



MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Matters

No. 5, June 1999

Spitalfields

As the excavation at Spitalfields approaches the halfway stage, important buildings that belonged to the Priory and Hospital of St Mary Spital are coming to light. One of these appears to be the Chapel and Charnel House, which was built in 1391, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene and St Edmund. Built in a chequerboard pattern of flint and greensand, with large buttresses dividing them into bays, the walls survive to a height of 2.5 metres and the springing of the vault survives intact (see front cover photograph). In front of the chapel lies a gallery that was originally built in the late 15th century for the Lord Mayor of London and the Aldermen to listen to sermons preached at the nearby Pulpit Cross.

Adjacent to this, in the hospital cemetery, large numbers of skeletons have been recorded and removed. All ages are represented, ranging from stillborn children to fully-grown adults. Group burials have been discovered, possibly of families, as well as many individual graves.

Beneath the medieval graveyard lies a Roman cemetery, and it is here that some of the most exciting discoveries have been made so far. An untouched stone sarcophagus, containing within it a lead coffin ornamented with beaded and scallop shell decoration (see picture), has been lifted and taken to the Museum of London. Other rich burials have been found nearby, together with a mausoleum that is timber-lined and contains at least one child's burial laid in plaster. Associated with this burial are several rare glass vessels.

The dig will continue until September. For further information check the official website (<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/sdg.htm>) and visit the on-site viewing gallery and museum (see back page for details).

Chris Thomas
Museum of London Archaeology Service



Blackfriars House

Blackfriars House was once located at the point where the Fleet flowed into the Thames, just to the west of Roman *Londinium*. An excavation has shown that reclamation from the rivers in this area occurred in the medieval period, under the auspices of the Knights Templar. Subsequent encroachment over centuries on both banks of the Fleet led to its decline with the result that it was eventually channelled into a culvert beneath New Bridge Street. Dumped layers on the former foreshores were retained by a complex sequence of timber structures, some of which were re-used timbers from ships.

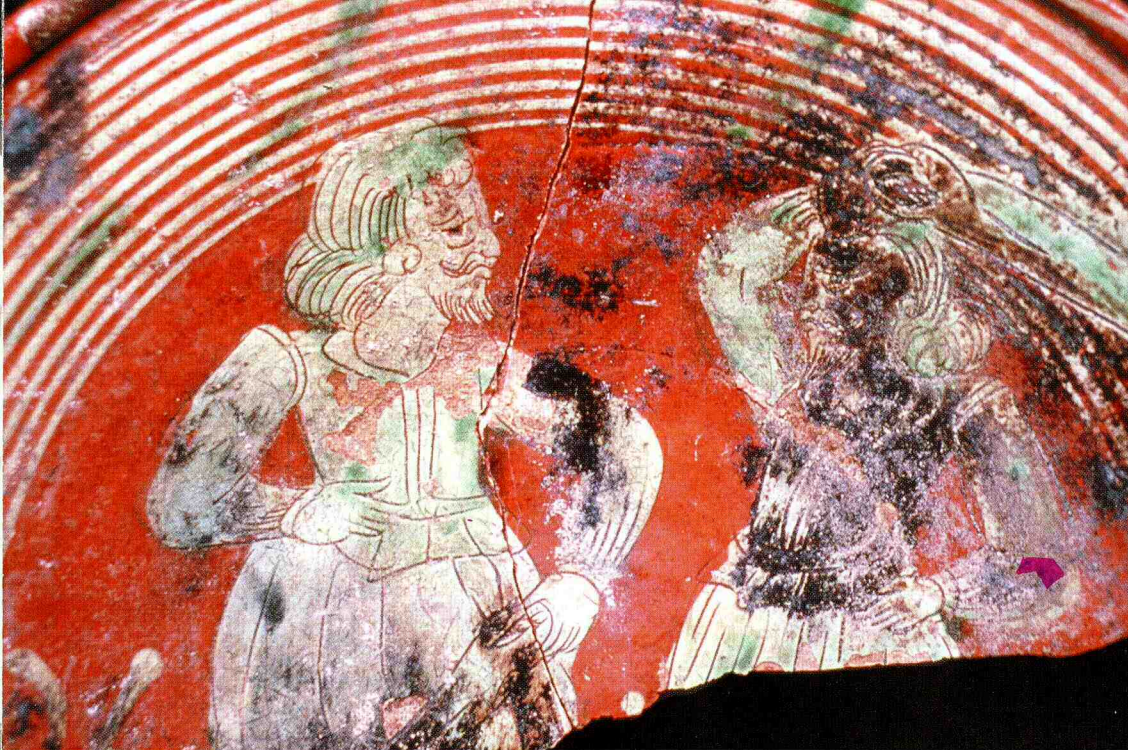
Henry VIII's Bridewell Palace was built in 1515–23 and Blackfriars House lies immediately to the east of the southern courtyard of the palace. The building was granted to the City in 1552 by Edward IV as a workhouse for the vagrant poor, and burials containing 16th- and 17th-century pottery were revealed during the dig. The graves were

orientated east/west and yielded 46 skeletons of varying ages.

