

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF AT SEVERN SIDE NORTH,  
BEWDLEY, WORCESTERSHIRE

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Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 2162  
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## Archaeological watching brief at Severn Side North, Bewdley

**Darren Miller and Erica Darch**

### Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on groundworks associated with the Bewdley Flood Alleviation Scheme (SO 786755; WSM 31563). Observations were made during, trenching, test-pitting and piling associated with the construction of flood defences along Severn Side North, and throughout the excavation of a chamber for a pumping station at the foot of Dog Lane. Archaeological deposits were identified during each set of groundworks, and a small assemblage of artefacts was recovered. The fieldwork records and finds were analysed along with information from previous fieldwork, and from historic maps and documentary sources.

The earliest remains identified along Severn Side North were fragments of timbers which were brought up by piling from a depth of around 4m below the present ground surface. By association with intact timbers found in a similar context on Severn Side South, the fragments are thought to represent part of a medieval quay. The timbers were overlain by a reworked deposit which appears to have been dumped against a late 19<sup>th</sup> century wall built further out into the river, remains of which were identified in several trenches and test pits. In addition to these features, several undated structural remains were found adjacent to, and underneath the present bridge. These features may be associated with the construction of the present bridge in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, or with earlier buildings which are known to have stood in the area before this time. The latest deposits comprised made ground and surfaces abutting the present riverside wall.

The excavations at the foot of Dog Lane exposed a sequence of post-medieval deposits and features, the earliest of which was a stone wall on an east to west alignment. Analysis of historic maps suggests that this wall pre-dates the present arrangement of houses and properties which is likely to be of 18<sup>th</sup> century origin. The wall was butted and overlain by a succession of dumped deposits, which were in turn cut by a chamber for a 19<sup>th</sup> century pumping station. The well-preserved remains of this installation lay just beneath the present road surface.

Taken together, the evidence indicates aspects of the development of the quayside from the later medieval period onwards. In particular, the timber quay along Severn Side North and its later replacements in stone testify to the continued maintenance of an extensive wharf, which is likely to have been central to the town's prosperity as an inland port and market town. The stone wall at the foot of Dog Lane is also of some interest in suggesting the existence of an earlier townscape. Finally, the single fragment of Roman tile provides the first indication of occupation in the area of the town during this period, and may indicate the presence of significant deposits in the vicinity.

## **Part 2 Detailed report**

### **1. Background**

#### **1.1 Reasons for the project**

Groundworks associated with the construction of flood defences along Severn Side North and a pumping station at the foot of Dog Lane were considered to have the potential to affect deposits of archaeological significance. This assessment was made by the Planning Advisory Section of the Service on the basis of information contained within the County Sites and Monuments Record.

#### **1.2 Project parameters**

The project conformed to two briefs prepared by the Planning Advisory Section for separate stages of the groundworks (AS 2002a), and to detailed specifications produced by the Field Section (AS 2002b). The project also conformed to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999).

#### **1.3 Aims**

The general aim of any watching brief is to establish the presence or absence of significant archaeological deposits and associated artefactual and ecofactual assemblages, and record them within the resources available. The results are intended to inform the research cycle, taking into account local, regional and national research frameworks. In the context of the present project, particular attention was to be paid to deposits associated with the development of the river frontage and occupation within medieval and later tenement plots fronting onto the river (AS 2002a, 2-3). In addition, the results were to be assimilated into the framework provided by the archaeological assessment of Bewdley and Wribbenhall undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Buteux 1996).

### **2. Methods**

#### **2.1 Documentary search**

The Central Marches Historic Town Survey report on Bewdley and Wribbenhall was consulted before the start of the fieldwork, as were borehole records supplied by Foundation and Exploration Services Ltd. In addition, an up-to-date print-out of all known sites, monuments and archaeological interventions in the area was obtained from the Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record. After the fieldwork, extracts from historic maps of the area were examined (OS 1883, 1923, 1929 and 1938), and a list of historic buildings was consulted (DoE 1986). Finally, an interim statement and a draft report on early phases of the project have been incorporated into the present report (Lockett 2001; Lockett and Jones 2001).

