

The 2010 season at Copped Hall

The Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project was back on site in 2010. The season started with the regular early-summer excavation week for WEAG members, held at the end of May. We had fine weather and a large and enthusiastic team of diggers and helpers. A special advance party removed the backfill and cleared the over-winter debris in our two 'live' trenches: one covering the south-western part of the Tudor mansion (Trench G, the 'rose garden' trench) and one just outside its south-eastern corner (Trench P), where the 'enigmatic circular brick platform' had previously been discovered.

During the WEAG excavation a total of 49 WEAG members took part for at least one day. A new venture in July was a series of three 'Taster Weekends', led by John Shepherd and intended to introduce complete beginners to fieldwork. These were a great success, and a number of those who signed-up subsequently took part in the two-week Field School, which was also well-attended. Together, the Taster Weekends and Field School attracted 64 participants.



Participants on the Taster Weekend at work on the newly-revealed brick floor in Trench P

Our plan for 2010 was to concentrate work on the brick platform in Trench P in order to finish the archaeological investigation and allow the Copped Hall Trust to consider its long-term preservation. Work progressed well. At the end of 2009, approximately two-thirds of the platform had been uncovered, together with part of its remaining thick encircling wall foundations, the 'robber cut' where part of the foundations had been robbed-out, and a north-south garden wall over its east side. In 2010 we intended to

uncover the whole of the platform and remaining foundations, investigate the relationship between the circular feature and the garden wall, and to excavate the northern part of the trench to check the extent of a cobble path together with any other features in that area. It had become clear that the platform had been built not on firm natural clay, but on the softer fill of what seems to be a large cut feature, possibly the ditch or moat which we have seen evidence of to the west. So, in addition, it was also planned to excavate the deposits on the west and south sides of the platform to investigate this.

During the WEAG excavation week, the northern third of the trench was worked on, together with an area on the eastern side of the garden wall: the latter revealed that the wall foundations continued at the same level under the garden wall and around the brick platform. In the north-east corner, more of a (Victorian?) water pipe was exposed, cutting through the garden wall and extending to the north edge of the trench. An additional small brick block was found on the east side of the wall at the north trench boundary, possibly a base for a gardener's dipping bowl. Removal of the remaining deposits over the northern part of the platform revealed a rectangular stone block, its inner edge set back from the brick slightly: the foundations on each side of it become narrower and there appears to be a stone base for a vertical frame on one side (the other has been robbed away). This suggests that the block was the step for a doorway into the round 'building', which now seems fairly certain to have been a dovecote.



Cleaning the brick platform, with the stone step of the dovecote on the right



Trench P at the end of the WEAG week: the brick platform from the south

Excavation of the north-west and north parts of the trench, outside the dovecote wall foundations, showed the extent of the cobble path and rubble layer, with a wide, dense layer of cobbles running along the north edge of the trench, possibly an earlier path than the east-west Victorian one revealed in 2009 across the middle of the trench. The excavation also exposed two other brick features:

- One running east about 1m from the west edge of the trench and then turning south above the wall foundation – this proved to simply be a line of bricks placed in a ‘dog-leg’ on the surface, with no clear function.
- The second, lying next to the first one at its west end but then running north-east to the north edge of the trench, outside the line of the wall foundation. It has at least three mortared layers of bricks in two parallel rows, with closely-fitted bricks laid across the top. In addition there is a ‘socket’ built from carefully placed tiles part-way along – this appears to be an inlet for a downspout, suggesting that the structure may be a drain for rainwater run-off.

View of ‘drain’ structure looking east from the north end of the western trench edge



Excavation of the deposits outside the robber cut on the west and south sides of the trench revealed layers with varying composition and contents (clay/soil/brick and tile fragments/pebbles), and colours. Several small deposits of brick rubble, about 0.3m in diameter, were found in this area, all of them at approximately the same distance out from the centre of the brick platform – possibly bases for scaffolding when the structure was built. As excavation in the south-west corner of the trench progressed, the lower deposits contained a number of interesting finds including a piece of daub (presumably from a wattle and daub building on or near the site), and may, therefore, be of medieval date.

In an attempt to establish the relationship between the circular structure, the cut feature and the Tudor mansion, it was decided to extend the trench to the north, to where a small trench dug in 2003 had found part of a wall. The initial extension was completed during the three Taster Weekends, thanks to the enthusiastic participation of the attendees. The new area is approximately 7m east-west and 6m north-south: a 1m path between the existing trench and the extension was left unexcavated for access, together with the north-west corner of the new area, to avoid a large tree.

