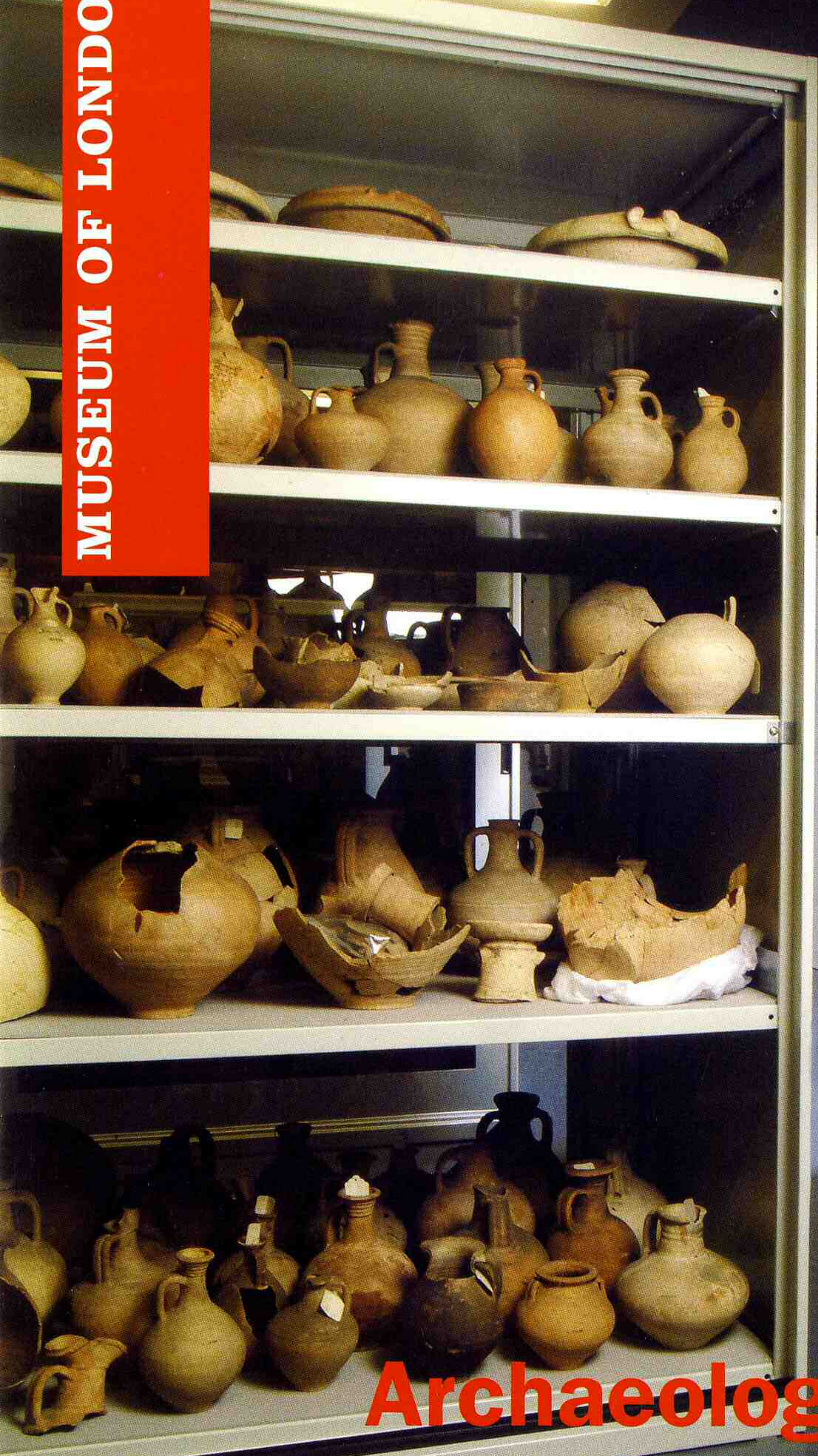


MUSEUM OF LONDON



Archaeology Matters

No 21, June 2004

The oldest Londoner

The earliest burial so far known in London was discovered recently on the site of the former White Swan public house in Yabsley Street, Blackwall. A single grave, cut into the natural sand, contained a poorly preserved crouched inhumation, possibly of a woman. Alongside her were a fragment of pottery bowl, a flint knife and other struck flints. A radiocarbon date obtained from an oak retaining plank within the grave was calibrated to 4220–3979 BC, making this one of the earliest burials recorded in the British Isles.

The discovery of a single early Neolithic grave is in itself unusual. Communal burial, beneath barrows or in mortuary enclosures, was more common in southern England. In this case, the grave lay near a contemporary settlement, represented by a scatter of struck flints and pottery, and was located on a sand and gravel bar beneath alluvium. Between these finds and the modern river was a large expanse of peat (also buried by alluvium), suggesting that

in prehistory the site lay on the foreshore of the Thames.

These discoveries belong to one of the most significant periods in Britain's history. Agriculture was being introduced from Continental Europe, either directly by colonists or as a result of the indigenous Mesolithic population adopting new practices. Whatever the exact mechanism, farming eventually displaced hunting and gathering as the subsistence base of the population. This site, located within the Thames Estuary, was believed initially to represent colonisation from the Continent, or a transitional Mesolithic/Neolithic group. Charred plant remains indicated the collection of wild plant foods co-existing with the new practice of cereal-growing. However, there is no evidence to link the site directly with the Continent, and scientific analysis of the pottery has in fact shown that it was made locally, apparently by an established, fully Neolithic, community.

Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Photo: Thames Valley Archaeological Services





Ceramics and glass collection

The archaeological importance of the Museum's ceramics collection is recognised worldwide, particularly as a result of scholarly publications in the 1980s. Although amassed before the advent of 'scientific' excavation, its numerous complete pots can be dated and interpreted by comparison with sherds from subsequent, well-stratified sites. It is this combination that made it possible to write – for example – the first authoritative history of medieval pottery, detailing changes in fashion and supply-sources between 850 and 1450.

