



**CHICHESTER HOUSE**  
**278-282 High Holborn**  
**London WC1**

London Borough of Camden  
Watching brief assessment

February 2009

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Site Code: HHV08  
National Grid Reference: 530824 181555

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## **Summary (non-technical)**

*This report has been commissioned by GMW Architects on behalf of the client HEDF II UK Office Sarl & HEDF II UK Residential in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at Chichester House, 278–282 High Holborn, London WC1.*

*Following the recommendations of the previous archaeological impact assessment (Bull and Dawson 2007) archaeological monitoring was carried out on the excavation of nine construction pits supporting the basement wall retaining props as the primary investigation work on new foundation construction to record and assess the level of basement truncation and the potential for archaeological remains on site. The work was monitored between 2nd and 26th of September 2008 during redevelopment of the site from the former multi-storey office and commercial building to new building of mixed retail, office and residential units, with a single basement with two different floor levels.*

*Only one archaeological deposit was recorded in section in one trench. This is interpreted as late post medieval cess pit fill. Natural terrace gravels were observed at 18.8m OD, truncated by the basement slab of Chichester House. The results indicate a very low (negligible) potential for survival of pre-modern remains, wholly removed by modern development.*

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*Fig 2 Trench locations*

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Chichester House, 278–282 High Holborn, London WC1 hereafter called ‘the site’. The site is located at High Holborn, bounded by Great Turnstile to the east, Whetstone Park and the north end of Newman’s Road to the south, Princeton House (271–277 High Holborn) to the west and High Holborn to the north (see Fig ). The centre of the site is at OS National Grid Reference 530824 181555. The level of the basement slab varies with an average height at c 20.5m OD. Modern pavement level near to the site lies at c 23.5m OD. The site code is HHV08.

A desk top *Archaeological (impact) assessment* was previously prepared by MOL Archaeology, which covers the whole area of the site. The desktop assessment was updated in 2007 to accommodate design changes to the proposed development (Bull, 2006; Bull and Dawson 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. These documents informed the design (*Method Statement*) for the watching brief which was eventually carried out (Howell 2008).

### 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 3, Bull and Dawson 2007).

### 1.3 Planning background

This document presents the results of the watching brief carried out according to the written scheme of investigation for archaeological monitoring on the site, as required under the archaeological planning condition placed on the development (Application No: 2007/3976/P). These follow the Standards and Code of Practice laid down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The report follows on from, and refers back to where necessary, previous documents produced on the same site including:

- The *Desktop assessment* (Bull 2006). This presented the initial assessment of archaeological potential on the site.
- The updated *Archaeological impact assessment* (Bull and Dawson 2007). This presented a re-assessment of archaeological potential on the site and an updated version of the proposed development impacts on the potential archaeological deposits.
- The *Method statement* for an archaeological watching brief (Howell 2008). This document presented the methodologies and standards to be implemented during excavation and post excavation processes on the site.

The site lies within an Archaeology Priority Area as defined by Camden Borough Council (APA2: London Suburbs). The designation arises from its proximity to *Lundenwic*, the known Saxon settlement centred on Covent Garden and The Strand, and to the line of a Roman road along High Holborn to the north.

#### 1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by GMW Architects on behalf of the client HEDF II UK Office Sarl & HEDF II UK Residential and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOL Archaeology). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute for 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*, 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 nature and characteristics of the natural topography?
- Is there evidence of burial practice, agriculture or quarrying in the Roman period along the route of the adjacent road?
- Are there any archaeological remains associated with the Middle Saxon settlement of Lundenwic, which lies to the south-west?
- Can any medieval remains found on the site be related to the roadside development along High Holborn westwards to St Giles Church?
- Can any post-medieval remains found on the site be related to known properties and do they contribute to our understanding of their inhabitants?

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

## 2 Topographical and historical background

### 2.1 Introduction

A description of the geology, archaeology and history of the site was provided in the previous *Archaeological assessment* (Bull and Dawson 2007, section 4). A brief resume is provided here:

### 2.2 Topography

The site overlies solid geology comprising London Clay strata. The London clay is overlain by the Pleistocene (Quaternary) drift deposits of Terrace gravels: fluvial deposits of the River Thames arranged in flights or gravel terraces. These terraces represent the remains of former floodplains of the River Thames. The Terrace beneath the site conforms to Lynch Hill terrace approximately 80m north of the boundary with later Hackney Gravel deposits (British Geological Survey map sheet 256; BGS 1994). When not truncated or eroded, these gravels are normally overlain by brickearth (mixed clay-silt loess) deposited by wind and water action after the last, most recent glaciation, c 10,000 years ago. It is estimated that natural gravel within the site lies between c 21.5m and c 20.0m OD (Bull and Dawson 2007).

