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Wyndham Way, Portishead

**An archaeological Assessment of the potential of development
land at Wyndham Way, Portishead, North Somerset;
with proposals for the mitigation of the effects of
development upon the archaeology of the site**

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WYNDHAM WAY, PORTISHEAD

An Archaeological Assessment of the potential of development land at Wyndham Way, Portishead, North Somerset; with proposals for the mitigation of the effects of development upon the archaeology of the site.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared in support of a planning application on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd. for a development on this site. Its purpose is to provide an assessment of the archaeological potential of the site on Wyndham Way through a desktop study, and to indicate the appropriate methodologies to be employed by way of mitigation in the event of a development proceeding.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Site

The development site comprises a triangular piece of land, over 1.5 ha in area, lying between Wyndham Way (A369 road) and Portishead Business Park, Portishead (NGR ST 470764). The site is level at around 8m aod., and is currently overgrown wasteland on the site of former industrial premises - a nail factory. The urban development of Portishead lies almost exclusively to the west of the site, on the far side of a former watercourse, the Pill, which now flows in a modern cut along the south-east boundary of the site. To the north and east is Portishead Dock, built at the end of the 19th century, and more recent commercial and light industrial premises now occupying parts of the flat meadowland between this site and the tidal shore of the Severn Estuary.

2.2 Archaeological and Historic Context

2.2.1 Other than sporadic discoveries of prehistoric material in the locality, the origins of Portishead probably lie in the Roman period. Much of the evidence for this has been the result of chance discoveries during building construction works during the second half of this century. This includes the remains of at least three stone-founded buildings, evidence for lead and iron working, and perhaps most notably a cemetery of inhumation burials, which may be of early post-Roman date (summary in Brown and Loosley 1982). Many of these discoveries are from the Gordano School area just south of the town, and have been reinforced by several more recent observations, salvage recording works or site evaluations here and in the area of the town centre (North Somerset County Sites and Monuments Record; *Bristol and Avon Archaeology*, nos. 1, 3, 4 & 6; etc.). No very comprehensive summary or interpretation of these disparate discoveries has yet been made, but a small settlement, possibly a villa estate, focused on the west bank of the estuary of the Pill, is most likely.

2.2.2 While the late/post-Roman cemetery could give a hint of continuing settlement beyond the Roman period, there may have been a break in occupation at Portishead

before the development of the medieval village here in the late Saxon period. Divided into two manors for much of its life, the historic core of settlement was around St Peter's church, although few physical remains from that period survive today. Once again, the head of the tidal Pill was the focus for a community dependant upon a mixture of fishing, farming and perhaps some local maritime trade on the Avon and Severn Estuaries.

2.2.3 In the post-medieval period Portishead saw little development beyond the original Roman and medieval centres until the 19th century. By then its potential both as a resort and as a port were being recognised by Bristol Corporation, within whose jurisdiction it then lay. Although never rivalling Weston-Super-Mare or Clevedon, further down the coast, its attractions as a coastal resort and subsequently a commuter settlement for Bristol, have been responsible for much development to the north, west and south of the historic core over the preceding century and a half. Its facility as a port was not fully developed until early in this century, utilising the mouth of the Pill, although this has now been superseded by the building of the Royal Portbury Dock further upstream at the mouth of the Avon.

2.2.4 The development site occupies the former site of a nail factory, built in 1910 by the Mustad Manufacturing Co. Until its closure in the late 1980s this was the sole producer of horseshoe nails in the UK. The siting of this factory was almost certainly stimulated by the development of Portishead Dock, representing the first real developments on the east side of the Pill. Another was the railway, a branch of which served the factory and the town station, both now replaced by Wyndham Way. Prior to this, the whole area east of the Pill was low-lying pasture and water meadows fringing the estuarine tidal marshes of the Severn. The earliest known map, representing the Parish of Portishead in 1740, shows this site within a field named "The Carlshams" on the east bank of The Pill (Brown and Loosley 1982).

2.3 Archaeological Potential

2.3.1 The current state of the proposed development site reflects its most recent period of use as a nail factory. All upstanding remains of these premises have been levelled; the sites of buildings and other structures represented by spreads of rubble and areas of hardstanding, now much overgrown. Documented information relating to the factory is relatively sparse, although its layout is clear from a series of large-scale Ordnance Survey maps of the locality, commencing with the 1911 1:2500 survey. Further information is available from sets of photographs published by the European Library (Crowhurst 1987, 1988 and 1993), which provide a fairly good record of the general layout and appearance of the works at different periods of its use. Given the present character of the site, the known history of the factory and the records which do exist, it appears unlikely that much of value within the context of the industrial archaeology of the site remains to be recorded.

