

Fig. 1: site location plan

Rosemary School and Sensory Gardens, 15 Woodbridge Street, Islington

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Introduction

Between December 2007 and July 2008, AOC Archaeology Group, on behalf of George Wimpey North Thames, carried out an archaeological investigation on the former site of Rosemary School and Sensory Gardens at 15 Woodbridge Street, London Borough of Islington (Fig. 1). The work comprised the excavation of three evaluation trenches, followed by a watching brief during general ground reduction and foundation excavation and a 10 m by 10 m open-area excavation. The site covers an area of c. 2000 m² and was centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) TQ 3153 8236. The development involved the construction of 22 houses with associated gardens.

The following synthesized report integrates the specialist findings. Full details of the site archive are accessible from London Archaeological Archive

and Research Centre (LAARC) lodged under site code RMY 07.

Topography and geology

The site is located approximately 900 m north of the City and 300 m north-east of the River Fleet which now runs under Farringdon Road. The site is located on natural river terrace sands and gravels, which were encountered at an average depth of 2.0 m below ground level. The site lies at c. 19 m OD, and slopes south-west towards the River Fleet.

Historical background

The earliest focused activity in the area was in the medieval period. The nunnery of St Mary Le Font was founded in 1144 in Clerkenwell,¹ immediately to the west of the site. Despite its proximity to a large and wealthy nunnery, the site appears to have remained undeveloped throughout the medieval period.²

In the 16th century London expanded rapidly, and Clerkenwell became a suburb of the City. With the dissolution of the monasteries, the nunnery no longer dominated the area. Some of the church grounds were bought up by the aristocracy,³ while Clerkenwell's proximity to the City and a regular water supply made it a natural overspill for London's poor.⁴

Clerkenwell became a far more affluent area during the 17th century; the presence of the New River Company, which had offices in the parish, led to the provision of fresh water from the nearby River Fleet for all those who could afford it.⁵ The area became known for its spas and wells, and the population increased dramatically; it became the home of merchants, watchmakers and jewellers.⁶

In 1615 the Clerkenwell Bridewell Prison was opened to relieve nearby

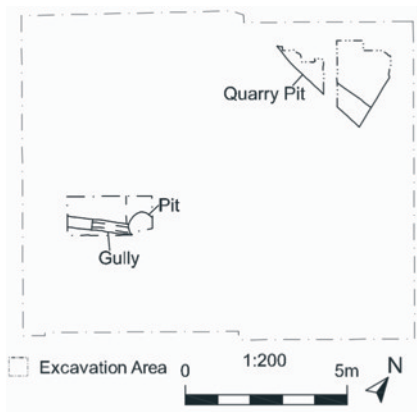


Fig. 2: plan of 16th- and 18th-century remains

Newgate and Bridewell Prisons. The prison incorporated a Quaker workhouse⁷ and part of the prison would have stood upon the west of the site (Fig. 1). The prison burnt down in 1679 but was swiftly rebuilt; it was redesigned in 1775 and became known as the New Prison. It was redesigned again in 1818, when it became the House of Detention, based on the model prison at Pentonville;⁸ the Quaker workhouse was entirely demolished in this later rebuild.⁹

The earliest cartographic evidence detailing the site shows gardens occupying the site; Rocque's map of 1746¹¹ describes these as 'Mulberry Gardens'. The earliest evidence of a road adjacent to the site is Red Bull Yard which is located immediately to the north of the site as depicted on Rocque's 1746 map.¹² Red Bull Yard was replaced by Woodbridge Street in the early 19th century. Tyrer's map of 1805¹² shows the east of the site occupied by terraced buildings, and the 1820 Ordnance Survey map describes the east of site as being occupied by 'Two Storey Tenements Ruinous'. Close by at 16A Woodbridge Street, the Finsbury Dispensary gave medical aid to the poor from 1819 into the 20th century.

