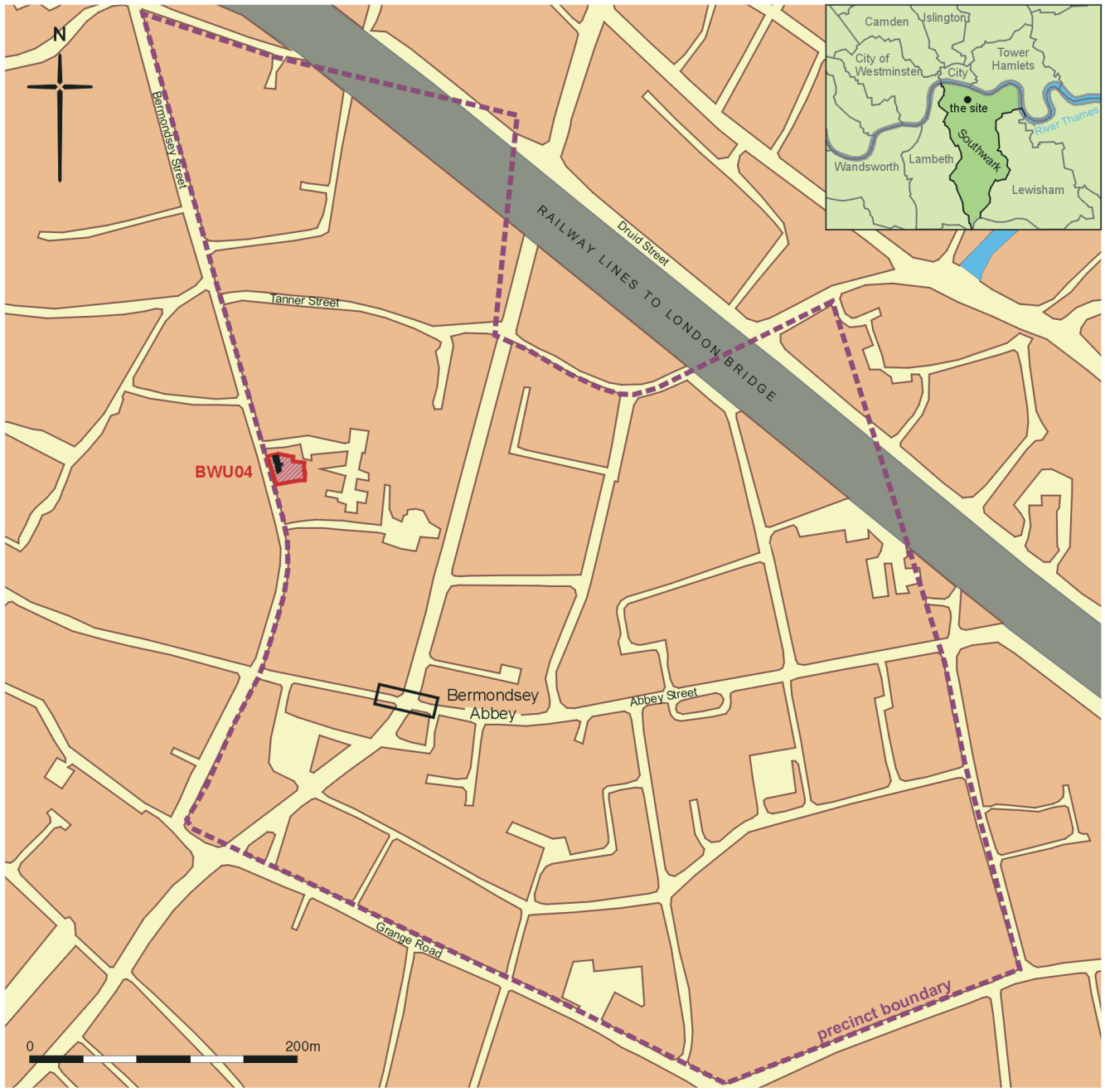


Fig. 1: site location plan, in relation to Bermondsey Abbey and its outer precinct

Medieval and post-medieval buildings along Bermondsey Street

Jeremy Taylor

Introduction

The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) was commissioned by Buxton Homes to undertake an archaeological investigation in advance of redevelopment at 163–167 Bermondsey Street, SE1.[1] The site is located in the London Borough of Southwark, within and adjacent to the boundary of the Bermondsey Abbey precinct.[2] The archaeological investigation took place in January and February 2004 and, with the exception of three areas, was restricted in depth to the formation level of the new development. The main area of investigation was in the north-west part of the site, near to Bermondsey Street. All medieval/early post-medieval masonry remains were protected and preserved *in situ*.

