



# Beer Wall Othery, Somerset: Phase 3-B

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Accession Code: TTNCM 68/2016  
Ref: 106062.03  
October 2016



**Beer Wall  
Othery, Somerset**

**Phase 3-B**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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**October 2016**

**WA ref: 106062.03  
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## Quality Assurance

<b>Project Code</b>	106062	<b>Accession Code</b>	TTNCM 68/2016	<b>Client Ref.</b>	
<b>Planning Application Ref.</b>		<b>Ordnance Survey (OS) national grid reference (NGR)</b>	339293 131515		

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\* I = Internal Draft; E = External Draft; F = Final

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# Beer Wall Othery, Somerset

## Phase 3-B

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Front Cover: Channel excavation



# **Beer Wall Othery, Somerset**

## **Phase 3-B**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

#### **Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by SKANSKA PROJECTS South West to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Beer Wall, Othery, Somerset, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 339293 131515. The watching brief was undertaken during works associated with a development project designed to improve the conveyance of water beneath the A372 by the construction of culverts beneath the road and lowering of the ground. The watching briefs took place intermittently between the 11 July and 27 September 2016.

The watching brief monitored the excavation of two large channels designed to control the flow of water from the river, and a separate service trench. Once it had been determined that any excavation would not go deep enough to clear the levels of peat, it was decided that the works would be monitored on an intermittent basis, with an archaeologist being present on site for one day per week. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the course of the works.



# **Beer Wall Othery, Somerset**

## **Phase 3-B**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

#### **Acknowledgements**

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank SKANSKA PROJECTS South West for commissioning the work. Richard Brunning, the Senior Historic Environment Officer for the South West Heritage Trust, is thanked for monitoring the watching brief and for his advice throughout the project. Mark Smith of SKANSKA PROJECTS is also thanked for his assistance on site during the watching brief.

The watching brief was undertaken individually on separate occasions by Jamie McCarthy, Lee Newton and Tom Blencowe. The report was written by Jamie McCarthy and the illustrations were prepared by Nancy Dixon. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Gareth Chaffey.



# Beer Wall Othery, Somerset

## Phase 3-B

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

##### 1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) has been commissioned by SKANSKA PROJECTS South West (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Beer Wall, Othery, Somerset, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 339293 131515 (**Figure 1**). The work was undertaken as part of a development project designed to improve the conveyance of water beneath the A372 involving the construction of culverts beneath the road and lowering of the adjacent ground.
- 1.1.2 The medieval site of Beer Wall (Somerset HER Site No. 32364) is located in this area and therefore the Site is thought to be of archaeological interest. Previous work, involving archaeological evaluation and a borehole transect programme, was undertaken to locate the wall but no traces of Beer Wall or any associated structures were identified within the footprint of the evaluation trenches (WA 2014). Subsequently a ground penetrating radar survey was conducted within two areas of land which lay within the proposed land take of the Langacre Rhyne floor relief channel (WA 2015a). This did not locate the medieval wall but did identify drainage and ditch-like features thought to be associated with agricultural activity.
- 1.1.3 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the watching brief (WA 2016) was prepared by WA and submitted to, and approved by, the Client and Richard Brunning (Senior Historic Environment Officer for SCC) prior to the start of fieldwork. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the guidelines and standards outlined in the Institute for Archaeologists *Standards and guidance for archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a).
- 1.1.4 The fieldwork was undertaken intermittently between the 11 July and 27 September 2016.

##### 1.2 Site location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The Site is located between the villages of Othery and Beer, and is bisected by the A372. The Site is situated on the low-lying North Moor, less than 5 m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), immediately east of the Sowey River, an artificial flood relief channel constructed in the 1960s to alleviate flooding of the River Parrett. The Langacre Rhyne flows parallel to the Sowey (**Figure 1**).
- 1.2.2 The bedrock geology of the Site is the Mercia Mudstone Group of the Early Triassic to Late Triassic epoch, comprising mudstone and halite-stone (British Geological Survey). To the south and immediate north of the A372, this is overlain by superficial deposits of Holocene alluvium, whilst peat deposits of the Quaternary period overlie the bedrock north of the road. The Site is at the southern edge of a broad band of peat that stretches from the area around Westonzoyland eastwards towards Dundon.





## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Archaeological and historical background

- 2.1.1 A limited number of findspots have been recorded 2-4 km to the south of the Site, including a Lower Palaeolithic handaxe from the gravels at Oath Hill and a stone axe hammer of Bronze Age date from fields to the west of Aller. Further afield, extensive waterlogged remains of international importance have been excavated approximately 11-13 km to the north east of the site. These comprise a Neolithic trackway known as the Sweet Track, and the Iron Age Lake Villages at Glastonbury and Meare.
- 2.1.2 Beer Wall is recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record for Somerset as Site No. 32364, and is located across the parishes of Othery and Aller. Built in the 13th century, it was designed to protect Aller Moors from flooding. A watching brief carried out in 2013 identified that the wall had been built along the line of an alluvial-filled channel. Stakes discovered in the upper silts of the channel were thought to be associated with the construction of the wall. Other monuments in the area relate to medieval and post-medieval settlement and agriculture, predominantly houses and farm buildings.

### 2.2 Previous investigations

- 2.2.1 Initial archaeological investigations comprised the excavation of four stepped trial trenches which attempted to locate the wall and six boreholes arranged either side of the A372 which aimed to locate the relict river channel (WA 2014). No traces of the Beer Wall, or any associated structures were identified within the footprint of the four evaluation trenches and it is possible the course of the wall falls beneath the current line of the A372. The trenches revealed deposits associated with possible road construction and water management in the form of ditches and banks. No archaeological features or artefacts were found. Further detail on the results of this evaluation can be found in the evaluation report (WA 2014).
- 2.2.2 Laminated peat sequences were recorded in the trenches and boreholes. Later palaeoenvironmental assessment dated peat deposits recovered from the boreholes to the Late Mesolithic period (5300-5070 cal. BC) and Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age (c. 2330-2140 cal. BC) (WA 2015b).
- 2.2.3 A ground penetrating radar survey was conducted within two areas of land which lay within the proposed land take of the Langacre Rhyne floor relief channel (WA 2015a). The primary features identified from the radar survey are drainage and agricultural features that are likely to be from the medieval, post-medieval and modern periods. The potential depth penetration of the radar pulse was negatively affected by the geology with a maximum depth of 1.9 m being achieved.

## 3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1.1 With due regard to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIFA) *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (CIFA 2014a), as fully defined in the WSI (WA 2016), the aims of the watching brief were:
- *to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works; including*
    - *To ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard;*



- *To confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;*
  - *To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains;*
  - *To determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains; and*
  - *To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.*
- *to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard; and*
  - *To prepare a report on the results of the watching brief.*

3.1.2 Specifically, project aims were to:

- *locate and record any prehistoric finds or features that may be present; and*
- *locate and record any evidence for the former course of the River Cary or associated medieval flood defences.*

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

4.1.1 The full methodology was detailed in the approved WSI (WA 2016), and is summarised below. The fieldwork consisted of the monitoring of groundwork and ground reduction through previously undisturbed soils. Where groundworks incorporate previously archaeological evaluated areas monitoring visits were more intermittent.

### **4.2 Fieldwork methodology**

4.2.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out within the WSI and in compliance with the ClfA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a), excepting where they were superseded by statements made below.

4.2.2 The fieldwork consisted of the monitoring of the excavation of four separate channels and a single trench associated with the development. The watching brief was undertaken by an experienced archaeologist over a total of ten separate monitoring visits. Visits became more sporadic once it was deemed that the archaeological potential of the Site was low and the impact on any archaeological deposits negligible.

4.2.3 The mechanical excavation was, where possible, undertaken using a toothless ditching bucket and under supervision by WA. Machine excavation was monitored to the required construction levels; no archaeological levels were reached.

4.2.4 The watching brief was maintained throughout initial excavations and concluded when it was clear that the potential for archaeological remains to be exposed had been exhausted.

4.2.5 WA staff investigated archaeological deposits and features by excavation and recording commensurate with the scale of work. All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded using WA's *pro forma* recording system.



