

A Section Across Fulham Palace Moat

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A TRENCH was excavated from September 1972 by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group through the riverside section of the mile-long infilled moat of Fulham Palace, a country estate of the Bishop of London since the 8th century.¹

Documentary evidence on the moat's origin is sparse and for archaeological evidence there was none. It is first recorded in the 14th century,² although it may be referred to in the 12th century.³ During 1443, a lease refers to fishing in the moat and a sluice was constructed in the early 17th century to flush it out with the Thames. However, from the 18th century there are frequent references to cleansing it from mud and refuse,⁴ During the latter part of the 19th century, due to the increasing pollution of this reach of the Thames, the moat became more and more insanitary and required several major cleansings. By 1921, the moat had become a stagnant ditch, stinking and overrun by rats and further nuisance added by the occasional drowning child; it was decided by the Bishop that rather than have the expense of periodical extensive cleansing, it would be better to have the moat infilled. This was completed in 1924 when some of the reclaimed land was conveyed to Fulham Borough Council as a park extension.

Local legend has attributed the moat to an incursion of a Danish army in 880,⁵ while local historians have considered it may have been nothing more than a medieval land boundary⁶ although admitting it is extraordinary for its size and is probably the largest medieval moated area in England.⁷

Following the discovery of a Romano-British settlement at Putney in 1962,⁸ the moat, due to its location and shape, was considered by some members of Wandsworth Historical Society possibly to

have had its origin in a Roman camp. In 1964, a trial trench by a local amateur archaeologist on an allotment within the moated area revealed 18th century refuse to a depth of some 8ft., without reaching natural.

Many local historians consider that the riverside area in the vicinity of the original village of Fulham adjoining the present Putney Bridge, was marsh in earlier periods and therefore was not occupied prior to the coming of the Saxons, circa 8th century. Historians have suggested that 'Fulham' meant 'Foul-town'—therefore literal proof of its marshyness. However, a geological map shows that the immediate area adjoining Putney Bridge, was not subjected to alluvium deposits.⁹ Flooding probably did not present a serious problem until at least the Saxon period.

This is one of the few places on the Thames west of the City where the existence of substantial sand and gravel banks without an overlay of alluvium, make an obvious crossing point.¹⁰

In 1972/73, the excavation of a trench 75ft. by 10ft. through a section of the moat and its inner and outer banks, revealed traces of occupation since the Neolithic period.

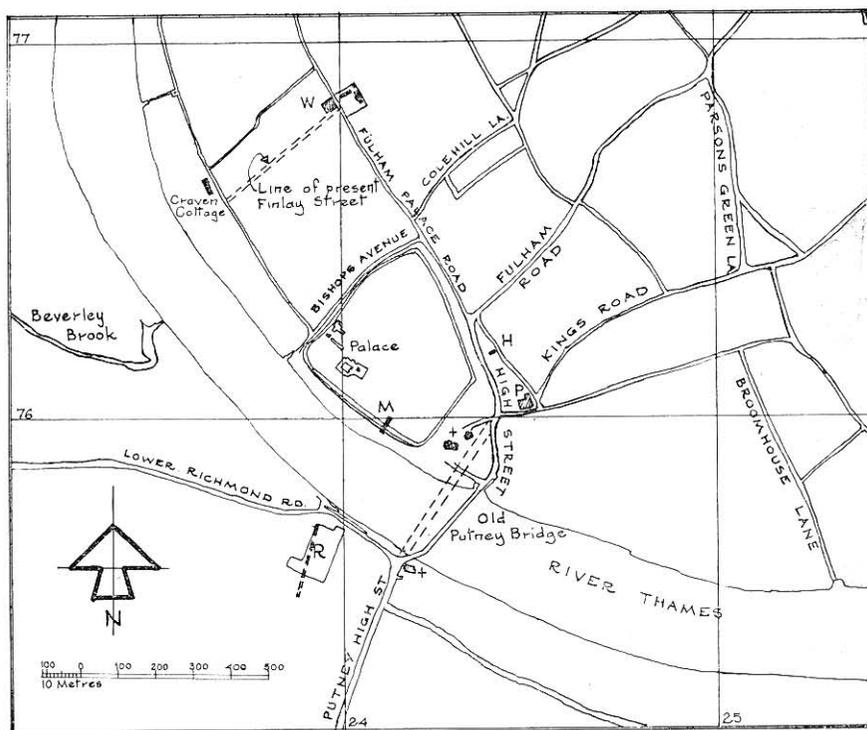
The soil is extremely rich and fertile, attested by the fact that prior to the development of modern Fulham after 1870, it was an area of small villages, separated by stretches of intensive farming and market gardening, supplying the London market. It had a high reputation for the quality of its produce and was renowned for its many nursery gardens, several of which were world famous.

