

# Evidence for the Great Fire and post-medieval suburban development at 12–14 New Fetter Lane and 43 Fetter Lane

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## Introduction

Archaeological investigations were undertaken by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) between November 2010 and March 2014 at 12–14 New Fetter Lane and 43 Fetter Lane, City of London, EC4. The site forms a roughly triangular plot at the junction of the two roads (Fig. 1). The approximate centre of the site is located at National Grid Reference 531315 181405. The excavation, which took place in two phases following initial evaluation, occurred in advance of and during redevelopment of the site (Fig. 2); a watching brief was later undertaken on construction work in the north-west of the site.

The evaluation demonstrated that some areas of the site had been truncated by post-Second World War basements and the excavation concentrated on those remaining parts

of the site that were to be affected by the new development. Subsequently, the northernmost areas of excavation (shown in lighter tone on Fig. 2) were found to have been truncated by a late 19th-century or early 20th-century concrete floored cellar. This article reports on the archaeological survival in the remaining excavation areas.

The site is located on the valley slope c. 300m west of the course of the old Fleet River (the approximate line of Farringdon Street) and is 600m north of the modern River Thames. This is reflected in the very gradual slope of the natural topography (Thames River Terrace gravels) which, where untruncated at the southern tip of the site, sloped down from 15.55m OD in the west to 15.31m OD in the east.

In the discussion that follows context numbers are presented in square brackets ([n]) and accessioned

finds numbers within angled brackets (<n>).<sup>1</sup> This article incorporates the results of analysis work on the artefacts and ecofacts undertaken by MOLA specialists.<sup>2</sup>

## Archaeological background

The site lies outside Roman London (which lay to the east of the Fleet) in an area about midway between the main Roman roads leading west from the town. The archaeological evidence for this period from the site is sparse and consists of quarry pits and areas of reworked gravel containing pottery dated AD 120–160. Roman cemeteries flanked many of the principal roads leading into London and a western cemetery lay beside the Roman road on the modern Holborn alignment.<sup>3</sup> However, no further evidence for Roman burials was encountered during the recent excavations.

Medieval London occupied the same footprint as the Roman town and reused its defensive wall. The Roman routes west also remained in use – the alignment of the Roman roads roughly conforms to medieval and modern Holborn and Fleet Street at the north and south ends of New Fetter Lane (Fig. 1) – and the area of the site appears to have remained largely undeveloped until the later medieval period. Fetter Lane is documented from c. 1245<sup>4</sup> but documentary evidence (as summarised on a reconstructed map based on archive records from c. 1270)<sup>5</sup> suggests that Fetter Lane, or 'Newstrate', ran through open land, probably used for agriculture or horticulture. From the late 15th to early 16th century the area began to develop into what was to become a densely-occupied suburb of the City of London, initially through ribbon development along the major roads, including Fetter Lane, by then known as 'Fewerterlane'.<sup>6</sup>

