

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS AT
MIDAS HOMES MARINA QUAY DEVELOPMENT,
BRIXHAM HARBOUR**

by

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Exeter Archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological observations (a watching brief) undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in October 1997 during construction work associated with a residential development at Brixham Harbour (Marina Quay). The work was commissioned by Midas Homes Limited in accordance with Condition 10 of the granting of conditional planning permission (Application No. 97/0008/PA) by Torbay Borough Council. The work was undertaken after consultation with T. Lowe acting for the Borough Planning Department.

1.1 **The site** (Figs 1, 2)

The area of development (SX927564) is situated directly to the east of the coastguard station at the south side of the outer harbour wall, from which it is separated by a narrow footpath. To the south and south-east lie King Street and Berry Head Road. Broadly rectangular in plan, the site is 140m long (east-west) and 50m-70m wide (north-south). The underlying geology consists of Devonian Limestone, which rises steeply to the south of the site towards the area of Rea Hill.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 **Prehistoric and Roman periods**

Prehistoric remains are known from the immediate area. A scatter of between 600-700 Neolithic flints, including a leaf-shaped arrowhead, was collected from a field lying some 400m to the north-east of the site at SX935566 (SMR SX95NW/28). Further east, the recovery of human bone and pottery has indicated Bronze Age activity at Ash Cave (SX93705668; SMR SX95NW/1), with perhaps an even earlier human presence (predating the last glaciation) also suggested by the faunal remains. There was probably an Iron Age promontory fort on Berry Head, where Roman coins found in the vicinity of the rampart suggest contact with the continent immediately prior to the invasion (Hoskins 1972, 349). In the immediate vicinity of the site, a worn *sestertius* of Claudius I (AD 41-54) has been found alongside Heath Road (SMR SX95NW/27). Thus although no finds have been made specifically from around Brixham harbour, its use in the prehistoric or Roman periods is likely.

2.2 **Medieval period**

Brixham, known as *Briseha* in 1086, was surrounded by the smaller Saxon settlements of Lupton, Colleton and Churston Ferrers (Thorn and Thorn 1985, 17.29, 17.28, 17.31, 17.30). It has been suggested that the nearby place-names of Kingswear and Kingston indicate that the whole peninsula south of the Galmpton neck was once a royal estate (Hoskins 1972, 350, Gover *et al.*, 515), but there is no substantial documentary evidence for this.

The Saxon settlement was probably situated at Higher Brixham, around the present parish Church (Hoskins 1972, 350), and it is interesting to note that even in 1765 the village lay well inland of the quay area (Fig. 3). Good use was undoubtedly made of the sheltered harbour area throughout the entire medieval period, and there are references to Brixham ships and boats in the 13th century (Summerson 1985, 114; Kowaleski 1993, 51).

2.3 **Post-medieval period**

By the early 17th century, the great concentration of seamen in the area to the east of Dartmouth accounted for over 40% of south Devon's sea-faring population, and 153 mariners, sailors and fishermen are recorded at Brixham in 1619 (Gray 1990, xvii, 26-7). In November 1688, William of Orange landed at Brixham Quay, after which he marched unopposed to London to become king.

2.4 19th and 20th centuries

By the 1850s Brixham was 'said to have the largest fishery in England. More than 270 sail of vessels, comprising 20,000 tons of shipping, and employing about 1600 seaman' (White 1850, 425). This vibrant market would probably account for the chain of shipwrights and their yards running east along the coast from the harbour. These are illustrated on the Tithe Map of 1838 (Fig. 4).

A shipbuilding yard owned by Daniel Dewdney (No. 1528) was situated in the western part of the site, directly to the east of the government-owned King's Quay (No. 1530; now the area of the coastguard station). An area of vegetable gardens (No. 1527) lay between Dewdney's yard and a much larger yard owned by Frederick Braddelly (No. 1523), which covered what is now the eastern end of the development. Both Dewdney and Braddelly were listed as ship owners in 1850 (White 1850, 430). The Tithe Map indicates that these yards did not incorporate extensive upstanding buildings in 1838, and the earlier surveyors' drawing of 1803-4 shows little detail.