Medieval

Bermondsey Street was laid out to connect the medieval settlement in Southwark to the Cluniac Priory of St Saviour at Bermondsey (founded in

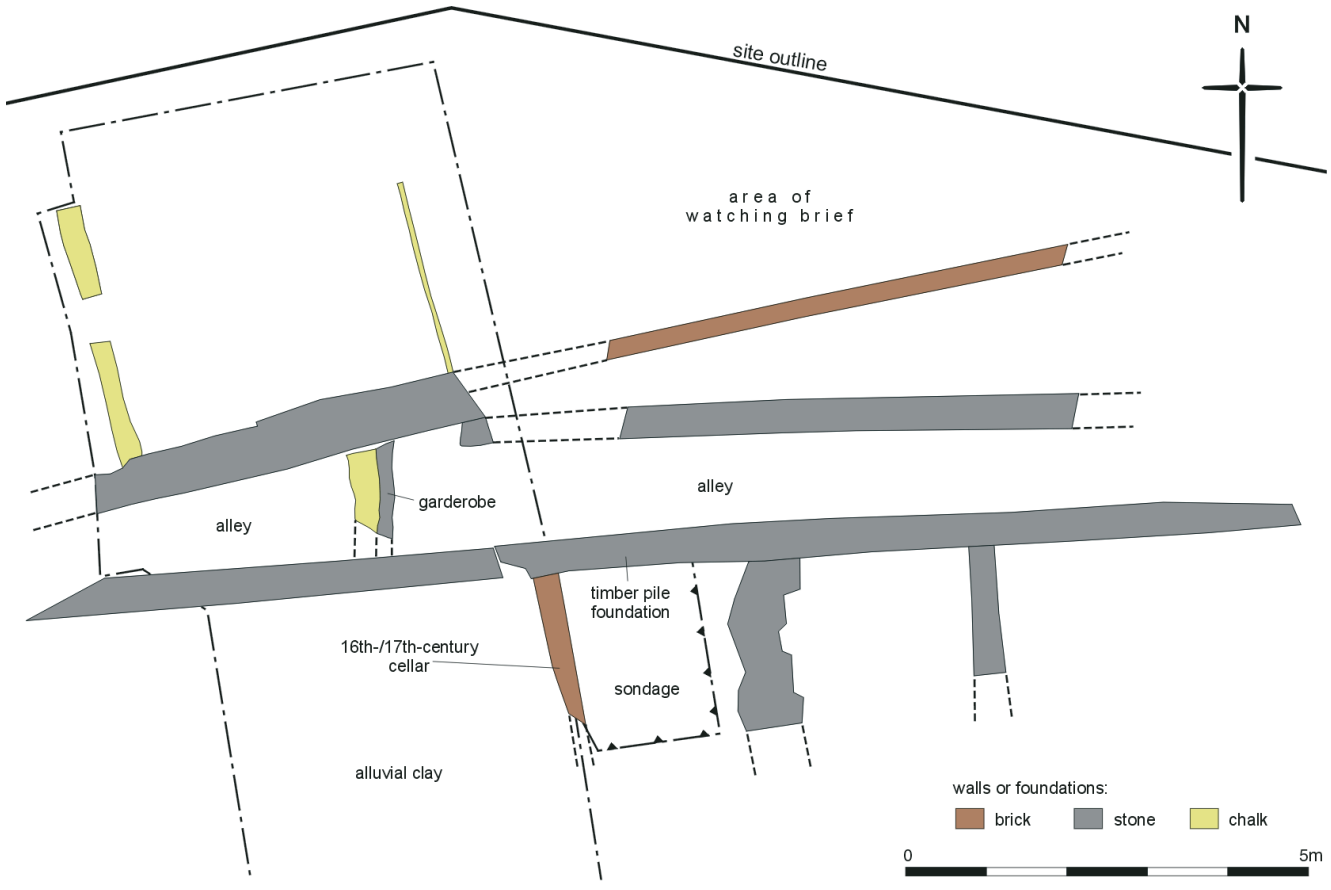


Fig. 2: plan of medieval and 16th-/17th-century walls

1082). The Priory became an Abbey in 1390 and the designation Bermondsey Street was first used in the late 14th century (previously it had been known as the 'causeway leading to Bermondsey' indicating the low-lying nature of the landscape). Bermondsey Street itself formed the western boundary of the precinct of the Abbey and the precinct wall ran along the east side of the road as far north as Crucifix Street (formerly Roper Lane).[3]

The most significant medieval features were three east–west aligned ragstone walls (Fig. 2). Because of restrictions to the depth of excavation, generally only the surviving top of the walls were observed; some of which were exposed immediately below modern deposits. The earliest building comprised two chalk-built foundations, which may have defined the west and east limits of a room within the building. A ragstone wall (0.50 m wide) defined the south side of the building. Pottery retrieved from overlying make-up dumps suggests a 13th- or 14th-century date.

Another building lay to the south; the north wall of this building created an alleyway between the two properties. This wall was traced for *c.* 15 m across site and its full surviving depth was observed in an excavated 19th-century brick cellar and a sondage to the east. The top of the surviving wall lay at 2.10 m OD and was built of randomly-coursed masonry (mostly obscured by modern whitewash) on a timber pile foundation. The timber foundation included an elm sill beam, supported by vertical whole elm log piles (Fig. 3).

In the alleyway dividing the two properties a garderobe was represented by a north–south aligned wall with a chalk core and ragstone facing, which formed the western side of a garderobe. This wall was bonded into the wall to the north, but lay beneath the wall to the south, clearly pre-dating it. A sample from the garderobe fill contained a large assemblage of waterlogged plant remains, including many foods and seeds from wild plants. Plum and cherry stones and pips of grape, fig, blackberry, wild strawberry and elderberry indicate a varied diet. Several seeds of hemp, black mustard and cat-mint were also found, and may be residues of plants used for medicinal purposes. Seeds of wild plants from arable and waste ground habitats, as well as damp ground, suggested that material from a variety of activities may have been deposited in the garderobe. The sample also provided a small quantity of bones representing a wide variety of food remains. These include each of the major domesticates, cattle, sheep and pig, as well as rabbit and fish. The fill of the garderobe produced small assemblages of both 13/14th-century and 16th-century pottery. The post-medieval assemblage may be intrusive, associated with a later post-medieval brick drain that had collapsed into the fill. Alternatively, it may represent continued use of the garderobe into the post-medieval period.

