

Fig. 1: the site location with an inset of Greater London

The origins of Lundenwic? Excavations at 8–9 Long Acre/16 Garrick Street, WC2

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Introduction

This article summarises the results of an excavation undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology Service in advance of proposed redevelopment (Fig. 1)¹. The investigation, which extended across the entire area of the site, revealed a number of Saxon features. A small amount of pottery and other finds were recovered, which, together with finds from nearby sites, provide clues to the development of settlement in the area that became the Middle Saxon trading

centre of *Lundenwic*. Also revealed were natural geological features and post-medieval remains, details of which are available in the archive.²

Archaeological background

Lundenwic was an important port that functioned as part of a network of trading settlements around the coast of north-west Europe.³ Over the past two decades excavations at numerous sites in the area around the Strand have uncovered evidence for settlement over an area of up to 60 ha.⁴ In

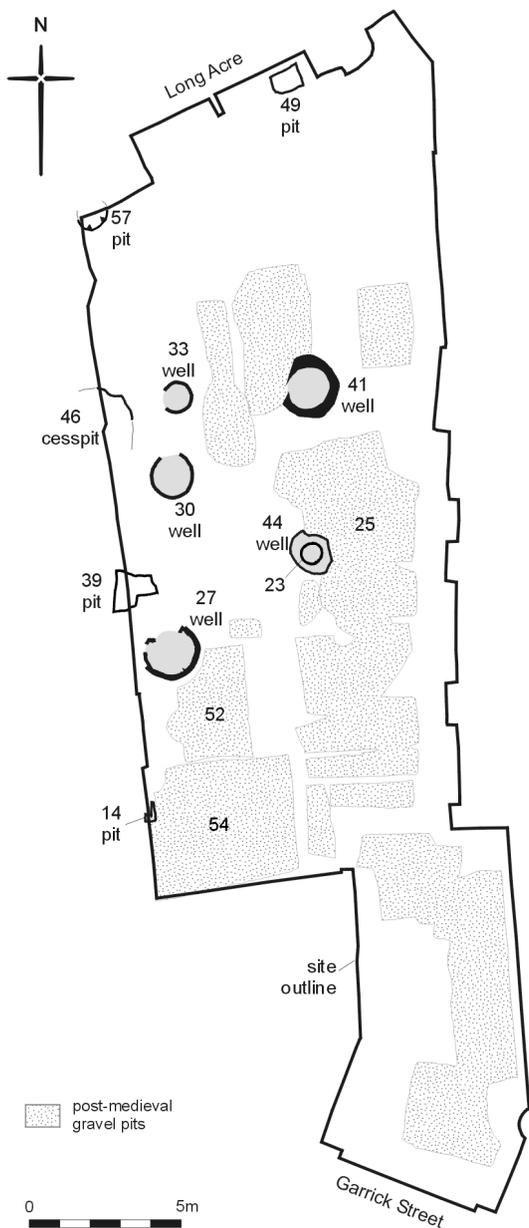


Fig. 2: site plan showing the location of the Saxon cut features, post-medieval walls and quarry pits

addition to roads and buildings, evidence has been found for a range of industries and for both regional and long-distance trade. The results of this work suggest that Lundenwic developed into a major settlement in the later 7th century, and that its heyday was in the 8th century. It was abandoned in the mid 9th century, probably at least partly as the result of the Viking attacks.⁵

The nature of the Middle Saxon settlement from *c.* AD 640 onwards is relatively well understood.

Much less is known of activity in the area prior to this, and the question of whether there was an extramural Saxon settlement in place when the church of St Paul's was founded in AD 604 remains unresolved.⁶ As will be discussed below, however, there is now some evidence for activity towards the western end of Long Acre that may date to the Early/Middle Saxon transition.

Natural topography and site location

The present ground surface between the Thames and High Holborn, as shown on Ordnance Survey maps, indicates that Long Acre to the north of the Royal Opera House is the highest point (*c.* 24 m OD) of a small hill.⁷ To the south the modern ground level slopes down towards the River Thames, while to the west and south-west it slopes down towards a former watercourse that ran southwards along the line of St Martin's Lane/Charing Cross Road to the River Thames, and the overall topography in the Saxon period was probably very similar.

