



Fig. 1: General view of excavation area, looking north. In the foreground is a Roman hypocausted building on Stave and Rosings Wharfs. Behind is St Mary Overy Wharf warehouse, flanked by St Mary Overy Dock and the rose window wall of the medieval palace great hall.

Photo: Museum of London

Excavations at Winchester Palace, Southwark

Brian Yule

Introduction

A SERIES of large-scale redevelopments of the Southwark riverfront in the 1980s have provided unprecedented opportunities to investigate the archaeology of the historic riverfront opposite the City. This report deals with excavations c 200m (660ft) upriver of modern London Bridge, on the site of medieval Winchester Palace (see Fig. 1 for general view, Fig. 2 for location of site). For five centuries from its origins in the mid-12th century, the palace was the London residence of the Bishops of Winchester. The only standing remains of this important medieval complex are the west wall of the great hall, with its intact rose window, and a short sector of the adjoining south wall (see front cover).

Archaeological excavations in 1983-4 in advance of Eagle Star Properties' redevelopment of a large area of the medieval palace compound revealed a remarkable sequence of medieval palace and Roman buildings and contemporary waterfronts, which allow new consideration of the topographical development of the area.

Most of the previous investigations in the area related to the medieval great hall and buildings to the west. Several 19th-century antiquarians recorded the picturesque ruins of medieval walls left standing after a fire gutted the buildings in 1814; most of the walls were subsequently demolished. Limited excavations by Francis Celoria in 1962-3 and Peter Curnow in

1971 helped to identify the structural phasing of the great hall, and also gave some hint of the rich underlying Roman sequence.

The 1983-4 excavations by the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology were carried out on the sites of 19th- and 20th-century warehouses (see Fig. 9) – Stave and Rosings Wharfs, Pickfords D Wharf, Pickfords B Wharf, and St Mary Overy Wharf; there were also watching briefs on a sewer trench along the line of Clink Street, and the widening of St Mary Overy Dock. This report summarises some of the main findings of these excavations and earlier work. It should be noted that full consideration of the sequence, and correlation of the data from separate excavation areas must await completion of the archive reports. It is hoped that the archives will be written up by 1991, to be followed soon after by publication.

Roman

In the mid-1st century AD the south bank of the Thames opposite the City was low-lying ground, subject to flooding from the tidal river. Evidence for the Roman riverfront in the presumed core area of the Southwark settlement (i.e. adjacent to the southern end of Roman London Bridge) is limited, due to medieval riverine erosion. Survival did, however, occur in the Winchester Palace area, c 250m (820ft) upstream of the Roman bridge. The early Roman riverfront crossed Pickfords D Wharf c 50-55m (170ft) south of the modern river wall, and was defined by close-set piles. Although no evidence survived of a flood embankment, some heightening of the riverfront might be expected to guard against tidal inundation; the piles may have helped to consolidate such a bank. The NW-SE alignment of the riverfront is different from that of the medieval and later south bank, and explains the orientation of the Roman riverside buildings on the adjacent Stave and Rosings

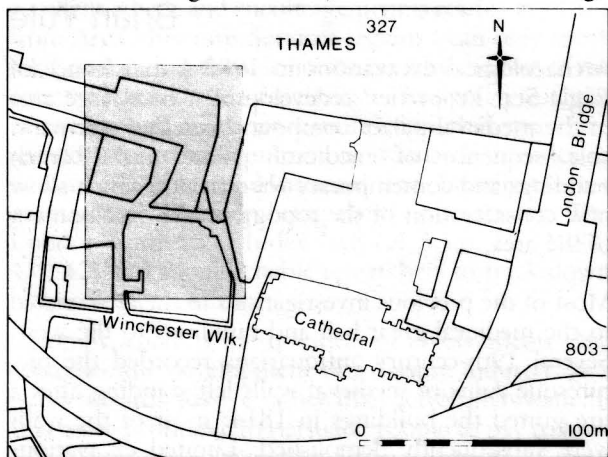


Fig. 2: Site location plan. See Fig. 9 for toned area.

