

Engaging
in the
Archaeological
Practice of
Everyday
Objects
Through a
Historical
Human
Activity:

Mudlarking.

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Revealing how human experience is shaped
by the environment involves exploring the
intrinsic connections between people
and their surroundings.

INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by rapid industrialization and environmental degradation, the relationship between humanity and nature has become increasingly fraught. The Anthropocene, a term describing the impact of human activity on the Earth's geology and ecosystems (Crutze and Stoermer, 2000), compels us to reassess our connection to the material world. Understanding the historical and cultural contexts of our interactions with nature is crucial as we navigate contemporary complexities. This essay situates ceramic practices within this framework, emphasizing how mundane objects can serve as vessels of memory, culture, and ecological awareness. By examining the interplay between human creativity and the natural environment, this study seeks to shed light on pathways toward a more sustainable and reflective existence.

This study begins by exploring the intrinsic relationship between the body and human experience through the lens of ceramic practices, particularly in their spiritual and meditative dimensions. The aim is to foster a dialogue that situates the viewer within a contemporary spatial context, evoking memories and individual experiences that align with the archaeological and environmental themes explored in this essay. This dialogue invites reflection on the connections between the urban landscape, nature, and the objects we use in daily life, such as mugs, bowls, and vessels—items that echo human history on a personal scale. Simultaneously, it expands to encompass the larger context of geological transformations, highlighting the continuity between our ancestors and the present.

Additionally, the study also investigates the tension between human activity and natural force, particularly in relation to the Thames River and its role in shaping London's history. Nature is a volatile power, and the progress of human civilization is often marked by environmental repercussions. Paradoxically, it is only when we confront the damage humanity has inflicted upon the natural world that we can fully appreciate what remains. Perhaps it is only through experiencing darkness that one can truly recognize the light. This study aims to rediscover a balance from within the chaos, offering a path that allows for an engagement with both the ancient past and the pressing challenges of the Anthropocene. The process of archaeological excavation serves as a metaphor for the layers of human impact on the environment, reflecting the intertwined histories

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of natural and human-made worlds.

Through this investigation, I will seek to address the environmental consequences of human development, paralleling methodologies found in contemporary discussions on *Material Reform* (Material Cultures, 2022). Just as the excavation of cultural sediment reveals histories, so too does a critical engagement with materials provide insight into the ecological challenges we face today. In this way, the study links the intimate, tactile experience of ceramic making to broader ecological and cultural conversations, offering a comprehensive approach to understanding our relationship with the earth and its resources.

By exploring the connection between ceramics and their materials to reveal the local pottery industry, and extending this relationship between archaeological findings and the environment, people can better understand how nature has influenced human society within its spatial context.

Ceramics as a central concept: reflecting human activity and environmental relationships

The initial concept of ceramics lies in its role as a tangible connection between human activity, environment, and history. Ceramic artifacts embody the essential link between the human body and the land, revealing a history that stretches back to prehistoric times. They provide evidence of traditional craft practices, reflected in the use of clay, light, and organic materials. Moreover, ceramics capture cultural memory and material transformation, serving as lasting symbols of human interaction with nature and techniques. This research explores the intersection of craft, archaeology, and the environment, highlighting how these objects reflect historical human experiences, skills, and interactions with natural resources.

The ceramic process becomes a metaphor for shaping and reshaping the human-environment relationship over time. In exploring the importance of objects within ancient lives and rituals, this study discovers layers of meaning that resonate with contemporary experiences. Examining these connections foreground the discipline's ties to archaeology and nature, encouraging deeper reflection on our shared human origin. This question has intrigued people for a long time, likely driven by an instinctive desire to explore their own existence. Such curiosity has also catalyzed the growth of archaeology, a field that has developed over the last two centuries alongside industrialization and modern technological advancements.



Fig. 1.

Gormley, A. (1991) *American Field*. [Work in progress with the Texca family, brickmakers].



Fig. 2.

Gormley, A. (1991) *American Field*. [Terracotta, around 35,000 elements, each 8-26 cm, overall dimensions variable].

From clay to kilns: how archaeology reveals human experience and its connection to the environment

A straightforward method to uncover the history of humans, animals, and plants is through excavating areas with physical evidence, such as remnants from heritage sites, fossils, or buried bones, to reconstruct human activity. This is crucial for understanding its context and further recognizing what happened during that time. Broadly, archaeology is explained as a study of the human past through its material remains, focusing on the human narrative. In *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (1991), the authors define it as the 'past tense of cultural anthropology,' embodying material culture left by former societies. The evidence involves analyzing various aspects of human experience, including buildings, tools, and artifacts, which reveal the techniques used and how they evolved into more sophisticated approaches to improve living conditions.

Moreover, understanding the starting point of ceramic production provides valuable insights into local production and how items were traded across regions, contributing to ancient exchange networks in Britain. For example, Roman kilns were discovered in Highgate Wood in 1962 by archaeologists Tony Brown and Harvey Sheldon revealed kiln remains and numerous pottery fragments dating from approximately A.D. 50 to A.D. 160. Scholars proposed that this excavation offered clues to identify a Romano-British pottery manufacturing site and suggested that production ceased after A.D. 160 due to the pottery industry's internal economics, potentially influenced by a controlled market on the Continent. Although the evidence is limited, it suggests a pattern rather than mere coincidence. Further interpretations arise from material finds in London, where there is relative scarcity of pottery from this period compared to later centuries.

