

EAGLE HOUSE
159–189 City Road
EC2

London Borough of Hackney

An archaeological watching brief report

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MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Service

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Site Code: EGA07
National Grid Reference: 532070 182080

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Summary (non-technical)

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief on geotechnical pits, carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service on the site of Eagle House, 159–189 City Road, London EC2. The report was commissioned from MoLAS by McCabe Builders UK.

Following the recommendations of an Environment impact assessment, three test pits and six window samples were monitored on the site.

The results of the watching brief have shown there is extensive truncation around the perimeter of the site car park. This is because of the construction of the existing building to the west and the former cellars of the 19th-century street front properties on the other three sides. Other areas of site showed evidence of truncation down to c 2m below ground surface, with possible alluvial deposits surviving underneath.

In the light of revised understanding of the archaeological potential of the site the report concludes the impact of the proposed redevelopment is low as no deposits or finds of archaeological significance were exposed during the watching brief.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Eagle House, hereafter called ‘the site’. It is located at 158–189 City Road and bounded to the south by City Road, to the west by Westland Place, to the east by Britannia Walk and to the north by Ebenezer Street. The Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference for the centre of site is 532070 182080. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is 17.5m OD. The site code is EGA 07.

An *Environmental Impact Assessment* (URS Corp, 2005) was previously prepared, which covers the whole area of the site. This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, and the initial interpretation of its archaeological potential.

An archaeological watching brief was subsequently carried out on three test pits within the car park that forms the eastern half of the site on the 4th June 2007. The result of these test pits are supplemented with the results of 6 window samples that were recorded on site on the 4th July 2007.

1.2 The planning and legislative framework

The Planning and legislative background to the site has been adequately summarised in the *Environmental Impact Assessment* (URS Corp, 2005).

1.3 Planning background

The watching brief was carried out on geotechnical pits in advance of planned archaeological evaluation, which was required as a condition of planning consent.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by McCabe Builders UK 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.

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

1.5 Aims and objectives

- What is the nature and level of natural topography?
- What are the earliest deposits identified?
- What are the latest deposits identified?
- Was there any Roman quarrying on the site?
- Is there any evidence for medieval agricultural activity?
- Is a post-medieval dump horizon present on the site?
- How much disturbance is there from the 19th-century buildings on the site?

2 Topographical and historical background

A detailed description of the geology, archaeology and history of the site was provided in the earlier archaeology section (MoLAS 2005) of the *Environmental Impact Assessment* (URS Corp, 2005). A résumé is provided here.

There has only been a limited amount of archaeological investigation along this part of City Road on which to base the following prediction of potential archaeological remains. The majority of previous fieldwork sites having been 300–400m or more from the current site.

2.1 Topography

In the area of the site the drift geology consists of Hackney Gravels, which are often but not always capped by brickearth.

2.2 Prehistoric

Few prehistoric artefacts have been found in the general area.

2.3 Roman

The site lies to the north of the city of Londinium and was reputed to be a semi-marshy, and perhaps unsuitable for settlement. To date, Roman finds in the vicinity of the site have been confined to the line of Old Street, with none closer than 250–300m from the present site. The area may also have been used for the quarrying of brickearth for firing into brick and tile in the Roman period.

2.4 Medieval

There is no archaeological evidence for occupation of this area during the medieval period.

2.5 Post-medieval

Historic maps show the site was surrounded by fields until the 19th century. By 1813, a frontage of buildings had been established along each of the streets defining the boundaries of the site. The site had become more densely packed with commercial and residential properties by 1872, and a public house had been established at the junction of City Road and Britannia Street.

The present building was constructed in the 1930s and underwent major refurbishment in the 1970s. The 19th-century buildings to the east of Eagle House were still standing until they were damaged beyond repair as a result of bombing during the Second World War.

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

Three test pits and six window samples were excavated within the car park.

The test pits and window samples were excavated by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS.

The test pits were excavated by JCB machine and the window samples involved the excavation by hand of a 0.20m by 0.20m pit to approximately 1m deep, followed by mechanical augering to *c* 3.2m (unless obstructed).

The locations of the test pits and window samples were recorded by MoLAS and plotted onto the Ordnance Survey 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).

The site has produced: 1 trench location plan and 9 trench record sheets. No finds were recovered from the site.

The site finds and records can be found under the site code EGA 07 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

For locations see Fig 2.

Test pit 1

Test pit 1 measured 5m by 5m and was 3.1m deep. It was located on the north-east corner of the car park, adjacent to Britannia Walk. The pit was filled entirely with loose rubble to a depth of 3.1m. Although no walls were encountered the lack of compaction suggests a back-filled cellar or perhaps casually made up ground. Though the latter seems unlikely given the level of Britannia walk.

