

47th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGISTS, 2010: SUMMARIES OF PAPERS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT BELMARSH WEST, LONDON BOROUGH OF GREENWICH

Diccon Hart and Martin Bates

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Archaeology South-East on land at HMP Belmarsh West (centred NGR 545194 179293) during August and September 2008. Two trenches, measuring 30m by 5m and 35m by 5m respectively, were excavated on the site in order to investigate the peat sequence and an associated palaeochannel. Radiocarbon determinations indicate that peat formation may have started on the site in the latter centuries of the Mesolithic (*c.*4235–4000 cal BC) and continued until the 2nd or 1st centuries BC.

The remains of timber structures of Early Neolithic date were encountered towards the base of the peat sequence. Preservation was poor and, coupled with their incomplete exposure, it is difficult to establish the exact form and function of the structural remains present. On the basis of discernible differences in the woodworking technology evident and the relative height of the remains, it is possible to perceive two structural entities: a possible north-south-aligned structure of closely laid split logs, partially overlain by a more extensive, dispersed structure of unconverted logs (Fig 1).

Radiocarbon dating of timbers from both structures indicates construction in the first quarter of the fourth millennium BC (*c.*3960–3700 cal BC). A slightly later date of 3640–3370 cal BC from an outlying post may indicate subsequent maintenance or repair

of the structures or merely an unrelated and intrusive element of natural wood.

The significance of these structures lies chiefly in their Early Neolithic date. Previously, the earliest structure found in the London Basin was the putative trackway revealed at Fort Street, Silvertown, which was dated to *c.*3340–2910 cal BC. The structures revealed at Belmarsh, therefore, constitute an exceptionally early example of human adaptation of the surrounding environment in the London Region.

The ultimate client was the Ministry of Justice and the works were managed by Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd and facilitated by Interserve Projects.

FINDS, FLOODS AND FABULOUS FROGS

Nathalie Cohen

When the tide is out, the foreshore of the River Thames is the longest open-air archaeological site in London, and much of the beach is freely accessible to the public. However, the exposed archaeological sites are vulnerable to the twice-daily scouring of the tidal river, and thus require close monitoring.

Building on initiatives pioneered by the Museum of London's Thames Archaeological Survey (1993–1999) and the Thames Explorer Trust's innovative education projects, the Thames Discovery Programme is a community archaeology project designed to engage a wide audience with the archaeology of the inter-tidal zone. This ambitious project is hosted by the Thames Estuary Partnership,



Fig 1. Early Neolithic structural remains at Belmarsh West (© Archaeology South-East)

in the UCL Environmental Institute, and the Thames Explorer Trust with generous support from Heritage Lottery Funding. Other partners include the Museum of London, English Heritage and the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

The archaeologists from the project are recording 20 key sites along the river with the support of the Foreshore Recording and Observation Group or FROG. The FROG is made up of volunteer members of the public, who have been trained in foreshore recording techniques and health and safety.

Significant discoveries made by the project, and presented during this short paper, include prehistoric timbers recorded on the foreshore at Vauxhall, radiocarbon dates for two human femurs recovered in Chelsea (Neolithic and Bronze Age), a possible structure of Iron Age date in Fulham, the Castle's ship-breaking yard in Charlton (Fig 2), an 18th-century child's burial from the Isle of Dogs (very close to the remains of the launch slipways of Brunel's 'Great Eastern'),

and an examination of the post-medieval riverside walls and timber structures on the foreshore in front of the Royal Naval College in Greenwich. Work by an independent FROG team, led by Andy Brown and Guy Taylor, in Swan Drawdock in Fulham found the previously unrecorded northern abutment of the early 18th-century bridge crossing from Putney.

Further information about the work of the Thames Discovery Programme and the FROG can be found on the project website www.thamesdiscovery.org.

SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY ALONG THE HAREFIELD-SOUTHALL PIPELINE

Daniel Hounsell

From February 2008 to September 2009 Network Archaeology undertook investigative archaeological work along the route of a proposed new gas pipeline. This work identified a landscape dominated by Late



Fig 2. Working on the foreshore in Charlton

Iron Age–Mid-Roman agricultural activity; however two settlement sites were also discovered. Both were located fairly near to minor water sources, occupied relatively high points in the landscape, and were sited on areas of light river terrace type geology, as opposed to the more difficult to cultivate London Clays which otherwise dominate the region.

