

The Vauxhall Pottery-I

History and background to 1977-81 excavations

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THE VAUXHALL POTTERY, c. 1690-1865 (Fig. 1) although perhaps less well known than some other London factories became by far the largest stoneware producer in the area during the early 19th century. Although outstripped by Doulton, Stiff, and Green on the Lambeth riverfront to the north by mid century, the Vauxhall factory deserves more attention. This article outlines its history as so far elucidated and sets the background for a second article¹ dealing with the results of the 1977-81 excavation of the site. The present account does however also include two aspects deriving from the excavation which are more appropriately dealt with under a historical heading.

Many pottery finds have stemmed from commercial excavations in the area adjacent to the eastern approaches to Vauxhall Bridge. As a result of a telephone cable trench cum tunnel cut east-west through the area a notable collection of both tin-glaze and stoneware pottery was made² in 1969-70. Some of the stoneware is directly associated with the Vauxhall Pottery. In 1964 two small archaeological trial trenches³ were dug within the area of the Pottery, but the first archaeological excavation of any extent came in 1972 when, north of the bridge-foot, The Albert Embankment was widened, cutting

into a large derelict riverside site. The Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society undertook emergency excavation⁴ here under very difficult conditions and recovered the remains of five circular stoneware kilns, parts of associated buildings, and large quantities of ceramics. In 1977 the remainder of the riverside site was sold with the intention of redevelopment. Careful evaluation of the map evidence for the extent of the Vauxhall Pottery and its likely degree of preservation was made and the above Society, under my direction, excavated the remainder of the factory site in the period 1977-81.

Map Evidence

The search for documentary evidence for the Vauxhall Pottery business is somewhat complicated by the use of five sites during its life. The main site and a small riverside plot lay in the Manor of Vauxhall while two others nearby in Vauxhall and Lambeth were in the Manor of Kennington. The fifth site was the Mortlake Pottery some four miles up river. The principle map evidence for the main site is summarised in Figs. 2 & 3. The earliest relevant map so far found is one of the Manor of Vauxhall in 1681 by Thomas Hill⁵, which as an inset contains an enlarged plan of the actual manor area lying between Vauxhall Creek (River Effra) and Vauxhall Stairs. A feature existing to the present day, and lying half way between these south and north points, is Marble Hall Lane, for which there is some evidence of medieval origins⁶. While the Key to this map clearly seems to negate the presence of a pottery the property from which it develops (H1) is quite clear. The next map is the well known large scale one of Rocque



Fig. 1: The Vauxhall Pottery Frontage 1852.

1. *London Archaeol* forthcoming.
2. D. Cockell 'Some Finds of Pottery at Vauxhall Cross, London' *Trans E.C.C.* (1973) 221-49.
3. J. Ashdown, *pers comm.*
4. B. Bloice 'A Pottery at Vauxhall Bridgefoot' *London Archaeol* 1 No.16 (1972) 363-6.
5. Map 18, Canterbury Cathedral Archives.
6. N. Woodward-Smith and J. Schofield 'A Late 15th Century Account for a Wharf at Vauxhall' *Trans L.A.M.A.S.* 28 (1977) 278-91.

