

St James's Palace: rediscovering the lost Eastern Wing

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Introduction

An archaeological investigation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (PCA) in 2019 at Marlborough Road, City of Westminster (Fig 1). The site is located on Marlborough Road¹ between St James's Palace and Marlborough House, extending from Marlborough Road's junction with Pall Mall to the north to the Tudor polygonal turret to the east of Colour Court in the south.

The investigation was conducted in preparation for the installation of pedestrian and traffic management systems, and to mitigate damage to the underground archaeological deposits and structures relating to the lost east wing of St James's Palace that had been identified during archaeologically monitored works of the Westminster Ceremonial Streetscape Project² and the Public Realm Improvement Scheme.³ This article looks at how the findings from the 2019 investigation, combined with the information from previous works, have improved our knowledge

and understanding of the demolished eastern wing of St James's Palace.

Archaeological evidence:

Medieval

The site of St James's Palace was originally the location of the hospital of St James the Less, a leper hospital which was founded before 1189 within a marshy stretch of land and a considerable distance from human habitation.⁴ Possible remains of the medieval hospital were found in 1838 during repairs to the Chapel Royal at the palace, when Norman stone mullions and other masonry were uncovered.⁵ In addition, during 1925 excavations under Colour Court, the foundation of the north wall of a building and medieval tiles were found, with burials on either side of the wall suggesting that this was the site of the hospital chapel.⁶

Other remains possibly associated with the hospital were seen in 1990 when a substantial chalk block foundation supporting a partial course

of ashlar Reigate stone wall was recorded, together with architectural fragments of 13th–19th-century date, pottery dating from the mid-12th century onwards and fragments of 14th-century decorated floor tiles.⁷

16th Century

St James's Palace was built in 1531 by Henry VIII and originally stood alone within St James's Park and hunting grounds. It was used primarily for state occasions and housing relatives, including his illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy, whilst the Tudor monarchs themselves resided at nearby Whitehall Palace.⁸ When Henry VIII took possession of the hospital lands in 1531 the surrounding area consisted mostly of open land. Layers of made ground, seen during the archaeological investigation in all three trenches, were found to contain material from the 16th and 17th centuries, and therefore are likely to relate directly to levelling associated with the original construction of St James's Palace.

Recovered from the made ground was a 1601 jetton, issued by the Nuremberg *Rechenmeister* Hans Krauwinckel II (c. 1586–1635) and used primarily for arithmetic calculation. Such tokens are frequently encountered during excavation of archaeological material from the 16th century, when numerical literacy became more widespread, and are typically of the Nuremberg 'Rose/Orb' series displaying a tressured *Reichsapfel* on the obverse and central rose on the reverse. However, the example discovered at Marlborough Road exhibits the suckling Romulus and Remus on the reverse, and the presentation of the two infants to the shepherd Faustulus by their foster mother, Acca Larentia, on the obverse (Fig 2), displaying a familiarity with classical literature and mythology and

