

Fig. 1: location map.

# The moated manor house at Platform Wharf, Rotherhithe

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AT THE BEGINNING of this century substantial remains of a stone wall, standing 5m (16ft) high, were uncovered during the rebuilding of an engineering works at the north end of Platform Wharf, Rotherhithe (Figs. 1, 2), and subsequently recorded<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 3). The stone wall, which had once formed the façade of a large medieval building and had been incorporated into later warehouses, survived to first floor level and had windows, extremely well-preserved, on both floors. It was this discovery, combined with further documentary research, that led the Museum of London to believe that these were the remains of the mid 14th century moated residence known to have been built in Rotherhithe for Edward III.

After the demolition of the last warehouse in 1978 the site remained vacant until it was acquired by the London Docklands Development Corporation as part of the Cherry Garden redevelopment scheme. Consequently in November 1985 the Museum's Department of Greater London Archaeology was granted a licence to conduct one week's trial work to determine whether that north wall still survived. Although now entirely subterranean, it did indeed survive in an excellent state of preservation, despite the intrusion of massive modern concrete foundations.

1. 'Remains of an Ancient Building at Rotherhithe' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 20 (1907) 132-42.

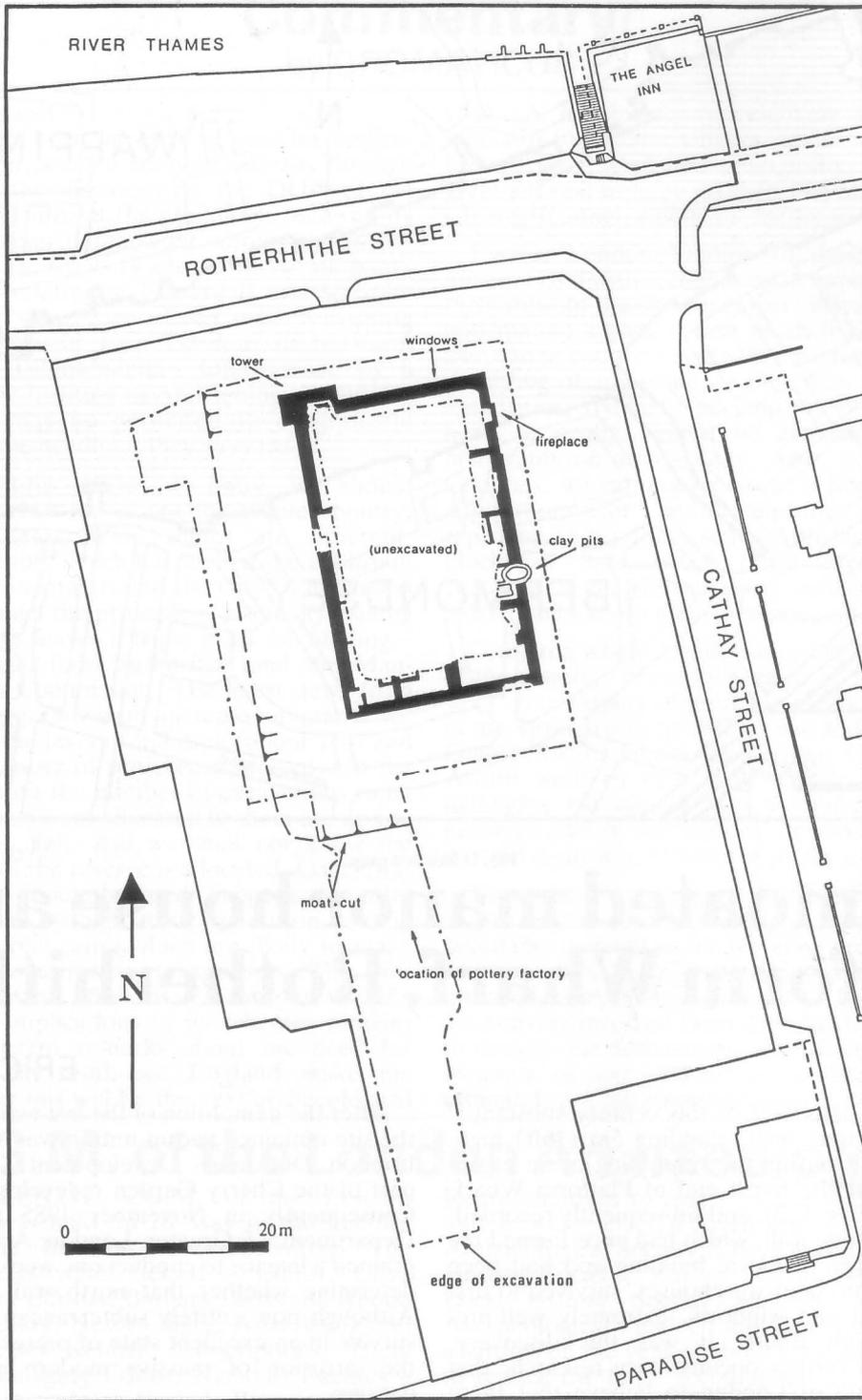


Fig. 2: plan of site, showing moated building and principal features within area of excavation.

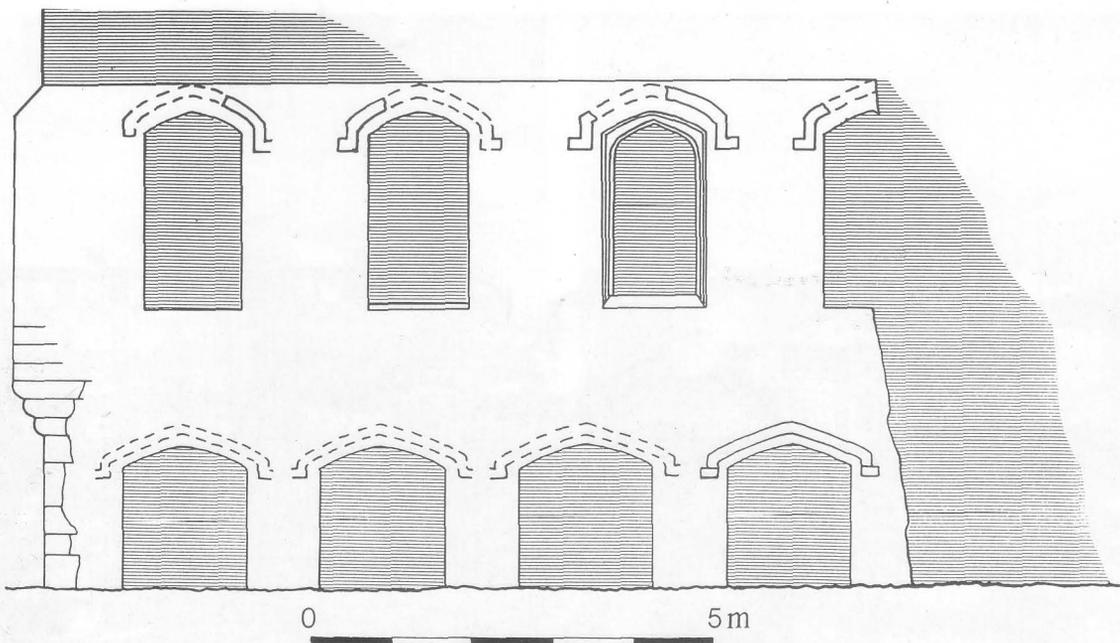


Fig. 3: north wall of moated building, as recorded in 1907.

It was not clear at that stage whether the rest of the site would yield equally well-preserved remains; therefore a more extensive investigation, funded by the LDDC, was undertaken in July 1986 and completed in January 1987. It is upon this site evaluation that this report is based.

### The historical background

Fieldwork has shown that the site occupies a sand and gravel island in the Southwark marshes; a location which, as attested by similar sites elsewhere in north Southwark and Lambeth, may well produce evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity. So far several unabraded sherds of Roman pottery have been found on the site and, in recent months, Roman cremation burials have been uncovered on a nearby site to the west of Wilson Grove and south of Bermondsey Wall East<sup>2</sup>. Certainly a Saxon settlement at Rotherhithe is implied by its name, derived from *Rethra hyd*, meaning a landing place or haven for mariners.

