# MERCHANTS ALMSHOUSES KING STREET BRISTOL

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

For

## **ESHA ARCHITECTS**

on behalf of

## THE SOCIETY OF MERCHANT VENTURERS

CA PROJECT: 2756 CA REPORT: 08250

HER Event No. 24691

DECEMBER 2008

COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY

### MERCHANTS ALMSHOUSES KING STREET BRISTOL

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

### CA PROJECT: 2756 CA REPORT: 08250

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date	23 December 2008			
issue	01			

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#### SUMMARY

Project Name:	Merchants Almshouses
Location:	King Street, Bristol
NGR:	ST 5870 7270
Туре:	Evaluation
Date:	8-10 December 2008
Planning Reference:	07/04520/F; 07/04521/LA
Location of Archive:	To be deposited with Bristol's Museums, Galleries and
	Archives
Accession Number:	BRSMG 2008.82
Site Code:	ALM 08

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in December 2008 at Merchants Almshouses, King Street, Bristol. Two trenches were excavated.

The evaluation established the presence of wall foundations associated with the former west wing of the Merchants Almshouses, constructed in the late 17th century. These foundations were themselves established upon what appeared to be the foundations of an earlier building. The former Marsh Wall was not exposed, although a combination of auger survey and observations of subsidence affecting neighbouring standing buildings suggests the route predicted in an earlier desk-based assessment is reasonably accurate. Significant amounts of redeposited soil and rubble, dating from the mid 17th to mid 18th centuries, found in both trenches probably reflects activity associated with the construction of the Almshouses in the late 17th Century.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December 2008 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation for Esha Architects on behalf of the Society of Merchant Venturers at Merchants Almshouses, King Street, Bristol (centred on NGR: ST 5870 7270; Fig. 1). The evaluation was undertaken to discharge a condition placed by Bristol City Council (BCC) on a planning application (ref: 07/04520/F;07/04521/LA) for the refurbishment and extension to the existing almshouse buildings, as well as the rebuilding of the former west wing.
- 1.2 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief for archaeological evaluation (BCC 2008) prepared by Mr R.H. Jones, City Archaeologist, BCC, and with a subsequent detailed Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CA (2008) and approved by Mr Jones. The fieldwork also followed the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* issued by the Institute for Archaeologists (2001) and the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991). It was monitored by Mr Jones, including a site visit on 9 December 2008.

#### The site

- 1.3 The proposed development site encloses an area of approximately 480m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2) and comprises a paved walkway and rest garden with scattered flowerbeds partly enclosed by the surviving eastern and northern wings of the Merchants Almshouses. The site is flat and located at around 9m AOD. It is bounded to the south by King Street, to the west by Venturers House, to the north by St Clements House and some minor buildings and to the east by the Old Library, now a Chinese restaurant.
- 1.4 The underlying drift geology of the area is mapped as Estuarine Alluvium of the Pleistocene and Recent era (BGS 1974). No alluvium was encountered during the evaluation.

#### Archaeological background (Fig. 2)

- 1.5 The Archaeological potential of the site was assessed in an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) carried out by CA in February 2007 (CA 2007). The results of the DBA are summarised below.
- 1.6 The course of part of the former medieval Town Wall, known as the Marsh Wall, constructed some time after 1240, was uncovered during archaeological investigations prior to the construction of Venturers House in the mid 1990s. From these results it was possible to project the continuation of the Marsh Wall across the centre of the proposed development area (Fig. 2), where it was anticipated to lay at a depth of somewhere between 2m and 2.5m below present ground level (bpgl).
  - 1.7 Documentary research found that an earlier almshouse had been constructed in the late 15th Century to the south of the Marsh Wall, along with an associated chapel dedicated to St Clement. The present almshouse was constructed at the end of the 17th Century and consisted of three wings (west and north built in 1696, the east wing in 1699). It is thought that the east wing was constructed over the site of the original building.
  - 1.8 St Clement's Chapel, situated to the south of the current Venturers House, was extended north in 1701 by the Merchant Venturers to form a new hall, Merchants Hall, that was separated from the almshouses by a narrow, gated passage.
  - 1.9 The west wing of the almshouses and the Merchants Hall were both severely damaged by bombing in 1941. In 1942 Bristol Corporation bought some of this land in order to widen King Street and construct a roundabout. Despite suggestions that the west wing be rebuilt, it was completely demolished shortly after 1942. The north and east wings were fully refurbished into nine self-contained flats in 1958-9.

