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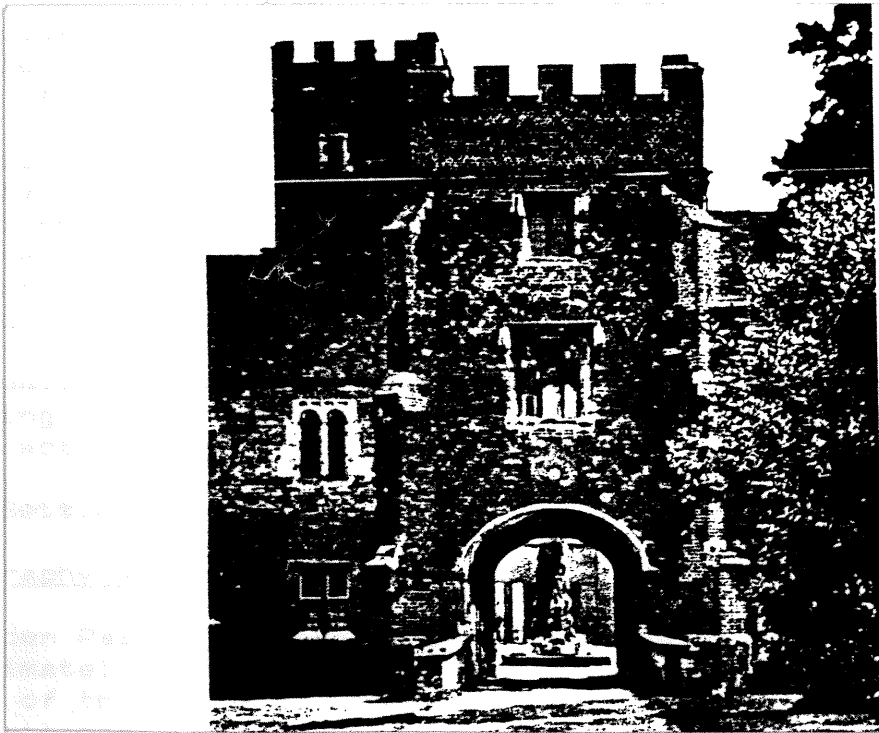
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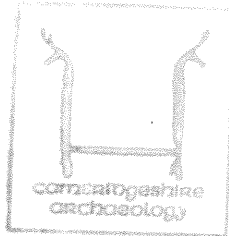
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# Buckden Palace 1989



Cambridgeshire  
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Rural Strategy



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WATCHING BRIEF AT THE INNER GATEHOUSE OF BUCKDEN PALACE

1989

NGR: 519215, 267885

BY WENDY HORTON B.A, M.Phil



## Summary

A watching brief was carried out around the inner gatehouse of Buckden Palace during the construction of new drains and soakaways. The most common find was building debris consisting of red brick fragments, stone, yellow mortar and gravel. This would appear to be modern, dating to the 19th and 20th centuries, and much of it may relate to the rebuilding of part of the gatehouse and other parts of the Palace in the late 19th century. Building foundations of earlier periods were not revealed and nothing was seen during the construction work worthy of preservation. Two of the soakaways appear to have cut through the 19th Century refill of the moat, although this cannot be proven.

## Introduction

Buckden Palace, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, was built as a house for the Bishops of Lincoln and much of what remains dates to the late 15th Century. It comprises a complex of red-brick buildings which are rather striking in appearance. The current owners are the Claretian Missionaries, who are also the main occupants.

A proposal was put forward to convert the inner gatehouse of the Palace, presently unoccupied, into a series of small flatlets. Much of the work involved restoration of the internal fabric of the building, the southern half of which is a grade I listed building. Recording of this was carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council Conservation Section. A further requirement was the construction of new drains and soakaways around the outside of the building and below some of the floors. This provided an opportunity to look out for the foundations or remains of earlier buildings on this site.

We would like to thank Keystone Architects and Designers for funding the archaeological work and also Alan Smith Ltd, Building Contractors, for their co-operation.

## The Setting

### Geography and Geology

Buckden Palace is located in the centre of Buckden, a village approximately 6km southwest of Huntingdon. It lies on the east side of the old Great Northern Road (A1), now re-routed west of the village, and was therefore in a useful location for travelling clerics and others. The building is sited on relatively flat ground, and the underlying geology is river gravel (3rd terrace).

