COCKWOOD HARBOUR TEST PITS, COCKWOOD, DEVON

Centred on SX 97630 80791

Results of an archaeological watching brief

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On behalf of:
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AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology in August 2015 during investigations in advance of proposed flood defence improvement works at Cockwood Harbour, Cockwood, Devon (centred on SX 97630 80791*). The site comprises the area enclosed by the existing harbour wall and the embankment of the South Devon Main Line train line, lying at between 1-3m aOD. The site lies within an area previously highlighted as being of archaeological potential.*

The excavations indicate that the current understanding of the evolution of Cockwood Harbour during the post-medieval period is correct.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1; Plate 1)

1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of test pits and boreholes carried out prior to proposed flood defence improvement works at Cockwood Harbour, Cockwood, Devon (centred on SX 97630 80791). The archaeological works were commissioned by the Environment Agency and carried out by AC archaeology on 12th and 13 August 2015.

1.3 The site comprises the area enclosed by the harbour wall and the embankment of the Exeter to Plymouth (South Devon Main Line) train line. The boundary between Starcross and Dawlish parishes passes through the harbour following the course of Cockwood Lake stream. The site lies at a height of approximately 1-3m aOD with the underlying solid geology comprising breccia of the Exe Breccia Formation overlain by superficial alluvial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 2015).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The site lies within an area of archaeological potential outlined in the *Teignbridge District Conservation Appraisal – Cockwood* (Anon. 2012). This document outlined the potential for the recovery of waterlogged environmental and boat remains from the sediments in the harbour.

2.2 None of the buildings present along the frontage of Cockwood Harbour date to earlier than the 17th century indicating the harbour is a relatively late development. During the late 18th century an earthen causeway, known as the 'Sod', was constructed across Cockwood Lake to carry the Exeter to Dawlish Warren road. The embankment carrying the South Devon Main Line train line was constructed across the eastern side of the harbour during the 1840s thus forming the present harbour layout. The two slipways that currently provide access to the harbour are recorded on the Devon Historic Environment Record (MDV111115 and MDV111116). Both structures are currently thought to be no earlier than early 20th century in date.

2.3 A series of watercolours by William Dawson depicting the route of Brunel's Atmospheric Railway were painted in 1848 (Garnsworthy 2013). Dawson's view of Cockwood Harbour looks to the south from close to the north end of the Sod. It shows that the Sod and the area of embankment in front of a small collection of buildings, one of which must be the Anchor Inn; both the Sod and the adjacent embankments were stone-faced by this time. The embankment stops abruptly to the east of these cottages and there is an unmade gap of what appears to be natural foreshore between the harbour embankment and the embankment of the railway line.

3. AIMS

3.1 The objective of the works was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological artefacts and deposits exposed during the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to observe any information regarding the construction of the extant harbour wall and associated structures, and potential waterlogged environmental and boat remains.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The watching brief comprised the monitoring and recording of 9 test pits and two boreholes excavated by Environment Agency's contractors.

4.2 Where possible all features and deposits exposed 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. 1; Plates 2-8)

5.1 Test Pit 1 was not excavated, but a stone was removed close to its location to assess the structure of the embankment wall. Test Pits 4-10 were located adjacent to the existing harbour wall (Plates 2-3). Test pits 2-3 were excavated approximately 0.40-0.50m from the harbour wall in the harbour sediments. A number of test pits contained deposits with modern ceramics, ceramic building material and glass. These materials were not retained and no finds of earlier date were observed.

5.2 Works near Test Pit 1 (Plate 4)
Works in the area of proposed Test Pit 1 comprised the removal of a stone block from the upper course of the lower section of the harbour wall. The wall here is battered at approximately 45^0 to the foreshore. The removal of the stone showed that the lower part of the harbour wall is formed from a single layer of mortar bonded masonry constructed over an earthen bank.

5.3 Test Pit 2 (Plate 5)
Test Pit 2 measured 0.50m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.70m below the current foreshore level. Deposits encountered comprised 0.55m of orange sandy gravel aggregate overlain by 0.15m of greyish brown sandy loam.

A further small section of the upper course of the lower harbour wall was removed. This revealed the same method of construction as outlined in Test Pit 1 (see 5.2 above).