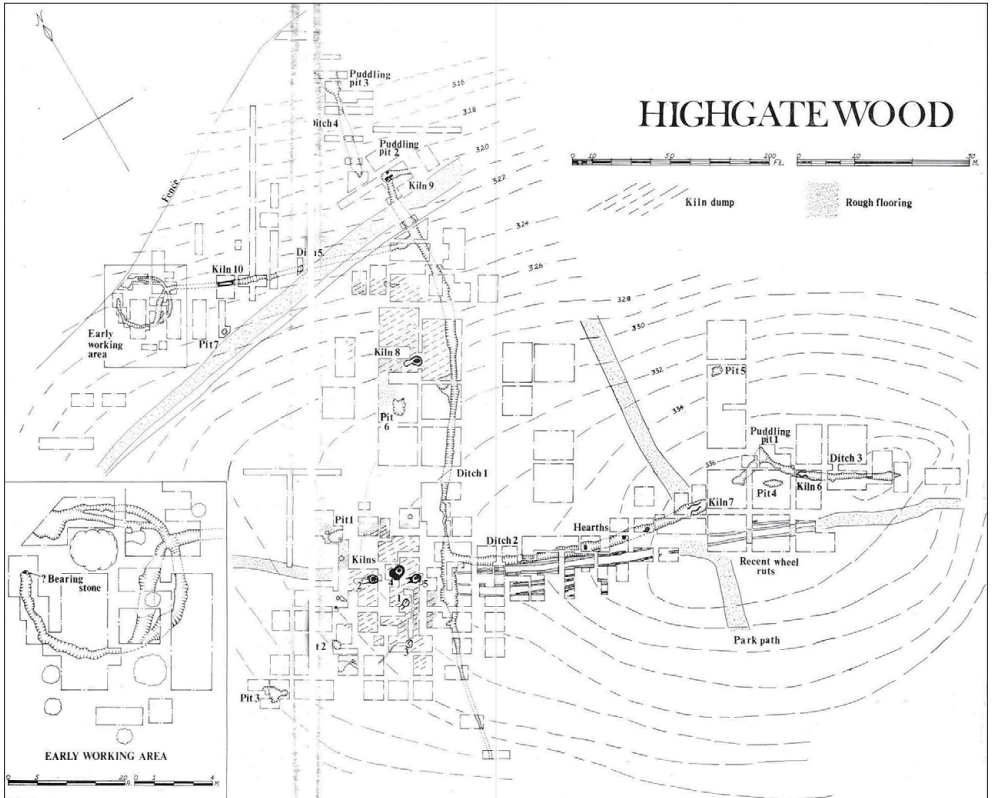


Fig. 3.

Brown, A.E. and Sheldon, H.L. (1979) *London Archaeologist*. [A plan of the features found with an enlargement of the early working area].

For example, some people assumed that a Highgate sherd occurs in the substantial rubbish deposits dated A.D. 60-80 at 207 Borough High Street; a red-bodied cream-slipped ring-neck flagon likely made at Brockley Hill (A.D. 70-100), was found among the pottery in Highgate Kiln 10; and the similar grogged vessels occur at Southwark Toppings Wharf (A.D. 70-110). These examples provide evidence that potters were engaged in the pottery industry, revealing more sophisticated technological developments in clay works over time. Exploring the scale of the production site and the structure of the industry raises questions about the environmental context and how people sourced materials for pottery-making (The Highgate Roman Kiln Project, n.d.).



Fig. 4.

H. Sheldon. (n.d.) *The Roman Kiln*. [One particular style of pots found at Highgate, and its 'poppyhead beaker' decoration].

Layers of time: exploring London's geological history through clay and fossils

Archaeologists have examined the composition of recovered artifacts, identifying the presence of London clay, which often has an orange, rust-like surface due to iron oxidation. This analysis enhances their understanding of geology and its practical applications. By excavating deeper layers, archaeologists can investigate different types of clay, different types of clay. This is particularly relevant in studying springs, which occur at the interface of two rock types, highlighting additional connections to the surrounding environment. Focusing on this methodology, two main geological layers have been identified: Bagshot Sand and Claygate Beds, ordered from the youngest to the older deposits.

The 'Bagshot Sand' is regarded to be near-marine sand deposited over 50 million years ago; it is often iron-rich but lacks fossils, making it challenging to analyze the depositional environment accurately. In contrast, the 'Claygate Beds' represent a more stable layer composed of fine sand and lacking gypsum, making it suitable for bricks and pottery production, while the 'London Clay' is a thick layer of stiff blue clay, also interspersed with sand layers formed from sediments discharged into the sea. Over time, it became sandier and alternated with mud layers from the Claygate

Beds. It is believed that the London Clay at Highgate Wood is overlain by the Claygate Beds, where sandy layering serves as evidence visible in areas of the wood above the 95-meter contour, slightly higher than Queen's Wood (London Geodiversity Partnership, 2014).

