

87-95 Curtain Road, London Borough of Hackney: An Archaeological Investigation Report

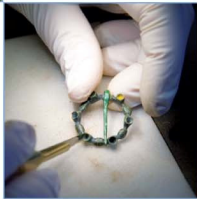
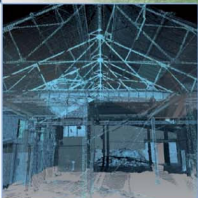
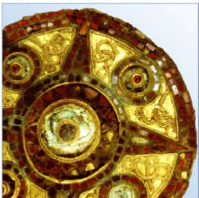
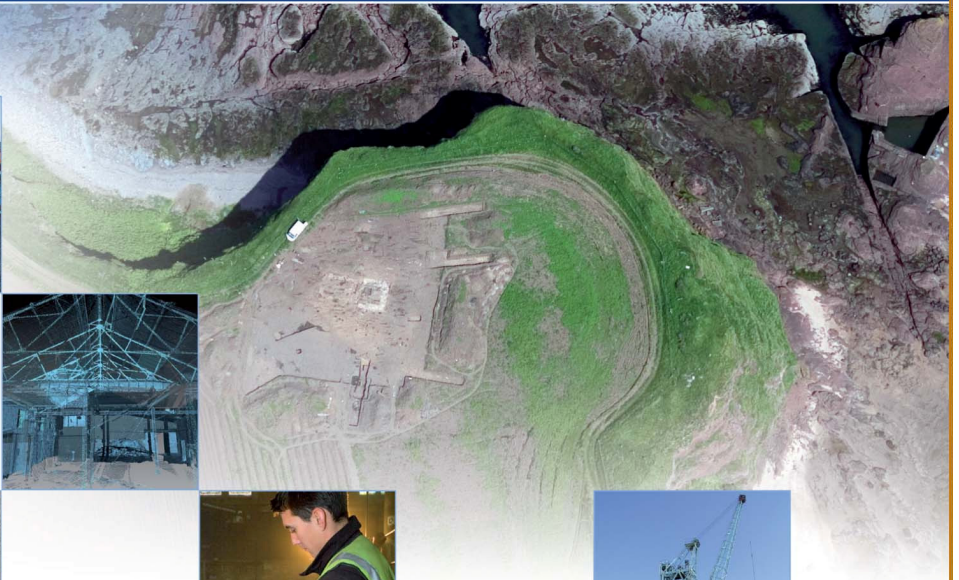
Planning Application Number: 2009/ 0914

National Grid Reference Number: TQ 3325 8244

AOC Project No: 32138

Site Code: CUT13

Date: February 2013



ARCHAEOLOGY

HERITAGE

CONSERVATION

87-95 Curtain Road, London Borough of Hackney: An Archaeological Investigation Report

On Behalf of: John Paul Construction
Exchange Plaza (3rd Floor)
58 Uxbridge Road
Ealing
London
W5 2ST

National Grid Reference (NGR): TQ 3325 8244

AOC Project No: 32138

Prepared by: Les Capon

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Date: February 2013

This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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Date: February 2013

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Non-Technical Summary

An archaeological investigation was undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group, on behalf of John Paul Construction, between the 4th and 8th February 2013 at 87-95 Curtain Road, in the London Borough of Hackney. The work consisted of monitoring the ground level as it was reduced to provide new basement levels, in an area of the site with archaeological potential. The area measured 13m by 12m, and was rectangular.

No archaeology was observed, with the deposits characterised by layers of cultivation soil overlying brickearth with no cut features.

Due to the lack of archaeological deposits encountered it is recommended that no further archaeological fieldwork be undertaken. The results of the project will be summarised for inclusion in the London Archaeology Round-up and published via the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) website. On completion of the project, the archive, consisting of paper records, drawings, digital and black and white photographs, will be deposited with the LAARC, Museum of London.

