

**NEW UNION WHARF,
STEWART STREET, CUBITT
TOWN, LONDON BOROUGH
OF TOWER HAMLETS E14**

3JU

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION**

SITE CODE: NUW13

REPORT NO: R12123

JUNE 2015



**PRE-CONSTRUCT
ARCHAEOLOGY**

**NEW UNION WHARF, STEWART STREET, CUBITT TOWN, LONDON BOROUGH
OF TOWER HAMLETS E14 3JU**

An Archaeological Evaluation

Site Code: NUW13

Central NGR: TQ 3840 79494

Local Planning Authority: London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Planning Reference: PA/12/00360

Commissioning Client: Hill Partnerships

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DOCUMENT VERIFICATION


Site Name

**NEW UNION WHARF, STEWARTS STREET, CUBITT TOWN, LONDON
BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS E14 3JU**

Type of project

An Archaeological Evaluation

Quality Control

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited Project Code			K3741
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CONTENTS

1	Abstract	3
2	Introduction.....	4
3	Planning Background	5
4	Geology and Topography.....	6
5	Archaeological and Historical Background	7
6	Archaeological Methodology	10
7	Phased Archaeological Sequence	11
8	Conclusions.....	11
9	Acknowledgements	12
10	Bibliography.....	13

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Context register	20
APPENDIX 2: Site Matrix.....	21
APPENDIX 3: Oasis form.....	22

PLATES

Plate 1: Section 1, (looking east).	14
Plate 2: Pile Timber (4) (looking east).....	14
Plate 3: Pile Timber (5) (looking south).....	15
Plate 4: General view of trench in relation to south wall of Kingfisher Court (looking north).....	15

FIGURES

FIGURE 1: SITE LOCATION	16
FIGURE 2: TRENCH LOCATION.....	17
FIGURE 3: SECTION 1.....	19
FIGURE 4: PLAN 1	19

1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 Between 18th and 19th May 2015 an archaeological evaluation was carried out prior to the redevelopment of the Phase 2 New Union Wharf site located at Stewart Street, Cubitt Town, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. and was targeted on the remains of a post-medieval slipway shown on 19th and 20th century maps.
- 1.2 During the evaluation three substantial timber piles were recorded, probably associated with the establishment of a river frontage or ground stabilisation pre-18th century. However, due to contaminated and unstable ground they remained inaccessible to close inspection. Therefore, their precise date or function remains undetermined.
- 1.3 No evidence of the slipway was found. It was clear that the posts had been cut off at the top, and they were directly overlain by modern material, suggesting that the area had been extensively truncated during the construction of the current estate.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited was appointed by Hill Partnerships to undertake an archaeological evaluation for the Phase 2 works at New Union Wharf, Ovex Close/Stewart Street, Cubitt Town in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets E14 3JU (Figure 1). The evaluation was carried out between 18th and 19th May 2015. Five phases of demolition and construction work are proposed across the whole site; Phase 1 has already been completed. This report relates solely to the Phase 2 works.
- 2.2 The work was commissioned in advance of the redevelopment of the site (planning application number PA/12/00360) in order to satisfy the archaeological condition attached to the planning permission.
- 2.3 The evaluation was managed for Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited by Helen Hawkins and the fieldwork was supervised by the author. Adam Single and John Gould (GLAAS), Archaeological Advisors to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, monitored the work on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.
- 2.4 The site is located at Ovex Close, Cubitt Town in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It is bordered to the south by New Union Close, to the north by Kingfisher Court, to the west by residential housing and the River Thames river frontage to the east.
- 2.5 Prior to the archaeological work commencing a non-intrusive desk based assessment of the archaeological potential of the whole site was carried out (Hyder Consulting (UK) Ltd 2012). Following this a written scheme of investigation was produced outlining the working methods of the archaeological investigation (Hawkins 2015).
- 2.6 A watching brief was carried out by PCA during geotechnical works across the five phases of the site. It comprised of six test pits and two trenches, some of which identified 19th century industrial and dock remains in the Phase 2 area (Grosso 2013).
- 2.7 The site as a whole was previously assigned the code NUW13. Upon conclusion of all stages of the work the completed archive will be submitted for deposition with the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC).

