



KINGS ARMS HOTEL, CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET

Archaeological Evaluation Report



**KING'S ARMS HOTEL,
CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT**

Prepared on behalf of:

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Figure 1: Site and planned trench location map showing projected line of Saxon Burh defences

Figure 2: Site and actual trench location map showing projected line of Saxon Burh defences

Figure 3: Sections 1 and 2

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by South Dorset Developments Ltd (the Client) to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of the King's Arms Hotel, Christchurch, Dorset (the Site), located at NGR 415993 092765.

The Written Scheme of Investigation allowed for the excavation of four evaluation trenches each 10 m in length. Four trenches were excavated, however due to discoveries on Site and advice following a Dorset County Council Monitoring visit, their layout and extents were altered.

Archaeological features were present in two of these trenches, dating to the post-medieval and modern period and containing no material of archaeological significance.

The area had previously been disturbed by levelling, specifically ground raising, and the canalization of the river, now known as the Mill Stream. The front, and supposed medieval street frontage, of the Site had been severely truncated by the insertion of modern services.

The two trenches to the rear of the property were excavated to a depth of 2 m and encountered made ground deposits to their full depth. Trench 1 was extended to ascertain whether this sequence of made ground continued and this was found to be the case.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Nick Roache, South Dorset Developments Ltd (the Client) for commissioning the work.

The Project and field work was monitored by Steve Wallis, Senior Archaeologist for Dorset County Council. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Peter Reeves.

Cornelius Barton conducted the fieldwork, with the assistance of Piotr Orczewski. The report was compiled by Cornelius Barton and Peter Reeves, the illustrations were compiled by Mark Roughly.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by South Dorset Developments Ltd to undertake the archaeological evaluation of a parcel of land adjoining the King's Arms Hotel, Christchurch, Dorset hereafter referred to as 'the Site' (NGR 415993 092765). These works were conducted to inform a planning application for the construction of 21 town houses and 3 apartments with associated parking on the land to the rear of the Hotel (**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The Site area is considered to be one of high archaeological potential and a programme of archaeological works was formulated after consultation with Steve Wallis, the Senior Archaeologist, Historic Environment Department, Dorset County Council. A Project Design was prepared by Wessex Archaeology and approved by Dorset County Council before the commencement of works.

1.2 Site Description

1.2.1 The Site comprises an irregular piece of land, covering an area of 4550m², located to the north of Castle Street approximately 50m from the Town Bridge within the historic core of Christchurch. Christchurch is located c.8km to the east of Bournemouth. The town lies on a natural promontory between the Rivers Stour and Avon.

1.2.2 Within the bounds of the Site are the King's Arms Hotel, a Grade II Listed Building, and ancillary buildings associated with it. The rear of the Site backs onto Ducking Stool Lane, the west boundary adjoins property on Ducking Stool Lane and Castle Street, the eastern boundary is defined by the Mill Stream.

1.2.3 The Site lies between 2 and 2.5m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), forming a generally flat area of land sloping gently to the east, toward the Mill Stream and the River Avon.

1.2.4 Christchurch lies on the alluvial sands and gravels of Pleistocene and more recent origin, forming a low ridge at the confluence of the Rivers Avon and Stour which then flow into Christchurch Harbour (British Geological Survey, BGS Sheet 329). The solid geology has a direct influence on the overlying soils, which comprise podzols and argillic brown earths, generally of a sandy loam nature with impeded drainage.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Previous archaeological work within the Area

- 2.1.1 Christchurch is rich in archaeological remains, and these have been previously reported upon in a desk based assessment (Wessex Archaeology 2005, ref 59750.01) and summarised in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2006 59751.1).
- 2.1.2 The Site was considered to have a high potential for the presence of archaeological remains ranging in date from the prehistoric to post-medieval periods with particular emphasis on the Saxon period. Of particular interest and based on limited observations during earlier development work it was conjectured that the Saxon defensive ditch or ‘burh’, ran through the Site on a north-south alignment (see **Figure 1**).
- 2.1.3 The majority of the Site falls to the east of the projected line of the defences and therefore outside of the ‘burh’, and likely area of settlement.

3 METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 Aims and objectives

- 3.1.1 As indicated, the results from the desk-based assessment of the Site indicated a high potential for significant archaeological remains.
- 3.1.2 The objectives of the evaluation were to determine, as far as reasonably possible; the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological remains within the Site.

