

**BOW GOODS DEPOT**  
Wick Lane  
London  
E3

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

An archaeological evaluation report

June 2007



**MUSEUM OF LONDON**

**Archaeology Service**

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An archaeological evaluation report

Site Code: BGJ07

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## **Summary (non-technical)**

*This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service on the site of Bow Goods Depot, Wick Lane, London, E3 2TB. The report was commissioned from MoLAS by Firstplan Ltd on behalf of the client, London Concrete.*

*Following the recommendations of the method statement two evaluation trenches and two test pits were excavated on the site.*

*The results of the field evaluation have helped to refine the initial assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. Deep deposits of modern landfill cover the site, in Trench 1 this truncated the natural gravel. Trench 2 located a thick layer of reinforced concrete forming a cover to the in situ remains of partially demolished masonry consisting of a vaulted wall and a possible column. This is identified as the former covered reservoir on the site known from historic maps of the 1860s which was later demolished for the construction of railway lines on the site.*

*In the light of revised understanding of the archaeological potential of the site the report concludes the impact of the proposed redevelopment will be low.*

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*Front cover: Detail of the 1867 Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of Bow*

Fig 1 Site location

Fig 2 Areas of evaluation

Fig 3 Plan of features in Trench 2

nb. all Figs located at the rear of the report

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Site background

The evaluation took place at Bow Goods Depot, Wick Lane, London, E3 2TB hereafter called ‘the site’. It is located within a curve of the River Lea with the Blackwall Tunnel Approach Road forming the southern boundary, Wick Lane lies to the west of the site. The OS National Grid Ref. for centre of site is 537452 1183464. Modern ground level on the site is *c* 8m OD. The site code is BGJ07.

## 1.2 Planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Method Statement* which formed the project design for the evaluation (see Section 1.2, MoLAS, 2007).

## 1.3 Planning background

Planning permission was granted subject to a condition placed upon the development.

## 1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Firstplan Ltd on behalf of London Concrete and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA, 2001).

Field evaluation, and the *Evaluation report* which comments on the results of that exercise, are defined in the most recent English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) as intended to provide information about the archaeological resource in order to contribute to the:

- formulation of a strategy for the preservation or management of those remains; and/or
- formulation of an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may adversely affect such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or
- formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigations within a programme of research

## 1.5 Aims and objectives

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London’s *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002

The following research aims and objectives were established in the *Method Statement* for the evaluation (Section 2.2):

- What is the nature and level of natural topography?
- What are the earliest deposits identified?
- What are the latest deposits identified?
- What construction methods and materials were used to construct the reservoir?



## **2 Topographical and historical background**

### **2.1 Topography**

The site is located towards the western edge of the Lea Valley on the periphery of the floodplain (valley bottom), the present course of the River Lea forming the eastern boundary of the site. The British Geological Survey Sheet 256, North London shows that the site lies at the interface of the alluvial floodplain on the valley floor with the higher ground represented by former terraces of the River Lea. Alluvium covers most of the site with terrace gravels limited of the western periphery of the site.

The land surface that exists across the site today is largely the result of the deposition of thick made ground deposits. These deposits have obscured the underlying ancient topography and produced an irregular land surface.

### **2.2 Prehistoric**

Prehistoric activity dating from the Neolithic to the Iron Age, as well as residual evidence for Palaeolithic archaeology has been found nearby.

### **2.3 Roman**

Excavations north and north west of the site have found a range of evidence of Roman activity from burials to industrial activity. It is suggested that given the proximity of the site to the projected Roman road from London to Colchester (north of the site) and the River that one would expect activity in this area even though to date no investigations have found evidence of Roman activity within the site boundary.

### **2.4 Saxon**

There is currently no archaeological or historic evidence for Saxon activity within the site and evidence from the surrounding area is still extremely limited, suggesting that the area was largely unoccupied after the Roman period, although both the London to Colchester road and the crossing point of the Lea may well have continued to be used and the river itself may have remained navigable. No physical remains indicating such a continuity of usage have yet been found.

### **2.5 Medieval**

Archaeological evidence for medieval activity comes from excavations from the surrounding area and suggests the settlement at Old Ford was situated within an agricultural landscape, the surrounding fields being a mix of both arable and pasture. Modern Wick Lane follows the route of an earlier medieval road.