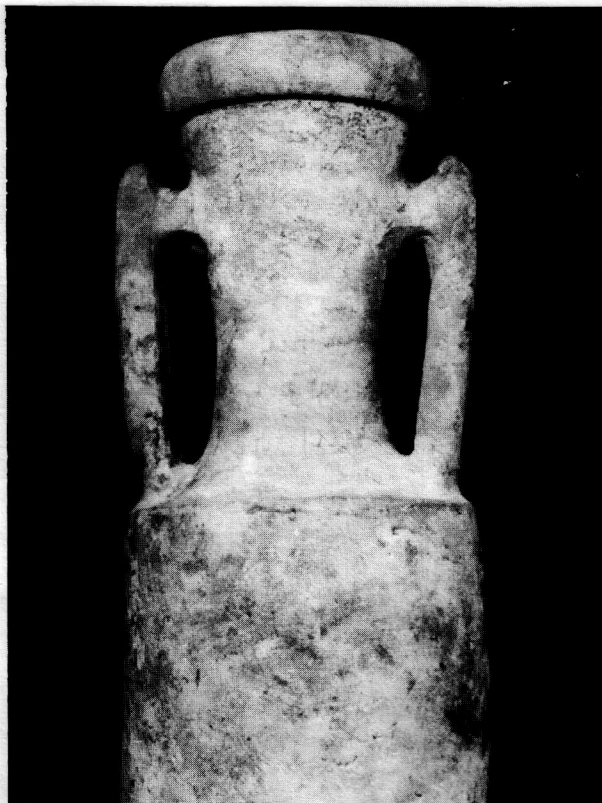


Fig. 3: 1st-century amphora found in a dumped foreshore deposit. An inscription on the shoulder identifies the contents as *liquamen* (fish sauce), the produce of Lucius Tettius Africanus from Antipolis (modern Antibes). Mackerel bones were found inside.

Photo: Museum of London

Wharfs (see below). The waterfront was advanced north of Pickfords D Wharf in the period AD 80-120. Dumps sealing the early foreshore contained large quantities of building material and highly decorated painted wall plaster, probably derived from the demolition of nearby buildings.

The Stave and Rosings Wharfs sequence revealed four main building phases, representing continuous occupation from the 1st to 4th centuries. The latest phase, a large riverfront property which occupied the site for at least 150 years, is an important addition to known public buildings in Roman London. The earlier sequence is also of some interest in revealing the process of property division and development of this sector of the Southwark riverfront. The early developments were all of short duration; the first three phases may have covered a period of 60 years or so. There is also an evident lack of continuity and an absence of fixed property boundaries: each new building phase entailed redevelopment of the site on a new layout, without reference to earlier building divisions. This is in marked contrast to the long-lived

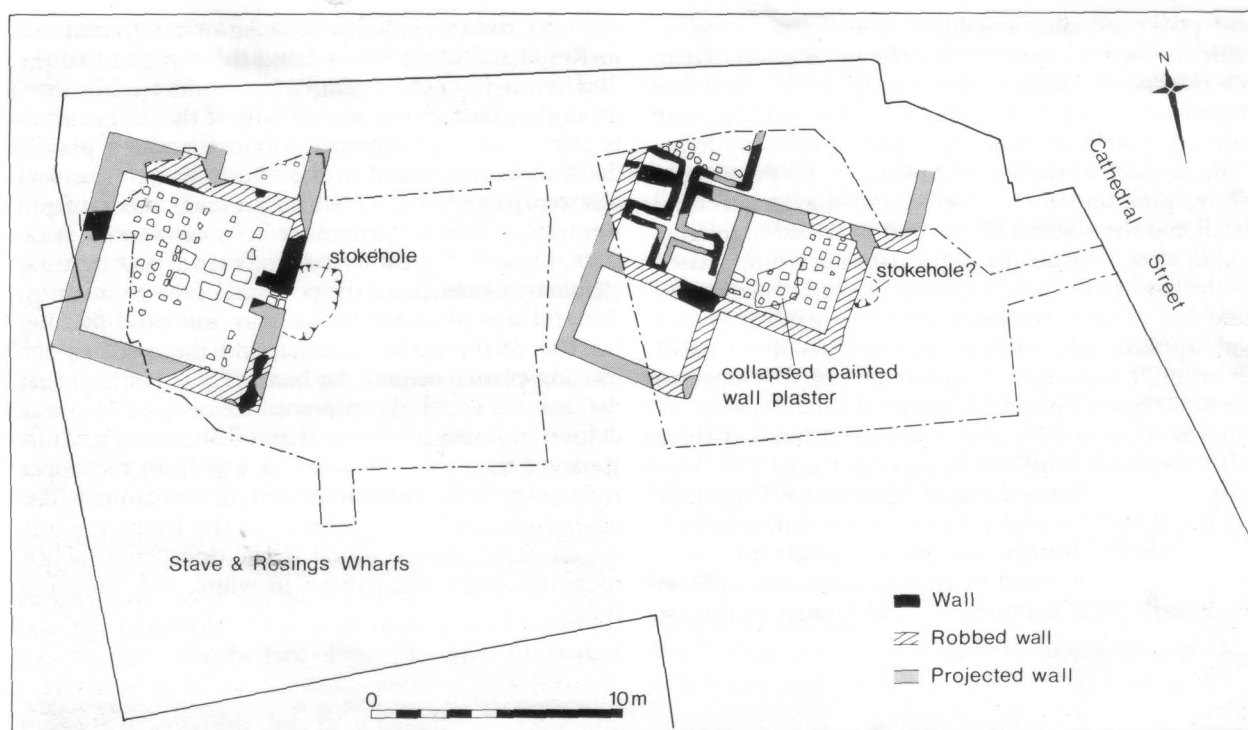


Fig. 4: Plan of 2nd-4th century building remains found on Stave and Rosings Wharfs.

