BRITANNIC HOUSE
1–6 Finsbury Circus
EC2

City of London

An archaeological watching brief report

January 2008

Site Code: FYC06
National Grid Reference: 532790 181670

Project Manager  Robin Nielsen
Author  Alison Telfer
Graphics  Sandra Rowntree
Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by DP9, on behalf of their client, in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) at Britannic House, 1–6 Finsbury Circus, London EC2.

Work on the installation of two new lifts shafts required the excavation of lift pits. One was for a new passenger lift and located in the central area of the existing building, the other was for a new goods lift, located to the east. These were monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS between 16th March and 7th April 2007.

No archaeological deposits were recorded in either lift pit. Natural sand and gravel were observed at 6.30m OD in Lift Pit 10, located to the east of the building; London Clay was seen at 6.10m OD in Lift Pits 5 and 6, located in the centre.
Table of Contents

1 Introduction 4
   1.1 Site background 4
   1.2 The planning and legislative framework 4
   1.3 Planning background 4
   1.4 Origin and scope of the report 4
   1.5 Aims and objectives 5

2 Topographical and historical background 7
   2.1 Topography 7
   2.2 Prehistoric 7
   2.3 Roman 7
   2.4 Medieval 8
   2.5 Post-medieval 8

3 The watching brief 9
   3.1 Methodology 9
   3.2 Results of the watching brief 9

4 Potential of archaeology 13
   4.1 Original research aims 13
   4.2 New research aims 13
   4.3 Significance of the data 13

5 Publication and archiving 14

6 Acknowledgements 15

7 Bibliography 15

8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form 17
List of Illustrations

*Front cover: Greenwood’s map from 1824, showing area of site*

*Fig 1 Site location plan*  
6

*Fig 2 Test pit location plan*  
11

*Fig 3 Section drawings from lift pits*  
12
1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Britannic House, 1–6 Finsbury Circus, hereafter called ‘the site’. The site was formerly 71–8 Lombard Street and 13–22 Cornhill; it lies on the north-western side of Finsbury Circus (Fig 1). The centre of the site is at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference 532790 181670. Basement levels varied between 8.17m OD and 7.06m OD. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is c 14.0m OD in Moorgate. The site code is FYC06.

A Method Statement (MoLAS, 2006) informed the design for the watching brief reported in this document. This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, as well as the initial assessment of its archaeological potential.

Archaeological remains were recorded by Frank Lambert in 1921, during the excavations for the basements of the current building. Fieldwork was also undertaken by the Museum of London in 1985 and 1987; in addition, a watching brief on geotechnical investigations was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA) in 2003 (site code BFY03).

1.2 The planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the Method Statement which formed the project design for the watching brief (see Section 1.2, MoLAS, 2006).

1.3 Planning background

The archaeological investigation was undertaken as part of a planning condition on the redevelopment. The present building is Grade II* Listed and it lies in the Finsbury Circus Conservation area as defined by the City of London.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by DP9, on behalf of their client and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS). It has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA, 2001).

The purpose of the watching brief was to determine whether archaeological remains or features were present on the site and, if so, to record the nature and extent of such remains. A number of more site-specific research aims and objectives were
established in the preceding Method Statement (MoLAS, 2006), and are outlined in the following section.

The purpose of the present report is to analyse the results of the excavation against the original research aims, and to suggest what further work, including analysis or publication (if any), should now take place.

1.5 Aims and objectives
The following research aims and objectives were established in the Method Statement for the watching brief (Section 2.2):

• What was the level of the natural topography?
• What are the earliest deposits identified?
• What are the latest deposits identified?
• Do any deep-cut archaeological features survive beneath the existing basement slab?

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London’s A research framework for London Archaeology, 2002.
An archaeological watching brief report ©MoLAS 2008

Fig 1 Site location
2 Topographical and historical background

2.1 Topography

The site is located to the west of the main channel of the (now backfilled) River Walbrook (flowing approximately along the line of modern Blomfield Street). Numerous tributary channels fed into the Walbrook. Investigated sites on the northern side of Finsbury Circus have generally produced evidence for these, which were also subject to period migration (i.e. 7–11, 16–18 Finsbury Circus, 6–8 Broad Street Place). On the basis of his investigations on the site in 1921, Frank Lambert suggested that a major tributary channel also flowed north-south down the western side of the present site (JRS, 1923). This has not been substantiated, but recent watching brief observations on the western part of the site suggest that deposits consistent with such a channel have survived the overall truncation on the site (BFY03; Maloney, 2004). Here, made ground dating to the 19th century was observed above a series of undated peat and alluvial deposits. In 1921, Lambert found gravel at 14–18 feet below the surface, producing an estimated level above Ordnance datum, 9.35–8.43m (formation level in the location of the proposed passenger lift pit is 6.56m OD), which is consistent with observations on other sites in the vicinity.

