BISON TO BEDLAM
CROSSRAIL’S ARCHAEOLOGY STORY SO FAR
Crossrail is among the most ambitious construction projects our country has seen. From improving journey times across London, to easing congestion and offering better connections, Crossrail will benefit millions.

The scale of the railway is breath-taking. Stretching from Maidenhead and Heathrow in the west through central London to Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the east. Crossrail covers 118km and involves constructing 42km of tunnels, building eight new stations and upgrading 28 existing stations.

Crossrail, Europe’s largest construction project also includes one of the most extensive archaeological programmes ever undertaken in the UK. This offers us the opportunity to reveal the layer cake of history that is hidden below London’s streets and acts as a catalyst for learning about our past.

Here we celebrate the half-way point of our archaeology works and share some of our key discoveries to-date.
London was once crisscrossed by rivers. The Crossrail route bisects a number of these ancient waterways. We have uncovered one historic channel west of Paddington that contained a large collection of animal bones from species that are now extinct in the British Isles, including prehistoric reindeer and bison that are approximately 68,000 years old.

The animals lived throughout Europe and Asia from at least 500,000 years ago. As the climate warmed these animals, along with the mammoth, disappeared from Britain and Europe.

A 55 million year old piece of precious amber was uncovered under the dock bed at Canary Wharf. This amber is larger and clearer than any previously found in the UK.

Amber in the UK’s geological sequence is extremely rare and very little amber has been found in London. The fossilised tree resin can be analysed to indicate the environment and what trees grew at that time.
We have discovered the remains of a large manor house surrounded by a moat at Stepney Green. The house, originally called King John’s Court, was built c1450-1550 and played an important role in the political and religious non-conformist movement in east London.

The royalist Marquis of Worcester bought the house in 1597 only to have it seized for acts of treason during the Civil War fifty years later.

The high status home was then acquired by a prominent parliamentarian, William Greenhill, who provided a safe haven for early Protestant nonconformists or Puritans to meet.

A meeting house, Baptist College, Congregational Church and school were added to the grounds and nonconformist activities at the site continued through to the 20th century.
Our excavations around Liverpool Street are providing insight into the lives of past Londoners.

Remains from the Roman city of Londinium have been revealed including household items, shoes and pottery.

Ice-skates have been found that date to a time between the 8th and 16th century when the marshland area, known as Moorfields, froze over in winter. Moorfields often flooded due to poor maintenance of drainage channels after the Romans left the city.

We have also commenced our work to carefully remove thousands of human remains from the Bethlehem ‘Bedlam’ Hospital burial ground beneath Liverpool Street. Studying the burial types and the remains can tell us about Londoner’s health at the time. We can also get an insight into how people lived, their diet, lifestyle, status and beliefs.

We expect that up to 4,000 skeletons will be uncovered. Crossrail will carefully rebury the human remains after consulting with the Ministry of Justice.
In the 1660s the Crown granted Soho Fields to the Earl of St Albans for development and within thirty years many of Soho’s streets and squares had been laid out.

Crosse and Blackwell began bottling pickles and preserves in the area in 1840. Over the next decades they expanded rapidly, buying up neighbouring properties. By the end of the 19th century the company was operating from a large new warehouse in Charing Cross Road. It was in the basement of this warehouse that we found a large network of underground rooms containing kilns, furnaces and an innovative refrigeration system.

One underground vault contained around 8,000 ceramic and stoneware jars. The finds are thought to be the largest discovery of late Victorian and early Edwardian jars in the country.

Investigations at Limmo Peninsula have uncovered the remains of the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company which played an important part in London’s industrial development and Newham’s social history, employing thousands of people to produce ships for navies around the globe.

The ironworks occupied the entire Limmo Peninsula between 1847 and 1912. Some of the world’s most famous warships were built and launched from the site including HMS Warrior, the world’s first all-iron warship and the SS Robin, the world’s last remaining steam coaster. Built in 1890, SS Robin recently underwent extensive £1.9m conservation work; part-funded by Crossrail.

We have uncovered parts of the works buildings and machinery that are helping us map the yard’s layout. We also uncovered a large piece of wreckage from a clinker boat, believed to be up to 800 years old.
Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s grand Great Western Railway terminus station at Paddington opened in 1854. Our works around the station have revealed many buried features of Brunel’s work including the original wood block road surface which provided noise abatement to residents from the hundreds of horse drawn vehicles using Departures Road.

We have also uncovered significant railway features at the Old Oak Common railway depot. This depot was one of the most modern locomotive repair facilities in the country when it opened. Traditional and modern construction techniques and materials were combined to create a depot capable of accommodating and servicing the company’s latest and largest locomotives. A mighty engine shed containing four turntables was the centrepiece of the extensive site.

Crossrail’s new train depot will be built at the site.

Many of the most significant historical items will find new homes in heritage railways across the country.

The sole remaining turntable was donated to the Swanage Steam Railway in Dorset.
Crossrail’s archaeology programme has completed half of its journey with many more interesting finds yet to be uncovered.

Digs will continue at all of the central London stations sites into 2014. Trial digs at Farringdon have already confirmed that medieval leather working took place next to an ancient river channel. We hope to determine whether these finds were associated with the nearby Charterhouse Carthusian Priory.

Major investigations in Liverpool Street will reveal the less salubrious parts of Roman London outside of the City walls. We expect to encounter Roman timber framed buildings and a street surface some six metres below ground level. The ‘lost’ Walbrook River may also be found. This was a canalised channel that divided the western and eastern parts of the city.

The Bedlam burial ground excavation will also continue as archaeologists carefully remove and safely re-bury the remaining skeletons from the burial site. This will be the largest archaeological excavation on the project.

In the east we will also work at four large tunnel portal sites at Pudding Mill Lane, Victoria Dock, North Woolwich, and Plumstead. Here we expect to encounter areas where Bronze Age people lived, farmed and hunted some 3,500 years ago. We will search for several hundred miles of timber tracks that were built by prehistoric communities to access the rich natural resources of the east London marshlands.
MOVING LONDON FORWARD