


LOST + FOUND





Untold histories of maritime
Greenwich and Deptford revealed
through a mudlark's finds

Thames Festival Trust

Made possible with

Heritage Fund

Photograph by Hannah Smiles

Since moving to South East London from Cornwall in the late 1990s, I have become fascinated with the rich maritime histories that Greenwich and Deptford hold. The objects I have discovered while mudlarking on the River Thames have led me to unearth countless stories of people who once lived and worked in these areas centuries ago, as well as places that no longer exist. When I hold these objects in my hand, it feels as if they are brought back to life for a short while. The joy that mudlarking has given me has been enhanced many times over by sharing these objects, and my research about them, with other people around the world on my YouTube channel.

When Adrian Evans approached me to collaborate with Thames Festival Trust on Lost & Found, I was thrilled to think that some of the precious things I had unearthed would be brought into the limelight and that new perspectives on their histories might be revealed. I remember exactly on what day, and in which location on the foreshore, each of the ten objects in this book were found. I have seen for myself how these objects have inspired the trainees too, and I'm excited that they are now reaching a whole new audience through their meticulous research and Hannah Smiles' stunning photography.

Unlocking forgotten memories from the mud of the Thames and giving a voice to people long gone; this continues to be my passion. I believe that objects find us as much as we find them.

Nicola White
Thames mudlark

Top: Lost & Found Heritage Trainees 2025.

Bottom: Samiha Hassan inspects a barnacle.

Photographs taken at Creekside Discovery Centre, Deptford, by Jon Barlow.

Introduction

By Tom Chivers
Heritage Project Manager,
Thames Festival Trust

Greenwich and Deptford are areas rich in shipbuilding and other maritime heritage, as well as archaeology, ecology and local history. But the stories of everyday life, and particularly the experiences of those connected with maritime industries and communities, are largely submerged within written records. In Lost & Found, a diverse group of heritage trainees were tasked with revealing these untold histories using objects found on the Thames foreshore by mudlark Nicola White.

This project, produced by Thames Festival Trust and made possible by a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, combined object research with a tailored programme of training. Paid traineeships were offered to a group of young Londoners to provide them with new skills, experiences and confidence to support them to enter the heritage sector. From over 200 applicants, 10 trainees, aged between 21 and 26, were selected: Isidora Bethell, Anna Freed, Gwena Harman, Samiha Hassan, Nadia Hirsi, George Jones, Claire Lacaden, Abondance Matanda, Jude Pretoria and Ted Tinkler.

Over a seven-week period in summer 2025, the trainees and I visited heritage sites across the city including the Cutty Sark, London Museum Docklands and the London Archives, and met a range of experts and heritage professionals – from curators and archivists to archaeologists and mudlarks. We went on walking tours of Greenwich and Deptford, waded through Deptford Creek at low tide, and explored the foreshore of the River Thames. On the first day of the project, the trainees were invited to select from Nicola White's extraordinary collection an object (or group of objects) found on the foreshore in Greenwich and Deptford. It was a bit like speed dating. Once matched, these intriguing, complex and meaningful finds provided the trainees with opportunities to research people, places and activities which are overlooked or not usually recorded in written history. This book is the result of that endeavour.

*

The thing about objects mudlarked from the Thames is that you can hold them in your hand. Pulled from the anaerobic mud of the riverbed at low tide, they emit a strange energy, possessing what the philosopher Jane Bennett calls *vitality*; objects like these, she writes, have 'trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own'.[1] The essays that follow, and the beautiful photographs by Hannah Smiles that accompany them, are attentive to the vital materiality of these things – objects made of iron, lead, pewter, wood, clay, shell and bone – as well as to the varied lives (and afterlives) that led to their discovery on the Thames foreshore.

Some of the objects – a turtle rib from the Caribbean, a power figure from the Congo River – have travelled thousands of miles before being deposited in the river at Greenwich or Deptford. Others – iron nails, a pewter medal, a sherd of Staffordshire pottery – were produced closer to home, in the workshops and factories of the Industrial Age. Others still were handcrafted by people who lived and worked in London's maritime communities: lead gaming pieces that may have been made by convicts incarcerated on the prison hulks of Woolwich; a tiny, pipeclay figurine of a woman whose precise origin remains unknown.

Two of the objects were produced specifically for children (a demographic often overlooked by historians) and are products of the great social reform movements of the 19th century: abolitionism and temperance. Others raise ethical and political questions that are as relevant today as they were in the past. A pewter syringe designed to treat sexually transmitted infections prompts reflection on the provision of medical care for marginalised groups. Iron ships' nails stamped with the broad arrow – to mark them out as government property – are read through the lens of working-class resistance. Barnacles and a turtle rib reveal the entanglement of the human and the other-than-human, drawing our attention to both the legacies of colonialism and ongoing environmental crises in the world.

We can be fairly certain that some of the objects – the ships' nails, barnacles and turtle rib – were dumped or abandoned in the Thames as waste, having come to the end of their use-lives. But others may have been invested with sacred power or personal meanings about which we can only speculate. Could the pipeclay figurine represent the goddess Venus, the Virgin Mary or a sailor's loved one? Is the *Nkisi Kozo* power figure a ritual offering or the survivor of colonial collecting? Was the Band of Hope medal cast into the river as a renunciation of the principles of temperance?

The essays in this book generate speculative, multiple histories, prompting new questions about the dating, provenance, manufacture and use of these beguiling finds from the foreshore. Together, they remind us that material culture is the product of dynamic exchange across space and time; it is never static. These are artefacts (and ecofacts) that 'evade precise categorisation', as Anna Freed writes in her examination of a mermaid deity figure. 'Like water,' she continues, 'they are fluid, flowing into each other with shifting meanings.' The trainees' research brought these forgotten objects on new journeys too – carried across modern London to be analysed by X-ray and XRF scanner, and by the attuned eyes of experts. They have inspired visits to archives and museums, and led to unexpected conversations with archaeologists, historians, curators, spiritual practitioners and each other.

Left: Jude Pretoria holds a Band of Hope medal.

Right: Claire Lacaden holds a pipeclay figurine.

Photographs taken at Creekside Discovery Centre, Deptford, by Jon Barlow.

I think of mudlarking as a form of 'unofficial' or *counter*-heritage.[2] Mudlarks' finds, salvaged from the dumped detritus and casual losses of the river, reflect the everyday lives of people in the past with an immediacy often absent in conventional heritage settings. As the essays that follow demonstrate, these objects shed light on the connections between the local and the global; the hidden networks of power, meaning and movement that make the Thames foreshore such a powerful repository of alternative histories – 'an archive like no other' as mudlark and historian Malcolm Russell puts it.[3]

From sacred figures to medical waste, from barnacles to broken crockery – these are things with the power to take us on journeys into other places and cultures, journeys into the past and even into imagined futures.[4] So reach out your hand and take the first step.

Footnotes

1 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010): viii.

2 Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Routledge, 2013): 15.

3 Malcolm Russell, *Mudlark'd: Hidden Histories from the River Thames* (Thames & Hudson, 2024): 15.

4 Harrison, *Heritage*: 7.

Syringe

Origin and date unknown, pewter. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

Syringes, symbolism and stigma: finding marginalised histories

By George Jones

Seasoned mudlarks pride themselves on their ability to notice unusual things amid the silt and shingle of the Thames foreshore. To a practised eye, the straight lines of clay pipe stems, nails or pins, and the perfect circles of buttons, badges and coins, spring out of the mess around them to form a teeny-tiny *Wunderkammer* from which the coolest items can be selected for further historical research – provided all the correct permits are obtained.

Finding modern syringes on the banks of the Thames doesn't require the same level of scrutiny or historical knowledge, so it's easy for even a novice mudlark to quickly amass a significant collection. The two most common types – the long, thin, plastic insulin syringe and its shorter, stubbier intravenous counterpart – turn up all over the place and can be distinguished from one another by sight alone. True devotees, however, know how to look for the details! The type of tip and locking mechanism can reveal a syringe's intended use, for example, and the level of wear and algae-intrusion provide valuable clues for dating your find. As a rule of thumb, the more scuffed-up the plastic is, the longer it's been there.

It's unclear, at this time, whether a permit is required to remove these artefacts for further research.[1]

Shown in the photograph opposite is the nozzle section of a small pewter syringe, found in Greenwich. Pewter is commonly made from tin with lead added for durability. It is relatively cheap and easy to melt and cast into different shapes and, as such, was the material of choice for syringe manufacture in the 1700s. At the start of the century there were over 400 pewterers' shops across England, with craftspeople typically living and working in the same building.[2] These were often concentrated in dockside areas as pewter products were sturdy and affordable, making them convenient for use on board ships in the form of plates, mugs and medical equipment; they were also heavy enough not to slide around and sturdy enough not to shatter if they did.

The short body and nozzle resemble the urethral irrigation syringes found in the surgeon's cabin of the *Mary Rose*, which sank in 1545, as well as those found onboard the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, which were made in the early 1700s.[3] These were used mainly to

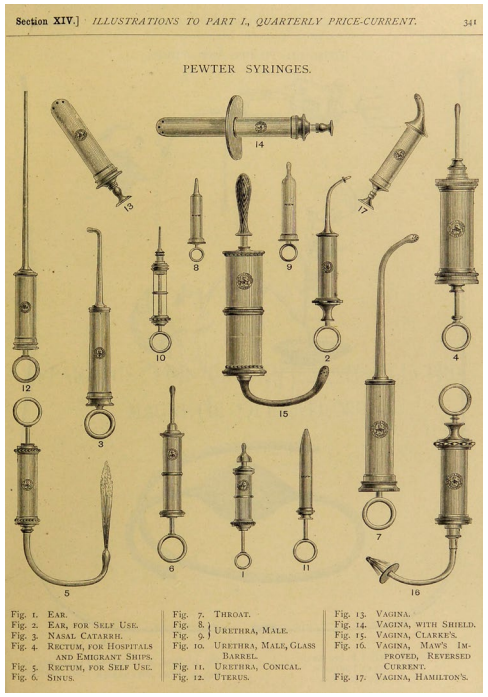
flush the urethras of those experiencing sexually transmitted infections with liquids like mercury or zinc sulfate in an effort to treat their symptoms. Similar syringes are found in catalogues of surgical instruments and naval medical kits as late as the 1880s, demonstrating the lasting convenience of single-purpose pewter objects alongside glass versions.[4] Syringes would have come with a plunger and a cap; as the photo shows, the nozzle is threaded for easy separation in order that it can be cleaned between patients. All this is to note that pewter syringes were a common object in maritime communities such as Greenwich and Deptford over a long date range, and that this one may have ended up in the river for any number of reasons: direct from the pewterer's shop, inland or on a ship, used or unused.

