

Excavations at the William Morris Gallery

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Introduction

The William Morris Gallery has been subject to a series of archaeological investigations by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (PCA). The site is located on the eastern side of the gallery and is located in Lloyd Park,¹ Walthamstow, in the London Borough of Waltham Forest (Fig. 1). The gallery building is designated as a Grade II* Listed Building known as Water House, which was built in the mid-18th century and was extended and modified during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Water House served as the home of William Morris from 1848–1856, and is presently a museum housing an internationally recognised collection relating to the life and works of William Morris, his contemporaries and the development of the Arts and Crafts Movement.²

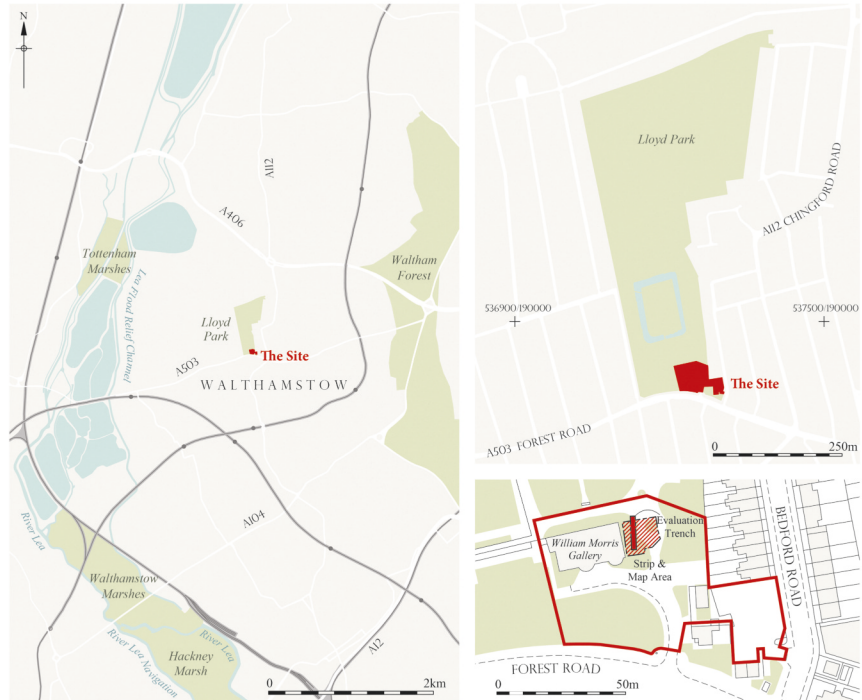


Fig. 1: site location and trench location



Fig. 2: Phases 2b, 3 and 4

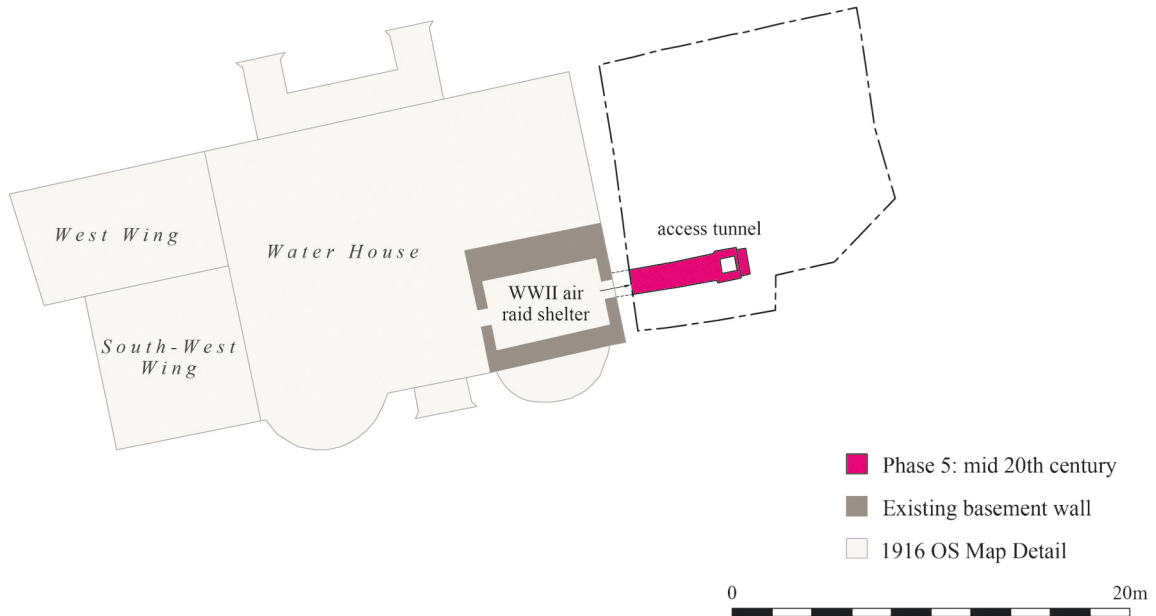


Fig. 3: Phase 5

This article is concerned with archaeological work undertaken in advance of the extension of the gallery as part of The William Morris Gallery Development Project (funded by the London Borough of Waltham Forest and The Heritage Lottery Fund).³ The archaeological work was carried out under the site code WMG11 and comprised an archaeological evaluation conducted in April 2011 and an

archaeological strip and map exercise undertaken in September 2011. The archaeological investigations comprised one evaluation trench measuring c. 13m in length, and a strip and map trench measuring c. 162m² (Fig. 1). The archaeological work confirmed the presence of 18th- and 19th-century brick structures which represented the East Wing and outbuildings of Water House. The brick structures were

demolished at the start of the 20th century, and a tunnel leading to a WWII air-raid shelter within Water House was constructed.

Archaeological sequence

Pre-18th century (Phase 2a)

A layer of made ground represented the earliest activity recorded on site. The layer produced a small amount of pottery dated between the late 15th century and 17th century, suggesting that it formed at the transition of the late medieval period and early post-medieval period.

Mid-18th century (Phase 2b; Figs. 2 and 4)

A north-east to south-west oriented drain, which had been constructed from red bricks, peg tile and Purbeck limestone pavers, had been cut through the made ground. An east-west wall had been constructed above the drain and was recorded centrally to the site, and a continuation of the same wall was recorded further to the east. A second east-west brick wall, recorded further to the north, was aligned with the extant northern wall of Water House. The two east-west walls had been constructed from red brick



