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TANGIER, TAUNTON

**An Assessment of the archaeological
potential of land at Tangier, Castle
Street, Taunton, Somerset; with some
proposals for the mitigation of the effects
of a development upon the site**

B.U.F.A.U.



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of land at Tangier, Castle Street, Taunton,
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by
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An Assessment of the archaeological potential of land at Tangier, Castle Street, Taunton, Somerset; with some proposals for the mitigation of the effects of a development upon the site.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared in support of a planning application, on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd., to develop this site. Its purpose is to provide an assessment of the archaeological potential of the Tangier site by means of a desktop study, and in the light of that information make recommendations as to appropriate methodologies to be employed by way of mitigation should development proceed. This study, and further recommendations arising from it is prompted by Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment 1990).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Site

The site proposed for development comprises approximately 3 ha., in an area bounded by Wellington Road and Castle Street to the south and south east, and by a footpath and the watercourses of the Mill Stream and Steps Water to the north and west (NGR ST 221 246). It is currently utilised variously for car parking and as commercial premises, including a garage on the Wellington Road frontage. The site is virtually level, lying within the floodplain of the River Tone just to the north, and is founded upon deposits of valley-bottom gravels and more recent alluvium, which mask the solid Keuper Marl geology at variable depths. The district, known locally as Tangier, lies on the western edge of Taunton's historic town centre area, and adjacent to the largely modern suburbs of Wilton and Galmington to the south west.

2.2 Archaeological and Historic Context

2.2.1 The origins of Taunton as a settlement, the county town of Somerset today, lie in the Anglo-Saxon period. However, the locality was clearly attractive to earlier people, who had been exploiting and settling in the fertile valley of the River Tone here for several millennia, prior to its foundation in the 8th century AD. Discoveries of flint artefacts are the principal evidence for earlier prehistoric activity in and around the town area, some of palaeolithic or mesolithic date. By the 4th millennium BC Neolithic communities were settling the region, evidenced once again by their flints but also in the scattered remains of settlements and other sites. The focus for later prehistoric activity was the nearby hilltop enclosure at Norton Fitzwarren (Ellis 1989), although other remains of contemporary Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements in the valley reveal an

intensification of land use and expanding populations in the centuries leading up to the Roman occupation. This pattern was probably reinforced during the Roman period as local communities eventually prospered within that social and political system. Excavations at several sites beneath modern Taunton and its suburbs have revealed traces of both Iron Age and Romano-British agricultural settlements, although there is no evidence of anything approaching an urban community, here or in the wider locality.

2.2.2 The foundations of modern Taunton were laid with the establishment of a minster church at the centre of a royal estate in the 8th century. Whether or not the defended hilltop site at Norton Fitzwarren still had some central role before that time, the new site overlooking a crossing of the River Tone was now to develop as the medieval centre of an increasingly wealthy agricultural region. From the 10th century this position was enhanced by a transfer of the extensive Tone Vale royal estates to the ownership of the Bishop of Winchester, and the development of Taunton thereafter as a commercial and administrative centre for those estates. Its success as a developing urban centre was marked initially by the location of a mint and market rights, while the 1086 Domesday record of 64 burgesses show it to have been the third largest settlement in Somerset (after Bath and Ilchester) at that time. Despite this documentary evidence, archaeological remains of the late Saxon period are elusive, although there are hints of settlement, and perhaps burials, in the St Paul's/Tangier and Wilton areas, to the west and south west of the medieval centre.

2.2.3 The modern town centre still conforms closely to its medieval predecessor, whose topography and arrangement seem to date primarily from the 12th century. The foci for this were the river crossing and market at the junction between the major north, east and west routes, and the castle founded early in that century as the administrative centre for the Bishop's wealthy estates. This was confirmed by a defensive bank and ditch perimeter for the town, the foundation of the Priory of St Augustine immediately outside to the north west, and the internal layout of burghage plots and other streets from the later 12th century onwards. Whether or not there had been substantial elements of the late Saxon settlement in this area (archaeological evidence is so far sparse), the medieval town was probably reorganised and given fresh impetus by the Bishops of Winchester at this time, part of a nation-wide movement to stimulate and capitalise upon the then rapid growth of urban economies by magnates and landowners. The town defences soon became redundant and there was further expansion of the urban area, particularly along the eastern and northern routes from the town, and to a lesser extent to the south west.

