

Mosaic

Londinium continues to surprise

An unprecedented collection of 19 metal vessels from the late Roman period (see front cover), on temporary display at the Museum of London until 27 January, is being hailed as the most significant find in 30 years of excavations in the Upper Walbrook valley. Discovered at the bottom of a wood-lined well, these well-preserved artefacts offer a rare glimpse into the last days of *Londinium*, and provide new evidence of the rituals which may have accompanied the Roman abandonment of the city.

The vessels lay at the bottom of the well and may mark its symbolic closure, a practice recorded elsewhere in London but usually with ceramic flagons, figurines and even animal or human skulls. It is also possible that these remarkable pieces were hidden by departing Roman Londoners who anticipated a return to the city. Coins found in the well date its construction to AD 330 and its closure to around AD 380, when significant parts of the Roman city had been deserted.

The finds were uncovered at Drapers Gardens, a site owned by the Drapers Company, during a dig by Pre-Construct Archaeology, and comprise large wine buckets, a cauldron and large dishes, handled shallow bowls or dippers, part of a hanging bowl, a set of three nested bowls, a flagon, an iron ladle and a trivet. They are, in the main, made of copper alloy with several vessels, a flagon and dish, in lead alloy. To find uncorroded metal tableware of this type is remarkable and extremely rare. Some of the objects even have swing handles that remain articulated after nearly 1700 years.

Although they look like fine household objects, it is possible that the hoard may also have had religious uses. Some shallow dishes with handles were part of the bathing process, other bowls, dishes and jugs were sets for washing hands (much food was eaten with fingers) but were also used during religious ceremonies, including sacrifices, where bowls were used for pouring libations in honour of the gods.

London Sugar and Slavery

As part of London's continuing reflection on the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 the Museum in Docklands opened its new exhibition *London, Sugar and Slavery*. Britain's involvement in the slave trade is a subject that received a substantial amount of media attention in March, and proves for an exhibition very self-aware of its politicised content.

The exhibition, like the rest of the museum, uses an engaging formula of bold displays mixed with interactive digital media and sound and light displays. The central theme of this exhibition is the triangular trade, showing the European demand for sugar being the economic driving force behind the transatlantic slave trade.

European traders exchanged goods for slaves on the west coast of Africa and in turn these slaves would be sold for huge profits to the plantations in the Americas. This money was then used to buy the raw materials produced on these plantations such as coffee, cotton and most importantly to this exhibition, sugar. These goods had enormous economic value, thanks to the voracious appetite of Londoners for sugar in their tea and coffee. Very apparent in this exhibition is the pain and abuse caused to the slaves throughout this period. But pivotally the exhibition exposes the relationship between London and the slave trade and is openly explicit about the importance of the industry to London's economy and the creation of the city we know today.

What I found particularly striking about this exhibition was the integral function of art. The striking and atmospheric film that starts the exhibition would not be out of place at the Tate Modern, its juxtaposed images of people and chains accompanied by a haunting soundtrack. I felt it was not only an exhibition designed to be informative but one that evoked empathy and emotional response from the viewer. The concept of freedom and family is one that is very apparent, and truly drives home the importance of the emotional devastation these events caused. The use of art as a form of expression in the exhibition reminds us as an audience to connect with the humanity of the exhibition rather than allow it to become just a voyeurism of horrors past.

Many may note that this is an exhibition from a European perspective, but this is a natural perspective considering the building itself once housed the sugar so dependent on the slave trade, and that this is a museum dedicated to the history and archaeology of London. It is also overtly politically correct, to the extent that it feels necessary to justify its use of language and to ensure that all of multicultural London is represented. But this isn't a criticism, just an indication of how self-aware this exhibition is. The slave trade will always be a delicate subject to combat and present, and the Museum in Docklands has done it in a sensitive and open manner. It is a concise exhibition, and thanks to its simplicity it preserves the emotional value and importance of its content. It has shown itself to be a vital and informative element to the growing awareness and accountability of the role of London in the history and economics of the slave trade and prompts reflection on current forms of slavery still found in the world today. It is reassuring to see it to be a permanent exhibition and one I hope that is far reaching.
Georgie Darroch

Closure of Wandsworth Museum

There have been further developments in the confusing story of the future of Wandsworth Museum (see *LA* 11, no. 8, p. 204 (Spring

2007) and no. 9, p. 252 (Summer 2007). The following information has been reported on the London Borough of Wandsworth's website. On 2nd July 2007, the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed recommendations concerning the Hintze Family Charitable Foundation's offer of funding to secure the future of Wandsworth Museum. The Foundation's offer was subject to a number of conditions, which included the presentation of a Business Plan, the establishment of a suitable company to operate and assume responsibility for the Museum, and use of the current West Hill Library site. The Executive approved the Committee's recommendations to note the content of the draft Business Plan prepared by ABL Cultural Consulting and to consider its recommendations for the use of the West Hill Library site. The Executive also agreed that Wandsworth Museum would remain open to the public at the Old Court House, Garratt Lane, until Sunday 30 December 2007.

From 1st January 2008, the Museum will be closed while building alterations are completed at the West Hill library building. If the negotiations with the Hintze Family Charitable Foundation are completed successfully, the museum's collections will be moved to 38 West Hill ready for the new company to open a new museum for Wandsworth later in 2008.

All change at 24 Hour Museum

The organisation behind the 24 Hour Museum has changed its name to Culture24, after an event hosted by Secretary of State James Purnell at DCMS. The 24 Hour Museum family of websites will be revamped and re-launched in spring 2008 under the Culture24 name, and will cover a broader range of services and cultural sectors than ever before. The main Culture24 site will feature a new resource discovery section for teachers, themed sections, more contemporary arts coverage and more ways for users to participate. Until then, news, reviews and features will still be going live at www.24hourmuseum.org.uk and www.show.me.uk.

Tebbutt Research Fund

Grants are available towards research into any aspect of the Wealden iron industry, or subjects pertaining to it. It is anticipated that some £100 plus will be available from the Fund. Applicants, who can be individuals or groups, should write a letter giving details of themselves, together with relevant information about the research envisaged, to David Brown, Hon. Sec. Wealden Iron Research Group, 2 West Street Farm Cottages, Maynards Green, Heathfield, Sussex TN21 0DG, by 31 March 2008.