The sand and gravel subsoil, approximately 25ft. deep, creates excellent drainage and would have

1. Keith Whitehouse, "Early Fulham," *London Archaeol* 1 No. 15 (1972), 344-347.
2. *Ibid.* 346.
3. Dennis Haselgrove, "Early Fulham — a rejoinder," *London Archaeol* 2 No. 1 (1972) 20-21.
4. C. J. Feret, "Fulham Old and New," (1900) Vol. 3, 146.
5. Keith Whitehouse *op.cit.* 346.

6. Dennis Haselgrove, *op.cit.* 21 and ed. P. D. Whitting "A History of Fulham to 1965" (1970) 25-26.
7. Dennis Haselgrove, *Church Gate & Its Surroundings* (1968) 34-35.
8. Nicholas Farrant, "The Romano-British Settlement at Putney," *London Archaeol* 1 No. 16 (1972) 368-371.
9. Ordnance Geological Survey of Gt. Britain, South London Sheet 270, reprinted 1962.
10. W. G. Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Medieval London*, (1968) 44.

Fig. 1. Map showing location of archaeological sites in Fulham —
M — Moat I site (F.A.R.G.) H —
High Street I site (F.A.R.G.) W —
Windmill site (F.A.R.G.) P — Ful-
ham Pottery (F.H.S.—A.S.) R —
Putney Roman Site showing
course of Roman Road (W.H.S.)



supported only light growth, easily cleared by early man. The flat terrain was ideal for ploughing and, for example, Fulham in Roman times may not have been very different than it was in the 18th century.

Neolithic

This period was represented by over 200 flint flakes, mainly from the Roman layers. Some were finished tools but the majority were wasters. Burnt flints and stones together with 'pot-boilers' were abundant in all layers, totalling many thousands and may represent several periods. Six fragments of pottery and some flints, came from a stratified area under the inner bank. A gully under the successive gravel surfaces of the outer bank was infilled with clay and 'pot-boilers'. Although there was no dating evidence, Neolithic appears to be the most likely period; features of similar character on the far side of the moat, dated to this period. Accompanying the gully were several small depressions and a possible post-hole containing one flint, cut into the natural sandy gravel and again lacking dating evidence but apparently contemporary with the gully.

Bronze Age

The only object which may date to the Bronze Age, was a lump of bronze with a high lead content. It may be part of the blade of a Late Bronze Age

socketed axe, perhaps from a scattered hoard. It was found near the top of the inner bank.

Iron Age

Over 100 fragments of coarse pottery were found including rims and bases, a few with simple decoration, in a variety of fabrics. Although they are of Iron Age type fabric, they came from Roman layers and if there had been any features dating to this period, they have been destroyed by the Roman occupation. Some sherds show Roman influence and others are of indefinable form. Therefore although some may be pre-Roman, they cannot be ascribed earlier than the Roman period.

Romano-British

There is considerable evidence for occupation in the Roman period, mainly during the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Under the inner bank of the moat, were two pebble and gravel surfaces, one of which had been definitely resurfaced (Fig. 2. G. S. 1 and 2). Their use is uncertain due to the short stretch uncovered but the resurfaced one may have been part of a road, pathway or yard. Associated with these surfaces was a large post-hole, 7ins. square, packed with approximately 30 large flint nodules, two large pieces of ragstone and other small debris. The post may

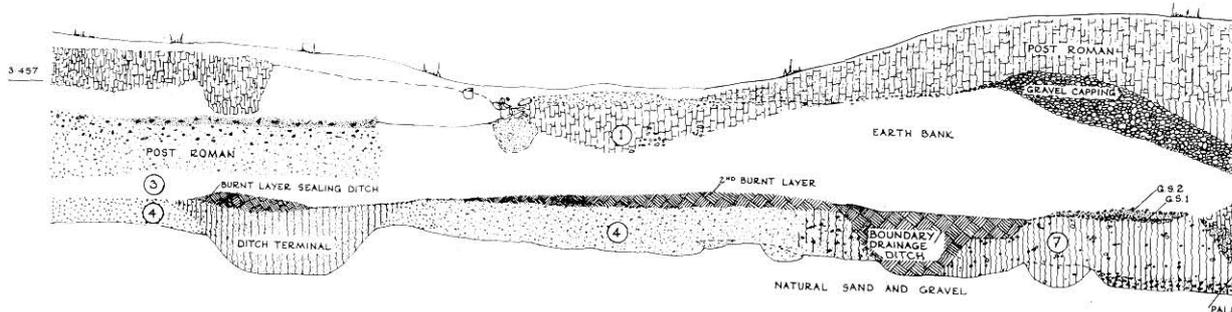


Fig. 2. East section across moat — 1, Light brown clayey loam; 2, Brown, iron-stained clay; 3, Brown/black patchy loam; 4, Dirty sand; 5, Grey silt with gravel content;

not have been part of a building but supported some other form of structure.

