

# Post-medieval Pottery Production at Woolwich

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THE EXCAVATION at the Woolwich Old Ferry Approach<sup>1</sup> in 1974 recovered a sequence of kilns producing earthenware and stoneware.<sup>2</sup> The stoneware kiln is unique at the time of writing, since it represents attempts to produce a saltglazed stoneware in Britain earlier than Dwight's venture in 1672.

This article is a brief summary of the detailed study of pottery<sup>3</sup>, from the three main production phases<sup>4</sup>, recovered from the excavation.

## Local clay sources

The London clay beds, which extend westwards from Plumstead Common, the site of 18th and 19th century potteries, towards Hither Green, would probably have been the source of clay for the red-earthenwares. The white firing clay required for the vessels of fabrics S1, S4a and S4b (described below), may have been obtained from the local seams of pipe clay<sup>5</sup>. A source at St. Mary's Hill, not more than 500 metres to the SW, would have been ideal for the potters.

## Phase one (Fig. 1, nos 1-7)

The earliest group of pottery, containing a large proportion of wasters, was recovered from a clay lined settling pit.

An earthenware fabric (E1), represents 99 per cent of the pottery from this phase, the remaining one per cent is made up of residual Roman and Medieval sherds. Only 25 per cent of the vessels of fabric E1 are glazed or slipped and decoration is confined to a painted white slip curvilinear designs, sgraffito and a few sherds with finger impressions around the body.

Jars (no. 1) and jugs (no. 2) are the commonest forms from this phase. Other common types are: moulded rim bowls (no. 3), usually with an internal white slip and glaze and horizontal handles; flanged rim bowls (no. 4) with steep sides; and pancheons, which are usually unglazed. Miscellaneous forms include pipkins; dishes (nos. 5 and

6), which have pulled feet on flat bases with knife trimmed sides; costrels (no. 7), which sometimes have an external clear lead glaze; chafing dishes; and watering pots.

No internal dating evidence was recovered with the phase one pottery, but the forms of vessel listed above are similar to those from excavations in the London area, such as at Watling Court and Cheam, Surrey<sup>6</sup>. A date from the late 15th to first half of the 16th century can be assigned to this group.

It is probable, since the forms of vessel resemble Dutch pottery of the period, that Dutch potters had established production in the area, to produce mainly domestic vessels both for local consumption<sup>7</sup> and for the London market.

## Phase two (Fig. 2, nos. 8-18)

Pottery from the stoneware kiln can be subdivided into four main fabrics as follows:

Fabrics S1: A stoneware with an external slip and poor saltglaze. Vessels in this fabric are mainly bellarmine with a mask and medallion, the commonest of which are illustrated (nos. 8 and 9). Seven types of mask and five types of medallion were recovered. A small proportion of the bellarmine have a mask and no medallion (no. 10) and two types of mask appear on these vessels. Small bottles (no. 11) and two main types of mug (nos. 12 and 13) were also produced in this fabric, the globular mugs having a medallion on the body and circle impressions around the neck.

Fabrics S4a and S4b: A white stoneware (S4a) and white highly fired earthenware (S4b), were recovered from phase two. These fabrics sometimes have a painted cobalt (blue) oxide beneath a clear glaze, and are often decorated with stamps of birds, leaves and crowns, or applied stars. The commonest forms of vessel are bowls (no. 15) and pipkins (no. 14), with tankards (no. 16 and 18), porringers (no. 17), mugs and shallow dishes forming a minor proportion of the vessels in fabrics

written by S. Pryor and will be published in *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 12 (1978).