As London continued to expand in the 19th century, Clerkenwell became known for its poverty.¹³ Despite this, the 1861 census records a chemist, ivory turners and jewellers as living in Woodbridge Street.¹⁴ The prison was partially demolished by an explosion in 1867, a result of the Fenian Revolt in Ireland against British rule.¹⁵ It was again rebuilt, and in 1871 the site was purchased by the prison authorities, however, by 1887 the prison had

closed and was replaced by the Hugh Myddleton Secondary School.

16th to 18th centuries

The earliest evidence from the site was artefactual: a medieval glazed floor tile and two Nuremberg jettons dating from the 16th century were retrieved from a later context. Jettons were used as medieval counting mechanisms or as tokens or gaming pieces. Only three cut features predating the 18th century were recorded (Fig. 2): a small gully and two pits. The gully, 2 m long and 0.3 m wide, possibly relates to the gardens shown on the Ogilby and Morgan map of 1676.¹⁶ It was cut by a 0.9 m wide circular pit: this along with a heavily truncated rectangular pit to the north-east are thought to represent gravel quarrying. The pottery and ceramic building material from these features was dated to the 16th and 17th centuries. Pottery dating from this period was retrieved from later levelling layers; much of it was domestic in nature. Other finds from this period included cattle and sheep bones, as well as isolated bones from cod, rabbit and chicken. They did not show any signs of butchery, indicating that the carcasses were butchered away from the site.

Late 18th and early 19th centuries

The late 18th and early 19th centuries were a time of change in Clerkenwell, as London grew much of the area was occupied by the poor. The garden and quarry features were sealed by late 18th-century layers of made ground

used for levelling prior to the construction of the site's first buildings.

Two levelling layers overlay the previous phase; they contained pottery dated to the 18th century, as well as 17th-century bottle glass and evidence of metalworking in the form of hammer-scale. The levelling layers were overlain by a structure in the south of the excavation area, comprising two rooms and a smaller area of associated features to the north (Fig. 3).

The building, constructed of red brick dating from the mid-17th to late 18th centuries, covered an area of 11.3 m east-west by 4.1 m north-south. Bricks from the northern east-west wall were dated to the 15th to 18th centuries, suggesting the reuse of bricks, indicative of an outhouse or workshop. The south-western room was a 'barrel-type vault' with a red brick floor, probably a tenement cellar. The eastern edge of this room was a dividing wall with a probable doorway in the south; to the east of the wall lay a second room. The room had a floor consisting of brick, square tiles and basalt slabs: the tiles were dated to the 18th to 19th centuries. The room contained a brick structure in the north corner with signs of heavy fire exposure, which is likely to represent an oven range.

To the north-west of the building was a series of rather insubstantial structures including an open-top drain, a roughly built wall constructed of 17th-century bricks, and an associated brick surface. The heavy truncation of these remains makes their function hard to discern.

