

ROMAN TIMBER LINED WELLS IN THE CITY OF LONDON: FURTHER EXAMPLES

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the course of research into the unpublished records of certain early

workers in the archaeology of the City of London, details of a number of sites in which Roman timber-lined wells had



Fig. 1 Roman wells: Location map of well sites mentioned in the text.

been found were brought to light. On all of these sites the wells were the only elements of the archaeology to have been recorded. These records and excavations do not appear in Merrifield's (1965) gazetteer of Roman London, nor were they available for inclusion in previous notes on wells and water supply (Wilmott, 1982a, 1982b). For this reason a location map is included as Fig. 1.

The first two sites to be noted here were excavated by the late G. C. Dunning. A number of Dunning's unpublished excavation records were recently presented to the Museum of London by Professor W. F. Grimes. Among these notes were references to the well sites, though the relevant texts were missing. The other three sites were recorded in limited detail by Mr Francis Greenway in notes presented to the British Museum together with his collection of antiquities from City sites. I am grateful to Catherine Johns of the British Museum for allowing access to this material.

II. THE SITES

A. 71-74, MARK LANE (Fig. 1a)

An interim report on the site appeared in the *Journal of Roman Studies* (1934, 212) and includes a brief description of the well which demonstrates that it was of jointed box-frame construction. The Guildhall Museum Accessions Register includes the following entries which add substantially to details of the well:

Acc. No. 13206; Two oaken boards 38ins. (0.96m) long, 17½ins. (0.44m) wide, and nearly 2ins. (50mm) thick. One has, at each end, a mortice 6½ × 2ins. (165 × 50mm) and the other has corresponding tenons. They formed part of a Roman well constructed of 12 such boards with its bottom 26ft (7.92m) below the present street level in 1933.

Roman flagon: Ring necked type 11½ins (292mm) high, rim diameter 3½ins (89mm), bulge 7½ins (190mm), base 3ins (76mm). Three reeded handle. Found at the bottom of the same well.

The flagon is now in the Royal Ontario Museum (Acc. No. 939. 9. 88), but has been identified by M. J. Hammerson (Museum of London manuscript

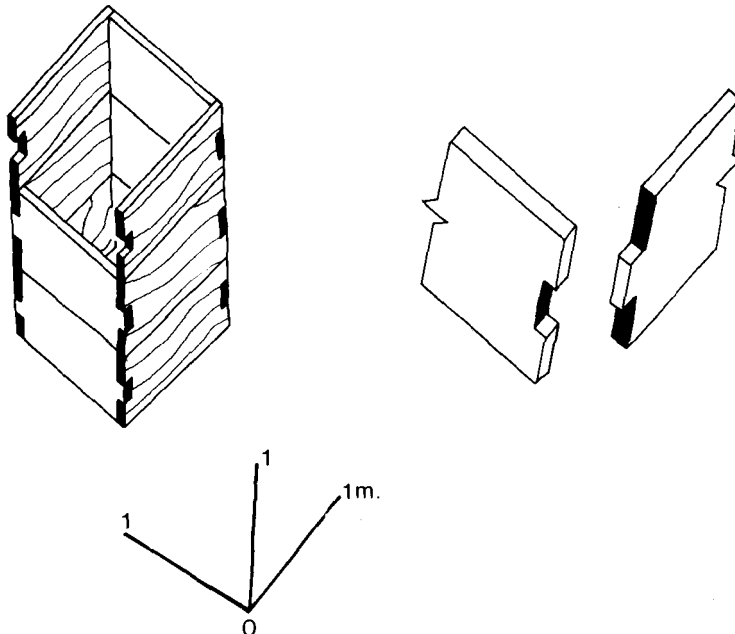


Fig. 2 Roman wells: Reconstruction of well and bridled joints from 71-74 Mark Lane.

notes) as a 1st-2nd century Verulamium Region type (*c.f.* Green, 1980, 49).

The description of the boards makes a reconstruction of the well (Fig. 2a) possible. The corners were jointed with a bridled joint (Fig. 2b). Like other such wells in the City the opposing sides consisted of identically treated boards; two with two mortices each and two with two tenons each. The twelve boards recorded would make up three surviving box-frames. No provision for corner braces on the top edges of the boards was made. The well was therefore of the same construction as that at 33-35, Poultry (Wilmott, 1982a, Fig. 21) and at 8, Union Street, Southwark (Marsh, 1978, 224-5). Both of the last mentioned wells were 2nd-3rd century in date, while the only recorded pottery from Mark Lane was late 1st-2nd century.

