



Left: Extreme weather encouraged some makeshift shelters, but digging continued through the winter.

but he was allowed to use the remaining budget on another site, Toppings Wharf in Southwark. With the hint that a professional career in archaeology might just be possible, he never returned to research, instead becoming a leading figure in the Rescue movement and eventually in the organisations that transmogrified into MoLAS.

He remembers the Old Ford team as a disparate group with a huge sense of dedication to a project and a field that many of them might never have otherwise experienced. The strong impression remains with him of sadness over all that had been lost through development in the area, and a deep

commitment to do all they could on their site before it was too late.

In all this time, Harvey has seen two distinct responses to threats to archaeological sites: the first has been to “make a bloody great fuss, the other to suggest little should be done that might rock the boat and jeopardise incremental progress.” He unequivocally believes that the former is the correct one, noting that even Geoffrey Wainwright acknowledges that the Rose has led to PPG 16. Not that Harvey believes that PPG 16 has all the answers: he points to Ros Niblett’s recent conclusion that the small scale of work now done in both Verulamium and St Albans may hinder attempts to

understand the Roman and later cities. He would like to see much more public involvement in archaeology: museum based community archaeologists working with professional teams and local groups could increase participation in the processes of recovering evidence and studying the historic environments which now make up greater London.

Meanwhile, he believes the innate interest and ability of people to get involved in their local archaeology is still strong, although the practice of learning has changed. While no one would wish for a return to the daily threats and destruction of archaeology of the 1960s, it remains to be seen whether even the best breeds of programmes like Widening Participation can galvanise the involvement and enthusiasm of non professionals quite as powerfully as rescue sites like Lefevre Road.

~~Harvey Sheldon was talking to Becky Wallower

The Lefevre Road site was published as: Sheldon, H. (1972) Excavations at Lefevre Road, Old Ford, E.3, September 1969-June 1970, *Trans London & Middlesex Archaeol Soc*, 23, 2, 42-77.

Letters to the editor

Mercury treatment

I was interested to read Fiona Tucker’s article in the Spring issue of *London Archaeologist* (vol. 11, no. 8), on the use of mercury to treat syphilis in 17th- to 19th-century London.

The discussion of mercury poisoning, in her introduction, immediately reminded me of one Victorian patient who suffered from this, and left a horrifying description of the symptoms – Charlotte Brontë.

The story is related in chapter 24 of Juliet Barker’s *The Brontës* (1994). At the very end of 1851 (when aged thirty-five), Charlotte was experiencing bad

headaches, with ‘white tongue – parched mouth and loss of appetite’. A liver problem was diagnosed, and she was accordingly prescribed a week’s course of ‘blue pills’, which contained a small dose of mercury. However, she quickly became very ill, unable to swallow anything other than a little liquid each day, ‘my mouth became sore, my teeth loose, my tongue swelled, raw and ulcerated while water welled continually into my mouth’, as she wrote on 20 January 1852 to Margaret Wooler (her former headmistress). Recognising the symptoms of mercury poisoning, she stopped taking the pills at once. She

reported to her friend Ellen Nussey that the doctor, Mr Ruddock, was ‘sorely flustered when he found what he had done’, saying that he had never known this effect produced in any patient – adult or child – by that dose.

There may, of course, have been numerous patients who were prescribed mercury for a variety of diseases other than syphilis, and who found, as Charlotte did, that the cure was worse than the illness!

Carol Hartley
33 Green Curve
Banstead
Surrey SM7 1NS

MARGARET WOOLDRIDGE 1918 – 2006

Margaret Wooldridge, who died aged 88 on 19th November 2006, will be fondly remembered by all those who knew her during her long association with London's archaeology.

Born in Norwich, and always proud of her home city (she never quite lost her accent despite years in London) Margaret joined the West London Archaeological Field Group (WLAFG) soon after it was established by Roy Canham in the mid-1960s.

Volunteering on the excavations then under way in Brentford, and further afield at Heathrow and Shepperton, Margaret eventually became a full time member of the archaeological team working across west London for the Museum of London from the 1970s.

During these years Margaret acted as WLAFG's Treasurer (husband Les was a Chartered Accountant), and also helped to organise the processing and storage of finds generated by the west London team. She made particular contributions to the animal bone group based in a succession of cramped premises in Brentford, and was never happier than when an opportunity arose to get involved in finds illustration – especially flintwork. Margaret was the welcoming public face of the Museum for new members of WLAFG and a regular helper at LAMAS Archaeology Conferences. She was also a staunch supporter of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, the CBA and the Museum of London's own

Friends of Fashion. However, she was perhaps most in her element in the 1980s when working alongside a new generation of younger archaeologists then coming onto the scene; tea breaks were invariably the setting for feisty exchanges on politics, gardening, literature and life.

After retiring from the Museum, Margaret threw herself into a new round of experiences, buoyed up by an enquiring mind, youthful outlook and mischievous sense of humour. She learnt to swim (an ambition of long standing) and was a keen member of extra-mural classes covering a bewilderingly eclectic range of subjects that included art appreciation, architecture, music, archaeology and philosophy. Typically, her musical tastes were wide and encompassed Vaughan Williams, George Melly, U2 and Bruce Springsteen, while 'phone calls from her at this time would invariably begin, without preamble: 'So, what can you tell me about Aristotle ...?'. Her love of drawing came to the fore again too, and the walls of her small house in Twickenham were hung with local views and still life sketches. It was an abiding sadness to her and to her many friends that the progressive and



Photo: Krystyna Gadd

miserable loss of her sight over the last few years of her life robbed her of this much-cherished outlet for her energies and talent.

Her last illness, though painful and debilitating, was mercifully short, and she retained her independence of spirit to the end. A lifelong atheist, she dismissed a deathbed offer of prayers with the words, 'yes, by all means pray if you must, just go somewhere else and do it ...!'. Margaret Constance Wooldridge will be much missed.

~~~Alison Parnum and Jonathan Cotton

### Portuguese faience

I found the article on Portuguese faience in the Summer 2006 issue interesting, but it would have been useful to have had some indication as to how it can be distinguished from English delftware, since some can seem very similar to the untrained eye; for example the Wan Li style copied by the Portuguese faienciers was also copied by English delftware potters.

It is said that the large amount of Portuguese faience in Amsterdam can be explained as imports by the Portuguese Jewish community there, but Portuguese Jews also settled in England

in the 17th century; they were officially permitted by Cromwell but it is believed that there may have been 'unofficial' settlers before then, so perhaps that may explain some of the Portuguese faience in England too.

It is also said that imports of Portuguese faience ended c. 1700, but the King Street context (no. 11 on the map on p. 115) dates to the 1750s, and the Queenborough House site (no. 1 on the map, though there placed rather too far south) is of similar date (c. 1745–70 according to the report in *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 91 (2004) 105–136). It would be nice to know whether these sherds were fifty or more years old

when deposited, or are evidence for import carrying on into the 18th century. This is particularly important for the Queenborough House site, since this was a delftware and stoneware waste dump, and the occurrence of exotic pottery in such contexts has been interpreted as models for the local potters to copy (as here p. 137), but this would be unlikely if they were fifty years old.

Graham Dawson  
40 Station Road  
Orpington  
Kent BR6 0SA