The surface of natural topography has been eroded by a number of small streams and rivers flowing south to join the Thames. Amongst the more substantial of these was the Fleet River, c 600m to the east of the site. The topography surrounding the site slopes noticeably downwards to the Fleet valley along High Holborn, from c 24.0m OD at the junction with Red Lion Street to the west, to c 21.6m OD at the junction with Chancery Lane to the east. A gentle southward decline to the Thames is observed where adjacent ground level in High Holborn and Great Turnstile lies at c 23.7m OD, sloping to c 19.8m OD on the south side of Lincolns Inn Fields to the south

### 2.3 Prehistoric

The site's location on the well-drained Lynch Hill gravel terrace close to predictable resources of the River Thames and River Fleet would have made the area attractive for settlement. Despite this, there is no evidence for prehistoric activity within the study area, other than Palaeolithic axes, Mesolithic flint tools and an isolated Iron Age find. It is not known whether these were in situ.

### 2.4 Roman

The site lies adjacent to a major Roman route and evidence of the roadway or ditches associated with it may be present. Although there is little evidence of settlement around the site, Roman burials and other chance finds have been recorded in the site vicinity. There is thus a general background potential in this area for Roman funerary evidence or other artefacts. Burials, as deeper cut features, have a greater chance of survival. Roman relict agricultural features (such as field ditches) could be present beside the roadways as could quarry pits into the gravel, to provide for the frequent repair/re-metalling of the nearby roads.

### 2.5 Saxon

Although the site lies to the north-east of the area normally associated with Lundenwic and is likely to be in marginal land outside the town, archaeological



remains from the Saxon period have not been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the site and are unlikely to be found on the site.

## **2.6 Medieval**

Archaeological remains from the medieval period have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of site and might be expected on site. The site occupied the north-west of Cup Field, and is likely to have occupied common open ground in the medieval period.

## **2.7 Post-medieval**

Early post-medieval documents indicate limited roadside development along High Holborn from and including the site westwards to St Giles Church.

Archaeological remains from at least the 16th century onwards, including a 17th-century inn, buildings, cellars and foundations, pits and drains, have been recorded in the immediate vicinity and might be expected on site. The most recent building on the site was constructed in the early 1950s, named Chichester House c 1960 and comprised a mixture of retail at ground floor level and offices above.

### 3 The watching brief

#### 3.1 Methodology

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

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

The locations of the areas of excavation were recorded by offsetting from adjacent standing walls and plotted on to a Basement Survey (Drg. No. 202–A, July 2008, Wentworth House Partnership). This information was then plotted onto the OS grid.

The heights of observations and/or archaeological remains were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum on the supplied basement plan (Dwg No 4328/099 Rev T02 Ramboll Whitbybird).

Where relevant, sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20; numbered contexts were allocated where appropriate.

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

The site finds and records can be found under the site code HHV08 in the MoL archive.

#### 3.2 Results of the watching brief

In total, 9 separate interventions (trenches) were made for the purposes of providing room for the construction of thrust blocks for the props supporting the retained basement wall of the site. The construction pits follow the site engineers' terminology for the construction as Raker pits and are referenced here accordingly. These have been allocated A–J consecutively (see Fig 2). With the exception of one trench (Raker D) all the trenches conformed to a similar size and profile: approximately 7m in length by 1.5m width and 2–2.5m depth. In all cases, apart from trench Raker D, the Raker pits recorded truncated natural gravels at c 18.0m to 19.0m OD immediately beneath the basement slab of Chichester House. There follows a brief description of the archaeological deposits as recorded in trench Raker D.

