

# EXCAVATIONS AT 552 KINGS ROAD, CHELSEA

David Divers

*With contributions by Nick Branch, Chris Green, Chris Jarrett, Peter Moore, Christopher Phillpotts and Jean-Luc Schwenninger*

## SUMMARY

*Archaeological excavations undertaken in advance of the redevelopment of the former Kings College, 552 Kings Road, Chelsea revealed evidence of the early post-glacial topography of the area and changing land use from medieval agriculture to landscaped gardens around a large post-medieval house. A military folly built by Lewis Lochie in the early 19th century was also found.*

## INTRODUCTION

Archaeological excavations were undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited at 552 Kings Road, Chelsea (NGR TQ 2605 7738) in advance of the redevelopment of the site (Fig 1). The excavation of two trenches was carried out between 13 January and 25 February 2000 following archaeological evaluation of the site in 1998 (Douglas 1998).

Although a house has occupied the site since the late 16th century, the oldest surviving building is Stanley House, which was completed in the early 18th century. It became a college in the mid 19th century when the first of several additions to the complex were made. The new residential development retains some buildings of historical or architectural merit (Blee 1998).

The work was funded by Bouygues UK Limited and was monitored on their behalf by Eric Norton, Norton Thompson Associates. The excavations were supervised by Mick Parsons and project managed by Peter Moore, Pre-Construct Archaeology. The site archive will

be deposited with the London Archaeological Archive Research Centre (site code KRC 98).

## GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

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At the time of excavation, ground level ranged from 5.6m OD to 3.7m OD reflecting the general slope in the underlying geology towards the back-filled Counter's Creek immediately south-west of the site (known as Chelsea Creek at its confluence with the Thames). The floor of the creek's valley was considerably disturbed in the early 19th century when its lower two miles were incorporated into the Kensington Canal which was '100 feet wide and able to carry vessels of 100 tons burden' (Barton 1962).

The natural geology of the site comprised London Clay, which is shown overlying Kempton Park Gravel on geological maps (BGS 1998). These sands and gravels were found to be partially overlain by brickearth deposits. Geological maps show the alluvium of Counter's Creek as being 100m wide (*ibid*).

Kempton Park Gravel, which underlies the Upper Floodplain Terrace of the Thames, is considered to be of Early to Mid Devensian age (Bridgland 1994). In the central London area this gravel overlaps Shepperton Gravel, which underlies the Lower Floodplain Terrace, and is generally regarded as Late Devensian. These gravels are generally mapped together (*eg* BGS 1998; Bridgland 1994), and in central London, where natural



Fig 1. Site plan and location

ground levels have often been substantially altered by building and civil engineering work, it is generally difficult to distinguish between the Upper and Lower Floodplain Terraces.

### The palaeochannels

Two palaeochannels on an approximately east-west alignment were recorded during the

excavation. Channel 1 was 1.25m deep and in excess of 7.2m wide and Channel 2 was probably at least 1.6m deep and over 7.0m wide, extending beyond the southern limit of excavation (Fig 2).

### Lithostratigraphic investigation

The fill of Channel 1 appeared to be entirely minerogenic, but in Channel 2 there were two