5 I am indebted to R. Rigden, Plumstead Museum, for information on pipe clay sources.

6 Orton, C. (*pers com.*)

7 Similar vessels have been recovered from other local excavations.

1 Directed by A. Pandrich.

2 The pottery and other finds have been deposited with the Plumstead Museum.

3 A full pottery report will be published in *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 12 (1978).

4 The structural and stratigraphical report has been

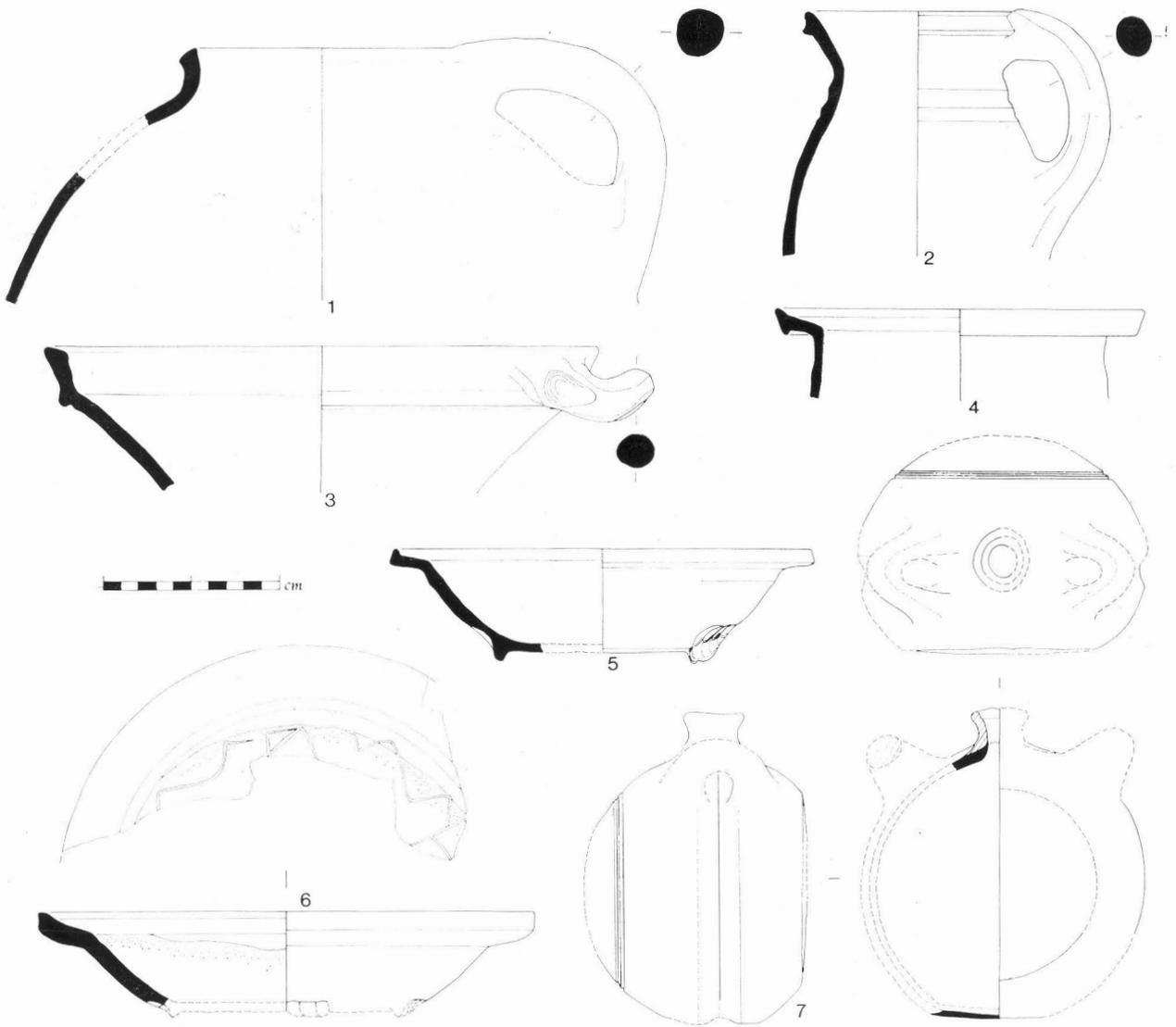


Fig. 1: Woolwich Pottery: Phase one. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$

S4a and S4b. The majority of the vessels in these fabrics are wasters and in most cases the oxide and glaze have bubbled.

Fabric E2: An earthenware with the same forms and fabric as the phase three vessels of fabric E2. The major forms are strainers and large storage jars, which will be described in more detail in the next phase.

The stoneware kiln has been dated from between 1660 and 1680 by clay pipes<sup>8</sup> and is likely to have been in operation around 1660 or a little earlier,

since it was overlain by an earthenware kiln, also dated from between 1660 and 1680 by clay pipes. There is evidence for a possible re-build of the earthenware kiln, which would suggest that it had been fired several times.

It seems likely that fabrics S4a and S4b were the result of experimental firings (the kiln was not found) and do not, therefore, represent a long period of production. A short time span between the phase two and phase three kilns is also indica-

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to B. Bloice for dating the clay pipes.

