

**London's Waterfront 1100–1666:
excavations in Thames Street, London, 1974–84**
John Schofield, Lyn Blackmore and Jacqui Pearce, with Tony Dyson

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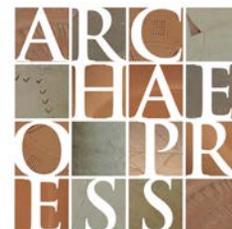
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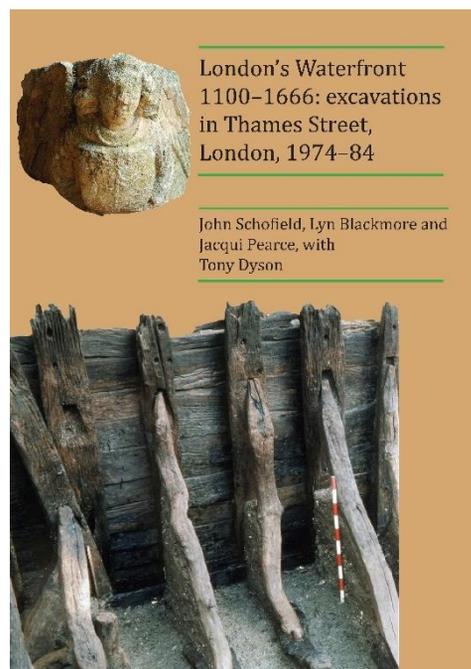
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This publication presents and celebrates the mile-long Thames Street in the City of London and the land south of it to the River Thames as an archaeological asset. The argument is based on the reporting of four excavations of 1974–84 by the Museum of London near the north end of London Bridge: Swan Lane, Seal House, New Fresh Wharf and Billingsgate Lorry Park. Here the findings of the period 1100–1666 are presented.

Buildings and property development on sixteen properties south of Thames Street, on land reclaimed in many stages since the opening of the 12th century, include part of the parish church of St Botolph Billingsgate. The many units of land reclamation are dated by dendrochronology, coins and documents. They have produced thousands of artefacts and several hundred kilos of native and foreign pottery. Much of this artefactual material has been published, but in catalogue form (shoes, knives, horse fittings, dress accessories, textiles, household equipment). Now the context of these finds, their deposition in groups, is laid out for the first time.

Highlights of the publication include the first academic analysis and assessment of a 13th- or 14th-century trumpet from Billingsgate, the earliest surviving straight trumpet in Europe; many pilgrim souvenirs; analysis of two drains of the 17th century from which suggestions can be made about use of rooms and spaces within documented buildings; and the proposal that one of the skeletons excavated from St Botolph's church is John Reynewell, mayor of London in 1426–7 and a notable figure in London's medieval history.

The whole publication encourages students and other researchers of all kinds to conduct further research on any aspect of the sites and their very rich artefactual material, which is held at the Museum of London's Archaeological Archive. This is a significantly large and varied dataset for the archaeology and history of London in the period 1100 to 1666 which can be continuously interrogated for generations to come.

About the authors:

John Schofield was an archaeologist at the Museum of London from 1974 to 2008. He has written several well-received books on the archaeology of London and of British medieval towns; and as Cathedral Archaeologist for St Paul's Cathedral, archaeological accounts of the medieval and Wren buildings.

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Tony Dyson was the principal documentary historian and general editor at the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London from 1974 to 1998.

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with contributions by
Jelena Bekvalac, Ian M Betts, John Clark,
Stephen Freeth, Helen Ganiaris,
Suzanne Keene and Sabine K Klaus

Summary

This publication brings together the archaeological and documentary evidence for a number of medieval and post-medieval secular properties and a parish church on four waterfront sites excavated in Thames Street in the City of London by the Museum of London in 1974–84: from west to east, Swan Lane (site A), Seal House (site B), New Fresh Wharf (site C) and Billingsgate Lorry Park (site D). Here the findings for the period 1100 to 1666 (the Great Fire of London) are presented.

