

TOPPINGS WHARF lies just at the east of the approach to the Medieval London Bridge. Its ground is part of the Hays Wharf Company estate which extends along the South Bank facing the City between the bridges at Cannon Street and the Tower. The excavation there has been made possible by the demolition of the warehouse buildings on the wharf. Its broad aim has been to examine the sequence of cultural deposits on a site adjacent to the Thames and probably affected by its flow.

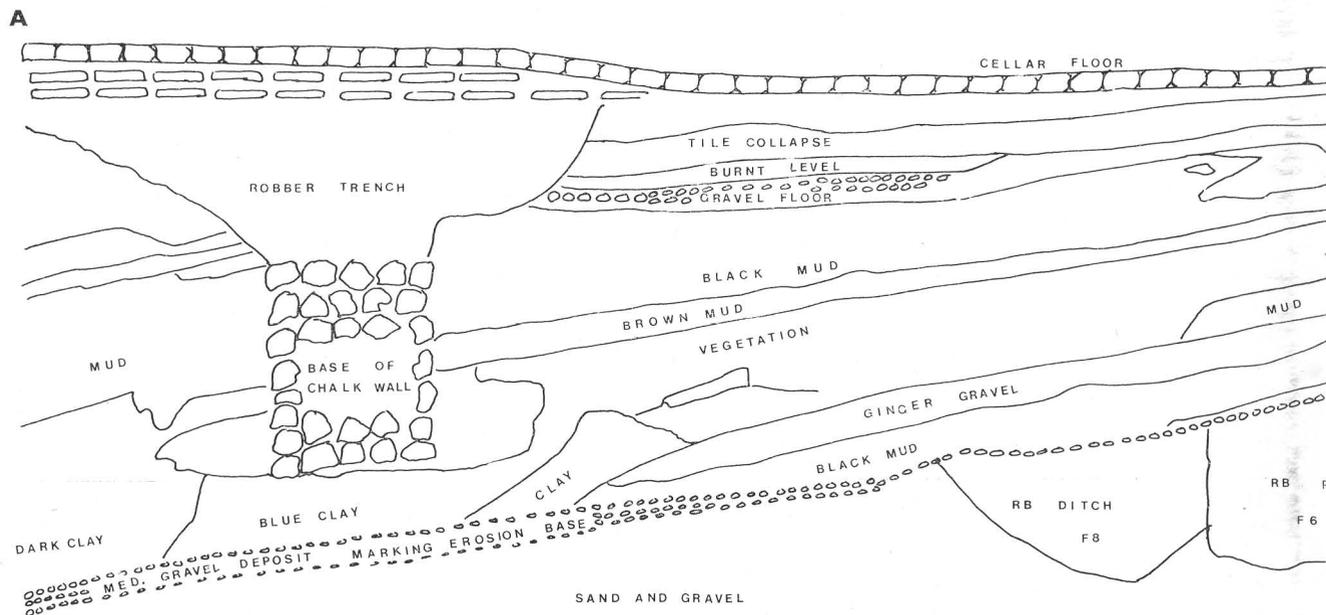
The first season of work took place between September 1970 and January 1971 and produced evidence of settlement on the sites during the Roman and Medieval periods. Pre-Roman occupation was indicated by deeper strata containing flints and pottery.

The sequence of deposits is illustrated in Section A-B. The earliest cultural horizon identified was a layer of dirty sand at a height of 2ft. above O.D. So far little of this sand has been examined and we cannot say to which of the later prehistoric periods the sherds and flint in it should be assigned. Above the sand lay a clean band of yellow clay about 2ft.

Excavations at Tooley Street, South

thick, this had possibly been laid by river action.

The Roman evidence was confined to the southern part of the site (see Site Plan). The surface of a baked clay floor was found cut slightly into the clay at a height of almost 4ft. O.D. The western edge of the floor was accompanied by large fragments of ragstone which could have belonged to a wall base. Other Roman features included a number of 1st century A.D. pits and an east-west ditch. Their fills contained much occupation debris including pot-



TOPPINGS WHARF ; SECTION A - B



Toppings Wharf Northwark

HARVEY SHELDON

tery, building tile, oyster shell and animal bone.

