

A REVIEW OF THE 54th LAMAS CONFERENCE OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGISTS HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON ON 18 MARCH 2017

Compiled by Bruce Watson

TIMBER AND TAXES: EXCAVATIONS AT THE OLD CUSTOM HOUSE, SUGAR QUAY, CITY OF LONDON

Sadie Watson (Museum of London Archaeology)

In 1973 an archaeological excavation was undertaken at Sugar Quay before its redevelopment (Tatton-Brown 1974; 1975). During 2016, history repeated itself when the site was redeveloped, providing another opportunity to re-examine more of the same waterfront structures. Fieldwork has established that the earliest revetment constructed here on the Thames foreshore was of post and plank construction. It was apparently built during the late 1st century AD. In about AD 130 a substantial quay was constructed further south of the first revetment. It consisted of a horizontal arrangement of squared oak baulks forming a 40m-long series of twin boxes with a curved plan (presumably reflecting the foreshore topography) (Fig 1). Few of these baulks were jointed together; instead, most of them merely rested on top of one another, and the front of this box-quay was secured by vertical piles. The impression is that this box-quay relied simply on its bulk to remain in situ as it was apparently not infilled with dumped material to weigh it down. Its full height is not known, but it was presumably topped by a plank decking.

Many of the timber baulks possess circular lettered stamps on all four faces and their ends. Therefore, they were stamped before use, implying that they were marked by the suppliers. During the late 3rd century AD, to the north of the box-quay, a riverside wall was constructed out of reused monumental ashlar blocks (Fig 1).

During *c.*AD 970–1000, a front-braced post and plank revetment was constructed directly in front of the Roman riverside wall. By 1180, its replacement revetment was 1m higher, presumably due to the impact of the construction of the White Tower and London Bridge on the tidal regime. By the 13th century this area of quay was known as Wool Wharf, and by 1280 a Custom House had been established here to tax the wool exports. It was rebuilt during the tenure of Geoffrey Chaucer as Controller of Customs (1374–86). The hall-like medieval Custom House was represented by fragmentary chalk rubble foundations. The Custom House was rebuilt in 1559 and 1669–71 after fires (Fig 1). During 1717–25 it was rebuilt after being wrecked by an explosion. In 1814 after yet another phase of fire destruction the Custom House relocated to adjacent, new purpose-built premises (completed in 1817) and then the site reverted to wharves until 1973.



Fig 1. Looking north across Sugar Quay with (foreground) the mid-2nd-century AD box-quay and (behind) the east-west aligned late Roman riverside wall; (right) the group of circular elm piles are part of the foundations for the 1669–71 rebuilding of Custom House, designed by Wren (© MOLA)

EXCAVATIONS AT 127–143 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, SOUTHWARK

Dougie Killock (Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

The earliest evidence of human activity on site was a residual Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead. Initial Roman activity consisted of revetting a stream channel to improve drainage. Shortly after *c.*AD 70, clay and timber buildings were erected along the eastern side of the approach road to London Bridge. Seven box-lined wells were later constructed to the rear of these buildings. Some of these wells contained significant finds assemblages including votive material. The late Roman dark earth contained intrusive finds including a papal bulla of Innocent IV (1243–54).

There was an unusually well-preserved sequence of medieval and post-medieval buildings, plus the surfaces of the contemp-

orary alleyway. Initial medieval activity consisted of tenements fronting on to the eastern side of Borough High Street, which were superseded by cellared masonry buildings. By the 16th century these properties included two inns: the Spur and the Horse's Head, later known as the Nag's Head. During the 17th century, to the rear of the street frontage within the former backyards of the Tudor properties, various brick-built cellared buildings were constructed on a piecemeal basis. To provide access to these new properties, the east-west aligned alleyway latterly known as Nag's Head Alley was progressively extended eastwards. Associated finds included a locally made delftware tin-glazed jug bearing a painted shield containing the letters 'S T D' and dated '1634'. It was probably part of a wedding present bearing the initials of the couple and the year of their marriage.

ST GILES: MEDIEVAL HOSPITAL, TUDOR MANSION AND 18TH-/19TH-CENTURY ROOKERY

Sam Pfizenmaier (Museum of London Archaeology)

The suburban Hospital of St Giles was probably founded during 1117–18 by Queen Matilda, the consort of Henry I, as London's first leper hospital. It apparently occupied a triangular plot of land bounded by St Giles High Street, Charing Cross Road and Shaftsbury Avenue. Today the site of the former hospital chapel is occupied by the parish church of St Giles-in-the-Fields (rebuilt 1731–3).