As there is no mention of Rotherhithe in Domesday Book, it must be assumed that in 1086 it was considered a part of the royal manor of Bermondsey. In 1089 that manor was granted by William II to the monks of La Charité-sur-Loire, who had arrived to take up residence in the newly-founded Cluniac priory of Bermondsey. There is no indication, however, that this grant

included Rotherhithe. The first reliable reference to Rotherhithe by name occurs in the *Annals of Bermondsey* for the year 1127, which records the grant by Henry I of a part of it (possibly half) to Bermondsey Priory, the rest having already been bestowed upon his son Robert, Earl of Gloucester<sup>3</sup>. The implication here is that by the reign of Henry I Rotherhithe was indeed a manor and, therefore, may have been created when William II granted Bermondsey to the new priory.

Despite the lack of evidence for a royal residence in Rotherhithe before the mid 14th century, it is certain that buildings of some consequence were located there, for when Edward III began his major works in the manor in February 1353 we find occasional references to "old houses" and "old chambers", implying some incorporation of existing structures into the new buildings. The principal source of information about these works is a series of Exchequer accounts: documents of immense value to historians for not only do they record the sums of money paid to (named) craftsmen but they also describe in some detail the works on which they were employed. We know, for example, that by September 1361 £1200 was spent on a hall, kitchen, various chambers, a wharf linked to the main building by a bridge over the moat, a gatehouse and a garden, as well as a large number of interior fixtures such as a fireplace, candelabra, tiling for

2. Derek Seeley *pers comm.*

3. Stephen Humphrey *pers comm.*



Fig. 4: general view of moated building, looking east.

(Photo: Museum of London)

walls and floors, wood for roofs and partitions and so forth<sup>4</sup>.

This phase of royal occupation was short-lived. Before his death in 1377 Edward bequeathed the manor to his Cistercian foundation of St. Mary Graces by the Tower of London, and this was executed in the early years of his successor, Richard II. Twenty years later Bermondsey Priory acquired the Rotherhithe moiety from St. Mary Graces at an annual rent of £20; thus in 1398 both halves of the Rotherhithe manor, originally divided by Henry I, were finally reunited under the proprietorship of Bermondsey Priory and remained so until repossessed by the Crown at the time of the Dissolution.

After the Dissolution a number of tenants held the property under lease from the Crown. By 1641 the building had become the site of a pottery factory: a poll tax of that year refers to one Thomas Barnebowe as an "earthen pot maker" at Rother-

hithe. Further, a 1651 Parliamentary survey of Crown possessions also mentions Barnebowe and Joseph Muston (his partner) as being leaseholders of "... a messuage commonlie called ... King John's House als the Moated Place ... now employed for a pothouse ..."<sup>5</sup>.

Rotherhithe was one of many factories in London producing the tin-glazed earthenware generally known as English delft. Despite the considerable quantity of pottery recovered from the site (see below) its productive life appears to have been short. After the death of Barnebowe in 1659 and Muston in 1661 the premises passed to Muston's son Joseph jnr., who was not a potter. The business moved elsewhere, for William Fry, first apprenticed at Rotherhithe in 1638, was himself taking apprentices for a new pothouse at Still Stairs, west of where Tower Bridge now stands. Furthermore, two hearth taxes of 1666 and 1669 do not record any potters in

4. R A Brown in *The History of the King's Works* vol. II (1963) H M Colvin (ed) 989-94.

5. Frank Britton *London Delftware* (1987) 39-40; PRO E.317/ Kent 53.



Fig. 5: north wall of the moated building, looking west.  
(Photo: Museum of London)