## **2.6 Post-medieval**

During the 16th and 17th century the site is in an area which remains largely undeveloped and rural. This is reflected in the early maps of the area.

It is clear that the site underwent an extensive transformation during the latter half of the 19th century, which would have resulted in a considerable degree of truncation to earlier archaeological deposits. By the time of the 1867 Ordnance Survey map the site is predominantly taken over by industry. The only patches of open land are to the south where earlier ponds have been covered and are referred to on the map as a 'Covered Reservoir' of the East London Waterworks.

By 1894 the covered reservoir is infilled and becomes built over with a series of railway lines and a Goods Shed. The area can be seen to have remained largely unchanged in the 1916 map, the 1938 map and the 1965 map.

### 3 The evaluation

#### 3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and monitoring during the evaluation was carried out in accordance with the preceding *Method Statement* (MoLAS, 2007, and the MoLAS *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoLAS, 1994).

Two evaluation trenches were excavated, with a further two smaller test pits excavated to confirm the findings of the original trenches.

Trenches were excavated by machine by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MoLAS. The locations of evaluation trenches were recorded by MoLAS Survey. This information was then plotted onto the OS grid.

A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was made in accordance with the principles set out in the MoLAS site recording manual (MoLAS, 1994). Levels were calculated by traverse from a Bench Mark on the public house north of the site on Wick Lane at 8.51m OD.

The site has produced: 2 trench location plans; 5 context records and 8 digital photographs. No finds were recovered from the site.

The site finds and records can be found under the site code BGJ07 in the MoL archive.

#### 3.2 Results of the evaluation

For trench locations see Fig 2

| <i>Evaluation Trench 1</i>                            |   |
|---|---|
| Location  | Waste ground west of the Concrete Plant |
| Dimensions  | 10.7m by 1.4m by 4.34m depth            |
| Modern ground level                                   | 7.97m OD                                |
| Base of modern fill                                   | 3.6m OD                                 |
| Depth of archaeological deposits seen                 | N/A                                     |
| Level of base of deposits observed and base of trench | 3.63m OD                                |
| Natural observed                                      | 3.6m OD                                 |

Natural terrace gravel was observed at the base of the trench at 3.6m OD as greyish sandy gravel. This was truncated by deep deposits of loose brick rubble, concrete and mixed silty sands. A thin layer of concrete was observed at the northern end of the trench at *c* 6.17m OD overlying some of the landfill, indicating different stages of

ground raising/ landfill dumping, although deeper modern intrusion was indicated in the southern end of the trench where plastic was located at the base of the trench..

| <i>Evaluation Trench 2</i>                            |  |
|---|--|
| Location  | Waste ground west of the Concrete Plant, at 90° to trench 1. |
| Dimensions  | 11.8m by 1.4m by 4.75m depth                                 |
| Modern ground level                                   | 7.97m OD   |
| Base of modern fill                                   | 5.86m OD   |
| Depth of archaeological deposits seen                 | 2.64m deep   |
| Level of base of deposits observed and base of trench | 3.22m OD   |
| Natural observed                                      | N/A  |

Natural gravel was not observed in this trench; flooding occurring at the base of the trench at 3.22m OD hindered further safe excavation. The great depth of the overlying landfill deposits restricted close observation of remains located. Partially demolished masonry was observed at the base of the trench in the north east facing section. This consisted of a 4.8m long section of wall (2) and vaulted roof (3) aligned north west - south east that continued out of the trench in both directions. The wall, made of red stock brick with a hard sandy concrete mortar, was 0.3m wide and observed as 0.84m high. The vaulted roof section, made of mixed yellow and red stock brick, was mortared into the top of the wall and survived to a height of 4.51m OD. The full depth of these features was not observed. A single section of red stock brick masonry (4) was located in the south west facing section opposite the vaulted roof. It was 0.8m wide and 1.14m high and is identified as a column that originally supported the vaulted roof, although no vaulting was observed. It survived to a height of 4.36m OD.

