



New Pumping Station, Willsbridge, South Gloucestershire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report





**New Pumping Station
Willsbridge
South Gloucestershire**

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

Prepared on behalf of:

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New Pumping Station Willsbridge South Gloucestershire

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bristol Water Plc to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor groundworks during construction of a new pumping station at Willsbridge, South Gloucestershire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 366568 170342. The work was carried out between the 29th and 31st October 2008.

Post-medieval archaeology was known to exist within the site in the form of the remains of The Dramway; the Avon and Gloucestershire Railway that carried coal from collieries near Yate south to the River Avon. The Dramway was completed in 1835 and was in use until around 1866, and was the last horse-drawn railway in Britain. The remains of the Dramway are known to survive in various places along the line as the stone sleeper blocks, which would have originally taken the track.

A section of the Dramway crosses the Site, coming in from the north having crossed the Bath Road. The speculated route of the Dramway crossed directly across the Site entrance, within the footprint of the proposed Site access road.

The watching brief identified no evidence of the Dramway. This is likely to be because the ground level was not reduced enough. However, service pipes identified as running north to south, corresponding with the speculated route of the Dramway, suggest that the Dramway's remains were destroyed by the previous pipe trench. No archaeological features were identified nor finds recovered during the watching brief.

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The fieldwork was undertaken by Chloe Hunnisett. This report was compiled by Chloe Hunnisett with report illustrations by Liz James.

The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Mark Williams.

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Figure 1 Site location plan showing route of the 19th century Dramway and archaeological watching brief area

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bristol Water Plc (The Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor groundworks during construction of a new pumping station at Willsbridge, South Gloucestershire (hereafter 'the Site'), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 366568 170342 (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken as a condition of planning application PK07/1771/F approved by South Gloucester Council for the erection of a pumping station with ancillary plant and associated works at the Site.
- 1.1.3 The archaeological officer for South Gloucestershire acting on behalf of the Local Planning Authority advised that the remains of a historic 19th century Dramway ran very close to the Site.
- 1.1.4 The watching brief was carried out within a smaller watching brief area within the Site (see **Figure 1**). The work was carried out between the 29th and 31st October 2008.

2 THE SITE

2.1 Location, topography and geology

- 2.1.1 The Site occupied an area of c.1000m² located on a strip of flat ground on the edge of a field and lay at a height of c.21m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The field sloped away below the Site to a stream, the Siston Brook to the west. The Site was bounded to the east by the A4175 Keynsham Road and a house lay to the north.
- 2.1.2 Within the Site a watching brief area was designated, restricted to an area 72m² at the entrance of the site, coinciding with the proposed site access (see **Figure 1**).
- 2.1.3 The Site was grassland, which had been closely grazed by horses, which were still present in the rest of the field during the watching brief.
- 2.1.4 The underlying geology within the Site was identified as Lower Lias, consisting of Clay (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1965, Bath (Solid and Drift), Sheet 265).

2.2 Historical Background

- 2.2.1 The Dramway is the local name for the Avon and Gloucestershire Railway that carried coal from the Coalpit Heath collieries near Yate, down to the River Avon in the south. It was a horse-drawn railway and got its name from the 'drams' or carts that carried the coal. Construction work started in 1829, with sections opening between 1830 and 1834, and the line was in use until around 1866. The route of the Dramway was carefully constructed to make maximum use of the slope of the land down to the River Avon near Keynsham, and there are several cuttings and embankments along the route, to give an even, gentle gradient. Coal was loaded into carts and these rolled slowly down the slope, led by horses and controlled by a brakeman or 'guide'. Horses pulled the empty carts back up the track to the coal mines.
- 2.2.2 The remains of the Dramway survive as the stone sleeper blocks, which would have originally taken the track. The section of the Dramway which crosses the Site comes in from the north having crossed the Bath Road. To the south of the Site the original line of the Dramway passed under the Keynsham Road by a tunnel and headed south east across the field to Avon Wharf.

3 AIMS

- 3.1.1 The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to identify and record any remains of the 19th century Dramway that were revealed during the course of the groundworks undertaken on the new access into the Site.
- 3.1.2 The watching brief was carried out in accordance with guidance given in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (revised 1999) and in accordance with Policy 11 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan (Adopted) January 2006 – ensuring the adequate protection of possible archaeological remains.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1.1 All groundworks were carried out under the constant supervision of an appropriately qualified and experienced archaeologist. All mechanical excavation was carried out with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation continued to the level necessary for groundworks. Care was taken not to damage archaeological deposits through excessive use of mechanical excavation.
- 4.1.2 Stripped material was visually examined for archaeological material.
- 4.1.3 A full drawn and digital photographic record was created.

5 RESULTS

5.1.1 The groundworks monitored on site comprised the hand excavation of a narrow trial trench measuring 0.3m wide x 5m long within the footprint of the proposed site access, for the purpose of service location. The trial trench was excavated to a depth of between 0.3 and 0.4m below ground level. Subsequently, the whole watching brief area was reduced by mechanical excavation to 0.2 - 0.5m below ground level.

