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Southampton Archaeology Unit

Report 850

Archaeological watching brief at 6 Kent Street, Portsea, Portsmouth, 2007/17

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2007

Client: Latimer & Ayles Partnership Limited



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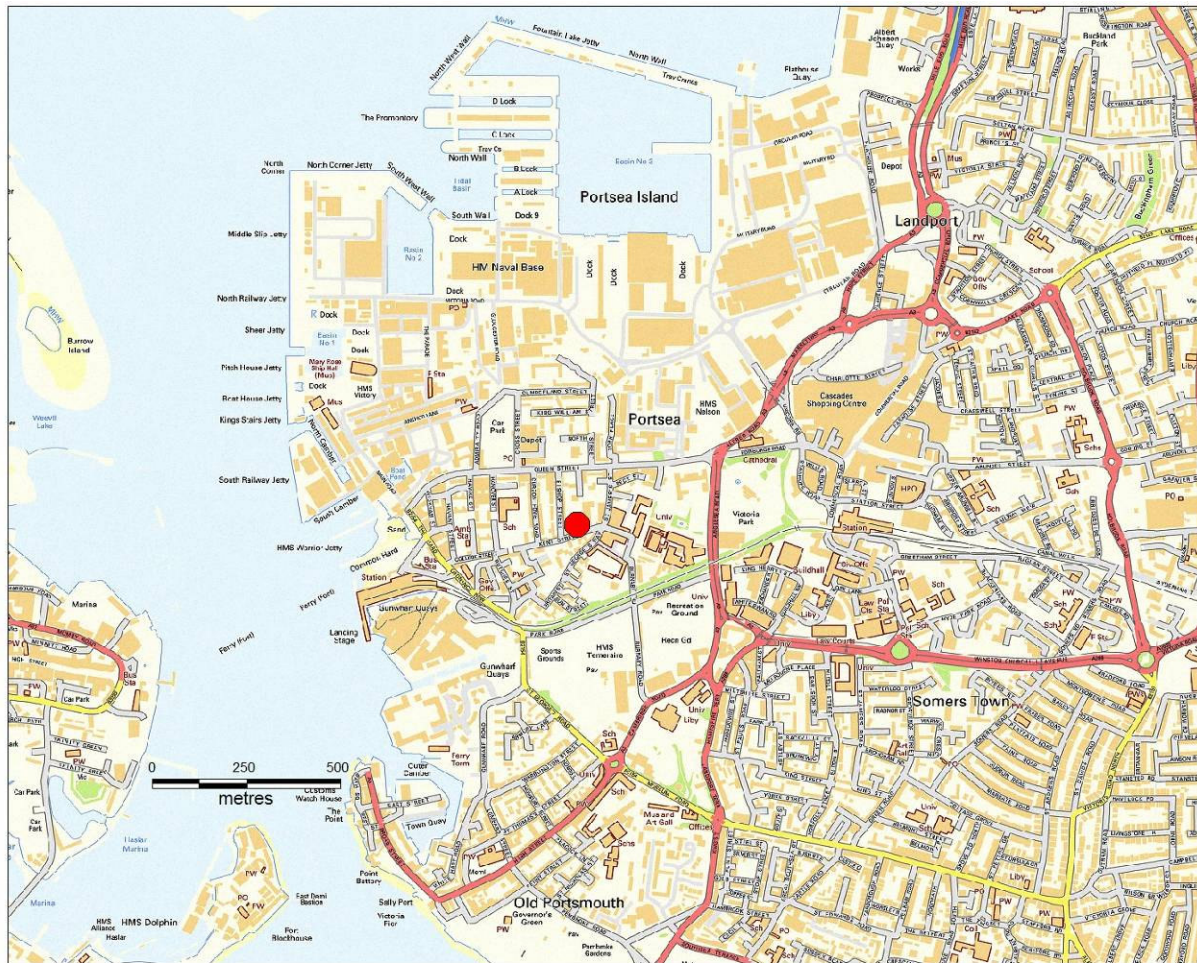


Figure 1. Site location.

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Report on the archaeological watching brief at 6 Kent Street, Portsea, Portsmouth, 2007/17

By PR Cottrell BA

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1. Summary

A watching brief was carried out by Southampton City Council Archaeology Unit on the groundworks for the construction of a block of 7 flats at 6 Kent Street, Portsea, Portsmouth. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed.

