

A capital concern: the Institute and London's archaeology

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One of the Institute of Archaeology's main aims, as expressed in its mission statement (p. 3), is "to play a major role in furthering the understanding of London's archaeological and historical past". Here a member of the Institute's staff, who has made many contributions to the study of London's past, summarizes the history of the Institute's involvement in the archaeology of the capital, and looks to the future.

Our links with London's archaeology go back to the Institute's creation as part of the University of London in 1937 (see *AI* 1997/98: 3). It has enjoyed particularly close connections with the Museum of London and its predecessors (the London and Guildhall museums), and its staff and students are now engaged in a wide variety of research projects concerned with London's archaeology and history.

The Institute and the Museum of London

Before Sir Mortimer Wheeler became the Institute's first Director, he was, from 1924, Keeper of the London Museum, where he organized important publications of the Museum's holdings on the archaeology of Roman, Saxon, Viking and medieval London. In 1944 he was succeeded as Keeper by Professor W. F. Grimes, who subsequently also became Director of the Institute (in 1956), while continuing to direct excavations for the Roman and Medieval London Excavation Council. That agency was responsible for the pioneering programme of research excavations on bomb-damaged sites in the City of London that was conducted from 1947 to 1962. Among its major projects were investigations of the Roman temple of Mithras, the Roman fort at Cripplegate, and the earliest levels beneath St Bride's church, all of which were summarized by Grimes in his classic of urban archaeology, *The archaeology of Roman and medieval London*. Its publication in 1968 showed that the Institute's Director was indeed playing a major role in furthering the understanding of London's past.

In the 1970s the Guildhall and London museums amalgamated to form the new Museum of London, which opened in 1976. The new institution took on a far more proactive role in the development of rescue archaeology in London during a long period in which major redevelopment took place within the historic core of the town. New units were set up employing teams of professional archaeologists in an attempt to record many important sites in advance of their imminent destruction. Some of the Institute's graduates gained work-experience or later employment in

the Museum's archaeological units, such as the Department of Urban Archaeology, the Department of Greater London Archaeology, or the units now known as the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) and its Specialist Services (MoLSS). In addition, other links with London's archaeology were developed by Institute students of conservation and museum studies, who worked on material in the Museum's archives. Also, Institute staff developed close links with the Museum and with other aspects of London's archaeology: John Wilkes served as a governor of the Museum, David Harris served on its Archaeology Committee and chaired its Environmental Studies Panel, Clive Orton took over the editorship of the influential quarterly journal, *The London Archaeologist*, which he continues to edit from the Institute, Clifford Price led a team that advised on the conservation of the medieval stonework in the Tower of London, and Mark Hassall is currently president of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.

London Archaeological Research Facility

Recently the Institute has become even more closely involved in the capital's archaeology. It was felt that more could be accomplished, particularly by building on the many informal and personal links that the Institute had developed with the Museum of London. So, in 1992, the London Archaeological Research Facility was established, under the chairmanship of James Graham-Campbell and with Gustav Milne as its secretary, to promote such inter-institutional research. With the support of the City of London Archaeological Trust, a

range of collaborative projects and initiatives were then set up. They include, for example, the compilation and publication of the annual *London archaeological bibliography*, which has become an essential research tool for all those engaged in the study of London's past. This is undertaken, in collaboration with *The British and Irish archaeological bibliography*, mainly by T. J. Gostick, assisted by Kim Ayodeji, both of whom are graduates of the Institute.

The Thames Archaeological Survey

Our most ambitious scheme is a major collaboration with the Museum of London, the Thames Archaeological Survey. The aim of this four-year project, which began in 1995, is to compile an inventory of archaeological and palaeo-environmental sites exposed on the Thames foreshore at low tide along some 60km of the river between the tidal head at Teddington and the Dartford bridge – the longest archaeological site in London. The survey teams have discovered a vast range of sites between the high- and low-water marks, all of which are threatened by erosion or redevelopment. Substantial tracts of prehistoric "submerged forest" (the remains of trees, roots, stumps or fallen trunks surviving from periods when river levels were much lower than today) have been found at many points along the tide-way, most extensively in Rainham and Erith, to the east of the City. A unique neolithic wooden beater or club was recovered from eroding peats at Chelsea (Fig. 1), but the most remarkable prehistoric finds are the Bronze Age oak piles from a bridge or jetty discovered at Vauxhall, on the south bank of the Thames between Battersea power station and the Houses of Parliament (Fig. 2).

Several medieval fish traps have also been found and recorded, by far the largest of which was at Chelsea, dating to the mid-Saxon period. The foundations of Tudor jetties or river stairs have been recorded at Richmond and Greenwich, as well as the abutment of the eighteenth-century bridge at Putney. Extensive remains of foreshore shipyards have also been found and recorded, together with the hulks of boats and barges (Fig. 3), and fragments from much larger wooden sailing ships which had been broken up on the Thames during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Surprisingly, the Thames foreshore in London had never been subjected to a systematic

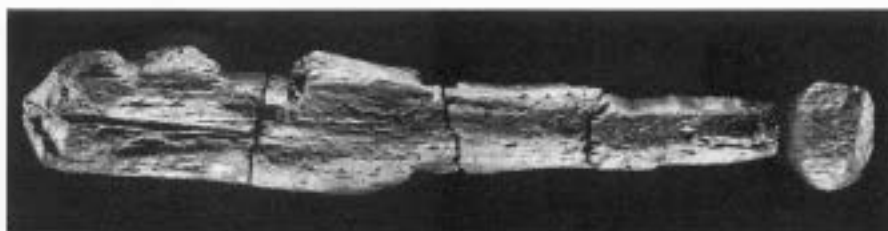


Figure 1 A neolithic beater or club of alder wood (about 80cm long) found in eroding peat deposits exposed on the Thames foreshore at Chelsea and dated by radiocarbon to 3530–3340 cal BC.