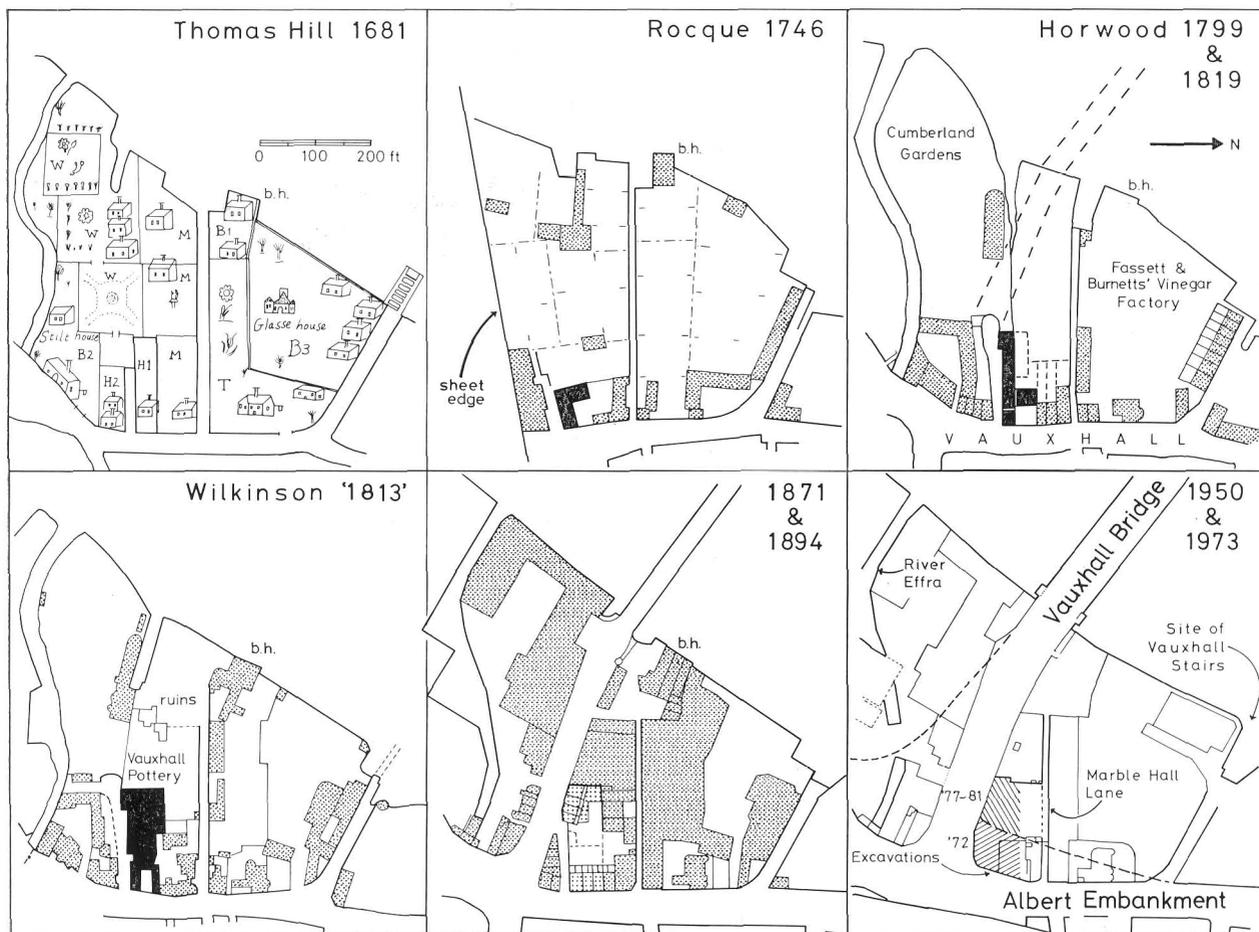


Fig. 2: Outline Vauxhall Pottery site Map History. Key: pottery buildings black, others stippled; where later map editions are indicated these are shown selectively by broken lines; excavated areas hatched; b.h. = barge houses; all plans to the same scale.

(1746), the southern limits of which unfortunately result in the exclusion of part of the area of interest. The frontage distances are reasonably accurate but there is an appreciable distortion in the overall layout and in this respect does not match the accuracy of the Hill map. However, the pottery building is shown and a surprisingly detailed correlation between these two maps can be made. Sometime in the second half of the 18th century the pottery expanded westwards with a long narrow building which is seen in the 1792-9 Horwood map. Thereafter the pottery progressively expanded northwards as evidenced from the later 1819 Horwood edition, Wilkinson

(‘1813’), the Greenwood maps (1827,30,35) etc., from which the maximum extent is seen.