The site of 8–9 Long Acre, therefore, lay on higher ground overlooking the watercourse at St Martin's Lane. The subsoil comprises river terrace deposits with well-defined bands of sand and sandy gravel. The basement of the former building had removed any land surfaces across the entire site truncating the surface of the underlying river terrace deposits to between 17.17 m and 18.51 m OD.

Results of the excavation

Despite extensive truncation, the lower parts of some archaeological features were of sufficient depth to have survived; both in the sections at the edge of the excavation and as isolated cut features within the investigation area (Fig. 2).

Five Saxon pits were found at the edges of the excavation, while a barrel-lined well was located at the approximate centre of the site. Together they yielded 28 sherds of Saxon pottery (566 g, 0.07 EVE). Cess/rubbish pit [14] is probably the earliest datable feature, with 11 sherds of which four are sandstone-tempered (Fig. 3), while the others contain varying amounts of organic matter.

Rubbish pit [49] contained a small sherd with mixed sand temper (fabric code ESMS), two



Fig. 3: Early Saxon sandstone-tempered ware jar with inverted shoulder from Manor Farm, Harmondsworth. This example is similar to the sherds from Long Acre but more complete (scale 1:4)

sherds of chaff-tempered ware and five of imported greyware that probably date from the earlier 7th century. Part of a fine-grained sandstone hone was also found in this pit (<4>). Rubbish pit [39] contained 12 different fills, one of which produced a small sherd of chaff-tempered pottery and part of an iron ferrule (Fig. 4, <5>). Cesspit [46] contained one sherd of chaff-tempered ware, the base of an imported North French greyware pitcher, and a small fragment of Niedermendig lava quernstone (<3>) imported from the Rhineland.

Well [44] consisted of a pit lined with wattle, into which a barrel had been placed to act as the shaft. Both the wattle and the wooden staves of the barrel had been well preserved by wet conditions, and the feature will be discussed elsewhere.⁸ Finds from the well comprise six small sherds of 7th- or 8th-century imported greyware pottery and one coarseware, with a copper-alloy object (Fig 4, <1>) and part of a large ‘bun-shaped’ loomweight.

In addition to waterlogged seeds, the plant remains from these features comprise wood charcoal (pits [39], [46], [49], [57]; well [23]) and charred cereal grains and weed seeds (pits [49], [57]; well [23]). The animal bone amounts to 34.811 kg (2691 fragments), of which over half was from pit [49] (19.17 kg). Pits [39], [49] and the well also contained small amounts of oyster shell.

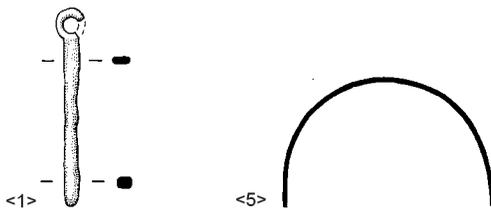


Fig. 4: copper-alloy object (<1>) and iron ferrule (<5>), scale 1:1

The Saxon pottery

Although Middle Saxon pottery has been relatively well researched,⁹ little is known of the Early Saxon pottery of the London region. Over the past few years, however, a number of recent studies have shown that there is a consistent sequence of fabrics in the 5th, 6th and early 7th centuries.¹⁰ Most of the pottery from the London region is handmade, contains mineral temper, sometimes with organic inclusions, and has a black, gritty appearance. Within this period, however, the amount of organic temper became more abundant, and chaff-tempered wares became the dominant type.¹¹ Recent analyses have demonstrated that while chaff-tempered wares span the Early and Middle Saxon periods, there is little, if any, overlap in the coarseware fabrics. This is an important discovery, since in most parts of the country it is almost impossible to reliably distinguish handmade, black-fired pottery of the 5th to 7th centuries from that of the 7th to 9th centuries.