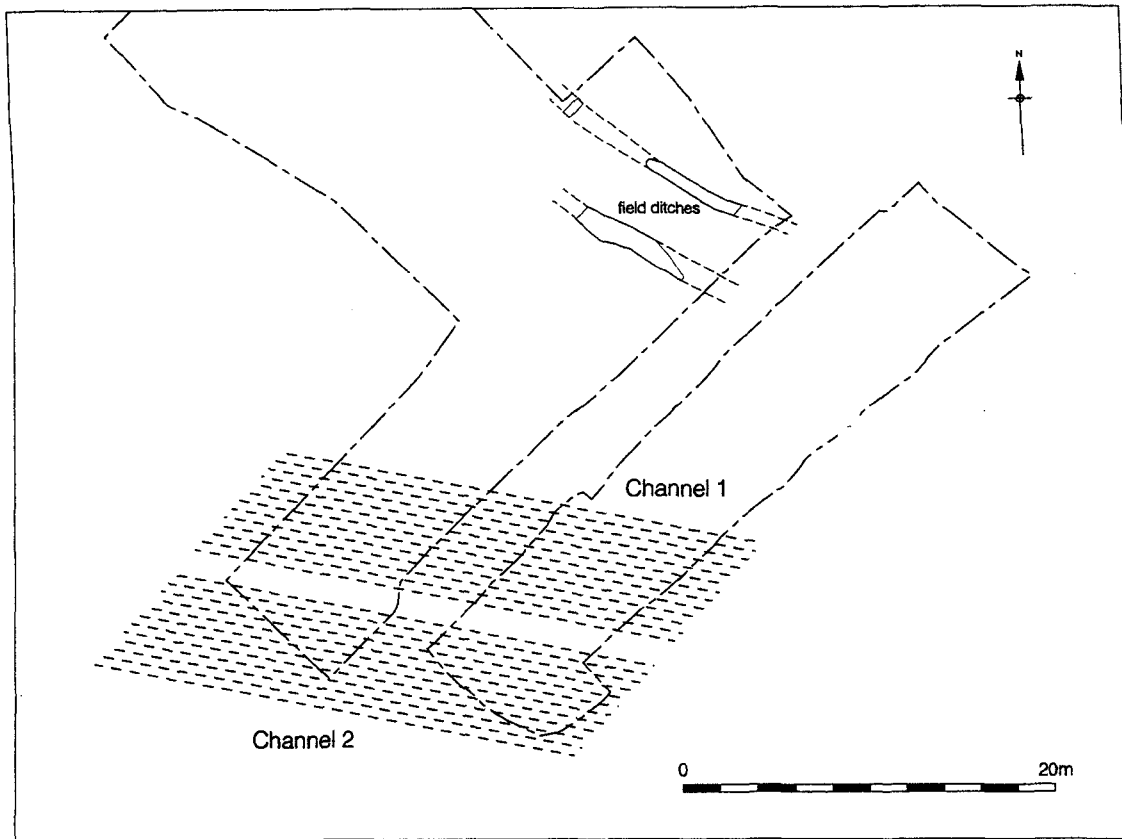


Fig 2. Plan of palaeochannels and medieval ditches

darker horizons which appeared to have an organic content. An undisturbed column sample was collected from the lower fills of Channel 2 which appeared to be confined within shallow channel-like depressions cut into sandy gravel. These lower fills suggest water flow was intermittent and that at times the channel became no more than a damp hollow.

#### Dating

Optically Stimulated Luminescence dating of sandy clay units within the palaeochannels suggests dates of  $20,930 \pm 5630$  BP for Channel 1 (OSL 1) and  $21,060 \pm 1980$  BP for Channel 2 (OSL 2). These dates provide an internally consistent dating framework for the lower part of the sedimentary sequence. However a bulk sample taken from a sediment fill of Channel 2, which was stratigraphically earlier than the deposit from which OSL 2 was taken, produced

a radiocarbon date in the range 10,140 Cal BP to 9,720 Cal BP.<sup>1</sup>

#### Pollen analysis

Analysis of the column sample in Channel 2 revealed pollen and spores in the bottom fill. The poor preservation may be attributed to physical destruction, which is often the case in sequences with a high coarse mineral content. Nevertheless, the pollen indicated a mixed plant community, characterised by birch and pine woodland, and herbs of tall grassland and short turf communities. The absence of evidence for warmth loving plant communities, such as elm or lime, may be indicative of cold climatic conditions. This interpretation is consistent with the dating implying that the sequence is Late Devensian (last glacial) or very early Holocene.

*Interpretation*

The natural sand and gravel, through which the palaeochannels were cut, seems most likely to have been part of the Shepperton Gravel which was deposited as an aggradational unit in the final stages of the Devensian Late Glacial. The relief of its upper surface is often differentiated by longitudinal bars and intervening channels. Infill of such channels and minor re-working of this surface can often be shown to have begun in the Early Holocene. The radiocarbon date (10,140–9,720 Cal BP) for the thin organic unit resting directly on the gravel is consistent with deposition at the very beginning of the Holocene. The alignment of the palaeochannels suggests that they may represent an early stage in the Holocene development of Counter's Creek.

