

# 45th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGISTS, SATURDAY 5 APRIL 2008

This year, for the second time, the annual LAMAS Archaeology Conference was held in the Wilberforce Lecture Theatre at the Museum in Docklands, West India Quay. It attracted a full house of 146.

As usual, the conference was split into two: the morning session was given over to recent archaeological work carried out across London, and the afternoon session was devoted to a celebration of the career of Harvey Sheldon under the title *Londinium and Beyond*. The five contributors to this latter session (Barney Sloane, Tim Williams, Ralph Jackson, John Shepherd and Richard Reece) published their papers in a CBA volume of the same name in 2008\*, so this synopsis will deal only with the five papers delivered in the morning.

## THE OLYMPICS 2012 SITE

The first contribution, 'The Olympics: first fruits of fieldwork', was given by Nick Bateman of MoLAS. He explained that the project covered some 500 acres of the Lea Valley, an area equivalent in size to the City of London and effectively the largest urban park to have been built in Europe since the mid-19th century. Fieldwork and reporting were being carried out by MoLAS and PCA,

working together as a joint venture for Capita Symonds and the Olympic Development Authority.

The site is an Archaeological Priority Zone spread across the four boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest. There have been three main strands to MoLAS/PCA's work so far: the recording of above ground structures; geoarchaeological boreholing and topographic modelling; and archaeological evaluation/excavation.

Over 50 standing structures have been recorded, including road and rail bridges, viaducts, Joseph Bazalgette's Northern Outfall Sewer, an Edwardian sweet factory (Clarnico), a range of WWII structures, including gun emplacements, a radar station, and an ammunition store, together with a series of electricity transmission pylons! Furthermore, the data from over a thousand boreholes have been matched against the sediments observed during the various archaeological interventions to build up a convincing picture of the buried topography and former environment of the Lea valley from the end of the Ice Age.

The human presence within this often deeply-buried landscape has been explored in a large number of evaluation trenches. So far, the southern areas of the site have produced

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\* The papers by Barney Sloane 'Picturing Roman London', Tim Williams (and Hedley Swain) 'The population of Roman London', Ralph Jackson 'Imagining health care in Roman London', John Shepherd 'Glass in Roman London', and Richard

Reece 'Satellite, parasite or just London?' are all contained in J Clark, J Cotton, J Hall, R Sherris & H Swain (eds) *Londinium and Beyond. Essays on Roman London and its Hinterland for Harvey Sheldon* CBA Research Report 156 (2008).

the most impressive results. Trench 1.12 in particular revealed a noteworthy sequence of activity that spanned the Bronze Age to the Roman period. Features excavated included parts of several field systems, at least five circular houses defined by eaves-drip gullies, together with four inhumation burials — two of which appeared to be of prehistoric date, and two Roman.

Bateman noted that the common thread running through the project was the way in which human communities had interacted and continued to interact with the Lea. The valley has provided evidence for a long history of change, of which the Olympics is but the latest manifestation.

### **SYON ABBEY**

The second paper, 'Syon Abbey: recent work', was given by Harvey Sheldon of Birkbeck. He summarised the results of the fourth season of work at the site, which is being undertaken as a summer training excavation by Birkbeck archaeology students.

The site is an important one, and linked to significant historical events by virtue of its position on the Thames and close to the main road running south-west out of London. Exploratory excavations conducted in 2003 by Time Team and since 2004 by Birkbeck have furnished good evidence for the church and other buildings associated with the Bridgettine Abbey founded by Henry V after 1415 — a double monastery of nuns and monks — together with traces of the gardens belonging to the post-Dissolution house.

The 2007 season focused on a further exploration of the brick burial vaults discovered within the (probably) five-bay monastic church, and on a massive brick-built latrine block with garderobe chutes situated to the south. In addition to the burials lying within the church, several others have been discovered under the south side of the cloister walk. Sheldon noted that it might be possible to link some of these burials with named individuals, among them Thomas Stanley, 2nd Earl of Derby (d. 1521, aged 44), and Sisters Mary West (d. 1533) and Edith Reynold (d. 1538), two of the resident Bridgettine nuns.

The abbey buildings were extensively demolished following its suppression in 1539, and a wide range of finds, including

roof and floor tiles, nails, and window glass and leaden fixings, testifies to the thoroughness with which this was carried out. One exceptional find was the left hand of a carved statue of Reigate stone holding a staff or pen. The statue was originally some 18 inches high and presumably adorned a niche somewhere within the abbey church. Whether it is part of a statue of St Bridget herself remains unknown.

Following its dissolution the abbey site eventually passed to the Earls and Dukes of Northumberland, who surrounded their new house with extensive gardens, several phases of which have been identified during the recent work. Syon Park is usually linked with the improvements made to it by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the 1760s after the 'hard frost' of 1739, but the garden features examined in the current excavations probably pre-date his work. One extensively robbed circular feature, some 10m in diameter and associated with a drain, perhaps a pool or fountain, may be the work of Henry Percy, 9th Earl. A second rather more substantial, marble-clad, brick-built circular feature, also furnished with a drain, could be the work of his son Algernon, 10th Earl, who inherited the property in 1632. Work on the site is expected to continue in 2009.

### **COPS AND DOSSERS**

In the third paper of the morning, 'Cops and dossers in Edwardian London', Andrew Westman of MoLAS delved entertainingly into the architecture of modern urban social control. He offered two case studies of building recording work he had carried out in the Kings Cross Road and at Newington Butts.

