



BRIXTON CENTRAL SQUARE
Tate Library Garden and Rushmore Square
Brixton
SW2

London Borough of Lambeth

An archaeological watching brief report

April 2008



MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Service

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National Grid Reference: 531025 175215

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by Transport for London (TfL) in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at Brixton Central Square, Brixton, London SW2.

Work on geotechnical pits was monitored between 7th and 8th April 2008 during initial groundworks intended to establish underground strata on the site before landscaping improvements.

Archaeological deposits and natural strata were recorded in section in three trenches. Natural gravel was observed at 14.30m OD, and the highest survival of archaeological deposits occurred at 16.20m OD. The trenches did not contain any significant archaeological deposits or features and the footings of the earlier coach station on the site were not observed.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place to the south-east of the junction between Effra Road, Coldharbour Lane, and Brixton Hill, in the London Borough of Lambeth, hereafter called 'the site' (see Fig 1). The centre of the site lies at National Grid reference 531025 175215. The site consists of two open areas used as public gardens: Tate Library Garden to the north and Rushmore Square to the south. They are both bounded by Effra Road to the west and by Brixton Oval to the east (which is within the site). Rushcroft Road, which runs east-west across the centre of the site, separates the two gardens. Coldharbour Lane and Saltoun Road (outside the site) form the northern and the southern boundaries of the Site respectively. Modern pavement level near to the site lies at *c* 16.50m OD. The site code is BXQ08.

A desk top *Archaeological (impact) assessment* was previously prepared by MoLAS, which covers the whole area of the site (MoLAS, 2008a). 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. This document informed the design (*Method Statement*) for the watching brief which was eventually carried out (MoLAS, 2008b).

1.2 The 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 watching brief (see Section 1, MoLAS, 2008b)

1.3 Planning background

The north-western part of the Site lies within an Archaeological Priority Area and Tate Library Garden is protected under the London Squares Preservation Act of 1931. The archaeological watching brief was carried out as part of the planning condition placed upon the development by Lambeth Council.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Transport for London 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* (MoLAS 2008b), 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 level of natural topography?

What are the earliest deposits identified?

What are the latest deposits identified?

Is there any evidence for the Roman road and associated roadside features, along the eastern boundary of the site?

Is there evidence associated of the early medieval road and associated features?

What evidence, if any, is there for late medieval agrarian activity on the site, associated with the use of the common land for grazing? Is there any evidence of drainage?

Are there any remains associated with the earlier phase of the Tate Library Garden and the 1930s Orange Luxury Coach Station?

