LAND ADJACENT TO THE TAMAR BRIDGE, 
DEVON AND CORNWALL 

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION 

C.A.T JOB: 0769
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GLOSSARY

ARCHAEOLOGY
For the purposes of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains, from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

MEDIEVAL
Taken here as the period from the Norman invasion in AD 1066 to approximately AD 1500.

NATURAL
Defined in archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, e.g. Lower Lias clay, river terrace gravels etc.

NEOLITHIC
A chronological division of the prehistoric period during which agriculture and domesticated animals are introduced to Britain. It is dated between c4500 BC - 2000 BC.

NGR
National Grid Reference given from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD
Ordnance Datum; used to express a given height above mean sea level.

ROMANO-BRITISH
Term used to describe a fusion of indigenous late Iron Age traditions with Roman culture, often abbreviated as ’R-B.’

SMR
Sites and Monument Record.
SUMMARY

In June 1998 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land associated with the proposed strengthening of the Tamar Bridge both in Saltash, Cornwall and Plymouth, Devon (NGR SX 4320 5885 and SX 4385 5870 respectively).

No archaeological features were encountered during the evaluation. Much of the area proved to have been heavily disturbed during construction of the bridge in 1959/60.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In June 1998 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned by CgMs Ltd (Archaeological and Environmental Consultants), on behalf of Hyder Consulting Ltd and Cornwall County Council Transportation and Estates Department, to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land associated with the proposed strengthening of the Tamar Bridge both in Saltash, Cornwall and Plymouth, Devon (NGR SX 4320 5885 and SX 4385 5870 respectively) (Fig. 1).

1.1.2 The fieldwork was undertaken in compliance with the Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA); and an evaluation brief the prepared by CgMs Ltd and approved by the respective archaeological officers within Plymouth City Council and Cornwall County Council.

1.2 The Study Area (Figs. 2 and 3)

1.2.1 The study area comprises land adjacent to the Tamar bridge abutments on both the Devon and Cornwall sides. Land use on either bank comprises informal grassland currently used as public open space. The underlying geology of the study area comprises Upper Devonian Slates including contemporary igneous intrusions. On either bank, the land slopes steeply down to a narrow crossing point of the Tamar.

1.3 Archaeological Background

1.3.1 An assessment of readily available archaeological and historical records was undertaken by CgMs Ltd during the compilation of the specification for field evaluation (Hunter 1998).
1.3.2 The assessment established that a number of prehistoric and Romano-British artefacts, including a Neolithic polished stone axe and a Romano-British coin have been recovered from the general area, although none specifically from the study area itself.

1.3.3 Anglo-Saxon settlement is attested to the west of the modern town of Saltash. Saltash itself was founded in the twelfth century, as the first of a series of ports along the Tamar estuary, and attained borough status later in the same century. The importance of Saltash declined in the post-medieval period, due largely to the growth of Plymouth (Sheppard n.d.).

1.3.4 The Tamar bridge was completed in 1961. Photographs taken during its construction testify to a considerable amount of demolition and clearance prior to bridge construction.

1.3.5 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken within the study area during the construction of an access road beneath the bridge (Fig. 3). It identified features and deposits associated with post-medieval buildings that had previously fronted Fore Street, Saltash and which had been demolished prior to the construction of the road bridge (Hunter 1997).

1.4 Archaeological Specification

1.4.1 A project design was issued by CAT in accordance with the archaeological specification issued by CgMs.

1.4.2 The objective of the archaeological evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, preservation, character, and date of any sub-surface features.

1.4.3 The archaeological specification originally proposed the excavation of 14 evaluation trenches, but following discussion with the archaeological curators it was agreed only 12 trenches were necessary. The 10 evaluation trenches
and 2 test-pits were excavated by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. All machining was carried out under archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological deposit, or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. In the event that significant deposits of modern overburden were encountered, the trenches were to be excavated to a minimum depth of 1m. This depth was the maximum limit of disturbance which construction works associated with the strengthening were likely to penetrate.