3 PLANNING BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Planning permission had been granted for granted for New Union Wharf, London for:
'Redevelopment of the site comprising the demolition of 189 existing residential units (including Heron Court, Robin Court, Sandpiper Court, Nightingale Court, Martin Court, Grebe Court and Kingfisher Court) and the construction of 3 blocks between 3 and 14 storeys' (Application No PA/12/00360)
- 3.2 Attached to the permission was the following condition (No 26):
'No development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works, in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
Reasons: the development of this site is likely to damage historic assets of archaeological interest in accordance with policy HE12.3 of PPS5 and policies: 7.8 of the London Plan 2011; SP10 of Core Strategy; CON4 of IPG 2007 and DM27 of the Managing Development DPD submission version 2012.'
- 3.3 The Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Hawkins 2014) set out the archaeological works which will be undertaken to allow this condition to be discharged.

4 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 4.1 The site background given below is taken from the Desk Based Assessment prepared by Hyder Consulting (UK) Ltd (2012) and the PCA reports noted above.
- 4.2 The solid geology of the site is of the Lambeth Group. The superficial geology is comprised of alluvial deposits
- 4.3 The current topology of the site is generally flat with a raised section along the frontage of the River Thames. The topography of the site is mostly artificial and the result of the area being covered in a significant depth of made-ground in order to make it suitable for development.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Introduction

5.2 The archaeological Desk Based Assessment was carried out for the study site by Hyder Consulting (UK) Ltd. (2012). The following is a summary of the background presented in this documents.

5.3 Prehistoric

5.3.1 The Isle of Dogs is thought to have been largely covered in water during the prehistoric period, with occupation concentrated on small areas of high ground linked with wooden trackways. However no finds dating to this period are recorded within the site.

5.3.2 The site is located within an area of archaeological priority that is thought to contain remains from the prehistoric period through to the post-medieval period. The land is at, or only slightly above the high tide level. As a consequence it almost exclusively consisted of river silts with the exception of the very western end of the area where sand occurs. The river edge would have varied widely as the sea level rose and fell over the millennia. The last cycle of sea level eroded much of the earlier sand deposits that had formed the original earlier bank. Research elsewhere along the Thames foreshore has demonstrated that prehistoric material recovered is likely to have come from eroded in situ archaeological contexts rather than having been discarded away from occupation or working areas.

5.3.3 A watching brief carried out to the west of the site at East Ferry Road identified various Holocene deposits; the sequence was interrupted by a period of erosion represented by a stream channel. A subsequent period of regression led to the deposit of (undated) peat. All later deposits were modern. This indicates the potential for prehistoric and Roman remains to be preserved beneath the modern deposits. It also indicates the potential for earlier Holocene remains to have been eroded away in places.

5.4 Roman

5.4.1 In the Roman period, London developed as an urban centre and later became the provincial capital at the centre of Roman Britain's communication system. The main centre of occupation in the Roman period was located to the north of the River Thames some 6km to the west of the site.

5.4.2 No archaeological assets dating to this period are recorded within the site and little Roman evidence is recorded from the Isle of Dogs, except for one site recorded at Westferry Road. This site was occupied from the 1st century AD on with the main use being the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. No structures were recorded at this site but the presence of gullies and pits suggest occupation and there is evidence that the site extend further outside of the area of excavation to the east. It is likely that rising water levels led to the abandonment of the site.

5.5 Early Medieval

5.5.1 Rising water levels at the end of the Roman period meant that the site and the whole of the Isle of Dogs was submerged by water. This inundation of water led to the deposition of a great depth of alluvium. Alluvium can reach thicknesses of 2m across the Isle of Dogs. Documentary evidence shows land reclamation from the Saxon period onwards.

5.5.2 No archaeological assets are recorded from this period either within the site or the surrounding area (500m radius from site boundary). This may be due to the area being under water.

5.6 Medieval period

5.6.1 Before development the land at the Isle of Dogs was marsh, lying several feet below water level. Protected from flooding by a bank or wall, it was drained by large ditches discharging into the River Thames through sluice gates. The bank was made of earth, or earth and chalk, possibly with a timber core in places. The wall varied in size and shape. In the narrowest parts, where it was more than 15ft high, the flat top was about 18ft across; slopes to both river and marsh gave an overall width of up to 150ft.

