

Bluebell Close, Sea Mills, Bristol

Archaeological Recording Project (Watching Brief)

**BSMR 24649
BRSMG 2008.79**



For:
ISG Pearce Limited.

Amy Willis BSc (Hons) PIFA
Avon Archaeological Unit Limited

Bristol: November 2008

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AAU Report Number 1075

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Summary

The following report details the results of an Archaeological Recording Project (watching brief) undertaken by the Avon Archaeological Unit Limited on behalf of ISG Pearce Limited. The project was undertaken in an area formerly occupied by eight flats and associated open spaces (NGR ST 5481 7661) and was carried out as a condition attached to planning permission during groundwork stages associated with the redevelopment of the site. The aim of the Watching Brief was to record all significant archaeological deposits or finds revealed during the course of the work

The study area has a footprint of approximately 1600m² and is located to the rear of properties fronting Woodleaze. Excavations as part of the development groundworks consisted of the removal of the existing foundations and a reduced level platform excavated to a depth of up to 400mm.

Following the demolition of the existing derelict buildings, the construction groundwork revealed deposits that consisted mainly of modern made ground overlying trench built foundations and undisturbed natural deposits. At the northern end of the site the stratigraphic sequence consisted of topsoil and made ground over a mid-to-light brown coarse, mixed gravel layer approximately 450mm deep. This in turn overlay a layer of light brown gravels. Towards the south of the site the gravels became increasing shallow and overlay a stony red clay layer. At the southern end of the site, made ground deposits lay directly over natural red marl, which was excavated to a max depth of 1.7m below the present ground level.

On the basis of their elevation and composition it is suggested that the gravel deposits identified on the site represent a previously unrecorded exposure of Pleistocene river gravels of the River Avon 2nd Terrace. Whilst no artefacts were recovered from the deposits their identification alone adds to the known distribution of these nationally important Pleistocene deposits in the lower Avon valley.

Other than the gravel deposits, which are strictly of geological as opposed to archaeological origin, no significant buried archaeological deposits or finds were located during the project. No evidence was identified to indicate any significant human activity within the study area prior to the post-medieval and modern periods.

Acknowledgements

The writer would like to thank ISG Pearce Limited for commissioning and funding the project. Thanks also go to Mr Richard Booth and Simon Silsbury of ISG Pearce Limited and the staff of Lawson Group and MFD Groundworks for their cooperation.

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Note

Whereas Avon Archaeological Unit Limited have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

1 Introduction and Background

This programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording during ground disturbance was requested by the Archaeology Officer of Bristol City Council as a standard requirement of Planning Permission and in accordance with the guidelines set out in PPG 16 (DOE 1990. *Planning and Archaeology*). The monitoring was required to record all unforeseen archaeological deposits revealed during groundworks associated with the redevelopment of Bluebell Close, off Woodleaze, Sea Mills, Bristol (NGR ST 5481 7661).

Avon Archaeological Unit Limited was commissioned by ISG Pearce Limited on behalf of Solon (SW) Housing Association to carry out the monitoring work as above and in accordance with the relevant guidelines of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, English Heritage's "Management of Archaeological Projects" and the standard aims, objectives and procedures of Avon Archaeological Unit Limited. Avon Archaeological Unit Limited produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (W.S.I.) that was approved by the Archaeological Officer, Bristol City Council (Young 2008).

The site is located to the rear of Nos. 25-35 Woodleaze, accessed via a narrow lane. The study area was formerly occupied by Nos. 1-8 Bluebell Close; modern brick built apartments constructed in the late 1990s. Historically the area was enclosed arable farmland before its development with housing in the 1920s; from the 1950s the study area was used as allotment gardens before being turned into garages in the 1980s. The potential for the preservation of earlier archaeological deposits within the study area is considered to be remote but not impossible.

Groundworks were monitored by the author over a period of three days in October 2008.

The archaeological archive gathered during the project (BSMR 24649 and BRSMG 2008.79) will be temporarily stored at the offices of Avon Archaeological Unit Limited and will ultimately be deposited with Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery for long term curation and storage.

