

# Fieldwork on the foreshore

True to its name, the Thames Discovery Programme has indeed made important discoveries in its investigation of 45 foreshore zones over three productive years.

Nathalie Cohen describes some key findings.

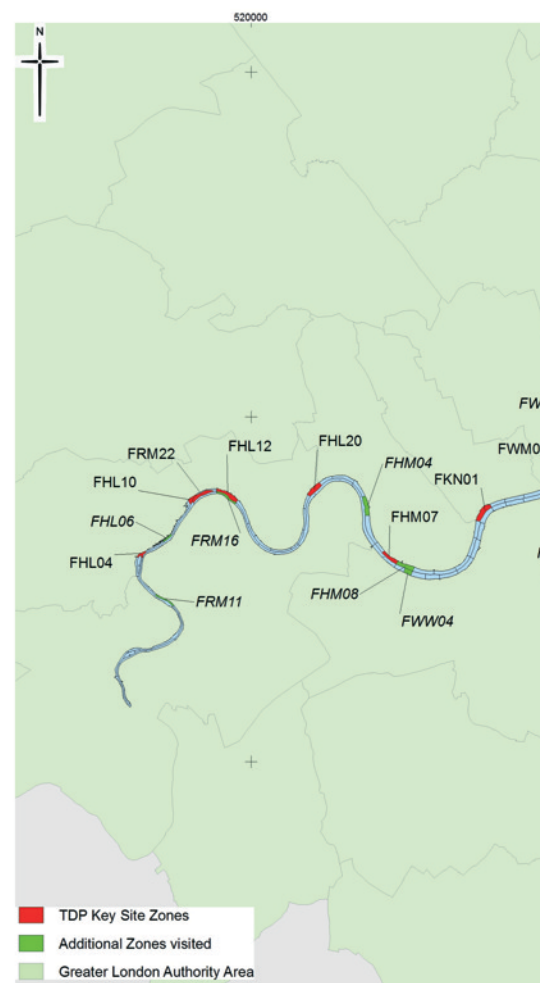
## Project Background

During the period October 2008 – September 2011, forty five archaeological foreshore zones, from a total of over two hundred possible sites across Greater London, were investigated under the auspices of the Heritage Lottery funded Thames Discovery Programme. These included the TDP key sites<sup>1</sup> and a number of other zones visited and / or surveyed as a part of the community archaeology programme (Fig. 1). This short paper summarises the results of investigation at a number of different sites, with reference to some of the wider research aims of the project.

## Prehistoric puzzles

The exciting discovery of surviving Mesolithic timbers at the foreshore at

Vauxhall (site code FLM01) has been described in a previous edition of *London Archaeologist*<sup>2</sup> and continued monitoring at the site during 2011 has recorded further possible structural remains, together with Mesolithic and Neolithic lithics. Artefacts found at the site are currently on display in the Museum of London's 'Archaeology in Action' gallery. However, Vauxhall was not the only site where an unexpected discovery revealed evidence for prehistoric activity on the river. Work at Fulham Palace (FHM07) by the Thames Archaeological Survey during the late 1990s had recorded a limited number of features on the foreshore; these included peat deposits and timber piles which may represent the remains of a stair or causeway providing access to the Bishop's Palace. Survey by the



