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Ancient futures

London's Inspector of Ancient Monuments is one of only 18 such officials serving all the geographic regions of England, under the auspices of English Heritage. Becky Wallower spoke to Jane Sidell, the Inspector responsible for the Greater London Authority area about her 'dream job'.

The official count of scheduled monuments in England is precisely 19,717. Of these Jane Sidell, with the area's Assistant Inspector, Iain Bright, has oversight of just 157, while the other eight regions share out the remaining 19,500 plus monuments. The imbalance arises simply because of the extent and significance of the monuments in London, some of which are of major international importance, and include locations within all four UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Tower, Greenwich, Kew and Westminster.

The government has kept a schedule of nationally important monuments since 1882. Scheduling is still applied only to sites of national importance, and only then if that is the most appropriate means of protecting them. It is the only legal protection for archaeological sites, but also covers over 200 other classes of monument, including standing structures and manmade landscape features. And not all scheduled monuments are that ancient. Although Jane's title includes the word, the only instance of it in the

Act that governs scheduling is in its title: the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. London's monuments in fact range in date from prehistoric periods, like the bell barrow on Parliament Hill, to WWII, including the Spitfire fighter pens at Kenley Aerodrome. Fifty seven monuments are grouped in the City of London, but the remaining sites are dotted widely across the GLA area, from a medieval deer park in Pinner, to Scadbury manor house in Bromley.

It's such variety and complexity that makes this 'the dream job' in Jane's book. But what exactly is that job?

A great part of it is advising the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on, and processing, all applications for consent to undertake works on the monuments. Applications like replacing some signposts could take a few hours, while others run for many months, as was the case with the development over Cannon Street rail station. The need to protect the extensive Roman archaeology beneath the station, keep the trains running throughout and monitor an ever-

changing development plan led to over two years' research, negotiation and attendance to determine the optimal sites for piling. Where some monuments may never see an application for consent, others, such as Hampton Court Palace, could have 20 cases running at once.

The overarching aim of the job – to protect the monuments from harm – can involve not just paperwork, but promotion and educational activities as well. "The best way for people to appreciate the importance of protecting a monument, particularly a hidden archaeological site," she says, "is for them to see it." The charnel house at the Spitalfields medieval monastery has been preserved under the development, for instance, but it's not easy to view through the glass. Walking round inside the monument gives a much better feel for its construction and purpose within the extensive complex. Having just set up a visit for local residents, Jane was looking forward to seeing jaws drop, as people realised the significance of what lies nearby. "The best bit," she reckons, "is when people get it." When a CBA



London field trip there fell on Halloween a few years ago, Jane was happy to have chocolate eyeballs, plastic skullies, spiders and jack-o-lanterns dotted round the masonry. "I'm all for informality where it's possible: it can make the monument more accessible and free up imagination and curiosity better than any lecture."

Interpretation is likewise important to help the public make sense of the sites. Signage, boards and leaflets are regularly revisited and revamped. At Winchester Palace on Bankside, a new leaflet is available and a display is planned in conjunction with Museum of London to exhibit finds from Roman and medieval remains. Merton Priory, the remains of which have been languishing off a grimy underpass for years, is getting an HLF-funded makeover with a garden, guides and greater access. Better signage around the City's Roman wall is on the cards too, especially where new development and the removal of the High Walk along London Wall is allowing a better chance to see where the wall runs and how it relates to the eponymous road.

As might be expected, inspectors also inspect; Jane and Iain try to get round all 157 monuments at least every few years. Some need to be attended more regularly – Jane tests the water preserving the remains of the Rose Theatre every month for any changes – and others, such as the livery halls in the City, where there is good oversight, less often. She has got into the habit of walking the entire length of the Roman wall frequently to monitor the inevitably high level of construction and infrastructure activity. On one of these excursions Jane spotted an unrecorded segment of Roman wall and adjoining eastern gate at Aldgate as she peered into a small, deep hole. It's not

uncommon to find unauthorised road works, usually due to contractors' ignorance that they're operating in a scheduled monument and need separate consent. "I've stood in front of a machine driver before now, and carry a card to read a caution to infringers if need be. Enforcement rarely comes to that, but you have to be prepared to get tough."

Jane aims to alleviate some aspects of enforcement by providing guidance and advice documents for different types of monument, construction or materials. As well as receiving copies of all applications to close City streets, she and EH colleagues have also, for example, produced guidelines for street works contractors. This is currently out for consultation, as is a new draft policy, also co-authored by Jane, on sampling strategies for large cemeteries like that at St Pancras, designed to help improve the usefulness and consistency of excavations on burial sites. On the materials front, the day before we met, she had co-chaired a concrete seminar, which she hopes will lead to useful recommendations. As WWII sites begin to deteriorate, advice on even this modern material is becoming critical.