As a result of these studies it was, therefore, possible to suggest that some of the pottery fabrics found at the present site, that adjacent to it, and another site in Long Acre¹² were unusual for *Lundenwic*, and that they might be of Early Saxon date.¹³ These are all body sherds that are in generally poor condition, suggesting redeposition. Three samples from LGC00 were selected for analysis to compare their petrological characteristics with those of Early and Middle Saxon coarseware fabrics from the London area.¹⁴

The most distinctive Early Saxon fabric group for the region comprises a range of sandstone-tempered wares (ware group ESST), which have a characteristic ‘sparkly’ appearance. These account for between 15% and 40% of the sherds recovered from sites that have been studied. They seem to have been most common from the mid 5th to mid 6th centuries, going out of use in the early 7th century, if not sooner. Two main types have been defined for the London area, both of which are represented at 8–9 Long Acre (four sherds).¹⁵

The first group is varied, but is characterised by a fine-grained sandstone that has a sugary appearance. The sherds from LGC00 fall into fabric type ESSTD, which has abundant evenly-

sized inclusions. The sample examined contains a quartzose sand, which in thin section is seen to consist almost entirely of fragments of a single sandstone type and its constituent quartz grains.¹⁶ The sandstone is an orthoquartzite, in which the original quartz sand grains have acted as centres for the deposition of more silica, leading to crystallisation around the original grains (whose boundaries cannot be seen in thin section). To date, sherds from nine other Early Anglo-Saxon vessels with a temper that predominantly contains fragments of this sandstone and quartz derived from it have been examined; most are from a site in Harmondsworth, while two are from a site in Hammersmith. This does not prove that the fabric was produced in this part of the Thames valley but it does suggest that the vessels were made to the west of *Lundenwic*.

The second fabric group (ESSTC) is characterised by fragments of a coarse-grained sandstone which has been identified in thin section as being lower Carboniferous Millstone Grit. In this sample, however, a small quantity of oolitic limestone fragments similar to those outcropping in the Cotswolds are also present, and so it was recorded as fabric ESSTCOL.¹⁷ Millstone Grit is a major constituent of many fluvio-glacial sands in northern England, but the oolitic limestone inclusions preclude such an exotic source. This mixture of Jurassic limestone and Millstone Grit is in fact found in some of the gravels of north-western Oxfordshire and north-eastern Gloucestershire, and probably occurs in glacial deposits closer to London. This fabric type too has been found in samples of Early Anglo-Saxon pottery from various sites in the Thames valley, again predominantly Harmondsworth but also Hammersmith and Tulse Hill.

In neither case can we yet use the thin section analysis to pinpoint the place of production but both wares contain distinctive inclusions that are absent from Middle Saxon coarsewares from *Lundenwic*.

Four other sherds could be of Early or Middle Saxon date. Two of them are sand-tempered, one fine ([20], fabric SSAND?), the other coarser with mixed rounded and angular sand ([48], ESMS). The others (fabric CHFQ) contain organic matter with coarse-grained sandstone and quartz derived from this sandstone.¹⁸ The

character of these grains suggests that they derive from deposits of Lower Carboniferous date (Millstone Grit) but whether they are detrital grains or derived from a millstone is not known. Chemical analysis suggests a local or regional source, as the composition of the sample is similar to finds of chaff-tempered ware from other Thames valley sites, especially two samples from Staines and Barking Abbey.

In addition there are eight chaff-tempered sherds in fabrics that are more typically Middle Saxon (fabrics CHAF, CHSF).

The site also produced eight sherds of wheel-thrown greyware, three of which were examined in thin section and using chemical analysis.¹⁹ Despite their visual similarity, all three have distinctly different characteristics in thin section, although, apart from indicating that one of the samples came from a region of Cretaceous or later rocks, the thin-sections did not give any indication of the likely source of the vessels. The chemical data were compared with those of other wheel-thrown continental imports of Early and Middle Saxon date from various sites in *Lundenwic* and beyond. The three Long Acre samples differ from most of the other samples in that they contain moderate to abundant quartz sand. Analysis shows that the compositions were more similar to each other than to the majority of other imported wares. There were, however, three exceptions: two are imported vessels from Early Anglo-Saxon burials at Coddham and Hadleigh in Suffolk and the third is a sample from an imported vessel from Drury Lane.²⁰ All three vessels belong to the same group of Frankish imported wares dated early in the *Lundenwic* sequence, if not pre-dating it.