When the pottery closed in 1865 the site was bought by its main customer Crosse & Blackwell⁷ and the business acquired by the Fulham Pottery. Crosse & Blackwell built warehousing on the north-west part of the site using the same wall lines as the pottery⁸, the warehouses being built round an open yard which was formerly the main pottery workshop area. Subsequently⁹ some additions and alterations were made which partially encroached on the yard area. The rebuilding of Vauxhall Bridge in 1906 with associated widening of the approaches¹⁰, led to the

7. D. Haselgrove and J. Murray (eds.); *J. Ceramic Hist* **11** (1979) 188.

8. Ordnance Survey, 5ft to the mile, Sheet XI 13, 1871.

9. Ordnance Survey, 5ft to the mile, Sheet XI 13, 1894.

10. Vauxhall Bridge Rebuilding Contract No. 2 (1903) 3143, drawing No. 7 Sheet 4; GLCRO.

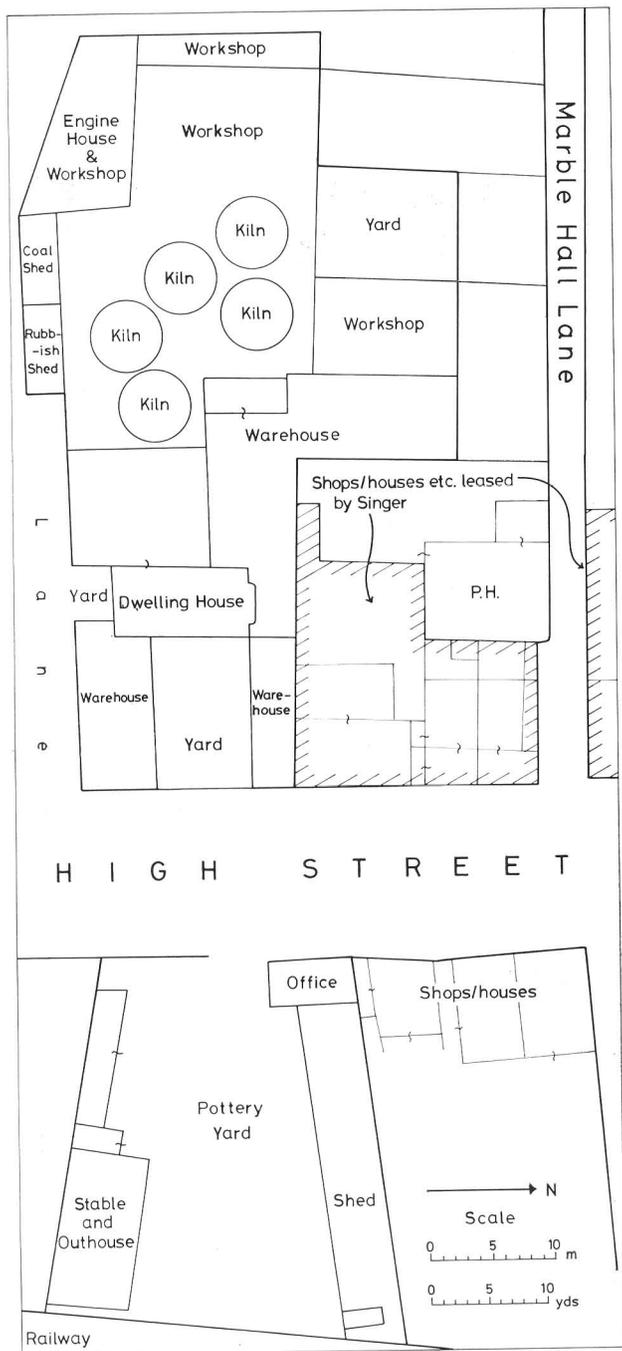


Fig. 3: Vauxhall Pottery Plan 1862-3. Based on Thames Embankment Plan with selective indication of adjacent properties.

11. Metropolitan Board of Works, Deposited Plans Vol. 1, MBW 2446; and Books of Reference MBW 2612; GLCRO.
12. Findlay 1852; V & A, Dept. of Prints & Drawing, D56. 1904.

vacation of the site by Crosse & Blackwell because access was effectively cut off. This has sterilised this part of the site to the present day, and since demolition of the warehouses it has remained an open area only intruded on since the 1920's by the inevitable advertisement poster hoarding. From these facts it seemed likely that substantial remains of the pottery could still lie under this area (as it so proved); and with the skeleton of late 19th century buildings still lying to the west providing a shadow of this end of the pottery, accurate site location was easy.

