

ROMAN POTTERY FROM THE CITY OF LONDON

by

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Summary

Examination of material in the Museum of London (1) indicated kilns in the northern part of the City producing grey wares, mica-dusted wares and 'London ware', and (2) identified a group of pre-Flavian vessels of Rhineland origin.

1. Roman Pottery Production in the Walbrook Valley

(1.1) 1-4 Copthall Close/20-28 Moorgate St. (TQ 3274 8141)¹

Introduction

In 1936 Quintin Waddington recovered a group of Roman wasters during the rebuilding of 1-4 Copthall Close, which lies in the northern part of the City, on rising ground west of the main Walbrook stream (Fig. 1). The material is recorded as coming from layers at the eastern end of the site, overlying the natural brickearth.² Mr. Adrian Oswald prepared the pottery for publication but this was prevented by the war and since then it has received little attention. The group consists of 386 sherds, divided as following:

plain grey wares	—	248	} 335 sherds of kiln ware
mica-dusted wares	—	56	
London ware	—	31	
samian	—	27	
other Roman	—	18	
post-Roman	—	6	

The date of the pottery and its wider significance is discussed below.

Grey Wares: (Figs. 2-3)

These formed the bulk of the surviving kiln material (approximately 85%) and two fabrics have been identified:

Fabric A: Grey granular slightly micaceous fabric, usually with darker surfaces. The external surface is usually rough (A1) but is occasionally smoothed (A2).

Fabric B: Smooth grey fabric with darker surfaces, usually externally smoothed.

The majority of the rims (Nos. 1-25) are from simple necked jars which vary in exact detail. Their bases (Nos. 26-51) have been turned to produce a distinctive domed profile and one has been impressed after finishing with a signet ring (see appendix p. 239). This type of base contrasts strongly with that produced at the Highgate kilns, which is flat with a basal groove, e.g. Brown and Sheldon (1974, Fig. 5, 68, 70). Other forms such as beakers (No. 52), bowls (Nos. 53-56, 60-61), bead rim jars (Nos. 57-59) and lids (Nos. 62-63) were much less common. There were in addition four sherds of poppy beakers, and sherds from a possible pedestal urn decorated with panels of barbotine dots.

Of the Copthall Close material the grey wares were most obviously kiln waste. Much of the pottery was discoloured and distorted, and many sherds had 'carbuncles', which had apparently been caused by the expansion of gases in the clay. In a few cases severe over-firing had turned the pottery to 'clinker'.

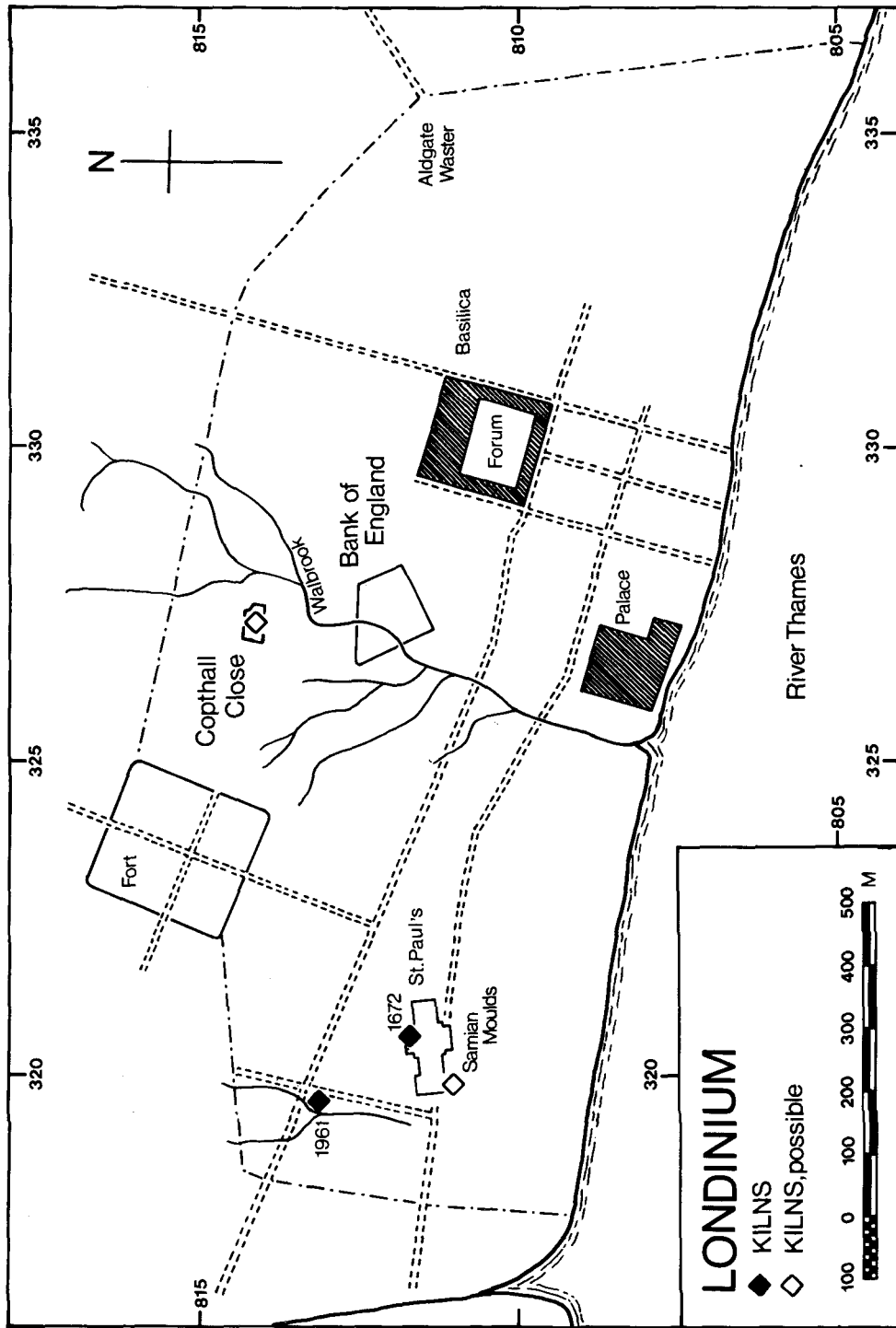


Fig. 1 Roman London; evidence for pottery production.