2. Introduction

The Archaeology Unit of Southampton City Council carried out an archaeological watching brief at 6 Kent Street, Portsea, Portsmouth, (fig 1) on behalf of Latimer & Ayles Partnership Limited. The observations were made by E McDonald between 3/9/2007 and 7/9/2007. The project was managed by PR Cottrell.

The site (fig 1) lies in Area 2 of the Local Areas of Archaeological Importance as defined by Portsmouth City Council. Area 2 covers the area of the naval dockyard, founded by 1495, and its defences. It includes the area of the settlement, housing dockworkers and their families, which became known as Portsea, and also the defensive circuit that protected the dockyard and settlement by the late 18th century. The area is defined principally as one of importance for post-medieval archaeology.

3. Aims of the investigation

The aim of the investigation was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within the area of groundworks. Any such remains were to be recorded and artefacts recovered.

4. Watching brief methodology

The methodology followed that specified in the Scheme of Investigation. The archaeological work on site consisted of observation of the machine excavation of the groundworks.

All archaeological records were made using the Southampton City Council archaeological recording system. The colours of deposits were recorded using the Munsell Soil Color Chart and these are used in this report (Munsell Color 1975). The archive is stored on Portsmouth City Council premises.

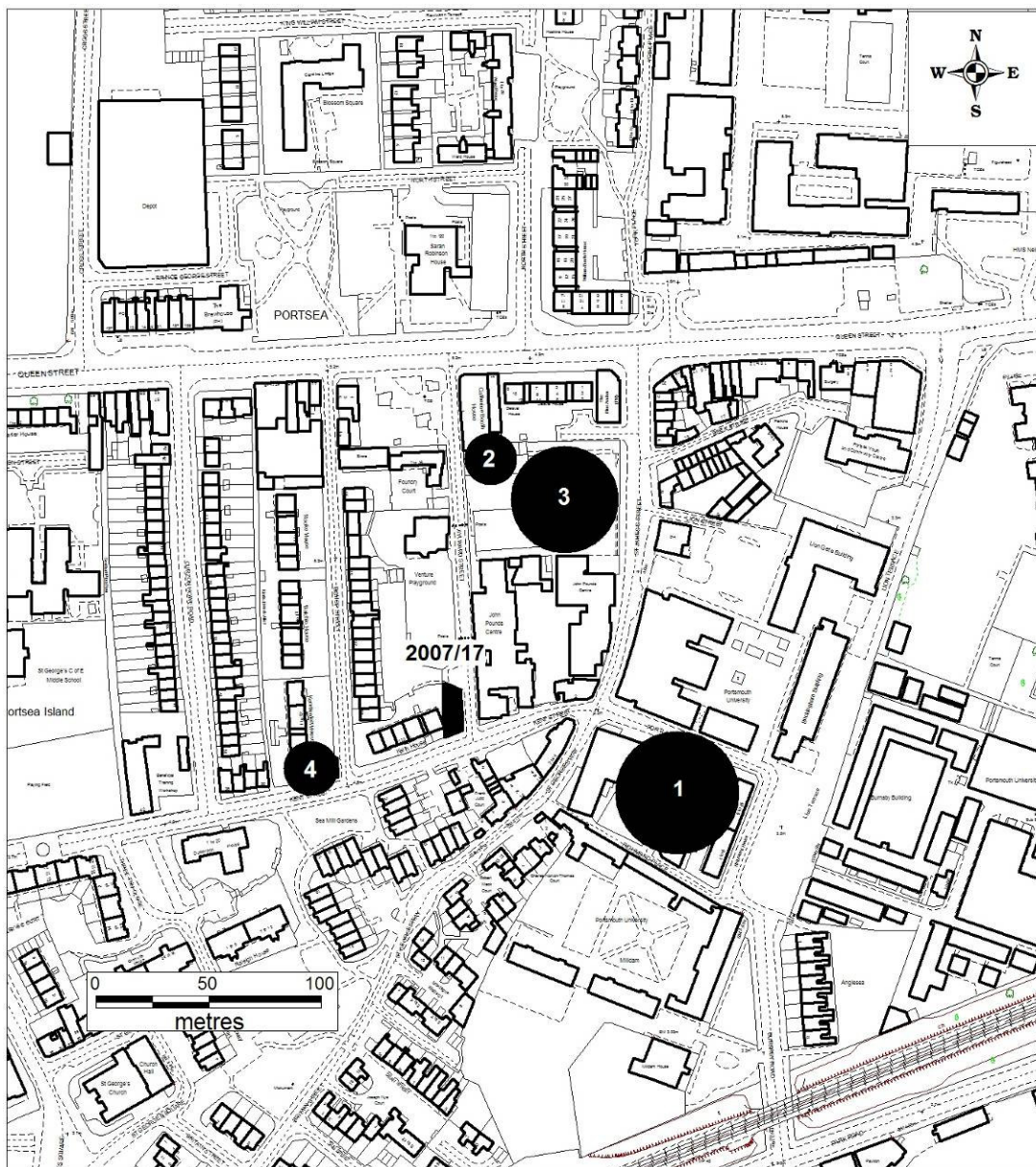


Figure 2. Site location showing archaeological investigations mentioned in the text.

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5. Site location and topography

The site is located in Portsea, at the junction of Kent Street and Aylward Street. (fig 2). The natural topography of the site is obscured by urban development, but the area of the site is generally level. The nearest spot heights shown on the Ordnance Survey map are 3.3m AOD at the junction of Kent Street and St Georges Way, 60m east of the site, and 4.6m AOD at the junction of Kent Street and Bishop Street, 50m west of the site.

