London’s religious houses: a review of ongoing research

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London’s medieval religious houses are fast becoming some of the best-documented in the UK and an exceptionally well-researched group in the context of western European cities, thanks in large part to the Greater London publication programme commissioned by English Heritage (EH). This programme has involved the assessment, analysis and publication of numerous archaeological excavations undertaken mainly in the 1970s and 1980s on the sites of five of London’s monasteries (Hinton and Thomas 1997). Developer funding and further EH support raised the number of houses to nine, and more recent developer-funded fieldwork will again increase the number. The resulting series of monographs on this sample of London’s monastic houses covers a number of orders (not including mendicants), both urban/suburban (intra-mural and extra-mural) and semi-rural or rural houses, and will include houses for women as well as for men. This review identifies particular aspects where the publication programme has produced high-quality information and has highlighted the potential for further research, some of which is already in progress.

Like the other great European cities, religious life in London was distinguished by its scale and diversity: the numerous fraternities, over a hundred parish churches, and some 50 religious houses – almost all founded before 1300 (Barron 2000, 433) (Fig 1). Similarly, the group of excavated and researched medieval religious houses is diverse (Fig 2). The Augustinian priory and hospital of St Mary-without-Bishopsgate commonly known as St Mary Spital was the first to be published in 1997 (Thomas et al), inaugurating the new monograph series published by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA; formerly MoLAS – Museum of London Archaeology Service). It was followed by the London Charterhouse (Barber and Thomas 2002), the Cistercian abbey of St Mary Stratford Langthorne (Essex; Barber et al 2004), the priory of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in Clerkenwell (Sloane and Malcolm 2004), and the Augustinian Holy Trinity Priory Aldgate (Schofield and Lea 2005) and Merton Priory (Surrey; Miller and Saxby 2007; Miller et al 2008). The EH-funded programme will be completed by Cluniac Bermondsey Priory (Surrey; Steele et al in prep), the Cistercian abbey of St Mary Graces in East Smithfield (Grainger and Phillpotts in prep) and the Augustinian nunnery of St Mary Clerkenwell (Sloane in prep). Recent excavations at, for example, the Augustinian nunnery of Haliwell (Holywell Priory) in Shoreditch will contribute further to the picture (Birchenough and Lewis in prep).

Founded over a period of nearly 300 years, these houses afford some interesting contrasts, dating from the first wave of foundations by the new political and social elite following the Norman Conquest up to those of the later 14th century. Beyond the city the Cluniac priory of St Saviour Bermondsey was founded in the 1080s and was the only Cluniac house in Surrey; in a semi-rural location on the south bank of the Thames, its Thames-side minster predecessor and the White Tower opposite were potentially significant

Fig 1
Detail from Wyngaerde's panorama of c1540: showing the various churches and religious houses in the east part of the city, with St Mary Spital on the skyline, top left, and the church of Holy Trinity Priory, top right, with to the right of it Aldgate with criminals' heads on poles; the Tower of London is bottom right (© Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

Fig 2
The religious houses of medieval London, and in its environs Merton, Stratford Langthorne and Bermondsey

factors in its foundation. The second religious house in Surrey in our group was Augustinian, St Mary Merton founded about 11km to the south-west of the city of London on the banks of the River Wandle in *c* 1117 by Gilbert, Sheriff of Surrey. The abbey of St Mary Stratford Langthorne was also in an originally secluded 'rural' location, but only some 7km east of the city; founded as a Savigniac house in 1135, the monastery was incorporated into the Cistercian order in 1147. These rural foundations contrast with those close to or within the city's walls.

A large number of religious houses and hospitals were founded in and around the city from the early 12th century. Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate, was the first religious house to be established inside the walls of London after the Norman Conquest, in 1107–8 (Fig 3). Founded by Queen Matilda, it was one of the earliest Augustinian houses in England, and it was the first to be dissolved, in 1532. On the edge of the city to the north-west were the two adjacent houses founded by Jordan de Bricet and Muriel de Munteni, in Clerkenwell – the priory of St John of Jerusalem (1144) and the Augustinian nunnery of St Mary (1145); St John's became the order's only priory in England, and its headquarters here. Also part of this urban/suburban subgroup is the priory and hospital of St Mary without Bishopsgate (later known as St Mary Spital), founded in 1197 on the fringes of the City, which became one of the largest medieval hospitals in Britain (Harward *et al* in prep).

