

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Florence Street and Shillingford
Street, London Borough of Islington**

Site Code: FCE 09

Central National Grid Reference: TQ 3180 8420

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Archaeological Watching Brief

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1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 This report details the results and working methods of an archaeological watching brief conducted on the excavation of four geotechnical test pits at Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington. The site is centred at National Grid Reference TQ 3180 8420.
- 1.2 The watching brief was undertaken on 3rd July 2009 and identified the presence of alluvial clayey sand in the west and firm sandy gravel in the east part of the site.
- 1.3 The alluvial sand in the west part of the site was overlaid by a dark deposit/fill of post-medieval date and to the east of the site the sandy gravel was found to rise up. The natural gravel horizon in the east was sealed by an undated firm deposit which was in turn truncated by the modern activity associated with the construction of the modern concrete floor of the existing building.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington on 3rd July 2009. The watching brief monitored the excavation of four geotechnical test pits in advance of the redevelopment of the existing site.
- 2.2 The work was commissioned by Salt Evans Ltd. The watching brief was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd, and was project managed by Helen Hawkins and supervised by Ireneo Grosso. A Written Scheme of Investigation¹ was prepared by Helen Hawkins and approved by Kim Stabler, Archaeological Advisor to the London Borough of Islington.
- 2.3 The site is located within an Archaeological Priority Area as defined in the London Borough of Islington UDP. The site is bounded by Florence Street to the west, by Shillingford Street to the east and by residential properties to the north and south.
- 2.4 The completed archive comprising written and drawn records will be deposited at the Museum of London under the site code FCE09.

¹ H Hawkins 2009 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief, at Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington* Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited unpublished report