The present street level in Mark Lane is +14.20m O.D. and the bottom of the well thus lay at approx. +6.28m O.D. Given three surviving box-frames the surviving depth of the well was 1.32m. The well would have been certain to have penetrated into natural gravel in order to reach ground water. The top of natural brickearth on the adjacent site of 69-70, Mark Lane was +9.60m O.D. (Museum of London manuscript notes). The relative thinness of the brickearth cap here is reflected by the level of +9.45m O.D. at the top of the natural gravel recorded at Mariner House, Crutched Friars, only 100m south of the Mark Lane site (Museum of London notes. These levels are shown on the geological map of London in Marsden, 1980, 16). The levels imply that the well was indeed sunk into the natural gravel.

B. 143-9, FENCHURCH STREET/ 18-20, CULLUM STREET (Fig. 1b).

This well was excavated in 1931 on a site close to that of the Roman forum. Very few records of the well survive. It is described in the Museum of London Accessions Register as a well of 'rectangular form, lined with wooden staves, and was, therefore, probably of box-frame construction. The following pottery was found in its fill.

Verulamium Region Whitewares (Green, 1980, 49: Fig. 3).

1. Flagon (*c.f.* Green, 1980, No. 66). Now in the Museum of Sydney, New South Wales (*The Times*, 29th March, 1938).
2. Flagon with double handle, ring-neck and a squared-off body. Dr. Paul Tyers comments

that this vessel probably dates to the Hadrianic-Antonine period. The squared body is unusual. M.o.L. Acc. No. 12691 (illustrated).

British Mica Dusted Ware (Fig. 3)

3. Flagon of a form imitating a bronze vessel. Dr Paul Tyers comments that this is not the local London mica-dusted fabric, but the vessel probably dates to the Hadrianic-Antonine period. M.o.L. Acc. No. 12692 (illustrated).

Miscellaneous Flagons

Three body sherds of other flagons of indeterminate origin were recorded. M.o.L. Acc. Nos. 12693-5.

South Gaulish Samian ware

Dragendorff 18/31 plate with the Domitianic-Trajanic stamp M. CRESTIO. The stamp is that of Crestio of La Graufesenque (pers. comm. G. Marsh). M.o.L. Acc. No. 12696.

C. ALDERMARY HOUSE, WATLING STREET/QUEEN STREET (Fig. 1c)

A full report on this site has appeared in a previous volume of these *Transactions* (Wilmott, 1982a). This report included details of 18 Roman wells found here, and on the adjacent site of Lloyds Bank International. Two wells were recorded by Greenway on the western edge of the site, bringing the total of wells on both sites to 20. All the levels below are estimated from those below street level given by Greenway.

Both wells were lined with barrels, one to each well. Only one of the two wells were examined. This was defined at a level of *c.* +8.15m O.D. in a 1st century 'occupational level', and the bottom of the well penetrated natural gravel, lying at *c.* +6.60m O.D. The barrel-well clearly did not penetrate London Clay, the highest level of which on the site was +5.23m O.D. (Wilmott, 1982a, 3-4).

All pottery recovered from the well is reported to have been of 1st century date. This is consistent with the date derived from pottery analysis for all other barrel wells so far excavated from Roman contexts in London (Wilmott, 1982a, 23, 47-8).

