

1 Old Queen Street Westminster

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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1 OLD QUEEN STREET

WESTMINSTER

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared for:

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by

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Summary

1 Old Queen Street, Westminster,

TQ 29910, 79635, Wessex Archaeology (Robert Wardill), Watching Brief, February-March 2004, London Borough of Westminster, OQT04.

The Site is believed to be located above the northern channel of the River Tyburn that bifurcated West of Westminster Abbey, to form Thorney Island, before joining the River Thames. The two channels survived into the medieval period as streams before disappearing completely in the 17/18th century.

One of five geotechnical test pits contained evidence for the presence of riverine deposits comprising layers of peat and a second pit contained evidence of rubbish dumping dating from the medieval and Post-medieval periods.

Deposits were located in two more pits but these appear to have been disturbed and no dating evidence was recovered to determine their archaeological significance.

The fifth pit was excavated from a higher level and contained a considerable depth of building rubble overlying a possible brick structure and soils of unknown date.

Acknowledgements

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The fieldwork was carried out for Wessex Archaeology by Robert Wardill who also prepared the report with contributions from Lorraine Mepham (finds) and Mark Roughly (illustrations).

1 OLD QUEEN STREET

WESTMINSTER

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by The Archaeological Consultancy on behalf of Mckay Securities plc to carry out an Archaeological Watching Brief on the excavation of five geotechnical test pits at 1 Old Queen Street, Westminster (the Site) centred on NGR TQ 29910, 79635. This report details the results of fieldwork carried out during late February and early March of 2004.
- 1.1.2 The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (1994 as amended) and a Project Specification prepared by Wessex Archaeology (2004) and approved by the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS) Archaeology Advisor.

1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 Number 1 Old Queen Street comprises a redundant office building of modern construction located to the west of Parliament Square at the corner of Old Queen Street and Storeys Gate (Figure 1).
- 1.2.2 The five geotechnical test pits were excavated within the standing building to investigate and assess existing foundations and ground conditions in advance of the proposed redevelopment of the Site.
- 1.2.3 Four test pits were excavated through the basement slab and one was excavated from ground floor level.
- 1.2.4 The geology of the area comprises primarily of sand and gravel overlying London Clay.

1.3 Archaeological Background

- 1.3.1 The Site is believed to be located above an in-filled channel of the River Tyburn.
- 1.3.2 The results of previous archaeological investigations indicate the Tyburn flowed from the direction of Buckingham Palace, bifurcating west of Westminster Abbey before joining the River Thames.
- 1.3.3 This bifurcation created a gravel eyot or island called Thorney Island upon which Westminster Abbey was built (Sloane *et al*, 1995).
- 1.3.4 The position of the Site places it towards the centre of the northern branch of the Tyburn as it heads north–east before curving round to the east to meet the Thames.
- 1.3.5 Following the Roman period the channels appear to have silted up surviving into the medieval period as streams. At this time the principal stream ran to the south of Westminster Abbey along the line of present day Great Smith Street. The stream forming the west side of the island, known as the 'long ditch', flowed along the line of Storeys Gate before turning eastwards entering the Thames between Derby Gate and Richmond Terrace (Sloane *et al*, 1995).
- 1.3.6 Streams are shown on maps dating to 1572 and 1658 but not on Rocque's map of London produced in 1746 (Sloane *et al*, 1995).

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

- 2.1.1 The general aim of the project was to determine, as far as reasonably possible, the presence/absence, extent, date, character, and depth of any surviving archaeological remains located within the test pits.
- 2.1.2 More specifically, the Watching Brief on the test pits would aim to confirm if the Site is located within a channel of the Tyburn and whether any evidence of the channel, its in-filling or other associated human activity, survives beneath the existing building.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Health and Safety

- 3.1.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety regulations (1992) and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation and regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.
- 3.1.2 A risk assessment was prepared by Wessex Archaeology before the commencement of fieldwork.

3.2 Fieldwork

- 3.2.1 All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (as amended 1999).
- 3.2.2 A total of five approximately square test pits ranging in area from $0.78m^2$ to $1.40m^2$ and between 1.60m and 2.30m deep were excavated within the Site (Figure 1).
- 2.1.3 Test Pits 1-4 were excavated through the basement slab the height of which lay between 1.11m and 1.14m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). Test Pit 5 was excavated from ground floor level, within a small open yard/light well to the rear of the building complex, at a height of at 4.06m aOD.
- 3.2.3 Removal of the concrete slab, which in the basement of the building was up to 0.67m thick, modern overburden and soils/river deposits down to the depth required by the geotechnical engineer was carried out by hand under the supervision of a Wessex Archaeology archaeologist.
- 3.2.4 Revealed archaeological deposits were assessed before excavations were continued either under the supervision of, or by, the Wessex Archaeology archaeologist.
- 3.2.5 Representative sections of each pit were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and described using Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording system. A photographic record of the works was maintained.
- 3.2.6 Recovered artefacts were washed and marked with site code and context number before suitable material (primarily ceramics) was scanned to assess the date range of the assemblage.