To the east the north side of the alley was defined by another ragstone wall observed mostly at modern ground level, but at greater depth during excavation of the garderobe (Fig. 2). Another ragstone wall observed only at modern ground level extended south of the alley. It may represent a property boundary broadly contemporary with

the alley wall. Fragmentary remains of a tile floor on its east side suggest it may have been reused as a foundation for a later post-medieval building.

Post-medieval

16th- to 17th-century buildings

From the late medieval period onwards, Bermondsey became the centre of the leather industry and was granted a charter by Queen Anne in 1703.[4] Leather manufacture remained the dominant industry into the 20th century and many sites in the area have provided evidence for this.[5]

The earlier medieval buildings, or at least their foundations, were reused during the post-medieval development of the site which was built on the same alignment as the medieval property (Fig. 4). The medieval chalk foundations defined an individual room within the main area of excavation, with later construction phases built immediately above. Limited aspects of separate rooms or buildings were exposed to the south and east at the very limits of excavation. The pottery assemblage retrieved from the earliest post-medieval sequence, indicates a mid-16th- to mid-17th-century date range.

The post-medieval sequence was complex, with only fragmentary evidence surviving. A roughly-built wall foundation comprising stone, chalk and brick fragments was constructed over the medieval chalk foundation on the west side of the property in the main area of excavation. It was probably contemporary with remnants of a brick wall overlying the earlier medieval ragstone wall, which had defined the southern limit of the property. Towards the south-east corner of the room, a pitched-tile hearth with an associated brick/tile wall forming its back edge were part of the same structure. At a lower level, an east-west brick drain ran along the north edge of the alleyway. Its east end had collapsed and sunk into the soft deposits associated with the garderobe. A brick/tile drain outlet built into the medieval ragstone wall immediately to the north, fed the drain from the south-west corner of the room/property described above.

