

## 1–7 Aylesbury Street London EC1

London Borough of Islington

Watching brief report

July 2016



**1-7 Aylesbury Street  
London  
EC1R 0DR**

Site Code AYL15  
NGR 531685 182236  
OASIS reference molas1-221391


Planning reference P110274  
Condition Number 4

Report on an archaeological watching brief

**Sign-off History:**

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## Summary

*This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by MOLA at 1-7 Aylesbury Street, London EC1R 0DR. The report was commissioned from MOLA by Meritcape Ltd to fulfil a condition attached to the Planning Consent given by Islington Local Authority.*

*In accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2014) a watching brief was carried out on the site between 26th January and 1st June 2015. Two lift pits, 3 secant pile locations and 8 pile caps were machined under archaeological supervision. It was originally intended that an archaeological excavation be carried out in the location of lift pit 1. During initial groundworks it became apparent that a large oil tank was buried below ground in the same location, so the methodology was altered to undertake a watching brief due to lack of archaeological survival.*

*A red brick wall was observed running north-south across the southern part of the site. This presumably relates to the 19th century phase of the site, when a public house with cellars was standing on the site. This was directly over a silty garden soil. This garden soil was also observed in the eastern and northern parts of the site. This probably dates to the Tudor period when the site fell within the gardens of the Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. This was seen between 17.50-16.90m OD.*

*A small area of York stone floor slabs was seen at the western side of the site at 16.90m OD. This was the same floor as that observed during an earlier evaluation on the site and was not excavated due to the specified impact level in this location.*

*Modern disturbance had removed any structural remains dating to the 18th century or earlier.*

*Natural deposits of loose orange gravels were seen at truncated levels between 15.2m OD at the east and 17.3m OD at the north.*

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Site background

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- 1.1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out by MOLA at 1-7 Aylesbury Street ('the site') between 26<sup>th</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015 (see Fig 1). This document is the Report on that work.
- 1.1.2 A desk top Archaeological Assessment (HEA) was previously prepared which covers the whole area of the site (MOLA 2007). 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).
- 1.1.3 A previous field evaluation (unrelated to this project) carried out by the Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA) MOLA in 1990 revealed 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>- century foundations and basements. An evaluation report was written on the results (DGLA 1990).
- 1.1.4 Further to the condition on Planning Consent a Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by MOLA (2014). All archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with that WSI.
- 1.1.5 It was originally intended to have two areas of full excavation in the location of proposed lift pits (Fig 2, MOLA 2014). However the northwestern of these (Area 2) was moved to the east (see Fig 24) and was subject to a watching brief. The excavation area to the east (Area 2) was in the location of a large buried oil tank, which had removed all potential archaeological deposits, so this was also subject to a watching brief (see 4.1).

## 1.2 Planning background

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- 1.2.1 The legislative and planning framework in which the watching brief took place was fully set out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* which formed the project design for the evaluation (see Section 1.2, MOLA 2014).
- 1.2.2 The watching brief was carried out to fulfil a condition attached to the Planning Consent given by Islington Local Authority (Consent reference P110274; Condition number 4).

## 1.3 Scope of the watching brief

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- 1.3.1 An archaeological watching brief is normally a limited fieldwork exercise. It is not the same as full excavation, though individual features may be fully excavated.
- 1.3.2 In the location of two lift pits it was proposed that the limits of the lift pits be archaeologically excavated down to medieval levels to provide a sample of deposits affected by the pile clusters. This controlled excavation was to be triggered by the presence of pre-18<sup>th</sup> century archaeological remains. In the event, during the preparatory ground works for this excavation it transpired that a large oil tank was below the ground surface in this location, which had removed all archaeological remains from the area. A watching brief methodology was instigated to record the surviving deposits in section. Further details are provided in section 4 (and also see Fig 4).
- 1.3.3 The watching brief was carried out within the terms of the relevant Standard for watching brief specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA, 2014).

- 1.3.4 All work has been undertaken within the research priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology, 2002*.
- 1.3.5 All work was undertaken within research aims and objectives established in the Written Scheme of Investigation for the watching brief (Section 2.2).

