

**An Archaeological Watching Brief of Engineering Test Pits at BSkyB Studios, Harlequin Avenue, Brentford, London Borough of Hounslow**

**Central National Grid Reference: TQ1640 7790**

**Site Code: HQA06**

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Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, November 2006**

**Commissioning Client:**

**Fugro Engineering Services Limited**

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**November 2006**

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## **1 ABSTRACT**

- 1.1 This report details the results and working methods of an archaeological watching brief of three engineering trial pits undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd at the site of BSkyB Studios, Harlequin Avenue, Brentford, London Borough of Hounslow. The site central National Grid Reference is TQ1640 7790. The watching brief was undertaken between 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006 by Richard Humphrey. The commissioning client was Fugro Engineering Services Limited.
- 1.2 The site consisted of three geotechnical trial pits, two of which were excavated in a car park at the northern end of Harlequin Avenue and one between buildings on the western side of Harlequin Avenue. The study area sloped gently downwards from the south to the north.
- 1.3 The three engineering trial pits dug across the site failed to reveal any surviving archaeology. Modern concrete and tarmac was seen to overlie twentieth century made ground that in turn overlay a sequence of naturally deposited gravels and clays.

## **2 INTRODUCTION**

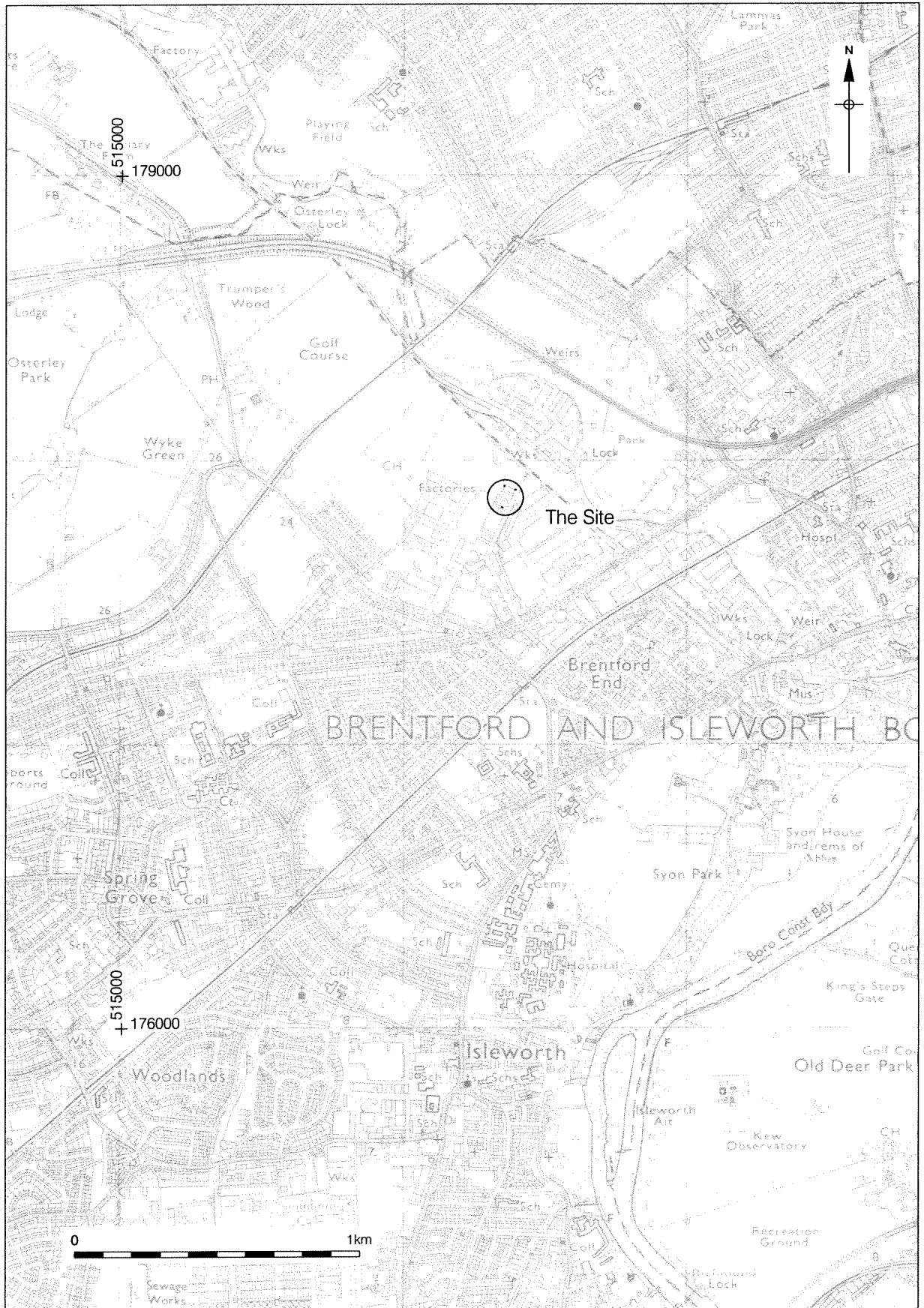
- 2.1 An archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd between 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006 by Richard Humphrey. The Project Manager was Gary Brown.
- 2.2 The site address is BSKyB Studios, Harlequin Avenue, Brentford, London Borough of Hounslow (fig.1). Trial pit 1 was bounded by Harlequin Avenue to the east, warehouse buildings to the north and south and a property boundary to the west (fig.2). Trial pits 2 and 3 were situated to the west and north of a warehouse, within the confines of the fenced BSKyB car park at the northern end of Harlequin Avenue (fig.2).
- 2.2 Three geotechnical trial pits were excavated by Fugro Engineering Services (FES) prior to redevelopment of the land into offices and studios. The work was commissioned on behalf of Fugro Engineering Services Limited and was undertaken following English Heritage guidelines.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.3 The National Grid Reference of the site is TQ1640 7790 and the site was given the code HQA06.

