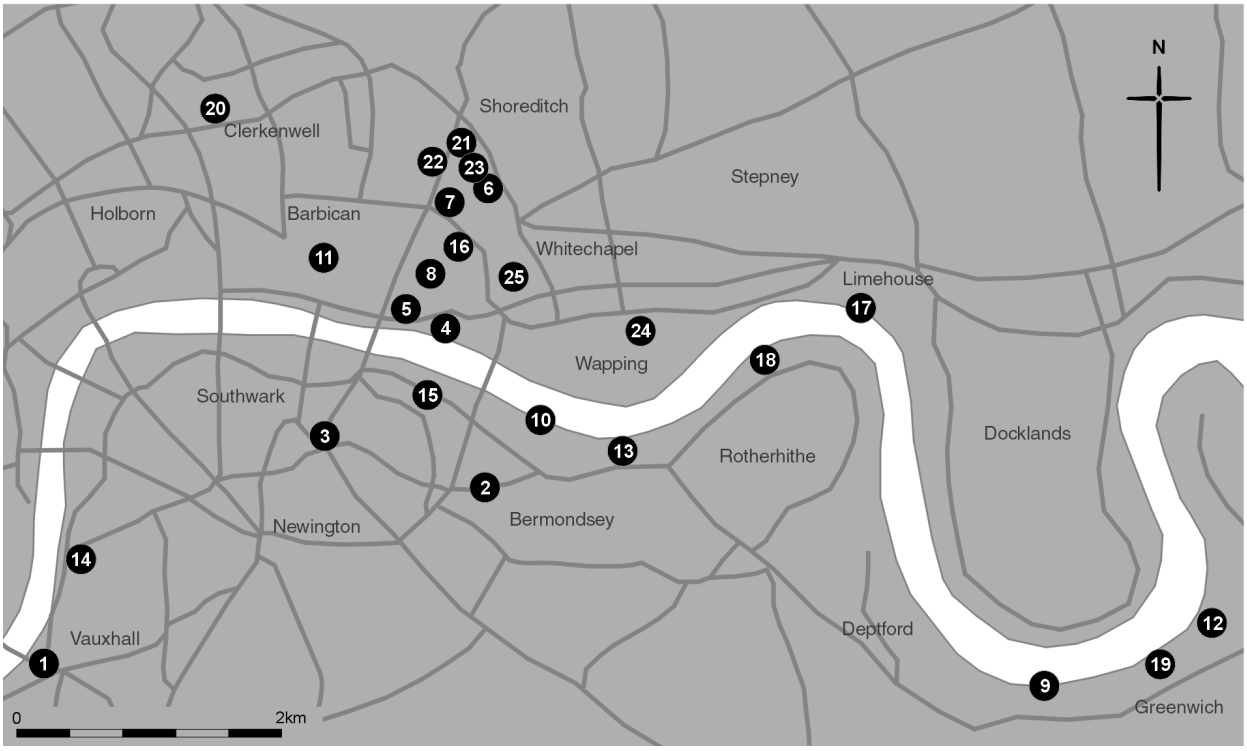

Fig. 1: locations of London sites where Portuguese faience was found.

1, ABK00; 2, BA84; 3, BHB00; 4, BIG82; 5, BPL95; 6, CPN03; 7, DUK77; 8, FCC95; 9, HOF84; 10, JAC96; 11, KIG95; 12, LAS01; 13, LMC04; 14, LMD97; 15, MGS96; 16, MIR84; 17, NHU99; 18, RHE01, 19, RNP99; 20, SJU99; 21, SQU94; 22, SRP98; 23, STE95; 24, TOC02; 25; WSN00

Portuguese faience in London

Tânia Manuel Casimiro

Introduction

Portuguese *faience* refers to the soft-bodied earthenwares covered with a lead-tin opaque white glaze, normally painted in blue or bichrome, produced in Portugal from the 16th century onwards. This designation has its origins in similar technique used at Faenza (Italy) during the 15th and 16th centuries, although the term *majolica* is nowadays more common. Despite all the possible designations, Portuguese literature and even current archaeological terms refer to the tin-glazed wares produced in post-medieval Portuguese territory as *faience*. Hence that will be the term used for the rest of this paper.