The OS 1:2500 map of 1864 (Fig. 5) shows the western shipbuilding yard (Dewdney's yard) in greater detail, with a large dock occupying the centre of the site. This was associated with a floodgate (also marked on the map). By 1906, the area of the dock had been largely built over by an ice factory (Fig. 6), also seen in expanded form on the OS revision(s) of 1936/7 (Fig. 7).

The early OS maps also show the shipbuilding yard with slips in the eastern part of the site (i.e. Braddelly's yard). These indicate that an indentation in the shoreline shown on the Tithe Map in the area of the gardens (No. 1527) at the centre of the site had been formalised into an open tidal dock and slipway by the construction of a harbour wall. By 1936/7 (Fig. 7), additional buildings had been constructed here, including a rectangular structure to the south of the dock. The 1967 OS map (Fig. 8) shows that the tidal dock was eventually extended and converted to a dry dock. This probably occurred during WWII, judging from 1946 RAF vertical aerial photographs (SMR SX95NW). The majority of the standing structures were subsequently (since the 1980s) demolished and the dock infilled. This was accompanied by the reclamation of a narrow strip of land running the full length of the site and the construction of a new harbour wall and promenade.

3. RESULTS

3.1 The dock

The clearance and excavation of the dock (A on Fig. 2) in the centre of the site revealed that its entire western side, and approximately one third of its eastern side (farthest from the harbour), had been originally created by quarrying into the solid bedrock.. A dock wall of large blocks of dressed limestone had then been built within the cut. A later concrete wall lined the earlier stone-built dock, and concrete settings for gates stood at the seaward end.

To the east of the dock, the limestone bedrock was observed at relatively shallow depths (between 0.4m and 1.5m) lying beneath disturbed modern material towards the southern

perimeter of the site. Midway across the site (immediately east of the dock) mixed rubble overlay red gravels to a depth of between 1.2m and 1.5m. Nearer the harbour, the rubble was visible to depths of over 1.5m, and the upper 0.5m contained modern steel reinforcing rods. Immediately alongside the dock, the rubble had been disturbed by the insertion of concrete rings in the 1980s. The dock was infilled during the groundwork, and material from the raised south-west corner of the site was redeposited over the ground to the east of the dock.

3.2 Revetting walls

Directly to the west of the dock, an area of made ground covered much of the south-west quarter of the site. This was partly retained by the remains of tall, limestone rubble walls (B on Fig. 2), which appeared to represent part of the eastern boundary wall of the former garden of Rock Villa and parts of 19th/20th-century structures which had been built adjoining the northern boundary wall of the Villa (Figs 5-8).

The area enclosed by the walls consisted of 2m of redeposited gravels overlying a series of surfaces (see below) beneath which was a deposit of make-up material containing sheets of tin and a sherd of pottery dated to the late 18th or 19th-century. At the western end of this area, the limestone bedrock lay at some 3m below the existing ground surface.

During the groundworks, a short length of another wall was revealed lying some 14m from the eastern wall along the exposed section of the north wall. This was also constructed of limestone rubble with lime mortar, but was less substantial than the other two walls. It may represent an internal division, or possibly the end of a small building. A series of surfaces abutted the short wall on either side. These could not be examined in detail, but a single sherd of 19th-century pottery was found in one of the make-up layers.

3.3 Ice factory wall

An east-west wall (C on Fig. 2) was exposed after the removal of the modern access road to the west of the dock. The wall lay parallel with the harbour wall some 13m from the northern perimeter of the site. Its lower section was constructed of limestone rubble in lime mortar, but the upper elements were of machine-made brick. The wall made a right-angled return (inland) at its east end, which abutted undisturbed limestone bedrock to the east. The exposed section to the south of the wall indicated that the limestone bedrock had been truncated to allow for construction on a level not much higher than the present walkway alongside the harbour. The exposed and truncated limestone face varied in height from between 1m and 3.5m above this level.