Syringes can be emotive and polarising objects. For many they produce an intense bodily response; a modern syringe is often attached to a needle, so looking at one can bring to mind personal memories of sharp pain, fear, blood and bruising. They are also symbols of a structured, ordered medical system and, therefore, imagined deviations from it. Pictured in a hospital, they connote treatment and healing. In today's medical guidance, syringes come out of clean, sterile plastic without being contaminated and are handled by experts who are trusted to use and dispose of them appropriately.[5]

The same object found outdoors becomes a symbol of danger and disease. For many, a syringe on the street connotes drug use, bloodborne illness and generalised threat that is often disproportionate to the actual risk, as though the object has a will of its own.[6] The 'syringe tides' of the 1980s also put these perceived risks into the context of environmental damage; the Port of London Authority website still lists 'hypodermic needles' as one of the potential dangers to which visitors to the Thames foreshore must be alert.[7]

Reading the pewter syringe through this symbolism brings to light the relationships between medicine, risk and control in its own time. Perceptions of sickness and health changed greatly across the 1700s and 1800s, and approaches to the treatment of sexually transmitted infections changed with them. Until 1795 seamen were fined up to 15 shillings – several days' wages – for having contracted a venereal disease. This – combined with the stigma associated with mercurial treatments and a fear of social consequences – encouraged them to conceal symptoms from naval doctors and seek treatment from the broader medical marketplace, where patent treatments with vague assertions of medical authority thrived.

As the British Navy expanded during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, naval surgeons sought to gain greater influence over sailors' health, in part by making efforts to standardise treatments and practices across vessels. The fine was dropped, but the concealment of seamen's symptoms was used to justify a more rigidly defined role for medical providers, suggesting that sailors were not responsible or knowledgeable enough to choose treatments for themselves, 'like children in need of control'.[8] The syringe, in this context, can draw attention to patients' experiences, highlighting the boundaries between care and control.



The symbol of the syringe shows how questions about who gets to be an expert on harm and health, and which practices are 'acceptable' acts of bodily autonomy, are trans-historic. In the UK today, access to care for stigmatised groups like drug users, disabled people, homeless people, sex workers and trans people – particularly around sexual health and abortion – is limited, compelling many to seek treatment outside the formal medical system. This is increasingly the case in the context of recent cuts to Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) and efforts to privatise NHS services.

Within marginalised communities, alternative structures of medicine and knowledge-sharing become necessary. Needle exchanges and safe injection sites, for example, emerged from drug users' unions and AIDS activism in response to their communities' unmet needs.[9] Similarly, DIY hormone therapy is – globally – the most common way that trans people access hormones due to medical gatekeeping.[10] These are parallel histories to those of conventional medicine. The anonymity of the syringe as an object can serve to direct attention away from orthodoxy and towards those it excludes.

There are used and unused syringes in the Museum of Transology's collection.[11] Archiving these objects and acknowledging the breadth of their history is itself an act of containment, but one that asserts the importance of understanding their use, users and context as part of the historical record. Perhaps future mudlarks, spotting a plastic syringe on the foreshore, will be able to find these modern histories of exclusion, resistance and harm-reduction too.

Left: Book of illustrations to *S. Maw, Son & Thompson's quarterly price-current: surgeons instruments, etc.*, 1882. Wellcome Library.

Footnotes

1 Port of London Authority, Thames Foreshore Permits: Frequently Asked Questions, https://pla.co.uk/thames-foreshore-permits.

2 Sarah C. Watkins-Kenney, 'Pewter Discovered on Shipwrecks of Early Eighteenth Century Slave-Trade and Pirate Vessels', in Lynn Brenda Harris & Valerie Ann Johnson (eds.), *Excavating the Histories of Slave-Trade and Pirate Ships* (Springer, 2022): 111–147.

3 Urethral Syringe, Mary Rose, https://maryrose.org/artefacts/urethral-syringe/; Urethral Syringe, Queen Anne's Revenge, https://www.qaronline.org/conservation/artifacts/tools-and-instruments/urethral-syringe.

4 Arnold and Sons, *Arnold and Sons Instrument Catalogue* (London, 1879).

5 NHS England Clinical Waste Strategy, 7 March 2023, https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-clinical-waste-strategy/.

6 John L. Fitzgerald, *Framing Drug Use* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 13–19; Sandra C. Thompson, Clem R. Boughton & Gregory J. Dore, 'Blood-borne viruses and their survival in the environment: is public concern about community needlestick exposures justified?', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 27:6 (2003): 602–607.

7 Port of London Authority, Thames Foreshore Permits.

8 Sarah Caputo, 'Treating, Preventing, Feigning, Concealing: Sickness, Agency and the Medical Culture of the British Naval Seaman at the End of the Long Eighteenth Century', *Social History of Medicine* 35:3 (2022): 749–769.

9 Naomi Braine, 'Autonomous Health Movements: Criminalization, De-Medicalization, and Community-Based Direct Action', *Health and Human Rights* (2020): 85–97.

10 Alex Barksdale, *Care and Freedom From Below: Experiments in Trans Autonomy Through DIY* (2024): 89.

11 Ezra Little, Museum of Transology Catalog (March 2020), https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/downloads/gb19f607x.

Figurine of a woman

Origin and date unknown, pipeclay. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles. Portable Antiquities Scheme: LON-2E275A.

The Forgotten Goddess

By Claire Lacaden

She is a small thing, barely the size of a pinky finger. Resting her weight on her left hip, her bottom half lies exposed and one arm hangs at her side, whilst the other raises bunched fabric above her navel. Her breasts are not covered; rather, they sit framed and apparent. She has a centre parting, hair lying flat against her scalp then cascading downwards towards her posterior. Her face is plain and indifferent. Her mouth turns slightly downwards though not in a frown. Never a frown. Her nose is almost triangular and her eyes are white: eternally open.

She cannot breathe and yet she sighs, tired after centuries of being trapped in sediment. Time has worsened her memory. She knows she is made of earth, specifically that used in the making of clay pipes,[1] though no one seems to smoke them now. Moulded and cast and attached to – what? She cannot remember, though she is sure it was important. She is a figurine: this she knows. The product of a tradition of exposed women forever enshrined in permanent form. Used as vessels for a sought-after beauty and forgotten to time until someone chooses to gaze upon them again. She thinks back to some of her sisters now.

The Female Nude as Divine

One of her oldest sisters was carved around 30,000 years ago and is named 'Venus of Willendorf'.[2] Fitting in the palm of one's hand, her enlarged breasts hang over her full belly, the groove of her genitalia prominently displayed. Her exaggerated features are mostly associated with childbearing, perhaps with a mother goddess lost to time. Scattered amongst the remains of Londinium are votive pipe-clay figurines of the Roman goddess Venus, used to request divine intervention in successful conception, birth and motherhood.[3] Even the western Christian religious figures of Eve and the Virgin Mary come to mind, both often depicted in medieval manuscripts with round bellies and exposed nipples.[4] The female nude is thus centred around the power that is human-life creation.

The goddess of love has been known by many names. At her core, she is a celebration of romance, sexuality and fertility: the basic human desire to connect with others emotionally and physically. One of her most well-known manifestations is the Greek goddess Aphrodite or her Roman counterpart Venus. They are often depicted with left

knee slightly bent and right hand tucking hair away from the face, as if they had just arisen from the foamy depths of the sea.[5] For the ancient Greeks and Romans, the nude body held the gateway to idealised divine perfection.[6] The masculine body, with its hard lines and taut musculature, was placed in opposition to the feminine body with its supple curves, voluptuousness and eroticism.[7] The female nude thus exists in two realities: to empower and display the beauty of the body but also to be subject to the gaze of others.

The Female Nude as Anatomical

It is in Florence (1780–82) that sculptor Clemente Susini created another sister: the 'Anatomical Venus'.[8] Glistening from the oiled wax of her skin, her glass eyes peer slightly downwards to her reclining body. Everything seems normal, except for her gaping torso and the innards placed neatly by her feet. Her goal: to contribute to a collection of dissectible wax models created for the study of anatomy. During the Enlightenment, the physical body was put under the microscope, part of the Cartesian desire to understand and then conquer the physical form so that one may transcend into a state of pure consciousness and reason.[9] The female body was associated with weak temperament, sensitivity and even hysteria. Anatomical models of this kind grew in number and fluctuated in size and material; some were made of ivory and were small enough to keep in the pocket.

Top: Venus of Willendorf as shown at the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria. Wikimedia Commons, 2020.

Bottom: Miniature ivory anatomical model from the 1600s–1700s, Germany. Wikimedia Commons, 2022.

The Female Nude as Satire

According to Greek myth, the goddess Demeter, weary from searching for her kidnapped daughter Persephone, sought refuge in the house of Keleus, where she refused to eat or drink.[10] Seeing her grief, a servant, Baubo, decided to lift her skirt in a humorous effort to cheer her up. This action of lifting-the-skirt is known as *anasyrma*[11] and has often been used in literature and art as a form of satire: a 'rude' gesture that connotes naughtiness, sensuality and seduction. In the 1700s and 1800s, this action was associated with sex work and so-called 'fallen women'.[12] During the mid-1800s, the growing fear of venereal disease produced moral panic and the idealisation of virginity. Contemporary artists depicted sex workers as devilish temptresses who lure weak men into their dens of iniquity. The female nude is thus humorously mocking but also dangerous – a warning to avoid wayward tendencies.

The Remembered Goddess

So, we return to our small figurine. In her contemplation, she realises she still does not remember why she was made. Was she a symbol of divine fertility, an anatomical aide or a devilish temptress? She does not remember. Maybe she does not want to.