The surface geology at the site consists of river terrace and aeolian deposits (brickearth) overlying clays of the Wittering Formation, part of the Bracklesham Group (British Geological Survey, 1994).

6. Historical and archaeological background

The harbour town of Portsmouth at the south-west corner of Portsea Island was in existence by the late 12th century and received a charter from Richard I in 1194. It developed into an important port for trade with Europe. During The Hundred Years War it was raided and burnt by the French in 1338 and 1369. The adoption of Portsmouth by Henry VII as a base for the building and repair of the king's ships led to the establishment of a permanent base for the Royal Navy. From the late medieval period the town of Portsmouth was surrounded by a circuit of fortifications which prevented its expansion. However the growth of the dockyard, the Navy and the garrison during the post-medieval period resulted in considerable pressure on accommodation within the town. By the early 18th century part of Portsmouth Common, the land to the east of the dockyard, had begun to be developed to house the dockyard workers and their families. This developed into the town of Portsea. Portsea was bounded to the south and east by the Mill Pond, formerly a tidal inlet previously known as Sea Mill Creek, sealed by a dam and fed by freshwater streams. South-east of the settlement of Portsea the pond was divided into two and the northern arm formed the eastern limit of the new settlement. A defensive circuit protected the dockyard and settlement by the late 18th century.

An early map of Portsea, dated 1716, shows an early stage in the development of the present day street pattern. The site of the development was to the west of the Mill

Pond, in the south-west of an area marked as a 'Gravel Pit' (fig 3). A map dated 1745 (fig 4) shows that further development had taken place, including the approximate area of the development site.



Figure 3. Detail of a map dated 1716 showing Portsea with the site location.
(The dark lines indicate proposed defensive works that were never built.)

