Thames Gateway Bridge London

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeology

25th September 2003

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Thames Gateway Bridge, London

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

On the 11th of August 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of ten geotechnical test pits on the proposed sites of the Thames Gateway Bridge. Excavations took place at Thamesmead West (NGR: TQ 4537 8048), on the south bank of the Thames and at Beckton (NGR: TQ 4300 8300), on the north bank.

The work was commissioned by Scott Wilson in advance of proposed construction of a new Thames bridge crossing. Although no archaeological remains were identified, test pits at Thamesmead exposed undisturbed peat and alluvial deposits consistent with the remains of buried landscapes possibly dating to the prehistoric period and later. The remaining test pits revealed extensive deposits of modern made ground on both banks of the River Thames.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between the 11th and 13th of August 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during excavation of geotechnical test pits at sites in Thamesmead West (NGR TQ 4537 8048) and Beckton (NGR TQ 4300 8300) East London. The work was commissioned by Scott Wilson in respect of a planning application for construction of a new Thames Gateway bridge (TGB) spanning the two areas.

1.1.2 A project brief was set by English Heritage (EH) and the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) for the monitoring of test pits to determine whether palaeo-environmental evidence survives and to update the Halcrow cross-section.

1.1.3 In line with the project brief, OA prepared a Environmental Impact Assessment Briefing Paper detailing how it would meet these requirements (OA, 2003a).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The sites lies on both sides of the Thames floodplain, at Thamesmead West to the south side and Beckton on the north side. The sites originally would have been between 1 m and 2 m above OD, however tipping has raised the current level in many areas to above 6 m OD. The Thamesmead site was approximately 70 ha in area, and the Beckton site approximately 4.5 ha in area.

1.3 Geoarchaeological background

1.3.1 In order to understand the potential for the survival and distribution of archaeological remains it is important to understand the changing nature of the Thames system over time. Deposition in the Thames Valley began in the late Anglian stage (circa 500,000 yr. BP) and continued intermittently throughout the Pleistocene (Gibbard 1994; Bridgland 1994; 1995; Bridgland et al 1995). Sediments, deposited in cold climate braided steam systems, exist as wedges of sand and gravel on the valley sides,

subsequently eroded by fluvial incision during periods of lowered sea level to create terraces. The most recent episodes of gravel deposition formed the Shepperton gravels in the valley bottom.

1.3.2 The surface of the valley bottom gravels formed the 'template' onto which alluvial and estuarine sedimentation occurred later, during the Holocene. In contrast to the relatively well known sequences of the Pleistocene, the nature of the Holocene sediments deposited during the last 12,000 years are not well understood and have only, with few exceptions, been described superficially (Bates 1999). The landscape during this period saw a number of changes, largely attributed to a rise in sea level caused by the continued shrinking of the polar ice caps and tectonic subsidence. The Holocene sediments form a wedge thickening downstream, from less than 2m at Tower Bridge to a maximum thickness of 35m east of the study area at Canvey Island (Marsland, 1986).

1.3.3 Within the inner estuary Holocene sediments consist of complex sequences of minerogenic and organic clay, silts, sands and peats, deposited in a variety of environments representing variously alder carr, fen, reedswamp, intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats. The currently adopted stratigraphic sequence for the Lower Thames is based on work undertaken by Devoy (1979, 1980). Borehole stratigraphies were integrated with biostratigraphic studies to infer successive phases of marine transgressions (Thames 1-V) represented by clay/silt units and regressions (Tilbury 1-V) represented by peat units. Devoy constructed two age-altitude curves of relative sea level movement, one for Tilbury (outer estuary) and one for Crossness, Dartford and Broadness (inner estuary). The model suggests transgressions occurred in the Palaeolithic/early Mesolithic periods, the late Mesolithic/early Neolithic periods, throughout the Bronze Age, in the middle Iron Age and at the beginning of the 4th century AD (Devoy 1980).