## 2 Topographical and historical background

- 2.1.1 A detailed description of the geology, archaeology and history of the site was provided in the earlier archaeological desk-based assessment (MOLA 2007). A brief resume is provided here:
- 2.1.2 The site is located on well-drained gravels close to the River Fleet and River Thames and would have been a suitable location for early settlement and agriculture. Despite this, little evidence of prehistoric activity has been found in the area despite numerous archaeological investigations in the past. No prehistoric activity has been recorded in the site vicinity, but pottery from Sans Walk, on the site of the nunnery of St Mary, c 180m to the west of the site indicates Iron Age activity in the area.
- 2.1.3 The site lay within the hinterland to the north of the Roman town and was probably in a rural landscape characterised by dispersed rural settlement. Ditches dated to the Roman period have been found 200m south of the site at 1–7 Albion Place. The significance of the discovery is uncertain, but may indicate an area of settlement in the immediate vicinity of the site.
- 2.1.4 Early medieval pits were recorded only 50m south of the site, at 42–47 St Johns Square, with the pottery sherds dating the site to AD 450–550. Finds were representative of a domestic settlement, or farmstead, with small scale industrial activities taking place. Two burials were also recorded 340m south of the site. The settlement would have been located close to the River Fleet and possibly represents early penetration of settlers inland. It is possible that associated features exist in the vicinity of the site.
- 2.1.5 Throughout most of this period, until the Dissolution in 1540, the site was located within the inner precinct of the Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (or Knights Hospitaller). The site was located in the north-east corner of the inner precinct, beside the precinct wall and immediately south of the ‘nun’s way’ (later Aylesbury Street), which led from St Johns Street to the nunnery of St Mary *de fonte* on the opposite side of Clerkenwell Green. Previous archaeological investigations in the immediate vicinity of the site suggest that this area was used as a garden and orchard, although the possibility of outbuildings associated with the Priory cannot be ruled out. The exact line of the inner precinct has not been established and may potentially cross the northern edge of the proposed development site.
- 2.1.6 During the post-medieval period the site was within the formal garden and orchard belonging to the Earl of Aylesbury’s estate. Historic maps dating from 1658 show a terrace of domestic properties fronting onto Aylesbury Street in the northern part of the site up until the 20th century, whilst the southern half of the site fell within the gardens and backyards to the rear of these properties. The site was developed during the 17th century, being occupied by six tenements. There is potential for further remains of 18th-century cellars, as observed in the two archaeological trenches dug on the site in 1990, along with footings of buildings. In the area of the backyards/gardens, remains of rubbish pits, cess pits, wells, drains, garden features and possibly small-scale industrial activity may be expected.
- 2.1.7 Little change to the site is shown on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map other than infilling in the backyards with rear extensions. By 1914 a public house had been built in the centre of the site which was replaced by two large warehouse-type buildings which are still standing on site.

## 2.2 Previous archaeological investigation on the site

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- 2.2.1 In 1990, the Department of Greater London Archaeology excavated two trial trenches on the site, as part of a wider evaluation at 8–15 Aylesbury Street/159–173 St John Street (site code ASS90). This comprised eight trenches, two of which were located within the site. The evaluation revealed 18th- and 19th-century cellars and basements within the footprint of the trial trenches.
- 2.2.2 The natural geology on the site is river terrace gravels, such deposits have been encountered at c 15.75m OD in trenches immediately outside the site. Current ground level is at c 19m OD to 19.5m OD.
- 2.2.3 Trench 5 of the evaluation was located in the north-eastern part of the site. It was only excavated to below the floor of an 18th-century basement, but soil deposits were observed below this, and were believed to represent a medieval horticultural horizon. The outer precinct wall was not observed in this trench and possibly lies further north under Aylesbury Street.
- 2.2.4 Trench 6, located in the western part of the site, recorded another 18th-century basement; no further investigation took place below this level.
- 2.2.5 It was observed during the evaluation that truncation by modern buildings was minimal due to the presence of 2–3m of post-medieval ground-raising. The presence of homogenous brown soils in the trenches from those trenches immediately east and south of (outside) the site suggest this area was probably part of the Priory garden. The evaluation revealed garden soils and cut features including two pits and a ditch immediately south of the site, which suggested that this part of the inner precinct probably remained open land possibly a yard and later a garden. High quality masonry rubble from the trenches adjacent to the site was thought to derive from a nearby building.



## 3 The watching brief

### 3.1 Field methodology

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- 3.1.1 The slab was broken out and cleared by contractors under MOLA supervision. Pile caps and other areas were excavated by machine by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MOLA. Generally the pile caps were reduced by a depth of 1.4m below current ground level, to a level of 17.80m OD, with the larger lift pit areas reduced to 15.20m OD. On the northern perimeter three linear pile caps were combined to form a single trench, reduced to 17.20m OD (see Fig 2).
- 3.1.2 Archaeological excavation of features was carried out in accordance with the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (MOLA 2014).
- 3.1.3 Trench locations were plotted on plans provided by the client using an 'offset methodology' and subsequently tied to the OS grid by MOLA Geomatics.

### 3.2 Recording methodology

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- 3.2.1 A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was carried out in accordance with the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (MOLA 2014).

### 3.3 Site archive

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Number of trench record sheets	1
Number of overall location plans	35
Number of Plan sheets	1
Number of Sections	8
Number of note book entries and notes	11

## 4 Results of the watching brief

For area and/or trench locations see Figs 2, 3, 4.

For area and/or trench feature sections and photographs see Figs 5-14.

### 4.1 Lift Pit 1 (Area 2 on Fig 4)

Location	Central part of eastern side of site
Dimensions	8m by 4m by 4m deep
Modern ground level/top of slab	19.2m OD
Base of modern fill/slab/turf	16.2m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	1m
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	15.2m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	15.2m OD
Level of base of trench	15.2m OD

4.1.1 It was initially proposed that this lift pit should be excavated under archaeological conditions. However upon the commencement of groundworks it became apparent that a large modern oil tank was in situ below the slab and this had effectively truncated any surviving archaeological deposits (Fig 4). A watching brief methodology was adopted to ensure a full recording of these deposits during the removal of the oil tank. The excavation extended down to 15.2m OD in order to enable the removal of the oil tank.

