

Fig. 1: Site of 1971 and 1974-6 excavations in relation to pre-Fire waterfront and former line of Thames Street. Dashed line shows present day street alignment, dotted line assumed medieval property boundaries. Chronology of waterfront reclamation: Period III — mid 13th century; Period IV — mid 14th century; Period V — late 14th century; Period VI — mid 15th century; Period VII — post 17th century (shown toned).

Medieval Buildings at Trig Lane

GUSTAV MILNE
CHRISIE MILNE

A DETAILED ANALYSIS of the medieval riverfront reclamation investigated on the Trig Lane site from 1974-6 (TQ 326 808) will be published later this year¹. However, the buildings recorded during that excavation are not assessed in that particular report, and the purpose of this short paper is to summarise the evidence for these structures and to establish their context.

Previous work in the area had shown that the medieval levels survived exceptionally well in the waterfront area of the City. In 1971 the con-

struction of the western end of the Upper Thames Street dual carriageway from Queenhithe to Blackfriars Bridge cut through the buried remains of a number of medieval buildings and associated deposits. Evidence of street surfaces, stone founded walls, internal floors and hearths were recorded in the sides of the trenches dug for the foundations of the underpass. Jeremy Haslam published a short report on this work² in which he claimed that the medieval buildings on both sides of Trig Lane, as well as the lane itself, were

1. G. Milne and C. Milne 'Medieval Waterfront Development at Trig Lane, London', forthcoming.

2. J. Haslam 'Medieval Streets in London', *London Archaeol.* 2, No. 1 (1972) 3-7.

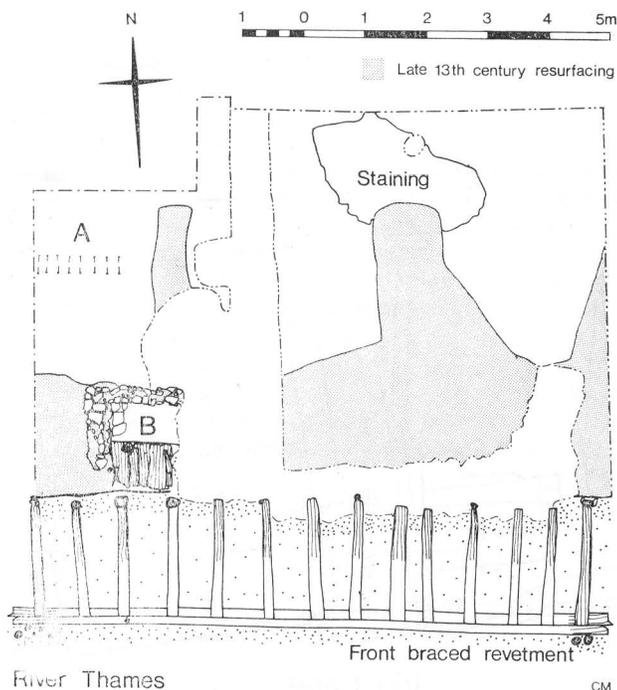


Fig. 2: Plan of Building A and Feature B in relation to line of contemporary waterfront.

laid out in the late 13th century. (Fig. 1).

From 1974-6 the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology excavated a 450m² site to the west of Trig Lane, just south of the line of Upper Thames Street (Fig. 1). The detailed examination of this area showed that it had been gradually reclaimed from the river, from the 13th to the 15th century. This process was effected by erecting a timber or stone revetment upon the foreshore to the south of the contemporary frontage, and infilling the intervening area with dumps of refuse sealed by a stone or gravel surface³.

A number of buildings and other feature overlay these reclamation deposits, and some of them could be directly related to the revetments whose construction dates had been established⁴.

The excavations examined the southern part of three adjacent properties which ran southwards from the original line of Upper Thames Street to

3. G. Milne and C. Milne 'Excavation on the Thames Waterfront at Trig Lane, London, 1974-76', *Medieval Archaeol.* 22 (1978) 84-104.
G. Milne and C. Milne 'The Making of the London Waterfront', *Current Archaeol.* No. 66 (1979) 203.
4. See section on Dating in Milne & Milne forthcoming *op cit* in note 1.

the river (Fig. 1). In contrast to the recent work at New Fresh Wharf, in which eleven pre-Fire buildings close to the Thames Street frontage were recorded⁵, the structures on the Trig Lane site were all situated on or immediately behind (i.e. north of) the line of the waterfront itself, overlooking the medieval River Thames.

