

Case Name: Roman Bath House, Shadwell

Case Number: 1447247

Background

An application to schedule the Roman bath house at Shadwell has been received.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	Name	Heritage Category
1	Roman Bath House, Shadwell	Scheduling

Visits

None: Data from other sources.

Annex 1

The factual details are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

Factual Details

Name: Roman Bath House, Shadwell

Location

Eluna Apartments, 4, Wapping Lane, London, E1W 2RG

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Tower Hamlets	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

History

The Roman bath house was one of the foremost buildings in a Roman town. The practise of communal bathing was an integral part of Roman urban life and provided relaxation, social congregation, exercise and hygiene. Private bath houses in towns were rare, and usually the preserve of the rich. The majority of the populace used public bath houses. These varied in size and plan according to local conditions and requirements, but would invariably consist of a series of rooms of graded temperatures with associated plunge baths. The normal arrangement was for rooms varying from cold (frigidarium) through warm (tepidarium) to hot (caldarium) together with ancillary rooms for changing (apodyterium), latrines, massage (unctorium) and possibly an exercise area (palaestra). Heating was provided by hypocausts connected to associated furnaces. Bath houses were also linked to, and depended upon, an engineered water supply including drains and sewers. Owing to its importance in the life of a town, bath houses were often amongst the first buildings to be constructed after the establishment of a town and therefore most date to the C1 or C2 AD. They are distributed throughout the towns of Roman Britain, which were principally situated in what is now eastern, central and southern England and south Wales.

The site at Shadwell lies on an area of former Thames foreshore 1km to the east of the Roman settlement of Londinium, at the confluence of the former channel of the river and a former stream draining from the north. The settlement at Shadwell arose in the mid-C3, possibly as a port or beach market associated with Londinium, and was abandoned early in the C5. Very little is known of Roman Shadwell outside of the bath house complex – immediately uphill was an enigmatic structure variously interpreted as a Roman military watch tower, a mausoleum or water tower built to serve the bath house. However, the size of the bath house suggests that Shadwell was either a sizeable settlement or had a large transient population.

The bath house at Shadwell was constructed between AD 230 and AD 275 as an L-shaped construction. A central entrance led to a common apodytarium or frigidarium, with tepidaria and caldaria in wings on either side. The bath house was extended to the north in the late C3, and a hypocaust built underneath the apodytarium/frigidarium. Shortly after that was built, the bath house fell into disuse, and was subject to periodic flooding. The bath house was reopened and further modified and extended in the early C4. The facility functioned until it was abandoned in the late C4, and it was partially dismantled in the late C4 and early C5.

Associated with the bath house was an open yard to the north (which may have functioned as a palaestra) and an accommodation block. The accommodation block to the north of the bath house and yard was a timber-framed construction, and contained a number of fixtures and fittings suggesting it was a relatively high status structure. The excavation evidence suggests that this building was associated with the use of the baths and high status food consumption, rather than a domestic dwelling.

Excavations of land to the west of the bath house revealed a sequence of buildings, all timber framed, and relating to domestic and food preparation uses. It is possible that they were associated with the bath house and its attendant building.

The history of the site after the demolition of the bath house is not clear. Certainly the lack of architectural fragments relating to the upper structure of the bath house suggests that it was comprehensively dismantled to floor level (or at least to the level of the suspended floor) shortly after the building fell out of use. The land surrounding reverted to marshland, and the site appears to have been disused until the post-medieval period. Indeed, Shadwell was almost uninhabited at the end of the C16, and saw very rapid growth in the C17. The site was shown on historic maps as built up throughout the C19 until 1938. The site was cleared between 1938 and 1948, and then built upon by 1968 (when it was the site of the National Dock Labour Board Office). The adjacent tower/mausoleum was excavated in the 1970s, the site to the immediate west in 1996-7 and 2002 and the site itself excavated in advance of development in 2002 and 2003. The remains of the bath house were preserved through foundation design.

Details

PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS:

A Roman bath house built on a spring line above the (then) north bank of the River Thames. The bath house was built in the mid-C3, and functioned until the late C4, whereupon the building was partially dismantled. The structure survives up to suspended floor level, complete with hypocausts. While the site has been partially excavated, the bulk of the surviving remains are preserved by foundation design.