4 **RESULTS**

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The following sections provide a brief summary of the findings for each test pit with details given in Appendix 1 and section/plan illustrations in Figure 2. Heights above Ordnance Datum (aOD) provided in the text refer to the top of each respective deposit.

4.2 Test Pit 1

- 4.2.1 Three layers were found beneath the modern deposits in Test Pit 1. All appeared to be natural river/marsh deposits. Layers **101** (0.26m aOD) and **102** (0.13m aOD) consisted almost entirely of organic material and appeared as dark brown, compact, homogenous, damp peat. Layer **104** (-0.07m aOD) was similar to the layers above but contained less organic material and more silt/clay.
- 4.2.2 At the interface of layers **102** and **104** was a partial layer (**103**) of various sized branches measuring from 0.04-0.10m in diameter (**Figure 2**). Some retained their bark and all were on the same north-east to south-west orientation. No evidence that the branches had been cut was found and their alignment is parallel to the flow of the river in this area as it is currently understood (Sloane *et al*, 1995). It is therefore probable that their deposition was the result of natural processes.

4.3 Test Pit 2

- 4.3.1 Test Pit 2 contained two very wet, black mixed deposits of sand and silt containing animal bone, oyster shells, building stone, tile, pottery, and wood. The pottery dates from the 11th century to the 16th/17th centuries.
- 4.3.2 These deposits, **201** and **202** at heights of 0.36m and -0.02m aOD respectively, appear to be a mix of river alluvium and redeposited medieval and Post- medieval rubbish dumps.

4.4 Test Pit 3

4.4.1 Layer **301** (0.38m aOD) was found in Test Pit 3 below modern deposits and above natural geology (London Clay) (**302**). It comprised mostly of what appeared to be redeposited organic material (peat) similar to that found in Test Pit 1 but it was dry and contained fragments of mortar and deposits of clay. No finds were recovered from this layer.

4.5 Test Pit 4

4.5.1 Layer **401** (0.46m aOD) was found below modern material overlying the natural geology (**402**). It comprised a compact mix of grey/black silt, lenses of orange sand, pebbles and mortar fragments. No finds were recovered from this layer.

4.6 Test Pit 5

- 4.6.1 For safety reasons, because of its considerable depth, all measurements and observations were made from the top of Test Pit 5.
- 4.6.2 Approximately half of Test Pit 5 contained the foundations of an existing, adjacent wall. The deposits next to this comprised layers of brick rubble and soil (501 and 502) down to what appeared to be a single course of red bricks (503). This feature extended out of the section edge at a height of 2.43m aOD and overlay deposit 504, which appeared to be a compact brown soil.

5 FINDS

- 5.1.1 A small quantity of artefacts were recovered from two contexts (201 and 202).
- 5.1.2 One piece of ceramic roof tile (146g) and two sherds of pottery (51g) came from context **201**. All are of medieval date, the pottery sherds both in a coarse sandy/flint-tempered fabric (EMFL) of 11th century date.
- 5.1.3 Finds from context **202** comprised five sherds of pottery (94g). Three of these are of medieval date, one coarseware (EMS) and two glazed wares (LCOAR and LLON); the two Post-medieval sherds are both coarse redwares (PMR), from glazed jugs of 16th or 17th century date.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1.1 The Watching Brief on the geotechnical test pits achieved its specified aims by identifying evidence for the presence of riverine deposits probably representing the northern channel/stream of the River Tyburn and evidence for its deliberate in-filling.
- 6.1.2 Test Pit 1 excavated in the basement of the office building contained remnants of river/marsh deposits but no clear evidence of human activity. The evidence from this test pit supports the theory that the Site is located within the ancient river channel and shows that environmental remains associated with it survive to depths in excess of 0.80m beneath the concrete slab of the building.
- 6.1.3 The 0.5m of mixed medieval and Post-medieval deposits found in Test Pit 2 appear to be remains of rubbish dumping within a wet, agitated environment. The chronology of these deposits correspond with historical evidence that both channels of the Tyburn survived as streams in the medieval period which disappeared altogether by the mid 18th century. The stream in this area would have run along the route of present day Storeys Gate which is less than 2m to the east of the test pit. The remains in this test pit may therefore represent the last vestiges of the northern channel and evidence of its demise by in-filling with rubbish in the 17/18th century.
- 6.1.4 The deposit found in Test Pit 3 appears to be redeposited riverine peat and that in Test Pit 4, a mixed dump of natural sand, clay, and river alluvium. No datable artefacts were recovered from either deposit so it is not possible to comment on their archaeological significance.
- 6.1.5 Test Pit 5 was excavated from ground floor level and was therefore not expected to encroach upon river levels. The evidence from this pit shows a considerable depth (c. 1.4m) of demolition rubble from previous episodes of building activity overlying a possible brick structure and soils of unknown date. Any survival of these remains beyond the yard/light well in which the test pit was located will have been limited by surrounding basements. The lack of modern basement excavations in the vicinity of Test Pit 5 does suggest that, if present, potential river deposits may survive to a greater height in this small area than in the rest of the Site.

