

Reports on our past lectures in 2015

30 January 2015

5th Nick Fuentes Memorial Lecture

Roman Sculpture

Francis Grew, Senior Curator of Archaeology, Museum of London

The speaker knew Nick Fuentes due to a shared interest in the Roman world and began by paying tribute to Nick's work in Roman Army research, re-enactment and the foundation of London Archaeologist.

There then followed an overview of Roman Sculpture mainly from London. This covered three main themes. First the small amount of surviving material in bronze, the highlight of this being the head of Hadrian now in the British Museum. The second part covered material from the Temple of Mithras site in the City of London. This site was excavated in the 1950s and again more recently, (see January 2014 below). Francis speculated that the diversity of sculpture from this site may be because it became a collecting place for sacred material from other sites in the later Roman period.

The final part covered funerary monuments and he finished with the sculpture of an eagle with a snake in its mouth discovered recently.

Colin Jenkins

27 February 2015

Wandsworth's war - surviving signs of World War 2 in the Borough

Alan Brooks, WHS member

Alan who is the author of 'London at War' presented a selection of memorials to the civilian dead of World War 2 as well as showing some other things surviving from the period. This included air raid shelters on Clapham Common and marks on houses indicating the presence of Fire Guards. He highlighted the value of the bomb damage maps of London published in book form in 2005 by the London Topographical Society.

Colin Jenkins

27 March 2015

'Tabard Square Revisited'.

Dougie Killock of Pre-Construct Archaeology

Dougie Killock gave a wonderfully illustrated talk on the excavation of Tabard Square, off Great Dover Street in Southwark, in the early 2000s. The year-long dig revealed that the vast 2-hectare site had been a religious complex with two rare Romano-Celtic temples, dedicated jointly to the Roman god Mars and the Celtic god Camulus. An inscribed marble fragment, dating from the late 2nd century AD, bore the first known use of the word 'Londinium'.

Other finds on the site ranged from early Roman timber posts, suggesting board walks to the river or storehouses, to a 17th century brick kiln, with an array of clay-pipes nearby. One extraordinary find that Dougie described as "stunning" was a tin of a white creamy substance, possibly make-up, dating from c.150 AD; the fingerprints of the last user were still visible on the inside of the lid.

Janet Smith

24 April 2015

'Slave-owners of Wandsworth: legacies of British slave-ownership in the Borough'

Nick Draper, University College London. Research Associate of the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership project

In a fascinating talk on a little acknowledged topic, Dr Nick Draper of University College London revealed that several sugar plantations in the West Indies bore names recalling their local origins: Roehampton, Battersea and Tooting among them. Contemporary engravings showed idyllic scenes but these belied the harshness of life for the slaves, whose death-rate far outstripped their birth-rate. Between the late 15C & late 19C, Dr Draper estimated that twelve-and-a-half million people had been traded as slaves, nearly a quarter of them by the British.

Local figures involved in slavery - either as slave-owners or as middlemen - were Alexander Lindo (1742-1812) of Putney Park; Edward Hyde East (1764-1847) of Battersea; Archibald Cochran (d. 1814) of Putney Hill; Mrs Frances Lyles (b.1805?) of Battersea - or Greater Chelsea, as she preferred to call it; Daniel Henry Rucker (1757-1848) of Wandsworth and Dr James Manby Gully (1808-1833) of Balham - better known for his involvement in the Charles Bravo Affair.

The slave trade was abolished in 1807 and slavery itself in 1833, prompting the payment of compensation to slave-owners totalling some £20m (perhaps £2bn in today's money). Lists of payments made and to whom, can be consulted at the National Archives in Kew. Dr Draper and his colleagues running the Legacy of British Slave Ownership project welcome researched contributions from the public to their LBS website.

Janet Smith

29 May 2015

'Using the Greater London Historic Environment Record'

Stuart Cakebread, Greater London Historic Environment Manager, Historic England

Stuart Cakebread, of Historic England, the newly created heritage advisory body (formerly English Heritage), described in detail the work of GLHER, set up in 1983 as part of the Museum of London. What began as a simple card index of archaeological finds is now a sophisticated digital archive of more than 100,000 records with links to maps, reports and finds. It can be searched by date, place or theme.