DESCRIPTION:

The remains at Shadwell comprise the partially excavated remnants of 15 rooms of a relatively large Roman bath house. The complex has an entrance into a vestibule on the south side, leading to a central apodyterium (changing room) or frigidarium (cold room) to the north. The apodyterium/frigidarium is flanked on both sides by tepidaria (warm rooms), caldaria (hot rooms) and alveii (hot bathing pools) to the north. Additional rooms of as yet unknown function flank the vestibule. Several phases of building and alteration are visible, with additional rooms added to the north, and a hypocaust inserted under the apodyterium/frigidarium.

Comparison with other known bath complexes allow the extrapolation of the excavated plan to either side, allowing for the existence of another bay to the east, probably containing a caldarium, with a praefurnium (furnace) beyond, and at least a caldarium, and second praefurnium to the west. These were, however, largely outside the excavated area.

The archaeological deposits on site survive up to a height of 1.3m above the foundations. Walls were constructed from a rubble core of flint, chalk and tile in a mortar matrix, and faced with alternating sets of two to four courses of Kentish ragstone and tile, on a foundation of uncoursed chalk and ragstone set in mortar. Hypocaust pilae were constructed from tiles and occasional limestone blocks, while suspended floors were constructed from tile supported by the pilae. Very few fragments of roof structure and internal surfaces survive, and so the interiors and roof cannot be described with any certainty. Recovered material suggests that the construction of the bath house utilised predominantly re-used building materials. Recovered artefacts include jewellery and an unusually high number of coins.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

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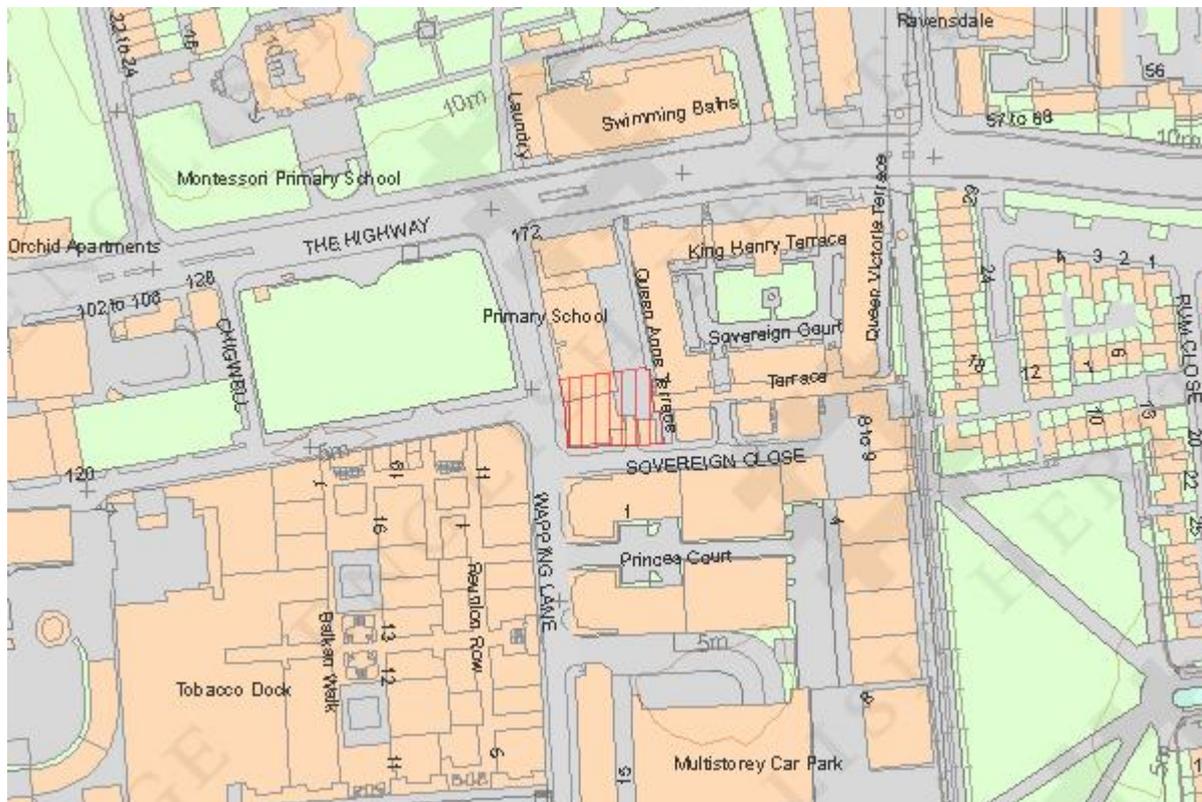
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Map**National Grid Reference:** TQ3484380682

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