Southampton Archaeology Unit

Report 1036

Archaeological watching brief at Grand Parade, Portsmouth, 2011/7

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2011

Client: BT Openreach

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Report on the archaeological watching brief at Grand Parade, Portsmouth. 2007/92

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1. Summary

BT Openreach commissioned the Southampton City Council Archaeology Unit to observe trenching for new cables at Grand Parade, Portsmouth. The site lay in the 'old town' area of Portsmouth.

2. Introduction

The Archaeology Unit of Southampton City Council carried out an archaeological watching brief at Grand Parade, Portsmouth (fig 1) on behalf of BT Openreach. The observations were made by G Dall between 24/02/2011 and 28/02/2011. The project was managed by PR Cottrell BA.

The site is within Local Area of Archaeological Importance 1. Area 1 covers the area of the "old town" of Portsmouth and its defenses. The town was founded in the late 12th century. The area includes the site of 16th century windmills and the tidal Mill Pond. To the north the area boundary is contiguous with LAAI 2. The defences include works from the early 15th century onwards, including a rare complex of Elizabethan defences, later remodelled by de Gomme in the late 17th century and Desmaretz in the mid-18th. The area is defined principally as one of importance for medieval and post-medieval archaeology.

Figure 1. Location of site (red square)
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3. Aims of the investigation

An *"**Archaeological Watching Brief** is defined as a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons within a specified area or site on land 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."* (Institute of Field Archaeologists).

The objective of the watching brief was to ensure that any archaeological features or deposits exposed by the groundworks were recorded and interpreted and that any remains disturbed were recovered.

4. Watching brief methodology

The archaeological work on site consisted of observation of the excavation of service trenches

All archaeological records were made using the Southampton City Council archaeological recording system (SMART system). The colours of deposits were recorded using the Munsell Soil Color Chart and these are used in this report (Munsell Color 2000). The archive is stored on Portsmouth City Council premises.
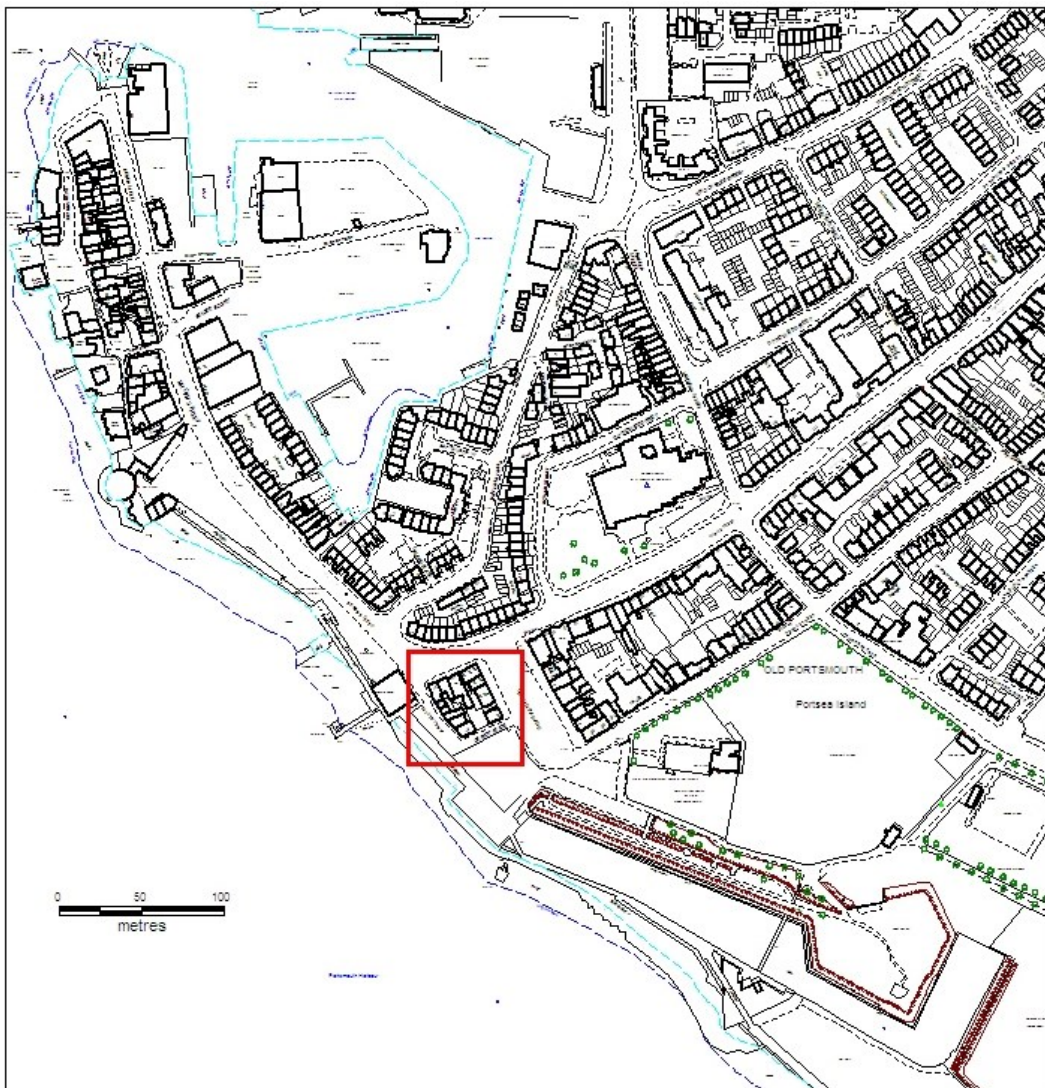