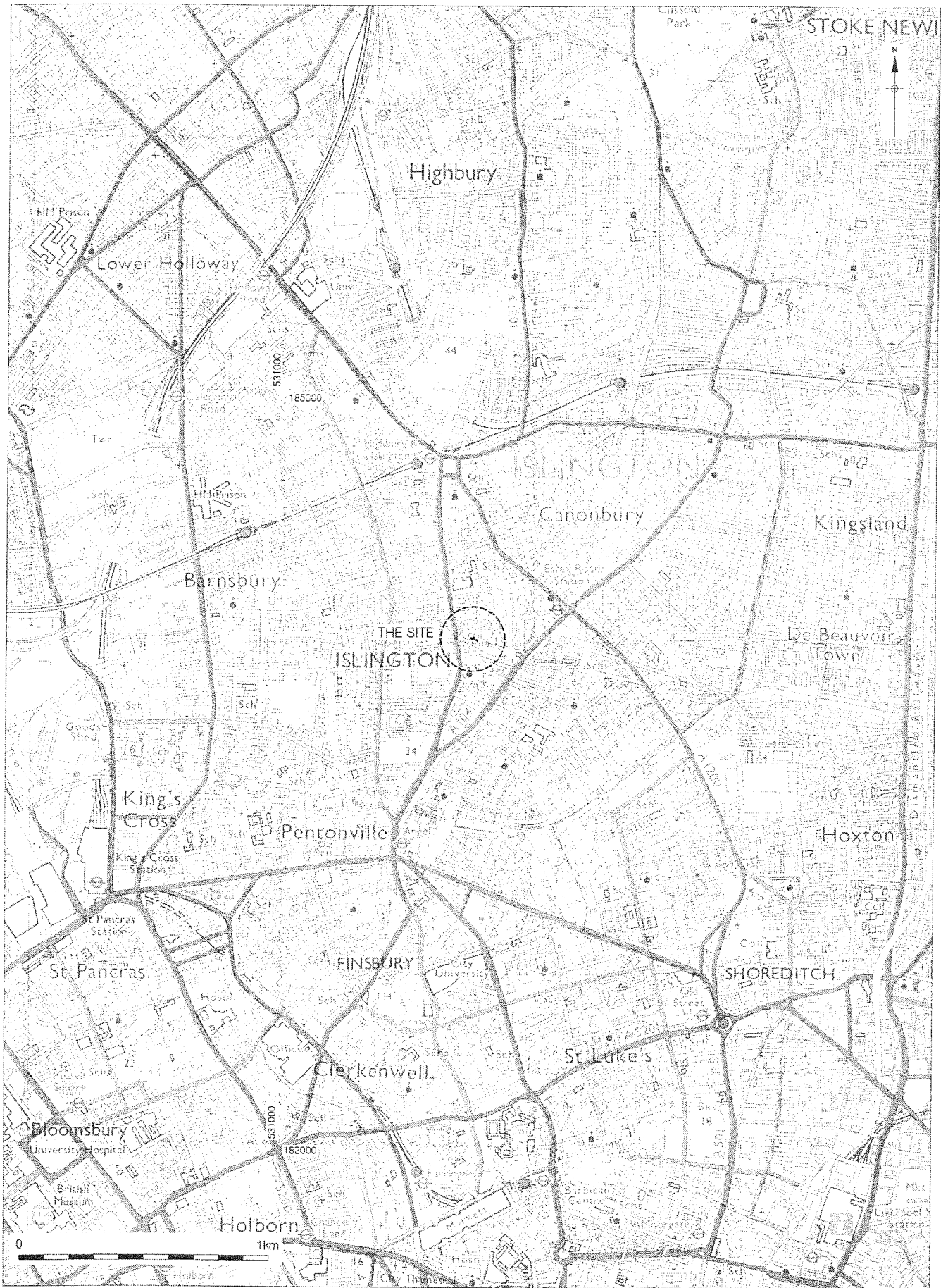
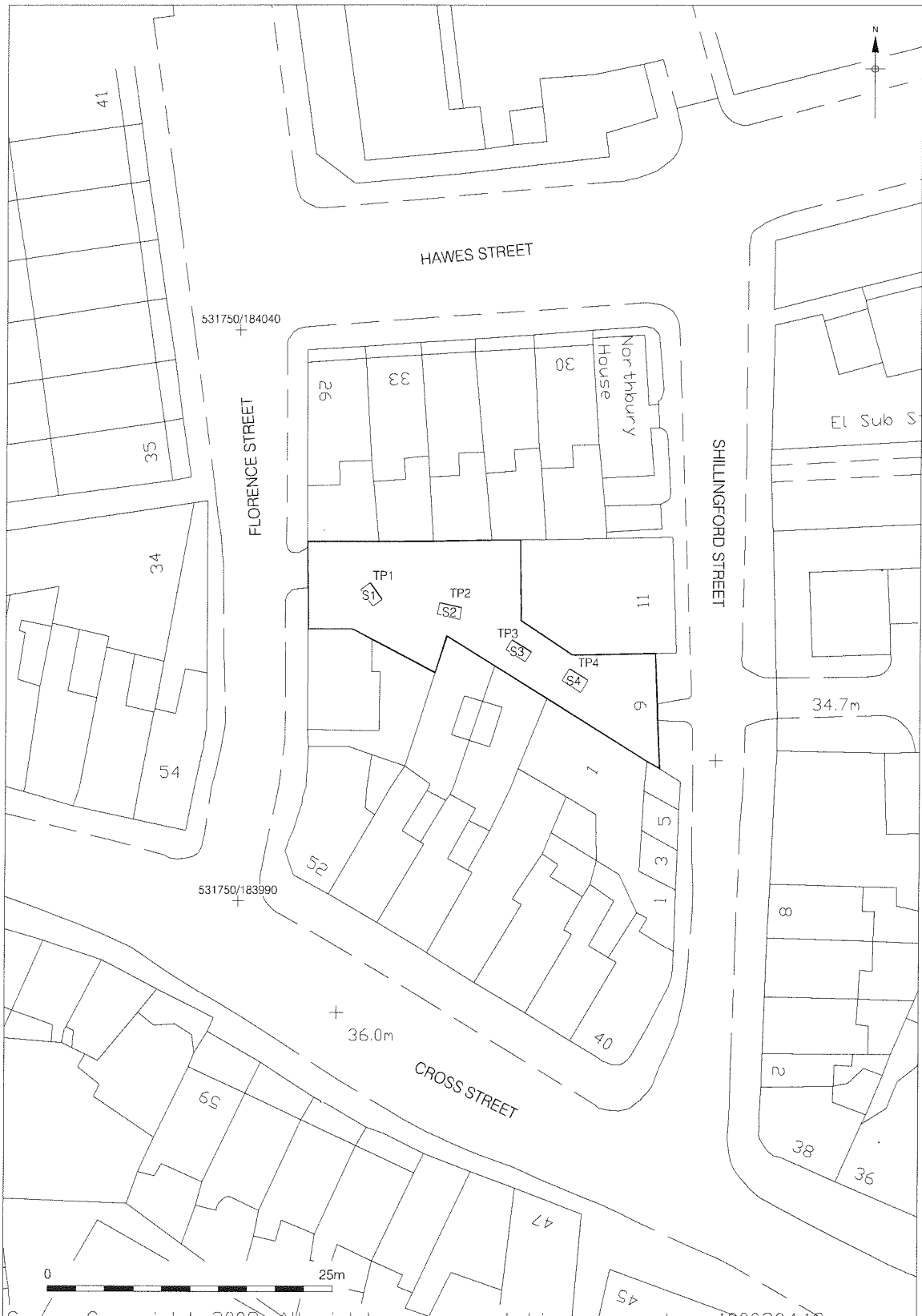


