



BRIXTON CENTRAL SQUARE London SW2

London Borough of Lambeth

Archaeological watching brief report

October 2009

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Site Code: BXQ08

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 groundworks associated with the construction of a new garden square with fountains and garden features was monitored between May and September 2009.

Manmade deposits and natural strata were recorded in section in several areas of excavation, including drainage trenches and a large pit dug to house the fountain pump room. Natural gravel was observed at c 14.00m OD. The watching brief areas did not contain any significant archaeological deposits or features and this phase of work confirmed the results from an earlier watching brief: that there were no surviving remnants of the earlier coach station (shown on front cover).

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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 an earlier watching brief which was carried out on geotechnical pits dug during April 2008 (MoLAS, 2008b; 2008c). This watching brief did not encounter any significant remains but it was recommended that a further watching brief be carried out to ensure the groundworks did not damage or destroy any potential buried archaeology.

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 this watching brief (see Section 1, MoLAS, 2009)

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 briefs were 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 2009), 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.

2 Topographical and historical background

A full and detailed background to the topography and history of the site has been presented in several earlier reports (MoLAS 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) and is therefore not reproduced here.

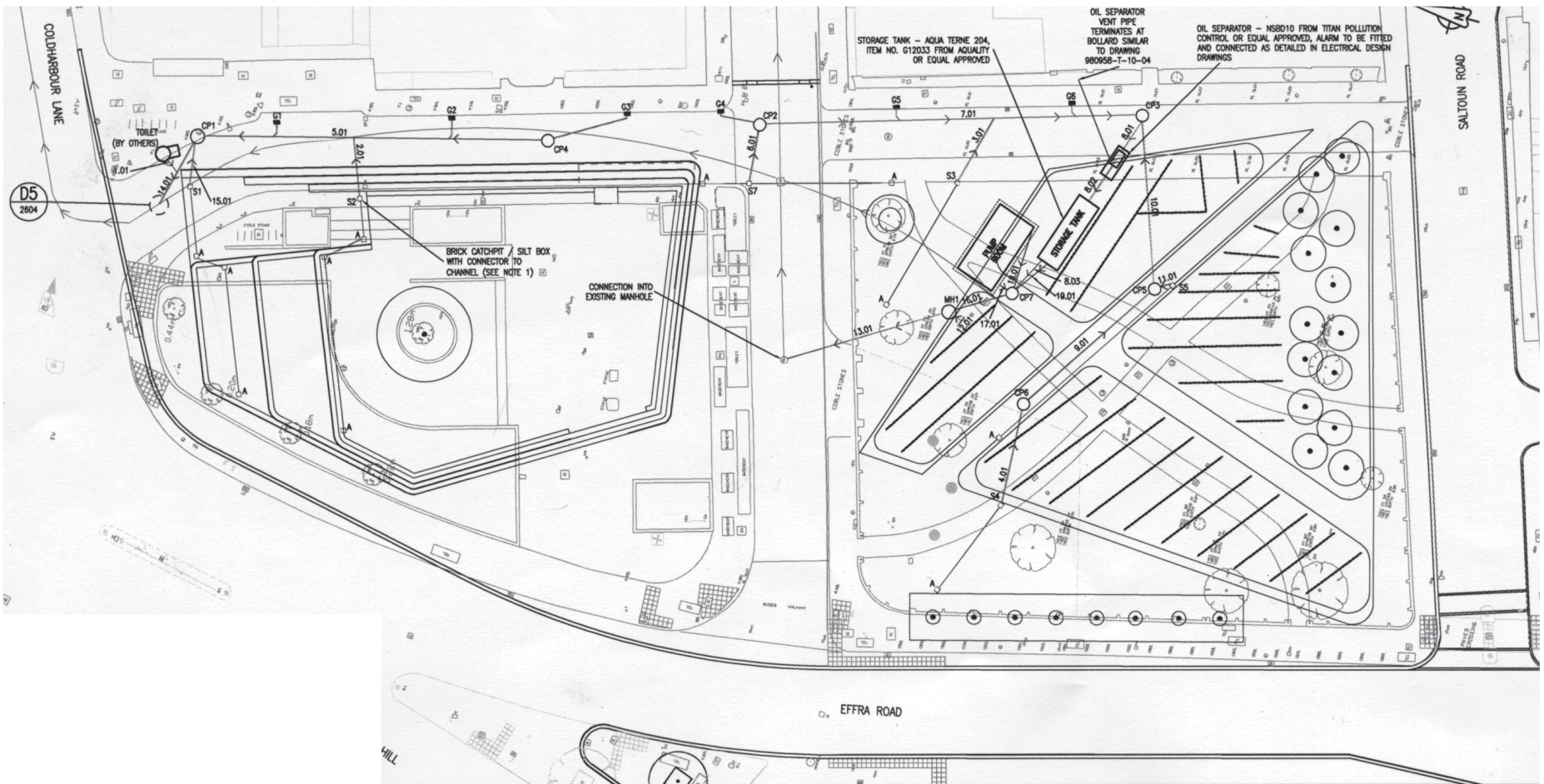


Fig 2 Location of groundwork interventions

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, 2009) 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 indicated on a plan supplied by TfL (Drawing No. 50375113/213/508).

