

Fig. 1: map of City of London showing location of medieval waterfront sites mentioned in these reports: 1, Baynard's Castle (BC72); 2, Trig Lane (TL74); 3, Vintry House (VRY89); 4, Thames Exchange (TEX88); 5, Swan Lane (SWA81); 6, Billingsgate Lorry Park (BWB83)

# Studying finds from the medieval waterfront

Heather Lindsay  
Penelope Webber

SINCE waterfront excavation began in earnest in London in 1972, (Fig. 1), it has been possible to show that all the room (330ft) stretch of land to the south of Thames Street has been won at the expense of the Thames, most of this extension taking place in a piecemeal but continuous programme during the medieval period. The waterfront deposits were exceptionally well-preserved (Fig. 2), containing the remains of buildings, wharves, jetties and boats, as well as many tonnes of artefacts including pottery, leather and metal objects of all types. Material from the first decade of waterfront excavation has already been published in the major series *Medieval Finds from Excavations*, a landmark for finds studies on both national and international level: volumes on shoes and pattens, knives and scabbards, dress accessories and textiles have already appeared<sup>1</sup>.

The two studies presented below concern finds from medieval reclamation dumps which had not been considered in detail in the catalogues discussed above: a hitherto unresearched class of trapezoidal buckle which was represented by examples from six waterfront sites, and the largest group of pewter finger rings from any British site, which was recently recovered from the Vintry House excavation (VRY89) immediately west of Southwark Bridge. Both these reports have been summarised from dissertations written by the authors while studying at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London: the projects were prepared in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the BA degree in Archaeology awarded by University College London in 1993.

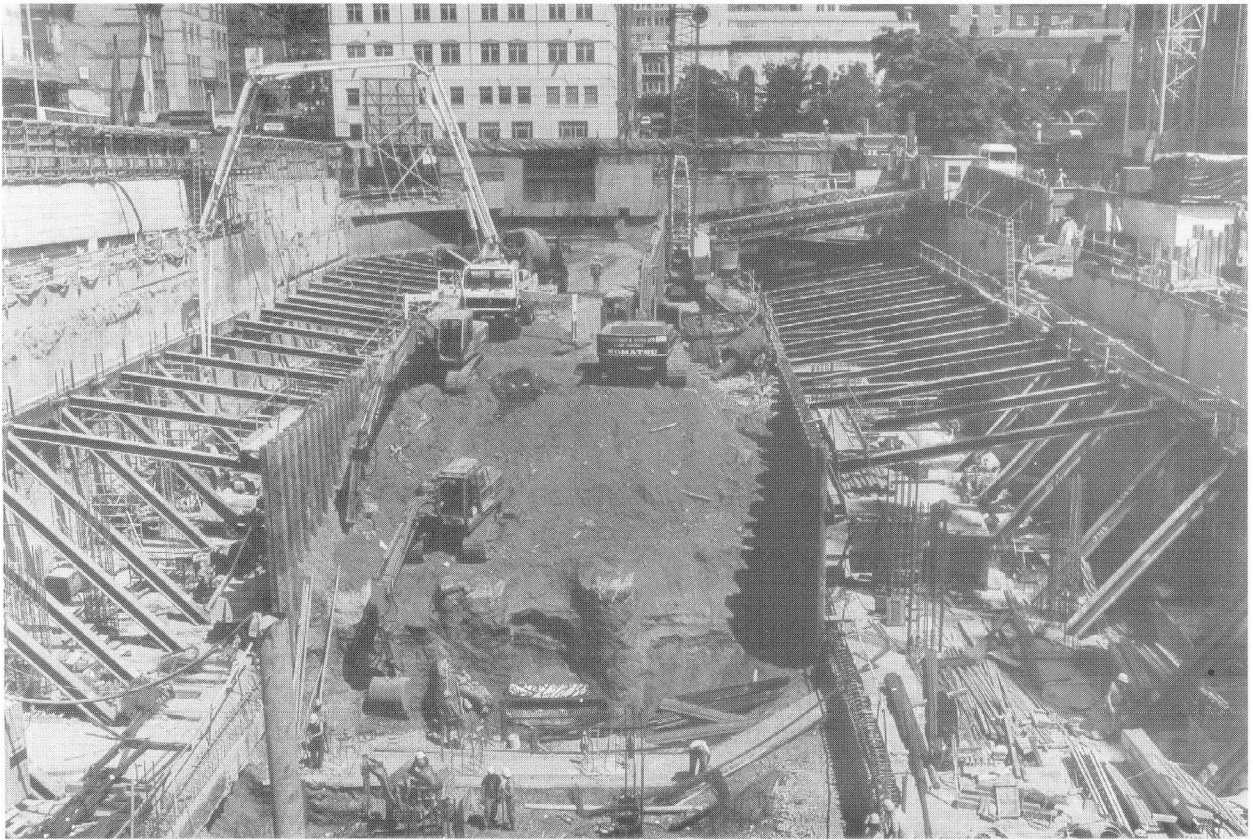
1. J. Cowgill, M. de Neergaard & N. Griffiths *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, 1: Knives and Scabbards* (1987); F. Grew & M. de Neergaard *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, 2: Shoes and Pattens* (1988); E. Crowfoot, F. Pritchard & K. Staniland *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, 4: Textiles and Clothing* (1992).

