

Reports on our past lectures in 2020

31 January 2020

10th Nick Fuentes Memorial Lecture

'Review of the last year's finds from London in the Portable Antiquities Scheme'

Stuart Wyatt, Arts Scholars Finds Liaison Officer, Museum of London

The Portable Antiquities Scheme, which has been in existence for around 20 years, is a means for the general public to report anything they find of an archaeological nature so that it can be recorded in a central database. (See the link above for full details). There are finds officers based in each county and our speaker is the one covering the whole of Greater London. He is based at the Museum of London but is also partly employed by the British Museum.

The talk showed pictures of some very impressive objects covering the Bronze age to the 18th century and reflects the wide range of items that he receives. However he pointed out that the vast majority of items come from the Thames foreshore where there are now around 1500 licensed mudlarks according to the Port of London Authority. Stuart is able to get out of the office at times to visit the foreshore, in particular going down to the estuary to explore the mud which has turned up almost complete Roman pots and what may be a bronze-age timber trackway.

Highlights include the many high status Roman items from the Dowgate area of the city. For the WHS he featured a selection of items from the Putney foreshore and concluded with a find on land, the Keston hoard of bronze-age axe heads. This hoard will be the subject of an exhibition later in 2020.

Colin Jenkins

28 February 2020

'Caroline Ganley (1879-1966) and the Women's Co-operative Guilds of Battersea and Wandsworth 1920-1965'

Dr Susan Demont, author

Caroline Ganley was an energetic and active public figure in Battersea (and beyond) for sixty years. She served on the local Council, London County Council and as an MP for South Battersea, and she was involved in numerous groups and organisations. One of the most important of these groups for Caroline Ganley was the Women's Co-operative Guild.

Dr Demont painted a vivid picture of the hardships and restrictions of life for women in the early twentieth-century in Battersea and Wandsworth. When she first came to live in Battersea in 1901 as a young wife and mother, Ganley herself experienced the

unrelenting, backbreaking household labour involved in caring for a young family in an overcrowded and inadequate home. The Women's Co-operative Guild provided a welcome change of scene - a valuable chance for women to get out of the home to meet in local Guild branches, both to discuss and learn, and to have fun with parties, outings and plays which they organised themselves.

In the case of Ganley's Lavender Hill Guild, the social aspects of Guild meetings were coupled with a profoundly serious engagement with important issues of the day, such as milk supply, unemployment, and opposition to war. The Guild also gave Ganley stimulating opportunities seldom open to working-class women. For example, she was able to travel abroad to International Congresses in Paris and The Hague, while her organisational skills were put to the test in the planning of a spectacular International Co-operative Festival at Wembley Stadium.

When Ganley died, she left her Guild brooch to the Lavender Hill branch in her will. As Dr Demont suggested, this bequest was a moving testament to the significance of the Women's Co-operative Guild in her busy life.

Yvette Williams Elliott

March to July 2020 no talks were held due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

25 September 2020 (Online via Zoom)

The Heathwall, South London's most overlooked underground river

Jon Newman, writer and archivist

Jon began by saying that the Heathwall has always been overlooked and undervalued. The river runs from York Sluis, which is the junction with the Falcon Brook on Falcon Road, to the Thames at Vauxhall. It circles the low lying historical island of Battersea following the course of the old Battersea Channel. It begins from a sharp turn off from the Falcon Brook and in this respect is similar to the River Efra which John has also researched.

The names of London's smaller rivers were only set in the mid 19th century by the Metropolitan Board of Works as part of sewerage scheme planning so before then the Heathwall was just denoted on maps as the Common Sewer. Battersea is very flat and it therefore acted as a drainage channel for the area and was originally under the control of the Kent and Surrey commissioners of sewers. Sluices were used on South London's rivers to manage the drainage and where possible prevent flooding.

At the end of 18th century the area began to change and in particular when the London and South Western Railway came to Nine Elms in 1840 they built the over the original channel of the Heathwall. Joseph Bazalgette and the Metropolitan Board of Works main drainage scheme buried the river in 1865. Jon explained the principles behind the system of intercepting sewers that eventually carry the effluent to the

outfall at Crossness for South London. Even though the scheme brought huge improvements pumping stations had to be built at the mouths of the underground rivers including the Heathwall to help with flood control from the 1880s.

He then took us on a journey following the river from Falcon Road to Vauxhall. Prices candles retained the last part of the Falcon Brook outlet stream as their dock after the rest of that river had been buried. Along the way the Heathwall passes the Shaftesbury estate built on market gardens in the 1870s. This is good quality housing but when first buried much poor housing was built along its course and this has been cleared subsequently as slums from 1935 onwards, leading to the course being denoted by a series of urban parks with alder and willow trees still following the line of the river.

If you want to know more, Jon has written a book published by backwaterbooks.

