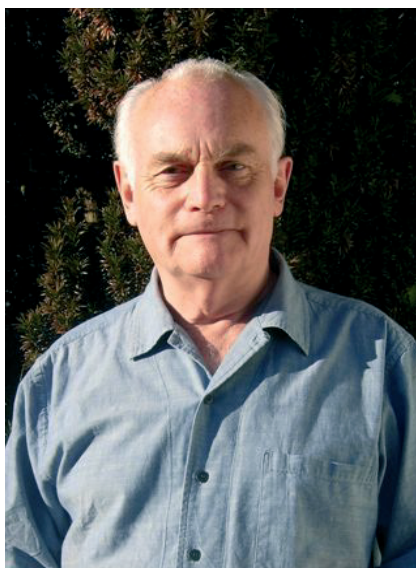


Now and then...

Peter Marsden wrote the first article in the first issue of *London Archaeologist* in December 1968, highlighting recent work on the Billingsgate Roman bath house, one of many major sites he excavated in the City over 18 years. **Sophie Jackson**, now working for Museum of London Archaeology, the organisation that eventually succeeded Peter's first employers, finds herself revisiting many of the sites he first excavated as the rebuilding cycle presents new opportunities to investigate.

Becky Wallower probed two perspectives on archaeology across 40 years.



Peter Marsden's natural inclination towards geology wavered in 1954 when his grandfather, a quantity surveyor, obtained permission for him to visit the building site of the new Bucklersbury House whilst Professor Grimes was excavating the Temple of Mithras. Within an hour and a half 14 year old Peter had found a Roman water tank. After volunteering on a series of Grimes' sites, he was invited to meet the Guildhall Librarian in 1959. Without realising it he was being interviewed for the job of the Guildhall Museum's site archaeologist. With few resources he chased a "bonanza of discoveries" through the 1960s and '70s, from the Huggin Hill Roman baths and the City defences to medieval

churches and Baynard's Castle. When Ralph Merrifield was commissioned to write a book that mapped Roman London, Peter worked with him, often being able to investigate theories about the city's layout, and adding much to the then very sketchy knowledge. He became fascinated by maritime archaeology whilst uncovering Roman and later ships in the Thames, and with others campaigned for the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. Peter is currently finishing the final volume of the Mary Rose publication, and is honorary curator of the Shipwreck and Coastal Heritage Museum in Hastings which he founded in 1986, and where a medieval sailing barge he excavated decades ago in Blackfriars is a central display.



Sophie Jackson had her first exposure to archaeology at the even younger age of 11, when her parents took her to a dig in Arkansas. Always interested from that point, she volunteered on sites through school and university holidays. Having taken a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Balliol College, Oxford, she couldn't face the prospect of becoming a civil servant, so took some time off to dig in Wessex and Malta and consider what to do next. In 1987, she got a job as a digger with the Museum of London working on the Mint site, where many of her current colleagues at MoL Archaeology got their start. Later as project manager she was involved in the design and management of excavations at important City sites, such as the Roman fort and forum and most recently Bucklersbury House, where the Mithraic temple is under debate once again. She is now Senior Consultant, overseeing a team of project managers, and is currently Chair of London Archaeologist.

What would you say was the highlight of 1968/2008?

PM: New knowledge about both Roman and medieval archaeology was really opening up by then, but the Roman bath and house at Billingsgate was especially important for what it told us about the end of Roman London. Late Roman coins and an early Saxon brooch showed occupation into the 5th century. But we were also presented with a major puzzle: the Middle Saxon evidence was missing in the uninterrupted stratigraphy on this and other sites. How could it not be there?

SJ: Hard to pick just one. Perhaps most important for me has been the discovery earlier this year of the foundations of the east end of the Temple of Mithras. We exposed a section through the temple, providing new information on its construction.

