MARSHALL'S BANK, CLEVEDON PILL, SOMERSET

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Clevedon Bay is the Bristol Channel outfall for the three channels of the river Yeo – the Blind Yeo, which flows into the Middle Yeo, and the Land Yeo, which follows the higher ground to the north. The fields and settlements to the east of the bay are protected from high water by Marshall's Bank, a large sea wall. A section through the sea wall, drawn during improvements works to the Land Yeo, has recorded structural elements which have been interpreted in the light of written sources, historic maps, geological test pits and partial sections of the flood defenses along Uphill Pill (east of Brean Down, see Figure 1), to the south. Although it has not been possible to date the earlier structures within the bank, a landscape study of the surrounding archaeological sites and features suggests that Marshall's Bank was the only flood defense constructed along Clevedon Bay and that it has the potential to be of considerable antiquity. Not only has a section of ancient flood defense been identified, but the structures within the bank may allow the recognition of further stretches of ancient sea wall along this coast in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Clevedon is familiar today as a charming small sea-side resort on the eastern shore of the upper reaches of the Bristol Channel, its pier,

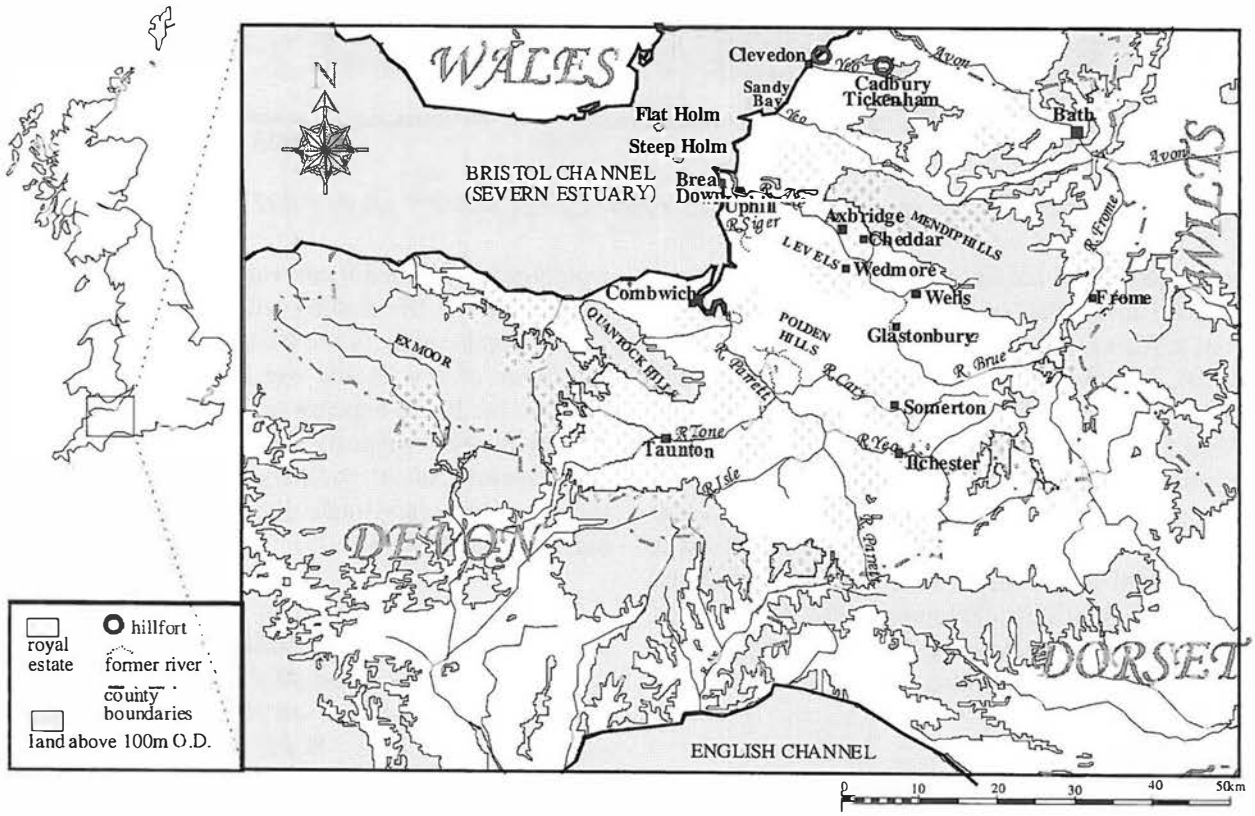

Figure 1. The Water Roads of Somerset (shaded areas show land above 100 m OD).