The OSL dates of 20,930 BP and 21,060 BP for mineral sediment in the lower channel fills is not entirely inconsistent with the fill being of Holocene age. These dates indicate a Devensian Late Glacial age for the last zeroing event to affect the sand grains in the OSL samples. The OSL dates suggest that the sand grains were not re-exposed to sunlight and zeroed when they were re-worked into the channel fill from the underlying Shepperton Gravel. Given the clayey or silty nature of most of the sediment examined in the column sample from Channel 2, and the turbid conditions of deposition that they suggest, this interpretation is entirely plausible.

**THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

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**Prehistoric and Roman periods**

There was no evidence for human activity associated with the palaeochannels. The oldest archaeological evidence was a small assemblage of undiagnostic flint flakes and tools, burnt flint and burnt daub, all of which were recovered as residual finds. The assemblage as a whole was most consistent with a Later Neolithic or Bronze Age date (Bishop 1998). Residual Roman pottery and tile were also recovered, but these were most likely brought onto the site, perhaps during the manuring of fields.

**Medieval Chelsea**

In the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042–1066) a woman called Wulfwer held Chelsea, but by the Domesday survey of 1086 *Chelched* was part of Edward of Salisbury's land. A tenant population of nine households with three slaves operated one plough, and another two ploughs were used on Edward's demesne land. There was also meadow, pasture, and woodland in the manor (Morris 1975, 20.1).

The site lay in the north-west corner of the parish and manor, bordered by Counter's Creek and the road to Fulham (Fulham Road), and would have formed part of the medieval common fields, worked in cultivation strips. The line of Kings Road was a headland between fields until the 17th century, serving as an access path from the village into the fields. The site was therefore probably ploughed in a NW–SE orientation (Faulkner 1829, i, 43).

The manor of Chelsea was acquired by Westminster Abbey by the early 12th century. By the middle of the century it was in the hands of a family of tenants called de Septem Fontibus, who held it until the early 14th century. In the 15th century the manor was held by the Shordych family, but was sold to Sir Reginald Bray in 1485 (Davies 1904, 37, 44–5; Sullivan 1994, map B).

Archaeological evidence for this period was limited to a probable ploughsoil layer and two parallel ditches, 3.3m apart, possibly demarcating a NW–SE road (Fig 2). The small assemblage of medieval pottery from these ploughsoils occurred as small abraded sherds. Medieval and post-medieval finds in the backfill of the ditches may indicate a reorganisation of the local medieval field system during the early post-medieval period.

**The 16th to mid 18th century**

Sir Reginald Bray died in 1503, and, after a period of dispute, the manor passed to his niece Margery and her husband Sir William Sandes in 1510. The manor was bought by Henry VIII in 1536, and a new house was built on the riverfront. Henry used the manor as part of the jointure bestowed on his last queen, Catherine Parr, who held it until her death in 1548. In 1553 Edward VI granted it to John Dudley, Earl of Northumberland; Dudley was executed shortly afterwards but his widow remained at the manor until her death in January 1556. Henry VIII's

fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, also died here in July 1556. The Crown leased the manor in 1559 to Ann, Duchess of Somerset, in 1587 to Sir John Stanhope, and in 1591 to Catherine Howard, Countess of Nottingham. It then remained in the Howard family until 1639.<sup>2</sup>

By the 16th century, the site had become part of the estate of Sir Thomas More, who settled in Chelsea in about 1524. In this year he bought two plots of land, one of 7½ acres and the other of 27 acres; there must have been other purchases later. The estate comprised mostly land to the west of Church Lane, possibly acquired by buying out tenants of the individual cultivation strips. Some of his estate may also have derived from the land in *Chelsey* bought from Sir Reginald Bray and bequeathed to Corpus Christi College at Oxford in 1518 (Davies 1904, 37–40, 85; Hardy & Page 1893, ii, 29).