1.3.4 The 'Thames-Tilbury' model is regarded as the seminal work in this area (Haggart 1995) and has been widely applied by researchers outside the original study area in the absence of regional models. However, recent work (Haggert 1995 in Sidell et al 2000:16) has highlighted several problems, such as the need for two age/ altitude curves, suggesting it cannot always be easily applied to the whole of the Thames Estuary, both in terms of lithology and age/ altitude analysis. (Sidell et al 2000:16). Recent work has been aimed at constructing regional models for estuary development (Long *et al*, 2000; Bates and Whittaker, in press) which begin to address the range of factors responsible for sequence accumulation

1.3.5 In conclusion, former landsurfaces (peat and organic deposits) on the Thames floodplain have been buried, and protected, within a succession of alluvial deposits (minerogenic silts and clays). The deposition of these sediments has occurred over a period of thousands of years. Evidence of early prehistoric activity could potentially be located at the base of the alluvium and cut into the underlying geology. Later prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity is likely to be located progressively higher up in the alluvial sequence, with possible medieval and post-medieval activity at the top of the alluvium.

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

1.4.1 The archaeological background to the Thames Gateway Project was prepared for the Environmental Impact Report (OA, 2003b) and is summarised below.

1.4.2 In brief, evidence from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods in the Lower Thames is largely confined to isolated find spots. *In situ* material is rare and assemblages largely comprise reworked artefacts deriving from the Pleistocene gravels. Evidence of later prehistoric occupation is more extensive. In the Neolithic and Bronze Ages major occupation appears to have been largely confined to the dry ground of the gravel terraces, as evidenced by the distribution of cropmarks, findspots and potential settlement sites. However, there is increasing evidence to suggest that activity extended onto the floodplain, in the form of seasonal and perhaps even semi-permanent occupation in the drier periods. Timber trackways are the most common type of prehistoric site found in the former marshes and have been found on a number of sites in East London, at Silvertown (Sidell et al 2000) Beckton, Dagenham and Rainham on the north bank, and at Bramcote Green (Thomas and Rackham 1996) and Erith to the south (Sidell et al 1997, Thomas and Rackham 1996).

1.4.3 The gravel terraces of the Lower Thames are known to have been intensively settled in the later Iron Age and Roman periods (Wilkinson et al, 1988) with the development of London as a major provincial capital and the subsequent remodelling of the surrounding economies. The terrace was still the focus for occupation and it is possible that the first elements of the marshland draining process may have begun at this time. Significant changes in this period include the growth of salt-making as an important activity along the estuarine and coastal margins There is extensive evidence for Roman cemeteries and a settlement in the Barking area, and an Iron Age defended settlement at Uphall. The majority of the marshland landscape seen today was created during the later medieval period (AD1066 to 1550), when the major phases of marshland reclamation and sea defence construction seems to have begun. However it is possible that the process of reclamation had started in the early medieval period (AD410 to 1066).

1.4.4 ***Scheduled Monuments*** - A 5 km Study Area around the footprint of the bridge contains five Scheduled Monuments, which are designated sites of national importance, none of which are located within or in close proximity to the proposed TGB Scheme. The closest Scheduled Monument is Barking Abbey located c. 800 m to the north.

1.4.5 ***Findspots and Sites*** - There are numerous Findspots and Sites within a 2 km Study Area, ranging from the Palaeolithic period to post-medieval period, which indicate that there has been extensive archaeological settlement patterns in the area (refer to Gazetteer in OA 2003, Environmental Impact Report for more details).

1.5 Acknowledgements

1.5.1 Alexandra Savage from Scott Wilson Ltd and the maintenance staff from Newham Borough Council.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site

2.1.2 To determine the presence or absence, location, extent, date, character and state of preservation of any archaeological and paleo-environmental remains within the sites.

2.1.3 To determine the OD height of features and deposits encountered..

2.1.4 To identify and record evidence of peat or alluvial deposits to assist in the updating of the Halcrow cross section.