#### Archaeological objectives

1.10 The general objectives of the evaluation were to establish the character, quality, date and extent of any archaeological remains or deposits surviving within the site. The specific objectives were to establish the locations of the foundations of the former almshouse's west wing and those of the former Marsh Wall. This information would assist BCC in making an informed judgement on the significance of the archaeological resource, and the likely impact upon it of the proposed development.

#### Methodology

- 1.11 The fieldwork comprised the excavation of two trenches in the locations shown on Figure 2. Trench 1 was 2.5m long and 1.8m in width, and located across the projected location of the former west wing of the almshouses. Trench 2 was 3m long and 1.5m wide, and positioned over the projected route of the former Marsh Wall.
- 1.12 Both trenches were excavated by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. All machine excavation was undertaken under constant archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon. All subsequent excavations were carried out by hand. All excavation ceased at a depth of 1.2m bpgl for reasons of health and safety. A series of auger holes were bored into the base of Trench 2 up to depths of 2.2m bpgl. Where archaeological deposits were encountered they were excavated by hand in accordance with CA Technical Manual 1: *Fieldwork Recording Manual* (2007).
- 1.13 Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential in accordance with CA Technical Manual 2: The Taking and Processing of Environmental and Other Samples from Archaeological Sites (2003). No deposits were identified that required sampling.
- 1.14 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CA at their offices in Kemble. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives under accession number BRSMG 2008.82 along with the site archive. A summary of information from this project, set out within Appendix D, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

#### 2. RESULTS (FIGS 2-5)

- 2.1 This section provides an overview of the evaluation results; summaries of the recorded contexts and finds are to be found in Appendices A and B respectively. Details of the relative heights of the principal features expressed as metres Above Ordnance Datum (m AOD) appear in Appendix C.
- 2.2 The evaluation exposed the foundations of three walls in Trench 1 and a stone-lined drain in Trench 2. Both trenches also recorded substantial quantities of redeposited soils and demolition material that sealed these features and which continued beyond the limit of excavation in each trench.

#### Trench 1 (Figs 3-4)

- 2.3 A north/south aligned wall, 104, was exposed close to the centre of the trench. This was partially visible below a later wall, 102 and was constructed from roughly worked sandstone blocks bonded together with a pink sand-based mortar. Patches of the exposed east facing elevation had been re-pointed with a lime mortar.
- 2.4 Wall 104 was very uneven in height, and appears unlikely to have been the foundation level for wall 102. It appears more likely to be the remains of a former structure that has been reused to carry wall 102.
- 2.5 A dark mixed soil deposit, 111, was encountered against the west facing elevation of the wall at the base of the trench. This layer was then sealed by a layer of loose sandstone rubble, 110, that included a lens of crushed slate which could represent the demolition of the structure associated with wall 104. Above this were further layers of mixed soils, 108 that contained two pieces of late 17th to 18th-century pottery and a clay tobacco pipe dated c.1690-1710. Partially overlaying this was a small spread of mortar, 109. Both 108 and 109 appear likely to be associated with the construction phase of the west wing of the almshouse in 1696.
- 2.6 Wall 102 was constructed of roughly worked limestone blocks bonded together with greyish lime mortar that included frequent charcoal inclusions. This wall, which was also aligned north/south, was 0.45m in width and survived to a height of 0.54m. A return wall to the west of similar construction and dimensions, 103, appeared to be

keyed into the western side of wall 102, although its upper course stood slightly proud of the remains of 102.

- 2.7 A layer consisting of redeposited stone and crushed mortar, 112, was identified between the western face of wall 102 and the northern face of wall 103. This partially overlay 114 a clayey deposit, which is very similar to 119 to the south of wall 103. Deposit 119 was overlain by 118, a layer of demolition rubble possibly from the demolition of the west wing of the almshouse.
- 2.8 A mix of redeposited soil, mortar and stone 107 was noted in section to the east of wall 102, overlying wall 104 and abutting the face of 102. It probably represents make-up related to the construction of the original yard within the three wings of the almshouses. To the west of wall 102, in the area delimited by it and wall 103, a darker layer consisting mainly of re-deposited soils, 113, was recorded, representing the demolition phase of the wing in the 1940s.
- 2.9 These walls and deposits were then sealed below a series of layers associated with the current yard surface.

