



MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Matters

No 9, February 2000



Photograph: Museum of London

Speculating about the last meal to have been prepared in a Roman mixing bowl, running one's fingers over the moulded designs on a glossy red samian sherd ... when it comes to awakening an enthusiasm for archaeology, there is nothing like handling real archaeological finds. Concerned that many children may never get the chance to handle history in this way, the Museum of London has embarked on a radical new project: to create 'mini-museums' for use in primary and special schools in London.

The mini-museum boxes – which are to be lodged permanently with schools – will be geared towards Key Stage 2 Study Unit 1 of the National Curriculum. This features the Romans as a special topic. Each box contains a mixture of real material – most of it poorly stratified finds from old digs – and replicas. There are samian and other pottery sherds, fragments of building tiles, tesserae and oyster shells. The replicas comprise a complete mortarium, a

samian cup, a glass oil bottle, a bronze manicure set, a wooden writing tablet and bronze stylus, a pottery lamp in the shape of a foot, a Medusa head pendant and a pack of two coins. Teachers' notes and classroom worksheets are also included.

Museum staff and volunteers have been busy preparing 200 boxes as a pilot scheme, and by Easter these will be in use in a representative selection of schools throughout Greater London. The pilot scheme has been financed by the Department for Education and Employment, with sponsorship from Talco, S J Gaskets and the Stewart Company, the suppliers of the boxes and packaging. The feedback will help us decide whether it will be possible to supply all 2000 or so of London's state schools with their own box. A learning experience for us all!

Jenny Hall
Museum of London

The Royal Arsenal

From the site's purchase by the Crown in 1671 to its final demise in 1994, the nation's principal arsenal and armaments factory stood at Woolwich. At its peak, during the 1914–18 war, the Arsenal covered over 1,200 acres and employed over 80,000 people. A recent programme of excavation and recording, funded by English Partnerships, is one of the largest industrial archaeology excavation projects ever to have taken place in the London region.

Work centred on the sites of the Royal Laboratories, built in 1696–7 for ammunition production, and of 'The Great Pile', a cannon-boring factory of 1717–20 attributed to Nicholas Hawksmoor. Both revealed evidence of continuous adaptation to new processes and technologies, including the switch from horsepower to steam power, as well as hydraulic, gas and electric installations. On the Royal Laboratory site there were fragmentary remains from its early 'courtyard' period and good evidence from its roofing-over in 1855 to form what was stated at the time to be 'the largest covered machine-shop in the world'.

Within 'The Great Pile' were found machine bases, coal cellars, iron and bronze furnaces, casting houses, boiler houses, an engine house and flue systems. The remains were often of massive scale – the foundations for one steam engine consisted of 250 tonnes of stone blocks – whilst the excavated casting pits were over 4m deep. Loose finds include crucibles, cannon-mould fragments, foundry tools, stone lithographic blocks, cannon balls and five iron cannons, as well as lead shot and bullets covering almost the whole period during which the Royal Arsenal Woolwich was in production.

A final discovery, beneath the industrial features, was a late Roman cemetery containing 140 graves. Whilst no human remains survived, coffin- and body-stains were hauntingly apparent. About a quarter of the graves included pottery, jewellery or other grave goods.

Ben Ford & Rob Kinchin-Smith
Oxford Archaeological Unit

Photograph: Oxford Archaeological Unit



St John's Clerkenwell

The priory of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem was one of London's most important medieval monasteries, occupying a five-acre site in Clerkenwell. Its great Tudor gateway, which still spans St John's Street, has long been a local landmark. Recently we have learned that substantial remains of other monastic buildings lie just below the modern houses and streets.

In Briset Street (named after Jorden de Briset, the Norman knight who founded the priory), a wall, roughly faced in ragstone on chalk foundations, and an internal clay surface have been discovered. They may have formed part of the Great Barn, where the priory's agricultural produce would have been stored. Like all medieval monasteries, St John's was partly self-sufficient, with its own gardens, orchards and fishponds. In places the wall was found standing to a height of over six feet (2m), its top within a foot (0.3m) of the present-day ground surface. The priory was closed in 1540, a victim of the

Dissolution of the Monasteries, and secular buildings soon appeared on the site. The walls of the Barn were partly incorporated into a pair of handsome brick-built cellars, which themselves survived to full ceiling height.

