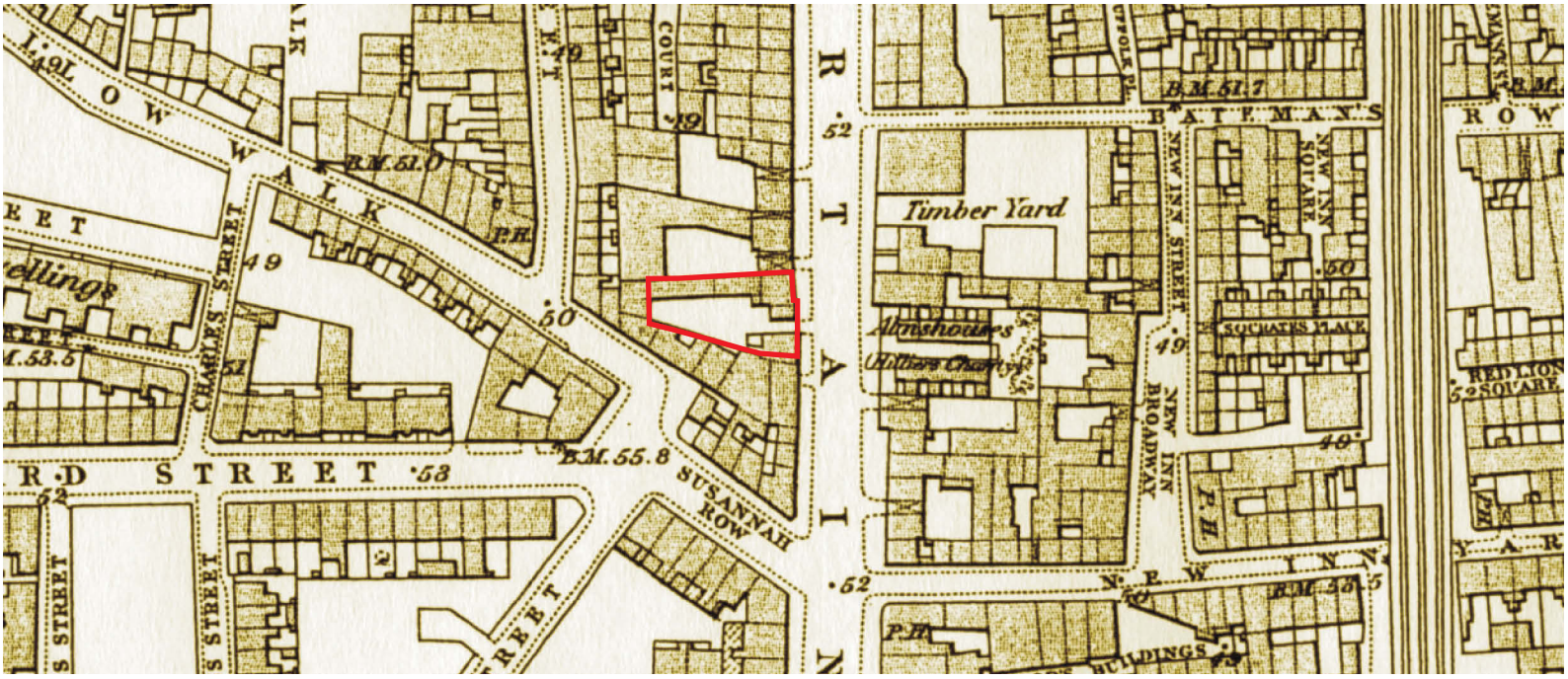

77–81 CURTAIN ROAD
London
EC2

London Borough of Hackney

An archaeological watching brief report

November 2005

REGISTERED IFA ORGANISATION

MUSEUM OF LONDON
Archaeology Service

77–81 CURTAIN ROAD
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An archaeological watching brief report

Site Code: CUQ05

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by Greig Ling Enginering on behalf of Glasshouse Group Ltd in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at 77-81 Curtain Road, Hackney, EC2.

Eight test pits where excavated against the walls of properties adjacent to the proposed area of re-development. These test pits where to determine the depths of the properties foundations and where monitored on the 10/10/05 and the 17/10/05.

