

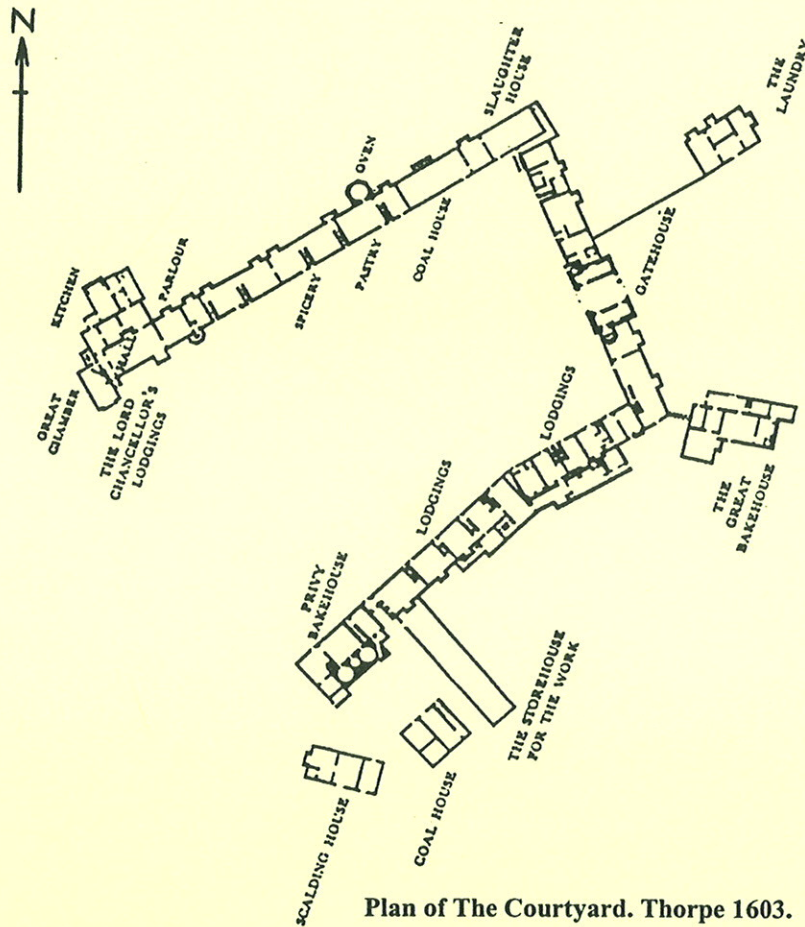
John Wardle

32 Courtyard, Eltham, Greenwich

NGR TQ 425 742

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Project Code CUD WB



Plan of The Courtyard. Thorpe 1603.

Oxford Archaeological Unit

December 1999

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Date: *9/12/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

December 1999

Summary

In November 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at 32 Courtyard, Eltham, Greenwich. Two Test Pits revealed chalk and mortar walls or foundations that probably belonged to part of the medieval Courtyard of Eltham Palace. Possible traces of a tiled floor surface and evidence of an associated demolition phase were observed. The construction trench for the present building was also recorded and the foundations and floor slab added during improvement works in the 1950s were noted.

1 Introduction

The property known as 32 Courtyard is undergoing refurbishment. The development proposal includes the removal of an internal wall, minor alterations to internal door openings and the blocking of a doorway. These works necessitated the excavation of two test pits to assess the load bearing potential of the ground and the nature of the existing foundations.

To satisfy the conditions of the Scheduled Monument Consent an Archaeological Watching Brief was commissioned by John Wardle, structural engineer. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with Ellen Barnes of English Heritage.

The Watching Brief was undertaken on 19 and 22 November.

2 Archaeological and Historical Background

The archaeological background to the Eltham Palace complex and the Gatehouse and Courtyard is the subject of desk based studies carried out by the OAU (OAU, 1996, 1999) the results of which are summarised below.

