



BRANKSOME
Courtenay Avenue
London N6 4LP

London Borough of Haringey

Archaeological watching brief

September 2022



**Branksome
Courtenay Avenue
London
N6 4LP**

London Borough of Haringey

Site Code CVE22
NGR 527070 187905
OASIS reference molas1-508787

Report on an archaeological watching brief

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Summary

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief on construction groundworks at Branksome, Courtenay Avenue, London, N6 4LP. The watching brief and report were commissioned from MOLA by Kornerstone Ventures Limited.

In accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2021) construction groundwork, primarily consisting of bulk ground reduction for a new basement, was monitored on the site between 7 July and 4 August 2022. The site lies within a Historic England Tier 3 Archaeological Priority Area (APA); 3.2 Hornsey Park, which covers the former medieval hunting park of the Bishop of London.

A buried soil with black organic tree remains was observed during the watching brief below extensive made ground deposits constituted of upcast clay and likely deposited during c 1930 when the street was laid out. The buried soil reflects the surface deposit of an ancient woodland environment, with the woodland only finally being cleared in preparation for residential development. The soil profile, due to local conditions, had an iron-depleted gleyed subsoil below the organic layer as opposed to the brown soil, or “Brown Earth”, commonly associated with woods, and was relatively thin, directly overlying natural Claygate Member clay. The leaching and lack of roots in the subsoil suggest a bitter, and periodically waterlogged soil which would have been inimical to tillage. This may be a partial explanation for why the area remained uncultivated woodland for so long. No archaeologically significant remains or finds were seen during the watching brief.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

- 1.1.1 An archaeological watching brief on construction groundwork was carried out by MOLA at Branksome, Courtenay Avenue, London, N6 4LP ('the site') between 7th July and 4th August 2022. This document is the Report on that work.
- 1.1.2 The level of the site varies from c 97.3m OD along the site's southern boundary to 96.8m OD along the northern boundary, and down to 96.4m OD in the rear garden toward the east of the site (GEA 2021, p3). The site was previously occupied by an existing dwelling house (Class 3C), dating from the original 1930s development of Courtenay Avenue, with garden areas to the front and rear of the house. The centre of the site lies at National Grid reference 527070 187905 (see *Fig 1*).
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was commissioned from MOLA by Kornerstone Ventures Limited. A Heritage Statement was previously prepared which covers the whole area of the site (Stephen Levrant Heritage Architecture, 2021).
- 1.1.4 Further to a condition on Planning Consent, a Written Scheme of Investigation for a watching brief was prepared by MOLA (2021). This and the Heritage Statement 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). All archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with that WSI.

1.2 Planning background

- 1.2.1 The development received planning permission from the London Borough of Haringey (ref: HGY/2021/1190) on 6 October 2021 and included Condition 18 requiring archaeological investigation in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* and "*subsequent analysis, publication & dissemination and deposition of resulting material..... in accordance with the programme set out in the WSI.*"

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. Where there is provision to stop demolition or construction for a reasonable time to allow archaeological work to take place, in the city of London, this has been termed a "watching/stopping brief".
- 1.3.2 The watching brief was carried out within the terms of the relevant Standard for watching brief specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA, 2014).
- 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 within research aims and objectives established in the Written Scheme of Investigation for the watching brief (MOLA 2021, Section 2).