Figure 1
Site Location
1:20,000 at A4



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Figure 2
 Test Pit Location
 1:500 at A4

3 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.1 The site lies on flood plain gravel, which forms a terrace of higher ground overlooking the River Thames. The British Geological Survey North London map indicates that the terrace gravel is underlain by London Clay.

- 3.2 The ground level was roughly flat from west to east, at a level of c. 34.5m OD.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Prehistoric

- 4.1.1 Islington was formerly part of the Great Forest of Middlesex, although the term 'forest' was used rather loosely and could refer to scrub and marshland, as with this site. There is only a small body of evidence for activity in the area during the prehistoric period. The remains of crocodile vertebrae pre-dating human occupation were found in the London Clay during the excavation of the Regent's Canal, more than 500m to the south of the site. The nearest evidence from Palaeolithic period comprises a flint assemblage found in Pentonville just over 1km to the southwest of the site. No evidence of Mesolithic activity has been recorded within the Borough.

4.2 Roman

- 4.2.1 There is somewhat more evidence for Roman activity in the area. It is possible that Upper Street may follow the course of a Roman road, and it has been suggested that long vanished earthworks at both Highbury and Barnsbury Square were of Roman origin. Traditionally Battle Bridge (modern Kings Cross) is said to have been the site of the battle which brought about the downfall of Boudicca and the Iceni. Coins and pottery were recorded at Barnsbury Square and four sherds of pottery were found residually at Popham Street. More coins were recorded at Kings Cross, 1.5km to the south west along with a coin hoard and tombstone at the adjacent York Way. A further tombstone was found at Lambs Conduit Street approximately 2km to the south west of the site and another was discovered in Islington pre-1775 amongst the ruins of a house. Metal grave goods, a coin, and a ceramic vessel were found at Old Street, some 1.5km south east of the site.

4.3 Anglo-Saxon

- 4.3.1 Islington is first mentioned in a charter dating from c. 1000, as *Gislandune* (*Gisla's* hill or down), when it supplied two men to man a ship. The name is probably derived from *Ysel* or *Yssel*, a diminutive of Ouse, meaning water of river. Indeed the ancient *Ysel* is an early name for the more recent Fleet River. There have been other claims that *issen* are the names for the local springs, or that *Iseldone* means lower fort or camp from the old British word for lower, *ishel*.
- 4.3.2 By the time of the Domesday Book the area was known as *Isendone*, *Iseldon* or *Iseldone* and comprised a number of manors including Canonbury, Barnsbury and

Highbury, much of the old 'woodland' having been cleared. At this time Islington had 27 householders, 13 cottagers, 9 *villeins* and 5 *borders*, collectively owning land to the value of 92 shillings. The settlement was primarily concerned with arable farming although there remained enough pasture for cattle while 60 pigs were able to root about in the nearby Toletone Woods. The settlement extended along two droveways, Upper and Lower (now Essex Road) Streets.

- 4.3.3 Notwithstanding the clear foundation of the town in the Saxon period, the evidence in the archaeological record is slight. A single sherd of Saxon pottery was found residually at 71-85 Essex Road. Queens Head Street has been claimed as the possible location of the Prebendal Manor of St Paul which was established in 1065.