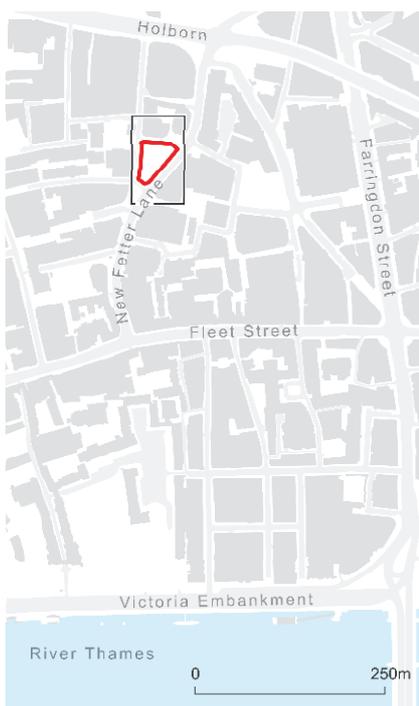


Fig. 1: site location

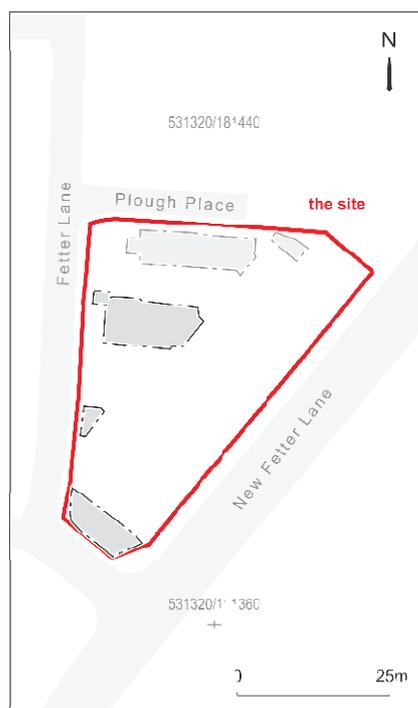


Fig. 2: areas of archaeological investigation

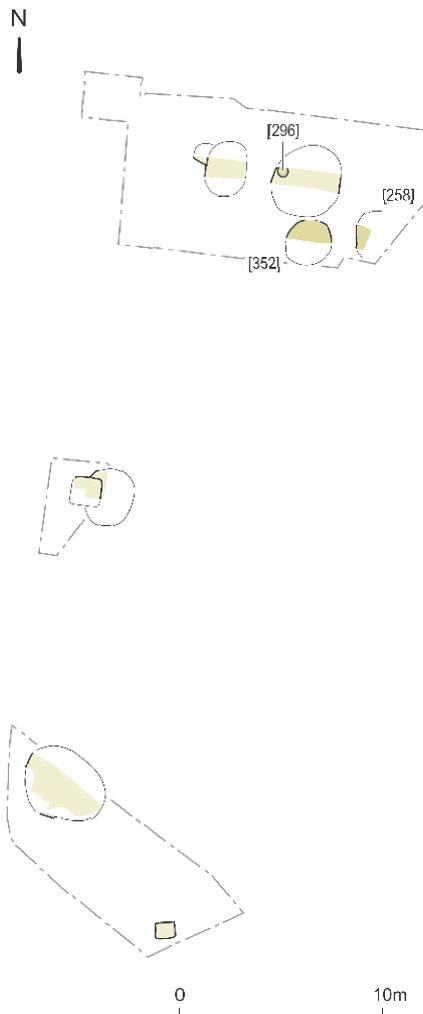


Fig. 3: early post-medieval pits

The archaeological evidence from the site confirms this pattern of development: activity pre-dating the late 16th century is sparse, and confined to a small number of ditches and rubbish pits of 14th- to early 15th-century date, but 17th-century occupation was well represented. Of particular interest is a cellared building that probably burnt down, or was damaged, in the Great Fire of 1666.

**Pitting in the late 15th–16th century**

In the late 15th and 16th century, the use of the site was characterised by quarries, refuse and cesspits (Fig. 3). They were not, however, all directly contemporary. The earlier pits, which post-date c. 1480, may well have lain in open ground, but two pits in the north of the site, [258] and [352] dating to 1550–1600 and 1580–1600 respectively, are likely to have been located in the backyards of properties fronting onto Fetter Lane. The pottery

within them was biased towards domestic vessels used for either drinking or cooking and included a smashed Cistercian ware (CSTN) mug (Fig. 4).

Similarly, the mineralised seeds in undated feature [296] indicated that it was associated with a cesspit,<sup>7</sup> which would also imply habitation nearby. In contrast, the dominance of wild plant remains and the limited number of artefacts in the pits at the southern end of the site suggests that at least some of these were quarry pits perhaps later used for occasional refuse disposal in an area of garden or waste ground. This apparent contrast perhaps reflects development and occupation spreading southwards along Fetter Lane from Holborn.

