

# **An Archaeological Evaluation at Indescon Court, Millharbour, London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

**Site Code: IDC07**

**National Grid Reference: TQ 375 795**

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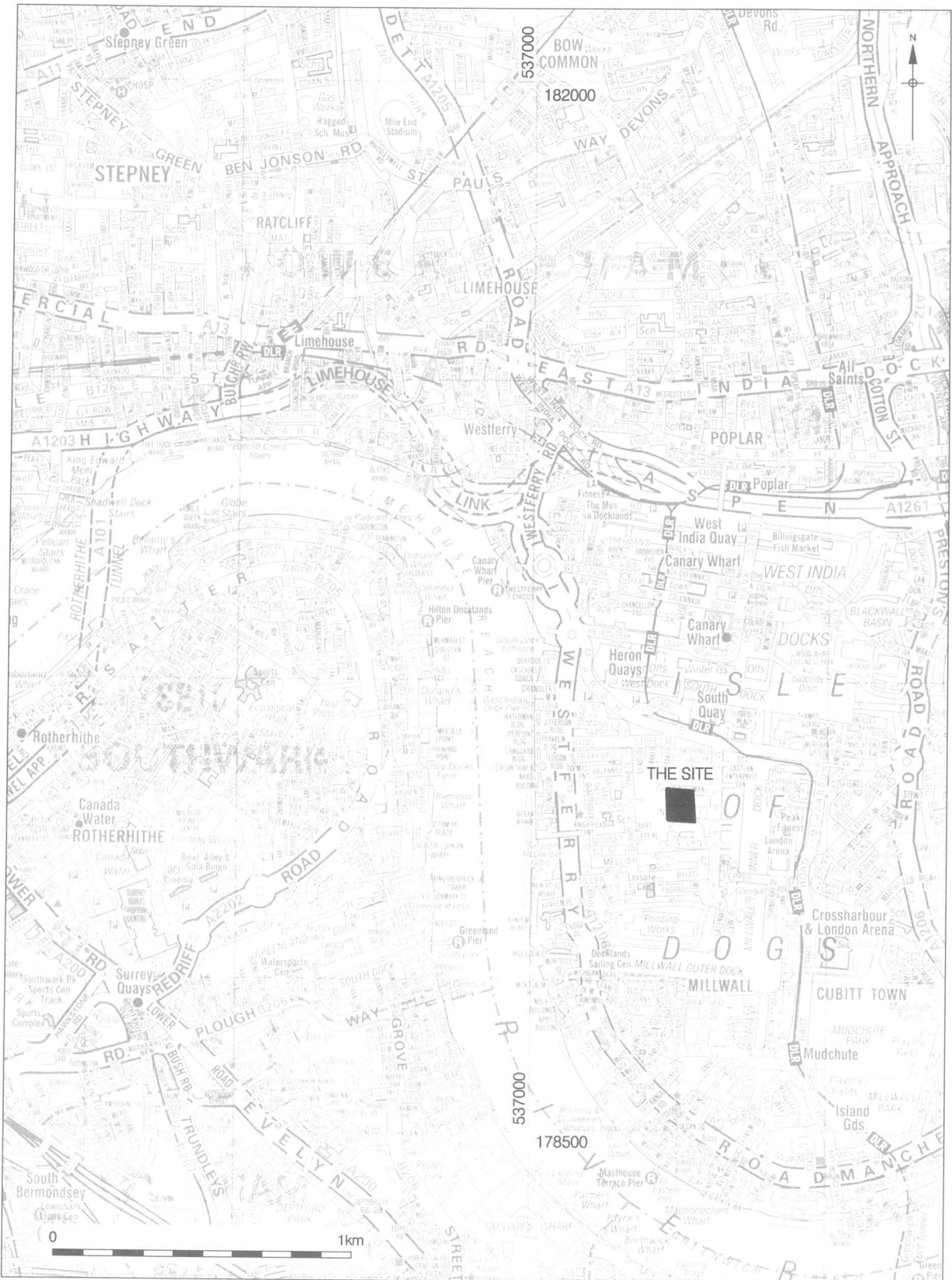
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## **1 ABSTRACT**

