

Recent Research on Post - Medieval Pottery from the City of London

Photography by John Bailey

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EXCAVATIONS AT CROSSWALL in 1979, supervised by John Maloney of the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London, revealed a square brick-lined cess-pit filled with pottery, glass, animal bone and building material. Pottery and clay pipes from the group date it to the late 18th century, probably c. 1770. No large assemblages from the

City of this date have been examined previously. Since the later 17th and early-mid 18th centuries are to be covered by a report on the Aldgate excavations of 1974, now in preparation¹, it was decided to analyse the Crosswall assemblage to

1. C. Orton in A. Thompson (forthcoming).



Fig. 1: Post-Medieval Redware

1. Paint Pot. Ht. 135mm.
2. Jug. Ht. 200 mm. External brown glaze.
3. One-handed bowl. Ht. 92 mm.
4. Pipkin. Ht. 104 mm.
5. Pipkin. Ht. 90 mm. Internal and external brown mottled glaze.
6. Two-handed dish. Diam. 273 mm.
7. Two-handed dish. Diam. 353 mm.

All vessels have an internal brown glaze unless specifically mentioned.

extend the Aldgate sequence.²

The group consists mainly of broken vessels which, on reconstruction, proved to be almost complete (Figs. 1 to 7). In addition, some of the pottery vessels are parts of sets and it is possible that the group could have been deposited at one time, as part of the wholesale clearance of unwanted goods, rather than as an accumulation of day-to-day refuse. Conversely, the animal bone collection, although smaller than in some post-medieval contexts, consists mainly of food debris, the exceptions being the complete skeleton of an Angora rabbit and a single bone from a Linnet, a species kept as song-birds during the late 18th century³.

Comparison of the Crosswall group with similarly dated assemblages in the City is useful. The changing pattern of pottery sources can be documented and some indication of the likely social status of the users of the pit can be obtained. The most interesting and least explored aspect of the assemblage is the quantification of the different types of vessels present and the proportions of pottery to glass, animal bone and clay pipes.

Methods

Groups of finds, to be useful for comparisons, must have been deposited at one time and must contain the rubbish from a single household or activity. They must also be sufficiently large for statistical methods of comparison to be employed.

Two methods of quantification are used in the DUA; weight, and the proportion of rim present (known as the Estimated Vessel Equivalent or EVE). As a rule of thumb, the DUA quantifies groups of pottery of c. 10 kg or more or over 20 EVEs. So far, only six Post-Medieval groups have been quantified (one of c. 1630 from New Fresh Wharf, three from Aldgate of c. 1680, 1710 and 1780, one of c. 1740 from Cutlers Gardens and the Crosswall group of c. 1770). Many smaller groups have been examined and mainly show the same trends as are indicated by the large groups.

Sources

By weight, the most common types at Crosswall are Post-Medieval Redware and Tin-glazed Ware, which were probably locally produced. One vessel (No. 8) was made on the Surrey-Hants border, near Farnham. The remaining wares came from China and the Midlands Potteries, notably Staffordshire

2. Full publication of this assemblage will appear in *Transactions of the London & Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*
3. P. Armitage and B. West (forthcoming).



Fig. 2: Surrey/Hampshire Border Ware
8. Stool pan. Ht. 192 mm. Green glazed inside and out.

and Nottingham.

By EVEs, the pattern is reversed. Chinese porcelain accounts for the greatest proportion of vessels, and non-local English wares are also more common by EVEs than by weight. This illustrates the common-sense rule that 'fine' light wares travelled further than 'coarse' heavy wares.

Comparison of the results of this analysis with those from the other groups shows some interesting patterns. From the beginning of the 17th century, three areas supplied London with earthenware; the Surrey-Hampshire border; the area around London (kiln sites are known at Lambeth and Woolwich); and the Harlow region of Essex. The relative proportions of these three groups of wares are shown in Table 1.

