

# Excavations at Carshalton House, 1992

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## Introduction

A SERIES OF excavations took place between June and August 1992 in the landscape gardens of Carshalton House (St Philomena's Convent and School; TQ 2775 6446), which had been laid out in formal style about 1715-1720 under the South Sea Company sub-Governor Sir John Fellowes, and subsequently landscaped in the informal style in the later 18th century (Fig. 1). The first excavations were in the walled garden as an evaluation before the construction of buildings in that area; the second was spoil excavation necessary to reveal the roof of the garden building known as *the Hermitage* to allow stabilisation of the structure. In the latter case the contractor was not obliged to carry out archaeological investigations whilst excavating, as only listed building consent for this work was required, but the contract was awarded to one of us (ACS) to conduct the spoil removal. During this operation important archaeological information was recorded, enabling a reconsideration of the building and its history. A report on this excavation is in preparation.

The evaluation excavations related to the proposed construction of a Gym extension in the walled gardens, formerly the middle garden (trenches A and B), and a new Science block south of the boiler house, formerly the side garden (trenches C and D). Excavations in trenches A and B began in the area north of the present Gym block (Fig. 2), and this interim report concerns only these two trenches.

## Trench A

In trench A a gravel path in recent use was immediately uncovered (Fig. 3, A). This was made of small, medium and large gravel with larger flints representing the later stages of use, with an edge of larger flints along the outside edge of the path (fig. 3, A and B). In addition, a layer of debris associated with the construction of the gymnasium in the early 1970s was recognised on the southern edge of the trench and a modern cut ran east-west across the northern end of the trench; its fill included

fragments of plastic and other modern debris, but nothing to suggest its purpose (Fig. 3, D; Fig. 4). Below both these modern features, the remains of cultivation trenches ran the length of the trench from north to south to the west (inside) of the line of the path (Fig. 3, C; Fig. 4).

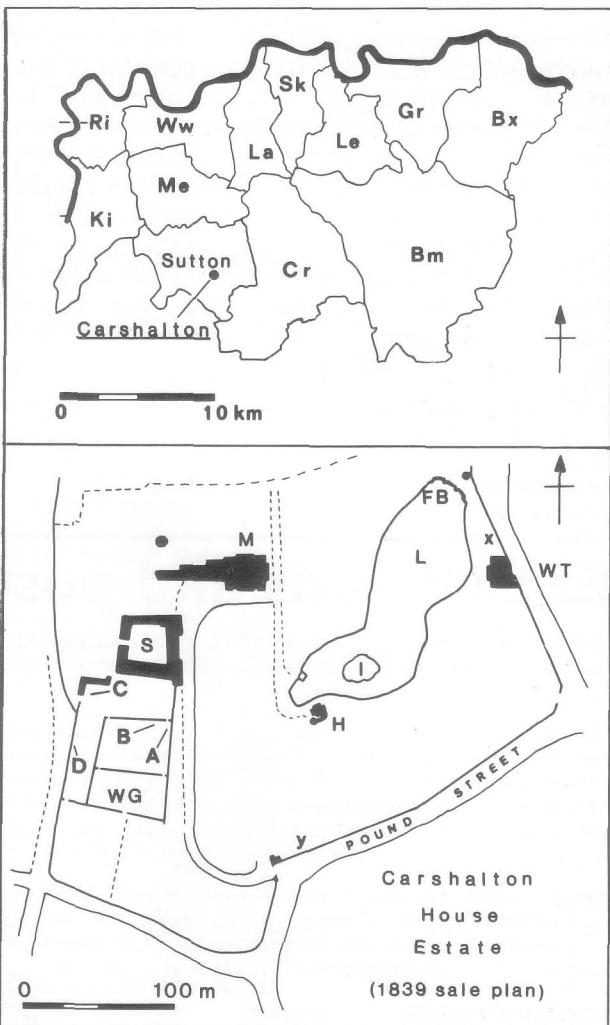


Fig. 1: Carshalton House. Location and plan of the estate based on the sale catalogue plan of 1839, and showing location of trenches A, B, C and D.

Key: S = stables; M = Mansion; L = Lake; WT = Water Tower; WG = walled gardens; I = Island; H = Hermitage; FB = fake bridge. x and y = areas of soil build-up recorded in earlier excavations.

i. A. Skelton 'Historic garden study' *London Archaeologist*, no. 2 (1985) 56.