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<sup>1</sup> English Heritage, Greater London Advisory Service, "Archaeological Guidance Papers: 3 Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork in London; 4 Archaeological Watching Briefs (1992).

### **3 PLANNING BACKGROUND**

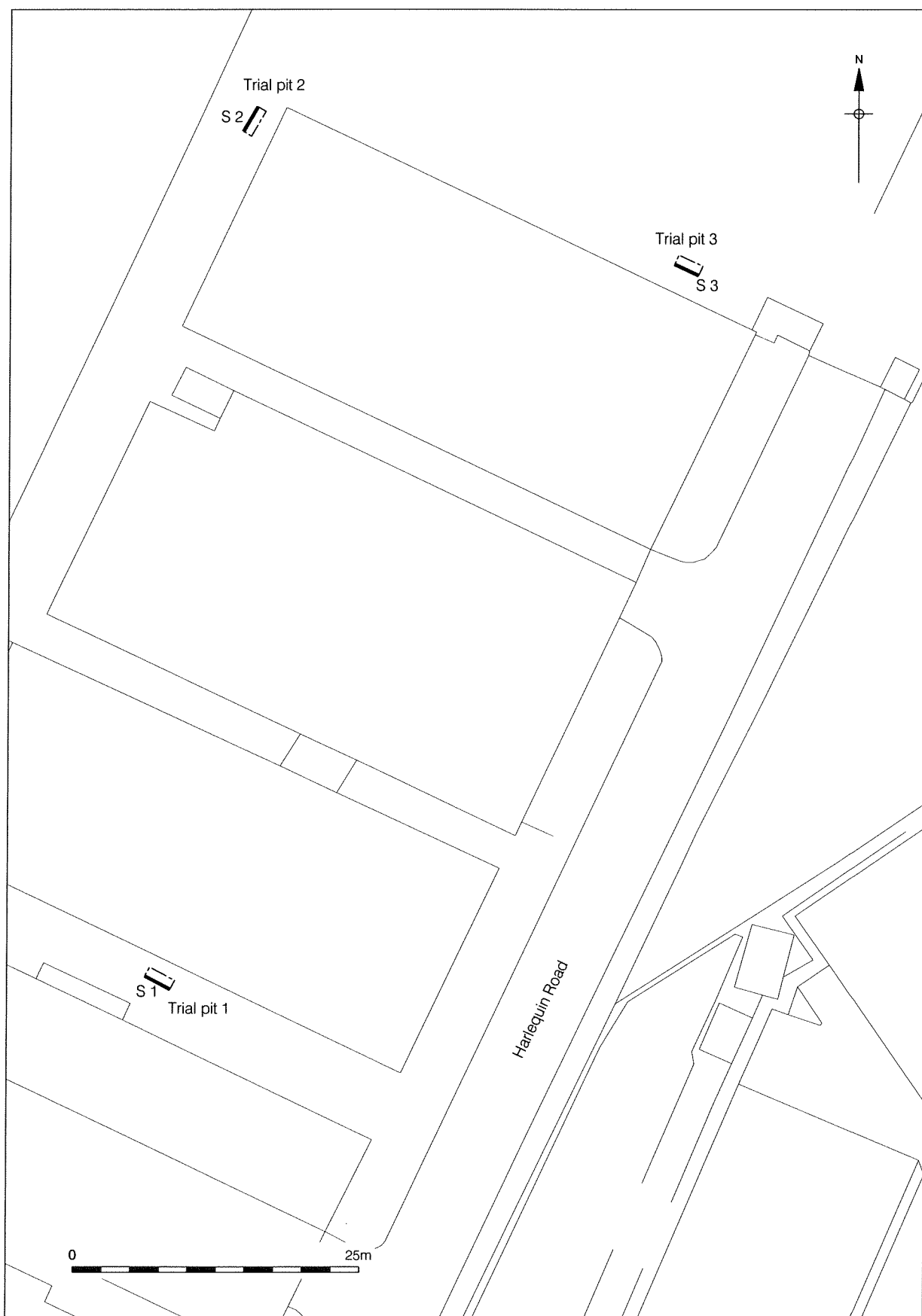
- 3.1 The site is located within an Archaeological Priority Area as defined in Hounslow's Unitary Development Plan. It is not located within or close to a Scheduled Ancient Monument.



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Figure 1  
Site Location  
1:20,000 at A4



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Figure 2  
Trench Location  
1:500 at A4

## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 As the site lies within an Archaeological Priority Area, English Heritage advised that there is sufficient evidence of archaeological activity within the vicinity to warrant archaeological mitigation.
- 4.2 Lower Palaeolithic material in West London is concentrated on the Lynch Hill Gravel where large numbers of flint handaxes have been recovered from gravel working in West Drayton (Collins, 1978). Artefacts have also been recovered from Creffield Road, Acton (Bazely *et al*, 1991) and Sipson Lane, Hillingdon (Cotton, 1984).
- 4.3 Upper Palaeolithic also exist in the Colne Valley, in particular the discovery of flint artefacts and horse and reindeer bones at Three Ways Wharf in Uxbridge (Thompson *et al*, 1998).
