

An Archaeological Watching Brief on Ground Reduction at Block G, Lefevre Walk Estate (Phase 3) Old Ford Tower Hamlets.

Site Code: LVW-05

Central National Grid Reference: TQ 3702-8360

Written and Researched by Strephon Duckering
Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, April 2005

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April 2005

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Illustration

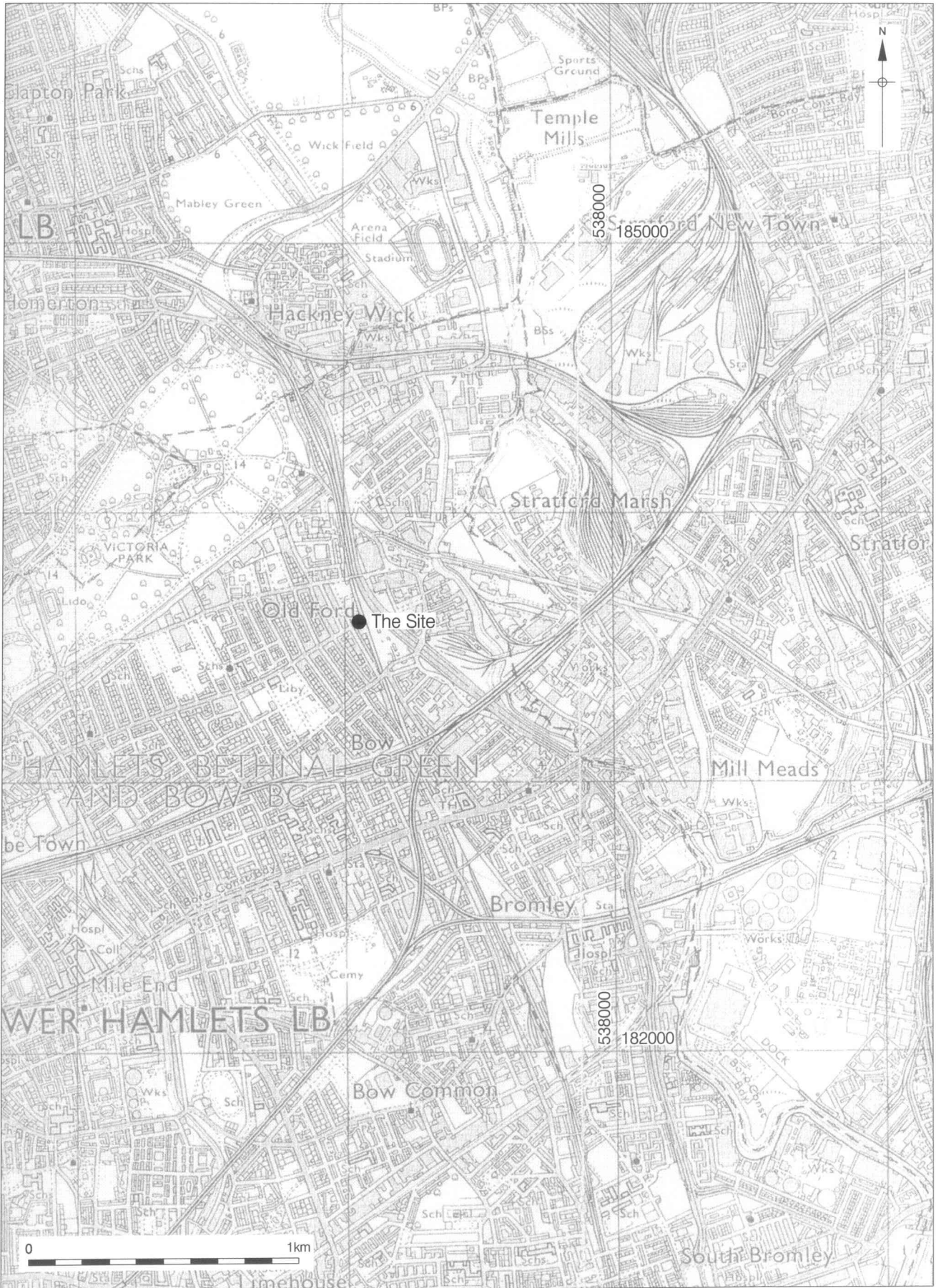
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1.0 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during works associated with the lifting of the ground floor slab and removal of concrete ground beams at Block G, Lefevre Walk Estate, Old Ford, Tower Hamlets. The watching brief was conducted between 12th and 15th April 2005.
- 1.2 In order to remove the concrete ground beams the 'fill' between them was to be removed by mechanical excavator. The north end of Block G was considered to be located in a potentially archaeologically sensitive area, that is, on the line of the Roman London to Colchester road, and is the reason for the watching brief.
- 1.3 The beams were removed in sequence from South to North. Attention was paid to the removal of all deposits around the E-W oriented foundation beams and the resultant sections (N-S and E-W), on removal of the beams themselves.
- 1.4 All the sections revealed natural sand and gravel, overlain by very modern deposits, except in one instance where deposits believed to be yards surfaces to the south of the Roman road and an adjacent ditch were preserved.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 An archaeological watching brief was conducted by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd., following the demolition of Block G, Lefevre Walk Estate, Old Ford, Tower Hamlets. Willmott Dixon Housing, on behalf of Circle 33, commissioned the watching brief.
- 2.2 The watching brief was a planning condition as the site's location put it on, or close to the projected line of the Roman London to Colchester road. This road was found immediately to the west during work at the Lefevre Walk Phase 1 site. The site (Block G) was bounded to the north by the Phase 1 and Phase 3 redevelopments, to the west by Legion Road (formerly Lefevre Walk), to the south by elements of the present redevelopment and to the east by new development designated Yallops Yard. The National Grid Reference of the site is TQ 3702 8360.
- 2.3 The site was given the code LVW-05.
- 2.4 The watching brief was carried out during demolition and groundworks, undertaken by Demo One, who removed the concrete slab, ground beams and non-archaeological 'soft' deposits sequentially to allow any archaeological deposits to be safely observed and recorded.
- 2.5 The project was monitored by David Divers, GLAAS Archaeology Officer, on behalf of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The site was project managed by Gary Brown and supervised by the author.



