

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT MERCHANT'S QUAY, THE DOCKS, GLOUCESTER

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With contributions by Angus Crawford

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Merchant's Quay, The Docks, Gloucester (NGR SO 82759 18332), on behalf of Vinci Construction Ltd. The client intends to redevelop the site for residential use in the form of flats and has submitted a planning application to Gloucester City Council. The project was undertaken to observe and record archaeological deposits exposed during the initial remediation works.

Nine trenches were observed. These revealed mixed post-medieval and modern demolition deposits and hardcore with frequent service trenches directly overlying the natural alluvial clays and sands, which contained hydrocarbon contamination.

No significant archaeological features, layers, structures or horizons were observed. Any dockyard features relating to the 18th and 19th century development of the area appear to have been scoured out during construction of the former shopping centre in the later 20th century, which removed earlier deposits down to the natural alluvial clays.

A small number of Roman and early medieval artefacts were recovered. They were all found within the upper horizons of the natural alluvial clay along with later material, suggesting that they are intrusive and representative of general discard into the River Severn. However the finds were generally unabraded, indicating that they cannot have moved far from their original place of deposition. This is not unexpected given the evidence for both Roman and medieval activity adjacent to the north.

The later 19th and 20th century finds can reasonably be supposed to have come from later intrusive activity into the alluvial clay when the dockyard was developed, associated service trenches and subsequent demolition took place on the site. The earlier material may have been imported onto the site at this time.

The presence of peaty alluvial clays indicates that the site has been subject to flooding and waterlogging through a long, albeit, indeterminate time. However, as there was no indication of any stratification or defined palaeochannels within the deposit, which was contaminated by hydrocarbons, the potential for meaningful palaeoenvironmental analysis was considered to be minimal.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Planning background

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Merchant's Quay, Gloucester Docks, Gloucester (NGR SO 82759 18332; Fig 1), on behalf of Vinci Construction Ltd. The client intends to demolish the existing Merchant's Quay Shopping Centre and redevelop the site for residential use with 48 flats for which a planning application has been submitted to Gloucester City Council (ref. 09/00585/FUL).

The proposed development site is considered to include a heritage asset with archaeological interest, the significance of which may be affected by the application

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a) and to a generic brief agreed with the Heritage Services Manager of Gloucester City Council (the Curator), for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2010).

2. Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record any archaeological deposits exposed during the groundworks and to determine the extent, state of preservation, date and type of these deposits as far as reasonably possible.

More specifically, it was indicated by the Curator that significant deposits likely to be encountered would be of a post-medieval and later date, particularly wharfs and warehouse buildings associated with the 18th century development of the dockyard area.

3. Methods

3.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of Gloucester City Historic Environment Record (HER).

In addition to this, a number of cartographic sources were examined that show the later 19th and 20th century development of the site and the surrounding dockyard buildings.

3.2 Fieldwork methodology

3.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2010). Fieldwork was undertaken on the 19 and 20 October 2010. A site reference number has not yet been assigned.

The excavation of nine trenches to varying depths was monitored. The trenches amounted to just over 141m² in area. Within the site area of approximately 1540m², this represents an observed sample of 9% (Fig 2). The works were undertaken to determine the extent of hydrocarbon contamination on site. For example, Trench 6 was extended to the north-west in order to discover the source of a quantity of diesel that was flowing from a disused service pipe trench.

Observation and recording of archaeological deposits was undertaken during and after machine excavation and was restricted to areas of ground disturbance associated with, and following the progress of the external contractors. Access into trenches was not made and all had to be recorded from above due to health and safety issues arising from the trench depths and stability of the sides. They were backfilled immediately after recording had taken place. The exposed sections were sufficiently clean and the deposits were well-defined, allowing clear observation, although any small deposits may not have been identified.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995) and artefacts were recovered in order to determine their date and nature.

3.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.3 **Artefact methodology by Angus Crawford**

3.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

All artefacts recovered were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the Service manual (CAS 1995; appendix 2), although due to the lack of access into the trenches this had to be achieved by searching the spoil heaps in order to provide a sample of the material from each deposit.