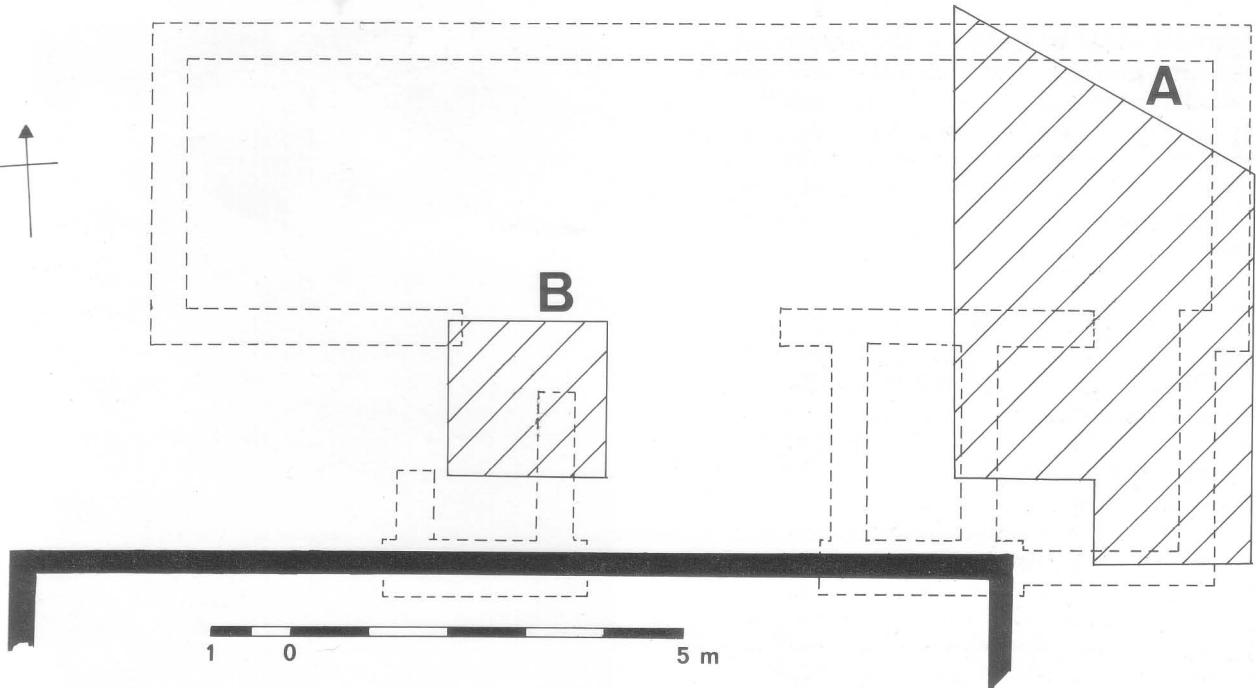


Fig. 2: position of trenches A and B to the north of the Gym, showing the line of the present Gym (in bold), and the position of projected foundations for the Gym extension (areas enclosed by dashed lines).

The major feature recorded in trench A was a substantial chalk linear feature, which ran from north to south and was overlain in places by the gravel path (Fig. 4; Fig. 5, A). This chalk 'bank' survived best at the north of the trench, where it measured up to 2m (6.5ft) wide. At the southern end it survived to a height of 0.75m (2ft 6in) but had been cut into a number of times, principally by a pit which survived as a semi-circular cut into the chalk bank in plan (Fig. 4; Fig. 5, C). It was filled with a fine brown soil, which could not be distinguished from the soils to the west; this fill overlay the heavily truncated remains of the 'bank' at a depth of 42.07m OD. On the western edge two other cuts were recognised (Fig. 4; Fig. 5, D). Below the bank a layer of reddish brown chalky soil, 130mm (5in) thick, was excavated (Fig. 5, B); it contained a large unglazed medieval pot sherd and a grey ware sherd which is considered to Romano-British or early medieval in date. The natural chalk was recorded at 41.87m OD.

### Trench B

A similar pattern of fine brown soil deposits was first located in Trench B, without the chalk bank

and gravel path. After the excavation of topsoil and a light mortar layer (also related to the construction of the Gym block in the 1970s), the remains of cultivation trenches similar to those in trench A were traced. Under these features, a fine brown soil was excavated which overlay the upper fill of a ditch at 42.26m OD. It ran north-west to south-east, cutting further brown soil deposits (Fig. 6). Few finds came from the three layers of fill defined within this ditch, but included medieval pottery and a small (12mm, 0.5in, long) fragment of ceramic building material, possibly post-medieval, from the lowest fill at 41.92m OD.

