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N, O & P WAREHOUSES  
Seagull Lane  
Royal Victoria Dock  
London  
E16

London Borough of Newham

A standing building survey

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MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Service



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Royal Victoria Dock  
London  
E16

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A standing building survey

Site Code: NPW04  
National Grid Reference: 540550 180822

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## SUMMARY (non technical)

The Museum of London Archaeology Service was commissioned by Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd to record aspects of a standing building at Seagull Lane, Royal Victoria Dock, London E16. In order to redevelop the site the building was to be gutted, but the facades retained. The archaeological investigation and a subsequent report were required as a condition of planning consent for this redevelopment. The investigation took place in October 2004.

'N', 'O' and 'P' warehouses were originally built in 1859 as a single warehouse, part of a series of dock buildings designed by George Bidder to serve the Victoria Dock, which was opened in 1855. The original warehouse, called 'K west', contained three floors, with windows to south and north. Hoists projecting from the roof to the south, facing the dock, were used to raise and lower goods between the ground and the different floors. This building was of brick, with cast-iron columns between the timber floors and a pitched, timber-framed slated roof. Ground level to the south was higher than to the north, at the level of the 1st floor, with a narrow basement area on the south side; this difference was possibly original, the dock being retained by earth ramps on which ran the railway lines that were an integral element of the dock's operations.

A fire in 1925 caused extensive damage and subsequently the warehouses were rebuilt and enlarged. The original brick south wall was substantially retained, but the north wall was rebuilt in brick and concrete, doubling the width of the building, with walls running south-north dividing the original warehouse into four (the first three being lettered 'N', 'O' and 'P' from east to west). There were no upper floors, goods being moved by an internal travelling crane in each new subdivision, mounted on the north-south walls under a pitched, steel-trussed slated roof. The warehouses were used to store American tobacco both before and after this rebuilding. The buildings were last used as warehouses in 1981, when they were converted to other uses, and they were again modified in the 1990s.

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*Table 1 Abbreviations used in this report*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Site background

The building investigated comprised three adjoining warehouses (called 'N', 'O', and 'P', running from east to west), situated on the south side of Seagull Lane, located to the north of the Royal Victoria Dock (Fig 1). The Ordnance Survey national grid reference to the approximate centre of the site is 540550 180822. Ground level next to the south of the building was at 6.10m OD. The Museum of London site code, by which the records are indexed and archived, is NPW04.

Apart from an external survey and ground plan undertaken by Marshall Survey Associates Ltd for the client Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd (Drawing Nos 04/1801-E and 04/1801-G, Figs 3 and 6), no previous archaeological description or investigation of the warehouses is known. The warehouses are briefly mentioned in the *Buildings of England* series (Williamson & Pevsner 1998, 181-3) and a survey of the Docklands (Al Naib & Carr, for North East London Polytechnic, 1986).

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Note: within the limitations imposed by dealing with historical material and maps, the information in this document is, to the best knowledge of the author and MoLAS, correct at the time of writing. Further archaeological investigation, or more information about the nature of the present buildings may require changes to parts of the document.

### 1.2 Planning background

On the advice of the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS), the local planning authority, the London Borough of Newham, applied a condition to planning consent for the demolition of the buildings and redevelopment of the site that the existing buildings be recorded, in accordance with the provisions of *Planning policy guidance 15: planning and the historic environment (PPG15)* (DoE 1994). The condition requires the format and degree of detail in the recording to conform to 'Level 1', in the terms of the specifications of *Recording historic buildings*, recommended by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHME 1996).

The site was not a Scheduled Monument, nor were the buildings listed, but GLAAS regarded them as of sufficient architectural and historic interest to require a basic level of recording before their demolition. The site lies in an archaeological priority zone (APZ) as defined by Newham Council.

### 1.3 Origin and scope of this report

The archaeological work of analysis and recording, and the production of this report, were commissioned from the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) by Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd.

The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 2001) and corresponds approximately to the form of record and reporting at 'Level 1', in the specifications, *Recording historic buildings*, recommended by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHME 1996). A Level 1 survey of this kind is intended primarily to create a visual record, and 'will generally be of exteriors only, though the interior of a building may sometimes be seen in order to make a superficial inspection and to note significant features' (ibid, 4).

The recording consisted of a series of digital photographs, measurements and notes, made in October 2004.

### 1.4 Research aims and method of work

The overall aim of the investigation was to secure 'preservation by record' of those aspects of the standing building and the site that were deemed of architectural, archaeological and historical interest. This was carried out in conformity with applicable planning policies and English Heritage guidelines (Archaeological Guidance Paper No. 3, revised June 1998). The investigation satisfied the research aims and it was determined that it would not be necessary to investigate the buildings further during demolition.

### 1.5 Organisation of this report and conventions used

All dimensions are given in metres or millimetres, except possibly for certain brick and timber sizes, and heights are given where appropriate in metres above Ordnance Datum (mean sea level), abbreviated 'm OD'.

*Table 1: Abbreviations used in this report*

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| BGS   | British Geological Survey                           |
| DoE   | Department of the Environment                       |
| GL    | Guildhall Library (London)                          |
| GLAAS | Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service      |
| LDDC  | London Docklands Development Corporation            |
| MoLAS | Museum of London Archaeology Service                |
| OD    | Ordnance Datum (mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall) |
| RCHME | Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England   |



## 1.6 Brief outline of the standing buildings

The following brief outline description should be read in conjunction with the plans and sectional elevations (Figs 2, 3 and 6) and selected photographs taken in October 2004 (Figs 4, 5 and 7–14).