Few buildings are specifically mentioned in the documentary references to the site, and it was not possible to identify any of them with the excavated structures. The following summary has been extracted from the documentary survey prepared by Tony Dyson for the forthcoming paper⁶. In 1256 the southern portion of the eastern tenement was said to comprise houses, buildings, a quay and a little chamber above the Thames, while the southern part of the western tenement in 1422 featured a message and garden with adjacent wharf and the 'stairs of the wharf', as well as facilities for dyeing. A garden is also mentioned with four cottages in the southern portion of the eastern tenement in 1447, and in the central tenement in 1475 a building called 'le dyehouse' adjacent to the wharf and two chambers over the great gate of the building were specified.

The earliest evidence of occupation and reclamation in the excavated area was associated with the mid to late 13th century G2 revetment. This

5. J. Schofield 'New Fresh Wharf: 3, the medieval buildings', *London Archaeol.* 3, No. 3 (1977) 66-73.
6. See note 1.

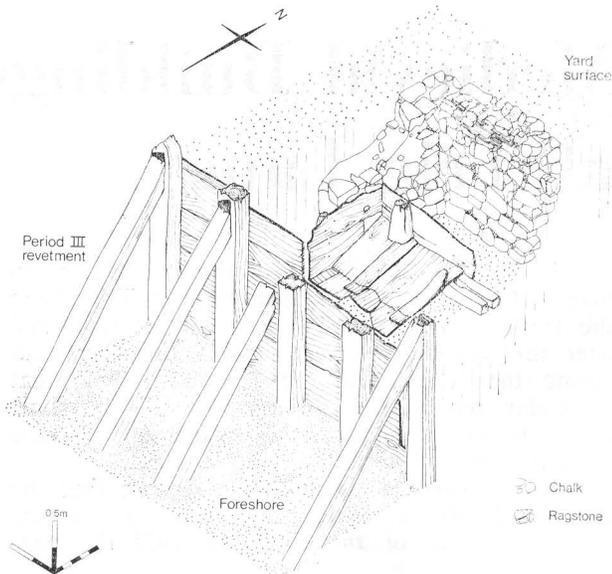


Fig. 3: Projection of sub-surface Feature B showing timber compartment probably used for storage.

