



The London Thames Estuary London

Tree-ring Analysis of Ship Timbers

Nigel Nayling

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THE LONDON
THAMES ESTUARY
LONDON

Tree-ring Analysis of Ship Timbers

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SUMMARY

This report summarises dendrochronological investigation of *in situ* timbers of a designated wreck identified as the *London*, located underwater at two sites in the Thames Estuary off Southend. Samples were taken from ceiling planks, framing timbers, and outer hull planks during diving operations in 2010. Four samples from Site 1 (including a sample from a previous study) were absolutely dated suggesting that the parent timbers were felled in Britain sometime after AD 1637. The dates produced support interpretation of Site 1 as part of the ship *London* which was launched in AD 1656 and lost following an explosion in AD 1665. Samples recovered from Site 2 generally had fast growth rates and therefore relatively few rings and no samples produced absolute dates.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nigel Nayling

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ARCHIVE LOCATION

Historic England Archive
The Engine House
Fire Fly Drive
Swindon SN2 2EH

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

Greater London Historic Environment Record
4th Floor
Cannon Bridge House
25 Dowgate Hill
London EC4R 2YA

DATE OF INVESTIGATION

2010

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Methodology.....	1
Results and Interpretation.....	2
Discussion.....	2
References	4
Tables.....	7
Figures	11
Appendix	14

INTRODUCTION

This document is a technical archive report on the tree-ring analysis of samples taken from a wreck designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973) and identified as the *London*. The *London* was built at Chatham, launched in AD 1656, and wrecked following an explosion in the Thames in AD 1665.

Two sites, some 400m apart (Fig 1; and *see* Tables 1 and 2 for the extents of the sites designated under PWA 1973), had previously been investigated during assessment of sites which might be impacted by the London Gateway development. The author had undertaken diving on Site 1 (known as the *London*) in 2005 and produced a dendrochronological date from a single timber indicating felling of the parent tree after AD 1635, and hence consistent with identification of this section of wreck as part of the *London* (Nayling 2005). No timber samples were recovered from Site 2 at that time, although the location of a timber structure and a single cannon did suggest the presence of a historic wreck.

METHODOLOGY

Underwater assessment and sampling of timbers at both sites was undertaken as part of a wider study carried out by Wessex Archaeology, a Designated Site Assessment of the *London*, as part of their Contract for Archaeological Services in Relation to the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973) (Wessex Archaeology 2012). Diving operations took place in June and July 2010 by a surface-supplied diving team. The author employed handsaws and a hydraulic chainsaw to recover selected samples. Poor visibility restricted sampling to dives undertaken on high water slacks. Six samples were recovered from each site, all timbers being of oak (*Quercus* spp).

Methods employed at the Lampeter Dendrochronology Laboratory in general follow those described in Historic England guidance (English Heritage 2004). Prior to measurement, the dendrochronology samples were cleaned with razor blades to expose the fullest ring sequence. Those samples which retained sufficient rings for analysis (ie a minimum of 50 rings) were then measured. The complete sequences of growth rings in the samples that were selected for dating purposes were measured to an accuracy of 0.01mm using a micro-computer based travelling stage (Tyers 2004). Cross-correlation algorithms (Baillie and Pilcher 1973; Munro 1984) were employed to search for positions where the ring sequences were highly correlated against each other. The ring sequences were also tested against a range of reference chronologies from Britain and Northern Europe. The *t*-values reported below are derived from the original CROS algorithm (Baillie and Pilcher 1973). A *t*-value of 3.5 or over is usually indicative of a good match, although this is with the proviso that high *t*-values at the same relative or absolute position must be obtained from a range of independent sequences. The ring sequences were plotted electronically and exported to a computer graphics software package (Inkscape V0.91) to enable visual comparisons to be made between sequences.