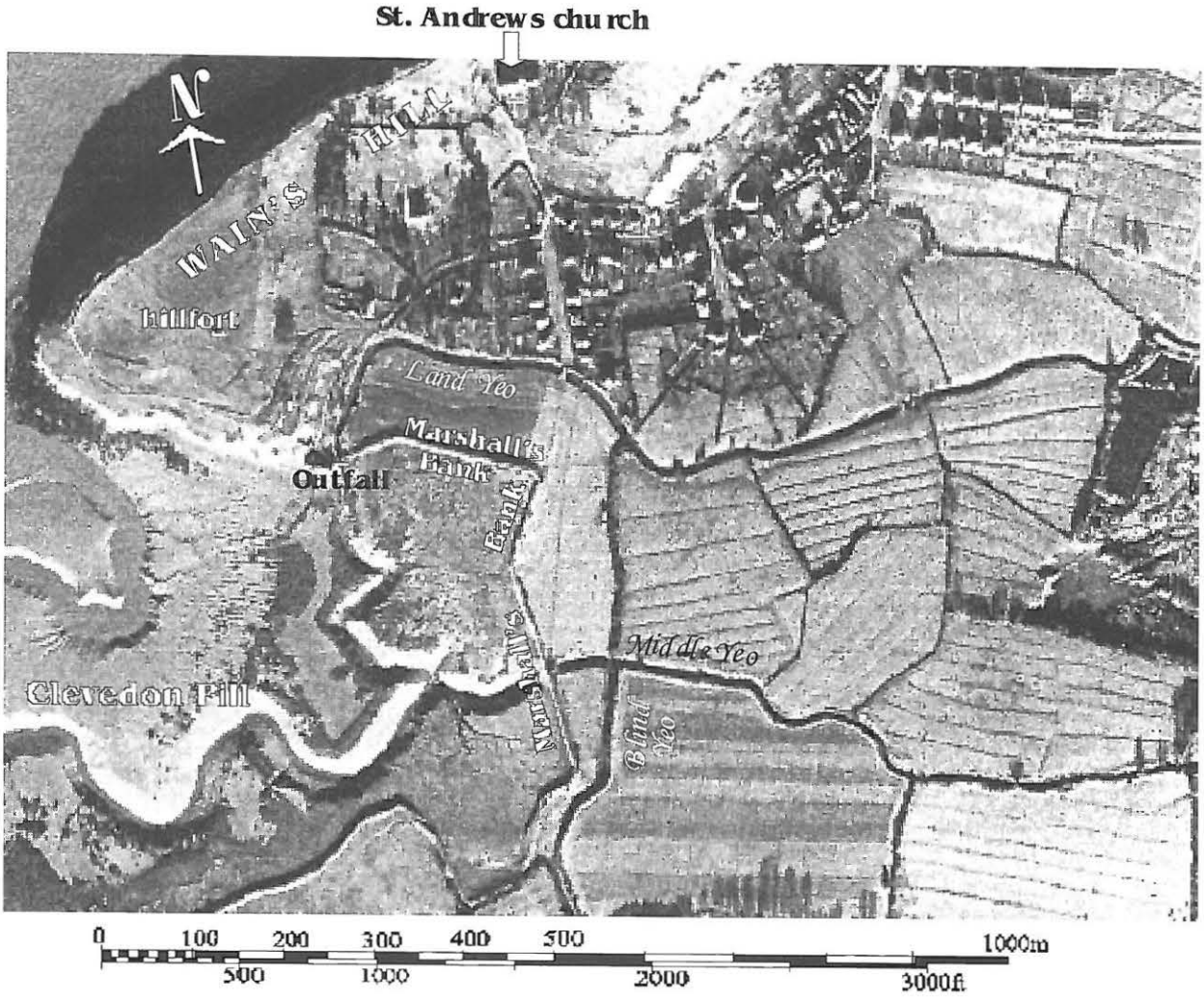

Figure 2. Detail of RAF aerial photograph, 1946 (CPE/UK/1869 photo 3092).

promenades and public gardens harking back to a by-gone era. One of its many attractions is the Poet's Walk, named after Coleridge and others of his ilk, leading out of town to the original parish church and a small Iron Age promontory fort on Wain's Hill. Local legend states that West End, at the base of the hill, just south of St. Andrew's church was the original settlement of Clevedon (Renton 1954, 5); the sea-side resort was constructed on common land by the lord of the manor in the 1820s (Dunning 1992, 68). Local knowledge is consistent with topography, as the annotated aerial photograph (Figure 2) demonstrates.

The three channels of the River Yeo (the Land Yeo, Middle Yeo and Blind Yeo, (represented on Figure 1 by a single line) discharge into the Pill forming Clevedon Bay, and would have provided fresh water, water power and navigation for the fishing village of West End. The original course of the Middle Yeo is now lost in a maze of rhynes and wet ditches defining the fields in the broad expanse of Clevedon Moor, but the topography suggests that it formerly formed one channel of a complex, meandering river system. The approximate direction of its course is indicated in Figure 3.

The low-lying land of Clevedon Moor is protected from the salty Bristol Channel by a large sea wall known as Marshall's Bank, effecting the conversion of low-value salt marsh into extremely valuable hay meadow. Wain's Hill itself, marked out in Figure 3 by the 5m contour, was said to have formed an island at high tide (Renton, 5), giving the village natural defensibility. The outfall of the northern branch of the river, the

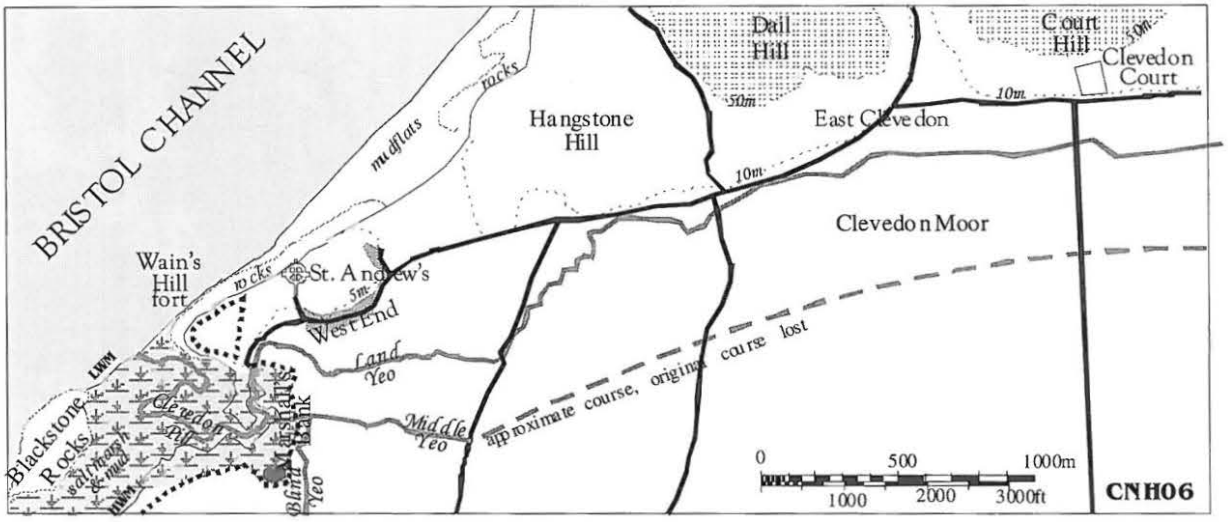

Figure 3. Key features of the Clevedon and River Yeo landscape taken from the Ordnance Survey map, the tithe map and the North Somerset Sites and Monuments Register.

