

19 YEARS UNDER THE TROWEL

How Elsyng Palace was Excavated 2004 - 2022



Illustrations and photos Neil, John and Lesley Pinchbeck and the Speaker

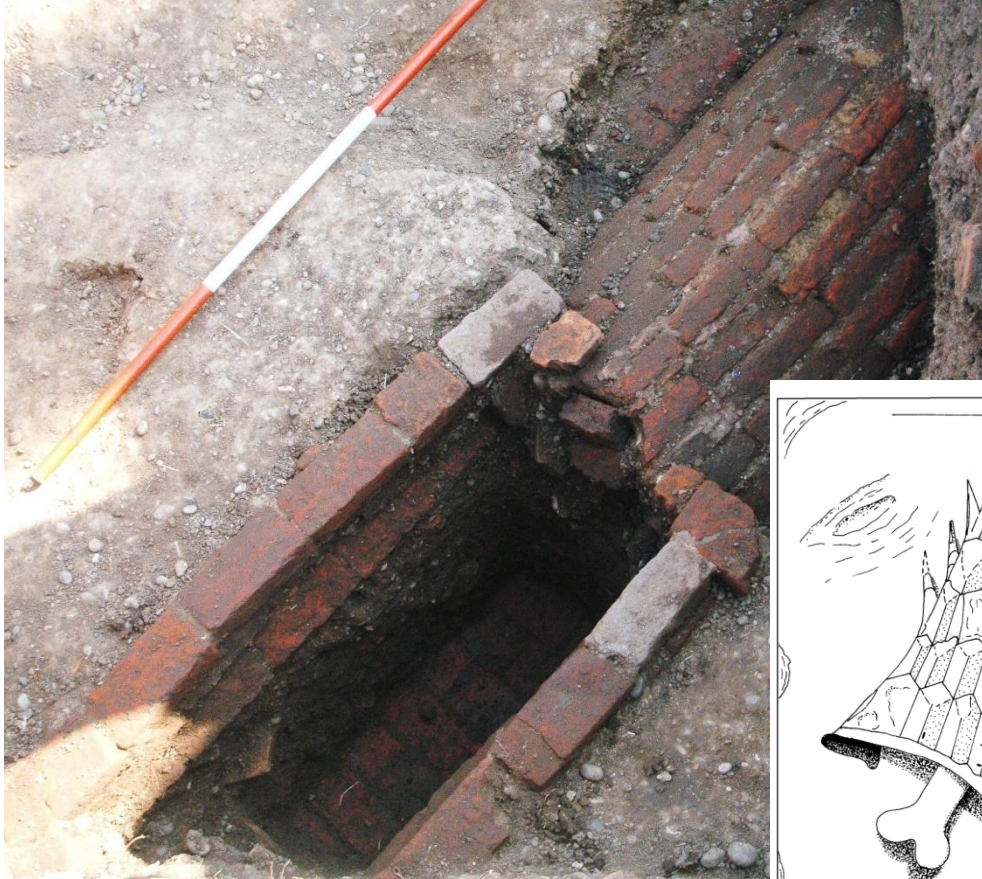
2004: How it all began with our late chairman Prof. Dennis Hill's enthusiasm to re-start excavations



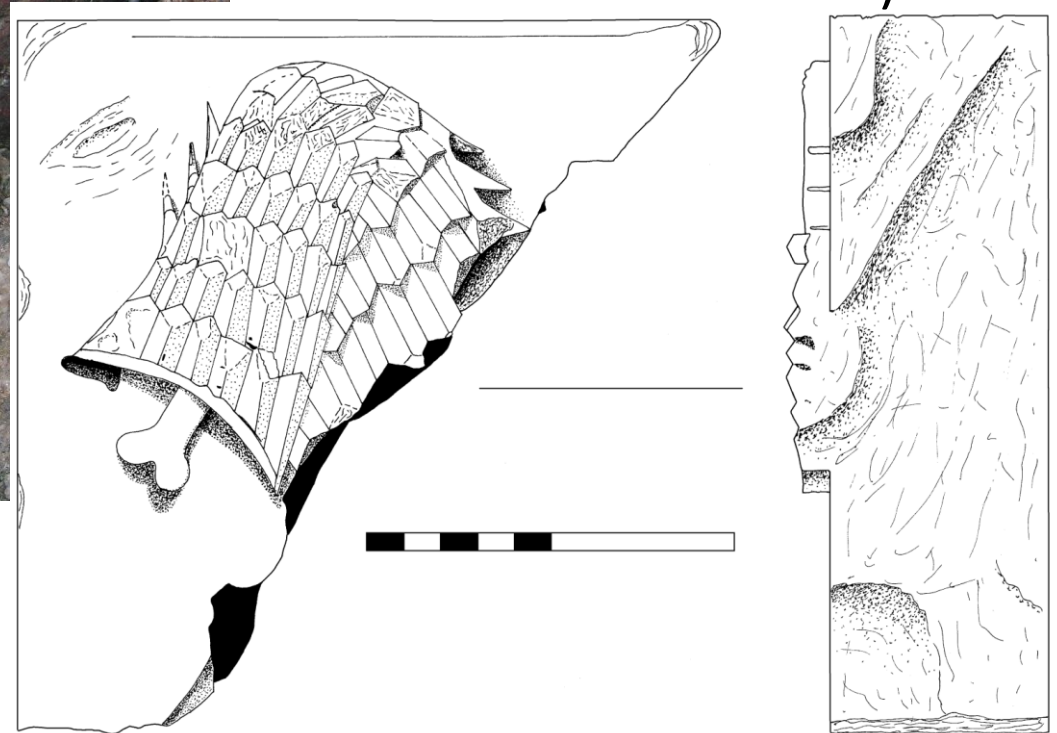
LBC Radio broadcast from the site..... but we didn't find much !