**Development pre-dating the Great Fire**

There is archaeological evidence for buildings on the site from the late 16th/early 17th century. This concurs with documentary evidence such as the Agas map of c. 1562, which shows Fetter Lane flanked by buildings.<sup>8</sup> Most subsequently underwent modification during the 17th century. Leake’s map of 1667 (Fig. 5) shows that the site lay close to the edge of the central London zone destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.<sup>9</sup>

The northern part of the site was initially occupied by Building 8, a cellared brick building. Very little of this building other than an external southern wall, an internal L-shaped brick wall and the remnants of mortar floor bedding had survived its demolition. It was replaced by Building 9 (Fig. 6), whose southern external wall was on the same alignment but further south than that of its predecessor. A northward return at the east end of this

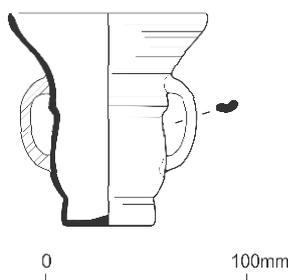


Fig. 4: Cistercian ware mug (from [258])

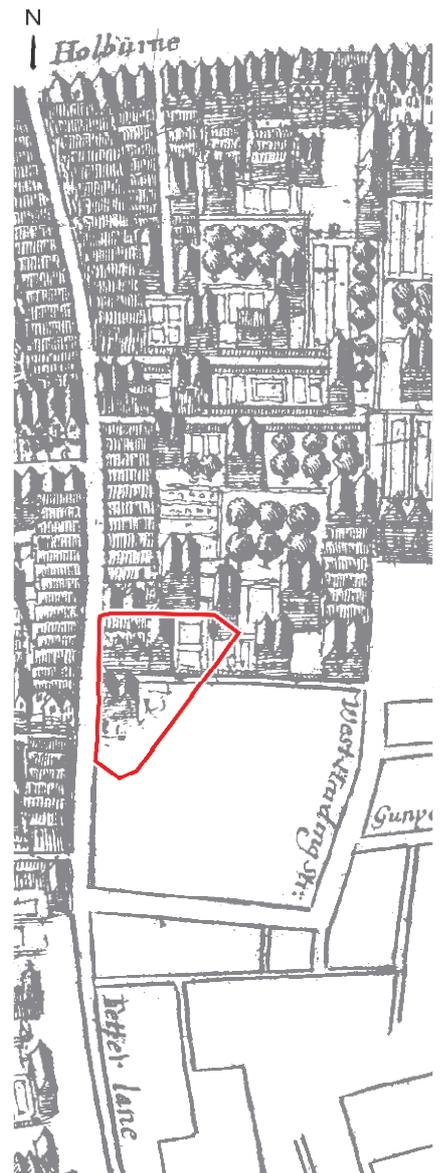


Fig. 5: the area of the site on Leake’s survey of 1667

wall defined the position of the back of the building.

Contemporary buildings to the south of Building 9 were less well-preserved. Building 10 fronting onto Fetter Lane (Fig. 6) was represented by brick walls, a soakaway and drain; the position of the external southern wall indicates a property at least 5m wide. In the southernmost excavation area, fragmentary wall remains associated with features such as brick floors and a brick-based post pit probably represent yards or working areas at basement level, belonging to at least two separate properties (Building 1 and Building 2/3; not illustrated). A more substantial building, (Building 4; Fig. 6), was constructed over the southernmost property in the early 17th century. Part

of the external southern wall, a brick cellar floor and drainage channel, and the internal north-west corner of the cellared room survived and indicate a property at least c. 4m wide.

It is likely that the phase of buildings represented by Buildings 4, 9 and 10 was in place at the time of the Great Fire. As is shown on Fig. 6, which shows these pre-Great Fire buildings against Ogilby and Morgan's post-Fire map of 1676, it can be seen that Building 9 was situated on the line of what subsequently became Dean Street. Dean Street is not present on Leake's map (Fig. 5), though its alignment is present as a narrow east-west alley forming a northern boundary to the area of properties on the east side of Fetter Lane.

