

# QUEENHITHE



View of Queenhithe flour wharf Charles Tomkins, 1801

Queenhithe was a thriving Saxon and medieval dock and is the only inlet surviving along the City waterfront today.

In AD 886 the Roman City was reoccupied by King Alfred the Great, the City walls providing some protection from Viking raids. King Alfred established the first harbour here at ‘Ethelred’s Hythe’. It is recorded in contemporary charters as a trading shore, where goods were sold directly from beached boats. The harbour was known as Queenhithe after Queen Matilda, wife of Henry I, was granted the dues from the dock in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. This right was inherited by successive English queens. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century it had become the principal dock for handling grain and other foodstuffs to feed London’s growing population. However, the dock declined in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in favour of the better facilities for larger vessels at Billingsgate downstream of London Bridge.



The inlet of Queenhithe is clearly visible on the ‘Agas’ woodcut map of 1561–70



Timbers from an aisled hall reused as part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century quay at Queenhithe

Archaeological excavations beneath the buildings behind you revealed evidence of Roman quays, King Alfred’s trading shore and the succession of medieval waterfronts, each one reclaiming more land from the Thames.

Most of these structures, known as revetments, were wooden and they have been well-preserved in the waterlogged conditions. Some were built using timbers recycled from buildings and ships, giving archaeologists a very rare opportunity to study Saxon and medieval woodworking techniques and to date them accurately by analysing tree-ring growth.

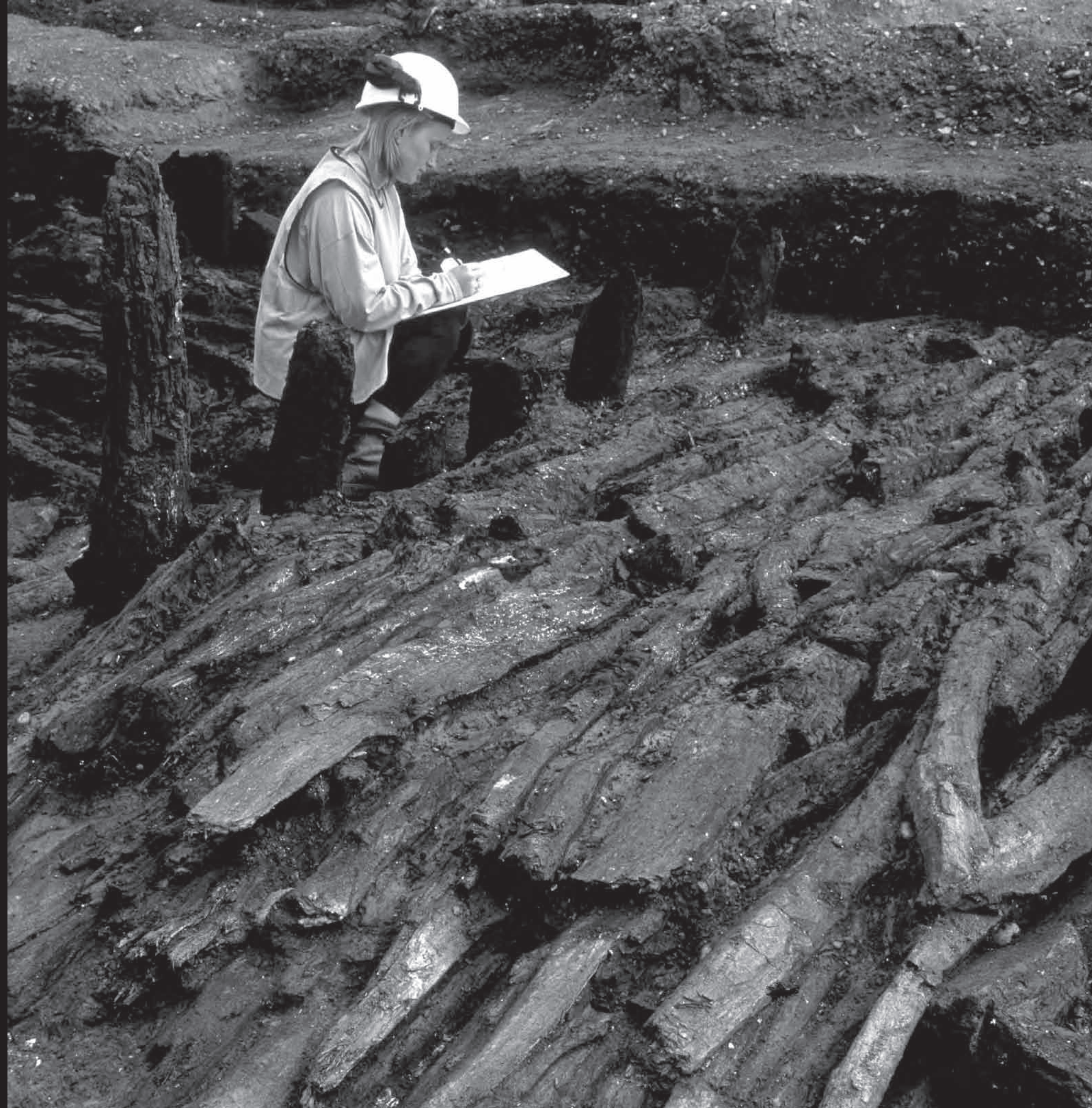
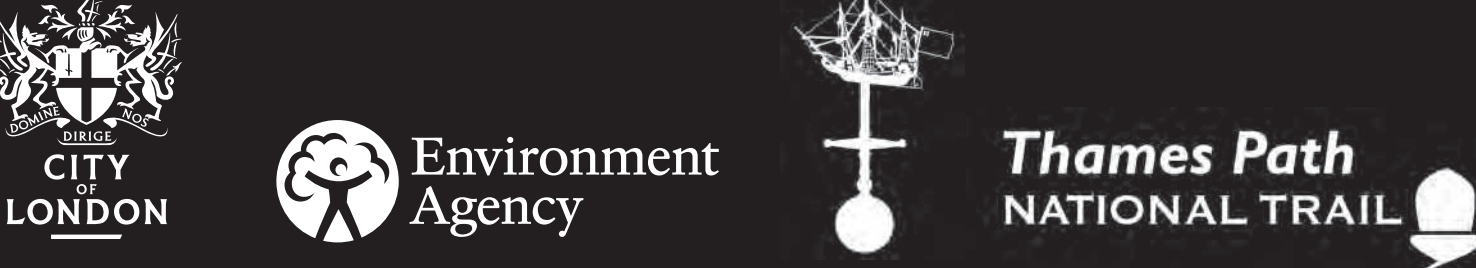
The river silts and reclamation dumps associated with these waterfronts have produced finds in remarkably good condition, particularly metal objects.



