

Fig. 1: Location of Peninsular House site and other recent excavations. (1) Miles Lane; (2) Billingsgate Buildings; (3) Billingsgate Bath-house; (4) Seal House; (5) New Fresh Wharf.

Saxon Botolph Lane

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IN 1973 MARTIN BIDDLE complained that "the evolution of London's street plan in the early middle ages has never received the attention it deserves"¹. He argued that the street pattern of medieval London was essentially complete by the 12th century, and that it was possible to suggest that it was the product of an Alfredian initiative though conclusive evidence for this was lacking². Excavations by the

Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology have subsequently examined the growth of the City's street grid on a number of occasions³, and this report summarises the evidence for the development of the Botolph Lane area in the Saxon period.

The archaeological excavation of the Peninsular House site was conducted in advance of its im-

1 M. Biddle et al, *The Future of London's Past* (1973) 4.36.

2 *Ibid.*, 4.41.

3 See for example S. Roskams & J. Schofield, "The Milk Street Excavation: Part Two", *London Archaeol.* 3, No. 9 (1978) 230.

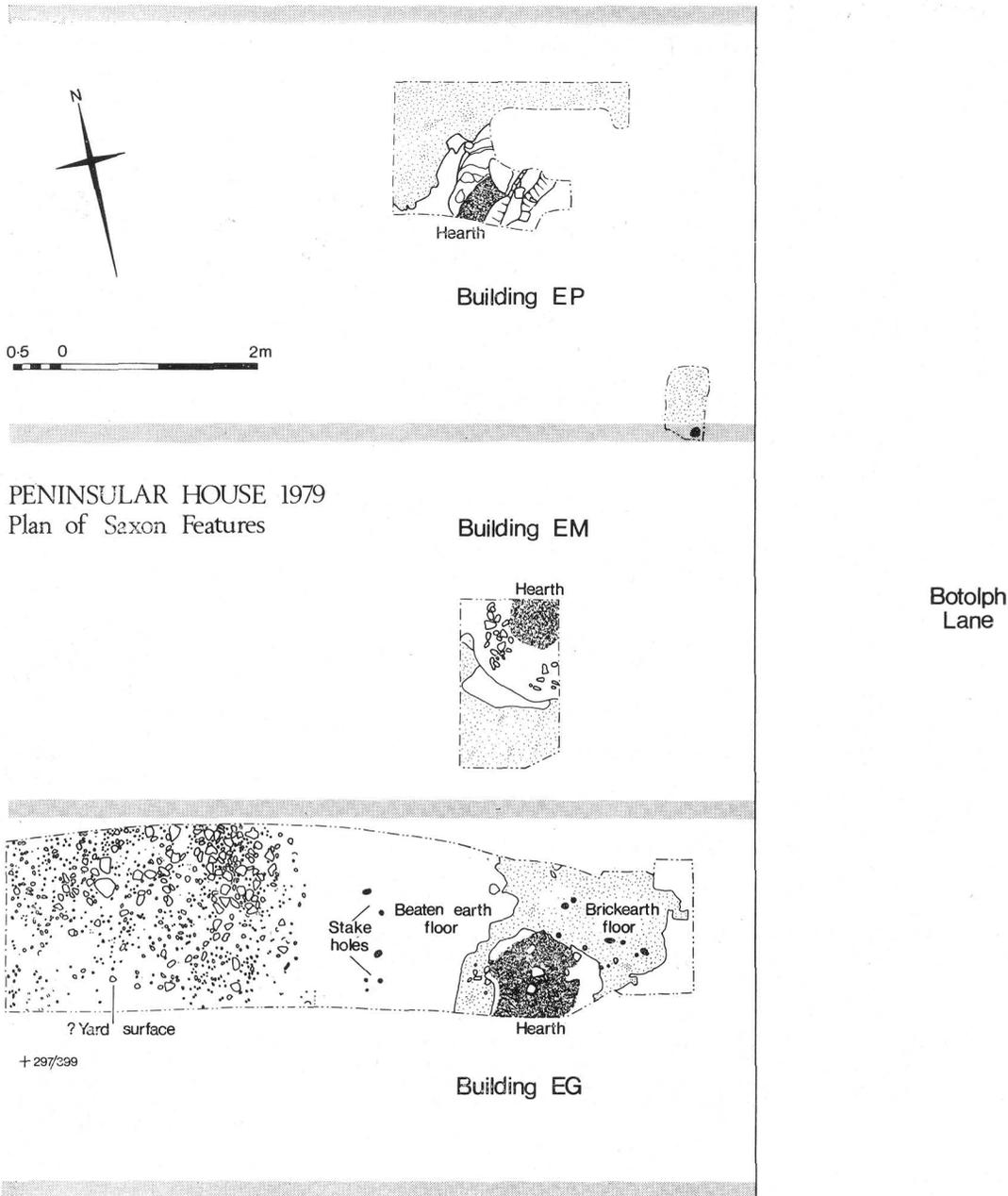


Fig. 2: Plan of 9th-10th century buildings in Area E fronting Botolph Lane with conjectured property divisions shown tinted.

minent redevelopment from October 1979 to the end of February 1980, and was generously funded by the developers, Vitaglade Ltd., and Verronworth Ltd. It provided an opportunity to examine the devel-

opment of the area just north of the Roman and Saxon waterfront site at New Fresh Wharf⁴ (Fig. 1), and south of the market at Eastcheap. In particular it was hoped that dating evidence for the laying out

4 J. Schofield & L. Miller, "New Fresh Wharf: 1, The Roman Waterfront", *London Archaeol*, 2, No. 15 (1976) 390-95; L. Miller, "New Fresh Wharf: 2, The

Saxon and Early Medieval waterfront", *London Archaeol*, 3, No. 2 (1977) 47-53.



Fig. 3: Section across Botolph Lane (A), showing earliest street surface (B) overlying dump (C), and laid at same height as internal Saxon floors (D). 10 x 100mm scale. See Fig. 10.

