

5 WESTSIDE COMMON, WIMBLEDON SW19 4UD

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

April 2006

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SITE CODE: WCB06

SITE CENTRE NGR: TQ 23323 70843

LB. OF MERTON PLANNING REF: 05/P1161

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Project 270

Abstract

An archaeological watching brief took place in February-March 2006 on a redevelopment site in Wimbledon Village, SW19. This work was carried out as part of the Local Authority planning process (Ref. 05/P1161) and in response to recommendations made by the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service of English Heritage.

The site lies on the western side of the historic village. Previous archaeological work here has produced prehistoric and medieval material, including 10th to 11th century pottery. Historic maps indicate that the area was developed by the mid 18th century, and there was certainly a building on the eastern part of the site by 1850.

The main groundworks comprised a basement excavation c. 23m by 13.5m in plan. This revealed much evidence for 19th century and later disturbance, including a probable sand/gravel extraction pit and subsequent residential development. Surviving in situ soil horizons produced some contemporary finds, mainly ceramic building material plus a few potsherds.

More notable was the discovery of a small section of brickwork, probably of late 18th century date and related by map evidence to a building that once stood at the eastern end of the site. A survey of 1776 also indicates a house in this area that was occupied by a gardener.

There was no evidence for prehistoric, medieval or earlier post-medieval activity. The natural Black Park gravel was exposed throughout the excavated area, although frequently truncated by recent activity.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out on a redevelopment site at 5 Westside Common, Wimbledon Village (Figure 1: site approximately centred at National Grid Reference TQ 2332 7084). The fieldwork took place during February and early March 2006.
- 1.2 The watching brief was required as a condition of planning consent for erection of a new residential house (LB of Merton Planning Ref. 05/P1161), and followed a preliminary Written Scheme of Investigation that was agreed with English Heritage. The development entailed replacement of the existing detached property with a new build, including a basement covering most of the footprint.
- 1.3 It was considered that the site had potential for archaeological remains, particularly in relation to prehistoric activity and to the medieval and later development of the present Village (see below 3.2. *ff*).

The site lies within an Archaeological Priority Area as defined by the London Borough of Merton UDP.

2. Acknowledgements

The archaeological work was commissioned by the householders, Mr & Mrs D Kershaw. Further assistance was given by the architect, Lyndall Scott RIBA.

Diane Walls (English Heritage Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service) monitored the project on behalf of the London Borough of Merton.

3. Site location and history

- 3.1 The site is located on fairly level ground at about 54.5m OD, overlooking Wimbledon Common to the east and bordered by Chester Road to the south (Figure 1). The plot itself is rectangular in plan with dimensions of *c* 50m east-west by 17m north-south.

The British Geological Survey (*Sheet 270*, 1998) indicates that the site overlies a natural ground surface of Black Park Gravel. This forms an extensive deposit over Wimbledon Hill and covers the much older London Clay that is exposed on the hillsides.

- 3.2 Prehistoric evidence includes some Palaeolithic material, but Mesolithic to Bronze Age finds are more common (*eg*, Phillips 1967, 33; Needham in Bird & Bird 1987, 132). Investigation to the rear of Chester House, *c* 150m to the south of the present site, produced a total of 184 pieces of struck flint, including a fine EBA barbed-and-tanged arrowhead (Potter 1993, 127).
- 3.3 Wimbledon Village itself appears to be of Saxon origin, with 10th century references to the place name of *Wimbedounyng* or *Wunemannedun* (Milward 1983, 7). Archaeological investigation has produced evidence for settlement between *c* AD 950 and 1100, including some remains from the Chester House site.

It is possible that settlement declined after the Norman Conquest and only recovered near the end of the medieval period. There is little documentary evidence for pre-13th century occupation, and archaeology has produced relatively few later medieval finds.

- 3.4** By the 18th century the site lay within the settlement that had grown up around the Common. Rocque's *Survey* of 1746 shows a number of plots and buildings, although nothing that can be conclusively related to the present site. A more detailed picture is given by *A Sketch of the Town of Wimbledon with the Lands adjoining...* of 1776, including an attached schedule of owners/occupiers and activities. It is possible that one of the smaller properties (No 47, occupied by a gardener) lies within the present site.

