

SILK MILLS
Conington Road
Lewisham
SE13

London Borough of Lewisham

An archaeological watching brief report

November 2006



MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Service

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An archaeological watching brief report

Site Code: VEN06

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by Bellway Homes (South East) in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at the former Venson site, Silk Mills, Conington Road, London, SE13 7LH.

The demolition of the former police vehicle maintenance building was monitored from 26 September – 12 October 2006. Most of the site had been truncated by the footprint of the building and the vehicle access roads and ramps.

Archaeological and natural deposits were recorded in section. Weathered chalk was observed at 8.18-9.78m OD and chalk bedrock at 7.50-9.38m OD, rising SW–NE. This was overlain by a layer of alluvium out of which two pieces of worked flint were recovered. In a few isolated areas a thin layer of topsoil was observed, containing 19th century pottery. Masonry foundations were recorded in the northern part of the site. These can be seen to correspond to buildings on the 1894-96 OS map.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at the former Venson site, Silk Mills, Conington Road, London, SE13, hereafter called 'the site'. The site is located at the southwestern side of the junction of Morden Hill and Conington Road and is bounded on the south and west by industrial and retail units backing onto the Ravensbourne River (Fig 1). The centre of the site is at OS National Grid Reference 538044 176175. Modern ground level 50m to the northwest to the site is 8.00m OD and 14.2m OD 20m to the northeast. The ground level slopes down toward the Ravensbourne River. The site code is VEN 06.

A desk top *Archaeological (impact) assessment* was previously prepared by MoLAS, which covers the whole area of the site (Knight, 2006). 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.

1.2 The planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Archaeological impact assessment* which formed the project design for the watching brief (see Section 2, Nielsen, 2006)

1.3 Planning background

The watching brief was undertaken under a condition (Condition 2) placed on planning permission (Ref. No.s DC/05/61256, DC/05/61256B, DC/05/61256B, decision dated 11th September 2006), requiring the submission and approval of a written scheme of archaeological investigation prior to commencement of development.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Bellway Homes (South East) 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 determine whether archaeological remains or features were present on the site and, if so, to record the nature and extent of such remains. A number of more site-specific research aims and objectives were established in the preceding *Method Statement* (Nielsen, 2006), and are outlined in the following section.

The purpose of the present report is to analyse the results of the excavation against the original research aims, and to suggest what further work, including analysis or publication (if any), should now take place.

1.5 Aims and objectives

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

- What was the character of the natural topography?
- What are the earliest deposits identified?
- What are the latest deposits identified?
- What can the site tell us about the environment adjacent to the Ravensbourne in the prehistoric and later periods?
- Is there surviving evidence for medieval or post-medieval mills or other industrial activity on the site?

