

Frobisher and Fleet House, Ebrington Road, Plymouth Archaeological Evaluation Report





**FROBISHER & FLEET HOUSE, EBRINGTON ROAD,
PLYMOUTH, DEVON**

Results of an Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief

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QUALITY ASSURANCE

SITE CODE	86050	ACCESSION CODE		CLIENT CODE	
PLANNING APPLICATION REF.	10/00847/FUL	NGR		248359,054709	

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PLYMOUTH, DEVON**

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Plate 1 West facing section of wall prior to excavation

**FROBISHER AND FLEET HOUSE, EBRINGTON ROAD,
PLYMOUTH, DEVON****Results of an Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief****Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Saltire Property Development Ltd to undertake an archaeological evaluation at the site of the former Frobisher and Fleet House, Ebrington Road, Plymouth in advance of redevelopment. The site lay on the line of the projected town defences.

A trench measuring 13m in length demonstrated that any traces of the town ditch were terraced away during groundwork to construct Frobisher House. Nevertheless, the results of the evaluation indicated that a short length of the town ditch may have survived on the projected line, beneath Trafalgar Street however, at the time of the evaluation, access was prevented by a stone wall, which was to be demolished as part of the planned redevelopment of the Site.

A subsequent archaeological watching brief was maintained on 30th November 2012 to enable the archaeological recording of any deposits following the wall's removal. The wall appeared to be the remains of a cellar, of likely late 19th or 20th century date. No evidence of the defences was noted following the walls removal and no other archaeological finds or features were recorded.

**FROBISHER AND FLEET HOUSE, EBRINGTON ROAD,
PLYMOUTH, DEVON****Results of an Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief****Acknowledgements**

This project was commissioned by Saltire Property Developments Ltd. and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to them in this regard. Additional thanks are also extended to Wayne Tipton and Dave Pearce of Midas Construction for their co-operation on site. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank Mike Daniells the Historic Environment Officer at Plymouth City Council for his advice during the project.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Oliver Good and Phil Harding who also compiled this report. The graphics were completed by Elizabeth James and the project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Sue Farr.

**FROBISHER AND FLEET HOUSE, EBRINGTON ROAD,
PLYMOUTH, DEVON****Results of an Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief****1 INTRODUCTION****1.1 Project Background**

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Saltire Property Developments Ltd (the Client) to undertake an archaeological field evaluation on land at Frobisher & Fleet House, Ebrington St, Plymouth (Figure 1), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 248359,054709, (hereafter ‘the Site’).

1.1.2 Planning permission (10/00847/FUL) was granted for the redevelopment of the Site to provide ground floor retail space with student accommodation above, comprising 17no. cluster flats with associated cycle and refuse storage. The consent was conditional on a programme of archaeological work being completed following demolition of the two existing properties and prior to redevelopment of the Site.

1.1.3 The Site lay across the postulated line of the town defences, built during the early 16th century. The town walls, which formed an integral part of these defences, were removed by 1765, however, it was considered possible that their line might be enshrined by the backfilled ditch. This was identified during the construction of the police station to the west of the Site (Barber 1979).

1.1.4 A brief for archaeological field evaluation was issued by the Historic Environment Officer at Plymouth City Council. This document required an archaeological evaluation be undertaken to target the projected line of the town wall defences and assess the archaeological potential of their survival within the development footprint.

1.1.5 As a result a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (WA 2012a) was prepared setting out the methodology by which Wessex Archaeology intended to implement the brief.

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The Site lies close to the centre of Plymouth within the Ebrington Street Conservation Area, to the north of Ebrington Street, east of Trafalgar Street and to the south of Hewer’s Row. This area is one of mixed residential, office and retail accommodation.

1.2.2 Frobisher House, which was constructed in the 20th century, occupied the corner of Ebrington Street and Trafalgar Street. Fleet House, built in the 19th century lay to the north on Trafalgar Street.

1.2.3 The Site topography slopes up from approximately 19m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on Ebrington Street to 23m aOD in the north.

