

XSM10

Worked Stone Assessment

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Site archive: finds and environmental, quantification and description

Table 1 Finds and environmental archive general summary

Building material	Two worked stones were recovered from site. Both were incomplete fragments. Of these one stone was fractured into two pieces. All stones were retained.
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The worked stone

Introduction/methodology

All of the worked stone has been recorded using the standard worked stone recording forms used by MOLA. The stones were photographed and where appropriate a 1:1 or 1:2 profile drawing was made, a 1:1 rubbing or a scaled plan drawing was made. Fabric analysis was undertaken with a x10 binocular microscope and a comparison was made with the MOLA stone library.

The medieval period

No stones present.

The post-medieval period

Gravestones

Two fragmentary gravestones were recovered from the core of a post-medieval wall (Contexts [1637] and [1645]).

Context [1637]

Accession <1115>

Two fragmentary pieces of black sandstone similar to that quarried at Caithness, Scotland which is an Old Red Sandstone of the Devonian era. The fragments interlock but do not represent a complete stone. The reverse face of the stone has a 45mm wide mitred chamfer and the entire face has been dressed roughly indicating that it was never intended to be seen. The thickness and surface wear suggests that the stone was a ledger slab which was laid horizontally and flush with the ground level around it. Very little wear was observed, despite this no inscription was visible suggesting that it comes from an unlettered stone or is an unlettered part of a much larger stone.

A similar designed ledger with a chamfered reverse was also recovered from Context [1115] during an earlier phase of work however as the petrology was that of

a Welsh slate the two stones cannot be of the same origin. Despite this the two stones seem to be stylistically similar and Context [1115] was dated to the second half of the 17th or very early to mid-18th century from the style of inscription and was found with a headstone (1135) which was dated to 1672 by inscription.

Context [1645]

Accession <664>

A single fragmentary piece of cream coloured fossiliferous limestone similar in character to the Corallian limestone of the Jurassic Period from Marnhull, Dorset. The fragments all interlock but do not represent a complete stone. The reverse face of the stone is extremely weathered which may be indicative that it once stood upright externally, although a much corroded iron fixing may point towards the possibility that the stone was once mounted on a wall. The thickness and decorative scheme on the front face suggests that the stone was a vertical grave marker with a discoid head characteristic of the 17th century.

The inscription reads:

MARY
(G)ODFREE
(DY)ED THE 2TH
(DA)Y OF SEPTEMBER
1665

The stone is approximately 80% complete with fractures to the left and bottom. It is characteristic of the very low headstones of the late 17th and early 18th century which were laid directly into the earth. Such stones often featured carved scrolls such as that located immediately to the right of the surname (G)ODFREE. No other decoration or elaboration is present.

The parish registers of St Giles Cripplegate record that a Mary Godfrey died of the plague on the 2nd September 1665.

The letter-cutting is a naïve sub-Roman font, neatly incised and adequately set-out with crude serifs. There is some evidence that the mason was illiterate given that the superscript 2TH is grammatically incorrect. Equally it could be representative of a non-uniform pattern of spelling which was still evident in the late 17th century. It was often the case that the text would be set out by a vicar or schoolmaster and executed by a mason or builder who was not necessarily an expert lettercutter during this early period, although the flourish with which the 5 of 1665 was cut does indicate a certain degree of capability.

Analysis of potential

The material all relates to a post-medieval wall, which however contains stonework from earlier periods. The two gravestones which can be located in the second half of the 17th century or early 18th century which were then reused in the 18th century. The gravestones come from the Bethlem Burial Ground as laid out in the late-16th century.

It is interesting to note that there are two widely spaced petrologies represented – Caithness and Dorset, and this was true of the earlier assemblage of worked stone from the site which had material imported from quarries as disparate as

Gloucestershire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Northumberland and Wales. This variety of material is not unusual within London which is an area poor in quality building stone yet rich in finance and infrastructure – particularly the sea routes which are made accessible by the Thames estuary. There is some potential for relating the headstone of Mary Godfree to a documentary and genealogical history for the period of the late 17th century.

Significance of the data

The post-medieval gravestones relate to an early burial ground opened as a non-parochial cemetery in 1568/9 on land taken from the Bethlem Hospital. The latest burials found to date are from 1729, although it is conceivable that interments were made into the mid-18th century. The reuse of the late 17th-century gravestones relates to an early encroachment into the cemetery by the built environment, and consequently they were reused less than a century after the initial interment. Therefore the significance of the gravestone <1115> is considered to be low and the stone can be discarded, whereas as <664> is well preserved and has supporting documentary evidence and is of medium to high significance.