

Cheap and cheerful: socially inclusive archaeology in Hackney and Lambeth

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It is well understood by all involved in London's archaeology that public support is vital to the survival of the industry/discipline. And for this support to continue we need to market our product. We do this in a variety of ways: we grab headlines concerning recent discoveries, we put on exhibitions and we give talks to interested groups including archaeological societies etc. We are very good at promoting ourselves; we have been doing this for as long as there have been archaeologists active in the capital.

Recently some of us have become interested in trying to reach new audiences, people perhaps who are not included in the museum-going population, who maybe don't read the papers, see news broadcasts or belong to societies. These 'non-traditional' new audiences include people living in London's disadvantaged communities. For example residents in Hackney suffer a number of disadvantages: 15% are on income support and the borough ranks second in the national Deprivation Index 2000.¹ Similarly, in Lambeth 11% of residents are on income support, and the borough ranks 21st in the Deprivation Index 2000.

In disadvantaged neighbourhoods people can lose touch with wider society. They can lose their sense of place within the wider picture. Archaeology helps us locate ourselves in time and space; it helps us understand change through time. Archaeology, therefore, has a lot to offer people who live in such neighbourhoods; it can help people regain their 'sense of place'. By allowing people to discover their local archaeology and history, they are able to claim their history for themselves, thereby increasing their sense of belonging.

Hackney

Hackney Building Exploratory (HBE) is an interactive centre designed to help local

communities understand and appreciate their area.² It focuses on issues such as buildings, planning and housing. The work of the centre is renowned and is cited in a recent Department of Culture Media and Sport report as being a prime example for best practice in the field of social inclusion and the built environment.³ I contacted HBE Director, Nicole Crockett last year whilst researching for my MA dissertation 'Social Inclusion and Archaeology: Southwark a case study' and was surprised to hear that the centre did not offer an archaeology programme. However, Nicole was receptive to the idea of including archaeology within the centre's activities, and encouraged me to put together an archaeology-based workshop.

The workshop, which would last two hours, was designed around the concept of 'sense of place'. Part one features *Above Ground Archaeology*. This involves participants placing cards showing pictures of some of London's scheduled monuments, historic houses etc., on a map of Greater London. Part two covers *Below Ground Archaeology*. Participants are given cards on which are printed the address and grid reference of excavations in Hackney. Information on the cards identifies the principal archaeological period and 'finds'. Stickers coded to represent the different archaeological periods are then placed at the appropriate location on a large-scale street map. Archaeology colleague Chris Tripp, my partner for the first workshop, was instrumental in developing part three of the workshop. This is a small-scale, portable version of the Museum of London's *The Dig*, where participants dig for and interpret artifacts hidden in sand boxes. Artifacts were loaned by John Shepherd at London Archaeological Archive Research Centre (LAARC) and represent Roman, Tudor and Victorian periods – ceramics and bones. A small display of complete pieces was also organised.



Fig. 1: 'I know what this is mum!' A family enjoy Digging Hackney archaeology workshop at Hackney Building Exploratory

Aims

As the aim of the workshop was to enable participants to claim their own history and ownership of their own environment, it was imperative that they were allowed to discover the archaeology for themselves. This would be achieved through a number of means. Working with the maps enabled participants to discover different locations for themselves, increasing their knowledge of Greater London and Hackney. Participants would also be encouraged to question the value of the information they discovered. This was achieved by supplying them with the appropriate archaeological tools, demystifying the how's and why's of archaeological investigations with emphasis on current planning processes. Participants would discover biased distribution of excavation sites, for instance. Also, as the excavation cards indicated the archaeological period of the 'finds' participants could also discover how the borough had grown and changed through time as different people moved into, and settled in, the borough. Assistance would be given regarding interpretation of the artifacts. Clues regarding the date of finds and

identification of the different materials would be given, but the main interpretation would depend on participants' observational and tactile skills. Participants would then be encouraged to put together a short story inspired by one or more of the artifacts they had 'dug up'.

Costs

The principle costs related to the production of the maps. The street maps are size A0 and laminated. Initial cost of these is high, but the HBE was able to negotiate a budget rate. The HBE already had a Greater London map, so this required no further outlay. Sand and boxes were relatively cheap. The maps and boxes could all be re-used; these costs should therefore be seen in terms of investment in future workshops. The cost of transporting the artifacts, as well as trowels and child-size hard hats from the LAARC, was also included. Other costs included research time, e.g. downloading Hackney excavations data from the LAARC database, preparing the *Above Ground* and *Below Ground* Archaeology cards, and fees for leading the workshop on the day.

Participants for the 'pilot' workshop were 30 children from a year 4 class – 8 year olds – from a local primary school; it was therefore important that the workshop covered various National Curriculum elements. This helped the HBE 'sell' the workshop to the school. The school was not, however, charged for attending the workshop, but they did incur some costs, i.e. transport. Various aspects of Key Stage 2 History and Geography were addressed, as well as discussion and presentation skills.

