

Excavations at Anchor Iron Wharf, Greenwich, Part I: the Tudor buildings

Julian Bowsher and Antony Francis, with contributions from Ian Betts (ceramic building material) and Jacqui Pearce (pottery)

Introduction

The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) undertook fieldwork at Anchor Iron Wharf, Greenwich SE10 (Fig. 1) in 2001–2003. It consisted of two evaluations, an excavation and two watching briefs. The site records are available for reference and further study at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC) under the site code LAS01. In 2008, MoLAS was renamed Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA); some references, such as in the acknowledgements, use this new style.

The site lay in east Greenwich, within an Area of High Potential for Archaeology as defined by the London Borough of Greenwich. Its approximate centre was at National Grid Reference

538930 178220. It comprised a Thames frontage (Anchor Iron Wharf) and a strip of land running back from the river, bounded by Hoskins Street to the west and Lassell (formerly Marlborough) Street to the east. Its southern edge followed a property boundary *c.* 30m south of Collington Street, which crossed the site (Fig. 2).

This article is the first of two to deal with the results of the excavation of the site and focuses on the Tudor period. The second article will examine the development of the site between the 17th and 19th centuries and, in particular, describe the ironworks identified in the north part of the site during the watching brief phase.

By the 19th century most of the site was occupied by terraced housing. In

the 1930s some were replaced by light industrial workshops and, after 1945, breakers and scrap yards also occupied parts of the site. These later uses meant that there was considerable ground contamination. In some areas the unstable modern overburden, a conglomeration of soil, rubble and scrap metal, and the underlying archaeological deposits, had been soaked with diesel oil and other contaminants. As a result, excavators wore protective suits and gloves. In the years after the Second World War the site had also been used as an ordnance disposal area. The subsequent removal of over 100 shells of varying calibre by bomb disposal specialists had led to some further ground disturbance.