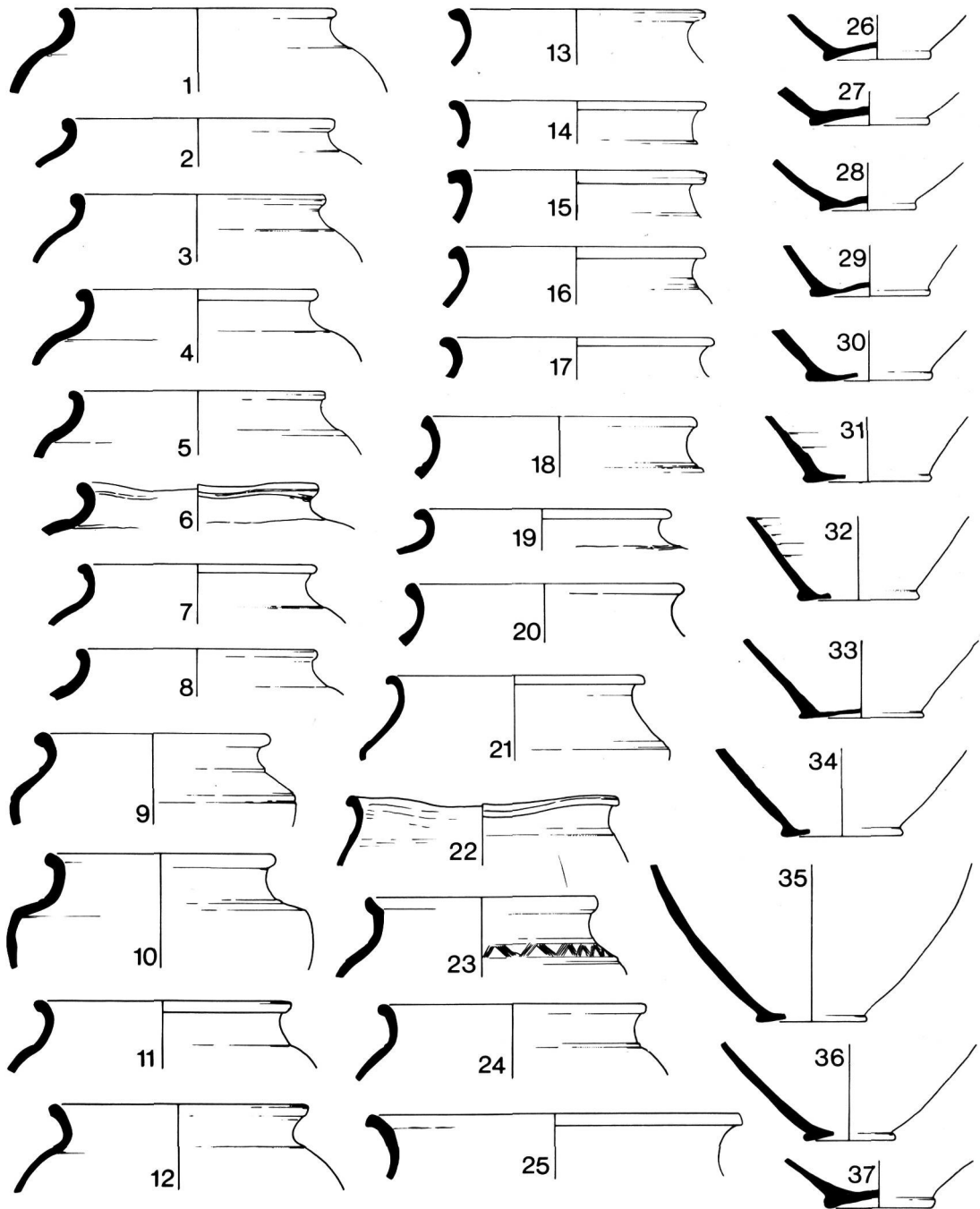


Fig. 2 Copthall Close; grey wares, 1-37 (1/4).

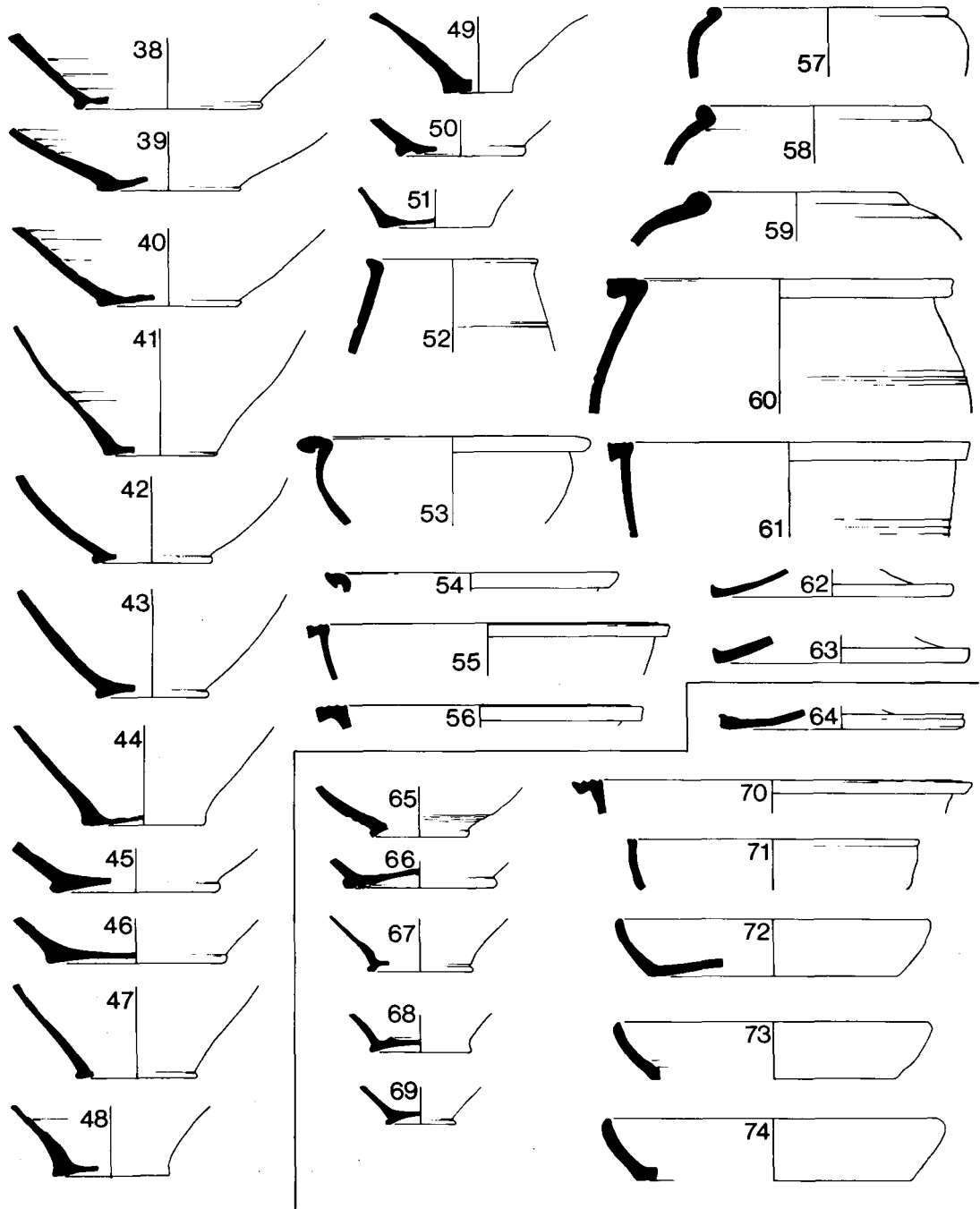


Fig. 3 Cophall Close; grey wares, 38-63: mica-dusted wares, 64-74 (1/4).

ILLUSTRATED POTTERY

Necked Jars: Fabric A1: 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 42, 43, 44, 47, 50.

Fabric A2: 2, 3, 9, 10, 13, 16, 20, 22, 23, 29, 31, 32, 38, 39, 40, 45, 46, 51.

Fabric B: 12, 14, 15, 24, 41, 48, 49.

Beaker: Fabric B: 52. Bowls: Fabric A2: 54. Fabric B: 53. Carinated Bowls: Fabric A1: 55, 60, 61. Fabric A2: 56. Bead Rim Jars: Fabric A1: 57, 58, 59. Lids: Fabric B: 62, 63.

