



ROTARY STREET
London
SE1

London Borough of Southwark

An archaeological evaluation report

August 2006



MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Service

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An archaeological evaluation report

Site Code: RTS06
National Grid Reference: 531739 179414

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Summary (non-technical)

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service on the site of Rotary Street London, SE1. The report was commissioned from MoLAS by Southwark Council on behalf of the client South Bank University.

Following the recommendations of Southwark Council, 3 evaluation trenches were excavated on the site.

The results of the field evaluation have helped to refine the initial assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. The trenches were excavated in the north, central and southern areas of the site to provide even coverage.

All 3 trenches exhibited a similar sequence of deposits. Natural gravel was encountered at between 0.26 and 0.72m OD. This was overlain by natural mid orange brickearth at between 1.00 and 1.32m OD. There then followed a lens of brickearth infused with plough soil, overlain by a mid grey brown, buried ploughsoil viewed between 1.58 and 1.78m OD. It appeared to be fairly sterile with no archaeological features or artefacts observed.

A series of demolition and dump layers sealed this and these were occasionally truncated by rubbish pits. Pottery within the pits suggested there were not likely to be earlier than 18th or 19th century.

Concrete footings and slabs completed the sequence with current ground level lying at between 2.60m OD in the North and 2.50m OD at the south

In the light of revised understanding of the archaeological potential of the site the report concludes the impact of the proposed redevelopment is unlikely to encounter any archaeological remains.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The evaluation took place at London South Bank University, Rotary Street, hereafter called 'the site'. The site is bounded by Rotary Street to the north and by existing buildings to south, east and west. The OS National Grid Ref. for centre of site is 531739 179414. The level of the ground surface lay between 2.50m and 2.60m OD. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is 3.50m OD. The site code is RTS06.

A *method statement* was previously prepared, which covers the whole area of the site (MoLAS, 2006) The *method statement* document should be referred to for further information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, and the initial interpretation of its archaeological potential.

An archaeological field evaluation was subsequently carried out on a series of trenches within the footprint of the proposed building. 3 evaluation trenches were excavated, the results of which can be found within section 3.2.