Yet despite its acknowledged importance, the collection was poorly accessible in cramped and ill-lit basements at London Wall. Now, thanks to a grant from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's *Designation Challenge Fund*, the entire reserve holdings of both glass and ceramics have been brought together at Mortimer Wheeler House. Between September 2003 and March 2004 a team of seven staff, supported by curators, conservators, documentation experts and photographers, unpacked over 19,000 pots and 6,000 glasses; catalogued and stored them in new clear-fronted cases or drawers; and photographed

12,000 of them. The catalogue and photographs have also been made available online.

With Neolithic pottery and 20th-century studio glass assembled in a single vast storeroom, the 'archaeological' alongside the 'art historical', less well-known aspects of the collection reveal themselves. Take the Whitefriars archive: documents and over 700 vessels representing the 150-year history of the leading London glassmaker, James Powell and Sons (1834–1980). Idolised today by aficionados of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the firm also made award-winning pieces prompted by late 19th-century archaeological finds. Harry Powell, the manager, wrote one of the first histories of glass, commissioned chemical analysis of Roman sherds, and even had the formula replicated. Researchers now have the chance to examine these experimental pieces alongside excavated glasses of the type that inspired them.

The collection is available to researchers by appointment.

Email: ceramics@museumoflondon.org.uk
www.museumoflondon.org.uk/ceramics/

Bronze Age Dagenham

Evidence for the Late Bronze Age (1000–650BC) has been accumulating steadily in the London region over the past decade. There have been few chances, however, to excavate a settlement in its entirety, as was done a few months ago in the centre of the Becontree Estate in Dagenham.

Initially, the settlement was bounded just by shallow gullies. Wide entrances faced SE and NW. In the centre of the NW entrance a huge pit provided the setting for what must have been an impressive upright timber. Its burnt remains were found at quite a considerable depth.