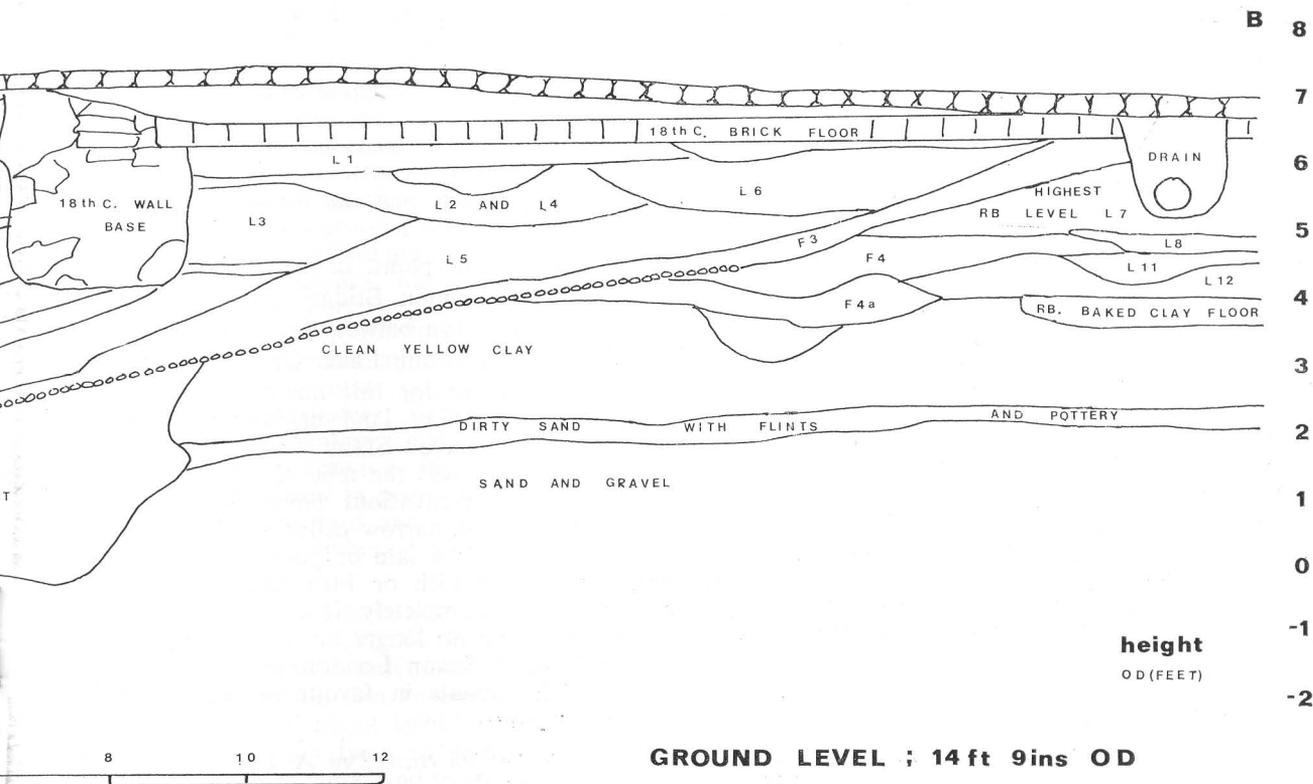
Section A-B shows that the Roman levels were affected by a river erosion. This cut the ditch—the most northerly of the surviving features—at a height of approximately 1ft. O.D. If the erosion is shown to be uniform on the site then the probabilities are that its action will have taken out any Roman settlement nearer to the river—and the actual bank itself.

Material evidence for the date of the erosion is limited but it had destroyed part of a wall, the

foundations of which were built of chalk blocks, broken tiles and gravel. A few sherds of pottery included in the construction could belong to the 11th or 12th century.

Pottery incorporated in the river gravel laid down on the line marking the erosion indicates that the river probably began to re-deposit in the 13th century. Section A-B illustrates the later Medieval sequence; it shows a succession of layers of clays, gravels, mud and vegetation banked up against earthier deposits. Evidence of Medieval post-erosion settlement is seen by the chalk foundations of a wall cut down through the accumulations of muds and clays. Although the wall had been partially robbed, the floor of the building is probably indicated by a spread of gravel. The associated pottery suggests that it was of late 13th or 14th century date while a layer of soot, and a jumble of blackened tiles over the gravel indicates that the building was burnt down.

The excavation also produced evidence of other late Medieval structures which dated to the period after the erosion and subsequent accumulation. At



