

## **CROSSRAIL: RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK IN WEST LONDON**

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*Report by John Spears*

Andy first described the Crossrail project, as a brand new railway running from Shenfield to West London with links to Reading and the West of England. He is concerned with the archaeology of a section running from Tottenham Court Road to Royal Oak. He also looked forward to investigating a later development of the project at Ilford depot where previous excavations found 1,600 fossil bones, a hand-axe and the famous Ilford mammoth.

Excavations at Royal Oak, where the new line becomes over-ground, has identified traces of river beds which once flowed towards the Thames. Within the river-beds, deep underground, were found bones from a prehistoric ox and a reindeer bone with scores which might have been animal tooth-marks or made by an early human butcher. Traces of flora indicated the area was once (50-70,000 years ago) open grassland where perhaps animals wintered because of the ample water supply. The climate was perhaps similar to that of Northern Scotland today.

Andy explained that the vast amount of soil excavated by the project is taken to Wallasea Island where it will be used to create a wildlife nature reserve.

The lecture then moved forward 70,000 years to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and changed from classical to industrial archaeology with the coming of the Great Western Railway. He described the building of the GWR running from Bristol to London by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and engineer David Gooch. The line was originally projected to terminate at the Euston Arch, but disagreement between the companies resulting to a temporary terminus at Paddington Station. The line opened in 1841. The original station was later demolished and a new station built nearby which opened in 1854. Andy hopes to investigate the site of the original station within his work with the Crossrail project.

He explained how Brunel over-engineered most of his development and how he built the GWR to a broad gauge of 7' ¼" instead of the standard gauge of 4' 8½" to give faster running and a more comfortable ride to passengers, but of course this increased costs. However, the GWR eventually converted to standard gauge in 1892. Some of Brunel's track has been uncovered. It had no sleepers but rail supports.

Andy showed slides of Old Oak Common where in 1903 a railway maintenance depot was built, including slides of steam locomotives, a turntable, archaeological finds of porcelain ware, a letterbox and graffiti. The turntable was restored after 1965 when steam was replaced by diesel power. Andy is clearly a railway enthusiast and has a collection of railway memorabilia. Altogether an interesting lecture which scanned 70,000 years in 60 minutes!