The hearth was replaced by a second pitched-tile hearth built immediately adjacent to the earlier hearth on its east side near the south-east corner of the room. A sondage excavated in the south-east quarter of the site exposed a north–south brick cellar wall that had been built over an earlier ragstone and brick foundation, Above the drain, an east–west fragment of brick wall with an un-mortared ragstone foundation lay between the medieval walls. It appeared to extend beyond the east limit of excavation, below 19th-century footings. It was probably built relatively early in the sequence, but did not appear to tie in with any other exposed structural elements.

18th- to 19th-century buildings

The later sequence was largely defined by walls aligned along the west and east limits of a property in the north-west area of excavation (Fig. 4). The surviving evidence for the 18th- to 19th-century development of the site was represented by part of a brick-built building. Remnants of a north–south brick wall, located in the north-west corner of the investigations, included

Fig. 3: medieval wall supported on timber piles

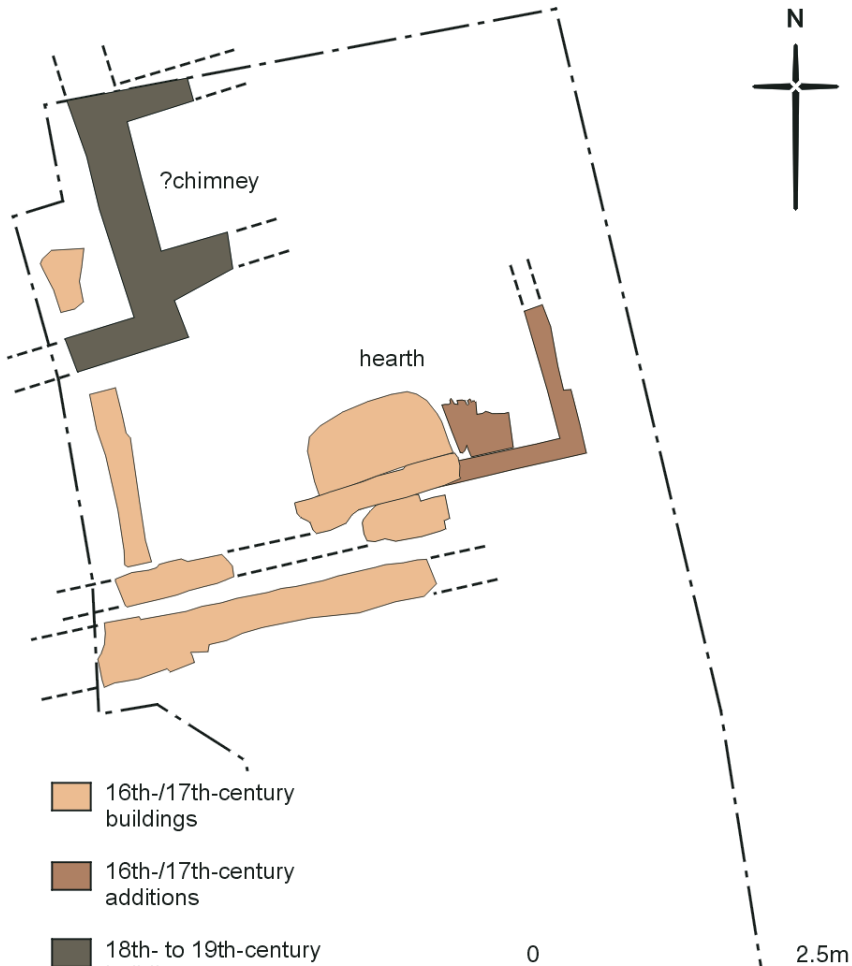


Fig. 4: plan of 16th-/17th-century and later walls

short extensions eastward creating an enclosed space that probably represented the base of a chimney. Further 18th- or 19th-century walls were seen to the east (not illustrated) suggesting this part of the site was densely occupied at the time.

