



Purfleet Riverside, London Road, Purfleet, ESSEX

Archaeological Watching Brief Report





**PURFLEET RIVERSIDE
LONDON ROAD
PURFLEET
ESSEX**

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned to carry out an archaeological watching brief to observe the removal of modern overburden from a site in Purfleet, Essex. The site, situated off London road, runs alongside the Thames and is centred on NGR 555520 177860. The watching brief was carried out at the request of Thurrock Council, acting on the advice of Essex County Council, in order to inform a condition of planning consent. The ground works were conducted by Vertase FLI Ltd.

The brief consisted of two phases of work. The first took place in July 2007 and involved the observation of the stripping of modern overburden down to alluvium, when the former was removed for decontamination. No archaeological features or related artefactual material were noted during this phase of work.

The second phase involved observation of the removal of modern overburden in the east of the watching brief area, after the removal of a concrete pad which overlaid this area of the site. Given the absence of archaeological features or material in the phase one area, and the proposed depth of the phase two excavations, it was deemed unnecessary to watch the second phase of works. This was agreed after discussion with Richard Havis of Essex County Council's Historic Environment Management (HEM) team.

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The project was commissioned by Robert Masfield (RPS Group) on behalf of George Wimpey Ltd (now Taylor Wimpey Ltd). Wessex Archaeology would like to thank RPS Group and George Wimpey for commissioning the project, and Vertase FLI Ltd. for their assistance and cooperation during work on site. The fieldwork was monitored by Richard Havis of Essex County Council's Historic Environment Management (HEM) team.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Lawrence Pontin. The fieldwork was undertaken by Gemma White, who also compiled this report, with illustrations by Kitty Brandon

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by RPS Group, working on behalf of George Wimpey (The Client), to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land off London Road, Purfleet, adjacent to the river Thames (see **Figure 1**). The area, centred on NGR 555520 177860, is hereafter referred to as the Site.

1.1.2 The watching brief was conducted at the request of Essex Council's HEM team, the archaeological advisors to Thurrock Council, and was required in order to inform a decision on conditions affecting planning consent for the proposed development of the Site.

1.1.3 The project involved watching the removal of modern overburden to reveal the alluvium below and monitoring for the presence of any archaeological features or deposits.

1.1.4 The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2007) and approved by Richard Havis of HEM.

1.2 Site Description

1.2.1 The Site consists of an open area bordered by the Thames sea wall to the south and a railway line to the north. It is reached from London Road, Purfleet and is centred on NGR 555520 177860. The area is proposed for residential redevelopment.

1.2.2 Layers of modern made ground and/or contaminated ground, in places 3m deep, cover the western part of the Site. This made ground is a consequence of previous development and industrial land use, and is being removed for sorting and decontamination by Vertase FLI Ltd. prior to further development. The eastern end of the Site is covered in a large concrete slab, below which modern overburden is 5 – 6m deep. is thought to be a consequence of truncation associated with the installation of tanks associated with industrial activity at some point in the past. Evidence of deposit depth comes from geotechnical survey conducted prior to the watching brief (Vertase, 2003).

2 GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Geology

2.1.1 The made ground overlies a 7-10m thick deposit of alluvium containing brown, very peaty clay. The interface between this deposit and the made ground was found to be very disturbed. The alluvium in turn overlies a 4-7m layer of river terrace gravel based on chalk bedrock. Both the gravel and alluvium layers thin out towards the north of the Site as the chalk deposit rises up from the river.

2.2 Topography

2.2.1 Topographically the site lies on the Thames Alluvial Floodplain.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Desk Based Assessment

3.1.1 A desk-based assessment of the Site was carried out by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2004) in order to determine the potential for the survival of archaeological remains on and around the Site area. A summary of the results follows.

3.1.2 Evidence for prehistoric activity has been found to the north of the Site, principally within and around the old Botany chalk pit and the Beacon Hill area. The Site also has the potential to yield Pleistocene and Holocene alluvium and gravel deposits, which may contain prehistoric material.

3.1.3 Evidence of Romano-British activity has been found at Botany pit and Beacon Hill, and a recent archaeological excavation at the northern boundary of the site revealed a Romano-British quarry pit (WA 2004). There is potential for the discovery of Romano-British features and finds on the Site.

3.1.4 There is low potential for Saxon or medieval remains within the Site as activities associated with the original village of Purfleet (first recorded in 1285) are not believed to have extended into the Site area.

3.1.5 The Post-medieval period (AD 1500-1799) saw the expansion and continued growth of Purfleet and its association with a number of developing industrial pursuits. There is no evidence that these activities reached the Site.

4 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

4.1 Aims and Objectives

4.1.1 The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the removal of the modern overburden to reveal the underlying alluvium, and within this alluvium establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains.

4.1.2 The objective of this exercise was to record the location, extent, date character, condition and depth of any surviving archaeological remains within the Site.

4.2 Fieldwork

- 4.2.1 All watching brief work was conducted in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (2001), excepting where these are superseded by statements made below.
- 4.2.2 All archaeological deposits were recorded by means of Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording sheets. A photographic record was made by means of black and white prints, colour slides and digital images. Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50.
- 4.2.3 Where no archaeological remains were present, the area was recorded by means of digital photography and measured sketch plans

4.3 Health and Safety

- 4.3.1 All work was undertaken 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 legislations, regulations and codes of practice which are in force.
- 4.3.2 Health and Safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork, and safe working practices took priority over archaeological considerations at all times

4.4 Phases of Work

- 4.4.1 Work was conducted in two phases on the Site.
- 4.4.2 First the removal of the modern overburden covering the west of the Site was monitored and any archaeological features in the underlying alluvium investigated and recorded.
- 4.4.3 Following this, excavations in the east of the site were due to be monitored in case ground works here extended down to the alluvium.