Fig 3
Holy Trinity Priory: view of the excavated interior of the 12th-century south transept and chapel, from the west (1m scale)

The last two religious houses in our group were exceptional, late foundations, both in the second half of the 14th century and both associated with the sites of Black Death cemeteries, just outside the city walls. One was the second London Cistercian house, St Mary Graces, founded on Tower Hill, East Smithfield, in 1350 by Edward III, and the second was the London Carthusian house or Charterhouse founded in 1371 by Sir Walter Manny on the site of the Black Death cemetery at West Smithfield. These were both remarkable urban foundations for orders traditionally associated with seclusion and austerity.

It is the combination, and wherever possible integration, of the many strands of archaeological and documentary evidence that sets these MOLA monographs apart. The archaeological evidence gained from excavation, both small- and large-scale, on these sites in advance of development has provided a wealth of data that are especially strong in certain key areas of monastic research. Detailed documentary research, undertaken as part of the analysis and publication programme, is included which complements and expands on the biographies of these houses in the Victoria County History series (the recently published *The religious houses of London and Middlesex*, reprints, with new introductions, the VCH entries for those houses). The monographs adopt a consistent format where a chronological narrative provides the basis for a series of thematic sections exploring aspects, comparisons and contrasts revealed by the narrative; these are supported by technical appendices.

Chronological and spatial development of the religious houses

A strength of the series of London monastic monographs is the information on the chronological and spatial development of each religious house, in particular the layout, including claustral ranges and subsidiary buildings as well as the church. Over the years the presentation of these data has changed a little to include, for example, a greater use of colour, but the successive period plans essentially present retained structures (of whatever date) and new build. Evidence for the buildings used in the initial, establishment phase is scarce across the country, but was recovered from Bermondsey – a small apsidal chapel, constructed in the Late Saxon/early Norman period and enclosed within ditches, and a timber latrine which spanned the ditch to the south – and St Mary Clerkenwell – a range of 'temporary' timber buildings. The subsequent creation of a complete claustral complex, in stone, is most clearly seen on the originally spacious rural sites. The construction of a stone church and subsequent development is most fully illustrated at Merton, where excavation was particularly extensive (Fig 4), and to a lesser extent at Stratford Langthorne. Bermondsey and Merton ably illustrate the process of construction of the main cloister in the 12th century; and *ex situ* architectural fragments play an important part in the dating of the early building sequences at these houses in particular. Some differences of plan reflect different foundation dates and/or affiliations, as in the case of Cluniac Bermondsey in the 12th century with its free-standing lavabo, possible bathhouse and retention of the earlier chapel, or the first simple, aisleless, cruciform church at Cistercian Stratford Langthorne. At the Knights Hospitallers' priory of St John Clerkenwell the 12th-century church consisted of a circular nave (replaced by a rectangular one during the late 13th century) and an oblong presbytery, the crypt of which survives under the present 18th-century church (Fig 5).

Rebuilding and expansion in the late 12th and particularly 13th century is a theme common to both the rural and urban houses. This was building work on a grand scale. A new five-bay presbytery of *c*1220, aisled and square-ended, was part of a larger reconstruction programme at Stratford Langthorne; at the same date a Lady Chapel was added to Holy Trinity Priory and the nave rebuilt. The refoundation of St Mary Spital in 1235 marked the beginning of a complete rebuilding of both priory and hospital. Merton's reputation was boosted by royal patronage with frequent visits from King Henry III. One of the most influential of all the English houses of regular canons, a massive rebuilding and expansion programme took place in the 13th and 14th centuries at Merton; the church was rebuilt in the 13th century, as were parts of the main cloister, including the chapter house (Fig 7). Enclosure of the precinct was seen as important in both rural and urban contexts, but physical separation may have been particularly relevant within London itself, as occupation became denser and suburbs grew to accommodate a population in *c*1300 of perhaps 80,000 to 100,000 (Barron 2000, 396–7).