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

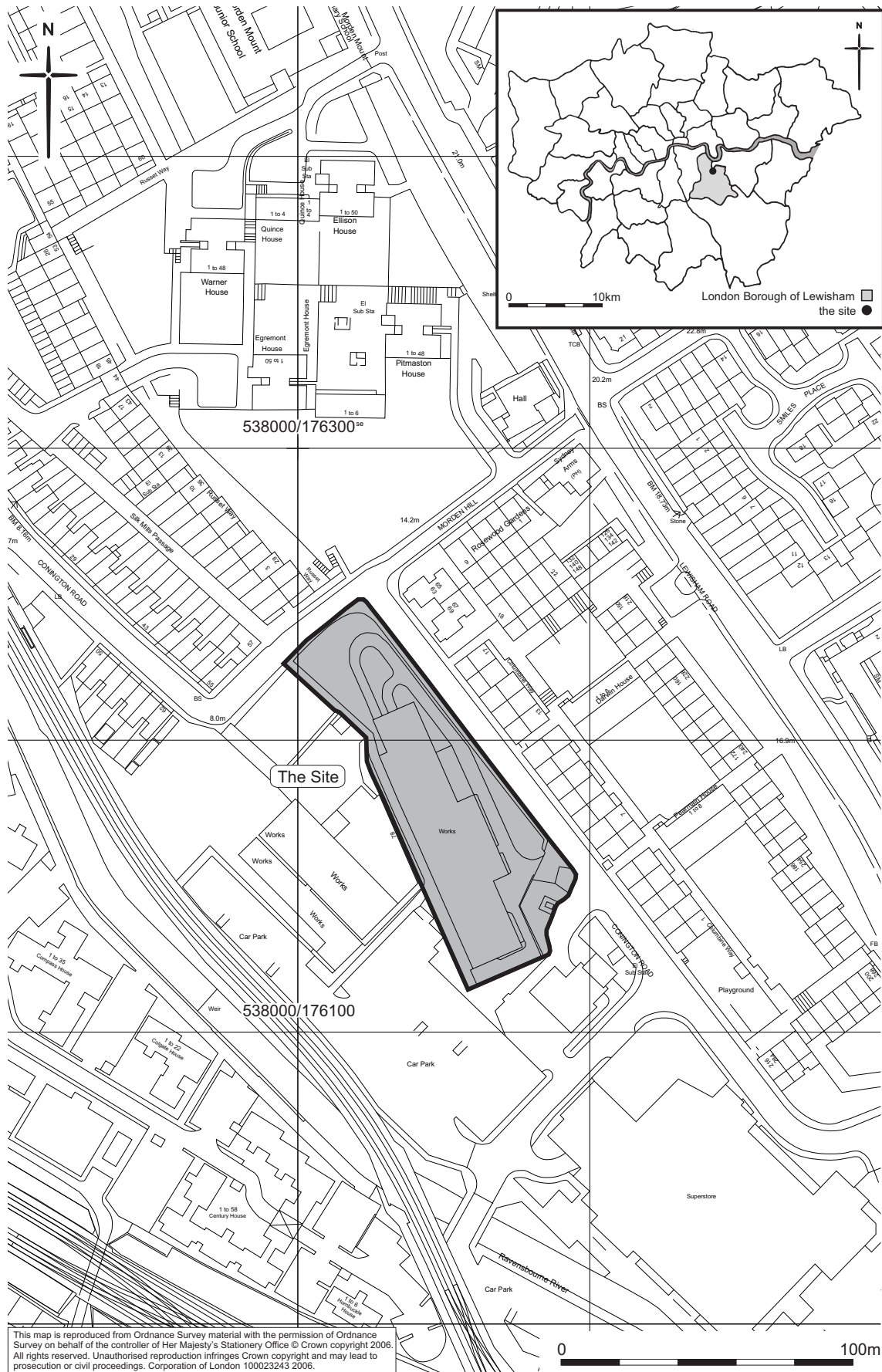


Fig 1 Site location

2 Topographical and historical background

The topographic and historic background has been covered in the preceding *impact assessment* (Knight, 2006) and *method statement* (Nielsen, 2006).