Later, the enclosure was widened to form a sub-square, 75m across. It was now defended by a substantial ditch (visible on the photograph as a continuous dark stain, interrupted, centre top, by the NW entrance). On the S side of the settlement evidence was found for an internal bank. In this phase the entrances were significantly narrower, and a short avenue consisting of pairs of posts led from the centre of the settlement to the SE

entrance. At this threshold was found a notable concentration of ceramic items, including loomweights and brick-like objects.

Internally, numerous postholes showed the position of roundhouses, usually with an eleven-post arrangement, and also of four-post structures. The settlement may have been destroyed by fire at one stage, as the enclosure ditch contained large quantities of burnt material.

Significantly, the land divisions established by the Roman period continued into much later times. Roman finds include a large fire-pit containing fragments of roof-tile, and a N-S boundary ditch that was part of a field system on exactly the Bronze Age alignment. This ditch may have been reworked in Saxon times. Some divisions seem to have survived even later, having been perpetuated by the medieval and post-medieval field boundaries that can be seen on 19th-century maps.

Fiona Keith-Lucas
Pre-Construct Archaeology

Photo: Pre-Construct Archaeology





A tall, greying terrace on the south side of Cable Street, E1, is a rare survivor from pre-Blitz Shadwell – so incongruous as to have long evoked the curiosity of local residents. Who used to live here, and how did they live? Excavation by the City of London Archaeological Society (CoLAS) of a small brick-lined cesspit beneath an old external WC in the rear garden of Number 208 is providing some of the answers.

Pottery indicates that the pit was not infilled gradually but in a single operation. Heaps of rubbish were thrown in, smashing anything breakable and scattering sherds from the same vessel throughout the deposit. Matching sets of crockery include largely complete, blue transfer-printed plates – with either the popular ‘wild rose’ or ‘willow’ pattern – and bone china tea-wares with Chelsea sprig decoration. Makers’ marks suggest that the group was discarded between 1845 and 1860.

Historical research has revealed that the house was not then inhabited by a single well-to-do

family – the class for whom it had been built 50 years earlier – but by poorer people, often in docks-related employment. In the 1841 census Cable Street was called ‘St George’s Place’, and the property was Number 8. Its occupants included Benjamin Bell, ‘living on independent means’, Mary Barnard, ‘seamstress’, and a sugar boiler, Christopher from Hanover (Germany). New occupants had arrived by the 1851 census; Francis Henshaw and Charles Horn, who both worked in the coal industry, and John Diederich Grimm of Hanover, another sugar boiler and lodging house keeper.

CoLAS is preparing the finds and environmental material for publication, as well as investigating the historical background. The pottery, glass and numerous clay tobacco pipes (see picture) are the basis for research projects that will provide a fresh glimpse into 19th-century lifestyle in the East End. For details about CoLAS see www.colas.freeserve.co.uk

Alan Thompson, CoLAS/Museum of London
Vanessa Bunton & Nigel Jeffries, Museum of London