Archaeological deposits were recorded in six of the eight test pits. Natural ground was observed at 13.43m OD, and the highest survival of archaeological deposits occurred at 15.02m OD.

The observations suggest that where archaeological deposits survive later basementing they represent quarry pit backfill or the build up of agricultural soils.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at 77-81 Curtain Road EC2, hereafter called 'the site'. The site is bounded by Mills Court to the North; Great Eastern Street to the South and Charlotte Road to the West (see Fig 1 Site location plan). The centre of the site is at OS National Grid Reference 533249 182417. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is 15.30m OD. The site code is CUQ 05.

A *Desk-based Assessment* was previously prepared by Genius Loci Cultural Project Consultants Ltd (Dr. P Chowne), which covers the whole area of the site. This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, and the initial assessment of its archaeological potential.

The field evaluation was carried out by MoLAS on the 10/10/05 and 17/10/05.

1.2 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Greig Ling Enginering and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA, 2001).

The purpose of the watching brief was to monitor trial works undertaken for engineering purposes and determine whether archaeological remains or features were present on the site and, if so, to record the nature and extent of such remains.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The watching brief was carried out at a very early stage of works and as a consequence few specific research aims and objectives were set. The following general research aims were set however:

- What is the level of truncation caused by earlier basements in this area?
- What is the nature and significance of the surviving archaeological remains?
- What are the levels of natural deposits and how do these compare to adjacent sites?