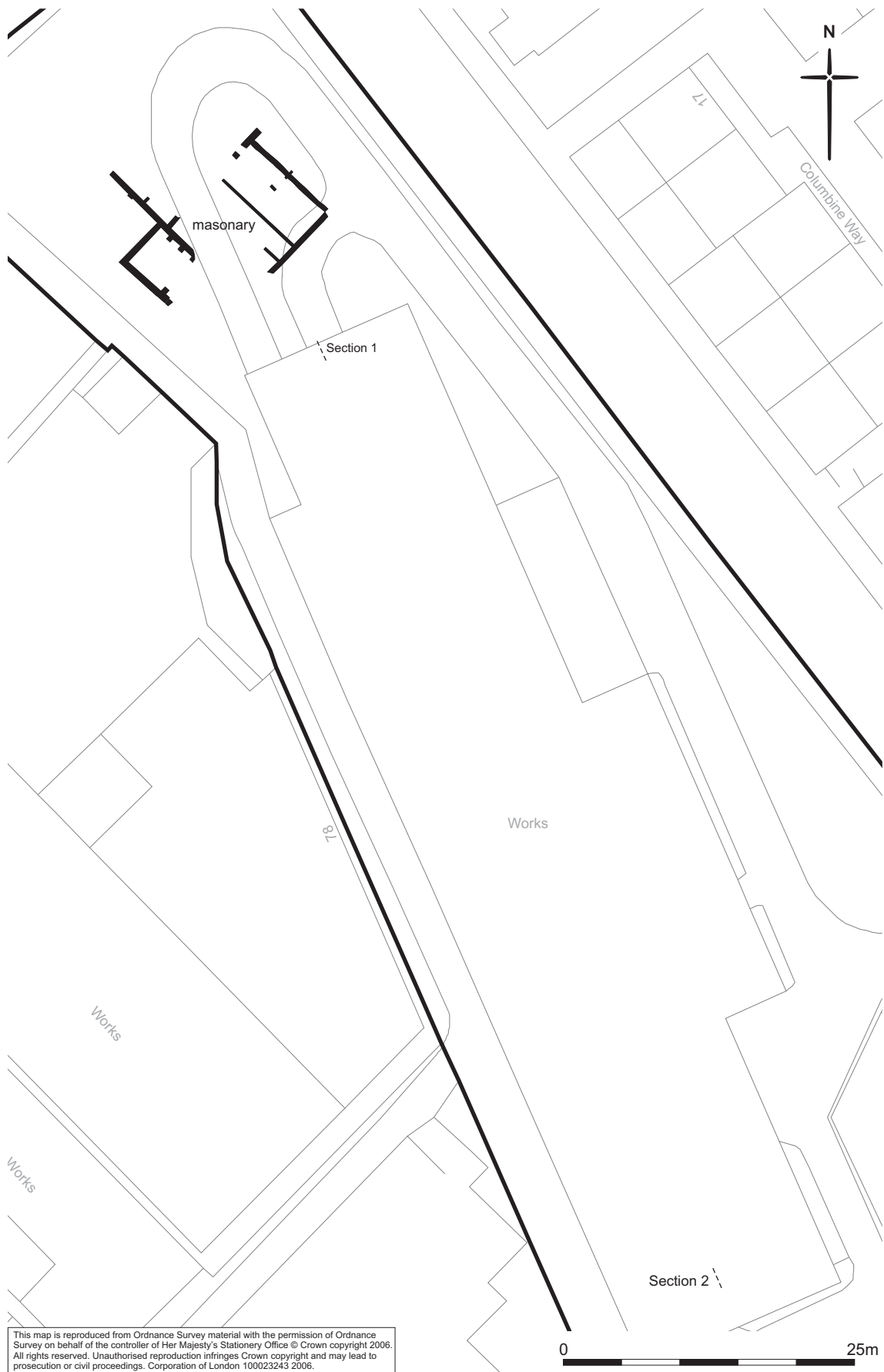


Fig 2 Location of sections

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief was done in accordance with the *Method Statement* (Nielsen, 2006) and the MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual (MoLAS, 1994).

The basement and ground floor slabs, ground beams, vehicle ramp tarmac, and underlying hardcore and makeup layers were removed under MoLAS supervision.

In the north end of the site, outside of the footprint of the building, the overlying topsoil was stripped to reveal the foundations of a pre-1840s building. This was recorded and then demolished under MoLAS supervision. The northern area also contained foundations from a 20th century building. These were removed under MoLAS supervision.

The heights of observations and/or archaeological remains were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum via a traverse to a known level attained from a perimeter site survey.

Where relevant, sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20; numbered contexts were allocated where appropriate.

The site has produced: 1 location plan; 24 context records; 2 1:20 section drawings; 3 1:50 plans.

The site finds and records can be found under the site code VEN 06 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

During the course of monitoring the demolition no archaeological survival was found beneath the footprint of the building. Archaeological deposits had also been truncated beneath the access road running NS along the east of the site, and the two ramps leading into the building at the north end.

Natural deposits of alluvium and chalk were, however, encountered beneath the footprint of the building. The bottom-most deposit was a layer of chalk bedrock, variously encountered at c 7.50m, 8.70m, and 9.38m OD rising from S–N across the site. Above this was a layer of weathered chalk, seen at 8.18m, 9.04m, and 9.78m OD again rising S–N. At the top of the natural sequence was a layer of truncated alluvium, out of which two pieces of undatable worked flint were recovered. In a number of places a thin topsoil horizon survived, again heavily truncated.