- 1.1 This document details the results and working methods of an archaeological evaluation at Indescon Court, Millharbour, London Borough of Tower Hamlets (fig. 1). The evaluation, commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Galliard Homes, was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology in advance of the redevelopment of the site for residential usage. The evaluation consisted of one trench undertaken between 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007 (fig. 2).
- 1.2 Indescon Court is bound to the north by Lightermans Road, to the west by Mastmaker Road, to the east by Millharbour and to the south by Lanterns Court and is located centrally within the Isle of Dogs peninsula. The site is centred at National Grid Reference TQ 375 795.
- 1.3 The evaluation found evidence for natural sandy gravels overlain by alluvially deposited sandy silts. The remainder of the evaluation trench was comprised of dump deposits dating to the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 An archaeological evaluation, commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Galliard Homes and undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd, was conducted at Indescon Court, Millharbour, London Borough of Tower Hamlets between 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007 (fig. 1). The site was centred at National Grid Reference TQ 375 795.
- 2.2 A borehole investigation conducted in 2006 indicated that a gravel island exists in the north of the site. As a consequence an evaluation trench was located in this area, predominantly to confirm the presence or absence of prehistoric archaeology.
- 2.3 A mixture of industrial units, yard areas and car parks have, until recently, occupied Indescon Court. Whilst the majority of the ground surfaces had been removed prior to the archaeological evaluation, it would appear that they were once comprised of a mixture of Tarmac, concrete and paved areas.
- 2.4 A temporary benchmark was transferred from the Ordnance Survey Bench Mark located at 47 Millharbour (4.83m OD).
- 2.5 The completed archive comprising written, drawn and photographic records will be deposited at the Museum of London under the site code IDC07.



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Figure 1  
Site Location  
1:20,000

### **3 PLANNING BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In November 1990 the Department of the Environment issued Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) "Archaeology and Planning" providing guidance for planning authorities, property owners, developers and others on the preservation and investigation of archaeological remains.
- 3.2 In considering any planning application for development, the local planning authority is bound by the policy framework set by government guidance, in this instance PPG16, by current Structure and Local Plan policy and by other material.
- 3.3 The relevant Development Plan framework is provided by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The plan contains the following policies, which provide a framework for the consideration of development proposals affecting archaeology in the Borough.

*5.62 Tower Hamlets has a long and rich history. Archeological remains are an important source of evidence of this history from Roman times to the recent industrial past. One of the principle sources of archaeological evidence is the development of sites, but this evidence is easily destroyed in the development process. The Council therefore wishes to ensure that development involving groundworks in areas which may contain archeological remains makes early and specified allowance for the investigation of the archaeological potential of the site before groundworks for the development is allowed to proceed. The Council's preference will be to seek and maintain any finds and remains in situ. The Council will seek the guidance of English Heritage and the Museum of London in determining the importance of archaeological remains.*

*5.63 The Council is concerned to see that sites which may be of interest are properly investigated and records made of any finds before development takes place. It is important the Borough's archaeological heritage is made accessible to the public as an educational, recreational and tourist resource. The Council will therefore support and promote measures which protect and conserve sites and which will allow the public access to sites with archaeological remains to the extent that this is compatible with the protection of the remains.*

**5.64** *The Council will seek professional archaeological advice from English Heritage or a professionally qualified archaeological organisation or consultant as appropriate and expect applicants to do the same when proposing development which could affect archaeological remains. It is important that developers have properly assessed and planned for the implications of their proposals in terms of scheduling time and resources for investigations to be carried out of the site. Proposals for investigation should be built into the development programme at an early stage in the process. Supplementary Planning Guidance on Archaeology and Development, outlines the preferred procedure for investigation before development takes place. An archaeological assessment is normally a desktop evaluation of existing information on the development site, commissioned from a professional archaeological body or consultant. Sources may include historic maps, written sources, previous finds, archaeological fieldwork and geographical surveys. An archaeological evaluation is in contrast field based, but, as distinct from a full archaeological excavation, is normally a small scale and rapid operation, entailing ground survey and limited trial trenching. It should, nevertheless, be carried out by a professionally qualified archaeological organisation or individual. An evaluation of this kind helps to define the character and extent of surviving archaeological remains in the area of a proposed development, and thus to indicate the weight that ought to be attached to their preservation.*

## **4 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

- 4.1 British Geological Survey: Sheet 270 identifies the underlying solid geology of the site as Lambeth Beds and Thanet Sand Formation. The Lambeth Beds are overlain by Terrace Gravels that are in turn overlain by deposits of alluvium (Bradley 2001).
- 4.2 The site has until recently been occupied by industrial units, yard areas and car parks (RPS 2006). These have since been demolished and the site can be typified as generally level with no distinct differences in the topography evident.
- 4.3 The current ground level of the site in the vicinity of the evaluation trench is c. 4.00m OD.



