

Arrowhead Quay,  
Marsh Wall,  
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Report on Archaeological Watching Brief





**ARROWHEAD QUAY  
MARSH WALL  
LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned to carry out an archaeological watching brief at Arrowhead Quay, Marsh Wall on the Isle of Dogs, centred on NGR Ref 537357,179924 in fulfilment of a condition of planning permission. The watching brief was carried out in order to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the Site.

The watching brief established that there were partial remnants of late 19<sup>th</sup> century cellars surviving on the Site, as noted from historical records. There were no associated stratified deposits, the Site having been severely disturbed at several points prior to and since the construction of the cellars. Truncation associated with the construction of the adjacent West India Dock had removed the possibility of surviving remains predating the Victorian period.

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**Acknowledgements**

The project was commissioned by Kevin Tilson on behalf of Ballymore Developments Ltd. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Lawrence Pontin. The fieldwork was undertaken by Cornelius Barton, who also compiled this report with illustrations by Kitty Brandon.

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REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Scope of Document**

1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Ballymore Developments Ltd (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Arrowhead Quay, Marsh Wall, E14 in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets centred on NGR Ref 537357,179924 (hereafter 'the Site') (**Figure 1**).

**1.2 Planning Background**

1.2.1 The watching brief was commissioned in compliance with a condition (no.5) attached to a planning consent from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (ref. PA/06/02107). Planning consent was granted for the redevelopment of the Site to provide a 16 and 26 storey office building with two levels of basement car parking and plant at a finished floor level of -1.050m Ordnance Datum (OD).

1.2.2 The Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS), archaeological advisor to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, had advised that the Site had the potential for archaeological remains. A previous evaluation of the Site (MOL Code MHW00) in May 2000 revealed a depth of over 4m of post-1866 deposits connected with the extension of the adjacent South Dock of the West India Dock complex from 1866 till 1870 and subsequent raising of land levels.

1.2.3 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2007) and approved by GLAAS.

**1.3 Site Description**

1.3.1 The Site, comprising a sub-rectangular parcel of land covering an area of c0.7ha, lies on land directly south of the South Dock of the West India Dock complex on the Isle of Dogs. The Site is bordered to the south by the Marsh Wall road and to the east by the Docklands Light Railway line (**Figure 2**).

1.3.2 The Site was previously used as an open air car park at grade.

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## 2 GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Geology

2.1.1 The underlying geology within the Site has been identified as Holocene alluvial clays and silts overlying mixed clay and sands, being part of the Lambeth Group of the Woolwich and Reading Beds (British Geographical Survey, Sheet 270, 1:50 000 series, 1998).

### 2.2 Topography

2.2.1 The Site is generally flat and lies at a height of approximately 4.81m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Site is located upon the Isle of Dogs from which important evidence has been retrieved for prehistoric human adaptation and use of the then marshland habitat. Evidence for Roman, Saxon and Medieval use of the area is slight and concentrated over 500m to the north of the site on better draining gravels.

3.1.2 The site appears to have been in agricultural use until the advent of the West India Docks in 1802. The Site at that time was south of the then City Canal, part of the West India Docks complex. The Canal was developed into the wider and deeper South Dock during 1866-70 with the Site from this time forming part of the southern bank. The Site was subsequently occupied by warehousing buildings but these were cleared after 1973 (RCHME 1994).

3.1.3 As discussed above, an evaluation (MoLAS, 2000) was undertaken on the Site in 2000. Consisting of one trench, set away from the Dock wall to the north and the Docklands Light Railway to the east, it measured 20m x 12m in plan at present ground surface and 3m x 3m at base and was excavated from 4.81m aOD down to 0.70m aOD (**Figure 2**). An auger core was sunk to a further depth of 2.00m beneath the base of the trench. River Terrace Gravels were found at -0.70m OD overlain by silt deposits containing redeposited brick and tile fragments. These were in turn overlain by a 19<sup>th</sup> century granite cobble set surface found at 1.90m aOD. The remaining 2.80m depth of material overlying this surface was dated to the post 1945 period.

3.1.4 The evaluation results indicated that the site has undergone two separate periods of cut and fill operations; the construction of the South Dock to the north during 1866-70 and the subsequent raising of land levels.