3.2.1 *The Masonry*

In total 12 wall segments and two stone steps were found, forming a possible structure with dimensions of 10m NW–SE and at least 15m NE–SW (Fig 3). The centre of the structure had been completely truncated by the vehicle ramp leading to the basement of the police maintenance building.

The earlier sequence of masonry was formed of eleven segments with identical brickwork and mortar: red unfrosted bricks and cream sand/lime mortar. There were three different thickness of wall: 230mm, 350mm, and 450mm representing two stretchers, three stretches, and four stretchers in width. The thickest walls are all located on the perimeter of the building and the thinnest in the interior. The three stretcher 350mm wide wall was located on the eastern side. The heavily truncated remains of similar masonry were seen beneath the modern brick boundary wall on Conington Road directly east of the recorded masonry.

To the west was a square cellar measuring approximately 4m x 4m and 1.36m deep, which contained a complex sequence of dumps. The earliest was dark grey clay-silt with a band of coal dust at its base. This could show that the cellar was used to store coal. Above this was a thick layer of redeposited alluvium containing brick and chalk fragments, slate, and coal. Overlying this was the most interesting dump, a thin layer of rusted iron fragments. This could be related to when the building was used as an armaments works during the Napoleonic Wars. No finds, however, were recovered. The top two layers were two demolition dumps containing mortar, brick fragments, and slate. This sequence suggests the cellar was not abandoned in a single event, but instead was slowly in-filled over a period of time. The upper fills contained 19th century pottery, specifically transfer ware.

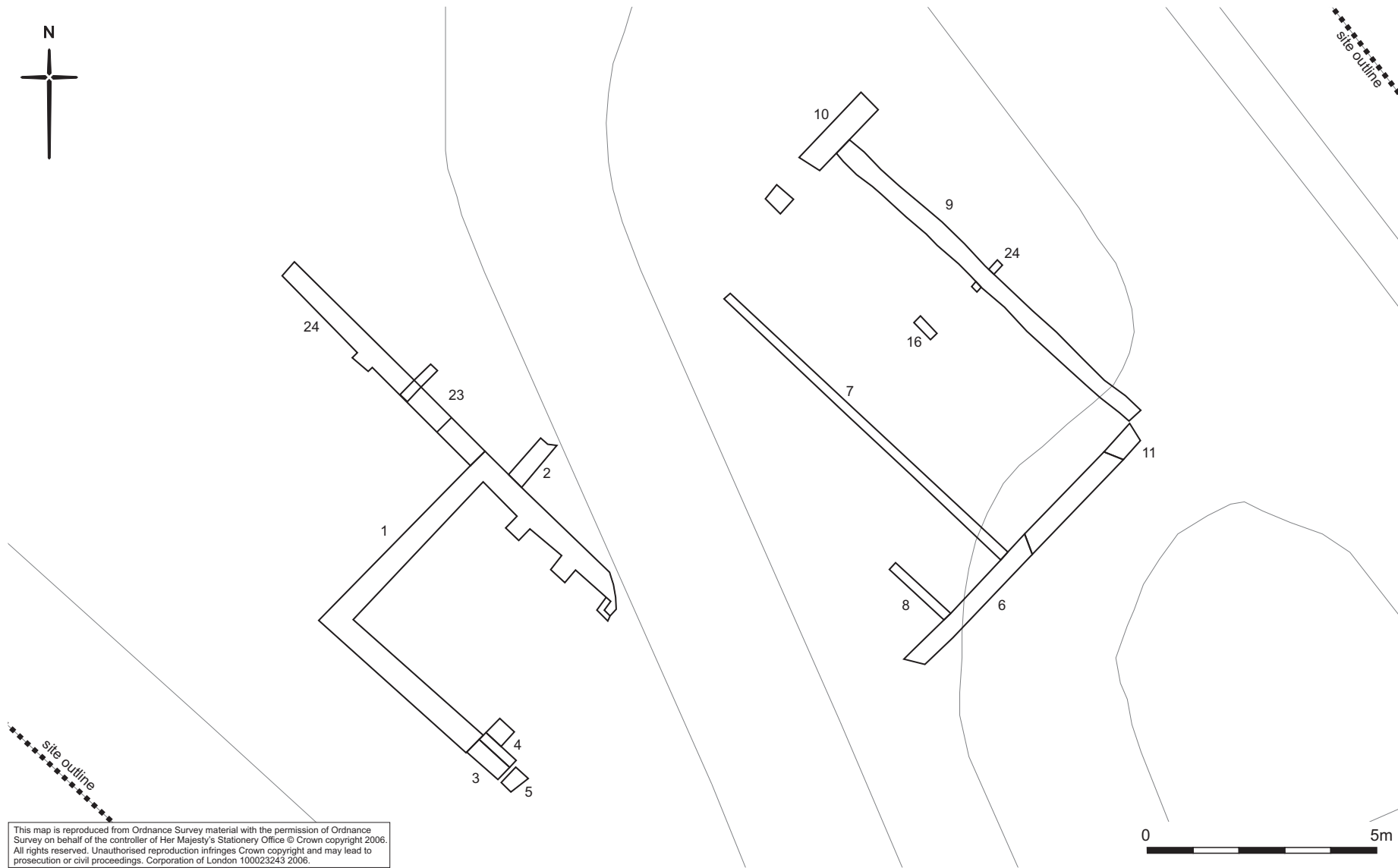
Attached to the western wall of the cellar and continuing to the north was a later wall, constructed with yellow, red, and orange unfrosted bricks and mid brown-grey sand/lime mortar. There was a small area of rebuild around a 1.0m slot in the wall which appears to be a stairway access to another cellar. This rebuild was built of red deeply frosted bricks. This masonry was heavily truncated by the ramp running into the basement of the modern workshop and ground reduction.

