

BECKLEY COURT COBOURG STREET PLYMOUTH

Results of a Desk-Based Assessment
&
Walkover Survey



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Beckley Court, Cobourg Street, Plymouth

**Beckley Court, Cobourg Street, Plymouth,
Devon**

**Results of a Desk-Based Assessment
&
Walkover Survey**

For

Tony Hayes of Bailey Johnson Hayes Consulting Engineers

On behalf of

Kenny Oke of Knightsbridge Student Housing Limited

By



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Summary

South West Archaeology Limited were asked to conduct an archaeological assessment of Beckley Court, Cobourg Street, Plymouth. Buildings have occupied the site since the 1830s but these were demolished through the 1940s and 1950s and replaced on the site with the present Beckley Court building in the early 1960s. Significant terracing of the land occupied by the present building has also clearly taken place, and probably truncated any earlier surviving archaeological deposits. Due to this significant amount of earth moving in the 20th century and the nature of the extant building we make no recommendations for future archaeological work on the site.

Contents	Page No.
List of Figures	5
Acknowledgements	5
1.0 Introduction	6
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Methodology	6
2.0 Results of the Desk-Based Assessment	8
2.1 Pre-19 th century maps	8
2.2 Early 19 th Century Developments	10
2.3 Ordnance Survey 1 st and 2 nd Editions	12
2.4 The 20 th century	13
3.0 The Walkover Survey	15
4.0 Conclusion	19
5.0 Bibliography and References	20

List of Figures

Page No.

Coverplate: Beckley Court in May 2014, viewed from north-west.	
Figure 1: Site location.	7
Figure 2: Thematic early 17 th century map (From: Stuart 1991).	9
Figure 3: Donn's map of 1765 (DRO).	9
Figure 4: John Cooke map c.1820.	10
Figure 5: Robert Creighton's map, 1835 (from Lewis' Topographical Dictionary).	11
Figure 6: 1842 Tithe map (PWDRO).	12
Figure 7: Ordnance Survey 1 st Edition map @ 1:2500, 1894 (PWDRO).	12
Figure 8: Ordnance Survey 2 nd Edition map @ 1:2500, 1907 (PWDRO).	13
Figure 9: Ordnance Survey 1938 map @ 1:10,560 (PWDRO).	14
Figure 10: Extract from the Air Raid Precaution Maps (PWDRO).	14
Figure 11: Beckley Court, viewed from the south-west.	15
Figure 12: Inner court of Beckle Court, viewed from the south-east.	15
Figure 13: Front of Beckley Court, viewed from the north-west.	16
Figure 14: Reynolds Building viewed from Beckley Court, viewed from north-west.	17
Figure 15: Beckley Court viewed from Armada Way, viewed from south-west.	17
Figure 16: View along Cobourg Street, viewed from the north-west.	18
Figure 17: North-east facing elevation of Beckley Court, viewed from the north-east.	18

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1.0 Introduction

Location: Beckley Court, Cobourg Street
Parish: Plymouth
District: Plymouth
County: Devon

1.1 Background

South West Archaeology Ltd were asked by Tony Hayes (of Bailey Johnson Hayes Consulting Engineers) on behalf of the client (Kenny Oke of Knightsbridge Student Housing Ltd.) to undertake a desk based assessment and walkover survey at Beckley Court, Cobourg Street, Plymouth (Figure 1). The purpose of this assessment is to place the site in its historical/archaeological context, in order to identify any archaeological or historical factors which might require action in the form of recording, evaluation or other mitigation prior to or during the course of any development works.

The site in question comprises a single large wedge shaped building, with a small inner courtyard. It is located in the centre of Plymouth on the south side of the University campus, off the A374. The land generally slopes down gently to the south-east. The present building was built in the 1960's during the redevelopment of the city following the Second World War.

1.2 Methodology

The assessment was undertaken by S. Walls with reference to IfA guidelines on the preparation of archaeological assessments. The necessary research was conducted at the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office and using internet resources. A walkover survey was conducted by S. Walls in May 2014.