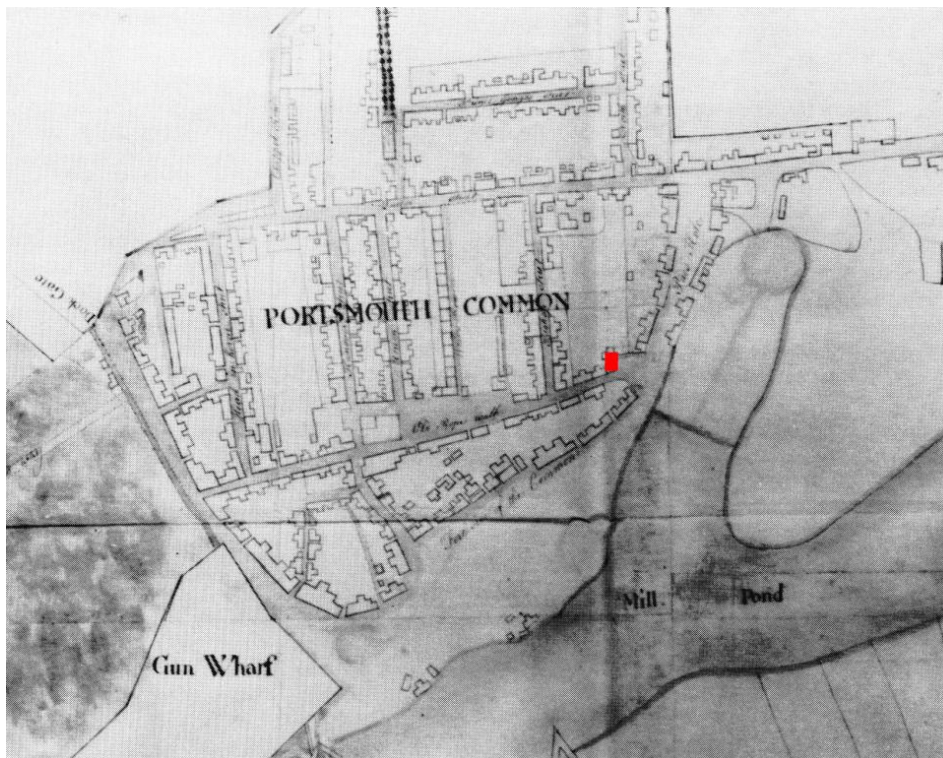


Figure 4. Detail of a map dated 1745 showing Portsea with the site location.

The building that occupied the site until recently is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1897. The previous edition, dated 1870, shows a different layout of buildings at the site, showing that the recent building was constructed between 1870 and 1897.

A number of archaeological investigations have been carried out in the vicinity of the site. These are shown, numbered, on figure 2.

A watching brief on the site of the new Business School, Richmond Place, east of the site (1) revealed that the site formerly lay within the northern arm of the Mill Pond (Hopkins, 2003). Black organic silt was recorded up to 1.6m below the modern surface.

A watching brief at Catherine Booth House, Queen St (2), revealed archaeological deposits dating to the later post-medieval period, earlier deposits, possibly related to gravel digging, pits, the earliest possibly of early 18th-century date, and the brick foundations of late 19th century terraced houses (Hopkins, 2003).

A watching brief at the John Pound Centre, St James St (3), revealed pits, possibly related to gravel digging, filled with silty soils, possibly from dockyard dredging, and evidence for a late 19th century industrial or commercial building (Hopkins, 2003).

A watching brief on the site of the former Portsea Arms public house, Kent Street (4), about 50m west of the site revealed a late-medieval soil horizon, two pits, and a cellar, possibly of 18th century date (Smith, 2003).

Two trial boreholes were drilled on the site prior to the development. A trial hole at the north end of the site revealed soil and clay with broken brick to a depth of 1.8m, with sandy gravel below it. A trial hole at the south end of the site revealed made ground and topsoil to a depth of 1.0m, then a layer of brick and lime 0.5m thick, a layer of mud with broken brick 0.3m thick, and a layer of wet, black mud 1.2m thick. Below this, at a depth of 3m, was clay, interpreted as natural (Latimer, 2006).

7. Results of the watching brief

The entire site was excavated by machine to a depth of 500mm prior to the insertion of a mass concrete slab foundation (fig 5).