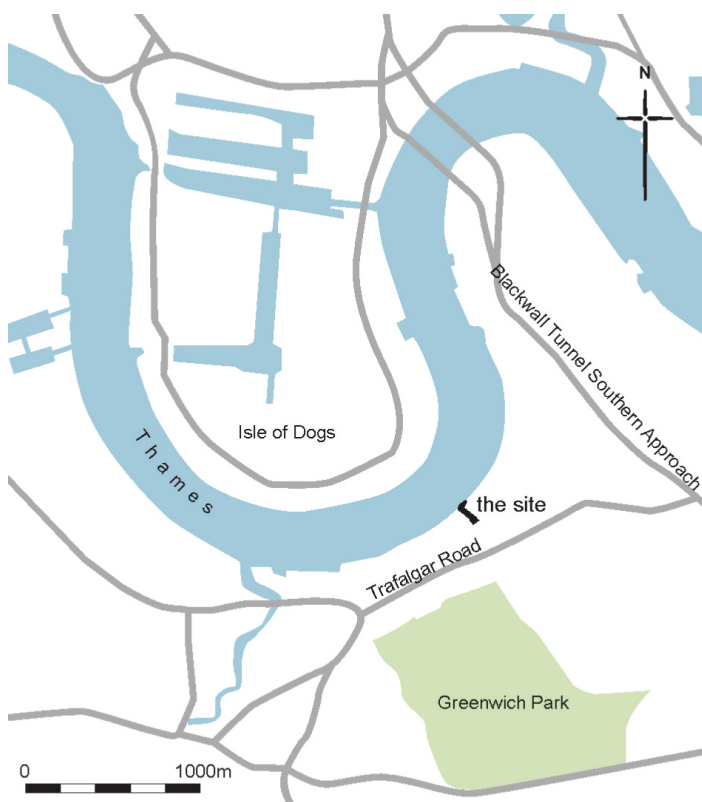


Fig 1: site location

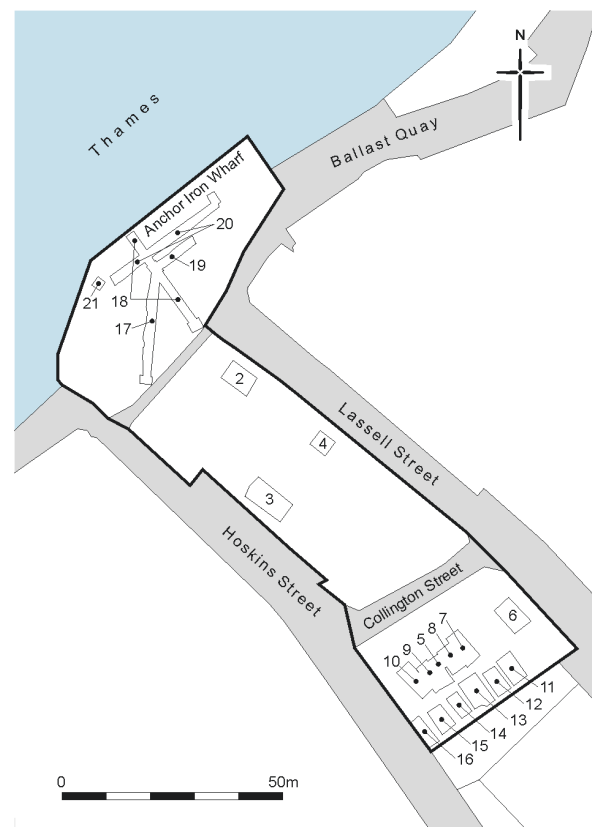


Fig 2: location of trenches

Geology and topography

The site lies close to the present southern bank of the River Thames. The natural ground surface across the site was formed by bands of clean sands and gravels, typical of peri- and post-glacial river terrace deposits,¹ which sloped down towards the river from a maximum of 2.13m OD to 0m OD. In the central and southeast part of the site, the gravels were sealed by a fine mid-brown subsoil at 2.02–2.45m OD, similar to deposits recorded on many nearby sites and almost certainly colluvial in origin. The northwest part of the site lay on ground reclaimed from the Thames. Here the colluvial subsoil was absent and the river terrace gravels were sealed by black silt at 1.25m OD. In comparison, the modern ground level across the site is, on average, at c. 4m OD.

Cumulatively, the underlying geology of Greenwich formed an ‘island’ of high gravels along the riverfront which had a strong influence on the pattern of human occupation and settlement in the area. The site lies at the eastern end of this island, beyond which the ground sloped away to more marshy terrain characterised by alluvial clays.

Even within the site there is a slope towards the river, and there was no evidence for buildings in the central part of the site before the late 17th/early

18th century, which might suggest the ground here was considered unstable. The site therefore, can be identified as lying at the easternmost edge of (historic) Greenwich.

Archaeological and historical background

There is little evidence of prehistoric activity in the immediate vicinity of the site beyond stray finds from the river that may have been washed downstream. The layout and extent of Greenwich in the Roman period remains uncertain, though there is thought to be a Roman road, branching off Watling Street, running diagonally southwestwards through Greenwich Park. A temple complex in the park may be associated with this roadway.²

Permanent settlement in Greenwich seems to have begun in the Saxon period. The manor of East Greenwich was almost certainly a royal holding but it – and other adjacent manors including Lewisham – had been given to the abbey of St Peter in Ghent (modern Belgium) by 964. The abbey founded a priory at Lewisham and a prior of Lewisham is mentioned in later documentary records.³ East Greenwich manor house was set on the riverside, just to the west of the site, and it is likely that this was the point through which riverine trade into and out of the abbey’s estate passed. It is also clear

from later documents that the manor house acted as a hostel for guest’s of the priory at Lewisham. In a report of 1268, the manor house was described as ‘the old house’ and the account describes repairs to the building itself.⁴ A further report to the abbey in 1396 notes that the ‘hostel’ was in good condition (perhaps rebuilt since 1268) and that the tiled gatehouse was ‘towards the fields’ indicating that its landward entrance was to the south. Other, presumably ancillary, buildings are described as thatched. The most important part of the description, however, is that the hostel was identified as the easternmost building on the river front in Greenwich. It is worth recording the history of this building to help explain the development of the Anchor Iron Wharf site itself.