- 5.6.2 The first clear evidence of settlement on the Isle of Dogs after the Roman period dates from the second half of the twelfth century, when William of Pontefract built a chapel on his estate, later known as the manor of Pomfret (otherwise Pountfret, or variants).
- 5.6.3 No archaeological assets are recorded from this period within the site or the surrounding area (500m radius from site boundary).
- 5.7 Post-medieval
- 5.7.1 It was not until the late post-medieval period that the Isle of Dogs saw intensive development when it became the focus of industrial activity associated with the nearby docks. Most of the archaeological assets recorded within the study are dated to this period.
- 5.7.2 The construction of the West India Docks in 1802 to the north of the site meant that the area became an important centre for trade. The East India Docks were subsequently opened in 1806, followed by Millwall Dock in 1868. A range of warehouses associated with the Millwall Docks are recorded within the study area. In 1812 the Poplar and Greenwich Ferry Roads Company was set up to supply a horse-ferry between Greenwich and the Isle of Dogs, and to make toll-roads to the ferry on each part of the river, including two of the north side (now Westferry and East Ferry Roads). The ferry roads opened up the Isle of Dogs for further development.
- 5.7.3 William Cubitt saw potential in the eastern area of the Isle of Dogs in the early 1840s, which is how the eastern area of the Isle of Dogs got its name, Cubitt Town. William Cubitt was responsible for the development of the housing and amenities of the area from the 1840s to the 1850s. Development consisted, mainly, of houses to support the growing population of workers in the local docks, shipbuilding yards and factories.
- 5.7.4 The presence of the docks made the area an important centre for trade in-turn, with shipbuilding (including docks and wharves) becoming prominent within the study area during this period. This is demonstrated through cartographic and documentary evidence as well as a number of archaeological evaluations carried out at the Pier Head Site at the South West India Dock Entrance. These evaluations identified a backfilled dock full of debris from ship repair and breaking. By the 1860s large shipyards were flourishing in Millwall and Cubitt Town.
- 5.7.5 Cartographic analysis shows that in 1869 two ship building yards were located within the site. Yarrows shipbuilding yard was built on part of the site after the financial crash of 1866 and appears on the 1898 OS map. Blackwall Iron works occupy the rest of the site at this time. The history of Yarrows ship building yard is of some significance in the context of 19th century ship building.
- 5.7.6 Between 1868 and 1875 350 steam launches were built. The yard produced important boats such as the *Llala* built in 1870 for Captain Young of the Royal navy to sail on Lake Nyassa in Africa. This boat was instrumental in ending the slave trade in East Africa. At the beginning of the 20th century Yarrow Shipbuilding moved from London to the Clyde. Here the Yarrow Company became one of the world's leading builders of destroyers
- 5.8 Modern
- 5.8.1 In the Modern period the area around the site continued to grow. Cartographic evidence shows New Union Wharf and Ovex Wharf were built on the site by 1950. However, generally industry on the Isle of Dogs in the 20th century has been characterised by the deterioration of premises from prestige manufacturing to nondescript light industry, wharfage and warehousing, down to scrap dealing and use as depots. A common feature has been multiple occupations of premises originally used by a single concern.
- 5.8.2 The shipbuilding yards to the south of the site which had been called London Yard changed to a jam factory on early 20th century OS maps. This is evidence of the area shifting from shipbuilding to trade in the early 20th century.
- 5.8.3 The site was developed into a housing estate in the 1980s. The area around the site is now characterised by large modern buildings and industrial works.

6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 6.1 An evaluation trench measuring 12m x 5m was excavated, located close to the south wall of Kingfisher Court. The trench was stepped in order to test the depth of the alluvial deposits.
- 6.2 Prior to the commencement of the archaeological evaluation the trench location was cleared and then CAT scanned by the principal contractor. The trench outline was then set out and excavation of the evaluation trench commenced. Removal of the modern made ground deposit was carried out using a 20 tonne 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.
- 6.3 All machine excavation was executed reducing the ground level incrementally under constant archaeological supervision. Excavation by machine carried on until the top of the archaeologically significant deposits or features were reached.
- 6.4 The recording systems adopted during the investigations was fully compatible with those most widely used elsewhere in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets; that is those developed out of the Department of Urban Archaeology Site Manual, now published by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS 1994).
- 6.5 A unique-number site code, NUW13, was obtained from the Museum of London and notified to the Archaeology Advisor to the Local Planning Authority for the original watching brief work (Grosso 2013). This site code will remain in use for all five phases of construction work.

7 PHASED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

7.1 Phase 1: Natural

7.2 The earliest deposits reached during the evaluation were the alluvial silts and clays [3] excavated to a depth of c.2.6m (-1.32m OD) and of 2.2m thickness. The base of the deposit was not reached, but the thickness indicated that the slipway was not present (Plate 1). The top of the deposit appeared to have been truncated and was located at 0.88m OD.

