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Southampton Archaeology Unit

Report 876

Archaeological watching brief at 61 St Thomas's Street, Portsmouth, 2007/227

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2008

Client: CG McCann



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Report on the archaeological watching brief at 61 St Thomas's Street, Portsmouth. 2007/227

By MP Smith BA MIFA and EL McDonald BA MA

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Archaeology Unit report	876
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Planning Reference No	07/01008/LBC

1. Summary

A total of four trenches were dug in the basement of 61 St Thomas's Street during alterations to the existing Grade II listed building. It is a three storey house of 18th century date. The work was carried out to waterproof the basement and to create more head room.

The natural was observed 0.25 to 0.3 m below the cellar floor in all trenches. Two pits, possibly soakaways, were observed below the limestone floor; they were filled with limestone blocks, mortar and fragments of post-medieval brick, and were very wet. A floor of limestone flags may have been the original cellar floor.

Above the limestone floor was a double layer of mortared tile and above that a brick floor. Associated with it was a rectangular feature constructed from brick and tile and situated in the northwest corner of the cellar. This may have been a sump.

2. Introduction

The Archaeology Unit of Southampton City Council carried out an archaeological watching brief at 61 St Thomas's Street, Portsmouth (figure 1) on behalf of CG McCann. The observations were made by EL McDonald BA MA between the 31/1/08 and the 12/2/08. The project was managed by MP Smith BA MIFA.

The site is within Local Area of Archaeological Importance 1. Area 1 covers the area of the “old town” of Portsmouth and its defenses. Portsmouth was founded in the late-12th century and the area is defined principally as one of importance for medieval and post-medieval archaeology.

3. Aims of the investigation

The aims of the investigation were principally to confirm the presence or absence of human use of the area, and the date, type, state of preservation, and extent of that use; to recover associated objects; and to record such evidence as did survive. In addition, the nature, dimensions, and relationship of natural deposits was to be noted and recorded (Southampton City Council Archaeology Unit 2008).

4. Watching brief methodology

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 will be deposited with Portsmouth City Council Museums service.

5. Site location and topography

The site is in the old town area of Portsmouth. It is located on the north side of St Thomas's Street, opposite the west end of Portsmouth Cathedral (figure 1).

The site is on Portsea Island which has Valley Brickearth above Plateau Gravel as the surface geological deposits (GSGB 1976). They are above the Bagshot Beds. The modern ground surface is at 2.7m OD.