Properties belonging alien priories in England, that is those subordinate to foreign abbeys, were seized by the Crown in 1414. The Lewisham holdings of St Peter’s Ghent were amongst those confiscated, and the manor of East Greenwich was given to the newly founded priory of Sheen⁵ (though it seems that the Crown retained part of the abbey estate in Greenwich – that area around the Old Royal Naval College 300m upstream – for separate (royal) development).⁶ The East Greenwich manorial site was now known as the Manor of Old Court and the name clearly referred to the place where St Peter’s Abbey had held its court and collected its tithes. An account of 1518 describes it as the ‘... tenement or ferme-place of the Prior and Convent of Sheen called Old Courte ...’.⁷ However an exchange of lands with Sheen in 1531 brought the estate back into royal ownership,⁸ and Henry VIII appears to have lost little time in fitting it up for a specific ‘tenant’. New glazing for the building in December 1532 identified it as ‘the lady marquess of pembrokes lodging at the este end of Grenewiche’.⁹ Accounts for work in January 1532/3 included payment ‘for provision of tile borde & lathe for the making of a tenement at the Kings ferme at the este ende of grenewiche called Olde Courte’¹⁰ which leaves no doubt of the identity of the building. Even in March there was payment to carpenters for ‘takyng down



Fig 3: the Hobby Stables on Travers’ plan of 1695 (map ref. MPE 1/245, reproduced by kind permission of The National Archives)

of a flowre and taking out of an old somer (beam) in the chamber over the kechen at the lady marquess of pembrokys loudging at the este end of grenewyche'.¹¹

The Marchioness of Pembroke was none other than Anne Boleyn, who was given the title in September 1532. Henry married Anne secretly in January 1533 – by which time she was pregnant with the future Queen Elizabeth – but the marriage was not formally recognised as valid until May, after Henry's first marriage to Catherine of Aragon had been declared illegal. Henry VIII had been born in Greenwich and his father's sumptuous new palace was Henry's favourite residence during the first half of his reign. The installation of Anne near to, but not yet in, the palace by the end of 1532 is clearly one aspect of these complicated developments. Conversely, after her execution in 1536, Old Court was leased out.¹²

The lessees and tenants of Old Court from this point on are recorded¹³ and a deed of 1550 describes the site as 'The capital mansion house with appurts. near the Queen's Stables by the Thames, at the East end of E. Greenwich, with the Mansion now or late in the occupation of Sir Thomas Speke, and the three stables called the Queen's Stables, and a barn there, at the East end of the said mansion'.¹⁴ This particular stretch of river front is clearly depicted in a panorama of Greenwich from the north by the Dutch artist Anthony Wyngaerde in 1558.¹⁵ A much later deed, dated 28th June 1670, describes the main house, presumably the former hostel, as 'Parsonage House' along with orchards, gardens, stables and outhouses and a long wall from the garden to Back Lane.¹⁶ Another deed of the next year (17th May 1671) describes the garden walk way from Parsonage House to Hogg Lane¹⁷ and both these lane names refer to what is now Old Woolwich Road. A particularly useful indenture of 1st April 1681 refers to 'all that Barne and stable with the appurtenances thereunto belonging or scituate and being in East Greenwich aforesaid called or known by the name of the Parsonage Barne and Stable'.¹⁸

The Manor of Old Court was finally leased by Sir John Morden in 1698 and the next year he was able to acquire the