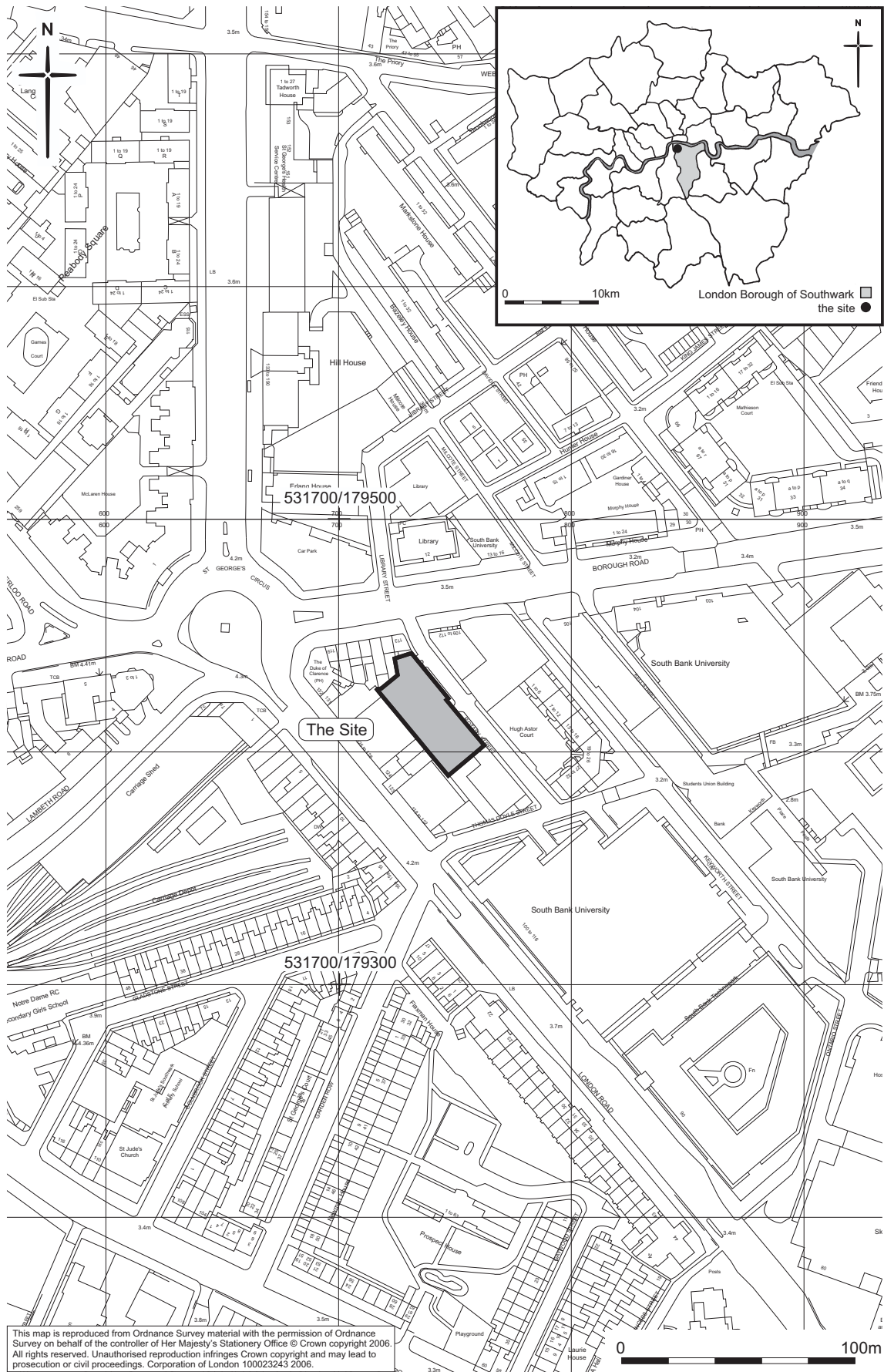


Fig 1 Site location

1.2 Planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Method Statement* which formed the project design for the evaluation (see Section 1.2, MoLAS, 2006).

1.3 Planning background

Conditional planning permission has been granted for the erection of a 2 storey temporary building for use as a LSBU students union centre – case file TP/ 1400-A with application number 06AP 0049.

The archaeological evaluation was carried out in advance of the construction of the new building.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Southwark Council 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).

Field evaluation, and the *Evaluation report* which comments on the results of that exercise, are defined in the most recent English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) as intended to provide information about the archaeological resource in order to contribute to the:

- formulation of a strategy for the preservation or management of those remains; and/or
- 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

1.5 Aims and objectives

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

The following research aims and objectives were established in the *Method Statement* for the evaluation (Section 2.2):

Is there any evidence of a burial ground associated with earlier chapels close to the site?

Is there any evidence of Roman activity on the site?

Is there any evidence of medieval activity on the site?

What is the nature and level of natural topography?

What are the earliest deposits identified?

What are the latest deposits identified?

2 Topographical and historical background

2.1 Topography

The natural deposits in the area of the site are Terrace gravels with sand and some clay overlying London Clay. The area to the south of the Thames was largely marshland and periodically flooded in the past, the south banks of the river being up to 14m lower than those to the north. Slow-moving and much wider than now, the Thames originally flowed through braided channels, which in prehistory surrounded the low-lying eyots or islands.

However, as the river levels rose during the medieval and post-medieval periods the open area known as St George's Fields would have been periodically flooded. As a result much of the area was considered unsuitable for permanent settlement and remained undeveloped until the late 18th century (Cowie, 1992).

Natural sands and gravels were recorded at a maximum height of between 1.70m and 2.00m OD during an archaeological evaluation on the east side of Rotary Street (Museum of London, site code: RAY92). Slight traces of yellow-brown brickearth overlying the gravels were observed to the north of the site. Evaluation further to the south east at Keyworth House (KWY01) revealed natural gravels at varying levels from 1.50m OD in the northern area of the site, to 1.42m OD in the east and 1.29m OD in the south.