Adjoining the post-hole were two features. The first, a pit, contained skulls of a dog and horse; these appear to be a votive offering facing east towards the post-hole. The dog was about the size of an average modern mongrel and had been buried whilst the flesh was still present. The horse's lower jaw was missing and was probably an old skull. The horse was fairly large, standing at least 15 hands at the withers. Its state of dentition showed that it was at least 15 years old on death and much wear on the first premolar could have been the result of the horse biting on a metal bit, although this is not certain because of the absence of the lower jaw.¹¹ The second feature, a small pit crammed tight with over 200 large pebbles, has no obvious purpose and may be associated with unexcavated features beyond the trench section.

Under the inner bank, cutting through the gravel surfaces, was a small 'V' shaped ditch, perhaps for drainage or boundary purposes, roughly parallel with the bank it dated to the early 4th century. Lying between the pebble and gravel surfaces and the bank was a thick layer of black loam containing burnt debris. This burnt deposit could be due to clearing of scrub and levelling, prior to the bank's construction. Behind the bank was a shallow depression containing a black fill with pottery, bone and burnt material, apparently the infilling of an earlier feature which may have been a pit but was more probably a ditch terminal.

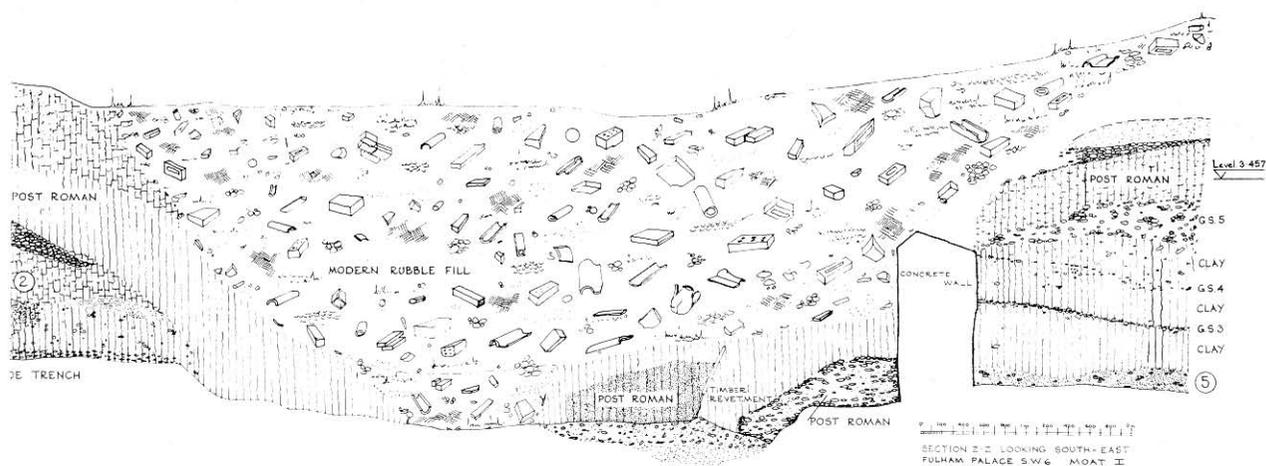
Inner Bank

The inner bank consisted of homogeneous brown sandy loam with gravel capping it and running

down its outer slope. On top was a row of three post holes, perhaps the remains of the supports of some sort of palisade for defensive purposes. On the outside of the bank was a small ditch with a round post-hole to take a substantial timber; the ditch was immediately back-filled. This may more than likely represent the wooden revetment to support the bank and prevent it slipping into the accompanying ditch. The top of the bank may well be intact because of the presence of post-holes, although the removal, or more probably the decay, of the revetment timbers has allowed some of it to slip into the moat; this in turn may have caused the top to slump somewhat.

The bank contained much Roman pottery and other debris but no later material. Dating evidence including coins, ceases about 360 in the layers stratified beneath the bank. However, coins in the bank carry through to Valens and Valentinian I. Therefore it would seem that the bank was constructed sometime between 360-380 and may well have been as a result of the barbarian raids circa 367, when Britain was severely ravaged. Due to the nature of its construction and size, it would seem reasonable that military help or at least advice was available.

