

New Fresh Wharf: 3, The Medieval Buildings

Photography by Trevor Hurst

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THIS THIRD PART of the interim report on New Fresh Wharf, excavated in 1974-5¹, covers the development of the area immediately downstream of London Bridge between the churches of St. Magnus and St. Botolph, Billingsgate, from the 12th century to the Great Fire of 1666. Eleven pre-Fire buildings (lettered A-K) were excavated in the three trenches (Areas I-III) (fig. 1), showing successive builds and rebuilds on six of the eight properties between the two churches; properties whose history can be followed in documentary sources, notably the Husting Rolls, from the late 13th century, and in one case from the mid 12th². Buildings C, D, H and J were

excavated by hand in Area I; the other buildings were observed during and immediately after machine clearance of basement foundations.

Buildings A and B were built on newly reclaimed land sometime around the 12th century. In each case a north-south wall (for A in Area III, of chalk, probably bonded with clay, on a raft of horizontal timbers; for B, in Area II, of rag, bonded with clay) formed the west side of a building (fig. 1) with fragmentary internal timber features. The wall of A was 0.86m wide, just short of the 0.91m (3ft.) required by the Assize of 1189, and by its line confirmed the earlier tenement boundary of posts and

1 By the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London. For previous interim reports see *London Archaeol.* 2, no. 15 (1976), 390-5; 3, no. 2 (1977) 47-53.

2 Documentary survey by Tony Dyson to form part of the forthcoming report.

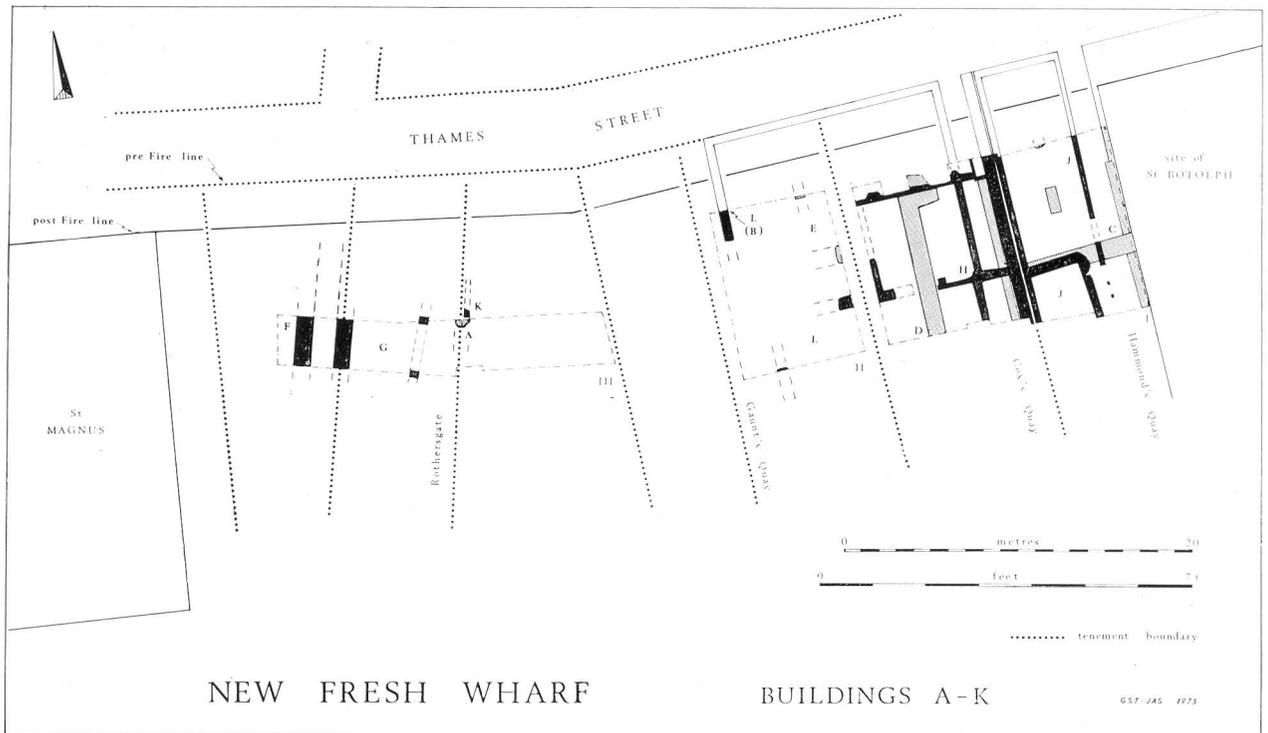


Fig. 1: New Fresh Wharf: medieval buildings A-K and tenement boundaries.