In plan, the area covered by the buildings measured roughly 69m from west to east and 45m from north to south (Fig 2). The buildings consisted of three separate warehouses, identified as 'N', 'O' and 'P' (lettered from east to west), which were part of one large brick building. This was a three-storey construction of yellow brick, the exterior walls being 0.50m thick. The slope of the ground means the southern elevation only displays two rows of windows; the third row is below ground level and contained in narrow light wells or basement areas (see Figs 3–5). Access from the south is by four wooden doors at ground level. The northern elevation has two rows of windows, the upper row being noticeably taller than those below (Figs 6–8). Access is through three large doors with metal roller shutters. There is also a series of metal doors that have been added below some of the windows at the lower level (see Fig 7). These doors and shutters are recent additions.

Two internal walls separated the three warehouses (Figs 9 and 10). These walls were 0.40m thick and were constructed of concrete-clad steel columns set 6.85m apart, with yellow bricks infilling the space between. Along the south side of the building at ground level with respect to the south (1st-floor level with respect to the north), was an internal walkway 2.70m wide, carried on brick arches (see Fig 11). This ran the length of the three warehouses, double pairs of steel doors communicating between the dividing internal walls. In warehouse 'P', to the south, there was also an area at a mezzanine level, a further 6.20m wide, supported on narrow iron columns. Along the eastern side of warehouse 'P' at basement level was a series of six arches each 2.50m wide and 3.00m high, forming an open arcade 20m long in total and 3.00m wide (see Fig 12). When seen, this survived only to ground-floor level (with respect to the south), but the presence of an iron door (Fig 13) connecting to the adjacent warehouse at 1st-floor level suggests this arcade could originally have functioned at that level but had been demolished recently. These brick arches were probably for the ventilation of the basement, referred to by Williamson and Pevsner (1998, 283). However, as the arcade did not extend across the whole of the east side of warehouse 'P', it may have had another function such as supporting machinery or offices, but without further research this must remain speculative.

At the time of recording, the roof had been removed and the interior was largely gutted, with no trace of any floors or machinery remaining.

