

EMERGENCY EXCAVATIONS AT OTFORD PALACE, 1974

INTERIM REPORT

By C. P. WARD

In August 1972, the Otford and District Historical Society drew the attention of the Department of the Environment to the impending development of the undulating piece of land abutting Bubblestone Road, Otford, east of the known foundations of the medieval portion of the archiepiscopal manor-house later known as Otford Palace (N.G.R. TQ 528591).

The ownership of the estate by the Church dated back certainly to A.D. 821, and it remained in the hands of the Archbishops of Canterbury until 1537 when, together with Knole, it passed to the Crown in exchange for other properties. It faded from history at the end of the sixteenth century.¹

An approach was made to the then owner of the land with a view to ascertaining the significance of the area of the Manor, but it was only in December 1973, following further representations to the authorities, that permission was granted to the Society's Archaeological Group (ODAG) to carry out an exploratory excavation with the approval of the developer, Messrs. Foven Construction Company Ltd., of Swanley, which had just purchased the land with planning approval for four houses.

During January to March 1974, work was carried out by ODAG under the direction of the writer in conjunction with the Dartford and Darent Valley Archæological Research Group, and the Fawkham and Ash Archæological Group, led by Mr. R. M. Walsh, with valuable assistance from members of the Kent Archæological Society, the Tonbridge Historical Society, the Maidstone Area Archæological Group, the Sevenoaks School Archæological Society, boys from Wildernesse School, Sevenoaks, and local volunteers, who in eight week-ends uncovered substantially the entire plan of the south-eastern corner of the medieval manor-house with overlying Tudor buildings of Archbishop Warham's palace.

The exploratory phase of the work was concluded in mid-March when plans drawn by the Group were placed in the hands of, and the site passed to, the Department of the Environment. Negotiations are in progress between the developer, the local authority and the Depart-

¹ R. D. Clarke and A. D. Stoyel, *Otford in Kent—a History* (forthcoming).

ment of the Environment to decide the future of the site, and it is to be hoped that the land may be preserved for posterity as an open space.

Special gratitude is due to Mr. P. E. Leach, F.R.I.B.A., who in addition to providing valued help with interpretation, surveyed the site and prepared the plans as the work advanced, and to Messrs. F. L. Clarke, B.A. and E. G. Spurr, of the Group, on whom fell much of the burden of co-ordinating the work, and also to Mr. P. J. Tester, F.S.A., for his advice and encouragement. ODAG also wishes to express its gratitude to Messrs. Foven Construction Company Ltd., for readily permitting the excavation which led to the recovery by the Group of a further section of the plan of this important building complex and, incidentally, highlighted the inaccuracy of the only published plan of Otford Palace.² Continuing a long-term project the Group hopes in future to recover further sections of the ground-plan of this important residence, with the ultimate object of presenting a cogent plan of the whole of this historic building, said in its heyday to have rivalled Hampton Court.

In view of the limited time available for excavation, and dense woodland covering part of the site, exploratory trenches were dug, of limited depth near the house sites, and in some cases expanded into adjacent areas of interest. These resulted in the discovery of the south-east corner of the building complex and the location and width of the moat, hitherto known only from documentary evidence. The sections indicated that development had taken place from west to east by enlargement of the original, probably island, site with soil being tipped in the moat at each phase of building.

The following sequence is suggested for this part of the site:

Period 1. Building or extension of the manor house with a bank to its east falling into either the embryo moat or to marshy ground. The nature of the finds in this area is consistent with those of kitchen refuse, and dates from the middle of the twelfth century. A scatter of Romano-British tile-fragments was also present.

Period 2. Building of the south-east tower and south and east wings; destruction of the Period 1 building is suggested by roof-tiling débris lying on the above-mentioned bank, followed by levelling up with spoil and, finally, with chalk to form the ground-floor base of the new building. The under-floor water-channel was contemporary with the walls abutting the moat.

The thickness of the west wall of the tower, together with the shape of the robbing that has taken place, suggested the inclusion of a staircase

² *Arch. Cant.*, xxxi (1915), facing p. 5.

and/or garderobe and the existence of the latter was confirmed at a late stage in this excavation by the discovery of a latrine with a brick base sloping into the water-channel. The tops of the dividing stone-walls of the adjacent latrine were also discovered, and the size of the assumed garderobe suggests that there may have been a range of latrines set in this wall.