#### **2.2 Fieldwork**

##### **2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy**

The fieldwork was limited to specific areas of groundworks. Along Severn Side North, these comprised trenching and test-pitting to locate buried services and establish ground conditions, the excavation of a guide trench for a de-mountable barrier and later piling within this trench. The strategy with regard to the trenches, test-pits and guide trench was to plot their locations and record the exposed deposits in plan and section. In the case of the piling, the strategy was

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to observe deposits brought up by the rigs, recover artefacts and environmental samples where possible, and to make regular enquiries of contractors as to the nature of ground conditions.

The groundworks for the pumping station chamber involved two stages of excavation. In the initial stage (excavation to 1.50m below ground surface over a 6.50 by 4.50m area), full access to the trench was possible, and recording and sampling could take place in the normal way (AS 20002b, 5-6). In the second stage of excavation however, the insertion of steel shutters (and rising groundwater) restricted both access and visibility, requiring a more flexible strategy of periodic access, and scanning of excavated spoil.

Minor groundworks in the car park to the west of Dog Lane were also observed. These were recorded in the usual manner adopted in such circumstances. In addition, at a late stage in the project a single trench was excavated close to the present bridge. The excavation of this trench was delayed several times, and unfortunately could not be observed and recorded.

### 2.3 **The methods in retrospect**

In general, the methods adopted are considered to have been appropriate to the aims of the project and to the circumstances of the fieldwork. The approach taken towards the groundworks along Severn Side North made the most of the limited windows for observation that they provided, while keeping the number of site visits within the limits imposed by resource constraints. As described below, the results allowed the nature of deposits along Severn Side North to be established, and certain deposits and features to be more accurately identified and dated. Similarly, the strategy adopted towards the excavation of the pumping station chamber in Dog Lane was rewarded by detailed information on the deep stratigraphy at this point, which may have significant implications for a wider area.

## 3. **Topographical, archaeological and historical context**

The history and archaeology of Bewdley and Wribbenhall has been comprehensively covered in a report by Buteux (1996), undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey. The area of the present project is mentioned several times in the report. In terms of its historical and topographical context, the report suggests that the block of tenements defined by Load Street, Severn Side North and Dog Lane was probably planned and laid out in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This redevelopment is thought to have been associated with an increase in the town's prosperity and the construction of the first of several bridges across the Severn. The report also mentions two finds of archaeological remains in the general area of the present watching brief, both made during the excavation of a sewer trench in 1991. In the first place, sandstone foundations and a wooden pile were found beneath the western underpass of the present bridge (WSM 111734; Taylor 1991). The sandstone foundations are likely to be those of the present west abutment, although the wooden pile (found at 3m below the surface) may have formed part of the foundations of a medieval bridge. Secondly, several timbers were exposed in the road opposite no. 17 Severn Side South (WSM 11173; Taylor 1991). Parts of these timbers were dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century by dendrochronology, and they are thought to represent a medieval quay. Other references to the area relate to the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings fronting onto the river (WSM 10706-7), and an 18<sup>th</sup> century redevelopment of the quayside (WSM 17747).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Stratigraphy

#### 4.1.1 Severn Side North

The groundworks along Severn Side North began with the excavation of four ground-investigation trenches in the locations shown in Figure 2. The trenches were between 4.0 and 7.45m long, a uniform 1.0m wide, and between 1.75 and 2.85m in depth. The most significant remains exposed were short lengths of a sandstone ashlar wall in Trenches 1 and 2, a lias rubble wall or foundation in Trench 2, and several features in Trench 5.

The sandstone wall lay parallel to and around 1.40m from the present riverside wall. In Trench 1, the wall was present at 2.14m below the surface, and continued below 2.50m, while in Trench 2 the wall was encountered between 2.45m and 2.85m but extended only part-way across the width of the trench, ending in a fair face indicating a deliberate building break (Plate 1). The lias rubble structure lay parallel to and 2.60m behind the sandstone wall and also stopped short of the north edge of the trench. Both walls were abutted and overlain by deposits of made ground which had been cut by services and sealed by roadstone and tarmac (Fig 3). Similar deposits were encountered in all four trenches, although in Trench 5 several features were found in association with the present bridge. The first comprised a narrow wall represented by a single course of roughly-hewn sandstone blocks which was traced for a short length in the west of the trench, parallel to the angle of the south abutment. The other features comprised a spread of sandstone rubble found beneath the pedestrian underpass of the bridge, which had been cut by a narrow gully on an east-west alignment. All these features were found at around 0.40m below the present ground surface.

