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ROYAL HOSPITAL
CHELSEA
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WATCHING BRIEF

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An Archaeological Watching Brief at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea

Site Code: RHK 05

Central National Grid Reference: TQ 2815 7825

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Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, October 2005

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1 ABSTRACT

1.1 This report details the results and working methods of an archaeological watching brief of geotechnical trial pits carried out at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

1.2 Natural gravel was observed at depths across the site varying from 0.90m below the ground level to the south of the site at a level of 5.49m OD to 1.70m below the ground level to the north at 4.31m OD. The results of both the test pits and boreholes would suggest that the natural sloped from south down towards the north and northeast.

1.3 Late 19th and 20th century dumped material between 0.76m and 1.60m thick was revealed in all test pits.

1.4 No structures associated with the Royal Hospital or earlier buildings were revealed during the watching brief.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 An archaeological watching brief of geotechnical trial pits was undertaken between the 15th and the 19th of September 2005 by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

2.2 The site is within the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea and it occupies the eastern area where the existing Infirmary building stands. It has a central National Grid Reference of TQ 2815 7825.

2.3 Five engineering trial pits were excavated across the site to a depth of the natural gravel and information from three boreholes was also obtained (Fig. 2).

2.4 The work was commissioned by Steffian Bradley Architects on behalf of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The project was project managed for Pre-Construct Archaeology by Jon Butler and supervised by the author. The site was monitored by Diane Walls, English Heritage GLAAS adviser to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

2.5 The completed archive comprising written, drawn and photographic records and artefacts will be deposited at the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (LAARC) at Eagle Wharf Road. The Museum of London Site Code assigned to the project was RHK 05.