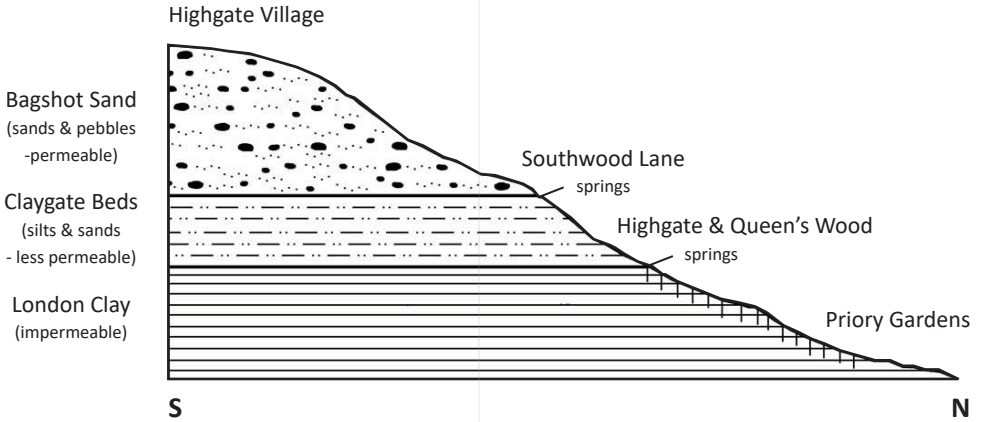


Fig. 5. Clements, R. et al. (2010). *Geologists' Association Guide 68*. [Spring lines to the North of Hampstead Heath].

As more heritage sites were excavated, it was assumed that large rivers in the past carried mud, which was discharged into the sea. For instance, along Archway Road, numerous fossils of sea shells and marine animals, such as crabs, lobsters, and nautiluses, have been found. Fossilized fruits and seeds of land plants, like the Nipa palm, were also discovered within the marine clay, along with shark teeth, occasional fish and land animal bones—including crocodiles and turtles—as well as fossilized wood and amber. These findings are evidence of the existence of warm or tropical seas, pointing to a tropical climate. Approximately 55 million years ago, England was covered by a tropical sea, rich in resources, before the area became land, with rivers flowing northward. Later, parts of North London were engulfed by ice sheets. Thus, these natural features not only nourished the land but also shaped the unique geological landscape, environment, and the use of local materials.

Chapter 1



Fig. 6. King, C. (2006) *London Geodiversity Partnership*. [The probable coastline c. 55 million years ago when the London Clay was being deposited].

Chapter 1

CHAPTER 2

Understanding the geography, geology, and the resources beneath London has revealed how they have influenced the landscape of the Thames River and the city. By analyzing the materials used in daily life and buildings, we can gain insights into how these geological factors have shaped our environment.

Following the discussion in Chapter 1, the streams pattern in Highgate Wood and Queen's Wood are a key point of interests, as they form an important part of the Thames River catchment. The streams in Highgate Wood flow eastward, while those in Queen's Wood flow east as well. The higher ground, known as the interfluvium, roughly follows Muswell Hill Road. Streams to the west join Mutton Brook, which links to the River Brent and flows into the Thames at Brentford. To the east, streams feed into Moselle Brook, which continues to the River Lea and joins the Thames at Bow Creek between Canary Wharf and City Airport. This network is integral to London's landscape today.

Observing the geological characteristics of London, including Highgate Wood and the Thames foreshore, has deepened my understanding of the intricate relationships between objects, people, and their environments. Each site, shaped by natural processes like erosion and sedimentation, reveals unique features. This inquiry connects to Geography, which explores how human culture interacts with nature and how locations shape human experiences, providing insight into the historical context behind contemporary practices.

Geology focuses on the Earth's physical processes, including its materials, structure, and history. While it shares commonalities with Geo-

graphy, it also investigates the physical properties of the Earth's surface and the societies that inhabit it (Murphy et al. 2024). As I explored these topics more deeply, they opened pathways to a greater understanding of how these disciplines intersect and inform one another. In *What is the difference between geology and geography?*, Benjamin Elisha Sawe (2018) explains that geology, from the Greek words *geo* (earth) and *logia* (study), focuses on the Earth's materials, processes, and history. Geography, comes from *geographia* meaning 'earth description,' both offers complementary perspectives to understand the dynamic interactions between humans and the Earth.

The sediments from the Thames highlight geographical peculiarities and illustrate how people have engaged with their environment, reflecting both London's history and the dual nature of our surroundings: the resources provided by nature and the environmental issues resulting from human activities. Notably, the combination of fresh and saltwater, known as 'brackish,' creates anaerobic mud that transforms the river into a nutrient-rich habitat for both animals and humans. This environment has fostered life and allowed London's society to develop alongside it. Additionally, the industries that also emerged along the riverbanks supported the thriving brick industry, as the abundant sediment near the river's mouth was ideal for brickmaking.

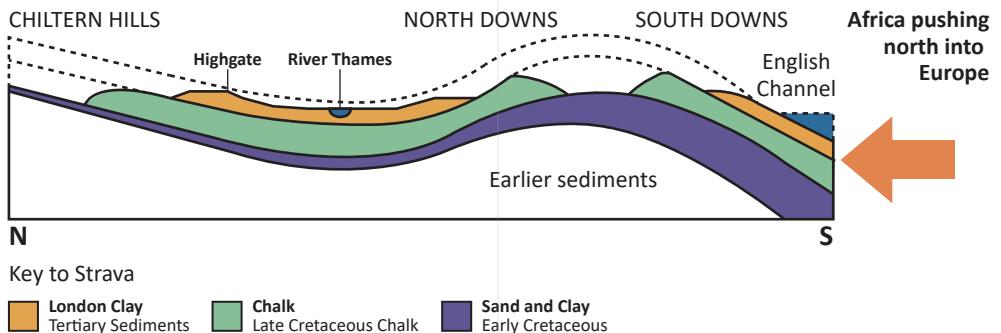


Fig. 7.

