

The Buried History of the Winchester Geese: Part 1

Intro: Hello and welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts and enthusiasts and asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold tales.

Ellie: Hello, I'm Ellie and welcome to another Hampshire HistBites episode. I'd like to introduce today's guest, Lucy Coleman Talbot, who's a social anthropologist and a PhD student at the University of Winchester. If you've been to any of our previous festival talks over the last few years, then you will definitely recognise Lucy and hopefully you might also recognise today's topic. That is, the Winchester Geese. Hello Lucy.

Lucy: Hi, Ellie. How are you?

Ellie: I'm okay, thank you. Thank you for being here.

Lucy: Thank you for inviting me.

Ellie: Ah, it's a pleasure. Now, I'm going to kick it off with, possibly a question that might not be related, but could you give us a definition of what social anthropology is?

Background

Lucy: Yeah, sure. So we don't go down too much of a rabbit hole, I will just keep it quite broad. In social anthropology, we're interested in the study of human society and culture. And the way in which we, I suppose, perhaps differ, 'cause you could ultimately say that about most disciplines, is we are particularly interested in behaviour and the ways in which people make their lives meaningful.

Ellie: Brilliant. What's your PhD on, just that we know what you're studying, what area and what views we're going to get, I suppose.

Lucy: So, although my work is grounded in social anthropology, it draws on two other disciplines as well. So I engage with historical and archaeological techniques. That means that I've done a lot of archival research and a lot of looking at history. And I also do, what we call contemporary archaeology, in that I engage with a burial ground, using archaeological techniques to record what's happening now in this space. Now the burial ground I'm referring to is the Cross Bones Burial Ground in Southwark. If anyone would ever like to visit, it's very close to Borough Market and London Bridge, and this is a known post medieval pauper burial ground.

Ellie: OK.

Lucy: And the reason it's interesting to me, from an anthropological perspective, is that the Cross Bones, since the 1990s, has become a site of pilgrimage. It's become a site of ritual. It's become a place where shrines have been curated and it really has become a place that is at the heart of a community. And, through my work, I look at Cross Bones as a site of memory. I look at the different ways people interact with this site, how they attribute meaning to it, how

it affects them and makes them feel about them themselves. And part of that is looking at the sites of mythic origins. Now, if you were to Google Cross Bones Graveyard, the first thing that would come up is that this is the burial ground that the Winchester Geese were put. And this is a mythic origin. It's not factually known, but part of that is because, as we know with history, not everything gets written down and it's often the marginalized that get completely erased from history. So in the 1880s, this tradition starts being written down by local antiquarians that Cross Bones Graveyard is the site that single women, which is a reference to prostitutes, were put by the Church because they were denied a Christian burial, even though they paid into the church, as part of their working agreement.

Ellie: Right. Could you then possibly take us back to the start? What was this agreement about? Why did they pay into the Church?

Lucy: Okay. So our most popular source of information on this is John Stow's *Survey of London*, 1598, published in 1603. And in it, John Stow talks of ancient men of good credit talking about a burial ground, far from the parish church, that these single women were put in and he refers to it as a Single Women's Church Yard.

So they were governed by the church yet denied Christian burial. Now, there is no particular evidence or information presented by Stow in relation to this and there are historians that, if they were here, would say that sometimes with John Stow, there is a level of artistic licence, shall we say. But this definitely can be backed up factually in some ways. So for example, at our Hampshire Records Office, looking back at ecclesiastical law records for the Bishop of Winchester, we can see that burials were happening in that area, they were recorded at that time. And in the margin of them, they were putting single woman, or single wench or single wench with child. Now, no other occupation on these records is stated. So that leads me to think, why would you write that in the margin of that record, if there wasn't something differently being done that you needed to identify?

Ellie: Yeah. Why is there so much emphasis put on that? You know, there's nothing for a single man, I suppose.

Lucy: It's well known and well understood that single woman referred to a prostitute. Another thing to bring in here is probably a little bit – so we've mentioned the Bishop of Winchester now, and we're mentioning the Winchester Geese. Probably, for me to contextualize that a little bit, because there's probably somebody listening, thinking 'What has Southwark got to do with Winchester? Why is the Bishop? Why are you in the Hampshire Records Office? What's happening here?' And it is a little bit convoluted, but I hope it will link us into quite a fruitful discussion about memory later on because the Bishop of Winchester had links to this area. And if anybody's taken a nice walk down by the Thames on the South Bank, they may have seen the ruins of Winchester Palace. I don't know if you're familiar with it, Ellie. Have you seen Winchester Palace?

Ellie: I have seen it from afar, but I've never visited.