7.3 Phase 2: 19th Century

7.3.1 Three vertical timber piles (one which had fallen at a forty five degree angle) were located in the trench but due to the instability of the upper layers of the trench, the presence of contaminated water and ultimately their depth, they were not examined close-up. Similar timber piles have been found in this area which date to the 19th century.

7.3.2 Timber [4] (see Plate 2), located at the north of the trench, was only partially exposed and measured 940mm long with a diameter of 540mm being round in section. Its top had been roughly cut off approximately level with the bottom of the hardcore layer (1) suggesting it had been truncated in the 20th century during ground levelling and consolidation. Similar piles found on nearby PCA sites were too massive to be removed even with modern machinery, which is presumably why this one was not removed.

7.3.3 At the south of the trench Timber [5] appeared to be rectangular in section with rounded edges (see Plate 3). It was 1036mm in length and measuring 280mm by 170mm in section. It was observed to be straight grained and very knotty. This timber had also been truncated.

7.3.4 Timber [6] had either fallen in antiquity or had been pushed over during construction of the current estate. It lay at a forty five degree angle. This timber was 1200mm long, rectangular in section and measured 260mm by 160mm and was located less than a metre from timber [5] in the south of the trench.

7.4 Phase 3: Modern (20th Century)

7.5 Overlying the alluvial layer was a layer of mixed hardcore and alluvial silts impregnated within a heavily contaminated 'perched' water table [2]. This layer was 0.44m thick (see Plate 4) and appeared to truncate the top of the alluvium. The site had been stabilised by a layer of crushed modern building material 0.76m thick [1] the top of which was at 2.88m OD.

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 General

- 8.1.1 The archaeological evaluation demonstrated that the site had been heavily truncated in the late 20th century during the development and piling of the area for the present housing blocks created in the 1980s.
- 8.1.2 Although the slipways marked on the Goad Insurance Plan of 1900 had been destroyed as part of those works, three timber piles were revealed in the course of excavation
- 8.1.3 The timber piles may represent an old river frontage or may form part of a larger grid of piles used to consolidate the land. Unfortunately, due to the contaminated perched water, unstable ground and their depth, they were inaccessible and only subject to inspection from the edge of the trench. No dating material was found or analysis of the piles possible.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 9.1.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Hill Partnerships for commissioning the work and Adam Single and John Gould for monitoring the work on behalf of Historic England and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.
- 9.1.2 Thanks to Sophie White for logistic support, Richard Archer for surveying the trenches, Ray Murphy for the AutoCAD illustrations and Helen Hawkins for project management and editing this report.

10 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Taylor, J. with Brown, G. 2009, *Fieldwork Induction Manual: Operations Manual 1*, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd.