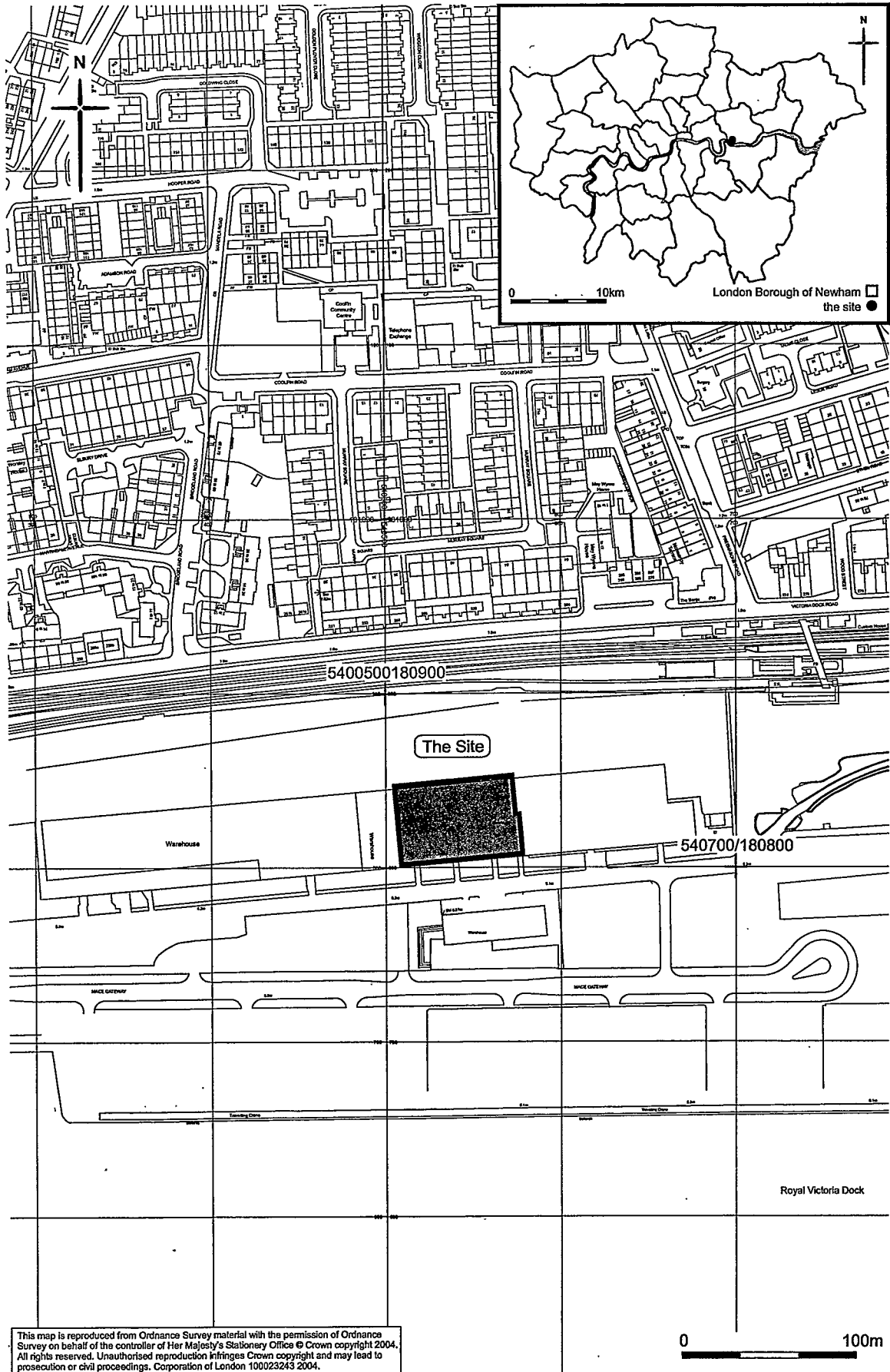


Fig 1 Site location

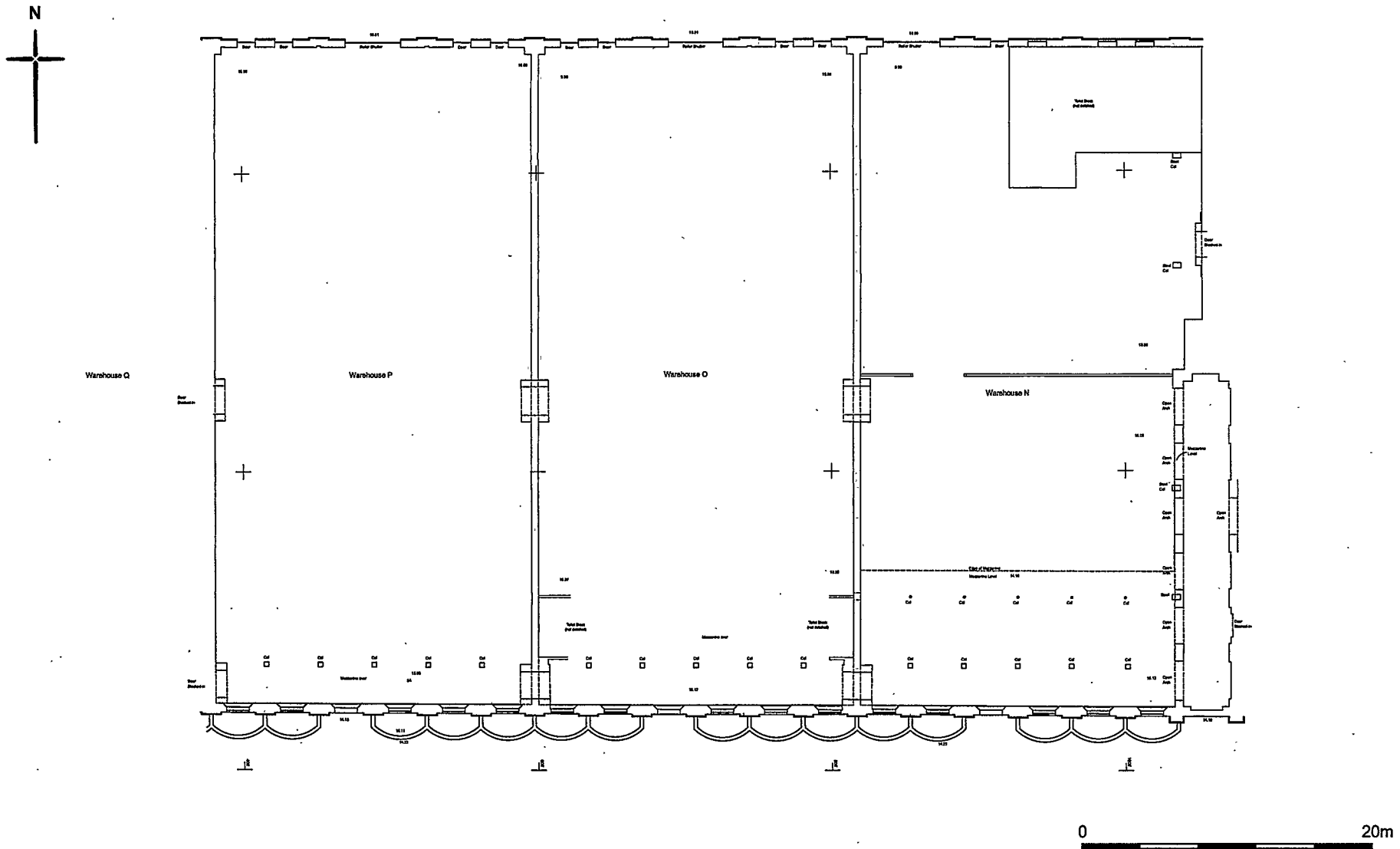
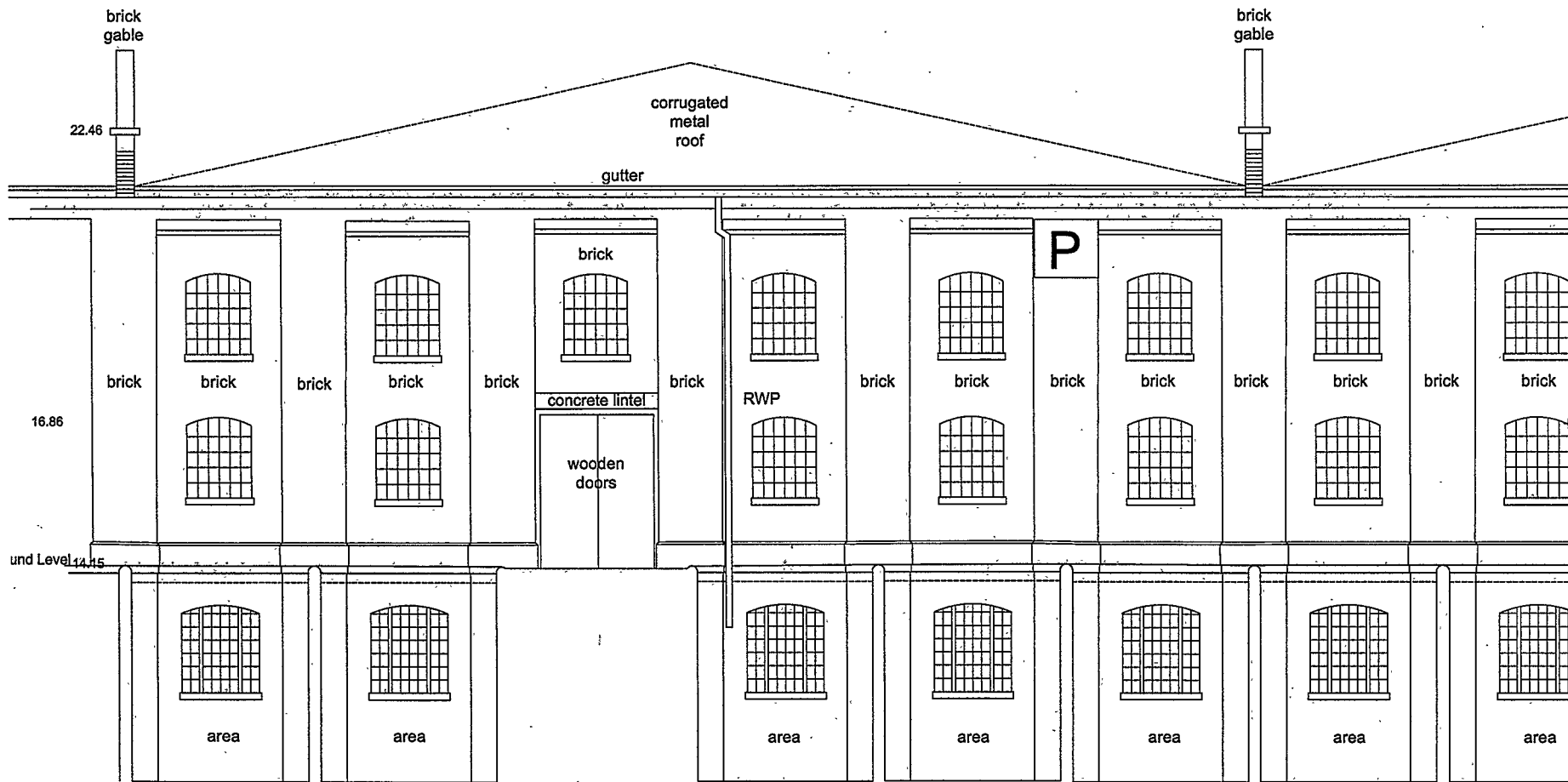


