

OATLANDS PALACE EXCAVATIONS 1968 INTERIM REPORT

BY

ALAN COOK, M.S.A.A.T. (*Field Director*)

AIMS OF THE EXCAVATIONS

IN view of the work now proceeding for Volume III of the *History of the King's Works* it seemed desirable that information on the orientation, extent, form and development of Oatlands Palace, Weybridge, should be obtained by excavation. Additionally, it was hoped that such information would provide useful material for comparison with the results obtained from other contemporary royal palace sites such as Whitehall, Hampton Court and Nonsuch.

Considerable local interest in the site has existed for some years. The Weybridge Museum and the Walton and Weybridge Local History Society have been anxious to further the research already carried out on the documentary sources for the history of the Palace and on the few visible remains still existing on the site

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE SITE

The site of the Palace¹ is marked on the latest Ordnance Survey maps in an area bounded by Grotto Road and Old Palace Road, Weybridge. Earlier Ordnance Survey maps had marked the site to the east of Grotto Road.

Since 1922 the whole area has been developed for Local Council and private housing; the east side of Grotto Road is now built up with semi-detached houses on small allotments (*c.* 1935). No investigation was made here at this time, although it was known that many archaeological features were observed during the housing construction. The size of the allotments and the intensive private gardening now carried out on this side of the road prevent any excavation except on the smallest scale by courtesy of the occupiers.

The area defined by Old Palace and Grotto Roads is owned by the Local Council, except for an allotment at the eastern end belonging to the Girl Guides' Association, and one private house allotment. Both the Council and Girl Guide Association properties maintained sufficiently large areas of open ground for effective excavation and it is owing to the co-operation of these organisations that the results outlined below have been obtained.

The principal visible remains are two brick carriage gateways, with heavily moulded brick four-centred arches, set in an ancient brick wall

¹ N.G.R. TQ 07976516.

which defines the northern boundary of the Council property, and a long brick vaulted culvert, with vaulted chambers at either end, which runs below the Girl Guides' Association property.

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION AND FIRST SEASON'S WORK

In March 1968 the present field directors obtained permission to excavate trial trenches across the northern end of the Girl Guides, Association property (See Trenches A1, A2, marked on the plan Fig. 1).

