Reports on our past lectures in 2021

All held online using Zoom

29 January 2021

11th Nick Fuentes Memorial Lecture

'Blossom Street, a major multiperiod site in Spitalfields'

Alison Telfer, Project Manager, Museum of London Archaeology

The site is close to Spitalfields and the railway from Liverpool Street Station. It has been the subject of archaeological interest since 2006 with the main excavation taking place between April 2019 and March 2020 when activities were curtailed due to Covid-19 lockdowns. Some site work has been able to continue.

Alison gave a chronological summary of what has been found illustrated with photos, therefore only a brief summary can be given here. The earliest phase are postholes in a gravel surface, the gravel appears to have been deliberately laid. There are 2 horse burials dated to the Iron Age and 6 Roman burials. Ditches on the edges of Roman roads were also found. A nearby site had 44 Roman burials and a large assemblage of Neolithic pottery.

The site is close to the medieval priory and hospital of St Mary Spittal. Medieval walls found may be part of a religious building. There were medieval cesspits, some lined with animal horns. Tudor brickwork, Tudor road surfaces, 16th century pottery, and evidence for ovens and kilns was also uncovered. The site is close to Folgate Street where houses from the 1720s remain including the 18th century 'historical experience' which can be enjoyed at the late Denis Severs house.

In the 19th century the area was briefly host to the East London Aquarium, opened in 1875 but destroyed by fire in 1884. The frontages of 19th century warehouses, a pub named The Poet and 1890s buildings with washrooms are to be retained in the new development but all archaeology has been removed. Some of the medieval stone went to The Tower of London for reuse and Tudor bricks were given to neighbours also for reuse.

There is much post excavation work to be done with Alison estimating this could take a year to complete.

Colin Jenkins

26 February 2021

'Heritage on tap: the Young's Brewery archive'

Emma Anthony, Wandsworth Heritage Service

Emma began her talk by quoting an academic at Glasgow University who said: "Our commercial and industrial heritage is as important as our cultural and natural heritage." Her wise words had come home to Emma during her recent work on the Young's Brewery archive which is to be donated to Wandsworth Heritage Service. The project, with its own archivist, had inevitably been interrupted by the pandemic and it had fallen to Emma to complete the cataloguing.

The Ram Brewery in Wandsworth can be traced back at least to the 16th century. In 1831 it was sold to Charles Young and Anthony Bainbridge, becoming incorporated as a company 60 years later. It remained in the hands of the Young family throughout the 20th century, finally closing in 2006 when it moved to Bedford to combine with the Wells Brewery. The archive consists of a wide range of documents and visual records: photographs, minutes, correspondence, a 'Black Book' on employees, a ledger giving details of all the company's famous shire horses and even a collection of bottle labels designed for Young's own beers. Top of the VIP visitors to the Wandsworth site was HM the Queen in 1981. There are no fewer than 5 albums devoted to this event, one of them consisting solely of correspondence planning the visit.

Emma felt that the collection as a whole reflected a strong sense of community at the Ram Brewery: there were cask-makers, blacksmiths and saddle-makers on site and, come Christmas, employees' children would enact a nativity scene with live animals and the chairman would dress up as Santa Claus. The collection will be made available to the public from the spring.

Janet Smith

26 March 2021

'Ewell Pits and Quarries', an intriguing Early Roman quarry site

Rebecca Haslam of Pre-Construct Archaeology

The site was being excavated before extensions were built for the North East Surrey College of Technology near Ewell East station. It is close to the spring line on the northern dip slope of the North Downs, and to the source of the Hogsmill River. In terms of the excavation it was divided into two sites.

The talk covered three historical periods; the oldest was a Bronze Age field system; but the Roman period was covered in most detail. There was evidence of quarrying for chalk or flint over the whole of the Roman period but of most interest was the

infilling of the quarries with ritual deposition in a structured manner. It is speculated that a religious building could have existed in the vicinity of the spring.

