

Old Shire Hall
High West Street
Dorchester
Dorset

Archaeological Monitoring and
Recording

REPORT

February 2017



Old Shire Hall
High West Street
Dorchester
Dorset


for

COAS project code: C1/AMR/16/SDD

West Dorset District Council

REPORT

Prepared by	Dr Clare Randall, Archaeological Officer
Date	21/02/2017

Approved by	Dr Cheryl Green, Post-excavation Manager
Signed	
Date	22/02/17

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL DETAILS

Client project/scheme ref.	N/A
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Local Planning Authority	West Dorset District Council
Listed building ref.	1119069
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Summary

Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) was instructed to carry out archaeological monitoring and recording as a condition of planning permission for the re-purposing of the Old Shire Hall, Dorchester, Dorset, into a visitor centre. The project was commissioned by Philip Hughes Associates on behalf of the developer, West Dorset District Council (WDDC).

The Old Shire Hall is situated in the centre of Dorchester, and therefore within the boundary of the Romano-British and medieval town. There are also extensive prehistoric remains in the immediate area. Shire Hall was constructed in 1797 on the site of a previous Shire Hall, and from the mid-20th century until 2013 was used as offices for local government. Previous evaluation work on the Site in 2012 indicated that the area had probably been terraced into the chalk prior to the construction of the building, reducing the likelihood of earlier archaeological features and deposits being present. However, it was considered likely that evidence relating to the construction and use of the Shire Hall itself may be disturbed by the conversion works.

Observations in the cellar, lift shaft, and trial pits identified four foundation piers, relieving arches, and a large pit, probably a latrine associated with the 19th century use of the building. The material filling the pit comprised early to mid-19th century glass, pottery, building materials, animal bone, iron objects and clay pipe. The nature of the material suggests that it was sourced from a nearby rubbish dump to backfill the pit when it became redundant. Several of the building elements observed were constructed directly on the natural chalk. It therefore seems that the construction of the building was indeed likely to have removed any evidence of the Romano-British or medieval town, or earlier prehistoric activity, which might have been expected in this area.

Contents

Summary.....	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2. The Site.....	2
3. Archaeological aims and research objectives.....	2
4. Methodology.....	3
5. Results.....	4
6. The finds.....	4
7. Discussion and Conclusion.....	6
8. Archive.....	6
9. Bibliography.....	7
Appendix 1: Context summary.....	15

Figures

Figure 1. Site setting.....	8
Figure 2. Detailed locations of archaeological features.....	9

Tables

Table 1. Glass.....	4
Table 2. Animal bone.....	5

Plates

Plate 1. Foundation pier S1 (facing N; 1m scale)	10
Plate 2. Foundation pier S2 (facing N; 1m scale)	10
Plate 3. Foundation pier S3 (facing S; 1m scale)	10
Plate 4. Foundation pier S4 (facing S; 1m scale)	11
Plate 5. Foundation arch F5 (facing N; 1m and 0.50m scales)	11
Plate 6. Foundation arch F7 (facing NW; 1m scale)	12
Plate 7. Latrine F6 (facing S; 1m & 0.50m scales)	12
Plate 8. Latrine F6 S extension fill (facing S; 1m & 0.50m scales)	13
Plate 9. TP 1 (facing N; 1m scale)	13
Plate 10. TP2 (facing W; 1m scale)	14
Plate 11. TP3 (facing N; 1m scale)	14

1. Introduction

1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) was instructed to carry out archaeological monitoring and recording as a condition of granting planning permission (planning reference: WD/D/14/000861 and WD/D/14/000863) for the re-purposing of the Old Shire Hall, Dorchester, Dorset (the 'Site') (**Figure 1**). Groundworks related to internal re-modelling to accommodate a change of use to a visitor centre and two residential units. The project was commissioned by Philip Hughes Associates on behalf of the developer, West Dorset District Council (WDDC).

1.2 The monitoring and recording was required as a condition of planning consent by the Local Planning Authority WDDC on the advice of Mr Steve Wallis (Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council). The condition (WD/D/14/000863 condition 3) stated:

"The applicant shall make arrangements for archaeological observation and recording to take place during groundworks. Details of these arrangements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority at least one month before any work commences on the development site.

REASON: In the interests of observing and recording archaeological remains which may be present at the site in accordance with Policy SA24 of the West Dorset District Local Plan (2006)."

