

**NATIONAL GRID  
LONDON CABLE TUNNELS PROJECT  
Highbury substation  
107 to 129 Seven Sisters Road  
London N7**

London Borough of Islington

Report on an archaeological evaluation

November 2013



**National Grid, London Cable Tunnels project  
Highbury substation  
107 to 129 Seven Sisters Road  
London N7 7QG**

Site Code SEV13  
NGR 530850 186400  
OASIS reference: molas1-164553

Planning reference: P2013/1262/FUL

Report on archaeological evaluation

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## Summary

*This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by MOLA at 107 to 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. The report was commissioned from MOLA by the client, the National Grid.*

*In accordance with the ARUP Written Scheme of Investigation (2013) and the MOLA method statement (2013) six evaluation trenches were excavated on the site between 28th October and 8th November 2013.*

*No archaeological evidence pre-dating the mid 19th-century was found, the ground having been disturbed by previous modern development. In Trench 6, in the central part of the site, the truncated remains of a late 19th-century brick well were located. A few fragments of mid 19th-century blue transfer ware (willow pattern), and part of a decorated leather object, provisionally identified as a document holder, were recovered from the backfill of the well. Historical sources indicate no construction on the site before the 1850s. In Trench 1, in the north-west corner of the site, two short lengths of 19th-century brick-built walls were seen, along with an unbonded single line of air bricks forming part of a flower bed, probably 20th-century. However, the identification of asbestos prevented access into the trench and recording.*

*The report concludes that the absence of archaeological survival on the site is due to the impact of 20th-century development, that has destroyed any potential archaeological in situ stratified deposits, with the only deep cut feature, a well, surviving. The well, dated to the second half of the 19th century and would have been associated with one of the villas that existed on the site and depicted on the 1869 Ordnance Survey map.*

## Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Topographical and historical background (from ARUP 2013) .....	5
3	Evaluation methodology .....	7
4	Results of the evaluation .....	8
5	Archaeological potential.....	11
6	Proposed development impact and conclusions .....	13
7	NMR OASIS archaeological report form.....	14
8	Acknowledgements.....	17
9	Bibliography.....	17

### List of Illustrations

(at end of the report)

*Front cover: Ordnance Survey map of 1868 showing the Victorian villas and their gardens*

*Fig 1 Site location*

*Fig 2 Trench location*

*Fig 3 Photograph of Trench 2 (looking north-west)*

*Fig 4 Photograph of Trench 5 (looking east)*

*Fig 5 plan of the 19th-century well [2] in Trench 6*

*Fig 6 Photograph of the 19th-century well [2] in Trench 6 (looking east)*

*Fig 7 Photograph of part of a leather object, provisionally identified as a document holder, from backfill [1] of the 19th-century well*

*Fig 8 Photograph of Trench 7 (looking northwest)*

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Site background

The evaluation took place at 107 to 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG ('the site'). The NGR is 530850 186400. The site code is SEV13 (Fig 1). Work was carried out between 28th October and 8th November 2013.

A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was previously prepared, which covered the whole area of the site (ARUP 2013). This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, and the initial interpretation of its archaeological potential. The WSI set out the approach to be taken implementing the initial stages of archaeological programme of works in the form of an archaeological field evaluation.

The WSI was followed by the *Method Statement* (MOLA 2013).

## 1.2 Planning background

The legislative and Planning framework in which the evaluation took place was fully set out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* which formed the project design for the evaluation, and detailed in the *Method Statement* (Sections 1.1.6 and 1.2). To summarise here:

In summary, the evaluation was carried out to fulfil a condition expected to be attached to the Planning Consent given by the London Borough of Islington.

## 1.3 Scope of the evaluation

Evaluation is defined by English Heritage as intended to provide information about the archaeological resource in order to contribute to the:

- formulation of an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may adversely affect such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or
- formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigations within a programme of research

An archaeological evaluation is a limited fieldwork exercise designed to test the conclusions of preliminary desk based work. It is not the same as full excavation.

The evaluation was carried out within the terms of the relevant Standard for evaluation specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (IFA, 2009).