**Fig. 1: Sites investigated** (Catherine Drew, MOLA)

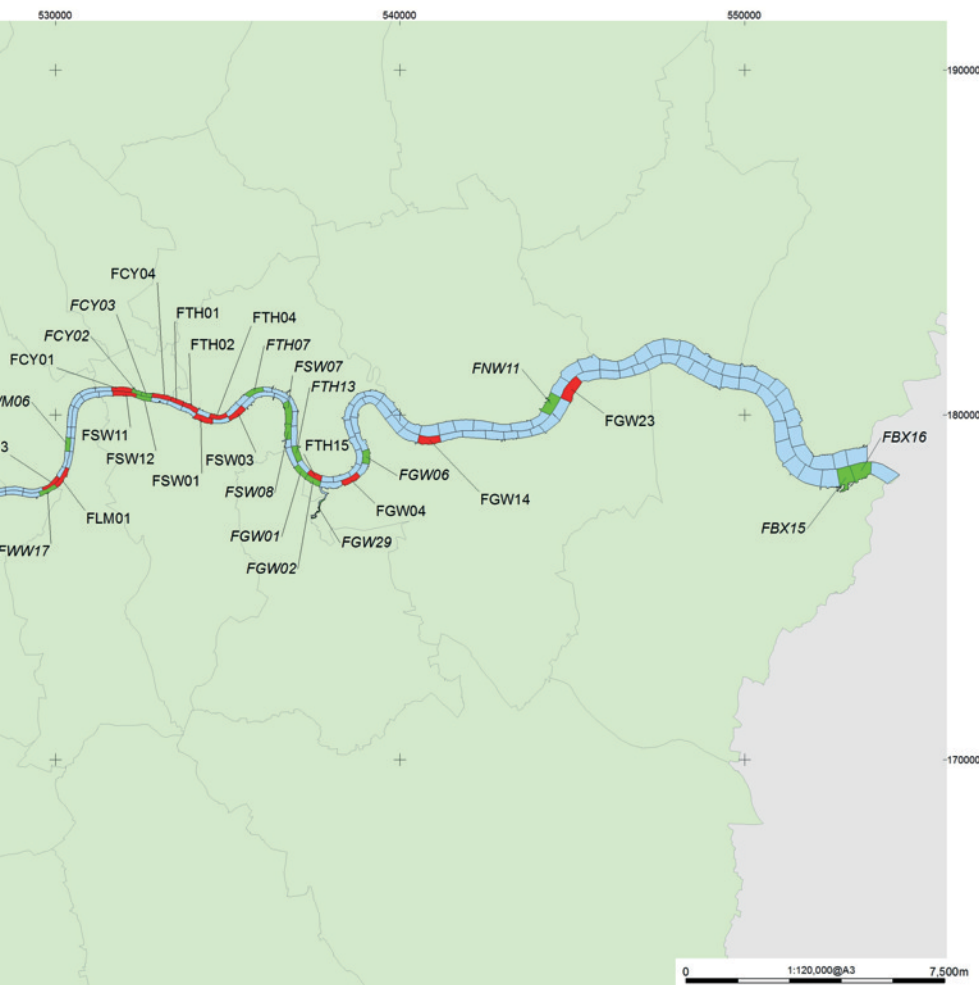
Thames Discovery Programme in July 2009 (as part of a Festival of British Archaeology event with Fulham Palace and Gifford) recorded three timber piles of Iron Age date immediately upstream of Putney Bridge (Fig. 2); interesting research remains to be undertaken on the possible association of this somewhat mysterious structure with the local archaeological landscape.

## Death and burial

Archaeological features surviving at on the foreshore at Chelsea (FKN01) include two mid-Saxon fish traps, timbers representing post-medieval activity probably relating to the Greaves boatyard and the remains of a paleoenvironmental deposit from which an extraordinary artefactual assemblage has been recovered. Detailed archaeological survey by the Thames Archaeological Survey, the Institute of



**Fig. 2: Survey and recording at Fulham** (Photo: Andy Chopping/MOLA)



Archaeology and Museum of London Archaeology has recorded a Neolithic wooden club or beater<sup>3</sup>, lithics, ceramics and animal and human bones, including part of a Bronze Age trepanned skull which was found in 2001. Two human femora recovered during these earlier phases of work were dated by radiocarbon analysis to the Bronze Age and Neolithic period, indicating that the remains at of least three individuals were present, and a recent monitoring visit to the site by the Thames Discovery Programme has found a third femur. While it is well known that the Thames is a source of prehistoric artefacts and human remains which may be associated with ritual activity on the foreshore, evidence for activity of a much later date has also been recorded. In April 2009, Nick Stevens of the Thames and Field Metal Detecting Society found a human skull (Fig. 3) on the foreshore at Burrell's Wharf (FTH15), which was reported to the Museum of London. A sample from

the skull was radiocarbon dated to AD 1735 - 1805 and the rest of the child's skeleton was excavated in January 2010. Osteoarchaeological analysis of the skeleton found that the child may have suffered ill health in his or her early years, but there was no evidence of any other disease or injury to the skeleton, and the cause of death remained unclear. It is also not known why this child had been deliberately buried on the foreshore<sup>4</sup> but further research suggests that this may not be an isolated phenomenon. In 2001, English Heritage archaeologists removed a skeleton dating to the early post medieval period from the foreshore at Bermondsey (FSW01), disarticulated remains of probable post medieval date have been found at Rotherhithe and Millwall, and *in situ* burials have been recovered during waterfront excavations by Museum of London Archaeology on the Greenwich Peninsula, at Cyclops Wharf on the Isle of Dogs and at Vauxhall.

### Access and infrastructure

Another study of particular interest has been the examination of structures which provide information regarding access to the inter-tidal zone and the river, such as causeways, jetties and wharves, and also the bridges that spanned the channel. At Trig Lane (FCY01), the foundations of the late 17th century river stair were recorded during a Foreshore Recording and Observation Group (FROG) training session in March 2010 (Fig. 4), while Summer Season fieldwork in 2010 and 2011 at the Tower of London (FTH01) has demonstrated that the foreshore has eroded severely at this site since the 1990s, especially at the eastern end near Tower Bridge. Here, previously unexposed structures, likely to be two phases of a river stair or jetty, probably of 17th or 18th century date, have been recorded. These substantial structures, comprising a series of timber baseplates and piles, and likely to be of several phases of construction are currently eroding out as the surrounding foreshore deposits are washed away. Other work undertaken at the site included an examination of the medieval and post-medieval riverside wall (the foundations of which are also now exposed in places), a study of access to the royal fortress<sup>5</sup> and,



