



Fig. 1: the moat and bridge looking south-west (towards the River Thames), with Gothick Lodge in scaffolding to left, and Bishops Park in the background. The 'tide-mark' on the parapet indicates the extent to which the moat was filled with builders' debris in 1921–24. (© Gifford)

Fulham Palace moat revealed

Phil Emery

A dry restoration of some 90 m of the moat of Fulham Palace, the most significant monument in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, has been designed by archaeological consultants Gifford. This is part of a wider archaeological project associated with restoration of Fulham Palace grounds and Bishops Park (funded principally by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund).

Fulham Palace was the home of the Bishops of London from AD 704 to 1733. The 14-hectare (35-acre) site in which the Palace stands is enclosed by an ancient moat measuring 1.4 km (0.9 mile) long – the largest domestic moated site in medieval England. The moated enclosure was designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1976 in recognition of its national importance, with the moat itself delineating the Scheduled area.

The origins of the moat are enigmatic, and archaeological investigations since the 1970s suggest, unsurprisingly, that its history of construction, modification, use and maintenance is long and complex. The moated enclosure was probably established on an island formed between two forks of a tributary of the Thames which sprang at Colehill ('Col' is Celtic for river). The earliest surviving mention

of the moat in historical documents dates to 1392 and refers to the *magna fossa* ('great ditch').¹

A water-filled circuit is shown on John Rocque's map (surveyed 1741–5) and last appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1916. Sections of the moat continued to be cleaned out until the early 1900s, but even by then it had become regarded as a maintenance liability. Controversially, the moat was filled in with builders' debris by Fulham Borough Council between 1921 and 1924 at the request of the Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram (in office between 1901–39).² In some places the moat was overfilled, resulting in the ground levels along its course becoming higher than its banks, but elsewhere the course of the moat is more readily discernible. However, the important point is that the entire moat is preserved below ground as an unbroken circuit.

One of the key aims of the refurbishment project is to revive the moat as a defining feature in the landscape. A section of the moat flanking Bishop's Avenue is therefore being restored through archaeologically supervised excavation, with repairs and conservation works to its associated stone bridge (the main pedestrian entrance to the Palace grounds) also being undertaken (Fig. 1). Significantly, in restoring key sections of the moat the project seeks to



Fig. 2 (above): remains of a medieval timber bridge. The mortised beam in the centre of the moat is the middle of three parallel sole plates representing vertical trestle supports for the bridge deck. The origin of the earlier group of timbers at the base of the excavation has yet to be determined.

(© Gifford)

Fig. 3 (right): recording the sluice gate and winding mechanism in June 2009. (© Gifford)

achieve the following:

- 1) to enhance visitors' experience of arrival at, and entry into, the Palace and their understanding of its historic setting;
- 2) to promote a wider awareness of the geography and remarkable survival of the moat circuit with a view to securing its long-term preservation;
- 3) to enhance the setting of the adjacent Gothick Lodge, which itself is undergoing restoration;
- 4) to reveal both elevations of the moat bridge to allow this structure to be fully appreciated; and
- 5) to emphasise the geographical relationship between the ancient Palace (established long before the Norman Conquest) and the adjacent Bishops Park (laid out from the 1890s).

In the longer term it is hoped that the restoration scheme can be extended to include other prominent parts of the moat circuit such as its corners, which are self-evidently parts of an enclosure. For some regular visitors to the Palace who have been walking over the structure for years, the existence of the well-preserved moat bridge has come as a surprise, as only its

parapets have been visible since the early 1920s.

Most recently, sample excavation of the full historic profile of the moat to the immediate north of the stone bridge has revealed two groups of medieval timbers, the earliest of which is an assortment of *ex situ* planks and a roundwood stake strewn across the base of the channel (Fig. 2). Dendrochronological analysis indicates a felling date between *c.* AD 1249 and *c.* AD 1285 for one of the timbers in this lower group. Sealing this deposit is a compact layer of silty gravel, containing pottery spot-dated to 1270–1350. This formed the level upon which three vertical trestles of a timber bridge – a precursor to the extant stone structure – were constructed. The sole plates of these trestles – mortised beams, approximately 4 m long and arranged in parallel on *c.* 2 m centres – survive (see Fig. 2).

A sluice connected the moat with the River Thames, allowing it to be re-charged at high tide and flushed out at low tide. A sluice gate was built in 1618 and rebuilt in 1842 following a flood. It is believed that the extant sluice gate, whose cast-iron winding mechanism is still visible (Fig. 3), is the same structure. In the summer of 2009, archaeological excavation to a depth of 1.5 m exposed more of the winding mechanism and its brick housing, and revealed that the structure was largely intact. Examination of the brickwork suggested that the sluice gate was rebuilt again in the late 19th century, probably as part of the construction of the river embankment in 1893. The riverward outfall of the sluice is still visible from the foreshore as a vaulted brick culvert beneath Bishop's Meadow and the river wall.

Archaeological finds recovered from the 1920s fills of the moat include a variety of glass and stoneware



Festival of British Archaeology

16 to 31 July 2011



With community digs, rarely open sites, hands-on activities, fun on the foreshore, courses, walks and talks – Festival of British Archaeology (FOBA) features more variety than ever this year. Across the capital, events are being organised by museums, local societies, heritage sites and specialist projects to get Londoners of all ages involved in archaeology over 16 days.

