

**Report on an excavation at  
Castle House,  
Otford, Kent  
2016**

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## **Contents**

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. Historical and Archaeological Background	Page 3
3. The 2016 Excavation	Page 6
4. Discussion	Page 8
5. Plans	Page 10
6. Bibliography	Page 11
7. Illustrations	Page 11

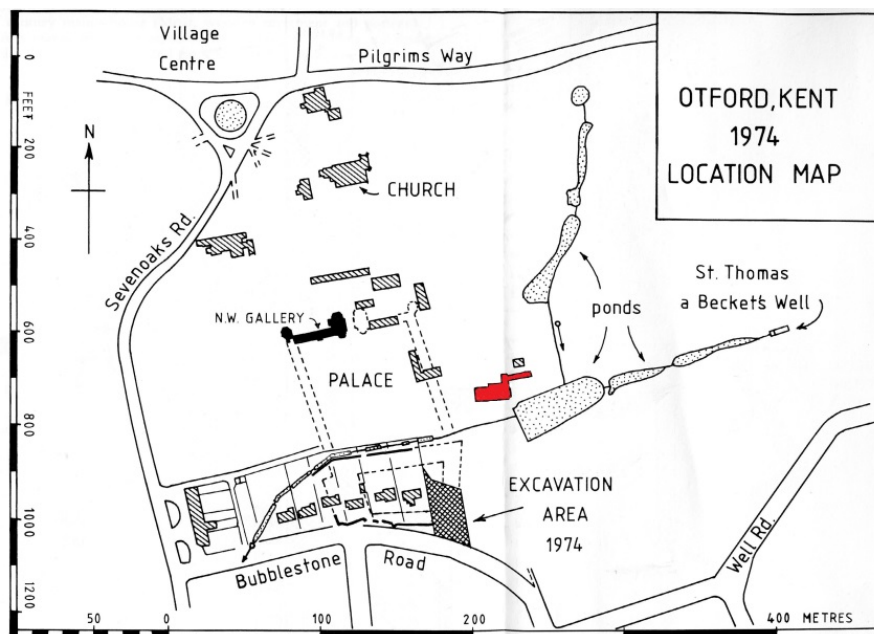
## 1. Introduction

Castle House, Sevenoaks Road, Otford, is situated within the scheduled area covering the remains of the 16th century Otford Palace (or Archbishop's Palace), built by Archbishop William Warham (scheduled monument no. 1005197).

In 2015, the owners of Castle House applied to build a kitchen extension, necessitating laying a supporting concrete foundation to a depth of 0.45m across an area of 12.5 square metres. Historic England requested that a Written Scheme of Investigation be submitted, followed by limited excavation to determine the likelihood of archaeological features being present. This excavation was carried out by the author in August 2015, assisted by members of West Kent Archaeological Society. Archaeological features were uncovered, and – after consultation with Historic England – it was decided to excavate the whole area. This was duly carried out in 2016.

## 2. Historical and Archaeological Background

The known remains of the Tudor Archbishop's Palace cover an area of about 1.4ha, most of which is likely to consist of buried foundations. At present the north-west tower and the western half of the north gate are still standing, with a range of connecting buildings.



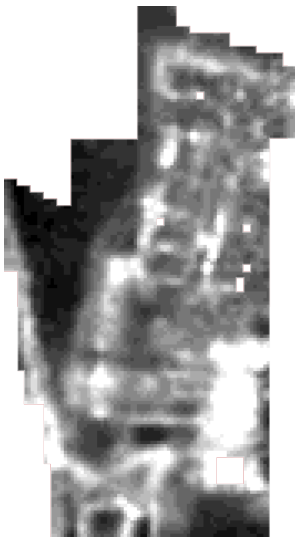
*Fig. 1: Plan of Otford Palace, showing Castle House (red) to the east (Philp 1974, adapted)*

Very little of the palace site has been investigated archaeologically. In 1974 about 600 square metres of the southern range were excavated by Otford and District Archaeological Group – and subsequently Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit – in advance of a housing scheme on Bubblestone Road (Fig. 1). This showed that extensive foundations remained (Fig. 2), and were, in places, only 120mm below the ground surface.



*Fig. 2: Otford Palace excavation on completion, 1974*

A geophysical survey was carried out in 2011-12 by West Kent Archaeological Society, using a Geoplan RM15 resistivity meter. This indicated that archaeological remains of much of the rest of the palace are likely to be present below the soil (Fig. 3). The area around Castle House, however, was not surveyed, so it was not known if there were any putative archaeological features in that area.