3.4 Other walls/structures

During the levelling of the south-west corner of the site, a 30m east-west section (D on Fig. 2) was exposed 13m from the southern site boundary and parallel with Kings Road. This section extended westwards from the line of a baulk (representing structural remains related to the demolished Rock Villa) lying midway along the site boundary (E on Fig. 2). Within the section, the footings of a number of north-south orientated walls, built from limestone rubble and lime mortar, were exposed. These cut into the bedrock and were abutted or overlain by material to depths of between 1m on the eastern side and 0.4m to the west. One section of wall, standing some 28m to the west of the baulk, was 1.5m in width, and bonded by a pale yellow lime mortar. Walls of 0.3m in width, employing a clean, white lime mortar similar to that used on all other sections of walling exposed on the site, abutted this wall on the same alignment to either side.

Across the centre of section D, a clean humic soil was observed between the bedrock and the later layers. This soil was approximately 0.4m deep and contained occasional fragments of wood, slate, brick, glass and 19th-century pottery.

4. CONCLUSION

- For at least 160 years, there has been considerable activity on the site, some of it involving relatively heavy industry. In the areas observed, various phases of rebuilding since 1838 appear to have removed all traces of any previous occupation, and recent piling in the area to the east of the dock would have further disturbed any potential remains. Along the entire north-western side of the site (west of the dock) the limestone bedrock has been truncated to some depth (up to 3.5m) on a line approximately 13m from the northern boundary of the site.
- No features or structural remains earlier than the 18th- or 19th-century were observed during the watching brief. Most of the substantial limestone walls are likely to be the remains of the first major development of the site which occurred between 1838 and 1864. All the pottery and other artefactual material recovered from the site dates to the 19th-century, except for one sherd of possible late 18th-century pottery.
- The position of the soil deposit located midway along section D corresponds to the vegetable garden shown on the Tithe Map. This probably represents the earliest deposit observed during the groundworks, although it produced only 19th-century material.
- The exposed limestone walls associated with the dock must represent part of the first harbour wall built between 1838 and the 1860s, which formalised a small open tidal dock. The concrete wall and gate settings represent its conversion to a dry dock during or immediately leading up to WWII.
- It is probable that the wall found near the north-west side of the site (C on Fig. 2) is an internal wall associated with the ice factory shown on Figs 6-7, with the brick upper course relating to later rebuilding.
- Parts of the dock within Dewdney's yard (shown on Fig. 5) may still survive beneath the reclamation material, but no traces of it were observed during the groundworks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Midas Homes Limited and administered by Mr. R. Stone (Company Architect) and P.J. Weddell (EA). Mr. T. Lowe of Torbay Borough Council identified the requirements of the work. Assistance with the documentary and cartographic search was provided by Veronica Woolford of Devon County Sites and Monuments Register.