Building 9 was relatively well-preserved (Fig. 7). Its red brick cellar floor survived largely intact at 15.64–70m OD and was subdivided by an internal wall, the base of a chimney stack flanked by raised brick hearths or fireplaces [245] and [246] on either side (Fig. 7). A brick-lined well was set into the floor, of which only the uppermost courses survived due to a Victorian culvert having been tunnelled below it. The bricks used to construct this building were made in London and dated to the 16th to early 17th century. Deposits and features associated with the building's use provided an assemblage of fragmented domestic pottery used for everyday functions, principally food preparation and serving. Various shaped bowl fragments together with small-sized single sherds (that could be either bowls or dishes) dominate this small group. The range of forms represented together with fabrics of which it was made, London-area red wares and products of the Surrey-Hampshire borders, suggest that the building was in use during the first half of the 17th century.

Two structures extended out from the eastern back wall of Building 9. Structure 4 (Fig. 6), which survived as an L-shaped wall keyed into and extending out from the eastern wall of the building may have been the base of a cesspit. Among the few fragmented pottery sherds within the disuse fill was a London-area slipped red ware bowl or dish with sgraffito decoration presenting

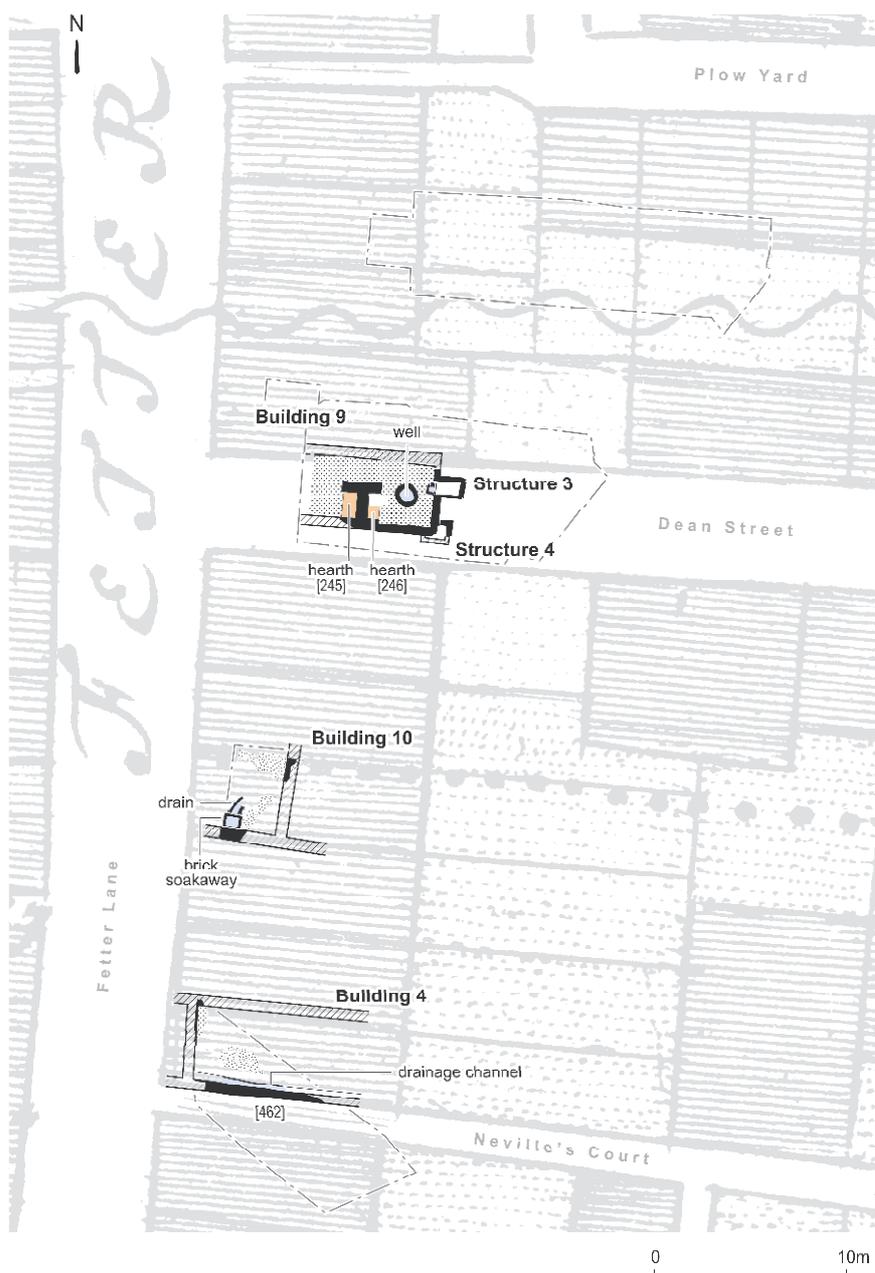


Fig. 6: plan of pre-1666 buildings, overlaid on Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1676