3.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context where possible. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992; Hurst 1994; and www.worcestershireceramics.org).

3.4 **Environmental archaeology methodology**

3.4.1 **Sampling policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4). In the event, no deposits or horizons were identified which were considered suitable for environmental analysis and neither were they accessible, so no samples were taken.

3.5 **Statement of confidence in the methods and results**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved, although it must be noted that two trenches had been excavated and backfilled in the western corner of the area before arrival of an archaeologist on site. There remains the possibility that archaeological features and deposits may have existed in this area that were not observed. The recovery of finds from spoil heaps due to lack of access is obviously not ideal, but every care was taken to make sure that finds were attributed to the correct deposit.

4. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site is located to the south-west of Gloucester city centre and the cathedral, within the historic dockyard conservation area. Whilst this is now predominantly utilised for shopping, visitor attractions and office space, this was formerly a thriving industrial-era basin and canal terminus. Accessed from Commercial Road, the site is on the east side of the Main Basin of the docks. Until recently it was the site of Merchant's Quay Shopping Centre.

The solid geology predominantly consists of Lower Lias clay of the Jurassic period (Green 1992) and the dockyard area is known to be on the alluvial floodplain of the River Severn (MoLAS 2007, 4).

HER information indicates that the broader area around the site has been previously subject to a number of archaeological investigations including excavations, evaluations and watching briefs. These have uncovered evidence of activity from the Iron Age to the post-medieval period, ranging from stray pottery and coins to floor surfaces, walls and the dockyard railway, although none have been conducted in the immediate vicinity of the site itself.

Burials of Roman date were uncovered during construction of Victoria Dock to the south-east in the 19th century (MoLAS 2007, 7), while another Roman inhumation has also been recovered nearby (Atkin and Garrod 1990, 190), indicating that a cemetery may have existed adjacent to an extra-mural suburb south of the main Roman settlement of *Glevum* (MoLAS 2007, 12). The medieval focus of activity seems to have been further to the north, particularly in the earlier medieval period, although the southward extent of medieval occupation has not been precisely determined (Baker and Holt 2004, 94-95). There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments approximately 160m to the north of the site; an area of the Roman *colonia* and Blackfriars Priory (HER ref. 330 and 116; MoLAS 2007, 2).

Civil War remains have been identified just to the north-east of the site. The city defences from this period crossed the northern part of the dockyard area (MoLAS 2007, 8). The defensive ditch was examined in two excavations in the 1980's at Southgate Street (*ibid*), whilst evidence for the 18th century Royal Infirmary was also found in this vicinity (Atkin and Garrod 1990, 185).

The major activity at the Merchant's Quay site has obviously been the development of the docks with associated buildings in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Main Basin was built between 1794 and 1799. The docks opened in 1812 and following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 Gloucester became the main corn trading port in the south-west of the country (Conway-Jones 1978, 13). This expansion of imports necessitated the building of the Victoria Dock (opened in 1849) and new warehouses, east of the Main Basin (MoLAS 2007, 9). The dockyards now contain 32 Grade II listed buildings (MoLAS 2007, 2), including Phillpott's warehouse which forms the northern boundary of the Merchant's Quay site (Fig 2).

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884 indicates the site to have been occupied by one long narrow building, divided into two, along the north-east side, mooring posts and rail tracks around the dock walls to the north-west and south-west, and a crane on the north-west side. Two adjacent buildings had been constructed along the south-west side by 1902. These were most probably warehouses of a similar style and layout as the extant warehouses surrounding the site. Infilling occurred sporadically through the 20th century and the crane appears to have remained until at least 1955. Merchant's Quay Shopping Centre is understood to have been built in the latter half of the 1980s (pers comm. Mike Quinn), which would have necessitated the demolition of the warehouses.

5. Results

5.1 Structural analysis

The trench locations are shown in Figure 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Two layers of natural deposits were identified. The lower of these comprised light grey fine sand with occasional orangey grey patches and was loose in consistency.