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

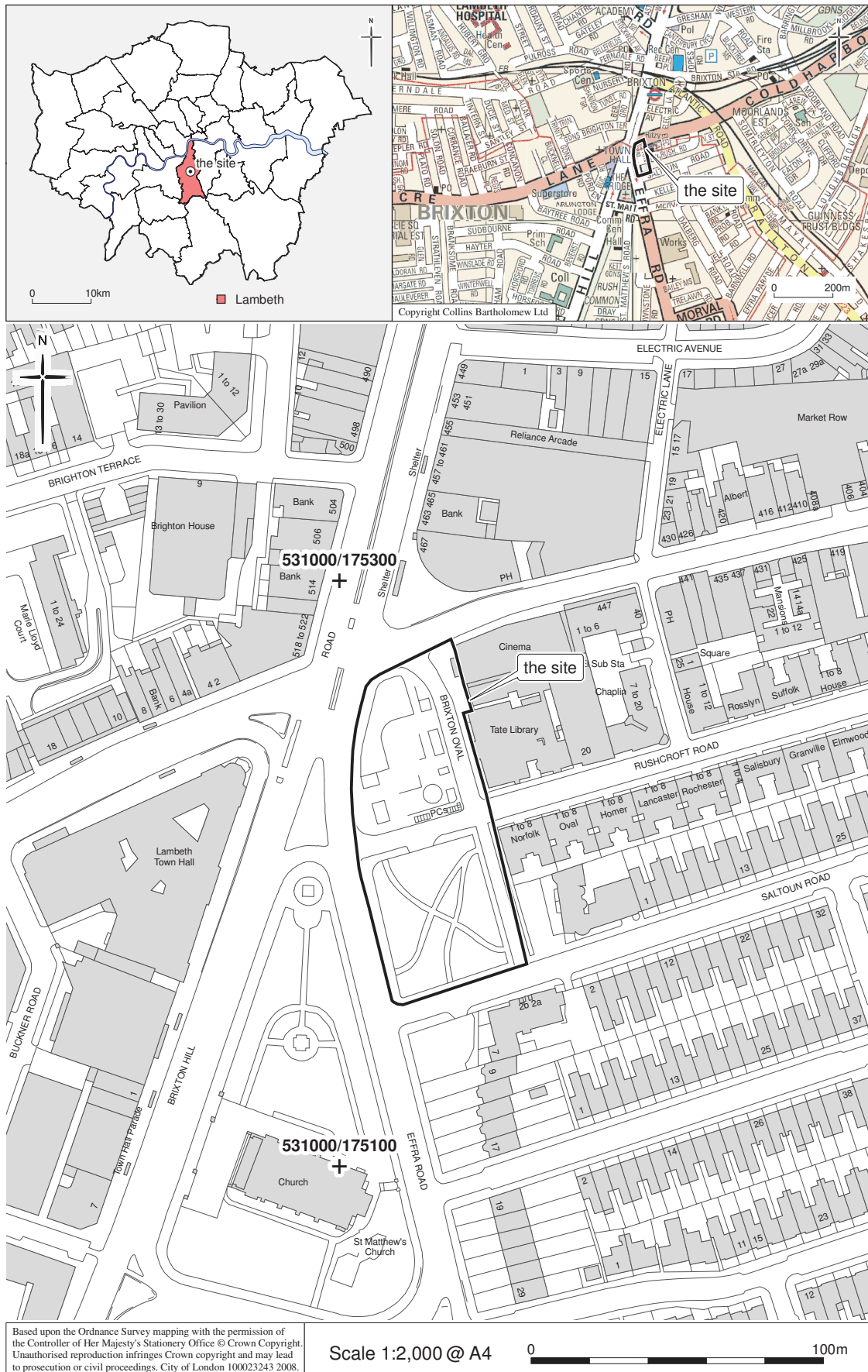


Fig 1 Location map

2 Topographical and historical background

2.1 Topography

Street level on Coldharbour Lane north of the Site is at 15m Ordnance Datum (OD) rising to 16.5m OD on Saltoun Road to the south. Barton (1992) shows the River Effra, one of London's "lost rivers" (now culverted over) flowing 100m east of the Site then crossing Coldharbour Lane and heading north following the modern course of Brixton Road. There are no available geotechnical data for the Site. The British Geological Survey (map 270) shows that the underlying geology is Taplow Gravels over London Clay. The gravels are the Pleistocene (Quaternary) fluvial deposits of the River Thames, arranged in terraces, representing the remains of former floodplains of the river.

2.2 Prehistoric

The Mesolithic hunter-gather communities of the postglacial period (c 10,000–4,000 BC) inhabited a still largely wooded environment. The Effra river valley would have been especially favoured in providing a predictable source of food (from hunting and fishing) and water, as well as a means of transport and communication. Evidence of human activity is largely characterised by finds of flint tools and waste rather than structural remains. There are no finds dated to this period within the study area.

The Neolithic (c 4000–2000 BC), Bronze Age (c 2,000–600 BC) and Iron Age (c 600 BC–AD 43) are traditionally seen as the time of technological change, the establishment of farming and settled communities, and forest clearance occurred for the cultivation of crops and the construction of communal monuments, and with increasing population and pressure on available resources throughout each period. There are no finds dated to this period within the study area.