- 4.4 Archaeological evidence suggests Mesolithic communities would have exploited the Thames Valley area and it's tributaries such as the Colne, (Chowne, 2000). However, their blanketing by alluvial deposits often hinders detection of finds and sites.
- 4.5 A lack of Neolithic evidence in the study area may be the result of limited fieldwork. There is considerable evidence for Neolithic and early Bronze Age farming practices towards Heathrow. Recent work suggests that evidence for farming communities is likely to be better preserved nearer to valley bottoms protected by alluvium, (Chowne, 2000).
- 4.6 The Thames foreshore adjacent to Syon Park has revealed considerable quantities of metal artefacts from the Bronze Age. Evidence suggests a Bronze Age settlement may exist under later deposits on the north bank of the river at Syon Reach, (Chowne, 2000). Excavations at Snowy Fielder Waye (Bell, 1996) revealed artefacts dating to the late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Indeed, the Kempton Park Gravels hold significant potential for revealing evidence of prehistoric settlements.
- 4.7 Romano-British activity in the area is widespread and finds are common during excavation. To the south of the study area is London Road- a Roman road that connected Silchester to London via Staines. A roadside development is suggested near the rivers crossing with the Brent. The Roman town of Brentford was established in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. However, there is little evidence to suggest Roman activity would have spread as far north as the study area, (Chowne, 2000).