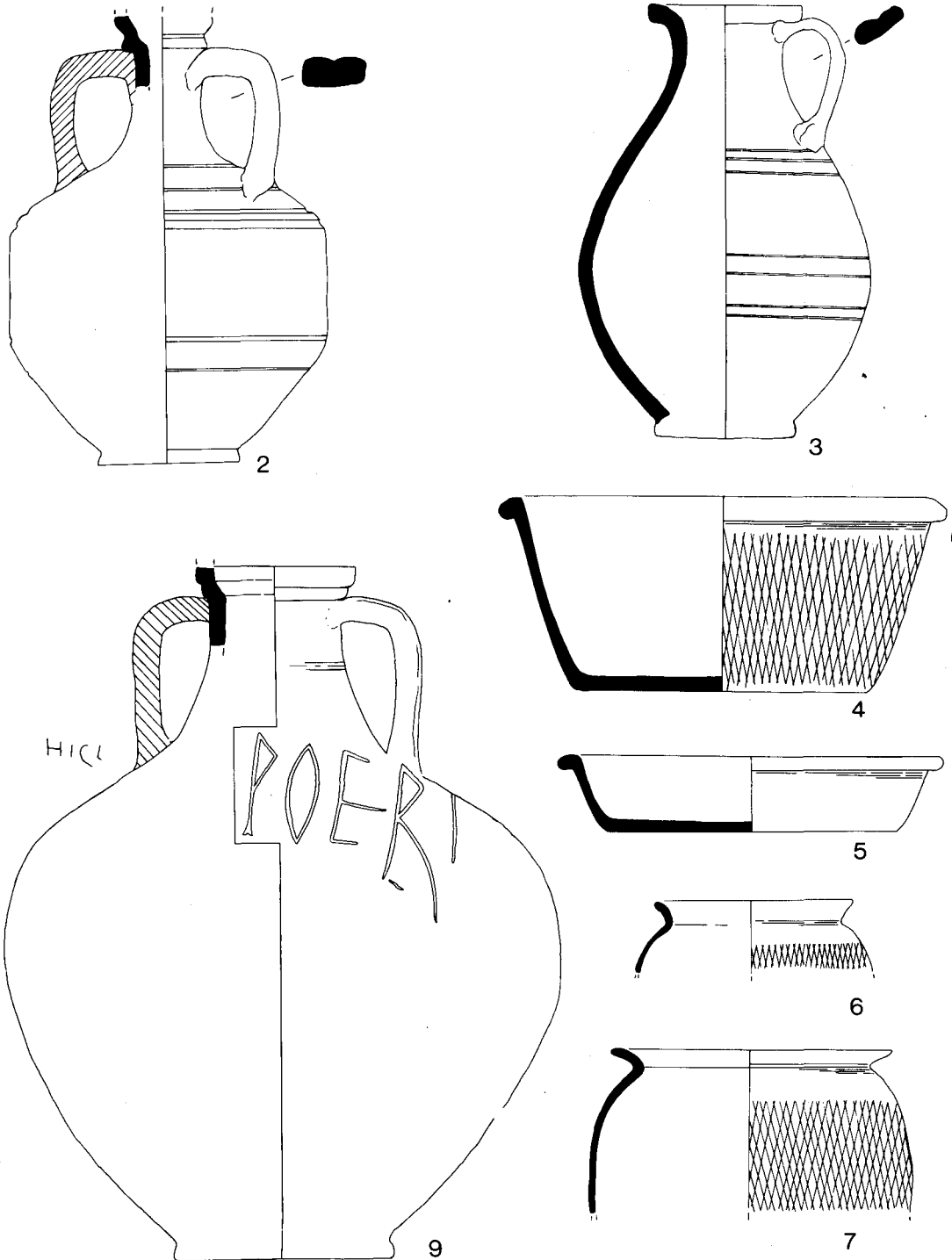


Fig. 3 Roman wells: Pottery from the wells at Fenchurch Street (2-3), Moorfields (4-7) and Whitechapel (9) (4).

Fragments of two stamped barrel staves were recovered from the well, and are preserved in the British Museum (Acc. Nos. 1961, 5-9, I-2). One was stamped twice on the inner face with the letters FVSC MAC. The other was stamped twice, saltirewise across the vent hole, Q. VET[TI] CATULLI giving the name of the cooper or the merchant whose goods were being transported in the barrels as Q. Vettius Catullus. Also upon this stave was the figure X which had been scored by the bung hole to indicate to the cooper the sequence of staves to be used in raising the barrel (*Journal of Roman Studies*, 1961, 195-96).

D. MOORFIELDS (Fig. 1d)

Greenway does not accurately locate this well. His sketch shows it to have been of box-frame construction and he mentions that the frames were jointed. The bottom of the well was lined with chalk, and the lower frames were held in place with oak branches which were neither dressed nor squared (*c.f.* Wilmott, 1982a, Well 24, Fig. 18). The filling of the well comprised a deposit of clay 1.52m deep with black mud 3.05m deep lying above it. A number of finds were recovered from this well. Most of these are now lost, including woodwork, an iron rod and a complete flagon. The rest of the objects are in the British Museum.

Pottery

Black burnished ware I (see Farrar, 1973; Williams, 1977)

4-7. Two cooking pots, a bowl and a dish, all of mid-second century date. (illustrated).

