

**Title: The Victorian pottery from Sydenham Brewery**

Author: Nigel Jeffries (Museum of London Specialist Services)

Project name and site code (s): SYB92

Date: 06/08/07

© Nigel Jeffries, 2007.

This research forms part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded study 'Living in Victorian London: Material Histories of Everyday Life in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis' Award Number AH/E002285/1 led by Dr Alastair Owens in the Department of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London.. This funding is gratefully acknowledged. For further information see [www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/victorianlondon](http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/victorianlondon)



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council



Queen Mary  
University of London

MUSEUM OF LONDON  
ARCHAEOLOGY

## 1 Introduction and methodology

This technical report considers the Victorian pottery from Sydenham Brewery (MoL sitecode SYB92) recovered from context ([27]), the backfill of a soakaway feature. This material was recorded in accordance with standard practice, using the Museum of London's medieval and later type series and entered onto the Oracle database. A statistical summary is provided below (Table 1). The numerical data comprises sherd count, estimated number of vessels (ENV), and weight but was further quantified by measuring rim diameter and estimated vessel equivalents (EVES: placing the rim onto a rim chart to measure its completeness as a percentage of a complete vessel). Orton, Tyers and Vince (1993, 167-181) provide further information with regard to these specific methods of pottery recording. The pottery is stored in 15 standard archive shoe-sized boxes and curated in the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC).

*Table 1* Dating and statistical counts for the pottery from context [27] SYB92

CONTEXT	TPQ	TAQ	SHERD COUNT	ENV	WEIGHT (GRAMMES)	EVES
[27]	c 1837	c 1850	789	270	39351	84.14

## 2 The pottery

As is common for archaeological ceramic assemblages dating to the Victorian period, all the pottery found is British made, reflecting the dominance of Great Britain's pottery industry and its worldwide markets. Factory made refined earthenwares predominate - it is the largest group within the assemblage (69.6% of vessel count) - as is the case throughout the London area, and indeed the whole country. The rapid growth during the mid 18th century of the Midlands industries which mass-produced durable, refined earthenwares, and later the various kinds of ironstone chinias, granites and so on, as well the overwhelming success of transfer-printing as a major force in the field of decoration, all combined to transform the production, marketing and use of pottery in Britain. Factory made refined earthenwares is a term used here to describe a selection of twice-fired refined whiteware bodies which are plain and undecorated, or with transfer-printed, painted, and industrial slip decoration.

From SYB92, transfer-printed refined whitewares and pearlwares are the most frequent among this group (total 37.8% of vessel count), with blue transfer-printed refined whitewares the most popular (24.1% of vessel count). Whilst there is only a limited collection of refined whitewares in other coloured transfer-prints (black, green colours and so on: less than 20 vessels), these are generally reserved for the moralising china plates and cups (below). The refined whitewares with various Flow Blue prints applied (Coysh and Henrywood 1984, 140), which includes a tankard, a soup tureen lid, and a series of different shaped - and therefore mismatched - teacups

and saucers, completes the printed wares. The next largest component among the refined earthenwares is plain, undecorated, refined whitewares (19.3% of vessel count: ‘CC’ or cream-coloured wares, Miller 1991, 3) in utilitarian kitchen (oval serving dishes, rounded bowls and so on) and sanitary forms (chamber pots).

Yellow wares also supply a reasonably large and well preserved group (11.2% of vessel count) among the British made earthenwares and decorated with industrial slip and/or mocha.

*Table 2 Pottery by source from context [27] SYB92 by statistical counts*

POTTERY SOURCE	SHERD COUNT	SHERD COUNT %	ENV	ENV %	WEIGHT grammes	WEIGHT %	EVES	EVES %
British made earthenwares	155	19.6	36	13.3	6443	16.4	8.91	10.6
British made stonewares	37	4.7	29	10.7	5767	14.7	17.55	20.9
Factory made refined earthenwares	557	70.6	188	69.6	22403	56.9	51.21	60.9
London made coarse red earthenwares	38	4.8	16	5.9	4633	11.8	6.47	7.7
London made tin-glazed earthenware	2	.3	1	.4	105	.3	.00	.0
Total	789	100%	270	100%	39351	100%	84.14	100%

The next section discusses the pottery following the remit for the interpretive discussion as proposed in the project design.

