

TRIAL PITS AT ELTHAM PALACE

London Borough of Greenwich, SE9 5QE

An Archaeological Watching Brief



September 2013

Trial Pits at Eltham Palace
London Borough of Greenwich, SE9 5QE

An Archaeological Watching Brief

Site Code: ELT13
NGR (centre): TQ 42600 73943

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September 2013

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Abstract

An archaeological watching-brief was undertaken by Compass Archaeology Ltd on the excavation of six pits in the car-parking and greenhouse areas of Eltham Palace, to the south-east of the palace itself. No archaeological finds, features, or deposits, were recovered during this.

The test-pits around the greenhouse had all been disturbed by the construction of the greenhouse, with modern deposits observed to between 0.35 and 0.75m beneath the present ground-surface. These directly overlay dirty/reworked natural clay deposits - any archaeological deposits which may have once existed had clearly been truncated by the construction of the greenhouse.

The two soakage pits in the car-park area retained more of a soil profile. The turf and topsoil overlay a brown silty deposit in both pits, to depths of between 0.25 and 0.5m beneath the modern ground-surface. Two small sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from these deposits. This overlay the dirty clay deposits.

The natural clay deposits were observed in all pits. That in the soakage pits was a slightly dirty clay deposit, observed at between 58.71mOD and 58.74mOD (0.25 – 0.5m beneath ground-surface), with the cleaner natural clay deposits being observed during probing to deeper levels. Natural clay deposits were observed in the trial pits around the greenhouse between 59.06mOD and 59.68mOD (0.35 – 0.75m beneath ground-surface).

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1 Introduction

1.1 This document forms a summary of the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken on the 13th September around the greenhouses and car-parking area of Eltham Palace, London Borough of Greenwich, SE9 5QE. The works involved excavating four test-pits and two soakage and CBR pits, in advance of further work involving the extension of car-parking facilities, creation of a new play area, and construction of a new visitor admission and café building

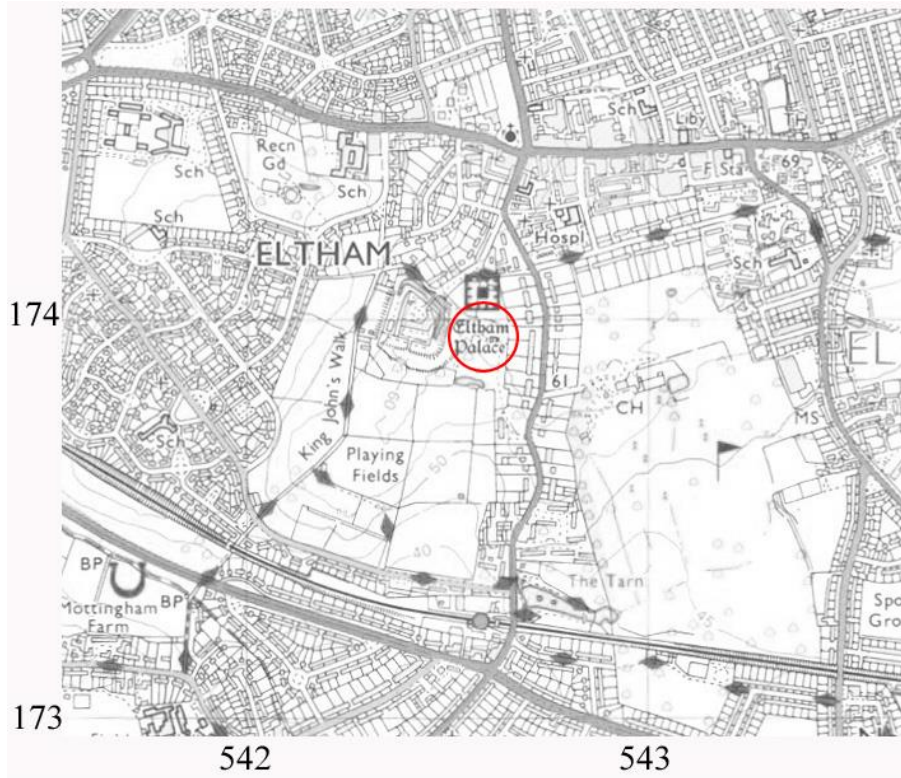


Fig.1: Location of the archaeological watching-brief.



Fig.2: Google-earth image of the area of the watching-brief (outlined in red), to the south-east of Eltham Palace itself.

1.2 The groundworks were commissioned by Helen Baker (National Project Manager) of English Heritage. The groundworks were undertaken by Albury Site Investigations. The watching brief was carried out after recommendations by Mark Stevenson, English Heritage Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service, who monitored the progress of the fieldwork.

2. Location, geology, and topography

2.1 The six pits were located in the area of the greenhouses and car-parking to the south-east of Eltham Palace, London Borough of Greenwich (centred at approximately NGR TQ 42600 73943). The four test-pits were positioned around the exterior of the greenhouses in area 1, with the two soakage pits either side of the car-parking to the south of this in area 2 (fig.3).

