

Portland Works, Royal Worcester Porcelain, Portland Walk, Diglis, Worcester

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Limited

by Danielle Milbank

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code RWP 04/65

March 2007

Summary

Site name: Portland Works, Royal Worcester Porcelain, Portland Walk

Grid reference: SO 8495 5400

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 20th September to 27th October 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Danielle Milbank

Site code: RWP 04/65b

Area of Site: 0.64 ha

Summary of results: No archaeological deposits nor finds of archaeological interest were observed though the natural geology was not encountered. A substantial thickness of made ground was observed in all areas of ground reduction.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Worcester City Museum in due course.

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Report 04/65b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Portland Works, Royal Worcester Porcelain, Portland Walk, Diglis, Worcester (SO 8495 5400) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Cliff Buddery of Berkeley Homes, (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd, Berkeley House, Abingdon Science Park, Barton Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4NB.

Planning permission (App no P05D0432) had been gained from Worcester City Council to redevelop the site of the Royal Worcester Porcelain works for a hotel complex and new residential apartments, with the refurbishment and reuse of other historical buildings. This permission applies to both the northern and southern parts of the Porcelain Works complex, and the planning consent is subject to three archaeological conditions (54, 55 and 56). Conservation area consent has also been gained (App no L05D0073) with a further condition (2) for a record of the factory buildings and manufacturing process prior to demolition. A summary of the relevant consents is presented in a brief for the project (WCM2006).

This report is concerned with a watching brief carried out during ground reduction for the basement car parking for apartment blocks on the Portland Walk. This follows the results of an earlier archaeological evaluation of the site (Wallis and Colls 2006).

The conditions attached are in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the City Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr James Dinn, Archaeological Officer for Worcester City Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Milbank between the 20th September and 27th October 2006 and the site code is RWP04/65. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Worcester Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the Diglis area of Worcester, which is situated in the Severn Valley, to the north of the Severn's confluence with the River Teme (Fig. 1). The site itself lies to the south of the city centre, in the valley of a former tributary to the Severn, the Frog Brook, whose extant part now comprises part of the Birmingham to

Worcester Canal. According to the British Geological Survey, the underlying geology consists of alluvium, with gravel terrace deposits of the River Severn occurring at the northern edge of the site (BGS 1993). A borehole investigation (STATS 2004) showed that, on average, made ground overlay alluvial deposits to a depth of 2m or more below present ground level. The results of the evaluation trenches excavated in the basement area suggest that clays encountered there were not naturally deposited, and are likely to comprise part of previous levelling activity (Wallis and Colls 2006).

The site was until recently, occupied by large industrial buildings, and is reasonably flat, at a height of 15m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological background and potential of the site has been summarized in a brief for the earlier evaluation stage of the project (WCM 2006) issued by Mr James Dinn, Archaeological Officer at Worcester City Museum, drawing on information presented in a desk-based assessment, small-scale evaluation and a watching brief during geotechnical investigation (AA 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; Morriss and Sherlock 2005). In summary, the site lies close to the confluence of the Frog Brook and the River Severn (Fig. 1). Such a riparian location, especially if a terrace edge can be identified, is often one preferred for earlier prehistoric settlement and the Worcester City Historic Environment Record notes the presence of prehistoric metalwork finds recovered from the river nearby. There was also a possibility of Roman deposits on the site, perhaps associated with a river port. Roman deposits including burial are recorded both to the south of the site and immediately to the north at the Severn Street site (AA 2005b; 2005c). Also to the north, late Saxon and medieval deposits have been recorded. Prior to use as a factory, the site was used as allotments, a ropewalk, timber yard and saw mill, and apparently as a dump of pottery manufacturing waste.