Interpretation of any tree-ring date is limited by whether sapwood or bark edge is present in a sample. Sapwood is distinguishable as lighter coloured band around the outer annual rings of a tree and represents the part of the tree that is alive. For British oaks the number of sapwood rings is estimated to be between 10 and 46 (Bayliss and Tyers 2004), an estimate based on observations of many thousands of samples from living trees and archaeological wood. At a microscopic level, sapwood in oak is recognisable by the open earlywood vessels used for water and mineral transport. Heartwood earlywood vessels appear filled when viewed microscopically as the cell walls have collapsed (tyloses) and no longer form the living part of the tree. Should a sample contain sapwood and bark edge, the year and even season of felling can be inferred from a dated sample. Should partial sapwood be present the estimate of between 10 and 46 rings is used to infer a date range for the sample. In samples where there is no sapwood or microscopic sign of the heartwood/sapwood boundary a date will represent a *terminus post quem* (date after which) the parent timber must have been felled. The date in this case will refer to the date of the last complete annual ring and the felling of the timber will be at least ten years after the date of that final ring.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Details of the samples recovered and the results of any subsequent analyses are summarised in Table 3. The position of samples taken from the two main sections of the wreck are shown in Figures 2 and 3, derived from sketches produced by the author soon after each dive. Seven of the 12 samples had sufficient rings for measurement and tree-ring width series were obtained (see Appendix). One of these series (Lon7008) cross-matched with the ring-width series from the sample recovered from Site 1 in 2005 (LonGatew) with a *t*-value of 5.11. The individual ring-width series from the LonGatew sample and all measured samples from the 2010 study were compared with British and other Northern European reference chronologies resulting in confirmation of the previous dating of LonGatew, and the dating of three of the newly measured series, Lon7008, Lon7009, and Lon7010 (Table 4) and confirming the match between Lon7008 and LonGatew.

The absolute dating and interpretation of the resultant four dated samples is shown graphically in Figure 4. None of these four samples retained any trace of sapwood and hence it is only possible to derive a *terminus post quem* for felling (Table 4; Fig 4). The four dated samples appear to be broadly coeval and hence it is possible to suggest that all were from parent trees potentially felled sometime after AD 1637.

DISCUSSION

The recovery of dendrochronology samples from a wreck such as the *London* is a challenging undertaking. Diving conditions (generally very poor visibility and very limited tidal windows) and the sites' locations on the edge and within of one of the busiest shipping channels in the world constrain the time available for sampling and requires the use of a dive team with significant previous experience, training, and competence. Nonetheless, as this report demonstrates, samples can be

recovered and dated assisting in the identification and characterisation of historically important shipwreck. Even when samples do not produce dates, the dendro-archaeological information that they provide, especially when *in situ* observation in challenging conditions can be very difficult, can be enlightening. Many of the samples recovered came from substantial timbers which could only have been sampled using a hydraulic chainsaw. Substantial though these were, they had few annual rings being derived from fast-grown oak trees apparently of relatively immature years at the time of felling. It could be argued that this represents effective timber production and selection at a time when the Navy Royal faced difficulties in securing sufficient timber for its purposes (Albion 1926).

The dated timbers from Site 1 are likely to be of English origin (Table 4), though the high level of similarity for one of the timbers with those from the Drogheda boat is of note. The dating evidence produced for the newly-sampled Site 1 timbers is consistent with the single previous date (Nayling 2005) and the identification of this site as part of the *London* launched in AD 1656 and lost in an explosion in AD 1665. Further samples, to confirm that Site 2 could indeed represent part of the *London*, and to produce dates with felling date ranges or bark edge dates, would be desirable if the opportunity presents at some point.

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TABLES

Table 1: Latitude and Longitude of protected area for Site 1 of London

Point	Latitude	Longitude
NW	51°29.7477'N	00°44.3802'E
NE	1°29.7435'N	00°44.4159'E
SE	51°29.7240'N	00°44.4091'E
SW	51°29.7287'N	00°44.3734'E

Table 2: Latitude and Longitude of protected area for Site 2 of London

Point	Latitude	Longitude
NW	51°29.7622'N	00°43.9862'E
NE	51°29.7532'N	00°44.0506'E

Table 3: Details of the samples obtained from the two sites identified as the London

