

Fig. 1: site location and trenches

A post-medieval shipyard and shipwrights' cottages at Deptford: some observations on pottery and material culture

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In the summer of 2000, Compass Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on a 0.6ha rectangular redevelopment site bounded by Plough Way, Enterprize Way, Capstan Road and Grove Street, Deptford, SE8 (Fig. 1). The site's eastern boundary lay some 65m from the Thames; map evidence showed that it had been this distance from the Thames from at least the 17th century. The site was cleared and was due to be redeveloped to form live/work units. An archaeological planning condition had been imposed on the planning consent as the land lay in an archaeological priority zone as defined in the London Borough of Lewisham's Unitary Development Plan.

A preliminary archaeological desk-top study had shown that the site lay on the western, landward side of an 18th- to earlier 19th-century ship-building yard, first mapped as such in 1725, with shipwrights' cottages shown on Rocque's map of 1746 (Fig. 2) along its western boundary (Grove Street). A geotechnical investigation showed that natural sand and gravels lay some 5m below modern ground surface. They were overlain by some 2.5m of alluvial silt/clay deposits, containing a layer of preserved peat. There was a further 2.5m of made ground (including archaeological deposits) over the alluvium. The developer redesigned foundations from the initially proposed 'vibro-compaction' type to a

less destructive piled solution. There was thus no requirement to evaluate the alluvium that was to be substantially preserved beneath pile caps and between piles.

Seven evaluation trenches (Fig. 1) were located in relation to Dugleby's plan of 1777 (Fig. 3). Trenches 1 and 2 lay west of a north-south aligned drain shown on Dugleby's plan, which separated the shipwrights' cottages west of it from the shipyard to the east. Brick foundations of 18th- and 19th-century cottages were found in Trenches 1 (Fig. 4) and 2 (Fig. 5). Trench 3 was situated on a north-south aligned drain, probably that shown on Dugleby's plan, and also cut the backyards of the cottages. This trench produced a mass of 18th- and 19th-century brick and timber features (Fig. 6). Trenches 4 to 7 lay within the shipyard according to the map evidence. Trench 4 revealed the foundations of what may have been a residential building inside the shipyard, while Trench 5 cut a deep sequence of dumped 18th-century clay/silt deposits with much coal, clinker and charcoal. A sequence of early-17th- to mid-19th-century dockyard surfaces and brick- and timber-lined east-west aligned drains were recorded in Trench 6. A small brick-built building in Trench 7 was of 18th-century date and may have been a store building inside the dockyard. Overall, there were 0.5 to 1m of 17th, 18th and earlier 19th-century deposits on the site, overlying the alluvium. They were well preserved, as a thick

layer of redeposited clay had been dumped onto the former shipyard and cottages in the middle of the 19th century to raise the level of the site for its new use as a railway yard. The evaluation results were presented in a report produced soon after the fieldwork was concluded.

The features and finds: Trench 1

Trench 1 uncovered the remains of one, possibly two, cottages that lay on the frontage of Grove Street; although the full sequence was not investigated in this trench, there was evidence for several phases of rebuilding. The earliest make-up layer that was excavated was [28]. It yielded undiagnostic sherds of post-medieval redware (PMR), tin-glazed ware (TGW), white salt-glazed stoneware (SWSG) pottery, alongside fragments of clay tobacco pipe and a glass bottle. The finds suggest construction between 1730 and 1780. Over [28] was layer [27], dumped brick rubble with stone mouldings and large fragments of roof tiles, that formed the surface for an internal floor. The small group of pottery found in [27] includes the profile of an internally glazed rounded concave PMR bowl (Fig. 9). Kilns producing PMR have been excavated in Woolwich and Deptford, and wasters recovered in Lambeth.¹ Sherds of combed slipware (COSL) dishes with piecrust decoration applied to the edge of the rim, and the profile of a red Surrey/Hampshire Border ware (RBORD) bowl were also recovered. The faunal remains recovered from [27], the only ones recovered from the site, consist of several cattle and sheep/goat bones, all of which show evidence of butchery. The pottery and clay tobacco pipe date the layer to between 1680 and 1700, but as it overlays context [28] the finds are residual.