Fig. 4: view of Phase 2b, 3 & 4 brick walls and Phase 5 tunnel, looking west

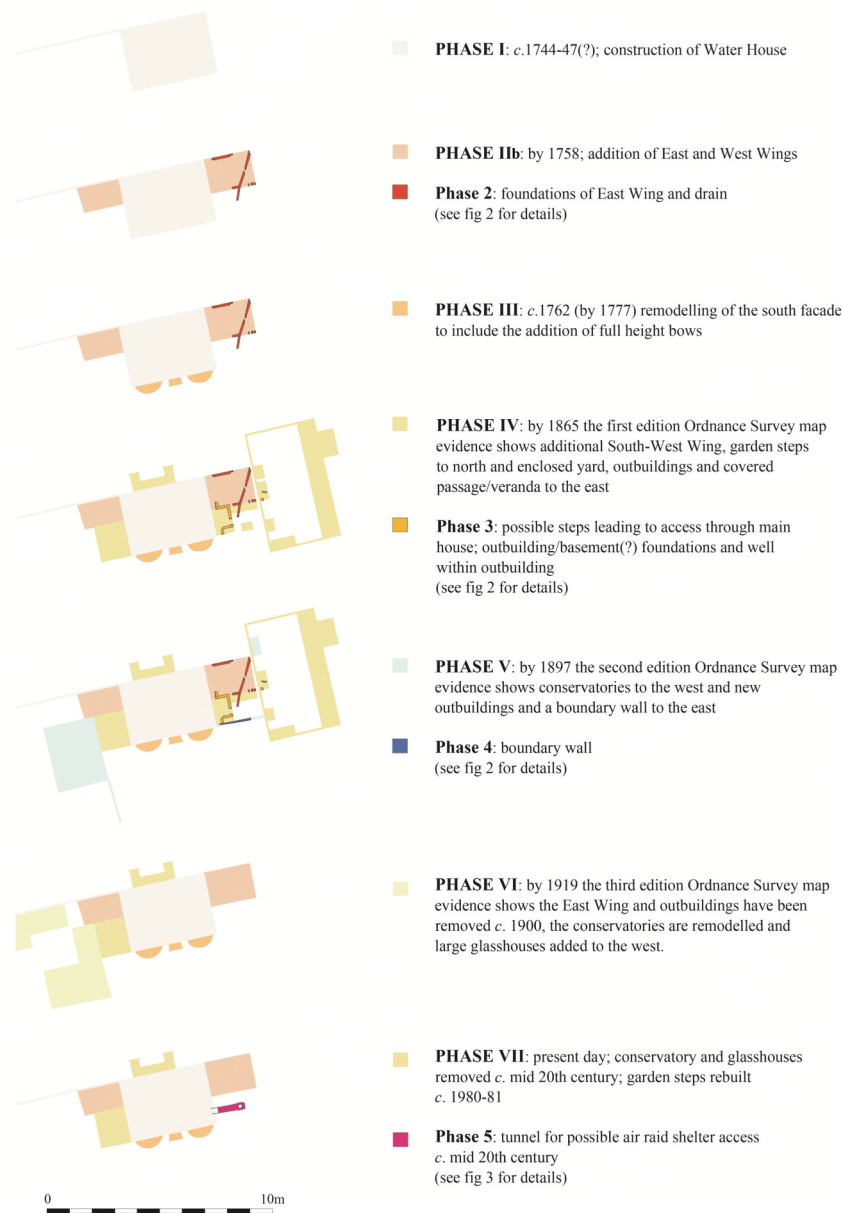


Fig. 5: Conservation Management Building Phases (Phases I–VII) and their relationship with PCA Archaeological Phasing (Phases 2b–5)

and represent elements of the East Wing originally attached to Water House.

Mid-18th century to mid-19th century (Phase 3; Figs. 2 and 4)

The East Wing was retained into Phase 3. A rectangular brick structure constructed of red brick was recorded in the south-west of the site, with its northern wall aligned with the southern wall of the East Wing. The rectangular structure probably represented an outbuilding located to the south of the East Wing and to the east of Water House. A compact sandy gravel deposit was recorded to the north of the outbuilding, within the footprint of the East Wing, and may represent the

remains of an internal bedding layer. A fragment of north–south oriented brickwork was recorded to the west and may represent a step forming part of an entrance through the eastern wall of the Water House. A wall fragment and part of a brick well were also recorded in the east of the investigation area and probably form part of an outbuilding built to the east of the East Wing during Phase 3.

Mid-late 19th century (Phase 4; Figs. 2 and 4)

The Phase 2b and Phase 3 buildings were retained and remained in use during Phase 4. An east–west red brick wall was constructed to the south of the

retained buildings, in line with the southern wall of Water House. The wall probably represents a boundary wall defining the southern part of the eastern building complex.

20th century (Phase 5; Figs. 3 and 4)

Demolition deposits were recorded above the wall footings, and it is evident that the earlier East Wing and associated buildings were demolished and an east–west tunnel was cut through the earlier walls and deposits. The tunnel measured 1.62m in width and 0.86m in depth, and had been constructed from circular concrete pipes encased in poured concrete. A brick entrance was located at the east end of the concrete tunnel. Whilst the western extent was located beyond the limit of excavation, it is thought that it would have led into a WWII air-raid shelter created from a converted basement and located in the south-east corner of Water House. A topsoil deposit sealed the earlier activity and formed during the use of the site as a garden to the east of the Water House during the latter part of the 20th century.