Fig. 2: Buildings C and J, looking south: 1, possible pier base for vaulting in C1; 2, Crosswall between C1 and C2; 3, doorway in crosswall; 4, eastern wall of building J, Hammond's Quay to the left; 5, cellar J2 with original brick floor and soakaway.

planks probably associated with the wharves at Rothersgate known in 1147-67. Building A lay on the east side of the alley as defined by the 14th century, but no alley surfaces survived for this earlier period.

Between Building B and St Botolph's church two properties became the sites of Buildings C and D in the later 12th or early 13th century (figs. 1, 2). More substantial buildings, they had walls of mortared coursed rag on foundations 1 m wide and up to 1.7 m deep of chalk blocks alternating with layers of gravel bedding. Building C comprised two rooms (C1-2) in the excavation, the northern with pier foundations indicating a possible vault (fig. 2). Building D, to its west, used the common boundary wall, and comprised one room 4 m by at least 7.1 m. It seems likely that walls continued to the north, but it is

not clear whether these indicate another room of D or a forebuilding of different date, as in the similar House I at Brook Street, Winchester³. In a secondary phase the east side of C was rebuilt, and a door inserted (? or an existing doorway replaced) at the east end of the crosswall between the two rooms (fig. 2, No. 3), incorporating a rebate with a bar-stop of the 13th or 14th century. The tenement was finally rebuilt as Building J.

The line of medieval Thames Street can be plotted by arguing back from the post-Fire realignment of the street frontage, and C1 can be reconstructed as a cellar of 3 x 2 bays, running back from the street at right angles, partially underground. Access

3 M. Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1962-63', *Ant.J.* 44 (1964) 197-9.

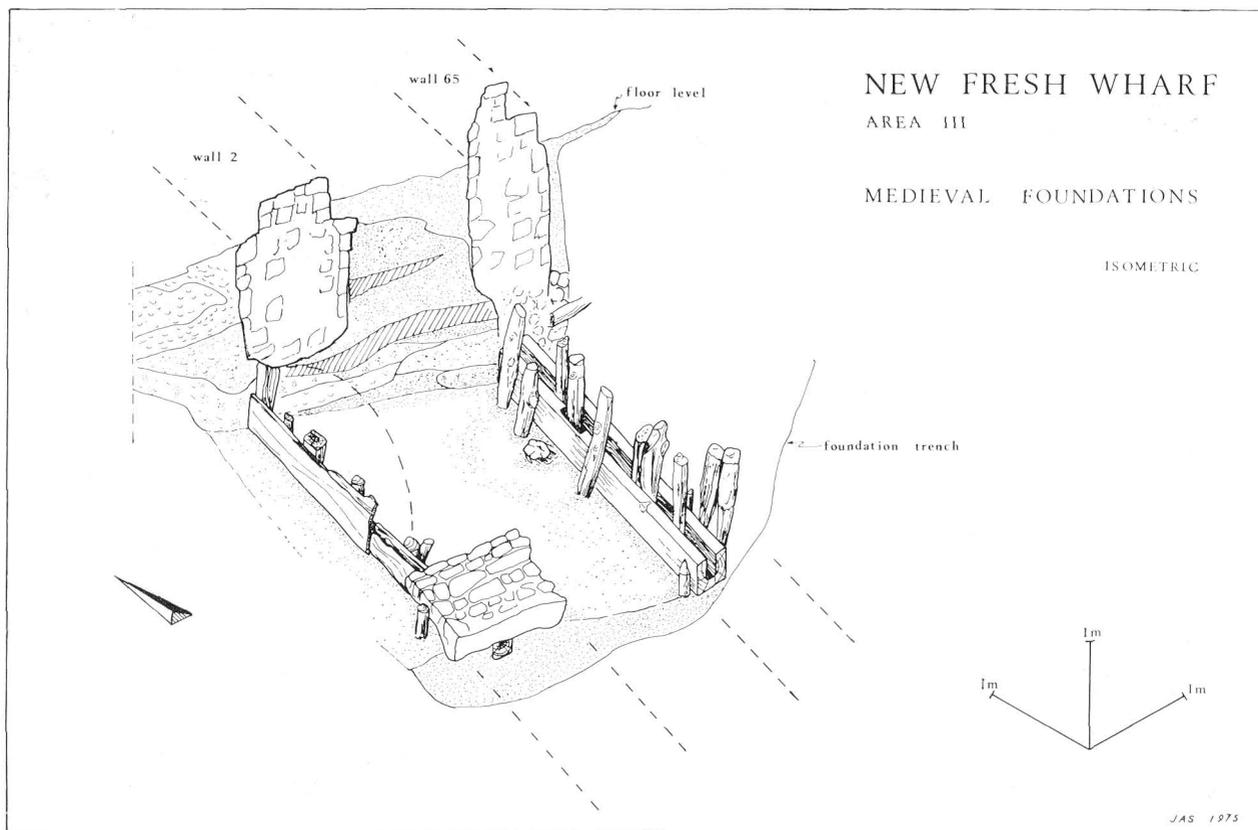


Fig. 3: Area III: foundations of Buildings F and G showing piling.