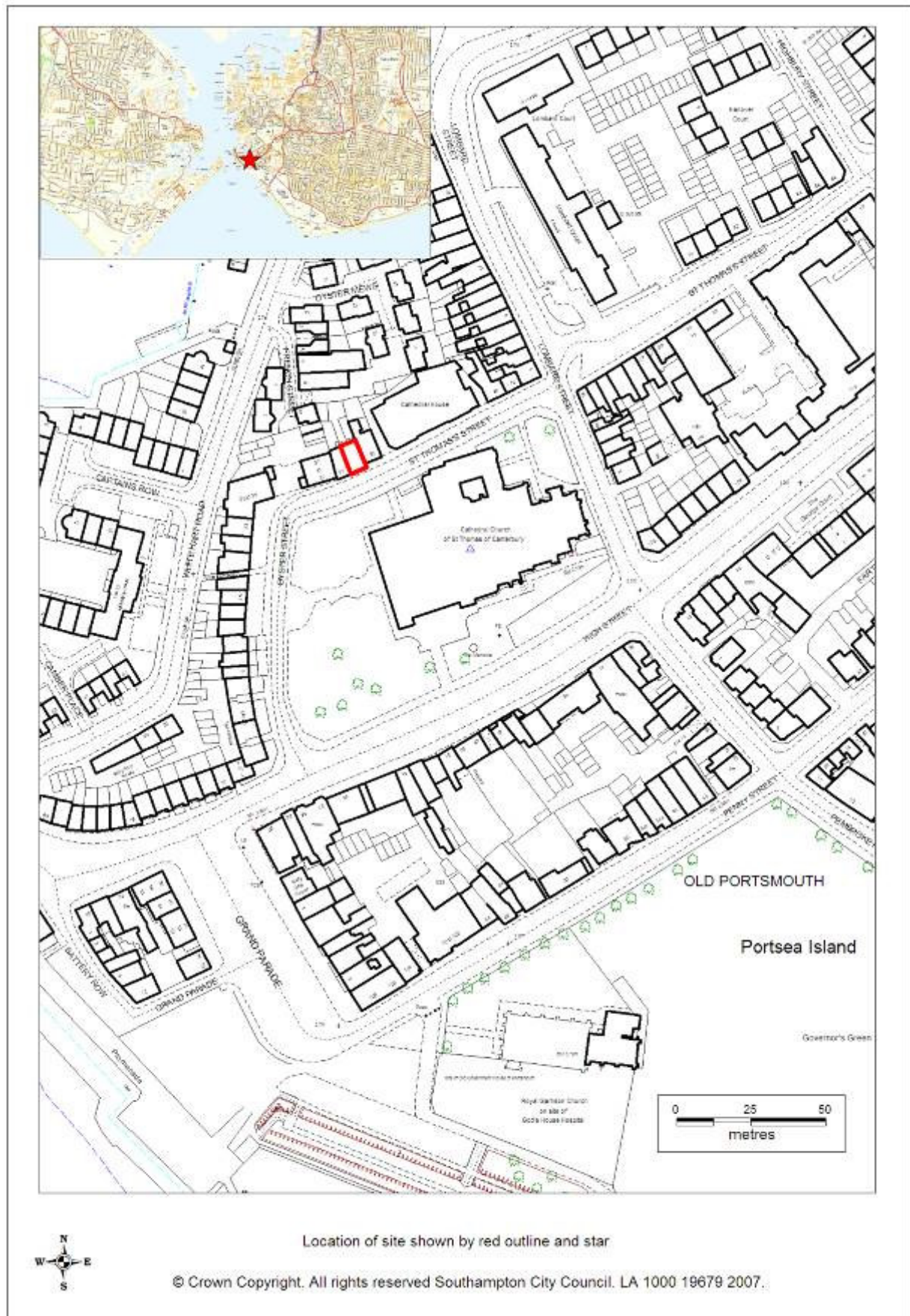


Figure 1. Site location plan.

6. Historical and archaeological background

The harbour town of Portsmouth 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 and the threat of war with France led to expansion of the town from the late 15th century.

Prior to the Second World War the site was occupied by retail and residential premises which were partially destroyed by enemy action.