The masonry was partially reduced and backfilled with greyish brown clayey silt (5) with frequent dumps of red brick and tile and then covered with a thick layer of reinforced concrete (1) with several ground beams supporting it at 5.86m OD. Overlying this were thick deposits of landfill rubble that covered the entire site.

| <i>Test Pit 3</i>                                     |  |
|---|--|
| Location  | Waste ground west of the Concrete Plant, east of trench 2. |
| Dimensions  | 3.2m by 1.4m by 3.05m depth                                |
| Modern ground level                                   | 8.14m OD   |
| Base of modern fill                                   | N/A  |
| Depth of archaeological deposits seen                 | N/A  |
| Level of base of deposits observed and base of trench | 5.09m OD   |
| Natural observed                                      | N/A  |

Test pit 3 was excavated to locate the limits of the reinforced concrete over the reservoir. No concrete was located, only landfill deposits of modern origin.

| <i>Test Pit 4</i> |  |
|-------------------|--|
|-------------------|--|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Location  | Waste ground west of the Concrete Plant, east of trench 2 and test pit 3. |
| Dimensions  | 2.8m by 1.4m by 4.19m depth   |
| Modern ground level                                   | 8.12m OD  |
| Base of modern fill                                   | N/A   |
| Depth of archaeological deposits seen                 | N/A   |
| Level of base of deposits observed and base of trench | 4.03m OD  |
| Natural observed                                      | N/A   |

Test pit 4 was also excavated to locate the limits of the reinforced concrete over the reservoir. No concrete was located, only landfill deposits of modern origin.

### 3.3 Assessment of the evaluation

GLAAS guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) require an assessment of the success of the evaluation ‘in order to illustrate what level of confidence can be placed on the information which will provide the basis of the mitigation strategy’. In the case of this site the trenches were designed to look for the remains of the covered reservoir and to locate any potential archaeology that may have been undisturbed outside of the reservoir. Natural terrace gravels were located in one trench but deep truncation was confirmed throughout the site.

## 4 Archaeological potential

### 4.1 Realisation of original research aims

- What is the nature and level of natural topography?  
Natural gravel was located in Trench 1 at 3.6m OD.
- What are the earliest deposits identified?  
The earliest identified deposits were the masonry associated with the covered reservoir.
- What are the latest deposits identified?  
The latest identified deposit was the reinforced concrete cover for the demolished reservoir.
- What construction methods and materials were used to construct the reservoir?  
Red and yellow stock brick with hard lime and concrete mortar using a vaulted chamber construction, possibly onto columns.

### 4.2 General discussion of potential

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of ancient ground surfaces (horizontal archaeological stratification) on the site is low. There is no potential for the survival of cut features, such survival is likely to be extremely limited in certain areas because of the deep truncation caused by the construction of the reservoir. The average depth of archaeological deposits concerning the reservoir where they do survive is likely to be *c* 2-3m.

### 4.3 Significance

Whilst the archaeological remains are undoubtedly of local significance there is nothing to suggest that they are of regional or national importance.

## **5 Proposed development impact and recommendations**

The proposed redevelopment at Bow Goods Depot, Wick Lane involves the construction of an asphalt coating plant and aggregates storage bays together with ancillary facilities and landscaping. There will be no impact of this construction on archaeological deposits, including the 19th century covered reservoir.

The assessment above (Section 4) does not suggest that preservation *in situ* would be an appropriate mitigation strategy. MoLAS considers that the low significance of the remains identified suggest that no further work should be undertaken.

The decision on the appropriate archaeological response to the deposits revealed within rests with the Local Planning Authority and their designated archaeological advisor.

## 6 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank London Concrete for their assistance on site.

## 7 Bibliography

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## 8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

OASIS ID: molas1-27677

### Project details

Project name Bow Goods Depot, Wick Lane, London, E3

Short description of the project Two evaluation trenches and two test pits were excavated on the site of the Bow Goods Depot. Deep deposits of modern landfill cover the site. Trench 2 located a thick layer of reinforced concrete forming a cover to the in situ remains of partially demolished masonry of a vaulted wall and a possible column. This is identified as the former covered reservoir on the site known from historic maps of the 1860s which was later demolished by the 1890s when railway lines crossed the site.

