

## Archaeology at Copped Hall 2002-2009

In 2009, the Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project (CHTAP) undertook an eighth season of excavation as part of its investigation of the remains of 'old' Copped Hall, the Tudor predecessor of the standing Hall which is being restored by the Copped Hall Trust. Following a pattern established in 2002, WEAG members dug for nine days around the Spring Bank Holiday. In August, we held two weeks of training excavations, the first for people new to field archaeology, and the second for those with some experience either at Copped Hall or on other sites.



We are currently working in two areas of the gardens, around 250m to the north-west of the standing Hall. This was the site of old Copped Hall, originally a large brick building of two or three storeys and a cellar, with a late-medieval style great hall and 'cross-passage' entrance, possibly built around 1500. It was subsequently extended to enclose a courtyard, with east and west wings and a covered colonnade to the north.

In our largest trench, the lower part of the cellar walls in the south-western corner of the old Hall have been revealed. When the Hall was demolished around 1750, this area was landscaped as part of the gardens of the new Hall; some of the walls were robbed out, probably so that the materials could be re-used in the new foundations. Substantial sections were, however, left behind, and by comparing these with a surviving plan of the ground floor of the Hall, made just before demolition, we have been able to start identifying different phases of its development during the 16th and early 17th century.

A major task is the removal of the 18th-century demolition backfill from inside the cellar. This has previously revealed part of a polygonal stair-tower built of Tudor brick at the south-western corner of the building. The 18th century plans show that it led from the cellar up to the great hall. Its five steps survive to almost a metre high. When the steps were first cleared, there seemed to be a solid surface at the base, overlain by a layer of crushed mortar; this layer was removed to reveal, however, not a floor, but a wall, continuing the east-west line of the south wall of the great hall. It appears to run under - so possibly pre-dates - the stair. The stair was in turn - at ground-floor level at least - replaced by a larger square tower which is shown on the 18th century plan.



Just to the north, we also made progress clearing the interior of another, later stair bay. This bay really did have the remains of an in situ brick floor at its base, overlying yet another wall, from an earlier phase of building.

Both these areas will need more work next year. There is still no trace at this level of the walls of the large west wing shown on the 18th century plan and which was added to the Hall perhaps in the 1570s. We have truncated fragments of an intermediate wing, cut through either by subsequent construction or robbing, but any remains of the late wing may be buried deeper and awaiting further excavation.



Our other active trench is a short distance away, in an area known as the lower great lawn which would have been just to the south-east of the old Hall. Here a ground penetrating radar survey by the University of East London revealed the presence of an intriguing round feature. Excavation uncovered a circular brick platform, c 7m in diameter, very carefully set out, with substantial foundations. The surface as we see it now is probably much later (18th century?) than the foundations (16th century?). The 'foundations' may even have originally been standing walls, buried when the gardens were landscaped. We don't know what the structure was; cistern, icehouse, dovecote or hawking tower have all been suggested, and it could have had a number of functions over time.

It was overlain by garden paths and walls, with post-holes suggesting decorative plant supports or similar structures. One of the post holes contained a large quantity of moulded bricks from a window mullion. These are identical to mid-16th century examples recorded at Hill Hall, our nearest Tudor 'great house' neighbour. In 2010 we aim to extend the trench further to locate the south side of old Copped Hall and to investigate the relationship of the Hall with the round structure. Was it freestanding or attached? Hopefully such information will give us a clue as to its function: although there is no shortage of ideas, none can be proved at present.

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### The early history of Copped Hall

Although we have yet to find any very early features, we have come across fragments of pottery from the late Iron Age and Roman periods, mixed with later material. A possible cut feature has also been identified, much truncated by later building, containing a few pot sherds from the 6th to the 9th century, so there is the possibility of early medieval activity on the site. Other pottery finds seem to support the documentary evidence that a fairly substantial building - or succession of buildings - has stood on the estate since at least the 13th century, although not necessarily on the same spot.



WEAG members have also been involved in research to supplement what was already known about the early history of the site. The estate was owned by Waltham Abbey from 1350 until its acquisition by Henry VIII in 1534. Copped Hall remained in royal hands until 1564, when it was granted by Queen Elizabeth to one of her favourite courtiers, Thomas Heneage, and his wife Anne. At this time, the buildings included a hall, great chamber, kitchen and service rooms, a court with a double gate, and a moat (Newman 1970, 18-19). It is likely that Heneage embarked on a major rebuilding project in order to receive Elizabeth as a guest, with further modifications made by subsequent owners.