7. Results of the watching brief

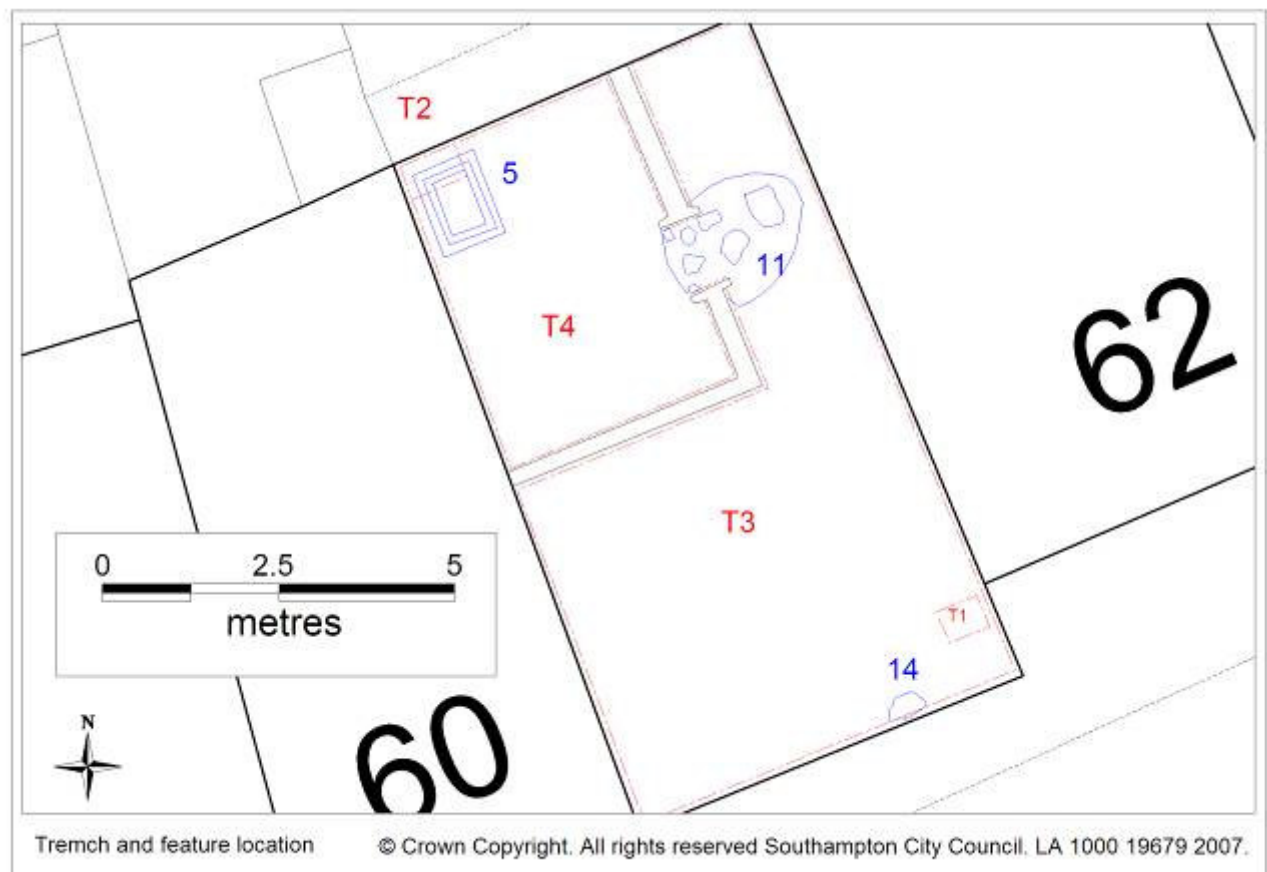


Figure 2. Trench and feature location plan.

7.1. Introduction

A total of four trenches were dug in the basement of 61 St Thomas's Street (figure 2). Trench 1 was a test pit in the southern part of the basement. It was 0.63m long, 0.52m wide and 0.22m deep. Trench 2 was a test pit in the northern part; it was 0.8m long, 0.5m wide and 0.34m deep. Trench 3 was a level reduction in the southern room, and was 5.8m long, 5.1m wide and 0.5m deep. Trench 4 was a level reduction in the northern room; it was 3.8m long, 4.6m wide and 0.5m deep.

7.2. Natural.

The natural was very changeable ranging from clay to sand to gravel. The earliest deposit encountered was sandy clay, context 13. It was mottled brownish yellow and grey, and was situated 0.3m below the floor of the cellar below contexts 4 and 10.

Above 13 was sandy clay natural, context 4, situated 0.25m below the cellar floor. This layer was situated in the east of the site, was 82mm thick, and was mostly clay with sandy patches.

Also above 13 was sandy loam natural, context 10. It was situated 0.25m below the cellar floor; it was 50mm thick in the north of the site and was not bottomed in the west of the site.

7.3. Pits.

Two features were observed in the natural. Pit 11 was in the north east part of the cellar. It was rounded, 2.1m long and 1.6m wide and was not bottomed (figure 3). It contained a fill of several limestone blocks, some only 0.1m long and others 0.5m long. It also contained fragments of slate, mortar, and a fragment of brick made of local brickearth of late-medieval to post-medieval date. Around the rubble was a very wet brown clay loam, context 12.



Figure 3. Feature 11 and fill 12 with limestone blocks.

Pit 14 was observed in the south of the site. It was rounded, 0.6m long, 0.5m wide and was not bottomed. It was filled with wet, yellowish brown, sandy clay. It contained several small limestone fragments.