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002

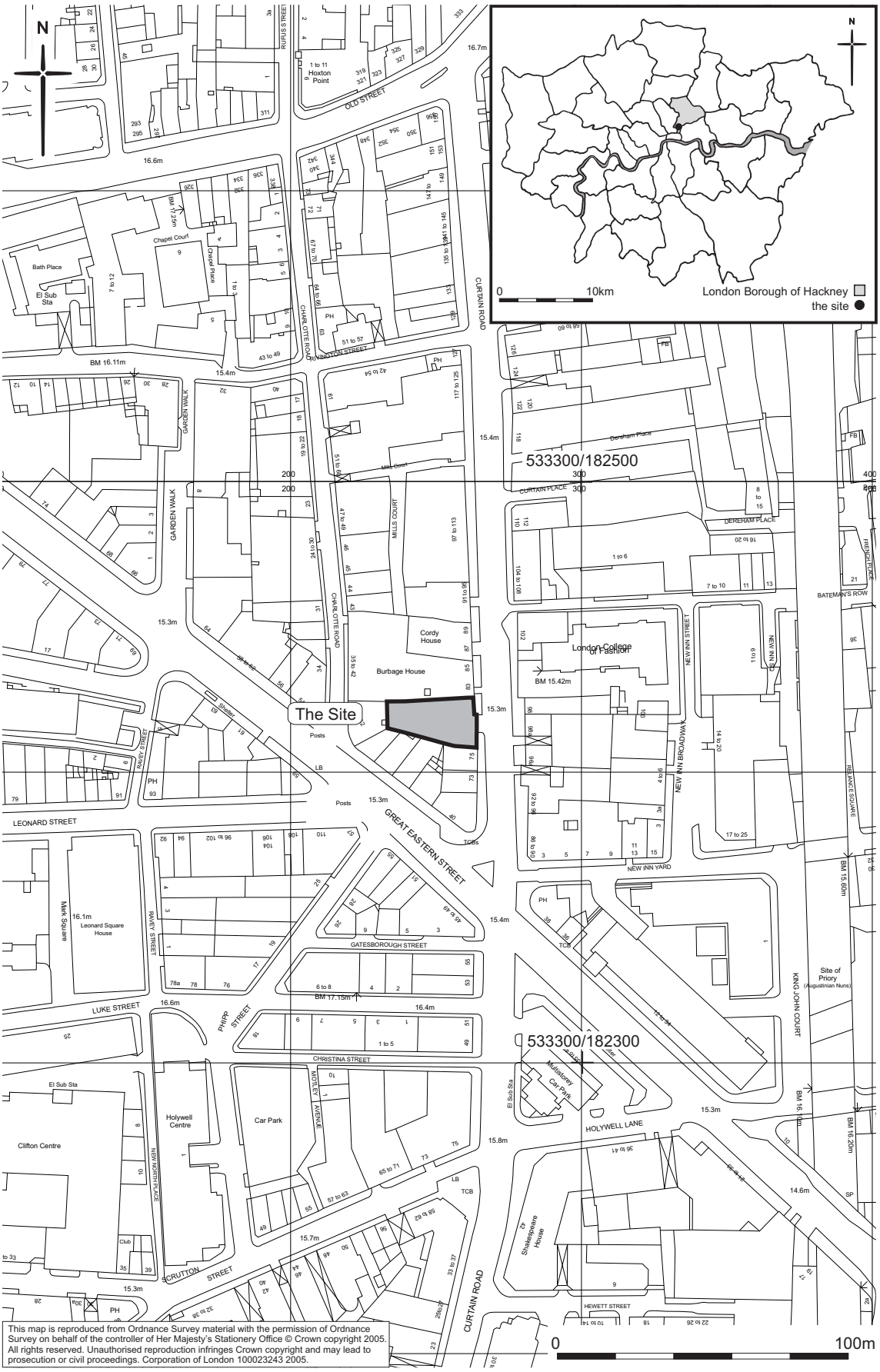

Fig 1 Site location plan

2 Topographical and historical background

A Desk-based Assessment was previously prepared by Genius Loci Cultural Project Consultants Ltd (Dr. P Chowne), which covers the whole area of the site. This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological, topographical and historical background of the site.

The site lies outside of the Roman and later city defences in an area with some potential for remains of prehistoric date. The precinct of Holywell Priory lay on the east side of Curtain Road opposite the site. The site remained in agricultural use until the late 18th century.

