

Southampton City Council

Archaeology Unit

Report 618

Report on the archaeological watching brief at 26 Bishop Street, Portsea, Portsmouth, Hampshire 2003.2391

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Contents

1. Summary.	2
2. Introduction	2
3. Watching brief methodology.	3
4. Site location and topography.....	4
5. Historical and archaeological background.	4
6. Results of the watching brief.	6
6.1. Introduction.	6
6.2. Natural deposits (prehistoric).	7
6.3. Buried soil (medieval)	8
6.4. 18 th century pits.....	8
6.5. 19 th and 20 th century development	9
6.5.1.Western cellar.....	9
6.5.2 Eastern Cellar	9
6.5.3 Cess pit.....	9
7. Conclusions.	11
Bibliography.	11
Appendix 1. Context list.	12
Appendix 2. Finds list.....	13

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By MP Smith BA MIFA

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1. Summary.

A watching brief was held on the site of a 19th century public house, during the construction of an apartment block. A late-medieval soil horizon was found. This was presumably part of Portsmouth Common. The site was developed during the 18th century. Two pits, and possibly a cellar of this date were found. The building was used as a public house, The Butchers Arms, by 1865. A 19th century brick-lined cess pit was also found. The building was rebuilt in the late-19th century.

2. Introduction

The Archaeology Unit of Southampton City Council carried out an archaeological watching brief at 26 Bishop Street, Portsea, Portsmouth (fig 1) on behalf of A & B builders and Decorators. The observations were made by G Dall, AD Russel BA PhD MIFA, and B Shuttleworth between 8th and 22nd October 2003. The project was managed by MP Smith BA MIFA. The development involved the demolition of an existing public house, and the construction of eight, one bedroom flats.



Fig 1. Site location plan, outlined in thick line.

3. Watching brief methodology.

The Archaeology Unit observed the mechanical excavation of groundworks in preparation for the construction of the new building. This included clearing out an existing basement at the east end of the site to a depth of about 3m. The excavation of footing trenches for the new building were also observed. The trenches were nominally 0.8m wide, though in many cases collapses of material resulted in the final width being much wider. The trenches were about 1.5m deep, except in the basement where they were approximately 0.3m

below the basement floor. Jenny Stevens of Portsmouth City Council Museums and Records Service confirmed that it would not be necessary to hold a watching brief on the trenches into the streets to make service connections, due to the likely level of disturbance there caused by modern services.

All archaeological records were made using the Southampton City Council archaeological recording system (SMART system). The archive is stored on Portsmouth City Council premises.

4. Site location and topography.

The site lies on the western side of the junction of Bishop Street with Kent Street in the Portsea district of Portsmouth. The Royal Naval Dockyard is situated to the north and west of the site, and Old Portsmouth to the south.

The underlying geology consists of Alluvium and Plateau Gravels over Bracklesham Beds. The natural topography is obscured by urban development. However, the modern ground surface is fairly level. An Ordnance Survey spot height of 4.6m OD is recorded at the junction of Bishop Street with Kent Street.

5. Historical and archaeological background.

Portsea lay in Portsdown Hundred. The adjacent town of Portsmouth developed from the 12th century (VCH 1908, 172). Portsea Manor was not specifically mentioned in Domesday Book but had emerged by the 12th century (*ibid*, 192). There was a church in Portsea since at least 1170 when it was granted to Southwick Priory (*ibid* 196-7). The church was rebuilt in 1887. Portsea itself grew up on the former Portsmouth Common, taking its name in 1792 (*ibid*, 191). In 1690 the common was described as an open field with one hovel on it. By 1775 it was densely built up with houses for dockyard

workers. It developed rapidly during the 19th century. The 1801 census gave its population as 25,387, but by 1901 it had grown to 180,800 (VCH 1912, 450). In 1908 it was described as having narrow streets with low houses.

A map of Portsea Island of 1716 (published in VCH 1908, 192) shows virtually no development on the Common. The Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1865 shows the area fully developed. A rectangular building with a small projection at its north-west corner was shown fronting onto Bishop Street. It was labelled “Butchers Arms P.H.” Two outbuildings were shown at the west end of the plot. The footprint of the building appears to be different on the 1898 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map. A photograph of the building taken just prior to demolition (published at www.knightsure.co.uk) shows what appears to be a late-19th century, two storey, public house with a 20th century extension at the rear. The 1948 Ordnance Survey 1:1250 map shows a sub-square building, with an outbuilding in the south-west corner of the plot. All of the neighbouring properties are missing, suggesting that they were destroyed during Second World War bombing. The 1951 map shows the same arrangement. The 1959 Ordnance Survey 1:1250 map shows the public house occupying the entire plot. The extension shown on the photograph was therefore built between 1951 and 1959.