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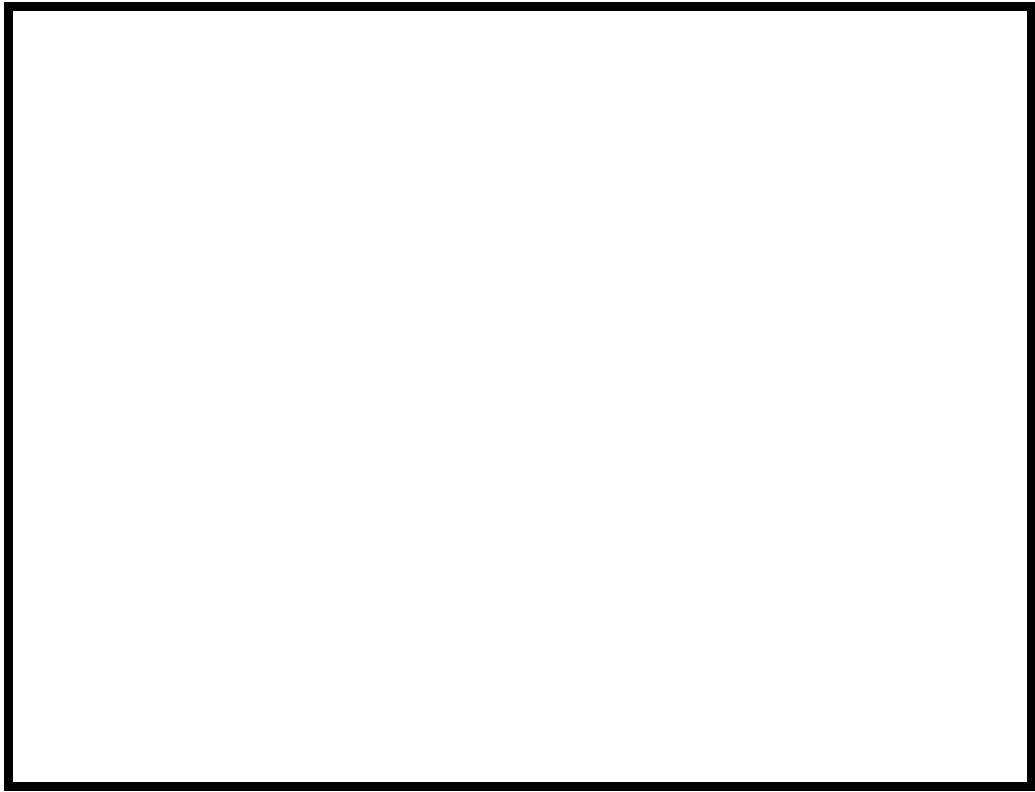


Fig. 3 Extract from *A Map of the County of Devon*, 1765 (B. Donn).