Project dates Start: 11-06-2007 End: 15-06-2007

Previous/future work No / Not known

Any associated project reference codes BGJ07 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)

Current Land use Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed

Monument type RESERVOIR Post Medieval

Methods techniques & 'Targeted Trenches'

Development type Land reclamation/de-contamination

Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the planning process Not known / Not recorded

**Project location**

Country England  
Site location GREATER LONDON TOWER HAMLETS BOW Bow Goods Depot, Wick Lane, London, E3  
Postcode E3 2TB  
Site coordinates TQ 37492 83504 51.5331791757 -0.01749038578410 51 31 59 N 000 01 02 W Point  
Height OD Min: 3.63m Max: 3.63m

**Project creators**

Name of MoLAS  
Organisation  
Project originator brief MoLAS project manager  
Project originator design MoLAS  
Project director/manager Derek Seeley  
Project supervisor Sian Anthony  
Name of London Concrete  
sponsor/funding body

**Project archives**

Physical Archive No  
Exists?  
Digital Archive LAARC  
recipient  
Digital Archive ID BGJ07  
Paper Archive LAARC

recipient

Paper Archive ID      BGJ07

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**Project  
bibliography 1**

Publication type      Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

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Author(s)/Editor(s)    Anthony, S.

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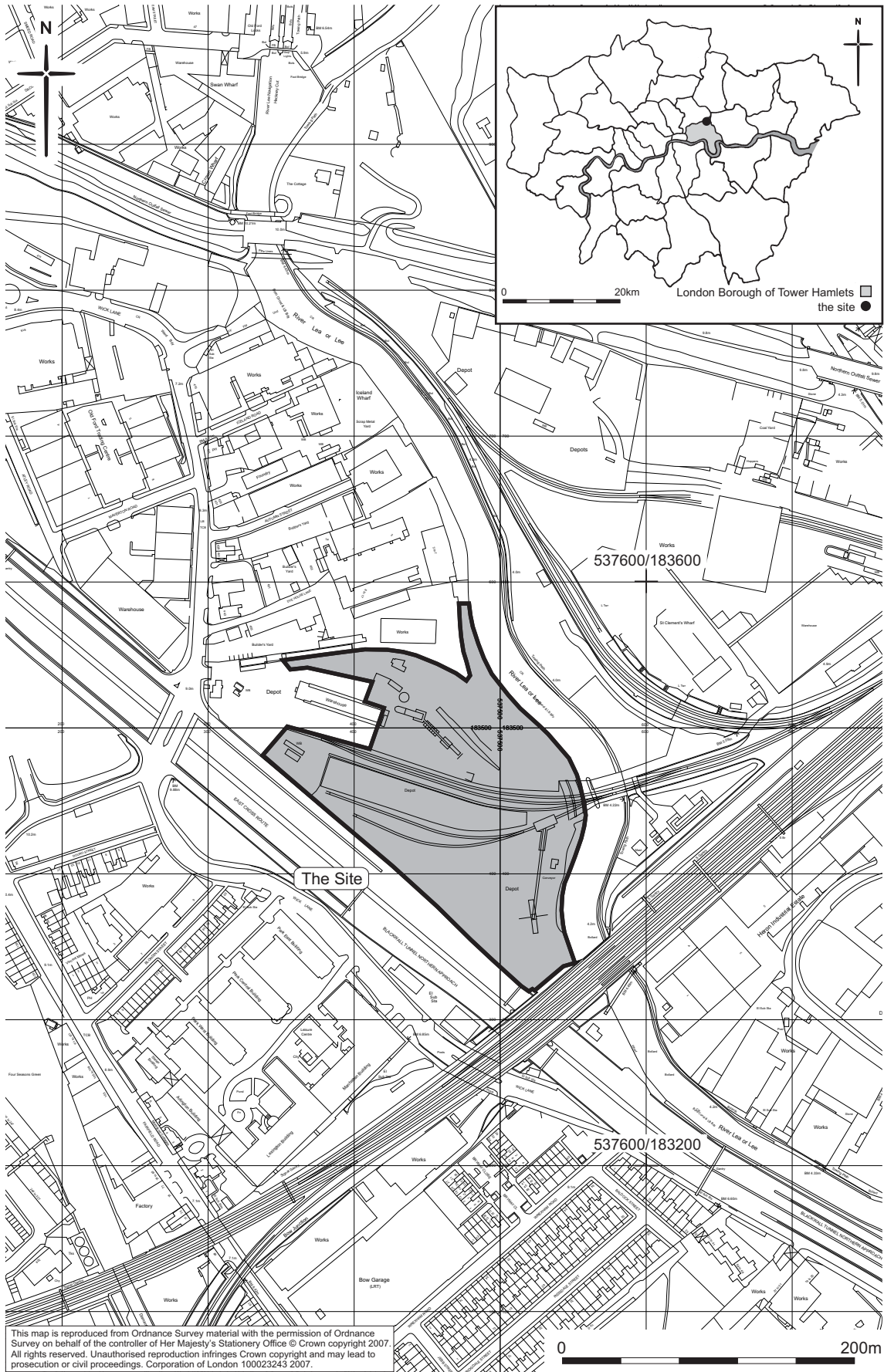


