

Plimsoll Statue, Hotwells Road, Bristol.

An Archaeological Watching Brief.



CONTEXT ONE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES LTD

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An Archaeological Watching Brief

for

Wessex Water plc

by



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Non-technical summary

Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief during groundworks for a section of sewer improvements at Plimsoll Statue, Hotwells Road, Bristol (NGR ST 56675 72570), over nine days between the 7th of June and the 30th of October 2006. The project was commissioned and funded by Wessex Water plc.

The investigation was requested by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), Bristol City Council, on the advice of Mr Bob Jones, (City Archaeologist, Bristol City Council) as a condition of granting planning permission for the construction of a large, partially above ground screen/ pump chamber (16.5m x 8.3m x 6m deep) at Plimsoll Statue, Hotwells Road, Bristol.

Groundwork excavations within two Test Pits revealed a simple sequence of modern Tarmac pavement surfaces overlying modern made ground. Below this several layers of alluvial river silt had built up within the main area of works.

A cobbled surface was observed beneath one of the layers of silt and several wooden piles had been driven into the river bed. It is likely that both the cobbles and the wooden piles relate to maritime activities on the banks of the River Avon. The wooden piles are likely to have been mooring posts for ships and boats using the river, whilst the cobbled surface probably formed part of a ramp or slipway, providing the boats with an access point. The lack of finds recovered from the Watching Brief means that it is not possible to accurately date these structures, although a post-medieval date is suggested.

A 16th century leather shoe was found within a deposit below the cobbled surface, quite close to the retaining wall running along the eastern edge of the Site. The sole of a second shoe (dating to the post-medieval period) was also discovered but unstratified.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief during groundworks for a section of sewer improvements at Plimsoll Statue, Hotwells Road, Bristol (NGR ST 56675 72570) (hereafter referred to as the Site), over nine days between the 7th of June and the 30th of October 2006. The project was commissioned and funded by Wessex Water plc.
- 1.2. The investigation was requested by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), Bristol City Council, on the advice of Mr Bob Jones, (City Archaeologist, Bristol City Council) as a condition of granting planning permission for the construction of a large, partially above ground screen/pump chamber (16.5m x 8.3m x 6m deep) at Plimsoll Statue, Hotwells Road, Bristol. In an email dated 26 April 2006 from Mr Jones to COAS it was stated:

"Immediately to the north of the Plimsoll statue are the substantial remains of a former landing stage, while the slipway was presumably connected with this. There are also suggestions that there may be further timber structures close to the statue - the 2nd edition OS shows mooring posts in this location and it is possible that there was a more substantial structure in this area. There is also the possibility that earlier timber structures could be found, given the extremely waterlogged conditions in this area."

- 1.3. The Site is situated just 880m south-east of the historic core of Bristol. The Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) and the Bristol Sites and Monuments Record (BSMR) record five archaeological events within c. 200m radius of the Site.
- 1.4. Given the recorded archaeological data for the environs, it was considered that archaeological features/deposits could be present on the Site, and that these would be damaged or destroyed by the development. However, as the nature or presence of such features/deposits had not been proven on the basis of currently available information, it was determined that a reasonable archaeological response would be to carry out a Watching Brief during all ground disturbance.
- 1.5. At the request of Mr Jones, COAS issued a *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief: Plimsoll Statue, Hotwells Road, Bristol* (April 2006) which provided a strategy for the archaeological works. This was submitted to and approved by Mr Jones prior to the commencement of the Watching Brief.
- 1.6. The request for the archaeological work follows advice given by central Government as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPG1), General Policy and principles*, 1997 and *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16) issued by the DoE in 1990. The recommendation also conforms to Policy 19 of the *Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Joint Replacement Structure Plan* (adopted September 2002) and Policy B22 of the *Bristol Local Plan* (adopted December 1997).
- 1.7. This report summarises the topographical, geological, archaeological and historical setting of the site, and presents the results of the Watching Brief.

2. Definition and objectives of a Watching Brief

2.1. An Archaeological Watching Brief is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) as:

“...a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive.” (IFA rev.1999).

