

Fig. 1: site location (scale 1:2000)

# Roman and medieval buildings, an assemblage of rare 18th-century glass, and other finds from 15–17 King Street, London EC2

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## Introduction

The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) carried out an archaeological excavation and watching brief in advance of redevelopment at 15–17 King Street and 44–46 Gresham Street between February and October 1999 (Fig. 1). Evaluation of the site in 1995 and 1998 had demonstrated that a significant depth of

Roman and post-Roman archaeology survived under the basement slab of 15–17 King Street and to the rear of 46 Gresham Street, which was later subsumed within the footprint of the new building. The site archive is available for consultation in the LAARC<sup>1</sup> under the site code KIG95; tabulated data and details from the site not published here can be consulted there by



**Fig. 2: excavation areas, test pits and areas of archaeology preserved *in situ***

arrangement. The archaeological work was funded by City and Provincial Properties plc. Because of the high level of archaeological survival on the south and east sides of the site, the piling plan was redesigned to minimise its impact on these areas. The piles were located close to the main party walls on three sides of the site, and it was in two of these areas (1 and 2) that controlled archaeological excavation took place in advance of the piling. The well-preserved archaeology in the northern half of 15 King Street, adjoining area 2, and in the southern half of 46 Gresham Street, adjoining area 3, was not excavated but preserved *in situ* (Fig. 2).

#### *Archaeological and historical background*

During the Roman period, the site was located to the north of the main east-west road across the settlement, established in *c.* AD 47.<sup>2</sup> The site lay in an area where later 1st-century development included the amphitheatre, secondary roads and timber buildings (Fig. 3). The expansion of the occupied area northwards during the late 1st century AD was influenced by the extension of the existing street grid<sup>3</sup> and the construction of the amphitheatre. A short-lived road or alley,

aligned north-east to south-west (R8), was recorded in 1963 just south of 15–17 King Street at 9–12 King Street, and was projected to cross the east side of the recent excavation.<sup>4</sup>

There is little or no evidence for occupation in the area between the 5th and the 9th centuries. Late 10th- to 11th-century sunken-floored and surface-laid buildings have been found nearby at 36–37 King Street (KNG85), 24–25 Ironmonger Lane (IRO80), 20–30 Gresham Street (GHT00) and Guildhall Yard (GYE92).

During the medieval period the area lay north of Cheapside, the City's main market and home to many of its merchants and financiers – including London's Jewish community.<sup>5</sup> This area, known as the Jewry (hence St Laurence and St Olave Jewry), was centred around Old Jewry, Ironmonger Lane and west along Gresham Street, beyond Lawrence Lane. The earliest reference to Lawrence Lane dates to *c.* 1108–30, when it was known as the 'street of St Laurence in the Jewry'. Gresham Street is first documented in 1279, when it was known as 'Cattestret'. London's Guildhall was built over the remains of the Roman amphitheatre in the mid-13th century.

The Great Fire of 1666 had a devastating effect on the area. Leake's survey of 1667 shows that New King Street, dissecting the properties between Lawrence and Ironmonger Lanes, had already been laid out. By the time of Rocque's 1746 map of the City and Westminster, King Street was said to be inhabited by 'Norwich factors and other wholesale dealers of Wealth and Reputation' who were traders in textiles. By the early 19th century the area was used for offices and warehouses. Cateaton Street was widened and improved, with its name changed to Gresham Street in 1845.

#### *Geology and topography*

The City of London lies above gravel terraces deposited by the River Thames and capped by brickearth. At 15–17 King Street natural brickearth lay between 10.85m OD in the north-east and 10.75m OD in the south-east (Open Area 1; not illustrated). There was a gentle fall towards the south-west corner of the site, where the surface lay at 10.52m OD. The underlying natural gravel surface lay between 10.41m OD and 10.03m OD.