At a later date, ten test-pits were excavated to locate buried services (Fig 2). Eight of these test pits were recorded archaeologically, two having been backfilled before observation could take place. The test-pits measured up to 4.40m in length by 1.45m in width, and were on average c1.45m deep. Most of the test pits showed recent made ground in section and plan, although Test-pits 2, 9 and 10 exposed further remains of the sandstone wall identified in Trenches 1 and 2 (Plate 2).

Later groundworks comprised the excavation of a guide trench and piling at close intervals within it. The guide trench extended all the way along Severn Side North and had a width of around 0.90m and a uniform depth of 1.30m (Fig 2). The west-facing section showed successive dumps of small gravels (Plate 3), while the opposite section showed tarmac and roadstone over brown silty sand with common brick rubble (Plate 4).

Piling within the guide trench was undertaken by two rigs working in tandem. The drills brought up relatively large amounts of spoil (Plate 5), and by a combination of periodic observation and liaison with the contractors it was possible to estimate the approximate depths from which deposits of different character had come. The deposits of made ground mentioned above appeared to continue for a further 2.20-2.70m below the level reached by the guide trench (ie to c3.50-4.00m bgs). Beneath this deposit lay around 0.85m of dark greyish brown silty sand from which several sherds of pottery and fragments of tile were recovered (contexts 1300-1303). From the south-east end of the guide trench to a point opposite no. 7 Severn Side North, this deposit appeared to bottom on wood which was brought up in a very fragmentary state, but appeared nonetheless to derive from structural timbers. Beneath the wood, and directly below the dark deposit to the north-west of no. 7 was a thick deposit of orange and grey sandy clay which is interpreted as natural alluvium, and at an indeterminate depth below this, grey and reddish brown sandstone was reached.



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#### 4.1.2 **Dog Lane (and Dog Lane Car Park)**

The initial excavation for the pumping station chamber reduced an area measuring approximately 30m<sup>2</sup> to 1.50 below street level (Fig 4). The deposits exposed in this stage comprised tarmac and hardcore over mid brown silty sand with common small to medium stones and brick fragments (context 1402). On the north side of the trench these deposits overlay finely stratified deposits of brick rubble, crushed sandstone and charcoal that appeared to indicate a former surface or surfaces. In addition, the initial excavation exposed part of the circular steel housing of a 19<sup>th</sup> century pumping station which was known to exist from previous service location work.

Further excavation took place within an open ring of steel shutters that largely obscured the sides of the trench (Plate 6). Rising groundwater within the trench also restricted visibility, despite the use of a pump). Nevertheless, it was possible to ascertain the basic sequence of deposits below 1.50m. This comprised a further 1.0m of made ground with fewer stone and brick inclusions (context 1403), around 0.70m of dark grey sand (context 1405), and finally natural orange sand (context 1405). However, it was also noted that both the lower made ground and the dark grey sand abutted the remains of a stone wall which lay underneath the open south side of the trench (Plate 7). The wall itself (context 1407) which comprised 2-3 courses of squared sandstone blocks with occasional tile fragments between courses; it appeared to enter the trench from the east, and run for approximately 1.50m before ending or returning to the south. On top of the wall, but apparently not extending into the trench was around 0.15m of reddish brown silty sand with frequent tile fragments (context 1406). Unfortunately it was not possible to record the wall or this deposit any further, although a fragment of tile was recovered from between two courses of the wall, and one sherd of pot and another fragment of tile were recovered from the overlying layer.

In addition to the main groundworks along Severn Side North and at the foot of Dog Lane, other groundworks in part of the car park to the west were observed and recorded. Landscaping in the south-west of the area removed recent hardcore and brick rubble to a maximum depth of 1.30m, while a shallower trench excavated to the rear of the houses fronting onto Dog Lane exposed a stable soil profile of dark brown silt loam over light brown clay silt.

#### 4.2 **Artefacts**

##### 4.2.1 **Recovery policy**

All artefacts were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

##### 4.2.2 **Methods**

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. Artefacts were identified, quantified, dated and recorded on a Microsoft Access 97 database. A *terminus post quem* (baseline date) was produced for each stratified context.

Pottery was examined and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

##### 4.2.3 **Analysis**

The artefacts were retrieved during trenching and piling along Severn Side North (contexts 100, 200, 1300, 1301, 1302 and 1303) and during excavations at the foot of Dog Lane (1400, 1403, 1406 and 1407).