The most significant find from the trench, however, came from the soil deposits cut by the ditch and to the north of it. The substantial remains of a small Early Bronze Age Collared Urn were uncovered at a depth of 41.955m OD; it was found in over 60 fragments, flattened into an area approximately 0.3m by 0.3m (1ft by 1ft) in the north-west corner of trench B (Figs. 6 and 7). Although the sherds are as yet uncleared, it is possible to discern twisted-cord impressed lines on the collar, which has a thick heavy rim with an irregular central groove. No

features could be linked with this deposit, and it was not possible to define the wider context in which the pot was deposited, although three small fragments of burnt bone recovered during excavation may suggest the presence of a cremation deposit. The need for further work in the area of the pot has been recognised, and is now under discussion.

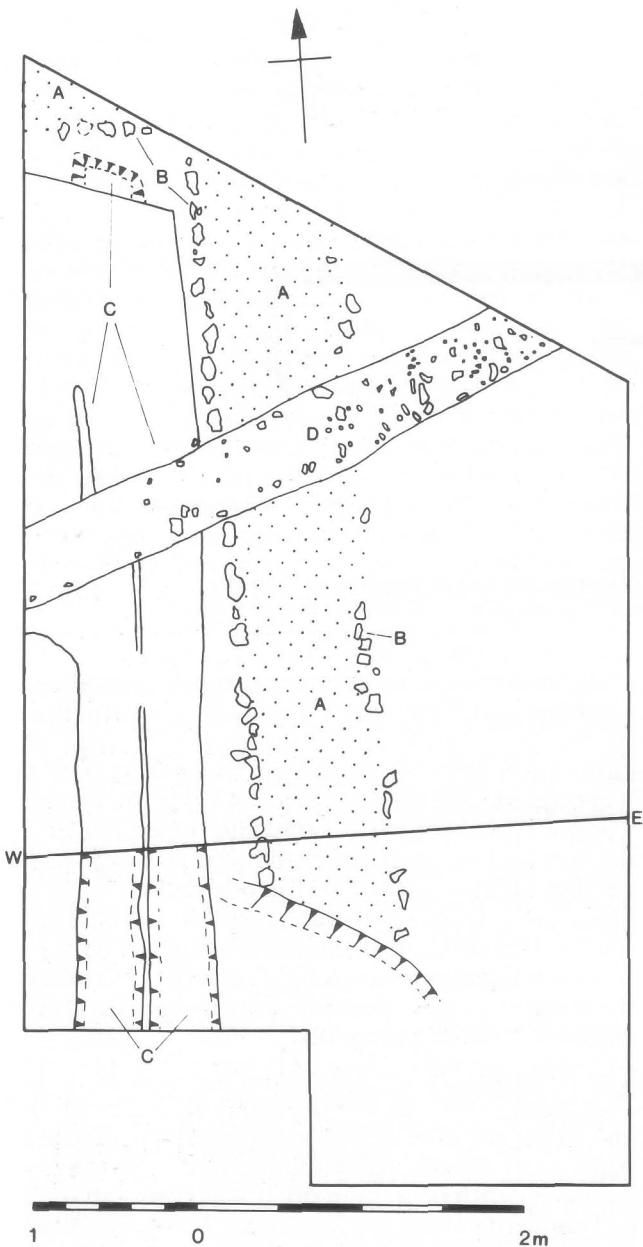


Fig. 3: trench 3, plan, showing the course of the gravel path (A) with flint nodule edging (B) cut by a modern cut (D) and the bedding, or cultivation trenches (C) which have been partly excavated. The line E – W is the section line of Fig. 5.



Fig. 4: trench A from the north, showing the extent of the chalk feature underlying the gravel path and the cut of the large pit into it in the west. The parallel bedding trenches can be clearly seen west of the cut, and further cuts into the bank to the east.

## Discussion

The excavation of trenches A and B have revealed much information about the development of the walled gardens since their construction in about 1720. Although the relationship of the chalk 'bank' to the garden walls themselves is not yet fully understood, it has been traced further south by auguring, and appears to turn west inside the wall in the south-east corner. At present, a tentative suggestion is that the chalk 'bank' lay around the immediate inside of the walled garden, perhaps forming a terrace and supporting a path. Since about 1720 when the garden walls were constructed, considerable re-landscaping has taken place, involving the movement and deposition of spoil all around the estate. Earlier excavations around the estate have shown that the ground surface along the east boundary of the estate to the north of the Water Tower has been raised by at least three feet, burying an early 18th century path and the base of the Water Tower itself under a fine brown soil