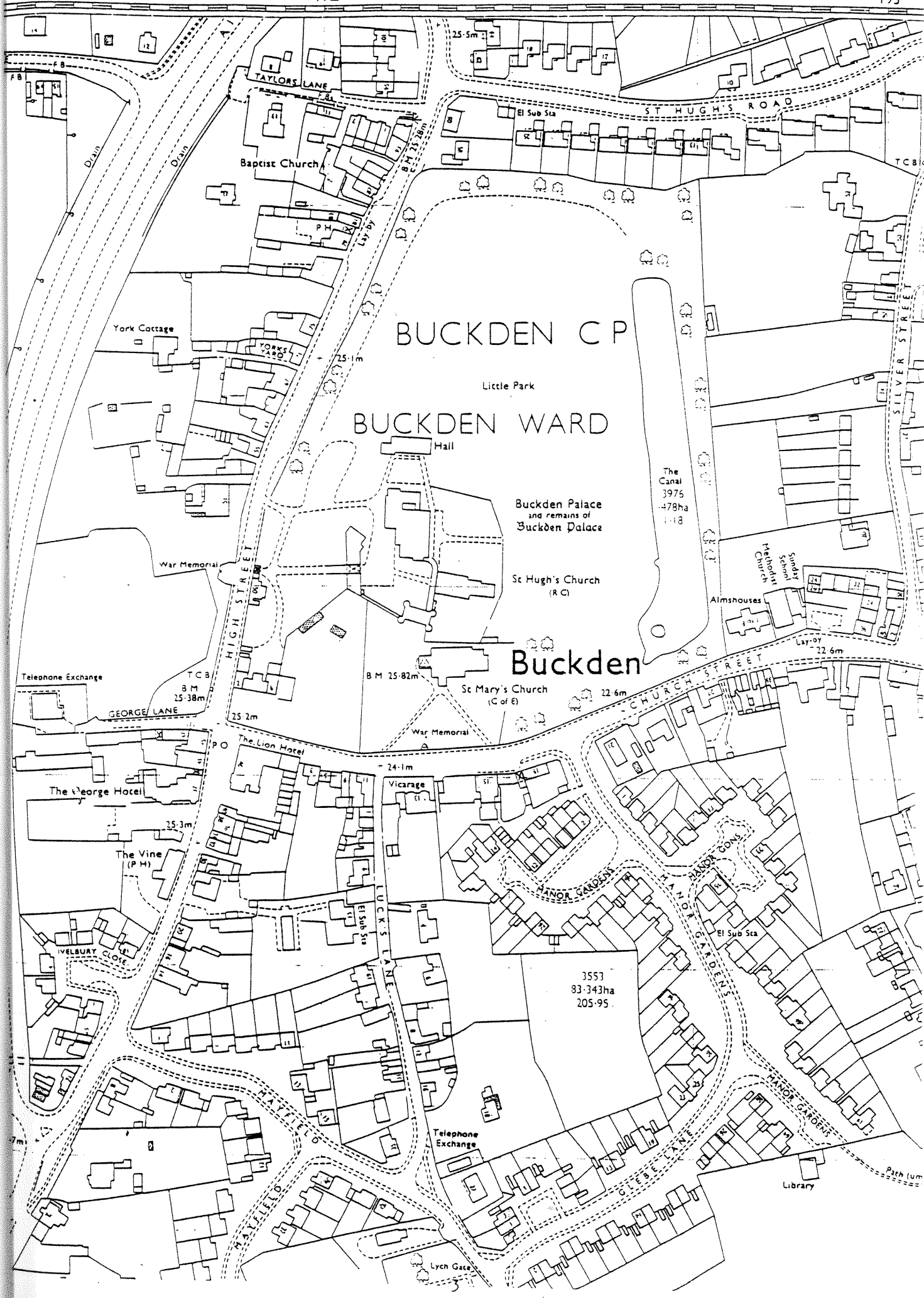
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BUCKDEN CP

Little Park

BUCKDEN WARD

Hall

Buckden Palace and remains of Buckden Palace

The Canal  
3975  
478ha  
1118

St Hugh's Church (R.C.)

Buckden

St Mary's Church (C of E)

Telephone Exchange

GEORGE LANE

The George Hotel

The Vine (P.H.)