Lucy: Okay. So those ruins are actually a real good geographical tell-tale sign for us in relation to the Bishop of Winchester. Winchester Palace was built so that the Bishop of Winchester would have somewhere that he could stay when he was up in London on business. And this was probably around 1149. So we're talking about Bishop Henry of Blois and we're talking about a Bishop that was at the time, the younger brother of King Stephen. So he'd established this palace up there at that time, which meant he was up in that area for business. But also, we need to understand that geographically, south of the river was not coming under

London. And so having that jurisdiction over that area, by the King, this was known to be a very unruly and difficult area, so the King was quite relieved in a way to get rid of it. I believe I recall, but I don't have a corroborated source of this in front of me, but I read somewhere that, for King Stephen, it was kind of 'Look, you can make up the rules in this area and you can do what you need to do to control it. And the only thing that we'll kind of deal with is murders or really kind of serious high-profile crimes.' So in that sense, the Bishop of Winchester had his own tiny world that was operating there.

Ellie: That's incredible. 'Cause, of course, hopefully our listeners will know that it's Henry of Blois that builds the Cathedral, and to my knowledge I think he was the second richest man in England.

Lucy: You're getting me on a feminist rant quite early here, because if we want to talk about profitability, as you know, Ellie, 'cause you were there, I did do a talk on the Winchester Geese last year for Heritage Open Days. And one of the questions I got was sort of where was the money going?

And I feel that's quite a complex question that a historian would probably do a better job of answering, but one thing is quite certain, just what you said. This was a very profitable time for this Bishop and Winchester Cathedral was being built at the time. So we don't know factually, what involvement that particular Bishop would have had with this. I'll just move on to that in a second, 'cause I think it's really important, timescale wise, to kind of understand, we're not entirely sure what was operating when, but this area had an enormous amount of brothels.

It was a place that people came on boats across the river. There was a lot of other things going on in this area. We know from Shakespeare's Globe, the Rose Theatre, this is an area where people came for entertainment. There would have been a lot of immigrants coming in off the ships. This was a very interesting and diverse space, but the brothels were a key part of that. And how this is tying us all back into what we were talking about in respect of Stow and his idea of women working in this area, being buried separately, is that there is a point in time where the Bishop brings in Ordinances, which are rules that essentially make sex work, in the Bishop of Winchester's Liberty of the Clink, legal.

There are 39 of them. But maybe I should just say that we're not entirely sure how long these rules were in place. And the reason for this is, there's a fascinating document, which is signed by the Bishop, and this Bishop moves us on to Henry Beaufort. So we've moved on a Bishop now and we've moved on a King. We've got King Henry II at this point, and it was widely understood and accepted that in 1161, the Bishop was granted power to license sex work, in the Liberty, by King Henry II. However, because this document was signed and dated at this time, suggests that this wasn't the case. And actually, having a look at this document, it transpires that it was actually created in the 15th century. So it was made to look like it was brought in in 1161, but it was far more likely that it was in the 14- or 1500s that this document was created.

Ellie: Oh, right.

And one of my favourite responses to this, 'cause if you look at a lot of history, academic works or books, they will say that it was the 1100s that this document was created. Kate Lister in 2018, she wrote a piece for the Wellcome Collection, and in that she says: "Naughty Bishop".

Ellie: Well, absolutely.

Lucy: Absolutely. Because he was trying to make it look authentic. But what we must also consider is, while it may have been written in at that time, that doesn't mean that these brothels were not operating and that there wasn't some kind of understanding between the Bishop and the people working in those stews. So I suppose the point I'm making is we don't know at what point those payments were happening, but the document would tell us that that was more around that time period.

Ellie: So essentially, what's happened is somebody's seen the loophole and gone "We can't have that. They'll catch us out at some point", and so they forged the document.

Lucy: I mean, obviously it's forged in that if you're dating it earlier than when you're creating it, you're making it look like it's been going on for a lot longer. However, I believe, and carbon dating of documents is not my area, but I suppose the assumption would be it's to make it more authentic. It's to make it look like it's been happening for a long time. You could think that that's because it had been, and they were trying to cover themselves. You could think that, actually, they were bringing it in at that point. And perhaps it was more about, 'Well, we've been doing it for this long.'

So, you know, from my perspective, I have absolutely no idea, but it's an important thing to point out because a lot of the sources, if you do find yourself thinking, 'This is fascinating, I want to look into it more,' you'll find that people are talking about this document in 1161. Sometimes they say 1162. And in actuality there have been these recent developments, it's just it was a little bit later. From a historical perspective, there's a lot of debates around the brothels or stews, as they would be known as well. A stew was described by Paul Slade in his book, in 2013, *The Outcast Dead at Cross Bones*, as "a sexy jacuzzi", which I just find really funny, personally.