- 4.2.6 A complete drawn record of archaeological features and deposits was compiled and included both plans and sections, drawn to appropriate scales (generally 1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections), and with reference to a site grid tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. The Ordnance Datum (OD) height of all principal features and levels was calculated and plans/sections were annotated with OD heights.
- 4.2.7 A photographic record was maintained during the watching brief using digital cameras equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images have been subject to managed quality control and curation processes which will embed appropriate metadata within the image and ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

## **5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS**

### **5.1 Natural soil sequence**

- 5.1.1 The stratigraphy was uniform across the areas observed during the archaeological watching brief. The topsoil was recorded as a dark reddish brown silt loam, which overlay a brown silty clay subsoil. These layers sealed a peat deposit which was recorded as being black in colour, organic, fibrous, moderately humified (**Plate 1**).
- 5.1.2 The full extent of the peat deposit was not exposed during the works; however, previous borehole samples indicate that the peat reaches an average depth of 10 m BGL. A full and detailed description of the peat deposits can be found in the report written for the previous phase of archaeological works at the Site and as such will not be discussed in any length here (WA 2014; 2015b).

### **5.2 Summary**

- 5.2.1 During the excavation of the service trench it was not possible to effectively monitor for potential archaeology as the deposits were not readily visible due to health and safety considerations (**Plates 2 and 3**). All spoil removed was visually scanned, however nothing was identified.
- 5.2.2 During the monitoring of the channel excavation works it became apparent that the construction level did not penetrate the peat deposits and therefore would not disturb any potential archaeological features or deposits (**Plates 4 and 5**).
- 5.2.3 Wood uncovered during excavation was exposed and examined for any potential evidence that it had been worked by hand. In all of the wood observed no such evidence was recorded, it is therefore thought that the wood is the remains of tree roots preserved in the peat deposits (**Plate 6**).
- 5.2.4 No artefacts or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during the course of the archaeological monitoring works within the proposed development site (**Plates 7 and 8**).

## **6 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE**

- 6.1.1 No artefacts were recovered during the watching brief.

## **7 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE**

- 7.1.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.



## 8 DISCUSSION

- 8.1.1 The watching brief was successful in its general stated aims of identifying an absence of archaeological remains within the areas impacted upon by the flood alleviation works. Due to the absence of archaeological remains a number of the specific aims (see above) were unable to be answered during this programme of works.
- 8.1.2 No traces of the Beer Wall were identified therefore no date was ascertained for its construction and likewise no information regarding construction method, origin materials or evidence for repair over time was established. It is possible that the course of the Beer Wall runs under the current A372 road which bisects the site.
- 8.1.3 No traces of the relic channel for the River Cary were identified, and therefore questions regarding where it used to flow and the character of the channel could not be identified.
- 8.1.4 Due to the lack of dating recovered from the peat deposits revealed in both the trenches and the boreholes it is difficult to derive meaningful information from the deposits, regarding landscape change and peat formation timescales.

## 9 STORAGE AND CURATION

### 9.1 Museum

- 9.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the excavation be deposited with Taunton Museum. The Museum has agreed in principle to accept the project archive on completion of the project. Deposition of any finds with the Museum will only be carried out with the full agreement of the landowner.

### 9.2 Archive

- 9.2.1 All archive elements will be marked with the site code **106062** and accession code **TTNCM 68/2016** and a full index will be prepared. The physical archive comprises of the following:

- *1 file of paper records*

- 9.2.2 The complete Site archive, which will include paper records, photographic records, graphics and digital data, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by Taunton Museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; Brown 2011; ADS 2013; ClfA 2014b).
- 9.2.3 Until final deposition with the museum the archive will be stored at the offices of WA Southern Region in Salisbury.

### 9.3 Discard policy

- 9.3.1 WA follows the guidelines set out in *Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections* (SMA 1993), which allows for the discard of selected artefact and ecofact categories which are not considered to warrant any future analysis. Any discard of artefacts will be fully documented in the project archive.
- 9.3.2 The discard of environmental remains and samples follows nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1993 and 1995; EH 2011).