2.3.2 Prior to this, and the later 19th-century construction of the railway, earlier maps (e.g. as in Brown and Loosley 1982) show this part of Portishead to have been fields, probably water meadows, at least as far back as the early 18th century. Excepting this, information concerning the pre-industrial use of the site is limited,

although from its position, formerly separated from the areas of historic settlement to the west by the Pill stream, some speculation is possible. Even today, this is a low-lying and relatively poorly drained environment, in all probability reclaimed at some time in the past from the coastal estuarine marshes. As such it would not have been attractive for permanent occupation and thus the likelihood of remains associated with the Romano-British or medieval settlements at Portishead is low. However, the Severn Estuary has been subject to very extensive coastal and sea level changes over the past few millennia, as recent studies have demonstrated (Rippon 1997, etc.). Thus, the possibility that remains of these, or earlier prehistoric periods, lie buried beneath more recent alluviation at a locality such as this must be taken into account. In these circumstances the preservation of high quality archaeological data in association with important environmental evidence should be anticipated.

3.0 RESPONSE

3.1 At first sight the desk-based assessment of this site and its immediate environs suggests a very low archaeological potential. The impact of activity relating to its most recent industrial use will have been to mask, and in all probability destroy, evidence for earlier use or occupation. Notwithstanding this, in the event of a new development proposal for the site proceeding it is necessary to consider whether any further assessment of its archaeological potential would be required in accordance with the Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment 1990), which techniques might be appropriate, and what their objectives might be.

3.2.1 The potential interest and value of the remains of the nail factory still occupying the site, in the context of Industrial Archaeology, has been assessed with reference to *Archaeological Guidance Note 4: Industrial Archaeology and Development in North Somerset* (North Somerset County Council 1997). In their current levelled condition any further recording of the remains is unlikely to add to the information already available from map or photographic sources (2.3.1). No more intensive documentary research is justifiable. However, it is possible that some remains of equipment or products of the factory survive on the site and could be collected.

3.2.2 Opportunities for assessment of the pre-industrial history of the site are severely hampered by its current condition. The application of such standard field evaluation techniques as geophysical prospection, surface/building survey, fieldwalking, trial trenching or test pitting are not relevant here. Furthermore, in view of the previous suspected agricultural character of the locality from at least the medieval period, the value in applying such techniques, even without an overburden of industrial detritus, would be questionable.

3.2.3 Despite the relatively close proximity of Roman settlement remains, and the possibility of earlier prehistoric utilisation of the area (2.2.1), there is no hard evidence or particular expectation for such evidence to be present on the development site. Nevertheless, the high potential for archaeological preservation along the shores of the Severn Estuary has been well demonstrated by numerous recent studies (3.2.1), and may thus be of relevance here. No specifically archaeological field assessment of

that potential is recommended at this stage, however, the results of any geotechnical ground survey undertaken should be made available as a supplement to this study. This will enable an assessment to be made of the impact of the factory development upon earlier stratigraphy, as well as providing clues to the origins of such deposits and their potential for containing any significant archaeological remains.

3.3.1 Subject to the detailed planning proposals submitted for the development of this site and with particular reference to works below present ground levels, the Planning Authority will require that a satisfactory scheme for the mitigation of the effects of development upon any archaeological remains on the site be in place. A detailed Brief for such a scheme will normally be provided by the Archaeological Officer in the North Somerset District Planning Department. Its implementation on behalf of the developer should be undertaken by a professional archaeological contractor and in accordance with a series of standard local and national guidelines (*Management of Archaeology Projects* English Heritage 1991; *Standards and Guidance documents for archaeological field evaluations, watching briefs, excavations, etc.* Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994-96; *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* Museums and Galleries Commission 1992; etc.) as specified in the Brief.

3.3.2 Recommendations for an archaeological response to the development proposals, and the prepared Brief, will be informed by the results of this preliminary desk-based assessment. Its conclusions and a recommended response are summarised below.

4.0 SUMMARY

4.1.1 Excepting the remains of an early 20th-century factory currently occupying the development site at Wyndham Way, there are no known archaeological sites or remains recorded within its bounds or immediate environs.

4.1.2 The intrinsic value or interest of the surviving industrial remains is low, although some materials or details of the former premises may still be worthy of collection or record.

4.1.3 The potential for earlier surviving archaeological remains is unknown, but if present may either be deeply buried or now largely destroyed by the foundations of the factory. The potential importance of any such survivals could, however, be considerable.

4.2 Archaeological Response

4.2.1 *Pre-Development:* As a supplement to the desk-top assessment any geotechnical ground survey data requires an evaluation of its potential for information on the earlier stratigraphic history of the site.

4.2.2 Subject to the recognition of an archaeological potential arising from 4.2.1, and any anticipated disturbance of such remains by groundworks for the development, it may be necessary to undertake a further stage of field assessment by trial trenching.

4.2.3 In the event of the implementation of 4.2.2 resulting in the recovery of significant archaeological remains, and subject to advice from the Planning Authority, a further scheme of archaeological investigation and recording may be required prior to development.

4.2.4 *During Development:* In the early stages of development involving major groundworks an archaeological watching brief should be maintained with a view to recovering any more information relating to the nail factory, as well as details of earlier stratigraphy.

4.2.5 *Post-Development:* Provision should be made for processing, synthesising and reporting of all archaeological data recovered from the site (including finds and records), with the objective of an appropriate summary publication; archiving and deposition of the data in accordance with the requirements of the approved local museum/record office.

References

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