Quarry 1 measuring approximately 13m x 11m x 4.5m deep had three infilling episodes: Event 1 dated AD 77 - circa AD 100 contained animal bones with many dogs, as well as human bones that appear to have been chewed by dogs. Event 2 dated AD 87 - circa AD 100 also contains human and animal bones. Event 3 dated as late first century to early second century is much simpler with no human bone. Quarry 2 which is much larger measuring 42m x 17m x 3m deep was also infilled. Quarries 3 to 10 are of a different character to 1 and 2.

The location of the quarries are tied to ditch termini of the Bronze Age field system and boundaries. There were also human burials related to these boundaries.

Finally Anglo Saxon activity was covered. A young to middle aged adult male was found buried in the top of Quarry 3, dated to AD 675-710, it contained a coin with a cross on. There is much evidence that the Saxons reused monuments in the landscape for burials which is borne out here by the reuse of an Iron Age / Roman site.

The speaker regards this as an important side which has raised interesting questions about Iron Age / Roman mortuary sites, boundaries in the Roman period and Middle Anglo Saxon burial customs.

Colin Jenkins

30 April 2021

Black Lives in Wandsworth's History

Sean Creighton

Sean began with a quote from John Archer in 1918. He then talked about the nature of history and where records can be found or not. There is a large tie in with the history of slavery. In this talk he is covering the borough from 1900 to 1965.

The earliest life he mentioned was John Blanque, Henry VIIs and VIIIs trumpeter. He them mentioned someone know as Black Joan in the 17th Century and the context of her life. There are local connections with those involved in the creation the Royal African Company and South Sea Company in the 18th century. Via this a number of black servants are recorded in the area from parish records, although more were visiting black slaves. John Spencer had a black servant Caesar Shaw in the 1740s.

Sean then moved on to the abolition movement and its local connections with the Clapham sect, who also brought a group of young Africans to Clapham for education. Compensation was paid to slave owners, see talk in September 2015 for more details.

He then talked briefly about British influence on American abolition and how other black communities developed in this country in the late 19th and early 20th century. There were a number of black entertainers.

Pixley Seme who founded the African National Congress was educated in Clapham. John Archer was Battersea's Black progressive and Labour activist and became involved in 'Pan Africanism' at the start of the 20th century. He was Battersea Mayor from 1913/14 and was in office at the start of the First World War.

Paul Robeson came in 1937 to sing in a concert celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Soviet Union and there were other singers and actors. Many people came to Britain from the Caribbean during the Second World War and some stayed but more same after the war via the Empire Windrush. Some of these were accommodated in the deep shelter at Clapham South. He then went onto talk about post war race relations up to the present day.

Colin Jenkins

28 May 2021

'Merton Priory - an extraordinary survival'

John Hawks, Vice Chair Merton Priory Trust, Founder Merton Abbey Mills, Trustee Wandle industrial Museum

The Chapter House is now under the huge Sainsbury's supermarket at Colliers Wood but 900 years ago this was the site of Merton Priory, an Augustinian foundation that had a church as long as Westminster Abbey. It was prominent in English royal and ecclesiastical history for 400 years, for example the first English law is the Statute of Merton. Thomas a Becket was educated there as also was Henry III's Chancellor Walter de Merton who in 1274 founded Merton College Oxford.

After the dissolution it disappeared completely, the reason being that in 1538 Henry the VIII built the palace of Nonsuch using the materials from Merton Priory. But Henry never really used Nonsuch and Mary Tudor sold it. Elizabeth I was fond of it and Thomas Tallis' great motet Sven in Allium was first performed there. Nonsuch was dug by Sir Martin Biddle in 1959 and fragments of Merton Priory were found.