of the two streets which formed the eastern and western boundaries of the site, Botolph Lane and Pudding Lane, would be recovered. A trench was therefore opened up parallel to each lane to facilitate the excavation of the buildings associated with these streets, and sections across Botolph Lane itself were examined. The work on the western side of the site near Pudding Lane (Areas A, B, C, D) revealed a 1st century timber quay, Roman masonry buildings, medieval pits and the basement of a building destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666⁵. However, little direct evidence for the laying out of Pudding Lane was recovered. By contrast in Area E to the east, limited excavation by three persons in nine weeks revealed evidence of superimposed buildings of mid to late Saxon date overlying the same type of dumped deposits as were sealed beneath the earliest metalling of Botolph Lane. Although the site was disturbed by modern foundations and drain trenches, the internal floor of Saxon buildings survived on three areas shown on Fig. 2. The earliest buildings overlay grey humic sandy silt up to 0.4m thick (c. 1ft 4in). Pottery recovered from the lowest levels of these deposits has been provisionally dated as Middle Saxon (c. 650-c. 850). However, the pottery from the upper levels was invariably

Roman, suggesting that the deposit was a dump of redeposited material rather than the result of a gradual accumulation of rubbish *in situ* or a developing turf line. (It was not possible to be certain of the nature of the features sealed beneath the dumps, as their excavation was not completed, but surfaces of the type found above the dumps were definitely not present below them.) The upper surface had been levelled and rammed firm, and onto this the beaten earth and brickearth spreads interpreted as internal floors were laid. They were associated with the remains of domestic hearths and ovens laid on prepared bases, and some had walls strengthened with wattlework (Figs. 4-7). If there is any truth in the popular legend concerning King Alfred's culinary catastrophe, then it would have been in ovens such as these that his cakes would have been burnt.

The buildings (in this report, a building = a sequence of internal floors) were separated from each other by horizons thought to represent destruction levels, major rebuilding or phases of external activity. Fourteen Saxon buildings were identified,

⁵ These features will be discussed elsewhere. The Pen 79 archive report may be consulted at the DUA offices.