In the next century, following the Black Death, two monasteries were newly founded on the sites of the London mass cemeteries, in part as a memorial to the dead. St Mary Graces was the last Cistercian abbey founded in England, established in 1350 in what was, unusually, not a rural setting, and to a non-standard Cistercian plan that was, in fact, typical of many other 14th-century monastic constructions. The layout of St Mary Graces was influenced by the existing cemetery chapel at East Smithfield, which was used by the Cistercians as their first church, and property boundaries, and evidently also by a wish to leave the two mass burial areas clear, possibly for further burials (Fig 8). Some 20 years later at West Smithfield, the

Fig 4
Merton Priory: the north side of the church under excavation, looking east from the west front (foreground) to the east end and Lady chapel

St Mary Clerkenwell

Fig 5
Priory of St John Clerkenwell: general plan of the precinct in c1180–c1280*, showing major identified features*

Fig 6
Priory of St John Clerkenwell: conjectural reconstruction of the inner and outer precincts c1480–1540

Fig 7
Merton Priory: the conjectural development of the church, chapter house, infirmary and infirmary cloister from the 12th to the 15th century

conventual buildings of the new Charterhouse also avoided the mass burial areas and here the Black Death cemetery chapel was retained as the permanent conventual church. Both houses needed to buy up further parcels of land to complete their precincts and struggled both financially and in recruiting monks in the later 14th century. This was a time of population crisis, when mendicant houses, by contrast, remained popular and private forms of devotion increased. Thereafter St Mary Graces' financial problems continued up to the Dissolution, but the Charterhouse's finances improved and the great cloister and main conventual buildings were completed, and the complex adequately enclosed.

Building programmes featured strongly at several of the older houses in the 14th century. A new presbytery and Lady Chapel extended Merton's church to about 110m long, and the chapter house was rebuilt (Fig 7). With its recovery from earlier financial problems, Bermondsey Priory underwent a substantial rebuilding programme in the 14th century (from *c*1330) which saw the remodelling of the eastern arm of the priory church, cloister and chapter house, with considerable rebuilding elsewhere: in the south range, around the second infirmary cloister and to its immediate east where a large courtyard and new chambers were built. It was raised to the status of an abbey in 1399. The archaeological evidence testifies to changes in lifestyle, in particular a decline in communal living and more separate accommodation, as was the case at other London houses and indeed generally. The monastic infirmary hall at Merton for example was subdivided to provide private accommodation for canons.

The 'invasion' of precincts by retired royal or civic officials, corrodians, the aristocracy and other laity is documented from the mid 13th century, but its

Fig 8
St Mary Graces: in 1538, illustrating the non-standard Cistercian church plan and layout influenced by the pre-existing cemetery chapel (Building 1), mass burial areas and property boundaries

physical expression – for example tenements erected or adapted for private tenants – has proved more difficult to identify archaeologically (see for example, Merton, Bermondsey). Interaction between the religious houses and Londoners is demonstrated at St Mary Clerkenwell where the creation of the parish of St

Mary Clerkenwell in the late 12th century was followed by the expansion of the nunnery church to accommodate the parish. At Holy Trinity at least one craft organisation used the priory church, and part of the nave was given over to parish use. The 14th-century outdoor pulpit at St Mary Spital was used for public preaching and the Skinners Company had a fraternity there. At Stratford Langthorne the parish church lay within the precinct.

The leasing of land and buildings within the monastic precinct to laity is a feature of the documentary evidence in the years immediately before the Dissolution and tenements could be identified at, for instance, St Mary Spital. Building work in the 15th and early 16th centuries identifiable archaeologically at these London houses is generally piecemeal and relatively small-scale (for example, domestic buildings and glazing of the cloister walks at St Mary Spital), and brick was commonly used, together with terracotta mouldings. In a period of economic depression and generally low numbers of religious, some contraction is evident in the pre-Dissolution period at Bermondsey with the disuse of the eastern area. The later 15th and 16th centuries, however, saw a return to prosperity for St Mary Clerkenwell, and church and cloister were significantly modified. Documentary and archaeological evidence suggest that there were a number of fine tenements leased to wealthy lay people inside the precinct in this period and that these tenements made a significant contribution to the nunnery's finances.