Her memory thinks back to her sisters but not the ones who are cold and lifeless. She and the others are symbols of those made of flesh, blood and bone; whose bodies are objectified, stripped and raped despite bleeding red. She feels their pain, her sisters. They are connected like a river, energies flowing into and over each other, caressing the cuts and bruises, healing slowly but surely. She may have forgotten herself, but she remembers them. Her daughters. Her mothers. Her sisters.

Footnotes

1. Pipeclay (also known as China clay or kaolin) was used in the production of tobacco pipes from around 1580 until the mid-1900s. In the 1600s, there were around 1,000 pipe makers in London alone. See: Malcolm Russell, *Mudlark'd: Hidden Histories from the River Thames* (Princeton University Press, 2022).
2. Alison E. Rautman, *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
3. Matthew G. Fittock, 'Broken Deities: The Pipe-Clay Figurines from Roman London', *Britannia (Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies)* 46 (2015): 111–34.
4. Helen King, *Immaculate Forms: Uncovering the History of Women's Bodies* (Profile Books, 2024).
5. Matthew G. Fittock, Tatiana Ivleva & Rob Collins, 'More than Just Love and Sex: Venus Figurines in Roman Britain', in *Un-Roman Sex* (Routledge, 2020): 54–89.
6. Linda Nochlin, *Linda Nochlin on the Body* (Thames & Hudson, 2024).
7. Rachel Meredith Kousser, 'Introduction: Approaching Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture: Ancient and Modern Perspectives', in *Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture* 1–16 (2008).
8. Joanna Ebenstein, *The Anatomical Venus / Joanna Ebenstein* (Thames & Hudson, 2016).
9. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (Routledge, 1992).
10. Aynur-Michèle-Sara Karatas, 'Personified Vulva, Ritual Obscenity, and Baubo', *Journal of Greek Archaeology* 4 (2019).
11. Miriam Robbers Dexter & Victor H. Mair, *Sacred Display: Divine and Magical Female Figures of Eurasia* (Cambria Press, 2011).
12. Julia Laite, 'A Global History of Prostitution: London', in *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s*, 31 (2017): 111–37.

Band of Hope temperance medal

England, late 1800s to early 1900s, pewter. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

To Resist the Greatest Foe: Temperance Bands of Hope in Deptford, 1890s–1910s

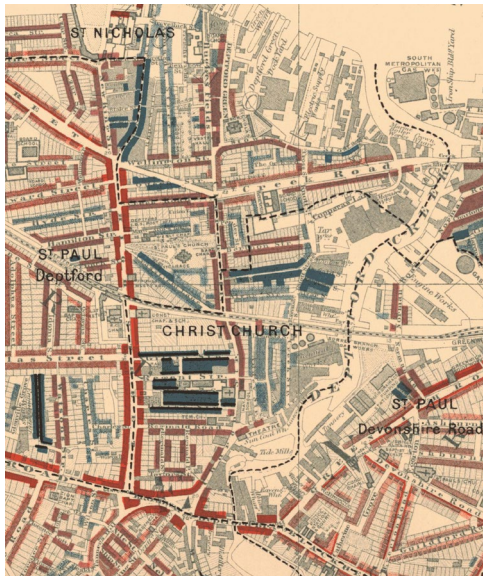
By Jude Pretoria

'There is no human being in so pitiable a plight as the inebriate: despised by his fellows, loathed by himself, a mental wreck, a moral suicide, cast out from earth.'[1] Thus was the drinker described in the Deptford Ragged School annual report for the year 1900. There was only one measure against this terrible fate: total abstinence from alcohol. Or at least that was the narrative of the advocates of temperance, a teetotal movement that grew massively throughout the 1800s. By the end of the century, it was present in practically every church, chapel and mission hall (Anglican and Nonconformist alike) across the country, under the guise of an array of organisations.

Most crucial of these were children's temperance clubs known as Bands of Hope. In an era where the consumption of alcohol was a ubiquitous part of everyday life, it was considered vital to warn against the dangers of alcohol from as young an age as possible. The Deptford Ragged School's report captured the broader purpose of the clubs. 'We hold that "prevention is better than cure,"' it read, 'and strive by our Band of Hope to save our children from the curse of intemperance.'[2]

The temperance movement began in earnest with the founding of the first Temperance Society in 1829, but it was some years before Bands of Hope came about. The first was established in 1847 in Leeds by the Reverend Jabez Tunnicliff and Mrs Ann Jane Carlile and heralded a proliferation of children's temperance clubs that within a decade had formed the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union.[3] In 1887, almost 20% of all eligible children were members of a Band of Hope: some 1.5 million children. A decade later, in 1897, membership had risen to over 3 million.[4]

As across the country, Deptford was inundated with Bands of Hope. The Lewisham High Road Congregational Church had three: the Lewisham High Road Band of Hope; the Napier Street Hall (its mission church) Band of Hope; and the Amersham Grove Band of Hope.[5] Using the 'religious influences' notebooks for Charles Booth's study of London life and labour, it is possible to say that there were *at least* 20 Bands of Hope in the Deptford area in 1900.



The Amersham Grove Band outlined the general programme of meetings across the year: 'Each meeting includes an address dealing essentially with practical temperance teaching, […] several musical evenings […] three chemical lectures […] three lantern lectures […] the usual winter recitation competitions; the year closing with a Christmas tea […] at which the recitation and attendance medals and prizes were distributed.'[6]

Awards were a key component of the Band of Hope programme, and medals became conspicuous symbols of members' commitment. The 1900 Band of Hope Manual lists four different medals: the New Member's Medal; the One Year's Membership Medal (to which a bar would be attached for each successive year); the Badge of Honour; and the Recruiting Member's Medal.[7] The last was the rarest, requiring a member to recruit six other children into their band. This process was described in the *Band of Hope Review*, compelling children 'to become recruiting-sergeants, and to get your school-fellows and play-fellows, and all the boys and girls that you know, whose parents are willing, to join the Band of Hope. Every new soldier we get in our army makes it easier to fight the cruel foe Strong Drink'.[8]

The rarity of a recruiting medal can be seen in the record of medal distribution at the annual meeting of the Deptford Congregational Church Band of Hope on 12th February 1901. Sixteen attendance medals and four spelling bee medals were given out, but no recruiting ones.[9] To receive a recruiting medal, one had to be especially dedicated to the cause and therefore likely to have received the other medals also. This was the case for Margaret Jessie Gosling. At the 24th anniversary meeting of the Creek Street Mission Hall Band of Hope in November 1911, Jessie was 'presented with a medal for recruiting, and as this was the fourth medal she had gained a book prize was also given to her'.[10]

As she was the only child named, the receipt of a recruiting medal was evidently especially noteworthy. With a name, we have a window into the life of one of the children who received a medal exactly like the one found on the Thames foreshore by mudlark Nicola White. Born in January 1902 in Dacca Street, Jessie Gosling was baptised at St. Nicholas' church; by 1911 she was living with her parents and two younger siblings in Crossfield Street.[11] Her father was a labourer for Deptford Borough Council, having previously worked as a sawyer.[12] Perhaps the 'respectable' job of her father contributed to Jessie's own commitment to temperance; their street, by contrast, was deemed highly 'unrespectable'. One of Booth's investigators found it to be 'very neglected, broken and dirty windows, doors open, children playing about […] squalid poverty'.[13] While not in the worst category on Booth's poverty scale, Crossfield Street nonetheless sat with a cluster of 'blue' streets on the map, concentrated around the creek and its industries.

Regardless of the conditions, Jessie evidently found a place of solace in one of her local Bands of Hope, whether out of religious conviction or simply for the community it offered her. It is impossible to say whose medal this is, and how it ended up in the Thames. Perhaps it was cast in, fell in, was lost, or dumped in with other possessions. There is joy in its anonymity, though. Without a direct association to an individual child, it now stands as a unique reminder of an overlooked and obsolete religious movement; a movement characterised by a culture of collective action and purpose. Who knows? It might even have belonged to Jessie.

Top: Charles Booth, 'Map Descriptive of London Poverty, 1898–9', in *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1902–1903). LSE Library.

Bottom: Cottages in Crossfield Lane (later Crossfield Street), 1890s. The London Archives (City of London Corporation).

Footnotes

1 London School of Economics (LSE) BOOTH/B/285: 83.

2 LSE BOOTH/B/285: 84.

3 'History of Hope UK', https://www.hopeuk.org/wp-content/uploads/History-PDF-.pdf.

4 'History of Hope UK'.

5 LSE BOOTH/B/285: 99.

6 LSE BOOTH/B/285: 124–125.

7 *Band of Hope Manual* (*British National Temperance Journal*, c. 1900), https://clok.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/2440/.

8 *Band of Hope Review* (1902), https://clok.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/48129/.

9 *The Brockley News*, 15 February 1901, British Newspaper Archive.

10 *The West Kent Argus*, 21 November 1911, British Newspaper Archive.

11 *London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms*, 1813–1924; 1911 England Census, Ancestry.

12 *1901 England Census*, Ancestry.

13 Jess & Mike Steele (eds.), *The Streets of London. The Booth Notebooks – South East* (Short Run Press, 2019): 138.

Mermaid deity figure

Africa or African diaspora, date unknown, cast iron. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

Mami Wata, Ọṣun, or another water deity? The Thames as a spiritual site for African diaspora communities

By Anna Freed

The Thames has long held spiritual associations for those living along its banks and today continues to serve as a vessel for diaspora groups to honour the riverine deities of their homelands. As with many mudlarked objects, this mermaid evades precise categorisation within the pantheons of Africa and diasporic Americas. Some of that ambiguity arises from the nature of water deities: like water, they are fluid, flowing into each other with shifting meanings, associations and depictions. In some anthropological texts, these feminine water spirits have been collated under the umbrella character Mami Wata,[1] regardless of whether a community uses the name to describe one or several spirits, or whether they use that name at all.

Mami Wata, in these definitions, is a migrant, an outsider deity brought to West African rivers through Portuguese contact, carried to other shores by the African diaspora. In this view, she is an African response to colonial encounter – a way to integrate and Africanise European folklore and imagery of mermaids, or a way to survive and resist enslavement, or a way to remain connected to home when disconnected from the land. But it would be wrong to elide too much, to lose the way different peoples in Africa and the diaspora approach water and conceptualise water spirits. Indeed, the very perception of Mami Wata as a foreign deity is not consistent. And this figure herself appears unique across documented representations of African mermaid deities.