2.1.5 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The work consisted of ten test pits of approximately 2.5 m long by 1.0 m wide, located at specific surveyed points within the footprint of the proposed route.(Figs 2 and 3). The test pits were excavated using a mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a 0.8 m wide toothed bucket. The pits were excavated in spits to the depth required by the Project Geologist, A. Savage of Soil Mechanics.

2.2.2 Due to the depth of the pits exceeding Health and Safety (H & S) limits recording was undertaken from ground level using hand tapes to measure the approximate depths of deposits. Removed overburden was examined for finds prior to the pits being backfilled. The sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20, and were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (OA, 1992).

2.2.3 The location of the test pits was surveyed in using a handheld GPS (Global Positioning System) unit.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The majority of the deposits encountered were of modern waste tipped on the sites. (See context inventory for further details) Test pits 125 and 126 within Thamesmead West were the only pits to produce deposits of archaeological significance and are described below.

***Test pit 125* (Fig.4, section 1)**

3.1.2 Located at TQ 45652 80264, this was excavated to a depth of 3.8 m below the existing ground level. At the base of the pit approximately 0.6 m of tenacious black silty peat (1257) was exposed . This waterlogged deposit contained a high concentration of organic matter in the form of wood. Overlying 1257 was a 0.3 m thick band of tenacious brown clayey silt (1256), an alluvial deposit which also

contained a high organic content. Sealing layer 1256 was a 1 m thick layer of a stiff blue grey clay (1255). This layer displayed evidence of lamination suggesting an alluvial origin. Above 1255 was a 0.3 m thick layer of tenacious, semi-compacted fibrous brown peat (1254). This contained partially decomposed organic debris. Lying above layer 1254 was a 0.25 m thick band of tenacious black silty peat (1253). Although this layer contained some modern finds these appear to be intrusive having come from the overlying made ground. Layer 1253 was then sealed by two layers, 1251 and 1252, forming a 1.35 m thick band of modern made ground.

Test pit 126 (Fig.4, section 2)

3.1.3 Located at TQ 45756 80057, the test pit was excavated to a depth of 1.3 m below ground level. At the base of the pit approximately 0.3m of tenacious blue grey and yellowish brown clay (1263) was encountered. Its laminated nature suggesting an alluvial origin. Overlying layer 1263 was a 0.6 m thick band of friable olive brown clay silt (1262), containing fragments of brick and tile and representing a buried topsoil. Sealing this layer was a 0.4 m thick layer of made ground (1261) composed of mixed silts and modern demolition debris.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand from the excavated spoil during the test pitting. All the finds recovered were late 19th or 20th century in date and would have been brought in during the various phases of landfill and waste tipping. Finds were recorded but not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 Deposits 1253, 1254, 1255, 1256, 1257 and 1263 have potential for survival of paleo-environmental remains. Samples of these deposits were not taken due to the potential for contaminated groundwater.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

4.1.1 This section reviews the success of the watching brief in addressing the original fieldwork aims, and the potential for further fieldwork and analysis to provide additional information

Aim 1: To clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site.

4.1.2 Substantial deposits of made ground exist across both sites. At eight out of the ten test pit locations the base of made ground was not penetrated and no insitu alluvial deposits were exposed. The presence however at Thamesmead of a buried topsoil (1262) overlying the natural clay (1263) within Test pit 126 suggests that this part of the site has been subject to minimal truncation or disturbance associated with the deposition of the made ground.

Aim 2: *To determine the presence or absence, location, extent, date, character and state of preservation of any archaeological and palaeo-environmental remains within the sites.*

4.1.3 No archaeological remains were identified during the watching brief. However due to the limited extent and depth of the excavations, the watching brief is not considered to be wholly reliable. There is a possibility that archaeological remains may still survive deeply buried beneath deposits of made ground. In addition, the method of excavation, employing a toothed bucket fitted to the mechanical excavator, together with limited access due to safety restrictions, greatly inhibited visibility of the deposits. There is a possibility that archaeological remains may still survive deeply buried beneath deposits of made ground.

