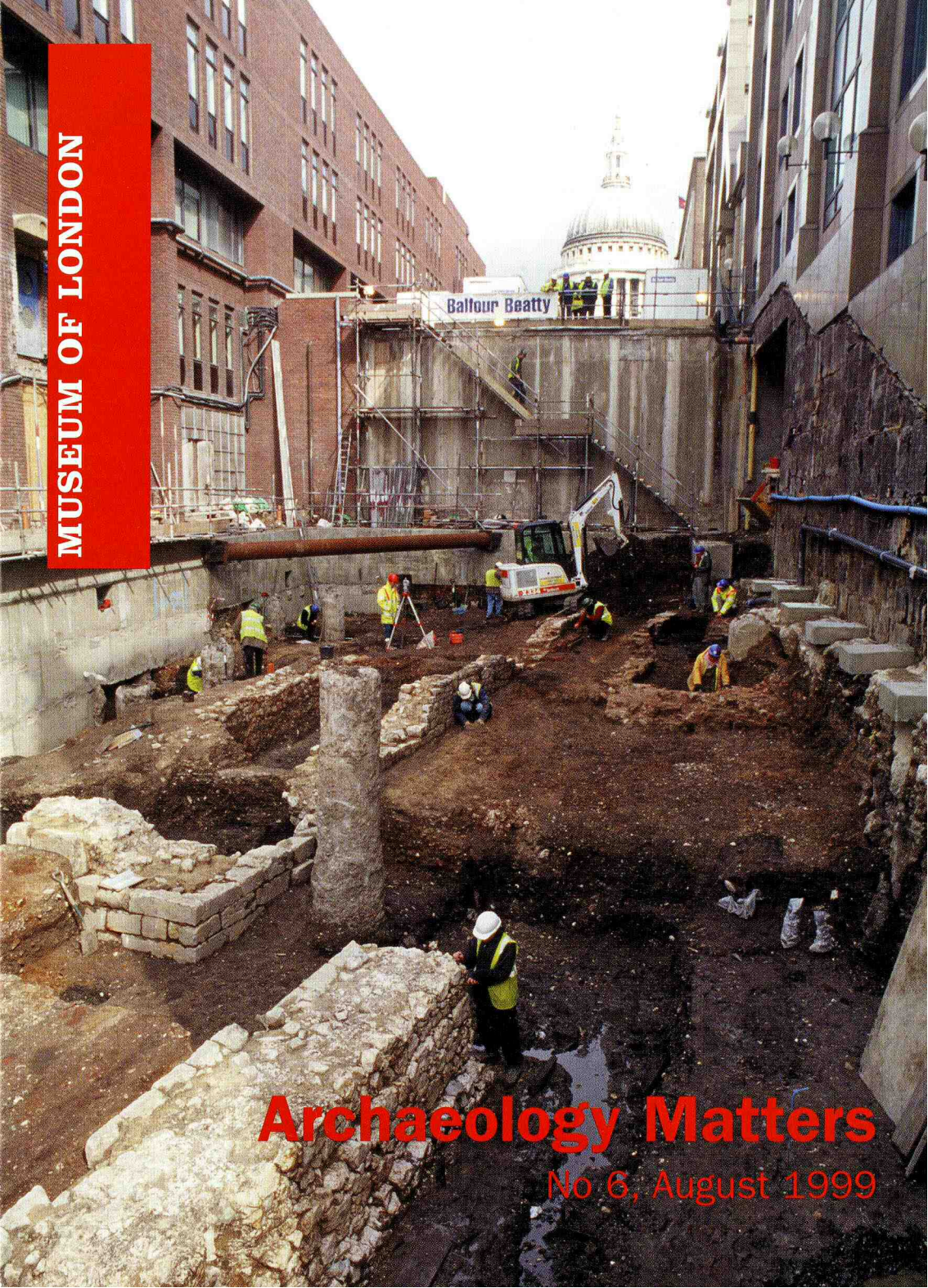


MUSEUM OF LONDON



Archaeology Matters
No 6, August 1999

Fish and ships

Work on the largest site ever to have been excavated in north Southwark has just come to a close. The dig, just to the west of Tower Bridge, was funded by CIT Markborough.