Back at Merton a stretch of the boundary wall survives and is owned by the National Trust, but is in need of repair. A Colonel Bidder first dug the site in 1921. There was Merton Abbey station from 1870 to 1970 and when this was demolished there was dig in the 1970s that revealed the foundations of the infirmary with many skeletons being found. The major dig took place over a period 3 years in the late 1980s and was funded by Sainsbury's. Only foundations remained and those of the great church were carefully covered up again. The Chapter House has been dug earlier so Sainsbury's had to raise the road and leave that accessible.

The Merton Abbey Mills area was created at the same time and over the years the Chapter House has been used for many types of events including theatre performances of Shakespeare and modern plays.

Merton Priory Trust was founded in 2003. Merton Council took over the freehold in 2011. Money from the council and the Heritage Lottery has allowed the surroundings to be the rebuilt with a kitchen and toilets but there are still issues with the drains. The trust have been able to build a wooden stage and later hope to create a herb garden in memory of the abbey cloister where herbs were grown for medicinal purposed. At the moment the organisation is totally volunteer run but will need a least a part time manager in the future given the ambitions that the trust have for the use of the space.

A video narrated by John, entitled Merton Priory - History Unearthed is available on YouTube.

Colin Jenkins

25 June 2021

'People and Families of the Wandle Valley'

Mick Taylor of the Wandle Industrial Museum

Mick began with a map of the River Wandle which has 2 main sources, one in Carshalton Park and the other in Croydon with water from the North Downs which emerges in Wandle Park. The number of mills that were on the river throughout history from Roman times is unclear, but it was very many considering that the river is only 12 miles long.

Of particular importance was calico printing in the 18th and 19th century which followed on from fulling in earlier centuries. Mick then went on to describe the involvement of a number of families and individuals who had connections with industry on the river. Only a few of these can be listed here.

Daniel Watney of brewing fame had sons with mills on the Wandle, including Upper and Lower Mill as Wansdsworth and connections with Mitcham. Still extant street names record this. James Watney got together with Henry Wells and was the last user of the Surrey Iron Railway.

Sir Geoge Amyand whose memorial is in all Saints Church, Carshalton was an MP and director of the East India Company who supported the inventor of copper plate printing for Calico. John Anthony Rucker established a calico printing works at Wandle Villa, Phipps Bridge and later built West Hill House in Putney.

The Ashby family had Brixton Windmill but were losing wind in the 1860s due to its becoming surrounded by other buildings, so they moved first to Butter Hill Carshalton and later to Grove Mill at Mitcham Bridge.

Many Hugenots were involved in Calico printing including Peter and Stephen Mauvillain who employed 205 people in Wandsworth and Mitcham.

One Josias Dewye a gunpowder manufacturer moved to Hackbridge in 1661 so had mills there. At the time this would have been an appropriately isolated spot for such a dangerous industry.

The Littler Family moved to Merton Abbey Mills from the River Lea at West Ham. Prior to 1904 Merton Abbey Mills consisted of wooden buildings but when Liberty took over in 1904 they demolished these and modernised the factory.

William Kilburn produced patterns which are held at the V&A and these may have influenced William Morris who became involved with the Wandle in 1881 and whose works lasted until 1940.

Gilliat Edward Hatfeild was involved with snuff milling at Morden Hall and donated Morden Hall Park to the National trust in 1940 as he had no heirs.

Colin Jenkins

30 July 2021

Making their mark: analysing fingerprints and finger impressions on prehistoric pottery

Meredith Laing, University of Leicester

Fingerprints and finger impressions are sometimes preserved on prehistoric pottery, either intentionally or inadvertently.

Analysis of fingerprints and fingertip impressions can provide an insight into the social dynamics of pottery production and decoration. Meredith's research on Bronze and Iron Age pottery and salt-making ceramics in Eastern England is now providing fascinating and, perhaps, unexpected results about who made these objects in this period.

Colin Jenkins

24 September 2021

Growing up in war-time Battersea

Carol Rahn

"War Come Home: Growing up in Wartime Battersea" was a community project with number of outputs, including oral history recordings, a book, a theatre production and support for schools studying WW2.