The earlier evaluation comprised 10 trenches in total with four trenches located within the proposed basement area. These showed a substantial thickness of made ground, including 19th and 20th century glass and pottery fragments, of which some representative samples were retained, and alluvial silts and clays which may have been imported as dump material from the River Severn and the Frog Brook. The depth of the deposits exceeded 3m. This suggests large-scale levelling of the site in the 19th and 20th centuries. Neither finds nor deposits of any earlier date were observed. The underlying natural geological layers were not observed in the evaluation trenches (Wallis and Colls 2006). On the basis of these results it was considered unlikely that the bulk of the subsequent ground reduction for the basement would affect any medieval, or earlier deposits, except,

perhaps in locally deeper intrusions such as lift pits or pile caps (and of course the piles themselves). Although during the evaluation exercise, no deposits relating to earlier use of the site for porcelain manufacture, or for waste disposal such as the dumping of pottery wasters were found, it was considered possible that such evidence might still be present. It was therefore considered necessary to conduct a watching brief during excavation of the basement.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits that might be affected by the groundworks during the development. The specific aims of the watching brief in the basement area were to record any archaeologically relevant levels that had survived, including deposits of prehistoric, Roman or later date, or any deposits relating to the development of the Royal Porcelain works or any earlier pottery manufacturing facilities.

The basement area to be reduced was an irregular-shaped portion of the site, roughly triangular, c.125m long and c.65m at the widest point, a total of 0.64ha. It was to be reduced from the current ground level of 15m AOD by 2.9m to c. 12.1m AOD, and was to form an underground parking area for the residential development.

The excavation of the car park area was to be carried out by one or more machines and archaeologically monitored at intervals with removal of the spoil in c. 1m spits. The exposed sections were to be made safe through battering or shoring/shuttering, with opportunity for archaeological observation of sections at various points as well as in plan. All archaeological finds were to be retained, with representative samples of any post-medieval finds also to be retained pending confirmation of the collecting policy of Worcester City Museum.

Results

The area was excavated by machine, and spoil removed by dumper. The stratigraphy was broadly consistent in all areas, albeit a heterogeneous mix. The upper levels predominantly comprised brick rubble, crushed concrete, and patchy sand and grey silt (the sand and silt only comprising approximately 5%-10% of the matrix) with small amounts of material such as glass, pottery, metalwork, etc. This layer was c. 1.25m thick. This level also incorporated some of the foundations of the previous modern buildings on the site. These were not recorded.

This overlay a layer of approximately 50% patchy mixed sand, grey silt and grey brown clays, and 50% brick rubble, pottery and glass fragments and occasional crushed concrete, which was c.1.50m thick. The base of the excavated area (c. 12.8m AOD) still comprised made ground with no alluvium or natural geological deposits

exposed. Similarly the areas of deeper intrusions, such as pile cap positions and lift pits which were another 0.5m in depth were not founded deeper than this made ground.

No deposits of direct relevance to use of the area for pottery production such as dumps of pottery wasters or structures such as kilns were observed.

