

The Ritz Hotel

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF SUMMARY REPORT

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1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 *Between 25th July and 17th August 2006 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AOC Archaeology at The Ritz Hotel, 150 Piccadilly, London, on behalf of RPS Planning, Transport & Environment.*

The watching brief comprised of the observation of the excavation of geotechnical pits by Soil Consultants Ltd. The pits were excavated to depths required by the geotechnical team. Some pits were abandoned due to the thickness of the reinforced concrete slab. The test pits that were recorded revealed backfill material within probable cellars or basements, which were presumably the remains of the Walsingham House Hotel or Bath Hotel that formerly occupied the site. A brick wall recorded in one pit was thought to be part of a late 19th/early 20th century vaulted chamber. London Clay was encountered in test-pits excavated within the basement of the existing building.

2 INTRODUCTION

Site Location

- 2.1 The site is located in the London Borough of Westminster, on the south side of Piccadilly. Green Park lies to the west and Arlington Street to the east (Figure 1). The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR): TQ 2905 8034.

Planning Background

- 2.2 The watching brief was undertaken pre-determination of planning permission. The results detailed in this document will be used to enable an informed decision regarding further archaeological work, should it be required by the LPA archaeology advisor.

Scope of Works

- 2.3 The purpose of the archaeological attendance was to recover data that will be presented as a statement on stratigraphic survival in a Desk Based Assessment (to be produced by RPS) regarding the potential for archaeological remains to be present on the site.
- 2.4 The test pits were of variable sizes, with variations in depth as determined by the depth of masonry foundations. Only seven test pits were recorded, the remainder being abandoned due to the thickness of the reinforced concrete.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Geology and Topography

- 3.1 The British Geological Survey map shows the site located on London Clay overlain by Hackney gravel and brickearth.

Historical Background

- 3.2 Piccadilly is one of the two ancient highways leading westwards out of London, the other being Oxford Street. It was first developed at the east end in the early 17th century and it is likely that the site of the Ritz was developed by the mid 18th century. The Ritz, London opened its doors on May 24th 1906 on the Piccadilly site of the Walsingham House Hotel, formerly the Bath Hotel.
- 3.3 Conceived by the renowned hotelier Cesar Ritz, The Ritz owes its architectural design to the successful partnership formed in 1900 between the Frenchman, Charles Mewes, and the Englishman, Arthur Davis. Together they had designed the Hotel Ritz in Paris and the Carlton Hotel in London's Haymarket. Between 1904 and 1905 they designed The Ritz in London. Cesar Ritz's innovations for the

hotel were, at that time, quite unique with bathrooms for every guestroom, double glazing, a sophisticated ventilation system, walk-in wardrobes, and brass, rather than wooden beds.

- 3.4 The Ritz is a Grade II listed building and was the first steel-framed building of any significance in London. It was praised for its brilliant refinement of detail and articulation. Large copper lions stand at each corner of the roof while ranks of soaring chimneys and projecting dormers break the skyline. It has French chateau-style architecture and Louis XVI furnishings. The Long Gallery, a vaulted gallery running the length of the building and linking a series of elegant public rooms, was considered a masterpiece in hotel architecture. Unhindered by either dividing doors or walls, the eye is drawn along the length of the Long Gallery to the far windows of the restaurant and through these to the hotel's Italian Garden and Green Park. Diagonal angles of beautifully carved stone run the Gallery's length, some opening to give views through to the Palm Court which epitomized the elegantly frivolous comfort of Edwardian high life. It was extensively refurbished between 1995 and 2005.

4 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

- 4.1 The aims of the investigation were to establish the presence/absence of any archaeological remains within the development site, and to record the stratigraphic sequence and level of truncation of deposits, if present.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 A Method Statement was prepared by AOC Archaeology Group (AOC 2006) outlining the methodology to be followed during the course of the archaeological monitoring.
- 5.2 The fieldwork was managed by Ron Humphrey for AOC Archaeology.
- 5.3 As the fieldwork was undertaken prior to the determined planning permission, no sitecode was assigned to the works.
- 5.4 The monitoring of the pits took place toward the completion of excavation by Soil Consultants Ltd, which allowed access to section profiles where necessary.
- 5.5 The recording of relevant pits was carried out by an experienced archaeologist.
- 5.6 A written and drawn record was completed for five pits: 2, 3, 13, 14 and 20 (Figures 3-5).
- 5.7 Excavation continued until the required depth was reached, usually when the full depth of wall foundation was exposed.

- 5.8 The watching brief was undertaken during July and August 2006.
- 5.9 All work was carried out in line with Archaeological Guidance Paper (AGP) 3: Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork (English Heritage, June 1998), and IFA Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (IFA October 1994).