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Figure 1
Site Location
1:20,000

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

- 3.1 Prior to the redevelopment of the Lefevre Walk Estate in 1995 there was very little evidence for pre-Roman land-use. Occasional chance finds were recorded on the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record but *in situ* features and finds were absent. This position has now changed with features and finds of Neolithic to late Iron Age date having been found in the immediate vicinity.
- 3.2 In the Old Ford area considerably more evidence exists for Roman occupation and land use than for any other era. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the evidence was provided by chance finds, mainly burials and coins. Since 1969, albeit from relatively small excavations centred on Roman Road and Parnell Road important and qualitative information had been obtained. The Roman London to Colchester road thought to have been established within a few years of the Roman occupation (probably by AD50) and continued in use at least until the end of the 4th century has been located on a number of investigations since 1969. A 60m length of it was investigated immediately to the west of Block G prior as part of the Phase 1 redevelopment. The line of the Roman road is shown on Figure 2.
- 3.3 Further excavations, especially associated with the Phase 2 and Phase 3 redevelopments, have demonstrated more evidence for land management, including field boundaries, buildings and a small inhumation cemetery.
- 3.4 There is little evidence for any occupation of the area by the 5th century and it is thought that the area remained heavily wooded. The Phase 2 excavation uncovered some features of mid Saxon date, although it is believed that the centre of activity in this era was to the east around the fording place.
- 3.5 By the late 11th century there was a fulling mill at Old Ford recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as the mill of Algot. It was again recorded in deeds of 1355 when it was known as Algoldesmille. Little is known about the size of the Medieval settlement at Old Ford but again the centre is likely to have been much closer to the river Lea. That notwithstanding, structural remains of 12th century date were recorded at the Phase 3 site to the north, close to the line of the medieval road, itself the precursor to Old Ford Road, that led to the fording point.
- 3.6 It is assumed that the area was wooded but in part farmed during the 17th and 18th centuries and maps of 1655, 1703 and 1746 illustrate the undeveloped nature of the area. On a map of 1839 the Hertford Union Canal is represented along with the earliest planned streets associated with the expanding Victorian city.

