

Mosaic

Battleships found in the Thames

The remains of some of the world's most powerful 19th-century battleships are believed to have been found on the foreshore of the River Thames. The discovery was made in Charlton, within the shadow of the Thames Barrier, by archaeologists working for UCL's *Thames Discovery Programme* (TDP), which is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The timbers provide a link back to the days of HMS Victory, when the British Empire depended on the Royal Navy's 'wooden walls' for its defence.

The large ship-timbers, found on the foreshore at Charlton, were once part of a shipyard. Between 1850 and the early 20th century the site was owned by a firm called Castles, which specialised in breaking-up ships at the end of their active lives before recycling the large quantities of timber.

Among the last wooden warships broken up at Charlton was the 131-gun HMS Duke of Wellington, the largest and most powerful ship in the world when she was launched in September 1852. She served in the Crimean War and ended her active service as the flagship of the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth until 1891, when she was replaced by HMS Victory. The remains of three other large wooden ships are also believed to be among the remains discovered at Charlton. HMS Anson, Edgar and Hannibal were all broken up by Castles during the same period. Each ship had 91 guns and was built between 1854 and 1860 at Woolwich or Deptford.

These magnificent ships – once the pride of the Royal Navy – suddenly became obsolete because of the dramatic development of battleships clad in iron, rather than old-fashioned wood. Superseded and no longer seen as fit for active service, they were sent to the scrap-yard from which they are being reclaimed. The TDP team will undertake further research to find out which timbers belong to which vessel.

The UCL archaeologists working on the site may have also discovered fragments of the last of the ironclad battleships, HMS Ajax, launched in 1880. She too was overtaken by new technology, just like the wooden warships which went before her. In this

case it was the introduction of superior steel-hulled warships that sent her to the breakers' yard.

The Thames Discovery Programme was launched a year ago. Since then, an ambitious public outreach programme has been developed. The team has begun a detailed archaeological survey of the London foreshore, which involves recording data from sites at increasing risk from river's daily tidal scour, an indirect consequence of climate change. To help undertake this mammoth task, the team is training a group of committed Londoners who will form the *Foreshore Recording and Observation Group* (FROG) (see p. 170). The ship-breakers yard at Charlton is one of the twenty key sites which will be monitored, recording an important chapter in our maritime history before it is lost forever.

£1.5 million HLF grant for the Museum of the Order of St John

The Museum of the Order of St John has had its £1.5 million HLF grant confirmed and will go ahead with a project to increase and improve its exhibition areas, create a new learning space for schoolchildren and a new research centre. The collection, which includes paintings and illuminated manuscripts, decorative furniture, ceramics, metalwork, jewellery, textiles, medals, armour and Islamic artefacts, all associated with the Knights Hospitaller, or the Knights of Malta, whose headquarters moved to England from Jerusalem in AD 1140, is currently displayed in the 16th-century St John's Gate and in the nearby 12th-century Priory Church.

The downfall of London Bridge

July 11th marked the 800th anniversary of the completion of London Bridge. A study by Mark Latham at the University of Leicester has uncovered a tale of corruption, mismanagement, financial crisis and a property crash that resulted in the downfall of the Old London Bridge. The research, to be published in the *London Journal*, provides a warning from history as plans are discussed for a new 'inhabited' London Bridge – between Waterloo and Blackfriars – with luxury flats, shops and restaurants.

The houses and shops were removed from Old London Bridge in 1756. The organisation that managed the bridge at that time was plagued with incompetent management and corruption. Both workmen and their managers charged inflated prices for materials and labour, the management left rents uncollected, and on several occasions the workmen were found to have deliberately and almost fatally damaged the Bridge in order to charge for its repair. Furthermore, managers often paid for improvements to their own houses out of the coffers of the Trust running the Bridge.

Problems were compounded by a highly risky, costly and poorly timed project undertaken in the teeth of a credit crisis to construct gentrified houses on the Bridge, in the belief that they would prove attractive to middle class Londoners and increase rental income. However, the authorities had grossly miscalculated the demand for such properties and the houses attracted only a handful of tenants.

A London-wide property crash ensued, and soon the Trust running the bridge was hemorrhaging income, the maintenance budget for the Bridge itself was being squeezed, and the vacant houses on the Bridge began to rapidly fall into a state of dangerous disrepair. By early 1755 the Trust had begun to petition Parliament in a desperate plea for the money to fund their demolition.

For more information, contact Mark Latham on tel: 0116 223 1375, email: ml123@le.ac.uk.

Aerial survey of London available

Aerial survey specialist Bluesky has released what is thought to be one of the first aerial surveys of London. A series of vertical photographs, flown in 1917 along the path of the Thames, are now available online at www.oldaerialphotos.com. Visitors to this site can also search through more than a million aerial photos, dating back to the 1940s, by simply entering a postcode, address or grid reference. Detailed search results, including the age and ground coverage, of every image that matches the search criteria are displayed and the visitor can choose to purchase either a hard copy print or digital image file.

Diary

October

12 (7.45 p.m.) West Essex Archaeological Group. 'Tudor Playhouses in London' by Julian Bowsher. Sixth Form Block, Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green.

13 (6.30 p.m.) London & Middlesex Archaeological Society. 'River and environment in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages' by Jane Sidell. Museum of London.

13 (7.30 p.m.) Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. 'Recent excavations at Merton Priory' by Dave Saxby. The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1.

13 (8 p.m.) Hendon & District Archaeological Society. 'Excavations at St-Martins-in-the-Fields' by Alison Telfer. Avenue House, East End Road, Finchley, N3.