the top of a stylised flower (possibly a tulip) and part of a panelled inscription that survived as up to three letters (Fig. 8). London-area slipped red ware decorated in this fashion is infrequent, and it is speculated here that the design was inspired by similar pottery made in the Low Countries.

A second cesspit or latrine, Structure 3, a little to the north and butting up against the same wall, was probably a later addition (Fig. 6; Fig. 7). The backfill contained a collection of 12 pottery vessels that served a range of utilitarian domestic functions within the 17th century. Best represented were flared and deep dishes in red and white

Surrey-Hampshire border ware. Fragments of a ubiquitous Rhenish sourced Frechen stoneware *Bartmann* jug or pitcher and a rectangular iron mount with at least two large perforations – perhaps a piece of structural strapping or part of a bucket handle mount were also present. A cast copper-alloy ferrule or terminal with decorative and possibly functional grooved ridges mounted on a (broken) cylindrical wooden rod could have come from a piece of furniture. A lead token (<15>), dated c. 1615–72, carries three horseshoes on one face and the initials IY on the other: it probably refers to an inn called the Farriers Arms



Fig. 7: cellar of pre-Great Fire Building 9, looking north

with the initials being those of the landlord.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Great Fire of 1666 – evidence from the site

The Great Fire broke out in Pudding Lane in the eastern part of the City on September 2nd 1666, spreading quickly westwards in the following days. Leake's survey of 1667 (Fig. 5) shows the site straddling the north-western limit of the area destroyed by the Great Fire, which included the southern part of Fetter Lane. It is unclear, however, quite how definite these mapped limits are. It is likely that fire damage was variable along this line, with some buildings surviving intact whilst others underwent substantial reconstruction or were entirely demolished. For example, although Nevill's Court in the southern part of the site (Fig. 6) is shown within the area of destruction on Leake's survey (Fig. 5), a number of pre-Fire buildings survived here until the early 20th century.<sup>11</sup>

A small pit filled with charcoal and brick rubble marked the disuse of the drainage features in Building 10 (Fig. 6) and probably relates to damage caused by the Great Fire. When it was reconstructed after the Fire, its new southern wall was built from bricks, salvaged from pre-Fire properties, but was rendered, possibly as a fire-retardant, with mortar. However, it is the building to the north of the site (Building 9; Fig. 6) which provides the clearest evidence for the Great Fire.

#### Building 9

The evidence for the Great Fire on the site derives principally from demolition debris within the cellar of Building 9 (Fig. 6), which contained significant amounts of burnt material and artefacts. For example, the group of 64 ceramic vessels from debris on the cellar floor<sup>12</sup> included pots distorted by heat or direct exposure to flames (Fig. 9). Amongst these items were containers used for various cold balms; cream treatments were represented by two London-made delftware ointment pots<sup>13</sup>, one plain (Fig. 9, top) and one decorated. The blue or polychrome painted decoration applied to the few delftware chargers and a saucer (Fig. 9, centre) used as decorative tableware was obscured by the considerable alteration to their otherwise brittle glazes caused by exposure to heat. Most frequent among the pottery were vessels made in kilns clustered on the Surrey-Hampshire borders. Given the burnt condition of this material it is difficult to ascertain whether they represent the white- or red-fired products of this industry, however, when this can be identified, red border ware are most common. A selection of this industry's common outputs survived as the reconstructable profiles or large-joining sherds and included a money box (Fig. 9, right), chamber pot, a deep dish, a deep and handled bowl, completed by fragments of tripod pipkins (for cooking and heating) and mugs and drinking jugs.<sup>14</sup> Continental imports were few, restricted