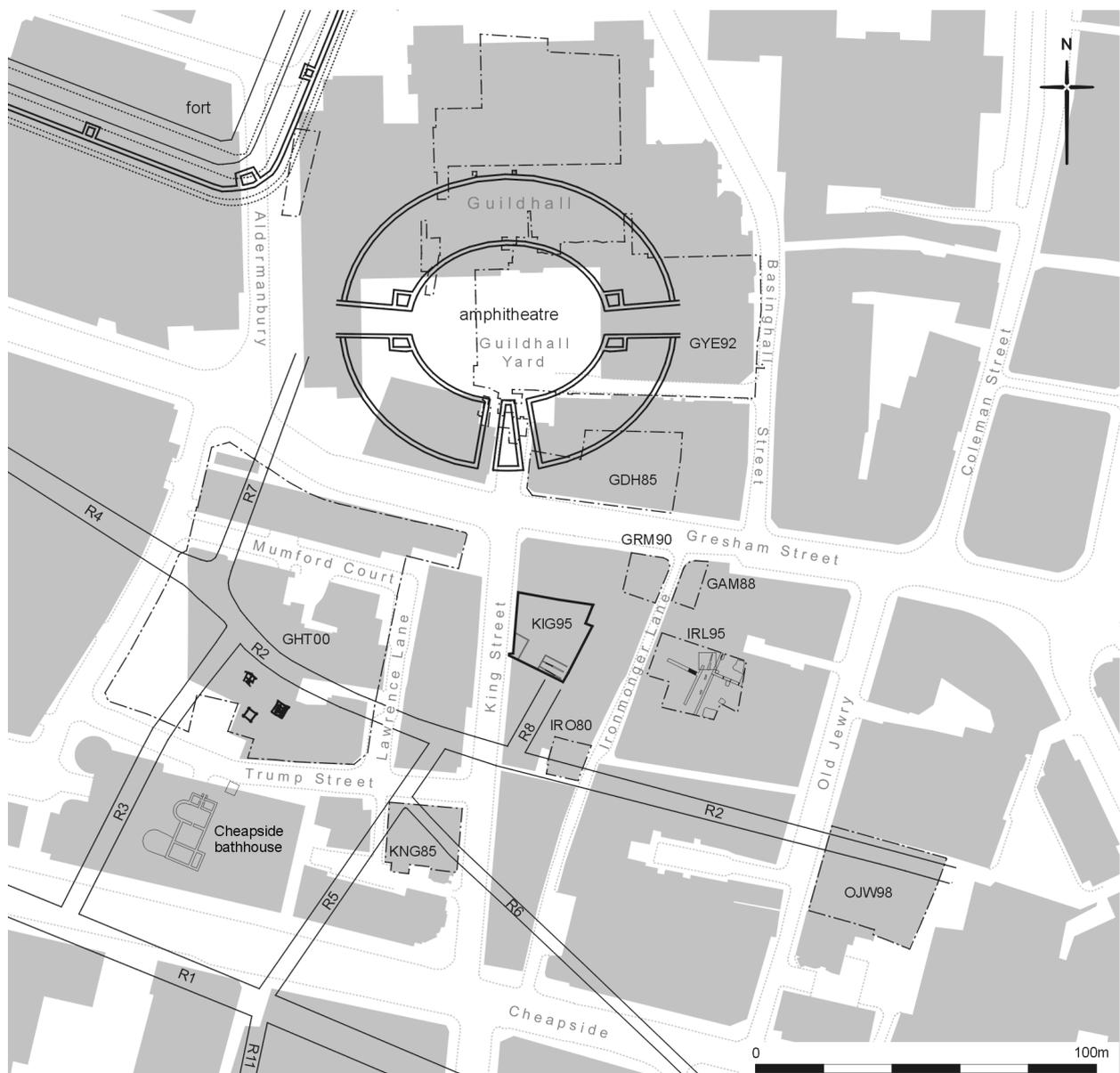


Fig. 3: the 15–17 King Street findings (KIG95) in relation to other selected excavations, the Roman road system and major Roman features; road numbers R1 to R8 are taken from Shepherd 1987; archives can be identified by the alpha-numeric site codes shown (e.g. IRL95) (scale 1:2000)