4.4 Medieval

- 4.4.1 Islington expanded along the Fleet Valley throughout the 13th century and St Johns Street was constructed to aid the journeys of the guests of the Knights Hospitallers to and from the priory. This road developed into a major artery between London and the Great North Road. A large number of religious communities built country houses in the area and had, by the 14th century, become the principal landlords of the locality. By the late medieval period Upper Street had become an important thoroughfare from the city to the north. In 1377 the inhabitants were granted the right to levy pavage for the maintenance of the road for three years and subsequently petitioned for a seven year renewal. In 1430 a conduit was built to provide water from Overmead to Charterhouse and it is possible that water from Islington was also supplying the gaols at Ludgate and Cripplegate. Edward IV was met in Islington by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London on his accession and in 1465 Henry VI was arrested there by the Earl of Warwick.

4.5 Medieval

- 4.5.1 Islington continued to be an important stage on the road to London in the 16th and 17th centuries, Henry VII being ceremonially welcomed there by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, after his defeat of the pretender Lambert Simnel. James I, likewise, was met there upon his accession to the throne. By this period Islington was renowned for its mansions with orchards and gardens. Henry VII enjoyed hunting in the area and owned two houses, in one of which he is reputed to have installed his mistresses. Queen Elizabeth also frequented the area, often visiting Sir John Spencer at Canonbury House. She is claimed to have visited Sir Walter Raleigh at a houses on Upper Street and the Earl of Leicester at Wards Place on Essex Road. During the reign of Mary a number of Protestant dissenters lived in the area who

became known as the Islington Martyrs after being discovered at prayer, and later burnt at the stake at Smithfields. The area was known also for its ponds and wild fowl at this time.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The watching brief monitored the excavation of four geotechnical test pits within the footprint of the property at Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington.
- 5.2 The test pit dimensions were:
- | | |
|------------|---|
| Test Pit 1 | 1.00m south-west to north-east, 1.80m north-west to south-east and 2.16m deep |
| Test Pit 2 | 1.20m north to south, 2.00m east to west and 3.10m deep |
| Test Pit 3 | 1.00m north to south, 2.00m east to west and 2.80m deep |
| Test Pit 4 | 1.20m north to south, 2.00m east to west and 2.76m deep |
- 5.3 The test pits were scanned for services by the contractor prior to the commencement of the ground works. An archaeologist was in attendance throughout the removal of all below ground deposits.
- 5.4 The site was given the code FCE09.

6 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

6.1 The test pit locations are shown on Figure 2 and the sections are shown on Figure 3.

6.2 Test Pit 1

6.2.1 Test Pit 1, located near the west entrance of the site, was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.16m below concrete floor surface (found at about 34.5m OD), and the earliest deposit was a natural greyish clayey sand [4]. This deposit did not contain any finds, was 0.35m thick and was interpreted as naturally formed alluvial clayey sand. Its greyish colour was the result of contamination from a diesel tank located just west of the Test Pit.

6.2.2 Sealing the natural deposit [4] was a 0.80m thick dark brown silt deposit/fill [1] with occasional oyster shells, animal bones and ceramic building material (CBM) inclusions. It was found 1.00m below concrete floor level and produced one pottery fragment of transfer printed Pearl ware dated between 1770 and 1840 and another of Red Border ware dated between 1550 and 1900.

6.2.3 The latest deposit in the test pit comprised 0.70m of modern made ground overlaid by 0.30m of concrete for the floor of the existing building.

6.3 Test Pit 2

6.3.1 In Test Pit 2, located 2-3 metres east of Test Pit 1, the earliest deposit identified comprised a naturally deposited mid greyish alluvial clayey sand [3] located at 2.70m below floor level. The alluvial sand [3] was 0.40m thick but not fully observed in its depth and was interpreted as being the same as context [4] found in Test Pit 1.

6.3.2 Sealing the natural horizon [3] was a 0.90m thick dark brown silt deposit/fill [2] with occasional oyster shells, animal bones and ceramic building material (CBM) inclusions. It was found 1.80m below concrete floor level and contained pottery sherds of Developed Cream ware dated between 1765 and 1830.