## 2.1 Chronology

The *terminus post quem* of c 1837 for this pottery assemblage is provided by the Staffordshire maker’s marks of J.Meir & Son (1837: Godden 1991, no 2635, 430) and Copeland and Garrett (1833-47: *ibid*, no 1090, 173), in conjunction with the chamber pot bearing the Royal CIPHER medallion of ‘VR’ for Queen Victoria (who ascended to the throne in 1837). However, it remains possible that this group was discarded after the mid 1840s. This is evidenced by the Doria transfer-printed pattern which is noted by Coysh and Henrywood (1984, 113) as being registered in 1844, and the Garland transfer-printed pattern attributed to David Methven & Sons (*ibid*, 246) whom operated between 1840 and 1930. Though the Copyright Act of 1842 made it possible for designs and shapes to be registered at the Patent Office in London, thus giving them protection for a period of up to three years, this does not necessarily mean that the registration of a particular print reflected the first time it was used. Given the combination of the above, it is therefore more likely that the group was deposited on the cusp of the 1840s, but possibly after 1844.

## 2.2 Function

When considering the pottery against its primary function, this assemblage divides almost equally between vessels used as teawares (25.6% of vessel count: saucers and teacups etc) and dining vessels (24.4% of vessel count: plates etc).

Three matching decorated sets have been identified among the teawares. The five more expensive (in relation to the refined whitewares with transfer-printed decoration) porcelain teacups (Spode's '4643' shape: Whiter 1970, 129) and two saucers with 'Chelsea sprig' moulded decoration supplied the first set, with the second comprising three cheaper refined whiteware octagon shaped teacups and two saucers with sponged decoration. The third set is up to two matching blue and white transfer-printed refined whiteware saucers each decorated with the Garland (Coysh and Henrywood 1984, 150) and Archers print (*ibid*, 25). In addition, there are up to three individually matched teacups and saucers with the same printed decoration (Forest, Rhine Views and an unidentified print resembling Tassils). Two Rockingham ware teapots provided the means of serving hot beverages from. The remaining tea drinking vessels are fragmented, suggesting this material was already much broken before being discarded, and therefore perhaps derived from yard and household rubbish and refuse heaps. This group is characterised by a few mismatched tea plates, a slop bowl with what appears to be an Italianate scene, a teapot with one of the Rural Scenery series of prints (*ibid*, 315) and a plain, undecorated refined whiteware cream jug. Coffee drinking was also enjoyed with the pottery used to take this beverage including a refined whiteware moulded coffee can with industrial slip and classical figures (these appear to be described in Spode's 1820 catalogue as 'low mug, dipped for Embossed Figures. 9 sizes': Whiter 1970, 114) and two yellow ware coffee cans. The whiteware jar with the print 'Fortnum and Mason Cocoa Paste 122 Piccadilly' reminds of the other hot drinks consumed in this property.

A large proportion of the yellow wares were used as drinking serving vessels with around a dozen large- to medium-sized globular jugs or pitchers retrieved. Beyond these other drinking vessels are limited to a complete stoneware ginger beer bottle and the lower profiles of a few other stoneware bottles. With pottery not usually reflecting the consumption of alcohol and tobacco during this period it is not surprising that this assemblage yielded just the one tankard (in Flow Blue print) and one yellow ware tobacco jar.

Refined whitewares with the ubiquitous Willow Pattern transfer-printed pattern (Coysh and Henrywood 1984, 402) constitutes the bulk of the former category, with up to 18 dinner and two dessert plates fragments present together with two large meat plates and the one sauceboat. Not all the dinner plates could be perfectly fitted and so the number of vessels may have once been fewer. This main setting was supplemented by up to seven plain, undecorated refined whiteware dinner plates (though these are mismatched with differing heavier bodies and glaze tints) and individual blue and white transfer-printed whiteware dinner plates notably those with Denon's Egypt (Coysh and Henrywood 1989, 69) and Chinese Marine (Coysh and Henrywood 1984, 82) prints. In addition, the 13 yellow ware and four refined

whitewares rounded bowls with banded and mocha industrial slip decoration applied (Sussman 1997) represent vessels put to many uses although their primary function is likely to have been for eating sloppy foods from.

Evidence of domestic chores is also provided. Food storage and canning apparently took place, with up to 16 quite well preserved plain, undecorated refined whiteware cylindrical jars in different sizes found. Boot blacking, and blacklead for polishing stoves was contained in up to nine substantially intact black and polish stonewares bottles, which once had paper labels attached advertising their contents and maker (Askey 1998, 102). Both the cylindrical jars and black leading bottles represent quite a comparatively large collection when compared with the other two study sites in this project (Limehouse Causeway: LHC93 and New Palace Yard: NPY73), or similar dated assemblages from Spitalfields (sitecode SRP98).