Finds

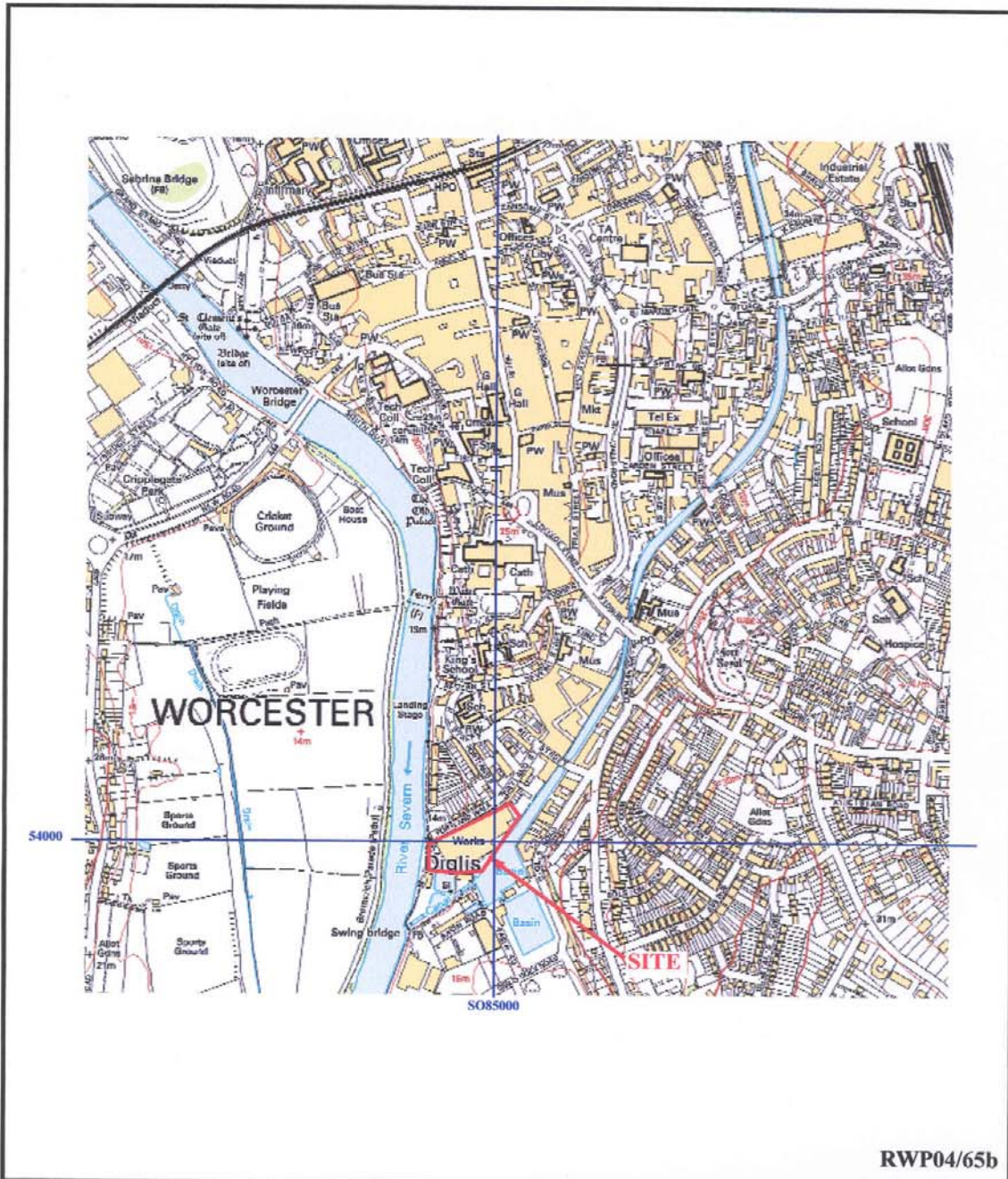
A small collection of glass bottles and pottery fragments from the made ground was retained pending confirmation of the collecting policy of Worcester Museum. All of the pottery and glass retained is of 19th /20th century date. The pottery is all mass-produced earthenware: none is porcelain.

Conclusion

Despite the potential on this site as a whole for archaeological remains to have survived, the area in which the underground car park was dug has been made up extensively in the late 19th and 20th centuries. There is no clear distinction between the two layers of dumping to suggest they were separate episodes, and the artefacts noted in each are broadly contemporary. The levelling activity appears to have been substantial, with a very large amount of domestic and demolition waste used (dumped?) over a large area, and to a considerable thickness. The occasional patches of silt and clay encountered here may have been imported after dredging or clearing activity of the Frog Brook or the River Severn, and are certainly not naturally deposited in this context. In the light of this, the development of this part of the site at such a level did not threaten any archaeological deposits or features.

