
**Archaeological recording at Pigeon
House Wharf, Pyrford, Surrey**

NGR: TQ 0539 5859

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Report to National Trust (Southern Region)

January 1999

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Summary statement

During towpath works on the site of Pigeon House Wharf, foundations of a building were observed by National Trust staff. These works had been required to remove fallen trees that were impinging on the towpath about 100m south of Pigeon House Bridge. This was known to be near the site of a building that had acted as a wharfinger's cottage or warehouse, and was of some interest to the management of the River Wey Navigations. C K Currie (CKC Archaeology) was asked to clean back disturbed soil and debris from the site, and to record the exposed foundations. He was assisted by River Wey Navigations maintenance workers, undertaking the work on 11th January 2000.

The remains of a brick building were found on the edge of the towpath of the River Wey Navigation, an artificial waterway constructed in the mid-17th century. This was almost certainly one of at least two buildings constructed on Pigeon House Wharf, probably in the 18th century. The wharf was at its most active after 1765, but it is not known if it continued as a going concern after the coming of the railways. The buildings here were owned by the Lovelace family, and were thought to be associated with the transport of flour and grain to and from nearby Ockham Mill.

That part of the building exposed was approximately 5.6m by 4.14m externally. From map evidence, this would appear to be the northern half of the building known as Pigeon House Cottage as it was at the time of the 1872 Ordnance Survey 25" plan. The excavated portion seems to have been divided internally by a later brick wall. At some time after 1823 a back extension was demolished, and the surviving structure appears to have been reorganised. The excavated portion seems to have been divided internally by a possible later brick wall. The western room had been given a concrete floor, probably after 1850, and may have been used for storage or a non-domestic use. The back room was given a new set of steps leading into the building, again after 1850. This room may have had a domestic purpose. An internal stub wall may have been one side of a fireplace.

Archaeological recording at Pigeon House Wharf, Pyrford, Surrey (NGR: TQ 0539 5859)

This report has been written based on the format suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Birmingham, 1994). The ordering of information follows the guidelines given in this document, although alterations may have been made to fit in with the particular requirements of the work.

1.0 Introduction

During towpath works on the site of Pigeon House Wharf, foundations of a building were observed by National Trust staff. These works had been required to remove fallen trees that were impinging on the towpath about 100m south of Pigeon House Bridge. This was known to be near the site of a building that had acted as a wharfinger's cottage or warehouse, and was of some interest to the management of the River Wey Navigations. C K Currie (CKC Archaeology) was asked to clean back disturbed soil and debris from the site, and to record the exposed foundations. He was assisted by River Wey Navigations maintenance workers, undertaking the work on 11th January 2000.

2.0 Historical background

The River Wey Navigation was started in 1651 under the direction of Sir Richard Weston. Its purpose was to connect the port of London to Guildford via river. Pigeon House Wharf was one of the many old wharves on the Navigation. It is not known when it was first constructed. The earliest recorded wharves on the Navigation were at New Haw, Send Heath, Dapdune and Guildford. These were all in operation by 1724, and all except Send Heath can be shown to date from the early years of the Navigation. It is possible that other loading and unloading points were at the various locks, but this was gradually abandoned in favour of purpose built wharves. A number of these were constructed by private individuals to serve specific industrial sites along the river valley.

By the late 18th/early 19th century there were many additional wharves along the course of the Navigation. Working from the Thames down to Guildford, there were wharves at Weybridge, New Haw, Parvis Bridge, Pigeon House Bridge, Newark, Cartbridge, Bowers Lock, Dapdune and Guildford, as well as a number of other less official unloading points. For example, Triggs Lock continued to be popular for unloading and loading long after the majority of locks were replaced in this capacity by proper wharves. The development of these wharves often caused some of the older wharves to fall into decline. For instance the wharf at Send Heath was abandoned in favour of Cartbridge Wharf, and Parvis Bridge and the first wharf on the Basingstoke Canal did much to promote the early abandonment of New Haw Wharf. Pigeon House Wharf, at Pyrford, may have also been instrumental in the decline of New Haw Wharf (Currie 1996, *passim*).