1. Introduction

1.1 Site Location

- 1.1.1 This document details the results of an archaeological investigation, consisting of an area 13m by 12m, reduced by 3m depth, in advance of a proposed new block with a basement at 87-95 Curtain Road, London Borough of Hackney (Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 The site is located on the western side of Curtain Road, Shoreditch, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) TQ 3325 8244 (Figure 2). The site is roughly rectangular, covering an area of approximately 550sqm and is bound to the east by Curtain Road, the north and south by adjacent properties fronting Curtain Road and to the west by Mills Court and the rear of Burbage House.
- 1.1.3 All previous buildings on site had been demolished, with girder supports based in clusters of concrete piles supporting party walls to the south and west.

1.2 Planning Background

- 1.2.1 The site lies within Shoreditch Archaeological Priority Area and Conservation Area as identified in the Hackney Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2010). Archaeological advice to the London Borough of Hackney is provided by Adam Single of English Heritage's Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS).
- 1.2.2 The site does not contain any statutory Listed Buildings, and does not lie within or adjacent to any nationally designated Scheduled Monuments, Registered Battlefields, Registered Park and Gardens or World Heritage Sites.
- 1.2.3 An archaeological condition (Condition 17) was attached to planning consent (2009/0914) for the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. A watching brief during geotechnical investigations and an evaluation have already been undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA 2009a and 2009b). Following this, a Written Scheme of Investigation (AOC 2012) set out the methodology for further archaeological investigation and was approved by Adam Single prior to the start of work on site.
- 1.2.4 Due to the constrained nature of the site, the depth of the archaeological horizon and requirement to support the party walls and Curtain Road frontage, a staged programme of investigation was discussed at a site meeting held on 1st November 2012 and attended by Adam Single (GLAAS), Paul Mason (AOC) and Mark Coatsworth and David Smith of John Paul Construction. This report relates to monitoring of excavations for the new basement area (Figure 2).

1.3 Geology and Topography

- 1.3.1 The British Geological Survey indicates that the solid geology underlying the proposed development site is London Clay, overlain by a superficial geology of Hackney Gravel (BGS 2012).
- 1.3.2 The ground floor of the slab lay level at 15.35m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The level was supplied by John Paul Construction Engineers.

2. Historical and Archaeological Background

- 2.1 The following background information has been paraphrased from a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA 2011).

The Prehistoric Periods (Palaeolithic c. 500,000 – 10000 BC; Mesolithic c. 10000 to 4000 BC; Neolithic c. 4000-2200 BC; Bronze Age c. 2200-700 BC and Iron Age c. 700 BC - AD 43)

- 2.2 Very little prehistoric material has been recorded in the vicinity of the study site. A chipped flint tranchet axe (SMR ref: 080011/00/00) was recorded at Great Eastern Street, but overall, evidence for the prehistoric period in the area is scant.

The Roman Period (AD 43 – AD 410)

- 2.3 The site lies to the west of the supposed route of Ermine Street, the main route heading north out of London. Ermine Street is believed to follow the line of Shoreditch High Street and Kingsland Road.
- 2.4 Excavations by the DGLA in 1989 between Holywell Lane and New Inn Yard identified Roman activity including 2nd and 4th century pottery and pieces of tegula. There is evidence for low level but widespread Roman activity across the area especially east towards Ermine Street, including groups of burials.

The Early Medieval (AD 410 – AD 1066) and Medieval Periods (AD 1066 – AD 1538)

- 2.5 The name Shoreditch is derived from the Saxon *Scoredich* which has been interpreted as 'ditch of Sceorf' or ditch leading to the [Thames] shore. No Saxon finds or settlement have ever been identified in this area.
- 2.6 The earliest reference to *Scoredich* is c. 1148 and properly refers to a drainage ditch leading down to the Thames.
- 2.7 The most important site in medieval Shoreditch was the Priory of St John the Baptist, usually known as Holywell Priory (Bull *et al* 2011). The priory was founded between 1133 and 1162 by Robert Fitz Generan and became the richest community of Augustinian nuns in England. The original priory site was three acres in size and included the Prioress's pasture, known as the Curtain, to the south of Holywell Lane. The main part of the priory was located north of Holywell Lane and south of Bateman's Row. The southern part of the priory was excavated by the DGLA in 1989. The excavations (SMR ref: 080141/00/0) revealed at least three phases of building on the site 2.50m below the current ground level. The excavation identified the south aisle of the church, a series of small chapels and possibly the south transept. Many of the walls had been robbed-out, but some remained extant to c. 1m high, including one wall that contained a possible reliquary niche. Two burials within the interior of the church were identified. The precinct wall of the priory was located south of the excavation, running near to and parallel with Holywell Lane and the western and northern boundaries were defined by a ditch which is illustrated on Horwood's 1813 map of the area.
- 2.8 An archaeological investigation by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited at 22-24 Bateman's Row (i.e. the northern side of the road) found a medieval feature c. 7.5m wide which is believed to be part of the ditch surrounding the priory (PCA 2008). The possibility that the corresponding southern ditch return might be situated along the western side of Curtain Road, i.e. within the existing development area, has been considered but no evidence of it has been encountered to date.

