



150 HOLBORN London EC1N

London Borough of Camden

Report on an archaeological watching brief

December 2023



**150 Holborn
London
EC1N**

Site Code HBR18
NGR 531165 181655
OASIS reference 329672

Planning reference 2016/2094/P

Report on an archaeological watching brief

Sign-off History:

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Summary

This document reports on an archaeological watching brief carried out by MOLA at 150 Holborn, London EC1. The report was commissioned from MOLA by McLaren Construction (London) Ltd on behalf of the client.

In accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2018) a watching brief was carried out on the site between 13 August and 11 December 2019. This work follows from a previously reported monitoring exercise in 2018 on five trial pits.

The scope of the watching brief was limited to the west side of the site where, based on the levels data, there was believed to be potential for the survival of cut features.

MOLA made 12 visits, the majority of which were carried out in November of 2019. Records for the visits were not available for the preparation of this report. No finds were recovered. During the busiest period of monitoring the majority of visits were under a half-day, suggesting little if anything was present to be recorded. MOLA ceased attending following a request from McLaren Construction (London) Ltd in early December 2019. No further visits were made.

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Front cover: The site location shown on the OS 1896 Town Plan

Fig 1 Site Location

Fig 2 Location of watching brief

1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

- 1.1.1 The archaeological watching brief was carried out by MOLA at 150 Holborn ('the site') between 13 August and 11 December 2019 (Fig 1). The main period of monitoring was undertaken in November 2023. This document reports on that work.
- 1.1.2 The site comprises an office building with a single level basement, and is bounded by Holborn to the south, Brooke Street to the east and 14-22 Gray's Inn Road to the west and buildings to the north. The centre of the site lies at National Grid reference 531160 181644 (see Fig 1). Modern pavement level near to the site lies at c 19.9m OD. The existing basement slabs lie at a variety of levels from 15.5m OD.
- 1.1.3 A desk top Archaeological Assessment (HEA) was previously prepared which covers the whole area of the site (MOLA 2017). This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site (and the initial assessment of its archaeological potential).
- 1.1.4 Further to the condition on Planning Consent a Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by MOLA (2018a). A previous report (MOLA 2018b) was prepared following monitoring of trial pits across the site.

1.2 Planning background

- 1.2.1 The legislative and planning framework in which the watching brief took place was fully set out in the *previous Archaeological desk-based assessment* (Section 9, MOLA 2017) and the WSI (Section 1, MOLA 2018) To summarise here:
- 1.2.2 The Camden Local Plan was adopted in July 2017 and has replaced the Core Strategy and Camden Development Policies documents as the basis for planning decisions and future development in the borough. The Local Plan contains Policy D2 Heritage, the most relevant sections of which are included below:

The Council will preserve and, where appropriate, enhance Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens and locally listed heritage assets.

Designated heritage assets

Designed heritage assets include conservation areas and listed buildings. The Council will not permit the loss of or substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;
- b. no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;
- c. conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d. the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

The Council will not permit development those results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm.

Archaeology

The Council will protect remains of archaeological importance by ensuring acceptable measures are taken proportionate to the significance of the heritage asset to preserve them and their setting, including physical preservation, where appropriate.

Other heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets

The Council will seek to protect other heritage assets including non-designated heritage assets (including those on and off the local list), Registered Parks and Gardens and London Squares.

The effect of a proposal on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, balancing the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

- 1.2.3 The watching brief was carried out to fulfil a condition attached to the Planning Consent given by Camden Local Authority (Consent reference 2016/2094/P; Condition: Historic England letter ref CLO 24563 dated 03/11/201).

1.3 Scope of the watching brief

- 1.3.1 An archaeological watching brief is normally a limited fieldwork exercise. It is not the same as full excavation, though individual features may be fully excavated.
- 1.3.2 The watching brief was carried out within the terms of the relevant Standard for watching brief specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2020).
- 1.3.3 All work has been undertaken within the research priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002.
- 1.3.4 All work was undertaken with research aims and objectives established in the Written Scheme of Investigation for the watching brief (Section 2.2)

2 Topographical and historical background

- 2.1.1 A detailed description of the topography, archaeology and history of the site was provided in the previous *Archaeological desk-based assessment* and *WSI*. A brief resume is provided here.