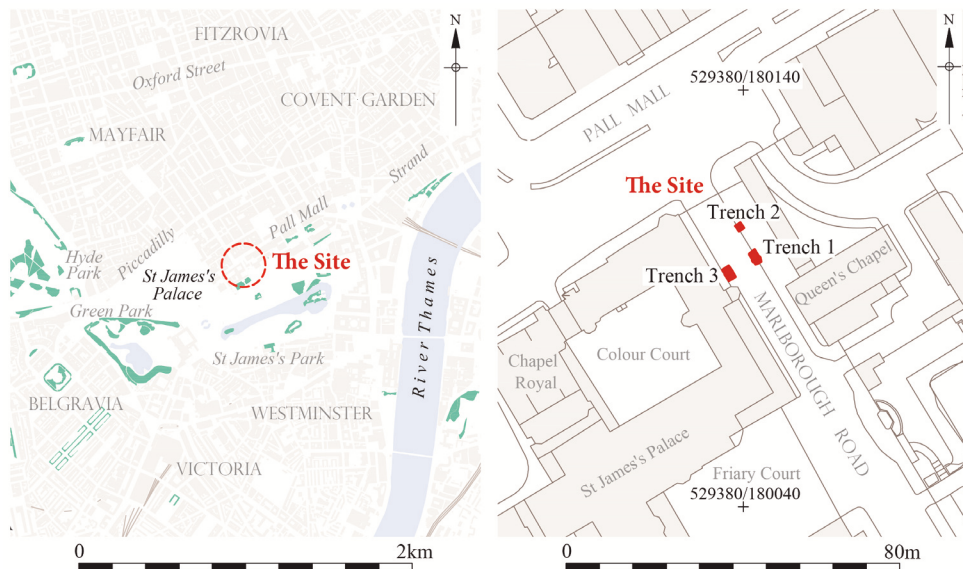


Fig 1: site and trench location



Fig 2: jetton of Hans Krauwinkel II, 1601

therefore likely belonging to a member of the aristocratic elite.⁹

The original palace built by Henry VIII consisted of four courtyards surrounded by ranges of red brick buildings with stone dressing.¹⁰ Of the original palace, all that now remains is the gatehouse, Chapel Royal and the walling of some of the courtyards including the north and east wings of Colour Court (Fig 3).¹¹ In the 2018 watching brief at St James's Palace Forecourt, the foundation of the external eastern turret of Colour Court was uncovered (Fig 4), and it is believed to be one of the surviving parts of the original Tudor palace.¹² Revealing a base of Reigate stone, it may represent stone from demolished parts of the hospital re-used during the construction of Henry VIII's palace.

17th Century

The palace was first extended to the east with the addition of the Queen's Chapel, which was completed by 1626 to allow Henrietta Maria to practise Roman Catholicism upon her marriage to Charles I. From 1649 until the Restoration in 1660, St James's Palace served as a barracks and prison, while the Queen's Chapel became a store for the contents of St James's library. Under Charles II, repairs were undertaken to restore the Palace for royal habitation and to prepare the Queen's Chapel for the arrival of the Catholic Queen, Catherine of Braganza.¹³

During this same period a cloistered friary was constructed in the location of the current Marlborough House; this was partly destroyed by fire in 1682 and then restored. Evidence of small-scale industrial metalwork activity¹⁴ in the form of hammerscale,¹⁵ slag, vitreous residue, charcoal and coal within a pit

to the north of the site (Fig 5), along with pottery dated 1630–80, post-medieval brick fragments and deposits of mortar are consistent with this phase of restoration. A layer of mortar sealing the pit and seen throughout Trench 2 in the north of the site probably represented the external ground surface during the remainder of the 17th century, when it is believed this area lay outside the limits of the Palace building itself but remained within the grounds of the Palace. This layer was truncated by a later linear feature.

1700–29

After 1698, when fire destroyed Whitehall Palace, St James's Palace

became the principal royal residence in London in 1702 and underwent many adaptations. Around this time Queen Anne commissioned a new set of State Apartments at the palace, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, resulting in a new south-west wing. Marlborough House was also built by Sir Christopher Wren between 1709 and 1711 for the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. To allow for its construction the friary attached to the Queen's Chapel was demolished.¹⁶

By 1729, the eastern wing of St James's Palace extended from the outer turret of Colour Court in the north-west, incorporated most of the Queen's Chapel and continued to align with the south-eastern range of Paradise Court (later to become Friary Court).¹⁷ A north-west/south-east wall, at least 5m long by at least 0.50m wide, was revealed in both Trench 3 and the watching brief of 2018 (Figs 4 & 6). It was constructed from red brick with a Reigate stone core and bonded with a hard, pale grey/white lime mortar, and was seen to run parallel to the existing north-eastern external wall of the current Palace.