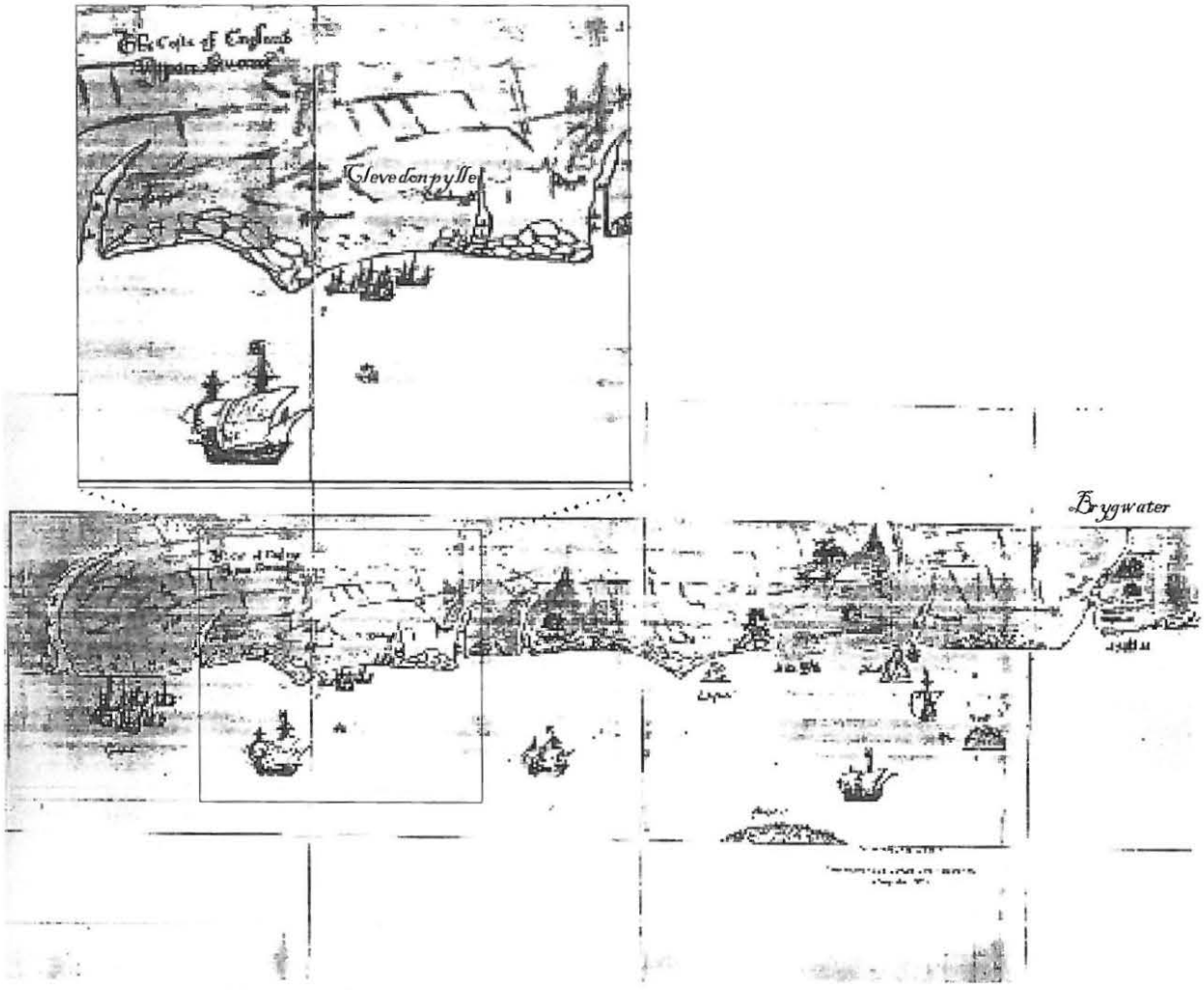

Figure 4. Detail from Tudor map "The Somerset Coast upon Severn", (Green, 1888 quoting Cotton MSS. Aug i, Vol i)

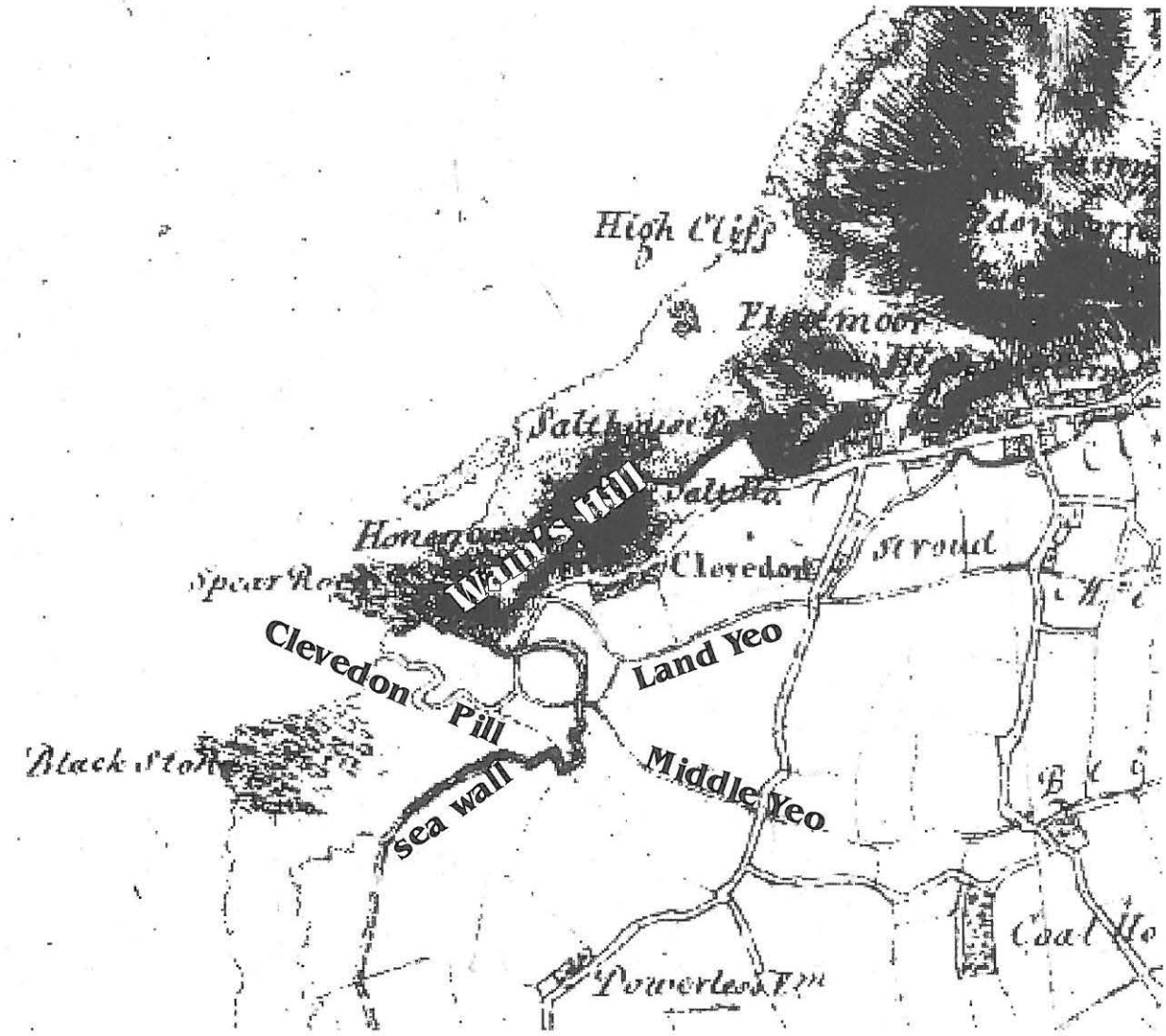

Figure 5. OS Surveyor' Drawing, 1810 (SRO ref.: OSD no. 48 DER. 33 2" card 58).

Land Yeo, flows through a sluice in the northern end of Marshall's Bank.

The Land Yeo sluice has recently been modernized and reinforced by the Environment Agency, leading to a programme of research and fieldwork upon which this report is based. Most important was the rare opportunity to monitor a cross-section through a sea wall, with the potential to reveal details of construction, maintenance and development of a significant, if poorly understood, class of field monument.

TOPOGRAPHY AND SOILS

The soils of Wain's Hill have not been surveyed. The soils of Clevedon Moor, to the east of the sea wall, are typical of the low-lying ground between Clevedon and Weston-super-Mare in consisting of ground-water gley soils.

"These are soils, normally developed within or over permeable materials, that have prominently mottled or uniformly grey subsoils resulting from periodic waterlogging by a fluctuating groundwater table." (Soil Survey of England and Wales).

They belong to the Newchurch 2 series of marine alluvium. These soils are characterised as "Deep stoneless mainly calcareous clayey soils. Groundwater controlled by ditches and pumps. Flat land. Risk of flooding in places." (Soil Survey of England and Wales).