This was not observed in all trenches due to their variable depths. Where visible it lay at between 2.30-2.60m below the current ground surface across the site.

The upper natural deposit was identified in all trenches. It consisted of peaty alluvial clay, dark grey black in colour with occasional intrusive pottery and bone fragments, ceramic pipe and floor tiles, as well as general building debris. It was contaminated with diesel and was cut through by frequent modern services. It was visible at varying depths across the site, ranging from 0.76-1.30m below the ground surface. There was no indication of distinct horizons or palaeochannels within the deposit.

No extant stratigraphic sequence of topsoil and subsoil was recorded.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Modern deposits

No deposits predating the modern period were observed. The natural alluvial clay was directly overlain by modern demolition rubble and occasional concrete foundation bases. This overburden comprised modern brick and concrete rubble, cabling and plastic sheeting, below compacted dumped gravels and sand. In places, this was intrusive within the alluvial clay where service pipe trenches had been cut and was up to 1.30m in depth.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Angus Crawford

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2. The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated trenches consisted of six sherds of pottery weighing 42g. In addition, fragments of tile, brick and animal bone were recovered and could be dated from the Roman period onwards (see Table 1). The level of preservation was good with the majority of sherds displaying negligible levels of abrasion.

Period	Material class	Count	Weight(g)
Roman	ceramic	4	360
late Saxon to early medieval	ceramic	2	52
late post-medieval to modern	ceramic	3	1220
modern	ceramic	1	628
	organic	2	140
totals		12	2400

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

5.2.1 The pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (Table 2). A total of five diagnostic form sherds were present and could be dated accordingly, the remaining sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span. Where mentioned, all specific forms are referenced to the type series within the report for Deansway, Worcester (Bryant 2004) or Webster (1996).

period	fabric code	fabric common name	count	weight (g)
Roman	12	Severn Valley ware	1	34
Roman	42	Amphorae	2	278
Roman	43	Samian ware	1	48
late Saxon to early medieval	57	Cotswolds unglazed ware	2	52

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by period and fabric-type

Roman

Four sherds of Roman pottery were present within the assemblage. All sherds were well preserved with three specific forms being identified. Of these, two were identified as amphorae sherds (probably of Dressel type 20 form) dating from the mid 1st to late 3rd century (fabric 42; context 101). A partial Samian vessel base (fabric 43, context 101) was from a Dragendorff type 27 cup, with illegible stamp, dated from the 1st to mid 2nd century (Webster, 1996).

The remaining sherd of Roman pottery was an undiagnostic oxidised Severn Valley Ware sherd of mid 1st to 4th century date (fabric 12; context 101). The pale orange micaceous fabric suggested a local Gloucestershire kiln source.

Late Saxon-early medieval

Two sherds were identified as Cotswold unglazed ware (fabric 57, contexts 101 and 401). Both were rim sherds from rounded jars (Deansway type 57.2) with tall everted and thickened rims. Both sherds were dated to a type production span of late 9th to early 12th century.

5.2.2 Other artefacts

Brick and tile

The single retrieved brick fragment (context 701) was of distinct modern production and therefore generally dated to the 20th century. A complete wall/floor tile could be identified as Platts manufacture (Staffordshire) which are broadly dated from the late 19th to 20th century (context 401). Two further fragments of tile were also identified to the same manufacturer and date range (contexts 701 and 801).

Organic remains

Two fragments of animal bone were present within the assemblage (contexts 101 and 701) and were identified as fragments of sheep and cattle bone respectively.

