

Archaeological Watching Brief

at

**THE THEATRE ROYAL,
KING STREET, BRISTOL.**

for

Hydrock Consultants Ltd.



Report No. 2077/2009
BHER No. 24666

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**THE THEATRE ROYAL,
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Centred on
N.G.R. ST 5880 7275

Client: Hydrock Consultants Ltd.

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NOTE

Notwithstanding that Bristol and Region Archaeological Services have taken reasonable care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

January, 2009.

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1. Introduction

Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) was commissioned by Hydrock Consultants Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during structural survey work at the Theatre Royal, King Street, Bristol. The watching brief was commissioned in advance of a planning application by the Theatre Royal Bristol Trust for structural alterations to, and new build within, the Theatre Royal (**Fig. 1**).

The Theatre Royal (centred on NGR ST 5880 7275), a Grade 1 listed building (Reference Number 901-1/16/624), lies close to Bristol city centre within the City and Queen Square Conservation Area. The building stands on the north side of King Street, approximately 150m south of Baldwin Street, at a height of approximately 9.3m aOD. The listed building, which comprises the Theatre Royal (HER 15M) originally built in 1764-6 (altered 1903 and 1970-72) and Coopers Hall (HER 16M) built in 1743-4 (altered 1970-72), is bounded south-east by St Nicholas Almshouse (HER 17M) built 1652-56, south by King Street, south-west by No. 36 King Street, west and north-west by the rear of the B. T. Telephone Exchange fronting on Telephone Avenue, north-east by Rackhay (street) and east (beyond a narrow alleyway) by the rear of No. 30 Queen Charlotte Street.

Historically, the site is located in the city parish of St Nicholas. The Theatre Royal spans the line of one of the defensive walls of the medieval city, known as the 'Marsh Wall' (HER 1041M), which dates from the 13th century.

The fieldwork (see **Fig. 2**) was undertaken between 4 - 14 November 2008 under the supervision of Tim Longman (Project Officer), who also compiled this brief report. The illustrations were prepared and the report compiled by Ann Linge (Design & Production Officer). The project was managed by Bruce Williams (BaRAS Manager).

2. The Watching Brief

The manual excavation of two small trial pits (TP1 & TP2), to a depth of 1 metre, revealed no significant archaeology, only modern concrete beams underpinning some existing brick partition walls. In addition, only loose modern fill (contexts 103 & 202) associated with the major alterations to the building that were carried out in 1970-72 was recorded.

However, the two boreholes (BH3 & BH4) drilled within the basement both produced samples containing 'organic material'. A 20mm thick dark brown, coarse, fibrous deposit (304) was sampled from BH3 at a depth of between 2.68 – 2.7m beneath the basement floor level of approximately 7.4m aOD, while another, similar, deposit some 80mm thick was recorded in a borehole sample obtained from BH4. That deposit, also described as '*a layer of organic material*' (406) was recorded at a depth of 1.77 – 1.85m below the basement floor level of approximately 7.28m aOD.

Three further boreholes were drilled just outside the footprint of the building, one (BH1 & BH2) at either end of an alleyway that gives access to the rear of the building from Rackhay, and a third (BH6) on the pavement in King Street in front of the theatre. The latter intervention, it was hoped, would extend within the ditch that existed beyond (south of) the Marsh Wall until the mid-17th century. A single sherd of glazed medieval roof tile was recovered from spoil (a mixed deposit of ashy fill; context 602) brought up from a depth of some 1.2m. The underlying alluvium was recorded between 1.9m and 13m below the present ground level, when the top of the solid geology (Mercia Mudstone) was reached.

3. Conclusions

It is known that the floor level within the basement was lowered by up to 1.5m during the scheme of works undertaken at the Theatre Royal in 1970-72. It is likely that those works had a negative impact

on any extant archaeological deposits and/or features and, as was observed in the two trial pits (TP1 & TP2), the disturbance continues for at least an additional 1 metre below the present basement floor levels.

No archaeological deposits of any significance were recorded in either BH1 or BH2. The boreholes merely recording undated fill deposits to depths of about 1.8m below ground level. The underlying geological deposits then comprised approximately 11.5 – 12 metre thick layers of alluvial clays and gravels of the Pleistocene period overlying Mercia Mudstone (f6) of the Triassic period (British Geological Survey 1962). However, significant archaeological deposits in the form of layers of ‘organic material’ were recorded in both boreholes (BH3 & BH4) drilled beneath the building. Both deposits (contexts 304 & 406) were sandwiched beneath soft yellowish brown clays and sealed stiff, dark grey clays. The relative thinness of both deposits lends support to the theory that both formed in shallow, natural tidal channels or transient pools in the marsh prior to the draining and reclamation of the area by the 13th century, rather than in relatively deeply cut man-made features ie. a Law Ditch. No ditch deposits were encountered either in BH6 suggesting that the borehole was probably located on the berm between the Marsh Wall and its associated ditch.