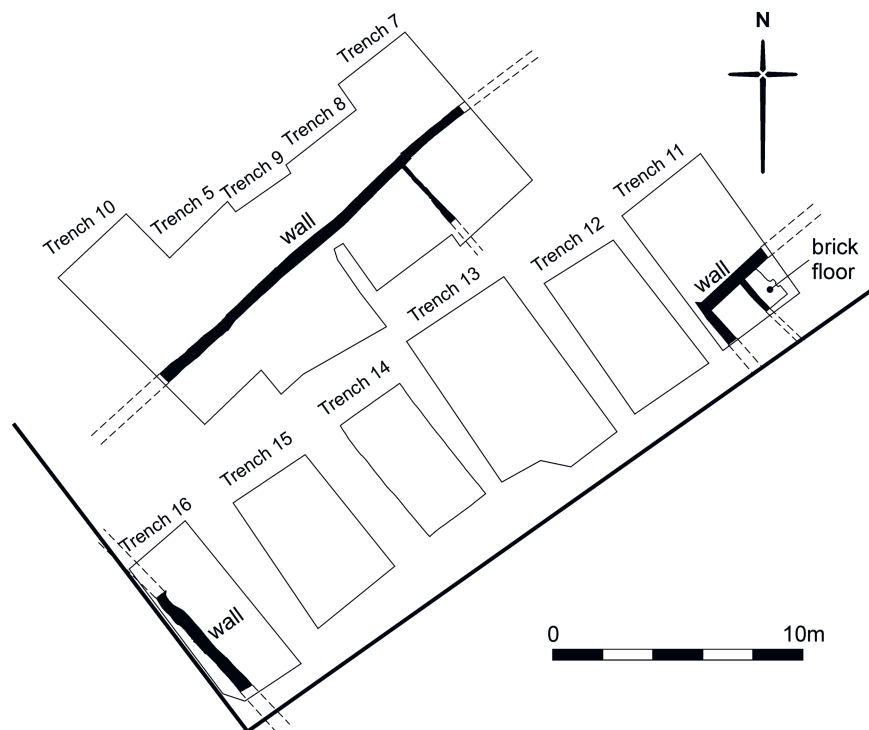


Fig 4: walls of Tudor building found during excavation

freehold thus finally ending royal ownership of the site. The purchase document describing the site reads:

"The Manor, or reputed Manor of Old Court.

Being part of a parcel of the demesne lands belonging to the said honor and manor of East Greenwich, with the parsonage, or tenths, or portion of tythes, of or belonging to the parish of Greenwich aforesaid, viz:

All that messuage or dwelling house, commonly known or called by the name of the parsonage house, with the site therof, consisting of one hall, one parlour, two kitchens, a pantry, two butteries, a larder, and four other rooms below stairs; ten chambers, a gate house, with two chambers over the gate house; one barn, containing four bays, one great stable, one little stable, with other out-houses; as also two little court yards, one fair garden, one orchard, and one plot of ground impaled, adjoining south-west on the Ballast Wharf, as also the said Ballast Wharf, lying south of the River Thames, situate, lying, and being at the east end of Greenwich town, in the said parish, in the said county of Kent, and containeth four acres".¹⁹

Fortunately, the Survey of the King's Manor of Greenwich by the Royal Surveyor Samuel Travers and dated

1695 clearly illustrates the disposition of these buildings (Fig. 3).²⁰ Our interest however lies with the outbuildings. The barn was almost certainly in the middle of the site but the stables, now labelled the Hobby Stables, were to the south-east and form the subject of our excavations. Although an important 'mansion' will undoubtedly have had stabling, the earliest mention relates to carpentry work at the 'quenys stabell' in 1544.²¹ The later deeds of 1550 and 1670 also refer to 'Queen's Stables' though most others just refer to stables.

Finally, it might be noted that the site had its own water supply. The report of 1268 required that the conduits needed repairing. Travers' survey notes that the supply ran from a spring known as Arundel Conduit 'towards the King's House, by the Ballast quay, or Hobby Stables'.²² This conduit was likely in the area of modern Colomb Street and we shall note Travers' interesting description as the King's House or Hobby Stables later. A further survey of 1780 for the Commissioners of Greenwich Hospital recorded that the "Hobby Stables belonging to the Crown, which stood near the Ballast Key, now Crawley's Wharf" was supplied by 'earthen pipes' from the same conduit though both had long been redundant by 1780.²³