2.3 Roman

The Romans established the town of *Londinium* (London) in the approximate area of the modern City of London and in the area of Southwark, with a bridge crossing just east of modern London Bridge. The site stood c 5.7km south-east of the Roman city and probably within open fields.

Brixton Hill (the A23 road) follows the course of a Roman road, which led from *Londinium* to Sussex, and passed immediately west of the Site. The road construction would have required at least temporary shelter and more permanent installations may have existed for quarrying gravel for constructing the causeway and metalling the road. Since it would have been used for trade, provisions for travellers (such as inns) may also have existed. However, there is no known evidence of any settlement along the road in the study area.

2.4 Saxon

Following the withdrawal of the Roman army from England in the early 5th century AD, the whole country fell into an extended period of socio-economic decline. A network of east-west tracks seems to have emerged at this time, such as Acre Lane and Coldharbour Lane, but there is no known accompanying settlement evidence. However, the name Brixton is thought to derive from Brix's stone, believed to have stood on Brixton Hill. Brixton Causeway was a part of the road from Streatham to London carried over a causeway to avoid the swamps and overflow of the River Effra at the foot of the hill (VCH Lambeth iv, 50–64). It followed the course of the earlier Roman road (see above).

2.5 Medieval

Domesday Book (1086), the survey commissioned by William I of the lands he had conquered in England 20 years prior, refers to the Brixton Hundred as Brixestan (Morris 1975). The site lay within the manor of St Mary's. Within the manor, the Site was located in Rush Common (also known as Rushey Common or Rushey Green). The main settlements were near Stockwell, Brixton Hill and Coldharbour Lane (VCH Surrey iv, 1-2), the last not far from the Site. It is likely that steps were taken to improve the marshy conditions in the later medieval period, in order to provide good-quality grazing for livestock and fertile land for crops.

2.6 Post-medieval

Rocque's map of 1746 shows the site located in uncultivated land immediately east of "Brixton Causway", now Brixton Hill, where a group of houses is shown. The western part of the Site falls within "Rushy Green". The River Effra, which Rocque calls "The Shore", flows east of the Site. Other nearby settlement is shown at Stockwell, c 650m north-west of the Site, and at Coldharbour, c 520m to the north-east (note that Coldharbour Lane was then named Camberwell Lane).



Fig 2 Trench locations

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief was done in accordance with the *Method Statement* (MoLAS, 2008) and the MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual (MoLAS, 1994).

The ground was broken out and cleared by contractors under MoLAS supervision. Trenches were excavated by machine by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS.

The locations of the areas of excavation were recorded on a plan supplied by TfL (Drawing No. Y1S-0096_P02).

The heights of observations and archaeological remains were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum via a traverse to spotheights on Effra Road.

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

The site has produced: 1 trench location plan; 9 context records and 3 1:20 section drawings. The site finds and records can be found under the site code BXQ08 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

In total, three separate interventions (trenches) were made on the site. These have been numbered A, B and C consecutively. There follows a brief description of the archaeological deposits as recorded.

For all trench locations see Fig 2

<i>Watching Brief Trench A (Fig 3)</i>	
Location	Southwest corner of site
Dimensions	2m by 3m
Modern ground level/top of slab	16.50m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	16.20m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	0.30m
Level of base of deposits observed	13.50 m OD
Natural observed	London Clay at 13.80m OD, gravels at 14.80m OD

Below the turf line in Trench A was a loose silty rubble deposit, presumably a make-up layer for the turf line. Below this was a dark brownish black silty clay, which had the appearance of garden soil and may be from the earlier phase of gardens on the site. Below this was a sequence of dumped gravelly clay layers that were probably imported as make-up. Natural gravels were observed below this at 14.80m OD and London Clay at 13.80m OD. The water table was also reached at this level.