Fig 9
Priory of St John Clerkenwell: reconstruction of the terracotta window of the first quarter of the 16th century (from Building 22, tenement 22 on Fig 6)

The adjacent but highly unusual religious house, St John Clerkenwell, had evolved by this date into one of London's premier residences – effectively secular – and it went through a period of 'great rebuilding' after *c*1480 (Fig 6). The order was particularly close to the Crown, including Henry VIII, and the prior was regarded as the chief baron in the Lords. The walled palatial inner precinct, accessed through the inner gatehouse (the Great Gate, completed in 1504), blended monastic elements, such as a large church, attached cloister and two cemeteries, with examples of a great hall, residential ranges and service courts. Beyond this ceremonial inner court lay a unique outer precinct filled with the houses and gardens leased from the English Priory by its own most important financial officials and others connected with the order. One tenant – possibly Thomas Tonge, Norroy (and later Clarenceux) King of Arms – may have been responsible for the construction of a stylish and courtly building facing the Great Gate; this brick structure was embellished with terracottas and employed the same craftsmen as worked on Layer Marney in Essex (Fig 9).

The location of the areas investigated archaeologically for the 'rural' houses meant far more information was recovered about the eastern portions of the monastic churches and cloisters than about the western. So we know a good deal about the construction, layout and buildings associated with infirmary cloisters constructed to the south and east from the 12th century (Bermondsey, Merton and Stratford Langthorne) and the more sophisticated drainage systems required – a very visible feature of the archaeological record on all the sites. West ranges, guest accommodation and subsidiary buildings and structures in both the inner and outer courts only occasionally feature archaeologically here: the precinct wall, a mill and possibly a large aisled guest hall, for example, in the 13th century at Merton.

Our knowledge of the layout of the 'suburban/urban', constricted precincts is often fuller, gained by drawing together the results from a large number of archaeological interventions and documentary (including later cartographic) evidence.

Where demolition at the Dissolution and later was wholesale, reconstruction of the form of the monastic buildings can be problematic. Holy Trinity Priory is one house where this process of reconstruction could be attempted. Whereas systematic demolition of the monastic church following close on surrender occurred at Bermondsey and Merton, at Holy Trinity the church structure was included in the adaptation of the priory buildings into a new grand house on the site. One of the largest complexes of buildings in the medieval City of London, of which only two fragments survive above ground today, Holy Trinity was previously largely unknown. Here, sufficient evidence was recovered from modern excavations, in the form of excavated walls, standing masonry and fallen fragments, together with many antiquarian drawings, and a ground-floor and a first-floor plan of all the monastery buildings made *c*1585; when brought together, this allowed a reconstruction of the superstructure in some detail (Figs 10, 11).

In the case of the nunnery church of St Mary Clerkenwell, its dual role as the local parish church meant it survived the Dissolution (renamed St James) and was only (largely) demolished in 1788; a combination of recent and historic archaeological and architectural recording has allowed the reconstruction of portions of the medieval nunnery church.

Fig 10
Holy Trinity Priory: reconstructed three-dimensional view of the priory at its fullest extent in c*1500 (including the latrine block), from the north-east (Richard Lea)*

The monastic way of life, and death

Whether located within or outside the city wall, or further out on the fringes, monasteries were landlords and consumers. The rural houses were characterised by large precincts, with home granges nearby to supply at least some of their daily food requirements. At Merton, as well as mills, there were stables, gardens, orchards, dovecotes, ponds, vineyards and fisheries within the priory precinct. These, and the water meadows along the river and hay meadow on the higher ground, could produce an abundance of locally grown fruits and vegetables, cereals and fresh fish, and be supplemented with foodstuffs from the priory's estates and the London markets, such as marine and estuarine fish and oysters, and imported herbs and spices. The wheat and barley found at Merton would have been used to produce respectively bread, and malt and beer. Pulses found at various London monastic sites include peas,

Fig 11
Holy Trinity Priory: reconstructed three-dimensional view of the former priory in c*1585, showing the post-Dissolution development of the former monastic buildings (Richard Lea)*

beans and lentils. 'Agrarian' buildings and craft activities can be identified within the precincts of the houses in and around the city – not just gardens and stables, but also barns and small-scale metalworking, bone and antler working, horn working, and tile production (see for instance variously Charterhouse, Merton, St John Clerkenwell, St Mary Clerkenwell) – but the ready availability of goods and services in towns meant that these precincts sometimes developed differently as their setting became increasingly urban.