2 Historical and Archaeological Background

The documentary and cartographic evidence for the study area has been collated and considered in a previous archaeological desktop study (BaRAS 1998). The principal results of the study indicated the following:

The Second (100ft) Terrace Gravels, deposited by the River Avon during the Pleistocene glaciations, have yielded a number of Lower Palaeolithic artefacts from the surrounding area. Also Mesolithic and Neolithic occupation has been recorded approximately 400m west of the site at Crabtree Slip and Crabtree Slip Wood where pottery and chipped and polished flint implements were found. Excavations on the Second Gravel Terrace in Shirehampton (Burchill 1993) revealed a series of postholes of possible Bronze Age date and further Bronze Age activity has been recorded on Kingsweston Hill to the north of the study area.

Approximately 900m to the southeast of the study area lies the Roman port and town of Abonae. Settlement is likely to have been established as a military fort possibly around 55AD, remaining until 85AD at the latest. Evidence suggests that there was a break in the occupation of the area between 85AD and the beginning of the second century AD when a small civilian settlement was founded. The town expanded throughout the 2nd century and by the 3rd century the waterfront at the mouth of the River Trim had been developed. The port and town remained until at least the second half of the 4th century but is unlikely to have survived long into the 5th century.

By the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, the study area was within the Manor of Kings Weston in the parish of Henbury. In 1771 the field, named “Longfield”, within which the study area once lay was owned by the Southwell family, who had purchased Kingsweston Manor in 1679.

The Tithe Award Survey for 1840 shows the study area is arable farmland belonging to the Sea Mills Farm, which formed part of the estate of Phillip Miles. By this time the field to the south of the study area, now known as Three Acre Covert, has been planted with trees.

Development of the area occurred from the 1920s, with the Portway being constructed in 1926. By the time of the 1938 OS map the site was an area of void ground to the rear of properties fronting Woodleaze. By the 1950s the site was in use as allotments and by the 1980s had been developed with garages.

At the time of the Desktop Study, undertaken in 1998, the garages, with the exception of one lock-up, had been demolished, only the concrete floors remained. Subsequently eight Housing Association flats were erected on the site.

Considering the known presence of Lower Palaeolithic fauna and artefacts, and later prehistoric activity on geologically similar areas in the Avon Valley and close to the study area, and the presence of the Roman military settlement and later small town of Abonae to the southeast, the City Archaeologist has requested a standard Archaeological Watching Brief to ensure all unforeseen and significant archaeological remains that are revealed during the course of the development are located and recorded prior to their destruction.

3 Methodology

3.1 Construction Methodology

Following the demolition of the existing buildings on site, the groundworks monitored consisted of the removal of the existing foundations and the digging of the reduced level platform across the site.

3.2 Archaeological Methodology

The writer monitored all excavations and preliminary earthmoving. Once exposed, deposits and features of potential archaeological significance were examined by hand and recorded using standard Avon Archaeological Unit Limited pro-forma sheets and photographed using a digital camera.