PENINSULAR HOUSE 1979

Saxon Hearths

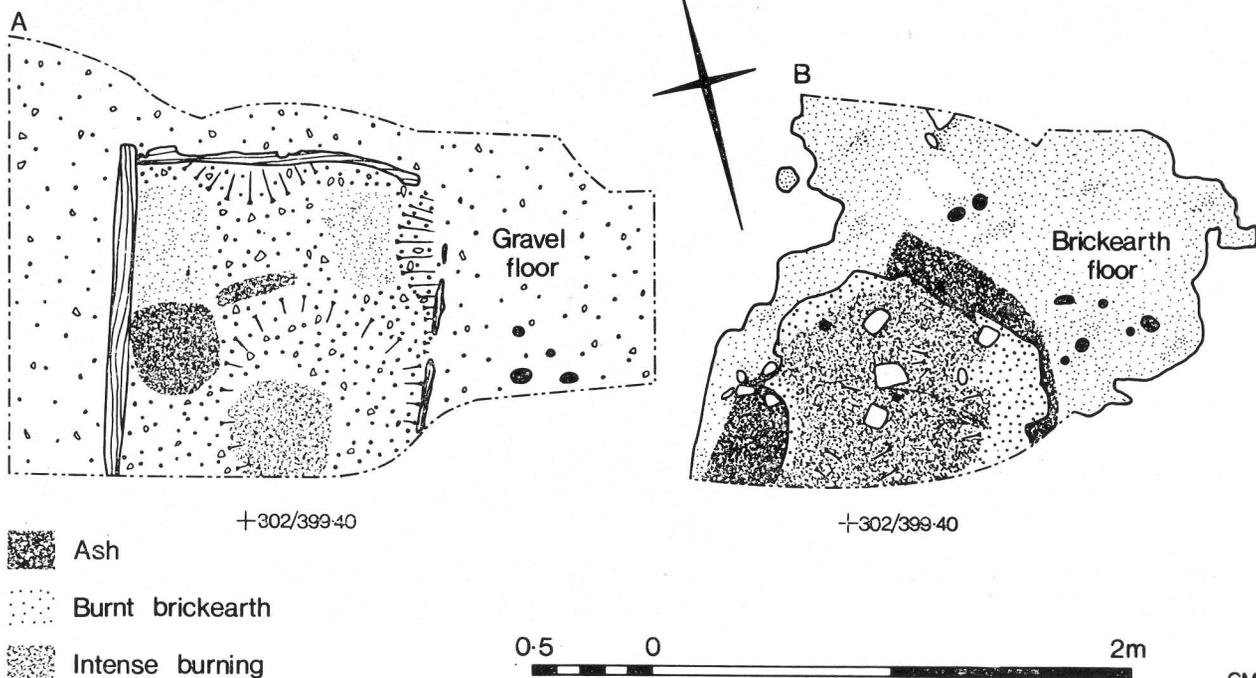


Fig. 4: 9th-10th century hearths or ovens in Area E. (A) Building EF: see Fig. 5. (B) Building EG: see Figs. 6 & 7.



Fig. 5: 9th-10th century hearth or oven on revetted gravel base, from Area E, Building EF. 10 x 10mm scale. See Fig. 4a.

two superimposed in the northern area, five in the central and seven in the southern area (Fig. 2). Of these, six were apparently destroyed by fire. The sequences on all these areas are different, suggesting that three separate building plots fronting Botolph Lane are represented, rather than a multi-roomed building parallel to it. The floors showed considerable evidence of wear, repair and replacement, as did the ovens and hearths. With one exception, the latter were replaced in the same position on the floor after every major phase of rebuilding. This suggests continuous occupation on clearly established building plots. On the three areas excavated the hearths were c. 4m apart (13ft), and this measurement may reflect the width of the associated buildings. The three "property plots" thus conjectured are shown on Fig. 2. If this assumption is correct, then the "properties" are smaller than the majority of Saxon buildings known from recent urban excavations although similar to some found in Saddler

Street, Durham⁶. However, this assessment must be viewed with considerable caution as the size of the area excavated was so small.

The stake holes such as those from Buildings EG (Fig. 2) and the large fragments of burnt daub with wattle impressions clearly visible in the destruction levels of Building EO show that the superstructure of at least some of the buildings incorporated wattle and daub walling. The absence of roof tile fragments in any of the make-up levels suggests that a perishable material such as thatch would have been used for roofing: such a suggestion is quite consistent with the number of fires which beset the street. Major accidental fires in the City are recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 798, 801 and 962, while marauding Danes may have been responsible for others during their raids in 842 and 982 for example⁷. If it were possible, the identification in the field of these specific fire levels would obviously be

6 M. Carver, "Three Saxo-Norman tenements in Durham City", *Med. Archaeol.*, 23, (1979) 9-11.

7 G. N. Garmonsway (ed), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ((1954).



Fig. 6: Base of 9th-10th century oven showing rubble-packed (?) heat reservoir, from Area E, Building EG. 2 x 100mm scale.