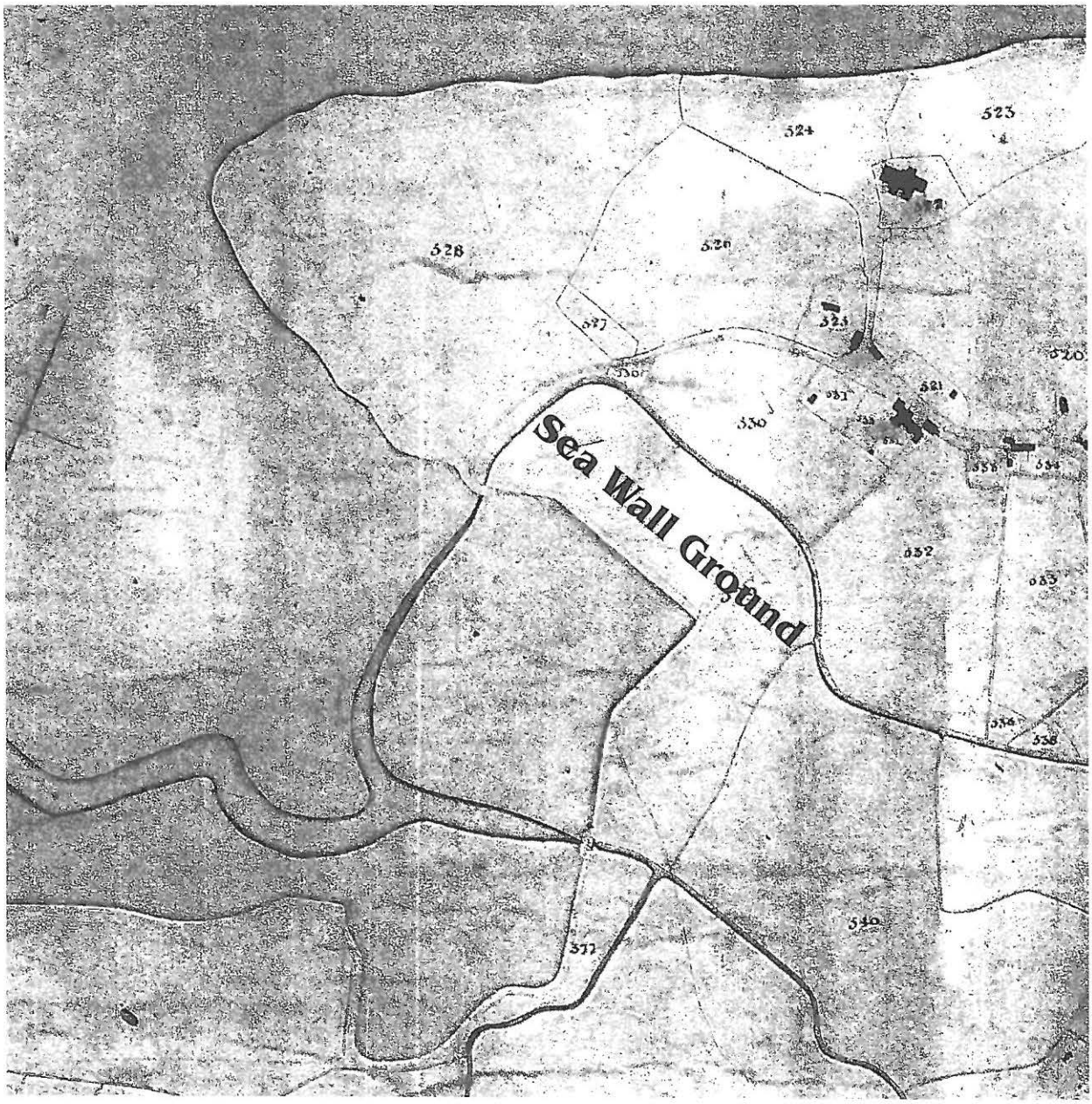

Figure 6. Tithe map 1839.

Such soils are best suited to use as hay meadow with grazing, and are probably the explanation for the large acreage of meadow and the 22 cattle and 8 horses recorded in the Domesday Book, below.

The contours picked out in Figure 3 suggest that Wain's Hill may well have formerly been an island at high tide, as the local tradition has it, now normally dry due to a combination of drainage and siltation of the river valleys. Clevedon Pill itself seems to have suffered considerable siltation. Late 19th century records indicate that the port had its own small fleet of 3 ships, varying in size between 50 and 100 tons, trading with Newport and Lydney for coal (Short, 107). In the 19th century, fishing nets were stretched along poles from the base of Wain's Hill to the Black Rock (Short, 108). One fish trap has recently been identified on Black Rock, giving a radiocarbon date in the late middle ages (Hillditch 2001).

The importance of the port is attested by the inclusion of Clevedon in a map of the coastal defences on the north Somerset coast from the