4.1.2 The sections contained 1-1.5m depth of modern piling mat, above a further 1.5m of modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) made ground above approximately 1m depth of a black silty deposit containing 18th century brick fragments (Fig 5). This was interpreted as the post-medieval garden soil seen elsewhere across the site. Natural orange gravel was seen at the bottom of the section, at 15.2m OD (Figs 5 and 6). No structures or features of archaeological note were observed.

### 4.2 Lift Pit 2

Location	Northeastern corner of site
Dimensions	8m by 4m by 1.4m deep
Modern ground level/top of slab	19.2m OD
Base of modern fill/slab/turf	17.9m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	None seen
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	17.9m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	N/A
Level of base of trench	17.9m OD

4.2.1 The excavation of this lift pit did not extend down to natural deposits as the finished level for its base was specified at 17.9m OD and there was no obstruction as had been seen in lift pit 1. Instead the sections were seen to contain disturbed ground on all sides, with modern rubble directly below the piling mat to a depth of 17.9m OD

(Fig 7). The post-medieval garden soil seen elsewhere across the site was not observed at this level. The eastern side of the site appeared to have seen more extensive disturbance than elsewhere, presumably associated with the construction of a light well and other structural elements along the eastern party wall.

### 4.3 Pile caps 1-3

Location	Southern side of site
Dimensions	2.7m by 2.7m by 1.4m deep
Modern ground level/top of slab	19.2m OD
Base of modern fill/slab/turf	17.8m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	N/A
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	17.8m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	N/A
Level of base of trench	17.8m OD

- 4.3.1 These pile caps were generally triangular in shape, with a square cap towards the southeastern corner of the site (Fig 2). They all had 0.40m depth of a loose modern make-up of brick rubble below the ground surface, above a deposit of dark brown silt, also containing brick rubble and other construction debris. This was not earlier than 19<sup>th</sup> century in date and presumably related to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century phase of activity during which the site was remodelled to include the addition of a public house with a cellar.
- 4.3.2 During the general ground reduction to enable the installation of the piling mat a wall of red brick was observed in this area (Fig 2, Fig 13, Fig 14). The top of the wall was seen as high as 18.80m OD, and it was seen for a depth of 1.3m. It ran north-south and a total length of 6m was observed; truncated at either end. The base of the wall sat directly on top of a black silty deposit seen elsewhere across the site and interpreted as a garden soil dating from the late medieval or early post-medieval period.
- 4.3.3 The backfill surrounding the wall contained 19<sup>th</sup> century brick fragments and other rubble, and presumably relates to the demolition of the building of which the wall formed part.

### 4.4 Pile caps 4-6, 10-14

Location	East and West sides of site, centre of site
Dimensions	2.7-3.3m by 2.7-3.3m by 1.4m deep
Modern ground level/top of slab	19.2m OD
Base of modern fill/slab/turf	17.8m OD
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	N/A
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	17.8m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	N/A
Level of base of trench	17.8m OD

- 4.4.1 Similarly, these pile caps were triangular in shape where adjacent to the LoE, with square caps towards the centre of the site (Fig 2). They also generally had 0.40m depth of a loose modern make-up of brick rubble below the ground surface, above a

deposit of dark brown silt, also containing brick rubble and other construction debris (Figs 11, 12). This was not earlier than 19<sup>th</sup> century in date and presumably related to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century phase of activity during which the site was remodelled to include the addition of a public house with a cellar.

- 4.4.2 During the pile probing phase of groundwork, the pile cap furthest north along this western side of the site (number 6) was excavated down to a York stone floor, which was observed at 16.9m OD. The floor slabs, although hard, were not mortared together and as such it was decided that the piling would be able to extend through this floor without the need for it to be excavated. This floor is very likely to have been the basement floor observed during the 1990 evaluation on the site, seen at 16.85m OD in trench 5 (DGLA 1990). Between the slabs it was possible to see that they had been laid directly onto a dark silty deposit, which appeared to be a garden soil, interpreted as the soil within the Priory of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. No finds were recovered from this soil, as it was not further excavated.

## 4.5 Secant pile locations 7-9

Location	Along the northern side of site
Dimensions	Combined to length of 15m by 2m by 2.2m deep
Modern ground level/top of slab	19.2m OD
Base of modern fill/slab/turf	18.2m OD (although variable)
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	1m
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	17.2m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	17.3m OD
Level of base of trench	17.2m OD

- 4.5.1 These linear trenches were combined by the contractors to form a single trench running along the northern site boundary. In common with the other interventions observed on the site there was a total depth of 1m of modern disturbance and rubble deposits below the ground surface.
- 4.5.2 At the western end of the trench a brick vaulted service duct was seen, containing several disused iron drains and other pipes, presumably originally leading the services from the site to the mains below the road directly to the north. To the east of this and 1m below ground surface (ie 18.2m OD) was a loosely laid possible floor of Victorian bricks. This probably relates to the series of terraced buildings on the site as shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1871 and 1916. Below this was a silty soil which may represent the garden soil seen elsewhere on the site. This was above a loose orange gravel, which may be the natural strata, surviving to a higher level below the street frontage.
- 4.5.3 At the east of this section was a deposit of loose mortar silt with fragments of chalk within it (Fig 10). This appeared to be medieval demolition material, and although it was not in situ as it directly overlay a post-medieval brick footing, it does indicate that there were medieval buildings in the vicinity which had been demolished and the rubble distributed across the general area.

