

# A JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE AND TIME: FROM SALISBURY PLAIN TO THE THAMES ESTUARY

July 26, 2013 [angela middleton](#) [Bronze Age](#), [Conservation](#), [Day of Archaeology 2013](#), [Finds](#), [Maritime Archaeology](#), [Post Medieval](#), [Prehistory](#), [Science London](#), [Stonehenge](#), [Thames Estuary](#), [Wiltshire](#)

Archaeological conservation is a varied profession. One day we may shift large waterlogged timbers, the next day we may be looking at minute fibre samples under the microscope. This is what we would get up to on a typical day:

X-radiography (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/x-radiography-of-archaeological-metalwork/>) forms an integral part in documenting archaeological artefacts. It allows us to look beneath surface layers and record unstable objects, such as iron. An X-radiograph (x-ray) shows the shape of an artefact, which can sometimes be heavily disguised by overlying corrosion layers. It shows the condition of an artefact, such as extent of corrosion, cracks or damage from marine boring organisms and it can show construction and decoration details, such as joints, precious metal inlays or coatings. We recently carried out quite a bit of X-radiography on finds from the protected wreck *London*: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ehmaritime/sets/72157634780135574/The London> (<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1000088>) sank following a gunpowder explosion in March 1665. It is currently being investigated as it lies in the very busy shipping channel of the Thames Estuary.



*Pewter Spoon from the London*



*X-Radiograph of pewter spoon*

But we go much further back in time. Large parts of our days have lately been taken up with conserving Neolithic and early Bronze Age artefacts for the new Stonehenge visitor centre. This is a huge project. Over 400 artefacts were assessed. More than 260 required conservation work. To read about the work see the most recent issue of Research News (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/research-news-19/>).



*One of the objects going on display at the new Stonehenge Visitor Centre being examined using an endoscope.*

And once all the practical work is done we can finally sit down with a cup of tea and start writing reports. Keeping records is of utmost importance in conservation. The treatment an object receives forms part of its history and we have to document this for future generations. There may be cases when old treatments have to be reversed, because materials have aged or failed. It helps if we know which materials have been used in the past. Reports also form the basis for research and can help colleagues to find solutions to their conservation problems. A recent report example can be found here: <http://research.english-heritage.org.uk/report/?15155>



*Ah, cup of tea!*