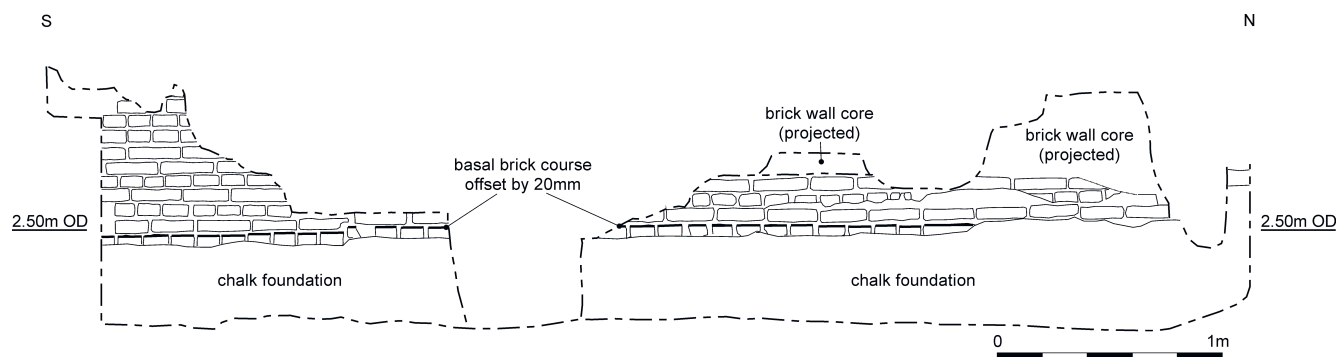


Fig 5: east face of Tudor building wall in Trench 16

The archaeological sequence

The structural remains described in this section were found in that part of the site to the south of Collington Street (Fig. 2; Fig. 4). A number of brick walls were identified, 0.50m wide and set in hard white/grey-white lime mortar with white inclusions. The size of the bricks, particularly their thickness, is typical of those used in the mid-15th to mid-16th century and entirely consistent with a Tudor date.

The walls were founded on chalk rubble up to 1m deep that overlay mortared brick rubble also up to 1m deep. Their depths varied – the important thing seems to have been to found them on the underlying natural gravel. The basal courses of the walls were offset by a maximum of 0.34m.

The longest section of wall (wall 1) ran east–west for 16.5m and was abutted on its south face by a thinner 3m length of north–south running wall (wall 2) resting on a thin chalk foundation (Trenches 5 and 7–10). Too thin to be load-bearing, wall 2 is likely to be a partition built either in a secondary phase of the original construction or as a later modification. Another 5.12m long section of dwarf wall (wall 3) was identified in the southwest corner (Trench 16) of the excavation area (Fig. 5). Wall 3 ran north–south but a 1.33m long eastward return seen in section at its south end. Further brickwork that abutted the west face of wall 3 and ran beyond the excavation trench under Hoskins Street, may have been the remains of a buttress. In the southeast part of the excavation area (Trench 11), east–west aligned wall 4 turned south at its west end to form wall 5. The area within walls 4 and 5 was subdivided by a narrower, north–south aligned partition wall (wall 6). A brick floor, set at a level

over the basal offset course of the walls, lay to the east of the partition (Fig. 6).

Perhaps because of the subsequent disturbance of the site, the dating evidence for the Tudor buildings was sparse – only eight sherds of early-modern pottery were found in associated contexts (a drain fill, a dump and a trampled layer) – and therefore not tightly datable. The sherds consisted of London-area redwares, post-medieval black-glazed ware and Surrey-Hampshire border ware, all of which could have been used during the late 16th–17th centuries. A single sherd from a bowl or dish in London-area slipped redware, found in a pit in Trench 10 outside the Tudor building, dates to the same period.

The majority of red bricks used in the walls and brick floor of the buildings were of two distinct types. The first type comprised two similar fabrics – fabric 3250 (characterised by a clay matrix with very fine quartz sand) and fabric 3257 (which often contains a scatter red iron oxide and silty inclusions) – almost certainly the products of different brickyards. Both types measure 208–223 (l) x 94–109 (w) x 48–55mm (th), and commonly have sunken top margins and a groove in the bottom edge. This groove, not previously noted on bricks in the London area, may have been caused by stacking the bricks in the drying shed or in the kiln/clamp before they were adequately dry. Fabric 3250 has also been found during the excavation of 16th-/17th-century structures in the main palace area (site code KIC02) and fabric 3257 in the Tudor tiltyard area of the palace (site code NAM02). Bricks of these fabric types, although probably later in date, have also recently been found at Brentwood, Essex, a known centre of brick production in the 19th century. There is insufficient evidence to

say where the bricks from the Greenwich building were made, but Essex is clearly a potential source. They are almost certainly not from near London, for although bricks of this type do occasionally occur in the capital they are very rare.

