

INDESCON COURT, MILLHARBOUR, E14:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 Abstract 1

2 Introduction 1

3 Geology and Topography 2

4 Archaeological and Historical Background 2

5 Aims of the Investigation 4

6 Methodology 5

7 Results 6

8 Conclusions 8

9 Bibliography 10

List of Figures

Fig 1 – Site location11

Fig 2 – Window sample locations12

Fig 3 – Deposit Model13

1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 *The following report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by AOC Archaeology 8th June 2006 at Indescon Court, Millharbour, E14 9TN, (NGR) TQ 3750 7952, on behalf of RPS Planning, Transport and Environment.*

Four boreholes were excavated to depths ranging between 4.00m and 6.00m as part of ongoing geotechnical investigations. Window samples from the borehole gouge were examined to recover stratigraphic data and provide a deposit model to inform RPS Planning Transport and Environment discussions with English Heritage (GLAAS).

Information from the window samples indicates that the site has been subject to 20th century ground-raising activities. The nature of the investigation meant that it was not possible to accurately determine the presence of an archaeological record from earlier periods.

2 INTRODUCTION

Site Location

- 2.1 The site is centred around Indescon Court (NGR) TQ 3750 7952 (Figure 1). It is within land bounded to the north by Lightermans Road, to the east by Millharbour, and to the south by Lanterns Court. Currently the site is occupied by a small business park with warehouse units around its periphery.

Planning Background

- 2.3 The local planning authority is the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Archaeological advice to the council is provided by Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS).
- 2.4 Outline planning permission to undertake the development has been granted under the Town & Country Planning Act (1990) Reference; PA/02/01330, subject to conditions. Condition 10 states that:

“No development shall take place until the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. The development shall only take place in accordance with the detailed scheme pursuant to this condition. The archaeological works shall be carried out by a suitable qualified investigating body that should be agreed by the Local Planning Authority”.

- 2.5 This condition has been required in accordance with *Planning Policy Guidance: Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16) issued by the Department of the Environment in 1990 (DoE, 1990).
- 2.6 The archaeological investigation was required to inform preparation of a written scheme of investigation, which will set out the mitigation strategy for the destruction of the potential archaeological resource.

3 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.1 The proposed development site is located on the Isle of Dogs, a peninsula of reclaimed marshland bounded by the River Thames on all sides except the north. Geology comprises recent Holocene alluvium, which is present across the docklands (BGS Sheet 270), overlying deeply buried Pleistocene terrace gravels.
- 3.2 Data gathered from similarly positioned late Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age sites (Bates & Whittaker 2004) suggest that settlement may occur above the terrace gravels (c. -2.00mOD) between -2.00m and 0.00mOD.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 This section has been adapted from a 2001 Desk-Based assessment compiled by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of RPS Planning Transport and Environment. Further information and references can be found in the original document.

Prehistoric

- 4.2 Deeply buried peats and alluvial deposits are known to form an ideal environment for the survival of prehistoric remains and information. This has been confirmed by archaeological investigations and excavations carried out by MoLAS in the vicinity of the proposed development site during the 1990's. These excavations revealed Bronze Age horizons in the upper levels of peat deposits, with Neolithic horizons below.
- 4.3 Undated alluvial deposits have been found just over 1km to the southeast of the proposed development site and undated peat deposits c. 300m to the southeast. Excavations and evaluations in 1998 by MoLAS at Atlas Wharf, c. 500m to the southwest, revealed prehistoric peat formation sealed by alluvial deposits. A sequence of timber platforms and associated structures dating to the Bronze Age were also revealed at the site.

- 4.4 Archaeological investigations by Pre-Construct Archaeology c. 750m to the south also revealed a sequence of peat and alluvial deposits dating from c. 3800-1000 BC but no evidence of human activity was found at the site.
- 4.5 An area of Palaeolithic forest and Neolithic and Bronze Age peat deposits have also been identified c. 550m south and southwest of the proposed development site.

