A REVIEW OF THE 48th LAMAS SPRING CONFERENCE OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGISTS HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON ON 9 APRIL 2011

Compiled by Natalie Cohen and Bruce Watson

This year's conference was dedicated to the memory of three recently deceased archaeologists: Penny MacConnoran, Geoff Egan and Bill White, all of whom had made an outstanding contribution to London's heritage and will be sadly missed by their friends and colleagues.

LONDON'S TOP SECRET: A MESOLITHIC STRUCTURE AT MI6

Nathalie Cohen (Thames Discovery Programme)

Erosion on the Thames foreshore at Vauxhall in front of the MI6 building has recently revealed a series of vertical timbers of uncertain plan and function, which have been radiocarbon dated to the Later Mesolithic (*c*.7600–4000 cal BC) (Fig 1). The calibrated dates are shown in Table 1.

The erosion at the site has also revealed Mesolithic flints, including a tranchet adze, and early Neolithic pottery, as well as animal bones and fire-cracked flints, implying that there was continuity of activity here, perhaps on an intermittent basis, over a considerable period of time (see *London Archaeologist* vol 12, no. 11 (2010/2011) for details). The intriguing question is exactly what this activity represents. Was it a fishing camp and were the timbers perhaps part of a jetty? The earliest log boat known in North-West Europe comes from the Netherlands and dates to around 7000 BC, so it is quite possible that similar craft were paddled along the Thames during the Mesolithic. Structural remains of Mesolithic date in the London area are non-existent, and most evidence for activity consists of flint scatters recovered from either subsoil horizons or

Table 1. The radiocarbon dates from the Vauxhall timbers

Laboratory code	Sample	Identification	$\delta^{13}C$ (‰)	Radiocarbon age (BP)	Calibrated date (95% confidence)
SUERC-24951	Post 1, sample 1	waterlogged bark	-29.9	5845 ±30	4790–4610 cal BC
OxA-22479	Post 1, sample 2	wood, *Quercus* sapwood	-27.9	5744 ±32	4690–4490 cal BC
SUERC-28992	Post 4, sample 1	*Quercus* sp. (complete to bark-edge, outermost 5–10 sapwood rings dated)	-27.7	5795 ±30	4720–4540 cal BC

Fig 1. The Mesolithic site on the Thames foreshore, seen from Vauxhall Bridge looking downstream (Photo Nathalie Cohen)

residual contexts, so to find timbers like this is exceptional. During the 1990s, the Thames Archaeological Survey recorded the remains of a Bronze Age platform or jetty leading into the river, upstream of Vauxhall Bridge; it appears that the utilisation of this area of the Thames foreshore, around the mouth of the Effra, has a much longer history than was previously realised. Currently the Mesolithic site is being gradually destroyed by erosion, but if the new Thames Tideway Tunnel sewer outfall connection is constructed here, then the whole sequence could be threatened with destruction.

EXCAVATIONS AT THE FORMER QUEEN MARY'S HOSPITAL SITE, CARSHALTON

Chloe Hunnisett (Wessex Archaeology)

It has long been known from the presence of a Late Bronze Age ring work (SM 163) that the area of Queen's Mary's Hospital, Carshalton, was the focus of early settlement. For earlier work at the hospital see *London Archaeologist* vol 12, no. 11 (2002).

During 2010, the site of the former children's infirmary was redeveloped. The earliest features were of Late Bronze Age date and therefore contemporary with the nearby ring work. However, the main focus of activity consisted of a sequence of Late Iron Age to early Roman (*c.*100 BC–AD 150) ditched enclosures, ditched trackways, storage pits, roundhouses (represented by penannular gullies), and one six-post structure. These features are interpreted as the remains of one or more pastoral farmsteads, perhaps with an emphasis on keeping sheep or goats. What was unusual was the high number of animal burials and cremations: cats, dogs, pigs, sheep/goats, and even a partly dismembered horse (its front limbs had been removed) were found interred in various storage pits. After these creatures had been interred all these pits had been rapidly backfilled. It is hard to find a functional explanation for this behaviour; it looks rather like some sort of ritual or sacrificial activity. Incidentally, this settlement showed a low level of Romanisation in terms of ceramics and a complete absence of Roman style buildings.