Utilitarian ‘country pottery’ kitchen vessels include a number of locally produced coarse red earthenware pots, such as the two lids that once fitted bread crocks, a mixing dish or pancheon (probably a milk pan for dairying), and a Sunderland-type slip trailed divided dish (Brears 1971, 63-4; 1974, 125 and 184) for baking and roasting, and two yellow ware oval serving dishes for similar use. The generally well preserved flowerpots found in different sizes and including a couple of small dishes for drainage, suggest herb growing in a kitchen garden or the beatification of the internal rooms with flowers.

The pottery reserved for private use includes a near complete plain, undecorated plain refined whiteware stool pan, which once sat in a wooden commode, with up to seven fragmented plain, undecorated refined whiteware chamber pots, and a few yellow ware chamber pots, completing the sanitary wares. In the Victorian household one might expect chamber pots to be stored and used in the bedroom, hidden either under the bed or placed on a nearby table. Even if this property was hooked up to a nearby sewer line or had access to a water closet, chamber pots would have still been required for small children. The upper profile of a ewer decorated with the common Wild Rose print presents the only evidence of the standard wash bowl and ewer set (although such combinations are rarely observed even among the pottery used by wealthy silk manufacturers and their families in Spitalfields). Completing the group are a few pharmaceutical wares comprising a few smaller plain, undecorated refined whiteware ointment pots for keeping cosmetics or storing pills.

Display and parlour items are supplied by the two matching porcelain figurines (accession numbers <5> and <6>) depicting Napoleon Bonaparte, and the molded whiteware cylindrical mug showing an oriental regal procession. All three vessels are unusual finds archaeologically, and hold some symbolism. The oriental regal procession probably has some historical precedence and the figurines depicting Bonaparte remain intriguing, although he cut a popular figure in Britain and a series of prints depicting his victories were also made by the Staffordshire potteries at the time (Coysh and Henrywood 1984, 257). It, however, remains possible that these figurines might be German or French made.

*Table 3 Primary function of the pottery from SYB92 by statistical counts*

POTTERY FUNCTION	SHERD	SHERD	ENV	ENV	WEIGHT	WEIGHT	EVES	EVES
------------------	-------	-------	-----	-----	--------	--------	------	------

	COUNT	COUNT %		%	grammes	%		%
Cover	3	.4	2	.7	748	1.9	1.55	1.4
Display	4	.5	4	1.5	112	.3	.00	.0
Drink	33	4.2	10	3.7	1068	2.7	1.55	1.4
Drink: serving	45	5.7	8	3.0	2079	5.3	2.15	1.9
Drink: storage/serving	5	.6	5	1.9	585	1.5	1.00	.9
Drink: teawares	170	21.5	69	25.6	4456	11.3	47.44	41.7
Food: consumption	223	28.3	66	24.4	7756	19.7	19.36	17.0
Food: cooking	1	.1	1	.4	30	.1	.10	.1
Food: multiple	52	6.6	17	6.3	1483	3.8	3.76	3.3
Food: preparation/serving	22	2.8	5	1.9	1312	3.3	0.45	0.4
Food: serving	55	7.0	14	5.2	4778	12.1	2.45	2.2
Food: storage	50	6.3	29	10.8	5821	14.8	16.12	14.1
Horticultural	25	3.2	10	3.7	2637	6.7	4.22	3.7
Hygiene	85	10.8	15	5.6	5165	13.1	4.18	3.7
Leisure	4	.5	3	1.1	152	.4	.76	.7
Pharmaceutical	4	.5	4	1.5	451	1.1	3.25	2.9
Writing	8	1.0	8	3.0	718	1.8	5.50	4.8
Total	789	100%	270	100%	39351	100%	84.14	100%

### 2.3 Cost

The cost of 19th-century twice fired refined earthenwares has merited study from archaeologists, notably George Miller in two influential articles (1980, 1991). Here Miller looked at Staffordshire potters price fixing lists in order to determine cost of plain and decorated wares. It was shown that whilst printed decoration was the most expensive type of decoration available for refined whitewares, Willow Pattern or “willow ware” (Miller 1991, 8) was the least expensive of all the patterns and because of its popularity was therefore always catalogued separately (Miller 1980, 4: colour is never defined in the price lists). Similarly, the seven sponge decorated whitewares also represented the cheapest form of all decoration, be they printed, painted or with industrial slip or ‘dipt’ decoration (*ibid*, 6; Sussman 1997). However, the cheapest of all are the plain, undecorated refined whitewares, which supplied a large percentage of the pottery from SYB92, largely surviving as chamber pots, plates and cylindrical jars. Though yellow wares would have also represented the inexpensive end of the ceramic market, little work has been conducted by archaeologists or ceramic historians about how these vessels were marketed, sold, or costed, despite the likelihood that this evidence has survived in contemporary trade literature and pottery catalogues deriving from the numerous northern Midlands potteries that made these wares. Contemporary descriptions for forms and prices for stonewares are better known through the survival of two wholesale price lists from the Lambeth potteries of Doulton & Watts and James Stiff & Sons, both dated to 1873 (Green 1999, 361-8). Whilst these supplied the terminologies and cost for the stonewares found at SYB92 some conversion is required to project this back from the 1870s.