- 4.8 There is evidence for Saxon activity in Brentford, Isleworth and Heston, although no finds or features have been made in close proximity to the study area.
- 4.9 The continued use of the Roman road into the medieval period is supported by evidence for a bridge being built for it at Brentford before 1224. The Doomesday Book describes the area as being divided into 'hundreds' that would have found the area predominantly composed of open common ground and woodland, (Chowne, 2000).
- 4.10 Post-Medieval land use in the area is likely to have seen the area used as agricultural land. However, Excavation at the former United Biscuits Site on Syon Lane in 1994 revealed natural brickearth to be truncated by a bedding trench and bedding pits of a post-medieval date. These were covered redeposited brickearth cut by later post-medieval postholes, stakeholes, pits and field drains that were in turn covered by modern dump layers, (MoLAS, 1994).
- 4.11 The site is currently in use as studios, warehouses and a car park for BSKyB.

## 5      **ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY**

- 5.1      The site was still in use as studios and warehouses for BSkyB and as a car park. FES excavated three separate engineering Trial Pits across the site in order to assess the geological conditions that existed in the area.
- 5.2      The excavations were monitored by an archaeologist. A JCB excavator was employed that was fitted with a toothed bucket. The resultant spoil was used to backfill the trial pits once detailed records had been made.
- 5.3      Recording on site was undertaken using the single context recording system as specified in the Museum of London Site Manual<sup>2</sup>. Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, and representative sections at a scale of 1:10. Contexts were numbered sequentially and recorded on *pro-forma* context sheets.
- 5.4      Levels were provided on site by a Fugro Engineer.
- 5.5      The site was given the Museum of London code HQA06

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<sup>2</sup> Museum of London, 1994. Archaeological Site Manual.

## 6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

### Trial Pit 1

- 6.1.1 Trial pit 1 was located to the west of Harlequin Avenue between two warehouse buildings (fig.2). It measured 2.5m east-west and 0.90m north-south. A diesel pump and several oil barrels suggested that this was previously used as a refuelling point. Removal of a 0.13m thick modern concrete surface [1] at a height of 20.22mOD revealed a layer of made ground [2]. There was some obvious hydrocarbon contamination in this layer that measured 0.17m in thickness at a height of 20.09mOD. This most likely represents a twentieth century phase of remediation in the area and acts as bedding for the concrete surface above.
- 6.1.2 Below this was a layer [3] measuring 0.10m in thickness that is representative of an interface between the made ground and natural deposits. It consisted of a sandy-silt that, although lacking in modern materials that would be expected in made ground, retained some degree of contamination as in the layer above. Natural deposits were first encountered as layer [4] at a height of 19.82mOD and 0.37m in thickness, consisting of a clean, orange-brown clayey-silt horizon. These were underlay by a similar layer [5] that was of a similar composition but blue-grey in colour. This layer was 0.43m deep at a height of 19.45mOD.
- 6.1.3 A horizon of natural blue-grey sandy-clayey-gravels [6] was seen to underlie this layer at a height of 19.02mOD. Layer [7] below this was of a similar composition but had lenses of orange gravels mixed in with the blue-grey layers above. This was seen at a height of 18.57mOD and had a thickness of 1.85m. Whilst excavating this layer, the trial pit became flooded.
- 6.1.4 Excavation of trial pit 1 came to an end on the observation of natural red-brown clay at a depth of 16.72mOD. This layer was not fully excavated. No archaeological finds or features were observed in this trial pit.

