



BRISTOL & WEST ARCHAEOLOGY

Land north side of Severn Road,
Avonmouth, Bristol

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Client: Build Consultants Ltd

18 October 2017

Bristol & West Archaeology

Planning Authority:

Bristol City Council

Planning Ref: 15/05705/F

National Grid Reference:

ST53350 32118

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Report Status: Final

Issue Date: 18 October 2017

BWA Ref: 17/2634

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Summary

From July 19 to July 24 2017 Bristol & West Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief on land off the north side of Severn Road during excavations for a sewage treatment plant and petrol interceptor tank on the development site. Other groundworks did not extend below the level of the recent made-ground across the site and did not form part of the watching brief.

During these works the only deposit of archaeological significance was a buried stabilisation horizon perhaps dating from the prehistoric or Roman period.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are owed to Build Consultants Ltd for commissioning the work and Mr Will Bailey, Site Manager, Tercon Ltd. for assistance on site.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning consent (15/05705/F) was granted by Bristol City Council for the construction of a vehicle recycling centre for dismantling cars, parts storage building, lorry and staff parking on land located off Severn Road, Avonmouth. Attached to the consent were three planning conditions relating to archaeology (Conditions 7, 18 & 19) for a programme of archaeological work (WSI), archaeological watching brief during groundwork and completion of the archaeological work.
- 1.2 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Build Consultants Limited 2017). It followed the Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (CIfA 2014) and Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MORPHE: The Project Managers' Guide) (EH 2006).
- 1.3 The archaeological work will be entered in the Historic Environment Record (HER) for Bristol and has been entered in the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) as Bristola3-298224. An accession number has been requested from Bristol City Museum as the expected recipient of the project archive.

2. SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Location

- 2.1 The site is centred on NGR ST 53350 32118 and occupied about 3.78 hectares on the north side of Severn Road, Avonmouth, very close to the boundary with South Gloucestershire. The site does not lie within a Conservation Area nor does it contain any listed buildings. The majority of the site was overgrown with coarse vegetation immediately prior to the fieldwork.

Geology

- 2.2 The geology underlying the site comprises Quaternary deposits of estuarine alluvium with a depth of approximately 5.45m overlying bedrock comprising mudstone of the Mercia Mudstone Formation.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 No previous archaeological work has been undertaken on the site. However, it would appear to lie very close to the now demolished buildings of Bank Farm which is known to have been in existence in 1841. The date for the farm is not known but it is likely to be post-medieval.
- 3.2 There are no known Prehistoric or Romano-British remains within the site. Within the wider area, the middle Wentlooge formations, consisting of clay, peat and organic horizons and overlying Mercia Mudstone bedrock at 10-15m depth below surface, are known to contain isolated areas of Bronze Age and Iron Age seasonal settlement remains. At nearby St. Katherine Farm was found the earliest evidence of activity in the area, a buried clay soil horizon dating to the Neolithic period (Bryant 2004, 7). Neolithic peat levels were uncovered by the Second Severn Crossing (Lawler 1992), and at Seawall Caravan Park (Insole and Longman 1997). Within the Bronze Age, Bronze Age soil horizons have been encountered at Katherine Farm and Cabot Park (Bryant 2004, 7-8). At Hallen (1.4km south of the site) Iron Age occupational levels were found to be at approximately 5.40m aOD, with overlaying deposits between 0.50 and 1m deep.