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## 4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The overall aim of the watching brief was to establish and record, the presence or absence of any archaeological remains that may survive beneath the present ground surface, through the observation of groundworks carried out during the development of the Site.

## 5 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Fieldwork

- 5.1.1 All watching brief work was conducted in compliance with the WSI (WA 2007), which follows standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (2001) and relevant GLAAS guidelines.

- 5.1.2 All archaeological deposits were recorded by means of Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording sheets. A photographic record was made by means of black and white prints, colour slides and digital images. Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50.

### 5.2 Finds Collection and Retention

- 5.2.1 No artefactual material was retained from the watching brief. Artefacts of late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century date were noted and in some cases photographed (see **Plates 5** and **6**) but were not retained for study.

### 5.3 The Archive

- 5.3.1 The completed project archive will be prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Appendix 3 of Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991) and in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage (UKIC 1990). The archive from the project will be deposited with the Museum of London under MOL Site Code ARQ07.

## 6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Results

- 6.1.1 The watching brief recorded remains of two partially surviving brick walls (**100**) and (**101**), and related elements (**Figure 2**). The walls appeared to be of late 19<sup>th</sup> century construction (**Plate 1** and **4**). The walls were of red brick in a Flemish bond pattern, with concrete bastions. The facing mortar was pointed on the south-facing side but unpointed on the north. The base of the wall foundations was set at 1.85m aOD. The top was at 4.10m aOD, although the walls may have originally been higher.
- 6.1.2 The walls enclosed an area containing fragmentary remains of two circular brick structures (**102**) and (**103**), also of late 19<sup>th</sup> century construction (**Plate 2**). Only the northern-side rims of these structures survived. They appeared to be the bases of two vats or storage vessels.



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- 6.1.3 No construction cuts for either the walls or the circular structures survived, due to 20<sup>th</sup> century truncation.
- 6.1.4 To the east of the walls were the remains of a brick floor (**104**) (see **Figure 2** and **Plate 3**). The floor was of similar date, being of late 19<sup>th</sup> century construction and built on a concrete raft footing. The floor lay at a depth of 1.36mOD.
- 6.1.5 The material surrounding the walls and covering the brick floor was clearly of late 20<sup>th</sup> century origin, consisting of mixed demolition rubble and clay, and containing a large quantity of material of very recent origin (see **Figure 3**). The material below the walls and floor consisted of a mixed silty clay deposit containing brick and tile fragments, and also containing a variety of larger finds of late 19<sup>th</sup> century origin including the remains of a wooden cartwheel (see **Plate 5**). This deposit directly overlaid a deposit of clean river terrace gravel, which was encountered at a depth of -0.15m aOD.
- 6.1.6 No further archaeological remains were present.

## 6.2 Discussion

- 6.2.1 The exposed brick structures appear to be within the footprint of the building recorded as G building in the Survey of London (Vol. XLIII, RCHME 1994). The building first appears on the map of 1881, as an extension of the wool warehouses to the east, with “a basement for storing oils [with] chutes linking the floors.” (RCHME 1996, p.299). The walls then are the remains of the cellars below this building, which accounts for the rough nature of the pointing work on the north face of the walls. The circular structures are presumably the remains of the oil storage facility, although they survived in a fragmentary state and no trace of the chutes remained. The building was demolished in 1976, during which activity the material covering the walls and floor was deposited.
- 6.2.2 The results of the watching brief confirm the conclusions of the earlier evaluation (MoLAS 2000). The area excavated during the watching brief did not include the footprint of the evaluation trench (see **Figure 1**) but the stratigraphic sequence is similar, consisting of layers of demolition rubble and silts lying directly above clean terrace gravel. This sequence is a result of the truncation during construction of the dock and later by post-war rebuilding and subsequent demolition. No remains of archaeological significance were present.

## 7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 All remains surviving on the Site were of recent origin, and therefore of limited archaeological interest. It is useful to note that the results of the watching brief confirm the accuracy of the plan and description of 1881. The stratigraphic sequence on the Site demonstrates that anything which may have existed below the brick structures has been destroyed by truncation. It is therefore recommended that no further archaeological works need be carried out on the Site.