The reason for this being, they wouldn't have all had the hot bath. It might be important to just give a little bit of understanding as to how these brothels were operating in this area. The stews, they were essentially bath houses. There is evidence to say that the Romans brought brothels to Southwark when they settled there. So there could be this longer tradition of this in the area. It's probably way more complex and way more interesting than maybe we have time to delve into, because I think we want to get more on to, you know, what am I doing in relation to them now, but I just think it's a good point to make.

Ellie: So we've talked about the Ordinance being signed and its possible issue surrounding its date that it was created. What did the Ordinance do? Did it serve the Bishop?

Lucy: The interesting thing about the Ordinances, they can be divided in different ways. So you have ones that look like or allude to protection of the sex worker. You have ones that look like they are protecting the customer, or the client. And you have ones that looked like they are generally looking for social order, in terms of society.

When I gave the talk, actually, in Winchester last year, I'd done a little bit of geeky analysis of them. And I was demonstrating that actually, when you break it down, the majority of them regulate the women, as opposed to the client or the wider societal issue.

I think the Ordinances are really interesting. I'll give you some examples of a few of them. They range, there are ones, so if we think about the male clients, there're ones that stipulate they're not allowed to punch the women in the face. There's regulation around them not being allowed to go back across the river after night, presumably they had issues with that happening with people going back into London. So they would have to stay within one of the brothels or the stew houses, if they were the last client of the day. But in relation to the

women, I mean, there's a whole stack of things. There's don't whore if Parliament is sitting. Don't whore if you have the burning sickness. You weren't allowed to wear an apron. You weren't allowed to work if you were pregnant. There were all these different rules. Oh, whore on a Sunday as well, because you know, even though you're paying into the Church, as part of this Ordinance, you can't be doing this on a Holy day.

Ellie: I wouldn't dream of it, no. The apron one is the one that I've pulled out from that. Would that be because wearing an apron was a sign of being a wife, being a mother, and that was something that these women weren't afforded?

Lucy: I would say that it probably does to a level come to a form of respectability because presumably if you were wearing an apron, you may have had another job that meant you were wearing one, but yeah, absolutely. I think, a lot of it has also been about understanding that a lot of it was about visible segregation.

I'll mention at this time that there were also hoods, called the Hood of Ray. We don't know masses about these. It was something that I was looking into quite extensively last year and I consulted with some medieval historians that I know that do work in respect of costume or sexuality. I think it's interesting because the Hood of Ray was essentially a striped hood, which I think might be to do with then the name, you know, because maybe it looked like you had rays around your head. But it was something that you had to wear, if you were a prostitute, at all times when you were working in the Liberty. So it feels very Handmaid's Tale, because it is. You know, it's a way of saying, 'you are this' and it means other people can spot you and they know what you're doing. If you were not abiding by the Ordinances, one of the punishments might be to have your Hood of Ray removed, taken from you, and you would then have to work, in order to make enough money, to purchase another Hood of Ray, right. But how can you work if you have to wear a Hood of Ray in order to make money? So I think what we need to do when we're thinking about these, and of course, it's one document that on the one hand gives us such insight, but it's giving us insight, as we know with things that go on in our societies, it's giving us insight to something that is government level, it's top down. And while it definitely gives us a comment on the human behaviours that are going on, it's not giving us the lived experience of these women.

And what I see here is a duality of their memory that's really, really important. How, on the one hand, I think there is something so progressive when we think about the modern struggles for sex worker rights that are happening in this country at the moment. And in fact, internationally. There's something so progressive about this idea of actually having it recognized in law that this is happening, in a way that, you know, benefits the person that is engaging in the sex work, just as much as perhaps other people in society. And that lends something so important to debates. You know, we can sit here and we can think: 'Wow, you know, we have all these issues with law and regulation in this country and look, back then they were acknowledging it was happening and they were regulating it.' And I think in that sense, the Winchester Geese can be this symbol of something very progressive.

However, we can't get so caught up in that, that we don't acknowledge the fact that a lot of these women would have had a really terrible time.

There were punishments in place if they were not paying into the Church or adhering to these Ordinances. I mentioned the removal of the Hood of Ray, but there were other ones. Head shaving. Being paraded around, on wagons with musicians. They may, if they try to escape, be captured and brought back and actually, that lends itself to more modern slavery and human trafficking and forced prostitution debates. So in a sense, the Geese have abilities to

become a symbol of something that can lend itself to this really complex, modern day struggle for recognition of the rights of women who identify as sex workers or prostitutes. Whether they're doing that by choice or whether they are forced into that situation in some way.