Non-local English Wares almost all came from Staffordshire, starting in the mid 17th century with butter-pots, followed by slipwares in the late 17th century, moulded slipware plates and brown stoneware in the early 18th century and white stoneware in the mid-18th century. Refined brown earthenwares of mid-18th century date (see No. 21) also probably came from Staffordshire, whilst the North-East Midlands supplied stoneware (Nottingham in the 18th and 19th centuries, and Derby and Chesterfield in the 19th century). From the late 18th century onwards most of the pottery found is white-bodied earthenware and bone china which came mainly from the Potteries, but could have been from other areas, for example Leeds. As a proportion of the total

Pottery type	Date					
	1630	1680	1710	1740	1770	1780
local	83.0	99.4	93.5	87.5	83.4	72.3
non-local	0	0.03	3.5	10.1	11.0	27.0
imported	17.0	0.42	1.5	2.4	5.6	0.4
Local wares						
Border ware	39.0	23.2	21.0	22.0	8.2	0.6
Harlow region	29.0	1.4	1.5	0	0	0
London redware	9.0	71.0	46.0	43.0	56.9	60.0
London tin-glazed	6.0	3.8	23.0	17.0	18.3	0.1
London stoneware	0	0	2.0	5.5	0	0
Non-local wares						
butter pot	0	0.03	0	0	0	0
Staffs. slipware	0	0	3.5	2.1	0	0
Staffs. white stoneware	0	0	0	8.0	10.6	0.5
Staffs. refined redware	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.1
Notts. stoneware	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.1
white-bodied earthenware	0	0	0	0	0	26.3
Imported wares						
Rhenish stoneware	15.0	0.4	1.0	0.2	0	0
Werra ware	0.4	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish lustreware	0.6	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese porcelain	0	0.02	0.5	2.2	5.6	0.4

Table 1: percentages of pottery groups of different dates from different sources, by weight

pottery assemblage, non-local English wares steadily increase from none in the early 17th century to just under a third by weight in the late 18th century. If we were to look at 19th century assemblages we would probably find this pattern continuing, until by the beginning of the present century locally-made pottery constituted only a small proportion of the total used.

Imported pottery rarely forms more than 5 per cent of any 17th or 18th century group by weight, with the exception of the early 17th century context from New Fresh Wharf. There, the major import was Rhenish stoneware (mainly Bellarmine bottles), with smaller quantities of Rhenish earthenware. (Werra Ware sliptrailed bowls and dishes are not uncommon in late 16th to early 17th century contexts in the City), and Spanish Lustreware. From early to mid-17th century contexts in the City there are several examples of Spanish Olive Jars and Starred Costrels and the occasional North Italian marbled slipware bowl or costrel, and sgraffito bowl. Northern French unglazed stoneware flasks are common at this time.

In the late 17th century Frechen stoneware from the Rhineland was still by far the most common import, although blue (and later purple and blue) stoneware from the Westerwald region of the Rhineland was also common. The total quantity of imports at this time was lower than in the earlier part of the century, mainly due to a decline in the importation of Frechen stoneware. In the 18th century German imports declined still further, and although Seltzer bottles of 19th century date are sometimes found, the latest type to be imported in any quantity was the Westerwald chamber-pot, found in mid-18th century contexts. Chinese porcelain was being imported into this country from the Medieval period onwards, although the earliest pieces that have been found in the City are from Great Fire contexts. The main period of importation that can be documented archaeologically started in the late 17th century.

Although it is tempting to interpret the quantity of imports directly as a measure of fluctuating trade patterns, there are several other reasons for the changes we find in the 17th and 18th centuries. The

importation of stoneware bottles declined at the same time as the English dark green bottle industry was being established. The importation of Chinese porcelain declined with the introduction of blue-painted creamware and transfer-printed wares in the last quarter of the 18th century. The local tin-glazed industry was producing copies of Chinese porcelain through the 17th and much of the 18th centuries yet there was still a market for the originals here, probably because of the considerable differences in quality.

The changes in pottery source revealed by comparing these groups can be mostly interpreted chronologically, but the writer has not yet examined enough contemporary groups to see

whether there are significant differences between them. For example, one might expect more imported finewares in the rubbish from the more prosperous areas of the town.

