Tudor bee boles at the Palace of Placentia

A watching brief being undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology in Greenwich has revealed important – and unexpected – remains of the Tudor palace.

PCA Director Peter Moore describes the findings and their future.

A very interesting discovery was made by Tanya Jones of Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited while supervising an on-going watching brief on restoration works at the Painted Hall, Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, for the Greenwich Foundation. The site lies within the grounds of the Palace of Placentia, originally constructed in 1443 and subsequently enlarged and altered throughout the Tudor period. The birthplace of Henry VIII, Mary I and Elizabeth I, the structure was mostly demolished by Charles II and it was not expected that this archaeological investigation would reveal core palace buildings given the results of previous investigations in the vicinity.

The watching brief initially found 18th- and 19th-century walls and flues, but then a sunken 15m^2 room was found towards the north-eastern end of the Painted Hall undercroft. Building materials specialist Kevin Hayward confirmed that the three extant walls of the sunken room were constructed from small Henrician bricks while the neatly laid floor was constructed of rows of over 100 tiles and 100 paving bricks. The preservation of glazes on the tiles varied considerably but most were plain yellow over a white slip, while a few were definitely glazed black or dark green. Five stone pavers in various sizes were located at the south-western end of the room possibly close to an entrance. A contemporary stepped feature was also found at the north-western end of the room. The tiles could be dated to the late 15th to early 16th century, but the same paving bricks at Hampton Court can be dated to the 1520s to 1540s. Kevin is currently working with a construction date of between 1510 and 1550.

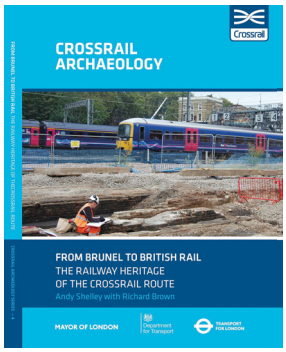
The sunken room was visually and historically interesting enough for the Greenwich Foundation, and their architects, Hugh Broughton Architects, to immediately consider how it could be made visible to the visiting public, a challenging feat considering its location was just at the proposed visitor entrance!

However the continuing project uncovered an even more interesting feature. The extension of the watching brief to the north-east encountered first a wall and then the deeper floors of parts of two vaulted cellars which would have had an internal height of about 2m. Only part of one of the cellars has so far been revealed, while the other has had all its western wall and part of its southern wall revealed. Both of these have niches built into the walls, four smaller ones in the western wall and three larger ones with chamfered divides (together with gaps at the divide bases) in the southern wall. The construction of the cellars is stratigraphically earlier than the floor, but they are most likely to be contemporary. On seeing photographs of these beautiful niches they were immediately identified by historic building restorer Kari Bower as being bee boles and within a short time she had found the documentary evidence for Tudor bee boles in cellars used for the storing of skeps (straw/wicker hives) during winter.

Sheltering bees from extremes of weather is probably as old as bee keeping, as may be their

ABOVE view looking south-west across Painted Hall undercroft and 1510–1550 tiled floor

From Brunel to British Rail: The Railway Heritage of the Crossrail Route



Andy Shelley with Richard Brown

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Reviewed by Rebecca Haslam

The fourth monograph in the Crossrail series focuses upon the historic railway infrastructure that was encountered along the route. Commencing with an incisive introduction to the project and an equally succinct overview of the importance of London's railway heritage, the scene is quickly and effectively set for the comparatively involved discussions that follow.

The Crossrail project cuts through London from east to west, making use of some older east-west lines in order to establish new railway connections with pre-existing routes. The project has therefore provided the authors of this monograph with an opportunity to present a cross section through the city's railway infrastructure from the dawn of the railway age to the present day. They have artfully used that to their advantage by establishing a broad chronological overview within their book in which detailed case studies focusing upon major industrial-era heritage elements are placed. These include the Great Western Railway's depots at Westbourne Park and Old Oak Common as well as key developments in east London.

Despite embracing a considerable range of sites, the core narrative is concise and well-illustrated, making a complex story that embraces multiple railway companies and chronological periods easy to navigate and understand. The authors are also mindful of their audience, which will no doubt include railway enthusiasts, historians and other members of the lay-audience, carefully crafting a text that can be accessed by seasoned heritage professionals and non-archaeologists alike. Care has been taken to set the results within a wider historical and archaeological framework at a range of spatial and temporal scales, which is vital to creating a fuller understanding of the life history of any archaeological site.

In summary, this book successfully expands the story of London in the railway age and forms an excellent addition to the steadily growing body of archaeological literature on the subject. Much of this has been amassed by developer funded projects however few examples have achieved the high standard of reporting that is evident in Shelley and Brown's monograph.

ABOVE view looking south with one of the Tudor cellars with larger bee boles to the south and smaller ones to the west
Both photos © Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited

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protection during winter to conserve their energy and food stores. Skeps were an early form of hive made of straw or wicker, however the sheltering of skeps in walls (bee boles) is almost unique to Britain and Ireland, and bee boles constructed in brick walls are concentrated in Kent. While the majority of datable examples are from the 17th and 18th centuries, Kent has several dating to the 15th and 16th centuries, three of which are in cellars. The earliest printed reference to wintering bees indoors was published by Gerrard Malynes in 1622, and a bee wintering instruction by Samuel Hartlib in 1655 might be taken to refer to using a cellar or an outbuilding.

The public access entrance at the Painted Hall in Greenwich is now subject to a redesign to allow both the tiled floor and the cellars with the bee boles to be viewed by the visiting public. Further uncovering of the structures will be required to maximise what can be viewed and interpreted; this will involve further archaeological investigation and recording. As it will probably present a unique opportunity to view Tudor cellars for the winter protection of skeps in bee boles, this promises to be an exciting exhibit.