

Bridport Town Hall, Dorset

An Archaeological Watching Brief



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Bridport Town Hall, Dorset

An Archaeological Watching Brief

for

Bridport Town Council

by



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Non-Technical Summary

Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief during internal alterations taking place in Bridport Town Hall, Bridport, Dorset (centred on NGR SY 45679 92921) (hereafter referred to as the Site). The project was commissioned and funded by Bridport Town Council, as requested by West Dorset District Council. The work was carried out in February and June 2011.

The Site has been well-served by the survival of historical documentation from the 16th century onwards. It shows that the Town Hall was built over the demolished remains of St. Andrew's Chapel, built to serve Carmelite Friars in the 13th century. It had become the market centre of the town, with a front onto the main route from Dorchester to the south west peninsula.

The Town Hall was constructed in 1785 to a design by William Tyler. The fabric survives well, although the introduction of toilets in the 1930s brought about the subdivision of the previously large, open, ground floor space. The building of the toilet led to the removal of most of the internal ceiling support pillars.

As well as being the town's administrative centre, the building has housed court proceedings into the early 19th century, as well as community events such as exhibitions and concerts. Throughout that time it had a mercantile role in the town, first as a market and later housing shops.

It is likely that a large well found during previous work and rediscovered during this project is Medieval. The dating of a second well is more difficult to determine. Eventually it formed part of the drainage system but in its original use as a water source it may have been associated with St. Andrew's Chapel.

1. Introduction

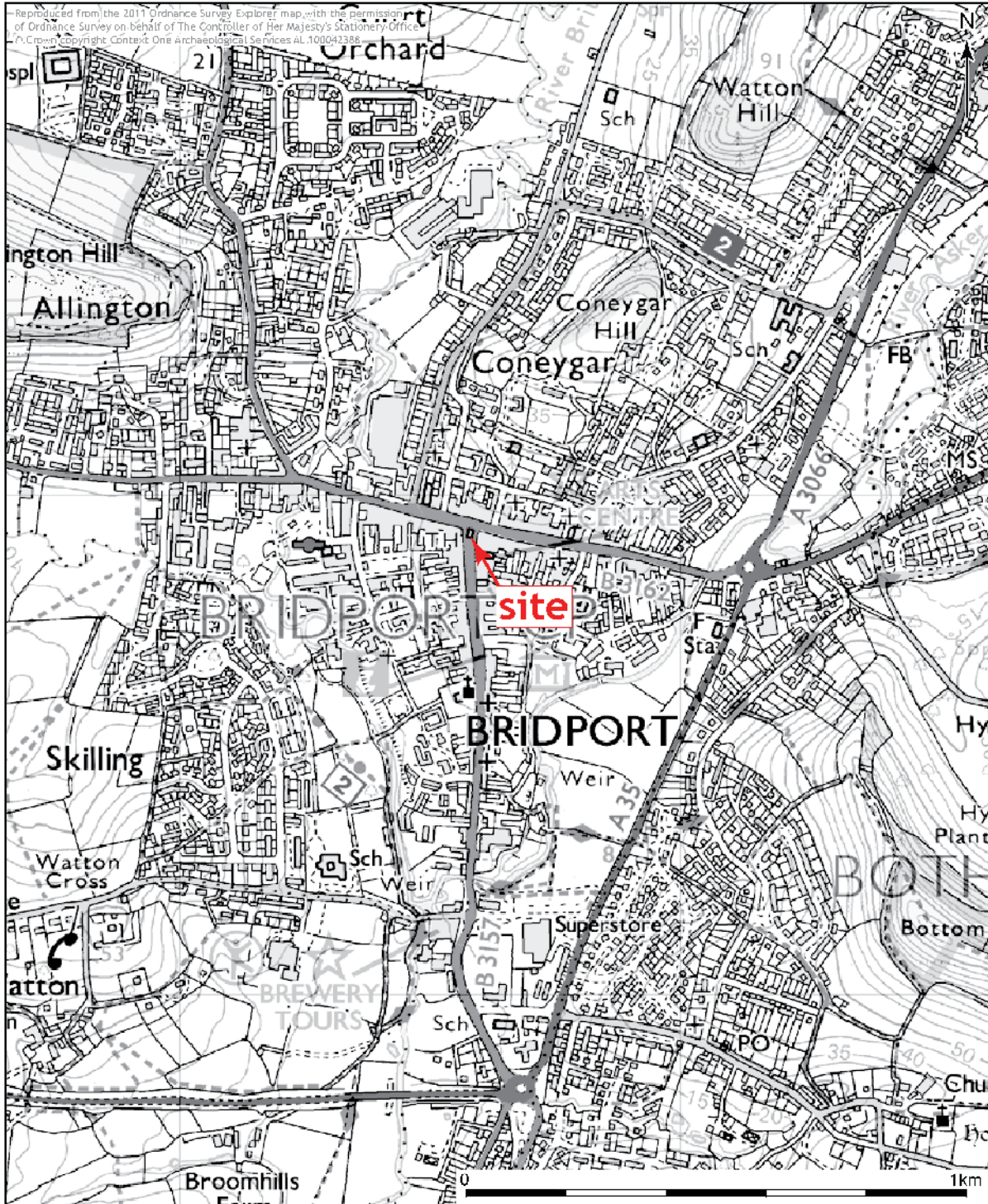
- 1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief during the internal alterations taking place in Bridport Town Hall, Bridport, Dorset (centred on NGR SY 45679 92921) (hereafter referred to as the Site). The project was commissioned and funded by Bridport Town Council.
- 1.2 The archaeological monitoring has been requested by West Dorset District Council as Condition 4 of granting planning permission to undertake internal alterations to Bridport Town Hall (Planning application no.: 1/D/09/001096). The condition states that:

“The submitted Design & Access Statement makes reference to the lowering of the proposed ground floor but there is no annotation to show how much the ground floor might be reduced (to avoid the need for ramped access). As a result the development shall not take place within the ground floor area until the developer has secured and implemented a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which shall have been submitted to, and been approved in writing by the Planning Authority.”

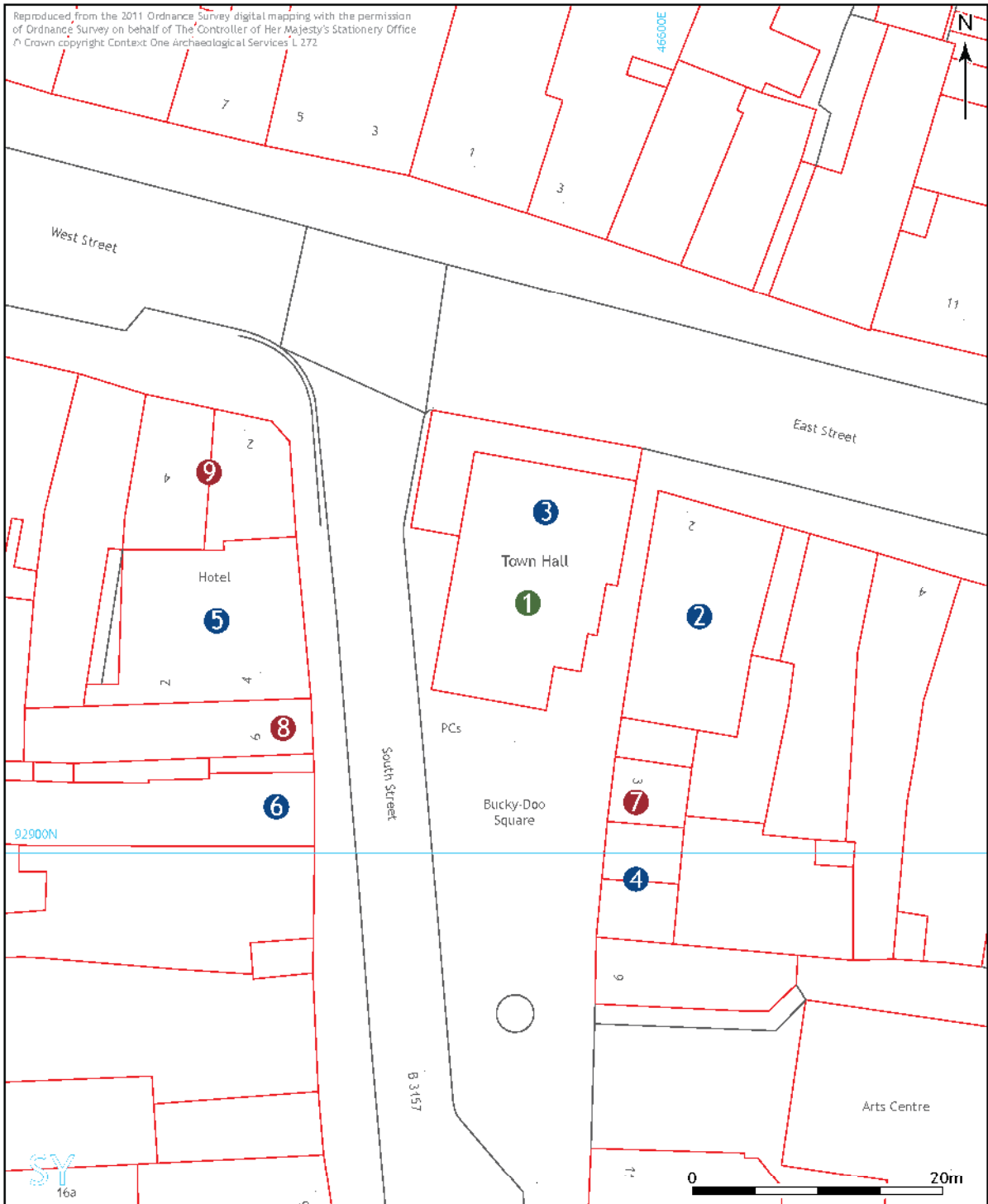
- 1.3 It was therefore considered that archaeological features/deposits could be present on the Site, and that these could be damaged or destroyed by development. However, as the nature or presence of such features/deposits has not been proven on the basis of currently available information, it was determined that a reasonable archaeological response would be to carry out a watching brief during all ground disturbance associated with the development.
- 1.4 The request for the archaeological work follows advice given by Central Government as set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010) and in accordance with Policy SA24 of the West Dorset District Local Plan (January 2003).
- 1.5 This report summarises the topographical, geological, archaeological and historical setting of the Site, and presents the results of the archaeological investigation.