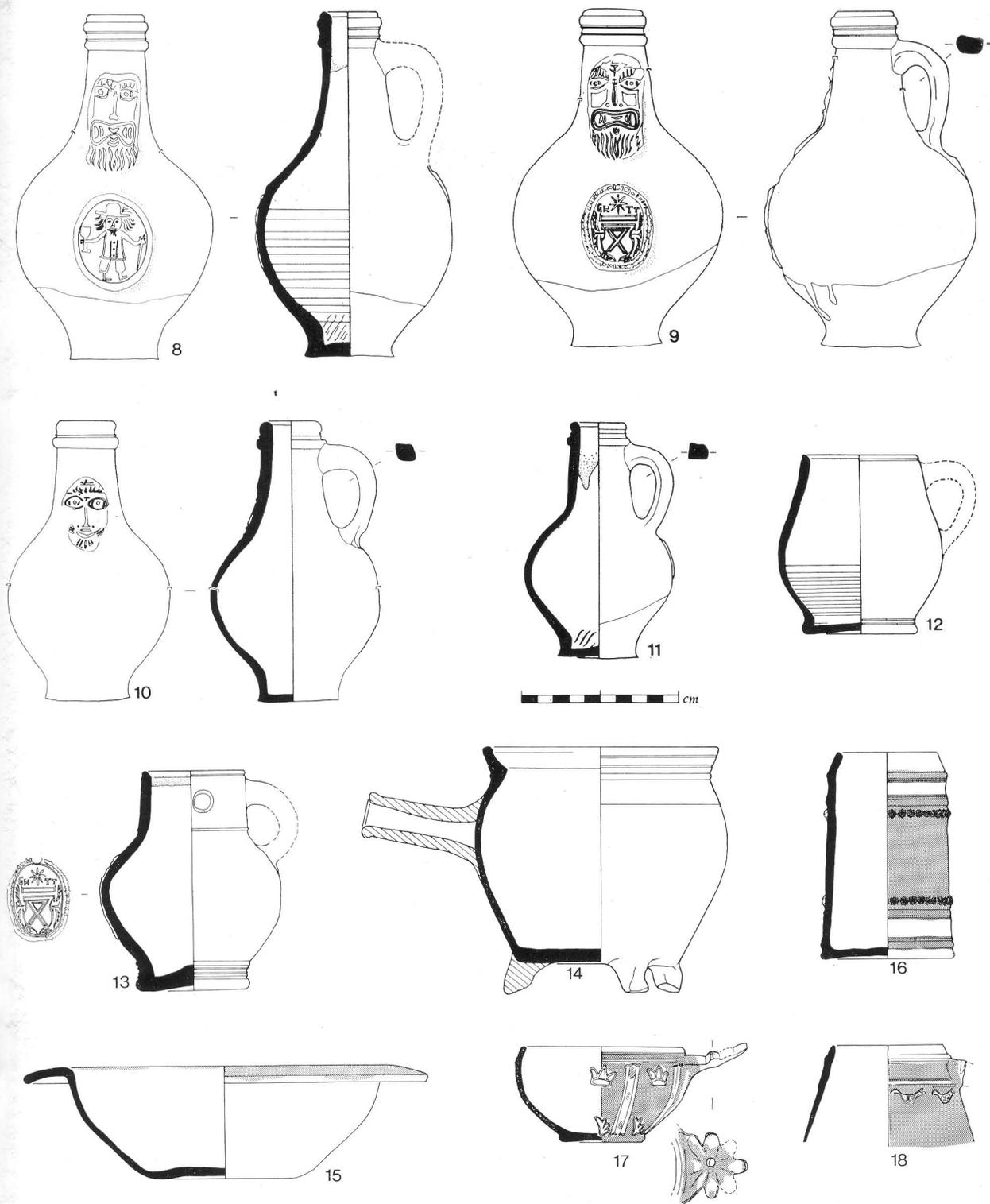


Fig. 2: Woolwich Pottery: Phase two. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$