Fig 2. The Portsea Arms, from the south-east, shortly before demolition. The 1950s extension is visible at far right. © www.knightsure.co.uk.

6. Results of the watching brief.

6.1. Introduction.

A summary description of the results of the watching brief will follow here, arranged according to the nature of the deposits found, and where possible in chronological order. More detailed context descriptions are given in appendix 1, and descriptions of the finds in appendix 2. Figure 3 shows the location of the main archaeological features.

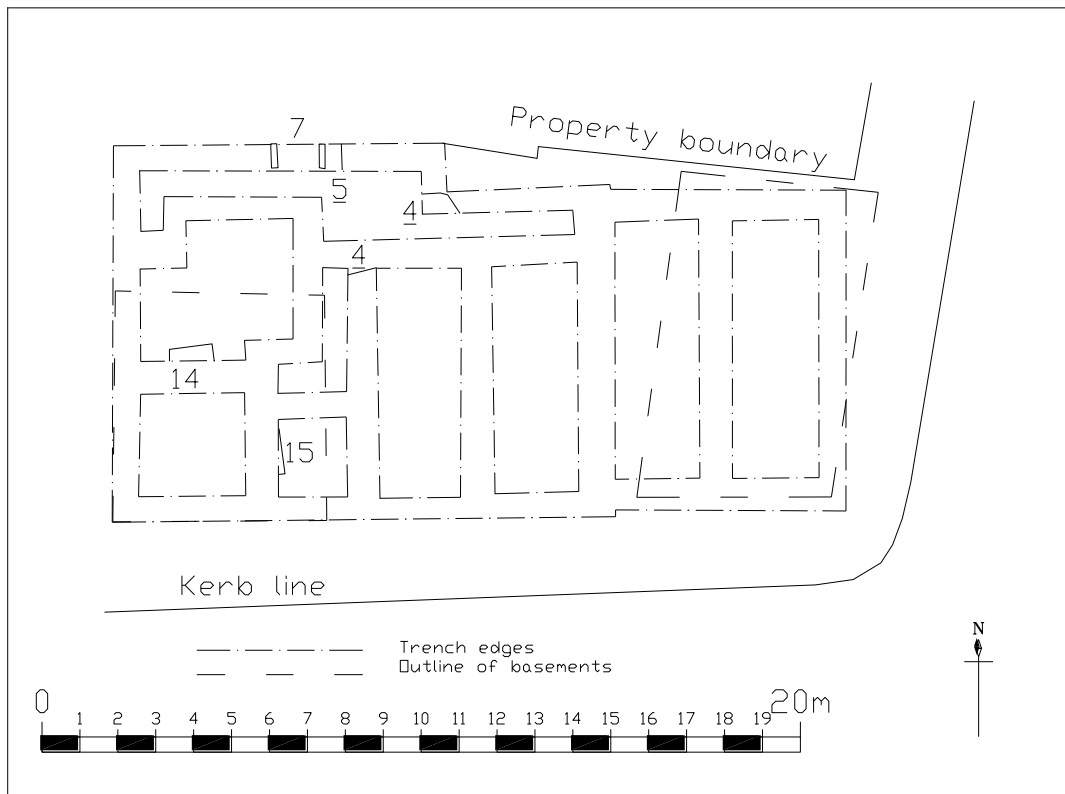


Fig 3. Plan of the foundation trenches, showing the location features.

6.2. Natural deposits (prehistoric).

The earliest deposit exposed in the watching brief was a dark brown coarse sand (12). Its base was not exposed, so it is not known how thick it was. A mixed layer of sands and gravels (1), up to 0.5m thick, overlay layer 12. The top of layer 1 was about 1m below the modern pavement level.

A layer of yellowish brown silty clay loam, or brickearth, (2), up to 0.3m thick overlay layer 1, especially towards the north of the site. It was probably deposited at the end of the last Ice age. Two burnt flints were recovered from it, and other burnt flints and a fragment of a core were recovered from the soil layer above it. These finds point to prehistoric use of the area, perhaps in the mesolithic period or later.

6.3. Buried soil (medieval) .

A 0.45m thick layer of brownish soil (10) overlay layer 2. It contained small fragments of bone, roof tile, medieval pottery and west country roof slate. This suggests the area was ploughed and manured during the medieval period. The source of the medieval artefacts is uncertain, but the roof tile and slate suggest that the refuse came from a site of higher status than a peasant's holding.

6.4. 18th century pits.