1.3 The programme of archaeological works comprised four elements: the production of a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which sets out the project strategy (approved by Mr Steve Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council on 19 July 2016); archaeological monitoring and recording; post-excavation and report production; and archive preparation and deposition.

1.4 The requirement follows advice by Central Government as set out in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) (DCLG 2012).

1.5 COAS shall retain the copyright of any commissioned reports or other projected documents, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved, excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client and the HET for the use of such documents by them in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the project design/specification. This licence will be extended to those conducting bona fide research as long as it does not breach client confidentiality.

2. The Site

2.1 The Site (centred on SY 69099 90734) covers a total of 3600 square metres and is located in the heart of Dorchester on the north side of High West Street (**Figure 1**). It is bounded to the north by hard standing to its rear, Glydepath Road to the west, High West Street to the south, and an adjacent property to the east. The Site is a Grade I Listed building (HE Ref. 1119069). A Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment by Philip Hughes Associates sets out a detailed history (2014). In summary, Shire Hall was constructed in 1797 on the site of a previous Shire Hall. It comprised two courts, cells and a grand jury room, although the building was used for local government and social activities in addition to judicial purposes. The rear of the building was extended in 1854 and 1874 with further alterations in the late 19th century. In the 1960's the western third of the building was altered to accommodate offices for the Rural District Council, together with re-modelling of the rear west and centre portions. The building was disused following the departure of West Dorset District Council to a new site in 2013. The Site is largely situated on level ground at an average height of c. 70m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The recorded geology is Portsdown Chalk Formation. The Old Shire Hall is situated in the centre of Dorchester, and therefore within the boundary of the Romano-British and medieval town. There are also extensive prehistoric remains in the immediate area.

3. Archaeological aims and research objectives

3.1 The principal aims of the archaeological monitoring were to:

- identify, investigate and record all significant buried archaeological deposits revealed on the site during groundworks;
- determine the character of the archaeological remains, where present;
- recover environmental information relating to the local historic environment of the area; and
- provide sufficient information to enable further mitigation strategies to be determined, where appropriate

3.2 The research objectives were to:

- determine whether there was any evidence specifically relating to the construction, development and use of Shire Hall, and identify any prehistoric remains, or evidence relating to the Romano-British or medieval town of Dorchester.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) (December 2014). COAS adhered to the *Code of Conduct* of the CIfA (1985, rev. 2000, 2014), and *Regulations for Professional Conduct* (CIfA, 2014, rev. 2015) at all times. The fieldwork methodology is summarised below.
- 4.2 COAS gave notification of the commencement of the works to the HET, but a Site visit was not found to be necessary.
- 4.3 Prior to the commencement of Site works, the excavation methodology was agreed between those responsible for carrying out the groundworks and COAS to ensure that all parties were aware of the monitoring requirements.
- 4.4 An archaeologist was on Site to monitor all specified groundworks with the aim of identifying and recording any archaeological features/deposits present. Provision was made to allow extra time for the appropriate excavation and recording of features revealed as a result of groundworks. Areas of the Site that had been subject to appropriate monitoring were identified to the groundwork contractor so that work could continue without archaeological supervision. All groundworks carried out with a machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket.
- 4.5 Core details of the deposit sequence across the Site were recorded using COAS *pro-forma* profile forms in digital format using iPad mini tablets. The frequency with which profiles were recorded was based entirely on variation of the deposit sequence. Spoil was examined for the retrieval of artefacts.
- 4.6 Where archaeological features/deposits were encountered, these were first assessed to determine the level of investigation needed to characterise them satisfactorily. This did not always require sampling through manual excavation, particularly for low-grade layers where it could be demonstrated that they would not provide any research value. Manual excavation was carried out in the manner set out below.
- 4.7 Archaeological features/deposits were recorded using standard COAS *pro-forma* feature intervention recording forms and/or context forms in digital format using iPad mini tablets. Stratigraphic relationships were recorded using a “Harris-Winchester matrix” diagram. Soil colours were logged using a Munsell soil colour chart. Features were drawn on dimensionally stable media at suitable scales, 1:20 for plans and 1:10 for sections. All archaeological remains were levelled to Ordnance Datum, either directly with a TopCon GRS1 RTK GPS unit or by means of a temporary bench mark, using an Ordnance Survey bench mark. A photographic record of the monitoring and recording was carried out, and involved the sole use of digital images. This included photographs illustrating in detail, and general context, the principal features and finds discovered. The photographic record also included working shots to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

- 4.8 The excavation of each context was, wherever possible, carried out in such a way as to produce at least one representative cross-section. The extent to which features/deposits were excavated and the percentage that was sampled was reliant on exposure through groundworks and taking into account the health and safety considerations of working within the basement.