2.2.4 The pattern and extent of medieval Taunton was maintained thereafter well into the 19th century, although much of its fabric was modernised. The town suffered particularly during the 17th century, and above all in the course of several sieges during the Civil War. As a result there is little of the medieval fabric now surviving above ground, beyond the churches and parts of the castle. The building of the canal and then the railway by the mid-19th century stimulated development of the northern suburbs, but most of the town's expansion dates from this century, incorporating such neighbouring village centres as Wilton, Galmington or Bishops Hull within new urban boundaries.

2.3 Archaeological Potential

2.3.1 The development site is currently occupied by business premises, yards and parking areas of quite recent origin. It contains no listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments, it is not included within a conservation area, and there are no records of any historic or archaeological discoveries from the site itself within the County Sites and Monuments Record maintained by Somerset County Council. The earliest cartographic representation, corresponding almost exactly to the present plot, shows the site as a field on John Wood's 1840 Plan of Taunton, although the area is also depicted (as open land) on an earlier Plan of Taunton c 1790. The first edition OS 1:2500 map (1888-9) shows the beginnings of suburban development along the Wellington Road here, although this piece of land was not developed until later, mainly with the building of the Castle Street link road.

2.3.2 Lying just a few hundred metres west of the Castle, the development site was separated historically from that core of settlement by the confluence of two watercourses, the Galmington and Sherford streams, with the River Tone. In early prehistoric times this would probably have been a low-lying, marshy area subject to periodic flooding. This character was well demonstrated by 19th-century discoveries on the nearby Tangier gasworks site (SMR 44414), and at Wilton Gaol beside the Sherford stream (SMR 44412 & 44413), where in deep excavations for foundations the remains of reindeer and woolly rhinoceros were found along with preserved trees and other vegetation. These discoveries indicate the preservation in waterlogged conditions of Pleistocene fauna and flora in deposits laid down during a past glacial epoch. No human remains or artefacts are recorded, but their presence must be a possibility. These stream valleys and the floodplain of the River Tone, also contain extensive deposits of fluvial gravels (noted during excavations west of the Castle, Leach 1984, 40-43), which were certainly an attraction for early human settlement. These environments may be one explanation for the scatter of early prehistoric finds from around Taunton, although it is not until the Iron Age and Romano-British periods that more concrete evidence of settlement or other land use survives (e.g. *op cit.*, 43; Ferris and Bevan 1993).

2.3.3. Historically, Taunton developed on a low ridge which terminates west at the Sherford stream, on the south bank of the River Tone. The location of the original late Saxon settlement is less certain, possible alternatives being the Wilton or St Paul's areas just to the west. Burials found near St Paul's House and other human remains found during construction of the gasworks at Tangier (SMR 44473) may support this, although neither group are reliably dated. The St Paul's/Tangier area would appear to have been too low-lying for any substantial settlement, though there is higher ground towards Wilton. In the later medieval period, after the building of the castle, the main route westwards to Exeter from the town crossed the lower valley of the Sherford stream, via a suburb (known as Shuttern) which developed along it through St Paul's towards Wilton. From here a side road led via Bishops Hull to Wellington (subsequently the Wellington Road), although there is no evidence for any suburban development in this direction. Early in the 13th century Taunton's mills and watercourses were reorganised. This included the construction of a large weir on the Tone (French Weir) and a new cut to serve the castle mill. Both lie immediately adjacent to the development site, part of the latter forming its north east

boundary. The Sherford and Galmington streams were also diverted into the millstream, a new cut for part of the latter (Steps Water) marking the western boundary of the site.

2.3.4. As is suggested by the available map evidence, the development site and its immediate environs remained as open fields or meadows until the 19th century. Apart from some ribbon development along Wellington Road, the eastern part of Tangier developed as a small suburb close to the gasworks, built alongside the river. The name “Tangier” derives from the Tangier Regiment billeted in this area for a while following the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685, and although no remains of that occupation are known, discoveries relating to this episode cannot be ruled out.

3.0 RESPONSE

3.1 The desk-based assessment of this development site and its locality provide no direct evidence for the survival of significant archaeological remains here, however, in the light of its position relative to nearby discoveries and their potential, it is necessary to consider what any further assessment of this sites’ potential may achieve.