Though Mami Wata's visual lexicon has incorporated global imagery over time, the idea that her tail is the result of European influence is contested. The argument is supported by the fact that the earliest surviving West African mermaids are found on Sapi ivories commissioned by the Portuguese and by the use of ships' mermaid figureheads in shrines.[2] Though alternative arguments suggest another external source like Egypt,[3] a more obvious suggestion is that it is an independent invention, depicted in materials ill-suited to archaeological preservation. Perhaps the most enduring foreign inspiration for Mami Wata depictions is an 1880s orientalist print from Germany of Maladamatjaute, an 'Indian' snake charmer who was either of Samoan[4] or French origin,[5] depending on the source. More recently, Hindu imagery has been integrated into depictions of Mami Wata. When so many

other African inventions have been dismissed by white academics as European or inspired by European contact (e.g. glass,[6] monumental architecture[7]), it is understandable to be wary of similar arguments. But regardless of whether mermaids were externally introduced, the resulting designs and cosmologies speak to great creativity and innovation.

The figure found on the Thames foreshore does not resemble these Mami Wata, bearing no trace of orientalist or Hindu influences. In fact, the same elements that lend themselves to a Mami Wata attribution – a mirror-like object, cowrie shells, rich adornment, and her fishtail – might suggest a more specific, Indigenous deity. Ọṣun, the Yorùbá òrìṣà of the Ọṣun River, is also associated with imagery of mirrors, cowries, and wealth. Yet I found Ọṣun through my initial instinct that her 'mirror' was a fan. The object has a scored border on both sides, an extra effort I felt suggested identical sides, or a fringe around the edge, and she holds it in a position that seems more natural for use as a fan. Whilst some Mami Wata priests use fringed fans,[8] circular, brass fans, abẹbẹ, are strongly associated with Ọṣun. Whilst Ọṣun is less

commonly depicted as a mermaid, her mermaid form, surrounded by cowrie shells, features on one gate at the Ọṣun-Òṣogbo Sacred Grove in Nigeria. Metal has strong connections to Ọṣun,[9] possibly making a figure cast in iron a natural choice.

Both Ọṣun and Mami Wata made their ways across the Atlantic, shaped by diaspora communities in parallel to their African counterparts, with later interactions merging, melding and influencing their depictions further. For those who conceived Mami Wata as a migrant, she was possibly an ideal figure to turn to, a foreigner who found new homes in Africa becoming a foreigner once more alongside her worshippers, and was later shaped into many distinct deities.[10] Ọṣun and her fellow water òrìṣà Yemọja also continued to be worshipped in candomblé and other creolised religions,[11] a practice of resistance when enslaved people faced violence and suppression of their indigenous identities. The influence of these diaspora spiritualities appear so strongly that early anthropologists even suggested Mami Wata was a diaspora creation later introduced to Africa.[12]

Ultimately, her identity remains uncertain: she could equally be another African or diasporic water spirit like Lasirèn, Mama D'Lo, Watramamma, Simbi, Dona Fish, Mamba Muntu, or another Yorùbá òrìṣà like Yemọja. What does feel concrete is her religious significance, and the religious significance of her entry into the Thames.

Worshippers of these figures have faced cycles of repression and resurgence across Africa and the Americas, complicating this academic study of their precise histories. Yet new diaspora groups are finding ways to worship, and to incorporate their practices into local landscapes. In 1970, the Thames formally became a sacred alternative to the Ganges for Hindus. Similarly, in 2016, Michelle Yaa Asantewa founded the Ọṣun River Ritual, which is held annually in the Wandle, a tributary of the Thames.[13] The event coincides with the start of the Ọṣun-Òṣogbo Festival, so the Thames and Ọṣun both become spaces to honour Ọṣun.

In this sense, the deposition of this figure may have been deliberate, part of the African diaspora's spiritual use of the Thames. Found in 2015, her deposition is probably recent due to her good state of preservation, but the figure herself and her life as a sacred devotional representation could be decades older. As such, she raises questions about boundaries: where culture becomes history; where the new becomes traditional; where one deity stops and another begins. She is the material product of a living, intangible heritage, of a culture being reclaimed and reworked by London's African diaspora; a heritage intertwined and in parallel to the practice in Ọṣun-Òṣogbo, in Africa, in the Americas, and wherever a body of water can be found.

Top: Unidentified, Yoruba Culture, Fan for an Osun Priestess, 19th–20th century. New Orleans Museum of Art, Museum purchase, Françoise Billion Richardson Fund, 90.306.

Bottom: Igbo artist, Mami Wata figure, Nigeria, 1950s. Minneapolis Institute of Art (The Norman Gabrick Endowment for African Art).

Footnotes

1 Henry John Drewal (ed.), *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas* (Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2008).

2 Drewal, *Mami Wata*: 37.

3 Mama Zogbe, *Mami Wata: Africa's Ancient God/Dess Unveiled*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Mami Wata Healers Society, 2007).

4 Drewal, *Mami Wata*.

5 'Chronique Des Tribunaux', *Le Gaulois*, 17 March 1887.

6 A. B. Babalola et al., 'Ile-Ife and Igbo Olokun in the History of Glass in West Africa', *Antiquity* 91, no. 357 (2017): 732–50.

7 Joost Fontein, *The Silence of Great Zimbabwe* (UCL Press, 2006).

8 Drewal, *Mami Wata*: 113.

9 Cornelius O. Adepegba, 'Osun and Brass: An Insight into Yoruba Religious Symbology', in Joseph M. Murphy & Mei-Mei Sanford (eds.), *Osun across the Waters* (Indiana University Press, 2010): 102–12.

10 Alex Van Stipriaan, 'Watramama/Mami Wata: Three Centuries of Creolization of a Water Spirit in West Africa, Suriname and Europe', in Gordon Collier & Ulrich Fleischmann (eds.), *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures* (Rodopi, 2003): 323–38.

11 Bettina E Schmidt, 'Mermaids in Brazil: The (ongoing) creolisation of the water goddesses Oxum and Iemanjá', in Samantha Hurn (ed.), *Anthropology and Cryptozoology* (Routledge, 2017).

12 Drewal, *Mami Wata*.

13 Michelle Yaa Asantewa, 'Finding Mami Osun: How I Reconnected to African Spirituality', *Fulham Palace*, 3 August 2023, https://www.fulhampalace.org/news/finding-mami-osun-how-i-reconnected-to-african-spirituality/.

Seven barnacles

Origin and date unknown, shell. Found by Nicola White in Deptford and Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

Barnacles: The Bane of Our Being

By Samiha Hassan

In May 1845, 'H. M. sloops *Erebus* and *Terror* left Greenhithe, on their attempt "to penetrate the icy fastness of the north, and to circumnavigate America".[1] The two discovery vessels had been docked at Woolwich, where the 'Lords of the Admiralty [boarded] the *Erebus* to witness the 'innovative fittings of the vessel.'[2] The ships were last seen in Baffin Bay in late July 1845 and the crew declared dead nine years later in 1854. In their description of both vessels, the *Illustrated London News* noted that there was 'not any copper sheathing […] as no danger is to be apprehended from the attacks of shellfish or barnacles'.[3] In a letter to Captain Sir James Clark Ross, who led an expedition in 1847 to search for the lost crew, Charles Darwin asked him 'to collect […] & preserve in *spirits* the Northern species of Cirripedia or Barnacles'.[4]

One species Darwin might have received from this expedition is the Hamer's barnacle (*Chiron hameri*). These crustaceans are distributed around the British coast, in the North and Celtic Seas, and in the Arctic Ocean. They are commonly found on hard surfaces such as stones, shells and ships.[5] The mass gathering of unwanted organisms on surfaces such as ship's hulls is known as 'biofouling' and has been described as 'the mariner's curse ever since man first set sail'.[6] Throughout history, humans have sought different methods to combat this problem. The barnacles found on the Thames foreshore by Nicola White, for example, have flat surfaces, indicating that they have been forcibly removed from the hulls of ships. The entangled relationship between barnacles and humans is laced, then, with violence.

What information can we glean from the journeys of these waste objects from marine environments to the intertidal landscapes of Greenwich and Deptford? Entanglement is the interweaving of different 'things' across spatial and temporal spaces and how these elements interact with each other; what Karen Barad describes as 'not a name for the interconnectedness of all being as one, but rather for specific material relations of the ongoing differentiating of the world.'[7] Nature does not speak as we do and has been marginalised as inferior to humans. Through researching barnacles found on the Thames foreshore, I have discovered the way in which these crustaceans persistently challenge human preconceptions of authority.

The presence of barnacles and other biofouling organisms on the hulls of ships reduces the speed at which they can move and increases the cost of the trip; a '10 micron (0.0001 mm) increase in average hull roughness can result in a 0.3 to 1.0 percent increase in fuel consumption.'[8] 'Slime films,' note Daffron, Lewis and Johnson, 'can impart powering penalties of 21%, with heavy calcareous biofouling increasing this penalty to 86%.'[9] Wooden ships covered in lead sheets fitted to impede marine growth are recorded from as early as 300 BC.[10] Moreover, there was still the labour-intensive process of removing barnacles from hulls. 'Careening' is the process in which a ship is tilted on its side until its hull is lifted out of the water to be cleaned or repaired.[11] Through scientific analysis, G. J. M. Van der Kerk discovered that organotin compounds were potent biocides. Tin is naturally nontoxic to most organisms, but when combined with an organic butyl compound (C_4H_9) it creates the highly toxic chemical tributyltin (TBT) used on waterborne vessels to prevent biofouling.[12] This drastically reduced the cost and time needed for cleaning and repairing a ship. In 1987, the Department of the Environment banned TBT use on small boats due to the harm it causes to non-targeted species such as dog whelks and oysters.[13] It is still used on boats longer than 25 meters.