Carol's talk started with a video, which focussed on the memorial on the site of the destruction of Christ Church in 1944 by a V2 rocket. The talk then continued with a selection of memories recorded on video from people who were mainly children during the Second World War.

There were discussions of various themes including the experience of bombing, sheltering, evacuation, working life and food rationing. A few had bad experiences of evacuation but most were positive, although many of the children came home after only a few months away from London.

It was reflected on by Carol that children were freer in what they did in those times. We also need to remember and almost everyone left school at 14 and started work so childhood was shorter. Education was of course disrupted by the war but people coped. One result of food rationing was that the diet was healthier than before or since.

Colin Jenkins

29 October2021

'Revealing Holywell Priory, Recent Excavations'

Matt Edmonds, Pre-Construct Archaeology

The site lies to the north of the city with Shoreditch High Street on one side and is crossed by the London Overground viaduct. The excavations of the area began in 1989 with work by Greater London Archaeology and later in 2006 by their successors Museum of London Archaeology. PCA have been involved for the last seven years.

In 2006 the Museum of London dug three trenches before London Overground was built. In 2015 PCA started work on the western side followed by excavations to the east in 2019. Finally in 2020 the work was more towards the centre of the site. Matt then went on to explain the site chronologically.

Some evidence was found for prehistoric occupation with features and a small amount of pottery and flint, although a larger assemblage of prehistoric pottery had been found earlier on a nearby site.

In the Roman period the site lay to the north of the city wall. A palaeo-channel and ditch in the west were found in 2015, and in 2019 an early Roman ditch was found on the eastern part of the site. A Roman grave was also found, explained by the fact that the area was close to the Roman Northern Cemetery. There was a corn dryer from the later Roman period.

The Augustinian Priory was founded between 1152 and 1158 on the site at Holywell Lane, Shoreditch, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist. It was thought to be named after a holy well. A plan of the priory was created in 1922 which shows that the excavations have taken place in the south eastern part of the priory

grounds. The church existed from 1190 to 1539 and the 2015 excavations extended from the gatehouse, of which the walls were found, continuing northwards following a roadway and then crossing the nave of the church. What is believed to be the holy well was found outside the walls. Part of the south wall of the church with a portico entrance was found as well as part of the north wall. Column bases of Caen stone in the south aisle survived as well a 13th century tiled floor. Shaped bricks found hint at their being a vaulted ceiling.

Excavations in 2019 found more of the medieval south wall of the church, and this survives under the new buildings. In 2020 the south transept and additional cells were excavated. The phasing here is complex. A medieval boundary ditch was found to the East. In the cemetery over 200 skeletons were exhumed and await further investigation. The bodies are not all associated with the priory as children's graves were found.

Medieval Holywell Priory is shown on Wynegardes panorama of London from 1540 which was around the time of the dissolution. In the Tudor period, the Curtain Theatre was built in the area of the former precincts of the priory. The church was subsumed into dwellings but the gatehouse survived probably into the 18th century.

Colin Jenkins

26 November 2021

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

In Search of Geoffrey Bevington and Ivy House, by Philip Boys

Philip introduced Geoffrey Bevington (c. 1841-1872), a Wandsworth photographer. Philip had encountered Bevington's name when researching the existence (or non-existence) of the giant Craig Telescope on Wandsworth Common, which is the origin of the area called The Scope. Philip eventually did find a photograph of the telescope, taken by Bevington.

Bevington himself proved equally elusive, although Philip discovered he was well-recognised in the USA. However, the recent acquisition by the Victoria & Albert Museum of a posthumous volume of some 750 of his photographs has opened a window on Bevington's life and work. The Bevington family made their money as leading leatherworkers in London and the family home, Ivy House, was on the edge of Wandsworth Common, which accounts for the their involvement in the fight to preserve the Common from development.

Geoffrey Bevington's photographs encompass travel, still-lifes, animals, portraits and his own family life and he has clearly been undeservedly overlooked as many are of extremely high quality. Philip is pursuing his researches and hopes that at least some of the photographs can be digitised (an expensive process) so Bevington's work can become better known both in Wandsworth and further afield.