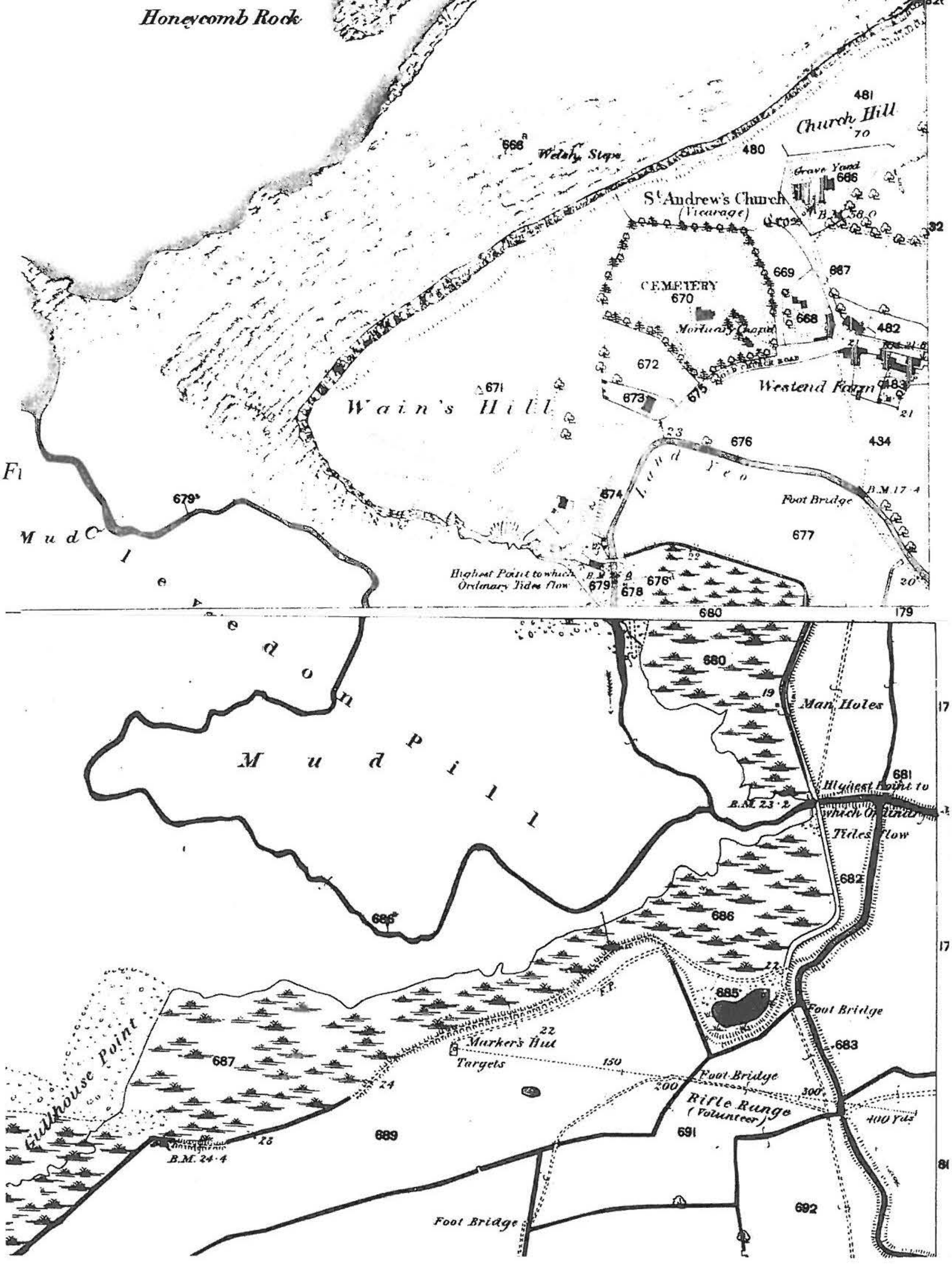

Figure 7. Detail from 1st edition OS map, 1:2500, 1885, Sheet IV.10.

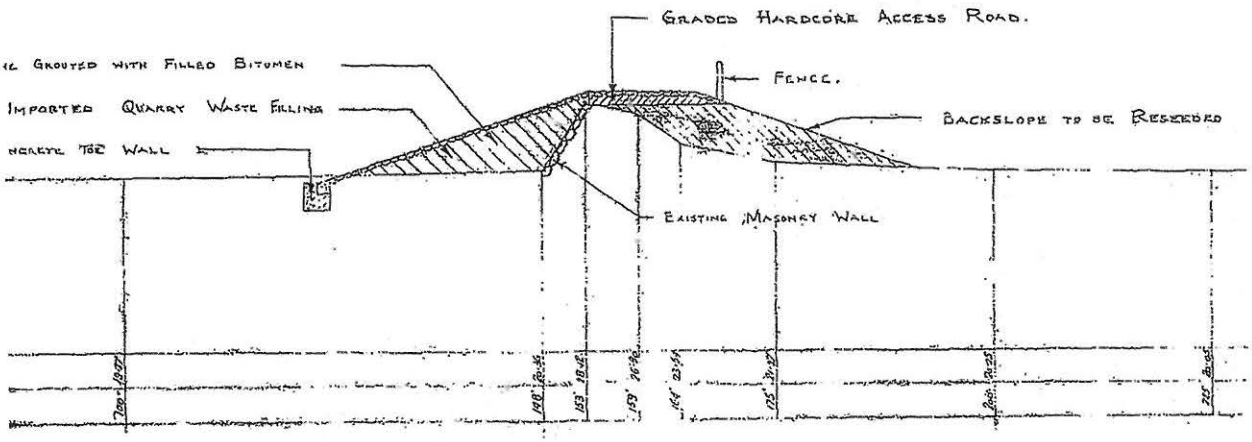

Figure 8. Somerset Rivers Board, Clevedon Sea Wall Scheme 3, 1958, construction diagram.

Kings Road - the approaches to Bristol and the Avon - south to Minehead during the time of Henry VIII (see Figure 4). The fact that Clevedon Pill is named and drawn suggests that it played some defensive role at that time. Note the cluster of ships and boats along the shore of what became the resort town of Clevedon.

In the later 19th century, a battery belonging to the 1st Somerset Artillery Volunteers was situated on a small terrace on the side of Wain's Hill, above the port. The target was anchored in the bay (Short, 108). Victorian barracks next to the Land Yeo sluice were still in use throughout WWII (SMR nos. 09777 and 41428).

The Land Yeo flows northeast to southwest along the base of Wain's Hill, a small, narrow, limestone hill or outcrop sharing the same alignment. The Land Yeo Outfall is situated upon a small spur of limestone below the SW end of the hill. Rocky cliffs fall from the summit ridge of Wains Hill into the Bristol Channel.

"In this hill are several old lead mines, and that kind of ore is frequently found in digging near the surface. Lapis calaminaris [calamine, an ore of zinc] is also found." (Collinson 1791, vol iii, 166).

The western end of the hill has been cut off by a set of straight banks and ditches, forming an Iron Age promontory fort which overlooks the small bay. Pottery found during paving of the Poet's Walk in the 1930s suggests its use continued into the Roman period. The fort affords commanding views of the Bristol Channel and contains a WWII pillbox (North Somerset Sites and Monuments Register nos. 00184 and 09756).

Clevedon's original medieval parish church lies in a col or small valley on the hill from where it is visible from the sea.

DOMESDAY BOOK

"Matthew holds CLIVEDONE from the King, and Hildebert from him. John the Dane held it before 1066; it paid tax for 51/2 hides and 2 furlongs. Land for 6 ploughs & 2 hides, with 1 slave; 8 villagers and 10 smallholders with 4 ploughs & 3½ hides and 2 furlongs. Meadow, 46 acres; pasture 1 ½ leagues long and as wide; woodland 2 furlongs long and ½ furlong wide. 7 unbroken mares; 1 cob; 22 cattle; 25 pigs; 115 sheep. Value Formerly 40s; value now £4." (Thorn, 1980)

This entry describes Anglo-Saxon Clevedon as a village with 8 or 9 houses (if the slave had a house) with 10 other houses on the fringes of the manor. The villagers and smallholders owned 4 plough teams (each containing 4-8 oxen) between