A biocide is 'a chemical compound or biological product used to kill, control the growth of, or repel a specific organism.'[14] The Earth's bodies of water, including the Thames, have been transformed into environments that serve human endeavours. However, this determination to control things deprives humans from understanding the barnacles' intricate character. The cement glands barnacles use to attach to hard surfaces are strong enough that they can remain attached even after death. Unless forcefully removed, a barnacle will accompany a vessel on its journey and remain in place even when shipwrecked. The wrecks of the *Erebus* and *Terror* were found in 2014 and 2016 respectively. As their hulls lacked biocidal metals, it is possible that the vessels encountered these marine organisms en route. Barnacles develop heavily calcified shells ($CaCO_3$) that grow at different rates depending on the water temperature. To identify the ambient temperature of a shipwreck, researchers analyse differences in the ratio of oxygen isotopes ($^{16}O/^{18}O$) in the shells.[15] The way in which the barnacles bind themselves to moving vessels thus tells us about the environmental conditions of their journeys.

London's dockyards are 'persistent places';[16] spaces entangled with organic materials and the intricate stories they carry. The perseverance of objects like barnacles invites us to examine these stories of entanglement. If we allow barnacles to speak naturally, in their nonhuman voices, these crustaceans can provide information on global maritime trade and wreckage site conditions that would otherwise be impossible to discover.

Left: John Wilson Carmichael, *HMS 'Erebus' and 'Terror' in the Antarctic*, 1847. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Footnotes

1 'Departure of the 'Erebus' and 'Terror' on the Arctic Expedition', *Illustrated London News*, 24 May 1845.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Charles Darwin, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 101.

5 Peter J. Hayward & John S. Ryland (eds.), 'Crustaceans', in *Handbook of the Marine Fauna of North-West Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2017): 302.

6 Michael A. Champ & W. Laurence Pugh, 'Tributyltin Antifouling Paints: Introduction & Overview', *Ocean's '87* (1989): 1297.

7 Karen Barad, 'Nature's Queer Performativity', *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (2011): 150.

8 Champ & Pugh, 'Tributyltin Antifouling Paints': 1297.

9 Katherine A. Dafforn et al., 'Antifouling strategies: history and regulation, ecological impacts and mitigation', *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 62, no. 3 (2011): 453.

10 Champ & Pugh, 'Tributyltin Antifouling Paints': 1296.

11 William Henry Smyth, *The Sailor's Word-Book* (Black and Son, 1867): 164.

12 Nathalia Brichet, 'Cruise ships deliver chemical cocktail to Caribbean marine life', *Feral Atlas*, https://feralatlas.supdigital.org/poster/cruise-ships-deliver-chemical-cocktails-to-caribbean-marine-life.

13 Champ & Pugh, 'Tributyltin Antifouling Paints': 1302.

14 Virginia Rodríguez Unamuno et al., *Encyclopaedia of Toxicology* (Academic Press, 2024), under 'Biocides'.

15 Ian D. MacLeod, John S. Killingley, 'The use of barnacles to establish past temperatures on historic shipwrecks', *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 11, no. 4 (1982): 249.

16 See Judith Schlanger, 'Knowledge as Exploration and Conquest', *Diogenes* 40, no. 160 (1992).

Turtle rib

Origin and date unknown, animal bone. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

Off with their Heads: Turtle to Mock Turtle, a Colonial Legacy

By Isidora Bethell

The mock turtle encountered in the pages of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) may seem like an entirely fictional creation. But while the creature itself is fantastical, its origins are rooted in a recipe that came into existence at the tail end of a very real appetite for turtle meat across the UK but centred in London.

This turtle rib was found on the Thames foreshore to the west of Enderby's Wharf, Greenwich. It is most likely from the green sea turtle or, as the *Illustrated Times* describes them in 1868, the 'edible turtle'.[1] The consumption of turtle meat in London's riverside communities makes it likely that this object ended up in the river through refuse disposal from a kitchen on shore or on board a ship, especially as this particular section of foreshore is known to be the site of a Georgian waste dump. To understand its consumption in London we must first look to turtles' natural habitat and origins, specifically in the Caribbean.

While turtle soup became a staple on British tables, its origins lie with the indigenous people of the Caribbean who ate it long before European ships appeared on their horizon. Archaeological evidence highlights the existence of these groups as early as 6,000 BCE. The Taíno people are recorded as eating turtle, smoked or grilled, as early as 100 BCE.[2]

In the early 1700s, European arrivals to the Caribbean known as buccaneers (from the Arawak word 'buccan' meaning a wooden frame for smoking meat) relied on indigenous knowledge to learn which animals were edible and how to hunt and cook them. They often lived separately from colonial authorities on islands and coastlines, and hunted both green sea turtles and hawksbill turtles for their meat and shells, which were used in European cutlery and trinkets.[3] An article of 1731 in the *Newcastle Courant* mentions hunters 'who were turtling on a maroon island to Leeward, and falling into the Hands of the Spaniards, were all murdered but two'.[4] British seamen grew particularly fond of the meat which they described as similar to both veal and lobster.[5] As the British Empire continued to colonise the Americas, sailors who lacked fresh meat caught turtles instead and held them in tubs of saltwater to be eaten during the journey back home. Around this time turtle was also fed to Britain's enslaved labourers on

plantations in the Caribbean. Turtle provided an easily accessible and, at that point, plentiful source of protein.

The eating of turtles was thus entangled in colonial practices, and associated with the Transatlantic Slave Trade.[6] While turtle had held, and continued to hold, a place in Afro-Caribbean cuisine, turtle soup eaten in 'the British fashion' also spread across the Empire.[7]

Let us now follow the turtle's journey from the tropical waters of the West Indies to the murky and polluted waters of the Thames, into the very centre of the British Empire, and into the dining rooms of the powerful.

From the 1750s turtle soup became a symbol of the wealth and extravagant lives of London's rich. Considered the product of conquest and as something foreign, the turtle appeared in satirical portraits of aldermen and other officials as a means of highlighting overconsumption or excess. One comic from 1773 personified aldermen as both 'turtle and gruel', the extreme ends of cuisine at this time, to satirise political and cultural division between opulent and frugal.[8] Aldermen are described as eating 'turtle feasts' rather than caring about hay prices.[9] Throughout the late 1700s and 1800s turtle soup was considered a delicacy, a high-status meal. Satirical comics even depict the Lord

Mayor as fat and overfed with his chain of office replaced by a golden turtle.[10] An 1830 comic, 'Fatal effects of gluttony, a Lord Mayor's Day night mare [sic]', depicts an alderman being attacked by a turtle, and other elements of the Lord Mayor's feast, drawing the viewer's attention to the pointless excess of civil hospitality.[11]

The Lord Mayor's banquet at Guildhall was said to have had turtle soup on its tables every year from 1761 until 1825.[12] However, it is clear from my research in The London Archives that this practice continued later, perhaps as the result of a resurgence in interest. Photographs taken in 1927 demonstrate that while turtles were at this point scarce, they were still consumed by high society, now seen as not only exotic but also rare.

Recipes for 'mock' turtle soup appeared as early as 1758 with Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery*. In this cheaper alternative, the turtle was substituted with a calf's head and hooves; these are the ingredients described in Lewis Carroll's interpretation of the mock turtle, the imagined animal eaten in this soup. By the late 1800s, canned mock turtle soup was widely available as the price of real turtles increased with their rarity. At the same time it became more commonplace for turtle soup to be served in pubs, especially by the river.

Turtle remains were found in an excavation of a late 1800s well at Leadenhall Buildings, suggesting that this was a place where live turtles were traded.[13] Nearby was The Ship and Turtle Inn on Leadenhall Road, which remained open until 2008. An advertisement from *The Morning Herald* in 1850 describes the new arrival of live turtles, available to be chosen and eaten.[14] In a later advertisement in 1905 in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, simple turtle soup is listed in a range of styles with prices attached, highlighting a changing culture around this consumption.[15]

In present day London, eating turtle soup, or even mock turtle soup, is considered a distant memory or even an imagined myth of the past. Today green sea turtles are an endangered species, due in part to overconsumption by British people at home and abroad. The origins of the delicate bone found on the foreshore in Greenwich lie in the British Empire's policies of expansion and exploitation. Small, brown and organic, it could easily have blended in with the mud of the riverbed. In our hands it is a door into understanding a complicated and underappreciated history.

Top: *Satire on civic hospitality*, 1830. The London Archives (City of London Corporation).

Bottom: *Preparing for Lord Mayor's Day*, c. 1790. The London Archives (City of London Corporation).

Footnotes

1 *Illustrated Times*, 5 December 1868, British Newspaper Archive.

2 Candice Goucher, *Congotay! Congotay! A Global History of Caribbean Food* (Routledge, 2014).

3 Ibid.

4 *Newcastle Courant*, Saturday 8th May 1731, British Newspaper Archive.

5 Richard Bradley, *The Country Housewife and Lady's Director* (1728).

6 Diane Elizabeth Kirkby, Tanja Luckins & Barbara Santich, 'Introduction', in Kirkby et al., *Of Turtles, Dining and the Importance of History in Food, Food in History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

7 May-bo Ching, 'The Flow of Turtle Soup from the Caribbean via Europe to Canton, and Its Modern American Fate', *Gastronomica* 16, no. 1 (2016): 79–89.

8 'The Aldermen Turtle and Gruel', 1773, London Picture Archive.

9 *Patriot*, Tuesday 16 July 1793, British Newspaper Archive.

10 'A corporate body under the operation of the Royal Commission', c. 1835, London Picture Archive.

11 'Fatal effects of gluttony, a Lord Mayor's day's night mare', 1830, London Picture Archive.

12 Janet Clarkson, *Soup: a global history* (Reaktion, 2010): 115–118.

13 Philip L Armitage & Colin McCarthy, 'Turtle remains found from a late 18th century well at Leadenhall Buildings', *London Archaeologist*, Vol 4.1 (1980).

14 *Morning Herald* (London), Tuesday 28 May 1850, British Newspaper Archive.

15 *Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday 30 December 1905, British Newspaper Archive.

Sherd of a cup

Decorated with illustration from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Staffordshire, 1800s, ceramic. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

The Great Transatlantic novel: British children's role in the anti-slavery movement

By Nadia Hirsi

Uncle Tom's Cabin was the book that started the American Civil War, according to President Abraham Lincoln. Written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, it was published in the US on 20 March 1852 and later gained international success. In Britain it sold 200,000 copies in the first month of publication: May 1852. In this essay, inspired by a small ceramic sherd found on the Thames foreshore in Greenwich, I examine how this important novel might inform us about British children's relationship to the anti-slavery movement in the 19th century.