## Dating the finds

The broad dating of the stages by which the London waterfront was extended on the sites in question has been established by a combination of stratigraphic assessment, dendrochronology, and the study of associated artefacts such as coins and the often large groups of pottery. Most of the rings and buckles considered here were found with material datable to Medieval Ceramic Phases 4 to 12, that is between c 1040 and 1450, although this dating is subject to revision. However, most of the examples in both these assemblages were recovered through the efforts of members of the Society of Thames Mudlarks who, working under the supervision of archaeologists and Museum of London curatorial staff, metal-detected spoil which had been removed from the sites (Fig. 3). As a consequence, the dating and precise provenance of the material is not always as unambiguous as one would like. Nevertheless, it proved possible to assign at least a broad date range to most of the examples by their general association with datable pottery and coins from the same admittedly re-worked dump.



**Fig. 2: waterfront preservation:** during the controlled excavation of the Thames Exchange site, structures such as this revetment were recorded. The anaerobic conditions ensured that associated objects made of leather or metal were equally well-preserved.



**Fig 3:** the Thames Exchange site, looking north in 1989. It was possible to mount controlled excavations only on the eastern third of the development area (marked C): the rest of the archaeological levels were removed by mechanical excavators. However, the spoil was sorted by metal-detectors on the off-site dump to recover the medieval artefacts.

## Trapezoidal buckles, by Heather Lindsay

The compiler of the London Museum's medieval catalogue in 1940 commented that 'the plain buckle, consisting of a single loop and pin, is an obvious and universal object, about which little can profitably be said'<sup>2</sup>; he would have revised his opinion had he been able to read Geoff Egan and Francis Pritchard's major study, published fifty years later<sup>3</sup>. In this recent volume, buckles from a series of waterfront sites excavated between 1972 and 1988 were considered, how they were made, their form and function, how their shape was affected by the vagaries of fashion. Of the 142 copper alloy buckles described, nine were classed as trapezoidal in shape, but were not studied in detail. Subsequently, excavations at the Thames Exchange and Vintry sites produced further examples, and in 1992 there were 19 items described as trapezoidal buckles listed in the finds catalogues held by the Museum of London (MOL) and its Archaeological Service (MOLAS). It was this group of material which formed the focus for the present study. As a consequence, the identification of 11 trapezoidal buckles was confirmed, and one particular type which did not appear in the 1991 *Dress Accessories* catalogue, a simple frame with a plate, was recognised and dated for the first time. The other items proved to be purse fixings and mounts, rather than buckles.

This was the first time that trapezoidal buckles had been studied as a group, in an attempt to determine their function and to see how or why this particular form developed, and to establish the date of whatever developments might be identified. The buckles were recovered from Baynard's Castle, Trig Lane, Vintry House, Thames Exchange, Swan Lane and Billingsgate Lorry Park (Fig. 1). The nomenclature was that used in the *Dress Accessories* volume. It is assumed that they were mass produced in London, since evidence of copper-alloy buckle manufacture has been found in the form of the waste product, mould and crucible fragments from some London sites.