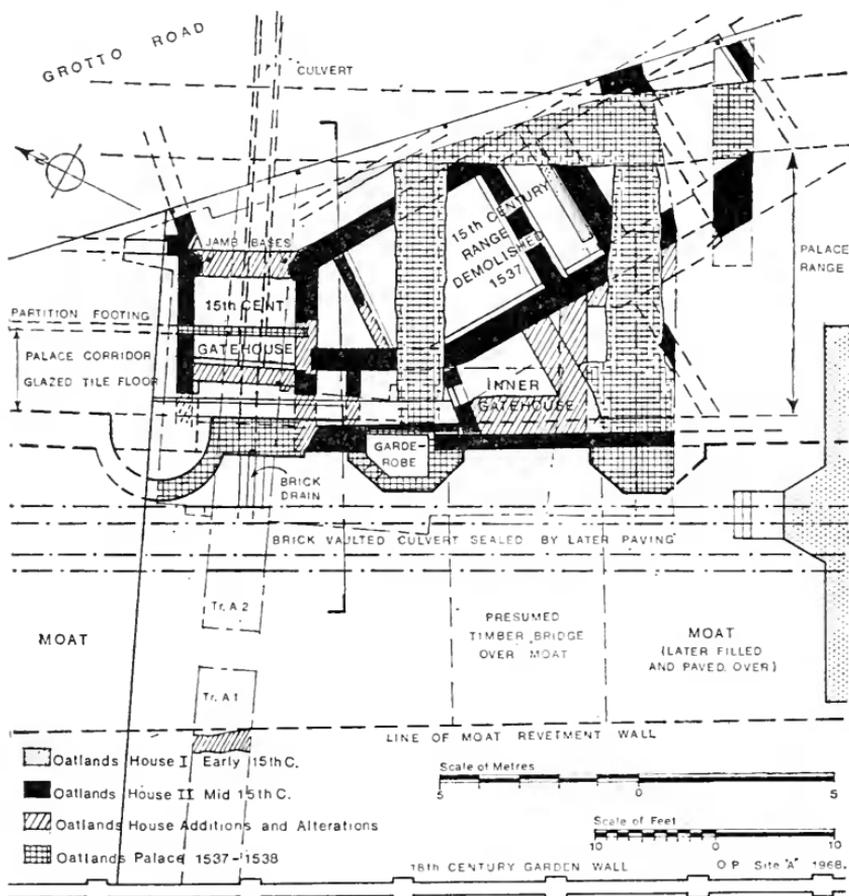


FIG. 1. OATLANDS PALACE: A SITE.

The results obtained from this work may be summarised as follows.

The culvert (see above) had been constructed to replace an open moat about eight metres wide. The moat was revetted by a substantial fair-faced brick wall to the east which supported some remains of the west wall of a range of building above. The outer revetment, to the west

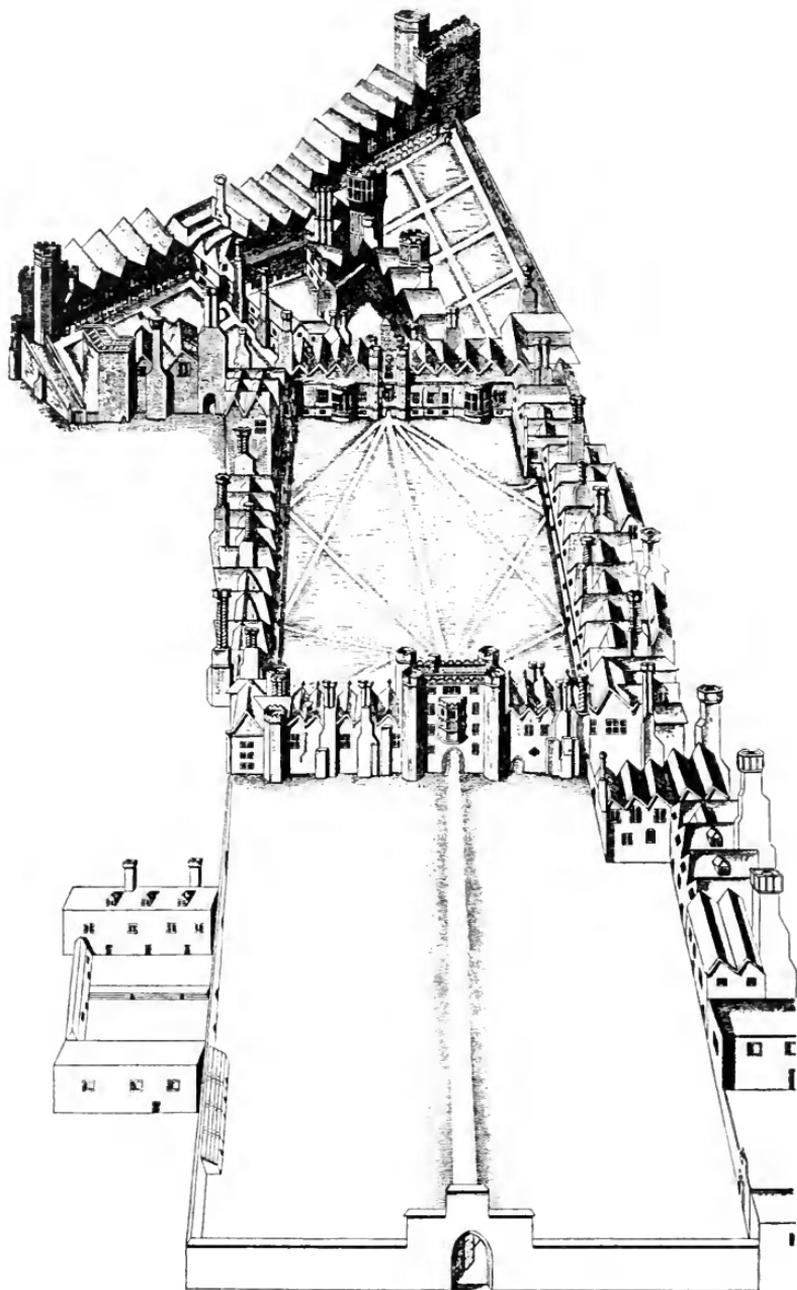
of the culvert, was found with its facework robbed back to a brick and stone rubble core. Beyond the outer revetment fragmentary remains of a red brick paving were found but it was clear that, after the construction of the culvert and the infilling of the remaining space of the moat, the whole area had been sealed at a higher level by a cobbled paving, laid to falls, made up of many fragments of broken mediaeval masonry including thirteenth-century moulded purbeck marble.