<i>Trench Raker D</i>	
Location	Eastern side of site parallel to Great Turnstile
Dimensions	7.3m EW by 1.5m NS; 2.1m deep
top of slab	19.42m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	18.8m OD
Depth of archaeological deposits seen	1.0m
Level of base of deposits observed	17.35m OD
Natural observed	18.8m OD

Compacted, mid yellow brown sandy gravels were truncated by the modern basement slab to c 18.8m OD. In the south facing section the gravels were truncated/interrupted by a 0.95m thick by 1.9m wide (in section) deposit composed of equal parts firm, black, silty clay and (human) cess matter. The deposit contained occasional inclusions of redbrick fragments and charcoal. The deposit is consistent in character with a 19th century date and probably conforms to a waste pit, the edges of which were not observed during the watching brief. Modern concrete overlay the deposits to a floor surface level of c 19.4m OD

## **4 Potential of archaeology**

### **4.1 Original research aims**

*What was the nature and characteristics of the natural topography?*

The former basements of Chichester House truncated deeply into the natural terrace gravels across the site. The natural gravels were observed at c 18.8m OD.

*Is there evidence of burial practice, agriculture or quarrying in the Roman period along the route of the adjacent road?*

The watching brief recorded no evidence of remains dating to the Roman period

*Are there any archaeological remains associated with the Middle Saxon settlement of Lundenwic, which lies to the south-west?*

The watching brief recorded no evidence of remains dating to the Saxon period

*Can any medieval remains found on the site be related to the roadside development along High Holborn westwards to St Giles Church?*

The watching brief recorded no evidence of medieval remains

*Can any post-medieval remains found on the site be related to known properties and do they contribute to our understanding of their inhabitants?*

The remains recorded that date to the post medieval period are limited to the fill of a conjectured cess pit. As the deposit was observed in section little further information can be gained from the remains, although the pit is likely to be associated with open area activity to the rear of High Holborn in the 19th century

### **4.2 Significance of the data**

The archaeological remains are of limited 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* (Howell, 2008) 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 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 development at Chichester House involved the demolition of the present property and construction of a new building of mixed retail, office and residential units, with a new basement formation and layout across two floor levels.

The previous *Archaeological impact assessment* (Bull and Dawson 2007) recommended the need for archaeological monitoring of geotechnical work and/or enabling work for engineering purposes by an archaeological organisation. The proposed monitoring would provide information on the nature and levels of any deposits or features surviving on the site.

The results of the watching brief have shown that the present basement has truncated deeply into the underlying Lynch Hill terrace gravels, removing any deposits within the basement footprint and confirms the conclusions of the previous desk based assessment. It is extremely unlikely that any further archaeological deposits and features will survive within the basement footprint of the present Chichester House building.

The decision on the appropriate archaeological response to the deposits revealed within the site so far rests with the Local Planning Authority and their designated archaeological advisor (Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service).

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## 8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

**OASIS ID: molas1-56526**

<b>Project details</b>	
Project name	Chichester House, 278-282 High Holborn, London WC1
Short description of the project	A watching brief was carried out on 9 engineering trenches prior to construction of the props supporting the retained wall facade to the site. In all cases the trenches showed truncated gravel deposits, with only one trench recording a late post-medieval /modern deposit of cess and burnt wood and rubble in section. The watching brief concludes that virtually all archaeological deposits were removed during the construction of the Chichester House foundations and basement in 1950s.
Project dates	Start: 02-09-2008 End: 26-09-2008
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	HHV08 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	CESS PIT Post Medieval
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Planning condition
<b>Project location</b>	
Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON CAMDEN HOLBORN Chichester House, 278-282 High Holborn
Postcode	WC1
Study area	1320.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 30824 81555 51.5172505309 -0.114303405617 51 31 02 N 000 06 51 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 18.80m Max: 18.80m
<b>Project creators</b>	
Name of Organisation	MoLAS
Project brief originator	MoLAS project manager
Project design originator	MoLAS
Project director/manager	Ros Aitken
Project supervisor	Agnieszka Bystron
Type of	Private developer