Discussion

A relatively complete record of the owners and occupiers of Water House and its precursors survives from the 17th century onwards, with the earliest occupant named as Sir Thomas Merry (died 1654), Master Mason to Charles I. The property later became the home of William Pierce/Piers, retired Bishop of Bath, whose son subsequently sold the property to Ralph Hawkins, a Citizen and Brewer of London. The property remained with the Hawkins family until the mid-18th century,⁴ and subsequently passed by marriage to Squire Woolball, owner of the nearby Grosvenor House. No evidence was found to indicate the development and use of land within the investigation area prior to the mid-18th century, and it is probable that any early development did not incorporate the archaeologically assessed land.

The property remained in the ownership of Squire Woolball until his death in 1750 and thereafter passed to his daughter. At the time of her marriage to Sir Hanson Berney in 1756

the property included a house which was described as 'a new built capital messuage or tenement'.⁵

A Conservation Management Plan was compiled for the William Morris Gallery in 2010, and analysis of the extant fabric of Water House as well as examination of cartographic and documentary sources allowed a number of building phases to be identified. The earliest construction phase was identified as c. 1744–1747, a date range which is supported by the presence of a brick scratched with the date '1744' in the upper east wall of Water House.⁶ No evidence of the earliest phase of construction was identified within the investigation area itself, and it is evident that this area of land was not initially developed (Fig. 5: Phase I), however the addition of an East Wing during the 18th century was attested by foundations and a drainage feature (Fig. 5: Phases II and III).

