AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT SPACKMAN HOUSE

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ABSTRACT:

In September/October 1991, six trenches were excavated in the orchard to the east of Spackman House.The archaeology indicated that the site had served an agricultural function until the beginning of the twentieth century, when Spackman House was constructed. The majority of the finds were Victorian or later, although the post-medieval period was represented, as well as a few earlier sherds (fourteenth century). In three of the trenches a sounding was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.5 metres, to observe the natural layers.

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1) INTRODUCTION:

Staff of the Passmore Edwards Museum carried out excavations between 23/9/91 and 11/10/91 at Spackman House, located off Brookfield Path, Oak Hill, Woodford Green, in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. (see fig. 1, page 41).

The property was to be sold and Spackman House demolished, to make way for subsequent development. No archaeological work had been done in the immediate area, and this presented a good opportunity to investigate before any potential evidence was destroyed. The site was excavated because of its proximity to the River Ching. Chance finds of prehistoric activity are known from the surrounding area, but there has been little archaeological investigation.

Excavation was confined to the area east of Spackman House, which is now an orchard. Trenches were situated away from the buildings, as the foundations of these are cut into the natural, and would have destroyed any archaeological evidence.

Method; Six trenches were laid out in two parallel lines of three trenches each. The base lines were situated parallel to the eastern boundary of the site so that they would be aligned down the slope towards the River Ching. It will be noted that for this report, the eastern boundary of the site was taken as running north/south, and that the trench sequences 1-2-3 and 4-5-6 progressed from south to north (see fig. 2, page 41, for the relationship between site north and true north).

As all the trees in the orchard were covered by Tree Preservation Orders, the base lines and the trenches themselves were sited to avoid damaging the trees in any way. With this in mind, the trenches were located in an attempt to cover as much of the site as possible.

The six trenches each measured three metres by two metres, and were excavated manually. Each layer, fill and feature was contexted and recorded. The natural clay was reached in all six instances. In the three trenches along the eastern base line (trenches 1,2,3), a sounding was excavated to investigate the nature of the natural layers The sounding was taken down to a maximum depth of 1.5 metres. All sections were then recorded.

Asbestos cement debris was discovered in the upper layers of a number of the trenches. A sample was sent to the Newham Health and Safety Department for examination. All remaining pieces of asbestos found on the site were buried in the spoil heaps. (see page 37 for further details).

It was expected that this method would uncover any archaeology that was present. It was also hoped that it could be determined how the slope of the land changed over historical times, and what the prehistoric land surfaces

were like in this area.

The site assessment was funded by the Borough of Waltham Forest, in advance of redevelopment. The site was negotiated and directed by Peter Moore. The site supervisor was Larry Bruce.

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4) PHASING STRUCTURE;

The archaeology revealed in the excavated areas could be divided into six phases. These are, in order from the earliest to the latest.

1) London Clay
2) Boulder Clay
3) Disturbed or redeposited natural
4) Early agricultural/levelling layers (pre 1850)
5) Late nineteenth/early twentieth century agricultural/levelling layers
6) Modern activity concerned with the orchard (post 1920)

The natural London Clay (Phase 1) underlies all areas of the site. It was not exposed in all trenches. In two of the three trenches that were excavated to a depth of 1.5 metres (trenches 1 and 2) the upper levels of this clay were encountered. Groups 6 and 15 belong to this phase.

Phase 2 consisted of a thick layer of Boulder Clay (up to 1.1 metres thick), which overlay the London Clay. This phase was completely excavated in trenches 1 and 2. In trench 3 the bottom of the layer was not reached at a depth of 1.5 metres. The top of the Boulder Clay was reached in trenches 4, 5, and 6. In some areas, the Boulder Clay contained irregular lenses or patches of gravel. Groups 5, 14, 27, 32, 39 and 44 belong to this phase.

Overlying the Boulder Clay in a number of the trenches were occasional layers and patches of a very mixed nature (Phase 3). These layers contained various combinations of gravel/clay/silt, and no finds were encountered. These are most likely to be disturbed or redeposited natural. This phase was represented be groups 4, 13, 26, and 31.

Phase 4 was evident in all trenches, and consisted of earlier agricultural/levelling layers (pre 1850). The soils of this phase were mainly silty, with some clay. A few cuts were evident, but they were very shallow and irregular, being damaged by subsequent activity. Groups 3, 11, 12, possibly 10, possibly 23, 24, 25, 30, possibly 37, 38, and 43 belong to this phase.