### Function and status

The buckles varied in size, in form and function, and seem to date to the period c 1220-1450, based on the evidence of broadly associated artefacts. The largest buckles could have been used with a horse harness or on a sword belt. There is a trapezoidal buckle depicted on the carved wooden effigy in

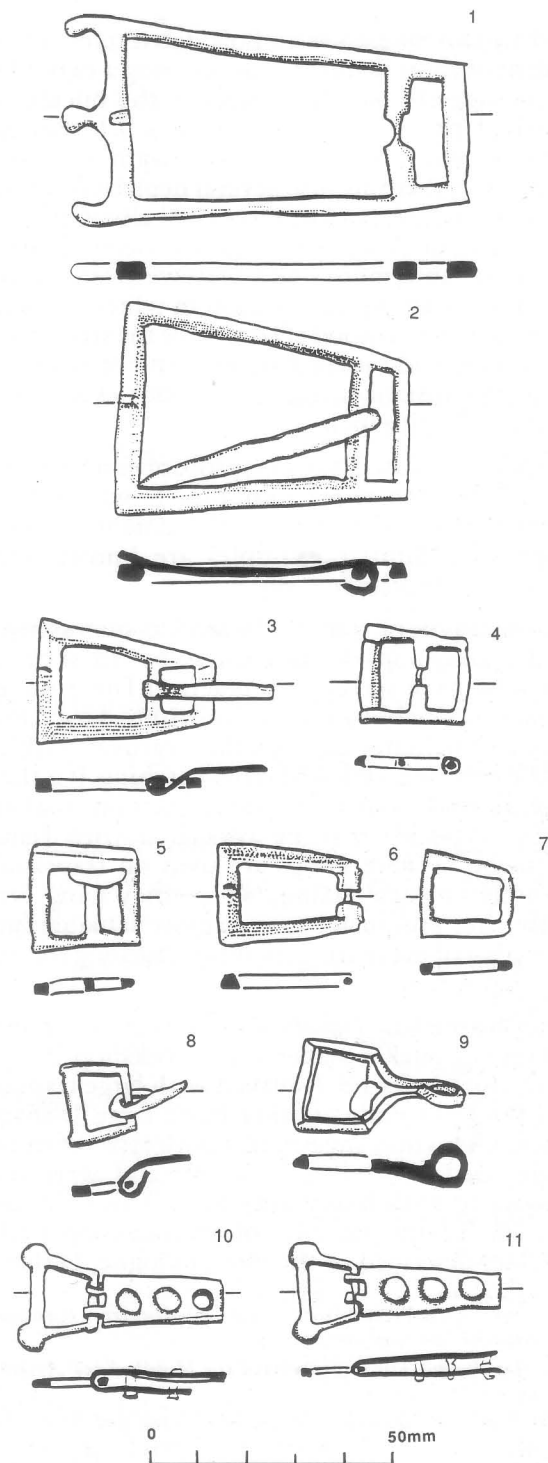


Fig. 4: trapezoidal buckles from the London waterfront: 1. Trig Lane TL74 acc no 1283; 2. Baynard's Castle BC72 acc no 1822; 3. Billingsgate BWB83 acc no 1935; 4. BWB83 acc no 4431; 5. Swan Lane SWA81 acc no 3028; 6. BWB83 acc no 1926; 7. BWB83 acc no 2476; 8. Vintry VRV89 acc no 85; 9. Thames Exchange TEX88 acc no 319.

2. J. Ward-Perkins *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (1940) 277.

3. G. Egan & F. Pritchard *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, 3: Dress Accessories* (1991).

Norfolk of Sir Robert du Bois, dated 1340<sup>4</sup>: it sits at a slant over Sir Robert's hips, securing a sword belt. This suggests that the shape of the buckle was particularly suited for securing a belt that was pulled down at one side by the weight of a sword. However, there are also several depictions of oval and rectangular buckles on sword belts<sup>5</sup>. This is also evidence for a trapezoidal buckle used to join two pieces of an armour chest plate vertically, rather than horizontally<sup>6</sup>, a situation in which the shape could be used to good effect, since the strap would only be as wide as the narrower end of buckle. In these two instances, trapezoidal buckles are clearly identified with men.

Buckle no. 9, dated 1330-50, is probably a spur buckle, comparable to three examples from Lyveden, Northamptonshire<sup>7</sup> for which a date of 1300-50 is suggested. Similar examples are known from Seacourt, Buckinghamshire<sup>8</sup>.

Another type of trapezoidal buckle, such as nos. 10 and 11, has knobs on the corners, but these do not seem to have served any practical function and were presumably a decorative whim. An example from Winchester also has this feature<sup>9</sup>, with the additional decoration of cross-hatching. It is therefore possible, but by no means certain, that this class of buckle may be associated with female garments. Where knobs are used on trapezoidal mounts or purse fixings where they hang vertically, they presumably serve a more valuable function, that of preventing the mount turning through 360 degrees.

