Obituaries

Donald Imber 1943–2004

Don Imber was born in Stockwell in 1943 and developed from a young age an intense interest in the history and archaeology of South London, particularly his native Lambeth. Excavation and research in the 1960s and 1970s had to be fitted round a busy career in the Merchant Navy. His duties as a wireless operator necessitated travelling the world’s oceans and thus lengthy periods of absence from Britain.

Don began as a volunteer with the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society in the early 1960s. He was one of many who benefited from what he later described as the “infectious enthusiasm” of Francis Celoria, then Field Officer of the London Museum. Encouraged by Celoria and his successor, Roy Canham, Don began a series of excavations in gardens and grounds, searching for Roman Stane Street, where modern highways deviated from its assumed straight line between Stockwell and Balham.

Don’s “trial by trowel” – to use his own term – took place on a number of sites between 1966 and 1971, often with the assistance of other volunteers, but sometimes, particularly in bad weather, alone and always kept going by his enthusiasm and determination. The results, also incorporating later fieldwork, were published by LAMAS in 1974.

Between 1974 and 1976, Don undertook research into the archaeological potential of Lambeth for SLAEC. Its fruits, Lambeth Lost and Found, was completed between periods of overseas service and published in 1979. It contained a detailed inventory of more than 200 sites and finds, from the prehistoric period to the mid-18th century and literally put Lambeth on the archaeological map.

Don’s survey was characterised by thorough and painstaking research and detailed references. He passionately wanted more archaeological work to be undertaken in the Borough, and Lambeth Lost and Found provided the ammunition that could be used to make the archaeological case to developers, local government and the public.

Marriage, a home outside London, family responsibilities and the demands of his job meant that Don had much less opportunity for archaeological research in the succeeding decades. His earlier contribution to London archaeology, carried out at a time when “professionals” were thin on the ground and there was much reliance on dedicated part-timers, was considerable. We send our sympathy to Fiona and to his sons James, Thomas and Michael.

Brian Bloice
Robin Densem
Harvey Sheldon

Daphne Lorimer MBE

It is with regret that we record the death of Daphne Lorimer MBE at Orkney on 15th February 2005. Although a radiographer by profession, archaeology was a lifelong interest. She cut her archaeological teeth, so to speak, on the Hendon and District Archaeological Society’s (HADAS) excavation at Hendon Church Terrace (CT73) in 1973/74. Then, having obtained the University of London’s Diploma in Archaeology, specialising in prehistory, she became site director for the first three years of the important HADAS excavation of the Mesolithic site at West Heath. She co-edited the publication of the site in 1991.1 Daphne was involved in all aspects of HADAS’ activities from fieldwalking to cooking Roman banquets! She was knowledgeable, efficient and good-humoured, full of enthusiasm and endlessly patient. She took a post-diploma course at the Institute of Archaeology on “The Study of Human Skeletal Remains in Archaeology” and thereafter specialised on human bones.

When she and husband Ian retired, they went to live in Orkney, where she immediately became

Don Imber at Henry Thornton School
involved in the Orkney Archaeological Trust (OAT). She served on its committee and was its chairman from 1996 to 2002. While in Scotland, she wrote many specialist reports on human bones from Scottish excavations. She received an MBE for services to archaeology. Our condolences to sons Andrew and Vincent and all the family – she is greatly missed.

Don Cooper


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**Letters**

**Paulinus and Boudica**

David Bird may well be right in arguing that Boudica’s last battle was fought as the Roman commander Paulinus retreated from London in the face of a numerically superior enemy. I have the impression that the ‘defile’ where he chose to make his stand is generally seen as a valley, but I find it hard to believe that this would give a heavily outnumbered army enough protection from flank attack, especially on the fairly flat land between London and Silchester.

Paulinus would have had the option of retreating towards Chichester, where Boudica’s army would no doubt have found a gratifying amount of loot. The London to Chichester Road has at least one narrow defile that would have made a formidable defensive position. As the road runs south-west from Ewell it crosses a couple of fairly shallow dry valleys at right angles. It then comes to the top of Mickleham Down. Here the modern path kinks and then runs down the spur of White Hill into the Mole Valley. The Roman road probably did the same thing, as the topography offers few other options. The top of White Hill is now wooded although the first edition one inch Ordnance Survey map shows that in it was open downland in the early 19th century. It may well have been wooded in the Roman period, as Nower Wood to the east is probably ancient. Here is a place for a cautious general to make a stand. The western flank is protected by the steep drop to the Mole Valley. If there was woodland on White Hill this would cover the south and east flank and the deep dry valley between White Hill and Box Hill would have provided additional protection.

I don’t know if Roman finds have been made in this area but two millennia of soil movement could have moved much of the battle detritus into down-slope hill-wash deposits.

I do not suggest that this argument is conclusive but the site is perhaps worth investigation.

John Phillips

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**Bililter Street**

I read with great interest the article on 5 Bililter Street, especially the large group of pottery from pit 121, because we excavated a similar very large group at the south end of London Bridge. During the excavations I thought this too might derive from the clear-up after the Boudican revolt, but later study of the pottery led me to date it to c. AD 70–80.

Like pit 121, it had very large quantities of pottery, many of which were substantially complete; it did, however, include two Dr 37 sherds (plus three possible ones), so it might be a little later than pit 121. It also included vast quantities of oysters (well over 9000 shells) and large quantities of animal bones, especially ox long bones which had been butchered in a distinctive way. There was some evidence for burning too but not a great deal. There is clear evidence that this deposit is a single event, as was the case with pit 121, not the result of gradual accumulation, and I have suggested that it was connected to a rearrangement of the local townscape.

Another deposit with similarities to pit 121 is from a pit at Walbrook recovered by Ivor Nöel Hume, which contained a large group of fairly complete pots of exactly the same date (although Nöel Hume dated it to AD 60). There also seems to be a large dump of oyster shells (‘thousands’) in the roadside ditch on the north-west side of the road at Montague Close of a similar date, though there is no mention there of large quantities of pottery, and there may be another large dump of the same date at Winchester Palace, including large quantities of burnt material.

Thus it seems likely that these ‘clearances’ are not a local phenomenon, but spread throughout Londinium. We seem therefore to have the Boudican revolt in AD 60, the subsequent clear-up, a very rapid reconstruction of the town, and then only ten years or so later another destruction (that this involved the destruction of buildings is