## 5 Archaeological potential

### 5.1 Answering original research aims

- 5.1.1 *What is the nature and level of natural topography on this area of the site?*  
Loose orange gravel was observed at truncated levels between 15.2m OD at the eastern side of site and to 17.3m OD against the northern street frontage.
- 5.1.2 *What are the earliest deposits identified?*  
The earliest deposits identified were the black silty garden soil seen directly over the natural in the eastern and northern sides of the site, and below modern disturbance elsewhere. The garden soil probably dates from the early post-medieval (or Tudor) period, when the site fell within the garden of the Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem.
- 5.1.3 *Is there any evidence of Iron Age/Roman activity on the site?*  
No evidence of the Iron Age or Roman periods was seen during the watching brief.
- 5.1.4 *Is there any evidence of early medieval activity on the site?*  
There was no evidence of early medieval activity seen during the watching brief.
- 5.1.5 *Is there evidence associated with the garden and orchard of the Priory of St John of Jerusalem, as the site is located in the north-east corner of the inner precinct?*  
A silty garden soil was seen in several areas across the site, although no dating evidence was recovered from within it, so it is unclear whether it relates to the medieval or later Tudor Priory gardens.
- 5.1.6 *Is there evidence of any outbuildings relating to the Priory?*  
There was no evidence of Priory outbuildings seen during the watching brief.
- 5.1.7 *Is there any evidence for the inner precinct wall of the Priory on the site, the exact line of which has not been established?*  
There was no evidence of the inner precinct wall, or indeed any structural remains associated with the Priory seen during the watching brief. An area of redeposited loose mortar silt with fragments of chalk within it appeared to be medieval demolition material, although as this was not in situ it is not possible to relate it to a medieval building with any certainty.
- 5.1.8 *What evidence is there for features associated with the formal garden and orchard belonging to the Earl of Aylesbury?*  
No evidence of features associated with the formal gardens were observed, although the garden soil seen could have dated to this period of activity on the site (17<sup>th</sup> century).
- 5.1.9 *What evidence is there for remains of domestic properties shown on 17th-century maps of the area?*  
There was no evidence of these 17<sup>th</sup> century domestic properties or contemporary

activity seen during the watching brief.

5.1.10 *Is there further evidence of 18th-century structures on the site?*

The only evidence recovered for 18<sup>th</sup> century structures was a small area of York stone flooring, seen in pile cap 6. This was at the same level as the cellar floor seen during the 1990 evaluation, also assumed to be an 18<sup>th</sup> cellar floor. This floor was not further excavated during this phase of works. It was set directly over a black silty garden soil, unfortunately undated.

5.1.11 *What are the latest deposits identified?*

There were extensive deposits of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century demolition rubble seen across the site.

5.1.12 *What is the extent of modern disturbance?*

Modern disturbance primarily consisted of the demolition rubble deposits seen across the site up to 1.5m deep, the deposition of which had presumably included the demolition of any brick cellar walls below ground level. In other areas 20<sup>th</sup> century drains and other engineering aspects of the demolished building has disturbed to a deeper extent, in particular the oil tank, which had effectively removed all archaeological deposits from a reasonably large area at the eastern side of the site.

## 5.2 Answering new research aims

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5.2.1 The relative dearth of archaeological remains seen during the watching brief indicates that further research aims are not necessary for this site.

## 5.3 Significance of the data

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5.3.1 Whilst the archaeological remains observed during the watching brief are of some limited local significance there is nothing to suggest that they are of regional or national importance. Neither were there any artefacts recovered, reducing the significance of the site further.

## 6 Publication and archiving

- 6.1.1 The results of the watching brief 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.
- 6.1.2 The site archive containing the original records will be stored in accordance with the terms of the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (MOLA 2014) with the Museum of London Archaeological Archive within 12 months of the end of the watching brief.
- 6.1.3 In view of the limited potential of the material (Section 5)) and the relatively limited significance of the data (Section 5.3) 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*.

## 7 Acknowledgements

- 7.1.1 The author would like to thank the site team from Meritcape, in particular Jamie who helped to organise the monitoring visits and arranged for the MOLA team to observe the groundworks. We would also like to thank Davood Kiani of Meritcape for commissioning this report and for his assistance during the site works. Jessica Bryan and Catherine Godsiffe of MOLA helped to undertake the watching brief, including Jessica attending the site over a weekend on one occasion.