Test pit 2

Test pit 2 measured 5m by 1m and was 2.7m deep. It was located on the grass area at the south-east corner of the site. Modern Cellar walls were observed to at least 2m below ground level. The walls suggest Test pit 2 was located over the cellar of a former property fronting City Road/Britannia Walk.

Test pit 3

Test pit 3 measured 5m by 1.5m and was 1.5m deep. It was located in the north-west of the car park. Modern concrete foundations and obstructions were encountered within a metre of the surface.

Window sample WS1

WS1 was located on the east of the car park, adjacent to Britannia Walk. The top of natural gravels were recorded at 3m below ground level. This was overlain by a clay deposit that graded from black to grey over the 1m depth of the deposit. An organic smell was noted suggesting the clay was alluvial, perhaps associated with a flood deposit or a marsh. Above this was a modern made ground deposit, with frequent fragments of red brick but no other indication of occupation, suggesting it was a prepared levelling layer.

Window sample WS2

WS2 was located on the grass area at the southeast corner of the site. Modern made ground was observed to the base of the window sample at 3.2m below ground level. The material suggests WS2 was located over the cellar of a former property fronting City Road/ Britannia Walk.

Window sample WS3

WS3 was also located on the grass area at the southeast corner of the site, but further along City Road. The top of natural gravels were recorded at 3.2m below ground level. This was overlain by 0.30m of natural Brickearth capped by 0.10m of grey, weathered Brickearth, that might have been an alluvial deposit. 0.40m of fine dark sand appeared to seal the Brickearth, but its origin could not be determined. Loose building debris lay above the sand, also of undetermined origin. The top 2m consisted of a fine imported dark topsoil.

Window sample WS4

WS4 was located in the plant bed at the southwest of the car park. Modern deposits were encountered to a depth of 2m, at which point an obstruction prevented greater depths from being reached.

Window sample WS5

WS5 was located in the plant bed to the west of the car park. Modern deposits were encountered to a depth of 2.6m, at which point an obstruction prevented greater depths from being reached.

Window sample WS6

WS6 was located in the plant bed towards the north of the car park. Modern deposits and redeposited Brickearth were encountered to a depth of 3.0m, at which point an obstruction prevented greater depths from being reached.

4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Realisation of original research aims

- What is the nature and level of natural topography?

Untruncated natural deposits were only seen in Window sample WS1. These consisted of alluvial clays at between c 15.5m OD and c 14.5m OD over natural gravels. Modern disturbance was observed in all the test pits and window samples along the western side of the car park.

- What are the earliest deposits identified?

Natural gravels were only observed in window samples WS1 and WS3. Brickearth capping the gravels was observed in WS3, but this was possibly truncated by a 19th-century cellar.

- What are the latest deposits identified?

Debris, probably representing the back-fill of the former cellars of the 19th-century street front properties, was observed in Test pit 1 and Test pit 2, and in Window samples WS2.

- Was there any Roman quarrying on the site?

There was no evidence for Roman quarrying on the site.

- Is there any evidence for medieval agricultural activity?

There was no evidence for medieval agricultural activity. The alluvial clay in WS1 indicates the land was unsuitable for agriculture.

- Is a post-medieval dump horizon present on the site?

There was no evidence for a post-medieval dump horizon on the site.

- How much disturbance is there from the 19th-century buildings on the site?

Evidence of disturbance from the 19th-century buildings was found in Test pit 1, Test pit 2, Window sample WS2 and. These suggest the site was truncated to the top of the natural gravels at 14.5m OD at the corners of City Road and Britannia Walk and Ebenezer Street and Britannia Walk.

4.2 General discussion of potential

The evaluation has shown there is extensive truncation around the perimeter of the site car park. This is probably because of the construction of the existing building to the west and the former cellars of the 19th-century street front properties on the other three sides. Evidence from other areas of the site showed a truncation level extending to c 2m below ground surface, with possible alluvial deposits surviving underneath. The whole site suffered bomb damage during WW II and it likely that it was largely levelled and cleared at this time.

4.3 Significance

There is no evidence of any remains of archaeological significance on the site.

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* (Lyon 2007) with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the excavation.

In view of the limited potential of the material and the relatively limited significance of the data 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

Given the revised archaeological potential (see section 4), despite extensive ground reduction for the proposed tower in the south-east corner, this report recommends that no further archaeological work is required for this proposed development.

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

7 Acknowledgements

MoLAS wishes to thank Shaun Finley of McCabe Builders UK and Barry Howard of Hunter and Partners Ltd for their help in preparing this report.