Friend, P.F. (2008). *London Geodiversity Partnership*. [Evolution of the London Basin and the Weald].

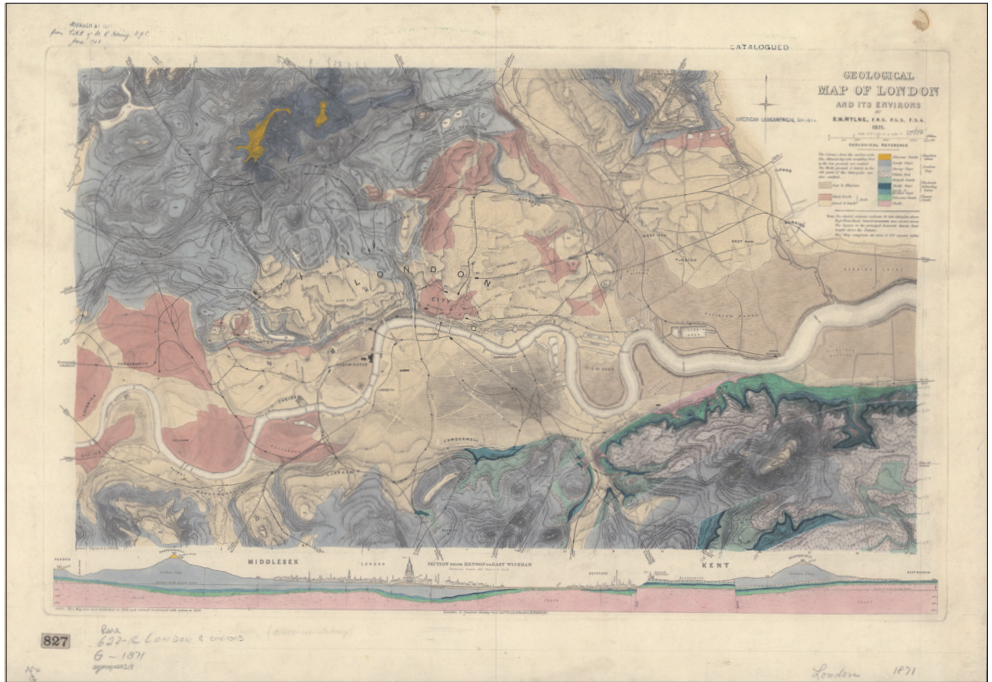


Fig. 8.

Mylne, R.W. (1993). *London Topographical Society*, No. 146. [Map of the geology and contours of London and its environs 1856].

A brick-built city, London reveals the history of brickmaking in local regions, spanning from Roman Britain to the Victorian period

The origins of brickmaking can be traced back to ancient times, as clay has been used as a building material since prehistoric eras. Early builders utilized river mud combined with other natural materials, such as wood or reed, allowing them to construct foundations and facades coatings by drying the mixture in the sun. This method dates back to Londinium when Roman society introduced these craft skills to Britain over two centuries, applying similar techniques to pottery (more information is provided in the following chapters). In light of this, I explore the local building history of the British Isles, where various natural materials have been utilized, including clay, stone, slate, timber, and straw. However, clay deserves particular attention due to the innovative brick-making techniques developed in recent centuries, which have significantly transformed infrastructure and housing. London is often described as a brick-built city, as noted

by Peter Hounsell (2022). This transformation resulted primarily from the Great Fire of 1666 and subsequent regulations enacted by local authorities, although several other factors also contributed to these changes.



Fig. 9.

Pyne, W.H. (1827) *The world in miniature: England, Scotland and Wales*. [A family moulding gang. 'Brickmakers'].

The history of brickfields across different periods particularly emphasizes the Victorian era, which witnessed a peak in production

The Romans are credited with introducing brickmaking to Britain, utilizing more sophisticated methods to shape wet clay into blocks. Evidence of their brick use survives at many sites, such as remnants of city walls showing tile courses and ragstone facing a rubble core. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, brickmaking in Britain declined, and many techniques were lost. However, the surviving Roman buildings provided a ready source of materials for later builders. Over a hundred churches in Essex contain Roman bricks (Ryan, P., 1999), most notably in St. Botolph's Priory, Colchester, where the Saxons and Normans recognized the structural potential of Roman clay products.

The first new bricks produced after Roman occupation were the so-called 'great bricks,' manufactured in the twelfth century. An example can be seen at Coggeshall Abbey in Essex, indicating that the brickmaking techniques were preserved after the Roman collapse, possibly through contacts with Cistercian houses on the continent. By the thirteenth century, these large bricks were superseded by Flemish bricks, which had proportions similar to modern bricks. Although there is some debate about their origins, these new bricks were used in well-known constructions, including the Tower of London's curtain wall, Sheen's royal palace, and Mercers' Hall (Schofield, J., 1984; Nightingale, P., 1995; Smith, T.P., 1985).

By the fourteenth century, indigenous brick-making had revived in England, with craftsmen from Dutch and German backgrounds bringing

their skills to eastern England, where raw materials were abundant. It wasn't until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that England experienced its first great age of brickwork. During this time, bricklayers displayed a high level of technical expertise, adapting imported details into a distinct domestic style, evident in the colleges of Cambridge, Hampton Court Palace, Lambeth Palace, and Lincoln's Inn. Brick became the fashionable material for country houses and palaces, as noted by John Leland (Wight, J.A., 1972; Blair, W.J. and Ramsay, N.L., 1991).

