

Eastcote House Gardens - Archaeological Investigations

by Brian Grisdale

The grounds of the demolished Eastcote House are maintained by the Friends of Eastcote House Gardens, and they, along with the London Borough of Hillingdon council, were in 2011 awarded monies from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help them progress their plans for the Gardens. In June 2012 this preliminary phase of the project involved an excavation on the site of the House to confirm its location and assess the condition of the remains, as well as testing the level of community involvement. Three of the four trenches excavated in this phase revealed the substantial main walls of the House and a basement or cellar. The fourth trench exposed another building believed to be the Coach House. Community interest and involvement was proven with the participation of about 100 adult and school children volunteers.

In August 2013 Eastcote House Gardens was again successful in obtaining Heritage Lottery Funding to progress their plans, which included restoring the remaining buildings in the grounds of the House, namely the Stables, Dovecot and Walled Garden, all of which are listed. This second phase work also included a more detailed archaeological investigation to progress the 2013 discoveries.

The archaeological work commenced with a dig that ran from the 28 June to 13 July 2014, which was the first of a series of four excavations planned to run over successive summers 2014 - 2017. Community involvement is a high priority requirement of HLF awards, thus the local community were strongly encouraged to participate in assisting with the dig in conjunction with the appointed specialists AOC Archaeology. In answer to the call for community participation, both myself and Simon Morgan of the Society probed the site with our trowels for several days, exposing the past.

The excavations this year were more extensive than the narrow trenches of 2012, and exposed a larger proportion of the main House walls and considerably more of the cellars in the Tudor portion of the House. During demolition in 1965 much of the House debris was deposited into the cellars, where the finds included the Purbeck Stone columns of the porch, moulded stone, marble and decorated ceiling plaster.

Other 'finds' during the two weeks of excavations were further revelations of the Coach House and probable evidence of 'Hopkyttes'. The latter is the late medieval building which existed on the site prior to Eastcote House and previously only evidenced in documentation. See Figs. 1 and 2.

Another aspect of community involvement was the provision of free Workshops by AOC for public attendance and participation. These roughly two hour courses included Historical Building Surveying/Recording, Laser Scanning and Geophysical Surveying.

It is hoped that an intermediate report on the 2014 archaeological work will be available before the end of the year, but a detailed analysis and interpretation will probably await the conclusion of the 2017 investigation.

The following photographs, taken on the 11 July, show some areas of the 2014 excavations:



Fig. 1

The outer 'north' wall of EH, mostly Tudor with a Georgian portion at the top of the picture. In the bottom left hand corner are flints which could be part of the foundations of a late medieval house. See Fig. 2



Fig. 2
Eastern end of 'north' wall from Fig. 1



Fig. 4



Fig. 3
A portion of the medieval floor area shown in Fig. 2 which could be the base for floor tiling



Fig. 5
Figs. 4 and 5 are views of the cellars under the Tudor house



Fig. 6.

Fig. 6 is of the Coach House which is just south of the existing Stables building. The excavation shows about a third or quarter of the plan area of the building. Evidence on and near the brickwork perhaps indicates the presence of a small smithy. Floor strata layers suggested building work dated 1500 or earlier.