The second type of brick, fabric 3065 (characterised by a clay matrix full of numerous large quartz grains), and one in slightly finer version 3046, was less common but occurs particularly in wall 3 and its associated foundation deposits. These measure 217–223 (l) x 100–107 (w) x 48–53mm (th) and also carried sunken margins and have also been found at the main palace site (site codes KIC02, NMA02, RNC93, RNK00, RNM99). Bricks in fabric 3046 occur in the main walls of the 1505 palace chapel (site code RND05). Bricks of this second type are found elsewhere in London, with bricks in fabric 3065 concentrated on sites south of the Thames, though the precise location of the brickyard supplying them is still unknown.

The Tudor building seems to have been reconstructed, probably in the late 16th or the 17th century, and a mortar floor and cobbled surface had been laid over the debris from the demolition of the primary structure.

A significant find, found as a residual item in an 18th-century drain, was the corner of a mid–late 16th-century delftware tile (Fig. 7). This was painted with a very unusual heraldic design for which no published parallels are known. Inductively-coupled plasma analysis showed the clay chemistry to be similar to an Antwerp-produced *Herkenrode* tile of the 1530s found at Whitehall Palace. The floor tile would have come from a high-status building, such as Greenwich Palace, or the house of a wealthy individual.²⁴

Discussion and conclusions

The remains found on the site are clearly associated with the stables in this location indicated on Travers’ map; indeed we can assume that wall 1 was part of the northernmost stable block shown there. Wall 2 was too light to have been an important structural element and was likely to have been a partition or wall within a courtyard. Wall 3 may have belonged to the separate building farther west, and walls 4 and 5 therefore represented the northwest corner of the southern, north–south aligned block, with its brick flooring. The brickwork of the walls and brick floor were all of similar fabrics and consistent with a date in the first half of the 16th century; only the addition within the stable block represents later work of the late 16th or early 17th century date.

A study of stable architecture has noted the ‘marked change in attitude towards [Tudor] stable design. They were set apart, built of high quality materials and given a status second only to the house itself.’ Two-storey brick buildings with brick floors (the care of horses feet was paramount)

become increasingly common.²⁵ Although the accounts for the period are fragmentary, it seems most likely that these stables were constructed on royal orders associated with a refurbishment of the riverside mansion in 1532/3; as we have seen, they certainly existed in 1544.²⁶ There were at least two stables at the palace 300m upstream and references to a separate Queens stable with her own Master of Horse,²⁷ may relate to these at the Old Court site.

The later title of Hobby Stables was a specific designation associated with a hobby (or hobyn) horse which was the size of a middle-sized pony. By the 15th century, the term sometimes denoted a small pacing horse or ambler – a horse which moved by lifting the two feet on one side together alternating with the two feet on the other.²⁸ However, by the mid-16th century, the emphasis moved towards heavier horses, which were increasingly necessary to pull the now fashionable

carriage. This led to further changes in stable design which, in wealthy households with large numbers of horses, meant that stables could, as here, become designated by the type of horse kept in them.²⁹ Within the royal court, the office of Groom of the Hobby Stables is known to have existed since at least 1612.³⁰

As we know, the site was later leased out and it appears that there was

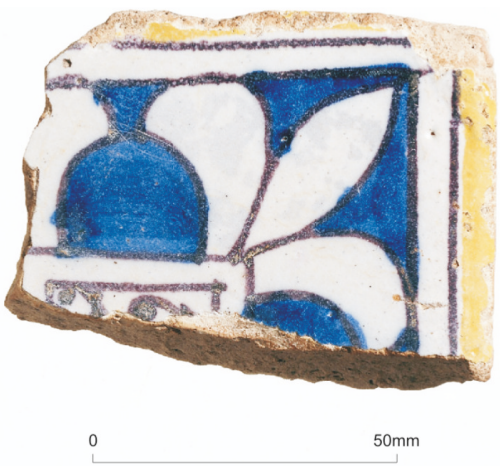


Fig 7: fragment of delftware tile with heraldic design, from a high-status building, mid–late 16th-century