3.2 Health and Safety

- 3.2.1 The health and safety of site staff and of the general public was of utmost importance during the undertaking of all fieldwork. A risk-assessment was prepared by Wessex Archaeology and all staff were required to familiarise themselves with it before fieldwork commenced.

3.3 Trial trenching methodology

Machine excavation

- 3.3.1 The Site has an area of approximately 0.5 ha. Four trenches representing a 2% sample of the Site were mechanically excavated (**Figure 2**).
- 3.3.2 All trenches were located by digital survey using a Total Station and tied in to the Ordnance Survey.
- 3.3.3 Mechanical excavation was carried out by means of a Kubota excavator under constant archaeological supervision. A toothed bucket was used to

break through the upper and final surface of tarmac, which in turn overlay a cobble yard. A toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate the trenches to their full depth. Mechanical excavation continued to the top of archaeological horizons or the underlying natural deposits, whichever were encountered first. Identified archaeological remains were excavated by hand.

- 3.3.4 The excavated uprisings were examined for archaeological material.
- 3.3.5 All features and deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's standard methods and *pro forma* recording system, with all features and deposits being assigned a unique number. A full graphic record was maintained. Plans and sections were produced at a scale of 1:20 and 1:10, where appropriate. The Ordnance Datum (OD) height of all principal features and levels was calculated, with plans and sections annotated with OD heights. A full photographic record was maintained, using digital cameras, colour transparencies and black and white negatives (on 35mm film).
- 3.3.6 Following permission from the Senior Archaeologist for Dorset County Council all the trenches were backfilled but the original surface of the carparking areas were not reinstated.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Archaeological remains were found in two of the four trenches (see **Figure 3**). These consisted of levelling deposits of a post-medieval date.

4.2 Trench 1

- 4.2.1 The trench was excavated parallel to Ducking Stool Lane in the north of the Site. The deposits exposed consisted of a series of layers of mixed clays, sand and building rubble. Uppermost in the sequence was a layer of redeposited sand (**105**) clearly laid to build up the ground level to the west of the river (see **Figure 3**). Below this were further layers of made ground to a depth of 1.6m. All these deposits contained ceramic material of post-medieval (17th/18th century) or modern date (19th/20th century).
- 4.2.2 Cut through the upper made ground deposits but below the tarmac cap was the footing for a NW-SE aligned wall (**104**). This wall-footing was clearly of modern origin, and may be associated with the building present on the 1939 OS map (WA 2005).
- 4.2.3 Below the made-ground deposits were layers of river-laid silty sand (**109**), also containing fragments of ceramic material of 19th and 20th century origin. Due to their modern date no artefacts were retained for further analysis. The trench could not be excavated below this point due to rising water.
- 4.2.4 Following a site monitoring visit by the Senior Archaeologist for Dorset County Council the trench was extended to the west to determine the extent of the levelling up deposits and to ascertain whether the Saxon burh defences

were present. The levelling layers were observed to continue and no evidence for the Saxon ditch was found.

4.3 Trench 2

- 4.3.1 Trench 2, aligned north west – south east down the centre of the car park, contained a similar sequence of deposits, once more consisting of layers of made ground to a depth of 2m. Pottery recovered from these deposits was in some cases older, being of medieval and 17th or 18th century date, but mixed with material of 20th century origin.
- 4.3.2 Below the made ground deposits was a layer of river-laid silty sand (208) similar to that in trench 1. The top of this deposit contained material of late 17th/18th century origin. A series of large wooden posts were sunk into this deposit to a total depth of 2.8m below ground level. The posts could not be formally excavated due to incoming water, but one of the posts was removed for further analysis. The posts were arranged in a north south line spaced approximately 1 metre apart. The posts are undated although they appear to have been placed to support the levelling layers.
- 4.3.3 Overlying the made-ground deposits was a cobbled surface of 20th century origin (202). This surface was probably contemporary with the wall found in trench 1.

4.4 Trench 3

- 4.4.1 The trench was excavated to a depth of approximately 0.5m before it was abandoned due to the presence of numerous modern service trenches. The service trenches appeared to mark an overhaul and realignment of foul and fresh water drainage from the site. The upgrading of drainage services is not uncommon on properties that are located adjacent to water channels, where environment laws prohibit the discharge of surface and rain water directly into aquatic environments.

4.5 Trench 4

- 4.5.1 The trench when excavated in its proposed location encountered live services, water and gas and, following instruction from the Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council, was moved to the east. The trench was excavated to a depth of 2m. No archaeological remains were encountered, with the sequence being similar to that in trench 2 and consisting entirely of modern made ground deposits.