would have been from the street, and it was probably used for storage or as a shop, independently of the stone-built first floor hall which, on the analogy of Southampton and other towns, may have lain above. Building D, also a cellar, filled only part of the tenement, whose west boundary is most likely to have been the line of later walls which divided the trenches (fig. 1). The break in foundations suggests a door on the north side, facing the street, as at Winchester. Documentary evidence mentions the tenements of C and D from c.1270, but no measurements are available⁴.

Building E, a rebuild of B, comprised an EW wall of chalk and mortar seen in the east baulk of Area II, a probable spread of flint cobbles to the south, and a possible internal NS wall of chalk and clay (figs. 1, 2). Dated only roughly to post mid-13th

century, it is probably the house known as *le Brodegate* by 1349. The name implies an alley from the street, which in later buildings was on the west side. Across Rothersgate from Building A, dumping in the 14th century preceded Buildings F and G on two properties crossed by the Area III trench. Two substantial foundations were found running NS, on piling which reused structural timbers pegged with stakes up to 0.97m long (fig. 3). The western foundation was certainly arched, in the manner of 14th century churches and notable secular buildings such as the Custom House of 1382⁵. Offsets indicating the change from foundation to wall ranged between 2.02 and 2.8 m O.D. Pottery from the double foundation trench was of the late 13th or early 14th century, but the trench was apparently recut for the eastern wall and its fabric contained sherds possibly of the 15th century. Correspondence with post-Fire walls, which ran on these foundations at a higher level, showed that the western wall was internal to a property first recorded in 1290 (Building F), with an

⁴ Detailed description of Buildings A-D in the forthcoming report by Louise Miller.

⁵ T. Tatton-Brown, 'Excavations at the Custom House site, City of London, 1973' *Trans. LAMAS* 25 (1974) 138-41.

alley between it and the eastern wall, which formed the common wall with the property to the east (Building G) first recorded in 1278. Rothersgate formed the east side of this property, and alley surfaces were recorded. It is possible that Building A was demolished as part of this general development and raising of levels along the properties and Rothersgate itself.

Building H, in Area II, was a radical rebuild of Building D (figs. 1, 4-7). The full width of the property was filled with three rooms (H1-3) with two or three narrower rooms (H4-6) on the east side. The interior faces of the walls of the main room excavated (H2) were covered with knapped flint in panels with chalk blocks in chequerwork pattern (figs. 4-7).

After demolition of most of D's eastern boundary, the old foundation was used for a new NS wall, 0.6m wide and surviving 0.55 m high. Westwards, over the razed foundations of D, three further walls formed the original chequerwork room; up to 1.17 m high, they were founded upon vertical stakes driven into the reclaimed land beneath. A greensand door re-