1.4.4 All artefacts recovered were catalogued and analysed in accordance with CAT Technical Manual 3 Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation (1995). Particular emphasis was given to potentially datable artefacts such as pottery. A full written, drawn and photographic record was kept during the programme of works.

1.4.5 The finds and site archive will, subject to agreement with the legal landowner, be deposited with an appropriate museum. It has been agreed by Plymouth and Truro museums that rather than split the archive, the whole paper and finds archive will be deposited in Plymouth.

2. EVALUATION RESULTS

2.1 General

2.1.1 A description of all trenches is presented within this section. Tabulated data including datum heights for all deposits is contained within Appendix 1.

2.2 Plymouth site (Fig.2)

2.2.1 Five 10m by 1.5m trenches were excavated at the eastern end of the bridge. Four trenches were sited within the informal parkland, the remaining trench
being positioned below the bridge. The site sloped markedly from east to west. No archaeological features were encountered during the evaluation trenching.

Trench 1

2.2.2 Trench 1 lay beneath the bridge, close to the existing abutments. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.1m. A modern topsoil horizon (101) sealed a sand and gravel consolidation deposit (102) associated with the bridge construction.

Trench 2

2.2.3 Trench 2 was positioned at the north-western limit of the landscaped parkland. The natural substrate (204) was identified throughout the trench, rising gently from west to east. At the western limit of the trench it was revealed 0.57m below the existing ground surface, and was sealed by 0.13m of red-brown silty clay, (203), interpreted as a remnant of the original land surface. At the eastern extent of the trench the natural substrate had been truncated, presumably during groundworkings associated with the bridge construction, and was sealed by post-construction debris associated with the landscaping of the parkland.

Trench 3

2.2.4 Trench 3 was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m. Densely consolidated rubble (302) was revealed throughout the trench.

Trench 4

2.2.5 Trench 4 lay near the western limit of the study area. The natural substrate was revealed at a depth of 1.3m below the existing ground surface, sealed by 0.43m of red-brown silty clay, (403), similar in composition to deposit (203) in trench 2, and again interpreted as the original land surface. This deposit was in turn overlain by 0.95m of modern overburden (402), from which a large quantity of oyster and cockle shell was recovered. The latter possibly derived from a previously disturbed, and consequently undated, midden.
Trench 5

2.2.6 Trench 5 was dug adjacent to the existing car parking facilities, close to the top of the landscaped slope. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2m through a dense accumulation of modern overburden. A test-pit was subsequently excavated at the eastern extent of the trench to determine the possible survival and depth of the natural substrate. Natural Devonian slate was revealed at a depth of 2.52m below the existing ground surface, sealed by 0.33m of red-brown silty clay, (503), interpreted as the original land surface. This deposit was in turn sealed by 2.20m of modern stone rubble, derived from the bridge construction.

2.3 Saltash site

2.3.1 Four 10m by 1.5m trenches, one 15m by 1.5m trench and two 2m by 1.5m test-pits were excavated at the western end of the bridge. All trenches were sited within informal parkland. The study area sloped naturally from west to east, with evidence for major landscaping works associated with the bridge construction. No archaeological features were encountered.

Trench 6

2.3.2 Trench 6 was located at the western limit of the study area, parallel to Fore Street. The trench totalled 15m in length, although it was excavated in two sections to avoid a live water mains.

2.3.3 The natural substrate (605) was encountered at a depth of 0.45m below the existing ground surface. It was cut by modern water mains [606]. The natural substrate and service trench were both overlain by a sequence of modern levelling horizons (602), (603) and (604), suggesting the area had originally been cleared to the top of the natural substrate during construction works associated with the bridge.

Test-pit 7

2.3.4 Test-pit 7 measured 2m by 1.5m. The natural substrate was revealed at a depth of 0.35m below the existing ground surface, sealed by a thin, 0.03m
deposit of ash and mortar (703), possibly representative of demolition debris associated with the building previously fronting Fore Street. This in turn was overlain by a mid brown clay deposit (702) which formed part of the existing bridge embankment.