Mica-dusted Pottery: (Figs. 3–4)

There were two fabrics:

Fabric C: Slightly granular with grey core and orange/red surfaces. Some sherds have noticeable red grog inclusions and small 'black holes', possibly due to the burning out of organic material.

Fabric D: Smooth with grey core and orange/red surfaces. Occasional inclusions and 'black holes'.

Dr. David Williams has kindly examined some of the sherds in thin section and a report will be published in the near future.³

The majority of the rims were from simple dishes in fabric C (Nos. 71–95; equivalent to Southwark form IVJ3⁴), and range from 85–170mm in diameter. All the dishes showed evidence of having been turned. The base of one was unique in having an internal red coating rather than mica-dusting; it was perhaps imitating Pompeian red ware. Apart from a reeded rim dish and a lid (Nos. 70, 64), the remainder of the sherds were from flagons, and although only bases have been illustrated (Nos. 65–69) there were several body sherds including two with handle 'scars'.

None of the mica-dusted sherds were distorted but the rising bases of several dishes (Nos. 71, 74, 85 etc.) suggest that they had sagged while being fired upside down. Some sherds also exhibited 'carbuncles' and blistering. These faults and the domed bases of the flagons are in common with the grey wares and suggest that they come from the same source.

ILLUSTRATED POTTERY

Lid: Fabric D: 64. Flagon Bases: Fabric D: 65, 66, 67, 68, and 69, which possibly comes from a beaker rather than a flagon. Reeded Rim Dish: Fabric D: 70. Dishes: Fabric C: 71–95.

London ware: (Fig. 5)

The material is all in the characteristic London ware fabric, but much is soft, underfired and discoloured to light grey, red or brown. On several sherds the decoration is carelessly incised. The forms represented imitations of samian form Drag. 37 (Nos. 96–102), straight-sided bowls (Nos. 103–105), vases (No. 106) and a base of a beaker (No. 107). There were also sherds of a plate and a beaker. These forms are discussed further below.

ILLUSTRATED POTTERY

Imitation Drag. 37: 96 (buff/brown, underfired), 97 (brown, underfired), 99 (black), 100 (black), 101 (brown/grey), 102 (black).

Straight-sided Bowls: 103 (black), 104 (buff/brown, underfired), 105 (buff/brown-red, underfired).

Vases: 106 (buff).

Beaker: 107, hard grey fabric with red surfaces. This sherd is unique in having a white, iron free slip, through which the decoration has been incised producing a *sgraffito* effect.

*(I.2) Bank of England (c. TQ 3270 8122)*⁵*Introduction*

A large quantity of London ware in the Museum of London was recovered during the rebuilding of the Bank of England between 1926 and 1934. The site lies across the

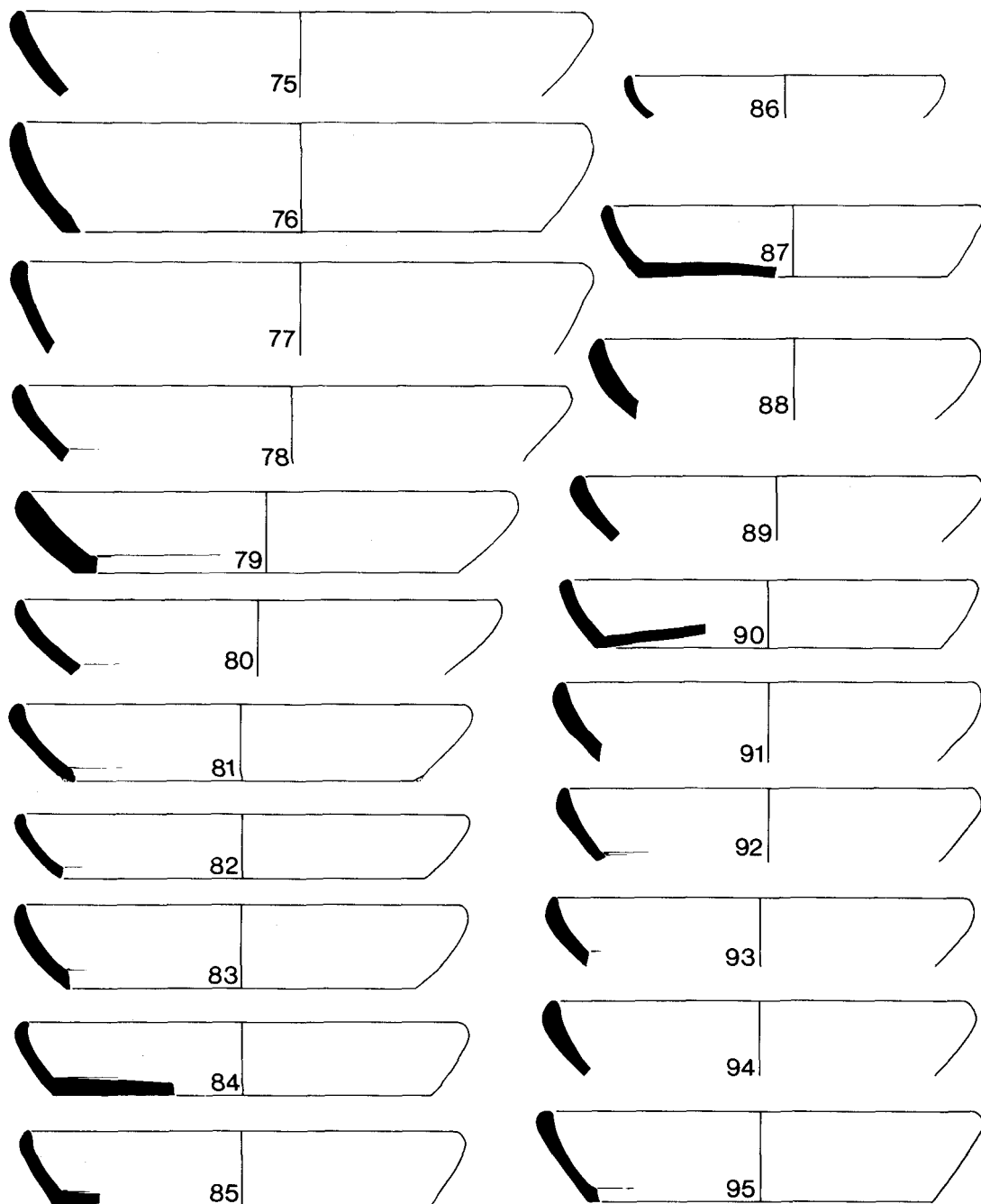


Fig. 4 Cophthall Close; mica-dusted wares, 75-95 (¼).

