

= Ralph Merrifield =

Ralph Merrifield (22 August 1913 ? 9 January 1995) was an English museum curator and archaeologist . Described as " the father of London 's modern archaeology " , Merrifield was a specialist in both the archaeology of Roman London and the archaeology of magical practices , publishing six books on these subjects over the course of his life .

Born in Brighton , Merrifield began his archaeological career as an assistant at Brighton Museum while attaining an external degree in anthropology from the University of London . He served in the Royal Air Force during World War II , and then in 1950 became the Assistant Keeper of the Guildhall Museum in London . In 1956 , he relocated to Accra to organise the opening of the new National Museum of Ghana , before returning to work at the Guildhall Museum . Here he produced a synthesis of known material on the archaeology of Roman London , published as *The Roman City of London* in 1965 .

In 1975 , following the amalgamation of the Guildhall Museum with the London Museum to establish the new Museum of London , Merrifield was appointed Senior Keeper , and soon after was promoted to the position of Deputy Director . In 1978 , he retired from this position but remained active within the archaeological community , publishing both *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* in 1987 as well as further studies of Roman London . Also giving public lectures across the country , he was a keen supporter of the Standing Conference on London Archaeology , a body designed to monitor what he saw as the negative impact that English Heritage was having on the city 's archaeology .

= = Biography = =

= = Early life and the Guildhall Museum : 1913 ? 74 = = =

Merrifield was born on 22 August 1913 in the Southern English coastal city of Brighton . He was raised primarily by his mother , his father having died when Merrifield was three years old . He undertook his sixth form studies at the Municipal School for Boys , and it was whilst doing , in 1930 , that he began working at the Brighton Museum as an assistant to the museum curator H. S. Toms , himself a former assistant of the archaeologist Augustus Pitt Rivers . Inspired by the museum 's ethnographic collection which he had helped catalogue , Merrifield embarked on a University of London external degree which he completed in 1935 ; although its main focus was in anthropology , the degree had also allowed him to take intermediate courses in botany . It was during this that he developed a keen interest in the archaeological evidence for both religion and for the magical practices that took place in Britain 's past .

Following the outbreak of the Second World War , in 1940 Merrifield was conscripted into the Royal Air Force and in 1943 he was transferred to its intelligence division , specialising in the interpretation of aerial photographs . As a result of this , he was posted to both India and Java . After the conflict ended in 1945 , he returned to work at Brighton Museum .

In 1950 , Merrifield took a post as Assistant Keeper of the Guildhall Museum in London , a job that he would retain until 1975 . At the time the museum lacked a premises , with Merrifield assisting the Keeper Norman Cook in establishing an exhibit at the Royal Exchange in 1954 . During these post @-@ war years the city 's archaeological community was largely preoccupied with salvaging the Roman and Medieval structures that were damaged by The Blitz and the subsequent urban redevelopment . In 1951 Merrifield married Lysbeth Webb , a colleague at the Guildhall Museum , and together they went on to have one son and one daughter .

In November 1956 , Merrifield was sent to Accra in Ghana to establish the National Museum of Ghana . The museum was due to be constructed in time for the day of Ghana 's officially achieved independence in April 1957 , with its exhibits having previously been part of the University Museum of Ghana , however upon arrival Merrifield found that the construction was delayed . Returning to the Guildhall after six months , he campaigned for the archaeological excavation of sites prior to

their redevelopment , resulting in the establishment of the Department of Urban Archaeology at the Guildhall Museum in 1973 .

In 1962 , he published his first important academic paper , a study of Roman coins found at the bottom of the River Walbrook . Although not a specialist in any one particular aspect of Romano @-@ British archaeology , he was able to synthesise a wide range of evidence to develop a picture of life in Londinium , the Roman settlement located in the City of London , publishing *The Roman City of London* in 1965 . The project had been suggested to him two years previously by the publisher Ernest Benn , and represented the first detailed study of Roman London to be published for 35 years . To produce it , Merrifield had catalogued all known Romano @-@ British remains in the city , further providing suggestions for where additional archaeological remains were likely located . The archaeologist W. F. Grimes described it as " a landmark in the study of Roman London " while the later archaeologist Harvey Sheldon called it " a masterful historical synthesis " . The book established Merrifield 's reputation to a wider audience . He followed this with two works aimed at a general audience , *Roman London* (1969) , in which he looked at evidence for Romano @-@ British occupation across the wider Greater London area , and then *The Archaeology of London* (1975) , in which he surveyed the archaeological evidence of the region from the Palaeolithic through to the Early Middle Ages .

= = = Museum of London and retirement : 1975 ? 95 = = =

In 1975 he became the Senior Keeper of the Museum of London , being promoted to the position of Deputy Director in 1977 , and being responsible for designing the Museum 's first Roman gallery . From 1976 to 1978 he served as President of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society . Merrifield retired in 1978 , and a festschrift , entitled *Collectanea Londiniensia : Studies in London Archaeology and History Presented to Ralph Merrifield* , was published in his honour . Recognising his many years service to the archaeological field , the University of London awarded him an honorary doctorate .

During his retirement , he continued to take an active role in researching London 's past . In 1983 , he published *London : City of the Romans* , in which he updated his account of Londinium with information obtained over the previous decade and a half . His book *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* appeared in 1987 , and was written to combat what Merrifield identified as a widespread neglect of ritual aspects in the archaeological record . Concurring with Merrifield 's assessment about this widespread neglect , the later archaeologist Roberta Gilchrist described it as a " rare contribution " to the discipline . The historian of religion Hilda Ellis Davidson praised the " cautious and balanced arguments " of Merrifield 's work , opining that it should be read by every archaeologist as a corrective to what she thought was their widespread ignorance of folklore .

Merrifield was uneasy with the changes made to London 's archaeological establishment by English Heritage during the early 1990s , strongly supporting the establishment of the Standing Conference on London Archaeology to monitor English Heritage 's actions . He also continued to talk on archaeological subjects , with his final lecture , " Magic Protection of the Home " , being given to extra @-@ mural students in Northampton in December 1994 . Following a short illness , he died of cardiac arrest in King 's College Hospital , London , on 9 January 1995 , leaving behind his wife , children , and grandchildren .

= = Legacy = =

Merrifield came to be known as the " father of London 's modern archaeology " , with Harvey Sheldon describing him as the " father figure " of London archaeology . According to fellow archaeologist W. F. Grimes , it was Merrifield 's " work in and about London " which earned him " an honoured place in British Archaeology " . In Merrifield 's obituary in *British Archaeology* magazine , Max Hebditch , the Director of the Museum of London , described him as being both " generous with his knowledge and friendship " and " energetic and active to the end " . Sheldon stated that he was " universally loved and admired " , having done " more than anyone else , both by example and

influence " , to place London 's archaeology on a firm footing . Writing in The Independent , Peter Marsden commented on Merrifield 's " quiet manner " which " obscured a steely determination " to advance scholarship .