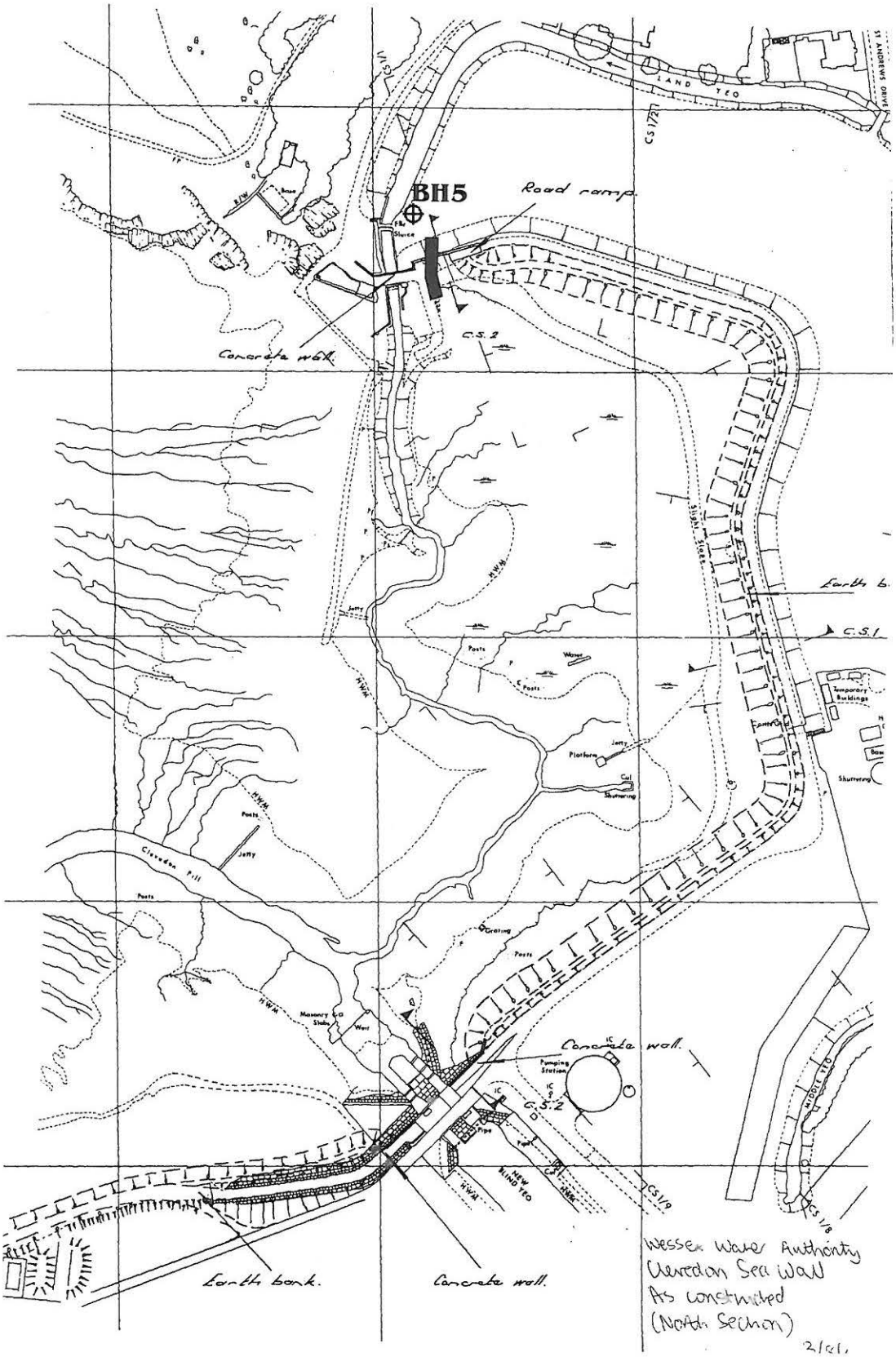

Figure 9. Plan of the 1984 Wessex Water Authority works; thick black line shows location of section Figure 10.

them, more than they need for their 3½ ploughlands. The manor was rich in meadow - the most valuable type of land in the medieval period; the supply of hay largely determined the number of animal which could be over-wintered. Clevedon's plentiful supply of hay grass would have enabled them to keep a large number of cattle plus a cob and 7 unbroken mares – a stud farm. The pigs would have fed in the woodland and the sheep would have grazed the pasture.

The manor was a royal holding in an area with few other royal manors, unlike south and central Somerset where the king was a major landowner (see Figure 1).

Few churches were mentioned in Domesday Book apart from those with landed, taxable estates and it is likely that a port would not have been subject to taxation if it were also part of a royal estate.

MARSHALL'S BANK

When a sea wall was first constructed, preventing sea water from entering Clevedon Moor, it is very likely that one consequence would have been the conversion of salt marsh into meadow land. Indeed, it is not too far fetched to suggest that this was one of the primary motivations for the construction of early sea walls. One of the implications of the Domesday record of Clevedon's 46 acres of meadow is that a sea wall had already been constructed by 1086.

HISTORIC MAPS

The progress of drainage of the Somerset Levels is usually represented by sequences of roughly parallel flood defences marking successive episodes of land drainage and reclamation (See Allen 1998, for example). A study of the historic maps of the area, however, suggests that the drainage of Clevedon Moor did not proceed in this fashion.

While it is difficult to argue from negative evidence, it is probably significant that the 1810 O.S. map indicates Marshall's Bank (annotated by us as 'sea wall' on Figure 5) and no other flood defences. Marshall's Bank appears on the tithe map (Figure 6) with the adjacent field named as a Sea Wall Ground in the tithe award. Similarly, the 1946 aerial survey (see Figure 2 for a detail) shows flood banks along the Land Yeo, the Middle Yeo and the Blind Yeo, but no other banks echoing the orientation of Marshall's Bank; neither do any of the Ordnance Survey maps down to the most recent edition. It would appear, therefore, that in this area the earliest sea wall was in the same location that Marshall's Bank occupies today.

Marshall's Bank suffered considerable alterations in 1958, when a channel was cut from the Blind Yeo, which had formerly emptied into the Middle Yeo, through the sea wall. As well as being diverted (see Figure 9), the bank was augmented with a large dump of quarry waste, capped with a sealing layer of bitumen (Figure 8). The existing bank shows as a blank profile with a stone revetment wall.

DEPOSITS AND FEATURES

Figure 10 portrays the measured sketch cross-section of Marshall's Bank recorded during the installation of the "sweetening pipe" which allowed the water of the Land Yeo to by-pass the sluice while the improvement engineering was under way. The cross-section was cut by a large mechanical excavator, with the result that the deep, exposed faces of the cut were very unstable and difficult to approach; at no time were we able to clean and inspect the deposits with the care we would have wished. The cut was made in three sections and linked together on the drawing board, with the borehole results, with reference to the recorded levels related to Ordnance Datum. We are indebted to Bruce Eaton for his assistance.

Soil samples were taken and numbered consecutively, the same numbers being used as context numbers for deposits. No relevant finds were recovered.

Breaches in sea walls will always be difficult, with the threat of the rising tide always making speed a priority. Nevertheless, it was possible to produce a measured sketch section containing a wealth of valuable information, described below in sequence from the earliest to the latest deposits.