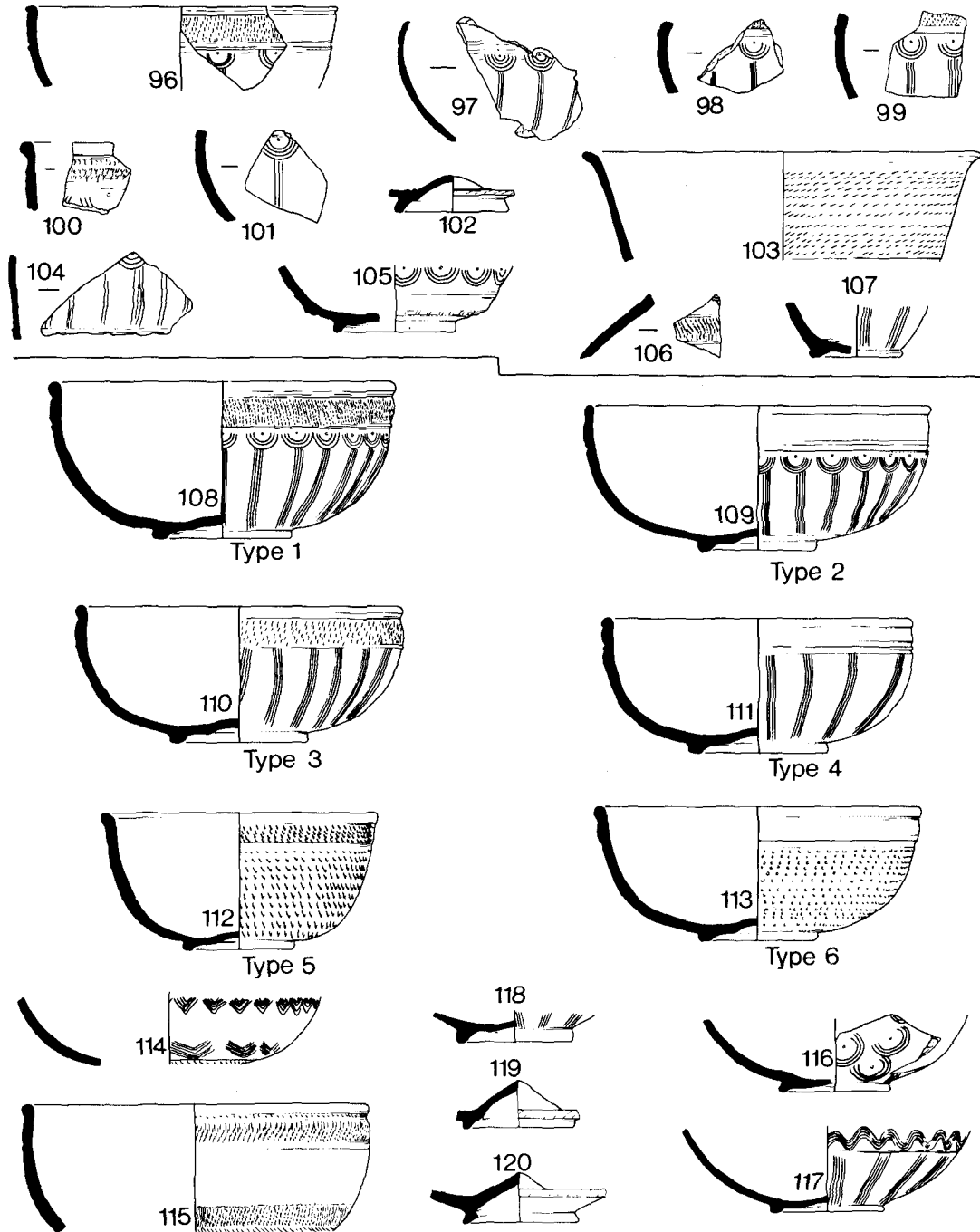


Fig. 5 Cophthall Close; London ware, 96-107: Bank of England; London ware, 108-120 (¼).

Walbrook valley some 200m south of Copthall Close (Fig. 1). As some of the motifs are identical to those from Copthall Close, the material almost certainly comes from the same kilns. However, none is obviously misfired and although some pieces are badly finished or marred by 'carbuncles' all were probably saleable. At present it is perhaps best to regard this group as debris from the sales area of the workshops.

Fabric:

The fabric is consistently fine, hard and slightly micaceous with a dark grey core and fine black burnished surfaces. There are occasional inclusions of red grog. A few sherds are fired red-brown near the surfaces or at the core. A comparison of thin sectioned London ware sherds from Copthall Close, the Bank of England and Southwark will be published shortly.

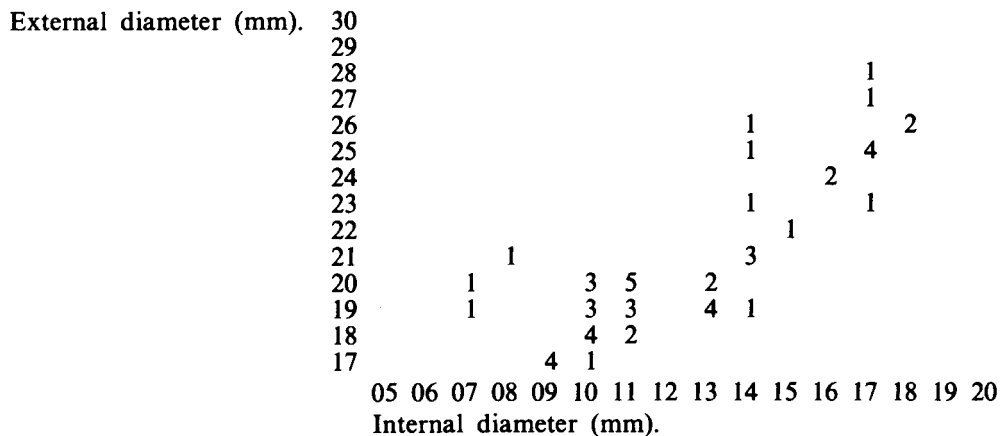


Fig. 6 Size range of three-lined ovolos.

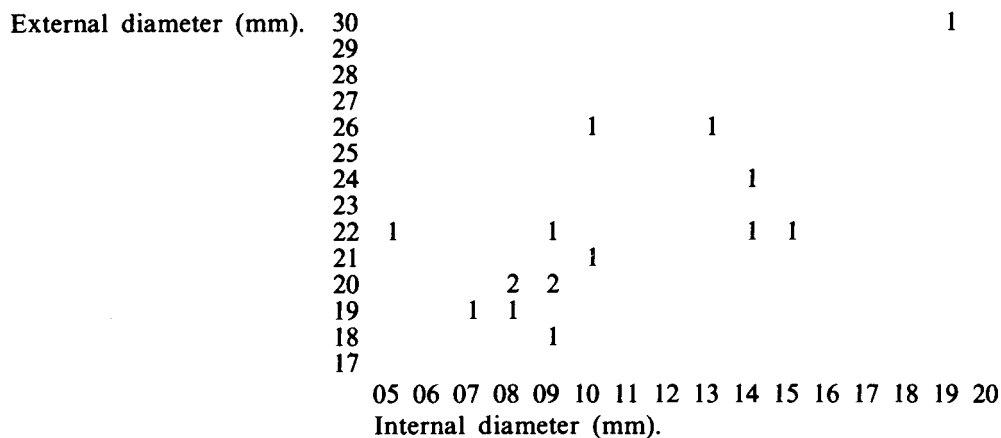


Fig. 7 Size range of four-lined ovolos.