The *Nuremberg Hausbuch* of c 1425<sup>10</sup> contains a picture of buckle-maker in his workshop. At least four thick belts are displayed with large trapezoidal buckles, while another has a large D-shaped buckle. This may suggest that both types of buckle were used in similar situations and were both associated with heavy-duty belts. This point may be worth pursuing since of the 142 copper alloy buckles described in the 1991 catalogue, D-shaped

and trapezoidal buckles were the least common forms, each with only nine examples. Given that both were equally rare, it is therefore possible that both served similar functions. For comparison, oval buckles were by far the most common form, with 59 examples, more than twice the number of circular, square, rectangular or double oval types, which all had between 22 and 24 examples.

### Buckles in Britain

Trapezoidal buckles have been identified from other sites in the country, including St Mary of Ospringe in Kent, where a highly decorated copper alloy example was recovered with ornamental plates<sup>11</sup>. A double buckle came from a grave at the Austin Friars at Leicester<sup>12</sup>, one which still had vestiges of gilt and enamelling was found in an unstratified contexts from Winchester<sup>13</sup>, and a pewter buckle from a silk belt was found in a garderobe in Sandal Castle<sup>14</sup>. Although this might suggest that trapezoidal buckles were fashionable, higher class items, it should be stressed that plain ones have been found in Southwark<sup>15</sup> and iron ones in Winchester<sup>16</sup> and Hadleigh Castle<sup>17</sup>.

Working from the admittedly broad dating framework suggested from the London examples, it subsequently proved possible to attempt to date a buckle from Howsham, in Yorkshire. This item was similar, though smaller, than two of the London buckles (nos. 10, 11), but retained its pin and evidence of gilding. The Yorkshire example was originally thought to be 14th or 15th century in date, but this may be rather late, since the London buckles seem to date to the period 1200 to 1350.

The study of medieval dress accessories has progressed considerably since 1940, as the research embodied in the most recent Museum of London catalogue shows. It is to be hoped that, in a rather more modest way, the study of trapezoidal buckles summarised has also been advanced, and with it our understanding of aspects of medieval technology, fashion and daily life.

4. J. Alexander & P. Binski (eds) *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (1987) no. 731.  
 5. A. Hartshorne 'The swordbelts of the Middle Ages' *Archaeol J* 48 (1891) 320-40.  
 6. M. Houston *Medieval Costume in England and France* (1939) 203.  
 7. G. Bryant & J. Steane *Excavations at the Deserted Medieval Settlement at Lyveden* (1975) 115.  
 8. M. Biddle 'The Deserted Medieval Village of Seacourt, Berks' *Oxoniensia* 26-7 (1962) 180.  
 9. I. Goodall 'Iron buckle and belt fittings' in M. Biddle (ed) *Winchester Studies 7, Object and Economy*. ii (1990) 532.  
 10. W. Treue et al (eds) *Hausbuch der Mendelschen Zwolbruderstiftung zu Nurnberg* (1965) pl 49.

11. A. Goodall 'Copper-Alloy Objects' in G. Smith 'The Excavation of the Hospital of St Mary of Ospringe' *Archaeol Cantiana* 95 (1979) 140.  
 12. J. Mellor & T. Pearce *The Austin Friars* CBA Res Rep 35 (1981) 133.  
 13. D. Hinton 'Buckles and Buckle Plates' in M. Biddle (ed) *Winchester Studies 7, Object and Economy*. ii (1990) 519.  
 14. A. Goodall 'Non-ferrous Metal Objects' in P. Mayes & L. Butler *Sandal Castle Excavations 1964-73* (1983) 231.  
 15. H. Sheldon 'Excavations at Toppings and Sun Wharves, Southwark, 1970-72' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 26 (1974) 96.  
 16. *Op cit* fn 9.  
 17. P. Drewett 'Hadleigh Castle, Essex, 1971-2' *J Brit Archaeol Ass* 38 (1975) 142.

## Pewter finger rings, by Penelope Webber

In 1981, it was suggested that 'gold, silver and bronze were the principal materials used to make rings in the middle ages. Only very occasionally are lead rings found'<sup>18</sup>. Ten years later, that statement was called into question following the discovery of 71 pewter finger rings from the Vintry House site in London, the largest assemblage of its type from any medieval site in Britain. Little attention had previously been paid to such items, in preference to study of the finer quality jewellery: finger rings made from lead and tin alloys are mentioned but rarely in catalogues, and are often excluded altogether<sup>19</sup>. Even the *London Museum Medieval Catalogue*<sup>20</sup> omits mention of all rings, but that was because World War II broke out before the relevant chapter could be completed. The only study which does consider the topic in any depth is that by Frances Pritchard in the recently-published *Dress Accessories* volume<sup>21</sup> which considered fifteen examples recovered after some 15 years of intensive excavation on the London waterfront. The recovery of the Vintry rings is clearly a major addition to our knowledge of such items: this short account of the group tries to draw attention to an otherwise overlooked fashion accessory which, it is argued, was far more common in 12th- and 13th-century London than was previously supposed.