to Frechen stoneware *Bartmann* and a drinking jug (a base and lower profile represented the best preserved example) and a sherd from the lower portion of a Montelupo polychrome bowl with chequer and interlace decoration.<sup>15</sup> The clay tobacco pipes from these debris layers consist of 12 bowls, 30 stems and three mouthpieces. The bowls are types AO9 and AO15,<sup>16</sup> with AO15 being the more common. The bowls in both types are often partially or wholly milled, and date to c. 1640–60 and c. 1660–80 respectively. A number of pipes, in particular those from [224] (Fig. 9, foreground), were severely burnt.

Other burnt finds included a wooden knob or finial and a short length of fine two-ply cord. A whittle-tanged knife with a short plain bone handle (with an unusual diamond-shaped cross-section) was not obviously damaged in the fire. Also recovered were a large corroded copper-alloy hook-and-eye – a type of dress fitting introduced in the 16th century and still in use today – and a plain copper-alloy sheet mount. Two tableware glass fragments (<43>, <44>) were present, together with a few small fragments of natural coloured and colourless window glass, some of which display putty lines from being inserted within a lead window came. This included a colourless fragment decorated with a brown painted foliate or foliage design, similar to those recovered from excavations of London's various medieval ecclesiastical centres.<sup>17</sup> Building material included peg and pantile roofing, with brick and plain glazed floor tile from the Low Countries. A decorated tin-glazed floor tile painted with a green, orange, blue and white geometric design (<91>; Fig. 10) was probably made at the Pickleherring pottery in Southwark c. 1618–1650.<sup>18</sup>

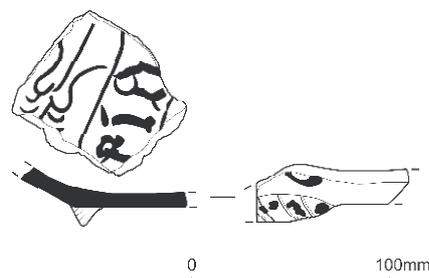


Fig. 8: sgraffito dish from the backfill of Structure 4

The final infilling and levelling over of the cellar, comprising deposits up to 3m thick in total, produced 52 variously preserved pottery vessels, a few clay tobacco pipe stems and bottle glass which combined to suggest this structure was sealed c. 1650–80. The sources of pottery supply and forms are common to London during the 17th century, but contained no evidence of ceramics made and used after the 1680s. Whilst the two London-area red ware handled bowls supplied the largest-sized and best preserved fragments, it is the green and yellow-glazed products of the Surrey-Hampshire border ware industry that mostly feature and are represented by various flanged dishes, rounded mugs and drinking jugs. Also present were two Frechen stoneware drinking jugs and a fragmented *Bartmann* and the neck and rim of an English (probably London) made glass bottle (of the 'shaft and globe' variety) dated c. 1650–80. Unlike the material from the deposits immediately sealing the cellar floor, these pots, pipes and glass displayed no evidence of being distorted through exposure to fire or high temperatures. A knife (<1>) has a plain ivory whittle-tang handle with a slightly bulbous terminal and is very similar to several examples from Aldgate, dated to the late 17th century.<sup>19</sup> As the handle is ivory, it is likely to date from the 1670/80s and to post-date the Fire.<sup>20</sup>

The character of the cellar infill found in Building 9, and the tight dating of c. 1660–1680 that can be attached to it, makes it very likely that this building was destroyed, or damaged beyond repair, in the Great Fire and that the secondary backfill within the cellar represents the clearance of the site and preparation for the laying out of Dean Street. The new street replicated the earlier, narrower thoroughfare.