Sir Thomas More was executed for high treason in 1535 and his lands were confiscated; almost all of Chelsea passed into the hands of the King. The custody of More's property at Chelsea was granted to William Paulet, later Marquess of Winchester, in April 1536. He converted this into a grant in fee on the accession of Edward VI in 1547. The Paulets and their successors, the Dacres, held the estate until the end of the 16th century (Davies 1904, 38, 47, 106).

The excavated site probably formed the field called Stonybridge Close, noted as a meadow held by Sir William Paulet, Lord St John, in rentals and surveys of the late 1580s.<sup>3</sup> Its northern boundary, along the road from Stamford Bridge to the village (Fulham Road), probably had a hedge and ditch which Thomas Bene was ordered to clean by the manorial court of 1543.<sup>4</sup>

In the last years of the 16th century Thomas More's former estate was broken up. Much of it, including the excavated site, passed to Sir Arthur Gorges (Davies 1904, 38, 107). He built a house called Brickills, probably by 1599 when Queen Elizabeth is recorded as having passed it. By 1620 the site was known as Brickbarn Close, and the land on its east side was called Sandhills (Beaver 1892, 131). These names suggest that the area was quarried for brickearth and that bricks were manufactured here.

After the death of Sir Arthur Gorges in 1625, the house became the residence of his son-in-law Sir Robert Stanley (Faulkner 1829, i, 55). It was leased, and then sold to Lady Stanley by her widowed mother, Lady Elizabeth Gorges, in 1637. It became known as Stanley House and is

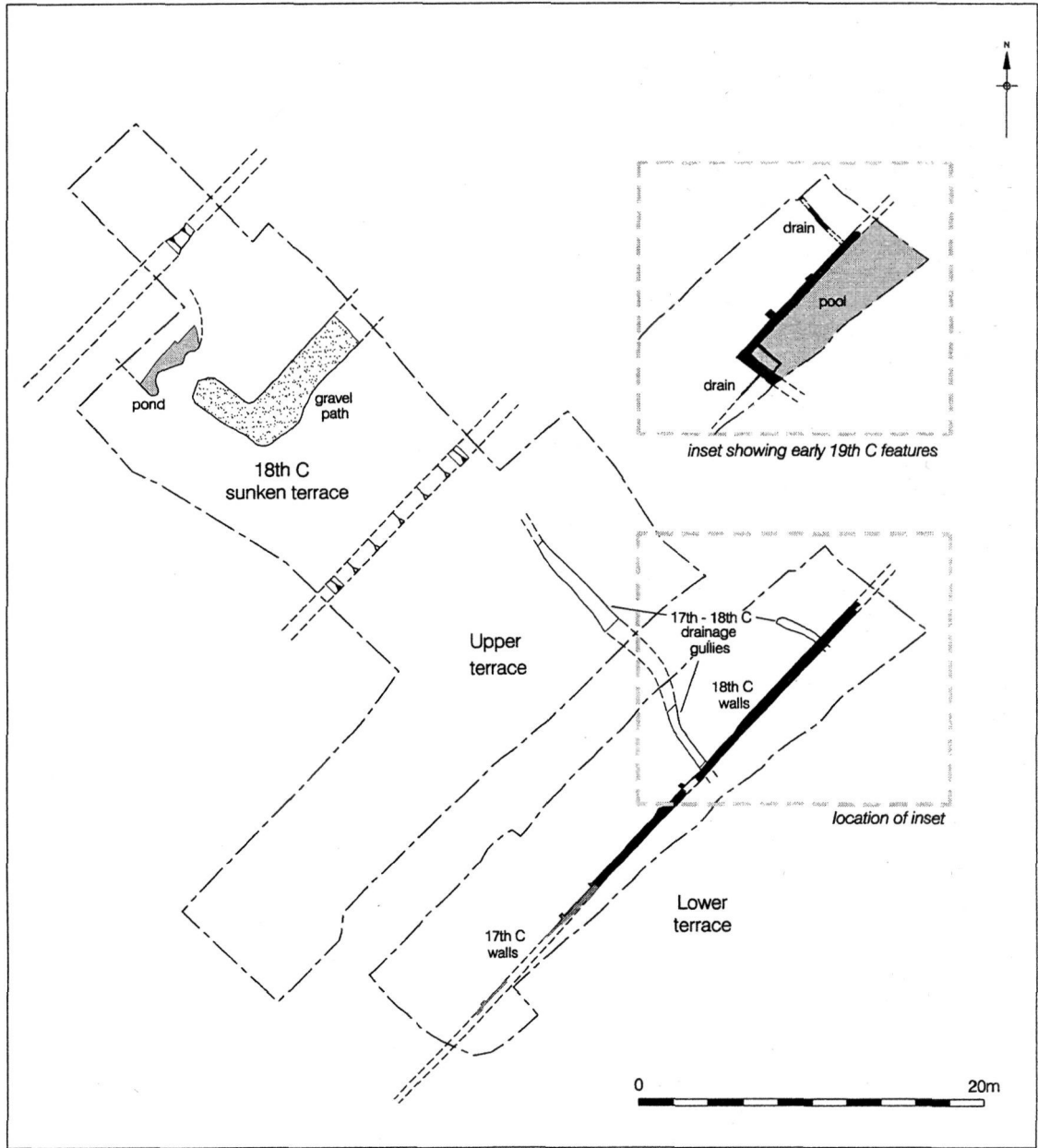
shown on contemporary maps as having 7 acres to the north of the house with a formal garden layout.<sup>5</sup> Stanley Close and Wrench's Garden lay to the east, within the excavation site. Sir Charles Stanley was assessed for 11 hearths in the house in 1662. The Stanley family continued to hold the estate until the death of William Stanley in 1691.<sup>6</sup>