2.2 Prehistoric

Prehistoric finds from the City are few but have increased in number and significance in recent years. Close to the subject site, residual Iron Age pottery has been identified on River Plate House, 175m to the west of the site, and a quantity of late Bronze age/early Iron Age pottery was discovered at the Honourable Artillery Company grounds, 400m to the north-west.

2.3 Roman

Lambert recorded a bed of reeds containing Roman dating evidence from the late 2nd century (JRS, 1923). During the Roman period, the River Walbrook flowed to the east of the site beneath Blomfield Street. It is possible that a tributary ran through the site itself.

A Roman road of the late 1st/early 2nd century ran east-west across 12–15 Finsbury Circus, 100m to the west of the subject site (FIB88), and across the adjacent site of 15–17 Eldon Street (ELD88). It is possible that the road also crossed the subject site.

The area was beyond the limits of the Roman settlement and its position close to the east-west road places it in an area used as an extramural cemetery. Burials and disarticulated human bone were discovered next to the site itself during drainage works and excavations for a new fire escape foundation in the basement of 14 Eldon Street in 1991 (Site Code BSP91), along with a feature interpreted as a quarry pit. These were apparently dated to the mid 1st-mid 2nd century AD.
In the later Roman period, the area around the site became marshy, possibly due to the construction of the city walls in the late 2nd to early 3rd century AD.

2.4 Saxon

There is little evidence for Saxon occupation in the area outside the City wall, and the area would presumably have remained a marshy waste.

2.5 Medieval

In the medieval period, the site was part of the prebendal manor of Finsbury, owned by St Paul’s Cathedral. In this period, the area was mostly marshland. Quarrying for brickearth and subsequent backfilling with waste was common in the vicinity.

2.6 Post-medieval

In the post-medieval period, the drainage was improved, and the area was gradually levelled with massive dumps of soil and building debris. In the 16th century, the area was used for archery practice, grazing and cloth-drying. During the great plague of 1665, the Moorfields area was recorded as being used for burial in ‘plague pits’ but very few burials have been discovered. After the Great Fire, in the following year, Moorfields was used as a dumping ground for fire debris.

Further reclamation of the marshland followed and, gradually, the area began to be settled. Finsbury Circus was laid out and built in the early 19th century. Marsh deposits overlying the possible Roman layer were about 1.20m thick. Finds from this material included pottery, spurs, domestic objects, all dating from the 15th century. Also recovered were deposits of 18th century or later date (Schofield with Maloney, 1998).

The excavations for the new basement “cut completely through the successive layers of earth and rubbish deposited during the past two thousand years” (APOC, 1924). This generalised truncation was confirmed by DUA observations of geotechnical test pits and boreholes in 1985 and 1987, which showed that natural sand and gravel lie directly below modern make-up for the basement slab.
3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief were done in accordance with the Method Statement (MoLAS, 2006) and the MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual (MoLAS, 1994).

The slab/ground was broken out and cleared by contractors under MoLAS supervision. Two lift pits were excavated by hand and by machine, by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS.

The locations of the areas of excavation were already plotted on to a Basement Survey (Drg. No. 05146/AP(0)208, Gaunt Francis Architects). This information was then plotted onto the Ordnance Survey grid (Fig 2). Heights of observations were recorded relative to the Ordnance Datum and provided by section plans (Drg. Nos. 0110 and 0168, Project No. E03, Waterman Structures Consulting Engineers).

Where relevant, sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10; the site has produced: one trench location plan and two section drawings. No finds were recovered from the site.

Records from the site can be found under the site code FYC06 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

In total, two lift pits were excavated as part of the lift shaft construction. These have been numbered in accordance with the contractors’ numbering system on site. There follows a brief description of the observed deposits.

For lift pit locations, see Fig 2; for section drawings, Fig 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lift Pit 10: Goods Lift</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Eastern area of building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dimensions</strong></td>
<td>1.55m (N-S) by 1.30m (E-W) by depth approx. 0.86m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modern ground level/top of slab</strong></td>
<td>7.06m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base of modern fill/slub</strong></td>
<td>6.30m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depth of archaeological deposits seen</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of base of deposits observed</strong></td>
<td>6.00m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural observed</strong></td>
<td>6.30m OD (gravel)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lift Pit 10 was excavated prior to the construction of the new goods lift. The total depth excavated for the lift pit was 6.20m OD; the new floor level next to the lift shaft is 6.56m OD.
This double lift pit is situated in the lobby area of the building and will be made from glass to enable visibility. The total depth for the lift pit was 5.515m OD, with finished floor level at 8.17m OD.
Fig 2 Test pit location plan

location of Passenger Lifts 5 + 6

location of Goods Lift 10
Fig 3  Section drawings from lift pits
4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Original research aims
The following research aims and objectives were established in the Method Statement for the watching brief (Section 2.2):

• What was the level of the natural topography?
  Natural sand and gravel were observed at 6.30m OD in Lift Pit 10 to the east of the site; London Clay was seen at 6.10m OD in Lift Pits 5 and 6, in the central area.