4. The Archive

The project archive will be deposited with Bristol Museums & Archives service under the accession number BRSMG 2008/78 and a digital copy of this report will be available to the National Monuments Record Centre (NMRC) in Swindon, which is maintained by English Heritage. The project has been entered in the Bristol Historic Environment Record (BHER) database as BHER 24666 and has also been allocated the OASIS reference number bristola1-51102.

5. Sources Consulted

Published Material

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999 *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

Unpublished Material

Bryant, J. 2005 *Archaeological Building Recording at No. 16 King Street, Bristol* (BaRAS Report No. 1354/2005; unpublished client report)

Jackson, R. 1997 *Archaeological Building Recording at The Naval Volunteer, King Street, Bristol* (BaRAS Report No. 363/1997; unpublished client report)

6. Acknowledgements

BaRAS would like to thank Alistair Cima, Chris Williams (Geo-Environmental Consultant), Lee Vollero and George Howell and the rest of the on-site team from Hydrock Consultants Limited for their assistance and co-operation during the programme of monitoring, as well as Dr Joanna Fortune (Principal Consultant) of Hydrock Consultants Limited, Darrell Morcom of Structures1, Sarah Smith (Project Coordinator) of the Theatre Royal Bristol Trust and Peter Insole (Archaeological Officer) of Bristol City Council for the HER data.

APPENDIX 1: Policy Statement

This report is the result of work carried out in the light of national and local authority policies.

NATIONAL POLICIES

Statutory protection for archaeology is enshrined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979), amended by the National Heritage Act, 1983. Nationally important sites are listed in the Schedule of Ancient Monuments (SAM). Scheduled Monument consent is required for any work, which would affect a SAM.

ODPM PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

The Planning Policy Guidance of Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16) consolidates advice to planning authorities. The Guidance stresses the non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource, details the role of the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), encourages early consultation with county and district archaeological officers and sets out the requirement for developers to provide sufficient information on the archaeological impact of development to enable a reasonable planning decision to be made.

PPG 16 also indicates the circumstances where further work would be necessary and outlines the use of agreements and conditions to protect the archaeological resource.

LOCAL AUTHORITY POLICY

Bristol City Council Supplementary Planning Document (2006) states (policy SPD No.7, p4):

- (ii) There will be a presumption in favour of preserving any archaeological features or sites of national importance, whether scheduled or not.

- (ii) Development which could adversely affect sites, structures, landscapes or buildings of archaeological interest and their settings will require an assessment of the archaeological resource through a desktop study, and where appropriate a field evaluation. Where there is evidence of archaeological remains, development will not be permitted except where it can be demonstrated that the archaeological features of the site will be satisfactorily preserved in situ, or a suitable strategy has been put forward to mitigate the impact of development proposals upon important archaeological remains and their settings; or, if this is not possible and the sites are not scheduled or of national importance, provision for adequately recording the site prior to destruction is made, preferably by negotiating a planning agreement to ensure that access, time and financial resources are available to allow essential recording and publication to take place.

APPENDIX 2: Context Descriptions

Trial Pits/Boreholes	Context No.	Description
TP1	100	Asphalt
	101	Reinforced Concrete
	102	Geotextile membrane
	103	Fill
TP2	200	Reinforced Concrete
	201	Geotextile membrane
	202	Fill
BH3	300	Reinforced Concrete
	301	Gravel
	302	Fill
	303	Alluvial clay
	304	Organic layer
BH4	305	Alluvial clay
	400	Reinforced Concrete
	401	Sand
	402	Concrete
	403	Gravel
	404	Fill
	405	Alluvial clay
BH6	406	Organic layer
	407	Alluvial clay
	600	Flagstones
	601	Reddish brown gravelly clay fill with inclusions of brick and sandstone
	602	Brownish grey gravelly clay fill with inclusions of ash and brick
	603	Alluvial clay
	604	Gravel
	605	Mercia Mudstone