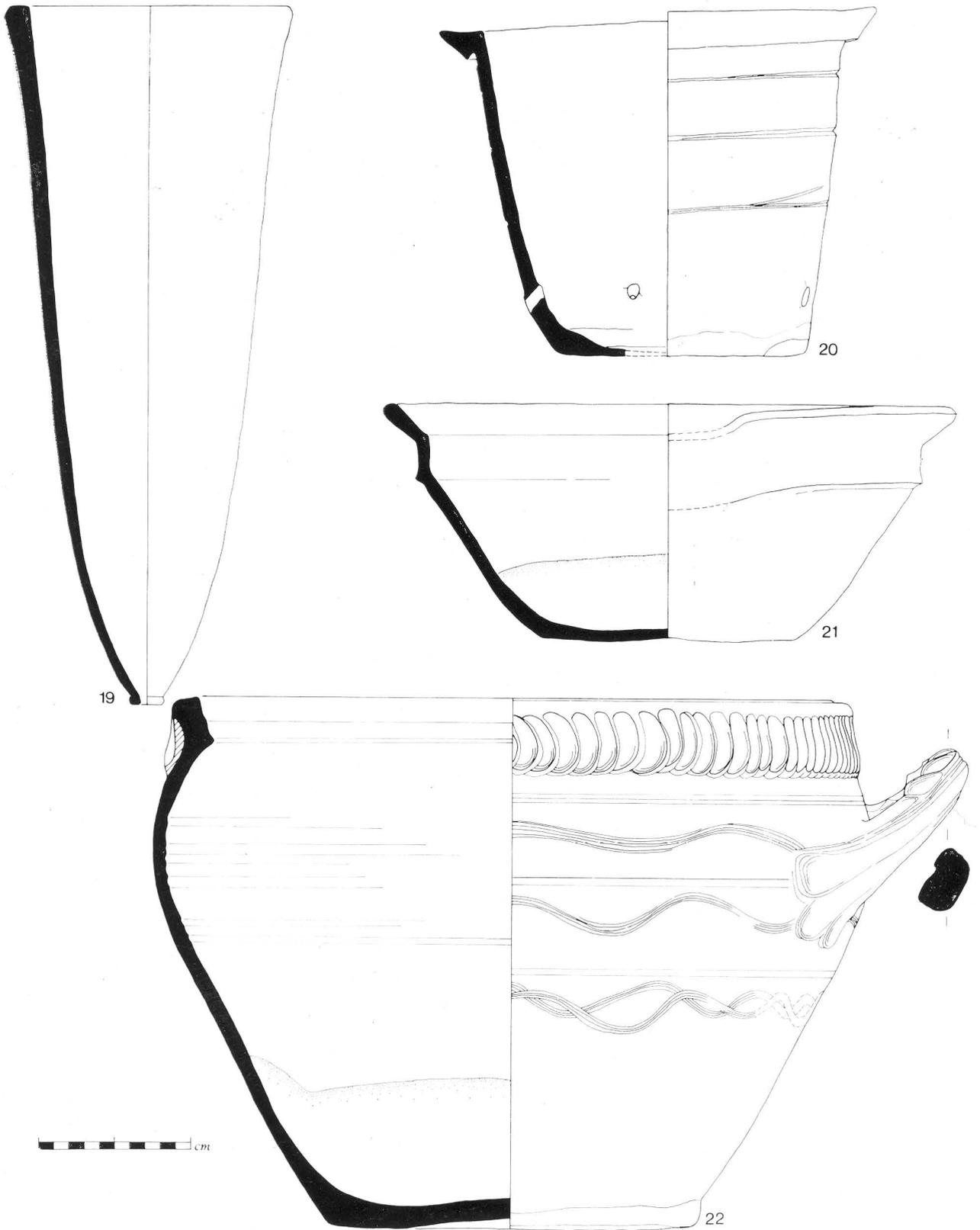


Fig. 3: Woolwich Pottery: Phase three. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$