5.2.3 Overview of artefactual evidence

context	material class	object specific type	count	Weight (g)	start date	end date	context <i>terminus post quem</i> date
101	organic	animal bone	1	6	0	0	Late 9 th to 12 th century
101	ceramic	pottery	1	48	43	150	
101	ceramic	pottery	2	278	43	275	
101	ceramic	pottery	1	36	900	1200	
101	ceramic	pottery	1	34	43	400	
401	ceramic	tile	1	982	1875	2000	Late 19 th to 20 th century
401	ceramic	pottery	1	16	900	1200	
701	organic	animal bone	1	134	-	-	Late 19 th to 20 th century
701	ceramic	brick	1	628	1901	2000	
701	ceramic	tile	1	122	1875	2000	
801	ceramic	tile	1	116	1875	2000	Late 19 th to 20 th century

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

The Merchant's Quay finds assemblage is indicative of general discard over the last 2,000 years. While of limited archaeological significance the artefacts are well preserved examples of material culture during the Roman and late Saxon to early medieval period in Gloucester.

6. Synthesis

No significant archaeological features, layers, structures or horizons were observed. Any dockyard features relating to the 18th and 19th century development of the area appear to have been scoured out during construction of the former shopping centre in the later 20th century, which removed earlier deposits down to the natural alluvial clays.

A small number of Roman and early medieval artefacts were recovered. They were all found within the upper horizons of the natural alluvial clay along with later material, suggesting that they are intrusive and representative of general discard into the River Severn. However the finds were generally unabraded, indicating that they cannot have moved far from their original place of deposition. This is not unexpected given the evidence for both Roman and medieval activity adjacent to the north.

The later 19th and 20th century finds can reasonably be supposed to have come from later intrusive activity into the alluvial clay when the dockyard was developed, associated service trenches and subsequent demolition took place on the site. The earlier material may have been imported onto the site at this time.

The presence of peaty alluvial clays indicates that the site has been subject to flooding and waterlogging through a long, albeit indeterminate, time. However, as there was no indication of any stratification or defined palaeochannels within the deposit, which was contaminated by hydrocarbons, the potential for meaningful palaeoenvironmental analysis was considered to be minimal.

7. 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.

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8. Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: Mike Quinn (Vinci Construction Ltd), Jonathan Smith (Heritage Services Manager, Gloucester City Council), and Phil Greatorex (Historic Environment Record Officer, Gloucester City Council).