Figure 2. The site in relation to Old Portsmouth.
© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved Southampton City Council. LA 1000 19679 2011.

5. Site location and topography

The site is located in Old Portsmouth, close to the south end of High Street, and just to the east of the Square Tower (fig 2).

The surface geological deposits in the area of the site are shingle and alluvium (British Geological Survey, 1994). The modern ground surface is at about 2.7m OD and is generally level.

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

The trenches were excavated in the footway surrounding a small block of properties lying to the south of the south end of High Street, west of Grand Parade and east of the Square Tower. This block appears on early maps of Portsmouth including those by De Gomme (1668), Lempriere (1716) and Desmaretz (*c*1750). It also appears on a plan of the town made in the reign of Elizabeth I, probably made in about 1584.

Very few archaeological investigations have been carried out in the area of the medieval town, however an ornamental pottery roof finial, dated to 14th century, was found nearby during works at the Dolphin Hotel. Excavation of Cathedral Green revealed a soakaway, pottery, roof slates, tiles and ridge tiles indicating a building or buildings of some substance; the Elizabethan town plan shows 3 houses at this point. A post-medieval cellar containing an oven was recorded at the site of 91 High Street.

An excavation was carried out by the Portsmouth City Archaeologist Russell Fox in 1972 on the east side of Grand Parade between the Garrison Church and the Saluting Platform, in the area of the building complex surrounding the Domus Dei, or Garrison Church, and Bishop Moleyn's Chapel, as shown on a 16th Century map (Fox nd).

The excavation in the northern section of the site revealed no activity prior to the early part of the 16th century although the area around the Domus Dei had been in use since 1220, which suggested that the area had been levelled, removing evidence of any earlier occupation. A mortar floor and wall foundations were revealed, with pottery that suggested an early 16th century date. This structure corresponded with buildings on the map referred to as the Gatehouse and Lodgings. They had been removed and a sturdy north – south masonry wall built across the site. This was probably a boundary wall that enclosed the whole complex.

In the south side of the building were a series of ovens and a pit containing a quantity of copper fragments suggesting that during a later phase the building was used by a copper smith. This building appeared to have been destroyed in the last quarter of the 17th century to be partly overlain with gravel with flint cobbles set into it. Clay pipe fragments in the gravel indicate that it was laid around 1700. It may have represented the first parade ground seen in Portsmouth and it survived mostly intact for a hundred years. In about 1800 the whole area was extensively dug for the foundations of substantial wooden buildings. This may be evidence of accommodation erected for an enlarged garrison needed during the Napoleonic wars. The whole area was resurfaced with gravel on several occasions.

Just south of the outbuildings the excavation exposed a solidly built tunnel of limestone construction aligned east – west. The tunnel itself was 1.4 metres in height with a paved floor overlaid by a thin layer of gravel. The tunnel was partly filled with clayey silt of fresh water origin that had apparently been washed in through the stonework. There was an insufficient amount of the tunnel exposed to determine its destination in either direction.