#### Trench 2 (Fig. 5)

- 2.10 The earliest deposit in trench 2 was mixed soil deposit 225, cut by a large silt filled feature 218. The interpretation of this unexcavated feature is unclear, although it is located close to the projected south side of the Marsh Wall (see Fig. 2). It could be a ditch or robber trench, although the absence of any fragments of stone or mortar would seem to preclude the latter interpretation, and the silty nature of the fill would lean toward the former. An unexcavated stone-lined, east/west aligned feature, 227, was set within the silty fill (216 and probably also 217) of cut 218. This was 0.45m in width and was constructed from two parallel lines of stones. The northern line of stones was constructed from roughly worked and unmortared limestone blocks while the southern line was made from a series of limestone tiles that had been pitched end-on. The area between these two lines was in-filled with a dark grey soil. The feature was tentatively interpreted as a drain, possibly strengthening the interpretation of 218 as an earlier ditch feature.
- 2.11 A possible robber trench 224 cut silt 217 in the northern part of the trench, and had four fills, 223-220, which appeared to have been tipped in from south to north. These

contained fragments of sandstone and mortar. Pottery sherds recovered from the secondary fill 222 were dated to between c.1650 and 1750, and the position and alignment of the robber trench matched that of the projected line of the Marsh Wall. The upper fill of the robber trench, 220, was sealed beneath a rubble make-up layer 219. South of drain 227 a series of mixed soil and rubble deposits (215, 214, and 211) overlay 216, and appeared to represent a series of levelling deposits associated with construction of the almshouse yard. A modern drainage pipe trench, 205, was also exposed in section, cutting both 219 and the uppermost of the levelling deposits, 211. This also truncated robber trench 224 and its fills (222, 221 and 220) so that the relationship between robber trench 224 and levelling deposits 215, 214 and 211 could not be established.

2.12 A series of auger holes were sunk along the base of the trench on either side of feature 227 to try to ascertain the likely depth and location of the Marsh Wall. These exposed further layers of redeposited soil and rubble until meeting an impenetrable stony layer, possibly remnants of the Marsh Wall, between 1.9m and 2.2m bpgl to the north of feature 227 (auger holes 1 and 2). An auger hole (6) to the south of feature 227 located a substantial deposit of redeposited clay c.1.6m bpgl. The base of this deposit was not reached by augering.

#### The Finds Evidence

- 2.12 Quantities of post-medieval pottery, clay tobacco pipe and animal bone were recovered from a demolition deposit 108 and robber trench fill 222.
- 2.13 Pottery types present consist of tin-glazed earthenware (BPT 99), North Devon plain and scraffito-decorated finewares (BPT 108), North Devon gravel-tempered (BPT 112) and Malvernian Redware (BPT 197). The types identified are typical of Bristol assemblages from the period *c*. 1650–1750.
- 2.14 A total of 14 fragments of clay tobacco pipe (151g) were recovered and consist of portions of 6 bowls and 8 stems. Several bowl types were present, all characteristic of the late 17th to 18th centuries (appendix B). None feature maker's marks and the dating provided is based on Oswald's typology (Oswald 1975).

2.15 The animal bone assemblage consisted of 14 fragments (142g) from pit fill 222. Cattle and sheep/goat were the only species identified. The bone was well-preserved but modern breakage was common.

#### 3. DISCUSSION (FIG. 6)

- 3.1 Although the Marsh Wall was not exposed within trench 2, the results of the auger holes (1 and 2), indicate that there is a very solid feature that the auger could not penetrate at 2m bpgl in the northern third of the trench (Fig. 5). The location of this feature aligns with the projected route of the Marsh Wall from its last proven location; trench 2 of the excavations at Venturers House in the mid 1990s (CA 2007; Fig. 6), as does the possible robber cut 224. The results of augering to the south of feature 227 (auger hole 6) exposed redeposited clay that appeared to be very similar in nature to a clay deposit recorded as being dumped against the outer face of a bastion on the Marsh Wall during excavations at St Nicholas's Almshouses in King Street, c. 200m to the east of the current site (Barton 1964, fig. 63). Therefore, it would appear likely that remnants of the Marsh Wall, if it survives, lie beneath the northern part of trench 2 as predicted, at depths of at least 1.9m below present ground level. The broad, silt filled, cut feature 218 may represent a ditch outside the line of the Marsh Wall, possibly a later recut of the original extra-mural ditch, which would have followed the south side of the wall.
- 3.2 This is supported by observations of the current east wing of the almshouses, where subsidence was noted either side of the point where it crosses the projected line of the Marsh Wall. Similar subsidence was also noted in the frontage and side of the Old Library building that is located immediately to the east of the site, evidenced by a large crack over the projected line of the Marsh Wall in the east wall of the building. Both sets of subsidence can be clearly seen to be positioned either side of the projected course of the Marsh Wall, giving the appearance that each building has effectively 'broken its back' as their foundations have sunk into the alluvial clays on either side of the wall, particularly the extra-mural ditch, but stood firm over the wall foundations themselves.
- 3.3 It is possible that wall 104 is part of the original 15th century almshouse (CA 2007). This earlier almshouse, however, is described as having been located to the south

of the Marsh Wall and beneath the current east wing (ibid.), so it seems more likely that wall 104 formed part of another, as yet unidentified, building. Map evidence predating the 17th Century is not clear as to whether a structure stood on this spot, which would have been just to the rear of the Marsh Wall.