IVELBURY CLOSE

The Lion Hotel

Vicarage

LUCKS LANE

Telephone Exchange

Lych Gate

Library

3553  
83.343ha  
205.95

TAYLORS LANE

ST HUGH'S ROAD

HIGH STREET

CHURCH STREET

SILVER STREET

MANOR GARDENS

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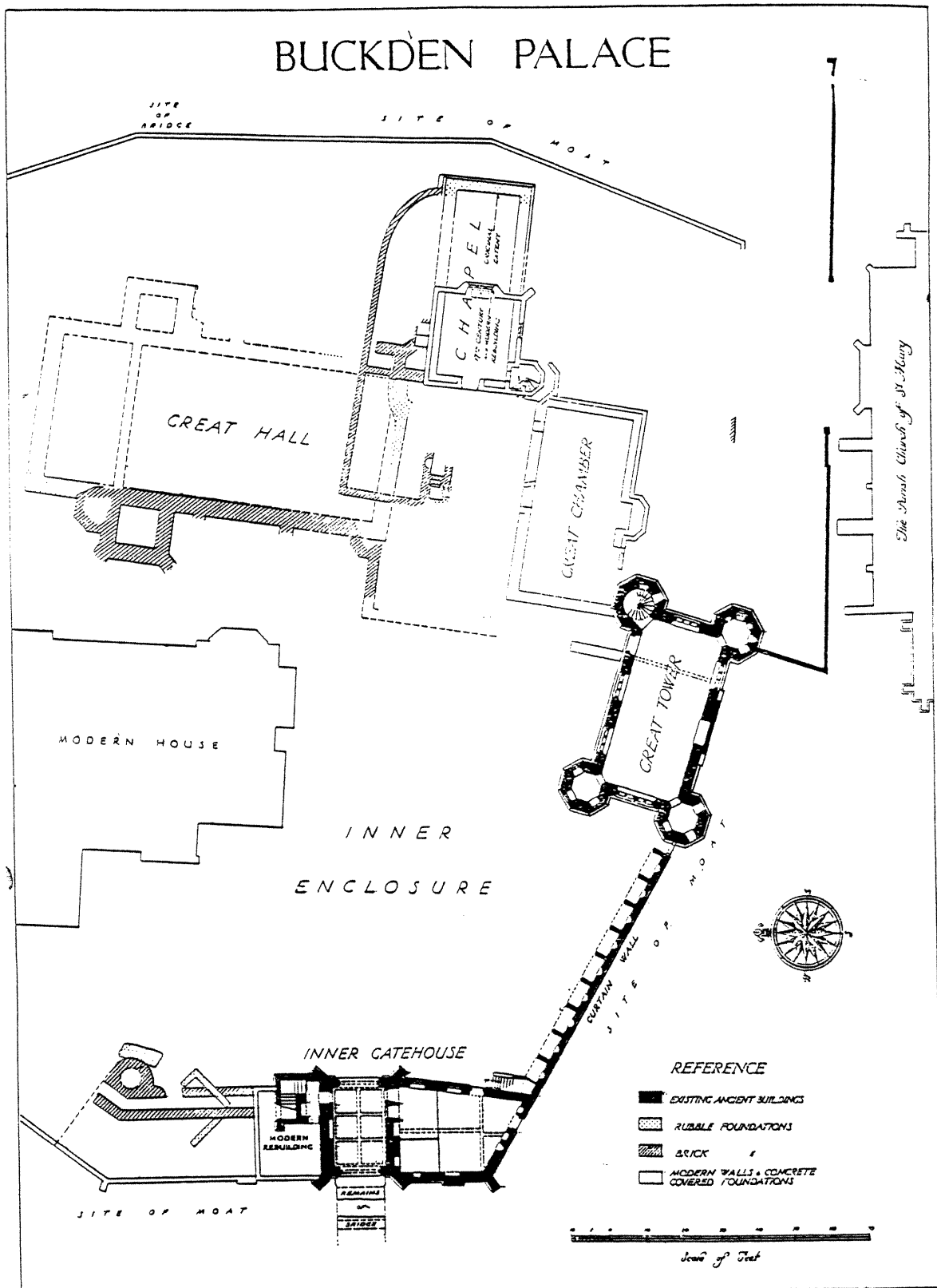
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# BUCKDEN PALACE