Lee & Pickering's Tithe Map of 1850 shows a small building on the eastern part of the site, with a boundary to the west and open land/gardens beyond. A similar layout appears on subsequent Ordnance Survey 25-inch maps of 1865, 1898 (Figure 8) and 1913. By the early 1950s this had disappeared, to be replaced before 1971 by the present boundaries and most recent house.

4. Archaeological research questions

The fieldwork presented an opportunity to address a number of research questions. These included:

- Is there any evidence for prehistoric activity, and how does this relate to other finds recorded in the area?
- Is there any evidence for Saxon/early medieval activity, and can the nature of this be defined (eg, settlement &/or agriculture)?
- Is there evidence for later medieval and earlier post-medieval land use/activity, including any indication of renewed growth from the 15th century? What light does this throw on the development of the Village?
- Can later post-medieval remains be related to the historic map evidence, in particular for a possible 18th century building on the eastern part of the site?

5. Methodology

5.1 The *Written Scheme of Investigation* (February 2006) was agreed prior to the fieldwork. The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with English Heritage guidelines (including *Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork*, 1998) and those of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (*Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*).

5.2 Exposed deposits and features were recorded by scaled drawing and 35mm photography. Individual elements were described but did not produce any significant finds and were therefore not separately contexted. Levels were derived from an OS Bench Mark (value 54.55m OD) located on the southern gatepost of West Lodge, facing onto Westside Common c 50m to the south of the site (Fig 1). The excavated area was located onto a 1:200 site plan by taped measurement: this was in turn related as a 'best fit' to the Ordnance Survey grid derived from the 1:1250 plan (Fig 2).

5.3 The fieldwork records have been allocated the site code: WCB06 by the Museum of London Archaeological Archive: there were no retained finds. An ordered and indexed site archive will be compiled in line with the MoL *Guidelines* and will be deposited in the Museum of London Archive.

6. The archaeological fieldwork

6.1 Summary (Fig 2)

The principal groundworks covered an area of approximately 23m by 13.5m in plan, taking in most of the footprint of the previous property plus adjacent land to the west. Initially a series of vertical steel beams were inserted from ground level around the perimeter of the new development. This was followed by bulk excavation to create a continuous basement, the surrounding ground being supported by concrete panels *c* 2.5m in length that were set between the *in situ* vertical beams.

6.2 The natural ground surface (Figs 6/7, 9, 11-13)

The natural sand and gravel (Black Park Gravel; *cf* 3.1 above) was exposed throughout the excavated area, although in many places more or less truncated by modern activity. In detail the deposit was mainly a firm sandy gravel, but with layers of more homogenous sand or occasionally medium to fine gravel. These variations are clearly seen in the surviving upper levels in Figure 12.

Up to about 2.5m of natural gravel was seen in excavation. The base of the deposit was not exposed, although a previous borehole in the southwestern part of the area shows this to be at approximately 50.0m OD and to overlie London Clay (*c* 4.8m below present ground level; *Soil Consultants Ltd.* 2004). A similar result was obtained from a second borehole near the western end of the site.

The highest level of natural was recorded at about 53.3m to 53.7m OD, with relatively little variation across the site.

6.3 Surviving soil horizons (Fig 9)

Where not truncated or disturbed by recent activity the natural deposit retained a weathered upper horizon, overlain or merging into a medium-light brown sandy subsoil. This was mainly present in the southwestern part of the excavated area (Figure 9), although occasionally apparent elsewhere (*eg*, Figures 6/7). These horizons were typically some 200mm to 400mm thick, with the upper subsoil yielding occasional fragments of ceramic building material (brick/tile) and a few sherds of commonly occurring 19th or early 20th pottery (plain and transfer-printed earthenware).

6.4 Pre-20th century development (Figs 3, 6 & 7)

Almost all evidence for previous development on the site related to the recently-demolished house (6.6 below). The only earlier remains comprised one piece of *in situ* brickwork that was exposed in the eastern section of the excavation, immediately behind the new steel frame.

The brickwork took the form of a southwest-facing corner, with a total of six extant courses when fully exposed (Fig 7). The adjacent brick faces were traced for no more than 0.35m, but it is assumed that these represent wall foundations running off to the north and east.