3.4 Wall 102 in trench 1 is clearly the eastern outer wall of the former west wing of the Merchants Almshouse that was demolished in the 1940s following bomb damage. Wall 103 is also clearly an internal division wall within this wing and can be seen on an Ordnance Survey map of the site published in 1883 (CA 2007, Fig. 12). The limited dating evidence from the evaluation supports the late 17th-century construction date for the west wing of the almshouses, and demonstrates that considerable ground raising took place during and after this period to form the current level of the rest garden.

#### 4. CA PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken by Neil J. Adam, assisted by Sian Reynish and Cherylynne Hyde. The report was written by Neil J. Adam, assisted by Teresa Gilmore (finds) and Sian Reynish. The illustrations were prepared by Rachael Kershaw. The archive has been compiled by Sian Reynish, and prepared for deposition by Kathryn Price. The project was managed for CA by Simon Cox.

#### 5. **REFERENCES**

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#### APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

#### Trench 1

No.	Туре	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
100	Layer	Flagstone surface			0.05	
101	Layer	Concrete bedding layer			0.05	
102	Wall	N – S external limestone wall	>1.8	0.45	0.54	
103	Wall	E – W internal limestone wall	>1.19	0.45	>0.48	
104	Wall	N – S sandstone wall	>1.8	>0.18	>0.65	
105	Layer	Topsoil, Flowerbed	1.9	1.5	0.22	
106	Layer	Make-up layer			0.18	
107	Layer	Soil build-up	>0.6	>1.8	0.24	
108	Layer	Demolition deposit	>0.6	>1.8	0.25	LC17-C18 c.1690- 1710
109	Layer	Demolition deposit	0.29		0.06	
110	Layer	Demolition Deposit	>1.8	>1.1	0.37	
111	Layer	Soil build-up	>0.9	>1.8	>1.3	
112	Layer	Stone and lime mortar deposit	0.6	>0.36	0.13	
113	Layer	Soil build-up	>0.85	>1.4	0.38	
114	Layer	Soil build-up	>0.88	>0.84		
115	Layer	Demolition deposit	>0.75	>0.40	>0.51	
116	Cut	Cut for modern drain		0.30	0.26	
117	Layer	Fill and pipe of cut 116		0.30	0.26	
118	Layer	Demolition deposit	>0.60	>0.53	>0.1	

#### Trench 2

No.	Туре	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
200	Layer	Topsoil, Flowerbed	1.72	1.3	0.16	
201	Layer	Flagstone surface			0.11	
202	Fill	Tertiary fill of cut 205		1.07	0.35	
203	Fill	Secondary fill of cut 205		1.1	0.36	
204	Fill	Primary fill of cut 205		1.1	0.77	
205	Cut	Cut for modern drain		1.2	0.78	
206	Fill	Fill and pipe of cut 207		1.4	0.65	
207	Cut	Demolition deposit		1.4	0.65	
208	Fill	Fill and pipe of cut 209		0.49	0.2	
209	Cut	Demolition deposit		0.49	0.2	
210	Layer	Make-up layer	>0.5	>0.25	0.2	
211	Layer	Make-up layer		>1.28	0.31	
212	Layer	Make-up layer		>0.42	0.2	
213	Layer	Make-up / demolition deposit		>0.65	0.22	
214	Layer	Make-up layer	>1.45	>1.8	0.17	
215	Layer	Make-up layer	>1.8	>1.5	0.32	
216	Layer	Fill of culvert 218		1.4	>0.84	
217	Layer	Fill of culvert 218		0.68	>0.54	
218	Cut	Cut of culvert		>2.1	>0.7	

219	Layer	Demolition deposit	>0.68	>0.65	0.67	
220	Layer	Upper fill of robber trench 224		>0.33	0.6	
221	Layer	Tertiary fill of robber trench 224	>0.75	>1.5	0.46	
222	Layer	Secondary fill of robber trench 224		>1.25	0.45	LC17- MC18
						C17-C18
223	Layer	Primary fill of robber trench 224		>0.72	>0.2	
224	Cut	Robber trench		>1.33	>0.84	
225	Layer	Make-up layer	>0.44	>1.8	>0.65	
226	Layer	Lens within cut of culvert 218		0.16	0.5	
227	Masonry	Culvert		0.45	>0.48	

