

WEST QUAY, BRIDGWATER, SOMERSET

(NGR ST 30003 37215)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

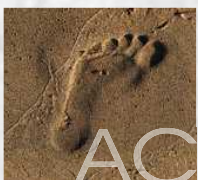
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On behalf of:  
Somerset County Council

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Date: May 2013



AC archaeology

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(NGR ST 30003 37215)

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## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology in March 2012 during repairs to West Quay, Bridgwater, Somerset (ST 30003 37215).*

*A wall and an adjacent surface had been exposed during removal of collapsed material behind the quay wall. Both were constructed of blue lias, and on the basis of previous observations in the area are tentatively dated to documented works in c. 1725 that included the construction of a new quay.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 Archaeological recording was undertaken by AC archaeology on 23 March 2012 during repairs to the West Quay, Bridgwater, Somerset (ST 30003 37215; Fig. 1). A section of river wall at West Quay partially collapsed in November 2011. During the removal of material behind the dislodged wall, historic structures were exposed at a depth of 3.7m from the road surface. Emergency archaeological recording of these structures was commissioned by Somerset County Council.

1.2 The site is situated on the west side of the River Parrett, on the east side of the medieval core of Bridgwater. It lies to the west of the medieval castle. Surviving remains of the castle on the west side of West Quay include a 13th-century wall and a medieval Watergate that was partially rebuilt in the 19th century (National Heritage List no. 1207427). The site lies at around 8m AOD, with the underlying solid geology comprising Triassic Mercian mudstone and halite stone of the Mercian mudstone group, overlain by Quaternary tidal flat deposits of clay, silt and sand.

1.3 In 1973 the local archaeological society monitored the excavations for a new sewerage scheme along West Quay (Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society 1976-77). In the vicinity of the present observations a 1.2m wide wall (feature 8) constructed of poor quality lias and sandstone bonded in sandy mortar, and aligned east-west, was exposed at a depth of 2m below the road surface.

### 2. AIM

2.1 The aim of the investigation was to prepare a photographic record of the historic structures exposed during the groundworks.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The investigation was undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (revised 2008). There were health and safety constraints relating to the confined space nature of the working area and there was no access to the exposed structures. All cleaning and detailed measurements were made by the contractor under the guidance of the site archaeologist. Further recording was undertaken from an intermediate level where a concrete surface had been laid to encapsulate and protect the 1970s sewer running under West Quay.

3.2 A written, drawn and photographic record was prepared in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*.

#### **4. RESULTS** (Fig. 2; Plates 1-6)

- 4.1** Two features were exposed within the base of the trench – a wall (1) and a surface (2). The wall was constructed of large blocks of blue lias bonded in hard pink mortar with lime inclusions (Plates 1-2). Four courses were visible, and the wall stood to a height of approx. 0.70m above the water level and adjacent surface (2). The contractor reported that it continued down for a further 0.50m. Clear faces were visible on its north, south and west sides. The north face was roughly aligned east-west, i.e. at right angles to the present quay wall, but was actually on a very slight northeast-southwest orientation. The upper surface was not flat, and it was clear that the upper section of the wall had been removed. The wall was partially overlaid by the present, collapsed quay wall.
- 4.2** To the west of this wall, a surface (2) had been partially exposed (Plates 3-4). Its north side had been disturbed, probably by the present excavations and its southern extent also appeared to have been removed. The surface comprised lias setts laid in rows aligned north-south. The setts were 100-200mm wide and up to 1m long, and were bonded in a reddish-pink lime mortar. A total of 13 rows were uncovered, and the surface continued, or had continued, westwards under the sewer pipe. It appeared to slope downhill westwards away from wall 1.
- 4.3** The relationship between wall 1 and surface 2 is unclear. There was a gap between the wall and the first row of setts. This may indicate that the wall had been constructed through an earlier surface, and that the gap represents the wall's construction trench. However, it is more likely that the two features are contemporary, and that the wall has rotated eastwards away from the surface, when the attached quay wall collapsed in 2011.
- 4.4** Above these features a thin layer of silts survived (3); otherwise all the removed material was modern infilling following the collapse of the adjacent quay wall (4). A small finds assemblage was recovered from this modern material. It comprised a rim sherd of South Somerset earthenware Sgraffito ware dish with yellow and green lead glaze of c. 18th-19th century date, a sherd from a creamware dish of c. 19th – 20th century date, and a base fragment of a green bottle of c. 18th-19th century date.
- 4.5** Within the working area several phases of masonry were identified in the collapsed quay wall (Plates 5-6). These all appeared to predate the present 19th-century quay wall parapet and streetscape. The earliest visible masonry was constructed of large lias blocks, and was orientated at a slightly different angle to the overlying rebuild (5). The later masonry (6) is in part stepped outwards (by c. 0.4m) from wall 4. It was built of well-laid coursed lias blocks bonded in pinky white mortar but was less well constructed than both walls 1 and 4. The southern section of this wall had been heavily repaired during the 20th century with concrete. The wall appeared to abut (or was perhaps abutted by) an east-west aligned wall (7) of which only the eastern stub survived. This wall appeared to be contemporary with the quay wall to the south, and where they joined was a section of angled masonry.