A Renaissance tiled stove

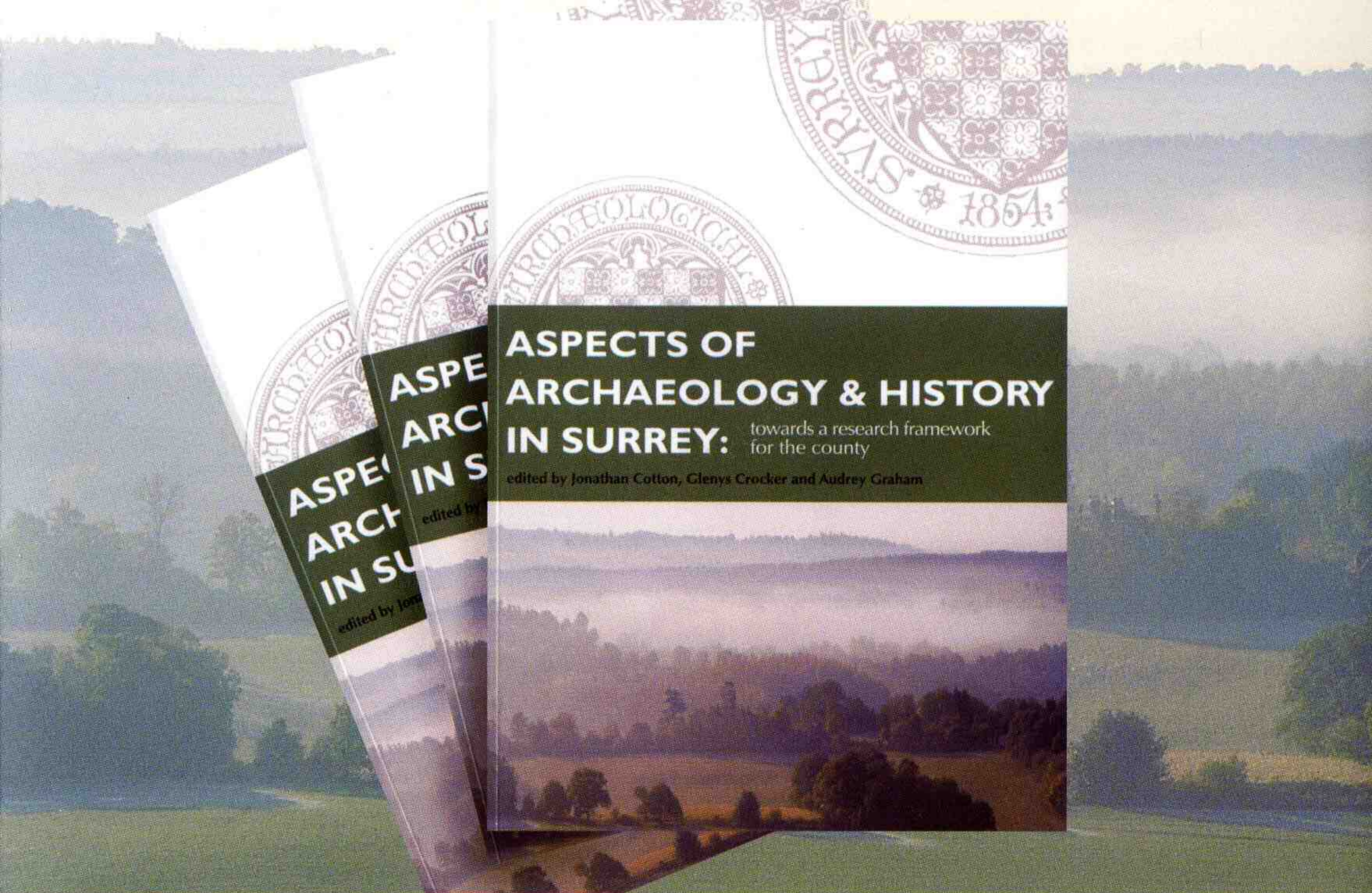
In the 16th century, the smokeless tile-built stove was a benchmark of Continental style and technological achievement. A monumental box, sometimes over 2m high and the same square, enclosed the fire and was connected directly to the chimneys. It was constructed from dozens of purpose-made tiles, which were elaborately decorated. The finest stoves were to be found in Germany, where they heated the great halls of the well-to-do.

Tantalising information about the use of such stoves in London has recently come to light with the discovery of a large number of tile fragments at Mitre Square, near Aldgate. Nearly all the fragments are in dark red earthenware with a thick white slip under a dark green glaze, and were made in or around Cologne in the 1560s or '70s. They are decorated with figured scenes derived from a well-known series, *The Seven Liberal Arts*, which was based on engravings produced by Hans Sebald Beham in 1539 and by Hans Holbein between 1535 and 1543. At least three tiles show the female figure, Logic, while several others (see picture) show a male figure, Atlas, in Graeco-Roman military dress supporting a column capital.