4.5 Finds Collection and Retention

- 4.5.1 No finds were retrieved during the watching brief.

4.6 Environmental Sampling Strategy

4.6.1 No environmental samples were taken during this phase of works.

4.7 The Archive

4.7.1 The archive, including site drawings and photographic records, is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury under the WA project code 66460. Following the conclusion of the project the archive will be prepared for deposition at a suitable museum in accordance with the *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage* (UKIC 1990).

5 RESULTS

5.1 Phase I area

5.1.1 No archaeological features or related artefactual material were present in the areas watched during phase one of the works on site. Removal of the overburden revealed a diffuse and disturbed horizon with the alluvium, in which no features were visible.

5.1.2 The overburden consisted of successive dumped layers of post-medieval material associated with previous industrial use of the Site and areas surrounding it (see **Plates 1** and **2**). Brick, glass and ceramics dating to the last century were noted in the overburden but were not retrieved for processing or further study.

5.1.3 As no features had been noted, it was agreed with Richard Havis of HEM that it was unnecessary to continue to watch Phase I.

5.2 Phase II area

5.2.1 Vertase confirmed that the bulk excavations in the Phase II area would not reach the alluvium levels. It was therefore agreed with Richard Havis of HEM that no watching brief would be required on the Phase II area

5.3 Conclusion

5.3.1 No archaeological remains were observed within the watching brief areas. After consideration of the watching brief results and consultation with Richard Havis of HEM, it was agreed that no further archaeological mitigation was required in the Phase I area of the Site, due to observed and projected levels of disturbance and contamination.

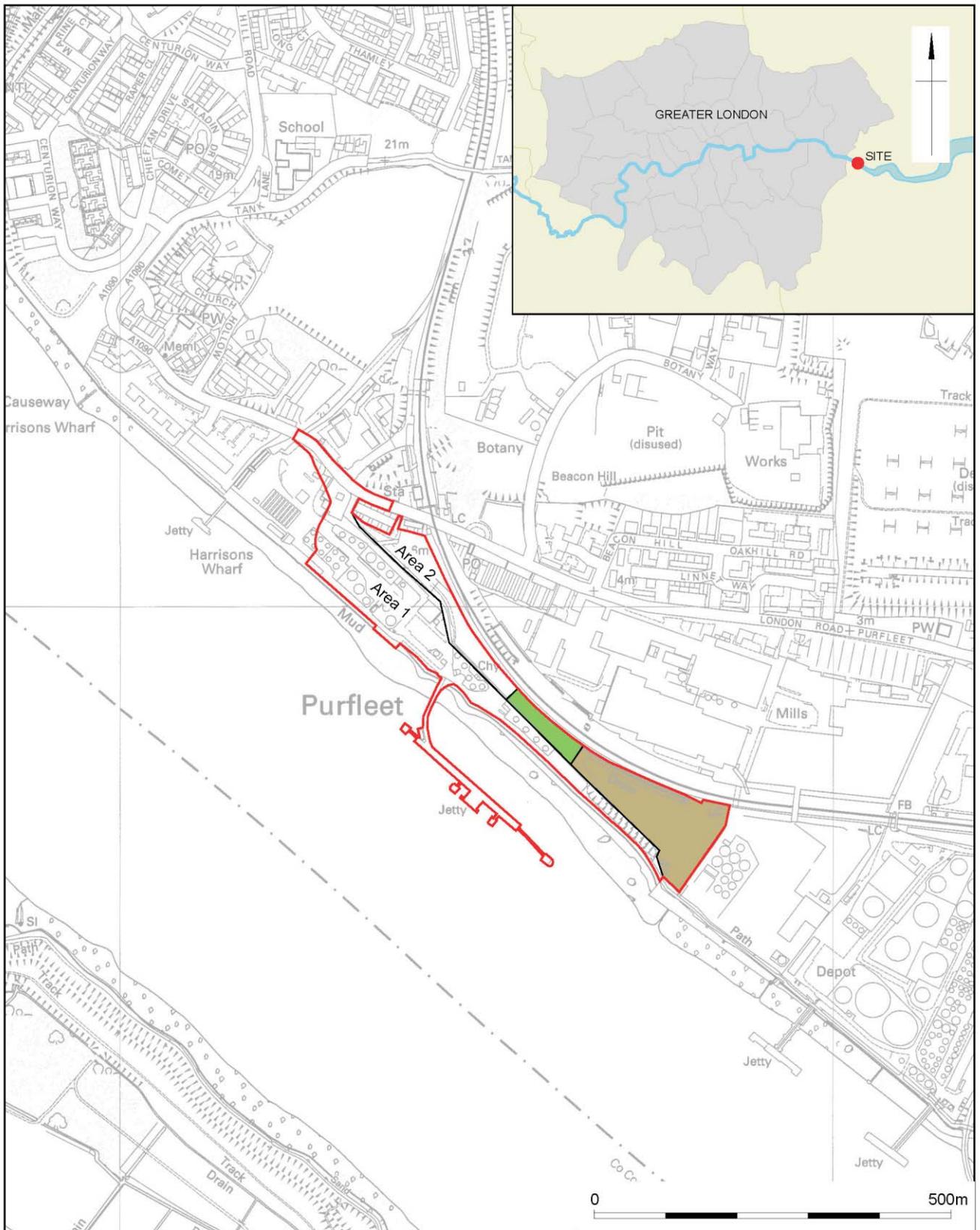
5.3.2 It was also deemed unnecessary to continue with Phase II, given the negative results of phase one and the fact that the bulk excavations in the Phase II area would not reach the alluvium levels.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Site location and plan of watching brief areas

Figure 1



Plate 1: Southwest facing section through made ground with 1m scale



Plate 2: Working shot showing machining with building debris

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