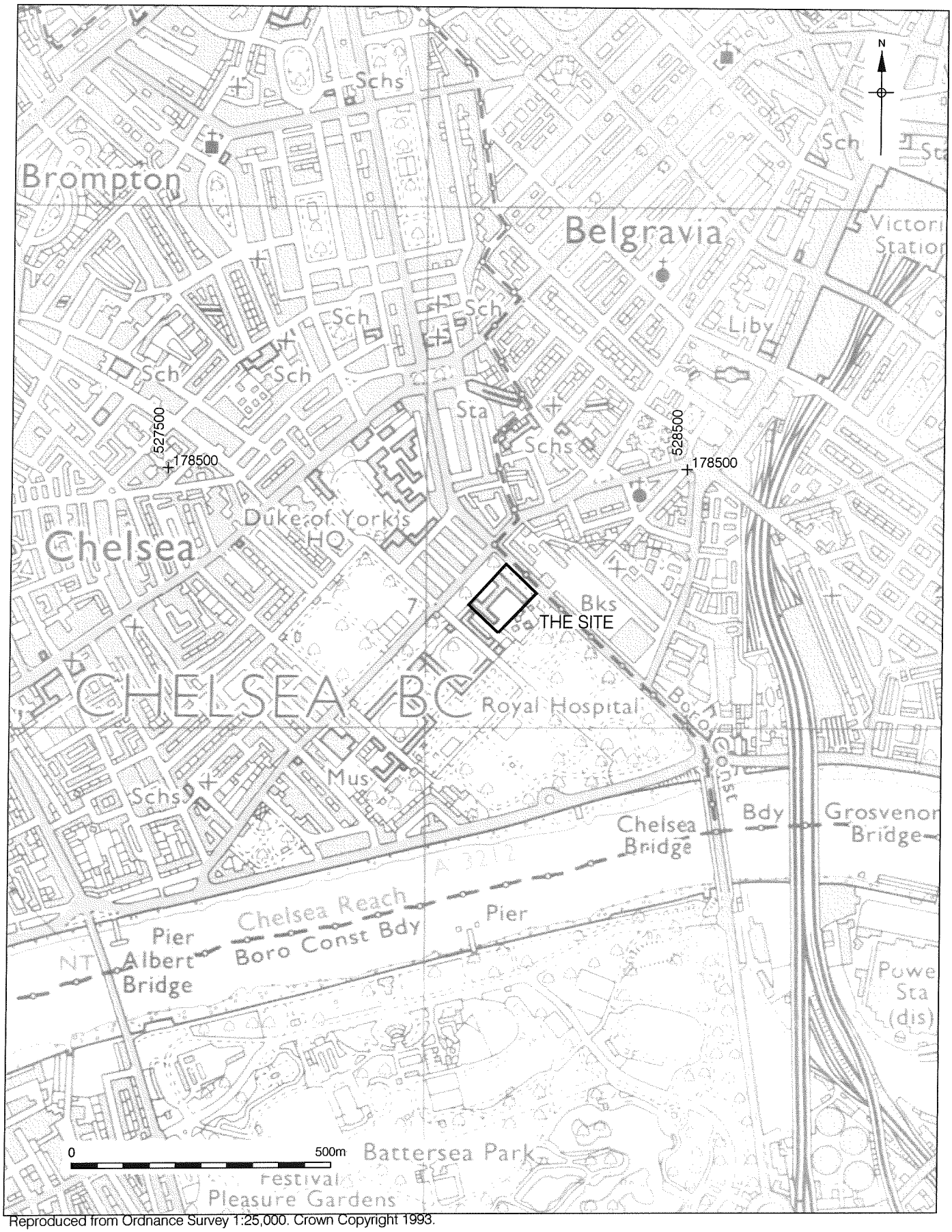
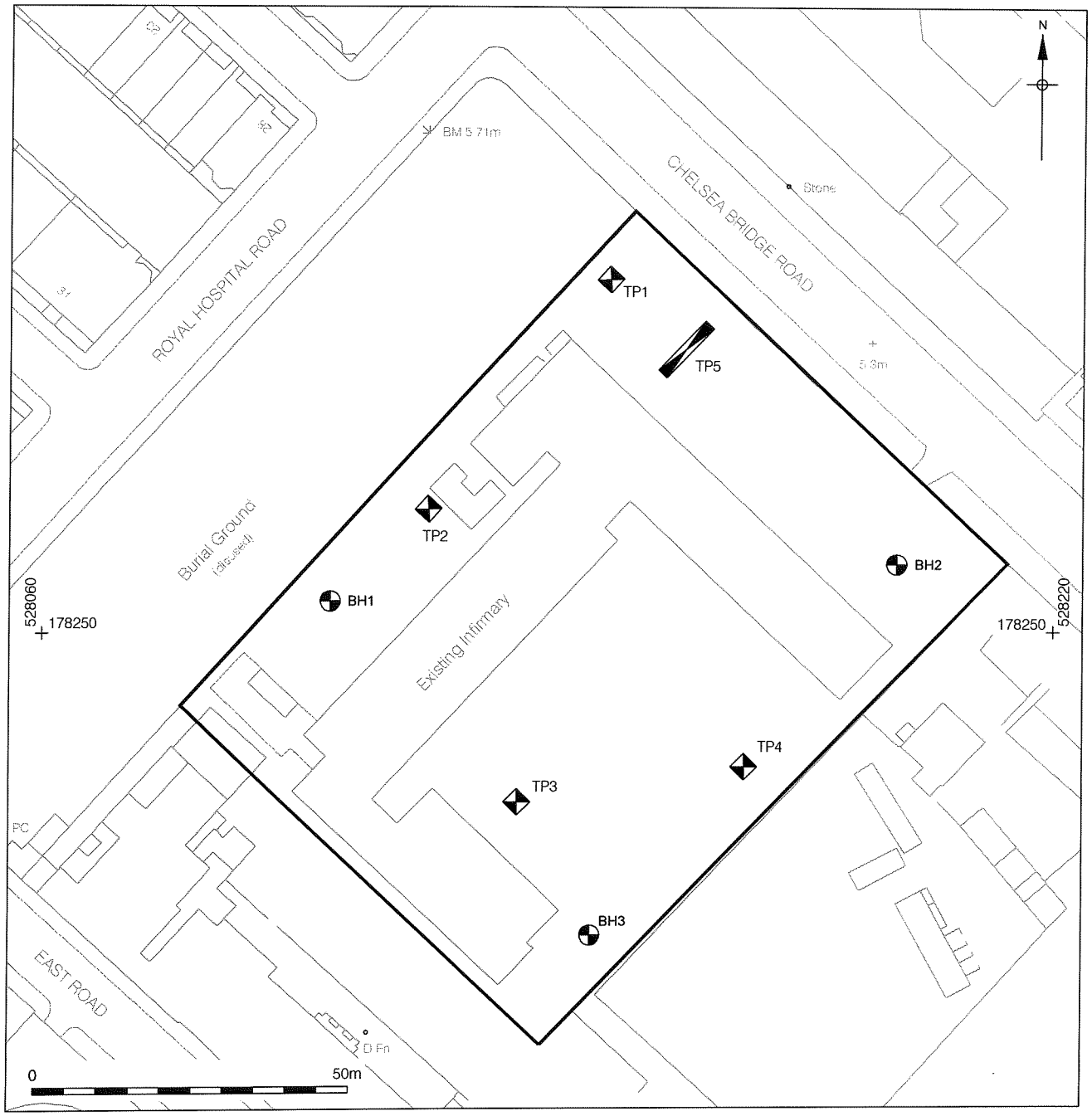


