

# Archaeological excavations at 30-36 Upper Clapton Road, Hackney

Mark Bagwell

with contributions by Christopher Phillpotts and Chris Jarrett

## Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of their clients, The Peabody Trust, to undertake archaeological investigations at 30-36 Upper Clapton Road, London E5, in advance of a proposed building development. An evaluation in March 2000 was followed the next month by a rescue excavation comprising one large L-shaped trench (Fig. 1).

The site lies on the first gravel terrace to the west of the River Lea, just above the 20m contour, as can be seen on Rocque's map of 1745 (Fig. 2). Ground level slopes down very gently west to east, but more perceptibly beyond the eastern boundaries of the site, towards the River Lea flood plain. Immediately to the west of the site, Upper Clapton Road, which was originally a minor medieval thoroughfare, follows the edge of the terrace. The site, formerly used as a storage yard and garage, was bounded on the western side by Upper Clapton Road, by *The Old Kings Head* public house and Prout Road to the south, and by light industrial units and commercial premises to the east and north. The underlying geology of the site is London Clay sealed by Taplow Gravel which, within the excavation area, was overlain by sand.

The site revealed evidence of activity and occupation from the medieval period onwards. This report places the archaeological findings into the historical context of the development of Upper Clapton from the medieval period onwards.

## Medieval Clapton

The settlement of Clapton appears to have been Saxon in origin, since it has an Anglo-Saxon name. This was formerly written *Clopton*, and means "settlement on the hill", referring to the

gravel terrace standing above the flood-plain of the River Lea to the east.<sup>1</sup> However, no surviving charters of the Saxon period relate to the area. In the late Saxon and medieval periods Clapton lay within the Bishop of London's great Manor of Stepney and Hackney, which covered the area between the River Lea, the River Thames, and Ermine Street, the main road to the north from Bishopsgate. This was probably part of the original foundation endowment of the bishopric of London in the 7th century. The medieval settlement at Clapton, recorded in the 14th century,<sup>2</sup> probably clustered around Clapton Pond, in a triangular green, approximately 300m south of the site. Clapton Pond, which still survives today (Fig. 1), can be seen on Rocque's map of 1745 (Fig. 2), at the western end of Marsh Lane (now Millfields Road). Clapton was a subsidiary hamlet of the parish of Hackney. It is not known if the houses of the settlement extended as far north as the excavated site.

## Medieval features

Natural sand was cut by three ditches between 0.40m and 0.65m deep and 1.75m and 2.70m wide at 19.70m OD, located along the eastern side of Upper Clapton Road and following its north-south alignment. The earliest ditch, nearest to the road, contained pottery sherds of South Hertfordshire grey ware dated to 1150-1300 and Coarse Border ware dated to 1270-1500.<sup>3</sup> It was re-cut to the east by a ditch with a terminus at its northern extent. The latest observed ditch, furthest from the road, had a terminus at its southern extent and produced a single residual pottery sherd dated to 1000-1150.<sup>4</sup> These features probably represent roadside drainage along the medieval route of Upper Clapton Road and perhaps imply an earlier origin to the road than is known from documentary sources, which suggest that it existed by 1378 and was a high street in 1447.<sup>5</sup>