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

All work was undertaken within research aims and objectives established in the *Method statement* for the evaluation (MOLA 2013, 2.2)

## 2 Topographical and historical background

(from ARUP 2013)

### 2.1 Medieval

A settlement called Tollentone /Tollington is mentioned in the Domesday survey and was a settlement by c 1000, when it was to provide two men for a ship. The manor or estate there in 1086 had nine tenants, whose farmsteads were probably near the junction of Heame Lane and Tollington Lane (later that of Seven Sisters and Hornsey roads), since a moated farmhouse lay on the south side of the junction (MLO28508 – APA16 Tollington Manor). The settlement was part of the manor of Highbury and the name continued in use to the end of the 17th century. It was superseded by Holloway and the hamlet had ceased to have a separate identity by the 18th century.

Medieval activity in the area is further evidenced by several moated houses in close proximity to the site. Hornsey Road, which in Camden's time was a "sloughy lane" to Whetstone, by way of Crouch End, which had only three houses, and no side paths, and was impassable for carriages. It was formerly called Devil's, or Du Val's, Lane, and earlier still Tollington Lane. There formerly stood on the east side of this road, near the junction with the Seven Sisters' Road, an old wooden house, called "The Devil's House," and an associated moat. Tradition fixed this place as the retreat of Duval, the famous French highwayman in the reign of Charles II. It survived as a public house and was still standing in the 18th century. The moat was finally infilled at some point prior to 1835 and the house is no longer extant. Barnsbury Manor and moat were located approximately 150m to the west of the site and belonged to the Priory of the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem. Barnsbury moat was visible until the 19th century.

### 2.2 Post medieval

John Rocque's Survey Plan of 1745 shows the site comprised of open fields with a small settlement directly west of the site and a building to the south of the site. The precursors of Seven Sisters Road and Hornsey Road are visible and their routes match the modern road layout.

Long Lands estate, east of Hornsey Road, was bought by the St. Pancras, Marylebone and Paddington Freehold Land Society, and sold off in plots in 1851; the provisional street names, Reform, Franchise, Liberty, and Freehold, reflected the society's aim to create more voters, but were soon changed, to Alsen, Andover, Victor, and Durham roads. The society also owned the Seven Sisters Road estate east of Long Lands, comprising Campbell (later Whadcoat) Road and the west side of Nightingale (Fonthill) Road, on which plots were sold off from 1857. Not only were estates being built with much open space between them, but building was far from rapid or consistent even where a street plan had been laid down. Most of the streets started in the 1850s were not completed until the 1870s or 1880s, and in the 1890s early villas were replaced by terraces. Sales of most of the St. Pancras Freehold Land Society's plots singly, or at not more than four to a person also made building progress erratic and had important social consequences - poorer tenants moved into the large houses intended for clerks and social decline set in from the start. The first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1869 shows the Great Northern Railway has been constructed running north to south to the east of the site and the site itself has

been developed as houses fronting onto Seven Sisters Road, with possible remnants of medieval field boundaries, aligned north-west, south-east.

Between 1894 and 1915 the Co-operative Society acquired the property at 129 Seven Sisters Rd and constructed an Assembly Hall to the rear. The Society made several attempts to develop the property and the adjacent land from 1915 onwards however the schemes were repeatedly refused.

The 1938 OS map shows that 121 to 129 Seven Sisters Road had been partially redeveloped although 129 and the assembly hall to the rear remained untouched. The buildings in the south-western part of the site suffered minor bomb damage during World War II. By the 1954, numerous buildings are shown on the central and eastern part of the site, but the possible remnants of medieval field boundaries in the south-west still remain.

## 3 Evaluation methodology

### 3.1 Field methodology

See Fig 2

Six evaluation trenches were excavated. The eastern end of the site was not going to be available for evaluation until considerably after the fieldwork in the western and central areas (Trenches 1 to 3 and 5 to 7). Therefore a second phase of evaluation (Trenches 4 and 8) was envisaged, for 2014 or later.

Trench 1 was partially excavated at the west end and then had to be abandoned due to the presence of asbestos.