#### **5. COMMENTS**

- 5.1** The groundworks had exposed a wall (1) and a surface (2). These were cleaned and recorded. No other features were exposed. The wall and surface could not be directly dated, and stratigraphically all that can be said is that the wall pre-dated the inner fabric of the present quay wall. In their conclusions on the 1973 recording, the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society noted that walls constructed of dressed lias and Ham stone (recycled from the medieval castle) may have been of

18th-century date and associated with the Duke of Chandos' building of Castle Street and Chandos Street, as well as a new quay, in c. 1725. It is possible therefore that the present wall and surface are the same date.

- 5.2 Surface 2 may have been a tidal slip situated away from a quay wall under the present West Quay road or adjacent properties. Wall 1 appeared to have been an isolated pier of masonry, although it is possible further masonry is or was present under the quay wall. The visible masonry did not appear to define the eastern side of the probable slip, and it is possible that it formed part of an entrance to the structure.
- 5.3 The visible fabric at the rear of the quay wall is likely to be of later post-medieval date (presumably later 18th-century onwards) if wall 1 below dates to c. 1725. The main fabric (5) could be of early-mid 19th-century date and may form the core behind the front dressed face of the quay wall that had been constructed by 1887.

## 6. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

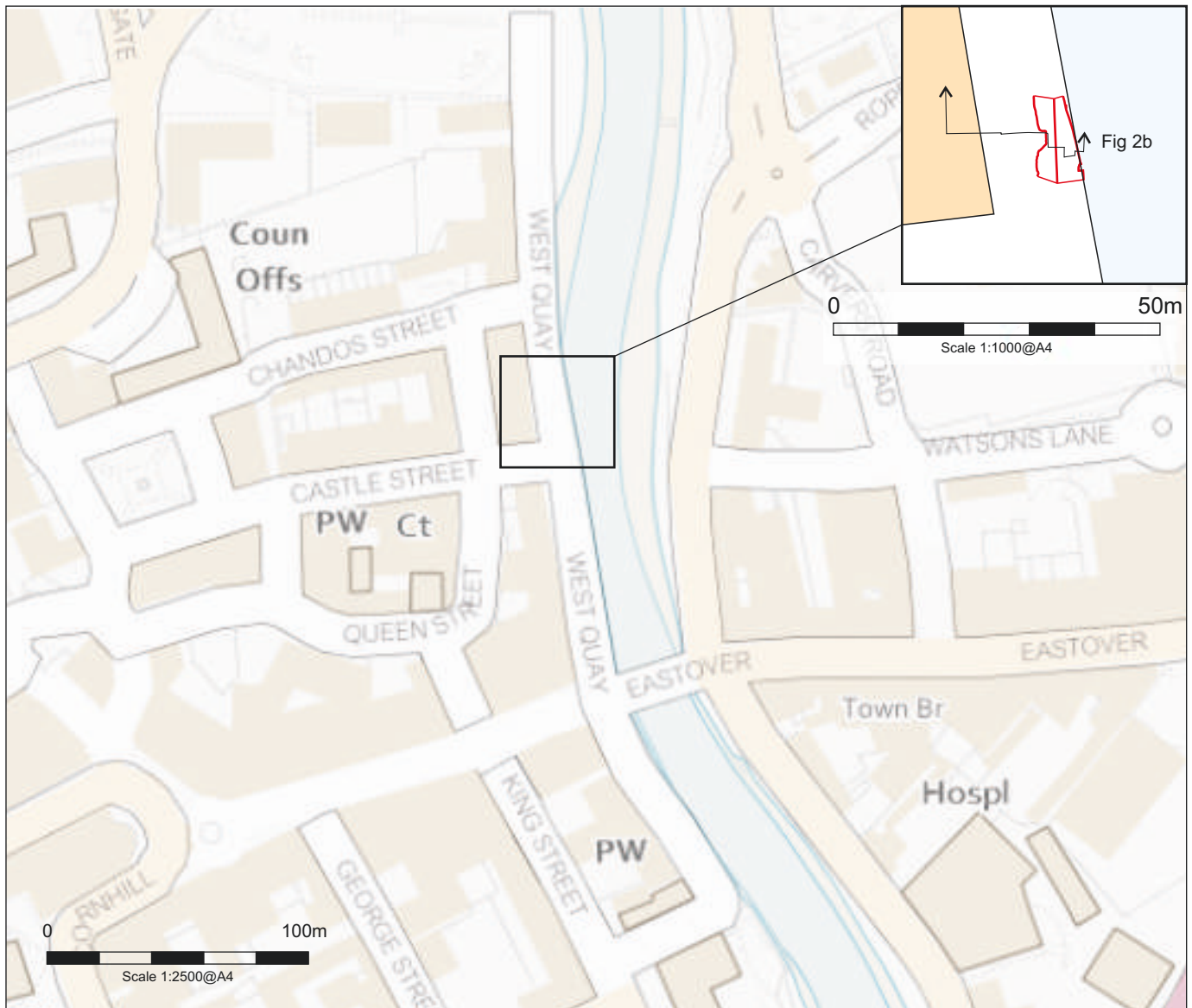
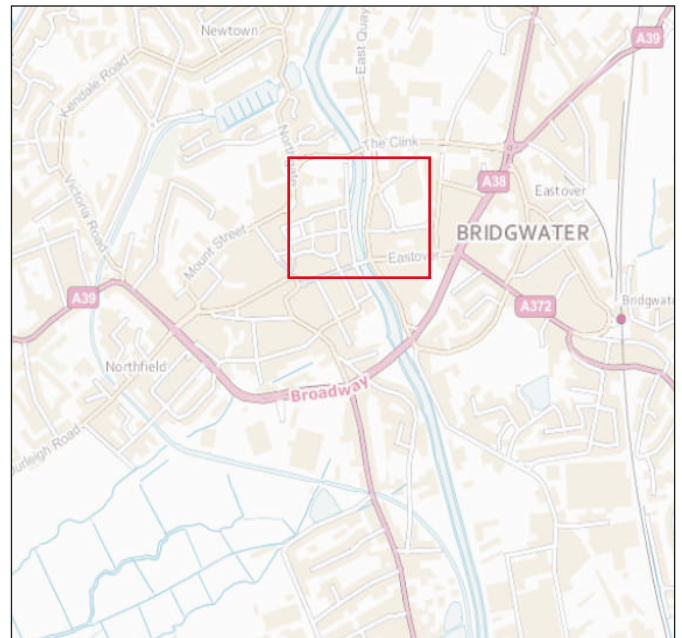
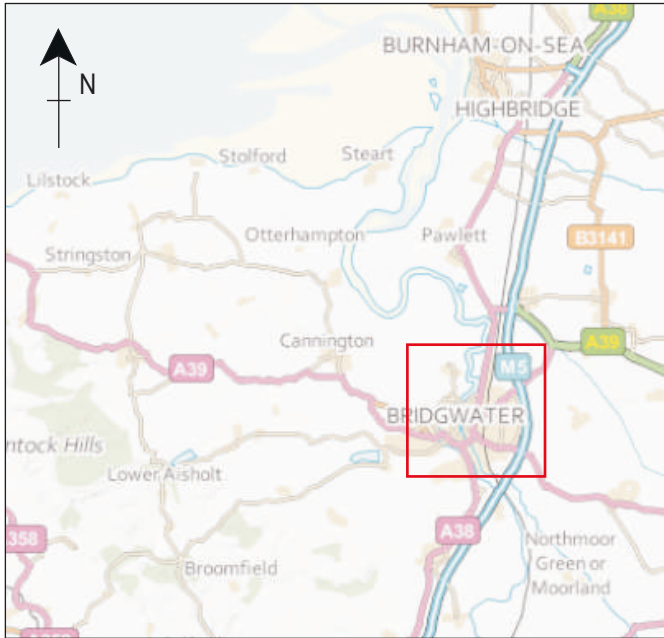
- 6.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. It will be deposited at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton under an allocated accession number.
- 6.2 An OASIS entry has been completed under the unique identifier 1207427.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 This report was commissioned by Somerset County Council. The project was managed for Somerset County Council by Bob Croft and AC archaeology by John Valentin. The survey was carried out by Andrew Passmore, the report written by Andrew Passmore with the illustrations prepared by Sarnia Blackmore. Thanks are due to the contractor Crestmoor for facilitating access and for cleaning and recording the archaeological features within the confined space working area.

## 8. REFERENCE

Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society, 1976-77, 'West Quay, Bridgwater, 1973', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, vol 121, 101-105.