2.2. The purpose of a Watching Brief is similarly defined by the IFA and is:

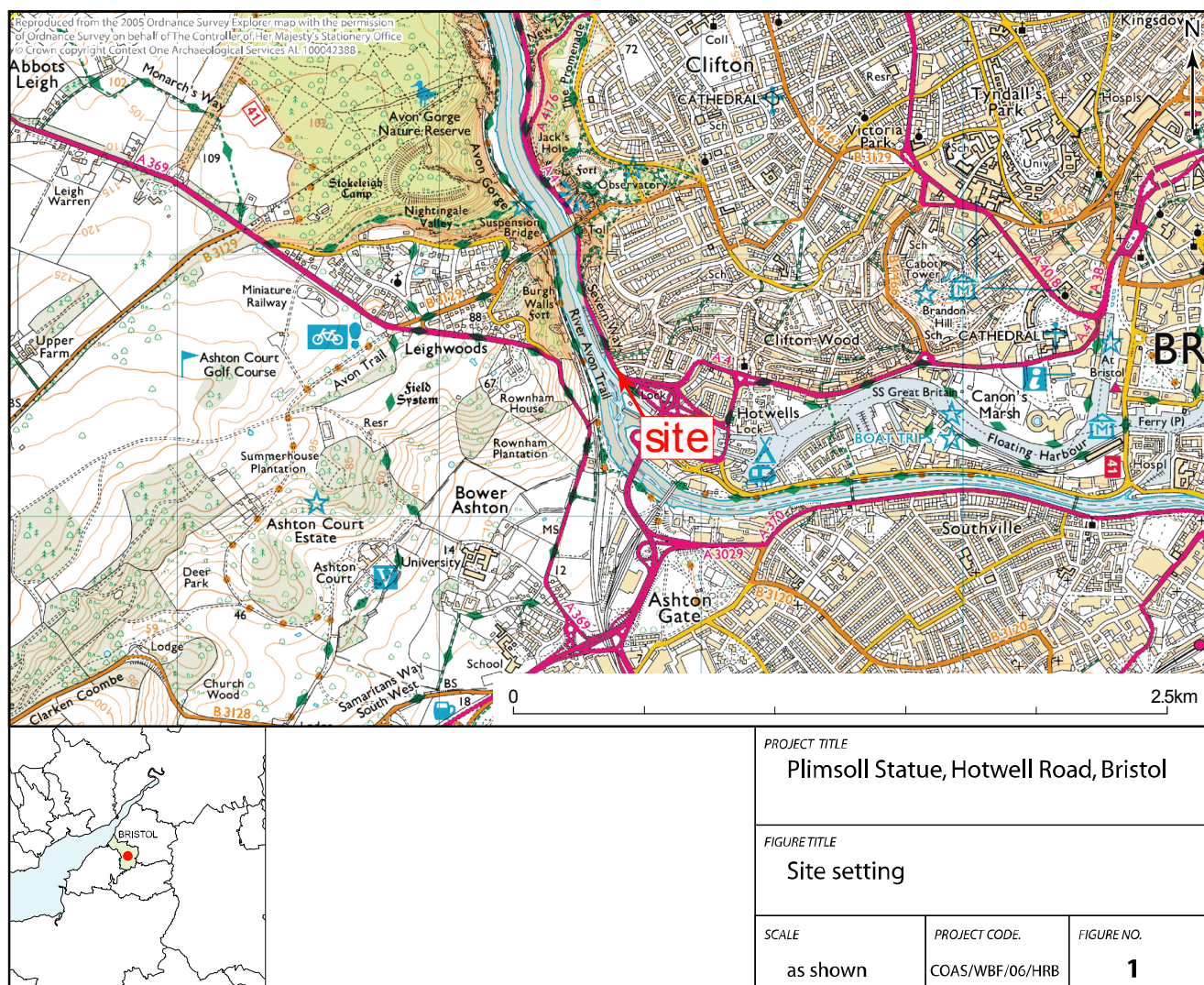
- *“To allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, their presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.*
- *To provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the Watching Brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.” (IFA rev.1999)*

2.3. The results of a Watching Brief are used to:

- produce a record of the location, nature, significance, importance and date of any archaeological remains encountered on the Site;
- add to the knowledge about the previous history of activity on the current site and its surroundings; and
- provide information to influence future planning decisions in the area.