- 3.7 By 1894 the residential pattern represented by rows of terraced housing on a grid like network of streets along with industrial properties close to the canal and railway lines is illustrated by the Ordnance Survey map of that year.
- 3.8 The Victorian buildings were swept aside during the construction of the Lefevre Walk Estate (1967-75), and the estate is, at the time of writing, nearing completion of its regeneration.



Figure 2
Orientation of Roman Road
1:500

4.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 An archaeologist was in attendance to monitor the removal of the ground floor slab at the north end of Block G and the removal of the concrete ground beams. The area monitored under archaeological supervision measured approximately 13.50m x 40.00m and was between 1.50m and 2.00m deep.
- 4.2 The concrete slab was broken out by a mechanical excavator using a breaker. The soft fill deposits between the ground beams were then excavated in spits to a depth of about 2.00m to allow the ground beams to be broken out and removed. Periodically, the sections were cleaned where possible, recorded and photographed.
- 4.3 The trench was backfilled by the contractor on a rolling basis, that is to say, as one ground beam was removed, the resulting trench was backfilled by the material excavated from the next one.
- 4.4 Levels were provided by engineers from Willmott Dixon Housing for the top of the slab which had a value of 11.87m OD and was 200mm thick, and the top of the ground beams which had a value of 10.97m OD.

5.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL PHASE DISCUSSION

5.1 Although all areas at the north of former block G were observed during ground reduction and ground beam removal operations, only one small area of surviving archaeological deposits were observed. These findings are described below and its location shown on Figure 3.

5.2 The area monitored was located at the north of Block G, where the projected line of the Roman road was likely to be. For the most part only modern (post 1969) deposits were recorded and represent truncation associated with the construction of Block G. However a small area of *in situ* deposits was recorded and is described below, but is believed to be part of a metalled surface south of the road. The sequence is shown on Figure 4.

5.3 Phase 1 – Natural Sand and Gravel

The natural yellowish orange sand and gravel [7] had been excavated out during the building of block G in the late 1960s-early 1970s, to a depth of about 10.50m OD

5.4 Phase 2 – Roman

Above the natural sand was a sequence of metalled materials and adjacent intrusion. The features were situated immediately to the north and south of a modern concrete pipe casing (oriented E-W) that cuts through them and was ironically probably the cause of their preservation.

On the north side of the drain and deposited directly on to the natural sand and gravel [7] was a clean yellowish orange flint grit and sand layer [11] overlain by a dark brownish grey layer of a more silty character [4]. The interface between the layers had a marked north to south slope downward of 0.15m over the surviving 0.46m width. The interface between the cleanish grit [11] and the natural [7] also sloped but more gently, in the same direction: 0.08m across a distance of 0.74m.

To the south of the pipe casing was a steep sided feature 0.62m wide and 0.58m deep and squareish in profile, [9]. It had two fills of sandy gravel material, [5] and [6]. The main body of fill [6], was a yellowish orange sandy gravel with reddish streaks, that looked like re-deposited natural. To the north of the feature, and represented as a vertical column was a more silty and discoloured fill, [5]. Its size and verticality suggests it may have represented the position of a decayed post.

It is that the sloping profile of the gritty layers [4] and [11] represent the southern slope of a camber, complimented to the south of the modern drain casing by a square profiled road side ditch represented by the