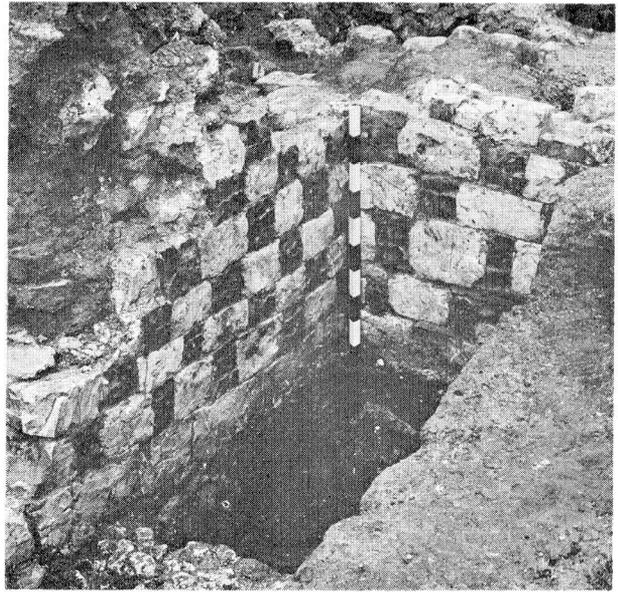
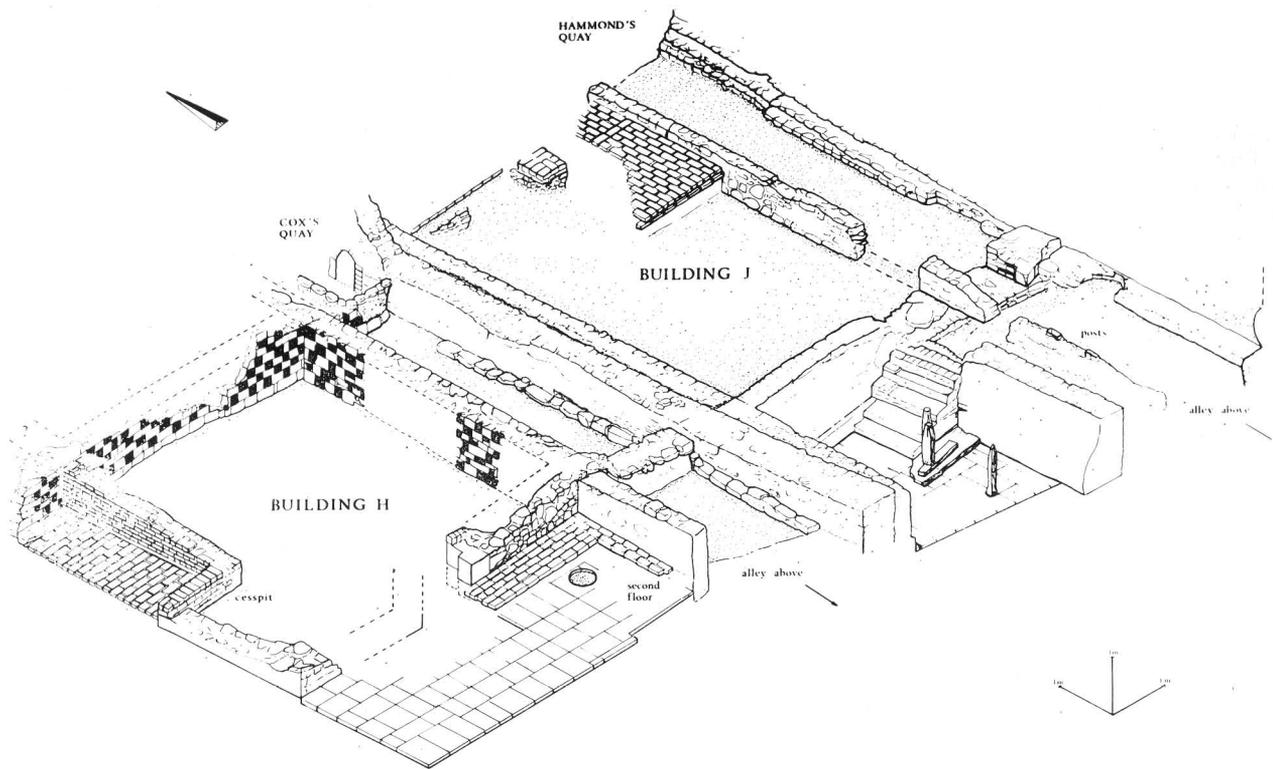


Fig. 4: Building H: detail of chequerwork in N.E. corner of room H2. A compass mason's mark is visible right of the scale.



NEW FRESH WHARF

AREA I

BUILDINGS H AND J

ISOMETRIC

Fig. 5: Buildings H and J: isometric of walls as found.

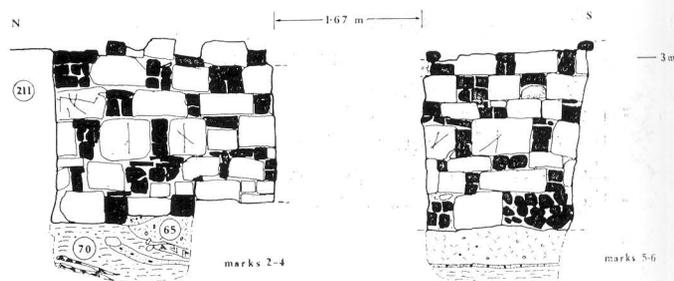
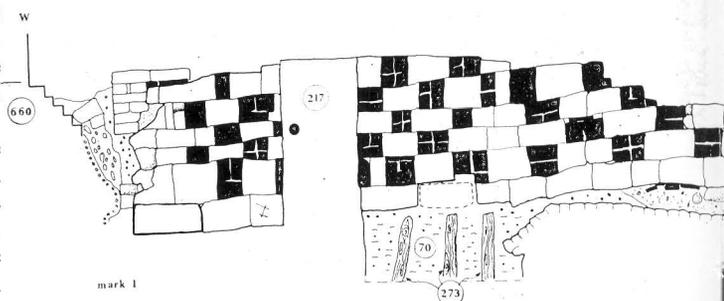
bate in the south wall indicated a door into the room to the south, though there was no access at this level into the other rooms. After the spreading of a layer of rammed chalk, a fourth chequerwork-faced wall was built to run north-south 1.6 m inside the east wall, cutting off the narrow space H5 from H2, now with all four faces of chequerwork. This arrangement was continued to the north, where the narrow room H4 was filled in the excavation with a garderobe pit for an intramural chute (fig. 7). To the south a similar division separated rooms H3 and H6, though the dividing wall staggered 0.15 m to the west. These internal divisions are possibly later than the initial construction, but the suggested reconstruction requires them to be primary. A floor of flagstones, with a soakaway cut into it, was found in H3. Secondary phases comprised the raising of floor levels and insertion of a brick cesspit in H2 (fig. 6:217; figs. 5,7), a second brick floor, which covered the soakaway, in H3 (figs. 5,7), and possibly the insertion of the garderobe in H4. Dating evidence suggests the building of H, in the 15th century, secondary phases in the 16th/17th, and destruction, probably by the Great Fire, in the mid-17th.

