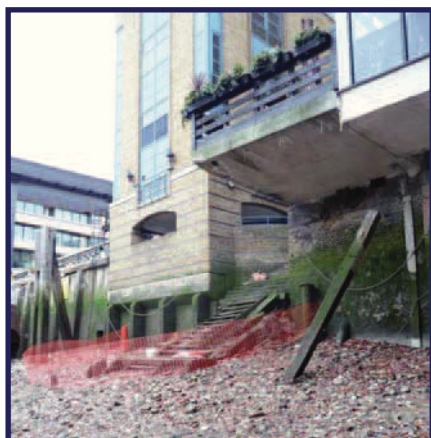
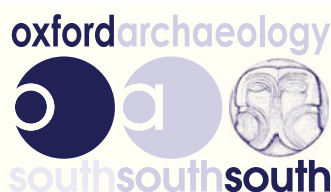


Cousin Lane Stairs City of London



Archaeological Watching Brief Report




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1	Mike Donnelly Project Officer	Dan Poore Head of Fieldwork	Dan Poore Head of Fieldwork	

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 Janus House
 Osney Mead
 Oxford OX2 0ES
 t: +44 (0) 1865 263800 e: oasouth@thehumanjourney.net
 f: +44 (0) 1865 793496 w: oasouth.thehumanjourney.net
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Cousin Lane Stairs, City of London

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Michael Donnelly

and illustrated by Leo Heatley and Sarah Lucas

Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
1 Location and scope of work.....	3
1.1 Project Details.....	3
1.2 Location, Geology and Topography.....	3
2 Methodology.....	3
3 Description of deposits.....	4
4 Discussion and conclusions.....	5
5 Bibliography and references.....	5



List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location map
Fig. 2 Test pit location

List of Plates

- Plate 1 The site viewed from the south-east
Plate 2 Work in TP01
Plate 3 TP02
Plate 4 TP03



Summary

In March of 2011 Oxford Archaeology South undertook an archaeological watching brief at Cousin Lane Stairs, City of London, for Fugro Engineering Services Ltd on behalf of the Environment Agency. The work involved the manual excavation of three geotechnical test pits through and beside a set of steps leading down from Cousin Lane to the foreshore. The work revealed details regarding the construction and design of the steps but did not penetrate down to archaeological horizons.

1 LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORK

1.1 Project Details

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology South (OAS), was commissioned by Fugro Engineering Services Limited on behalf of the Environment Agency to undertake a watching brief to monitor the excavation of geotechnical trial pits on the foreshore of the River Thames. This document describes the results of those works
- 1.1.2 The geotechnical investigation was undertaken as part of an Environment Agency Permitted Development to replace a set of stone and metal steps.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS) guidelines.

1.2 Location, Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies within the City of London on the stairs at the end of Cousin Lane (TQ 32526 80689) and the foreshore of the River Thames (Plate 1).
- 1.2.2 The geology of the area is alluvial sands, clays and peats overlying clays, silts and sands of the London Clay Formation (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1981).
- 1.2.3 Most if not all of the invasive activity took place within deposits brought into site as part of riverside maintenance, presumably at some time during the late 19th or first half of the 20th century.

2 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1.1 Three test pits were excavated by hand by Fugro ground workers, monitored at all times by a qualified archaeologist. It was initially proposed that two test pits would be excavated to a depth of around 3m, however, conditions on the ground meant that three much smaller test pits were excavated in order to allow for the placement of a hollow plastic pipe over a suitable location that would be examined further by window sampling.
- 2.1.2 TP01 was located through a thick overburden of sand bags that had been used to reinforce the steps, and was also intended to go through any steps that survived below this. The excavators encountered severe obstacles almost immediately.
- 2.1.3 TP02 and TP03 were located immediately west of the steps. Because of an obstruction in TP02, TP03 was excavated 0.4 m to the south.
- 2.1.4 What this all resulted in was three test pits measuring around 0.5 m square and between 0.3 m and 1.2 m deep rather than two test pits 1 m square and 3 m deep. These alterations to the original plan greatly reduced the potential of the ground works to disturb archaeological deposits.