A 17th-century timber-lined pit was also discovered on the site. Notable amongst the finds were a complete earthenware jug, a Werra slipware dish depicting two cavaliers with drawn swords (see picture), and an imported Raeren panel jug with an applied frieze of the electors of the Holy Roman Empire dated 1603.

Although much land had already been reclaimed, it was not until the late 17th century that development began in earnest. Excavation uncovered brick structures, which are illustrated on early maps of the area, together with the Fleet Wall. This was 4.3 metres deep and over 2 metres wide, forming the embankment along the east edge of the site beside the river.

Catherine Cavanagh
Project Officer, AOC Archaeology Group



Northgate House

Several Roman pottery kilns have been discovered at Northgate House in the heart of the City of London. The site lies on Moorgate and in the Roman period would have been in the valley of the Walbrook, the stream that divided the City in two. The stream was prone to flooding and this discouraged settlement, but the plentiful supply of water meant that various industries, including metal, leather and glass-working, grew up along its banks.

When the site was last redeveloped, in the 1930s, large numbers of pottery 'wasters' (vessels that did not fire properly and so were thrown away) were discovered. This suggested that the site had once been the location of a pottery kiln, and the recent work, funded by MEPC UK, confirmed this. In addition to the kilns, pits almost entirely filled with pottery wasters (see picture) have been excavated

together with other structures that would have been used in the production of pottery.

These kilns are by far the best preserved to have been discovered in London. Two of the kilns are circular, over 4 feet in diameter, and the floors are pierced with a series of holes which would allow hot air to rise from beneath. Within the kilns are the remains of the foundation structure. The potters appear to have been making a wide range of unusual vessels, including lamps, small amphoras, lids, bowls and dishes; many of these were produced in a special clay, making the objects sparkle. The kiln probably was in use during the early 2nd century, but further research is required to confirm this.

James Drummond-Murray
Museum of London Archaeology Service



Beneath the British Museum



The British Museum is currently undergoing a substantial redevelopment within the central quadrangle, the Great Court, following the departure of the British Library. Archaeological remains have been limited, as the area was not developed until the late 17th century. Montagu House was established in 1676 and the building became the first British Museum in 1753.

The removal of the structures around the Round Reading Room has revealed a deposit of gravel up to 4 metres thick in places, which represents an earlier course of the River Thames about 300,000 years ago, during a warm period between the Ice Ages. The gravel is varied, ranging from bright yellow sand to black manganese or iron stained deposits with sub-rounded flints. Occasional large flint blocks have been found, up to a maximum dimension of 40cm, indicating the considerable strength of the river in flood.

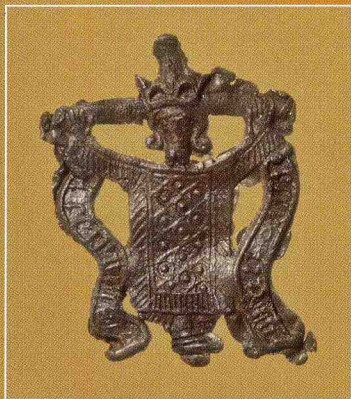
Although no remains of extinct animal species have been recovered, two artefacts have been found: a flint hand axe (left) and a roughout (right). In the case of the latter, a block of flint was being reduced, but apparently was unsuitable for producing a hand axe and was thus discarded. Elsewhere several flakes have been found from similar reductions.

Unfortunately none is in situ, as material has been swept down and deposited as part of the fluvial process. These discoveries mirror other finds from elsewhere in Bloomsbury. Hand axes have been recovered from Woburn Place and the earliest identification of a hand axe was made in 1715 from a find in Grays Inn Lane.

Tony Spence
The British Museum

Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities

Illustration courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum



Pilgrimage to Bermondsey

The souvenir badges made of lead and tin bought by pilgrims visiting religious shrines in the Middle Ages are always intriguing finds. Mass-produced and inexpensive, they usually show the saint or a hallowed object that was the main attraction at each shrine.

One such souvenir (see picture – inset at actual size), which was found by a Museum of London archaeologist in 1992 at a Southwark site near Tower Bridge, had eluded identification until this year. Research has now shown that it depicts the once famous Rood (crucifix) of Bermondsey Abbey. The angular letters on the labels that hang to each side of Christ are difficult to decipher but seem to be Latin for ‘this is the badge of Bermondsey’ (*ecce signum Berm *ondsiy*).

