

12 BILLETFIELD, TAUNTON, SOMERSET

NGR ST 22987 24270

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Planning reference: Taunton Deane Borough Council
38/13/0286, condition 5

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Abbey Estates Development Company
Ltd

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AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AC archaeology in July 2014 during groundworks associated with the construction of a residential development at 12 Billetfield, Taunton, Somerset (centred on ST 22987 24270).

Across all of the monitored areas 20th-century deposits were exposed overlying the natural. No archaeological deposits or features were exposed. No significant finds were present.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AC archaeology in July 2014 on land at the rear of 12 Billetfield, Taunton (centred on ST 22987 24270). The investigation was commissioned by the Abbey Estates Development Company Ltd and was required under condition 5 of the grant of planning permission by Taunton Deane Borough Council (reference 38/13/0286) for "conversion of building into 3 No. apartments and erection of 4 No. apartments to the rear of 12 Billetfield, Taunton" determined, as advised by the Somerset County Council Senior Historic Environment Advisor.
- 1.2 The site is located in the centre of the historic core of Taunton on the south side of Billetfield. No. 12 Billetfield was constructed in the 1870s as Hughenden House, and was one of a pair of attached properties. It was latterly known as Hertford House, in use as a dentist's surgery, with a doctor's surgery in a modern extension to the rear (south) of the house. It is situated at a height of approximately 26m aOD. The underlying geology comprises Triassic Mudstone and Halite Stone of the Mercia Mudstone Group (British Geological Survey 2014).
- 1.3 The development comprised the conversion of the historic building into three apartments, which will include the construction of a small extension on its east side behind the front range, as well as the demolition of the 20th-century doctor's surgery and replacement with a larger detached three-storey apartment block.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The rear of the site is situated over the line of the medieval and later defences of Taunton (Somerset HER 44459), which are documented from the mid-12th century, although archaeological evidence indicates that they are slightly earlier in date. In typical fashion, these comprised a ditch and bank, the latter being topped with a palisade. They had gone out of use in the early post-medieval period when they were renewed during the English Civil War of the 1640s (Gathercole 2002).
- 2.2 There is good archaeological evidence for the defences, including from excavations on the east side of the town. Around Billetfield, the evidence is less clear. At No. 8 Billetfield located to the west of the site a large clay deposit is interpreted as the medieval defensive bank (HER 44668), whilst at No. 14 Billetfield, situated immediately northeast of the site, no evidence for the defences was recovered (HER 15447), the site apparently having been heavily disturbed during the 20th century. Further afield, excavations at Silver Street, located to the northeast of the site, have identified the highly truncated remains of the bank (HER 44704), whilst at Jellalabad Barracks, situated to the southwest of the site, only the base of the ditch, infilled in the 18th century, survived (HER 44455).
- 2.3 In addition to the town defences, the Historic Environment Record contains an entry for 'The Mount' within the development site (HER 32299). This was a large circular (c. 15m diameter)

mound with a central tree that was depicted on the 1888 1:500 scale Ordnance Survey map of the area. The entry notes "The SE part has been removed by a lane called The Mount which follows the line of the town defences. It seems to be an unlikely location for a prospect mound and may be the landscaped remains of a civil war earthwork that gave its name to the area. The mound is no longer extant". Its location is partly under the 20th-century extension to the property.

3. AIMS

- 3.1** The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the groundworks associated with the development in order to identify, excavate and record any archaeological features present, in particular those associated with the town defences and The Mount.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation by AC archaeology (Passmore 2014). It comprised the attendance of a site archaeologist during initial trial excavations, and ground reduction in the southeast corner of the site.
- 4.2** The new detached three-storey apartment block was constructed using piles, and built off shallow ring beams that were laid entirely within modern deposits. Excavations for the ring beams were therefore selectively monitored.
- 4.3** All features and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012).

5. RESULTS (Fig. 2; Plates 1-4)

5.1 Introduction (Plan Fig. 2; Plates 1-4)

The observed groundworks consisted of two machine-excavated pits (Test pits 1 and 2) to investigate the foundation of the rear wall of the property, an area of a demolished building in the south-west corner of the site, and excavations associated with the eastern half of the new apartment block. No archaeological features were observed and the deposits are described below.

5.2 Test pit 1

Test pit 1 was located in the south-east corner of the site. It measured 2.6m long by 0.60m wide and was positioned to investigate the foundations at the corner of the boundary wall of the plot. The long side was placed against the rear wall of the plot which is regarded as following the line of Taunton's medieval defences. The rear (south) wall foundation continued to the base of the test pit, giving a total height of the stone-built wall of some 4m; this wall appears to be late 19th or early 20th century in date. The side (east) boundary wall was brick-built with foundations continuing only 0.40m below ground surface; it was not keyed into the rear wall. The sequence of deposits exposed within the plot consisted of the following:

Context no.	Description	Interpretation	Depth	Finds
100	Tarmac and hardcore	Modern car park	0-0.10m	-
101	Blackish-brown silty clay	Garden soil	0.10-0.50m	19th-20th century pottery
102	Dumps of reddish-brown silty clay	Made ground	0.50-2.50m+	Common 19th-20th century pottery, china, glass, CBM, slate, oyster shell and animal bone