Translating the above onto the SYB92 assemblage, then whilst most of the pottery would have been relatively inexpensive to buy, the construction of a number of different matching decorated tea and dinner services suggests these had been brought with aesthetics and maintenance in mind. Additionally, the purchasing of the 270 vessels discarded would have also required some financial outlay, albeit spread over a

10 to 15 year period. However, the variety and proportions of the pottery represented here in terms of body types (i.e. red earthenware, stoneware, porcelain, yellow ware, and the different refined whiteware bodies) are not radically different in terms of composition to other ceramic assemblages of similar date in London. This merely reflects what pottery was available and being most commonly used by Victorian Londoners across the social spectrum. The apparent determinant for status, as suggested by analysis of the pottery used by wealthy silk manufacturers and their families in Spitalfields, is not only quantity, but the achievement of an overall homogeneity and uniformity in their ceramics services with little apparent imagination and variety (Holder and Jeffries, in prep).

## 2.4 Social and domestic space

The diverse range of pottery recovered from the soakaway means that the material selected for discard was derived and collected from most rooms in this property, rather than being restricted to ceramic kitchen vessels, for example. Taking a standardised view of the arrangement of the Georgian property this material was once used in then one can imagine the diverse range of vessels being used in most rooms, from the eight stoneware inkwells for writing kept in the study, the few ointment pots for cosmetics and pills sitting in the bedroom, the stoneware bottles which stored black leading and polish in kept in the scullery or storeroom, and the bone china tea drinking services and figurines occupying the parlour.

*Table 4 Simplified functional categories for the pottery from SYB92 context [27] by statistical counts*

POTTERY FUNCTION	SHERD COUNT	SHERD COUNT %	ENV	ENV %	WEIGHT grammes	WEIGHT %	EVES	EVES %
Display	4	.4	4	1.5	112	.3	.00	.0
Drink	253	32	92	34.2	8188	20.8	52.14	45.9
Food	403	51.1	132	49	21180	53.8	42.24	37.1
Hygiene/Pharmaceutical	89	11.3	19	7.1	5616	14.2	7.43	6.6
Other	40	5.1	23	8.5	4255	10.8	12.03	10.6
Total	789	100%	270	100%	39351	100%	84.14	100%

## 2.5 Gender and individuality

As noted, the sorts of small knick-knacks that once filled Victorian houses and parlours are represented by the Napoleon porcelain figurines. The role that figurines and other bric-a-brac played in the Victorian parlour has been considered by Paul Mullins when interpreting the material from the excavations on the Cypress Archaeology Project (Praetzellis and Praetzellis eds, 2004, Chapter 4). However, one of the notable aspects of the pottery is the quantity of children's pottery in the form of moralising china (mostly in plates), all of which have mottos bearing either one of Benjamin Franklin's maxims or popular contemporary poems, rhymes and prayers (Table 5). Perhaps the most personalised of all this group is the small bone china

christening cup with the gold enamelled monogram of 'William' painted over-glaze. Were these vessels gifts for the children of the house to instruct them on the structure of the family ("The presents"), and to aid education? Similarly, though the eight inkwells found can be construed as a sign of literacy their use remains unclear. For example, did these belong to the children of the house for their education? Or did they remain in the study (if one existed) for the patriarch of the house, or were they used by the matriarch to compose letters, keep household accounts and maintain her diary?

*Table 5 Moralising china found from SYB92*

Vessel	Motto or image	Full motto	Interpretation
Plain refined whiteware toy plate with nursery decoration	...DW...	Unclear	
Black transfer-printed whiteware toy plate	'With cakes and toys throughout the year and called me her "sweet little dear" my grandmother'	'The presents. Who came to see me far and near. With cakes and toys throughout the year and called me her "sweet little dear" my grandmother'	"The presents" was a poem written by Jane Taylor (1783-1824) in honour of her grandmother
Black transfer-printed whiteware toy plate	Partial image of mother and daughter hugging		
Black transfer-printed whiteware toy plate with over-glaze painted decoration	'There are no gains without pains'... 'ind...'	'There are no gains without pains' 'industry pays debts'	Written by Benjamin Franklin for Poor Richard's Almanac 1737
Two red transfer-printed whiteware toy plates with over-glaze painted decoration	'At the working mans house hunger looks in but dares not enter'		Written by Benjamin Franklin
Green transfer-printed whiteware cylindrical mug	Partial image of children playing		
Black transfer-printed whiteware plate with over-glaze painted decoration	Angels with harps reading from prayer book on table with inscription 'How glorious is our heavenly King who reigns above the sky' and 'How...	'How glorious is our heavenly King who reigns above the sky'	The inscription is from Isaac's Prayer

