

The Greater London Historic Environment Research Strategy

Peter Rowsome reports on progress on behalf of the team developing the GLHERS: where has it got to and what's left to do?

We last reported on the development of a research strategy for the historic environment of Greater London in the summer of 2008, when an extensive consultation exercise was just getting underway. Completed in early 2009, this consultation included over 300 interested parties, and comments were received from a wide variety of organisations and individuals.

The research strategy forms the final part of a research framework for London, following on from a resource assessment (*The Archaeology of Greater London*, Museum of London 2000) and a research agenda (*A research framework for London archaeology*, Museum of London 2002). A key goal of the Strategy has been to develop and expand its terms of reference from the primarily archaeological approach of the earlier documents to encompass the broader historic environment - the totality of the physical evidence for past human activity, buried and built. To do this, the Strategy defines a closely related series of elements – landscape and habitation pattern; settlements and places; buildings and structures; and artefacts and deposits. It applies these specifically to the Greater London area as a set of six research headings: a city in its hinterland and world context; inhabiting the pre-urban landscape; evolving urban

settlement; identifying places and communities; buildings for living and work; and artefacts: manufacture and consumption.

A draft text submitted to the project Steering Group and English Heritage for comment in 2009 was revised, circulated for further comment in 2010, and further revised earlier this year. A final agreed draft should be available for general consultation this autumn. An edited version will then be prepared for a dedicated web page and in print form in 2012.

This must sound like a long-winded process and we can only agree that it has taken a long time. Revision of the Strategy has been challenging, given the need to take into account the concurrent development of new heritage policies and the changing environment for heritage funding, where community involvement and collaboration are increasingly important. During our work on the GLHERS, major policy initiatives have included Planning Policy Statement 5 – Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5, 2010) and the identification of priorities in the National Heritage Protection Plan (NHPP, English Heritage draft 2010) as well as several new regional and thematic research strategies. Setting out London's position in this landscape of moving heritage goal

posts has not always been easy. We hope that the final document will help researchers navigate their way through the forest of competing priorities to develop well-focused proposals.

The Strategy begins by explaining the term 'historic environment' and its application to the London area. A summary of recent research work follows, ordered in relation to our newly defined research elements of the historic environment. The core of the Strategy is the Action Plan, which sets out research priorities and strategic actions for the next five years. Research priorities are related to national, thematic and regional research strategies as well as detailed objectives identified in the 2002 Research Agenda. Strategic Actions listed are intended to facilitate the development of a research culture suitable for the wider historic environment. Research Priorities include sample projects, though it is important to note that they are not intended as a comprehensive or ranked list.

The Strategy is supported by a series of Case Studies reflecting the wide range of research work completed in recent years, underway or proposed. A final chapter will include advice on developing research proposals and gaining support from funding bodies and others.

There is a danger that documents such as the Strategy sit on shelves where they are rarely used beyond obligatory references that try and justify work already required or intended. Active use is more difficult to achieve, as is devising measures for tracking its success, but we hope that the Strategy will develop a life of its own as users become familiar with its concepts and take it in new directions through innovative research projects. The Strategy is intended to encourage debate of priorities and not set them in stone.



A piece of 17th-century delftware excavated by local school children at the Museum of London's Arnold Circus community excavation.

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