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# 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street, City of Westminster

Archaeological Watching Brief Report on Geotechnical Works



Ref: 103030.02  
March 2014



**6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street  
City of Westminster**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report on Geotechnical Works**

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## Quality Assurance

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# 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street City of Westminster

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report on Geotechnical Works

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## 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street City of Westminster

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report on Geotechnical Works

#### Summary

Wessex Archaeology was appointed by Purcell UK to carry out an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical works on land at the rear of 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street, City of Westminster, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 530164 179392 (hereafter 'the Site') (**Figure 1**). The geotechnical works were in advance of a planned refurbishment project of 6-7 Old Palace Yard.

The Site is currently occupied by the Grade I Listed and Scheduled Monument of the Jewel Tower, and 6-7 Old Palace Yard which is Grade II\* Listed. The moat surrounding the Jewel Tower is also Grade I Listed and the whole Site is within the area of the World Heritage Site associated with the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church. The location of the geotechnical works comprises a grassed garden area roughly rectangular in plan measuring c. 14m x 6m, located to the south of 6-7 Old Palace Yard and east of the Jewel Tower.

The watching brief was undertaken on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

Two successful exploratory window samples were monitored along with six failed attempts. In all of the eight attempted excavations post-medieval walls and floor surfaces were observed. Where these were directly encountered these could not be penetrated by the window sample rig therefore these holes had to be abandoned

The two successful window samples had very similar stratigraphies below the post-medieval construction layers. Alluvial deposits containing varying amounts of small snails were recorded. No peat deposits were observed however increasing amounts of dark organic flecks were seen at about 2.8m BGL. The natural sandy gravels were seen from c. 3m BGL with a single alluvial layer trapped between them was noted at 3.7m-3.87m BGL.



## **6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street City of Westminster**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief Report on Geotechnical Works**

#### **Acknowledgements**

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The fieldwork was undertaken by Jo Condliffe. The report was compiled by Jo Condliffe and edited by Mark Williams. The illustrations were prepared by Jo Condliffe. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Mark Williams.



## 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street City of Westminster

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report on Geotechnical Works

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

##### 1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was appointed by Purcell UK to carry out an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical works on land at the rear of 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Abingdon Street, City of Westminster, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 530164 179392 (hereafter 'the Site') (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 The geotechnical works were in advance of a planned refurbishment project of 6-7 Old Palace Yard.
- 1.1.3 All works were carried out in accordance with the relevant guidance given in the Institute for Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 2008).
- 1.1.4 The archaeological watching brief monitored two window samples and six attempted window samples on the Site. The fieldwork took place on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014. This report documents the results from the geotechnical works.

##### 1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 The Site is located within central London in the City of Westminster, and forms part of the grounds of the Houses of Parliament. The Site is separated from the main Palace of Westminster by Abingdon Street, and lies 54m to the south of Westminster Abbey and 140m to the east of the River Thames.
- 1.2.2 The Site is currently occupied by the Grade I Listed and Scheduled Monument of the Jewel Tower, and 6-7 Old Palace Yard which is Grade II\* Listed. The moat surrounding the Jewel Tower is also Grade I Listed and the whole Site is within the area of the World Heritage Site associated with the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church. The location of the geotechnical works comprises a grassed garden area roughly rectangular in plan measuring c. 14m x 6m, located to the south of 6-7 Old Palace Yard and east of the Jewel Tower.
- 1.2.3 The Site is bound to the north by Old Palace Yard, to the south by College Gardens to the east by Abingdon Street and the Palace of Westminster and to the west by the Grade I Listed Abbey Precinct Wall and residential buildings beyond. The underlying geology at the Site is comprised of London Clay Formation, clay and silt a sedimentary bedrock formed 34-56 million years ago in the Palaeogene period with superficial deposits of Kempton Park sand and gravel formed 2 million years ago (British Geological Survey).



## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken by Wessex Archaeology prior to the watching brief the summary of which is given below (Wessex Archaeology 2014a).
- 2.1.2 The recorded historic environment resource within a 350m study area around the site was considered in order to provide the context for the discussion and interpretation of the known and potential resource. Designated heritage assets of national importance within the wider area were also included to assess the impact of the development upon these assets. There are 131 Listed Buildings and two Scheduled Monuments within the 350m Study Area.
- 2.1.3 The archaeological resource within the 350m study area is very detailed owing to the sites position upon Thorney Island, an eyot within the Thames and an attractive place for settlement since the prehistoric period. Sporadic remains dating from the Palaeolithic period to the Iron Age have been found across the Study Area, mainly comprising unstratified finds. Building remains dating to the Romano-British period have been recovered from within the study area, however no substantial settlement has been identified. A small wooden Anglo-Saxon church appears to have been the beginning of the established settlement at Westminster, which was later replaced by a Benedictine monastery by the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Westminster Abbey grew up around this and the village at Westminster thrived after this point. The early medieval period saw the first royal palace at Westminster and the Jewel Tower was constructed within the site in 1365. Prior to this the Site had been part of Westminster Abbey, and structural remains associated with this have been found along the western boundary of the site. Westminster in the later medieval, post-medieval and modern periods continued to be the focus of parliamentary importance and the remaining medieval and post-medieval buildings have resulted in this area becoming a World Heritage Site.
- 2.1.4 The assessment established that overall there is a moderate potential for the presence of buried archaeological remains to be found within the site. The site lies within the boundary of the World Heritage Site of the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church. Within the site are the Grade I Listed and Scheduled Jewel Tower, and the Grade I Listed moat to the Jewel Tower, as well as 6-7 Old Palace Yard which is Grade II\* Listed. The site is bound by the Listed Westminster Abbey Precinct wall. Previous excavations that have taken place within the Site have revealed the remains of the Jewel Tower moat, a small additional section of medieval wall within the Jewel Tower garden, foundations of a 12<sup>th</sup> century building associated with the abbey, building foundations of a 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century building, and the remains of 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings that previously surrounded the Jewel Tower.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Aims and objectives

- 3.1.1 The aims and objectives of the archaeological watching brief, were to:
- *determine the presence or otherwise of remains of archaeological interest within the impact area;*
  - *understand further the character, form, function and date of prehistoric and later activities represented by any archaeological remains on the Site; and*
  - *to preserve by record any significant archaeological remains within the development area and to attempt a reconstruction of the history and use of the Site.*





### 3.2 Fieldwork methodology

- 3.2.1 The following methodology was proposed in order to meet the aims of the investigation works. All fieldwork was carried out in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 2008).
- 3.2.2 Two exploratory (shallow) boreholes using window sampling techniques (**Figure 1**) were monitored. The window samples were hand dug to a maximum depth of 1.2m below ground level and then advanced to a maximum depth of 5m below ground level.
- 3.2.3 All excavated spoil was scanned visually for artefacts.

### 3.3 Recording

- 3.3.1 All recording was undertaken using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording sheets using a continuous unique numbering system.
- 3.3.2 A representative section, not less than 1m in length, of deposits from ground surface to the top of the natural geology was recorded within each test pit.
- 3.3.3 Photographs were taken as appropriate, providing a record of the excavated test pits and borehole samples, and images of the overall Site. The photographic record comprises digital photography. A photographic register of all photographs taken is contained within the project archive.

### 3.4 Health and Safety

- 3.4.1 Health and Safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork and safe working practices overrode archaeological considerations at all times.
- 3.4.2 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992, and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force at the time

## 4 GEOARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

- 4.1.1 A total of two window samples were monitored to a depth of 5m below ground level: **WS1** and **WS2.7**. During the hand dug excavation of **WS2** a number of obstructions were encountered which resulted in six failed attempts to excavate the window sample in different locations before the seventh was successful (**Figure 1**).
- 4.1.2 A similar stratigraphy was observed at the top of each successful and failed window sample. A 0.20m thick layer of dark brown clay silt topsoil with turf overlay a brown and yellowy grey silty sandy made ground deposit which contained various quantities of CBM and concrete rubble, gravels, mortar and other demolition waste material. Beneath this at varying depths were either brick and concrete wall foundations or tile and stone floor surfaces. Where walls or stone floors were directly encountered these could not be penetrated by the window sample rig therefore these holes had to be abandoned.
- WS1 (Figure 2)**
- 4.1.3 The hand excavation of **WS1** was successful in reaching a depth of 1.25m BGL. The eastern end of an east-west aligned single brick width wall was exposed at 0.25m BGL, however only two bricks of this were exposed and they could potentially be demolition material within the made ground. The excavation continued down the eastern side of this. At 0.7m below ground level three courses of a red and yellow stock brick wall were

