

*Further notes on the
Collection of ex-situ stonework
at*

LESNES ABBEY, ERITH

by

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1. Nature of Request

Following on from the Historical Analysis & Research Team report of December 1999, Ellen Barnes was informed that Mr and Mrs Bennett had contacted Bexley Council about the removal of more stone from their garden to the Lesnes Abbey site. We were also asked if we would like to see the stones in the garden before they were moved.

On 19th May, I visited their house at 44 New Road, Abbey Wood, Bexley, SE2, and confirmed that their garden is the principal source of a group of stones removed to the Lesnes Abbey site in 1999 and the subject of our Historical & Analysis Research Team, Reports and Papers 16. In that report, the stones are erroneously described as having come from number 40 New Road.

Mr and Mrs Bennett are in the process of reordering their garden and want to remove worked stone, marble and brick rubble from the existing landscaping scheme. Because of the proximity of their house to the Lesnes Abbey site, it was assumed that some of the stone derives either from the standing remains or from excavation and, in 1999, the Council's ground staff agreed to take it onto the abbey site. Unfortunately, the stones were stored in the monastic latrine at the north end of the site and once there, mixed with fragments, which the ground staff had accumulated through routine site maintenance. Consequently, from our examination of the combined group, it was not possible to conclude whether there was a real connection between Lesnes Abbey and the stones from the garden of 44 New Road.

However, the visit to the Bennetts' house has clarified some of these issues. No reason can be seen to connect the assemblage of stones remaining in their garden with the known fabric of the abbey. Instead, it appears to derive from three probably discrete and unrelated sources, all of which date from the nineteenth or twentieth century.

Origin of the request: *Ellen Barnes (London Region)*
Date of the request: *(original request 6 October 1999)*
Site visit: *24 May 2000*
Date of Report: *2 June 2000*
File Number: *Bexley 39 (see also Bexley 1 and 18)*

2.

The rubble and stones in the garden of 44 New Road, Bexley

In the last ten to fifteen years the garden has been much neglected. From discussions with Mr and Mrs Bennett and their neighbour, at 42 New Road, it seems the original owner of the house, Mr May, an employee of Tate and Lyle at Limehouse and a keen gardener, was responsible for the layout of the garden, **Fig. 1**. Overall, the scheme appears to have evolved over a period of years rather than the product of a single action. The materials used were probably imported to the garden in several batches. One of the hollow chamfer roll-and-fillet window mullions is set in the front garden wall, **Fig. 2**. This wall is constructed with random building debris including bricks set within their original mortar. This method of construction, incorporating vitrified brick, typically the product of incendiary bomb action, suggests a post-World War II construction date.

Overall, the mix of paving, building rubble and worked stones is, late nineteenth or twentieth century in character and can be divided into the following three groups.

1. Statuary marble fragments

For the most part, the front garden is paved with white statuary marble slab fragments, probably Italian in origin, **Fig. 1**. The edging to the paving consists of lengths of baluster rail, in the same white marble, totalling at least fifteen metres in length. In the long back garden, the paths nearest the house are paved with the same white marble slab fragments without an edging, **Fig. 4**. At the far end of the garden, next to the shed is a group of straight and radiussed, statuary marble dado mouldings, **Fig. 5**. There are also isolated examples of a half baluster in a red marble, probably griotte, **Fig. 6**, and an architrave in white marble, **Fig. 7**. Some of the baluster rails have been drilled with holes, c. 5mm in diameter, presumably for non-ferrous dowels. The use of such marble in this country is common from the nineteenth century onwards.

2. Building rubble

Elsewhere, building rubble appears to have been used to create small earth retaining walls aligned along the length of the garden: the garden slopes down from west to east. Some of the retaining walls have now been dismantled and the rubble put into heaps either side of the central path about half way up the garden, **Fig. 8**. The rubble includes red and yellow brick, some glazed white, some blue engineering brick and broken concrete paving slabs. The bricks are clearly from demolition debris since they retain, and in some cases are cemented together with a dense hard white cement mortar. The materials indicate a late nineteenth or twentieth century date.