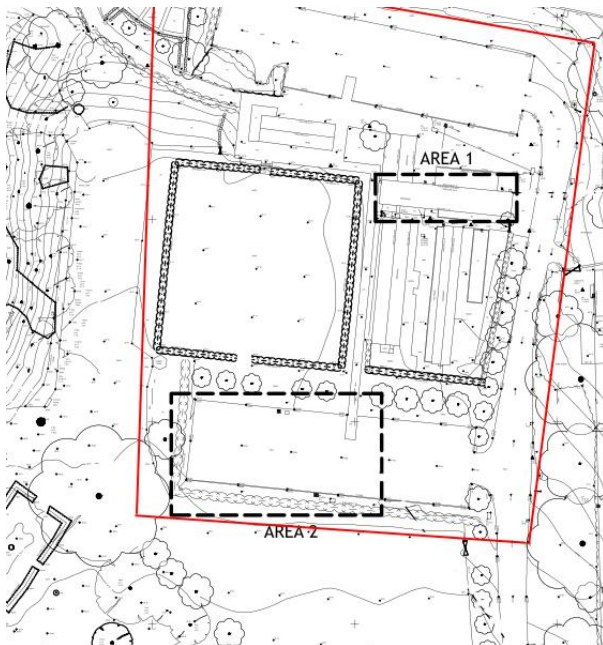


Fig.3: Location of two areas of groundworks.

2.2 The geological survey (BGS, 1998, Sheet 271) indicates that the site lies on the Lambeth Beds.

2.3 An archaeological evaluation on the site in 1996 (site code EBE) uncovered the natural clay or silt-clay. An auger survey undertaken as part of the same phase of work on the area just to the south of this site uncovered the natural deposits at around 0.4 – 0.45m beneath the present ground-surface.

2.4 The level of the site is at approximately 60mOD, on gently sloping hillside.

3. Archaeological and historical background

3.1 Prehistoric

Little evidence has generally been uncovered in this area for prehistoric activity, although the location of the site on a prominent hilltop seems likely to have been favoured by early settlers. The evaluation undertaken in 1996 on the site (site code EBE) uncovered an east-west prehistoric ditch, possibly part of a rectilinear boundary or enclosure, running along the northern boundary of the site (Oxford Archaeological Unit 1996; see fig.4). This was dated to the Late Bronze Age, supporting the possibility that there was some prehistoric activity in this area.

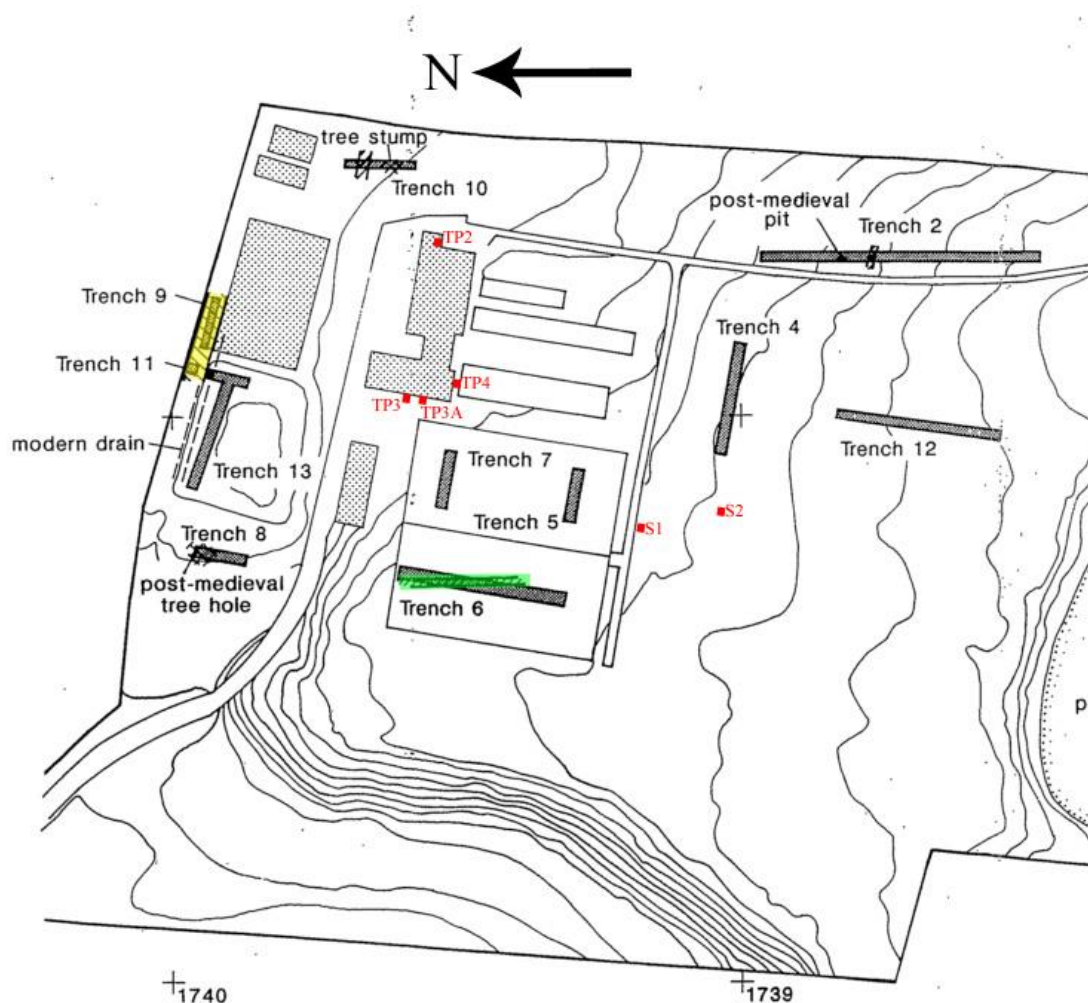


Fig.4: Plan showing the location of the Bronze Age ditch (shown in yellow) uncovered during the 1996 evaluation. Green denotes a post-medieval ditch. The locations of the trial-pits and soakage pits are shown in red.

3.2 Roman

Little evidence for Roman activity has been found in this area. One Roman coin was found on Eltham High Street (MLO2945), and a small Roman farmstead was uncovered in the 1920s some 900m north-east of Eltham High Street.