4 Geology, Topography and Land Use

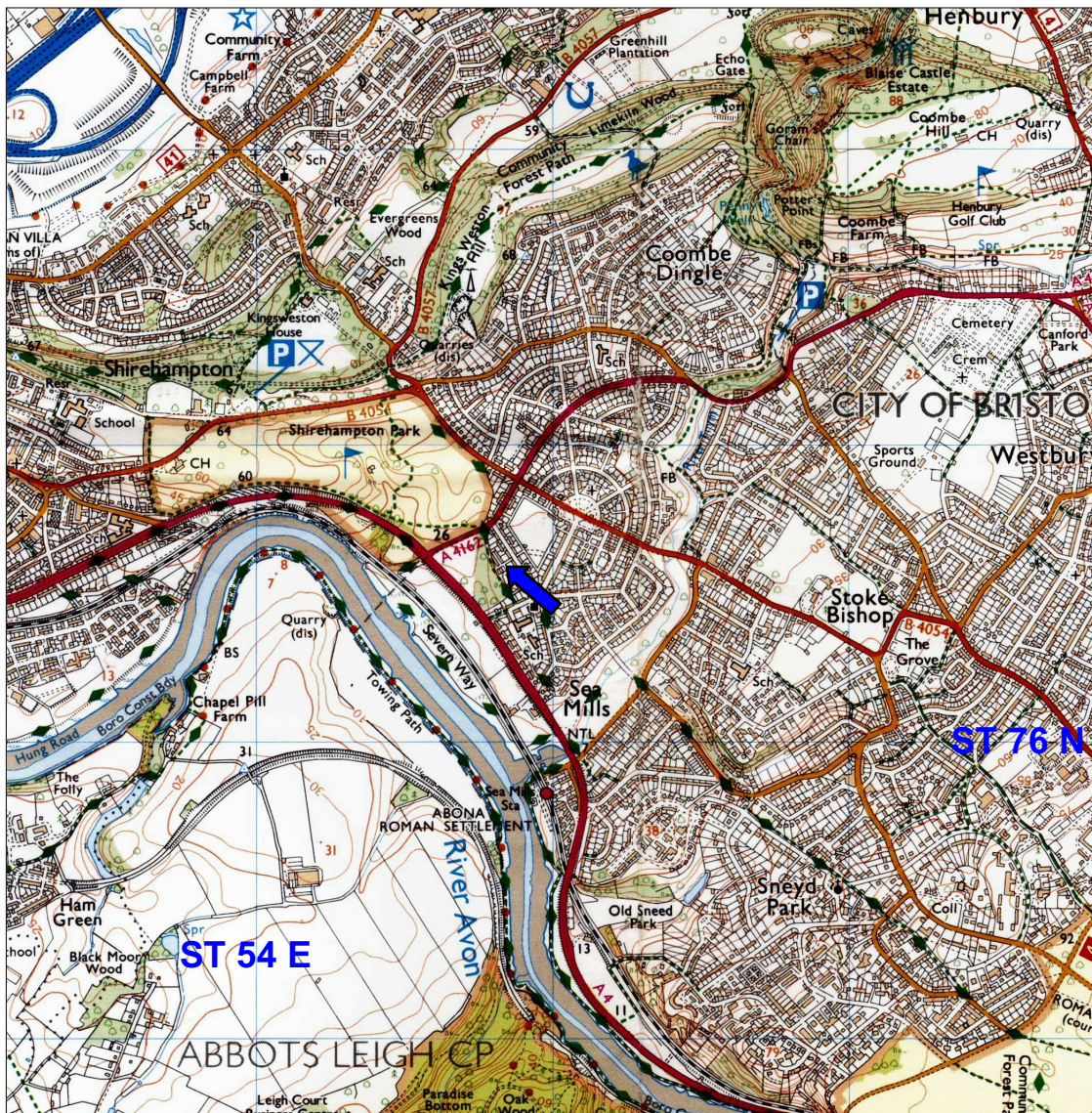
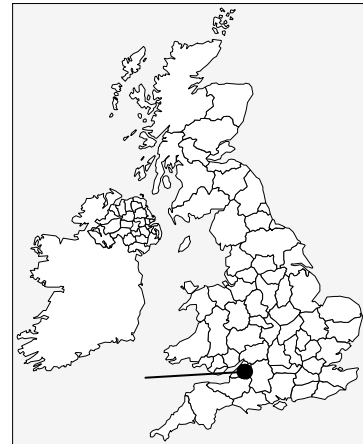
The development area comprises c. 1600m² of land to the rear of houses fronting Woodleaze and is located on roughly level ground approximately 27m aOD. Prior to demolition the study area comprised eight Housing Association flats and associated gardens and car parking. The underlying solid geology of the study area consists of Dolomitic Conglomerate of the Triassic period within a larger expanse of carboniferous Lower Limestone Shell. The study area is probably sited on the Pleistocene 100ft or Second Terrace Gravel of the River Avon. In general the Second Terrace Gravel is comprised of bands of red sandy clay, semi-rounded blocks of Millstone grit, Carboniferous Limestone and Greensand chert, red and white quartzose sand, and limestone gravel with Carboniferous pebbles, quartzite and flint (Ap Simon & Boon 1960).

