

PORTWAY COMMUNITY SCHOOL BRISTOL

PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

CA PROJECT: 1746
CA REPORT: 05008

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Fig. 1 Site location plan (1:25,000)

Fig. 2 The site, showing location of groundworks (1:1250)

SUMMARY

Site Name:	Portway Community School
Location:	Bristol
NGR:	ST 535 762
Type:	Programme of Archaeological Recording
Date:	Intermittent between 12 July 2004 and 13 January 2005
Planning Reference:	03/04285/F/N
Location of Archive:	Bristol City Museum
Accession no.	2004/16
Site Code:	PCS 04

A programme of archaeological recording was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology during groundworks associated with the development of a new school to replace the existing Potrway community school, Bristol.

Structural remains associated with an army camp dating to the Second World War were uncovered, however no other archaeological remains or artefactual material pre-dating the modern period was recovered.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Between July 2004 and January 2005 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out a programme of archaeological recording for HBG Construction Western Limited (on behalf of Bristol City Council) at Portway community school (centred on NGR: ST 535 762; Fig. 1).
- 1.2 The programme of archaeological recording was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to a planning consent for the construction of a new school to replace the existing Portway community school (Planning ref: 03/04285/F/N). The objective of the programme of archaeological recording was, with the resources available, to preserve by record archaeological deposits within excavations associated with the new development, the presence of which are attested to in section 1.7 below.
- 1.3 The archaeological fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) produced by CA (2004) and approved by Bristol City Council acting on the advice of Bob Jones, Bristol City Archaeologist. The fieldwork also followed the *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999).

The site

- 1.4 The site is located along the ridge of high ground overlooking Shirehampton and the valley of the River Avon. The site drops steeply away to the south, while to the north of the site the ground rises and is bounded by a road (Fig. 2). The site lies at approximately 57m AOD.
- 1.5 The underlying geology of the area is mapped as Lower Limestone shales with the Upper Portishead Beds of Old Red Sandstone bounding the southern end of the site. Both date to the carboniferous period (BGS 1974).
- 1.6 The western half of the site is currently occupied with buildings associated with the existing school, while the rest of the site is used as playing fields.

Archaeological background

- 1.7 Archaeological interest in the site arises from the presence of Palaeolithic and Roman sites and findspots in the vicinity of the site. Various archaeological interventions and assessments are recorded on the Bristol Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and it is not intended to list these here. However, the site has been subject to earlier desk-based assessment and watching brief (SMR 20066 and 20067 respectively). The desk-based assessment identified eleven finds of Palaeolithic artefacts within the area of the playing fields, and concentrations of hand axes 500m to the southeast and southwest of the school. The watching brief recorded only a single undated wall foundation. Evidence from recent geotechnical investigations (by Hyder Consulting – factual report dated 12 May 2003) suggest that the site lies to the north of the terrace 2 gravels, and that the playing fields have been subject to ground disturbance in recent times. This includes the construction in 1942 of military holding barracks, used by the US Army waiting for D-Day. Then later, as a familiarisation stop for American troops being sent into the active European theatre until 1944, when the base was closed down (Thomas 1989, 2002). The buildings were later demolished, prior to construction of the school playing fields. During the geotechnical investigation bedrock was, in places, revealed close to the surface suggesting playing field construction in particular had probably truncated any potential archaeological remains. Therefore, the potential for finding archaeological artefacts and features *in situ* was relatively low, whilst there was higher potential for recovering redeposited artefacts of some intrinsic interest, such as the Palaeolithic hand axes previously recorded in the vicinity.

Methodology

- 1.8 The fieldwork followed the methodology set out within the WSI (CA 2004). An archaeologist was present during intrusive groundworks, comprising ground reduction across the site by bulldozer, excavation of building footings and associated service routes, and the excavation of an attenuation pond. Groundworks observed thus covered the whole of the area outlined in blue on Figure 2. Following discussions with Bob Jones, Bristol City Archaeologist, on 28 January 2005 it was agreed that it was unlikely that intelligible archaeological remains would be

uncovered during the demolition and subsequent landscaping of the existing school buildings and that no further archaeological monitoring would be necessary.

- 1.9 Written, graphic and photographic records were compiled in accordance with the CA Technical Manual 1: *Excavation Recording Manual* (1996).
- 1.10 Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the finds and site archive will be deposited with Bristol City museum under accession number 2004/16.

2. RESULTS (FIGS 2 & 3)

- 2.1 The natural geological substrate 504, consisting of mottled clays, was revealed at the northern extent of the site at an average depth of 0.78m below present ground level. This gradually dips away to a depth of 1m within the centre of the site, while at the southern extent of the excavation no natural substrate was revealed. This was overlain by bands of silt and clay 104, 404, 503 averaging 0.3m in thickness, which were in turn sealed by 0.25m of subsoil and 0.2m of topsoil.
- 2.2 The southern end of the site contained a completely different stratigraphic sequence, where modern dumping had raised the ground level. Dark grey/blue silts and clays with modern building materials were revealed at a depth of 3m below present ground surface overlain by 0.36m of very mixed silts and clays.
- 2.3 Remnants of building footings and pads related to the Second World War army camp were recorded in plan (Fig 2). Three distinctive groupings of concrete piles (A, B, and C) were noted. A single concrete footing pad (D) measured 4.6m in width and 6.4m in length. There were also a number of scattered smaller concrete posts and/or postholes where some of these had been removed previously.
- 2.4 Despite visual scanning of spoil, no artefactual material predating the modern period was recovered.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 The programme of archaeological recording identified foundations of a Second World War military camp, used as a holding barracks for allied troops waiting for D-Day in 1942, then later used by American troops being sent into the European theatre (Thomas 1989). The Ordnance Survey of 1952 suggests that the camp extended beyond the area of remains observed, and contained a moderately complex and closely packed series of buildings. It seems evident, therefore, that the majority of foundation slabs and footings were removed during the construction of the school playing fields.