exposed on a west north-west to east south-east alignment. Butting the lowest course was a red tiled floor surface 0.02m thick. Beneath this was another layer of sandy silt made ground sitting on top of a 0.15m thick deposit of light yellow sandy mortar.

- 4.1.4 From 1.25m BGL cores were mechanically removed. This produced a series of sandy and silty clay alluvial deposits to a depth of 3.4m. The upper deposit contained mortar and charcoal flecks while the lower deposits contained varying amounts of small snail shells and dark organic flecks. At 3.4m BGL natural sandy gravels appeared with varying grades of fine and coarse sand and sizes of gravels. At 3.7m a 0.1m thick alluvial deposit was observed between the sandy gravels. The maximum depth of the window sample was 5m BGL.

**WS2.1 (Figure 3)**

- 4.1.5 The hand excavation of **WS2.1** reached a maximum depth of 0.3m BGL where a post-medieval north-south aligned red brick wall was encountered. Therefore this window sample location was abandoned.

**WS2.2 (Figure 3)**

- 4.1.6 The hand excavation of **WS2.2** reached a maximum depth of 0.94m BGL. The excavation had located the southern face of a post-medieval east-west aligned red brick wall foundation which was faced with concrete below the top course. This was potentially a return of the north-south aligned wall encountered in **WS2.1**. At 0.94m a stone slab floor surface was found butting the wall, therefore this window sample location was abandoned.

**WS2.3 (Figure 3)**

- 4.1.7 The hand excavation of **WS2.3** reached a maximum depth of 1.4m BGL. The excavation was directly in the corner of two post-medieval butting red brick walls. A north-south wall (potentially the same wall seen in **WS2.1**) and an east-west aligned foundation wall faced with concrete below the top course. The relationship of the two walls was not observed due to the limited size of the excavation area. At 1.1m BGL the water table was encountered. Small fragments of wood were found within the made ground from below this level however none were suitable for analysis. At 1.4m BGL a hard surface was encountered possibly a floor. Therefore this window sample location was abandoned. Post-medieval pottery was retrieved from the made ground deposit above the floor level.

**WS2.4 (Figure 3)**

- 4.1.8 The hand excavation of **WS2.4** reached a maximum depth of 0.6m BGL where a post-medieval north-south aligned red and yellow brick wall was encountered. Therefore this window sample location was abandoned.

**WS2.5 (Figure 3)**

- 4.1.9 The excavation of **WS2.5** reached a maximum depth of 1.18m BGL. The top and side of a post-medieval north-south aligned red brick wall was encountered at 0.3m BGL. Using the window sample rig excavation continued down the west face of the wall. Below the made ground was a layer of light yellow sandy mortar at 1.1m BGL which lay directly upon a sandstone floor slab at 1.18m. Therefore this window sample location was abandoned.

**WS2.6 (Figure 3)**

- 4.1.10 The hand excavation of **WS2.6** reached a maximum depth of 0.85m BGL. The excavation located the west side of a north-south aligned service trench from which pea gravel continuously spilled into the excavated hole. A probe into the hole encountered a hard surface at 0.85m BGL. It is unknown if this was a wall or floor surface. Therefore this window sample location was abandoned.



