Reports on our past lectures in 2025

31 January 2025 (Online via Zoom)

15th Nick Fuentes Memorial Lecture

'Hopes and fears - archaeology in the City of London after the War'

Dr Peter Marsden

Peter opened by saying that the work done by Nick Fuentes was fundamental to the success of archaeology in the City. Immediate post war archaeology in the City was led by Prof William Grimes who was digging from 1947 to 1962, the highlight his work being the finding the Temple of Mithras with many wonderful sculptures. Another figure from the early days was Ivor Noel Hume who was active from 1950 to 1957 when he went to USA.

Peter himself came to London in 1954 at the age of fourteen when the City was still covered with bomb sites. He started in 1954 helping with recording on building sites, including the discovery of a Roman Barge in Southwark. From 1960 he was employed by the City so worked on many digs until 1973. He said that he felt that he was always in a rush when working on building sites. Not much was known in early 1960s about the remote history of London but this changed with the amount of work that was done. The City of London Excavation Group was set up in 1964 with Nick and Peter. Nick and his successors led work done by volunteers at weekends, whilst Peter and other employed archaeologists worked during the week. Also in 1965 Ralph Merrifield's book on Roman London was published.

Peter then took us on a chronological journey through the history of London. Small traces of Boudican destruction in AD 60 were being found in 1960's. Then more of Flavian London (AD 69-96) was uncovered including Huggin Hill Baths. Roman walls were seen in Bush Lane when London was being rebuilt after the Great Fire, and more was found when Cannon Street Station was being built in the nineteenth century but the records of what was found are now lost. The archaeology appears to show that Cripplegate Fort was not occupied in later part of 2nd century and that fewer rubbish pits in the later 2nd to 3rd and 3rd to 4th centuries compared to the 1st to 2nd century indicate a fall in population.

A Roman shipwreck from the 2nd century was found in 1962. This was well reported in the newspapers at the time which fortunately led to its preservation. Billingsgate Bathhouse was also scheduled as an ancient monument and office block plans for the site had to be modified. Archaeology in the City was finally better organised when in 1973 the Department of Urban Archaeology was created, which later became MOLA.

Colin Jenkins

28 February 2025 (Online via Zoom)

'A Harley Street for the Poor? The Lives and Times of the Bolingbroke Hospital'

Sue Demont of The Battersea Society

Sue concentrated her talk on four main points: the origins of the hospital; the buildings; its medical strengths and directions; and benefactions. Bolingbroke was founded in 1876 by Canon Erskine Clarke as a Providential and Self-Supporting Hospital and opened in 1880. It was a paying hospital for artisans and the 'lower middle-classes' - clerks, commercial agents, upper servants - people who had a horror of pauperdom and the workhouse and who could, in theory, afford some limited fees. Over time the hospital expanded, wings were added, including the well-known William Shepherd wing with its concrete balconies; the children's ward with its thirteen tiled panels depicting nursery rhymes; and the 1936 administration block. It is now a Grade II listed building, in part because of the continuity of the architects involved (Young and Hall).

Bolingbroke attracted eminent medical men (no women until the First World War) almost from the start, among them Dr Cecil Lyster, an early practitioner of electrotherapy and radiology. In 1893 a casualty ward was opened, and throughout its existence the hospital had far more outpatients than inpatients, leading to the creation of the Victoria Outpatients wing in 1901 (which today is the Bolingbroke Surgery). From the start funds were needed as many patients struggled to pay the fees, however the hospital attracted generous benefactors and, in addition, from 1905 there was a very active League of Friends. With the reorganisation of the NHS in the mid-1970s the hospital began to struggle. It initially responded by focussing on geriatrics, but in 2008 it finally closed, amid loud protests, and all clinical services were transferred to St John's Therapy Centre.

Celia Jones

28 March 2025

'Syon Abbey revisited: shedding light on late medieval England's wealthiest nunnery'

Robert Cowie

Robert began by reminding the audience that he began digging with WHS before becoming a professional archaeologist with Museum of London Archaeology. Tonight's talk was a summary of digging in the grounds of Syon House, to locate the remains of Syon Abbey. There was a Time Team dig in 2003, but of very limited duration. Then between 2004 and 2011 Birkbeck College ran training digs each summer for students and much more could be uncovered. Here are a couple of photos of those.

Time Team.
Photo © Robert Cowie.

Birkbeck.
Photo © Robert Cowie.