Sample Code	Timber location and function	Conversion	Dimensions	Total Rings	Sapwood	ARW	Date of sequence	Felling date
Lon7001	Site 2, ceiling/stringer? 2014, 35mm treenails	Quartered	220 x 205	66	9+?B	3.21	undated	-
Lon7002	Site 2, SW end of ceiling/stringer? 2004, 35mm treenails	Quartered	185 x 150	73	+HS	2.09	undated	-
Lon7003	Site 2, NE end of ceiling/stringer? 2004, 35mm treenails	Halved	245 x 195	51	+?HS	2.86	undated	-
Lon7004	Site 2, framing timber	Whole	360 x 360	40	+HS	6.00	unmeasured	-
Lon7005	Site 2, scarf of framing timber	Tangential	340 x 85	39	-	6.92	unmeasured	-
Lon7006	Site 2, framing timber	Halved	340 x 260	71	22+?B	3.77	undated	-
Lon7007	Site 1, lower (hull?) plank 2016	Tangential	290 x 80	28	+?HS	4.11	unmeasured	-
Lon7008	Site 1, framing timber 2017	Whole	275 x 270	217	-	1.24	AD 1354–1570	after AD 1580
Lon7009	Site 1, framing timber 2018	Quartered	350 x 280	129	-	2.94	AD 1489–1617	after AD 1627
Lon7010	Site 1, upper (ceiling?) plank 2019, 35mm diameter oak treenails	Tangential	350 x 120	72	-	1.85	AD 1556–1627	after AD 1637
Lon7011	Site 1, upper (ceiling?) plank	Quartered	170 x 100	36	14+?B	5.47	unmeasured	-
Lon7012	Site 1, displaced framing timber scarf fragments	Tangential	180 x 30	-	-	-	unmeasured	-
LonGatew	Site 1, loose framing timber fragment recovered during site assessment in 2005	Quartered	175 x 70	159	-	1.95	AD 1467–1625	after AD 1635

Total rings = all measured rings; ARW = average ring width of the measured rings in millimetres; Sapwood: +?B = possible bark edge, +HS = heartwood/sapwood boundary, +?HS = possible heartwood/sapwood boundary. All samples were oak (*Quercus* spp)

Table 4: Correlations between individual ring-width series LonGatew, Lon7008, Lon7009, and Lon7010 and previously dated site masters

a) LonGatew (AD1467–1625)

Reference chronology	Date span	<i>t</i> -value
Lower House Farm, Tupsley, Herefordshire (Tyers 1997a)	AD 1425–1613	6.49
Upper Lake, Westbury, Shropshire (Worthington and Miles 2001)	AD 1418–1546	5.61
Abbey Road (AYR99), Barking, London (Tyers <i>pers comm</i>)	AD 1314–1599	5.51
Mercers Hall, Gloucester, Gloucestershire (Howard <i>et al</i> 1996)	AD 1289–1541	5.56
Broomden Barn, Ticehurst, East Sussex Barrels (Tyers <i>pers comm</i>)	AD 1457–1577	5.50
The Guildhall, Worcester, Worcestershire (Howard <i>et al</i> 2006)	AD 1361–1609	5.30
Hoarstone Farm, Bewdley, Worcestershire (Tyers 2008)	AD 1350–1617	5.24
Warleigh House, Tamerton Foliot, Devon (Arnold <i>et al</i> 2006)	AD 1367–1539	5.20
Church House, Edenbridge, Kent (Howard <i>et al</i> 2000)	AD 1377–1538	5.12
Sydenham House, Marystow, Devon Panelling (Arnold <i>et al</i> 2015a)	AD 1266–1629	5.08

b) Lon7008 (AD1354–1570)

Reference chronology	Date span	<i>t</i> -value
Winchester College panels, Hampshire (Lewis 1995)	AD 1403–1537	7.65
Drogheda boat, Co Louth, Republic of Ireland (Daly <i>pers comm</i>)	AD 1390–1530	6.59
26 Westgate Street, Gloucestershire (Howard <i>et al</i> 1998)	AD 1399–1622	6.59
St Briavel's Castle, Gloucestershire (Howard <i>et al</i> 1999)	AD 1362–1636	6.51
White House, Vowchurch, Herefordshire (Nayling 1999)	AD 1364–1602	6.37
St Tetha's Church, St Teath, Cornwall (Arnold <i>et al</i> 2007)	AD 1386–1518	6.27
Mercers Hall, Gloucester, Gloucestershire (Howard <i>et al</i> 1996)	AD 1289–1541	6.17
Duppa's Cottages, Pembridge, Herefordshire (Tyers and James 2004)	AD 1319–1478	6.15
Sydenham House, Marystow, Devon (Arnold <i>et al</i> 2015)	AD 1266–1629	6.13
Lightshaw Hall, Golborne, Greater Manchester (Groves 1998)	AD 1414–1552	6.10

c) Lon7009 (AD1489–1617)