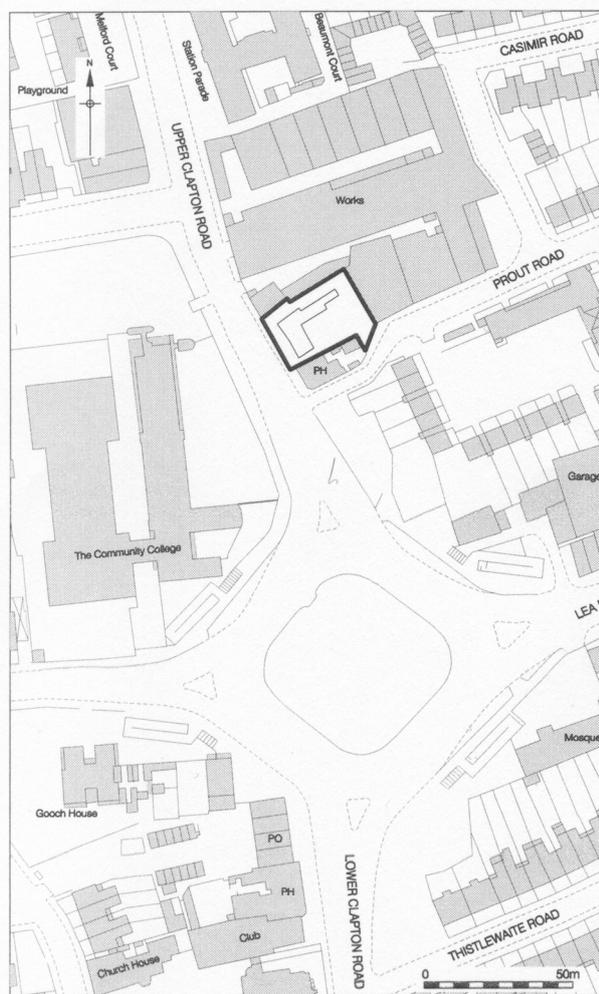
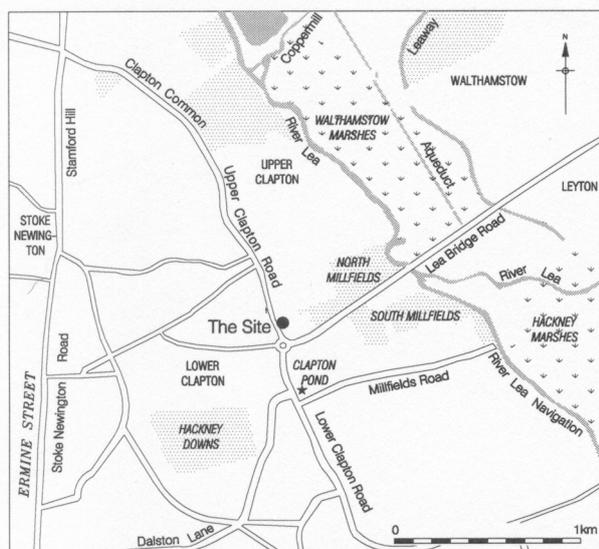


Fig. 1: site/trench location

The ditches were sealed by a silty sand medieval plough soil deposit up to 0.40m thick which covered much of the site. It contained small numbers of pottery sherds of London-type ware dated to 1080-1350 and Kingston ware dated to 1230-1400. They probably derived from manuring activities in ploughed cultivation strips. The absence of other features, except a gully near the road, suggests the site may have been part of one of the open fields of Clapton called Mill Field; the original name of Lea Bridge Road was Mill Field Lane. This name is preserved today as Millfields Road, formerly Marsh Lane (Fig. 2), and as North and South Millfields, open (recreation) ground on either side of Lea Bridge Road just 200m east of the site.

The medieval pottery was largely derived from local sources provided by the London-type wares, and the more distant Kingston ware and Surrey/Hampshire coarse border ware. Most were from cooking pots, many with sooted external surfaces indicative of domestic activity. Some may have derived from a settlement in the vicinity, presumably Clapton, as early as the 11th to mid-12th centuries.

### Development in the 16th and 17th centuries

The site lay at the northern limit of the village of Clapton, which in the early decades of the 16th century became one of the series of villages around London that was used as a commuter belt by Henry VIII's courtiers. A large brick residence, on the opposite side of Upper Clapton road from the excavated site, was built around two courtyards possibly as early as 1476, but is only certainly known from 1532, when it belonged to the Earl of Northumberland and lay within the manor of Hackney Lordshold. In January 1535 Northumberland sold the house to the king, and it became known as King's Place. A few months later, Henry VIII granted it to Thomas Cromwell who subsequently surrendered it back to the king in 1536. The Earl of Northumberland was living there again in 1537. In the 17th century the house passed through the hands of various gentry families, and became known as Brooke House. It ceased to be an aristocratic residence in 1677.<sup>6</sup> Following bomb

damage in the Second World War, the remains of Brooke House were excavated and recorded by W. F. Grimes in 1955-56.<sup>7</sup>

The Old King's Head public house, adjacent to the site's southern boundary, was probably erected in about the 1660s. Its name is thought to have referred to the memory of King Charles I, who was executed in 1649, but to have been built after the restoration of his son Charles II in 1660. Charles I's portrait was built into the coloured tiling of the wall of the lobby.<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Clarke thought it was probably the oldest public house in Clapton.<sup>9</sup> The old rat-infested clapboard structure (Fig. 3), as one observer called it, was demolished and rebuilt in brick in 1875.<sup>10</sup> No remains of the 17th-century building were visible above ground at the time of excavation.