1.2.4 The British Geological Survey 1:50000 scale solid and drift map of Plymouth (Sheet 348) maps the Site as mudstones of the Saltash Formation.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Recent investigations in the area

- 2.1.1 The principal feature of interest related to the projected line of the town wall defences which ran through the northern third of the Site. No other archaeological finds or features of significance were recorded from the Site or its immediate vicinity.
- 2.1.2 Most of the records within the immediate area date to medieval and post-medieval buildings, including 10 with Listed status. Charles Church, is the only Grade I Listed Building and comprises the church and war memorial, which originally dates from the mid-17th century.
- 2.1.3 The town defences were built during the early 16th century and extended from the castle westwards to add landward strength to the Hoe. Additional fortifications were built or existing defences strengthened during the Civil War. These later works consisted of ditches and ramparts that were enhanced by stone revetting at a later date. Hollar's 'siege map' of 1643 shows the site of 'Resolution Fort' one of the principal defensive works of the town during the Civil War to the south of Ebrington Street and Beaumont Road.
- 2.1.4 The town walls had been removed by 1765. Remains of a ditch, probably associated with the defences, were revealed (Barber 1979) during construction of the police station, approximately 200m to the west of the Site. An archaeological evaluation (WA 2012b) undertaken along the projected line of the defences at the Plymouth College of Art, between the police station and the Site, identified remains relating to the subsequent residential expansion at the end of the 18th century, following the removal of the town wall, although no evidence of the wall itself was noted.
- 2.1.5 Archaeological investigations along Ebrington Street to the west recorded a small number of late post-medieval features and the concrete base of a WW2 air raid shelter. The site had been disturbed by 20th century terracing for the construction of Frobisher House. Further investigations comprising a four trench evaluation to the east of the Site along Park Terrace confirmed modern disturbance.

2.2 Geotechnical Investigations

- 2.2.1 Site Investigation works (Red Rock 2012) confirmed the presence of mudstone slate bedrock approximately 0.30m and 0.60m below existing ground levels. No geotechnical work was undertaken along the projected line of the town wall defences or ditch.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 General Objectives

- 3.1.1 The archaeological field evaluation aimed to:
- Clarify the presence/absence and extent of any buried archaeological and palaeoenvironmental remains within the Site that may be impacted by development.

- Identify, within the constraints of the evaluation, the date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the Site.
- Assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons and to document the extent of archaeological survival of buried deposits.
- Characterise the town defences within the Site should they be present and investigate and record its stratigraphic sequence.
- Produce a report which will present the results of the archaeological mitigation in sufficient detail to allow an informed decision to be made concerning the Site's archaeological potential.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Health and Safety

4.1.1 Health and Safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork. Safe working practices will override archaeological considerations at all times.

4.1.2 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992, and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

4.2 Fieldwork methodology

4.2.1 All works were conducted in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (IfA 2008) and Archaeological Watching Briefs (IfA 2008), excepting where they are superseded by statements made below.

4.2.2 Following the demolition of Frobisher and Fleet House, a single trench measuring 20m long and 2m wide, (**Figure 1**) was proposed across the projected line of the town defences. Due to site constraints the trench measured 13m, but was still able to target the projected line of the town's defences.

4.2.3 The trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a wide toothless bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. Mechanical excavation continued in spits through made ground deposits down to either the uppermost archaeological features or natural deposits, whichever was encountered first.

4.2.4 Where any archaeological features were encountered they were investigated by hand, with a sufficient sample of each layer/feature type excavated in order to establish the principal aims of the evaluation.

4.2.5 At the completion of the work the trench was backfilled using the excavated material and left level on completion. No other reinstatement or surface treatment was undertaken.

4.2.6 The general depth of the trial trench would be regulated by the need not to exceed an agreed safe depth or no deeper than 1.2m according to site conditions.

4.2.7 The Local Planning Authority were informed prior to the commencement of the fieldwork and provision was made for a site monitoring meeting.

4.3 Recording

4.3.1 All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system. This included not only written descriptions of any archaeological deposits but also contained a complete drawn record of excavated archaeological features and deposits. Graphics were drawn at appropriate scales (1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections) and tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

4.3.2 The Ordnance Datum (OD) height of all principal features and levels was calculated and plans/sections annotated with OD heights.

4.3.3 A digital photographic record was compiled showing the trench and its location within the general context of the Site.