Roman, Saxon and Medieval

- 4.6 Nothing dating to the Roman period has been found either in the vicinity of the site or on the site itself. It has been suggested that the reclamation of land which makes up the Isle of Dogs was carried out by the Romans, but a medieval date for the work is generally accepted as being more likely.
- 4.7 It is unclear when the name 'the Isle of Dogs' was first used and which area of the peninsula it applied to, but the earliest known use of the name was on a map in Robert Adam's *Thamesis Description* in 1588. The first recorded name for the Isle of Dogs was Stepney Marsh which is first mentioned in the late Saxon period, c. 1000AD, *Stebunhithe* or Stybba's landing place. However no finds dating to the Saxon period have been found in the vicinity of the proposed development site or on the site itself.
- 4.8 By the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086AD much of the land belonging to the manor of *Stibenhede* is in the hands of the church and wealthy individuals. It is thought that an embankment wall of wood, earth and stones was constructed in the early medieval times which allowed the marshlands to be cultivated and used as valuable grazing lands as well as a source of fish and wetland fowl.
- 4.9 Documentary references in the 13th century refer to a William of Pontefract, who had an estate on Stepney Marsh together with a chapel and a windmill. There is also a reference in 1230 to a 'Pontefract Bridge' but its precise location in the Isle of Dogs is not known.
- 4.10 The site of St Mary's chapel is known c.750m to the southwest of the site. The earliest reference to a chapel dedicated to St Mary dates to 1380 but it was abandoned by the middle of the 15th century, with only part of it surviving as a farm building into the 19th century. Antiquarians in the 19th century reported the foundations of a building associated with St Mary's chapel. The possibility of a deserted medieval hamlet in the same area was also suggested.

Post Medieval

- 4.11 The excavations and evaluations at Atlas Wharf revealed a post medieval softwood revetment.

- 4.12 Many mills were built along 'Marsh wall' on the west side of the peninsula during the 17th and 18th centuries thus giving it the new name of 'Millwall'. Although Gascoyne's map of 1703 shows only 7 mills, at their peak in the middle of the 18th century, there were some 12 mills. Some of the mills had associated buildings near to them including cottages, granaries and storehouses. The closest to the site any of these mills would have been was c.350m away to the west.
- 4.13 Yarrow Ship Yard was built in 1868 c. 750m to the east of the proposed development site.

Cartographic Evidence

- 4.14 Historic 18th century maps of the Isle of Dogs show no development other than the mills along the west bank (Marsh Wall, later Millwall) of the peninsula.
- 4.15 It is not until Stanford's map of 1862 that streets with residential housing are seen, the closest buildings being on 'Alpha Road'. This road and others south of it, had been extended considerably by 1934-40 and grain stores and railway sidings associated with West India and South Docks, can also be seen extending over the proposed development site.
- 4.16 The site is currently home to a warehouse complex which was constructed during the late 1980's under the government's 'Enterprise Zone' scheme for aiding redevelopment of the London Docklands.

5 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

- 5.1 The aims of the watching brief were defined as being:
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the area of development impact, to assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological features and deposits and to determine the extent of previous truncations of the archaeological deposits.
- 5.2 The specific objective of the Watching Brief as defined by the Written Scheme of Investigation (AOC 2006) was to:
- Recover stratigraphic data to be presented in the form of a deposit model to inform RPS Planning Transport and Environment discussions with English Heritage.
- 5.3 The final aim was to make public the results of the investigation, subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

6 METHODOLOGY

- 6.1 Prior to commencing the watching brief on site, a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) was prepared by AOC Archaeology (AOC Archaeology 2006).
- 6.2 All fieldwork procedure followed AOC Archaeology Group Ltd Fieldwork Sector On-Site Handbook, dated May 2003 (AOC 2003b) and was conducted in accordance with the WSI.
- 6.3 The recording conformed to current best archaeological practice and local and national standards and guidelines. (English Heritage 1991, 1992, 1998a, 2002; IFA 1992, 1994, 1997; Museum of London 1994; United Kingdom Institute for Conservation 1983, 1990; Council for British Archaeology 1987).
- 6.4 Prior to commencing work a unique code for the project, **IND06**, was obtained from the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (LAARC).
- 6.5 All excavations were carried out under the constant supervision and observation of an experienced archaeologist.
- 6.6 Boreholes were assigned numbers prior to excavation. These were WS1 to 5
- 6.7 The Boreholes were excavated until the contractor reached the required depth.
- 6.8 WS3 was abandoned due to the presence of impenetrable material beneath the ground surface.
- 6.9 The watching brief was undertaken by Ken Bazley under the overall project management of Ken Whittaker for AOC Archaeology.

7 RESULTS

WS1

7.1 WS1 was located in the northwest corner of the site (Figure 2).

Summary table

0.00-0.43m	(1/001) Imported topsoil
0.43-1.00m	(1/002) Compact dark brown deposit w/ modern inclusions
1.00-1.25m	<i>void in gouge</i>
1.25-1.45m	(1/003) Similar deposit to (1/002)
1.45-2.00m	(1/004) Fine yellow gritty sand.
2.00-2.86m	<i>void in gouge</i>
2.86-3.68m	(1/005) 'Dirty' brown alluvial clay
3.68-4.00m	(1/006) Blue grey alluvium ¹
NFE	

7.2 Natural alluvium (1/006) containing organic and calcareous materials was found at a depth of 3.68m from the ground surface. This was overlain by a slightly 'dirtier' alluvium (1/005) which may represent a leaching zone. A fine yellow gritty sand (1/004) which was similar to builders aggregate overlay this deposit. Sealing this were two compact deposits (1/002) (1/003) which contained modern inclusions. These can be considered identical as they were separated only by a void in the gouge. Imported topsoil (1/001) was located at the top of the borehole.