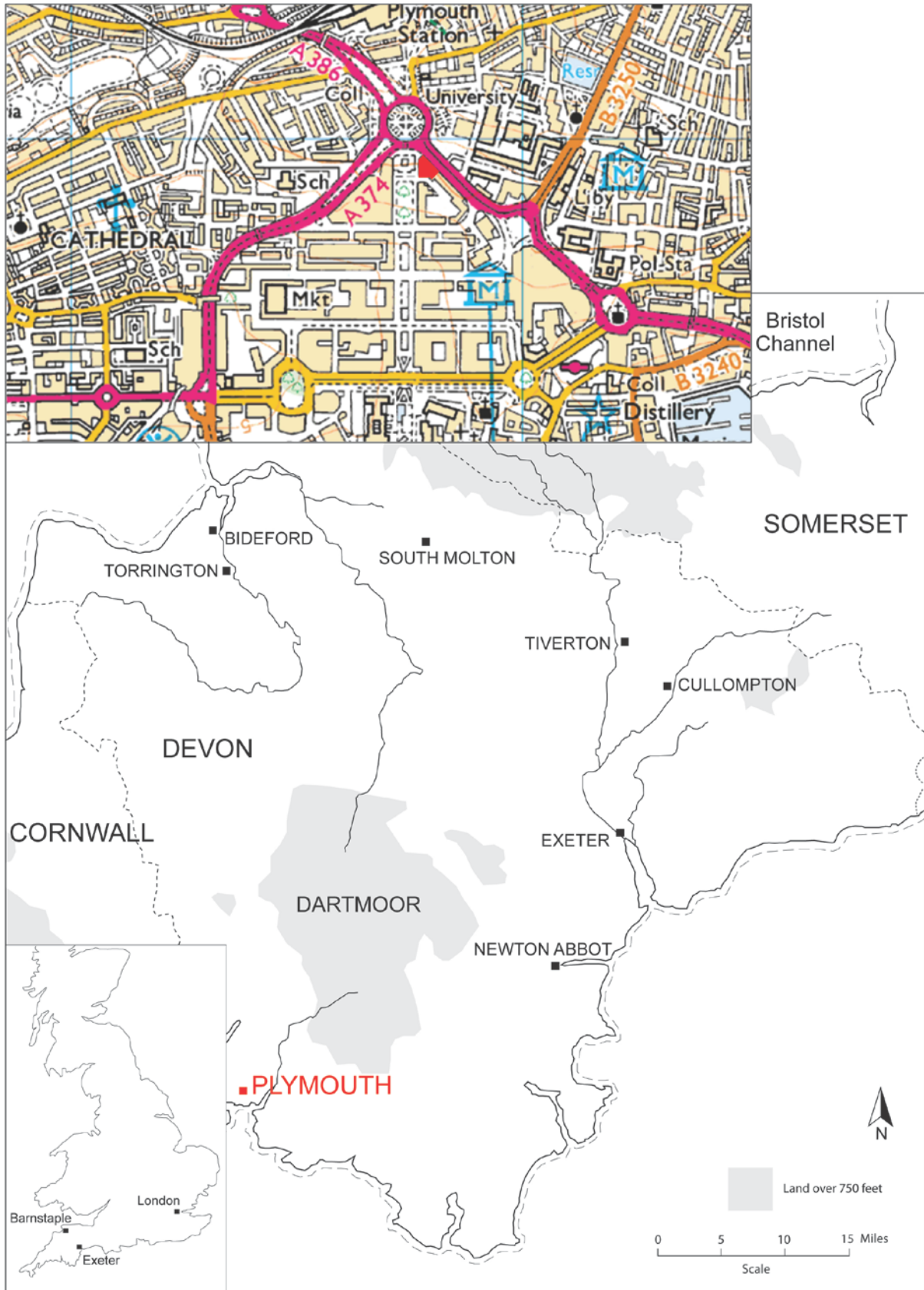


Figure 1: Site location (The site is highlighted in red).

2.0 Results of the Desk-Based Assessment

2.1 Pre-19th century maps

The cartographic record prior to the 1830's generally lack any details of the specific area of the development site, as they focus on the town, and at this time it laid just outside the city proper limits, beyond The Old Town Gate.