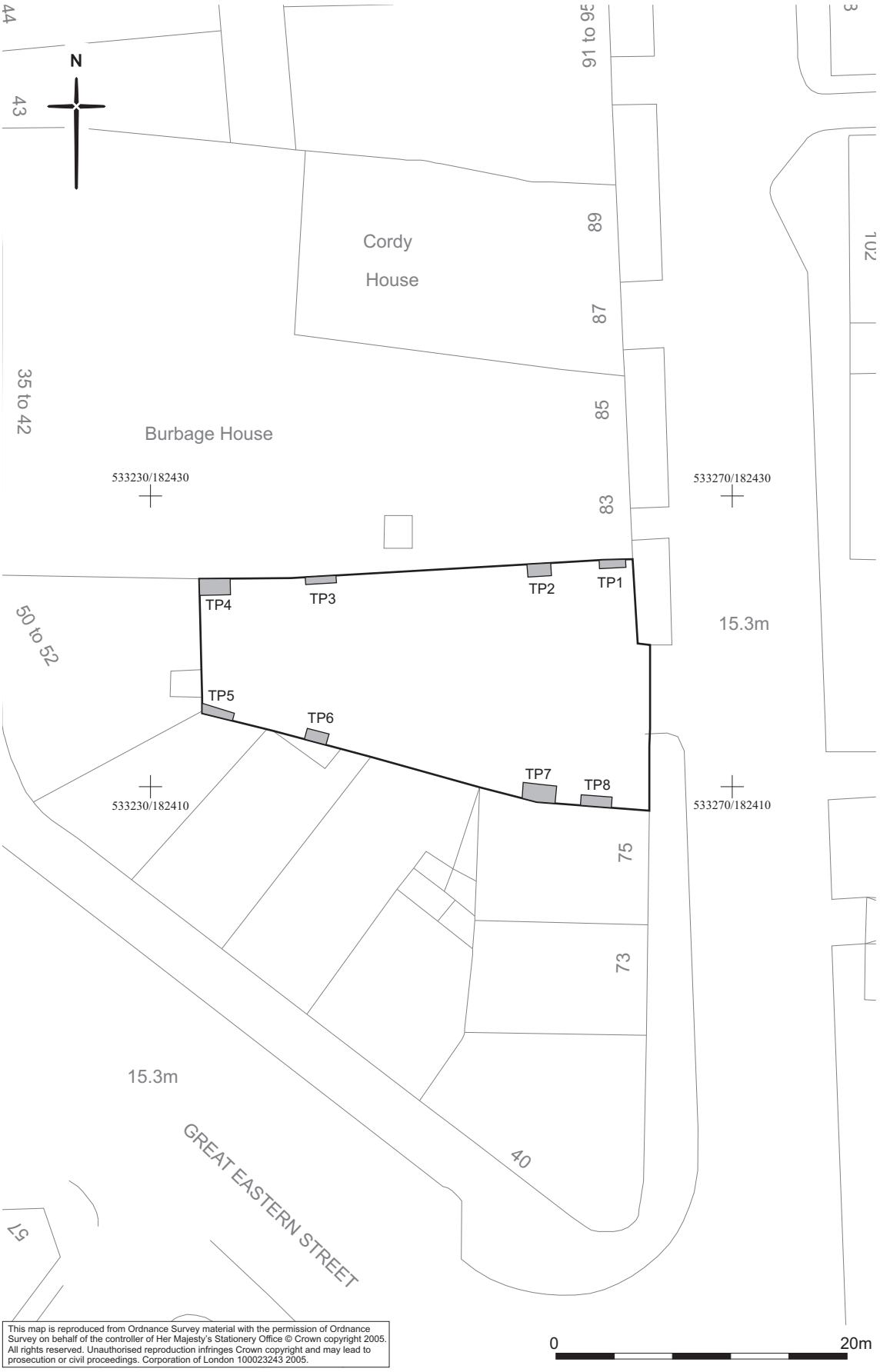

Fig 2 Test pit location plan

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief was done in accordance with the MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual (MoLAS, 1994).

The ground was broken out and cleared by contractors under MoLAS supervision. Test pits were excavated by machine by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS.

The locations of the areas of excavation were recorded by a member of staff from MoLAS offsetting from adjacent standing walls and plotted on gridded draughting film. This information was then plotted onto the OS grid by the MoLAS surveying team.

The heights of observations were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum via a traverse to the OS benchmark located near the entrance of the London College of Fashion, Curtain Road.

Where appropriate relevant contexts were allocated context numbers. The site has produced: a trench location plan at 1:100; 8 trench sheets, 25 context records and digital photographs. In addition one box of finds was recovered from the site.

The site finds and records can be found under the site code CUQ 05 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

In total, eight small separate test pits were excavated for the purpose of determining the depth of the foundations of the adjoining buildings to the site. These test pits have been numbered consecutively and a brief description of the recorded archaeological deposits follows.

For all trench locations see Fig 2 Test pit location plan

Test Pit 1

Location	NE corner of the site
Dimensions	2.10m by 0.60m by 3.20m
Modern ground level	15.32m OD
Base of modern fill	14.87m OD
Depth of archaeological deposit seen	0.45m
Level of base of deposits observed	12.12m OD
Natural observed	12.12m OD

Natural brickearth [7] consisted of a loose brownish orange clay with inclusion of flint with evidence of root action. The deposit was recorded at a height of 12.12m OD. Directly above the natural lay a mid grey silty clay with inclusions of flint, oyster shell, bone, pottery, charcoal and ceramic building material [6]. The thickness of the deposit was 2.75m and was recoded at a height of 14.87m OD. A selection of pot recovered from the deposit dated from the early 19th century.

The mid grey deposit was sealed by a car park surface, comprised of a layer of tarmac and aggregate [1] giving a combined depth of 0.45m and was recoded at a height of 15.32m OD.

Test Pit 2

Location	Northern edge of site 3.90m West of Test Pit 1
Dimensions	1.80m by 1.00m by 2.90m
Modern ground level	15.30m OD
Base of modern fill	13.17m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	2.35m
Level of base of deposits observed	12.48m OD
Natural observed	12.48m OD

Natural brickearth [5] in Test Pit 2 also consisted of a loose brownish orange clay and was recorded at a height of 12.48m OD. Evidence of root action within the deposit was also observed. A mid grey silty clay [4] also overlaid the natural, but had fewer inclusions. Inclusions included flint, oyster shell and charcoal. The thickness of the deposit was 0.47m and was recoded at a height of 12.95m OD.