The origin of Pigeon House Wharf is not known, but it is thought to have developed in the 18th century, largely to serve Ockham Mill. Wharf Lane, a track leading up to the wharf, comes directly from Ockham Mill. No mention of Pigeon House Wharf has been found in the

earlier Navigation documents. The earliest accounts for the Navigation date from 1724. At this time there was a lock-keeper who served both Pyrford and Walsham Locks. This might suggest that he was stationed at the wharf, although there is no direct mention of it, and, where specific mention is made, it seems that loading and unloading was mainly carried out at Pyrford Lock (SRO 129/7/1). The earliest indication of a wharf here dates from 1765 (SRO 129/7/2). It appears to have been on the east bank, either side of Pigeon House Bridge. Most historic maps show at least one building here. The tithe map for Pyrford shows at least two, one probably a wharfinger's house, the other a warehouse (SRO, Pyrford tithe survey).

New Haw Wharf declined from the 1790s onwards, and Pigeon House Wharf may have briefly grown in importance. Between 1775 and 1790 more goods were handled here than at any of the other old wharf sites north of Dapdune, with the possible exception of Send Heath. The trade at Pyrford far exceeded that at New Haw, although towards the end of the 1780s many goods seem to have been diverted to the more recent wharf at Parvis Bridge. It was not uncommon for Pigeon House Wharf to handle over 300 loads a quarter in the last quarter of the 18th century. In the quarter ending September 1775, 580 loads passed through this wharf. There were, nevertheless, occasional quiet periods, but these do not seem to have lasted long. In the quarter ending June 1776 only four loads are recorded, with a very reasonable 288 1/2 and 305 1/2 loads being listed in the quarters either side of this low point (SRO 129/7/4a).

By the early 19th century there appears to have been two wharves adjoining Pigeon House Bridge, the 'upper loading place' and the 'lower loading place'. It is recorded in the 1826 survey that the lower wharf was in need of repair, as was the upper wharf. To carry out the repairs piles, planks and chalk were required (SRO 129/107/1, p. 9). The wharves here are mentioned as being in better repair in 1843 (SRO 129/107/2). In 1845 the only wharves mentioned on the Wey Navigation are Pigeon House, Newark, Send Heath (Cartbridge), Dapdune and Guildford (SRO 129/107/3). There is no longer any mention of New Haw, although this may be because it had become a private wharf. However, Newark Wharf was a private wharf, but this was mentioned in 1845.

It is unlikely that it will ever be possible to draw too many definite conclusions about these wharves because of the frequent inconsistency of the records. Like so many of the other rural wharves, Pigeon House probably declined rapidly in importance after the coming of the railways in the later 1840s. Its isolation from an immediate railway track may have allowed it to carry on functioning longer than most, but it is not mentioned on the 1888 Sale Catalogue (SRO 129/141/4).

The idea that the wharf was created mainly to serve Ockham Mill is supported by the tithe survey for Pyrford. This lists two buildings on the wharf, both owned by Lord Lovelace. One of these is listed as a cottage, but there are no details for the other. Lord Lovelace was lord of the manor for Ockham (Sprules 1911, 361), and owned an interest in the mill. It would seem, therefore, that the buildings serving the wharf had been erected by his family or their tenants to serve what was largely a private wharf. In 1776 there were two bargemasters specifically listed as being 'of Ockham', John Hopkins and John Spong (SRO 129/46/13), further indicating this connection.

There are no buildings shown in the vicinity of the wharf on Rocque's county map of c. 1770, but this may be a matter of the small scale. The earliest map showing the wharf is the Navigation map of 1782. This marks Pigeon House Bridge as 'Warehouse & Loading Place' (SRO 129/143/13). Jago's more detailed map of 1823 calls the wharf 'Pyrford Wharf', and shows two buildings near the end of Wharf Lane (SRO G129/143/1-10). One of these is right on the left hand side of the lane as it meets the towpath, with the other larger building 10m or so to the north. This larger building seems to be close to the spot where the recent archaeological works were carried out. It seems to have an extension on the back. This building seems to have been still standing in 1872 when the first 25" Ordnance Survey maps are made (sheet XVII.11). A building is still shown at the end of Wharf Lane on a sale catalogue of 1905, although it is uncertain which building this represented (SRO 129/142/20).