It is likely that this construction dates to the latter part of the 18th century, or perhaps slightly later. The bricks that were more closely examined were unfroged, with dimensions

of *c* 220mm by 100mm by 60-65mm. They were bedded in a fairly soft sandy mortar, although the coursing arrangement could not be determined within the limited area exposed.

This brickwork clearly relates to a building that is recorded in the eastern part of the site by the Tithe Map of 1850, and by subsequent Ordnance Survey maps of 1865, 1898 and 1913 (see 3.4 above & Figure 8). The same building may also be depicted as property No. 47 by the *Sketch of the Town of Wimbledon with the Lands adjoining...* of 1776.

6.5 The large pit (Figs 3, 10 & 11)

Natural deposits to the northwestern were heavily truncated by a large pit, which extended some 8.5m to 11m into the area of excavation and also continued beyond this to the north and west. The sides were quite steeply inclined, and to the southwest were visible cutting the lower soil horizons some 0.8m below present ground level (*c* 54.0m OD). The base of the pit was up to 2.8m below ground level, although shallower at the western limit of excavation (*c* 1.5m to 2.0m) and apparently rising in this direction.

The purpose of this feature is not definitely known and it does not appear on any of the consulted maps, but it is assumed that it represents a gravel/sand extraction pit. The fill was also quite clean, and indeed contained quantities of redeposited natural material (*cf.* Fig 10). However, there were occasional pieces of 19th century brick (red and very rarely yellow stock). Together with the overlying reworked soil this would suggest a date in the later 19th or earlier 20th century.

6.6 Mid-later 20th century disturbance (Figs 3, 12-13)

The previous house on the site was probably built in the 1960s, and underwent subsequent extension to the south and west. These developments caused considerable ground disturbance in the central and eastern parts of the new footprint. The depth of this varied between *c* 0.7m and 1.4m below the existing surface, but it had generally removed previous soil horizons and any other evidence of occupation.

There was some other evidence for recent activity, mostly superficial but including a large (*c* 2m deep) pit adjoining the south section of the excavation.

7. Assessment of the results

The archaeological fieldwork has provided an opportunity to address the site-specific questions that were defined in section 4. above. The responses are outlined below:

- *Is there any evidence for prehistoric activity, and how does this relate to other finds recorded in the area?*

There was no evidence for prehistoric activity, nor were any residual artefacts recovered from the site.

- *Is there any evidence for Saxon /early medieval activity, and can the nature of this be defined (eg, settlement &/or agriculture)?*

There was no evidence for any Saxon or early medieval activity.

- *Is there evidence for later medieval and earlier post-medieval land use/activity, including any indication of renewed growth from the 15th century? What light does this throw on the development of the Village?*

There was no evidence for later medieval /earlier post-medieval activity.

- *Can later post-medieval remains be related to the historic map evidence, in particular for a possible 18th century building on the eastern part of the site?*

The evidence for post-medieval activity related very largely to the later 19th to later 20th centuries, and included both the former house on the site and a previously-unrecorded pit (possibly for sand/gravel extraction) to the west.

A small area of *in situ* brickwork at the eastern end of the site clearly relates to the building that is shown on a number of plans after 1850, and potentially as early as that of 1776. However, the remainder of this structure lay outside the present area of excavation.

8. Conclusion

The archaeological watching brief recorded deposits and features relating to activity since the 19th century. These included part of a large pit, evidence for later residential development and some *in situ* soil horizons, as well as considerable disturbance and truncation.

One notable find was a small section of brickwork, probably constructed before 1800 and related by map evidence to a building that stood on the eastern part of the site. A survey of 1776 suggests that this may originally have been occupied by a gardener.

Artefactual evidence was represented by occasional later post-medieval finds, mainly of ceramic building material plus a few potsherds. These are only of value in confirming the date of associated deposits and have not been retained.

The watching brief did not produce any evidence for prehistoric, medieval or earlier post-medieval activity. It is possible that this had been removed by later disturbance, although the extant soil horizons were closely examined.