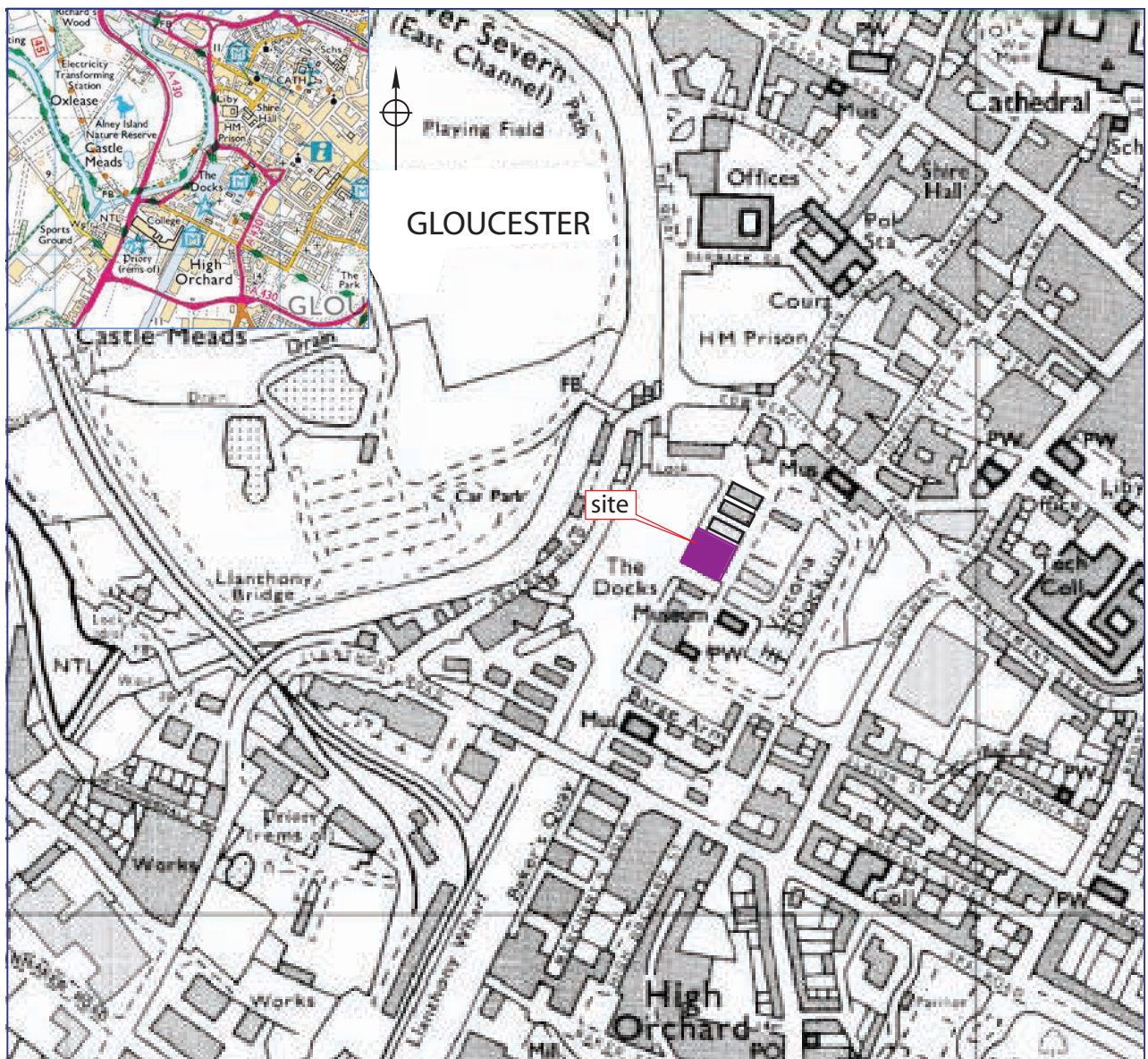
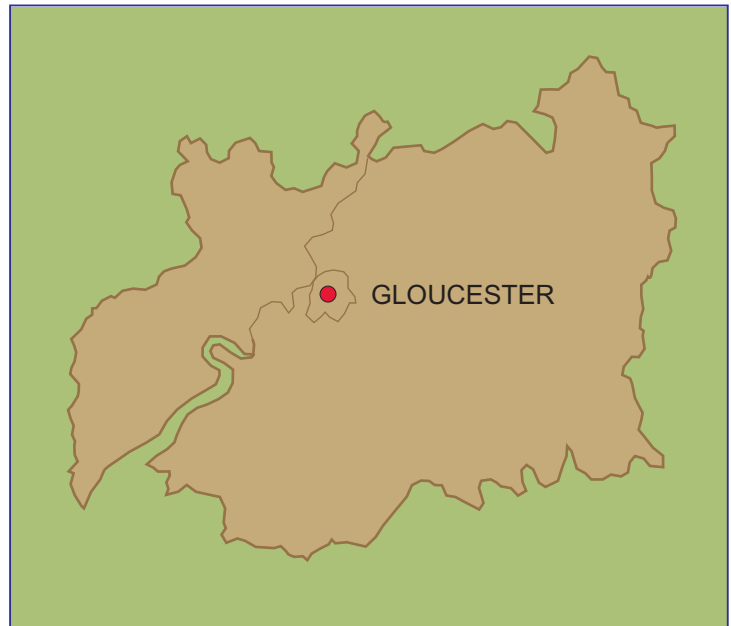
9. Personnel