3. Hollow chamfer and roll-and-fillet window and vaulting fragments

From the rubble, a group of yellow brown limestone fragments has been extracted which clearly relate to the stones described in our earlier report under the heading, '*The large group of hollow chamfer and roll-and-fillet window and vaulting fragments.*' The fragments in the garden clearly share the same combination of mouldings, **Fig. 9** to **Fig. 11**. However, one particular feature indicates that this group dates from the nineteenth century or later and cannot therefore be monastic in origin. Like the fragments observed on the abbey site, some of the stones incorporate a loose tenon in the joint between adjacent stones. In one case, the mortar in which a loose slate tenon had been set, still adhered to the stone within the socket, **Fig. 12**. The stone was wet and the mortar appeared dark brown in colour and very hard. This suggests Parker's Roman cement or an equivalent, which in turn indicates a date either very late in the eighteenth century or nineteenth century. The combination of the use of this cement with late medieval moulding profiles suggests gothic revivalist architecture of the early to mid-Victorian period.

3.

Summary and Recommendations

The unmonitored introduction onto a historic site of a large group of moulded stones, which have no known connection with that site, is in effect a contamination of the site's archaeological record.

It is therefore recommended that,

1. to ensure that there is no real connection between the assemblage of mouldings at 44 New Road and Lesnes Abbey, any more moulded stones found in the clearance of the garden should be put on one side to await further examination.
2. no more stonework should be taken from 44 New Road onto the Lesnes Abbey site unless a real connection can be demonstrated.
3. once the clearance of the stones from 44 New Road is complete and the absence of any real connection between the two sites is established, the stones described in our previous report as *'The large group of hollow chamfer and roll-and-fillet window and vaulting fragments'* should be removed from the abbey site and disposed of, having no real historical value.
4. a sample stone from the roll-and fillet group is subjected to petrologic analysis, in order to identify its likely source. This information may help in identifying the provenance of this group.



Fig. 1 An aerial photograph of New Road, in the possession of Mr and Mrs Bennett



Fig. 2 The front garden wall of 44 New Road



Fig. 3 The front garden path, composed of marble slab fragments and baluster rails



