

# BIG82

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BIG82

Billingsgate Market Lorry Park, Lower Thames Street, EC3  
S Roskams

NGR: TQ 32980 80650

SMR: 043356-61

Excavation here (Figs\*BIG overall, gallery) took place over a 12-month period, funded by DoE and the Corporation, with additional funding by the Manpower Services Commission, the City of London Archaeological Trust and help from several other sponsors.

The Roman quay was investigated in the closing weeks of the excavation, and enough was recorded to show that it was a continuation of the quay excavated in 1974-6 on the sites at New Fresh Wharf (NFW74, SM75) immediately to the E. The construction here however included what was probably the base for a crane. The principal quay timbers were dated by dendrochronology to AD 201-28, which is in agreement with the structure being the same as that at New Fresh Wharf (AD 209-44). After some robbing of the structure, part was rebuilt and this gave a later dendrochronological date of AD 239-75 (Brigham 1990).

There was then a gap in occupation of the area until the 9th or 10th c; the areas behind and in front of the Roman waterfront silted up. The first signs of new constructional activity above this required the removal of elements of the quay in the E to give an inlet to the N formed by two very substantial stave-built revetments at least 2m high, and running off the site the E and W behind which was packed clay with timber lacing. The revetment was strengthened by large tie-back braces in the body of the clay.

This arrangement was retained throughout the 10th and 11th c, although partial collapses, and perhaps rising river levels, required various additions to the front of the revetment. Eventually the inlet was filled in, but its position was preserved by a conspicuous property boundary which ultimately divided the areas of St Botolph's Wharf and Billingsgate.

From the 12th c, the waterfront made successive advances to the south, with a series of front-braced revetments (Fig\*BIG). These showed extensive signs of prefabrication in the form of carpenters' marks and the reuse of timber from both contemporary buildings and boats. In the early 12th c, their configuration included a tongue of land projecting into the river, its position reflecting the now-filled inlet. The metallings of this projection constituted the earliest form of St Botolph's Wharf.

In 1180 or later the waterfront was advanced c 3m southwards by the insertion of a new front-braced revetment. Timber buildings were constructed behind this in the NE part of the site. Subsequently the revetment was completely robbed out, and a front-braced revetment was inserted (1205 or later), with dumps behind it creating a new working

surface. Later (1220+) a sequence of timber buildings with associated hearths was constructed immediately behind the revetment.

In 1250+ the waterfront advanced *c* 6m further S with the insertion of a new front-braced revetment. This was in turn sealed by further dumps (1250–70), presumably behind a new revetment which lay to the south of the limit of excavation. Over these dumps the gravel metallings of St Botolph's Lane were laid down. From the 13th c, the waterfronts lay off the site to the S, but the sequence of contemporary buildings behind them was examined; the buildings lay either side of the lane of St Botolph's Wharf, now evident. On the W side, it flanked the 12th c masonry E end of the church of St Botolph, to the S of which probable secular buildings developed. In the early 15th c the latter included a well-preserved undercroft, and in the mid-15th c the church expanded S to incorporate this previously domestic structure, probably as a vestry (as suggested by documentary evidence), and the open area between it and the early church was made into a private chapel. This plan continued through until the 16th c (possibly as late as 1600) when the chapel was converted into the choir of the church.

To the E of the lane, by contrast, commercial buildings continued in use from the 13th c to the post-medieval period. The earliest of these were timber-framed, with clay-infilled walls and containing hearths and in one case an associated timber drain. These buildings may have been structurally integrated with the waterfront revetments which bounded them in the S; this is significant for the study of the character of structural development in the medieval waterfront area, and fits with the way in which different forms of revetment construction match changes in property boundaries behind them.

For the watching brief on this site see BWB83.

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