

# Changing London

AN HISTORIC CITY FOR A MODERN WORLD

## UNDERSTANDING LONDON: THE RIVERS OF MEMORY

The Thames has always been key to the growth and sustainability of London. As our cover photo of the ExCel Centre in Newham demonstrates, it exemplifies the capital's capacity to renew itself: the great working docks may have gone but the areas they once occupied are reinventing themselves as places for Londoners to live, to do business, to relax.

Rivers of memory flow across the metropolis and not just along its waterways. Walk down any high street in London and look up. In the architectural details above the modern shop fronts are reminders of past lives, past purposes, past aspirations. Look down and see how the relationship between modern street patterns and green spaces echoes the lives of earlier communities that shaped them. Probe still deeper and we find ample evidence of the ways successive generations of Londoners made the capital their home, their workplace, their playground.

This issue of Changing London explores how a dynamic engagement between past and present can enrich London's future.

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IN FEBRUARY 2003, THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER JOHN PRESCOTT PUBLISHED THE *SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PLAN*, A NATIONAL BLUEPRINT FOR THE REGENERATION OF SOME OF ENGLAND'S MOST DEPRIVED AREAS. ALAN BYRNE, LONDON'S REGIONAL PLANNER, REPORTS ON ENGLISH HERITAGE'S CONTRIBUTION – A NEW TOOL TO HELP UNDERSTAND ALL THE FACTORS THAT MAKE AN AREA WHAT IT IS.

# CHARACTERISATION

'Areas perceived as derelict wastelands often reveal a rich and complex past when carefully examined.'

## INFORMATION POINT

**Copies of *A Welcome Home: A sense of place for a new Thames Gateway* can be obtained from English Heritage Corporate Communications. Call 020 7973 3000.**

**Further information on the progress of London's Olympic bid can be obtained from the following address: London 2012, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf E14 5LT Tel: 020 7093 5000 or visit [www.london2012.org](http://www.london2012.org)**

The *Sustainable Communities Plan* addresses the needs of both the north, where areas of decline need to be managed, and the south, where pressures for growth have to be accommodated. Massive programmes of renewal and development are planned. Up to £22 billion is allocated for planned growth in the four South East Growth Areas of Milton Keynes/South Midlands, Ashford, London-Stansted-Cambridge Corridor, and Thames Gateway. The latter area, covering much of East London and extending into adjacent areas of South Essex and North Kent, will provide for 200,000 new homes over and above the 900,000 already projected in Regional Planning Guidance for the South East up to 2016. Such volumes of development have not previously been seen in this country, not even during the post-war housing boom years.

One of English Heritage's responses to the government's agenda of renewal and growth has been to commission a number of characterisation projects. The largest and most complex of these is the Thames Gateway Characterisation

Project, bringing together the resources of three English Heritage regional teams (East of England, London and South East) with Essex and Kent County Councils. Chris Blandford Associates were commissioned to produce a strategic historic landscape character model of the whole Thames Gateway sub-region in little more than six months of intensive work. The project aimed to capture three broad strands of data relating to historic landscapes, the built heritage, and hidden landscapes associated with buried archaeology and to mould them into a single, composite picture of the historic environmental character of the area.

Part of the purpose of the project was to present a picture of the sub-region that would challenge some of the pre-conceived and largely derogatory perceptions of the area that are current. The Gateway is often seen as a wasteland of dereliction and despoiled landscapes, industrial decline and deprived communities – a “Cockney Siberia” as it was famously called in a recent *Guardian* article. Our feeling

was that this overly negative view underestimated the complexity and richness of the area, and that a greater understanding of historic character would benefit the future planning and development of homes, jobs and services by drawing on the inherent characteristics of the area. Parts of the Gateway are characterised by medieval marshland, creeks and mudflats fringing the Thames estuary which overlay numerous archaeological sites, ranging from prehistoric submerged forests to post-medieval shipwrecks. Under and beside these lie deep deposits of gravel and sand that contain evidence of human activity stretching back over 450,000 years. The built heritage is equally diverse from medieval buildings and churches, through historic town centres and vernacular rural buildings, to 19th century industrial sites and 1930's suburbs.

The project was launched, at the Laban Centre in Deptford, in March 2004. The main output of the project is a GIS map-based, interactive tool available to key decision makers and developers in the Gateway. This can

be revised and updated as further research is undertaken and more data becomes available. A summary document explaining the main findings of the characterisation work, *A Welcome Home: A sense of place for a new Thames Gateway*, was published and widely distributed to partners and stakeholders in the area. A series of regional seminars will be held to disseminate the key messages of the project and meetings held with a range of important partners involved in the future development of the sub-region. We are looking at how characterisation can help to inform a heritage strategy for the Thames Gateway in a similar way to that being prepared for the green environment. It is our ambition that both present and future communities should benefit from the fullest possible understanding of their unique heritage.