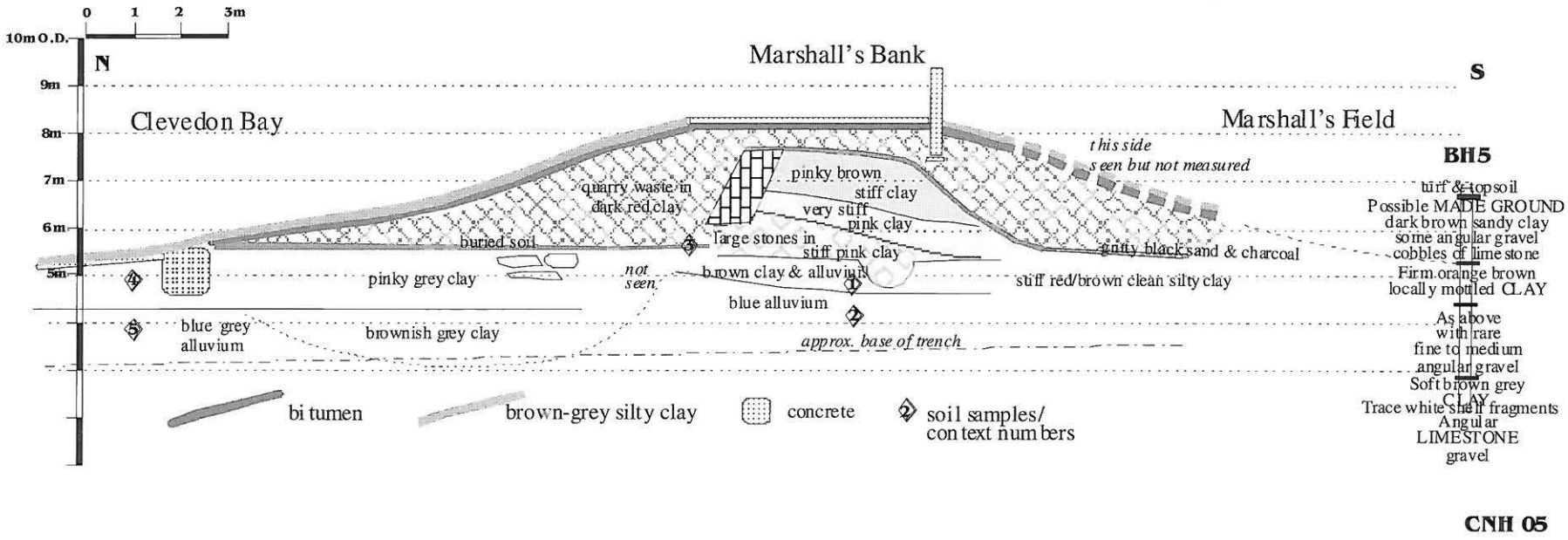

Figure 10. Section of Marshall's Bank including borehole (BH5). Location on Figure 9.

THE CORE OF THE OLD SEA WALL

Soils below the bank (Figure 3)

layer/ sample no.	description	interpretation
2	clean blue alluvial clay	marine clay
1	mixed light brown clays with blue alluvial clays	? salt marsh deposits

These two deposits, sealed below the bank from its earliest origins, were not seen anywhere else in the pipe trench. The upper surface of the lower deposit could be seen to be sinking below the weight of Marshall's Bank. The marine clay (**2**) is ubiquitous within the flood plains of north Somerset and elsewhere, while the upper deposit (**1**) should represent the soils prevalent before the bank was constructed, usually found to be salt marsh (see, for example, Hollinrake, C & N 2002). The upper alluvium (**1**) has been cut by a feature – a ditch or a pit. Without being able to see this feature in plan, it is impossible to discuss it further.

sample no.	description	interpretation
none	large unworked local limestone (up to 50 x 30 x 20cm) in very stiff pink clay	earliest remaining sea wall
none	very stiff pink clay	raising of sea wall
none	stiff pinky brown clay	raising of sea wall

Above these two deposits lies the pre-20th century sea wall. The deposit forming the lowest layer of the sea wall, large stones in pink clay, most likely comes from the quarry on the lower slopes of Wain's Hill. This deposit fills the feature cut into the upper alluvium (**1**) described above. It is likely that hand-cleaning and closer inspection would reveal further structures within this layer, either earlier features or features and structures designed to stabilize the stones.

Stiff clay was used to raise the bank: the pink clay, lacking in organic matter, was probably quarried from deep undisturbed natural geology; the pinky brown deposit was probably quarried from a higher level where the mineral clay is mixed with organic soil. Again, these deposits are more likely to derive from Wain's Hill than from Clevedon Moor, where the soils are dominated by the blue marine clay and the brown and grey salt marsh deposits, but they could also have derived from large building works elsewhere.

It is impossible to know whether these three deposits constituted one operation or two or more, and what length of time elapsed between various maintenance and augmenting episodes. Heightening of the bank could have occurred in response to rising sea level, but it is equally likely that the weight of Marshall's Bank caused the sea wall to subside into the soft alluvial deposits upon which it is resting. This is an example of the kind of issue that could be resolved by a more thorough analysis of the deposits than was possible on this occasion.

sample no.	description	interpretation
none	masonry composed of unworked off-white limestone bonded with soft, ashy shelly lime mortar	revetment of sea wall

The bank described above was faced by a stone revetment wall. This is the wall depicted on the profile in Figure 10, above. Stone was being exported from the quarries at Uphill, near Weston-super-Mare, and Chepstow, across the Bristol Channel in Monmouthshire, in the years from *c.* 1900 to *c.* 1920 to make up the seawalls between Kingston Bay and Clevedon; it is likely that the stone revetment wall dates from this time (Eglinton, n.d).

sample no.	description	interpretation
none	black gritty sand mixed with charcoal	non-slip surface

The top of the revetment wall, the sea wall bank and the level ground in Marshall's field was covered by a layer of sand. The addition of charcoal suggests that this is a product of human agency rather than a natural deposit resulting from severe wave action covering the bank with sand. Similar sandy spreads are common in marine and coastal environments, including aboard ship, and

were laid down to prevent people slipping on wet surfaces. This layer extended over the top of the revetment wall, suggesting that the practice was still current in the 20th century.

Soils below the 1958 bank

sample no.	description	interpretation
none	stiff red/brown clean silty clay	colluvium

The lowest layer below the old sea wall, the blue marine clay, does not continue beyond the protection of the bank, nor are the deposits to the north or the south of the old sea wall the same. The Marshall's Field soil appeared in the trench as a single layer.

layer/ sample no.	description	interpretation
3	thin layer (c15-20cm thick) of dark brown, slightly silty, humic clay	Buried soil
4	pinky-grey clay becoming browner towards sea	upper colluvial/ alluvial deposits
5	blue/grey/brown clays	lower alluvial deposits mixed with marine clay
none	concentrated area of 2 courses large, flat local unworked limestone within layer 4, full extent obscured by contractors' cage	hard standing, pos. for unknown structure
none	concrete structure (c1m x 1m) going across pipe trench, at top of layer 4	toe wall from 1958 bank enhancement
none	thin skin of concrete extending seawards from concrete toe wall	overspill from concrete slipway?
none	brownish grey clay between blue-grey alluvium (layer 5) and blue alluvium (layer 2), part obscured by contractors' cage	alluvial/marine sediment filling unseen feature

This deposit lies in a roughly equivalent position to the brown alluvial clay (**1**) below the old bank. The redness indicates a substantial mineral component, suggesting that some of the clay derives from disturbance of the lower clays somewhere within the watershed, in a clearance episode which post-dated the formation of the first sea wall. The deposits below the seaward part of the 1958 bank were recorded as distinct layers containing several features.