6 RESULTS

Test Pit 2

- 6.1 Test Pit 2 was located alongside Arlington Road site boundary and was c.1m², excavated to a depth of c.5.20m.

Depth Below Ground Level

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| 0.00 – 0.22m | (2/001) Edging stone |
| 0.22 – 0.50m | (2/002) Concrete foundation |
| 0.50 – 0.60m | (2/003) Mortary sand levelling layer |
| 0.60 – 3.60m | (2/004) Rubble backfill |
| 3.60 – 5.20m | (2/005) Brick wall |

- 6.2 A late 19th/early 20th century wall (2/005) was on the eastern (Arlington Road) side of the pit. It was constructed of red brick measuring 240mm x 110mm x 60mm and bonded with a cement-rich grey mortar. A hole was present, allowing light into an otherwise dark area. Possibly this was part of a service delivery chute for coal being poured down from the street level to the basement below. This was backfilled with a rubble deposit (2/004) of dry pink/brown brick and mortar. The backfill deposit was sealed by a 20th century levelling layer of mortar and sand (2/003), which was in turn overlain by a concrete foundation (2/002) for the edging stone (2/001).
- 6.3 No pre late-19th century archaeological deposits or residual finds were identified in Test Pit 2.

Test Pit 3

- 6.4 Test Pit 3 was located against the division wall with 21 Arlington Street and measured 2.00m x 1.50m x 1.24m with a depth of 2.20m.

Depth Below Ground Level

| | |
|--------------|---|
| 0.00 – 0.70m | (3/001) Garden Soil |
| 0.00 – 0.70m | (3/002) Flower bed wall |
| 0.20 – 0.30m | (3/003) Ornamental brick flooring |
| 0.30 – 0.60m | (3/004) Concrete foundation for (3/003) |
| 0.60 – 0.70m | (3/005) Bedding layer for (3/004) |
| 0.70 – 0.76m | (3/006) Made ground |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 0.76 – 0.86m | (3/007) Made ground |
| 0.68 – 1.24m | (3/008) Concrete foundation for wall (3/002) |
| 0.20 – 1.20m | (3/009) Construction cut for (3/002) |
| 0.88 – 2.20m+ | (3/010) 20 th Century red brick wall |
| 0.68 – 1.24m | (3/011) Chalky backfill in cut [3/009] |
| 0.90 – 2.20m+ | (3/012) Brick rubble backfill |

- 6.5 The earliest deposit recorded in Test Pit 3 was a red brick wall (3/010) of probable 20th century date, given its location directly below the present wall. It comprised the same build as (2/005) in Test Pit 2. Backfill material (3/012) was observed to its north side. This was overlain by three deposits of made ground (3/007 – 3/005) which were in turn sealed by a concrete foundation layer (3/004) for a brick floor (3/003). Cutting these deposits was a construction cut [3/009]. This was initially filled with a chalky backfill (3/011) which was sealed with a concrete foundation layer (3/008) for wall (3/002). To the south of the wall was a garden soil deposit (3/001).
- 6.6 No archaeological deposits or residual finds were identified predating the late 19th/20th century wall (3/010).

Test Pit 3



Test Pits 11 and 12

- 6.7 The excavation of Test pit 11 was suspended at a depth of less than 500mm. A corner of a yellow brick structure was revealed almost immediately with holes revealing a large void around it (i.e. no backfill).
- 6.8 Test Pit 12 was still being broken out at the time of visit. An electricity cable ran along its outer edge, narrowing the area of excavation. Its location at the corner of two walls meant that only construction cut fills for the present walls would be excavated, making further monitoring of this pit unnecessary.

Test Pit 13

- 6.9 Test Pit 13 was located in the basement, towards the Arlington Street front, and north of the proposed new build area. Pit 13 measured 1.0m x 0.60m with a depth of 1.66m.

Depth Below Ground Level

| | |
|---------------|---------------------------------|
| 0.00 – 0.25m | (13/001) Concrete basement slab |
| 0.25 – 1.40m | (13/002) Brick wall |
| 0.25 – 1.66m | (13/003) Rubble backfill |
| 1.66 – NFE | (13/004) Natural London clay |
| 0.25 – 1.66m+ | (13/005) Concrete foundation |

- 6.10 The earliest deposit was the natural London clay (13/004). Overlying this was a concrete foundation (13/005), adjacent to a contemporary brick wall (13/002). To the west of these structural elements was a backfill deposit (13/003) which was sealed by the concrete ground slab (13/001).

Test Pit 13



Test Pit 14

- 6.11 Test Pit 14 was located to the north of the proposed two level basement area, to the west of Test Pit 13 in the basement level. It measured 1.0m x 0.60m and was excavated to a depth of 1.10m, where groundwater started to appear.