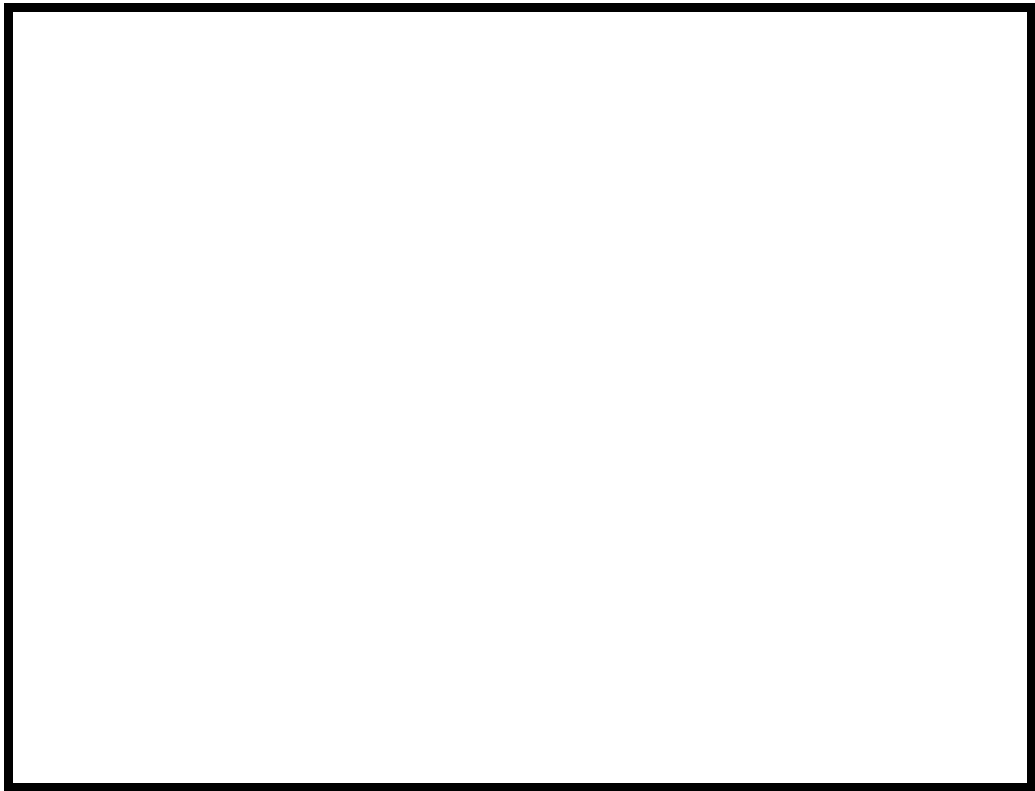
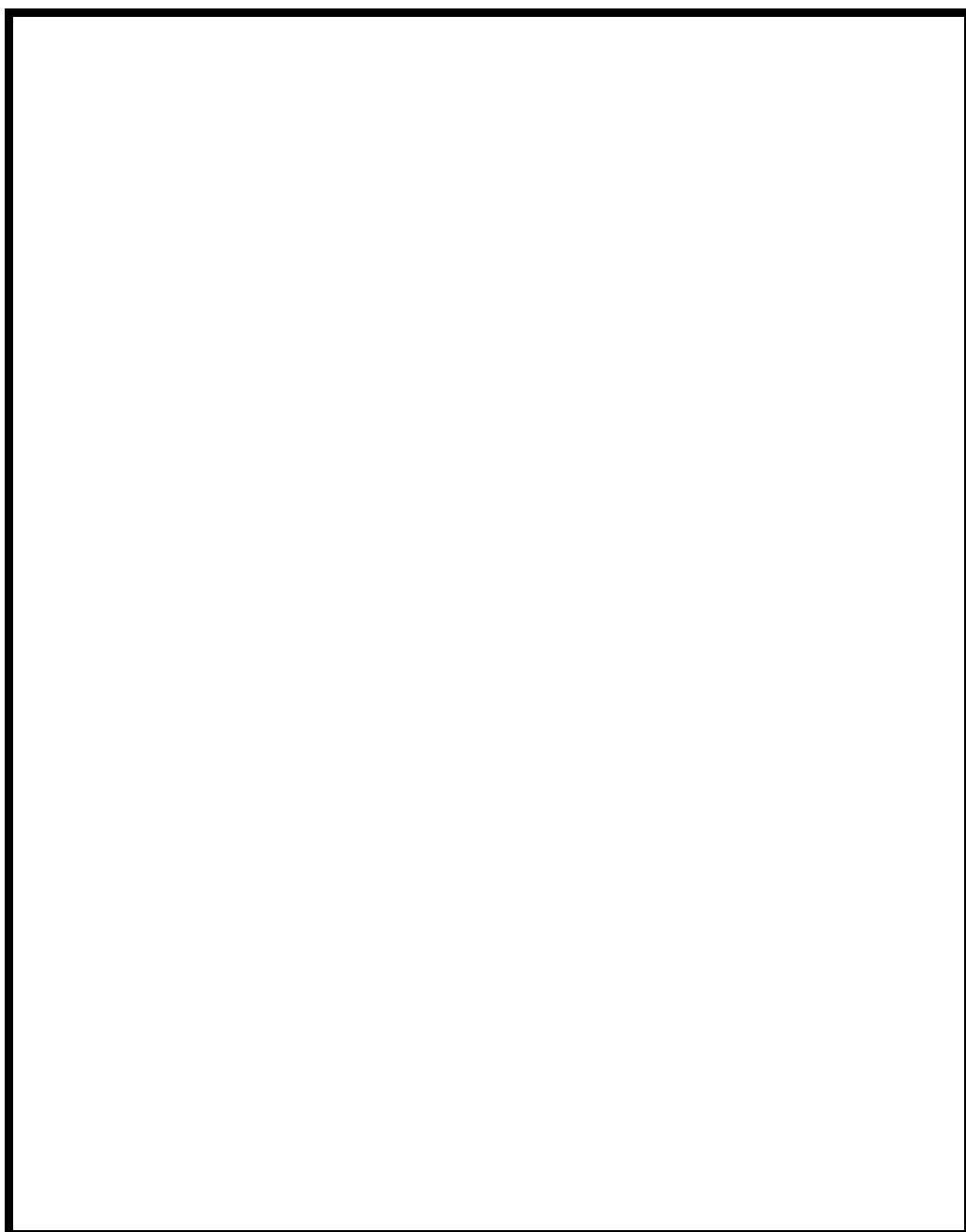




Fig. 6 Extract from OS 1:2500 maps, 1906.