11 PLATES



Plate 1: Section 1 looking east; made ground and alluvial clays



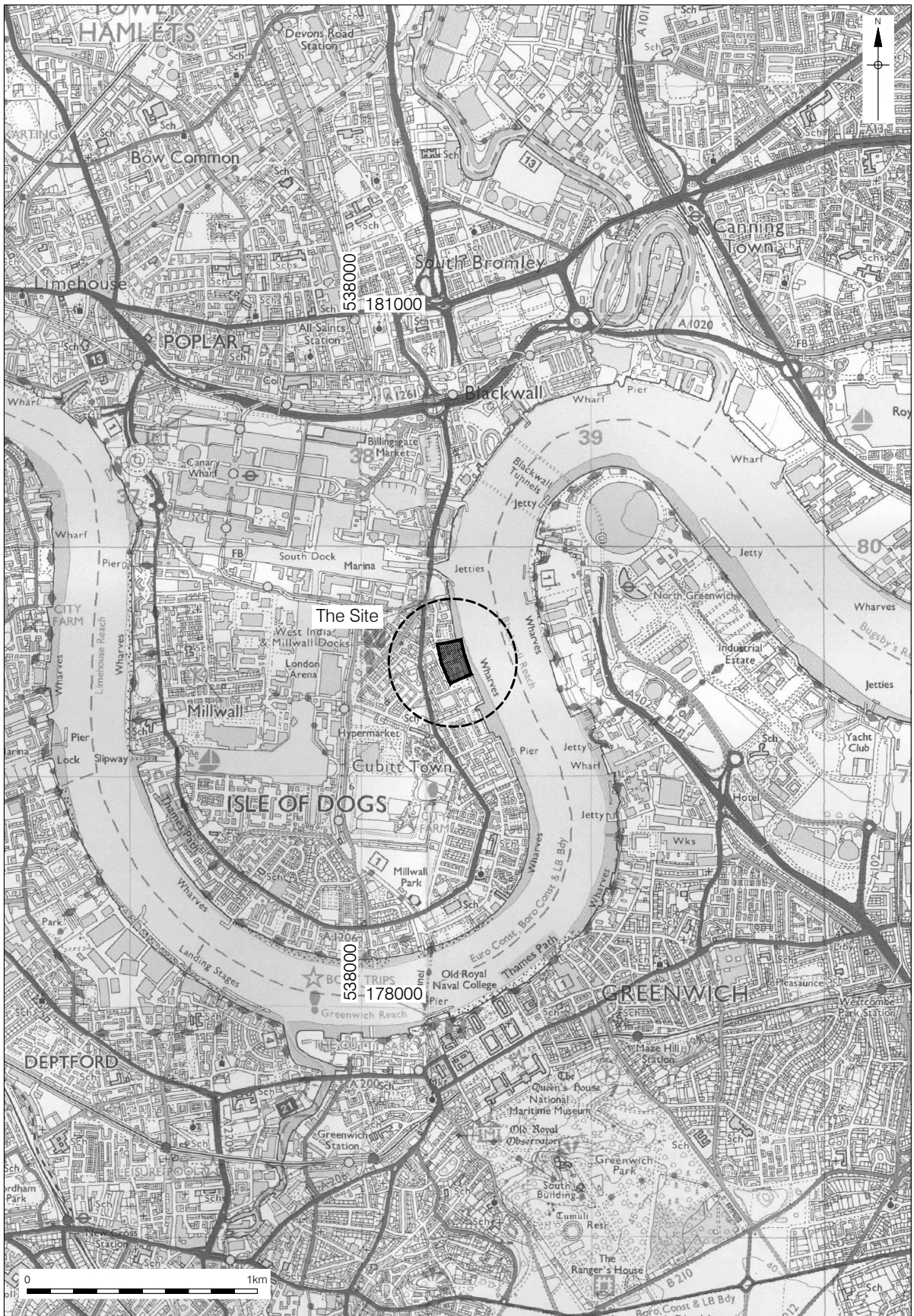
Plate 2: Timber pile [4] at north of trench (looking east).