3.3 Saxon

No archaeological evidence for Saxon activity or settlement has been found in the vicinity of the site. However the Domesday Book records that this area was held by Alwold from Edward the Confessor, suggesting that there may have been some activity at this date.

3.4 Medieval

Settlement and activity in this area existed from at least the late 11th century. Excavations at Eltham Palace in the 1970s uncovered a timber building of late 11th century date, with two further phases of building dated to the late 12th and early 13th centuries, all sealed by a mid-late 13th century cultivation soil (Woods 1982, 215). The documented history states that this area was initially held by Haimo (sheriff of Kent) on behalf of Odo of Bayeux. In 1088 it was passed to the Earl of Gloucester, then to the De Clare family from 1216, to John de Veci in 1278, and to Bishop Bek (Bishop of Durham) in 1295.

Bishop Bek constructed the first stone buildings on the site of Eltham Palace, in the late 11th – early 12th centuries. Parts of these, including the western perimeter wall, two towers, chapel, and hall, have been found in excavations.

In 1305 the area was passed to Edward II. It was used as a royal palace for the next 200 years. During this time much rebuilding and modifications took place – in 1475 the Great Hall, stone moat bridge, and lodgings were built; and Henry VIII rebuilt the chapel.

The land to the south of the royal palace was part of the royal park in this period, and was presumably wooded and used for hunting. That to the east (the area of the site) may have been used for orchards and a tilt-yard, with the brick wall which forms the northern part of the site possibly being part of this.

3.5 Post-Medieval

From the mid-16th century the palace was in decline, such that by the early 17th century it was said to be in disrepair. During the Commonwealth it was passed to Colonel Nathaniel Rich, who demolished most of the buildings. In 1633, following the restoration of the monarchy, it reverted back to the king who leased it to Sir John Shaw who rebuilt the Old Lodge and laid out ornate gardens to the south.

Cartographic evidence provides a more detailed insight into the history of the site in the post-medieval period. Rocque's mid-18th century map (fig.5) shows the palace buildings in decline, but with some of the avenues and gardens of Shaw's house. The site itself appears to cross the boundary between two fields – an orchard to the south, and a cultivated field to the north.



Fig.5: Extract from Rocque's 1741-46 Map, with site marked.

Archaeological excavations support the picture of this area being generally undeveloped until at least the 18th / 19th centuries. No finds pre-dating the 18th century were found during the 1996 evaluation on the site, and post-medieval features consisted of two field boundaries and one probable drainage ditch (Oxford Archaeological Unit 1996; see fig.4).

The 1844 Tithe Map (fig.6) also depicts the site in generally open and undeveloped land, crossing two main fields and with only one small building in the western part of the site. The 1869 OS Map (fig.7) shows it in broadly the same way.

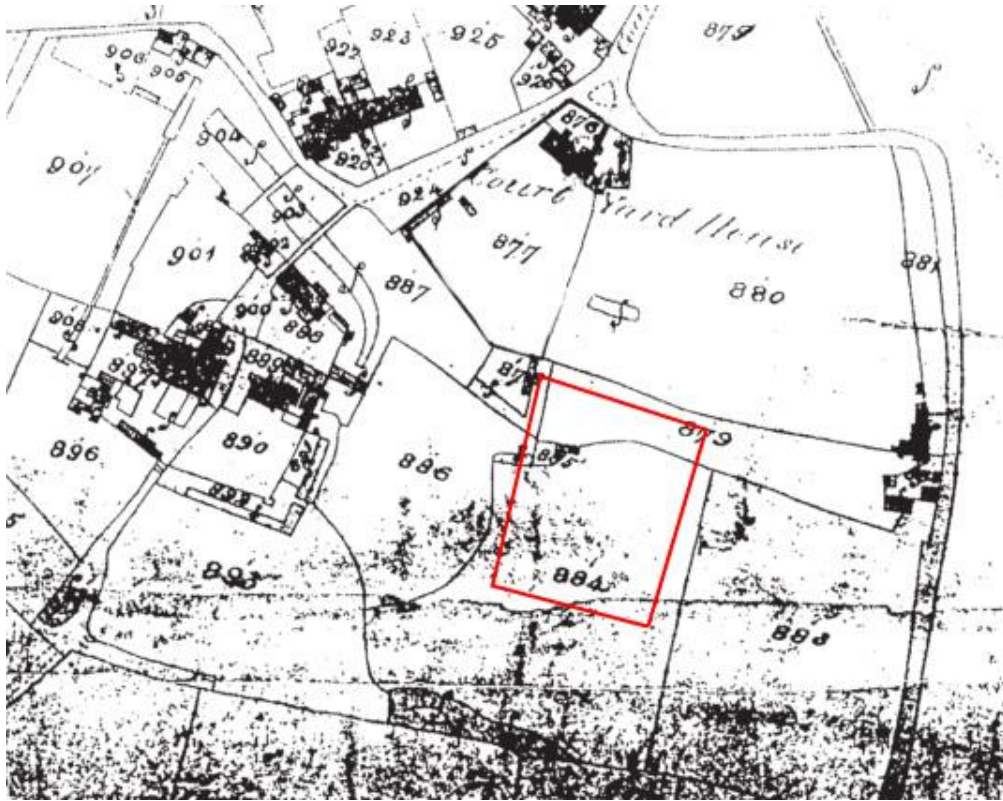


Fig.6: Extract from the 1844 Tithe Map, with site marked.

