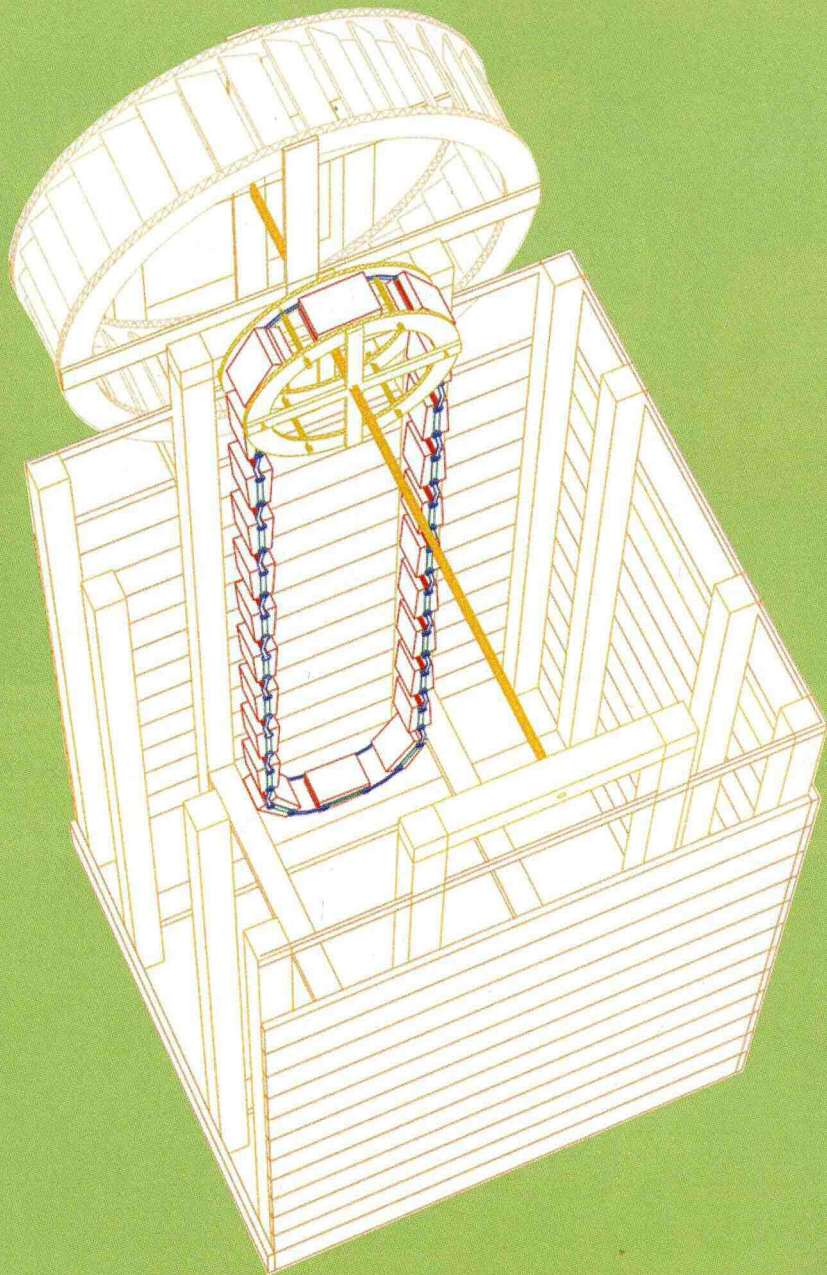


MUSEUM OF LONDON



Archaeology Matters

No 16, December 2001

Minister's Question Time



Children from Sutton Play & Youth Service visited the Museum in October and were taken by surprise when suddenly they had to answer questions from a Government minister. They were working on *The Dig*, an innovative, hands-on introduction to archaeology that was one of a number of educational projects to catch the eye of Baroness Blackstone, Minister of State for the Arts.

