

**CYRIL MAIDMENT** has been examining and assessing images of remnants of the Merton Priory precinct, and he now offers his thoughts on

## ACCESS TO THE PRIORY

Whilst digitising the photographs in the Wimbledon Society Museum, I came across many that puzzled me. One in particular I couldn't place. This is No.3 on the page opposite. The title was 'Gate House entrance in High Path'. Try as I might, I could find nowhere in High Path where it might have been. Months later I came across the drawing from 1925 (from Chamberlain's *Reminiscences of Old Merton*), which is No.4, 'Entrance Gateway to Gate House opposite Priory Gateway', and the problem was solved. You can see they are one and the same gateway. Today it would not be High Path but Station Road. I suppose before the houses were built in Station Road it was part of High Path. The photograph of the garden is interesting. There is a railing round the end of a long narrow lake that covered the length of the garden, and much flint to be seen in the garden wall, suggesting that at one time it belonged to the priory.

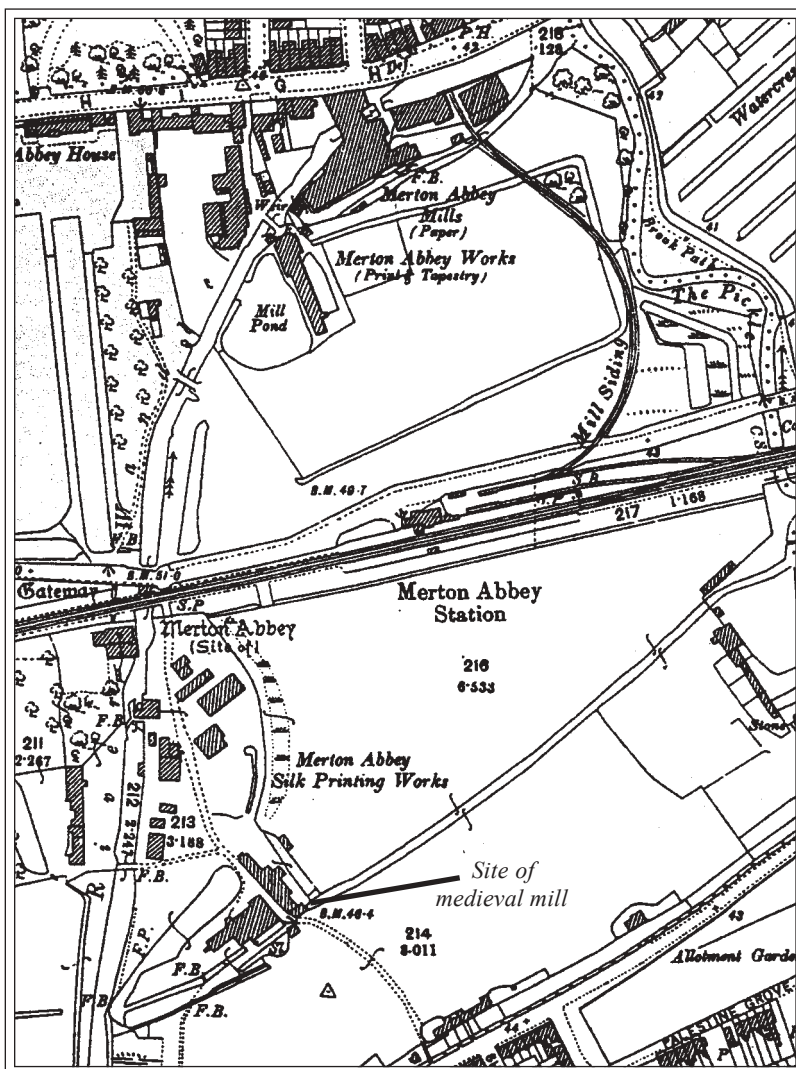
Picture No.1 shows what Abbey Road looked like until 100 years ago, again a long priory wall. On the High Street stood the mansion (No.2) once lived in by Rear Admiral Smith, and thought to occupy the site of the priory gate house. Pictures 5 and 6 are of our much-loved Norman arch, firstly as it is today and secondly as it was found in what had become part of Liberty's premises. It is thought that the original building, of which it was part, was the prior's house, or possibly a house for visitors. Picture No.7 is the entrance gate of the prior's house. It was exactly opposite the rear gate of Gate House across the road. Many of us can remember it. Sadly it was dismantled, never to be seen again. If you walk along Station Road you can still see parts of the priory wall in between car repair shops, which cannot be expected to take great care of the old wall.