The ground was cleared by contractors under MOLA supervision. Trenches were excavated by machine by the contractors in 0.20m spits, and monitored by a MOLA supervisor.

Archaeological excavation was carried out in accordance with the *Method Statement* (MOLA 2013) and WSI (ARUP 2013).

### 3.2 Recording methodology & site Archive

A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was carried out in accordance with the *Method Statement* (MOLA 2013).

A proposed location plan of the trenches was supplied ARUP from which calculations could be made to locate them on the ground. Trench 3 was relocated west of its original position as it lay within the footprint of a site access road. Some adjustment to the alignment of Trench 6 was also made to avoid a pre-located site office. Archaeological remains were planned by offsets from baselines along the lines of the trench and tied in by MOLA Geomatics team using a GPS system and plotted onto the OS grid.

The heights of observations and/or archaeological remains were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum established by a Costain site engineer, with a value of 30.71m OD (located in the north-east corner of the site). From this, a second temporary bench mark (TBM) was established on the west boundary wall with a value of 29.56m OD.

### 3.3 Site archive

Numbered contexts were allocated where appropriate. The site has produced: 1 trench location plan; 13 trench plans @ 1:20; 3 context records; 5 trench record sheets; 37 photographs.

The site records can be found under the site code SEV13 in the MoL archive.



## 4 Results of the evaluation

For trench locations see Fig 2

### 4.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the north-west corner of the site and was intended to be 15.0m long by 2.0m wide. Excavation of the trench began at the west end of the trench, but only extended for 4.0m before the trench was abandoned because of the presence of asbestos (see Fig 2). Approximately 0.40m of topsoil was stripped revealing an orange-brown sub-soil. As no personnel were allowed into the trench, no record could be made of the surviving archaeological evidence, apart from a photographic record for the archive. It was observed that two short lengths of north-east/south-west aligned 19th-century brick-built walls were present on the north edge of the trench, below the topsoil. Approximately 1.0m to the west and aligned north-west/south-east was an un-bonded line of pale cream air bricks, three courses high forming a crudely-built wall, probably part of a retaining wall for a flower-bed. The brick-type suggested a 20th-century date.

### 4.2 Trench 2

Location	Central Southern area
Dimensions	7.50m by 4.0m by 0.6m depth
Modern ground level	28.95m OD
Base of modern fill	28.31m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	None
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	N/A
Top of surviving natural observed at	28.31m OD
Level of base of trench	28.31m OD

No archaeological deposits had survived within the trench. The evidence showed extensive disturbance by 20th-century development (Fig 3). The natural geology was yellow-orange clay, interpreted as weathered London Clay.

### 4.3 Trench 3

Location	Southern corner of the site
Dimensions	7.50m by 4.0m by 1.15m depth
Modern ground level	29.27m OD
Base of modern fill	28.22m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	None
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	N/A
Top of surviving natural observed at	28.22m OD
Level of base of trench	28.12m OD

No archaeological deposits had survived within the trench. The evidence showed extensive disturbance by 20th-century development and contamination by

hydrocarbons. The natural geology was yellow-orange clay, interpreted as weathered London Clay.

#### 4.4 Trench 5

Location	Central northern area
Dimensions	15.0m by 2.0m by 1.24m depth
Modern ground level	29.20m OD
Base of modern fill	28.31mOD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	None
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	N/A
Top of surviving natural observed at	28.31m OD
Level of base of trench	27.96m OD

No archaeological deposits had survived within the trench (Fig 4). The evidence showed extensive disturbance by the construction of late 19th early/20th-century foul water pipe that ran along the northern side of the trench. The natural geology was yellow-orange clay, interpreted as weathered London Clay.