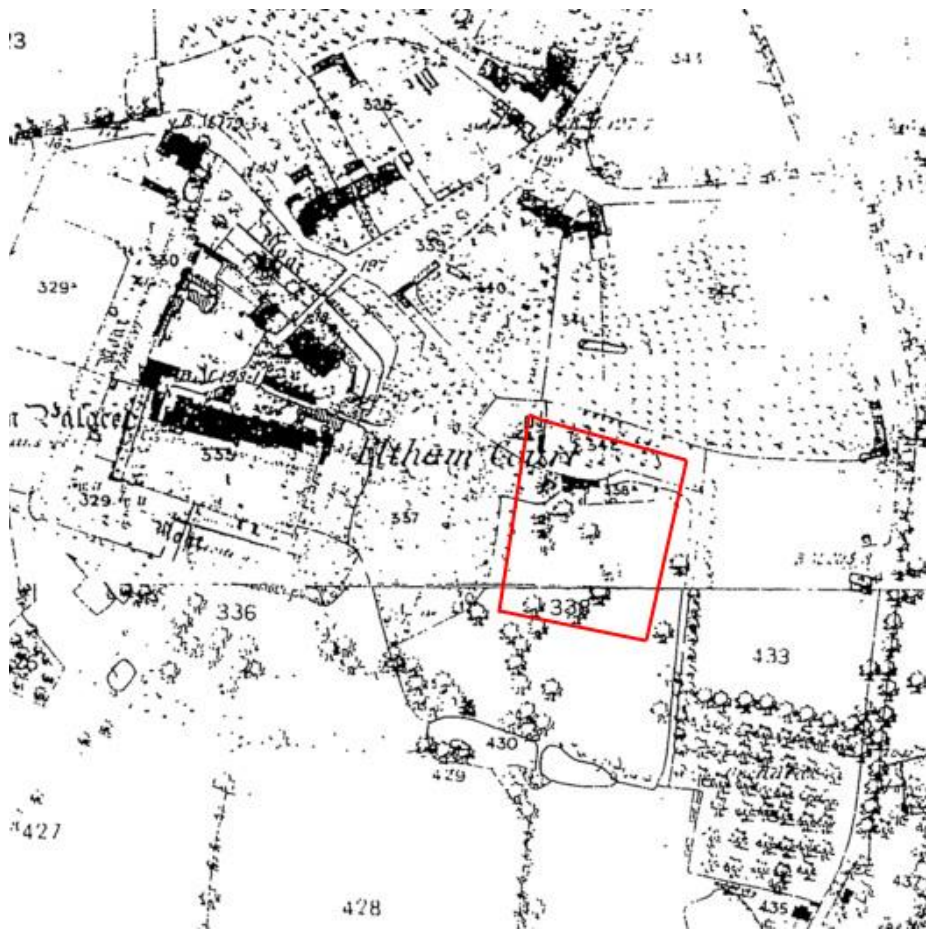


Fig.7: Extract from the 1869 OS Map, with site marked.

In 1933 Stephen Courtauld obtained the lease for Eltham Palace. He restored the Great Hall, constructed Eltham Hall, extended the moat, and laid out new buildings, to broadly the form found today. The 1957 OS Map (fig.8) shows the site following this development. The site consists of tennis courts and buildings in the central part (as today), with open areas to the north and south of this (before the construction of the road and car-parking areas).

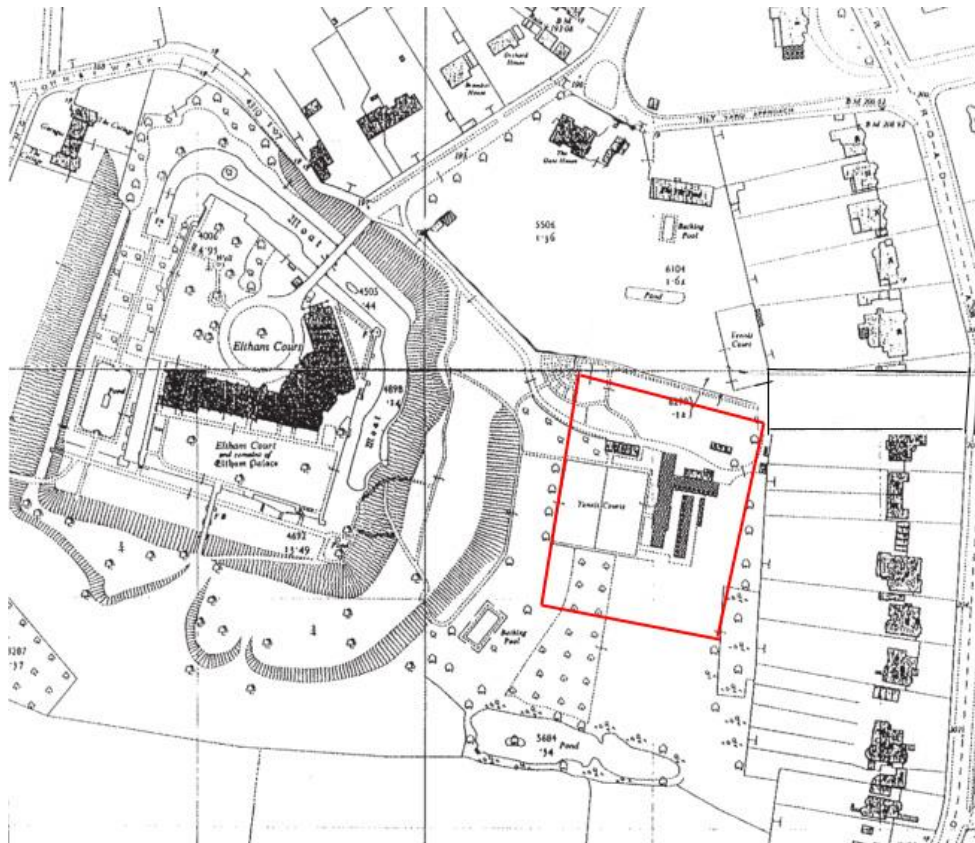


Fig.8: Extract from the 1957 OS Map, with site marked.