The fieldwork was undertaken by Tom Vaughan and Richard Bradley. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan. Finds analysis was undertaken by Angus Crawford and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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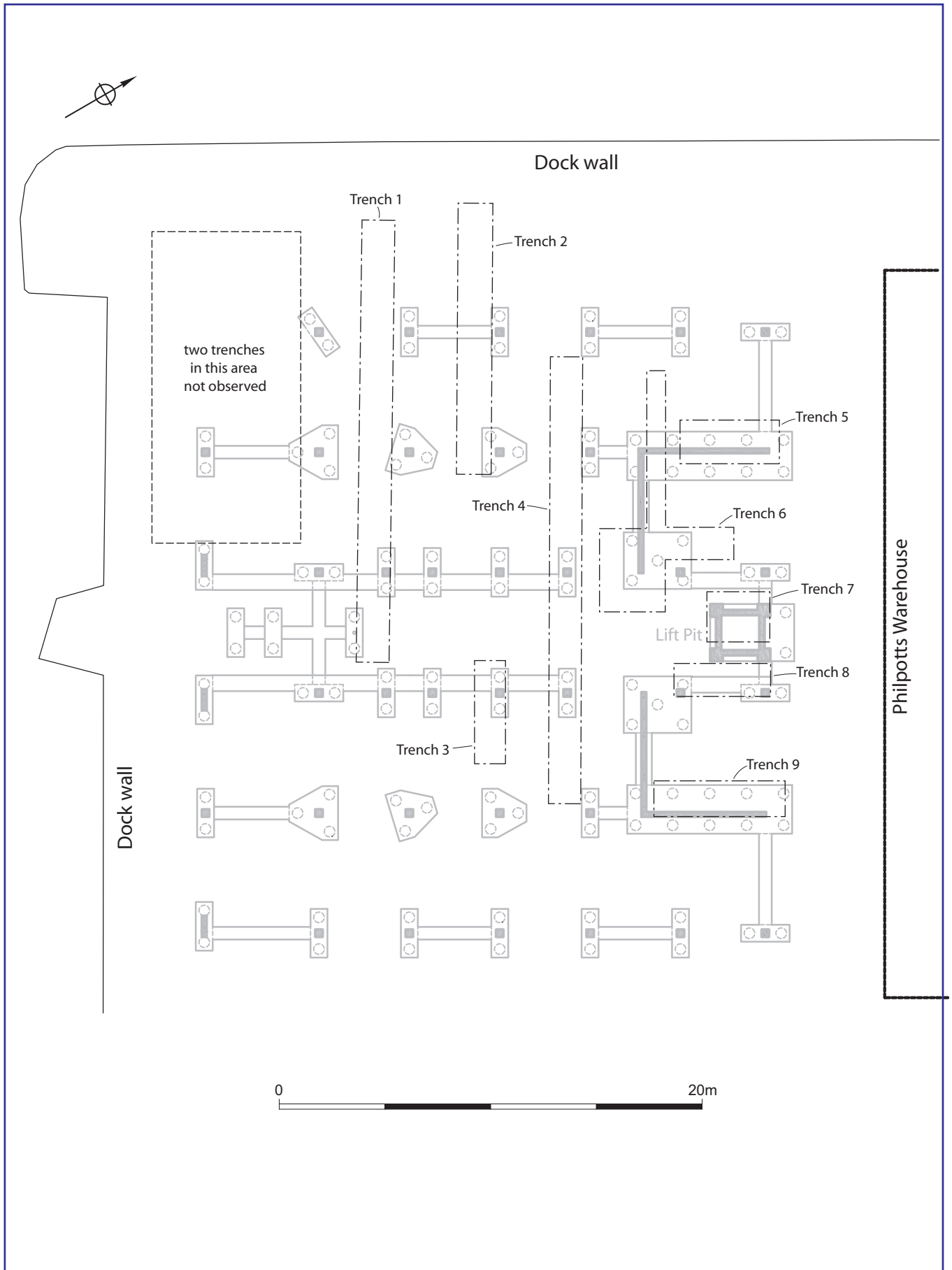
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



Location of trenches (based on Arup Dwg F02)

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1, General east view of the site, with Philpott's warehouse to the left



Plate 2, General north-west view of the site, with the Main Basin in the background