WS2

7.3 WS2 was located in the southwest corner of the site (Figure 2).

Summary table

0.00-0.40m	(2/001) Reddish dark brown aggregate
0.40-0.77m	(2/002) Gritty dark brown deposit w/ CBM frags and glass
0.77-0.85m	(2/003) Grey gritty sand
0.85-1.25m	<i>void in gouge</i>
1.25-2.50m	(2/004) Blue grey alluvium w/ calcareous deposits ²
2.50-3.57m	<i>void in gouge</i>
3.57-3.90m	(2/005) Blue grey alluvium w/ calcareous deposits
3.90-4.00m	(2/006) Fine sand with clay particles ³
NFE	

¹ described in geotechnical logs as: 'stiff dark grey red streaked clay'

² (2/004) & (2/005) grouped together and described in geotechnical logs as: 'stiff red streaked dark brown sandy with some calcareous deposits, shale'

³ described in geotechnical logs as: 'made ground: compacted coarse dark brown yellow sand'

- 7.4 Fine fluvial sand (2/006) was found at the bottom of WS2 at 3.90m below the ground surface and was overlain by alluvium (2/005). It is possible that the sand may be a lens within the alluvium rather than a uniquely identifiable deposit. Contexts (2/005) and (2/004) may represent the same layer; the alluvium having been separated by a void in the gouge. There is a chance, however, that the higher deposit (2/004) could be re-deposited. Further voiding in the gouge occurred above deposit (2/004). Sealing the alluvium was 0.85m thickness of made ground deposits consisting of contexts (2/003) (2/002) and (2/001).

WS3

- 7.5 WS3 was located in the centre of the Indecon Court car park. The drill struck impenetrable material and was refused at a depth of 0.40m.

WS4

- 7.6 WS4 was located south of Indecon Court entrance road, alongside Millharbour (Figure 2).

Summary table

0.00-0.19m	(4/001) Imported topsoil
0.19-0.58m	(4/002) Sand and crushed concrete
0.58-0.65m	(4/003) Remains of road surface
0.65-0.85m	(4/004) Fine yellowish grey sand
0.85-0.94m	(4/005) Dark brown friable clayey soil w/ modern incl.
0.94-1.41m	<i>void in gouge</i>
1.41-2.00m	(4/006) Dark brown stiff sandy clay
2.00-3.25m	<i>void in gouge</i>
3.25-3.48m	(4/007) Mid brown sandy clay mix. Natural.
3.48-3.70m	(4/008) Light grey clay w/ grit. Natural.
3.70-6.00m	(4/009) Blue grey alluvium ⁴
NFE	

- 7.7 Natural alluvium (4/009) was discovered at a depth of 3.70m from the ground surface, and was overlain by two shallow layers of gritty sand (4/008) (4/007)⁵. These were both interpreted as natural, possibly being remnant foreshore deposits. A series of made ground layers (4/006) (4/005) (4/004) overlay these deposits, possibly making up a consolidated base for the potential road surface or pathway (4/003) 0.58m beneath the ground surface. Sealing (4/002) was a layer of sand crushed concrete which could have either

⁴ described in geotechnical logs as 'stiff red streaked dark grey clay (alluvium)'.

⁵ (4/007) & (4/008) grouped together and described in geotechnical logs as 'firm dark brown clay with pebbles (alluvium)'

resulted from demolition, or been deposited as a hardcore prior to construction of the business park. Topsoil (4/001) seems to have been imported to improve the local aesthetics.

WS5

- 7.8 WS5 was located north of Indecon Court entrance road alongside Millharbour (Figure 2).

Summary table

0.00-0.34m	(5/001) Imported topsoil
0.34-0.64m	(5/002) Imported subsoil w/ CBM frags
0.64-0.72m	(5/003) Crushed concrete
0.72-0.88m	(5/004) Remains of road surface
0.88-1.00m	(5/005) Grade I aggregate
1.00-1.16m	(5/006) Grey brown mixed gravel w/ modern incl.
1.16-2.00m	(5/007) Loose fine yellow sand. Frequent pebbles
2.00-2.22m	<i>void in gouge</i>
2.22-3.37m	(5/008) Loose fine grey sand w/ modern inclusions.
3.37-3.58m	(5/009) Similar to (5/008). More clayey with depth.
3.58-4.00m	(5/010) Brown clay, becoming more bluer. Alluvium.
NFE	