Fig. 7 Extract from OS 1:2500 maps, 1936/7.



1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Brixham harbour (Fig. 1) in October 1997 during groundwork associated with the construction of a Midas Homes housing development (Marina Quay). The project was commissioned by Midas Homes, on the advice of Torbay Borough Council. The work was undertaken after consultation with T. Lowe, acting for the Borough Planning Department.

2. THE SITE

The development is situated between King Street and Berry Head Road, and the south side of the outer harbour (SX 927 564: Fig. 1). It lies directly to the east of the Coastguard Station. A narrow pedestrian walkway separates the site from the harbour wall.

The site is roughly rectangular in plan (Fig.2), with east-west dimensions of some 140m and a north-south width of between approximately 50m at the west end and 70m to the east. The area is comprised of Devonian Limestone, which rises steeply to the south of the site towards the area of Rea Hill.

The site had previously been cleared of buildings, leaving tall revetting walls intact. The existence of industrial structural remains, such as a tidal dock, were known in advance of the project.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Brixham was a developed settlement at the time of the Domesday census (Thorn and Thorn 1985, 109a). Settlements names in the area such as Kingswear and Kingston suggest a royal estate in Saxon times, but it had passed out of crown hands, and was held by Ulf at the time of the arrival of the Normans (Hoskins 1972, 350). The Saxon settlement was situated at Higher Brixham, around the present parish Church, but use must also have been made of the harbour area. It is interesting to note that even by 1765, when Donn produced his Map of the County of Devon (Fig.3), the town of Brixham is clearly shown as physically separate from, and lying well inland of the quay.

Recovery of human bone and pottery indicates a Bronze Age presence at Ash Cave, situated some 800m along the coast to the east of the site (SX 9370 5668). The faunal remains also suggest a very early human presence at the cave, that predates the last glaciation, although record of the recovery is limited and precludes detailed interpretation.

A scatter of between 600 and 700 Neolithic flints, including a leaf-shaped arrowhead, was collected from a field lying some 400m to the north-east of the site (SX 935 566). A later Prehistoric presence is suggested by the earthworks situated on Berry Head, with an Iron Age use a distinct

possibility. Roman coins found in the vicinity of the rampart suggest contact with the continent immediately prior to the invasion (*ibid.* 350). Roman coin finds are relatively numerous in the area, the nearest being the recovery of a worn Sestertius of Claudius I (AD 41-54), found alongside Heath Road. At any point during the prehistoric period use of the natural harbourage must be considered likely.

By the 1850s Brixham was 'said to have the largest fishery in England. More than 270 sail of vessels, comprising 20,000 tons of shipping, and employing about 1600 seaman' (White 1852, 425). This vibrant market would probably account for the chain of shipwrights and their yards running east along the coast from the harbour. These are illustrated on the Tithe Map of 1838 (Fig.4). A shipbuilding yard owned by Daniel Dewdney was situated directly to the east of the government owned King's Quay (now the area of the Coastguard Station). An area of vegetable gardens then lay between Dewdney's yard, and a much larger yard owned by Frederick Braddelly, which covered what is now the eastern end of the development. Both Dewdney and Braddelly were listed as ship owners in 1850 (*ibid.* 430). The Tithe Map suggests that none of the yards held extensive upstanding buildings in 1838. The 2 inch OS Surveyor's draft of 1803-4 is not particularly clear, but appears to show no features not apparent in the later Tithe Map.

Ordnance Survey 25 inch maps, surveyed in 1867, indicate that shipbuilding yards and associated slips covered the eastern and central thirds of the site. The western third, lying alongside King's Quay is shown as an ice factory. By this date a harbour wall had been constructed along the full length of the shoreline of the site, with some reclamation of land fronting the ice factory. An indentation in the shoreline shown on the Tithe Map in the area of the gardens at the centre of the site, had been formalized by the harbour wall. This formed an open tidal dock and slipway for smaller vessels at high tide. The slips shown at the east end of the site on the tithe maps were still present in 1904 (Fig. 5). By 1936, additional buildings had been constructed in the yards to the east, including a rectangular structure to the south of the open dock. The harbour wall remained unchanged.