#### APPENDIX B: THE FINDS

#### Finds Concordance

Context	Artefact type	Count	Weight (g)	Spot-date	BPT
108	Post-medieval pottery: North Devon gravel tempered	2	13	LC17-C18	112
	Clay tobacco pipe: Oswald type 19	1	15	<i>c</i> .1690-	
				1710	
222	Modern pottery: ceramic drain pipe	1	48		99, 108
	Post-medieval pottery: North Devon gravel tempered,	12	550	LC17-	
	North Devon fine tempered, tin-glazed earthenware,			MC18	
	North Devon scraffito, Malvernian redware				
	Clay tobacco pipe: Oswald types 13, 18, 19, 20	13	136	C17-C18	
	Animal bone; cattle, sheep, cow-sized, sheep-sized	14	142		

#### APPENDIX C: LEVELS OF PRINCIPAL DEPOSITS AND STRUCTURES

Levels are expressed as metres below current ground level and as metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), calculated using the benchmark located at 73 Queen Square, Bristol (10.45m AOD).

	Trench 1	Trench 2
Current ground level	0.00m	0.00m
	(8.76m)	(8.73m)
Probable Marsh Wall		2.20m
(Auger bore hole)		(6.53m)
Almshouse foundations	0.18m	
	(8.58m)	
Limit of excavation	1.18m	1.24m
	(7.58m)	(7.49m)

Upper figures are depth below modern ground level; lower figures in parentheses are metres AOD.