EXCAVATIONS AT 8–10 MOORGATE, CITY OF LONDON

Al Telfer (Museum of London Archaeology)

The Moorgate area of the City was damp and marshy for centuries, so it remained relatively undeveloped until the 16th century, when it was drained. However, the Romans made extensive use of this area and its nearby Walbrook tributary from the late 1st century AD onward. Damp conditions mean that timber work was well-preserved and to avoid the dampness the emphasis was always on building upwards, favouring the preservation of the earlier buildings. Activity on site began with the construction of box-like wooden revetments to raise the area above the potential flood level and also to level up the natural slope along the western edge of the stream channel. The wall lines were founded in pile clusters to improve stability and the superstructure of the walls was exceptionally well-preserved (Fig 2). The walls mainly consisted of solid brickearth sills coated with mortar render, but some were interlaced with wattle panels. Planking protected the bases of some external walls from erosion by water dripping down from the eaves. The floors consisted of slabs of clayey brickearth. Two of the buildings were separated by a stepped, gravel alleyway leading down to the nearby channel. Finds included four copper-alloy cosmetic mortars, implying that someone was either manufacturing them or selling them locally. Excavation of part of the edge of the stream channel revealed a great depth of waterlain peaty sediments, indicating a still or stagnant aquatic environment.

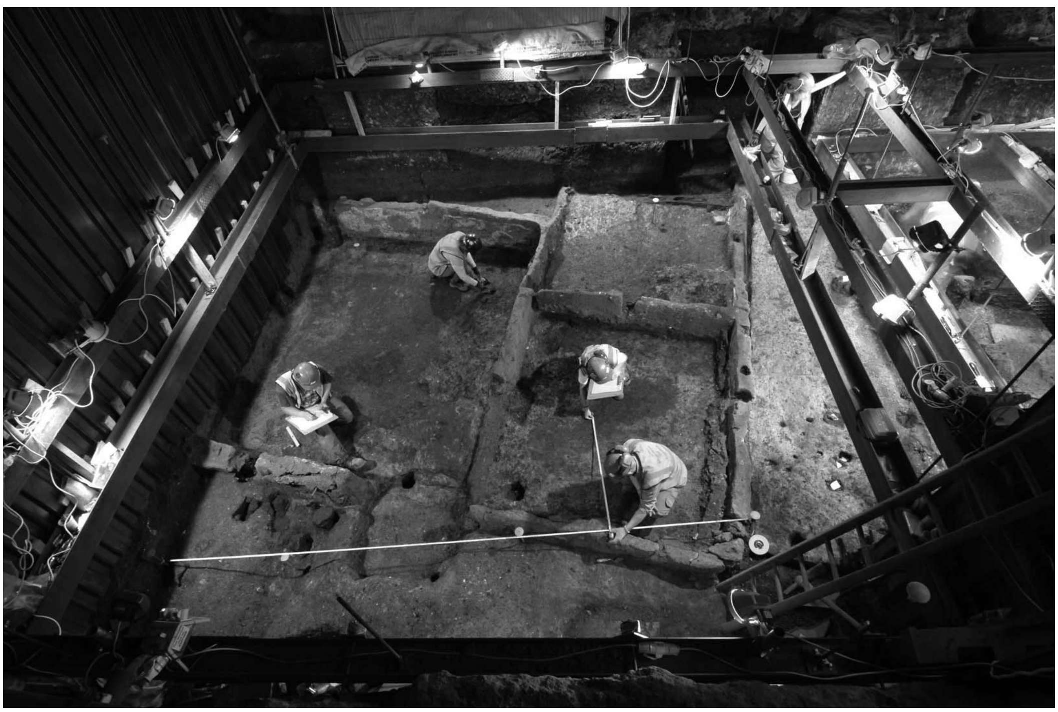

Fig 2. An early 2nd-century building with brickearth sills under excavation at Moorgate. It possessed at least five rooms plus a corridor and possibly functioned as a workshop (Photo Maggie Cox, MOLA)

RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Becky Halsam (Pre-Construct Archaeology)

This work inside the British Museum complex involved the replacement of 19th-century buildings with a new conservation exhibition centre. Fieldwork revealed a stretch of the defensive ditch (5m wide and 1.8m deep) and bank hastily erected during 1642–43 at the beginning of the first English Civil War. At this time some 11 miles or 17.7km of defences were constructed around greater London, encircling Southwark and the Cities of London and Westminster, as a precaution against Royalist attack. Some idea of the haste involved in the construction of these defences was indicated by the heavily rutted land surface where spoil from the ditch had been barrowed or carted across wet ground to construct the bank or rampart. Brick rubble had been dumped here to create a more a durable worksurface during construction. It is apparent from the dating evidence that the partly infilled ditches would still have been visible as a landmark during the early 18th century, implying that the Civil War earthworks shown on the Vertue map of 1739 were still extant. This is the first discovery of a well-preserved stretch of London's Civil War defences (see cover).

During 1675–79 most of the site became part of the gardens of Montague House. This house was purchased by the government in 1754, as the nation's first national museum and library, which later became the British Museum. The remainder of the site remained farmland during the 18th century and was used to dispose of the carcasses of a number of longhorn cattle, which presumably died *en masse* from some infectious disease such as anthrax or foot and mouth.

RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT BOROUGH MARKET, THAMES LINK PROJECT

David Saxby (Museum of London Archaeology)

In advance of the Thames Link railway viaduct widening scheme various excavations have been carried out in the Borough Market area of Southwark. Work at one location, the former Wheatsheaf public house, Stoney Street, revealed a sequence of post-medieval buildings, cesspits and wells, starting in the 16th century, when this area of open land was engulfed by suburban sprawl. Finds from these cesspits included three almost complete Delftware bowls or 'chargers'; one is decorated with tulips, a second depicts a 'Dutch-style boy and dog', and the third bears the coat of arms of the Leathersellers' Company dated 1674 and was produced to celebrate the marriage of Nathaniel Townsend. One of these Delftware vessels is temporarily on display in the Museum of London 'Archaeology in Action Gallery' and the others are on display in the 'War, Plague and Fire Gallery'.

The post-medieval buildings had been constructed on arable or garden soil horizons of medieval date. Under these soils was a sequence of early Roman buildings. The impression is that a substantial building of masonry construction with wall lines marked by piles clusters was retained and adapted over a long period of time, probably until the late Roman period. It contained an oven or furnace. Associated finds included a copper-alloy oil lamp. One of the nearby trenches excavated inside Borough Market revealed evidence of a collapsed Roman painted plaster wall. Block-lifting of these fragments revealed a number of complex colour schemes, indicating that parts of several walls or elements of several superimposed designs may have been present.

'WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE': RECENT EXCAVATION OF THE THEATRE, SHOREDITCH

Heather Knight (Museum of London Archaeology)

Part of London's first purpose-built Elizabethan playhouse aptly called 'the Theatre' has been uncovered in Shoreditch. It was built in *c.* 1576 inside the outer court of Holywell Priory, next to the former monastic guest house, by James Burbage and his brother-in-law John Brayne. Part of the brick foundations for the timber-framed, multi-sided gallery which contained the three tiers of seating was uncovered. Inside the gallery was part of the sloping yard where the rest of the audience stood. Architecturally there are many similarities between this site and the 'Rose'. Finds included a number of broken Borderware money boxes used to store the takings of the people who collected the admission fees; the money was then extracted by smashing the boxes. In 1594 the premiere of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was staged at this playhouse. In 1598 the timber-framing of 'the Theatre' was dismantled and moved to Bankside, where it was subsequently reused in the construction of the 'Globe'. Interestingly, documentary evidence provides a narrative for the events and the names of all those involved in this litigious venture, but furnishes no details concerning its plan or construction, which excavation has now revealed. It is proposed to build another theatre on the site where hopefully the remains of its predecessor will be displayed.