2 Topographical and historical background

2.1 Geology and Topography

- 2.1.1 The site, which is at c 97m OD, occupies a position on the lower northern slope of Prospect Hill, which has a high point of 115m OD, located 320m to the south of the site. Prospect Hill is itself the most north-easterly prominence of a ridge of high ground running to the south-west. Hampstead Lane and Spaniards Road follow the rising ridge line and the top of the ridge runs consistently at between 130m OD and 134m OD from the Spaniards Inn (a 17th century inn with 18th century toll house) to Whitestone Pond at the northern end of Hampstead's Heath Street, from where the ground drops away again to the south-east.
- 2.1.2 The ridge (as with much of the north-western part of Hampstead Heath) is underlain by sands of the Bagshot formation, with two small patches of superficial Stanmore Gravel at Spaniards End and the Spaniards Inn (810m to the south-west of the site) and Inverforth Close (1500m to the south-west of the site). The northern limit of the Bagshot Sands is approximately half-way along Courtenay Avenue, northwards from which point the underlying natural bedrock consists of deposits of Claygate Member (laminar clay, silt and sand, final/transitional London Clay deposit), on which Branksome is sited (British Geological Survey (BGS) (<https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain3d/>).
- 2.1.3 Ground investigation works were previously undertaken on the site by GEA (GEA 2021). Two boreholes were cored in the front garden and one in the rear garden (GEA 2021, see Appendix for borehole location and logs). All three boreholes encountered similar deposits:
- 2.1.4 London Clay was encountered at c 6.0 to 7.0m bgl, overlain by the Claygate Member to c 2.0m bgl. Above these obviously natural deposits, a 1.5 to 1.7m thick layer of yellow brown sandy clay, categorised in the report as made ground, was seen below a thin topsoil and turf layer 0.2 to 0.3m thick.
- 2.1.5 While the British Geological Survey (BGS) digital data notes no superficial deposit above the Claygate Member at the site's location, it is probable that at least a portion of this thick 'made ground' deposit consists of a layering of natural drift deposit below reworked natural and anthropogenic deposits.
- Prehistoric period (800,000 BC–AD 43)*
- 2.1.6 There are no known Palaeolithic finds (800,000–10,000 BP) within the site's locality.
- 2.1.7 Mesolithic hunter-gatherer (10,000–4000 BC) presence in the Hampstead Heath area has been indicated by the presence of flint artefacts at a number of locations. A Mesolithic settlement site was excavated by the Hendon and District Archaeological Society between 1976 and 1981 in West Heath, close to the Leg of Mutton Pond (site code WHS76). Over 61,000 pieces of worked flint were found, including tools, cores and flakes, which indicate that tools were being produced on the site, located c 1.85km from Branksome to the south-west.
- 2.1.8 A watching brief by Museum of London Archaeology Service between May and August 1992 (site code BGP92) along a N-S pipeline across Hampstead Heath recovered unstratified Mesolithic flints to the south-east of Kenwood House, c 550m from the site (MoLAS 1992).

- 2.1.9 A worked flint blade- possibly a Neolithic (4000–2000 BC) fabricator tool, is noted in the Greater London Historic Environment Record as having been found in the garden of Kenmore, situated at the junction of Winnington Road and Hampstead Lane, 590m to the south-west of the site (Historic Environment Record: 081937/00/00).
- 2.1.10 The site likely remained within a largely wooded environment throughout the post-glacial prehistoric period.

Roman (AD 43–410)

- 2.1.11 The site is located 3.9km north-east of Watling Street, the Roman Road from London (Marble Arch) to St Albans (Verulamium) (Margary 1967, 171, 189).
- 2.1.12 No Roman activity is known from the site's immediate locality, and it likely remained within a wooded environment at the time. An important pottery production centre consisting of at least ten kilns, in operation between AD 50 and AD 120, is known from Highgate Woods, c 1.6km northeast of Courtenay Avenue. The site is accordingly a Haringey Tier 1 APA:
1.1 Highgate Wood Roman Pottery Production Site.

Medieval period (AD 410–1485)

- 2.1.13 The site remained within ancient woodland throughout the medieval period. From AD 604 area was owned by the Church (St Paul's), passing to the Bishop of London following the Norman Conquest (Historic England and Oxford Archaeology 2021, 79). The estate was subsequently emparked as a hunting ground known as Hornsey Great Park, which corresponds with the Tier 3 Archaeological Priority Area (APA); *3.2 Hornsey Park*. The hunting park contained a substantial medieval moated lodge in the northern part of the park, dating from at least as early as 1293 (Historic England and Oxford Archaeology 2021, 23), which is a Tier 1 APA: *1.2 Bishop's Lodge*, which is located c 450m to the north of the site.

