

MUSEUM OF LONDON



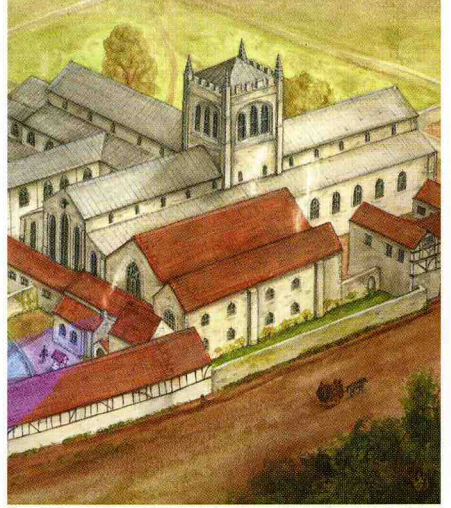
# Archaeology Matters

Spitalfields issue Autumn 1999

# Historic Spitalfields

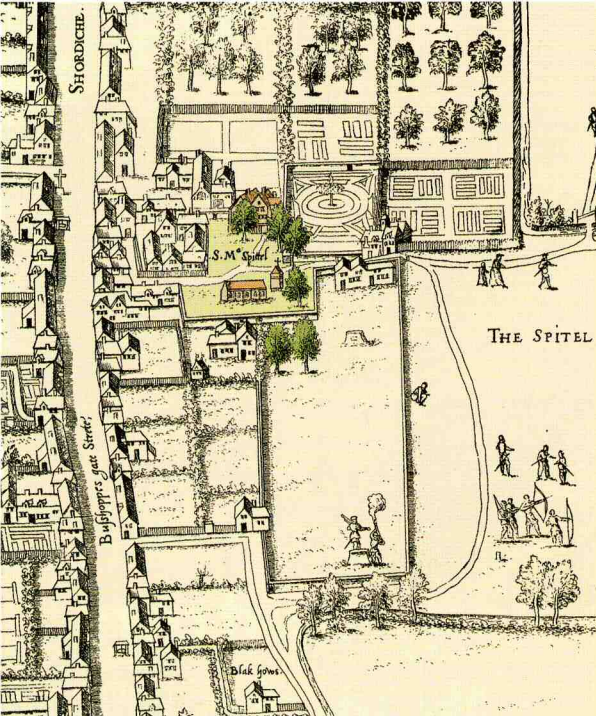
The current excavations by the Museum of London Archaeology Service, funded by the Spitalfields Development Group, have revealed a remarkable sequence of remains from Roman to early modern times.

Spitalfields lies outside the city walls of Roman and medieval London and takes its name from the priory and hospital of St Mary Spital, which was founded in 1197 to look after travellers and women in childbirth. The priory church was situated to the north of the excavations, under Spital Square. Adjoining it were the hospital wards, together with accommodation for the monks who served there. The entire monastery was closed by order of Henry VIII in 1538.



In later times, narrow streets and alleys were laid out where the hospital had once been. Seventeenth-century Spitalfields became the home of Huguenot refugees from France, and a centre for weaving high-quality silks. Later, Jewish immigrants from central Europe, themselves often tailors or clothiers, came to settle.

Spitalfields today retains its multicultural spirit, being the home of a thriving Bangladeshi community.



সেইট ম্যারী স্পিটাল্ হাসপাতাল ও মনস্টারি যা ১১৯৭ সালে স্থাপন করা হয়েছিল, থেকে স্পিটালফিল্ডস্ নামের উৎপত্তি হয়েছে। ১৫৩৮ সালে মনস্টারি বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়েছিল, পরবর্তীতে স্পিটালফিল্ডস্ ফ্রান্সের হিউগোনট শরণার্থীদের বসবাসের স্থান হয়েছিল এবং এখানে উচ্চ-মানের এক ধরণের সিল্ক তৈরী করা হত। লণ্ডন মিউজিয়ামের বর্তমান খননের কাজের জন্য অর্থ প্রদান করছে স্পিটালফিল্ডস্ ডেভেলপমেন্ট গ্রুপ।

## Roman Spitalfields

In the 2nd century AD the Romans began using the Spitalfields area as a cemetery, as well as for quarrying and agriculture. Roman law forbade the burying of the dead within the city walls, and so large cemeteries developed alongside the approach roads.

So far about 60 Roman burials and five cremations have been excavated on the site. The cremations were interred in pots or glass jars. Some of the burials were laid in chalk, some had food offerings and some were buried with pottery or glass vessels.

One highly unusual find indicated a high-status burial: a stone sarcophagus containing a decorated lead coffin (see picture). Found beside it were a jet box and a glass phial probably dating to the 4th century AD. The remains within the coffin were those of a woman in her early 20s. Next to the sarcophagus was a wooden mausoleum containing at least one child's burial, accompanied by six glass vessels.



