Archaeology and the Fulham Palace Refurbishment Project: managing expectations

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Set in verdant grounds on the north bank of the Thames and overlooked by the 15th-century crenellated tower of All Saints Church, Fulham Palace remarkably retains a sense of the rural seclusion that the Bishops of London historically enjoyed as residents when away from the City. In 2005–6, this tranquillity was temporarily disturbed by an extensive scheme of vital refurbishments which involved physical intervention on the site, both above and below ground. Adapting the Palace and its grounds for the 21st century provided archaeologists with a rare opportunity to undertake a coherent archaeological investigation across a wide area. This interim account attempts to set the archaeological project within the context of fieldwork undertaken at the site since the 1970s and, with reference to the present results, to define some research priorities to assist in the future archaeological management of the Scheduled Monument (Fig. 1).

Historical and archaeological background

Prehistoric

Multi-period occupation of this riverside site from as early as Neolithic times is suggested by the results of archaeological fieldwork undertaken by various organisations, augmented by chance finds. Exploitation of the fertile terrace gravels of the Thames flood plain in the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods is attested by a combination of excavated evidence and incidental discoveries.[1] Transitory hunting and fishing in the area gave way to early farming settlements, but the location of these settlements in the vicinity of the study area is not known.[2] Residual worked flint and pottery were recovered during excavations within the Scheduled Monument by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group (FARG) in 1972–3[3] and 1986,[4] and were also found to the north of the site.

Roman

In 1972–3, excavation by FARG of a trench between the walled garden and Bishops Park which crossed the moat revealed compelling evidence of Roman occupation nearby.[5] Further evidence in the form of a ditch was recorded during an excavation by FARG to the immediate north of the palace in 1986.[6] Fulham Palace has been interpreted as a possible site for a Roman settlement controlling a river crossing, as it lies on the projected line of a Roman road recorded in Putney by the Wandsworth Historical Society.[7] The presence of firm sand and gravel on both sides of the Thames between Fulham and Putney suggests that, in the Roman period, the river could be forded at this point.[8]

Bishops' residence

As the residence of the Bishops of London, Fulham Palace is believed to have its origins in the Saxon period; Fulham was part of the bishop's estates from AD 704 when Bishop Tyrhtil, Bishop of Hereford, granted 50 hides of land to Bishop Wealdhere, Bishop of London (AD 704–709).[9] In AD 879 a 'band of Vikings gathered and took up quarters at Fulham' for the winter before sailing for Frankland the