Notably, the *Act for the Rebuilding of the City of London* in 1667 established building regulations mandating that all new structures be made of brick or stone to prevent future fire hazards, a response to the Great Fire that destroyed 13,000 properties. This marked the beginning of a significant and permanent brickmaking industry in the vicinity of London. As brickmaking spread from the east coast to various regions of the country, different types of bricks were produced based on the local clays available. The composition of clay varies across geological formations (Prentice, J.E., 1990), influencing the development of brickmaking in subsequent centuries. Early brickmaking primarily relied on superficial clays that were easier to manipulate, as some clay minerals were challenging to work by hand. This changed with the invention of suitable machinery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, enabling the processing of harder clays. In London, the clays typically used for brickmaking date back to the Pleistocene age. These sedimentary clays, known as wind-blown loess deposits, contain a small proportion of minerals but are rich in silica, which vitrifies when fired, giving yellow stock bricks their renowned durability.

By the nineteenth century, the bricks used to construct London's expanding suburbs were made from weathered London clay blended with street sweepings of grit and cinder (British Regional Geology, 1996). Brickearth found on the alluvial terraces bordering the River Thames reflects fluctuating water levels over geological time, providing suitable materials for hand brickmaking in the London area. Over time, more advanced manufacturing methods were introduced, such as drying bricks on the hack ground before firing them in kilns (Woodforde, J., 1976). Brick and tile production peaked during the Victorian era, driven by the massive demand for industrial construction, including canals, docks, railways, tunnels, and

domestic housing. However, several factors contributed to the decline in local brick production after this period, including resource depletion, the shift from manual to machine techniques, the demand for higher-quality tiles, and changes in local architectural styles.



Fig. 10.

Ideal Homes. (n.d.) *Brickmaking*. [Blythe Hill Fields, Brockley, c. 1890].

CHAPTER 3

Mudlarking is a unique human activity that has existed since the Great Fire of London and the subsequent rapid industrialization in the sixteenth century, although its meaning has changed over time. Utilizing mudlarking as an archaeological method to search for historical treasures along the riverbed raises awareness of deposited objects and their significance, fostering a more responsible approach to collaboration between industry and education.



Fig. 11.

Cecconi, A. (n.d.) *London Museum*. [The neck from a stoneware bottle with a bearded face known as a Bartmann bottle 1500s — 1600s].

By envisioning a scene where people sit on the beach on a sunny day prompts exploration of their activities, interactions, and the surrounding environment, including the sights, sounds, and sensations that define the foreshore experience. The twice-daily tides of the Thames create ideal conditions for exploring the river, allowing visitors to uncover the region's stories. Tourists and local residents often stroll along the foreshore, enjoying healing moments and meditative experiences during low tide. Access to the Thames foreshore is available at various points, typically marked along the Thames Path with visible road signs.

Kate Sumnall (2024), curator of *Secrets of the Thames: Mudlarking London's Lost Treasures*, notes that this activity was first recorded about 200 years ago when impoverished children, known as 'mudlarks,' exchanged their findings—often bits of rope, bones, and copper nails—from the Thames for goods or a few pennies. Artifacts dating back 10,000 years could be discovered in this area of mud, sand, and rocks. In the twentieth century, these destitute researchers vanished from the foreshore, and the grand finds unearthed during the Victorian construction boom became

rarer (Russell, M., 2022). However, this practice continues today, fueled by social media interest (The London Museum, 2024), evolving into a narrative activity that uncovers thousands of years of human history.



Fig. 12. Mayhew, H. (1861) *London Labour and the London Poor*. [An illustration of a young mudlark].

The methods for clarifying artifacts

“The way pottery was made is crucial for deciding who made it, particularly the types of pottery reflect the needs, level of technological knowledge and market force in the societies that produced them” (Laing, L., 2014). Initially, pottery emerged to store and deliver water and food, later expanding to baking, boiling, and frying. With the influence of science, art, and trade, pottery has diversified across cultures, as seen in British pottery today. A key feature of earthenware is its connection to the land—clay. Understanding the period of artifact can also reveal the history of its time.

One of the primary archaeological techniques today is typology, refined by Oscar Montelius, which categorizes artifacts chronologically by material—stone, brass, and iron. This approach, rooted in the Three Age System from the nineteenth century, became widely adopted and involved systematic excavation and analysis (Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P., 1991). In my research on the Thames foreshore, I apply similar methodologies to analyze the findings, revealing London's past. Archaeologists use pottery as a chronological indicator, building typologies based on changes in vessel shape, materials, providing insights into production technologies, and firing temperatures to understand the technological capabilities and cultural practices of different societies.

Categorizing the approximate periods of the treasures is based on the utilization of materials and skills from that time

Another method that helps archaeologists infer the possible time period of artifacts is studying pottery terminology associated with specific techniques used in a particular culture and region. By examining variations in texture, glaze, and form, archaeologists can construct a timeline reflecting technological advancements and social and cultural exchanges. For example, pottery fragments from various periods—such as Roman, Medieval, Tudor, Stuart, Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian—are often found along Thames foreshore, including jars, bowls, beakers, vessels, jugs, and plates. These remnants serve as silent storytellers, providing a tangible link between the flow of time and the enduring presence of human craft.