The site of 32 Courtyard is situated immediately to the north-east of the historic moated site of Eltham Palace (Figure 1). It lies on a prominent hilltop at a height of 60 m OD on Claygate Beds.

The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record indicates no recorded pre-medieval archaeology on the site of Eltham Palace. However the Eltham area does have a possible Roman farmstead 900 m north east beyond Eltham High Street and chance finds of Roman burial urns to the north and east.

Settlement on the site of Eltham Palace can be demonstrated from at least the 11th century from archaeological and historical sources. The earliest recorded structure on the site, identified by Woods' excavations between 1975 and 1979 (Woods 1982), was a timber building dated to the late 11th century with two further phases of wooden building dating to the late 12th and early 13th centuries. It is possible that this phase of activity may not just be confined to the area of the later moated site. The first substantial stone-built remains on the site belong to the late 13th-century palace of Anthony Bek, the Bishop of Durham.

Little now remains of Bek's stone-built manorial complex although excavations undertaken by Dr D Strong and Maurice Craige in 1952 revealed the western perimeter wall and two towers at its north-west and south-west corners. Investigations by Humphrey Woods in 1975-9 (Woods, 1982) revealed the remains of possible chapel and hall structures. Bek passed the manor house to Edward II in 1311 and it was used extensively as a royal palace for the next 200 years with various additions and episodes of rebuilding particularly in the 14th century. During this period much of the surrounding area consisted of royal parkland. The focus of medieval settlement seems to have been to the north.

From the middle of the 16th century the importance of the palace declined and it fell into disrepair, becoming little more than a hunting lodge. During the Commonwealth, Colonel Nathaniel Rich appears to have demolished most of the buildings with the exception of the great hall. At this time the parks were also heavily plundered to provide timber for Cromwell's shipyards.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, when the site was little more than a picturesque ruin, a series of developments and new building work took place, culminating in 1933 with the acquisition of the lease of Eltham Palace from the crown by Stephen Courtauld. He completed the restoration of the Great Hall, demolished the 19th century tenements and constructed the new Eltham Hall, also undertaking extensive landscaping of the grounds

A field evaluation by the OAU (OAU 1996) was carried out on land to the east and south-east of the moated site. A number of post-medieval features which were interpreted as field boundaries were noted as well as a possible prehistoric ditch, although no evidence for associated settlement was seen.

The plan of the medieval palace is reasonably well known. The Courtyard lay between the current Gatehouse and the bridge over the existing moat (Figure 2). There were three ranges:

- A north-western range that ran down towards the Palace, exactly incorporating the remaining Chancery Buildings used by Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas More;
- A south-eastern range, with kitchens and lodgings, which ran down to the Palace from the approximate centre of the current Gatehouse garden. A long enclosure, used as a "storehouse for the work", projected eastwards beside the current southern boundary of the garden;
- A north-eastern range with the original Gatehouse. Map evidence suggests that the corner of the north-eastern and south-eastern ranges lie within the centre of the area of the current Gatehouse building.

32 Courtyard appears to lie directly over part of the north-western range, just to the north-east of the Lord Chancellor's Lodgings, which are the only buildings of the original courtyard still standing.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established OAU standards (OAU 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

In the area of the two Test Pits (Figure 3) the contractors removed a woodblock floor covering. They then broke out the concrete floor slab using a mechanical breaker and removed some of the hardcore foundation. The Test Pits were then archaeologically excavated by hand and the deposits were cleaned, inspected and individually recorded on proforma sheets. Plans and sections of the pits were drawn and a colour slide photographic record was made.

5 Results

Test Pit 1 (Figure 4)

Test Pit 1 was located within the building of 32 Courtyard, adjacent to the south-eastern wall of the property. It measured 0.85 x 0.70 m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.05 m below the top of the concrete floor slab.