Plate 3: Timber pile [5] at south of trench

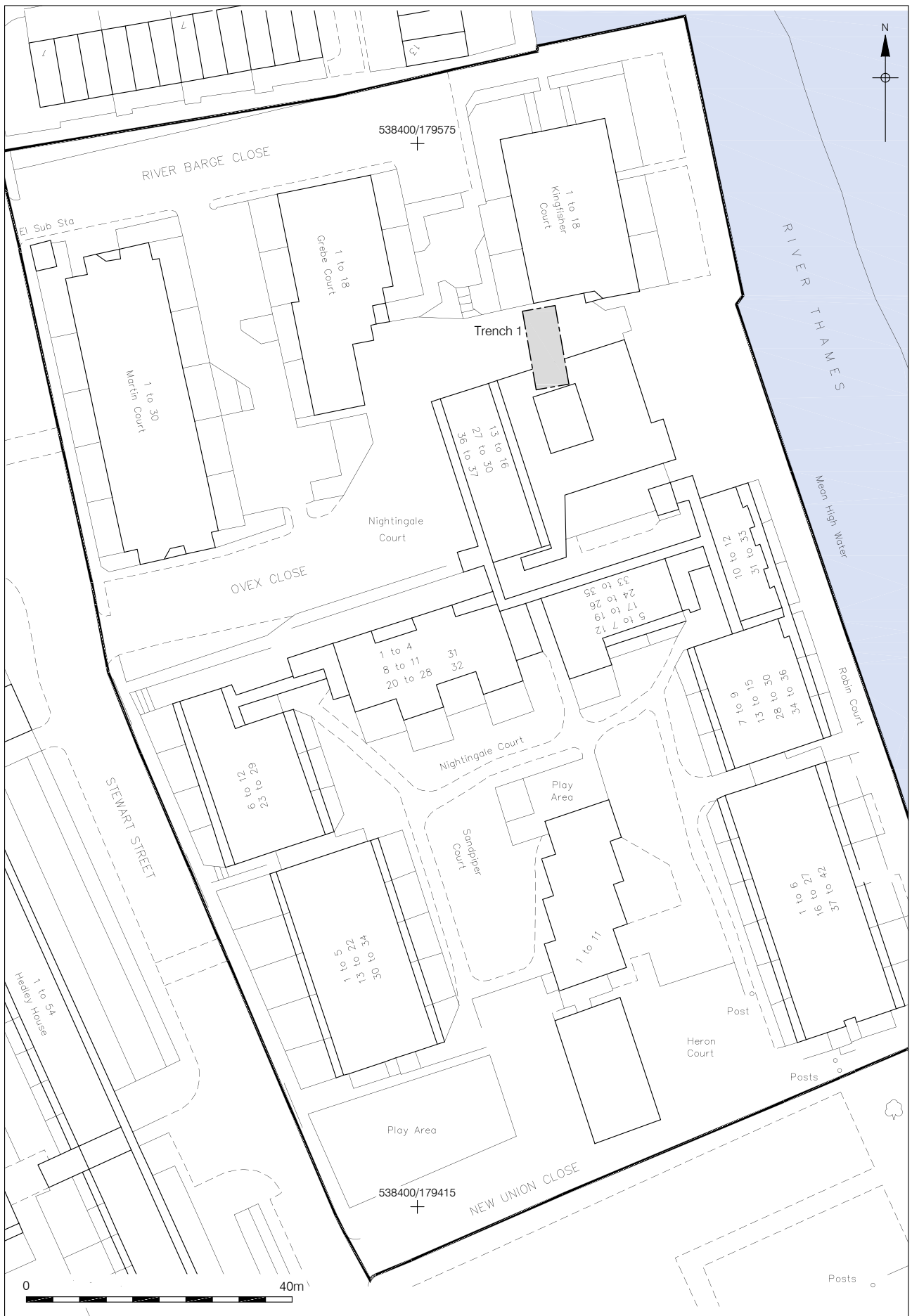


Plate 4: General view of Trench 1 looking north. South wall of Kingfisher Court in background.



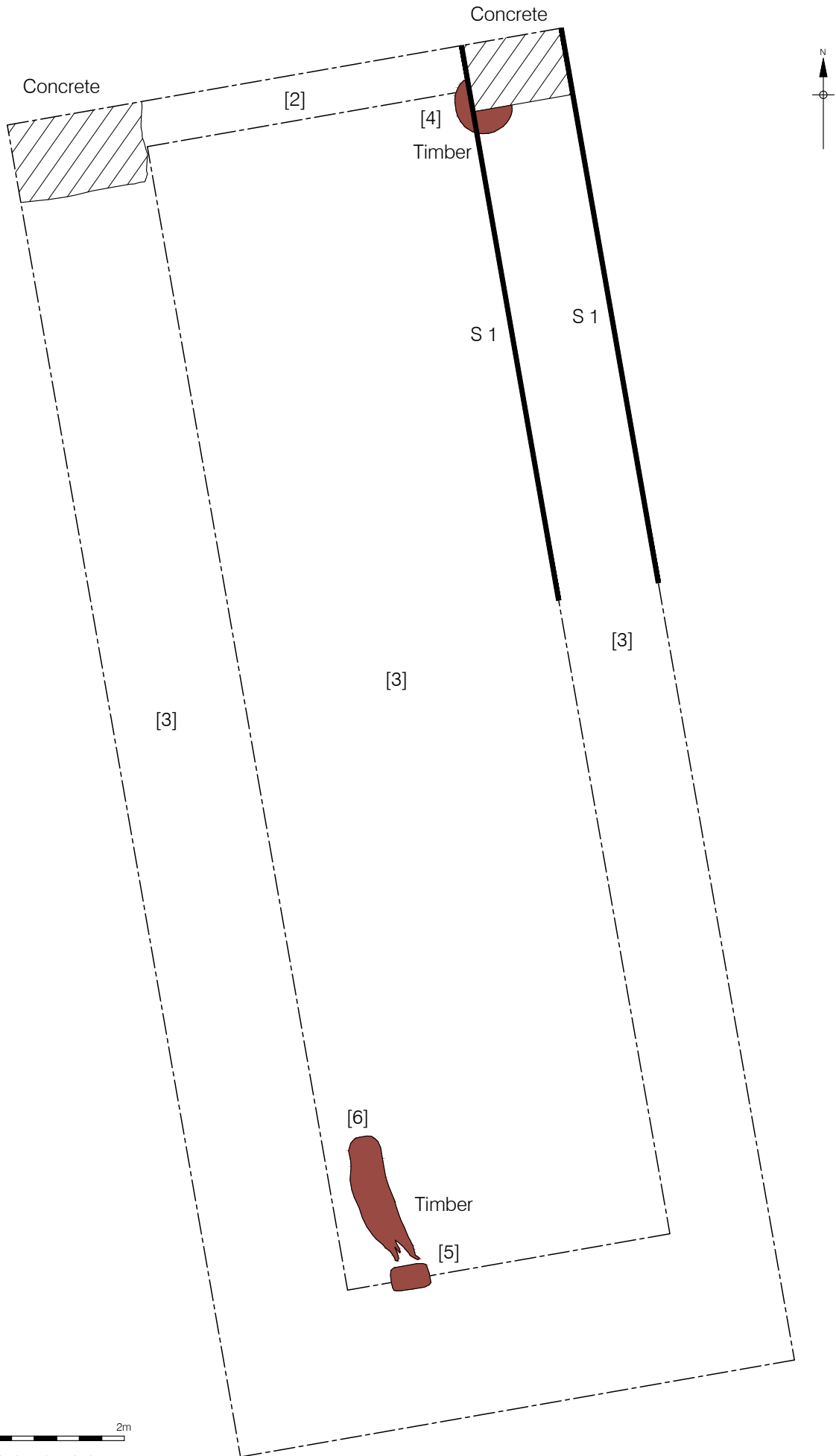
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Figure 1
 Site Location
 1:25,000 at A4



