



West Essex Archaeological Group Experience Weekend Summer 2025



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This introduction to the site and its long history has been compiled from the following sources -

Holloway, C. (2010) "Recent excavations on the site of a Tudor Mansion at Copped Hall, Essex" *London Archaeologist*. Volume 12 No.9. London Archaeologist: London.

Copped Hall Trust. *History*. [ONLINE] <http://www.coppedhalltrust.org.uk/>

Keith, S. (2007) *Nine Centuries at Copped Hall*. Metloc Printers: Essex.

Introduction

The Copped Hall you see standing today dates from around 1750 when it replaced a great Tudor house located on the sheltered slope to the north-west which was demolished (some of the features and bricks from the original house can still be seen in Copped Hall today). Following a fire in 1917 Copped Hall fell into dereliction and its surrounding land attracted the attention of property developers. In response, locals formed the Friends of Copped Hall, promoting the historical importance to prevent re-development. In 1993 the Copped Hall Trust (CHT) formed, raising money to buy the site and their aims are as follows:

- Restore the interior of the mansion to its mid 18th-Century glory
- Restore the extensive gardens
- Establish the layout of the previous mansion at the North of the gardens
- Improve understanding of the site's historical significance
- Provide educational opportunities for the local community

In 1984, the Archaeology Unit of Essex County Council recorded the visible remnants of "Old" Copped Hall; a brick and stone pillar and short section of wall, and some ivy covered walls in the current sunken rock garden. Small trenches also located some fragments of masonry. Under the Copped Hall Trust's ownership, there was a desire to discover if more of the old hall survived. Since 2001, the buried remains have been investigated by the West Essex Archaeological Group (WEAG) in conjunction with the Copped Hall Trust Archaeology Project. The excavations and associated research have involved both amateur and professional archaeologists, and have given many people their first taste of practical archaeology.

Background

The recorded history of Copped Hall begins in the 12th century, suggesting a substantial building existed, belonging to the Fitzaucher family, who served the King as huntsmen. In 1303 the Estate totalled 180 acres including park, arable and meadow land. Copped Hall changed ownership in 1337 to Sir John Shardlow. He later conveyed it to the Abbots of Waltham who described Copped Hall as "a mansion of pleasure and privacy". Edward III granted them permission to further extend the park by 120 acres on the Epping side.

The site was then gifted to Henry VIII in 1537 in the hope of saving Waltham Abbey from dissolution, although Henry VIII visited Copped Hall he never lived there. In 1548 Edward VI allowed his sister Mary to live at Copped Hall. When she later ascended the throne, she leased Copped Hall to Sir Thomas Cornwallis and later, in 1558 it was transferred to the Duchy of Lancaster. In 1564 Queen Elizabeth I granted Copped Hall to her Privy Counsellor and Vice-Chamberlain of the Royal Household, Sir. Thomas Heneage who started to rebuild the mansion.

Copped Hall then passed from the daughter of Sir Thomas Heneage to Lionel Cranfield, 1st Earl of Middlesex, in 1623. Cranfield lived in retirement at Copped Hall until his death in 1645, while there he filled the house with treasures and extensively cultivated the garden. Lionel Cranfield's two sons followed him as owners of Copped Hall, however it was their sister's son, Charles Sackville, 8th Earl of Dorset, who inherited Copped Hall from them. He sold the hall in 1701 to Sir Thomas Webster and took much of its contents to Knole House where they can be seen to this day. During the 37 years of Webster's ownership Copped Hall became rather dilapidated,

foundations started to give way and a hurricane damaged other parts. In 1739 the estate was sold to Edward Conyers whose son, John, demolished the mansion in 1748.



Fig. 1 - View of Copped Hall in Essex, from the Park - 1746 - George Lambert and Francis Hayman. Commissioned by John Conyers to record his inheritance and commemorate the Tudor House before he demolished it.
(Image courtesy if the Tate Britain)

An early drawing of Copped Hall, shows a row of roof gables. It would have originally been constructed as a timber framed building but would later have acquired tall brick chimneys. The external walls of the principal parts would probably have also been rebuilt of brick with corner buttresses. The mansion would have endured alterations and rebuilding over the centuries to keep pace with architectural fashions. In 1564 when Queen Elizabeth I gifted Copped Hall to Sir Thomas Heneage the buildings included a hall, great chamber, kitchen and service rooms, a court with a double gate, and a moat. It is likely that Heneage carried out major rebuilding work before receiving Elizabeth as a guest, either in July 1568 or in time for her second visit in 1578. A view of Copped Hall in its final form can be seen in M.J. Farmer's 1735 drawing (Fig. 2). This shows a house of three storeys: the south range with wings to east and west enclosing a courtyard, the north side comprising a single-storey loggia or covered colonnade.