Colin Jenkins

30 October 2020 (Online via Zoom)

'The Impact of Industrialisation on London's Health' a project studying the bones of Londoners

Jelena Bekvalac, Museum of London

Jelena described a research project looking at what can deduced about the health of Londoners in the period of industrialisation from 1750 to 1900 using the bone collection at the Museum of London. The museum has over 20000 individual skeletons but for this project the criteria for selection was the dates, the fact they needed to be adult, at least 70% complete and that the age and sex were known, this left 2241 individuals. Various techniques were used to perform the analysis including digital radiography and CT scanning. Medical professionals were also involved to provide a modern medical viewpoint.

Booths maps were used as an exemplar for showing how London divided in terms of social class and could be used in comparison for some of the skeletal collection. What was used mainly for providing information on social status was the contextual information obtained from the archaeological archive for each site in relation to burial type.

For comparison with the data obtained for London in the period under study, bones from a number of sites outside of London, e.g Swinton and Wharram Percy, as well as bones from the pre-industrial period in London were used. These provided comparisons for seeing any patterns and trends over time and notably for seeing what was happening in London.

The study looked at a number of themes, trauma and hazardous environments, pollution, cancer, obesity and ageing. Seven diseases which leave evidence in the bones were used as markers. The conclusions of the study are many, such as that

atmospheric pollution had a large effect in London, but smoking was not so significant. It is difficult to see cancers in skeletal remains so not many are seen in the historical data but there is evidence that cancer had increased over the industrial period. Life expectancy is difficult to assess but there is evidence for increases after 1870. Older age people are however under-represented in skeletal remains.

A book entitled *Manufactured Bodies* has been published to which the reader is directed for the full results of this project. This has been published through Oxbow and can be purchased through their website and also through Amazon.

Colin Jenkins

27 November 2020 (Online via Zoom)

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

TV and the Boat Race by Neil Robson

On Saturday 2nd April 1938 the BBC television service first broadcast the Boat Race. Neil explained what happened and gave us some background to the birth of television in Britain.

Britain led the world in starting a "high definition" TV service using 405 lines in November 1936, broadcasting from Alexandra Palace on a frequency of 41 Mhz so with a range of around 50km. However television sets were expensive, half the price of a small car so audiences were small. One of the first outside broadcasts was of the Coronation of George VI in May 1937.

On the day of the boat race in 1938 the BBC had 3 cameras at Chiswick linked to Alexandra Palace but the sound link failed so Howard Marshall commentated on the race from the view on a monitor at Alexandra Palace. The sound link was however restored at the end of the race. Next day the first ever Sunday broadcast was transmitted for 30 min from Chiswick on the history of the boat race.

The TV service closed down after a Disney cartoon just before the start of the war on Friday 1st Sept 1939 and did not resume until June 1946.

Wandsworth Families Affected by Internment in World War One by Ann Stephenson

During the First World War German and Austrian civilians were regarded as enemy aliens so were interned, many at Alexandra Palace and also on the Isle of Man. Ann has investigated 140 British born Wandsworth women who were married to German or Austrians and applied for help. The occupations of the men varied but were predominantly in the service industries with waiters at the top followed by hairdressers and bakers.

Ann gave some examples of specific cases and explained what happened at the end of the war. Some of the men were repatriated back to Germany during the war and then wholesale at the end of the war. She found that 66 of the 140 couples managed to get together again after the war. Others went abroad, many separated and also people changed their names so as to hide their Germanic origins.

What a carve up! How Wandsworth Common was butchered 1800-1871 by Philip Boys

Philip showed various maps and explained how much of the common was lost to development from 1800 onwards. The original area of over 300 acres was reduced to around 150 acres. The Spencers can in some part be held responsible for this. In the 1860s there were efforts to preserve the remaining common led by John Buckmaster who lived near Clapham Junction station.

This culminated in the Wandsworth Common Act of 1871 so 2021 is the 150th anniversary of this. The Friends of Wandsworth Common are planning various events in 2021 to celebrate, including the erection of plaques to commemorate John Buckmaster and a book on the history of the common.

A Plague Saint - Travels with St. Roch by Kate Nichol

Over 20 years ago Kate walked to Santiago de Compostela in Spain and talked to the WHS about this on the 27 February 1998. Whilst St. James is the main saint one thinks of as being associated with this pilgrim route there is also St. Roch, who is always depicted with a small dog. He is the patron saint of dogs, knee complaints, surgeons and batchelors!

The information on St. Roch is somewhat confusing. He either lived from 1297 to 1327 or from 1348 to 1376/9. He was supposedly born in Montpellier where the railway station is named after him, and is buried in Venice. But did he really exist or was he created as a plague saint to fulfil a religious need. If you are unable to get to Montpellier or Venice the church at Pendomer in Somerset is dedicated to St. Roch and has windows depicting his life.

Colin Jenkins