These pits may have been soakaways, or could perhaps have been earlier pits whose loose fill had been removed and replaced with the firmer rubble and clay.

7.4. Limestone floor

Above the natural was a limestone floor (context 3), some 140mm below the modern floor of the cellar. It consisted of large limestone slabs irregularly laid. The slabs ranged from 0.1m to 0.5m long and were mostly 0.1m thick (figure 4).



Figure 4. Limestone floor 3.

7.5. Brick floor and sump

Above the limestone floor were two layers of roof tiles and mortar, context 2. The tiles were 262mm long, 174mm wide and 11mm thick, some had peg holes. They were made with clay from the Reading Beds and were dated to the post-medieval period. Overall the layer was 65mm thick (figure 5).



Figure 5. Tile floor context 2.

Above the tile and mortar layer was a brick floor, context 1 (figure 6). The bricks were 227mm long, 108mm wide and 69mm thick.

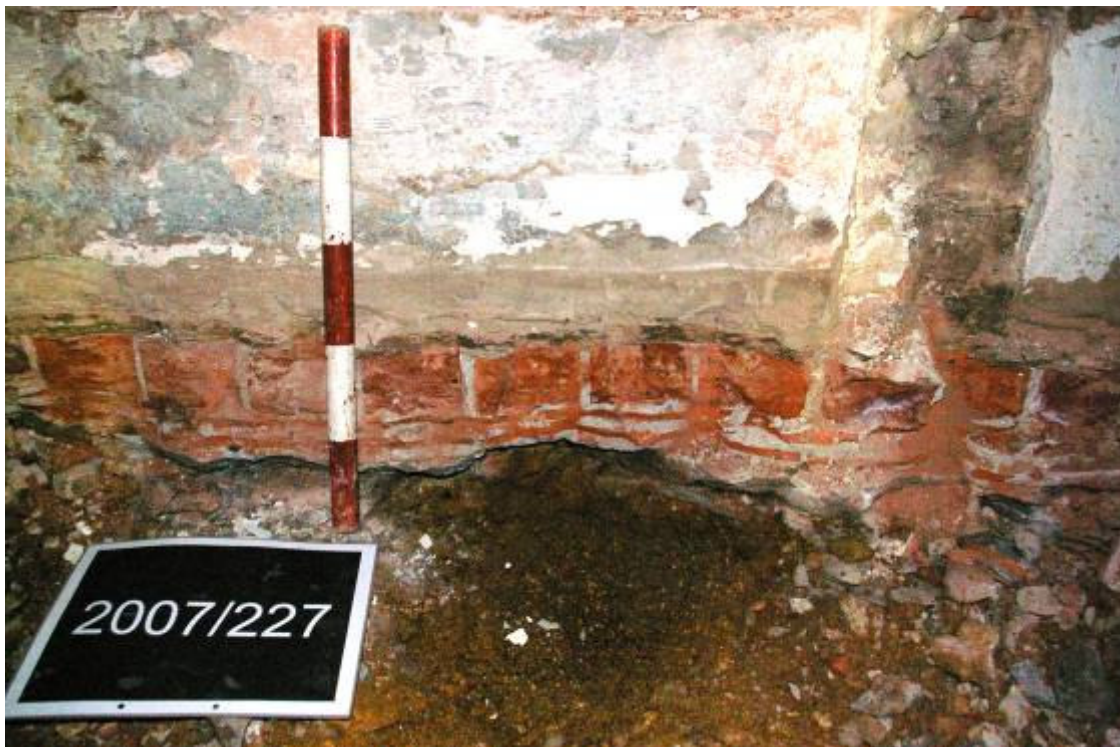


Figure 6. Brick floor 1 above tile floor 2.