A footbridge called Bloody Bridge had crossed the Creek but after the restoration of King Charles II in 1660 the route along the Kings Road was converted into a carriage road with a new bridge across the Creek. The Crown made up the road with gravel and the landholders on either side dug ditches along its sides. Attempts by the Crown to restrict access along the new road led to protests by landowners who were still working the fields in 1718–19 (Faulkner 1829, i, 43–4).

Stanley House was being rebuilt when William Stanley died in 1691. The new building was a few yards north of the original 16th-century house, whose foundations were partly exposed in 1887. The new structure was left unfinished for a number of years, but tenants were being listed in the rate books from 1701 onwards.<sup>7</sup> This new house was owned by Sir Henry Arundell, followed by his son Thomas. They had various tenants in the first half of the 18th century, including Joseph Collins from 1703 to 1726, and Admiral Charles Wager in 1743.<sup>8</sup>

Hamilton's map of 1664 (updated to 1717) and Desmaretz's map of 1717, although small-scale, both suggest the presence of a series of garden terraces to the north of Stanley House. To the east the land was divided into a series of rectangular enclosures aligned NW–SE, probably derived from furlongs of cultivation strips in the medieval common fields. An early 18th-century view of Stanley House shows the grounds to be thickly wooded.

Archaeological evidence for the extensive landscaping and terracing of the gardens, suggested by early 18th-century maps, was found between the house and Counter's Creek. Excavation revealed a stepped terrace extending along the width of the excavation. The upper terrace to the north-west was at least 0.5m higher and was retained by a brick wall which only survived at its south-western end (Fig 3). The bricks were consistent with the wall's construction being associated with the late 16th- to 17th-century Brickills House. However, it may date to



*Fig 3. Plan of post-medieval garden features*

the rebuilding of Stanley House at the very end of the 17th century.

Possible garden soils or horticultural deposits, which appear to have been continually reworked into the mid 18th century, were recorded on the upper terrace. They produced relatively large

quantities of low status pottery, presumably being derived from the wares of the estate's workers rather than the main occupants of the property.

Two, possibly three, linear features associated with this phase of activity were also recorded (Fig 3), their silty fills suggesting a drainage

function, and the mid 18th-century finds are consistent with archaeological evidence for new developments at this time.