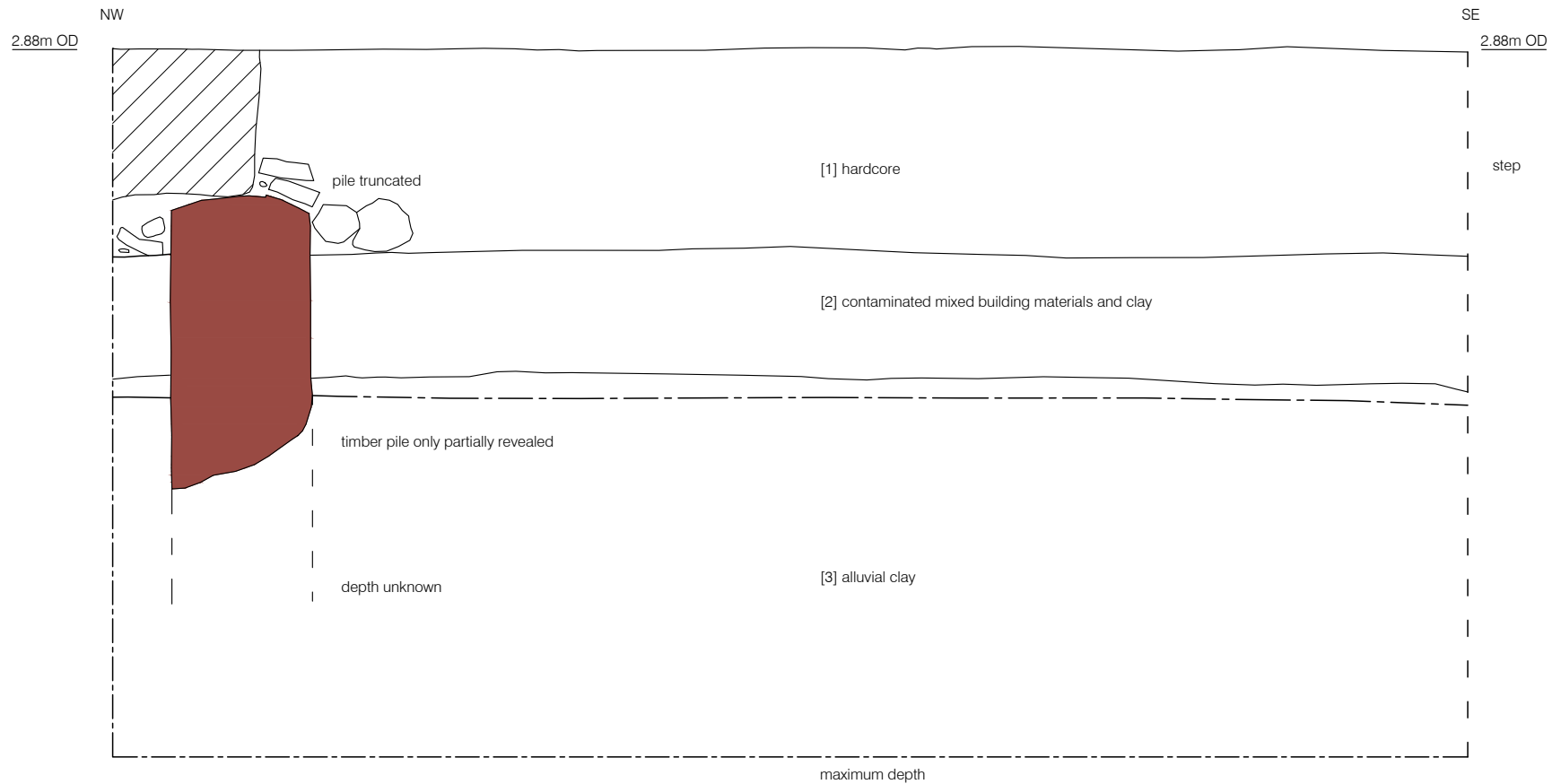
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Figure 2
 Trench Location
 1:800 at A4