In 1848, Water House became the family home of William Morris (b. 1834, d. 1896) the acclaimed 'designer, craftsman, writer, conservationist and socialist'.⁷ The Morris family relocated to Water House from Woodford Hall following the death of William Morris senior in 1847, and the house became home for Morris, his widowed mother and his eight siblings until 1856.⁸ William was 14

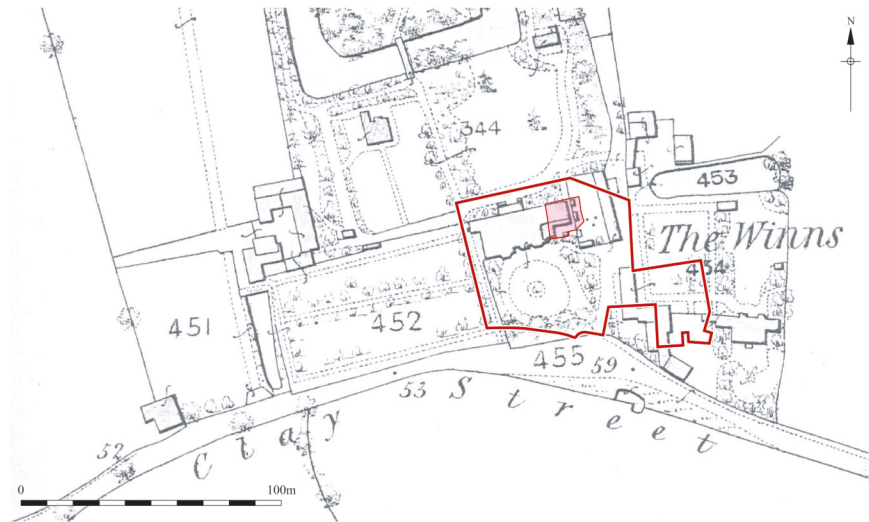


Fig. 6: First Edition Ordnance Survey, 1865

years old when the family moved to the house, and he initially spent much of his time at Marlborough College in Wiltshire, before being withdrawn from the school in 1851. William returned to Water House for most of 1852, during which time he studied for his Oxford entry with a private tutor.⁹ William began his studies at Exeter College, Oxford in 1853, during which time he formed friendships with the artists Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.¹⁰ Both artists visited Water House, and Rossetti is recorded as having painted the cherry tree in Mrs

Morris's garden.¹¹ The time spent at Water House also influenced the young William Morris, and aspects of the landscape feature in some of his early poetry.¹² In 1857 Water House was sold to the wealthy newspaper publisher and editor Edward Lloyd and the house was named as *The Winns*.¹³ The Ordnance Survey of 1865 (Fig. 6) and two photographs from the same year (Figs. 7 and 8) show *The Winns* as it existed at this time. Documentary records also show that the east wing of the 19th-century house was once occupied by kitchens, a scullery, store and servants quarters,¹⁴ and it is believed that the servants of both the Morris family and Lloyd family would have lived and worked from this part of the house during the mid-19th century. Evidence of the 19th-century east wing and its outbuildings were recorded in the archaeological record (Fig. 5: Phase IV) and as 'scars' to the east facing elevation of the extant wall fabric (Fig. 9).

Edward Lloyd and his family left the house in 1885, discouraged by the late-19th-century suburban development of the area. The Ordnance Survey of 1897 indicates that a boundary wall had been constructed at the front of the East Wing by the end of the 19th century, evidence of which was found in the archaeological record (Fig. 5: Phase V). In 1898 Frank Lloyd (son of Edward) offered the house and its grounds to Waltham District Council for use as a public recreation facility, and Lloyd Park was opened in July 1900.¹⁵ The



Fig. 7: 1865 photograph showing front elevation of the house



Fig. 8: 1865 photograph showing back elevation of the house

east wing was demolished during the early years of the Council's ownership, and after an unsuccessful attempt at opening a museum in 1908 the house was occupied by the Walthamstow Public Health offices until 1940. Early-20th-century deposits relating to the demolition of the east wing (Fig. 5: Phase VI) and a WWII air-raid shelter tunnel leading from a basement to an external area were recorded (Fig. 5: Phase VII). Artists Sir Frank Brangwyn and Arthur Mackmurdo subsequently presented a large part of their 19th- and 20th-century art collections as a memorial to the achievements of William Morris, and the William Morris Gallery was opened by Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, in 1950.¹⁶ The new William Morris Gallery extension was opened in August 2012¹⁷ and provides for the continued celebration of the property's most illustrious past resident.



Fig. 9: East elevation of Water House and wall scars

Acknowledgements

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