property boundaries observed on many sites in the City and Southwark. Interpretation of building use must await the full analysis of ground plans and associated finds. Nevertheless the apparent range of building types, even in contemporary developments, suggests considerable variety in land use during the 1st and early 2nd centuries.

The earliest buildings probably date to the 60s or 70s AD, and sealed early Roman quarry pits. Two short-lived building phases were separated by a waterlaid clay, representing a flood event (?and breaching of the postulated flood embankment). They were both of clay and timber construction, and conformed to a NW-SE orientation. By the end of the 1st century a new north-south property boundary, defined by a timber fence, cut across the line of earlier structures. To the east was a well-preserved, clay-walled, ?residential building with internal mortar floors, white plastered walls, and a tile hearth built into one of the walls. To the west was a large apsidal-ended building constructed of stone and tile. The structure may have been built at the time the riverfront was advanced to the north. Its size and the early use of masonry suggest a public building, though its function is uncertain.

In the first half of the 2nd century the boundary fence was removed and both buildings were demolished. Earth dumps raised the land level across the site in

preparation for the construction of masonry buildings (which reverted to the NW-SE orientation) (see Fig. 4). It seems likely that the building remains belong to a single large establishment, with a frontage on the river of at least 30m (100ft). It appears to have continued in use, with various alterations in layout, into the 4th century.

Seven rooms were identified on Stave and Rosings Wharfs. Five had been fitted with hypocaust under-floor heating systems. The floors were supported by tile *pilae* in four of the rooms (see e.g. Fig. 5), and a cruciform arrangement of stone-built channels in the fifth. Although the ground surface had been truncated, finds from destruction debris indicate the presence of mosaic and *opus signinum* floors. Pitched roofs are indicated by *imbrices* and *tegulae*, though there is also evidence for at least one of the rooms having a vaulted roof (see below).

A major find from one of the hypocausted rooms in the south-east range was a large slab of wall plaster (almost 4 sq.m./35 sq.ft. in area), which proved to contain two superimposed paintings. The plaster was found face down over the robbed remains of the hypocaust, and had fallen from the top of the north-west partition wall (for location see Fig. 4). Careful cleaning has revealed two very different schemes. The earlier was an elaborate architectural perspective design including colonnades, entablature

and pediment, and a winged male figure standing centrally (see reconstruction drawing, Fig. 6). There is a rich use of colour. Yellow ochre, applied in fresco technique, formed the ground, over which were painted panels of red, blue and green to define elements such as doorways and sky. Finer painting in white, pink and brown delineated the architectural detail and the winged figure, and provided highlights and shadow. The quality of the painting is emphasised by the use of expensive materials like red cinnabar and gold leaf (a small fragment of yellow painted plaster with applied gold leaf was recovered from the fill of an intrusive feature, and almost certainly belonged to the same room's painted scheme). Cinnabar, over six times as costly as red ochre, is attested from only three other Romano-British buildings, and gold leaf from only one¹. Dr Roger Ling of Manchester University has noted that the wall painting "is the only relatively well-preserved British example of a scheme more frequently encountered in Roman Italy, especially in the Fourth Style at Pompeii (third quarter of the 1st

century) and in Hadrianic and Antonine decorations in Rome and Ostia (second and third quarters of the 2nd century)."² On stratigraphical and art historical grounds a date in the second half of the 2nd century is likely. The 3rd-century fashion for much plainer decoration is revealed in the later scheme. The wall was replastered; over a white ground, bands of red formed a geometric pattern, rather similar to the basic framework of the earlier scheme's main architectural elements. Evidence for the position of the painting on the wall was provided by the dark red band framing the top of the earlier scheme, and the angle of the backing plaster behind the band. These confirm that the band formed the topmost element of the wall decoration where it met that of the ceiling. It is apparent then that the painting was from the upper zone of the wall, and that the ceiling was vaulted. The other main decorative scheme in the room was the mosaic floor; *tesserae* found in the destruction debris suggest a geometric pattern in white, red, blue and yellow.