Tiles from the same series have been found previously in this area, which in medieval times lay within the precinct of Holy Trinity Priory. Do they derive from a stove in the mansion of the Duke of Norfolk, who acquired the site progressively after the Dissolution of the Monasteries and gave it its new name, Duke's Place? If so, they would give a rare glimpse of the furnishings in the home of one of England's most powerful noblemen. Alternatively, they may have been imported and used by a potter, Jacob Jansen, and other immigrants from the Continent, who lived here after the Duke was beheaded in 1572.

Information from Jacqui Pearce,
Museum of London Specialist Services





Landscape: Giles Pattison

Happy Anniversary Surrey!

Surrey is home to more than just commuters, cricketers and showbiz celebs, as a new book on the county's archaeology and history makes clear. Published to coincide with the Surrey Archaeological Society's 150th anniversary, *Aspects of Archaeology and History in Surrey: towards a research framework for the county* gathers together a number of papers read at a conference held at the University of Surrey in June 2001. In practical terms it updates and expands the scope of the 1987 volume, *Archaeology of Surrey to 1540*, edited by David and Joanna Bird.

The new book has been edited by Jonathan Cotton, Glenys Crocker and Audrey Graham, and follows the lead given at the 2001 conference in providing a more rounded picture of the county's past. In part this reflects the current fashion for general 'inclusiveness', but in part too it reflects a long overdue recognition of the need to accommodate the more recent, and often still upstanding, past.

Accordingly, 18 contributions explore a wide range of topics that encompass the prehistoric perception of, and Roman religious sites within, the Surrey landscape; the county's Saxon origins, medieval manors and vernacular architecture; and the diverse impacts wrought on Surrey by royal landholding, London, industry and the Second World War.

The volume was officially launched last month by David Miles, Chief Archaeologist, English Heritage, at a special conference held at Southwark Cathedral, close to the Bridge House Hotel, which hosted the Society's Inaugural Meeting in May 1854. *Aspects* can be obtained direct from the Surrey Archaeological Society at Castle Arch, Guildford, GU1 3SX, price £20 plus £4.70 postage and packing.

Further details of the other sesquicentennial events are on the society's website: www.surreyarchaeology.org.uk

NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS

Saturday 17 & Sunday 18 July

To celebrate the recent opening of the Centre for Human Bioarchaeology, our theme this year is 'People from the Past': what excavated remains can tell us about people's appearance, clothes and how they lived.

Museum of London, London Wall

Saturday 10.00am – 5.50pm

Sunday 12.00am – 5.50pm

Events include lectures; workshops on the conservation of ancient clothing; and a chance to visit the new Human Bioarchaeology Centre.

Free, but advance booking required for some activities. Please phone the Box Office (0870 444 3850) for further information.

Mortimer Wheeler House

Saturday 10.30am – 4.30pm

Sunday 12noon – 4.30pm

Especially geared towards families, the programme includes our award-winning archaeological hands-on activity, The Dig. You will also have the opportunity to Meet the Experts and tour our new Ceramics and Glass Store.

Free, but advance booking required for some activities. Please phone the Box Office (0870 444 3850) for further information.

Museum in Docklands

Saturday and Sunday 10am – 6pm

Another chance to see spectacular finds from the grave of the Southend Saxon King. Find out also about archaeological finds from the Thames.

Admission: £5 (adults), £3 (concessions).

Nearest station: DLR West India Quay.

Roman amphitheatre

Saturday at 11.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm

Sunday at 1pm and 2.30pm

Tour this grisly entertainment site in the company of one of the Museum's Roman curators.

Access via Guildhall Art Gallery (free entry with National Archaeology Days leaflet).

