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Peel Street Northam, Southampton

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Museum Ref: SOU 1691
Southampton City Council Planning Ref: 15/00536/FUL
Ref: 110010.04
November 2015



**Peel Street
Northam, Southampton**

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Quality Assurance

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Plate 2: Typical pile hole in north-east of Site, looking west

Plate 3: Typical pile hole in south-east of Site, looking south-east

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Peel Street Northam, Southampton

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Polystar Plastics Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the initial groundworks associated with the proposed redevelopment of land off Peel Street, Northam, Southampton, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 443050 112300.

The fieldwork was undertaken between Friday 10th and Tuesday 14th July, and Monday 19th and Tuesday 20th October 2015.

The watching brief comprised the monitoring of 100 drilled pile holes across the central northern part of the Site and a further 25 drilled pile holes to the east. A broadly common stratigraphic sequence was recorded by visual examination of the displaced material arising from the pile holes, which were 10–16m deep; no accurate measuring of depths and thicknesses of deposits was possible. The natural comprised river terrace gravel. In most of the pile holes a layer of alluvial material comprising brownish grey silty clay directly overlay the river terrace gravel, but in seven pile holes in the central northern and eastern areas bands of peat were present within or beneath the alluvium. The deposits in the pile holes to the south-east were noticeably wetter, probably reflecting a subterranean flow of water following the course of a former stream.

The probable alluvial deposits and peat are likely to reflect the former presence of Northam Marsh, evidence for which has been recorded in a number of previous investigations in the vicinity. Northam Marsh may have bounded the north-eastern edge of Mid-Saxon *Hamwic*, and elements survived until the late 19th century, accurately depicted on maps of 1846 and 1870, before the area was finally reclaimed and built over.



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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Polystar Plastics Ltd for commissioning the project.

Ingrid Peckham, Southampton City Council Historic Environment Record Officer, is thanked for commenting on an earlier draft of this report and providing additional information, particularly regarding the geology of the area.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Mike Cepak and Jamie Wright, who also wrote this report. The report has been edited by Phil Andrews and Ruth Panes, and the graphics prepared by Nancy Dixon. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Andrew Crockett.



Peel Street Northam, Southampton

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Polystar Plastics Ltd (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the initial groundworks associated with the redevelopment of land off Peel Street, Northam, Southampton, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 443050 112300 (**Figure 1**), referred to henceforth as 'the Site'.
- 1.1.2 The redevelopment comprises the demolition of existing buildings and the erection of new buildings to provide replacement offices and an industrial unit to allow installation of new machinery.
- 1.1.3 A detailed planning application for the redevelopment was submitted in March 2015 (Planning Application 15/00536/FUL). This application is an amendment to a previous permission (Planning Application 11/01298/FUL) which was approved in 2012.
- 1.1.4 The Southampton City Council Historic Environment Group Leader (the lead archaeologist within the Historic Environment Team, which forms part of the Planning, Transport and Sustainability Division) was consulted as part of the planning application and recommended that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken on the groundworks associated with the redevelopment, including the demolition of the existing buildings where this occurs below slab level.
- 1.1.5 The watching brief primarily comprised the archaeological monitoring of 125 drilled pile holes. Of these, 100 were located across the central northern part of the Site, each excavated to approximately 10m below ground level. A further 25 drilled pile holes were subsequently excavated to the east, to approximately 16m below ground level. Arisings from these bored piles were observed and described to provide information on the below ground strata impacted during the drilling process.
- 1.1.6 This document summarises the results of this work and adheres to the fieldwork strategy and methodology documented in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (WA 2015), submitted to and approved by the Southampton City Council Historic Environment Group Leader.

1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 The Site encompasses an area of approximately 0.275 ha and lies between Peel Street to the east and Wilson Street to the south-west. To the north and north-west are existing buildings owned by the Client. To the south are commercial offices, warehouse buildings and Rochester Street (**Figure 1**).
- 1.2.2 The Site is located on or close to former marshland, specifically Northam Marsh, which extended north-west from the River Itchen in this area (Morton 1992, fig. 9b).

