

medieval ceramics **Reviews**

[page 68 / blank]

Robert Cowie and Lyn Blackmore

with Anne Davis, Jackie Keilly and Kevin Reilly

Lundenwic

Excavations in Middle Saxon London, 1987–2000

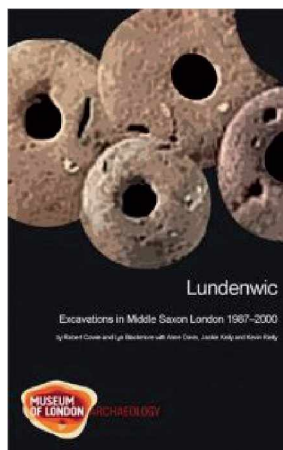
MOLA Monograph 63

2012. Museum of London Archaeology. London

Hardback, 361 pages, 187 figures, 64 tables

ISBN ?

Price £34.00



In the year 1984 both Alan Vince and Martin Biddle independently published papers that argued for the location of mid-Saxon London on the north bank of the Thames, around what is now the Strand, west of the Fleet river. As more archaeological evidence was recovered to support their claims the rest of us eagerly awaited a synthesis that would

characterise Lundenwic and allow comparisons with contemporary ports such as Hamwic and Ipswich. With the publication of *Lundenwic: excavations in Middle Saxon London, 1987–2000*, that wait has been amply rewarded. This exhaustive account covers the findings from eighteen sites excavated within an area of c 60 hectares between Aldwych and Trafalgar Square. The aim is to consider those sites, as stated in the summary, ‘in their local, regional, national and international context’. It seems they have done more than that, for there is actually little about the individual sites, with most of the discussion bringing all the evidence together in an attempt to characterise and populate the mid-Saxon town.

There are ten chapters, organised thematically, followed by 100 pages of specialist reports in appendices, which are supported by a CD containing tabulated finds data, while the whole is studded with illustrations and photographs that match the high quality we have come to expect in MOLA publications. The appendices are important and useful because the thematic structure means that the finds evidence, with which this review is mostly concerned, is scattered throughout the text as it becomes relevant to discussions on such things as diet, industry or trade. Appendix 11.5, ‘The pottery’, extends over 30 pages and takes the form of a typical pottery catalogue, compiled with her customary thoroughness by Lyn Blackmore and incorporating, poignantly, contributions from the late Alan Vince. There is a description of the methodology, which includes tables of fabric codes and their quantities, and also their approximate date ranges. There follows a catalogue that characterises each ware type, divided into sections on ‘Local, regional and other hand-made wares’ and ‘Continental wares’.

For some, confusion could be engendered by the use of the term ‘hand-made’ to head a section that includes Ipswich ware. It may be assumed that ‘hand-made’ is used here to denote ‘hand-built’ (erroneously because, as the potter John Hudson would remind us, all the pottery described here was made by hand) but Ipswich ware, as we know, is the earliest post-Roman wheel-thrown ware in England. Such carelessness might be worthy of a mild rebuke but is forgivable because in truth, this appendix is necessarily cursory in a volume that gathers so much evidence together under a themed discussion. It would be good to know, however, that one day all the mid-Saxon pottery data will be made available for comparison with other published assemblages.

It is probably a good idea for those interested in the ceramic evidence to study the appendix first, as a way of familiarising oneself with the range of wares, vessel types and places of origin that are represented. This is a useful exercise because in the main text fabric codes, such as MSWWA or NFSROUA, are used instead of ware names. This is a standard approach that is not confined to London but one does wonder (again) why it is not possible to write ‘Rouen A’ instead of FSROUA, which must constitute something of a challenge for readers who are not ceramicists. This is especially true when there are references on page 144 to Table 44, which lists the fabric codes but is way ahead on page 229, although you’d have to go to page xix to find that out because the reference on page 144 does not give a page number for the table. We ceramicists, perhaps we archaeologists, are not always the best at writing with the less specialist reader in mind and it would not take much effort to redress this. Once one has worked out the mechanics, however, any reader should be able to settle down and enjoy a well constructed and insightful narrative.

This is not simply a survey of the evidence, it is an attempt to investigate the way people lived in mid-Saxon London. After the initial introduction and a site-by-site description on the excavations, the third chapter takes the reader into a series of discussions that consider virtually every aspect of the town and its inhabitants. Chapter headings include ‘The political and geographical setting’, ‘Earlier landscapes and the origins and development of Lundenwic’, ‘The layout and organisation of the settlement’, ‘Food production and consumption’, ‘Crafts and industry’, ‘Trade and exchange’ and ‘Life and death’, with a final concluding chapter that considers further work. Sometimes, where the evidence barely exists, the narrative can seem a touch forced; for instance in the section on lighting, where there are so few related finds that we are informed that ‘it is quite possible that many of the unidentified fragments of iron are from pricket lamps, cupped sticks or similar fittings’. It is equally possible that they are not. Where it works, the narrative is absorbing and even where the evidence is slight, the point surely is that the authors have thought about the subject and placed that notion before the reader.

