

BRESSENDEN PLACE
London
Victoria
SW1

City of Westminster

An archaeological evaluation report

Site Code: VSB06
National Grid Reference: 528398 179478

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Summary (non-technical)

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) on the site of the Bressenden Place development which forms a block bounded by Bressenden Place to the north and east, Buckingham Palace Road to the west and Victoria Station to the south. The site comprises some 8ha. The Ordnance Survey National Grid reference is 529022 179256. Land Securities commissioned the report from MoLAS

Following the recommendations of an Archaeological Impact Assessment a number of boreholes were monitored across the site (Cowan 2005)). The archaeological and geoarchaeological monitoring have shown that there is survival of historic archaeological deposits to the east of the site and alluvial clays and sands across the site at depth probably dating from the mid-Holocene onward. The results of the field evaluation coupled with a survey of the date, type and footprint of existing buildings have helped to refine the initial assessment of the archaeological potential of the site indicating areas of potential and truncation.

In the light of revised understanding of the archaeological potential of the site the report concludes the impact of the proposed redevelopment varies between no impact and a more significant impact on surviving archaeological deposits.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The Bressenden Place development forms a block bounded by Bressenden Place to the north and east, Buckingham Palace Road to the west and Victoria Station to the south (see Fig 1). The site comprises some 8ha. The Ordnance Survey National Grid reference is 529022 179256. The site code is VSB06. Within this report the property is known as ‘the site’.

A desk-top *Archaeological impact assessment* (Cowan, 2005) was previously prepared, which covers the whole area of the site. The *assessment* document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, and the initial interpretation of its archaeological potential.

1.2 Planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Archaeological impact assessment* which formed the project design for the evaluation (see Cowan, 2005).

1.3 Planning background

The Planning and legislative background to the site has been adequately summarised in the previous *Archaeological Impact Assessment* (Cowan, 2005).

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Land Securities 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).

Field evaluation, and the *Evaluation report* which comments on the results of that exercise, are defined in the most recent English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) as intended to provide information about the archaeological resource in order to contribute to the:

- formulation of a strategy for the preservation or management of those remains; and/or
- formulation of an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may adversely affect such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or
- formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigations within a programme of research

1.5 Aims and objectives

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002.

The following research aims and objectives relevant to this evaluation are taken from the *Archaeological impact assessment*:

- What is the actual degree of palaeoenvironmental survival present across the site
- What is the nature and levels of deposits beneath the basement slab – especially the level and degree of truncation suffered by the geological deposit

2 Topographical and historical background

The topographical and archaeological background to the site has been adequately examined in the previous *Archaeological Impact Assessment* (Cowan, 2005), but will be summarised here.

The site lies within the marshy flood plain of the River Tyburn and the eastern part of the site is crossed by a branch of the river, known as the Tachbrook. The subsoil comprises deposits of alluvium over Kempton Park terrace gravel.

During the prehistoric periods much of the area would have been wet and marshy with pools of water, possibly lakes, separated by boggy ground. There would have been many small channels surrounding higher areas of sandy islands. Areas such as this would have been exploited by prehistoric people for food, such as wild plants, fish and waterfowl, as well as for building materials such as reeds and willow.

From Roman through to the Medieval periods, little is known of the immediate area of the site as it probably remained part of an extensive marsh. Even in the medieval period the site was on marginal land, which would have been unsuitable for settlement although as water-meadow land, the site had value and indeed was exploited for hay and pasture. Even in the 16th and 17th centuries, it is clear from later maps that it was undeveloped and set within open fields.

In historic times the existence of marshy, low-lying ground has had a distinctive impact on the nature of activity in the area; its use for pasture, osier beds and market gardens being continued into the 19th century when large-scale residential development was preceded by land reclamation. Profitable though market gardening was, from the middle of the 19th century onwards it could not keep pace with the escalating value of land for building, as suburban London continued to expand westwards. For example, the Chelsea Waterworks Canal, created in the eighteenth century and lying in open land next to the Buckingham Palace Road had become increasingly redundant by the 1880s with a serious decline in trade on the canal. By 1929 much of the canal was filled in and it was an obvious route from the Thames to a new London railway terminus, Victoria Station. The first lines to the station ran along the eastern side of the canal and the station opened on 1st October 1860.