## Results of the archaeological fieldwork

### *Prehistoric finds*

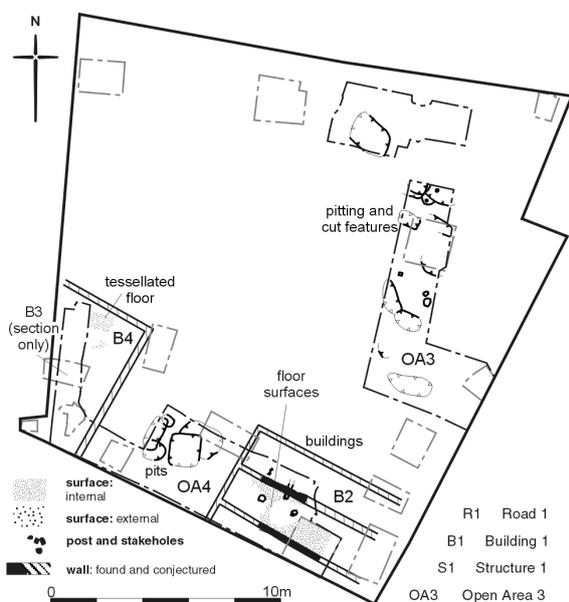
Although no prehistoric features were found, two worked flints from Roman deposits – a small core tablet <99> and a neatly retouched flint knife <98> – indicate prehistoric activity in the area.

The core tablet shows some evidence for platform edge abrasion and has been struck in order to rejuvenate the core and enable further flakes to be struck from it. It has been carefully worked and although not a diagnostic type may perhaps be dated to the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age on technological grounds.<sup>6</sup> The flint knife has been neatly worked on a thin blank and is similarly dated.

*The Roman sequence; c. AD 43–400*

The earliest extant Roman activity was composed of scattered pits, ditches and quarries cut into the natural brickearth and gravel (Open Area 2; not illustrated). A small quantity of pottery dated *c.* AD 50–100 was recovered from three of the pits. The cuts were backfilled to allow construction of clay and timber buildings. Building 1, which lay on a north-west to south-east alignment in the south-east corner of the site (not illustrated), had narrow wattle or hurdle walls. Patchy gravel and brickearth floors showed clear signs of scorching associated with hearths. A small amount of pottery, dated *c.* AD 50–100, was recovered from this structure.

Building 1 may have been systematically dismantled. A substantial midden deposited within the building may have been a deliberate levelling-up for new building. The deposit contained ash and charcoal rake-out from hearths and much domestic refuse, including pottery and animal bone. Finds included parts of a corroded Roman bow brooch <120>, probably a Dolphin type with a decorated bow, and what may be a very corroded La Tène type brooch <104>. The overall date of the assemblage is *c.* AD 100–120 but most of the pottery dates to the 1st century, suggesting that Building 1 was demolished before AD100.



**Fig. 4: composite plan of Roman evidence; Buildings 2–4 and Open Areas 3–4**

Building 2 was constructed over the midden layer on a similar alignment to Building 1. The remains of two parallel brickearth walls divided three individual rooms containing brickearth floors at *c.* 11.06m OD (Fig. 4; Fig. 5). The walls had been rendered with painted plaster (see below). The southern of the two walls overlay a Building 1 wall line, indicating some continuity in the internal plan of the two buildings. The new building may represent a more substantial remodelling of the earlier structure.

The western part of Excavation Area 2 was isolated from Buildings 1 and 2 by modern foundations and disturbance which had truncated the west end of the building sequence. The archaeological sequence to the west was clearly external, composed of a few pits and mixed make-ups with semi-metalled surfaces (Open Area 4) and dated to the 2nd century or later.

Further west, close to the King Street frontage, internal deposits recorded in section at *c.* 11m OD are assumed to be surfaces within a clay and timber building (Building 3). A single sherd of Hoo ware, dated *c.* AD 50–100, was recovered from the building.

