

Commentary

by Gromaticus

I expect that, like me, many of you have been fascinated by Neil MacGregor's series 'A History of the World in 100 Objects' on BBC Radio 4. Apart from giving me great enjoyment, it has led me to ask two questions: (1) which 100 object would I choose for a history of London? and (2) what does this series tell us about the relationships between archaeology, history, and other disciplines?

First, the 'fun' question: which objects would I choose? Not "which are the nicest objects?" but "which tell the story of London best?" Here are just a few for starters:

Prehistoric

Upper Palaeolithic blades from Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge

Not an obvious choice, but full of significance. They show the first evidence for humans moving back into the London area after the end of the Ice Age. Although I'm not a lithic specialist, I find them beautiful objects, full of skill.

The 'Battersea Shield' from the Thames

A well-known, and perhaps too obvious, artefact. But it speaks of the depth and complexity of our pre-Roman culture, which is often unrecognised. There is also the mystery of the rituals that led it to being deposited in the Thames.

Roman

The Tabard Square inscription

The first written record of the name London, in the form *Londiniensi*. It also speaks of the trade at the heart of

Londinium, and it comes from a long-expected temple complex south of the Thames.

The Arras Medallion

To those with long memories, the one-time logo of *London Archaeologist*. Struck to celebrate Constantius' recovery of Britain in AD 296, it depicts the personification of London kneeling before the city gate, which is approached by a Roman warship. Constantius is portrayed mounted on horseback in the guise of a triumphant emperor, holding a spear in one hand and a globe in the other, with the inscription 'restorer of eternal light'.

Saxon

Brooch from Billingsgate Roman Bath-house

Apparently insignificant by contrast, this saucer brooch found in the ruins of the bath-house, speaks to me of the fall of empires and the end of *Londinium*. And how did it come to be dropped here, and by whom?

Garnet brooch from Covent Garden

I'm fascinated by Saxon London. How did these refugees from the continent (my interpretation) come to build such a vibrant culture in *Lundenwic*, and create such works of art? And then why bury them with the dead?

Coin of King Alfred

Alfred the Great is pivotal in London's history (see Jeremy Haslam's article in this issue). This coin is a symbol of his administrative abilities and the foundation of *Lundenburh*, back inside the city walls.

Medieval

A pilgrim badge from the Thames

There are just so many of them, and at least two have featured on our cover. A reminder of the part played by religion and pilgrimage in this period, and that the lives of medieval Londoners were not as static as sometimes thought.

The Billingsgate trumpet

One of the largest artefacts found by metal-detecting waterfront deposits. Archaeological evidence for music is rare, so this one is too good to miss.

Post-medieval

Hatpin from the Cheapside hoard

The hoard was found in 1912 and recently described as "the finest collection of Elizabethan and Jacobean jewellery in the world." A large pearl forms a ship, attached to it are a gold mast, rigging and rotating pennant. This speaks to me of the wealth, confidence and craftsmanship of this period.

The 'pirate' pottery from Limehouse

Recent excavations have revealed an amazing assemblage of world-wide pottery, which may represent 'loot'. As a ceramicist, I had to include this, but more generally it portrays London's world-wide trading links.

Well, that's my choice; what would your's be?

It's interesting that, although the series can be described as history told through artefacts (which is a pretty good definition of archaeology), many other disciplines (e.g. metallurgy) are needed in their interpretation, without which archaeology would be impoverished.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

This year's annual lecture starts with the event in 1989 that changed both Shakespearean scholarship and heritage protection forever: the Rose Theatre excavation became the catalyst for a reappraisal of Elizabethan theatre, and the creation of PPG 16. In his lecture entitled *New Light on London's Shakespearean Playhouses*, Julian Bowsher, co-director of the Rose excavation, reviews the knowledge drawn from the Rose and Globe sites, the findings of 20 years of subsequent

theatre research and major discoveries north and south of the river. A clearer idea has emerged of acting space, actor/audience interaction and behaviour inside the playhouses. New discoveries of the Hope and animal baiting rings on Bankside, and excavations of the Theatre in Hackney (continuing this year) provide new insights into playhouse development.

Please note we have a new venue this year: Museum of London's new Clore learning space. Our reception at 6.30 pm

will be followed at 7 pm by a short AGM and the annual lecture. The proceedings will include the election of Officers, and the election to the Publication Committee of six Ordinary Members. There will be one vacancy to fill. Nominations (and RSVP for the reception please) should be made to the Secretary, 44 Tantallon Road, London SW12 8DG or via the website: londonarchaeologist.org.uk/contact.

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