The pottery

Lucy Whittingham

This site produced a well-preserved assemblage of 265 sherds from 23 deposits, 19 of which date from 1550–1650 and therefore represent a tightly-dated collection of early post-medieval ceramics. The largest assemblage of 114 sherds, also from the dump layer that produced a chatelaine (see below), is of particular interest as a typical late 16th- to early 17th-century collection associated with demolition material used for levelling. The assemblage can be closely dated to 1580–1600 and cross- joins with sherds from the same vessels in a trample layer, dumped deposits and construction debris associated with the latest pitched-tiled hearth. This typical domestic assemblage of everyday household vessels is a good representative sample of all 19 early post-medieval groups which contain some well-preserved vessels such as the 16th-century Cistercian ware drinking cup found in a make-up level (Fig. 5). In total 31 vessels are a mix of imported continental stoneware and English tin-glazed earthenware drinking vessels and domestic red earthenware vessels used in the preparation of food or for serving. There is a clear contrast between the finer-quality drinking vessels used as tableware and the domestic serving vessels. Five drinking vessels are represented by a Raeren drinking jug with typical frilled foot-ring base,[6] a Siegburg *Trichterhalskrug*,[7] a rounded mug with corrugated body in London-area early post-medieval redware, two examples of a London-area post-medieval slipped redware goblet; one with clear glaze and one with copper glaze. Other drinking vessels are represented by jugs in fine 'Tudor Green ware', post-medieval redware and London-area early post-medieval redware and a south Netherlands maiolica jug with a dark blue glaze. The domestic food preparation vessels are comprised of cauldrons, tripod pipkins, jars, carinated dishes, condiments and flanged dishes. These 20 vessels are primarily made in coarse and fine red earthenware, for example 60% of the vessels are cauldrons in London-area post-medieval redware and London-area early post-medieval redware with just one example in Dutch red earthenware and one in Surrey/Hampshire border redware. One near-complete lid in London-area post-medieval redware is a rare survival. Other cooking vessels are two tripod pipkins in London-area post-medieval redware and London-area post-medieval slipped redware and a collar-rimmed dish in London-area post-medieval slipped redware. Three flanged dishes are noticeably of fine quality which may have resulted in their purchase as tableware rather than kitchen ware. One example is made in a fine micaceous Hafner-type whiteware with a continuous lead glaze on the interior, upper surface, and two examples in London-area post-medieval slipped redware with sgraffito decoration on the interior. One vessel of particular interest is the upper part of a two handled south Netherlands ring handled vase with dark blue glaze on the exterior. These are a specific import bought for use as a display vase and are securely dated to between 1480–1575.

The proportion of imports (19% of the total assemblage) is high but not unusual for a site in Southwark. The presence of south Netherlands maiolica vessels and the clear selection of fine-quality English and imported drinking vessels are perhaps indicative of a high-status household or establishment specifically purchasing vessels for display. Unfortunately this particular assemblage is associated with a dump layer and cannot be related to any specific building.

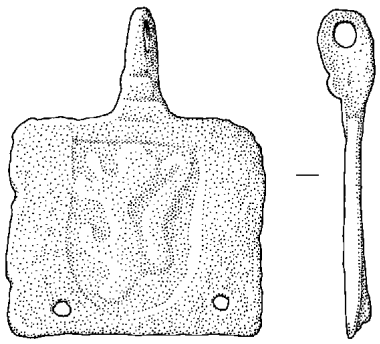


Fig. 6 Copper-alloy horse harness pendant (width 33 mm)

Fig. 7 13th-century leather scabbard (height 160 mm)

The registered finds

Nicola Powell

The site produced a number of interesting and fine objects. Of note, though from an unstratified context, is a rectangular copper-alloy horse harness pendant (Fig. 6). Depicting an early form of lion rampant left, it probably dates from the 13th century. The suspension loop is complete and the pendant has two pierced holes close to the bottom edge, suggesting either a period of reuse or the position of decorative knops. The only other find of certain medieval date is an incomplete leather scabbard (Fig. 7), also from an unstratified context. It has a centre-back seam with edge stitches and the front is decorated with two panels of lozenge-shaped stamps. The stamps depict *a castle triple towered,* also an heraldic design. The scabbard, too, probably dates from the 13th century.