Buildings 2 and 3 were destroyed in a fire, possibly of 2nd-century Hadrianic date. The remains of this fire horizon were found across the south end of the site (Open Area 5; not illustrated). The destruction debris from Building 2 contained much painted wall plaster. It is fairly coarse, sandy and uncommonly thick at up to 55mm. It is not of especially high quality, with fairly large areas of red, white and off-white (or discoloured white), and may come from dado or border areas. The destruction debris covering Building 2 was up to 0.30m thick (Fig. 5).

The fragmentary remains of a plain red tessellated floor, found at *c.* 11.38m OD to the north of Building 3, was part of Building 4, a later structure built after the fire. Although no walls survived, a north-east to south-west building alignment is proven by the diagonal rows of tesserae, which would originally have been laid up to the wall faces.

Isolated Roman cut features were recorded to the north-east in excavation areas 1 and 3, including stakeholes, postholes, small pits, slots or gullies and a possible gravel surface (Open Area 3). Nearly all of the archaeology in these areas had

been truncated to the level of the natural brickearth by a 19th-century basement, and consequently the cut features can only be roughly related to the building phases. Pottery from most of the features dated to the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, suggesting that the most intensive use of Open Area 3 was broadly contemporary with Building 2.

Overall, the Roman pottery assemblage from the site appears to be domestic. It is also a very homogenous assemblage, which may suggest a similarity of function across all of the buildings and open areas at the site for much of the Roman period. While the assemblage does not include imported fine wares, apart from samian, the percentages for local fine wares are unusually high.

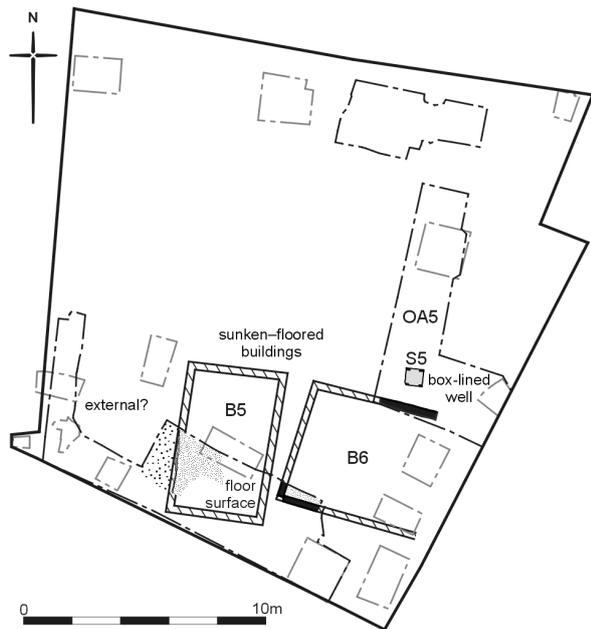
#### *The medieval sequence; c. 950–1500*

Two Late Saxon, sunken-floored structures (Buildings 5 and 6) cut into the Roman sequence

on the southern part of the site (Fig. 6). Building 5 was orientated north-south and only its west wall and an area of internal surfacing survived. The wall was composed of wattle hurdles which had completely decayed, leaving a clear impression of the original wattles and the rods they had been woven around. The building also incorporated decayed horizontal timber joists (Fig. 7) which appear to have supported a wattle hurdle floor. Use of a hurdle floor is unusual, although it would have been cheaper than floorboards and may also have been chosen to bridge the large Roman cesspit which lay beneath it. This floor was replaced by a semi-metalled gravel floor which contained several finds. These included a copper-alloy spatula-headed tool <90> and waste from bone working in the form of a knife-trimmed peg <112> tapering towards one end and with a lathe centre mark visible on the other end. The disuse backfill of Building 5 contained a fragment of stone rotary quern <97>.



Fig. 5: destruction debris in Building 2 (looking west)



Building 6 lay to the east and was constructed differently, with timber base plates and post and stave shuttering to the walls. All the timber elements had decayed, leaving only a powdery residue. The base plates and the base of the construction cut for the south-west corner of the building lay at *c.* 10.42m OD, with its north wall at the slightly lower level of *c.* 10.29m OD.