A detailed insight into the nature and range of the monastic diet is provided by the large faunal assemblages recovered from several of the houses, notably Merton. Here the main archaeological evidence for food and diet came from the infirmary complex and the area to the south, including the aisled guest hall; the main kitchen and refectory were not excavated. The 17,000+ fragments (about 68kg) of bone from animals, birds and fish represent only a fraction of the food waste produced, but show that beef, lamb, mutton, pork and chicken were eaten, together with small quantities of various (more expensive) game species, including heron, swan, wild duck, partridge, woodcock, brown hare and venison. Fish waste was diverse and abundant, mainly marine and estuarine species with only a very small component of freshwater species: herring, cod, whiting, haddock, smelt, the carp family including common bream, and eel, with small quantities of thornback ray, sturgeon, plaice/flounder, conger eel, gurnard and mackerel. The few fruits found – grape, apple, plum, sloe/blackthorn, blackberry/raspberry, elder, hazel and walnut – would have been cooked or used in drink, rather than eaten fresh. Comparable evidence was recovered from Charterhouse (Fig 12).

Fig 12
Charterhouse: selected food plant remains – fruit stones (plum, cherry, sloe), walnut shell and seeds (grape, apple, fig and mulberry

The 'rural' monasteries occupied a convenient location, with accommodation, close to London. Like Merton, Bermondsey's duties of hospitality required the provision of fairly opulent meals for guests, and evidence of the consumption of crane, deer, hare and swan was plentiful, indicating that at least some of the monks or their guests enjoyed luxury foodstuffs. The faunal remains recovered came from the area to the east, and also south-east, of where the main monastic kitchens would have been located and derive from a wide range of fish, bird and mammal species. Overall, the diet of the community can be considered of consistently high quality in terms of staple species (cod, herring, plaice/flounder, chicken, goose, beef, mutton and pork), with evidence from all the principal faunal groups for additional very high status consumption. Relaxation of the dietary rules is evident elsewhere too, for instance at St Mary Clerkenwell. A comparison between Bermondsey and the hospital of St Mary Spital on the fringes of the city, however, suggests interesting differences: that there are significantly greater components of poultry, mutton and pork at Bermondsey than are seen at St Mary Spital, and also significantly greater abundance and diversity of game and high-status species. These differences are particularly striking if the groups from the last pre-Dissolution period from each site are compared. Across London's monastic houses – Bermondsey, Merton, Stratford Langthorne and St Mary Graces, but not St Mary Spital – a relatively high prevalence of DISH (diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis) in the burial populations provides further evidence of laxity of diet and lifestyle. DISH is associated with ageing (especially male ageing) increasingly linked with a calorie-rich diet and obesity (with attendant late-onset diabetes).

The large monastic infirmary complexes at both Merton and Bermondsey, comprising a hall with beds,

Fig 13
Merton Priory: wooden bowl (base diameter 75mm)

chapel and cloister and ancillary buildings (which would typically include a kitchen, wash or bathhouse and bloodletting house) were extensively excavated, as were the hospital infirmary and chapel at St Mary Spital where the inmates were cared for by lay sisters. The 13th-century infirmary kitchen at Merton produced a large range of vessels. Food was most probably generally eaten from turned wooden bowls; three of the six from Merton had marks of ownership carved or burned into the base of the vessel (Fig 13), but there were also pottery ladles for heating, consuming or serving individual portions.

A high incidence of plants that could have been used to prepare herbal remedies was recorded from medieval deposits at both Merton and St Mary Spital. Potential medicinal plants found in the general infirmary area at Merton included large numbers of black mustard seeds – an antidote for poison and for treating coughs, toothache and throat swellings according to the 17th-century herbalist, Nicholas Culpeper – and greater celandine – used for warts and eye trouble. Moderate numbers of henbane and hemlock seeds, used for treating inflammations and swellings, were recovered from the reredorter. Objects and vessels associated with medicines and medical care from the infirmary and/or reredorter areas at Merton and Bermondsey included distillation vessels and the glass urinals used for the diagnostic inspection of urine. Study of residues is revealing the types of culinary and medicinal uses to which various vessels were put.