2. Site Location, Topography and Geology

- 2.1 Bridport is small town which has developed around the River Brit, lying on the coastal road to the south west peninsula, ca. 22km west of Dorchester and 17km east of Axminster. It is 1km north of the resort of West Bay.
- 2.2 Bridport Town Hall is situated at the heart of the town on the south side of the junction of South Street with East and West Streets. It is on level ground at around 15m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) set on interbedded Siltstone and Limestone (Eype Clay Member) forming a low island surrounded by alluvial clay, silt, sand and gravel.



PROJECT TITLE		
Bridport Town Hall, Bridport, Dorset		
FIGURE TITLE		
Site setting		
SCALE	PROJECT CODE	FIGURE NO.
as shown	C1/WBF/10/BTH	1



<p>Legend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> site boundary ● Medieval ● Post Medieval ● Early Modern 	<p>1. SMR No. MDO481 St. Andrew's Chapel</p> <p>2. SMR No. MDO11848 Greyhound Hotel</p> <p>3. SMR No. MDO12 Town Hall</p> <p>4. SMR No. MDO12194 5, 5a and 7 South Street</p> <p>5. SMR No. MDO12268 George Hotel</p> <p>6. SMR No. MDO12270 8 South Street</p> <p>7. SMR No. MDO12193 3 South Street</p> <p>8. SMR No. MDO12269 6 South Street</p> <p>9. SMR No. MDO12493 2 and 4 West Street</p>	<p>PROJECT TITLE</p> <p>Bridport Town Hall, Bridport, Dorset</p>	
	<p>FIGURE TITLE</p> <p>Detailed site setting showing HER information</p>		
	<p>SCALE</p> <p>as shown</p>	<p>PROJECT CODE</p> <p>C1/WBF/10/BTH</p>	<p>FIGURE NO.</p> <p>2</p>

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The archaeological and historical background for the Site has been drawn from secondary sources. In the main this comprised records held by Dorset County Council as part of the Dorset Historic Environment Record (HER) and cartographic sources held by the Dorset History Centre. In the following text numbers preceded by 'Figure 2' refer to records held on the HER and listed in Appendix 2. Additional published and unpublished sources are referenced in the text as appropriate.