### Later 18th to early 19th century

Rocque's map of 1746 shows a similar layout of the grounds, although the gardens were perhaps more elaborate than on the earlier maps. Stanley House was bought by the Countess of Strathmore in 1777 who built conservatories and hot-houses in the gardens for her collection of exotic plants. The house was then sold in 1780 to Mr Lewis Lochie, founder of the Military Academy at Little Chelsea and author of treatises on fortification.<sup>9</sup> Lochie laid out the grounds with miniature ditches, ramparts, bastions, and out-works which became a local attraction for a while.<sup>10</sup>

In 1806–7 the jurisdiction of the Westminster Commission of Sewers extended to the Creek. Its powers included the ability to widen and alter watercourses and make new sewers (Faulkner 1829, i, 59). The land along the east side of the Creek was below the high water level of the Thames and was probably prone to flooding.<sup>11</sup> The Creek was canalised as the Kensington Canal in 1828, with a new brick bridge carrying King's Road across it (*ibid*, i, 54). In 1859 the canal was filled in and the railway built over it.

From about 1815 Stanley House was occupied by William Hamilton, British Envoy at the Court of Naples, who superintended the transportation of the Parthenon marbles from Athens for Lord Elgin. He built a large gallery on the east side of the house which still houses casts of the marbles.<sup>12</sup>

The 17th-century terrace retaining-wall appeared to have been rebuilt, or repaired, at its north-eastern end during the 18th century. The wall was rebuilt using a pink mortar rich in brick dust, a type of mortar well known during the 18th century for its water resistant properties (Langley 1748, 43), although there was no evidence for any associated water features. Garden soils on the upper terrace, to the north-west of this wall, continued to be worked during this period.

Further evidence for landscaping during the 18th century included a 0.6m deep sunken terrace, although no evidence for retaining-walls survived. A gravel path recorded in its base appeared to lead to a silt filled, irregularly shaped, large pit that may represent a pond or

water feature (Fig 3). These modifications could reflect the more elaborate appearance of the gardens on Rocque's 1746 map.

There was a major redevelopment of the grounds within the area of excavation during the early 19th century. The north-eastern end of the retaining-wall was raised by at least 0.8m, this new addition being supported by buttresses on the north-west side of the wall. A new south-eastern return built into these new upper courses made the south-western part of the retaining-wall redundant and the gardens within the excavation area were raised and levelled (Fig 3).

The raised retaining-wall and its new south-eastern return, which was built using the new waterproof Roman Cement patented in 1797 (Kelsall 1989, 21), formed a 1.3m deep enclosure that appears to have been used to hold water. Water entered the feature along a brick drain through the top of the retaining-wall, the flow of water being controlled by an iron valve. Flow through the exit drain, found at the base of the pool's south-western wall, separated from the main pool by a brick silt-trap, was also controlled by an iron valve. The interior of the feature had been scoured clean of all deposits to the extent that the bases of the wall were exposed indicating occasional turbulent water flow. Backfill was found immediately over the last scouring event. The water level in the pool would have been controlled by adjusting both in-flowing and out-flowing drains allowing the selective removal of water, which had been cleared of silt and vegetation so as not to block outlet drains.

The feature was probably built by the military academic and author Lewis Lochie, between 1780 and 1815, who is known to have built military structures, or follies, in the grounds. The feature could have been the walled face of the angle of a counterscarp as in use by Vauban from the late 17th century to at least Napoleonic times (Hogg 1975, 65, 70). The water management arrangements would also be consistent with a military wet ditch, which would also require water management and control of silt build-up.

Three parallel NE–SW linear features found in evaluation Trench 11 may also represent mock military earthworks. These gravel filled trenches were spaced 7.25m apart; they had vertical sides and a flat base and measured 1.7m wide and 1.66m deep. A resistivity survey showed a network of linear anomalies both parallel and perpendicular to the features recorded in Trench 11 (Dean *et al* 1999).

### Mid to late 19th century

By the late 1830s the main house, which was re-named Stanley Grove, was entered by a driveway from King's Road, where there was a lodge. The rectangular enclosures to the east were occupied by a house called Stanley Place and an exotic nursery with a large conservatory, run by a Mr Knight.<sup>13</sup>

In 1840 the property, comprising the house and 11 acres of grounds, was purchased by the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor and renamed St Mark's College for the training of teachers. At this time the grounds were laid out as parkland with many trees but there were also two kitchen gardens and three small meadows, which were all surrounded by a wall.<sup>14</sup> All previous archaeological features were abandoned and the general ground level raised.