4. Archaeological research questions

The fieldwork represented an opportunity to address the following general research questions:

- Is there any further evidence for prehistoric activity on the site, particularly in relation to the Bronze Age ditch uncovered in the 1996 evaluation?
- Is there any evidence for Roman activity on the site?
- Is there any evidence for Saxon – medieval activity in relation to Eltham Palace to the west of the site? In particular, is there any evidence that this area was used as a tilt-yard / orchards during this period?
- What is the evidence for post-medieval activity on the site? Is there any evidence for anything pre-dating the 18th century? What form (agricultural, etc) does the evidence for later activity take?

- At what levels do archaeological or geological deposits survive across the area?

5. Methodology

5.1 Fieldwork

The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (in particular, *Standards and Practice in Archaeological Fieldwork, Guidance Paper 3*) and to the standards of the Institute for Archaeologists (*Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*). Overall management of the project was undertaken by a full member of the Institute.

The excavation of all pits was undertaken by hand.

Adequate time was given for investigation and recording of the observed pits. The archaeological monitoring included an on-site photographic, drawn, and written record. A *pro forma* Trench Record sheet was completed for each pit, recording the nature of exposed deposits and details of any archaeological finds and features. Where suitable, finds/samples were collected from deposits for dating purposes. Photographs, recording representative trench sections and general site locations, were also taken. Levels were derived from the site-survey.

Both the Client and Mark Stevenson, English Heritage, were kept advised of the progress of the fieldwork.

5.2 Post-excavation work

The fieldwork was followed by off-site assessment and compilation of a report, and by ordering and deposition of the site archive.

Finds were treated in accordance with the appropriate guidelines. Finds and artefacts were retained and bagged with unique numbers related to the trench records. Assessment was undertaken by appropriately qualified staff.

Copies of this report will be supplied to the Client, and English Heritage GLAAS. A short summary of the fieldwork has been appended to this report using the OASIS Data Collection Form, and in paragraph form suitable for publication within the 'excavation round-up' of the *London Archaeologist*.

6 Results

Each pits will be discussed in turn (see figs.9 and 21 for their locations). This will include a discussion of their stratigraphy, features, any finds, plus a selection of photographs. The four test-pits will be discussed first, and then the two soakaway pits. It should be noted that trial-pit 1, on the northern side of the greenhouse, was aborted due to the existence of a drain.



Fig.9: Plan showing the location of the trial pits (in area 1, see fig.3).

6.1 Trial Pit 2

Trial-pit 2 was located on the north-eastern corner of the greenhouse, and measured approximately 0.4m in width (east-west), by between 0.45m and 0.55m in length (north-south), by approximately 1.1m in depth. Further auguring in this pit took place to c3m in depth.

The brick foundations of the greenhouse were observed in the southern section to c1.2m beneath the modern ground-surface.

The other sections consisted of c50mm of paving slabs, over 80mm of sand bedding, over 180mm of a grey stoney-sandy-clay (modern make-up deposit for the paving slabs). This overlay between 0.2 and 0.45m of a very disturbed modern silty deposit, with large chunks of brick rubble and concrete in. Beneath this was a solid homogeneous clean grey clay deposit (the natural deposit, although potentially contaminated by the boiler room to the west), observed from between 0.5 and 0.75m beneath the modern ground-surface (59.43mOD – 59.68mOD) to the limit of excavation. Deeper auguring recorded more natural clay deposits, cleaner and more solid with depth.

A boiler room is believed to have once been positioned just to the west of this trial-pit. This may account for the depths of modern disturbed ground observed in this pit.

No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded.



Fig.10: *Photo of the south-eastern corner of pit 2. 1m scale.*



Fig.11: *Photo of the eastern section of pit 2. 1m scale.*



Fig.12: *The western section of pit 2.*

6.2 Trial Pit 3

Trial-pit 3 was positioned on the western side of the greenhouse, on the boundary between the single-storey greenhouse to the north and main greenhouse to the south. This measured 0.25m in width (north-south) by 0.3m in length (east-west), and was excavated to a depth of 0.65m. Further auguring took place to c3m in depth.

The foundations of the greenhouse were observed in the eastern section down to c1m in depth.

The other sections consisted of 50mm of paving slabs, over approximately 0.3m of disturbed modern deposits. This consisted of a loose dark grey-brown-black silty-clay deposit, with chunks of brick rubble and concrete in. This directly overlay the relatively clean yellow-brown clay (natural deposits), observed approximately 0.35m beneath the modern ground-surface (59.27mOD) and continuing for 0.3m to the limit of excavation. Continued auguring to c3m uncovered more clay, getting cleaner with depth.

No finds or features of archaeological significance were observed.



Fig.13: *Photo of the south-eastern corner of pit 3. 0.5m scale.*



Fig.14: *Photo of the southern section of pit 3. 0.5m scale.*

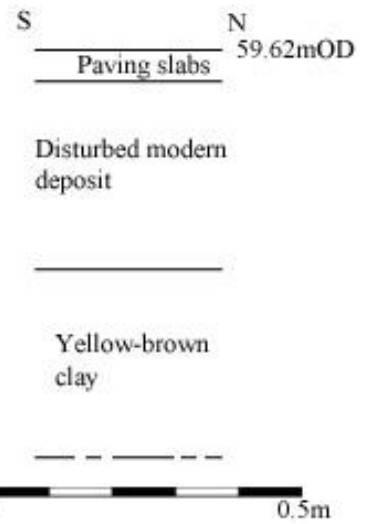


Fig.15: *The western section of pit 3.*

6.3 Trial Pit 3A

Trial-pit 3A was located just to the south of pit 3, on the western wall of the greenhouse. This measured 0.45m in length (east-west) by 0.22m in width (north-south), and was excavated to c0.65m in depth (with deeper auguring to c3m).