Medieval

3.2 During the late Saxon period *Bridian* was a defended burgh, eventually with a mint, although it may have been sited a little to the east of the modern town (WBD 2011). Current evidence suggests that it was in its present location before The Norman conquest (Bellamy 2008, 8). Along with several other Dorset settlements it appears to have suffered shrinkage between the Norman invasion of 1066 and the Domesday Book of 1086 (WBD 2011). The 'keeper' of a Castle at Bridport (which is thought to have straddled modern South Street) was imprisoned in 1150 (WBD 2011). Bridport Museum (Figure 1), on South Street and ca. 90m south of the Town Hall, is known as 'the castle' and there is documentary evidence that a town gate existed immediately north of it (Bellamy 2008, 12).

3.3 The earliest record of rope making, the industry for which Bridport is best known, is in 1211, when King John commissioned hempen thread for rope used in the fitting out of his navy. Two years later the urgency of production may be gauged by his order that ropers should work 'night and day' (Lambert 2011; Bellamy 2008, 14). For much of the 16th century the town had the exclusive rights to naval rope production (WBD 2011). It retained its ascendancy until the mid 18th century, after which better quality imports from Holland and Russia made inroads into the market (Bellamy 2008, 21).

3.4 A small community of Carmelite Friars was established in 1265 (WBD 2011), leading to the construction of St. Andrew's Chapel by 1267 (Figure 2, 1; Appendix 3; Bellamy 2008, 15), on the site of the modern Town Hall. The Friars appear to have left when an application for larger grounds was turned down a century later. Bridport was granted a borough charter in 1253 (WBD 2011).

3.5 The Medieval market was situated at the junction of East, West and South Streets, hence including the area of the present Site, and leases for stalls and shambles survive from the 15th to 17th centuries (Bellamy 2008, 17). The location offered the advantage of frontage on the route from Dorchester to Exeter. It is assumed that a market building and school, built in anticipation of a grant of 1593, was close to St. Andrew's Chapel (Bellamy 2008, 17).

Post Medieval

3.6 Bridport was a bit-part player during the unsettled 17th century. The future Charles II narrowly evaded capture in the town in 1651 and the first shots of the Monmouth Rebellion were fired there in 1685 (WBD 2011). Otherwise, the prosperity of town during the late 17th and 18th century is reflected in surviving Grade II listed buildings (Figure 2, 2, 4 and 5). That it continued to thrive despite the decline of importance of rope-making to the town is demonstrated by the quality of late 18th and 19th century buildings (Figure 2, 6-9).

3.7 As late as 1774, St. Andrew's Chapel remained a central place in Bridport life due to its situation at the nexus of the three streets, South, East and West Street. It is clearly marked on Hutchins' map of that year (Bellamy, figure 10), as is the Guildhall, across West Street to its north, which was badly damaged by fire in 1782 (Bellamy 2008, 24). In 1785 an Act of Parliament allowed the Chapel and associated market building and shambles to be demolished to make way for the Town Hall (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 4), funded by the imposition of an annual tax rate.

- 3.8 The structural history and usage of the new building is well documented from its completion. Designed by William Tyler of London in a 'T'-shaped plan, it comprised a 'large ground-floor market and an upper floor to contain the council chamber, which would also serve as a magistrates court' (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 5). A planned school room was omitted as it was considered too expensive but a free-standing market area was added to the scheme, surviving until its demolition in 1946. The cupola and clock were added in 1804.
- 3.9 A heritage assessment of the building carried out in 1998 concluded the 'principal architectural and functional elements of Tyler's original scheme have survived' (Plate 1) and this remained the case until the present development of the interior (Plate 2). Here, the most significant modifications had been the introduction of public toilets at the south end of the ground floor, the Town Hall's toilets and electricity substation on the south end's east side and the removal of partitioning for market stalls on the west side (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 27).