Years later we would realise that the existing geophysics we had was only reflecting geology and later landscaping..... but by luck in 2005 we hit this palace drain full of demolition goodies.....



including the 'chicken brick' (took a couple of years to discover it was a falcon's wing and the personal symbol of Sir Thomas Lovell)



And so the annual digs continued

Elsyng is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and you have to convince English Heritage (now Heritage England) you are competent, there is a good reason to excavate and that you have a strategy to be allowed to dig



So people with the right skills✓ and ability to report your results rapidly but in a professional way✓

**ENFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY ARCHIVE REPORT**



**EXCAVATIONS AT ELSYNG PALACE, FORTY
HALL, ENFIELD, JULY 2022**

(SITE CODE FXU22)

(SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT LO 59)

(EXCAVATION CENTRED TQ3381 9886)

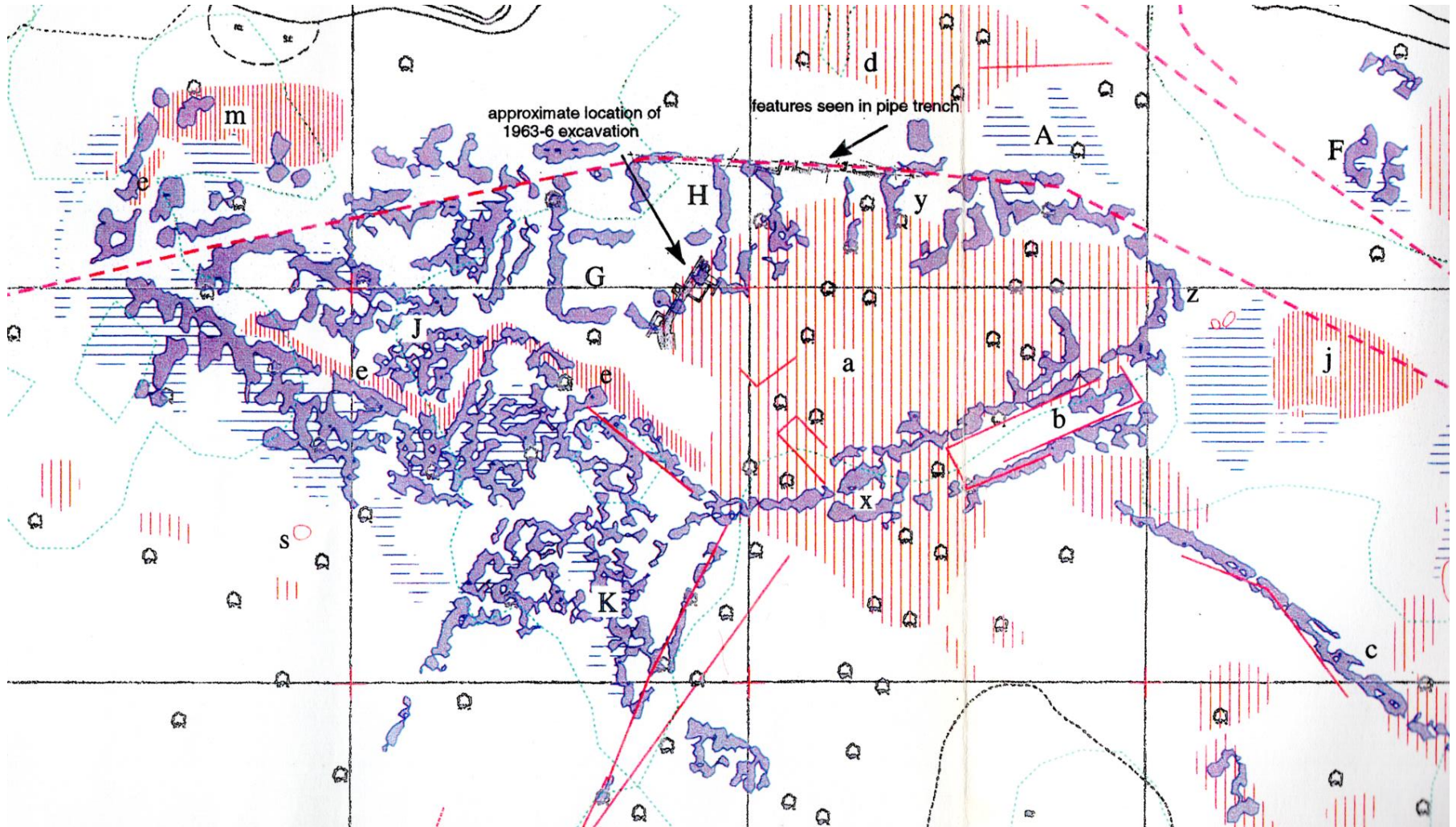
by
MARTIN J. DEARNE

with contributions by
IAN K. JONES
NEIL PINCHBECK

Illustrator
Martin J. Dearne

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As to the reason and strategy, it was to check the accuracy of this geophys someone else had done on the site and to identify the edges of the complex so we could say how big it was and begin to reveal its plan



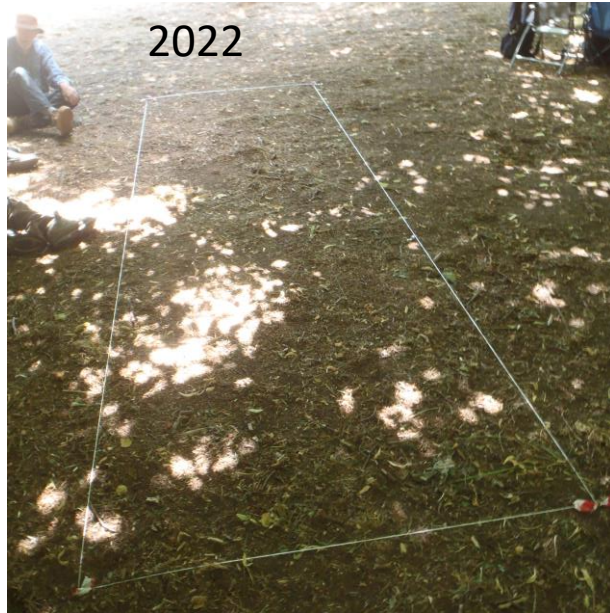
Which was fine till someone at Parks broke the Scheduled Ancient Monuments Act and took a minidigger to the site to plant trees !!!



So 2005 – 7 we cut lots of test pits and expanded some into trenches along the Lime Tree avenue to test where English Heritage could allow tree planting

The actual excavation process is.....

Lay your trench out...



...take your turf off...



...and your topsoil.



Then it is all slow trowelling off every successive layer



and sometimes the site behaves itself and bits of the palace appear soon....



and sometimes you just have to watch and wait



but it is far more complex and varied than just trowelling.....