3. Site location, topography and geology

3.1. Hotwells Road (NGR ST 56675 72570) is situated c. 880m south-east of the historic core of Bristol (**Figure 1**). The Site occupies roughly level ground c.12m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) on the eastern bank of the River Avon. According to the British Geological Survey (2001), the Site is underlain by estuarine alluvium. The soils in this area are characterised by loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater (Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC), 2006).



4. Archaeological Background

4.1. The archaeological background for the Site has largely been drawn from secondary sources. This comprised a data search of archaeological records held by Bristol City Council as part of the Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) and the Bristol Sites and Monuments Record (BSMR). A summary of this information is displayed below in **Table 1**.

SMR No.	Description	NGR	Distance/Direction from Site
Prehistoric (500,000BC - AD43)			
BUAD 3282	Late Bronze Age socketed axe. Found during deep excavation for construction of new locks.	ST 56768 72436	c. 160m SSE
BSMR 20685	Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (2001). Evidence of Bronze Age activity in the vicinity.	ST 56810 72578	c. 140m E
Medieval (AD1066 - AD1547)			
BUAD 919M	Ferry. Old Rownham Ferry said to have been established by St. Augustine's Abbey, Bristol.	ST 56700 72480	c. 100m S

SMR No.	Description	NGR	Distance/Direction from Site
Post-medieval (AD1547 – 1800)			
BUAD 1580M	Building. Nos. 302-304 Hotwells Road originally built in c. 1710. The well in the rear garden was the public water supply for the area until it was capped during mid-19 th century following cholera outbreaks.	ST 56762 72528	c. 90m SE
BSMR 20685	Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (2001). A survey of the manor of Clifton produced in 1746 indicated a large group of buildings, originally occupied by middle-class professionals. Demolished in 1952.	ST 56810 72578	c. 140m E
Modern (1801 – present)			
BUAD 598M	Building. Harbour Master's House built 1858. Demolished in 1964.	ST 56783 72389	c. 220m SSE

Table 1. Summary of archaeological events/find spots within c. 200m radius of the Site.

5. Methodology

Wessex Water methodology

- 5.1. A machine with a toothless bucket excavated the main construction area (c. 22m x c. 9m) to a total depth of c. 4.5m from the level of the existing road. The machine excavation was carried out in 1m spits. To protect the Site from twice daily flooding by the high tide (**Plate 1**), scalpings were laid down after the removal of each 1m spit and then removed with the next 1m spit.
- 5.2. At regular intervals it was necessary to consolidate the retaining wall to the east of the Site with wall ties. These were inserted into holes drilled into the walls surface. Two Test Pits (TP1 and TP2) (**Figure 2**) were hand dug on the eastern side of the retaining wall to locate any existing services before the drilling commenced. After excavating to a depth of c. 1.2m, sheet metal shoring was inserted into the sides of the main trench to stop them collapsing. As digging commenced beyond 1.2m, the sheets were piled into place (**Plate 2**). It was therefore, not possible to fully or accurately record the northern, western or southern edges of the trench.