3.0 Strategy

The author was asked to go out and record the foundations uncovered on a rescue basis the day before the work was undertaken. In such circumstances, strategy is based on a Project Design written for such work, C K Currie, *Project Design for archaeological rescue work* (1999). This is based largely on the guidelines laid out in the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (1994). They have been adopted by the author, who has often responded to rescue situations during routine maintenance on the River Wey Navigations.

Telephone conversation with property staff indicated that the author was required to go to the site, clear any disturbed soil and debris away from the remains, and record them. It was understood that there was no requirement to extend the excavations over areas not previously disturbed. The verbal instructions given also required monochrome and colour photographs, with scales, to be taken. The scale adopted for planning in these circumstances is 1:20. Full co-operation in carrying out these tasks was given by maintenance staff who were on site at the time. The author was asked to leave the site exposed for property staff to inspect, with responsibility for backfilling being left with the client.

4.0 Results

The site was under the cover of ivy-covered trees, at least one of which was rotten and had fallen over into a tangle of thick undergrowth. An irregular shaped area had been cleared prior to the archaeologist's arrival, and parts of three walls and a concrete surface had been exposed. The archaeologist's work on the site comprised tidying up the exposed area, and removing disturbed earth. The area exposed was approximately 5.6m E-W and 4.9m N-S. An exact rectangle could not be formed as there was a tree in the extreme SW corner, and a larger area of trees and impenetrable roots in the SE corner.

A dark sandy loam topsoil (10YR 3/2) overlay the foundations. These first appeared on the far edge of the towpath, 3.2m in from the east bank of the Navigation. In places the remains were less than 0.05m (5 cms) below the surface. The topsoil depth was slightly deeper on the

east side of the site, but nowhere was it more than 0.15m (15cms) above the remains of the building. Although only the tops of the walls were exposed for the most part, in other places, where slightly more earth had been removed, it could be seen that the walls survived to at least three courses high.

Nearest the Navigation, the foundations comprised brick footings with an average width of 0.35m. The wall parallel with the edge of the towpath was approximately 4.14m long externally, and 3.52m internally. The full length was not fully exposed owing to tree roots, making this figure a good estimate. Over 90% of the wall was exposed. The bricks were laid with alternate headers and stretchers on the external face. The NW corner of the wall seemed to be reinforced internally.

The north wall of the structure was also of brick with headers and stretchers in alternate courses. This was 0.35m wide and approximately 5.6m long external, 5.10m internally. This wall had two externally features butting against it. Just inside the NW corner was a drain 0.35m by 0.5m. It comprised a rectangular sump, made of a single course of brick rendered with a thin layer of concrete. The sump was 0.4m deep and had an iron grill in the bottom. This structure did not seem to be bonded to the wall, and was probably a later addition. It was served by a glazed ceramic pipe of late 19th- or 20th-century date.

About 2m to the west was a series of two steps, possibly the main entrance to the building. This extended outwards 0.73m from the edge of the wall, and was 1.06m wide. It seemed to be made of bricks covered in concrete render with rubble and earth in the void between the outer walls. There was some suggestion that it was bonded into the external wall of the building. Although most of the structure was made of frogless bricks, the occasional early frogged brick could be found inserted, probably through repairs. A frogged brick was observed in the steps and in the threshold area of the main wall.

Only the inside edge of the east wall of the building was seen. A large dead tree overlay the rest of this area. The width of the east wall was not measurable without removing the tree.

