

Swandon Way / Old York Road,
Wandsworth. SOY92

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF CARRIED OUT ON THE HOMEBASE, OLD YORK ROAD SITE, WANDSWORTH TOWN, LONDON SW18.

Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was asked by Willmot Dixon Symes Ltd, on behalf of the Grantchester Group Plc, to undertake a watching brief during the latest phase of development of the site. Work started on the 26th of October 1992, and lasted for five weeks.

Site Location

The site, coded SOY 92, lies immediately to the South of Wandsworth Town railway station, in the London borough of Wandsworth. It is bounded on the South by the railway embankment, on the East by Trinity Road and on the North and West by Swandon Way (National Grid Reference TQ259752).

The site measures approximately 200 metres (East/West) by 40 metres (North/South); covering an area of approximately 8,000 square metres.

The current redevelopment

The latest phase of work included the rerouting of a Victorian mains sewer, which ran diagonally (Southwest/Northeast) across the site. This necessitated the excavation of a trench, approximately 1 metre wide and 320 metres long, which, being 5 metres deep, would destroy all archaeological deposits along its length.

Geological background

The local geology is comprised of London Clay, below a mixture of flint/quartz gravels and sand (Thames Terrace 1), laid down by the River Thames at the end of the last glaciation (1). The Thames now runs approximately 250 metres North of the site, and the River Wandle, once a major tributary, flows into it approximately 300 metres to the West.

Archaeological background

The fertile alluvium, deposited by the rivers along their valley bottoms, would have provided a rich hunting and gathering ground for the prehistoric people of this area.

Previous archaeological work has shown that the remains of the earliest, Palaeolithic, settlement are likely to survive only on the higher river terraces to the South (2). However, archaeological excavation has produced evidence of later Prehistoric activity on these lower terrace gravels (3).

Research has shown that little other than agricultural activity has taken place in this area until houses were built, in the 19th century, along the eastern end of Warple Way, which ran east/west across the centre of the site. Later still, a chemical works was built on the Northern edge of the site.

Therefore, over much of the site, the possibility of finding undisturbed prehistoric deposits was high.

Previous disturbance of the archaeological deposits

Several developments, prior to commencement of the current redevelopment programme, had already destroyed the archaeological deposits in some areas.

The Victorian mains sewer, observed at both ends of the site, was constructed in a trench, approximately 4 metres wide and 4 metres deep, which has destroyed approximately 720 square metres of the archaeological deposits on the site.

A deep pit, approximately 5 metres long (North/South) was observed, immediately North of the electricity substation, at the Eastern end of the site. This appeared to be of 19th century date and had removed all earlier archaeological deposits, but its East/West extent could not be determined.

Around thirty trial pits, three metres deep, excavated in 1988, have destroyed approximately 48.6 square metres of archaeology. Study of the results of bore hole and trial pit testing (4) shows that several of the chemical works buildings were basemented, destroying approximately 392 square metres along the Northern side of the site, and a further 196 square metres (approximately) were destroyed by the removal of a concrete floor within another building, associated with the railway station, to the South.

Therefore, immediately prior to commencement of the latest phase of work, approximately 1552.6 square metres, or 19.4%, of the potential archaeological deposits on the site had already been destroyed.

The effect of the current work on the archaeological deposits

The excavation of the sewer trench has now destroyed a further 420 square metres, or 6.5% of the surviving deposits, and the vibro-flotation technique, employed for the foundations of the new buildings, will have destroyed, or at least severely disturbed, a further 50%. Thus, after completion of the project, a little more than 25.% of the original deposits will remain intact.

Methods and problems

The trench was mechanically excavated in a series of 4 metre lengths. Due to the instability of its sides, the trench had to be excavated rapidly (each length taking an average of 15 minutes), and drag box shoring had to be inserted immediately following excavation. The ends were then shored, and the sewer pipe layed, prior to beginning excavation of the next

and drag box shoring had to be inserted immediately following excavation. The ends were then shored, and the sewer pipe layed, prior to beginning excavation of the next section.

It was not possible to enter the trench, due to its dimensions, and the constant collapse of its sides precluded close observation and recording of the archaeological deposits through which it cut.

The machine continually smeared the archaeological deposits, severely reducing visibility, and this, together with the speed of excavation, limited the use of photographic recording.

The lack of available space necessitated the constant movement of excavated spoil, thus making it difficult to associate any artifacts, found within it, with any particular archaeological deposit.