Chequerwork of the original room (Elevations 3 and 5, fig. 6) was of chalk blocks and panels of knapped flint in orange mortar (black mortar is known elsewhere to have been used for effect); up to six courses survived above a base course of larger chalk blocks. The partition wall (213: Elevation 4, fig. 6) differed in having no base course, its flint panels larger and more irregular, and pieces of rooftile used to level up the courses. Eighteen masons' marks were seen. Two marks, crude versions of the mason's compasses (e.g. 213, northern fragment, fig. 5) and an X perhaps representing the opposed triangles of the mason's double-headed axe (also on wall 213) are common elsewhere. On the southern wall (Elevation 5, fig. 6) an upward progression of marks by courses — compasses, one stroke/three strokes/compasses/perhaps one stroke — could be seen. This was not related to the size of blocks, and applied only to a small length of walling.

Chequerwork first appears as a subsidiary design in flushwork, the technique of laying flints, usually knapped, in panels of stone tracery. One of the earliest examples of both techniques is the gatehouse of Butley Priory, Suffolk, c.1320-56. Both are seen on many churches in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex from c.1430 to the early 16th century, and on civic buildings such as the Guildhall at King's Lynn. Further south there are groups, with local variations, in Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex, Wiltshire and Kent, as late as c.1578. London examples include the in-

6 I am grateful to the members of my extramural classes at Ewell and Eltham for help in finding parallels.

Elevation 3: wall 211



Elevation 4: wall 213

NEW FRESH WHARF

AREA I

ELEVATIONS OF CHEQUERWORK ROOM H2

side of medieval Newgate (?possibly a repair of the early 15th century), the parapet of Southwark Cathedral (modern, but said to be a copy of a medieval feature), the Holbein gate at Whitehall (1538) and the Guildhall crypt (early 15th). This last is the only parallel for internal chequerwork, but is not in flint and chalk. The room remains unique.

Documentary evidence points to an alley (Cox's Quay) down one side of H by 1559, and after the Fire it lay on the east. It is likely that rooms H4-6 were beneath the alley, which would be at about 3.5m O.D., giving cellars of c. 2.2m. The partition wall 213 and its continuations north and south must therefore have supported the inner wall of the house