The waterfront excavations in London, which began in 1972, have produced great advances in our knowledge about the nature of reclamation on the river bank and extension of properties into the river. The inclusion of thousands of artefacts and pottery sherds in the reclamation and foreshore deposits are an unequalled catalogue of the material culture of medieval London; and the carpentry of the wooden revetments tells us about medieval buildings which have otherwise not survived in London (and some examples are earlier than the earliest standing buildings in other medieval towns). The excavation narrative is arranged in four consecutive periods from 1100 to 1666. The nature of London's waterfront, including its public buildings and Thames Street itself, is considered for each period; the developing relationship of the waterfront area to the rest of the medieval and Tudor City of London is also outlined.

The wider area of the study is the waterfront south of Thames Street between the sites of the 11th-century All Hallows the Great church in the west (today just to the east of Cannon Street railway station viaduct) and the probably 10th-century Billingsgate dock in the east, a length of about 475m (about 1550ft). Just over half way along this length of waterfront, the north end of medieval London Bridge met the bank of the river and the street. The focus of research is two blocks of properties, eight tenements upstream of the Bridge, labelled for this study Tenements 1–8; and a second block downstream of the bridge, labelled Tenements 9–16. Generally it was only the parts nearest to

Thames Street, which would have contained the most important buildings, which were excavated; documents, early views and maps provide context and setting. Excavations here of 1974 to 1984 are the main focus of this study, but more recent excavations of 2003–6 on some of the same properties and nearby are fitted into the narrative, with their complementary results.

Between 1100 and 1666 the waterfront of the City of London, between Thames Street and the River Thames, literally grew by extension into the river until fossilised by the erection of stone river walls. By the end of the main period of reclamation, around 1450, the new land south of the street could be up to 100m wide, formed by innumerable expansions on private properties, which had the effect of making indented inlets or docks for ships at Queenhithe and Billingsgate. Earth and rubbish were used to make the reclamation units, which are often dated by the dendrochronology of timbers used in the waterfront structures (Figure 1).



Figure 1 The early 13th-century waterfront excavated on the Billingsgate site, 1982, looking north from the river side. The section of revetment on the left (D:Waterfront 14), dated by dendrochronology to about 1235, was later conserved and displayed in the Medieval Gallery of the Museum of London

Over the five and a half centuries studied here, changes in the topography, building design and material culture

Period	Properties and buildings, building materials	Pottery	Non-ceramic artefacts
M1 1100–1200/1220	extensive reclamation; buildings of stone and timber on the reclaimed land; dyehouses	London-type wares predominate	a limited range, but already the main categories of household fittings and clothing (shoes)
M2 1200–1350	more reclamation; subdivision of waterfront properties (more tenants); tiled roofs from 1200, brick appears before 1350; possible first example of glazed window	Kingston-type ware 1230, Surrey-Hants ware 1270; decline of Andenne ware and Rhenish ware imports; shift to wares from S France and Mediterranean	apparent abundance of artefacts thrown away, perhaps a consumer culture
M3 1350–1500	more subdivision; some large houses on the reclaimed land, including two livery company halls; dyehouses and brew houses interchangeable	London-type wares decline; increased import of stonewares from Rhineland	from documentary sources, massive imports of objects of all kinds, household and trade
P1 1500–1666	houses now 3–4 storeys tall; warehouses named as room functions; Dutch wall tiles a feature of buildings on site D	several types of Continental pottery, a more European culture	artefacts of this period not in this study; for future analysis

Table 1 Observed changes over time on the study sites in Thames Street

of the studied properties south of Thames Street can be observed (Table 1).

The documentary history of these tenements is among the richest that can be provided for any secular properties in the City. The history of owners and tenants can be reconstructed, and information compared with the archaeological findings to study public and private space, the network of waterfront alleys, the components of tenements and the process of subdivision, specialised buildings and equipment, warehouses and cranes. There are also detectable differences in land use above and below the Bridge, particularly from the 16th century onwards. The establishment of the Legal Quays by the Elizabethan government in 1559 was probably instrumental in moving the landing places for foreign goods downstream of the bridge. This government act changed the London topography.