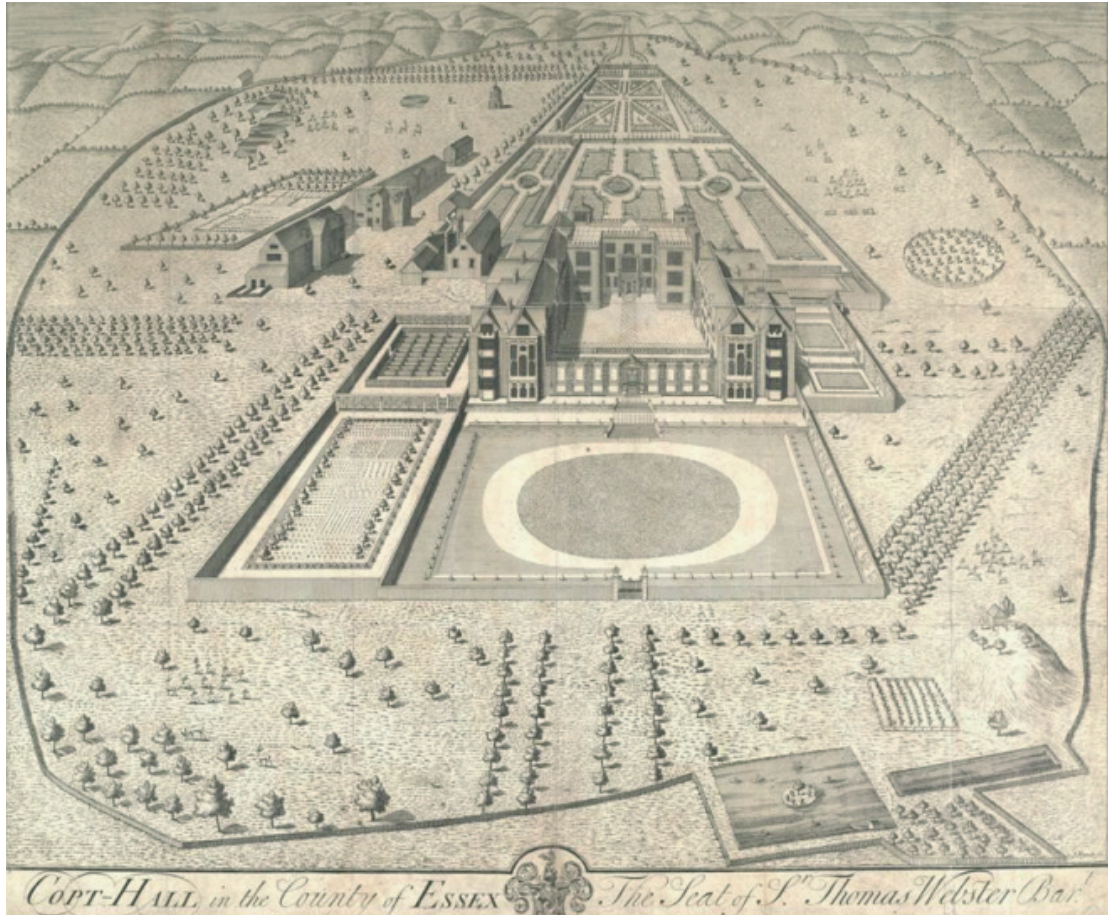


Fig. 2 - Drawing of Copt Hall (Copped Hall) from M.J. Farmer's 1735 *History of Waltham Abbey*.
(Image courtesy of Holloway, 2010)

If you are interested in a detailed history of Copped Hall we recommend the purchase of *Old Copped Hall 1258-1748* by Norah Carlin. Prior to retirement Carlin was a Principal Lecturer in History at Middlesex University and has a number of history books to her name. You can purchase a copy prior to your weekend course via our website or copies will be available on the courses.