Reference chronology	Date span	<i>t</i> -value
Nyetimber Farm Barns, Gay Street, West Chiltington, West Sussex (Arnold <i>et al</i> 2010)	AD 1463–1605	7.94
Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge, Chingford, London (Hibberd and Tyers 1993)	AD 1398–1541	7.33
Hays Wharf, Southwark, London (Tyers 1996)	AD 1248–1647	7.11
Abbey Road, Barking (AYR99), London (Tyers 2001)	AD 1314–1599	6.65
Willington Stables, Bedfordshire (Miles and Worthington 1998)	AD 1328–1538	6.21
Croft Castle, Herefordshire (Tyers 2002)	AD 1475–1666	6.08
Droitwich, Worcestershire (Groves and Hillam 1997)	AD 1454–1651	5.71
Hergest Court, Kington, Herefordshire (Miles 2001)	AD 1406–1665	5.59
Titchfield Market Hall, Hampshire at Weald and Downland Museum (Tyers <i>pers comm</i>)	AD 1504–1617	5.56
Dore Abbey Church, Herefordshire (Tyers and Boswijk 1998)	AD 1363–1612	5.48

d) London7010 (AD1556–1627)

Reference chronology	Date span	<i>t</i> -value
The Vyne, Hampshire (Miles <i>et al</i> 1998)	AD 1543–1653	6.13
Newdigate, Surrey (Bridge 1998)	AD 1261–1639	5.53
42 High St, Winchester, Hampshire (Tyers and Groves 2000)	AD 1523–1633	5.30
Cressing Temple Granary, Essex (Tyers <i>et al</i> 1997)	AD 1487–1622	5.09
St Giles House, Wimborne, Dorset (Bailliff <i>et al</i> 2017)	AD 1541–1659	5.06
White Tower, Tower of London, London (Miles 2007)	AD 1463–1616	5.04
Yatton Church, North Somerset (Tyers and Wilson 1999)	AD 1564–1691	4.89
Cressing Temple New House, Essex (Tyers 1997b)	AD 1560–1633	4.80
Kirby Hall, Deene, Corby, Northamptonshire (Arnold <i>et al</i> 2015b)	AD 1378–1795	4.73
Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire (Miles 2005)	AD 1577–1719	4.71

FIGURES



Figure 1: Maps to show the location of The London in the Thames Estuary, marked in red. Scale: top right 1:105,000, bottom 1:75,000 © Crown Copyright and database right 2022. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