Groundworks associated with re-paving were carried out at the west side of Grand Parade in 2010. No archaeological investigation took place but a tunnel built in stone with brick repairs was exposed by the contractors, (Colas) who photographed it. It was located within the footway east of 13 and 14 Grand Parade and was parallel with the front of the building. The tunnel was backfilled and the paving relaid.
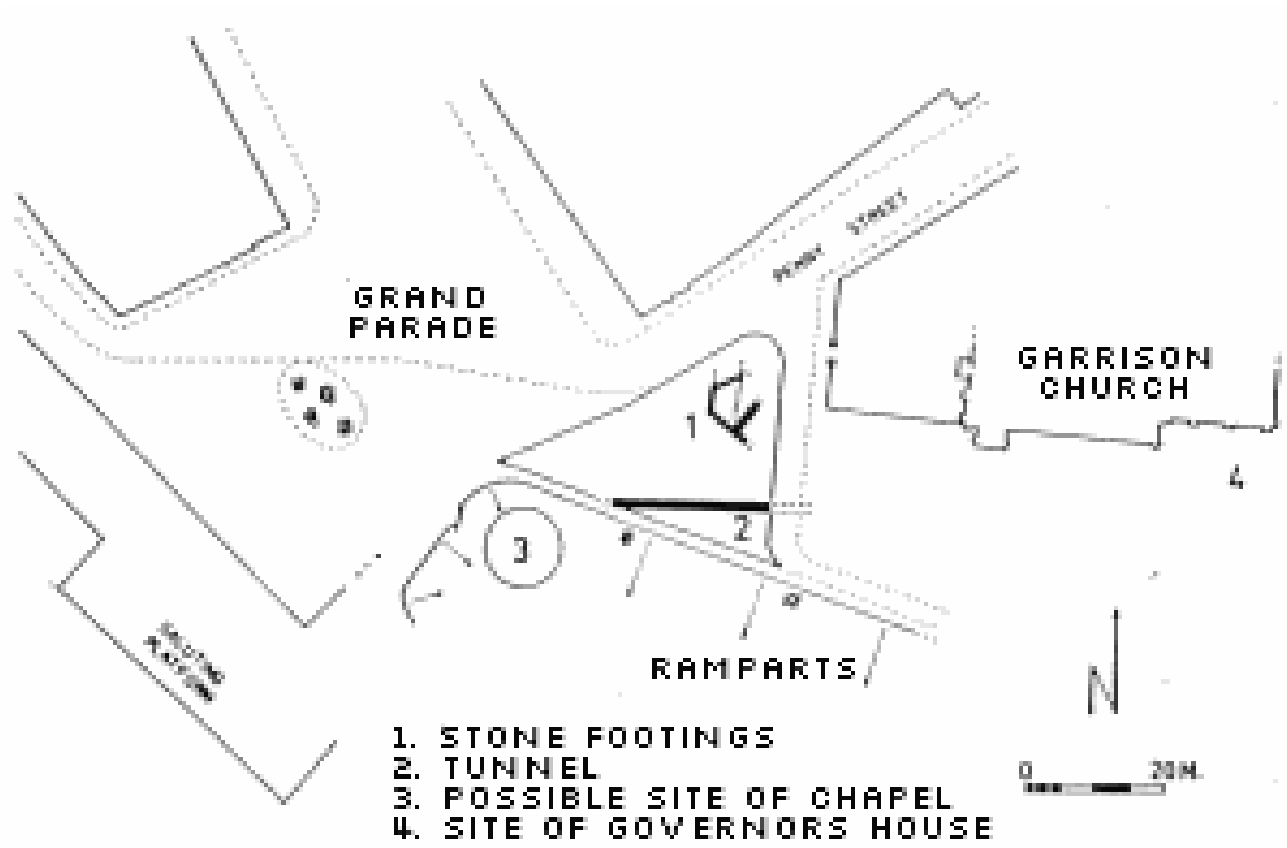
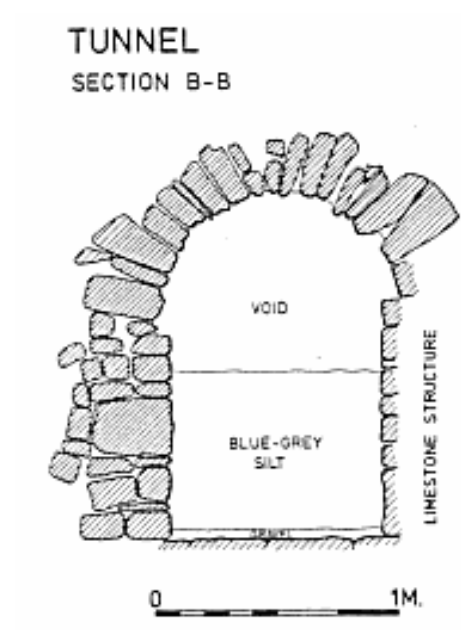**Figure 3: The site of the tunnel found in the 1972 excavation after Fox (nd).**

GRAND PARADE

PERRY STREET

GARRISON CHURCH

RAMPARTS

1. STONE FOOTINGS
2. TUNNEL
3. POSSIBLE SITE OF CHAPEL
4. SITE OF GOVERNORS HOUSE

0   20 M.

N

TUNNEL
SECTION B-B

VOID

BLUE-GREY
SILT

LIMESTONE STRUCTURE

0   1M.