A portion of the south wall of the building was exposed between obstructions. The exposed portion was 2.4m in length and 0.22m (or two bricks wide). The full length of a cross wall, between the north and south walls was exposed. This was 3.52m long and 0.23m wide. It was not bonded into either adjoining walls, displaying clear straight joints at both ends. This internal wall divided the structure into two rooms. The west room, nearest the Navigation, was 3.52m by 1.68m internally. At least three quarters of the inside of this room was covered by a concrete floor. This was made of brick rubble in concrete mortar with a concrete render as the upper surface. The southern part of this room did not appear to be covered in concrete, as there appeared to be an edge to the concrete 0.8m into the room from the south side. The concrete floor was much broken up in places, particularly near the eastern wall. On the far north edge of the concrete, adjacent to the external drain, were the remains of a horizontal iron pipe projecting slightly from the concrete. This seemed to have been set into the north wall.

The eastern room made by the dividing wall was 3.18m E-W and 3.52m N-S internally. Against the south wall was a short stub wall 0.73m long and 0.4m wide. This appeared to be bonded into the south wall. About a third of this room was not examined (the SE corner) because of a tree and large roots growing in this area.

5.0 Discussion

The structure showed signs of having been repaired and altered during its lifetime. Although it is not entirely clear which building this represented, its position suggests it was the larger of the two buildings shown on Jago's map of 1823. This building seemed to be two roughly equal rectangles, the most westerly of which was exposed here. If this was the case, there may have been further remains under the dead tree to the east. The situation is further complicated by the 1st edition 25" Ordnance Survey map of the area. This shows a single building seemingly on the site of the larger Jago building. The back extension has gone, but has been replaced by a smaller extension, placed exactly midway along the back wall of the building. The real anomaly, however, is the river frontage width of main building. Scaled off this appears to be approximately 8m, which is about double the width of the excavated building.

Initially this seems to contradict the excavated evidence, but if one considers it carefully an explanation can be put forward. By comparing the width of the north and south walls, it will be noted that the north wall is thicker than that on the south. The latter is the same width as the internal north-south wall on the east side of the concrete-floored room. This suggests that the south wall is an internal division, and not an external wall. The full size of the building in 1872 was probably twice the width of the excavated portion. That this information did not come out from the excavation is explained by the position of a tree approximately over the junction of the south and west walls of the excavated structure. In these circumstances, one would expect further remains to the south of the excavated part of the building.

The evidence suggests that the building excavated was probably at least of late 18th-century. The occasional frogged bricks found in the structure are unlikely, therefore, to be part of the original structure. For the most part the walls were made of frogless bricks. Frogged bricks were found in the entrance steps, in the threshold adjoining the steps, and in the NW corner of the building where it seemed to have been reinforced. The later drain here penetrated the wall, suggesting that this part of the structure had been at least partly rebuilt, probably in the later 19th century. The steps also seemed to be of later 19th-century date.

Although the concrete in the west room was of a crude type, it is unlikely to be much earlier than the middle of the 19th century. Similar concrete, made by including tile rubble within concrete mortar has recently been excavated in Bushy Park where it could be accurately dated to after 1850, but before 1894 (Currie forthcoming). These changes may represent the gradual changing use of the building.

It would seem that the structure was that known in the later 19th century as Pigeon House Cottage. It is possible that it may have begun its life as a warehouse. It is quite likely that it served both uses during the period that Pigeon House Wharf was most active (between about

1760 and 1850), with the building being subdivided between domestic and warehouse functions. It is possible that the two rectangles making the plan of this building (if it has been correctly identified as this building) represented a cottage attached to a storehouse. After about 1850 the building may have undergone a gradual transformation as its store purpose gradually declined. The building at the back seems to have been demolished by 1872; to be replaced by a smaller structure, possibly a single storey lean-to. The internal stub wall in the eastern room may have been one side of a fireplace, suggesting the back room in the excavated plan was a domestic room. Storage may have continued on a smaller scale in the room nearest the Navigation.

