

Lost and found and lost and found and...



Not all the 'new' objects on display for the first time in our new Medieval London gallery are recent finds. Indeed one has the distinction of being among the earliest recorded archaeological finds from London.

Between 1668 and 1673, as part of the planned improvements after the Great Fire, the lower stretch of the river Fleet, from Holborn to the Thames, was being straightened and canalised. John Conyers, an apothecary, and a keen antiquarian, visited the site and recorded some of the finds the workmen were making. His notes, now in the British Library, describe a particular brass seal matrix 'as broad as a Crowne peice wth a noose to hang to a purse this wth a spread eagle upon it & a inscription in a ring round it vizt: Sigillum ingelram: de pruce(?) in Large Saxon letters'.

After disappearing for two centuries, the seal next turned up in the collection of Sir Joseph Dimsdale in about 1900 – with information from a paper label 'Found in the new cut of

Fleet Ditch, between Fleet Gate and Holborn Bridge'. Sold at the auction of Dimsdale's collection in 1913, it eventually passed into the hands of Sir Robert Burrows, a Cheshire coalowner – who presented it to the London Museum in 1945.

It remained unnoticed in the museum strong room until, thanks to the Museum of London's computerisation programme, I discovered that we had one more medieval seal on record than I'd been aware of!

And who was Ingelram? He was the youngest of six brothers of the de Préaux family, great landowners in Normandy and England in the time of King John. When John lost Normandy to the French king in 1204, the family split, and Ingelram remained loyal to John. How his seal finished up in the Fleet we shall probably never know.

John Clark
Museum of London

Conservation challenges

To conserve nearly 1300 objects within a year was quite a challenge for the Conservation and Collection Care department. The range of items chosen for the Medieval Gallery involved virtually all members of the team: Paper conservators dealing with manuscripts and books, Archaeological and Applied Arts conservators processing dozens of structural pieces, both small and large, and a Textile conservator cleaning a vest, sock and codpiece.

As the Museum's technicians helped us reconstruct two of the largest archaeological finds, a 2m-high Thames revetment and part of a 13th-century boat, which together make a visually stunning centrepiece to the gallery – the River Wall – other staff were painstakingly assembling tiny slate fragments from Henry VIII's Nonsuch Palace. It was important to show how these decorated panels looked originally, starkly contrasting with the adjacent reconstructed panel of white stucco. Close by, 16th-century wall plaster from Brook House has been restored and re-displayed. Formerly hidden in the old gallery, it is now a bright and colourful addition to the new.

Sometimes additional research could take place. Fragments of stained glass window, deliberately crumpled during the dissolution of Merton Priory, were investigated with the help of an expert in virtual reconstruction, enabling us to build up an image of part of the original window. In some oyster-shell paint pallets, from Merton and Guildhall, we discovered several different – often expensive – pigments at the bottom of the shells. A painted panel, excessively overpainted by restorers many years ago, was found to have the original medieval paint underneath.

As you tour the gallery, look out for a round fencing shield ('buckler'), where just half has been cleaned. This is a visual reminder of the skills involved in putting an object on display. Detailed information about the treatment of this and other key exhibits is available on the gallery computer screens.

Rob Payton

Conservation and Collection Care Department



Headstone Manor



Photo: Harrow Council

For 20 years one of London's finest timber-framed buildings has been kept securely under wraps of protective polythene. Now, thanks to the owners, Harrow Council, public contributions and a grant from English Heritage, the first phase of restoration has been completed, allowing Headstone Manor's splendid medieval hall to be enjoyed again.

Built around 1310–1315, the house originally comprised a 7m-wide hall of at least two bays and a cross-wing. John Stratford, Archbishop of Canterbury, bought it in 1344, and for the next two centuries archbishops resided there when touring Middlesex. Recent recording has revealed that the house was considerably upgraded in the mid-16th century – 100 years earlier than previously believed. Ceded to Henry VIII at the Dissolution and sold on, Headstone was let to the Redyngs, who set about creating a fashionable Tudor residence by adding rooms and modernising the hall. They inserted at least one tall, mullioned window, and hid the fine medieval roof joinery behind a ceiling.