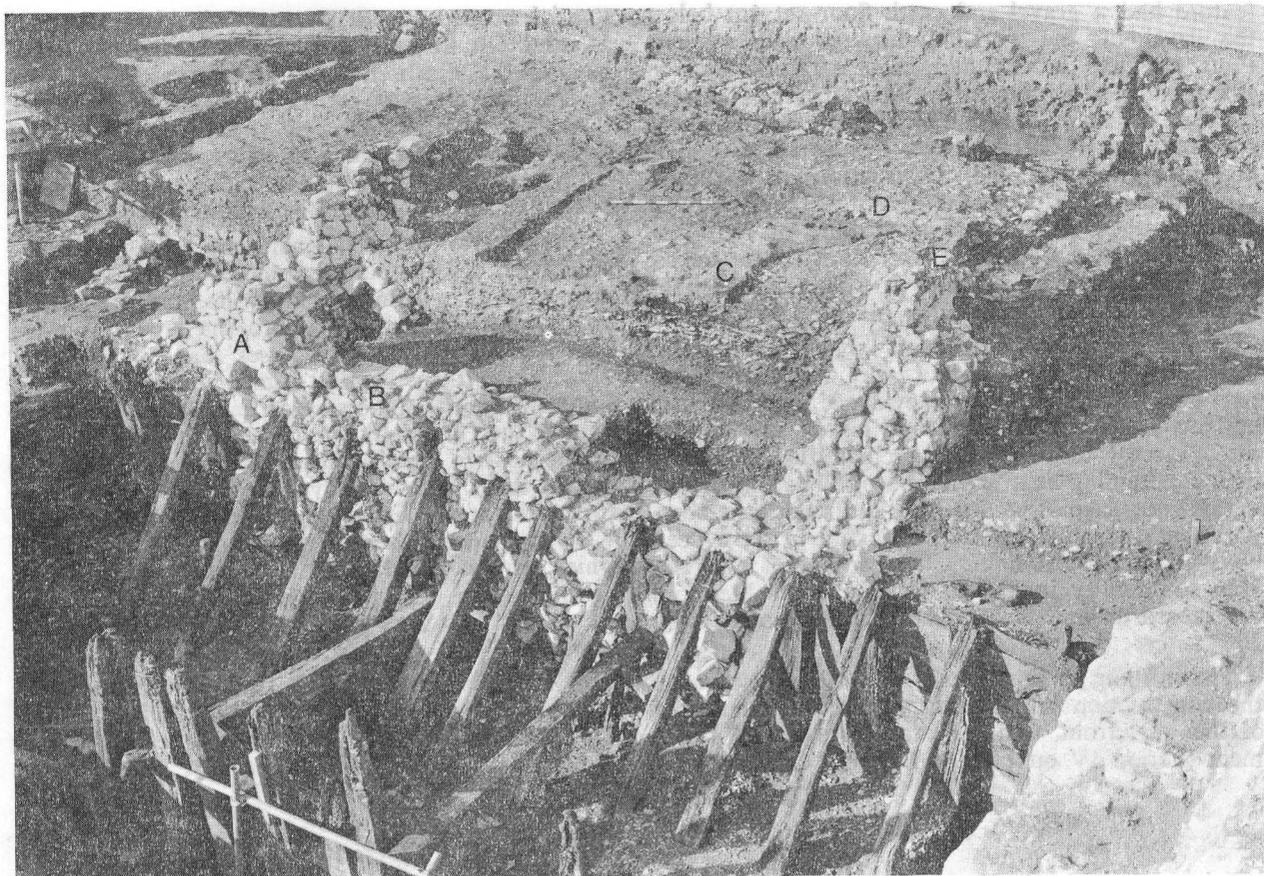


Fig. 4: Building C looking NW. (a) drain (b) chalk rubble foundations (c) floor sealing earlier levels of fire-damaged building seen in section (d) partition wall (e) dwarf stone wall.

10 x 100mm scale

Photo T. J. Hurst

ran east-west across the site on the line marked Period III on Fig. 1. A worn gravel surface sealed the dumped deposits to the north of the G2 revetment over most of the excavated area, and was interpreted as an external surface. In the north west corner was an occupation deposit of dark grey silt c. 100mm (4in) thick, immediately to the south of which traces of a possible base plate were recorded. These features comprised the evidence for the earliest phase of Building A. They were all sealed by a substantial deposit of Purbeck marble chippings which formed a clearly defined external surface over the area exposed to the north of the G2 revetment. Three superimposed floors overlay the stone surface in the same position as the earlier internal floor, suggesting that Building A was rebuilt and continued in use for some time after the area had been resurfaced (Fig. 2). Three metres to the east of Building A was an irregularly shaped area of staining on the stone surface c. 3m

(10ft) east-west and 1.8 (6ft) north-south, possibly representing a second structure contemporary with Building A. The form and function of these features could not be determined from their fragmentary remains, although it is possible to suggest that the building line was set back from the southern edge of the waterfront.

In the later 13th century, the G2 revetment was replaced by the G3 structure which involved the cutting of a number of north-south trenches through the earlier deposits to accommodate the back-braces⁷. One of the back-braces was itself cut by Feature B. The northern and western walls of this feature were built of random chalk rubble; the southern wall was formed by part of the horizontal planking of the G3 revetment, but the eastern wall had been destroyed by the mid 14th century Building C (Figs. 2 & 3). In its earliest phase, the

7. Milne & Milne 1978, *op cit* in note 3, pages 87-9.

feature had a gravel and earth floor set 1m below the level of the contemporary ground surface. Four ragstone blocks had been carefully laid in the north west corner of the floor, perhaps to support a timber floor which was subsequently removed. In its latest phase, Feature B was divided into two with the construction of a timber compartment in its southern half with a planked floor (Fig. 3). The southward slope of the floor was probably the result of later dumping of debris onto it and subsidence below it rather than a deliberate structural attribute.