The cottages are thought to have been demolished around the middle of the 19th century, according to the map evidence. The deposits that relate to this event included a dumped brick rubble fill [29] in the south-west corner of the trench. The small quantities of pot and clay tobacco pipe in it suggest that demolition occurred between 1780 and 1800. This is at odds with the cartographic evidence, so the finds may be residual or redeposited. A similar dump [37] in the north-west part of the trench also yielded earlier finds. The clay tobacco pipe, the two penny farthing coins and three trade tokens (with a possible *fleur-*

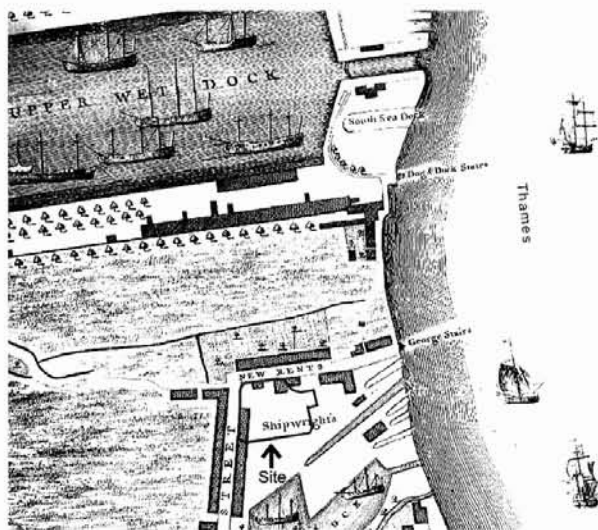


Fig. 2: the site in relation to John Rocque's map of 1746

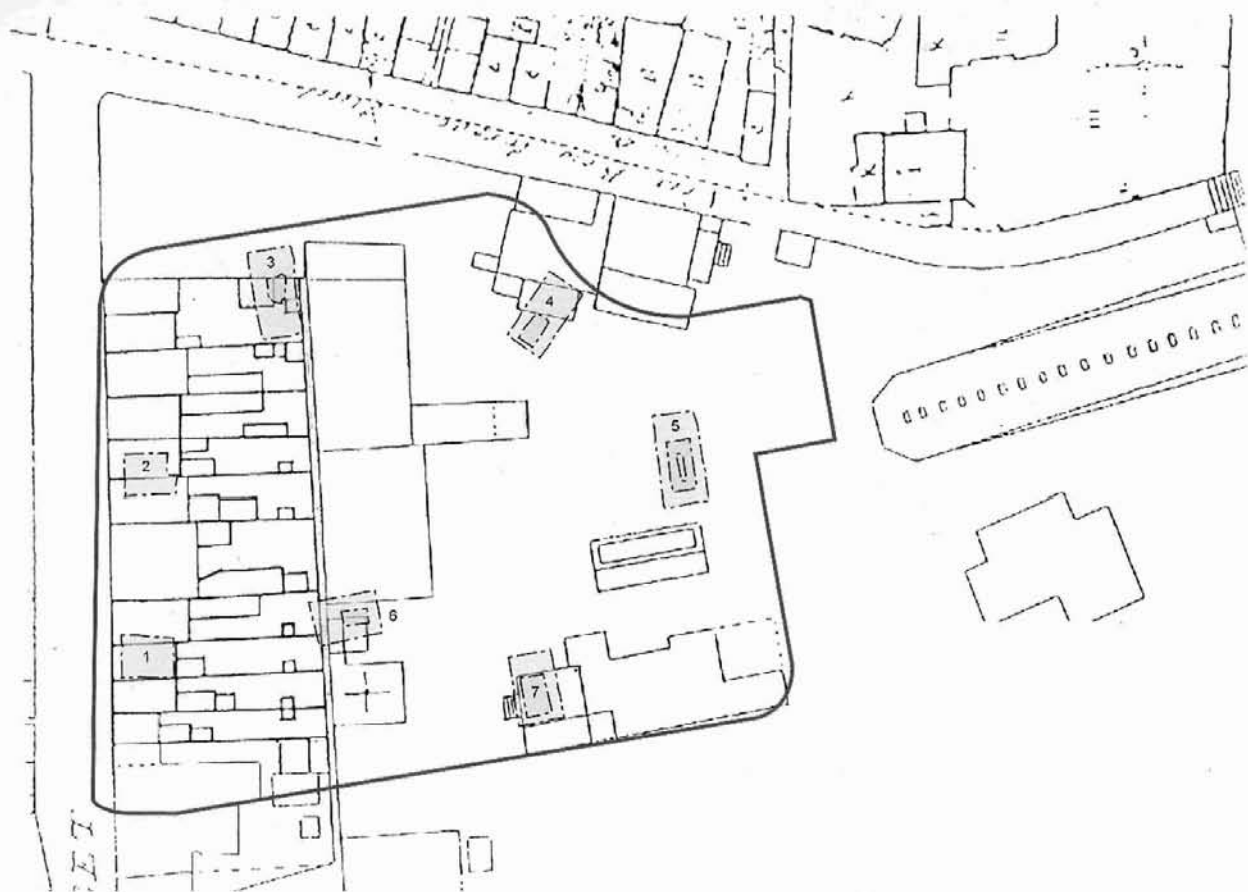


Fig. 3: the site outline and seven evaluation trenches shown in approximate relation to a tracing by the late Brian Gill of a Map of an estate belonging to Sir Frederick Evelyn Bart situate in the Parishes of St Nicholas and St Paul Deptford in the County of Kent surveyed by John Dugleby 1777, held under reference O/2/267/2 at the Corporation of London, London Metropolitan Archives

de-lys and anchor decoration) date from the first half of the 18th century. However, the pottery dates from the later 18th century and includes a blue and white painted English porcelain knife handle and pearlware (PEAR) plates, either decorated with blue feather-edged scalloped rims, or with early Chinese line-style engraving transfer prints (PEAR TR1). Another layer [40] associated with cottage demolition yielded the only medium-sized group of pottery, 37 sherds from an estimated number of 21 vessels (ENV), which together with other finds (including a wine bottle and fragments of clay tobacco pipe) date this event to between 1820 and 1840.