After many subsequent modifications, the building eventually degenerated into a skeleton

that presented huge restoration challenges. Ian Wilson, the Council's project manager, explains. 'To make it structurally sound would have meant replacing so much historic fabric that hardly anything original would have survived. We, therefore, decided to insert a steel frame and literally hang the house from that, allowing the 'Old Parts' to be preserved, but taking the weight off their feet'. The new steel frame is visible but unobtrusive, preserving the house as it has become – a mis-shapen, lived-in record of its remarkable history.

Headstone Manor is surrounded by a water-filled moat and has other magnificent historic buildings nearby, including the Tithe Barn, which houses much of the Harrow Museum. Guided tours are available at weekends, May to October, or at other times by special arrangement. For further information telephone 020 8861 2626 or e-mail museum@harrowarts.com.

Information from David Martin (Archaeology South-East), David Fellows (English Heritage), Mary Hesling (Harrow Museum) and especially Ian Wilson (Harrow Council).

St Paul's rediscovered

The medieval St Paul's cathedral was Britain's largest building. Yet today it is not well known. It lay directly under Wren's cathedral, which replaced it after the Great Fire of 1666 and is popularly assumed to have obliterated it entirely. But small fragments survive in the ground, the best of these being remains of two of the buttresses which supported a first-floor chapter house and parts of the surrounding cloister. These were built in 1332 and until recently were just about visible – though entirely unrecognised by most passers-by – in gardens south of Wren's nave.

The adjacent door into the Wren cathedral is one of the entry points for disabled people. This must be upgraded, along with the overgrown site of the chapter house outside. But the medieval fragments, part of Britain's first building in the Perpendicular style, are too fragile to leave exposed. So the Surveyor to St Paul's, Martin Stancliffe, has designed a new landscape in stone that will form a surface just

above the remains, which will themselves be safely buried in geotextile and sand. The design will replicate those parts of the buttresses and cloister which lie directly below, so making visitors aware of the building for the first time and also improving access for wheelchairs.

To aid this careful project, MoLAS undertook an evaluation to see how much of the medieval work survived. The archaeologists came down, as expected, on the south-east corner of the cloister, last seen in 1937. In further pits they found the Purbeck floor of the vaulted space below the chapter house (see picture). The landscaping works, programmed for early 2006, will perhaps show how these fire-damaged buildings were partly reused by Christopher Wren as his site office – which is probably the main reason they have survived to this day.

John Schofield
Museum of London



A London crannog?



Photo: AOC Archaeology Group

Archaeological evidence is very scarce for the period of transition between the Roman occupation of the London area and the Anglo-Saxon takeover. To date it has come from a few sites along the valleys of the Thames and its tributaries, usually from small scattered settlements and burial groups. It has long been held that the first Saxons to arrive here may have been settlers who were given land within the Roman province in return for military service, assisting the Romano-British population against attack from groups beyond the northern boundaries of the empire. However a recent discovery in north London suggests that the intermingling of cultural traditions may have been far more complex than would occur simply with one group settling in the territory of another.

During 2004, Ikea Developments sponsored an excavation on the site of their new superstore in Edmonton. Designed primarily to give a context to prehistoric flintwork found earlier in the area, the dig unexpectedly uncovered a

very substantial timber structure over and within a former channel of the river Lea, covering an area of at least 8.5m by 6m and probably much more, it was built of logs and stakes with a brushwood cover. The timbers have been carbon-dated to a range centred on the 5th century AD and show many typical Anglo-Saxon joints and fixings.

Carved wooden objects, including a wooden trough and mallet, and animal bones found within the woodwork suggest that this was a domestic site built on an artificial island within the river channel. Subsequent flooding had swept away much of the structure but sufficient remained to show that it would have been big enough to support buildings. If so, it would strongly resemble a crannog in the Celtic tradition well represented in Scotland and Ireland but hitherto unknown in south-east England.