Fig. 7: Levelled remains of 9th-10th century oven. Note stake holes for wattle supported wall. Area E, Building EG. 2 x 100mm scale. See Figs. 4b, 5.

a useful method of checking the pottery dating. The Peninsular House site produced one of the best sequences of stratified Saxon pottery yet found in the City, but close dating of this material is not at present possible. However, a provisional assessment suggests that the pottery associated with the earlier phases of building (which included several sherds of Ipswich ware) is pre-Alfredian, while that from the later buildings is possibly 10th century.

The Saxon Street

Three sections across Botolph Lane were examined. One was cut during the period of controlled excavation (Fig. 3), and two during the monitoring of the contractor's subsequent work⁸. The deposits in the centre of the street had been destroyed by the insertion of a 19th century brick sewer, and the earlier metalling of Botolph Lane only survived bet-

ween the sewer and the basement walls (Figs. 9, 10). Nevertheless, comparison of all three sections revealed many common features, although they were up to 14m (c. 45ft) apart. Overlying the grey silts were deposits of compacted gravels, stones or cobbles forming external surfaces. Their position, nature and extent suggested that they were part of a series of street metallings rather than yard surfaces. They formed an obvious contrast with the internal brick-earth and beaten earth floors c. 2m to the west, demonstrating that the eastern wall of the Saxon buildings must have lain on the same general alignment as the 19th century building line (Figs. 9 & 10).

If it is assumed that the vertical development of the street surfaces is directly related to the vertical development of the buildings which apparently fronted the street, then the first metre of street surfacing could all be pre-13th century, although no dating material was recovered from the road itself. The lower of these early surfaces incorporated a higher proportion of ragstone and tegulae fragments than the upper surfaces, in which a corresponding increase in the use of large waterworn flint cobbles was recorded. This perhaps suggests that material from derelict Roman buildings was initially utilised. When the source was exhausted, cobbles from the coast were used for metalling as was the case with the streets of Alfredian Winchester⁹. Layers of grey silt c. 100mm (4ins) thick representing an accumulation of mud or rubbish overlay two of the earliest surfaces, but did not seal the later more compacted

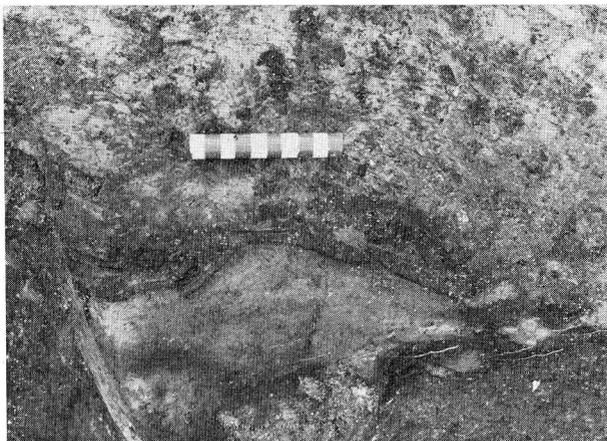


Fig. 8: Details of burnt wattlework supporting 9th (?) century oven wall. Area E, Building EO. 10 x 10 mm scale.

⁸ The willing co-operation of the McAlpine's staff in allowing us access to the site was much appreciated, as was their obvious interest in our work.

⁹ M. Biddle, *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*: Winchester Studies I (1976) 450. We are indebted to Tony Dyson for this reference.