## **5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **5.1 Prehistoric**

5.1.1 The Sites and Monuments Record shows that isolated prehistoric finds have been made within the vicinity of the site (Bradley 2001). Whilst little is known about the type of activities that may have been undertaken, the marshlands, with the flora and fauna that it contained, would have provided a valuable resource to nearby prehistoric communities.

### **5.2 Roman**

5.2.1 Although it has been suggested that attempts at draining the Isle of Dogs were made during the Roman period (*anon* 1998) there is no indication to suggest that the site or its vicinity were utilised at this time.

### **5.3 Saxon**

5.3.1 There is no indication to suggest that the site or its vicinity were utilised during the Saxon period.

### **5.4 Medieval**

5.4.1 The Isle of Dogs peninsula was a sparsely populated marshland during the medieval period. Attempts were made to drain the land during the 13<sup>th</sup> century but by 1488 the riverside embankment had been breached and the peninsula returned to its original marshy condition.

### **5.5 Post-medieval**

5.5.1 The name *Isle of Dogs* is first recorded in 1588, but it is probable that the name had been in use for some time prior (*anon* 1994). Numerous theories exist regarding the adoption of the name, including a suggestion that it derives from “Isle of Ducks”, a reference to the numerous birds that would have lived in the marshlands (Cobham Brewer, 1898), however, the origins of the name remain unknown.

5.5.2 During the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch engineers successfully drained the peninsula and the fertile ground was used for cattle grazing. However, it was not until the construction of

the West India Docks in 1802 that full scale urbanisation of the Isle of Dogs took place. Many dock workers settled on the peninsula and by 1901 21,000 people were living there (*anon* 1998).

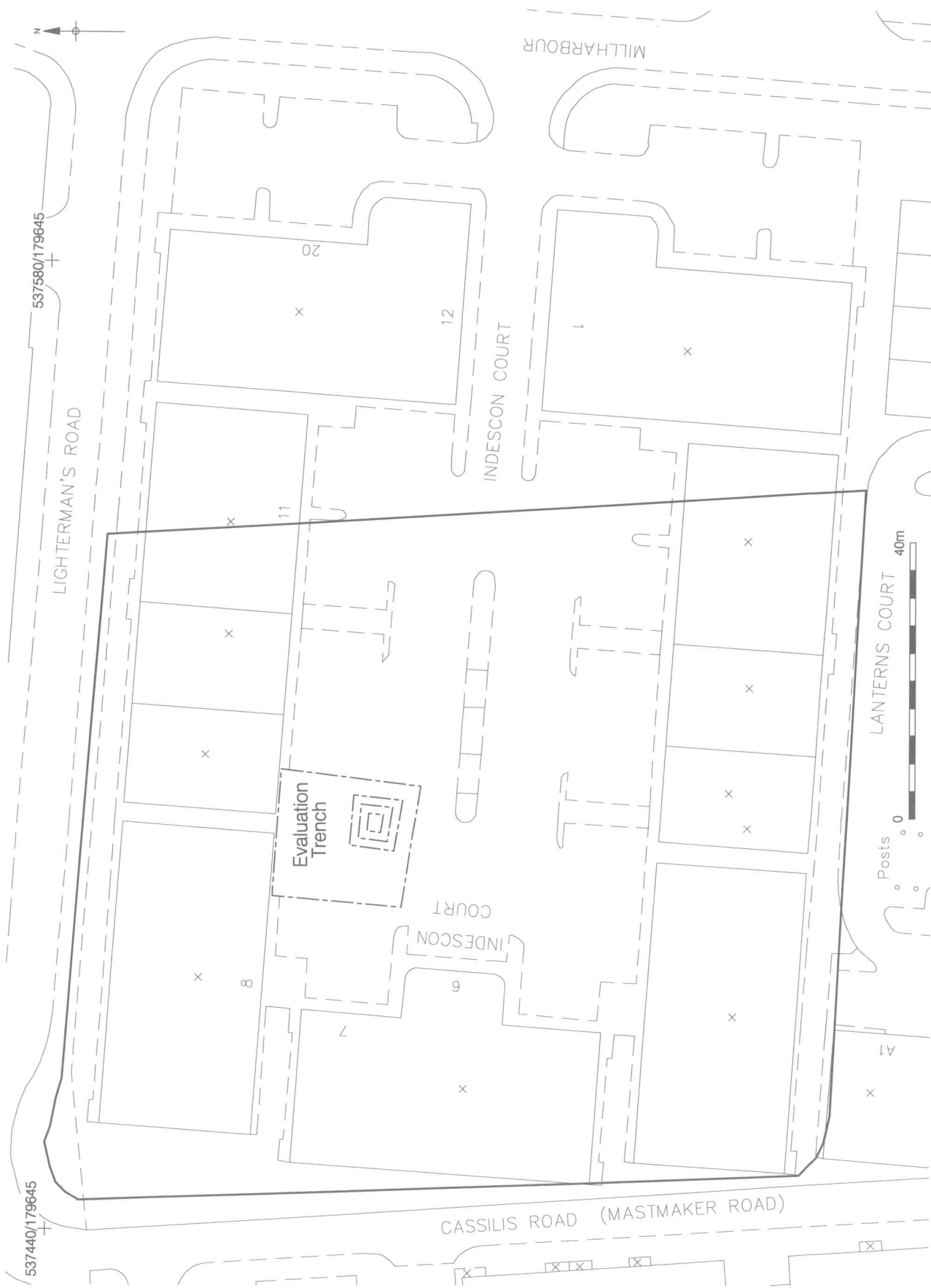
5.5.3 The main historical use of the study site was between the late 1800's and 1950's. At this time the site was in use as a railway depot with associated railway tracks, sidings and a grain depot (RPS 2006).