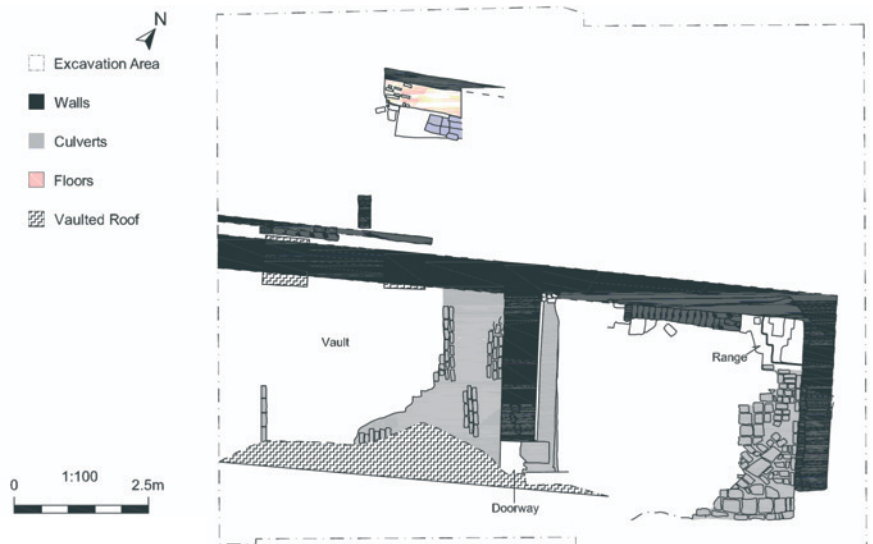


Fig. 3: plan of late-18th- and early-19th-century remains

A high proportion of the finds from deposits of this phase were residual; some of this may be due to the reuse of old vessels. Much of the pottery assemblage indicated low-status domestic use, with a selection of kitchen and table wares; very few of these wares were imported. Much of the animal bone relating to this period belonged to mature sheep rather than lamb, which would again indicate low-status occupancy as lamb was preferred to mutton by those who could afford it.

Finds dating from this phase were recovered from later contexts. They include clay tobacco pipes, an ivory-handled toothbrush and an ivory cutlery handle. An armorial clay tobacco pipe (RF23) dated between 1750 and 1780 was recovered from a later 19th-century levelling layer (Fig. 4). Its bowl was embossed with the coat of arms of the House of Hanover and the three ostrich feather of the Prince of Wales (later George IV). The inscription reads 'DIEU ET MON DROIT': God and my right. While this may indicate some degree of wealth, the residual nature of the clay tobacco pipe and the fact that it was from a levelling layer in which material is likely to have been imported, casts doubt upon its value as a measure of social status.

Early 19th century

The next phase of construction dates from the early 19th century and was limited to the north-west corner of the excavation area (Fig. 5). It consisted of a probable wall, floor and an oven range or kiln directly overlying part of the earlier structure. The kiln structure was rectangular, measuring 1.80 m long by 1.16 m wide, and was constructed of three red brick courses, with two symmetrical recesses; this may suggest some mechanical process. The bricks showed evidence of fire exposure and have been dated to the 17th century,

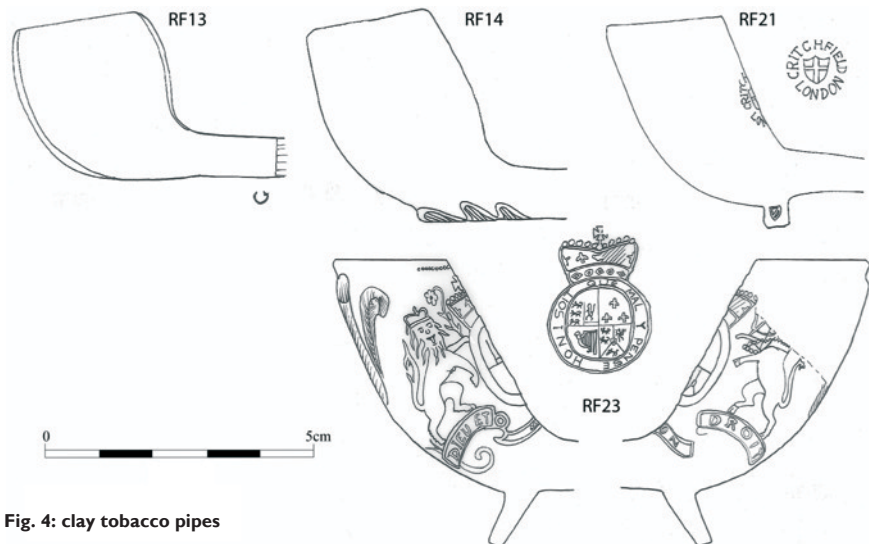


Fig. 4: clay tobacco pipes

indicating probable reuse. The structure was abutted to the north by a very rough brick surface which was likely to have been external; the bricks were dated to the 19th century and were from north Kent. The only finds attributed to this phase were two sherds of clay pipe from a later levelling layer.

Mid- and late 19th century

The previous phases of activity were overlain by two levelling layers across the northern portion of the site: they mark a period of demolition and rebuilding. The levelling layers contained late 18th to mid-19th-century low-status domestic pottery, 18th- and 19th-century ivory cutlery handles, hammer-scale and butchered cattle and sheep bone. Overlying these layers was a basement with probable garden structures to the west, and two culverts (Fig. 5).