Indeed, the Circle and District line runs through the site area south of Victoria Street and was constructed in 1868 and this was a cut and cover line. The tunnelled Victoria Line runs through the site area, from north to south on the eastern side of the site. It was constructed between 1968 and 1971. Victoria Station consists of two termini side by side both opened in 1860.

3 The evaluation

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and monitoring during the evaluation was carried out in accordance with the preceding *Archaeological Impact Assessment* (Cowan, 2005) and the MoLAS *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoLAS, 1994).

On-site trial-work, in the form of geotechnical borehole monitoring was carried out to get an indication of the degree of palaeoenvironmental survival present across the site. Where possible all boreholes were all recorded to gravel. Geotechnical pits that were excavated for engineering purposes were found to have been largely in the area of 'cut and cover' associated with the station and Underground railway lines and therefore of no archaeological interest. Other boreholes were ruled out because they took place on either weekends or at night.

Three borehole starter pits were excavated in positions designated by the contractor (Fig 2). The ground was broken out and cleared by contractors. The pits were excavated by hand by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS. Three boreholes then followed the initial trench excavation at the same locations. The boreholes were carried out by the contractor while being monitored by MoLAS geoarchaeologist.

The locations of borehole starter pits were recorded by MoLAS offsetting from adjacent standing walls and plotted on to an existing site plan. This information was then plotted onto the OS grid.

A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was made in accordance with the principles set out in the MoLAS site recording manual (MoLAS, 1994). Levels were calculated by reduction from ground level OD heights provided by the contractor.

The field results obtained from the borehole observations were then plotted using TerraStaion software to produce a composite transect across the site which has been used to interpret the observations (Fig 3, 3.3). This interpretation has also benefited from taking account previous observations in the area.

The site has produced: one trench location plan and on site logs. The site finds and records can be found under the site code VSB06 and will be subsequently deposited in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the evaluation

<i>Borehole 05/02</i>	
Location	529059.91; 179197.47
Dimensions	0.5m by 0.5m
Modern ground level/top of slab	5.35m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	1.65m OD
Thickness of alluvium observed	2m
Level of base of deposits observed	-0.65mOD

Borehole 05/02 was located to the north east of the site in a driveway area to the west of Bressenden Place behind number 122 Victoria Street. Borehole 05/02 was hand excavated by contractors to 1.2m depth. Only modern fill was observed. The borehole monitoring showed that modern fill consisting of concrete slab, ash and brick over more concrete to 2.4m and disturbed ground extended to 3.7m below the surface. Below the made ground lay a variably sandy clay deposit which extended down to the gravels at 7m below surface.

<i>Borehole 05/03</i>	
Location	529087.16; 179197.08
Dimensions	0.5m by 0.5m
Modern ground level/top of slab	5.3m OD
Base of modern fill/slab	1.6m OD
Thickness of archaeological deposits seen	1.9m
Level of base of deposits observed	-0.3 m OD
Natural observed	-0.3 m OD

Borehole 05/03 was located in the north east of the site in Bressenden Place opposite BH05/02. Borehole 05/03 was hand excavated by contractors to 1.2m depth. Only modern fill was observed. The borehole monitoring showed that modern fill and disturbed ground extended down to approximately 3.7m below surface. At this level a peaty or 'stable sweepings' deposit was encountered over sandy silts to approximately 4.5m depth. Below the peat deposit lay a sandy silt deposit which extended down to silty sands at approximately 5m below surface. The sands in turn lie over the gravels at 5.7m depth. Furthermore, all sediments encountered below the peat included occasional tile or building material fragments of indeterminable date.