Figure 1
Site Location
1:10,000



Key:

Trial pit (actual size: trenches 1-4 0.45m x 0.45m; trench 5 0.45m x 3.7m)

Bore hole (not to scale)

Figure 2
Trial Pit and Borehole Location
1:1000

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The site is within the Royal Hospital Chelsea which was founded by Charles II for veteran soldiers. It was erected on the site of an unsuccessful College of Theology established in 1618 by Dr Sutcliffe, Dean of Exeter. The college was closed after 40 years and the government took over the building for the housing of Dutch and Scottish prisoners of war. In 1666 it was granted to the Royal Society but was too dilapidated to use[1].

3.2 The foundation stone of the new hospital which was designed by Christopher Wren was laid by Charles II in 1682 and the building was finished in 1692. It was constructed around three courtyards with a statue of Charles II erected in the centre one. Minor alterations were made to the buildings in 1765-82 by Robert Adam and a stables were added to the west by Sir John Soane in 1814[2].

3.3 To the east of the hospital stands the infirmary. The original infirmary building was designed by Sir John Soane and located to the west of the Royal Hospital adjacent to Soane's stable block. Soane's infirmary was destroyed by a landmine in 1941 and rebuilt with 80 beds in 1961on its present site to the east of the Royal Hospital[3].

3.4 In c.1690 Lord Ranelagh, Paymaster General to the Forces, had a house built to the east of the Hospital. In 1742 the house and gardens were laid out as pleasure gardens, Ranelagh Gardens, centred around a large rotunda. The House stood to the north of the rotunda. In 1805 the house and the Rotunda was demolished and the grounds are now part of the Hospital grounds.

3.5 Archaeological work conducted by Oxford Archaeological Unit, during 1997, in the east side of the Hospital and along the line of Chelsea Bridge Road has identified layers of cobbles probably related to surfaces associated with both the Chelsea College and the early use of the College[4].

3.6 In 1997 a watching brief was conducted by MoLAS. In the northwest of the site in the Great Kitchen of the Royal Hospital, which was constructed as part of the Wren's

[1] Weinreb, B. & Hibbert, C., 1983, The London Encylopaedia, p149
[2] Weinreb, B. & Hibbert, C., 1983, The London Encylopaedia, p149
[3] Weinreb, B. & Hibbert, C., 1983, The London Encylopaedia, p150
[4] Maloney, C. & Gostick, T.J., 1998, London Fieldwork and Publication Round-up 1997, London Archaeologist Vol.8, supplement 3, p90

original Royal Hospital building, trial holes revealed two spur-walls which where part of the original Wren building phase of the Royal Hospital[5].

[5] Maloney, C. & Gostick, T.J., 1998, London Fieldwork and Publication Round-up 1997, London Archaeologist Vol.8, supplement 3, p90

4 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

4.1 The underlying geology of the site according to the British Geological Survey is mainly Kempton Park gravel with the exception of the east and southeast corner of the site where alluvium (mainly sand silt and clay) can be found.