Fieldwork

Archaeological evidence for the earlier Fitztaucher ownership consists of residual pottery sherds from the 11th to 13th centuries and some nibbed roof tiles. The exact location of this Hall is not known, although there is a strong possibility that it was incorporated into the larger Tudor building. Stylistic clues from the Farmer drawing, and an 18th-century plan (Newdigate Plan), have helped us to interpret the physical evidence and establish a building sequence. A focus of our work has been a large trench excavated over the south west wing of the building (Trench G). When the Hall was demolished, the lowest part of the cellar was backfilled and sealed with a layer of clay. We have been able to compare the excavated remains with the 18th-century plan and drawing.

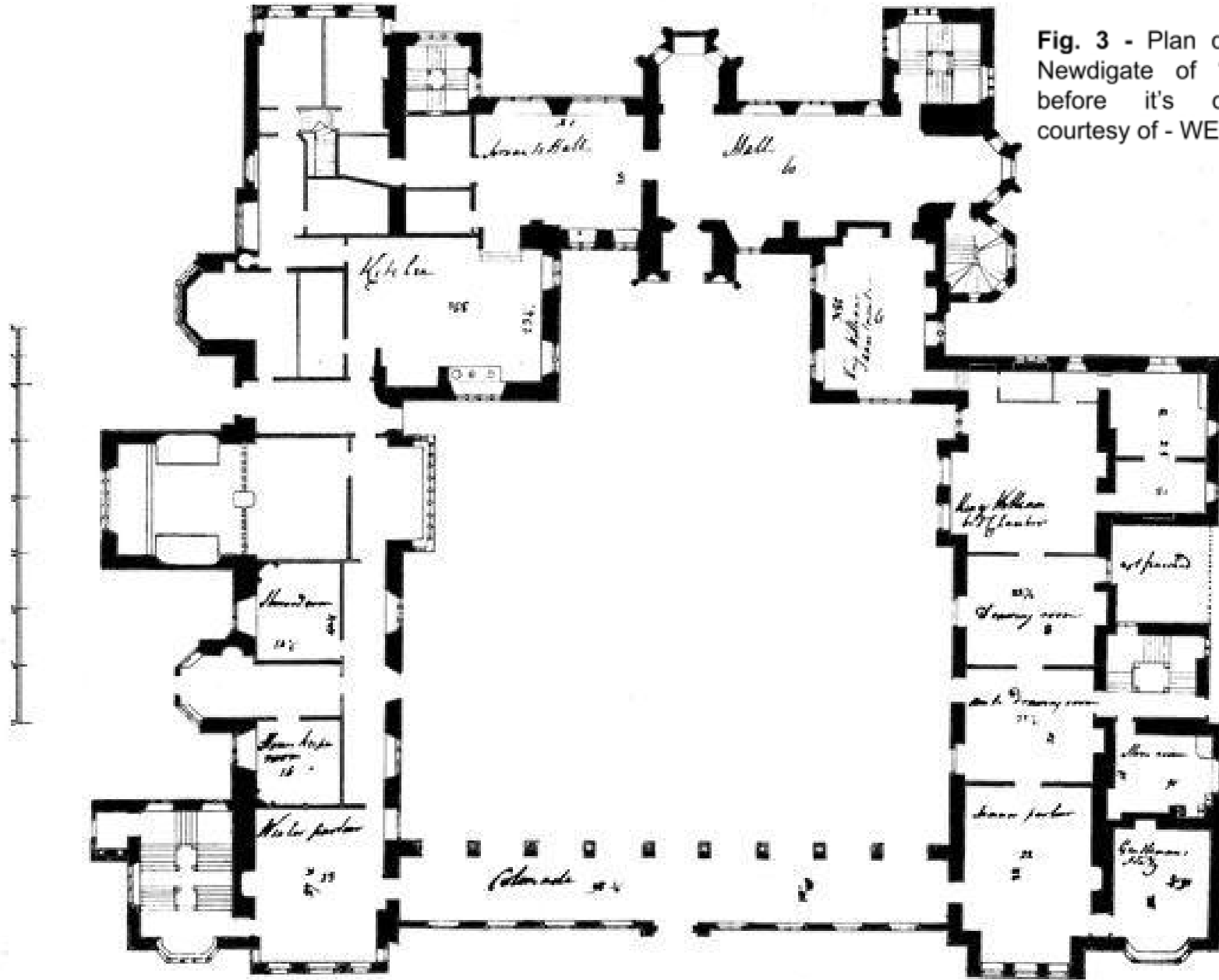


Fig. 3 - Plan drawn by Sir Roger Newdigate of "Old Copped Hall" before it's demolition. (Image courtesy of - WEAG)

Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project, Essex:

Ground floor plan of the south wing of old Copped Hall,
(floor plan reproduced by courtesy of Essex Record Office, ref. D/DW E26/11)

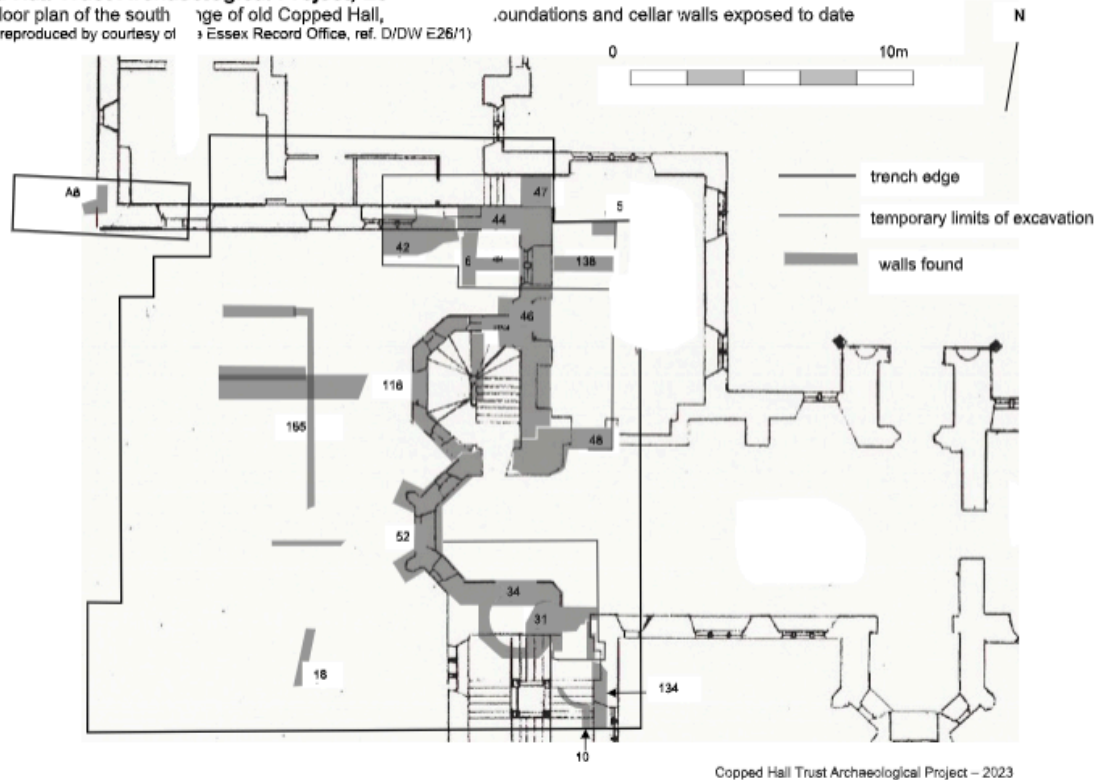


Fig. 4 - Masonry exposed in Trench G show in comparison to the 18th-century Newdigate floor plan.

In recent years WEAG have focussed on finding remains of the vast garden landscaping; to the south-east of the building footprint, successions of pebble paths, landscaping layers, and garden walls have been found. In the last couple of years we have investigated the slope between the existing upper and lower lawns, based on what appears to be a staircase structure in the 1735 Farmer drawing (Trench Y). This trench is still under investigation and most notably has produced large stone window mullions, likely recycled from the original house, that were used to support the stair treads.

In 2007 a ground-penetrating radar survey just south of the original house revealed a large round feature (Trench P - now closed). Excavation uncovered a circular brick platform with substantial foundations. It is thought that the structure was a dovecote (**Fig. 9**).

We have recovered a wide range of pottery sherds, most of which are inevitably associated with "New" Copped Hall, but a growing number are contemporary with the older house. Local industry is represented with pottery from Essex and London but also further afield with fragments from France, the Rhineland and even some high-status Italian marbled ware.

Glossary of terms you may hear

Artefact - An object (whole or in part) which has been used or made by humans and provides physical clues to the activity carried out in the area of discovery

Assemblage - A group of artefacts found together, from the same place or time.