Trench 2

Two phases of a cottage on the Grove Street frontage were uncovered. The white mortar layer

[80] used in the construction of the first building (built on the surface of the alluvium) included a fragment of cylindrical saggar. This piece of kiln furniture relating to the tin-glazed pottery industry may have been redeposited, as there is no such pothouse nearby. The finds from the other layers associated with the first phase of cottage imply that it was constructed between 1700 and 1740; the pottery includes worn TGW sherds, a Chinese porcelain blue and white (CHPO BW) plate, a PMR rounded bowl handle (Fig. 9) and a Chinese line-style engraving willow pattern plate (PEAR TR1). The pottery (CHPO BW, COSL, Creamware; CREA, PMR) from the construction layers relating to the later building [66], although in a poor condition and highly fragmented, suggest the second phase of construction took place between 1740 and 1780.



Fig. 4: view south-west showing brick-built foundations of cottages in Trench 1. Scale 0.5m. Grove Street is visible through the railings

The demolition layers [43] and [45] of the later cottage were recorded in the east of the trench. Sherds from a CREA teapot, together with a scalloped-edged meat dish and plate, the base of an English porcelain (ENPO) tea cup, a finely painted TGW punch bowl and an early Chinese line-style engraving willow pattern plate (PEAR TR1), were found. Other finds were fragments from squat and cylindrical wine bottles, a small glass phial, with partly melted glass that may have resulted from burning during demolition.