Some time after excavation had started another plan was located which included the most comprehensive plans of the pottery yet found. This was the 'Albert Embankment' Development Plan¹¹ (1862-3) where each plot of land was numbered and in an accompanying Reference Book, owners, lessees, occupiers, and plot function was given. A selective extract showing the pottery and part of its setting forms Fig. 3. To complement this there is a water colour frontage picture of 1852¹², here redrafted as a line drawing (Fig. 1); and also a panorama of 1859¹³. Plans and documents associated with the building of the first Vauxhall Bridge (1809-16) help to build up a picture of the environs of the Pottery. Some, associated with barge houses (Fig. 2) first built in the 17th century and held by the Worshipful Companies of Fishmongers, Mercers and Clothiers, show a riverside plot used by the Pottery (clay ground and shed) in the late 18th century and up until the Bridge was built (see below).

Samuel Swabey

A number of accounts of the history of the pottery¹⁴ have been written from the late 19th century onwards but all contain some errors. Here the history in terms of the resident potters is summarised in Table 1. For the early, pre 1750, history little has yet been added to the work of Rhoda Edwards¹⁵. However dates post 1758 are definitive and are based on comprehensive search of directories, all classes of rate books, wills, and other evidence. The first perceptible expansion of the pottery is in the hands of Samuel Swabey (some time pre 1758 to 1790) who not only built westwards but leased two other plots as clay grounds. One was the riverside area cited above, and the other to the east of Vauxhall Street was further developed by later potters. It may be speculated that two clay grounds were needed in

13. *Illustrated London News*, 1859, p.94.
14. Chaffers, *Marks & Monograms* . . . 1866 and later eds.; Jewitt, *Ceramic Art of Gt. Britain*, 1878 and later eds.; Blacker, *ABC of English Salt-Glaze Stoneware*, 1922 (Mortlake only); Brayley, *Topo. Hist. Surrey V* (1850) 37; also *VCH Surrey II*.
15. Rhoda Edwards London Potters ca. 1570-1710' *J. Ceramic Hist* 6 (1974) 13-14, 18, etc.

Potters	Dates	Events		
	1681	no pothouse — Thomas Hill 1681 map		
	1697	pothouse to let — Advertisement <i>London Gazette</i> 28 June 1697		
Jonathan Chilwell II	?			
	1696-7	<i>House of Commons Journal</i> XI 709		
	d. 1712			
Jonathan Chilwell III & William Chilwell	1712	tin-glaze & stoneware made		
	?			
Samuel Swabey	post 1745 pre 1758			
		claygrounds leased		Riverside & High St. (East) pre 1788 pre 1788
	d. 1790			
Mary Swabey (wife) & Stephen (son)	1793	sold		
William Wagstaff	1794			
		tin-glaze business moved to Mortlake	1804	c. 1812 Site sold to Bridge Company
	d. 1808			
John Wisker	1808			
		tin-glaze business moved to Princes' St.	1823	
	d. 1835			
Alfred Singer	1835			
	1865	tin-glaze end: site sold to railway	1846	Singer & Green (1855-7) Daniel Green (1859-61) Fisher (1865-9)) Branksea Pottery (1870-3)

Table 1. Outline Vauxhall Pottery Chronology

order to ensure separation of the two different clays needed for tin-glaze and stoneware. With Samuel Swabey's death in 1790 his properties in Buckinghamshire and Westminster were willed to his wife Mary and son Maurice; with the copyhold pottery property and other lands, in Lambeth, to his younger son Stephen. From various leases, in which he was described as 'potter, Vauxhall', Stephen appeared to be capitalising on the estate. Mary was named in the rates for the Pottery from 1791-3, but it is perhaps not surprising that the pottery was soon sold.