## PUTTING CHARACTERISATION TO WORK: PLANNING LONDON'S OLYMPIC BID

English Heritage has been involved with the Masterplan for the Lower Lea Valley and Olympics from its early stages, writes Sarah Buckingham. The timetables set by the International Olympics Committee are tight and English Heritage has had to work swiftly and closely with the specialist consultants to the Masterplan Team – the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOLAS) and Pre-Construct Archaeology.

Our Historic Areas and Conservation Team provided a historical overview of the proposed Olympic site. This helped identify buildings and areas of historic and townscape interest which might be affected by the Games and merit further investigation or even formal designation. Meanwhile the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) has been continuing discussions about archaeological matters. Although

the Lower Lea Valley has a poor image today, it has an extremely rich historical past and archaeological potential, from prehistory up to the ground-breaking industrial activity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The information gathered has been fed into the Masterplan and accompanying Environmental Statement, enabling the historic environment of the area to be addressed in considerable detail.

English Heritage is now working closely with London 2012, the Masterplan Team and the Joint Planning Authority Team for the Olympics planning applications to ensure this excellent work continues. The aim is not just to win the Olympic Games for London but to work towards the regeneration of the whole area, emphasising its local distinctiveness and raising awareness of its extraordinary historical legacy.



# BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN GENERATIONS

ENGLISH HERITAGE IS HELPING PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW LONDON CAME TO BE THE WORLD CITY IT IS TODAY. ON THESE PAGES, **STEVEN BRINDLE** REPORTS ON HIS DISCOVERY OF A UNIQUE BRIDGE BY THE GREAT VICTORIAN ENGINEER BRUNEL, **SARAH VIDLER** WRITES ABOUT THE EVER-POPULAR BLUE PLAQUES PROGRAMME – AND **ALICE MOORE** EXPLAINS HOW WE ARE USING OUR PROPERTIES FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.



The Bishops Bridge Road bridge concealing Brunel's original structure beneath.

## BRUNEL'S FIRST IRON BRIDGE REDISCOVERED – AND SAVED

Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-59) is so famous that one might think that everything of any importance about him and his work, was already well known. This was rather dramatically disproved by the rediscovery, last year, of his first iron bridge over the canal at Paddington. While carrying out research for a new history of Paddington Station, I found his notes for load-testing cast-iron beams for a bridge at Paddington in the National Archives. An interesting archival find, but did it still exist? On going to inspect, most of the Bishops Bridge Road bridge looked like an Edwardian rebuilding; the towpath was inaccessible, so one could not really see the canal bridge.

In May 2003 I consulted Westminster City Council, explaining the discovery, and asked how to gain access to look at the bridge. This caused more of a stir than I appreciated. Westminster had been planning the replacement of the whole bridge since 1999, and were just one week away from signing a contract for the £62m project. The bridge was due to be demolished in 10 months' time.

Westminster deserve all possible credit for their reaction, then and since. They realised that destruction of this remarkable survival should be

unthinkable, while we realised that obstructing a public infrastructure project of this importance would be contrary to the public interest. The only way forward was by voluntary negotiation. We would have to understand the bridge structure better to know if we could take it apart. We engaged Malcolm Tucker, a specialist in recording industrial structures; test pits were dug, and the structure recorded in detail. English Heritage provided a full photogrammetric survey, while Westminster and their main contractors, Hochtief PLC, provided engineering analysis. Sliding the bridge sideways was assessed, and rejected. The crucial point was passed in October, when Westminster confirmed that they would bear the estimated £500,000 cost of dismantling. By December, we had a detailed method statement agreed, and were ready to go: the bridge closed to traffic on 10 January.

The press announcement of the discovery on 3 March was national news, arousing a remarkable level of public interest. A preferred site for reconstructing the bridge across the canal has been identified close by. We are hopeful that it will be completed in 2006, in time to celebrate the bicentenary of Brunel's birth.



The Brunel bridge being dismantled.

# CHANGING LONDON – AN EDUCATION OVERVIEW

In London we are extremely fortunate to have a wide variety of properties which provide a wealth of educational inspiration to all ages, from the Roman Wall to magnificent Eltham Palace. English Heritage provides free educational bookings to all educational establishments (including home educators) who book in advance of their visit to their preferred site, providing that the groups carry out educational work at the site. All visits are site led, with the exception of recently acquired Apsley House where there is a special schools programme in place. Our new Regional Education Officer, Alice Moore, provides advice to teachers wanting to visit the properties in London, such as whether sites are suitable for the youngest age group and also if the

history of site coincides with their area of study.