7 C. Platt, *The English Medieval Town*, London, 1976, fig. 53.

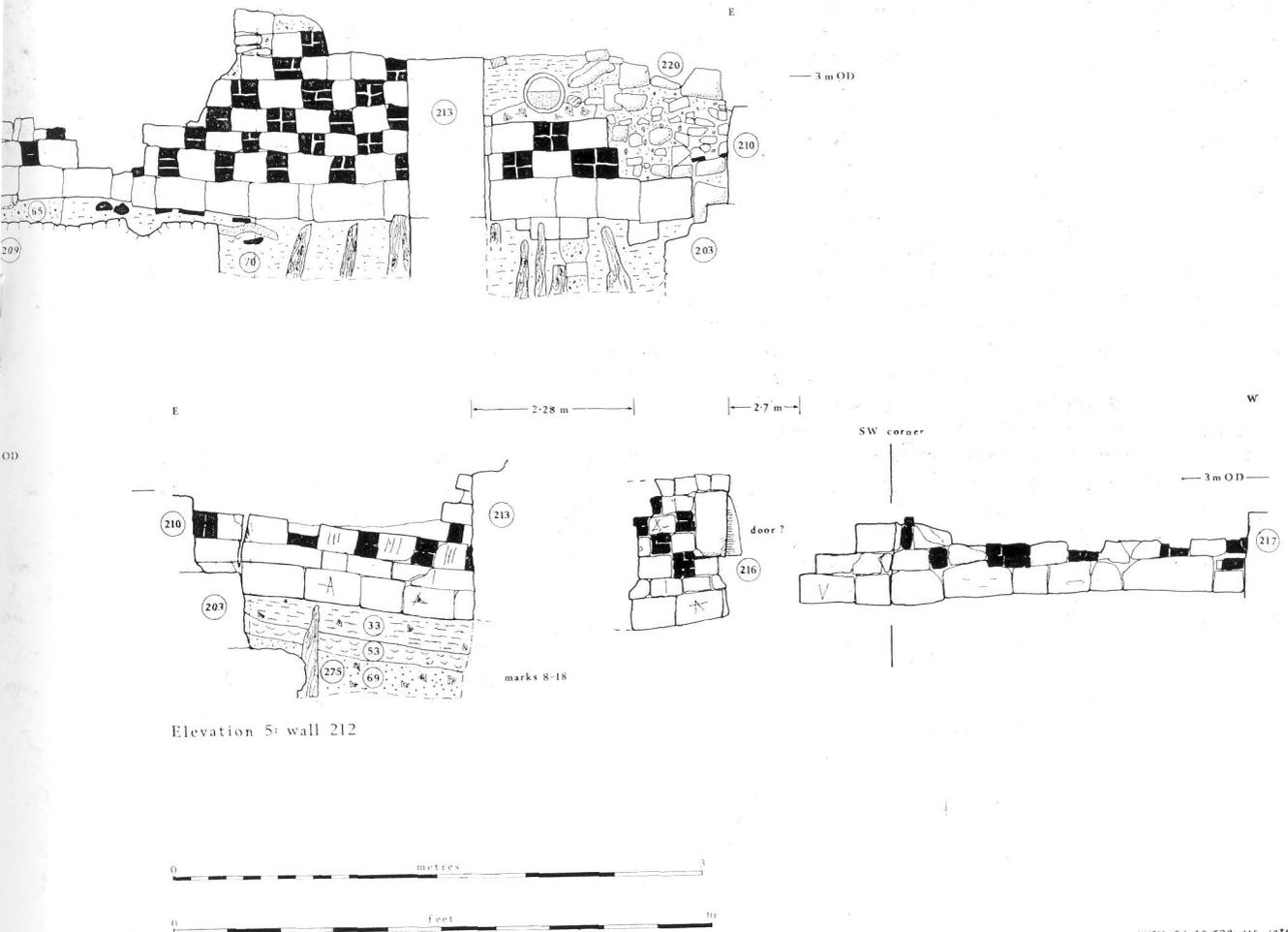


Fig. 6: Building H: elevation of chequerwork.

above, and this argues for their being primary. The cesspit in H4 may have been cleaned out by access from H1, as at Catherine Street, Exeter⁷.

A reconstruction of Building H is shown in fig. 7, based on the excavated remains and the line of medieval Thames Street. H1 and H2 are equal-sized cellars, probably not quite totally underground (cf. Tackley's Inn, Oxford). The intramural chute to H4 is taken to the first and second floors.

A three storeyed house is likely in this quarter of the City by the 15th century. The back wall of the house would run along the south wall of the chequerwork room, which might account for the subsidence under the alley in Elevation 5 (fig. 6). The subsidiary

buildings behind the house would be to one side of the property, the alley coming into the open air at this point southwards to act as a light well (cf. 8 Purfleet St, King's Lynn⁸). The principal house, though filling the property from side to side, was deeper than it was wide, and must have been roofed at right angles to the street. It seems likely that the sidewalls were masonry to the eaves, with a timber-framed front (as at 166 Fore Street, Exeter⁹) and possibly rear. It is possible that H6 did not function as a cellar, since no occupation surfaces associated with H were found inside it. As in King's Lynn, the hall of the tenement may have been above H3, sharing a chimney stack with its kitchen at the south

8 V. Parker, *The Making of King's Lynn*, London, 1971, fig. 11.

9 D. Portman, *Exeter Houses 1400-1700*, Exeter, 1966, 74-5, fig. xi.

end — hence the absence of hearths in the excavated rooms. The room above the chequerwork room may therefore be seen as a parlour between the hall and the room next to the street, probably a shop.