When the Romans introduced their civilization to Londinium in Britain, they revolutionized pottery production in Britain. One example of this is ‘Black burnished ware,’ characterized by a polished surface achieved through pebble-burnishing. Another notable type, Samian ware, imported from Gaul, is easily identifiable by its glossy red finish. These vessels were often decorated with ‘barbotine,’ a technique using a clay and water mixture to create dynamic scenes of animals, such as dogs, hares, or stags around their surfaces. Medieval pottery introduced innovative solutions to firing challenges, like adding shells to clay to reduce shrinkage and cracking. Coarse Borderware, produced along the Surrey-Hampshire border during the mid-fourteenth century, is distinguished by its splashes of green glaze and occasional stab marks from firing.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought significant changes to English pottery and imported ceramics. Borderware, recognizable by its off-white clay and glazes in yellow, green, olive, or brown, became a staple in early modern households. Concurrently, salt-glazed stoneware from Germany, particularly brown jugs from Frechen and grey vessels from Westerwaldkreis, gained popularity. These items, often adorned with cobalt blue motifs like coats of arms, royal portraits, and antipapal propaganda, introduced Renaissance-style aesthetics to English homes.

Tin-glazed earthenware from the Netherlands innovated with a white enamel glaze that allowed for vibrant painted decorations. The influx of Chinese porcelain into London markets, auctioned off to dealers known as ‘chinamen,’ coincided with new imports like tea, coffee, sugar, and cocoa. This era marked the rise of refined earthenware, particularly porcelain, which began to replace tin-glazed pottery. A distinctive type of refined earthenware from this period is Mochaware, known for its seaweed-like decoration, created by dripping a solution of ingredients onto vessels coated in liquid clay, such as urine, tobacco juice, ground iron scale, and hops. Additionally, transfer printing emerged as a new technique, replacing hand-painted pottery and allowing intricate designs to be applied more efficiently, making matching dinnerware sets affordable for the growing middle class.

The evidence above reveals how historical techniques shaped the development of new pottery types in London. Exploring these everyday objects through an archaeological lens, particularly via mudlarking, uncovers the rich stories of this great city—marked by delightful serendipity and surprising discoveries for explorers.



Fig. 13.

Russell, M. (2022) *Mudlark'd: Hidden Histories from the River Thames*. [IN FOCUS-Pottery. Different types of pottery between five main periods.]

CHAPTER 4

As environmentalist Julia Watson (2020) argues, “indigenous technologies are not lost or forgotten, only hidden by shadow of progress in the remotest places on earth.” This serves as a reminder that the memory and knowledge of the past have taken another form in the modern society, which has grown up with mankind.

Vernacular architecture, shaped by the Earth's resources, reflects a deep connection between material use and local environments

The sense of belonging and spirit of place has shaped architectural design across cultures and throughout history, as evidenced by numerous examples in vernacular architecture worldwide. However, some crucial terms merit reiteration: vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, or rural (Rudofsky, 1964). These concepts engender a broader exploration into what has shaped the local environment and, perhaps, shaped us in turn—especially the ancient wisdom found in art and spatial design. This type of architecture embodies the integration of local customs, traditional artisanal techniques, materials, and ecological considerations into everyday architectural practice.

In the Anthropocene era, climate challenges have heightened awareness of how materials are sourced and used in contemporary society. This shift invites a return to indigenous knowledge and practices, offering sustainable solutions deeply connected to local ecosystems. By re-examining vernacular architecture and exploring the instinctual qualities of materials like ceramics—shaped by hand, earth, and tradition—we can rediscover pathways to more ecologically mindful and culturally grounded design practices. Ultimately, this journey into the wisdom of the past encourages us to rethink our relationship with the environment, reminding us that progress can be achieved without severing our ties to tradition, material authenticity, and a sense of place.



Fig. 14-16.

Lanoo, J. (2023) *Vitra Garden House*. [Built Upon the Memory of a Place, Design by Atelier Tsuyoshi Tane Architects].

CHAPTER 5

The three experiments from the study: Mudlarking, Mapping, and Clay Vessels offer potential avenues for encouraging people to engage with local history and the environment from both archaeological and ecological perspectives, thereby raising awareness of the significance of both the past and nature.

Artifacts and Echoes: Bridging Past and Present Through Local Engagement

The project explores meanings that span different timeframes, from the past to the future, through experiments at both micro and macro levels using archaeological practices and modern technologies. It begins with mudlarking, which involves collecting historical artifacts from the foreshore while providing an immersive experience of past human activities, transforming encounters into a personal insight. This process aligns with the exploration of the Thames River, particularly through access points from the city center to the east, seeking vivid narratives that intertwine animals, plants, and human presence. Mudlarking offers a framework for examining London's diverse landscapes and provides new data sources for geography and geology, informing subsequent project phases. Collected sources include images of the foreshore and its surroundings, sound recordings or video clips captured during key moments, historical maps sourced from esteemed institutions, as well as stories from local residents and relevant academic articles.

In addition, the OS Maps application is utilized to document activities on the mud, generating a trail of footprints that is later transformed into a personalized map. This new map, based on geological and geographical data, aims to engage the public, fostering deeper connections with the region's history and spatial context, thereby creating a sense of resonance between people. Building on these investigations, discarded materials from the foreshore are incorporated into everyday objects—clay vessels, creating individual interpretations of the findings. These crafted items further weave together the material and temporal layers of the project.