1. Dr Roger Ling, *pers. comm.*

2. *Ibid.*

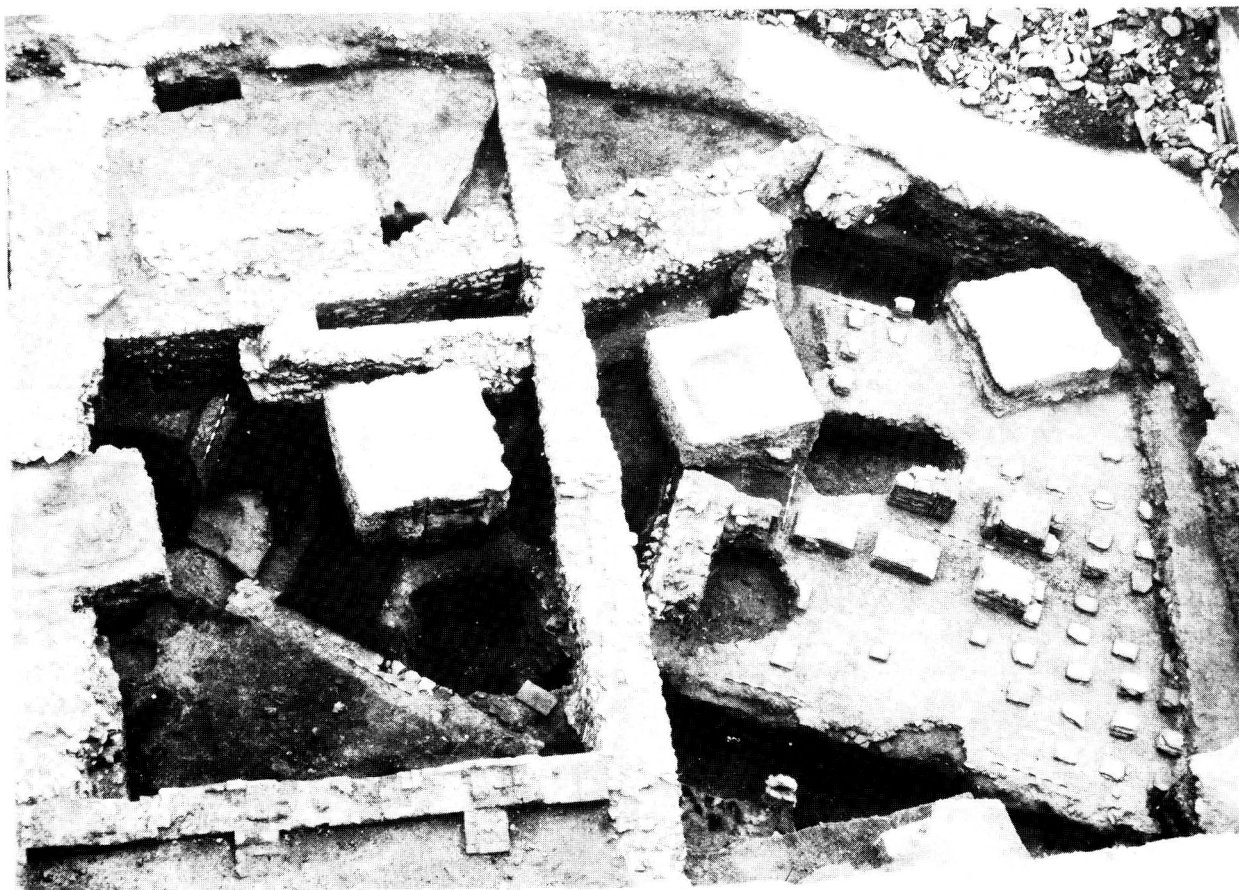


Fig. 5: Western trench, Stave and Rosings Wharfs, looking south. The Roman structures are aligned NW-SE. The chalk wall footings are part of the medieval palace courtyard ranges.

Photo: Museum of London

The size and prominent riverfront location of this property suggest that it was a public building of some importance. The fact that five of the seven identified rooms had been fitted with hypocausts might suggest that we are dealing with a bath house. Supporting evidence may be the flue tiles found in destruction deposits, and the vaulted roof of the wall painting room, thought to be characteristic of bath buildings; and the large bases adjacent to the flue of the hypocaust in the large room in the western trench could be identified as supports for a hot water tank. The bath house interpretation is, however, by no means certain. The rooms are smaller than might be expected in public baths, and the quality of decoration indicated by the wall painting and mosaic floor might be more appropriate in a suite of living rooms that had been fitted with central heating.

