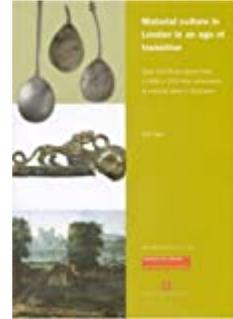


**Geoff Egan.** *Material Culture in London in an Age of Transition: Tudor and Stuart Period Finds c. 1450-c. 1700 From Excavations at Riverside Sites in Southwark.* London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2005. xix + 257 pp. \$40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-901992-39-7.



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## **Tudor and Stuart Artifacts: The Material Evidence of Early Modern Consumerism**

Nearly all excavations in London, like most historic cities in Britain and Europe, are carried out in advance of redevelopment that will destroy the archaeology with deep foundations. As a result, the work is carried out at speed, but thanks to effective planning regulations, and funding from developers as well as the national agency English Heritage, the deposits from riverside sites in Southwark were excavated with reasonable care. This has allowed groups of material to be dated by association, one item with another. Moreover, resources have been made available to analyze the vast array of artifacts from these excavations, resulting in a series of groundbreaking assessments of the material culture of London from Roman times onwards, of which this is one.

This substantial catalogue volume of finds from excavations in just one small part of London is an important publication, revealing the rich diversity of material remains that come from this important period in the city's development. The excavations revealed vast quantities of rubbish collected from Southwark, south of the Thames, and deposited to make up the new ground near the river

during the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This means that the finds do not have a detailed context which relates back to particular houses or owners, but they represent the types of material in use in this part of London during the period.

The detailed location of a find, and its associations with a sequence of deposits and the other artifacts within them, is extremely important for archaeologists. This allows understanding of which items were deposited at the same time, suggesting that they were in use together up to that point, even though they may have been made at very different times. Some of those items thrown away would have been relatively new, but others may already have been of some antiquity, having been in use or kept as heirlooms for a considerable time. Therefore the dating of the deposit in which we find items needs to be compared with the date when objects may have been made. This is in contrast to the many individually interesting artifacts found by building contractors and brought into a museum, or those objects found on the Thames Foreshore—the tidal mudflats revealed be-

side the river through the city at low tide—which are just isolated discoveries, however interesting the particular objects may be. Thus, the importance of even communal dumps of refuse is very considerable for archaeological interpretation, which then throw light on the other artifacts not found in what are termed closed contexts. These assemblages allow us to see the diversity and possible use-lives of particular types of object, as some were less likely to last than others.

Geoff Egan, the main author of this volume, is an expert on early modern material culture. London has been particularly fortunate in the intensity of excavations that have revealed evidence from this period, and Geoff Egan has been the one who has seen most of these objects as they come from the ground into the museum stores. Therefore he has a wide-ranging knowledge of previous assemblages from London which, combined with his many contacts on the continent of Europe, means that he is best placed of anyone to make sense of this vast collection of material. This volume is concerned with a bewildering array of artifacts, but it excludes ceramics, the most common archaeological find, as other specialists work on this most ubiquitous and voluminous of all artifact categories. However, in some cases it is the dating of deposits from the ceramics they contain that has helped in the chronology of the material reported here, so it is important to acknowledge their largely unseen contribution to this volume. Other evidence provides important dating, notably the coins, but what we have here is a collection which is varied, unusual, and highly illustrative of the wide variety of portable material culture in use in London at this time. The development of chronologies for the myriad of artifact classes is important, as from the very late Middle Ages onwards we see an increasing speed in fashion changes, with ideas of stylistic obsolescence being applied to a wider range of objects and across more elements of society.

This volume will not be easy for non-specialists to use, as it is primarily a descriptive, illustrated catalogue of artifacts grouped according to use categories. However, it is a mine of information on the form and in some cases the decoration on many small everyday objects in use in this period. What is notable about the last decades of the Middle Ages and through the early modern period is the exponential growth in the amount of material culture in circulation. The equivalent deposits of the medieval period contain many ceramics—both vessels and tiles—and some iron knives and nails, a few personal ornaments such as buckles, and some coin, but the density of non-ceramic finds would be relatively low. Here we

see the beginnings of our all-too-familiar consumer culture. Moreover, we see some major shifts that do not just result from greater amounts of the existing repertoire of objects. Rather, we see new artifact categories appear for the first time, and numerous others become items used by the many rather than the elite few. Articles of personal adornment, tableware such as metal spoons, and children's toys, are just some examples of this kind.

Mass production of small metal-ware items did take place in the Middle Ages; pilgrims' badges, for instance, are seen here in their final phases before changes in religious behavior occurred as a result of the Reformation. But it is in the early modern period that production on a large scale began for many more types of items. The medieval guilds attempted to keep pace with change and maintain standards of production and quality control, but we see from the analysis of metal artifacts that this was not always achieved. The metal analyses by David Dungworth are set within wider comparative studies already undertaken on London material and that from further afield in Britain, and demonstrate both elements of conservatism and control on the one hand, and innovation and change on the other in the light of different production processes, products, and demands. Many items such as pewter were stamped with marks to indicate producers, so that quality issues could be tracked back to their source. Unstamped items could be of poorer quality, so the buyer had to be aware of the choices they were making. Also visible in this material is the shift to literacy, with more initials being used to replace the previously dominant symbols used as marks. Other items show an increasing concern with ownership, again with initials taking over from heraldry, a sign both of the decrease in importance of old symbols and families, but also in the social widening of ownership to many who did not have family heraldry to draw upon.

This volume contains a heady mixture of the exotic and the mundane. Highly decorated feeders for caged birds can be contrasted with simple buttons lost from items of clothing. Of course some items were recycled, and so are not represented here, and valuable items if lost were more likely to be retrieved either by their owner or by someone lucky enough to see them, and so they are not as well represented in this publication as they would have been in past everyday life. Nevertheless, this volume offers a window into the material culture that is less often displayed in museums, where the more artistic, high-quality products often dominate exhibitions. The small toy objects are particularly poignant, revealing not only the greater availability of items for consumption by

all members of the family, but also the very enculturation of new generations into the obsession with consumption and the role of material culture in the construction and manipulation of social relations. For historians used to the study of changes in material conditions offered by probate inventories, this volume gives form to some of the items on those lists but largely shows the myriad of items that were too inconsequential to be itemized there. We need to realize how materialistic the Western world

had become by the end of the sixteenth century, and that the trends visible in the documents represent even more substantial changes in the everyday lived experience of those in vibrant urban centers such as London. The Museum of London, English Heritage, Geoff Egan and his colleagues all need to be congratulated on making this material available. It is now up to scholars in many disciplines to consider the implications of such a rich cornucopia that they have revealed.

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