- (9) The natural exposed in the base of the pit was a friable, mottled, mid brown silty clay.
- (8) This was overlain by the remains of the base of a wall or foundation consisting of unshaped chalk pieces ranging from 0.08-0.20 m diameter, set in a light pinkish brown mortar containing numerous lime flecks. Only 0.15 m depth of this feature remained due to truncation of its upper surface. The feature was orientated north-east south-west and 0.85 m length and 0.25 m width were exposed, although neither of these measurements represents its full extent.
- (7) This wall was butted on its south-eastern side by a 0.08 m thick demolition deposit consisting of chalk, mortar, charcoal and pieces of ceramic building material.
- (6) Both the wall and this demolition deposit were overlain by a thin spread of post-demolition material comprising a mid grey silty clay with flecks of brick, mortar and chalk.
- (5) Both these demolition deposits were cut by the foundation trench for the existing front wall of the property, which projected 0.25 m from this wall. The trench was steep sided and excavated archaeologically to a depth of 0.55 m, although latter deepening of the Test Pit by the contractors for their purposes revealed that the foundations for this wall extended nearly 2 m below the top of the floor slab and consisted of a concrete footing supporting the brick wall.
- (4) The construction trench was backfilled with a friable mid-brown silty clay containing numerous pieces of ceramic building material.
- (3) The deposits were sealed by a 0.12 m thick make up layer consisting of tenacious mid-brown clay with sparse specks of building material and charcoal.

- (2) This deposit was overlain by a 0.22 m thick loose hardcore foundation for the concrete slab consisting of brick, tile, concrete pieces and mortar.
- (1) The slab itself was a hard, mid grey concrete 0.20 m thick, containing circa 30% gravel, with a 0.02 m concrete screed on top.

Test Pit 2 (Figure 4)

Test Pit 2 was located within the building of 32 Courtyard, adjacent to a north-west south-east internal wall of the property. It measured 1.10 x 0.75 m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.72 m below the top of the concrete floor slab.

- (18) The natural exposed in the base of the pit was a friable, mottled, mid brown silty clay with evidence of burning on its upper surface.
- (15) This was overlain by the remains of the base of a wall or foundation consisting of unshaped chalk pieces ranging from 0.08-0.16 m diameter, set in a light pinkish brown mortar containing numerous lime flecks. A maximum 0.18 m depth of this feature remained due to truncation of its upper surface. The feature appeared to be orientated north-east south-west. The exposed wall was 0.45 m long and 0.60 m wide. Neither of these measurements represents its full extent.
- (14) Also overlying the natural to the south-east of wall (15) was a discrete area of broken red tiles that was 0.01 m thick. No complete tiles were seen and they may be part of demolition deposit (13), however they did have the appearance of a possible floor surface. A direct relationship with wall (15) could not be ascertained although they did sit on the natural at the same level.
- (13) Sealing both the wall and the possible tile floor was a demolition deposit of chalk, tile, flints and charcoal lenses 0.18 m thick.
- (17) The wall, demolition deposit and natural were all cut by the construction trench for the north-west south-east standing internal wall of the property. The trench was steep sided and was 0.30 m from the wall. It was only excavated to a depth of 0.25 m but observations in Test Pit 1 indicate that it could be up to 2 m deep.
- (16) The construction trench (17) was filled by a friable mid-brown silty clay containing pieces of ceramic building material.
- (12) The deposits were sealed by a 0.12 m thick make up layer consisting of tenaceous mid-brown clay with specks of building material.
- (11) This deposit was overlain by a 0.20 m thick loose hardcore foundation for the concrete slab consisting of brick, tile, concrete pieces and mortar.
- (10) The slab itself was a hard, mid grey concrete 0.20 m thick, containing circa 30% gravel, with a 0.02 m concrete screed on top.

6 Discussion

The sequence of deposits in the two Test Pits is broadly similar and indicates that a building with chalk and mortar walls or foundations sitting on the natural clay was demolished, virtually to ground level. This was followed by the excavation of deep foundation trenches and the construction of the brick walls of the present building. The ground surface was then made up with a silty clay deposit. Finally a hardcore foundation and a concrete floor slab forming the base for a woodblock surface were constructed.