Feature B cannot have been larger than c. 1.4m (4ft 6in) square, although it may well have been part of a larger complex, the evidence for which was not recorded. Its compartmental layout and lack of direct access to the river preclude the possibility of it functioning as a garderobe pit. The timber lining did not seem so well fitted as to render the compartment watertight, so it is unlikely to have been constructed to store liquids. The storage of a perishable commodity in a cool moist state is therefore considered to be the most likely function of Feature B.

The infilling of this feature immediately preceded the construction of Building C and the advancing of the waterfront with the erection of the G7 revetment (Period IV on Fig. 1). Building C was a sub-

stantial property c. 5.2m (17ft) wide internally and at least 6m long north-south, although the extent beyond the northern limit of excavation was not determined. It was set c. 5m (16ft 6in) west of the present edge of Trig Lane, while on the foreshore to the south there was evidence of a contemporary river stair. Two phases of occupation were identified, separated by a destruction horizon.

On the western side, where the building overlay the Period III compacted stone surface (see above), the wall was c. 0.5m (1ft 8in) wide, and founded on flint nodules laid directly onto the ground surface. The wall was only two courses high, and was flat topped as if to support timber-framing. To the south, where the stone surface had been cut away to remove the G2 revetment and erect the G3 structure, more massive chalk rubble foundations over 2m (6½ ft) deep were employed to compensate for the softer less stable backfill material in this area. Fig. 4 shows the undressed, roughly coursed chalk rubble which cannot have served as a river wall, but was a sub-surface foundation sealed within the infill associated with the Period IV advance of the waterfront. The size of these foundations suggests that they may have supported a two-storied building.

The tile base of a ?partition wall and a rammed chalk floor were also shown to be contemporary with the earliest phase of Building C (Fig. 5). The