Angus Stephenson
AOC Archaeology Group

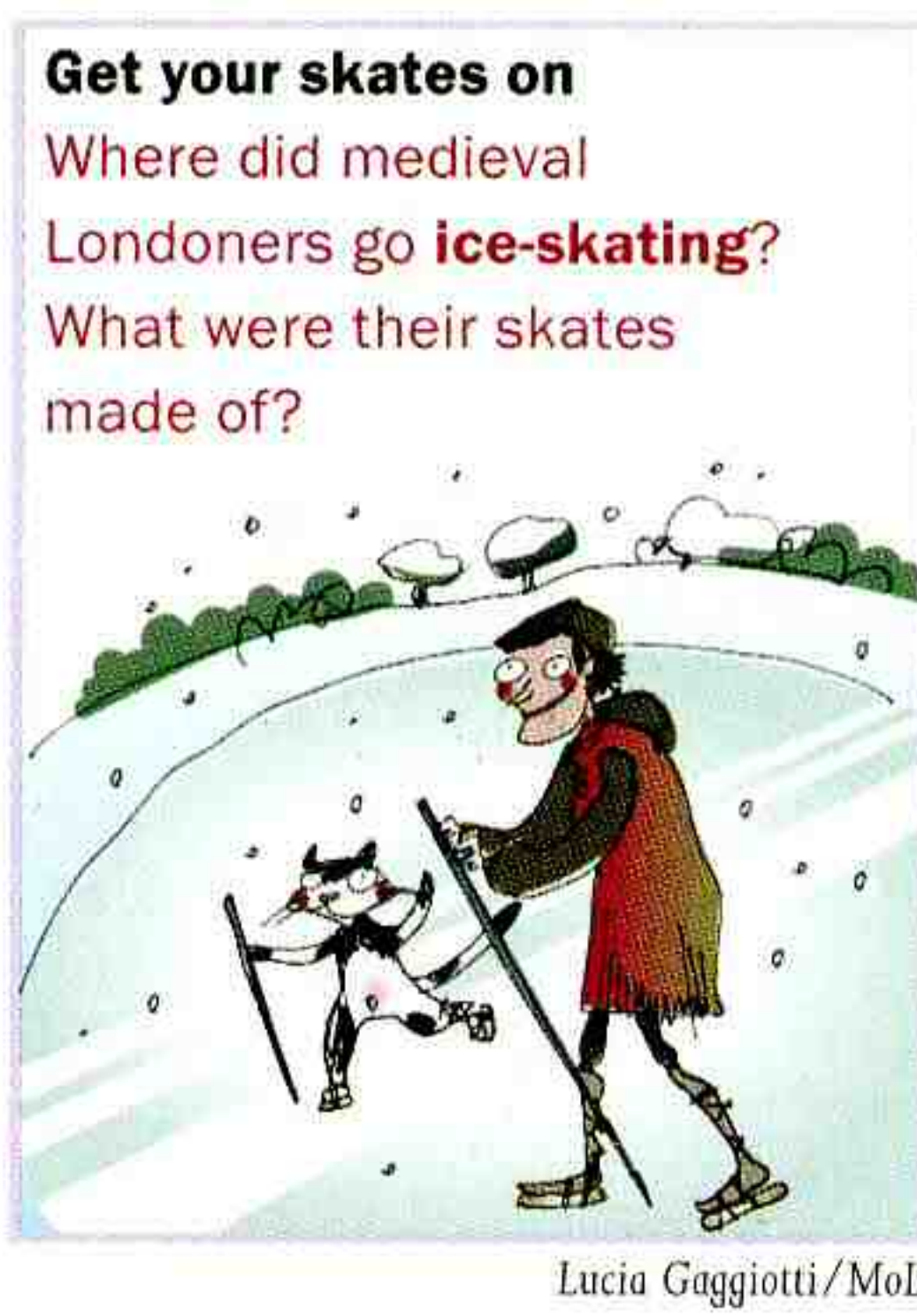
EVENTS

Medieval misconceptions

Tuesday 7 February, 7pm (2 hours)
Terry Jones, one of the team that shaped a generation's attitude to the Middle Ages in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, will give his take on this grossly misrepresented period. Advance booking required: telephone the Box Office (0870 444 3855)

Winter half-term events for families

Saturday 11 February – Sunday 26 February
Explore the high points of medieval fashion or get the low-down on Dick Whittington's cat – there's something for everyone in this programme of object-handling, story-telling and workshops.
Telephone the Box Office (0870 444 3855) for further information



STUDY DAY AT MUSEUM IN DOCKLANDS

Liquid history: recent discoveries in London's maritime history

Saturday 18 March, 10.30am – 5pm
Seven talks by distinguished speakers from English Heritage, Birkbeck College, Thames Explorer Trust and the Museum, with a special focus on ship and boat building in the Thames.
Tickets (£20; £15 concs) available from the Box Office (0870 444 3855)