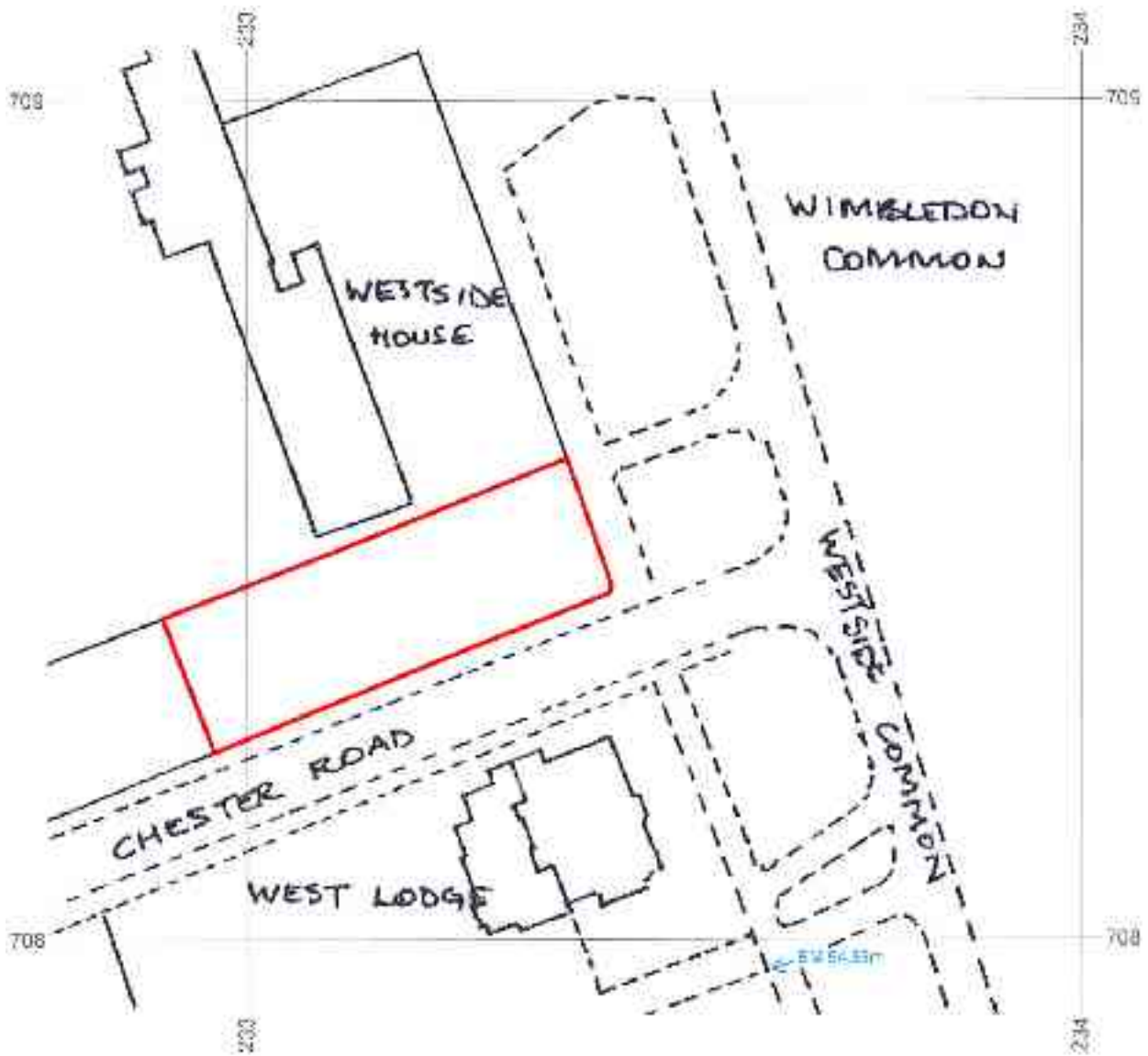


Fig 1 Site outline in relation to a plan based on the Ordnance Survey 1:1250 map (*TQ 2370 NW*)