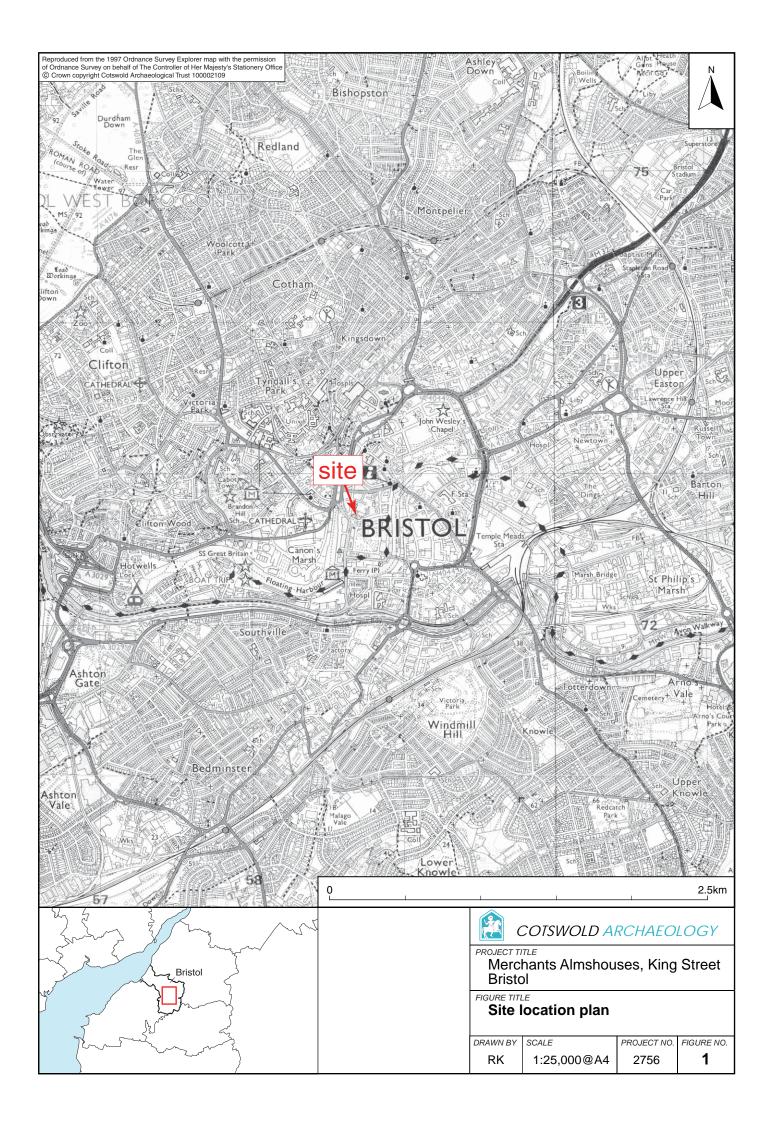
#### APPENDIX D: OASIS REPORT FORM

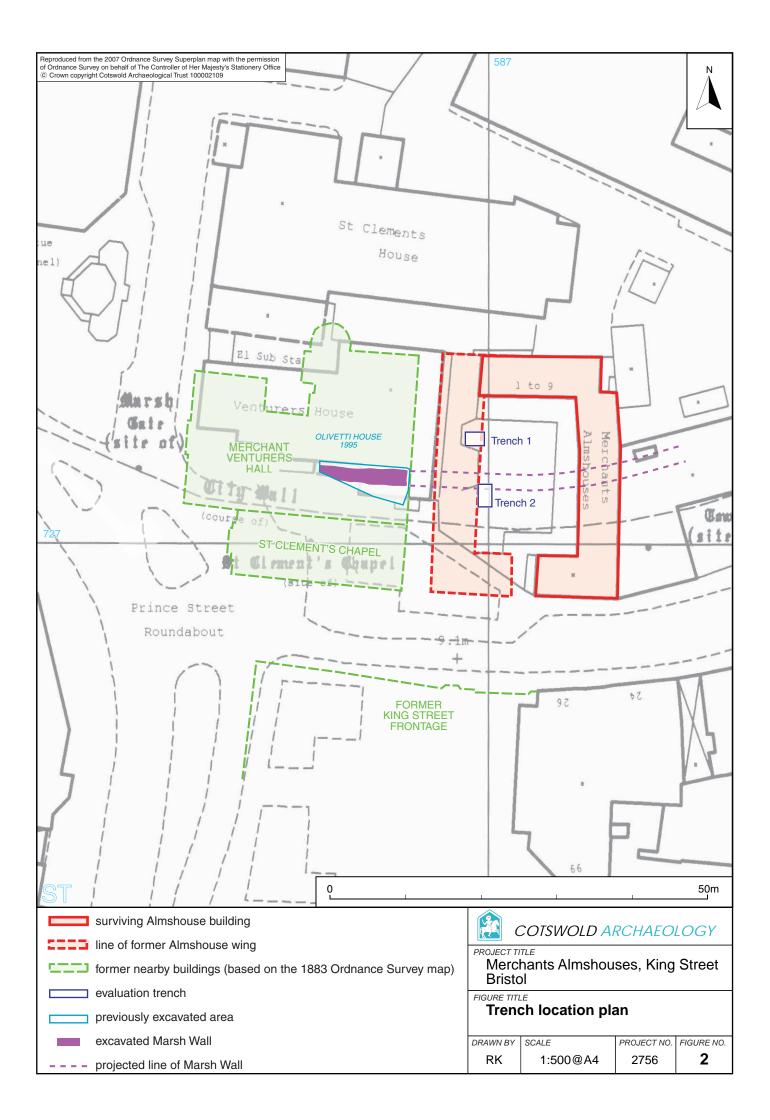
#### PROJECT DETAILS

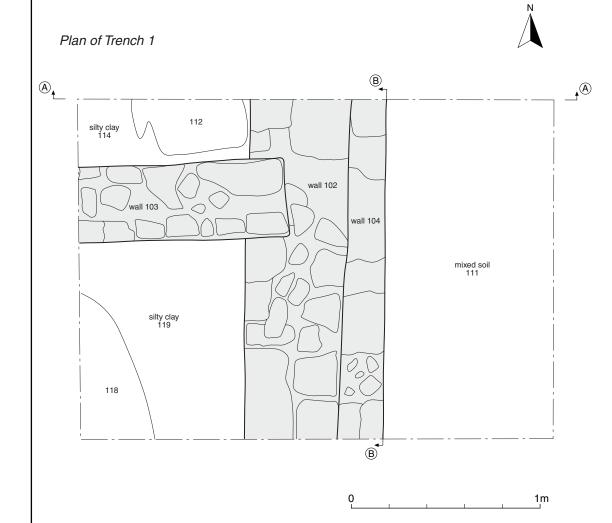
Project Name	Merchants Almshouses, K	ing Street, Bristol			
Short description	Cotswold Archaeology Merchants Almshouses,	An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in December 2008 at Merchants Almshouses, King Street, Bristol. Two trenches were excavated.			
	The evaluation established the presence of wa foundations associated with the former west wing of the Merchants Almshouses, constructed in the lat 17th Century. These foundations were themselve established upon what appeared to be the foundations of an earlier building. The former Mars Wall was not exposed, although a combination of auger survey and observations of subsidence affecting neighbouring standing buildings sugges the route predicted in an earlier desk-base assessment is reasonably accurate. Significant amounts of redeposited soil and rubble, dating from the mid 17th to mid 18th centuries, found in boot trenches probably reflects activity associated with the construction of the Almshouses in the late 17th				
	Century.				
Project dates	8 – 10 December 2008				
Project type	Field Evaluation				
Previous work	Desk Based Assessment	(CA 2007)			
Future work	Unknown				
PROJECT LOCATION					
Site Location	King Street, Bristol				
Study area (M <sup>2</sup> /ha)	480m <sup>2</sup>				
Site co-ordinates (8 Fig Grid Reference)	ST 5870 7270				
PROJECT CREATORS					
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology				
Project Brief originator	Bristol City Council				
Project Design (WSI) originator	Cotswold Archaeology				
Project Manager	Simon Cox				
Project Supervisor	Neil J. Adam				
PROJECT ARCHIVES		Content, pottery, animal bone, clay pipe, metalwork			
	BRSMG 2008.82				
Physical	Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives	Ceramics, clay pipe, animal bone, metalwork			
	BRSMG 2008.82				
Paper	Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives	Context sheets, Trench Record Sheets, Photographic Record			
	BRSMG 2008.82	Sheets, Drawing Register, Levels sheets, A4 and A3 drawings			
Digital	Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives	Digital photos			
	BRSMG 2008.82				