5 FINDS

- 5.1.1 A small quantity of finds, comprising animal bone, ceramic building material, pottery and oyster shell, was recovered from two trenches (1 and 2) during the evaluation. These range in date from medieval to post-medieval. All have been quantified by material type within each context, and the results are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: All finds by context (number / weight in grammes)

CBM = ceramic building material

Context	Animal Bone	CBM	Pottery	Shell
106			1/7	
107	7/490	2/263	1/28	
205	4/237	4/133	3/251	12/146
206	2/405		8/183	
207			2/313	
TOTAL	13/1132	6/396	15/782	12/146

- 5.1.2 Medieval material comprises three sherds of pottery, one from context **205** and two from context **206**, and one fragment of a medieval ceramic roof tile from **205**. One of the sherds from **206** is a jar rim in coarse sandy ware of a type found widely across south-east Wiltshire and east Dorset, and probably of 12th or 13th century date. The other two sherds are later medieval sandy wares, probably 14th or 15th century. In each context these finds occurred residually, associated with post-medieval material.
- 5.1.3 The remaining pottery includes Verwood-type earthenwares from east Dorset, Westerwald stoneware from the Rhineland, white saltglaze, and modern refined whitewares. The Verwood-type earthenwares from context **207**, including a small porringer, serve to date this context to the 17th or 18th century; other wares came from made ground or levelling deposits and are unlikely to be *in situ*.
- 5.1.4 Other finds comprise animal bone (cattle, horse, sheep/goat), post-medieval brick and roof tile fragments, and oyster shell.

6 WATERLOGGED WOOD

- 6.1.1 One of a series of large vertical wooden posts was collected during the archaeological evaluation and taken to Wessex Archaeology's environment department for analysis.
- 6.1.2 The timber was collected from trench 2, where the sedimentary sequence is described as nineteenth to twentieth century made ground to a depth of approximately 2m overlying a fluvial silty sand (**208**). Artefacts retrieved from the surface of the sand are dated to the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century. The series of large wooden posts were all of the same diameter and height and were set in a line. Each post had been sunk or set into the silty sand to a total depth of 2.8m below ground level, that is, 0.8 m below the surface of the silty sand. The posts could not be excavated due to a high and rising water table, but one of the posts was retrieved for further analysis, as reported here.
- 6.1.3 Following cleaning and description, a fine slice was taken from the post along three planes (transverse section (TS), radial longitudinal section (RL) and tangential longitudinal section (TL) using a razor blade. The pieces were mounted in water on a glass microscope slide, and examined under bi-focal

transmitted light microscopy at magnifications of x50, x100 and x400 using a Kyowa ME-LUX2 microscope. Identification was undertaken according to the anatomical characteristics described by Schweingruber (1990) and Butterfield and Meylan (1980). Identification was to the highest taxonomic level possible, usually that of genus and nomenclature is according to Stace (1997).

- 6.1.4 The surviving post measures 140x100x810mm in size but the top end has clearly eroded and splintered, the post would therefore have been longer but its full length remains unknown. The wood is degraded and partially desiccated but clear evidence of working remains. The main shaft has been shaped and the bark removed and the base has faceted cuts at the base fining to a point, forming a stake or post. The wood is identified as *Quercus* sp. (oak).
- 6.1.5 The post is shaped from mature oak wood. Oak has been a common tree type within the British Isles since early prehistory, it is not chronologically distinctive and is often used for structures due to its strength and durability. That the wood is degraded is more a function of fluctuating water table and the encasing sediment type than an indication of antiquity. Its age cannot therefore currently be gauged since there are no archaeological remains directly related with it.
- 6.1.6 The evaluation did not record a post pit structure or posthole and therefore it can be assumed that the post was driven into its position. Artefacts dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth century were retrieved from the surface into which the post was driven, the line of posts were buried in deposits suggested to be nineteenth/twentieth century in date.
- 6.1.7 Should the date of this series of posts remain a key issue, absolute dating would be required. Although the piece had been shaped, and bark removed, the cambium layer and outer rings remains in places, the outer rings (those close in age to the date of felling) could therefore be sampled and submitted for AMS dating if required. However, it is suggested archaeologically the structure is likely to be of post-medieval or modern date.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1.1 The archaeological evaluation has determined that the northern two thirds of the Site, that area located between the rear of the hotel and Ducking Stool Lane, is unlikely to contain archaeological deposits.
- 7.1.2 The northern area, evaluated through the excavation of trenches 1 and 2, suggests that this area was extremely low lying, certainly up to the late seventeenth early eighteenth century. The area was then raised, the event evidenced by the 2m depth of layered deposits observed in the sections of both trenches. Artefacts contained within these layers indicate a nineteenth/twentieth century date for the latter event.