You'll find *London Archaeologist* setting up our stall at the Museum of London on **30/31 July**, during a weekend full of Roman activities for all ages. Bring the family along to create a magnetic mosaic or make a lucky charm to take home in a Roman-style pouch.

The FOBA website (festival.britarch.ac.uk/whatson) has regularly updated details. Here is just a taster...

Sat 16 July

3500 years of British Treasure: first of a series of lunchtime gallery talks by museum experts
13.15-14.00, gallery36, British Museum. See britishmuseum.org

Sat 16 – Sun 31 July

Romans in London: MOL's show stopping Roman-themed activities, walks and visits with a special weekend on **30/31 July** featuring gladiatorial games at the amphitheatre
10.00-18.00, Museum of London, London Wall, EC2. See museumoflondon.org.uk

Sat 16, Sat 23 – Sun 24, Sat 30 – 31 July

The Rose revealed: tours of the Elizabethan theatre site
11.00–17.00, 56 Park Street, London SE1. See rosetheatre.org.uk

Sun 17 July

Archaeology of Enfield: finds identification, mystery objects, kids activities, displays and competitions centred on

excavation by Enfield Archaeology Society at Elsyng Palace

11.00-16.00, Forty Hall, Forty Hill, EN2 9HA. See enfield.gov.uk/museum

Mon 18 – Fri 22 July, Mon 25 – Fri 29 July

Digging Deep: discover 2000 years of archaeology at the Bank of England's new display, with lunchtime talks and family trail.

10.00-16.45, Bank of England Museum, Bartholomew Lane, EC2R 8AH. See bankofengland.co.uk/museum

Wed 20, Fri 22, Wed 27, Fri 29 July

Life in a Roman Villa: walks and family activities
10.00-16.30, Crofton Roman Villa, Crofton Road, Orpington BR6. See the-cka@fsnet.co.uk

Sat 23 July

Meet the Romans: interactive historical event
10.00-16.30, Valence House, Becontree Avenue, Dagenham. See lbbd.gov.uk/valence

Sat 23 – Sun 24 July

Tower of London archaeology weekend: finds hunting, craft activities, conservation and archaeology stalls. Historic Royal Palaces with City of London Archaeology Society, Thames Discovery Programme, PLA and others.

11.00-16.00, the wharf & beach, HM Tower of London, EC3. See hrp.co.uk, for foreshore times and other information.

Roman bath house open weekend: family activities, historical trail and a rare opportunity to see this Roman site.
11.00-16.00, Roman Bath House, Poverest Road, Orpington
See bromley.gov.uk/leisure/museums/

Sun 24 July

Ice Sunday: rare chance to descend beneath the Canal Museum into huge Victorian wells that held ice from Norway for distribution for Londoners' food preservation.

10.00-16.30, 12-13 New Wharf Road, N1 9RT. See canalmuseum.org.uk.

Sat 30 – Sun 31 July

Merton Priory: children's archaeology and block printing demonstrations in the medieval chapterhouse

10.00-17.00, Merton Abbey Mills, Merantun Way, London SW19 2RD. See mertonpriory.org

Sun 31 July

Archaeology Day: sandpit and live digs, stalls and activities with Bexley Heritage Trust and Bexley Archaeological Group
10.00-15.00, Hall Place and Gardens, Bourne Road, Bexley DA5 1PQ. See hallplace.org.uk.



bottles, china, teapots, porcelain dolls and a well-preserved 'Lipton's Tea' enamel sign (Fig. 4).

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the PCA team which is undertaking the archaeological excavation and recording, in particular its supervisor Iain Bright. Thanks are also due to Mark Holland (Chris Blandford Associates), Rik Fox (The Morton Partnership), Brian Lofthouse (Thomas Ford and Partners), Ross Sinclair (Potter Raper Partnership), Peter Dando (Vinci UK Ltd), Dr Scott Cooper (Director of Fulham Palace), Keith Whitehouse, Dr Jane Sidell (Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage), Miranda Poliakoff (Curator, Museum of Fulham Palace) Dr Damian Goodburn (MOLA), John Brown (formerly of Gifford), Ian Tyers (dendrochronology), Barbara Woda (formerly Head of Urban Design and Conservation, LBHF).

I. P.A. Emery and C. Mayo 'Archaeology and the Fulham Palace Refurbishment Project: Managing Expectations' *London Archaeol* 11 no. 12 (2008) 327–333.



Phil Emery, an Associate at Gifford (part of Ramboll), is the archaeological consultant for Fulham Palace and the ongoing Bishops Park and Fulham Palace 'Restoration and Revival' project. He first became involved in the archaeology of the Palace in 1986 when he worked with Keith Whitehouse (Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group).

2. Letter from A.R. Powys, Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, to *The Times* (dated 13th May 1921), protesting at the proposed use of the moat 'as a dump for building rubbish'.

Fig. 4: the enamel sign deposited between 1921–4 when the moat was filled in. (© PCA)