The chalk and mortar walls are constructed from similar levels, and made of the same materials. It is reasonable to assume that the walls are contemporary. The wall in Test Pit 1 (8) has a clear orientation parallel to and inside the present house wall. It can be noted that the older, adjoining buildings to the immediate south-west, which are the only structures of the original courtyard buildings still standing, are set slightly back from the building line and would be in alignment with wall (8). The orientation of wall (15) in Test Pit 2 is less certain due to truncation by the construction trench for the standing wall but it would appear to be running parallel to wall (8).

A survey exists of the Eltham Palace Courtyard buildings by John Thorpe in 1603. When overlaid onto a map of the existing buildings it strongly suggests that these chalk and mortar walls could be part of the front and rear walls of the north-western range of the Courtyard (Figure 2). If the wall in Test Pit 2 does indeed run parallel to the one in Test Pit 1 then the previous Courtyard building would have been *circa* 4 m wide. It should be remembered, though, that the orientation of wall (15) is not certain and it may represent an internal or dividing wall. It is not clear whether these walls would have been trench built as they are heavily truncated. The presence of a possible tiled surface (14) at the same level as the wall in Test Pit 2 would lend weight to the argument that the walls were constructed from the ground surface without a significant foundation trench. However these tiles are broken and were only noted in a small corner of Test Pit 2 with no direct relationship to wall (15) visible. This combined with the fact that tiles were also noted in the overlying demolition deposit means that the tiles could just be part of the demolition and the existence of a surviving floor is only a possibility.

The demolition material noted in both Test Pits appears consistent with walls (8) and (15), containing similar chalk and mortar. The date of this demolition is not clear but the lack of any significant abandonment layers would suggest that rebuilding followed almost immediately.

It is believed that the present building was constructed around 1800 and it appears to be shown on a plan of Eltham Palace dated 1806. The style and materials of the building do not contradict this view. It would be reasonable for the builders to construct their new foundations outside the line of the pre-existing building. The make up layer consisting of deposits (3) and (12) was not securely dated but is more likely to have been deposited to raise the floor level in the property at this time rather than being part of later works.

During the 1950s the property underwent a major refurbishment and the hardcore foundation and concrete floor slab formed part of this work. It is unlikely that the builders would have needed to excavate and then make up the ground again at this time, hence the reason for attributing the make up layer to the earlier rebuilding phase.

David Score
OAU
December 1999

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Oxford Archaeological Unit 1996, *Eltham Palace, London Borough of Greenwich, Archaeological Evaluation*, (unpublished client report, incorporating desktop assessment).

Oxford Archaeological Unit 1992, *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992, Wilkinson D. ed).

Woods H 1982, Excavations at Eltham Palace, 1975-9 *Trans London and Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 33, 215-65.

Cartographic Sources Relevant to the Eltham Palace Area

Eltham Palace, Woolwich, as surveyed by John Thorpe (c.1603) PRO/MPF 228

John Rocque's Map of London and Ten Miles beyond (1741-6)

A Survey of the Parish and Manor of Eltham by John Holmes (1749) PRO/ MR 692

Halstead's map of the Hundred of Blackheath (1798)

Ordnance Surveyors Drawings, Sheet 132 (1797)

Mudge's Map of Kent (1801)

Plan of Eltham Palace (1806) PRO/MR 986

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1" (1816)

Plan of Eltham (1839) PRO/MR 1507

Eltham Tithe Map and Award (1844)