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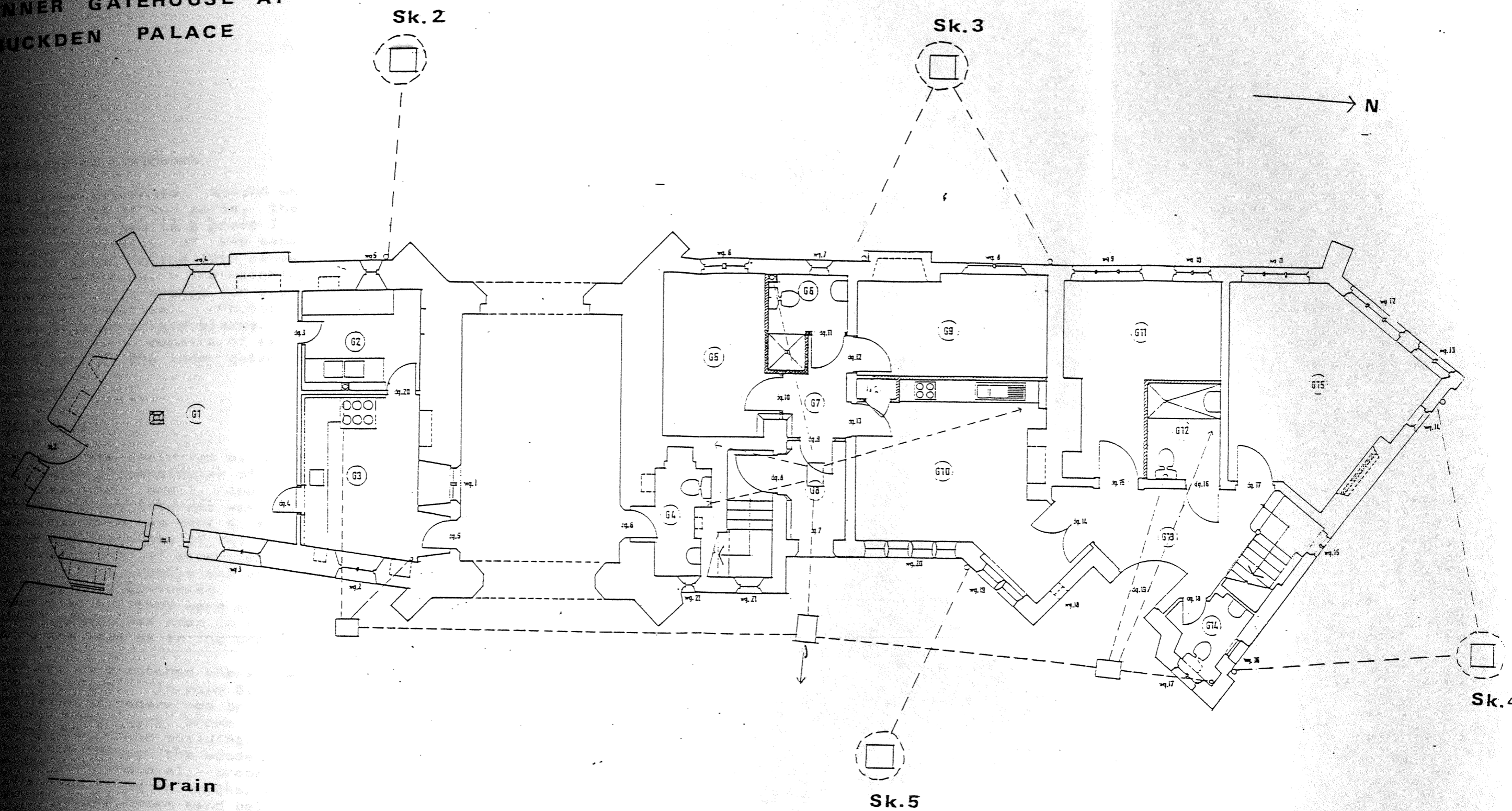
## History

The history of Buckden Palace has been written in detail elsewhere, so only a brief summary is given here. It was built as a house for the Bishops of Lincoln at a time when the Diocese of Lincoln extended southwards to the River Thames. Buckden itself was noted in the Domesday Survey as being a Manor belonging to the Bishops of Lincoln. The first house to be mentioned in the records was apparently built of timber and was in use during the episcopate of Hugh of Lincoln in the late 12th century. It was replaced in 1225 AD by Hugh de Wells, but burnt down in 1291. A new house was immediately constructed. Most of the current red brick Palace, however, dates to the late 15th Century and much of the work was done by Bishop Thomas Rotherham and Bishop John Russell. Bishop Russell was responsible for the inner gatehouse and his arms can be seen on the front of it. The main components of the Palace were: an outer gatehouse, an inner gatehouse, the Great Tower, the Great Hall, the Great Chamber and the Chapel. These features, except the outer gatehouse were enclosed by a moat. The Palace stayed under the ownership of the church until 1870, except for two brief interludes in the 16th and 17th Centuries. It was then taken over by the Claretian Missionaries in 1957, who still own it today. During the last few centuries, many parts of the complex have been renovated, and some demolished and occasionally rebuilt. In 1838, about half of the main buildings were demolished, including the northern part of the inner gatehouse which was later rebuilt. In 1870, the moat, which ran along the west (outer) side of the inner gatehouse was filled in.