On a second site, we have uncovered the remains of houses along St John's Street, which were occupied by wealthy tenants of the priory. Tantalising clues to the above-ground appearance of the monastery and nearby buildings emerged in the form of high-quality stone mouldings. These include fragments from two fireplaces, one of which was decorated with a Tudor Rose. A further remarkable find was a leaden seal of Pope Innocent III (1196–1214), which must have been issued within a very few years of the foundation of the monastery itself in 1185.

Dick Bluer and Kieron Heard
Museum of London Archaeology Service



Photograph courtesy of MoLAS

Let's face it!

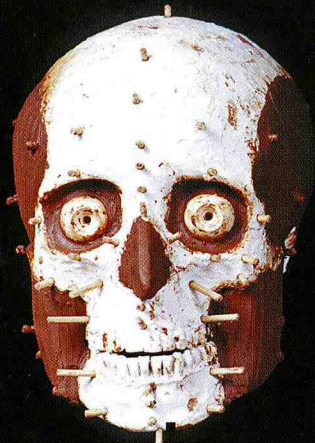
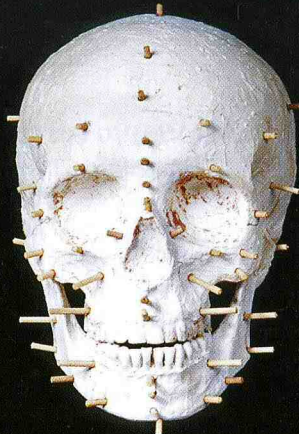
Let's face it, it's not every day that one can come face to face with a Roman Londoner. But now, thanks to the work of Caroline Wilkinson of the Unit of Art in Medicine at Manchester University, this is now possible for visitors to the Museum of London. Using techniques originally developed to help the police identify unnamed skeletons, Caroline has reconstructed the head of the young woman whose burial was discovered at Spitalfields last year. Over 10,000 people came to see her decorated lead coffin, when it was displayed for just a few weeks last spring. The reconstruction of her head was commissioned by the BBC TV programme, *Meet the Ancestors*, which last month broadcast a programme describing the find.

Reconstruction was a painstaking process that combined artistic skill with data from the latest medical research. Analysis of her teeth, for instance, showed that our Roman woman had spent her early life in Spain or the western Mediterranean rather than Britain. The first step in reconstruction was to make a cast from her skull. Her main facial muscles could then be modelled in clay; the outlines traced of her nose and eyes; further layers added to form soft tissue just beneath the skin. From this complete clay model, the final wax version was cast. Dark eyes, hair and skin tone were fashioned by a medical artist, Alison Levy, to give a Mediterranean look. The result is a portrait that without doubt would be recognised as a lost friend or relative by a Roman who lived 1,600 years ago.

The reconstruction, together with the coffin and other finds, are now on display in the Museum. A booklet, sponsored by the Spitalfields Development Group, tells the story of this amazing discovery (see back cover).

Hedley Swain and Jenny Hall
Museum of London

Photographs courtesy of BBC's *Meet the Ancestors*



Vintage finds



Photograph: Museum of London

New Year celebrations came early at the Museum of London when, in December, experts broached two bottles of late 17th-century wine. The bottles, found during the year-long Spitalfields dig, had been thoughtfully laid down in the cellar of the Master Gunner's House – a building known to have been demolished in 1682. Each holds about a pint and half (nearly a litre) of wine, and one is still sealed with a cork.

The wine is a glorious golden yellow, with a rich bouquet. After detailed checks to ensure that it is uncontaminated and safe to drink, a tiny sample was extracted by syringe (see picture) and 'blind tasted' by two eminent Masters of Wine: David Molyneaux-Berry and Michael Broadbent. Michael's first impression was a Madeira, or possibly a dry Sherry; David stated without hesitation that it is 'a dry

Madeira, with a low alcohol content and high acidity'. Incredibly, the verdict of the two tasters matched precisely the results obtained by chemical analysis. Geoff Taylor, of Corkwise Limited, reported an alcohol level of just 6.25%; that the wine is unfortified; and that it has been made from white grapes. 'In my opinion', he said, 'a dry Madeira now termed Sercial is the closest match'. The Sercial grape is still used to make high-quality dry Madeira – but now as a fortified wine with a much higher alcohol content than our 300-year-old vintage.

