

## To market, to market...

Gary Brown's transformation from schoolboy digger in Lincoln to MD of one of the UK's leading archaeological contracting units owes much to the revelatory standards and inspiring colleagues encountered at his most significant site, at Leadenhall Market.

**RIGHT** Basilica and forum area superimposed on a modern City map with Leadenhall Court site in gold just north of the market. Gary directed digs in the western trench and later in Whittington Avenue to the east of the original site.

**BELOW** The base of the massive basilica wall in the west trench with the Lloyds building rising up behind.

**All images:** Museum of London, except where noted.

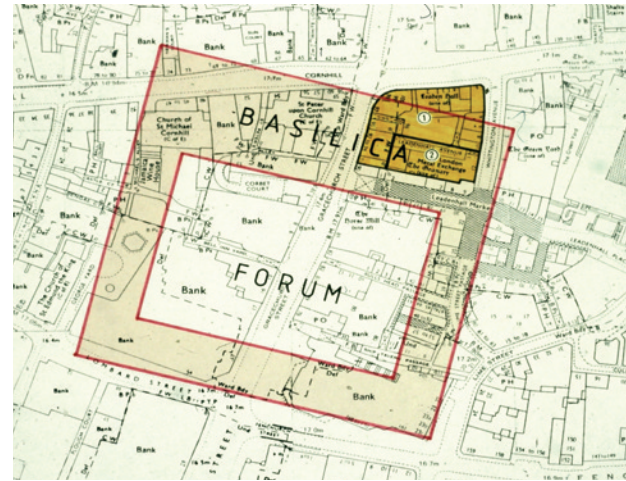


A circuitous route led Gary Brown to Leadenhall Court (just north of the market) in 1984, but he has no doubt that it was a key site in setting the standard for archaeological intervention, not just for him, but for a whole generation of archaeologists. The fact that it influenced his career so strongly has, in turn, influenced archaeology in London: in 1993 Gary went on to found Pre-Construct Archaeology, one of the first independent contracting units in the capital post PPG16.

Like many future professionals growing up in the era of rescue archaeology before the 1991 planning policy guidance, Gary spent school holidays in his teens on digs. Working under Dominic Perring on Flaxengate in Lincoln in the mid-1970s, he first encountered the complex multi-period layers that would eventually become his bread and butter. When he hadn't made up his mind what direction to take by the time he finished school, he gained a place on a YOP scheme in Lincoln digging on high profile sites such as St Paul in the Bail. There,

excavation of a sequence of churches dating from the 19th century back to one of Anglo-Saxon origins convinced excavators at the time that it was the church of Paulinus described by Bede. Alas, having broken his leg, Gary missed the discovery of the site's iconic find, a 7th C bronze hanging bowl, to say nothing of the Roman sequence.

Lincoln's Roman origins had perhaps the strongest pull for him, though, and he finally determined to study ancient history and archaeology. With a degree from Manchester University under his belt, he headed for London,



where he knew the Department of Urban Archaeology (the DUA – a forerunner of Museum of London Archaeology) was engaged in a frenzy of work in the early '80s development boom. On sites like Fenchurch Street, his colleagues included John Maloney, Jez Reeve, Geoff Egan and Andrew Westman, who would later prove influential in both his own career and the development of archaeology in London.

A sharp economic downturn took him to Italy for several long summer seasons where, in Ferrara, with LA's current Managing Editor Peter Rowsome, he taught the DUA's single context recording system whilst excavating deeply stratified urban areas before a final season in the Roman city of Luni.

For a day job, Gary returned to Lincolnshire and took up a position with the south Lincolnshire Archaeological Unit, under the direction of Brian Simmons. His first major site directorships were on major excavations at Old Place, Sleaford where elements of an Iron Age *oppidum* were revealed, and at the Roman settlement at Sapperton.

People are important to Gary, though, and he realised that he needed to be where all his significant friends were again working – in London. Contacting John Maloney at the DUA led to work at Leadenhall Court, where he joined experienced members of the team to bring on a large intake of new staff. Having all the staff trained up to a very high level of proficiency, says Gary, was fundamental to the success of what became an exceptional site.

With Gustav Milne at the helm, investigating layers from medieval down to early Roman, the site expanded across a large area, and Gary took charge of the western trench. Here his team excavated through to pre-basilican levels where clay and timber buildings survived. Two years later, when the Whittington Avenue site to the east of the basilica became available, Gary returned to help lead further investigations in the area, this time uncovering the portico beyond the absidal western end of the basilica, complete with herringbone

## LEADENHALL COURT

**RIGHT** View of the massive basilica walls, looking west.

**FAR RIGHT** The Whittington Avenue site to the east of the Leadenhall Court excavations revealed this Roman tiled *opus spicatum* surface, which formed the floor of a portico on the eastern side of the 2nd C basilica's apse.

**BELOW** Gary Brown at PCA's London office. Photo: Pre-Construct Archaeology



floor (*opus spicatum*), and a complex of pre-basilican structures, both timber and masonry.

On one of his regular visits to Lincolnshire a chance conversation there led to a complete change of direction. As PPG16 brought new requirements for developer-funded archaeological assessments, and commercial work began in earnest, Gary remembers remarking offhandedly, "Why couldn't we do it better?" By 1993, he had joined with his former director Brian Simmons and his brother Colin Palmer-Brown, also an archaeologist, to form Pre-Construct Archaeology in Lincoln.