Backfill - Relates to the fill of a trench, often referenced when we talk about the backfill of the foundations of the house, or of trenches that builders used to build or reuse walls on the site

Bioturbation - Changes to the nature, form and arrangement of archaeological deposits and sediments as a result of biological activity in the ground.

Bothy - WEAG specific. Refers to the former gardener's hut next to the walled garden where finds processing is carried out and the tools are stored at the end of the day

CBA - Council for British Archaeology - A charitable organisation established to preserve and promote archaeology in England and Wales - Our Experience Weekends are part of the CBA's Festival of Archaeology

CBM - Ceramic Building Material. Can refer to bricks, roof and floor tiles etc.

Construction Trench - A linear hole dug to provide a solid footing for a wall or similar feature.

Context - The technical term for defining an individual, identifiable stratigraphic unit or event.

Context sheet - A form used to record the characteristics and interpretation of an individual context, including measurements, descriptions and relationships to other features.

Cropmark - Usually observed from the air, these are marks created on the surface of the ground, usually when the grass is very dry, that can reveal archaeological features hidden underground.

CTP - Clay Tobacco Pipe - Pipes were usually made out of a white clay, we occasionally find the bowls of pipes but most often fragments of stem.

Cut - A context representing a moment in time when other archaeological or natural deposits were removed for the creation of a new feature

Deposit/Fill - The material filling a cut context. This can be the footings and the wall itself, or the backfill that has accumulated or been deposited into a cut feature such as a construction trench, ditch, grave etc.

Excavation - The act of intrusively digging up a site to reveal the archaeological features underground.

Flotation - A method for extracting artefacts or environmental information from a context. Often carbonised plant remains, shells, small bones and insect remains that would otherwise be

overlooked can be collected from soils and sediments. This is achieved by stirring a sample of soil in water, allowing lighter materials to float over a weir to be collected in a fine sieve.

Geophysics - General term referring to the use of geophysical techniques to determine buried features. The most common techniques are magnetometry, resistivity and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR).

In situ - used to describe features and artefacts that are in their original place or have been left in the trench for further investigation or recording.

Levels - Used to establish the height of sites and archaeological features above sea level.

Mattock- A tool similar to a pickaxe used to excavate the trench, can be used to remove larger quantities of earth. Always maintain awareness of others in the trench when using the mattock.

Photogrammetry - The process of creating accurate scaled maps or 3D models using a series of photographs. (Fig. 6)

Posthole - A rock or earth-cut socket which at one time held an upright timber post.

Robber Trench - A hole dug to extract usable building material from an existing structure.

Section - The vertical side wall of an excavation trench. Used to understand the sequence of events/contexts on a site

Stratigraphy - A principle adopted from Geology. The study of the formation, composition, sequence and deposition of layers through time. The succession of layers and features, often noticeable through the trench sections.

Temporary Bench Mark (TBM) - A bench mark is an ordnance survey record of height above sea level, usually in a prominent place. Archaeological sites have temporary bench marks which denote the level traversed and calculated onto site from the fixed bench marks.

Trench - In archaeology this term refers to any area of ground subject to formal excavation.

Trowel- A small hand tool with a diamond shaped head used for precise excavation.

Worked/Knapped Flint - Stone tools are often made from flint or chert which are worked into tools for cutting or scraping

Worked Stone - Stone that has been shaped by human hands, this could relate to window mullions, decorative facings etc.

Bibliography and Useful Reading

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Pictures of Interest



Fig. 5 - The spiral staircase (Trench G) being excavated; it does not match the Newdigate plan, and is believed to possibly pre-date the square stair tower at the south end of the plan.