Post-medieval period (AD 1485–present)

- 2.1.14 The site continued to be a part of Hornsey Great Park into the post-medieval period. While parts of the ancient woodland were gradually given over to agriculture throughout the period, the site remained within an area of surviving woodland known as Bishop's Wood. Directly to the north-east of Courtenay Avenue, much of the land had been given over to agriculture by the time of the 1872 Ordnance Survey. The fields to the north-east of Courtenay Avenue were purchased for Highgate Golf Course in 1904 (Historic England and Oxford Archaeology 2021, 79). The south-eastern portion of Bishop's Wood was finally developed in the late 1920s and 1930s, with Courtenay Avenue largely completed by 1936. The existing house dates from 1930.

3 The watching brief

3.1 Field methodology

- 3.1.1 The excavation works requiring archaeological monitoring consisted of groundworks associated with the construction of the new basement, primarily consisting of a bulk ground reduction within the footprint of a perimeter piled wall.
- 3.1.2 Excavation was undertaken by contractors using a variety of mechanical excavators and proceeded from the rear of the property (in the east of the property) towards the street front. Where practical, ground was reduced in 0.3m layers (in local areas) using a flat-bladed ditching bucket.
- 3.1.3 Records took the form of photographs with notebook records made on the deposit sequence encountered across the area of excavation.
- 3.1.4 Notebook records were related to scaled site plans drawings, which were subsequently best-fitted to digital Mastermap OS large scale mapping.
- 3.1.5 Key levels of a buried land surface were taken by the site engineer related to the site datum. They are expressed in this report as metres above Ordnance Datum (m OD).



Photo 1 Main excavations, looking south

3.2 Recording methodology

- 3.2.1 A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was carried out in accordance with the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (MOLA 2021).

3.3 Site archive

Number of trench record sheets	1
Number of overall location plans	0
Number of Context (SU) sheets	0
Number of photographs	6
Number of Plans	0
Number of Sections	0

4 Results of the watching brief

4.1.1 See *Fig 2* for locations

4.2 Basement

Location	527059.4 187904.2 - west centre of site
Dimensions	30m E-W x 25m N-S
Base of modern fill/slab/turf	N/A
Depth of archaeological stratigraphy above natural (if any)	None surviving
Level of base of lowest features or deposits observed	94.66m OD
Top of surviving natural observed at	95m OD
Level of base of trench	N/A

- 4.2.1 In the lower part of the excavation, natural brown weathered clay of the Claygate Member (upper London Clay with sand and silt lenses) was seen, changing to blue-grey London Clay at depth.
- 4.2.2 Above the weathered clay a soil sequence was seen, with a clearly identifiable buried soil horizon marking the top of the sequence and reflective of the wooded ground surface that existed immediately prior to development of the site in the 1930s. The surface of the buried soil undulated significantly, with the top of the deposit seen at between 94.66m and 95.2m OD.
- 4.2.3 The buried soil took the form of a black organic ("Of") horizon with identifiable organic remains and frequent tree stumps and roots (or "2Of" where buried). Organic soil horizons with poorly decomposed organic remains normally occur in areas of poor drainage.
- 4.2.4 Below this organic horizon, but part of the same soil profile, was a greyish iron-depleted zone- suggestive of an eluvial (or washed-out) deposit, completely without roots. The lack of roots in this horizon may be a result of (seasonal?) waterlogging that prevented access to oxygen. The deposit would be expected to be sandy as a result of leaching in-situ, and derived from the clayey-silty subsoil, modified by a considerable period of lying beneath an acid environment.
- 4.2.5 The whole profile might be referred to as "gleyed". In this it is quite different to the dominant woodland soil in England, which tend to be brown soils, or "Brown Earths", where organic matter has been absorbed into an iron-retaining subsoil (hence the brown colour). Directly below the eluvial horizon on this site there was the weathered clay of the Claygate Member.
- 4.2.6 There did not appear to be a build-up of soils or geological sediments, which could have potentially contained archaeological remains, nor were there any "cut", or dug, features or structures.
- 4.2.7 The soil horizons described above, particularly the leached horizon, indicate that this soil was present undisturbed for sufficient time for the underlying clay to have been considerably chemically weathered, and any archaeological finds would likely have been present in the black layer, had they been present. No archaeological remains or finds were, however, observed.
- 4.2.8 The occurrence of the poor soil on site is significant as it may help explain why much of the locality remained untilled for so long.