Decoration:

During the early Roman period combed wavy lines and verticals are common on vessels of late La Tène descent in Britain and on the continent, such as girth beakers, e.g. at Neuss, Filtzinger

(1972, Taf. 13, 1-7), at Nijmegen, Holwerda (1941, Nos. 26, 30, 33, 38) and at Camulodunum, Hawkes and Hull (1947, Form 85), or butt-beakers, e.g. at Hofheim, Ritterling (1913, Form 102), at Nijmegen, Holwerda (1941, Nos. 52, 53, 55), and Camulodunum, Forms 91, 116A. Two imitation samian form Drag. 29 are illustrated from Neuss with compass drawn half circles ('ovolos'), Filtzinger (1972, Taf. 31; 6, 7; Form 32b, dated A.D. 25-50). Another example from Okarben, further south in the Taunus, is dated A.D. 85-130, Wolff (1915, Taf. V, 29). Therefore, it seems likely that the decorative technique on London ware originates in the Lower Rhineland area, as do several of the forms.⁶

The distinctive incised ovolo decoration was achieved by means of a compass-like instrument with a toothed end.⁷ No actual tools survive from the Roman period but they were probably made of wood or bone. As each separate implement would have produced a distinctive motif, it was initially hoped that a catalogue of ovolos could be produced in the same manner as for samian. However, although certain types did emerge, distortion, differential depth and other factors such as variable shrinkage, made it impossible to define individual motifs exactly. Examination suggested there were at least fifteen varieties. Moreover, teeth would eventually become worn or broken, resulting in different patterns from the same original tool. Only much larger quantities of material will allow a comprehensive catalogue to be produced. The size distribution of the ovolos is shown in Figs. 6 and 7. The following points can be noted:

1. Ovolos with three lines were commonest, with occasional examples of ones with four or five.
2. Ovolos with four lines were more common on the imitation Drag. 37 Type 2 than Type 1.
3. Only one size ovolo was used on any one vessel.
4. The ovolos on vases were generally larger than those on bowls.

How the smooth surface was achieved on London ware is not yet certain but it was probably produced by burnishing the pottery, some of which had previously been slipped.

Forms:

The 212 sherds consisted of the following forms:

		<i>Number of sherds</i>	<i>%</i>
Imitation Drag. 37	—	114	53
Straight Sided Bowls	—	21	10
Vases	—	53	25
Plates	—	20	10
Other	—	4	2

Imitation Drag. 37 (=Southwark Form IVEI): (Fig. 5)

Due to the large numbers of this form, type vessels and unusual designs only have been illustrated.

- Type 1 (No. 108) Upper Zone: Rouletted.
Lower Zone: Ovolos above combed verticals.
Total: 26.
- Type 2 (No. 109) Upper Zone: Undecorated.
Lower Zone: Ovolos above combed verticals.
Total: 13.
- Type 3 (No. 110) Upper Zone: Rouletted.
Lower Zone: Combed verticals.
Total: 4.
- Type 4 (No. 111) Upper Zone: Undecorated.
Lower Zone: Combed verticals.
Total: 7.
- Type 5 (No. 112) Upper Zone: Open rouletting.
Lower Zone: All over rouletting.
Total: 3.

Type 6 (No. 113) Upper Zone: Undecorated.
 Lower Zone: All over open rouletting.⁸
 Total: 5.

In addition there were some unusual schemes of decoration represented only once (Nos. 114–117) and three bases (Nos. 118–120). The two omphalos bases are similar to one from Cophthall Close (No. 102).

Straight Sided Bowls: (Fig. 8)

This group includes a number of variants, some of which seem to be imitations of samian forms Drag. 29 (e.g. No. 132), or Drag. 30 (e.g. No. 134), but others tend more strongly towards *terra nigra* originals (such as Hofheim Form 109A). A wide range of decorative combinations occur.

Vases: (Fig. 9)

These have been divided into two forms on the basis of body profile. Type 1 (e.g. No. 135) has a pronounced shoulder whereas Type 2 (e.g. No. 138) lacks a distinction between neck and body. These forms are equivalent to Southwark Forms 11R1 and 11R2 respectively. There are no bases in this group of Bank of England material but several were found on the site in 1926,⁹ which were taken to be from pedestal urns of Belgic origin and used as evidence for pre or early Roman occupation in London. It however seems likely that these bases, described as 'grey ware with smooth black surface', were from London ware vases.¹⁰ It is significant that the distribution of such pedestal bases in London¹¹ shows a marked concentration in the Cophthall Close–Bank of England area. The rims of Nos. 136, 138 and 139 have been reconstructed. Ornamentation on these vases seems to have been restricted to the upper part of the vessel and consists of a variety of decorations.

The origin of Type 1 lies in the Gallo–Belgic vases known from many continental sites e.g. at Nijmegen, Holwerda (1941, Forms 25 and 44) and at Blicquy, De Laet *et al.* (1972, Plate 8, t. 23B, 1; Plate 16, t. 42, 1 etc., dated late first–early second century). Type 2 may be an imitation of samian *lagenae* (Déchelette Form 62).

Plates (=Southwark Form VC1): (Fig. 10, Nos. 141–148)

These are similar in form to continental *terra nigra* types, e.g. at Nijmegen, Holwerda (1941, Forms 77a–d), at Hofheim, Form 97Aa and see also Rigby (1973, Form 21); but these lack the characteristic rouletted decoration of London ware plates.¹²

Carinated Beaker (=Southwark Class 111G): (Fig. 10, No. 149)

This form is represented by only one example and a further sherd from Cophthall Close. The form also originates on the continent (Holwerda, 1941, Form 26, Hofheim Form 113 and Camulodunum Form 120) and is widely copied in Britain during the first century A.D.

Others: (Fig. 10, 150–154)

These include two bowls, two rouletted dishes and a lid. The fabric of one of the dishes (No. 153) is different to the normal London ware.³

(I.3) Discussion

The evidence from the Cophthall Close and the Bank of England strongly suggests kilns in the Walbrook Valley.¹³ The possibility that the pottery is the result of dumping should not be ignored, but it seems unlikely that it was brought far from its place of manufacture. During the early Roman period the Walbrook Valley seems to have been an industrial area and the undeveloped northern part of Roman London would have been ideal for pottery production, despite being only 350m from the basilica and forum.¹⁴ The dating of London ware from Southwark is c. A.D. 90–130 and there is no reason why the City material should be any different.¹⁵ Such a date would also suit the mica-dusted and grey wares. However none of the grey wares have yet been identified in Southwark and closer dating will depend on analysis of groups from the City.

