

Fig. 1: reconstruction of Buildings H and J at New Fresh Wharf (JS, 1975). Though the cellars had stone walls, the ground and upper floors were probably timber-framed

William Widmore's pottery cupboard: excavations in Thames Street, London, 1974–8

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This article is the second to report on the London Waterfront Tenements project to research and publish four excavations of 1974–82 in Thames Street in the City of London. It is a consequence of a grant to the project from the City of London Archaeological Trust for one of the authors, JP, to assess and date the pottery from one of the sites, New Fresh Wharf, excavated in 1974–8. The site lies in Lower Thames Street just east of the north end of the modern and medieval London Bridges.¹ Here we explore several themes of the period 1300 to 1666: the development

of house forms on the waterfront; the association of excavated remains and artefacts with named people; and the archaeology of the Great Fire of 1666.

The New Fresh Wharf site comprised six medieval properties between the parish churches of St Magnus the Martyr (which still stands, as rebuilt after the Fire) and St Botolph Billingsgate, which was destroyed in the Fire and not rebuilt. The properties were long and narrow, pushing out into the Thames in many stages from the 10th century to the 15th. By 1300, when documentary evidence begins to

be available, most contained stone buildings facing Thames Street to the north. Several were already a century old, but they pointed to London's status as a European city. The plan of one, with a small entrance block near the street, finds a close parallel in a house of around 1200 still partly surviving beneath a building in Prague. In Thames Street, we know the names of some of the owners, and very occasionally those who occupied and lived on the properties.²

This article concerns developments on two adjacent properties, which in

NEW FRESH WHARF POTTERY

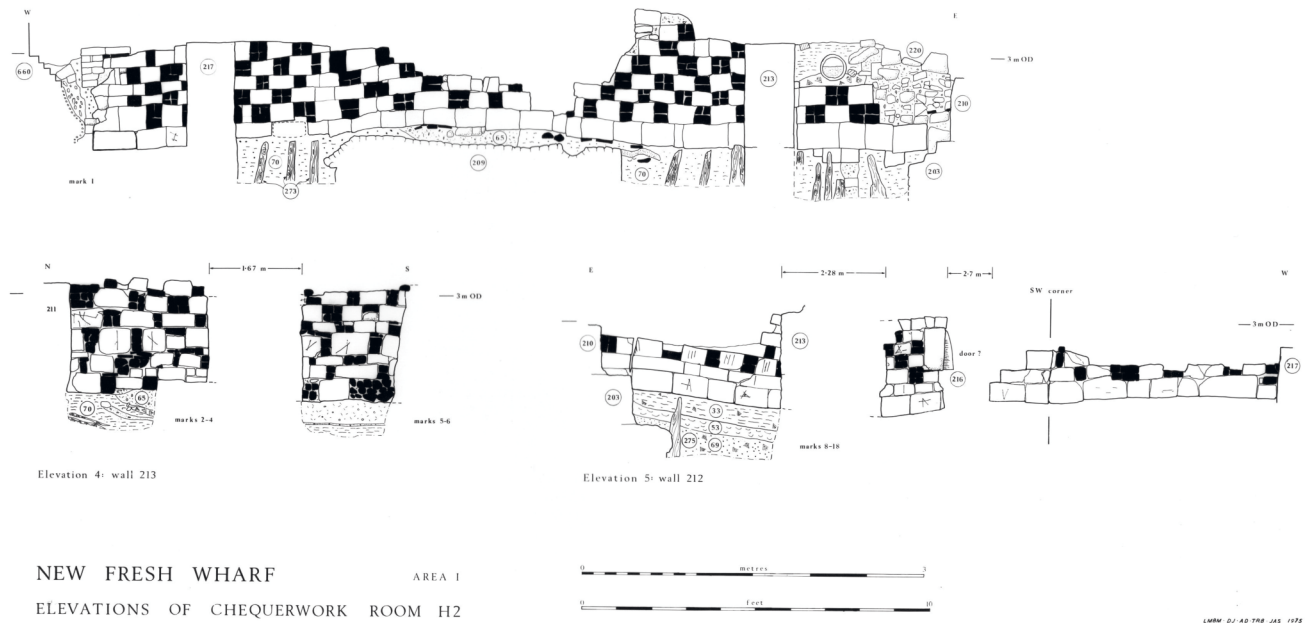


Fig. 2: elevations of the surviving chequerwork walls of the rear cellar in Building H, 1974 (L Miller, 1977); above, the north wall; below, the east and south walls

the 16th century were known as Cox's Quay and Hammond's Quay respectively (Fig. 1). The archaeological drawings reproduced here are those from the 1970s³ when the two excavated houses against Thames Street were labelled Buildings H and J (this will change into another scheme for the intended fuller publication). In each case the label is given both to a house next to the street and the beginnings of subsidiary buildings behind, down an alley which led to the wharf. Although the drawings of 1977 hinted that the ground and upper floors of the houses