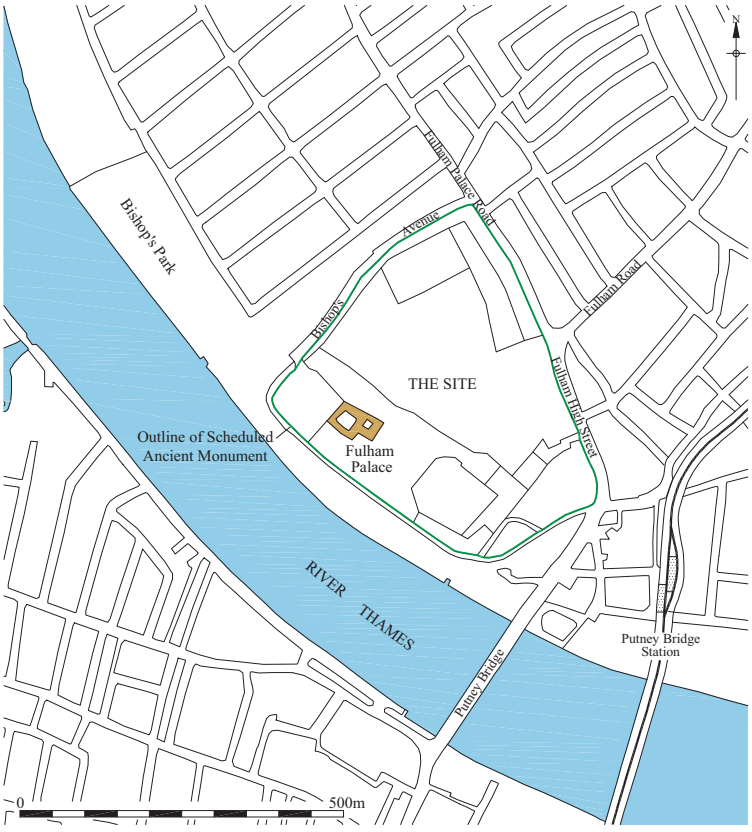

Fig. 1: site location (© Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

following year.[10] A bishop's residence is known to have existed here as early as 1141.[11] Its original buildings were most likely laid out within what is known as the *Homestead Moat* in the western corner of site (now called *The Paddock*)[12]. In the 13th century the house was rebuilt in its current location in the western corner of the great moated enclosure. Here it could be seen from the river, with a pathway leading from the manor's barge landing.[13]

The Moat

The moated enclosure is trapezoidal in plan and, at approximately 14.5 hectares (36 acres), was claimed as the largest in England. In many places the moat is still discernable, despite its systematic infilling by Fulham Borough Council between 1921–4. For most of its 1,460 m (nine-tenths of a mile) length, it delineates the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Fulham Palace appears to have been established on an island formed between two forks of a tributary to the Thames which sprang at Colehill. This stream fed the moat at its northern corner.[14] A more detailed understanding of the natural topography and the possible origins of the moat has been slowly emerging from piecemeal archaeological recording by various organisations in and around the Scheduled Monument since the 1970s.[15] However, as these investigations have tended to be limited in scope, they have provided only localised, and sometimes ambiguous, 'snapshots' of the moat or ancillary artificial channels in relation to the natural terrain and hydrology.

It seems plausible that the canalisation of natural watercourses as a means of reclaiming marshy ground in the floodplain was an ongoing process that started with the earliest occupation of the site. If this is the case, the origin of the moat becomes a somewhat more complex question. The moat alignment, first recorded in post-medieval maps (Fig. 2),[16] may be the result of a deliberate plan to rationalise channels – already partially managed – into a coherent circuit. The question then becomes one of dating this latter development. While it seems most likely that such a major construction was instigated by the Bishops of London in the medieval period, earlier origins for the moat cannot be ruled out on the current archaeological evidence.

Gardens

Formal gardens would have been an integral feature of the grounds of the manor from medieval times, and there was a *floruit* in their development under the prolific plant collector Bishop Compton between 1683 and 1713.[17] A sense of the character of thepalace set within its garden layouts is provided by John Rocque's map published in 1746 (Fig. 2). Archaeological remains of formal garden beds were recorded to the immediate north of the palace by FARG in 1986.