- 1.2.3 The underlying geology throughout the Site is shown as Wittering Formation of sand, silt and clay (British Geological Survey (BGS) 1987). Superficial Tidal Flat deposits of clay and silt have also been mapped (BGS online viewer 2015), where they are called Quaternary deposits. Brickearth is not specifically recorded by the BGS in this area, possibly because it has been conflated with the Superficial Tidal Flat deposits, and river terrace gravels are not apparent on the BGS online viewer (2015). However, previous archaeological investigations within the immediate vicinity of the Site have encountered Pleistocene deposits of brickearth above river terrace gravel (for example at SOUs 500, 1164, 1348 and 1399; see **Figure 1**).
- 1.2.4 Topographically, the Site ranges between 1.98m and 2.85m aOD (above Ordnance Datum). The highest point within the Site boundary is in the south-west corner, with the Site gradually sloping down towards the north and east.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The Site is located within Area 8 of the Local Areas of Archaeological Potential (LAAP), which is one of sixteen areas defined in the City of Southampton Core Strategy, and which offers a general guide to the archaeological potential in Southampton. Peel Street is located on the north-eastern boundary of LAAP Area 8, which identifies the potential of prehistoric landscapes to survive in the river terrace and peat deposits of the River Itchen.
- 2.1.2 A search of the Southampton Historic Environment Records (HER) within a 250m radius study area of the Site indicates that there are no previous known archaeological assessments or investigations within the Site boundary. However, the course of the former Southampton to Salisbury canal is projected to cross the south-east corner.

2.2 Sites and previous investigations

- 2.2.1 The Roman settlement of *Claesentum* is located north of the Site, on the east bank of the River Itchen at the location of the later Bitterne Manor. The grounds of Bitterne Manor are also the recorded site of an Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery.
- 2.2.2 The Site is located just to the north-east of the Mid-Saxon town of *Hamwic* in or close to an area that was previously marshland (Morton 1992, fig. 9b), known later as Northam Marsh. *Hamwic* may have initially focused on an early cemetery at the St Mary's Stadium site (SOUs 942, 993, 1002 and 1019) 250m south-west of the Site (Birbeck *et al* 2005) (**Figure 1**), and developed in the late 7th century to become an important trading and production centre. A short distance to the north-east of the Stadium site, and approximately 200m south of the current Site, the discovery of disarticulated human bone (SOU 77) some years ago might indicate the location of contemporary burial place.
- 2.2.3 Throughout the 8th and early 9th centuries *Hamwic* was one of the largest towns in England. By the mid-9th century, however, the available evidence indicates that *Hamwic* had been largely abandoned (Birbeck *et al* 2005; Morton 1992).
- 2.2.4 The eastern extent of *Hamwic* was bounded by the River Itchen, but the northern limit has not been fully clarified and it is possible that the north-eastern extent was defined by the presence of Northam Marsh (Morton 1992, fig. 9b).
- 2.2.5 Various investigations over the past four decades have clarified some details of the extent of Northam Marsh (**Figure 1**), but there is no specific information on its chronology and nature. The Southampton to Salisbury Canal was constructed across the area in the

1790s, and a century later Northam was expanding rapidly, with the area by then covered by a network of roads and housing.