Trench 3

This trench revealed the backyards of the cottages and outbuildings on the domestic side of the drain shown on Dugleby's plan of 1777, and the drain itself. The dumped lenses [98] and [100] on either side of the brick-lined sump [113] yielded a group of fragmentary pottery that comprised a COSL dish, a PEAR plate with a blue feather-edged scalloped rim, a CREA chamber pot, and a PMR



Fig. 5: working shot in Trench 2, looking south, showing two phases of foundations of a brick-built cottage

rounded pantheon. Also recovered was a large glass phial or small bottle with a kick base, and clay pipe dating between 1780 and 1820. The finds suggest the sump was constructed between 1780 and 1800. This phase was probably contemporary with the demolition of the cottages and associated structures. The ENPO fluted dish with crude floral/leaf overglaze painted decoration (Fig. 9) together with the profile from a floral decorated transfer-printed ware tea cup dating from the second quarter of the 19th century were found in the last usage/backfilling [99] of the sump. The clay pipe that was found dated between 1840 and 1880. Finds from the backfill [101] of the wood-lined drain that emptied into the sump include a green transfer-printed ware sherd (PEAR



Fig. 6: view north showing contexts in Trench 3, scale 0.2m

TR3). The backfill contained part of the base of the ENPO fluted dish found in the sump backfill [99]. The clay pipe found was of a later date, between 1850 and 1880. This backfill [101] also yielded a small part of the base of a large glass beaker, part of which appears to have been ground down more than the rest, suggesting a repair. It was finer than one would expect from a shipwright's home, and being repaired perhaps shows that it was either passed down the social ladder or well looked after. The drain and sump appear to have been backfilled between 1840 and 1850, in agreement with the map evidence for the change in use of the site.

Trench 4

The brick foundations recorded in this trench may have been from a residential building inside the shipyard. A later robber trench was also found. Unfortunately there were few deposits associated