would be of masonry, all research since on such London houses, for instance the surveys of Ralph Treswell of 1610–12, indicates that they would have been largely timber-framed. Such houses of two-room plan are known from about 1390, and had 3½ storeys by 1600.⁴ On Cox's Quay, a 12th-century stone building was demolished and the north end of the property rebuilt. Building H comprised a house of two rooms (probably of two or 2½ storeys in the 14th century) with an alley down its east side, which widened at the back of the street-range to give light to a range

of buildings down the side of the property. The excavated walls of the street-range were those of cellars. The rear room had all four walls faced in chequerwork of squared chalk and flint, with many masons' marks on the chalk, indicating great care in construction (Fig. 2; Fig. 3). From this rear cellar a doorway led to another room, floored with stone flags, which would have been beneath the first building along the alley (Fig. 4).

The pottery only allows a broad date of some time in the 14th century to be suggested for the building's construction. Excluding a few residual late 11th- to 13th-century sherds, the earliest large group of medieval pottery dates to c. 1270–1350. It appears to have been deposited over a fairly short period and includes 126 sherds from a minimum of 47 vessels. These come mainly from baluster and conical jugs in London-type and Mill Green wares. The remaining medieval sherds come from contexts dated between c. 1350 and 1500, with the usual range of London-type and Surrey whitewares represented. Amongst these are two near-complete drinking jugs in Cheam whiteware, and part of a large rounded or bung-hole jug in Surrey-Hampshire coarse border ware, with the broad strap handle, deeply stabbed and incised, that is typical of this form. There is very little pottery that was not made in the London region. Three sherds from jugs in Scarborough ware



Fig. 3: north-east corner of the rear cellar of Building H at New Fresh Wharf, 1974; 1m scale

and part of a baluster jug in Saintonge ware with mottled green glaze are the only examples of later medieval wares brought in from further afield. The pottery is dominated by jugs and related forms such as smaller drinking jugs. In keeping with their late medieval date, they are very plain, with none of the elaborate decoration that enlivened the output of late 12th- and 13th-century potters supplying the capital. The emphasis is on functionality rather than eye-catching decoration, but a large number of vessels designed for serving beverages could imply use in a household of reasonable means. This everyday character in the ceramics continues into the 17th century, though now enlivened with jugs in Frechen ware from the Rhineland and a dish of north Italian sgraffito ware.

The internal use of chequerwork is rare in the London area, and parallels elsewhere have proved difficult to find; a vaulted undercroft with chequerwork walls has been recorded at Kingston-upon-Thames and is now preserved, but its date is not certain. Chequerwork is employed in the 15th-century crypt of Guildhall, but more clumsily. It is found on the outsides of buildings, and town gates, at points throughout south-east England. One possibility being



Fig. 4: the north side of the south wall of the rear cellar at Building H, 1974; the squared block of Reigate stone is part of the jamb of a doorway into the room beyond, with a later floor of brick. On either side of the chequerwork, foundations of Victorian warehouses (MOLA)

considered by scrutiny of the 1974 excavation records is that the chequerwork room was the only cellar beneath the house, and was accessed by the doorway from the separate range to the rear. This would have given the cellar a special, if unknown, status. It may be significant that when the church of St Botolph Billingsgate, two doors away, was refurbished in the 15th

century, this included a wall of similar work; but the significance eludes us. Owners during the 14th century were mostly fishmongers, though by 1394 it was changing hands as a financial asset quite often; owner-groups included clergymen. By 1419 it was owned by a saddler and a grocer. So the builder of the house and its chequerwork cellar remain a mystery.



Fig. 5: pottery from a drain leading from Building J to the river. Back row (from left to right): Surrey-Hampshire border whiteware bowl, Frechen stoneware Bartmann jug, Surrey-Hampshire border ware mug. Middle row, Surrey-Hampshire border whiteware skillet and dish, tin-glazed ware dish. Front row: Werra slipware dish and two mature Valencian lustreware porringers. (A. Chopping, MOLA)