For one thing it is often not trowels but mattocks you need on this site



Extremely rare photo
of a site director actually
doing some digging

and emptying brick built features like
garderobes is a big part of it



and in order that we don't miss small especially metal finds the site and spoil are metal detected and loose soil often hand sorted



If not this year for instance we would have missed this tiny farthing of Charles I

and then at the end there is the back breaking task of putting everything you have dug out back in the hole !



and putting the turf back on



There are of course the wonderful moments of discovery as things buried for centuries emerge



But there are also long periods when nothing happens as one job cannot start before another is complete



and what can really slow us down on this site ?

Well, for one thing tree roots..... we are usually near the trees of the Lime Tree avenue, we don't want to damage them, but digging under and round them can be a nightmare



...then the fact that the whole palace is covered in brick rubble and re-landscaped with compacted gravel !



...and that people have to get into precarious positions to excavate deep features



and of course worldwide pandemics !



...but what really gives us problems is the great British weather.
Blazing sun so we have to erect shades and the ground bakes



2022 when we actually had to cancel one day because 40° C is too dangerous to work in



...and then, often just days later, absolutely torrential downpours

2011



2017



2019



requiring ingenious solutions to work through them

but in 2019 we even had to cancel the open day

2011



2019



which was a blow because public outreach events have been a big feature of the excavations from the start

we always try to explain what we are doing and why to casual visitors

and in 2018 we got the chance to publicise the site in a Channel 5 documentary



we have even had Forty Hall managers on site in period costume



for several years we welcomed school groups to the site while we had borough funding to do so