Other medical treatments were available. A fragment from Merton of the most ornate spectacle frames so far known from the medieval period suggests eye conditions were being treated (Fig 14). Within the precincts people were occasionally buried with medical items: possible medical support plates, which could have also held herbal poultices in place, at Stratford Langthorne and Merton; and a possible iron hernia belt at Merton (Fig 15). Well-healed fractures such as those at Merton (13% of the skeletons examined showed evidence of fracture, of which the majority

Fig 14
Merton Priory: the bone spectacles (scale 1:1; reconstruction 1:2)

Fig 15
Merton Priory: the possible hernia belt in situ *on a ?mature adult male buried in the north transept (1.0m scale)*

were well healed, and more were aligned than misaligned) indicate the use of wooden splints, whereas a number of apparently untreated fractures at Stratford Langthorne indicate a different response, perhaps a trust in prayer rather than medicine at this Cistercian house. But even at Merton there was at least one individual whose fracture had gone untreated.

The very large numbers of burials excavated at these London houses provide an unrivalled opportunity to examine the health of the different communities represented: analyses have been reported of 664 individuals from Merton, 647 from Stratford Langthorne, 193 from Bermondsey and 179 from St Mary Graces. While 126 were reported originally from St Mary Spital, further excavations have uncovered over 10,000 medieval burials. Only chronic diseases and conditions affecting the skeleton are identifiable in the burial populations, but these include leprosy, tuberculosis, congenital syphilis, DISH (above), arthritis and rickets, making it possible to examine in particular the growth of urban diseases, such as TB. Sample data are being made available as part of the Wellcome Osteological Research Database (WORD), accessed through the Museum of London website (www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Human remains/).

Central to the examination of all the burial populations is the question, who are the people buried? The examination of the characteristics of the population overall and of the various chronological and spatial subgroups is a theme repeated in the monographs, and one which includes, of course, not only study of the diet, health and lifestyle of the burial population but also the burial practices observed at different times and in different locations. Thus at Merton 700+ burials in all were excavated from the external cemetery, and within the church, cloister and chapter house. The skeletal remains of 664 individuals were analysed: these were overwhelmingly adult (94%), and of those adults 77% could be identified as male and only 7% as female; there were very few children. Only one individual's identity was hinted at, that of Prior Michael Kympton who died in 1413, as indicated from a tomb inscription (a rare occurrence at London's religious houses; cf Watson and White in prep). Some were interred in coffins of stone and lead, but more commonly of wood, in stone-lined graves (cists), or covered by wood, but the majority were probably buried just in a simple shroud. A number of individuals, particularly in the north transept, were buried clothed, as suggested by gold thread (from vestments) and other textiles, shoe buckles, and buckles on the pelvic region and belt accessories. Burials to the north of the church were probably a mix of lay and clerical interments, while the area to the south-east was probably reserved principally, but not wholly, for the canons, and the chapter house for older individuals with a relatively privileged lifestyle; all were male, probably priors or higher status laity. The church held relatively high-status burials compared to the external burial areas. A decrease in the rate of burial in monasteries generally has been linked with lower population numbers after the Black Death up to the 16th century, and a preference for burial in mendicant houses and parish churchyards.

Bermondsey, Merton and Stratford Langthorne all show a contraction in the number of burials in the external monastic cemetery in the 15th century, and at Bermondsey even disuse.

The burials excavated at these houses provide a wealth of data for treatment of the dead, including the use and frequency of various coffin types and of grave goods, and of the social and economic status of those interred. Developer-funded analysis and publication of the more recent (1991–2007) large-scale excavations on the site of St Mary Spital, particularly in the hospital's cemetery, will give us an exceptional understanding of this medieval hospital and its inmates (Harward *et al* in prep; Connell *et al* in prep). Here, two mass burial episodes in the hospital cemetery dated to the 1250s are thought to represent the victims of a documented famine which followed a series of poor harvests; other burial pits might relate to famines of the 1150s and 1316, to undocumented famines or outbreaks of various epidemic diseases.