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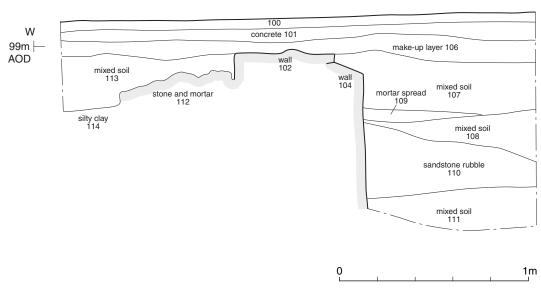
CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2008 Merchants Almshouses, King Street, Bristol: Archaeological Evaluation CA typescript report no: 08250







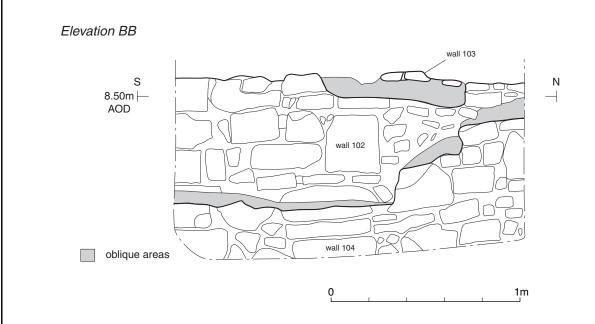
Section AA



Photograph of Trench 1, looking east



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Photograph of walls 102 and 104, looking east



