

STOUR WHARF, STOUR ROAD, E3
LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

October 2006



STOUR WHARF, STOUR ROAD, E3
LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SITE CODE: SOF 06

SITE CENTRE NGR: TQ 3731 8411

PLANNING REF: PA/06/00833

COMPASS ARCHAEOLOGY LIMITED

5-7 SOUTHWARK STREET

LONDON SE1 1RQ

Telephone: 020 7403 9660

Facsimile: 020 7403 9661

e-mail: mail@compassarchaeology.co.uk

October 2006

©Compass Archaeology Limited

Abstract

An archaeological evaluation took place in October 2006 at Stour Wharf, Stour Road, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, prior to commercial redevelopment of the site. The work was carried out as part of the planning process, and to inform on the need for further archaeological mitigation.

The site is not within an Archaeological Priority Area but it is considered that the site has the potential for archaeological remains, specifically Roman features, including preserved timber structures and posts. There is little evidence for later activity. In the post-Roman period it is likely that the land remained marginal and periodically flooded, although at a later date it was probably drained and cultivated. The first building development appears to date to the beginning of the 20th century.

The evaluation included three machine-dug trial pits. The pits were between 4.6m to 5.2m deep and were dug from the present ground surface (c 5.89m to 5.99m OD) to the level of natural River Terrace deposits. The evaluation was also informed by a previous ground investigation comprising test pits and two deeper boreholes (Card Geotechnics, Ref. CG/4333; June 2006).

The recorded deposits were broadly comparable across the site. Between 0.7m and 2.3m of 19th century and later made ground overlay an alluvial sequence comprising clean silt, mixed silt/organic material and, occasionally, peat. These lower horizons did not produce any cultural artefacts or other remains. The organic material may reflect a period of marine regression, whilst the overlying sterile silts reflect rising sea levels and flooding which continued into the post-medieval period.

The alluvial sequence was between 2.0m and 4.2m thick and sealed natural River Terrace sands and gravels at between 0.91m and 1.60m OD. The high point of natural was recorded midway along the eastern boundary of the site, with falls elsewhere to the northwest and northeast. It is likely that in the earlier prehistoric period much of the area would have been above the contemporary river level, with progressive flooding during or after the Bronze Age.

The evaluation did not reveal any in situ timbers or other significant finds or remains. It is therefore recommended that no further archaeological mitigation should be undertaken in relation to the proposed redevelopment.

Contents		page
1	Introduction	1
2	Acknowledgements	1
3	Background	2
4	The evaluation	2
	4.1 Areas of investigation	2
	4.2 Methodology	2
	4.3 Diagrammatic sections and photographs	5
5	Summary of the findings and conclusion	13

Appendices

I	OASIS Data Collection Form	16
II	London Archaeologist summary	18

Figures		page
1	The site boundary in relation to the 1:1250 Ordnance Survey map	3
2	Location of the trial pits (TP1-3)	4
3	Section through deposits in Trial pit 1	5
4	View of Trial pit 1 looking north	6
5	View of Trial pit 1 looking south	6
6	Section through deposits in Trial pit 2	7
7	View of Trial pit 2 looking north	8
8	View of Trial pit 2 looking south	9
9	Section through deposits in Trial pit 3	10
10	View of Trial pit 3 looking northwest	11
11	View of Trial pit 3 looking northeast	12
12	Simplified sections through Trial pits 1-3	14