2.2 Topography

- 2.2.1 The geology on the site comprises Hackney gravel over London Clay (BGS).
- 2.2.2 In places the gravels are capped by fine-grained silt known in London as Langley Silt Complex ('brickearth'), which was laid down as alluvium and/or wind-blown deposits during the last glaciation around 17,000 BC. This produced fertile soils but was often exploited for the manufacture of bricks and much has been removed by quarrying or by subsequent building development. The records do not show any surviving brickearth on the site (Site code BRK80 archive record).
- 2.2.3 Geotechnical surveys (not for archaeological purposes) were undertaken on the site in 2013 (Ground Engineering Limited, 2013, Ref C12950) and 2016 (RPS, June 2016). The 2013 Investigation recorded made ground to 0.5–2.4 metres below existing basement floor level (mbfl) (14.0–15.0m OD), which is 4.9–6.2metres below ground level.
- 2.2.4 The made ground was generally shallower towards the north of the site and deeper towards the south of the site, which ties in with its history of the southern extent of the site being more consistently occupied with buildings than the northern part. The top of Hackney Gravel was recorded at 4.9–6.2mbgl (14.0–15.0m OD).
- 2.2.5 The top of London Clay was generally higher towards the north of the site and deeper towards the south of the site, at 7.6–8.8m below ground level (11.4–12.3m OD).

2.3 Archaeology

- 2.3.1 Evidence for prehistoric activity within the study area is sparse; however, some Mesolithic and Neolithic finds were recorded. Remains of Palaeolithic and Iron Age date are also recorded nearby but outside the study area. At this time the site was likely covered in woodland, suitable for occasional hunting or resource gathering and possible temporary settlement.
- 2.3.2 Roman remains have been uncovered in a number of archaeological investigations within the study area. The site lies within the London Suburbs APA, which argues that a Roman cemetery may reach from the City as far west as the junction of Bloomsbury Way and New Oxford Street, 1.1km west of the site, where two Roman roads are thought to have joined (GLHER). One of these roads lies approximately along the line of contemporary Holborn and potentially within the southern half of the site.
- 2.3.3 Burials of Roman date cut into the gravels have been recorded during archaeological investigations within the study area and a number have also been recorded through chance finds. These burials formed part of the dispersed Roman cemetery consisting of occasional cremation and inhumation burials located on land alongside the major road leading to the city which passes through the southern half of the site.
- 2.3.4 At 142 Holborn, just across Brooke Street 10m to the east of the site, two 1st to 2nd century vessels and a third of mid- to late- 1st century AD date containing burnt human bone were found in 1896. Another antiquarian find of two cremations in urns was made at the Holborn end of Gray's Inn Road, possibly within 10m of the site to

the south or west. An archaeological evaluation in the area of Barnard's Inn, 90m south of the site, recorded the presence of three Roman burials, one cremation in a pot, another cremation in a brick cist and a inhumation burial accompanied by grave goods including jet beads, a finger ring and a bone pin. A watching brief at Furnival Street, 140m to the south of the site, encountered a small cut feature filled with brickearth as well as Roman tile was interpreted as potentially a Roman burial,. At 43–46 Southampton Buildings 100m to the southwest of the site, a watching brief encountered a supine inhumation truncated by a series of inter-cutting pits, all dating to the Roman period. At Quality Court, 145m to the south of the site, Roman burials are thought to have been removed by later brickearth quarrying, although the evidence for this is unclear.

- 2.3.5 Roman quarry pits cut into the gravel have been recorded were being backfilled with brickearth and many areas contained redeposited brickearth, which suggests the gravels were the main target for these early quarry pits. Archaeological investigations at 311–318 High Holborn 120m west of the site recorded a possible Roman gravel pit likely associated with the nearby Roman road and a possible Roman ploughed soil horizon.
- 2.3.6 Within the site a watching brief recorded the discovery of some residual Roman pottery (MOLA 2017, p 18). In light of the extensive burial remains in the area the residual Roman pottery recorded on the site may be the remains of Roman roadside activity, such as burials with pottery, or the remains of dumping of domestic or building material.
- 2.3.7 At this time the site lay outside the city of *Londinium* alongside a major Roman road, and possibly held roadside ditches and associated activity, potentially including quarry pits and burials.