sponsor/funding  
body

Name of  
sponsor/funding  
body HEDF II UK Office Sarl & HEDF II UK Residential

#### Project archives

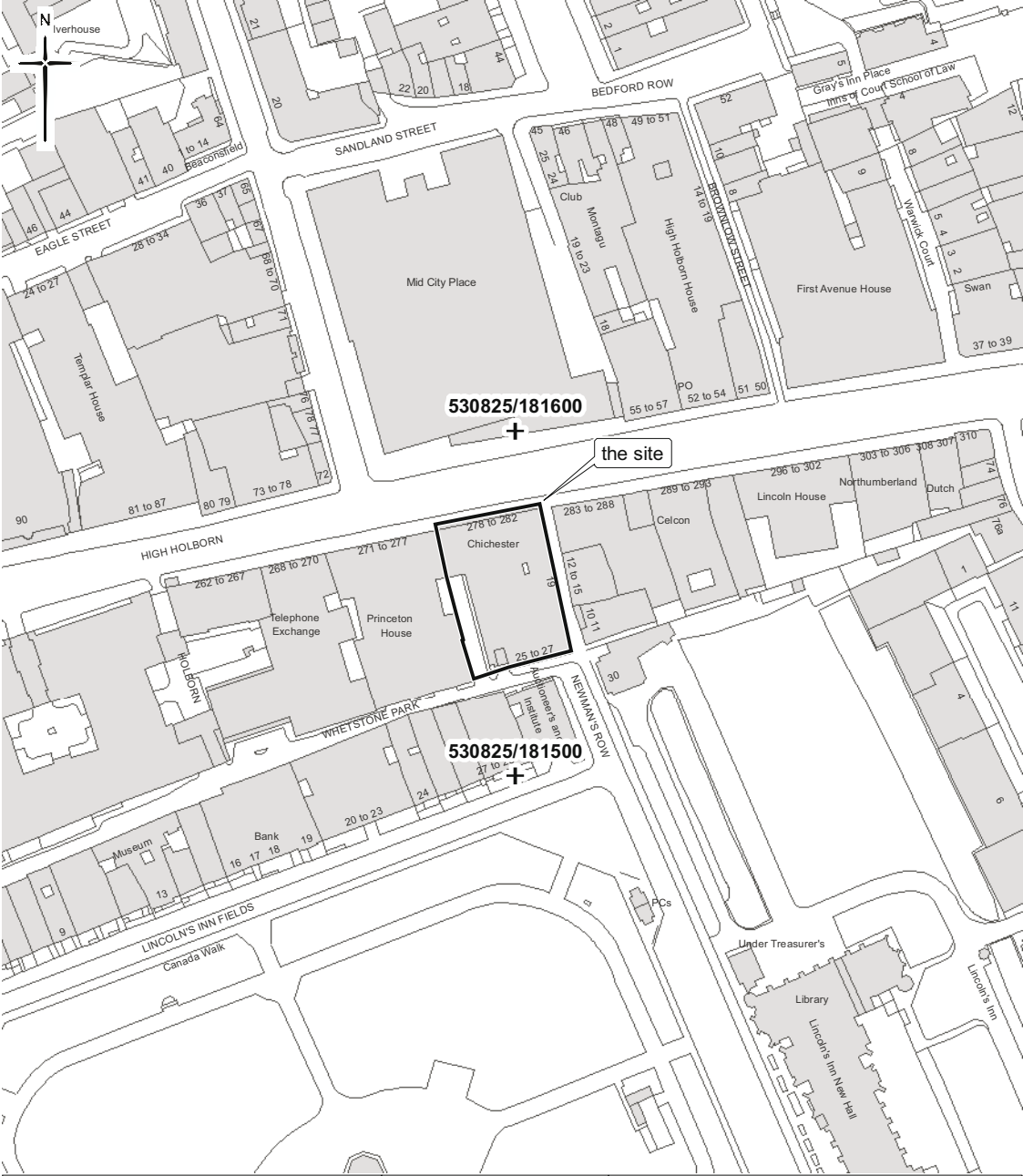
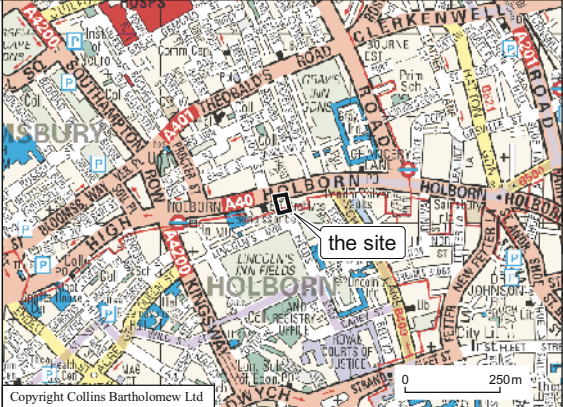
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Physical Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Contents	'Stratigraphic'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography','Text'
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	'Stratigraphic'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Plan','Report','Section','Unpublished Text'

#### Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Chichester House, 278-282 High Holborn, London WC1: a report on the watching brief.
Author(s)/Editor(s)	'Bull, R and Bystron, A.'
Date	2009
Issuer or publisher	Museum of London Archaeology
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Scale 1:2,000 @ A4



Fig 1 Site location

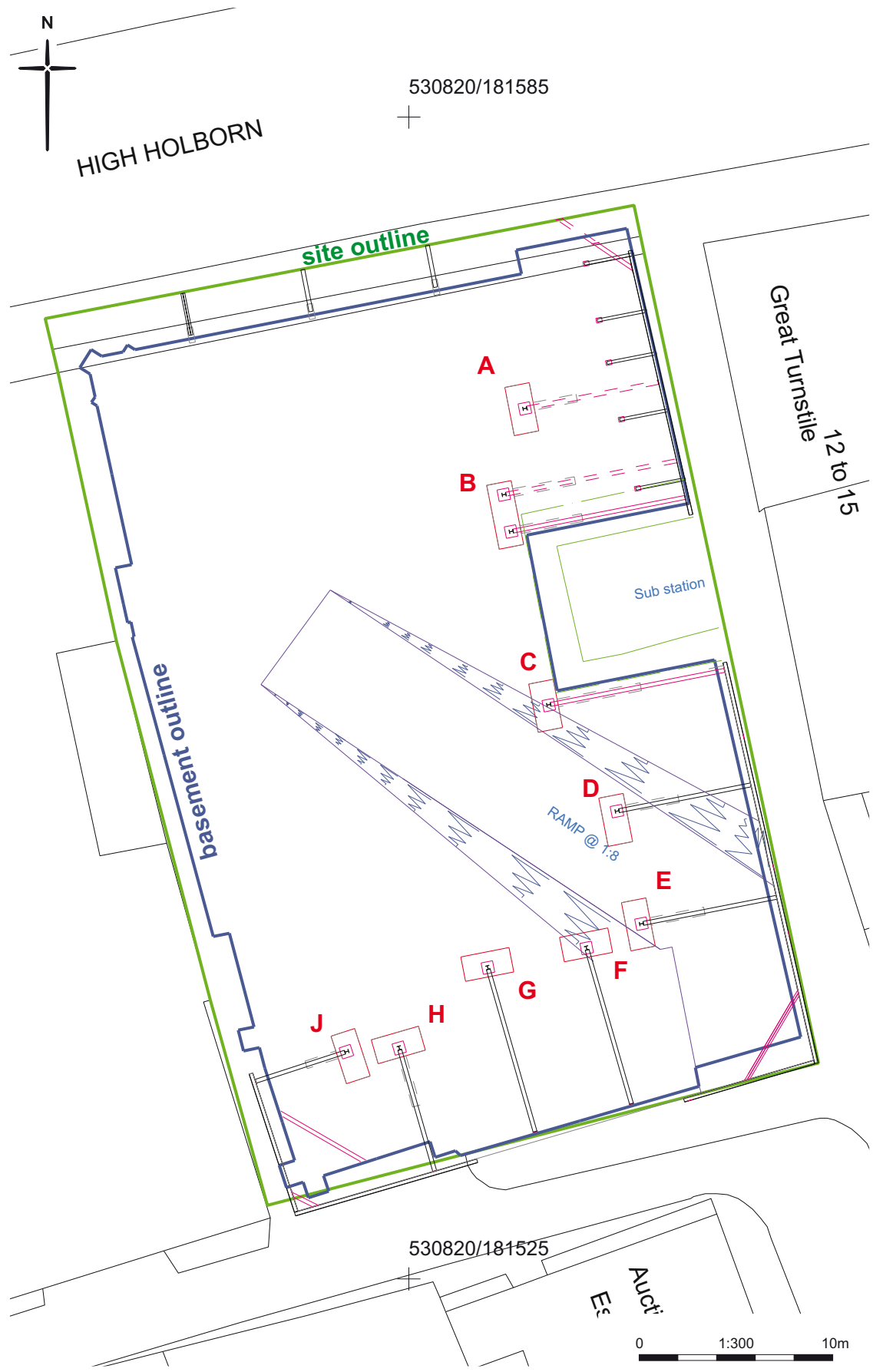
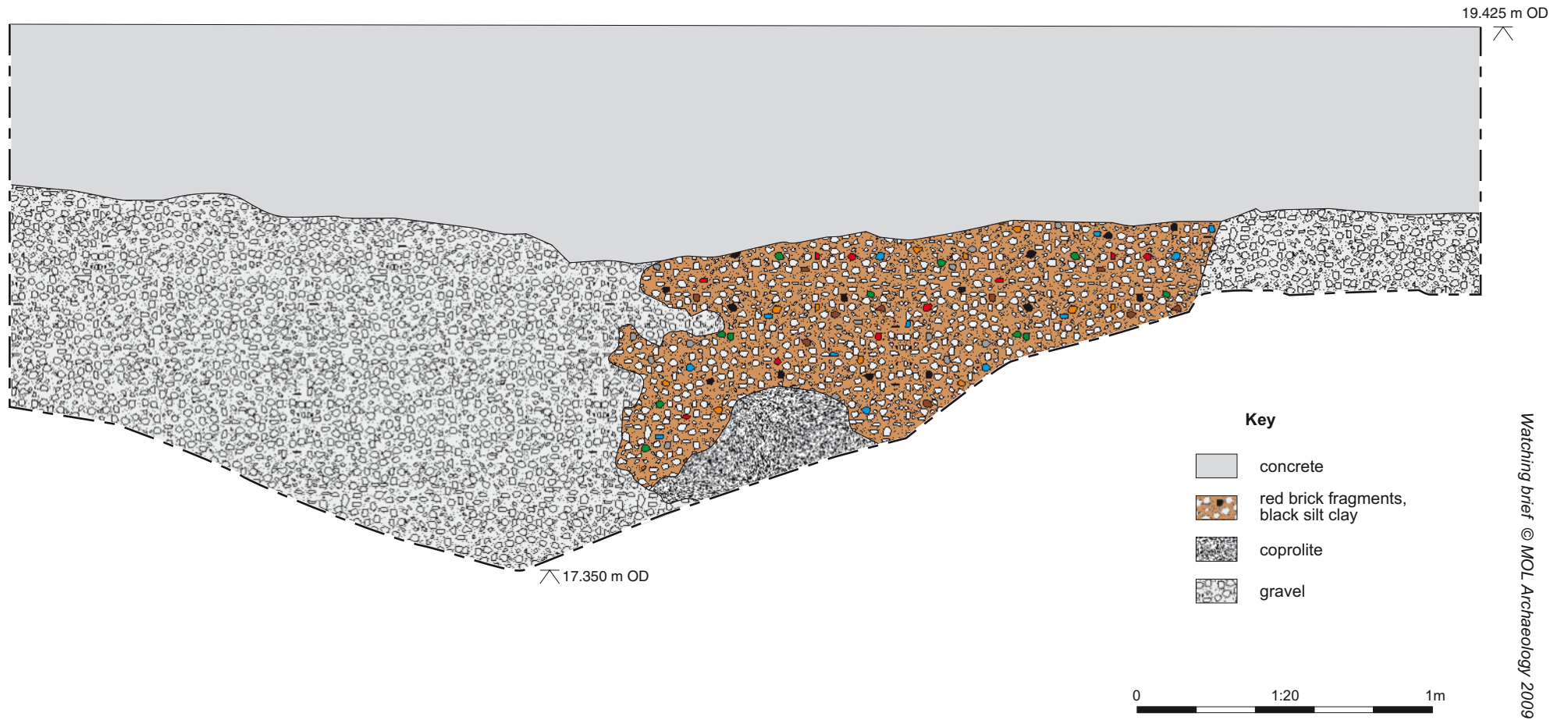


Fig 2 Location of watching brief trenches

W

E



19.425 m OD

17.350 m OD

Key

- concrete
- red brick fragments, black silt clay
- coprolite
- gravel

0 1:20 1m

CAMD1126WB09#03

Watching brief © MOL Archaeology 2009

Fig 3 South facing section of trench Raker D