

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 56/87

THE IDENTIFICATION OF WOOD FROM  
ARTEFACTS EXCAVATED BY THE D.U.A.  
AT LONDON SITES: CUTLER ST., PLA  
WAREHOUSE/HARROW PLACE, 1978.

R M O Gale

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#### Summary

Waterlogged wood samples from 37 artefacts, medieval and post-medieval in date, were examined and identified using comparative anatomical methods.

The woods which were mainly from species of British origin included some interesting imported examples, particularly those associated with fine cabinet-making.

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WOOD IDENTIFICATION OF ARTEFACTS FROM CUTLER STREET, PLA WAREHOUSE/HARROW PLACE  
1978

Introduction

Waterlogged wood samples from 37 artifacts were prepared and examined. Thin sections in transverse, tangential longitudinal and radial longitudinal planes were made using a razor blade. The condition of several samples was so poor that sections were only obtained after the material had been frozen sufficiently for the ice crystals to support the structure. The sections were mounted in 50% glycerine and examined using a light microscope. The cellular structure was compared and matched with name reference material.

Results

- Con 1613 AN 383 post-medieval bobbin - Guaiacum sp, lignum vitae.  
Con 276 AN 318 post-medieval pulley - Guaiacum sp.  
Con 954 AN 928 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp, oak.  
Con 954 AN 922 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 941 post-medieval barrel - Fagus sp, beech.  
Con 954 AN 933 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 932 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 674 barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 534 AN 399 (?) post-med spherical object - probably family Salicaceae which includes Salix sp, willow and Populus sp, poplar.  
Con 1252 AN 413 post-medieval waste material - 26 fragments with representatives of Diospyrus sp, ebony, Santalum sp, sandalwood, Buxus sp, box.  
Con 954 AN 720 post-medieval spade - Fagus sp.  
Con 954 AN 936 medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 934 medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 927 medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 854 AN 916 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 940 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 943 post-medieval bucket - Quercus sp.  
Con 903 AN 944 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 935 post-medieval - Quercus sp.  
Con 903 AN 722 - barrel - Fagus sp.  
Con 954 AN 923 post-medieval barrel - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 926 post-medieval - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 924 post-medieval stake - Quercus sp.  
Con 897 AN 411 wedge - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 677 post-medieval - Fagus sp.  
Con 954 AN 937 post-medieval - Quercus sp.  
Con 303 AN 315 post-medieval - Pinus sp (sylvestris group).  
Con 829 AN 400 post-medieval - structurally very poor condition, possibly family Salicaceae which includes Salix sp, willow and Populus, poplar.  
Con 964 AN 868 post-medieval - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 929 post-medieval - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 676 post-medieval - Ulmus sp, elm.  
  
Con 341 AN 317 post-medieval - Pinus sp, pine (sylvestris group).  
Con 1252 AN 412 post-medieval - 6 fragments, Diospyrus sp, ebony.  
Con 954 AN 920 post-medieval - Quercus sp.  
Con 954 AN 858 post-medieval - Fagus sp.  
Con 954 AN 938 - Fagus sp.

Con 1212 AN 413 - post-medieval waste - 36 fragments, 35 fragments Juglans sp, walnut and 1 fragment probably Buxus sp, box this sample was in an advanced state of decay and packed with fungal spores.

### Discussion

Material from this site included several imported timbers which were usually employed in fine woodwork such as cabinet making. Mainly these were in the form of fragments or slivers usually not more than 1cm wide and several cms in length.

Diospyrus sp, ebony, a very hard wood taking a good polish which varies in colour from light to black, the latter being most valued for cabinet making. The genus occurs throughout Africa, across Asia to the Philippines and Malaya and also in America.

Santalum sp, sandalwood, a genus with 25 species native to E Malaysia, Juan Fernandez and from Australia to Polynesia. The timber from several species is used commercially the most common being S album now cultivated in E India. The wood is scented by an aromatic oil.

Guaiacum sp, lignum vitae, indigenous to W Indies and Central and Tropical America was originally imported into this country in the early 16th century for the oil content which was used in the treatment of venereal disease. This led to its use for drinking vessels and the very hard dark wood, excellent for turnery, was subsequently used in cabinet making. The oleaginous property of this wood also provided a suitable self-oiling medium for bearings, cogs and pulleys as seen in this context.

Juglans regia, walnut, introduced to Europe by the Romans was much favoured for cabinet making in the 17th century.

The remaining timbers represented are native to Britain.

The structure of Salix sp, willow and Populus sp, poplar is very similar and it is not possible to identify either by the anatomical features alone.