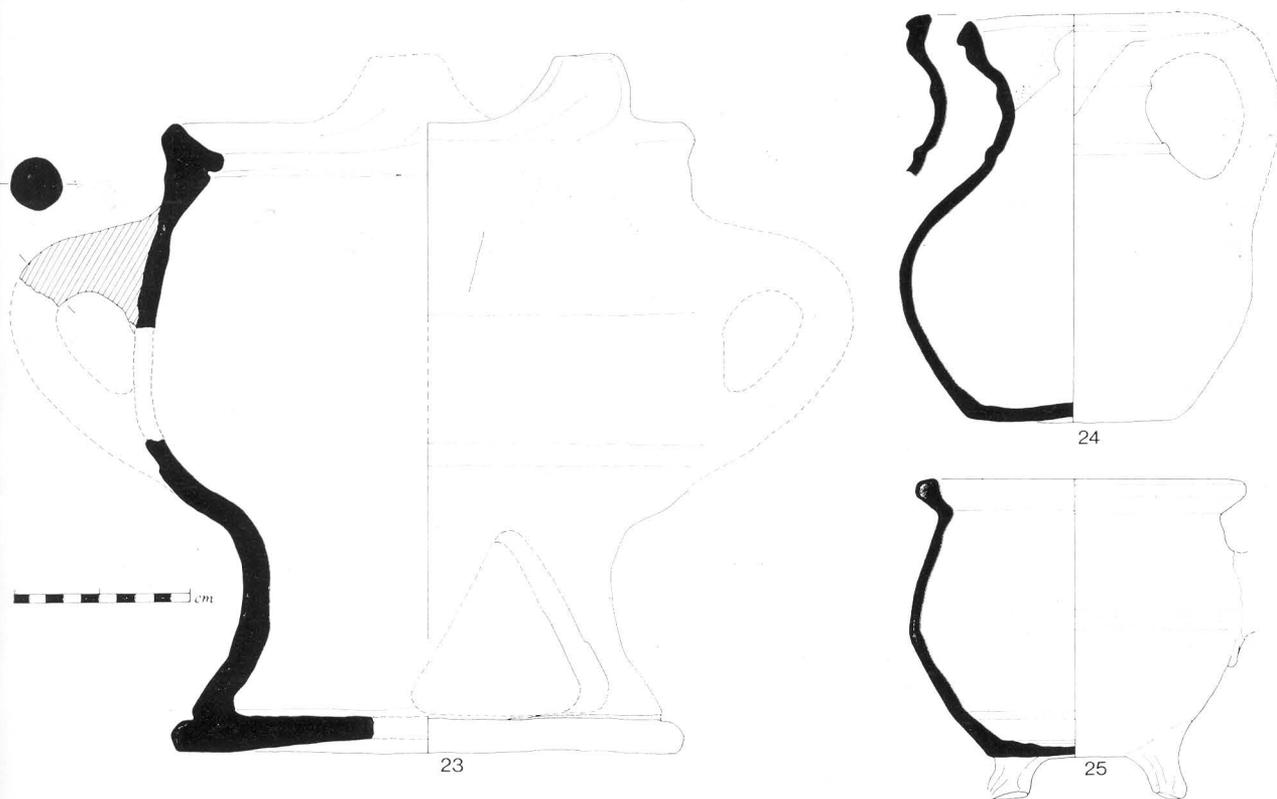


Fig. 4: Woolwich Pottery: unstratified group. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$

ted by the similarity of the earthenware forms and fabric.

The saltglazed vessels were probably produced for sale mainly to the public houses both locally<sup>9</sup> and within London<sup>10</sup>. The tankards and mugs of white stoneware and earthenware (fabrics S4a and S4b), would have catered for public houses, whereas the bowls and pipkins would probably have been for domestic use.

It is likely that the vessels of fabrics S1, S4a and S4b were produced by German potters operating the Woolwich kilns<sup>11</sup>.

### Phase three (Fig. 3, nos. 19-22)

The majority of the vessels from the earthenware kiln are of fabric E2. Over 50 per cent are unglazed, the commonest forms being: Sugar cones (no. 19), which were used as moulds in the manufacture of sugar; strainers (no. 20), which are

usually unglazed, in a reduced fabric, and have grooves around the body; small storage jars; large storage jars (no. 22), which usually have a thumbled strip beneath the rim. Many of the large jars have an internal white slip beneath a clear lead glaze and a few have a copper stained or flecked glaze over the slip. Miscellaneous forms include pipkins, pancheons (no. 21), chafing dishes and a watering can.

The phase three earthenware kiln produced mainly industrial vessels, such as the sugar cones and strainers, whereas the domestic wares, such as the storage jars and miscellaneous vessels, represent a small proportion of the output of the pottery during the 1660 and 1680 phase.

The earthenware kiln would have supplied a local market with its domestic wares<sup>12</sup> and, to a lesser extent, its industrial wares — whereas the

found at Coleman Street, in the City.

11 A more detailed discussion with references will be published in the full report.

12 See examples recovered from a local excavation, *op. cit.* in note 9, Fig. 7 and 8, nos. 15-22.

9 Examples were recovered from a local excavation, see J. De Goris, 'The Finds', in T. W. Courtney, 'Excavations at the Royal Dockyard, Woolwich, 1972-73', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 9 (1975), 42-102, Fig. 5, no. 1.