During the course of the redevelopment of the Vintry site between 1989-91, some 71 pewter finger rings were recovered with metal detectors, mostly from soil dumped off-site. Of this group, 52 were retained by the Museum and were studied in the dissertation. The results are summarised in Table 1. The hoop refers to the actual

18. J. Cherry 'Medieval Rings' in A. Ward *et al* (eds) *The Ring: from antiquity to the 20th century* (1981) 55.

19. E.g. O. Dalton *Catalogue of Finger Rings in the British Museum* (1912).

20. J. Ward-Perkins *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (1940).

21. . *Op cit.* fn 3, 332-5.

## Description

### *Hoops with round sections:*

Description	catalogue no.	suggested date range
with no bezel	1	undated
with irregular bezel	2	c 1100-1160
with round bezel	3	c 1100-1160

### *Hoops with flat sections:*

broad band bezels	4-7	c 1100-1220
	8-10	undated
rectangular bezel	11	c 1100-1160
bezel with false stone setting	12	c 1100-1160
bezel with face mask	13	c 1060s
bezel with multiple settings	14-15	undated

### *Hoops with triangular or semi-circular settings:*

flat bezels with three rows of beading	16-17	c 1100-1220
	18	undated
bezel with cross-hatched or diagonal design	19	c 1100-1220
	20, 22	undated
	21	c 1240-1330
bezel with diagonal lines & beading	23	c 1100-1220
bezel with square panels of decoration	24-25	c 1100-1220
square & rectangular bezels	26-29	c 1070-1220
square/rectangular bezel with openwork	30-31	undated
lozenge-shaped bezel	32-34	c 1070-1240
	35-36	undated
lozenge-shaped bezel with false stone	37	undated
bezel with multiple lozenge shapes	38	undated
bezel with oval/lozenge shape	39	c 1100-1160
	40	undated
round bezel	41	c 1100-1160
	42	undated
oval/round bezel with false stone	43	c 1100-1220
	44-47	undated
bezel with pellet-shaped false stone	48	c 1240-1330
bezel with multiple round settings	49	c 1100-1160
flower-shaped bezel	50	undated

### *Hoops with lozenge-shaped sections*

round bezel	51-52	undated
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Table 1: pewter finger rings from the Vintry site (VRY89). The rings were recovered from off-site spoil dumps: the suggested date range is therefore that of the broadly-associated artefacts from the same dump.

ring itself, the bezel the element which would hold the stone or act as a decorative feature. The catalogue number refers solely to the numbering system used in the dissertation, not the MoL accession number. The *suggested date range* represents the value given to all the finds recovered from the particular dump from which the ring was found: it is based partly upon a provisional assessment of the dendrochronologically-dated structures recorded on the site, and partly upon pottery groups from the associated dumps. Where a number of rings of a similar design were associated with deposits of differing dates, as was the case with nos. 26 to 29 for example, then both the earliest and latest dates for the group as a whole is shown. However, it should be stressed that many of the rings recovered from the off-site dumps were not associated with any feature or datable find. Some of these are marked *undated* in the Table: the others are listed alongside similar examples for which a date could be suggested.

### Made in London

Over 80% of the Vintry rings examined were made in three-piece moulds, a process which leaves distinct casting seams on the opposite sides of the hoop. Little effort seems to have been made to

remove these seams, which supports the suggestion that such rings were manufactured on a large scale. Although four pewter finger rings are recorded in Winchester<sup>22</sup> and Beverley<sup>23</sup>, published reports from other major urban excavation programmes in Kings Lynn or Southampton for example have not revealed other examples<sup>24</sup>. This could suggest that these items were mass produced in a very few centres, such as the City, and were most commonly in use there, perhaps as a peculiarly London fashion.