5. Results

- 5.1 The uppermost deposits (7-100) were variously concrete and rubble. The underlying natural chalk (7-105) was seen in at least two interventions. A full context summary is included in **Appendix 1**. In the cellar, the suspended floor had been removed to reveal the underlying cavity.
- 5.2 Examination of the works in the cellar revealed four square foundation piers (S1-S4) running in a north-south line through the western half of the cellar at roughly the mid-point (**Figure 2**). These were of random rubble construction using chalk of varying sizes cemented with a lime mortar (**Plates 1-4**), seated on the natural chalk. These piers were square in plan, measuring c. 0.60 by 0.70m in plan, the exposed height being c. 0.70-0.80m in exposed height. In the northern wall of the cellar were two shallow brick relieving arches, F5 and F7, which form part of the foundation structure (**Plates 5 & 6**). These also were seated onto the natural chalk.
- 5.3 A single cut feature (F6) was noted in the centre of the cellar (**Figure 2 & Plate 7**). This comprised an irregular sub-rectangular cut, (7-104) oriented north-south (in alignment with the building), with straight vertical sides and a flat base, measuring 3.10m long, 1.65m wide and c. 1.00m deep. An apparently rectangular extension on the south side suggested two linked elements to the whole feature. This pit contained three fills of grey silty clays with variable amounts of chalk and flint (contexts (7-101), (7-102), and (7-103)) (**Plate 8**). In particular, context (7-101) had the appearance of a high volume rapid backfilling event, and contained the majority of the finds recovered from the Site, including glass, pottery, metals and animal bone (**Section 6**).
- 5.4 The excavation of three trial pits for two drains (TP1 and TP2) and a pipe trench (TP3) were observed in the central northern room which had formerly housed a Cold War bunker. These trial pits were all excavated to a depth of c. 0.30m. In the case of TP1 and TP2 this were cut into recent deposits of demolition or levelling material, and no underlying deposits were seen (**Plates 9 & 10**). In the case of the pipe trench, TP3, this cut directly into the underlying natural chalk (**Plate 11**).

6. The finds

- 6.1 A range of finds were recovered from the exposed surface of the cellar where they had been sealed by the suspended floor. These included newspapers (1979-1981, including Dorset Evening Echo), matchboxes and cigarette packets (Player's Navy Cut, Player's Weights, Guards, Senior Service and Woodbine) dating to the mid-20th century, and which presumably related to previous conversion works. A selection of post-medieval finds were also recovered from the only cut feature in the cellar, F6. This included glass, pottery, ceramic building material and animal bone.

The Glass

- 6.2 A total of 18 fragments and three complete bottles were recovered from contexts (7-100) and (7-101) of F6 (**Table 1**). This included a number of fragments of bottles dating to the first half of the 19th century, as well as some examples of later bottles. A single fragment from (7-101) represented a piece of the neck of a flask, jug or decanter of later 18th or 19th century type. No further work is needed on the glass, and it is not recommended that it should be retained for long term curation, although some of the entire bottles may be suitable for display in the new visitor centre.

Table 1. Glass

CONTEXT	FEATURE	WEIGHT	DESCRIPTION
(7-100)	F6	1275g	11 fragments post-medieval bottle glass – three necks of onion bottles, earlier 19 th century.
(7-100)	F6	691g	Entire wine bottle, pale green glass, post c. 1870
(7-100)	F6	646g	Entire rum/brandy bottle, dark green glass post c. 1880

(7-100)	F6	966g	Entire onion bottle, mould blown, c. 1800-1820
(7-101)	F6	892g	7 fragments post-medieval bottle glass. One neck of onion bottle c. 1780-1820. One neck fragment of dark brown-green glass of a probable jug or decanter. Handmade, with a wide neck and simple rim with external cordon and broad smooth curved neck. A piece of applied glass represents the upper attachment of the handle. Of 18 th or 19 th century type.