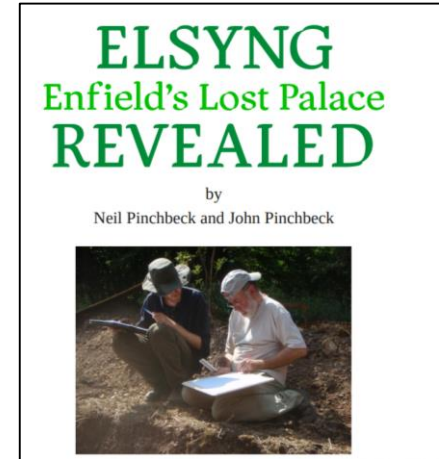
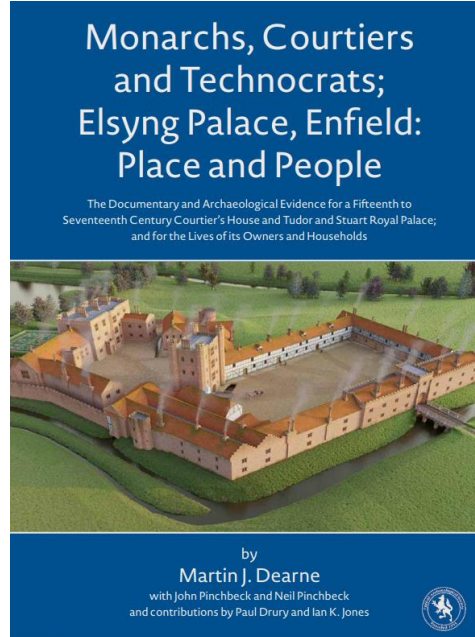
and HLF funding this year enabled us to run quite a programme of school visits



and tours by a blue badge guide



in fact that HLF funding enabled a lot, like a film of the excavation, an oral history project and the publication of two books on the site



but it has always been the family open day or weekend that has been the mainstay of bringing the palace and the excavations to a wider audience



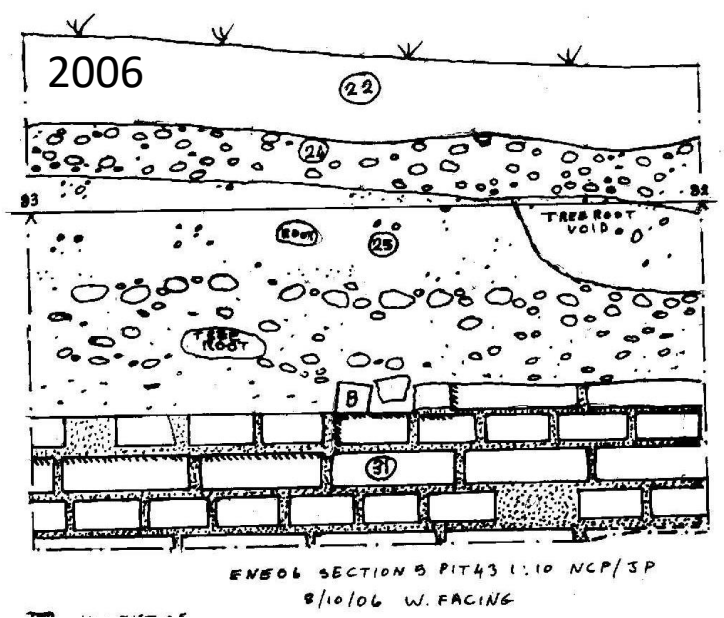
this year the HLF funding and the work of the museum service who have partnered us from the very start made that family open weekend bigger and better than ever



The most important responsibility on an archaeological site though is to record what you find, especially as layers we dig away cease to exist so Neil draws everything to scale



....and the section of every trench is drawn....



...and everything is photographed many many times



and plans and sections all carry levels to relate them to Ordnance Datum so recording is in three dimensions

ENFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
LEVELS REGISTER

SITE CODE FXU22 SHEET 1 OF 6 SHEETS
 LOCATION AND DETAILS OF TBM: TC191
 IS THE TBM A PERMANENT FEATURE: YES (SEMI)
 HOW HAS THE TBM BEEN LAID IN TO A PERMANENT O.S. BENCH MARK: Gps
 TBM'S RELATIONSHIP TO ORDNANCE DATUM: +31.363

Each sequence of levels should begin and end with a backsight. Sequences should be separated by a blank line.

LEVEL OR 'BACKSIGHT'	NO.	READING	MARKED ON PLAN / SECTION (GIVE NO.)	CONVERSION TO O.D. LEVEL
BACKSIGHT		1.736	*	
1		1.408	PLAN 3	31.691
2		1.483	"	31.616
3		1.502	"	31.597
4		1.448	"	31.651
5		1.540	"	31.559
6		1.438	"	31.661
7		0.862	PLAN 2	32.237
8		0.903	"	32.196
<hr/>				
9		1.325	PLAN 2	31.774
10		1.300	"	31.799
11		1.169	"	31.930
12		1.219	"	31.880
13		1.640	PLAN 3	31.459
14		1.630	"	31.469
15		1.708	"	31.391
16		1.666	"	31.433
17		1.684	"	31.415
18		1.627	"	31.472
19		1.062	PLAN 2	32.037
20		1.060	"	32.039
21		1.212	"	31.887
22		1.300	"	31.799
23		1.365	"	31.734
24		1.333	"	31.766
25		1.427	"	31.672
26		1.444	"	31.655
<hr/>				
BACKSIGHT		1.789		
27		1.500	*	
27		1.500	PLAN 2	31.652
28		1.232	PLAN 5	31.920
29		1.263	"	31.889
30		1.250	"	31.902