Stowe was a devout Christian and self-proclaimed abolitionist who was disturbed by the growing enslavement and trafficking of, in her words, 'an oppressed race'.[1] According to Stowe, Christians who were not part of the abolitionist movement must have been ignorant of the true hell that was slavery; had they known, they too would be plagued by this moral failure. With this sitting heavy on her mind, Stowe took it upon herself to inform White America of the disgusting treatment the enslaved population faced.

Stowe's original text explores the whole spectrum of the institution, from the allegedly 'mildest form of slavery'[2] in Shelby plantation to the awful master Simon Legree. The British children's edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* omits the more 'extreme' displays of chattel slavery, instead using illustrations by George Cruickshank to portray its degradations and conveying an anti-slavery message in a way that translated effectively to children.[3] The emphasis on illustrations provided a long-lasting visual legacy to the novel. Throughout the narrative, the young daughter of plantation owner St Clare, Eva, shares a close bond with Uncle Tom. Through their relationship, the reader is prompted to feel empathy for, and thus humanise, enslaved people. It is questionable whether this was indeed the case for all readers, be they American or British. However, the image of Eva and Uncle Tom together was 'the most widely reproduced of all the novel's scenes'.[4] In Britain, hundreds of ceramic figurines were produced depicting little Eva on Uncle Tom's lap.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is based on the lived experience of an enslaved man, Lewis Garrard Clarke – the real Uncle Tom – whom she interviewed. One can imagine her eagerly jotting down details of his trauma in her notebook as she began to craft out a

character that is now both canonical in English language literature and intrinsically tied to the history of the Transatlantic slave trade and the social history of Black Americans. When interviewed in 1888, aged 70, Clarke, then a 'free' man, denied receiving a single cent from Stowe.[5] But Clarke was more than a case study for Stowe's bestseller; he was its blueprint.

The British public resonated with Stowe's novel so much that many editions were published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Notable editions include an illustrated edition published by John Cassell in 1852 and a children's version, *Uncle Tom's cabin, told to children*, published by Jack London in around 1904.[6] Cassell presumably shared the author's belief in the power of images. As Stowe wrote to Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The National Era*, 'There's no arguing with pictures, and everyone is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not'.[7] The success of the novel in Britain may be attributed to growing anti-American sentiment and perhaps produced for readers an air of moral superiority. The Slavery Abolition Act had been passed in 1833, although this was not enacted instantly in Britain's colonies, where slavery was still operating until around 1840 under the guise of the apprenticeship system. It is impossible to calculate the scale of slavery still operating on British soil after the Act had been passed as it was never legal in the first place. Nevertheless, as an abolitionist text, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was well received and it was arguably the children's editions which cemented the novel in the British literary canon.

Naturally, when a book becomes a bestseller, a canny publisher will produce merchandise in order to capitalise on its success. This is where the ceramic sherd comes into play. Staffordshire pottery refers to pottery produced in the region by a variety of different makers, often sharing similar styles and materials. An array of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* memorabilia was produced. The majority of these items were figurines of Uncle Tom with Eva, echoing the popularity of their bond. Alongside figurines, children's crockery was produced depicting scenes associated with the book. Children's themed plates were a Victorian phenomenon that consisted of illustrations of moral stories decorated on lead-glazed earthenware or salt-glazed stoneware. Often, they were biblical stories, such as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Children's plates had two functions: firstly, to be visually appealing, a piece of memorabilia fit for the Victorian parlour; and, secondly, as an educational tool. If these were their functions, it raises the question: What does this tell us about the awareness of British children to the atrocities of slavery? V. A. Crewe & D. M. Hadley suggest that 'these plates reflect awareness among this working-class community of the anti-slavery movement'.

There is earlier evidence, too, of Staffordshire ceramics being used to raise awareness of slavery and the true cost of sugar production. A plate produced in 1850, for example, portrays one enslaved man and two enslaved children carrying sugar cane and is emblazoned with the text 'Sugar: How it grows & How it's Made' and Cane Mill'.[8]

Fifty-eight years before, in 1792, it was recorded by Katherine Plymley that many children had begun to boycott sugar in solidarity with enslaved people.[9] Child abolitionists were militant in their approach; one seven-year-old, Panton, refused to have his shoes shined because he had heard that the polish contained sugar.[10] These young activists were labelled anti-saccharists. The need for a label suggests that this was a large-scale movement. For many children, their anti-slavery sentiments will have been influenced by adults in their lives, be it teachers or parents. But this doesn't mean that children themselves did not feel moved to contribute to the abolition movement. Regardless of whether the anti-slavery message came from illustrations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on a plate or cup from an adult, it is clear that children up and down the country were not only aware of the abolitionist movement but were active participants in it. They were indeed on the right side of history.

Left: Uncle Tom and Eva, Staffordshire, England, 1855–1860, glazed and painted ceramic. Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts, USA.

Top: George Cruikshank, illustration to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852, woodcut. © The Trustees of the British Museum (1978,U.3166)..

Footnotes

1 Harriet Beecher Stowe to Prince Albert, 20 March 1852, Gilder Lehrman Collection.

2 Stephen Railton, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin & Slavery', *Interpret Mode* (1999), https://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/intslav.html.

3 The first edition was published in 1852 by John Cassell in London.

4 Railton, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin & Slavery'.

5 *Shields Daily Gazette*, Wednesday 18 April 1888, British Newspaper Archive.

6 H. E. Marshall, *Uncle Tom's Cabin Told to the Children* (E. P. Dutton & Co., c. 1904).

7 Jo-Ann Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture* (University of Missouri Press, 2007): 2.

8 Plate, c.1850, Staffordshire, England. Museum Collections Fund, HD 2020.3.1.

9 University of Exeter News, 'Georgian children boycotted sugar to protest against slavery and support abolitionists, study shows', 1 April 2021, https://news-archive.exeter.ac.uk/2021/april/title_853263_en.html.

10 Ibid.

Ships' nails

Origins and dates unknown, iron. Found by Nicola White in Deptford.
Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

Colonial and working-class legacies on the foreshore

By Gwena Harman

The Thames foreshore constitutes a vast, collapsed chronology of discarded, lost and forgotten shards of London's past. Many of these objects bear witness to the reality of London's complex and often brutal history as a centre of empire. They reveal intimate details of lives caught up in the city's expansion by colonisation, violence and extortion. They expose contradictions obscured by rapacious growth. To handle objects from the Thames foreshore – such as these ships' nails, found at Deptford – is to encounter spectral insights into the unwritten lives of ordinary people who shaped the city, and their powerful acts of resistance against a society intent on draining them of their labour and a history intent on discarding them.

Mudlarks and the policing of the foreshore

The original mudlarks were some of the city's poorest and most vulnerable people, surviving by gleaning scraps such as coal, bone, wood, rope and nails from the foreshore to sell. Mudlarks are described in a newspaper article from 1884 entitled 'The Lesser Mudlark' as 'almost a distinct species', 'obstinate and greedy little creatures' that are 'born to be hung'.[1]

The history of the foreshore as a working site is a history of enclosure. Throughout the 18th century huge stretches of the foreshore were privatised as dockyards were rapidly built to meet the increasing demand for ship building, maintenance and breaking required by imperial expansion and colonisation. Mudlarks were demonised and criminalised as London's docks became increasingly rigorously policed, severing them from their livelihood in a violent act of enclosure.

The first written account of mudlarking comes from Patrick Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (1796). Colquhoun was a merchant who made his fortune trading the products of enslaved people's labour on plantations in America. His primary concern was keeping mudlarks away from the moored ships of West India merchants. He proposed the establishment of a 'marine Police Office', which would enclose the foreshore from the mudlarks who relied on the common space to make their living and protect the imported profits

of enslaved labour. Mudlarks have always embodied an antithesis to the privatised foreshore initiated by Thames dockyards, operating against new laws of privatisation by exercising their historical right to access common land. Their eradication represents the consolidation of the policed enclosure that defines the foreshore today.

Deptford Dockyard and Collective Resistance

The iron nails I have been researching were found in Deptford, where the Royal Naval Dockyard built and maintained warships between 1512 and 1869.[2] London was Britain's first slaving port, and Deptford was one of the first docks from which transatlantic slaving ships sailed.[3]

Iron nails were mostly used to fasten the timber planks of the deck, with wooden 'tree' nails being used to secure the timbers of the hull.[4] These nails are all hand-forged, a technique that ensured they were strong enough to withstand the vast amounts of pressure they'd be put under at sea. They span the best part of two hundred years, between the late 1700s and the 1900s, although some could be older. Most of them are stamped with a broad arrow symbol, which has been used to signify military and Crown property since at least 1627.[5] It was also used to brand the clothing of convicts incarcerated on board prison hulks, to mark the clothing of convicts transported to Australia, and in North America to brand trees selected to be felled by the British Navy.[6]

Economic historian John Habakkuk wrote: 'Labour resistance to "labor-saving" machinery has been cited as the chief reason that England continued to produce nails by hand into the late 19th century.'[7] Dockyards have a long history of collective resistance. There are multiple accounts of Deptford shipwrights (ship builders) striking against poor wages and proposals to revoke their right to 'chips' (offcuts of timber and spare materials left over after a ship was built). Chip materials were used to build the houses and fuel fires of the dockworkers when coal was scarce or expensive; they were an essential resource relied upon for survival.[8] In July 1801 chips were replaced by 'chip money', an additional sixpence to shipwrights' daily wages.[9]

The nails are a nexus point that delivers into our hands a remnant of human ecology that has normalised colonisation. This is what gives the nail its potency; within its material presence is condensed the economy of its making: the extraction of iron from the land; the processing of ingots and the hundreds of years of blacksmithing expertise; the industrial development of the foreshore that facilitated centuries of ship building and breaking in naval yards; the working lives defined by industrialisation and the profits of the Transatlantic Slave Trade that built London. They show us a history which has been normalised; that England is built on hundreds of years of colonialism and enslavement. These nails are not merely symbolic; they are involved directly in these processes of violence and exploitation. They are the material legacy of hundreds of years of colonial violence.