The 1967 version of the OS 25 inch map (Fig.6) indicates little significant change in the area other than in the form of the small tidal dock. This had been extended fore and aft, and given gates to create dry dock facilities. Vertical photographs of the site taken in 1946 by the Royal Air Force show the dock in its extended form, while Luftwaffe photographs taken from considerable altitude suggest its presence during the war.

Demolition of the majority of the standing structures and infilling of the dock in the early 1980s was accompanied by the reclamation of a narrow strip of land running the full length of the site. This work included the construction of a new harbour wall and pedestrian access alongside the harbour to the marina.

4. RESULTS

The site was first visited during initial clearance and excavation of the tidal dock, situated almost centrally within the site. The dock was constructed from large blocks of dressed limestone. Along the entire western side of the dock, and approximately a third of the eastern side, situated away from the harbour, it had been created by quarrying into the solid limestone geology of the area. The dock wall had then been built within this excavation. A later concrete wall lined the earlier stone-built dock and concrete settings for gates stood at the seaward end.

Tall, limestone rubble walling revetted an area of made ground, directly to the west of the dock. The raised area covered much of the south-west quarter of the site (Fig.2). The northern wall facing the harbour, was first removed by machine. The upper 2m of the material contained within the walling was of modern date, being redeposited gravels. These overlay a series of surfaces. The two end walls had originally stood above these surfaces to a height of at least 1m. A sub-dividing wall of limestone rubble in lime mortar was sealed by the modern surfaces. This wall lay 14m along the exposed section from the eastern revetting wall, which itself was orientated north-south, and lay roughly parallel with the dock. A series of earlier surfaces abutted the sub-dividing wall on either side. Layers of make-up for one of these surfaces produced a single sherd of 19th-century pottery.

At the western end of the removed wall the solid limestone geology of the area lay at some 3m below the existing surface produced by the deposited modern material. The make-up material lying between the undisturbed limestone and the overlying surfaces abutting the divide wall contained sheets of tin and a sherd of pottery dated to the later 18th or 19th-century. Material slumped against the western revetting wall produced the bowl from a clay pipe of 19th-century origin.

Subsequent removal of the modern access road into the site from the south-west, and the deep deposits of underlying make-up, revealed a wall that approximately continued the east-west alignment of the revetting wall removed earlier (Fig. 2). This stood parallel with the harbour wall and 13m from the northern perimeter to the site. The lower section of the wall was constructed from limestone rubble in lime mortar, the upper elements from machine-made brick. At the east end of the wall a right angled return was exposed heading inland. This was constructed from local limestone rubble in lime mortar. This abutted undisturbed limestone to the east.

The exposed section to the east of this wall indicated that the limestone geology stood to a height of between 2.5m and 3.5m above the construction levels. The limestone had been truncated on a line lying parallel with the harbour wall to allow for the building on a lower level. This level stood not much higher than the present walkway alongside the harbour. The exposed and truncated limestone face varied in height from between 1m and 3.5m above this level, extending along the line of the previously removed revetting wall.

Where levelling was undertaken in the south-west corner of the site, a section of some 30m in length was exposed running parallel with and 13m from the southern boundary to the site (Fig. 2). The section extended west from a point on line with a wall-revetted baulk (presumably a structural remain related to the demolished Rock Villa) lying midway along the boundary to the site on this side. The footings to a number of north-south orientated walls, built from limestone rubble and lime mortar, were exposed. These cut the limestone geology of the site, and were abutted or overlain by material to depths of between 1m on the eastern side and only 0.4m to the west. One section of walling, standing some 28m to the west of the baulk, was 1.5m in width, and bonded by a pale yellow lime mortar. Walls of 0.3m in width, and employing a clean, white lime mortar similar to that used on all other sections of walling exposed on the site, abutted this wall on the same alignment to either side.