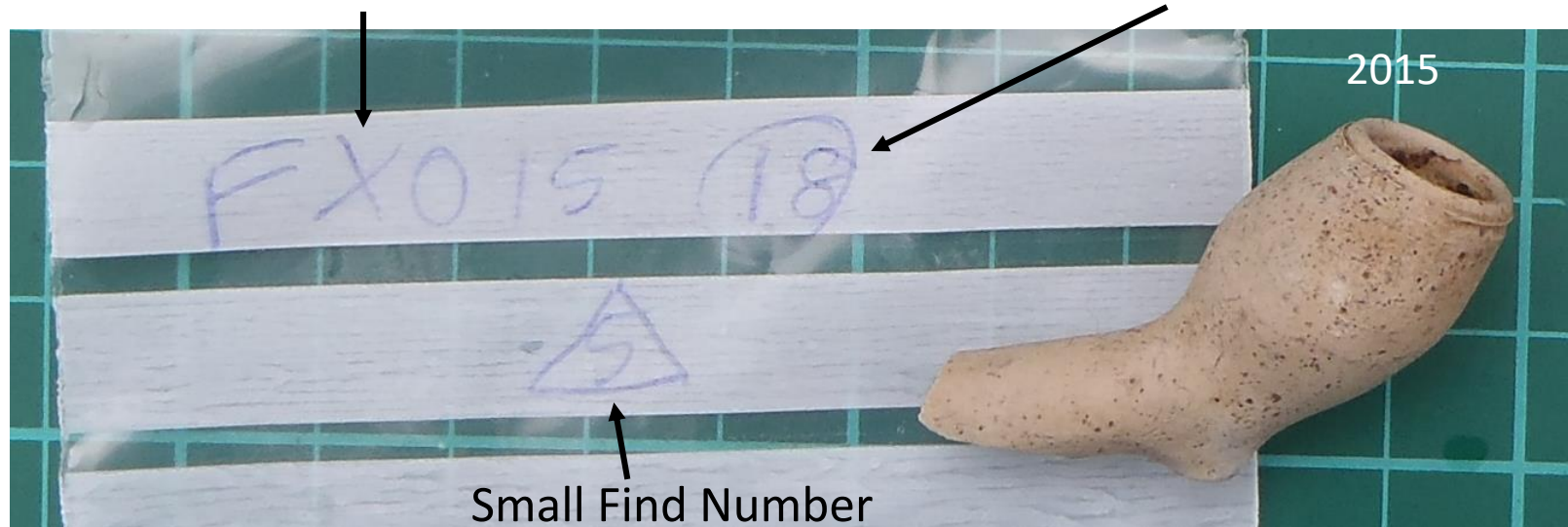


including 'small finds' (those particularly important objects for dating or establishing what was going on on the site) which are bagged and recorded individually on plans and special written record sheets

Site Code

(Unique to every dig done in London)

Context (i.e. layer) Number




2022 small finds included an iron key and a gilded furniture stud



above all every context (layer, cut feature, wall, floor or whatever) has its own number and written record sheet



 Enfield Archaeological Society																			
Context Recording Sheet																			
Grid Square	Site	Site Code	Context Number																
DEPOSITS 1. Colour 2. Composition 3. Variations 4. Inclusions 5. Compaction 6. Dimensions			CUTS 1. Shape in plan 2. Sides 3. Base 4. Dimensions 5. Orientation 6. Truncated 7. Fills 8. Discussion																
STRATIGRAPHIC MATRIX																			
<table border="1" style="width:100%; height:40px;"> <tr> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> <td style="width:12.5%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>																			
Interpretation: (ring) External Internal Structural Natural Other (Specify)																			
INTERPRETATION																			
Sketch plan or section over																			
Plan numbers	Section number/ Elevation number		Date and initials																
Photographs	Highest Level	Lowest Level	Checked by																
General finds (ring) None pot glass metal cbm burnt flint struck flint other			Environmental finds Bone wood leather other																
Small finds			Sampled Yes / No Sample Number																

What only a couple of us see is the huge amount of 'post-ex' work it takes to turn the records made on site and the finds collected into a coherent professional archive and report

**ENFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY ARCHIVE REPORT**



**A SECTION ACROSS THE SOUTHERN
PERIMETER OF ELSYNG PALACE, FORTY
HALL, ENFIELD, JULY 2014**

(SITE CODE FXI14)

(SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT LO 59)

(EXCAVATION CENTRED TQ|3379 9685)

by

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with contributions by

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IAN JONES

Illustrator

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**ENFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY ARCHIVE REPORT**



**EXCAVATIONS AT ELSYNG PALACE, FORTY
HALL, ENFIELD, JULY 2017**

(SITE CODE FXO17)

(SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT LO 59)

(EXCAVATION CENTRED TQ|3380 9887)

by

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NEIL PINCHBECK

Illustrators

Martin J. Dearne

Neil Pinchbeck

Trevor Springett

all the context sheets, plans, sections, photos and other records are collated to produce a detailed description and interpretation of the site in this illustrated report (these are extracts of 2022's)

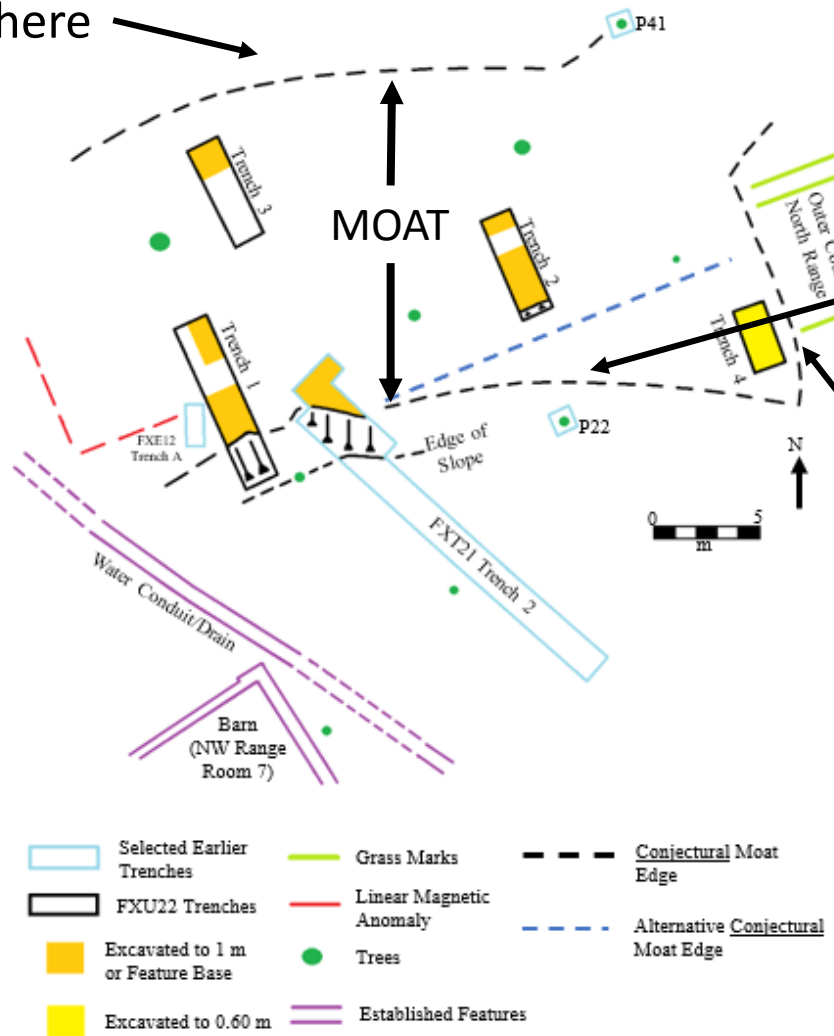
Feature [5] and its Fills

- The only feature encountered was what is interpreted as an extremely large and deep moat, [5]. Though the edge of the cut into natural which formed this feature was only seen at one point (in the south of Trench 1; Fig. 2) it was clearly the same cut as seen (as context [14]) in FXT21 Trench 2. In both instances the cut comprised a fairly long, very irregular (perhaps heavily demolition disturbed) and gentle slope (the absolute edge of which probably lay just beyond the limit of excavation in Trench 1) which then became steeper before it dropped away suddenly to form the very steep side of a feature whose base lay over 1.00 m below the present ground surface at multiple excavated points so was not seen in the present (depth limited) excavation.



