



The Old Mill, Bexley High Street, London Borough of Bexley

Proactive Observation Recording Exercise Report





**THE OLD MILL,
BEXLEY HIGH STREET,
LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY**

PROACTIVE OBSERVATION RECORDING EXERCISE REPORT

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LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY**

PROACTIVE OBSERVATION RECORDING EXERCISE (P.O.R.E) REPORT

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PROACTIVE OBSERVATION RECORDING EXERCISE REPORT

Summary

This report presents the results of an archaeological Proactive Observation Recording Exercise commissioned by Apex Developments Ltd and carried out by Wessex Archaeology during ground works at The Old Mill, Bexley High Street, Old Bexley in the London Borough of Bexley, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 549626 173476.

The work was carried out as a means to discharge a planning condition attached to consent for the re-development of the Site, and took place intermittently from the 22nd October and 23rd November 2007.

The Proactive Observation Recording Exercise observed the excavation of two piers for stairwells and the removal of a floor slab on a demolished extension to a depth of between 1m and 1.7m below the present ground level.

All of the archaeological deposits observed during the watching brief appeared to be modern in origin and almost certainly represent levelling deposits and dumps either dumped from the banks of the river or possibly into a mill pond perhaps during the construction of the eastern wing of the Mill shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps of the area.

The report concludes that archaeological remains do not exist within the development area, any remains which may have been present having been disturbed and truncated during previous building work on the Old Mill.

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PROACTIVE OBSERVATION RECORDING EXERCISE REPORT

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Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank Mark Stevenson of English Heritage Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) for monitoring the project.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Lawrence Pontin. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve George and Gary Evans, who also compiled this report, with illustrations by Kitty Brandon.

THE OLD MILL, BEXLEY HIGH STREET, LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY

PROACTIVE OBSERVATION RECORDING EXERCISE REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of Document

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Apex Developments Ltd (the Client) to undertake a Proactive Observation Recording Exercise at The Old Mill, Bexley High Street, Old Bexley, London Borough of Bexley (the Site), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 549626 173476 (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 This document presents the results of the Proactive Observation Recording Exercise which took place intermittently from the 22nd October and 23rd November 2007.

1.2 Planning Background

- 1.2.1 The programme of archaeological work was undertaken in fulfilment of an archaeological condition on planning consent (Ref code: 07/04640/FULM London Borough of Bexley) for the erection of new staircases and an extension to an existing single storey extension on land to the rear of the Old Mill, Bexley High Street, Old Bexley. This was attached by the Local Planning Authority after consultation with Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) and was in accordance with The Department of Environment's Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (1990).
- 1.2.2 The Proactive Observation Recording Exercise was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Wessex Archaeology (WA, 2007 ref 67480.01) and approved by GLAAS.

1.3 Site Description

- 1.3.1 The Site lies on the east and west banks of the River Cray in Old Bexley some 240m to the east of Bexley railway station and 150m to the west of the parish church of St. Mary.
- 1.3.2 The area covered by the programme of works lies to the rear (south) of the Old Mill, which is being retained, and lies some 40m to the south side of Bexley High Street (A223). To the south and east, the Site is bordered by gardens and houses fronting on to Clarendon Mews and Bexley High Street. The western edge of the Site is formed by a narrow road and a hard standing for a car show room and builders merchants. The area between the Old Mill and Bexley High Street is currently open ground (**Figure 1**).

2 GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Geology

- 2.1.1 The underlying geology of the area comprises River Alluvium Deposits (British Geological Society, Sheet 271).

2.2 Topography

- 2.2.1 The land on the Site is flat. The modern ground level in Trench 1 is 12.75m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and in Trench 2 12.80m aOD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 There has been no previous archaeological work carried out on Site and the Site is not part of a Scheduled Monument (SM). However the Site lies within the historical core of Old Bexley and is within an Archaeological Priority Area as defined in the London Borough of Bexley Unitary Development Plan (2004).