EXHIBITION

Roots to Reckoning

1 October 2005 – 26 February 2006
Featuring over 100 photographs by three Jamaican-born Londoners, Armet Francis, Neil Kenlock and Charlie Phillips, the exhibition bears witness to the cultural growth of London's black communities from the 1960s onwards.
Free admission

Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate: an archaeological reconstruction and history

John Schofield and Richard Lea
Definitive publication, illustrated mostly in colour, of one of London's most important but least known monasteries.
MoLAS Monograph Series 24, 2005, £32.95

Material culture in London in an age of transition

Geoff Egan
Tudor and Stuart period finds c 1450 – c 1700 from excavations at riverside sites in Southwark.
MoLAS Monograph Series 19, £17.95

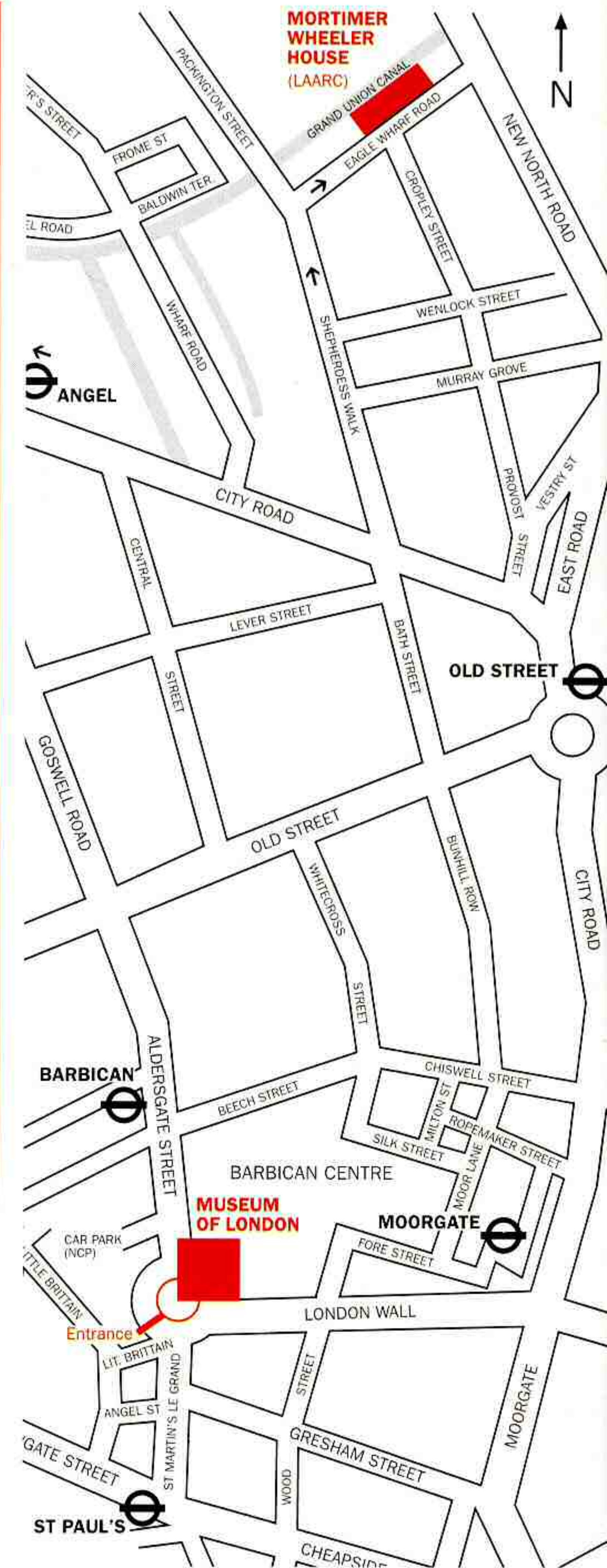
The Cistercian abbey of St Mary Stratford Langthorne, Essex

Bruno Barber, Steve Chew, Tony Dyson and Bill White
Architectural history of the monastery from its 12th-century foundation, and study of 647 burials – the largest sample from any Cistercian cemetery in Europe.
MoLAS Monograph Series 18, 2004, £18.95

Merton Priory

David Saxby
A full colour booklet summarising the latest research on an important Augustinian monastery, a favourite of Henry III and other medieval kings.
MoLAS and London Borough of Merton, 2005, £4.50

Book orders: please phone **020 7814 5600**. Payment by credit or debit card.
Prices as stated, plus post and packing.



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