

Land to the rear of 7 Priory Road, Wells, Somerset

Centred on NGR ST 54765 45444

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

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Bell Cornwell

Document No: ACD940/1/0

Date: July 2014



AC archaeology

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## Summary

*An archaeological trench evaluation, comprising the excavation of a single T-shaped trench totalling 16m long, was undertaken at No. 7 Priory Road, Wells, Somerset in July 2014 by AC archaeology. The trench was positioned over the footprint of the proposed development. It was machined to the top of natural subsoil or in situ archaeological deposits where these were encountered.*

*A shallow gully of later post-medieval date was exposed, cutting natural subsoil at a depth of approximately 1.25m. Its purpose is likely related to a former garden and orchard depicted on early mapping. A wall footing exposed at a depth of 0.85m was post-medieval in date and is likely to post-date the gully. It appeared to be the footing for a building shown on early mapping first as a glass house, then as a more substantial structure, finally demolished between 1968 and 1971.*

*Stratified finds comprised post-medieval pottery, clay pipe, iron nails and fragments of animal bone, largely from levelling and demolition layers. Two sherds of medieval pottery recovered from demolition material related to the post-medieval wall are certainly residual, but hint at earlier activity in the vicinity of the site.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological trench evaluation at 7 Priory Road, Wells, Somerset (ST 54765 45444), carried out in support of a planning application for the erection of a single dwelling and associated works.
- 1.2 The archaeological work was commissioned by Bell Cornwell on behalf of Napier Smythe and carried out by AC archaeology on the 1st and 2nd July 2014.
- 1.3 The site is located within the curtilage of property No. 7, on the southeast side of Priory Road, Wells, lying at approximately 39m aOD, under tarmac surface to the rear of the existing property. The underlying geology is Mercia Mudstone Group - Mudstone and Halite-stone. Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 200 to 251 million years ago in the Triassic Period, overlain by Alluvial Fan Deposits - Clay, Silt and Sand.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is located within the historic city of Wells approximately 575m to the southwest of Wells Cathedral. Wells originated as a Roman settlement and was subsequently a Saxon and Medieval town. There is documentary evidence for medieval town defences. The Medieval borough was created in 1174.
- 2.2 The site is located within the precinct of the medieval hospital of St Johns Priory, founded in 1206 (HER 24796). Foundations of the priory hospital were observed during construction of a new school in 1858. At that time, foundations and architectural components of the old hospital were noted as extensive. The Priory, No 2 St John Street, incorporates part of the hospital, including some of the original features. More recent excavations at the rear of 9 and 11 St John's Street have encountered burials associated with the hospital (HER 30284).
- 2.3 During an evaluation and watching brief in 2000 and 2001 at Beckett Place, located immediately southeast of the site, medieval ditches associated with the hospital were exposed. In addition, Roman features, principally ditches, were encountered, and along with a quantity of finds of this date, are likely to indicate occupation activity in the vicinity (HER 44867 and 156143).

### **3. AIM**

- 3.1** The aim of the trench evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site.

### **4. METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)**

- 4.1** The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of one T-shaped trench measuring 11m NE-SW and 5m NW-SE in length, and 1.40m wide (Fig. 2) centred on the footprint of the proposed new house. Removal of soil overburden was undertaken under the direction of the site archaeologist.
- 4.2** All features and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology proforma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012). Detailed sections or plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate.

### **5. RESULTS**

- 5.1** The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.4m. Natural subsoil (105) was encountered at an approximate depth of 1.35m and exposed across the southern half of the trench. Overlying deposits comprised a layer of demolition material (110) sealed by up to 0.5m of later post-medieval levelling (103). At the northern end of the trench deposit 103 had been cut by two modern service trenches and was overlain by modern brickwork. Modern surfacing, c. 0.32m thick, comprising hardcore (102, 101) and tarmac (100) sealed the trench. Two sherds of medieval pottery and one 19th century sherd were recovered from demolition rubble 110, in addition to animal bone and numerous iron nails and fragments.
- 5.2** A single NE-SW aligned linear feature (F107) cut the natural subsoil. At the northeast end of the trench a NE-SW aligned wall (S109) was exposed at a depth of 0.85m. Ditch F107 and wall S109 are described below. A layer of post-medieval levelling and demolition debris (104) overlay natural subsoil and the fill of F107. It appeared to also abut wall S109 to the southeast. At its north-eastern extent, levelling layer 104/112 contained a partial, broken millstone lying flat and abutting wall S109. A thin, discrete, spread of compact crushed mortar, ash, gravel and brick fragments (108), measuring up to 0.8m across and 0.07m thick, overlay layer 104 and abutted wall S109. It tentatively represented remnants of levelling for a former surface, perhaps originally cobbled. A clay tobacco pipe bowl and two sherds of pottery dating to the early 18th century were recovered from deposit 108.
- 5.3 Ditch F107**  
Ditch F107 was aligned NE-SW and was exposed to a maximum length of 6m. It measured 0.8m wide and 0.25m deep with gently sloping sides and a rounded base. It contained a single fill (106) composed of mid brown silt with occasional angular and sub-rounded gravel, and cobbles. A fragment of iron was recovered from fill 106.
- 5.4 Wall S109**  
Wall S109 was aligned NE-SW and exposed to a maximum length of 3.60m. Its full width and depth were not exposed. The fabric comprised a facing of rough-hewn limestone and mudstone blocks between 0.1 and 0.3m in size, randomly coursed and un-bonded, with an un-bonded rubble core of smaller irregular fragments.