Across the centre of this section, a clean humic soil was buried between the limestone geology and later layers and surfaces. This soil measured some 0.4m in depth and contained occasional slate fragments and pieces of wood and very occasional fragments of slate, brick, glass and pottery. The pottery dates to the 19th-century.

To the east of the dock, beneath the southern perimeter to the site, modern material directly overlay the limestone to depths of between 0.4m and 1.5m. Midway across the site and immediately east of the dock, mixed rubble overlay red gravels to a depth of between 1.2m and 1.5m. Nearer the harbour, the mixed rubble was visible to depths of over 1.5m, the upper half-metre containing modern looking steel reinforcing rods. The underlying gravels were not visible at this point.

Removal of material from a band of some 5m in width lying alongside the dock on its east side, indicated that the rubble had been disturbed by the insertion of concrete-filled concrete rings, reputedly lain in the 1980s. These are said to extend over much of the site to the east of the dock.

The dock was infilled during the groundwork. Material removed from the raised ground in the south-west corner of the site was redeposited to raise levels over and to the east of the infilled dock.

5. CONCLUSIONS

No indication of features or structural remains predating the 18th- or 19th-century were observed during the watching brief. The majority of the sizeable limestone walling is likely to correspond to the first major development of the site between 1838 and 1867. All the pottery and other artefactual material recovered from the site dates to the 19th-century, except in the case of a single pottery sherd, where a possible late 18th-century date may be applied.

The exposed limestone walling associated with the dock must represent the first harbour wall built between 1838 and 1967, which originally formed a small open dock. The dry dock, with its concrete walling appears to be an enhancement to the facilities, produced during or immediately leading up to the last war.

It is probable that the wall found near the north-west side of the site represents an internal wall associated with the ice factory shown on the 1867 map. It is assumed that the brick upper coarse relates to later enhancements. It is presumed that the harbour wall built between 1838 and 1904 still survives beneath the later reclamation material in this area.

The soil located midway along the exposed section, running parallel with Kings Road, is the earliest deposit in this area of the site. Its position would correspond with the vegetable garden shown on the Tithe Map. This soil only produced dateable material of 19th-century origin.

Use of the site before the production of the Tithe Map is certain. An early historic or even prehistoric presence is also a reasonable deduction considering the wealth of archaeology from these periods in the vicinity. Subsequent use of the area has removed all major trace. The site has seen considerable activity, some of it involving relatively heavy industry. In areas to the east of the dock, recent piling has further disturbed any potential remains of earlier activity. Along the entire north-western side of the site to the west of the dock, and on a line some 13m from the boundary to the site, the limestone geology has been truncated to some depth. This will have removed any surviving archaeology in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Mr. R. Stone, Company Architect for Midas Homes. Mr. T. Lowe of Torbay Borough Council identified the requirements of the work. Assistance with the documentary and cartographic search was provided by Veronica Woolford of Devon County Archaeological Services. The watching brief was undertaken by the author.

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Fig. 4 Extract from Brixham Parish Tithe Map, 1838.

Fig. 5 Extract from OS 25 inch map, 1904.

Fig. 6 Extract from OS 25 inch map, 1967.

Mr R. Stone
Midas Homes Ltd
Homeside House
Silverhills Road
Newton Abbot
DEVON
TQ12 5YZ

7 January 1998

Your ref: MHL:RCS:JMW
Our ref: THG/SDT/3312/B

Dear Mr Stone

Archaeology: Brixham Marina

I enclose three copies of our report on the above scheme, and have forwarded a copy to Mr Lowe (Planning Department, Torbay Borough Council). Please let me know if you require any further copies or information.

Yours sincerely

T.H. Gent
Exeter Archaeology

Mr T. Lowe
Planning Department
Torbay Borough Council
Torquay
TQ1 3DR

7 January 1998

**REF: Conditional planning permission (Application No. 97/0008/PA), Condition 10
(Archaeology)
Midas Homes Brixham Marina**

I enclose one copy of our report on the above scheme. Please let me know if you require any further copies or information.

Yours sincerely

T.H. Gent
Exeter Archaeology