

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGY

The English Heritage Quarterly Review for Greater London, August-October 2001 contains the following report:

Borough: MERTON

Site Name: FURNITURELAND, MERTON HIGH STREET SW20 [*sic*]

Arch Org: MoLAS **Report Type:** POST-EXC ASS **Site Code:** MHH 00

Summary: TQ2630 7010: the earliest feature encountered during the excavation was an east-west aligned ditch and recut. This ditch could date to any time between AD100 and the 15th century.

The first evidence for occupation comes from the structure dated to the middle of the 15th century which was open to the south and probably abutted a tile kiln (not found during the excavation). It is likely that the structure represented a forming shed for tile making and also a work area in front of the kiln.

A second kiln was constructed around 1480 and this was recorded during the excavation. The kiln itself was partly built with waste tiles from earlier kiln firings. The excavated part of the kiln comprised three furnace chambers and a flue had been placed along the back of the kiln to help feed air to the kiln fires. The presence of this flue would appear to indicate that the 'forming shed' was still attached to the kiln and so there may have been a circulation problem. After a number of firings, the kiln was rebuilt and a replacement series of furnace chambers constructed. The back wall of this replacement kiln was constructed from reused Reigate capitals from a 12th century building belonging to the priory of St Mary Merton. During the tile making phase it seems that the immediate area of the site was stripped of the natural layers of brickearth (and any overlying layers) in order to provide raw material for the tile works. It is likely that the tile kiln was situated near to an entrance into the Prior precinct.

Truncating the kiln was a chalk foundation wall for the 'Gatehouse' built around 1500. The walls were generally truncated to cellar floor level. The foundation formed a small building measuring 7.20m wide and running into the northern trench section, with the majority of the buildings probably lying beneath the current Merton High Street. These foundations could form the back end of a western tower, if the superstructure were in brick (which would not require a large, wide foundation). If this is the case it is possible to reconstruct a potential gateway, where two towers are astride an entrance arrangement c12m wide. Associated with this building is a thick dumped layer, where the ground was raised up after the clay extraction had finished.

During the middle of the 18th century the medieval building was enlarged with the addition of extensions to each side, thus extending the cellar to a width of 13.20m. Walls with more shallow foundations had been truncated during the 20th century demolition.

The gatehouse was demolished in the early 20th century and the site was also truncated horizontally at this time, in order to prepare the wooden suspended floor for the subsequent Palais de Dance [*sic*]. This truncation had removed the post-medieval external surface and shallow wall surfaces.

Date of Report: MAR 2001

(See Peter Hopkins' report in Bulletin 138 on Dave Saxby's talk to the Society, 'Recent Work on the site of Merton Priory'.

The site, on the corner of Merton High Street and Mill Road, is of course in SW19. The building which replaced the gatehouse in 1909 was used for roller-skating and then for making airships. It was not converted to a palais de danse until 1922.

The same issue of the EH Quarterly Review carries brief and largely negative reports of other archaeological investigations in the Borough of Merton.



The rear of Gatehouse, Merton, from a old postcard

JG