Plate 1. Bridport Town Hall (from NW)

- 3.10 In its early days the Town Hall had administrative functions, housing the 'Court of Common Council', which heard cases for which fines of up to £20 might be in order, as well as Council meetings. Until 1825 it was on the circuit for quarter sessions for all crimes which did not incur the death penalty. As a community resource it was available 'for all convenient public purposes', as decided by the governing trustees in 1787. These ranged from temporary use as a Methodist chapel to an exhibition and concert space. It retained its role as the core of the market from which stalls spread (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 18-21). The introduction of a concrete floor in 1936 (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 15), replacement of the pillars and addition of partition walls to support toilet blocks were the most significant structural change to the ground floor up to the present.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs issued by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). The fieldwork methodology is summarised below.
- 4.2 Context One gave notice of the commencement of archaeological monitoring to Mr Steve Wallis (County Archaeologist, Dorset County Council) who was kept fully informed during the course of the investigation.
- 4.3 Excavation of the ground floor was monitored and recorded by a COAS archaeologist for the purpose of identifying and recording any archaeological remains, features and deposits present. Excavation in test pits continued to the depth of formation, archaeological features or *in-situ* subsoil/natural geology, whichever was encountered first. Where appropriate extra time was allowed for the manual excavation and recording of significant features and deposits. Features revealed as a result of development groundworks and all spoil was examined for the recovery of any archaeological artefacts.
- 4.4 All archaeological remains were planned on dimensionally stable media at a scale of 1:20, and sections drawn at a scale of 1:10, levelled to Ordnance Datum, with reference to a temporary benchmark established by a Global Positioning System (GPS). A photographic record, consisting entirely of digital images illustrated in both detail, and general context, the principal features and finds discovered, as well as including working shots to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.
- 4.5 No finds were recovered, nor were any environmental samples collected.

5. Results

- 5.1 The deposits and features encountered during fieldwork are listed and described in **Appendix 1** In the text, context numbers for cuts appear in square brackets, e.g. [104]; layer and fill numbers appear in standard brackets, e.g. (102). Where a feature is discussed, it is referenced with its cut, and associated fill.

Structural sequence

- 5.2 The Site was entirely within the ground floor of the building. At the start of the watching brief two rows of two of the original octagonal, 14” (0.34m) diameter oak columns survived on their 10” (0.24m) high Portland Stone plinths (**Plate 2**). Some pillars were removed and the remaining plinths had been partially submerged during the laying down of a make-up layer and a concrete floor, presumed to be or toilets added in 1936
- 5.3 Trenches 1 and 2 cut through the present concrete floor (104) (**Plate 3**), through rubble make-up layers (116) (**Figure 4**, section 1; **Plate 4**) and (115) (**Figure 4**, section 2) including shale, slate, brick and concrete fragments before reaching a lower concrete surface (100). In Trench 4, set immediately inside the Site’s north wall, the make-up layer (114) overlay natural clay (110) and had been cut by a pit [113], also filled with slate and brick rubble (112) (**Figure 4**, section 3).
- 5.4 The underlying natural clay (110) was identified in Trench 3 (**Figure 4**, section 4), sealed by a rubble make-up layer (109) which included limestone, brick and slate. It had been cut by a service trench [108] also filled with rubble, including a length of three courses of mortared brick (106) (**Plate 5**). The trench was extended eastwards so that it exposed the substantial foundations of large mortar-bonded limestones of the Town Hall’s external east wall, cut by a second service trench [118]. The wall itself was concealed by rendering which appeared to be contemporary with construction of the toilets.

Based on client plan Drawing No. 200A/08A Jonathan Rhind Architects



- location of trenches
- section location and number
- original foot print of building
- pillars

PROJECT TITLE
Bridport Town Hall, Bridport, Dorset

FIGURE TITLE
Ground plan showing trench and section locations

SCALE	PROJECT CODE	FIGURE NO.
as shown	C1/WBF/10/BTH	3



Plate 2. Interior showing replacement pillars and surviving original pillar (right; from S)



Plate 3. General view of Trenches 1, 2 and 4 (from SSW)



Plate 4. Trench 1 (from W)



Plate 5. Trench 3, north end (from W)



Plate 6. Trench 3 extended, north end (from W)



Plate 7. Trench 5, general (from N)



Plate 8. Trench 5, section (from N)