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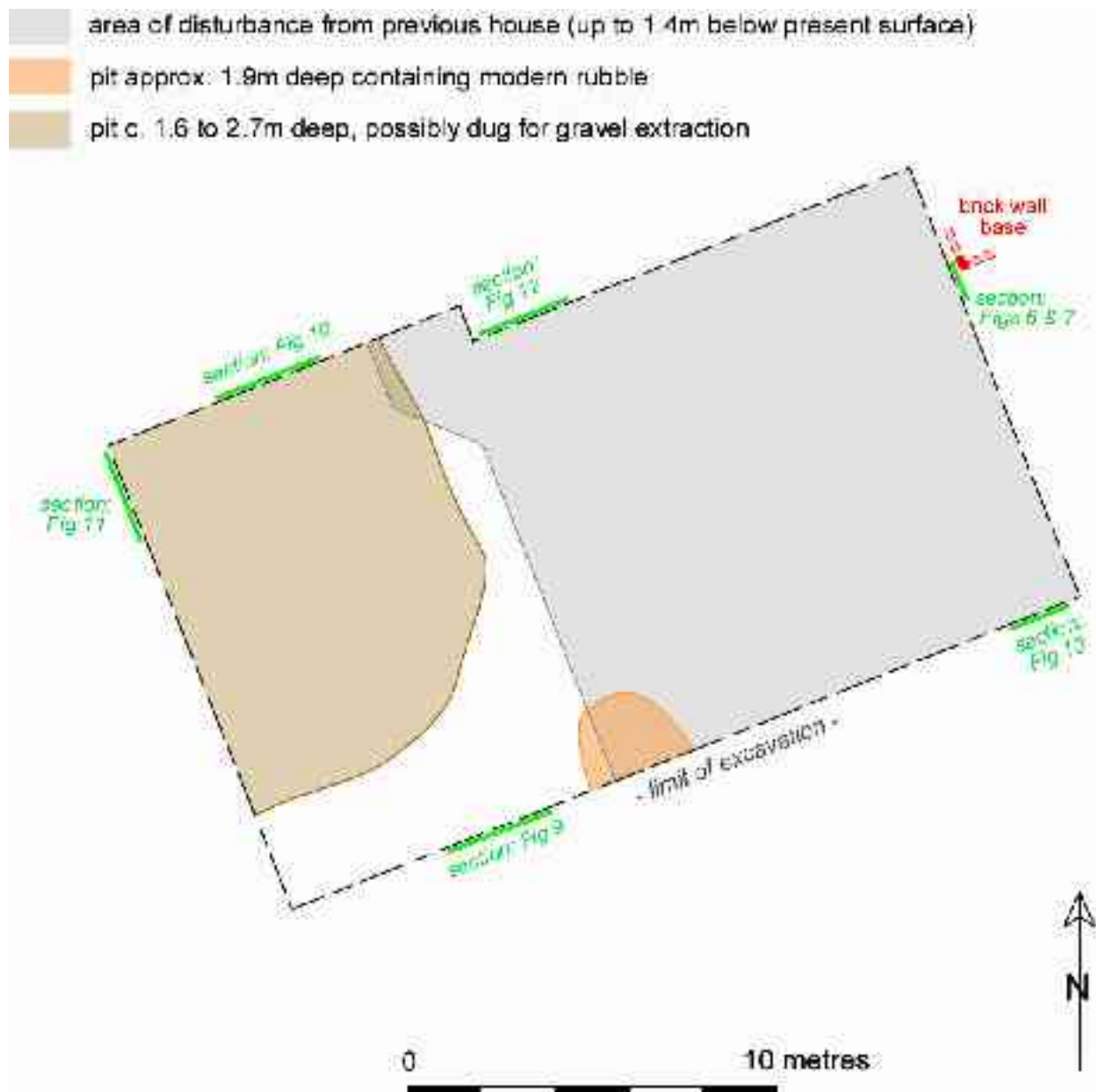


Fig 3 Plan of the basement excavation showing the principal features and areas of significant disturbance, plus location of the illustrated sections (Figures 6/7 & 9 to 13)



Fig 4 View during the bulk excavation, looking northeast toward the Common



Fig 5 View looking east during the final stage of the excavation, with the small area of *in situ* brickwork in Figures 6 & 7 arrowed



Fig 6 Detail of the exposed section at the eastern end of the site, including at top left the partly-exposed *in situ* brickwork (0.5m scale)