5.4 Test Pit 3 (Plate 6)
Test Pit 3 measured 0.55m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.60m below the current foreshore level. Deposits encountered comprised 0.30m of grey estuarine silty clay overlain by up to 0.30m of sandy gravel aggregate. At a depth of 0.20m below ground level a stepped cement footing was recorded protruding from the lower section of the harbour wall. A layer of highly organic silty clay with abundant ceramic fragments was recorded overlying the cement footing and abutting the sandy aggregate.

5.5 Test Pit 4
Test Pit 4 measured 0.60m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75m below the current foreshore level. Deposits encountered comprised 0.25m of blackish

grey sandy silt loam overlain by reddish brown sand containing mixed stone inclusions and fragments of modern ceramics. The same cement footing as recorded in Test Pit 3 was present. Beneath this the harbour wall was projected out in a northeast direction before becoming vertical again at the base of the intervention.

5.6 Test Pit 5

Test Pit 5 measured 0.80m long by 0.50m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m below the current foreshore level. The same deposit sequence as recorded in Test Pit 4 was observed, including the projection of the lower harbour wall, which extended out in a southeast direction.

5.7 Test Pit 6

Test Pit 6 measured 0.50m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.90m below the current foreshore level. A single deposit of dark blackish grey loamy sand containing modern glass and ceramics was encountered; it appeared to be heavily contaminated with fuel oil.

5.8 Test Pit 7

Test Pit 7 measured 0.40m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m below the current foreshore level. Deposits encountered comprised pale brown sandy silt overlain by dark blackish-grey sandy silt loam. The upper layer in this test pit was heavily waterlogged.

5.9 Test Pit 8

Test Pit 8 measured 0.50m long by 0.50m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m below the current foreshore level. The same deposit sequence as observed in Test Pit 7 was recorded. The lower section of harbour wall protruding from the upper vertical section, and was constructed from a mixture of mortar-bonded breccia, limestone and greensand blocks.

5.10 Test Pit 9 (Plate 9)

Test pit 9 measured 0.55m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m below the current foreshore level. Deposits encountered consisted of 0.35m of dark blackish grey sandy silt loam overlain by 0.25m of mid brown sandy loam.

5.11 Test Pit 10 (Plate 10)

Test pit 10 measured 0.45m long by 0.40m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.30m below the current foreshore level. At the base of the intervention a layer of very compacted mixed stones were present overlain by a layer of mid brown sandy loam.

5.11 The Cores

Two cores were drilled, located above Test Pits 9 and 10. These established that the wall was between approximately 0.72m (above Pit 9) and 0.80-0.85m thick (above Pit 10), and was constructed largely of solid stone blocks possibly with some looser core material.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Although the extent of the current investigations was limited it has been possible to make a number of observations about the nature of the existing harbour structures.

6.2 The earthen core of the causeway carrying the Exeter to Dawlish Warren road was exposed adjacent to the proposed location of Test Pit 1. This appears to be encased in a single layer of mortar-bonded masonry. It was not possible to establish whether the masonry cladding is a later addition or whether it is contemporary with the initial construction of the causeway. This probably post-dates 1848 and this area is not embanked in Dawson's watercolour. It is,

however, in place by 1890 when the road is shown on the 1st edition 25" Ordnance Survey map so presumably dates to the second half of the 19th century.

6.3 The upper section of the existing harbour wall may represent a separate phase of construction to that of the lower section. Dawson's Watercolour only appears to depict the lower sloping section of stone-faced embankment. This may represent an earlier (?late 19th-century or early 20th century) flood defence mechanism, perhaps related to the upgrading of the highway on the Sod. It also appears that sections of this upper wall may have been rebuilt or altered since its initial construction, although more thorough historic building appraisal would be required to confirm this.

6.4 The presence of a cement footing, modern aggregates, and deposits containing modern materials adjacent to a number of sections of harbour wall are indicative of 20th-century interventions, possibly representing strengthening works, associated with the harbour wall structure.

6.5 Due to the shallow nature of current investigations no buried environmental deposits were encountered, and it is not possible to comment on the environmental potential of the harbour sediments.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

7.1 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 221047, which includes a digital copy of this report.