The settlements demonstrated occupation from the Late Iron Age to the Early Roman periods by people engaged in agriculture (animal rearing and crop production), industry (mainly iron working), and ritual activity as demonstrated by elaborate enclosures (Fig 3) and cremations. These activities appeared to be taking place within discrete spatial zones in the settlements — domestic occupation being the most centrally located and the areas of ritual activity being placed on the far edge of the settlement, with the unoccupied agricultural land beyond.

Both settlement sites were relatively short-

lived with neither surviving beyond the 2nd century AD and with no later Saxon or medieval activity evident.

THE ROMAN CEMETERY AT 28–30 TRINITY STREET

Dougie Killock

The site is situated to the south of the Roman suburb in Southwark, close to the major Roman crossroads of Stane Street and Watling Street. Previous discoveries in the area suggested that the proposed redevelopment might lie above a Roman cemetery. Trial trenches demonstrated the potential of the site, revealing a burial dated AD 180–300, which suggested that a more extensive cemetery might be present.

A programme of full excavation by Pre-Construct Archaeology recovered 44 inhumations (Fig 4) and an earlier urned cremation. The inhumation cemetery was used from



Fig 3. Ritual structure discovered during the Harefield–Southall pipeline excavations



Fig 4. Truncated inhumation burial with grave goods

around AD 180 and coins dated AD 388–402 demonstrated that burial may have continued into the 5th century. Notable grave goods included complete glass vessels, pottery and personal items such as jewellery.

Apart from the burials, extensive ditch systems formed an imposing element of the archaeological landscape. These dated from the 1st to late 4th/5th centuries and demonstrated systematic surveying and land division. A large rectangular structure was also found in the southern part of the site, beyond the boundary of the cemetery. No evidence was recovered for a stone building; the foundations were probably formed of large timber beams that supported a timber superstructure. The full ground plan of the building was not recovered due to modern truncation but it appeared to form a colonnaded cloister, possibly a shrine.

Notable quantities of Roman coins were recovered, the vast majority of these dated to the later 3rd and 4th centuries. A small but important group of coins dating to the later 1st century was recovered from the southern part of the site, near the timber building.

MARSHALL STREET: PESTHOUSE, WORKHOUSE AND AN URBAN CEMETERY

Sarah Ritchie, Mike Henderson and Adrian Miles

The archaeological excavation by Museum of London Archaeology, on behalf of Marshall Street Regeneration, revealed an extensively used area of post-medieval London. This included evidence of gravel quarry pits and two intensively used extramural burial grounds associated with the parish of St James, Piccadilly, in use 1694–c.1790. Aspects of wall foundations and pier bases belonging to the Poland Street workhouse established in 1725 were also uncovered.

Historic building recording of a Grade II listed public bathhouse was also conducted. Although first opened in 1851, the building that stands today was built in 1928 by the noted architects Alfred and Kenneth Cross.

Multiple phases of burial were observed, with inhumations densely packed and on various alignments. Burials were located in

defined stacks and contained within wooden coffins. Biographical information was recovered from at least 90 partially legible coffin plates.

A total of 2,516 articulated burials were subject to osteological assessment, representing one of the largest skeletal assemblages recovered in Britain. This provided important demographic information and revealed evidence of a range of pathological conditions and disorders that gives an insight into the health and living conditions of the local population.

Further research will help contribute to our understanding of the population that lived during this time of significant change and development in London.

MEDIEVAL LONDON'S MATERIAL CULTURE: FORTY YEARS ON

Geoff Egan

This paper described the advances made in understanding the medieval material culture of London over the past forty years.

The mid-11th-century Cheapside manufacturer's hoard of pewter jewellery (including some unfinished pieces) is no longer isolated, with a number of finds now showing a fuller repertoire of accessories in the same style and what they looked like after sustained use. A small focus of late 11th-century Byzantine finds has turned attention in a new direction for this period. In pottery studies the detailed examination of the geology of the clays used has brought a fresh understanding of the location of kilns. The main focus of effort on non-ceramic finds for the three centuries from 1150 appears in the seven volumes of the HMSO series, with firm dating from dendrochronology and associated finds providing a close dating frame for these syntheses and finds already held in museums. This has been complemented by a steady range of significant medieval objects from the Thames reported by the finders.

Some gaps remain — the generation c.1450–80 is yet to be represented by a well-preserved, wide-ranging assemblage of metalwork and other non-ceramic items from a formal, excavated sequence.