The Bermondsey Rood was one of London’s important destinations for pilgrims and was

said to have been discovered near the Abbey in 1117. This badge was unearthed just half a mile away and was perhaps lost by a local person. It confirms that it was a Saxon-period crucifix, its design perhaps based on an even older pilgrim attraction at Lucca in Italy.

By adding one more to the list of identified badges, this latest research usefully supplements the Museum of London’s recent publication, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and secular badges*. Indeed it is now possible to identify as Bermondsey souvenirs two badges found further afield, one in Buckinghamshire, the other, presumably bought by a pilgrim from the Continent, in the Netherlands. Many mysteries still surround these artefacts, but each discovery contributes to our reconstruction of this fascinating aspect of medieval life.

Geoff Egan
Museum of London Specialist Services

Medieval Islington

Excavation last autumn revealed substantial remains of medieval to early post-medieval buildings on the north side of Islington Green. To the rear of these structures was a large boundary ditch. Several phases of building were observed, the earliest consisting of chalk foundations and brickearth floors, the later represented by foundations of chalk, ragstone, Reigate stone and brick.

An oven, constructed from Reigate stone (see picture), had been set into the brick wall of one of the buildings, the outer wall of which was over 1 metre thick. Continuous repairs had been carried out on the oven, involving the replacement of its floor and opening, which suggests that it was in use for a considerable period of time. A sequence of hearths was also found, with ash and charcoal rake-out deposits covering the brickearth floors. In the earliest phase two circular hearths operated in tandem, perhaps serving an industrial purpose. These were replaced by a pitched tile hearth and

then by two further hearths that incorporated reused quernstones.

Elsewhere a pitched tile hearth 4 metres long was found alongside the main north-south wall of the building complex. The wall itself had been robbed out. This hearth was later replaced by a brick and Purbeck marble fireplace, the brickearth floors were replaced by red tiles, and the chalk and stone walls were rebuilt with brick. A fine cobbled courtyard comprising knapped flints and shaped lumps of ragstone was also laid at this time.

These buildings represent perhaps the most substantial archaeological remains of medieval Islington so far excavated. Analysis of the finds and documentary research is in progress. The excavations were generously funded by Sager Construction Limited.

Jon Butler

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited



Events

Spitalfields Archaeology Centre

Until 26 September

Exhibiting the story of the Spitalfields excavations.

Lamb St, E1 (north-west corner of Spitalfields Market)

Open Mondays to Fridays 12pm–2pm and Sundays 10am–4pm.

Closed Saturday

Tube/rail: Liverpool Street (Bishopgate Exit)

Bus: 5, 8, 26, 35, 43, 47, 48, 149, 242, 243A, B1, 67

National Archaeology Days

Find out about the Museum of London's archaeological work by taking part in the weekend's activities.

Saturday 24 July

Meet the Experts

11.00am–1.00pm & 2.00pm–5.00pm

Guided tour of the Museum of London's archaeology and social history archive in Hackney

Bus leaves at 10.15am, 11.45am, 1.15pm & 2.45pm 90mins

Numbers limited AB

Conservation Laboratories tour

2.00pm & 3.30pm 30mins Age 8+ OA

Demonstration: Come and see how archaeologists record a site

12.00pm, 1.30pm & 3.00pm 30mins

Workshop: Ready Steady Dig

1.00pm & 3.00pm 50mins Age 6+ OA

Sunday 25 July

Tour of the archaeological excavation at Spitalfields

1.00pm & 3.00pm 60mins Numbers limited AB

Meet the Experts

1.30pm–5.00pm

Walk: The City's archaeology

2.00pm 120 mins Fee £7.50 (conc. £5.00) AB

Demonstration: Geophysics

12.00pm, 1.30pm & 3.00pm 30mins

Workshop: Archaeological Quest

12.00pm–4.00pm Age 11+ AB

Adults £5.00 (adults must be accompanied by a child), children £3.50, family £15.00 (up to 2 adults and 3 children)

Admission to National Archaeology Days' events is free WITH Museum admission ticket (£5.00 adult, children free, unless stated otherwise).

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

Museum of London

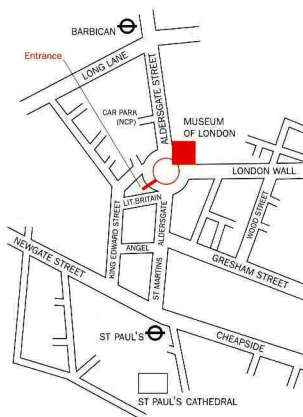
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Cover: Chris Thomas investigating the vault of the Spitalfields Charnel House