At the same time as the construction of the culvert vertical chases for rain water pipes had been cut into the brick wall of the range above the moat. These led into drains to the culvert. With the infilling of the moat the pipes must then have been required to carry off the water which had formerly discharged directly into the moat. This discovery confirmed that, at the time of construction of the range, the moat was still retained as an integral part of the scheme of building above but had been replaced by the culvert some years later.

The length of brick wall rising some ten courses above the last cobbled courtyard pavement level was found to be bonded with a semi-circular projecting feature above the level but straight-jointed on to the moat revetment below. In a southern extension from Trench A2, a semi-octagonal projection was found containing an internal shaft with outlet to the moat. This projection was similarly straight-jointed on to the revetment below last pavement level. The relationship of these two features was seen to be accurately reflected in the sixteenth-century drawings of the Palace which survive and could be interpreted as the northern of the two bay windows (on the further facade of the Middle Court of the Palace as shown in the drawings) and the base of the north-west octagonal turret of the tall Inner Gatehouse. All subsequent discoveries have confirmed this interpretation with the result that it is now possible to predict with accuracy the position of any part of the Palace as depicted in the Wyngaerde sketches and Gough engraving of the sixteenth century (Fig. 2).

It was seen that the moat revetment wall belonged to an earlier phase of construction than the remains of wall it now carried. Any work it may have originally supported had been mostly demolished to ground level to make way for the later work. The continuation of Trench A2 across the wall showed inside the range the remains of a glazed-tile floor of chequer board pattern. Immediately below this floor the toe of the wall footing projected well beyond the inner face of the earlier revetment. In addition the remains of a brick-on-edge floor were discovered finishing on line with another moat revetment wall set close to, and almost parallel with, the first between two cross walls. Three metres to the east the cross walls ended with attached bases of heavily moulded brick jambs. All this work below the final tiled floor has been interpreted as a gateway to a substantial house predating the Henrician palace. The moulding of the brick jambs suggest a date of *c.* 1470.

While this excavation was in progress on the Girl Guides' Association site a trench was dug midway along the northern boundary (B. site), (Fig. 3). Here the north and south wall foundations of the north range of the Middle Court were found extending in line from the projection of



The Palace of Oatlands, in Surrey.

From a drawing which belonged to Rich. Gough, Esq., & which appears to have been made about the time of Queen Elizabeth.

FIG. 2. OATLANDS PALACE: GOUGH ENGRAVING.

