

# DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN INSPECTOR OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS

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I have the greatest job title in the world, and deal with some of the greatest archaeology in the world (there are four World Heritage sites in London, and I have involvement in three) – something I never forget and never cease to be amazed about. I've been very fortunate – getting on in archaeology is about hard work, learning and reading everything, being passionate about the subject but also about luck and being in the right place at the right time. I've had more than my fair share of luck, and try very hard not to forget this. I deal with 157 ancient monuments in London, ranging from 18<sup>th</sup> century milestones to Hampton Court Palace, all of which need protection and interpretation. I always approve of an Occam's Razor approach to life – simplifying down to key issues/messages, so I see my job as to Preserve and Present London's Ancient Monuments. I try to interfere a bit in other things, and of course nominate new sites for scheduling where I feel there is real threat to outstanding archaeology. Sadly, the threat in London can be quite high, not just from development, but also neglect.

Fortunately I don't have an average day, so what has this day held for me so far? It started at 8am, and actually conditions were quite average. It was raining, and I was holed up in a proper caff (Al's on Bermondsey Street) having tea and toast. This is my touchstone across London – finding good caffs with quality tea and toast for less than two quid. Pleased to say that Al's is still doing well on my grading, particularly astonishing given how Bermondsey Street is getting more and more chi-chi.

I co-incidentally bumped into my colleague Iain Bright (Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments) in the caff – we were meeting on site, but have similar tastes in caffs. Great start there. So suitably fuelled, we proceeded to site where our contact was 25 minutes late – it was a straightforward meeting to discuss the glass box over the medieval tower base of Bermondsey Abbey – it's currently in a bar, and the glass occasionally gets broken (not fights, but generally someone dropping wine bottles!) – we chatted about how to improve the presentation, and to incorporate some interpretation into the display to try and help people understand this really interesting 11<sup>th</sup> century Cluniac Abbey which is otherwise completely buried and can't be recognised in the streetscape.

Frantic zip back to the English Heritage office for a meeting with colleagues in London about Archaeological Priority Areas (one of many names) – these are zones used by planners and archaeologists to get a handle on whether proposed development will harm archaeology. London has a great range of these, many of which are out of date, not big enough, too big, in the wrong place, and generally in need of revision. We discussed a range of issues from what in fact to call them, grading them, whether all cemeteries are automatically of archaeological interest, brownfield/greenfield, industrial archaeology and so on. It's a long term project, not least of which because they must be completely tied in with Local Authority policies. But it's all making sure we recognise the significance of London's

archaeology and protect it as thoroughly as possible. We can't learn about or interpret our archaeology unless we ensure it's protected through the planning system.

After that I opened my countersigned performance development review for last year- fortunately I'm not being sacked, and a number of lovely things were said about my hard work (I suspect my managers don't realise quite how fabulous this job is and how many people would like to do it). Got a bit of a wiggling for being a little outspoken on some issues, but see above for the need for passion and enthusiasm in archaeology!

Another item this afternoon comes with some fieldwork on Hampton Court – this is one of the most amazing scheduled monuments I deal with, but of course it's remarkably sensitive. Some fieldwork is taking place currently, and is taking a little longer than planned, which is of course not unexpected in archaeology. A certain amount of discussion was needed to ensure that enough fieldwork is undertaken to fulfil the brief, whilst not holding up the programme. In many ways, the predominance of email correspondence is a shame as sometimes getting the tone right for these sorts of discussions is difficult.

Iain and I have just discussed a new major planning case in Barking town centre- it has raised the knotty issue of setting. Most developments steer clear of scheduled monuments, but they do affect the context and setting. Barking Abbey is a super site – a nunnery founded in AD 666 (not a very good year, you'd think) and the remains, whilst heavily restored, are very good, and allow clear understanding of scale and form. Barking town centre is on the up and up, and unfortunately, this is literally the case, with quite tall buildings being proposed which may overshadow the Abbey. So we're recommending a formal impact assessment here.

This is quite a good range of the elements of the job, from fine detail of fieldwork at Hampton Court, presentation of remains at Bermondsey, planning related issues with the Priority Area discussion and then setting at Barking. All important issues, and really interesting sites. A little more prehistory would be lovely, but I suspect that's asking for the caster sugar on the cherry on the icing on the cake.