The side of the excavated latrine was of coursed brickwork with stone above; this was the only instance of this sequence found on the site which, together with the poor bonding of the stone to the adjacent wall, suggests that the latrines may have been rebuilt or relined at a later date. There would have been little flow of water through the internal water-course without some form of sluicing, and it is to be expected that some such arrangement existed to provide a suitable scouring action from time to time.

Periods 2 or 3. Numerous traces of brick superstructure imposed upon Period 2-stonework were found, but it is not clear whether this formed part of Period 2 or a later reconstruction; in one case (Wall 8) the brick overlaps the edge of the stone suggesting that they were not contemporary. In that area, a fire-blackened, flat and brick-paved hearth was found together with what may have been another hearth but with no blackening; it may, therefore, have been a recess or cupboard. In both cases, traces remain of brick sides and backs. Nearby was a dressed stone-plinth, and a course of level bedded stone, which may have been the jamb and threshold of a doorway leading from the tower into the east wing.

Period 3. The moat was filled with chalk which included some Romano-British material, the provenance of which is unknown. However, several possible sources lie on the nearby North Downs. The making-up of the ground-level necessitated further drainage, and two brick-channels were formed to the south and north of the tower, having at least three 'manholes' serving probably the dual role of receiving pipes from above and providing access for cleaning. The northerly drain falls to the north-east end of the under-floor water-course and traces were found of a rough brick-wall forming a channel apparently from the direction of the spring whose waters still flow past the site. This would have been used to feed the water-system required by the filling-in of the moat. Documentary evidence points to its having had a wooden roof to support the garden when the palace was in occupation.

Period 4. The destruction of this complex deposited a considerable scatter of débris over the site directly beneath the topsoil. Demolition was generally to just below ground-level, although certain areas,

notably the east wall of the tower and the soffit to the under-floor water-course, were subject to extensive robbing due, in the first instance, probably to the greater fall of ground and, in the second, possibly to superior material having been used in the soffit. It may be worthy of note that the nearby conduit to the north, carrying the stream, recently surveyed, has in general a flat brick Tudor arch; also worthy of comment is the fact that the heavy stone-slabs used for the tops of the Period 3 drains were not robbed.

It is likely that the major part of the dismantling took place in the seventeenth century, but the removal of the soffit to the internal water-course may have occurred as late as the eighteenth century judging by the débris incorporated in the loose rubble fill.

MATERIALS

Period 1

Generally Kentish ragstone set in yellow mortar.

Period 2

Walls of Kentish ragstone, random faced externally, with rubble in-fill set in yellow mortar. A free-stone ashlar block $325 \times 250 \times 125$ mm. ($13 \times 10 \times 5$ in.) was discovered in the tower, suggesting that the extensively robbed areas may have been faced with this as also were probably the upper parts of the latrines. The walls of the water-course appear to be of dressed limestone blocks and the bottom of chalk slabs.

Period 3

The new drains were built up on ragstone rubble foundations from the bottom of the moat and provided a 225×225 mm. (9×9 in.) channel with a flat chalk or brick bottom, a half-brick wall on one side and a whole-brick wall on the other (outer) side, having massive capstones of what may be Sarsen. The size of brick used in this phase of the building is of the order of $230 \times 110 \times 50$ mm. ($9 \times 4\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ in.). Some of these have a curious groove around both top and bottom—the purpose, if any, of which is not understood, but must have been formed in the mould.

Roof-tiles (broken) of various cambers and sizes of the order of $145 \times 225 \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ mm. ($5\frac{3}{4} \times 9 \times \frac{1}{2}$ in.) were recovered. They comprised two identifiable types, both probably manufactured on the estate: (a) having round or square peg-holes, and (b) having similar, smaller, nail-holes. Evidence for re-use of the former is provided by nails securing them by means of small pierced lead plates spanning the peg-holes.

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SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL OBJECTS RECOVERED

1. *Stone*: Fragments of moulding; 2. *Brick and tile*: Romano-British *tegulae* and box-tiles. Medieval to Tudor brick and roofing-tile fragments. Encaustic tile; 3. *Pottery*: Sherds ranging from twelfth century to modern; 4. *Glass*: Fragments of window-glass; 5. *Iron*: Nails of various sizes. Tudor purse frame. Nineteenth-century box-lock pistol; 6. *Lead*: Trimming from sheet. Beading from window (?). Tile-retaining plates; 7. *Brass (latten)*: Bell; 8. *Pewter*: Spoon; 9. *Bone*: A considerable quantity of animal bones, some bearing evidence of butchery; 10. *Leather*: Remains of shoes; 11. *Wood*: Lengths of timber. Portion of comb.

These finds will be the subject of a separate report.