The manufacture of pewter vessels such as plates, dishes, jugs and chalices seems to have been based primarily in London and York: by 1348 pewterers were granted ordinances for the regulation of their craft. The abundance of the metal in London is also reflected in the large number of 11th to 15th-century lead, tin and pewter tokens, badges and other dress accessories recovered from the waterfront excavations. The metal was popular since it could be used to imitate silver, but was less than half the price<sup>25</sup>.

### Medieval finger rings

In the medieval period finger rings were an important indicator of status and wealth. They were worn for decoration, as a sign of religious devo-

22. M. Biddle (ed) *Winchester Studies* 7, *Object and Economy*, ii (1990) nos 2077, 2078.

23. B. Spencer 'Objects of Lead Alloy' in D. Evans & D. Tomlinson *Excavations at 33-5 Eastgate Beverley, 1983-6* Sheffield Excavations Reports 3 (1992) 143-7.

24. H. Clarke & A. Carter *Excavations in King's Lynn 1963-1970* (1977); C. Platt & R. Coleman-Smith *Excavations in Medieval Southampton 1953-69* (1975).

25. M. Campbell 'Metalwork in England 1220-1400' in *op cit* fn 4, 167.

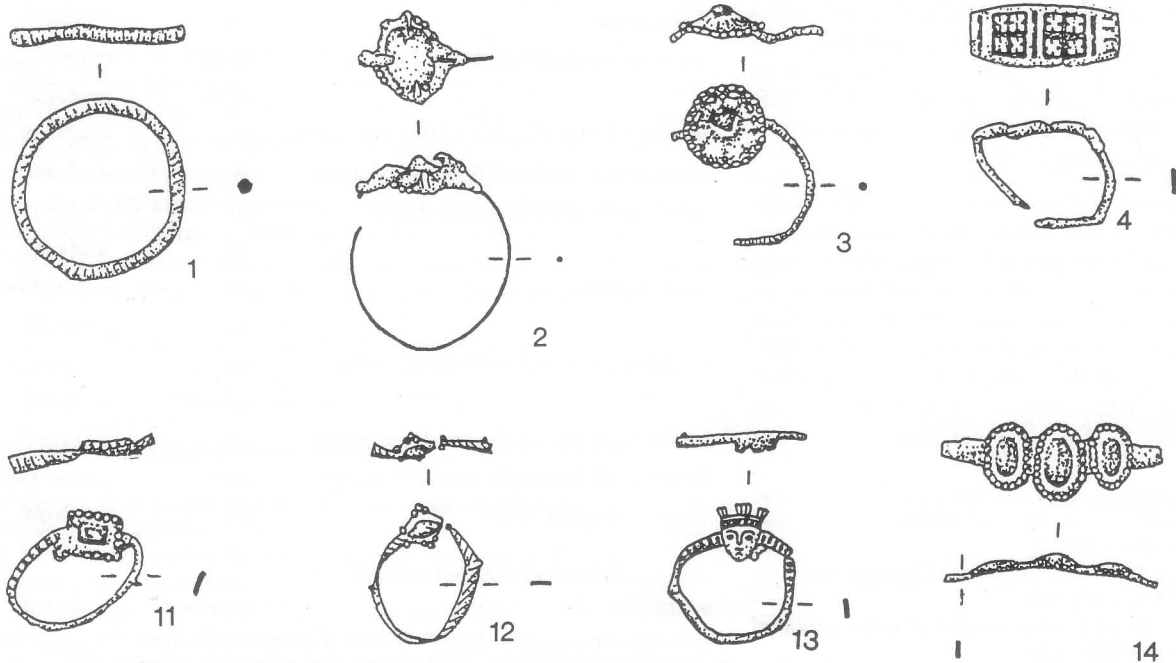


Fig. 5a: pewter finger rings from the Vintry site (VRV89). Scale 1:1.

tion, for amuletic reasons, as an indication of love or marriage or as a token of mourning<sup>26</sup>. Finger rings became so important a statement that sumptuary laws were introduced in 1337, 1363 and 1463, which attempted to restrict the wearing of precious metals and stones<sup>27</sup>. This means that there was probably a substantial market for base metal finger rings, such as those made from pewter, especially since these looked very like silver when polished.

Our knowledge of how rings were worn in the medieval period is based primarily on the study of contemporary illustrations and of effigies on tombs. From such work it is known that both men and women wore rings on upper and lower joints of the fingers and on the thumbs. The majority of the pewter rings from the Vintry site are small, and therefore probably worn by women or children. However, those over 20mm in internal diameter (e.g. nos. 1 and 2) presumably would have belonged

to men. Significantly, the composite ring and those with the most unusual decoration were among the largest and the more expensive of the rings in this group.