**Fig. 3: Skull from Burrell's Wharf** (Photo: Nick Stevens)





**Fig. 4: Recording the stair at Trig Lane**  
(Photo: Nathalie Cohen)



**Fig. 5: 12th century bone buckle from the Tower foreshore** (Photo: Nathalie Cohen)

working with the Society of Thames Mudlarks, the Thames and Field Metal Detecting Society and the Portable Antiquities Scheme, a finds survey of the artefactual assemblage near Tower Bridge. Significant artefacts recorded include a whalebone, a cannon ball, a syphilis syringe, a number of Roman coins, medieval and later coinage, and a medieval bone buckle<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 5).

At Greenwich Palace (FGW04), a

structure interpreted as a Tudor jetty was recorded by the Thames Archaeological Survey<sup>7</sup>, however recent work by the Thames Discovery Programme has recorded a range of additional features, suggesting considerable erosion is occurring at the site. These include a number of new timber and masonry structures (Fig. 6), together with deposits of unabraded ceramics and other artefacts, which

again appear to relate to Tudor activity on the waterfront of the nearby palace of Placentia. Further east, a series of timber piles and baseplates, likely to be medieval in origin, have been recorded – these appear to represent a jetty or pier structure. The woodworking techniques used suggest a date of construction as early as the 12th century, thus the jetty could be associated with ecclesiastical activity at the waterfront, as the manor of Greenwich was owned at the time by the Abbey of St Peter in Ghent, Belgium. Other features of interest on the site include the 17th century riverside wall (the foundations of which are also visible), and the waterfront of the Trinity Almshouses at the eastern end of the zone.

We have also examined the foundations of a post-medieval bridge between Putney and Fulham. The Thames Archaeological Survey recorded part of the surviving remains of the 1729 bridge footings at Putney (FWW03) in the 1990s, and the TDP completed a detailed survey of the same feature during summer fieldwork in 2009 (Fig. 7). Also recorded at this site were a wooden drain and a causeway (probably both of Victorian date) and parts of a very large hard, which include a possible crane base, located near Putney Railway Bridge. Other features of interest on the site include drainage outfalls, the remains of an aqueduct beneath Putney Bridge and an extensive surviving stretch of Victorian brick built riverside wall. Across the river at Fulham (FHM08), a number of features were recorded within the zone, in a small area between Putney Bridge and the entrance to Carrara (or Swan) Dock, including brick riverside walls, the remains of a causeway and two large timber piles (which were determined to be a part of the early 18th century bridge). Further work within Carrara Dock itself by an independent FROG group led by Andy Brown and Guy Taylor (Fig. 8) discovered the previously unrecorded northern abutment of the early 18th century bridge, the first crossing to be built on the Thames after the medieval London and Kingston Bridges.



**Fig. 6: The FROG at work in front of the Royal Naval College** (Photo: Nathalie Cohen)





**Fig. 7: 18th century bridge foundations on the foreshore at Putney** (Photo: Nathalie Cohen)

### Conclusions and acknowledgements

Further information about the archaeological survey work at the key sites is publicly available via the TDP website – this includes background archaeological and historical information, short field reports (journal entries uploaded as FROG Blogs, papers in the Riverpedia section and as articles in TDP *Newsletters*) with over 1,800 project images held on Flickr. TDP staff have also produced and/or contributed to a number of published articles on a variety of subjects<sup>8</sup>. Archaeological data for the key sites has been deposited with the Greater London Historic Environment Record



**Fig. 2: FROG team at work in Carrara Dock** (Photo: Nathalie Cohen)

(GLHER) and with the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC), and a report detailing the fieldwork, events and activities of the project is also available online<sup>9</sup>.

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monitoring the archaeology of the intertidal zone.

*Nathalie Cohen studied Medieval Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. With the Museum of London and its Archaeology Service (now MOLA) she worked on the Thames Archaeological Survey, and as an Archivist and a Built Heritage Specialist. Having completed an MA in Maritime Archaeology, she led the Thames Discovery Programme for three years. She is currently employed as the Cathedral Archaeologist for Southwark Cathedral, as a regional Archaeologist for the National Trust, and as a foreshore specialist for MOLA.*

**The Thames Discovery Programme is now hosted by Museum of London Archaeology: for further information, please visit [www.thamesdiscovery.org](http://www.thamesdiscovery.org).**

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3. M. Webber with H. Ganiaris 'The Chelsea Club: a Neolithic wooden artefact from the River Thames' in *Towards a New Stone Age: aspects of the Neolithic in south-east England* (eds. J. Cotton and D. Field) 124–127, CBA Research Report 137 (2004).

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8. For example see:

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