



Market Place dig delves through the centuries

By John Lawrence

Layers of history were uncovered when a team of archaeologists dug into the ground of Market Place on a spot that was once at the bustling centre of village life in East Finchley.

Members of the Hendon and District Archaeological Society spent two days sinking pits on the grass area next to the children's playground, where in the 19th century stood a Post Office, shops and cottages.

Artefacts from that period were pulled from the ground, including crockery and medicine bottles, and towards the end of the dig the team reached the remains of an even older brick floor where they found pottery items dating as far back as the 1500s or 1600s.

"This is like a treasure trove for us," said the society's Janet Mortimer. "The amount of items we are finding suggests we are digging into the garden or kitchen area of the homes that used to stand here."

Post-war dump with finds below

Careful measurements of the grass area and comparisons with old maps proved that the dig site had probably been used as a dump for rubble and sand when much of Market Place and Chapel Court was cleared for rebuilding following bomb damage in the Second World War.

This meant there were more layers of soil to get through before any items of interest could be discovered. One test

pit did not give much away but a second yielded a string of finds, including a fragment of a plate bearing the coat of arms of the City of London and a fully intact glass bottle for Kutnow's Powder, a 19th century remedy that claimed to treat headaches, indigestion, diabetes, liver problems and gout.



Me old china: A plate fragment pulled from the ground

Dozens of onlookers turned up throughout the weekend to watch the dig in progress. Easily seen in the 1m x 1m holes were different earth layers, with light-coloured sand on top giving way to a darker layer with more ash content, indicating a period of intense human habitation.

The archaeologists hope they will be given permission to return to the dig to see what more the older layers can reveal. In the meantime, they will be cleaning off the items they've already found, ready for fuller identification and cataloguing.



Going underground: The dig in full swing at the Market Place site. Photo Mike Coles

When pig traders came from far afield

Market Place and its surrounding roads were once packed with cottages and shops, largely thanks to pigs, as this pocket history from the Barnet Council archives reveals. "The Market Place takes its name from a large pig market which started around the 1660s. By the end of the 18th century the [then East End, Finchley] pig market was the largest in Middlesex, with market days on Wednesday and Thursday. Pig drovers from as far away as Shropshire would sell the pigs to London butchers or to local farmers.

"Deals were done at houses with names like *The Sow and Pigs*. It was said that the pigs were fed on grain that had been used for distilling gin. After his arrest, the highwayman Jack Sheppard was held at *The George Inn* in Market Place, disguised as a butcher.

"By the 1840s the market had decreased in importance and was only held on Mondays. By the 1890s there were only auctions every few months. However the pig tradition continued and, in 1955, 25 pigs were kept around Prospect Place and at the Fuel Land Allotments [over on the High Road].

"Prospect Place was built during the 1820s and Chapel Street took its name from the Congregational chapel on the [High Road]. By the 1930s



Closely packed: Cottages and shops occupied the site in Victorian times

the area was considered in need, as many of the houses were small and not suitable for living in.

"On 15 November 1940 the area was heavily bombed during the Blitz. Many of the houses were destroyed. In

the early 1960s [the whole area was cleared and] three 11-storey flats were built [in the new Prospect Ring and Norfolk Close], the first being opened in April 1960 by Margaret Thatcher, then MP for Finchley.

A cure-all... and a case of murder

Thrown away possibly more than a century ago and uncovered by the Market Place dig was a rectangular glass medicine bottle that once contained a popular remedy called Kutnow's Powder.

Sold throughout the late Victorian period and well into the 20th century, Kutnow's was an effervescent saline powder that claimed to be effective in treating headaches, indigestion, gout and a range of other ailments.

The neat pale blue bottle it came in measures around 11cm tall and would have once contained a glass or rubber stopper. The name of the product is emblazoned on the side in raised lettering.

Sinister sample

Kutnow's also has a fascinating connection to a notorious murder case. In November 1898, Henry Barnett died after taking a dose from a sample tin of the powder that had arrived unsolicited to his address in New York.

The powder was later analysed and found to contain cyanide. It was strongly suspected, but never proved, that the product had been tampered



Glass find: Archaeologist Janet Mortimer with the Kutnow's bottle

with by Barnett's friend Roland Molineux, a chemist who also happened to be his rival for the affections of a beautiful woman called Blanche Cheseborough. Roland and Blanche went on to marry but their union ended just four years later in bitter divorce.

Any bones yet?

One young dinosaur fan who turned up to watch the Market Place dig on its second day arrived in his *Jurassic Park* jacket with high expectations. He asked the excavation team plenty of questions and seemed very interested, even though there were no immediate signs of prehistoric fossils. "Children are often fascinated by what we do," said Janet Mortimer, from the Hendon and District Archaeological Society. "Fossils from the dinosaur period do turn up at certain sites if you are lucky. Around this part of East Finchley, we have to be honest, you would have to go down pretty deep to find anything from that era."

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