

SGI 21 The Ilford Mammoth

London Borough of Redbridge,

Bronze Plaque to the Ilford Mammoth is placed on the wall of the Ilford Methodist Church Hall, 58 Ilford Lane (between Britannia and Bengal Roads). It is visible on the wall from Ilford Lane.

Grid reference: TQ 4371 8609

The History

In the early 19th century, when Ilford was a village on the London Road, a number of brick pits were in operation in the vicinity and occasionally the workmen came across the bones of large Pleistocene mammals in and below the 'brickearth'. The sites extended over a distance of about 2 kilometres (over a mile) between the banks of the River Roding to Seven Kings. At least three pits were in operation during the middle of the 19th century - the heyday of fossil collecting at Ilford.

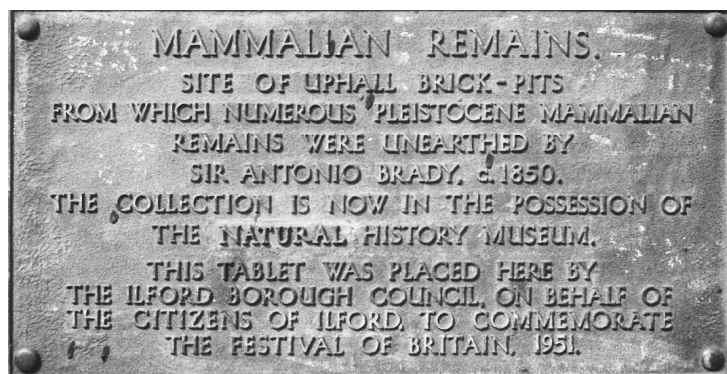
The most famous locality was the **Uphall Pit**, (TQ 436 861) between the Roding and what is now Ilford Lane. Contemporary accounts state that the 'brickearth' in this pit consisted of yellow sandy loam with shells and the bones were usually found at a depth of about 5 metres. It dates from a temperate, interglacial stage within the Taplow/Mucking Gravel which is correlated with Marine Isotope Stage 7 and is therefore about 200,000 years old. Uphall Pit was the site of the discovery of the skull of the 'Ilford mammoth' in 1863 which had tusks nearly 3 metres long and is regarded as the most complete mammoth skull ever found in Britain. It is a Steppe Mammoth, *Mammuthus trogontherii*. The catalogue of Brady's collection records in detail the excavation of the beast and describes how difficult the task was. It states: 'You must imagine the skull resting half exposed in compact brickearth, requiring a spade or trowel to remove it, but the fossil itself as friable as decayed wood or tinder, the ivory of the tusks being equally soft and shattered.' Another spectacular find was made in 1865 which was the complete skull of a woolly rhinoceros and it was expertly removed under Brady's supervision.

The Plaque

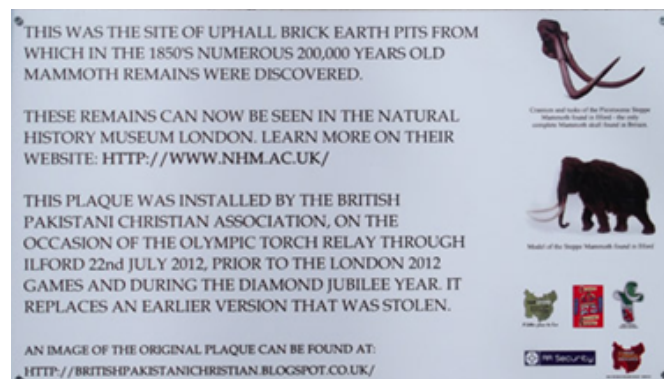
The site of the Uphall Pit was marked by a bronze plaque on the front wall of the Ilford Methodist Church Hall. It was erected by the Borough Council in 1951 to commemorate the Festival of Britain but it was stolen in January 2012. In July 2012, a replacement was installed by the British Pakistani Christian Association during the run-up to the London Olympics and has since been replaced by a more permanent plaque. In 2014 the BPCA organised a Festival to commemorate 150 years since the skull was found. The original is held by the Natural History Museum with a replica of the skull and tusks made of resin in Redbridge Central Library. It is suspended above the Welcome Desk and visitors can take a closer look by climbing the staircase in the middle of the building to the first floor, where they will find a panel with some explanatory text.

All the pits have now been filled in and the sites developed and so at present this plaque is the only record on the ground of what was one of the richest sites for Pleistocene fossil mammals in the world. The original complete skull and tusks of the mammoth are still on display in the Natural History Museum, London.

Text taken from GeoEssex/Essex Field Club with thanks



Original Plaque



Replacement plaque 2012

'Marley the Mammoth' Mosaic

In 2024, a splendid, new mosaic (below) was commissioned by Redbridge Council to commemorate the Ilford Mammoth. Located on the walls of Clementswood Baptist Church on Ilford Lane, IG1 2LG (legs.line.oiled), 'Marley' depicts a mammoth skeleton superimposed on the form of a mammoth, all made from a mosaic of white and multicoloured, plastic jar and bottle tops which were collected by local residents and schoolchildren. The artist behind the project is Caitlin Atherton of PlasticShed.org.



Access

The museum is in Clements Road, Ilford IG1 1EA and the nearest station is Ilford served by TfL Rail and Great Eastern services from Liverpool Street. Many bus services serve Ilford town centre.

References

- George, W.H. 2000. *Dr. Richard Payne Cotton (1820-1877) Physician and collector of Ilford fossils*. ISBN 0953409228. 24 pages.
- Hinton, M.A.C. 1900. The Pleistocene Deposits of the Ilford and Wanstead District. *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* **16**: 271-282.
- Jackson, P. 1986. *The Return of the Mammoth: Fossil mammal remains from 19th century excavations in Redbridge*. An introduction to an exhibition held in the Local History Room Central Library, Ilford. 12 pp.
- Redknapp, M. and Currant, A. 1985. 'Another day's elephant hunting in Essex': recently excavated fossil remains from Ilford. *Essex Journal* **20**:8-10.
- Schreve, D. C., 1998, Mammalian biostratigraphy of the later middle Pleistocene in Britain., Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 2 Volumes, 776 pp. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1317926/>
- Walker, H. 1880. A day's elephant hunting in Essex. *Transactions of the Essex Field Club* **1**:27-58.
- Woodward, H. 1864. Discovery of a cranium of *Elephas primigenius* at Ilford, Essex. *Geological Magazine* **1**:244-245.

Websites

Natural History Museum: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/london-calling-specimens-from-the-big-city.html>

Redbridge Museum: www.redbridge.gov.uk/leisure-sport-and-the-arts/redbridge-museum

Redbridge Council; Caitlin Atherton – the artist behind Marley the Mammoth;

<https://engage.redbridge.gov.uk/caitlin-atherton-the-artist-behind-marley-the-mammoth>



The Ilford Mammoth cast comes home to Ilford in 2012.

Natural History Museum palaeontologists Prof Adrian Lister (middle) and Simon Parfitt (right) with Redbridge Museum Manager Gerard Greene (left) and the donated mammoth skull cast