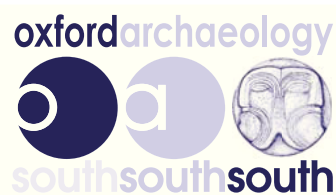


Great Minster Street Winchester



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Great Minster Street, Winchester

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written and illustrated by Steve Teague

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Summary

During April-June 2013, Oxford Archaeology undertook an intermittent archaeological watching brief during groundwork for the repaving and resurfacing of Great Minster Street, Winchester. Since the maximum depth of the groundwork was 0.30m, archaeological levels were not reached.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), were commissioned by Hampshire County Council (HCC) to undertake an archaeological watching brief during environmental improvements on Great Minster Street, Winchester which involved replacing of the street surface and pavement along the length of the street. The watching brief was undertaken intermittently during ground works between 23rd April – 11th June 2013.
- 1.1.2 Although the work was not subject to planning permission, given the location of the site and the proposed maximum depth of the groundwork (0.5m), there was potential for the works to reveal archaeological deposits, including possibly human remains associated with the medieval Cathedral Cemetery. Consequently HCC issued a Specification/Brief (HCC Job No. C.J007455.01) which outlined the scope of the archaeological works required, namely an intermittent watching brief and some level of recording of any exposed sub-surface archaeological deposits revealed. Consequently OA submitted an archaeological method statement (Written Scheme of Investigation) that was approved by Tracy Matthews, Historic Environment Officer at Winchester City Council (WCC), prior to the commencement of works. Also as a precautionary measure a licence for the removal of human remains was obtained from the Ministry of Justice (Licence Number: 13-0036).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies centrally within Winchester and comprises the length of Great Minster Street, a public highway (centred on NGR SU 48067 29357). The street terminates at its northern extent with The Square and at its southern extent at the junction with Little Minster Street/Symonds Street. Along its east side, the site is bounded by Nos 1-2 Great Minster Street at its northern extent and by the Outer Close of Winchester Cathedral along its southern extent. On its west side it is bounded by Minster House and by a number of houses, retail units and The Old Vine public house (3-9 Minster Street).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed works currently consists of a mixture of tarmac and paved road surfaces and the stone pavements flanking each side of the street. The length of the street measures approximately 105m in length and 10m in width (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.3 The geology of the site is River Terrace Deposits, 1 - Sand And Gravel over Chalk (British Geological Survey: Geology of Britain viewer).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

Prehistoric

- 1.3.1 The site lies close to the valley bottom, where river gravels were lain down at the end of the last Ice Age (Late Pleistocene, c 20,000 to 10,000 BP) under periglacial conditions. Evidence of early prehistoric activity within the town is scarce, and consists of a number



of flint scatters from excavations and stray finds. During the Middle Iron Age a large enclosure at Oram's Arbour occupied the western slopes of the valley bottom to the north-west of the site, controlling a natural ford across the broad floodplain along what is now the line of the High Street (Qualmann *et al* 2004). It is possible that some habitation occurred on the tufa island or slightly raised areas within the floodplain which was first identified during the excavations of the Brooks (Zant 1993).

Roman

- 1.3.2 The Roman town of *Venta Belgarum* developed as a *civitas*, a regional administrative centre, and this status is reflected in the provision of major buildings grouped around a forum, located immediately to the north of the site of the present cathedral. The site lies centrally within the Roman defensive circuit: The low-lying prehistoric floodplain located immediately to the east of the site was probably progressively drained as the settlement expanded eastwards, with the River Itchen being diverted outside the eastern boundary (Qualmann *et al* 2004). The location of known and conjectural north-south Roman streets in the area of the site is not well understood though a major east-west street is known to lie approximately below the line of the High Street and a second is projected to cross the southern half the site (Wacher 1983, Fig. 65). These streets were presumably flanked by buildings though such levels are likely to lie well below the impact level of the proposed works.

Saxon and medieval

- 1.3.3 During the first part of the 5th century organised urban life in *Venta Belgarum* ceased and there is little evidence for occupation in the town until in the mid-7th century when a royal church known as Old Minster, soon to achieve Cathedral status, was constructed partially sited under and immediately north of the nave of the present cathedral located to the east of the site. The western extent of its precinct is unknown though Biddle has speculated that this area may have formed part of a royal palace (Biddle 1983). The New Minster was founded in 901 by King Edward the Elder immediately to the north of the Old Minster, both as a Royal Mausoleum for his father, King Alfred the Great, and as a town church for the newly established burh. It is thought that its western boundary at one point was denoted by the present Little Minster Street to the west such that the site lay within its precinct, possibly containing part of its cemetery and conventional buildings. After the destruction of the palace in the 12th century and removal of the New Minster to Hyde, the site seems to have formed part of the cemetery of the present Norman Cathedral (Keene 1985).