The foundations of the greenhouse in the eastern section were observed to c0.7m beneath the modern ground-surface.

The stratigraphy in the other sections consisted of 50mm of paving slabs, over c0.5m of a loose silty-clay disturbed modern deposit. This contained chunks of brick rubble, etc, within it. This directly overlay a dirty yellow-clay (the uppermost, slightly disturbed, natural deposits), observed for 0.1m (at approximately 0.55m beneath the modern ground-surface, 59.06mOD) and continuing beyond the limit of excavation. Deeper auguring uncovered cleaner clay deposits.

No finds or features of archaeological significance were observed.



Fig.16: *Photo of pit 3A. 0.6m scale.*



Fig.17: Photo of the north-eastern corner of pit 3A. 0.6m scale.

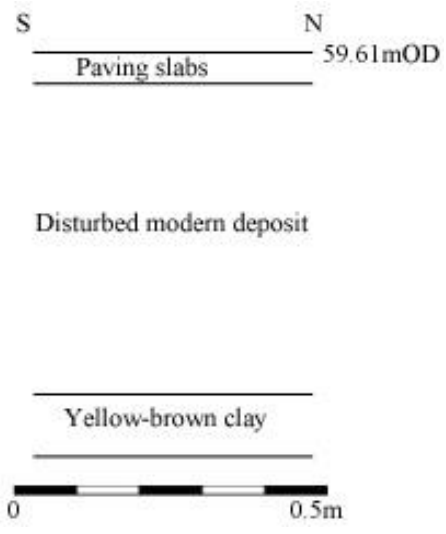


Fig.18: The western section of pit 3A.

6.4 Trial Pit 4

Trial-pit 4 was positioned on the northern wall of the greenhouse to the south of pits 3 and 3A. It measured 0.3m in length (east-west) by 0.26m in width (north-south), and was excavated to a depth of 0.15m, with deeper auguring to c2.75m.

The concrete foundations of the greenhouse building were observed 0.13m beneath the modern ground-surface (beneath 50mm of paving and 80mm of loose topsoil). These were 20mm thick. Excavation did not continue beyond this, however the deeper auguring did uncover clay deposits.

No finds or features of archaeological significance were observed.



Fig.19: Photo of pit 4, from above. 0.2m scale.

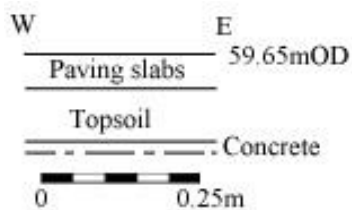


Fig.20: The northern section of pit 4.