Mudlarking

A special acknowledgment goes to Wandle News (Herlihy, O. 2024) for providing an accessible introduction and detailed insights into exploring the Thames River. The list of access points is

organized into twelve main areas, running from east to west: Greenwich, Lewisham, Isle of Dogs, Limehouse, Rotherhithe, Wapping, Bermondsey, Southwark, Lambeth, The City, Westminster, and Wandsworth. At the start of this exploration, I followed the list for my first fieldwalking along the foreshore, beginning near the Royal Naval College. By observing the surface without disturbing the mud allowed a full immersion into the surrounding environment—the sounds of the tide, people, and birds blending together. The surroundings naturally evoked reflections on past human activity in the same location, and this experience sparked me an idea to document the mudlarking journey, mapping the route, offering a guide to serve as a reference for others engaging in the same practice. Therefore, I continued doing as many fieldworks on the foreshore as possible, and the footprint was generated by using the smartphone application OS Maps and applied in later stages.



Fig. 17-18.

Tseng, S-N. (2024) *Mudlarking*. [Photos of Thames foreshore in different locations].

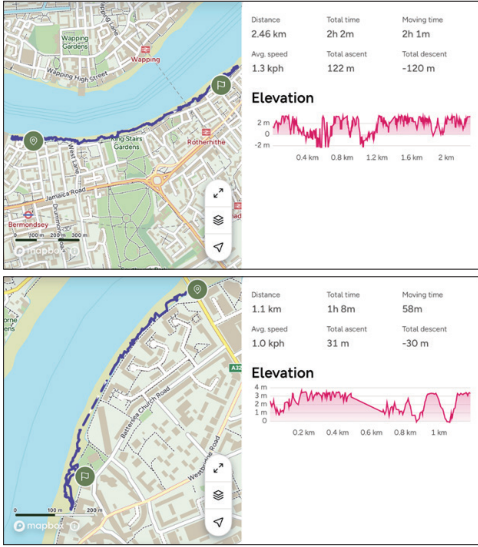


Fig. 19-20.

Tseng, S-N. (2024) *Mudlarking*. [Two of the footprints from applying OS Maps when doing the Mudlarking].

Mapping

Harley, J.B. (2001) argued that maps are social constructions of the world: “Far from holding up a simple mirror of nature that is true of false, maps redescribe the world—like any other document—in terms of relations of power and of culture practices, preferences and properties.” Under this view, the verb form ‘mapping’ is more appropriate in this context than the noun ‘map’, as the former refers to an ongoing process that is incomplete, indeterminate, and mutable (Abrams, J. and Hall, P., 2005). This concept underpins my mapping experiment, which reflects the idea that we live in a world of constant change, open to exploration and deeper meanings.

The experiment results in a series of maps expressing different scales of the surrounding area, redrawn using QGIS and data from sources like the British Geological Survey, UK Soil Observatory, and the U.S. Geological Survey. Subsequently, the footprints generated from various locations encourage people to engage with their environment, offering a personal journey through the mud and a broader spatial understanding of the city.

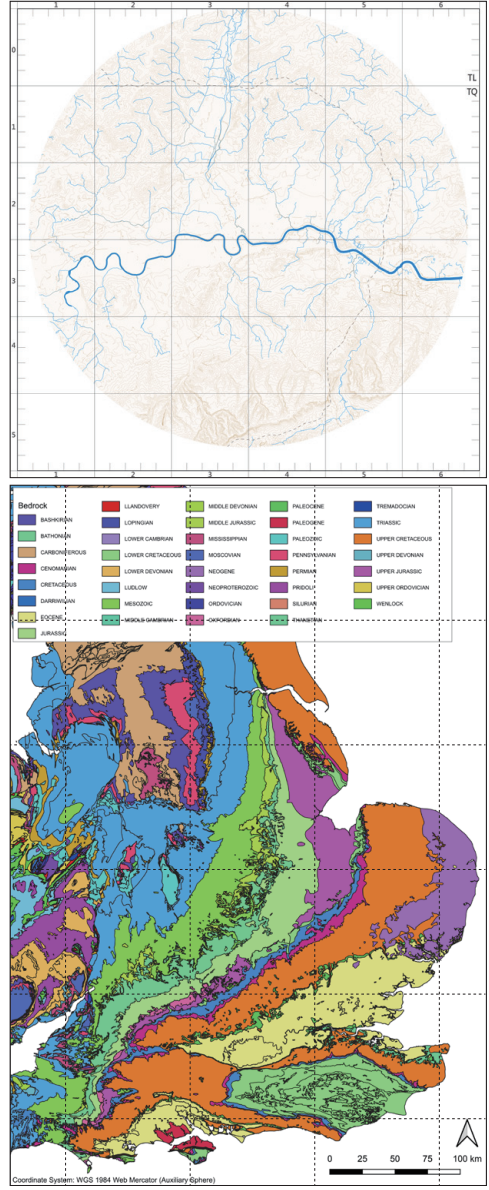


Fig. 21-22.

Tseng, S-N. (2024) *Mapping*. [The geological maps of the initial version which regenerated by utilizing QGIS].

Clay Vessels

The findings from mudlarking and mapping, along with collected artifacts, offer insights into London's history and local narratives. The pottery practice focuses on the core features of everyday objects—form, texture, material, and technique—paralleling archaeological methods from earlier research. This work engages in a dialogue with the remnants of history, creating a bridge between past and present.