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PROJECT

West Quay, Bridgwater

TITLE

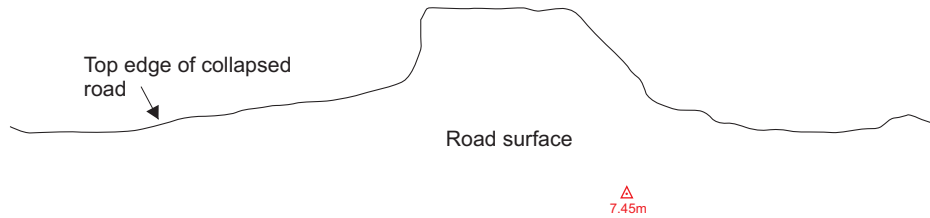
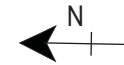
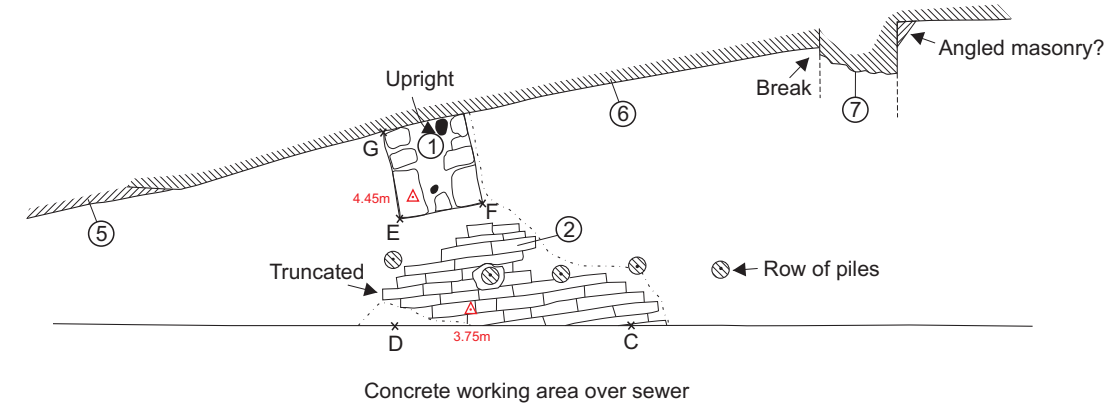
Fig. 1: Location of site



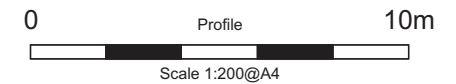
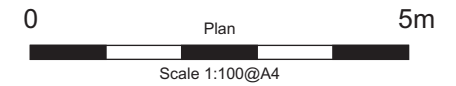
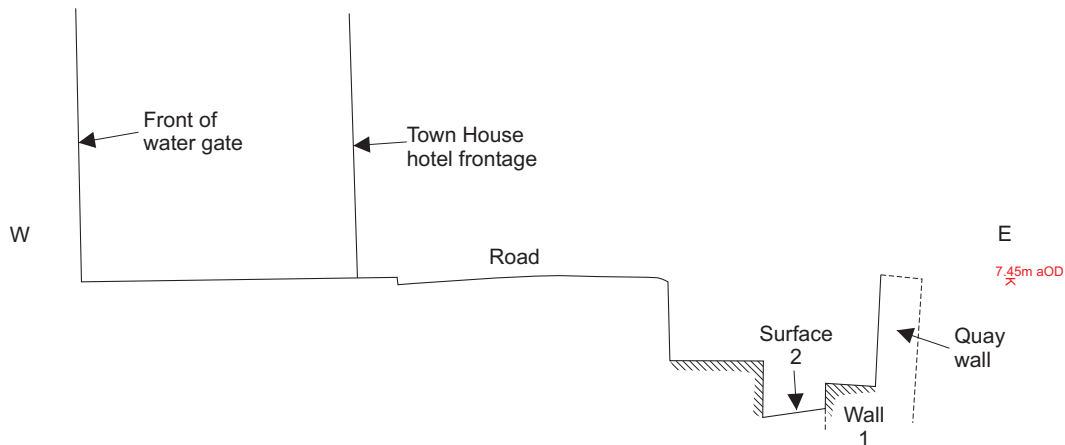
Site location



a) Site plan



b) Profile



PROJECT  
West Quay, Bridgwater

TITLE  
Fig. 2: Site plan, and profile showing relationship with the Water Gate





Plate 1: Wall 1 after initial cleaning viewed from the west. 1m scale.



Plate 2: Wall 1 after further cleaning, viewed from the west, also showing surface 2.



Plate 3: Surface 2, viewed from the south.





Plate 4: Surface 2,  
viewed from the north.



Plate 5: Wall 6 viewed  
from the southwest.



Plate 6: Wall 7 viewed from the west.

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