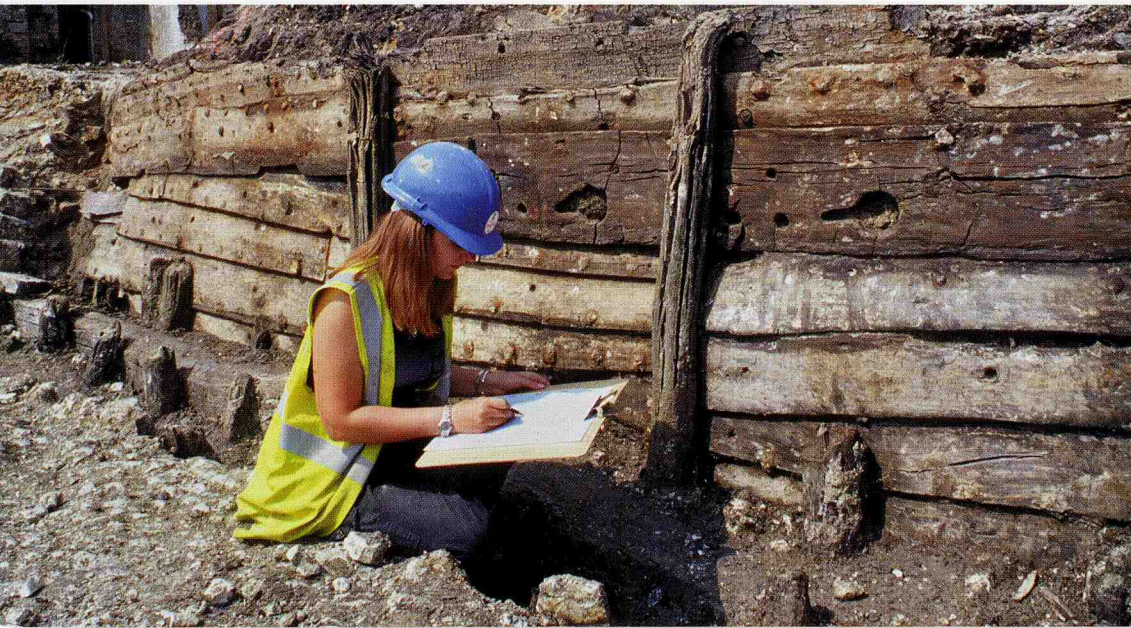
Along the riverfront a complex timber structure was found which has been provisionally identified as the tail-race and wheel-pit of a 16th century tidal mill. It would have connected the Thames with the moat of the late medieval manor-house known as Fastolf's Place. Discovered nearby were a medieval fish farm, and a number of Tudor fishponds. Some of the ponds were unlined and irregular, but there were also three rectangular stone-lined tanks each measuring over 10 metres long and 1.5 metres deep. In one of the ponds a banana skin was found – an amazing survival, which proves that this exotic fruit was available in England hundreds of years earlier than previously thought.

Behind the chalk-block walls of one rectangular tank, and so forming the initial phase of construction, were two sections of planking from a medieval ship. The planks were mainly

of oak and measured 5.5 metres long overall. Several rows survived, to a total height of 1 metre, and they were joined together with iron rivets in such a way that the bottom of each plank overlapped the top of the plank below (a method of ship building called 'clinker-building'). The ship will have been well over 15 metres long.

By far the most important feature was the survival of the top plank (gunwale), because this demonstrates that the ship was a rowing galley, the first time that such a vessel has been excavated in the British Isles. The gunwale contained three ports for oars (oar-locks) and cut-outs for the benches where the oarsmen sat (see picture). The ship showed signs of having been repaired on several occasions, but tree-ring dating has shown that she was built originally from trees that grew in Ireland and were felled no earlier than 1267 but no later than about 1276.

*Richard Bluer, David Saxby
Museum of London Archaeology Service
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On the tiles

On the site of the new Merrill Lynch Regional Headquarters in the City of London, within the cellars of an 18th century building, a large brick-built oval water tank of early 19th century date has been revealed. This tank, which may have been used for storing oysters, was lined with over fifty reused tin-glazed wall tiles. An unusually diverse range of designs was present, painted in a wide variety of decorative styles. Originally the tiles would have been used in kitchen areas, as decorative features at the sides of fireplaces and, perhaps, as skirting at the base of walls. Nearly all the tiles date from around 1750–1800.

The majority of the tiles are either blue or purple on white. Most show landscape scenes painted in either circular or hexagonal borders, with various styles of corner motif. Some of these borders are particularly elaborate. Other tiles are painted with mythological beasts,

biblical scenes, flower vases and various floral patterns. There are also a number of fragments with imitation marble designs and parts of decorative tile panels. Some of these are probably Dutch imports, whilst the remainder are products from either Liverpool or London.