APPENDIX 3: Figures and Plates

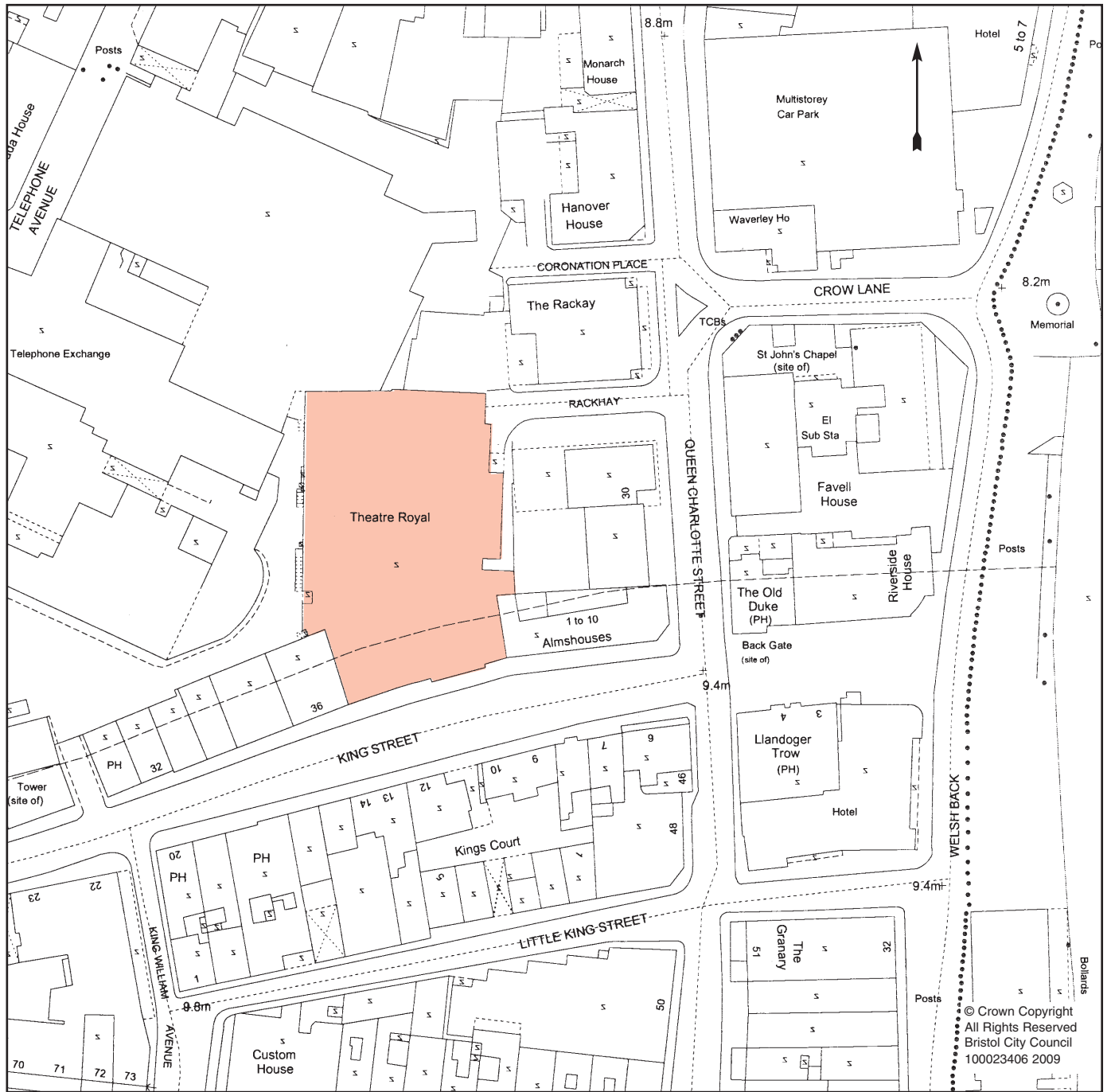


Fig.1 Location plan (scale 1:1250)

