

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF
AT
SEVERN SIDE SOUTH, BEWDLEY,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Council

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Project 2439
Report 1208
WSM 33377

Archaeological watching brief at Severn Side South, Bewdley, Worcestershire

Background information

<i>Client</i>	Severn Trent Water
<i>Site address</i>	Severn Side South, Bewdley Worcestershire
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 378937 275146 to 378755 275359
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WSM 00767
<i>Brief</i>	HEAS 2003a
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2003b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

Previous archaeological work on the site

Severn Side South has been subject to archaeological investigation (WSM 31923), most recently during flood alleviation scheme work undertaken by the Environment Agency. The evaluation element of the project saw a trench opened in the bandstand area of the river front. This trench was in the supposed location of a medieval bridge, although no archaeology relating to such a structure was revealed. However, the loose sandstone rubble found mainly within the trench did abut a substantial stone wall which was medieval in character. This wall was thought likely to be the southern wall of a building on the north side and adjacent to the bridge. Eighteenth century documentary (engraving) evidence supports this theory. The sandstone rubble within the trench was interpreted as landfill behind the present retaining wall, where this had been built outwards to incorporate the surviving first pier of the medieval wall (Miller and Darch 2002a).

The watching brief areas were located at various intervals along the length of Severn Side South. Mostly visible were surfaces and deposits of 19th century and possible earlier dates, as well as compacted clay in various locations, which had replaced these older deposits. Further finds of a structural nature were located near the present bridge (Miller and Darch 2002a), though this is further to the north and away from the excavation work for the present scheme.

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

Bewdley has been the subject of a survey undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Buteux 1996) and contains a summary of previous archaeological work in the town.

Historical and archaeological background

Severn Side South forms the southern half of Bewdley's river front, extending from Load Street in the north to Lax Lane in the south. Some of the properties on the street frontage date from the 17th century, with the tenement plots of these buildings suggesting they were laid out as a planned area in the late medieval/early post-medieval period. The road might be of some antiquity, as it begins (or ends) at an ancient ford across the Severn at the end of Lax Lane (Miller and Darch 2002b).

There is evidence that part of the area was a medieval quay. At a point outside of No.17, Severn Side South, several timbers were located around 3m below the present road surface (WSM 11174). These timbers are comparable to a layer of timbers noted at a similar depth along Severn Side North, suggesting a quayside at a similar point on the opposite side of the river (Miller and Darch 2002b).

The trenching for this scheme stopped just south of the area thought to be the location of the west side of one of Bewdley's medieval bridges. This bridge spanned the river from just opposite the present address of no.5, just underneath the raised bandstand area and crossed the river to Wribbenhall (Miller and Darch 2002b).

Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible. Furthermore, given the data from previous fieldwork, the fieldwork afforded the opportunity to observe deposits that would potentially show successive quay fronts migrating eastwards through time.

Methods

General specification for watching brief	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	SMR Sources cited by the SMR Landmark digital map based on 1 st Edition Ordnance Survey Worcs XIV NW 1884-96 1 st Edition Ordnance Survey 1883 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale, 1929 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale, 1938
Date(s) of fieldwork	13 th October to 18 th December 2003
Area of deposits observed	c 400m ² . Indicated on Figure 2
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Services length 250m width 1.50m depth 3.00m

Access to or visibility of structure

Observation of the groundworks was undertaken both during and after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits. Due to the depth of the pipe trench, box shoring was put in before the trench was fully excavated, so in most cases the sections of the trench were not fully visible. Due to health and safety considerations, access in to the trench was mostly not possible. Watching brief coverage of the pipe trench excavation along Severn Side South was intermittent but came to around 80% of the total area exposed.

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits were not ideal, but nevertheless allowed a reasonable degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

Deposit descriptions

Context	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth (below ground level)
Valve chamber				
101	Tarmac	Modern	Car park surface	0-0.10m
102	Compact mixed layer of crushed grey limestone and 19 th century demolition material	Post-medieval	Layer of modern made ground	0.10-0.60m
103	Compact light orange brown silty sand. Quite		Possible buried subsoil	0.60-1.05m