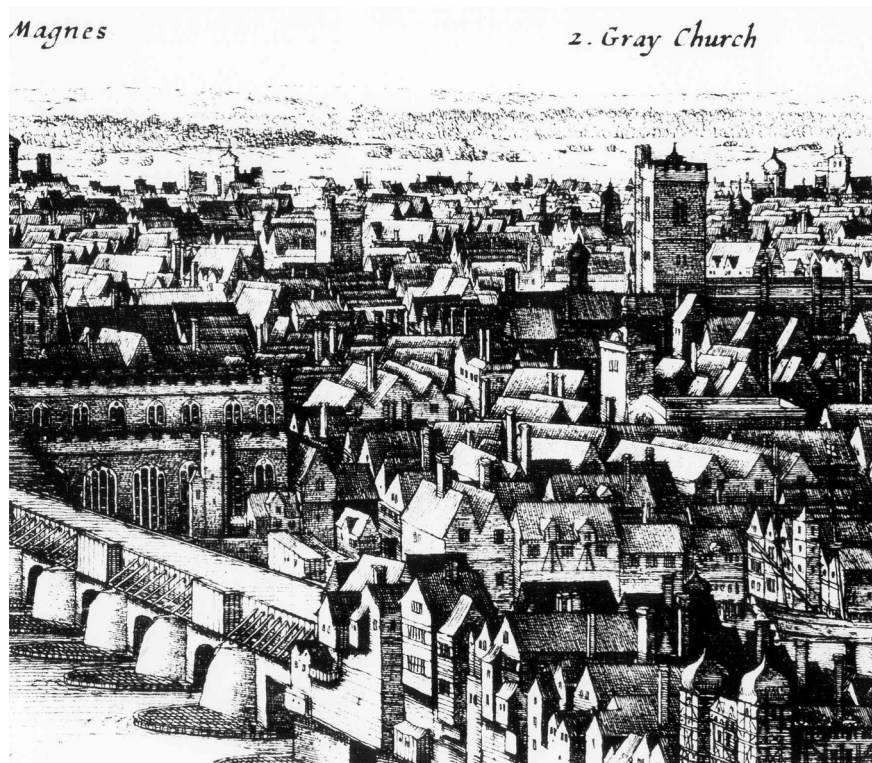


Fig. 6: the area of the site on Hollar's Long View of 1647. The site lies between the churches of St Magnus (left) and St Botolph Billingsgate (middle right). In the bottom left, temporary works after a fire of 1632 at the north end of London Bridge, which fortuitously became a fire break in 1666 and thus saved the Bridge and north Southwark from destruction

Next door to the east was Hammond's Quay (Fig. 1). Here a 12th-century stone building lasted until the first half of the 16th century, when the Building J complex replaced it. Like its neighbour, Building J comprised a house probably of two rooms with a basement, which in this case clearly did extend under the whole house up to Thames Street. The house was the same depth as that on the adjacent Cox's Quay; their backs aligned. On Hammond's Quay, the alley similarly led to the wharf, and from the alley immediately behind the front house a stair perhaps first of timber, then of brick, led into one of the cellars along the property.

The whole property had been bequeathed to the Vintners' Company, in memory of its owner John Wakelee, his family and another vintner Geoffrey Dallyng, in 1439. The company accounts survive from 1522 and occasionally mention it; the name Hammond's Quay first occurs in 1559, by which time Building J had probably been erected. By 1608 the property was in five parts or tenancies; there would have been many people living here. This becomes interesting because in the

watching brief on the New Fresh Wharf site in 1978, a large brick drain was found south of this cellar, serving further buildings to the south. In it was a large group of pottery of 1612–30, with glass and clay pipes (context FRE78 [511]; Fig. 5).⁵

It seems probable that the drain with its rich fill of artefacts was below the tenancy of William Widmore or Wydmore, plaisterer, in 1609–41 and his widow Joan in 1641–56. This is a significant assemblage, consisting of 92 sherds of pottery from a minimum of 63 vessels. Many of the sherds are large and many join to form complete vessel profiles. It has all the hallmarks of a household clearance of unwanted or damaged pots, thrown away over a short period or as a single episode. There is a high proportion of Surrey-Hampshire border ware, made chiefly in the whiteware fabric with green or clear (yellow) glaze, as well as a smaller quantity of red border ware, which remained of secondary importance to whitewares throughout the 17th century. A very wide range of forms was recorded, a marked characteristic of the border industry, which was one of the most diverse in south-east

England in its output. Kitchen and serving wares include carinated and flared bowls, a colander and flanged dishes. There are also sherds from porringers, a pedestal salt and a near-complete skillet. A similar range of functions was served by the fine redware industry centred on Harlow in Essex, which supplied London c. 1580–1700. These include sherds from jugs, a flanged dish, and a tripod pipkin that has an overall clear glaze inside and out. From the same source, a barrel-shaped mug in black-glazed redware has survived almost intact. Heavy-duty earthenwares for kitchen and storage use were largely supplied by the London-area redware industry, with sherds from several tripod pipkins and cauldrons, some of them with zones of white slip under a green glaze.