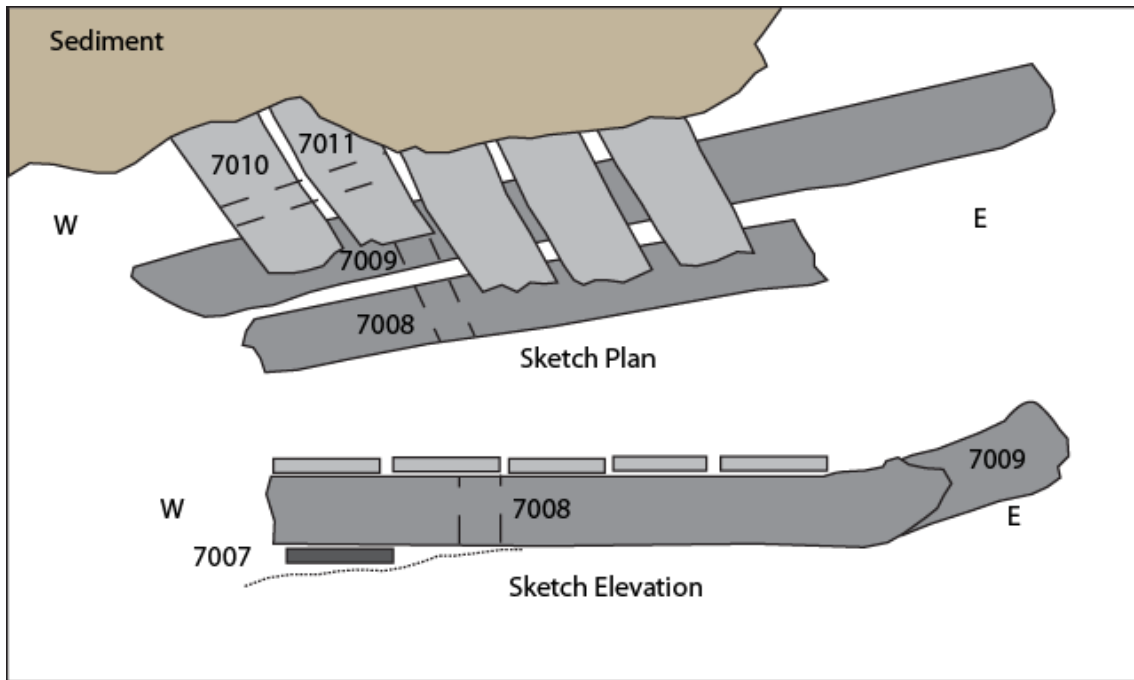


Figure 2: Location of wood samples taken from hull structure at Site 1. Timbers are shaded light grey (ceiling), mid grey (frames) and dark grey (outer planking?)

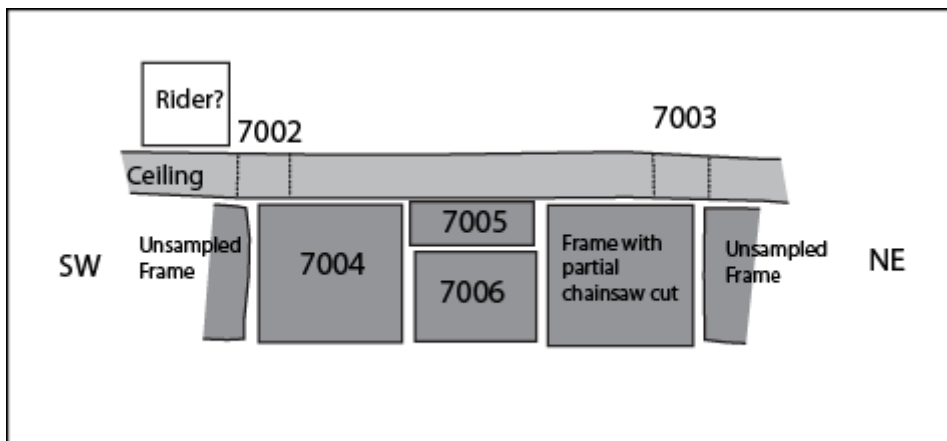


Figure 3: Location of wood samples taken from hull structure at Site 2. Timbers are shaded light grey (ceiling), mid grey (frames)

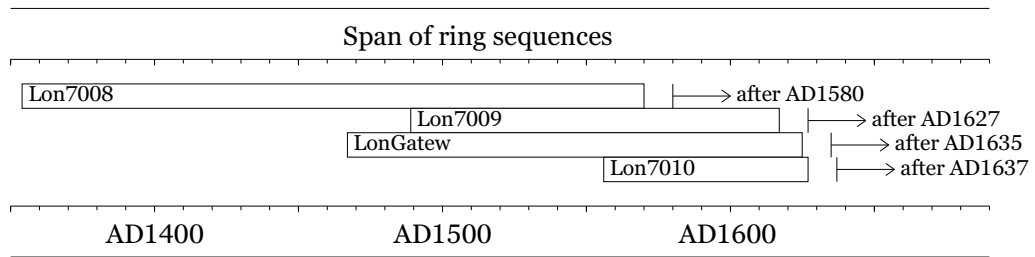


Figure 4: Bar diagram showing relative positions, and individual felling dates, of the four dated samples from site 1 of the designated wreck the London. White bars = heartwood rings

APPENDIX

Raw ring-width data in units of 0.01mm

Lon7001

361	299	433	289	280	305	385	252	422	544
462	570	377	433	319	622	469	487	425	369
336	242	262	283	297	234	179	202	238	249
232	181	243	253	278	316	274	327	206	227
226	272	328	248	264	355	284	329	308	352
456	324	381	272	365	398	418	386	284	343
269	221	230	229	266	223				