### Trial Pit 2

- 6.2.1 Located on the western corner of a warehouse in the B SkyB car park, trial pit 2 measured 2.50m north-south and 0.80m east-west (fig.2). A breaker fitted to the JCB was used to break through modern tarmac [9] at a height of 18.32mOD. This was 0.10m thick and its removal revealed a layer of made ground [10] most likely dating from the mid-twentieth century. This was 0.10m deep and contained frequent pieces of demolition rubble, such as brick and concrete, its purpose being to act as a levelling layer for the tarmac surface above it. Below this was another phase of modern levelling [11] at a height of 17.97mOD. Measuring 0.50m in thickness it

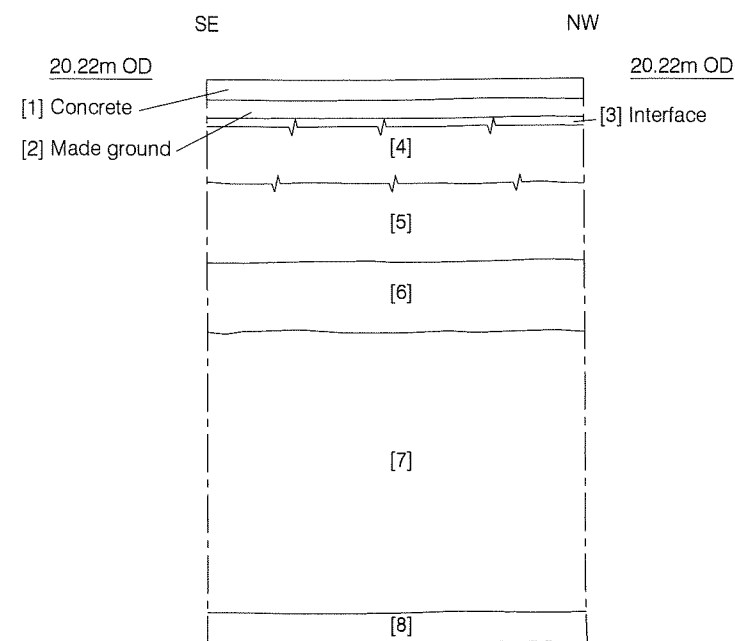
consisted of a light green-grey clayey-silt combined with modern material, such as tar, and represents an engineered levelling layer.

- 6.2.2 A deposit of clean orange-brown clay [12] was seen at a height of 17.47mOD. This represented the highest layer of natural stratigraphy in trial pit 2. It was 0.15m thick. Below this was another natural horizon [13] at a height of 17.32m OD. This consisted of clayey-sandy-gravel and was excavated to a depth of 2.30m below ground surface (16.02mOD). Subtle changes were noticed in the composition of this layer such as a change from angular to rounded stones in the gravels and a slight reduction in the clay content of layer. Excavation of trial pit 2 did not continue any further than this horizon due to collapsing sides that were deemed both a health and safety risk as well as a threat to the stability of the nearby warehouse. No archaeological finds or features were observed in this pit.