*Fig. 3: Resistivity plot of south-eastern range of palace, showing one of the towers at the bottom*

The building now known as Castle House has received a number of alterations and additions over the centuries. The original building was possibly constructed as early as the 1530s as a rectangular, two-storey, timber-framed building (Weir 2015, p 15). It has been suggested that this was a replacement for an earlier building making up the demesne farm for Otford Manor (Clarke & Stoyel 1975, p 68). Two unequal wings were added at 90 degrees, probably during the 17th century, the eastern one of which now forms the kitchen (Weir 2015, p 17). There have been additions to the building right up to the early 21st century (Weir 2015, p 20), which makes interpretation of the relatively few historical maps available difficult, as the scale generally precludes precise detail.

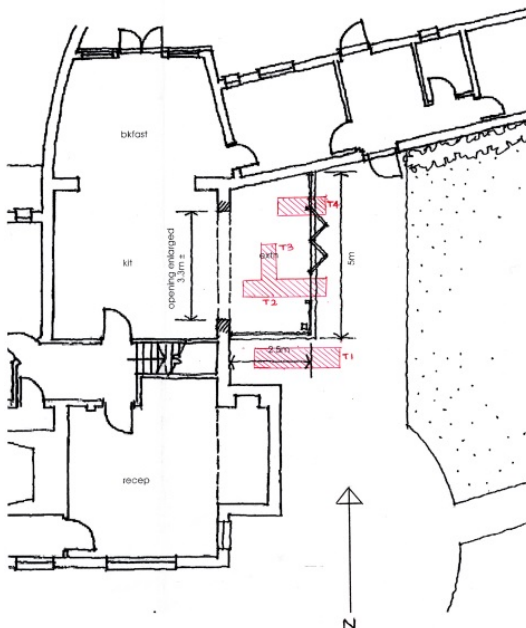
In 2015 a series of trial trenches was excavated over the intended area of the kitchen extension. The area investigated was part of a paved patio (Fig. 4), extending out from the current kitchen door by 2.5m, with a 5m width.



*Fig. 4: The site before excavation*

An area of paving approximately 6m x 4m was lifted. Four trenches were dug (Fig. 5), and revealed several archaeological features of significance. Trenches 1-3 all revealed a topsoil which contained some CBM, mainly consisting of broken Kentish peg tile. This mid-grey-brown soil gave way to a rubble layer consisting of compressed mortar containing a large amount of broken peg tile. At the western end of each trench, nearest the extant standing building, a layer of flat laid bricks was found beneath the rubble layer, discoloured by burning and sooting.

There were no metal finds of any significance. One coin was found on the spoil heap through metal detection – a 1939 farthing. The pottery assemblage mainly comprised 18th-19th century material, save for one sherd of Roman Patchgrove ware, datable to the late 1st/early 2nd century AD (T Connell, pers comm 2015).



*Fig. 5: Position of trial trenches*

### 3. The 2016 Excavation

In August 2016 the trial trenches were reopened and extended to cover the full site area of 6m x 3m. This allowed excavation of the whole width between the extant 17th century chimney and the 19th century garden wall at the end of the 17th century extension to Castle House. At the same time West Kent Archaeological Society were able to carry out a resistivity survey of the back lawn adjacent to the patio beneath which the archaeological features were lying. The geophysics revealed nothing under the lawn, implying that any building did not extend beyond the patio, so was therefore no more than about 8m in length.

Research revealed that the 1869 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 6) shows an 'extension' on the side of Castle House exactly over the excavation site. According to the map the structure did not extend further than the current paving. This feature does not appear on smaller-scale maps.



*Fig. 6: 1869 O/S map showing extension on Castle House. The apsidal effect would appear to be an optical illusion, caused by the way the dotted line has been marked*

Excavation revealed a continuation of the features found in the trial trenches. The sequences were exactly the same, with the same incidence of brick and peg tile, and concentrations of primarily 19th century pottery. An iron door hinge was lifted (initially thought to be 'window furniture') which was hand-made, probably locally (Fig. 7). This cannot be given any particular date, based on design, but is presumed to be contemporary with the building.