One of the few relevant cartographic sources is an early 17th century map (see Figure 2), which shows the approximate site occupying part of a field labelled as *Fowens Land* (the Fownes were a prominent family in Plymouth and Devon in the 17th century). The area generally appears to have been largely undeveloped as this time with the buildings at this date grouped around the Old Town Gate, and only the roads, leat systems and a few isolated buildings, including a barn on *Fowens Land*, having been developed beyond this. The area was sometimes referred to at this time as the *Old Town Without (The Wall)*. Cobourg Street or at least its predecessor appears to have been a primary route out of the 'Old Town' in the early 17th Century being marked as *The way leading towards Saltash*.

Other pre-19th century maps of Plymouth do not show the site in detail or often miss the site (see Figures 3 and 4). It would be fair to interpret the lack of detail north-west of the Old Town Gate and cut off point of these early maps as an accurate depiction of the limit of the townscape and therefore the lack of development on the site.

By the late 18th century the town wall and its narrow gates were becoming a hindrance, and by the early 19th century most of the gates, and much of the wall had been demolished. Old Town Gate was amongst the last to be removed in 1809, and its demolition led to an explosion of development to the north of the Old Town. Cobourg Street (initially *Cobourg Place*) was seemingly lain out (or at least named) at around this time.

Beckley Court, Cobourg Street, Plymouth

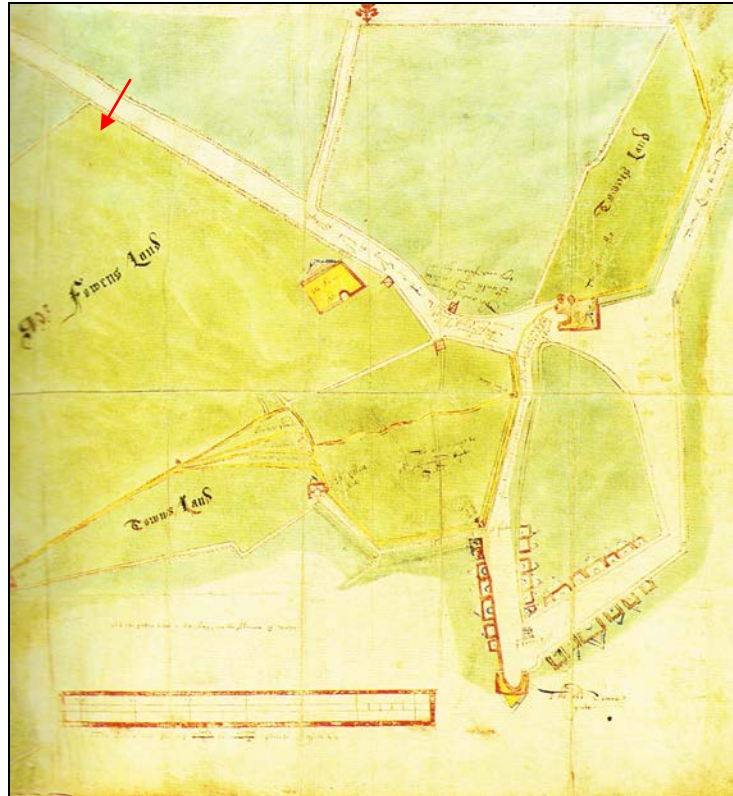


Figure 2: Thematic map showing the water system, mills and streams in the north-west edge of the town of Plymouth, Early 17th century (From: Stuart 1991) (the site is indicated).

