

SUMMARY REPORT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING OF GEOTECHNICAL TEST PITS AT THE FESTIVAL HALL, PAIGNTON.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of seven trial pits, excavated by Earth Science Partnership, on behalf of Ellis Williams Architects, as part of the ground investigation of the site prior to development.

2 THE SITE

The site lies between *c.* 3-4m OD, and is some 30m west of the seafront in an area of reclaimed foreshore, now occupied by the Festival Hall, built in the 1960's, and landscaped gardens and lawns. Pits 1-4 and 7 were excavated to the north of the Festival Hall within the lawn and gardens there, while 5 and 6 were excavated against the west wall of the Festival Hall to locate the top of the capped pile and the ground beam upon which the walls of the building rest.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

During the excavation of the pits an archaeological presence was maintained in order to record any surviving archaeological deposits. Excavation was undertaken using a wheeled excavator using a toothed bucket, 0.85m wide. Measurements were taken of the depth of stratigraphy exposed, pits were also photographically recorded, using colour slide and black and white print. Finds recovered during inspection of the sides of the excavation and the spoil were bagged and labelled.

4 RESULTS

The trial pits measured *c.* 2.4m by 0.85m, in each pit the final depth was determined by the stability of the sand forming the sides of the pit which in most cases was *c.* 2m, but extended to a depth of 3.5m in pit 7. This represented just under a 4% sample of the area to be affected by the development.

4.1 Trial pits 1- 4, and 7

Excavation of these pits showed that the typical stratigraphy across the site was of *c.* 0.3m of brown clayey topsoil beneath which, in pits 1, 2 and 4, was a layer of compacted reddish clayey sand. This layer varied in depth between 0.3-0.5m, representing levelling prior to the importation of the topsoil and landscaping of the present day gardens. This levelling layer had been dumped directly onto the existing foreshore material, which consisted of *in situ* sand with frequent shell fragments. Unabraded pot sherds recovered from the upper level of the sand in pit 2 suggest that the foreshore in this area had been exposed up until the 19th century at its latest. In pit 3 the levelling layer was somewhat thicker (0.7m), and contained large to massive fragments of concrete and tarmac. Pit 7 was positioned to locate two services running approximately north-south on the west side of the site. This pit eventually measured 7.5m x 1m orientated east-west. While no archaeological deposits were exposed, *in situ* sand at the west end of the pit contained frequent fragments of mortar, up to 5cm in size. No datable finds were recovered from amongst the mortar, though it may be possible that these inclusions represent demolition material from Torbay House and associated out buildings. Alternatively this mortar could have been included in the beach deposits during the laying of the levelling material. Excavations to locate the sewer pipe were observed to a depth of 3.5m through sandy beach deposits.

No archaeological features, were observed within the *in situ* beach deposits that underlay the site.

4.5 Trial pits 5 and 6

Only pit 5 was observed of the pits excavated, observed to a depth of 0.8m whereupon the ground beam was exposed, against the side of the Festival Hall. During the excavation of pit 5 the stratigraphy was shown to consist of building rubble overlying the foundation pile and ground beam. No *in situ* deposits were encountered within pit 5, on this basis pit 6 was not observed.

5 CONCLUSIONS

No archaeological deposits were encountered within any of the trial pits excavated. The complete dearth of any such features combined with a absence of any soil horizon or surfaces and dated artefacts earlier than the 19th century suggest that the demolition of, and the removal of the fabric of Torbay House and associated out buildings was undertaken quite thoroughly, and that subsequent landscaping and construction on the site have effectively removed any previously surviving archaeological deposits in the areas covered by the test pits.

Stephen Reed
Exeter Archaeology
2nd November 1998

Appendix: Observations on additional trenching 24 November 1998

An additional trench was excavated adjacent to the site of TP7. This was 8m in length and c. 0.75m wide and aligned broadly east-west. At the western end it was hand-excavated to a depth of 1.2m and at the eastern end machine-excavated to a depth of 3m - 3.5m. Apart from recent construction material and service trench fills, the stratification was as seen previously. Loose sand and gravel was observed to the full depth of the trench at the eastern end. No other archaeological deposits or features were observed and no finds were recovered.

The conclusions about the character of the archaeological potential of this site therefore remain unchanged.

Exeter Archaeology
December 1998