The important factor concerning the section of the bank excavated, is that the material, apart from the gravel capping, does not come from an accompanying ditch. The bank is constructed of scraped up soil presumably from the surrounding ground surface. There may be two reasons for this. Either this section was one of the gaps in the bank during construction to pass through material dug from the ditch, or that the gap was an entrance which may have been filled in during the latter half of the 4th century. This could mean that the bank was actually



7, Light clayey material with loose gravel content. G.S. denotes Gravel Surfaces.

constructed earlier.

Road?

On the outside of the moat were three successive gravel surfaces, each one on a clay foundation, suggesting superimposed road surfaces of the 3rd and 4th centuries (GS 3-5). Although only one edge was excavated and the section was just 10ft. wide, this may suggest an east-west road following the riverside course of the moat. It should be noted that the top gravel surface (GS5), which is contemporary with the bank curves down towards the moat, whilst the other surfaces (GS 3-5) appear to have been truncated indicating that they had been partially cut away when either the inner bank's accompanying ditch or the enlarged later moat was dug.

As with the inner bank, all later layers had been stripped off down to the gravel and then lined with a thick layer of clay during the 18th century. Overlying this were several feet of 18th and 19th century layers which corresponds with successive raising of what was an elevated public footpath, Bishops Walk, due to frequent inundations of the Palace grounds by the Thames. It was further raised when the adjoining tide-meadow was embanked and formed into the present public riverside park (Bishops Park) in 1893. A concrete wall on the outer edge of the moat which adjoined the successive gravel surfaces, was probably also constructed at this time, to prevent the raised park footpath from collapsing into the moat.

Finds

The number of finds was very high in relation to the area of the trench and it should be remembered that the trench's positioning was dictated by convenience.

Among the 4,000 sherds, Nene Valley and Ox-

fordshire kiln wares were prominent but, naturally enough for the period, there was little Samian. A considerable amount of building material occurred including fragments of flue tiles. The small finds included 60 coins, many pieces of jewellery and hundreds of iron objects. Evidence for the economy of the settlement was represented by the bones of the usual domesticated animals and by fragments of coal, charcoal and metallic slag.

The Moat

The moat had been thoroughly cleaned out in recent centuries and the clay silt dated probably only to the last two hundred years, undoubtedly due to one of the major cleanings out at the end of the 18th century. All earlier layers had been removed down to the natural gravel and the moat lined with grey clay to make it impervious. There was no sign of a Roman ditch for this had presumably been destroyed by the moat, which was probably enlarged from the same ditch in the early medieval period.

Discussion

The area now covered by Fulham Palace and its grounds has traces of occupation since the Neolithic period, which completely dispels the previously held view that it was marshy and unsuitable for settlement.

Evidence discovered has proved that there was a Roman settlement in Fulham from at least 270 until 380, if not longer. There is a scatter of 2nd century pottery including Antonine Samian but so far no sherds have been identified to suggest earlier occupation. Putney has ditches, pottery and features dating to the 1st century, and evidence may yet be found elsewhere in the Fulham Palace grounds. As the excavation appears to be on the

Fig. 3. Section across inner bank looking north.

(Photo: Paul Arthur)



edge of the settlement, this evidence for later occupation may be due to late 3rd century expansion or movement. There is no reason why it should not have continued on into the 5th century, as Putney seemed to have.¹² There are no signs of destruction and it may just have been abandoned.

The nature of the finds coupled with the section of the earthwork excavated, indicates substantial occupation. Supported by substantial evidence the moat appears to owe its origin to the latter half of the 4th century, if not earlier. One very large acreage it encloses—28 acres, to which one must add Fulham High Street which makes a total of approximately 33 acres.¹³ It would seem, on the face of it, unlikely that the Saxons would wish to enlarge the embanked area, and therefore there may exist here a large Roman settlement site, hitherto unknown.

The reason for the settlement is obvious. As mentioned earlier, there is strong conjectural evidence for a prehistoric crossing between Fulham and Putney, a good reason for occupation in the area.¹⁴ At any period the site of the crossing would have a strategic importance. With this in mind it should be considered that the Romano-British settlement could be of Iron Age origin, with the possibility of an earthwork first constructed during these times, being seriously considered. The moat may not have

been constructed at one period and there are indications that there was a substantial multiple earthwork on the east side adjoining Fulham High Street. The flat flood-plain that covers the whole of modern Fulham would be a disadvantage in times of trouble and linked with a need to hold the crossing, could well be the reason why an earthwork was constructed enclosing the area that later became Fulham Palace.