Fig 6: an archaeologist uncovers Tudor walls and brick floor in Trench 11

some uncertainty over the area covered by the lease. Travers' 1695 survey notes that the Hobby Stables were 'unjustly withheld from the Crown' and blames Lady Boreman (widow of Sir William Boreman who acquired the lease of Old Court in 1676) who 'pretended to many things in this manor which she hath no right to'.³¹ This does not seem to have upset the eventual sale of the whole property to Sir John Morden in 1699. Though two years later one Thomas Pechey, 'mews and stable keeper to the King at Greenwich' brought a petition to the Attorney General 'concerning a piece of ground on which stands the Hobby stable &c. and in the possession of Sir John Morden's tenant but being in truth part of the demesnes of the King's manor of East Greenwich'. No more was heard about the matter, which might have been quietly dropped with 'possession being nine points of the law'. In any case, it is clear that shortly after Morden's acquisition of the site he started redeveloping it. As we shall see in Part 2, any Tudor structures were demolished and new buildings date to the early 18th century. A Morden College estate map of 1739 reveals a new and different ground plan.³²

This work, and accompanying

research, is particularly relevant to students of the life of Henry VIII. Not only do we find him installing his mistress in this little corner of Greenwich but almost certainly building new, fashionable stables in the same area. The subsequent history of the building is a murky addition to the account of royal Greenwich.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Berkeley Homes (City & East London) Limited for commissioning and funding this work, and Mark Stephenson of English Heritage for his valuable input. We are also grateful to Julian Watson, Frances Ward, Greenwich Heritage Centre and Elizabeth Wiggins, Archivist, Morden College. The site supervisors were Julian Bowsher (evaluations) and Antony Francis (excavation and watching brief), and the field staff were Kevin Appleton, Raksha Dave, Catherine Drew, Elaine Eastbury, Vince Gardiner, Richard Hewett, Isca Howell, Will Johnson and Mark Wiggins.

Finds analysis was carried out by Jacqui Pearce (pottery and clay tobacco pipes), Ian Betts (building material), Jackie Keily (bulk glass, accessioned

finds and coins), Lynne Keys (iron slag), Anne Davis (botanical samples), Alan Pipe (animal bone), Damian Goodburn (timber), Liz Goodman (conservation) and Mike Hughes (inductively-coupled plasma analysis). The graphics were produced by Ken Lymer and Juan Jose Fuldain. The site was surveyed by MOLA Geomatics and photography was by Maggie Cox. Robin Nielsen and Julian Hill provided project management for the work.

Julian Bowsher has been a Senior Archaeologist at MOLA for nearly 30 years. Although now mostly desk-based he has been involved in various aspects of Greenwich's archaeology for many years.

Antony Francis is a Project Officer at MOLA His book Stepney Gasworks: The Archaeology and History of the Commercial Gas Light and Coke Company's Works at Harford Street, London E1, 1837-1946, published by MOLA, appeared in 2010. He is currently working on the post-excavation analysis for the site of the Royal Dockyard founded in 1513 at Convoys Wharf, Deptford, excavated in 2011-12.

1. Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), sheet 270.

2. B. Wallower 'Roman Temple Complex in Greenwich Park?', Part 1' *London Archaeol* 10 no. 2 (2002) 46-54; 'Part 2' *London Archaeol* 10 no. 3 (2002) 76-81.

3. For example Cart. 13 Hen. III. m. 12.—a grant of liberties, &c. to the prior of Levesham.

4. H.H. Drake (ed.) *History of Kent. Part 1: The Hundred of Blackheath*. (1886) 43 n7.

5. *Ibid*, 43; H.E. Malden (ed.) *The Victoria County History of Surrey*, Vol 3, (1967), 89-94.