Fig. 4 The back garden with marble paths in the foreground



Fig. 5 A group of straight and radiussed dado moulding in white marble

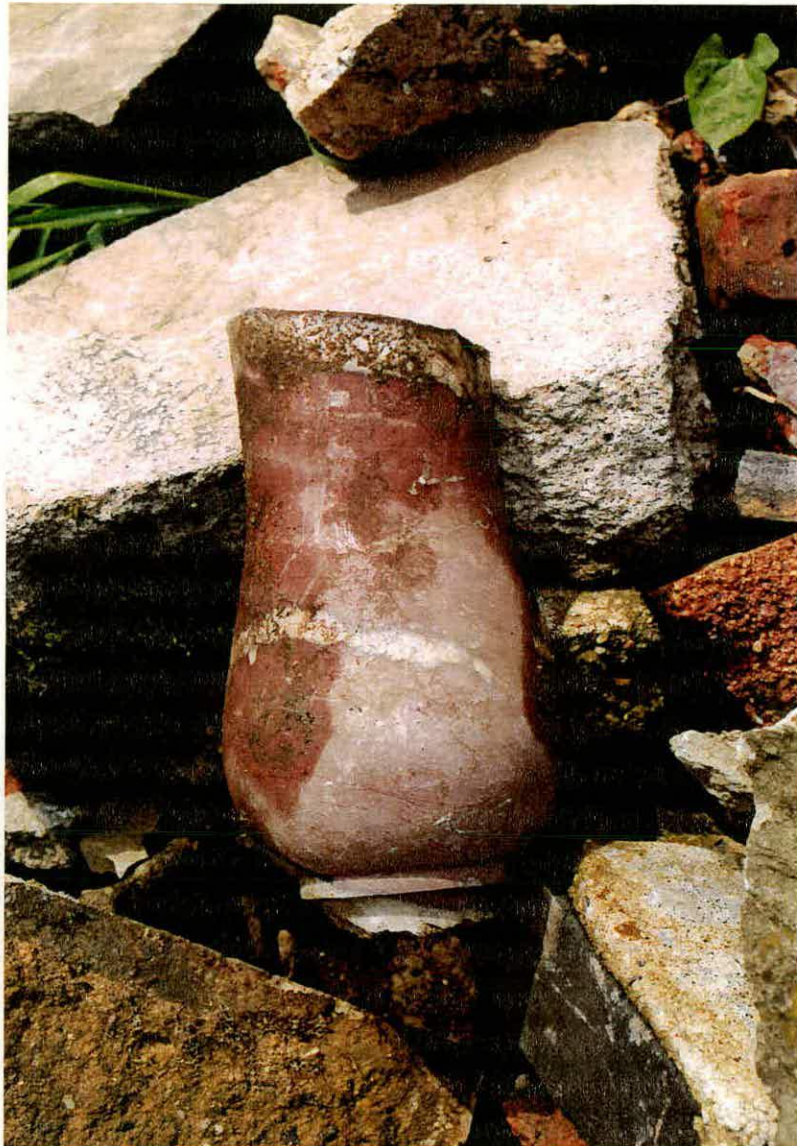


Fig. 6 A red marble baluster



Fig. 7 A white marble architrave



Fig. 8 One of the rubble heaps in the middle of the garden



Fig. 9 Roll-and-fillet moulded window mullions



Fig. 10 Roll-and-fillet moulded window jamb



Fig. 11 Fragments of cusped tracery

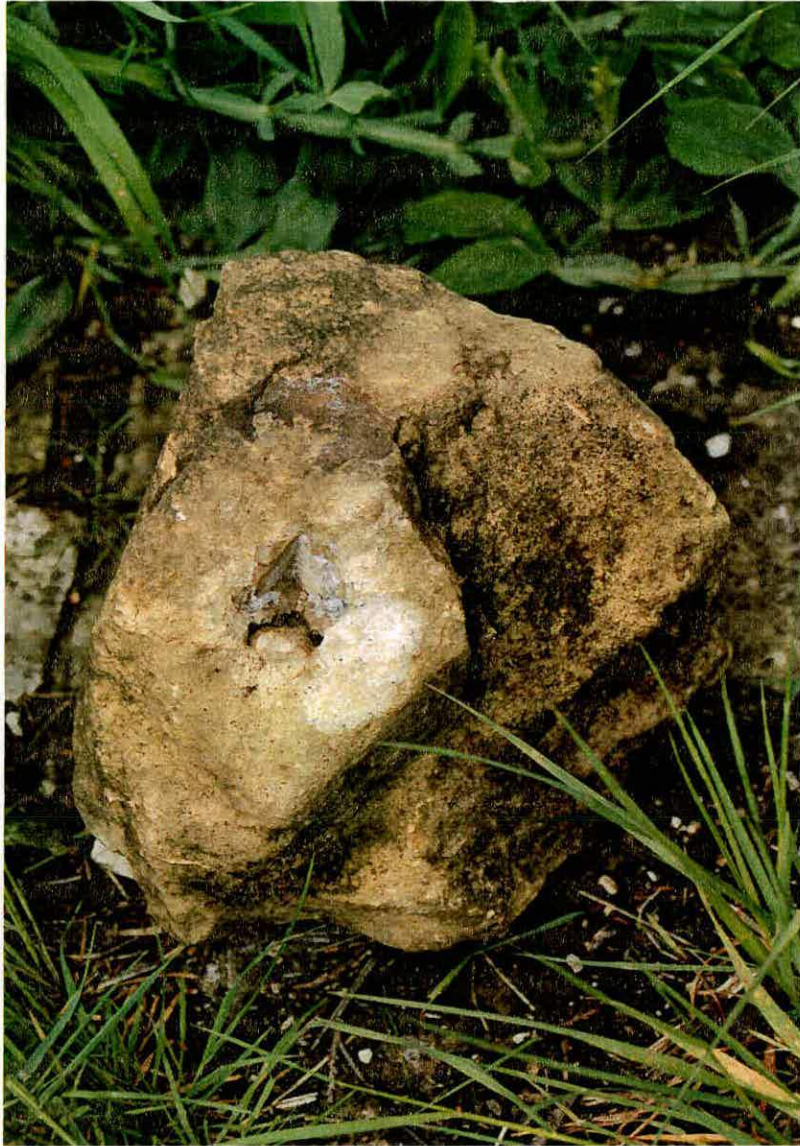


Fig. 12 A socket for a loose slate dowel