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9 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

OASIS ID: molas1-34647	
Project details	
Project name	Eagle House, 159-189 City Road, London
Short description of the project	The results of the watching brief have shown there is extensive truncation around the perimeter of the site car park. This is because of the construction of the existing building to the west and the former cellars of the 19th-century street front properties on the other three sides. Other areas of the site showed evidence of alluvial deposits surviving under a truncation level of 2m below ground surface.
Project dates	Start: 04-06-2007 End: 04-07-2007
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	EGA07 - Sitecode
Type of project	Watching brief
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Current Land use	Other 15 - Other
Monument type	CELLAR Post Medieval
Monument type	ALLUVIUM Uncertain
Methods & techniques	'Augering', 'Sample Trenches'
Development type	Building refurbishment/repairs/restoration
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Development type	Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON HACKNEY STOKE NEWINGTON Eagle House, 159-89 City Road, London
Postcode	EC2
Study area	4.20 Hectares
Site coordinates	TQ 3207 8208 51.5216783962 -0.09615737554820 51 31 18 N 000 05 46 W Point
Height OD	Min: 17.00m Max: 18.00m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	MoLAS
Project brief originator	Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service
Project design originator	MoLAS
Project director/manager	Jo Lyon
Project supervisor	Isca Howell
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Project archives	
Physical Archive	No

Exists?	
Digital Archive Exists?	No
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Archive ID	EGA 07
Paper Contents	'Survey'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Correspondence','Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Plan','Report','Survey ','Unpublished Text'
Project bibliography	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Eagle House, 159-189 City Road, London
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Howell, I
Date	2007
Issuer or publisher	MoLAS
Place of issue or publication	London
Description	Client report

