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In planning our 40th anniversary we saw an opportunity for a special interview in the SIGNIFICANT SITE series. Ideally we should look at the life of someone who had been involved in London archaeology throughout those years, and crucial in its development. Then, chatting to a group of archaeologists at the LAMAS conference, the perfect candidate was suggested: *London Archaeologist's* editor since 1976, Clive Orton.

The sylvan spot at Mitcham Grove that Clive designates his significant site was to throw up both unexpected remains and unusual finds. Its particular resonance for Clive, however, is more as a rite of passage to a new phase in his life in 1974 – a resonance that is especially strong this year as he reaches another major transition. After 29 years at UCL Institute of Archaeology he retires from his post as Professor of Quantitative Archaeology with plans to tackle new challenges.

By 1974 Clive was something of a seasoned veteran, having had his first taste of excavations when he joined Martin Biddle's team in Winchester as a schoolboy volunteer in summer of 1963 before he went up to Cambridge. That first year he discovered the joys of living in a condemned pub, where visiting bikers couldn't understand why they couldn't get a drink, and also realised – with some relief – that developing back problems meant that he couldn't actually handle a wheelbarrow. Sent inside to work on finds, he found his metier. Learning the processes under the wing of a motherly Philippa Fox-Robinson (later, as Philippa Glanville, a curator at the Museum of London) suited his ordered and analytical mind and

he especially enjoyed working with pottery, which seemed to him to be somewhat neglected. He even featured in a BBC documentary, hastily learning how to stick a pot together for a reconstruction segment. In his second summer in Winchester he became Assistant Finds Supervisor on the Assize Court site and his pay went up to a princely £1 a day, from which was docked 6s a day for dinner, bed and breakfast. By his final stint in summer of 1966 he was enjoying £2 a day as Finds Supervisor for the Brook Street site and the accommodation, in a disused army camp where the food was good and barracks dry, had improved markedly.

The rest of these years he was reading mathematics at Cambridge, where he stayed on for a fourth year to take a Diploma in Mathematical Statistics (which anywhere else would have been an MSc). For that year he was employed as a Cadet Statistician by the Civil Service, on condition that he worked for them in the holidays and after qualifying. He ruffled some feathers by showing that the aptitude tests used to select computer programmers were useless. With earnings coming in before he even finished his education, he saw his future unfolding as a conventional life of security, with family, home and a safe, permanent job. Summer archaeology had to give way to his commitments as a government statistician.

Clive terms his next seven years the 'Harvey years'. Archaeology in London was in a state of flux, with the voluntary efforts of local societies being displaced by incipient professional units. Having run into Harvey Sheldon at a LAMAS conference in 1968, Clive revived his archaeological interests, working at

**TOP:** Mitcham Grove at the time of Henry Hoare, 1826.

**OPPOSITE TOP:** Part of 19th-century walls, with seating for late refronting, and part of porch. The unexpected medieval wall emerged beyond the cross wall.

**OPPOSITE BELOW:** View from the cricket pavilion of site – main wall is in front left.



weekends, and evenings on important sites such as the Highgate Wood potteries, Bow Roman Road (see London Arch vol 11, no 9) and Toppings Wharf.

By comparison, the Civil Service was becoming less and less attractive, with initial interesting census and survey work giving way to wearisome agricultural accounts. Three factors combined to induce Clive to take a psychological leap of faith that would have been unthinkable before. Personal tragedy hit his family when his first child was born dead, undermining his intent of creating a secure family life. Then a job came up through Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee to work on the post-excavation backlog of Southwark sites. And finally he felt moved to change when, at a Lenten group at his church, the text from Jeremiah being discussed was 'Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words'.

Suddenly liberated from his own expectations, Clive took a 60% pay cut to work for SAEC. In the few weeks before starting the new job in 1974, he took the chance to work on Surrey Archaeological Society excavations at Mitcham Grove under David Bird. Clive remembers it as idyllic, with a beautiful setting, plenty of archaeology, good company and unexpected results.

The old Hovis sports ground on the bank of the River Wandle had been acquired for housing development by Merton Council. It was known to be the setting of the elegant 18th century mansion constructed to plans by Adam for Alexander Wedderburn, eventually Lord Chancellor under George III, and then sold to famed Fleet Street banker, Henry Hoare. Documentary evidence also suggested an earlier house on the site, the location of which was unknown. The objective, in just a few weeks of rescue and training excavation, was to find both these buildings as well as any extension of the nearby Saxon cemetery.