10 A bellarmine of a type produced at Woolwich was

major proportion of the industrial vessels would have been sold on the London market<sup>13</sup>.

Very little evidence was recovered from the excavation to throw any light on the pottery production in the area between the second half of the 16th and first half of the 17th century. It seems likely, however, that a small group of wasters<sup>14</sup> represents this phase. Three vessels from this group have been illustrated (Fig. 4, nos. 23-25). The chafing dish (no. 23) does not have the internal base which is usually characteristic of vessels of this class and it shows signs of a second opening in the upper half of the body. Jugs (no. 24) are well represented within the group and have a bib of white slip, beneath a clear glaze, opposite the handle. Pipkins (no. 25) are also a common type within the group.

### Conclusions

The groups of pottery from the Woolwich Ferry excavation indicate extensive pottery production in the late 15th or first half of the 16th century, and again during the second half of the 17th century. The period between these major phases is not represented by any large groups of wasters, but it

would seem, from the evidence available, that pottery production in the area may have been continuous.

13 A sugar cone of the type produced at Woolwich was found in London, and is now in the collection of the Museum of London.

14 This group will be discussed in more detail in the full report *op. cit.* in note 3.

## Save It!

READERS CANNOT have failed to notice the new plastic envelopes in which the Winter issue of the *L.A.* was delivered. When the idea was first suggested, your editor's environmental conscience was troubled—are synthetic envelopes really an advance on paper ones? He was won over by the point that the new ones can be re-used as finds bags on excavations, and therefore urges readers to open them carefully so that they are in a fit state to be used again. The logo, for the benefit of those who have not recognised it, is a free adaptation of the Trier medallion, commemorating the triumphant entry of Constantius Chlorus into London in 296 A.D. and was drawn by Pamela Greenwood. We hope to produce a badge bearing it.

# Excavations & Post-Excavation work

**City**, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to Brian Hobley, Chief Urban Archaeologist, DUA, 71 Basinghall Street, E.C.2. (01-606 1933/4/5). For information on post-excavation work, contact Penny MacConnoran at this address.

**Brentford**, by West London Archaeological Field Group. Excavation and processing. Enquiries to Alison Laws, 71-72 Brentford High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. (01-560 3880).

**Fulham**, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group.

(1) Fulham Palace, Bishops Avenue, S.W.6. Excavation work under the floor of the great hall and other rooms will reveal medieval foundations and cellars, known from 18th century plan and surveys. Enquiries to K. Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6 3AA. (01-731 0338).

(2) Sandford Manor, Rewell Street (New Kings Road), S.W.6. Excavation work in grounds of 17th century house, traceable back to at least 14th century, hopefully will find medieval and earlier occupation. Enquiries to Excavation Director, C. E. Oliver, 18 Albany Court, Ashburnham Road, Ham, Richmond, Surrey. (01-948 2633 or 661 1421) or K. Whitehouse.

**Hammersmith**, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. All types of work and finds: prehistoric, Roman, medieval and later. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7-10 p.m. and weekends after dusk. St Peter's Church Hall, Varna Road, S.W.6. Contact: K. Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6 3AA (01-731 0338).

**Inner London Boroughs**, by the Inner London Unit. Several rescue site in various areas. Enquiries to Irene Schwab (01-242 6620).

**Kingston**, by Kingston-upon-Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to

Marion Smith, Kingston Museum, Fairfield Road, Kingston (01-546 5386).

**North-East Greater London**, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

**Putney**, by Wandsworth Historical Society. Two acre site at junction of Felsham Road and High Street lies on Roman and medieval settlements. Alternate weekends. Enquiries to Nicholas Farrant, 7 Coalecroft Road, S.W.15. (01-788 0015).

**Southwark**, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee. Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Harvey Sheldon, S.L.A.E.C., Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, S.E.1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

**Surrey**, by Surrey Archaeological Society. Enquiries to David Bird, Field Officer, S.A.S., Castle Arch, Guildford, Surrey. (0483-32454).

**Vauxhall Pottery**, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Excavation at weekends only. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. All enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, S.E.17. (01-703 3324).

### GENERAL EXCAVATIONS

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly *Calendar of Excavations* from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of fieldwork. The *Calendar* gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £3.00 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kensington Road, S.E.11.