Phase 5 was also evident in all trenches, and comprises later agricultural/gardening/levelling layers (post 1850). These are mainly silty soils, generally with less clay content than the preceeding phase. A number of more well preserved cuts were assigned to this phase. Groups 2, 8, 9, possibly 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, possibly 23, 29, 34, 35, 36, possibly 37, 41, and 42 belong to Phase 5.

Phase 6 represents the turf layer and topsoil layer(s), which relate to modern orchard activities (post 1940's?). Groups 1, 7, 16, 17, 18, 28, 33, and 40 belong to this phase.7) ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Peter Moore undertook the various negotiations and directed

the site. He also provided valuable comments and suggestions during the writing of this report. The excavations were supervised by Larry Bruce. The field staff consisted of Steve Chew, Alice Hodgins and Chris Jarrett. Paula Bowers enthusiastically volunteered during the final stages of the excavation.

The Borough of Waltham Forest generously funded the excavations.

Thanks to Mr. Rob Shipway for his work on behalf of the Council. Also thanks to Mr. McKenzie for arranging the use of Spackman House as a site office.

A very special thanks to Paula Bowers, Jenny North, Mike North and Maree Bone, residents of the Cottage, Spackman House, for their kindness and hospitality.

Dr. Frank Meddens kindly identified the pottery.

Graham Reed was responsible for the illustrations.

Thanks to J. Banks of the London Borough of Newham's Central Health and Safety Section, who supplied the Asbestos Identification Report.

6) INTERPRETATION/SUMMARY:

See page 43 for a section through the site showing the different phases. Also see page 44 for a representative section showing all phases.

London Clay (phase 1) is a glacially deposited layer that underlies this area of London. The clay slopes gradually down from north to south (towards the river).

During subsequent peri-glacial activity, the Boulder Clay (phase 2) was laid down. This layer also slopes down from north to south, as does the London Clay.

There is a great time span between phase 2 and phase 4. Phase 3 consisted of what appears to be redeposited or disturbed natural. However, the large percentage of clay and gravel, coupled with the significant amount of silt in these layers, suggest that the natural had been disturbed after the succeeding silty layers had accumulated. Agricultural activities such as ploughing might account for this. However, as no finds were found from this phase, it is not possible to assign a more precise date to it.

The Ordinance Survey Map for this area indicates that the site was an open field at least until 1919. The earliest pottery dates from the thirteenth/fourteenth century, indicating that activity of some sort was taking place. Throughout the post-medieval period, the concentration of pottery increased over time, indicating that the agricultural activity was also increasing. The lower, more clayey soils contained dateable evidence of pre 1850's although this has been much disturbed by ploughing and subsequent activity (phase 4). There was some indication of an attempt to terrace the southern edge of the site to raise the level of the field in this area (groups 24 and 25). From the dateable evidence it appears that this early terracing took place in the early nineteenth century. There is no certain evidence of earlier terracing, but this could have easily taken place and been damaged by subsequent activity.

Phase 5 consisted of less clayey soils than the preceeding phase. The majority of finds from this phase were mostly nineteenth and early twentieth century, and are associated with the later agricultural activities on the site, as well as gardening activity that occurred after Spackman House was constructed (1920"s), but before the establishment of the orchard. The large amount of metal objects (primarily nails and large objects; tool and machine parts) suggest agricultural activities. Additional terracing of the site took place during Phase 5, which resulted in the field reaching its present level.

Phase 6 consisted of the modern topsoil and turf layers,that date from the last half of the twentieth century, after the orchard was established.

Although disappointing from an archaeological point of view, excavation confirmed that the site was used for agricultural purposes during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that earlier activities (as early as the thirteenth century) were taking place in the area. A greater understanding of the natural layers near the River Ching was also obtained. (see pages 43 and 44).

The amount of asbestos found in the limited area of excavation would indicate that there could be a considerable amount remaining in the upper layers of the orchard, especially in the northern portion of the site. The London Borough of Newham's Central Health and Safety Section identified the sample as Asbestos Cement Debris with significant amounts of Chrysolite. The recommended course of action is "that the debris be removed by an approved asbestos contractor. The removal should be arranged by the owner of the site. To comply with the revised council policy the corporate contracts unit have to be notified of works with asbestos which affect council employees, and who will recommend approved contractors". (Asbestos bulk sample-identification report; Reference No. HSB 2755). A facsimile of the identification report has been sent to Mr. Tapper of the Waltham Forest Environmental Health Division. This should be taken into account during any redevelopment.