Initial activity on site consisted of the digging of a north–south aligned drainage ditch, which was backfilled during *c.*1080–1150. A small fragment of a truncated chalk rubble wall foundation may represent part of the house of the hospital's master; on the internal side of the wall were postholes and a hearth. Residual finds of building material included four glazed Westminster floor tiles (*c.*1250–1310). The northern boundary of the hospital precinct along St Giles High Street was delimited by a substantial ragstone masonry wall with a chalk rubble core. The earliest phase of the boundary wall dated to the late 13th or 14th century. The wall possessed numerous rebuilds caused by structural instability due to its close proximity to an external ditch.

In 1539 the hospital was dissolved and in 1545 its entire premises, apart from the chapel (which was retained as a parish church), was granted by Henry VIII to John Dudley, Lord Lisle. He remodelled the former master's house adding three brick-built turrets to its façade. This residence, known as Dudley House, was clearly intended to be an architectural statement of grandeur, as the hexagonal corner turret incorporated moulded brickwork and was externally rendered and painted. During the late 16th century a brick-built structure, interpreted as a gatehouse and which probably controlled access to the back garden, was constructed nearby. The boundary wall was extensively rebuilt in brick during this period, and its associated ditch was being systematically infilled by *c.*1550.

In 1720 the site was bisected by the

creation of Denmark Street. By this date Dudley House had been demolished and the site was now occupied by high-density terraced housing, shops and workshops. The remains of a former 18th-century blacksmith's forge at 22 Denmark Street was underpinned and block-lifted to ensure its preservation. By the end of the 18th century the site was occupied by a series of slum properties, adjoining the notorious St Giles Rookery. Surviving features associated with this period of occupancy consisted of brick-lined cesspits, soakaways and wells.

LONG LIVE THE BOLEYN: EXCAVATIONS AT THE FORMER WEST HAM FOOTBALL GROUND

Neil Hawkins (Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

During the mid-16th century a manor house known as Green Street House was constructed in East Ham, probably by Richard Breame (died 1546), a courtier of Henry VIII. It was acquired by the Roman Catholic Church in 1869 and subsequently used as a reformatory school, then a maternity home (*c.*1907–12) and latterly as a social club. Despite later alterations and extensions, the Tudor great hall, aligned at right-angles to the street, survived intact, with a kitchen range to the east. To the south of the house was a free-standing, crenelated, polygonal tower, which, by the 19th century, was erroneously known as Boleyn Castle, as it was widely believed that Anne Boleyn lived here before she married Henry VIII in 1533 (Fig 2). By *c.*1904 the extensive grounds to the east of the house were occupied by West Ham United football club, who built their stadium here. Sadly, the house and tower became derelict and were demolished in 1955, when the stadium was rebuilt and enlarged. This former West Ham ground was affectionately known as 'the Boleyn' and the polygonal tower inspired the castle motif present on the club's badge until 2016.

Following the closure of the football stadium in 2016 the site of the Tudor manor house was redeveloped. Its cellared brick-built foundations were well-preserved and some showed evidence of barrel vaulting and herringbone-paved floors. Associated finds included an unusual ceramic hand-

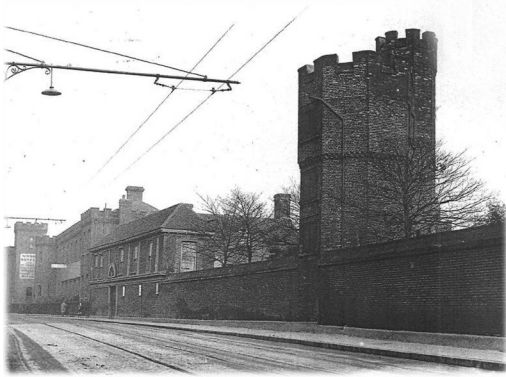


Fig 2. An early 20th-century view looking northwards along Green Street, showing the former Tudor manor house with (foreground) the tower known as Boleyn Castle and the adjoining garden wall; fronting on to the street is an entrance to the late 17th-century range and to the rear can be seen the late 19th-century extension added during the conversion into a reformatory (this extension involved demolishing the earlier gatehouse or main entrance) (© PCA)

held culinary stamp, probably intended for decorating pastry. Within the former gardens were gravel quarry pits and numerous bedding trenches.