A prefabricated box-lined well (Structure 5), whose lower levels were preserved due to waterlogging (Fig. 8), lay to the north of Building 6 in an external area (Open Area 5). The base of the well was at 8.98m OD and was cut into natural gravel. Up to two and a half courses of oak boards survived, set on edge and pegged to four corner posts. The boards had been split from straight knot-free logs, cut from large oaks well over 200 years old and around 1m in diameter at chest height. These characteristics are typical of

**Fig. 6: composite plan of Late Saxon evidence; sunken-floored Buildings 5 and 6 and box-lined well Structure 5**



**Fig. 7: sunken-floored Building 5 showing part of decayed west wall and floor joists (looking west)**



**Fig. 8: late 10th-century box-lined well Structure 5 (looking east)**

temperate wildwood oaks from an area of unmanaged woodland reasonably close to London.<sup>7</sup> Tree-ring dating shows that one of the boards has a likely bark edge date of AD 976. The felling date ranges of the other dated timbers from the well coincide with this date. As there are no signs of previous use, weathering or decay of the board, it seems likely that the well was constructed in AD 976 or soon afterwards. The oak corner posts showed clear signs of previous use, indicated by a range of redundant auger holes, some of which had been made with a spoon auger. The posts may originally have been building timbers but could not be dated. The contemporary ground surface from which the well was constructed had been truncated in antiquity but it is assumed that the well was in use with Buildings 5 and 6.

The fill of the well contained a rare example of a cleft oak roof tile or 'shingle' which had been trimmed with a broad-bladed axe and had two

14mm-diameter holes for the original peg fastenings. It is very similar to a 10th-century example found at Bull Wharf.<sup>8</sup> The well fill also contained a large and species-rich botanical assemblage preserved by waterlogging. It included a range of food plants, mainly fruits, which may have been used for food and drink. Elder, blackberry/raspberry, plum, sloe and hazelnuts may have been gathered from the wild, but fig was imported.<sup>9</sup> Peach is unusual for this period, although an early medieval example was found at 1 Poultry.<sup>10</sup> The wild plants include nettles and goosefoot, indicative of nutrient-rich habitats, and suggest an area of waste ground nearby. The overall character of the sampled material suggests that it was part of a backfill which post-dated the disuse of the well.

The earliest extant medieval features were scattered domestic pits (Open Area 6; not illustrated). The paucity of pits is unusual for an urban situation and suggests that from the 12th

century onwards the site was covered in buildings whose yards lay outside the area of excavation. One pit produced part of a bun-shaped fired clay loom weight <31>, a form typical of the Mid- to Late Saxon period.<sup>11</sup>

The pits pre-dated masonry Buildings 7–10, all of which were aligned north-west to south-east (Fig. 9). Part of the east wall of Building 7 was recorded in the south-west corner of the site (Fig. 10) and contrasted with the foundations of Buildings 8–10 in being made entirely of unmortared ragstone and extending to below *c.* 10.40m OD. Its exact date remains uncertain but is likely to be early medieval.

Immediately to the west of the wall was a similar unmortared ragstone footing, which may have been the south side of an associated north-west to south-east return or buttress. The base of the construction cut was recorded at *c.* 10.37m OD and the masonry survived to *c.* 10.80m OD; above this level the footing had been completely robbed.

The best preserved of the medieval structures was Building 8, constructed against the east side of Building 7. Building 8 was rectangular in plan and measured in excess of 5.60m by 10.50m (Figs. 9; 10). The walls were built of ragstone and were based on relatively shallow foundations, with the basal course composed largely of broken quernstones. The building had a substantial mortar floor at *c.* 11.44m OD, laid over a thick bedding layer of broken Roman tile. The mortar floor was replaced by a chalk floor.