**Fig. 10:** early to mid-17th-century tin-glazed floor tile from the infill of the Building 9 cellar



**Fig. 9:** selection of burnt artefacts from the cellar of Building 9: London-made delftware charger (left), ointment pot and saucer (top); red border ware money-box (right); clay tobacco pipes

Reconstruction after the Great Fire retained much of the medieval layout of the City, but the rebuilt streets were generally wider, one of a number of measures taken to prevent a future fire spreading as rapidly as in 1666.<sup>21</sup> By 1720, John Styrpe's Survey of London could describe Dean Street as 'well-built and inhabited'.<sup>22</sup>

#### Nevill's Alley

Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1676 shows an alleyway to the south of the plot occupied before the Great Fire by Building 4 (Fig. 6). This passageway, Nevill's Alley, later Nevill's Court, is not evident on either Faithorne and Newcourt's map of 1652 or Leake's survey of 1667, though the style and level of detail of these plans is such that pre-Great Fire origins of the alley, though unlikely, cannot be completely discounted.

A substantial arched brick culvert inserted along the south side of the foundation for the south wall of Building 4 survived over a length of 7.9m (Fig. 11). It is likely that it ran along Nevill's alley. The construction backfill around the culvert produced a coin dated 1717–24. Although much of the arched roof had collapsed or been truncated, part of a brick drain or chute emptying into it was recorded in its western extent. The disuse fill at the base of the drain produced a number of domestic items of 19th-century date, including a bone toothbrush and

nailbrush and eight copper-alloy objects (teaspoons, buttons, a ring and a disc); the latest coin found within this deposit suggests that the culvert remained in use until at least the 1860s.

#### 19th-century and later development

The properties immediately north and south of Nevill's Court, as rebuilt during the Victorian period and shown on the Goad fire insurance map of 1886,<sup>23</sup> were a restaurant and shop respectively. The archaeological evidence for this period consisted of Building 5, to the north of the alley, and Building 6, to its south. Both buildings had flagstone floors to the cellars with ceramic drains running beneath. Deposits associated with the construction of the Building 6 cellar included a Victorian halfpenny (<63>) dating to 1860. The coin carries well-lettered, but incomprehensible, graffiti cut into the queen's shoulder. A substantial yellow stock brick wall (Building 7) represented a later reconstruction of the north wall of this property, entirely truncating any earlier walls on this alignment. Further north, the remains of yellow stock brick walls of at least three further properties fronting onto Fetter Lane were recorded (Buildings 11, 12 and 14),<sup>24</sup> both to the north and south of Dean Street. These late 19th- to early 20th-century buildings were demolished after the site was bombed during the Second World War.<sup>25</sup> Nearly three centuries after the



**Fig. 11: 18th-century brick culvert [445] in Nevill's Alley, looking west. The southern wall of Building 4 ([462]) can be seen to its north (right)**

Great Fire, the post-war reconstruction that followed represented a second major episode of rebuilding following catastrophic damage to this part of the City.

### Conclusions

The excavations at 12–14 New Fetter Lane and 43 Fetter Lane have added to our understanding of the development of the western, suburban zone of the City from the 16th to 18th centuries.

The developing character of the area is demonstrated by the evidence from the site of open areas containing quarry pits and rubbish pits, succeeded by a lengthy sequence of cellared buildings. It is very likely that one of these buildings (Building 9) was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. As such, the site contributes to the developing body of evidence for the Great Fire<sup>26</sup> in the archaeological record.<sup>27</sup>

### Acknowledgements

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Within MOLA, site work was supervised by Anthony Francis, Hana Lewis and Lesley Dunwoodie. Specialist contributions were provided by: Ian Betts, building material; Julian Bowsher, coins and tokens; Anne Davis, plant remains; Alan Pipe, faunal remains; Beth Richardson, accessioned finds. Geomatic input was provided by Gideon Simons, Raoul Bull and Catherine Drew. Project management was undertaken by David Divers and Julian Hill with graphics by Hannah Faux and Carlos Lemos and photography by Andy Chopping and Maggie Cox.