## 8 Bibliography

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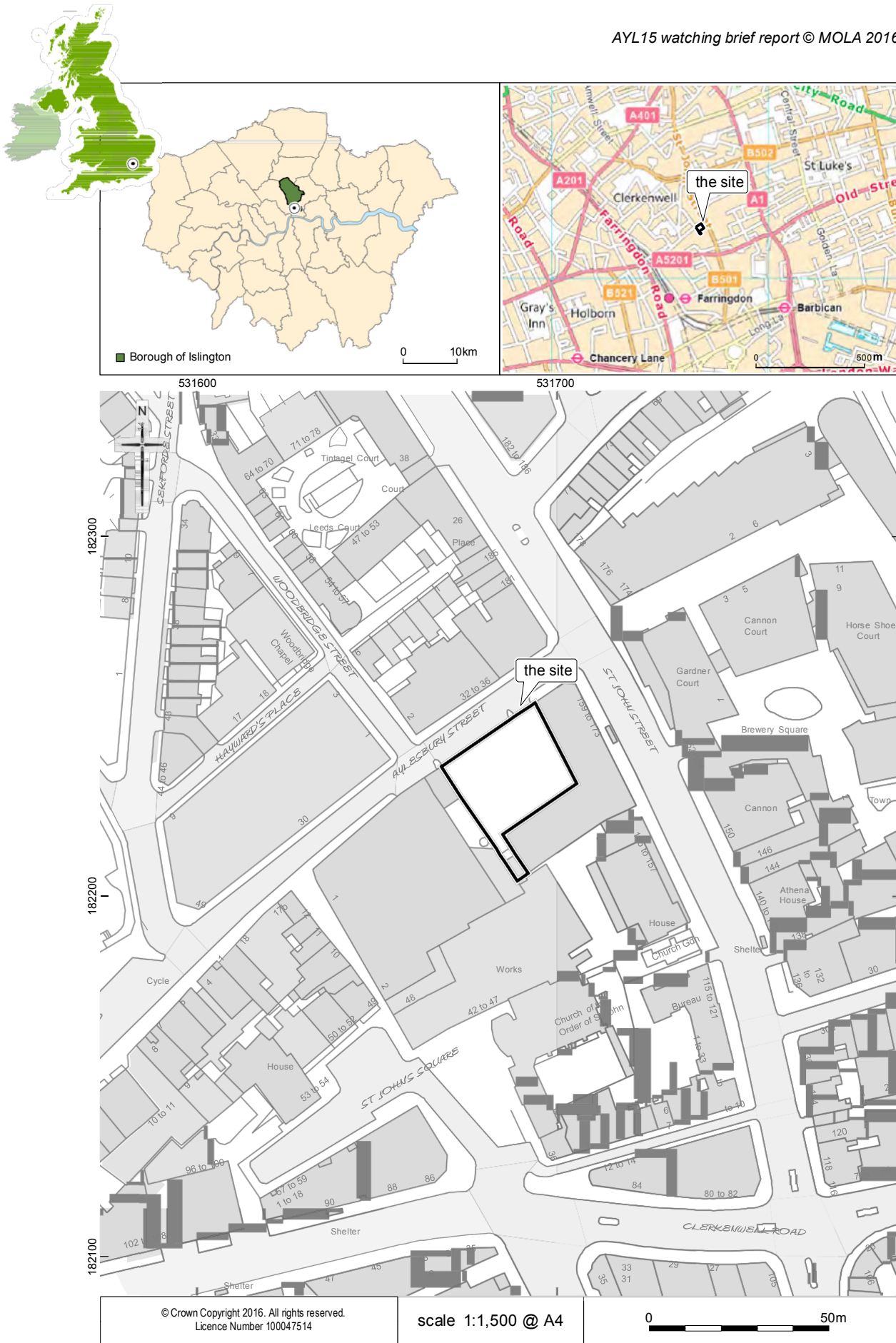