Foreign pottery, or its local imitations, is well represented. There are sherds from five dishes in delftware decorated in styles typical of the early 17th century. One has polychrome painting and the others are blue and white, including three dishes decorated with a chequerboard design that was derived from Low Countries sources. All delftware recovered is typical of the output of the Pickleherring pothouse in Southwark (directly opposite the site on the other side of the Thames), made during the second two decades of the century. Part of a dish in Portuguese faience has blue-painted armorial decoration. There are also sherds from two small handled bowls in late Valencian lustreware. At a more mundane level, there are sherds from Dutch red earthenware vessels for kitchen use, amongst them part of a cauldron or pipkin and a chafing dish, which is a much less common find in this fabric in London. Other imports come mainly from the Rhineland, with sherds from six Bartmann jugs in Frechen stoneware, including the complete upper body of a vessel with facemask and a rounded bowl in Werra slipware from northern Germany.

Research by Claire Gapper on the 16th- and 17th-century plaisterers of London informs us that William Widmore rose through the ranks of the Plaisterers' Company to be Master in 1631–2, three years before his death. No surviving plasterwork in the London area can be attributed to him. Indeed,

he was fined several times during his career for faulty work, on churches (such as St Magnus in 1629) and houses or secular buildings such as some at Botolph Wharf, next to his house, in 1615. He was however appointed Bridgehouse Plasterer for a period up to his death. So while we do not have records of his plasterwork anywhere, we do have what seems to have been some of his china. This is a rare instance where artefacts can be associated with specific people in a London context before the Great Fire.

The New Fresh Wharf site and its situation is shown in Hollar's Long View of 1647 (Fig. 6). St Magnus the Martyr church is clearly shown at the north end of London Bridge, and what may be St Botolph's church a short distance to the east; but the whole half-mile distance to the church of St Katherine Cree ('Gray Church') is foreshortened, and there were several other churches along this general line (for instance St Margaret Pattens). The 17th-century interior of St Botolph, and the location of its tower, is being investigated by the next stage of the present project, which will deal with the excavation at Billingsgate in 1982 of the southern third of the church.

Buildings on the New Fresh Wharf site were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 which started across the street in Pudding Lane. Graphic evidence of the collapse of the buildings was recorded on both Cox's Quay and Hammond's Quay. In the backward cellar of



Fig. 8: fragments of window lead from the Great Fire destruction of Building J



Fig. 7: the cellar below the building along the alley at Hammond's Quay (Building J), looking southeast (compare Fig. 1), 1974 (scale 1m; MOLA). The pine floor was covered in debris of the Great Fire, which had burned the stores against the walls

Hammond's Quay, the building evidently collapsed quickly, sealing a pine floor but burning some staging or shelves against the wall (Fig. 7). The debris contained finds, including a sadly ineffective leather fire bucket with the initials of St Botolph's parish ('S B B') on it, and the date 1665 or 1666; and pieces of lead came from lattice-windows in the buildings (Fig. 8).

The work sponsored by CoLAT on the New Fresh Wharf medieval and post-medieval pottery has enabled these and other buildings on the site to be dated, as far as pottery can be used. The pottery in what was probably the drain below Widmore's house on Hammond's Quay is one of several substantial 17th-century groups from the sites in the project: another drain of similar date, next door at Botolph Wharf, produced a much wider range of artefacts.⁶ At least for the first half of the 17th century, these waterfront sites are good reservoirs of data about the material culture of their residents.

Finally, though the contribution of this site is small, we have begun our study of the archaeology of the Great Fire and its effect on the properties south of Thames Street. There will be much more to say on this aspect when similar analysis has taken place of the large excavation at Billingsgate lorry park of 1982, the site of St Botolph Billingsgate church and Botolph Wharf. With the help of Stephen Freeth, formerly Keeper of Manuscripts at Guildhall Library, we also hope to investigate the layout, building history and furnishings of St Botolph from the early Middle Ages up to and beyond the Reformation.⁷

John Schofield continues to write up his obligations of the 1970s and 1980s. Jacqui Pearce has been working as a specialist in medieval and later ceramics from London (including glass and clay tobacco pipes) for 37 years, first with the DUA, then MoLAS and now MOLA.

1. J. Schofield 'The medieval port of London: publication and research access' *London Archaeol* 13 no. 7 (2012) 181–6. Location maps for the sites are to be found there.

2. This project includes documentary research on the properties by Tony Dyson.

3. J. Schofield, 'New Fresh Wharf: 3, the medieval buildings' *London Archaeol* 3 no. 3 (1977) 66–73.

4. J. Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, London Topographical Soc Publ 135 (1987).

5. The pottery was recovered on the watching brief by Louise Miller.

6. J. Schofield and J. Pearce 'Thomas Soane's buildings near Billingsgate, London, 1640–66' *Post-Medieval Archaeol* 43 (2009) 282–341.

7. Text and graphics files about the wider project can be downloaded from the CoLAT website, www.colat.org.uk.