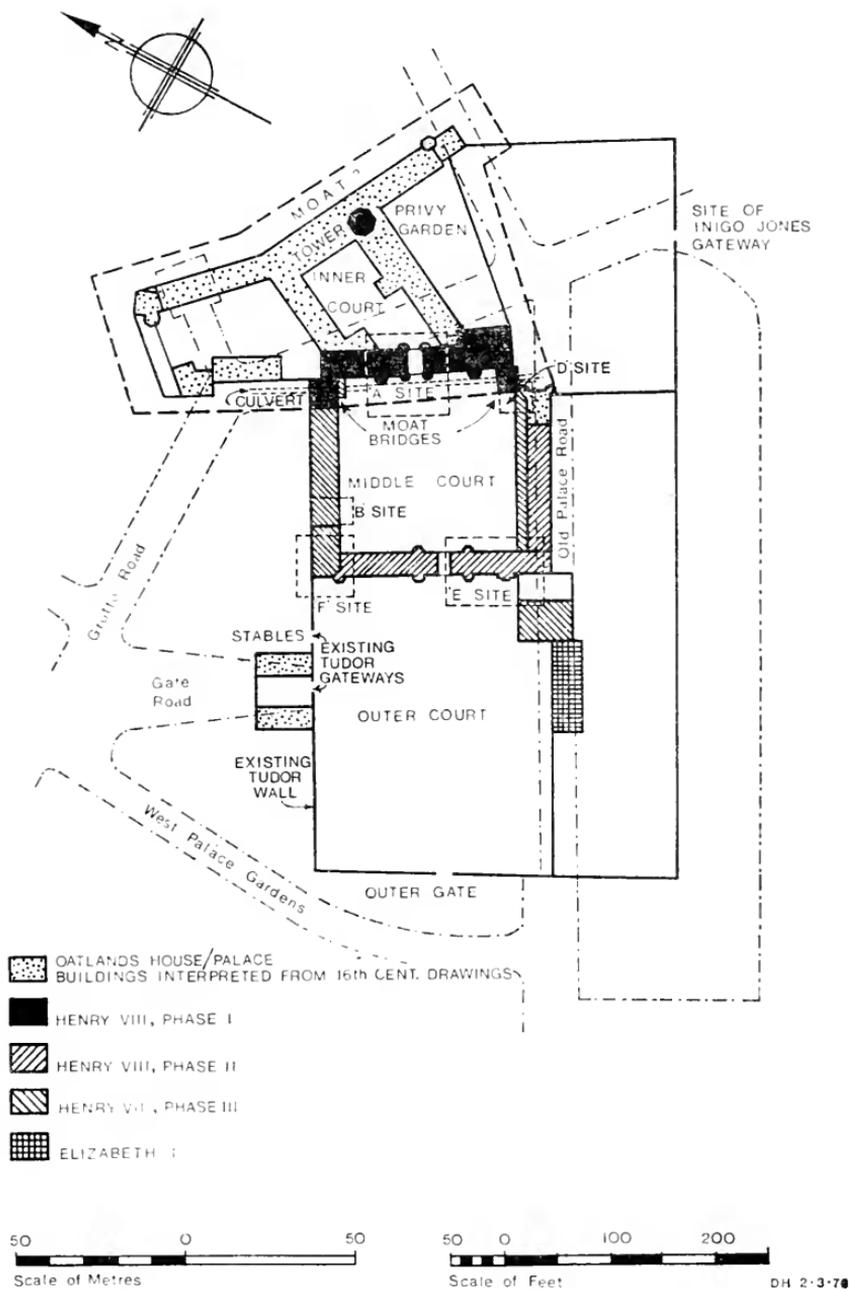


FIG. 3. OATLANDS PALACE: INTERIM DEVELOPMENT PLAN, showing phases of construction so far interpreted and principal sites of excavation in 1968.

the large vaulted chambers at the north end of the culvert. The massive foundations in B. 1 were composed of reused mediaeval rubble, suggesting a post-dissolution date. Thus at the conclusion of the first season two sides of the Middle Courtyard had been accurately determined.

THE SECOND SEASON

Work was continued on details of the fifteenth-century gatehouse, the excavation of a small brick culvert found running below this gatehouse floor and the successive additions made to continue the secondary culvert through the second moat revetment wall and on into the 'moat' culvert.

