

Aerial view of the excavations looking west.

Greenwich Palace Excavations 1970

Photographs by the Author

DURING AUGUST and September 1970 an excavation in the North East quadrant of the Grand Square of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, was carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Public Building and Works.

The earliest house on the site was a manor house built by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, after acquiring the land in 1426¹. When Gloucester died in 1447 his house was taken over by Queen Margaret, who ordered alterations. Various improvements, made to the house during the second half of the 15th century, are recorded, but there is no clear indication of the plan of the house, and before the recent excavations even its approximate position was quite uncertain.

In 1499 Henry VII paid for 600,000 bricks at Greenwich: this marked the beginning of the complete reconstruction of the manor. From the documents it was not clear whether Henry's building replaced or merely altered Gloucester's house; in

the excavated area at least the old house was demolished and the new structure was built to a completely different plan. The bulk of the palace seems to have been completed by about 1505, although stables, a barn and a new armoury with two towers were added by Henry VIII.

Unlike the manor house the general appearance of the palace is known from drawings and paintings². The principal range ran along the waterfront and contained, from E. to W., the chapel, the state rooms, and the King's privy rooms. Almost in the centre of the river front stood a tower which formed the most prominent feature of the palace. To the S. of the river range were two or three courtyards, apparently bounded by ranges; one of these is shown in Wyngaerde's view of the palace from the park. Unfortunately no contemporary plans of the palace have survived but small-scale plans of the site, drawn in the 1690's during the construction of Greenwich Hospital, show "the Old Chapell" under the eastern

1. *The History of the King's Works* H.M.S.O. (1963) 949.

2. Many of these are published in G. H. Chettle, *The Queen's House*, (London Survey Committee XIV, 1937).

side of the projected position of the Queen Anne Block. This is the only documentary evidence for the location of the palace, and despite several attempts to produce a block plan, it and the other archive material, proved insufficient for the purpose.

In view of the impending publication of that part of the official history of the Office of Works which deals with Tudor Greenwich,³ an opportunity was taken to locate some portion of the palace. The structures uncovered are shown in the plan, and may be divided into three main phases.

1. The Manor House, c. 1430-c1500.

In the excavated area the manor house consisted of a range 8.5 m. broad running along the edge of the river with two main cross walls. The walls were built of brick, and averaged 70 cms thick. Two pairs of garderobes led to brick-built vaulted culverts which discharged into the Thames. A brick pavement formed, perhaps, a courtyard to S. of the house. The sand tile-bed for the original floor was preserved in one part of the excavations. The floor itself had been raised and a lead pipe inserted. This alteration and the insertion of several secondary walls of uncertain function can probably be ascribed to the years after 1447. At the end of the 15th century the house was demolished to within 10 cms of the floor level. The razed walls served the builders of the new palace as sleepers to carry the joists for the ground floor.

2. The Palace, c. 1500-c. 1690.

After the demolition, trenches were cut for a new and extensive sewage system which intersected that