The artefactual evidence for this article comes from excavations throughout London, in an area running roughly from Vauxhall to Greenwich Park, although the larger concentration of finds lies within the City (Fig. 1). The objects are housed at the Archaeological Service of the Museum of London (Eagle Wharf Road), and with Pre-Construct Archaeology (Brockley).

These objects, although securely produced in Portugal, cannot be geographically referred to a specific site. Until recently no factory site was known from the 17th century, and all the evidence for their existence came from texts referring to the existence of such structures. Although a workshop has been found near Porto (Vila Nova de Gaia) the bulk of the written sources refer to Lisbon as the most important production centre with about 28 kiln structures.[1] The lack of extensive chemical analysis on Portuguese faience has led to an identification based on form, surface treatment, and especially decoration, as the base of chronological definitions.

The majority of the motifs used in these products tried to imitate Chinese patterns, which had specific meanings and symbolisms. The Portuguese potters followed the Chinese models; however, the lack of understanding about the nature of those symbols led to erroneous copies, transforming some patterns into completely different subjects and even creating new names for them that later entered the potters' slang and passed to current studies.

Archaeological evidence

The sites

The majority of the finds recovered in London comes from domestic environments: cess pits, kitchens and other areas around the houses offered several fragments. Household contexts are definitely the most common ones, especially from cess pits and ditches, which suggest that these artefacts have been discarded, possibly due to their breakage. Nevertheless, the hypothesis of an intentional discard should not be put aside, based on an 'out of fashion' time. This seems to be the case for finds for finds from the following sites: BIG82; BPL95; CPN03; DUK77; KIG95; LAS01; LCM04; LMD97; MSG96; MIR84; NHU99; RNP99; SJU99; SQU94; and STE95. Also from residential areas, but from within the house compartments, such as kitchens or isolated rooms, one can mention BA84 and TOC02 where a kitchen, rooms, and a cellar floor have been found.

From all these sites, the collection recovered at Narrow Street (NHU99) should be mentioned, due to its 60 fragments.[2] This group of houses, whose occupation can be dated from the late 16th to the late 17th centuries, belonged to people related to the sea and to dock activities. Among diverse labour activities, piracy and privateering seem to have been two of the most frequent, which elucidates how these artefacts were acquired. During this period, English pirates were feared, and accounts of several sea attacks in Portuguese waters are known. Portuguese products were expensive objects, and their trade, although frequent, did not amount to large quantities. One has to imagine the hypothesis of a ship capture, or the looting of some place where they were being used or kept. On the other hand, the amounts of other imports found on this site such as lustreware, Chinese porcelain, Italian *maiolica*, Seville blue-on-white (sometimes identified as Portuguese *faience*), Iznik and Persian pottery, and even a fragment of a native Caribbean product, supports this idea. Such a rich (in value and variety) collection had to be acquired by illicit means, considering one would need to be to be very rich in order to acquire it by legal means. On the other hand, the existence of inferior quality Portuguese objects in the same contexts permits one to infer that they were not produced to enter the European trade systems, and so acquired by other means. The bulk of the found Portuguese artefacts seem to be identifiable with products of between 1625 and 1675. Only two artefacts possess puce decoration, one of them with lace and the other with an outlined peach, although they are found in contexts where the other artefacts, though in blue, present a similar late chronology.

SQU94 (context 101, the filling of which was dated to 1600–1650) should be mentioned in connection with a small dish fragment decorated in blue, white and yellow. This last colour is usually said to be used in decoration only after the second quarter of the 17th century.[3] Before this period, yellow was only used in tile production and even after this date, its usage was rare.[4] Can this small fragment show that yellow was already a common colour in *faience* production before 1625, permitting its exportation?