4.2 The watching brief revealed only sandy gravels within the test pits and boreholes.

4.3 The site currently occupies level ground

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

5.1 The watching brief of the geotechnical trial pits was conducted in accordance with the specification written by Jon Butler of PCA and approved by Diane Walls, English Heritage GLAAS adviser to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

5.2 Five engineering trial pits were excavated across the site and investigated as an archaeological watching brief to investigate ground conditions. One of the trial pits (TP5) was excavated to the depth of 0.55m only to find out if the root of a protected tree were going to be affected by any activity associated with the proposed development. During and continuing after the monitoring of the geotechnical trial pits three engineering boreholes were also excavated and information was obtained and used to complement the data from geotechnical trial pits and this has been incorporated into this report.

5.3 The test pit dimensions and locations were as follows:

TP1 was located to the north of the site and measured 0.45m by 0.45m by 1.55m deep.

TP2 was located to the southwest of TP1 and measured 0.45m by 0.45m by 1.80m deep

TP3 was located to the south of the site and measured 0.45m by 0.45m by 1.16m deep.

TP4 was located to the south of the site and measured 0.45m by 0.45m by 1.10m deep.

TP5 was located to the north of the site to the southeast of TP1 and measured 3.70m by 0.45m by 0.55m deep.

5.4 These were excavated by hand under archaeological supervision. The size and depth of these trial pits precluded any examination of features or deposits by hand below a depth of 1.00m, deeper deposits and features being recorded from the top of the trial pit.

5.5 In addition three boreholes were monitored.

BH1 was located to the northwest of the site.

BH2 was located to the east of the site.

BH3 was located to the southeast of the site.

6 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

6.1 TP1

The trial pit was located in the infirmary car park to the northeast of the site and southeast of a disused burial ground. The earliest deposit natural sandy gravel was observed at a depth of 4.31m OD. It consisted of a 0.05m thick (not fully excavated) yellow orangey gravelly sand layer [3]. Overlying [3] was a mid brown greyish sandy silt layer [2] at 5.01m OD which was 0.70 thick. Two fragments of mid 19th century pottery were recovered from this layer. Sealing layer [2] was a mid grey brownish sandy silt layer [1] with moderate gravel, occasional pottery and glasswork waste. It was found at 5.13m OD and was 0.12m thick. Layer [1] was sealed by a 0.53m thick 20th century make up layer for the 0.15 thick tarmac for the existing car park.

6.2 TP2

This trial pit was located to the north of the infirmary and to the southwest of trial TP1. The earliest deposit observed was the natural sandy gravel [12] found at 4.72m OD. Overlying [12] was 1.60m of 19th/20th century deposit [11] that was found at 6.32m OD. This deposit was sealed by 0.10m of topsoil for the grass of the present garden to the north of the infirmary.

6.3 TP3

This trial pit, located to the southeast of the site, was relocated about 0.50m to the northeast from its original proposed position. The earliest deposit observed was recorded at a depth of 5.36m OD. This was a natural yellow orangey sandy gravel [6] at least 0.30m thick but not fully excavated. Layer [6] was sealed at 5.56m OD by a mid brown sandy gravelly silt layer [5] approximately 0.20m thick and one fragment of mid 18th century pottery was recovered from this layer. Overlying [5] was observed a 0.55m thick 20th century demolition deposit and the topsoil with the grass, 0.15m thick, for the present infirmary garden.

6.4 TP4

Trial pit 4 was located in the garden south of the existing infirmary and was relocated about 2.00m to the northwest of its original proposed position. The earliest deposit observed was a 0.20m thick natural gravelly sand [9], which was found at 5.31m OD. Overlying [9] was observed at 5.65m OD a 0.34m thick light brown greyish sandy silt layer [8]. No dating material was recovered from this layer, which was sealed by a

0.41m thick mid grey brownish sandy silt layer [7] found at 6.06m OD. Only one clay pipe fragment was recovered from this layer and was interpreted as a post-medieval layer. The topsoil and the grass, 0.15m thick, sealed [7].