- 3.1.2 A number of archaeological remains dating from the Palaeolithic to Post-medieval periods have been found in the area.

Palaeolithic (500,000-10,000 BC)

- 3.1.3 Palaeolithic flint tools and flakes have been found in the area mostly close to the River Cray, these include a number of struck flint artefacts uncovered to the southeast of the Site at The Grove (NGR 548300 171800), to the north at Old Bexley (NGR 549500 173500) and an important series of flint working sites from quarries in the Crayford/Dartford area (these include Stoneham's Pit, Furner's Old and New Pits, Ruttter's Pit and Talbot's Pit) (MoLAS, 2000, 39 and Map1).

Mesolithic (10,000-4,000 BC)

- 3.1.4 Mesolithic material, comprising struck flint tools and flakes, has been uncovered at several sites in the vicinity. To the southeast of the Site at Stable Meadow Allotments (NGR 548600 172200) and Bunkers Hill (NGR 548900 172100) (MoLAS, 2000, 59 and Map 2). A number of more substantial remains including a Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic hearth were found in the 1990s during work at Thanet Road to the northwest of the Site (Bishop, 2003, 255-271).

Neolithic (4,000-2,400 BC)

- 3.1.5 A flint arrowhead is recorded as having been found to the southeast of the Site at Stable Meadow Allotments (NGR 548600 172200). A number of Neolithic finds are recorded to the north at Crayford (MoLAS, 2000, 76 and Map 3).

Bronze Age (2400-700 BC)

- 3.1.6 Few remains of Bronze activity have been in the area although a palstave axe and a flint dagger have been found to the southwest of the Site at Eynessford Crescent (NGR 547510 173126) and Longlands Road (NGR 545480 172468) (MoLAS, 2000, 94, Map 4).

Iron Age (700 BC-AD 43)

- 3.1.7 No Iron Age finds have been found in the immediate vicinity of the Site. The nearest trace of Iron Age occupation comes from some way north of the Site in the Crayford area (NGR 551010 175070) where a Middle–Late Iron Age settlement was uncovered in the 1930s (MoLAS, 2000, 115, Map 6).

Romano-British (AD 43-410)

- 3.1.8 No significant Romano-British sites are known from the immediate area of the Site. However, a Roman “Building” was recorded at Stable Meadows Allotments (NGR 548530 172270) (MoLAS, 2000, 163, Map 7).
- 3.1.9 A number of Romano-British sites are known from the Crayford area (MoLAS, 2000, 163, map 7) where the present day line of the A207 is thought to follow the line of the main Roman road (Watling Street) from London to Dover (Weinreb and Hibbert, 1983, 850).

Saxon-Medieval (AD 410-1499)

- 3.1.10 No Saxon sites are known from the area although an important Saxon burial and “Teutonic” ornaments are recorded as being found at Crayford railway station (NGR 551000 175000) (MoLAS, 2000, 199, Map 9).
- 3.1.11 The main focus of Saxon activity in the area appears to have been Crayford situated where Watling Street crossed the River Cray, and it was at Crayford that, according to the Saxon Chronicle; “in AD 457 Hengst and Aesc fought the Britonsand killed four thousand men” (<http://www.briannia.com/history/docs/asintro>).
- 3.1.12 Bexley is mentioned as belonging to the archbishop of Canterbury in Domesday Book (AD 1086) where it is called *Bix*. Domesday mentions a church and three watermills in the area (Weinreb and Hibbert, 1983, 64, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report>). It is suggested that one of these stood on the site of the present Old Mill.
- 3.1.13 Bexley, which had been held by the non residential Archbishop of Canterbury from AD 814, was given to Henry VIII by Archbishop Cranmer during the 24th year of his reign (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report>).
- 3.1.14 The present St. Mary’s church appears to date from at least the 12th century (Weinreb and Hibbert, 1983, 64).