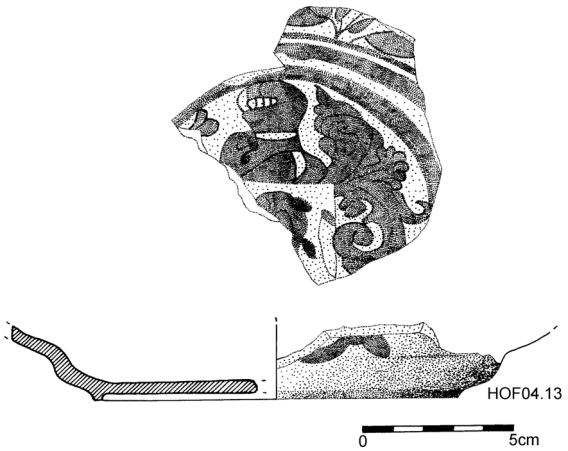

Fig. 2: Portuguese faience dish with Silva's coat of arms (1650–1675)

The majority of these artefacts were recovered in excavations performed in residential areas of the City occupied in the 17th century by wealthy people with the economic capacity to acquire imported goods, or by people who had other means of getting them. However, some artefacts were recovered from other places such as WSN00 (an extraction pit filled with domestic waste after the Great Fire), SRP98 (filling a trench excavated during the Civil War on an Old Artillery Ground site).

Despite the large percentage of household sites, places of different nature did also provide Portuguese *faience*. Three sites seem to be related to trade purposes, located on the Thames waterfront: HOF04, RHE01 and JAC96, the first two identified in areas where the East India Company developed its activities.[5] HOF04 provided a considerable number of pieces, including a bowl bearing the coat of arms of the Silva family (Fig. 2). Other forms such as bowls, dishes and even a cylindrical drug jar were observed. These objects can be chronologically located from around 1625 to the end of the 17th century, combining examples of Wan-Li style decoration and *aranhaõs* with botanical elements (Fig. 3) and armorial designs outlined in puce, which are said only to appear after 1650. The quantity and quality of the material found at this place may have several interpretations, such as the broken cargo from some ship bringing artefacts from Portugal, or even just the remains of some warehouse. However, the time differences between these artefacts suggests separate arrivals to London, which may indicate a wharf where ships (probably coming from some Portuguese port) would unload their cargos. In this sense it is not difficult to recreate the action of throwing away broken objects.

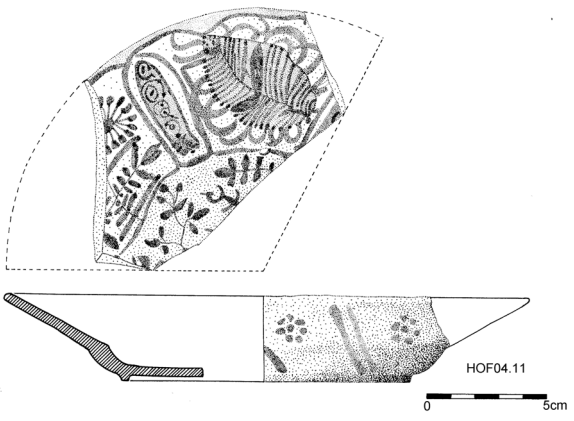

Fig. 3: Portuguese faience dish with aranhão (1625–1675)

ABK00 has been identified as a waste dump from a delftware pot house in the Vauxhall area of Lambeth, which existed from 1732 to 1793, and the only industrial site where this type of artefact has been identified. However, although not included in this paper, it seems that similar artefacts were found in an industrial context at Platform Wharf, Rotherhithe.[6] This small article does not present any drawings or descriptions, so it is impossible to determine if the artefacts were from a previous period or if they belong to the delftware factory production period from 1638 to 1663. Although highly fragmented, the context provided a small bowl with a floral blue-on-white decoration which can be compared to products developed from the second quarter of the 17th century onwards. The presence of two of these artefacts in delftware factories in different parts of London may indicate that they were probably used as models for production, considering the demand for Chinese patterns.