The Post-Medieval (AD 1538 – AD 1900) and Modern Period (AD 1900 to present)

- 2.9 In the 16th century, the southern part of the priory site was leased to Thomas, Earl of Rutland, who constructed a mansion here. Part of the mansion was identified in the 1989 excavation. However, this mansion is not believed to extend to the north of the priory precinct, into the development area.

- 2.10 The priory was demolished during the Dissolution but the gatehouse survived and was later demolished c. 1800.
- 2.11 During the Tudor period the population of London increased in size and greater occupation of the suburbs inevitably took place. The area around Shoreditch became inhabited by the poor, and expanded rapidly throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Shoreditch and Hoxton were notorious for their taverns and theatres in this period.
- 2.12 In 1576 a theatre was constructed within the former priory site by a local man named James Burbage. Its location corresponds with the junction of Curtain Road and New Inn Yard, and its construction in timber in an octagonal shape has very recently been confirmed by archaeological investigation. This theatre was demolished and rebuilt on the south bank where it became known as the Globe.
- 2.13 A second theatre, The Curtain, was built nearby in 1577, located near to the junction of Curtain Road and Hewlett Street. Shakespeare acted here and it is believed that Romeo and Juliet was first performed here. The Curtain fell into disuse by 1625, and was destroyed by the great fire of London in 1666.
- 2.14 The 1989 excavation at the priory found a thick layer of garden or agricultural soil dated to the 17th century, sealing demolition deposits. Cut into this layer were 18th century basements and cesspits indicative of the development of slums in the area during this period (SMR ref: 080141/00/0).
- 2.15 Horwood's map of 1813 shows the presence of a building on the western side of the ditch in the location of the existing development site.
- 2.16 By 1851 Shoreditch was inhabited by 109,000 people and the area was renowned for its overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. Slum clearance began in the 1920s and 30s. The area was heavily bombed during the Second World War, it was not until after this period that the area was extensively redeveloped.

Previous Archaeological Site Investigations

- 2.17 A watching brief during geotechnical investigations and an evaluation have already been undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (PCA 2009a and 2009b). The watching brief showed that up to 3m of modern made ground, large concrete obstructions and concrete floors lay below modern ground level in the southern, non-cellaried side of the site.
- 2.18 In the northern, cellaried, side of the site, limited archaeology survived in a strip along the northern and eastern edges. Elsewhere in the basement, the formation level for its floor was below the archaeological horizon.
- 2.19 An undated sub-circular feature was found within the eastern strip in the basement. Its fill contained a high concentration of burnt daub, possibly suggesting a prehistoric date.
- 2.20 No in situ Roman features were encountered in the watching brief and evaluation but large quantities of Roman ceramic building material were noted throughout the sequence suggesting the probable presence of Roman activity in the immediate vicinity

3. Strategy

3.1 Aims of the Archaeological Investigation

- 3.1.1 The general aims of the archaeological investigation were defined as being:
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains in the southern part of the site.

- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To map any archaeological remains encountered and sample excavate the features.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of excavated archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the extent of previous truncations of the archaeological deposits.
- To enable the archaeology advisor to make an informed decision to satisfy the conditions.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation.