<i>Borehole 05/05</i>	
Location	528965.72; 179161.09
Dimensions	0.5m by 0.5m
Modern ground level/top of slab	5.35 OD
Base of modern fill/slab	2.15m OD
Thickness of alluvium observed	3.5m
Level of base of deposits observed	-1.15 m OD

Borehole 05/05 was situated toward the centre of the site in Victoria Street in front of number 148. Borehole 05/05 was hand excavated by contractors to 1.2m depth. Only modern fill was observed. The borehole monitoring showed that modern fill and disturbed ground extended down to a depth of approximately 3.2m below surface. Below the made ground lay a sandy clay deposit which extended down to clay sands at approximately 5m below surface. The sands, in turn, lie over the gravels at approximately 6.5m depth.

3.3 Geoarchaeological discussion of the site stratigraphy

The gravels form the basis of the Holocene sequence as they represent deposits laid down during the last glacial period (Fig 3). The gravels, known as Kempton Park gravels, are found to vary little in height (*c.* 1.5mOD) across the bulk of the site between boreholes 05/05 and 05/02 but climb relatively steeply upward over a short distance between 05/02 and 05/03 to -0.4mOD. The levels tie in well with OD heights on the gravels from other sites in the area particularly those from Eland House and 119–128 Wilton Road (Corcoran, 2000), which returned levels of -1 and -0.9m respectively. The gravel high of 05/03 could be indicative of an edge of the channel deposit as the eastern part of the site is known to have been crossed by the Tachbrook, a tributary of the Tyburn River. Alternatively, this may represent the edge of the shallow lake thought to exist locally during the early part of the Holocene as mentioned in the impact assessment (Cowan, 2005).

The sands, which form the next deposit over the gravels, were often found to be clayey or silty. It is possible the sands were deposited as mid-channel or point bars in the channel utilised by the Tachbrook and the finer, clayey fraction of the sands indicates either a slackening in the water flow. Again, alternatively, these clayey sands could represent the slow silting up of a lake or hollow in the floodplain through overbank flooding by local rivers.

Over the sands lie silts and clays that continue to indicate the slackening of the water flow locally. Whether this is indicative of the lake infilling or the depositional regime of the Tyburn (or indeed a combination of both) remains unclear although the ever increasing redundancy of channels / water flow in the area would lead eventually to the dominance of a marshy environment known to exist historically.

3.4 Assessment of the evaluation

Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS) guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) require an assessment of the success of the evaluation ‘in order to illustrate what level of confidence can be placed on the information which will provide the basis of the mitigation strategy’.

In the case of this site the evaluation has shown that the survival of deposits potentially containing archaeological evidence of historic activity, specifically from the area of BH05/03, is good. The lithostratigraphic sequences recorded in the boreholes are also compatible with geoarchaeological records from this site and other sites in the area, suggesting that the sequence recorded is likely to be reliable. The

evaluation trenches / boreholes were distributed across the site allowing a relatively broad sample of the geoarchaeological resource to be observed and recorded, however boreholes provide only a very small window through which to view the buried deposits and artefacts discarded by people in the past and are difficult to properly assess using this technique.

4 Archaeological potential

4.1 Realisation of original research aims

The following research aims were proposed in the *Archaeological impact assessment* (Cowan, 2005):

- *What is the actual degree of palaeoenvironmental survival present across the site?*

Palaeoenvironmental survival of sediments was good across the site at depth as seen in the geoarchaeological assessment. Possible organic clays and sands in BH05/02 and BH05/03 relating to an increasingly redundant river or lake exist across the site. Archaeologically, however, palaeoenvironmental survival was limited largely to an organic layer or ‘stable sweepings’ layer and building materials seen in BH05/03.

- *What is the nature and levels of deposits beneath the basement slab – especially the level and degree of truncation suffered by the geological deposit?*

The geological deposits suffered truncation in varying degrees across the site. In BH05/02 the natural deposits were truncated to 3.2m below surface; in BH05/03 the natural deposits were truncated right down to the gravels at 5.6m below surface; and in BH05/05 the natural deposits were truncated to approximately 3m below surface.

4.2 General discussion of potential

An assessment of areas of archaeological potential has been made based upon the date, type and footprint of the buildings across the site. With reference to figs 4 and 5 the site has been divided into archaeological zones (AZ) to help assess the archaeological potential of the site as a whole.