6.5 TP5

Trial pit 5 was located to the northeast of the site in the infirmary car park and south of TP1. It was excavated to a depth of 5.36m OD only (0.55m from ground level) to determine if any of the major roots of a protected tree approximately 2.00m south of the pit were going to be affected by any activity associated with the proposed development. The earliest deposit observed at 5.31m OD was a 0.05m thick mid brown greyish layer [10] with moderate modern demolition rubble. Sealing [10] was the topsoil (0.30m thick) and the tarmac for the infirmary car park.

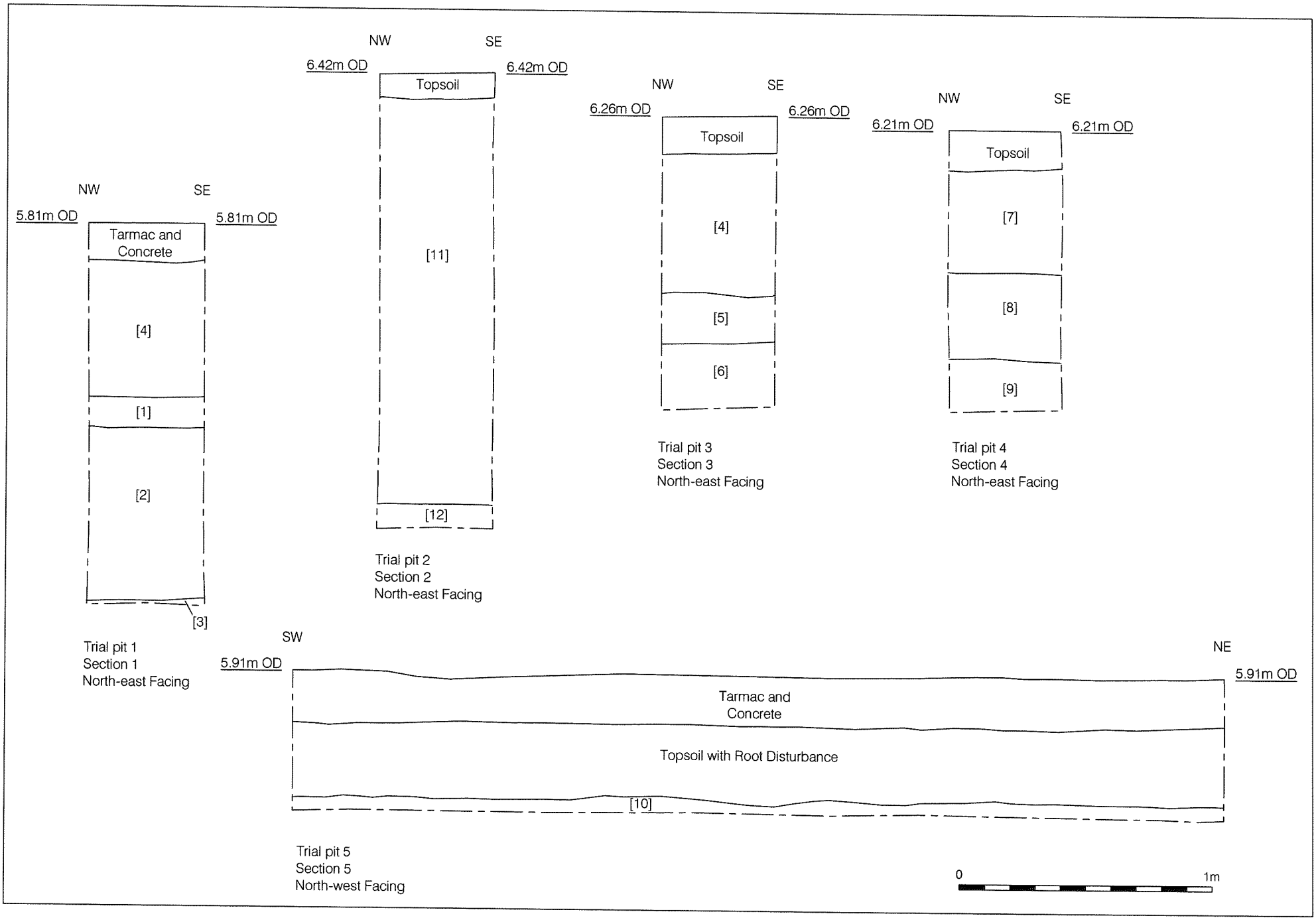


Figure 3
Sections 1-5
1:20

7 THE BOREHOLE DATA

7.1 Three boreholes were drilled across the site. They aimed to supplement the results of the geotechnical trial pits, particularly as to the presence or absence of substantial deposits associated with post-medieval or earlier activity, and to provide data for a broad topographic model for the site. The results relevant to the archaeological investigations are tabulated below.