The materials

Several forms have been identified in the production of these artefacts. Varied pots with different functions are known. At first the major production followed the Chinese porcelain tradition, producing large quantities of *pratos (*dishes), *taças* (bowls), *jarros* (jars) and *potes (*pots); however, European influences led to the manufacture of new forms. In this sense, *mangas de farmácia (*cylindrical drug jars), *escudelas* (porringers), *terrinas* (soup bowls), *bacias* (basins), *caixas* (boxes), *fruteiras* (fruit bowls), *galhetas (*cruets), *canecas* (mugs), *picheis* (jugs), *aquamanis* (aquamaniles), *bilhas* (stoops), *garrafas* (bottles), *gomis* (ewers) and even *bacios* (chamber pots) among many different forms, satisfied the national and international demand.[7] Although all these shapes were produced in Portuguese workshops, the London contexts only offered dishes (Fig. 4), bowls (following eastern porcelain models), jars and bottles (Fig. 5).

The best-known examples of Portuguese *faience* present a blue-on-white decoration. This seems to be the rule for the first production period.

Nevertheless, from the second quarter of the 17th century onwards, new colours start to appear and puce and yellow enter in the decoration, although blue continues to be the most frequent colour. Although generally accepted, recent unpublished studies are redefining this chronology, based on *faience* found outside Portugal, where secure dated contexts (such as SQU94, see above) are providing decorations and colours for the first half of the 17th century, thought to be from later periods.

The decoration is usually divided into *decorative families*. The most common family was the one defined as *aranhaõs* (big spiders); this was the most frequent on the London sites, although others existed, such as the *desenho miúdo* (finely drawn), *espirais e geometrico* (spirals and geometrical), *rendas* (lace) and the *contas* or *pérolas* (beads or pearls). In most forms these patterns are located all over the artefact, except on plates, where they are painted on the ledge. Usually the centre was destined for a specific decoration, where a floral motif, a landscape with animals, a human or divine figure was painted, combining oriental and occidental influences. This was still the part of the object reserved for ordered decorations such as noble and religious armorial motifs or even people's names. The underside of the plates usually presents a floral decoration; although a typology has not yet been developed, it is possible that it too followed a chronological pattern.

The decrease of the international market demand, especially due to the development of tin-glazed ceramics in the Low Countries and England, was a blow to traditional *faience* production.[8] These countries had their own production, and specific laws were passed trying to limit pottery imports from other countries. Some workshops in Lisbon, Coimbra and possibly Porto continued their production throughout the 18th century, but demand started to decrease. However, the absence of an external market which required Chinese-styled objects led to a free development of other subjects, creating new forms and decorative patterns.[9]

Discussion

During the 17th century, several workshops throughout Portugal were producing vast amounts

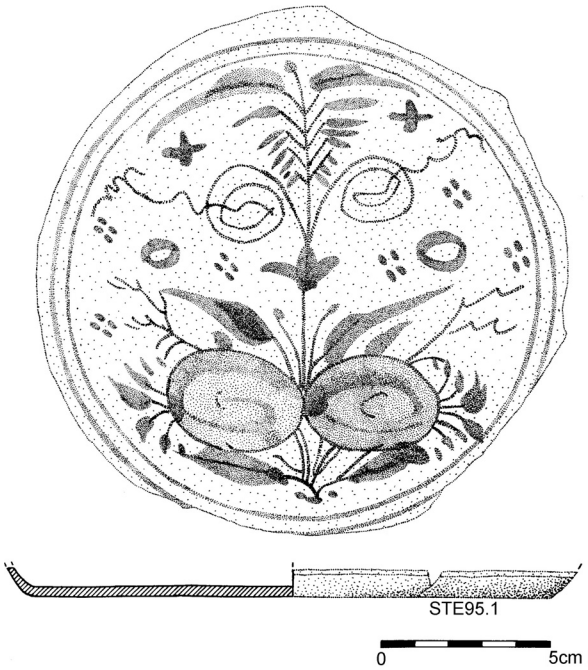

Fig. 4: Portuguese faience dish (1650–1675)