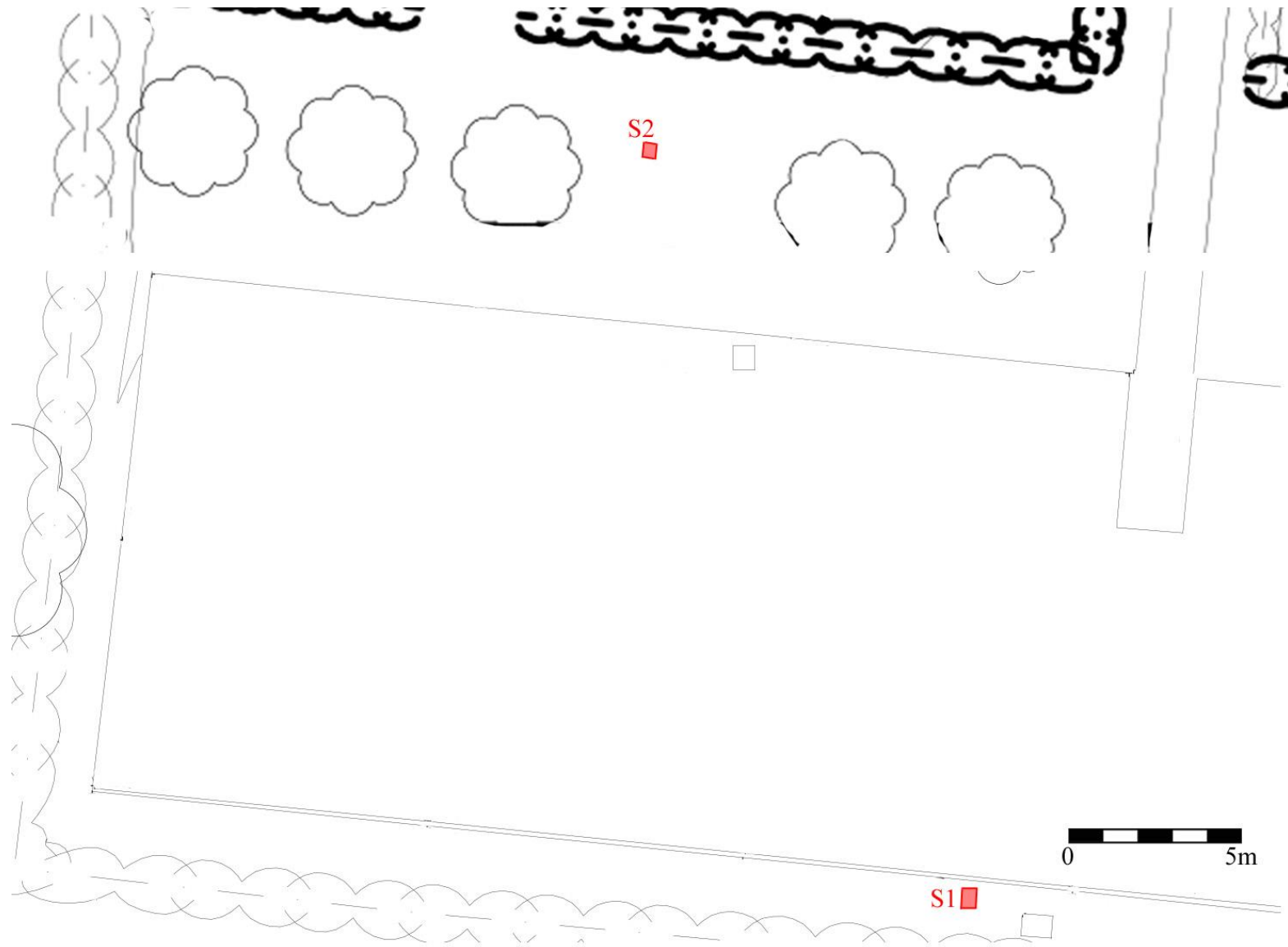


Fig.21: Plan showing the location of the soakage pits (in area 2, see fig.3).

6.5 Soakage Pit 1

Soakage pit 1 was located on the southern side of the car-park area (in area 2). It measured 0.65m in length (north-south) by 0.42m in width (east-west), and was excavated to $c0.75\text{m}$ in depth.

The turf and loose mid-brown garden topsoil was observed for $c100\text{m}$ in thickness. This overlay a mid-light brown silty deposit, with occasional small pieces of ceramic building material, chalk, pebbles, etc, observed for 0.15m in depth. Within this was one small sherd of blue transfer-printed ware, dated to between 1830 and 1900. This presumably reflects the general 19th century activity in this area (as found during the evaluation), with this area generally remaining as open fields.

This overlay the solid yellow clay, observed at $c0.25\text{m}$ beneath the modern ground-surface (58.74mOD) and observed for 0.5m, continuing beyond the limit of excavation. This was not completely, clean, as contained some pebbles, fragments of ceramic building material, and concrete fragments; although was presumably the uppermost, slightly disturbed, level of natural deposits.



Fig.22: Photo of the south-western corner of soakage pit 1. 0.6m scale.



Fig.23: Photo of the southern section of soakage pit 1. 0.6m scale.

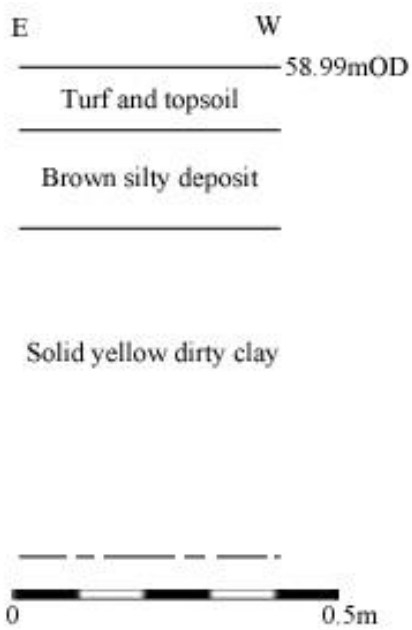


Fig.24: The northern section of soakage pit 1.

6.6 Soakage Pit 2

Soakage pit 2 was positioned on the northern side of the car-parking area, within area 2. This measured 0.4m in length (north-south) by 0.3m in width (east-west), and was excavated to $c0.7$ m in depth.

The turf and loose garden topsoil was $c50$ mm in depth. This overlay a mixed mid-light brown silty deposit, with occasional pieces of ceramic building material and chalk in. One small sherd of Staffordshire slipware, dated 1650-1800, was recovered. The site fell generally within areas of open land / orchards at this date.

The yellow-brown clay deposit was observed $c0.5$ m beneath the modern ground-surface (58.71mOD), and observed for 0.2m in thickness (continuing beyond the limit of excavation). This was not completely clean, as contained flecks of ceramic building material and chalk. Deeper auguring, to $c1.5$ m, showed the clay deposits getting cleaner with depth – by $c1$ m beneath the modern ground-surface it was clean.



Fig.25: Photo of the south-eastern corner of soakage pit 2. 0.6m scale.



Fig.26: Photo of the southern section of soakage pit 2. 0.6m scale.

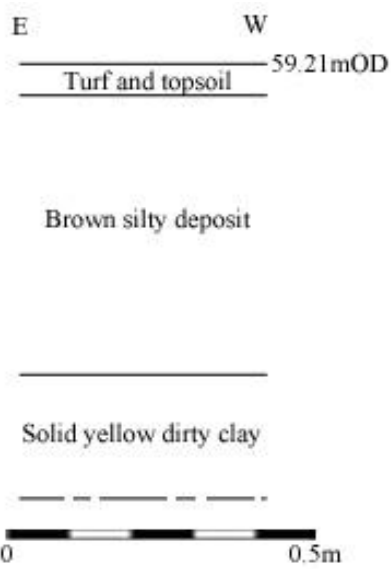


Fig.27: The northern section of soakage pit 2.

7. Conclusions

This archaeological watching brief therefore uncovered no finds or features of archaeological interest.

The test-pits around the greenhouse had all been disturbed by the construction of the greenhouse, with modern deposits observed to between 0.35 and 0.75m beneath the present ground-surface. These directly overlay dirty natural clay deposits - any archaeological deposits which may have once existed had clearly been truncated by the construction of the greenhouse.