### The 16th- and 17th-century features and timber-framed building

A 16th- or 17th-century rectangular building, represented by a wall foundation one brick wide, was recorded in the north-west of the site. It was

set back 8m from and parallel to the present main road (Building 1, Fig. 4). Its dimensions were 4.30m east-west by 3.20m north-south, continuing north beyond the limit of excavation. The wall was constructed to a height of 0.58m at 20.85m OD, of five courses of stretchers with a single course of headers set on edge at its base. The wall, set within a narrow construction trench, would have formed the foundations for a timber framed building.<sup>11</sup> Tiles *in situ* on top of the wall functioned as a plinth, presumably to level it for a timber sill beam and keep it off the ground. None of the building's floor surfaces survived and there is little evidence for its function or status. Later, probably in the late 17th or early 18th centuries, a 5.10m long north-south aligned wall, one brick wide, was built on top of the structure's eastern side. This extended southwards and beyond the southern limit of the trench.

Fifteen shallow pits and postholes were excavated, truncating the medieval plough soil at around 20m OD (Fig. 4). Many were located along the site's western boundary forming a north-south alignment, also having similar



Fig. 2: Rocque's map of 1745 showing site in relation to the River Lea



**Fig. 3: The Old Kings Head public house just before demolition in 1875, with Warwick House just visible to the left**

shapes, up to 0.50m deep with sharp profiles and rounded bases, and contained much brick rubble possibly, used to stabilise posts. Although some residual 15th- and 16th-century material was present, most features in this phase produced small numbers of sherds consisting of post-medieval redware, post-medieval fine redware and Metropolitan slipware indicative of the 17th century. The latter two are products of the Essex redware kilns. One of the pits produced two Atkinson and Oswald type 18 clay tobacco pipes, dated 1660-1680, one of which had a circular stamp with the initials D C intertwined (Fig. 5). Initials for a possible maker could not be found within the date range of the bowl, but Duncan Cotton is known to have been making pipes in 1696.<sup>12</sup> An east-west aligned ditch by the road, and another aligned north-south towards the east of the site, contained 17th-century Metropolitan slipware and post-medieval redware pottery

types, as well as residual 16th-century pottery sherds.

It is likely that the postholes represent a fence line delineating the boundary of a property or field bordering the road. The pits may represent a hedge, trees or rubbish disposal activities along the roadside. They are all indicative of increased activity in Upper Clapton, and their alignment and location suggests continuity since the medieval period in the use of this part of the site as the eastern boundary of the main road. An expansion of settlement was also reflected in the amount of pottery recovered from this period, which forms the largest part of the total assemblage. The vessels are all of domestic forms, some were table wares, but the majority were bowls and cooking pots with their external surfaces sooted, probably from cooking food or boiling water.

## The 18th century

By the 1720s, Upper Clapton Road, known as Hackney Lane, was still considered a 'back road'.<sup>13</sup> In 1738 it was turnpiked; the turnpike gate lay at the northern corner of Lea Bridge Road and Upper Clapton Road. The third milestone from London stood outside the King's Head, and was shown on a map of the turnpike road in 1799, but was subsequently removed.<sup>14</sup> The construction of Lea Bridge Road in 1758, along the line of a former unhedged track leading to Lea Bridge (as can be seen in Fig. 2), drew many more residents to Upper Clapton<sup>15</sup> and the population of the village continued to rise steadily throughout the 18th century. Rocque's map of 1745 shows the site lying within the ribbon development along the east side of the main road, opposite Brooke House. The King's Head was