- 7.9 Natural alluvium (5/010) was found at a depth of 3.58m below the ground surface. The top of the deposit was mid brownish grey, but became more blue with depth. Directly overlying it was loose, fine grey clayey sand (5/009) which contained modern CBM fragments, followed by a similar, less clayey deposit (5/008). As in the other boreholes, a further series of made ground dumps (5/007) to (5/001) could be shown to make up the rest of the sample. As with WS4 there appeared to be the remains of a road surface or pathway (5/004), followed by a layer of demolition rubble or hardcore (5/003). Imported soil (5/002) (5/001) is at the top of the sequence.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 All of the boreholes were excavated until natural alluvium was found. The window samples revealed the alluvium between 3.58m and 3.70m beneath the present ground surface. One exception to this was in WS2, where an alluvial deposit (2/004) was revealed at a depth of 1.25m beneath the ground surface.
- 8.2 It is well documented that the Isle of Dogs lies on reclaimed marshland and for this reason there are good grounds to assume that the anomalous alluvium (2/004) does not lie naturally at this height. The anomaly may therefore be accounted for by the possibility that (2/004) is re-deposited. The sediment

appeared to contain more calcareous and organic inclusions than the alluvium discovered at lower depths (2/005) (1/006) (5/010) (4/009) including pieces of wood and shale fragments. Alternatively it is possible the abnormality was caused by the action of the drilling rig.

- 8.3 In all boreholes (see Figure 3: Deposit Model) it is the case that the alluvium was sealed by a series of sandy deposits (5/008) (2/003) (1/004). Of these, (5/008) contained modern building debris and therefore cannot be considered natural. Sandy deposits near the bottom of WS4 (4/007) (4/008) did not contain any obvious anthropogenic material and it thought therefore they are fluvial deposits. The similarity of depth with (5/008), however, could lead to interpretation as made ground.
- 8.4 The upper levels of strata (see Figure 3: Deposit Model) in WS4 and WS5 at the eastern periphery consisted of sandy aggregates (5/005) (4/004), asphalt (5/004) (4/003) and concrete (5/003) (4/002). This suggests the likely presence of a road or other consolidated surface in the recent past. It is probable that this surface was buried during construction of the business park in the late 1980s. In comparison, the upper levels of strata in WS1 and WS2 at the western periphery consisted of compact earthy deposits (1/002), (1/003) and (2/002) which contained modern inclusions such as CBM and glass. These can probably be considered as equivalents, having similar characteristics. Unlike deposits revealed in WS4 and WS5, these do not show evidence of prior use of the site and are more indicative of deliberate ground-raising dumps.
- 8.5 In general, the window sample data indicates that ground level has been raised across the site. Much of this is related to occupance of the site within the 20th century, although there are known to have been reclamation and ground-raising works sometime during the medieval period. Unfortunately the nature of this investigation meant that it was not possible to accurately determine the presence of such medieval activity. Whilst the data recovered from the window samples shows an absence of significant archaeological strata in the recorded positions, it does not, however, preclude the possibility that archaeological deposits may be present elsewhere on the site.
- 8.6 Giving that the Isle of Dogs has been subject to ground raising activity it is likely that the alluvium, with the exception of (2/004), is to be found at its natural level, and is not likely to have been truncated.
- 8.7 Publication will be by OASIS form and include an electronic copy of the watching brief report which will be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS). A summary will be submitted to the London Archaeologist fieldwork round-up.

AOC Archaeology Group Ltd (2003). *Fieldwork Sector On-Site Handbook*.

AOC Archaeology Group Ltd (2006) *Indecon Court, E14: A Written Scheme Of Investigation For An Archaeological Watching Brief*.

Council for British Archaeology (1987). *First Aid For Finds (Second Edition)*.

English Heritage (1991). *Management of Archaeological Projects*.

English Heritage (1992). *Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation Reports Archaeological Guidance Paper: 5*.

English Heritage London Region 1993 *Model Brief for an Archaeological Assessment Archaeological Guidance Paper: 1*.

English Heritage (1998a). *Archaeological Guidance Paper 3: Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork*. (English Heritage London Region).

English Heritage (1998b). *Archaeological Guidance Paper 4: Standards and Practices in Archaeological Reports*. (English Heritage London Region).

English Heritage (2000) *Model Clauses on Archaeological Science for Briefs and Specifications*.

English Heritage (2002). *Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation*.

Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994). *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations*.

Institute of Field Archaeologists (1997). *Code of Conduct*.

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (2001) *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment at Indecon Court, Millharbour, Isle of Dogs*.

Museums and Galleries Commission (1994) *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections*.

Museum of London (1994). *Archaeological Site Manual (3rd edition)*.

Fig 1

Fig 2

Fig 3