3.2 The dimensions of the pile layouts recorded (A-C on Figure 2) suggest the buildings were laid out to a general plan used in the construction of such camps, which would accommodate two beds length with a wide central corridor (Thomas 1989). The exposed features suggest that the majority of the buildings (the personnel barracks themselves) were probably built from wood and placed on raised stilts. This method was a fairly common set up within semi-permanent military camps as it stopped vermin and damp problems. Other buildings within the complex, such as stores were again made from wood, but built directly onto concrete footing pads (possibly evidenced by structure D).

3.3 The camp was demolished in the 1950s, during the construction of the school playing fields. The absence of earlier archaeological features may indicate that while Palaeolithic and Romano-British material has been located in the surrounding areas, as attested in 1.7 above, there was no activity on the site. Equally later landscaping during the construction and demolition of the military base and subsequent construction of the school playing fields may have removed evidence of such activity.

4. CA PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken by Jonathan Webster, Nicholas Witchell and Derek Evans. This report was compiled by Jonathan Webster. The illustrations were prepared by Lorna Gray. The archive has been compiled by Jonathan Webster, and prepared for deposition by Ed McSloy. The project was managed for CA by Simon Cox.

5. REFERENCES

BaRAS 1995 *Archaeological Desktop Study of Portway Secondary School, Penpole Lane, Shirehampton, Bristol for Property Services Department, Avon County Council*

CA 2004 *Portway Community School, Bristol; Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

BGS (British Geological Survey) 1974 Sheet 264. *Bristol; Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Solid and Drift Scale 1: 50 000*

OS (Ordnance Survey). 1952 *ST 5377 SE (31/5377SE) Shirehampton Scale 1:1250*

Thomas, E. 1989 *War Story* Burleigh Press Ltd. Bristol

Thomas, E. 2002 *The continuing story of Shirehampton* J.W. Arrowsmith Ltd. Bristol

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

101	Topsoil, Dark orange brown humeric sand, high disturbance of modern material throughout, 0.21m thick.
102	Deposit, Mid orange brown sand and clay mix, moderate quantity of modern material throughout, 0.29m thick.
103	Structure, Modern concrete footing, concrete slabs laid down and surrounded by single course of breezeblock constructed bricks, 4.6m in width, and 6.4m in length.
104	Deposit, mid grey-yellow silty clay, low level of disturbance, 0.21m+ thick.
201	Deposit, Mid grey-pink gravel, 0.3m thick.
202	Deposit, Mid brown-red silty clay, 0.36m thick.
203	Deposit, Dark grey-red clay with light red and grey intrusions throughout. 1.14m+ thick.
301	Deposit, Mid grey-pink gravel, 0.2m thick.
302	Deposit, Dark brown-red with light red and grey intrusions throughout. 1.5m+ thick
401	Topsoil, dark brown sandy-silt, 0.2m thick.
402	Deposit, Mid brown sandy-silt, frequent quantity of modern material throughout, 0.2m thick.
403	Subsoil, Orange sand and clay mix, contains moderate gravel inclusions, 0.35m thick.
404	Deposit, dark purple silty clay, 0.25m thick.
405	Natural substrate, Mid orange-yellow clay, 0.01m+ thick.
501	Modern hardcore deposit, light grey sand and gravel mix, 0.25m thick.
502	Deposit, Dark grey silt and clay mix containing moderate quantity of modern material throughout, 0.13m thick.
503	Deposit, Mid yellow-orange sand and clay mix, 0.4m thick.
504	Natural substrate, Mid blue grey clay, 0.5m thick.
505	Natural substrate, Dark purple-pink clay, 0.5m thick.
506	Natural substrate, Mid blue and mid grey-white clay, 0.02m+ thick.
601	Deposit, dark grey-blue silt and sand mix containing moderate quantity of modern material throughout, 3m+ thick.
602	Structure, Brick culvert, orientated northwest/southeast, brick construction. 0.75m+ wide, 8m+ in length, 1.5m BPGL

APPENDIX 2: LEVELS OF PRINCIPAL DEPOSITS AND STRUCTURES

Levels are expressed as metres below current ground level and as metres above Ordnance Datum, calculated using the temporary benchmark provided by site surveyor (56.7m AOD).

	Area 1	Attenuation pond
Current ground level	0.00m (57.0m)	0.00m (56.86m)
Limit of excavation	0.71m (56.29m)	3.0m (53.86m)

Upper figures are depth below modern ground level, lower figures in parentheses are metres AOD