5.5.4 During World War II the peninsula was a key target and was heavily bombed. A significant number of local civilians were killed in the bombing and extensive destruction was caused on the ground, with many warehouses being destroyed and much of the dock system put out of action. Although the docks experienced a brief resurgence after the war they closed progressively during the 1970s, with the last closing in 1980 (*anon* 1998).

5.5.5 From the 1950's to the 1970's it appears the depot was no longer present at the site although the railway sidings and an above ground storage tank remained. The buildings which have recently been demolished on site were constructed in the early 1980's as part of the London Dockland areas regeneration (RPS 2006).

## 6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 6.1 A borehole investigation conducted in 2006 indicated that a gravel island exists in the north of the site. As a consequence an evaluation trench was located in this area, predominantly to confirm the presence or absence of prehistoric archaeology.
- 6.2 The evaluation trench measured 15m by 20m at ground level. Whilst it was initially intended to excavate the trench in its entirety, with steps at 1.20m intervals, it was eventually agreed that a smaller area would suffice. Consequently an area located in the southeast corner of the trench and measuring 6.60m by 7.20m was excavated, down to the natural horizon. The full depth of the trench was 4.15m (figs. 3 & 4).
- 6.3 The evaluation trench was machine excavated using a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. Mechanical excavation continued through undifferentiated deposits in spits no greater than 200mm until the natural horizon was attained.
- 6.4 Torrential rainfall severely undermined the safety of the trench and given that no significant archaeological deposits had been encountered no further work, with the exception of recording, took place within the trench following machine clearance.
- 6.5 Recording was undertaken using the single context recording system as specified in the Museum of London Site Manual. The trench was located using a Total Station Theodolite and a representative section was drawn at a scale of 1:10. Contexts were numbered sequentially and recorded on *pro-forma* context sheets. A photographic record was also kept.
- 6.6 Potentially high levels of contaminants on site, including Arsenic and Lead, necessitated the use of contamination suits, gas masks and decontamination units. Whilst finds were collected according to standard retrieval methods, the potentially high level of contamination on site has ensured that the collected material, once spot dated by an appropriate specialist, will not be retained as part of the site archive.
- 6.7 A temporary benchmark was transferred from the Ordnance Survey Bench Mark located at 47 Millharbour (4.83m OD).
- 6.8 The site was given the code IDC07.