Post-medieval

- 1.3.4 During 1349 the citizens of Winchester gained legal access to the western and northern parts of the cemetery in order to hold markets after which the present western boundary of the cemetery was established to the east of the site (*Ibid.*). Godson's map of Winchester (1750) shows that most of the buildings flanking both sides of Great Minster Street had been established by this time. Indeed all the buildings that lie within the area of the site are listed, dating to either the 17th or 18th centuries (British Listed Buildings online)



- 1.3.5 Observations, during the installation of the Winchester Light Art Project within the north side of the Outer Cathedral Close (immediately adjacent to the Winchester Museum) revealed 19th century and later levels at a depth of 0.30-0.35m (Teague 2002).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To record any any archaeological remains that may be exposed during to the course of the works and to preserve any archaeological remains by record.
- 2.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological deposits and features and to make available the results of the investigation.
- 2.1.3 To establish whether the Cathedral cemetery extended into the area of the site, if such levels are exposed during the works, or can be deduced by the presence of disturbed remains within later deposits.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The replacement of the existing pavements and street surfaces was undertaken in three main stages with attendance by the archaeologist only required intermittently during groundwork preparation prior to the laying of the new surfaces. All groundwork was undertaken using a mini-digger unless otherwise stated.
- The replacement of the stone paving slabs along the western side of Great Minster Street between its junction with Little Minster Street up to No 6 Great Minster Street. Limited ground reduction to a maximum of c 0.30m below the pre-existing pavement surface.
 - The replacement of the stone paving slabs along the eastern side of Great Minster Street between its junction with Little Minster Street and No 1 Great Minster Street. Limited ground reduction to a maximum of c 0.30m below the pre-existing pavement surface.
 - The replacement of the existing tarmac street surface between the entrance into Cathedral Green on its south end up to north side of No 1 Great Minster Street. This removal of the existing tarmac and any subsequent excavation totalled a depth of just c 0.15m. The excavation depth was less than the 0.35m that was originally envisaged (HCC Site Inspector *pers. comm.*) since the compactness of level reached immediately below the existing tarmac was considered adequate enough to support the new road surface. Against the nearly built pavement either side of the street a channel c 0.60m wide was excavated to a further depth of c 0.15m in order to accommodate edging stones.
- 2.2.2 The only other significant groundwork comprised a small hand-dug trench to examine the depth of a metal gas pipe that fed an adjacent gas-powered street lamp. The trench measured c 0.85m x 0.40m and revealed the pipe at a depth c 0.40m. Two further hand-dug trenches of similar size were dug along the line of a high voltage electric cable trench but were not observed. However in both cases the position of the cable conformed to that of an earlier cable detector survey, apparently at a depth of c 1m



below the existing tarmac street surface. Below the tarmac, each trench was apparently filled with 'Type 2' hardcore down to the level of the cable.

3 RESULTS

- 3.1.1 Throughout the length of the former pavement on either side of the street the base of modern levels were not breached at a depth of 0.30m (below the level of the former pavement slabs), the maximum depth excavated. Most often modern hardcore, concrete rubble/sand was revealed that either acted as the foundation level for the former pavement/kerb or pertained to the fills of earlier service trenches that were clearly denoted by the existing manholes/covers visible along its length. This was most evident along the eastern pavement adjacent to Nos 1-2 Great Minster Street and further south within the area adjacent to the entrance into the Cathedral Close.
- 3.1.2 Within the area of the street, once the existing tarmac surface (thickness c 0.15m) was removed no further excavation was required since the HCC engineers considered the underlying exposed levels of sufficient compactness to support the new tarmac surface. Consequently over much of the area the machine bucket did not remove the trampled underside that would have formed when the original tarmac surface was first constructed, rendering the exposed levels rather diffuse. However it was clear that visible levels were of recent date and predominately comprised the fill of a large sewer trench measuring c 2.1m in width that lined up with existing manhole covers that are located along the length of the street. Clearly visible within the exposed fill of this trench was modern material including concentrations of broken bottle glass (not retained). A second trench followed the line of the aforementioned high voltage electric cable trench that ran along the western side of the street. Both these trenches seemingly cut brick rubble/hardcore that was probably laid as a foundation for the modern street. Along the eastern side of the street a compact layer of mixed mid orange/buff mortar was exposed within the area to the south of Minster House, closest to the metal fence that bounds the Cathedral Close. Within the edging trench that ran against eastern edge of the street it was revealed to be at least 0.07m thick and contained red brick fragments. It is unclear whether it was filling a trench or represented a dump.
- 3.1.3 Within the sides of the gas pipe inspection trench, the existing tarmac street surface (0.15m thick) was seen to directly overlie a fairly clean mid grey-brown silty clay loam that contained flecks of red brick which continued to the base of the trench, at a depth of 0.40m. It is unclear whether this soil was contained within the trench cut for the gas pipe or represented an earlier soil horizon.
- 3.1.4 No finds were retained.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 It is clear, due to the very limited depth of the groundwork undertaken that archaeological levels were not reached during the course of the works. Indeed visual inspection undertaken suggests that the base of the deepest excavations, along the eastern side of the street, did not go lower than the existing ground level of the Cathedral Close that is located less than 1m to the east. This would imply that the earliest levels exposed probably represent make-up for the pre-existing street surface