5.3 Test pit 2

Test pit 2 was located against the rear wall, 4.5m to the south-west of Test pit 1. It measured 2m long by 1.5m wide with the short axis against the wall. The rear stone wall had been underpinned by modern blockwork to a depth of at least 1.80m; its full depth was not exposed. The sequence of deposits against the wall consisted of the following:

Context no.	Description	Interpretation	Depth	Finds
200	Tarmac and hardcore	Modern car park	0-0.10m	-
201	Reddish-brown clay	Made ground	0.10-1.10m	19th-20th century pottery
202	Reddish-brown clay	Natural	1.10-1.80m+	-

5.4 The area of a former small detached building in the south-west corner of the site was cleared to a depth of approximately 1m below the ground surface. Only modern deposits were exposed and the rear wall in this area was constructed of modern blockwork and brick; much of this forms a gable wall of a modern church hall constructed on the neighbouring plot to the south.

5.5 The excavation for the ring beam at the front of the eastern half of the apartment block was monitored. The deposit sequence was broadly similar to those recorded in the test pits, with modern dumps of made ground overlaying the natural clay. No archaeological features or deposits were exposed.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 In the area monitored during the watching brief there had been much the 20th-century disturbance. Adjacent to the boundary wall this disturbance was between 1m and at least 2m deep. This disturbance continued towards the front of the site at the shallower recorded depth.

6.2 This disturbance relates to several episodes of landscaping and construction, which started in the early 20th century, and initially involved the relandscaping of the gardens of the house and the removal of the large circular mound known as The Mount. Later disturbance was caused by the construction of the doctor's surgery and the adjacent church hall in the later 20th century.

6.3 No archaeological deposits or features were exposed, and therefore no evidence for the medieval defences of Taunton, or for the earthwork feature The Mount, was uncovered. In view of its occurrence across the site, and its exposed depth within the test pit, the clean reddish-brown clay (202) is considered to be a natural deposit, rather than part of the bank associated with the town's defences.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 7.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, and will be deposited with the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton, under the reference numbers TTNCM 72/2014 and HER 32572.
- 7.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 205951, which includes a digital copy of this report.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

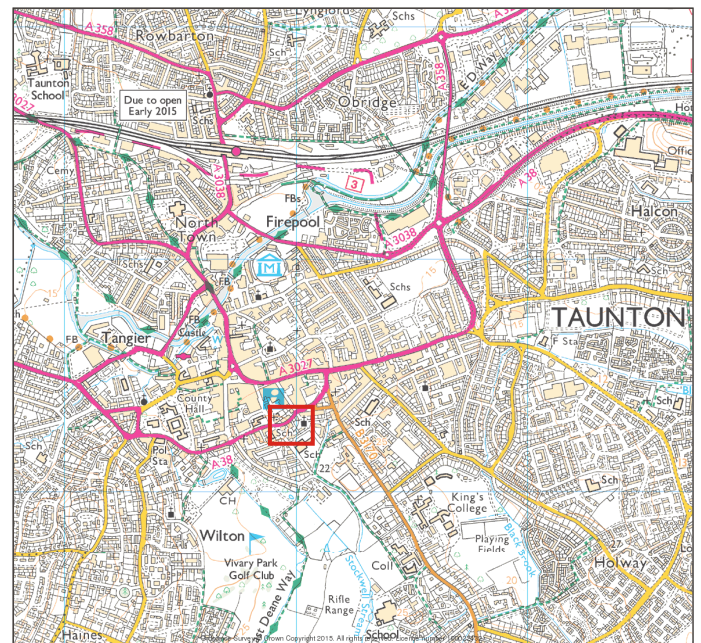
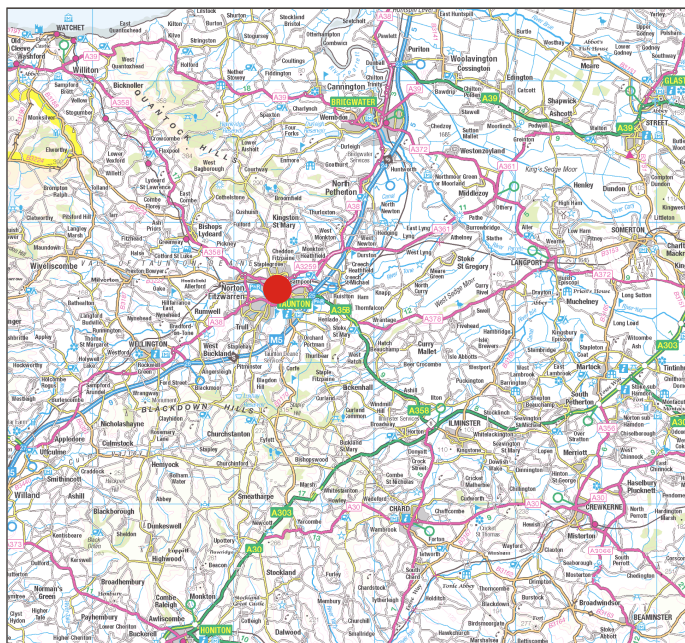
- 8.1** The watching brief was commissioned by the Abbey Estates Development Company Ltd and managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The site work was carried out by Kerry Kerr-Peterson and Chris Caine. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai. The collaborative roles of Steve Membery and Chris Webster, Somerset County Council Historic Environment Service, are duly acknowledged.