## 6. FINDS by Charlotte Coles

### 6.1 Introduction

All finds recovered on site during the evaluation were retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. A small collection of animal bones and iron objects were recovered along with several pieces of CBM, clay tobacco pipe, medieval and post-medieval pottery.

Context	Context Description	Iron		Clay pipe		CBM		Med Pot		Post-Med Pot		Animal Bone	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
103	Levelling layer			1	2							18	431
104	Demolition layer			1	7							25	725
106	Fill of ditch 107	1	31									4	126
108	Levelling spread 108			1	17	1	30			2	12		
110	Demolition layer	36	829					2	12	1	2	10	83
Total		37	860	3	26	1	30	2	12	3	14	57	1365

Table 1: The finds. Weights are in grams

### 6.2 Iron

A total of 37 pieces of iron was recovered from two contexts, with thirty-six pieces from demolition layer 110. The Iron objects consist of thirty-one nails, four flat plates of iron, a badly corroded iron bar and one unidentifiable heavily corroded piece.

### 6.3 Clay tobacco pipe

A total of three pieces of clay tobacco pipe was recovered from three contexts; these are two stems and a bowl. The bowl (context 108) is very heavily burnt and blackened on the inside and outside of the bowl. The small part of the remaining attached stem is unburnt. The bowl is burnished and has a heel stamp of "RICH GREEN LAND" who was a pipe manufacturer based at Norton St Philip in Somerset in the early 18th century (Higgins Unpub.).

### 6.4 CBM

A single small piece of brick was recovered from levelling spread 108.

### 6.5 Medieval Pottery

A total of two pieces of medieval pottery was recovered from demolition layer 110. These are a piece of 13th-14th century pottery possibly in upper greensand stone derived fabric and a piece of 14th-15th century jug in an unknown fabric.

### 6.6 Post-Medieval Pottery

A total of three pieces of post-medieval pottery was recovered from two contexts. These are one piece of 19th century pottery from context 110 and one piece of south Somerset ware and one piece of English Industrial ware both dating from the 18th century.

### 6.7 Animal Bone

A total of 57 pieces of animal bone were recovered from four contexts. The remains are in good condition. The bones from levelling layer 103 include a distal cattle humerus. The bones from demolition layer 104 include three cattle teeth, a cattle femur, a fragment of cattle vertebrae, four sheep metapodials, a sheep radius, a sheep horncore and a sheep pelvis which has been gnawed by dogs. The bones from the fill of ditch F107 include part of a cattle ulna, a juvenile cattle mandible and a sheep metapodial. The bones from demolition layer 110 include a distal sheep humerus.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

- 7.1** The evaluation exposed a single ditch (F107) and a wall footing (S109), both of broadly later post-medieval date. The stratigraphic relationship between the gully and the wall remains uncertain as overlying levelling layer 104 was not investigated where it abutted wall S109. It seems likely, however, that the wall post-dates the gully. Layers 104 and 108 tentatively represent levelling for a possible surface to the southeast of wall S109 and perhaps incorporating the millstone fragment, apparently set into deposit 104.
- 7.2** Wall footing S109 corresponds well with a glazed roofed structure depicted on OS first edition mapping (OS 1st edition 1887), representing its southeast external face. It appears to have been a glass house within a garden and small orchard to its rear. By 1948 a potentially more substantial structure is shown in this location and is present until as late as 1968. The structure was removed between 1968 and 1971.
- 7.3** It seems likely that gully F107, which was aligned parallel to wall S109 and the northwest boundary of the site, is also related to the garden and orchard.
- 7.4** Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered. They were residual within post-medieval to modern demolition deposit 110. However, they do hint at earlier activity in the vicinity of the site, which is probably associated with the hospital of St Johns Priory.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1** The evaluation exposed little, apart from pottery in a residual context, that could be related to the medieval or earlier history of Wells. The site shows little potential for archaeologically significant finds, having been built upon during the 20th century.