7.2 This report, and the OASIS entry, represents the archive for the project.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

8.1 The watching brief was commissioned by the Environment Agency, and managed for them by Charles Hill. The site works were carried out by Paul Cooke. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

9. REFERENCES

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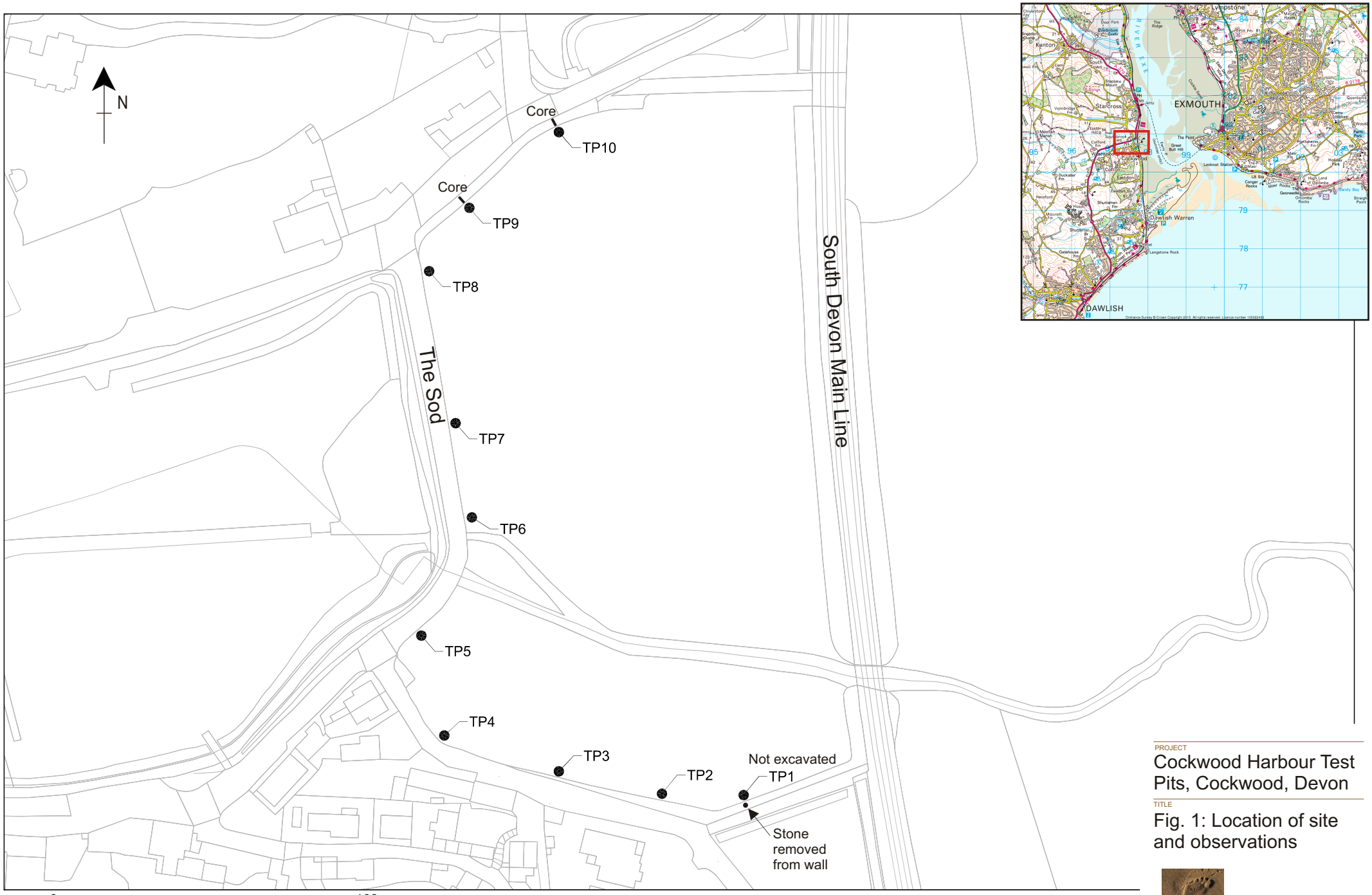

PROJECT

Cockwood Harbour Test Pits, Cockwood, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site and observations

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Plate 1: General view of area of test pits 6-10, looking southwest

Plate 2: General view of area of test pits 2-4, looking southeast

Plate 3: Excavation of test pit 4 in progress, looking south

Plate 4: Stone removed from embankment wall adjacent to proposed location of test pit 1, view to southwest

Plate 5: Test pit 2, looking southwest (scale 0.5m)

Plate 6: Test pit 3, looking southwest (scale 0.5m)

Plate 7: Test pit 9, looking northeast (scale 0.5m)

Plate 8: Test pit 10, looking north (scale 0.5m)

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