

Birkbeck College training excavation 1997

THE 1997 BIRKBECK College Centre for Extra-Mural Studies training excavation took place on a site awaiting redevelopment, just south of Trinity Church Square, Southwark, London SE1. The site was made available for evaluation by the London Borough of Southwark, who generously grant-aided the work. Additional funds, for the teaching of students, were provided by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee and the Surrey Archaeological Society. Tools and equipment were provided by the Museum of London Archaeology Service.

The excavation lasted for five weeks, and about 125 students participated in courses of a week's duration. Specialist sessions in surveying, finds analysis, conservation, environmental archaeology and photography were provided by MOLAS staff.

The site lay south of the urban core of Roman and medieval Southwark, in an area which had apparently remained as open ground until the early part of the 19th century. By then the land had become part of the estate of the Corporation of Trinity House, which was developed for residential purposes from the 1830s onwards. Although some of the more prestigious squares and streets on the estate remained largely intact, the long terrace

that had run east-west across the site was demolished in the early 1960s, to be replaced by a temporary annex to the nearby Crown Court.

Previous small-scale investigations in this part of Southwark suggest that in the Roman period it was an area where farming was carried out and where, especially close to the routes of Watling Street and Stane Street, cremations and inhumation burials had been deposited.

The training excavation revealed two north-south and one east-west Roman ditches, probably field boundaries. The east-west one was the most extensively examined; it had been recut a number of times and contained much pottery, as well as building material, animal bone, fragments of wall plaster, burnt daub, *opus signinum* and tesserae. The material was largely uneroded, perhaps suggesting that buildings stood close by. An evaluation also revealed a few prehistoric flints and sherds, and a medieval north-south ditch, perhaps a field boundary. Foundations and debris from the 19th century terrace, and of a Rag Store which had been fitted into the space north of the terrace and south of the gardens in Trinity Church Square, were also recorded.

A report on the evaluation is being prepared for archive and publication by a CEMS evening class at the Museum of London.

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dispersal of Roman and medieval finds in local field even this far from London. But at Waltham we give the credit for thick loam layers found in excavating garden plots to the horses, or rather to the owner who supplied the food and in particular the straw bedding and had to disperse the soiled waste, and he chose a way which was easiest and at the same time beneficial to his garden.

It is not surprising that the authors found their homogeneous dark earth 'highly humic', they even note the presence of phosphates, which is typical of human and animal waste. A simple explanation is usually the best. The 14th-century merchants, shopkeepers and gentry of London would have needed many horses, and have looked after them at night, perhaps even more carefully than in the rural hinterland.

Today my own vegetable plot is rising relative to the grass, due to the use of an electrical-driven shredder, since all the woody material is returned to the ground as well as the leafy compost; so originally, I suggest, it was horses, now it's horse-power having the same effect on our plots. Presumably London was divided into individual plots in the 14th century and well before, so the answer to the dark earth has to be something common to the activities of the individual occupiers at this time. Perhaps chickens, ducks and pigs deserve a little credit too, all phosphate factories working continuous shifts.

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Experimental Archaeology

FOLLOWING THE demise of the *Bulletin of Experimental Archaeology*, those interested in conducting experiments in archaeology have had no forum to discuss their activities.

Would you be interested in a possible Newsletter about Experimental Archaeology, covering large or small contributions,

professional or amateur? This could be used to gather together experiments from various areas and facilitate communications between interested parties.

Such a Newsletter could be distributed quarterly – please contact me to express your interest.

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Westminster Abbey bell

I SUSPECT that the letter by P. Stevenson, in the Winter issue of *London Archaeologist*, requesting information about the Westminster Abbey bell, was more than a little tongue in cheek.

The bell broadcast was the tenor bell of a peal of ten bells all cast in 1971 by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, and weighs 30 cwt. There are two others bells in the tower which were cast in 1598 and 1583 respectively. These two bells are rung every day for services, although not by rope and ringer, but by electric hammers.

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Back issues

I HAVE bound copies of the first seven volumes of *London Archaeologist* (1968–1997) together with nos. 1–7 of volume 8. I would like to give these volumes free of charge to any reader who will collect them from this address. Can you help please?

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