### **WS2.7 (Figure 4)**

- 4.1.11 The hand excavation of **WS2.7** was successful to a depth of 1m BGL. As seen in the other window samples the made ground deposit overlay a sandstone slab floor surface and a redbrick wall observed at 0.6m BGL. Two artefacts were retrieved from the upper made ground deposit of this window sample. A thin red brick with no frog and is therefore likely to date at either late medieval or early post-medieval. Also a large carved piece of stone was observed containing a thin recess. This may have been a waste piece of stone window frame.
- 4.1.12 At this particular point the stone slab and wall had been truncated by a later 12" clay drainage pipe which had subsequently become obsolete. This provided a small gap for the window sample rig to utilise from a depth of 1m. Further similar made ground was observed to a depth of 1.8m where alluvial clays were seen. Similarly to **WS1** the upper alluvial layer contained chalk, mortar and charcoal flecks while the lower deposits increased in quantities of snail shell and dark organic flecks. The natural sandy gravels appeared at 2.95m with another alluvial layer observed between them observed at 3.87-3.94m. The maximum depth of the window sample was 5m BGL.

## **5 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE**

- 5.1.1 The pottery, bricks and tiles observed from the window samples were not retained. Neither was carved stone fragment from **WS2.7** due to logistic reasons, which was returned to the made ground deposit from which it was retrieved. No artefacts pre-dating the most-medieval period were observed.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Window Samples**

- 6.1.1 The Site appears to have undergone substantial development during the post-medieval period relating to extensions associated with 6-7 Old Palace Yard. In all of the eight attempted excavations walls and floor surfaces were encountered. These have subsequently been truncated and levelled to produce the current ground surface seen today.
- 6.1.2 The two successful window samples had very similar stratigraphies below the post-medieval construction layers. Alluvial deposits containing varying amounts of small snails were recorded. No peat deposits were observed however increasing amounts of dark organic flecks were seen at about 2.8m BGL. The natural sandy gravels were seen from c. 3m BGL with a single alluvial layer trapped between them was noted at 3.7m-3.87m BGL.
- 6.1.3 The presence of the thin brick and carved stone fragment from within the made ground deposit of **WS2.7**, above what is believed to be a post-medieval floor surface securely dates their deposition to the destruction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and later buildings on the Site and does not necessarily suggest that they originated from this location.

## **7 STORAGE AND CURATION**

### **7.1 Museum**

- 7.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the fieldwork be deposited with an appropriate museum. It is anticipated the museum will principle to accept the project archive on completion of the project. Deposition of any finds with the Museum will only be carried out with the full agreement of the landowner.



## 7.2 Preparation of Archive

- 7.2.1 The complete site archive, which will include paper records, photographic records, graphics, artefacts, ecofacts and digital data, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by the appropriate museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; IfA 2009; Brown 2011; ADS 2013).
- 7.2.2 All archive elements will be marked with the site code **103030**, and a full index will be prepared. The physical archive comprises the following:
- 1 file of paper records & A3/A4 graphics

## 7.3 Discard Policy

- 7.3.1 Wessex Archaeology follows the guidelines set out in *Selection, Retention and Dispersal* (Society of Museum Archaeologists 1993), which allows for the discard of selected artefact and ecofact categories which are not considered to warrant any future analysis. Any discard of artefacts will be fully documented in the project archive.
- 7.3.2 The discard of environmental remains and samples follows nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1993; 1995; English Heritage 2002).

## 7.4 Security Copy

- 7.4.1 In line with current best practice (e.g. Brown 2011); on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.



## 8 REFERENCES

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## 9 APPENDICES

### 9.1 Appendix 1: Context Descriptions of Window Samples

All (+) indicate deposits/features not fully excavated  
'Depth' equals depth from present ground surface

Window Sample 1 Depth: 5m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-0.90m	Mid red grey silty clay sand with CBM, flints clay lumps, mortar and slate.	Made Ground
0.25-0.45m	Two yellow stock bricks bonded with grey cement mortar. Possibly end of a wall or demolition rubble in backfill. East-west alignment.	Possible Wall
0.70m+	West north-west to east south-east wall of three courses of red and yellow stock bricks with grey cement mortar.	Post-medieval Wall
0.90-0.92m	Red tile floor butting adjoining wall.	Floor
0.92-1.10m	Mid yellow brown sand.	Made Ground
1.10-1.25m	Light yellow fine sandy mortar.	Made Ground
1.25-1.70m	Mid grey brown clay sand with mortar and charcoal flecks and fragments.	Made Ground
1.70-1.95m	Dark grey blue and green clay sand chalk lumps with occasional small gravels.	Made Ground
1.95-2.20m	Mid-dark orange brown sand clay with chalk lumps and flecks.	Natural: Alluvium
2.20-2.60m	Mid green blue silty clay with frequent snail shells. Soft compaction.	Natural: Alluvium
2.60-2.85m	Dark black silty clay. Organic but not fibrous. Soft compaction.	Natural: Alluvium
2.85-3.40m	Mid yellow orange clay with occasional small gravels and snail shells. Compact.	Natural: Alluvium
3.40-3.70m	Mid yellow orange course sandy gravels.	Natural: Gravels
3.70-3.80m	Mid grey brown silty clay, soft compaction.	Natural: Alluvium
3.80-4.75m	Mid orange yellow fine sand and gravel.	Natural: Gravels
4.75m+	Dark brown sandy gritty gravel.	Natural: Gravels
Top 1.20m Hand Dug. Core recovery: 1-2m 50%, 2-3m 95%, 3-4m 55%, 4-5m 60%		