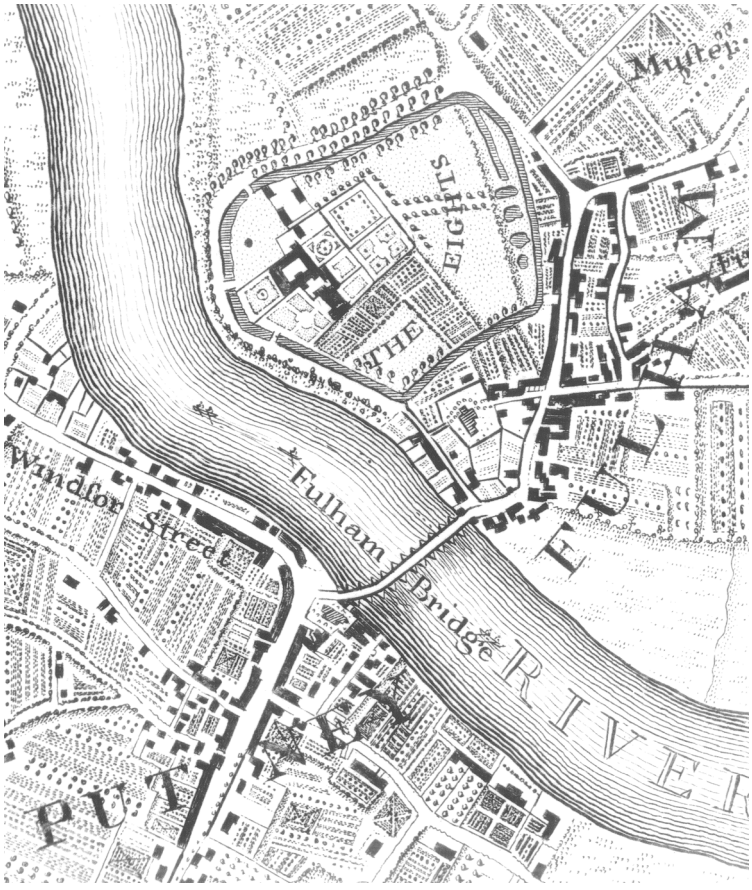

Fig. 2: extract from John Rocque's map (surveyed 1741–5, published 1746).
Photograph by Geremy Butler, by courtesy of the Guildhall Library

The Refurbishment Project – Phase 1

In 1975, two years after the bishops ceased residing here, the palace and grounds were leased from the Church Commissioners for 100 years by Hammersmith Council, initially to convert it into a museum and art gallery with facilities for local organisations.[18] Since the 1950s, the palace had seen only minor improvements to its buildings and services infrastructure. By the new millennium, however, the need to upgrade these facilities had become critical for the property to sustain itself as an arts and heritage amenity, generating its own income from commercial leasing and hire as a venue for hospitality and events. In October 2006, in partnership with The Fulham Palace Trust and with major financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham successfully completed the first phase of refurbishment of the Palace under the direction of Dr Scott Cooper.

As a Grade I listed building standing within a Scheduled Ancient Monument,

Fulham Palace is the single most significant heritage asset within the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, and has deservingly been subject to two conservation plans in 1988[19] and 2003.[20] Project planning benefited from the detailed assessment of the historic buildings and archaeological remains that had been carried out by Dr Warwick Rodwell and Keith Whitehouse respectively. Careful consideration of the proposed design and contract methodology at an early stage in the refurbishment project, by conservation and archaeological professionals, helped to minimise any adverse effects on the historic fabric and archaeological remains. Working with a design by conservation architects Thomas Ford & Partners and structural engineers Moreton Partnership, and its own team of mechanical, electrical and environmental engineers, Gifford Ltd provided archaeological advice to the design team and liaised with English Heritage on below-ground archaeological matters. Having undertaken field evaluation on the site in 2003, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (PCA) were appointed as archaeological contractor for the project and were embedded with the appointed Principal Contractor, Mansell Construction Services Ltd, to facilitate coordination of archaeological recording.

The scope of the works to the palace and its grounds was extensive. Internally it comprised restoration of Bishop Sherlock's Room with its fine Rococo ceiling, refurbishment of the Bishop's former bedrooms in the East Quadrangle and refurbishment of the East Quadrangle's public rooms for use as a museum, café and gallery. Throughout the palace's West Courtyard and across the grounds the works took the form of comprehensive renewal of services which had reached the end of their useful life, having only seen *ad hoc* repair since their installation.