Post-medieval-modern (1499-present)

- 3.1.15 Bexley appears to have been a rural hamlet built up around the Old Mill and St Mary’s church until the 19th century (Weinreb and Hibbert, 1983, 64).
- 3.1.16 Major development of the area began in the mid 19th century following the building of South East Railway’s Dartford loop and Bexley railway station in 1866 (http://www.bexley.gov.uk/localstudies/local_history). Further development occurring in the 20th century.
- 3.1.17 On Ordnance Survey maps of the area dating from the 1870s (not shown) the Mill House is shown in its present position, with north-south running wings on both banks of the River Cray to the rear of the main building in the area covered by Trench 1 and 2. The areas to the west and east of the Site is shown as gardens
-

with open land behind. The present High Street and bridge does not appear to have essentially changed.

- 3.1.18 The present Old Mill House was largely rebuilt after a fire in the 1960s it was most recently used as a Public House and Restaurant.

4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 4.1.1 The overall objective of the Proactive Observation Recording Exercise was to establish and record, as far as reasonably possible, any archaeological remains that may survive beneath the present ground surface.
- 4.1.2 It sought to characterise the nature, date, depth and state of preservation of any features and deposits and to retrieve where present, stratified assemblages of finds and ecofacts.
- 4.1.3 More specifically, it sought to determine the nature of and record any Saxon and medieval remains on site particularly any remains of an earlier mill.

5 P.O.R.E METHODOLOGY

- 5.1.1 All works were conducted in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (2001), English Heritage's London Region Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork (1998) excepting where they are superseded by statements made below.

5.2 Fieldwork

- 5.2.1 The fieldwork strategy is described in detail in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Wessex Archaeology, 2007) but in summary it comprised the supervised excavation in 50mm spits, of the proposed staircases and areas covered by the extension (marked as Trenches 1 and 2 respectively on **Figure 1**).
- 5.2.2 The work was carried out with a mechanical mini excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and all works took place under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist.
- 5.2.3 All archaeological deposits were recorded by means of Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording sheets.
- 5.2.4 A photographic record was made by means of black and white prints, colour slides and digital images.
- 5.2.5 Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50 and sections at 1:10.

5.3 The Archive

- 5.3.1 The completed project archive will be prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Appendix 3 of Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991) and in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage (UKIC 1990).
- 5.3.2 The archive from the project will be deposited with the Museum of London under MOL Site Code OMX 07.
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6 RESULTS

Trench 1

- 6.1.1 Trench 1 was rectangular in plan and 81.8m² in size, covering most of the area to the rear of the Old Mill on the east bank of the River Cray. Work involved the removal of a concrete hard standing and floor slab of the former extension to a depth of ca 0.5m and the excavation of a pile base for a stairwell, up against the outside of the existing building to a depth of ca 1.7m (ca.11.00m aOD) (**Figure 1**).
- 6.1.2 The soil profile observed was broadly similar in all the sections observed (**Figure 2, Plates 1 & 2**).
- 6.1.3 The earliest deposit uncovered in this part of the Site was the yellow coarse sandy gravels of the natural geology (**106**). This was observed at a height of 1.5m below the present ground level. This deposit, whose base was not reached at 1.7m below modern ground level, appeared to slope down from east to west.
- 6.1.4 This was overlaid by a deposit of dark grey ashy sandy silt (**105**) which contained fragments of brick including a whole unfrosted red brick and sloped down from east to west and south to north.
- 6.1.5 This was itself covered by layers of fine sandy silts (**104**) and coarse sandy gravel (**103**) respectively. Both of these deposits sloped down from east to west and both contained small fragments of red roof tile and bricks.
- 6.1.6 The latest deposit observed in this part of the Site was a 0.3m thick layer of mixed gravely soil and modern demolition material (**102**) this was sealed by the concrete slab of the recently demolished extension and cut by a brick and concrete wall footing of the demolished extension.
- 6.1.7 All of these deposits appeared to be modern in origin and almost certainly represent levelling deposits and dumps either dumped from the banks of the river or possibly into a mill pond perhaps during the construction of the eastern wing of the Old Mill shown on the earliest Ordnance survey maps of the area.
- 6.1.8 Aside from the levelling deposits (**102, 103, 104, 105**) no archaeological deposits or remains were uncovered in this trench.
- 6.1.9 No traces of the wings shown on the 1873 Ordnance Survey maps or of the medieval / post-medieval mill were observed during the watching brief in this trench.