Early medieval (Saxon) period (AD 410–1066)

- 2.3.8 *Holeburne* is recorded in Domesday Book (AD1086), with rents raised from two cottars (peasant cottagers) (Domesday, eds Williams and Martin 1992, 358). Part of Bloomsbury to the west is recorded as having vineyards and woodland for 100 pigs (Weinreb and Hibbert 1995, 76). The name Holborn may derive from the Anglo-Saxon *hol*, a hollow, and *burna*, a stream. This was the name given to the upper (non-tidal) reaches of the river; Fleet was from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning tidal inlet (Weinreb and Hibbert 1995, 292).
- 2.3.9 The church of St Andrew (GLHER no. 200726, 041888) beside modern Holborn Circus lies 300m to the south-east of the site. It is first mentioned in documentary sources in AD 951 and 959, which refer to the 'old wooden church' with the dedication 'Sancte Andreas' beside the 'wide army street'. This record suggests a mid-Saxon origin for the manor / parish and indicates that the church lay beside the Roman road, near an important crossing of the River Fleet (Schofield 1984, 32; Weinreb and Hibbert 1995, 710). The GLHER notes the location of the medieval village on the eastern edge of the parish; their point data suggests this lies 105m north-east of the site but the recorded village location, at the junction of modern Farringdon Road and Charterhouse Street, is outside the study area 370m east of the site (GLHER no. 082859).
- 2.3.10 The site is in the London Suburbs APA, which describes the middle Saxon settlement of *Lundenwic* as follows. 'Although neither the boundaries nor the structure of the settlement have yet been determined by the excavations which have arisen through the development process, some indication of the internal structure can be derived from the zones in which particular activities were undertaken. Most of the residential area appears to have been in the central part to the north of the Strand. Iron smelting and butchery may have been confined to the northern and eastern peripheries of the settlement.
- 2.3.11 Quarrying for gravel on a large scale was probably at the far limits of the town to the west' (GLHER). The possible pits or ditch remains recorded on the site may have

had medieval origins, related to the boundary between the city and St Andrew's parish. No features clearly dated to this period are known to have been found in investigations in the study area although some remains are undated.

- 2.3.12 At this time the site was located away from the centres of settlement and was likely pasture or cultivated land alongside the old Roman road, which was still in use, beside the Holborn bars at the entrance to the City.

Later medieval period (AD 1066–1485)

- 2.3.13 At the end of the 12th century, the writer William FitzStephen recorded that the area north of the medieval City of London provided a place of recreation for its residents, with flowing streams, and springs and mills. The fields were used for pasture, as well as crops (quoted in Stow, 23-24).

The management of at least part of the land appears to have passed into the hands of the Greyfriars (Franciscan Brothers) of Newgate. In 1258, they had established a water supply system for the monastery, sourced near the Fleet River 365m east of the site, but at the end of the 13th century the supply was declared inadequate, and the lead pipe was extended to a reservoir fed by nearby springs in the vicinity of Queen Square, 800m to the northwest of the site. A medieval or post-medieval conduit was recorded at Brooke Street, 15m north of the site.

- 2.3.14 Archaeological investigations in the study area record medieval quarry pits and ditches, as well as the construction of some significant buildings. The Knight Templar's 12th century circular church was found 100m southwest of the site. Barnard's Inn medieval hall, a Scheduled Monument, lay 90m south of the site with some of its gardens fronting onto Holborn and other gardens south of the hall. Deep garden soil was recorded in investigations here, cut by later pits and a chalk-lined ditch or cess pit and medieval chalk walled structures.
- 2.3.15 Other medieval remains within the study area include medieval quarry and rubbish pits, 70m southeast of the site, pits of uncertain function 105m south of the site and one group of quarry pits backfilled with domestic rubbish including a 15th century jug, 145m south of the site. Another jug was found on Holborn, just south of the site.
- 2.3.16 Lobel's map of 1270 shows that the site was located on the eastern side of what was then 'Purtepolestrate' within an area which was fully developed by this time. Holborn Bars can be seen immediately to the south of the site and the boundary between St Andrew's parish and the City is also shown as dashed line running through the site. The bars marked the termination of the City Liberties and also constituted one of the six bars where tolls were collected from carts and carriages entering the city (Thornbury 1878). 'The Middle Row,' Holborn was a block of houses situated in the middle of Holborn road at the southern end of Gray's Inn Road, 50m southwest of the site.
- 2.3.17 The site lies within the London Suburbs APA, which describes its significant medieval features as incorporating 'the medieval suburb of Holborn. This includes the Old Temple, the original headquarters of the Order of the Templars in England between 1128 and 1162, which later became part of the Bishop of Lincoln's Inn; ...the late medieval Inns of Court; and roadside taverns' (GLHER).
- 2.3.18 At this time the site was developed with buildings and lay on the north side of Holborn, at the entrance to the City.