The pottery

- 6.3 A total of 12 sherds of pottery were noted from (7-100) and (7-101), weighing a total of 916g. A single sherd of a white glazed vessel may represent the rim of a chamber pot. The remaining sherds relate to yellow and green glazed earthenware jars. In addition, there were two stoneware brown glazed jars, 240mm high and 105mm in diameter. One was entire, and one was broken at the neck, but both had the remains of paper labels still attached. Both labels indicate that the contents comprised 'Stephens Blue Black Writing Fluid', and the design of the bottles and label indicate a date in the mid-19th century. Presumably these large ink bottles relate to the use of the building for courts in the 19th century. The fragmentary material from F6 has no potential for further research, and it is not recommended for long term curation. It may be possible to date the ink bottles more closely and might be of interest for inclusion in the new visitor centre.

The clay pipes

- 6.4 Two pipe stems were recovered from (7-100) and (7-101) respectively, and two partial bowls from (7-101) of types which date to c. 1800-1820 and c. 1810-1840. No further work is needed on these items; they are not recommended for long term curation.

The other finds

- 6.5 A fragment of slate weighing 50g came from (7-101), and a piece of stone with attached calcite crystals from (7-100), which also produced a small piece of post-medieval green glazed ridge tile. A collection of fragments of brick and tile weighing 4851g came from (7-101). The depth of two brick fragments could be measured and at c. 2 ½" thick are likely to be post-medieval in date. Three metal objects were recovered from (7-100) of F6, a cut nail (4g), 19th century; an iron bar (611g), c. 55cm long, with one end turned into a loose curl, and with two holes drilled at the opposite end, and which may represent a hinge strap from a large door; and a large key (98g). This was 140mm long, with a flattened oval bow, circular shank and two teeth on the bit. It is an 18th or 19th century type. Three oyster shells were recovered, one from (7-100) and two large examples from (7-101). Oysters have been widely consumed from the Romano-British period onward. No further work is required on this material and is not recommended for long term curation, with the exception of the key, which may be included in the new visitor centre.

The animal bone

- 6.6 A total of 23 fragments of animal bone weighing c. 910g were recovered from contexts (7-100) and (7-101) of feature F6. Fragments were identified to species and element and examined for indications of age, taphonomic change, butchery and processing. The bone condition was generally fairly good. The species represented were cattle, sheep/goat and dog (**Table 2**). A catalogue is included in the Site archive.

Table 2. Animal bone

SPECIES	Number of identified specimens (NISP)/No.		
	(7-100)	(7-101)	TOTAL
Cattle	3	7	10
Sheep/goat	1	2	3
Dog		1	1
Domestic fowl	2		2
Cattle-size		5	5
Sheep-size		2	2
	6	17	23

- 6.7 Whilst few conclusions can be drawn from this small assemblage, cattle were the most abundant species, relating to almost half the specimens. The minimum number of cattle represented was two, one adult and one juvenile. Whilst none of the cattle fragments could be measured, they were consistent with the known

range of post-medieval animals. One femur fragment displayed butchery marks indicative of heavy chopping blows, coupled with a break which occurred when the bone was fresh, indicating the deliberate processing of the carcass. Three fragments of sheep/goat were identified, with one fragment of humerus identified positively as sheep; this had measurements within the range of post-medieval animals. A minimum of a single animal could have contributed this material. A single fragment of dog pelvis was also noted. This was from an adult animal, and had a light cut mark adjacent to the hip joint. It should also be noted that two fragments of sheep-sized mammal long bone and part of a sheep/goat metatarsal were considerably more weathered than the rest of the material, and may represent redeposited material.

- 6.8 This collection of animal bone would seem to be largely consistent with the post-medieval date of the artefacts from these contexts. However, there are some aspects which indicate that it is likely that this material may have been brought from elsewhere rather than deriving from food waste generated within the building. The inclusion of more weathered fragments points towards this. It is also worth noting that the butchery of dog carcasses, as indicated by the cut mark on the single fragment of dog bone, is unusual, although known in assemblages earlier than the post-medieval period. No further work is needed on this assemblage, and it is recommended that the material need not be retained for long term curation.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