3.1.2 The specific aims of the archaeological investigation were defined as being:

- To ascertain whether there is any evidence for prehistoric activity on the site.
- To ascertain whether there is any in situ Roman archaeology on the site and if so, to consider it in relationship with the route of Ermine Street.
- To recover evidence for the exploitation of the site during the medieval period, with particular consideration of its location in relation to Holywell Priory.
- To characterise the use of the site in the post-medieval period.
- To contribute to the regional research agenda set out in the relevant frameworks documents (MoL/EH 2002).

3.1.3 The final aim is to make public the results of the investigation, subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 A Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by AOC Archaeology (AOC 2012) defined the site procedures for the archaeological evaluation. This document detailed how the investigation, comprising excavation of the area of the new basement, would be undertaken (Figure 2). All work was carried out in accordance with local and national guidelines (IfA 2009 & 2010, EH 2008 & 2009). Provision was made for a report as defined in the Written Scheme of Investigation. The need for subsequent archaeological attendance was dependent on the results of this reduced-ground excavation.

3.2.2 A unique site code for the project (**CUT 13**) was issued by the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (LAARC), and was used as the site identifier.

3.2.3 The levels for the trenches were established using survey data provided by the client.

3.2.4 The evaluation was conducted by the author under the overall management of Paul Mason, AOC Project Manager. The site was monitored by Adam Single of GLAAS on behalf of Hackney Borough Council.

4. Results

4.1 Basement excavation

Level (OD)	Depth BGL	Context Number	Description
15.35m	>3m	(1)	Piles and block footings
15.35m	0.25m	(2)	Building slab
14.85m	1.70m	(3)	Late post-medieval made ground
13.15m	0.70m	(4)	Post-medieval cultivation soil
12.45m	0.25m	(5)	Brickearth

12.20m	NFE	(8)	Naturally-lain sand and gravel
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- 4.1.1 The new basement was located in the southwestern corner of the site (Figure 2). The exposed area for potential archaeology measured 13m north-south and 12m east-west. The lowest deposit identified was yellowish brown sand with 80% small and medium gravel (8), representing a deposit of Hackney Gravel, lying level at 12.20mOD. This was sealed by 0.25m depth of compact, stiff yellowish brown silty clay with no inclusions (5), recognised as brickearth and lying at 12.45mOD. No archaeological features cut this horizon, and there was a sharp interface with cultivated ground above, with no subsoil present.



Plate 1. Site Overview looking Southwest: Brickearth with Pile Intrusions

- 4.1.2 The cultivated ground (4) was very dark greyish brown, 0.7m thick, sandy silt, with occasional inclusions of gravel and brick fragments, and rarer inclusions of oyster shell. No pottery was observed during the ground reduction that could provide a precise date, but the general hard fabric of the bricks was suggestive of a post-medieval date. .
- 4.1.3 Above this cultivated ground and the wall footing was another deposit of similar character, being very dark greyish brown sandy silt (3), with c.30% gravel and brick inclusions. The pieces of brick were larger than the layer below, being $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ bricks, either yellow or red, typically with a thickness of 67mm, consistent with a late 18th or 19th century date. Transfer printed porcelain/china was also observed within this layer, again attesting to a 19th century date. None of the finds were retained. This deposit was cut by a narrow trench 0.27m wide [10] with a brick wall foundation on a concrete plinth built within it (9). The bricks measured 225mm by 105mm by 67mm, indicative of a structure of late 19th or 20th century date. It survived for no more than three courses, and ran parallel to the western boundary of the site for 8m before turning west.
- 4.1.4 The top of the upper cultivated ground lay at 14.85mOD, and was sealed by bedding layers for the floor of the previous building on site, which were 0.5m deep (2). The surface of these lay at 15.35mOD, at the same level as Curtain Road to the east. The cultivated layer was also cut by the

construction event for the previously extant basement on site [7], which was backfilled with loose bricks, tiles and other building materials (6).

- 4.1.5 The site was regularly truncated by six clusters of piles with pile caps above [1], which were the footings for a series of girders installed post-demolition for retaining the party walls of buildings to the south and west. The impact of these piles had resulted in the previous truncation of 6% of the site.