An intriguing further clue to the use of the building is the evidence for a military presence. Twenty-seven fragments of a large marble inscription were recovered from the stokehole of the large hypocausted room in the western trench (see Fig. 7). The finely-cut

3. M. Hassall and R. Tomlin 'Roman Britain in 1984' *Britannia* 16 (1985) 317-22.

inscription can be dated internally to the early 3rd century, and lists groups of seven or eight individuals by *Cohort*³. One of the names listed, 'Gontius', is previously unrecorded and may be a Germanic name related to Gunther. One interpretation would identify the individuals as legionary soldiers, perhaps the specialised *beneficiarii consularis*, who were seconded to the provincial governor for civil administrative duties. Their presence is known from an inscription at York⁴, the probable capital of Britannia Inferior in the 3rd century, and would be expected in London, probable capital of Britannia Superior. It is tempting to interpret the Winchester Palace inscription as indicating that these troops had a base, or perhaps a guild headquarters, on the Southwark riverfront.

Much of the complex was demolished in the late 3rd/early 4th century, though at least some of the rooms were retained. Coin evidence suggests that occupation continued into the second half of the 4th century.

Medieval and later

The earliest post-Roman activity found on site was

4. R. Wright 'Roman Britain in 1969' *Britannia* 1 (1970) 307.

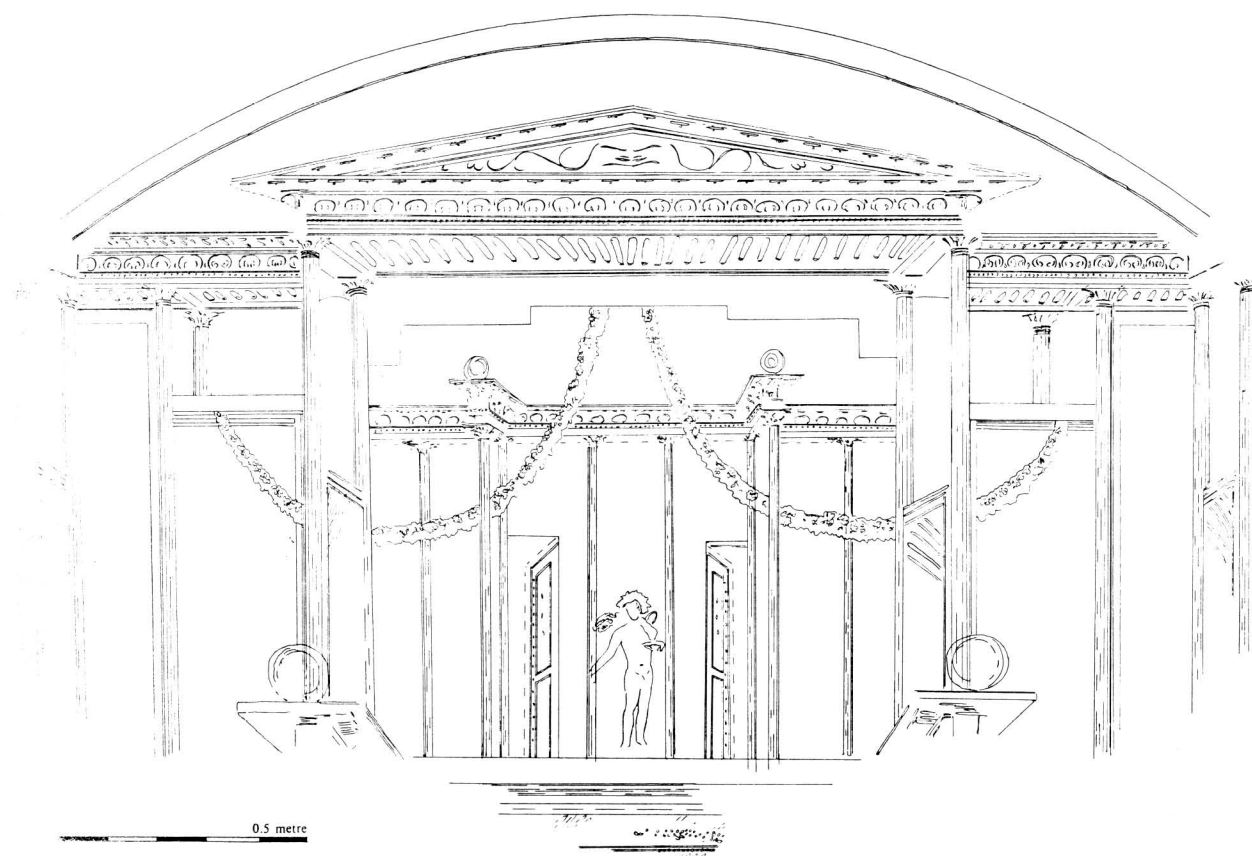


Fig. 6: Late 2nd-century wall painting – reconstruction drawing. The painting was from the top of the wall, revealing the presence of a vaulted ceiling.