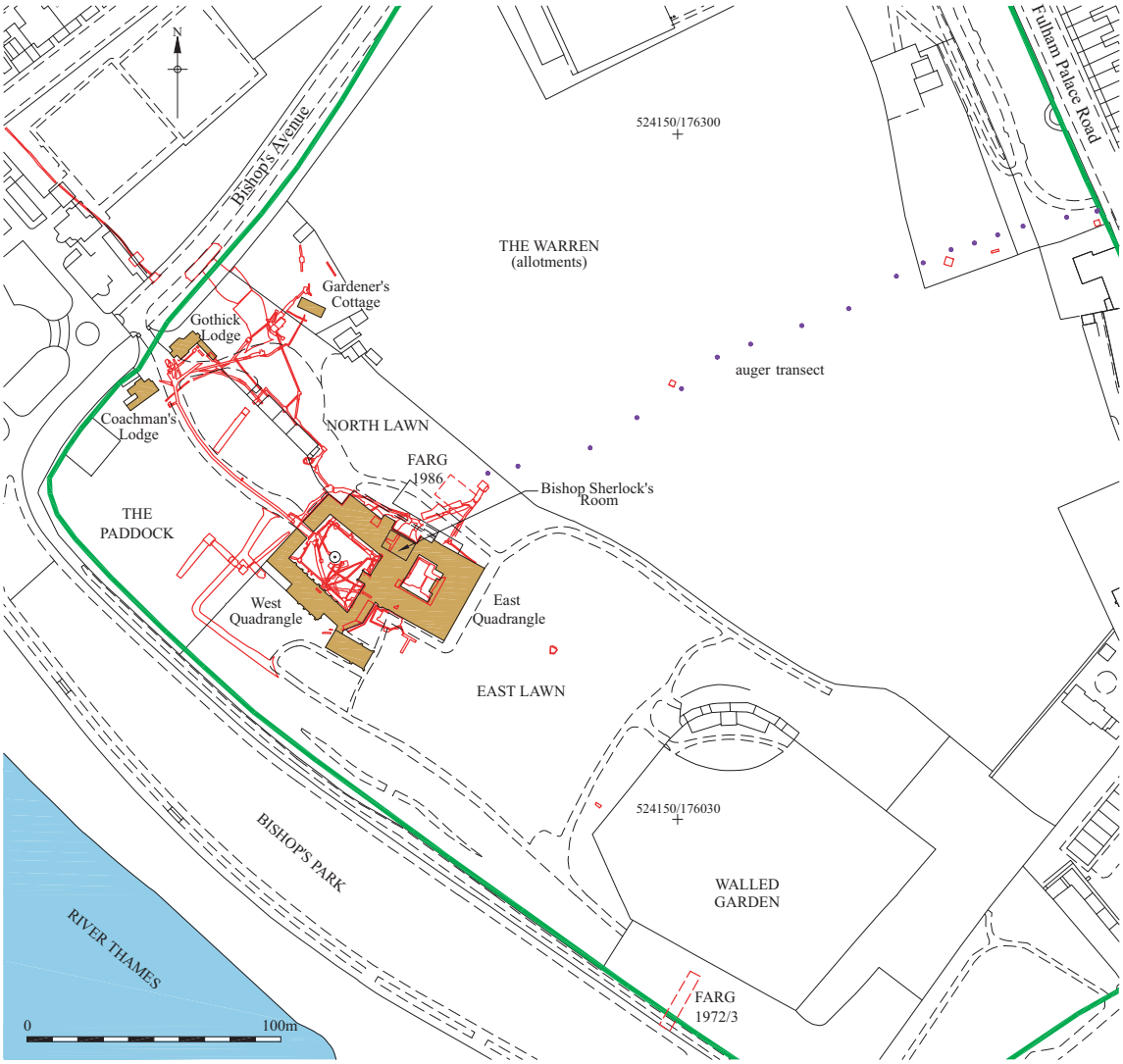

Fig. 3: trench locations (© Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

Fig. 4: Ground Penetrating Radar Survey in East Lawn by Stratascan Ltd in 2005 (© Gifford)

As part of the present project, installation of services along two principal transects across the entire moated site provided a key opportunity to develop a rudimentary model of the buried natural topography, and thereby to provide a sound base from which to understand the emergence of a more regularised landscape. In 2005 an engineering investigation of the proposed route of a directionally drilled sewer from the north-eastern edge of the palace grounds, across the allotments (*The Warren*) to join an existing public sewer beneath Fulham Palace Road, provided an opportunity to record a transect through buried deposits across the Scheduled Monument from south-west to north-east.[21] During the main contract, excavation of a trench for a new electricity supply from the bowling green on the opposite side of Bishop's Avenue to the West Quadrangle of the palace provided a north-west to south-east transect, albeit dog-legged (Fig. 3).