২শত খ্রিষ্টাব্দে রোমানরা এই জায়গাটিকে একটি কবরস্থান হিসাবে ব্যবহার করত কারণ ঐ সময়ে জায়গাটি শহরের দেওয়ালের বাইরে ছিল। এখন পর্যন্ত মোট ৬০টি কবরের খননের কাজ শেষ হয়েছে। এগুলির মধ্যে একটি ছিল খুবই অসাধারণ, একটি পাথরের সমাধির মধ্যে একটি লোহার কফিন, যার মধ্যে একটি বিশোক্তর যুবতীর দেহাবশিষ্ট পাওয়া গেছে।



## Medieval Spitalfields

The recent excavations have revealed the cemetery which belonged to the priory and hospital of St Mary Spital. The cemetery may have contained as many as 7,000 burials, including hospital inmates, monastic canons, lay sisters and benefactors. It was in use from 1235 until 1538, although the hospital inmates were buried in a separate cemetery until 1280. Of particular interest are the remains of a tomb containing a papal bulla: a lead disc (see picture) given as a reward by the pope for charitable works. In three graves priests were found to have been buried with a communion set consisting of a pewter chalice and paten (see main picture).

A chapel has also been discovered, with a charnel house beneath, built between 1389 and 1391, and dedicated to St Edmund and St Mary Magdalene. The vaulted charnel house, which was used for storing bones disturbed when new graves were dug, was built partially below ground and measured over 13.6 metres by 7 metres. It was supported by three buttresses on its north and south sides and by two at its eastern and western ends. The south wall was built in a chequerboard pattern of flint and stone, and survived to over 2.5 metres above construction level. It seems that the charnel house was cleared after the priory was closed, because few bones remained within it.



Lying within the cemetery was an open-air pulpit, which was used for preaching sermons at Easter. It was probably built in about 1390 and survived until the late 17th century. A gallery was built against the Charnel House in 1488 for the Lord Mayor and alderman to attend the sermons at the pulpit.

The outline of the east end of the priory church has now been uncovered. The church seems to have been extended in the 15th century and within it are the remains of at least five burials, including one in a wooden coffin and one in a brick tomb, although the latter was robbed out at a later date. The tiled floor of this building was also robbed out but the impressions of the tiles could still be seen in the mortar into which they were bedded.

সেইস্ট মেরী স্পিটাল হাসপাতাল সংলগ্ন কবরস্থানের মধ্যে প্রধানতঃ এই খনন কাজ করা হয়েছে। কয়েকশত কবরের রেকর্ড করা হয়েছে, এবং একটি চ্যাপেল আবিষ্কার করা হয়েছে।

১৩৮৯ এবং ১৩৯১ সালের মধ্যে তৈরী চ্যাপেলের সেলারটি, নতুন কবর খোঁড়ার সময় উদ্ধারকৃত অস্থি রাখার জন্য ব্যবহার করা হত। কিন্তু হাসপাতাল বন্ধ হওয়ার সময় এটি পরিস্কার করা হয়েছিল। সেলারের একদিকের দেওয়ালের উচ্চতা ছিল ২.৫ মিটারেরও বেশি।

চ্যাপেলের সামনে একটি বেদি ও একটি দালান ছিল এবং লণ্ডনের মেয়র এখান থেকে ধর্ম সম্পর্কে উপদেশ শুনতেন। কবরস্থানের দক্ষিণদিকের জমিটি পশুপালন ও খাদ্য উৎপাদনের কাজে ব্যবহার করা হত।

## Cemetery research

In excess of 5,000 skeletons will eventually be excavated from the cemetery making it the largest assemblage in the country. Many of the skeletons show evidence of infectious disease. To date, 12 individuals indicate tuberculosis infection in their bones. Tuberculosis is a disease transmitted between people living in close association with each other; London during the medieval period would have presented ideal conditions for its spread.

Several skeletons show evidence of fractures sustained earlier in life, many of which are well healed. The knees of one young male show severe trauma that occurred when he was very young. The injury was so severe it interrupted the normal growth of the tibiae (shinbones). The right knee also probably had a perforation that allowed bacteria to gain direct access to the bone. The right leg was distorted by nearly 45 degrees from the normal. Despite such severe trauma, he survived well into adulthood; perhaps this is a measure of the care and support he received after his injuries.

One adult male has suffered from an injury to the right side of his skull (see skull on the right), which was caused by a sharp-edged implement such as a sword or axe. One adult male in his forties has two well-healed holes on the top of his skull (see skull on the left) suggesting trepanation, one of the earliest surgical procedures. Both are well healed, the uppermost having a layer of bone completely covering the wound. Trepanation may have been carried out to relieve pressure, or for ritual or religious reasons. This is one of the earliest examples of such treatment in London.