0 2m
 © Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd 2015
 21/05/15 RM

Figure 3
 Plan of Trench 1 showing timber piles
 1:50 at A4



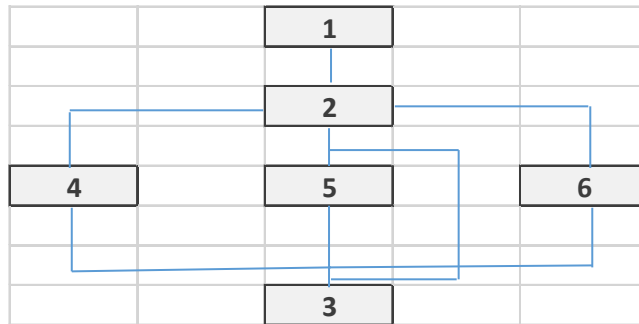
Section 1
Trench 1
South East Facing



APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT REGISTER

Site Code	Context	Trench	Type	Description	Phase
NUW13	1	Trench 1	Layer	Made ground: building rubble & hard core	3
NUW13	2	Trench 1	Layer	Contaminated alluvial clay	3
NUW13	3	Trench 1	Layer	Natural alluvial clay	1
NUW13	4	Trench 1	Timber	Timber pile	2
NUW13	5	Trench 1	Timber	Timber pile	2
NUW13	6	Trench 1	Timber	Timber pile	2

APPENDIX 2: SITE MATRIX



APPENDIX 7: OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: preconst1-214316

Project details

Project name NEW UNION WHARF, STEWARTS STREET, CUBITT TOWN, LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS E14 3JU

Short description of the project Between 18th and 19th May 2015 an archaeological evaluation was carried out prior to the redevelopment of the Phase 2 New Union Wharf site located at Stewart Street, Cubitt Town, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. and was targeted on the remains of a post-medieval slipway shown on 19th and 20th century maps. During the evaluation three substantial timber piles were recorded, probably associated with the establishment of a river frontage or ground stabilisation pre-18th century. However, due to contaminated and unstable ground they remained inaccessible to close inspection. Therefore, their precise date or function remains undetermined. No evidence of the slipway was found. It was clear that the posts had been cut off at the top, and they were directly overlain by modern material, suggesting that the area had been extensively truncated during the construction of the current estate.

Project dates Start: 18-05-2015 End: 19-05-2015

Previous/future work Yes / Not known

Any associated project reference codes NUW13 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area

Current Land use Residential 1 - General Residential

Monument type WOODEN POST Post Medieval

Significant Finds NONE None

Methods & techniques "Targeted Trenches"

Development type Housing estate

Prompt Planning condition

Position in the planning process After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON TOWER HAMLETS POPLAR New Union Wharf,
Stewart Street, Tower Hamlets

Postcode E14 3JU

Study area 2500.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 384000 794940 51.4969188771 -0.00598111957373 51 29 48 N 000 00
21 W Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 0m Max: 0m

Project creators

Name of Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited
Organisation

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originator

Project design Helen Hawkins
originator

Project Helen Hawkins
director/manager

Project supervisor Wayne Perkins

Type of House builder
sponsor/funding
body

Name of Hill Partnerships
sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive No
Exists?

Digital Archive LAARC
recipient

Digital Archive ID NUW13

Digital Contents "none"

Digital available Media "Database","Images raster / digital
photography","Spreadsheets","Survey","Text"

Paper Archive LAARC
recipient

Paper Archive ID NUW13

Paper Contents "none"

Paper available Media "Context
sheet","Map","Matrices","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section","Survey
","Unpublished Text"

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