Located on Fig 3; see also drawn section (Fig 7) overleaf

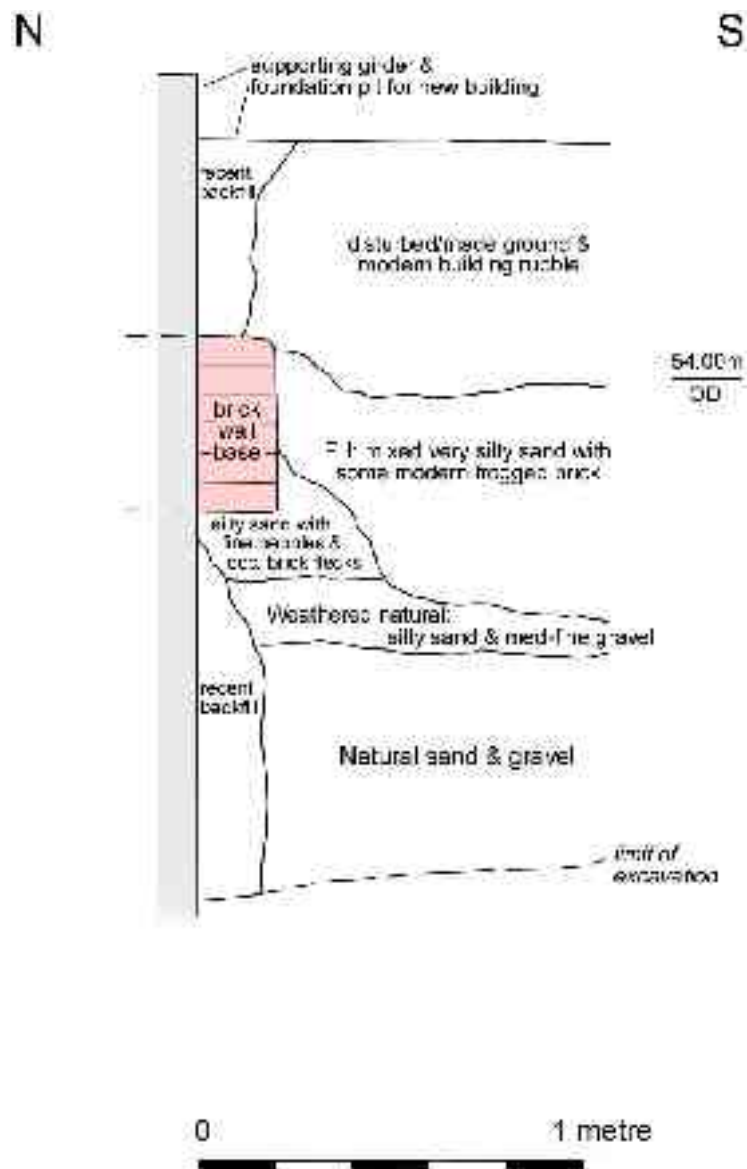


Fig 7 Drawn section of the deposits and features shown in Figure 6, including the fully exposed brickwork (located on Fig 3)