5.2 Geology

5.2.1 The soil sequence revealed within the site was a thin covering of loose, modern topsoil. In places this overlay a thin layer of tarmac with a gravel underlay. Below this was made ground across the whole watching brief area, consisting of either compact gravel layers; mixed re-deposited clay, gravel, stone rubble and modern ceramic pipe sherds; or a very loose, mixed deposit composed of topsoil, gravel and rubble. The latter deposit contained 20th century refuse including ceramic building material, pottery, glass; these finds were not retained.

5.3 Trial Trench

5.3.1 The trial trench excavated was very narrow (0.3m) and thus an accurate assessment of the sediment sequence below the made ground was difficult, but natural deposits were not reached within the <0.4m deep trench. Within the 5m long trial trench, 2 metal service pipes and a modern telecommunications cable were revealed, running north to south parallel with the Keynsham Road. The most westerly of the metal pipes (thought to be a water pipe) was located directly within the assumed route of the 19th century Dramway.

5.4 Ground Level Reduction

5.4.1 The subsequent mechanical reduction of the proposed site access did not proceed below made ground deposits in any part of the watching brief.

5.4.2 Immediately outside the watching brief area, the ground level dipped sharply, and excavation revealed the current site access to be a raised embankment.

5.4.3 No *in situ* evidence of limestone railway sleeper blocks, metal railway tracks or other remains were identified. However, small chunks of limestone (0.1-0.4m) were common within the varied made ground deposits within the watching brief area. Visual inspection of these, plus other stone identified around the site, revealed no evidence of working which would prove their previous use as railway sleeper blocks; for example drilled holes to allow attachment of metal "chair" fixings (Barber, 1986). However the stone could be the remains of these sleeper blocks, potentially destroyed/broken up by the installation of the metal service pipe(s).

5.4.4 No other archaeological features were identified within the watching brief area.

6 FINDS

- 6.1.1 No finds were retained from within the watching brief area.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL

- 7.1.1 No material suitable for environmental analysis was demonstrated to be present within the watching brief area.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 No archaeological features or finds were uncovered during the watching brief. It is possible that the Dramway remains could be preserved below the made ground and remain unaffected by the installation of the 20th century pipes, this would mean the current groundworks would have no impact upon the remains. However it seems more likely that any remains of the Dramway were removed during more recent groundworks.