The material retrieved was dated to the Roman, medieval, post-medieval and modern periods. The largest groups of finds were pottery, tile and brick. Other material recovered included glass, sewer pipe, lead, iron and slag, all probably post-medieval or modern in date. There was also a piece of worked waterlogged wood (from context 1302).

#### *Pottery*

The pottery was mostly modern stone china (fabric 85) and a small number of sherds of post-medieval redware and stoneware. One sherd of medieval pottery (oxidised glazed Malvernian ware, fabric 69) was recovered from context 1300, although post-medieval clay pipe and 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century tile were also recovered from this context.

#### *Tile*

Most of the tile was of a long-lived type dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or modern. There was one piece of Roman tile, which was the only artefact of Roman date from the site, (from context 1303). The tile had obvious wear marks on one edge and two large (about 2cm across) iron inclusions inserted into the underside. If the inclusions were natural then they should have been removed before the tile was fired. It is therefore suggested that the tile was re-used although, when and as what, is unknown (Laura Griffin, pers comm). The tile from context 1407 (a wall) is of the 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century type.

#### *Brick*

The brick was post-medieval and modern in date.

#### *Stone*

A fragment of dressed stone from 1402 had been sawn but also has linear wear marks on one surface suggesting the stone may have been re-used to sharpen needles (Derek Hurst, pers comm).

#### 4.2.4 **Dating**

A *terminus post quem* date was obtained for the following contexts; 1402 and 1406 (modern); 100, 200 and 1300-1303 (post-medieval) and 1407 (13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century).

#### 4.2.5 **Significance**

Although the material recovered is not on the whole unusual, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about possible activities carried out in the area, as the contexts are not necessarily related to each other and individual contexts did not contain a large amount of material.

### 5. **Discussion**

The limited windows provided by the various groundworks present obvious problems of interpretation. However, it is still possible to offer a number of interpretations which are consistent with the evidence from the watching brief and with other sources of information.

In the first place, it is likely that the deeper made ground observed along Severn Side North once abutted the earlier quayside wall identified in several of the trenches. In addition, it appears that the same deposits overlay an earlier timber structure, which by association with the remains recorded on Severn Side South probably represents the remains of a medieval quay. A four-stage model for the development of the quayside at this point can therefore be proposed. Before the medieval period, it can be assumed that the riverside was essentially natural in appearance, with gently shelving banks on which boats could moor in favourable

conditions. This arrangement appears to have served until the medieval period (possibly the 15<sup>th</sup> century), when the riverside became a quayside proper with the construction of a continuous wooden structure, and infilling of the area behind. This would have provided a more formal landing stage, and allowed boats with deeper draughts to moor alongside; it may also have acted as a flood prevention measure, by channelling excess water downstream. It appears that the medieval quay was maintained well into the post-medieval period when a stone wall was built further out into the river, and the land behind levelled up, in what may have been an attempt to increase the area of the quayside. This wall can be associated with the ragged, slightly curving structure shown on a 19<sup>th</sup> century photograph (Plate 8; Jeremiah 1998). Thereafter, perhaps in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the quayside was redeveloped once again, with another retaining wall being built still further out into the river: this is the wall which was identified in short lengths in Trenches 1 and 2, and in Test-pits 2, 9 and 10. The gap in this wall identified between Test-pits 2 and 10 may be associated with a flight of steps leading down to the river shown on a photograph taken in 1914 (Plate 9, Jeremiah 1998). Finally, at some point in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the present riverside wall was built and surmounted with metal railings, suggesting that area had by then ceased to function as a viable landing stage. The only remains along the quayside which cannot readily be fitted into this model comprise the lias rubble wall or foundation found near the centre of Trench 2, and the features found adjacent to, and underneath the east underpass of the present bridge. It is possible that the former structure may have been associated with the medieval timber quay, as it lies close behind the line which this is assumed to have followed, although it may also relate to an intermediate, post-medieval quayside wall. The sandstone wall adjacent to the southern bridge abutment, and the features beneath the east underpass are less readily interpreted. As with the remains found beneath the west underpass in 1991, it is likely that they relate to the foundations of the west abutment, although it is possible that they are associated with one of the row of buildings that is known to have closed off the end of Load Street prior to the construction of the present bridge (Worcs Record Office BA 4600, parcel 1063, ref 705.550). In view of their relatively shallow depth, it is highly unlikely that they represent the foundations of a medieval bridge.