A careful examination of the vaulted chambers at either end of the culvert showed that they had originally been constructed as brick arched bridges each of two spans, designed to cross the moat at either end of the Middle Court west facade. Both vaults of the northern bridge could be entered from the culvert but only one vault was accessible at the southern end. In order to prove the existence of a second vault here an excavation (Site D) against the estimated southern face of the bridge showed the blocked arch to the predicted vault. Attached to the south-west corner of this bridge one side of an added octagonal brick turret was found built up from the moat floor. Above the bridge evidence remained to show its use as the sub-structure of a short wing projecting over the moat from the line of the main facade. The evidence of the sixteenth-century drawings shows that the northern bridge must have been used similarly prior to the addition of the north and south ranges of the Middle Court.

During this season further work was carried out on the north range of the Middle Court which confirmed the earlier findings and showed several cross walls and other features.

THE THIRD SEASON

The Third Season's work included area excavation of part of the Outer Gatehouse and the range running south from it (Site E, Fig. 4); the area excavation of the Inner Gatehouse and the range of the fifteenth-century house into which its foundations had been cut (Site A, Fig. 1) and, with the co-operation of some of the Council tenants, it was also possible to excavate areas in the north-west corner of the Middle Court (Site F, Fig. 3).

On the last-mentioned site the inner junction of the north and west ranges was determined and a large octagonal turret on the west face of the west range, prominent in the sixteenth-century views, was examined. The adjacent room in the north range was found to be a semi-basement which, from the extraordinary number of stoneware bellarmine fragments found, was probably a wine cellar.

The area excavation of the west range (Site E) showed that both the range and the Outer Gatehouse had been constructed into and against an earlier brick precinct-wall with brick offset footings, in contrast to the