Figure 4: Cross-section through the tunnel found in 1972 after Fox (nd)

Figure 5: The tunnel found on the corner of Grand Parade in 2010. (Colas)

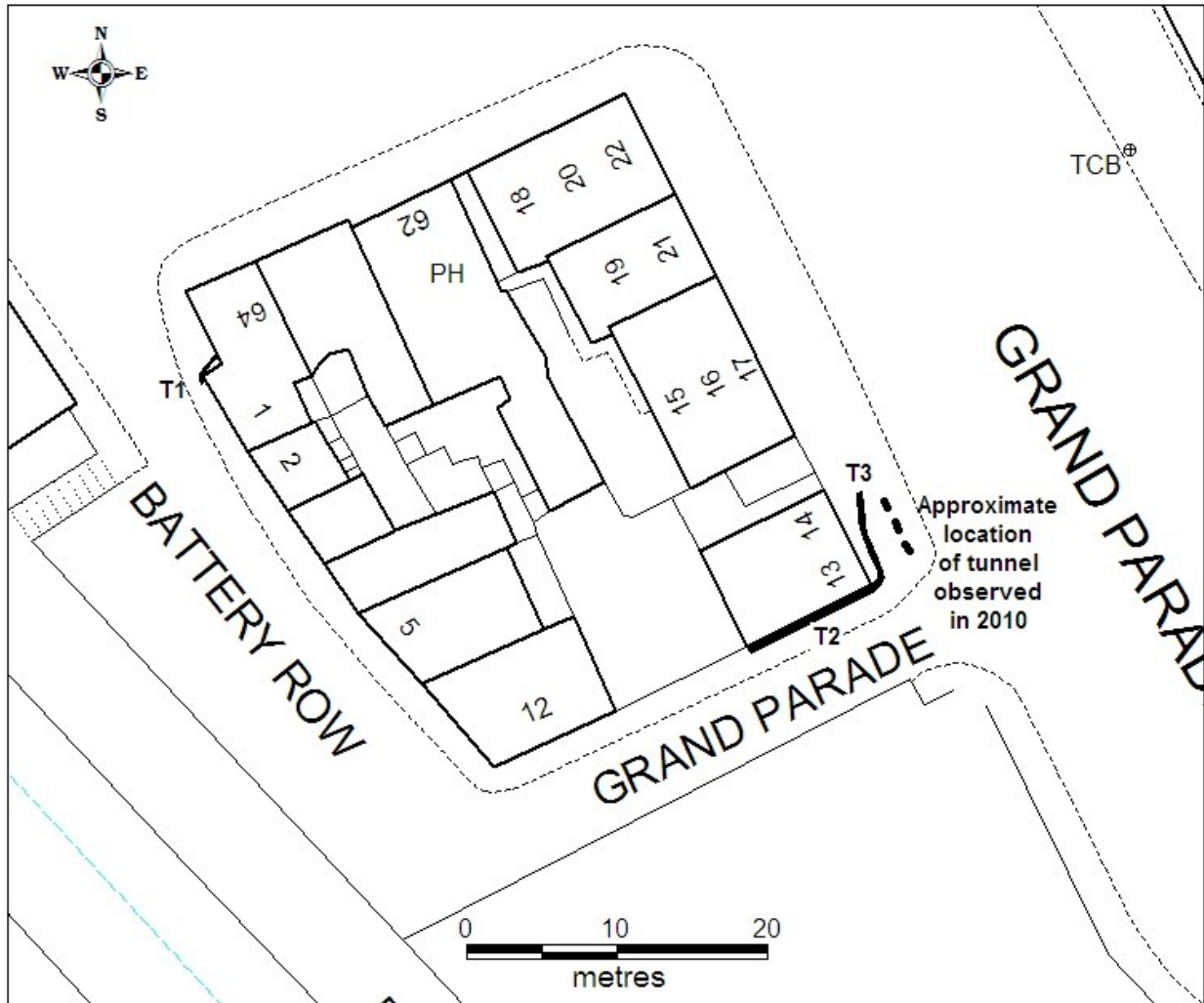**Figure 6: The interior of the tunnel found in 2010. (Colas)**

Figure 7. Site plan.
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7. Results of the watching brief

Three trenches were excavated, each *c*300mm wide and *c*300mm deep. The earliest deposit exposed was context 4, moderately stony, very dark, greyish brown, silty clay loam at least 150mm thick, containing a few fragments of oyster shell and ceramic building material. It was present in all three trenches, but in trench 3 it contained thin lenses of light yellowish brown gravel, context 5. Layer 4 was overlaid by context 3, a thin (*c*50mm) layer of crushed brick and mortar rubble, probably deposited as hardcore. This was overlaid by context 2, a mixture of grit and cement, the bedding material for the modern block paved surface. No deposits of archaeological significance were observed and no finds were recovered. The stone tunnel or drain seen in 2010 was not exposed.

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8. Conclusions

It had been hoped to be able to examine the 2010 tunnel and ascertain its alignment, but the present excavations did not go deep enough to reach the tunnel found nearby in 2010. It is possible that both the 1972 tunnel and the 2010 tunnel are part of a system of drains in the southern part of the old town, but their date and purpose remains a mystery.

Bibliography

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