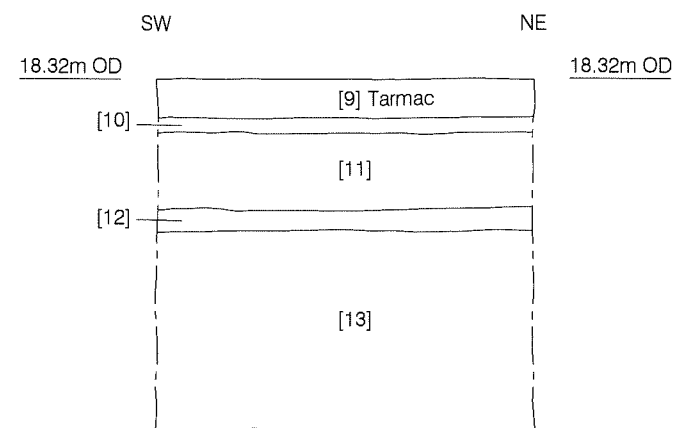
### **Trial Pit 3**

- 6.3.1 As with trial pit 2, a breaker was used by the JCB to remove the modern tarmac [14] of the car park surface to create trial pit 3 that measured 2.30m east-west and 0.90m north-south. The trench was located in front of the north-east corner of the warehouse that marked the southern boundary of the car park (fig.2). This measured 0.10m in thickness at a height of 18.20mOD. Below this was a thick (0.35m) layer of modern concrete at a height of 18.10mOD. A clay horizon [16] was below this and had a depth of 0.65m at a height of 17.75mOD. Within this layer were the disturbed remains of a disused service pipe from the early to mid-twentieth century, confirming this to be a modern deposit rather than a natural clay soil horizon.
- 6.3.2 Removal of this layer revealed a blue-green grey alluvial silty-clay deposit [17] that was representative of the top of natural deposits in this trial pit. This was seen at a height of 17.10mOD and measured 0.35m in depth. Its compaction and the absence of modern inclusions separated it from the overlying clay and differentiated it from the layer of engineered levelling material seen in test pit 2.
- 6.3.3 Layer [18] underlay this alluvial deposit at a height of 16.75mOD. It was comprised of firm, clean orange-brown clay and measured 0.85m in thickness. A lense of gravel was observed in the northern side of the test pit. Another horizon of natural clay [19] was seen to underlie this layer. It was notably different from the above in that it was far firmer and a darker shade of orange-brown. It had a depth of 0.40m at a height of 15.90mOD. Excavation stopped on the detection of London Clay at a height of 15.50mOD. This was very stiff and a mid-grey colour with occasional orange mottling.
- 6.3.4 No archaeological features or finds were seen in this trial pit.