FINDING LONDON'S FIRST THEATRELAND: EXCAVATING THE CURTAIN PLAYHOUSE

Heather Knight (Museum of London Archaeology)

The Curtain Playhouse in Shoreditch was open by 1577. It was here that Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, performed between 1597 and 1599 before they built the Globe theatre at Bankside. *Henry V* was apparently premiered here. The Curtain closed in *c.*1625. It was subsequently demolished and its site lost. Therefore, the challenge was to locate its remains and then determine its plan. Initial fieldwork located truncated brick-built foundations, which it was thought were part of a polygonal building. Further work confirmed that its plan was rectangular (external dimensions 25m by 22m) consisting of four ranges grouped around a central external space, where most of the audience would have stood. The eastern range housed a long

rectangular stage (some 14m by 5m). The overall design of this purpose-built theatre was very similar to the sort of temporary stage that could have been set up in the courtyard of a contemporary inn. One possible reason for this type of stage design may have been to facilitate its alternative use as a fencing school. Finds from beneath the stage included over 250 glass beads of various sizes. The tiny ones were probably sewn on to clothes and the larger ones worn as jewellery. The star find was the lower portion of a ceramic bird whistle, a fairly common contemporary toy. However, in this context it might have been used to imitate bird song, during *Romeo and Juliet* (3.5) for instance. The site will be preserved and displayed within the new development appropriately known as The Stage.

THE CROSSRAIL PROJECT

Tunnel: The Archaeology of Crossrail

Jay Carver, Project Archaeologist Crossrail

In addition to the challenge of carrying out an intensive programme of archaeological fieldwork to accompany the construction of over 96km of new railway and 40 construction sites extending from Reading in Berkshire eastwards to Abbey Wood in Kent and Shenfield in Essex, it was also intended to provide a comprehensive programme of public outreach. This included numerous press releases, which inspired a National Geographic feature (Smith 2016). There were three Channel 4 documentaries: 'The Return of the Black Death' (first broadcast 6 April 2014); 'Crossrail Discovery: London's Lost Graveyard' (19 July 2015) and 'The Mystery of the Crossrail Skulls' (24 April 2016). During 2012 a temporary exhibition entitled: 'Bison to Bedlam' was held in the Crossrail visitor centre. There was an imaginative programme of site open days (Fig 3). A viewing gallery for commuters was installed outside Liverpool Street Station during the excavation of Bedlam burial ground. There were community archaeology digs on various sites and artists in residence at the Bedlam burial ground and Stepney City Farm excavations. The finale was 'Tunnel: The Archaeology of Crossrail' exhibition at



Fig 3. Dave Sankey (Senior Archaeologist) showing some visitors the day's finds during an open day at the Stepney City Farm site (© MOLA)

the Museum of London Docklands during 2017 (*Tunnel 2017*).

Seven of the ten Crossrail archaeology monographs are already published (see Bibliography; and *Reviews*, this volume), which is very commendable. These publications have included railway heritage (Shelley 2016), a Victorian shipyard (Harrison 2015), standing buildings (Brown 2016) and synthesis (Brown *et al* 2016).

A Journey through Time on the Crossrail South-East London Line

Graham Spurr (*Museum of London Archaeology*)

Geoarchaeological fieldwork along the Crossrail corridor across East London from Canning Town to Plumstead provided a transect across the Holocene floodplain of the lower Thames. These riverine sediments

were studied using a combination of core samples from boreholes, plus bulk and monolith samples recovered from trenches. The primary aim of this fieldwork was to construct a three-dimensional digital representation of the geological sequence. The palaeoenvironment was studied by the recovery of macro- and microplant fossils, including diatoms, ostracoda and pollen from sediment samples. A chronological framework was established by radiocarbon dating organic material.

The earliest deposit was the floodplain gravels, deposited by a braided river system during the late-glacial (Devensian) period (*c.*29,000–*c.*9500 cal BC). This activity resulted in a undulating land surface consisting of river channels separated by low gravel islands. This glaciation was followed by climatic improvement, so that by *c.*7000 cal BC temperate deciduous mixed forest had been established across the Greater London area. This temperate environment was exploited by Mesolithic (*c.*9600–*c.*4100 cal BC) hunter-gatherers, who intermittently camped on these riverine islands. Fieldwork at the North Woolwich Portal revealed the butt end of a Mesolithic axe and knapping debris. By the Late Mesolithic a combination of rising sea levels and isostatic recovery was progressively flooding the lower areas of the floodplain. This flooding resulted in the deposition of fine-grained silts, clays and sands known as the 'lower alluvium'. This phase of transgression was interrupted during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (*c.*3800–*c.*1200 cal BC) by an apparent fall in sea level, prompting the water level in the floodplain to drop. This regression allowed the development of large areas of alder carr and brackish marsh and represented a build-up of peat deposits. At the North Woolwich Portal during this period deciduous woodland developed. It consisted of alder along the riverside, with elm, hazel, lime and oak predominating on the drier, higher ground. A ramshackle wooden trackway was apparently constructed here to allow people to easily cross this wetland. By *c.*1200 cal BC, rising sea level was permanently drowning the lower reaches of the floodplain, forcing people to relocate to higher ground. This ongoing marine transgression has deposited more fine-grained sediments known as the