Trench 2

- 6.1.10 Trench 2 was rectangular in plan and 12.7m² in size and was situated to the rear of the Old Mill on the west bank of the River Cray. Work involved the excavation of a pile base for a stairwell up against the outside of the existing building to a depth of ca 1.6m (ca.11.10m aOD) (**Figure 1**).
- 6.1.11 The soil profile observed was broadly similar in all the sections observed.
- 6.1.12 The earliest deposits uncovered in this part of the Site were the yellow coarse sandy gravels of the natural geology (**203**). This was observed at a height of 1.5m below the present ground level. This deposit, whose base was not reached at 1.6m below modern ground level, appeared to slope down from west to east.

- 6.1.13 This was overlain by a deposit of crushed red brick and general 19th century demolition rubble (**201**) which filled a large cut (**202**). This covered all of Trench 2 (**Figure 1**).
- 6.1.14 Fill **201** and Cut **203** appeared to be modern in origin and almost certainly represent levelling deposits and excavations which possibly took place during the construction of the western wing of the Old Mill shown on the earliest Ordnance survey maps of the area.
- 6.1.15 Aside from the levelling deposits (**201**) no archaeological deposits or remains were uncovered in this trench.
- 6.1.16 No traces of the wing shown on the 1873 Ordnance Survey maps or of the medieval / post-medieval mill were observed during the P.O.R.E in this trench.

6.2 Finds

- 6.2.1 All material observed in the up cast from the excavations was of obvious twentieth century origin. It was therefore noted and discarded.

6.3 Environmental Sampling

- 6.3.1 Due to the absence of suitable deposits, no samples were taken for environmental analysis.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1.1 All of the deposits observed during the watching brief appeared to be modern in origin and almost certainly represent levelling deposits and dumps either dumped from the banks of the river or possibly into a mill pond perhaps during the construction of the eastern wing of the Old Mill shown on the earliest Ordnance survey maps of the area.
- 7.1.2 Aside from the levelling deposits no archaeological deposits or remains were observed.
- 7.1.3 No traces of the medieval / post-medieval mill or of the wing shown on the 1873 Ordnance Survey maps of the area were observed during the watching brief.
- 7.1.4 Natural geological deposits comprising undulating, coarse sandy gravels were observed in all of the excavated areas at a height of between 1.5m and 1.6m below the present ground level.

8

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APPENDIX 1-TRENCH SUMMARY TABLES
Trench 1

Context no.	Type	Description	Keywords	Height below present ground level
101	Layer	Concrete	Construction.	0.0-0.21m
102	Layer	Dark brown, clay sand. Very frequent gravel, frequent fragments red tile	Made ground Mixed soil and building rubble. Levelling. Dumps Infill	0.21-0.51m
103	Layer	Mid grey brown, coarse sandy gravel= small sub-rounded to well rounded pebbles, well sorted deposit. Occasional small fragments peg tile	Levelling. Dumps Infill	0.51-1.10m
104	Layer	Mid grey brown, fine sandy clayey silt. Occasional small well rounded to sub-rounded pebbles, flecks charcoal and red CBM	Levelling. Dumps Infill	1.10-1.30m
105	Layer	Dark grey, ashy coarse sandy silt. Very occasional small sub-rounded to sub-angular pebbles, occasional fragments of red and yellow brick	Levelling. Dumps Infill	1.30-1.50m
106	Layer	Mid yellowish orange brown mottles, coarse sand and gravel, gravel = occasional medium well rounded pebbles, frequent small sub-angular to well rounded pebbles	Natural Geology	1.50-1.70m (+)
107	Fill	Mid brown gravelly clay with modern building rubble- infill of 112	Construction	1.40m
108	Wall	North-south aligned modern brick wall. Concrete foundations	Construction	Top-0.40m Base-1.40m-
109	Cut	Modern cut for underpinning of mill. Uneven sides 45°, base; flat. Filled with 110	Construction	Top-0.0m Base-0.40m
110	Fill	Mid grey-brown silty clay with gravel and frequent modern building rubble- infill of 109	Construction	0.00m
111	Wall	East-west aligned modern brick	Construction	Top-0.40m