3.2 No above-ground structures or remains of intrinsic archaeological or historic interest currently occupy the site, and thus no further recording of such is required.

3.3.1 The only available information for earlier uses of this site is 19th-century map evidence, which depicts it as a field (Wood 1840, etc.). However, the potential for earlier uses or occupancy is hinted at by several archaeological discoveries in the locality, and other references (2.3.2 - 2.3.4).

3.3.2 Among these, the Pleistocene waterlogged deposits are perhaps the most important, although the possibility of contemporary human evidence, as well as later prehistoric or Romano-British activity on this site, must also be considered.

3.3.3 While at first sight, this locality appears to lie beyond the boundaries of any Saxon or medieval settlement, the discovery of two groups of burials (Tangier and St Paul’s), as well as theories suggesting some late Saxon/early medieval settlement focus west of the later town centre, may give it added significance.

3.3.4 Although of probably least potential, the association of this area with the aftermath of the Monmouth Rebellion, and possibly also the Civil War sieges, could also be reflected in surviving remains here.

3.4.1 Opportunities for further assessment of any potential for the survival of evidence are clearly hampered at present by the current use and condition of the site. The application of such standard field evaluation techniques as geophysical prospection, fieldwalking or other surface survey is not appropriate.

3.4.2 Trial trenching or test pit excavations could provide more specific information relating to earlier remains or occupation, however, it should be pointed out that without further clues to the possible whereabouts of any such remains it would be difficult to effectively target such an investigation. Furthermore, in the case of any more deeply buried deposits of the type encountered previously in the area (2.3.2), the employment of such techniques for their assessment would be both difficult and expensive.

3.4.3 As an alternative to 3.4.2 the results of any geotechnical ground survey should be consulted as a supplement to this study. Core sample or test pit logs could provide clues to earlier environments and land use, as well as enabling some assessment to be made of the impact of the proposed development upon previous stratigraphy and potential remains.

3.5.1 Subject to the specifications of a detailed planning proposal submitted for the development of this site, and with particular reference to works below current ground level, 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 Environment Department of Somerset County Council. Its implementation on behalf of the developer should be undertaken by a professional archaeological contractor and in accordance with standard local and national guidelines for such works (*General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset*, Somerset County Council 1995; *Management of Archaeology Projects*, English Heritage 1991; *Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards*; *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections*, Museums and Galleries Commission 1992; etc.) as specified in the Brief.

3.5.2 The recommended archaeological response to detailed development proposals for the Tangier site, as specified in the prepared Brief, will be informed by this desk-based assessment. Its conclusions and suggestions for an appropriate response are summarised as follows.

4.0 SUMMARY

4.1.1 No known archaeological sites or discoveries are documented on the Tangier development site, although it lies within an area of some historic and archaeological potential.

4.1.2. The potential for survival of significant archaeological remains is unknown, although important early prehistoric deposits may be present here at some depth. Opportunities for further pre-development assessment are currently limited, existing modern uses of the site obscuring original ground levels and possibly disturbing any earlier remains.

5.0 RESPONSE

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

5.1.2 Subject to the recognition of archaeological data arising from 5.1.1, and any anticipated disturbance of such evidence by groundwork's required as part of the development, a further stage of field assessment by trial trenching may be required.

5.1.3 In the event of 5.1.1 or the implementation of 5.1.2 resulting in the recognition of significant archaeological remains, it may be necessary to implement a further scheme of archaeological investigation and recording prior to development. This would be subject to advice from the Archaeological Officer, Somerset County Council, and would form part of the Brief for a mitigation of the effects of the development upon archaeology.

5.2.1 *During Development* During those preliminary stages of the development which involve major below-ground works, a watching brief should be maintained with a view to recovering further information relating to any previous use of the site and its stratigraphic history.

5.2.2 Should the watching brief encounter remains of particular significance, and subject to the advice of the County Archaeological Officer, a contingency should be available for some additional resources towards recovery and recording, without prejudice to the development.

5.3 *Post-Development:* Provision should be made for processing, synthesis and reporting of all archaeological data recovered from the site (including finds and records), with the objective of an appropriate summary publication of the results; archiving and deposition of the data in accordance with the requirements of the County Record Office/Museum Service.

Sources

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