- 4.2.9 Above the buried soil, there was a layer of upcast clay, presumably locally derived from excavations for the development of the street in the 1930s. This deposit was seen across the site to ground level at approximately 97m OD.

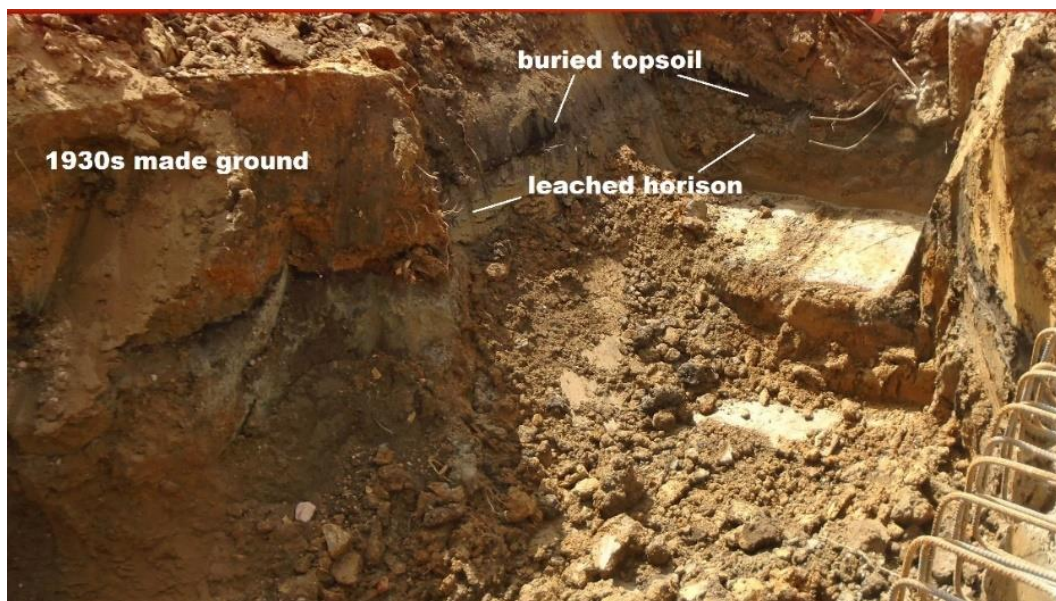


Photo 2 East end of basement excavation, looking north

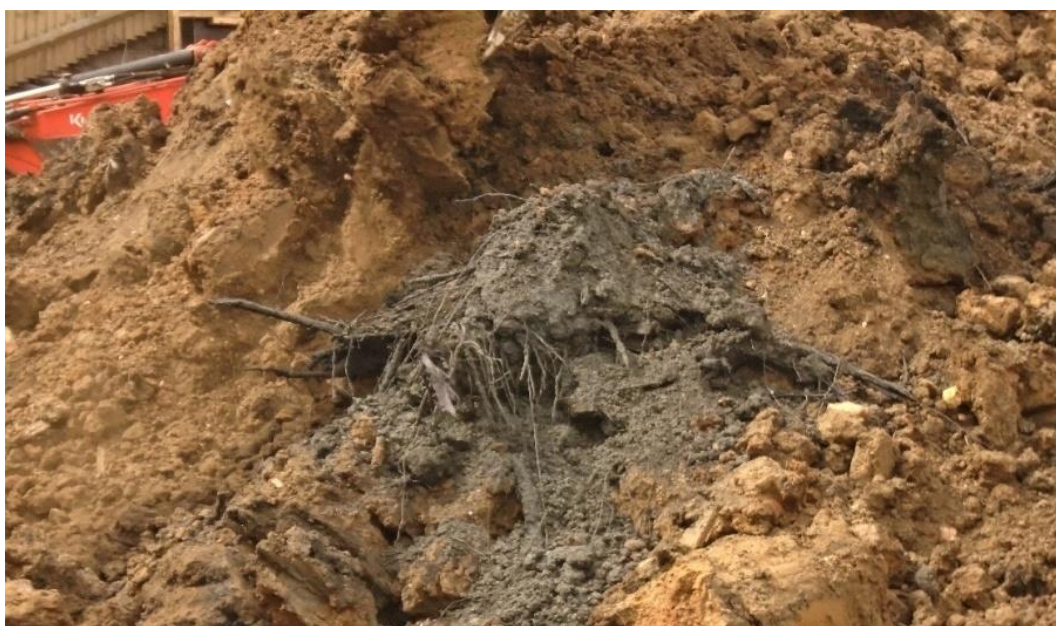


Photo 3 Preserved tree roots in buried soil



Photo 4 Basement trench, looking southwest

5 Archaeological potential

5.1 Answering original research aims

5.1.1 Some broad research aims (section 2.2, MOLA 2021) were answered as follows:

- *Natural topography* consists of underlying clay, sloping from southwest to northeast, 95m – 94m OD within the excavated area
- The *earliest deposits* were the pre-1930s soil which showed no real signs of accretion, and probably had been subject to erosion. It appears to be a poorly-drained and acidic soil despite the slope, probably reflecting the underlying clay and the path of rainfall run-off. Whilst no archaeological remains were found, it is consistent with the area being preserved as historic woods into the modern era
- *There were no archaeological remains present on the site*
- *No remains relating to the medieval hunting park were identified.* However, the buried soil observed would have been difficult to turn into productive tillage so that may explain why the area was preserved as a medieval hunting park
- *The latest deposits identified* were the post-1930s made ground, probably formed by upcast material from constructing the previous house on the site

5.2 Significance of the data

5.2.1 No archaeological remains were recorded during the watching brief.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1.1 The watching brief at Branksome, whilst not recovering any archaeological finds or recording any historic remains, did produce significant information on the development of Hornsey Park and, in light of the poor soils present, a possible factor for why it remained uncultivated for a long period.
- 6.1.2 The results of the watching brief will be made available through the OASIS reporting system as well as the Heritage Gateway site and a summary of the watching brief will be circulated in the “Annual Round-up” of Greater London archaeological work in London Archaeologist journal.