In the north-west corner of the cellar was a rectangular brick feature. It sat in a construction trench, 5, which was 1.22m long and 1.01m wide. It was not bottomed but was at least 0.3m deep (figure 7). A limestone slab, context 9, formed the base of this feature. It was rectangular and was 690mm long and 430mm wide (figure 7). It was bonded to the bricks and tiles of this feature. The bottom of the slab was not observed. Above the slab was a rectangular box of brickwork, context 6. The bricks were without frogs, and measured 232mm long, 106mm wide and 69mm deep. They were post-medieval in date. Two layers of tiles, context 7, were laid on the inside of the bricks and may have been a lining. The tiles were 10mm thick, were made with clay from the Reading Beds and were post-medieval in date. Tiles were also used between the two courses of bricks.



Figure 7. Feature 5 with structural elements 6, 7, and 9.

7.6. Unstratified finds

Five modern coins were found on top of the brick floor 1.

- 1962 Bulgarian 10 stotinki coin
- 1949 USA, 5 cents
- 1958 French, 10 francs
- 1966 British half penny
- Undated British, three pence
- Unidentifiable coin

8. Conclusions

The natural was observed 0.25m to 0.3 m below the cellar floor in all trenches. This was probably close to the level of present day high tides, if not below it.

A limestone flagged floor may well have been the original cellar floor. Two possible soakaways, or perhaps earlier pits, were observed below the limestone floor. They were filled with limestone blocks, mortar and fragments of post-medieval brick.

Above the original limestone flagged floor was a layer of mortar bonded roof tiles, and above them was a brick floor. A brick and tile rectangular feature, also post-medieval in date, was situated in the north-west corner of the cellar. It may have been a sump.

The floor level may have been raised due to flooding of the cellar.

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Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Watching Brief at 61 St Thomas's Street, Portsmouth

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	Above	Below	Description
1	2		Brick floor
2	3, 9	1	Tile floor, bedding
3	4, 10	2	Limestone floor
4	13	3	Sandy loam, natural. 10YR5/8 sa 4
5	10	6, 7, 9	Construction trench
6	5, 9	1	Brick rectangular feature, with stone base
7	5, 9	1	Tile lining of rectangular feature
8			Unstratified finds
9	5	6, 7	Limestone base
10	13	3, 4	Sandy gravel, natural. 10YR5/6 sa 4
11	4, 13	12	Possible pit /soakaway
12	11	3	Fill of pit. Sandy clay loam. 10YR5/3 sa 2. Containing fragments of limestone mortar and slate
13		4, 10, 11, 14	Sandy Clay. Mottled 10YR6/6 and 10YR6/1 sa 1
14	4, 13	15	Possible pit /soakaway
15	14	3	Fill of possible pit /soakaway. Sandy clay. 10YR5/6 sa 4

Appendix 2. Finds list.

Context no	Mat grp	Mat Type	Find Type	Wgt(gm)	No of frag	Description	Length	Width/dia	Thickness
2	3	CERAMIC	TILR	1074	1	Peg tile. P med. Reading beds, round holes	262	174	11
3	1	STONE	RUBL	556	1	Purbeck limestone marble	0	0	0
3	1	STONE	BLOC	321	1	Caen	0	0	0
6	3	CERAMIC	BRIC	0	1	P med, no frog. Paint on one face	233	103	65
7	3	CERAMIC	TILR	638	1	P med. Reasing beds	0	0	10
7	3	CERAMIC	TILR	6	1	P med peg tile. Reading beds	0	0	10
8	5	METAL	COIN	2	1	1962 Bulgarian 10 stotinki	0	0	0
8	5	METAL	COIN	5	1	1949 USA 5 cents	0	0	0
8	5	METAL	COIN	3	1	1958 French 10 francs	0	0	0
8	5	METAL	COIN	6	1	1966 UK halfpenny	0	0	0
8	5	METAL	COIN	7	1	Date obscured UK 3 pence	0	0	0
8	5	METAL	COIN	3	1	Unidentifiable	0	0	0
12	1	SLATE	TILR	58	2		0	0	0
12	3	CERAMIC	BRIC	10	1	L med / P med. Local brickearth	0	0	0
12	1	SLATE	TILR	183	3	SLWL	0	0	0
15	3	CERAMIC	TILR	42	1	P med, round hole, Reading beds	0	0	10