An assessment of the woodwork revealed during MoLA Archaeological investigations at the Crossrail site at Moorgate; Site code XSP10

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1 Quantification and assessment

1.1 Site archive: quantification and description

This part of the report provides only a very brief summary outline of the historic waterlogged woodwork found more details are supplied below.

Table 1	I Finds and	environmental	archive	brief	general	summar	v
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Timber			
Prehistoric	None clearly dated found		
Roman	Two small stakes of Roman date were found in the lower fills of a ditch dated by associated finds to the Roman period		
Saxo-Norman	None found		
Medieval	The remains of the outer hoop elements of a reused cask were found in a truncated pit lining		
Post-Medieval	Woodwork of this period included a softwood post and sawn softwood plank and a pile or stake tip		
Industrial period	None found. Unless above very late in date.		

1.2 Woodwork quantification

Table 2 Woodwork

Material	Length	Volume(approx)	Count	Count as % of total
Timber	All under 1.5m long	c. 1 small wheelbarrow load	5 structural items	By number <40% but much more bulk than roundwood
Roundwood	c. 0.85m long	c. ½ bucket	Total 7 cask hoops	Approx 60 % by number but not bulk
Reused			All the cask hoops.	C. 60%
Total				NA

1.2.1 Introduction

The location of the excavation and watching brief area in part of the buried Walbrook Valley complex of low lying marshy land and multiple water channels, suggested that waterlogged ancient woodwork was likely to be found. This was likely even though the area lay just outside the historic City walls and was only thought to be intensively developed in post-medieval times. A long series of excavations in this area by MOLA and PCA archaeology teams have demonstrated the richness of the Valley zone for preserved historic waterlogged woodwork.

This brief report sets out to summarise the woodworking details of the woodwork found such as, species range, methods of working, and possible function etc. For the lay out and stratigraphic position of the woodwork discussed here readers must consult the main site assessment report.

1.2.2 Methodology

The woodwork found was excavated by the MOLA field team at this site in several different phases (See main report by S Pfizenmaier). After the usual plans at 1:20, basic context descriptions were made and photographs taken. This writer did not see woodwork in situ but examined site records and several of the lifted items at MOLA facilities to complete the recording and sampling. This specialist work was broadly in line with the Museum of London Archaeological Site Manual woodwork recording section and English Heritage Guidelines on Waterlogged Wood.

1.2.3 Prehistoric woodwork

N\A

1.2.4 Roman woodwork

A group of stake holes without surviving woodwork was found along the south edge of E-W ditch [157] in Area A. It is likely that these are traces of fencing along side a drainage ditch. The ditches may have had the dual function of drainage and marking out properties or paddocks for grazing. Any fencing could have reinforced that role, contained livestock and also prevented people falling into wet ditches in the unlit urban fringe setting on the edge of the Roman town.

Surviving stakes [50] and [101] were found sealed in the lower fills of E-W ditch cut [49]. Stake [50] survived only as a tip under 0.1m long x 80 x 30mm and was trimmed from a half pole. Stake [101] survived 0.87m long by 40 mm dia., had been driven into compacted gravels. This stake was rather decayed.

1.2.5 Saxo-Norman woodwork

NA

1.2.6 Medieval woodwork

The woodwork here was initially interpreted as the remains of a 'wattle lining' to a small truncated pit [108] but further examination of the records made on site show that the 'wattle work' [107] was actually the remains of several barrel or tub hoops (See Fig 7 XSP 10 Interim statement of 07,03,14, By Pfizenmaier and Elsden,) There were no stakes). The vast majority of larger, historic, stave built (Or 'coopered') vessels were bound with multiple wooden hoops, often used in several close set zones, rather than the steel bands we see today. Stave built barrels, casks and sometimes tubs have been found reused in many types of cut features in London and elsewhere. Most commonly they were reused as well linings but have also been found lining sumps, soakaways and tank-like features such as lime slaking pits. Quite often the valuable and re-useable staves were removed from the inside after the first reuse leaving fragile roundwood hoops stuck in the back-fill of the cut first made to contain the vessel. The very clean, sharp site photograph seems to clearly show that seven hoops survived from the lowest zone of hooping in the original cask. They were clearly split and shaved ½ rods of roundwood c. 30mm across and retained the impressions of the staves which they had once held together. Only c. 25-30% of the circumference of the vessel was indicated due to extensive truncation. They appear to be typical of medieval cask hoops and the feature is provisionally dated to the late medieval period from associated finds. This implies occupation of the site or close by at this period.

1.2.7 Post-medieval woodwork-

Timber [31] was a thick, sawn softwood plank found set on edge running N-S. It survived 1.5m long as recorded on-site by 230mm wide and 70mm thick. A possible tenon joint was noted on site but not seen off-site. The saw marks were clearly those of pit sawing by hand suggesting it was not late 19^{th} century or later. The beam section timber was found set at c. 90 degrees to the plank and ran E-W. It survived 1.5m long x 180 x 170mm, almost square. The preserved end of the timber was sawn to a slight angle rather than square for some reason. The surfaces of the timber were axe hewn, though weathered, again suggesting that it probably dated to before the end of the 19^{th} century. It is difficult to discern what this truncated structure was perhaps part of a cellar or tank revetment originally? It was also noted on-site that the timber might have been a post originally and was possibly displaced?

The beam timber was slice sampled but had barely 50 annual rings so was unsuitable for tree ring dating and a wood SP ID samples was taken. The same was the case for the plank element. On grounds of the species used and methods of working a date range of late 16th to 19th century is likely though a 17th century to c.1800 date range is perhaps most likely.

Timber [141] survived as the slightly decayed very tip of a pile or large stake. It had a length of only 0.2m and was c.80mm square and hewn from a whole log. Dating is uncertain but late medieval or post-medieval was suggested on-site (This writer did not examine the item). No sample was taken.

1.3 Assessment work outstanding

No further assessment work is suggested except possibly the analysis of the species ID samples of timbers [31] and [32].

2 Potential for further analysis

2.1 Woodwork

Given the very truncated condition of this small collection of historic worked waterlogged wood it would seem to have little potential for further analysis.

3 Significance of the data

3.1 Woodwork

The significance of this small assemblage is also very limited from a central London perspective, though the finding of the woodwork hinting at fencing along some of the E-W drainage ditches and the remains of some form of late post-medieval softwood structure are parts of the local site story.

4 Revised research aims

4.1 Woodwork

Again the results of the site work and woodwork recording and assessment are limited. No significant additional research aims have been thrown up by this assessment.

5 Method statements

5.1 Woodwork

It is estimated that a fully referenced and updated short summary of this material could be prepared for the site analysis in no more than 0.5 days which would also include liaison with other project staff and up to two illustrations as required.