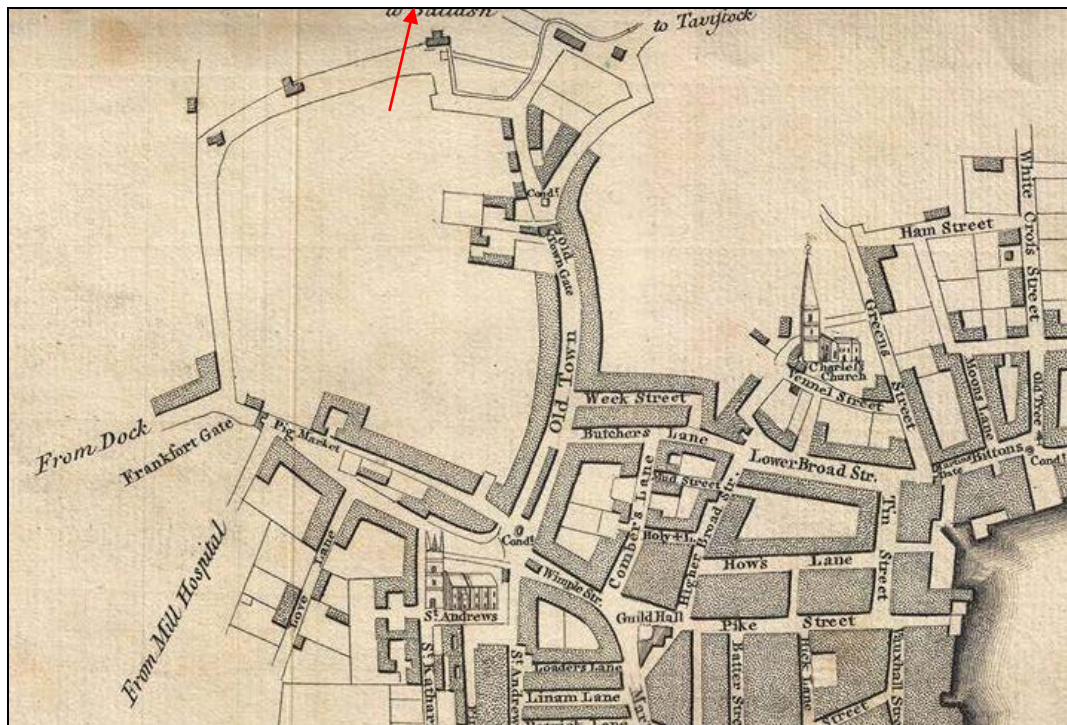


Figure 3: Donn's map of 1765 (DRO) (the site is located just off the map).

2.2 Early 19th Century Developments

An engraved map by Cooke, dated to 1820 (Figure 5) shows the beginnings of this expansion of the town in the 19th century beyond its former gated walls. Along Cobourg Place, developments appear to have been focused on the opposite side of the road to the proposal site and along James Street. The triangle of land south-west of Cobourg Street, on which the site is located, is largely undeveloped at this date. This lack of development may suggest that it was still owned by a single owner at this date (as in the early 17th century). The barn and mills indicated on the early 17th century map (Figure 2) still appear to be extant at this date, or at least, to have been replaced by buildings located in similar positions.



Figure 4: John Cooke map c.1820 (the site is indicated) (from: Johnson 2010).

An 1835 engraving by Creighton is the next available cartographic source (Figure 5). This map depicts the triangular area south-west of Cobourg Street as having been fully developed in rows of buildings, most-likely victorian terrace housing. This is shown in slightly greater detail, and giving a greater sense of urban development, and the details of developing road systems, in the 1842 Tithe map (Figure 8). For example a narrow road (Cobourg Lane) is shown running parallel to Cobourg Street, with the wider William Street also parallel further to the south-west. Richmond Street, which was shown as a small cul-de-sac on the 1820 Cooke Map, was extended to form a crossroads opposite James Street. Richmond Street presumably represents the line of the former boundary to the plot shown on the early 17th century map (Figure 2).



Figure 5: Robert Creighton's map, (From: Lewis 1835) (the site is indicated).



Figure 6: 1842 Tithe map (PWDRO) (the site id outlined in red).

2.3 Ordnance Survey 1st and 2nd Editions

The Ordnance Survey 1st Edition, from 1894 (Figure 9) shows more detail of the development indicated in the tithe map. The site was occupied by terrace housing and the afore mentioned triangle of land south-west of Cobourg Street, between Richmond and York Street have been fully developed. The 1907 2nd Edition (Figure 10) shows further continuity with the previous cartographic images.



Figure 7: Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map @ 1:2500, 1894 (PWDRO) (the site is outlined in red).



Figure 8: Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition map @ 1:2500, 1907 (PWDRO) (the site is outlined in red).