The pilot went well. The children, their teacher and the two classroom assistants all enjoyed the session. Looking for the excavation locations was popular; the children were totally absorbed searching for the excavation grid references. One girl discovered an excavation down her auntie's street! The children also noticed the concentration of excavations along Kingsland Road – Roman Ermine Street. The digging was the most popular activity. The children were most impressed with the animal bones, although pottery sherds and *tesserae* were also popular. Stories relayed at the end of the session included one about a Victorian woman; she lived in a quite nice house, had small



Fig. 2: 'Close-up archaeology'. Over 50s archaeology workshop at Hackney Building Exploratory

fingers, and owned at least one teacup! At the end of the session the children were shown some of the display artifacts, and Chris and I relayed our own short stories regarding these artifacts. Display artifacts included a Roman child's leather shoe and a black-sooted pipkin cooking pot.

Evaluation and further workshops

The class teacher, HBE Education Officer, Amanda Riddick and HBE Exhibition Development Manager Emma Bennett who all attended the pilot session, gave the workshop a favourable evaluation. The main aims of the workshop were achieved, i.e. increasing 'sense of place' awareness, National Curriculum history and geography elements, and discussion, interpretation and presentation skills. Suggestions for improvements included increasing the time

available for 'digging', interpretation and story telling.

I was booked to undertake two further workshops. These were part of Discover Hackney Week; one was with an over 50s group from a nearby estate (Fig. 2), and the other a drop-in event for families (Fig. 1). For the over 50s group, who I was told had expressed a strong interest in local history, I expanded the information on the excavation cards, concentrating on excavations in the immediate area. Participants particularly enjoyed rediscovering 'living memory' information. The family workshop received considerable press coverage, promoted by Metro newspaper as one of the 'Top 5 things to do this week'. Evaluation of the workshops by the family groups was very favourable. The family groups worked well

together, with children and adults both helping each other, a sure sign that the workshops are engaging, interactive and pitched at an appropriate intellectual level.

Lambeth

On the strength of the success of the Hackney workshops I have been able to attract funding to run two workshops in Lambeth. These have been run as part of Stockwell Urban Festival.⁴ 35 schoolchildren attended the workshops, as well as eight adult teachers/assistants (Figs 3, 4). I was also able to further promote local archaeology by putting together an archaeology stall at the festival's Fun Day in the Park event. In addition I was able to reuse material from the stall as the basis of an archaeology exhibition, which is currently on show at the local library. The success

of the workshops and the sustained interest and promotion of the festival – and archaeology – through the exhibition, has more than fulfilled the initial festival brief. The festival co-ordinator is impressed and is keen to include archaeology events in next year's festival programme.

Summary

The intention of this article is to demonstrate that archaeology events/activities can be put on 'within' the community, that there is a demand within disadvantaged communities, that events/activities need not be expensive and that activities/events can be interactive and engaging. Activities/events can also be intellectually accessible to a variety of audiences: adults – of differing ages, including over 50s – and children. The only barrier to making archaeology more



Fig. 3: 'Amazing!' Delight and surprise for two girls from Reay Primary School, Lambeth digging for artifacts at *Stockwell Uncovered* archaeology workshop



Fig. 4: Team work. Teacher and pupils from Reay Primary School, Lambeth search for excavation locations at Stockwell Uncovered archaeology workshop

accessible, attracting new audiences etc., is the limit of the organisers' imagination, their ability to identify opportunities in the 'marketplace' and their ability to target and exploit these opportunities.

Archaeology has a lot to offer all Londoners, particularly those within London's disadvantaged communities. It is our duty as guardians of the past to promote our archaeology – it is not difficult or expensive, but it does require sustained commitment!

Definition: Social Inclusion

A term initiated by government to describe individuals and communities experiencing 'a variety of linked problems, including unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown'.⁵

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1. www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/tables/eng/TableViewer/wdsview/2/06/02
 2. Hackney Building Exploratory 2003 information leaflet
 3. DCMS 2002 *People and Places: Social Inclusion for the Built and Historic Environment* UK: Department of Culture, Media and Sport
 4. L. Smith 'Outing' *Archaeology in Lambeth* Quarterly Review: April to June 2003 London: Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS) forthcoming.
 5. www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/publications/reports/html/pse/pse_html/04.htm 10/6/02
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'Westminster' tile clay has shown that in some cases the finished tiles were transported from London to pave buildings elsewhere (such as Windsor Castle and Canterbury), while in other cases the 'Westminster' tilers themselves travelled, making tiles at production sites outside London (notably in the Midlands and Norfolk).

The book is well illustrated with maps, colour photographs and over 160 tile designs. It is an important contribution to the study of medieval floor tiles, and will be an essential reference work, not only for those working in London, but to all with an interest in the subject.

Beverley Nenck