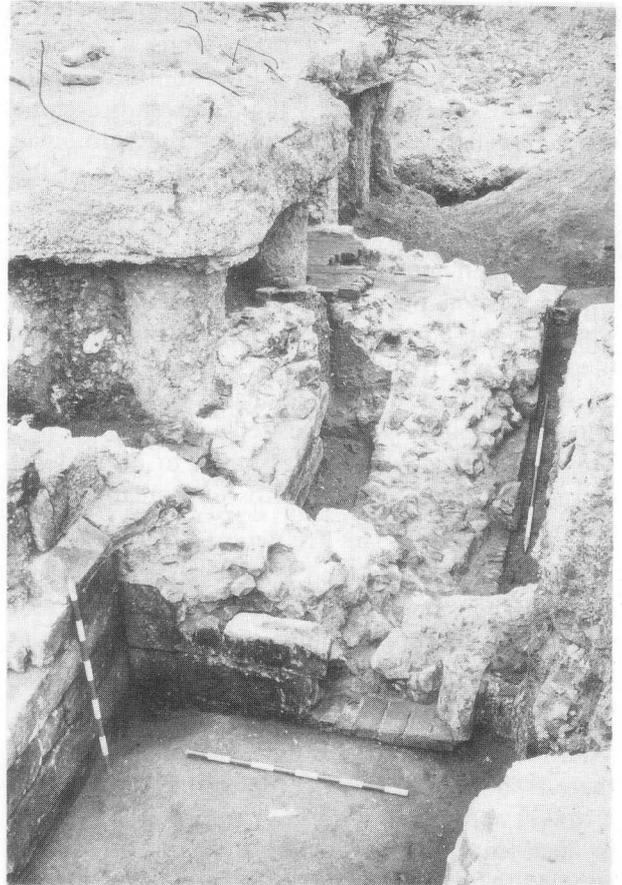


Fig. 6: north-west tower, looking west. The possible kiln can be seen top centre.  
(Photo: Museum of London)

the Rotherhithe area. One can reasonably assign a date of *c* 1662, therefore, to the demise of the pottery factory at Platform Wharf<sup>6</sup>.

Finally, if there is any doubt as to the location of the medieval manor house and its identity with the 17th century pottery factory, there is a deed of mortgage, dated 15th December 1682, which refers to a “capital message or mansion house commonly called ... the moated place or the pothouse” and “... a message or tenement called by the sign of the angel.”<sup>7</sup> (the *Angel* public house, now very much a tourist attraction, still stands at the north end of Cathay Street, overlooking the Thames).

Some time after the factory closed the house was demolished and, in the ensuing centuries, the site has been variously occupied by an engineering works, granary, tobacco warehouse, police station and dwelling houses.

### The Medieval Remains

R. A. Brown describes Edward III's manor house as comprising an Inner Court of stone buildings enclosing an open courtyard and surrounded by a moat, and an Outer Court to the south of the moat of less substantial (timber) structures surrounded by an earthen bank<sup>4</sup>.

The strategy adopted by the Museum for its evaluation was to trench in selected areas so as to define and record the layout of major archaeological features without damaging the more delicate remains alongside. Five trenches were dug: the north, south, east and west to locate the Inner Court, and the south-west to uncover evidence of the Outer Court.

The Inner Court has proved to be a most impressive structure: it is rectangular, approximately 30m N-S × 20m E-W (100 × 66ft), with walls 1m

6. Britton, *ibid.*; PRO E.179/258/2 & 188/508.

7. John Harvard Library, Southwark, Deed No 436.

(3ft) thick surviving to a height of nearly 3m (10ft), all surrounded by a moat c 8m (26ft) wide. The walls, constructed of ashlar with a mortared chalk rubble core, are abutted by thin chalk and ragstone internal walls which divide the interior into small apartments or chambers. Within the fabric of the north wall two sills have survived from the four ground-floor windows first recorded in 1907, with much of their internal detail well-preserved, along with a portion of an associated tiled floor. Elsewhere, in the north-east corner of the building, this tiled floor was found to overlie at least four earlier medieval surfaces of crushed chalk and mortar built upon a foundation of redeposited natural sandy clay. This sandy clay, which is assumed to be of local extraction, produced the sherds of Roman pottery referred to above.

The room with the tiled floor was also served by a greensand stone fireplace inserted into the east wall with a corbelled chimney jutting out over the moat. It would appear that this fireplace was a later addition into the main fabric of the outer wall.

Although damaged by modern concrete piling, there is in the north-east corner of the Inner Court a tower, approximately 6 × 3m (20 × 10ft), which projects into the moat. Internally it contains a cobbled floor, which may be the base of a staircase, and the remains of an earlier (possibly pre-Edward III) wall, here reused as the spine of the tower.