The masonry found can be related to the 1894-96 OS map (Fig 6) and London Bomb Damage Map (Fig 7). The earlier structure had been demolished by the time the 1894 map was produced. Yet it is clear from this map that it was originally part of the development of buildings to the NE. The NE–SW walls [6], [10], and [11] (Fig 3) are in alignment with the neighbouring buildings. The three-stretcher 350mm thick wall is the dividing wall between adjacent structures. It is unclear if the cellar is part of the same structure, as there is no relationship between the two segments of masonry.

The later structure is represented by the two stairs on the SW side of the cellar [3] & [4] and the wall running NW–SE from the north side of the cellar [22]. These clearly are part of the building that is seen in the 1894 map. This building was standing until the Second World War, but was then completely destroyed by a direct hit from a V2 rocket (Fig 7).



8



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Fig 3 Masonry

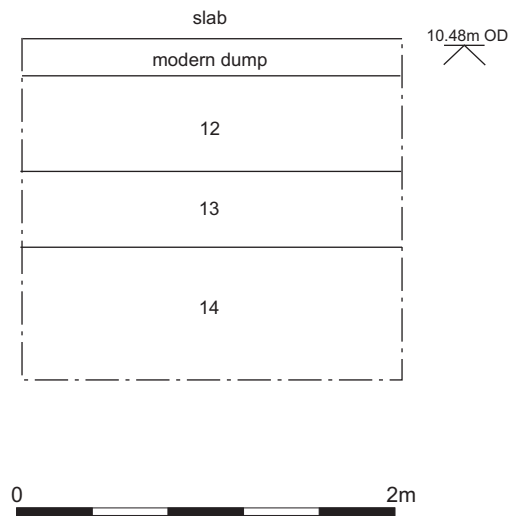


Fig 4 Section 1

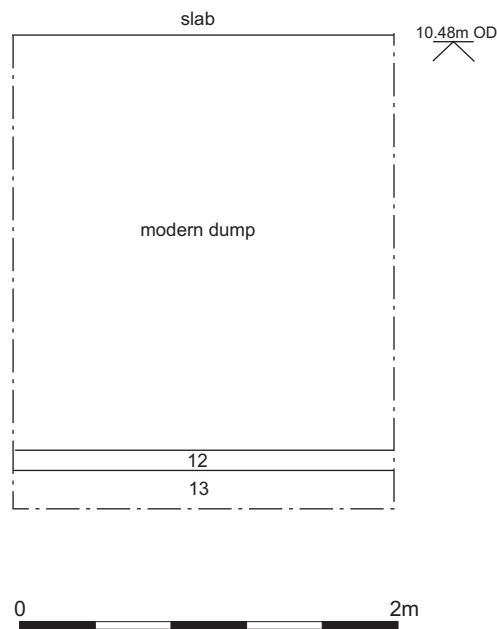


Fig 5 Section 2



Fig 6 Masonry overlain on 1894-96 OS map



Fig 7 London Bomb Damage map

4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Original research aims

- *What was the character of the natural topography?*

Chalk Bedrock was encountered higher than was anticipated, capped by sand and gravel. The chalk rose from SW–NE, along the line of the Ravensbourne valley. The British Geographical Survey indicates chalk outcrops either side of the Ravensbourne, forming a defile in this part of Lewisham.

- *What are the earliest deposits identified?*

A layer of alluvium contained residual undatable worked flint

- *What are the latest deposits identified?*

19th-century topsoil.

- *What can the site tell us about the environment adjacent to the Ravensbourne in the prehistoric and later periods?*

Little can be said about the environment, owing to the heavy truncation on the site.

- *Is there surviving evidence for medieval or post-medieval mills or other industrial activity on the site?*

While there was no evidence for medieval mills (the site is too far from the river), there was evidence for post-medieval industrial activity. The masonry found is likely to relate to the Silk Mills, which on the 1894 OS map is directly south of the site.

4.2 New research aims

None.

4.3 Significance of the data

Whilst the archaeological remains were 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.

The site archive containing original records and finds will be stored in accordance with the terms of the *Method Statement* (MoLAS, 2006) with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the excavation.