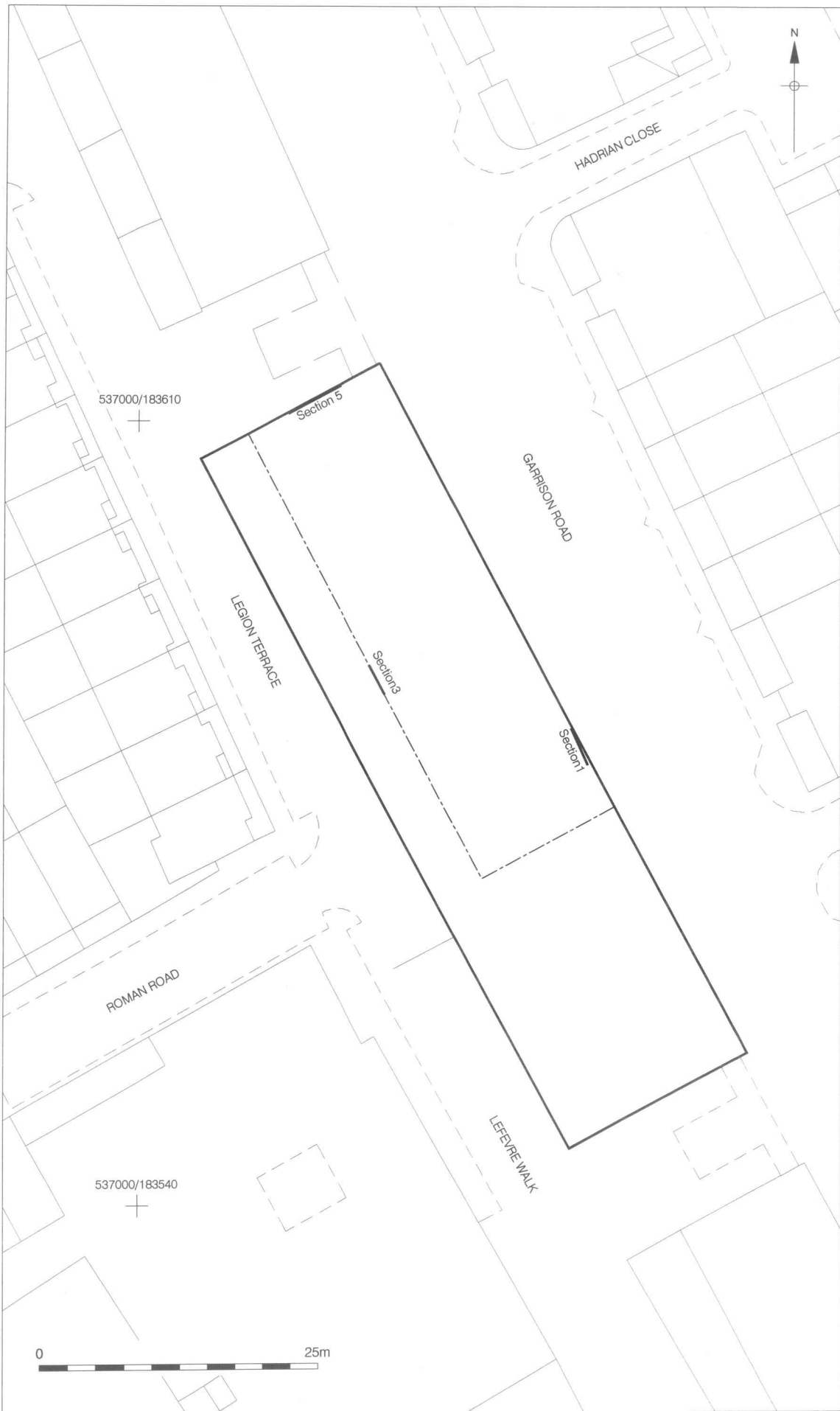
gravel fills [5] and [6]. It is possible that the discolouration of the gravel fill [5] was caused by the run off of water from the cambered road to the north.

Although no dating material was recovered from the sequence, it was interpreted as being of Roman date. However, this material was too far south of the Roman road for it to have been part of it. It is possible that it was part of the yard adjacent to South Track as found during the Phase 1 excavations. However, it was some distance to the south of the yard's projected line, and was not composed of the same course material. It would seem therefore that the surfaces exposed in the Watching Brief are not associated with the London to Colchester road, but rather represent a fragment of a separate metalled surface of unknown function.

The entire section measured 2.14m N-S, including and separated by 1.00m of concrete pipe casing [3]. The highest level of the metalled deposits was at 11.27m OD and the lowest at 10.64m OD.

5.5 Phase 3 – 20th Century

Overlying the putative yard and ditch and filling the rest of the excavated area was a mixed layer of made ground, up to 1.50m thick. It was datable by the plastic detritus within the brick rubble and silty sand deposit that surrounded the ground beams. This dumped debris was visible in all sections and it appears that the road sequence above was a lucky survival.