5. Finds

- 5.1 During the course of the archaeological investigation, no finds were retrieved from the basement reduction area and no environmental samples were taken. 19th century porcelain and brick rubble was observed, but not retained.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The archaeological investigation successfully characterised both the stratigraphic sequence and the archaeological potential of the site. Hackney Gravel was sealed by brickearth, with cultivated soil above. The lack of any subsoil between the brickearth and the dark brown soils above it suggests that the soil was probably cultivated in situ, of sufficient depth to disturb and remove the expected subsoil horizon. Such reworking of the ground is likely to have disturbed and removed any shallow archaeological features, had they been present. The brickearth was notably clean, indicating that features did not cut the brickearth.
- 6.2 The ground above the cultivated soil had many more inclusions of brick, as well as the pottery, which may be indicative of a general raising of the ground through general dumping of waster material in the 19th century. This may in part derive from upcast materials from basements and other building episodes in the post-medieval period. The wall foundation cut through this does not represent part of the building depicted on Horwood's map, since it has a concrete plinth.
- 6.3 The lack of any archaeological features in the basement area, and the paucity of finds from Roman, medieval, or early post-medieval periods indicates the low level of archaeological potential for the site. A meeting with Adam Single of GLAAS, Archaeology Advisor to the London Borough of Hackney, on 11th February 2013 on site determined that no further archaeological work was required in regard to this development, neither in the form of further excavation, nor watching brief.

7. Publication and Archive Deposition

- 7.1 Due to the nature of the results at this stage of the archaeological investigation, publication is expected to be limited to a summary in the London Archaeology Round-up and publication via the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) (Appendix B).
- 7.2 On completion of the project, the archive, consisting of paper records, drawings and digital and black and white photographs will be deposited with the LAARC.

8. Bibliography

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Appendices

Appendix A – Context Register

Context No.	Context Description	Length	Width	Depth
1	Piled foundations	Each 0.5m	Each 0.5m	>3.00m
2	Building surface with bedding layers	13.00m	11.00m	0.50m
3	Dumped or cultivated dark brown sandy silt	12.00m	11.00m	1.70m
4	Cultivated dark brown sandy silt	12.00m	11.00m	0.70m
5	Brickearth	12.00m	11.00m	0.25m
6	Hackney Gravel	12.00m	11.00m	NFE
7	Fill of [8]	12.00m	2.0m	>3.00m
8	Cut for former northern basement	12.00m	2.0m	>3.00m
9	Brick footing	11.00m	0.25m	0.25m
10	Cut for [9]	11.00m	0.25m	0.25m

Appendix B – OASIS Form

OASIS ID: aocarcha1-134035

Project details

Project name 87-95 Curtain Road

Short description of the project No archaeology was observed, with the deposits characterised by layers of cultivation soil overlying brickearth with no cut features.

Project dates Start: 04-02-2013 End: 08-02-2013

Previous/future work Not known / No

Any associated project reference codes CUT 13 - Sitecode

Any associated project reference codes 32138 - Contracting Unit No.

Type of project Recording project

Site status Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)

Current Land use Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices

Monument type NONE None

Significant Finds NONE None

Investigation type ""Part Excavation""

Prompt Planning condition

Project location

Country England

Site location	GREATER LONDON HACKNEY HACKNEY 87-95 Curtain Road
Postcode	EC2A 3BS
Study area	156.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 3325 8244 51 0 51 31 28 N 000 04 44 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 12.44m Max: 12.45m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	AOC Archaeology
Project brief originator	EH GLAAS
Project design originator	AOC Archaeology
Project director/manager	Paul Mason
Project supervisor	Les Capon
Type of sponsor/funding body	Contractor
Name of sponsor/funding body	John Paul Construction

Project archives

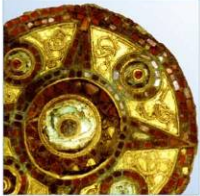
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Museum of London-LAARC
Digital Archive ID	CUT 13
Digital Contents	"Stratigraphic"

Digital Media available	"Database", "Text", "Images raster / digital photography", "Images vector"
Digital Archive notes	held at AOC until transfer
Paper Archive recipient	Museum of London-LAARC
Paper Archive ID	CUT 13
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section", 'Unpublished Text'
Paper Archive notes	held at AOC until transfer

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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