Still working partly in London while the business was built up, Gary soon realised that the best opportunities were there. An amicable parting of the ways led to two quite separate businesses existing, in London and in Lincoln, both with the same name. Neither Gary nor his brother wanted to give up what they considered their own inspired brand, and only recently has the Lincoln business finally changed its name to reduce confusion somewhat.

PCA became one of the earliest forces in commercial archaeology in London, competing mainly with MOLAS, which had emerged from the DUA. Gary remarks, "With hindsight we went into it

rather naively, with no great business plan, but considerable confidence and good experience." Vital to growing the business early on, he says, was gathering key clients, and, particularly, acquiring key staff, several of whom have remained with PCA for more than 15 years. Originally operating from his front room, he was careful not to overstretch the fledgling unit, and no-bid on large contracts such as Baltic House, despite having successfully carried out the evaluation. Once 'proper' premises were secured and key staff like Peter Moore and Frank Meddens came on board, both credibility and capability shot up. Obvious business expertise convinced potential clients that PCA spoke their language, so larger projects like Deptford Power Station and Adlards Wharf began to come their way. The regrettable closing in 1996 of the Newham Museum Service – a significant player in archaeological work until then – had a silver lining in two forms: a key competitor was knocked out of the market, and further experienced staff became available. Mark Beasley, David Divers, Chris Jarrett and Ken Sable all played a part in PCA's growth.

Eighteen years on, PCA has over 100 staff, and a new Cambridge regional office has recently been added to those in London and Durham. Often in the news are projects such as Tabard Square, which revealed an important Roman temple complex and the first inscription actually citing *Londinium*; Drapers Gardens, the popular publication for which was last year runner up for the London Archaeological Prize; and Shadwell bathhouse, which changed perceptions of how Romans lived outside the city walls.

With PCA coming up with such noteworthy



projects, why does Leadenhall Court stand out as Gary's most significant site? The answer lies in two factors: the archaeological environment at the time, and the legacy it left for archaeological practice.

In the heady days of the '80s, the City was well-resourced to enable the maximum recovery of information through investigation and analysis. London was abuzz with the Royal Mint site near the Tower and Holy Trinity Priory precinct at Aldgate being investigated, Cannon Street and Huggin Hill bath complexes seeing further excavation and the Rose playhouse emerging from the south side of the river. But all, of course, relied on voluntary funding from developers, trusts and public bodies: nothing was certain and both sites and jobs – mostly on short contracts – were insecure.

Partly because of such insecurity, archaeologists were determined to get the most from fleeting and often complex opportunities to excavate. That new generation – schooled in systems and processes that were designed to work within physical, cost and time constraints – became the mainstay of today's top professionals.

With director Gustav Milne ready, as Philip Barker exhorted, to 'expect the unexpected', the investigations delivered everything from the long sequence of pre-basilican structures, to walls of the medieval market garner (granary), found surviving behind Victorian brickwork. The development sequence for Londinium's forum and basilica was rewritten, and, through the analysis of houses and shop buildings, the domestic lives of early inhabitants revealed. Evidence as serendipitous as an owl pellet helped illuminate the demise of Roman phases, enabling comparisons with contemporary sites in decline such as Huggin Hill baths.

For Gary, Leadenhall encapsulated much of the potential of the City's archaeology. It showed the standards that could be reached through interaction between disciplines as diverse as demolition crews, surveyors, diggers and groundwork operatives. Because archaeological staff knew their job, hugely complicated stratigraphy yielded outstanding results, convincing Gary that single context recording should be the standard for urban archaeology. And on a personal note, Leadenhall is especially memorable for him: it's where he first met one Josephine Batteson, who became his wife and a co-director of PCA.

Looking to the future, Gary sees a threat that some of the worst consequences of pre-PPG16 archaeology could return. "England has developed a good curatorial structure that protects the past within a sensible, flexible framework," he says, "but it's in danger of being dismantled through piecemeal cuts." Archaeology in London is at the mercy of financial constraints, at all levels. As an example, he cites GLAAS (English Heritage's

Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service): responsible for monitoring most of the capital's archaeology, the unit is already understaffed, and now having to cover gaps looming in the boroughs. "Sites falling under the radar and controls being lost could lead to a disintegration of the archaeological record that could affect research for years into the future," he says, "and with job losses running at 20% across the profession, expertise is vanishing, possibly permanently."

If – a big if, perhaps – planning control can be stabilised, however, Gary sees no reason why, with best practice, the contracting units, and with them archaeology in London, can't flourish. There may even be an upside in the new Planning Policy Statement, PPS5, where new predetermination work may emerge, albeit after a long gestation period. Reflecting on both the challenges of the current climate and on the high standards set at Leadenhall Market, Gary believes that, at their best, commercial contractors can deliver – both to the archaeological record and to client organisations – and he'll be happy if he and PCA can do precisely that.

*~ Gary Brown was talking to Becky Wallower*

The Leadenhall Court site (LCT84) was published as a book with an appendix summarising the Whittington Avenue (WIV88) excavations: **G. Milne (ed) *From Roman Basilica to Medieval Market - archaeology in action in the City of London* HMSO 1992.**

LA is very grateful to Gustav Milne and Cath Maloney for retrieving images from the archives.



**BELOW LEFT** Last view of the interior of a 15th-C wall of the market garner before demolition, with dressed ashlar stone facing the upper storey granary and arched chalk foundations. Found behind Victorian brickwork, it had unexpectedly survived 19th-C redevelopment.

**BELOW RIGHT** Cutaway reconstruction of the north west corner of the market garner at Leadenhall shows the decorated facade the public market presented to London.