Fig 2 Plan of warehouses 'N', 'P' and 'O' at ground level



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NPW04 Standing Building Survey ©MoLAS 2004

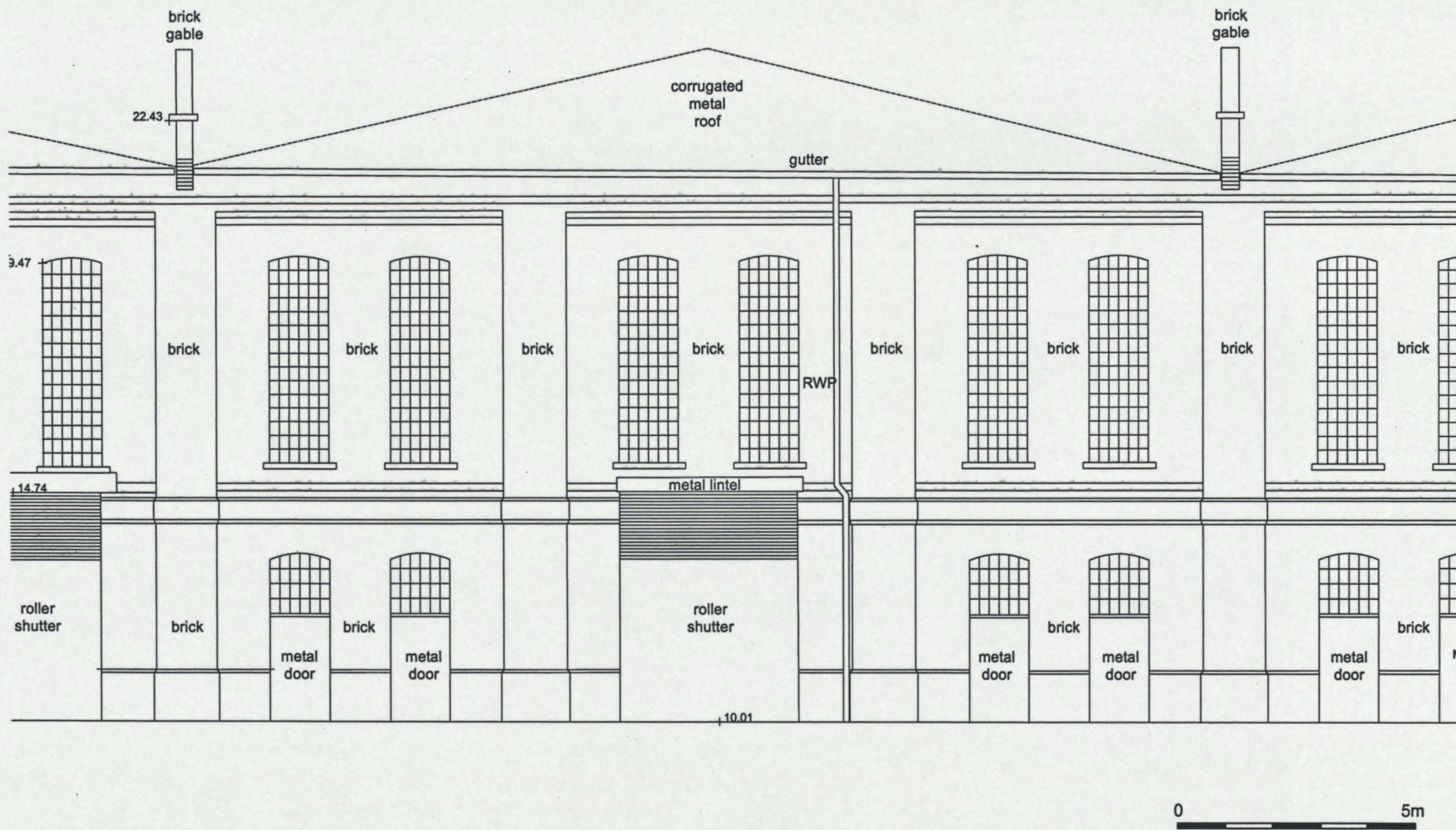
Fig 3 Sectional elevation showing southern face of warehouse 'P'