- 7.1.3 The posts observed in trench 2 are most probably of a late date, suggested by their uniformity in size, the regularity of their spacing and their straight alignment. It is possible that these posts performed one of two functions, either they marked the edge of the previously meandering fluvial channel of the stream or they formed part of a stabilising structure constructed during raising of the ground level.
- 7.1.4 The trenches, 3 and 4, located on the street frontage recorded severe truncation of deposits. No archaeological features or structures were observed in these trenches and no artefacts were retrieved.
- 7.1.5 Although the line of the Saxon 'burh' is projected to pass through the Site no traces nor evidence for the presence of the defensive structure was found. Similarly no artefacts dating to the Saxon Period were retrieved from the Site. Either the ditch existed further to the west, under the footings of the Hotel, or it has been destroyed by subsequent development and canalisation of the river.
- 7.1.6 Although the presence of the posts and levelling deposits is worth noting, there were no archaeological remains recorded on the Site which require further investigation.
- 7.1.7 A handful of residual medieval sherds were retrieved from the Site, however these are symptomatic of chance deposition rather than established settlement.
- 7.1.8 The Site does not appear to contain surviving archaeological remains of any significance. The line of posts observed in trench 2 are presumably related to riverbank consolidation predating the 20th century but no older than 17th century.

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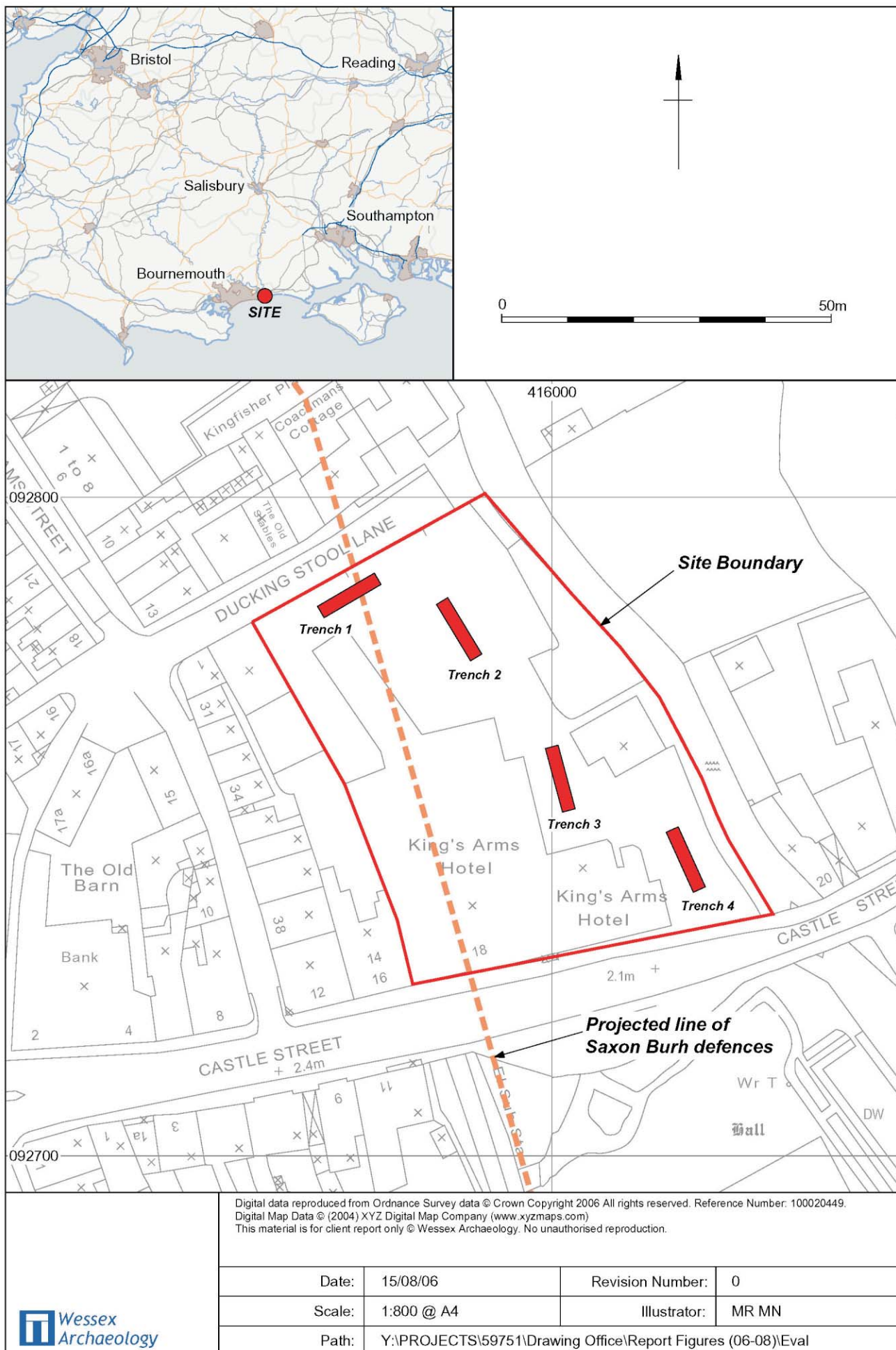
APPENDIX I – TRENCH SUMMARY TABLES