Function

Although we do not know the precise function of many types of post-medieval pot, and indeed, many types probably had more than one use, we can quite reliably assign each vessel to a broad functional class. For example, kitchenware, tableware, storage vessels, medicine containers, bottles and chamber pots. Kitchenware includes pipkins, skillets, baking trays and various types of plain bowl. The proportion of kitchenware declined steadily during the 17th and 18th centuries from



Fig. 3: Tin-glazed Wares

9. Chamber-pot. Ht 115 mm.
10. Chamber-pot. Ht. 115 mm.
11. Chamber-pot. Ht. 115 mm.
12. Drug pot. Ht. 93 mm. Decorated in blue.
13. Plate. Diam. 220 mm.
14. Plate. Diam. 230 mm.

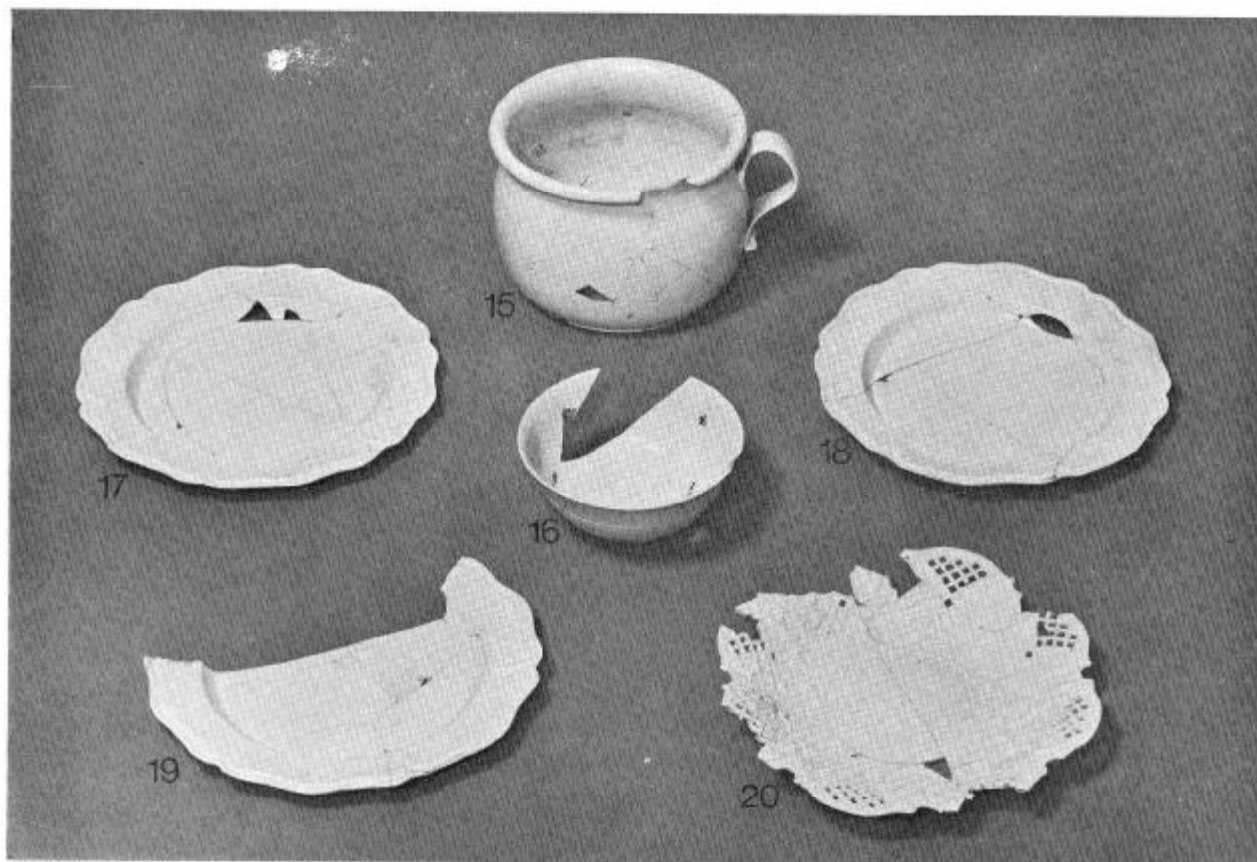


Fig. 4: Staffordshire White Salt-glazed Stoneware

- 15. Chamber-pot. Ht. 128 mm.
- 16. Bowl. Ht. 64 mm. Turned lines on exterior.
- 17-19. Plates. Diam. 240 mm. Moulded design.
- 20. Plate. Diam 235 mm. Moulded basket-work design.

about one third to less than one tenth of an assemblage (by EVEs). This is probably due to the increased use of metal vessels.

Tableware includes decorated bowls, dishes, plates, cups and other drinking vessels, jugs and more specialised vessels like chafing dishes and salts. Surviving material from throughout the period bears witness to the new fashion of using matching sets of vessels; for example, the Crosswall group contains three identical plates (Nos. 17-19) and three identical porcelain dishes (Nos. 29-31) whilst another two porcelain dishes (Nos. 24 and 27) are so similar that they probably come from another matching set. There is no significant chronological trend in the proportion of tableware, but there are large differences between groups. This tableware pottery was competing with wood and