Three tiles are of particular importance. Two show a standing lady and a seated gentlemen (see picture), whilst the other has part of a vase. The design on these tiles is not painted but impressed on the surface with a wood block. Wood block tiles of this style are extremely rare in London. The tiles can be precisely dated, as production did not last more than about six months. They were made in Liverpool in either 1756 or 1757.

Ian M Betts

Museum of London Specialist Services

Bruce Watson

Museum of London Archaeology Service



Millennium Bridge

The construction of the Millennium Bridge has provided an opportunity to examine the medieval waterfront on both sides of the Thames, at Bankside in Southwark and St Paul's Vista in the City. The City bridge abutment was partly on the site of an earlier excavation (Trig Lane, 1974–76). Previously excavated structures were uncovered again, yielding useful information about the rate and manner of deterioration of buried archaeological deposits.

The Southwark excavation revealed a series of well-preserved timber river walls (revetments) dating from the 14th–15th centuries up to the 1930s. These incorporated large fragments of a pre-Industrial Revolution barge of the type illustrated on 18th century riverscapes. Behind the revetments a remarkable vertical sequence of drains was recorded: at the bottom a hollowed-out log, above this a plank drain, then, finally, arched brick culverts.

On the City bank the quay front was found to have advanced southwards by a total of

20 metres during the 13th and 14th centuries. Revetments were built progressively further into the river, the space between the new and old walls being filled in to create dry land. A narrow inlet, apparently part of the first revetment phase, was retained and extended with each advance. The earliest structures were of timber but by the mid 14th century these had been replaced by a masonry river wall which also lined the inlet. In the 15th century a dock was created with the addition of a wall built into the Thames. Eventually the inlet was filled with river silt and dumped material, and evolved into a lane (Boss Alley).

Both sites produced numerous artefacts, including fine metalwork, cloth seals, leather shoes, scabbards, clothing and accessories (some highly decorated), imported and domestic pottery, and decorative tiles.

Robin Wroe-Brown
Museum of London Archaeology Service



Southwark Wells



Excavations at Swan Street in late 1998 revealed extensive remains of early Roman Southwark, as well as medieval and post-medieval activity. But it is only now six months later that artefact research is beginning to disclose some of the site's darker secrets.

Substantial rubbish pits of 1st century date contained domestic debris, as well as quantities of painted wall plaster, building materials and tesserae. To the south of these pits a large ditch appears to have formed the southern boundary of 1st–2nd century settlement to the north along the lines of Stane Street and Watling Street. This ditch seems to have been used to dump domestic rubbish, necessitating its cleaning on at least three occasions between AD 43 and 80.

To the south of this boundary a series of fifteen wells had been dug, ranging in date from AD 60 to 180. These consisted of both unshored shafts and circular and square timber-lined shafts. Six contained complete or partial pottery

vessels (see picture). The pots appear to have been deliberately broken, and it has been suggested that they represent votive offerings. Dog skulls and a human skeleton were recovered from one of the shafts, and may also represent ritual activity. Offerings of this sort are common in Roman wells, with the jars being broken to prevent their use by the dead against the living. Modern well-dressing and wishing wells are a distant echo of this practice.

The settlement appears to have extended southwards during the 2nd century, with gullies, fence lines and large rubbish pits being dug, and a second boundary ditch being excavated to the extreme south of the site. More barrel and timber-lined wells were dug during the medieval and post-medieval periods, including one constructed from reused stone, probably taken from nearby Bermondsey Abbey.

Mark Beasley
Pre-Construct Archaeology

The Rose Theatre

For over a decade the remains of the Rose have languished in the basement of an office block, invisible to the public. Now for the first time an exhibition, developed by the Rose Theatre Trust, displays the results of the excavation that has been so crucial to the reassessment of Shakespearean theatre. Visitors can watch a new on-site video (narrated by Sir Ian McKellen) and can view the location of the foundations through an evocatively lit display, which helps bring the theatre on Bankside back to life.

Archaeologists from the Museum of London discovered the remains of the theatre in 1989. Built by Philip Henslowe in 1587, this was the first playhouse to be erected on Bankside (see picture) and the fifth purpose-built playhouse known to have been constructed in London. Although the excavation uncovered only part of the building, this was the first time that any of London's Tudor or Stuart theatres had been recorded archaeologically. It has thus contributed greatly to debates about the type

of theatre within which English drama developed.