2.2 Roman

During the Roman period the area in which the site lies would have been above the average high water level of the River Thames, estimated to be between 1m and 1.50m OD. Occupation seems to have been concentrated in the vicinity of Borough High Street and the area around the site does not appear to have been densely occupied during the Roman period.

However, Stane Street, which runs from London to Chichester, has been recorded under Newington Causeway, to the east of St George's Circus. Excavation, approximately 200m to the south, on the west side of Newington Causeway revealed a metallised surface close to Stane Street. This was interpreted as a track or lane leading to the main roadway. There were also the remains of Roman ditches, probably forming an enclosure, two cremation burials and three fragments of stone carving, one from an altar, one of a female water-nymph and one of a female head. Animal burials, consisting of two dogs and three pots in a wooden box, lamps and other Roman artefacts were also thought to be ritually deposited perhaps as part of human burials. In addition there have been several discoveries of Roman finds including coins, tesserae and tiles, in the immediate area during the 18th and 19th centuries along with a cremation jar which was found on St George's Fields. Sherds of Samian pottery were discovered in Library Street, directly to the north of the site, and during the

archaeological watching brief carried out on test pits on the site, a sherd of Roman pottery was recovered (Watson 1999).

These discoveries of finds do not point to the area being heavily settled and as yet no Roman buildings have been excavated in the immediate area, although stretches along the route of Borough High Street to the east are known to have been inhabited.

2.3 Medieval

In the medieval period the open ground around the site, was called Southwark Fields, and subsequently renamed after the chivalrous medieval knight, St. George. It was used as common land for grazing and pasture (Watson 1999). Settlement in Southwark was concentrated around the southern bridgehead of London Bridge, further to the south the land is likely to have been open, remaining uninhabited due to its marshy nature.

Evaluation at Keyworth House by MoLAS in 2001, to the south-east of the site recorded the presence of a number of pottery sherds recorded dating to the medieval period and an east-west channel which may have acted as a drainage ditch during this time.

Approximately 205m to the east on Newington Causeway (NEV01), a possible ploughsoil, containing medieval material, was revealed. It was cut by a number of features, including a pit containing mid-11th - 12th century material.

2.4 Post-medieval

During the early post-medieval period the area of open area of St George's Fields slowly diminished. As the population grew during the 17th and 18th centuries the area was increasingly used for the disposal of rubbish and sewage. Blackfriars Bridge was constructed in the 1760s, leading to the planning of the road system across St George's Fields. Most of the land was at or just below the high water level. In 1771, it was reported that 70,000 loads of rubbish had been used to give the roads 'sufficient height and solidity' (Walford, date unknown). It is thought however that the location for St. George's Circus was chosen due to a natural rise in the ground.

At Keyworth House (KWY01) ploughsoil was recorded across the site dating to the 17th century. This relates to a period of agriculture and/or pasture. The area of the site was actually open land from the early medieval period up until development in the 18th century. Brick built foundations from 18th century domestic tenements shown on Horwood's map of 1799 were also recorded, as well as three wells which were most likely associated with the backyard areas of the housing. The wells appeared to have been backfilled in the 19th century.

In the early 19th century new buildings were constructed around the Circus. During the 19th and 20th centuries the area was mainly used for industrial purposes. The

central site area lies in an area of an infant school, which can be seen on the Ordnance Survey map of 1876.

The Presbyterian Chapel of St George's has occupied land just north-west of the site since 1846. There was also an Independent Wesleyan chapel built in 1840 to the south of the site, fronting onto Thomas Doyle Street (then called Earl Street). It is possible that these are the latest elements of earlier places of worship on the site that also included a burial ground.

3 The evaluation

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and monitoring during the evaluation was carried out in accordance with the preceding *Method Statement* (MoLAS, 2006), and the MoLAS *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoLAS, 1994).

3 evaluation trenches were excavated on the site within the footprint of the proposed building

The slab/ground was broken out and cleared by contractors prior to MoLAS attendance on site. Trenches were excavated by machine by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS.

