

EXCAVATIONS AT BUCKLE STREET / LEMAN STREET

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SUMMARY

Excavations at 24–26 Buckle Street and 19 Leman Street, London E1 revealed a small amount of Roman and post-Roman ceramic material. However, a shallow feature cut into the brickearth contained Neolithic Peterborough Ware sherds, which although not uncommon in the London area, are unusual as they are from east London; the majority of Peterborough Ware findspots are in the west and south-west of the London area.

INTRODUCTION

Between April and October 2003, an archaeological evaluation and watching-brief was carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) on the site of 24–26 Buckle Street and 19 Leman Street, London E1, site code LEB03 (Miles 2003). The work was funded by Gilmac Building Services Limited and took place prior to the redevelopment of the site. The site is bounded by Leman Street to the west, Buckle Street to the north, and buildings to the east and south, including the St George's German Lutheran Church (Fig 1). The centre of the site is at OS National Grid Reference TQ 33974 81252. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is *c.*13.40m OD.

THE POTTERY

Three sherds belonging to the rim and shoulder of a decorated Peterborough Ware vessel of Fengate type (Fig 2) were recovered from a shallow feature cut into the brickearth, context [24], which also contained some fragments of medieval or post-medieval bell mould. The sherds are made from a hard fabric with a dense

matrix with naturally occurring very fine to fine quartz or mica. The fabric is tempered with sparse to moderate, ill-sorted, very coarse (up to 5mm), crushed calcinated flint and sparse, very coarse (up to 6mm), 'pink' unburnt flint, and it also contains sparse, very coarse, sub-rounded (organic?) voids and very rare, medium rounded, metallic red inclusions. The matrix has a tendency towards a laminar fracture, a feature common to Peterborough Ware, and the use of flint and limited sand inclusions are also typical of this type of pottery (Woodward 2002, 107).

The collar is decorated with panels containing diagonal and vertical grooves; the internally bevelled rim has herringbone incisions on the top and also has possible horizontal grooves on the interior, below the bevel. The cavetto area has one clear, deep impression which has been made with a fingertip and the crescent of the fingernail can be seen at the bottom of the hole. There are also traces of two further impressions on the break of the sherds, suggesting that there was a horizontal band of fingertip impressions. Recent research, involving taking casts of the deep impressions on three vessels of Peterborough Ware recovered from the Thames, demonstrated that in these instances the impressions were variously made by slender fingertips, whittled sticks or twigs (Cotton & Johnson 2004, 128). Following this research, a cast of this fingertip impression was taken by Liz Goodman, MoLAS conservator, using addition-type silicone-based impression material (see *ibid.*, 147 for methodology followed). The resulting cast clearly shows a fingertip impression, complete with a short fingernail, a contrast to the longer fingernails on the casts taken as part of Cotton and Johnson's research (2004, fig 15.3).