4.3.4 The survey was carried out with a Leica Viva series GNSS unit using the OS National GPS Network through an RTK network with a 3D accuracy of 30mm or below. All survey data was recorded using the OSGB36 British National Grid coordinate system.

4.3.5 A unique site code **86050** was allocated to the Site, and was used on all records and finds.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Inspection of the Site confirmed that that rising ground to the north of Ebrington Street had been terraced away prior to the construction of Frobisher House. As a result the former floor level of Frobisher House lay at between 17m and 17.50m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). This was approximately 3m below the anticipated upper lip of the town ditch.

5.2 Evaluation trench

5.2.1 A trench approximately 13m long was excavated under archaeological supervision, using a wheeled JCB excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide grading bucket, across the projected line of the town defences.

5.2.2 The trench could not be excavated to its full length at the north, which lay in solid rock beyond the steep cliff face of the Frobisher House foundation terrace.

5.2.3 The excavation in the base of the terrace showed that the natural bedrock mudstone was overlain by a thin layer of modern levelling material approximately 0.30m thick. No trace of the ditch was found.

5.3 Town ditch

5.3.1 A deposit of poorly sorted, redeposited mudstone was visible for within a break in a stone wall on the west side of the Site. This wall revetted the rising ground on which Trafalgar Road lies (**Plate 1**). The deposit lay on a

flat base of natural mud stone at 18.4m aOD and approximately 1m above the level of the terrace.

- 5.3.2 The edges of the feature were preserved behind the wall making it impossible to ascertain the width and profile. Nevertheless natural mudstone rose on either side to the foundation layers of Trafalgar Road, at approximately 20.3 m aOD suggesting that the fill may have occupied a cut feature.
- 5.3.3 The alignment of the possible feature also coincided with the line of the projected line of the town ditch almost exactly. It was therefore considered possible that a short length of the town ditch did outcrop in the western section of the Site.
- 5.3.4 As a result, the Historic Environment Officer at Plymouth City Council was consulted who advised an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during the wall removal to record anything of archaeological interest.

5.4 Watching Brief

- 5.4.1 The watching brief recorded and monitored the removal of the wall noted during the evaluation. The walls removal revealed a sterile geological shale deposit with no archaeological features.
- 5.4.2 The wall appeared to be part of 19th/20th century cellar which had been cut through and built up against the natural shale geology.

6 ARTEFACTS

- 6.1.1 No artefacts were recovered during the fieldwork.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1 Although the initial evaluation trench indicated that there was a possibility that a short stub of the town ditch may have survived beneath Trafalgar Street, along the projected line of the ditch, removal of the stone wall confirmed the ditch was not present within the Site.
- 7.1.2 It is likely all traces of the town ditch across the Site were probably terraced away during groundwork to construct Frobisher House.

8 ARCHIVE

8.1 Preparation and Deposition

- 8.1.1 The project archive will be prepared in accordance with the guidelines outline in Appendix 3 of Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991) and in accordance with the UKIC Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage (Walker 1990).
- 8.1.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury under the WA project code **86050**. The completed archive, which will include all paperwork, will on the completion of the fieldwork and post

excavation reporting ultimately, be deposited for permanent storage with the local museum.

- 8.1.3 Digital images will be curated under arrangements agreed for the Wessex Archaeology Digital Image Archive Trial and will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (University of York) as part of the submission of an OASIS record for the project.

8.2 Copyright

- 8.2.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved. The Museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profit making, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

8.3 Security Copy

- 8.3.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon); a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at the Museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

9 REFERENCES

Barber, J., 1979, 'New Light on Old Plymouth' Proceedings of the Plymouth Athenaeum

Red Rock, 2012 Window sample logs from Frobisher House site.

Wessex Archaeology , 2012a, Frobisher and Fleet House – Written Scheme of Investigation: Method Statement for an Archaeological Evaluation. Report Reference 86050.01

Wessex Archaeology , 2012b, Plymouth College of Art, Plymouth – Archaeological Evaluation. Report Reference T15820.01

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

All depths are below ground level. The order in which the deposits are listed represents their stratigraphic position, except where noted.

