



CoLAT
The City of London
Archaeological Trust

Written in our bones

New research to shed fresh light on the impact of industrialisation

PRESS RELEASE

24 April 2015

The Museum of London today announced a ground-breaking research project to explore the effects of industrialisation on Londoners. The research hopes to uncover new clues about the very nature of disease and how it has affected people as Britain has moved into the age of industrialisation.

The research has been made possible by a City of London Archaeological Trust grant from a bequest made by the late Rosemary Green.

John Schofield, Secretary of the City of London Archaeological Trust, said: “The City of London Archaeological Trust is very happy that the Rosemary Green bequest is used to gather this cutting-edge data on the signs of industrialisation in the skeletal collections on the Museum of London.”

Leading the project is Jelena Bekvalac, based at the Museum of London’s Centre for Human Bioarcheology, along with her research team, Gaynor Western and Mark Farmer.

Jelena Bekvalac, said: “The most tangible evidence we have for the long-term consequences of the industrialisation process upon us is, quite simply, written in our bones. Using the very latest digital technology, we will examine the skeletal remains of over 1,000 adult men and women from industrial-era London in addition to a further 500 skeletons from the medieval metropolis.

“Modern health trends have seen a shift towards increasing life expectancy but we want to look again at what are often thought of as ‘man-made’ conditions like obesity and cancer. Given today’s more sedentary lifestyles, far removed from the physically active and natural existence of most of our forebears, there are some big questions about the origins of these diseases and how they relate to the modern environment.”

The research aims to address some of these questions by analysing diseases affecting the human skeleton. The museum will use the latest clinical techniques, including digital X-Ray scanning, to get a better understanding of what the bones in its collection tell us and to assess their change over time. The research aims to examine the influence of the industrial revolution, a pivotal catalyst in the formation of the modern age, on the changing nature of disease – from the medieval and post-medieval periods through to the present day.

The project offers an exciting opportunity to digitise some of London’s most important skeletal collections, while simultaneously telling a new story about the health of Londoners over time.

This work will culminate in the creation of an extensive new interactive digital resource that can be explored online. Jelena Bekvalac plans to make an immediate start on the digital scanning. She aims to publish her team's findings as soon as possible and deliver a series of lectures about the work.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

For more press information please contact Laura Mitchell, Media Officer, Museum of London (0)20 7814 5502 / 07713 565 806 / lmitchell@museumoflondon.org.uk

About The Museum of London

The Museum of London tells the ever-changing story of this great world city and its people, from 450,000 BC to the present day. Our galleries, exhibitions, displays and activities seek to inspire a passion for London and provide a sense of the vibrancy that makes the city such a unique place.

The museums are open daily 10am – 6pm and are FREE to all, and you can explore the Museum of London with collections online – home to 80,000 objects with more being added.

www.museumoflondon.org.uk

About The City of London Archaeological Trust

The City of London Archaeological Trust (CoLAT) is a charity whose purpose is to support and initiate archaeological work in the City of London and its environs. CoLAT was formed on 25 July 1974. The Trust is administered by a Management Committee comprising four nominees of the Court of Common Council of the Corporation of the City of London, representatives of the Society of Antiquaries, UCL Institute of Archaeology and the Council for British Archaeology, and other invited academics, along with the Director of the Museum of London and the Chief Executive of Museum of London Archaeology.

The Trust supports all kinds of archaeological work and the exhibition of archaeological sites and concentrates on educational or research activities, within or in addition to existing research frameworks.

www.colat.org.uk