

Liz Howe: an archaeological tribute

Pat Miller and Al Telfer

Liz's archaeological career spanned over 25 years. She initially became involved in archaeology as part of the MSC community programme for archaeology in Northamptonshire and like many of her contemporaries and former colleagues here today was attracted to the rewarding but sometimes exasperating world of professional archaeology into what was to become a long standing career in the field.

Many of her former colleagues present today know Liz from her work with the various embodiments of Museum of London Archaeology. She first joined the Museum in the late 1980s working in North London and the City of London on a variety of important archaeological sites. These included several Roman cemeteries on the edge of the City and the Huggin Hill Roman baths. She and colleagues, excavated and recorded London's past during the day and at the end of the week socialised as only archaeologists can at a variety of drinking establishments across the City. Al remembers first meeting Liz in a pub by the Thames in 1989, a couple of hours after she had appeared on Blue Peter. She turned up beaming with Natasha Dodwell (and her badge), having just been filmed at the Huggin Hill site.

Although digging on sites was rewarding, Liz's managerial skills came to the fore and she moved on to supervising archaeological sites in and around the City including the large multi-period excavation at Baltic House. She knew how to run an excavation professionally and how to deal with contractors on site as well. Gordon has mentioned how the Keltbray demolition crew used to call her 'diamond Liz' because she was so tough!

Liz was a highly experienced Senior Archaeologist and subsequently a Project Manager supervising archaeological fieldwork and the ensuing post-excavation analysis. She managed small and large projects across various London boroughs including watching briefs, evaluations and excavations. Those of note include an important site in Gresham Street within the Roman Fort in the City of London and, outside London, Marefair, a large site in Northampton.

Liz had a long term involvement in post-excavation projects, culminating in authorship of several academic publications. Liz's name graces archaeological reports on the Roman defences and medieval industry at Baltic House, City of London, and excavations at medieval and Roman Cripplegate, also in the City.

Liz also contributed to the developing profession of archaeology. She worked for improvements in workplace and site health and safety and the poor pay and conditions in the profession. She was an ardent supporter of woman working in archaeology and was particularly encouraging to women supervisors.

After working for so long in the capricious world that is the archaeological profession, Liz decided that there was a life at least partially outside archaeology. She retrained and qualified as a town planner, but it was no surprise to her former colleagues to see that archaeology was included in the planning business which she and Gordon established.

Liz wasn't afraid of voicing her opinion. She followed her emotions, as well as her instincts, which meant that the day had a good chance of ending in a way that you hadn't foreseen. She would do battle for you if she had to - and probably also if she didn't have to. But with Liz there was no pretence, and certainly no pretensions; she was true to herself and loyal to her friends. Her former colleagues and friends will all miss Liz very much.