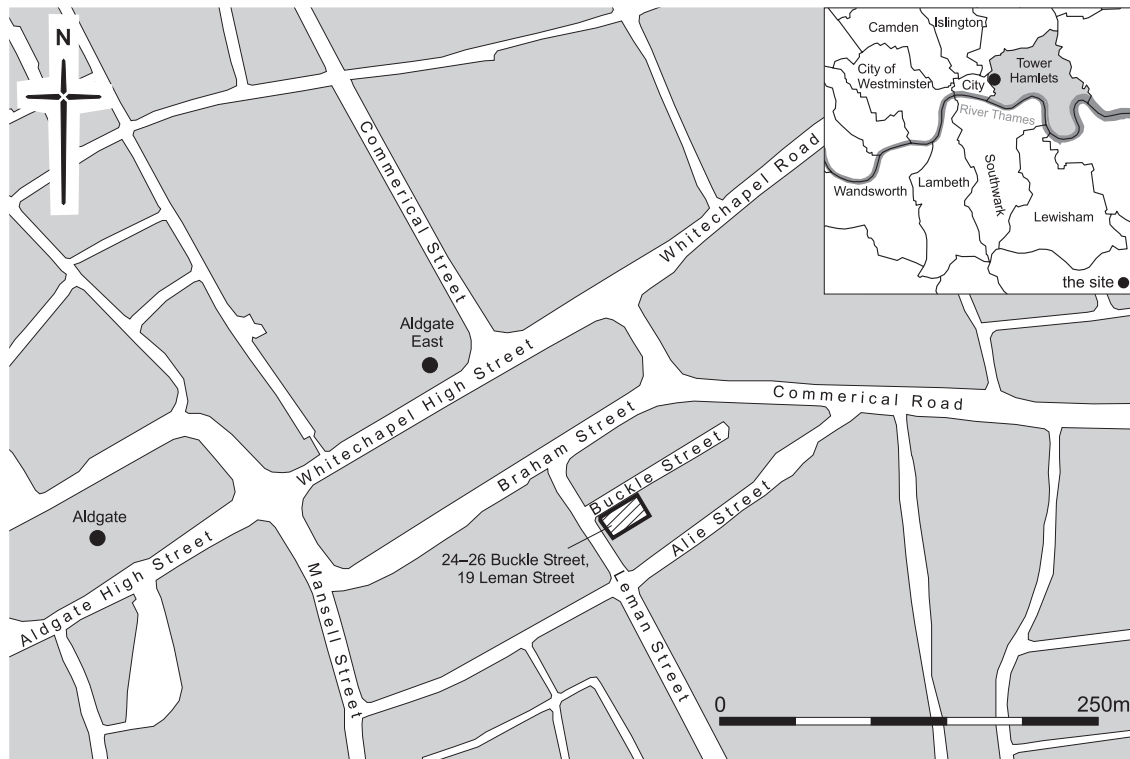


Fig 1. Location of the site (scale 1:5000)

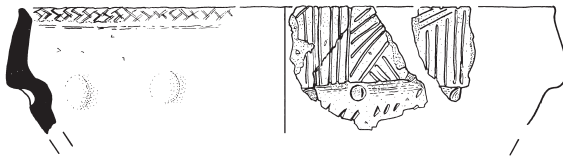


Fig 2. Peterborough Ware sherds from context [24] (scale 1:4)

Only a small part of the body of the vessel remains but from this it is clear that it was decorated with a row of oblique, relatively shallow fingernail impressions. The decorative schemes used and the form of the vessel fall into the categories of Peterborough Ware set out by Smith (1974).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Peterborough Ware is part of the pan-British and Irish ‘impressed ware’ phenomenon, which appears shortly before 3300 BC (Gibson 2002, 81–2). Recent re-evaluation of the radiocarbon dates available for Peterborough Ware pottery indicates that all three of the Peterborough

Ware types — Ebbsfleet, Mortlake and Fengate — were fully developed by 3000 BC, and that the ware was ‘no longer in vogue’ by the middle of the third millennium (*ibid*, 80).

The general pattern for the Thames Valley is that Peterborough Ware has been recovered from pits, middens, monumental ditches, burials, and watery deposits (Barclay 2002, 85). In the London region most of the Peterborough Ware has come from pits (49 instances), and the next most common depositional context is a river channel or foreshore (16 instances) (Cotton & Johnson 2004, 145). It is of note that in the London area the vast majority of the complete and semi-complete vessels come from the Thames (*ibid*, 145). As the shallow feature at the site that contained the Peterborough Ware also contained some medieval or post-medieval material, the significance of the depositional context is unclear.

The site is less than 1km to the east of the City boundary, and so this vessel should be viewed in the light of recent work undertaken on the City’s prehistory as well as on Neolithic pottery in the London area. It has been noted that few

prehistoric finds have been recovered in the City of London and its immediate surrounding area, although a recent review of the evidence suggests that more than was previously acknowledged has been found (Holder & Jamieson 2003). As part of their survey, Holder and Jamieson plotted the findspots of material from different periods of prehistory within the area of the modern City of London, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, Neolithic pottery is poorly represented. Whether this is due to lack of activity or lack of preservation is debatable (see Holder & Jamieson 2003 for discussion), but this dearth of Neolithic pottery is also borne out in Cotton and Johnson's survey of Peterborough Ware in the London region as a whole (Cotton & Johnson 2004). Their work establishes that the Peterborough Ware found in the London region is unevenly distributed, with the south and the south-west of the London area being well represented, and the north and east of the London area being less so (*ibid.*, 134). Indeed, the closest findspots of Peterborough Ware are small sherds from Plantation Place (site code FER97) and Blossom's Inn (site code GHT00; Thompson 2004). In both of these cases the sherds are very small, and in the case of the Plantation Place material, it is not certain that they are Peterborough Ware, although they are almost certainly Neolithic in date. The nearest certain Peterborough Ware sherds are from Lefevre Walk Estate in Bow (Maloney & Holroyd 1999, 27), and there are further sherds in Walthamstow, Barking, and the Royal Dock's Community School (Cotton & Johnson 2004, 142).

Therefore, this discovery of a fragmentary Peterborough Ware vessel from 24–26 Buckle Street and 19 Leman Street is an important contribution to our knowledge of this type of pottery in the London area, which is currently dominated by vessels recovered from the river and from south and south-west London.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the work of all those involved in the project. The post-excavation work was generously funded by Gilmac Building Services Limited and Nick Truckle of English Heritage monitored the site and provided advice and support. The MoLAS project manager was Dave Lakin and the MoLAS senior archaeologists were Jon Sygrave and Adrian Miles.

Thanks are also due to Jon Cotton, Curator (Prehistory), Museum of London, who very kindly read and commented on drafts of this paper. Gabby Rapson of MoLAS drew the vessel and the site plan was prepared by Ken Lymer of MoLAS. Liz Goodman, Conservator at MoLAS, and Karen Lovén, a UCL MSc student, prepared the cast of the fingertip impression.

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