With a staff of only three, GLHER is heavily dependent on volunteers and Stuart urged us, as a local group, to alert his team to any archaeological discoveries in the area. Anyone doing their own research is welcome to contact the team by email, phone or via the Heritage Gateway Website.

Janet Smith

26 June 2015

AGM followed by 'Downstream: A History & Celebration of Swimming the River Thames'.

Caitlin Davies, Author & Journalist.

Caitlin Davies gave an entertaining talk based on her recent book, *Downstream: a History & Celebration of Swimming in the River Thames*. Taking a dip in London's famous river is surprisingly popular - some 10,000 people a year are reckoned to do it - and it's a pastime with a long history. Eton School archive contains evidence of Thames swims as far back as the 1500s and both Charles II and James II were known to be keen dippers in the late 17C.

Surprisingly, Victorian women took to the water, too: in 1875, aged just 14, Agnes Beckwith swam a 5-mile section of the Thames from London Bridge to Greenwich ... probably wearing stockings. She may be little known today but to the Victorians she was the premier female swimmer of the world.

A slightly later star was the Australian swimmer, Annette Kellerman who, after overcoming a childhood disability, swam a 13-mile stretch of the Thames downstream from Putney 'through the flotsam and jetsam of London' and swallowing 'what seemed like pints of oil.' But for some, swimming alone wasn't enough: Jules Gautier, also known as 'the manacled swimmer', completed the Boat Race course ... with a rope in his mouth and towing a boat behind him!

Janet Smith

31 July 2015

'A journey from Battle Bridge to King's Cross: the archaeology and history of a London suburb'

Rebecca Haslam of Pre-Construct Archaeology

Rebecca gave us an overview of the archaeology and history of the Kings Cross area focussing this time on the area to the south of the Regents Canal as far as Euston Road. The current archaeological work has recovered a small amount of Roman building material and there are reports that Roman remains were found when St Pancras Old Church was rebuilt in the 19th century.

The Old Church may date back as early as 625 AD and by Domesday a sizeable settlement occupied the area around the church but this declined in the 13th century possibly due to flooding from the nearby River Fleet. In the 18th Century pleasure gardens were built in the area and in 1767 a smallpox and fever hospital. Significantly the coming of the New Road (now Euston Road) in 1756 improved transport but also created a clear distinction between the area to the south which became fashionable Bloomsbury and area to the north which was industrialised.

The Regents canal opened in 1820 which was followed shortly by the Imperial Gasworks. The archaeological dig on this contaminated site has found the bases of retort houses, gas scrubbers and support for what was possibly a large gas main. Gas holders on the site went through several phases of development with the installation of a three lift holder in 1883. The first railway was the Great Northern Kings Cross Station in 1850 with its hotel of 1853-54 now restored. The Midland built St Pancras station in 1868 and the rail transport of coal allowed the gasworks to expand.

The industrialisation of the area made it very mixed in terms of housing quality. The Improved Industrial Dwellings Company built a number of tenement blocks in the 1860s of which one survives. Another building of interest is the German Gymnasium of 1865, the first purpose built gym in Britain. This building is retained as part of the huge recent redevelopment of the area but little of the old street pattern remains and even the gasholder frames have been re-erected in a different location.

Colin Jenkins

25 September 2015

'Meet the Huguenots'

Charlie de Wet, Chair and Trustee of the Huguenots of Spitalfields

Charlie de Wet gave a lively presentation on the contribution of the Huguenots to British life and culture. They were Protestant refugees from France who are first recorded as having arrived in London in 1548. Following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which brought an end to religious toleration, an estimated 400,000

Protestants left France in fear of their lives. Some 50,000 came to this country in 1687 alone. After the revocation, they were not allowed to return to their homes. The tears on the Wandsworth Council coat of arms are said to represent the tears of the Huguenots. Charlie said their wide range of skills led to their becoming prominent silversmiths, clockmakers, paper-makers, gunsmiths, artists and, of course, silk-weavers. A good gauge of their success was the fact that the first Governor of the Bank of England (and later Lord Mayor of London) was himself a Huguenot: John Houblon (1694-97).