It is made clear that things that were important to the conduct of daily living in a mid-Saxon port should be revealed and understood. Lighting must have been important and it is good to see it discussed. In that sense the book is a triumph, because all the strands of evidence are woven together, by multiple authors, to produce a proper synthesis in a sure-footed search for meaning. Specific sections include: hearths and ovens; wells and water supply; horticulture; agricultural equipment; fish; drink; evidence for the processing, transport, storage and cooking of foodstuffs; smithing; antler working waste; woodworking tools; coinage; burial practice; clothing. There is plenty more too, covering most aspects of mid-Saxon life.

Pottery crops up throughout but it figures most prominently in the chapter entitled 'Trade and exchange', where regional and international trading networks are considered separately. The discussion of the pottery is centred mainly on characterising the fabrics that typify each period of the settlement in an attempt to establish their likely places of origin. The picture seems to be one of regional types being brought into the town from some distance away, or at least that pottery was not made within the town.

In terms of regional trade, Ipswich ware is an interesting, consistent presence, while there is new evidence to help clarify the international picture. ICPS analysis has shown, for instance, that what are known here as North French white wares are comparable with products from La Londe and Rouen, which are also quite separate from Rhenish types. As the authors note, there is still much work to be done and the problem facing all of us is the continuing lack of published comparative evidence from Ipswich and Quentovic, two similar port towns that were probably regular trading partners with Lundenwic. This work is therefore somewhat isolated as we await publications from those other sites but it does set the benchmark high. Even well-published sites such as Hamwic or Dorestad lack this sort of overview, while those that need much more work now have something to aspire to.

This is a model work of synthesis that shows how full use of the evidence can enable the construction of a detailed and thoughtful interpretation. It is surely no coincidence that a finds specialist is one of the principal authors, supported by co-authors with extensive artefactual and environmental expertise. This is how it should be, for many of us have, for some years, been arguing that finds are central to understanding people and their places, while the mud from which they are recovered is, on its own, insufficient to illuminate very many aspects of past lives. Even here, people are not explicitly referred to in the text and their presence is reflected in the discussions of the material evidence rather than brought out in terms of their actions, needs and aspirations. That, though, is outside the scope of

this monograph and as it stands, all the authors deserve high praise for producing such a fine consideration of all the evidence. The legacy of the late Alan Vince has been honoured in a work he would have not only have approved of but surely enjoyed.

Duncan Brown

Ben M Ford and Steve Teague
with Edward Bidulph, Alan Hardy and Lisa Brown
Winchester

A city in the making

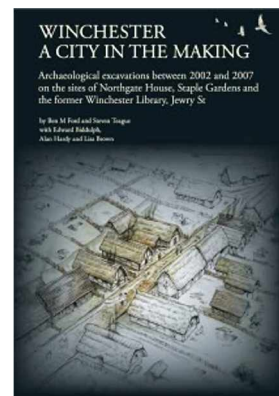
Archaeological Excavations between 2002 and 2007
on the sites of Northgate House, Staple Gardens
and the former Winchester Library, Jewry St

Oxford Archaeology Monograph 12

2011. Oxford Archaeology, Oxford

?Softback, 402 pages plus specialist appendices on CD and online
at <http://library.thehumanjourney.net/663/>

Price £25.00



Despite being one of the most important medieval cities in the country and having been subjected to decades of excavation, publication of archaeological sites in Winchester has been all too sparse, particularly in recent years. This is changing however, as Winchester Museum Service have undertaken to publish a number of

volumes on material excavated at suburban sites and the publication work of the Winchester Excavation Committee, led by Martin Biddle, is ongoing.

There has yet to be published a definite statement on medieval pottery from Winchester, however as part of the museum publication programme a volume is forthcoming. The volume under review here is somewhat exceptional therefore, in providing an integrated report on the stratigraphy and finds from large-scale excavations in the centre of Winchester, undertaken by Oxford Archaeology in 2002 and 2007. Although Iron Age and Roman levels were investigated, the majority of the evidence is of medieval (9th–14th century) date and the site itself is exceptional in an urban context, as, despite being in the centre of the town, the land functioned as a market garden in later periods, meaning that there was minimal disturbance to earlier deposits. In general terms the introduction to the book provides a useful and concise overview of archaeological research in Winchester.

The book then follows a conventional format, detailing the stratigraphic evidence for the Roman, late Saxon and Anglo-Norman period before a discussion