9. REFERENCES

British Geological Survey 2014, www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience

Gathercole, C. 2002, *An Archaeological Assessment of Taunton. English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey*, Somerset County Council.

Passmore, A. 2014, *Land to the Rear of 12 Billetfield, Taunton, Somerset, ST 22987 24270, Written scheme of investigation for an archaeological watching brief, Taunton Deane Borough Council planning reference 38/13/0286*, AC archaeology document no. ACD961/1/1



0 25m
Scale 1:750@A4



Location of site

PROJECT

Land to the rear of 12 Billetfield, Taunton, Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location

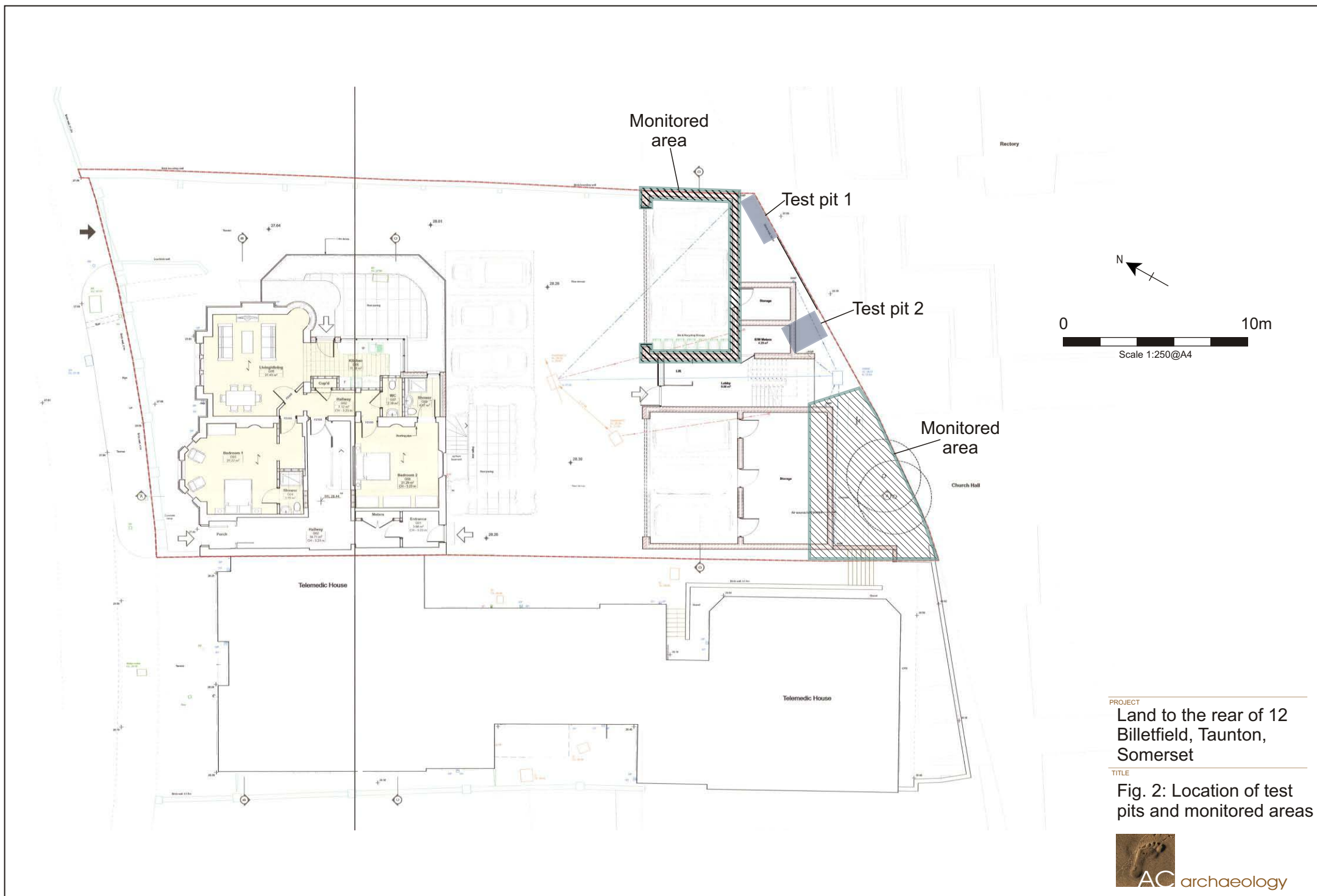




Plate 1: General view of the site, looking east



Plate 2: Test pit 1, looking south (scale 1m)



Plate 3: Location of test pit 2, looking south-west (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Test pit 2, north-east facing section (scale 1m)

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