Most enforcement issues, however, centre on criminal damage such as theft and vandalism, including regular instances of graffiti, illegal metal detecting, smashed phone boxes and stolen sculptures and war memorials. Key to getting the police on side is talking to them, stirring their interest and demonstrating that heritage crimes aren't victimless, but affect all of us – police officers included – as they degrade communities.

"On top of the usual activities, we also generally have a major scheme lurking in the background that needs attention over the long term," she says. The current such project is the mammoth Thames Tideway Tunnel,

OPPOSITE PAGE: The charnel house at Spitalfields was preserved beneath the pavement after the excavations in 1998-2000.

Photo: ©English Heritage

ABOVE: Decorative railing fished out of the canal during the restoration of Bonner Hall Bridge in 2011.

Photo: ©English Heritage
RIGHT: A previously unknown 10m segment of Roman city wall at Tower Hill was uncovered and recorded by MOLA after demolition works in advance of the construction of a new hotel, where the remains will be on view. ©MOLA

where Jane is responsible for monitoring the effect of plans on anything on the foreshore below high tide level, and has so far advised on 11 pieces of evaluation. The next major project to run and run will probably be the High Speed 2 rail scheme.

Archaeological monuments, though just a small proportion of her casebook, are inevitably important ones: only 5% of the archaeological record nationwide is scheduled. They can also be complicated, as there is often overlap with, for instance, the curatorial archaeologists in Southwark, the City or her colleagues in GLAAS (Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service), museum education staff, the professional archaeological units and consultants, developers and planners. They also require perhaps the most sensitive interpretation as so few are visible.

This is a job that clearly demands a huge range of knowledge and experience, across disciplines, periods, techniques and laws. With a degree in archaeology, an MSc in Zooarchaeology and a PhD on sea level rise and settlement, Jane worked as an environmental and then animal bone specialist at MOLA (then MoLAS),



INSPECTOR OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS



ABOVE: Scadbury late medieval moated manor house in Orpington is the latest Scheduled Ancient Monument. It was tended for many years by Orpington and District Archaeological Society, who are currently excavating to determine the nature of the medieval, pre-Tudor moat. Scadbury will be open July 13 and 14 during the Festival of Archaeology. Photo: ©English Heritage
BELOW: Jane Sidell oversaw several Time Team excavations in scheduled monuments. Here she discusses the search for the medieval 'university' at Lincoln's Inn with Phil Harding. Photo: ©English Heritage

before joining EH 15 years ago, initially as Science Advisor. She maintains that science is still central to her role as Inspector: "When advising how to analyse paint samples, or recommending whether caesium vapour magnetometry or quantum squid magnetometry would be the more appropriate geophysics tool, I at least need to know who to call."

The core of the job, and plainly the aspect that most satisfies Jane every day, is problem solving. "We're not there to stop change or to block progress. What we're trying to do is help determine how people can achieve what they want to do without harm to the monument." It's that philosophy, the art of the possible, which guides every application for consent. At Hampton Court for instance, the creation of a new kitchen garden to parallel the historic one was made possible by archaeological investigation, followed by a scheme which set out the new planting at a higher level than the historic beds and slightly offset from them, but in the same pattern, using historic species, enabling both historic and modern to coexist.

"I've always loved the thought of this job – following in the footsteps of Pitt Rivers [the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments] clambering about in tweed – but it's the day to day reality that

delights. In my dreams, I might have hoped to uncover a new 10m section of Roman wall, as we've just found behind Tower Hill tube station, but perhaps wouldn't have anticipated a new German source on the Battle of Britain bombing raids on RAF Kenley turning up at Hendon last month. Newly translated, that will provide a different point of view to present for the 75th anniversary celebrations there next year. And I'm not sure I'd have predicted having to draw up a spec to replace 40 urinals at Greenwich Hospital either, or least of all advising on the position and design of new raven cages at the Tower."

Plainly, heritage is not without threats, from multiple sides. Cuts at EH

have severely reduced the number of staff. Changes in heritage structure in England could see EH split in half next year and the status of archaeology is uncertain [the report is due after this article has gone to press]. Inspectors could be separated from colleagues looking after the EH estate, which in London includes Winchester Palace, Eltham Palace and Chiswick House. The loss of conservation officers in the boroughs is also a big concern, as 40% of scheduled monuments are owned by local authorities.