The two soakage pits in the car-park area retained more of a soil profile. The turf and topsoil overlay a brown silty deposit in both pits, to depths of between 0.25 and 0.5m beneath the modern ground-surface. Two small sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from these deposits. This overlay the dirty clay deposits.

The natural clay deposits were observed in all pits. That in the soakage pits was a slightly dirty clay deposit, observed at between 58.71mOD and 58.74mOD (0.25 – 0.5m beneath ground-surface), with the cleaner natural clay deposits being observed during probing to deeper levels. Natural clay deposits were observed in the trial pits around the greenhouse between 59.06mOD and 59.68mOD (0.35 – 0.75m beneath ground-surface).

No archaeological finds or features were therefore encountered during this archaeological watching brief. Those around the greenhouse had been heavily disturbed by the construction of the greenhouse, and, although those in the car-parking areas retained more of a soil profile, the only finds recovered were two small pieces of post-medieval pottery, with no archaeological features identified.

8. Bibliography

General Sources

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Eltham Tithe Map and Award, 1844.

Ordnance Survey Maps. Various dates and scales.

Rocque, 1741-6, *Map of London and Ten Miles Round*.

Appendix I: OASIS data collection form

OASIS ID: compassa1-159237

Project details

Project name	Eltham Palace - watching brief on trial pits
Short description of the project	<p>An archaeological watching-brief was undertaken by Compass Archaeology Ltd on the excavation of six pits in the car-parking and greenhouse areas of Eltham Palace, to the south-east of the palace itself. No archaeological finds, features, or deposits, were recovered during this.</p> <p>The test-pits around the greenhouse had all been disturbed by the construction of the greenhouse, with modern deposits observed to between 0.35 and 0.75m beneath the present ground-surface. These directly overlay dirty natural clay deposits - any archaeological deposits which may have once existed had clearly been truncated by the construction of the greenhouse.</p> <p>The two soakage pits in the car-park area retained more of a soil profile. The turf and topsoil overlay a brown silty deposit in both pits, to depths of between 0.25 and 0.5m beneath the modern ground-surface. Two small sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from these deposits. This overlay the dirty clay deposits.</p> <p>The natural clay deposits were observed in all pits. That in the soakage pits was a slightly dirty clay deposit, observed at between 58.71mOD and 58.74mOD (0.25 - 0.5m beneath ground-surface), with the cleaner natural clay deposits being observed during probing to deeper levels. Natural clay deposits were observed in the trial pits around the greenhouse between 59.06mOD and 59.68mOD (0.35 - 0.75m beneath ground-surface).</p>
Project dates	Start: 13-09-2013 End: 13-09-2013
Previous/future work	Yes / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	ELT13 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Current Land use	Other 8 - Land dedicated to the display of a monument
Significant Finds	POT Post Medieval
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF

Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON GREENWICH ELTHAM Eltham Palace
Postcode	SE9 5QE
Study area	3.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 42600 73943 51 0 51 26 45 N 000 03 08 E Point
Height OD / Depth Min: 58.71m Max: 59.68m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Compass Archaeology
Project brief originator	English Heritage/Department of Environment
Project design originator	Compass Archaeology
Project director/manager	Geoff Potter
Project supervisor	Emma Jeffery
Type of sponsor/funding body	English Heritage

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Museum of London Archive
Physical Contents	"Ceramics"
Digital Archive recipient	Museum of London archive
Digital Contents	"Ceramics"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Museum of London Archive
Paper Contents	"Ceramics"
Paper Media available	"Correspondence", "Notebook - Excavation", "Research", "General Notes", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section", "Unpublished Text"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Trial Pits at Eltham Palace
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Jeffery, E
Date	2013
Issuer or publisher	Compass Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	5-7 Southwark Street, London, SE1 1RQ
Description	Report detailing the results of the archaeological watching brief. Includes photographs, sections, plans, and text describing each pit.

Entered by	Emma Jeffery (emma@compassarchaeology.co.uk)
Entered on	16 September 2013

Appendix II: London Archaeologist summary

Site Address: Eltham Palace, London Borough of Greenwich, SE9 5QE

Project Type: Watching Brief

Dates of Fieldwork: 13.9.2013

Site Code: ELT13

Site Supervisor: Emma Jeffery

NGR: TQ 42600 73943

Funding Body: English Heritage

An archaeological watching-brief was undertaken on six pits in the car-parking and greenhouse areas of Eltham Palace, to the south-east of the palace itself. No archaeological finds, features, or deposits, were recovered.

The test-pits around the greenhouse had all been disturbed by the construction of the greenhouse, with modern deposits observed to between 0.35 and 0.75m beneath the present ground-surface. These directly overlay dirty natural clay deposits - any archaeological deposits which may have once existed had clearly been truncated by the construction of the greenhouse.

The two soakage pits in the car-park areas retained more of a soil profile. The turf and topsoil overlay a brown silty deposit in both pits, to depths of between 0.25 and 0.5m beneath the modern ground-surface. Two small sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from these deposits. This overlay the dirty clay deposits.

The natural clay deposits were observed in all pits. That in the soakage pits was a slightly dirty clay deposit, observed at between 58.71mOD and 58.74mOD (0.25 – 0.5m beneath ground-surface), with the cleaner natural clay deposits being observed during probing to deeper levels. Natural clay deposits were observed in the trial pits around the greenhouse between 59.06mOD and 59.68mOD (0.35 – 0.75m beneath ground-surface).

Appendix III: Pottery Report

Soakaway 1:

TPW: Blue Transfer-printed ware (underglaze), 1830-1900. 1 sherd, 6g. Bowl

Soakaway 2:

STSL: Staffordshire slipware, 1650-1800. 1 sherd, 8g.