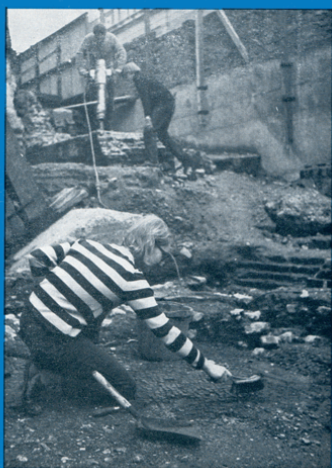
ROMAN BATH
IN THE CITY

BLACK PRINCE'S
PALACE

PUTNEY IN THE
DARK AGES

BEGINNING
ARCHAEOLOGY

BOOKS EVENTS
COMMENTARY



We are still interpreting the results and hope to be able to say more about the superstructure of the temple and the nature of the Walbrook Valley at the time.

What was/is the biggest concern for archaeology that year?

PM: There was no funding for archaeology and no team of people to do the huge amount of work. Only by forming the City of London Excavation Group (COLEG, later COLAS) with Nick Farrant [London Archaeologist's founding editor] was it possible to carry out some work with volunteers working at weekends and during the week. We became experts at finding money. At Billingsgate people could roll money down a scaffold tube into a bucket into the excavation, and on the 'Roman Palace' site in Bush Lane, we melted down printers' lead from wartime drains and sold it for scrap.

SJ: it's been a year of two extremes, with the first half experiencing a terrible shortage of experienced archaeologists for site work, and the second half characterised by fears for the future. That's certainly foremost now: what will happen to development funded archaeology in a recession?

Describe the funding issues that/this year.

PM: The only Guildhall Museum money for archaeology was to be found in the budget for fixtures and fittings, and that was minimal. Tools were borrowed or begged. I tried to get the Museum to buy a bicycle to help me get around the sites in the City, but that was rejected, so I had to continue pushing equipment and finds through the City streets in a wheelbarrow.

SJ: We've been amazingly free of funding issues this year – the shock is yet to come. Rather like a great bulge going through a snake, we have lots of big sites to be digested, and the post-excavation work will be going on for some time. However the signs are that whilst sites associated with commercial office development are drying up, other types of project, for example infrastructure, are still coming through.

What contribution did/do volunteers make?

PM: Huge. Without Nick and the COLEG volunteers much of the archaeology of the City in the 1960s would have been destroyed without record, and major discoveries like Huggin Hill baths, Billingsgate, parts of the 'Roman Palace', medieval churches and some of the Roman and medieval city defences lost forever. And, of course, the City of London Archaeological Society would not have been created.

SJ: Very sadly, it seems almost impossible to use them on site now. In a sense it's a good sign that archaeologists are now paid to do the work, but commercialisation and health and safety considerations have largely excluded volunteers from developer-funded sites. Post-ex and archive work is easier for volunteers to access. And of course some of the community archaeology projects make it possible for anyone with an interest to get involved – Bruce Castle saw something like 3000 children on site in three weeks. They also offer lots of other benefits – bringing sites that otherwise wouldn't be looked at to public notice and making history feel more personal.

FAR LEFT: Peter Marsden
LEFT: Sophie Jackson showing students Roman painted wall plaster found in Lime Street in 2007.

ABOVE: COLAS digging at Billingsgate on the cover of LA no 1.

RIGHT: An amazing survival. The foundations of the Roman Temple of Mithras are exposed beneath several metres of concrete. Ian Blair cleaning the section formed by the construction cut for the 1954 double basement of Bucklersbury House.



INTERVIEWS

How much of a factor were/are health and safety considerations on site?

PM: I was always anxious about safety, but we all used common sense. Apart from normal cuts, bruises and blisters we never had a single serious accident on any of the sites.

SJ: Huge. A good thing they're taken more seriously. Even though some rules seem bureaucratic and not that helpful, you just shudder when you see early site photos with archaeologist in tweed jacket standing next to working machines under terrifyingly high sections. However, there were fewer people working on site then, and possibly not in conditions that were quite so dangerous as some today.

How did/does publication and archiving of the work figure in your considerations?

PM: This was a major issue as I had little time for publication and there were no proper archiving facilities until the 1970s. Even getting reports typed up was a challenge, but I did start writing up short annual report for the LAMAS journal. I feel particularly proud of having set up the first basic archiving system for City archaeology sites, collecting into files all the early records that I found scattered in drawers and cupboards in various parts of Guildhall.