	BH1	**BH2**	**BH3**
OD LEVEL ON TOP OF BOREHOLE	6.30m	5.98m	6.19m
THICKNESS OF TOPSOIL AND GRASS	0.15m	0.15m	0.15m
THICKNESS OF MODERN DEPOSIT	0.15m	0.15m	0.55m
OD LEVEL OF BROWN SANDY SILT LAYER	6.00m	5.68m	-
THICKNESS OF BROWN SANDY SILT LAYER	1.00m	1.05m	-
OD LEVEL OF NATURAL SANDY GRAVEL	5.00m	4.78m	5.49m

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Natural sandy gravel was observed across the site and gradually sloped from the south, where the highest level recorded was 5.49m OD in BH3, to the north where the lowest level of the site was 4.31m OD. This is probably due to truncation because the vicinity of the River Thames to the south shouls suggest that the ground should slope to the south. No archaeological cuts where observed within the test pits.

8.2 A mid brown sandy silt layer was observed across the site, except for TP2 and BH3 where 20th century dump deposit sealed the natural gravel. This layer was interpreted as a post-medieval layer of 18th/19th century date.

8.3 20th century dumped deposits and make up layers were encountered across the site.

8.4 No masonry associated with the buildings of the Royal Hospital or previous building on the site were encountered.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

9.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Steffian Bradley Architects for commissioning the watching brief. The author would like to thank Jon Butler for his project management, Hayley Baxter for the illustrations and the geotechnical crew from Concept for on-site co-operation.

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INDEX

Context No.	Type	Test Pit	Description
1	Layer	1	Mid grey brownish sandy silt
2	Layer	1	Mid brown greyish sandy silt
3	Layer	1	Natural sandy gravel
4	Layer	3	Sandy silt layer
5	Layer	3	Post-medieval layer
6	Layer	3	Natural sandy gravel
7	Layer	4	Mid grey brownish sandy silt layer
8	Layer	4	Sandy silt layer
9	Layer	4	Natural sandy gravel
10	Layer	5	20th century dump deposit
11	Deposit	2	Modern dump deposit
12	Layer	2	Natural sandy gravel

APPENDIX 2: OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM

1.1 OASIS ID: preconst1-10305

Project details

Project name	Royal Hospital Chelsea
Short description of the project	An archaeological watching brief of geotechnical trial pits was undertaken between the 15th and the 19th of September 2005 by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This work took place in conjunction with site geotechnical investigation works. Four engineering trial pits were excavated across the site to a depth of the natural gravel and information from tree boreholes was obtained. The engineering trial pits were recorded as a watching brief. The natural sandy gravel that was observed across the site and gradually sloped from the south, where the highest level recorded was 5.49m OD in BH3, to the north where the lowest level of the site was 4.31m OD. No archaeological cuts where observed due to the size of the test pits. A mid brown sandy silt layer was observed across the site, except for TP2 and BH3 where 20th century dump deposit sealed the natural gravel. This layer was interpreted as a post medieval layer (18th/19th century). 20th century dump deposit and make up layers were encountered across the site.
Project dates	Start: 15-09-2005 End: 19-09-2005
Previous/future work	Not known / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	rhk 05 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA Royal Hospital Chelsea

Study area	8436.00 Square metres
National grid reference	TQ 2815 7825 Point
Height OD	Min: 4.31m Max: 6.42m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd
Project brief originator	Pre-Construct Archaeology
Project design originator	Jon Butler
Project director/manager	Jon Butler
Project supervisor	Ireneo Grosso
Sponsor or funding body	Steffian Bradley Architects

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	LAARC
Physical Contents	'Ceramics'
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Media available	'Text'
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC

Project bibliography 1

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