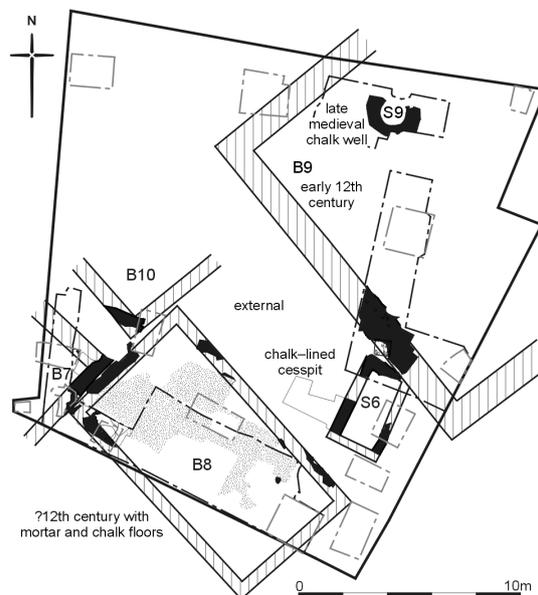
Parallel with Building 8 and further to the north were the partial remains of Building 9, the largest of the medieval buildings to survive (Fig. 9). Modern basemending mean that only part of the south wall of the building was found and no associated floor surfaces survived. The foundation was built entirely of mortared chalk rubble and was over 1.50m wide. The masonry survived to a level of *c.* 10.90m OD, with the base of the construction cut at *c.* 10.15m OD. Cleft beech piles supported the foundation where it crossed the location of the earlier well Structure 5. Tree-ring dating shows that the piles were cut in 1128. The absence of comparable foundations in the northern part of excavation areas 1 and 3 suggests that the building measured at least 17m by 10m (*c.* 55ft by 32ft). The relatively early date

and size of Building 9 would have influenced the position and alignments of surrounding buildings.

A rectangular, chalk-lined cesspit (Structure 6) was later built at an angle against the south side of Building 9 (Fig. 9). The walls of the cesspit survived to a level of *c.* 11.45m OD with the base of the feature set on the natural gravel at *c.* 10.22m OD. The lower part of the cesspit's east wall may have been part of an earlier stone-lined cesspit. The primary fill contained a 13th-century Kingston-type ware cooking pot, with traces of external green glaze.

Only the south-west corner of Building 10 was defined, flanking Building 7 to the south (Fig. 9). Its alignment mirrors that of Building 7, but its different build makes it unlikely that they were part of a single development. The core of the footing was composed predominantly of mortar, with occasional blocks of uncoursed ragstone, and the unusually high ratio of mortar and loose compaction of the masonry could indicate that the foundation had been partially robbed.

A chalk-lined well (Structure 9) was located in the north-east corner of the site. The well lining was constructed above a circular segmental oak collar with the chalk courses levelled with medieval peg tile fragments. The lining had been repaired with late medieval or Tudor brick, and the well deepened by inserting part of a barrel



**Fig. 9: composite plan of medieval evidence; stone-founded Buildings 7–10**

into the bottom of the shaft. The waterlogged barrel staves were at least 0.50m long and bottomed out at c. 8.77m OD. Although the barrel would have increased the capacity of the well, its relatively small size may suggest that its primary function was as a silt trap. At the end of its functioning life, the well shaft had been backfilled with mixed rubble which contained fragments of worked stone from a high-status late medieval building.

#### *The post-medieval sequence; c. 1500–1900*

Nineteenth-century basemending meant that the floors or surfaces of earlier post-medieval buildings did not survive, although a few deeply-founded brick-lined features were found along the east side of the site. The earliest of these features formed the south-west corner of a brick cellar (Building 11; not illustrated) and appears to be Tudor in date. This structure was built against and partially underpinned the north side of the substantial chalk foundation of Building 9. The cellar was clearly part of a building which fronted onto Ironmonger Lane to the east and survived until destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. In the rebuilding after the Great Fire the cellar was largely demolished and parts of it incorporated into a large brick-lined cesspit (Structure 10; not illustrated). Both brick structures were based on natural gravel.