A large pit-like feature (4) cut layer 10 near the north end of the site. It was difficult to define its edges, but it measured at least 3m by 2m. It had a mixed fill (3), whose finds assemblage probably dates from the 18th century with some possible residual 17th century material. The three small fragments of 19th century clay tobacco pipe may have been intrusive.



Fig 4. Pit 4, fill 3, looking south, cut by a modern drain. Layers 1 and 2 at left.

Another pit-like feature (5) cut layer 2 at the north end of the site. Its relationship with layer 10 was not established due to later disturbance. Only its east edge was exposed, which was nearly vertical. It had a single fill (6). The only datable find was the top of a medicine phial, probably of 18th century date but possibly later.

The lack of finds in both these pits suggests that they were not excavated for rubbish disposal. It is possible they were dug for gravel.

6.5. 19th and 20th century development

6.5.1. Western cellar.

A cellar (13) was present in the south-west corner of the site. It was sub-square in plan, measuring approximately 6m by 6m, by about 1.2m deep. It was not safe to enter the trench to closely investigate its walls. However, the west wall appeared to be modern, perhaps associated with the outbuildings shown on the 1898 map, or even the 1950s extension. The north (14) and east (15) walls appeared to be earlier, and may have been part of the outbuilding shown on the 1865 map. This suggestion that walls 14 and 15 were part of an earlier structure is substantiated by the fact that they were contained within the larger cellar trench 13, and would have enclosed a basement measuring about 4m squared. It was not possible to measure their bricks. An ashy backfill (16) butted against wall 14.

6.5.2 Eastern Cellar

A larger cellar (un-numbered) was present at the east end of the site, occupying the Bishop Street frontage. It measured approximately 8m by 5m in plan, by about 3m deep. It probably related to the mid-19th century Butcher's Arms but the demolition of the above ground building had removed all the evidence of that building and later phases.

6.5.3 Cess pit.

A brick-lined cess pit cut into fill 6, though feature 5 might have been its construction pit. The pit was probably rectangular in plan. Its east and west

walls (both numbered 7) were 1m apart. Their bricks measured 220mm by 110mm by 60mm ($8\frac{3}{4}"$ by $4\frac{3}{8}"$ by $2\frac{3}{8}"$). There were two fills (8 and 9) between the walls. Fill 8 was probably a backfill consisting of gravel and soil. It produced only one find, a 19th century ceramic mortar (Mason's Patent Ironstone). Fill 9 was a friable soil full of late 19th century rubbish. The finds included glass (Chateau Lafitte and medicine bottles and window glass); pottery (Copeland-Late-Spode AD1847+, Mocha ware, Pearlware, imitation jasperware, Mason's Ironstone, and Creamware). A Holloway's Ointment pot, (dated after 1842) "For the Cure of Inveterate Ulcers, Bad legs, Sore Breasts, Sore Heads Gout and Rheumatism" survived intact. Food refuse included animal bones, cockles and winkles. A number of 19th century clay pipes were recovered, none had identifying marks.



Fig 5: Cess pit 7 looking east with fill 6 beyond, the small excavation shows where a sample of fill 9 was removed.

7. Conclusions.

The natural deposits were the gravels and sands of the Bracklesham Beds with brickearth above. The buried soil horizon, 10, suggests agricultural use in the late-medieval period.

Features 4 and 5 would suggest that the area was developed during the 18th century. This would support the historical evidence. It is possible that the earlier walls of cellar 13 belonged to an 18th century building. This building would have been an outbuilding to the public house called the Butcher's Arms, extant by 1865. The pub itself would appear to have been rebuilt in the later 19th century. It is not clear to which phase the large eastern cellar belonged, but the enlargement of cellar 13, to the west, probably occurred at this time. The brick-lined cess pit would have been associated with the public house, but it is not certain to which building phase it belonged. The late-19th century public house was extended to the west in the 1950s.

Bibliography.

Ordnance Survey, 1987: *Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) - drift*. Sheet 315.

VCH, 1908: *A History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Volume III*.

VCH, 1912: *A History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Volume V*.

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	Layers of pale yellow brown to strong brown sands and gravels
2	Layer	10YR 6/4, light yellowish brown, silty clay loam, sa 0
3	Fill of 4	10YR 5/2, greyish brown, silty loam, sa 3
4	Feature	Edges not clearly defined. >3m x >2m x 0.6m
5	Feature	Shape in plan uncertain, east edge near vertical. >1m x 0.6m x >0.75m
6	Fill of 5	10YR 5/2, greyish brown, silt loam, sa 3. Slate and flecks of brick
7	Structure	Pair of brick walls, 1m apart. Bricks = 220 x 110 x 60mm. Mortar = sandy lime
8	Fill of 7	10YR 3/1, very dark grey, silt loam, sa 2
9	Fill of 7	Friable fill, no description
10	Layer	10YR 4/3, brown/dark brown, silty clay loam, sa 2. Oyster shells
11	Unstratified	Finds from spoil
12	Layer	7.5YR 4/4, brown/dark brown, coarse loamy sand, sa 1
13	Feature	Cut for cellar. 6m x 6m x 1.2m
14	Fill of 13	North wall of cellar. Bricks with limestone slabs, lime mortar
15	Fill of 13	East, brick, wall of cellar
16	Fill of 13	10YR 3/1, very dark grey, sandy silt loam, sa 1. “Ashy” inclusions

Appendix 2. Finds list.