Window Sample 2.1 Depth: 0.30m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-0.30m	Mid yellow grey silty clay sand with grit and gravel.	Made Ground
0.30m+	North-south red brick wall with grey cement mortar.	Post-medieval Wall

Window Sample 2.2 Depth: 0.94m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-0.94m	Mid yellow grey silty clay sand with CBM and concrete.	Made Ground
0.30m+	East-west red brick wall with mid grey cement mortar with concrete facing.	Post-medieval Wall
0.94m+	Stone or concrete floor surface.	Slab Flooring

Window Sample 2.3 Depth: 1.40m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-1.40m	Mid yellow grey silty clay sand with CBM and concrete. Water table at 1.1m BGL within which small fragments of wood survive. Pottery retrieved.	Made Ground
0.30m+	North-south red and yellow brick wall with grey cement mortar.	Post-medieval Wall
0.30m+	East-west red brick wall with grey cement mortar faced with concrete below top course.	Post-medieval Wall
1.40m+	Stone or concrete floor surface.	Slab Flooring



Window Sample 2.4 Depth: 0.60m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-0.60m	Mid yellow brown silty clay sand with CBM and concrete.	Made Ground
0.60m+	North-south red and yellow stock brick wall with mid grey cement mortar.	Post-medieval Wall

Window Sample 2.5 Depth: 1.18m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-1.10m	Mid-dark grey silty clay sand with CBM and concrete rubble.	Made Ground
0.30m+	North-south red brick wall with mid grey cement mortar.	Post-medieval Wall
1.10-1.18m	Light yellow sandy mortar.	Made Ground
1.18m+	Green/yellow sandstone slab.	Slab Floor

Window Sample 2.6 Depth: 0.85m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-0.85m	Mid yellow brown silty clay sand with CBM and concrete. Pea gravel from service trench next to hand dug hole.	Made Ground
0.85m+	Solid surface found with probe. Unknown if a wall or floor surface.	Wall or Floor

Window Sample 2.7 Depth: 5m		
Depth	Description	Interpretation
0.00-0.20m	Dark grey brown clay silt with turf.	Topsoil
0.20-0.60m	Mid grey yellow silty clay sand and gravel with CBM and concrete rubble.	Made Ground
0.60-0.68m	Green/yellow sandstone slab.	Slab Floor
0.68-1.00m	Red brick wall with mid grey cement mortar. Unknown orientation.	Post-medieval Wall
0.68m+	Clay drainage pipe (abandoned).	12" clay service pipe
1.00-1.80m	Mid grey silty can with CBM rubble and demolition material.	Made Ground
1.80-2.20m	Mid brown blue silty clay with occasional chalk lumps and charcoal flecks.	Natural: Alluvium
2.20-2.95m	Mid grey blue silty clay with occasional chalk flecks and dark organic flecks. Colour of material darkens towards bottom horizon. Occ snail shells.	Natural: Alluvium
2.95-3.65m	Mid yellow orange coarse sandy gravels.	Natural: Gravels
3.65-3.87m	Light yellow fine sand.	Natural: Gravels
3.87-3.94m	Mid grey brown silty clay.	Natural: Alluvium
3.94m+	Mid orange brown coarse sandy gravels.	Natural: Gravels
Top 1.00m Hand Dug .Core recovery: 1-2m 60%, 2-3m 90%, 3-4m 60% 4-5m 70%		