A continuing demand of Jane's job is reviewing what should be added to or deleted from the Heritage at Risk register. Progress on monuments such as Merton Priory, which could be removed from the register soon, is tempered by new and growing challenges. An ever more important factor in this context is the setting for scheduled monuments as intense development hems in central sites. It's been widely reported that UNESCO has issued cautions on potential loss of world heritage site status if major construction is allowed to overpower the areas around Westminster and the Tower. Jane is likewise concerned about the setting of the monuments. When a Daily Mail journalist wrote to EH to complain about a satellite dish on one of the residential units at the Tower of London not long ago, she mused thoughtfully. What she noticed far more than the small dish was the giant form of the Walkie Talkie towering above. Preventing harm from threats of that nature will take more than a single Inspector of Ancient Monuments with a caution card, but it's a challenge Jane will no doubt be up for taking on.



Archaeology everywhere:

Festival of Archaeology 12–27 July 2014

The coordinators, Council for British Archaeology, expect this year's annual Festival of Archaeology (FOA) to include more activities and attract more people than ever before. Last year more than 1000 events took place countrywide, organised by 450 museums, local societies, community archaeologists, universities, schools and heritage organisations.

London Archaeologist will once again team up with Museum of London in July, but this year we're off to one of London's prime scheduled monuments, Billingsgate Roman Bath House (pictured right). On Sunday 13 July from 11 am to 4 pm, we join curators from the Museum and students from the Institute of Archaeology for an open day with plenty to see and do. You can view the extensive remains in this rarely open site from a new suspended walkway just being installed, and students and curators will provide background talks and show off Roman finds. LA's family-centred Roman activities include a chance to design a special bath house mosaic, or create a secret Roman curse tablet to avenge a wrong or bring good luck from the gods.



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Highlights elsewhere in London include the ever-popular Thames foreshore forage at the Tower of London with COLAS (see back page), and excavations at Tudor Elsyng Palace in the grounds of Forty Hall in Enfield. In the City, Huguenots of Spitalfield are organising numerous walks, talks and open days, some of which are free. The British Museum will again be running gallery talks by experts. Islington Archaeology and History Society explores George Orwell, Highbury and the V1 bomb on a 90 minute walk. Museum of London and Harrow Museum have an open day at the training excavation being run at moated Headstone Manor, where you can inspect finds, watch medieval re-enactments, and view the dig.

Details can be found on the FOA website, where more entries are being added every day. Check it regularly to find an event up your street: www.archaeologyfestival.org.uk.

Letter to the editor

The geological identification of the sculpted relief panel from Bermondsey Priory as French¹ was fascinating. However, I would like to comment on the interpretation of this scene which was described as a depiction of Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead (*John* 11: 38-44).

First, the piece is very eroded so all the detail has been lost; therefore it is impossible to determine the subject depicted with certainty. This degree of erosion suggests that it probably formed one element of an external decorative scheme perhaps a tympanum or a frieze. Secondly, the relative size of the figures depicted is important: it shows 'spiritual perspective', a characteristic of Romanesque sculpture, which required that the most important characters were the largest. Therefore, the large standing figure holding a book or gospel is almost certainly Christ. The three small figures to the left of this large figure may be kneeling, while the seven figures to the right of this figure all appear to be standing. If this scene does represent the raising of Lazarus then he should be among these seven figures and identified by his 'bindings' or shroud, but in the absence of all detail this identification is not possible. Thirdly, while it is probable that this panel represents a scene from Christ's ministry, it cannot be linked with any particular event with certainty. Assuming that this panel does represent the raising of Lazarus then as Christ's last act of his ministry before Passion week it provides

a possible clue to the theme of the rest of the sculptural scenes. Fourthly, the raising of Lazarus is depicted in one of the two Romanesque sculptural panels preserved in Chichester Cathedral. In the Chichester panel Christ is the largest figure holding a gospel in one hand. It is believed that these two panels date to c. 1125–50 and originally formed part of a choir screen. Fifthly, an 11th-century date has been attributed to the Bermondsey panel², on stylistic grounds: a Romanesque date for this fragment seems very plausible, which in Greater London suggests a date of c. 1050–1150.

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that sculptural material from Greater London's medieval monastic and parish churches is actually quite rare. An important assemblage of ex-situ sculptured stonework was recovered during the 1969–73 Montague Close excavations in Southwark directed by Graham Dawson. It included a figure of Christ in Majesty and possibly Synagoga. It is believed this stonework was derived from the Chapter House of the Priory of St Mary Overy, but sadly this material is unpublished and therefore is unknown to researchers.

Bruce Watson

1 K. Hayward 'Mother and daughter monasteries: a geological link between France and Saxo-Norman priories in Bermondsey and Lewes' *London Archaeol* 12, no. 12 (2014) 347.

2 T. Dyson, M. Samuel, A. Steele & S. Wright *The Cluniac Priory and abbey of St Saviour Bermondsey, Surrey: Excavations 1984-95* MOLA monograph 50 (2011) 22.