3 DESCRIPTION OF DEPOSITS

- 3.1.1 The work took place in and around a set of steps, possibly a former slipway or quayside (Fig 2). These had been constructed of very large stone blocks, up to 2 m in length and around 0.5 m in maximum thickness, although 0.3 m was the norm. The steps measured 3.3 m in width and extended south from the river front for 4.1 m. Only the lower course appeared to have survived and much of the original build had clearly been lost. The surviving portion of the steps street-side had been capped with concrete steps but on the foreshore area the steps had been repaired with a ramp of sandbags held in place with road irons and Rebar. Grilled iron steps had then been set in place linking the concrete steps with the existing stone slabbed step frontage.
- 3.1.2 TP01 was positioned directly up against the riverside front at the north-west corner of the steps. Below around 1.5 m of fairly concreted sand bags, a deposit of concrete, stone and shell sat over the brick core of the steps (Plate 2). At the western edge some of the original basal stone steps survived and this greatly hampered the excavations. Under this were foreshore deposits consisting of sand/gravel/flint cobbles with numerous inclusions of bone, late post-medieval tile/construction/building material (CBM) and a mix of modern finds including plastic, metal, a windscreen-wiper, glazed ceramics and glass. Clearly the deposits directly below the damaged steps had been reworked by tidal action.
- 3.1.3 The foreshore area of the steps was covered with similar finds, all very water rolled, however, a short distance east, the make up of the foreshore changed abruptly to dense deposits of slag before changing again to cobbles with tile/CBM and pot but no animal bone. To the west of the steps the foreshore became very rich in massive flint cobbles and blocks. Its appearance suggests the dumping of material, probably ballast, in order to stabilise the riverside.
- 3.1.4 TP02 and TP03 were located around 0.4 m apart. TP02 encountered a timber obstruction at 1.15m, which wouldn't allow a window sample to be done. TP03 was therefore excavated for the window sampling core. Both test pits revealed a brick-built plinth underlying the stone steps to a depth of 0.6 m. Working in conjunction with this was a set of wooden piles and beams. More beams and posts were identified around 0.3 m west of the steps and may have formed part of a groyne. The deposits surrounding the brick plinth in TP02 were identical to those found in TP01 and included the discovery of a 1973 one pence piece from around 1m down, again showing the high degree of tidal reworking (Plate 3).
- 3.1.5 TP03 revealed a very different sequence below an initial 0.5m of typical foreshore deposit (Plate 4). Here a deposit of very dark grey-black silty clay material very much like a garden or night soil, containing large quantities of late post-medieval or early modern ceramics, glass and tile, was found in and around the wooden piles and brick steps. This material resembled an intentional backfill and may have been used to fill in or make-up the ground around the steps after or during their construction. The steps at this end also differed in that here, the brick plinth was tiered slightly and although this may have been for display, it is almost certain that this was for increasing the support given by the foundations on the riverside end of the steps, the place most vulnerable to erosion.
- 3.1.6 No significant archaeological deposits were discovered in any of the test pits.



4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The excavation of the test pits at Cousin Lane did not reveal any significant archaeological remains. The pits themselves were very restrictive in nature and rapidly filled with ground water, but each produced finds of a very modern nature down to their maximum depths.
- 4.1.2 It is clear from the often diverse nature of the material culture identified here, that much of the foreshore at this location had been reinforced with periodic dumping of material, probably ballast or made-ground deposits. It is also clear that the tides had reworked material to a very great extent.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1981, Sheet 270.