Sponsored by Land Securities, *The Dig* was the most logistically complex educational activity the Museum had ever organised. But this was rewarded by its immense popularity. Between August and October 1,750 children were brought by their schools, and a further 5,700 came along in family groups. Two full-scale archaeological 'sites' were built, and these were each divided into 12 trenches where a group of two or three pupils could work with adult helpers. Supervised by 'real' archaeologists from the Museum or other fieldwork contractors, and supported by a

host of volunteers from archaeological societies, the apprentice diggers carefully unearthed the remains of a medieval monastery and of a Roman house beneath. They learned how to use a trowel, to identify pottery, and to describe and draw their discoveries. Such was the enthusiasm that universities should prepare for a surge in applications for archaeology courses around the year 2010!

The Dig was but one of several educational projects the Minister had come to see. Through a working model and computerised reconstructions (see front cover), the *Roman Waterworks* display explains to students of all ages the complexities of hydraulic engineering. Through the *School Boxes* scheme, 200 London primary schools each now have a miniature museum of Roman artefacts. But, as one *Dig* supervisor put it, "In projects like these I wonder who learns more. 'Them' or me? Before this I knew very little about what archaeology means to children".

Medieval Mikveh

From the Norman Conquest until 1290, when all Jews were expelled from England, there was a sizeable Jewish community of money-lenders and merchants living in the City of London between Milk Street and Old Jewry. While there is a great deal of documentary evidence for this, paradoxically, there is very little archaeological evidence concerning London's medieval Jewry. So when an early 13th-century stone-lined ritual bath, or mikveh, was discovered along Milk Street, it caused tremendous excitement in Jewish communities both in London and further afield. Indeed, this is one of only two medieval mikvaot known in England.

The bath had been constructed below floor level of a cellar as a subterranean feature, and it took the form of a small apsidal-ended cistern, lined with greensand ashlar blocks. Surviving to a depth of about 1.5m, it was nearly 3m long and 1.4m wide. It was entered from the north side by a flight of seven stone steps.

The function of a mikveh is to provide facilities for spiritual cleansing by total immersion, often before an act of worship. Therefore, the presence of a mikveh at sub-cellar level suggests that one of the upper rooms of the house would have been converted into a private synagogue. Nothing of the upper levels of this particular building survived, but it is known that until 1290 the property was owned by a Jew named Moses Chespin.

The excavations at 20–30 Gresham Street are sponsored by Land Securities plc, and are being carried out by MoLAS in collaboration with AOC Archaeology Group. The mikveh was carefully dismantled stone by stone, thanks to funding from the Bevis Marks Trust, and it is hoped to find a suitable site where it can be rebuilt.

Bruce Watson
Museum of London Archaeology Service



Breaking the Law?

The stewards of the Inns of Court in the 17th century were understandably concerned about the amount of money they had to spend replacing broken pottery. Everyday accidents were one thing, but when the students rioted and used their drinking jugs as missiles, that was a different matter entirely. Such happenings were scrupulously logged in the record books, and they may well explain the discovery of nearly 200 complete but broken jugs during recent excavations in the Inner Temple.

In addition to the green-glazed drinking jugs, the rubbish pit where they were found contained candlesticks, chafing dishes (used for keeping food hot on the table) and a bed-warming pan; it had been filled around 1640–60. There were some Delftware ointment jars, but otherwise, nearly all the vessels had been made by potters around Farnham and Guildford, with whom the Inns of Court are known to have placed regular contracts. Compared with the rest of society,

the lawyers seem to have been conservative in their tastes, besides being exceptionally careless with their property. By the mid-17th century the drinking jug was passing out of fashion, and a globular form of mug was in vogue. And, as another find from the pit shows, they were just as old-fashioned in their sanitary habits. Whereas most London households were by now using chamber pots, residents of the Temple had to make do with an antiquated, medieval type of stool pan.