- 2.2.6 Marsh deposits were found during an archaeological watching brief on three sites in Cable Street and Wilson Street, 100m north and 40m west of the Site respectively (SOU 1399/MSH4071). The top of the marsh deposits was generally at between 1.3m and 2m aOD, the deposits were up to 0.5m thick, and several contained wood, twigs and peaty material. Burnt flint and a single flint flake were also recovered.
- 2.2.7 Part of a possible prehistoric stream or creek was recorded a little further to the north on the corner of Northam Road and Kent Street (SOU 500/MSH1636), along with some worked flints and burnt flint, on the western edge of the marsh. Further to the east at Northam Community Centre on Peel Street (SOU 1164/MSH2450), less than 100m north-east of the Site, a natural stream was found, perhaps related to the possible prehistoric stream or creek on SOU 500, neither of which match the courses of the streams shown in this area on the Royal Engineers map of 1846 (see **Figure 2**). No marsh deposits were encountered at SOU 1164 suggesting that this area was dryland, as was also the case to the north-west of the Site at SOU 1042 (MSH2696) and SOU 1348 (MSH2545), and to the south-west at SOU 1677 (MSH5535).
- 2.2.8 A large linear feature aligned north-east to south-west is plotted crossing the south-east corner of the Site (**Figure 1**), and this represents the northern arm of the Southampton to Salisbury Canal (SOU1613/MSH2954). Construction of the canal began in 1796 but it was never completed and was filled in during the mid-19th century.
- 2.2.9 Nineteenth-century maps are particularly useful in showing the topography and development of the area within and around the Site. The Royal Engineers map of 1846 is both detailed and accurate and shows a small stream crossing the northern half of the Site from north-west to south-east, joining the River Itchen at what is now Belvidere Wharf (**Figure 2**). Partly within the Site and further to the east, extending north of the stream and cut through by the course of the canal, is a small area of water or marsh which in all probability represents the last vestige of Northam Marsh, with another stream appearing to drain into it from the north. The 1870 town plan shows that by then the area of water/marsh within the Site had disappeared, presumably reclaimed, but remnants survived to the east, along with a couple of short sections of the canal. The northern half of the Site is shown covered by housing, and the course of the former stream has become fossilised in several property boundaries. By 1897 the entire area of the Site had been developed.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and objectives

3.1.1 The generic aims of the watching brief were;

- *To enable the preservation by record of any archaeological features or deposits uncovered and to establish the extent (where possible), date, character, relationship, condition and significance of surviving archaeological features, artefacts and deposits within the area to be impacted by construction work*
- *Where significant archaeological remains or deposits are identified, to inform discussions on the final extent and scope of the required archaeological mitigation*
- *To place any identified archaeological remains within their context.*



- 3.1.2 A specific objective of the watching brief was to establish the presence of deposits relating to the former Northam Marsh, which may have formed the north-eastern boundary to the Mid-Saxon town of *Hamwic*.

3.2 Fieldwork methodology

- 3.2.1 Prior to the archaeological watching brief, some of the existing buildings on the Site had been demolished, foundations taken out, and any associated concrete slabs had been removed. This provided an area of open space within the centre of the Site to enable the piling works to proceed.
- 3.2.2 An experienced archaeologist was present at all times during the drilling of the 125 pile holes, which were excavated using a rotary drilling rig. All arisings resulting from this work were described and visually scanned for artefacts. The drilling process did not allow for any below ground measurements to be taken on any of the displaced material described below, and so no detailed recording of the deposit sequence was possible.
- 3.2.3 All works were undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out within the WSI (WA 2015). All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the guidance of and standards outlined in the *Chartered Institute of Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a).
- 3.2.4 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 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 Deposit sequence

- 4.1.1 A total of 100 drilled pile holes were monitored across the central northern part of the Site, laid out in a regular pattern within the 30m by 30m footprint of the new factory building and an adjacent base to support six circular silos; to their east an additional 25 drilled pile holes, in three rows, were monitored within the 40m by 10m footprint of a new office block fronting onto Peel St (**Figure 1; Plate 1**). All of the pile holes were drilled to a depth of approximately 10m or 16m below current ground level. Due to the nature of the piling no accurate measurements of depths and thicknesses of deposits was possible. Furthermore, the precise sequence of deposits was not always clear.
- 4.1.2 The piling area itself was covered by approximately 0.5m of construction rubble, brought to the Site prior to the watching brief to provide a level platform for the drilling rig. Below this, at least 0.5m of 19th–20th century made ground overlay alluvial deposits.
- 4.1.3 A broadly common stratigraphic sequence was recorded by visual examination of the displaced material arising from the pile holes. The natural comprised mid-yellow sand and small gravel, representing river terrace gravel. In some of the pile holes to the west, blue clay appeared to underlie the river terrace gravel, but this deposit was not recorded to the east.
- 4.1.4 In all but two pile holes within the footprint of the industrial unit and silos to the west, a layer of probable alluvial material comprising grey or brownish grey silty clay directly overlay the sand and gravel (river terrace gravel). However, there is a possibility that at least some of this material was discoloured natural brickearth, rather than alluvium, though the nature of the monitoring precluded more certain identification. In the remaining