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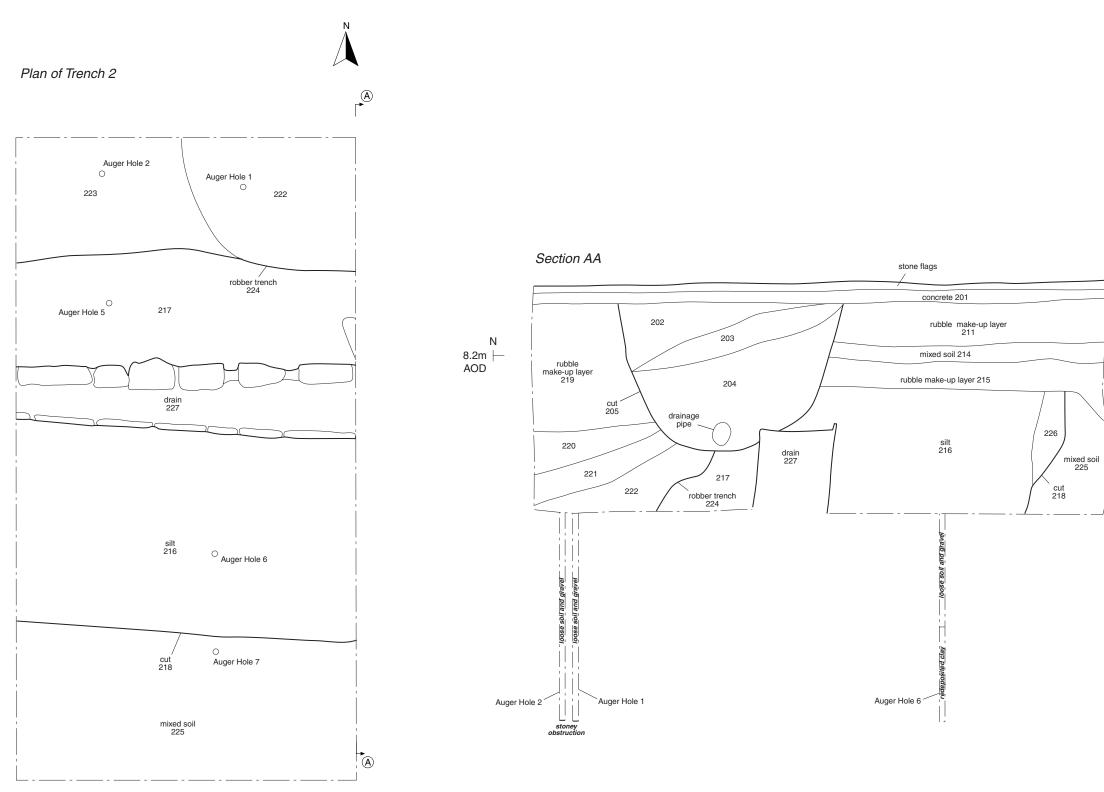
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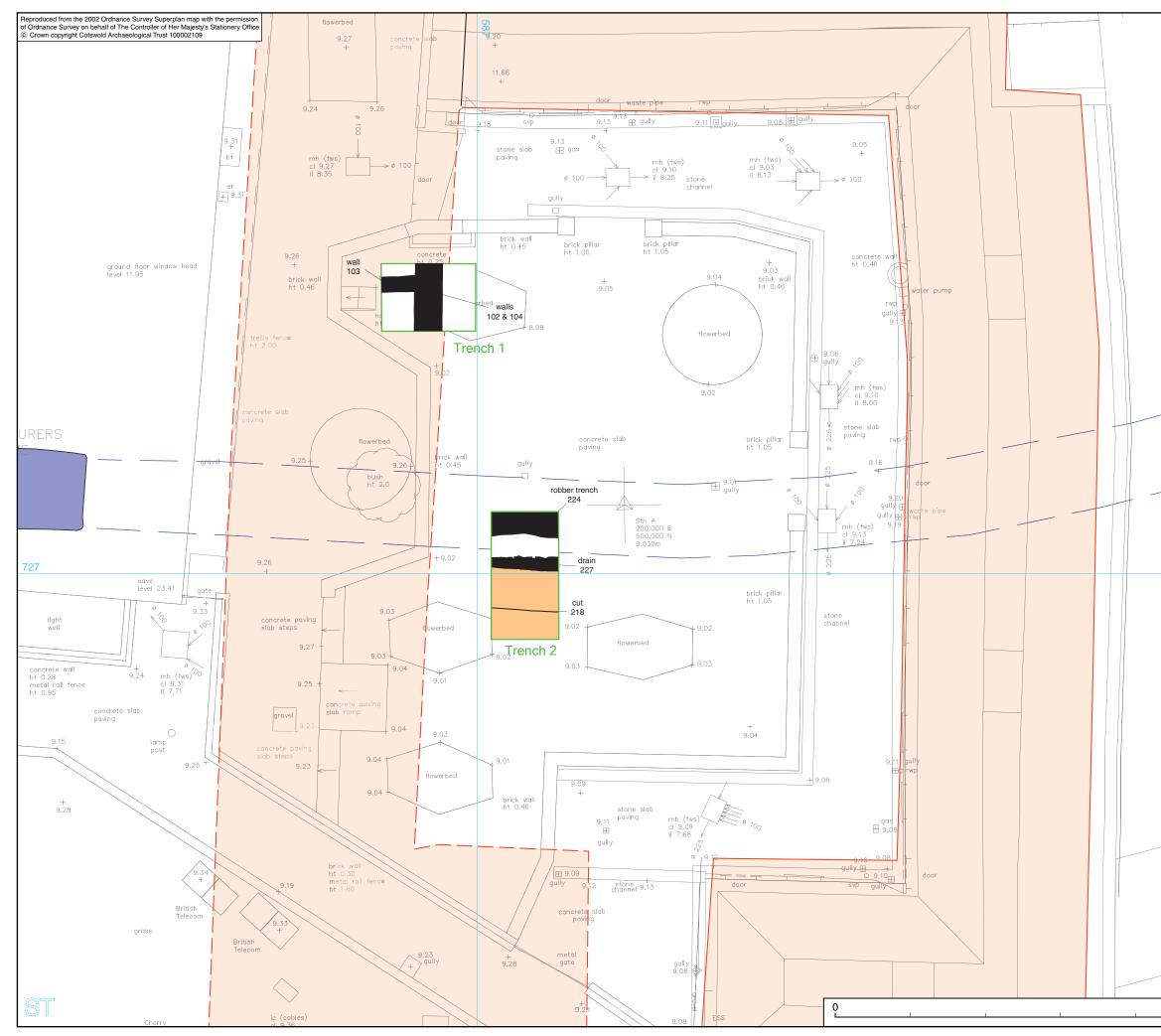
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	PROJECT TI Mercl Bristc	nants hants bl		ses, King	Street