2.4 The 20th century

The three towns of Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse were united in 1914 and Plymouth was officially granted city status in 1928. The 1938 Ordnance Survey Revision map (Figure 11) shows possible amendments or simply more detail than previous maps to buildings within the general area of the site. The site itself remained unchanged from terrace housing apart from some possible intrusion from the widening of Cobourg Street. The widening of the street in c.1926 did see the demolition of the Plymouth Public Free School at the south-east corner of James street, with a new school being built set further to the north, fronting onto the less busy Glanville Street (Moseley 2012). Also note the addition of the chapel (Cobourg Street Methodist Chapel) at the north-west end of Cobourg Street. The chapel was built in 1907, and purchased in 1936 by the city to enable its demolition and the widening of York Street (Moseley 2012).

The Air Raid Precaution map (Figure 12) provides further detail and shows continued continuity in the layout of the site. Although this map records many of the bomb sites in Plymouth, it does not record any direct bomb damage to the site. Some of the site was fire damaged as the result of the incendiary bombs. After the war, through the 1940's and 50's a large number of houses were cleared from William Street (and presumably Cobourg Street), as part of the 'Plan for Plymouth'. In the late 1950s the former York Street was widened and re-landscaped along with much of the land immediately south-west of the site as a city garden/vista still present- and known today as 'Armada Way'. The road layout incorporating the A374 as it is today was established past and west of the site. This development involved the removal of any remaining Late Georgian and Victorian terrace housing that occupied the site and its immediate surroundings and the building of Beckley Court as it stands today.

Beckley Court, Cobourg Street, Plymouth



Figure 9: Ordnance Survey 1938 map @ 1:10,560 (PWDRO) (the site is outlined in red).



Figure 10: Extract from the Air Raid Precaution Maps (PWDRO) (the site is indicated).

3.0 The Walkover Survey

A walkover survey of the site was conducted in May 2014. The site consisted of a 1960's building on the south side of- and facing onto Cobourg Street at its north-west end. The building and its inner courtyard were made-up of block and stone work with concrete and tarmac surfaces (see Figures 13 and 14).



Figure 11: Beckley Court, viewed from the south-west.



Figure 12: Inner court of Beckley Court, viewed from the south-east.

The building adjoining its south-east end was a modern student housing development/conversion (Figures 18 and 19). The only historic building within the immediate vicinity, is located to the east of the site, on the adjacent side of Cobourg Street was the Reynolds Building (Figure 16). The Reynolds building is a Plymouth University building that was originally built as a bank in the 1920s around the time of the road being widened. It has in recent history become part of the university and re-named after the 18th century Plympton born artist Joshua Reynolds (University of Plymouth 2012).



Figure 13: Front of Beckley Court, viewed from the north-west.



Figure 14: Reynolds Building viewed from Beckley Court, viewed from north-west.

The land along the south-eastern side of the building has clearly been terraced away (Figure 15) reducing the probability of surviving buried archaeological remains. The land west of this has been landscaped in the 20th century as part of the planned vista of Armada Way (Figure 17).



Figure 15: Beckley Court viewed from Armada Way, viewed from south-west.



Figure 16: View along Cobourg Street with Beckley Court on the right and Reynolds Building on the left, viewed from the north-west.



Figure 17: North-east facing elevation of Beckley Court, viewed from the north-east.

4.0 Conclusion

The expansion of Plymouth in the 19th century as evident in the cartographic record was part of the rapid growth of the three towns at this time. This expansion eventually led to the demolition of the town wall and the majority of the town gates were removed (Pye and Woodward) to make way for the expanding town and traffic flow. The growing development along Cobourg Street evident between 1820 and 1842 began after the removal of The Old Town Gate in 1809. Cobourg Street was however already in existence as a major thoroughfare to the town from at least 1643, when the Town Wall and gateways were first established. The area was however largely agricultural until the 19th century expansion.

It is clear that within the designated development area there is recorded evidence of buildings dating from the 1830s, these were however destroyed and demolished in the 1940s-1950s and replaced by the extant 1960s building. The location and nature of these late Georgian and Victorian buildings may become evident during ground works, however the walkover survey suggests that the level of terracing means that little if any traces of earlier occupation are likely to survive. Due to this significant amount of earth moving in the 20th century and the nature of the extant building we make no recommendations for future archaeological work on the site.

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Devon Record Office

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