## 9.4 OASIS

- 9.4.1 An OASIS online record <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/> will be initiated and key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators Forms. All appropriate parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to the Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environmental Record (HER). This will include an uploaded .pdf version of the entire report (a paper copy will also be included with the archive). A copy of the record is presented in **Appendix 1**.

## 9.5 Copyright

- 9.5.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the site will be retained by WA 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-profitmaking, and conforms to the *Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003*.

## 9.6 Security Copy

- 9.6.1 In line with current best practice (e.g. Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

## 10 REFERENCES

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- 2015b, *Beer Wall Phase 2, Othery, Somerset: Palaeoenvironmental Assessment and Analysis of Borehole Samples*, unpublished client report, ref 106060.04
- 2016, *Beer Wall Phase 3-B, Othery, Somerset: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Watching Brief*, unpublished client report, ref 106062.01



## 11 APPENDICES

### 11.1 Appendix 1: OASIS form

OASIS ID: wessexar1-266366

#### Project details

Project name	Beer Wall, Othery, Somerset Phase 3-B
Short description of the project	Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by SKANSKA PROJECTS South West to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Beer Wall, Othery, Somerset, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 339293 131515. The watching brief was undertaken during works associated with a development project designed to improve the conveyance of water beneath the A372 by the construction of culverts beneath the road and lowering of the ground. The watching briefs took place intermittently between the 11 July and 27 September 2016. The watching brief monitored the excavation of two large channels designed to control the flow of water from the river, and a separate service trench. Once it had been determined that any excavation would not go deep enough to clear the levels of peat, it was decided that the works would be monitored on an intermittent basis, with an archaeologist being present on site for one day per week. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the course of the works.
Project dates	Start: 11-07-2016 End: 27-09-2016
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	TTNCM 68/2016 - Museum accession ID
Any associated project reference codes	106062 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 1 - Minimal cultivation
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Planning condition

#### Project location

Country	England
Site location	SOMERSET SEDGEMOOR OTHERY Beer Wall, Othery, Somerset Phase 3-B
Postcode	TA7 0QL
Study area	0 Hectares





Site coordinates ST 339313 131520 50.913494890958 -2.939909642997 50 54 48 N 002 56 23 W Point  
Lat/Long Datum WGS 84 Datum  
Height OD / Depth Min: 37m Max: 40m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Wessex Archaeology  
Project brief originator SKANSKA PROJECTS South West  
Project design originator Wessex Archaeology  
Project director/manager Gareth Chaffey  
Project supervisor Jamie McCarthy  
Type of sponsor/funding body Developer  
Name of sponsor/funding body SKANSKA PROJECTS South West

