The London Temple of Mithras (Update 1)

Following months of studying of the archaeological records, we began at our workshop to set out the stones in an order that was representative of the few photographs we had; whilst retaining some element of structural integrity. Each stone or brick was dry laid in sand pits, numbered, photographed and given a unique reference code that would allow us to palletise the material to rebuild the Temple piece by piece when back on site.

Part of this was the recreation of Roman bricks, many of which had been lost over the previous build and dismantle (as they are comparatively soft and brittle). The bricks are rather different from those we would expect to see today, being a flatter, wider shape not unlike a thick tile. The examples of the surviving original tiles were examined and it was felt the composition likely to be reflective of an alluvial clay – as in dredged from a river. This would seem to make perfect sense as transportation was a major cost during construction and as the site was on the edge of the lost Thames tributary of Wallbrook (its name derived from its proximity of The London Wall and the river). The closest match we could find was using a historic brick maker who still today dredge their clays direct from the river their brickworks backs onto. No materials whatsoever are added and the brick is simply left to air harden for a week or 2 before being fired slowly in large scale kilns. The result is a fine, clean brick (containing no inclusions) that is both a reasonable visual match and composition.
The London Temple of Mithras (Update 1 cont’d.)

To set the building in a relevant context, flooring both within and outside the temple was required. To recreate this, a number of tonnes of Roman era mud and soil retained by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) from an adjacent site were delivered to our workshop. Our team laid out the mud and soil which contained fragments of spoil brick and stones creating nave and aisle floors. Once the floor had been dressed and walked upon (to give the impression of use), huge quantities of silicon rubber were applied to take a full impression of the floor. These moulds were then cleaned and a reinforced resin applied to make a positive cast. The casts once coloured, are imperceptible from the original source, yet remain solid and stable allowing them to be maintained.

The Temple will once again open to the public in 2016
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0tBB9W506g
The London Temple of Mithras (Update 1 cont’d.)

Once on site we scaled up one of the MOLA drawings and used this as an actual size footprint which we could build directly on top of. As the loadings were considered to be potentially high, the very low level stonework was substituted for modern concrete block. On top of this, we laid in courses the stone, brick and mortar to capture the spirit of each elevation of the build. The final processes all relate to ageing and distressing and are where we inject a bit of theatre. Mortars and renders were subjected to techniques that recreated the ravages of time including removal of aggregates and a number of mud washes – the intention being to recreate the illusion of the temple being freshly uncovered as it was found in 1954.

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