Trench: 1			
Length: 10m		Width: 2m	Depth: 2m
Context Number	Description	Depth	
101	Tarmac cap	0.11m	
102	Building rubble- levelling deposit/made ground	0.25m	
103	Cut for wall footing	0.60m	
104	Wall footing	0.60m	
105	Redeposited sand- made ground	1.85m	
106	Dark grey-brown silty clay with building rubble fragments- made ground	0.75m	
107	Dark grey builders gravel- made ground	1.40m	
108	Redeposited gravel- made ground	1.65m	
109	Dark yellow gravel- river laid deposit	2m+	
110	Silty sand river laid deposit	2m+	
111	Lens of building rubble and gravel	0.85m	

Trench: 2			
Length: 10m		Width: 2m	Depth: 1.6m
Context Number	Description	Depth	
201	Tarmac cap	0.10m	
202	Cobbles	0.20m	
203	Building sand and gravel	0.35m	
204	Dark grey brown silty clay with building rubble fragments- made ground	0.95m	
205	Coarse grey gravel- levelling deposit	1.15m	
206	Dark yellow builders gravel- levelling deposit	1.25	
207	Pale grey silty sand with dark brown silt patches- river laid deposit	1.45m	
208	Dark grey silty sand with dark grey silt patches- river laid deposit	1.5m+	

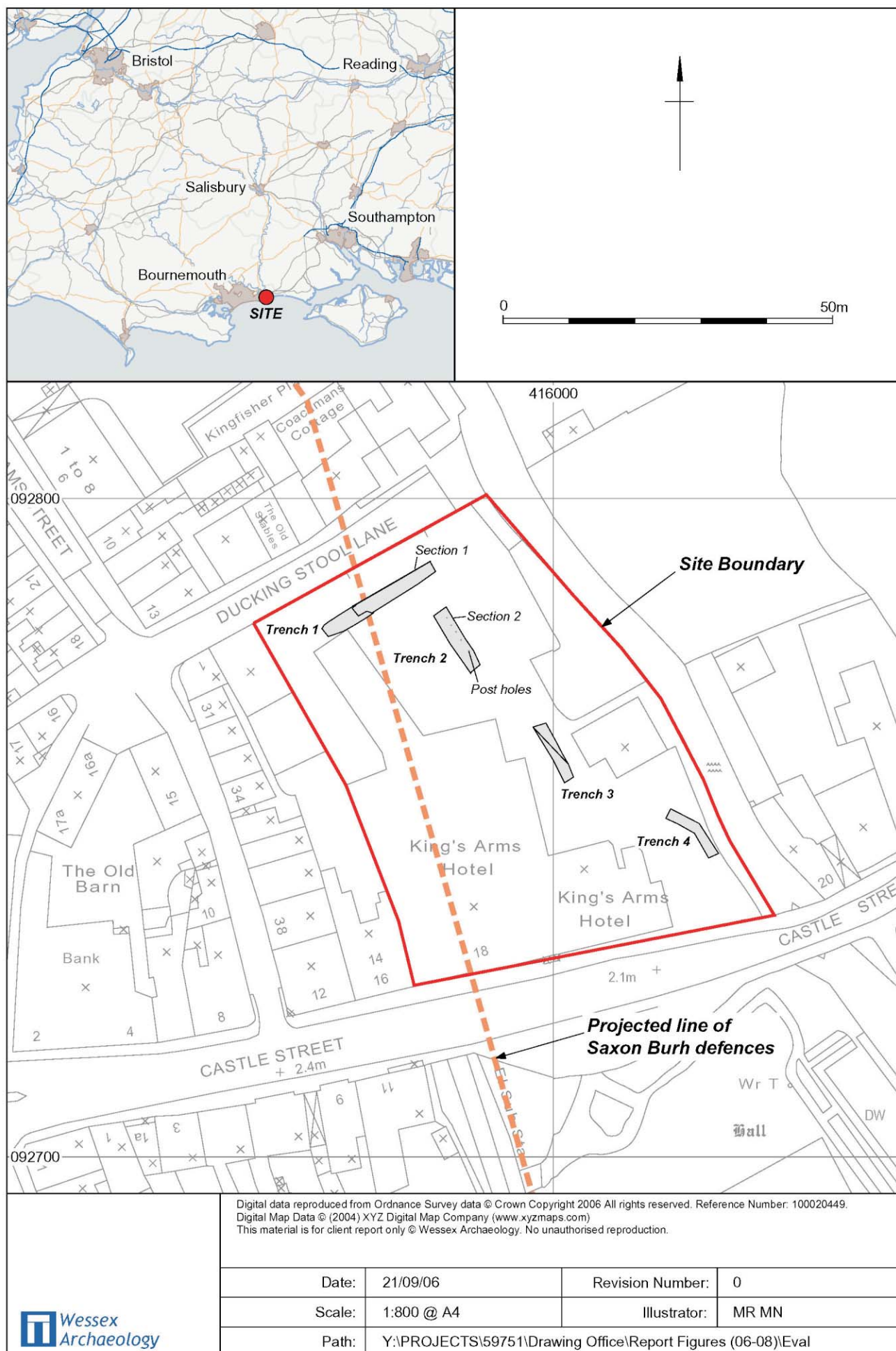
Trench: 3			
Length: 10m		Width: 2m	Depth 0.5m
Context Number	Description	Depth	
301	Concrete cap	0.10m	
302	Made ground	0.5m+	