Figure 1

Location of the Study Area

The Study Area 

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Scale 1:25000

Figure 2

Approximate Boundary of the Study Area

Study area outlined in **RED**

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Scale 1:1250

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Figure 3

*Plan Showing Location of Foundation Removal and
Reduced Level Excavation*

Outline of Study Area in **RED**

Approximate Area of Foundation Removal



Area of Reduced Level Excavation



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5 Watching Brief

5.1 *Removal of existing foundations (figure 3 & plates a-d)*

Large concrete foundations were removed across the north eastern two thirds of the site; foundations were deeper to the southeast with a maximum depth of 1.7m in the eastern corner of the site. The majority of foundations removed were approximately 0.6m wide, with areas of slab foundations in the approximate centre of the site along the former frontage of the properties. A number of services were noted running NW-SE along the former frontage of the properties, with off shoots running into the buildings; all services were removed.

A simple stratigraphic sequence was noted; at the most northerly end of the excavation area approximately 350mm of made ground overlay a dark brown silty clay approximately 300mm deep, this in turn overlay the natural gravels. Mid brown gravels were observed for a depth of 450mm and overlay further gravels in a pale yellow clay matrix (see **plate b**), the depth of which was not ascertained.

Approximately 15m from the northern end of the site the gravels became increasingly shallow overlying a layer of red stony clay (see **plate c**). At the southern end of the site, excavations revealed a predominantly red stony clay immediately below the made ground layer, for a maximum observed depth of 1.3m (see **plate d**), with shallow, c100mm deep, pockets of pale gravel, less than 0.5m², on the surface.

5.2 *Excavation of Reduced Level Platform (figure 3 & plates e & f)*

The area of the reduced level platform was lowered by shallow excavation across the footprint of the area up to a depth of 400mm below the modern ground surface. The north easterly two thirds of the site had been highly disturbed by the removal of foundations (see above), however, the removal of approximately 400mm of topsoil, from an area approximately 10m x 2.5m in the south easterly corner of the excavation area revealed apparently undisturbed natural deposits of red and grey clays (see **plate f**).

The reduced level excavation of the previously undisturbed third of the excavation area along the southwest boundary of the site revealed only modern made ground deposits.

5.3 *The Finds*

No archaeologically significant finds of any sort were recovered during the Watching Brief exercise. Finds of modern pottery, glass, brick and other ceramic building material were observed and noted in made ground in many areas but were not retained.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The Archaeological Watching Brief has been conducted in accordance with a Planning Condition issued by Bristol City Council and the Scheme of Work submitted by Avon Archaeological Unit (Young 2008) and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

The construction groundwork revealed deposits that consisted mainly of modern made ground overlying trench built foundations and undisturbed natural deposits.

The gravels identified on the site are of interest and, on the basis of their elevation and composition, it is very possible that they represent a previously unrecorded exposure of Pleistocene river gravels of the River Avon 2nd Terrace, the so called 100ft Terrace. Whilst no artefacts were recovered from them their identification alone adds to the known distribution of these nationally important Pleistocene deposits in the lower Avon valley.

Other than the gravel deposits, which are strictly of geological as opposed to archaeological origin, no significant buried archaeological deposits or finds were located during the project. No evidence was identified to indicate any significant human activity within the study area prior to the post-medieval and modern periods.

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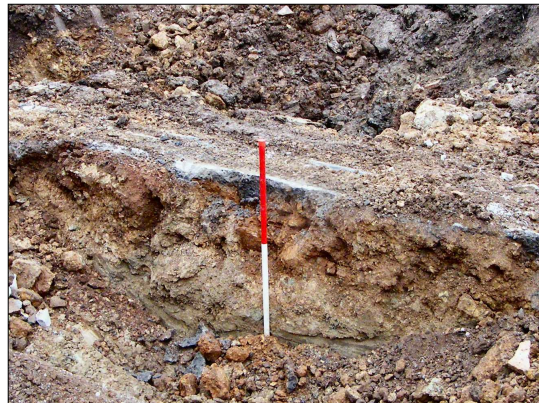
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Plates



a) The site in the early stages of foundation removal, looking southeast.



b) Exposed natural, dark gravel layer overlying pale gravels. Looking northeast. Scale 1m.



c) Exposed natural; pale gravels overlying red stony clay. Looking east.



d) Maximum depth of excavation showing red clay at SE end of site. Looking southeast.



e) Study area after reduced level excavation. Looking southwest



f) Area of natural clay exposed during the reduced level excavation in the south eastern corner of the site. Looking southeast.