- 3.3 Romano-British (AD43-early 5th century) evidence in the Avonmouth area has so far been found to be limited to the eastern part of the levels probably because the coastline at that time lay further east than the modern coastline. Excavation at Crooks Marsh Farm in 1979 resulted in the discovery of a Romano-British farmstead below 0.5m of alluvial clay, suggesting that after the site was abandoned it was constantly flooded. The farmstead existed in a contemporary landscape containing two Roman roads, small settlements at Henbury School and Cattybrook, a villa at Kings Weston and the small town of Portus Abonae on the river Avon (Bryant 2004, 8). During the Roman period rising sea levels meant the amount of dry land available for settlement or cultivation fluctuated and by the later Roman period the area was too wet to support occupation.
- 3.4 A recent archaeological watching brief during trial pitting and excavation for the access road for the current site off Severn Road revealed only the uppermost modern made-ground deposits (BWA 2016).
- 3.5 Excavations to the north at Seabank in 1996 revealed several phases of medieval activity suggesting settlement in the vicinity and a buried soil horizon lying at between 5.2 -5.3 metres aOD of possible Iron Age or Romano-British date (Insole 1999).
- 3.6 A watching brief at Seabank Power Station found peat layers in at least four locations lying between 4.53 and 4.64m aOD and a buried surface at 1.56m aOD. (Longman 1997).
- 3.7 An archaeological watching brief in 2005 on land lying opposite the current site found layers of peat in five test pits which it was thought may have dated from the Bronze Age.
- 3.8 Archaeological investigations on a nearby site to the southeast off Severn Road revealed a buried soil layer at 3.13m aOD, thought to be of prehistoric date.

4. OBJECTIVES AND RECORDING METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The watching brief followed the methodology outlined in the Written Scheme of investigation (Build Consultants Limited 2017) and involved monitoring all groundworks where excavation affected deposits below the recently made-ground covering the site.
- 4.2 All records, drawings and photographs have been prepared as a standard archive according to English Heritage MAP2 standards.

5. RESULTS

Sewage Treatment Plant

- 5.1 A three metre square pit was excavated for a sewage treatment tank, which reached a depth of 4.65m. Deposits exposed comprised modern pile-mat (100) and modern made-ground material (101) sealing alluvial clay (102) and (103).

Petrol Interceptor

- 5.2 A 5 metre deep stepped excavation was undertaken for the installation of a petrol interceptor tank. Beneath pile mat 100 and up to 2.4 metres of modern made ground (108) lay several layers of alluvium (102-104 and 106-107), with a black clay and silt organic-rich layer (105) recorded at a level of 4.12m aOD.

6. DISCUSSION

- 6.1 With the exception of Layer (105) no other features or deposits of archaeological significance were revealed during the watching brief and no artefacts were found.
- 6.2 Layer 105 is interpreted as a stabilisation horizon formed during a period of lower water levels on the site, but it was undated. However, lying at a level of 4.12m above ordnance datum it is thought likely to date from the prehistoric or Roman period although no direct comparisons could be made between it and the peaty deposits found nearby during test pitting in 2005, which were thought to date from the Bronze Age, or the peaty deposits found at Seabank Power Station in 1996 which were thought to date to the Iron Age or Roman period.

7. BIBLIOGRAHY AND REFERENCES

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8. APPENDIX 1 TABLE OF CONTEXTS

Table of Contexts						
No	Type	Description	Length	Width	Depth	Date
100	Deposit	Modern pile-mat of crushed demolition rubble.	Whole area of site.		0.5m	C21
101	Deposit	Firm, dark brown clayey silt, very root disturbed. Occasional small gravel fragments with some localised lenses of gravel.	Sewage treatment Plant		0.3m	C21
102	Deposit	Mid-brown alluvial clay deposit.	Sewage treatment Plant and Petrol Interceptor tank.		1.7-3.65m	-
103	Deposit	Grey alluvial clay with black organic smears.	Sewage treatment Plant and Petrol Interceptor tank.		0.2m+ - 0.5m	-
104	Deposit	Mottled (c80-20%) blue/grey and yellow brown alluvial clay.	Petrol Interceptor tank.		0.5m	-
105	Deposit	Black clay and silt organic rich band of material in section at approximately 4.12m aOD.	Petrol Interceptor tank.		50-70mm	? Prehistoric
106	Deposit	Bright, grey blue alluvial clay.	Petrol Interceptor tank.		0.4m	-
107	Deposit	Dark Grey alluvial clay with threads of light grey clay reflecting cracks in the exposed and dried out surface of the alluvium.	Petrol Interceptor tank.		1.2m	-
108	Deposit	Modern, very mixed made-ground material.	Whole site, varying in depth.		0.5 - 2.4m max.	C21



Plate 1. Sewage Treatment Plant Pit as excavated, looking NW, scale 2m.



Plate 2. Petrol Interceptor Tank as excavated, looking N, scale 2m.



Plate 3. Petrol Interceptor Tank as excavated, looking SW. Scale 2m.