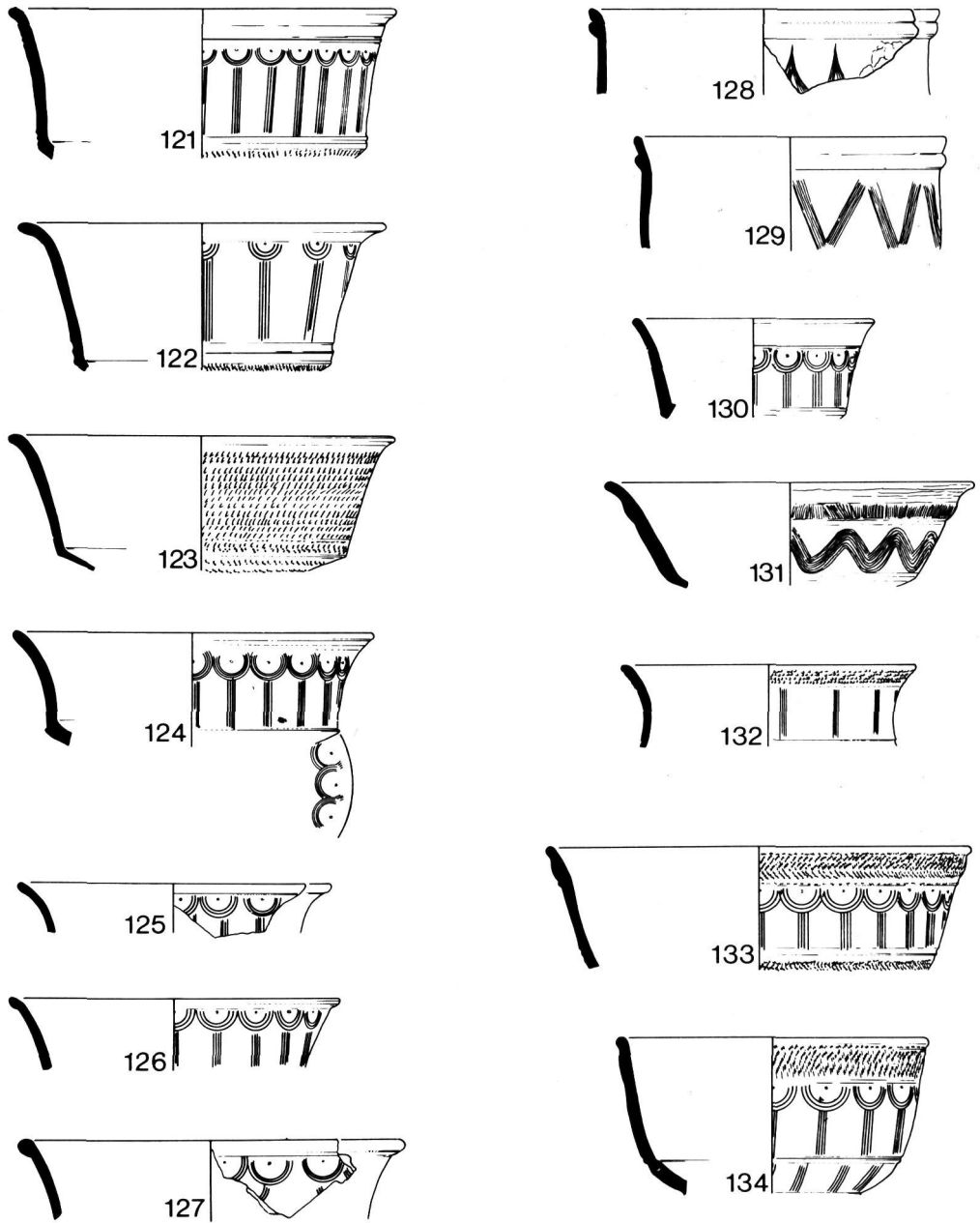


Fig. 8 Bank of England; London ware, 121-134 (¼)

The material from Copthall Close-Bank of England greatly expands the evidence for pottery production in London, which has previously been fragmentary and mostly restricted to the western part of the City (Fig. 1).¹⁶ There is also evidence for samian manufacture later in the second century, supported by the 'Aldgate Waster' and samian moulds recorded from the vicinity of St. Paul's Cathedral.¹⁷ The long suspected samian industry in London can now be seen in the context of earlier fine ware production.

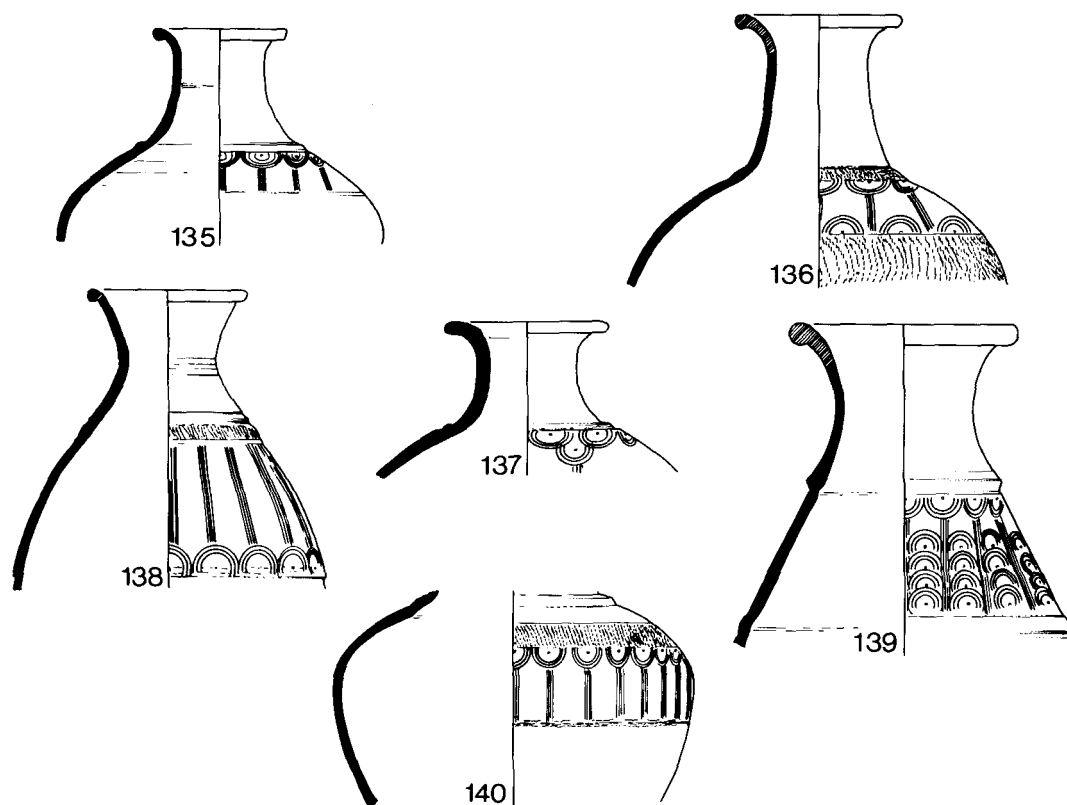


Fig. 9 Bank of England; London ware, 135-140 (¼).

Appendix

A Stamped Sherd from Copthall Close by Dr. Martin Henig

(Fig. 11)

A sherd of micaceous grey ware (No. 31) is stamped on the base with the impression of a signet stone. The use of intaglios in this way is not unique and we may cite a parallel on the base of a Belgic 'egg-shell' beaker from the site of Nos. 55-61 Moorgate Street, in the very near vicinity, Henig (1974, Vol. 2, 103-104, Plate 54, No. 806). The only other example known to me from Britain is the base of another eggshell beaker from Richborough, although a piece of legionary ware from Holt, Denbighshire incorporates a gemstone-sealing as a decorative motif, Henig (1974, Vol. 2, Plate 54, No. 805