A large and important early 18th-century finds and environmental assemblage was collected from the cesspit, marking the feature's final phase of use as a cesspit and its secondary use for the disposal of domestic refuse. The pottery does not appear to be associated with food preparation and storage, and the stoneware bowls, cups, mugs and tankards point to the consumption of certain beverages. The predominance of pottery used for the drinking of beer, spirits and tea suggests that it may come from a nearby tavern or affluent household. Taverns sold wine but in the 18th century they broadened their appeal to sell beer and spirits.<sup>12</sup> The use of tea wares has been noted at the former King's Arms tavern in Uxbridge High Street,<sup>13</sup> and they are the sort of wares that would have been used in a tavern or a gentlemen's club meeting in a hired private room, a practice widely known from documentary sources.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 10: parallel walls of Buildings 7 (left) and 8 (right); both were preserved *in situ* (looking north)**

The cesspit also contained glass vessels, including both rare, high-status and utilitarian pieces. Three brown glass vessels decorated with opaque white trails are of particular interest. Two small tankards or mugs, one complete <1> ( Fig. 11), and one fragmentary <2>, are of the same form and design, having a straight neck and a globular body with mould-blown vertical ribbing and decorated with a marvered trail of opaque white glass. All that remains of a third vessel <58> is a curving rim fragment with a white trail around its edge, possibly part of a miniature glass hat.<sup>15</sup> The complete mug is paralleled by a fragmentary example from Southampton<sup>16</sup> and a rim fragment from Exeter.<sup>17</sup> The Southampton example was thought to be an early 17th-century Spanish import, but it is now thought this type may be English and of slightly later date.<sup>18</sup> A similar mug displayed in the Museum of London dates to around 1685.<sup>19</sup> A plain brown glass tankard in the Victoria and Albert Museum has applied thread decoration around its neck,<sup>20</sup> whilst

Ravenscroft and others were producing similar small tankards in early English lead glass from the 1670s.<sup>21</sup> These glass mugs and tankards were imitating the shape of early English stoneware vessels, which in turn were imitating north European forms. Globular-bodied mugs or 'gorges' were produced in large numbers by the Fulham pottery of John Dwight<sup>22</sup> from around 1675 to the end of the 18th century, and the similarity in the forms is apparent.<sup>23</sup>

If these brown and white glass vessels were made in England it is odd that so few examples have been found in Britain, and a Continental origin cannot be ruled out. Spanish glass is fairly rare in Britain although this is not the case with ceramics. After the lull in trade between the two countries created by the Elizabethan wars, there seems to have been a significant revival.<sup>24</sup> Although the trade fell away again after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, there is evidence that some Spanish ceramics continued to be imported. If the glass is Spanish it may have come to Britain *via* the Caribbean colonies<sup>25</sup> and the examples from London, Southampton and Exeter, all major ports, may support this theory.

A wide variety of faunal remains came from the same cesspit. Young domestic mammal bones indicate that veal, lamb and young pigs were eaten. Game was represented by rabbit and hare. Remains included at least one turkey, a species brought into Europe from North America in about 1530.<sup>26</sup> Other food waste included domestic birds such as chicken, goose, duck and pigeon, and wild birds included thrush and members of the sparrow family. Bones from eel, smelt, herring, mackerel, the cod family and flatfish indicate that more marine than freshwater species were present.

A rich assemblage of botanical material was dominated by waterlogged and mineralised fruit remains. Fruit seeds were abundant, particularly fig, raspberry and blackberry. Grape, strawberry and mulberry were also present, along with smaller numbers of apple, elder and barberry. A few mineralised *Prunus* stones (plum, sloe, cherry, etc) were also identified. All these fruits have been recovered from post-medieval sites in the City<sup>27</sup> and would have been used in a range of foods and drinks.<sup>28</sup> Mineralised peppercorns, also found at several post-medieval sites in the City,<sup>29</sup>



**Fig. 11: complete glass tankard from a post-Great Fire brick-lined cesspit (height 98mm)**

were used as a meat preservative and for overcoming the smell of putrefying food. Other seeds included tentatively identified black mustard, which was ground together with white mustard seeds to produce mustard flour used as a condiment.<sup>30</sup> Leguminous seeds of vetch/tare/vetchling/pea may have been from cultivated species.

