GeoArch

Report 2013/14

Watching brief on development of Sixth Form Centre, The Cathedral School, Llandaff

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Abstract

Groundworks for the project consisted solely of a series of six holes drilled for piles to take an infill extension to the rear of the existing Nursery as part of the conversion into the new Sixth Form Block. The holes were drilled from the surface of a layer aggregate used to raise ground levels in the area after the 2001 conversion of the former Headmasters' House into the Nursery. The drilling technique did not permit the recovery of core or other significant remains from the substrate.

The boreholes met a layer of resistive bedrock at around 3m below surface. This layer was already known from the geotechnical investigations prior to development. The holes were completed at 5m below surface.

The watching brief produced no useful archaeological information.

A report on the previous geotechnical investigations employed in the design of this project, which used cored holes, showed that they almost certainly would have produced useful information, had they been observed.

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Background

This report details a watching brief undertaken on developments at 'The Sixth Form Centre', The Cathedral School, Llandaff, undertaken during the late spring of 2013.

The developments were necessitated by the conversion of the former nursery by The Cathedral School, Llandaff. The conversion entailed minor internal alterations to the existing structure and an extension into the courtyard situated to the rear.

The site lies to the SE of the core of Llandaff and Bishops' Castle (RCAHMW 2000). It had been investigated previously during the conversion of the old Headmasters' House into the Nursery in 2001 (Young 2001a). At that time medieval features were located below the footprint of the northern wing extension and medieval deposits also occurred at greater depth below the area affected by the current development. The northern part of the garden has also had some geophysical investigation (Young 2001b).

The developments were the subject of Planning Applications 11/00207/DCO and 11/00208/DCO. Granting of consent in August 2011 was subject to an approved scheme of archaeological works (Clause 4). A written scheme of investigation produced by GeoArch in April 2013 was approved and development commenced in April 2013.

The construction project was managed by Knox and Wells Ltd. with NVB Architects.

Historical/Archaeological Context

The site lies within a walled garden, broadly corresponding to a 13th century moated area to the SE of the Bishops' Castle, interpreted either as the original proposed extent of the castle (for which construction probably started in the late 13th century, but which may not have been completed until the mid-14th century after a significant hiatus) or as a 'works compound' for the castle construction (Young 2001a).

The later medieval use of the area is not known, but appears to have been maintained as part of the lands immediately attached to the castle until at least the early 17th century (based on Speed's map of c.1610; James & Lewis 1987). Speed's map is grossly inaccurate in dealing with the SE side of Llandaff, but does not indicate the presence of the walled garden.

The garden is first documented in an estate map of the late c.1776. It remained a manorial holding, together with the castle, which formed the northern half of the

garden after the removal of the SE curtain wall. Despite its ownership lying with the manorial holdings with the Mathews of Radyr, it seems clear that the gardens were leased by Llandaff Court from an early period; certainly by the time of the Tithe Map (1844) the tenancy of the gardens lay with the Rev. Thomas, owner of Llandaff Court. An account of life at Llandaff Court in the time of Walter Coffin (Williams 1893) suggests that the kitchen gardens had incorporated the castle before about 1820. Llandaff Court was provided with no other kitchen garden, so far as is known, from its construction in the 1740s, so an 18th century date for the creation of the kitchen gardens in the 'walled garden and former castle is quite possible.

The current works were preceded by a program of geotechnical testing (Core Geotechnics 2012) which used a rotary core drilling rig from a hand-dug inspection pit at several localities around the site. The results obtained appear to have had the potential to generate archaeologically useful information, in particular from BH01 which was drilled in approximate anticipated location of the moat. Unfortunately this programme of works was not notified and therefore not monitored.

Methods

The methodology for the intervention, approved as part of the Planning Permission, entailed a watching brief on a series of bored piles to the NE of the existing house. The watching brief was conducted on Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 of April 2013 under generally dry weather conditions.

The area of the development was previously a surfaced play area, with the surface at approximately 25.93m OD. For the purposes of recording (Figure 1) an arbitrary datum of z=10.0m was established on this surface.