Discussion

The site has produced handmade pottery typical of types found on Early Anglo-Saxon sites in the Thames basin, and wheel-thrown greywares which are also likely to pre-date most of the imported pottery found in *Lundenwic*. The sandstone-tempered wares could well be contemporary with those found at Clerkenwell, Hammersmith and in the Harmondsworth area, which mainly date to between AD 450–550.²¹ Pit [14], which contained chaff-tempered wares but no imports, could, therefore, either date to the 6th

century, or be a 7th-century feature with a few residual 5th- or 6th-century sherds. The other pits, which contained chaff-tempered and imported wares, should date to the late 6th or 7th centuries, but the imported greywares from the well are more typical of late 7th and 8th centuries. There are two possible interpretations for the earlier pottery: either it originated in a rural settlement which preceded, and was eventually subsumed by the trading centre, or it indicates that the trading centre itself originated during the same period as the foundation of St Paul's cathedral at the beginning of the 7th century.

It would not be surprising for the cathedral to have acted as a stimulus for trade and contact with the Frankish empire but the Long Acre site holds out the possibility, which only future excavations can test, that there was some form of transitional Early/Middle Saxon settlement in the area, and that some form of trading place was in

existence at the time of, or soon after, the Augustinian mission. To conclude, the investigation has led to some unexpected and important discoveries, and has demonstrated that it is sometimes the nature, rather than the number, of finds that is most significant.

Acknowledgements

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1. Site code LGC00; TQ 3011 8088. The excavation was carried out by Robert Cowie, the scientific pottery analysis by Alan Vince, and the text was prepared and collated by Lyn Blackmore. Specialist information on the building material, plant remains and animal bone was supplied by Ian Betts, Ann David and Alan Pipe respectively. Steve Caldwell made the thin-sections and Dr N. Walsh, Royal Holloway College, London, undertook the ICPS analysis. The finds were drawn by Faith Vardy and the maps by Kenneth Lymer.
2. R. Cowie *8–9 Long Acre and 16 Garrick Lane, London WC2, City of Westminster: an Archaeological Post-Excavation Assessment*, MoLAS (2001). The archive can be consulted by appointment at Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED.
3. A. Vince *Saxon London: An Archaeological Investigation* (1990); R. Cowie 'Mercian London' in M. Brown and C. Farr (eds) *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in Europe* (2001) 194–209.
4. See references in fn. 2 and also: R. Cowie 'A gazetteer of Middle Saxon sites and finds in the Strand/Westminster area' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 39 (1988) 37–46; R. Cowie with C. Harding 'Saxon settlement and economy from the Dark Ages to Domesday' in *The Archaeology of Greater London: an assessment of the archaeological evidence for human presence in the area now covered by Greater London* (2000) 171–206; G. Malcolm and D. Bowsher with R. Cowie *Middle Saxon London: Excavations at the Royal Opera House* (2003) MoLAS Monograph 15.
5. See references in fn. 3 and fn. 4, and R. Cowie 'Londinium to Lundenwic: Early and Middle Saxon archaeology in the London region' in I. Haynes, H. Sheldon and L. Hannigan (eds) *London Under Ground: the archaeology of a city* (2000) 175–205.
6. L. Blackmore 'From beach to burh: new clues to entity and identity in 7th to 9th-century London' in G. de Boe and F. Verhaege (eds) *Urbanism in Medieval Europe – Papers of the Medieval Europe Brugge 1997 Conference 1* (1997) 123–5 [123–132]; R. Cowie *op cit* fn 3, 198.
7. N. Holder, D. Bowsher and K. Pitt with L. Blackmore 'Across the Saxon town: three new sites in Lundenwic' *London Archaeol* 9 (2000) 151–9; Malcolm *et al*, *op cit* fn 4, fig. 11. The approximate centre of the hill lies at the junction of Bow Street and Long Acre.
8. R. Cowie and B. Barber in prep., *Lundenwic: archaeological evidence for Middle Saxon London*, for MoLAS Monograph Series.
9. L. Blackmore 'The pottery' in Malcolm *et al*, *op cit* fn 4 and references therein.
10. L. Blackmore in R. Cowie and L. Blackmore in prep., *Early and Middle Saxon rural settlement in the London region*, for MoLAS Monograph Series. See also M. Laidlaw, and M. Laidlaw and L. Mephum 'Early Saxon pottery' in P. Andrews and A. Crockett, *Wessex Archaeology Rep.* 10 (1996) 33–38 and 87–91. This work has included thin-