Fig 4 Photograph showing southern exterior elevation, looking north-west



Fig 5 Photograph showing interior of 'P', looking south



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NPW04: Standing Building Survey ©MOLAAS 2004

Fig 6 Sectional elevation showing northern face of warehouse 'O'



Fig 7 Photograph showing northern elevation, looking south-west



Fig 8 Photograph showing northern elevation, windows looking north-west



Fig 9 Photograph showing partition wall between 'O' and 'N' looking south-west



Fig 10 Photograph showing partition wall between 'P' and 'O', looking south-west





Fig 11 Photograph showing demolished mezzanine, looking west



Fig 12 Photograph showing arched brick arcade, looking south-east



Fig 13 Photograph showing iron door in east wall of 'N', looking east



Fig 14 Photograph showing riveted girder in 'N', looking north-east

## 2 Topographical and historical background

### 2.1 Geology

Natural geological strata on the site consist of river alluvium (BGS, 1993).

### 2.2 History of the site

The Victoria Dock was constructed in 1850–5, creating direct competition with the East and West India Docks and forcing established dock companies to reduce their rates and concentrate on export in order to sustain themselves (Survey of London, Vol XLIII, 260). Warehouses were constructed on the earth ramps around the dock to store goods unloaded from ships, and typically goods were then transferred from the warehouses to railway wagons, railway connections being an integral element of this dock's operations from the start. The dock, named the 'Royal Victoria Dock' when the Royal Albert Dock was opened to the east in 1880, had the added advantage of being able to accommodate ships needing repair. Following the closure of the docks in 1981, the dock buildings have either been demolished or converted to other uses.

### 2.3 Development, function and occupants of the standing buildings

The warehouses described in this report were constructed in about 1859 on the north side of Victoria Dock. Among a series of large brick warehouses identified by letters, these particular buildings comprised warehouses 'N', 'O' and 'P' (lettered in order from east to west). They formed part of a much larger set of buildings, with warehouses to either side still standing, although the latter had been altered from their primary function. The following information is taken from published sources, notably successive Goad insurance plans and Ordnance Survey plans.

Williamson and Pevsner (1998, 29–36, 181–4) refer to warehouses 'K'–'R', on the site of warehouses 'N'–'O', as being a series of three-storey buildings used as a bonded tobacco store, the architect being George P Bidder, engineer to the consortium that constructed the dock. These warehouses originally consisted of two storeys, a loft under the roof, and a basement ventilated by arched brick areas. The timber floors were supported by cruciform cast-iron columns, and the trussed timber roof, in the case of 'K', incorporated iron hanger rods. By the time of the 1891 Goad insurance plan (GL: vol G, sheet 364), there were three large buildings in line on the north side of Royal Victoria Dock, identified as 'L', detached and to the east, and 'K' and 'S', adjoining each other to the west, with other, smaller warehouses in front of them, next to the dock, called 'H', 'W' and 'X', as well as a small shed for a fire engine and a larger 'volunteer drill shed'.

Building 'K', described as a 'tobacco warehouse', is shown as constructed of brick, very long from west to east relative to its width, and divided centrally by a brick wall. The two halves of this building are labelled 'K west' and 'K east', the division being

roughly in line with the east end of warehouse 'W' to the south; the latter was built in 1883, according to Williamson and Pevsner (1998, 183). Near the west end of 'K west' a subway is marked, leading (at basement level) to a jetty (Jetty 'D') in the dock. The first five jetties on the north side of the dock, presumably those labelled 'A' to 'E', were an original innovation (*ibid*, 181), and thus the subway may have been original, too. The Goad plan shows three railway lines running along the dock in front of warehouses 'K' and 'S', and on to embankments to the north-east. A schematic cross-section of 'L' and 'W' show that the level of the dockside was at the level of the 1st floor in 'L', with a 'concrete roadway', on which the railway lines were laid, forming the ground immediately to its south. The details of 'L' in section suggest that it closely resembled 'K', as described above, and 'K' would probably also have been accessible from the south at the elevated ground level, while its basement was at the level of the ground to the north.