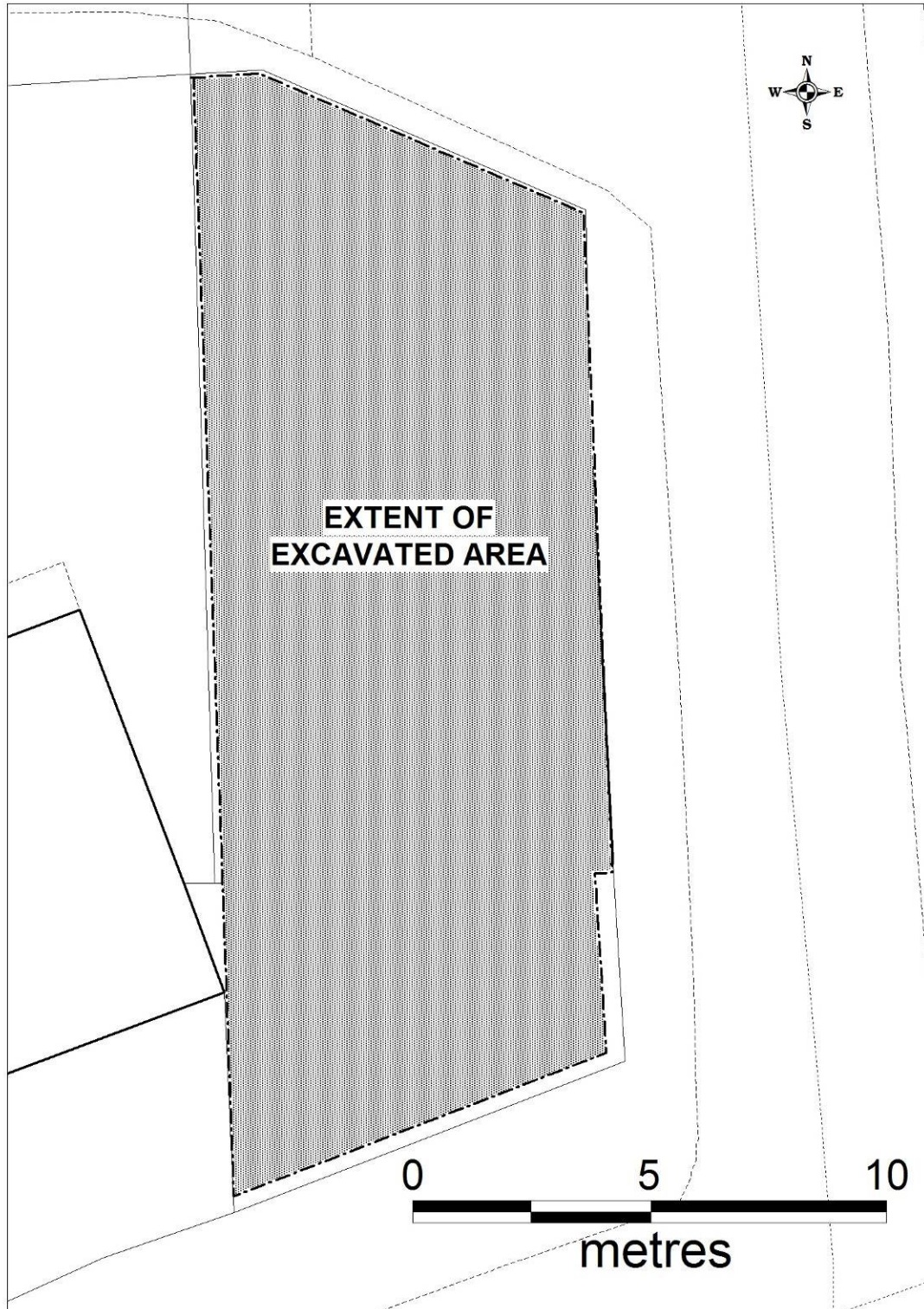


Figure 5. Plan of site.

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Context 1, which extended over the whole site was a layer of moderately stony, dark grey, clay loam that contained fragments of brick, concrete, glass, slate and plastic. It was c400mm thick at the north end of the site and c500mm thick at the south end. It overlaid context 3, moderately stony, greyish brown clay loam with brick and concrete fragments. Remnants of the concrete foundations of the previous building were observed (contexts 4 and 5).

8. Conclusions

The excavated contexts consisted entirely of modern deposits associated with the occupation and demolition of previous buildings on the site. No archaeologically significant features or deposits were observed.

The evidence from the trial holes suggests that gravel abstraction from the site during the early 18th century had left a hole of uneven depth that was later filled with various materials. The layer of brick and lime revealed by the southern trial hole probably resulted from the demolition of the earlier buildings on the site during the late 19th century. The mud below is consistent with the evidence from the nearby John Pound Centre site, where it was suggested that gravel pits had been filled with material dredged from the dockyard.

Appendix 1. Context list

Number/letter codes (eg 10YR 3/1) = Munsell soil colour codes.

sa = stone abundance – 0 = virtually stone free; 5 = gravel

Context	Type	Description
1	layer	10YR 4/1 clay loam, sa3, with modern building debris,
2	unstratified	
3	layer	10YR 5/2 clay loam, sa3, with brick & concrete
4	feature	foundation trench
5	fill	concrete foundation, fill of 4
6	layer	modern paving

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