AFTERNOON SESSION: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MODERN LONDON

Until very recently it was widely believed that archaeology had nothing to contribute to the study of the capital's 19th- to 20th-century material culture, such deposits and structures were routinely dismissed as 'modern diturbance'.

SEEING BELIEVES: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THREE LONDON THEATRES AND CINEMAS

Andrew Westman (Museum of London Archaeology)

Before it was recently demolished a derelict theatre in Dalston Lane, Hackney, was the subject of investigation. It began life in 1885 as a circus complete with arena, appropriately known as the 'Coliseum', which was soon adapted into a repertory theatre. In 1920 it was converted into a 'Super Cinema', which closed in 1960. Then in 1965 it was transformed yet again into a Jamaican night club and concert venue known as 'the Four Aces'. The talk was a fascinating account of how one Victorian building had been tirelessly altered to meet the changing tastes of public entertainment.

'WHAT DOES THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MODERN LONDON LOOK LIKE?'

Nigel Jeffries (Museum of London Archaeology)

This was the question posed by the speaker, drawing on his interdisciplinary study of aspects of the capital's 19th-century material culture recovered from disused cesspits (see Museum of London *Research Matters* no. 4 (May 2010) for details). As these privies were gradually replaced by main sewers as part of the Victorian public health improvements, these redundant features were often rapidly infilled with a wide variety of domestic rubbish providing a vivid snapshot of the material culture of the occupants of these properties. From 1851 onward the detailed census returns provide a wealth of details concerning ages, places of origin and occupations of the people surveyed, allowing the lives of the people who discarded this rubbish to be studied in unprecedented detail. While many aspects of 19th-century London life are very well documented thanks to journalists, maps, photography (from the 1850s), social surveys, trade directories *etc*, other aspects such as the material culture of the poorer people which is being systematically recovered from archaeological investigations has until now attracted little study.

A MONUMENT TO MILLWALL: REDISCOVERING THE SS GREAT EASTERN

Eliott Wragg (Thames Discovery Programme)

Until the end of the 19th century London was an important centre for ship building and many vessels were constructed along the Millwall foreshore. The greatest of these vessels, the 'SS Great Eastern', was built by John Scott Russell during 1854–58 and designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It was constructed on two huge sloping concrete and timber slipways and then launched sideways by being pushed and pulled down a series of iron rails. When launched in 1858 the 'SS Great Eastern' was the largest ship in the world and a technological marvel, but sadly she had a short working life, being scrapped in 1889–90. Large areas of the two concrete and timber slipways are preserved

Fig 3. Thames Discovery Programme volunteers recording the eastern slipway on the foreshore (Photo Thames Discovery Programme)

behind the river wall and much more of these structures survives on the foreshore (Fig 3). However, it is regrettable that there is little in Millwall today to publicly commemorate the construction of this vessel and it would be wonderful to see the outline of this vanished leviathan decked out as a garden to remind us of its existence.

INTIMATE VIEWS OF PAST LIVES

Roy Stephenson (Museum of London)

The session ended with reminding us why communal or public archaeology is important and how the excavation of blitzed houses, to take one example, allows archaeologists to engage with a completely new audience, such as family or military historians. Stephenson stressed that we also need to involve the next generation of Londoners in the capital's heritage. Looking around the audience it was a timely reminder that unless we heed his words we risk joining the dodo.