On the tenement to the east, Building C was rebuilt as Building J in the first half of the 16th century (figs. 1-2, 7-8). The layout resembles that of H in certain points, and it may be that the area immediately upstream of Billingsgate was developing as a trading area in the late medieval period so that large cellars with halls above were giving way to a series of smaller rooms with better access between street and wharf. Two NS walls only 0.3m wide formed the sides of a cellar (J1), with an alley down the east side (Hammond's Quay, 1559); there was no evidence that the space under the alley was a cellar. The east wall of C was retained, and the old crosswall reused; a smaller cellar of brick (J2) was now approached from the alley by means of a stairwell, for which tile-lined postholes survived (fig. 1,

5). Both rooms had floors of brick, and a drain brought rainwater from the gutters inside the property to empty into a soakaway within J2. Access to J1 may also have been by the stairwell. In J1, at the north baulk, traces of what might be brick pads for wooden pillars were seen. Secondary features of J included a second brick floor in J1 and a pine floor in J2, on which was found fragments of staging or racking, charred and buried in fire rubble containing a bucket with an inscribed date of 1660 or 1666 (fig. 8). The debris also contained one piece of moulded stone window mullion and two pieces of some kind of internal moulding, presumably from Building J. This has also been reconstructed (fig. 7); it is possible that the thinner masonry supported a timber frame at a lower level than in H. The near-coincidence of the wall between J1 and J2 with the division between H2 and H3 argues that the back-wall of the main house of Building J ran along the crosswall, so that the gable line would be common to

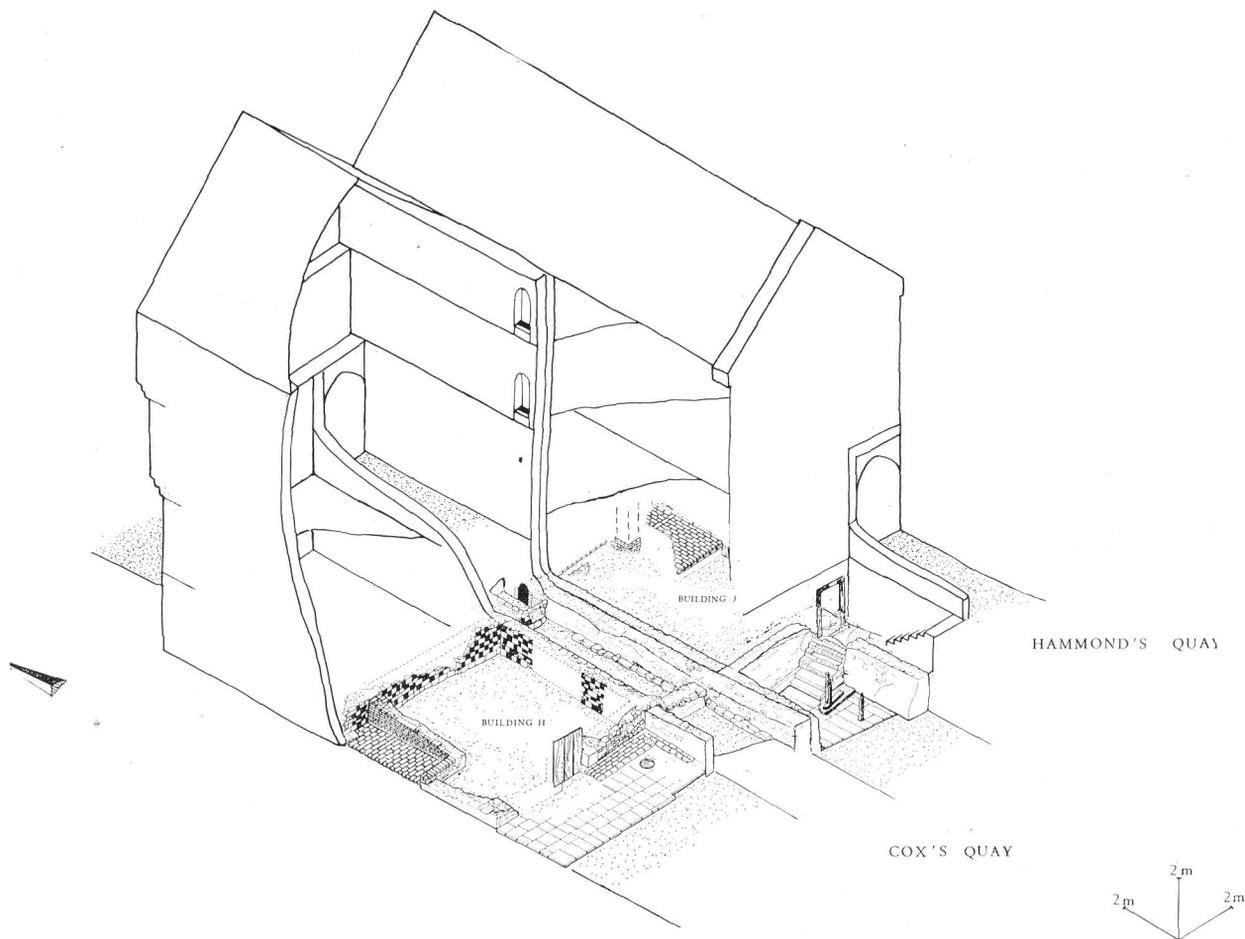


Fig. 7: Buildings H and J: reconstruction with the proposed line of medieval Thames Street.

both houses. Again the alley came out into the light at this point, the only difference from Cox's Quay being that here the subsidiary buildings were thinner to allow for the stairwell down into J2.