Analysis of the brick fabric and mortar has suggested that it was built after 1700 and, as this corridor is known to have been present by 1729

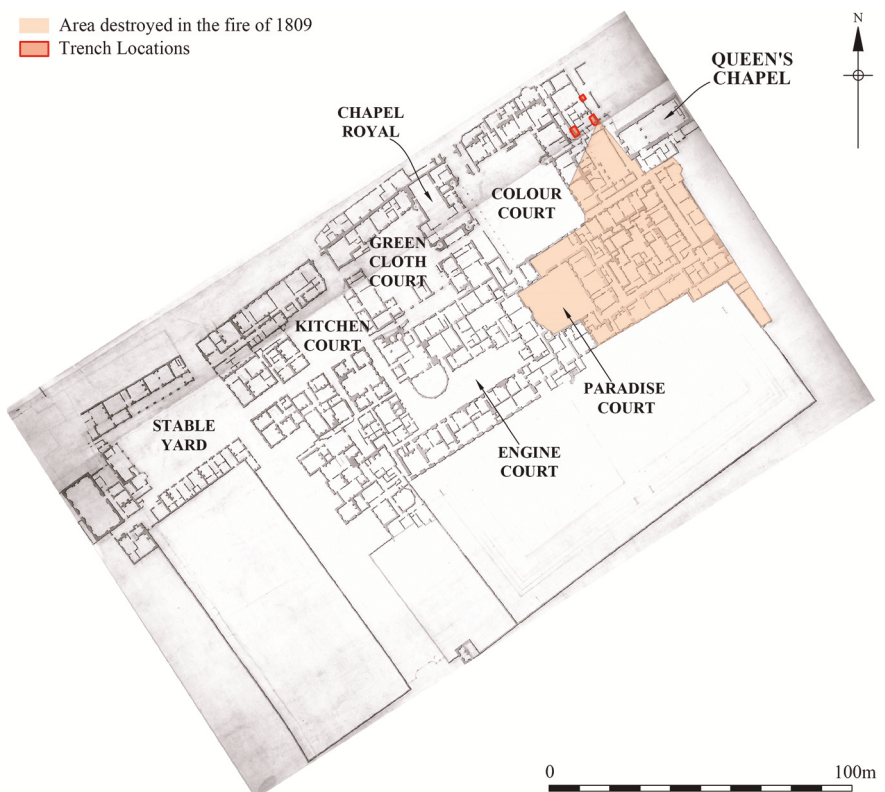


Fig 3: plan of St James's Palace, 1793



Fig 4: 16th- and 18th-century masonry overlaid on to the 1793 Floor Plan

(see Fig 4), it would indicate that this structure was built between 1700 and 1729. Reigate stone has been seen within the foundations of the eastern Tudor turret and it is likely to be a further example of re-used building material. It is unlikely, however, that this material originated from the hospital buildings themselves as the hospital's stone tower is believed to have been demolished during the 16th or early 17th century.¹⁸

This wall probably represented the external wall of a corridor of rooms to the north of the Tudor turret. Possible internal walls¹⁹ within this corridor were observed in the 2018 watching brief and, although only seen in plan, their location and construction, being a singular brick thick, makes it likely, particularly as plans of the palace from 1729 and 1793 show a number of internal divisions.

1729–93

Over time a number of outhouses had

been built against the external walls of the palace to the east of the Clock Tower, including a barber's shop, a coach house, alehouse and a public toilet. The public toilet was demolished in 1736, with the remaining buildings demolished upon expiry of their lease in 1748.²⁰

This allowed for the extension of the east wing of the palace, with primarily a two-storey building, which was extended with a third storey and bow window, and by 1793 the northern corner of the palace extended to fill what is now Marlborough Road (Figs 3 & 4).²¹

Plans of St James's Palace from this time show the thickness of the previous external wall to have doubled in width. This was seen during the investigations with the

addition of a 0.40m thick brick wall to the north-east face of the previously external wall of the corridor of rooms (Figs 4 & 6). On the same alignment on the north-eastern side of Marlborough Road, a further substantially thick brick wall was seen within both Trenches 1 and 2 (Figs 4 & 5), forming the external north-eastern wall of the extended palace. The function of these rooms is not known, but a drain constructed through the foundation of the wall in Trench 2 to the north might suggest that it was a service room.

A further wall on the same north-west/south-east alignment was observed c. 2.6m to the north-east. The masonry wall was 0.60m wide and was traced for a distance of c. 8m. It is depicted on the 1793 plan of the palace as a garden or boundary wall (Fig 3), and formed a passageway which allowed access to the Queen's Chapel to the south-east for palace outsiders at a time when Catholicism was not widely practised and places of worship were not commonplace.