- 7.1 Observation of the works in the cellar, lift shaft, and trial pits in adjacent areas of the building exposed four foundation piers, two brick relieving arches within the present cellar wall, and a large pit which is likely to represent a latrine.
- 7.2 The pier bases positioned along the length of the cellar predated a series of brick piers which previously supported the floor of the room above and which were recently removed. Two relieving arches in the north wall of the cellar were also seen. Both the piers and the relieving arches were constructed on the natural chalk surface. These observations have not changed the understanding of the development of the building but have documented the foundation aspects of its construction.
- 7.3 The sub-rectangular pit, F6, with an indication of a more extensive shape in plan comprising two linked pits, would seem analogous to a latrine soakaway. This feature would be consistent with the use of the Shire Hall as a public building, and with the housing of prisoners of the court. The material which filled this feature is all post-medieval in date but ranges from the earlier part of the 19th century into the mid-19th century. The nature of the material, including hints of more weathered material within the animal bone, including a fragment of dog with butchery marks, indicates that this material may not have been immediately derived from activities within the building. It is likely that it was sourced from a nearby rubbish dump to fill in the feature when it became redundant.
- 7.4 The trial pits only revealed further make-up layers of demolition debris, and in TP3 cut directly into the underlying chalk. No remains of the Cold War bunker were seen. This, and the observation of the relationship of the foundation elements constructed onto the chalk mentioned above confirms the finding of the previous evaluation (Tabor 2012), that the ground had been terraced into the natural chalk before construction of the Shire Hall.
- 7.5 In conclusion, this project has observed aspects of the building foundations and an additional feature probably relating to its use in the 19th century. It seems that the construction of the building was indeed likely to have removed any evidence which may have been present of the Romano-British or medieval town, or earlier prehistoric activity which might have been expected in this area.

8. Archive

- 8.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) requires that an archaeological archive arising from development works is made publicly accessible (para. 141). The archive comprises two parts: the paper/digital archive including site records and images; and the artefact/ecofact assemblage.

- 8.2 The paper/digital archive is the property of the archaeological contractor until it is deposited with the receiving institution once the full programme of works has been carried out. This element of the archive will be prepared in accordance with prevailing standards for deposition.
- 8.3 The artefact/ecofact assemblage is the legal property of the landowner (excluding any items that fall under The Treasure Act 1996). In this case, none of the material recovered has been recommended for long term curation for display or study, but any items which the client wishes to retain will be appropriately ordered.