Routing of new and replacement services within the western part of the palace grounds was guided by the mapping of buried anomalies of potential archaeological significance by three geophysical techniques: resistivity, magnetometry and ground penetrating radar[22] (Fig. 4). This augmented resistivity surveys undertaken by North East London Polytechnic in 1976 and the Ancient Monuments Laboratory in 1989.

In the laying out of new services, the aim was to protect any previously uninterrupted bodies of archaeological strata – that might provide viable subjects for future open-area excavation – from being subdivided unnecessarily. New services were designed, therefore, either to follow, or to be tucked up alongside, corridors of previous disturbance by existing services. From the outset, an iterative design procedure was adopted, the service layouts being adapted dynamically to take account of unexpected archaeological discoveries during the contractors' excavations. A proactive approach was applied in the coordination of groundworks and the associated watching brief attendance to ensure that a coherent archaeological record was generated while maintaining predictability in the construction programme. Throughout the project, close working relationships were developed between the archaeologists and the Museum of Fulham Palace which, being ideally located and suitably equipped, was the natural vehicle for community involvement and information dissemination.

Archaeological results of recent work

PCA's brief for the archaeological work at the palace comprised two main elements; firstly a 'policing' role to ensure that all intrusive works within the scheme were as designed, and not unduly threatening archaeological remains which, if exposed, were investigated to ensure a professional record. Second, in areas where the project design had identified that archaeology was both likely to be present and at risk from the new work, PCA undertook detailed excavation and recording to mitigate the risk.

Whilst this approach ensured that the impact upon archaeological remains was limited to areas of unavoidable disturbance, which had been sanctioned by Scheduled Monument Consent, it also meant that the investigation trenches were as small as possible to reduce the impact, and as such did not afford the opportunity for wide-ranging research. Questions arising during the course of the work, which in a typical archaeological project would be solved by extension or enlargement of the trench, were not so easily solved at Fulham Palace. The archaeological remains found during the work were therefore often seen in a small-scale context. The results presented here are an interim report, pending post-excavation assessment.

Natural

Natural terrace gravels were found in the Paddock area during the course of the work, and were overlain by natural sands further to the north around the existing stable and beneath the North Lawn. As expected, the natural topography showed a fall from north-east to south-west towards the river.

Roman

Evidence of Roman activity was found to be concentrated beneath the North and East Lawns, and was represented by ditches, pits and post-holes. Little can be definitively said at this early stage as to their specific purpose, but it is hoped that when considered in association with excavation work in the North Lawn by FARG in the 1980s, which found similar features, their interpretation can be expanded.

Medieval

Medieval remains were concentrated in two areas: within the Paddock, to the west of the Chaplain's Garden, and beneath the North Lawn. In the former, with the insertion of two new soakaway trenches, two substantial linear features were revealed: they were parallel, aligned north-south, and are likely to have formed part of the double-ditched enclosure of the early medieval manor house that pre-dated the existing palace structure. Their alignment corresponds to that of similar features seen on a geophysical survey conducted in 1976, which identified a corner of the enclosure to the north-west of the palace. Pottery recovered from the fills of both ditches dates to the 13th–14th centuries, and therefore correlates well with the accepted chronology, in which the palace was rebuilt in its current position in the 13th century, rendering the Homestead Moat unnecessary.

Fig. 5: remains of a medieval well found beneath the North Lawn (© Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

In the area of the North Lawn, to allow the installation of new service runs, archaeological excavation exposed a pitched-tile hearth and a chalk well. Fills from within the well were dated to the late 12th or early 13th centuries, but also contained a well-preserved coin of Crispus (AD 323–324). The hearth was associated with an outbuilding, and showed evidence of at least one repair; it was sealed by a soil horizon dating from the 13th century. The proximity and date ranges for the well and hearth imply that both constructions were associated with the reorganised medieval ground-plan of the palace following its rebuilding in its current position (Fig. 5).