<i>Watching Brief Trench B</i>	
Location	Northern part of the site
Dimensions	2m by 3m
Modern ground level/top of slab	16.50m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	16.30m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	None observed
Level of base of deposits observed	11.90m OD
Natural observed	London Clay at 13.80mOD

Below the turfline in Trench B was a loose silty rubble make-up layer, 1.40m deep. Below this was a layer of crushed brick mortar acting as bedding for a disused metal pipe. Below this was a brown clay with gravel inclusions 1.30m deep that was modern and was fill for a cut for a sewer pipe. London Clay was seen at 13.80m OD.

<i>Watching Brief Trench C</i>	
Location	Northwest part of the site
Dimensions	2m by 5m
Modern ground level/top of slab	16.50m OD
Base of modern turf	16.30m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	None observed
Level of base of deposits observed	14.80m OD
Natural observed	None observed

Below the turfline in Trench C was a brown silty clay with frequent rubble. This was above a geotextile membrane and a clean gravel ballast deposit below, which were in turn sealing a layer of compacted rubble and concrete layer, presumably relating to the demolition of the Esso petrol station that stood on this part of the site until the 1970s. The trench was not excavated further.

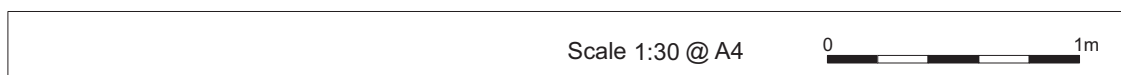
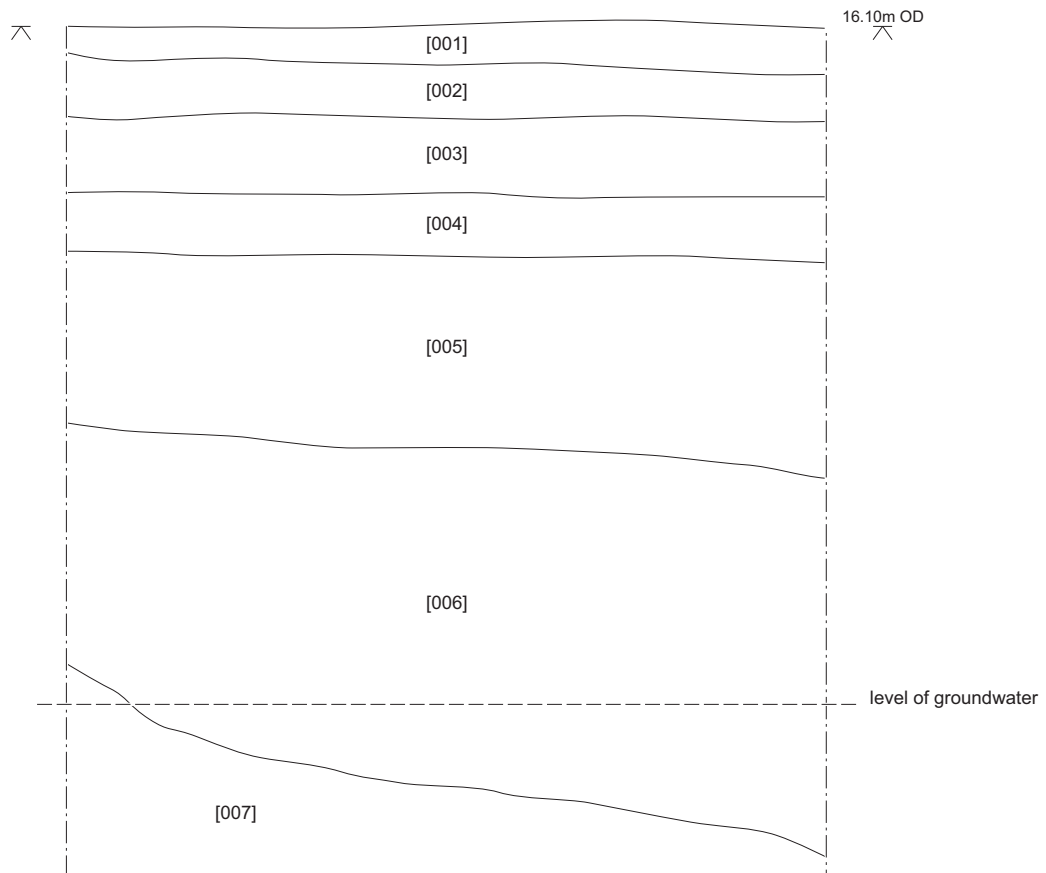