In view of the limited potential of the material (Sections 4) and the relatively limited significance of the data (Section 4.3) 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 Conclusions

The watching brief confirmed the presence of post-medieval industrial activity on the site. Residual prehistoric finds were also recovered from the alluvium, though due to heavy truncation no conclusions could be drawn about the prehistoric environment.

7 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following for their contributions and help in producing this report: Bellway Homes (South East) for commissioning this report, and Sloan Demolition for their assistance.

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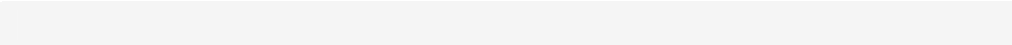
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9 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

9.1 OASIS ID: molas1-20683



Project details

Project name Silk Mills, Conington Road, Lewisham, SE13 7LH

Short description of the project Watching Brief on demolition of police vehicle maintenance building. Most of site heavily truncated by building and access roads and ramps. Two pieces of worked flint recovered from alluvium. Masonry found at north end of site relating to post-medieval industrial works nearby.

Project dates Start: 26-09-2006 End: 12-10-2006

Previous/future work No / No

Any associated project reference codes VEN 06 - Sitecode

Type of project Recording project

Site status Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area

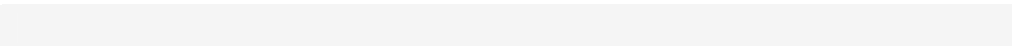
Current Land use Industry and Commerce 1 - Industrial

Monument type SILK MANUFACTURING SITE Post Medieval

Monument type ARMAMENT MANUFACTURING SITE Post Medieval

Investigation type 'Watching Brief'

Prompt Planning condition



Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON LEWISHAM DEPTFORD AND NEWCROSS
Silk Mills, Conington Road, Lewisham

Postcode SE13 7LH

Study area 2000.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 38044 76175 51.4671779541 -0.01240450610050 51 28 01 N
000 00 44 W Point

Height OD Min: 8.18m Max: 9.78m

Project creators

Name of Molas
Organisation

Project originator brief Local Planning Authority (with/without advice from County/District
Archaeologist)

Project originator design MoLAS

Project director/manager Robin Nielsen

Project supervisor Christopher Menary

Type of Developer
sponsor/funding
body

Name of Bellway Homes (South East)
sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive No
Exists?

Physical Archive LAARC
recipient

Digital recipient Archive LAARC

Paper recipient Archive LAARC

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title Silk Mills, Conington Road, Lewisham SE13 7LH

Author(s)/Editor(s) Menary, Christopher

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