Schools can access information regarding London's properties through a number of different ways, as well as asking Alice for advice. English Heritage has produced a number of published resources which can be invaluable for teachers including books, posters and CD-ROMS. These cover a wide spectrum of subject matters, from citizenship to linking literacy and numeracy to history. A new booklet has just been produced 'Using Historic Sites: How to organise and carry out an effective group visit', which is available free of charge to all educational groups who book a site visit.



## INFORMATION POINT

Steven Brindle's new book *'Paddington Station – its History and Architecture'* is published by English Heritage at £25. ISBN 1873592701.

Teachers can access information about sites, visiting arrangements and available resources via the EH website on [www.english-heritage.org.uk/education](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/education)

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## BLUE PLAQUES:

### KEEPING US IN TOUCH WITH OUR PAST

Running for an astonishing 137 years, the ever popular Blue Plaques scheme is a part of London's history, its iconic blue dots connecting the social history of one of the world's greatest cities with its bricks and mortar.

Those 'plaqued' range from the instantly recognisable (Mozart, Vincent Van Gogh, Brunel, Sylvia Pankhurst) to others who may be unfamiliar, yet whose influence created the world we live in now. With homes ranging from the grandest houses to the suburban semi, we apply the same diligent research and careful attention to all. All we ask is that one hundred years

from birth or twenty years from death have passed and that the building associated with them still stands.

With almost 800 already in place, we aim to erect around twenty plaques a year in London. Such is its popularity that the scheme is being extended across the whole of England on a region-by-region basis, starting in the East of England. Forthcoming London plaques include poet Ezra Pound, composers Edvard Grieg and Gustav Holst and lexicographer Henry Watson Fowler. Pictured is actor and writer Stephen Fry outside 54 Eaton Square in London – the former home of

actress Vivien Leigh – during the launch of 'Handheld History', an innovative new guide for mobile phone users linking them to the lives of famous figures commemorated by our Blue Plaques in Central London.

## INFORMATION POINT

For information on Blue Plaques contact the Blue Plaques Team on 020 7973 3794 or visit [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk) and click on "Places to Visit and Events". For "Handheld History" visit [www.handheldhistory.com](http://www.handheldhistory.com)

ALTHOUGH ENGLISH HERITAGE WANTS EVERYONE TO UNDERSTAND LONDON BETTER – THAT DOESN'T MEAN PRESERVING EVERYTHING IN ASPIC. BUILDINGS AND HISTORIC AREAS ACROSS THE CAPITAL ARE BEING EXPLORED, RECORDED AND WHERE NEEDED, RESTORED. THEY ARE ALSO BEING SENSITIVELY REUSED AND GIVEN A NEW LIFE AND PURPOSE. HERE, OUR IN-HOUSE ARCHAEOLOGY TEAM REPORT ON PREHISTORIC 'TRACKWAYS' WHICH HAVE BEEN PERFECTLY PRESERVED, **PAUL CALVOCORESSI** ASSESSES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONVOY'S WHARF AND PLANS FOR ITS REUSE, WHILE **ANDY WITTRICK** RECORDS EFFORTS TO SAVE BROMLEY HALL, A RARE TUDOR SURVIVAL IN EAST LONDON.

# FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT

## GATEWAY TO THE PREHISTORIC THAMES

Perhaps one of the most significant archaeological discoveries within Greater London in recent years has been the identification of a preserved prehistoric marshland landscape buried beneath metres of clay and peat to the east of London within the Thames Gateway regeneration area.

Excavations such as the one pictured at Beckton have demonstrated that a network of timber trackways and platforms dating from 3500 years ago survive perfectly preserved in the deposits laid down by fluctuations in the level of the River Thames. The trackways were a response to changing environmental conditions,

when rising water levels made access to the wildlife-rich marshlands more difficult. The peat that preserves the trackways also acts as a time capsule, preserving organic material such as pollen and insects that enable archaeologists to recreate the environment and landscape of this area of London from thousands of years ago.



## CONVOY'S WHARF, DEPTFORD: KEY TO NAVAL SUPREMACY AND INDUSTRIAL POWER

Convoy's Wharf is a site of major historic importance. Until 1869 it was the Deptford Royal Dockyard, established by Henry VIII in 1513. Being the nearest Royal Dockyard to the Admiralty, it played a significant part in Britain's rise to naval supremacy. The Dockyards generally, as major, state-capitalised undertakings employing large skilled labour forces, were also a key element in the country's development as a leading industrial power.

Fewer buildings survive from the Dockyard period than at, for example, Chatham, but they include a covered shipbuilding slipway of

circa 1847, listed grade II, and one of an important group of structures which pioneered long-span roof construction before the better-known trussed roofs.

