

Our annual excavation at Elsyng Palace in July 2022 coincided with both the (covid delayed) full publication of all of the results of our excavations up to 2019 in our monograph *Monarchs, Courtiers and Technocrats*, which also published years of documentary research into the history of the site, and with the main stages of the Heritage Lottery Fund supported Stories of Enfield project which sought to bring knowledge of the palace to a wider audience. Consequently as we dug we were being filmed (watch the film at [www.enfarchsoc.org/elsyng](http://www.enfarchsoc.org/elsyng)) and our efforts were being documented for a second book, *Elsyng, Enfield's Lost Palace Revealed*, which is also now available at [www.enfarchsoc.org](http://www.enfarchsoc.org), while the middle weekend was dominated by two successful days of displays and tours complimenting weekday schools visits. Not all of these could go ahead though – and even excavation had to be cancelled on one day – due to the unsafe heat as we sweltered in 40° !

The actual excavation though had only one objective, to further investigate a very large rubble filled cut feature we had encountered in 2021 while trying to locate the inner gatehouse of the palace, the very general location of which could be inferred with some certainty from what else we know of the palace plan. Known from documentary evidence to have been a four storey high, moat fronted block that featured high status accommodation above the gateway between the outer (service) and inner courts of the palace, we had (quite tentatively) postulated that the cut feature might be a robber trench from a main wall of this gatehouse. So two initial trenches were cut in the same general area, later augmented by a third and fourth (Fig. 1). As sections of them were excavated it became increasingly clear though that the feature was just too big to be a robber trench. We excavated at selected points to a depth of 1 m (the maximum safe and permitted depth on this site) and the general stony brickearth and rubble fill was still going; we excavated across the feature at points 13 m apart and there was the same fill; we excavated at points 25 m apart along the feature and there was the same fill. The obvious conclusion then was that this was a perhaps 15 m wide, 25 m or more long and well over 1 m deep cut into the ground and the only reasonable identification of it was as the moat known to have fronted the gatehouse.

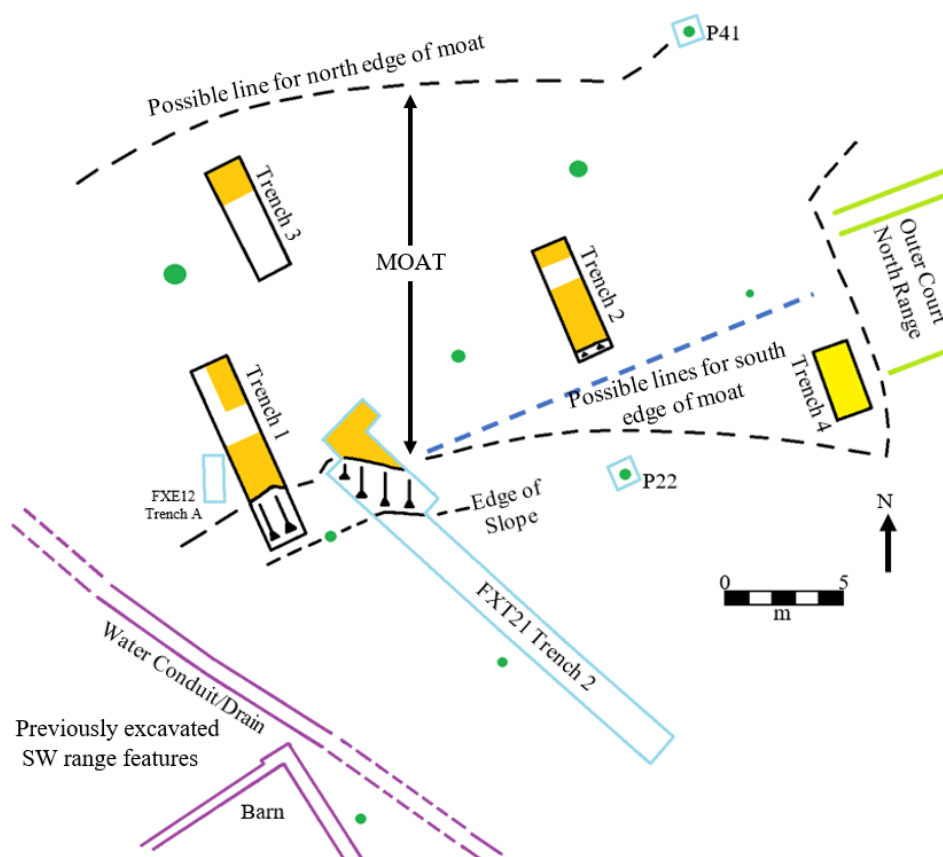


Fig. 1: General site plan including earlier trenches/test pits (light blue) and trees (green).  
Deeper excavated areas in orange/yellow.