*Fig. 7: Large iron door hinge*



The late 20th century wooden balcony and steps were dismantled, and the supporting concrete slab was lifted, thus finally revealing the entire brick fireplace. Once removed, and the rubble layer cleared, a slot was revealed in the brick hearth (Fig. 8); this was lined with stone slabs along its entire length, save for a crude repair carried out with bricks at the edge of the hearth. The slot was 170mm wide by 90mm deep. It appeared to run the whole length of the building, from the extant house wall, across the fireplace and across the compacted mortar surface to disappear under the east section (Fig. 9). At one time it appears to have run under the extant house wall to the other side.



*Fig. 8: Slot continuing under extant house wall*

The slot appears to be contemporary with the hearth, and thus is an original feature of the building. Further excavation revealed it to be full of compacted coal chippings along its whole length, other than two iron nails.



*Fig. 9: Complete slot cutting through floor*

The brick hearth showed signs of sagging, probably due to constant heat, and there were signs of vitrification to the left hand side adjacent to the slot, indicating that it was either the hottest part of the fire or had been subject to more burning than the rest.

To the south of the new building lies the modern ceramic drain from the house (Fig. 10), but this is outside the building and has not interfered with the archaeological remains.



*Fig. 10: View south past modern drain to 17th century chimney breast*

#### **4. Discussion**

It can now be confirmed that the bricks are the remains of a hearth, possibly dating to the 16th or 17th century (based on the size and shape of the bricks). The fireplace is part of a building that is likely to be buried beneath the patio of Castle House. A resistivity survey of the adjacent back lawn indicates that the structure does not project beyond the patio, and measurements taken based on the 1869 Ordnance Survey map would appear to show the same. The internal dimensions of the building would have been about 5m square.

The back wall of the fireplace was integrated into the extant side wall of the 17th century extension to the house, but whether the newly discovered building predates the extension, or was part of it, is difficult to tell. Dating evidence is scarce. The majority of pottery and china from the site is mid 19th century, and would appear to date from the demolition of the building. There are several potential medieval and post-medieval fabrics, but there is also Roman material. None of the older pot was in a secure context (pottery report forthcoming).

If this was originally the demesne farm of Otford Palace (Clarke & Stoyel 1975, p 68) then it possibly consisted of a range of buildings. The size of the newly uncovered fireplace would be consistent with the room being a bake house or kitchen. However, the stone lined slot in the floor is more consistent with a brew house, or laundry, and could be contemporary with the 17th century extension. The semi-vitrified area of the fireplace adjacent to the slot implies a large container full of liquid being heated, and then draining into the slot to run out of the building through the wall now hidden by the patio, as the slot slopes slightly in this direction. That this function of the room was deemed important is indicated by a brick repair to the slot, although this cannot be dated since the bricks seem contemporary with the fireplace, but there



would have been a ready supply of these bricks over the years from the demolition of the nearby palace and outbuildings.

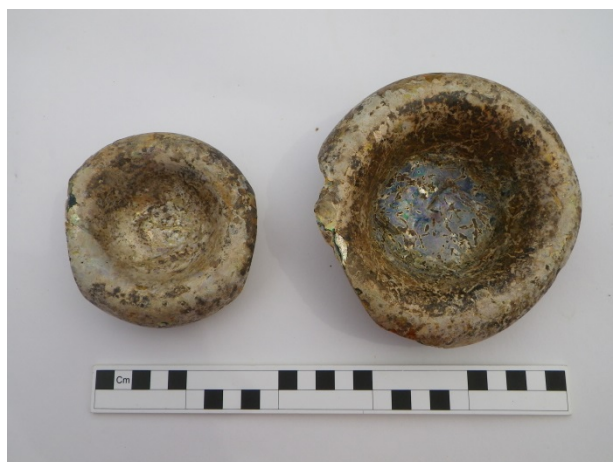
Access to the building would have been through an external door, probably in the wall opposite the fireplace, or in the north wall (as the southern wall would have been partly obscured by the 17th century chimney breast of the house extension).

It is unfortunate that there is currently nothing to date the fireplace itself other than the bricks, as the rubble layer probably represents demolition of the building. Aside from peg tile and brick fragments, there was nothing in this layer but late 18th/early-mid 19th century material. The one exception to this was a fragment of decorated glazed floor tile (Fig. 11), but this was probably from the nearby Archbishop's Palace.



*Fig. 11: Floor tile fragment*

In particular, a couple of pieces of blue 'willow pattern' china and a sherd of 'cream ware' china, buried securely in the rubble layer, set the date of demolition within a broad period of 1780-1870. This is confirmed by a number of fragments of glass bottles (Fig. 12), datable to the early-mid 19th century. One of them, from the Royal German Spa in Brighton, did not come into production until 1825. Given that the tithe map of 1844 does not appear to show the newly revealed building, the implication is that demolition had taken place by then, possibly in the 1830s or early 1840s.