two pile holes, in the north-east corner of the area, a layer of peat (of uncertain thickness) lay above the river terrace gravel and below alluvium (see **Figure 2**).

- 4.1.5 One or more bands of peat were also observed within the alluvial brownish grey clay to the east (**Plate 2**), but lay at unknown depths. Here, patches of blue grey clay noted in some pile holes may have formed a basal part of the alluvial sequence, but their extent and thickness is unclear. The maximum observed thickness of the peat bands was approximately 0.1m, and while some appeared to comprise almost entirely organic material, some were composed of laminated organic and clayey layers. These were recorded in five pile holes about midway between the northern and southern extent of piling on the east of the Site. A block from one of the bands of peat contained a sherd of 19th or 20th century glass and fragments of ceramic building material (CBM), which were not certainly intrusive. The peat bands were not observed in the wetter, southern pile holes (see below), although this could be the result of the limitations of the working method.
- 4.1.6 In places, and at unknown depths, the grey alluvial clay was formed of 'couplets' of 1–2mm thickness, where the clay was 'dusted' with a very fine sand or silt. This is often an indicator of estuarine deposits, when the stronger currents of the outgoing tide deposit coarser material than the incoming tide.
- 4.1.7 The gravels in the south-east of the Site were consistently wetter than those to the north-east, and water was brought up from depth in several pile holes in this area (**Plate 3**).

5 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

- 5.1.1 A sherd of modern glass and several fragments of post-medieval CBM were noted but not retained.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

- 6.1.1 No contextually secure material was identified for the purpose of sampling during the watching brief.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1.1 The nature of the piling meant that recording of the depths, thicknesses, nature and relationships of the deposits was far from ideal. Nevertheless, what is interpreted as Pleistocene river terrace gravel was present across the area, and no overlying brickearth was certainly identified. In one area, to the west, blue clay appeared to underlie the river terrace gravel, and this clay could be the top of the Wittering Formation. These natural deposits were in turn overlain by alluvial deposits.
- 7.1.2 Although some estuarine deposition is suggested, the probable alluvial deposits recorded across the piling area are likely to reflect the former presence of Northam Marsh, evidence for which has been seen in a number of previous investigations in the vicinity, particularly to the north and west. Furthermore, the earliest detailed and reliable map, produced by the Royal Engineers in 1846, shows what is likely to be a relic of this marsh extending into the northern half of the Site and fed by a stream crossing this area (and probably by another to the north), and draining into the River Itchen to the east (**Figure 2**).
- 7.1.3 The waterlogged nature of the gravels from the south-eastern pile holes probably reflects a subterranean flow of water following the approximate course of a former stream recorded on the 1846 Royal Engineers map.



7.1.4 On this basis the results from the watching brief appear to confirm that the Site lay within the area of the former marsh adjacent to the River Itchen, the peat recorded in several of the pile holes perhaps reflecting the fill of a channel within the marsh. The maximum extent of the marsh remains to be clarified, but the results from a number of investigations and watching briefs suggest that at one time it very roughly covered an area bounded today by Kent Street to the north, Northam Road and Britannia Road to the west and Victoria Street to the south, with the River Itchen to the east (**Figure 2**). Certainly by 1846 it was very much reduced in size, with a small part surviving until after 1870, but by 1897 the remainder had been reclaimed and built over.