The study addresses several major questions. The reclamation units contained thousands of medieval and Tudor artefacts (Figure 2), and hundreds of kilos of native and foreign pottery. Where did the pottery and artefacts come from? Do they have any significance in their locations behind waterfront revetments or on foreshores, or are they all hopelessly mixed up because they were mixed up before they were brought here?

Two of the study sites, Swan Lane and Seal House (sites A and B), were particularly fruitful in this regard, and many of their major landfill units were dated by dendrochronology. Coins were present but being always residual were not useful for dating the strata. No local concentrations of individual types of artefact was noticed. The soil for the reclamation dumps was probably gathered from rubbish tips on properties all over the city;

their sources cannot now be specified (except in one case of a possibly royal source for dumps at Baynard's Castle at the west end of the City waterfront). Reclamation along the foreshore included dumps containing large amounts of broken pottery from the second half of the 11th century. From the pottery, the conclusion has been that reclamation dumps were usually of slightly mixed date, whereas the foreshores contained more contemporary material. It is not possible to rely on the finds from a particular reclamation dump to date its deposition by themselves; nor, as they were almost certainly brought from further afield, can they tell us about activities taking place in a particular waterfront tenement. The foreshores are no better, and their strata have been more fluid during their long existence.

Objects can however speak. The thousands of medieval and post-medieval artefacts tell us about specific aspects of culture, fashion and religious beliefs. The range of these everyday things, the evidence of mass production of, for example, buckles, belt fittings and dress ornaments, and the sheer number of near-identical items bear witness to the thriving market for the consumption of goods that documentary sources attest. Many of the artefacts were probably imported objects, but research has yet to show this by analysis of them. We can explore how the finds on London waterfront sites in general contribute to a suggestion that the early modern consumer revolution and consumerism began not in the 18th century, but in the late Middle Ages. Along with a consumer society came fashion, which can be detected in the objects.

Objects are intimate evidence of the beliefs of Londoners, whether an elaborate pilgrim souvenir from Canterbury or seals from indulgences, buried with



Figure 2 Artefacts from reclamation deposits: clockwise from top left, a group of armorial mounts with identical shields, found probably surrounded by coarse cloth on site A, probably mid 15th century, from horse harness or for fitting to swords; a 17th-century Metropolitan ware jug from site D; fragment of a 16th-century tin-glazed floor tile made in Antwerp, from site D; and a shoe from an 12th-century reclamation deposit at site B, with an embroidered vamp stripe. For detailed information on the objects, see the figures showing them later in this text



people. At the beginning of the 16th century England seems to have been one of the most Catholic countries in Europe. A study of pilgrim badges largely from the waterfront sites as a whole has shown that badges from 39 sites in Britain and 109 sites in Continental Europe, from Vadstena in Sweden to Bari in Italy, have been found in London; and many come from the sites in this volume. The medieval waterfront silts also produced the Billingsgate trumpet (so called from the site where it was found), one of the earliest surviving examples of a medieval musical instrument from Europe, and the only known example of a medieval European straight trumpet (Figure 3).



Figure 3 The Billingsgate trumpet, the only known example of a medieval European straight trumpet; found during earth-moving on the Billingsgate site, 1984. It may have been lost from a ship in the period 1260–1350

Next, there is a wish to study the the functions of the buildings and open areas on the study sites. What did the interiors of the buildings look like? How did they change over time? To what extent is this illustrated by the artefacts? To what extent can each property and new development be linked to specific owners or occupiers, as mentioned in the documentary record?

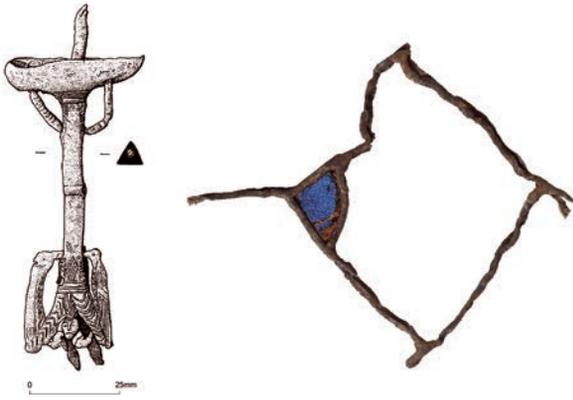


Figure 4 Household fittings and equipment from the Swan Lane site: left, an iron and lead candlestick with birds and possibly human figures, perhaps 12th-century, from a reclamation dump of 1180–1270; right, a fragment of window came with coloured glass, from a reclamation deposit of 1270–1330



