

DANNY HARRISON: SENIOR ARCHAEOLOGIST ON A FORMER CHURCHYARD SITE

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Friday was forecast to be an unseasonable bright and mild day as British summertime goes, with rain predicted for only half the day. I went into the office at the comparatively leisurely time of 9am, having been told the previous day that there were no sites I needed to attend. On arriving it seemed that phone calls had been received from a site, kindly but forcibly asking where the archaeologist was. I then speedily received a Site Written Scheme of Investigation from a project manager, an address, a phone number to call when I got there and a had a brief meeting outlining what was to be done when I got there. I got together some boots and basic kit and then hared down the road with all my clobber to catch a bus.

Thankfully when I arrived on site it began to rain, and luckily I was locked out for long enough to cool off for a bit. The site was without its foreman for the day, but the onsite contractors were anxious to get started on reducing ground in a churchyard for a building extension; though the building had been designed to have a minimum footprint intrusion, it was likely that some disarticulated bones might be found.

We began the ground reduction and soon found a large quantity of bones- which we carefully retrieved and placed in storage to be reburied. It became quickly evident that these bones had been deliberately placed in the area being excavated, probably by the builders when they

disturbed burials during works nearby on site in the 1970's. Among these bones we were very surprised to find a tiny lead coffin which had been placed with them. We carefully moved this with the bones to a safe place. On examination, we noticed an inscription on the coffin lid. I wrote this down and photographed it. The excavation went on all day, punctuated with refreshing showers.



When I returned to the office, I consulted a website archive with the colleague I had been providing cover for. I was very surprised to find the name on the coffin in the records. It seems that the baby- who had sadly passed away aged only 15 days, had been buried two days later and a couple with the same surname- possibly parents, were recorded as living on the same street as the church. The profession and surname of the man were closely associated with the area and its immigrant population, the man being a weaver of Huguenot descent. On further searching, I was pleased to see that this couple had a child two years after the death of the baby we found, who hopefully survived into adulthood.