The six holes for the piles (Figure 1 – P1-P6) were drilled with a rotary bit solid bit which does not result in any extraction of core. The boring as none-the-less monitored, for it can produce small fragments of debris on clearance.

Preparatory work in the south-west corner of the watching brief area consisted of the excavation of a small trench to remove the existing drains and brick manhole (Figure 1, plan). Observation of the stratigraphy (Figure 1, section) on the northern side of the trench showed a 0.55m thick layer of recent made up ground (aggregates and building rubbles) below the upper play-area surfacing material. The modern made up ground (Context 01) overlaid a layer of red-brown clay with stones and charcoal inclusions (Context 03) representing the disturbed working level of the 2001 construction work. This layer was only exposed to the west and north of the concrete slab (Context 02) that was left in situ before piling. It yielded a small of body sherd of probably medieval pottery and a lump of lime.

All six holes progressed easily through a soft clay/silt deposit down to -3m (for the northern row of piles; approximately 22.9m OD) or -3.5m (for the southern row; approximately 22.4m OD), at which depth a more solid layer of bedrock was encountered. All holes were terminated at -5m (approximately 20.9m OD).

Results

The piles were drilled from the surface of an aggregate layer laid on the surface remaining after the 2001 construction episode. This aggregate served to raise ground levels significantly to the rear of the former Nursery – and provided a base layer for a soft, all-weather, play surface.
Some minor debris was recovered during the clearing of the hole, but in the event most such particles were clearly collapse from the overlying limestone aggregate layer, although a few particles from the more competent siltstone layer in the bedrock towards the base of the holes were recovered.

Interpretation

This layer of resistive bedrock at around 3m below surface had been recorded by the previous geotechnical work. The likely depth of the moat, if it did traverse this area, would be less than 3m. Records of the upper 3m were not capable of discriminating between the fill of the moat and the soft, clay-dominated upper part of the rock succession on the basis of the powder produced by the drill. Whether the moat crosses the area of this site therefore remains unknown.

Thus, in summary, the monitored piling holes did not yield any archaeologically significant information. In contrast, the earlier rotary cored test holes almost certainly would have yielded useful information, had they been monitored.