One of the more interesting aspects of the site was the system of co-directorship: when David Bird couldn't be there, Mitcham Grove was run by Esmée Webb, a prehistorian who had never before worked on walls. As a result of them never being on site at the same time, a system of communication became a much greater feature than usual on the dig.

In the vanguard of new technologies in archaeology, the University of Surrey had done comprehensive geophysics over the sports ground with good equipment. As a result the first trench was placed exactly over the steps and front hall of the Hoare mansion. Further excavation found not only a Tudor house with the same footprint, but the unexpected remains of a medieval house on a different alignment.

A line of roof tiles, apparently having fallen as a single event into the mud but later found not to relate to any excavated wall, was one intriguing find from the medieval building. Another was the massive amount of delftware – all kiln waste. At the time Clive

felt that this was linked to the 18th century rebuilding, when it was probably brought in as hardcore. No kilns were known at Mitcham, and, since the clay for delftware is all from similar sources, little could be done to place its origins. Work done subsequently on the typologies of the wasters hasn't convinced him otherwise, though current thinking by David Bird is that it was brought in after the demolition of the house in 1840. With no funding for post-ex work on the site, and after several subsequent interventions by other groups as the housing estate was delayed, much remains unresolved.

After this idyll, SAEC was something of a hotbed of controversy, with post-ex methodologies ever under debate. Still convinced archaeology was for him, though, Clive moved on after two years to work in finds for the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London.





## MITCHAM GROVE

An opening in 1979 for a research assistant at the Institute seemed an ideal move, combining his skills in computing and statistics with archaeology – until the funding ran out three years later. After working with the Sussex Field Unit for six months, on sites such as the Roman part of Boxgrove and medieval Winchelsea, he joined the Department of Greater London Archaeology (a new entity created with GLC funding to bring the numerous small units together with more resources and professionalism) as Greater London Finds Officer, once more under Harvey Sheldon. As there was actually no room for him at the DGLA, a deal was struck with the Institute to accommodate Clive in return for occasional use of his expertise.

From his office in the Institute he gradually moved over to the academic side, first for sabbatical cover and finally, in 1986 as lecturer in quantitative methods in archaeology. He became professor seven years ago, and also heads up the degree programme for MA in the Archaeology of London.

Of all the sites he's been involved with, Mitcham Grove sticks in Clive's memory for several reasons. First, it was local – just a bus ride from home in Sutton – and that appealed to what he calls his medieval peasant outlook, sticking close to the area he knows best. It was also perhaps the most pleasant site he's worked on – featuring open fields, trees, wildlife and the river, and with the well-furnished cricket pavilion as site hut. The importance of communication struck him particularly there, as did the usefulness of geophysics. It contributed an example of displaced anomalous finds skewing results in his book, *Mathematics in Archaeology*. And Mitcham became symbolic of breaking free from self-imposed constraints and a need for security.

In the event, he reached all the goals he'd set himself back at Cambridge in the 1960s: his daughter Ruth came along while he was at the DUA and has this year presented Clive with his first grandchild; his son David has just completed a PhD; he is deeply embedded in his home and community life in Sutton



and his job as an archaeologist has seen him through to his early retirement this summer.

He himself seems rather bemused by how his life has turned out. He remarks, "I'm a professor at the biggest archaeology department in the UK, in a field I love, doing what I most want to do and I don't even have a degree in archaeology, never mind a PhD – how did that happen?"

Fortunately for *London Archaeologist* readers, Clive will continue as Editor for the foreseeable future. He'll also do some guest lecturing and update his bestselling Cambridge University Press book, *Pottery in Archaeology*. A type of consulting in public is envisaged – where Clive helps to solve problems for students who have 'a pain in my chi square' – as well as some one-to-one consulting for students and staff. He'll spend more time with his church in Sutton, get into 'small p' politics with groups like Amnesty International, and write his life story. And there's one final twist to his significant site: as a result of contacting David Bird for background for the interview for this feature, he's been asked to have a look at the pottery at Mitcham Grove again after 34 years, and write up the analysis.

~~Clive Orton was talking to Becky Wallower

**TOP:** The curious row of tiles, initially seen as a roof collapse, but unrelated to any wall.

**RIGHT:** Clive Orton, left, marking his retirement as Professor at the Institute of Archaeology, with Harvey Sheldon.



*With thanks to David Bird for background notes on the site and to Eric Montague for sight of a soon to be published article on the history of Mitcham Grove. A brief report on the excavation was published as: Bird, D G, 1975. Merton: Mitcham Grove (TQ 271679), Bulletin, Surrey Archaeol Soc, 114, 3-4; and reprinted in Surrey Archaeol Collect, 71, 1977, 284-5*