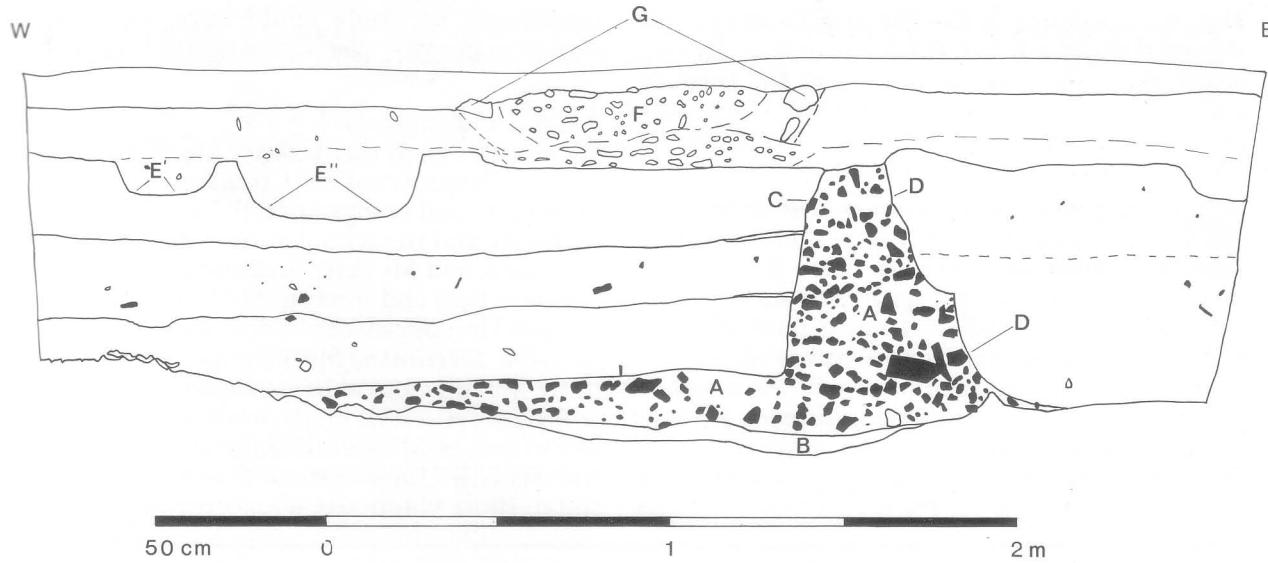


Fig. 5: trench A, west-east section, showing the chalk bank (A); the sub-bank layer (B), in which medieval pottery was found; the circular pit cut (C) and the smaller double cuts (D) also through the chalk bank. The later, modern bedding or cultivation trenches are E' and E''. The gravel path (F) with its flint nodule edging (G) lies above.

similar to that found in trench A and B. Further raising of the ground level has occurred along the south boundary (Fig. 1, x and y). The cutting back

of the chalk 'bank' on both west and east sides in trench A, including the large semi-circular or circular pit, probably post-date this phase, which is tentatively dated to the later 18th century, when Fellowes' rigid formal layout was completely transformed into the informal landscape we see today.

The history of the pre-garden phase is more sketchy. Evidence for medieval occupation is limited almost to the large sherd of medieval pottery from the layer under the chalk 'bank', and it appears that

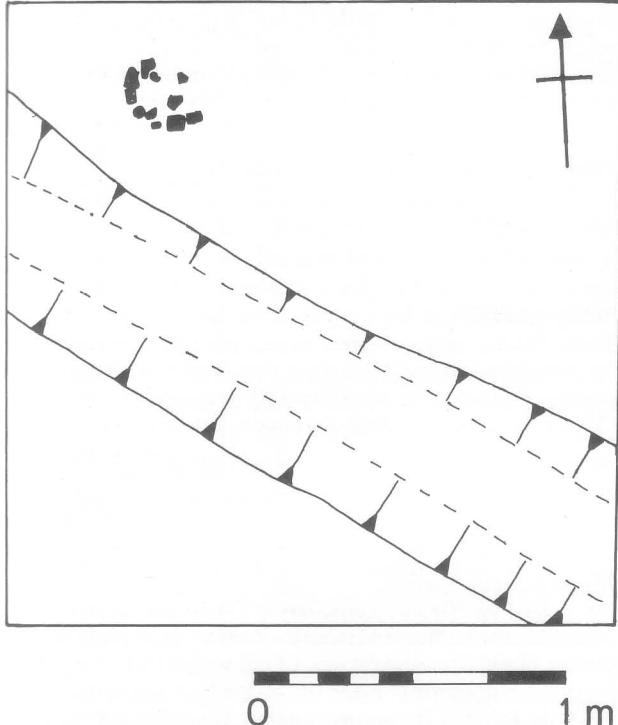


Fig. 6: trench B, plan, showing the position of the post-medieval gully and the pot deposit in the north-west corner.