### THE FINDS

*Chris Jarrett*

The medieval pottery, which occurred in small quantities, may be indicative of agricultural activity. 17th-century pottery was also scarce but by the 18th century large assemblages start to occur, often indicating an accumulation over a period of time. By the latter half of the 18th century, the pottery might be expected to reflect its association with a high status property, but it showed conflicting evidence of socio-economic status. The fairly mundane assemblage contained few quality items and the Tin-glazed wares were often of a poor quality, perhaps indicating that the pottery assemblage derived from servants quarters. However, a glass item and the high occurrence of initialled tobacco pipe bowls may imply a degree of affluence. The early 19th-century deposits tended to show a greater degree of affluence in material culture. The pottery included fashionable items such as a Black Basalt teapot and a Wedgwood candlestick, while a transfer printed Pearl ware service of plates was identified. A Creamware plate with maker's stamp is of note as only higher quality items in this ware are usually marked. The wine bottles are most likely to originate from inhabitants of higher social status while the fragments of phials, presumably mostly medicinal, could have been used by any of the inhabitants.

### CONCLUSIONS

The Quaternary deposits are typical of those associated with the Devensian Late Glacial and Early Holocene in the Lower Thames valley. The proximity to Counter's Creek, one of the 'lost rivers of London', and a possible palaeo-depositional relationship to it provide an early prehistoric interest at the site.

In the medieval period, the area of the excavated site was probably part of the open fields of Chelsea, ploughed as cultivation strips. The property was first united by Sir Thomas More in the 1520s, but continued as farmland, although bricks may have been manufactured on the site in the late 16th century. The site was probably laid out as formal gardens when Stanley House (originally known as Brickills) was first built in the late 1590s. The early terraces may have evolved from steps and hollows resulting from the quarrying of brickearth. Archaeological and cartographic evidence show that these terraces were certainly present by the early 18th century, and may have been made more complex in the middle years of the century.

The construction of mock fortifications, during Lewis Lochie's occupancy of the property (1780–1815) is likely to have removed or masked earlier structures and garden designs. A walled water feature, which partly incorporated an earlier terrace retaining-wall, may have been one of these military follies.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory, Miami, Florida calibrated to 2 Sigma (95% probability): Beta 143076, 8830 ± 40 BP, 13C/12C ratio 27.1.

<sup>2</sup> Davies 1904, 37–8, 45–54; LPH xiv(1), 163, no. 403(57); xv, 541; BL Harley Roll L26.

<sup>3</sup> BL Harley MS 6853 f383; Harley Roll L26.

<sup>4</sup> PRO SC2/188/43 m1d.

<sup>5</sup> Map of Chelsea, surveyed 1664 by James Hamilton, up-dated 1717.

<sup>6</sup> Davies 1904, 38, 39, 130; Faulkner 1829, i, 57; SoL iv 43–4.

<sup>7</sup> Faulkner 1829, i, 57; Beaver 1892, 153; Chelsea Society 1956, 27; SoL iv 43.

<sup>8</sup> SoL iv 44; Faulkner 1829, i, 58; Kings Road 1716, PRO MPE482, no. 33.

<sup>9</sup> SoL iv 44; Faulkner 1829, i, 59; Chelsea Society 1956, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Faulkner 1829, i, 59; Chelsea Society 1956, 27–8.

<sup>11</sup> LMA WCS/PR/39.

<sup>12</sup> Faulkner 1829, i, 60; SoL iv 44.



<sup>13</sup> Faulkner 1829, i, 61; LMA MDR/1839/6 no. 334; WCS/PR/84; PRO IR29/21/9 and IR30/21/9 nos 42, 43 and 49.

<sup>14</sup> *Illustrated London News* 4 March 1843, 158–9; SoL iv 44.

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 LMA London Metropolitan Archives  
 LPH Letters and Papers of Henry VIII  
 OS Ordnance Survey  
 PRO Public Record Office  
 SoL London County Council Survey of London

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