Archaeological survival below ground is more extensive, including major features such as Henry VIII's Grand Storehouse and the double dry dock. The Basin, river walls, entrance locks and mast ponds have also been identified, as well as, just outside the Dockyard, the location of the house and garden of the famous 17th century diarist John Evelyn. The Storehouse, which survived above ground until the 1950s, has recently

been scheduled.

Until 2000 the Wharf was operated by News International. It is now vacant and the Richard Rogers Partnership is working up a Masterplan for its redevelopment. In discussions English Heritage has been encouraging not only the re-use of the significant structures and the protection of important archaeology, but also urging that an understanding of the history and archaeology should be used creatively both as a stimulus to the design process and in creating a new community on the site with a distinct sense of place.





Bromley Hall circa 1890.



Bromley Hall today.

## SAVING BROMLEY HALL

“Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach” hardly conjures up visions of a tranquil marshland backwater; but step back 500 years or so and this is quite likely what you would be seeing. All very different now of course, with one of London’s busiest highways carrying thousands of vehicles each day to and from this important Thames crossing. However, sitting literally just feet from all of this is Bromley Hall, dating back to the late 15th century and the start of the reign of the Tudors and listed grade II\*. Arguably in the most blighted and hostile environment of any listed building in London, there can be little doubt that the vast majority passing by barely give this dirty building, with its air of neglect, a second look – indeed probably the only reason why anyone might throw a glance at it is due to the huge advertising hoarding that is bolted incongruously to one side.

Fascinatingly, recent investigations have shown that the Hall appears to be the only surviving structure of the lower of Bromley’s two medieval Manors. It is a rare and comparatively complete survival of a brick structure from the early Tudor period, albeit with later

alterations. Having seen many different uses over the years, including suffering bomb damage in WWII, Bromley Hall has more recently faced a long period of vacancy, and whilst its future was being decided it was placed on our Buildings at Risk Register.

A brighter future for the building is now being planned following its purchase by Leaside Regeneration in 2001, who will undertake a programme of repair and adaptation for use as a local business centre, with funding being provided from various sources including English Heritage. As a necessary precursor to this, a comprehensive programme of archaeological and architectural fabric analysis and recording was undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) in association with ourselves. This has greatly increased our knowledge of the building’s past, and will help build a more complete picture of its many and varied uses (and owners) down the centuries. Whilst it may never break free from the traffic, its new lease of life will be a triumph for conservation and a signal that will give hope to others.



Excavating and recording evidence of earlier buildings below ground level.



Bromley Hall road frontage.

## UNDERSTANDING LONDON

In our efforts to understand London, we undertake much detailed and painstaking research. Analysing buildings, excavating archaeological sites and conserving historic landscapes – all help to build up a wider, more integrated picture of the kaleidoscope of factors that make London the city that it is, and to provide a framework for its future regeneration.

The new tools we are developing, like characterisation, are beginning to help us understand London as never before. Characterisation is not just a story about the past: it is a tool for framing the future.

There is no need to go out and create new identities for existing communities from scratch. Our intention is to help people gain a more vivid sense of place that takes into account everything that previous generations of Londoners have contributed to the city.

London has always been a city of immigrants from Roman times onward. Wave after wave of visitors have enriched the capital and made it a truly world city. In order to understand London fully, we need to appreciate its long tradition of tolerance and openness, so in our next issue, we will be looking at London's diversity over the centuries.

### CONTACT DETAILS

We would welcome comments and suggestions on this edition. These should be sent to

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## LONDON SQUARES CAMPAIGN: FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

The weekend of 12th and 13th June saw the seventh annual Open Garden Squares event in London. Over 80 private garden squares were opened in an event arranged by the London Parks & Gardens Trust and supported by English Heritage. A further 30 public gardens took part to raise the profile of these often overlooked areas of city green space. Gardens that opened ranged from Charterhouse Square through to a Victorian square in Hackney which was the inspiration for the BBC's Eastenders. Additionally this year saw the first ever garden skills fair in Bedford Square organised by English Heritage. Over 1,500 people visited the stands of 30 exhibitors



covering everything from horticultural advice, to tree care, bronze sculpture patination, home composting and railing design. We look forward to next year's event!

## CAPITAL SOLUTIONS



In March English Heritage launched a new brochure – Capital Solutions – which demonstrates in 23 case studies how historic buildings can provide the stimulus to the best new design and put the historic environment at the heart of regeneration.

Free copies can be obtained from English Heritage Customer Services – call 0870 333 1181.

### NEXT ISSUE

**One in four Londoners is from an ethnic minority group, drawn from over 90 different countries and speaking around 300 languages. However, immigration is nothing new to the capital. Its historic environment holds many reminders of past immigration to the city down the centuries.**



**In our next issue we will be looking more closely at this legacy and how London has always adapted to newcomers from diverse cultures and the remarkable impact they have had on the character and life of the city.**