#### 4.5 Trench 6

Location	Central area of the site
Dimensions	15.0m by 2.0m by 1.02m depth
Modern ground level	29.22m OD
Base of modern fill	28.20m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	0.67m (maximum depth of excavation allowed within trench)
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	27.39 m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	28.20m OD
Level of base of trench	28.20m OD

The natural geology was yellow-orange clay, interpreted as weathered London Clay and was located at 28.20m OD, into which a well [2] had been cut (Fig 5). It was located some 4 metres from the west end of the trench, c 1.0 metre below ground level (Fig 6). It was constructed of frogged bricks, dated to the Victorian period (1830 onwards: pers comm Ian Betts, MOLA) and was slightly oval in shape, measuring 1.00m by 1.22m. Only a maximum depth of 0.67m could be recorded below the base of the trench for health and safety reasons. It was backfilled with dark bluish grey silty clay [1]. The filled contained a few fragments of blue transfer ware pottery dated to after 1850 (pers comm Jacqui Pearce MOLA), and a large fragment of decorated leather (Fig 7) measuring c 0.70m long by 0.25m wide that has been provisionally identified as part of a document holder (pers comm Beth Richardson, MOLA).

#### 4.6 Trench 7

Location	North-east area
Dimensions	15.0m by 2.0m by 0.85 depth
Modern ground level/top of slab	29.07 to 29.26m OD
Base of modern fill	28.74m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	None
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	N/A
Top of surviving natural observed at	27.74m OD
Level of base of trench	28.31 to 28.41m OD, with sondage to 27.74m OD

No archaeological deposits had survived within the trench. The evidence showed extensive disturbance by 20th-century development (Fig 8). The natural geology was yellow-orange clay, interpreted as weathered London Clay and was located at 27.74m OD

## 5 Archaeological potential

### 5.1 Answering original research aims

The following research aims and objectives were established in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* for the evaluation watching brief (Section 3):

#### 5.1.1 General aims

- *To determine, as far as reasonably practicable, the presence/absence, location, extent, date, character, condition and significance of any archaeology present at the site.*

No in situ horizontally stratified deposits were identified on the site and widespread modern disturbance with contamination by hydrocarbons was present in Trenches 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, the truncation ranging from 0.60 to 1.52m deep. Trench 1, from observation only, was the only trench that had not been subjected to such disturbance or truncation. A mid-19th century well, recorded in Trench 6, and two short lengths of brick wall of 19th-century date in Trench 1 represent the only archaeological features which survived in the area evaluated.

- *To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features encountered.*

No such deposits were present within the area evaluated.

- *To mitigate the impact of construction on any significant buried archaeological features.*

The only possible archaeological feature, a late 19th-century well, was identified, and recorded during the evaluation. The walls in Trench 1 could only be recorded photographically.

#### 5.1.2 Specific aims:

- *To determine whether any remains of the medieval settlement of Tollington are present on the site.*

No such remains were present on the area evaluated.

## **5.2 General discussion of potential**

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of ancient ground surfaces (horizontal archaeological stratification above natural ground) on the site is very low. There is limited potential for survival of very deep cut features, such as the well in Trench 6. However, survival is likely to be extremely limited due to impacts of the 20th-century development across the site. There was no evidence of the historically-attested late 19th-century construction, apart from the well and walling, nor of any earlier archaeological remains.

## **5.3 Significance**

The only features present, a late 19th-century well and walling, are of limited, local significance. The object provisionally identified as a decorated leather document holder was initially unidentified, until comparison was found from a similar item from the Olympic Park site in East London. As such, the item adds to the corpus of late 19th-century leather from London.

## **5.4 Assessment of the evaluation**

GLAAS guidelines require an assessment of the success of the evaluation 'in order to illustrate what level of confidence can be placed on the information which will provide the basis of the mitigation strategy'.

In the case of this site, there is high level of confidence in the results obtained from the evaluation. All the trenches show severe disturbance down to the surface of natural geology, a level of truncation between 27.74 and 28.31m OD. The only possible archaeological features surviving were a late 19th-century well, and two short lengths of brick walling of 19th-century date.

## **6 Proposed development impact and conclusions**

Taking into account the results in all the trenches it appears that stratified archaeological deposits do not survive across the area of the evaluation, which has been truncated, with the possible exception of very deep cut features, such as wells.

The proposed redevelopment at the site involves the construction of a National Grid electricity substation and associated infrastructure including 44 residential units and 4 commercial units. In addition the access arrangements and associated landscaping and parking will be altered and a perimeter boundary erected around the site.