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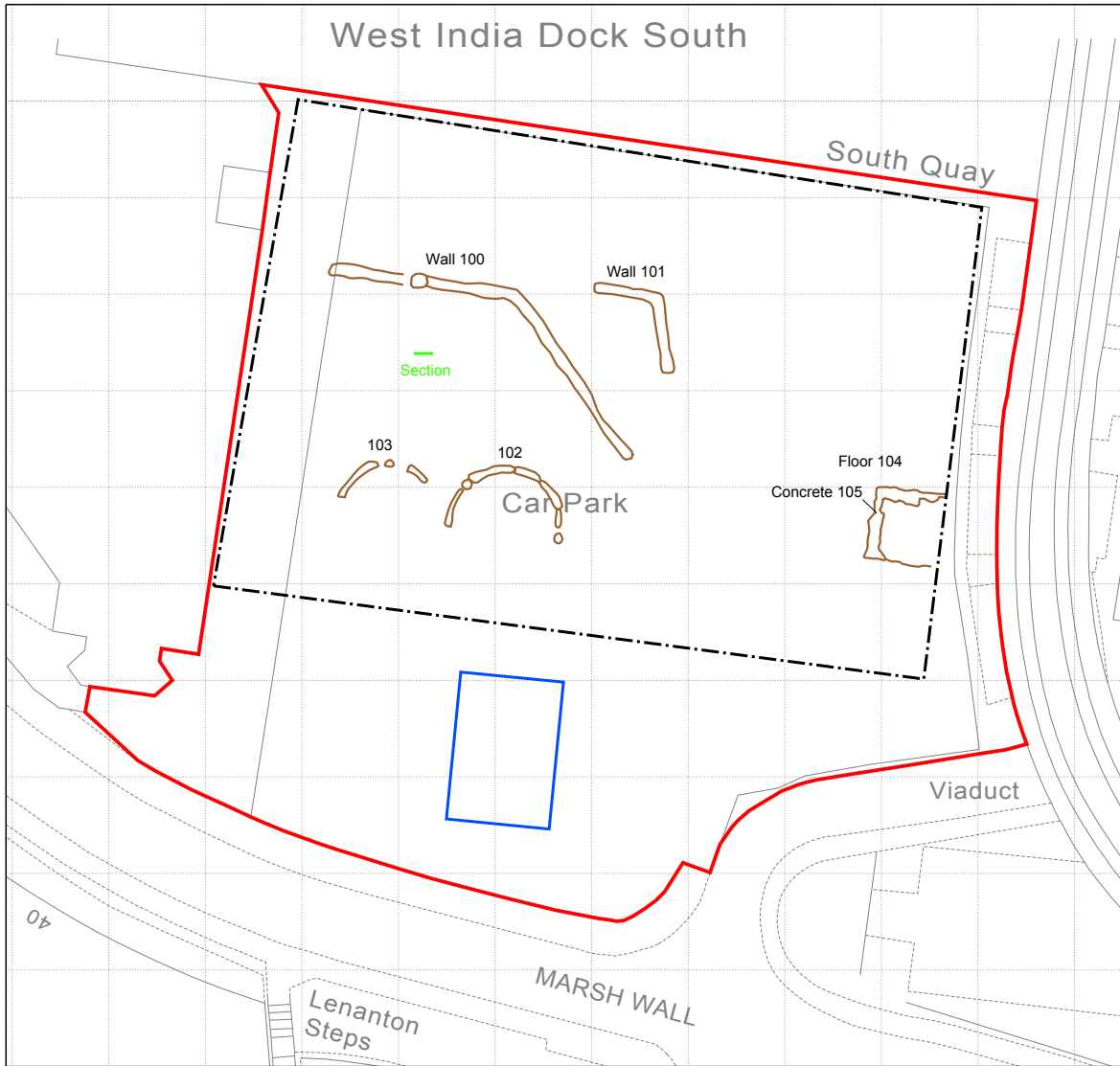
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Site Location Map