Figure 5 Native and foreign 17th-century pottery from a drain on the New Fresh Wharf site, perhaps from the household of William Widmore, plasterer

The deep deposits along the waterfront, by comparison with those in most of the rest of the City of London, mean that buildings survive well; though the buildings have been altered many times and inevitably replaced during the centuries. Stone buildings, perhaps with vaulted undercrofts, were built on the reclaimed land by 1200; at Swan Lane they included a large dyehouse, active for a prolonged period. Timbers reused in waterfront structures tell us about early buildings on land; in particular, that the techniques of constructing buildings with timber frames of squared timbers and a range of joints was developed in London in the late 12th century. Important examples are found on two of the sites in this study of buildings with low walls of stone or clay which would have supported timber frames in the second half of the 13th century, a major development in medieval building technology. This study summarises what the waterfront excavations since 1972 contribute to a history of domestic buildings in London and Britain from 1100 to 1666. Their rooms and spaces include vaulted undercrofts, halls, outbuildings and yards; there is detailed evidence of doorways and windows, stairs, tile floors, and household fittings and equipment (Figure 4). As a group, the excavated buildings provide an important

collection of dated examples from the waterfront area to match others now being produced by other large archaeological projects in the City, for instance the study of the east end of Cheapside and Poultry published in 2011. We can now compare areas of the City through their medieval and Tudor building stock. This is an analysis of London's former townscape at a new level which did not seem possible a few decades ago.

The pottery in and around the buildings is generally homogeneous, and ways have not yet been found to analyse pottery in order to illustrate activities or the uses of buildings at any one moment or over time, with the notable and encouraging exceptions of the two specific exercises studying 17th-century pottery and artefacts in a drain at site C (New Fresh Wharf) (Figure 5) and scattered through several buildings and another drain at site D (Billingsgate) (Figure 6). From the rich evidence on the Billingsgate site, we can begin to elucidate the functions of rooms and spaces at a level not often possible on sites in London or elsewhere, by a conjunction of examination of the buildings, the artefacts within them, and the documentary evidence.



Figure 6 From a drain on the Billingsgate site full of artefacts, part of the household effects probably destroyed in the Great Fire: a Raeren stoneware statuette of a woman with an elaborate head dress and a pewter lid from a Westerwald stoneware mug



Figure 7 Detail from the panorama of 1647 by Wenceslaus Hollar, showing cloths hanging from poles on a building on the waterfront side of the Swan Lane (site A) site, probably part of a documented rebuilding of the property in or after 1638 as a house and dyeing establishment. The archaeological excavation took place in the area of buildings behind the waterfront

Study of the pottery shows trade and cultural links with many places around the North Sea and deep into the Rhineland; pottery made in the London area in the 12th and 13th centuries is found in British towns up to the north of Scotland, and in present-day Norway, Sweden and Denmark. This monograph presents a detailed study of the native and foreign pottery found on two of the sites, Swan Lane and Seal House for the period 1100 to 1666.

These tenements were a mixture of domestic and work buildings from the start. Industries or crafts which made or processed things are evident in the 12th-century dyeworks on the Swan Lane site, a possible fish-drying house at Seal House, and other industrial buildings to be explored in the future from debris within them. We publish a room by room inventory of Dyers' Hall, on the Swan Lane site, in 1602. What is probably another dyeworks on the waterfront south of the site is shown by Hollar in 1647 and is identified with known construction works on the site in this part, of 1638 or shortly after (Figure 7).