Recoded at a height of 13.10m OD, a 0.15m thick spread of concrete [3] cut the mid grey deposit. This concrete spread formed the basement floor of a demolished building. Demolition material [2] comprised of brick rubble was recoded at a height of 14.85m OD and had a thickness of 1.75m. Sealing this demolition rubble was the tarmac surfaced car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.30m OD

Test Pit 3

Location	Northern edge of site 6.00m East of Test Pit 4
Dimensions	2.50m by 0.60m by 2.60m
Modern ground level	15.29m OD
Base of modern fill	12.99m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	N/A
Level of base of deposits observed	N/A
Natural observed	N/A

No archaeological deposits where observed or recorded in this test pit due to the unstable edges formed by loose brick rubble back filling a basement. The demolition rubble was excavated to a concrete basement floor [21] which was recoded at a height of 12.99m OD. Demolition material [20] comprised of brick rubble was recoded at a height of 15.24m OD and had a thickness of 2.60m. Sealing the demolition rubble was the tarmac surfaced car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.29m OD

Test Pit 4

Location	NW corner of the site
Dimensions	2.50m by 1.30m by 2.10m
Modern ground level	15.27m OD
Base of modern fill	12.67m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	N/A
Level of base of deposits observed	N/A
Natural observed	N/A

As with Test Pit 3 no archaeological deposits where observed or recorded in this test pit due to the unstable edges formed by loose brick rubble back filling a basement. The demolition rubble comprised of loose brick rubble [16] was excavated to a depth of 2.10m and was recoded at a height of 14.77m OD. This demolition rubble was sealed by the tarmac car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.27m OD

Test Pit 5

Location	SW corner of the site
Dimensions	2.50m by 0.80m by 3.30m
Modern ground level	15.28m OD
Base of modern fill	14.83m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	1.05m
Level of base of deposits observed	13.43m OD
Natural observed	13.43m OD

Consisting of a loose brownish orange clay natural brickearth [19] was recorded at a height of 13.43m OD. Evidence of root action within the deposit was observed along with small to medium rounded flint. A mid grey silty clay [18] overlaying the natural, had identical inclusions to deposits [6] (Test Pits 1), and [10] (Test Pits 8). These inclusions included flint, oyster shell, pottery and charcoal. The thickness of the deposit was 2.13m and was recoded at a height of 14.23m OD.

A 0.60m deposit comprised of a light grey sandy silt with brick rubble and chalk fragments [17] was recoded at a height of 14.83m OD overlaid the mid grey deposit. Sealing the brick rubble and chalk fragments was the tarmac surfaced car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.28m OD

Test Pit 6

Location	Southern edge of site 6.00m East of Test Pit 5
Dimensions	1.80m by 0.90m by 3.00m
Modern ground level	15.32m OD
Base of modern fill	13.47m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	1.85m
Level of base of deposits observed	12.37m OD
Natural observed	12.37m OD

Natural brickearth [25] was recorded at a height of 12.37m OD and consisted of a loose brownish orange clay with inclusions of small to medium rounded flint. The deposit also showed evidence of root action. Recoded at a height of 13.47m OD and overlaying the natural lay a 1.10m thick mid grey silty clay deposit [24], with inclusions of flint, oyster shell, pottery and charcoal. A selection of late 18th /early 19th century pot was recovered from the deposit.

Overlaying the mid grey deposit was the same brick rubble deposit observed in Test Pit 5 [17]. Recoded at a height of 14.57m OD the 1.10m thick deposit also comprised of a light grey sandy silt with brick rubble and chalk fragments [23]. Sealing the brick rubble was the tarmac surfaced car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.32m OD

Test Pit 7

Location	Southern edge of site 2.00m West of Test Pit 8
Dimensions	2.60m by 0.80m by 2.50m
Modern ground level	15.35m OD
Base of modern fill	13.65m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	1.700m
Level of base of deposits observed	12.85m OD
Natural observed	12.85m OD

Showing the same signs of root action the natural brickearth consisted of a loose brownish orange clay [15] and was recorded at a height of 12.85m OD. This would appear to be the same brickearth observed directly to the North (Test Pit 2) and to the East (Test Pit 8). A mid grey silty clay [14] again overlaid the natural, with inclusions of flint, oyster shell, pottery and charcoal. The thickness of the deposit was 1.10m and was recoded at a height of 13.65m OD. Pottery recovered from the deposit dated from the late19th century.