Fig 1 Site location

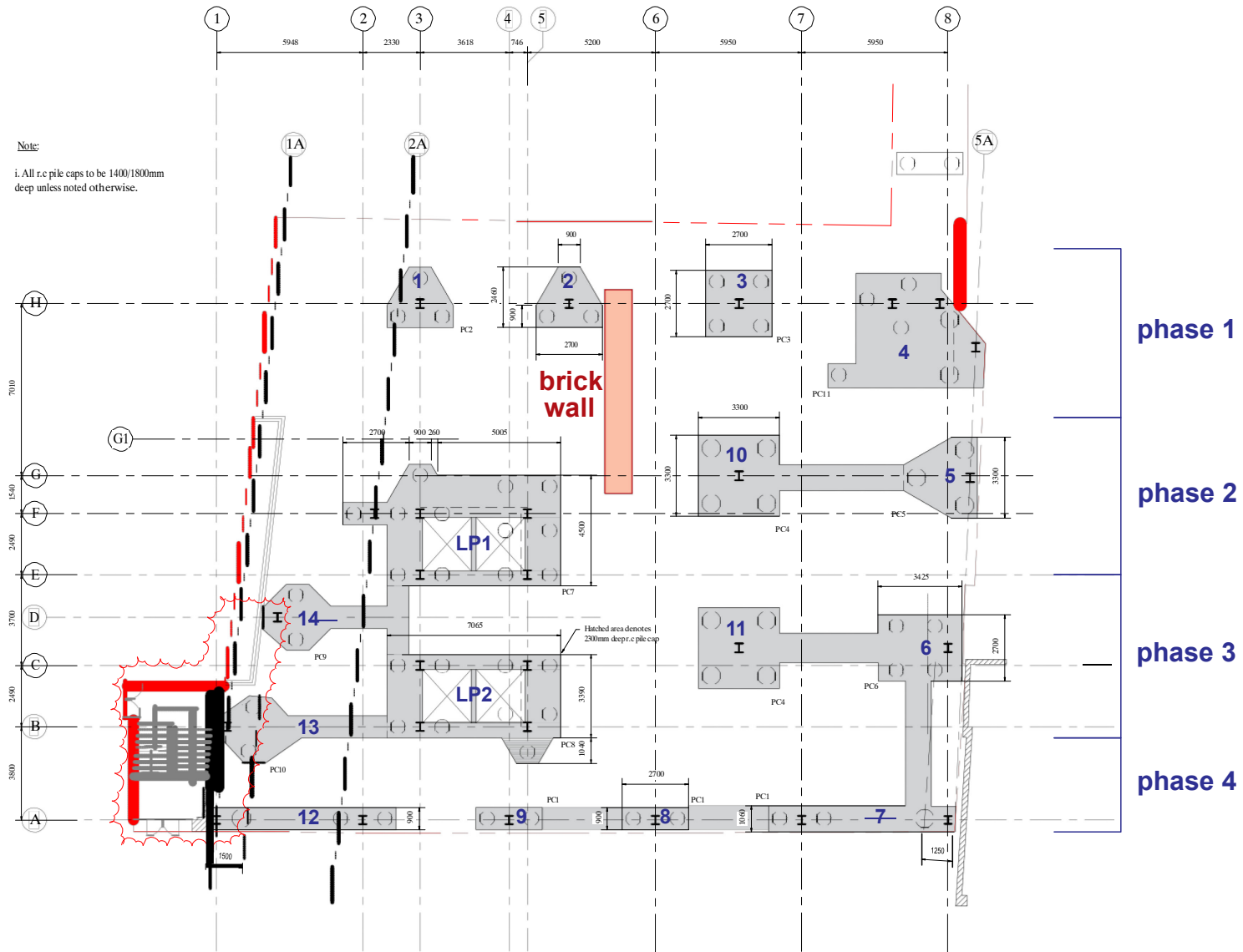


Fig 2 Areas covered by watching brief, showing location of brick wall

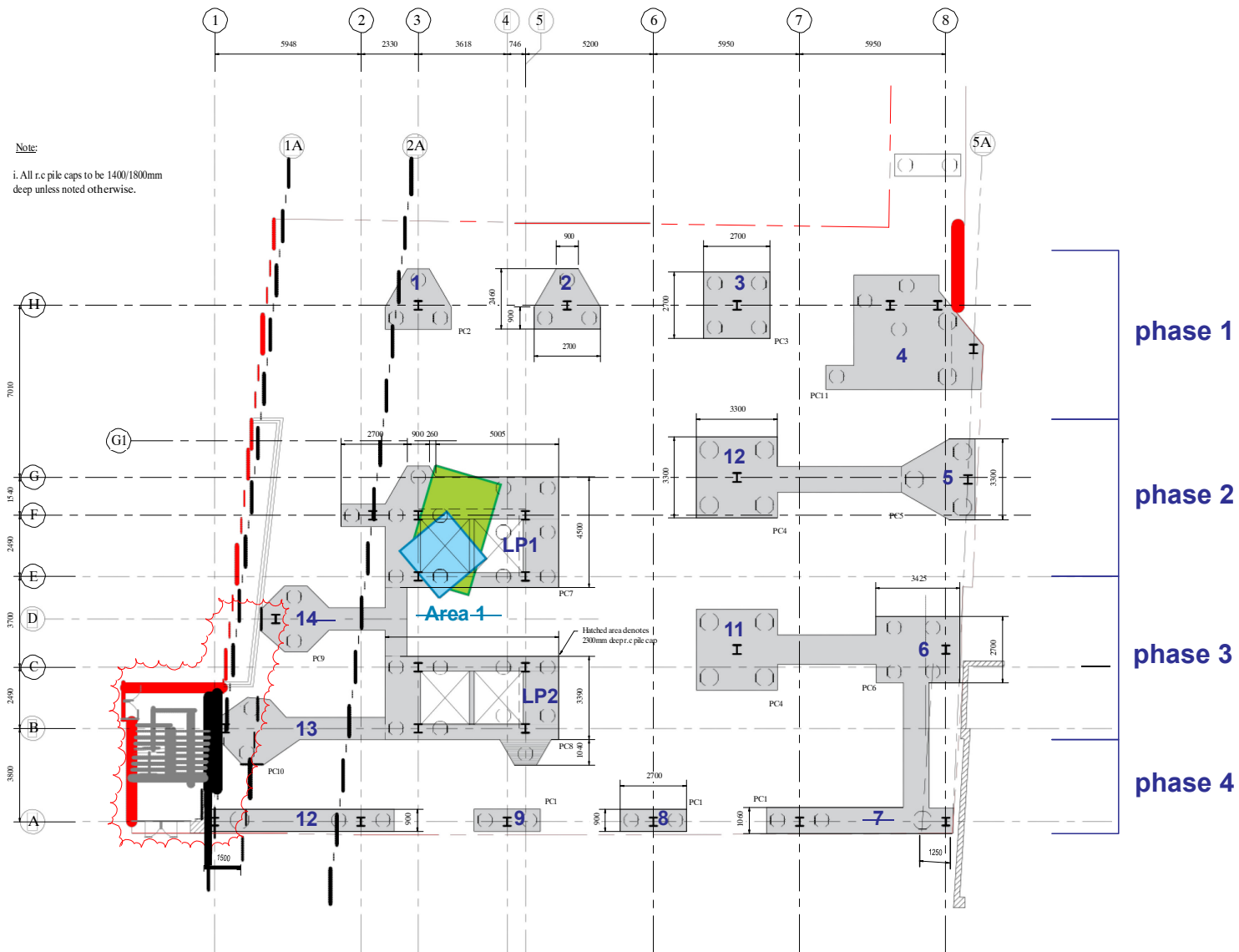


Fig 4 Site plan showing location of lift pit 1, proposed archaeological trench and oil tank