Evidence from the dig, which revealed two phases of building, is complemented by map and written information. John Norden's maps of 1593 and 1600 show two differing structures, whilst documents (chiefly the papers and accounts of Philip Henslowe) record Henslowe's construction of the building in 1587. Documents also describe Henslowe's financial outlay for structural alterations in 1592 and the income derived from the performance of plays by, amongst others, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Robert Greene and Thomas Kyd.

The exhibition is at 56 Park Street, London SE1 (0171 593 0026) and is open seven days a week, 10.00am–5.00pm. Entrance is £3 for adults with reductions available.

Simon Blatherwick
Freelance Archaeologist and a Director of the
Rose Theatre Trust Company
Illustration courtesy of the Rose Theatre Trust Company





Perry Oaks

The nine-month excavation of a 21-hectare site at the Thames Water Sewage Works at Perry Oaks, Hillingdon has been underway since April. The project is being carried out by Framework Archaeology, a joint venture between the Oxford Archaeological Unit and Wessex Archaeology.

The site lies on the edge of the Taplow Gravel Terrace, overlooking the River Colne valley. Running along the edge of the terrace, the Stanwell Cursus (an embanked avenue defined by ditches) formed a major focus within the Later Neolithic and later landscape. Several pits filled with burnt flint probably pre-date the Cursus and, along with a post alignment found just to the south in 1996, may form part of an earlier, ceremonial landscape which was later

formalised by the construction of the Cursus. A small, enclosure close to the Cursus, may also date to the Later Neolithic period.

During the Middle Bronze Age, a major field system, incorporating the earlier enclosure and partially utilising the Cursus bank, was laid out on the gravel terrace. Originally simple in form, the field system was later modified by the insertion of trackways and waterholes, perhaps in response to an intensification of stock keeping.

The field system seems to have gone out of use by the early Iron Age and there is at present little evidence of later activity.

Ken Welsh
Framework Archaeology

Family Event: Object Handling Dickens' Children

Thursday 26 and Friday 27 August
12.00pm, 2.00pm & 3.30pm 30mins Age 7+ OA
Come along and discover how objects can bring alive the contrasting lives of Dickens' children.

Seminar: The Spitalfields Excavation

Saturday 11 September
1.30pm– 5.00pm
Fee £7.50 (no concessions) Numbers limited AB
Find out about the latest discoveries with a guided tour of the site and a series of illustrated talks. Refreshments are included.

Walk: Historic Bankside From the Romans to Shakespeare

Wednesday 15 September
6.00pm 120mins Fee £7.50 (no concessions) AB
Visit an ex-Roman suburb, the site of medieval monasteries and the home of some of the first theatres. Southwark has them all!
Led by Hedley Swain, Museum of London

Walk: The City's archaeology

Wednesday 22 September
6.00pm 120mins Fee £7.50 (no concessions) AB
Visit the key areas of archaeological discovery in the City.
Led by John Shepherd, Museum of London

Lecture: London before Alfred — The Museum's exhibition *Alfred the Great: London's forgotten king* — 8 September to 9 January

Friday 24 September
1.10pm 50 mins
Explore the Dark Age archaeology of the region before the actions of King Alfred changed the role of London forever.
By Bob Cowie, Museum of London Archaeology Service

A 14th-century pottery site in Kingston upon Thames, Surrey. Excavations at 70–76 Eden Street

By Pat Miller and Roy Stephenson
Price £7.95 ISBN: 1 901992 07 1 This book is available from the Museum of London shop (Tel 0171 814 5600) or from MoLAS at Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (Tel 0171 410 2200)

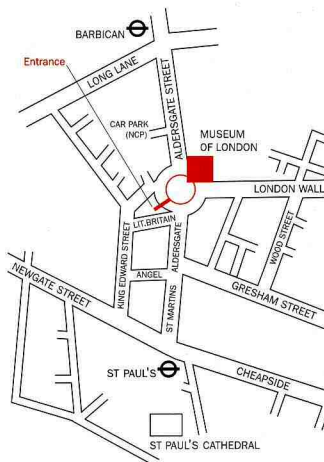
Unless otherwise stated admission to the above events is free WITH a Museum admission ticket which is valid for one year (£5.00 adult, children free).

AB Advanced booking required
OA Tickets on arrival

For bookings or for a full list of events please phone the Museum's Booking Department on 0171 814 5777

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Cover: The Millennium Bridge site, with medieval river walls in the foreground.