A chatelaine, made of at least seven pieces of copper-alloy wire, was recovered from a dump layer in the alleyway, dated 1580–1600. It is complete with hook and is in remarkable condition. Five thicker gauge pieces of wire form the hook and attachment loops. These are tightly bound with thinner-gauge wire to present a flat face and enabling the chatelaine to lie flat.[8] Part of the chain is attached, from which keys and other household and personal items would have been suspended. An almost identical chatelaine was recovered from Abbots Lane, Southwark,[9] where an early- to mid-16th-century date has been suggested.

Fig. 5: a rare 16th-century Cistercian ware drinking vessel found in an early-post-medieval make-up level (height 73 mm)

Discussion

The late medieval buildings and alleyway and their subsequent redevelopment recorded during these investigations mirrors the building sequence as recorded during nearby archaeological investigations at 151–153 Bermondsey Street.[10] The use of timber piles indicates the unstable nature of the underlying peat and alluvial sequence.

Although it was not possible to confirm precise construction dates, size or form they suggest a group of relatively high-status late medieval buildings within the Abbey precinct. During this period they would have remained in ownership of the Abbey. By the time the Abbey was surrendered to Henry VIII in 1537–8, the majority of buildings the Abbey owned had been assigned on long leases.[11] This may be reflected in the early post-medieval pottery assemblage, which suggested the possible presence of a high-status household nearby. The archaeological investigations clearly demonstrated that the medieval walls had been utilised as foundations for later buildings and in

The radiocarbon

The *shofar* (plural *shofarot*) is a musical instrument made from an animal's horn (often a ram). It is an ancient, ritual Jewish instrument, which is mentioned 69 times in the Bible, the first instance being *Exodus* (19:16) at the Theophany on Sinai. *Shofarot* were used during the circuits of Jericho, after which the walls collapsed (Joshua 6).[1] In the synagogue ritual the *shofar* is blown briefly after morning services during the month of Elul as a preliminary to its most significant use, on Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, when a complex sequence of a hundred calls is performed.[2] It is also an important component of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when a single *shofar* blast at nightfall signals the end of the fast day.

Two ram's-horn *shofarot* were discovered in London in the mid 19th century and it has been claimed that both are of medieval date (pre-dating the expulsion of the Jewish community in 1290). However, in the absence of any associated artefacts or a secure context these claims have never been substantiated. Therefore in January 2007 it was decided to radiocarbon the London *shofarot*, at the University of Oxford Research Laboratory for Archaeology and History of Art (Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit), to allow them to be placed in secure cultural context.

The first example was recovered apparently during dredging of the Thames at Vauxhall in 1850 along with another artefact**,** described as a 'Trumpet of Ox Horn of a grayish-black hue, about 14″ in length … 2″ diameter

MEDIEVAL BERMONDSEY (cont'd)

places the property alignment was retained until at least the 19th century.

Significant finds recovered during excavation included a copper-alloy horse harness pendant and an incomplete leather scabbard, both provisionally dated to the 13th century. A copper-alloy chatelaine, complete with hook and in remarkable condition, probably has an early- to mid-16th-century date. The site also produced a tightly dated collection of early post-medieval ceramics.

Acknowledgements

MoLAS would like to thank Buxton Homes for generously funding the project. The author would like to thank Sarah Gibson, then Senior Archaeology Officer for Southwark, for her advice and support throughout the project, and Derek Seeley who managed the project for MoLAS.

Thanks are also due to the MoLAS archaeologists who worked the excavation: Valerie Griggs, Dave Saxby and Mark Wiggins; and the MoLAS Geomatics team, who surveyed the site.

This report incorporates contributions by Terence Paul Smith (building material), Lucy Whittingham (post-Roman pottery), Nicky Powell (small finds), Kate Roberts (plant remains), Kevin Rielly (animal bones), Damian Goodburn (ancient woodwork). Ken Lymer prepared the site illustrations; finds drawings by Faith Vardy; site photography by Maggie Cox and studio photography by Andy Chopping.

1. National Grid Reference 533291 179565; site code BWU04. The site archive is available for consultation with prior arrangement at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED.