The locations of evaluation trenches were recorded by MoLAS geomatics team. This information was then plotted onto the OS grid.

A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was made in accordance with the principles set out in the MoLAS site recording manual (MoLAS, 1994). Levels were calculated by traversing from a benchmark on St Georges Circus

The site has produced: 1 trench location plan; 3 section drawings at 1:20 and 10 photographs. No finds were recovered from the site.

The site records can be found under the site code RTS06 in the MoL archive.



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Fig 2 Trench location plan

3.2 Results of the evaluation

For trench locations see Fig 2.

<i>Evaluation Trench 1</i>	
Location	Northern area of site
Dimensions	7 by 2m
Modern ground level/top of slab	2.60m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	1.22m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	1.10m
Level of base of deposits observed	0.30m OD
Natural observed	0.30m OD

Evaluation trench 1 was located in the northern area of the site and measured roughly 7m x 2m however was stepped to avoid modern concrete intrusions.

Natural gravel was observed at 0.30m OD. This was sealed at 0.02m OD by a natural orange brickearth.

Overlying this at c. 1.00m OD was a dirty brickearth mixed by root action with ploughsoil. This was 0.40m thick and contained occasional charcoal flecks.

Sealing this at 1.32m OD was a 0.30m thick mid grey brown silty ploughsoil. Occasional charcoal flecks and fragments were observed however the deposit was largely sterile.

A truncated rubbish pit was also present at 1.32m OD at the western limit of the trench containing 19th century pottery.

The latest deposits encountered were a mixture of modern concrete and made ground which completed the sequence at 2.60m OD.