metal and it is difficult to interpret the proportion of tableware correctly. Variations may be due to the different activities giving rise a particular rubbish deposit or to difference in social status of the users of the pottery.

The detailed analysis of the tableware has only just begun. The proportion of plain to decorated tin-glazed plates, for example, might indicate status, while there were probably differences in the value of porcelain vessels depending on the presence of over-glaze enamels and gilding, and on the weight of the vessel (so that cups and dishes would be cheaper than plates or jars). On the basis of these criteria, the Crosswall porcelain should be a moderately rich collection since it has three enamelled dishes and a large bowl but no plates. Rose Kerr of the Far Eastern Department of the Victoria and

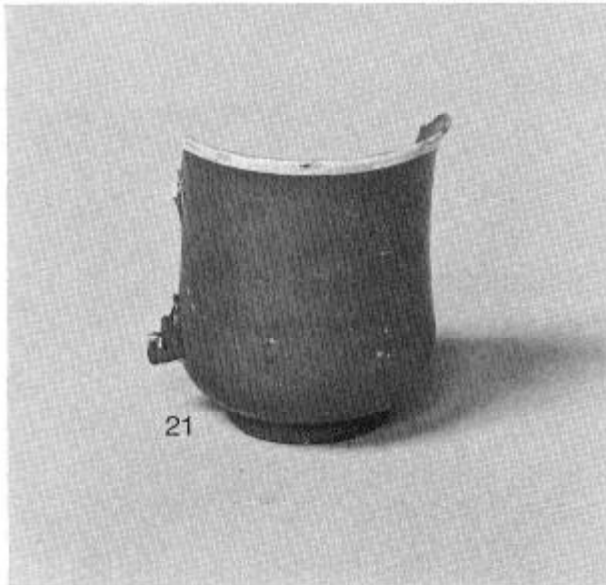


Fig. 5: Refined Red Earthenware
21. Cup. Ht. 71 mm. Brown glaze, white slip line around rim.

Albert Museum has commented that the painting of the porcelain is in general of good quality, with the exception of the bowl, which is of provincial Chinese origin. It seems therefore as if these assumptions may be valid.

The third major class of vessels includes chamber pots and stool pans and, for obvious reasons, is more common in cess-pit groups than in others (one group at Aldgate contained 50% chamber pots). Early 17th century chamber pots have a rounded rim rather than a flange but by the late 17th century the class had split into two; flanged and round-rimmed. The round rimmed type in the late 18th to 19th century was also used as a paint container and was sometimes purpose-made for this function⁴.