	sterile material with few visible inclusions. Occasional medium sub-rounded stones. Does not look dumped or landscaped			
104	Compact mid orange brown silty clay. No visible inclusions		Alluvium or colluvium	1.05-1.55m
105	Very soft and loose yellowish orange fine sand with no visible inclusions		Possible weathered sandstone	1.55m-
Outfall structure				
201	Dark brown mottled grey soft silty clay loam. Moderate small irregular stones	Modern	Modern riverbank topsoil	0-0.30m
202	Dark greyish brown compact clay loam. Abundant medium-sized fragments of 19 th century demolition material. Abundant sherds of 19 th century domestic ceramics and bottle glass. Moderate large broken red brick and degraded sandstone	Post-medieval	Dumped 19 th /20 th century make-up layer	0.30-1.50m
Flood defence valve chamber				
301	Tarmac	Modern	Modern road surface	0-0.10m
302	Compact light yellowish brown aggregate.	Modern	Crushed limestone rubble for road surface make-up	0.10-0.50m
303	Compact black sandy ashy layer with abundant 19 th century demolition material	Post-medieval	Landscaped material for previous road surface?	0.50-0.70m
Pipe trench along the length of Severn Side South				
400	Tarmac and hardcore material	Modern	Road surface and make-up layer beneath it	0-0.20m
401	Mid grey sandy silt with moderate medium rounded stones. Cut through by a number of services and their backfills present within the layer	Modern?	Make-up layer for road and consolidation of frontage	0.20-1.85m
402	Mid brown silty sand. Present throughout the entire length of Severn Side South except where truncated by services etc. Cattle horn found within this layer	Post-medieval	Earliest stratigraphical layer recorded along length of the pipe trench. Earliest phase of dumping to establish frontage? Date unknown – possible post-medieval	1.85m-
403	Mixed sands and silts – backfill material		Fill of service cut 404 and physically sits on service 405	1.50-2.50m
404	Almost vertically-sided		Cut for service 405	

	cut			
405	Concrete and modern ceramic pipes		Services	2.50m-
406	Mid brown grey gravelly layer, v.similar to 401		Make-up layer	0.25m-
407	Loose red sand	Modern	Backfill in service cut 408	0.25m-
408	Steep, concave-sided cut	Modern	Service trench, filled by 407	
409	Mid brown silty sand	Modern	Backfill around service	0.40-2.50m
410	Dark grey sandy silt. Moderate angular and rounded medium sized stones	Modern	Make-up layer for road	0.15-0.60m
411	Orangey red sand	Modern	Backfill over service	0.65m-
412	Dark grey sandy silt	Modern	Backfill around services	0.10-1.40m
413	Silty light brown sand		Layer	1.40m-
414	Loose red sand	Modern	Backfill of service trench	0.10m-
415	Near vertically-sided cut, filled by 414	Modern	Modern service feature	0.10m-
416	Light orangey silty sand		Layer – make-up	0.30-0.65m
417	Mid grey silty sand		Layer – make-up	0.65-1.10m
418	Mid brown sand		Layer- same as 402	1.10m-
419	Dark grey sandy silt - very stony layer. Abundant mixed stones	Modern	Make-up layer for present road.	0.10-0.60m
420	Mid brown sand	Modern	Mixed layer	0.60-0.80m
421	Ceramic and plastic pipes		Collection of services and backfills around them	0.80-2.00m

Discussion

The vast majority of the deposits seen in the sections of the groundworks seem to have been deposited in order to build up the river frontage. Material seems to have been derived from riverine deposits along with other materials. The earliest stratigraphical deposit seems to have been context 402, which was visible in nearly all areas of the groundworks as they progressed north along Severn Side South. This layer of material seemed homogenous and produced the only find from the project. The bone found within this layer was a piece of cattle skull with the right horn attached. The bone did not display any obvious butchery marks. If it was part of a larger collection of similar bone this would have suggested tanning or horn-working in the vicinity, but a single find perhaps excludes this possibility (Liz Pearson pers comm). The highest density of layers visible were located in the top half of the pipe trench. Many of these contained modern brick rubble and were heavily cut through by modern services throughout the length of the trench, some of which were very deep, substantial concrete structures. The layers seemed to be made ground, deposited in order to form the present riverside frontage and would date to the post-medieval period.

Conclusions

The lack of dating evidence for the earliest stratigraphical layer is unfortunate, as it fails to date a sequence of activity that was present along almost all of the trench in Severn Side South. The bone discovered within the layer confirms that this is a layer that has been dumped in this location, probably in order to establish the river frontage in something like its present form. The trenching did not expose any highly significant archaeological deposits or features. No *in situ* timbers relating to the medieval wooden quays thought to be in this area were found. This could have been due to the

relatively narrow width of the pipe trench, which could have missed such remaining timber posts. Alternatively, the trench might have been a little too shallow or messy at the base for any timbers to have been noticed. Unfortunately, no further information on the formation and evolution of the medieval timber quays was gleaned from this project. However, this does not mean that significant archaeological deposits do not exist buried along the frontage.

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Severn Trent Water at Severn Side South, Bewdley, Worcestershire (NGR SO 378937 275146 to 378755 275359, WSM 33377). The trenching revealed a number of layers, which seem to have been deposited in the post-medieval and modern periods in order to form the present river embankment. An earlier layer was present throughout the length of the pipe trench, which contained a piece of cattle skull with horn attached.

Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	22
Photographic records AS3	17
Digital photographs	76
Drawings	15
Boxes of finds	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Worcestershire County Museum Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury Near Kidderminster Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
telephone	01299 250416

Acknowledgements

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