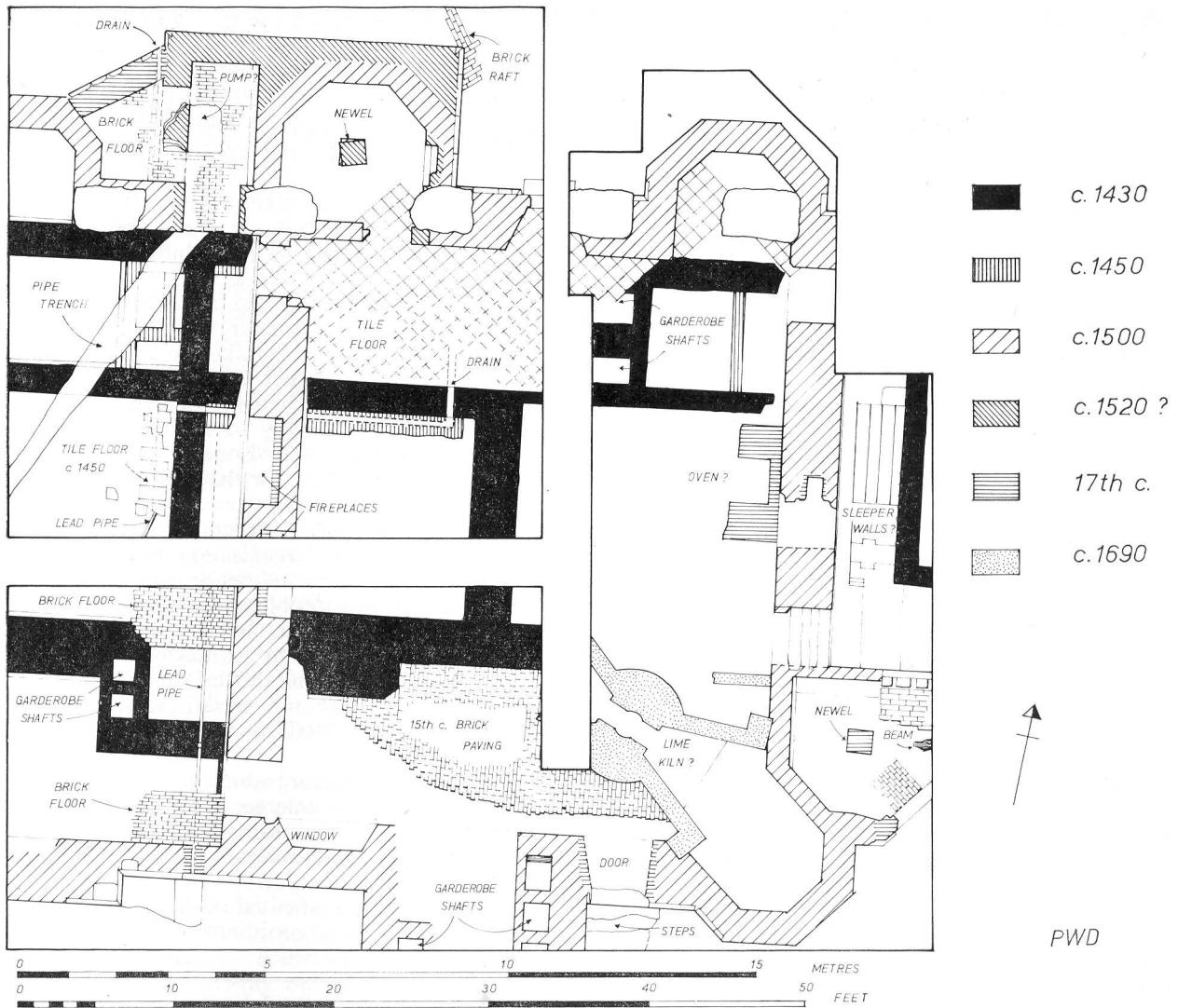
One of the heavily silted brick culverts, about two feet wide.

of the manor house. The wardrobe shafts discharged into brick-vaulted chambers, three of which were explored. Between these chambers ran brick culverts about 60 cms wide and originally about 1.5 m. high, although now silted to a depth of about 90 cms. After the completion of the culverts the main brick walls of the palace were begun. The excavations revealed the N., S., and E. walls of the great tower of the palace; as at present interpreted this was a rectangle 14.1 m. from N. to S. and at least 17 m. from W. to E. Three semi-octagonal bays, the centre one containing a staircase, formed the river front and another bay, set diagonally, stood in the SE corner; a porch in the angle between the tower and the range gave access from the courtyard to the ground floor. The tower was divided into two sections by a spine wall, containing two fireplaces. Part of the abutting E. range was uncovered; from it two doors opened into the tower. That to the N. led to what seems to have been a corridor with a solid floor, separated from the rest of the tower perhaps by a partition. To the W. this corridor ran as far as the staircase turret; since the main river entrances to the palace stood to the E. of the excavated area it is possible that the corridor ran from this entrance along the ground floor of the range to the great tower, and so by a set of back stairs to the privy apartments. The corridor was floored with yellow and green glazed tiles, which sealed a somewhat worn coin of 1554, and so were presumably replacements.

Not long after the completion of the great tower the staircase turret was thickened by a brick structure with a rectangular face, which rested upon a raft of bricks built up to the face of the octagon. The lower string course was preserved in this area, and at the angles of the brick thickening it was finished with a chamfered stop. On the N., the riverward side, of the thickening there was no string. Wyngaerde's view of the palace from the river in 1558 shows a forebuilding or jamb projecting like a barbican from the great tower into the river; visible in the view is an arched opening in the W. side of the forebuilding. We can now interpret this opening as a passage which allowed access along the edge of the river after the building of the forebuilding—a concept similar to that of the Queen's House at Greenwich, where Inigo Jones' house was built astride the main road. The forebuilding was perhaps added by Henry VIII at about the same time as his

3. *The History of the King's Works, III* H.M.S.O. (forthcoming). I must thank Mr. H. M. Colvin for allowing me to read his draft chapter on Greenwich, and for discussing the problems on the site.

4. Shown on the plan as "c.1520." It was probably built before 1532: from this date nearly complete accounts have been preserved.



Plan of the 1970 excavation.

alterations to the tilt yard.⁴ It was, at any rate, completed before Wyngaerde's drawing of 1558.

