

## The Wandle Festival

On the weekend of 12-13 June 2004 there will be a Wandle Valley Festival. There will be a co-ordinated programme of events all along the river. It will provide two days of enjoyment for people of all ages - especially families. As part of the festival the Chapter House at Merton Abbey will be open for the festival weekend. There will be displays and finds from the archaeological excavations. The Museum of London's award winning "The Dig" for children aged between 5 and 11 years old will be held in the Chapter House.



If you would like to book a place on the dig or volunteer time for the event please contact David Saxby at the address at the end of the newsletter. All the events can be found on the following web site [www.wandlevalleyfestival.org.uk](http://www.wandlevalleyfestival.org.uk).

Merton Abbey Mills will also be celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. On Saturday, come and cheer on a Duckathon and have a go on the pottery wheel and decorate a pot.



On Sunday afternoon the birthday will be celebrated with the help of Mayors from all four Wandle boroughs, shire horses from Young's Brewery, clowns and a band. The Mayors will inaugurate a new bridge across the river and cut a giant birthday cake.

If you would like to help promote the Merton Priory Trust or contribute in any other capacity, please write to:

The Treasurer, Merton Priory Trust,  
Stable Cottage, 72 Leopold Road,  
Wimbledon, London, SW19 7JQ

For information about the Wandle Festival please contact: David Saxby  
MoLAS, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London, N1 7ED tel: 0207 410 2200/2244  
email: [daves@molas.org.uk](mailto:daves@molas.org.uk) or [dsaxby@fsmail.net](mailto:dsaxby@fsmail.net)

For other events at Merton Abbey Mills contact John Hawks at [mertonabbeymills@freeola.com](mailto:mertonabbeymills@freeola.com)



# Merton Priory Trust

[www.mertonpriory.org](http://www.mertonpriory.org)

Newsletter No. 1.  
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Welcome to the first Merton Priory Trust newsletter. From AD1117 until it disappeared after the Dissolution in AD1538, Merton Priory was one of the biggest and most important monastic houses in the land. It stood on the former line of the Roman Road "Stane Street" on the banks of the River Wandle.

The site not only boasts one of Britain's most important medieval monasteries, but was also the site of one of Britain's most influential textile centres dating back to the 17th-century with calico printing occurring on the site in the early 18th-century.

In the 19th-century the leading Pre-Raphaelite designer and poet William Morris had his workshops on part of the site whilst the Merton Abbey Mills site was occupied by the influential firm of Liberty & Co.

Very few relics remain, but over the years the site has been extensively excavated, many artefacts discovered and the

foundations of the medieval Chapter House preserved. The aim of the Merton Priory Trust is to create a permanent Heritage Centre as a focus for all the past, present and future historical work done on the priory site, to enable both visitors and the local community to appreciate its historical importance.

The Merton Priory Trust has recently had informal talks with the Heritage Lottery Fund in order to take the project forward to apply for HLF money to build the Heritage Centre. The next stage is to apply for a Project Planning Grant (PPG) to be followed by the application for the main project.

Further advances have been made to the web pages which will include a fuller account of the history and archaeology of the Merton Priory site.

As part of the redevelopment of Merton Abbey Mills a number of archaeological investigations have been carried out. This work has

been undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) and has been kindly funded by Countryside Plc. and Cophorn Homes.



Bennett's mill in the 1890s

In 2002 an archeological excavation was undertaken of an early 19th-century calico mill called "Bennett's mill". This mill dates to 1802 and was established by John Leach for the production of cotton handkerchiefs and other fine goods. Around 1811 the works were in the hands of Thomas Bennett, Leach's son-in-law. These were taken over by Edmund Littler in 1831 who, from the 1870s produced printed silks for Liberty & Co. By the 1890s, Littler's were producing all of Liberty's goods and in 1904 Liberty & Co. purchased the Merton print works.

The archaeological excavation revealed the entire range of workshops including the water-wheel head-race and tail-race which ran through the middle of the building. Within the western

part of the building were four brick furnaces used for the production of dyes. These furnaces were fueled with coal and recovered from the coal ash were fragments of madder and indigo dyes. A dye mixing paddle and a copper strip from a print block were also found.



One of the brick dye furnaces

To the east of the water-wheel race were three furnaces and to the south of these was a cellar containing more brick furnaces. Recovered from the cellar was a leather apron and a large number of bottle stoppers suggesting dye mixing was carried out here.



The water-wheel within Bennett's mill

In 2003 two 12th-century fishponds and a ditch were found within the low-lying area to the east and south-east of the priory's infirmary complex. Recovered from the base of the ditch were the bones of birds including a small duck thought to be a teal and a bone from a jackdaw or magpie. Also found was a large wooden bowl, a key, a bracelet and a stone mixing mortar.



Excavating one of the 12th-century monastic fishponds

Further excavations undertaken in 2003 uncovered the extensive remains of the monastic mill of Merton Priory. The mill dates from the 12th-13th-century and was constructed from chalk. It measured over 25m in length by 11m wide. The mill contained a flint-built oven or furnace and a possible drying room.

By the end of the medieval period a large stone lined tank measuring 12m by 5m had been built within the walls of the mill building. A 3m wide head-race was formed

by stone and tile abutments located on either side of the mill leat.



The medieval mill and head-race

From the 16th-century the mill had been rebuilt in brick and a number of drains were found leading from the southern wall of the mill to empty into the mill leat.



The south wall of the mill

It is likely that this building stood until the early 18th-

century. Recovered from the rubble fill of the tank were carved stone fragments from a 15th-century monastic window, possibly from the cloister of Merton Priory.