The Imperial Airways Experience, flying down to Durban in 1937, by Neil Robson

Britain's first national airline reflects the British Empire at its furthest reach, and in the 1930s it too was at its peak. By the 1930s not only were Imperial Airways carrying passengers and some freight, but they also introduced a very cheap new airmail letter service - although it extremely limited in weight.

The new Short Empire Flying Boat C Class was the last word in air-travel technology and by tracing the journey of one passenger, the Revd Harold Wilde of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Neil brought to life the experience of a six-day journey from Southampton to Durban.

Delightful contemporary illustrations paint a picture of well-dressed and carefree travellers enjoying a relaxing time in lounges and eating light snacks at suspiciously small tables. However, it seems that this journey required more stamina than might at first appear. No stage was longer than two hours, as the flying boat required frequent refuelling, and in total it made some 20 or so landings and take-offs - either at sea or, later in the journey, on the River Nile. There were five overnight stops on the way, where passengers might hope to relax and forget the continuous and extremely noisy vibration of the day in the best hotels available. The cost for this innovatory time-saving method of travel was £125, which interestingly works out at not much more than first-class air travel today.

The Tunnels under Putney Wharf, by Phil Everson, read by Dorian Gerhold

Phil Everson has been on the trail of tunnels that lie beneath Putney Wharf and where they run to. Rumour has it that there was a tunnel from a monastic building on what is now Brewhouse Lane and that it ran beneath the river to the north side of the Thames and then continued as a passage to Fulham Palace, but this was highly unlikely.

In the 1970s a hatch was indeed found in a cellar on the Putney side, revealing tunnels. One led toward the river, but could only be explored a short way, as it was flooded. Another longer one was explored as far 4-6 Putney High Street and the south end of Putney Bridge. A feature which could be a tunnel is depicted on an 1894 Ordnance Survey map, and runs towards what was the site of the Red Lion pub. The replacement of old Putney Bridge in the late 1880s realigned the roads in this area and removed several buildings. It is conjecture whether the tunnel could have been built to transfer passengers from the ferry landing to the Red Lion.

Putney and Wandsworth enlarged, people and places in Victorian and Edwardian photos, by Dorian Gerhold

Old photos are often consulted and enjoyed for their topographical information, but not enough notice is taken of the people who are so often included - either by design or as a result of their own curiosity and interest in the process. Many of the older photographs of Putney are miraculously sharp as they are on glass plates; sadly their

Wandsworth equivalents are not so good, but nevertheless both provide a delightful doorway to the past.

A number of photos of the pubs - one of the centres of social life then as now - show customers and staff posing outside, often with tankards, and at the Waterman's Arms in Wandsworth (c. 1882), two boatmen pose with their oars, looking curiously like heraldic supporters among their fellow drinkers. In 1880 the Spread Eagle in Wandsworth has a mixed crowd outside and there is even a pram tucked away in the corner.

Shops feature heavily, mostly with their wares prominently displayed on the frontage, and with their owners and staff standing proudly before them. Lower down the scale a shop has a closing-down sale and there is a rag and bone man in Wandsworth selling what would now probably be very desirable antiques. Many of the shops, including a hairdresser in Lower Richmond Road and a lemonade seller on West Hill, have posters almost obscuring the many small panes of their windows - the amount and variety of drink advertised is remarkable.

Horse-buses crammed with passengers, variously dressed, fill the streets. There are children everywhere, including one delightful bespectacled young girl, and all of them wearing what seem to be far too many clothes to be at all comfortable. Hats record the seasons, with both men and women wearing boaters in the summer months, and shoes vary from neat little buttoned boots to the heavy worn-down versions of labourers. Practically all the men wear suits - even the crossing-sweeper has his cut-away jacket, which no doubt passed through many hands before it came to him.

Celia Jones