The area had both religious and royal connections. Henry V founded Shene (Richmond) Palace, Shene Charterhouse, a Carthusian priory and Syon Abbey, a Bridgettine house. The original location was opposite Shene Palace but in 1431 the Bridgettines moved to Isleworth, in what is now Syon Park. Bridgettenes are a double order founded by a Swedish noblewoman with typically 60 sisters and 25 brothers. Their original abbey is at Vadstena in Sweden and the building arrangements at Syon closely followed the layout there. Whilst Syon Abbey was founded by Henry V, it was built by Henry VI and became one of 16th-century England's richest religious houses.

During the various digs parts of the large church were found as well as the cloisters and residences of the sisters and brothers. The rule was that the nuns were on the north side and the brothers on the south side, each had their own enclosed convent and cloister. In the church there were separate areas with burials also divided in the same way, a number of brick lined graves have been found and some named individuals identified.

Syon Abbey was closed in 1539. In the final years of Mary I's reign, Syon Abbey was briefly restored but later the land passed to the Duke of Northumberland and the current Syon House is his London residence.

Colin Jenkins

25 April 2025

'Researching the lost houses and gardens of Wandsworth Common'

Three speakers from the Heritage Group of the Friends of Wandsworth Common

The project to research the buildings around the common was undertaken by the Friends of Wandsworth Common Heritage Group, chief among them Philip Boys, Stephen Midlane and Sarah Vey, each of whom contributed to this talk. The initial impetus for the research came from earlier work done on the notable photographer Geoffrey Bevington, who lived in Ivy House on Trinity Road, near the crossing with East Hill. In 2023 the Group put out a call for volunteers, twenty-two of whom signed up. Workshops were arranged and, using the 1868 Ordnance Survey map, thirty-two houses were identified for research. The areas looked at were, roughly, Nightingale Lane, Burntwood Lane, Westside and Northside, and Bolingbroke Grove. Sadly, all of the houses in the survey have been destroyed, and in some cases very little information can be found, nevertheless, much was achieved, and several talks have been given to the Friends of Wandsworth Common. The Group are still researching and are calling for more volunteers to continue the research.

Celia Jones

30 May 2025

Cancelled as unable to get into the Friends Meeting House on the night.

27 June 2025

'Mapping Rich and Poor: The Charles Booth Archive'

Indy Bhullar, Curator for Economics and Social Policy at LSE Library.

The Library at the LSE holds most of the researchers' notes for Charles Booth's great work on poverty in London and are a valuable resource for the understanding of Booth's Inquiry, begun in 1886. With the aid of assistants (including Beatrice Potter, later Webb, and George Duckworth), who consulted local School Board Visitors' reports and accompanied policemen on their beats, Booth first mapped the levels of society and income in the city, depicting them in seven different colours. The Poverty Maps were published in 1889. Two years later Booth's team began to examine the links between poverty and industry, interviewing employers and employees, the self-employed, the unemployed and trade unions in as many trades as possible, and enquiring into conditions and wages. The results were published between 1892 and 1897. For the final round of the Inquiry, the religious influences survey, the researchers interviewed members of philanthropic and religious organisations, the people most concerned with the alleviation of poverty and want. The final, revised and enlarged third edition (1902-3), ran to seventeen volumes and covered all three sections. The 450 notebooks at the LSE can be accessed via booth.lse.ac.uk. They reveal the

individual and specific data underpinning the published works and are a unique record of London life at the end of the nineteenth century.

Celia Jones

25 July 2025

'Wandsworth Historical Society 60 years and more on the Wandsworth Foreshore'

Pamela Greenwood

Pamela began by pointing out that the society has been studying the foreshore for over 60 years, but it is not clear how much over the sixty. The first independent WHS activity was a visit reported in the Wandsworth Borough News on 14th August 1964, Roman pot was found and it is believed that boats were used as it was in conjunction with the local Sea Scouts. The Thames Basin Archaeological Observers Group predates 1964 and had already been observing the foreshore for a number of years.

Virtually all subsequent work has covered the area between the mouths of the Wandle and Beverley rivers. The Putney Fish Trap was discovered in 1971. This has two radio carbon dates in the range AD 410-620 but like many other features has been washed away and Pam went on to discuss the changing foreshore over the last 60 years as it is affected by erosion and various uses of the river. For example features such as a barge bed seen in 2024 had gone by 2025.