## **9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS**

- 9.1** The finds, paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. The finds and archive will be deposited at the Somerset Museum under accession number TTNCM 69/2014. The project has a Somerset County Council HER event number of 32569.
- 9.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 184123, which includes a digital copy of this report.

## **10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 10.1** The evaluation was commissioned by Bell Cornwell and administered by Simon Hughes for AC archaeology. The site work was undertaken by Vince Simmonds and Dan Brace. The illustrations were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

## **11. REFERENCES**

Higgins, D. Unpub, Paper on 'Clay pipes from Glastonbury Abbey Excavations', Symposium at Glastonbury Abbey, 2011.

### **Online sources**

Heritage Gateway

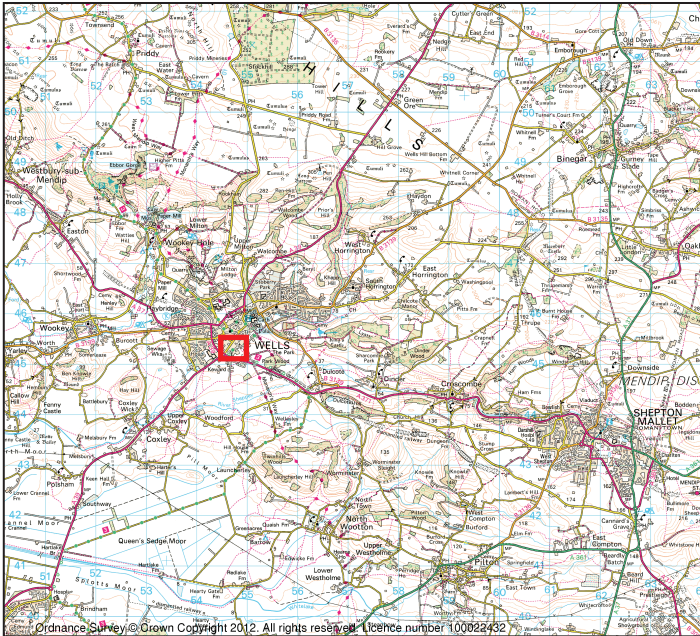
**Maps consulted**

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st Edition 1887

Ordnance Survey 6-inch Somerset Sheet XL1.NW 1948

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1968

Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 1971



- Property boundary
- Building
- Evaluation trench

PROJECT

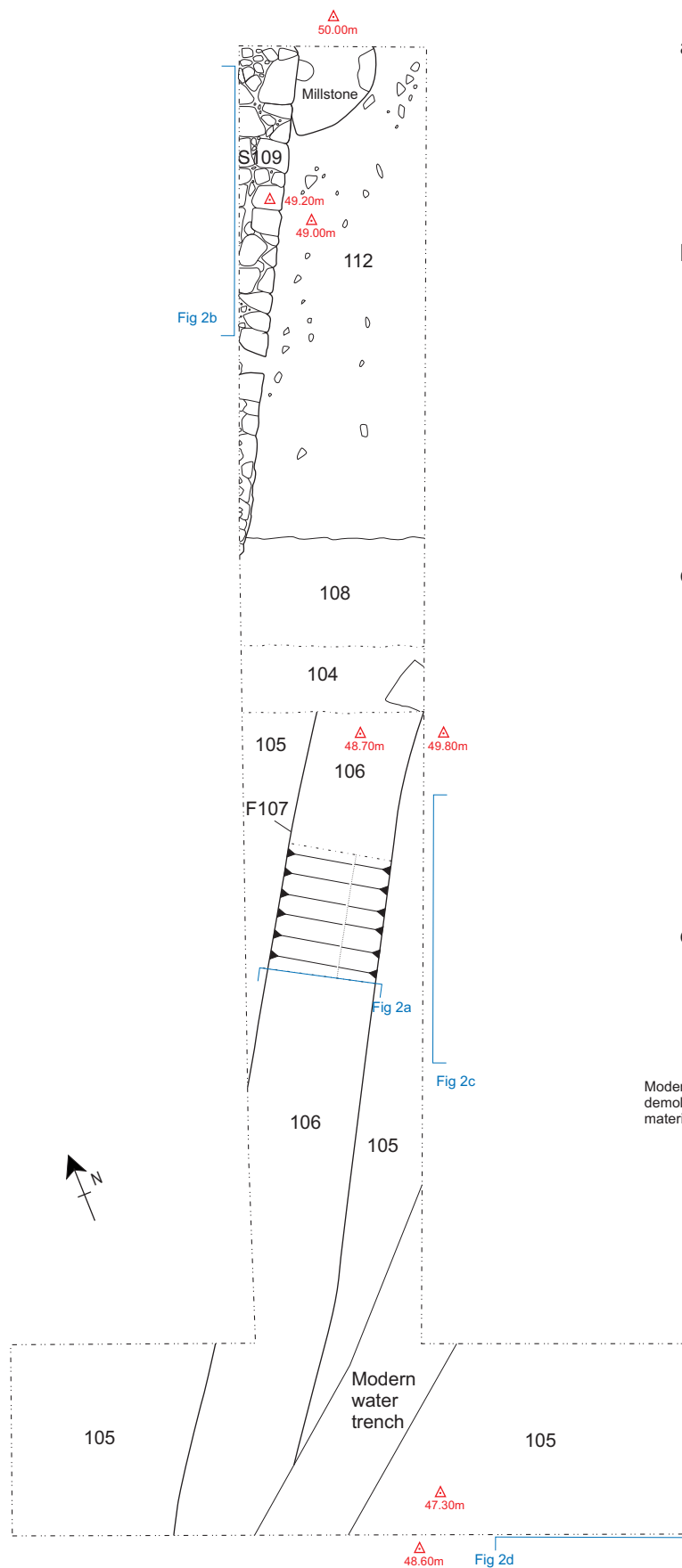
Land to the rear of 7 Priory Road, Wells,  
Somerset