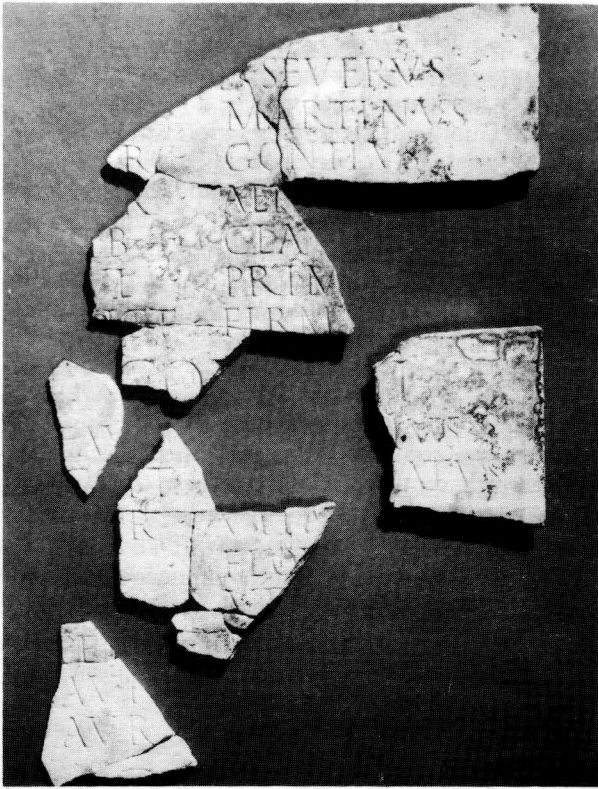


Fig. 7: Early 3rd-century marble inscription, listing members of a ?military guild.

Photo: Museum of London

late Saxon. Several large pits on Stave and Rosings Wharfs produced 10th/11th-century pottery groups. The only structural remains pre-dating medieval Winchester Palace were found on Pickfords D Wharf:

an east-west ragstone wall founded on a timber raft, dated by dendrochronology to 1095-1125.

In the mid-12th century Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester, acquired land on the Southwark river-front for a London residence because of "the many inconveniences and losses sustained through the lack of a house of our own when called to London on royal or other business."⁵ By the 13th century Winchester Palace consisted of two courtyards, a small privy garden and a large recreational and kitchen garden, over six acres in extent. Many records survive of medieval Winchester Palace, from contemporary illustrations (like Hollar's panorama, see Fig. 8) to detailed financial accounts relating to building and maintenance works on the palace. A fortunate coincidence of interests meant that at the time of the excavations Martha Carlin was completing her Ph.D. thesis, which incorporated an examination of all the documentary records⁶. The archaeology and history complement each other to give a fuller picture of the development of the palace.

The excavations (see Fig. 9) were concentrated on the centre of the palace compound – the great hall and the building ranges round the inner courtyard, reflected by modern Winchester Square. It is now clear that this layout was the result of extensive rebuilding of the palace in the 13th century. Little is known of the 12th-century palace of Bishop Henry de Blois. However excavations at Pickfords D Wharf

5. P.R.O. E40/6112(5) (Ancient Deeds, series A).

6. Published as M. Carlin 'The reconstruction of Winchester House, Southwark' *London Topographical Record* 25 (1985) 33-57.