The bottles will remain on display at the Museum for just a few more weeks, until 27 February, as part of the exhibition London Eats Out.

Francis Grew
Museum of London

High Street Londinium

What was it really like to live in a Roman house or to buy food at a Roman shop in Londinium? How can we translate the fragmentary remains of Roman buildings found on archaeological sites into life-size reconstructions that can be entered and experienced today? These were the themes of a thought-provoking day-school held at the Museum of London last autumn, and are among the challenges facing the curators and archaeologists responsible for the Museum's most demanding archaeological exhibition yet.

High Street Londinium, scheduled to open next July, will feature reconstructions of three complete timber framed buildings, based on the excavations at No1 Poultry in the heart of the Roman town. These include a bakery or hot food shop, hard at work on a busy morning, and a house where a woodworker has his workshop in the back room. The third is a pottery shop in the early evening where the shop-keeper is cashing up for the day. Discoveries such as the remains of a panelled wooden door provide information about

fixtures and furnishings to a level of detail that is rarely available for Roman Britain.

A particular aim of the project is to recreate these timber-framed buildings, as far as possible, using materials and techniques that the Romans themselves would have used. Damian Goodburn, an archaeologist who has been studying Roman woodwork for 15 years, has shown that these seemingly ordinary structures represent a revolution in carpentry techniques. They were modular rectangular buildings that were constructed almost in kit form to an 'off the peg' design. The Romans introduced various carpentry joints to enable much of the work to be prefabricated off-site. Their tools, although limited, would be recognisable today, including a prototype saw.

Roman houses constructed in this way lasted on average about 20 years. Sadly our reconstructions will not be allowed to stand the test of time.

Julie Reynolds
Museum of London

Photograph: MoLAS



BRIDGING HISTORY

Friday 17 March 2000 to Sunday 14 May 2000

This exhibition will examine three and a half thousand years of London's bridges and their progress toward the new Millennium Bridge that will link St. Paul's to Bankside.

A series of events has also been arranged.

Lecture: London's first bridge

Friday 17 March 2000 1.10pm 50mins OA

Jon Cotton & Mike Webber, Museum of London

Lecture: When London Bridge was broken down

Friday 24 March 2000 1.10pm 50mins OA

Bruce Watson, Museum of London Archaeology Service

Lecture: Bridges for the Millennium

Friday 31 March 2000 1.10pm 50mins OA

Roger Ridesdell-Smith, Ove Arup

Walks: The gateway to London: Crossing Bridges

Sunday 26 March 2000 10.30am 120mins AB

Wednesday 17 May 2000 6.00pm 120mins AB

Fee: £7.50 (£5 concessions)

Hedley Swain, Museum of London

London & Middlesex Archaeological Society (LAMAS) 37th Annual Conference to be held at the Museum of London

Saturday 15 April 2000 11.00am – 6.00pm

£3.00 (LAMAS members), £4.00 (non-members)

Further information from Jon Cotton, Early Department, The Museum of London, 150 London Wall, London, EC2Y 5HN

The Spitalfields Roman

This publication, sponsored by the Spitalfields Development Group, chronicles one of the most exciting and important archaeological discoveries made in recent years in London: the undisturbed burial of an important Roman citizen of the fourth century.

£3.50 ISBN 0-904818-95-0

Excavations at 72–75 Cheapside/83–93 Queen Street City of London

A unique report presenting the Roman, Saxon and medieval finds from the excavations carried out in 1991 at the junction of Cheapside and Queen Street, City of London.

Julian Hill and Aidan Woodger
£7.95 ISBN 1-901992-08 X

These publications are 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).

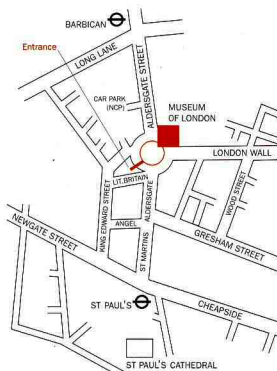
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If you would like to receive Archaeology Matters regularly, please call 0171 814 5730.

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For bookings or for a full list of events please phone the Museum's Booking Department on 0171 814 5777

Unless otherwise stated admission to events is 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

Cover: Reconstruction of the Spitalfields Roman Woman.