The heights of observations and archaeological remains were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum via a traverse to spot heights 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, 1 1:20 section drawing and several pages of notes. The contexts were not re-recorded from the original observations made during the first phase of watching brief (MoLAS 2008c). The site finds and records can be found under the site code BXQ08 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

Below the turf line across the site was a loose silty rubble make-up layer, 0.50m deep. Below this was a dark brownish black silty garden soil. Within these two layers were various modern service trenches and pipes, and along the northern and eastern sides of the pump room excavation were modern (20th century) brick walls from a cellared building that had stood on the site. Below this was a sequence of dumped gravelly clay layers that were probably imported as make-up (Fig 4). Natural gravelly clay was observed below this at *c* 14.00m OD. The water table was also reached at this level. There was significant grey discolouration within the clay at the western side of the pump room trench (Fig 5), this had been encountered during the earlier watching brief on geotechnical pits and probably originated from contamination due to the petrol station that had stood on the site until the 1970s. Directly below the modern tarmac within a drainage trench excavated on Rushcroft Road were timber setts used as bedding within the 19th century road surface, probably used to reduce the noise from horse-drawn vehicles. These were set directly on top of loose brick rubble make-up and the drainage trench was not excavated further.

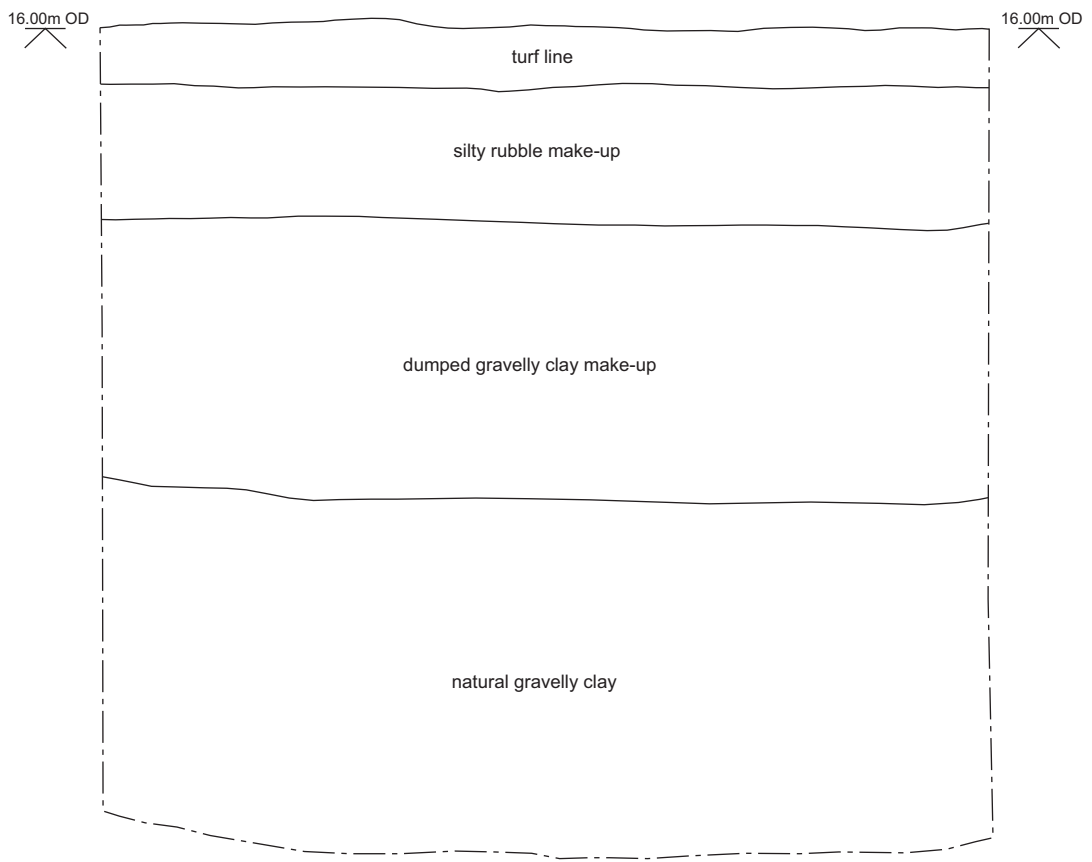


Fig 3 Section of west side of pump room trench



Fig 4 View to east showing pump room trench section



Fig 5 View to southeast in pump room trench, showing grey staining from contamination

4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Original research aims

What was the level of natural topography?

Natural gravels were seen at c 14.00m OD.

What are the earliest deposits identified?

The earliest deposit identified was a silty garden soil below the modern turf line.

What are the latest deposits identified?

The latest deposit identified was a crushed and compacted rubble layer below the turf line in the northern and eastern sides of the pump room excavation.

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?

No remains of the earlier Tate Library Garden or the Orange Coach Station were observed.

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, 2009) 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 no archaeological remains of significance were noted.

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, and Joe Jarvis of FM Conway for his help during the fieldwork phases of works.

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9 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

9.1 OASIS ID: molas1-64670

Project details

Project name	Brixton central square watching brief
Short description of the project	watching brief on groundworks in advance of development of public square
Project dates	Start: 12-06-2009 End: 23-09-2009
Previous/future work	Yes / No
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Current Land use	Community Service 2 - Leisure and recreational buildings
Monument type	BURIED SOIL HORIZON Post Medieval
Monument type	TIMBER SETTS Post Medieval
Monument type	BRICK CELLAR WALLS Modern
Significant Finds	TIMBER SETTS WITHIN ROAD 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 172512 50.9337839877 0.179111071421 50 56 01 N 000 10 44 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 13.80m Max: 14.80m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	MOL Archaeology
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)

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive Exists?	No
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	'Stratigraphic'
Paper Media available	'Notebook - Excavation', 'Research', 'General Notes', 'Section'

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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Title Brixton Central Square: an archaeological watching brief report

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

Date 2009

Issuer or publisher MoLA

Place of issue or London
publication

Description A4 report, brief report on watching brief

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

Entered on 24 September 2009