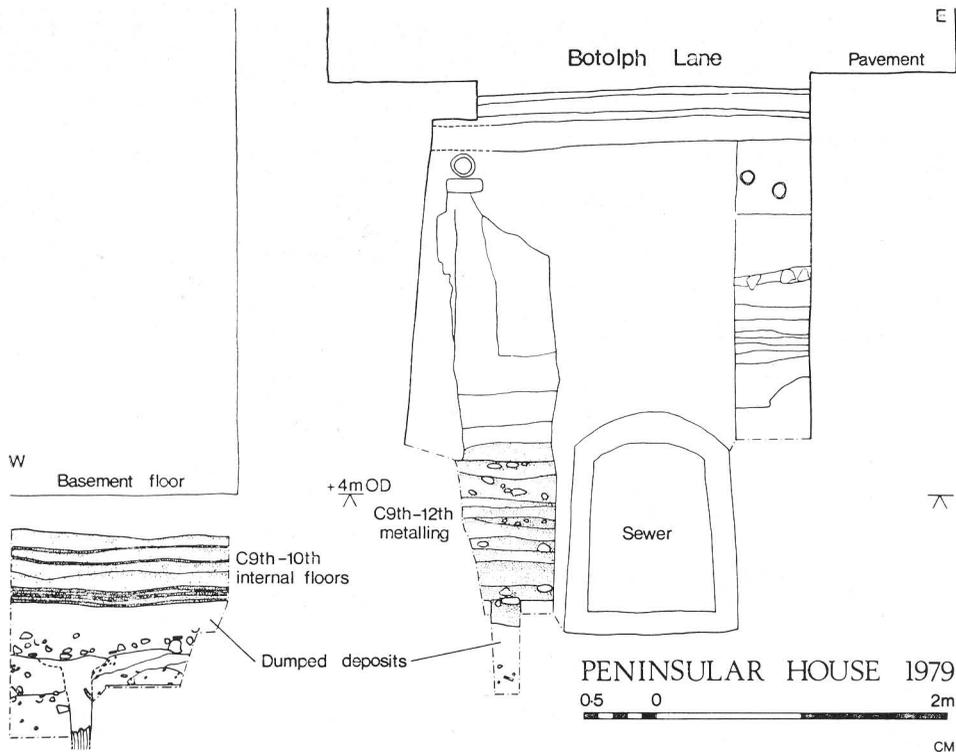


Fig. 9: Composite section showing relationship of Saxon Buildings EA to EH to earliest surfacing of Botolph Lane.

metallings, indicating that the later surfaces were better prepared and maintained than their fore-runners.

At least three of the more readily distinguishable surfaces were identified on sections some 14m (45ft) apart: this suggests that the street was surfaced as a whole (perhaps by a "civic authority"?) rather than in a piecemeal fashion by the owners of property fronting the lane. It was also possible to show that the gradient of Botolph Lane had not changed since its inception.

Although the width of the Saxon street was not established conclusively, it is clear that its western edge must have lain approximately below the modern building line, demonstrating that the western side of the lane had not diverged significantly from its original alignment. However, John Leake's map records that the lane was 14ft (c. 4.3m) wide in 1666, the same width - building line to building-line - as it was in 1979. It is therefore possible that the 9th century street may have had a similar width.

The excavation thus produced a well-stratified

sequence of Saxon deposits representing continuous domestic occupation next to Botolph Lane. The Lane itself may have been laid out at the same time as the buildings. This has implications for the dating of the rest of the street grid south of Eastcheap, suggesting that the area may have been intensively developed before the Alfredian date recently proposed by Tony Dyson for the laying out of the streets near Queenhithe¹⁰. However, it must be stressed that the dating is based solely on an assessment of the pottery evidence, and this is the subject of continuing research. Nevertheless, the excavations certainly provided a much earlier date for Botolph Lane than the earliest surviving documentary reference of 1348-9¹¹. Given that St. Botolph's church is unlikely to have been built before the 10th century, as the ground on which it stood does not seem to have been reclaimed until then¹², the lane must therefore antedate the church after which it was later named.

Acknowledgements

This article was principally based on the PEN 79

lished before the Alfredian restoration of London in the late 9th century. (*pers comm*).

10 T. Dyson, "Two Saxon Land Grants for Queenhithe" in J. Bird, H. Chapman & J. Clark (eds), *Collectanea Londiniensia* (1978) 214-5. According to D. Perring, recent work at 6-8 Bow Lane may suggest that the street grid of which Bow Lane is part was also estab-