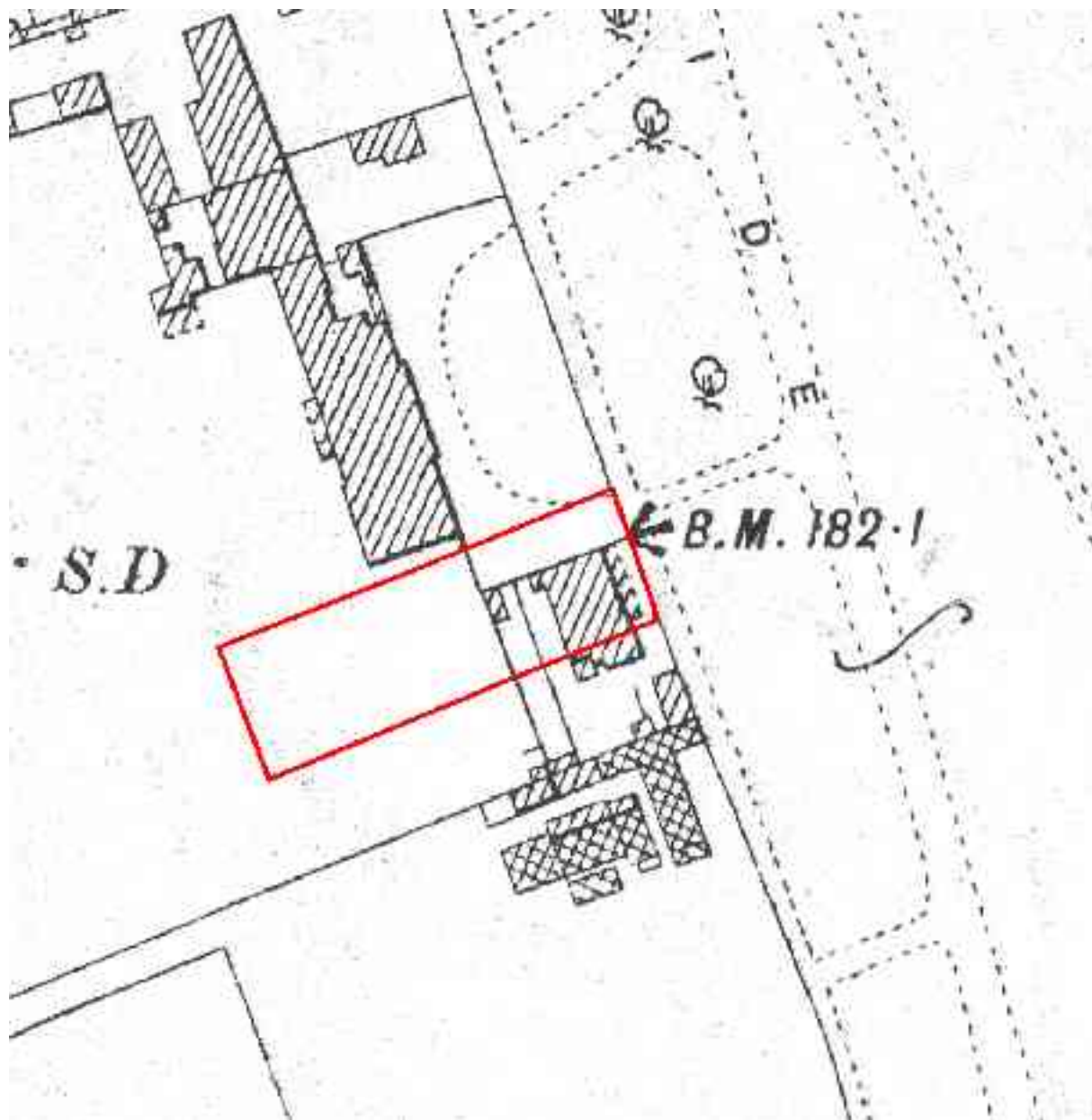


Fig 8 The site outline in relation to the Ordnance Survey 25-inch 2nd Edition map of 1898, showing a building at the eastern end that evidently relates to the brickwork seen in Figures 6 & 7