এই কবরস্থান খুঁড়ে ৫,০০০ বেশি কঙ্কাল পাওয়া যাবে এবং ফলে এটিই হবে দেশের সবচেয়ে বড় সমাবেশ। অনেকগুলি কঙ্কালে সংক্রামক রোগের নমুনা পাওয়া গেছে। একজন প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক লোকের মাথার খুলিতে দুটো ফুটা পাওয়া গেছে যা ব্রেইনের উপর চাপ বন্ধ করার জন্য করা হয়েছিল। এটিই লওনে এই ধরনের চিকিৎসার সর্বপ্রথম উদাহরণ।



## Suburban Spitalfields



By the 17th and 18th centuries, Spitalfields had begun to assume the shape with which we are familiar today. Steward Street, Fort Street, Brushfield Street and Gun Street were built in 1682 in the old priory grounds, and many of the houses along them were still in use in the 1960s.

The excavations have shown that these houses were built at existing ground level, about 2 metres below modern ground level, and that material was then dumped in the streets and back gardens to turn the ground floors into basements and raise the ground to its current level. Much of this material contains charcoal and ash, and may have been debris removed from the City after the Great Fire of 1666.

The houses were built from brick. The cesspits in their back gardens (see pictures) contain a wealth of household refuse, clay pipes, wine bottles and chamber pots, together with the food remains that will tell us about people's diet and health. These cesspits were used up to the 19th century, when sewers were laid under the streets.



১৭০০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দে পুরো জায়গা জুড়ে সারি সারি বাড়ি তৈরী করা হয়েছিল। এর কিছু কিছু বাড়ি ১৯৬০সাল নাগাদ ব্যবহারের যোগ্য ছিল। এই বাড়িগুলি ছিল ইটের তৈরী এবং পিছনের দিকের জায়গা ময়লা ফেলার কাজে ব্যবহার করা হত যেখানে অনেক মাটির পাত্র (ছবি দেখুন), কাঁচ এবং খাদ্যদ্রব্যের অবশিষ্ট পাওয়া গেছে যা আমাদের তৎকালীন বাসিন্দাদের খাদ্য ও স্বাস্থ্য সম্পর্কে অবগত করবে।

**Alfred the Great 849-899: London's forgotten king**

Wednesday 8 September to Sunday 9 January 2000

The Museum of London marks the 11th centenary of King Alfred's death on 26 October 899 with a major exhibition which paints a vivid picture of the man as a national ruler and lawgiver. The exhibition shows how recent archaeological excavations and historical research have dramatically changed our understanding of the significance of the events of 886, and how vital Alfred's concept of a new London was. **The exhibition is supported by Clifford Chance, the City of London Archaeological Trust and the Corporation of London.**

*A series of events are taking place during September and October to complement this exhibition.*

**Study Day: Alfred the Great: London's forgotten king**

Saturday 16 October 1999

10.30pm-5.00pm Fee £16; £10 concessions **AB**

Who was Alfred the Great? This study day offers the opportunity to hear the latest thinking on some of the major issues surrounding Alfred. Experts will discuss recent archaeological evidence for a radical new view of Alfred's London and the nature of pre-existing settlement.

**Lecture: London before Alfred**

Friday 24 September

1.10pm 50 mins

Explore the Dark Age archaeology of the region before the actions of King Alfred changed the role of London forever.

By Bob Cowie, Museum of London Archaeology Service

**Lecture: Excavating King Alfred's London**

Friday 1 October

1.10pm 50 mins

Recent excavations have demonstrated the reality of King Alfred's re-foundation of London in 886 and the new city's development in later Saxon times.

By Julian Ayre, Museum of London Archaeology Service

**Lecture: Alfred – Then and Now**

Friday 8 October

1.10pm 50 mins

An assessment of Alfred's modern reputation in the light of recent archaeological and historical evidence.

By Professor Janet Nelson, University College London

**Excavations at the Priory and Hospital of St Mary Spital**

Christopher Thomas, Barney Sloane & Christopher Philpotts

£32 ISBN: 1 901992 00 4

This well-illustrated report, combining documentary with archaeological evidence, presents a fascinating account of one of Britain's largest medieval hospitals. Essential background reading for anybody with an interest in the current excavations.

Available from the Museum of London shop (Tel 0171 814 5600) or from MoLAS at Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (Tel 0171 410 2200)

Unless otherwise stated admission to the events listed above are free **WITH a Museum admission ticket, which is valid for one year (£5.00 adult, children free)**. **AB** Advanced booking required **OA** Tickets on arrival  
**For bookings or for a full list of events please phone the Museum's Booking Department on 0171 814 5777**

**Spitalfields Archaeology Centre**

Lamb Street, London E1  
 (north-west corner of Spitalfields Market)

**OPEN UNTIL SUNDAY 26 SEPTEMBER**  
**Open Mondays to Fridays 12pm-2pm**  
**and Sundays 10am-4pm.**  
**Closed Saturdays.**

For further information about archaeology at Spitalfields, please contact:  
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