• What are the earliest deposits identified?
  Natural deposits were the only ones encountered. The clay that was recorded at a depth of 6.10m OD was confirmed as being London Clay, rather than a later waterlain deposit associated with the Wallbrook. The basement of the present building had already destroyed any potential previous archaeological remains.

• What are the latest deposits identified?
  Natural deposits were the only ones encountered.

• Do any deep-cut archaeological features survive beneath the existing basement slab?
  No archaeological features survived at all.

4.2 New research aims
In light of the results from the archaeological watching brief, there is no need for further research.

4.3 Significance of the data
The watching brief at 1–6 Finsbury Circus revealed substantial truncation from the basement of the present building. MoLAS considers that, as the site did not produce any archaeological deposits, there is no need for further investigation. The decision on the appropriate response to the works, however, rests with the City of London planning authority and their designated archaeological advisor.
5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the excavation will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

The site archive containing original records will be stored in accordance with the terms of the Method Statement (MoLAS, 2006) with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the excavation.

In view of the limited significance of the data (Section 4.3), it is suggested that a short note on the results of the watching brief should appear in the annual round up of the London Archaeologist.
6 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following for their contributions and assistance on site: Frank Gallagher, Nigel Hamilton-Brown, Sean Halvey and Michael Bunyan of ISG InteriorExterior.

Thanks also to Sandra Rowntree for the illustrations. The project was project managed by Robin Nielsen of MoLAS.

7 Bibliography

APOC, 1993 “Archaeological treasures from New Britannic House site”, Anglo-Persian Oil Company Magazine, Vol. i, No. 2

Corporation of London Department of Planning and Transportation, 2004 Planning Advice Note 3: Archaeology in the City of London, Archaeology Guidance, London

Department of the Environment, 1990 Planning Policy Guidance: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16)


English Heritage, 1991 Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2)

English Heritage, May 1998 Capital Archaeology. Strategies for sustaining the historic legacy of a world city


Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), supplement 2001, By-Laws, Standards and Policy Statements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists: Standards and guidance – the collection, documentation conservation and research of archaeological materials

JRS, 1923 Roman Britain in 1921 and 1922, Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. XI

MoLAS, 2006 Britannic House, 1–6 Finsbury Circus, London EC2, Method statement for an archaeological watching brief, MoLAS unpublished report


# 8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

## 8.1 OASIS ID: molas1-35822

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short description of the project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project dates</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous/future work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any project codes associated reference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site status (other)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Land use</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monument type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Finds</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods &amp; techniques</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development type: Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)

Prompt: Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the planning process: After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country: England
Site location: GREATER LONDON CITY OF LONDON CITY OF LONDON Britannic House
Postcode: EC2
Study area: 120.00 Square metres
Site coordinates: TQ 3280 8109 51.5126092792 -0.08601352526930 51 30 45 N 000 05 09 W Point
Height OD: Min: 6.30m Max: 6.30m

Project creators

Name of Organisation: MoLAS
Project brief: Corporation of London
Project design: MoLAS
Project director/manager: Robin Nielsen
Project supervisor: Alison Telfer
Type of sponsor/funding body: DP9
Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital Archive Exists? No

Paper Archive

Paper recipient LAARC

Paper Media available

- 'Notebook - Excavation'
- 'Research'
- 'General Notes'
- 'Plan'
- 'Unpublished Text'

Project bibliography 1

Publication type A forthcoming report

Title Britannic House, 1-6 Finsbury Circus, London EC2, A report on the watching brief

Author(s)/Editor(s) 'Telfer, A.'

Date 2007

Issuer or publisher MoLAS

Place of issue or publication 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London, N1 7ED

Description A4 book

Entered by Alison Telfer (atelfer@molas.org.uk)

Entered on 21 December 2007

Please e-mail English Heritage for OASIS help and advice
© ADS 1996-2006 Created by Jo Gilham and Jen Mitcham, email Last modified Friday 3 February 2006
Cite only: http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/print.cfm for this page