The plan shows the roof of 'K' as pitched, with its ridge running from west to east, slated and containing ten skylights in each half. Timber dormers are shown on the south side of the roof in the eastern half, containing hoists which projected over the south elevation of the building. Not all external doors are shown on the plan, but it seems likely that the hoists gave access to doors on each floor, and goods were raised and lowered between the ground and different floors by this means. There were no hoists to the north, and there need have been no doors there either, although at least 17 window bays are shown in each half of 'K'. Fireproof iron doors communicated between the two halves of 'K' and with 'S', to the west.

In 1925, following a fire, there was a major reconstruction of warehouse 'K'. New roofs and party walls were constructed to form a series of tall, single-storey spaces, subdivided into four warehouses side by side, each with a hipped roof. The Goad plan of 1970 (GL: vol XIIA, sheet 364) identifies the latter warehouses as 'N', 'O', 'P' and 'R', from east to west (omitting 'Q' for some reason). From the position of warehouse 'W', which was apparently the same building as shown in the earlier plan, it can be seen that these four warehouses occupied the area formerly taken by 'K west'. This is confirmed by the survival of the subway, to the west, which ran south from 'R', but was no longer connected to a jetty, the north side of the dock having been completely rebuilt. The width of the warehouses had been roughly doubled, by rebuilding the north wall much further to the north. To the east, in 1970, 'K east' remained much as it had been. Another warehouse adjoined 'K east' to the north. This warehouse, labelled 'K annexe', did not run the whole length of 'K' to the east, and this forms a recognisable shape in many different plans and maps.

The plans show, internally, the brick arched walkway along the south wall, with double iron doors through the partition walls between the warehouses, and 'oil store' under the south-west corner of 'O'. A schematic cross-section, labelled as applicable to warehouses 'N'-'P', shows a typical example of these warehouses looking north. Thus the walls shown to either side are those which ran from south to north, described on the plan as being of ferro-concrete construction, supporting a steel-trussed, slated roof. The roof was separate on each warehouse, and hipped to north and south. No floors interrupt the space inside, and a travelling crane is shown as a hanging steel frame, its ends running on rails near the top of these walls. While the north wall and the internal partition walls had been rebuilt in 1925, the south wall facing the dock was presumably the original south wall of 'K west'. This seems to be confirmed by

the fact that the south walls in both the 1891 and 1970 plans have 12 windows, identically, while for comparison the north wall in 1891 had 17 windows, and that in 1970 had 22. A small cross-section of warehouse 'L' shows it with a narrow basement area to its south, much as before, but also enlarged with a low single-storey addition to the north. In a recent survey warehouses 'N'-'O' had corrugated iron roofs.

Another survey (North East London Polytechnic, 1986, 219-220) states: 'Bonded tobacco warehouses. North side Royal Victoria Dock. Imposing 'shed like' range of buildings, from west to east S, R, P, O, N and K sheds reminiscent of Vickers' Engineering shops, Barrow in Furness. Dating from 1880'.

The warehouses appear to have been designed and built specifically to house large hogsheads of American tobacco, each weighing half a metric ton. These were stacked and moved using the travelling overhead cranes, which were electrically powered, installed in the 1920s. The only exception, shown in the 1970 Goad plan, is that the basement of 'K east' was used to store 'ginger in casks'. The building was restored for the LDDC by Rees Johns Bolter, architects, in 1994-5 and fitted for use as a public hall and exhibition space (Williamson & Pevsner 1998, 183).

### 3 The standing building survey

#### 3.1 Methodology

All archaeological analysis and recording during the investigation on site was done in accordance with the Museum of London *Archaeological Site Manual* (1994) and MoLAS *Health and safety policy* (2003). The location and exterior of the standing buildings were determined in outline on the modern Ordnance Survey plan, and identification and extent of the warehouses confirmed by the Goad insurance plans of 1891 and 1970 and a recent aerial photograph. The developer supplied plans of the buildings at a scale of 1:100 (Drawing No 04/1801-G: Fig 2), dated 18 February 2004.

The site was visited on 5 October 2004 and photographs were taken internally and externally to illustrate aspects of the building. Several measured sketches were also made. The building had been largely gutted by this time, with no floors or roof, so few internal features could be noted. It was previously unclear which features of the original building, if any, had survived the fire of 1925 and later renovation in the mid 1990s.

The site records comprise the supplied architect's plan and elevation drawings, one site drawing, 14 photographic images in digital format, all colour, and accompanying notes, together with sketch copies of the relevant sheets of the Goad plans, and a copy of the aerial photograph. No objects or samples were collected. The site records will be deposited in due course in the Museum of London archaeological archive under the site code NPW04.