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Figure 1: Site location

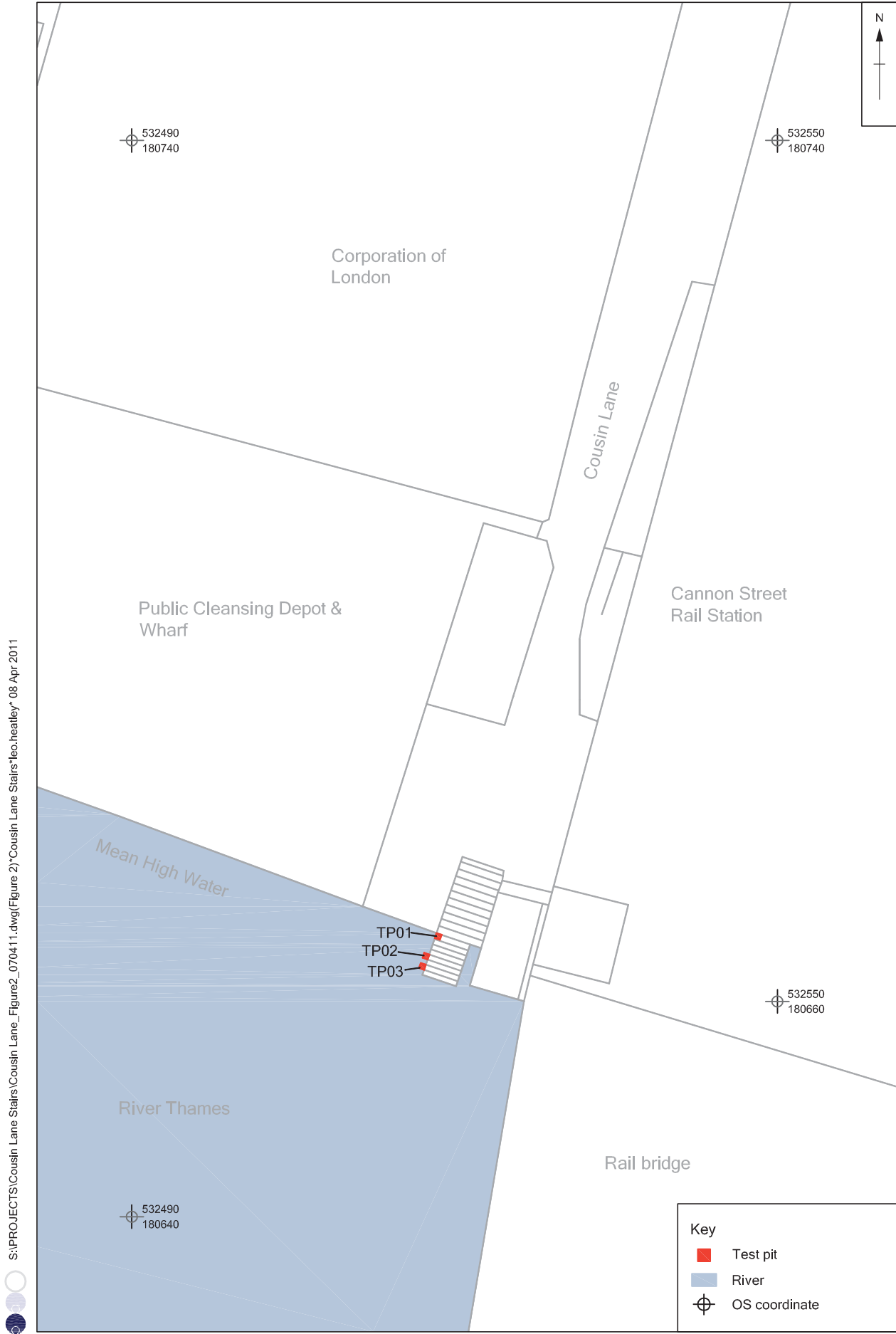


Figure 2: Test pit location



Plate 1: Site viewed from the south-east



Plate 2: Working in TP01



Plate 3: TP02



Plate 4: TP03



Head Office/Registered Office/ OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850 500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850 599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Mauguio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oamed@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>

OA Grand Ouest

7 Rue des Monderaines
ZI - Ouest
14650 Carpiquet
France

t: +33 (0) 2 49 88 01 01
f: +33 (0) 2 49 88 01 02
e: [info@oago.fr](mailto: info@oago.fr)
w: <http://oago.fr>



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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