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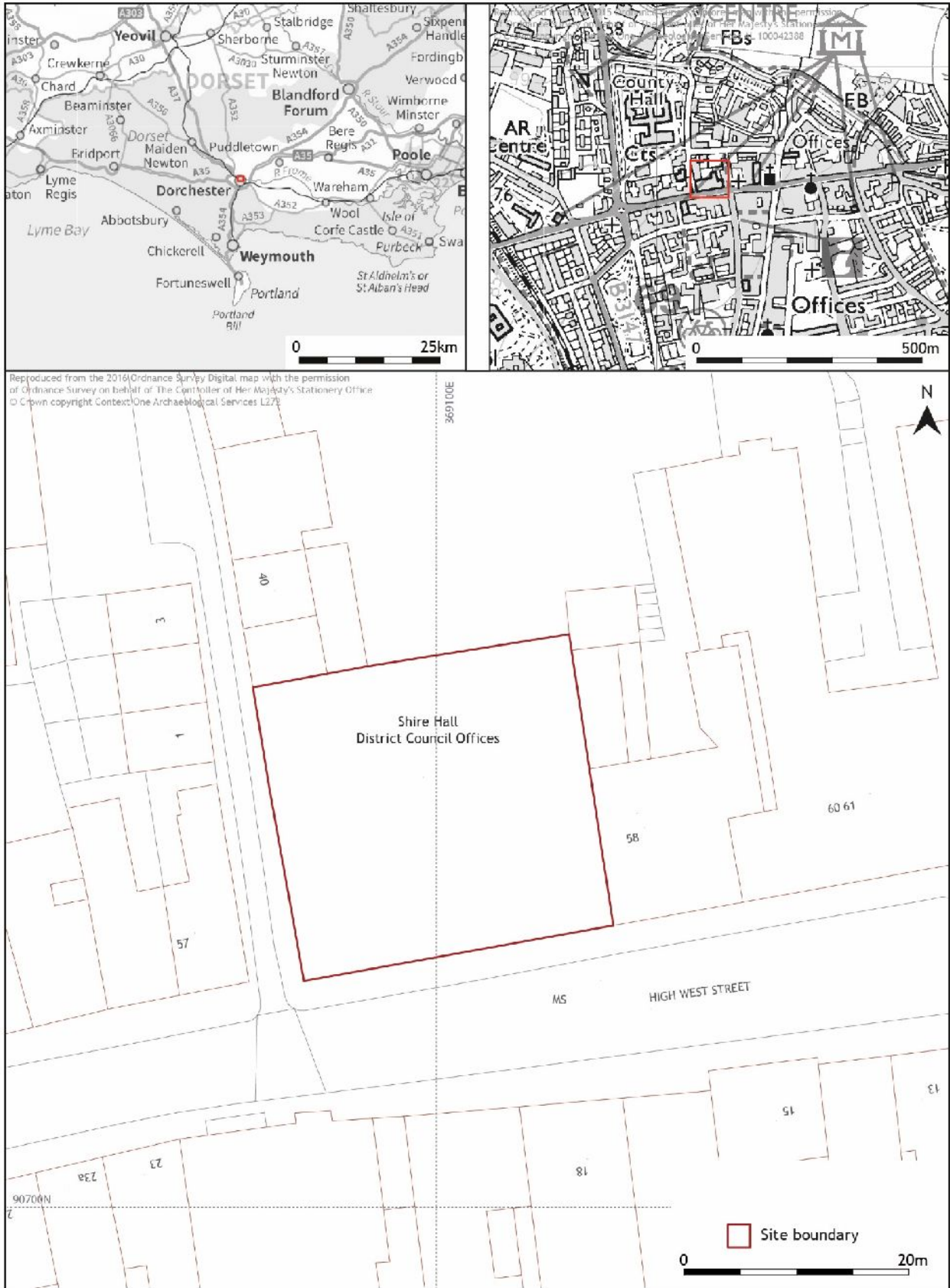
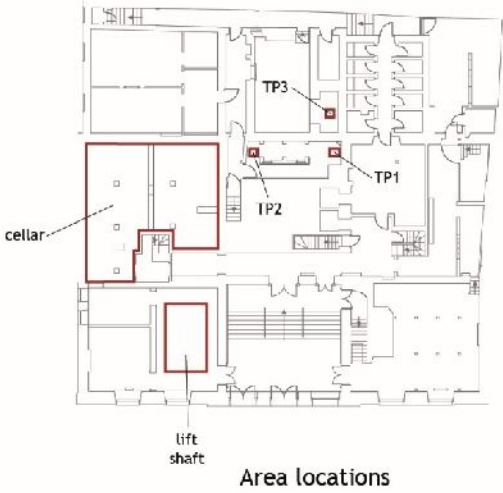
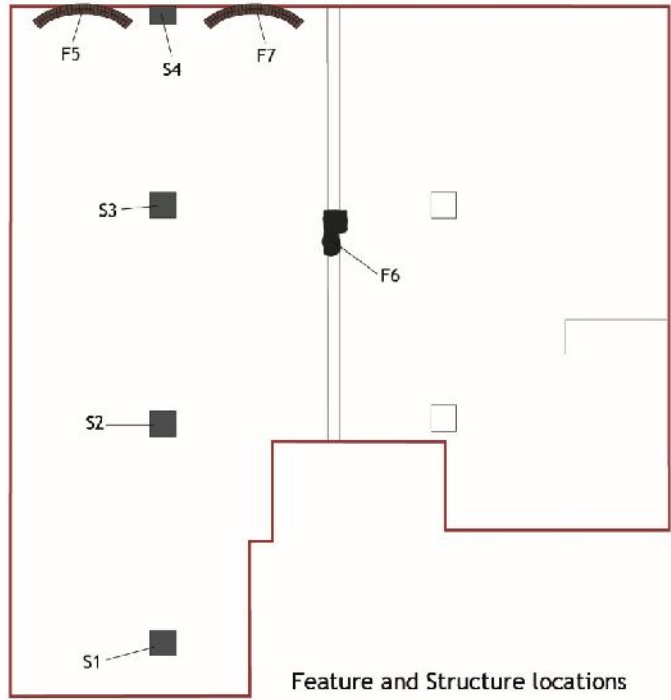


Figure 1. Site setting

Based on client plan drawing number 100 © Philip Hughes Associates Historic Buildings Conservation Consultants





 context one ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES LTD	
Project Old Shire Hall, Dorchester, Dorset	
Title Detailed locations	
Scale 0 ————— Area locations 1:500 ————— 20m	
0 ————— Feature and Structure locations 1:100 ————— 5m	
 N	
Project code	C1/AMR/16/SDD
Figure No.	2

Figure 2. Detailed locations of archaeological features



Plate 1. Foundation pier S1 (facing N; 1m scale)