Ellie: I've got the Ordinances in front of me and I'm just having a read through them as you are so brilliantly explaining there. The theme that I get when you read the 39 Ordinances is that the Bishop didn't very much care for petty squabbles or any real harsh treatment that the women had to face themselves. And then, all of a sudden, it jumps up and any bad thing that happens if somebody doesn't pay over a certain amount or something like that, it jumps straight to the King.

Lucy: It's difficult for me to comment too much on the inner mechanics of how that was working, because we just don't know. We have this document and it lists these things, but it's like with any situation, you know, you could pull a bit of modern, contemporary, British law now, and you could read it, but it might not reflect the nuance of how that's being experienced by different people.

One way of reading it, is that he was very protecting of them. He wasn't out looking after them himself. These were his conditions that he was putting in place, but there is one way to look at it and think, that actually, the very acknowledgement that these women may have experienced violence, and things like that, is something that demonstrates a level of understanding of what it might've been like for them.

However, you're absolutely right. Certain things are going straight to King's Court. There's, of course, there's records of punishments and things like that. But in terms of lived accounts, we just don't have them. And I think we're at a point with history, we're at a point with heritage, where we're reconsidering that lens for which we look back at history and what we take really for factual, you know, just 'cause it's documented, doesn't make it factual. And as has been proved with the Naughty Bishop, because he just put a random date on it and it completely changed the way scholars were engaging with it.

To summarise, you know, historians have been having debates for years. I mean, Martha Carlin wrote *Medieval Southwark*, that's sort of seen as a real seminal text in response to understanding the history of Southwark.

There's been a lot of scrutiny about some of the things that have been presented in there. Some historians feel that the brothels predated the dates that she says, or they were after. There's always going to be different sources and information coming out about things. But I think we can understand, just for the purposes of what we're doing here, that there was definitely something going on in respect of this activity. The records that I've seen in the archive in Winchester, they demonstrate the fact that women who were engaged in prostitution or at least perceived to be, were being marked off on these records. There must have been a reason for that. John Stow, even if it was just chatter in the tavern, felt cause to write it down. And in the 1880s these antiquarian studies that are saying 'There were these women, they were working here, but they were denied Christian burial. They were buried far from the parish church.' They may be quoting Stow, but we don't know. There may have been oral traditions of this, where people were passing this history down. In the same way that, you know, I think the internet and social media presents an era where we're getting much more proportionate views, to some extent, but we're getting more lived experience accounts. Sometimes we're learning about what people are going through from people, from different

cultures, from marginalised communities. And it may be that some of that information was being passed down verbally and that's why it was written down in the 1880s.

I think the take home from this episode should be that we've established that there's a lot of question marks when it comes to the Winchester Geese, particularly where they might have been buried. But one thing is for sure, if they were not remembered at the Cross Bones Burial Ground, where would they be remembered?

Bishop Owning a Brothel

Ellie: My final question on the actual contemporary time relates again to the Bishop. Would he have owned a brothel himself, is there anything that was directly linked to him?

Lucy: We're not just talking exclusively about one Bishop, particularly, if we are to understand that the brothels and the stews were operating in Southwark for a really long time, and just when the Ordinances later go out and we have the Reformation and things like that, it doesn't mean that everything's going to cease.

But one particular Bishop, that I think we mentioned earlier, that should definitely be mentioned is Henry Beaufort. And the reason for that being is that he was the Cardinal and there is an alley actually, which is not often open anymore in Southwark, cause it doesn't actually really lead anywhere these days, but it's called Cardinals Cat Alley. I'm kind of paraphrasing from my mind here, but there was a brothel called the Cardinals Hat or Cardinals Cap.¹ I would need to check that. There is kind of this idea that maybe he would be walking around the area in that, and maybe he did own one of the most successful brothels in the area, which we do know is true. And we do know that when, later when the stews were disbanded, he actually moved his brothel, because it was so successful, to France where he was still able to have that. And it was a very popular brothel. It would have been known. It's probably quite likely that that's where this kind of argot of Winchester Goose comes from, because not only is this about Winchester Geese paying into the Church, it's also about a Bishop owning a brothel.

Ellie: Thank you so much, Lucy.

If you've enjoyed listening to today's episode and would like to find out a bit more, all of the links will be available on our website. Next week in part two of this episode, I'll be continuing my discussion with Lucy on the Winchester Geese and finding out how they are remembered today. We do hope you can join us.

Outro: We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you'd like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, winchesterheritageopendays.org, click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you for listening.

¹ Most searches seem to suggest 'Cap' instead of 'Hat'.