1. Introduction

- 1.1** This report details the results of an archaeological evaluation which took place prior to the redevelopment of land at Stour Wharf, Stour Road, E3, London Borough of Tower Hamlets.
- 1.2** The site itself covers an irregularly shaped plot some 110m in length by 20 to 35m wide, approximately centred at NGR TQ 3731 8411 (see Figure 1). The land has been recently cleared of previous buildings and the underlying concrete slab, with the exception of a small sub-station to the northeast.
- 1.3** The evaluation was required as part of the planning process prior to redevelopment, and to inform upon the need for further archaeological mitigation.
- 1.4** It was considered that the site has potential for Roman features, including preserved timber structures and posts. There is also some possibility of palaeo-environmental and prehistoric remains. In the post-Roman period it is likely that the land remained marginal and periodically flooded, although at a later date it was probably drained and cultivated.
- 1.5** It was considered that there was a low to negligible potential for all other archaeological periods. Documentary and map evidence suggests that for much of the time the land was marshy and periodically flooded, and of marginal value. The site itself was not developed until the beginning of the 20th century.
- 1.6** The evaluation was carried out on the 5th October 2006 and consisted of three test pits mechanically dug and archaeologically monitored. The evaluation was informed by a previous ground investigation comprising test pits and two deeper boreholes (*Card Geotechnics, Ref. CG/4333; June 2006*).
- 1.7** It is understood that redevelopment of the site will comprise new commercial premises to the east, between Stour Road and the Lee Navigation, plus access, parking and loading facilities within the central and western areas (*cf. Figure 2; Planning Ref. PA/06/00833*).

2. Acknowledgements

- 2.1** The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Dr Royston Clark of The Environmental Dimension Partnership on behalf of H Forman and Son.
- 2.2** Archaeological measures on this site were supported by David Divers, Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service, English Heritage.

3. Background

- 3.1** The recent ground investigation (Card Geotechnics 2006) revealed a sequence of alluvial deposits up to 1.9m thick, reflecting a marshy or flooded environment. There were also some chalk and flint gravel inclusions, although it is not clear whether these formed distinct layers or buried surfaces. It was also possible that the site contained other natural features, such as deeper braided channels and higher banks of gravel and sand. The present ground surface is at approximately 6m OD.
- 3.2** It was considered possible that Roman and prehistoric remains including both stray artefacts and *in situ* surfaces and timber remains could be found within the alluvial deposits overlying the River Terrace. Investigation at the former Crown Wharf Ironworks, some 200m to the south of the present site (site code DAC03), revealed nearly forty timber piles plus the remains of two very large posts set on plank baseplates: there was also an apparently associated gravel layer or surface. The remains lay on a northwest-southeast alignment and are considered to be of Roman date, possibly part of a bridge or jetty. The tops of the timbers were recorded at 1.50m to 1.83m OD, with apparently associated dump layers above 1.30m OD (*pers comm* David Divers).

4. The Evaluation

4.1 Areas of investigation

The evaluation included three trial pits located across the evaluation site (Fig 2). They were dug by a 13 ton tracked excavator using a ditching bucket. The trenches were each 2m wide by 4m in length, and from 4.6m to 5.15m deep. The pits are numbered in order of excavation, TP1 to TP3.

4.2 Methodology

- 4.2.1** A *Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation* was agreed prior to commencement of the fieldwork (Compass Archaeology, October 2006). The programme was also carried out in accordance with guidelines issued by English Heritage and by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
- 4.2.2** The exposed deposits were recorded, measured and photographed, although individual layers did not produce any significant finds and were not separately contexted. Levels were derived from an OS spot height on the eastern side of the canal opposite the site, value 6.1m. The areas of investigation were located by taped measurement onto a 1:500 enlargement of the current redevelopment plan (Figure 2).
- 4.2.3** The records of the evaluation have been allocated the unique site code *SOF 06* by the Museum of London Archaeological Archive.