William Wagstaff

At birth the pottery was presumably making only tin-glaze wares but early in the 18th century stoneware began to be produced (archaeological evidence), and during the century the latter expanded at the expense of the former. Wagstaff bought the pottery in 1793 and held it until 1808. In 1804 when well established at Vauxhall he removed the tin-glaze

business to the Mortlake Pottery¹⁶, this presumably being done to allow product rationalisation and expansion of the stoneware side. At this date one might have expected him to have stopped tin-glaze production altogether. He continued to hold the riverside clay ground plot until the land was sold to the Vauxhall Bridge Company. It is interesting to note that in a continuation lease¹⁷ with the Fishmongers, Merciers and Clothiers, that there was a specific prohibition of loading and unloading goods riverwards at the adjacent dock. From general evidence it seems that incoming raw materials, and later some outgoing finished goods (in the Singer Period) must have gone through the Vauxhall Creek (Effra) wharves. The building of Vauxhall Bridge (opened 1816) just missed cutting off the west end of the Pottery. The bridge must have had both positive and negative effects on the working of the business, but the failure to have direct access to the river was an inhibiting factor in the development of (or even viability

16. J. E. Anderson, *A Short Account of the Mortlake Potteries*, privately printed 1894; or see Blacker *op. cit.* fn. 14.

17. Fishmongers Company Records. MSS 6911; Guildhall Library: also 6912-16

of) the factory. William Wagstaff was a man of some standing in the parish, being Overseer of the Poor, and who in his will left several hundred pounds to several local asylums/schools. For a time he was principal tenant of residential properties in Water Lambeth, as were other successful potters, and he also had estates in Spitalfields and Limehouse. On his death in October 1808 he left the Vauxhall Pottery business to his nephew John Wisker then aged 32.

John Wisker

Wisker ran the pottery until his death in 1835, and during this period continued to extend northwards the buildings on the main pottery site. In 1823 he brought the tin-glaze business, as Anderson describes¹⁶, back to 'the Vauxhall Pottery'. This is a somewhat misleading description because it was not back to the main site but to an 'old' pottery at the very south end of Prince's Street on the east side behind the King's Arms public house. The word "pot-house" appears at this locale on the Rocque map of 1746, and it is now clear that this refers to the buildings to the north of the word on the map. This pottery can be traced back with certainty through directories and rate books to the Kennington Survey of 1785, but Court Book entries prior to this make no mention of a pottery and, at the moment, the gap remains between 1785 and 1746. Thus from 1823 the Vauxhall Pottery made tin-glaze here. Apart from the archaeological evidence of 'Singleton' eye ointment pots being made by this factory, there is a Vauxhall Pottery Invoice¹⁸ for them. While it is not directly dated it is written on paper watermarked 1832¹⁹. Applicable to stoneware, John Wisker obtained a Patent in 1833 for apparatus designed to grind hemispherical section lid seals²⁰. At this time the Vauxhall Pottery was by far the largest producer of taxable stoneware in London, Wisker paying 60% of the total tax levied on eleven London potters²¹. He represented the London potters in the campaign for removal of tax on stoneware bottles which was re-imposed in 1812 after a lapse of over a hundred years.

18. Records of Stephen Green Ltd., B/SIN; GLCRO.
19. Kindly drawn to my attention by J. Cox.
20. J. Wisker, British Patent No. 6523, 1833; see also P. Amis, *London Studies* 1 (1974) 14.
21. A. R. Mountford 'Documents Relating to English Ceramics of the 18th & 19th Centuries' *J. Ceramic Hist* 8 (1975) 3-40, e.g. Appendices 11 & 18.
22. A. Singer & H. Pether, British Patent No.8042, 1839.
23. See Brayley *op. cit.* fn. 14.
24. The lid stamp reads 'Singer, Vauxhall, London, Registered No.4138, Dec. 17 1858'.
25. Chaffers *op. cit.* fn 14
26. *ibid.*

Alfred Singer

After the demise of John Wisker, Alfred Singer at the age of 19 or 20 took the pottery and held it until closure in 1865. Further technological improvements are shown in a patent of 1839, in the names of Singer and his assistant Henry Pether, for a method of manufacture of mosaic tesserae²². Some of these were incorporated into important buildings in London²³ but of greater long term significance was the use of the method under licence by Mintons in Staffordshire. Another ingenious product was a locking lid which claimed to be a registered design²⁴ although this has not yet been traced in official records. The main site was developed northwards to its maximum extent and steam power was introduced there. The site on the east side of Vauxhall High Street was developed from being a clay ground to premises containing stables and an office surrounding a yard (Fig. 3). Directory entries show Wagstaff, Wisker and Singer as producers of 'delph and brown stone' pottery, with Wisker in addition making 'crucibles'. This last was only continued ephemerally (last entry 1842) by Singer, who however, subsequently advertised 'chemical apparatus' (1842), mosaic paving (1847), and drainpipes (1851), with additionally in the final years 1860-5 terra cotta.