7.1.5 Thus, although only limited further information relating to the chronology, former extent and nature of Northam Marsh has been obtained, it remains likely that it bounded the north-eastern extent of Mid-Saxon *Hamwic*.

8 STORAGE AND CURATION

8.1 Museum

8.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the watching brief (under code SOU 1691) be deposited with Southampton City Council, who have agreed in principle to accept the project archive on completion of the project.

8.2 Preparation of archive

8.2.1 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 Southampton City Council Archaeological Collections (SCC 2007), and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; Brown 2011; ADS 2013; ClfA 2014b). A full-colour paper copy of the entire report will also be included with the archive

8.2.2 All archive elements will be marked with the site/accession code, and a full index will be prepared. The physical archive currently comprises the following:

1 file/document case of paper records

8.3 OASIS

8.3.1 An OASIS online record <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/> has been initiated for the watching brief work.

8.4 Security copy

8.4.1 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.

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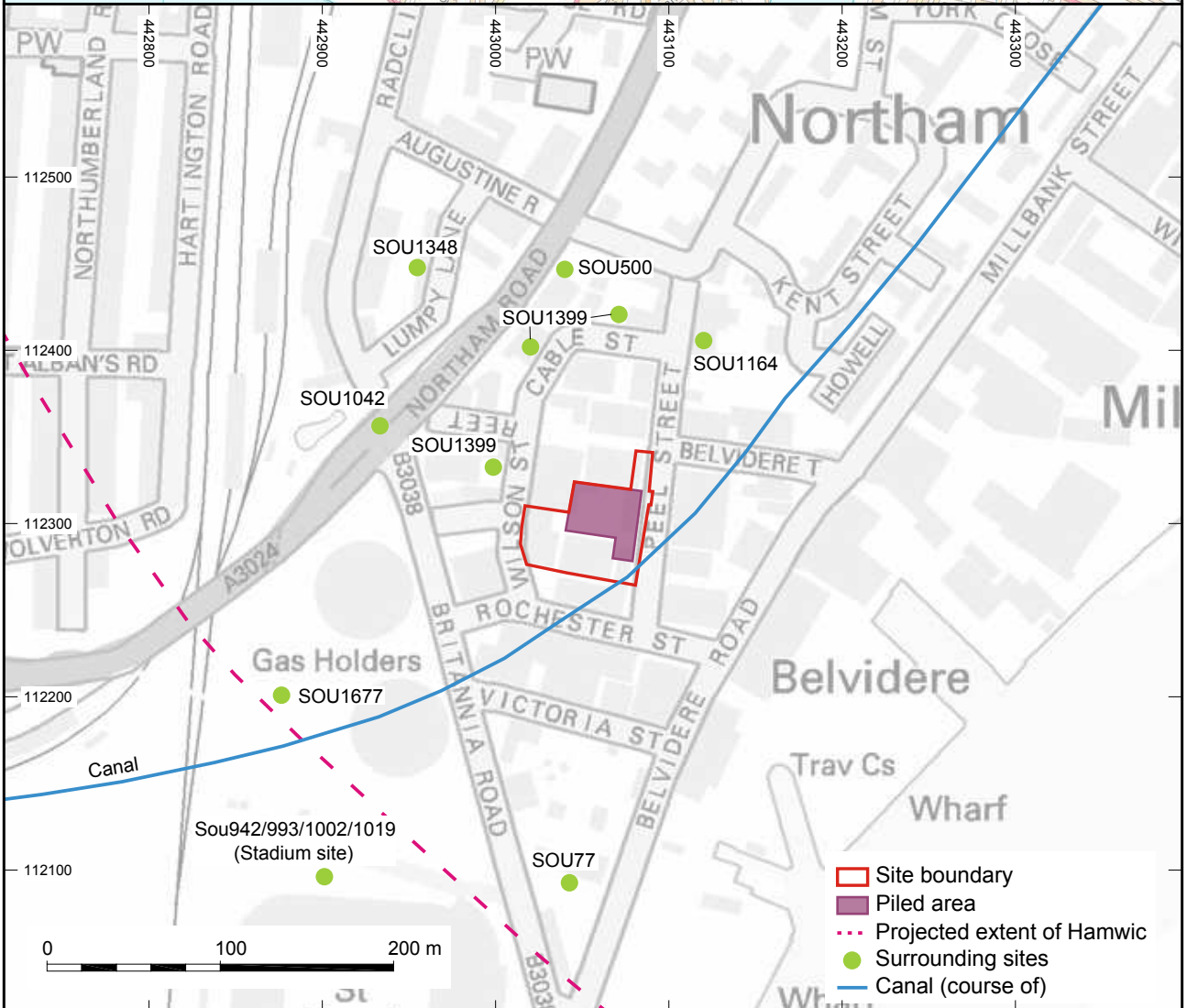
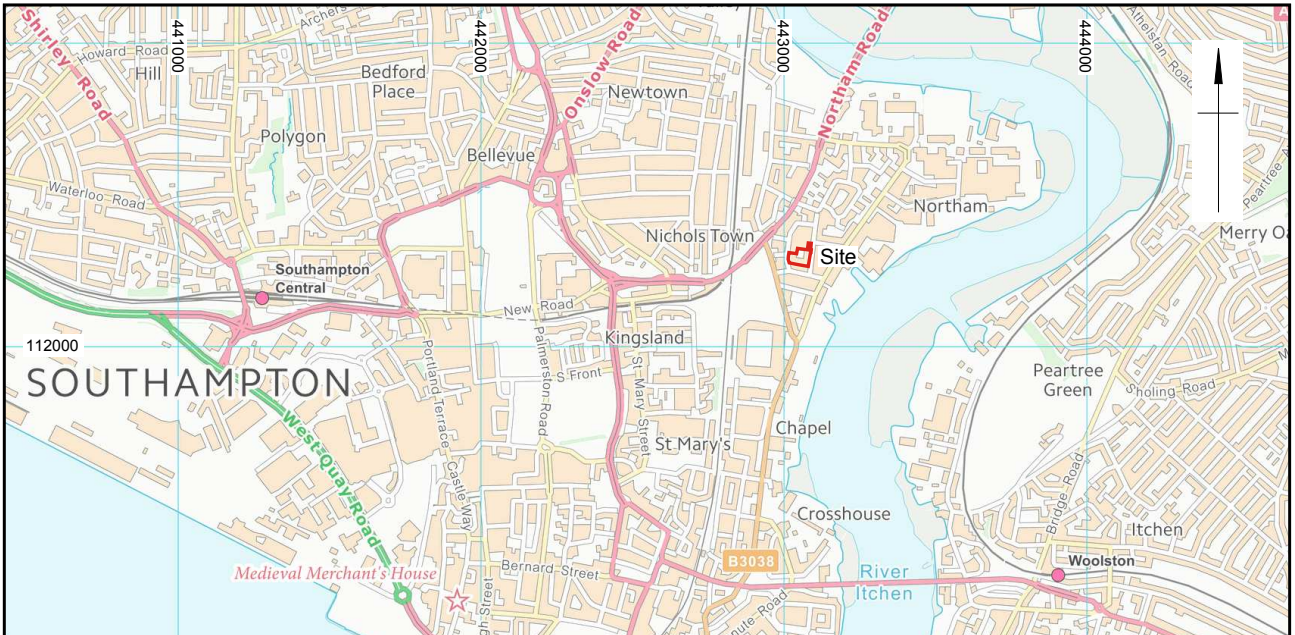