and pavements, given the absence of evidence for earlier surfaces at the depth excavated.

- 4.1.2 At the junction of Little Minster Street and St Clements Street, the thickness of the tarmac and underlying modern make-up for the existing street surface was been found to be 0.50m (Teague 2003).

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APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Great Minster Street, Winchester

Site code: WINCM:AY507

Grid reference: Centred on SU 48067 29357

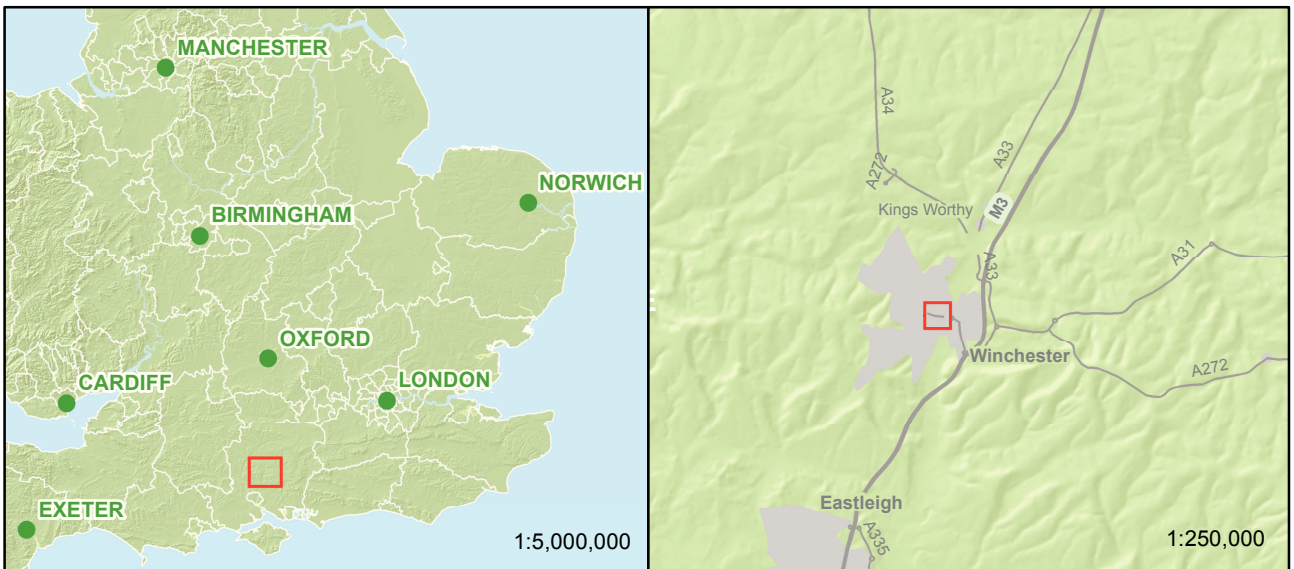
Type of watching brief: Resurfacing of street and pavements

Date and duration of project: 23rd April – 11th June 2013

Area of site: 0.065ha

Summary of results: During April-June 2013, Oxford Archaeology undertook an intermittent archaeological watching brief during groundwork for the repaving and resurfacing of Great Minster Street, Winchester. Since the maximum depth of the groundwork was 0.30m, archaeological levels were not reached.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Winchester Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: WINCM:AY507