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Figure 2  
Evaluation Trench Location  
1:800

## **7 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE**

### **7.1 Phase 1: Natural**

7.1.1 The earliest deposit recorded during the excavation of the evaluation trench was a naturally deposited sandy gravel horizon [4] encountered at a height of -0.09m OD (fig. 4).

### **7.2 Phase 2: Natural/undated**

7.2.1 Overlying the natural gravel was a light yellow, sandy silt layer [3] indicative of alluvial deposition and encountered at 1.16m OD (fig. 4). No cultural material was contained within the layer and its date of deposition is unknown.

### **7.3 Phase 3: 19<sup>th</sup> century**

7.3.1 The alluvial horizon was sealed by a firm, light brownish grey, sandy silty clay layer [2] encountered at 2.11m OD (fig. 4). Contained within the deposit were fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) and pottery, one fragment of which was stamped "1840". The layer probably represents dumping during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

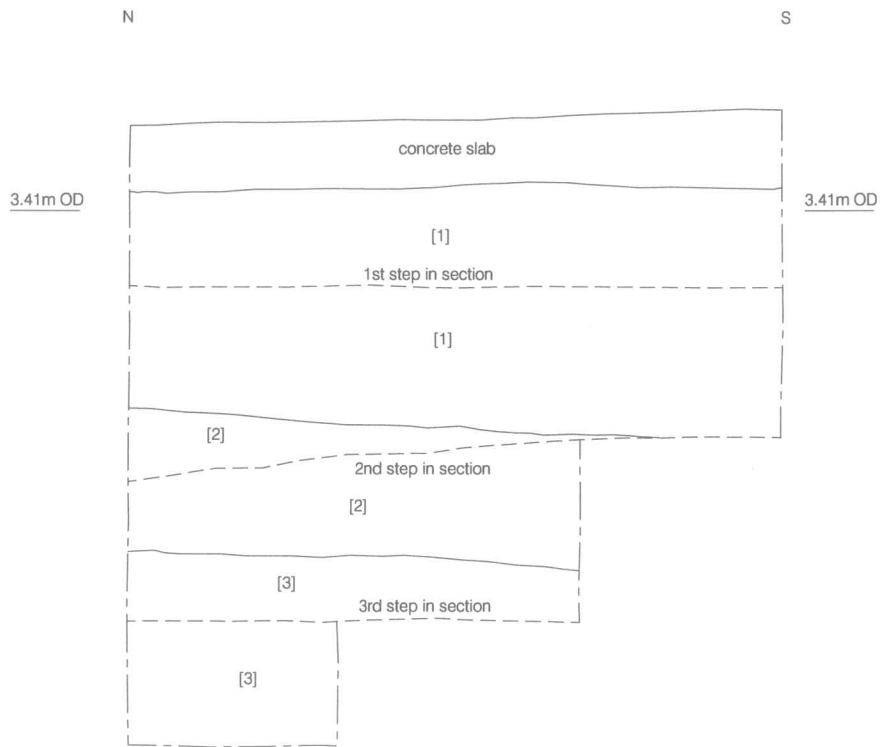
7.3.2 Sealing the dump horizon was a mottled yellowish, greyish brown dump layer [1] encountered at 3.61m OD. The layer contained occasional fragments of 19<sup>th</sup> century CBM and pottery and appears to relate to the same episode of late 19<sup>th</sup> century land reclamation discussed above.

### **7.4 Phase 4: Modern**

7.4.1 The remainder of the trench was comprised of defunct service trenches and a 0.45m thick concrete raft present throughout the trench. The concrete raft was encountered at 4.01m OD, a height that represents the current ground level in the vicinity of the trench at the time of excavation (fig. 4).



Figure 3  
Plan of Evaluation Trench  
1:200



Section1  
West facing representative section



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Figure 4  
Section 1  
1:50

## **8 CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The earliest deposit recorded on site was a natural sandy gravel horizon overlain by an undated alluvial layer. This horizon in turn was sealed by c.2m of ground reclamation dating to the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  
- 8.2 The archaeological evaluation was intended to assess the presence and survival of archaeological deposits, particularly prehistoric, within the vicinity of a gravel island identified in a previous borehole investigation. However, no evidence was found to suggest that the site was utilised during the prehistoric period and no evidence of human utilisation of the site was found predating the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereon a concentrated effort to reclaim the land had been undertaken.



