

# London Archaeologist

## Archaeological research and education in London

The research community in Greater London ranges from internationally renowned institutions such as University College London's Institute of Archaeology and Institute for Historical Research to the Museum of London and local societies such as the Enfield Archaeological Society (<http://www.enfarchsoc.org/>) and the Camden History Society with its outstanding record of local history publications (<http://www.camdenhistorysociety.org/>). Many organisations provide support to researchers. These include national bodies such as Historic England and their Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) and Greater London Historic Environment Record, as well as museums, universities, archaeological contractors, the Archaeological Archive, the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), local archaeological and history societies, archives and local studies libraries, and various community groups.

## Research milestones

Formal overviews and syntheses of London's archaeological research findings have included the work of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHM) in the 1920s. Work such as REM Wheeler's Museum of London catalogues in the 1920s and 1930s, Merrifield's *The Roman city of London* (1965) and Grimes' *The excavation of Roman and medieval London* (1968) can now be seen as milestones in our growing understanding of London's archaeology. An important recognition of the fragile and finite nature of London's archaeological resource was Biddle and Hudson's *The future of London's past* (1973). Archaeological excavation and associated research and publication gradually became more formal after this date with the setting up of archaeological units such as the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA) and the GLC's Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA). The DUA and DGLA were combined as MOLAS in 1990. The passage of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16) at the same time formally adopted the principle of developer funding.

## London Research Strategy

In the 1990s advice on appropriate levels of archaeological fieldwork and research was increasingly presented in terms of national best practice and included *Frameworks for Our Past* (Historic England 1996). More recently Historic England has been developing policies based on production of regional research frameworks.

Issued in 2015, *A strategy for researching the historic environment of Greater London* is the final instalment of the three-part research framework for London. The Strategy follows on from a Resource Assessment ([Archaeology of Greater London MOLA 2000](#)) and a Research Agenda ([Research framework for London Archaeology MOLA 2002](#)). While parts 1 and 2 of the framework were traditional paper publications the new Strategy is an on-line pdf, a webpage, social media and links to other groups, placing the emphasis on participation, interaction and discussion to take research in new and exciting directions. We hope that this Strategy will help researchers – amateur and professional, academic or community-based – to successfully navigate the sometimes choppy waters of heritage guidelines to develop new research topics.

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The Strategy extends beyond archaeology to include the broader historic environment – all aspects of the physical evidence for past human activity. Over 300 consultees from a wide variety of backgrounds played a part in developing the document, giving their time to discuss ideas for promoting research and identifying priorities. It is not intended as the final word on the subject but a starting point which we hope you will not only read but contribute to, helping us add to it and develop it in new and interesting directions over the coming years

The Strategy ([Research Strategy pdf final November 2015](#)) sets out a series of inter-related *Research Elements* that can be applied to the historic environment of the Greater London area, summarising recent research work in these terms. A proposed five-year *Action Plan* is also outlined, including *Strategic Actions* to facilitate the development of a research culture and *Research Priorities* related to national, thematic and regional research strategies. Identification of particular projects is limited to a few examples – the hope is that we can work together and share ideas to help develop projects and shape the strategy over time. The *Case Studies* show that London's historic environment research sector is alive and well but that there is potential for it to expand and evolve.

The London research framework is intended to complement regional research frameworks for the South East, the East and the Greater Thames Estuary. Historic England are also working on a series of Thematic Research Strategies intended to help identify research goals and provide criteria for the allocation of resources.

## Funded research

Developer-funded analysis and publication work became the primary driver of archaeological research after the passage of PPG16 in 1990. MOLA, and later PCA, developed in-house publication series for sites with significant findings. Such publications include monographs, studies papers and popular booklets, and more information on this work can be found at [www.museumoflondonarchaeology.org.uk/English/Publications](http://www.museumoflondonarchaeology.org.uk/English/Publications) and [www.pre-construct.com](http://www.pre-construct.com). The MOLA publication programme has included Historic England-funded analysis and publication of important 'backlog' excavations. All the archaeological contractors working in Greater London also produce many papers and articles for journals and other publications each year.

Another important example of research arising from developer-funded or planning control excavation include the work of The Centre for Human Bioarchaeology (CHB), which was established as a branch of the Archaeological Archive in 2003. The CHB holds over 17,000 excavated human skeletons from sites in Greater London, building on MOLA work at Spitalfields. The collection is a unique assemblage and spans the Neolithic to post-medieval periods, with more than two thirds of the collection available online via the Wellcome Osteological Research Database (WORD).

While developer-funded planning control-related research forms a particularly important segment of London's overall research each year, we should not underestimate the contribution of local societies and groups. Many of London's archaeology and history societies have active publication programmes (see above) and support the work of many individual volunteers and researchers. The GLHERS consultation identified a need to audit and collate information on this disparate research in order to make it more useful to other researchers. An audit of local history research has been proposed by the LAMAS Local History Committee. GLIAS also has an active research programme

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which leads to the publication of articles and gazetteers such as *The Industrial Archaeology of Southeast London*.

## Academic research

Both the Institute of Archaeology and the Institute for Historical Research run important programmes of research that include many London topics. Work ranges from undergraduate and graduate studies through to post-graduate research and some developer-funded work at UCL's Centre for Applied Archaeology.

Academic work on London archaeology and history also takes place at Royal Holloway and King's College London, as well as at many other British universities and abroad.

Of course many other organisations also carry out important research. For instance, the Survey of London is undertaking two major new parish surveys, on Woolwich and Battersea, taking the Survey back to South London after many years' focus on areas north of the Thames.

The primary goal of all of this archaeological and historical research, whether developer-funded work prompted by the planning process or undertaken within the confines of an academic institution, is to disseminate knowledge. While all published research will educate and inform, many projects are developed with specific access and learning goals in mind. The Museum of London is particularly active in this area, engaging school children with targeted National Curriculum topics such as *The Great Fire of London* and using its website to provide resources for teachers and students (<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Schools/Resources/>).

The Museum of London Archaeological Archive helps in the delivery of access and foundation courses, undergraduate degrees such as those offered by Birkbeck College and graduate studies at UCL and elsewhere. Practical support can include advice on course content, teaching assignments, access to data and artefacts, site visits and liaison with students on the best topics for research. The Greater London Historic Environment Record also offers opportunities for volunteer work and accepts BA, MA and MSc students.

Other research projects that focus on local or volunteer work and public engagement are run by local archaeology and history societies (see above). An unusual example of a very successful project for the general public is *The Thames Discovery Programme*, which aims to increase understanding of the historic Thames. The project was initially funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, with data being added to the Greater London Historic Environment Record and searchable through the Heritage Gateway facility.

~Peter Rowsome [and Dominic Perring]