Despite such unfavourable conditions, it was possible to distinguish several different soil horizons within the trench sides, and retrieve sufficient artifacts to provide an indication of their date. It was also possible to record a small section of the archaeological deposits in the Western area of the site.

The results

A 2.00 metre section through the deposits was archaeologically recorded towards the Western end of the trench. Recording had to be completed extremely quickly, prior to flooding by ground water.

The earliest deposits observed were the Thames terrace gravels. These were orange/brown sandy gravels, with layers and lenses of light brown/yellow sand, the top of which lay at 4.1M OD. The upper 0.1M was less gravelly and contained small lenses (up to 0.5M long and 0.1M deep) of clay and sand lenses. Sandy lenses became more frequent, and appeared at a higher level, towards the East. No artifacts were found within the gravels.

The gravels were overlaid by a thin band (up to 30mm) of light grey/brown clayey sand, with occasional charcoal flecks. The interface between this layer and the gravels below was not clear and, particularly to the East, it blended into the clayey sand lenses within the gravels.

A soft white, chalky deposit, only 1 or 2mm thick, which had formed on the surface of this deposit, created a distinct interface with the layer above.

This layer was cut into by two small features. The Westernmost feature was 150mm deep and 60mm wide, with near vertical sides. Its sides tapered slightly, from 60mm at the top to 40mm at the bottom, and it was filled with a mid brown/grey sandy clay, with occasional remains of rotted roots. The interface between this fill and the layer above was vague, and it contained no finds.

The second feature was slightly larger, being 210mm wide and 160mm deep. Its Western edge sloped by 40mm from top to bottom, while that on the East curved in to become 120mm wide at a depth of 70mm, before sloping a further 20mm to a flat bottom. The deposit filling this

feature was indistinguishable from the layer above.

These deposits were overlaid by an homogenous layer of mid- grey/brown, clayey sand, with moderate brown iron-like flecks, black organic flecks and charcoal flecks. This deposit is locally known as "ploughsoil". The only finds retrieved from this deposit were one small and abraded sherd of German stoneware and another of tin glazed earthenware (neither of which required further study and so were not retained). These can be dated to the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

This deposit was truncated by a feature with gently sloping sides and bottom that contained mid grey/brown clayey sand and gravel. This was truncated, and all archaeological deposits above it destroyed, by postwar features and dumps.

Approximately 15 metres to the East of the section, and at several other points along the length of the trench, it was possible to clean small sections through the deposits. At each point the "ploughsoil" was found to be approximately 0.6M deep, and to lay directly above the gravel, with no distinct horizon, and no other deposits or features apparent between them.

From observations made during excavation and study of bore hole and trial pit results, it would appear that the height of the gravels, and the depth of the "ploughsoil", remained constant right across the site.

Above this deposit a similarly homogenous black silty sand was observed, also present for the entire length of the trench. This contained several sherds of mid-nineteenth century earthenware. This deposit was cut by several drains and one large pit, of nineteenth or 20th century date.

Above this was a postwar mixed dump deposit, which constitutes the present ground surface.

A shallow trench, less than a metre deep, was excavated along the Northern boundary of the site, to take the foundations for the new building. The sides of these trenches displayed a multitude of dumped deposits, of 19th century and later date.

Discussion.

It is possible that the thin deposit between the gravels and "ploughsoil", recorded in section, represents a small area in which an early ground surface survives. The presence of charcoal flecks within it would indicate human activity. The feature cutting it to the West was sealed by the "ploughsoil", and could be interpreted as a stake hole. However, the Easternmost feature was filled with "ploughsoil", which finds date to the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

Excavations by the Museum of London at Swandon Way (3) and York Road (5) (approximately 100 and 500 metres North East of the site, respectively), revealed an apparently identical sequence of deposits, lying at similar heights to those recorded on the Homebase site.

At the York Road site, features, overlaid and filled by "ploughsoil", were found cutting into the

sands and gravels. Several of these, excavated in plan, were found to be linear, and were interpreted as plough marks, and were dated to the seventeenth century. The darker, 19th-century, deposit above is similarly interpreted. Such interpretation accounts for the homogenous nature of the deposits and the lack of any clear interface between them.

This would account for the presence of similar features on the Homebase site, suggesting that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, deep ploughing over a large area, has destroyed the earlier archaeological deposits. The presence of what may be the remains an early ground surface, exposed at the extreme West of the Homebase site, might suggest that in some areas ploughing was not as deep, and that prehistoric deposits may survive in some areas. The evidence suggests, however, that such deposits are unlikely to survive to any extent in the area covered by the Homebase development.