## Discussion

The excavation at 15–17 King Street, although small, has added significantly to our understanding of the development of the area south of the Guildhall from the Roman period onwards. Roman timber buildings, associated with the late 1st-century expansion of the settlement, were located at the south end of the site. They lie across the projected line of a north-east to south-west aligned road (R8), indicating that it either stopped to the south of the site or must lie further to the east.

The Late Saxon sunken-floored buildings from the site add to those already known from the area. A contemporary box-lined well produced a date of AD 976 and compares with the earliest tree-ring dates for similar structures in this part of the City. At 72–75 Cheapside (CID90) the first Late Saxon buildings predated a well of AD 918, whilst at Guildhall Yard (GYE92), the earliest

burial and building timbers have been dated to the early 1060s.<sup>31</sup> The dating of these structures illustrates the gradual expansion of the Late Saxon and early medieval settlement northwards from Cheapside following reoccupation in the late 9th century.

The substantial stone-founded buildings found on the site were probably occupied by wealthy merchants or affluent members of the Jewish community during the 12th and 13th centuries. Interestingly, the north-west to south-east alignment of the medieval buildings varies from the known road pattern of the time. The skewed 'Roman' alignment of these buildings raises the possibility that other buildings in the area which have previously been attributed a Roman date could in fact be medieval. The corner of one such building was found immediately to the south, on 13–14 King Street in 1956, and could represent the south end of Building 8.

Although the post-medieval levels had been largely destroyed by 19th-century basements, the finds, botanical and environmental assemblages from the late 17th-century brick-lined cesspit, associated with an affluent household or tavern, form an outstanding group that deserves publication in its own right. The glass tankard is a particularly rare and significant find and is the only known complete example of its type. Future research may elucidate when and where the tankard was made.

## Acknowledgements

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The principal author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the major contribution of members of MoL Specialist Services whose work has been integrated here: Rupert Featherby – Roman pottery; John Giorgi – plant remains; Damian Goodburn – ancient woodwork; Nigel Jeffries – post-Roman pottery; Jackie Keily – accessioned finds – who would like to thank Hugh Wilmott and John Shepherd for comments on the glass; Jane Liddle – animal bone; and Terence Paul Smith – building material. Limitations on space have caused us to summarise aspects of this work, but detailed reports are available for consultation in the archive.

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## Excavations and post-excavation work

**London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre**, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED. Contact Archive Manager, Roy Stephenson (020 7566 9317).

**Croydon & District**, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday. Archaeological reference collections of pottery fabrics, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 8 Brentwood Road, South Croydon, CR2 0ND.

**Borough of Greenwich**. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites within the Borough. Contact Greenwich Heritage Centre, Building 41, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, SE18 6SP (020 8854 2452).

**Hammersmith & Fulham**, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from the Borough. Tuesdays, 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. At Fulham Palace, Bishops's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (020 7385 3723).

**Kingston**, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society (KUTAS). Processing and

cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Thursday (10 a.m.) at the North Kingston Centre, Richmond Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 5PE. Enquiries 020 8546 5386.

**Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd.**, Unit 54, Brockley Cross Business Centre, 96 Endwell Road, Brockley Cross, London SE4 2PD. Environmental- and finds processing, cataloguing and archiving of excavated material. Contact Finds Manager, Märit Gaimster (020 7639 9091).

**Surrey**, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 1ND (01483 594 634).

*Individual membership of the Council for British Archaeology includes six issues a year of British Archaeology, as well as the supplement CBA Briefing, which gives details of conferences, extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The individual membership rate of £29 p.a. includes postage; payment should be sent to C.B.A., St Mary's House, Bootham, York, YO30 7BZ (01904 671 417).*