

# The DUA legacy

Following its 50th anniversary, John Maloney looks back on the pioneering work of the London-based Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA), which had its origins in the rubble of the undeveloped bomb sites that still littered London in the 1960s.



DEPARTMENT OF URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY, MUSEUM OF LONDON

This year, 2023, is the 50th anniversary of the creation of the pioneering London-based Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA), originally as part of the Guildhall Museum, which was shortly thereafter subsumed into the Museum of London.

## Origins

The origins of the DUA can be traced back to the extensive bomb damage the City of London suffered during the Blitz. In the late 1960s, many of those bombed sites were still undeveloped, but there was no official procedure for dealing with the threat to archaeology that this posed.

The threat to most of these sites was wholesale demolition and rebuilding,

*Right: Trig Lane medieval waterfronts and buildings (1976)*



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*Right: The front cover of the Estates Gazette (with permission, 1989)*



COURTESY OF ESTATES GAZETTE

The FoLP report included a recommendation for an archaeological team with a digging staff of 74 and five vehicles, and proposed that the running costs should be borne 50:50 by the City Corporation and the Department of the Environment (DoE), rather than the costs 'falling on developers'.

Following a report by Max Hebditch, the director of the Corporation of London's Guildhall Museum (*Archaeology in the City of London – an opportunity*), he and the DoE agreed to the formation of a five-man rescue team – the Guildhall Museum's Department of Urban Archaeology. Bearing in mind FoLP's recommendation of a team of 74, this was a very meagre response – but it was a start.

On 1 December 1973, Brian Hobley, who had experience with urban sites in Coventry, was appointed chief urban archaeologist.

## Baynard's Castle and urban archaeology

I first joined the DUA in 1974, on a fee and subsistence payment of just £18+ a week with no sickness or holiday pay. Along with three others, I was sent to the Baynard's Castle site.

This was a challenging introduction: we were immediately turned away and left in no doubt by the site manager there that we weren't welcome. A few frantic phone calls later, we returned and quickly learnt about the rough and tough reality of urban archaeology, but also about its potential, even in a rescue situation.

Our excavations soon located the north wall of the medieval castle, including a gate tower with a splayed window. We then had to watch while it

often with double basements, which mostly resulted in the removal of all surviving archaeological stratigraphy.

A pressure group, RESCUE, was formed to influence public opinion that specific provisions needed to be made for the country's major historic cities and towns.

RESCUE commissioned a survey entitled *The Future of London's Past: the archaeological implications of planning and development in the nation's capital* (FoLP), in which they reported that 'virtually all the accessible deposits would be destroyed within the next 15 years'.

In part, an impetus for that survey was the large site of Baynard's Castle, a fifteenth-century mansion-cum-fortress on the north bank of the River Thames near Blackfriars Station, which remained as an open site for two years without permission to investigate it forthcoming. Getting permission for access, and the resources to do even basic recording, was difficult.

*8-10 Crosswall, Roman city wall, foundations of Bastion 4A and the V-shaped ditch in section*

was demolished. However, that gave us the unexpected benefit of being able to investigate the foundations of this north wall, which turned out to be the remains of an even older structure: the Roman riverside wall.

This wall had toppled over onto its face due to the erosion caused by the rising level of the Thames and 52 sculptured Roman blocks had been incorporated into the base of the wall, many of them from a monumental arch.

## Recording complex urban sites

A particular challenge we were faced with was how to record the complex urban archaeology, which could be over 6m thick in places.

We also encountered a variety of challenging site situations, including basements, tunnels (see right), shafts, underground arches – in short, all sorts of difficult working conditions.

As was the norm at the time, recording was based on subjective, sometimes rather random, descriptions of layers in site notebooks and the creation of 'phase plans' and section drawings. There were no established or consistent methods for describing what became known as 'contexts' and plans were based on what was thought to represent a 'phase'.

## Context sheets and the Harris Matrix

The DUA introduced new standard context sheets, coupled with single context plans. Allied to this was the introduction of the Harris Matrix as a means of establishing stratigraphic sequences.

These changes radically altered the efficiency and reliability of site excavation and recording generally.

The requirements of this system placed a responsibility on site staff to define, plan, record, and excavate. It democratised site work and, in effect, hastened the understanding of stratigraphic processes.

Eventually, the trialling of the system led to the publication of the first DUA Site Manual in 1980, which has subsequently been published in more than 30 languages.