The manufacture of tin-glaze by Singer continued until, with the extension of the railway from Nine Elms to Waterloo, the Prince's Street site together with part of the eastern High Street premises were sold to the railway in 1846. The tin-glaze products in the last years were of a very humble nature²⁵. This has been claimed²⁶ to have been the

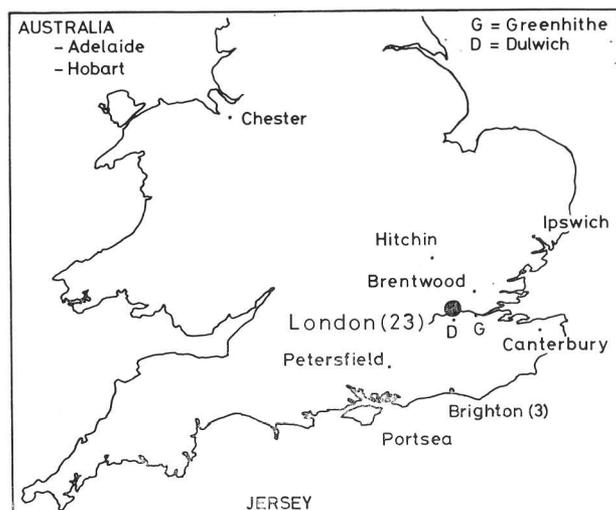


Fig. 4. Distribution of Singer Customers as Indicated by Pottery Stamps.

last factory in England making tin-glaze, the others having faded out by the turn of the century, and now the evidence for its persistence here is quite strong.

In the stoneware field, without wishing to preempt the excavation report unduly, it can be observed that the wares were almost entirely restricted to simple commercial items such as wine and spirit jugs, jars and bottles & etc. It is only in this period that customers' names begin to appear stamped on the vessels. Because of the large quantity of pottery recovered from the Singer levels in the excavation — about one ton from a terminal deposit, and another six tons from an estimated half of a deposit dating to about 1851 — a reasonable impression of the geographical distribution of the products can be gained. This is shown in Fig. 4 where, necessarily, individual London customers are omitted because some two dozen are already known. One well known London customer was Crosse & Blackwell who was supplied throughout the whole of the Singer period, and after 1865 by the Fulham Pottery. There were also a few other customers in inland locations (e.g. Brentwood, Hitchin, and Petersfield), but quite a few more coming from English coastal towns, clearly indicating transport down the Thames Estuary and round the coast by boat. It is possible that some other sites could have been reached by canal. The furthest flung exports are to the Isle of Jersey and there were also two customers in Australia.

It may be noted that the 1851 deposit date cited was based on combined study of customer stamps and directory evidence. While the function of some pots is self evident, e.g. wine jugs and spirit flasks, others may state their function or directories yield the answer. For example, a series of full width rim jars have been shown to have been used to hold salt, drugs, cheese, confections, and turtle based products²⁷. Apart from one invoice, no Vauxhall Pottery factory records have been found but in their place some of these pots speak as documents.

Turning to raw materials, the stoneware potting clay likely came from the Poole, Dorset area. Some figures for both clay and coal consumption are given by Brayley¹⁴. It has been alleged²⁸ that the Pottery gained use of 'Bristol' glaze soon after its invention by Powell in 1835. This does not seem very likely, but it was in use at Vauxhall by about 1850. Rather more can be said about the refractory materials used in the kilns. In the 18th century it is possible that the so-called 'Windsor' bricks were used. Wisker in the first third of the 19th century made some of his own refractory bricks and tiles using