Plate 1. High tide on the River Avon



Plate 2. Machine excavating trench surrounded with sheet metal shoring

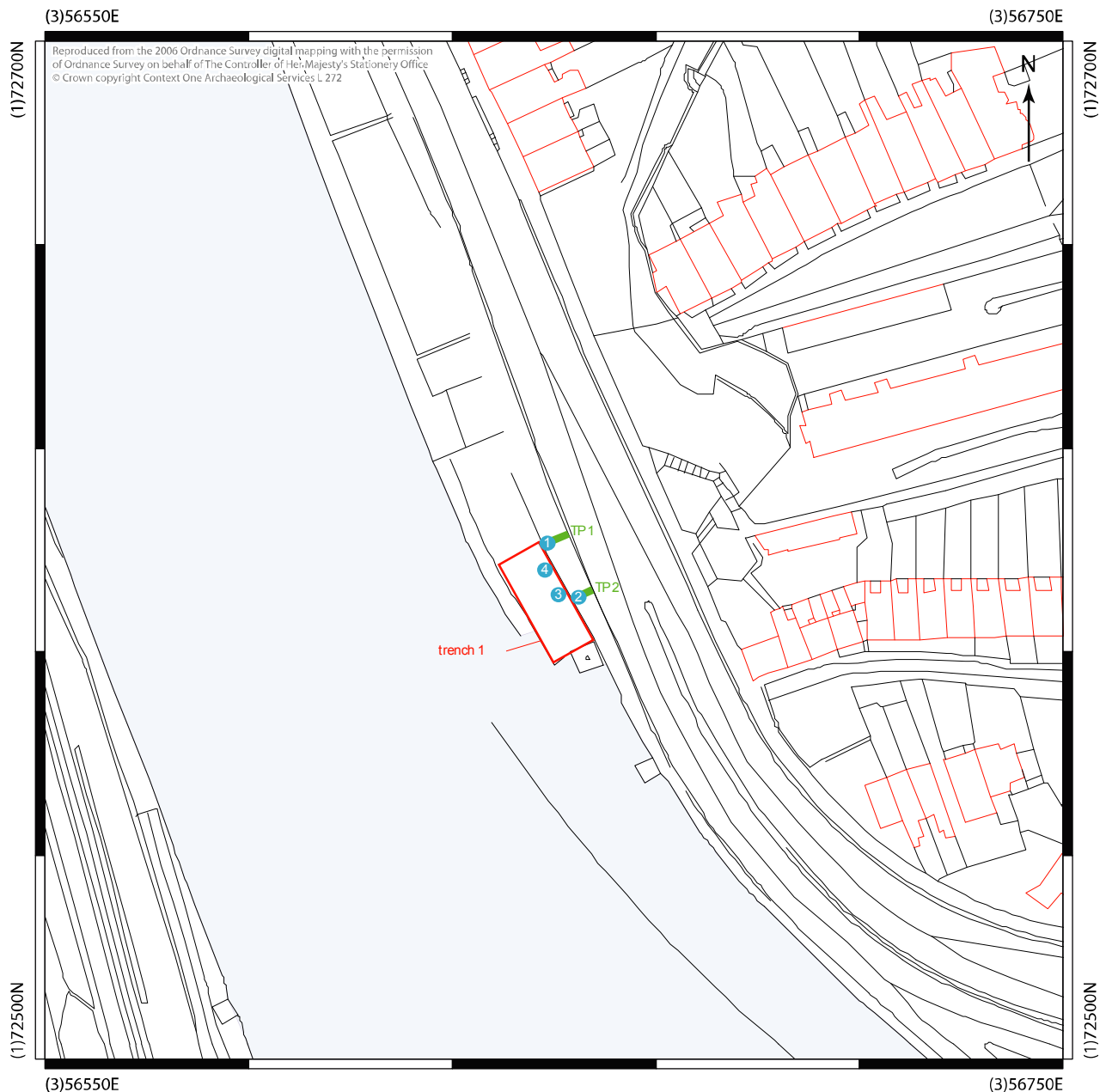
Archaeological methodology

- 5.3. The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* published by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) in October, 1994 (rev. September, 1999). COAS adhered to the *Code of Conduct* issued by the IFA in October, 1997, and the *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology* (1990, rev. September, 2000), at all times during the course of the investigation. Current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.
- 5.4. A qualified archaeologist was present on site to monitor all major groundworks relating to the development for the purpose of identifying and recording any archaeological features/deposits present and retrieving artefacts.
- 5.5. A written record was maintained of archaeological features/deposits and finds encountered using standard COAS *pro-forma* recording sheets. In addition, at appropriate locations across the site, profile sections were recorded using standard COAS *pro-forma* profile log sheets to illustrate the principal stratigraphic and physical characteristics of the deposits encountered. Soil colours were recorded using a Munsell soil colour chart.
- 5.6. A photographic record of the Watching Brief was prepared involving the use of monochrome photographs and digital images. This included photographs illustrating features identified and significant finds discovered. The photographic record also included working shots to illustrate the general nature of the archaeological operation mounted.
- 5.7. Artefacts collected from archaeological features/deposits were bagged using a combination of site code and context numbers. Bulk finds such as post-medieval and modern brick and tile were not collected although location, type and frequency were recorded.
- 5.8. All finds from the site were retained for processing and conservation where necessary, in preparation for further analysis and archiving. A specialist report of the artefact assemblage was compiled using both descriptive and tabular formats (see section 7.)