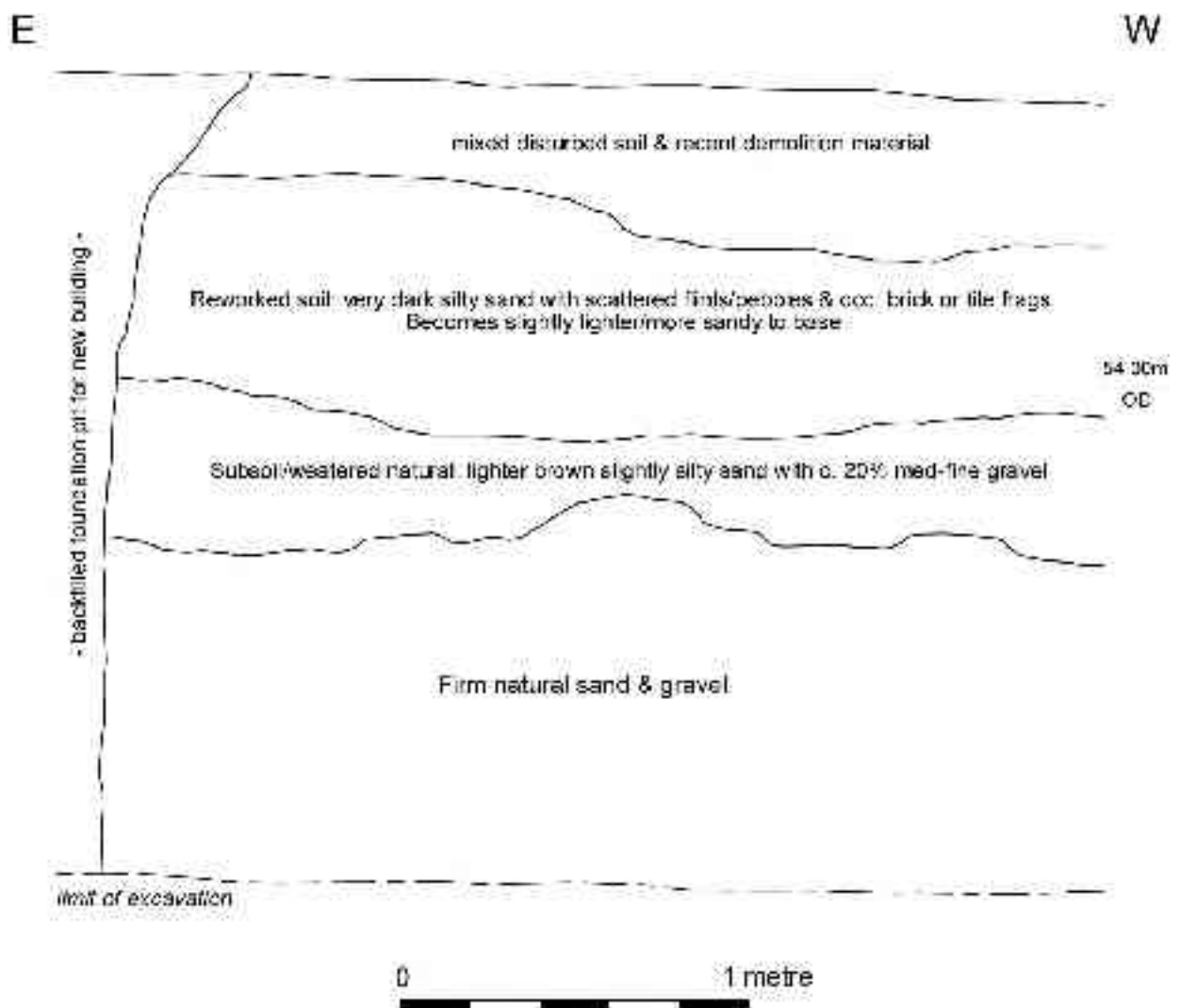


Fig 9 Photograph and drawing showing reworked soil horizons towards the southwest corner of the site (located on Fig 3)



ground level at c 54.6m OD

c. 4-500mm mixed soil & recent demolition material, etc

c. 250mm compact sandy silt with some gravel & brick rubble

Fill: lenses of mid grey-brown silty sand, some darker soil and occ. brick fragments with fairly clean sandy gravel (repositioned natural)

Note the series of tip lines running down from west to east

limit of excavation at c 51.9m OD



ground level at c 54.6m OD

c. 400mm compact sandy silt with intermediate layer of brick rubble

Fill: clean sandy gravel (repositioned natural) interleaved with darker silty sand with pebbles & silty soil

Natural sandy gravel at c. 52.5m OD, rising to a maximum of 52.92m to west

Figs 10 & 11 Views at the northwestern corner of the excavation, showing deep fills within the assumed gravel extraction pit (located on Fig 3)



ground level at c 54.9m OD

mixed soil & recent demolition material

Disturbed & made ground, loose silt soil with building rubble (brick, concrete & some plaster)

Natural: up to 150mm fine gravel over sand and coarser gravel layers



ground level at c 54.5m OD

mixed soil & recent demolition material

Disturbed/made ground, fairly loose silty sand/gravel with some building rubble

slightly silty sand/gravel (?disturbed subsoil)

Natural sandy gravel, becoming more sandy with depth

Figs 12 & 13 Exposed sections showing extensive ground disturbance in the area of the previous house

Appendix I. London Archaeologist publication summary

5 Westside Common, Wimbledon SW19 4UD. NGR: TQ 23323 70843. CA (Geoff Potter).
Watching brief. Feb-March 2006. WCB06

Summary

Basement excavation for a new house revealed extensive ground disturbance, including a probable 19th century sand/gravel extraction pit and later residential development.

A small section of *in situ* brickwork probably dates to the late 18th century. This is related by map evidence to a building that stood at the eastern end of the site, and may also be the gardener's house that is shown on a survey of 1776.

There was no evidence for earlier activity. Natural Black Park gravel was exposed throughout the excavated area, although frequently truncated.

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