## 2.6 Condition of material

The condition of the ceramics is generally good, although some elements were better preserved than others. This probably reflected breakage and use rates, the delicateness of different ceramic bodies, with some of the tea drinking vessels and the sanitary wares already well broken before they reached the soakaway. When compared with the pottery from the other two study sites, the SYB92 material is statistically the least preserved.



*Table 6 Mean fragmentation rates by sherd and vessel count and EVES*

Context	Mean weight per sherd (grammes)	Mean weight per vessel (grammes)	Mean EVES per vessel
[27]	49.8	145	0.32

## **2.7 Variability**

Firstly, this pottery assemblage contained the largest number of vessels (up to 270) discarded when compared with the other two study sites for this project (Limehouse Causeway and New Palace Yard). Although most were transfer-printed white refined wares and pearlwares (up to 102 vessels from a total of 270 vessels or 37.8% of vessel count), proportionality context [1] from LHC93 contained the most printed wares (46.8%). In difference to the Limehouse groups, which raise their own interesting questions about the use of ceramics at the beginning of the Victorian age, the composition of the pottery used in Sydenham suggests this was used by a single family group, perhaps supplemented by a few lodgers/servants. Here ceramics helped construct their material world. Structured mealtimes are suggested where the principal dinner service was provided by dinner plates, two meat and dessert plates and a sauceboat all decorated with the cheaper Willow Pattern print. However the different maker's marks (i.e. Davenport and two with J.Meir & Son) or body type marks present (i.e. 'stoneware' or 'ironstone' etc: these are no more than marketing terms) suggest these do not represent a wholesale purchase of the one set from the one supplier, but a more piecemeal or replacement acquisitions. A varied selection of a few matching printed and sponged decorated teacups and saucers sets were also kept, which in turn were supplemented by the occasional matching teacup and saucer for individual use. Plain, undecorated refined whiteware jars labelled with preserves and newly canned foods were kept in the scullery or storeroom next to the black leading and polish bottles. The stoneware inkwells and the moralising china show a concern for education, religion, literacy, respect for the family and teaching the dictums of the age.

## **2.8 Further questions**

When determining the further research on the ceramics from SYB92, there are questions that pertain to individual elements of the assemblage itself and then, on another level, questions about the interpretation of this material in a broader context. However, the first line of enquiry is understanding the social space of the particular property the ceramics were once used during the 1830s-40s. Was it a farm building, or was it the Sydenham Brewery? What was its layout? Did it have a kitchen and storeroom? Was a hook up to a nearby sewer the reason for the soakaway's filling, thereby providing the opportunity for the inhabitants to throw away their unwanted pottery and glass? Whatever the scenario, this property would have looked and been arranged differently to the Georgian buildings of New Palace Yard, and the similar dated tenements of Limehouse. Once this is achieved (presuming it can be) the second task is determining the details of the occupants themselves during this period.

A number of the ceramics themselves require more work in order to uncover the multi-level meanings behind their use. This is particularly relevant for understanding the role in which the Napoleon Bonaparte figurines played in this property, where further contextual historical information is needed to consider where these were made, whom might have used them and where marketed for, as well as the opportunity for a material object to provide an interesting micro-history behind the role in which Bonaparte continued to play in British culture. Identification is required about the oriental procession scene present on a whiteware cylindrical mug. What is the image depicting? On a more personal level, does the documentary research reveal the presence of a boy called William, whose christening cup was thrown away in the soakaway? What was the role that moralising china played in constructing Victorian society?

Beyond the above, more general questions remain about quality and cost of 19th-century ceramics, in particular the potteries and marketing of the more everyday 'country pottery' vessels (Sunderland-type ware, yellow ware and locally produced coarse red earthenwares) that make a consistent appearance in all the study group assemblages. Due to their apparent mundane use and limited resale value they have largely received little study from art and ceramic historians (with the notable exception of Brears 1971 & 1974) and remain ignored by British archaeologists. In addition, there has been little research into the way in which smaller quantities of ceramics and glass were marketed and sold once they reached London (not all where sold in wholesaler warehouses), although this may well have been covered in Transactions of the English Ceramic Circle, albeit probably focused on the expensive end of the market.