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Figure 3
Trench Location
1:500

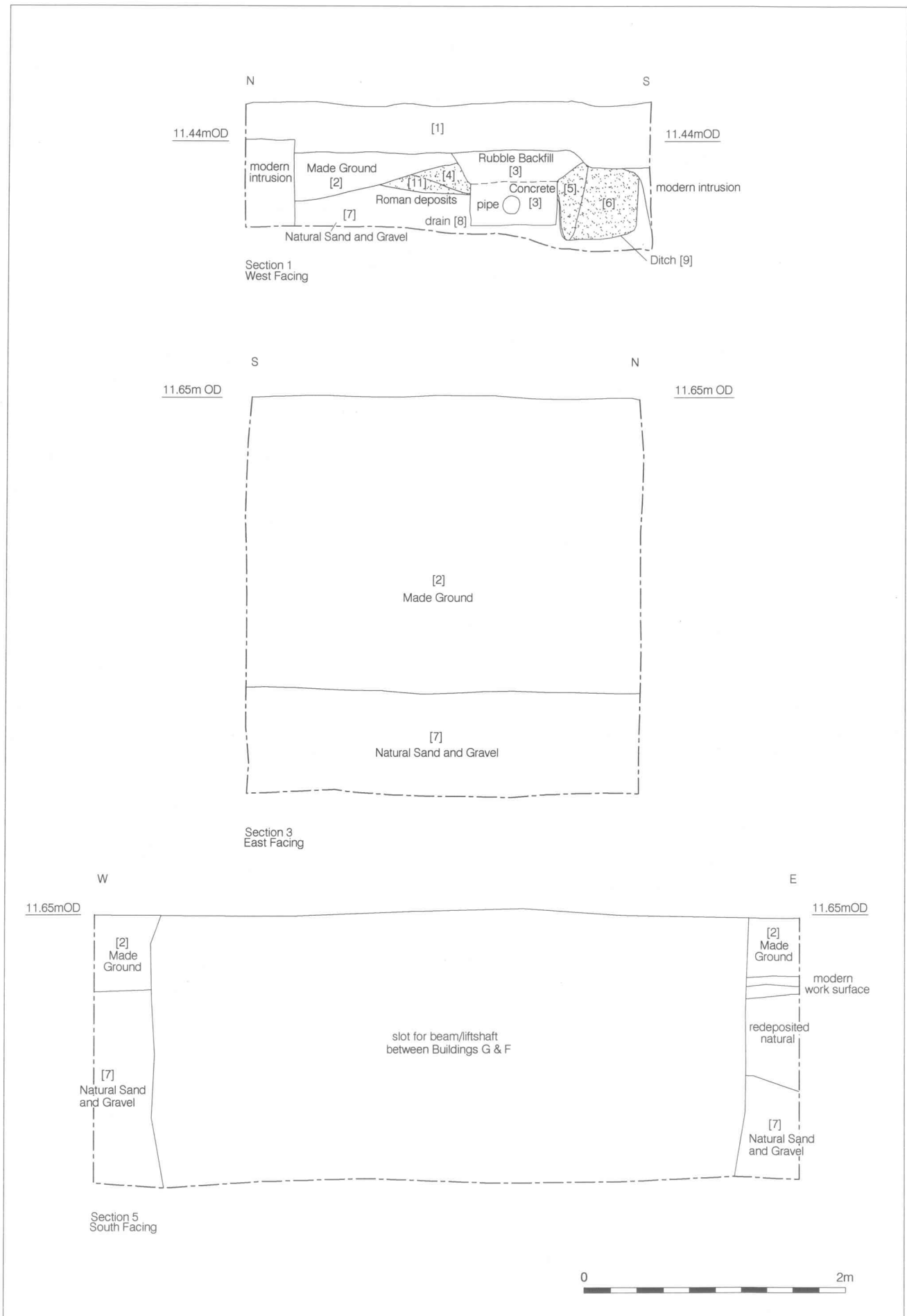


Figure 4
 Sections 1, 3 & 5
 1:40

6.0 INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The watching brief was intended to locate and record any Roman archaeology that may have survived between the ground beams associated with the construction of Block G.
- 6.2 The natural sand and gravel was identified in all sections of the trench excavated.
- 6.3 Above the sand, and at one location only, grit, gravel and sand deposits were encountered in section and are interpreted as being a remnant of the southern most limit of the London to Colchester road, an adjacent intrusion is interpreted as being part of the southern roadside drain.
- 6.4 There was no evidence for any later deposits above the sand and the next occupation phase was represented by the 20th century layer of made ground.
- 6.5 It would appear therefore that although a fragmentary Roman sequence has survived in the westernmost section, the greater part of the area was reduced to below previous formation levels.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