4.1.4 The peat, recorded in test pit 125, may represent a period of drier conditions at this location and should be considered a significant horizon for identifying evidence for past human activity at a time when the floodplain may have been more accessible to local communities. The laminated nature of the overlying silt- clay within testpits 125 and 126 suggests these deposits were laid down in a low-energy environment possibly at the interface between dry and wet ground.

4.1.5 Marginal locations, for example the edge the gravel terrace, marshy ground or the edge of a channel, are considered to be a focus for past human activity due to the abundance of natural resources. Many of the prehistoric remains identified on the Thames marshes in the past take the form of wooden structures or track ways, preserved in waterlogged conditions, leading from the higher dry ground of the gravel terrace onto the floodplain Although these discoveries are by no means common place they often occur on the surface or within peat deposits possibly connecting islands of higher drier ground within the floodplain. Such islands may now lie deeply buried by later deposition of alluvial deposits. The waterlogged condition of the peat and alluvial deposits recorded at Thamesmead offers the potential for good survival of palaeoenvironmental evidence in the form of plant remains, insects and pollen. Clearly the potential of this evidence would be greatly enhanced if sampled in association with archaeological remains.

Aim 3:To determine the OD height of features and deposits encountered.

4.1.6 Unfortunately no OD levels were taken by the geotechnical engineer during the fieldwork.

Aim 4: To identify and record evidence of peat or alluvial deposits to assist in the updating of the Halcrow cross section.

4.1.7 The limited exposure of undisturbed peat and alluvial deposits together with the absence of datums and radiometric dating, means the interpretation of these deposits with reference to existing stratigraphic models for the region is limited. However it is likely, based on stratigraphy, that the organic deposits date to the prehistoric period and as such may tentatively be related to Devoy's Tilbury IV period of peat formation. The overlying alluvial silt-clays however in the absence of artefactual

material could date from to any period from the later prehistoric though to the medieval period.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test Pit	*Context*	*Type*	*Depth*	*Comments*	*Finds*
101	1011	Layer	0.0 m -0.4 m	Capping layer of redeposited clay	-
	1012	Layer	0.4 m - 0.9 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, concrete, stone.
	1013	Layer	0.9 m - 1.2 m	Made ground	Brick and tile
	1014	Layer	1.2 m - 1.5 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, concrete, stone
	1015	Layer	1.5 m - 1.9 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, plastic, slag
	1016	Layer	1.9 m - 2.5 m	Made ground	Stone, plastic
	1017	Layer	2.5 m - 3.6 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, plastic, glass
	1018	Layer	3.6 m - 3.9 m	Made ground	-
102	1021	Layer	0.0 m - 0.65 m	Made ground	Brick, tile ,glass, stone, metal
	1022	Layer	0.65 m - 1.1 m	Made ground	Brick, tile
	1023	Layer	1.1 m - 1.8 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone
	1024	Layer	1.8 m - 2.3 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, pottery, wood
	1025	Layer	2.3 m - 3.0 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, metal
	1026	Layer	3.0 m - 3.5 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, pottery, glass, metal
119	1191	Layer	0.0 m - 0.55 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, glass, stone, metal
	1192	Layer	0.55 m - 0.9 m	Made ground	Casting sand, slag
	1193	Layer	0.9m - 3.5 m	Made ground	Brick, tile
120	1201	Layer	0.0 m - 0.3 m	Modern trackway surface	Brick, tile, stone, wood, glass
	1202	Layer	0.3 m - 0.7 m	Made ground	Brick, tile
	1203	Layer	0.7 m - 1.3 m	Made ground	Slag
	1204	Layer	1.3 m - 3.2 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, wood, stone, glass, pottery, metal
121	1211	Layer	0.0 m - 0.35 m	Modern trackway surface	Brick, tile
	1212	Layer	0.35 m - 0.7 m	Made ground	Brick, tile
	1213	Layer	0.7 m - 1.1 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, wood, casting sand, slag
	1214	Layer	1.1 m - 3.1 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, glass, metal, tree trunks
122	1221	Layer	0.0 m - 0.6 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, wood, glass, metal,
	1222	Layer	0.6 m - 0.9 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone

Test pit	*Context*	*Type*	*Depth*	*Comments*	*Finds*
122	1223	Layer	0.9 m - 2.1 m	Made ground	-
123	1231	Layer	0.0 m - 1.7 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone, wood, glass, metal
	1232	Layer	1.7 m - 3.8 m	Made ground	Casting sand, slag
124	1241	Layer	0.0 m - 0.7 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone, glass, wood, metal
	1242	Layer	0.7 m - 1.1 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone, glass, metal
	1243	Layer	1.1 m - 2.7 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone, glass, wood, metal, slag
	1244	Layer	2.7 m - 3.65 m	Made ground	Casting sand, slag
125	1251	Layer	0.0 m - 0.7 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone, glass, metal
	1252	Layer	0.7 m - 1.35 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone
	1253	Layer	1.35 m - 1.6 m	Uppermost layer of marshland/peat deposits	Brick, tile, stone
	1254	Layer	1.6 m - 1.9 m	Natural peat deposit	-
	1255	Layer	1.9 m - 2.9 m	Natural alluvial clay	-
	1256	Layer	2.9 m - 3.2 m	Natural alluvial deposit	Wood
	1257	Layer	3.2 m - 3.8 m	Natural peat deposit	Wood
126	1261	Layer	0.0 m - 0.4 m	Made ground	Brick, tile, stone, glass
	1262	Layer	0.4 m - 1.0 m	Probable topsoil	Brick, tile
	1263	Layer	1.0 m - 1.7 m	Natural alluvial clay	-

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Appendix 4 GLSMR/RCHME NMR Archaeological Report Form

1) TYPE OF RECORDING

Evaluation, Excavation, **Watching Brief,** Building Recording, Survey,

Geoarchaeological Evaluation, Fieldwalking, Other

2) LOCATION

Borough: Greenwich and Newham

Site address: Thamesmead Marshes, Greenwich and Jenkins Lane, Beckton, Newham

Site Name: Thames Gateway Bridge Site Code: TGD 03

Nat. grid Refs: centre of site: TQ 4537 8048, Thamesmead Marshes, TQ 4394 8289, Jenkins Lane

Limits of site: N TQ 4397 8287 S TQ 4576 8001

E TQ 4566 8026 W TQ 4400 8300

3) ORGANISATION

Name of archaeological unit/company/society: Oxford Archaeology

Address: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 OES

Site director/supervisor: Mike Sims Project manager: Andrew Holmes

Funded by:

4) DURATION

Date fieldwork started 11th August 2003 Date finished: 13th August 2003

Fieldwork previously notified? NO

Fieldwork will continue? YES

5) PERIODS REPRESENTED

Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon (pre-AD 1066), Medieval (AD 1066-1485), Post-Medieval, **Unknown**

6) PERIOD SUMMARIES Deposits consistent with buried landscapes were found. Lack of dating evidence makes period assignment subjective.

7) NATURAL

Type: Mixed blue grey and yellow brown alluvial clay

Height above Ordnance datum: Between 2 m and 8 m depending on depth of made ground.

8) LOCATION OF ARCHIVES

a) Please provide an estimate of the quantity of material in your possession for the following categories:

NOtes 50 x A4	PLans 4 x A3	PHotos	Ngtives 36
SLides 36	COrrespondence	MScripts (unpub reports, etc)	
BUlk finds 0	SMall finds 0	SOil samples 0	
OTher , sections x 10			

b) The archive has been prepared and stored in accordance with MGC standards and will be deposited in the following location: TBC

c) Has a security copy of the archive been made?: NO

10) BIBLIOGRAPHY

See Appendix 2 Bibliography and References

SIGNED: DATE:

NAME :