Billingsgate Roman House and Baths

Saturday 11am – 2pm and 3pm – 5pm

Sunday 12.30pm – 2pm and 3pm – 5pm

Visit a remarkably preserved Roman hypocaust, and handle some of the objects discovered there.

Free. Address: 101 Lower Thames Street. Nearest station: Monument.

Syon House Archaeological Excavations

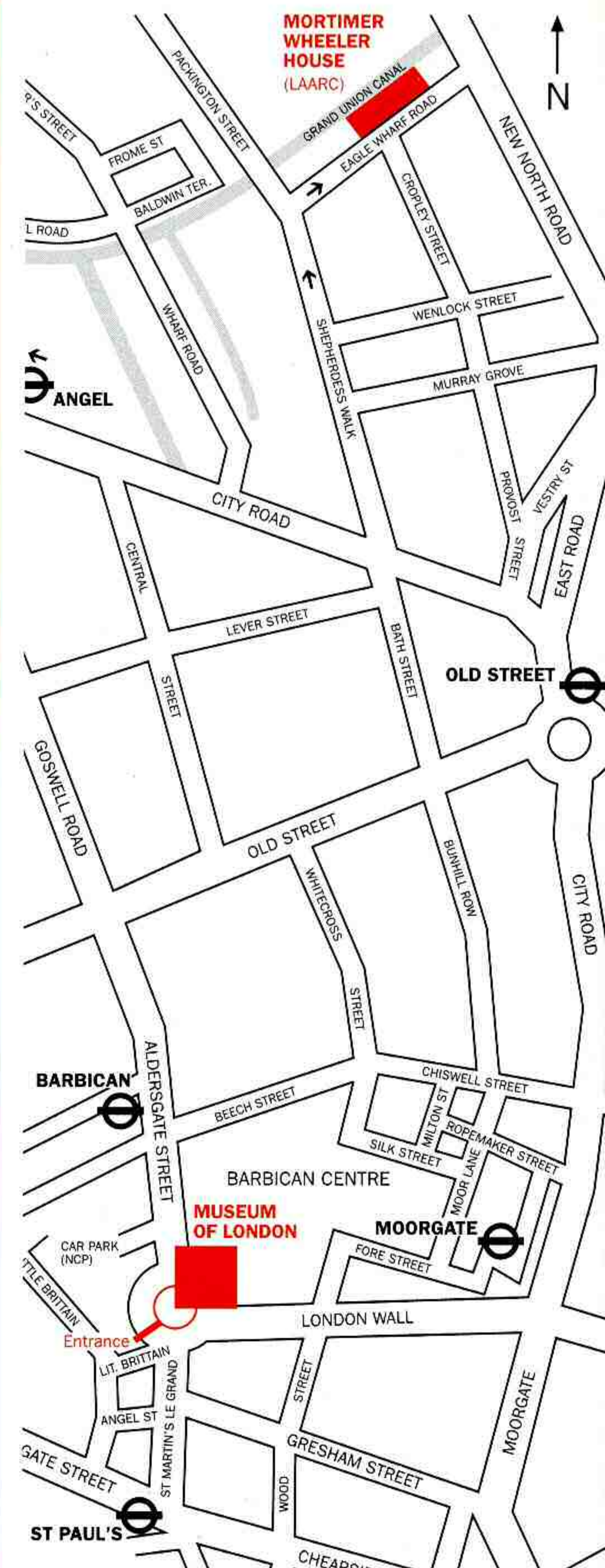
Sunday only, 10.30am – 4pm

See the remains of the medieval abbey being unearthed by a student team from Birkbeck College.

Free. For further information, please telephone Birkbeck:

020 7631 6627/6631, or email: archaeology@fce.bb.ac.uk

For general enquiries or to request a free National Archaeology Days leaflet, with times of all events, please phone the Box Office (0870 444 3850).



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Front cover: the new Ceramics and Glass store