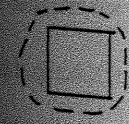
## Previous Archaeological Fieldwork

It is reported in the Parish File of 1926 (RCHM) that the foundations of the Great Chamber, Chapel and parts of the Hall date to the 13th century, as does a wall excavated outside these structures, which may have formed the fourth side of a courtyard. These may have been the original foundations of the house built by Hugh de Wells, which burnt down in 1291. If so, it implies that the houses of the Bishops' changed little in location over the centuries. It is noted in 'History of Buckden Palace' (author unacknowledged) that Dr. R.H. Edleston, who owned the property from 1919, was very interested in the past and carried out excavations. It would appear that he excavated the brick pier and abutment of the eastern span of the bridge which crossed the moat just outside the inner gatehouse. He may also be responsible for the archaeological work carried out on the Great Chamber, Chapel and Hall.

# INNER GATEHOUSE AT BUCKDEN PALACE



Drain



Soakaway

Scale 1:100

## Strategy of Fieldwork

The inner gatehouse, around which the watching brief took place, is made up of two parts; the southern half dates from the late 15th century and is a grade I listed building. The northern part, originally of the same date, was demolished in 1838 and rebuilt later in the 19th century. This section is a grade II listed building. The watching brief was carried out during the excavation of trenches for drains and soakaways (see site plan for their location). Photographs were taken and sketch sections drawn at appropriate places. Features to watch for were the foundations or remains of earlier Bishops' houses, the original north part of the inner gatehouse and the moat.

## Results

### The Drains

The major new drain ran along the inner (east) side of the building, with perpendicular offsets running into the building. The trenches were small, approximately 35cm deep and 40cm wide. Nothing of any interest was seen in the sections, probably because the trenches were so shallow. Building rubble, comprising whole and fragments of red brick, yellow mortar, gravel, and occasional pieces of stone were seen in the dark brown loam topsoil. This rubble was unstratified and looked modern; of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Man-holes were constructed at various intervals, but they were no deeper than the drain trenches. Some modern cement was seen in the section of one, the fills otherwise being the same as in the drain trenches.