Fig 3 Photograph of Trench 1 South facing section

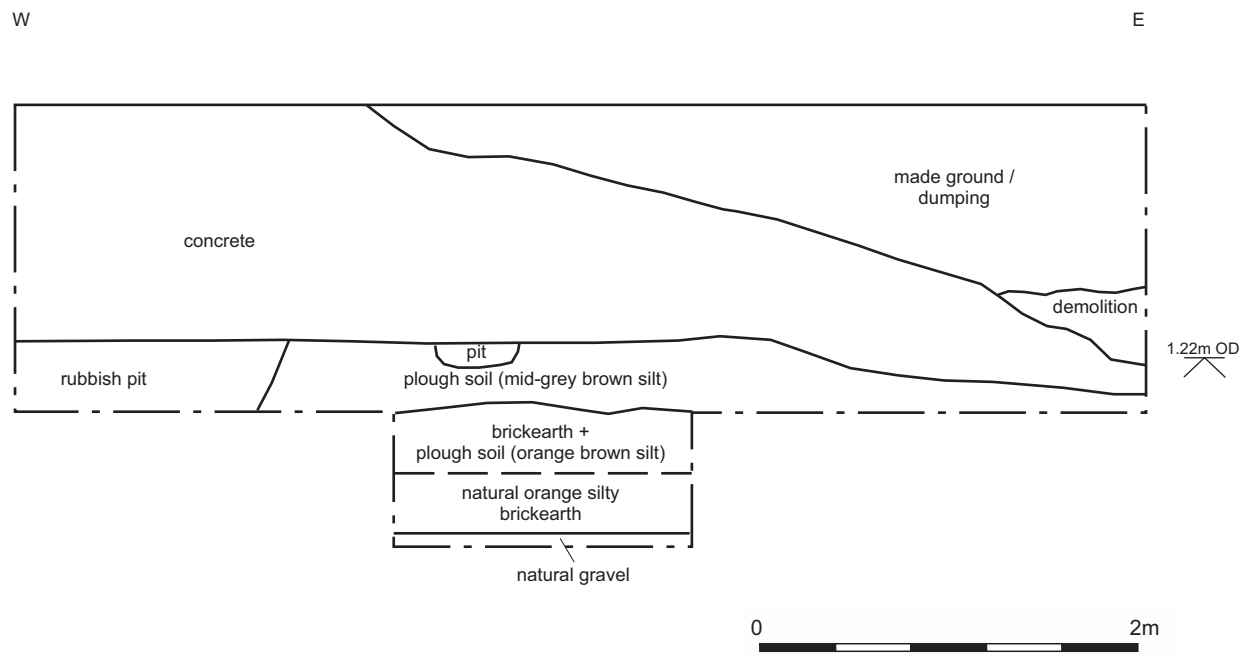


Fig 4 Trench 1: South facing section

<i>Evaluation Trench 2</i>	
Location	Central area of site
Dimensions	7 by 2m
Modern ground level/top of slab	2.60m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	1.2m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	0.80m
Level of base of deposits observed	0.72 m OD
Natural observed	0.72m OD

Evaluation trench 2 was located in the central area of the site and measured 7m x 2m but was stepped slightly to avoid modern concrete intrusions.

Natural gravel was first seen at 0.72m OD. This was sealed by a <0.50m thick deposit of natural orange brickearth infused with ploughsoil at 1.22m OD.

Overlying this at 1.55m OD was a mid grey brown silty ploughsoil, 0.35m thick and containing occasional charcoal flecking but otherwise sterile.

2 18th/ 19th century rubbish pits were observed at the southern limit of the trench. These were viewed at 2.00m OD and were > 0.80m deep.

The northern side of the trench contained a small layer of demolition material first visible at 1.80m OD consisting of fragmented brick and mortar and > 0.30m thick.

The sequence was completed by concrete and modern make up/ dump layers at 2.60m OD.



Fig 5 Photograph of Trench 2 East facing section

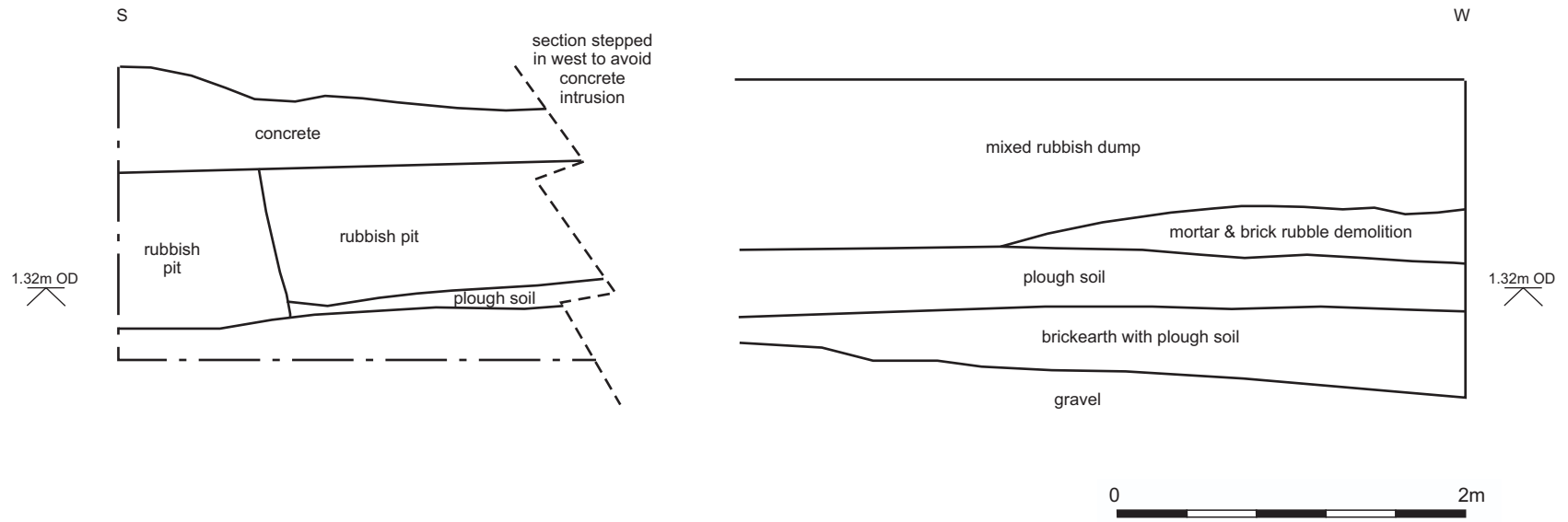


Fig 6 Trench 2: East facing section

<i>Evaluation Trench 3</i>	
Location	Southern area of site
Dimensions	7 by 2m
Modern ground level/top of slab	2.50m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	1.60m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	1.00m
Level of base of deposits observed	0.88 m OD
Natural observed	0.88m OD