The wall found in 2003, likely to be the south-eastern corner of Copped Hall as shown on the 1740s scale plan, was re-exposed, approximately 1.6m west and 3.9m north of the ‘door step’ stone on the brick platform. The trench also revealed the continuation of the garden wall to the north, and the continuing cut containing the water pipe, running to the north-west corner. The two weeks of the Field School in August concentrated on this area, with the detailed drawing of the brick platform and overlying garden wall, as the surfaces in the main trench were very soft as a result of rain. The 1740s scale plan of the Hall does not show anything beyond its south-east corner; the trench extension revealed, however, a substantial wall running west-east

across the trench, a brick floor running north from the new brick wall, and several other wall sections in the north-east corner running beyond the trench boundaries.



General view of the Trench P extension, looking north-west, showing the garden wall in the foreground, the south-east wall of the Hall in the top left corner, with the 'new' wall running from the Hall to the garden wall, and the brick surface beyond it. Note the lead pipe visible in the centre.

As expected from the plan, the wall of the hall is very wide (4ft or 1.2m). The west-east wall is also substantial (3ft or 0.9m) with a levelled course of bricks on a rubble base, suggesting it was more than just another garden wall. The brick floor behind it is also well built, consisting of closely laid bricks on a deep rubble base. It was clearly in use for some time, as it has been repaired in a number of places with later stock bricks. Both the brick floor and the west-east wall have been cut into in several places creating a number of round(ish) holes, possibly for the purpose of planting shrubs. On the south edge of the west-east wall is a layer of tiles – most appear to be roughly deposited, but at the west end there is an area where they have been piled up, possibly for the purpose of levelling.

Running across the south edge of the extension, and up to the wall of the Hall, was a layer of densely packed cobbles, corresponding to those found in the original trench. These were removed, revealing a layer of brick/mortar rubble, potentially from the demolition of the walls. Embedded in this rubble layer was a length of lead pipe that had been cut when the excavation for the water pipe was made – the piece to the east of the cut was removed. A number of finds were collected across the trench, including glass, tile, pottery and bone fragments, but the most complex was a deposit of bones found on the eastern boundary of the trench – this was carefully dismantled, and initial indications are that it contained the remains of at least 4 medium sized birds (larger than pigeons). Some of the surrounding soil was processed in the flotation tank, described below, recovering a number of very small bone fragments.

The Trench P extension, showing in the centre of the picture the south-east corner of the Tudor Copped Hall



There are a number of questions that next year's work in Trench P will aim to answer, including the extent of the newly exposed walls and floor, and tile layer, and their purpose. It is also hoped to investigate the fills beneath the brick platform, and its underlying structure. However further work on the extension may be overshadowed by

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the urgent need to stabilise the brick platform, which is endangered by erosion of the sides of the robber cut. This would then enable investigation of the infill deposits in the moat/ditch (visible as multiple layers of grey / brown in both faces of the cut), and the underlying structure of the brick platform and its central column.



View looking north in Trench P, showing the cut with the water pipe, the wall of the Hall on the left, the west-east wall running across the centre, the brick floor in the background and the tile deposit in the foreground



View looking east over Trench P, showing the insecure edge of the brick platform and the deposited layers in the vertical face of the robber cut.

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While the main focus of the year was Trench P, in the rose garden (Trench G) we spent the WEAG members' week examining the previous years' records to clarify our understanding of the sequence of levelling deposits, and determine areas where the underlying masonry needs further study. A small area over a possible robbed out foundation was excavated, and more backfill was removed from the cellar of the great hall.

In Trench G we had hoped to answer some questions about the apparent lack of archaeological evidence for the walls of the large west wing running north from the great hall, and how they might relate to other phases of building in this part of the site, but were largely disappointed. A section cut through the redeposited clay



where one wall 'should' be was not particularly helpful, although clearance of what we assume to be demolition rubble revealed more of the remains of the brick floor which we first saw last year.

Cleaning the brick floor in the stair bay on the western side of the Hall

Removal of the clay backfill in the cellar of the great hall was more rewarding, however, as a number of brick drains were revealed, suggesting the floor must have been very damp.

Planning the brick drains in the west end of the great hall

Outside the footprint of the building, the plan had been to do a final check, record and backfill of a sondage previously dug around the site of the Rose Garden's central sundial, where an earlier north-south wall had been found. As it turned out, we will have to delay backfilling, as a mysterious brick structure came to light in the side of the trench. Not unlike a chimney or flue, it may have been a socket for a timber upright, or possibly a chute or downpipe for water.



The brick socket or chute



During the WEAG excavation we also welcomed around 35 visitors from the Central London Young Archaeologists Club (normally based at the LAARC in Eagle Wharf Road), who enjoyed a tour of the standing mansion, examined the finds displayed in the archaeology room, and inspected the trenches. The visit was a success, and in the future it would be good to be able to give the young archaeologists a chance to wield their trowels.