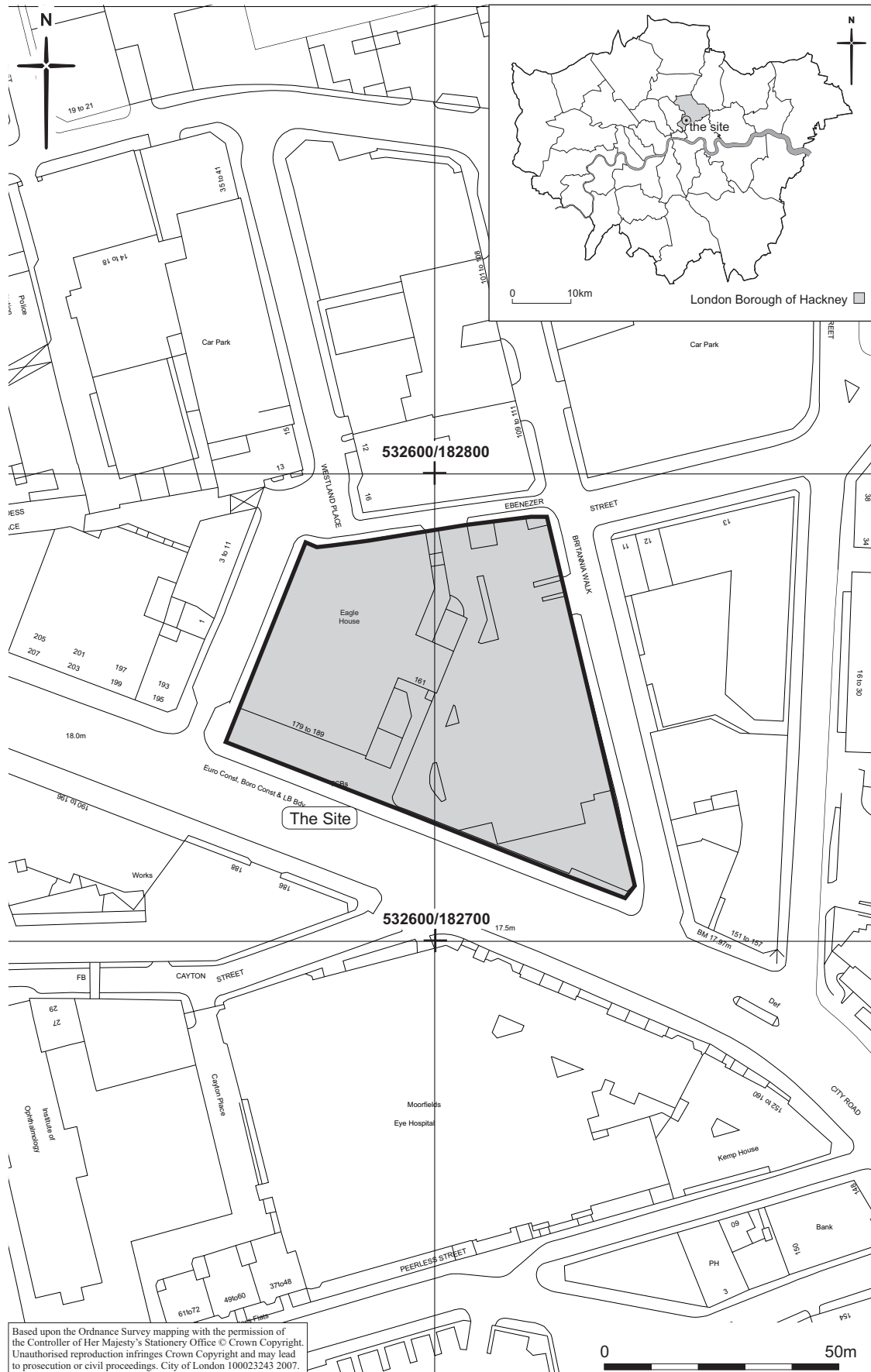


Fig 1 Site location

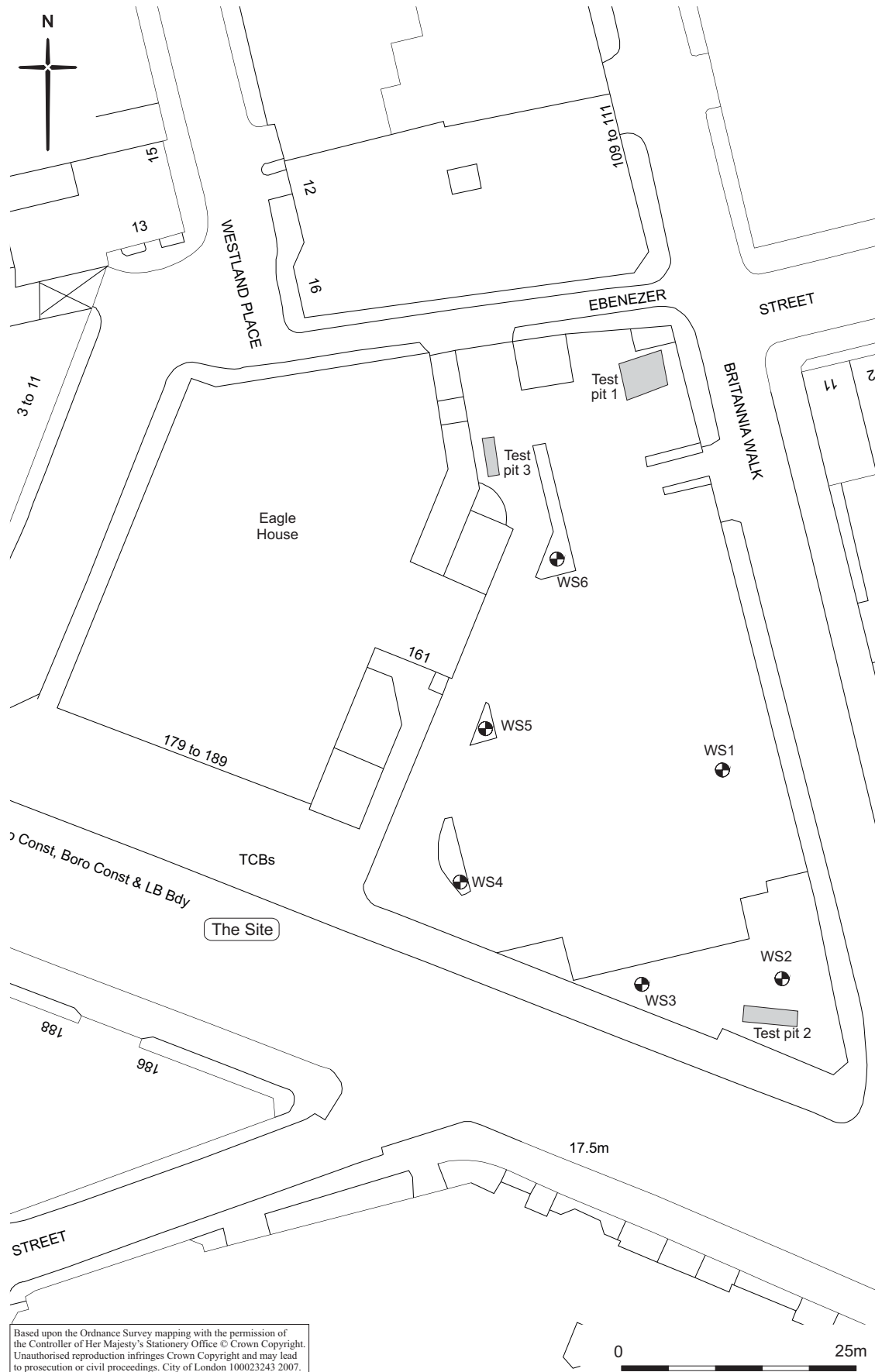


Fig 2 Locations of test pits and window samples