Secondly, it is possible that the wall found in the trench for the pumping station at the foot of Dog Lane is of considerable antiquity, and might relate to an earlier arrangement of tenements and buildings in the area. The depth of the wall, at around 2.5m below the present surface (and 1.0m below the presumed 19<sup>th</sup> century ground level) provides a crude indication of its date, while a fragment of tile from the wall itself is of a type conventionally dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These evidences are not in themselves conclusive of an early date, as ground levels in the area have obviously changed significantly, and the tile from the wall may be residual; moreover, the layer immediately above the wall produced sherds of modern pottery and post-medieval tile. However, the location of the wall in the middle of the road, and the lack of any apparent relationship with the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century building immediately adjacent argues most strongly for an earlier date. The road is also in the same position as it occupied in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the building is likely to have replaced an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century building, occupying the north-west end of a continuous frontage. It is therefore possible that the wall is of pre-18<sup>th</sup> century date, and associated with an earlier frontage, or arrangement of buildings along the quayside. If this were the case, then the wall would date to a period before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as the line of the present frontage appears to have been established by then (DoE 1986).

Lastly, it is likely that the fragment of Roman tile brought up by piling along Severn Side North is the first material of this period to be found in Bewdley, and it may be taken to indicate the presence of associated remains. Small quantities of Roman artefacts have been found to the north-west of Wribbenhall (Buteux 1996, 4), and in the grounds of Tickenhill Manor (WSM 3723), and these provide a general context for activity in the area during this period, and several settlements of Roman date have been excavated further afield. These remains provide a context for activity at Bewdley, but hitherto nothing has been found within the limits of the town itself. Regarding the potential significance of the tile, it must be acknowledged that it was recovered from a later levelling deposit, composed of materials which had originally accumulated elsewhere. However, it is nonetheless likely that the

materials were obtained from the immediate area, and that the tile is a reliable indicator of Roman activity in the vicinity. In addition, it may be significant that this Roman activity should be represented by a fragment of tile, rather than a sherd of pottery: the former may reasonably be associated with buildings and occupation, while the latter may reflect merely a chance loss, or manuring with midden material. At present, the evidence is too slight to confirm the presence of a settlement, although it is likely that it indicates the presence of further buried remains.

## 6. **Research frameworks**

The CMHTS report on Bewdley and Wribbenhall provides the main research framework for the results of the watching brief. As discussed above, the results provide useful additions to the existing framework, and should inform future planning decisions and archaeological projects. In particular, the model proposed for the development of the quayside may be tested elsewhere along its length, while the wall at the foot of Dog Lane may have implications for the chronology of urban development in the area. The Roman tile from Severn Side North also suggests a new dimension to the archaeology of Bewdley, which future work may be able to investigate more thoroughly than was possible in the scope of the present project.

## 7. **Publication summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on groundworks associated with the Bewdley Flood Alleviation Scheme (SO 786755; WSM 31563). Observations were made during, trenching, test-pitting and piling associated with the construction of flood defences along Severn Side North, and throughout the excavation of a chamber for a pumping station at the foot of Dog Lane. Archaeological deposits were identified during each set of groundworks, and a small assemblage of artefacts was recovered. The fieldwork records and finds were analysed along with information from previous fieldwork, and from historic maps and documentary sources.*

*The earliest remains identified along Severn Side North were fragments of timbers which were brought up by piling from a depth of around 4m below the present ground surface. By association with intact timbers found in a similar context on Severn Side South, the fragments are thought to represent part of a medieval quay. The timbers were overlain by a reworked deposit which appears to have been dumped against a late 19<sup>th</sup> century wall built further out into the river, remains of which were identified in several trenches and test pits. In addition to these features, several undated structural remains were found adjacent to, and underneath the present bridge. These features may be associated with the construction of the present bridge in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, or with earlier buildings which are known to have stood in the area before this time. The latest deposits comprised made ground and surfaces abutting the present riverside wall.*

*The excavations at the foot of Dog Lane exposed a sequence of post-medieval deposits and features, the earliest of which was a stone wall on an east-west alignment. Analysis of historic maps suggests that this wall pre-dates the present arrangement of houses and properties which is likely to be of 18<sup>th</sup> century origin. The wall was butted and overlain by a succession of dumped deposits, which were in turn cut by a chamber for 19<sup>th</sup> century pumping station. The well-preserved remains of this installation lay just beneath the present road surface.*