7 THE ARCHIVE

7.1.1 The project archive will be held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology at Old Sarum, Salisbury, under the project code 55550. In due course the archive is to be deposited with the Museum of London under the site reference of OQT04.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sloane B., <i>et al</i>	1995	<i>The Roman Road and River Regime: Archaeological investigations in Westminster and Lambeth.</i> London Archaeologist, Vol. 7, No. 14.
Wessex Archaeology	2004	1, 3-7 Old Queen St, London Borough of Westminster: Archaeological Watching Brief Project Specification. Unpublished

APPENDIX 1: TEST PIT SUMMARIES

Test Pit 1		Length: 1.40m	Width: 1.40m	Max Depth: 1.65m		
(8		(at top)	(at top)			
	_			Surface height	1.11m aOD	
Context	Тур	e Description	Description			
No.					(in m aOD)	
		Modern cor	crete slab		1.11	
					0.46	
		Modern cor	struction rubble		0.46	
					0.26	
101	Laye	r Dark brown	Dark brown peat. Damp deposit comprising			
		obvious org	obvious organic material (twigs, grass, roots etc)			
102	Laye	r Dark brown	Dark brown peat. As 101 however the organic			
		material is l	material is less obvious and only larger twigs, roots		-0.07	
		etc are appa	etc are apparent.			
103 Layer		r Partial layer	Partial layer of 7 various sized branches measuring			
		from 0.04-0	from 0.04-0.10m in diameter. Some retain their			
		bark. All or	bark. All on north-east to south-west orientation.			
		No evidence	No evidence that the branches had been cut.			
10 4	10 4 Layer		Mid brown silty clay containing large pieces of			
		wood (bran	wood (branches)			

Test Pit 2 Len (at t		ngth: 1.40m top)	Width: 1.40m (at top)	Max Depth: 1.60m		
Context	Туре	Description		~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~	Depths	
No.					(in m aOD)	
		Modern con	crete slab		1.13	
					0.49	
			Modern construction rubble			
					0.36m	
201	Layer	Black/dark g	rey sandy silt. Wet d	leposit containing	0.36	
		occasional pebbles, pieces of wood and building stone, oyster shell animal bone, pottery			-0.02	
202	202 Laver Black/dark grey silt. Wet deposit containing				-0.02	
		occasional pebbles, pieces of wood, animal bone and pottery.			-0.15	
203	203 Natural		Light grey clay. No obvious inclusions.			
	geology?				-0.47	

Test Pit 3	Lei (at	ngth: 1.00m top)	gth: 1.00m Width: 0.92m op) (at top)		62m	
			Surface heigh		t 1.14m aOD	
Context No.	t Type Description				Depths (in m aOD)	
		Modern concrete slab			1.14 0.57	
Modern construction rubble		struction rubble		0.57 0.38		
301	301 Layer I f		Dark Brown peat. Similar to 101 in pit 1 but not wet. Contains deposits of grey clay and flecks/fragments of mortar		0.38 0.0	
302 Natural L geology		Light grey clay with orange mottles		0.0 -0.48		

Test Pit 4	Leng (at te		th: 0.78m Width: 0.78m Max (at top)		Max Depth: 1.7	6m
					Surface height	1.13m aOD
Context	Context Type		Description		Depths	
No.						(in m aOD)
			Modern concrete slab			1.13
						0.46
401 Layer			Mixed layer comprising dark brown organic			0.46
			material, dark grey/black silt and lenses of orange sand. Contains frequent pebbles and mortar fragments.		-0.10	
402 Natural geology		ral 9gy	Light grey clay turning to orange sand and clay at bottom of pit.		-0.10 -0.63	

Test Pit 5		Leng (at t	gth: 1.15m op)	Width: 1.05m (at top)	Max Depth: 2.3	80m
					Surface height	4.06m aOD
Context	Context Type		Description			Depths
No.						(in m aOD)
			Modern conc	rete slab.		4.06
						3.86
501	Layer		Loose soil and building rubble.			3.86
						3.18
502 Layer		r	Compact brown soil containing frequent large			3.18
		pieces of brick/tile.			2.43	
503 Wall		Single course of five bricks.			2.43	
504	504 Layer		Compact brown soil containing occasional small			2.43
		pieces of brick/tile.			1.76	



Site and test pit location map





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