of *faience* destined to satisfy internal and external markets. The production satisfied many requests, from the simple white undecorated bowl, destined to serve food, to the sumptuous dish whose function was simply to decorate the household. Functionality was one of the most important features for *faience* use in Portugal, and the low cost of simple bowls allowed their widespread use; however, this does not appear to be the case abroad. Considering the London finds, the quantity of one or two objects per site and the high quality of their production suggests their function was decorative. The nature of the artefacts, with their generous proportions and highly elaborate decoration, combines with the places where they were found (especially domestic contexts). They should be considered as high-quality exotic items satisfying a demand for eastern goods. Looking at the house environments which characterised the 17th century, one could in fact reconstruct the disposition of some of these artefacts, securely kept in specific furniture which appeared at this time allowing items to become a decorative element of the house.

In fact, from the 25 sites, only Narrow Street seems to have used them for other purposes

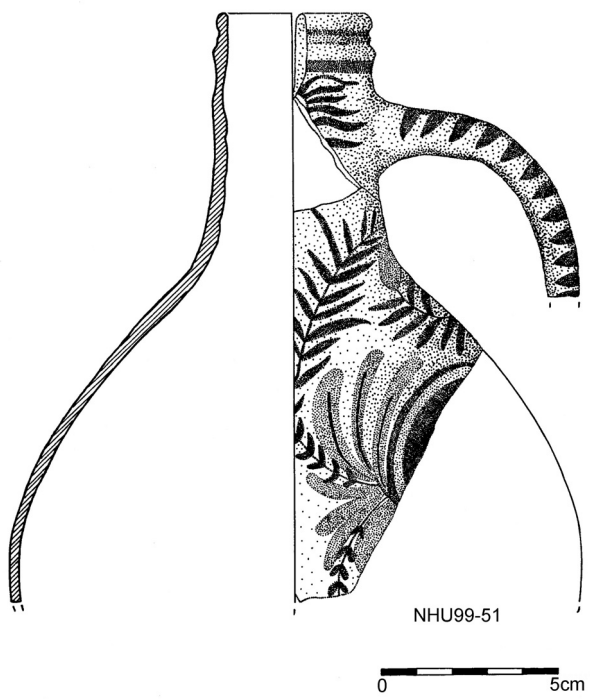

Fig. 5: Portuguese faience jar (1625–1675)

besides decoration. Not only due to its quantity, which permitted the organisation of tableware sets, but especially due to the forms present, it seems possible that they were in everyday use. This becomes even easier to believe when looking at forms such as small dishes, bowls and bottles, which would have been used to contain liquids such as water or wine. Although only recurring to a visual observation, wear marks were not found on any artefact from other places, except on the ring foot of the dishes and bowls from this site, reflecting constant use.

Portuguese *faience* must have been acquired as a high-valued item, considering that no small and modest objects were registered. The serving and eating function should have been reserved to other glazed ceramics and even some delftware productions, easier and cheaper to acquire.