*Taken together, the evidence indicates aspects of the development of the quayside from the later medieval period onwards. In particular, the timber quay along Severn Side North and its later replacements in stone testify to the continued maintenance of an extensive wharf, which is likely to have been central to the town's prosperity as an inland port and market town. The stone wall at the foot of Dog Lane is also of some interest in suggesting the existence of an earlier townscape. Finally, the single fragment of Roman tile provides the first*

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*indication of occupation in the area of the town during this period, and may indicate the presence of significant deposits in the vicinity.*

## 8. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 24 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 1 Context Number catalogue AS5
- 15 Trench Record sheets AS 41
- 5 Abbreviated Context Records AS40
- 7 Photographic records AS3
- 7 Colour slide films
- 7 Black and white photographic films
- 8 Scale drawings
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum

Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury

Near Kidderminster

Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

## 9. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank Simon Murray (Halcrow UK Ltd), and Peter Dunnion and Julian Mitchell (Birse) for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project.

## 10. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Darren Miller. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Woodiwiss. Fieldwork was undertaken by Neil Lockett, Darren Miller, Tom Vaughn and James Goad. The finds were analysed and reported on by Erica Darch, and the illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt.

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*Plate 1: Top of former quayside wall exposed in test-pit 10*



*Plate 2: Break in former quayside wall exposed in test-pit 2*

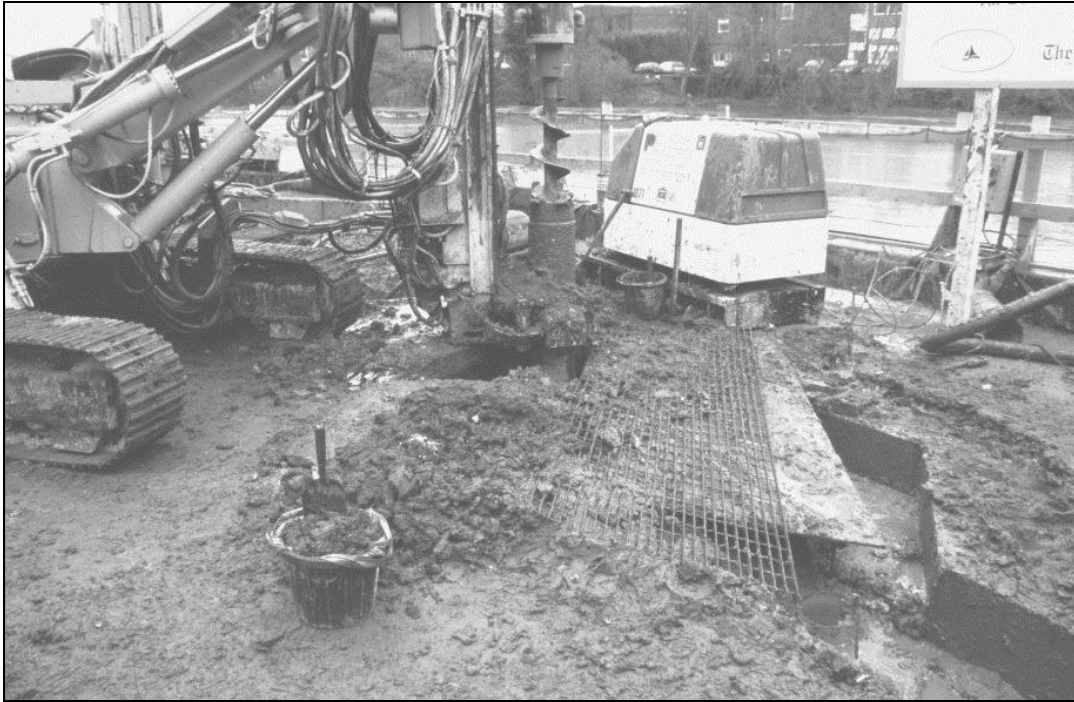


*Plate 3: General view of guide trench showing dumped gravels in west-facing section*



*Plate 4: Made ground exposed in east-facing section of guide trench*





*Plate 5: Piling in progress*



*Plate 6: Deep excavations at foot of Dog Lane*



*Plate 7: Location of stone wall beneath open south side of shuttering*