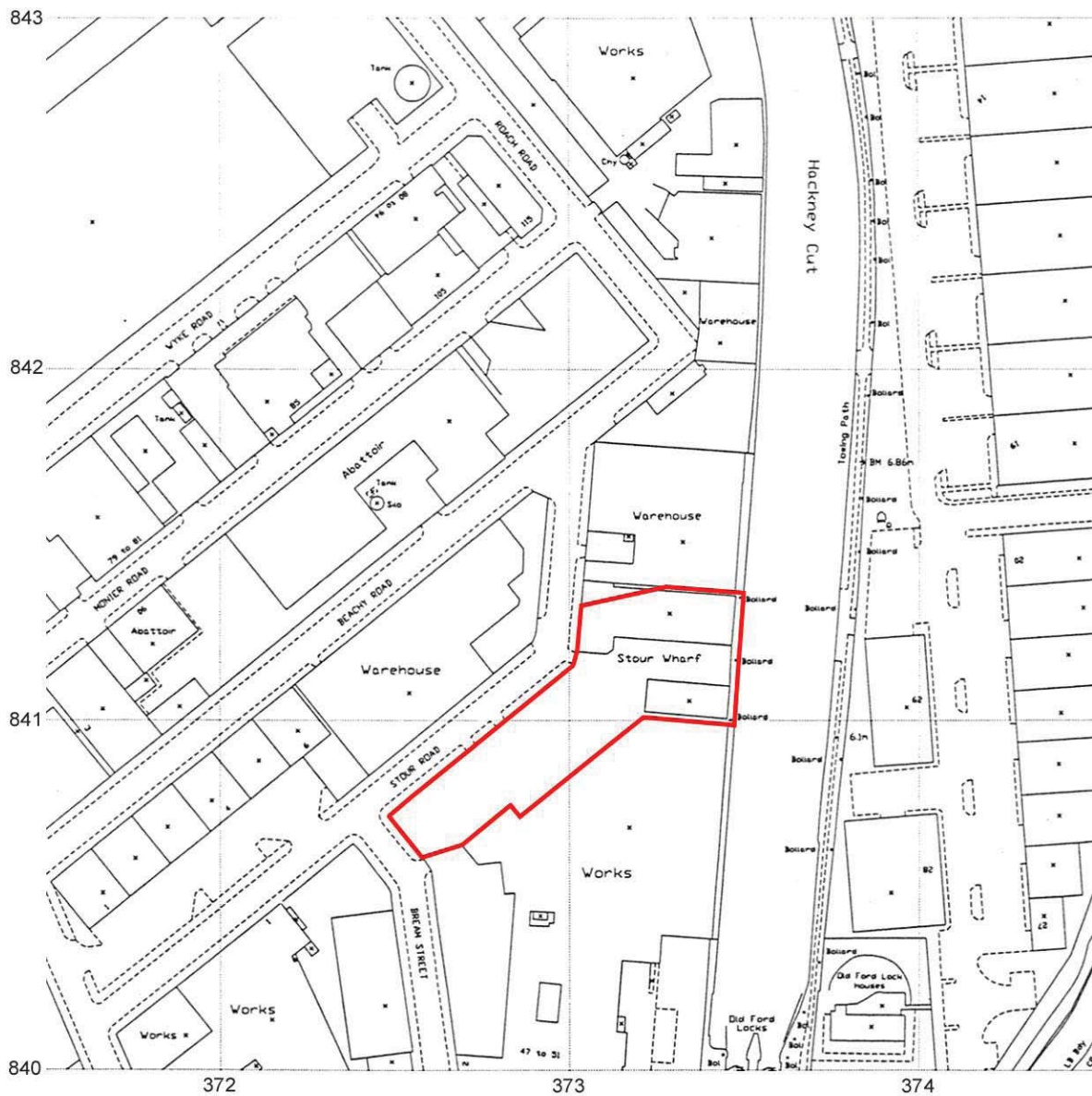


Fig 1 The site outline in relation to an existing Ordnance Survey map (Plan TQ 3784SW; reproduced at 1:2000)

Reproduced from the 2000 Ordnance Survey 1:1250 map with permission of the HMSO. ©Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Compass Archaeology Ltd., London SE1 1RQ, licence no. AL 100031317