Plan of Eltham (1848) PRO/MPE 730

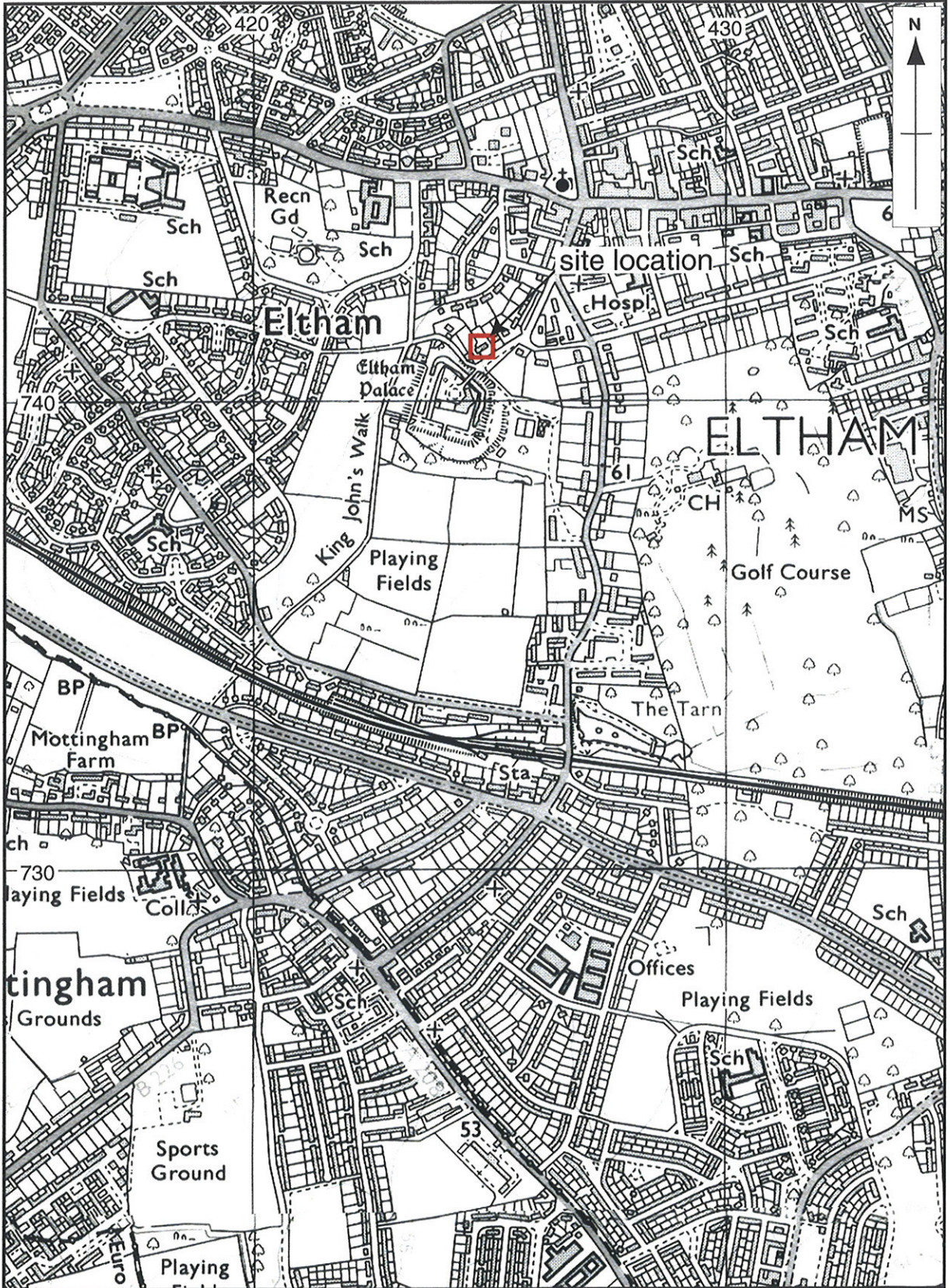
Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" (1869)

Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25" (1897)

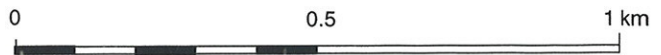
Ordnance Survey 2nd revised edition (1916)