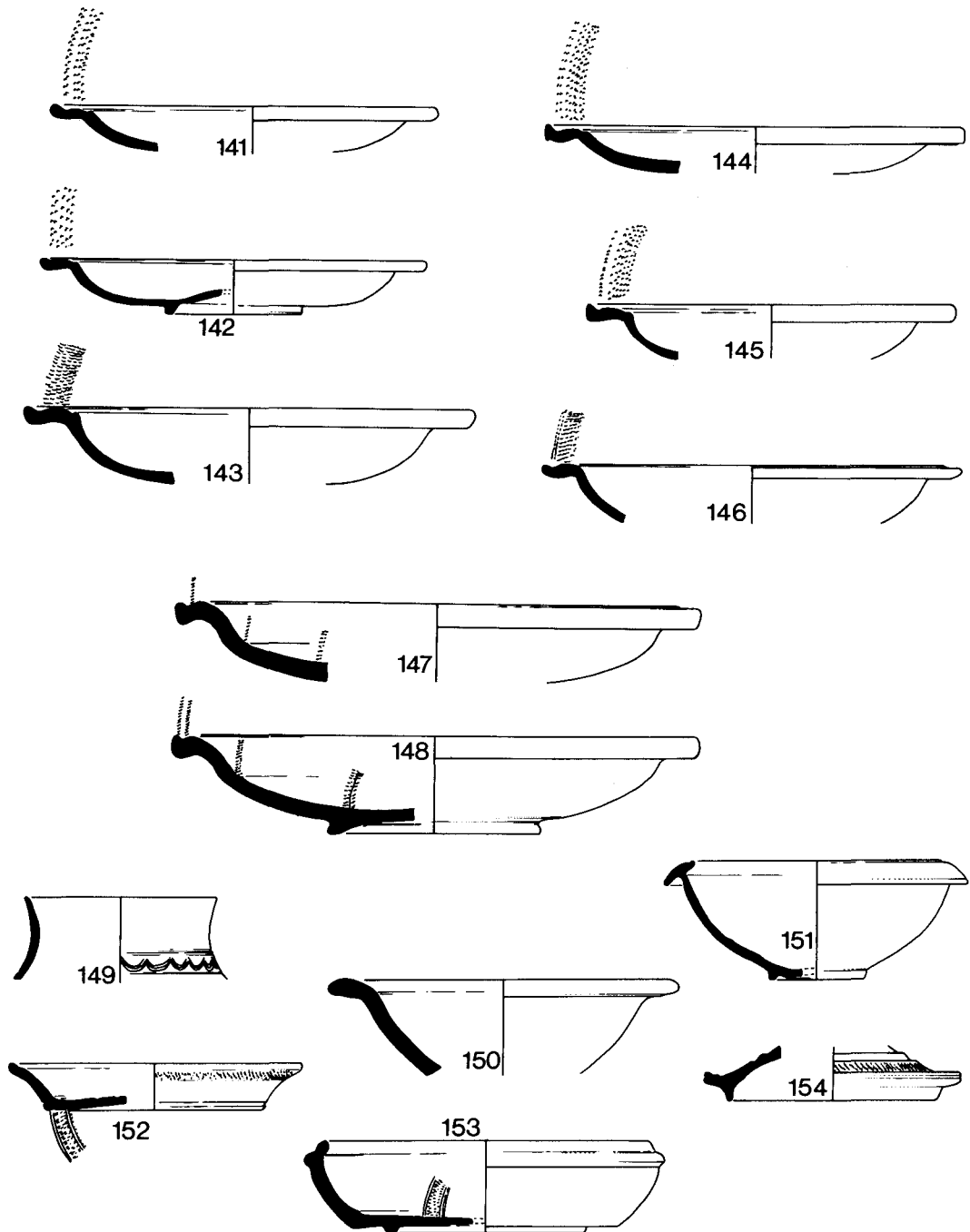


Fig. 10 Bank of England; London ware, 141-152, 154: other, 153 (1/4).

[Richborough], No. 804 [Holt]). Several pots from continental sites are also stamped with a signet, Henig (1974, Vol. 1, 26, refs. cited), also Mócsy (1974, 72, Plate 4b). Our sherd seems to be the first unequivocal evidence of a potter owning a signet-ring, with the suggestion this implies of a certain degree of literacy, although we must bear in mind that intaglios have been found on kiln sites, Henig (1974, Vol. 1, 63).

Unfortunately the clay is coarse and the impression of low quality; moreover, the break in the sherd means that only some two thirds of the device survives. It seems to depict a nude male figure who *may* be holding a mask or severed head in front of his face. Is it Perseus with the head of Medusa? (See Furtwängler [1896, 176–177, Plate 32, No. 4243] for type.)

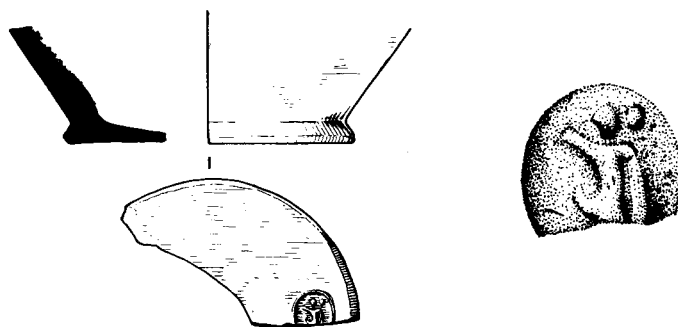


Fig. 11 Copthall Close; stamped grey ware sherd (1/2); detail (2/1).

2. Pre-Flavian Vessels from London

Amongst the early acquisitions of the Museum of London from London are an interesting group of four vessels, distinguished by their unusual form and fabric (Fig. 12, 1–3, 5). A further example in the British Museum also comes from London (Fig. 12, 4).¹⁸ Their precise findspots are unknown, but their undamaged condition suggests that they originally came from graves. The vessels are linked by their exceedingly hard and very granular grey fabric.¹⁹ Despite their coarse fabric, the vessels are well made and the jugs, especially, delicately moulded.

1. Museum of London Acc. No. 2842 (London) small one-handed jug with well defined shoulder. The rim is externally grooved and lid-seated.
2. Museum of London Acc. No. 10458 (Fetter Lane, c. 1894) small one-handed jug with rounded shoulder, decorated with two grooves. Rim as No. 1.
3. Museum of London Acc. No. 419 (Austin Friars, 1889) small beaker with upright rim, grooved externally. Body decorated with two cordons.
4. British Museum Acc. No. p1973, 7–2, 28 (Great St. Helens, 1932) small beaker with cornice rim. Cordon and groove on body.
5. Museum of London Acc. No. 407 (Bishopsgate Street) small squat necked jar with beaded lip. Two coarse girth grooves.

Nos. 1–4 are impossible to parallel in the London area, and elsewhere in Britain only occur on early military sites. Their origins are clearly in the Rhineland where such forms are very common. The one-handed jugs²⁰ can be paralleled by Hofheim Form 89 (Claudian–Neronian), Neuss Form 2 (Tiberio–Claudian) and at Nijmegen, Stuart (1963, Form 213A; A.D. 70–105) and the beakers²¹ by Hofheim Form 85A, Neuss Form 3b and at Nijmegen, Stuart (1963, Form 204A; A.D. 40–80). It is therefore possible that these vessels are imports perhaps even brought over at the conquest in A.D. 43. However, No.

