

Early water management on the Waterworks River in Stratford, London E15

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Introduction

In 2008 an industrial site at 150 Stratford High Street, London Borough of Newham, was archaeologically investigated by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) in advance of redevelopment. Between February and June 2008, ten evaluation trenches were investigated (Fig. 1, Tr. 1–10), two of which (Tr. 7 and Tr. 8) were subsequently extended to form one area, which was fully excavated. The approximate centre of the site is at NGR 538340 183730. It was excavated under the site code WHU08 and the artefactual, digital and paper archive from it will be lodged at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre.

The site lies on the east bank of the latest course of the Waterworks River, one of the Bow Back Rivers, and is roughly triangular in shape. It is bounded by Stratford High Street to the south-east and Warton Road to the north-east (Fig. 1). The Waterworks River, previously called Temple Mills Stream, originally flowed across the site and drove a mill, but it was diverted to its present course in the early 1930s.

The braided channels of the River Lea, known as the Bow Back Rivers, were in existence by the 11th century and powered several mills which are mentioned in the *Domesday* survey.¹ It is probable that the network of streams was originally formed by natural processes but was considerably altered

and canalised in order to drain the marshes. The Bow Back Rivers remained tidal into the 18th century.

Before the late 18th century, the Lea Valley was relatively undeveloped and the area of the site consisted in the main of marshland and fields lying between the settlements of Stratford-le-Bow (modern Bow), Stratford Langthorne (Stratford) and West Ham.² However, Saynes Mill, originally a tide-powered corn mill, was known to have occupied the site from at least the 13th century.³ The medieval period saw a steady increase in the number of tide-mills built along the Bow Back Rivers. Saynes Mill was one of the furthest upstream.

The archaeological work in

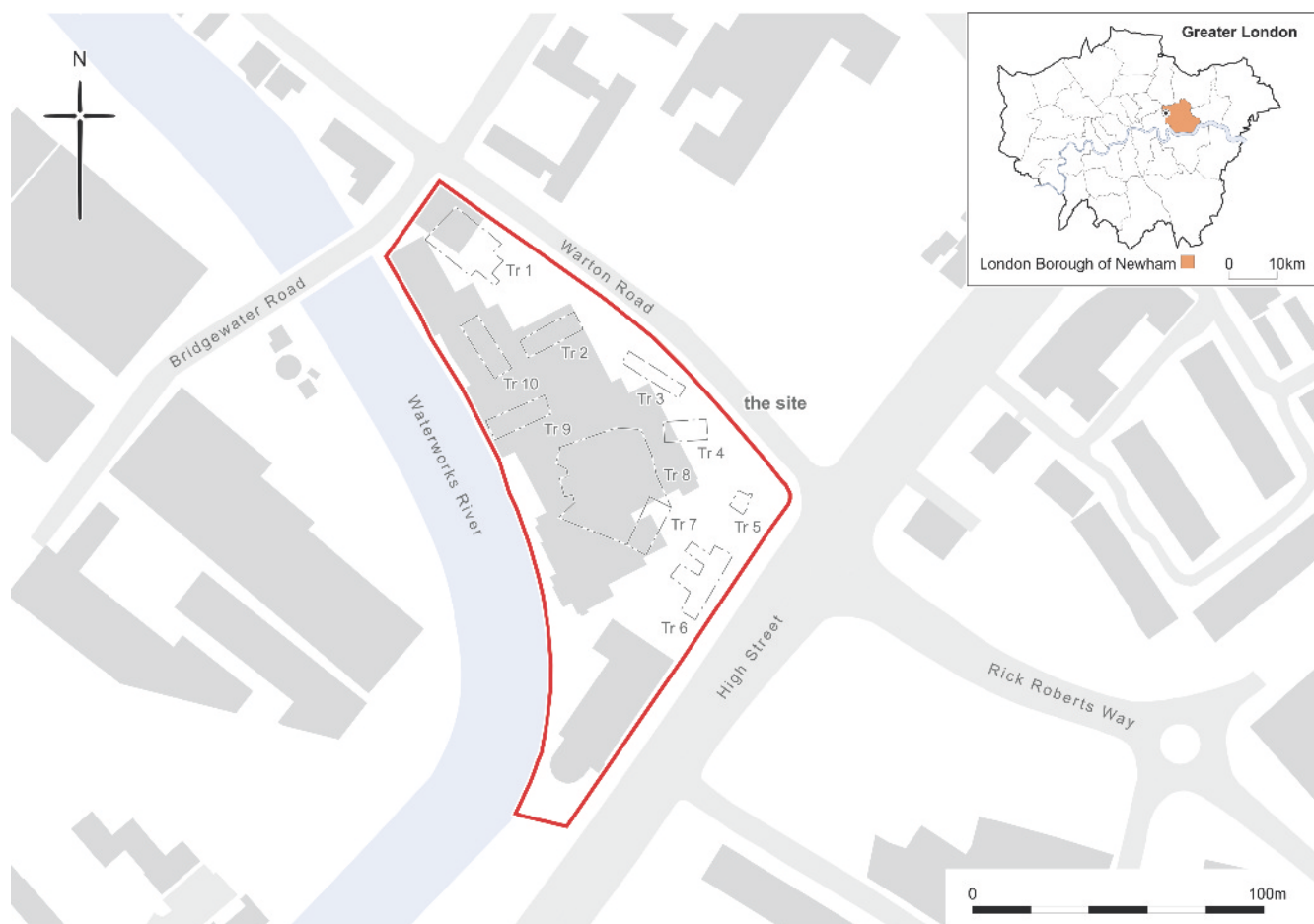


Fig. 1: site location and position of the trenches