6. *Op cit* fn 4, 54 n1. The development of royal residences and palaces on that site has been discussed at great length elsewhere.

7. *Ibid*, 77.

8. *Ibid*, 43-44.

9. J.W. Kirby 'Building Work at Placentia 1532-1533' *Trans Greenwich & Lewisham Antiquarian Soc* 5, no. 1 (1957) 34.

10. *Ibid*, 36.

11. *Ibid*, 37.

12. *Op cit* fn 4, 44, 77; R. Saw 'The Morden College Archives' *Trans Greenwich & Lewisham Antiquarian Soc* 7, no. 1 (1964). The identity of Anne's 'lodging' seems to have been confused by Barbara Ludlow 'Of cabbages and queens: The story of Combe Farm in East Greenwich (Part 1)' *Bygone Kent* 6 no 27 (2005), 423-30, with the farm in East Greenwich which Henry VII bought for her (*op cit* fn 4, 43 n13), clearly different to the Old Court manor which the Crown acquired through exchange. The farm in question was probably

in Combe and acquired to provide Anne with income.

13. *Op cit* fn 4, 44-6. Drake noted here that the young Edward VI 'could only offer a feeble resistance' to the rapacity of the courtiers who had been awarded so much former Church property by his father (*ibid*. 44, n3).

14. *Op cit* fn 4, 44 n3.

15. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Reproduced extensively, for example in *op cit* fn 4.

16. Morden College Archives. Boreman leases, envelope A. Back Lane and Hogg Lane are former names for stretches of the present Old Woolwich Road.

17. *Ibid*.

18. *Ibid*, envelope B.

19. J. Kimbell, *An Account of the Legacies, Gifts, Rents, Fees &c appertaining to the Church and Poor, of the Parish of St Alphege, Greenwich in the County of Kent* (1816). To which is added An Appendix, containing the Plan and Survey of the Royal Manor. The Grant of the Manor of Old Court to Sir John Morden. The Local Act for the Governance of the Poor &c. Greenwich, p210. The Manor was transferred to the Trustees of Morden College at Sir John's death in 1708 and it was certainly regarded as one of their greatest assets. E. Wiggins 'Morden College and its archives' *Journal Greenwich Historical Soc* 3 no 5 (2008) 216. The main site was sold off only recently.

20. Samuel Travers *Survey of the Manor of Greenwich, November 1695* TNA MPE 1/245 (also reproduced in Kimbell 1816). Another similar map of The Manor of Greenwich was produced in June 1694, TNA MR 1/329(1).

21. *Op cit* fn 9, 298.

22. Reproduced in *op cit* fn 19, 29 no. 9).

23. TNA, ADM 80/63 (extracts).

24. I.M. Betts and R.I. Weinstein *Tin-glazed tiles from London* (2010); M.J. Hughes *Inductively-coupled plasma analysis (ICP) of six tin-glazed tiles found in London* unpublished archive report (2009); J.G. Hurst and J. Le Patourel 'Imported maiolica floor tiles from Whitehall Palace, London' D. Gaimster (ed.), *Maiolica in the north: the archaeology of tin-glaze earthenware in north-west Europe c 1500-1600*, Brit Mus Occas Pap 122, (1999) 181-3.

25. G. Worsley *The British Stable*, (2004) 21.

26. Though not as grand as the contemporary stables at Hampton Court, cf *op cit* fn 25, 21ff.

27. S. Thurley *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England* (1993) 70-2.

28. R.H.C. Davis *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment* (1989) 136.

29. *Op cit* fn 25, 49.

30. The 1612 reference relates to the poor conditions associated with the job, G. Dyfnallt Owen *Calendar of the Manuscripts ... preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, Vol 24 Historical Manuscripts Commission no 9 (1976) 809. The office continued into the 19th century, see R.O. Bucholz *Office-holders in modern Britain*, Vol XI; *Officials of the Royal Household 1660-1837* (2006) 645-55.

31. *Op cit* fn 19, 228.

32. John Holmes, Greenwich Survey map including Billingsgate, Anchor Wharf, Back Lane, Church Street, Crane Street, 1739, Morden College archives.