Cutting the mid grey silty clay and recoded at a height of 13.80m OD, was a 0.15m thick spread of concrete [13]. This concrete spread formed the SW corner of a basement floor of a demolished building. The corner of the red brick building (un-recorded), occupied the Eastern half of the test pit. Running E-W the wall turned North and shows evidence of a blocked doorway or coal scuttle. Demolition material [12] comprised of brick rubble was recoded at a height of 14.90m OD and had a

thickness of 1.10m. Sealing this demolition rubble was the tarmac surfaced car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.35m OD.

Test Pit 8

Location	Along the Southern edge 3.00m West of the SW corner of site
Dimensions	2.50m by 0.90m by 3.60m
Modern ground level	15.35m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	12.79m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	2.10m
Level of base of deposits observed	11.49m OD
Natural observed	11.49m OD

The natural brickearth observed in Test Pits 7, 1 and 2, consisting of loose brownish orange clay was also present in this test pit. Recorded at a height of 11.49m OD the natural deposit [11] contained very occasional flint and showed the same signs of root action. The same mid grey silty clay observed in test pits to the North, East and NW of Test Pit 8 also overlaid the natural. Containing inclusions of flint, oyster shell and charcoal the deposit [10] was recoded at a height of 12.79m OD and had a thickness of 1.30m.

A basement floor of a demolished building constructed from a 0.15m thick spread of concrete [9] either overlaid or cut the mid grey deposit. Recoded at a height of 12.94m OD the concrete floor supported or abutted an E-W aligned red brick wall. This un-recorded wall abutted the wall of number 75 and is undoubtedly the same wall observed in Test Pit 7. Demolition material filling the exposed basement area comprised of a band of brick rubble and a dark grey silty clay [8]. Recoded at a height of 14.89m OD the demolition rubble had a thickness of 1.60m. Sealing the back filled basement was the tarmac surfaced car park [1] recoded at a height of 15.35m OD.

4 Conclusions

Limitation of the test pits and the confined area of the site limit the overall interpretation of the potential archaeology. The initial interpretation of the mid grey silty clay directly overlying the natural clay would be to suggest a substantial area of made ground truncated later by basements over much of the site.

The substantial depth of the mid grey silty clay (between 1.85-3.86m thick), and the depth from ground level to natural could indicate the presence of a back filled quarry pit (it is possible however that the deposit represents a build-up of agricultural soil) . The observation of natural orange clay in six of the eight test pits could further suggest the quarry was extracting clay, possibly during the latter half of the 18th century when the area was still open land, or prior to the construction of houses in the early 19th century.

If the proposed redevelopment area has been subjected to quarrying the potential for stratigraphic archaeology would be very limited depending on the extent of the quarrying, which may cover a wider area and be beyond the confines of the redevelopment area. A longer term accumulation of agricultural soil would allow slightly greater potential for survival of remains pre-dating the late 18th century.

4.1 Original research aims

- What is the level of truncation caused by earlier basements in this area?

Level of truncation by basement activity varied from 12.67m OD in the NW corner (Test Pit 4), to 13.17m OD at the Eastern end of site (Test Pit 2). Basement activity along the Southern perimeter of the site varied from 12.79m OD in the SE corner (Test Pit 8), to 13.65m OD towards the Western end of site (Test Pit 7).

- What is the nature and significance of the surviving archaeological remains?

The nature of the archaeology observed from the substantial depth of the mid grey silty clay and from the depth of ground level to natural could suggest the presence of a backfilled quarry, which was then later used for the construction of houses in the early 19th century. These surviving archaeological remains would be of local significance.

- What are the levels of natural deposits and how do these compare to adjacent sites?

The level of natural brickearth along the Northern perimeter varied from 12.64m OD in the NW corner (Test Pit 4), to 12.12m OD at the NE corner of site (Test Pit 1). The Southern perimeter of the site varied from 13.43m OD in the SW corner (Test Pit 5), to 11.42m OD at the SE corner of site (Test Pit 8).