## **9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 9.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Lorraine Darton of CgMs Consulting for commissioning the work on behalf of Galliard Homes and also David Divers (GLAAS) for monitoring the project.
- 9.2 The author would like to express her thanks to the O'Shea staff for their support during the evaluation. The author would also like to thank Will Johnson for his assistance on site; Lisa Lonsdale for organising the logistics; Dave Harris for the illustrations; and Tim Bradley for project managing and editing the report.

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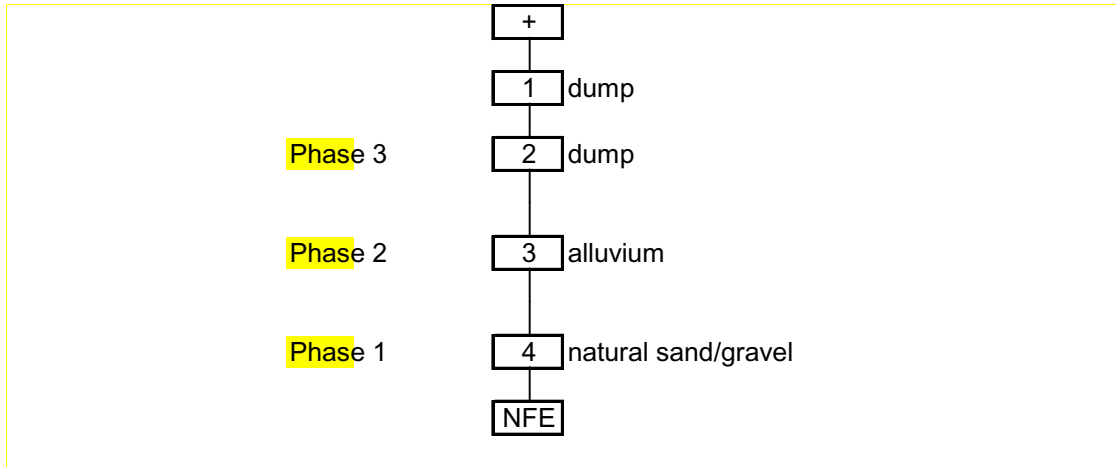
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## APPENDIX 1: SITE REGISTER

Site Code	Context No.	Plan	Section / Elevation	Type	Description	Height m OD	Date	Phase
IDC07	1	n/a	S. 1	Layer	dump/levelling layer	3.61	19th century	3
IDC07	2	n/a	S. 1	Layer	dump/levelling layer	2.11	19th century	3
IDC07	3	n/a	S. 1	Layer	alluvium	1.16	natural/undated	2
IDC07	4	n/a	S. 1	Layer	natural sand/gravel	-0.09	natural	1

## APPENDIX 2: MATRIX



## APPENDIX 3: OASIS REPORT

OASIS ID: preconst1-29100

### Project details

Project name	An Archaeological Evaluation at Indescon Court, Millharbour, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Short description of the project	An evaluation, commissioned by CgMs on behalf of Galliard Homes, was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology in advance of the redevelopment of Indescon Court, Millharbour, London Borough of Tower Hamlets for residential usage. The evaluation consisted of one trench undertaken between 17th and 20th July 2007. The evaluation found evidence for natural sandy gravels overlain by Alluvially deposited sandy silts. The remainder of the evaluation trench was comprised of dump deposits dating to the latter half of the 19th century.
Project dates	Start: 17-07-2007 End: 20-07-2007
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	IDC07 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 4 - Storage and warehousing
Methods & techniques	'Targeted Trenches'
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)

Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the planning process Not known / Not recorded

### Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON TOWER HAMLETS TOWER HAMLETS Indescon Court, Millharbour

Study area 1.80 Hectares

Site coordinates TQ 375 795 51.4971929481 -0.01893731131770 51 29 49 N 000 01 08 W  
Point

Height OD Min: -0.09m Max: -0.09m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd

Project brief originator CgMs Consultants Ltd

Project design originator Lorraine Darton

Project director/manager Tim Bradley

Project supervisor    Joanna Taylor

Type of sponsor/funding body    Galliard Homes

**Project bibliography 1**

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