Hand-forged nails are relics of resistance to the industrial machines driven by the coercion and subjugation of London's poor; machines that fuelled the city through the 19th, 20th and into the 21st century. They are inextricably connected to figures of working-class resistance: blacksmiths who knew the value of their labour and the quality of their craft; mudlarks sustained by an ever enclosed foreshore; rebelling dock workers who won better pay. The foreshore churns up the histories of London, rolls them in the wash of time and tide, eroding and exposing the fraught history of a city built on colonial violence, etched with working-class resistance, hundreds of years of people cast aside by the conveyor-belt force of linear, industrial progression.

The broad arrow rests on the Deptford foreshore. Its presence contains the story of our colonial history, branding people and stamping objects, tying them to the monarchy and empire, controlling their movements and uses through their designation as private property. Encountered by mudlarks, transported prisoners and indigenous Americans, the broad arrow maps the globalisation of the British Empire itself.

Left: Archibald Henning, 'The Mud-lark', in Henry Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor* (Charles Griffin and Company, 1864). © British Library.

Footnotes

1 'The Lesser Mudlark', *Manchester Courier*, 16 August 1884.

2 Helen Paul, 'The Grit in the Oyster: Deptford, Enslavement and the Challenges of Memorialisation', *The London Journal* 50, no.1 (2025): 99.

3 Ibid: 94–5.

4 'Today in London Strike History: 1739: Chips on their Shoulders, Deptford Shipwrights Strike', Past Tense Histories (2018), https://pasttense.co.uk/2018/10/20/today-in-london-strike-history-1739-chips-on-their-shoulders-deptford-shipwrigh ts-strike/.

5 E. H. Fairbrother, "The Broad Arrow': the King's mark', *Notes and Queries* 11, no.9 (1914): 481.

6 Fairbrother, 'The Broad Arrow': 482.

7 Tom Wells, 'Nail Chronology, The Use of Technologically Derived Features', *Historical Archaeology* 32, no.2 (1998): 88.

8 'Today in London Strike History'.

9 Ibid.

Gaming tokens

Origins and dates unknown, lead. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

A Melting Point of 327.5°C in the Thames' Carceral Geographies

By Ted Tinkler

Lead has a melting point of 327.5°C. It can be melted and manipulated into forms with the flame of an ordinary candle or an open fire, but it does release toxic fumes in the process. Lead has a melting point of 327.5°C. It's a 'soft' metal whose structure, content and context can shift when applied with a little heat. The prison-industrial complex has a melting point. It must. Its structures of harm and violence can shift; they need to.

Prison abolition[1] draws out connections between carceral institutions, infrastructure and control; and imagines alternatives that weave together the liberation of places, people and spaces.

Present Social Lives

I am drawn to the social lives of objects.[2] The way that 'objects not only have meaning in their present social contexts, but also their assumed past, and potential future[s].'[3] Here we start with 99 handmade lead pieces (numbered 1 to 6) and five associated outliers including a domino and a tag numbered '4'. Found on the Thames foreshore in Greenwich, these objects are most likely associated with gaming or counting. Collected over repeated visits to the foreshore. Are they 99 individuals, or a collective? They have no formal makers name or mark but hold the many impressions of physical touch. The hammering of impressions and holes into the lead.

A patchwork gaming set? What happens if you lose a piece? Maybe all these objects were the one lost piece from 99 games? Are these objects networks of information? Were they lost from a local workhouse or pub? Were they dropped from steps that led down to the Thames, a site itself associated with gambling? Did they fall from the deck of a prison hulk during someone's daily routine? *Wake at 5am, forced labour, looming transportation, lost lead tokens, wood saturated with bodily fluids, ship beams disintegrating with decades of violence* – war, imperialism, prisons.

Assumed Pasts

I was told these objects were probably made on a prison hulk – a decommissioned warship used to incarcerate people. Prison hulks were semi-permanently moored along the Thames between 1776 and 1856. There were at least 69 British prison hulks active during this period,[4] including at Deptford,

Woolwich, Chatham, Portsmouth and in British colonial outposts such as Bermuda, Gibraltar and Australia.

It is not inconceivable that these lead tokens came from prison hulks, but it's just as likely they fell from the land. This collection of objects and the prison hulks are constructed companions. Told together in one story because of the proximity to both river and land, the liminal space of the foreshore.[5] And honestly, I don't feel the need to get to the bottom of this unknown. They are all stories.

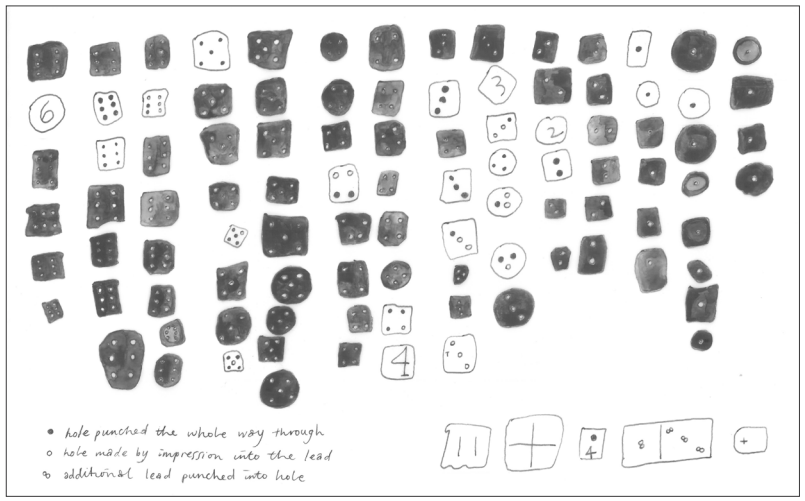
In 1776, the Criminal Law Act authorised the use of decommissioned ships as prison hulks as 'temporary' sites to hold incarcerated people before they were transported to Australia. An 'overcrowding solution'. This pipeline formed because the previous British colonial exports of human life to America was hindered by the Revolutionary War. It was a reconfiguring of violence.

The Thames was a lively space bustling with ships, docks, and people moving through the water. Would a few stationary ships decommissioned and 'repurposed' as prison hulks stand out? Would their inhabitants? Step out your door and did an intrusive shadow loom? Was the state trying to hide them too? Did it feel like when the cruise ships come into dock now and block the light usually afforded by the emptiness of the river?

The prison hulks sat on the silty bed of the Thames. Nearby, the Crowleys made manacles (to restrain prisoners) in their factory at Enderby's Wharf. The Warren in Woolwich was a site of forced labour and used for unmarked burials of people imprisoned on the hulks.[6] From here, people were forcibly transported out of the river mouth on sea-worthy convict ships to penal colonies in Australia. The 1776 Act authorised the use of prison hulks for two years, and yet it persisted for 80 and spread far beyond the Thames. At the beginning of 1845, 3,169 people were incarcerated on board prison hulks (greater than the number of people, 2,937, incarcerated on land).[7]

Handmade tokens called 'leaden hearts' can tell us something of the individuals behind these numbers. Some faced transportation for as little as stealing a wheel of cheese (Lewis Lyons in 1831).[8] Some faced lifetime transportation for nonviolent offenses such as coining (Elizabeth Martin in 1831).[9] Others were offered a 'conditional pardon' if they served in the army or navy, which came with similarly poor chances of survival.[10]

Prison hulks, like those built on land, were grounded in the 'construction of disposable people'.[11] The conditions on the hulks were extremely poor; for example, between 1776 and 1778, nearly one in four people incarcerated on the hulk *Justitia* died.[12] Many deaths were caused by infectious diseases, neglect and inadequate medical care. This persists in prisons today. For example, a 2009 inquest into Paul Clavert's death in Pentonville ruled that his death was 'contributed by neglect'.[13]



Left: Ted Tinkler, Gouache and ink on paper, 2025.

Potential Futures

There is current and ongoing state violence throughout the prison-industrial complex (from prisons and detention centres to psychiatric hospitals and the police). This includes the privatisation of the prison industrial complex; the broadening definitions of criminality (e.g. criminalising of peaceful protestors); and carceral spaces becoming more fragmented and less detectable (e.g. detention in healthcare spaces).[14]

From 2023 to 2025 the *Bibby Stockholm* incarcerated asylum seekers on a barge in Portland, Dorset. Likewise, these vast networks of detention and removal centres are typically located near transport hubs, does this feel familiar?[15] The modern police force was invented around 200 years ago and slowly spread out from London during the 1800s.

'Just as prisons and police are made to appear like a *natural* function of society, *as if they had always been there*, the contemporary prison's deployment within the landscape aims to erase the specific violence of the expansions of mass incarceration within the city.'[16]

In their work on 'carceral geographies', Hussein Mitha writes about the state's idea of turning HMP Barlinnie in Glasgow into a museum; a 'repurposing would exacerbate a false consciousness in relation to the state's prison industrial complex… turned into 'heritage', which it could simultaneously claim was 'of the past', thereby erasing the expanded carceral regime of the present…'[17] So, we must remember, incarceration is not only historic violence. Its mechanisms and institutions are old, *but not that old*. They are not inevitable. They can be unravelled.

Footnotes

1 For further reading on Abolition see: Critical Resistance (co-founded by Angela Davis & Ruth Wilson Gilmore); Mick Ryan & Tony Ward, 'Prison Abolition in the UK: They Dare Not Speak Its Name?', *Social Justice* 41, no. 3 (2015): 116; Woods Ervin in Gabriella Paiella, 'How would prison abolition actually work?', 15 June 2020, GQ, www.gq-magazine.co.uk/politics/article/prison-abolition.

2 Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

3 Bella Mirabella (ed.), *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories* (University of Michigan Press, 2011): 61.

4 https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/prison-hulks/.

5 Ruth Wilson Gilmore wrote that 'Abolition is not absence, it is presence.' To me this resonates with the liminal space of the foreshore, a murky shifting ground full of unknowns, mirroring the unknowns of these lead objects.

6 https://www.royal-arsenal-history.com/woolwich-arsenal-prison-hulks.html.

7 *Pictorial Times*, Saturday 20 December 1845, British Newspaper Archive: 14.

8 A26136: Engraved token of Lewis Lyons, 1831, London Museum.

9 HO 17/54/114, The National Archives.

10 Jeff James, 'Raising Sand, Soil and Gravel' Pardon Refusers On-Board Prison Hulks (1776–1815)', *Family & Community History* 20, no. 1 (2017): 3–24.