Plate 3, Trench 1 during machining, view south-east



Plate 4, Trench 2 section at north-west end of the trench, view south-west



Plate 5, Trench 3 sample section, view north-east



Plate 6, Trench 7 section, view south-east

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 21m Width: 1.50m Depth: 2.80m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel. Loose and un-cohesive, cut by frequent services and contains patches of medium orange yellow pea gravel. Includes brick and concrete rubble, iron rods and blue plastic.	0.00-0.90m
101	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, becoming sandier with depth. Cut by occasional services, contains occasional bricks and residual bone and pottery fragments. Highly contaminated with diesel.	0.90-2.34m
102	Natural sand	Light grey fine sand with occasional orange grey patches. Loose throughout.	2.34m+

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 12.8m Width: 1.60m Depth: 2.60m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel. Loose and un-cohesive, cut by frequent services and contains patches of alluvial clay - probably disturbed remains of layer (201) when services put in. Includes brick and concrete rubble, iron rods and blue plastic.	0.00-1.30m
201	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay. Cut by occasional services, contains occasional bricks and residual pottery fragments. Highly contaminated with diesel.	1.30-2.60m
202	Natural sand	Light grey fine sand, becomes waterlogged with depth. Loose throughout.	2.60m+

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 4.90m Width: 1.60m Depth: 1.80m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel. Loose and un-cohesive, cut by frequent services and contains patches of medium orange yellow pea gravel. Includes brick and concrete rubble, iron rods and blue plastic.	0.00-0.80m
301	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay. Cut by occasional services, contains occasional bricks and pottery fragments. Highly contaminated with diesel. Not fully excavated to natural sands.	0.80-1.80m+

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 21.20m Width: 1.60m Depth: 1.80m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel, as (100). Contains frequent modern rubble, including blue nylon rope. Becomes shallower at south-east end of trench, being a maximum of 0.60m in depth.	0.00-1.20m
401	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, as (101). Includes ceramic service pipes, floor tile, modern CBM and Medieval pottery fragments. Contaminated with diesel. Not fully excavated to natural sands.	1.20-1.80m+

Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 4.80m Width: 2.10m Depth: 1.80m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
500	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel, as (100). Contains frequent modern rubble, including blue plastic sheeting.	0.00-1.00m
501	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, as (101). Cut by occasional service pipes. Contaminated with diesel, not fully excavated to natural sands.	1.00-1.80m+

Trench 6

Maximum dimensions: Length: 11.60m Width: 6.50m Depth: 1.90m

Orientation: NE-SW + NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
600	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel, loose, as (100). Contains frequent modern rubble, including concrete and plastic.	0.00-0.80m
601	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, as (101). Cut by occasional service pipes. Heavily contaminated with diesel, not fully excavated to natural sands.	0.80-1.90m+

Trench 7

Maximum dimensions: Length: 3m Width: 2.30m Depth: 2.30m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
700	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel, as (100). Contains some cabling, plastic and general demolition rubble.	0.00-1.30m
701	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, as (101). Contains general CBM, plastic piping and assorted 19 th /20 th century detritus	1.30-2.30m
702	Natural sand	Light blue grey sand, becomes waterlogged with depth. Loose throughout.	2.30m+

Trench 8

Maximum dimensions: Length: 4.50m Width: 1.50m Depth: 1.80m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
800	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel, loose, as (100). Contains frequent modern rubble and services.	0.00-1.10m
801	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, as (101). Cut by occasional service pipes. Contaminated with diesel, not fully excavated to natural sands.	1.10-1.80m+

Trench 9

Maximum dimensions: Length: 6.20m Width: 1.70m Depth: 1.40m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
900	Made Ground	Mixed light yellowish brown fine sand and pebble gravel, loose, as (100). Contains frequent modern rubble and services.	0.00-1.10m
901	Natural clay	Dark grey black compact and cohesive peaty alluvial clay, as (101). Cut by occasional service pipes. Contaminated with diesel, not fully excavated to natural sands.	1.10-1.80m+

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

2	Fieldwork progress records AS2
1	Photographic records AS3
54	Digital photographs
1	Drawing number catalogue AS4
9	Trench record sheets AS41
1	Scale drawing
1	Box of finds
1	Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery
Brunswick Road
Gloucester
GL1 1HP

Tel. Gloucester (01452) 396131
