

Industrial archaeology at Anchor Wharf

Robert Carr



This photograph shows the single-fluke anchor sculpture *Anchor Iron* by the eminent sculptor Wendy Taylor which was installed on Anchor Wharf, Greenwich in 2004; the sculpture was commissioned by Berkeley Homes. If it is actually iron and not a plastic composite it is almost certainly a 'ready made'. There is also a single-fluke anchor on public display at North Woolwich and it is probable that redundant anchors were locally available 20 years ago.

Single fluke anchors are sometimes used to position dredgers, drilling platforms, etc. The sculpture more-or-less occupies the position of an anvil from the site's iron-working period – see below.

Anchor Wharf was excavated by Museum of London mainstream archaeologists in 2001–3. A report dealing with the industrial period was published in the *London Archaeologist*, spring 2013, volume 13, number 8, pages 217-222. A previous article in the *London Archaeologist* published in 2012 dealt with the site's Tudor buildings.

At the extreme north-east of the site, the archaeologists unearthed an anvil of relatively modest size. This was an iron cylinder 22 inches in height and 31 inches in diameter. The anvil had a dished top and there was a vertical hole about 2 1/3 inches in diameter through the centre. The published description does not mention a horn so this was probably a specialised anvil intended principally for anchor work. The published archaeological report makes no attempt at interpretation.

Around and to the east of the anvil was a deposit of hard concreted slag – smithing hearth bottom. Immediately south of the anvil were pieces of broken machinery. Among these pieces was a pair of smooth rollers, so there were ironworking rolls on the site but these may have been in use at a later date than the

anvil. There were also two more smooth rollers, approximately paired. So from this evidence there were no pyramidal rolls. A roll with just a pair of rollers, similar to a domestic mangle, would only have been of use for smoothing sheets of metal, not for plate bending. For that, at least three rollers are required. Again there is no attempt at interpretation.

Drawings and paintings from the 19th century give a good idea of what took place at Anchor Wharf. There was an open-sided smithery with a timber roof and in the best illustration you can make out what appears to be a substantial row of blacksmiths' tools. There is also another illustration which appears to show these tools. Small craft such as cutters, ketches, schooners and collier brigs were commonplace around the Wharf and many of them were presumably waiting to have their anchors attended to.

Some of the pieces of machinery associated with the anvil, for example the rolls, were quite likely of a later date than the anvil itself and may even have come from an adjacent site. It is fairly certain that the principal ironworking remains discovered by archaeology date from the 19th century and that these are the remains of a specialised manual smithery operated by Crowley Millington and Co.