**Test-pit 8**

2.3.5 Test-pit 8 measured 2m by 1.5m, and was excavated to a depth of 1m. Densely consolidated rubble within a fine silty clay matrix (802) was encountered throughout the trench.

**Trench 9**

2.3.6 Trench 9 was located below the bridge. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3m. Densely consolidated rubble (902) was revealed throughout the trench.

**Trench 10**

2.3.7 Trench 10 was located beneath the bridge, close to the cliff face at the northeastern limit of the site. A trial test-pit was excavated to a depth of 1.75m at the southern extent of the trench. Redeposited soil horizons, interspersed with thin deposits of rubble, were encountered throughout the trench.

**Trench 11**

2.3.8 Trench 11 was located to the north of the existing bridge embankment. A previously undisturbed silty clay soil horizon (1103), interpreted as a cultivation soil, was revealed at a depth of 0.95m below the existing ground surface. Post-medieval pottery, a clay tobacco pipe and animal bone were retrieved from the deposit. It was sealed by modern rubble associated with landscaping undertaken during and immediately after the construction of the bridge.

**Trench 12**

2.3.9 Trench 12 was located to the north of the bridge embankment. The natural substrate was revealed at a depth of 1.1m below the existing ground surface. It was sealed by 0.6m of previously undisturbed cultivation soil (1203) from
which sherds of post-medieval pottery were retrieved. This in turn was overlain by 0.4m of bridge construction debris within a silty clay matrix (1202). All these deposits were cut by modern pit [1205].

3. ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

3.1 General

3.1.1 Although no archaeological features were encountered during the current programme of works, the evaluation trenching has revealed the extent to which landscaping associated with the bridge’s construction has affected the potential survival of archaeological deposits on either side of the river.

3.2 Plymouth site

3.2.1 Two distinct zones of activity associated with the bridge construction and subsequent landscaping may be identified.

3.2.2 Evidence from trench 1, located beneath the bridge close to the existing abutments, suggests this area underwent wholesale truncation during the construction of the bridge. Consequently the potential survival of archaeological deposits within this area must be identified as low.

3.2.3 Evidence from the remaining trenches sited within the open grassland suggests that localised truncation to the natural substrate has occurred, although in general, the original land surface has survived buried beneath the landscaped parkland. Stratigraphic evidence from the western extent of trench 2, coupled with topographic analysis of the immediate area, suggests the original land surface survives less than 0.3m below current ground levels along the western boundary of the site (see Fig. 2). Along the eastern limit of the site, adjacent to the existing carpark, over 2.2m of modern overburden was revealed within trench 5 sealing the original land surface.
3.2.4 Such evidence suggests that archaeological deposits, if present within the site, would survive largely undisturbed beneath the modern landscaped parkland. However, it should be noted that no evidence of archaeological activity was identified throughout the site either within the original land surface, or cutting the natural substrate.

3.3 Saltash site

3.3.1 The evaluation trenching on the Saltash side has identified a broadly similar depositional history to the Plymouth site, with evidence for the burial of the original land surface, notably to the north of the bridge.

3.3.2 At the western limit of the study area, where the bridge meets the natural slope of the land, the stratigraphic evidence retrieved from trenches 6, 7 and 12 suggests that only a limited quantity of modern overburden is present. To the south of the bridge, within trenches 6 and 7, the natural substrate was revealed at depths of 0.45 and 0.36m below the present ground surface respectively. However, it is worth noting that modern deposits associated with the subsequent landscaping of the immediate area immediately seal the natural Devonian slate. Such evidence suggests this general area underwent wholesale clearance after the demolition of the properties which previously fronted Fore Street. This is further confirmed by a series of photographs supplied by Hyder which show the area during bridge construction in 1959/60.