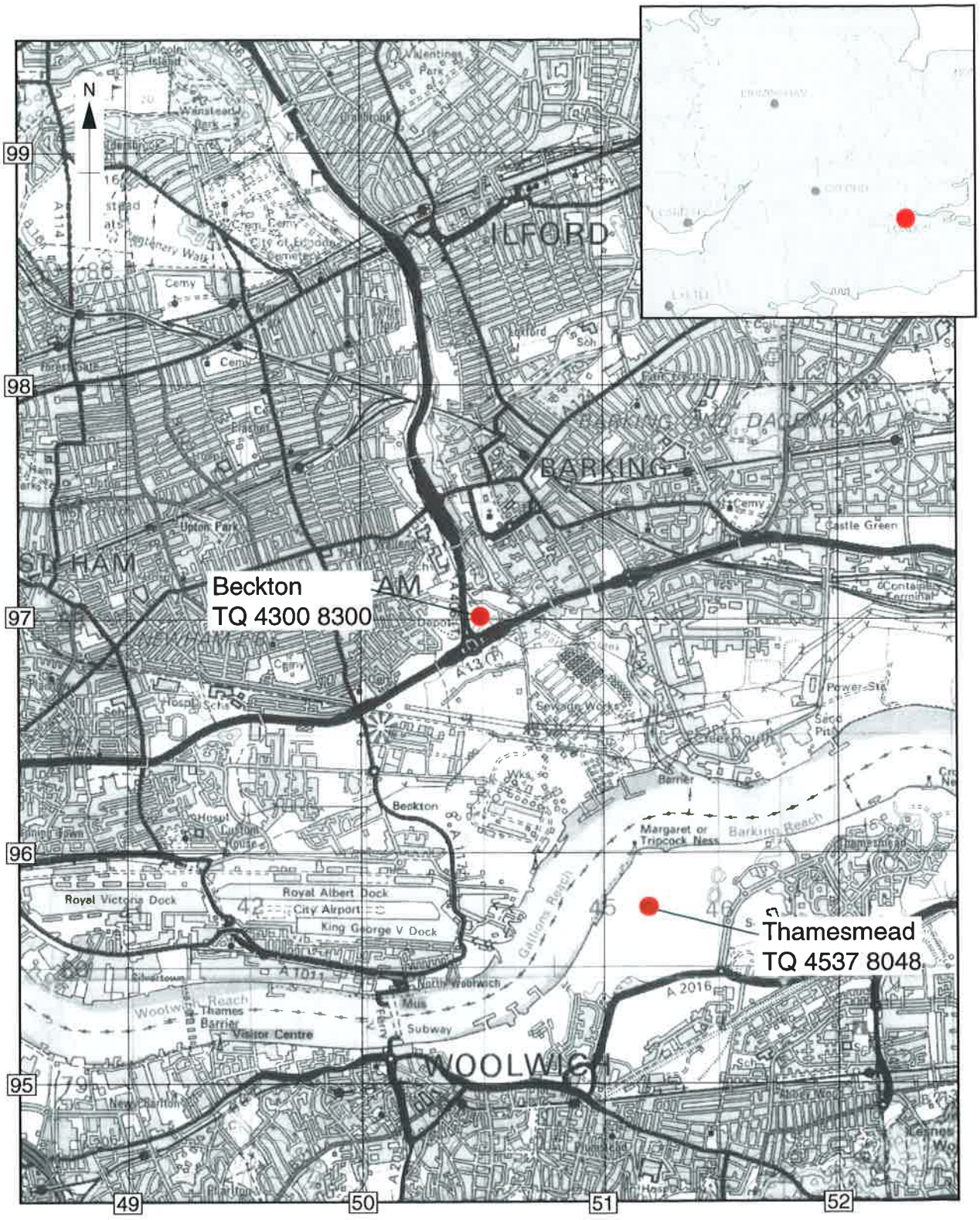

Figure 1: Site location

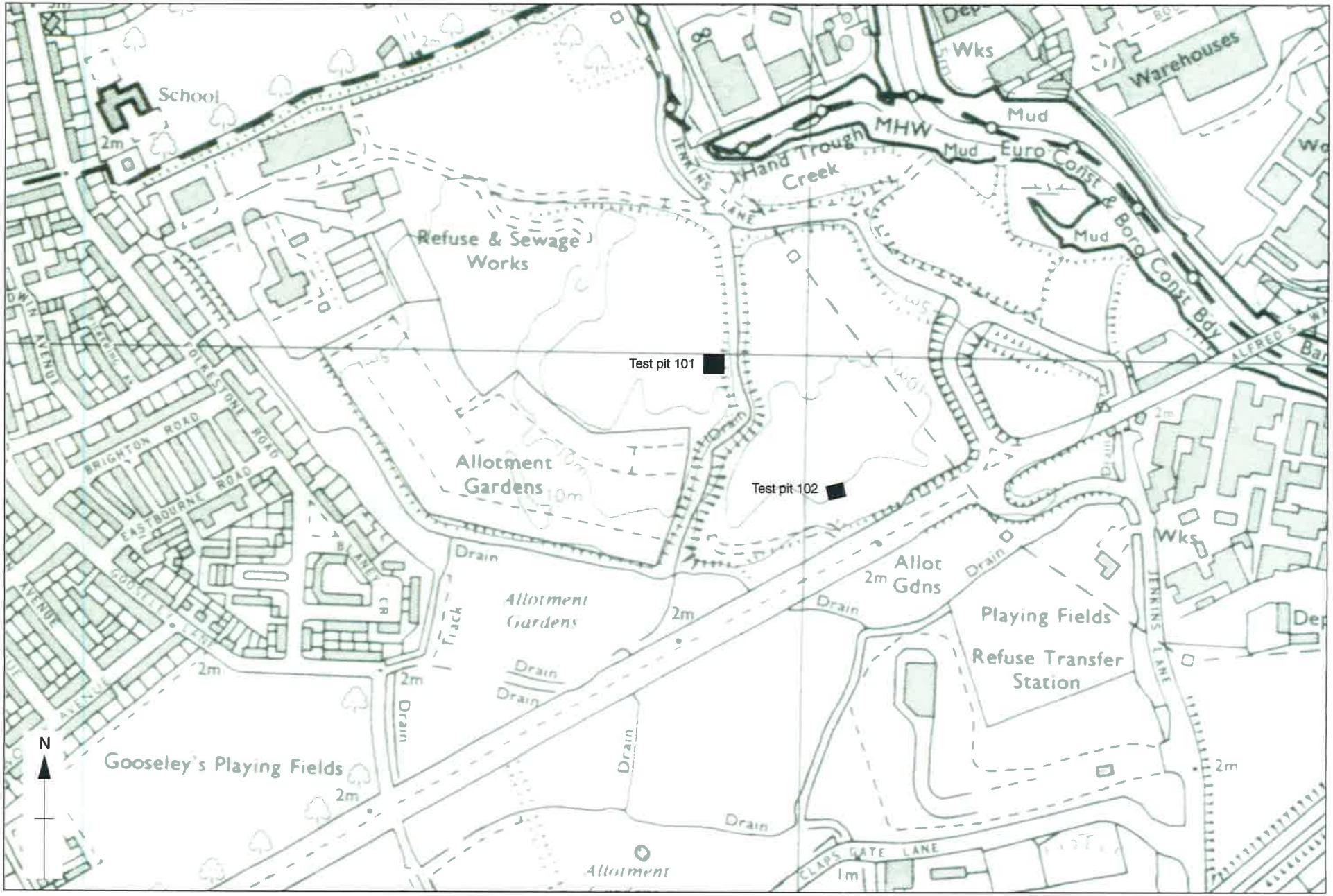