Fig 1 Site location

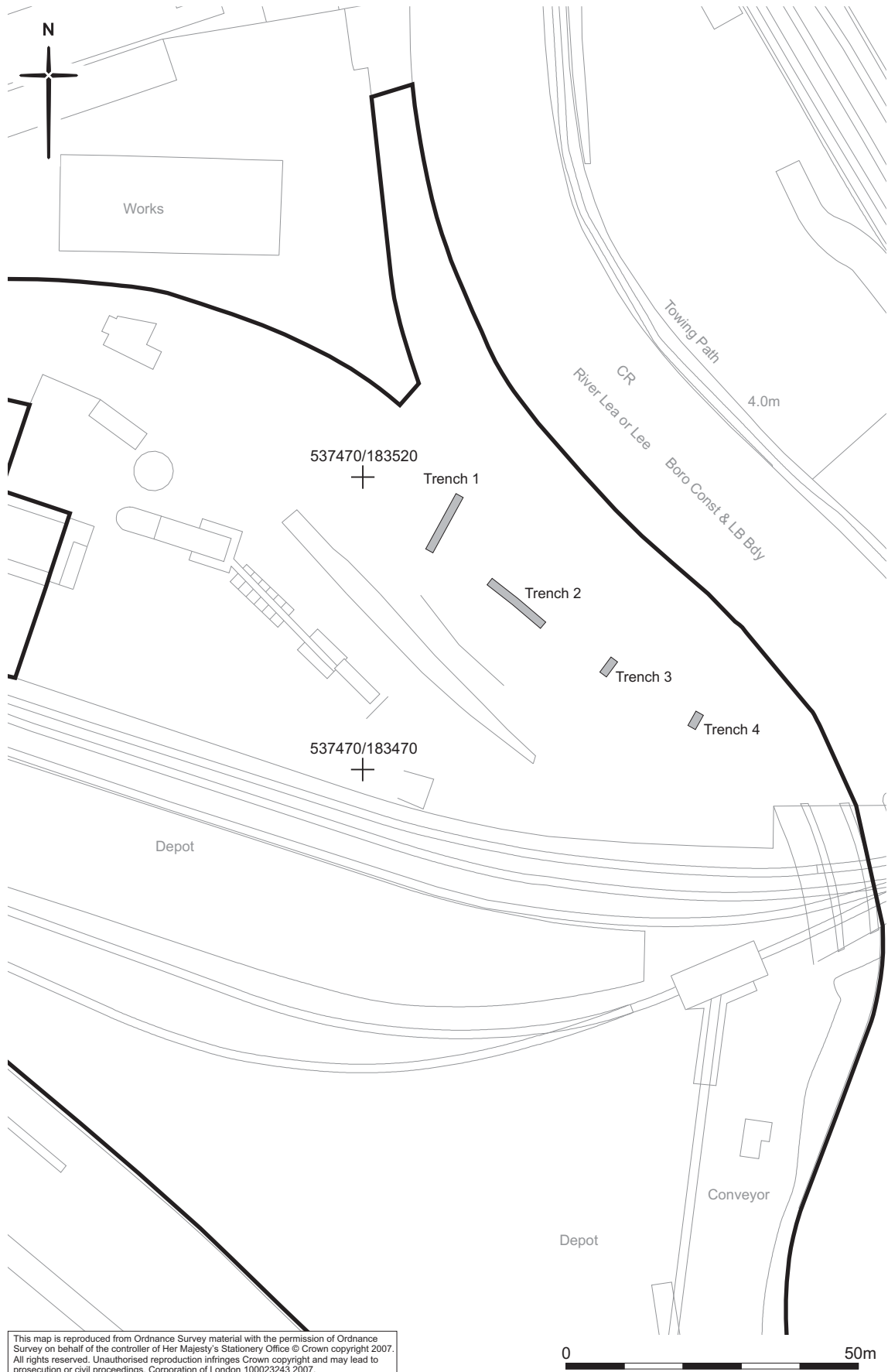


Fig 2 Areas of evaluation