'upper alluvium'. When faced with such dramatic evidence of environmental change over the last 10,000 years, it is amazing that some individuals still doubt if the climate is changing and argue that even if it is we should not bother to do anything about it.

Stepney Green: Moated Manor House to City Farm

Dave Sankey (Museum of London Archaeology)

During the 15th century a substantial moated manor house was established at Stepney Green. It consisted of an imposing brick-built, courtyard house accessed via a gatehouse (later known as King John's Tower). Both sides of the encircling moat were lined with brick walls. Finds from the moat included an exotic hard wood (*Lignum vitae*) bowling ball. In 1597 the house was acquired by Henry Somerset, later fifth Earl of Worcester, and renamed Worcester House. During the English Civil War the earl's property was sequestered by Parliament, and in 1644 one of England's first Nonconformist meeting houses was constructed here. Subsequently, the meeting house became a Baptist college (1830) and later a Congregational church and school were built. By the late 19th century, after the college had relocated, all the buildings apart from the church and school were demolished and replaced by terraced housing, which was badly bombed during World War Two. Subsequently, the remaining houses were demolished and the site left vacant. This unoccupied site was squatted in the 1970s and subsequently converted into the Stepney City Farm (Sankey 2015).

Peeking into the Past: A Glimpse of the Black Death at Smithfield

Don Walker (Museum of London Archaeology)

In 2013 the excavation of a new grout shaft through the Black Death cemetery in Charterhouse Square revealed three phases of burials. It is documented that this emergency suburban cemetery was established during the 1348–9 pandemic, which it is believed killed between a third and a half of London's population (estimated

at between 60,000 and 100,000). Fieldwork defined three phases of inhumations interred in rows of closely spaced individual graves. The earliest phase of 11 burials dates to 1348–9, the second phase of two burials to c.1348/9–61 and the final phase of 12 burials to the 15th century (see *LAMAS Transactions* 2014, 295–7). Osteological examination of the Charterhouse burials revealed widespread evidence of dental disease, trauma (fractures) and degenerative complaints such as Schmorl's nodes (spinal degeneration), probably caused by heavy manual labour.

This tiny sample from a large cemetery has proved to be highly significant as the DNA of *Yersinia pestis* has been extracted from the teeth of a number of these individuals from all three phases of activity. This is the bacterium which causes three related epidemic diseases known as bubonic, septicaemic and pneumonic plague (Pfizenmaier 2016). The successful recovery of the DNA of *Yersinia pestis* from the contemporary burials at the East Smithfield Black Death cemetery, and also from 1665 Great Plague victims excavated at the Crossrail site of Bedlam burial ground, has allowed London to contribute to ongoing international research analysing the genetic development of historic and contemporary outbreaks of the plague virus.

Crosse & Blackwell 1830–1921: A British Food Manufacturer in London's West End

Nigel Jeffries (Museum of London Archaeology)

Excavations undertaken in advance of the new Crossrail Tottenham Court Road Station in the City of Westminster, on the former premises of the food manufacturer Crosse & Blackwell, revealed artefactual and structural evidence relating to the firm's occupancy of the site. In 1838 this firm purchased 21 Soho Square as a factory and subsequently acquired a series of adjoining properties to create a complex of offices, factories and warehouses. In the 1870s the company decided to demolish these properties and construct two new warehouse and factory buildings during 1877–85. During this redevelopment a redundant brick-built water cistern was infilled with some 13,000 whole and fragmentary examples of unused ceramic and glass vessels intended to contain

their products. These vessels included glass bottles for sauces and condiments such as 'Mushroom Catsup', ceramic bung jars for chutneys, mustards and piccalilli, plus thousands of white earthenware jars for jams, marmalade and potted meat products. Some of the vessels still possessed paper labels, so we know exactly what type of jam (including raspberry and plum), sauce or potted meat they were designed to hold. This vast assemblage provides a vivid insight into late Victorian manufactured foodstuffs and their packaging (Jeffries 2016).

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