References

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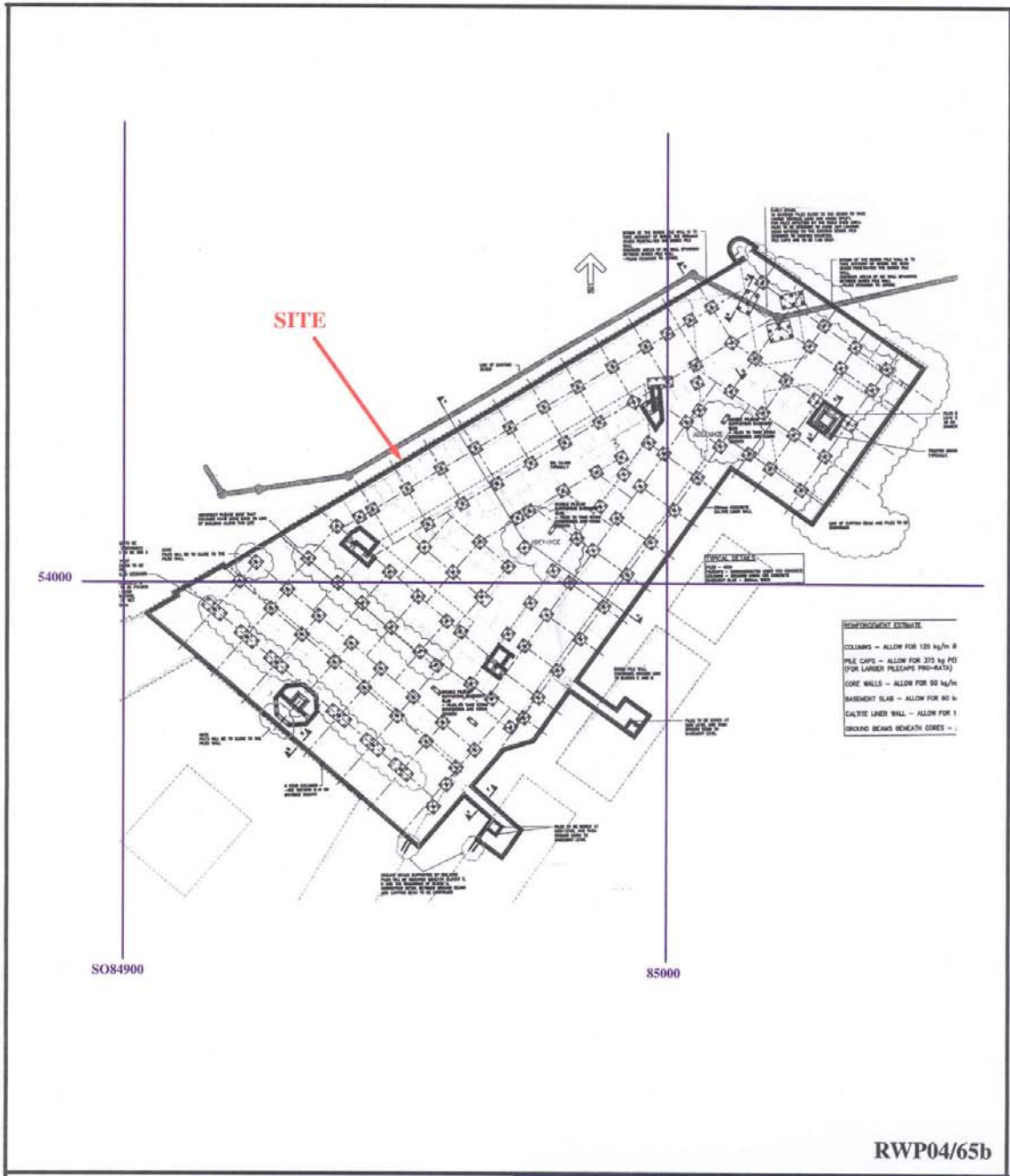
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**Portland Works, Royal Worcester Porcelain,
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Figure 1. Location of site within Worcester.

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Portland Works, Royal Worcester Porcelain,
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Figure 2. Location of watching brief in
basement area.

Scale: 1:100

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES

Portland Works, Royal Worcester Porcelain, Portland Walk, Diglis, Worcester

SE NW 15m

Made Ground
(Brick rubble, crushed concrete,
glass and pottery fragments, patchy grey silt and sand)

Made Ground
(Patchy sand, grey silt and grey brown clay,
brick rubble, pottery and glass fragments and occasional crushed concrete)

Base of reduced area at 12.8m aOD

0 2m

Figure 3. Representative section

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