16 (7 p.m.) City of London Archaeological Society. 'Violets and kangaroos, or Great War archaeology from Salisbury Plain to Plugstreet Wood' by Martin Brown. St Olave's Parish Hall, Mark Lane, London EC3.

17 (2.30 p.m.) Merton Historical Society. 'Sir Francis Carew's Garden at Beddington' by John Phillips. South Wimbledon Community Association, Haydons Road.

22 (6 p.m.) Gresham College. 'The Birth of Heritage and the Fabrication of History' by Simon Thurley. Museum of London.

30 (8 p.m.) Wandsworth Historical Society. 'Recent Roman discoveries in London' by Alison Telfer. Friends' Meeting House, Wandsworth High Street.

November

7 (2.30 p.m.) Merton Historical Society. 'A history of Du Cane Court: land, architecture, people and politics' by Gregory Vincent. Raynes Park Library Hall.

9 (7.45 p.m.) West Essex Archaeological Group. 'Snettisham Gold Torcs' by Nigel Meeks. Sixth Form Block, Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green.

10 (6.30 p.m.) London & Middlesex Archaeological Society. 'Early Roman quarrying and building stone use in London and south-east England' by Kevin Hayward. Museum of London.

10 (7.30 p.m.) Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. 'The Birkbeck Training Excavation at Syon House' by Harvey Sheldon. The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1.

10 (8 p.m.) Hendon & District Archaeological Society. 'Bricks and skeletons: St John's Brick Church Ruin' by Frederick Hicks. Avenue House, East End Road, Finchley, N3.

12 (8 p.m.) Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. 'The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record' by Stuart Cakebread. Mayo Hall, ground floor, United Reformed Church, Eden Street, Kingston.

13 (8 p.m.) Enfield Archaeological Society. 'Waltham Abbey Excavations 2008' by Peter Huggins. Jubilee Hall, Parsonage Lane, Enfield.

13 (8 p.m.) Richmond Archaeological Society. 'Digital outreach in archaeology' by Lorna Richardson. Vestry Hall, 21 Paradise Road, Richmond.

20 (7 p.m.) City of London Archaeological Society. 'From Ice Age to Essex – excavations on the Essex gravels' by Pamela Greenwood. St Olave's Parish Hall, Mark Lane, London EC3.

December

5 (2.30 p.m.) Merton Historical Society. 'The cinema buildings of Merton past and present' by Richard Norman. Snuff Mill Environmental Centre, Morden Hall Park.

8 (6.30 p.m.) London & Middlesex Archaeological Society. 'Rebels and infidels at the City's Village Hall' by Stefan Dickers. Museum of London.

8 (7.30 p.m.) Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. 'From Minster to Morley' by Len Reilly. The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1.

10 (6 p.m.) Gresham College. 'From Boom to Bust: The Politics of Heritage 1997 to 2009' by Simon Thurley. Museum of London.

11 (8 p.m.) Richmond Archaeological Society. 'Finds from Drapers' Gardens, City of London' by James Gerrard. Vestry Hall, 21 Paradise Road, Richmond.

14 (7.45 p.m.) West Essex Archaeological Group. 'London bodies – how skeletons tell us how they live' by Rebecca Redfern. Sixth Form Block, Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green.

January

12 (7.30 p.m.) Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. 'Recent archaeological work in Southwark' by Chris Constable. The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1.

Conferences

Lost Cities in the Mediterranean, Council for Kentish Archaeology, 2 to 5.30 p.m., Saturday 24 October at the Old Sessions Lecture Theatre, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury. Tickets price £4 from CKA, 7 Sandy Ridge, Borough Green, Kent TN15 8HP (see please). Website www.the-cka.fsnet.co.uk.

Pomp and Power – Carriages as Status Symbols, Museum of London, 12 and 13 November. Tickets: one day £40 (£20 concs.); both days £75 (£35 concs.) from

Museum of London Box Office (020 7001 9844 or email groups@museumoflondon.org.uk). For information email pomp&power@museumoflondon.org.uk.

Courses

Practical Archaeology, two-year course starting October 2009 at the Centre for Community Engagement, University of Sussex. One weekday evening per week and some Saturdays, plus 15 days practical work. For further information visit www.sussex.ac.uk/cce/pracarch or tel. 01273 678 300.

Traditional Rural Trades and Crafts

weekend courses throughout the year until September 2010, at the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, Singleton, Chichester, West Sussex, PO18 0EU. Further details from Diana Rowsell at this address, phone 01243 811 464, or visit www.wealddown.co.uk/Courses/adult-education-continuing-education.htm.

Membership

Individual membership of the Council for British Archaeology, which includes six issues a year of *British Archaeology*, costs £28 p.a.; full price/renewal price £34 p.a.; joint membership with *London Archaeologist* costs £36 (new CBA members only). See <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/cba/membership/pricelist> for details. Payment should be sent to C.B.A., St Mary's House, Bootham, York, YO30 7BZ (01904 671 417).

Practical archaeology

AOC Archaeology Group. Contact Melissa Melikian, Post-Excavation Manager (020 8843 7380).

London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre. Contact Archive Manager, Roy Stephenson (020 7566 9317).

Croydon & District. Contact Jim Davison, 8 Brentwood Road, South Croydon, CR2 0ND.

Borough of Greenwich. Contact Greenwich Heritage Centre, Building 41, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, SE18 6SP (020 8854 2452).

Hammersmith & Fulham. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (020 7385 3723).

Kingston. Enquiries to 020 8546 5386.

Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. Contact Finds Manager, Mairi Gaimster (020 7639 9091).

Surrey. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 1ND (01483 594 634).