Trench: 4			
Length: 10m		Width: 1.8m	Depth: 1.9m
Context Number	Description	Depth	
401	Tarmac cap	0.10m	
402	Mixed dark silty clay with building rubble- made ground	1.9m+	



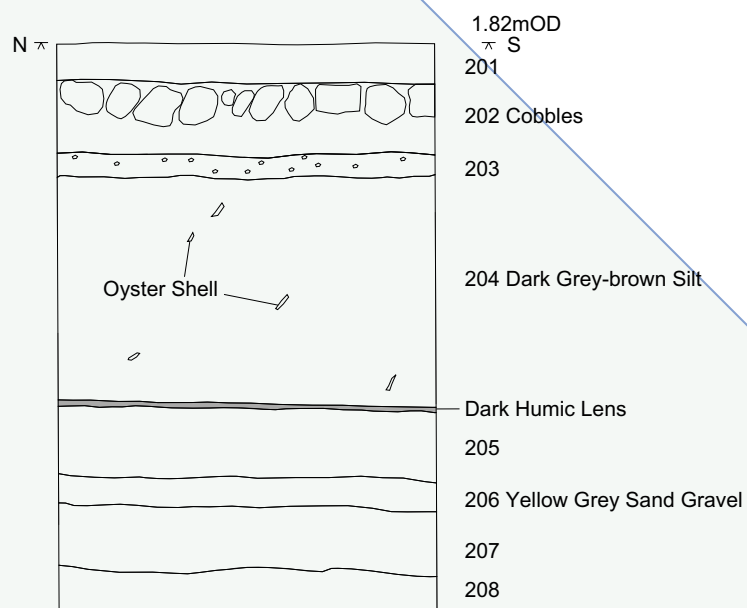
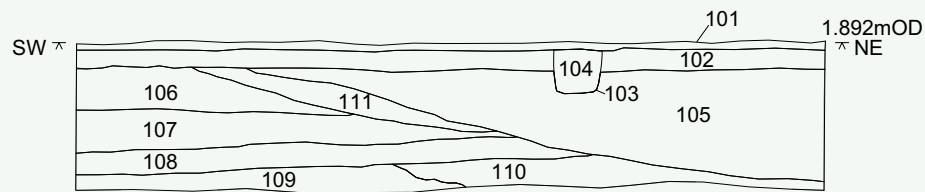
Site and Planned Trench Location Map showing projected line of Saxon Burh defences

Figure 1



Site and actual Trench Location Map showing projected line of Saxon Burh defences

Figure 2





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