6. Results

- 6.1. The deposits and features encountered during fieldwork are listed and described in **Appendix 1**. In the text context cut numbers appear in square brackets, e.g. [901]; layer and fill numbers appear in standard brackets, e.g. (900). Where a feature is discussed, it is referenced with its cut and associated fill numbers. A representative profile of the deposit matrix was taken within each Test Pit (Profile 1 and Profile 2) and within the main area of works (Profile 3 and Profile 4) (**Figure 2**).
- 6.2. Groundwork excavations within Test Pits 1 and 2 (to a depth of c. 0.45m and c. 1m respectively) revealed a simple vertical sequence of modern footpaths (100) and (200), overlying modern made ground (101) and (201) (Profile 1 and Profile 2).
- 6.3. Various layers of alluvial river silt (300), (2000) and (2001), were observed within the main area of works to a depth of at least 4.5m (Profile 4). At the centre of the western edge of the Site the alluvial silts overlay a cobbled surface (1000), the full extent of which was not revealed. At least two wooden piles (1001) and (1002) had been driven into the alluvial silts.

The piles were not fully recorded as it was not possible to safely enter the Site with the machine, once the metal shoring was in place.



<div> <div style="border: 2px solid red; width: 20px; height: 10px; display: inline-block;"></div> site boundary </div> <div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 20px; height: 10px; display: inline-block;"></div> test pits </div> <div> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; width: 10px; height: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center; line-height: 10px;">x</div> profile </div>		PROJECT TITLE Plimsoll statue, Hotwell Road, Bristol	
		FIGURE TITLE Detailed site setting showing area of development	
SCALE as shown		PROJECT CODE. COAS/WBF/06/HRB	FIGURE NO. 2

7. The finds

- 7.1. The finds were separated into artefact types and quantified by context number, quantity and weight in grams. This data is presented as a table (**Table 2**). Bulk finds such as post-medieval and modern brick/tile and slate were noted on the profile logs and context sheets but not collected. The majority of the finds are post-medieval or modern in date and are likely to derive from casual loss or dumping. A request has been made to the site owner to transfer the title of all finds recovered to Bristol City Museums and Art Gallery.
- 7.2. Of note in the assemblage is a near complete early 16th century pointed shoe with a high cut vamp (**Plate 3**). The shoe consists of; a vamp, a sole, part of the welt, a fragment of the sole and two rear quarters joined by edge/flesh butt seams to each other and the vamp; these have latchet straps crossing over the vamp that would have originally been fastened by a buckle. The shoe measures 220mm long and has worn through around the big toe.



Plate 3. 16th century pointed leather shoe

Object Number	Context Number	No.	Weight	Period	Comments
Pottery					
-	101	1	8g	c.1780 +	Transfer printed whiteware
-	101	1	62g	c.1840 +	Transfer printed whiteware pen rest
-	101	1	19g	Post - medieval	Red earthenware
-	u/s	2	107g	Post - medieval	Red earthenware
-	u/s	2	37g	1780 +	Transfer printed whiteware
-	u/s	2	6g	1750 +	Glazed fine earthenware
CBM					
	u/s	1	76g	Modern	Glazed wall tile
Metal					
-	u/s	1	10g	Post – medieval	Fragment of iron knife
Animal bone					
-	u/s	1	48g	-	Cattle rib
-	u/s	1	29g	-	Left sheep/goat humerus
Leather					
-	3000	1	159g	c.1500 - 1550	Shoe
-	u/s	1	87g	Post – medieval	Round shoe sole

Table 2. Finds by context

References

Egan G., 2005, *Material culture In London in an age of transition, Tudor and Stuart finds from c. 1450-1700 from excavations at riverside sites in Southwark*, MOLAS Monograph 19

Marc Carlson, I., *Footwear of the middle ages; an ongoing examination of the history and development of footwear and shoemaking techniques up to the end of the sixteenth century*,
<http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/shoe/SHOEHOME.HTM>