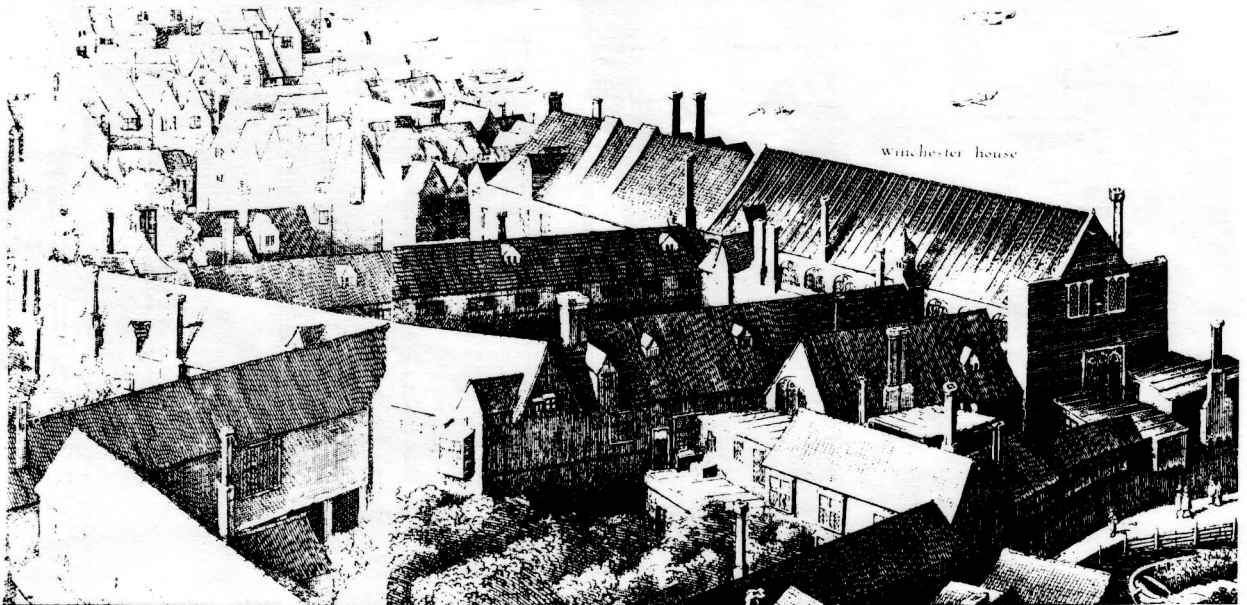


Fig. 8: Winchester Palace from the mid-17th-century panorama by Wenceslaus Hollar (cf. Fig. 9).