Lon7002

236	289	238	324	283	260	239	131	251	266
244	374	606	524	352	271	174	129	170	157
245	224	187	225	196	303	250	445	305	309
260	158	210	238	191	274	201	221	231	160
198	178	136	166	261	151	163	277	194	165
134	142	126	158	148	152	123	164	121	143
127	144	146	141	154	168	169	102	96	100
97	91	86							

Lon7003

678	292	312	283	339	322	262	154	247	305
281	139	200	120	266	225	350	330	256	213
201	253	414	430	581	489	389	393	340	387
270	385	335	378	315	210	374	367	335	268
294	296	236	170	119	97	145	86	143	146

148

Lon7006

357	825	889	830	669	576	574	751	567	387
641	408	559	511	746	432	460	312	348	339
361	465	490	401	555	516	372	514	529	464
452	397	347	232	195	268	286	355	251	377
383	307	305	343	339	442	290	308	313	308
216	258	275	132	237	144	329	260	256	379
170	163	168	174	166	209	221	224	137	192

90

Lon7008

92	39	47	59	74	64	83	97	245	94
68	164	203	169	236	413	372	264	243	147
218	159	106	109	104	110	122	148	174	168
227	484	309	149	116	86	70	130	87	105
88	96	109	122	250	242	345	428	276	220
206	160	147	159	216	173	154	92	118	144
103	110	141	180	256	117	182	130	75	178
117	97	103	112	209	234	175	177	237	259
206	197	166	213	162	162	108	95	60	82
160	109	113	129	176	216	142	181	98	130
163	142	174	158	226	142	216	121	114	92
65	80	93	106	141	134	208	143	123	86
83	165	132	95	111	118	63	68	62	75
133	154	189	146	122	102	104	117	77	101
124	90	139	75	66	94	121	119	119	124

90	135	118	105	91	99	71	68	65	57
73	54	44	62	56	63	68	96	149	73
75	63	73	96	115	78	59	70	68	84
93	93	62	55	60	113	81	84	68	58
54	46	64	55	61	54	60	60	38	41
48	64	52	79	78	78	64	42	34	36
50	42	43	39	41	43	43			
Lon7009									
397	470	418	277	455	473	332	407	392	241
352	311	400	362	432	424	412	417	518	437
354	477	418	493	398	547	463	287	275	420
464	241	299	449	413	391	309	379	384	338
432	462	639	451	496	490	590	609	409	354
299	313	293	219	323	253	431	364	322	405
318	346	543	417	255	344	393	236	323	352
425	227	226	181	219	309	345	151	138	223
221	197	256	183	155	228	166	167	175	142
115	234	194	162	216	189	148	213	217	152
193	188	155	177	199	254	172	163	152	99
116	184	144	164	135	146	111	141	130	156
115	88	136	115	190	118	127	146	151	
Lon7010									
259	187	184	330	459	412	526	334	257	103
100	201	232	230	222	349	189	131	95	93
54	112	82	176	288	207	120	174	204	351
161	150	101	206	117	112	155	156	226	197
219	209	179	103	155	174	236	199	214	133
199	148	201	129	143	160	171	158	157	153
149	145	121	114	146	161	166	127	133	150
133	99								
LonGatew									
196	181	195	302	152	144	137	210	291	290
189	193	229	201	358	166	120	150	192	272
227	169	124	120	202	155	211	294	212	419
211	258	206	137	164	209	182	189	229	265
217	181	235	161	186	203	223	230	216	179
328	324	330	133	196	227	167	114	147	110
110	151	119	81	118	114	237	265	210	254
258	227	241	233	499	236	301	242	170	254
204	176	258	176	252	123	124	170	186	118
123	114	143	194	187	224	143	233	409	151
188	188	186	191	201	248	236	179	139	116
218	167	343	171	133	337	218	180	179	201
167	164	160	147	237	135	116	274	216	128
93	94	81	117	183	208	229	162	199	310
150	271	178	149	147	108	210	240	149	126
112	131	156	207	242	167	78	121	142	



Historic England Research and the Historic Environment

We are the public body that looks after England's historic environment. We champion historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.

A good understanding of the historic environment is fundamental to ensuring people appreciate and enjoy their heritage and provides the essential first step towards its effective protection.

Historic England works to improve care, understanding and public enjoyment of the historic environment. We undertake and sponsor authoritative research. We develop new approaches to interpreting and protecting heritage and provide high quality expert advice and training.

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