3.2.3 To the north of the bridge within trenches 11 and 12 a garden cultivation soil was revealed beneath 0.85m and 0.5m of modern overburden respectively. The survival of this soil horizon, which pre-dates the construction of the bridge and contained post-medieval pottery, suggests that archaeological deposits, if present within this area, would survive largely undisturbed. However, it must be reiterated that no archaeological features were identified either cutting the cultivation soil identified within trenches 11 and 12, nor the underlying natural substrate revealed within trench 12.
3.2.4 At the eastern limit of the site, the original land surface may be expected to survive close to or even form the current ground level (see Fig. 3)

3.4 Effectiveness of the Evaluation Strategy

3.4.1 The evaluation has succeeded in characterising the impact of the bridge construction upon the archaeological potential of the study area. The trenching identified the original land surface and/or the natural substrate within six of the twelve excavated trenches. The lack of archaeological deposits within these deposits suggests that the study area must be considered to be of low archaeological potential.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cotswold Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mr Jim Hunter (CgMs Ltd); Mr Keith Ray (Archaeological Officer, Plymouth City Council); Mr Steve Hartgroves (Principal Archaeologist (Planning and SMR), Cornwall County Council); Mr Andy Heap (Hyder Environmental), Mr Mike Leather (Plymouth City Council) and Mr Tim Wood (Cornwall County Council) for their assistance during the course of this project.

The fieldwork was carried out Cliff Bateman, Mark Brett and Tim Havard. The report was written by Cliff Bateman and the illustrations drawn by Rick Morton.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

CAT 1998 Project Design for an Archaeological Evaluation. Tamar Bridge

Hunter, J. 1997 An Archaeological Watching Brief at Tamar Bridge, Fore Street, Saltash, Cornwall. (unpublished client report)

Sheppard, P. nd *Historic Towns of Cornwall*
Figure 1  Location Plan
Figure 2  Trench Locations: Plymouth side
Figure 3  Trench Locations: Saltash side
APPENDIX 1

Tabulated trench description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRENCH</th>
<th>CURRENT GROUND LEVEL</th>
<th>DEPTH OF MODERN OVERBURDEN</th>
<th>TOP OF UNDISTURBED DEPOSITS PRE-DATING BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION</th>
<th>TOP OF NATURAL SUBSTRATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLYMOUTH SIDE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.90m OD</td>
<td>1.10m +</td>
<td>Not established</td>
<td>Not established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30.74m to 32.16m OD</td>
<td>0.34m</td>
<td>30.30m OD</td>
<td>30.17m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36.96m to 37.37m OD</td>
<td>1.10m +</td>
<td>Not established</td>
<td>Not established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>31.91m to 32.14m OD</td>
<td>0.95m</td>
<td>31.40m OD</td>
<td>30.96m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>37.05m to 39.2m OD</td>
<td>2.20m</td>
<td>37.00m OD</td>
<td>36.68m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALTASH SIDE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.13m to 39.26m OD</td>
<td>0.45m</td>
<td>None: fully truncated</td>
<td>36.89m to 38.82m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>34.06m OD</td>
<td>0.36m</td>
<td>None: fully truncated</td>
<td>33.70m OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.25m OD</td>
<td>1.0m +</td>
<td>Not established</td>
<td>Not established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.26m to 21.42m OD</td>
<td>1.2m +</td>
<td>Not established</td>
<td>Not established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.88m to 21.74m OD</td>
<td>1.75m +</td>
<td>Not established</td>
<td>Not established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.95m to 30.27m OD</td>
<td>0.85m</td>
<td>29.43m OD</td>
<td>Not established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>32.90m to 34.22m OD</td>
<td>0.50m</td>
<td>32.40m to 33.75m OD</td>
<td>31.90m to 33.41m OD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

Concordance of Finds

Trench 11
(1108) 9 x post-medieval pottery sherds, 225g
       6 x animal bone fragments, 115g
       1 x clay tobacco pipe, stamped base
       1 x tile fragment, 31g

Trench 12
(1203) 3 x post-medieval pottery sherds, 50g
APPENDIX 3

Archive Components

Site Data
Context Records
Drawing Register
Site Drawings
Levels Register
Photographic Register
Photographs

Finds Data
Context Finds Records
Finds Index by Category

The stratigraphic archive for the site consists of the following elements:

- Context Sheets: 51
- Plans: 5
- Sections: 12
- B&W photos: 64
- Colour slides: 64
- Level Nos: 64
Fig. 3 Trench locations, Saltash