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Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2013

Figure 1: Site location

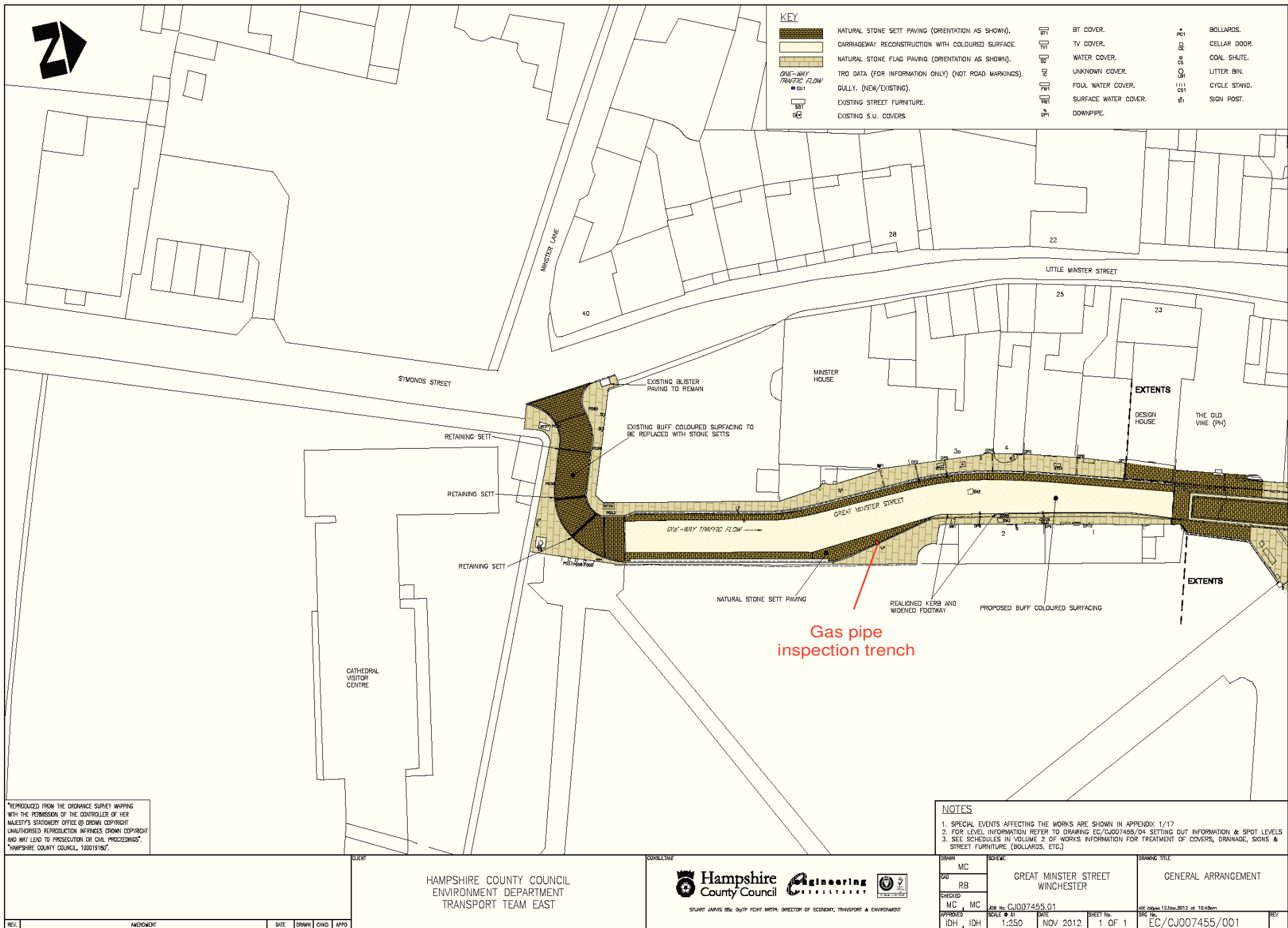


Figure 2: Engineer's plan showing extent of works (HCC Drawing EC/CJ007455/001) (not to scale)



Plate 1: Pavement (at junction with Little Minster Street) at formation level - looking E



Plate 2: Pavement opposite Minster House at formation level - looking S



Plate 3: Pavement opposite Nos 1-2 Great Minster Street at formation level - looking N



Plate 4: South end of Great Minster Street at formation level - looking N



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