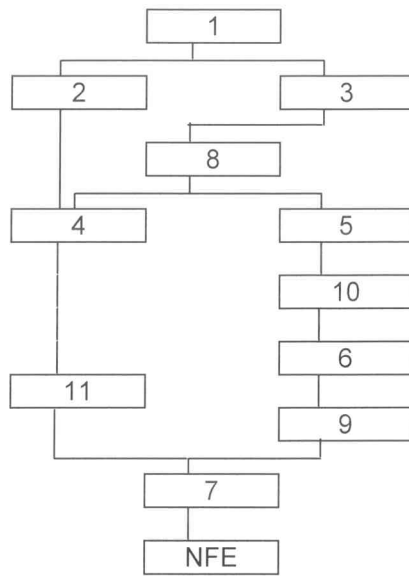
- 7.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank Willmot-Dixon Housing for commissioning the Pre-Construct Archaeology to undertake the work. Particular thanks are given to Stephen Gray and Ross Taylor for their assistance. Thanks also to Demo One for their help and co-operation during the ground reduction work. PCA are grateful for help and assistance from GLAAS, initially from Nick Truckle, and then his successor David Divers. Finally I would like to thank Vicky Ridgeway for visiting the site and sharing for her knowledge by confirming the identity of the Roman deposits.
- 7.2 The author would also like to thank Hailey Baxter for the illustrations, and Gary Brown for his project management and editing.

APPENDIX 1

Context Descriptions

Number	Type		Notes
1	Layer		Layer of demolition rubble, made ground
2	Layer		Layer of 20 th made ground
3	Fill		20 th services pipe casing and backfill. Fill of [8]
4	Deposit		Flint grit and sand. Yard deposit
5	Fill		Silty gravel. Yard deposit. Fill of [10]
6	Fill		Sand and gravel fill of [9]
7	Layer		Natural-Thames terrace gravel
8	Cut		Modern cut for service pipe [3]
9	Cut		Possible yardside gully. Fill [6]
10	Cut		Cut within [9]. Fill [5]
11	Layer		Flint grit and sand. Yard layer

Appendix 2-Matrix



APPENDIX 3 – OASIS FORM

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM

[List of Projects](#) | [New project](#) | [Change your details](#) | [HER coverage](#) | [Log out](#)

Printable version

OASIS ID: preconst1-8018

Project details

Project name	Block G, Lefevre Walk Estate (Phase 3) Old Ford Tower Hamlets
Short description of the project	The watching brief was intended to locate and record any Roman archaeology that may have survived between the ground beams associated with the construction of Block G. The natural sand and gravel was identified in all sections of the trench excavated. Above the sand, and at one location only, grit, gravel and sand deposits were encountered in section and are interpreted as being a remnant of the southern most limit of the London to Colchester road, an adjacent intrusion is interpreted as being part of the southern roadside drain. A layer of 20th century made ground sealed the rest of the site.
Project dates	Start: 12-04-2005 End: 15-04-2005
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	LVW-05 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	LEK-05 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Current Land use	Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed
Monument type	YARD Roman
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON TOWER HAMLETS BOW Block G, Lefevre Walk Estate (Phase 3) Old Ford Tower Hamlets.
Postcode	E3
Study area	607.00 Square metres
National grid reference	TQ 3702 8360 Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd
Project brief originator	Contractor (design and execute)
Project design originator	Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd
Project	

director/manager Gary Brown
Project supervisor Strephon Duckering
Sponsor or funding body Willmott-Dixon Housing

Entered by Strephon Duckering (info@pre-construct.com)
Entered on 29 April 2005

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