Metal

Greenway refers to two iron hooks which lay at the bottom of his well in association with the object described below.

8. Pewter or other lead alloy flagon. The vessel is 240mm in height and is in poor condition, as it has been crushed flat and cracked on one side. It has not been turned, but may have

been lathe spun, the three small zones of linear decoration suggesting that some lathe work was done. The rim has a wide, sunken disc around the lip. The vessel has a thick strap handle, rising from a leaf shaped handle escutcheon on the side of the wide part of the body. The handle is slightly curved, turning to meet the rim in a virtual right-angle, level with the top of the flagon. The handle is wider at this point and is splayed to meet the neck. This wide splay is relieved by the carving of a deep scallop on each side of the handle.

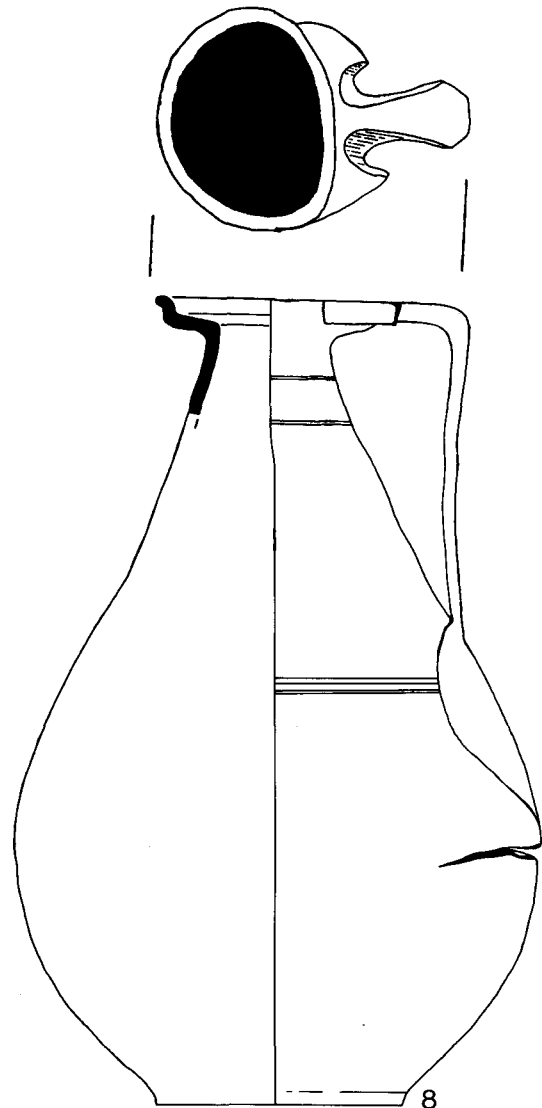


Fig. 4 Roman Wells: Pewter flagon from the Moorfields well ($\frac{1}{2}$).

The Romano-British pewter industry has been discussed by Peal (1967) and Jones (1983). Though no metallic analysis has been undertaken on this object as advocated by Jones (1983), it seems possible that it is a product of the late Roman pewter industry in Britain (Peal, 1967, 22). The only parallels in form to this flagon are 4th century bronze examples, a particularly close parallel coming from Hauxton (Cambs) (Eggers, 1966, 139). British Museum Acc. No. 1959, 5-3. I (illustrated).

Wood

Greenway records the discovery of a bucket or barrel, and of a wooden post. The latter is of interest as it seems possible that it may have formed part of the mechanism at the well-head. Greenway's sketch makes the object impossible to reconstruct in terms of scale. It shows a square-sectioned piece of wood tapering to a narrower, round-sectioned stem. There were projections on all four faces and also on the end of the object.

E. WHITECHAPEL (Aldgate).

The well here is not precisely located. It was constructed of one large, complete barrel, 2.18m in height with a further halved barrel placed beneath it. One of the staves in the complete barrel was branded with three separate marks. At the top were the letters MCS, in the centre T. SENBON, and at the base AVITI.

The significance of this multiple stamping is obscure (*Journal of Roman Studies*, 1961, 195-96). Only one find survived from this well.

Verulamium region Whitewares (Green, 1980, 49).

9. Large, bulbous flagon, originally having two handles. The vessel is incised on the body with the word POERI. Catherine Johns and the writer have noticed a further, possibly stamped inscription HICL beneath the surviving handle. British Museum loan from Mr F. Greenway, 1960 (illustrated).

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