Evaluation trench 3 was located in the southern area of the site and measured 7m x 2m however was stepped to avoid modern concrete intrusions.

Natural gravel was identified at 0.88m OD. This was overlain at c. 1.00m OD by a mixed layer of natural brickearth and ploughsoil.

Overlying this at 1.78m OD was a mid grey brown silty ploughsoil <0.60m thick and devoid of intrusions aside from occasional charcoal flecks. This was truncated to the east by large 18th/ 19th century rubbish pits from 2.50m OD and sealed to the west from 1.60m OD by a 0.20m thick mortar and brick demolition dump.

Made ground and degraded concrete sealed the sequence at 2.50m OD.



Fig 7 Photograph of Trench 3 North facing section

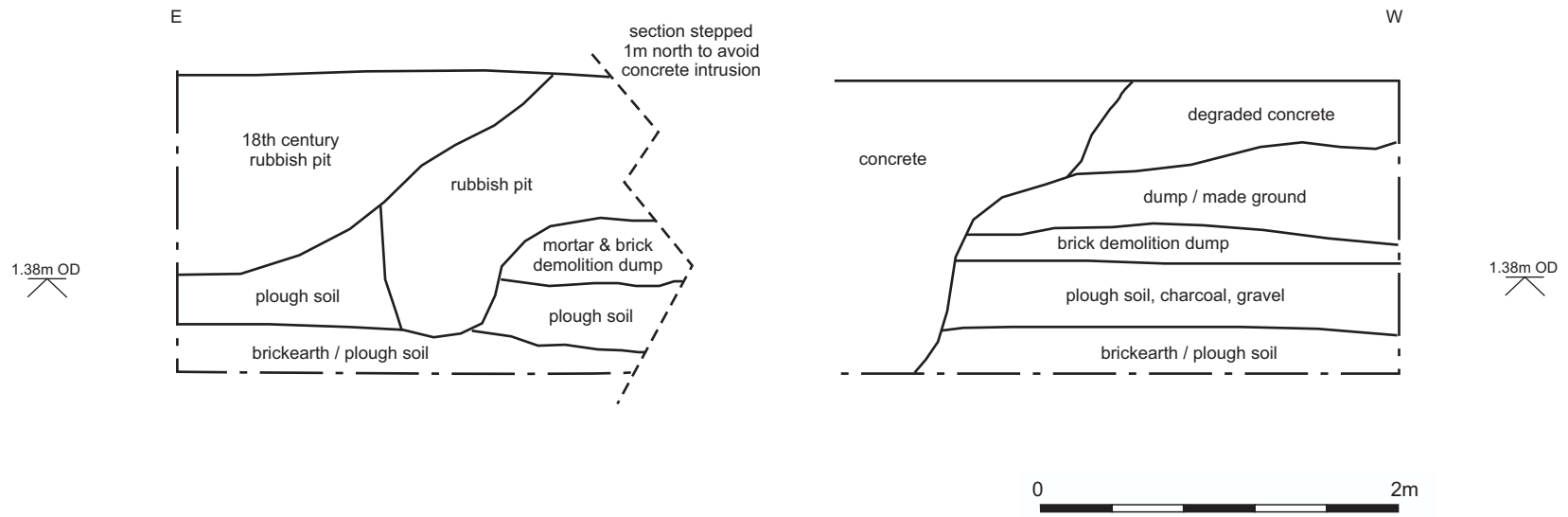


Fig 8 Trench 3: North facing section

3.3 Assessment of the evaluation

GLAAS guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) 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 the evaluation trenches excavated show clearly the type of archaeology likely to be encountered across the site. The trenches were located in an even spread across the north, centre and south of the site and natural deposits were encountered in all of them.