The Dissolution and after

The story of the conversion of these sites into courtiers' mansions and lodgings, and other tenanted properties, in the period *c*1540 to *c*1600, is a particular strength of these monographs. The process of dissolution itself is highlighted, for example, by a large, exciting and uniquely informative assemblage of artefacts and materials discarded from the conventual buildings at Bermondsey; the post-Dissolution reuse of the various sites is explored. Courtiers, noblemen and Crown officials all benefited from the leasing and sale of London's monastic houses, as for instance the Duke of Newcastle and the nunnery of St Mary Clerkenwell; and Robert Southwell, solicitor of the Court of Augmentations and Bermondsey Abbey – with Southwell quickly selling on to Sir Thomas Pope. Sir Edward North acquired the London Charterhouse; Sir Richard Rich St Bartholemew's Priory Smithfield; Thomas Audley Holy Trinity Priory Aldgate; and St Mary Graces passed to Sir Arthur Darcy who lived there between 1542 and 1560 (Schofield and Lea 2005, 181–5). Demand for accommodation in the city undoubtedly played an important part; the aristocracy, like the heads of the religious orders before them, needed a base in the capital. At Holy Trinity the church was part demolished and part-converted into a noble mansion. While the church was mostly demolished at both Bermondsey and St John Clerkenwell, for example, the Bermondsey cloister was converted, and at St John Clerkenwell the priory buildings were almost all retained beyond the Dissolution of the Hospitallers in 1540, becoming the residence of nobility and the location, for a while, of the royal Master of the Revels.

The potential

The array of data and publications available is already considerable and expanding rapidly, both as regards individual religious houses and syntheses. Excavation has been taking place at the Augustinian nunnery of Haliwell (Holywell Priory) in Shoreditch (Birchenough *et al* 2009; Birchenough and Lewis in prep); investigations in the 1970s to 80s of Westminster Abbey (identified in Hinton and Thomas 1997) were brought together with the 1990s excavations for the Jubilee Line extension (Thomas *et al* 2006); and archaeological work on the mendicant houses of London has also been summarised (Thomas and Watson in prep; cf Röhrkasten 2004). This will raise the number of houses covered in detail in academic publications by MOLA to a dozen or so by 2011, supported by a more general overview of the archaeology of medieval religion in London, commissioned by English Heritage (Barber *et al* in prep). Investigations from the 1960s onwards of the Augustinian priory of St Mary Overie have been pulled together as part of Southwark Cathedral's Millennium Project (Divers *et al* 2009) and piecemeal development will undoubtedly continue to reveal more details of these religious houses, as has already happened at Bermondsey Priory (Pre-Construct Archaeology), Merton Priory (MOLA), and at Stratford Langthorne (MOLA) where the location and layout of the gatehouse has been confirmed by a community archaeological project.

The potential of the existing and still accumulating data is being recognised and exploited. Data sets from the London religious houses are central to two already published studies: Westminster-type medieval floor tiles, an important and common feature of the material culture of these houses and elsewhere in south-east

England (Betts 2002); and a national survey of burial practice and attitudes to the dead (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005). The Wellcome Osteological Research Database has already been referred to and offers exceptional opportunities for the comparative study of the medieval burial populations from various religious houses, including St Mary Spital, and parish churches, together with the East Smithfield Black Death cemetery (Grainger *et al* 2008). Close integration of the archaeological and documentary evidence offers exciting opportunities for research, as for example in the mapping of London's mendicant precincts before and after the Dissolution (Holder in prep), and for a better understanding of the significance of religion to the capital.

In the 1990s Caroline Barron commented that as a result of work in the 1980s by historians

> '*the pious practices and prejudices of the lay Londoner have been brought much more sharply into focus. By contrast there has been relatively little recent work on religious houses of medieval London*' (Barron 1998, 31)

The situation has radically changed since then. The Greater London Publication Programme's 'clearing-up' of archaeological investigations, as it was termed in 1997, has proved far more productive than that phrase might have suggested – not only in terms of individual monographs but in the contrasts and comparisons it has evoked and the synthetic studies it has and will continue to generate. This joint venture, between English Heritage and Museum of London Archaeology, funded by English Heritage, will have a lasting legacy far beyond its original remit.

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