2. A.R. Martin 'On the topography of the Cluniac abbey of St Saviour at Bermondsey' *J Brit Archaeol Ass* 2 ser **32** (1926) 195.

3. J. Drummond-Murray, D. Saxby, B. Watson 'Recent archaeological work in the Bermondsey district of Southwark' *London Archaeol* **7**, no. 10 (1994) 251–7.

4. M. Carlin *Medieval Southwark* (1996), 30–1.

5. B. Weinreb and C. Hibbert *The London Encyclopedia* (1995).

6.K. Heard 'A post-medieval tawyers yard in Bermondsey' *London Archaeol* **9**, no. 5 (2000) 137–43. and D. Divers, D. Killock and P. Armitage 'Post-medieval development at 8 Tyers Gate, Bermondsey' *London Archaeol* **10**, no. 3 (2002) 69–75.

7. As in J.G. Hurst, D.S. Neal and H.J.E. Beuningen *Pottery produced and traded in north-west Europe 1350–1650* (1986) fig 94 no. 300.

8. As in *ibid.* Pl. 30 (right).

9. G. Egan, *Material culture in London in an age of transition,* MoLAS Monogr Ser 19 (2005) 64.

10.R. Bluer 'Abbot's Lane, Tooley Street, An archaeological excavation and watching brief' unpub MoL rep (1992).

11. K. Wooldridge, 'The archaeology of 151–153 Bermondsey Street, Southwark' *Surrey Archaeol Coll* **90** (2003) 181–210.

12. *Op. cit.* fn 1, 220.

dating of two London *shofarot*

by Tamara Chase, Jennifer Marin, Ken Marks, Jeremy Schonfield and Bruce Watson

at the larger end'. The latter, now lost, appears to have been another shofar.[3] The surviving Vauxhall *shofar* is part of the Cuming Museum's Collections.

The result for the Vauxhall *shofar* shows that it postdates the Readmission of the Jewish community (1656) to England.[4] Since this date there has been a large Jewish community in London and there are a number of other *shofarot* in the capital dating from this period. It is 95.4% certain that the Vauxhall *shofar* dates from the period 1680-1939, and within this date range there is 63.3% probability that it dates from 1800-1939.[5] As the *shofar* was found in 1850, this date range can be narrowed down to c1680-1850, indicating it was discarded during the 18th century. Why were two *shofarot* discarded in the Thames at Vauxhall? The correct way to dispose of ritual objects that have become unusable is to bury them in a cemetery. However, the presence of a split along the base of the instrument would have made it unusable for ritual purposes, and if this flaw developed during its manufacture, there would have been no point in keeping it. If this instrument (and the other missing example) were never completed or used, then they would not have been considered *shofarot*, so could have been disposed of in a different manner from ritual objects. One can speculate that throwing them into the river was perhaps felt to be a more appropriate or respectful way of disposing of them than throwing them out with the household rubbish.

The second example was recovered from Leadenhall Street in the City of London during 1855.[6] Nothing is known about the circumstances of its discovery. The Leadenhall *shofar* is part of the Jewish Museum's collections. The radiocarbon date for the Leadenhall *shofar* reveals that it has a 95.4% probability of dating from AD 1680-1939, and that within this date range there is 63.5% probability that it dates from 1801-1939.[7] It therefore seems certain both the London *shofarot* are of very similar date. From 1761 until 1838 the Bricklayers' Hall, Leadenhall Street, was used as a synagogue, so possibly the *shofar* has some connection with this building. [8]

It is planned to produce an article on the London *shofarot* for *Jewish Historical Studies* (the transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England).

Acknowledgements

The radiocarbon dating of the Vauxhall shofar was funded by the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee; and the dating of the Leadenhall shofar was funded by Ken Marks.

1. Shofar, Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971) vol 14, 1442-47.

2. According to tradition, the month of Elul is the time that Moses spent on Mount Sinai preparing the second set of tablets after the incident of the golden calf (Exodus 32; 34:27-28). Today the month of Elul is a time of repentance in preparation for the holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Jewish Year 5769: sunset October 8, 2008 - nightfall October 9, 2008).