Bottles form a class on their own and are found both in glass and in stoneware. This class includes several of the 17th century imports which may have been brought to the country as wine or spirit containers. Bottles vary considerably in their frequency, from none at all to over 50% of an assemblage (for example a Great Fire assemblage at Pudding Lane contains a very high proportion of both glass and stoneware bottles, while a contemporary group from Peninsular House contained none at all).

4. A stamped example is illustrated by P. Amis. *Some domestic vessels of Southern Britain: a Social and Technical Analysis*, 1968.

Storage jars also vary considerably in their occurrence, being completely absent from some assemblages and forming over 10% of others. The frequency of storage jars by weight is much higher than this since they are heavy and break into many pieces. The highest proportion of storage jars to other vessels yet found occurs at Peninsular House, in a store-room apparently burnt down in the Great Fire. Although only part of this store was excavated, over thirty identical jars were discovered in the debris.

Of the remaining vessels, those used as medicine containers are the most common, either being tin-glazed albarellos or drug pots (e.g. No. 12 at Crosswall), or glass phials. The Crosswall pit contained a large number of these glass phials, yet other groups contain none at all. Other miscellaneous vessels include candlesticks, money boxes, bird pots and industrial vessels such as stills and moulds.

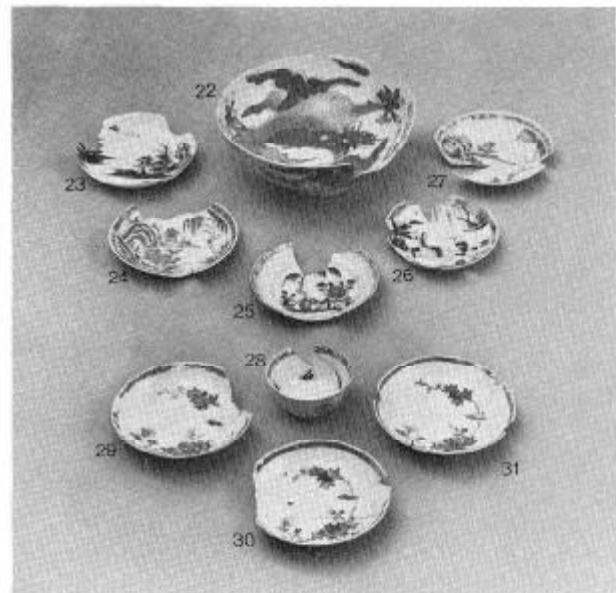


Fig. 6. Chinese Porcelain
22. Bowl. Ht. 75 mm. Provincial blue and white production.
23. Dish. Diam. 115 mm. Blue and white.
24. Dish. Diam. 120 mm. Blue and white.
25. Dish. Diam. 116 mm. Café au lait enamel on underside.
26. Dish. Diam. 107 mm.
27. Dish. Diam. 116 mm. Same set as no. 24.
28. Cup. Ht. 40 mm.
29-31. Dishes. Diam. 118 mm. Café au lait enamel on underside and over-glaze enamel and gilding on top.



Fig. 7: Glassware

- 32. Jar. Ht. 107 mm. Light blue glass, moulded fluting.
- 33. Flask. Ht. 125 mm. Light blue glass.
- 34. Drinking cup. Ht. 155 mm. Clear glass.
- 35. Drinking cup. Ht. 153 mm. Clear glass.
- 36. Tumbler. Ht. 84 mm. Clear glass.

A large quantity of dark green wine bottles and clear glass medicine phials was also found, together with parts of a mirror with cut-glass decoration and a bird feeder (Egan, forthcoming).

We have quantified information on six large groups spanning the 17th and 18th centuries (the Great Fire assemblages at Peninsular House and Pudding Lane still have to be processed in detail). The results of a preliminary analysis are very encouraging. Significant differences are found that cannot be explained chronologically, and only further analysis will be able to tell us exactly what the differences mean. If we were to add the relative quantities of clay pipes and food debris to the information

from pottery and glass, the results would, I am sure, make an important contribution to our knowledge of the lives of 17th and 18th century Londoners, complementing that derived from written sources.

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