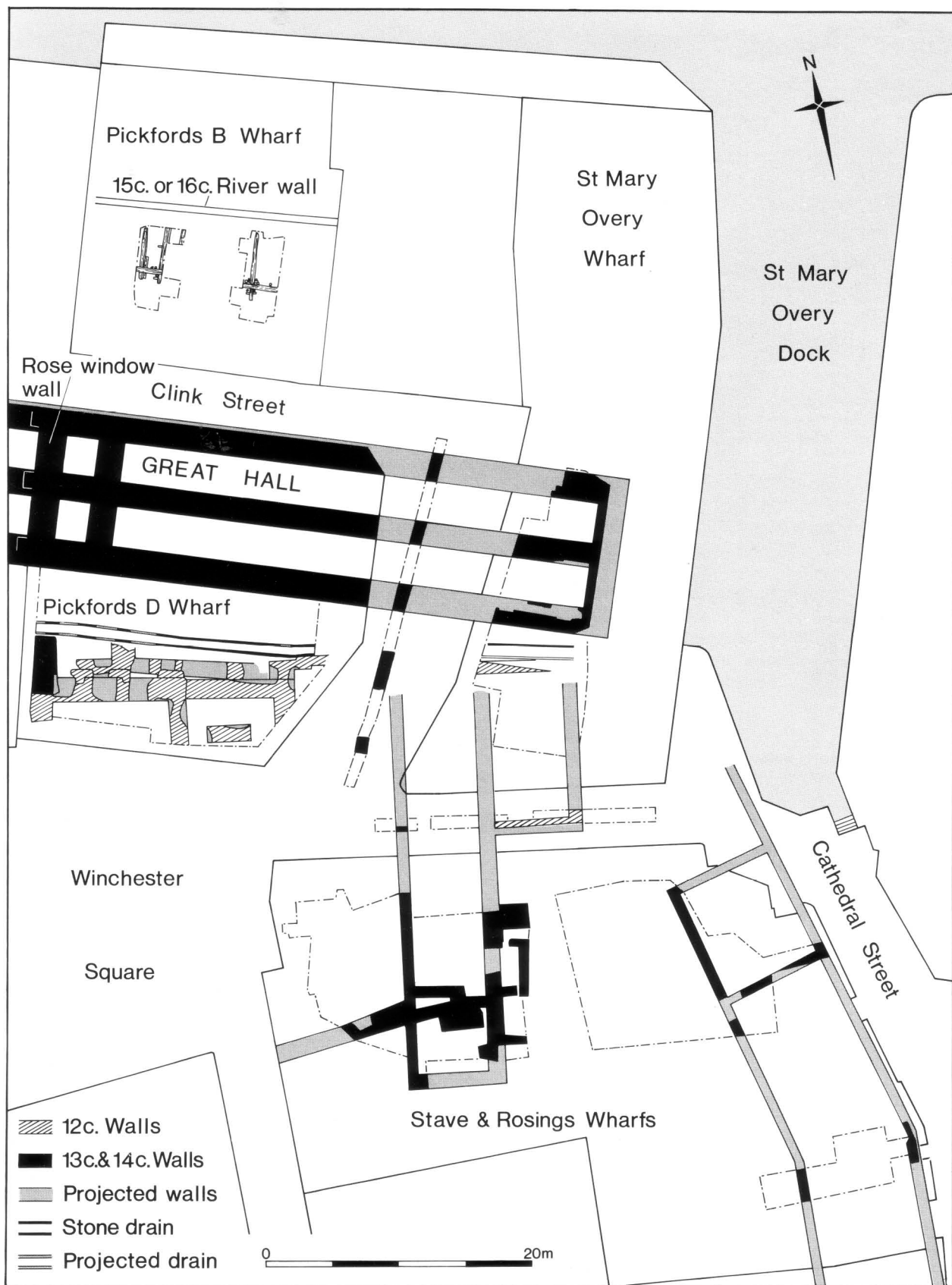


Fig. 9: Plan of excavated features of medieval Winchester Palace.



Fig. 10: 13th-century stone drain, referred to as the 'Great Gutter' in documentary records. Built of slabs of Purbeck limestone, the drain carried waste from the service range west of the great hall into St Mary Overy Dock, and was flushed out by the Thames.

Photo: Museum of London

located part of a large masonry building which must pre-date the 13th-century great hall; and an east-west wall found in the sewer trench south of St Mary Overy Wharf probably formed the south wall of the ?12th-century chapel.

The focal building in the 13th-century palace was the 'new' great hall – one of the largest secular buildings in medieval London. Three massive, parallel, stone foundations, built on oak sleeper beams, extended at least 60m (200ft) west of the east end wall discovered in St Mary Overy Wharf (the western limit of the original building lay beyond Celoria's excavations, west of the rose window wall). The central footing carried an arcade which subdivided the ground floor undercroft into vaulted bays. The hall was at first floor level, with service rooms to the west, and the bishop's chamber at the east end of the building. Dendro-chronological dating of the oak beams below the footings gives a felling date between 1190 and 1235. The building may have been completed in 1224-5

when three tilers and four workmen spent 15 days covering it with 7500 tiles⁷.

Structural evidence indicates that the rose window wall was secondary to the original hall construction. It may have been built in the early 14th century, contemporary with a vaulted corridor to its east, which provided access through the undercroft to the wharf to the north of the building. Buttresses on the west face of the rose window wall indicate that for some time after its construction the hall was separate from service rooms to the west. The three doors in the rose window wall, traditionally to the buttery, pantry and kitchens, must date to a later period when the service range had been integrated again into the west end of the hall.

To the south of the hall was the inner courtyard. Excavations on Stave and Rosings Wharfs located the walls of building ranges defining its south-eastern

7. *Ibid*, 37.

corner (see Fig. 5). The east range is known to have housed the bishop's knights and clerks, probably at first floor level above storage rooms⁸.

The curious, oblique alignment of the courtyard ranges to the great hall was probably dictated by the continued use of the original 12th-century chapel (thought to be the building south of the east end of the great hall) after the rebuilding of the hall in the 13th century⁹. East of the courtyard ranges was the bishop's privy garden, beyond which was a range of rooms built along the eastern boundary wall of the compound. Like many walls of the medieval palace, this wall, though rebuilt many times, continues down to the present day as a property boundary.

The wharf serving the palace was north of the great hall. Three riverfronts were found on Pickfords B

8. *Ibid.*, 40.

9. *Ibid.*, 39-40.



Fig. 11: 14th-century garderobe built in the trapezoidal-shaped space between chambers in the south-east corner of the courtyard ranges. Excavation of the alternating organic and lime deposits recovered a gold ring, three glass urinals, two iron keys, and assorted pottery.

Photo: Museum of London



Fig. 12: Part of mid-14th-century riverfront revetment. The oak timbers, with well-preserved mortice and tenon joints, formed a back-brace for the vertical planks of the revetment. Photo: Museum of London

Wharf. The earliest, 11m (36ft) north of the hall, consisted of large squared beech baseplates, with only remnants of the surviving superstructure. It was cut through by the oak backbraces of a later waterfront which had been advanced 5m (16ft) to the north (see Fig. 12). Dendrochronological dating of the oak timbers indicates a felling date of 1354. This waterfront was in turn superseded by a stone riverside wall, which maintained the same frontage, and may be of 15th or 16th-century date.

Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, the last bishop to use the palace, died there in 1626. The palace was broken up in the 1650s, and buildings subdivided and used as tenements and warehouses. By the Victorian period the riverfront had been extensively rebuilt with large warehouses, which continued to serve the Port of London until the 1960s. The Eagle Star Properties' redevelopment has retained the shells of two of the Victorian warehouses in a mixed development of offices, shops and apartments. At its heart stand the surviving walls of medieval Winchester Palace.

Acknowledgements

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