*Lesley Dunwoodie is a Project Officer and Nigel Jeffries a medieval and later ceramic, glass and clay tobacco pipe specialist at MOLA.*

1. The building and structure numbers relate to the land use seriation of the site and cross-refer with the site digital archive which forms a component of the full site archive deposited under the site code NFT10 with the Museum of London's Archaeological Archive (LAA), where it may be consulted by arrangement.  
2. For specialist assessment of the site, see MOLA 2012, *12–14 New Fetter Lane, 43 Fetter Lane, London EC4, City of London: Post-excavation assessment*, unpub MOLA report and MOLA 2014, *12–14 New Fetter Lane, 43 Fetter Lane, London EC4, City of London: Addendum to the post-excavation assessment*, unpub MOLA report.  
3. S. Watson *An excavation in the western cemetery of Roman London* (2003) MOLA Archaeology Studies Series 7  
4. M. Lobel *The City of London from prehistoric times to c. 1520* Historic Town Atlas (1989) 73.  
5. *Ibid.*, map of the City of London c. 1270.  
6. *Ibid.*, map of the City of London c. 1520.  
7. F. Green 'Phosphatic mineralisation of seeds from archaeological sites' *J Archaeol Sci* 6 (1979) 279–84.  
8. R. Agas 'Civitas Londinum' c. 1562, reproduced in H. Margary in assoc. Guildhall Library, Kent *A collection of early maps of London* (1981).  
9. *Ibid.*, J. Leake 'A map of the City of London showing the extent of the damage caused by the Great Fire of 1665' (1667).  
10. Cf. M. Mitchener and A. Skinner 'English tokens

c. 1425 to 1672' *British Numismatic J* 54 (1984) 127.  
11. P. Ackroyd *London: The Biography* (2001) 237.  
12. The contexts with pottery and pipes considered here are [216], [221], [222], [223] and [224]. Most of this material, including the burnt pots, was found in [221] and [224] and the presence of sherds from a number of vessels found smashed in both deposits indicates the cellar was filled as one event with material from the same source.  
13. I. Noël Hume *Early English Delftware from London and Virginia* (1977) Fig IV, no. 3, nos. 7–9, 62–3.  
14. J. Pearce *Border Wares* (1992) Fig. 24, nos. 82–6. The descriptions given to the various products of this industry from this site are consistent with Pearce's typology.  
15. Found in [221], this bowl was made in a production centre close to Florence, Italy, and can be paralleled to published examples, notably J.G. Hurst, D.S. Neal and H.J.E. van Beuningen *Rotterdam Papers VI* (1986) Fig. 4, no. 8.  
16. D.R. Atkinson and A. Oswald 'London clay tobacco pipes' *J British Archaeol Assoc* 32 (1969)  
17. <42> [216]. Examples of window glass in this idiom can be found in T. Dyson et al *The Cluniac priory and abbey of St Saviour Bermondsey, Surrey* MOLA Monograph 50 (2011) 237–42.  
18. A complete tile with a similar design is illustrated in I.M. Betts and R.I. Weinstein (2010) *Tin-glazed tiles from London* (2010) 107 no. 94.

19. F. Grew in A. Thompson, F. Grew and J. Schofield 'Excavations at Aldgate 1974' *Post-Medieval Archaeol* 18 (1984) 100–106.  
20. *Ibid.*, 101.  
21. J. Schofield *The Building of London from the Conquest to the Great Fire* (1993) 175.  
22. J. Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1720) I.12.282; see [www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype/index.jsp](http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype/index.jsp) (accessed Jan 2016).  
23. C. E. Goad *Insurance plan of London* Vol. II (1886)  
24. The Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1874 (5ft to 1 mile) shows the layout of these properties in some detail.  
25. London Topographical Society *The London County Council Bomb Damage Maps 1939–45* (2005) map 62.  
26. I. Blair and B. Watson with J. Pearce 'The Great Fire of London: Ivor Noël Hume's investigation of the 17th-century material culture of the metropolis' in E. Klingelhofer *A Glorious Empire Archaeology and the Tudor-Stuart Atlantic World* (2013) 106–118.  
27. N. Jeffries and R. Wroe Brown 'Material evidence from the Great Fire: burnt artefacts discarded in a well in Philpott Lane, City of London' *London Archaeol* 14 (3) 59–63; N. Jeffries, R. Featherby, and R. Wroe Brown 'Would I were in an alehouse in London!: a finds assemblage sealed by the Great Fire from Rood Lane, City of London' *Post-Medieval Archaeol* 48 (2) (2014) 265–88.