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9 REFERENCES

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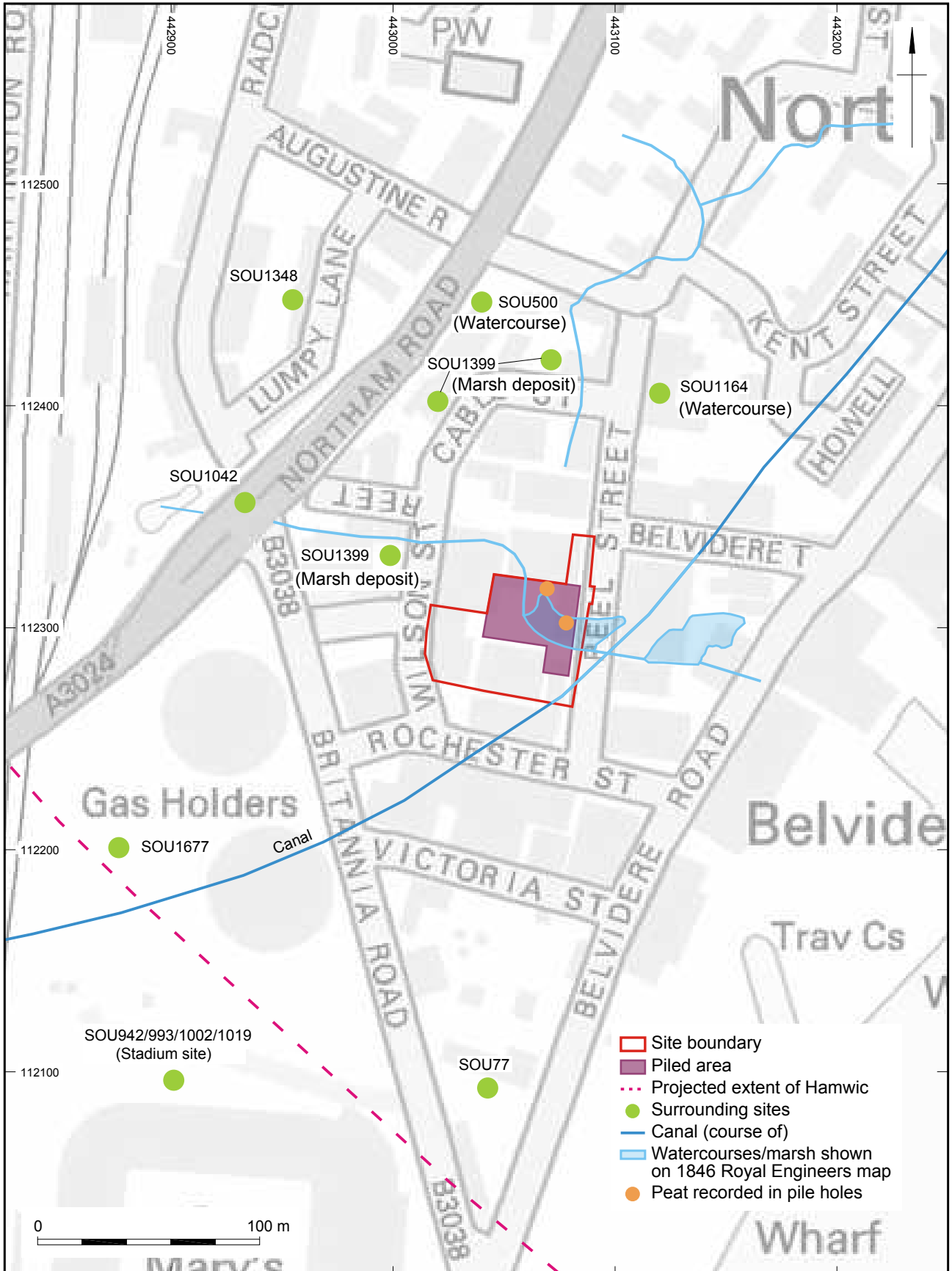
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Site Location Plan, showing selected previous investigations in the vicinity

Figure 1



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Site and surrounding area, with watercourses taken from the 1846 Royal Engineers map

Figure 2



Plate 1: Site of proposed office building with silos to the left, looking north



Plate 2: Typical pile hole in north-east of Site, looking west



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Plate 3: Typical pile hole in south-east of Site, looking south-east

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