

Mosaic

Frankincense from Roman Spitalfields

The first scientific evidence of frankincense being used in Roman burial rites in Britain has been uncovered by a team of archaeological scientists led by the University of Bradford. The findings prove that, even while the Roman Empire was in decline, these precious substances were being transported to its furthest northern outpost. The discovery was made through molecular analysis of materials previously thought to be of little interest – debris inside burial containers and residues on skeletal remains and plaster body casings.

The samples came from burial sites across Britain: Dorset, Wiltshire, London and York, dating from the 3rd to the 4th century AD. Of the forty-nine burials analysed, four showed traces of frankincense – originating from southern Arabia or eastern Africa – and ten others contained evidence of resins imported from the Mediterranean region and northern Europe. One sample was from a rich young Roman lady, whose 4th-century skeleton and sarcophagus were discovered near Spitalfields Market in 1999 (see *LA 9* no. 1, 3).

Classical texts mention these aromatic, anti-microbial substances as being used as a practical measure to mask the smell of decay or slow decomposition during the often lengthy funeral rites of the Roman elite. But it was their ritual importance which justified their transportation from one end of the empire to the other. Seen both as gifts from the gods and to the gods, these resins were thought to purify the dead and help them negotiate the final rite of passage to the afterlife.

These resins were only recovered from burials of higher status individuals, identified from the type of container used, the clothing they were wearing and items buried with them. This is consistent with the known value of frankincense in antiquity and the fact it had to be brought to Britain via a vast and complex trade route.

Museum of London to move?

The Museum of London has revealed that it is considering moving from its current building to Smithfield General Market, which was saved from demolition in July when Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, ruled that the scheme would have ‘an extremely harmful effect on the significance of the General Market as an important non-designated heritage asset’.

Reports in the media said that the museum had identified the former market as one of three options for its future. A spokesperson for the Museum of London said: ‘in order to create a museum that meets the needs of Londoners and visitors to the city, the Museum of London is considering a range of very speculative options for our

long-term future and a detailed appraisal of each is under way’.

Museums moving east

The Treasury announced in December 2014 that it was allocating £141 million towards the creation of a new arts and education quarter on the site of the London 2012 Olympics in Stratford. The Victoria and Albert Museum is to be a key player, along with the Sadler’s Wells Dance Company, the University of the Arts, the London College of Fashion and University College London. The east London scheme has been dubbed ‘Olympicopolis’, an allusion to the ‘Albertopolis’ area of South Kensington, named after Prince Albert and constructed as a legacy of the Great Exhibition of 1851, home to the V&A, the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Royal Colleges of Music and Art, Imperial College and the Royal Albert Hall.

Staff at the V&A emphasise that they plan ‘a different type of museum’, letting visitors see some of the normally hidden processes of research, conservation and curation. The intention is also to encourage cross-fertilisation between the different institutions on the site, to emphasise modern design and to mount exhibitions like the successful David Bowie show of 2014 – and all of this will be housed in a ‘museum building that people will talk about’.

Cuming Museum from the ashes

Southwark Council is hiring lead architects to rebuild the historic Walworth Town Hall and Newington Library, following the devastating fire in March 2013 (see *LA 13* no. 9, 252 and no. 11, 316). The council has given an outline design brief to the three competing architects and is asking residents to give their thoughts on their initial designs, based on the brief, before a final decision is made in the New Year. The Council has agreed a vision for the future of the rebuilt building as a new, world-class civic centre for Walworth, including:

- an enhanced Newington Library space,
- a space for the display of the Cuming collection and Southwark museum,
- a flexible space that could be used for a variety of purposes including community and civic events, exhibitions and performances.
- facilities for marriage, civil partnership and citizenship ceremonies undertaken by the Southwark registrar’s service.

Since the fire, the Council has worked to stabilise and secure the building, but there is a great deal more work to do to rebuild this cherished community building. Throughout the past year, it has been careful to salvage as many original features as possible and has worked closely with English Heritage.