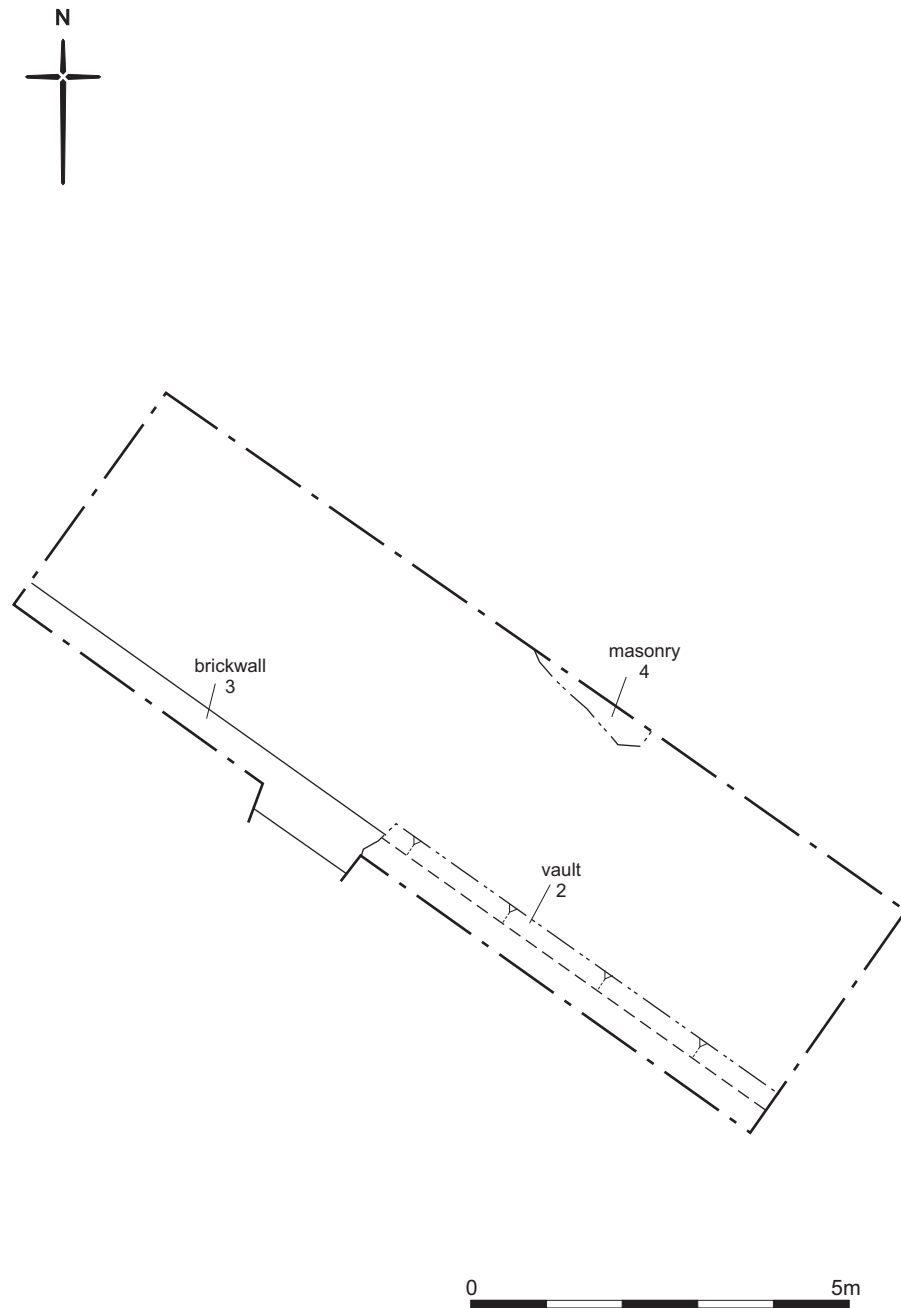


Fig 3 Plan of features in Trench 2