bought-in refractory clays. In the Singer period however there was an almost exclusive use of refractory bricks brought from the Newcastle-upon-Tyne region. There, refractory clays are associated with the Coal Measures and the link with coal supplies to the Pottery is obvious. The change in the Wisker period is directly related to the change from rectangular wood-fired kilns to coal-fired circular ones. Five brick makers have been identified from this area, two of them dominating the supply to Vauxhall. 'RAMSAY' stamped bricks are commonest, followed by 'PRUDHOE'. The relevant Ramsay business began in 1828 and it is well enough documented. The Prudhoe bricks were named after a village and rather less is known about this manufacture. Cowen, later Sir George Cowen a prominent political figure in the north east, also supplied some bricks, this business starting about 1820. 'NEWTON' and 'LISTER' bricks have also been found. Outside the Newcastle-upon-Tyne area bricks also came from Stourbridge, Wolverhampton, and Hanley, but many other sources remain unidentified because so little work appears to have been done on indexing brick makers stamps and their provenance. This equally applies to ordinary building bricks used in London.

An isolated pair of directory entries in 1856-7 linking 'Singer and Green', and first noted by Garner, are worth elaborating on because they shed some light on the state of the Vauxhall Pottery business in the final years. The association began in 1855, as shown by a Sewer Application²⁹, and must be with Daniel Green, but is only concerned with the premises on the east side of the High Street. Confusingly at this time both sides of Vauxhall High Street were numbered independently, the two sides being in different administrative areas, and it so happened that Singer occupied No. 3 on both sides. After 1857 Singer appears simply to sub-let out these premises, and use by other pottery businesses (Table 1) as a storage depot (drain pipes etc.) went on until 1872 or 73. The Green pipes came from the Cliffe Pottery at Rochester.

The loss of parts of the Vauxhall Pottery premises to the railway was probably not of great importance but other constricting factors spelt out clear limits to the factory's life. It had no direct access to the river, and Vauxhall Bridge and its approaches had begun to drive a wedge between the pottery and Vauxhall Creek. From the north the continued expansion of the Burnett vinegar and spirit manufactory, which by about 1860 had taken most of the land there, and moreover also that between the pottery and the river, prevented any further expan-

27. R. Edwards 'Turtles Turned' *London Archaeol* 4 No. 4 (1981) 102.

28. Hugh Owen, *Ceramic Art in Bristol*, 1873

29. Metropolitan Commissioners of Sewers, Register of Letters, Applications, etc. June-Dec. 1855, pp.128, 174, MCS 243. See also MCS 242, p243. GLCRO.

sion. A weakness in the business may perhaps be indicated by the release of the remainder of the eastern High Street premises, and it is known that Singer was a sick man in these last years. The last straw was the Thames Embankment later to be called the Albert Embankment. In the original plan (1862-3) it was intended that it was to run all the way south from Westminster Bridge to Vauxhall Bridge. While the south end would not have cut through the pottery a proposed access road adjacent to the bridge would have done so. In the end the embankment never reached this far because the project ran out of money. The embankment meant the end of nearly all the small potteries by the river, and the only survivors were those like Doulton who had now outstripped the Vauxhall Pottery and had the power and money to solve the problems of river access. Alfred Singer sold out in 1865 while the

going was good and retired, to live in comfortable circumstances until the end of the century, leaving £27,000 in his will.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Excavations & post-excavation work

City, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, E.C.2. (01-600 3699).

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

Croydon & District. Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collections of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Hon. Curator, Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Ltd., Museum Building, Croydon Biology Centre, Chipstead Valley Road, Coulsdon, Surrey. (01-660 3841 or 22 43727).

Hammersmith, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group.

Processing of post-medieval material from Sandford Manor and medieval material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m., at Fulham Palace, Bishops Avenue, Fulham Palace Road S.W.6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6. (01-731 0338).

Inner London Boroughs, by the Inner London Unit, Several rescue sites in various areas. (01-242 6620).

Kingston, by Kingston-up-Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Hinton, 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).

South West London Boroughs, by the South West London Unit, excavations and processing. Enquiries to Scott McCracken, St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew (01-940 5989).

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, SE1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey. (01-546 1050 x 3665).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. 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).

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 field work. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £4.50 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, S.E.11.