Most of these features and deposits are self-explanatory, but some further discussion of the change between the blue alluvium below the old seawall (layer 2) and the brownish grey clay is required. Although this area could not be viewed because of the obstruction by the contractors' cage, the deposits in this area are clearly discontinuous and the observations are consistent with the theory that the creation of the first sea wall caused the blue alluvium to the seaward side to be scoured away. It is likely that layer 2 originally merged with layer 5, that this continuity was disrupted by scouring after the first sea wall was put in place and that, at a later date, the void resulting from the scouring was filled with the brownish grey clay (See Allen 2004 for a similar formation at Caldicot).

The 1958 bank

sample no.	description	interpretation
none	unworked local pinky red limestone	quarry waste
none	thin layer (up to c30cm thick) of bitumen entirely covering quarry waste	protective layer for quarry waste
none	thin layer (up to c40cm thick) of brown grey silty clay on both sides of sea wall	alluvium
none	concrete above bitumen layer on top of sea wall	road to sluice gate
none	concrete wall at landward side of road, sunk up to 50cm into quarry waste, resting on concrete pad	part of sluice maintenance and enhancement, 1983

DISCUSSION

Although it is not possible to put an absolute date on the activities on Marshall's Bank, it is clear that the measured sketch section illustrates the main features and deposits forming an historic sea wall of some antiquity. The revetment wall below the quarry waste is almost certain to date to the early decades of the 20th century (see above), indicating that the pink clay and stone bank are earlier features.

The authors believe, therefore, that this is the first time that any ancient flood defence – either sea wall or river bank – has been seen in its entirety in historic Somerset. The authors did, however, record partial sections through the flood defences at Uphill Sluice in 2004 which are broadly comparable with the Clevedon section (Hollinrake 2004). No dating evidence was recovered at Uphill, but Williams is of the opinion that the River Axe will have been accompanied by a comprehensive network of flood banks and drains by the 13th century (Williams, 1970: 43-4). The Uphill sections were cut by machine but cleaned by hand, allowing the detection of more detail than was possible at Clevedon.

Figure 3 shows that Clevedon Pill is surrounded by archaeological sites which have the potential to provide historical contexts for the construction of a sea wall in the location of Marshall's Bank. They suggest that the Pill was a busy port of some considerable antiquity. There follows a brief outline of the major archaeological sites in the immediate vicinity with some observations on issues that might arise in further research on each of them.

Wain's Hill hillfort

No archaeological excavations have taken place in the hillfort, but work on the footpath on Wain's Hill in the 1930s produced late Romano-British pottery "on top of the inner rampart on the south side just below the turf. Lifting of the turf in places in the interior revealed 'a very thin scatter of buff-coloured sherds of thumbnail size' (?Iron Age)." (Burrow 1981, 294).

Late Romano-British pottery suggests a Roman period use of the hillfort, perhaps as a lookout point or a defensive position for the populace during troubled times. This could also be an indication of Dark Age hilltop settlement in much the same way that seems typical in Somerset on sites such as South Cadbury, Cadbury Congresbury and Glastonbury Tor.

This potential for Dark Age occupation may also have some bearing on the place-name "Clevedon", formed from the Middle English *cleof, cleove* – a cliff and *dun* – fortified place; usually applied to settlements on a low hill (Gelling and Cole, p. 164-5). The implications of the name are that there was a settlement above the cliffs of Wain's Hill around the time when English place-names were being formulated in Somerset. The hillfort would fit the topographical description of the place-name, while the church may owe its location to the proximity of a suggested settlement in the hillfort.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles records that King Alfred constructed a system of coastal defenses that successfully protected the coasts of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall from Viking attack (Swanton 2000: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, AD 915, 99). If Clevedon Pill was capable of harbouring ships of up to 100 tons, it was also a port requiring defending. The Alfredian *burh* at Watchet – Daws Castle – demonstrates the type of defences Alfred employed (McAvoy 1986); the hillfort at Wain's Hill could also have been reused in the Anglo-Saxon period for this purpose. Viking raids along the coast might have prompted the local fishermen of West End to seek a more secure dwelling place on the hill. Perhaps this is the relevance of the manor being a royal holding at the time of Domesday Book.

St. Andrew's Church

Founded by the Augustinians, who acquired Bristol Cathedral in 1142, the Old Church, as it is locally known (Renton 1954, 5), shows signs of having had some kind of existence before that time. The size of the Norman church suggests that it had predecessors (Renton 1954, 8). Many of the small, early, irregular monasteries of pre-Conquest foundation were "regularised" by Augustinian canons after the Conquest. The dedication could possibly have changed from the original Welsh (?) saint at this time, leading to

what could appear to be an original foundation rather than a refoundation (Richard Morris, *pers. comm.*).

"In 1257 the Augustinians were given the revenues of Clevedon, Weston-in-Gordano, Portbury, Tickenham and two churches in the south of the County because, being a monastery in a seaside town, they were put to great expense in the matter of entertaining" (Renton 1954, 5). The list of churches appears to represent ecclesiastical properties which were transferred to the Augustinians along with St. Andrew's. If that was the case, this suggests that Clevedon was a Saxon minster and the site of a monastery.

In 1291 St. Andrew's became the parish church, at about the same time as the aisled old church – presumably Norman – was pulled down and the existing nave and south aisle was built. A few stones bearing the characteristic Norman chevron motif may still be seen on the south wall and the chancel (Renton, 1954, 7-8). In 1323 Bishop Dokensford tonsured 10 monks in the chapel of Clevedon Court (Dunning 1992: 69). This may indicate that some form of monastic establishment still existed in Clevedon at that time, the chapel of Clevedon Court being preferred to St. Andrew's after the latter had become the parish church.

The Land Yeo rises at the western end of Dundry Hill before passing Clevedon Court, where Roman coins and skeletons were excavated as recently as 1877 (Short: 107), suggesting that the port at Clevedon Pill was also in use in the Roman period.

SUMMARY

All of the activities outlined above were focused on the Clevedon Pill. There is evidence for a wide range of activities – defensive, industrial, domestic, fishing, coastal and river management, communications and trade – through a wide range of dates – from the Iron Age, through the Roman period and then through the medieval and post-medieval periods. The construction of Marshall's Bank could conceivably belong to any of these periods; the technology is not even beyond the bounds of the Iron Age, when the construction of large defensive banks was familiar in the hillforts.

Given the paucity of harbours along this coast, it should come as no surprise that small bays, such as Clevedon Pill, might be far more important in the past than appears obvious today. This harbour, in common with the majority of small ports along this coast, is becoming clogged by constant deposition of silts. It is these silts, however, which tend to foster the preservation of the archaeological record.

Despite the lack of information regarding dates of the flood banks at Uphill or the sea walls at Uphill and Clevedon, enough information has been forthcoming to be satisfied that these flood defenses are late 19th century at the latest and should be listed as historic banks. Doubtless, careful excavation of the demolished sections would have produced very interesting results to contribute to a field with hardly any recovered data. Indeed, so little was known about the structure and date of flood banks that a simple watching brief was the only investigation required. After the data recovered at Uphill and Clevedon, surely the time has come for any further demolition of flood defenses to benefit from more thorough archaeological monitoring.

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