Fig 3 Southeast facing section of Trench A

4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Original research aims

What was the level of natural topography?

Natural gravels were seen at 14.80m OD in Trench A. London Clay was seen at 13.80m OD in Trenches A and B.

What are the earliest deposits identified?

The earliest deposit identified was a probable garden soil in Trench A.

What are the latest deposits identified?

The latest deposit identified was a crushed and compacted rubble layer in Trench C, relating to the demolition of the Esso petrol station on the site during the 1970s. A geotextile membrane and gravel ballast deposit sealed this, presumably intended to prevent the seepage of contaminants into the surrounding ground.

Is there any evidence for the Roman road and associated roadside features, along the eastern boundary of the site?

There was no evidence of the Roman road or any associated features.

Is there evidence associated of the early medieval road and associated features?

There was no evidence of the early medieval road or any associated features.

What evidence, if any, is there for late medieval agrarian activity on the site, associated with the use of the common land for grazing? Is there any evidence of drainage?

There was no evidence for this phase of activity on the site.

Are there any remains associated with the earlier phase of the Tate Library Garden and the 1930s Orange Luxury Coach Station?

The crushed and compacted rubble layer seen in Trench C probably relates to the demolition of the Esso petrol station. No remains of the earlier Tate Library Garden or the Orange Coach Station were seen.

4.2 Significance of the data

The archaeological remains observed on the site are not of any great significance and there is nothing to suggest that there are further remains on the site of local, 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 will be stored in accordance with the terms of the *Method Statement* (MoLAS, 2008b) with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the excavation.

In view of the limited potential of the material (Section 4.1) and the relatively limited significance of the data (Section 4.2) 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 carried out on the site has shown that there are no archaeological remains of significance were noted, within the geotechnical trial pits. Further archaeological work on the site will comprise an archaeological watching brief during the groundwork's for the redevelopment and upgrade of the square.

7 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following for their contributions and help in producing this report: Ian Chapman and Paul Potter of TfL.

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9 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

9.1 OASIS ID: molas1-40715

Project details

Project name	Brixton Central Square
Short description of the project	Watching brief on geotechnical pits project
Project dates	Start: 07-04-2008 End: 08-04-2008
Previous/future work	No / No
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Site status	English Heritage List of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest
Current Land use	Community Service 2 - Leisure and recreational buildings
Monument type	BURIED SOIL HORIZON Post Medieval
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON LAMBETH BRIXTON Brixton Central Square
Postcode	SW2

Study area 100.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 531025 175215 50.9362131307 0.179224650943 50 56
10 N 000 10 45 E Point

Height OD Min: 13.80m Max: 14.80m

Project creators

Name of Organisation MoLAS

Project brief originator Transport for London (TfL)

Project design originator London Borough of Lambeth

Project director/manager Stewart Hoad

Project supervisor Sadie Watson

Type of sponsor/funding body Transport for London (TfL)

Name of sponsor/funding body Transport for London (TfL)

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital Archive Exists? No

Paper Archive recipient LAARC

Paper Contents 'Stratigraphic'

Paper Media available 'Context sheet','Drawing','Map','Section'

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title Watching brief report on Brixton Central Square

Author(s)/Editor(s) Watson, S

Date 2008

Issuer or publisher Unpub, MoLAS issuer

Place of issue or MoLAS
publication

Description short client report

Entered by sadie watson (swatson@molas.org.uk)

Entered on 16 April 2008