A number of alterations can at the moment be ascribed only generally to the late 16th or 17th centuries⁵. The forebuilding was enlarged on the W. side and a small brick-floored room was formed between the staircase turret and the western octagon. Two lead pipes brought water to a square hole in the centre of the room, which was probably a pump-room for fresh water; a drain in the wall removed any spillage. A square brick newel was inserted into the porch at the SE angle of the tower; a door, reached by steps, was broken into the S. wall of

5. Documentary evidence suggests that the Elizabethan works at Greenwich were minimal, and the alterations may

the tower near the porch. By these alterations the porch became a staircase direct from the courtyard to the first floor of either the tower or the adjacent range; the inserted door was then necessary to allow access once more from the courtyard to the ground floor.

Abandonment and Demolition 1663-c. 1690.

A new palace was begun by Charles II in 1663. By 1669 only the King's House (part of King Charles Block) had been completed, and little or nothing further was started until the foundation of the Naval Hospital after 1692. How much of the Tudor palace had been demolished when work began on the Hos-

be provisionally ascribed to the period when James I was repairing his new palace.

An Archaeological Research Centre for the London Region

JEREMY HASLAM

TWO RECENT conferences at Nottingham and London, on aspects of the crisis facing British archaeology, have highlighted the acute problems faced by archaeologists concerned with the investigation of sites which are being threatened in increasing numbers. I would, therefore, like to put forward some suggestions relating to ideas brought out at these conferences which might lead to a possible solution of the archaeological problems peculiar to the London region.

While working for a year with the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee, I became very impressed with the organisation and effort put into the methodical extraction of archaeological and historical information over large areas of the old town, and more importantly, by the facilities for processing and writing up of the information and finds made possible by a centrally organised unit.

Since coming to London I have been struck by the contrast in the archaeological picture between Oxford and here, even allowing for the difference in areas. The archaeological scene here appears so fragmentary that it is difficult to realise at a superficial glance that there is any co-ordination of archaeological work throughout London as a whole, just as it is all too obvious that the number of final reports on excavations conducted in the region (including the City) can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. For instance, as is well known, the many rescue excavations in the City have had to remain unpublished beyond the stage of brief interim reports through lack of time on the part of Guildhall Museum staff; and the work of the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society is

severely restricted by lack of space, time and manpower to process and write up their mountains of finds.

What therefore seems necessary is a body whose concern is with the **whole** of the London region (which one might define as the administrative area of Greater London), and whose responsibility would be, briefly, to co-ordinate and materially assist all the piecemeal and fragmentary archaeological research at present being undertaken in this region.

Without wishing to seem critical of, or wishing to overide, existing arrangements or organisations—many of them long standing—I should like to propose the establishment of a London Archaeological Research Centre (LARC), for the existence of which there are many precedents in provincial towns, such as Winchester, Oxford, Southampton, Exeter, etc. There is at present no organisation in the London region with a sphere of reference wide enough to comprehend the vast problems of the recovery of the patterns of prehistoric and historic settlement in the region as a whole, or to tackle the problems of retrieving and publishing this information on other than a very parochial and unsatisfactory scale. I therefore envisage LARC as having the following aims:

1. To act as a collector, administrator and distributor of funds for emergency excavations in the London region, and for whatever research is necessary for their analysis and proper publication.
2. To realise the full potential of the London region by drawing up a coordinated programme of research priorities which will take into account

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pital is at present unclear. A painting in the Maritime Museum attributed to Vostermann shows the tilt-yard towers partially demolished, and some of the river front of the old palace still standing beside the King's House; the Royal Observatory, which can be seen in the painting, provides a *terminus post quem* of 1676. A plan of c. 1694/5 describes most of the palace site as "the Works." Between 1676 and 1694/5, then, the area excavated in 1970 had been levelled. Above the demolished walls of the palace piles of lime and unused brickbats remained from the building work of the 1690's. In the SE corner of the site a small brick structure had been built on the demolition debris. It consisted of a circular core of brickwork divided into two halves by a vent, with two pairs of screen walls running

from the core. There were traces of charcoal and crushed shell, and it seems most likely that the structure was the lowest part of a kiln for the burning of the lime mortar required for the building of the Hospital.

Further Digging

The excavations have thus achieved their initial object: the alignment of the river front of the palace has been established and we now know the exact location of an important part of the plan, the great tower. It is clear that much of the palace still lies below the Grand Square, and a second season, in which more of the palace may be uncovered, is proposed between 2 April and 22 May 1971. We have urgent need of volunteers, skilled or unskilled, to help with the work. All who wish to join in will be most welcome, and should write to me at New College, Oxford.