SJ: It's crucial – the point of the whole thing really. There shouldn't be any excuse now for not publishing quickly, both in journals, and in more accessible, popular formats. Archiving has been a big problem in the past, but the systems are in place now. Though developers can find it hard to understand how the post-ex work can

INTERVIEWS

cost as much as the excavation, they generally get it, once they know more about all the scientific investigation, specialist knowledge and detailed analysis that goes into the reports.

What role did/do specialists play?

PM: Finds specialists weren't really available in those days, especially as we had no money, and I had no time to organise specialist work. My aim was to collect as much data, even if hardly processed, for future study by others. It is gratifying to see some of my work taken forward by later archaeologists, as in, for example, the new Guildhall monograph. Site surveying which I had to do myself, on the principle that archaeological remains must be able to be plotted on the 50-inch OS maps. OD levels were not normally used by anyone before I started, but I was anxious to build up data for a geographical contour map of the natural in the City and Southwark. This was how I identified that Roman Southwark had been built on a sandbank in the marshes, for example.

SJ: An enormous role. Where in the past archaeologists had to know something

about finds, history, surveying, now people tend to have different responsibilities and areas of expertise. Whilst finds specialists are typically involved in post-ex it is very important to have them involved on site, to explain what's coming up, how to best excavate it, what its significance is, to advise on sampling strategies and crucially to provide spot dating.

What were/are career prospects like?

PM: Very limited, though I didn't want to move on. I was so amazed by having the privilege of being paid to work at the edge of human knowledge about how London was born and grew, that it was only when I became fascinated with the maritime aspects of the port of London, that I ever thought about doing anything else.

SJ: Better than they have been, assuming the economy doesn't completely nosedive. There's now a good variety of options: commercial units, academic research, and the newest branch, the consultants and project managers in the engineering firms. Pity the pay doesn't match the variety of opportunity though.

How important were/are museums for archaeology?

PM: Absolutely central. Guildhall Museum took an important lead in archaeology, especially when Max Hebditch started the Department of Urban Archaeology. Museums are crucial repositories for the artefacts and site records. Moreover, museums are set up to use that data to tell stories about the past. Max Hebditch has figured large in my career, and was supportive when I decided to found the maritime museum in Hastings and seek a Doctorate at Oxford University.

SJ: Very. Not just in archiving and displaying the story, but, crucially, in their role as curators of the past. In London where we have some 20 archaeological contractors, it's vital for someone to have the overview of what is found, what is changing, and how it all fits together. Local museums are likewise incredibly important to keep

people's history close to them, to understand in great detail how the locality has developed.

What is likely to be the biggest change or challenge in the future?

PM: The biggest challenge has to be to devise a system of accessing the huge archive of records that already exists, published and unpublished, particularly for London. It's really crucial that such a vast amount of data becomes available for research on a national basis, in as many forms as possible.

SJ: Are we ever likely to have a step change of such magnitude as PPG 16 in the future? It completely revolutionised archaeology almost overnight, yet has become an accepted mechanism for both developers and archaeologists. In the immediate future the biggest influence on archaeology and archaeologists could be the economy!

What one thing would you bring from the present to the past/the past to the present?

PM: The knowledge that the study of London's archaeology would get much better. In the 1960s I felt desperate about the fate of London's past. With huge sites being redeveloped, the lost legacy was on a massive scale. I knew that we were working at such a basic level, just skimming the surface. I wish I had known that one day there would be a requirement for sites to be investigated archaeologically, and that our inadequate arrangement for London's archaeology would be replaced by highly professional and relatively well-funded teams of people.

SJ: The sites. To be able to apply the resources and expertise we have now to the incredible sites that still existed 40 years ago would be absolutely amazing. These days we're returning to sites where the original archaeology was sometimes little more than a watching brief over a vast area, often watching the archaeology just being machined away. And now, on Cannon Street for instance, we can spend almost a year excavating as little as 50 cubic metres, extracting every detail that might give us more information on dating, phasing, environment, usage, development...

What wouldn't I give to have the Stock Exchange site back, where no archaeology at all was done?



LEFT: Part of the Roman 'Governor's Palace'
A section of masonry recorded and preserved in situ at Cannon Street in 2008.