Building C came into the hand of the Vintners in 1439, and they or their tenants must have developed it into Building J. It is possible that the change in the cellars — from vaulted cellars, probably with earth floors, to cellars probably flat-ceilinged, brick floored and in one case with wooden staging — reflects a change to specialised trading. Certainly the Great Fire, which started in Pudding Lane, the northern extension of Rothersgate, at a house some 100m north of the site, was aided in its spreading by the spirits in the wharfside warehouses along this part of Thames Street.

Buildings K and L (fig. 1) are roughly late or post medieval in date. Building K survived only as a fragment of brick walling and a probable brick floor on the site of Building A, east of Rothersgate, in Area III. Building L was found immediately under the basement in Area II. It comprised a wall of coursed rubble in mortar down the eastern side of the alley (later Gaunt's Quay), which has been inferred for the underlying Building E, perhaps with a doorway onto the alley. The EW wall of E was demolished and a new wall, with a hearth, built EW about 2.6m to the south. This probably also had a doorway in it, and being 0.6m wide may have been the back of the main house, since it lines up roughly with the walls of H and J for which a similar function has been suggested. The hearth indicates a primary stack, presumably connecting two cellars. The room to the north contained a floor of plain tiles in yellow and green glazes and bricks. At the south baulk another wall was seen

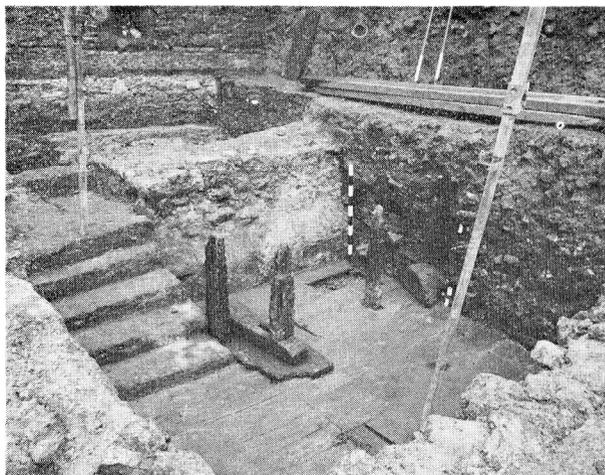


Fig. 8: Building J: cellar J2 with burnt staging, filled with debris of the Great Fires.

which is probably part of Building L, indicating that the alley widened by that point (perhaps akin to the widening of Hammond's Quay in Building J). Demolition by fire, undated, was strongly suggested.

Thus the Great Fire can be blamed for the destruction of Building J, probably of H, and probably (by inference) of the other buildings standing at the time at the foot of Pudding Lane, Buildings F, G, K and L. It is hoped that future excavation on or near the site will uncover the succession of quays which corresponded with, and could perhaps illuminate, the changing circumstances prompting the rebuilds and re-arrangement of tenements from their establishment in the 12th century to their violent demise in 1666.

Local Societies — amendments

The sixth list of amendments to the list of local societies published in Vol. 2 no. 9 is as follows:

The Eltham Society: Sec. Mrs. S. Simmons, 29 Red Lion Lane, Shooters Hill, S.E.18.

Lewisham Local History Society: joint Secs. Miss I. M. B. Dyer, 80 Ermine Road, S.E.13 and D. J. Dalton, 10a Sydenham Park, S.E. 26 4EQ.

Pinner and Hatch End Local History and Archaeology Group: Sec. E. Hayden, 21 Cecil Park, Pinner.

Thameside Archaeological Group: Acting Sec. Valerie Smith, 19 Shrubbery Road, Gravesend, Kent.

West Essex Archaeological Group: Sec. D. F. Cousins, 102 Malford Grove, South Woodford, E.18 2DQ.

A.G.M. of the London Archaeologist

The eighth A.G.M. was held on the 20th May in the Lecture Theatre of the Museum of London. The following officers were elected:—Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editors, Rhoda Edwards and Beth Richardson; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Sally Petchey; Managing Editor, Nicholas Farrant — and the auditors were re-elected. Representatives to serve on the Publication Committee were elected from the Museum of London and the following societies: Barnet, City of London, Greenwich and Lewisham, S.L.A.E.C. and West London. Following the close of business, Ralph Merrifield spoke on "The Museum of London and its Role in London's Archaeology".