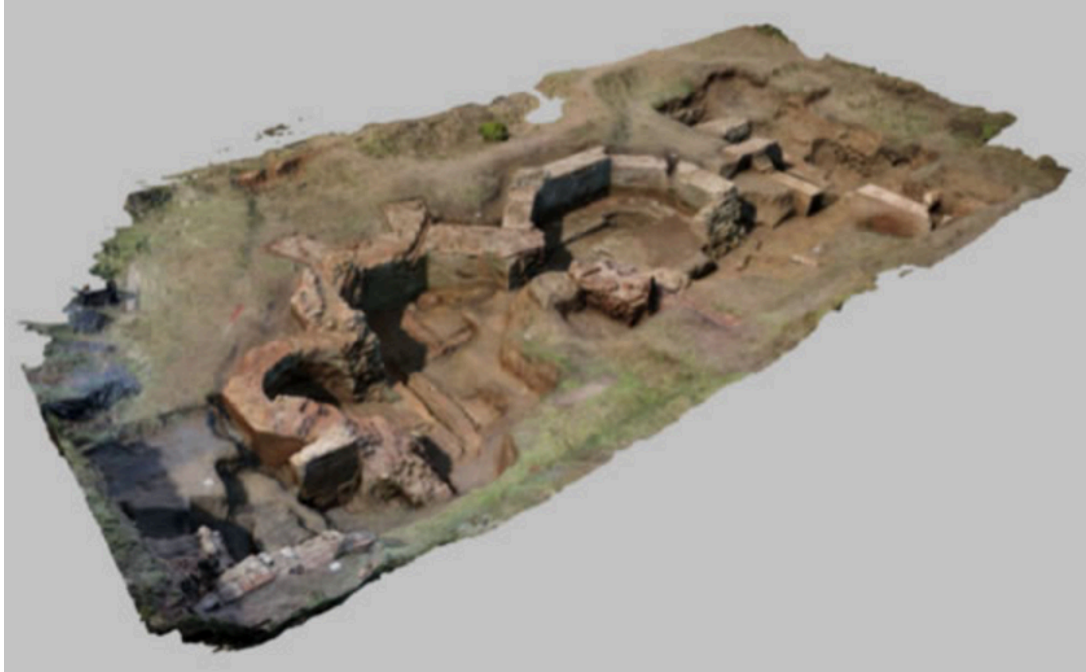


Fig. 6 - A still image from the photogrammetry carried out on Trench G in 2015 by MOLA.
Overhead view of the South-West cellars.

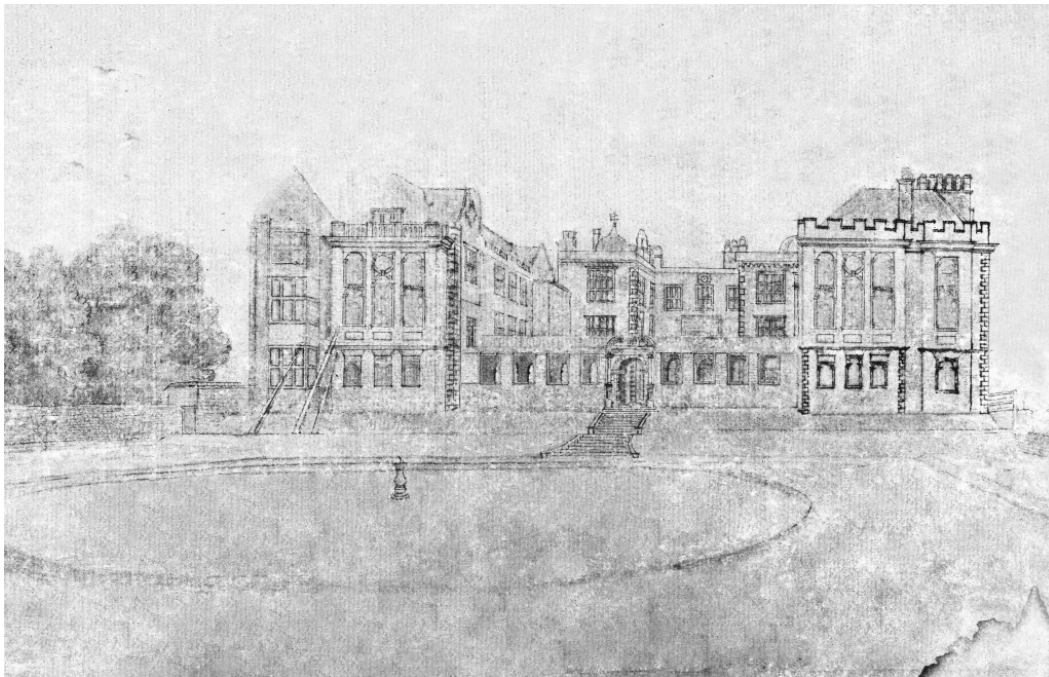


Fig. 7 - A drawing of Old Copped Hall obtained from the Essex Records Office



Fig. 8 - View of Copped Hall, from across the lake - 1746 - G. Lambert and F. Hayman. Commissioned by John Conyers to record his inheritance and commemorate the Tudor House before he demolished it. (Image courtesy if the Tate Britain)



Fig . 9 - Circular feature in Trench P, now closed. Believed to be the remains of a Tudor Dovecote