AZ 1 is located at the southern end of the site from Victoria Street southward. This encompasses the entrance to Victoria Station including the area originally cut and covered during the construction of the Circle and District Line terminus in 1868. Consequently this is considered an area of low to no potential. This is largely due to the construction of the station itself and the walkways under Terminus Place and Wilton Road that extended to some 10m depth. Coupled with this however, the construction of a water reservoir at the extreme southern end of the site took place in the early eighteenth century and shows up on Roque’s map of 1747 (see frontcover and Cowan, 2005). The combination of these would have eradicated any archaeology in this area although there still remains the possibility of survival in the extreme southeastern corner under Wilton Road and the extreme southwestern corner where neither the station nor the reservoir reached. If the cut and cover areas in front of the station were less extensive than is anticipated then evidence for the former wharfs and timber yards might be expected.

AZ2 takes in the whole extent of Victoria Street and the area around the clock tower at the intersection of Victoria Street, Wilton Road and Vauxhall Bridge Road. With the exception of both the Circle and District Line and KPS sewer, which were both cut and covered to varying degrees, this zone is considered of moderate archaeological potential. This is because the area has always remained largely undeveloped and, with the exception of modern services, any archaeology present should remain largely intact. Before the laying out of the modern road network in the early 19th century, the area seems to have been used for timber yards.

AZ3 occupies the central area of the site and is bounded by Allington Street (both on the north and east) and the site boundary, along Buckingham Palace Road, to the west. This zone has mixed potential with both open spaces and built areas. Allington street, like Victoria street, was always a thoroughfare and consequently largely undisturbed. The area within and behind the buildings in this block has in parts also remained undisturbed. Brewer street, the former name of Allington Street was in existence by the mid-18th century, before there was widespread construction in the area. Along the street frontages where Victorian/Edwardian buildings exist cellars will probably have truncated the archaeological potential. Equally, the construction of modern buildings in this block probably has further disturbed the archaeological deposit. The greatest potential for survival lies in the central part of the area and in the actual road carriageways where disturbance may be limited to services.

AZ4 encompasses the northern part of the site from Allington Street in the south to the northern limit of the site which includes a section of Bressenden Place. This is an area of largely low potential as most of the buildings here are modern and probably would have completely truncated any archaeological deposit that may have survived up until their modernisation. In contrast however, the roads in this zone - including a section of Bressenden Place and Warwick Row - always have remained undeveloped and, with the exception of modern services, any archaeology present should remain largely intact. This area was the first to be developed (at the end of the 18th century).

AZ5 is situated in the eastern half of the site and includes the southern section of Bressenden Place and the buildings as far as Allington Street in the west. This area has mostly moderate potential for archaeological survival. Although much of the area is built upon suffering the disturbances alluded to above (including a section of the KPS sewer, which is assumed to have been cut-and-cover when originally built), the section of Bressenden Place in this location has only been lightly built upon in the past comprising small factory/workshop buildings and some more substantial structures fronting onto Victoria Street. Borehole BH05/3 returned the most promising archaeological deposits seen from the evaluation. Coupled with this, the area could be the edge of the channel or lake and therefore of great interest palaeoenvironmentally. The theatre which covers a large area of the western part of AZ5 is a listed building. The Victoria Line has been tunnelled underneath this part of the site.

The evaluation has shown therefore, that the potential for survival of ancient ground surfaces (horizontal archaeological stratification) on the site is probably limited to open areas such as under the existing roads or spaces behind buildings. However, little information is available at present regarding the basements to the existing buildings and alluvial deposits may well still survive below a single basement depth.

Certainly archaeological survival is likely to be extremely limited in certain areas because of the amount of disturbance by the 'cut and cover' nature of the Underground Railway system, for example, as well as modern building intrusion. The average depth of archaeological deposits where they do survive is likely to be between 1m and 3m below surface.

4.3 Significance

Whilst the archaeological remains are undoubtedly of local significance there is nothing to suggest that they are of regional or national importance.