Much of the interior of the building was severely damaged, but where possible the façade and those key historical features of the interior which have survived, will be preserved and restored. As part of the initial restoration phase the Council has been granted listed building consent to reinstate the west wing roof.

CoLAT needs a new Secretary

John Schofield has announced that he wishes to retire from the job of Secretary to the City of London Archaeological Trust (CoLAT), a post he has held since 1990. The handover should be in December 2015. The post is not paid, but an honorarium may be discussed. This is an important job in a Trust which is dedicated to making the archaeology of London available to a wider audience. More information can be obtained from John Schofield, john@jschd.demon.co.uk. The Trust’s website, which describes its activities, is www.colat.org.uk.

Bedlam excavation starts

Excavations have recently started on the site of the Bedlam cemetery near Liverpool Street, undertaken by MOLA on behalf of Crossrail. The cemetery was opened in 1569 to help with the overflow from the City churches. It is estimated that by the time the cemetery was closed in 1738, some 20,000 people had been buried there. A team of 60 archaeologists will work six days a week to remove some 3000 skeletons and carefully record evidence of what may prove to be, in archaeological terms, London’s most valuable 16th-, 17th- and 18th-century cemetery site. Tests on excavated victims will further the understanding of the evolution of the plague’s bacterial strain. The excavations are expected to continue until September, after which the site will become a new ticket hall.

Funding for CITiZAN

We are pleased to report that the CITiZAN project (the Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network, see *LA Vol 13* no. 12 (Spring 2014) 348) has been awarded £1.7m by the HLF, with match funding from The Crown Estate and National Trust. Volunteers will be recruited from Spring 2015, see www.mola.org.uk/projects/research-and-community/citizan.

and for Turner’s house

Sandycombe House in Twickenham, the Home of JMW Turner from 1813 to 1826 (see *LA 14*, no 3 (Winter 2015) 84), has been awarded a grant of £1.4m by the HLF.

Diary

Please note that most societies anticipate a donation for attendance by non-members.

April

11 (3 p.m.) Carshalton & District History & Archaeology Society. 'Prehistory in Surrey' by Jon Cotton. Milton Hall, Cooper Crescent, Nightingale Road, Carshalton.

13 (7.45 p.m.) West Essex Archaeological Group. 'Insights from a Victorian Pawnbrokers Burial Ground in Bethnal Green' by Rachel Ives. Sixth Form Block, Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green.

14 (6.30 p.m.) London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. 'Palace foreshores: investigations on the River Thames at Fulham, Westminster, Greenwich and the Tower of London' by Nathalie Cohen. Clore Learning Centre, Museum of London.

14 (7.30 p.m.) Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. "'Our Park' – Southwark Park's 150 years' by Pat Kingwell. The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1.

14 (8 p.m.) Hendon & District Archaeological Society. 'Excavations by Pre-Construct Archaeology at the former Inglis Barracks' by Ian Cipin. Avenue House, 17 East End Road, Finchley.

17 (8 p.m.) Enfield Archaeological Society. AGM and 'The excavations and fieldwork of Enfield Archaeological Society 2014' by Martin Dearne and Mike Dewbrey. Jubilee Hall, junction of Chase Side and Parsonage Lane, Enfield.

17 (8 p.m.) Richmond Archaeological Society. 'What did the Vikings ever do for us?' by Simon Coupland. Vestry Hall, Paradise Road, Richmond.

May

6 (8 p.m.) Epsom and Ewell History and Archaeology Society. 'Ancient Turkey' by Jeff Cousins. St Mary's Church Hall, London Road, Ewell.

8 (8 p.m.) Enfield Archaeological Society. 'Portals to the past: recent finds on the Crossrail archaeology programme' by Jay Carver. Jubilee Hall, junction of Chase Side and Parsonage Lane, Enfield.

11 (7.45 p.m.) West Essex Archaeological Group. 'The Walbrook: recent excavations along London's Roman river' by Sadie Watson. Assembly Hall, Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green.