Portuguese *faience* helped to satisfy European and even worldwide demand for objects related to oriental (Chinese and Japanese) culture, which had grown since the 16th century. Although porcelain and other exotic items already reached Europe through continental trade routes, Portugal gave Europe the opportunity to know and acquire these objects more frequently and at a lower price, but still expensive. However, from the early 16th century onwards, the end of the Ming Dynasty and the presence of Dutch and English in the Indies reduced the Portuguese trade in porcelain. These artefacts entered Europe in larger quantities and at a lower price than when traded by Portugal. As a response to these problems, Portuguese tin-glazed workshops, producing since the 2nd half of the 16th century, started to decorate their objects in blue, following the Chinese patterns, especially Wan-Li, the most required. Although far from the fine beauty and carefully drawn porcelains, this new production created accessible imitations of eastern products. The cheaper prices led to widespread adoption in Europe, where a *chinoiserie* taste was settled for at least half a century. Exotic habits were being acquired by Europeans, and the British were no exception. Tea, for example, was just another oriental practice introduced by Catarina de Braganza (wife of Charles II) in her court, along with the use of spices in a fine and colourful oriental setting. The curiosity towards the eastern behaviour led to a development of a new and refined taste, which passed to domestic environments in which ceramics were just another element. Textiles, furniture, ivory, food, drinks and other objects offered new colours, tastes, scents and sounds satisfying the demand for a eastern taste.

This fashion was confirmed by the success of this new production, which was able to popularise the eastern taste, enlarging its accessibility. Other places in Europe, especially Spain, were producing blue-on-white artefacts; however, they did not use Chinese motifs, the European demand at the time. In the 17th century the British were operating in the Far East, and British society had direct access to Chinese porcelain, and some of the sites where Portuguese *faience* was recovered also had Chinese porcelain. However, *faience* was cheaper, and one big and finely decorated dish made in Portugal certainly cost less than a porcelain dish. Despite the availability of cheaper artefacts which somehow alluded to an oriental environment, when possible, people would spend more money and buy a small porcelain bowl or plate.

It should be considered that although Portuguese *faience* appears scattered throughout the world,

almost all contexts reveal a high-quality life. No poor areas are known to have acquired these objects. They appear in castles, palaces, rich religious environments, noble and *bourgeoisie* houses. London is not an exception. The price restrictions makes it a product present in many places, but in small amounts.

Although this taste continued in the 18th century, Portuguese *faience* was replaced by Dutch and British products, which, until this point in time, were of a lower quality. The Navigation Acts of the late 17th century made the import of foreign pottery to Britain very expensive, and people turned to national products, which also started to follow the Chinese patterns. This reproduction might explain the presence of a small Portuguese *taça* (bowl), decorated after the Chinese style, in a delftware pottery house in the mid-18th century. It is known, even today, that many potters acquire already made pots in order to recreate similar forms and drawings, and this is the second example of Portuguese *faience* discovered at delftware production sites.

However, *faience* started to acquire a reputation of its own and soon Chinese motifs were combined with European ones and new forms appeared, satisfying new demands. People, families and religious orders started to demand specific decorations, especially names and coats of arms. In fact, some orders and families seem to have demanded the production of entire tableware sets, such as the order of the Flamengas or the Silva family. Examples of these objects have been found from the Netherlands to Virginia, South America and now in London (HOF04). The nature of this find outside Portugal is still difficult to define, however several hypotheses can be advanced. The Silvas were an enormous family and some of them were captains of ships, travelling and trading from Portugal to other countries. This was the case of the Sacramento captain Francisco Correa da Silva, who possessed one entire tableware set on board.[10] Nevertheless, the presence of so many artefacts in several parts of the world cannot be justified by a member of this family in every country. In this sense, it is possible that some of those artefacts were given as gifts to certain people as a sign of friendship and allegiance or even sold as fashionable items, the same being true for other coats of arms. Where HOF04 is concerned, its discovery on a waterfront site related to commercial purposes might indicate this last option or, even simpler, a piece that was on board a ship where a member of this family was part of the crew, and after being broken by some reason, thrown overboard.

The analysis of the London Portuguese artefacts shows that the majority presents a dish or bowl, decorated with *aranhões* and floral elements following the Ming Wan-Li style, most of them combining these patterns. In this sense, despite the existence of other forms and decorations, it appears that English society demanded Chinese fashion artefacts.