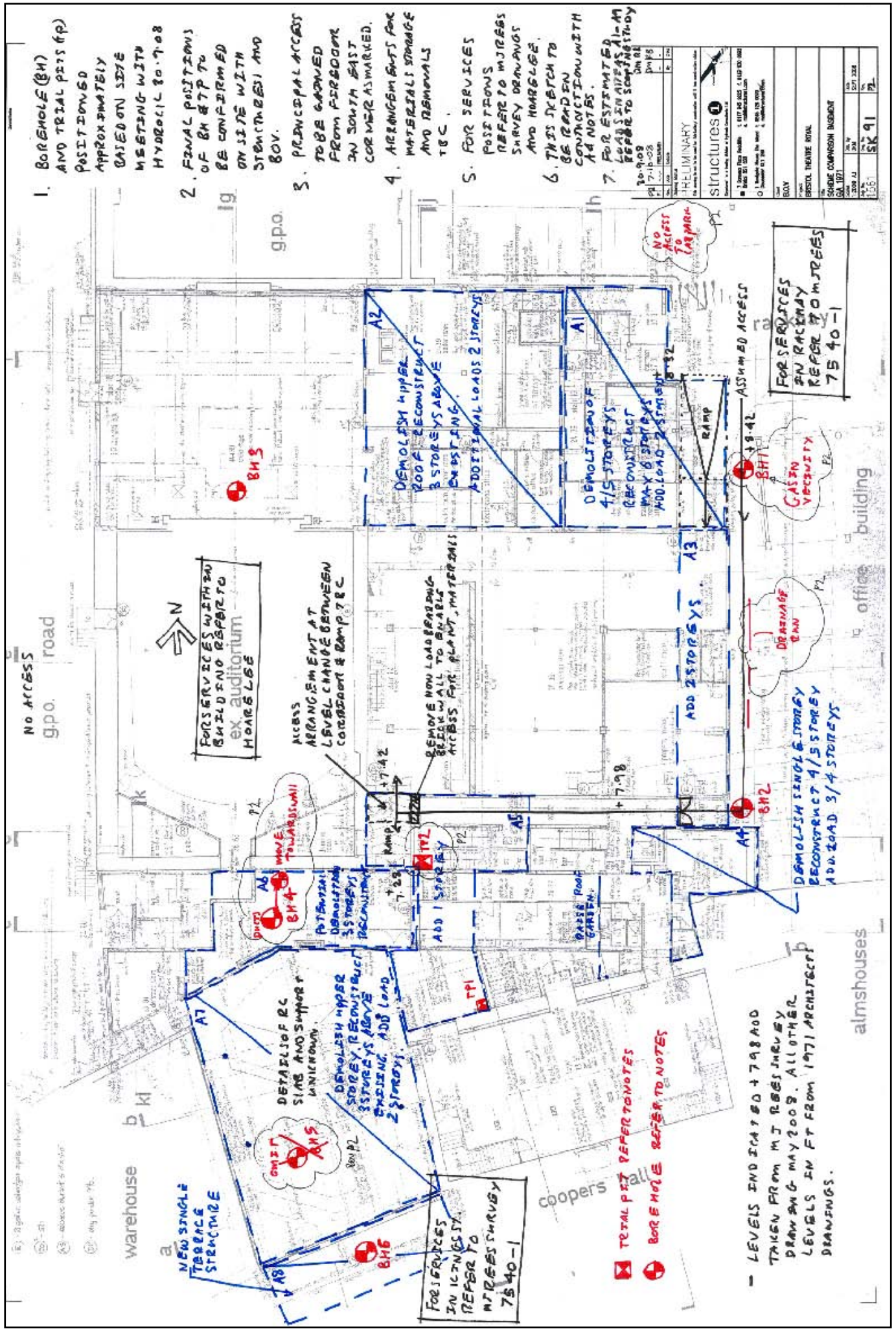




Plate 1
View south along alleyway, at the rear of the Theatre Royal, towards BH2



Plate 2
Borehole cores 0-2m from BH4.
Note thin layer of 'organic material'
between 1.77m-1.85m



Plate 3
Close-up of layer of 'organic material' from BH4



Plate 4
Borehole cores 0-4m, from BH3.
Note very thin deposit of 'organic material' between 2.68m-2.7m



Plate 5
View of TP1, looking south



Plate 6
View of TP2, looking west



Plate 7
Looking north along alleyway, at the rear of the Theatre Royal, towards Rackhay showing the location of BH1