The decision on further archaeological work on the site rests with the local planning authority.

## 7 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

**OASIS ID: molas1-164553**

### Project details

Project name	National Grid - Highbury Substation, 107-129 Seven Sisters road
Short description of the project	Six evaluation trenches were excavated Between 28th October and 8th November 2013. Five of the trenches only revealed disturbed ground. In trench 6, a 19th-century well was excavated. the backfill contained a fragmented metal trace and part of a leather apron.
Project dates	Start: 28-10-2013 End: 08-11-2013
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	SEV13 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 3 - Retailing
Monument type	WELL Post Medieval
Significant Finds	LEATHER Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	""Targeted Trenches""
Development type	Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)
Development type	Pipelines/cables (e.g. gas, electric, telephone, TV cable, water, sewage, drainage etc.)
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON ISLINGTON FINSBURY n ational Grid, London Cable Tunnels project Highbury substation
Postcode	N7 7QG
Study area	2914.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 30 86 51 0 51 33 26 N 000 07 28 W Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 28.31m Max: 28.88m

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### Project creators

Name of Organisation	MOLA
Project brief originator	Arup
Project design originator	MOLA
Project director/manager	Nicholas Elsdon
Project supervisor	Portia Askew
Type of sponsor/funding body	National Grid
Name of sponsor/funding body	National Grid

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### Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	LAARC
Physical Contents	"Leather"
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Contents	"Leather"
Digital Media available	"Database","Images raster / digital photography"
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	"Leather"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Diary","Drawing","Matrices","Photograph","Plan","Report","Survey","Unpublished Text"

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### Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	National Grid, London Cable Tunnels project, Highbury substation, 107 to 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG



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**OASIS:**

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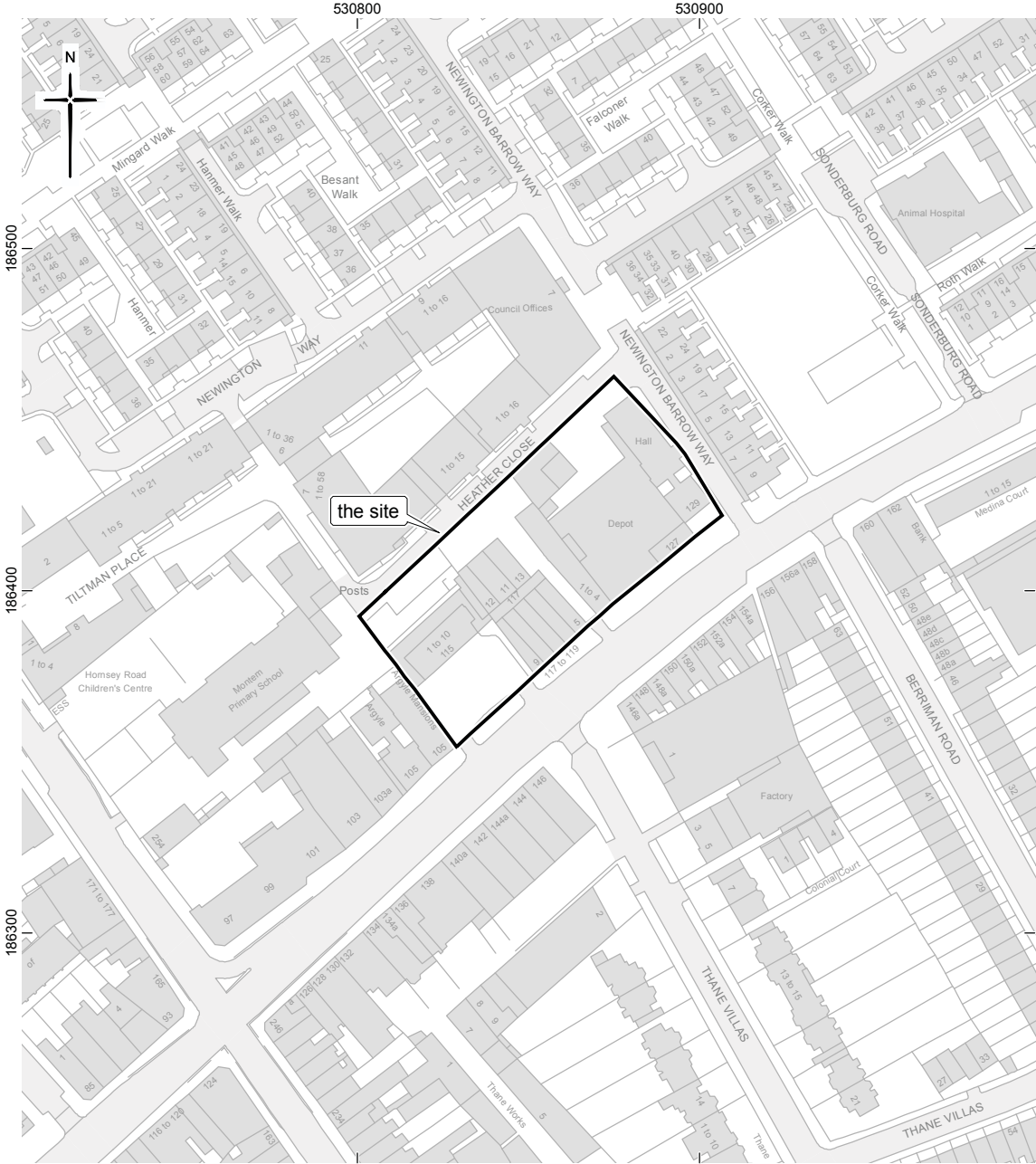
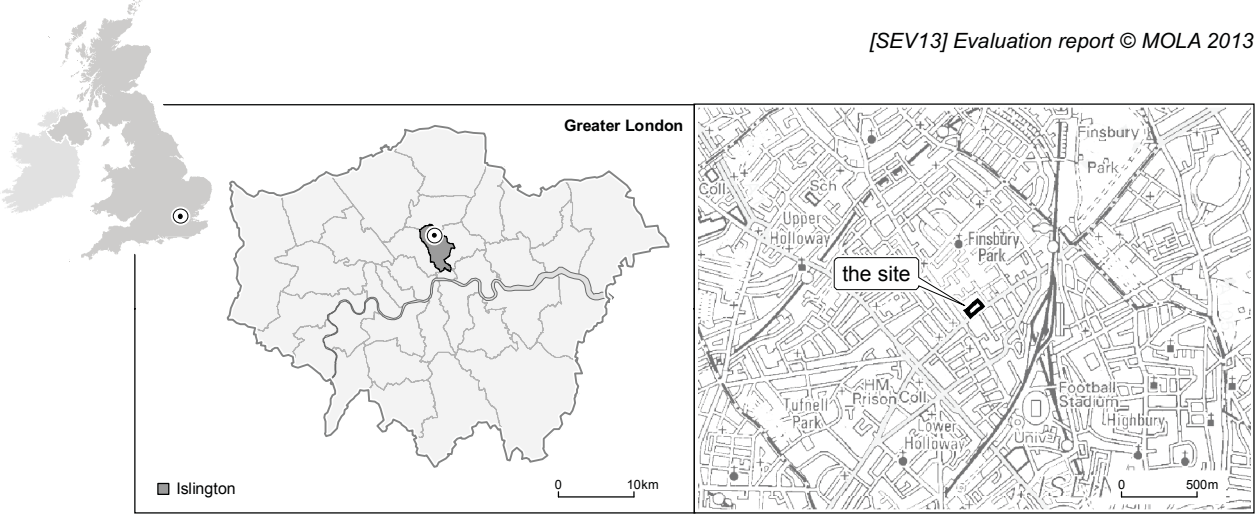
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## 8 Acknowledgements