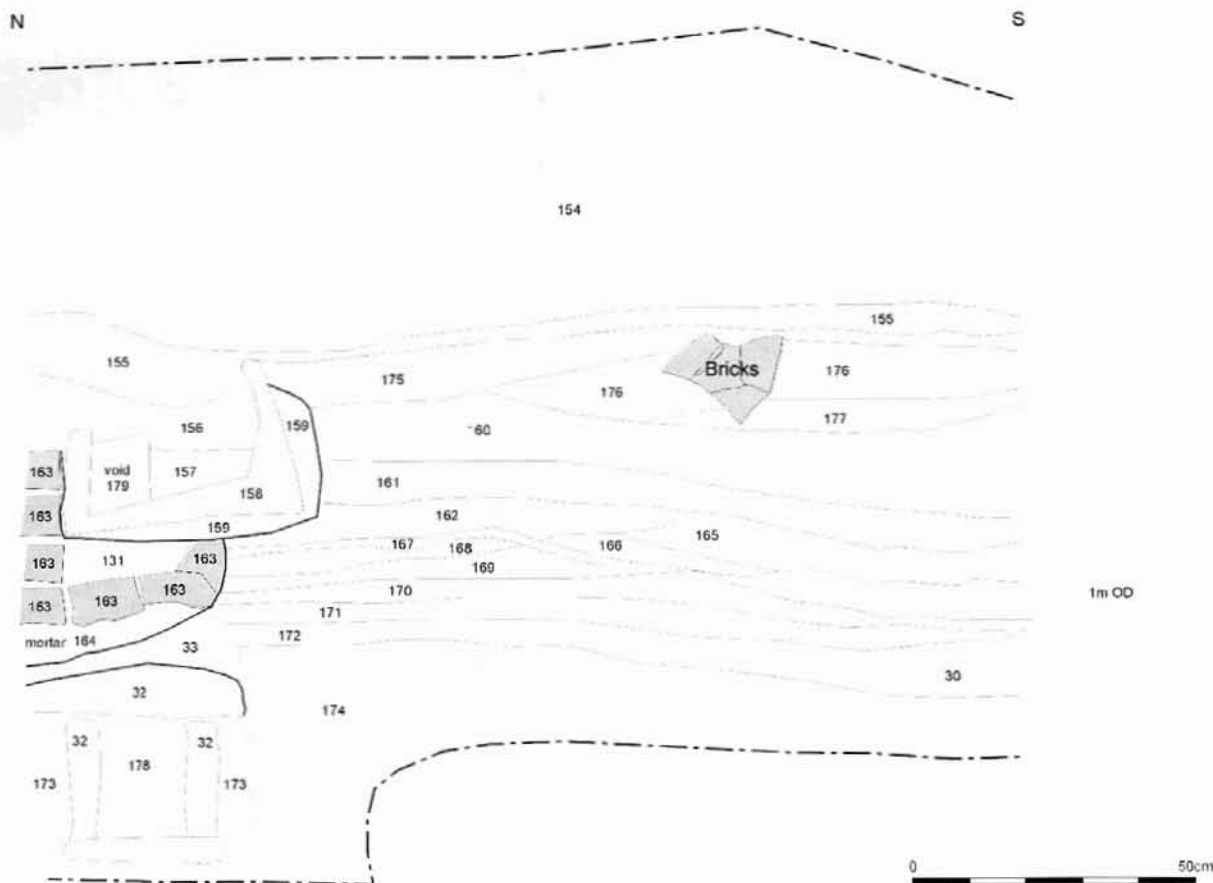


Fig. 7: Trench 6, section (located on Fig. 1). The natural alluvial clay/silt [174] was overlain by a sequence of 17th- to early-19th-century shipyard external surfaces; it was also overlain by a succession of three drains. The lower and upper drains were timber-lined, while the middle one was brick-lined. Layer [154] was dumped clay, deposited in the middle of the 19th century to make up the site for its new use as a railway depot. The clay also existed in the upper step of the trench (not illustrated)

with the building, and only small groups of pottery were found. They include a PMR pipkin recovered from the backfill of the construction cut for this building. This, together with the clay pipe found, suggest a construction date between 1680 and 1780. The only pottery from the 'occupation layer' [76] was a single sherd from a PMR chamber pot rim and a CHPO BW plate (Fig. 9).

Trench 5

The large cut feature in this trench was filled with dumped black clay/silt backfill with coal and clinker. It represents a shipyard feature of unknown function. Its extent is unknown as no

sides to the feature lay within the trench. Two backfills [1] and [2] yielded four sherds of pottery: the base of a black-glazed ware (BLACK) and sherds from a PMR jar, a LONS storage jar, and a TGW small cylindrical jar, indicate this feature was filled between c. 1670 and 1800.

Trench 6

A sequence of external shipyard surfaces containing wood chips and off-cuts was recorded in this trench (Fig. 7). The earliest yard surface [72] overlay the alluvium and contained a clay tobacco pipe dated 1680-1710. The yard was cut by the construction trench for an east-west aligned

timber-lined drain. The construction backfill ([33]) for the drain contained a clay tobacco pipe dated to 1700-1770. Two later overlying drains were associated with shipyard surfaces. The only pottery from the trench was an extremely abraded sherd of medieval London-type ware (LOND) and an equally worn sherd of Roman pottery recovered from a compacted gravel layer (context [31]). They suggest that this deposit had disturbed earlier land use.

Trench 7

Part of the brick foundations of an 18th-century shipyard building, possibly a store, was recorded (Fig. 8). The two gravel surfaces that lay outside this building yielded an undiagnostic sherd of CHPO BW and another of TGW. The other finds include two pieces of slag.



Fig. 8: view south-west in Trench 7, showing brick walls of building. The scale (0.5m) lies on the building's floor

Post-medieval pottery fabric and forms (c. 1500-1900)

The post-medieval assemblage consists of 215 sherds (ENV total of 164) from 27 contexts. The majority of the assemblage was from small groups (less than 30 sherds), with one medium-sized group of 37 sherds. All the percentages given in the text relate to the counts of sherds in each fabric. A count of fabrics by ENV can be found in Table 1. The main type of pottery recovered is the ubiquitous London area post-medieval redware (PMR, 23%), found mainly in a range of bowls and storage jars. The London pottery industry is also represented by tin-glazed wares (TGW, 19%), most of which appear to date to the later 17th to 18th centuries because of the later decorative styles applied. The forms are also of a

later date and consist of plates, with fewer coffee cups, punch and tea bowls. The TGW was usually highly fragmented, and consisted of small-sized base and rim sherds in a poor condition, with flaked glaze and abraded surfaces. The next largest group are the Staffordshire-type wares, and dominated by combed slipware dishes and mugs (COSL, 4%) with the white salt-glazed stonewares (SWSG, 1%) found in more limited quantities in which fragments of teacups were identified together with a colander or strainer.