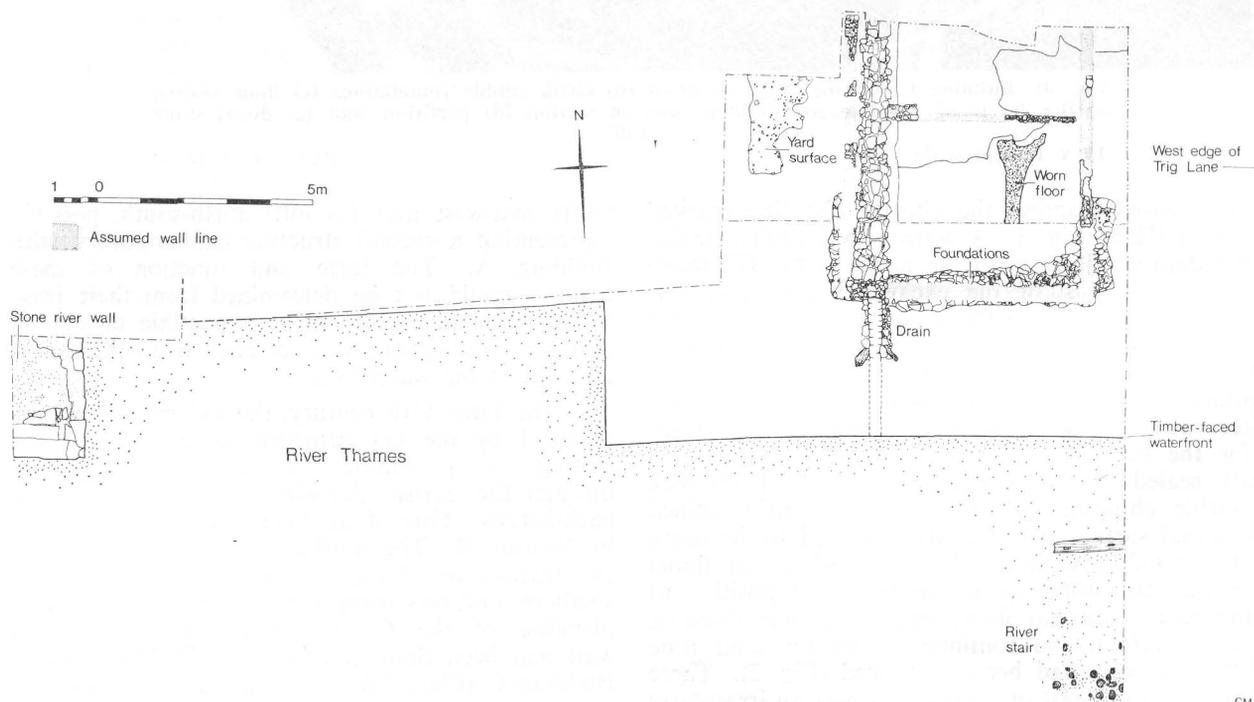


Fig. 5: Plan of Trig Lane waterfront in c. 1350 showing position of Building C, cf. Fig. 6.