### Twelfth-century fashion

This study of the Vintry pewter finger rings has tried to extend the pioneering work of Frances Pritchard. It has shown that such items were being made in quantity in the 12th century, significantly earlier than the date of the earliest ring discussed by her, which was 13th-century. It also proved possible to identify which designs were more common than others, and that some of these were specific to this particular medium. The use of false stones and the similarities between silver finger rings and pewter ones with square fields of decoration show that some of the base metal rings were intended to be a cheaper copy of a more expensive design. However, the design which incorporates a

26. *Op cit* fn 18, 53.

27. S. Bury *An Introduction to Rings* (1984) 8.

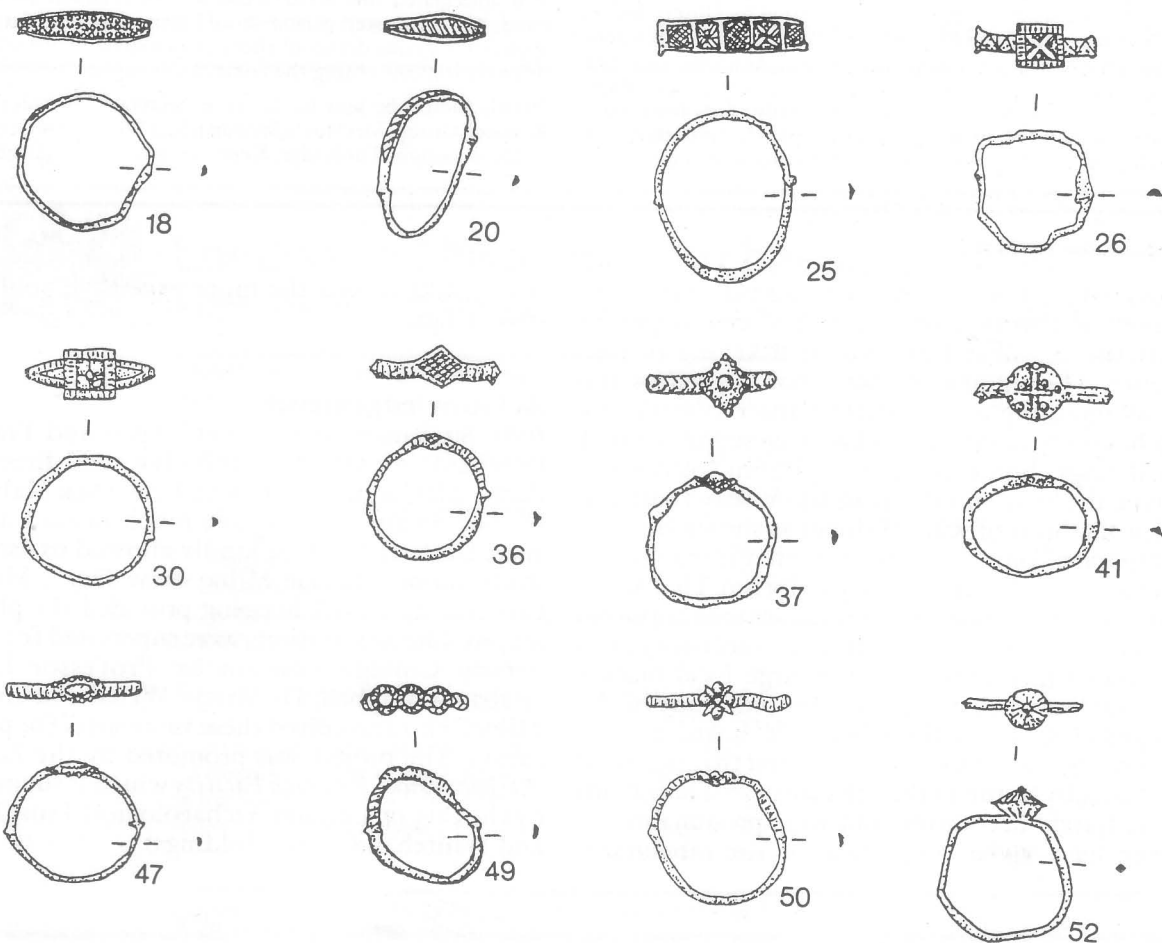


Fig. 5b: pewter finger rings from the Vintry site (VRY89). Scale 1:1.