11 E. Ekwall, "Street-names of the City of London" (1954) 160.

12 L. Miller, *Op cit* in Note 4.

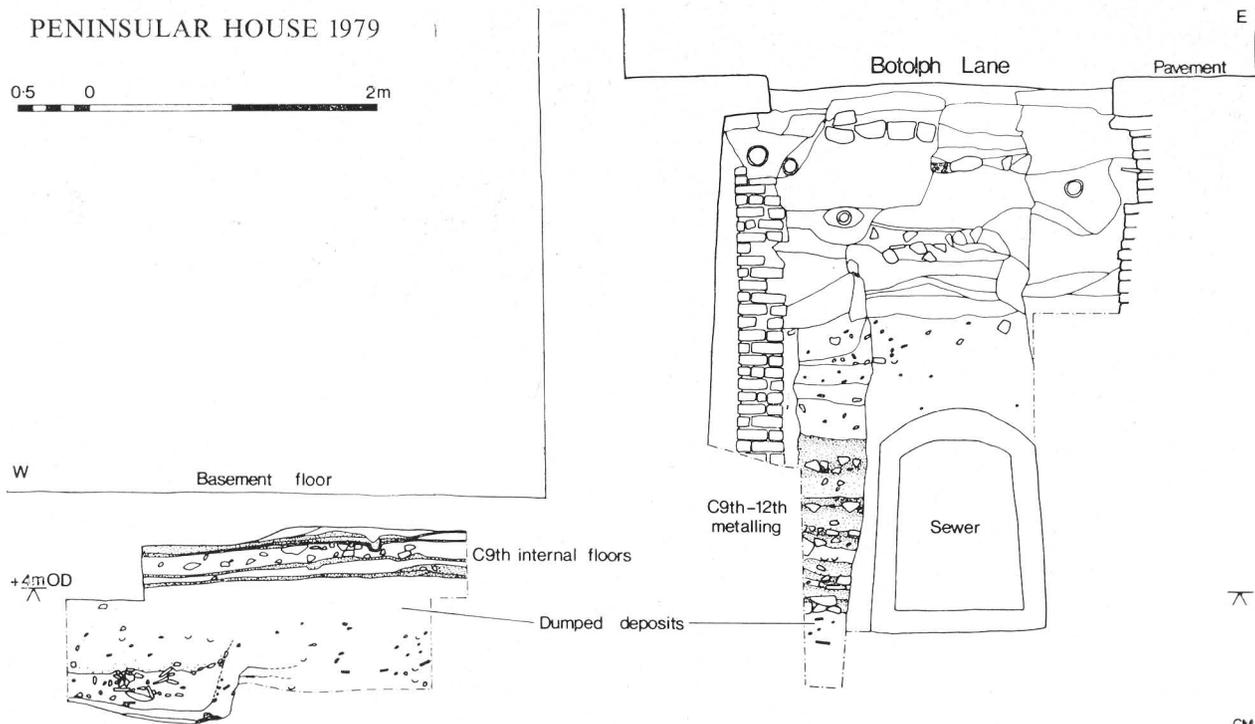


Fig. 10: Composite section showing relationship of Saxon Buildings EO and EP to earliest surfacing of Botolph Lane.

archive reports written by D. Bowler and N. Bate-man. Both excavated on Areas E (Buildings) and F (Road), together with R. Harris, T. Roberts and P. Chitwood assisted by members of COLAS and Lanfranc School, Surrey. Their hard work is grate-

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quiries to Nicholas Farrant, 7 Coalecroft Road, S.W.15. (01-788 0015).

South West London Boroughs by the South West London Unit, excavations and processing. Enquiries to Scott McCracken, 399a Upper Richmond Road, S.W.15 (01-878 0479).

Southwark, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee. Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Harvey Sheldon, S.L.A.E.C., Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, SE1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Paid and unpaid volunteers required urgently for sites in Staines and Stanwell. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey. (01-546 1050 x 3665).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Excavation at weekends only. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. All enquiries to S.L.A.S. c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, SE.17 (01-703 3324)

GENERAL EXCAVATIONS

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly *Calendar of Excavations* from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of fieldwork. The *Calendar* gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £3.30 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, S.E.11.

Excavation Round-up 1980

DIRECTORS, secretaries and other people concerned with excavations carried out during 1980 are asked to send a short report to the co-ordinator, Beth Richardson, D.U.A., 71 Basinghall Street, London, E.C.2. (01-600-3699 Ext. 287) for inclusion in the Spring issue. It would be appreciated if these could be modelled on the ones in Vol. 3, No. 14 and if they could be sent in by 31st December.