



Searching the Thames Foreshore

Code of Practice

Introduction

The Port of London Authority (PLA) is the statutory harbour and navigation authority for the tidal Thames – the outer Thames Estuary to Teddington Lock. The PLA also owns much of the riverbed and foreshore up to the mean high-water mark. As part of this role, the PLA regulates searching and excavation of the foreshore to the west of the Thames Barrier, on both its own land and on behalf of the Crown Estate on its land. Permits are issued by the PLA for these purposes.

This Code of Practice has been developed to provide guidance to those involved in searching the Thames foreshore on the requirements that are necessary to ensure the activity is carried out in a safe and sustainable manner.

The Foreshore

The foreshore of the River Thames is a sensitive environment, and London's longest archaeological site, with finds dating back to 4500BC, as well as the border to London's working river and the UK's busiest inland waterway and must be protected and respected by all that use it.

There are various areas where searching is restricted or even prohibited to preserve this valuable historic resource and protect it from environmental harm. Up to date details on where searching is allowed can be found on the PLA's website, and it is recommended that this is checked regularly.

www.pla.co.uk/thames-foreshore-permits

Safety

Any Permit Holder must:

- Take appropriate care when using access points, most of which are not owned or maintained by the PLA, as these may become slippery after being covered by the tide.
- Ensure that they know where there are alternative access or exit points to and from the foreshore, in case your original access point becomes unusable due to a rising tide. Check the tide tables for the area to ensure you know the times of high and low water. There are available along with live tide data on the PLA website – www.pla.co.uk or for a mobile friendly version.
- Check the weather forecast before venturing onto the foreshore and taking appropriate precautions. Care should be exercised around any outfall structures when heavy or sudden rainfall is experienced or expected, even some distance from the river.

- Wear appropriate sturdy footwear as the foreshore can be uneven, muddy, and there may be remnants of river works and other trip hazards.
- To avoid infections, including Weil's disease, do not consume food or touch your face (mouth, eyes etc) without first washing your hands.
- Tell someone where you intend to search and what time you intend to return. Please also let them know if you are delayed.
- Take a mobile phone with you. If you get into difficulty and require assistance, contact the Coastguard via 999.

Restricted areas

Any permit to search the Thames foreshore only applies to land within the ownership of the PLA or the Commissioners, and to the west of the Thames Barrier. Searching the foreshore down river (east) of the Thames Barrier is prohibited.

Restrictions are in place to preserve historically significant sites and for safety reasons and are not made unnecessarily.

Any permit holder must respect any areas that are restricted as shown on the map available on the PLA website: www.pla.co.uk/thames-foreshore-permits.

The PLA reserves the right to revoke the permit of anyone found searching in a restricted area.

Searching best practice

Permit holders should always aim to disturb the foreshore as little as possible.

Each and every hole (however small or shallow) that is dug must be refilled with the excavated material to support the local environment, before it is left or covered by the next incoming tide.

Boulders should not be overturned but picked up and moved to one side to prevent any flora or fauna living on the surface from being destroyed. Any boulders that are moved must be replaced to their original position.

Even for Digging Permit holders, no digging or scraping should be undertaken around fixed structures in the foreshore. The combined effect of tides, waves and digging may undermine walls, piles and other structures, and allow moorings to shift. Digging around fixed structures can create conflict with other users and property owners and may damage important structures such as flood defences, moorings, slipways, river walls etc.

Litter

Any rubbish created by the activity on the foreshore should be taken off the foreshore and disposed of responsibly.

Reporting and Recording Regime

Permit Holders must report their finds under the Portable Antiquities Scheme (www.finds.org.uk) which can be done through their local Finds Liaison Officer. For London, this is done through the London Museum (formerly known as the Museum of London).

When reporting finds, Permit Holders must be able to provide details of how, where and when the object was found. '[What3Words](#)' can be useful to provide the "where" information.

Where an object found by the Permit Holder is, or is believed to be, treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996, this must be notified to the local Coroner. Potential treasure is usually identified and reported in conjunction with the Finds Liaison Officer.

As stated in the Terms and Conditions of the permits, the PLA and Commissioners reserve their rights in relation to the ownership of objects found, and no rights are granted to a Permit Holder in this regard.

The PLA does not support the disposal of items found on the foreshore for gain, whether financial or otherwise, to avoid the exploitation of our unique archaeological environment.

Exceptions to this may be agreed in certain circumstances, such as items to be precured by museums, and holders of Creative Permits, where finds are incorporated into art or other creative ventures.

Useful contact information

The Port of London Authority:

Website:	www.pla.co.uk
Mobile friendly website:	mobile.pla.co.uk
Email:	Foreshore.Permits@pla.co.uk
PLA Thames Barrier Navigation Centre:	0203 260 7711
PLA Harbour Master:	01474 562 200

London Museum (previously known as the Museum of London)	www.londonmuseum.org.uk
Portable Antiquities Scheme – Finds Liaison Officer	www.finds.org.uk/contacts swyatt@londonmuseum.org.uk
HM Coastguard in an Emergency	999 or 112