The first case study comprised a pair of buildings that formerly housed the Clerkenwell Police Court (built 1841) and Magistrate's Court (built 1903–1906) near Kings Cross. These sat either side of the original Police Station (rebuilt 1867) and had recently been converted into a hotel. Westman sketched in the architectural and social context of both buildings, noting that the magistrate's court was in effect the first stop along the rocky road to criminal justice. The courtroom at the rear of the 1841 building (in which a young Charles Dickens

had served as a reporter) had sadly already been demolished, but those in the later building — designed by Metropolitan Police architect John Dixon Butler — were still extant. This gave Andrew a rare opportunity to record the interiors. The layout and furnishings of Court No. 2 had changed little since it was first designed and built, and were carefully choreographed to be both practical yet theatrical.

The second case study comprised the large working men's lodging house on Newington Butts, one of six so-called Rowton Houses built in 1897 under the patronage of the philanthropist Montagu Lowry-Corry, Lord Rowton (or 'Monty' to his many friends). This building housed up to 900 men at 6d a night and provided physical evidence of new construction materials and techniques employed by Sir Richard Farrant ('Dickie') and his architect Harry Bell Measures. Following the demonstrable success of the Rowton Houses, the latter secured the contract to design the station buildings on the new deep Central Line (opened in 1900), and, following a visit paid to the Newington Butts house by the future Edward VII ('Bertie'), army barracks for the War Office at Sandhurst and elsewhere. Westman laid stress on the social milieu that allowed individuals such as Monty, Dickie, Harry, and indeed Bertie, to flourish in the cause of 'philanthropy that pays 5%'.

## RECENT WORK IN THE CITY AND BEYOND

Sophie Jackson then provided a whistlestop tour of 'Work in the City and beyond' carried out by MoLAS in 2007. Over 60 fieldwork projects had been undertaken, and she had selected sites with quality data that had the potential to tell good stories.

Outside the City, work on the East London Line Extension fell within the precinct of the Priory of St John the Baptist, Holywell, which was the ninth richest nunnery in the country at the time of its dissolution (Syon, see above, was the richest). Excavations had focused on the church structure, and revealed two column bases dated to 1200–1230 and a sequence of nuns' burials. In addition, two underlying Roman burials had been placed head to toe in a ditch. Further

work at St Martin-in-the-Fields located a very early Roman building of *c.*AD 50 with a possibly military connection. A number of very late Roman structures were also found, and at least three phases of early Saxon buildings — a remarkable return from a narrow excavation trench.

Equally striking was the depth and preservation of the Roman stratigraphy on the Walbrook Properties site on the eastern bank of the Walbrook. Again, very early Roman features were located in the form of two substantial ditches first seen in 2006. These were overlain by a complicated sequence of late 1st-century clay-and-timber buildings employing at least ten different construction techniques. Even earlier deposits survived at Number One New Change, including prehistoric features and pottery. The site lay adjacent to the findspot of the famous Cheapside jeweller's hoard of 1912, though sadly nothing further of this was discovered.

The waterfront sites at Mondial House and Riverbank House offered opportunities to re-examine sites last developed in the 1970s and early 1980s. At the former scant archaeological monitoring had been possible during the digging of a 50ft-deep basement in 1973, but a sequence of 13th- and 14th-century timber waterfronts and a possible dock were found to have survived beneath a crane base. Work at the latter site had allowed observations made by Geoff Egan in 1981 to be confirmed and expanded upon.

Finally, also in the City, work to the east of the Forum at 8–13 Lime Street had discovered an important dump of painted wall-plaster lying on the tessellated floor of a building demolished in the 2nd century. Jackson noted that this was the best assemblage of such plaster found in the City since the 19th century; it features a dado of plain yellow panels bordered by black and white bands separated by wider vertical dark red bands. The various panels appear to have been embellished with representations of hanging garlands, a pink candelabrum with twisting vine stems and exquisitely realistic bunches of grapes, petalled flowers and a goldfinch.

## DRAPERS GARDENS

Jaw-dropping preservation also featured in

the final contribution of the morning session, 'Excavations at Drapers Gardens, City', from Tim Bradley of Pre-Construct Archaeology. Bradley, who had Project Managed the site, outlined the work undertaken by his colleague Neil Hawkins.

Drapers Gardens lies close to the confluence of several streams of the Walbrook and around 100m inside the later Roman city wall. As its name indicates, the area had survived as a garden until well into the post-medieval period, which meant that the Roman archaeological sequence from the 1st to the 3rd centuries was unusually well preserved. The earliest feature comprised an east-west wooden trackway adjacent to a river channel. The trackway contained timbers felled in the winter of AD 62, suggesting that it had been built shortly after the Boudican rebellion. On the higher ground and enclosed by a wooden palisade, a series of *in-situ* deposits included a complete wooden door and infant burials contained in small wooden boxes. Bradley speculated that the door may have represented the gateway to the Underworld!

Massive ground consolidation in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries involved the dumping of 1–2m of deposits, following which a sequence of buildings was laid out fronting on to a street. Individual buildings were provided with small wooden bridges to cross a revetted channel. One building had been destroyed by fire in the Hadrianic period, another was furnished with an *opus signinum* floor; a series of drains had been laid, some with lead joints and fixings. Ovens lent the place a semi-industrial feel, and dumps of butchered bone and leather off-cuts gave a hint as to the activities carried out in the various buildings. Four wells were also located, including the base of a late 4th-century (post-AD 375) example that contained a hoard of 20 metal vessels, comprising a handled bucket, dishes and plates. The hoard has no known parallel within the City's archaeological record and indeed neither do a number of the other finds from the site. These include the skull of a brown bear — perhaps brought into the settlement for sport or entertainment — and a foot-long wooden ruler with divisions marked in inches.