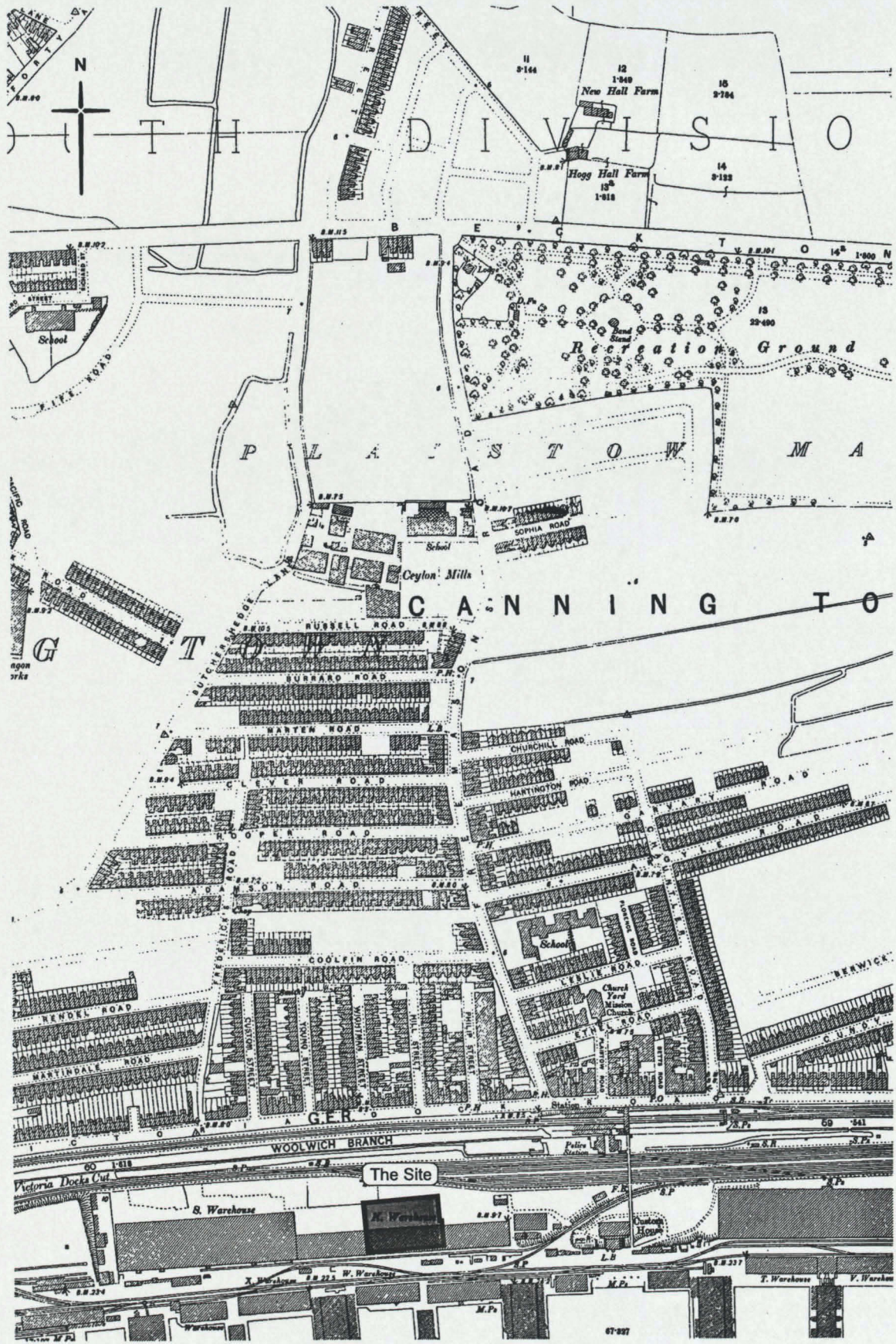


Fig 15 Ordnance Survey map from 1893 showing original and present outline of the building

## 3.2 Archaeology of the buildings

### 3.2.1 Phase 1: Main brick build (1859)

The original plan of the warehouses can be seen on the Goad insurance plan of 1891 (described in 2.3, above) and the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plan of 1894 (Fig 15). At this time, the main building which contained the warehouses was known as warehouse 'K' and measured approximately 199m, from west to east, by 22m from north to south. It seems likely that the southern elevation recorded (see Figs 3–5) dates to this period and includes details such as the corbelling above the 2nd floor and the original windows.

Presumably the original warehouse contained floors at levels corresponding to the three lines of windows in the surviving southern elevation. Access to the upper floors would have been by hoist, located at the top of the front of the south wall, through doors in the south wall, and possibly through internal trap doors. Ground level to the south could have been higher than to the north, originally, the difference probably reflecting the bunding of earth around the edge of the dock.

### 3.2.2 Phase 2: Rebuild (1925)

A fire caused extensive damage to the warehouse in 1925, particularly to the west. Major internal rebuilding followed and it was probably at this time that the building was enlarged greatly to the north and subdivided, the new subdivisions being named as warehouses 'N', 'O' and 'P' ('R' being the fourth new subdivision, furthest to the west). The entire northern wall of the building also appears to have been replaced in this phase: this is confirmed by a comparison between the original building as shown in plans of 1891 and 1894, and the present one (Fig 15), which marks an increase in the south–north dimensions of the building from approximately 22m to 45m.

On the north side of the buildings, although the tall windows of the ground floor (at 1st-floor level on this side) and the steel lintels above the large doorways are indicative of a 1920s build, the architect and builders paid particular attention to details which complemented the original Victorian design. The corbelling above the 1st-floor windows, for example, blends with the shallow vertical piers in the same way it does on the southern elevation.

Internally, by implication, the upper floors were removed in the rebuild, leaving a single, huge open space inside.

The overhead crane mechanisms would have been added in the upper part of the warehouses in this phase, as the roofs were rebuilt without the original hoists to the south. The upper part of the south–north walls leant outwards, forming narrow, parallel platforms on which rails for each end of the travelling crane could be mounted; these can be seen clearly in Figure 10. The riveted girders were also likely to have been installed at this time (Fig 14).