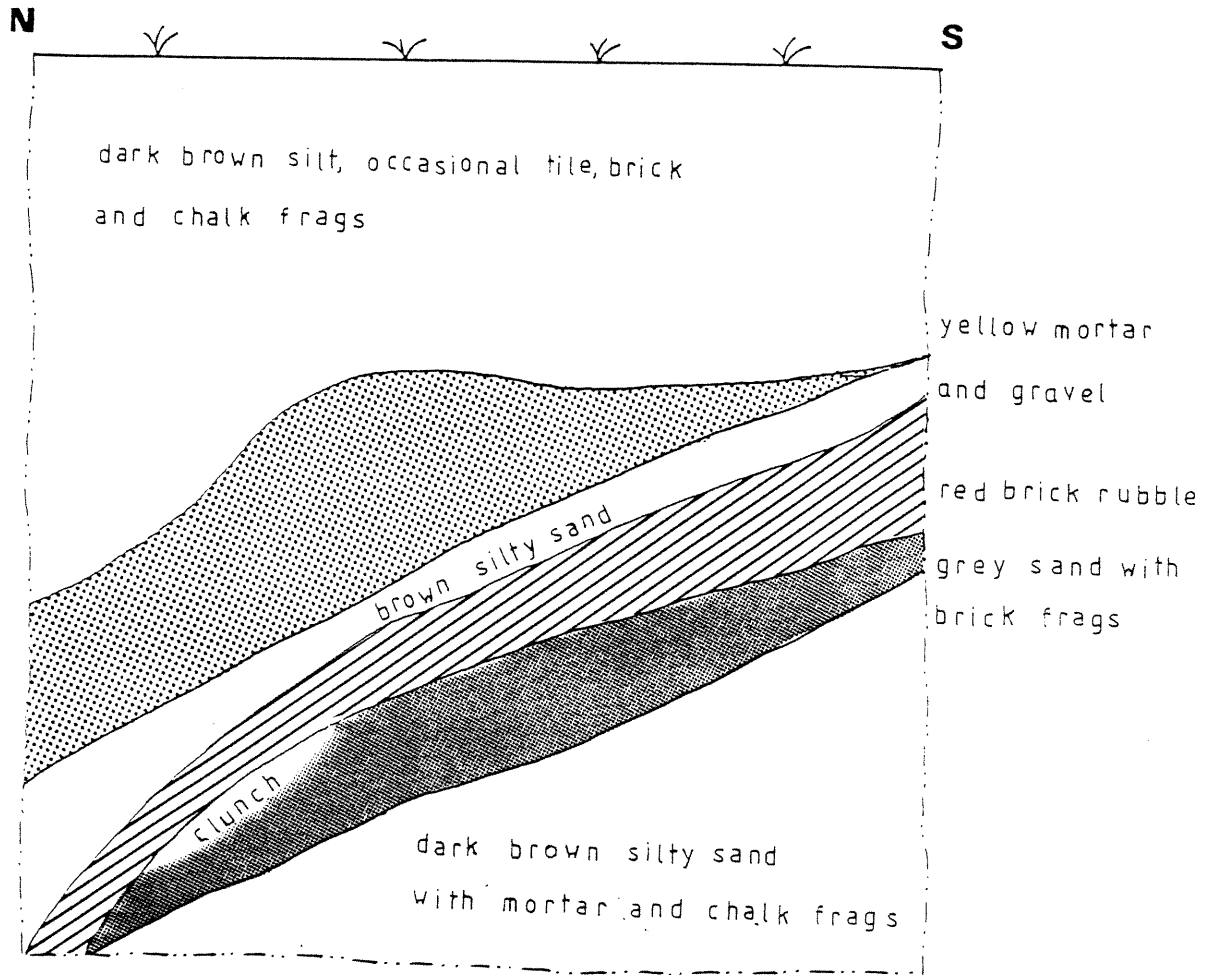
Sections were watched where drain lines cut through floors inside the building. In room G13, at the north end of the gatehouse, one layer of modern red bricks was seen directly beneath the floor, with dark brown loam below. Room G3 is in the Grade I listed end of the building, which dates to the 15th Century. A drain cut through the wooden floor of the room, but the sections showed post-medieval, probably modern material, including some flat, red tiles or bricks, approximately 4cm thick, with a layer of yellow and brown sand below, including moderate stones and fragments of chalk or clunch. Some small fragments of red brick, approximately 2cm across were seen at the south end.

### The Soakaways

The soakaway trenches, being larger than the drain trenches, produced more interesting sections. A watching brief was carried out on numbers 2 - 5.



# SOAKAWAY 3



**East Section**

**Sketch 1:20**

Numbers 2 and 3 were located on the outer (west) side of the gatehouse, and it was hoped that some evidence might be found for the moat, which was filled in in 1870. Its exact width and location, however, is unknown. A bridge crossed the moat immediately outside the entrance gate, with the water running through an arch, the very top of which can be seen opposite (north of) soakaway 2. Only the curving top of the uppermost bricks can be seen.

Soakaway 2: 1.8 x 1.9m square and 1.4m deep. The edges of the moat were not revealed and there were no structures, such as wall foundations or floors. There was a band of tarmac showing in the south section and part of the west section, 55cm down. Above that was dark brown silty loam containing frequent pebbles. Approximately 80cm below the surface in the west and north sections was a layer of gravel, approximately 15cm thick. Also in the north section, 40cm from the surface was a band 15cm deep of light brown silt and gravel containing fragments of red brick and mortar. This band slopes down slightly towards the east. Occasional fragments of red brick and tile were found throughout the fill, and all the material looks modern (19th or 20th Centuries). It is hypothesized that this soakaway is located in the middle of the moat, and thus cuts through the 19th century fill. The edges of the moat are beyond the east and west limits of the soakaway.