There are numerous finds from the foreshore dating from the end of the Ice Age onwards. These were illustrated and Pamela paid tribute to three people who did so much of the work but are no longer with us, Nicholas Fuentes, Hilary Sims and Bob Wells. She concluded with a draft plan for a project to consolidate all the information about the work that has been done on the foreshore.

Colin Jenkins

26 September 2025

Our annual members evening has now moved to September rather than November.

This year the following were featured:

We began with **Norma Cox**, whose researches into Merton businesses reached New Malden, beginning with Shannon Corner, named after Shannon Ltd, who manufactured office equipment there from 1883. Decca Radar had several factories in the same area of New Malden until the end of the last century. In 1917 the printers Bradbury Wilkinson moved to New Malden, where they printed bank notes for many countries. Meanwhile, in nearby Merton, Ferguson's rubber factory produced, among other things, a large model of a ram for Young's Brewery.

Neil Robson extolled the virtues of Ernest Shackleton, 'the gift that goes on giving'. Three years ago the site of the sinking of HMS Endurance was finally located and photographed. In 2023 Shackleton's Polar Medal with three clasps came up for auction and is now in the Polar Museum in Canterbury, New Zealand. Finally, in 2024 the original wooden cross from the Shackleton memorial cairn in South Georgia was moved to its final resting place in Discovery Point museum in Dundee.

In 'A bend in the road: Garrett Lane' **Imogen Grundon** made the case for this intriguing local quirk being the site of a temporary Roman marching camp, thrown up during the invasion of Julius Caesar in 54BC. This could mean that the army landed near Hythe, followed waterways northwards through the Caterham Gap, and crossed the Thames near the River Wandle, instead of taking the more easterly route hitherto suggested by historians and archaeologists.

Nigel Black continued his researches into organisations involved in the development of London as a great metropolis in the nineteenth century. The city's fire brigade was founded in 1866, when the Metropolitan Board of Works centralised all the various brigades set up by insurance companies. Acts regulating the supply of water and the creation of fireplugs were passed, new brass helmets were designed and a rapid expansion plan created new fire stations.

Celia Jones

31 October 2025

'Barn Elms Tideway Site Report: Going to town on an Iron Age oppidum'

Mike Curnow

Mike Curnow, Project Officer at MOLA, brought us up to date with the findings at this site. He began by reminding us of the origins of the research and excavations, beginning in 2025/26 (mentioning of course the 1974 dig by WHS, which unearthed the first Iron Age PAS and historic finds). Recent excavations cover the years 2019-21, and it is the finds during that dig that are the subject of ongoing analysis and of Mike's talk and for his conclusion that the site can justifiably be termed an 'oppidum'. Extensive work on post holes has revealed three separate types of building: a rectangle (unusually), a semi-circle and a typical set of holes such as is found in classic roundhouses.

Radiocarbon dating of the contents of the ditch on the site, including a human bone, suggest that bodies were possibly left to de-flesh. Of the pottery on the site, initial analysis gives the place of origin of many objects as Marseilles. Finally, tests on the stone pieces were inconclusive, although one blade appears to date from the lower Palaeolithic period. Further analysis on the finds from the site is being undertaken - on the registered finds, on more of the pottery as well as environmental analysis of bone, plant and food remains.

Celia Jones

28 November 2025 (Online via Zoom)

'Shakespearian playhouses' or **'The Past, Present and Future of Theatre archaeology in London'**

Heather Knight, MOLA

The speaker has been in charge of the excavations of 3 theatres from the Elizabethan period so is well qualified to talk on this subject. It is an area where archaeology has greatly expanded our knowledge in particular over the last 20 years because there are very few contemporary images. The Rose was the first site to be investigated in 1989, followed by the Hope in 1999-2000 and since 2008 the remains of The Theatre, Curtain, Red Lion and Boars Head have been excavated.

Nine playhouses are now known with a cluster in North London and the better known ones on Bankside. The Rose was found to be 14 sided originally, remodelled in the 1590s to be horseshoe shaped. Others such as The Curtain were round and some were rectangular so it is now assumed that the various shapes all coexisted and are likely to have suited different styles of drama.

The speaker reflected on the importance of the preservation of these sites and linking them to the modern world, for example with the "Before Shakespeare" project setup in 2016 and A Museum of Shakespeare which is being created at the site of The Curtain.

Colin Jenkins