8. Discussion and conclusions

- 8.1. A cobbled surface was observed beneath one of the layers of silt and several wooden piles had been driven into the river bed. It is likely that both the cobbles and the wooden piles relate to maritime activities on the banks of the River Avon. The wooden piles are likely to have been mooring posts for ships and boats using the river, whilst the cobbled surface probably formed part of a ramp or slipway, providing the boats with an access point. The lack of finds recovered from the Watching Brief means that it is not possible to accurately date these structures, although a post-medieval date is suggested.
- 8.2. A 16th century leather shoe was found within a deposit below the cobbled surface, quite close to the retaining wall running along the eastern edge of the Site. The sole of a second shoe (dating to the post-medieval period) was also discovered but unstratified.

9. Archive

- 9.1. The written archive is currently held at the offices of Context One Archaeological Services Ltd and consists of 2 monochrome photographs, 27 digital images in .jpg format, 4 COAS *pro-forma* profile log sheets and a photographic register. Arrangements will be made to deposit the archive with the Bristol City Museums and Art Gallery within 12 months following the

submission of this report. As noted in section 7.1 above, a request has been made to the site owner to transfer the title of all finds recovered to Bristol City Museums and Art Gallery.

- 9.2. Copies of the Watching Brief report will be deposited with:

Wessex Water plc
Claverton Down Road
Claverton Down
Bath
BA2 7WW

City Centre Projects and Urban Design Team
Department of Environment, Transport and Leisure
Planning Services
Brunel House
St George's Road
Bristol
BS1 5UY

- 9.3. As part of our commitment to public archaeology, an e-report will be available to view online or download as an Adobe Acrobat™ file from the COAS website at www.contextone.co.uk/bristol.htm following entry onto the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) where it will become a publicly accessible document.

10. COAS acknowledgements

- 10.1. Context One Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank Ms Katie Dunmore (Environmental Services Team, Wessex Water plc), for her assistance throughout the course of the investigation, and Mr Bob Jones (City Archaeologist, Bristol City Council), for curatorial advice.

11. Bibliography

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Planning Policy Guidance Note 1: General Policy and Principles, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), 1985 (rev. 2000)

Code of Conduct, Reading: IFA

**Institute of Field
Archaeologists (IFA), 1990
(rev. 2000)**

*Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual
Arrangements in Field Archaeology*, Reading: IFA

**Institute of Field
Archaeologists (IFA), 1994
rev. 1999**

Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief

**Multi Agency Geographic
Information for the
Countryside (MAGIC),
2006**

<http://www.magic.gov.uk>

Appendix 1. Context Summary

Context no.	Period	Type	Description	Length	Dimensions	
					Width/Diameter	Thickness/Depth
Profile 1						
100	Modern	Layer	Tarmac pavement.	-	-	0.10m
101	Modern	Layer	Made ground. Firm sand and gravel with common small angular stones and lumps of tarmac.	-	-	0.40m+
Profile 2						
200	Modern	Layer	Concrete footpath.	-	-	0.25m
201	Modern	Layer	Made ground. Friable sand and gravel with, brick, charcoal and slate.	-	-	0.75m+
Profile 3						
300	Modern	Layer	Alluvium. Compact clay with brick, coal, plastic and rubble inclusions.	-	-	1.00m+
Profile 4						
2000	Modern	Layer	Alluvium. Dark greyish brown (10YR 5/2) compact clay with brick inclusions.	-	-	2.20m
2001	Modern	Layer	Alluvium. Very dark grey (10YR 3/1) firm clay.	-	-	1.20m
2002	19th century	Structure	Cobbled slipway. Constructed with rectangular stones (0.45m x 0.2m x 0.1m)	-	-	0.20m
Trench 1						
1000	19th century	Structure	Cobbled slipway. Constructed with rectangular stones (0.45m x 0.2m x 0.1m)	-	-	0.20m
1001	Post – medieval	Structure	Wooden pile.	-	-	-
1002	Post – medieval	Structure	Wooden pile.	-	-	-
1003	Post – medieval	Structure	Wooden pile.	1.20m +	0.25m	-
3000	Post – medieval	Layer	Alluvium. Very dark grey (10YR 3/1) firm clay.	-	-	0.40m+