The dyeing industry, requiring a large amount of river water, was a feature of the area upstream of the north end of London Bridge from the 12th century, and continued to be so until the Great Fire. By the 14th century its facilities were shared with brewing establishments, which had become complexes of equal size by 1600. In the 14th to 17th centuries there was



Figure 8 Seventeenth-century tin-glazed wall tile from site D, from a building probably destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. These tiles may have been made in the Netherlands or in Britain; they are evidence of strong cultural links with Holland

probably an industrial tone to the properties south of Thames Street, which would influence the landuse and form of the private and corporate buildings. Some buildings on site D destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 however had Dutch tiles in their rooms (Figure 8); perhaps a fashionable European tone in richer houses among the utilitarian buildings of the waterfront.

St Botolph Billingsgate, first mentioned around 1140, expanded to the south in the middle of the 15th century through a grant to the parish by John Reynewell, mayor 1426–7, or his trustees by 1456 at the latest; a grave in the new extension contained two skeletons, and one may be Reynewell himself (Figure 9). The church extension included an existing stone building a few metres to the south, which was then incorporated into the body of the church. The function of this building, now the southernmost part of the church, is not clear, but is suggested to have formed a fraternity hall. Many aspects of the internal features and decoration of the church can be reconstructed from the survival of its accounts from the late 16th century up to the Great Fire. One intriguing find was made during the earth-moving during construction at Billingsgate in 1983–4: an impressive stone corbel carved with an angel holding a shield bearing a merchant's mark, probably from



Figure 9 Is this skeleton John Reynewell, mayor of London in 1426–7? In the extension southwards of St Botolph's in the 15th century, this man and a woman were buried in brick tombs in the middle of the new space, probably facing a new altar. The man may be the sponsor of the extension, John Reynewell (d 1445). He was a prominent City merchant who rebuilt the drawbridge gate of London Bridge during his mayoralty

the church, and possibly from the roof of Reynewell's extension (Figure 10).

Sixty-nine people were buried in the south part of the parish church of St Botolph which was excavated on the Billingsgate site. They are probably of mid 15th to mid 17th-century date. The degree of survival of human remains was good, and they form a valuable group of parish interments. In general the people had the range of skeletal pathologies and conditions seen in other contemporary London populations (Figure 11), though without evidence of tuberculosis or syphilis as might be expected. Fractures were few, though one young man had survived a blunt blow to his head and an older man had a deformity of his right hand which might have been from damage to his tendons. Various sorts of osteoarthritis and one case of gout were recorded.



Figure 10 The angel corbel found on a landfill site in the lower Thames valley, to which earth from the Billingsgate

The results of the excavations are compared to others in London and elsewhere. From the large campaigns of urban excavation in London since the 1970s, we now have published reports on many sites. The history of this waterfront zone of the City can be compared with central sites around Cheapside, to see how the two zones were different in their buildings, material culture and development. The results from London are also compared to work on the archaeology of waterfront areas in other towns and cities for this period, both in Britain and abroad.

Though there have been many archaeological excavations along Thames Street, the archaeological resource remains in quantity and must be protected. This study proposes that some thought should be given to the preservation of the long reservoir of deep strata, from the Roman period onwards, which lies beneath most of the line of the present Upper and Lower Thames Street. A final section of this monograph presents a series of section drawings and elevations of the deep strata excavated on two of the sites, Seal House and New Fresh Wharf. They show the deposits of all the recorded periods since the Roman in the 2nd century, and serve not only to demonstrate the depth of archaeological deposit here which is unparalleled in London, but also to be part of the archive behind other previously-published studies of the sites in Roman and Anglo-Saxon times, and their large archive of artefacts and records which is held by the Museum of London.

Fundamentally, this is an account of four excavations carried out at a crucial time, the first decade of reasonable archaeological provision in the City of London; and of their artefactual material, the study



of which laid the foundations of many kinds of archaeological research in London and by imitation elsewhere in the decades which followed, and which continues to do so 40 years later. The four excavations in this study form a starting-point for further study of the material culture of the whole City because of the wealth of information recovered and the length of the archaeological sequences recorded.



Figure 11 Details from the analysis of human remains at Billingsgate: above, multiple linear enamel hypoplastic defects in the mandibular canines and premolars of skeleton D[301], a juvenile of 6–11 years; below, evidence of Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis (DISH) on the spine of skeleton D[783], possibly John Reynewell

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