The culverts were constructed of red brick. One small culvert ran north-south, feeding into a larger culvert running c. 7 m east-west before turning northwards. The large culvert sloped from west to east, draining away from the possible garden area.

Constructed above the culvert was a basement measured 3.2 m by 3.0 m;

the walls were constructed from red and yellow stock bricks in stretcher bond, dating to the late 18th or 19th centuries. The structure comprised a 4 m long northern external wall, a 4.5 m long western external wall, a 3.2 m long dividing wall running northwest-southeast, and a sleeper wall on the same alignment, probably to support a basement floor. The northern wall extended to the eastern edge of the excavation area, suggesting a second eastern basement room. The eastern external wall, which would have fronted Woodbridge Street, was not encountered. Within the basement room three fireplaces/oven ranges abutted the northern basement wall, suggesting this was a kitchen.

The western exterior wall was abutted by a small tiled floor with a brick surround dated to the late 18th or 19th centuries: it was 1.4 m by 1.0 m, and may have formed a porch. This surface ran into a second, lower, tiled surface, which may have been a porch step. A limestone paved path was also visible in this area to the south of the porch; this probably represents a small garden or yard area.

Finds from this phase included three 19th-century fine Dutch or French and one English clay tobacco pipes from a levelling layer. Two of the pipes (Fig. 4, RF13 and 14) were imports, the third, produced by Gambier of Givet,¹⁷ is a fine English clay tobacco pipe stamped with the arms of the City of London (RF21).

Most of the remains of this phase were sealed by a thin, 0.1 m thick, silty layer, indicating slow deposition and a phase of abandonment. This probably

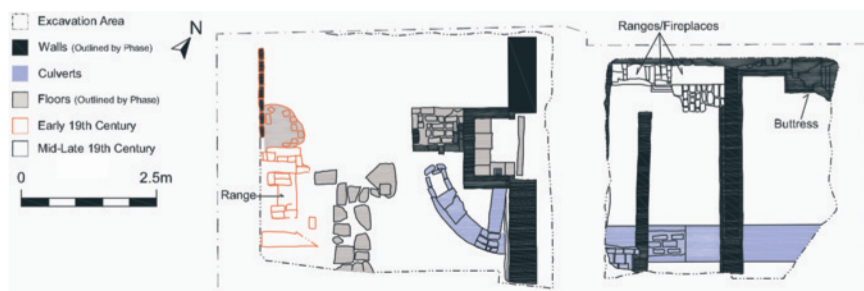


Fig. 5: plan of early-19th- and mid- to late-19th-century remains

related to the purchase of the site by the House of Detention in 1871.

Late 19th and early 20th centuries

The House of Detention closed in 1887 and the Hugh Myddleton School was constructed. The remains of this phase (Fig. 7) correlate with structures visible on the 1894 Ordnance Survey map.

A levelling layer overlay the remains of the previous phase in the north-west of the excavation area. In this deposit were three irrigation syringes, one of which was complete (Fig. 6).

Pharmaceutical containers retrieved from the modern overburden probably relate to the neighbouring Finsbury Dispensary. Domestic pottery from the levelling layer included tableware dated to the late 19th century.

The levelling layer was overlain by the main body of the school complex, which was rectangular in shape and ran parallel to Woodbridge Street. It was divided into three sections by two walls running south-west to north-east; each of these sections was divided into rooms by smaller walls. Most of the school's wall foundations were of concrete, which obscured many of the remains from earlier phases. Ink bottles dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries were retrieved from the made ground which overlay these structures; they were too large for domestic use and may be related to the school or be from a printer's shop nearby. The school was demolished in the 1960s and replaced by Rosemary School and Sensory Gardens.



Fig. 6: the syringe (RF5) (scale in cm)

Discussion

Activity appears to have begun with garden and quarry features.

