

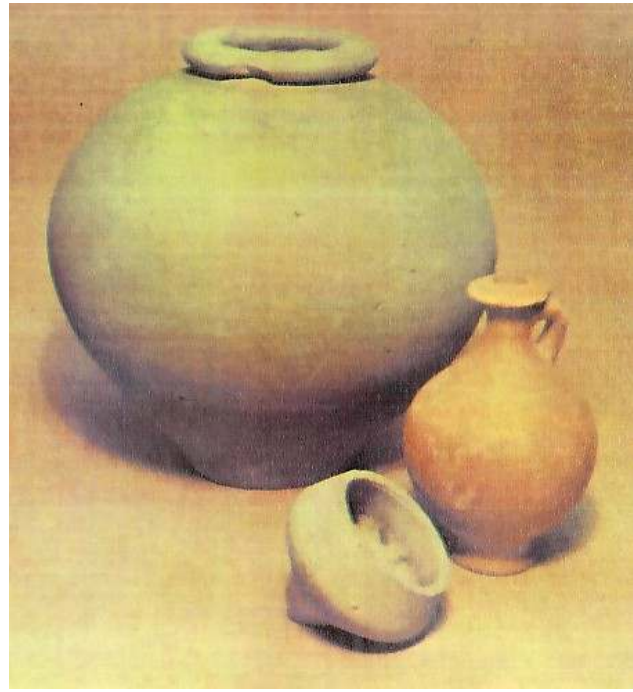
## Eltham Society Walk – The Road to South America Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2008, led by Margaret Taylor

Over thirty people met at 2 o'clock outside Christchurch on Eltham High Street on a Sunday early in May to begin on the road to South America. We were to explore the many connections that Eltham has with South America, some rather tenuous.

Our first encounter with South America was on Bexley Road with the monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*), which is a native of Chile. These were first brought to Britain in the 1790s by Archibald Menzies. Before we arrived here though we peeked through the fence to Whitewoods opposite Westmount Road, which is likely for residential redevelopment. The boundaries of the land occupied by Whitewoods are part of the mediaeval field pattern of Eltham, although we had difficulty imagining this today.

We passed by the end of Glenesk Road where there is a house (No 14) with the name Roman Land which, when being built in the 1930s, was the site of roman bones and artefacts that are now stored in the Heritage Centre at the Woolwich Arsenal. They consisted of a cremation group of two urns containing bone fragments and sandy soil, a pottery bottle and a small cup dating from about 160 AD<sup>1</sup>.

We strolled down Butterfly Lane, one of the old lanes of Eltham along with Gravel Pit Lane, Kidbrooke Lane and Stoney Alley. To the east of Butterfly Lane is Pippenhall Stables, an area that could all intent be part of the old agricultural landscape of Eltham. At the end of the lane is a sports centre that has designs to be four times as large with football and social activities with a large area of parking. The plan had been turned down but there were concerns that they would appeal.



**Burial group from Glenesk Road**

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<sup>1</sup> Reg Rigden *'The Romans in the Greenwich District'*, London Borough of Greenwich, 1974



**Pippenhall stables**

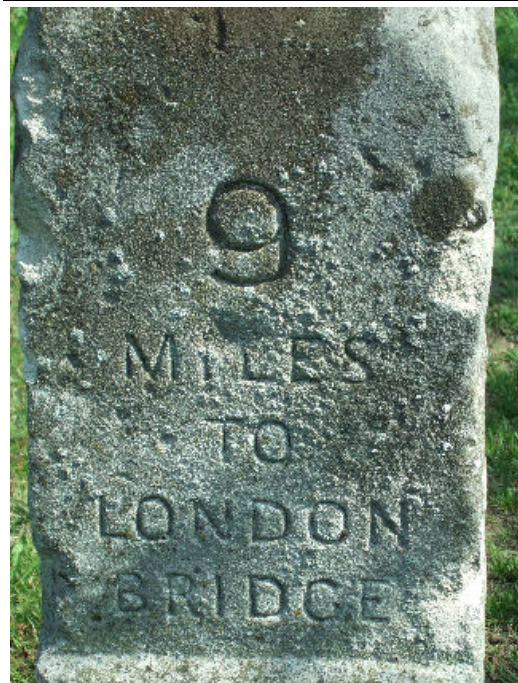
From this point we could see the backs of the houses in Inca Drive (off Footscray Road) – a link with South America but only in name. We walked around to the other side of Pippenhall Stables meadows and along another lane by the side of allotments, which had some fine examples of hedgerows that had probably been there since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, enclosing the mediaeval field pattern of Eltham.

When we came back to Bexley Road, we saw the entrance to the Environmental Centre that is operated for Greenwich and Lewisham. This centre subsequently had an open day of 7<sup>th</sup> June that gave a wonderful opportunity to see the work (look at [www.widehorizons.org.uk](http://www.widehorizons.org.uk) for pictures). Opposite the entrance is a milestone, inscribed on east face is “9 miles to London Bridge” and on the west face: “7 miles to Dartford” put there by the New Cross Turnpike. But the inscriptions were on the wrong side.

Just by here is Lemonwell, the site of an old spring that was reputed to be good for eye diseases.

On, down the hill towards the end of the trail to South America, to the home of Colonel John Thomas North. He made his fortune mining nitrate for artificial fertilisers and building railways in South America, hence being called “The Nitrate King”. He was one of the richest people in Britain, renting the mansion at Avery Hill from 1882 and purchasing it in 1888. By 1891 he had extended his estate to include large tracts of open land and woodland on Shooters Hill and towards New Eltham. He also re-routed the Eltham to Bexley Road further away from the house. The house has fancy doors that were designed for Lima cathedral, but were the wrong size.

**The traveller coming from London Bridge would be confused being confronted by:**





**The door from Lima**

Our final part of the visit was to the Winter Gardens, which had fallen into disrepair with the breakdown of the heating system. Although there is hope now that this will be repaired. On leaving the Winter Garden, Margaret recited a variation of the music hall song "*Where did you get that hat*", which was written for the visit of King Edward VII who visited the mansion when Prince of Wales. It had a reference to Colonel South as the converse of Colonel North

We finally, all took refreshment at the brightly painted café in Avery Hill Park and thanked Margaret for a very enjoyable and informative walk to South America.

Laurie Baker