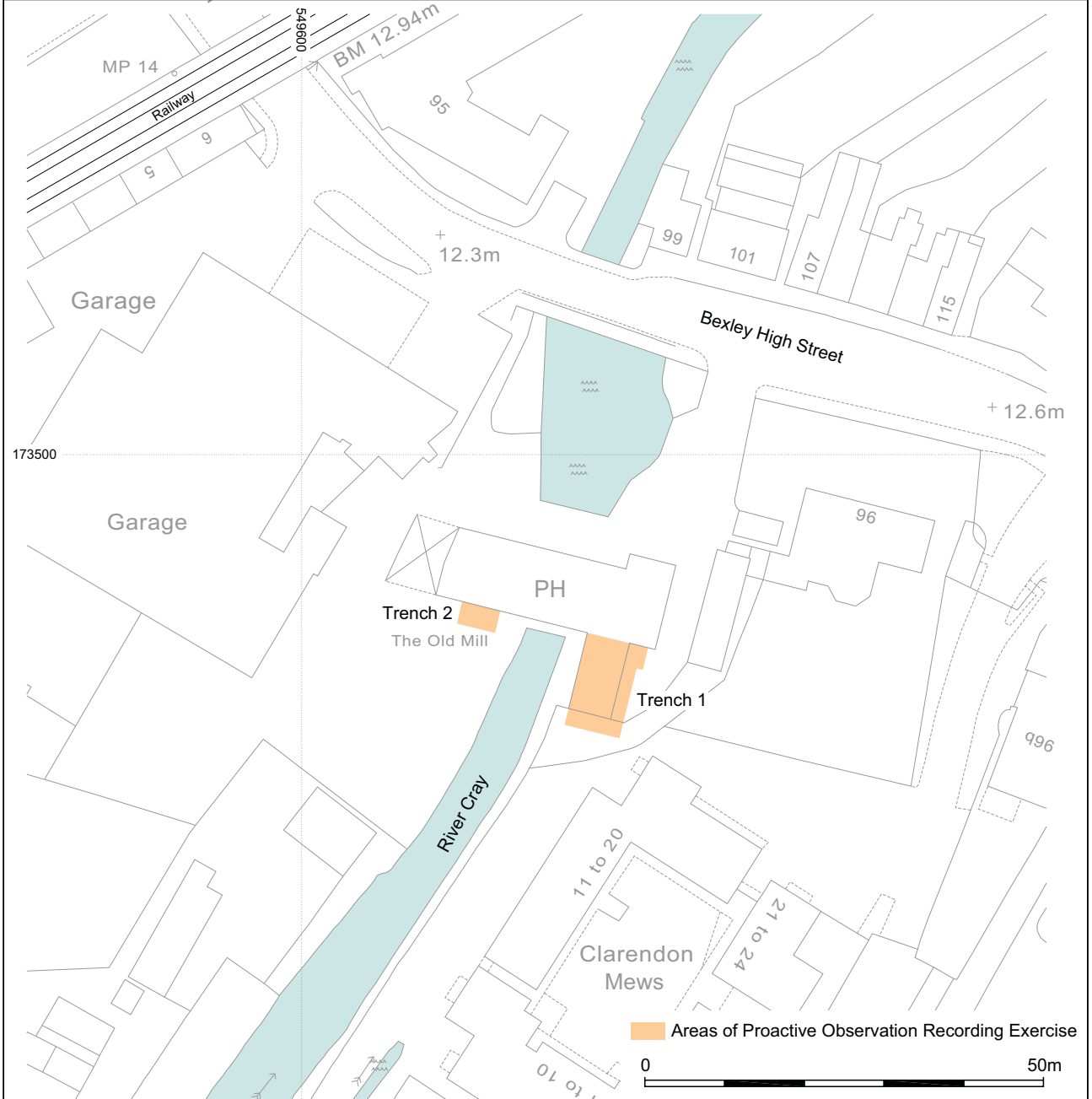
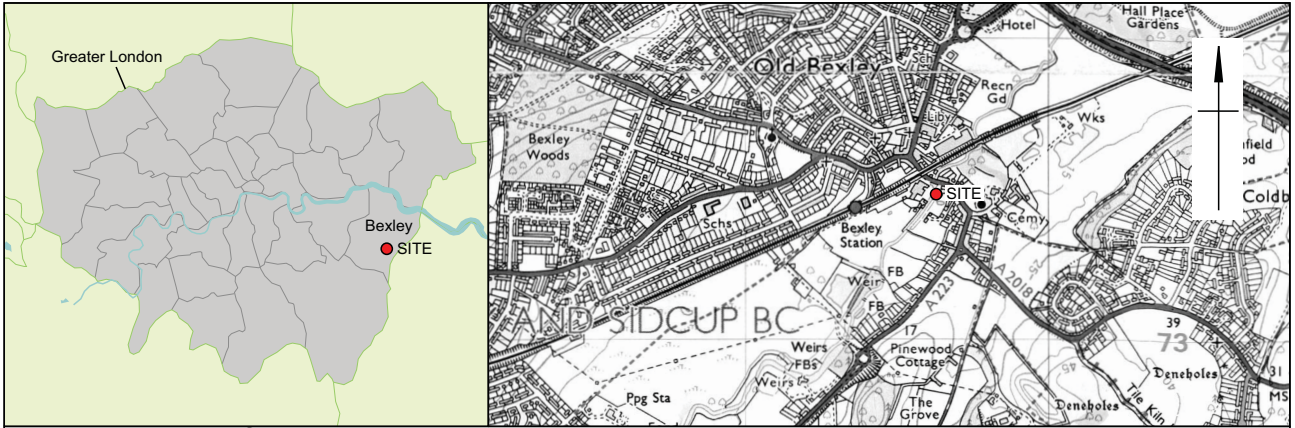
		wall. Concrete foundations		Base-1.40m-
112	Cut	Foundation trench for 111 . Vertical sides, flat base. Filled with 107	Construction	Top-0.00m Base-1.40m
113	Fill	Mid brown clay and gravel with modern building rubble- infill of 114	Construction	1.40m
114	Cut	Foundation cut for extension north-south. Vertical sides, flat base. Filled with 108 and 113	Construction	Top-0.40m Base-1.40m