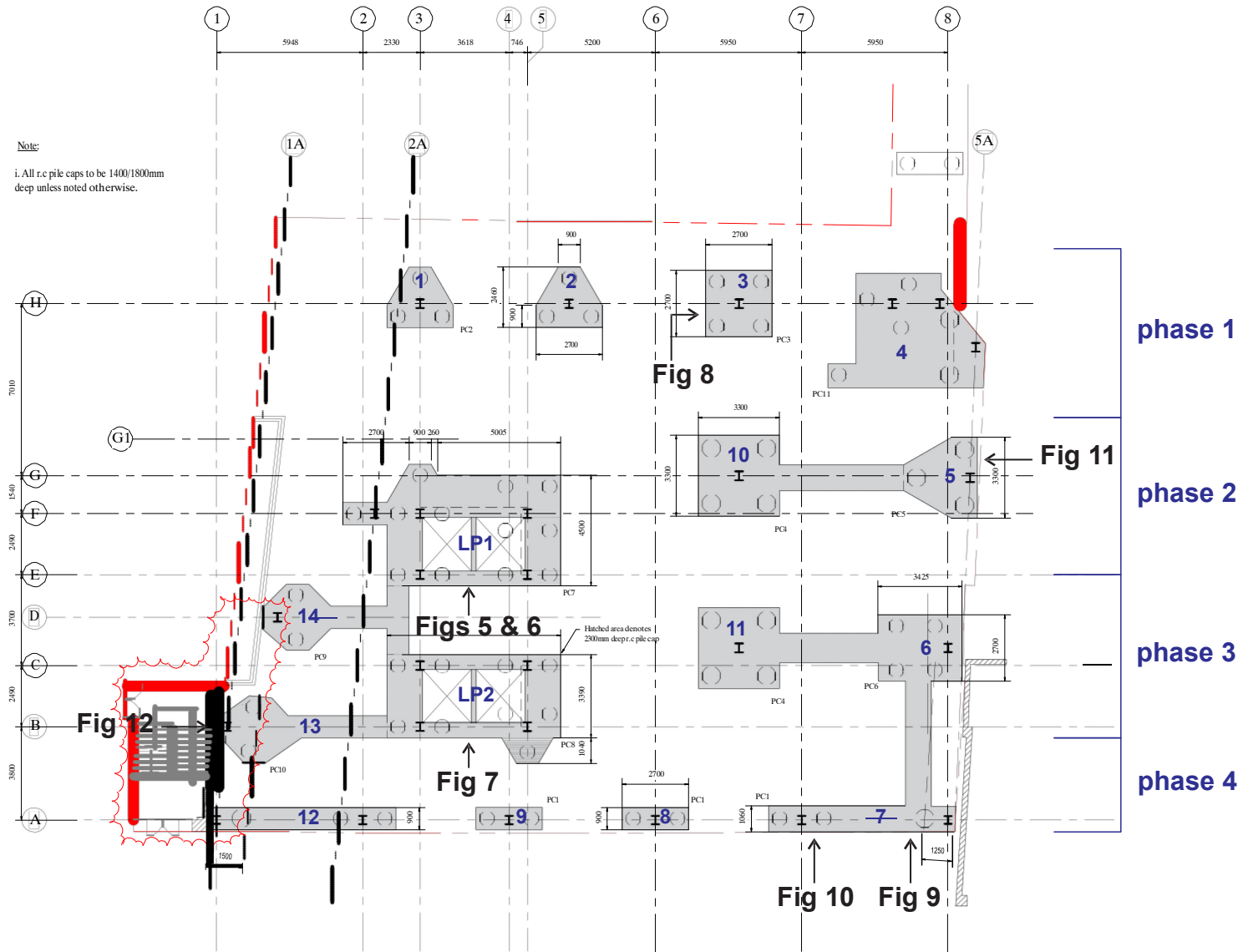


Fig 3 Site plan, showing location and direction of photographs and sections

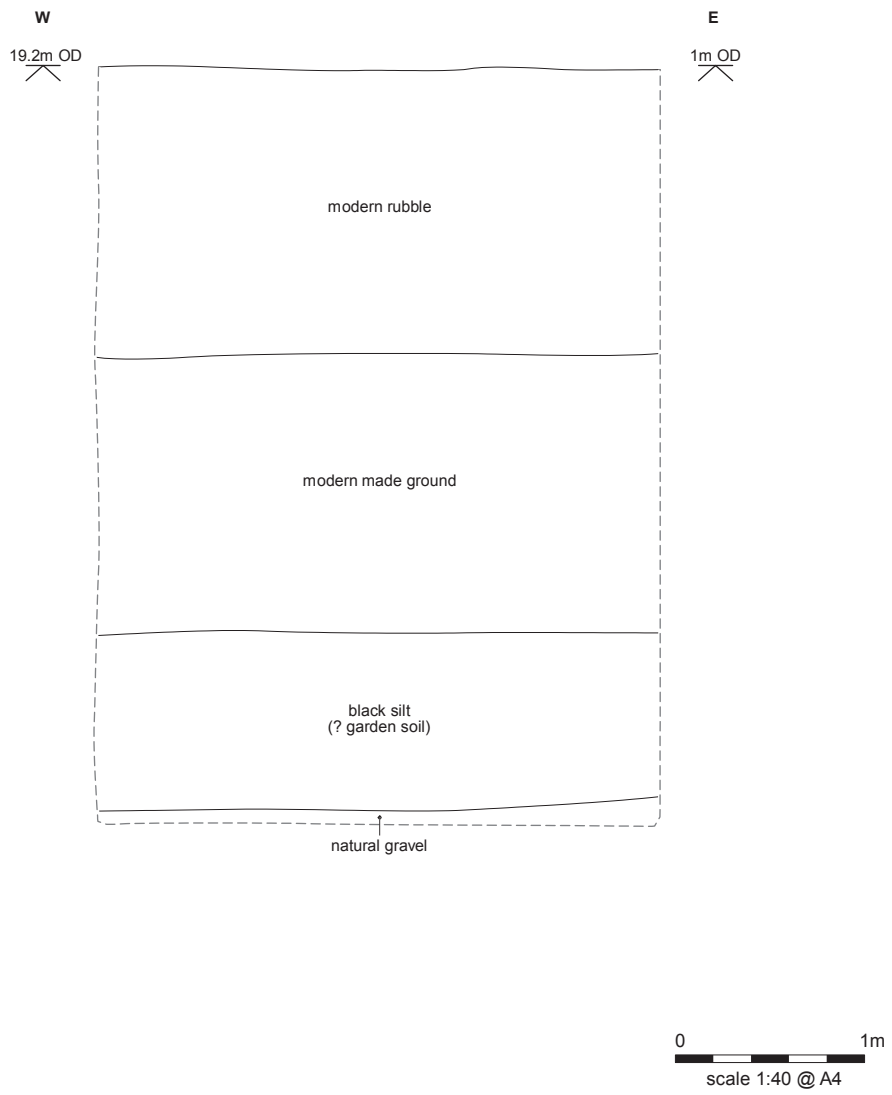


Fig 5 South facing section of lift pit 1



Fig 6 Photograph during machining of lift pit 1, view to northwest



Fig 7 Photograph of north facing section of lift pit 2, view to north



Fig 8 Photograph of east-facing section of pile cap 3, view to west



Fig 9 Photograph showing western end of south-facing section in trench along northern street frontage (secant pile trench 7), view to south





Fig 10 Photograph showing eastern end of south facing section in trench along northern street frontage (secant pile trench 9), view to south



Fig 11 Photograph showing typical pile cap at west of site (pile cap 5), view to east



Fig 12 Photograph showing typical pile cap at east side of site (pile cap 13), view to west



Fig 13 Brick wall running north-south across southern part of the site, view to northwest



Fig 14 Brick wall running north-south across southern part of the site, view to north

## 9 OASIS archaeological report form

**OASIS ID: molas1-221391**

### **Project details**

Project name	1-7 Aylesbury Street
Short description of the project	watching brief on groundworks in advance of redevelopment
Project dates	Start: 26-01-2015 End: 01-06-2015
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	BRICK WALL Post Medieval
Monument type	GARDEN SOIL Medieval
Significant Finds	N/A None
Significant Finds	N/A None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

### **Project location**

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON ISLINGTON FINSBURY 1-7 Aylesbury Street
Postcode	EC1R 0DR
Study area	300 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 531685 182236 50.942505207602 0.180458574474 50 56 33 N 000 10 49 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 15.2m Max: 17.3m

### **Project creators**

Name of Organisation	MOLA
Project brief originator	MOLA
Project design originator	MOLA

Project director/manager	Derek Seeley
Project supervisor	Sadie Watson
Type of sponsor/funding body	Commercial developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Meritcape

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### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Contents	"Survey"
Digital Media available	"Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic","Survey"
Paper Media available	"Diary","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section"

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### Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	1-7 Aylesbury Street,London EC1R 0DR, An archaeological watching brief report
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Watson, S
Date	2015
Issuer or publisher	MOLA
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Description	A4 report, bound loosely. Includes colour photographs.

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