Post-medieval period (AD 1485–present)

- 2.3.19 The Tudor London map of 1520 is based upon historical and archaeological sources, forming a reconstruction of the city at this time. The site is conjectured to form part of a block of buildings on the eastern side of what was then 'Grayenne Lane' or 'Portpole Lane.' The site footprint appears to be completely occupied by buildings, but given that this is a reconstructed impression of the area this does not necessarily mean this was the case.

- 2.3.20 Agas' map of 1561 does not provide much more detail, but it does offer an isometric perspective of the site. The two maps show that by the mid-16th century the site and the area surrounding it was already undergoing intense development.
- 2.3.21 All successive maps show that the site underwent consistent and quite intensive development and redevelopment. However, while the archaeological investigation ahead of the construction of the existing basement showed archaeological features surviving from a depth of 16.4m OD, the existing basement will have truncated or removed all remains from the 1500s onwards. The excavation also suggested that the western third of the existing building is likely to have removed all but the bases of deep cut features.
- 2.3.22 All earlier structures were demolished to make way for the existing early 1980s buildings on the site, as shown on the Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 scale map of 1992–95. The watching brief on the site in advance of the redevelopment at that time (site code BRK80, MOLA, 2017 p 18) recorded the slab at 17.30m OD and found two 16th century pits, both c 1.0m deep. The site is currently occupied by retail units along Gray's Inn Road, Holborn and Brooke Street, with a service yard to the rear containing an open area and a car park ramp which gives access to the basement car park of the adjoining building to the north.

3 The watching brief

3.1 Fieldwork timeline

- 3.1.1 Following from previous monitoring in 2018, for which a report has already been prepared and submitted, (MOLA 2018b) two visits were subsequently made to site the following year, 13/08/2019 and again 06/09/2019, by MOLA to make contact with the construction team and to monitor progress.
- 3.1.2 This archaeological work was to address the following issues required as archaeological monitoring and identified in the WSI that had previously been approved by LB Camden in 2018 (2018/3817/P):
- i. Removal of existing pile caps
 - ii. Proposed basement extension and deepening
 - iii. Excavations associated with the insertion of 5 lift pits
 - iv. New pile caps and any other ground work with potential to impact on archaeological remains
- 3.1.3 In late October 2019 MOLA were informed by Michael Fisher of McLaren Construction (London) Ltd, that excavations for the removal of the pile cap (i, above) at 150 Holborn were to commence the following week. It was agreed that attendance would commence Friday 1 November 2019.
- 3.1.4 MOLA provided attendance the 1 and 8 November, when following a phone call between MOLA PM Rosalind Marris and Michael Fisher, attendance was increased to twice-weekly visits. This continued for a further three weeks.
- 3.1.5 MOLA were notified 5 December 2019 that there was no requirement for site attendance and that MOLA were to “stop sending someone to site unless instructed by McLaren, MOLA are only to attend site when instructed to by McLaren (As per attached signed order)” (Sunny Virk QS email to R Morris, 5/12/2019). R Morris responded 12/12/2019 that having been on leave, the message to stand down had been missed but that the agreement in November had been to “attend twice a week. This change was never communicated to me, but since your email, I have informed the senior archaeologist that we are not required on site at the moment.” (R Morris to S Virk 12/12/2019), informing in a subsequent email that the original agreement had been made with McLaren site manager, Michael Fisher.
- 3.1.6 Subsequently, MOLA was not made aware of any works undertaken, identified as ii-iv (above), after December 2019.
- 3.1.7 The next email which MOLA received from McLaren is dated 20 June 2020 informing MOLA that no further attendance is required as the basement slab had been cast.
- 3.1.8 For the period of MOLA attendance, no site records are available nor are any finds at Mortimer Wheeler House, the latter suggesting that no features were observed during the limited period of monitoring of works for the removal of the pile caps.