The site was notable also for the number of mid to late 18th-century hair or wig-curlers that were found. Even though curlers are known from many London sites, the chances are that these particular curlers were the property of outfitters whose business thrived on supplying judges and barristers with wigs for court.

Excavation by Pre-Construct Archaeology.
Information from Chris Jarrett.



Rural Spitalfields

The Priory and Hospital of St Mary Spital (founded in 1197) occupied a narrow strip of land over 400m long, extending from Fleur-de-Lis Street to Artillery Lane. In the central part of the site, the church, hospital and cemetery have been the focus of numerous excavations, but this year the opportunity came to investigate a large area in the southern half – the Outer Precinct – about which much less is known.

The boundary between Inner and Outer Precincts was formed by a ditch, 2m wide and 1.5m deep. The ground to the south had been ploughed at one time, and there was a large pond containing brushwood, perhaps from overhanging trees. A group of post-holes arranged in a circle over 15m across probably marks the position of an animal corral. Much of the Outer Precinct thus seems to have been used as a farm, so that the priory could be partly self-sufficient in food. In the south-east corner of the site stood two buildings. One was an imposing, chalk-founded structure with a large rectangular bay – but it is not yet known

if these buildings were monastic or immediately post-Dissolution in date.

North of the boundary ditch, and so bordering the huge monastic cemetery in the Inner Precinct, were found several buildings in an unexpectedly fine state of preservation. Documentary evidence suggests they were houses occupied by elderly residents of the hospital. Several phases were recorded, with stone progressively replacing timber. One house had a cellar, reached down a flight of wooden steps, and its chalk walls survived over 1m high. Buried in the floor of a nearby building was a small crucible containing mercury, which suggests that this particular room was a workshop. After the Dissolution in 1539, all these structures were demolished and the ground levelled to become an artillery practice ground.

*The excavation, by the
Museum of London Archaeology Service,
for the Spitalfields Development Group,
was directed by Chris Thomas.*



Bronze Age Barrow



© Surrey County Archaeological Unit

A visitor to southern England in the Early Bronze Age (around 2000 to 1500 BC) would have been struck by the way in which the natural landscape had been altered by massive, carefully-built mounds of earth. The product of many days of hard work, these barrows appear to have served partly as burial places, partly as markers for areas of importance to local communities. Compared with the rest of Greater London, the Thameside gravels of west London are rich in this category of monument – there was, for example, a row of nine barrows near Heathrow – but hardly any have been excavated or dated precisely. The recent excavation by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit of a ring-ditch at Coldharbour Lane, Thorpe is thus of particular importance.

The ring-ditch formed a complete circuit about 30m in diameter and appears to be all that remains of a round barrow that had been ploughed away in antiquity. (A barrow at

Teddington stood 4m high at the time of excavation in 1854.) With the loss of the barrow itself, it is not known whether it contained any burials, but two crouched inhumations were discovered close together in the lowest fill of the ditch on the north-east side of the monument. They are likely to date to the Early Bronze Age. No grave goods accompanied the burials but the fill of the ring-ditch contained a variety of finds, including pottery of early to middle Bronze Age date and flints dating to the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Also recorded on the site was evidence for a Roman field-system – part of which cut across the ring-ditch – and a number of Roman and Saxon pits. The dig was funded by RMC, in advance of gravel quarrying.

Jane Robertson
Surrey County Archaeological Unit

Look Ahead with Archaeology

'The shale bracelet looks expensive, it could have been buried with someone rich. The twisted armlet looks cheaper.' Thoughts such as these formed the basis for a small exhibition opened earlier this year in east London. It is the result of a collaboration between the Museum of London and Look Ahead Housing and Care, an association which provides homes for people with high support needs. The exhibition was prepared with residents of a Look Ahead project in Cannon Street Road, Whitechapel.