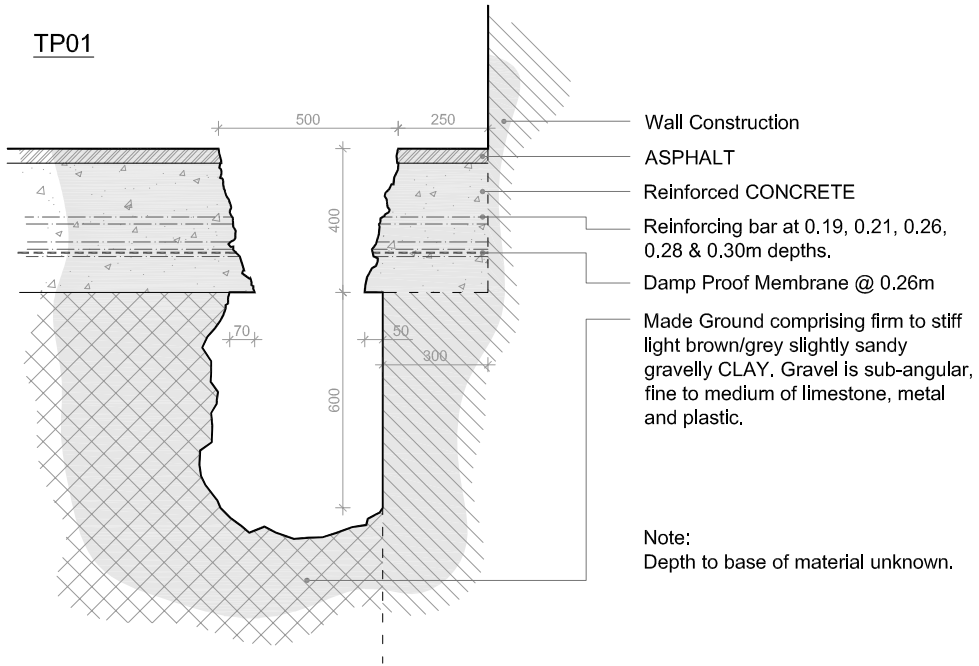


Plate 8
View of drilling rig outside the Theatre Royal, on the site of BH6

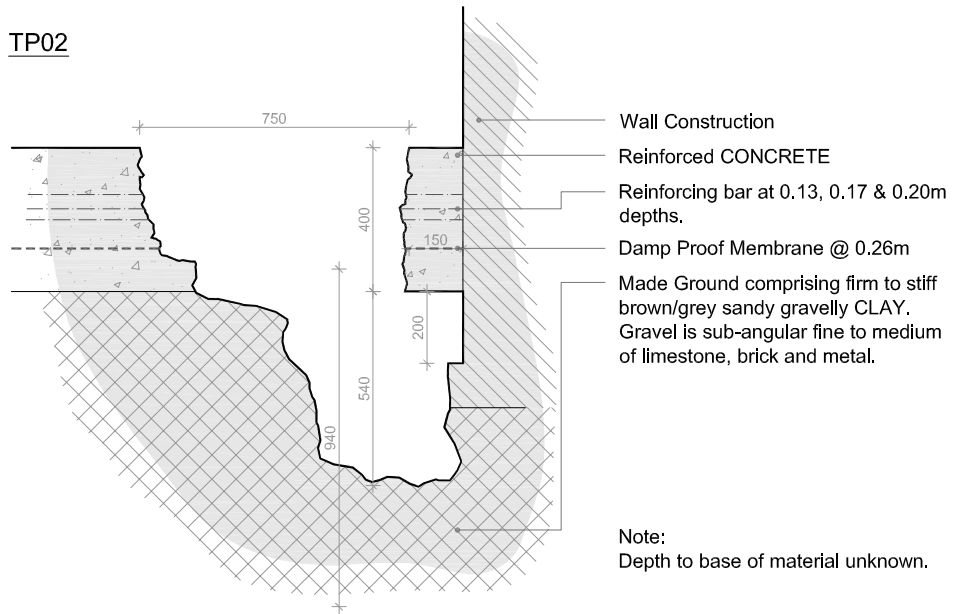
APPENDIX 4: Sections of Hand Dug Trial Pits & Borehole Logs (courtesy of Hydrock Consultants)



TP01



TP02



<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Rev</td> <td>Date</td> <td>Description</td> <td>By</td> <td>Ckd</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>26/11/08</td> <td>ISSUE</td> <td>MJF</td> <td>JF</td> </tr> </table>		Rev	Date	Description	By	Ckd	A	26/11/08	ISSUE	MJF	JF	Project BRISTOL THEATRE ROYAL	Client BRISTOL OLD VIC THEATRE	Over Court Bams Over Lane Almondsbury Bristol BS32 4DF TEL: 01454 619 533 FAX: 01454 614 125 E-Mail: bristol@hydrock.com or visit www.hydrock.com
		Rev	Date	Description	By	Ckd								
A	26/11/08	ISSUE	MJF	JF										
Title Sections of Hand Dug Trial Pits		Drawing Status INFORMATION	Job No. C08364											
		Drawn MJF	Checked JF	Scale at A4 1:20	Date 26/11/08	Issue Date 29/11/08	Drawing No. 08364 - SK001	Revision A						