The forms draw inspiration from British pottery styles from 4000 B.C. to A.D. 1900 (Laing, L., 2014), the project cultivates an indigenous atmosphere, reshaping collective memory. Analyzing the textures of fragmented treasures through a digital microscope and studying the landscape of mud and river offers a deeper interpretation of the materials and their contexts. This analysis led to the creation of texture samples that enhance my understanding of local materials. The project produced bowls, plates, and cups that reflect the rough surfaces of the Thames foreshore, using

hand-carving and impressing techniques to transfer natural textures onto the vessels, echoing historical artifacts. Each piece features a functional, transparent glazed interior and a raw, irregular exterior, imitating the organic qualities of the environment.

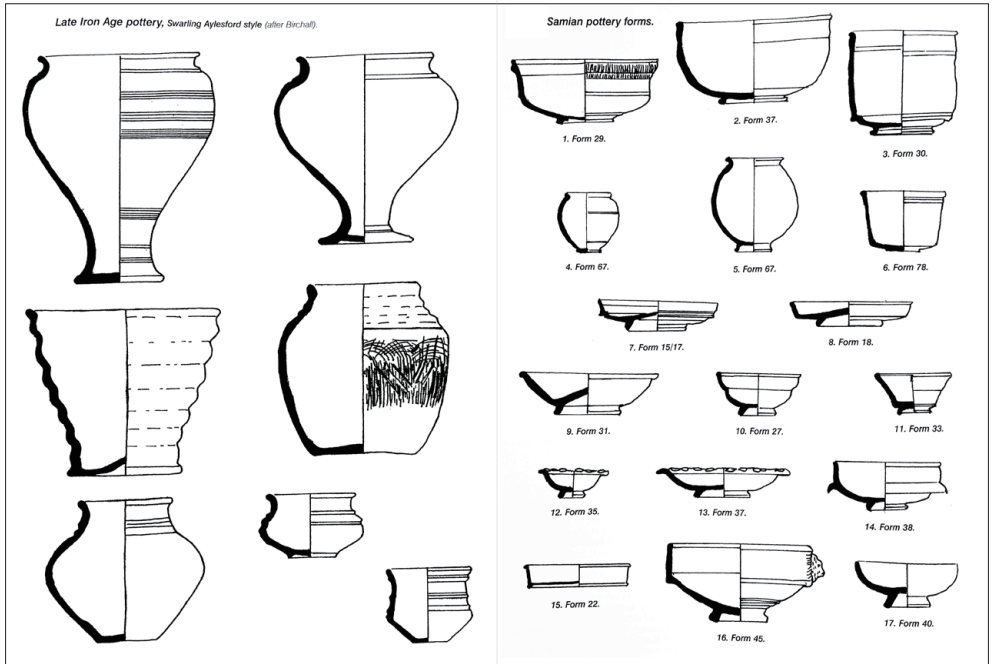


Fig. 23.

Laing, L. (2014) *Pottery in Britain 4000BC to AD1900*. [The reference to two pottery forms: Swirling Aylesford style and Samian ware].



Fig. 24.

Tseng, S-N. (2024) *Clay Vessels*. [Using a digital microscope to observe the texture of the objects].

Materials used in the clay vessels are sourced from the Thames foreshore, blending clay with reclaimed materials and undergoing fired or unfired processes. This approach encourages a sustainable, resource-conscious mindset, reducing dependence on industrial production systems by utilizing readily available materials. It reflects concerns about the climate crisis and emphasizes the relationship between human activity and environmental impact by limiting resource exploitation. Initially, the concept was to use London Clay to align with the project's theme, but its extraction proved challenging. Instead, I chose Scarva Earthstone Professional PF560 White, a strong, fine-grained plastic clay known for its smooth texture and excellent thermal shock resistance, capable of firing up to 1300°C. This off-white clay effectively highlights the mixed materials after firing. Reclaimed materials gathered from the foreshore are ground into fine dust using a mortar and pestle, then merged with the clay. These methods offer the fragments an afterlife, transforming discarded or underutilized materials into valuable resources.



Fig. 25.

Tseng, S-N. (2024) *Clay Vessels*. [The fragments collected from the foreshore, ground into powder, and used as materials].

Finally, the techniques of pottery-making employed reflect individual considerations, particularly the choice to use a throwing wheel for clay-making. This method shapes containers by centering the material around an axis, guiding the vessel's formation through a controlled and deliberate process. While this skill has ancient roots, it was traditionally practiced by hand or foot, without reliance on powered mechanisms. Utilizing modern equipment in conjunction with traditional skills can provide a feasible solution to transform the current state of the industry, highlighting the importance of the wisdom of the past.

This interdisciplinary design approach may help people progress toward a more responsible future by sharing knowledge across various scales—from the individual to the spatial, hand-made to machine-made, digital to physical, and ephemeral to enduring. By exploring the history embedded in objects, as well as the relationships between humans and nature, and the potential of materials alongside indigenous techniques from local, we can engage with individuals, makers, builders, constructors, enterprises, and governments. In doing so, we can create new meanings that contribute to a better today and tomorrow.



Fig. 26-27.

Tseng, S-N. (2024) *Clay Vessels*. [Creating vessels by drawing inspiration from the forms of ancient British pottery].

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