Acknowledgments

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Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Evaluation at Swandon Way, Wandsworth, SW18.

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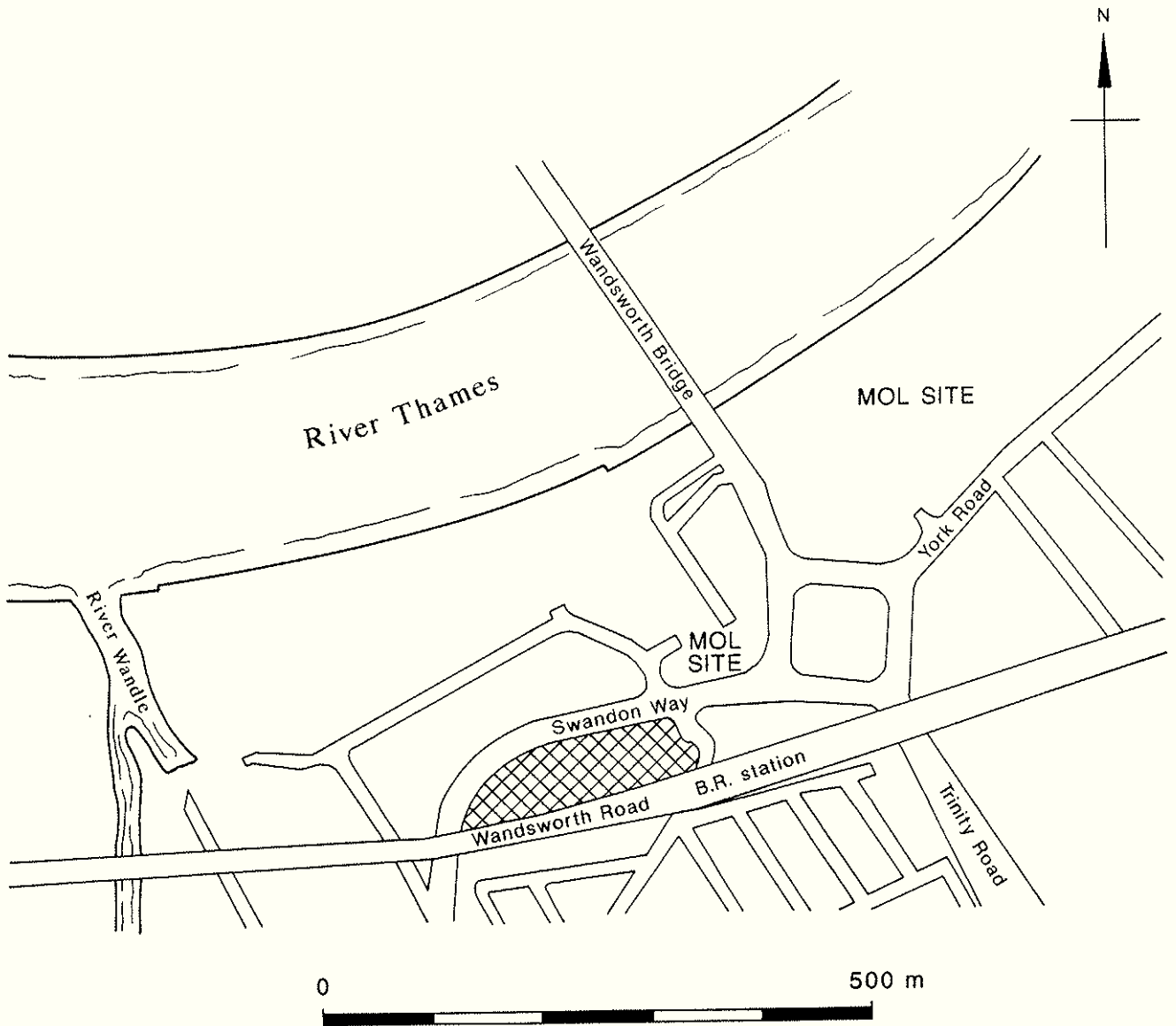
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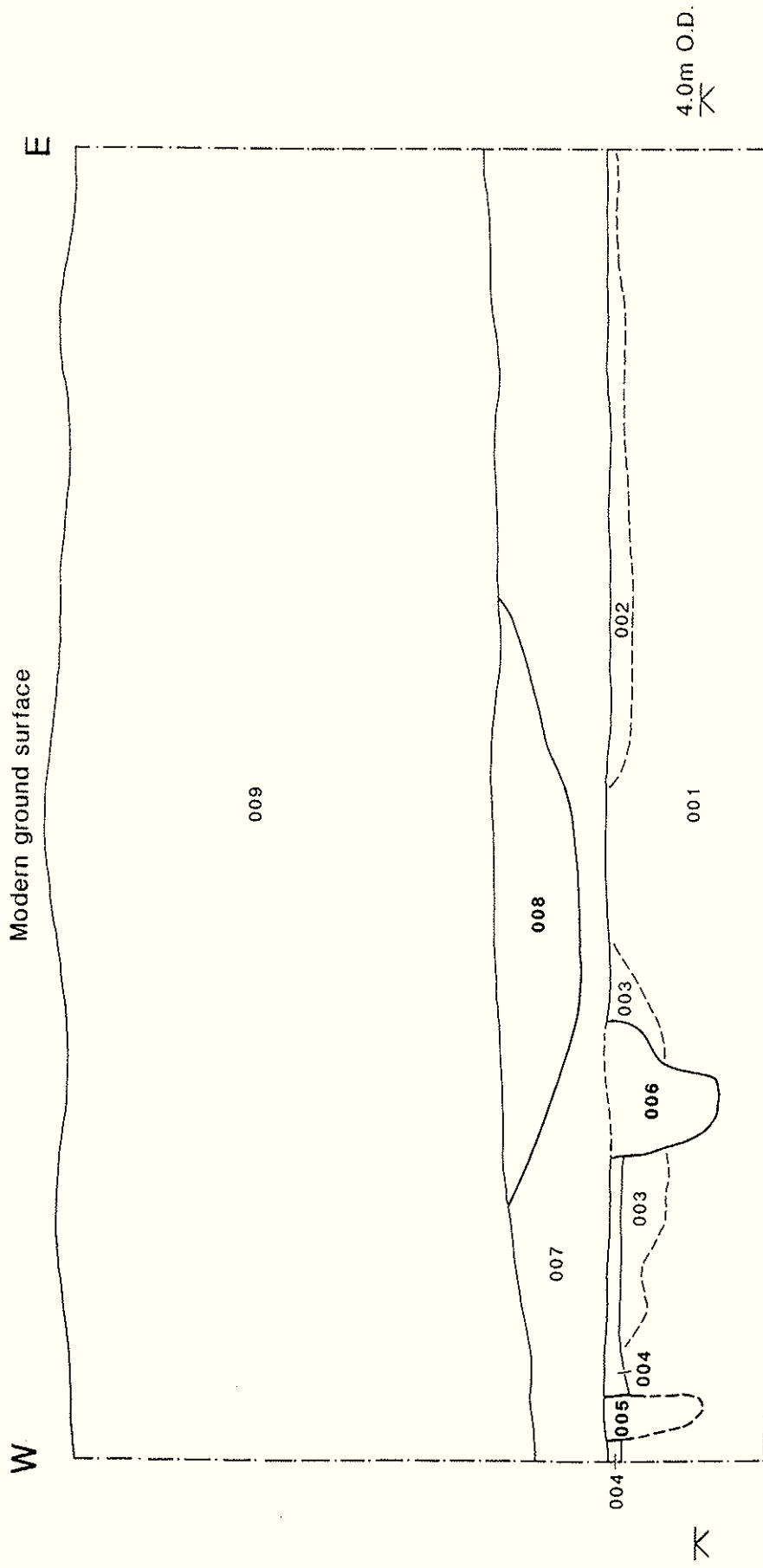
Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Evaluation at the John Watney Distillery Site, York Way, Wandsworth, SW18.

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Site location plan

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- 001 "Natural" orange/brown sandy gravel with light brown/yellow sand layers and lenses.
- 002 Light grey/brown clayey sand with charcoal flecks - prob = 004 - with white chalky deposit on surface.
- 003 Light brown clayey sand with occasional gravel.
- 004 Light grey/brown clayey sand with charcoal flecks - prob = 002 - with white chalky deposit on surface.
- 005 Mid grey/brown clayey sand with occasional remains of rootlets.
- 006 Mid grey/brown clayey sand with moderate brown fe-like flecks, black organic flecks and charcoal flecks - prob = 007.
- 007 Mid grey/brown clayey sand with moderate brown fe-like flecks, black, organic fleck and charcoal flecks.
- 008 Mid grey/brown clayey, sandy, gravel.
- 009 Postwar rubble and dumps - prob within cut - 008 and 007 definitely truncated.

See large scale site plan (w one) for section location.