Exactly how far the moat ran is still to be determined – it looks as if one end of it may have run up to the buildings we know formed the north range of the outer court and there is a possibility that an arm of it ran round other elements of the inner court. But this is a much bigger – and more impressive – moat than might be anticipated here and it must have been a very prominent feature of the palace plan, making a significant statement about the building complex’s status. With a large bridge, which must also be envisaged as crossing the moat, and coupled with an imposing gatehouse façade, it is likely to have made the approach to the inner from the outer court a very grand one.

Whilst that is a significant advance in our knowledge of the palace it does mean that we were more than usually focused on what finds might emerge from its fill, there being no prospect of finding features other than the moat on this site given its size; and the gatehouse itself is clearly further north than we could excavate this year. Much of that moat fill was fairly barren of finds, but it evidently comprised individual dumps of material that had come from different stages of the palace demolition and or different areas of the palace. And in a few specific places there were consequently fair concentrations of finds. In particular at the one point where we excavated a section of the south edge of the moat its fill featured a lot of very small finds recovered by hand sorting the spoil excavators had dug away. These included a few larger items like a big iron key (Fig. 2), but also many copper alloy dress pins from the fastening of collars and cuffs to clothing, as well as many lace chapes or aglets, copper alloy tubes fitted to the end of the many laces that Tudor and Stuart clothing was also fastened with. Add in the animal bones from this deposit, which were often very small ones down to fish bones, and one wonders if this particular dump had derived from emptying something like a palace drain.



Fig. 2: Iron Key

By contrast one very large find of significance was a 2.5 kg ‘hearth bottom’, a thick disc of iron slag with a convex base which is indicative of a significant amount of smithing activity having taken place on the site at some date. That need not be at the time that Elsyng was a royal palace though as it had a history dating back into the Medieval period, which was emphasised by another find, part of a decorated lead glazed floor tile featuring representations of deer (Fig. 3) which was made at Penn in Buckinghamshire between 1350 and 1390. Fragments of a tin glazed (Delft) floor tile (Fig. 4) by contrast must have belonged to towards the end of the life of the palace and other finds too probably had a range of dates.



Fig. 3: Lead glazed tile fragment  
(reconstruction of the whole tile)



Fig. 4: Tin glazed tile fragments

Thus there was a hooked clasp of the C15th to mid/late C16th perhaps from a cloak (Fig. 5), but a complete belt buckle (Fig. 6) belonged to the period 1550 – 1650 and might well have been lost not long before the demolition of the palace. Along with several more Frechen Bartmann (German salt glazed stoneware) jug sherds decorated with armorials to add to our growing collection from Elsyng (Fig. 7), the finds then maintained the 2022 digging team's interest as they trowelled and mattocked through moat fill. Hopefully in July 2023 we can finish defining just how big that moat is and move on to exploring the gatehouse it must have made the approaching of an impressive experience.

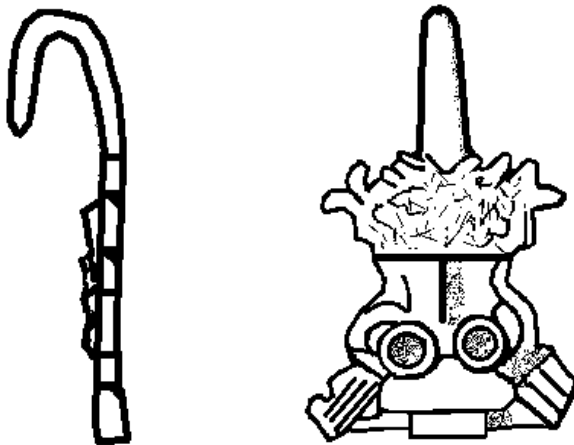


Fig. 5: Copper alloy hooked cloak clasp

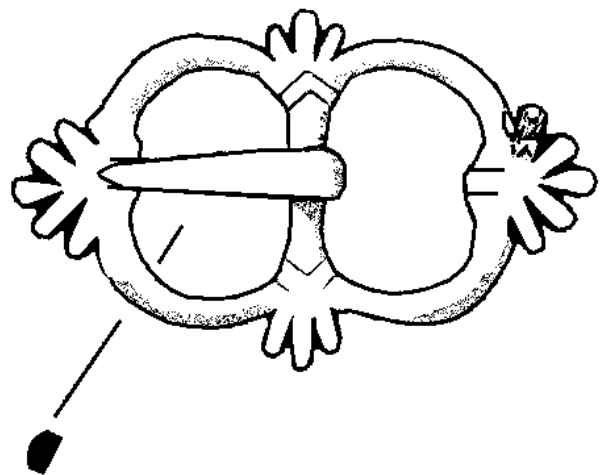


Fig. 6: Copper alloy belt buckle



Fig. 7: Frechen Bartmann jug sherd showing the arms of Jülich-Cleve-Berg (a state today straddling the border between Germany and Holland)