5 Assessment by EH criteria

The recommendations of the GLAAS 1998 guidelines on *Evaluation reports* suggest that there should be:

‘Assessment of results against original expectations (using criteria for assessing national importance of period, relative completeness, condition, rarity and group value)...’ (Guidance Paper V, 4 7)

The Department of the Environment published a set of guidelines with criteria by which to measure the importance of individual monuments for possible Scheduling. These criteria are as follows: *Period; Rarity; Documentation; Survival/Condition; Fragility/Vulnerability; Diversity and Potential*. The guidelines stress that ‘these criteria should not...be regarded as definitive; rather they are indicators which contribute to a wider judgement based on the individual circumstances of a case’.¹

In the following passages the potential archaeological survival described in the initial *Impact Assessment* document (Cowan,2005) and Section 3.2 above will be assessed against these criteria.

Criterion 1: period

The greatest potential of the site may be to provide information on the palaeoenvironmental conditions reflected in the natural stratigraphy surviving across the site likely to date from the Mesolithic/Neolithic periods onward, judging from evidence collated from nearby sites. There is limited potential for probably medieval to post medieval deposits in undisturbed areas.

Criterion 2: rarity

There is nothing to suggest that any of the likely archaeological deposits are rare either in a local or national context.

Criterion 3: documentation

Whilst there may be contemporary documentation for the later medieval period from c AD1300 on, the truncated and fragmentary nature of the archaeological remains will limit the usefulness of most of this information.

Criterion 4: group value

The group value of this site primarily relates to palaeoenvironmental evidence from surrounding sites that indicate that the whole area has good potential for the reconstruction of the original, natural landscape from the mid-Holocene onward. Indeed, as the site itself remained untouched for most of the prehistoric and historic periods there should be good evidence, where it has survived modern truncation, for palaeoenvironmental reconstruction.

¹ Annex 4, DOE, Planning and Policy Guidance 16, (1990). For detailed definition of the criteria see that document. Reference has also been made to Darvill, Saunders & Startin, (1987); and McGill, (1995)

Criterion 5: survival/condition

The evaluation has demonstrated that alluvial deposits potentially containing evidence for environmental reconstruction are locally well preserved but archaeological remains have been more truncated across most of the site. However, given the size of the site it is probable that extensive areas of archaeological deposits do survive in places.

Criterion 6: fragility

In consideration of the method of construction for the new development at Bressenden Place where the proposed redevelopment involves the construction of an extensive new basement over much of the site footprint, the damage to potential archaeological deposits is likely to be significant.

Criterion 7: diversity

Clearly, taken as a whole, the archaeological deposits which are likely to be found at the site represent a diverse and heterogeneous group of archaeological remains of all types. They probably mostly comprise palaeoenvironmental deposits from the mid-Holocene onwards and archaeological strata from the late medieval through the post-medieval periods. However, this diversity is in itself the product of a random process of vertical and horizontal truncation and separation. There is no reason to suggest that the diversity *per se* has any particular value which ought to be protected.

Criterion 8: potential

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of palaeoenvironmental deposits is locally good although deposits that might contain archaeological evidence are vulnerable to considerable vertical and horizontal truncation and separation.

6 Proposed development impact and recommendations

The proposed redevelopment at Bressenden Place involves the construction of a new basement over a large part of the site footprint, although various development options are still under consideration.

This evaluation has shown alluvial deposits have been found across the site as on adjacent sites, down to –1.5m OD and therefore may survive beneath the present buildings. However, the basements of the existing buildings are likely to have removed most horizontal stratigraphy and cut features from the medieval and post-medieval periods and an assessment of areas of archaeological potential has been drawn up in light of this. The impact on the surviving archaeological deposits by the construction of a new basement across the site will be significant in areas where there are no existing basements and those areas for which the evaluation has demonstrated potential for archaeological survival.

The decision on the appropriate archaeological response to the deposits revealed within Bressenden Place rests with the Local Planning Authority and their designated archaeological advisor.

7 Acknowledgements

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