3.2 Recording methodology

- 3.2.1 While it is standard practice to carry out a written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2018), there was no field archive available for the preparation of this report. This may be the consequence of the Senior Archaeologist leaving MOLA in March 2020 and mothballing of MOLA offices at that time for Covid. Equally, there are no finds held by MOLA, insofar as the author can ascertain.

3.3 Site archive

Number of trench record sheets	0
Number of overall location plans	0
Number of Context (SU) sheets	0
Number of photographs	0
Number of Plan sheets	0
Number of Sections	0

4 Archaeological potential

4.1 Answering original research aims

- 4.1.1 The limited nature of the proposed works and the watching brief upon them makes it unreasonable to establish many specific archaeological research objectives. Nevertheless a few research questions were outlined in the *WSI* (MOLA 2018):
- 4.1.2 *What is the nature and level of natural topography?*
The geology on the site comprises Hackney gravel over London Clay. While the gravel was consistent across the five trenches of the previous phase, it is unknown whether the height of the gravels, recorded between 16m aOD (MOLA 2018, GB13) and 14.10m OD (MOLA 2018, GB8), was repeated.
- 4.1.3 *Are there any Roman remains present? If yes, what is the nature, extent and character?*
While the previous archaeological monitoring undertaken in 2018 yielded possible evidence for Roman activity, there are no records or finds from this intervention indicating comparable evidence from this period.
- 4.1.4 *What is the earliest medieval occupation on site? What was its nature and extent?*
No evidence for medieval remains was indicated during this intervention.
- 4.1.5 *Do any post-medieval building foundations/ structures survive on site?*
No evidence for post-medieval remains was indicated during this intervention.
- 4.1.6 *What is the extent of modern disturbance?*
Modern disturbance was indicated by the need to break out the basement slab, the extent of truncation of any potential archaeological horizons to which this requirement applied is unknown.

4.2 Answering new research aims

- 4.2.1 No new research aims were raised following the watching brief.

4.3 Significance of the data

- 4.3.1 There is no indication as to the nature of any potential archaeological remains observed.

5 Publication and archiving

- 5.1.1 The results of the watching brief will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic research into the development of London.
- 5.1.2 The site archive, such as it is, containing original records and finds will be stored in accordance with the terms of the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (MOLA 2018) with the Museum of London Archaeological Archive.
- 5.1.3 In view of the limited potential of the material, it is suggested that a short note on the results of the watching brief should appear in the annual round up of the *London Archaeologist*.

6 Acknowledgements

- 6.1.1 This report has been commissioned from MOLA by McLaren Construction (London) Ltd on behalf of their client.

7 Bibliography

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8 Figures



Fig 1 Site location



Fig 2 Location of watching brief

9 OASIS archaeological report form

OASIS Summary for molas1-521366

OASIS ID (UID)	molas1-521366
Project Name	Watching Brief at 150 Holborn
Sitename	150 Holborn
Sitecode	HBR18
Project Identifier(s)	P23-656
Activity type	Watching Brief
Planning Id	2022/4847/P, 2022/4847/P, 2022/4847/P
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	MOLA
Project Dates	13-Aug-2019 - 11-Dec-2019
Location	150 Holborn NGR : TQ 31163 81646 LL : 51.518518, -0.110993 12 Fig : 531163,181646
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Camden Local Authority District : Camden Parish : Camden, unparished area
Project Methodology	Archaeological monitoring was undertaken, but no records were available for the compilation of the report
Project Results	Unknown outcome as attendance limited and no records survive
Keywords	
Funder	Private or public corporation McLaren Construction
HER	Greater London HER - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Rosalind Morris, Gwilym Williams
HER Identifiers	
Archives	

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