

## MERTON PRIORY, THE SITE OF THE FIRST ABBEY MILL (MoLAS)

[The text has been slightly shortened.]

The second half of November saw the last phase of archaeological work on the Merton Priory site: almost two decades of work here ended with a flourish, with the discovery of the site of the monastic mill, quite probably founded with the priory itself in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The site is owned by Countryside Properties plc and Cophorne Homes. The monastic buildings had completely disappeared by 1800, and for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the site was covered with industrial buildings. As a result the entire area was covered in concrete and asphalt, the archaeology being penetrated here and there by heavy concrete foundations. The development plans, for apartment blocks, are predicated on the idea that the remains should be left untouched, and this zone used for car parking (an advance on the earlier phases, when important parts of the priory remains were covered by Merantun Way and the Savacentre).

Evaluation of the site in 2001-2 had made it clear that the river Wandle had altered its course dramatically since medieval times, with an infilled channel running right across the site: the main river channel now runs to the west. As the evaluation proceeded, evidence of a large historic mill-pond and masonry revetments and what looked like the head-race of a mill-lead appeared, and then one flank of a large brick and stone building, all well outside the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The developers agreed that a further evaluation should be carried out. The work, like previous phases on the Merton site, was carried out by Museum of the London Archaeological Service. David Saxby was the site supervisor.

The work, recently completed, revealed the complete foundations of a mediaeval watermill with a revetted mill-lead and a large associated building. The mill-wheel, about 3m wide and undershot, sat between massive masonry abutments. The foundations were generally robbed towards the north, but on the south side towards the mill-lead, preservation was very good indeed. The buildings, initially constructed on chalk rubble and flint footings, were repeatedly remodeled: initial assessment has identified six putative building phases. The later phases, tentatively ascribed to the 16C and 17C, were mostly in brick, with a lot of re-used clay tile.

If the mill itself was relatively small (c.5m by 8m), the associated building immediately to its east was a good deal larger. A particularly interesting feature was what appeared to be a large pool or tank within this building, divided into two sections. It seems likely that the structure had an industrial purpose perhaps associated with cloth production. Another interesting aspect relates to the great quantities of animal bone, mostly sheep and cow, found on the site, which may represent further evidence of industrial uses.

*The medieval mill  
and head-race  
(MoLAS)*

