

“The old order changeth...”

an appreciation of Nick Fuentes

Clive Orton

Nick Fuentes' recent death, reported in our previous issue, was a reminder to some of us of what feels like a distant period of London's archaeology – pre-PPG, pre-Museum of London – when archaeologists had to struggle to achieve even minimal access to sites, and many important sites went unrecorded. Among the heroes of this era were Peter Marsden, whose moving account of these days, *Hopes and Fears*, drew a record attendance to our 2009 AGM, and Nick, less well known now, but a major player in the story of London's past.

In the 1960s, Nicholas Farrant (as he was then) was a member of the bowler-hat-and-brolly brigade, working for the Bank of England, but at weekends he picked up his trowel to join Peter Marsden, then the Archaeological Assistant at London's Guildhall Museum. In 1964 Nick was Peter's weekend supervisor on the Huggin Hill Roman Bath site, which led to the setting up of the City of London Excavation Group (CoLEG), a team of amateur archaeologists dedicated to saving what they could of London's archaeology. Many other sites followed,



Nick as the 'Mule of a Soldier' holding all his kit in his Ermine Street Guard days, Summer 1981

including Cannon Street station, the Guildhall car park, and another Roman bath-house, this time at the Coal Exchange site in Thames Street. In 1966 the group re-formed itself as the City of London Archaeological Society (CoLAS), which still flourishes today.

Not content with all this fieldwork, in 1968 Nick spotted a gap in the market and founded the *London Archaeologist*, which he went on to edit until 1976. The magazine was modelled in its format on the recently-founded *Current Archaeology*, but Nick claimed to have owed his inspiration to our regional neighbour *Kent Archaeological Review*. A loan of £100 from local archaeological societies helped to get the magazine off the ground (at a price of 3/-, 15p, per copy), and the rest, as they say, is history.

After the creation of the Museum of London and its Department of Urban Archaeology in 1974, there was less scope for part-time archaeologists in the City, and Nick focused his attention more on his home patch, Putney, where he attempted to synthesise work carried out over many years by the Wandsworth Historical Society and others, as well as continuing with his own fieldwork. He gave up the editorship of *London Archaeologist* in 1976 to devote more time to this work, but remained Managing Editor (an elder-statesman sort of role) until 1998. In 1981 he took early retirement from the Bank of England, changed his name back to Fuentes, and devoted himself full-time to archaeology.

Nick's interest in the past, especially the Roman period, was wide-ranging, and he was a key member of the re-enactment group *The Ermine Street Guard*. Two images from this period stick in my mind: one of Professor John Wilkes dressed as a Roman Emperor, taking the salute of the Guard in the quad of UCL, and one of Nick wearing his legionary armour to demonstrate St Paul's teaching on 'the full armour of God' to an enthralled group of Sunday-

school children and their parents.

Nick's home in Putney, which always felt like an unofficial museum, played an important role in the social life of London's archaeologists, and his Christmas parties were legendary (perhaps especially the one when it snowed so heavily that people had trouble getting home afterwards).

All this came to an abrupt end in 1997 when Nick suffered a severe brain haemorrhage, which would have killed a lesser man, and which left him in a wheelchair. Nevertheless, heroically assisted by Pam and Alexander, he continued to attend important events at the Museum of London. Now, at last, Nick can take his well-earned rest. We shall not see his like again.



Nick the family man, at one of his son Alexander's birthday parties