In other areas features such as pits, post-holes and ditches were also found to contain medieval material, although whether they can be securely ascribed to that period or are, in fact, later is still to be confirmed. One such example of residual medieval remains was found in the foundations of the lean-to structure which abuts Gothick Lodge flanking the Moat Bridge. In two areas, the presence of decorative carvings on some pieces suggested that they derived from a church, possibly the chapel that formed one of the easternmost buildings within the medieval palace complex before its demolition in 1764. Medieval artefacts were also recovered variously from subsoil and horticultural soil deposits which were recorded across the site.

Fig. 6: remains of the 16th-century State Wing found beneath the North Lawn
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Post-medieval

Foundations of West Quadrangle and Housekeeper's Wing

The Tudor expansion of the palace from its medieval origins, centred around the

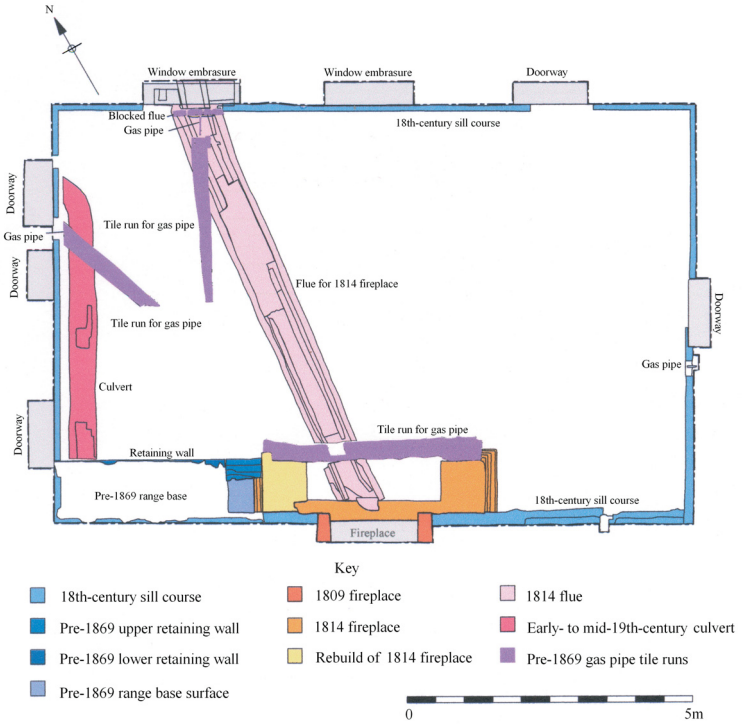

Fig. 7: Bishop Sherlock's room – remains found beneath floor level, by phase
(© Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

current West Quadrangle, was seen in various places in the form of foundations and standing walls. Notable sections were recorded within the West Courtyard and in a section of wall at first-floor level in the current East Quadrangle. This represented the exterior face of the Tudor western range before its complete enclosure in the post-medieval period. The West Courtyard was subject to the greatest area of impact by the refurbishment works, as historically it has been the major access route for services into and from the palace. By reusing these existing service runs, disturbance was kept to a minimum, but the contractor's excavations still revealed tantalising elements of the post-medieval palace in the form of drains and wells. A notable feature was a north-south aligned barrel-vaulted culvert that would have served a well, shown in this location on 19th-century plans. Within the culvert could be seen a mechanism for pumping water up and through the feature, and which may have related to the installation of the fountain at the centre of the courtyard.

Areas of masonry around the northern corner of the West Quadrangle, heavily truncated by previous services, were attributed to the early post-medieval Housekeeper's Wing, which can be seen historically in this position.

State Wing

In the area of the North Lawn, detailed archaeological investigation was conducted to allow the installation of new service runs. Excavation revealed the north-west corner and easterly extent of the 16th-century State Wing of the palace, with a cellar that had altered in use (to include a privy or cesspit) before the block's demolition in 1715. Judicious use of previous truncations through the walls enabled all new services to be installed with no additional impact upon the archaeological remains, which were protected and left *in situ* (Fig. 6).