Colin Jenkins

30 October 2015

'A load of old rubbish: Artefacts from the Walbrook valley and life in Early Roman London'

Michael Marshall, from Museum of London Archaeology

Michael Marshall gave a presentation on the range of Roman artefacts recovered from digs in the City of London. Items from the area of the Walbrook valley form a very significant proportion of the Roman objects on display at the Museum. This is due to the waterlogged conditions in that area which allow metal, wood, leather and textiles to survive in excellent condition.

In the antiquarian period before the rise of modern scientific archaeology many metal objects were found by workmen but those preserved were almost always complete and in good condition. It is not clear if this was due to bias in the collecting or if complete objects were ritually deposited. More recent digs, in particular the Bloemberg site, show that there is evidence for deposition of complete objects in the actual river channel but items found on the riverbanks were more likely to be from general rubbish dumping.

Many brooches have been found and detailed investigation has shown evidence that in the immediate post conquest period continental styles dominated, but later more local styles were developed. Around 350 shoes have been recovered, together with evidence of food processing, including the components of a mill, and some 400 new writing tablets with text. The tablets are being deciphered by Roger Tomlin of Oxford University who will be publishing the results from this in the near future.

The talk was just a snapshot of ongoing work. With many digs still in progress there are likely to be more fascinating finds to report on.

Colin Jenkins

27 November 2015

Our last Friday meeting of the year is given over to short talks by members. This year the following were featured:

Douglas Jerrold, Henry Mayhew and Putney Common by Chris Anderson

Douglas Jerrold (1803 - 1857) was a 19th century author famous in his own day but now largely forgotten. He lived at West Lodge on Putney Common; the later site of Putney Hospital; from 1844 to 1852. There he wrote his most famous work 'Mrs Caudles Curtain Lectures'. This is a series of 36 comic observations about aspects of Victorian life serialised in the magazine Punch. Jerrold had been in the navy, wrote his first play at the age of 14 and is credited with coining the term 'Crystal Palace' for the buildings of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Henry Mayhew (1806 - 1887) was the founder of Punch but is best known for his work 'London Labour and The London Poor' which he dedicated to Jerrold. Mayhew and Jerrold had met in Paris where both were escaping from debtors. They were bohemian hard drinking men who were unable to look after their money. Mayhew later married Jerrold's daughter.

Family History Connections and Surprises by Kate Nichol

A talk from research sparked off by being given papers about the life of her father Norman Nichol (1920 - 1990). He worked as a teacher at Pelham Road School in Wimbledon in the early 1950s. This led to a look at the history of the school; built 1909, closed 1982 and now converted to flats. The architect of the school was H P Burke Downing who also designed the Lambeth Municipal Buildings and many churches. The other thing that came out was the curious naming of South London telephone exchanges in the days before direct trunk dialling.

Roehampton Village by Dorian Gerhold

The present village is almost entirely Victorian. In 1617 the ancestor of the village was in Roehampton Lane and 3 houses encroached on the common at that time. There was a brick works from 1624 to 1670 when the area was enclosed. Cottage Row had been built by the early 18th century as can be seen in the first decent map by John Corris from 1787. Institutions came to the area in the 19th century with buildings housing many more people. There was slum clearance in the 20th century and the building of the Alton Estate which produced the character of today's Roehampton.

Two Puzzles from the Thames by Bob Wells

Bob showed two metal objects found on the foreshore. The first object can only be described as a mini brass bra just a few cm across. This could not initially be identified but Pamela Greenwood saw a parallel in a write up of an excavation in Greece (in French) and it appears to be part of an anklet decoration.



The second object has not yet been identified. Suggestions included part of a chariot harness, a bucket handle and a mirror handle. Bob found one part of it in 2009 and the second part in the same place on the foreshore in 2015.



Colin Jenkins