11 Yudi Feng, Mapping Carceral Geographies, 2024, https://confluence.gallatin.nyu.edu/context/interdisciplinary-seminar/mapping-carceral-geographies.

12 Anna McKay, 'Floating hell: the brutal history of prison hulks', BBC History (2022): 27–31.

13 https://history.inquest.org.uk/case-profiles/paul-calvert/.

14 Dominique Moran, 'Carceral Geographies: Spaces of Exception and Internment', in Michelle Brown & Eamonn Carrabine (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Visual Criminology* (Routledge, 2017): 73.

15 Historic transportation mirrors recent plans to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda.

16 Hussein Mitha, 'Glasgow's Carceral Geography', in *The Moon Spins The Dead Prison: An Anthology of Abolition* (School of Abolition, 2022): 20.

17 Ibid: 22.

Nkisi Kozo power figure

Africa or African diaspora, date unknown, wood and iron. Found by Nicola White in Greenwich. Photographed by Hannah Smiles.

Time to let out that dog in you

By Abondance Matanda

Bakongo means ‘the people who are like the leopard’ according to my Dad who, as an individual, would be identified as a Mukongo. Our tribe has grown, thrived, endured and reinvented itself for centuries, coexisting with the Nzadi o Nzere. In the Kikongo language, that means ‘The River That Swallows All Rivers’. Its mouth pours into the Atlantic Ocean from the western coast of central Africa. This is the region – home to the world's second-largest tropical rainforest – where the Ntotila dia (Kingdom of) Kongo was established circa 1390, after around 700 years of migration and expansion.[1]

Kongo became a sophisticated political nation, and its distinct spirituality has shapeshifted and been subject to cultural syncretism over time. Kongolese religious practice is beautiful and fearsome in its expression of a unique cosmological understanding of Kongo and her leopard-like people’s position, power and purpose in the intangible and material worlds; the celestial and earthly planes. Ultimately, this faith worships one Creator God called Nzambi Mpungu and his female counterpart Nzambici, but a defining feature is the relationship between living beings and ancestral spirits.

Nkisi is the word for spirit. Minkisi is the plural term for a group of spiritual objects that were once labelled 'fetishes' but are now typically translated as ‘power figures’. In essence, they are objects that have been animated or charged with the power, energy and symbolic characteristics of a particular entity, such as a person who has passed on to the realm of the ancestors or an animal that can act as an intermediary between that place and the land of the living.[2]

I’ve been researching a wooden power figure carved in the shape of a dog, making it an Nkisi Kozo. There is no equivalent term in European languages, but it can be understood as a kind of dog spirit.[3] Its materiality is fascinating in isolation, but so is its cultural context. Across the world, animals have been given symbolic associations according to their physical qualities, whether lions and eagles, or lambs and doves. Within Kongolese society, there was a reverence for dogs and their physical abilities – in this case, as hunters.[4] Certain categories of minkisi were inherently aggressive. The Nkisi Kozo found on the Thames foreshore could have been created to attack the threat upon Bakongo society posed by missionaries.[5] Some of

those missionaries actually hailed from Deptford, travelling up and down the Nzadi o Nzere river in the 1890s on vessels constructed in London's shipyards.[6] They could have been perceived as trying to steal indigenous identity and replace it with something foreign, so they needed something to chase them Western Christian ideologies back to sender.

When this Nkisi lived in Kongo, I wonder if it was named after a particular ancestor who defied a mundele (white man). Maybe they wanted to come back to earth to continue the fight to maintain African sovereignty, worldview and consciousness.[7] Maybe the spirit of the Kozo is still alive and has resurfaced above the water in the 21st century to influence the new discourse around repatriation and decolonisation. It probably feels too suffocated to fulfil this task from the confines of a museum case or storage facility.

So Nicola White is the mudlark to whom this little dog with a big spirit chose to reveal itself in the summer of 2021. Nicola documented the process of discovering-deliberating-leaving-tweeting-returning, then deciding-collecting-cleaning-caring for this rare, bizarre, intimidating, intriguing… thing. What is it? Can it harm me? Should I take it home? These are some of the uncomfortable but understandable interrogations Nicola shared in her YouTube video 'The Mysterious Wooden Dog with nails in his back found on the Thames'.[8] Being transparent about what was unknown and unfamiliar to her has enabled others with different knowledges to come forward and create new layers of understanding about this piece of African sculpture.

It's possible that our object was once part of the collections at the Horniman Museum in Forest Hill, but we may never know how it ended up in the river only a few miles away in Greenwich. In 1936, the Horniman's collection guide described in detail some of the 'nail fetishes' it had acquired for its ethnographic gallery.[9] However, there is 'no information about where, when and by whom they were collected'.[10] If he were reading this now, the institution's founder, Frederick Horniman, would probably be mortified to discover that a Black woman originating from that 'primitive' Kongolese tribe claims not only to be civilised enough to publish cultural research, but actually to be British!

Undercurrents of many histories are dancing on these pages as intensely and freely as they do through my blood; as playfully and brightly as the mirror that once reflected

things visible and invisible off the back of this Nkisi Kozo. We are now in an era when heritage is being contested and confronted. So are you gonna be brave enough to face this grimacing canine, laughing at the thrill of chasing you through the forest of your own psyche? Are you tough enough to stand up tall too, even though you ain't had ten nails hammered inna your flesh? Or have you? Maybe you do know what it's like to be backstabbed, but still have to hold your head high and keep chasing what you were born, designed, assigned to do. Maybe you do got that dog in you…

It is difficult, confusing and painful diving into the dark history of maritime encounters and transactions between my ancestors and the Europeans that saw them as so savage that they deserved to be dehumanised. But times have changed, despite the legacies that remain. A thousand words can barely express the magic of this object; how it was once crafted in the capable hands of an unrecorded Mukongo artisan thousands of moons/ngondas ago. Yet is still intact enough to be held in my Mukongo hands, thousands of ocean miles away – thanks to the anaerobic mud of the tidal River Thames, which preserved the wood, nails, paint, glass and feathers of this Nkisi Kozo until she was ready to let the dog out.

Top: Congo, 1934–39. West Africa box, Woolwich Brass Foundry. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Bottom: X-ray of Nkisi Kozo, 2025. Image by Dr Thomas Kelly, School of Geography Laboratories at Queen Mary, University of London.

Footnotes

1 Rebecca Bayeck, 'Unsung History of the Kingdom of Kongo', New York Public Library (2021), https://www.nypl.org/blog/2021/11/02/unsung-history-kingdom-kongo.

2 Hein Vanhee, 'Kongo Minkisi: Agents of Order & Disorder', in Karel Arnaut (ed.), *Re-Visions: New Perspectives on the African Collections of the Horniman Museum* (Horniman Museum. 2000): 93.

3 Wyatt Macgaffey, 'The Eyes of Understanding - Kongo Minkisi', in *Astonishment and Power* (Smithsonian Institution, 1993): 21.

4 James E. Johannes, 'Dogs in the spiritual world of the Kongo People', *The Official Bulletin of the Basenji Club of America* 41, no. 2 (June 2008): 16–17.

5 Vanhee, 'Kongo Minkisi': 91.

6 'Box D29.1 and D29.2: Congo Mission Slides #1 and #2', Museum of Everyday Life/Lewisham Local History Society & Jude Pretoria, 2024. Archive collection of lantern slide images of a missionary trip to Congo in the 1890s, edited by Dr John Price. Congo Mission Slides, https://moel.org.uk/d29-1_006705-missionary-lantern-slide-1/.

7 Simon Kavuna Kafwandani, 'Minkisi Description in an ethnographic notebook', in. Wyatt Macgaffey (ed.), *Astonishment and Power - They Eyes of Understanding: Kongo Minkisi* (Smithsonian Institution, 1993): 21.

8 Nicola White, 'The Mysterious Wooden Dog with nails in his back found on the Thames', Tideline Art (2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Upybjfh2qGc.

9 *Guide to the Collections in The Horniman Museum and Library* (London County Council, 1936).

10 Vanhee, 'Kongo Minkisi': 90.

Credits

Nicola White, Mudlark
Hannah Smiles, Photographer
Ellie Pinney, Designer

For Thames Festival Trust:

Adrian Evans, Director
Tom Chivers, Heritage Project Manager

Acknowledgements

Lost & Found is made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Using money raised by National Lottery players, The National Lottery Heritage Fund supports projects that connect people and communities with the UK's heritage. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to reveal untold maritime histories of Greenwich and Deptford.

Lost & Found was created in collaboration with an exceptional group of artists, mudlarks and heritage professionals. For their time, expertise and enthusiasm we extend our thanks to: Remiiya Badru; Monika Buttling-Smith, Marie-Louise Plum and Jason Sandy, Hands on History; Dr Justin Colson, The Institute of Historical Research; Dr Claire Harris, Museum of London Archaeology; Dr Anna McKay, University of Liverpool; Dr Helen Paul, University of Southampton; Sophie Perkins, The National Lottery Heritage Fund; Pippa Barber and Chris Sawyer, Port of London Authority; Kelvin Shewry, Paddy Hayes and their colleagues at Creekside Educational Trust; Dr Hannah Stockton and Fern Aldous, Royal Museums Greenwich; Kate Sumnall and Stuart Wyatt, London Museum; Patricia Underwood and Meg Woof, Lewisham Heritage; and Symeon Ververidis, The London Archives.

Expert analysis on the Nkisi Kozo power figure and the barnacles was provided by Dr Tom Kelly (Queen Mary, University of London) and Alan Pipe (Museum of London Archaeology) respectively.

We are grateful to the Port of London Authority for granting us permission to visit the Thames foreshore. Anyone searching the tidal Thames foreshore from Teddington to the Thames Barrier – in any way for any reason – must hold a current and relevant foreshore permit from the Port of London Authority. This includes all searching, metal detecting, 'beachcombing', scraping and digging.

Published by Thames Festival Trust, 7 Bell Yard, London WC2A 2JR.

First published 2025.

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Angel Press Limited.

ISBN: 978-1-0369-3169-8.

Thames Festival Trust

Made possible with

Heritage Fund