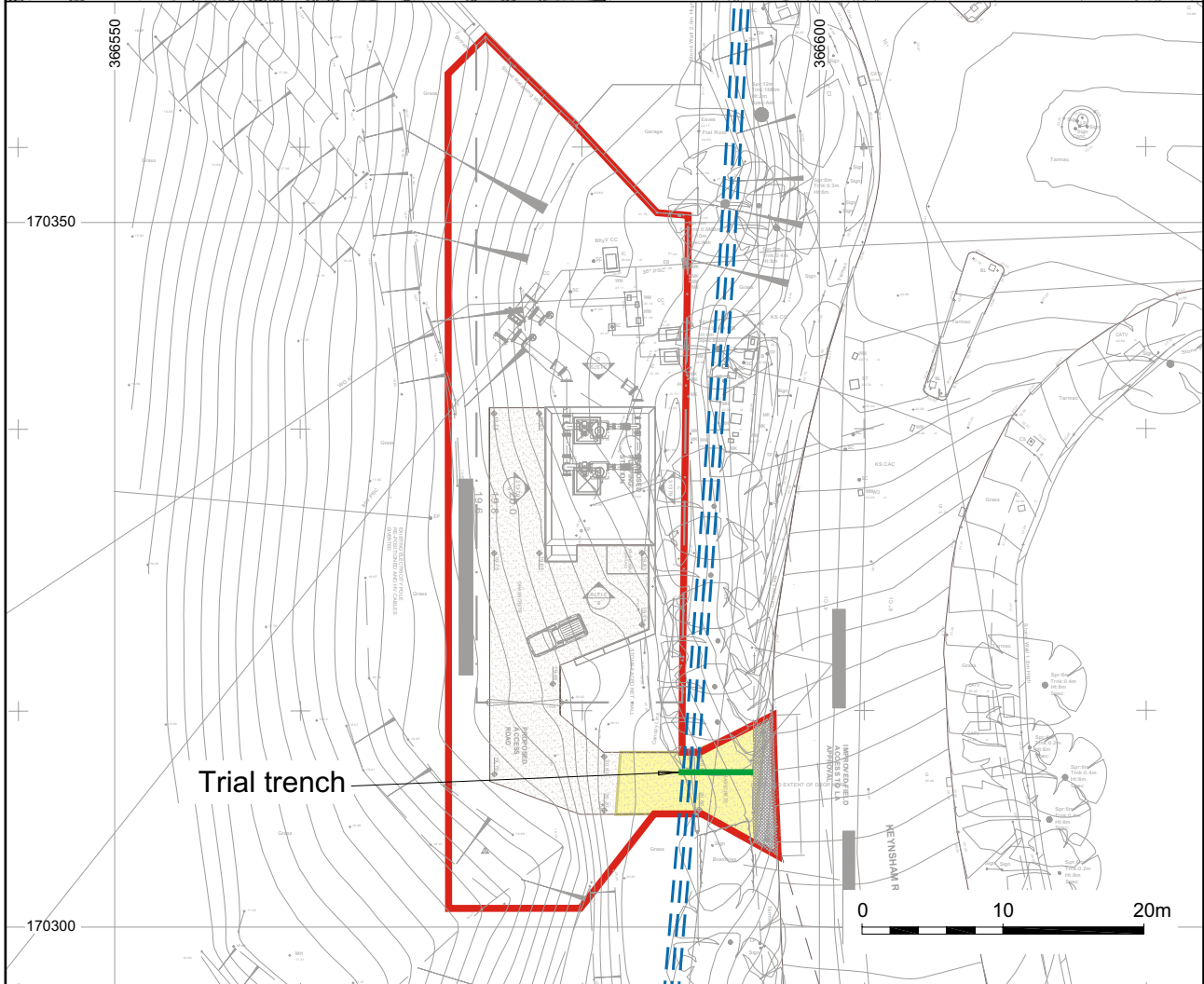
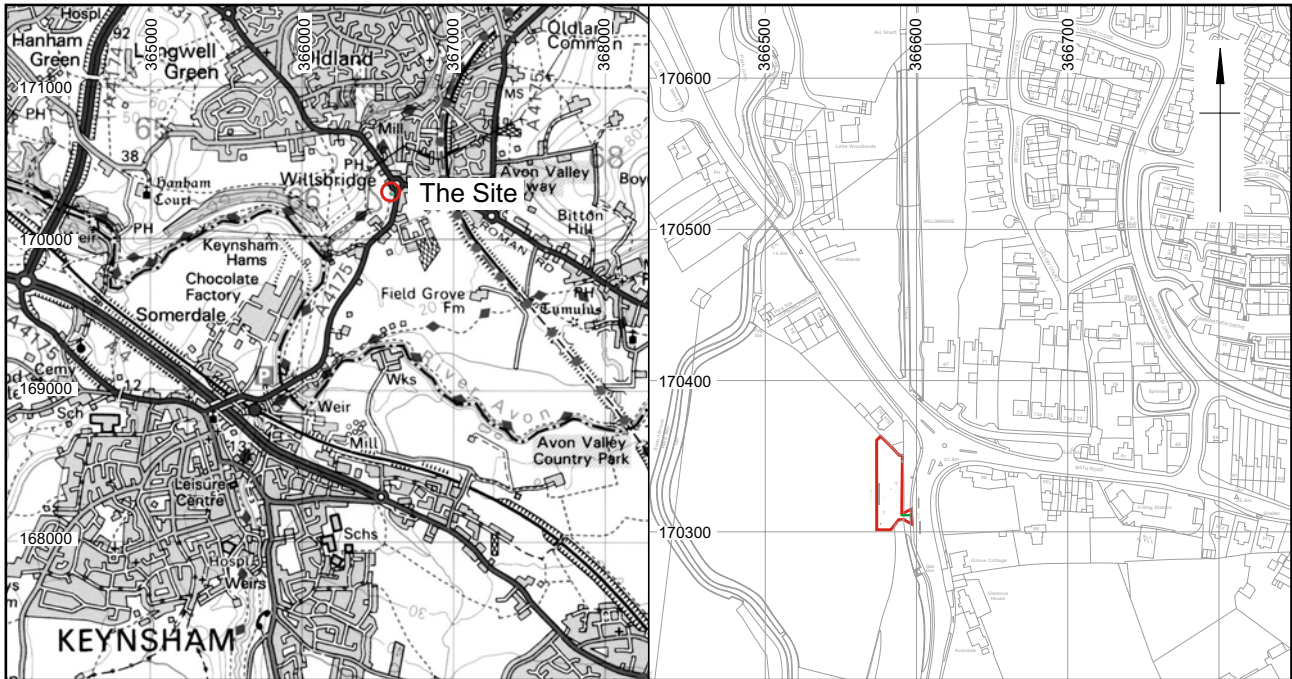
9 ARCHIVE

- 9.1.1 The project archive comprises a ring bound file that contains the risk assessment, the method statement, site location plans, a written record of the watching brief and a digital photographic record sheet. This archive is currently held at Wessex Archaeology's office building under the site code 67430.02, but will ultimately be deposited for permanent storage at Bristol Museum.

10 REFERENCES

Barber, R. 1986, *The Dramway*. Avon Industrial Buildings Trust.

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) *Solid and Drift*, Bath, 1965, Sheet 265.



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Site location plan showing route of the 19th century Dramway and archaeological watching brief area Figure 1



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