### Project archives

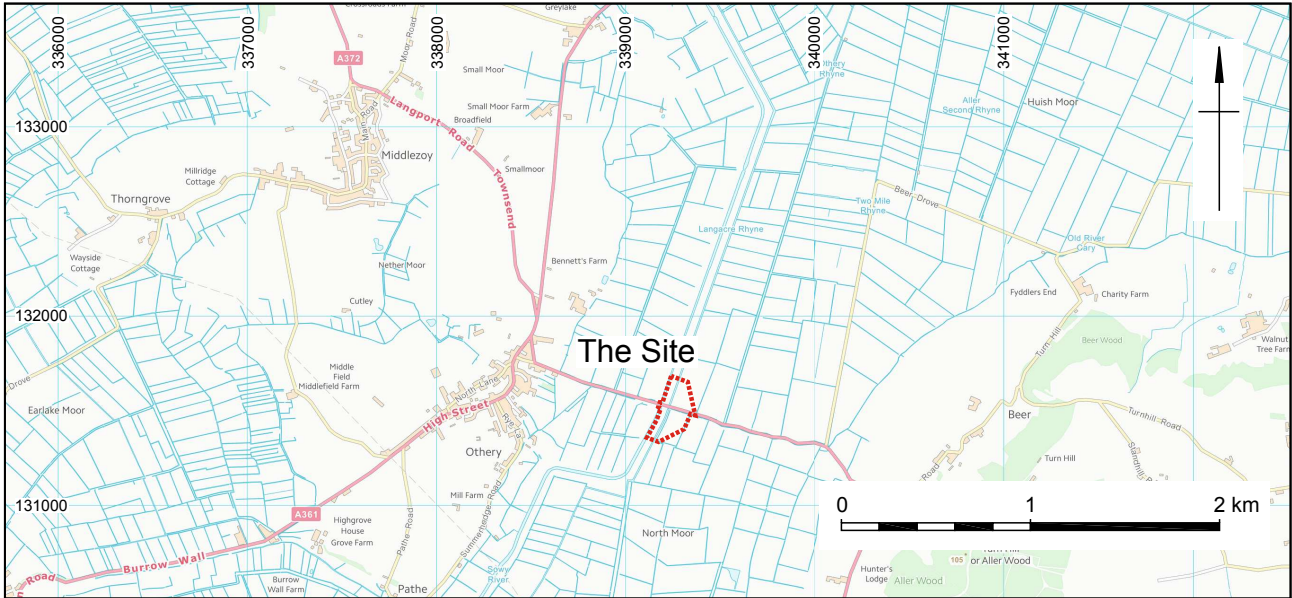
Physical Archive recipient Somerset County Museum  
Physical Archive ID 106062  
Physical Contents "other"  
Digital Archive recipient Somerset County museum  
Digital Archive ID 106062  
Digital Contents "none"  
Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography", "Text"  
Paper Archive recipient Somerset County Museum  
Paper Archive ID 106062  
Paper Contents "none"  
Paper Media available "Drawing", "Map", "Plan", "Report", "Section"






**Project  
bibliography 1**

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Site location and areas covered by the watching brief

Figure 1



Plate 1: Peat deposits, view from south-east



Plate 2: Service trench visibility, view from north


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Plate 3: Service trench, view from north-west



Plate 4: Excavated channel, north of road


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Plate 5: Channel excavation, south of road

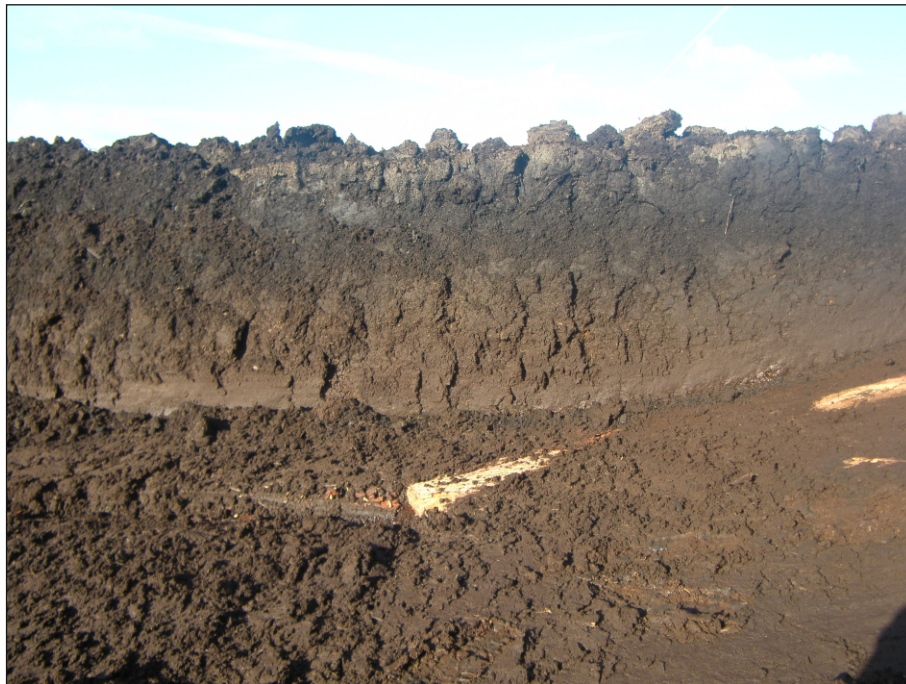


Plate 6: Peat deposits and tree roots, view from north-east


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Plate 7: Excavated channel, north of road



Plate 8: Newly flooded channel, south of road

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