Conclusion

The trade of Portuguese *faience* in London was far from being part of a highly specialised trade system and, although frequent, its amounts were very low, only trading high-quality artefacts in small quantities. Although this was a cheap alternative to porcelain, which entered the European markets at an enormous price, it does not seem to have been traded in considerable amounts, except probably to Amsterdam to satisfy the request of the Portuguese Jewish community.[11] Despite the knowledge of several workshops in Portugal, the lack of specific typological studies does not allow us to infer where these artefacts were being produced. However, the homogeneity of the collection, with only a few slightly different pieces concerning fabrics, glaze and painting, may indicate similar workshops, probably Lisbon and Vila Nova de Gaia. Although Portuguese workshops started to produce in the 2nd half of the 16th century and continued until the 20th century, the exportation to London developed in the first three quarters of the 17th century (especially from 1615 to 1660), until the development and protection of the delftware industry.

The London findings do not seem to present any special feature, and fit within the type of artefacts found in other parts of the British Isles, Europe and the world, satisfying a demand for Chinese patterns. They appear scattered throughout the city, although with special incidence on the river front and City area, where they would be easier to acquire. On the other hand, this was the area where wealthy and middle-class people lived and,

although cheaper than porcelain, it was still an expensive import. These artefacts were a way of having *chinoiserie* items at home, satisfying the demand for this fashion taste, although they did not replace the demand for Chinese porcelain and other exotic items obtain through the English presence in the Indies.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on a dissertation submitted for the degree of MA in Artefact Studies at UCL Institute of Archaeology. The map was re-drawn by the Drawing Office of the Museum of London Archaeology Service, funded by a grant from the Institute of Archaeology Publications Committee.

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Appendix– site addresses

ABK00 – Queensborough House, 19 Albert Embankment, Lambeth, SE11

BA84 – Bermondsey Abbey, Abbey Street, Long Walk, SE1

BHB00 – Former York Clinic, 117 Borough High Street and Nag's Head Yard Workshop

BIG82 – Billingsgate Market Lorry Park, Lower Thames Street, EC3

BPL95 – Monument House, 30–35 Botolph Lane, 29-31 Monument Street, EC3

CPN03 – Spitalfields, Providence Row, Crispin Street, E1

DUK77 – St James's Passage Subway, 2–7 Duke's Place, EC3

FCC95 – Lloyd's Register of Shipping, 68–71 Fenchurch Street, 1–7 Railway Place, EC3

HOF04 – Wood Wharf, Horseferry Place, Thames Street, Greenwich, SE10

JAC96 – Jacob's Island, Bermondsey Wall West, SE1

KIG95 – 15–17 King Street, 42–46 Gresham Steet, EC2

LAS01 – Anchor Iron Wharf, Lassel Street, Hoskins Street, SE10

LMC04 – Former London City Mission, Paradise Street, Cathay Street, SE16

LMD97 – Lambeth Bridge Street, Lambeth Road, London, SE1

MGS96 – 26 Magdalen Street, SE1

MIR84 – 12–14 Mitre Street, EC3

NHU99 – 43–53 Narrow Street, Limehouse Basin, Tower Hamlets, E14

RHE01 – Bombay Wharf, Ceylon Wharf, East India Wharf, 101–105 Rotherhithe Street, St Mary Church Street, SE16

RNP99 – Royal Naval College (former): Pepys Building, Romney Road, Greenwich, SE10

SJU99 – 48 St John's Square, EC1

SQU94 – Spitalfields Market (former), Spitalfields Residential Development, Spital Square, Lamb Street, Nantes Passage, Folgate Street, EC1

SRP98 – Spitalfields Ramp, Spital Square, 280 Bishopgate, EC1

STE95 – 250 Bishopgate, Steward Street (car park), Brushfield Street, E1; 240–276 Bishopgate, EC2

TOC02 – Tobacco Dock, 130–162 The Highway, E1

WSN00 – 25 West Tenter Street, E1