6.3.3 The remainder of this test pit was occupied by modern made ground 1.40m thick which was in turn sealed by the modern concrete floor for the existing building. The concrete floor was 0.40m thick, and was located at c. 34.5m OD.

6.4 Test Pit 3

6.4.1 Test Pit 3 was located about 5m east of Test Pit 2. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.80m from ground level and the earliest deposit encountered was firm natural orangey sandy gravel [6], about 0.40m thick, which was observed 2.40m below concrete floor level.

6.4.2 The natural horizon [6] was sealed by firm mid brown yellowish, gravelly sandy silt [5] found 1.00m below concrete floor level. This layer did not contain any finds, was 1.40m thick and was observed on the west part of the south facing section 3.

6.4.3 Deposit [5] was truncated to the east by substantial modern truncation which was in turn sealed by the modern concrete floor for the existing building at 34.50m OD.

6.5 Test Pit 4

6.5.1 Test Pit 4, located 3m east of Test Pit 3 and was excavated to the maximum depth of 2.76m below concrete floor level. The earliest deposit encountered was very firm, mid orangey sandy gravel [8] which was very similar as context [6] observed in Test Pit 3.

6.5.2 Natural gravel [8] was overlaid by a 0.70m thick layer of mid grey brownish sandy gravelly silt [7] which was found 1m below concrete floor level and produced one fragment of pottery identified as London Stoneware and dated between 1670 and 1900. This layer was very similar to context [5] observed in Test Pit 3.

6.5.3 Context [7] was sealed by 0.70m thick modern made ground which was in turn overlaid by 0.30m thick concrete floor for the existing building located at c.34.50m OD.