Fig. 7: contemplating the collared urn fragments.

almost immediately below the 18th century garden deposits prehistoric evidence has survived. But the situation of the Collared Urn — in the form of archaeo-historical 'limbo' — leaves too many questions unanswered, and it is hoped that the further work will sort out a few of them.

At present, post-excavation work is under way on the Science block trenches C and D, where significant occupation evidence of Later Bronze Age date has also been found, apparently sealed under later landscaping deposits. There is no doubt that Carshalton House is an important site of the prehistoric period in the region, set within an area of known Bronze Age occupation evidence, perhaps finally centred on the Later Bronze Age enclosure at Queen Mary's Hospital some 2km further south up the dip-slope (at TQ 279 822), from where its

inhabitants no doubt could have maintained a watchful eye over the occupants of our site.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank: Sister Monica McCauley and the Daughters of the Cross for their generous hospitality and orange juice; the headmistress Mrs Kilkenny and the school authorities for their co-operation, and Mr Peter Bird and Mr Peter Moore for their help and interest. Mr Ken Whittaker of English Heritage discussed the site with us, which Dr Nick Merriman, Ms Virginia Neal and especially Mr Jon Cotton have helped us with all the prehistoric pottery. Finally, our thanks to our main work force of Messrs Bill Smith and Leslie Capon, and Ms Gill Hummerstone for their hard work, and to those volunteers who turned out for us.

## Letters

VOL. 6, NO. 16 of *London Archaeologist* to hand, together with notice of renewed subscriptions, etc. I suppose for some time now, and nothing at all to do with the price, my reaction to *LA* has been qualified by the perhaps inevitable, in an increasingly developed area of archaeological opportunity, reduction in the stimulating news content of the magazine. This was briefly relieved when the Roman amphitheatre was discovered, and where I visited when still working in London. The problem of writing up an ever more worked out site will be as apparent to you as anyone else, but as a substitute, the lay reader will find it hard to digest the technical processes of wet sieving or the extraordinary deadening account of the Museum of London's digestive tract.

Having for most of my life worked in Archives, and incidentally pre English Heritage been responsible for a rather more knowledgeable approach to the selection of HLG, DOE and PSA etc., etc. (including Savile Row plans) archaeological, etc., records for transfer to the PRO than would have been the case if someone less steeped in the subject had been involved, I am fully aware of the objectives, and the problems which the system described is designed to overcome. In fact, I had opportunity, when visiting the Museum of London to advise on records, to see some of this activity at the time when the finds catalogue was being computerised. Of this I seem to recall the glazed eyes of the operators, which in a sense leads to the question previously implied, has *LA*, lacking source material, become so inward looking as to distance itself from other than readers who are *active* in the field of archaeology?

It is perhaps not for me to comment on the policy enshrined in this forbidding system, but it would be fair to say that the greatest danger in succumbing to the allure of computer potential, and related computer led systems, is the one of over reliance to the point where the users become incapable of thinking for themselves, particularly at the point when information re-

trieval from, and/or exploitation of same in, an overstuffed machine, becomes ever more protracted and time consuming. Or overdependence to the point of accepting only print out as Gospel<sup>1</sup> as in the case of my address, which may or may not be the case why I have not received Vol. 6 nos. 13-15!

If you care to print this letter, I could perhaps be persuaded to renew my subscription long enough to see if it provokes a response both from your colleagues and other readers, and a change in editorial direction?

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### "Lucy's Child"

THIS WAS a very comprehensive and erudite review of a "thoroughly good read". But the review itself was hard going in places — two sentences of 10 lines each and one of sixteen lines. One has to go back to the beginning to find where it started.

Dennis Corble  
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### Montfichet's Tower

I've looked up *Harben's Dictionary of London* for references to Montfichet's and Baynard's Castles. They were on pp. 78-9 (plus plan of Blackfriars) and pp. 424-5. I did wonder whether Bruce Watson has done so for his article on the Norman Fortress (*LA* vol. 6, no. 14, 371-7). It does quote quite a few references to both.

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