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8 Figures

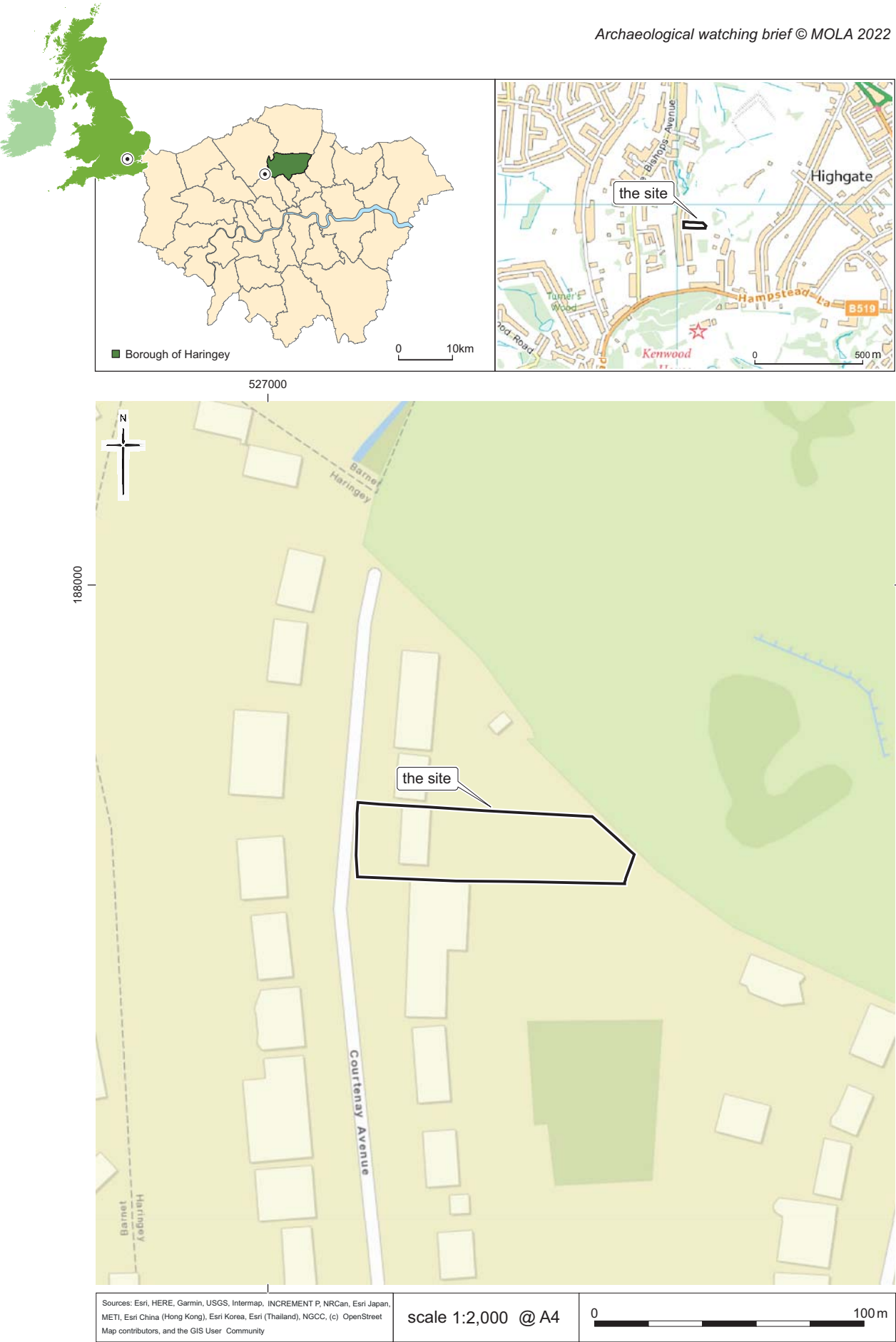


Fig 1 Site location



Fig 2 Trench Locations

9 OASIS archaeological report form

Summary for molas1-508787

OASIS ID (UID)	molas1-508787
Project Name	Branksome, Courtenay Avenue, London, N6 4LP an archaeological watching brief
Sitename	Branksome, Courtenay Avenue, London, N6 4LP an archaeological watching brief
Activity type	Field Observation (Monitoring)
Project Identifier(s)	CVE22
Planning Id	HGY/2021/1190
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	MOLA
Project Dates	07-Jul-2022 - 04-Aug-2022
Location	Branksome, Courtenay Avenue, London, N6 4LP an archaeological watching brief NGR : TQ 27070 87905 LL : 51.5756972920431, -0.167694852630665 12 Fig : 527070,187905
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Greater London District : Haringey Parish : Haringey, unparished area
Project Methodology	Site inspection, notebook descriptions and annotated drawings with photo locations + engineers levels
Project Results	A soil buried in the 1930s was exposed, below which there was no build up of historic deposits, nor archaeological remains or deposits. No archaeological finds or objects were observed. The buried soil was wooded and it is likely to have been so since a medieval deer park (belonging to the Bishop of London) was created here in the Middle Ages
HER	Greater London HER - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	D, Sankey