The level of the ground to the south of the warehouse, if not already higher than to the north (as explained above), could have been raised at this time, possibly in connection with the documented construction of jetties and other buildings between this warehouse and the actual dock, further to the south.

**3.2.3 Phase 3: Modifications (1990s)**

It is likely that concrete lintels were inserted above doorways in the northern and southern elevations in this phase, when the building was converted into an exhibition hall.



## **4 Potential of the archaeology**

### **4.1 Original research aims**

This report reconstructs in outline the history of the building on the present site, both from the archaeological investigation of its fabric and from documentary sources that were available at the time of writing.

### **4.2 New research aims**

Due to unforeseen problems with gaining access to the Port of London Authority records, it has been agreed with English Heritage that more detailed background information on the history of the site can be submitted to the developer as a later, separate document. It is unlikely, however, that the conclusions of this report will be seriously affected by further documentary research.

### **4.3 Significance of the data**

The standing buildings are undoubtedly of significance for the architecture and history of the immediate locality, but nothing was found to suggest that they are of wider regional or national importance in this regard. The academic requirement to publish the results of the investigation will therefore be met by reporting the results in summary form in appropriate professional journals and in the annual excavation round-up in the *London Archaeologist*.

### **4.4 Salvaged fixtures, fittings and materials**

There was no archaeological requirement to salvage any of the materials or fittings.

## 5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the survey will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

The site archive containing original records will be stored with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the survey.

In view of the limited potential of the material and significance of the data, it is suggested that a short note on the results of the watching brief should appear in the annual round-up of the *London Archaeologist*.

## 6 Acknowledgements

The archaeological survey and this report were commissioned by Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd, whom the project manager and author wish to thank. They are grateful especially to Tony O'Connor of Fitzpatrick for facilitating access to the building and supplying plans and photographs. They also thank Robert Whytehead of GLAAS, for his advice and support. Andrew Westman would like to thank Michael Melia and other staff of Guildhall Library for their help in obtaining historic plans.

Archaeological analysis and recording was by Tony Mackinder, assisted on site by Raoul Bull. The archaeological photographs of the standing building were also taken by Tony Mackinder and off-site were scanned and printed by Maggie Cox. Alison Telfer and Andrew Westman, who copied the Goad insurance plans, contributed or edited parts of the text. Illustrations were by Jane Dunn.

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## 8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

MoLAS1 - 5662.

### Project details

Project name N, O and P Warehouses

Short description of the project The Museum of London Archaeology Service was commissioned by Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd to record aspects of a standing building at Seagull Lane, Royal Victoria Dock, London E16. In order to redevelop the site, the building was to be gutted, but the façades retained. The archaeological investigation and a subsequent report were required as a condition of planning consent for the redevelopment. The investigation took place in October 2004. 'N', 'O', 'P' Warehouses were originally built as a single warehouse as part of the complex of dock buildings at Royal Victoria Dock in 1855. A fire in 1925 caused extensive damage and subsequent rebuilding to take place, particularly in the interior of the building, which was known to have stored American tobacco after this period. The building was last occupied in 1981 and again modified in the 1990s.

Project dates Start: 05-10-2004 End: 05-10-2004

Previous/future work No / Not known

Any associated project reference codes NPW04 - Sitecode

Type of project Building Recording

Site status None

Current Land use Community Service 1 - Community Buildings

Monument type WAREHOUSE Post Medieval

Prompt Planning condition

### Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON NEWHAM NEWHAM N, O and P Warehouses, Seagull Lane

Postcode E16

Study area 1590 Square metres

National reference grid TQ 40550 80822 Point

**Project creators**

Name of Organisation MoLAS

Project originator brief English Heritage/Department of Environment

Project originator design MoLAS

Project director/manager Derek Seeley

Project supervisor Tony Mackinder

Sponsor or funding body Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd

**Project archives**

Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital recipient Archive LAARC

Digital Archive ID NPW04

Digital Archive Exists? Yes

Paper recipient Archive LAARC

Paper Archive ID NPW04

Paper Archive Exists? Yes

**Project  
bibliography 1**

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Publication type                 | Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)   |
| Title                            | N, O and P Warehouses, Seagull Lane, Royal Victoria Dock,<br>London, E16  |
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| Entered on                       | 22 December 2004  |

## 9 Appendix 1: list of archaeological photographs

| Image number | Direction of view | Description  |
|--------------|-------------------|--|
| 041          | looking NW        | Outside of P, mainly obscured by hoarding            |
| 042          | looking SW        | Partition wall between O and N, partially demolished |
| 043          | looking SW        | Partition wall between P and O, partially demolished |
| 044          | looking SE        | Arched brick arcade, partially obscured              |
| 045          | looking SE        | Mezzanine level, from ground floor                   |
| 046          | looking S         | Inside P, mezzanine demolished                       |
| 047          | looking E         | Iron door in east wall of N, from ground floor       |
| 048          | looking NW        | North elevation, windows                             |
| 049          | looking NE        | Iron door in east wall of N, from mezzanine level    |
| 050          | looking W         | Partition wall between N and O, from mezzanine level |
| 051          | looking W         | Demolished mezzanine from doorway in previous photo  |
| 052          | looking NW        | Outside building, south side                         |
| 053          | looking SW        | Outside building, north side                         |
| 054          | looking S         | Outside building, north side, doorway                |