Plate 1: WS1 hand dug hole to tile floor



Plate 2: WS1 hand dug hole to 1.25m



Plate 3: WS1 Core 1-2m



Plate 4: WS1 Core 2-3m



Plate 5: WS1 Core 3-4m



Plate 6: WS1 Core 4-5m



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Plate 7: Hand dug hole of WS2.1



Plate 8: Hand dug hole of WS2.2



Plate 9: Hand dug hole of WS2.3



Plate 10: Hand dug hole of WS2.4



Plate 11: Hand dug hole of WS2.5



Plate 12: Hand dug hole of WS2.6



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Plate 13: WS2.7 hand dug hole to 0.7m



Plate 14: Carved stone fragment from WS2.7 made ground



Plate 15: WS2.7 Core 1-2m



Plate 16: WS2.7 Core 2-3m



Plate 17: WS2.7 Core 3-4m

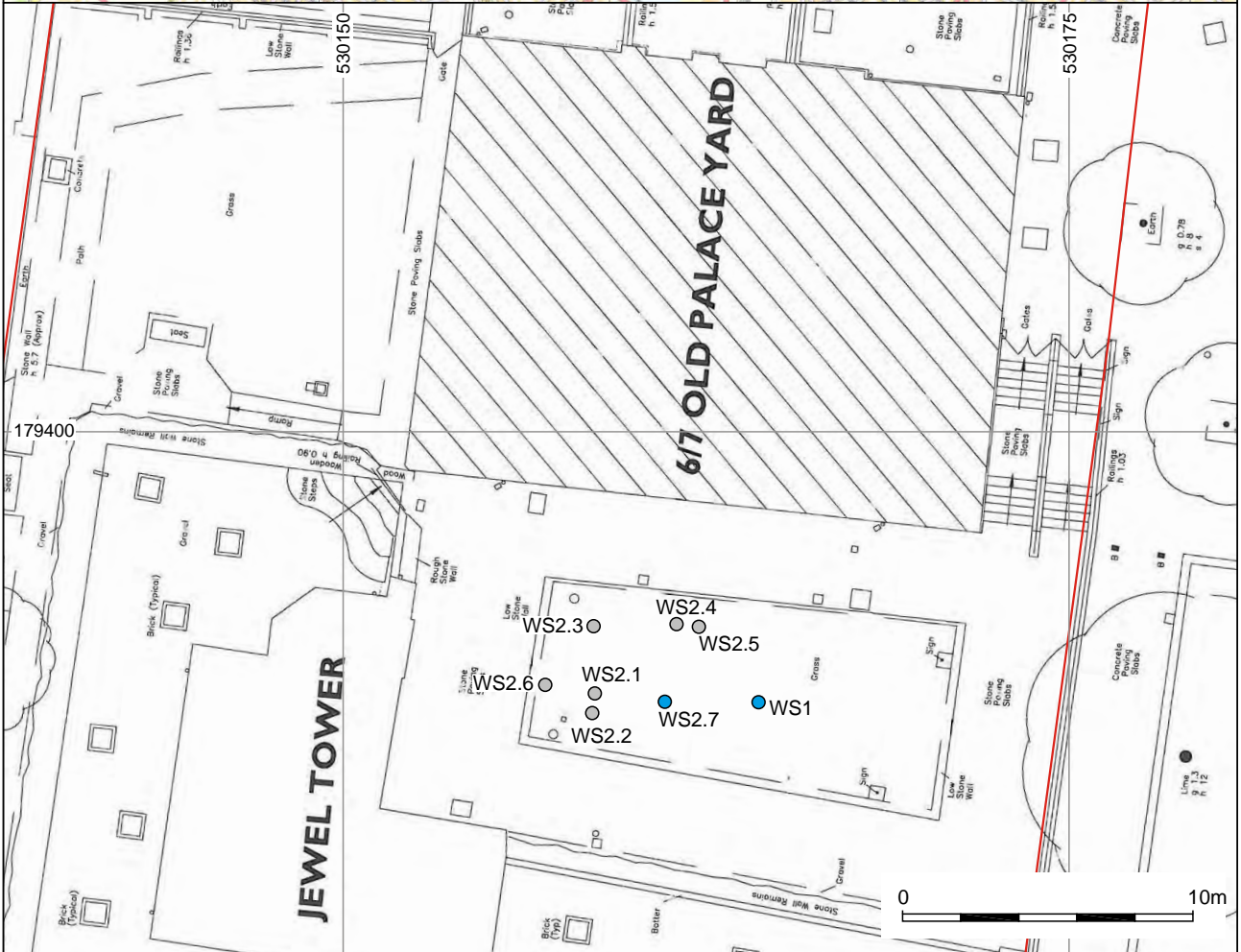
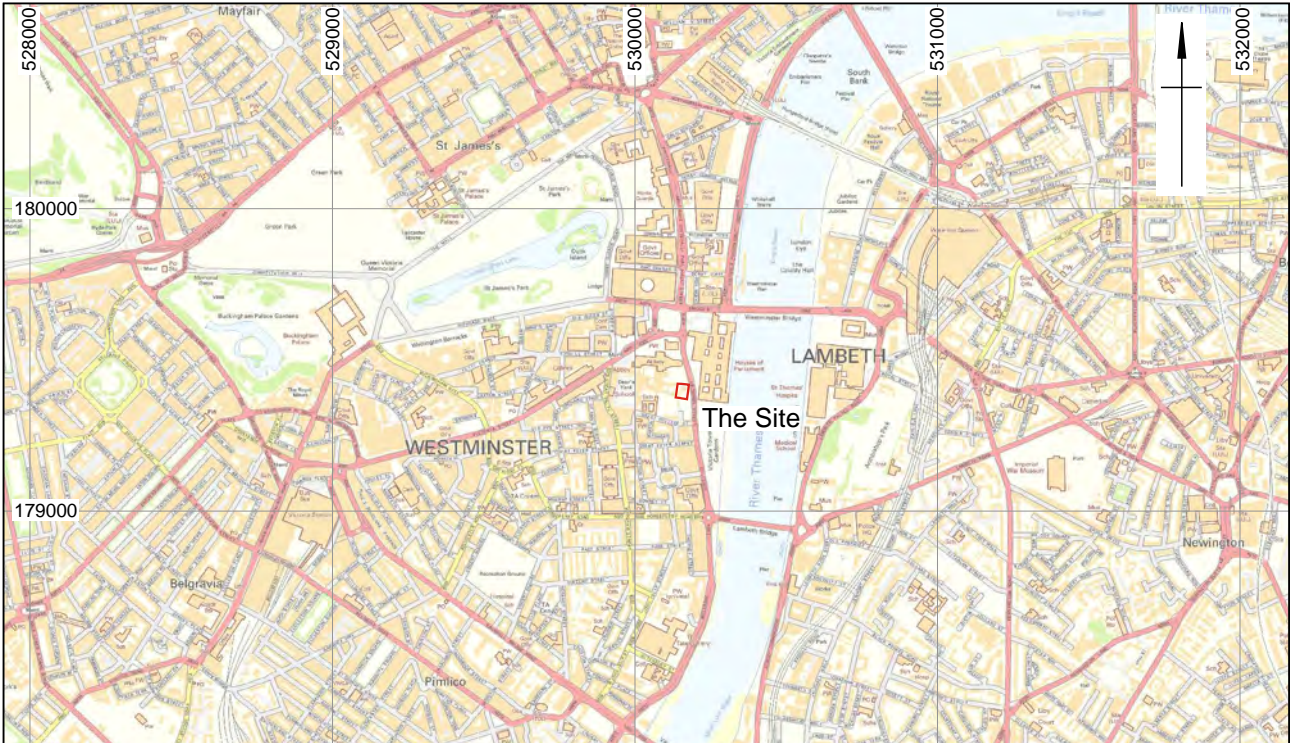


Plate 18: WS2.7 Core 4-5m



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- The Site
- Successful WS
- Abandoned WS



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Site location with position of Window Samples

Figure 1



salisbury rochester sheffield edinburgh



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