Soakaway 3: located to the northwest of the gate was 2.0 x 2.4m square and 2.4m deep. It was the most interesting of the soakaways, since it produced some dramatically sloping stratigraphy. This was particularly clear in the east section (see drawing), where layers of building debris can be seen slumping down together from south to north. These comprise the following layers from top to bottom: yellow mortar and gravel of uneven depth; brown silty sand, approximately 15cm thick; red brick debris, 20-30 cm thick; and light grey-brown sand with fragments of red brick and clunch. Below these slumping layers was a deposit of dark brown silty sand with occasional fragments of mortar and chalk.

On the opposite, west side of the soakaway, the layer of red brick debris can be seen sloping down even more sharply from south to north, with a gradient of approximately 1 in 2. Stratigraphically above it is a homogeneous fill of dark brown silt with few inclusions. The red brick layer is also seen in the south section, where it is horizontal, as is the band of yellow mortar and gravel seen in the east section. The latter is also seen in the north section, but the red brick layer must run below the bottom of the trench. Near the top of the north section was a layer of tarmac, and in the west section, a faint and narrow layer of light grey sand. These look post-medieval or modern and two pieces of post-medieval pottery were also found.

It is likely, as in no. 2 above, that this soakaway also cuts through the 19th Century moat fill and that the sides of the moat have not been reached. The slumping stratigraphy may reflect how material was thrown into the moat in the 19th Century; people could have stood on top of the bridge facing north, and chucked in building debris. Such building debris would be plentiful at this time, since demolition, renovation and rebuilding were taking place. An alternate explanation for this stratigraphy is that a large pit or feature was constructed immediately to the north of the soakaway, and that all the stratigraphy slumped down as a result. This stratigraphy, however, would still comprise the deliberate infill of the moat.

Soakaway 4: was constructed just beyond the northern end of the gatehouse, which dates to the 19th Century. It was 2.3 x 1.7m square and 1.6m deep, and produced nothing of particular interest. Some large grey stones up to 35cm across, were seen immediately underneath the grass in the topsoil, dark brown silty loam. Some had worked edges or faces, and they would appear to be left over from the building of the north end of the gatehouse. Running along the east section of the trench, 25cm below the ground surface, was a wall or foundation of coarse concrete, 24 cm thick. A make-up level for this feature lay directly below, and comprised a mixture of concrete, pebbles and soil. A very similar wall can be seen on the ground surface, about 7m to the west and parallel to it. They would appear to go together, and are modern, but their function is unknown.

A pit or cut was revealed in the southwest corner, containing black material which looks like tarmac, with fragments of brick and mortar. The feature is 60cm deep, and the top is 26cm below ground surface. It might be related to the construction of the courtyard car park, or even the more recent car parks to the north. In the south, east and west sections, is a band of yellow sand, again looking very modern, approximately 1.2m below ground surface and continuing below the bottom of the trench. These sections otherwise contained brown silty sand containing a mixture of mortar, brick and pebbles. The north section was very uninformative due to root action.

Soakaway 5: located east of the gatehouse, was 1.9 x 2.2m square and 1.35m deep. It cut through the car park tarmac on the east side. From approximately 15 to 30cm down, on all sides, was a layer containing red brick fragments, pebbles and mortar. This resembled that seen in the cut for the drain running along the east side of the building. In the north section was a faint dark layer, approximately 5cm thick and 80cm below ground level, which swept up at the west end. This could be some sort of feature. There was a lens of gravel directly above it. The rest of the material in this section and also in the south section was yellow-brown silty sand. The east section contained a little more stratigraphy, there being a change in the corner between the

north and east sections. Underneath the ubiquitous layer containing red brick fragments and yellow mortar were bands, in descending order of: yellow sand, grey-brown silt, yellow sand and yellow-brown sand. There was a broken lense of tarmac between the latter two layers and the whole section may comprise make-up levels for the car park.

The drain trenches constructed between the soakaways and the sides of the building were also watched and nothing of interest was observed. The deposit containing red brick fragments and yellow mortar was seen throughout.

### Conclusion

This watching brief, which involved looking in dispersed and mainly small trenches around the inner gatehouse of Buckden Palace, produced little of archaeological interest, and certainly nothing worthy of preservation. As far as could be seen, all the material revealed was of the 19th or 20th Centuries, probably a reflection of the amount of renovation, demolition and rebuilding which took place at that time.

The soakaways on the west side of the gatehouse, nos. 2 and 3, appear to have cut through the 19th century fill of the moat, although this is difficult to prove without finding the edges of the moat. It would be a useful exercise in the future, if permission and funding were granted, to excavate a trench laid out across the proposed line of the moat and find its exact location and dimensions.

### Bibliography

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