B 8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

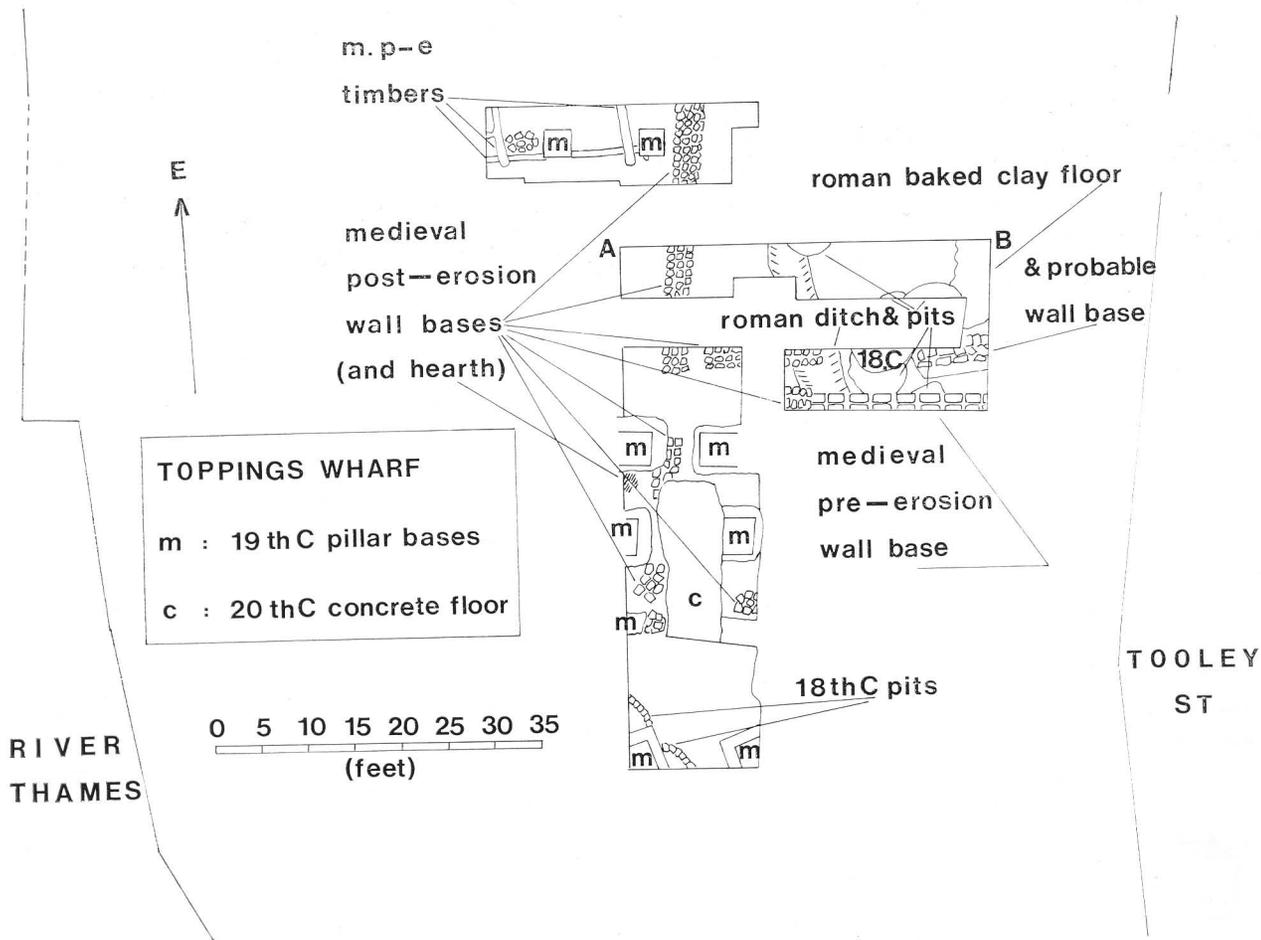
0

-1

-2

height
O.D. (FEET)

GROUND LEVEL ; 14 ft 9ins OD



Site plan showing the relationship between the structures of various periods and the modern river bank as excavated in the first season's work.

least two buildings with chalk foundations and one with a timber frame are indicated (see Site Plan). Clearly investigations of their size, and interpretation of their function must await further work on the site.

Acknowledgement. Much assistance has been received from the Proprietors of Hays Wharf, Ltd. Thanks are especially due to Sir David Burnett Bt., M.D.E., T.D. the Chairman and Mr. E. C. Boorman, the Group Surveyor. The help of the staff of Trollope & Colls has also been appreciated. The excavations are being carried out for the Southwark Archaeological Excavations Committee, and are financed by the Department of the Environment and Southwark Borough Council.

COMMENT by Graham Dawson

THERE IS neither time nor space here to go into the implications of this excavation. But it seems worth-

while to make one point. In her study of the position of Saxon London Bridge¹, Miss Honeybourne concludes that it ran between St. Olave's Stairs and the bottom of Pudding Lane. One of the principal pieces of evidence for this line was the existence of a narrow strip of land belonging to the City running to St. Olave's Stairs which it was argued, quite reasonably, was the relic of the Saxon Bridge approach. The excavations have shown that this strip, which is the narrow cellar on the east of the excavated area, is a late or post-medieval creation and that in the 13th or 14th century, houses lay across it and completely ignored its boundaries. Therefore it can no longer be used as evidence for the position of Saxon London Bridge and one of the chief arguments in favour of this position is thus removed.

1. *Studies in London History* ed. A. E. J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway, pp. 17-39.