It is uncertain when these changes occurred, but the evidence suggests that the size of the building was reduced after 1823. It is suggested that the warehouse was mainly used by the Ockham miller to store grain and flour making their way to and from the wharf. It is not known if Ockham Mill abandoned the Navigation for the railway about 1850, or whether it continued to send and receive produce by barge for many years after this. Milling eventually ceased at Ockham in 1927 (Stidder 1990), but it is likely that it was in decline before this. However, it must have still been a considerable concern in the 1860s because the Lovelace family had the mill rebuilt at this time following a fire. Whatever happened at Ockham Mill, there is evidence that the structure underwent changes from about 1850, when it appears to have been modernised. The concrete floor on the room nearest the Navigation might suggest that this was used as a store until the end, but the added internal division might indicate that the back room was a domestic space, entered by a new set of steps on the north side. Ordnance Survey maps show that the building was demolished between 1914 and 1934.

6.0 Conclusions

The remains of a brick building were found on the edge of the towpath 100m south of Pigeon House Bridge. It was found during maintenance work on the River Wey Navigation, an artificial waterway constructed in the mid-17th century. This was almost certainly one of at least two buildings constructed on Pigeon House Wharf, probably in the 18th century. The wharf was at its most active after 1765, but it is not known if it continued as a going concern after the coming of the railways. The buildings here were owned by the Lovelace family, and were thought to be associated with the transport of flour and grain to and from nearby Ockham Mill.

That part of the building exposed was approximately 5.6m by 4.14m externally. From map evidence, this would appear to be the northern half of the building known as Pigeon House Cottage as it was at the time of the 1872 Ordnance Survey 25" plan. The excavated portion seems to have been divided internally by a later brick wall. At some time after 1823 a back extension was demolished, and the surviving structure appears to have been reorganised. The western room was given a concrete floor, probably after 1850, and may have been used for storage or a non-domestic use. The back room was given a new set of steps leading into the building, again after 1850. This room may have had a domestic purpose. An internal stub wall may have been one side of a fireplace.

7.0 Recommendations

Leaving the foundations exposed for public viewing would require considerable conservation work to prevent frost from damaging them. The exposed remains would also constitute a maintenance problem. In these circumstances, it would probably be best to rebury the remains. However, it would be beneficial to put up an interpretative display explaining the site, and showing by plan, and possibly by photographs, what remains are present. Such a display would need to be made vandal resistant. Although the property staff might consider it useful to have a full plan of the building, it should be noted that the further remains, conjectured in this report, have yet to be disturbed. It is normal procedure not to disturb archaeological remains unless they are threatened in some way.

8.0 Archive

The archive for this work has been deposited with the County Museum Services. Copies of the report were lodged with the client, the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and the National Monuments Record in Swindon, Wiltshire.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are given to all those involved with this project. In particular, Richard Chapman and Charlie Shaw of the River Wey Navigation Maintenance Team, together with Colin Floyd, the lengthsman at Walsham Lock. They provided motorised boat transport for the author and his equipment to the site, and helped in the clearance work. They also assisted the author in taking site levels. Andrea Selley of the River Wey Navigations Headquarters' staff commissioned the work and provided advice. Vince Locatelli, Maintenance Team manager, also provided support.

10.0 References

10.1 Original sources in the Surrey Record Office (SRO):

Documents cited here were formerly held in the Guildford Muniment Room (GMR) until 1998. Thereafter they were moved to the new Surrey Record Office (SRO) at Woking. Old GMR numbers have been retained here, but pre-fixed SRO.

SRO G129/7/1-4a General account books for River Wey Navigation from 1724

SRO G129/46/13 List of barges and bargemasters on the Navigation, 1776

SRO G129/107/1-3 Surveys of Navigation, 1826, 1843 and 1845

SRO G129/141/4 Sale Catalogue for the Navigation, 1888

SRO G129/142/20 Sale Catalogue Pyrford Place 1905

Maps & plans:

SRO G129/143/1-10 Jago's map of the River Wey Navigation, 1823

SRO G129/143/13 Map of River Wey Navigations, 1782

SRO Pyrford tithe survey, 1844
Ordnance Survey 25" map, 1872, 1914, and 1934 editions (sheet XVII.11)

10.2 Secondary sources

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