(+) feature/deposit not fully excavated

Trench 2

Context no.	Type	Description	Keywords	Height below present ground level
201	Fill	Red and grey, loose demolition debris mostly red unfrogged and frogged bricks	Secondary Levelling. Construction	0.0m
202	Cut	Covered whole of trench Sides. Vertical stepped down. Base-Flat. Filled with 201	Demolition	Top-0.0m Base-1.50m
203	Layer	Mid yellowish orange brown mottles, coarse sand and gravel, gravel= occasional medium well rounded pebbles, frequent small sub-angular to well rounded pebbles	Natural Geology	1.40m (+)

(+) feature/deposit not fully excavated



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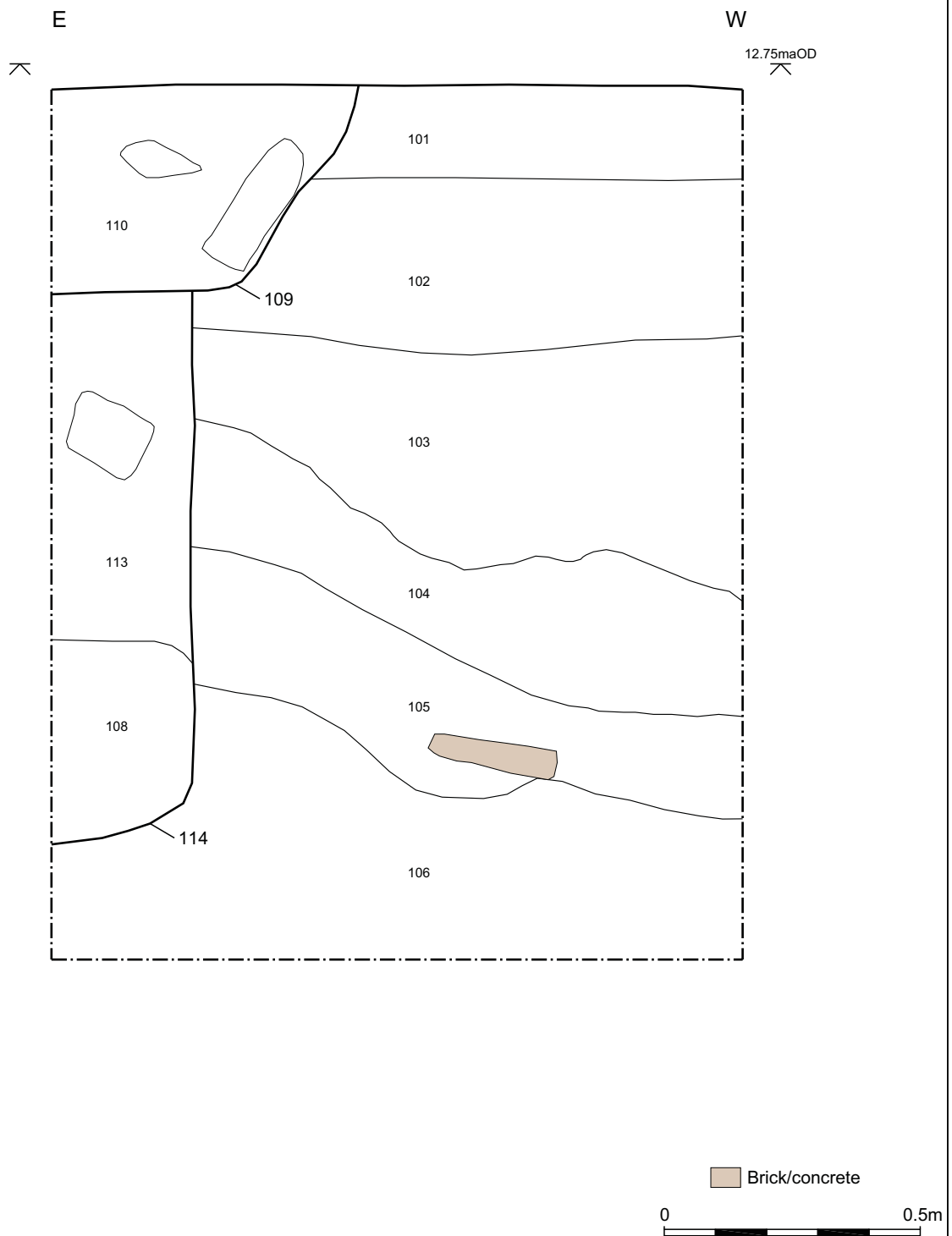
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Site location map

Figure 1



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North facing representative section, Trench 1


Figure 2



Plate 1: North facing section of Trench 1



Plate 2: North facing section of Trench 1

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