

GLA 62 Sipson Lane Quarry Complex, RIGS

London Borough of Hillingdon, TQ 076 779
Ownership: AABC Group

This site comprises what were until recently two working sand and gravel quarries north and south of Sipson Lane on the site of the potential third runway for Heathrow. The surrounding area is flat, lying on the Taplow Terrace as does Heathrow Airport which is in view to the south. The land was formerly agricultural, mainly market gardens and orchards. Since the early 20th century, gravel extraction has been an important industry in the Colne Valley and in the Thames valley locally.

By 2020, the southern quarry had ceased operations and was being prepared for restoration to 'agricultural land¹' by backfilling with inert waste by the owner. The northern quarry (Wall Garden Farm) appears also to have ceased extracting sand and gravel and in 2021 was processing the remaining production from the southern quarry which was opened as an extension in 2009². This was, until 2019, the only remaining GLA working quarry in the Colne Valley. The recent quarrying activity was the latest of several quarries in the area, some of which have yielded important archaeological finds (e.g., under Terminal 5, and Holloway Lane, west of Sipson).

The Sipson Lane quarries have provided key sections within the GLA of the Taplow Gravel Member terrace deposit of the Middle Thames and the overlying Langley Silt Member (Brickearth). The Langley Silt was widely exploited in the area for brickmaking until the early 20th century and provided excellent soils in the area for agriculture. The Sipson Lane quarries have also been the subject of archaeological investigation and the southern quarry was observed continuously by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) while the Langley Silt was being stripped to reveal the Taplow Gravel beneath. This was a 5-year project and has been found to be a multi-period site ranging from Neolithic to medieval. Summaries of the finds during the project can be found in the *London Archaeologist* round-up of fieldwork for 2010³, 2012⁴ and 2014⁵.

Taplow Gravel Member

LGP members visited the southern quarry in 2012 and saw 2 m of the Taplow Gravel exposed as the Langley Silt was being removed. The northern quarry had revealed c. 9 m without reaching the underlying London Clay Formation. The Taplow Gravel dates from Marine Oxygen Isotope Stage (MIS) 6 and is a late Pleistocene cold-climate gravel of age c. 180,000 to 155,000 years. Together with the Langley Silt, it is a member of the Maidenhead Formation (Thames Catchments Subgroup) which includes river terrace, silt, and other deposits of Anglian to Holocene age (i.e. c. 500,000 years to recent). The Taplow Gravel comprises sand and mainly flint gravel with a sharp base on the London Clay.

Langley Silt Member

About 1 m thick at this locality, the Langley Silt overlies the Taplow Gravel Member and forms the surface with a sharp base on the latter. The type locality is a gravel pit in Langley, several km to the west, and it averages 3 m in thickness across its outcrop, reaching a maximum of 5 m. It is mainly a windblown deposit (loess) which accumulated under cold, arid, tundra conditions during the last cold stage (Devensian, c. 100,000 – 11,700 years), though some may be water-lain.

Access

The above-mentioned LGP visit was possible only when accompanied by a representative of the quarry owner (then Henry Streeter Sand & Ballast Ltd); the site was locked when not operating. In any case, the owner was reluctant to allow visitors. Ownership has changed since then – the AABC Group has operated the site since 2016 – and its policy for visits is unknown (2021). The main hazard was, and is, danger from machinery and HGVs.

It is unlikely that an accessible face can be maintained on this site, but it should be considered in the next round of planning applications.

References

1. [Sipson Quarry - 45408/APP/2017/2075](#). Planning application to Hillingdon Council to extend the deadline for completion of permitted operations (extraction of sand and gravel as an extension to existing quarry at

Wall Garden Farm, backfilling with inert waste and restoration to agricultural land) from the 5th of August 2017 to the 30th of September 2019 (accessed April 2021).

2. <https://modgov.hillingdon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=29634> (accessed April 2021).

3. Wylie, J. (2011). London Fieldwork and Publication Round-up 2010. *London Archaeologist* **13 (s01)**, 1-45. https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/london_arch/ then go to 'ADS library' on that page (accessed July 2021).

4. Maloney, C. (2013). London Fieldwork Round-up 2012. *London Archaeologist* **13 (s03)**, 89-126. (Online access as above.)

5. Coombe, P. and Grew, F. (2015). London Fieldwork Round-up 2014. *London Archaeologist* **14 (s02)**, 47-90. (Online access as above.)

The fieldwork round-ups summarise the projects and results for each borough.



Southern quarry: Taplow Gravel Member. Langley Silt Member exposed above the bench
.Photo: Peter Collins June 2012

Site Map

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