Plate 2. Foundation pier S2 (facing N; 1m scale)



Plate 3. Foundation pier S3 (facing S; 1m scale)



Plate 4. Foundation pier S4 (facing S; 1m scale)



Plate 5. Foundation arch F5 (facing N; 1m and 0.50m scales)



Plate 6. Foundation arch F7 (facing NW; 1m scale)



Plate 7. Latrine F6 (facing S; 1m & 0.50m scales)



Plate 8. Latrine F6 S extension fill (facing S; 1m & 0.50m scales)



Plate 9. TP 1 (facing N; 1m scale)



Plate 10. TP2 (facing W; 1m scale)



Plate 11. TP3 (facing N; 1m scale)

Appendix 1: Context summary

CONTEXT NO.	FEATURE	PERIOD	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EARLIER THAN	CONTEMP. WITH	LATER THAN	LENGTH	WIDTH/DIAMETER	THICKNESS / DEPTH
(7-100)	NA	Modern	Layer	Concrete and/rubble upper layer	NA		All	NA	NA	Variable
(7-101)	F6	Post-medieval	Fill	Pit fill - Soft light grey (10 YR 7/1) silty clay with angular chalk and frequent flint fragments	(7-100)		(7-103)	1.40m	1.30m	1.10m
(7-102)	F6	Post-medieval	Fill	Pit fill - Friable greyish brown (10 YR 4/2) silty clay with stone fragments c. 0.30x 0.10m	(7-103)		(7-104)	0.70m	0.20m	0.10m
(7-103)	F6	Post-medieval	Fill	Pit fill -Cemented light grey (10 YR 7/1) silty clay with frequent angular chalk and flint fragments <0.20m	(7-101)		(7-102)	1.40m	0.70m	0.90m
[7-104]	F6	Post-medieval	Cut	Pit - A sub-rectangular cut on a N-S alignment with straight vertical sides and flat base	(7-102)		(7-105)	3.10m	1.65m	1.00m
(7-105)	NA	Natural	Layer	Natural chalk	[7-104]		NA	NA	NA	NA
(7-106)	S1	Post-medieval	Structure	Foundation pier - Random coursed worked chalk blocks (10YR 8/1) 0. 12-0.20m x 0.10-0.30m x 0.8-0.30m, with lime mortar bonding 0.02-0.08m thick	(7-100)		(7-105)	0.60m	0.60m	0.80m
(7-107)	S2	Post-medieval	Structure	Foundation pier - Random coursed worked chalk blocks (10YR 8/1) 0. 12-0.20m x 0.10-0.30m x 0.8-0.30m, with lime mortar bonding 0.05-0.07m thick	(7-100)		(7-105)	0.60m	0.60m	0.80m
(7-108)	S3	Post-medieval	Structure	Foundation pier - Random coursed worked chalk blocks (10YR 8/1) 0. 05-0.10m x 0.10-0.25m x 0.07-0.12m, with lime mortar bonding 0.02-0.05m thick	(7-100)		(7-105)	0.60m	0.60m	0.70m
(7-109)	S4	Post-medieval	Structure	Foundation pier - Random coursed worked chalk and limestone blocks (10YR 8/1) 0. 15-0.20m x 0.15-0.25m x 0.10-0.15m, with occasional broken brick with lime mortar bonding 0.02-0.07m thick	(7-100)		(7-105)	0.60m	0.75m	0.60m
(7-110)	F5	Post-medieval	Structure	Foundation arch - shallow arch of brick with lime mortar on the west side of the north wall, underpinning the existing wall	Existing wall			2.00m		0.35m
(7-111)	F7	Post-medieval	Structure	Foundation arch - shallow arch of brick with lime mortar on the east side of the north wall, underpinning the existing wall	Existing wall			1.50m		0.50m
(7-112)	TP1	Post-medieval	Layer	Demolition/levelling layer - Soft dark grey (10 YR 4/1) silty clay with frequent angular chalk fragments <0.10m	NA			1.50m	1.20m	0.30m
(7-113)	TP2	Post-medieval	Layer	Demolition/levelling layer - Soft dark grey (10 YR 4/1) silty clay with frequent angular chalk fragments <0.10m	NA			0.80m	0.50m	0.30m
(7-114)	TP3	Post-medieval	Layer	Natural chalk	NA		NA	2.50m	0.40m	0.30m

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