TITLE

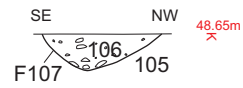
Fig. 1: Site location and trench  
location plan



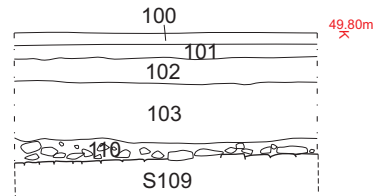




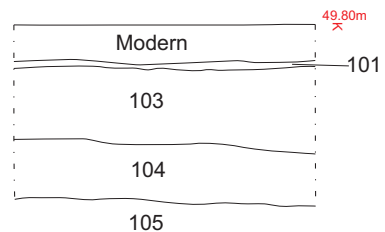
a) Section of F107



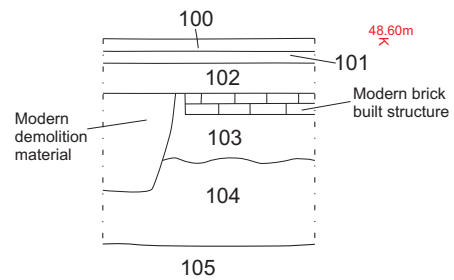
b) Southeast facing section



c) Northwest facing section



d) Northeast facing section



Arbitrary datums

PROJECT

Land to the rear of 7 Priory Road, Wells,  
Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 2: Trench plan and sections





Plate 1: General site view,  
looking northwest



Plate 2: View of gully F107,  
looking northeast



Plate 3: View of wall footing S109,  
looking southwest (scale 1m)



# Appendix 1

Tabulated context descriptions

**Appendix 1. Tabulated context descriptions**

<b>Trench 1</b>			<b>Length</b> 11m 5m	<b>Width</b> 1.4m 1.4m	<b>Alignment</b> NE-SW NW-SE
<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>		
100	Tarmac	0-0.08m	Modern surface		
101	Crushed rock	0.08-0.1m	Hardcore		
102	Crushed rock	0.1-0.15m	Hardcore		
103	Very dark grey, silty loam, occasional fine gravel and cobbles	0.15-0.65m	Post-medieval mixed demolition and levelling		
104	Brown silty loam with occasional gravel and cobbles, rare charcoal.	0.65-1.2m	Former yard surface		
105	Red brown silt and clay with gravel	1.35m+	Natural subsoil		
106	Mid brown silty loam with occasional gravel sub-angular cobbles and intrusive roots.	1.25-1.50m	Fill of post medieval gully F107		
107	Linear cut, gently sloping sides, concave base.	1.25-1.5m	Cut of post-medieval gully		
108	Light grey sandy silt with abundant mortar, ash gravel and occasional brick fragments	0.65-0.72m	Layer of levelling material		
109	NE-SW aligned Stone wall footing, rough limestone and mudstone blocks, un-bonded	0.85m+	Stone footing		
110	Grey-brown, sandy silt, with abundant angular and subangular limestone, mudstone and sandstone cobbles and boulders	0.70-0.85m	Demolition debris		
111	Grey-brown sandstone		Part of millstone		
112	Red-brown and greyish-brown sandy silt clay with frequent cobbles and gravels		Possible former yard surface. Same as 104		

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