Figure 1



0 50m

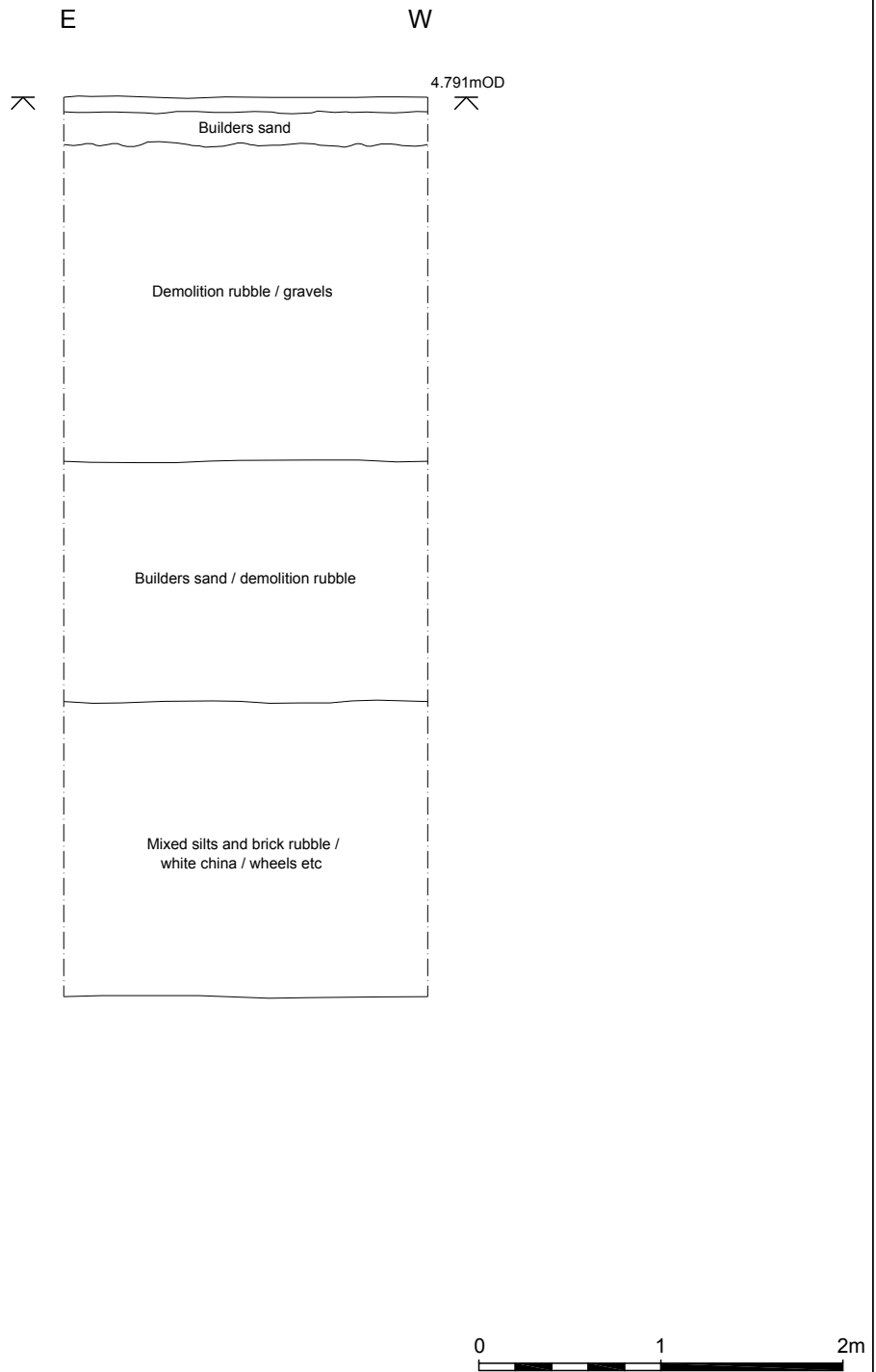
- Excavation Area
  - Previous evaluation Trench (MoLAS)
  - 19th century brick features
  - Section
- Wessex**  
Archaeology

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Site plan showing excavated area, 19th century brick features and MoLAS trench

Figure 2



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North facing section through demolition deposits

Figure 3



Plate 1: Wall from southwest (oblique) with 1m scale



Plate 2: Base of circular structure from northwest with 1m scale

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Plate 3: Brick floor (19th century) from west



Plate 4: Working shot of walls from northeast

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Plate 5: Wagon wheel with 1m scale



Plate 6: Mixed ceramics and other finds

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