Fig. 4: Trench 3 North Section (1:20)

these archive reports are also the way we communicate to Historic England what we think the next step in the process of uncovering the palace is for the following year. So this year what in 2021 looked like a robber trench for the inner gate house turned out to be a huge moat in front of it and based on that next year we will dig here



to find the north side of the moat and hopefully that gatehouse and we will dig here

to confirm the south side of the moat and here

to see how the moat relates to the known north range of the outer court

and then there is all the work on the finds



.... so the rim of an elaborate glass bowl, but what date, where was it made it can take weeks of book research to be sure (in fact ?C17th and probably Venice)



Similarly coin of Henry VIII of course...till you study the detail. In fact it is a posthumous issue by his son Edward VI

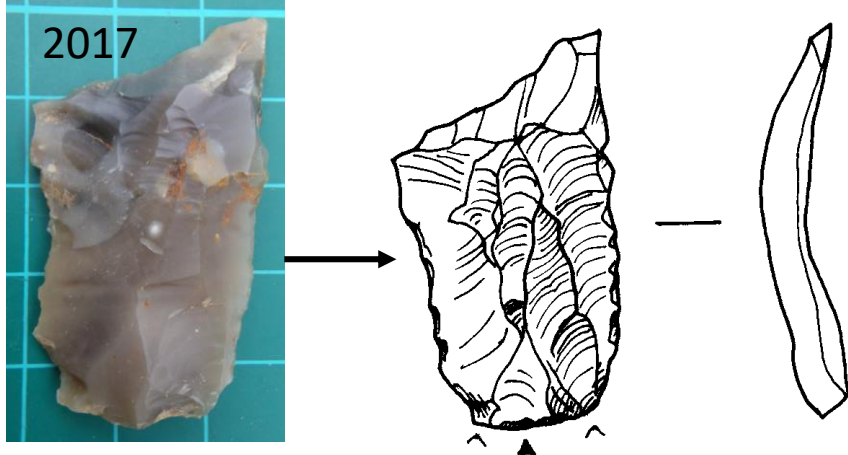
Just washing the finds is exhausting !

but every find must be identified to type,
partly so it can be dated

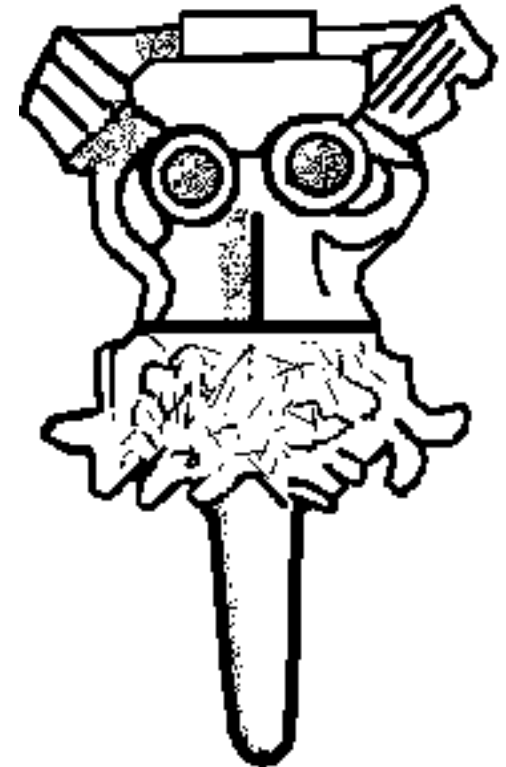


and many
have to be
reconstructed
to identify
and draw

photographing finds is one way of recording them, but often to bring out the detail they must be carefully drawn



which may first involve long hours of careful cleaning like of this Tudor hooked clasp found this year



while other finds like snails or seeds may have to be identified under high magnification



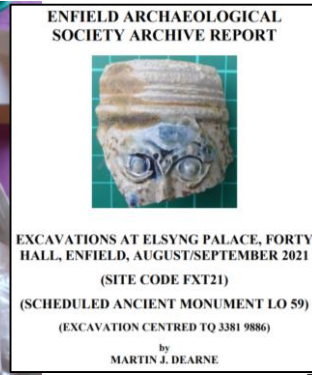
and all the pottery etc has to be marked with site code and context number



And finally a mass of paperwork, drawings, digital records and carefully packaged finds need to be brought together to form the archive that goes to the museum



2021



**Excavations at Elsyng Palace August/September 2021 (FXT21):
Finds Report
by
Martin J. Dearne
with contributions by
Ian K. Jones
Neil Pinchbeck**

Contexts appear at the end of entries thus: [8] with any Small Find number. * Indicates objects illustrated in the full archive report.

Collection and Retention

- All pre twentieth century material was collected from all contexts except for cbm, which was often summarised on context sheets and reburied except for some items catalogued. Much listed cbm, and numbers of iron nails, unremarkable body sherds and much lead waste etc was, however, not ultimately kept into archive (marked NK in the catalogue).