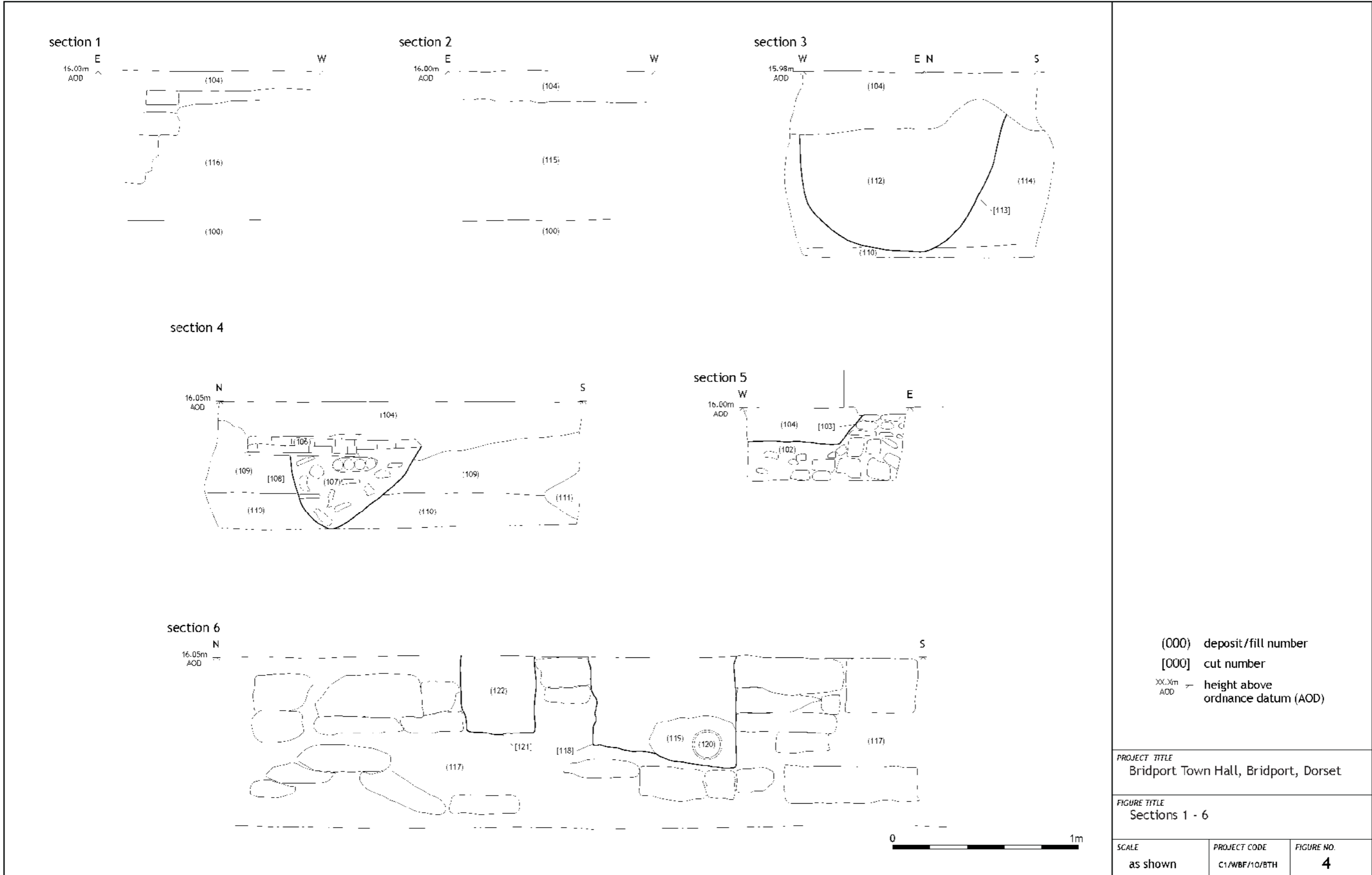




Plate 9. Trench 6, well outer wall (from W)



Plate 10. Trench 6, well detail (from E)



Plate 11. Trench 6, well (from overhead)



Plate 12. Manhole (123) and well (124) (from NW)



Plate 13. Well (124) and culvert (125) (from NW)

- 5.5 Trenches 5 and 6 addressed the north west and west sides of a large, stone-built well which had been discovered in 1997 (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 23), when it was identified as the Borough Well and thought possibly to be Medieval in origin. Trench 5 exposed part of the north west outer wall, which was positioned to the south east of a pillar plinth (Figure 4, section 5; Plates 7 and 8). The outer wall was also exposed on the west side, under an internal partition wall for the stair case. Exploration of the interior showed that it had been very well constructed of massive sandy limestones, some burnt red, and other stones which could not safely be identified (Plate 10). The depth of the well is uncertain but is at least 4m (Plate 11).