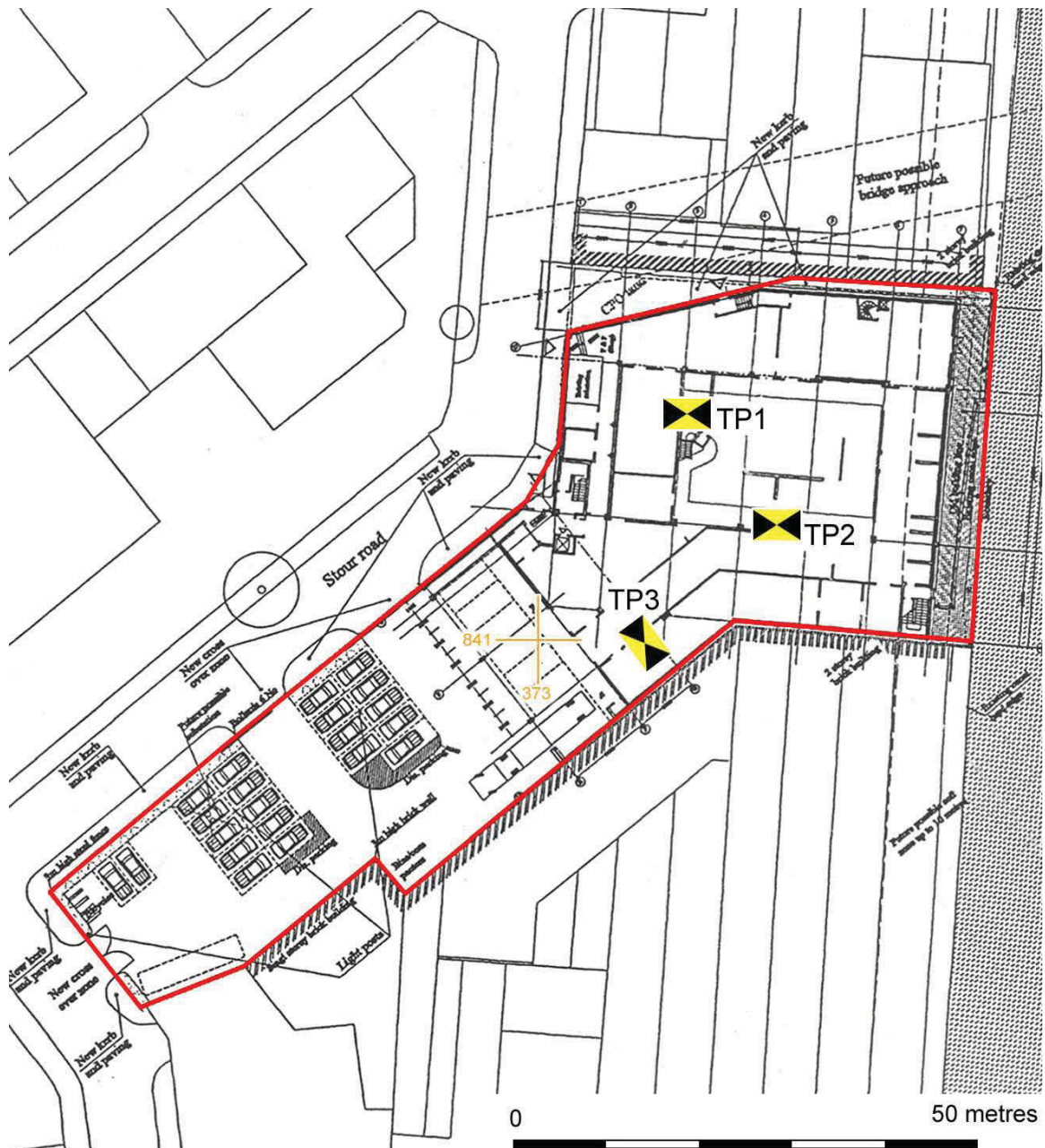


Fig 2 Proposed location of the three archaeological test pits (each measuring c 2m x 4m) in relation to the redevelopment plan of the site (based on East & Cyprus Ltd. Drawing No. AR-003)

4.3 Diagrammatic sections and photographs

Stour Road, Stour Wharf E3		(SOF 06)	
Trial Pit no. 1	Equipment & methods: 360° tracked excavator		
Approx. dimensions of pit: 2m x 4m	Ground level: c 5.89m OD	Orientation: E-W	Date: 05.10.06
Description	Reduced level (m)	Legend	Depth (m) (thickness)
Moderately loose mid dark brown silty sand with frequent demolition rubble throughout (<i>made ground</i>)	5.89		0 (0.70)
Firm, light brown clay with occasional rubble contamination from above deposit (<i>alluvium</i>)	5.19		0.70 (1.14)
More homogeneous silt, dark blue becoming black with depth (<i>alluvium</i>)	4.05		1.84 (1.90)
Dark to black clay containing occasional organic remains and some peat	2.15		3.74 (1.24)
Loose fairly dark/black medium gravel becoming finer and slightly sandy with depth (<i>natural – limit of excavation</i>)	0.91		4.98 (>0.20)
	0.71		