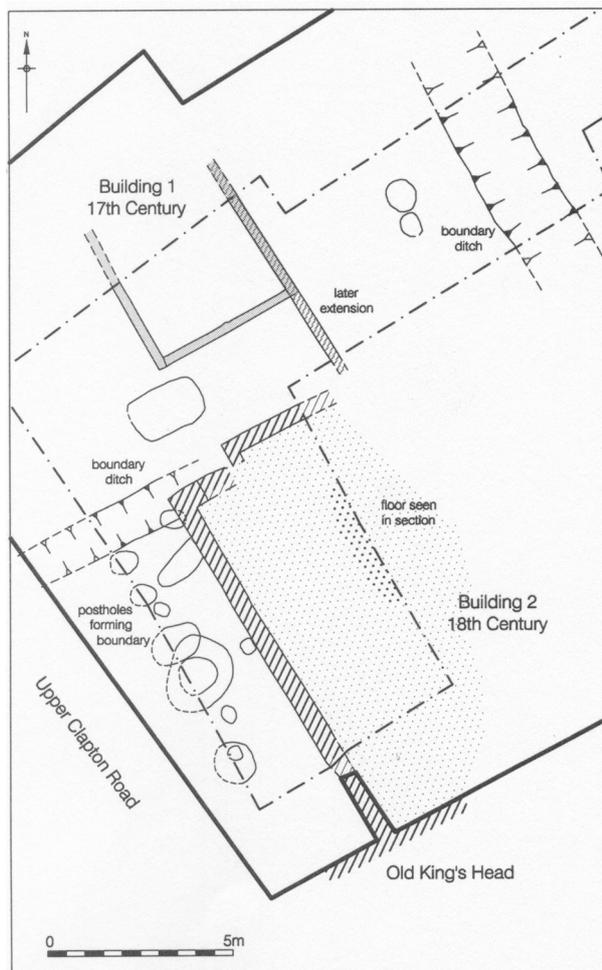


Fig. 4: 17th and 18th century archaeological features

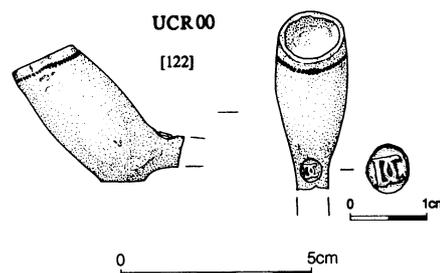


Fig. 5: initialled clay tobacco pipe

certainly open as a public house in 1752, when its landlord William Coleburn was fined five shillings for serving drinks on a Sunday.<sup>16</sup>

## The development of Warwick House

A silty sand deposit, 0.40m thick, containing late-17th-century pottery sherds, overlying the 17th-century features, represents another phase of horticultural use. It was truncated by the construction cut for a large north-south aligned brick wall (Building 2) to 21.28m OD, consisting of a wall two bricks wide and two bricks deep, built on top of a 1m deep stepped foundation with an eastern return at its north extent (Fig. 4). To the south it was bonded to the cellar of the Old King's Head public house. Its bricks were of late-17th- to early-18th-century date and its uppermost courses showed evidence of rebuilding in the early 20th century.<sup>17</sup> It was set back 5m from the present main road, with gravel surfaces and garden soil in between representing use as a front garden. To the east, another brick wall represented an 18th-century rebuild, and a brick surface represented its internal floor. The building remains were overlain by demolition rubble. The only feature which probably related to Building 2 was a pit which produced two fragments of 18th-century Chinese porcelain blue and white plates, both with recessed bases and decorated with botanical designs; and a sherd of tin-glazed earthenware plate (TGW H) decorated in a style dated c. 1690-1710.

These structures represent the remains of a large gentry house, known as Warwick House, which fronted onto Upper Clapton Road, built some time in the late 17th to early 18th centuries. Between 1745 and 1823 it consisted of a north-south range set back from the main road,



**Fig. 6: maps of 1823 and 1870 showing wall foundations encountered during excavations**

contiguous with the Old King's Head public house, with a front yard or garden (Figs. 2 and 6). It had three storeys; the west front had a central doorway with a moulded architrave and a hood, and windows with rubbed brick dressings (Fig. 3). To the rear a large garden extended to the line of present-day Casimir Road.<sup>18</sup> In 1843 the house belonged to the estate of the Tyssen family, which owned the manors of Hackney Kingshold and Hackney Lordshold, with a tenant called James I Beresford.<sup>19</sup> Later in the century it belonged to a series of veterinary surgeons, who had stables with an entrance in Waterloo Place.<sup>20</sup> By 1870 an east-west extension and a covered carriage entrance had been added. It is possible that Building 1 still survived at this time, or at least that its boundary had been maintained, as the excavated remains reflect the range of buildings shown to the north of the carriage entrance (fig. 6). Warwick House stood empty and became dilapidated during the early 20th century before being renovated (by 1930) and used again as a private house.<sup>21</sup> Bomb damage during the Second World War led to its demise and was followed by its clearance in the 1960s.

## Conclusion

The medieval ditches along the site's western boundary were probably for drainage of the main road between Clapton and Stamford Hill, which

started its development during the medieval period. The medieval plough soil is evidence that the site also formed part one of the cultivated fields of Clapton.

The site was later occupied by a timber-framed building as part of the 17th-century ribbon development of Upper Clapton located along the main road, and later by a gentry residence called Warwick House built in the late 17th or early 18th centuries. This continued as a residential property until the mid-20th century, sometimes occupied by veterinary surgeons, with stables to the rear of the premises. The main house was badly damaged by Second World War bombing and was completely cleared in the 1960s.

## Acknowledgements

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- 21 *Ibid.*

## Excavations and post-excavation work

**London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre**, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. Contact Archive Manager, John Shepherd (020 7566 9317).

**Croydon & District**, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collections of pottery fabrics, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

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Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (020 7385 3723).

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