Cartographic evidence supports the suggestion of 17th-century garden features,¹⁸ while the presence of quarry pits may suggest an industrial process taking place nearby. The presence of gardens around the site correlates with documentary evidence depicting Clerkenwell as a retreat for the wealthy in this period, as would the presence of rare foods such as cod, chicken and rabbit. As the garden features were cut by quarry features, this could indicate a change in function from domestic to industrial.

The structural remains of the 18th century and early 19th century are consistent with the tenements seen on maps of the time, and were probably of poor quality. The bricks recovered from this phase indicated a workshop or outhouse; it may be that the ground floor of the tenements was being used as a workshop. At this time the area was known for its crafts, especially watch-making.¹⁹ The presence of hammer-scale in deposits of this period suggests industrial processes took place within the area, possibly in Red Bull Yard. The mature sheep bones suggest that the area was relatively poor, eating mutton rather than lamb.

No evidence of any of the various phases of the prison was recorded, and no related artefacts were found.

After Woodbridge Street had been constructed in the early 1800s, the site continued to be occupied by tenements, albeit occupied by more affluent tenants. The census evidence and the presence of fine imported pipes suggest middle-class occupants.²⁰ The presence of a garden or yard connected to a substantial drainage system supports the notion of some degree of wealth in Woodbridge Street.

In the later 19th century the site appears to have been left derelict until

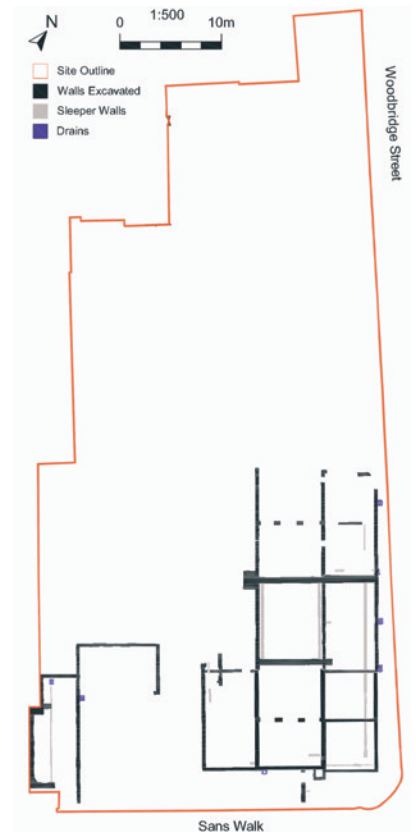


Fig. 7: plan of late-19th- and early-20th-century remains

the construction of the school buildings, probably because the site was purchased by the prison in 1871.²¹ Its dereliction may also be related to the destruction caused by the Fenian explosion of 1867.²²

Acknowledgements

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1. MoLAS *Rosemary School, 15 Woodbridge Street, London, EC1* (2003).

2. *Ibid.*

3. B. Weinreb and C. Hibbert *The London Encyclopaedia* (1983).

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Op cit fn 1.*

8. W.J. Pinks *A History of Clerkenwell* (1865).

9. *Op cit fn 1.*

10. *Op cit fn 1.*

11. *Op cit fn 1.*

12. J. Tyrer *Plan of Clerkenwell Parish* (1805).

13. *Op cit fn 3.*

14. 1861 Census data accessed at Islington History Centre.

15. The explosion occurred when Richard Burke, who had been employed by the Fenians to buy arms,

was arrested and held in the House of Detention. Fenian Michael Barrett used gunpowder to effect Burke's escape, but only succeeded in killing twelve people. He was later executed for his crimes.

16. *Op cit fn 1.*

17. Gambier of Givet had offices in London between 1865 and 1895.

18. Horwood's map of 1792.

19. S. Lewis (ed.) *A topographical*

dictionary of England (1848).

20. 1861 Census data accessed at Islington History Centre.

21. AOC Archaeology *Rosemary School and Sensory Gardens, 15 Woodbridge Street, London Borough of Islington: an archaeological post-excavation assessment* (2009).

22. A.M. Sullivan *Atlas and Cyclopaedia of Ireland* (1900).