- 5.6 A second stone-built well, (124), was found under the threshold of the south entrance, modified by the addition of a brick-built manhole (123) to its north west side (**Plate 12**) and by the cutting of a brick culvert (125) through its south west revetting (**Plate 13**). The well was at least 4m deep. The culvert had been designed to allow water to drain into the well, which would have rendered the latter unfit for its original purpose.

6. Finds

- 6.1 No finds were noted or retained from the Site.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

- 7.1 The lack of finds has limited the potential for dating events from the fieldwork. However, primary documentation of the Site from 1774, through the period of Town Hall's construction in 1785 and up to the present survives very well, although the original architectural drawings by Tyler, which were exhibited at the Royal Academy (Thorpe and Cox 1998, 5), appear to have been lost. The location of St. Andrew's Chapel on Hutchins' map, with the documented associated markets, indicates continuity of use within this area from the Medieval period.
- 7.2 The Watching Brief has in the main identified the modifications made in order to construct toilets, an event dated by documentation to 1936, which subdivided what had been an open space under a ceiling supported by pillars. The concrete floor was laid over a rubble make-up which raised the ground level by up to 0.65m. Perplexingly, the make-up layer appears to overly an earlier concrete layer which cannot be accounted for in the documentary evidence.
- 7.3 It is likely that the large well in Trenches 5 and 6 is, as suggested by Thorpe and Cox, the borough well and there seems no reason to disagree with the Medieval date they offer. Dating of the second well (124) is more difficult to ascertain. The brick-built manhole is no earlier than 1936 and more probably later. Upper courses of culvert wall are of similar, probably contemporary, material but the lower and middle courses appear to be earlier. This change of use to drainage rather than water source may date to the construction of the Town Hall in 1785. It is possible that the well itself was associated with St. Andrew's Chapel.

8. Archive

- 8.1 The Site archive is currently held at the offices of Context One Archaeological Services Ltd and consists of 128 digital images in .jpg format, 6 drawn plans and sections on stable drawing film and the written paper record - including 21 context sheets and various registers. The archive will be prepared to comply with guidelines set out in *Environmental Standards for the Permanent Storage of Excavated Material from Archaeological Sites* (UKIC 1984, Conservation Guidelines 3)/ *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage* (UKIC 1990)/ *Standards in the Museums Care of Archaeological Collections* (Museum and Galleries Commission 1992)/ *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (English Heritage 1991). Arrangements will be made to deposit the archive with Dorset County Museums Service within 12 months following the submission of this report.

8.2 Copies of the Watching Brief report will be deposited with:

Bridport Town Council
Mountfield
Bridport
Dorset
DT6 3JP

Dorset County Museum
High West Street
Dorchester
Dorset
DT1 1XA

9. COAS Acknowledgements

9.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank the site manager, Keith Fiddymont (for Bridport Town Council) for his unstinting assistance during the project and to Mr Steve Wallis (Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council) for curatorial advice.