Bishop Sherlock's Room

Substantial work was conducted in Bishop Sherlock's Room to allow the restoration of the room to its 18th-century grandeur. Remains of the under-floor workings of the 19th-century kitchen that replaced the dining room were found and preserved *in situ*. They included the foundations of both the 19th-century kitchen range and a later gas range, complete with pipe-work intact (Fig. 7). A highlight of this excavation was the recovery of large quantities of plaster mouldings – both finished and unfinished – that can be recognised in the current Rococo ceiling and cornice (Fig. 8).

Barn and Farm Yard Area

In the Stable Yard area and around the Gothick Lodge, remains of the ancillary buildings connected with the post-medieval 'farm' were found. Leadbetter's plans of 1764[24] show the stables (now represented by a rebuilt block dating to 1873) continuing as a complete range to the west, of which elements were found as brick footings and tiled surfaces. Photographs in the collection of the Museum of Fulham Palace show a barn in the position now occupied by the Gardener's Cottage; elements of this structure (which had its origins in the early post-medieval period) were revealed in the work.

The Moat

The moat, which envelops the entire Scheduled Ancient Monument, was largely unaffected by the works except in two locations. First, with the creation of the new access road to Bishop's Avenue, evidence could be seen of the moat's backfilling (in 1921–4), when its upkeep became prohibitively expensive for the bishops. Second, the drilling of a new sewer tunnel beneath the allotments to the north of the palace required the excavation of a new man-hole shaft where the new sewer was connected to that existing under Fulham Palace Road. This work revealed 20th-century backfilling of the moat down to its basal level, with no evidence for revetting or recutting.

Priorities for future research

Post-excavation work relating to the recent archaeological investigations at Fulham Palace (Phase 1) is still at an early stage. A second phase of refurbishment, comprising improvements to further parts of the palace buildings and also restoration of the Walled Garden area to the east of the main building, is currently being planned. Coherent integration of the various phases of fieldwork, which

Fig. 8: Egg-and-dart plaster mouldings found beneath the floor in Bishop Sherlock's Room (© Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd)

overlap physically to a great extent, thus emerges as a logical agenda for the future archaeological management of the Scheduled Monument. The methodology adopted during the Phase 1 archaeological fieldwork, whereby interventions were micro-designed to reduce the impact upon the buried resource, proved effective in allowing the development to proceed while reducing archaeological risk. The manner in which the remains that were encountered had been anticipated prior to the fieldwork, and were exposed in small areas, with minimal loss of *in situ* archaeological deposits, testifies to this. From an archaeologist's standpoint this approach can seem frustrating, since the site embodies a wealth of Roman, medieval and post-medieval deposits, which would amply repay set-piece, open-area archaeological excavation. Yet the the site's Scheduled Monument status is key to protecting the remains from unnecessary intervention, arising either from the curiosity of archaeologists, or a desire to bring the palace itself into the 21st century. Despite its limited scope, the Phase 1 work has generated an invaluable dataset. This will help ensure that the likely archaeological impacts of further interventions in the palace grounds – in the context of archaeological research, redevelopment or future refurbishment – may be anticipated, and that appropriate mitigation steps are taken wherever necessary.

In Phase 2, during subsequent post-excavation work, and in response to future impacts which cannot yet be anticipated, the Fulham Palace project should yield further opportunities for investigating a number of site-specific research questions, which may be defined with reference to the London-wide research framework.[25] They relate to:

- further defining the site's natural topography and hydrology;
- determining the origins of the moat and associated earthworks;
- exploring the archaeological potential of Roman-period deposits at the site;
- investigating the late Saxon episcopal palace and the area within the Homestead Moat further identified by the recent work;
- charting the development of the palace and its grounds through the medieval, Tudor and post-medieval periods.

The ongoing archaeological project will also seek to collate the considerable quantity of information which has been gained from various investigations at the site over the last 40 years.

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