Ordnance Survey 25" (LCC edition) (1935)

Ordnance Survey 1:1250 Scale Plan (1957)



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scale 1:12,500

Figure 1: site location

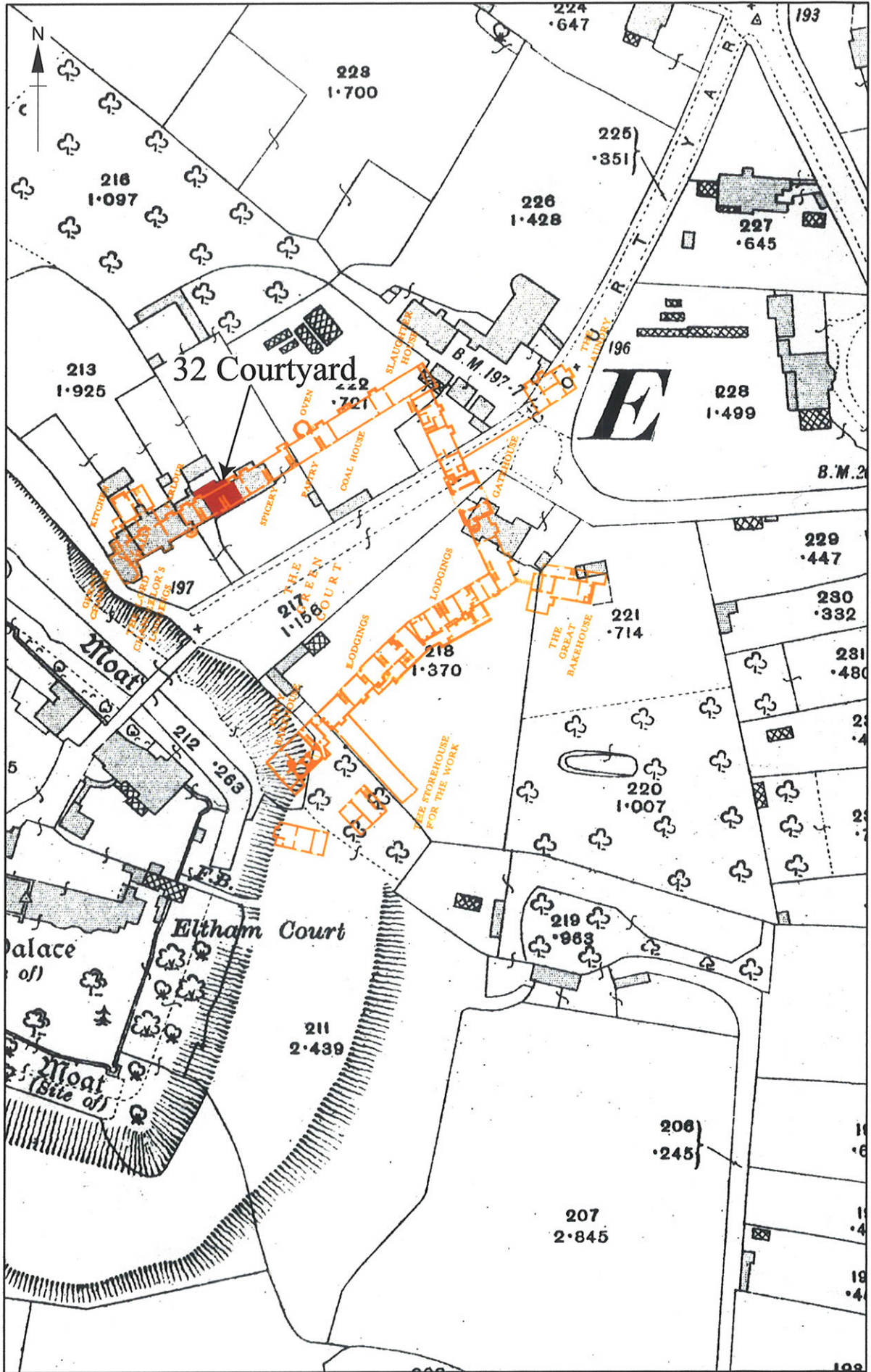


Figure 2: O.S. 25" Plan (1916), (enlarged 150%) showing location of 32 Courtyard overlain by 1603 survey of Eltham Palace Courtyard buildings by John Thorpe.