10. Bibliography

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Appendix 1. Context Summary									
Context no.	Period	Type	Description	Earlier than	Contemp. with	Later than	Length	Width/ Diameter	Thickness / Depth
100	1930s	Layer	Floor. Concrete	115, 116,					
101	Modern	Layer	Floor make-up layer. Reddish black (2.5YR 2.5/1) brick and stone rubble	100					
102	Late C18	Deposit	Mound of rubble under pillar. Reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) firm clay silt including up to 90% small angular limestones	105, 104	109, 114			0.90m	0.40m
103	1930s	Cut	Floor grading cut. Thought be 1930s	104		102		0.90m	0.40m
104	1930s	Layer	Floor. Light greenish grey (7/1) concrete			105, 112			
105	Late C18	Structure	Support pillar. Light grey limestone and wood	104		102		0.45m	4m
106	Modern	Structure	Course of masonry. Red brick, stretcher bonded. Dumped in rubble make-up layer	104		107, 108	1.90m		0.23m
107	1930s	Fill	Pipe trench fill. Weak red (2.5YR 4/2) soft clay silt including up to 50% concrete and stone rubble, brick and slate	106		108, 109		1.40m	0.80m
108	1930s	Cut	Pipe trench cut. West to east 'V' profiled linear cut	107		109		1.40m	0.80m
109	Late C18	Layer	Floor make-up layer. Reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) firm clay silt including up to 25% small, angular limestones, brick and slate	108	102, 114	110			0.60 to 0.75m
110	Geology	Layer	Natural clay. Olive grey (5Y 4/2) clay	109					
111	Modern	Layer	Deposit. Light greenish grey (7/1) concrete. Appears to be intrusive	109		110		0.4m	0.51m
112	Modern	Fill	Pit fill. Reddish black (2.5YR 2.5/1) friable silty clay including up to 60% rubble, with brick and slate	104		113		2m	1.5m
113	Modern	Cut	Pit cut. Flat bottomed, bowl-shaped pit	112		114		2m	1.5m

114	Late C18	Layer	Floor make-up layer. Reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) firm clay silt including up to 25% small, angular limestones, brick and slate	113	102, 109	110			1.20 to 1.30m
115	Modern	Layer	Make-up layer. Reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) soft clay silt including shale, slate, brick and concrete fragments	104	116	100	1.30m	1m	0.80m
116	Modern	Layer	Make-up layer. Reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) soft clay silt including shale, slate, brick and concrete fragments	104	115		1.20m	1m	0.80m
117	Late C18	Deposit	East external wall foundation. Limestone bonded in random coursing with lime mortar	104					0.90m
118	Modern	Cut	East to west straight sided, sloping bottomed service trench	119		117		0.80m	0.60m
119	Modern	Fill	Drain pipe covering. Concrete	104		120			
120	Modern	Fill	Service pipe	119		118			
121	Modern	Cut	Service trench. North east to south west straight sided, flat bottomed linear cut	122		117		0.40m	0.40m
122	Modern	Fill	Concrete fill of service trench [121]	104		121		0.40m	0.40m
123	Modern	Fill	Manhole revetting. Rectangular in plan, modern brick			125			0.35m
124	Pre 1785	Fill	Well revetting	125		110			8m
125	Modern	Fill	Walling of culvert. Red brick. Storm water drain into well	123		124			0.60m
200	Modern	Layer	Make-up/demolition. Limestone mortar including fragments of limestone. Observed in south-facing section of Trench 3	119		201			0.12m
201	Post Medieval	Layer	Natural clay. Mid yellow brown mottled with grey clay	200					

Appendix 2. Dorset Historic Environment Record

SMR No.	Description	NGR	Figure 1 ref.
Medieval (AD1066 - AD1547)			
MDO481	St. Andrew's Chapel. Existed on site of Town Hall from at least 1268 until demolition in 1785	SY 4659 9292	1
Post Medieval (AD1548 - AD1699)			
MDO11848	Greyhound Hotel. 18 th Century origin. Grade II listed.	SY 46604 92919	2
MDO12	Town Hall. Built 1785-86	SY 46590 92923	3
MDO12194	5, 5a and 7 South Street. 17 th to early 18 th centuries. Grade II listed.	SY 46599 92898	4
MDO12268	George Hotel. 18 th Century origin. Grade II listed.	SY 46564 92919	5
MDO12270	8, South Street. Late 18 th to early 19 th century house, subsequently shop. Grade II listed.		6
Early Modern (AD1800 - AD1850)			
MDO12193	3, South Street. Mid 19 th century house/shop. Grade II listed.	SY 46600 92905	7
MDO12269	6 South Street. Built in 1818 as house. Subsequently shop. Grade II listed.	SY 46562 92910	8
MDO12493	2 and 4 West Street. Mid 19 th century house/shop. Grade II listed.	SY 46565 92930	9