Context no	Mat Type	Find Type	Wgt(gm)	No of frag	Description
2	FLNT		11	2	Burnt flint.
3	AGG		17	1	May be caulking tar.
3	CRMC	BRIC	733	5	different bricks, one a blue header.
3	CRMC	TILR	535	3	different tiles of different fabrics.
3	CUAL	PIN	1	1	small fragment
3	FLNT	BURN	12	1	
3	IRON		667	1	
3	PCLY	TPIP	13	1	tobacco pipe bowl. Late 17th c..
3	PCLY	TPIP	3	3	tobacco pipe bowl. 19th c..
3	PCLY	TPIP	13	2	One stem and one bowl. Early 18th c..
3	POT	BOWL	56	1	Verwood bowl.
3	POT	DISH	96	2	Verwood type dish. 17th to 18th c..
3	POT	DISH	50	3	Red earthenware with sgraffito with paint. Italian or French.
3	POT	FRAG	16	1	A fragment of Iberian Redware.
3	POT	FRAG	26	1	Red earthenware. Fareham ? 18th c..
3	POT	JUG	100	1	Base. Local earthenware. 17th c.?
3	STON	FRAG	81	1	Granite.

Context no	Mat Type	Find Type	Wgt(gm)	No of frag	Description
3	STON	TILR	1	1	West Country slate.
6	GLAS	PHIL	10	1	Pale green neck of medicine phial, 18th-19th c..
6	SLAT	TILR	46	1	
8	POT	MORT	1658	4	Masons Patent Ironstone Mortar.
9	BONE		93	20	Fish, bird, rabbit?, and other animal bones.
9	CRMC	TILR	232	1	Peg tile, two circ holes, pmed
9	CUAL		21	7	3 buttons, 1 pin, 1 dress hook, 1 eyelet, and 1 other object.
9	GLAS	BOTL	43	1	A fragment of wine bottle.
9	GLAS	BOTL	127	5	Chateau Lafitte wine bottle with seal.
9	GLAS	BOTL	19	1	Bottle or jar fragment.
9	GLAS	PHIL	62	1	Dark blue cylindrical phial.
9	GLAS	WINE	10	4	Four fragments of wine glass.
9	GLAS	WNDW	49	1	'Bullseye' of green window glass.
9	IRON	RIVT	161	1	An iron rivet?
9	PCLY	TPIP	43	4	One tobacco pipe stem and three bowls. No marks.
9	POT		302	6	China, divided dish, green transfer printed, Copeland late Spode, 1847+.
9	POT		15	2	Refined earthenware brown glazed.
9	POT		49	3	Imitation jasper ware.

Context no	Mat Type	Find Type	Wgt(gm)	No of frag	Description
9	POT	BOTL	186	2	Stoneware bottles.
9	POT	BOWL	28	5	China Pearlware bowls.
9	POT	BOWL	57	3	Mocha ware bowl.
9	POT	BOWL	19	2	Creamware bowls.
9	POT	DISH	19	1	Masons Patent Ironstone China dish.
9	POT	DISH	37	5	Porcelain over glaze enamel.
9	POT	DISH	157	1	large Creamware serving dish.
9	POT	JAR	40	1	Holloways Ointment jar.
9	POT	PLAT	166	2	Pearlware willow pattern plates.
9	SHEL		16	7	3 winkles, 4 cockles.
9	WBON	HNDL	1	1	Turned bone handle.
10	BONE	BONE	12	2	One cow bone and one sheep bone.
10	CRMC	TILR	4	1	Probably a roof tile fragment but may be coarse pot. Medieval.
10	FLNT	BURN	66	1	A burnt flint.
10	FLNT	CORE	54	1	
10	POT	JUG	5	1	late medieval jug or pitcher. English.
10	STON	TILR	10	2	West Country slate. Anglo-Norman to Post-Medieval.
11	POT	FRAG	23	1	Fragment of Verwood pot.
16	GLAS	BOTL	101	1	Miniature spirits bottle. Brown. 19th-20th c..