References

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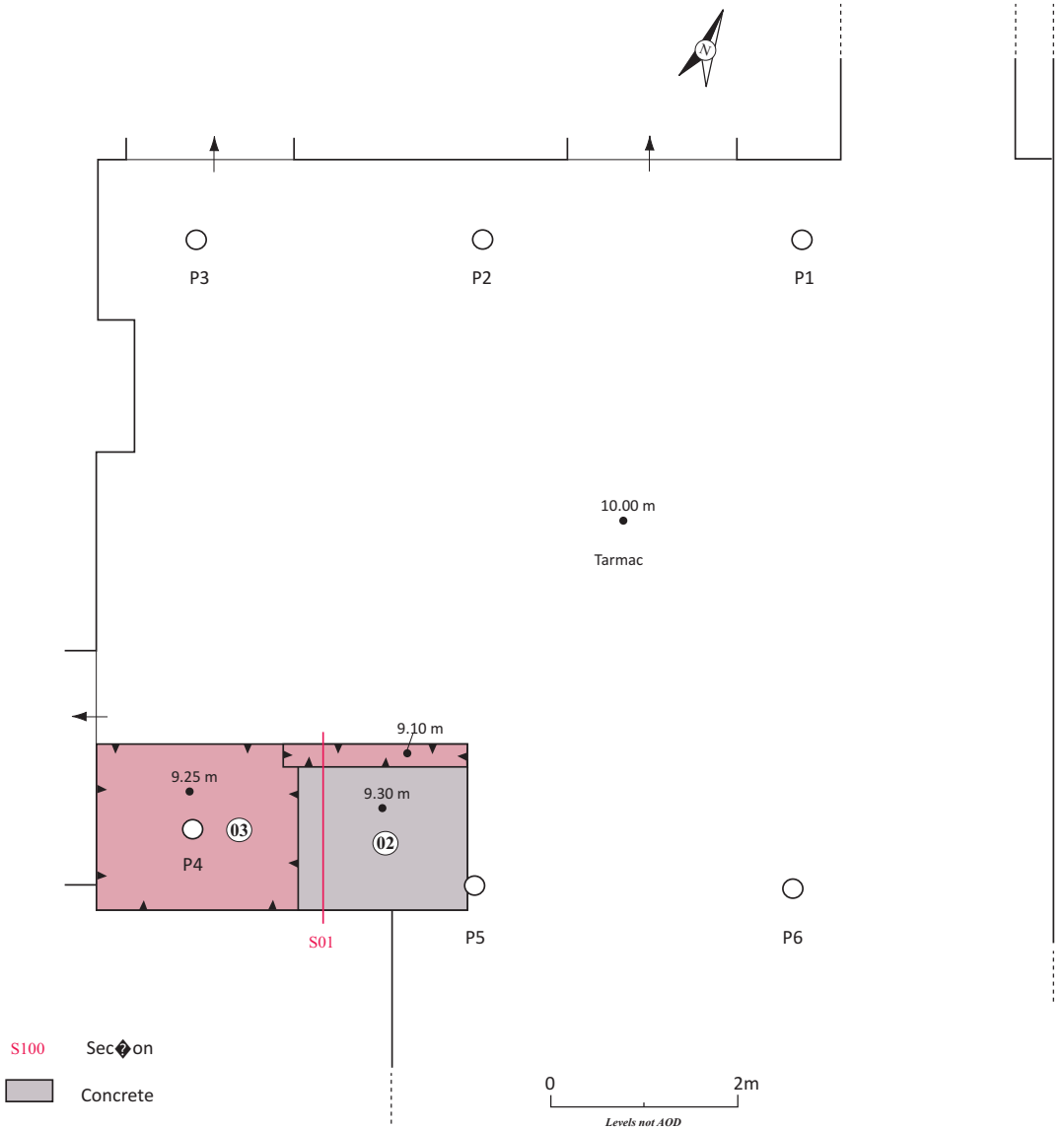
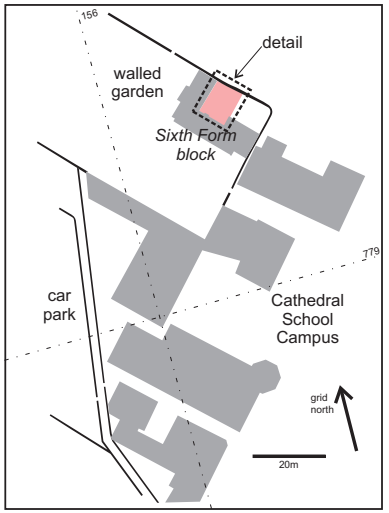
***Figure 1**: Plan of the locations of drilled holes P1-P6, with summary sketch sections. For details see text. Inset shows the location of the site, with the pink tone showing the development.*





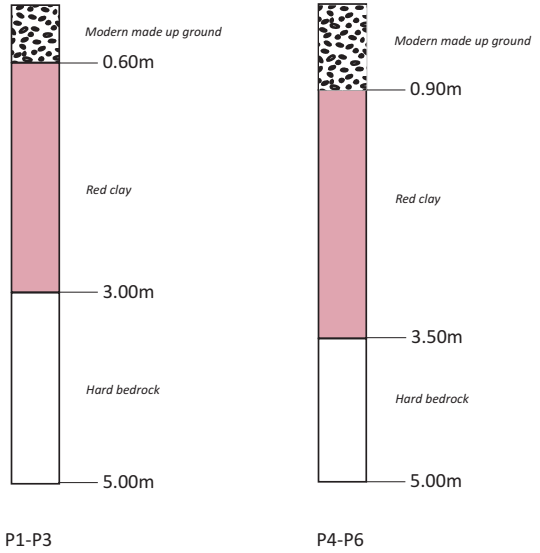


Figure 1: Plan and sec ons

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