

Reigate Stone at Battersea

Tim Tatton-Brown

THE SUMMER 2000 issue of *London Archaeologist* contains articles on 'The Reigate Stone research project' and 'The Archbishop of York's Mansion'¹. In this brief article I want to try to bring the two together because it is little known that much of the Reigate stone brought to London in the Middle Ages was stock-piled in the area called *Bridges* or *Bridge Court*², on the site that was later to have Bishop Booth's 1471-2 mansion built on it. In fact, it was only in the mid- to later 15th century that some of the storage sites for Reigate stone were moved up the Thames to Wandsworth and Vauxhall. By this time the Bridge Court store, which had principally been used by Westminster³, was perhaps surplus to requirements, and hence ripe for redevelopment after Edward IV's coming to power in 1471. Is it possible, therefore, that the 'high proportion of crushed or broken chalk rubble' found in the 1996 evaluation trenches⁴ was, in fact, Reigate stone? Chalk is, of course, a pure white limestone, while Reigate stone, which was nearly as soft as chalk when weathered, contains glauconite (and mica) making it a light green colour. Were any samples of the 'chalk' retained?

The use of the Bridges site is apparently first documented in detail in a charter of c. 1218, in which Pentecost of Wandsworth, with the consent of the Abbot of Westminster, grants the canons of Waltham Abbey a plot of land at *Bridges* (*Bruges*) in Battersea, which is enclosed on the south by his court and garden, on the north by a creek flowing from the Thames to a bridge at *Brugge*, and on the west by the Thames itself⁵. The dimensions of the plot are given as 6 perches (105 ft) east-west and 4 perches (70 ft) on the Thames frontage (west), while it was only 3½ perches (61¼ ft) wide on the east. This was clearly part of the site described by Duncan Hawkins and dug in 1996.

1. *London Archaeol* 9, no. 5 (Summer 2000) 145-6 and 129-36 respectively.

2. T Tatton-Brown 'The quarrying and distribution of Reigate Stone in the Middle Ages' (forthcoming).

3. See R B Rackham 'The nave of Westminster' *Proc Brit Acad* 4 (1989-90) 11. It is likely, however, that Cardinal Wolsey used this site when building Hampton Court and Whitehall Palace.

4. D Hawkins *et al*, fn 1, 136.

5. R Ransford *The early Charters of Waltham Abbey 1062-1230* (1989) 432-3.

6. *Ibid*, 431. Its location is discussed in detail in Tatton-Brown, fn 2.

7. I am most grateful to Peter Huggins for corresponding with

The charter goes on to give the canons free access to the site for their men's carts, horses and pack animals, and to allow them to enclose the plot, and build and work on it. The exact use of the site is not specified, but another charter of the same time (and the immediately previous one in the list) gives the canons permission to dig for stone at a quarry in Reigate⁶. It seems almost certain that the site was to be used for the stone coming overland from Reigate, before it was put on ships for onward transportation to Waltham Abbey⁷. It is worth noting that, at a slightly later date, a pipe roll, relating to the royal works at Windsor Castle, mentions Reigate stone being transported to Windsor via *Bruges* or *Bridges*⁸, while in the mid-13th century much Chaldon freestone was purchased for Westminster Abbey by Algar and William 'of Bridge'⁹. In the late 14th century, when the nave of Westminster Abbey was being rebuilt, 'a garden called *Briggecourt*' was leased for storing Reigate stone, at 3s 4d per annum¹⁰. In 1369 large quantities of stone were needed for Edward III's new work at Windsor Castle, and the accounts give the costs of transportation from the quarries to Kingston and Battersea, and thence on to Windsor¹¹. So by this time Kingston upon Thames was also being used as a transhipment site. Other royal accounts of about the same time mention Reigate stone going to the Tower of London, Westminster Palace, and Rochester Castle, and transhipment *via* Battersea is usually mentioned¹².

In summary, the site between the Thames and York Road at Battersea was of very great importance for the London Reigate stone industry in the Middle Ages, and it is a very great pity that the 1996 archaeological work was on such a small scale. Let us hope that future sites in the area will be more fully excavated before redevelopment.

me about this in 1993. The Reigate quarry is about 15 miles south of Battersea.

8. Pipe Roll 6 John, 57.

9. H M Colvin (ed.) *Building Accounts of Henry III* (1991) 290-1. Chaldon is a manor and parish near Reigate, where the stone was also dug. It is indistinguishable from Reigate stone (see Tatton-Brown, fn 2).

10. Rackham, fn 3.

11. W H St John Hope *Windsor Castle, an architectural history* (1913) 179.

12. For example, for Rochester Castle in 1367-8, see *Archaeol Cantiana* 2 (1859) 112 and 121, where the fabric rolls are transcribed.