Fig 3 Section through deposits in Trial pit 1



Fig 4 View of Trial Pit 1 looking north



Fig 5 View of Trial Pit 1 looking south

Stour Road, Stour Wharf E3		(SOF 06)	
Trial Pit no. 2	Equipment & methods: 360° tracked excavator		
Approx. dimensions of pit: 2m x 4m	Ground level: c 5.99m OD	Orientation: E-W	Date: 05.10.06
Description	Reduced level (m)	Legend	Depth (m) (thickness)
Loose mid brown sandy silt with frequent demolition rubble throughout (made ground)	5.99		0 (1.00)
Firm, light brown clay with occasional rubble contamination from above deposit	4.99		1.00 (0.30)
More homogeneous silt, dark blue becoming black with depth, occasional organic remains (alluvium)	4.69		1.30 (1.20)
Dark-black clay containing organic remains occasional peat deposits (alluvium)	3.49		2.50 (2.40)
Loose fairly dark/black medium gravel becoming finer and slightly sandy with depth (natural – limit of excavation)	1.09 0.89		4.90 (>0.20)

Fig 6 Section through deposits in Trial pit 2



Fig 7 View of Trial Pit 2 looking north



Fig 8 View of Trial Pit 2 looking south

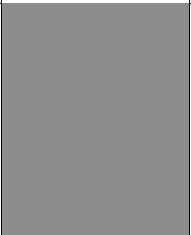
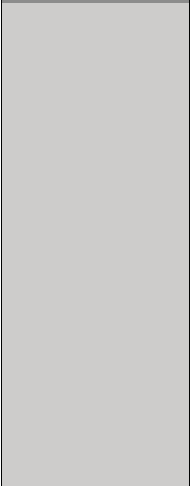
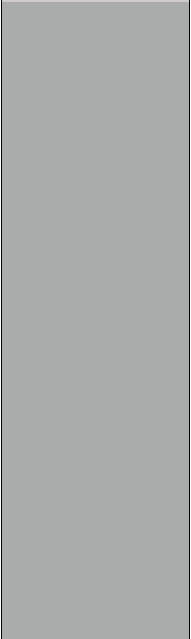

Stour Road, Stour Wharf E3		(SOF 06)	
Trial Pit no. 3		Equipment & methods: 360° tracked excavator	
Approx. dimensions of pit: 2m x 4m		Ground level: c 5.99m OD	Orientation: NW-SE Date: 05.10.06
Description	Reduced level (m)	Legend	Depth (m) (thickness)
Loose light brown coarse sand and crushed brick rubble (made ground)	5.99		0 (0.74)
Loose mid brown coarse sand and silt containing demolition rubble (made ground)	5.25		0.74 (1.63)
Firm black clay containing occasional organic remains and peat deposits (alluvium)	3.62		2.37 (2.02)
Loose fairly dark-black medium gravel becoming finer and slightly sandy with depth (natural – limit of excavation)	1.60 1.40		4.39 (>0.20)

Fig 9 Section through deposits in Trial pit 3



Fig 10 View of Trial Pit 3 facing northwest



Fig 11 View of Trial Pit 3 facing northeast

5. Summary of the findings and conclusion

- 5.1 The evaluation revealed a broadly comparable sequence of deposits across the site, with mid 19th century and later made ground overlying a series of alluvial horizons and thence natural River Terrace deposits. There was no direct evidence for pre-19th century human activity, either in the form of discrete artefacts or *in situ* remains such as preserved timbers.
- 5.2 The principal points of the trial pit record can be summarised as follows, and are also depicted in Figure 12 overleaf:

Investigation area	Surface level (m OD)	Depth of topsoil & recent made ground (m)	Alluvial sequence		Top of natural Terrace Gravel (m OD)
			Top (m OD)	Thickness (m)	
TP1	5.89	0.70	5.19	4.28	0.91
2	5.99	1.00	4.99	3.90	1.09
3	5.99	2.37	3.62	2.02	1.60