Redwares	40	food consumption	44
Tin-glazed wares	36	serving/storing	15
Pearlware	25	teawares	12
Creamware	20	food preparation	10
Chinese porcelain	15	food storage/serving	5
English stonewares	9	hygiene	3
Staffs. coarsewares	9	beverage consumption	2
English porcelain	6	pharmaceutical	1
residual medieval wares	2	horticultural	1
Staffs. stonewares	2	food distribution	1
continental imports	2	display/serving	1
		cooking	1

Table 1: (left) pottery fabrics represented; (right) functional categories represented (by ENV)

The pottery of the latter half of the 18th century is characterised by different fabrics. The English porcelain (ENPO and ENPO PNTD, 4%) was usually undecorated and occurred in a range of tea bowls and saucers, together with a near-complete fluted dish. After the redwares, pearlware is the next largest group in terms of fabric occurrence (PEAR, 15%), and was decorated in a range of blue and white transfer Chinese-influenced designs. The forms represented were plates, saucers and tea bowls together with a tureen lid. Another group was a selection of hand-painted blue and white under-glazed decoration pearlwares (PEAR PNTD) that again followed the standard Chinese house and landscaped decorations applied to the transfer printed wares. The later coloured transfer printed wares (PEAR TR3) occurred only in very small quantities and were decorated in European floral designs dating from the second decade of the 19th century. Creamware (CREA), often identified as plates or dishes, also make up a large percentage of the assemblage (10%). Continental imports consist of one sherd each of Westerwald stoneware and an Iberian jar. Wider imports include Chinese porcelain decorated in the common blue and white

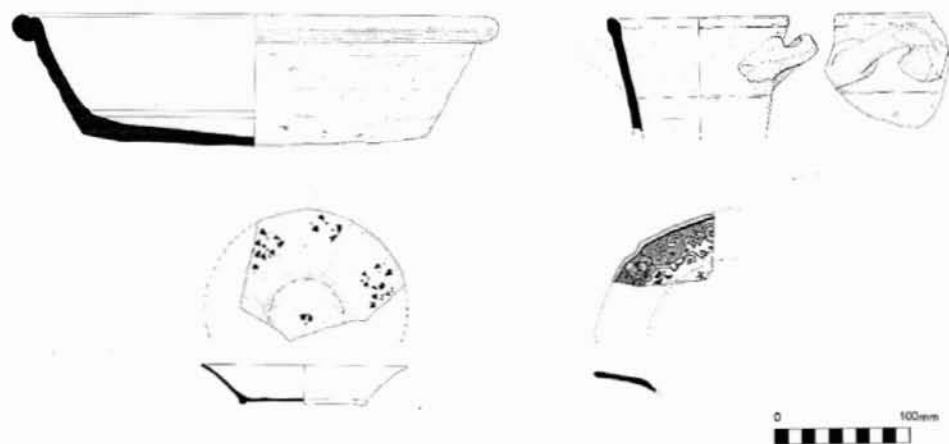


Fig. 9: (top left) post medieval redware bowl; (top right) post medieval redware handled bowl; (bottom left) English porcelain fluted dish; (bottom right) Chinese porcelain octagonal plate fragment

style (CHPO BW, 7%); one sherd of *famille rose* (CHPO ROSE, <1%) was also identified. The latter is characterised by its delicate rose pink over-glaze-enamelled painted decoration. All the Chinese porcelain appears to date from the early-to mid-18th century, is mostly of average quality, and would have been fashionable but relatively inexpensive.