1 Coins and Tokens

- 1.1 AR (hammered silver) sixpence Elizabeth I 1567
Obv. Bust l. (intermediate bust 4B) with large rose to r.
ELIZABETH:D:G:ANG:FR:ET HL:REGINA
Rev. Arms of England and France on shield quartered by long cross with 1567 above
POSVI DEV:ADIVTOREM.MEV:
mm 74 (coronet) Seaby 2562 Moderately worn. Die axis ↙
[3] SF 7
- 1.2 AE token (jetton) Rose/French Shield variant
Obv. Three crowns and three fleurs de lys alternating around a rose
Largely illegible
Rev. Three fleurs de lys on a crowned shield
Largely illegible
Di. 2.1 cm [3] or [13] SF 6
- 1.3 AE token (jetton) Ship penny type Probably 1515 - 1612
Obv. Illegible (probably ship in profile)
Largely illegible but probably by a member of the Schultes family
Rev. Three fleurs de lys in a double lozenge, each side flanked by a star and two spots
[V]IVE:[??]E: ?BON [.....]?FRA (?version of VIVE LE BON ROI DE FRA (long live the good king of France))
Di. 2.4 cm [3] or [4] SF 10

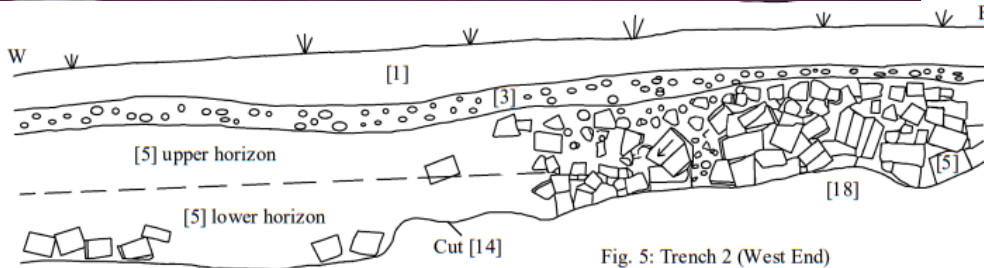



Fig. 5: Trench 2 (West End)
Section and Profiles (1:20)

And year on year of course they slowly build up the picture of the palace, some of which we have just published

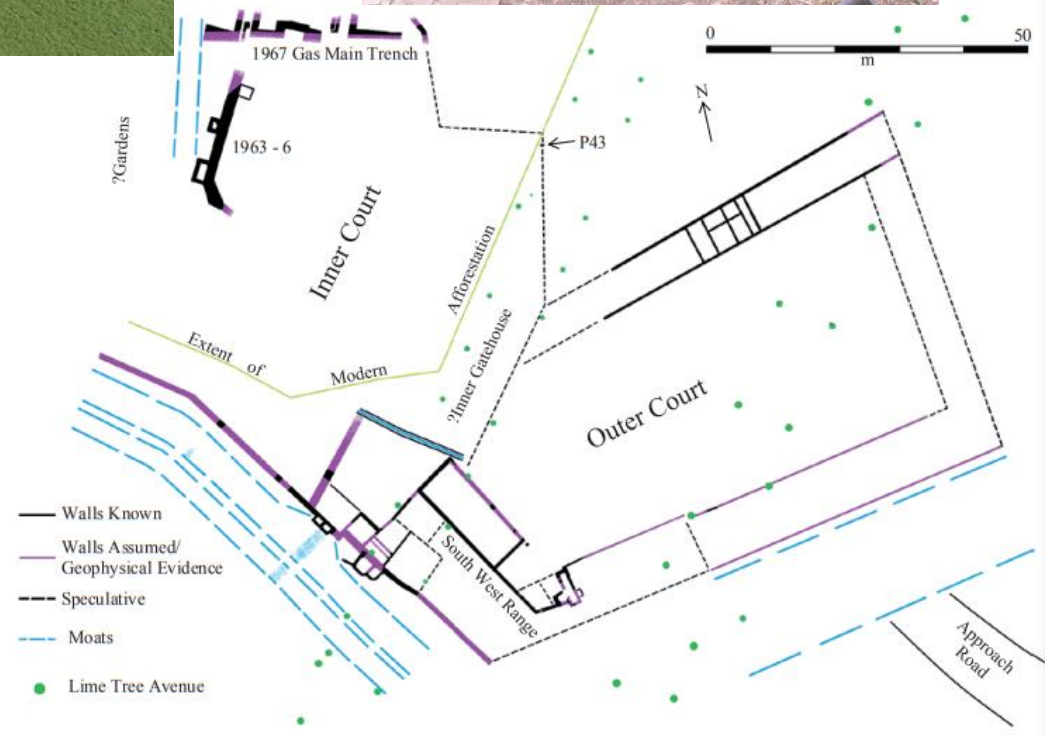



**Monarchs, Courtiers
and Technocrats;
Elsyng Palace, Enfield:
Place and People**

The Documentary and Archaeological Evidence for a Fifteenth to
Seventeenth Century Courtier's House and Tudor and Stuart Royal Palace;
and for the Lives of its Owners and Households



by
Martin J. Dearne
with John Pinchbeck and Neil Pinchbeck
and contributions by Paul Drury and Ian K. Jones



So you may not realise even if you dig with us all that goes into a successful Elsyng excavation ... but one more thing does, the hard work and enthusiasm of all the diggers



Thanks to them all and to you for listening