Figure 2: Test pit location plan - Beckton

0 200 m

1:5000

Figure 3: Test pit location plan - Thamesmead

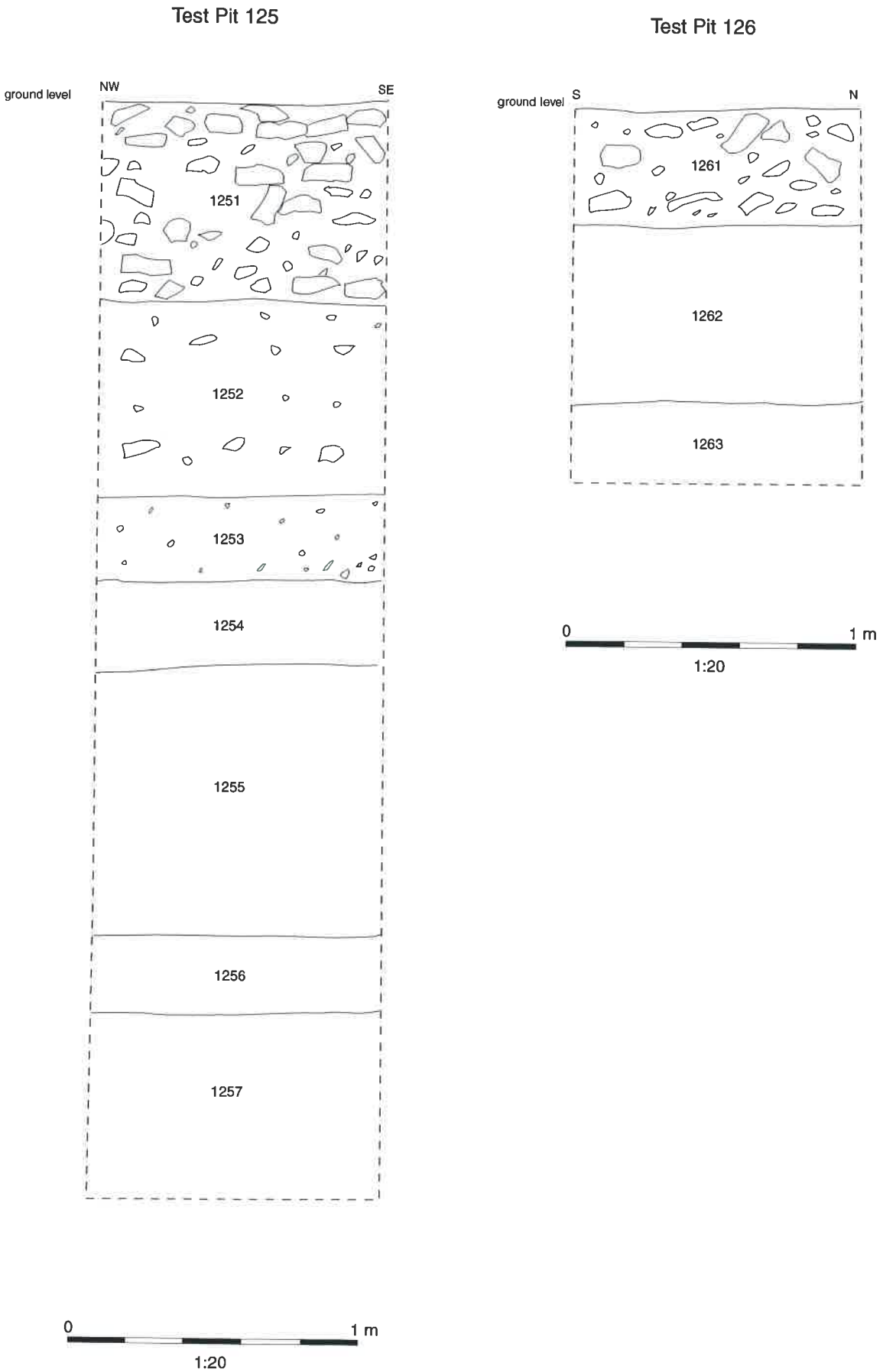

Figure 4 Test Pits 125 and 126 - sections

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