The assigning of the earthwork to the Roman period could provide an explanation as to why the Bishop of London acquired the site and later chose it as the headquarters of his Middlesex estates; also why the Danes chose Fulham to make camp, as they usually took over existing earthworks, to save the unnecessary inconvenience in digging one.

The following points should be borne in mind when further research and excavation is undertaken:

1. There is a gap of approximately 300 years between the known end of the Roman occupation and the acquisition of the site by the Bishop of London in A.D. 705. What settlement, if any, occupied the site during this period.

2. Inference of a large Roman settlement at Fulham, has led to the view that it may be the site of a small lost town.¹⁵ The Thames would have been looked upon as a highway not a boundary, so the two settlement areas of Fulham and Putney may

found on a site a quarter of a mile to the north of the Palace.

15. Possibly one of those mentioned by Roy Canham, "Ravenna Cosmography," *London Archaeol* 1 No. 8 (1970) 179.

12. Nicholas Farrant *op. cit.* 371.

13. Keith Whitehouse *op. cit.* 347

14. Stan Warren, "Neolithic Occupation at Putney," *London Archaeol* 1 No. 12 (1971) 276-279. In addition Neolithic/Bronze Age material is currently being

have borne a single name. Fulham may also have some bearing on London during the obscure days of the sub-Roman period as it is only at a distance of about 8 miles.

3. The shape of the moat was originally considered to have been similar to a Roman Fort. This led to the view that a 1st century fort may have been established at the site of Fulham Palace during the invasion of A.D. 43. Although this cannot yet be substantiated, it should still be considered a possibility because of the nature of the settlement and crossing as already discussed.

4. In the area north of the Palace, from at least medieval times, the village fields (Fulham Fields) may well have served the same purpose during the Roman period of supplying the settlement with food, perhaps exporting the surplus to London. River communication would have made this comparatively easy.

5. Fulham Road and Fulham Palace Road are probably Roman feeders connecting Fulham and Putney with London and the West. The former would appear to connect the crossing with a road found running through the middle of the Putney settlement (see fig. 1).

6. There ought to be one or more Roman cemeteries in the vicinity. The area of Fulham Parish Church, adjoining the moat, appears to be a strong contender for the site of one of them.

7. Various earthworks and mounds to the east and north of the Palace grounds which are still partially extant, are represented on 19th century Ordnance Survey maps or can be inferred from medieval place names; they may be of Romano-British origin or earlier.

It is not possible in an article of this nature, to fully discuss the importance and potential of this site. However, it is hoped that the full report will

be published at the end of 1974.

There is good reason to believe that the discovery of Romano-British settlements both at Fulham and Putney, should cause a major rethinking of this area of the Thames in Roman and earlier times. Further evidence of early occupation should be found as large areas of the London Borough of Hammersmith (Fulham and Hammersmith) are re-developed in the coming years.

The Palace and its grounds will be opened to the public later this year. Although Hammersmith Council intends to retain the grounds as they are, there are bound to be some alterations and it is hoped that these will give the opportunity for further excavations, which are needed to understand the nature of this site.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my immediate thanks to the following: Hammersmith Borough Council for granting permission to excavate; Cllr. N. Raynsford, Chairman of Civic Amenities Committee and the Manager and staff of the Parks and Cemeteries for help and the loan of equipment; Wandsworth Historical Society for the loan of equipment; Nicholas Farrant and Stan Warren for their advice; London and Middlesex Archaeological Society and Ralph Merrifield for advice and a grant; R. Paul Hills, Charles Chinn and their employers, Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons Ltd., for advice and the loan of trench shoring; Paul Arthur for acting as site supervisor, and for the conservation of coins and small finds; Christopher Oliver, site surveyor, for preparing the section and map; Betsey Kentish for processing and storage facilities; Geoffrey Evans for storage facilities and transport; and of course, over 60 volunteers who helped with the excavation and processing.

Local Societies

The fourth list of amendments to the list of local societies published in Vol. 1, No. 15 is as follows:

Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group — Sec. K. Whitehouse, 56 Tamworth Street, S.W.6.

Merton Historical Society — Sec. Miss E. Waugh, 24 Mostyn Road, S.W.19.

Survey of London Museums

In the April number of the *Illustrated London News* there is an article on the results of a special survey commissioned by the periodical on four of London's national museums and art galleries prior to the introduction of charges; the two museums are the National History and the Science. The main finding seems to be that charges will make visitors even more exclusive and unrepresentative of the population than at present.