Three garderobes have so far been identified. Within the east range a small, rectangular chalk-lined pit abuts a narrow drain which appears to pass through the east wall, its purpose presumably being to discharge waste out into the moat. Two small recesses within the west wall would have fulfilled the same role; the northernmost, although subsequently blocked with chalk, still has the voussoirs of a drain arch clearly visible at the base of the wall. The other is inserted into the south-west corner of the building.

The Outer Court, according to R. A. Brown, is situated to the south of the moat. No evidence has yet been found of a bridge connecting the two enclosures, although a series of timber piles surviving in the waterlogged deposits at the bottom of the moat may well be the foundations of such a structure. Part of the earthen bank surrounding the



Fig. 7: brick-lined clay puddling pit inserted into the east wall of the moated building.

(Photo: Museum of London)

Outer Court has been recorded in excavation, but a concentration of post-medieval features which may belong to the pottery factory prevented any deeper investigation. A small test-pit in this area, however, has revealed a number of timbers cutting into the natural sand at a similar depth to that of the medieval stone building to the north.

#### The Post-Medieval Remains

Excavation has shown that, in the 17th century, considerable refurbishment took place to convert the moated building into a pottery factory. Medieval stone features were rebuilt in brick, the moat was largely drained and backfilled with debris from the factory and the buildings of the Outer Court were demolished and replaced by a large industrial complex of workshops, pits, drains and storehouses.

Two brick-lined pits were inserted into the east wall of the Inner Court (Fig. 7). A rectangular pit clad in slate served as a cistern to supply water *via* a lead pipe to a sub-circular pit, in which the clay was refined prior to throwing and firing: this pit was found to be still full of clay. A second pit, containing a different clay, was found further south within the



Fig. 8: stack of delftware wasters.  
(Photo: Trevor Hurst)

industrial area. Both clays are currently being analysed to establish their provenance and suitability for making earthenware.

Two structures possibly identifiable as kilns have so far been located. The first, cut into the foundations of the north-west tower, consists of a burnt brick floor *c* 2m (6½ft) square with the remains of its east, west and south walls surviving up to 3 courses high. It appears to be the base of a heating chamber for a kiln, the superstructure of which had been destroyed by modern concrete foundations (Fig. 5). The second kiln seems to have been built in the medieval room originally served by the fireplace in the east wall of the Inner Court. It is probable that the fireplace served as a firebox for a kiln within the medieval chamber, now furnished with a brick floor similar to that in the north-west tower. Bricks from the claypits and kilns have been examined and certainly fall into the date range for the Rotherhithe pottery (*c* 1638 – *c* 1662<sup>8</sup>).

At the same time much of the west wall of the Inner Court was refaced with brick, and some structural features such as doors, windows and garderobes blocked up. Crucial dating evidence for this activity is provided by the re-use of unglazed

delft tiles within a levelling course in the wall.

Although the documentary evidence implies a terminal date of *c* 1662 for the pottery factory, the reasons for its short life are far from clear. What is certain, however, is that of the many tons of pottery dumped into the moat during the 25 years of the factory's life a large percentage appears to be unflawed and, therefore, rejected for no apparent reason. These dumps, over 1m (3ft) deep, probably display the complete repertoire of the 17th century delft potter in both the unglazed state and as finished glazed and painted wares, as well as including large quantities of furniture and lining material from the kilns themselves. It is likely that when Platform Wharf is fully excavated and its pottery published it will prove to be one of the most important delftware sites so far discovered in Britain.

### Future Work

Platform Wharf is one of very few archaeological sites so far excavated in London that has a complete, well-documented, royal moated building within its boundaries. Although very little of it has been excavated there is every reason to hope that the interior of the moated building will survive; the waterlogged medieval levels in the moat are likely to provide much organic material and environmental information, and beneath the industrial complex to the south the timbers exposed in the test-pit may belong to the range of buildings of the Outer Court. The discovery of Roman pottery suggests that evidence of Roman activity may lie beneath the medieval layers.

In view of the above, various options are being considered for the future of the site

### Acknowledgements

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8. Ian Betts *pers comm*.