Discussion

Most of the post-medieval pottery can be used to establish a broad chronological sequence and to help to characterise the deposits from which they were recovered. The assemblage broadly supports the cartographic evidence for land use; there is no pottery that dated after 1850, when the railway depot was constructed and the main phase of shipyard activity ceased. Despite its limited application, the assemblage nevertheless reflects the range of ceramics used during this period. Although the pottery overall could be considered as 'characterless' (in that it did not contain many vessels or groups that were worthy of note), pottery groups were found that relate to specific occupational sequences or events in Trenches 1 to 3. Trenches 4-7 yielded only small groups of pottery that each consist of no more than five sherds. Many of the buildings and their related deposits from Trenches 1-3 can be ascribed to the shipwrights who occupied the site. Most of the brick used in the construction of these buildings were reused, and all the bricks exposed were unfroged. The pottery the shipwrights used

included not only coarse red earthenwares but also tablewares from Staffordshire and China and some English porcelain. Much of the pottery was worn, especially many of the finewares, which implies that these vessels had been subject to much use before being discarded.

The functional categories of the pottery found (by ENV, see Table 1) show a clear preference for plates and dishes used for food consumption and teawares, with few vessels used for hygiene, drinking or cooking. The repair on the glass beaker in Trench 3 is a reflection of certain items being 'recycled' when they usually would have been discarded. The demolition of the cottages for the remodelling of the railway in 1851, and the dominant 19th-century date of much of the pottery, indicates that at least some of the material discarded could have belonged to the last generation of shipwrights. The finds from these layers, although sometimes earlier than the date for the demolition of the cottages, could be the fragments of unwanted possessions of the last inhabitants and an accumulation of general rubbish within the cottages after they were abandoned and subsequently sealed. The problem with interpretation of the assemblage is that it does not represent the full sample, since only designated areas were excavated and not all the material could be recovered from what was an evaluation or trial 'dig'. This means that the sample is 'flawed' in this respect and therefore, as the title of the article denotes, the pottery and the other material culture found provide more of an observation than final interpretation.

Conclusion

The curatorial decision after the evaluation was that there was no need for further archaeological investigation, as the thick layer of redeposited 19th-century clay provides a protective layer against the impact of the proposed foundations on the underlying deposits. However, the archaeological research questions raised in the project design included "Is there evidence of post-medieval shipbuilding on the site?" and "Do remains of the structures shown on maps from 1725 to 1868 survive on the site?" The answer was yes to both questions, demonstrated by shipyard surfaces with wood chips in Trench 6, shipwrights' cottages and other features found in Trenches 1-3, and the brick-built structures found in Trenches 4-7. The evaluation report also included a recommendation from the pottery specialist (Nigel Jeffries) that an article should be written for *London Archaeologist* to enable items representative of the 'everyday' material culture found on the former post-medieval dockland areas to be considered. The client, GLE Property Developments Ltd, kindly took up the suggestion.

Acknowledgements

Chris Francis of West and Partners arranged for the initial desk-top study and the evaluation, and supported the idea of this article. We are grateful to him, and especially to the client, Chris Rushton of GLE Property Developments Ltd, who kindly commissioned all stages of the project. We are grateful to Mark Stevenson of English Heritage, who also supported the idea of the article. The late Brian Gill kindly provided the tracing of Dugleby's map (Fig. 3). We thank Jane Liddle and Alison Nailer (both of the Museum of London Specialist Services), and Kieron Heard, for their reports on the animal bone, registered finds, and clay tobacco pipe respectively. The pottery drawings are by Julia Jarrett, graphics by Adam Single. The inset map on Fig. 1, based on an original by Pre-Construct Archaeology, is used with permission. The on-site archaeological team was Matt Barnes, Robin Densem, Andrew Francis, Denise Mulligan, Geoff Potter, Adam Single and Hanna Steyne. The site archive will be deposited at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC).

I. B. Nenck, with a contribution by M. Hughes 'Post Medieval Redware Pottery of London and Essex' in G. Egan and R. L. Michael (eds) *New and Old Worlds* (1999) 235-245.

Excavations and post-excavation work

London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. Contact Archive Manager, John Shepherd (020 7566 9317).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites in the borough. Contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, SE18 1JT (020 8855 3240).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from the Borough. Tuesdays, 8.00 p.m. to 10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith

Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (020 7385 3723).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society (KUTAS). Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Thursday (10 a.m.) at the North Kingston Centre, Richmond Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 5PE. Enquiries 020 8546 5386.

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking, GU21 1ND (01483 594 634).

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