Depth Below Ground Surface

| | |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| 0.00 – 0.30m | (14/001) Current basement floor |
| 0.30 – 1.10m | (14/002) Basement wall footing |
| 0.30 – 1.10m | (14/003) Backfill |
| 1.10 – NFE | (14/004) London clay |

- 6.12 The earliest deposit observed was the natural London Clay at 1.10m below ground surface. A concrete wall footing (14/002) was built on top of this. Backfill deposit (14/003) overlay this and was in turn sealed by concrete basement floor (14/001).
- 6.13 No archaeological remains or residual finds were observed in Test Pit 14.

Test Pit 5

- 6.14 Test Pit 5 was located on the western edge of the proposed new build, in the current parking area. It measured 0.50m² with a depth of 0.88m.

Depth Below Ground Level

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 0.00 – 0.22m | (5/001) Concrete car park surface |
| 0.22 – 0.88m | (5/002) Rubble backfill |
| 0.22 – c. 5.00m | (5/003) Brick wall of chamber |

- 6.15 The earliest deposit encountered was a brick wall (5/003) which formed part of a chamber extending down from a 20th century manhole. This was stratigraphically overlain by a backfill deposit (5/002) of rubble. Both contexts were sealed by the present concrete car park slab (5/001).

7 FINDS

- 7.1 No finds were identified during the watching brief.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The earliest archaeological deposits observed during the geotechnical excavations were the extensive masonry remains of late 19th or 20th century date. These most probably represent the earlier basements or service runs of the previous hotels on the site. The large quantities of rubble backfill material are also presumably a consequence of demolition activity of the earlier buildings.

- 8.2 This watching brief indicates that any pre-19th Century remains are likely to have been truncated by the present and former structures on the site. The only natural deposits recorded in the test pits were at a depth of 1-1.5m below the basement floor of the existing buildings.

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Figure 1 – Site location

Figure 2 – Detailed Site Location

Figure 3 – Ground Floor detailed test pit location

Figure 4 Lower Ground Floor detailed test pit location (with only the recorded test pits shown)

Figure 5 Basement detailed test pit location

Figure 6 - Test Pit Sample Sections

Appendix A – Context Register

| Context No. | Context Description | Length | Width | Depth |
|-------------|--|----------------|----------------|----------|
| 2/001 | stone- edging | edge of trench | edge of trench | 0.22m |
| 2/002 | foundation for 2/001 | Trench | Trench | 0.28m |
| 2/003 | levelling sand for 2/002 | Trench | Trench | 0.10m |
| 2/004 | rubble backfill | Trench | Trench | 3.00m |
| 2/005 | cellar/basement wall | edge of trench | edge of trench | c. 1.60m |
| | | | | |
| 3/001 | garden soil | Trench | Trench | 0.70m |
| 3/002 | garden wall | not rec. | 0.22m | 0.76m |
| 3/003 | modern brick flooring | Trench | Trench | 0.11 m |
| 3/004 | concrete foundation under 3/003 | Trench | 0.40m | 0.30m |
| 3/005 | made ground | Trench | Trench | 90mm |
| 3/006 | made ground | Trench | Trench | 60mm |
| 3/007 | mortary levelling layer | Trench | Trench | 0.10m |
| 3/008 | foundation for wall 3/002 | Trench | not rec. | 0.32m |
| 3/009 | cut for 3/010 | not rec. | 1.00m | 1.00m |
| 3/010 | wall | section only | section only | 1.30m |
| 3/011 | backfill in cut 3/009 | as 3/009 | as 3/009 | c.0.40m |
| 3/012 | backfill in cut for 3/010 | Trench | Trench | 1.30m |
| | | | | |
| 13/001 | concrete floor | Trench | Trench | 0.25m |
| 13/002 | brick wall /foundation on south edge of trench | Trench | 60mm | 1.40m |
| 13/003 | rubble backfill | Trench | Trench | 1.40m |
| 13/004 | london clay | Trench | Trench | L.O.E |
| 13/005 | concrete foundation-for buttress? | 0.44m | Trench | 1.40m |
| | | | | |
| 14/001 | current basement floor | Trench | Trench | 0.28m |
| 14/002 | basement wall footing | 0.60m | 0.60m | 0.96m |
| 14/003 | backfill over 14/002 | 0.60m | 0.40m | 0.96m |
| 14/004 | london clay | 0.60m | 0.40m | L.O.E |
| | | | | |
| 5/001 | concrete car parking surface | | | |
| 5/002 | backfill | Trench | Trench | 0.08m |

| Context No. | Context Description | Length | Width | Depth |
|--------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 5/003 | brick wall of chamber leading to vault | very west edge of trench | very west edge of trench | 5.00m |