- 5.3 It is likely that fairly recent activity has truncated the alluvium in several areas. The upper level of alluvium visible in Trial pits 1 and 2 is not visible in Trial pit 3, where the made ground layer is more than twice the thickness of that in Trial pits 1 and 2, extending to 3.62m OD. This may represent a change in the scale of modern development to the southwest of the site.
- 5.4 The upper level of alluvium comprised generally clean and sterile silt or slightly sandy silt, indicating a flooded environment with little plant life. Some brick and demolition rubble was visible in the upper 150mm of the deposit in TPs 1 and 2, but this can be put down to general contamination from the above made ground. Organic material within this layer was limited to occasional branches and other driftwood.
- 5.5 There was a marked change in the alluvial sequence between 4m and 4.6m OD. In general this appeared as a dark blue silt containing more frequent organic material, which in Trial pit 1 became more peaty with depth. This deposit became progressively blacker across trial pits 1 & 2 at a depth of *c* 3.5m OD (2.2m OD in Trial pit 1). The organic/peat horizons may reflect a period of marine regression and development of a marshy environment, followed by progressive flooding of the landscape.
- 5.6 The surface of the natural River Terrace was at its highest in the centre/south of the site, at about -1.6m OD (TP3), whilst the lowest point was recorded in the northwest corner at 0.91m OD (TP1). Thus there is some evidence for change in the underlying topography of the site, Nevertheless, is clear that in the earlier prehistoric period much of the land would have been above contemporary water level, becoming marginal and progressively flooded during or after the Bronze Age.