12 (6.30 p.m.) London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. 'The official London Blue Plaques scheme, 1866–present day' by Howard Spencer. Clore Learning Centre, Museum of London.

12 (7.30 p.m.) Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. 'Protecting London –

past, present and future' by Gustav Milne. The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1.

12 (8 p.m.) Hendon & District Archaeological Society. 'The Knights Templar and their London connections' by Robert Stephenson. Avenue House, 17 East End Road, Finchley.

15 (8 p.m.) Richmond Archaeological Society. 'Metalworking in Viking Dublin' by Justine Bayley. Vestry Hall, Paradise Road, Richmond.

June

8 (7.45 p.m.) West Essex Archaeological Group. 'Treasures from the Thames' by Nathalie Cohen. Assembly Hall, Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green.

12 (8 p.m.) Enfield Archaeological Society. 'Updates from the Thames Discovery Programme' by Elliott Wragg. Jubilee Hall, junction of Chase Side and Parsonage Lane, Enfield.

15 (8 p.m.) Hendon & District Archaeological Society. AGM. Avenue House, 17 East End Road, Finchley.

July

3 (8 p.m.) Enfield Archaeological Society. 'Enfield at war: shirts, shells and poison gas' by Ian Jones. Jubilee Hall, junction of Chase Side and Parsonage Lane, Enfield.

16 (8.15 p.m.) Bexley Archaeological Group. 'The Islington WW1 Project – archaeology and methodology' by John Shepherd. Bexley-Sidcup Conservative Club, 19 Station Road, Sidcup.

Conference

South-east region industrial archaeology conference, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday 25th April, at Ashburton Hall, Sussex Street, Winchester. Tickets £12 to include morning coffee and afternoon tea; buffet lunches £10 extra. Details from www.hias.org.uk or phone 01962 855200.

Events

Celebrating fifty years of the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society, 1965–2015. Anniversary Buffet Dinner for members and friends, 7 p.m., Tuesday 19th May, at Novotel Lambeth Road, SE1. Cost: £25 per person, including gratuity but excluding drinks. Booking and payments to George Young, 12 Swinburne Court, Basingdon Way, SE5 3EP (cheques payable

to Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society).

Membership

Individual membership of the Council for British Archaeology, which includes six issues a year of *British Archaeology*, costs £36 p.a. Visit: <https://shop.britarch.ac.uk/>.

Short courses and summer schools

Bexley Archaeological Group Annual

Training Excavation, 27–31 July, teaching the basics of field archaeology. Cost £100, including one year's membership of BAG. For further information, or to book a place, contact Pip Pulfer, principalfieldofficer@bag.org.uk, 07961 963 893, website www.bag.org.uk.

Five-day field school at Copped Hall, near Epping, 18–22 July and 15–19 August, by West Essex Archaeological Group and Copped Hall Trust. Full details at weag.org.uk. Also taster weekends 11–12, 18–19 and 25–26 July and 15–16 August.

Kent Archaeological Field School. Short courses throughout 2015; two-day courses cost £50 unless otherwise stated. Details from the Kent Archaeological Field School, School Farm Oast, Graveney Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8UP, or visit www.kafs.co.uk.

Sussex School of Archaeology. Programme of day schools and longer courses throughout 2015, day schools usually cost £40. Details from Sussex School of Archaeology Limited, Unit 12, Mays Farm Selmeston, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6TS. Telephone 01323 811785 or visit www.sussexarchaeology.org.

Practical archaeology

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

London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre. Contact Archive Manager, Francis Grew (020 7566 9317).

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

Borough of Greenwich. Contact Greenwich Heritage Centre (020 8854 2452).

Hammersmith & Fulham. Contact Keith Whitehouse (020 7385 3723).

Kingston. Enquiries to 020 8546 5386.

MOLA. Contact Karen Thomas, Head of Archive (020 7410 2228).

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

Surrey. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Surrey History Centre (01483 594 634).