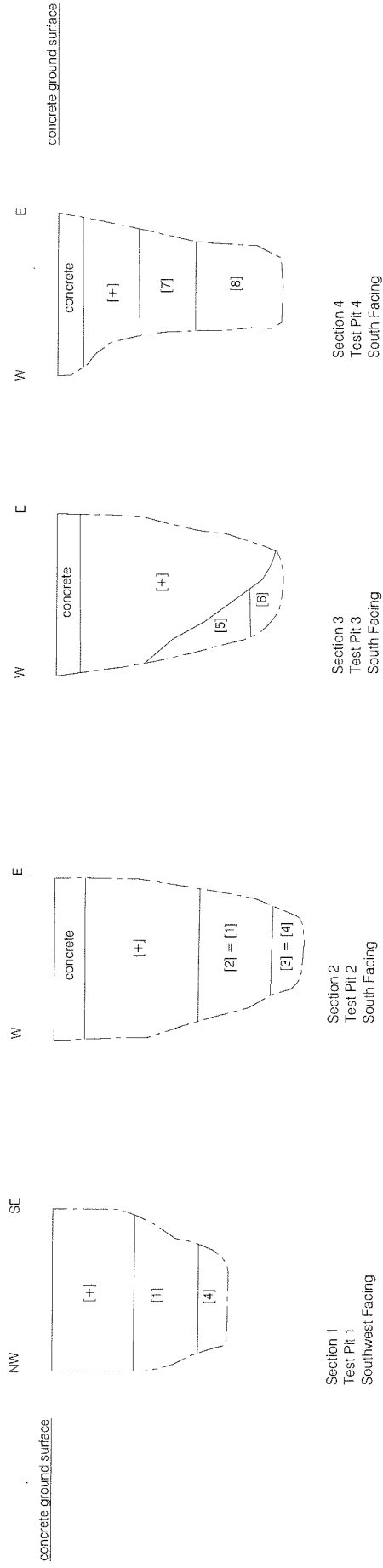


Figure 3
Sections 1 - 4
1:75 at A4

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The watching brief found evidence, on the west part of the study site, for a considerable deposit of alluvial clayey sand represented by contexts [4] and [3] in Test Pits 1 and 2 respectively. This alluvial deposit/fill was in turn sealed by post-medieval deposits/fills [1] and [2] which were interpreted as being fills of the possible channel.
- 7.2 The natural alluvial deposit observed in Test Pits 1 and 2 did not extend to Test Pits 3 and 4. In these Test Pits (3 and 4) the natural horizon was represented by firm orangey sandy gravel which seemed to rise upwards to the east from 2.40m below concrete floor level in Test Pit 3 to 1.70m below concrete floor level in Test Pit 4.
- 7.3 Context [5] and [7] in Test Pits 3 and 4 respectively possibly belong to the same undated context which sealed the natural horizon in the east part of the study site.
- 7.4 An examination of the Rocque map of 1746 for the area indicates that the site lay at this time in open ground. There is no evidence for a stream or pond in the vicinity of the site. Later maps show the site located to the rear of residential buildings and again there is no suggestion of a water feature. There is therefore no map evidence for a channel or pond in the area in the post-medieval period, although the pottery found in fill [1] suggests a post-medieval date for the infilling or silting up of the channel. This suggests that the feature has medieval or earlier origins but had silted up by the 18th century.
- 7.5 The watching brief showed that the western part of the study site was heavily contaminated with diesel which leaked from a tank located to the west of Test Pit 1. The chemical contamination had not affected the eastern part of the site.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Boyer, P. 200, *An Archaeological Desktop Assessment of 5 Almeida Street & 129 Upper Street, London Borough of Islington N1* Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited unpublished report.

Hawkins, H. 2009 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief, at Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington* Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited unpublished report.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 9.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank Steve Evans of Salt Evans Ltd for commissioning the work.

- 9.2 The author would like to thank, Jenny Simonson for the illustrations, Chris Jarrett for the pottery spot dating and Helen Hawkins for her project management and editing.

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INDEX

Trench No.	Context No.	Plan	Section / Elevation	Type	Description	Date	Highest Level	Lowest Level
TP1	1	n/a	1	Fill/Deposit	Dark brown sandy silt	03/07/2009	33.4	33.4
TP 5	2	n/a	2	Fill/Deposit	Same as [1]	03/01/1900	32.7	32.7
TP 5	3	n/a	2	Deposit	Same as [4]	03/07/2009	31.8	31.79
TP 5	4	n/a	1	Deposit	Natural greyish clayey sand	03/07/2009	32.76	32.76
TP 5	5	n/a	3	Deposit	Gravelly sandy silt	03/07/2009	33.46	31.8
TP 5	6	n/a	3	Deposit	Natural firm orangey sandy gravel	03/07/2009	32.1	32.1
TP 1	7	n/a	4	Deposit	Mix grey gravelly silt sand (post-med)	03/07/2009	33.5	33.5
TP 1	8	n/a	4	Deposit	Same as [6]	03/07/2009	32.8	32.8

APPENDIX 2: OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: preconst1-61799

Project details

Project name	Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington
Short description of the project	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington on 3rd July 2009. The watching brief monitored the excavation of four geotechnical test pits in advance of the redevelopment of the existing site. The test pits suggested that a possible channel was present in the west of the site, the later fills of which contained post-medieval pottery. In the east of the site, the gravel terrace rose up and was sealed by an undated layer of silty sand material which was in turn sealed by a thick layer of modern made ground.
Project dates	Start: 03-07-2009 End: 03-07-2009
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	FCE09 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Site status (other)	Archaeological Priority Area
Current Land use	Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed
Monument type	POSSIBLE CHANNEL Uncertain
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Project location	
Country	England

Site location	GREATER LONDON ISLINGTON ISLINGTON Florence Street and Shillingford Street, London Borough of Islington
Postcode	N1 2DP
Study area	250.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 3180 8420 51.5407950914 -0.099253635110 51 32 26 N 000 05 57 W-Point
Lat/Long Datum	Unknown
Height OD / Depth	Min: 31.79m Max: 32.80m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd
Project brief originator	Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service
Project design originator	Helen Hawkins
Project director/manager	Helen Hawkins
Project supervisor	Ireneo Grosso
Type of sponsor/funding body	Architectural Practice
Name of sponsor/funding body	Salt Evans Ltd
Project archives	
Physical Archive recipient	LAARC
Physical Contents	'Ceramics'
Digital Archive	LAARC

recipient	
Digital Contents	'none'
Digital Media available	'Spreadsheets', 'Text'
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	'none'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet', 'Plan', 'Section', 'Unpublished Text'
Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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