3. Original label written by Henry Syer Cuming (1817-1902). The Vauxhall *shofar* is in the Cuming Museum, 151 Walworth Road, Southwark, SE171RY (Acc. Co 1156), www.southwark.gov.uk/cumingmuseum.

4. OxA-18381, formerly Co1138, now Co1156, d13C=-25.08 121 ± 27 BP, 25/4/08.

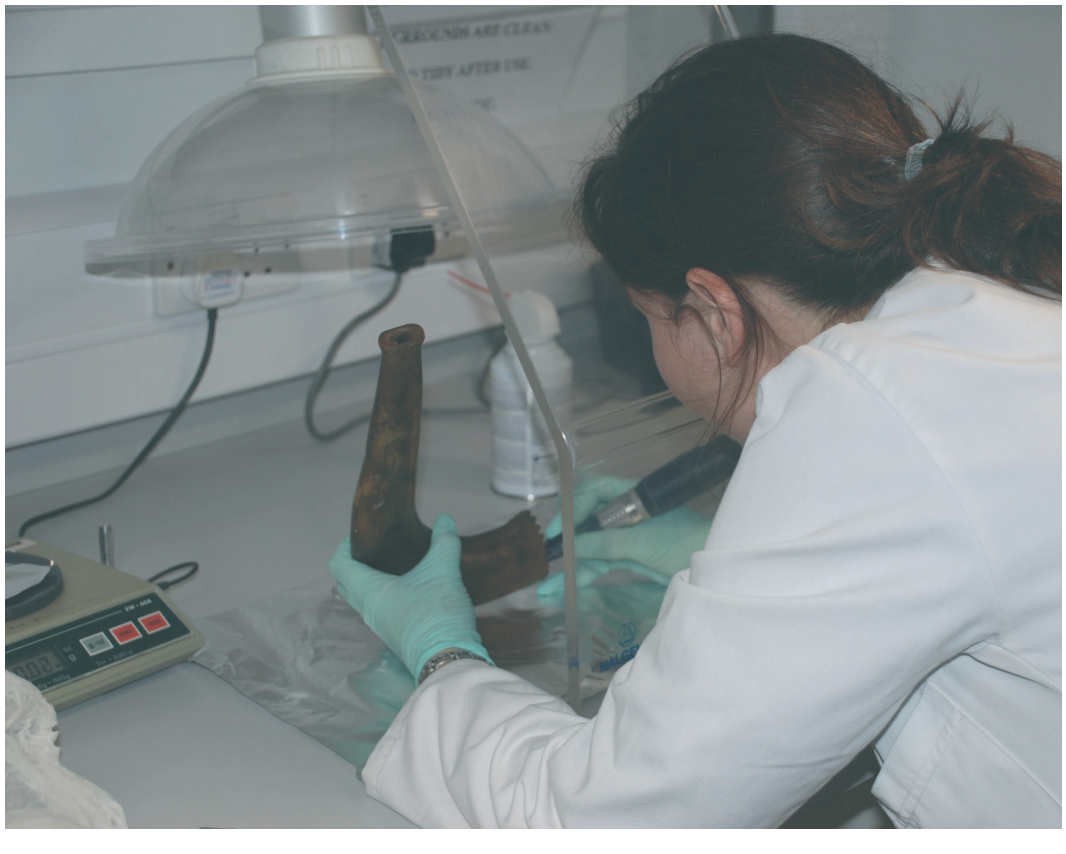
5. Dates in calibrated years.

6. The Leadenhall shofar is in the Jewish Museum: London's Museum of Jewish Life, 129-131 Albert Street, Camden Town, NW 1 7NB (Acc. JM 193). The Jewish Museum is currently closed as it is being expanded and is expected to reopen during summer 2009, www.jewishmuseum.org.uk

7. OxA-18382 JM 193, d13C=-23.88 121 ± 26 BP, 29/4/08.

8. J. Jamilly The Georgian Synagogue (London 1999), p11. The hall was leased to the Elders of the New Synagogue until 1883, and soon after this date the premises was redeveloped. So it is certain the *shofar* was not found on the site of this synagogue.

Photo: Bruce Watson



OPPOSITE PAGE: The Vauxhall *shofar*
RIGHT: Dr Fiona Brock of the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit extracting samples from Vauxhall *shofar*