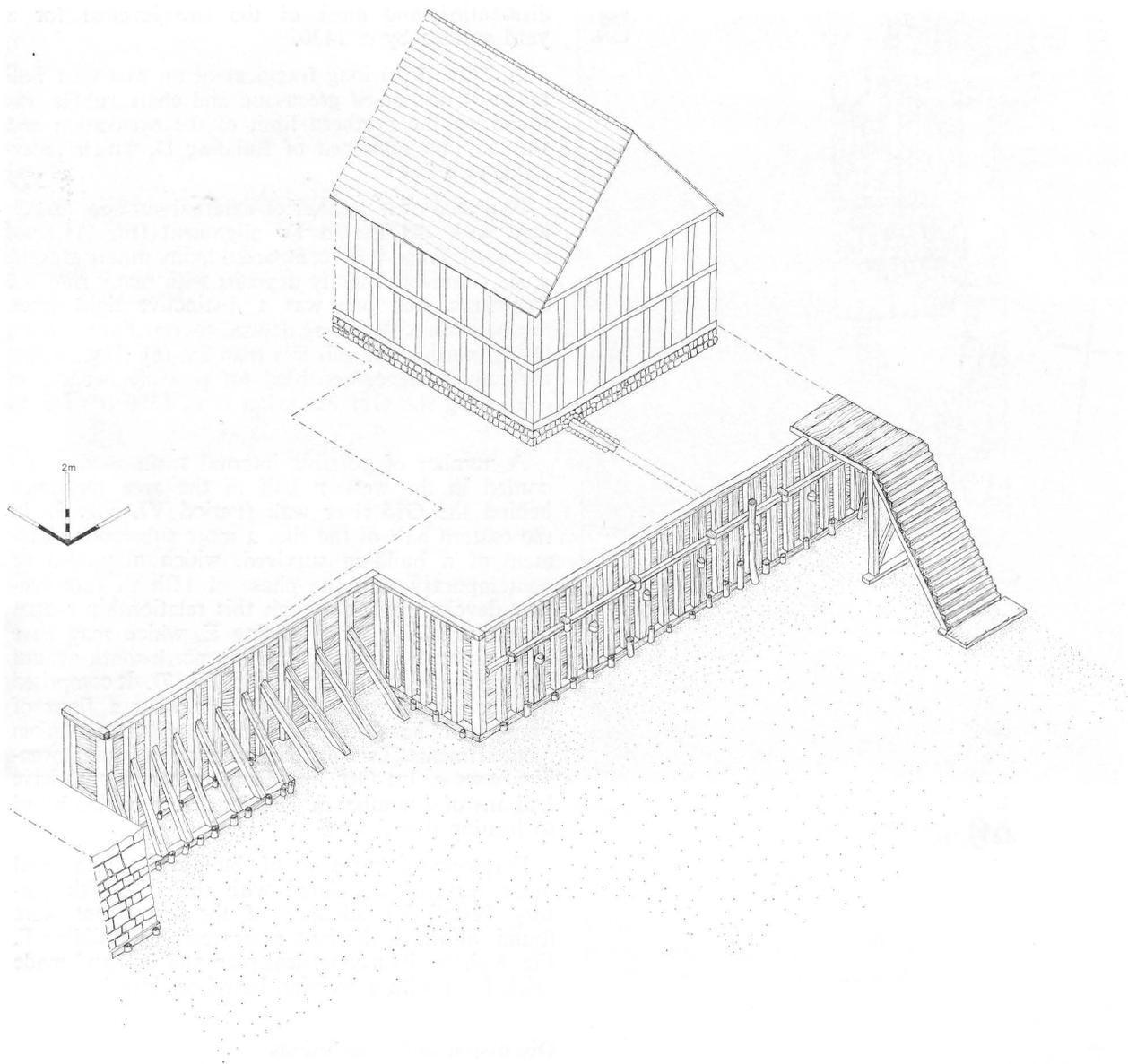


Fig. 6: Partial reconstruction of Building C, showing relationship to other features on Trig Lane waterfront in c. 1350. Looking NE, cf. Fig. 5.

upper surface of this chalk floor showed evidence of scorching and was overlain by a 0.2m-0.3m (8-12 in) thick layer of burnt material which extended beyond the line of the east wall of the building, perhaps marking the position of a doorway. Stratified within the burnt debris were horizontally laid spreads of burnt oyster shell. It therefore seems possible that the building was partially burnt down, and that shell fish were being stored in the southern room at the

time of the fire.

This destruction horizon was sealed by a substantial levelling layer of unburnt oyster shells over which the footings of the east wall and a worn mortar floor were laid, suggesting that the building was rebuilt and re-occupied after the fire.

A chalk block drain with a bore of c. 0.55m (21 in) was subsequently inserted into the western side of

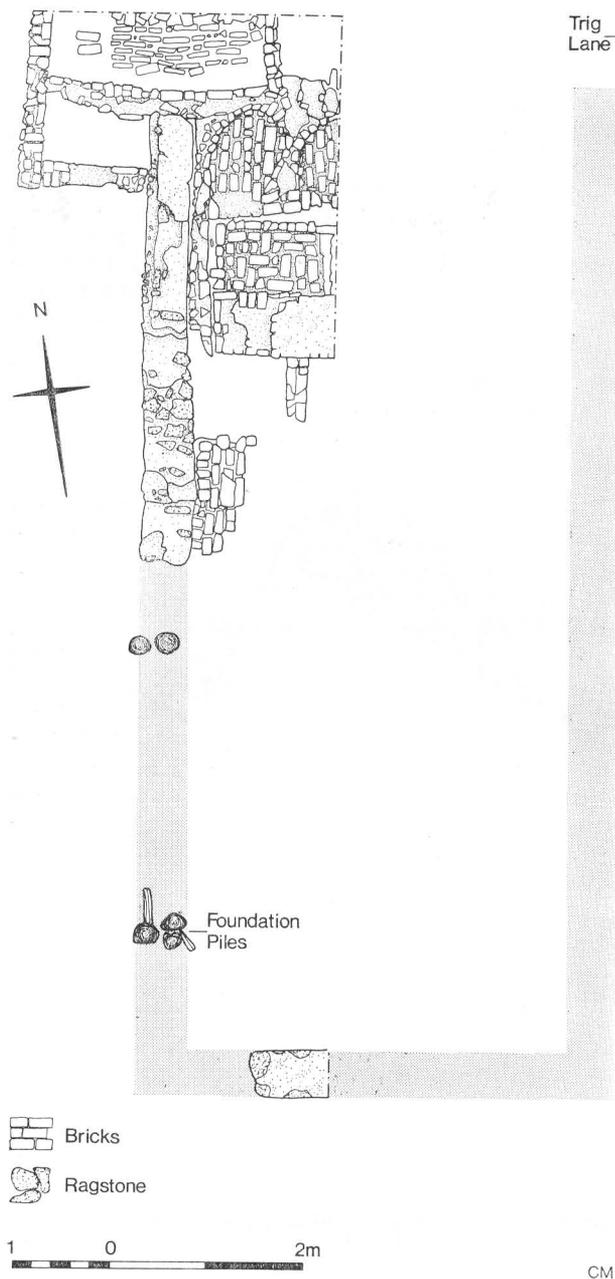


Fig. 7: Plan of Building E situated c 10m north of Period VI river wall (see Fig. 1).