The type of archaeology viewed during the evaluation had characteristics common to all of the trenches such as post medieval rubbish pits, plough soil and brickearth.

Considering the consistency of the sequence shown in all the trenches, MoLAS believes that a high level of confidence can be placed on the results.

4 Archaeological potential

4.1 Realisation of original research aims

- Is there any evidence of a burial ground associated with earlier chapels close to the site?

No evidence of a burial ground was observed

- Is there any evidence of Roman activity on the site?

No evidence of Roman activity was observed

- Is there any evidence of medieval activity on the site?

No evidence of medieval activity was observed

- What is the nature and level of natural topography?

Natural gravel was observed at between 0.30m OD to the north and 0.88m OD to the south suggesting there may be a downwards slope towards the north.

- What are the earliest deposits identified?

The earliest deposit identified is the brickearth infused with plough soil

- What are the latest deposits identified?

The latest deposits identified are the 19th/ 20th century made ground consisting of dumped deposits

4.2 General discussion of potential

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of ancient ground surfaces (horizontal archaeological stratification) on the site is low. The archaeology observed was generally sterile ploughsoils, made ground of dumped materials and 18th-19th century rubbish pits. The average depth of archaeological deposits where they do survive is likely to be 1.00m.

4.3 Significance

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

5 Proposed development impact and recommendations

The proposed redevelopment at Rotary Street involves the erection of temporary student accommodation. The impact of this on the surviving archaeological deposits will be to seal them however later development following the temporary buildings are likely to remove them entirely.

The assessment does not suggest that preservation *in situ* would be the only appropriate mitigation strategy. MoLAS considers that despite the remaining archaeological deposits being of local significance in that they add to our knowledge of the post medieval land use of the area, no further archaeological site investigation is necessary.

The decision on the appropriate archaeological response to the deposits revealed within Rotary Street rests with the Local Planning Authority and their designated archaeological advisor.

6 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank London South Bank University for commissioning the archaeological evaluation and Hornagold and Hill for their assistance throughout the project.

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OASIS ID: molas1-17058

Project details

Project name Rotary Street

Short description of the project Following the recommendations of Southwark Council, 3 evaluation trenches were excavated on the site. The results of the field evaluation have helped to refine the initial assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. The trenches were excavated in the north, central and southern areas of the site to provide even coverage. All 3 trenches exhibited a similar sequence of deposits. Natural gravel was encountered at between 0.26 and 0.72m OD. This was overlain by natural mid orange brickearth at between 1.00 and 1.32m OD. There then followed a lens of brickearth infused with plough soil, overlain by a mid grey brown, buried ploughsoil viewed between 1.58 and 1.78m OD It appeared to be fairly sterile with no archaeological features or artefacts observed. A series of demolition and dump layers sealed this and these were occasionally truncated by rubbish pits. Pottery within the pits suggested there were not likely to be earlier than 18th or 19th century. Concrete footings and slabs completed the sequence with current ground level lying at between 2.60m OD in the North and 2.50m OD at the south In the light of revised understanding of the archaeological potential of the site the report concludes the impact of the proposed redevelopment is unlikely to encounter any archaeological remains.

Project dates Start: 31-03-2006 End: 03-04-2006

Previous/future work No / No

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area

Current Land use Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed

Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON SOUTHWARK SOUTHWARK Rotary Street

Postcode SE1

Study area 125.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 31739 79414 Point

Height OD Min: 0.26m Max: 1.32m

Project creators

Name of MoLAS
Organisation

Project originator brief Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body

Project design MoLAS
originator

Project director/manager Derek Seeley

Project supervisor Lindy Casson

Type of Southbank University
sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive No
Exists?

Digital Archive No
Exists?

Paper available Media 'Photograph','Plan','Report','Section','Survey '

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Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

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Author(s)/Editor(s) Casson, L

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