### The archaeological investigation of the site

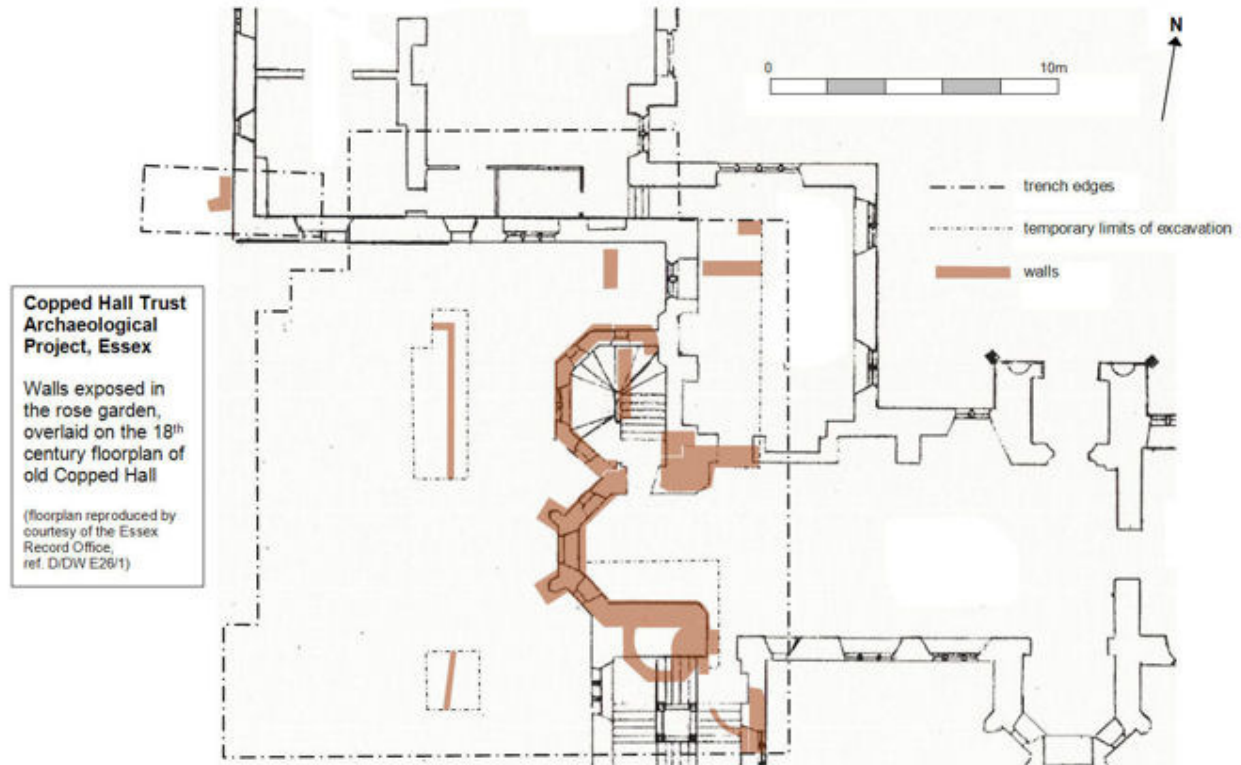
As part of its project to restore the gardens, the Copped Hall Trust wanted to establish the layout of the old Hall; the only remnants previously visible were a brick and stone pillar and short section of wall (originally the west end of the loggia) and parts of the cellars of the east range, recorded in detail in 1984 by the Archaeology Unit of Essex County Council (Andrews 1986, 100), and which now form a retaining wall for the sunken rock garden. In 2001, WEAG was asked to investigate further and carried out a geophysical survey followed, in 2002, by the excavation of three trenches near the loggia pillar. We uncovered drains, constructed from brick and tile, two narrow brick walls, and a more substantial section of wall, the position of which appears to be consistent with that of a fireplace on an internal wall shown on John Conyers's plan. Areas of brick rubble and mortar were also found, possibly demolition debris or the remnants of the robbed-out external walls of the Hall. In 2003 we opened a trench in an area which in the late-19th century had been made into a rose garden, and started to uncover the cellars of the west end of the south range, thought to be the earliest part of the Hall. It became clear that archaeological survival was far better than expected, and later that year the Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project was established, with twice-yearly excavations (including a training dig) organised jointly by WEAG and CHT, and additional research and finds processing carried out by WEAG members.



In subsequent seasons the rose garden trench has become our main area of work, where excavations have revealed the lower parts of the cellar walls of the south-eastern part of the great hall, largely corresponding to the mid-18th century plan of the ground floor. This has proved invaluable, as we have been able to scale-up its measurements to compare with what we find, and it is a fascinating exercise to compare the plan of what was above ground in 1748 with the below-ground remains. Walls not shown on the plan indicate phases of building which were not visible at the time of demolition. All the walls are brick-built. The bricks themselves can only be generally dated to c 1450-1650, so it is relative dating (from details such as walls butting up against each other, the colours and fabrics of the bricks or mortar, and the regularity of coursing), together with the documented history, which tells us about the sequence of building. As well as the extension of the original southern range of the Hall with large east and west wings there seem to have been intermediate phases and lesser modifications. Further work will aim to refine our understanding of the building sequence.