## The London Archaeological Research Facility

THE PRINCIPAL aim of this independent body, which was formed in 1992, is to promote research into the development of London through the closer co-operation of the principal archaeological agencies currently working there. It also actively encourages the publication of that research. Under the chairmanship of Professor James Graham-Campbell, an Advisory Board has been appointed to promote the work, to seek funding and to administer those funds.

Its first project was a building recording exercise at St Vedast church (see *LA* 7 no. 3, 67-72), but it is also concerned with post-excavation work. Research students from the Institute of Archaeology at University College London have been working with archaeologists at the Museum of London on an informal basis for many years. Beginning in October 1992, a new scheme was launched which aims to provide a more formal structure for such joint research, for the mutual benefit of all parties. The situation is this: the Museum has a backlog of archaeological material which it is at present unable to study or publish, while every year University College has a number of students currently seeking dissertation projects. As part of a general move to forge closer links between these major archaeological institutions, a range of material from recent excavations has kindly been made available to UCL students for legitimate research projects. The scheme, which is co-ordinated by Gustav Milne, has the support of the Museum of London, the MOLAS senior management team and the approval of the Academic Board of the Institute of Archaeology. A report published by the Museums Association in 1992 *Museums and Higher Education* highlights the value of such projects, stressing the importance of furthering collaboration between museums and universities.

Following on from Henrietta Clare's study of the Roman panpipes published in the last issue of the *London Archaeologist*, summaries of more dissertations on London material prepared by UCL students in 1992-3 are included in this issue.

## New Egyptian Gallery at the British Museum

THE NEW Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gallery of Early Egypt was opened at the British Museum on 16 October. It traces the history of Egypt from the adoption of agriculture in about 5000 BC to the establishment of a centralised state in about 3000 BC. The new gallery contains many objects from burials at Abydos and Saqqara, including inscribed tombstones, stone vases, copper tools and vessels, and delicate ivory or bone carvings. A major exhibit is a reconstructed Predynastic grave containing typical vases and other objects around the naturally-preserved body of a man from about 3300 BC. The book *Early Egypt*, by A. J. Spencer, is available from the Museum bookshop, price £9.95.

## Tebbutt Research Fund

THIS FUND was established as a tribute to the life and work of the late C. F. Tebbutt, OBE, FSA. Individuals and groups are invited to apply for grants towards research, including associated expenses, into any aspect of the Wealden Iron Industry.

It is anticipated that about £200 will be available from the fund. Any interested person should write a suitable letter of application giving details of themselves together with relevant information concerning the research envisaged.

Details should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Wealden Iron Research Group, Mrs Shiela Broomfield, 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9HD, tel. (0732) 838698.

(continued from p. 139)

cross-hatched bezel is one of a number of patterns unique to this type of ring: it has been suggested that the cross-hatching provided keying or pigment<sup>28</sup>. The significance of what is perhaps the most appealing design, that of the facemask (no. 13), has yet to be decided: it had been suggested that such rings should be seen as pilgrim souvenirs<sup>29</sup>. Given the broad similarity of the Vintry facemask with the head of king William as shown on contemporary coins<sup>30</sup>, it is possible that it may represent a token of allegiance or patriotism. That apart, the majority of the Vintry rings are seen as purely decorative items, a fashionable dress accessory mass produced in London for the large local market from at least the 12th century. Indeed, study of the finger rings from the Cheapside hoard supplemented by more recent finds suggest that the trend had already begun in the 11th century<sup>31</sup>. These items were purely decorative, and were presumably enjoyed by a wider proportion of the inhabitants

than could afford the more expensive gold and silver rings.

## Acknowledgements

Judy Stevenson (MOL), Geoff Egan and Frances Pritchard (MOLAS) gave sound advice and direction; Penny McConnoran, Duncan Lees, Dick Malt and Hedley Swain (MOLAS) gave much needed assistance; Dr Peter Chowne kindly allowed us use of a study room; Chrissie Milne drew Fig. 1; Maggie Cox and Andrew Chopping provided the photographs. The dissertations were supervised for University College London by Professor James Graham-Campbell, Dr Martin Welch and Gustav Milne, who also edited these summaries for publication. The project was promoted by the *London Archaeological Research Facility* which is supported by the City of London Archaeological Trust Fund and Whitehall Court (Holdings).

28. Francis Pritchard *pers comm.*

29. *Op cit* fn 21, 335.

30. G. Brooke *English Coins* (1950) pl. 118.

31. Francis Pritchard *pers comm.*