Floor plan of 32 Courtyard

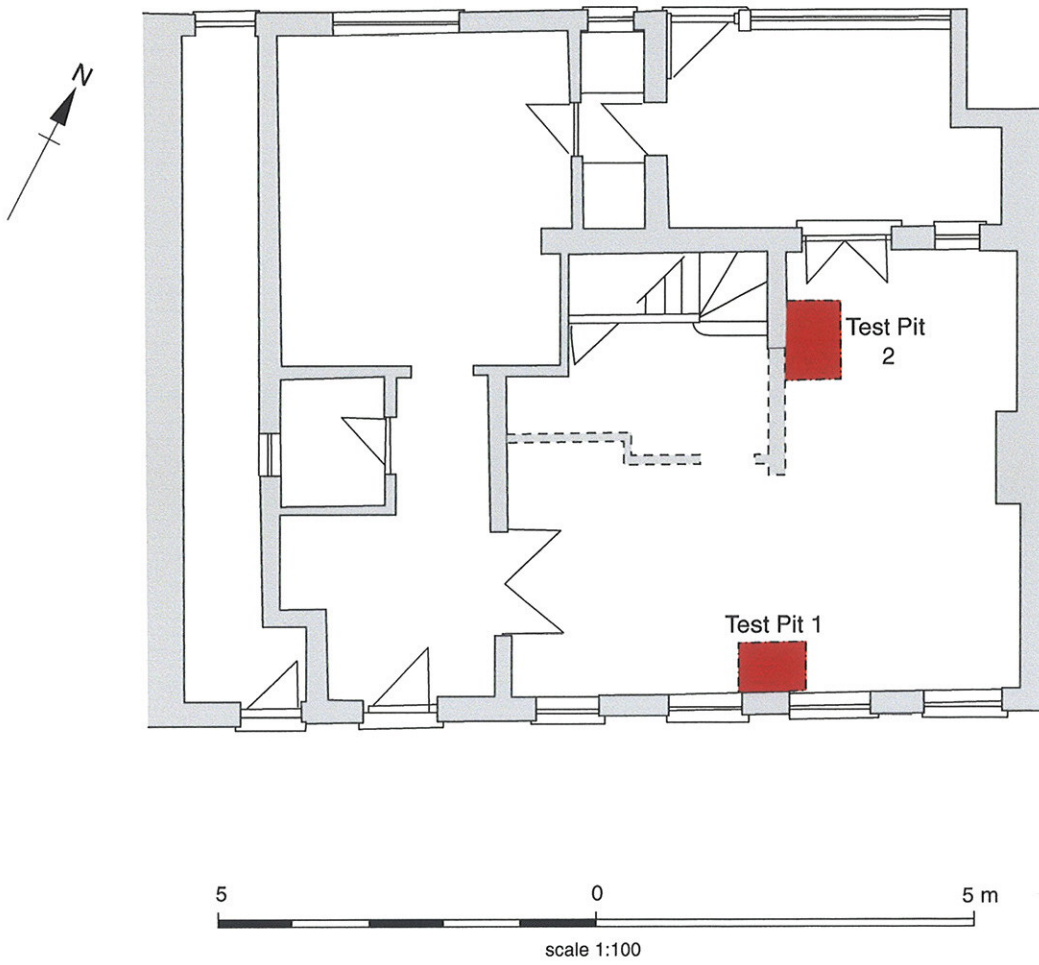
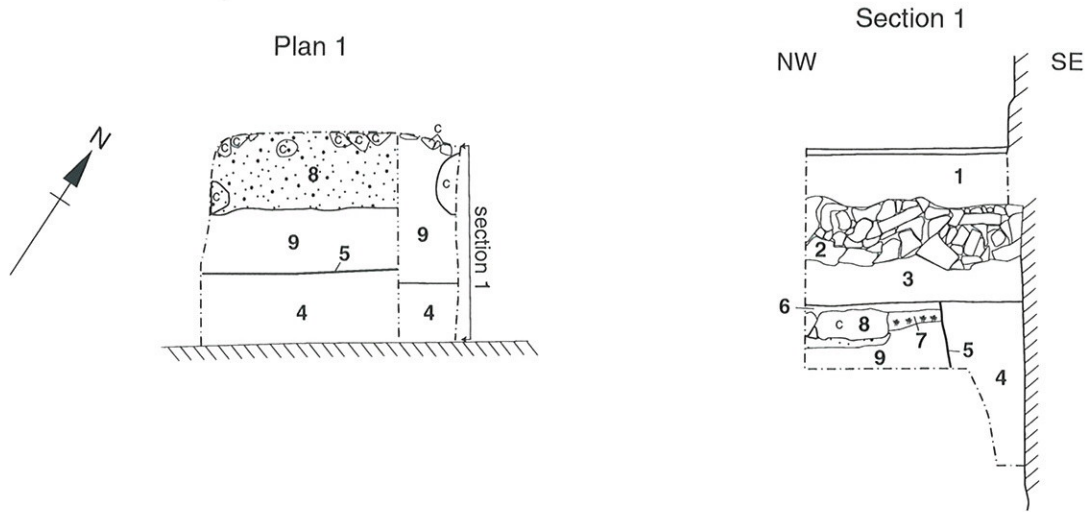
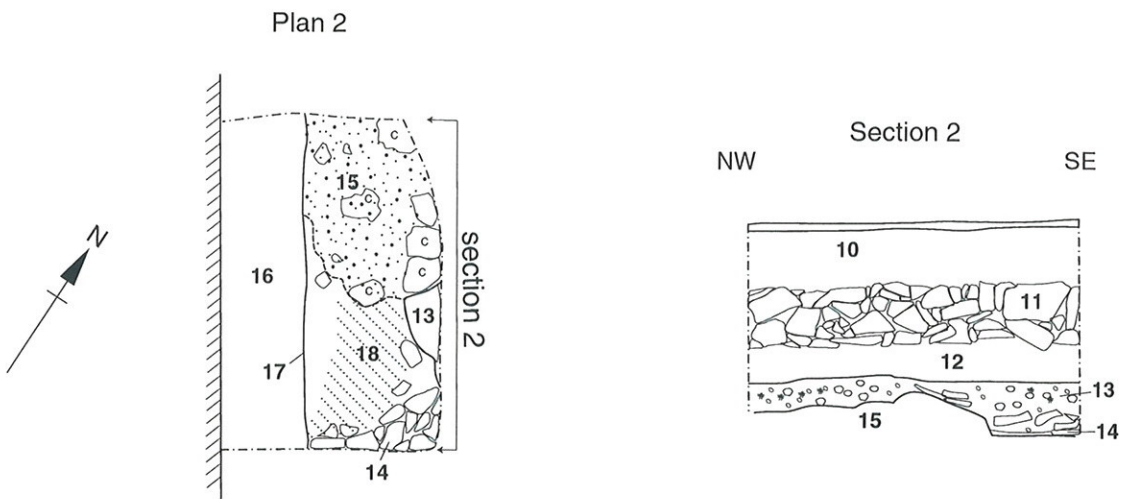


Figure 3: Floor plan of 32 Courtyard, with Test Pit locations

Test Pit 1



Test Pit 2



-  burning
-  mortar
-  chalk
-  charcoal

(section measurements taken from top of concrete floor)



Figure 4: Test Pits 1 and 2, plans and sections



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