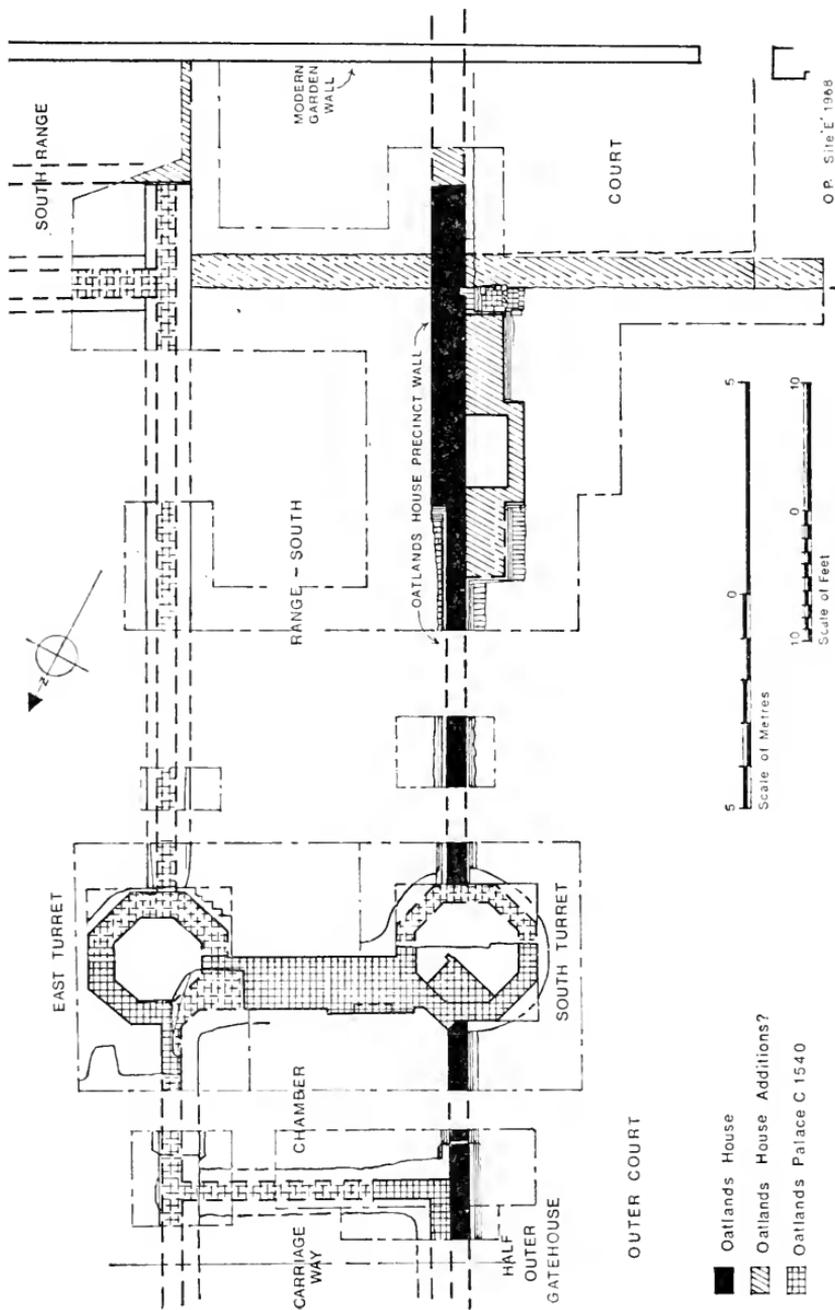


FIG. 4. OATLANDS PALACE: E SITE.

new foundations for the range, which were trench-built of reused monastic mediaeval masonry. Substantial Romanesque and Gothic mouldings and carvings have been salvaged from these foundations.

The complete stripping of the north end of the Girl Guides' Association site showed the development of the earlier pre-Palace range running east from the fifteenth-century gatehouse discovered earlier in the year. The general interpretation proposed for this area (Site A) is:

- 1 An early house, of which the poorly-built sleeper foundations composed of brick, stone and flint rubble were found, where not disturbed by later work. The slightness of these foundations suggests a timber building. (Early fifteenth century.)
- 2 A more substantial brick house on the same alignment. (Mid-fifteenth century.)
- 3 The insertion of a gatehouse into 2 at an oblique angle to the range (c. 1470)
- 4 The formation of a moat with a new revetment to the gatehouse and the house site, but south of the gatehouse the moat revetment is aligned to leave a widening berm between the house and the moat. This area is later built over with secondary structures.
- 5 The blocking off of the gatehouse both internally and externally.
- 6 The demolition of this part of the house to ground level (1537) and the construction of a new range and gatehouse retaining the moat revetment but otherwise disregarding all earlier foundations.
- 7 The infilling of the moat and its replacement with a culvert. (c. 1540.)

PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER EXCAVATION

The aims of excavation during 1969 were as follows:

- 1 To determine the original function of the moat bridges and their position in the sequence of building development.
- 2 The continuation of the area excavation south from the Inner Gatehouse to the south moat bridge. This is the only accessible area of the Palace to the east of the moat within the site of the original fifteenth-century house and it was hoped that further work would clarify the planning of both structures and their relationship.
- 3 Some further work in the north-west corner of the North Range which has been shown to be possibly a wine cellar. The function of the adjacent turrets was investigated. The results of this work will be given in a subsequent report.

FINDS

A large quantity of late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century pottery and glass has been found which will be published in the final report. Many fourteenth and fifteenth-century encaustic floor tiles have also been recovered almost all of the Penn or Wessex types. Apart from reused monastic material, architectural fragments have all been standard masonry mouldings of c. 1540.

CONCLUSION

The work of the Oatlands Palace Excavation Committee has been supported by the active interest of local bodies, the Ministry of Public Building and Works and the Surrey Archaeological Society.

The continuation of this support during 1969 should see the completion of the work in the areas available for present excavation. It is believed that the aims set out at the beginning of this report will then have been realised for a large area of Oatlands Palace following final interpretation of the material.