The display focuses on finds from the eastern cemetery of Roman London, a major burial ground stretching between the Minories and Hooper Street, Tower Hamlets. The preparatory workshops involved studying objects from the Museum's collection, choosing items for display, writing text and organising the case layout. During discussions about the display, the residents expressed an interest in exploring the relationship between

the invading Romans and the pre-Roman population. They were also amazed by how intricate many of the objects were – particularly a small Roman oil lamp, which one participant described as being '(so) well designed, (it) seems to be ahead of its time'. Some residents are hoping to take their interest in archaeology further by getting involved with other events organised by the Museum.

The display was installed at Cannon Street Road at the beginning of October. It will remain there until the New Year, when it will move to the Brady Arts and Community Centre, Whitechapel. It will stay on public display at the Brady Centre for four months and there become the focus for a series of art workshops with adults and children.

Adrian Green
Museum of London



GALLERIES

World City, 1789–1914

Over 3000 objects – many of them never previously displayed – are at the heart of our brand new **World City** gallery. Tracing the phenomenal changes that took place in London life during the period between the French Revolution and the First World War, this is the largest exhibition project to have been undertaken in the Museum's entire 25-year history. Take a **Victorian Walk** past the original shopfronts or workshops that recreate the world of the watchmaker, tobacconist and pawnbroker. Go on a **Journey through Victorian London**, using a computer workstation to guide you through dozens of film clips and images in a multimedia experience.

For details of the comprehensive programme of lectures, drama presentations and workshops that will take place throughout December and January, please telephone the Box Office 020 7814 5777 or go to our website.

LECTURES

Archaeology in London

Fridays 1, 8, 15, 22 February; Wednesday 27 February
1.10pm (50 mins)

From the Temple of Mithras to the Rose Theatre – London has been the scene of some of the most breath-taking and emotive archaeological discoveries in the world. Gentleman collectors, charismatic curators, multi-million-pound redevelopment projects and hundreds of dedicated researchers have all played their part in rescuing London's past. To coincide with the opening in February of the **London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre**, this five-lecture series will look in depth at the fascinating history of archaeology in the capital and at the personalities involved.

For further information, please telephone the Box Office 020 7814 5777.

BOOKS

Medieval Finds from Excavations in London

Started in 1987 and now running to seven volumes, the Museum of London's **Medieval Finds** series has become the benchmark for the publication of archaeological artefacts. Already used by countless students, archaeologists and general readers worldwide, each book is also a mine of information for replica-makers and theatrical costumiers. The earlier volumes, which have been out of print for some time, are now available in a hardback edition with corrections and a new introduction. Published by Boydell & Brewer, £25.00 (each volume).

Knives and Scabbards

By Jane Cowgill & Margrethe de Neergaard

Shoes and Pattens

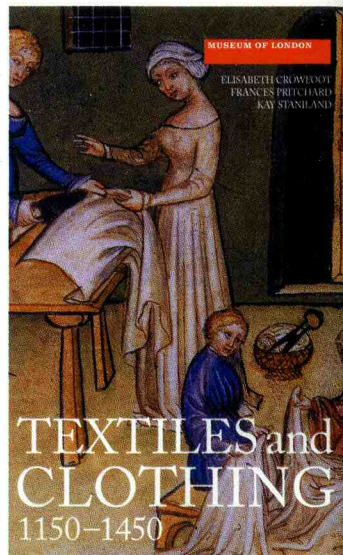
By Francis Grew & Margrethe de Neergaard

Textiles and Clothing, c. 1150 – c. 1450 (see picture, top right)

By Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard & Kay Staniland

To order books mentioned in this leaflet, please phone 020 7814 5600.

Payment by credit or debit card. Prices as stated, plus post and packing.



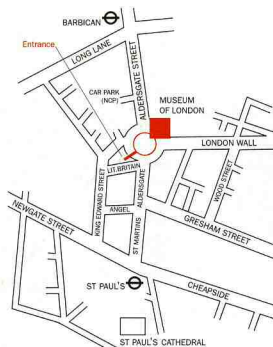
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