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Scale 1:2,000 @ A4

0 100m

Fig 1 Site location



Fig 2 Trench location





Fig 3 Photograph trench 2



Fig 4 Photograph trench 5

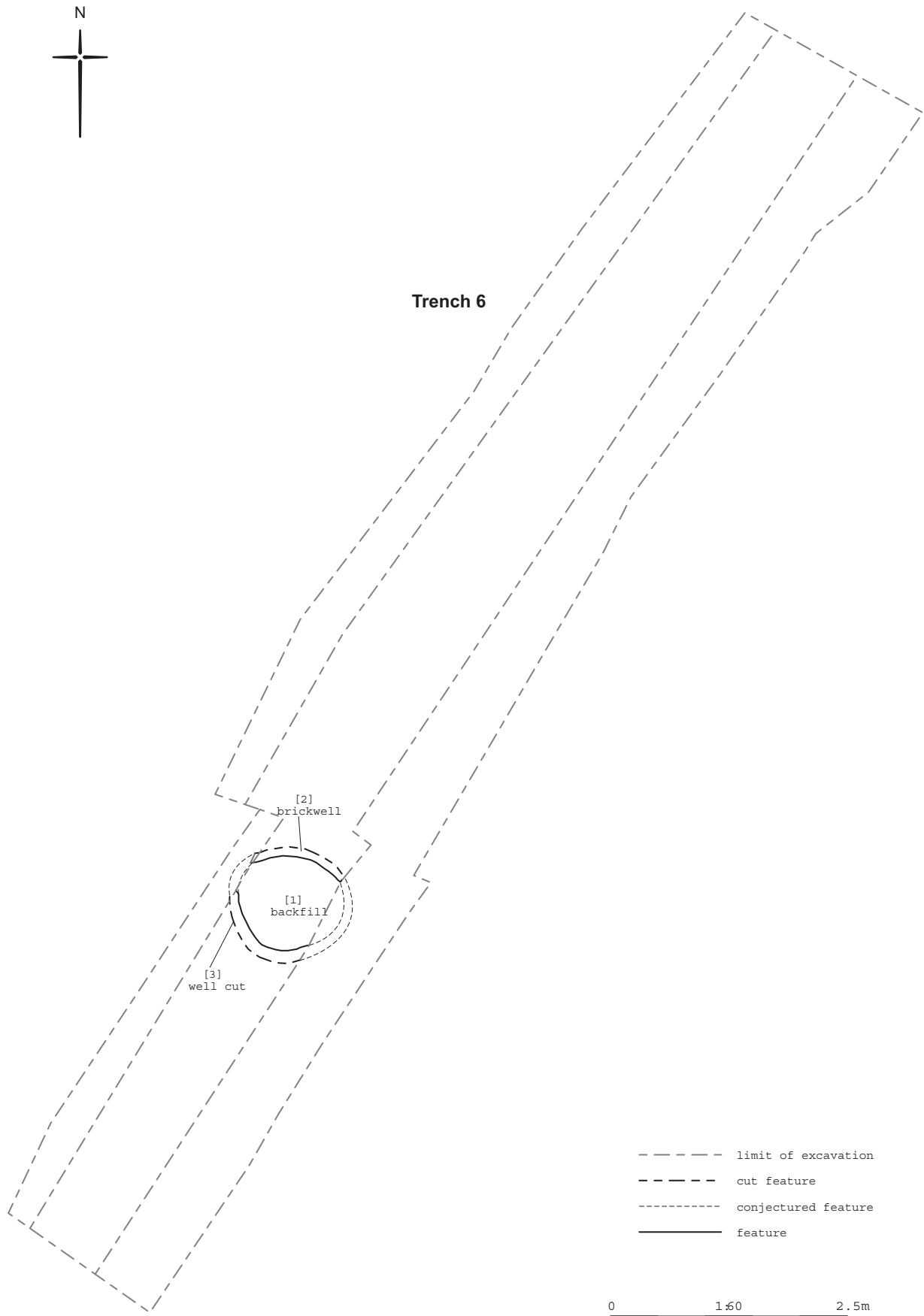


Fig 5 Plan of 19th century Trench [2] in





Fig 6 Photograph of 19th-century Trench 6 (Looking east)



Fig 7 Photograph of part of a leather document holder from backfill [1] of the 19th



Fig8 Photograph of trench 7 (looking northwest)