19<sup>th</sup> century barge beds are still visible at low tide today

After the 14<sup>th</sup> century waterfronts began to be built in stone, which lasted much longer, and the process of reclaiming land slowed down. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century most of the waterfront in the City had reached the modern alignment.

Today, remnants of the Victorian use of the riverfront and port can be seen at low tide on the foreshore beneath you. These are barge beds, constructed to level and stabilise the foreshore for berthing flat-bottomed barges, which transported goods to and from the warehouses lining the waterfront in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Timbers laid to help prevent erosion and flooding in AD 1050 next to the Saxon dock

## CONSERVATION

The foreshore at Queenhithe Wharf helps to support the 350 species of invertebrates and 115 species of fish which can be found in the River Thames. The foreshore, the area between Low and High Water Mark, represents the most ecologically important area as it provides somewhere for algae to grow, a home for invertebrates, feeding grounds for birds and spawning areas for fish.

The foreshore habitat in the City of London is severely constrained by urban development. We have been careful not to disturb this fragile environment during construction works by limiting our works on the foreshore.

The timber fenders on the face of the wall have been kept as they contribute to the biodiversity of the river by allowing a base for seaweeds and invertebrates.

Gammarus zaddachi, a typical estuarine shrimp, and two mudsnails, viewed under the microscope



## FLOODING

This river wall at Queenhithe Wharf forms part of the tidal flood defences protecting the City of London from flooding. If any section of the walls along this stretch of river were to breach it would cause considerable flood damage to property and major disruption to transport and infrastructure. The Environment Agency, along with the City of London, have strengthened and improved the wall at Queenhithe Wharf to reduce the flood risk to people and property. The design of these improvement works has been guided by English Heritage, who required the appearance of this scheduled ancient monument to be maintained. The design ensured that minimum disturbance was caused to the archaeology and ecology of the wharf.

The strengthened river wall was opened by Alderman Gordon Haines in Summer 2008.