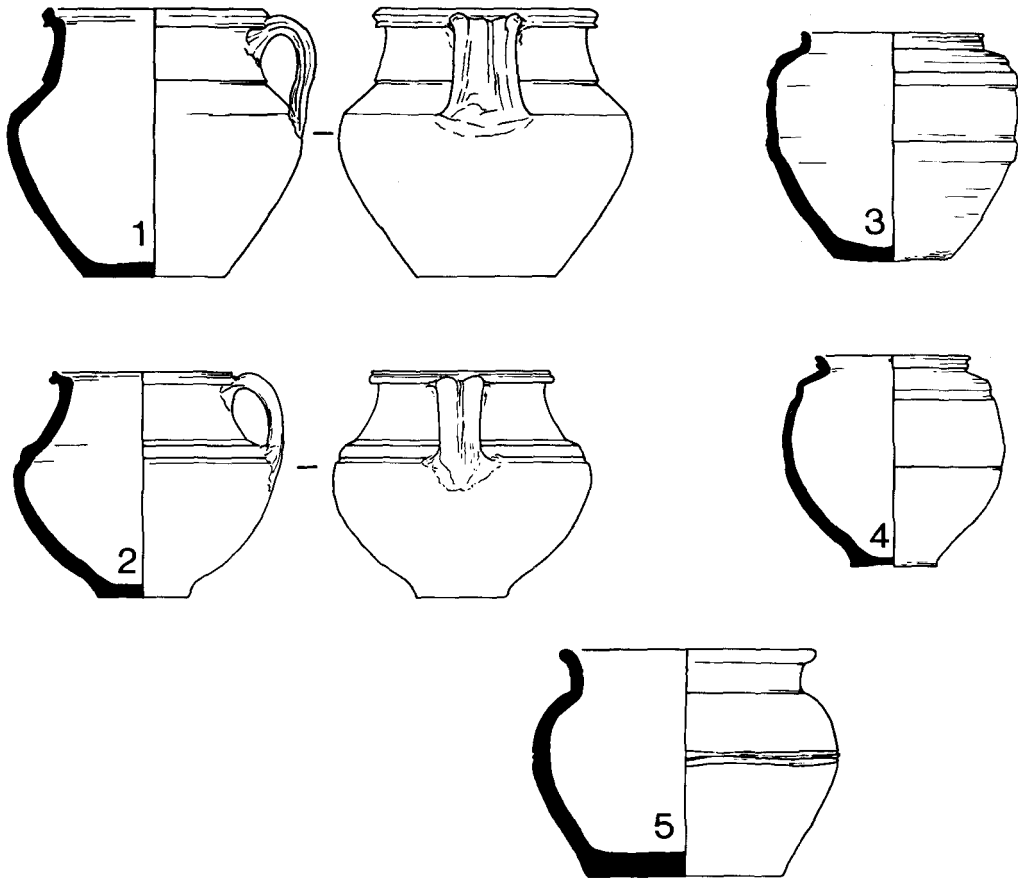


Fig. 12 Pre-Flavian vessels from London, 1–5 (1/3).

5 cannot be directly paralleled on the continent and is more likely to be of Belgic origin, see Swan (1975, Fig. 4, 44 and refs. cited). Continental potters were probably working in the Verulamium region from an early period, Marsh and Tyers (forthcoming), and there is no reason why they should not have worked in the London area as well. Therefore, rather than seeing the vessels as imports, they may be the products of Rhineland potters, associated with the military, working in the vicinity of London.

Whatever their exact origins the vessels are extremely early, probably Claudian, and furnish additional proof of early military activity in London.

NOTES

- ¹ Museum of London Acc. Nos. 14,994/7.
- ² For reports on the discovery, see *J. Roman Stud.* 27 (1937) 241; *Annual Report, Library Committee, Guildhall Library Museum for 1936 (1937)* 14–15 and *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 7 (1937) 669–670.
- ³ See 'Excavations in Southwark, 1972–74', forthcoming. Six mica-dusted sherds from Copthall Close and fifteen sherds from Southwark were analysed. Half of the Southwark sherds fell into two close groups which also included four of the Copthall Close sherds thin sectioned. The composition of the other two Copthall Close sherds indicated that different clays had been used. It is however uncertain how the physical composition of the brickearth changes in London or whether the Roman potters found it suitable for potting at all. The Southwark sherds confirm a late first–early second century date for the Copthall Close material. Eight London ware sherds were thin sectioned, all from vessels of imitation Drag. 37 form (three from Copthall Close, three from the Bank of England and two from Southwark). Six of these fell into one group with two sherds from the Bank of England having a slightly different composition. In addition sherds from two plates (inc. No. 153), whose fabric differed from the London ware and appeared to be closer to *terra nigra* fabrics, were thin sectioned. The results confirmed that they were not closely related to the other sherds analysed.
- ⁴ For Southwark forms, see Marsh and Tyers (forthcoming).
- ⁵ Museum of London Acc. Nos. 14,297–14,305 and 14,863.
- ⁶ Compare especially the decoration on the carinated beaker (No. 149) with that on vases from Blicquy, De Laet *et. al.* (1972, Plate 18, t. 49, 2; Plate 60, t. 212, 2a and Plate 66, t. 228, 1).
- ⁷ A similar motif is known on bone objects, e.g. Frere (1972, Fig. 54, 193) and on shale trenchers, e.g. Biddle (1967, Fig. 6). Three of the latter have been recorded from London, Biddle (1967, appendix, Fig. 10, 11, 19–21).
- ⁸ Compare with a similar bowl from Vindonissa, Ettlinger and Simonett (1952, Taf. 18, 423) where an indigenous La Tène origin is proposed.
- ⁹ See R. C. H. M. (1928, Vol. 3, Fig. 2, 6–8).
- ¹⁰ See Hawkes and Dunning (1931, Fig. 23).
- ¹¹ A London ware vase from Silchester has a base of this form, May (1916, Plate 71, 113).
- ¹² Similar plates with rouletting occur at Chichester but in a different fabric. Information kindly provided by Valery Rigby.
- ¹³ This is supported by finds of 'graphite' coated ware from Founders Court, R. C. H. M. (1928, Vol. 3, 130) and by two complete London ware vases, now in the Museum of London, Home (1926, Plate facing p. 180). There is also a mica-dusted waster in the Museum of London from London, not seen by the writers, but apparently of Drag. 30 form.
- ¹⁴ For evidence of Roman pottery production inside towns, see Wild (1975, 161, footnote 124).
- ¹⁵ London ware was produced at several other sites in southern Britain notably Upchurch, Kent and Ardleigh, Essex.
- ¹⁶ For references, see Marsden (1969) and Marsh and Tyers (forthcoming).
- ¹⁷ See Simpson (1952). The production of the Aldgate-Pulborough potter is currently dated c. A.D. 120–150, Webster (1975, 170). For the moulds, see R. C. H. M., (1928, Vol. 3, 140). Although the kiln discovered at the Paternoster Development Site in 1961 was assumed to produce coarse wares, Marsden (1969), its construction was most unusual. The closest parallels to the published plan are kilns with tubes, Duhamel (1974, Fig. 7C), which were mostly used for firing samian but possibly also mica-dusted wares, e.g. at Gloucester, Rawes (1973).
- ¹⁸ There are four more vessels of similar type from London. They are, a further one-handled jug (Lothbury), a beaker (London), a straight sided beaker with a handle (Southwark) and a simple necked jar (St. George's in the East), all in the Museum of London. It is hoped to publish these in the future as they are unavailable for study at the present. The grouping of several of these pots in the north-eastern part of the City may be significant in relation to the areas of early cemeteries.
- ¹⁹ In appearance the fabric is not dissimilar to late Roman Mayen ware. However, macroscopic examination by Dr. David Peacock indicates that it lacks the volcanic inclusions; quartz being the filler.
- ²⁰ The rim moulding distinguishes these jugs from later varieties of the form, which continue to be produced until the late Roman period.
- ²¹ These beakers are absent from sites on the Germanic Limes, indicating a date prior to c. A.D. 85 for this form.

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