In addition to the excavation of the south range, the work carried out by WEAG each year has revealed a surprisingly substantial foundation for the loggia, and parts of outbuildings to the east of the old Hall.

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### The development of the gardens

The archaeology does not stop with the demolition of old Copped Hall in the mid-18th century. How were the gardens redesigned afterwards? The natural slope of the ground was terraced, but when? On the lower great lawn a succession of pebble paths, landscaping layers, and garden walls has been revealed. In the area of the rose garden the remains of the old Hall were covered in a levelling layer of clay, possibly the spoil from the foundation trenches of the new Hall. The late-19th century rose beds were cut into this layer, along with two systems of land drains; the garden labourers had to dig through the buried wall foundations as well as the clay in order to lay the drains. All these features have been fully recorded as part of the story of the site and of the people who lived and worked there.



### The finds



Some of the finds give us unexpected glimpses of the lives of past occupants. They include the bowl of a late-19th century clay tobacco pipe commemorating the 100th anniversary of the participation of the Enniskillen Regiment in the Egyptian campaign of 1798, perhaps once owned by one of the gardeners. A fragment of glass, dated to the late-15th to 17th century, came from a vessel known as a matula. These were often used for the inspection of urine as a guide to health and well-being. We have recovered a wide range of pottery sherds, most of which are inevitably associated with the 18th and 19th centuries, but many are contemporary with old Copped Hall. They remind us of how life at the Hall was part of a wider network of commerce and industry: our 16th and 17th century pottery includes fragments from France and the Rhineland. Other fragments come from major white ware pottery industry around the Surrey/Hampshire Border. Local wares dating to the 13th to 17th centuries are well-represented, including the Mill Green industry based around Ingatestone in Essex, and the potteries at Harlow producing Metropolitan slipware. We have also found floor tiles dated to the 14th to 17th centuries.

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CHTAP has given many people, of all ages and from all walks of life, their first taste of practical archaeology. We have helped to train university students in fieldwork skills, including a number who have travelled from the United States. Those who come back each year have been able to see the Project develop and progress, as well as building up their skills and experience. It is a great opportunity to get involved and find out more about local history and archaeology. In addition to the WEAG members who have given so much of their time, we have had help and support from the local and London museum services, other archaeological societies and individual specialists and, especially, the Friends of the Copped Hall Trust. Why not come along and find out more?

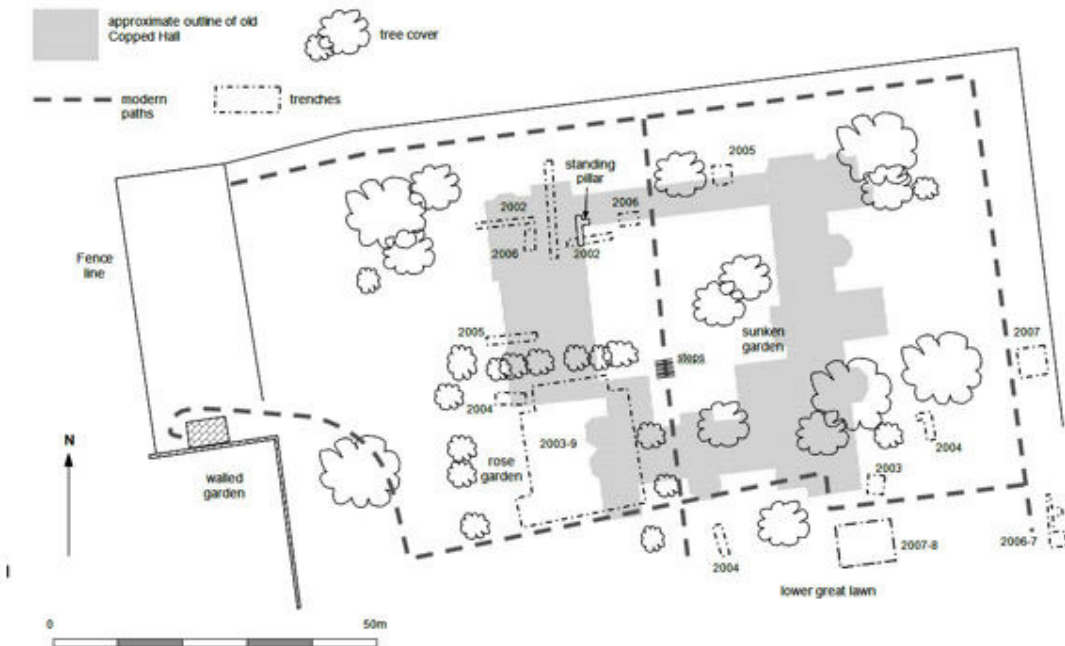


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Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project, Essex: trenches dug 2002 - 2008



Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project - 2009



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### References and further reading:

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West Essex Archaeological Group	2003	<i>An archaeological evaluation carried out at Copped Hall by West Essex Archaeological Group in 2002</i>