19th Century

In 1809, much of the east and south ranges of the palace were destroyed by fire, including one of the original courtyards of Henry VIII's palace (Pheasant Court) and most of Paradise Court, (later renamed Friary Court) (Fig 3). Much of the ruins lay untouched for several years with the exception of the state rooms which were restored by 1813.²² Between 1822 and 1824



Fig 5: Trench 2, looking south-west, showing a 17th-century pit and ditch, cut by a later 18th-century wall and drain (1m scale)

demolition took place between Colour Court and the Queen's Chapel to create a passage for pedestrian access between Pall Mall and The Mall. A pit was observed to the south of the site in Trench 3 containing an iron masonry cramp and chalky mortar, along with clay tobacco pipes dated to the 19th century; this pit along with a heavily truncated cut feature were likely related to this phase of demolition and associated repair during the early 1800s.

The finds assemblage recovered from the 18th-century drain in Trench 2 yielded clay tobacco pipes dated 1730–1910 and pottery dated 1580–1700, which together suggest that the drain had silted up and fallen out of use at some point after 1780, most plausibly when the rooms were demolished in 1822–4.²³

In 1844, James Pennethorne first became involved in discussions about the future of St James's Palace and its surroundings, including building a road to the east of the palace, a road across St James's Park, and extending Pall Mall in the west to Green Park. Nothing was done until 1856 when a modified scheme was agreed upon, which comprised widening the passage into a road between St James's Palace and Marlborough House to the east (now Marlborough Road), the construction of a suspension footbridge across the lake in St James's Park (now the location of the Blue Bridge) and the erection of a single-storey lodge and gates at Marlborough House.²⁴ The

construction of the road led to the eastern part of the palace being demolished to provide a wide thoroughfare.

Conclusion

Despite being a major royal residence for nearly 500 years, remarkably little is known about the early history of St James's Palace and the medieval leper hospital that previously occupied the site. There has been very little archaeological work to date within the palace so any opportunity to conduct archaeological investigations is welcome. The watching brief in St James's Palace forecourt and the investigations as part of the Westminster Ceremonial Streetscape project have allowed a lost part of the eastern part of the palace to be uncovered, which accords well with the 1793 survey of the palace.

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Fig 6: Trench 3, looking south-east, the early 18th-century wall can be seen along the right side of the trench continuing beyond the excavation, with a later 18th-century wall abutting it (1m scale)

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1. The site is centred at NGR TQ 29501 80094.
 2. S A Harris *Westminster Ceremonial Streetscape Project Location K: Marlborough Road, London SW1A IBG: an assessment of an archaeological investigation* PCA unpub rep (2019) and R Banens *Westminster Ceremonial Streetscape Project: Location K: Marlborough Road, London SW1A IBG: Summary of an Archaeological Watching Brief* PCA unpub rep (2018).
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 4. K Scott *St James's Palace: A History* (2010), 16–17.
 5. M B Honeybourne 'The Leper Hospitals of the London Area' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **21** (1) (1963), 54.
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8. *Op cit* fn 4, 27.

9. M Andrews 'Appendix 7: Jetton Assessment' in S A Harris *op cit* fn 2, 52–4.

10. *Op cit* fn 6, 128–9.

11 *Ibid*, 128.

12. *Op cit* fn 3.

13. *Op cit* fn 4, 54 and E Walford, 'St James's Palace', in *Old and New London: Volume 4* (1878) 100–22.

Source: *British History Online* <https://tinyurl.com/y54qkijb> [accessed 5 March 2020].

14. K Turner 'Appendix 10: Environmental Assessment' in S A Harris *op cit* fn 2, 59–61.

15. M Gaimster 'Appendix 6: Metal Finds Assessment' in S A Harris *op cit* fn 2, 51.

16. *Op cit* fn 4, 57

17. *Ibid*, 72.

18. *Ibid*, 30–1.

19. *Op cit* fn 3, 32.

20. *Op cit* fn 4, 80.

21. *Ibid*, 80 & 97.

22. *Ibid*, 96.

23. *Ibid*, 96.

24. G Tyack *Sir James Pennethorne: Architect and Urban Planner* (1987).