Trench 1	Dimensions :	13m x 1.8m x 0.30m		
Context	Category	Description		Depth
101	Layer	Redeposited mudstone make-up following site clearance following demolition		0.30m

APPENDIX 2: OASIS RECORD FORM

Frobisher and Fleet House - Wessex Archaeology

OASIS ID - wessexar1-142381

Versions

View	Version	Completed by	Email	Date
View 1	1	S Farr	s.farr@wessexarch.co.uk	31 January 2013

Completed sections in current version

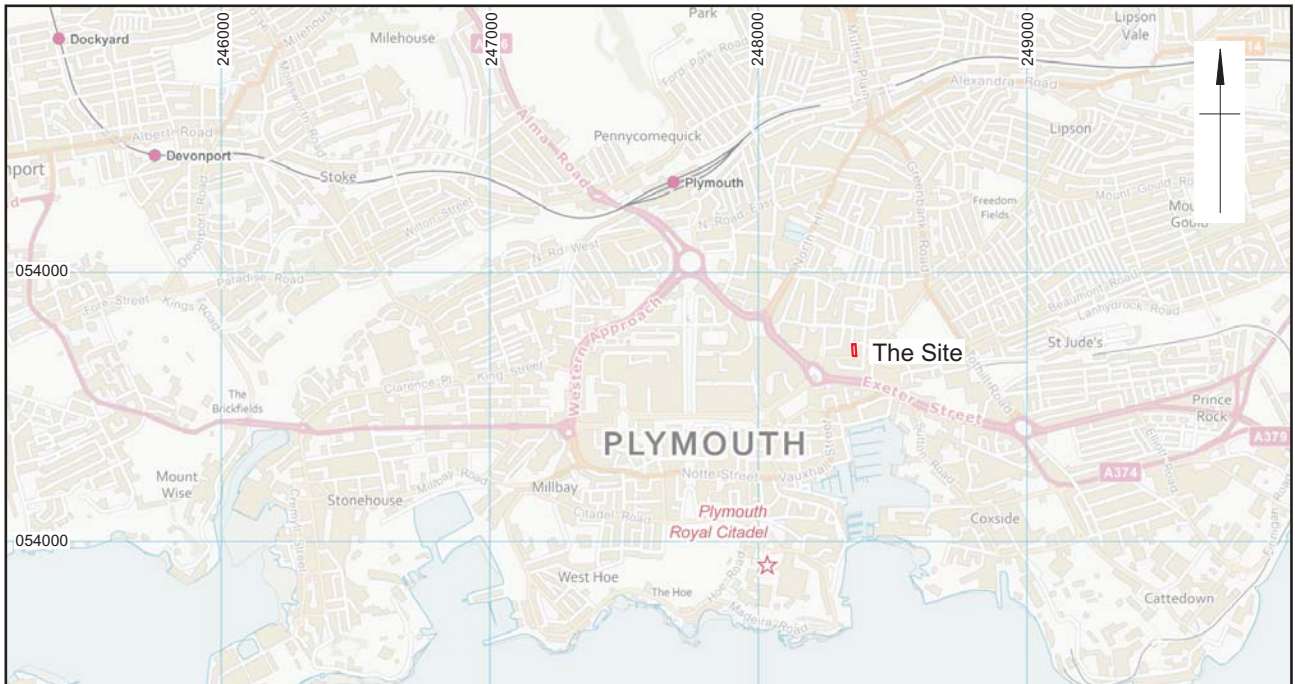
Details	Location	Creators	Archive	Publications
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1/1


Validated sections in current version

Details	Location	Creators	Archive	Publications
No	No	No	No	0/1

File submission and form progress

Grey literature report submitted?	No	Grey literature report filename/s
Images submitted?	No	Image filename/s
Boundary file submitted?	No	Boundary filename
HER signed off?		NMR signed off?



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Site Evaluation trench Projected line of Town Wall ○ Window sample 	<p>Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2012 Digital data reproduced from Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright 2012. All rights reserved. Reference Number: 100020449. This material is for client report only © Wessex Archaeology. No unauthorised reproduction.</p>			
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Site location plan

Figure 1



Plate 1: West facing section of wall prior to excavation

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