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During the second week of the Field School we were pleased to welcome members of the City of London Archaeological Society (CoLAS), who inspected our trenches in some detail, examined the finds, and toured the mansion and gardens. Rose Baillie, the chairman of CoLAS later wrote to say how much the visitors had enjoyed their day, and particularly wanted to thank all those from WEAG who had helped, and answered their questions so enthusiastically!

Two other good friends of the Project also came to review progress, and give their valuable advice. Pat Ryan, the expert on bricks in Essex, spent an afternoon examining our masonry, which she last saw when not much more than the tops of the walls in the Rose Garden had been exposed. Mike Hacker, who was involved in the analysis of the 'grey layer' found in 2004, made useful observations on the areas of the site where natural clay had been found, and confirmed that we still have substantial amounts of redeposited clay to deal with.

Of particular interest to Mike, and everyone else this year, was the environmental flotation tank masterminded, constructed and operated by Nick Daines. This is used to wash and sieve samples of any deposits which might contain tiny seeds, shells or bones. One sample from Trench P was taken of the soil surrounding the bones of four medium sized birds, and processing in the flotation tank revealed a number of very small bone fragments.



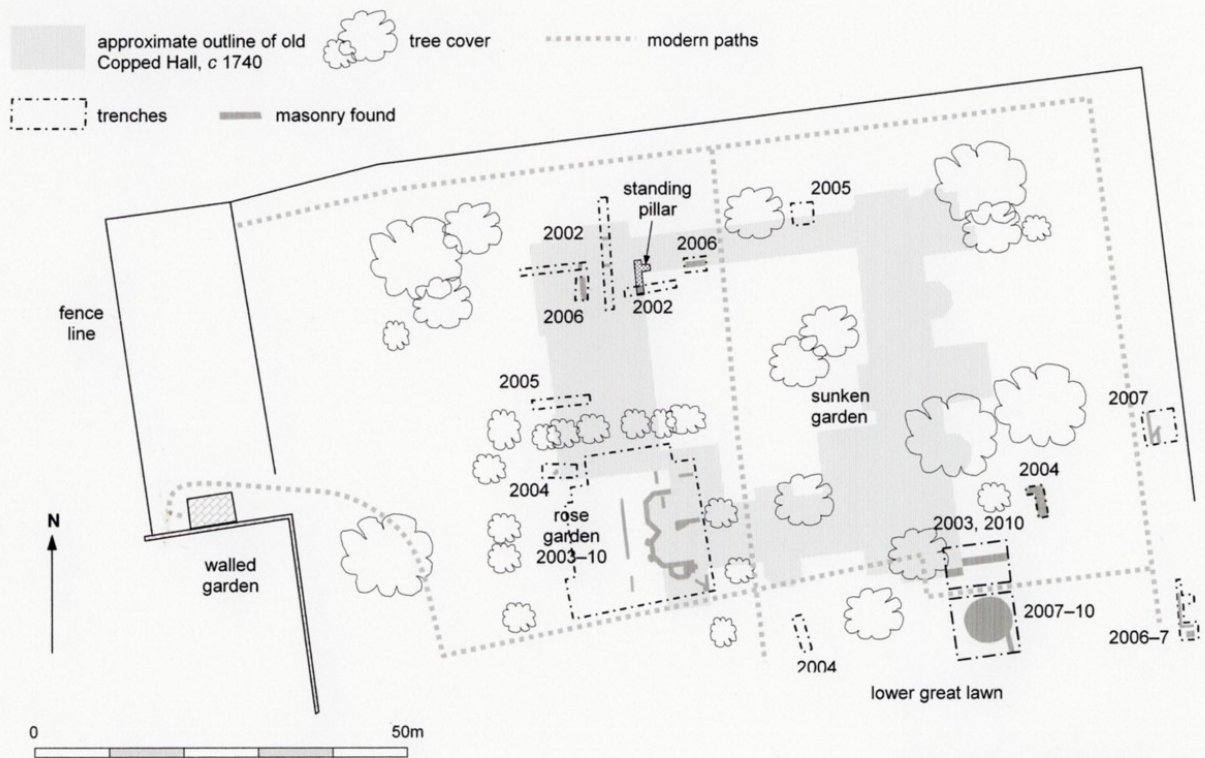
The flotation tank in action



As always, thanks are due to everyone who took part on site in the trenches, or helped behind the scenes.

**Andrew Madeley
Christina Holloway**

Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project, Essex:
Trenches excavated 2002–2010



Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project – 2011