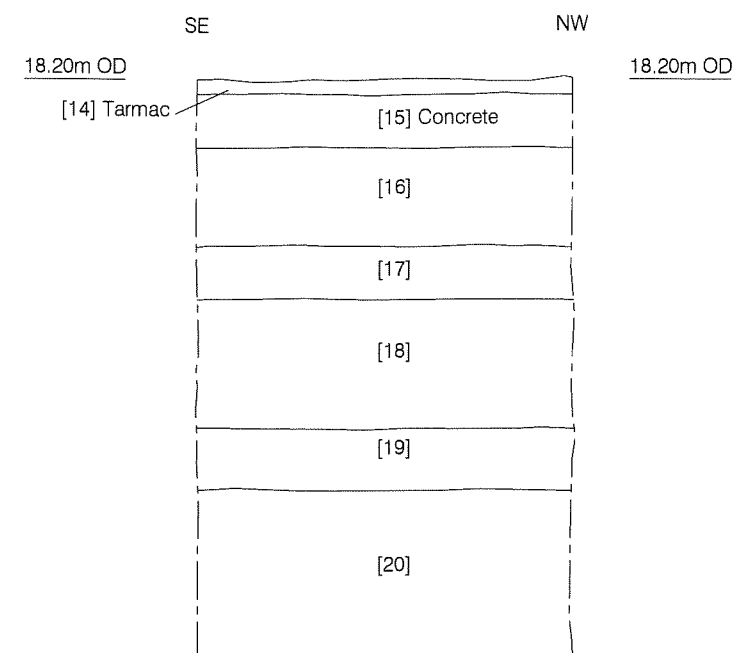




Section 1  
Northeast facing  
Trial pit 1



Section 2  
Southeast facing  
Trial pit 2



Section 3  
Northeast facing  
Trial pit 3



Figure 3  
Sections 1 to 3  
1:50 at A3

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.1 Natural gravels were seen to overlie natural clays and ranged in height from 19.82mOD to 17.10mOD. Excavation of trial pit 2 ceased before clays were detected due collapsing sides of the trial pit that constituted a health and safety risk.
- 7.2 There was no evidence of prehistoric finds or features observed in any of the gravels that appeared across the site.
- 7.3 No features were observed to be cut into any of the silt or upper clay layers that were seen in the three trial pits.
- 7.4 Remediation works in the mid-twentieth century appear to have destroyed any potentially surviving archaeological remains that would have existed above natural stratigraphic layers. Levelling of the study area most likely removed any agricultural horizons that may have yielded archaeological finds and features.
- 7.5 The disused service pipe seen in trial pit 3 is likely to be a twentieth century feature and holds no archaeological significance.

## **8      ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 8.1      Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank Fugro Engineering Services Limited who commissioned this project.
  
- 8.2      The author would also like to thank Tony Smith (Fugro), Chris Brewis (ARUP) and Adele Endesson (ARUP) for assistance on site, Dave Harris for the illustrations, and Gary Brown for his project management and editing.



## 9 Bibliography

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## Appendix 1 Context Index

Context No	Trench	Type	Description
1	1	Layer	Concrete
2	1	Layer	Made Ground
3	1	Layer	Made Ground
4	1	Layer	Natural Silt
5	1	Layer	Natural Silt
6	1	Layer	Natural Gravel
7	1	Layer	Natural Gravel
8	1	Layer	Natural Clay
9	2	Layer	Tarmac
10	2	Layer	Made Ground
11	2	Layer	Modern Levelling
12	2	Layer	Natural Clay
13	2	Layer	Natural Gravel
14	3	Layer	Tarmac
15	3	Layer	Concrete
16	3	Layer	Modern Clay
17	3	Layer	Natural Silt
18	3	Layer	Natural Clay
19	3	Layer	Natural Clay
20	3	Layer	Natural Clay

## Appendix 2 Section Register

Section No.	Datum	Scale	Direction
1	20.22	1:10	NE-facing
2	18.32	1:10	SE-facing
3	18.20	1:10	NE-facing

## Appendix 3 OASIS FORM

**OASIS ID: preconst1-20010**

### Project details

Project name	An Archaeological Watching Brief of Engineering Test Pits at BSKyB Studios, Harlequin Avenue, Brentford, London Borough
Short description of the project	This report details the results and working methods of an archaeological watching brief of three engineering trial pits undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd at the site of BSKyB Studios, Harlequin Avenue, Brentford, London Borough of Hounslow. The site central National Grid Reference is TQ16407790. The watching brief was undertaken between 30th and 31st October 2006 by Richard Humphrey. The commissioning client was Fugro Engineering Services Limited. The site consisted of three geotechnical trial pits, two of which were excavated in a car park at the northern end of Harlequin Avenue and one between buildings on the western side of Harlequin Avenue. The study area sloped gently downwards from the south to the north. The three engineering trial pits dug across the site failed to reveal any surviving archaeology. Modern concrete and tarmac was seen to overlie twentieth century made ground that in turn overlay a sequence of naturally deposited gravels and clays.
Project dates	Start: 30-10-2006 End: 31-10-2006
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	HQA06 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project

Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Planning condition
<b>Project location</b>	
Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON HOUNSLOW BRENTFORD BSkyB Studios, Harlequin Avenue
Postcode	TW8
Study area	10.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 1640 7790 51.4875598006 -0.323315613259 51 29 15 N 000 19 23 W Point
Height OD	Min: 17.10m Max: 19.82m
<b>Project creators</b>	
Name of Organisation	Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd
Project brief originator	Pre-Construct Archaeology

Project design      Gary Brown  
originator

Project              Gary Brown  
director/manager

Project supervisor    Richard Humphrey

Name of              Fugro Engineering Services Ltd.  
sponsor/funding  
body

#### **Project archives**

Physical Archive      LAARC  
recipient

Entered by            Richard Humphrey (rhumphrey@pre-construct.com)

Entered on            2 November 2006

#### **OASIS:**

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