*Fig. 12: Two large bottle bases from the demolition layer*

The Ordnance Survey map of 1869 clearly shows the building as part of the structure of Castle House. Some of the 19th century detritus could easily be as late as this; however, it is worth considering that the 1869 map may have been copied from an earlier map, so the features were not extant at the time. Research to date has not identified these features appearing on any available earlier maps. It should not be ruled out, then, that the building was a short-lived structure that was constructed sometime after 1844, and demolished in the latter half of the 19th century, but this is unlikely. To add to the uncertainty, a version of the building is discernible on the 1898 Ordnance survey map, but none of the demolition material seems to be this late.

There is a possibility that the bricks and slot represent a stable of some kind that was later used as a fireplace, but this would not explain why half the floor was brick, and half the floor clay and mortar. There was nothing in the floor to indicate posts for a partition of any kind.

The relative cleanness of the fireplace bricks, together with the coal dust preserved in the joints and the drainage slot, suggests that demolition was a single event and that the building would have stood roofed – if not used – up to the point of demolition. A lack of complete brick or tile in the demolition layer implies that anything usable was salvaged.

After the building was demolished, the ground level appears to have been built up very evenly over the remains that were left in situ. It may be that the size of this building determined the extent of the patio, although the current paving dates from the 20th century, probably the 1950-60s, when a large amount of hard landscaping was carried out to the garden.

## 5. Plans

The plans (Fig. 13) are from the trial trenches. Planning of the fully excavated area was not possible; however, it was photographed with the planning frame in place.

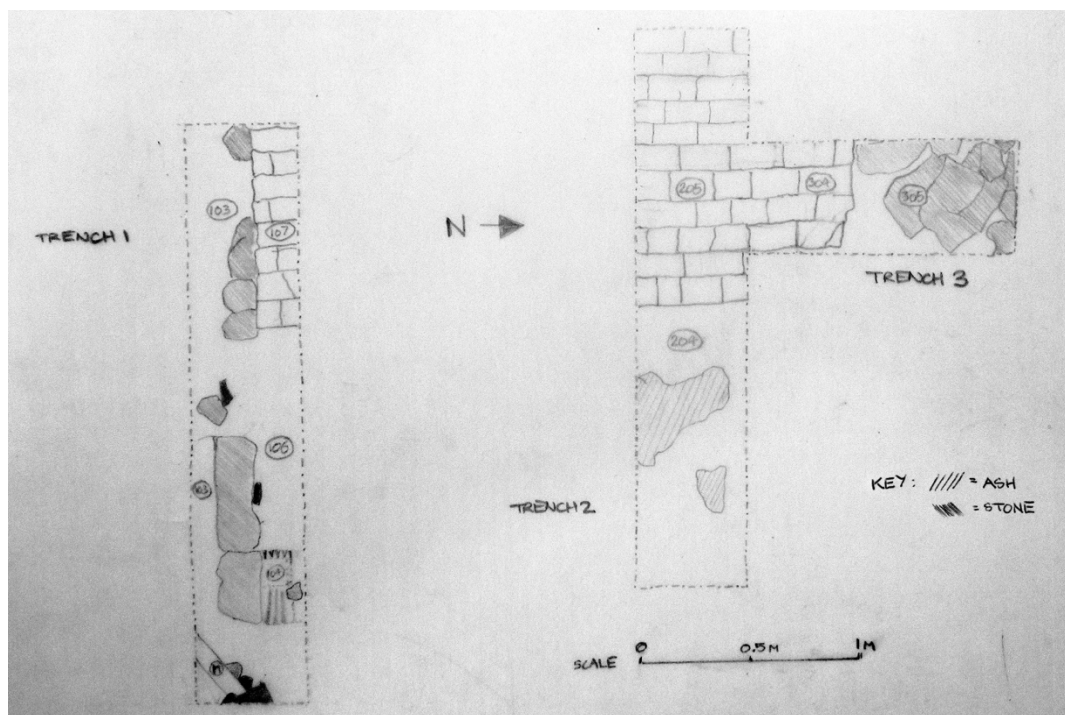


Fig. 13: Plans of trial trenches

## 6. Bibliography

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## 7. Illustrations

Fig. 1-2            B Philp (Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit)  
Fig. 3             West Kent Archaeological Society  
Figs 4, 7-12      K Fromings

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