## The Finds Section

The broader expertise of the DUA was reflected by the unit's Finds Section's work on the thin-sectioning of

*John Maloney recording in the Gracechurch Street telecommunications tunnel (4m below existing ground level) which provided a cross section through the Roman Forum levels (1977)*



*Dominant House/Huggin Hill hypocaust (1989)*



ceramics. The section began a pottery reference collection, which still remains much sought after by researchers.

Other sections that made significant contributions included Environmental, Computing, and Historical Research. The Photographic Section produced

some of the best photographic coverage in British archaeology at the time, which was hugely important for the archive and publications.

## Reporting, archives

From the outset, the DUA started producing many reports, including one covering the first six years of investigations, sponsored by Mobil.

Ultimately, a notable aspect of the DUA's initiatives has been the creation of an archive that included annual excavation round-ups for the *London Archaeologist* magazine and a gazetteer for all the investigations in the City (1907-91).

Brian Hobbey realised that the burgeoning relationship with developers needed to be consolidated and extended more widely.

As a result, he sought to create a code of practice with the main property developers' group, the British Property Federation, together with the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (SCAUM).

In 1986, the *British Archaeologists and Developers Liaison Group Code of Practice* was launched, which was a significant advance in the relationship between developers and archaeologists.

## The Vine Street dig: part one

During the 18 years of the DUA's existence many outstanding sites were investigated – some 400 – and at its busiest it employed 250 professional staff. During 1988-89, it negotiated £6.5million from developers.

While there are far too many significant sites to do justice here, I would like to finish with a site that has recently come back to prominence after 20 years. A new development, called 35-36 Vine Street EC3N 2PX, City of London, comprises two former archaeological sites: 8-10 Crosswall (Emperor House); and 1-2 Crutched Friars (Roman Wall House).

In 1979-80, I supervised archaeological excavations at 8-10 Crosswall which uncovered a fine stretch of the Roman defensive landward wall (approximately 10m long and 3m high), the foundation of an associated bastion (tower) which had the remains of a reused Roman tombstone on top, and a stretch of the Roman V-shaped ditch.

The Roman wall had been incorporated within the basement wall of a nineteenth-century bonded warehouse, concealed by a whitewashed

mortar-render surface. On top of the foundation were the sparse remains of its superstructure, which consisted of part of a Roman tombstone and imprints of other such large stones.

I was intent on negotiating the retention of the Roman wall and tower base in the new building and the developers, European Ferries, agreed to the proposal and to display it in the new building, named Emperor House.

The architects designed a viewing gallery which could be viewed from the service yard. They regarded the scheme as an aspect of 'placemaking'. European Ferries' buy-in to the benefits of investing in heritage was later confirmed by financial contributions to two further projects.

First, the company helped fund an exhibition and international conference on Roman urban defences in the West, which set the site in a wider context (and proceedings of which were later published by the Council for British Archaeology).

Later, when Brian Hobley floated the idea of a Roman wall walk, sponsorship was again provided in part by European Ferries, enabling the route and the panels (designed and project-managed by the Museum of London) to go ahead.

## Vine Street: part two

Fast forward 40+ years and, as has been the case in the City in recent times, the approximately 20-year cycle of redevelopment led to Emperor House

and Roman Wall House backing onto it and sharing a party wall, being demolished together.

The development provided a great opportunity to consolidate the Roman remains and the interface with that internal stretch of wall on the neighbouring Roman Wall House site. Thanks to an innovative collaboration between Urbanest (the developers), the City of London, Historic England, and the Museum of London, the preservation and display of the remains were enhanced, not least by the inclusion of a 'mini-museum'.

It is appropriate that in this 50th anniversary year of the DUA, the first professional archaeological unit in the City of London, that one of its earliest efforts at preservation should be further built upon and enhanced. ■

*John Maloney was the Principal Excavations Officer, Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA), Museum of London, during 1986-91. He is retired and lives in Wiltshire.*

*Brian has been immortalised in the eponymous Hobley's Heroes website, which was created in 2010 and produced by former and current London site staff.*

*It contains a wealth of material, including newsletters, and is an important history and reference source for the DUA. [www.hobleysheroes.co.uk/](http://www.hobleysheroes.co.uk/)*

*35-36 Vine Street: the developer held a City Wall at Vine Street Celebration Event - to the right of the wall and bastion foundation, some of the mini-museum display cases can be seen (20 September 2023)*



JOHN MALONEY