In the centre of the page there is a little plan putting this all together, and showing how close was the west door of the giant priory church.

Certainly this area of the priory does seem to be of importance as far as access is concerned. Dave Saxby, for many years the leading Museum of London archaeologist on the site, looks at the open area still evident at the junction of Abbey Road and Station Road, and thinks there may have been a gate house at this point, particularly taking into account the avenue of trees to be seen on the 1741-5 Rocque map, running through the Gate House gardens, parallel to Abbey Road.

One needs to bear in mind that once the main course of the Wandle was south and east of the priory, setting the parish boundary. The Roman ford carrying Stane Street 50 metres south of Merton bridge, and the site of the large priory mill, east of Bennett's mill, confirm this. Consequently access to the priory complex would have been easier from the west. In addition, is it possible that when the Augustinians arrived there was still some limited use of Stane Street, which was inconvenient because it goes through the middle of the site, and the priors chose to seal off that approach?

**[It is likely that other readers may have some ideas on this subject and would like to air them in the *Bulletin*. We would be very glad to have further contributions on this topic.]**



*The main course of the River Wandle from Phipps Bridge once flowed south and east of the Priory. (Today it is west and south of the Priory site.)  
Detail from 1894 OS map*

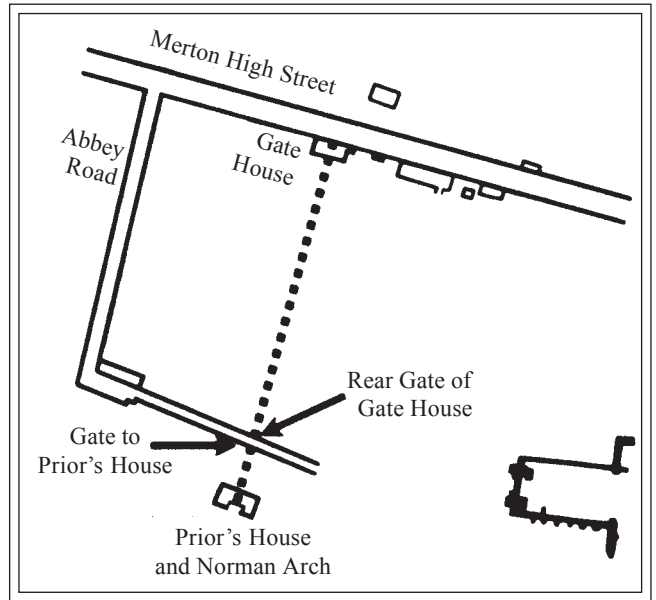


1 Abbey Road

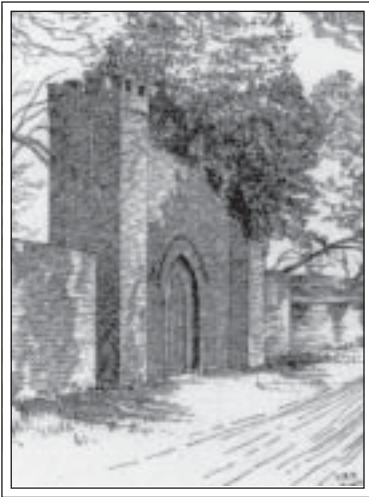


2 Gate House

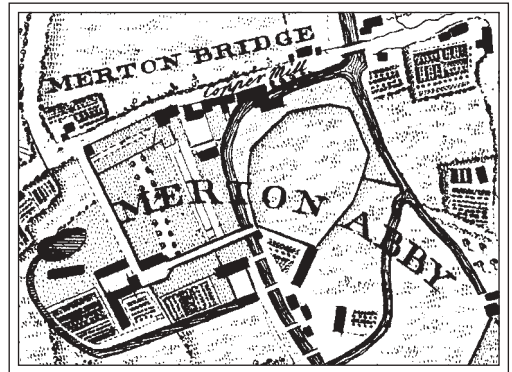
3 Rear Gate of Gate House from the garden



4 Rear Gate of Gate House from Station Road



Detail from John Rocque's map of 10 miles around London 1741-5



5 Norman Arch re-constructed at Merton Parish Church



6 Norman Arch of Prior's House



7 Gate of Prior's House