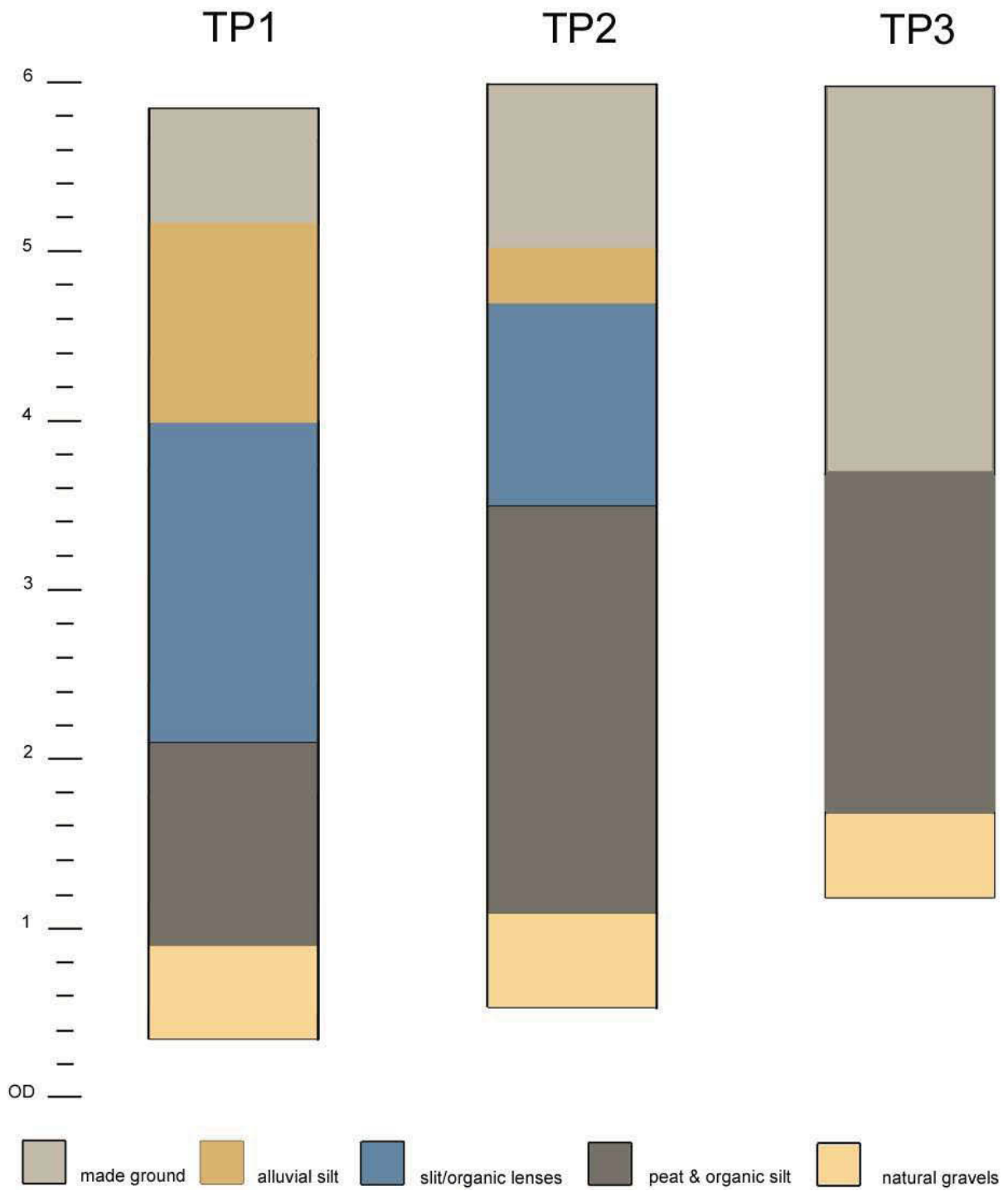


Fig 12 Simplified sections through Trial pits 1-3

5.7 The evaluation did not reveal any significant remains, or any other evidence for human activity prior to the 19th century. In particular, there was no sign of worked or *in situ* timbers to correspond with those previously recorded about 200m to the south. However, it is considered that the evaluated area represents a fair sample of the likely deposits and levels of survival on the site.

In view of these results is recommended that no further archaeological mitigation should be undertaken in respect of the proposed redevelopment.

Appendix I.

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM

OASIS ID: compassa1-19063

Project details

Project name	Stour Wharf, Stour Road, E3
Short description of the project	Evaluation consisting of three trial pits measuring 2m by 4m machine dug down to the natural River Terrace sand and gravels. The pits were approximately 4.6m - 5m in depth. The site was viewed as having potential to produce Roman archaeology, specifically preserved timber structures and posts. No in-situ finds or timbers were recovered. Deposits within the trial pits were broadly comparable across the site. Below a made ground layer some 0.7m to 2.3m deep was a firm light brown clay alluvium layer. This sealed a dark blue alluvium layer with occasional organic and peat deposits becoming increasingly black towards the top of the natural gravels. The combined thickness of alluvium was between 2.0 to 4.2m. Natural River Terrace gravels were recorded at between 0.91m and 1.6m OD.
Project dates	Start: 05-10-2006 End: 05-10-2006
Previous/future work	No / No
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed
Significant Finds	Modern
Methods & techniques	'Test Pits'
Development type	Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON TOWER HAMLETS TOWER HAMLETS Stour Wharf, Stour Road, E3
Postcode	E3
Study area	24 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 3731 8411
Height OD	Min: 0.91m Max: 1.60m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Compass Archaeology
Project brief originator	English Heritage/Department of Environment
Project design originator	Compass Archaeology
Project director/manager	Geoff Potter
Project supervisor	Colin Reid
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Developer

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Museum of London archive
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography'
Paper Archive recipient	Museum of London Archive
Paper Contents	'Stratigraphic'
Paper Media available	'Diary','Drawing','Map','Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section'
Entered by	Colin Reid (mail@compassarchaeology.freemove.co.uk)
Entered on	12 October 2006

Appendix II. London Archaeologist summary

Stour Road, Stour Wharf, E3 2NT. TQ 37310 84110. CA (Colin Reid). Evaluation. October 2006. H Forman & Son Ltd. SOF 06.

Summary

An evaluation followed previous investigation in the area that had identified potential for Roman remains, specifically preserved timber structures and posts.

Three machine-dug test pits revealed a broadly comparable sequence across the site, with 19th century and later made ground sealing alluvial (silt and organic) horizons. No cultural artefacts were recovered.

The alluvial sequence was up to 4.2m thick and sealed natural River Terrace sands and gravels at between *c* 0.91m and 1.6m OD.