Building C, and passed through the southern wall to disgorge into the Thames some 3m (10 ft) to the south through the G7 revetment. This feature was destroyed in c. 1380 when the waterfront was extended once again. It is not known precisely when the building itself fell out of use, although it had been

dismantled and most of the site levelled for a yard surface by c. 1430.

A 2.4m (8 ft) long fragment of an east-west wall made of uncoursed greensand and chalk rubble was found on the northern limit of the excavation and was all that remained of Building D, which superseded Building C.

Evidence of a number of external surfaces associated with the Period IV alignment (Fig. 1) were recorded. Some were compacted loam, others gravels, some compacted sandy deposits with many roof tile fragments, and one was a distinctive light green crushed stone. A poorly defined mortar floor c. 5.8m (19 ft) north-south but less than 2m (6½ ft) wide was the only evidence recorded for possible occupation overlaying the G11 extension of c. 1380 (Period V, Fig. 1).

A number of possible internal surfaces were recorded in the western half of the area reclaimed behind the G15 river wall (Period VI, Fig. 1). In the eastern half of the site, a more substantial fragment of a building survived, which may also be contemporary with the phase of 15th to 16th century development, although this relationship cannot be proved. This was Building E, which may have been a narrow building running north-south against the western edge of Trig Lane (Fig. 7). It comprised a trench built ragstone wall enclosing a floor of orange-red hand made bricks and three sunken compartments. Two of these were sub circular oven-like bases c. 1m (3ft 3in) diameter, which may have had any of a number of functions from baking bread to heating dyers' vats.

Fragmentary remains of buildings, drains and other features associated with the 16th-17th century Period VI advance of the waterfront were found, of which the best preserved was Building F. Fig. 8 shows its asymmetrical plan and its hand made brick floor with a wooden barrel set into it.

Discussion and Conclusions

Excavation has shown that the waterfront had already been extended as far as the 1974-6 site by the mid 13th century, implying that the process of extension began considerably earlier. The development of the area south of Thames Street may well date from the 12th rather than the later 13th century as previously suggested⁸. The first reference to Trig Lane (although not by that name) is in a deed of 1256⁹. The work at Trig Lane has thus established how and when the area was reclaimed from

8. *Op cit* in note 2, p6.

9. Information from Tony Dyson, see note 1.



Fig. 8: Building F, situated in northwest corner of site, looking N.

10 x 100mm scale

Photo T. J. Hurst

the river, the nature of the timber and stone revetments utilised in this process, and the fact that every waterfront property was served by its own river stair. In addition, parts of the buildings, and associated yards have been examined and sections across Trig Lane itself recorded.

These sections demonstrated that the Lane was only 2-3m (6-10ft) wide in the pre-Fire period, with buildings built up against both its sides for at least part of its length. This bears out the documentary reference to the Lane in 1346, when William Trig was prosecuted for obstructing it with wooden stalls, which prevented other citizens conveying their merchandise to and from the river by horse and cart. In his defence, he claimed that the lane was too narrow to be used by carts, which could not turn in it¹⁰.

10. H. Chew and W. Kellaway (eds) *London Assize of Nuisance 1301-1431* (1973) 396.

The topographical relationship of successive buildings to the Lane, the river stairs and the line of the waterfront was clearly never static, although the excavations were not extensive enough for general conclusions to be drawn on this point. Nevertheless it is suggested that the riverfront end of the property was perhaps more intensively developed than might have been expected, although there were at least some open yard areas here in the medieval period.

Evidence for a number of timber-framed buildings was recorded, and a storage or semi-commercial function for some of them is suggested. The documentary references to fishmongers occupying the properties are supported by the archaeological evidence of the large quantities of oyster shell found within and around Building C for example. The domestic apartments were presumably further north, and some of them were perhaps cut by the trenches observed in 1971.