4.2 Significance of the data

Whilst the archaeological remains are undoubtedly of local significance there is nothing to suggest that they are of regional or national importance.

5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the excavation will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

In view of the limited potential of the material (Sections **Error! Reference source not found.**) and the relatively limited significance of the data (Section 4.2) it is suggested that a short note on the results of the watching brief should appear in the annual round up of the *London Archaeologist*

6 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Greig Ling Enginering for their cooperation during the watching brief and for their contributions and help in producing this report:

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8 Appendix 1 Assessment of the pottery from a watching brief at 77–81 Curtain Road, London EC2 (CUQ05)

Jacqui Pearce (26/10/05)

8.1 Site archive: finds and environmental, quantification and description

Table 1 Finds and environmental archive general summary

Post-medieval pottery	27 sherds, 26 ENV

8.1.1 The pottery

Table 2 Pottery summary

Post-medieval pottery	27 sherds	26 ENV

The medieval and later pottery from CUQ05 was spot-dated and recorded in accordance with current MoLSS procedure, using established Museum of London codes for fabric, form and decoration. The data were entered onto the MoLAS Oracle database, along with minimum quantification by sherd count (SC) and estimated number of vessels (ENV). A summary of the spot dates assigned to each context is given in Table 3.

Table 3 Date range of assemblage

Context	TPQ	TAQ	Size	Type	SC	ENV
6	1800	1850	S	PM	7	7
14	1830	1900	S	PM	3	3
18	1840	1900	S	PM	8	8
24	1780	1820	S	PM	9	8
Total					**27**	**26**

*8.1.1.1 Post-medieval (*c *1500–1900)*

The selected pottery collected dates chiefly to the 19th century. All contexts are small, and none is represented by more than nine sherds. A larger sample might have allowed closer dating, since diagnostic sherds can easily be missed in the field when sampling. Based on the pottery that was kept, there is evidence for 18th- and possibly late 17th-century activity from context [24] in the form of part of a porringer in Surrey-Hampshire red border ware (RBOR), and sherds from a chamber pot in plain white tin-glazed ware (TGW C) and a plate in Staffordshire-type slipware with feathered decoration (STSL). Late 18th- to early 19th-century finewares are represented by sherds of creamware (CREA) from contexts [6], [18] and [24], including a hexagonal, pedestal base, probably from a tureen, with diamond pattern moulded decoration around the edge, part of a rounded bowl and two plates. A sherd

from a bowl in pearlware (PEAR), introduced in the 1770s, was found in [6], and in context [14], the profile of a plain plate in refined white earthenware (REFW), which became increasingly popular during the first half of the 19th century. Part of a cup in transfer-printed ware with underglaze printed and painted decoration (TPW6) dates after c 1840, when this kind of decoration was introduced (context [18]).

Five sherds of Chinese blue and white export porcelain (CHPO BW) were collected, coming from all contexts considered here. One comes from a large, heavily potted dish in poor quality, provincial porcelain with a standard landscape pattern ([6]). The remaining sherds all come from plates decorated in typical late 18th- to early 19th-century styles, with landscapes or flowers. None is of particularly good quality. There is however, part of a teabowl in English porcelain with underglaze blue transfer-printed decoration from context [24]; this dates to c 1780–90 and would have been more expensive to purchase than the contemporaneous Chinese porcelain found on the site.

Coarsewares are represented by eight sherds of London-area post-medieval redware (PMR), found in all sampled contexts. This is the everyday, utilitarian pottery used by Londoners from the 17th century onwards, and by the late 18th century it was used chiefly for large storage jars, bowls and dishes. These are the only forms identified in the Curtain Road material, and would have been found in the kitchens and store-rooms of households across then social spectrum.

Part of a wall tile in tin-glazed ware (<1>), probably Dutch, was found in context [14]. It is decorated in blue on white, with a landscape painted within a roundel and ox-head corners. The tile probably dates to the mid 18th century, and would most likely have come from a fireplace surround.

None of the pottery collected is of a kind associated with high status occupation, although the English porcelain teabowl may represent better quality household ceramics. No medieval or Roman pottery was found and very little that could be earlier than the mid to late 18th century. There is also no pottery that was definitely introduced later than 1840.