Figure 2 The remains of Bronze Age oak piles that supported a bridge or jetty on the south bank of the Thames at Vauxhall, with two members of a survey team from the Institute of Archaeology, 1998 (scale bars: 0.5m).



Figure 3 Remains of the stern assembly of a nineteenth-century barge found on the Thames foreshore east of Battersea Bridge, being cleaned by a student from the Institute (scale bar: 0.5m).

archaeological survey before 1995, but the work of the surveying teams, which have included members of local societies as well as students and staff from UCL, has yielded impressive results. The Survey is currently based at the Museum of London. It is supported financially by English Heritage and the Environment Agency, as well as from other sources, and it is generating further research by postgraduates and undergraduates at the Institute.

The recording of buildings

Since 1992, new Institute fieldwork, in addition to the work along the Thames, has been encouraged by the London Archaeological Research Facility. A programme of building recording in London churches has been started, with work in the City at St Vedast and St Bartholomew-the-Great, as well as at nearby St James in Clerkenwell, St Thomas in Southwark, and at Westminster Abbey, the last directed by Andrew Reynolds. A major long-term project has also been started in Southwark Cathedral, now directed by two Institute postgraduates, Nathalie Cohen and Simon Roffey. Collaborations include work with English Heritage recording an eighteenth-century building in Dean Street, Soho, and with MoLAS in the crypt of the Guildhall. However, the longest-running collaboration has been with the Museum of London, working on the Grimes London Archive project in the City. This has involved Institute teams recording at St Bride's church, the Roman fort at Cripplegate, sections of the City wall, and the tower of the medieval hospital of St Mary Elsing (Fig. 4).



Figure 4 Building recording under way at the base of the tower of the medieval hospital of St Mary Elsing in the City of London, 1996. The medieval remains are dwarfed by surrounding high-rise office blocks.

Coursework research by students

The Institute offers the only undergraduate course in Britain on the archaeology of Roman and medieval London. It also encourages students to undertake research for their dissertations on subjects suggested by staff of the Museum of London, which the London Archaeological Research Facility then helps to publish. Fourteen studies have already been seen through to publication under this initiative, on subjects such as Roman quays, metal boxes to protect document seals, pottery and pan pipes, medieval warehouses, churches, weights, finger rings, buckles and quern stones. Funding has also been raised from the City of London Archaeological Trust for a bursary, awarded to an MA student engaged in research on a London topic. Two students have now completed dissertations while supported by that award: Simon Holmes on a Roman cemetery at Giltspur Street in the City, and Lorraine Darton who carried out a study of the Saxon street plan.

A collaborative future

Thus, it can be seen that the Institute is once again playing a significant role in the study of London's archaeology, encouraged initially by the previous Director, David Harris, and now by the present Director, Peter Ucko. Three members of the Institute's academic staff (Nick Merriman, Gustav Milne and Clive Orton) formerly worked, as did Wheeler and Grimes, for the Museum of London, and it is clear that collaborating with the Museum is going to be a developing part of the activities of the Institute. Indeed, following Simon Thurley's appointment as the new Director of the Museum, the relationship between the two institutions has become even closer. Consideration is now being given to the possibility of further work on the Museum's London archaeological archive, the largest such database in the country. Collaboration is the key that will ensure that London's archaeology continues to be studied at the Institute. The list of over 50 recent publications presented here, which incorporates the work of some 30 members of staff and postgraduates, shows that the Institute remains a leading centre for research on London's archaeology.

Notes

The following list of publications demonstrates the volume and diversity of the research conducted by Institute staff and students on London's archaeology, 1992/98. M. Archibald, J. Lang, G. Milne, "Four medieval coin dies from the London waterfront" *Numismatic Chronicle*, 163–200, 1995.
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— "The hall of the barber surgeons" *The London Archaeologist* 8(6), 163–7, 1997.[‡]
— & G. Milne, *Ledger stone recording in Southwark Cathedral 1996* (Unpublished archive report, 1996).[‡]
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H. Clare, "Roman panpipes found in London", *The London Archaeologist* 7(4), 87–92, 1993.[†]
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— *From Roman basilica to medieval market* (London: HMSO, 1992).
— *The port of Roman London* (revised edn) (London: Batsford, 1993).
— *English Heritage book of Roman London* (London: Batsford, 1995).
— "Foreshore archaeology", in *Thames Gateway*, 23–8 (Swindon: Royal Commission of Historical Monuments England, 1995).
— "A Tudor landing stage at Greenwich", *The London Archaeologist* 8(3), 70–74, 1996.[‡]
— "A palace disproved: reassessing the provincial governor's presence in 1st-century London", see Bird et al. (1996: 49–56).
— "Blackfriars ship 1: Romano-Celtic, Gallo-Roman or *Classis Britannicae?*",

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- *St Bride's Church London: archaeological research 1952–60 and 1992–5* (London: English Heritage Archaeological Report 11, 1997a).[‡]
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D. Sklar, "Burial of a premature baby", see Milne (1997a: 92–3).[‡]
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[†] Report based on an Institute student dissertation.

[‡] Report based on fieldwork by members of the Institute.