



Chichester and District Archaeology Society

Excavation of Trial Trenches

Oyster Quay, Warblington, April 2022

Mike Kallaway

June 2022



Oyster Quay, excavation in progress 1st April 2022

Summary of Findings

Chichester Harbour Trust having recently purchased Oyster Quay are keen to learn more about its history. Documentary research has confirmed that a timber Quay was probably constructed in the early 20th Century, though exact dates are not clear at this stage.

The purpose of the excavation was to try and establish the origin and possible evidence of the usage of the shingle bank prior to the construction of the 20th Century Quay.

Evidence from the excavations and subsequent augering revealed a hard layer of periglacial sediment deposited by long-distance flow from the Downs about half a metre below the surface. This formed a slightly raised lobe of deposit, upon which the Quay was constructed. It could have been used as a landing for centuries before the Quay was built.

Finds recovered from the excavation are consistent with the construction of the 20th Century Quay. No finds could support the dating of activity earlier than the 19th Century.

Historic Background to the Site

Oyster Quay is at the end of Pook Lane, Warblington. The site was purchased in 2018 by the Chichester Harbour Trust and is within the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The grid reference for the Quay is: SU 7241 0526.

A satellite image of the general area is shown in Fig 1. This shows the remains of an early 20th Century timber, steel and concrete structure approximate dimensions 30 metres by 20 metres constructed on top of a shingle bank.



Fig 1 Satellite image of Oyster Quay

This structure first appears on Ordnance Survey Maps in 1931 however it is believed that it was constructed sometime earlier, possibly around the time of the First World War.

In earlier Ordnance Survey Maps the timber structure is missing but a shingle bank is shown in the same location, (Fig 2). There is no annotation on these earlier maps to indicate if the bank was man-made or natural. There is also no indication if it was used for landing boats. However, situated on the shore at the end of a track it would have provided a convenient location to load or offload cargo. The 1907 map shows a parish boundary centred on the shingle bank. This is likely to be medieval or maybe even Anglo-Saxon in origin suggesting that the bank has been a feature since these times.

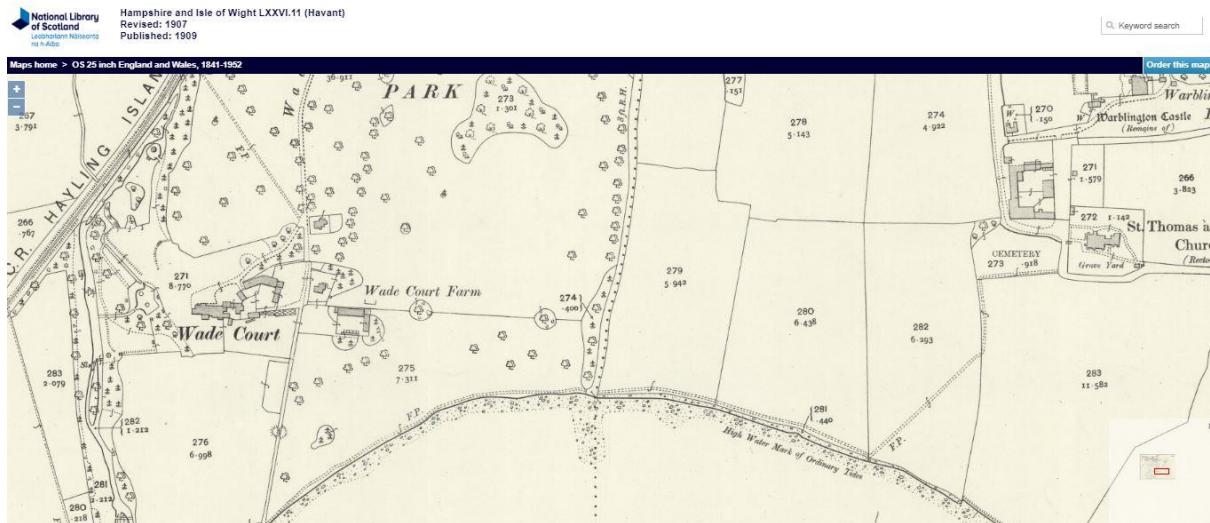


Fig 2 An extract of 1907 OS 25 inch to one mile map

The Quay has had quite a colourful history since the 19th Century (Griffiths A, 2019). It was used as a bathing pool in the 1870's. Sometime early in the 20th Century, probably just before the First World War the timber Quay was constructed. After the war it was used as a shipbreaking site and seems to have fallen into disuse after WW2. An aerial photo taken in 1946 (Fig 3) shows a more substantial structure than remains today.



Fig 3 Aerial photo of Oyster Quay in 1946

Site Access/ Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Risk Assessment (Appendix 1) was prepared prior to undertaking the survey.

Method

The site is located within the Chichester Harbour SSSI, SPA, SAC designated site and therefore the timing of the works were planned to cause minimum disturbance to over-wintering and passage migrating birds.

Approval for the work was sought and granted by Chichester Harbour Trust, Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Historic England, Natural England and Hampshire County Council. The Marine Management Organisation were notified.

Two trial trenches 1.5 metres by 1 metre were excavated to the south and south east of the wooden quay, (Fig 4). It was recognised that Trench 1 would be in the area probably disturbed during the construction of the 20th Century Quay and Trench 2 probably outside this area.

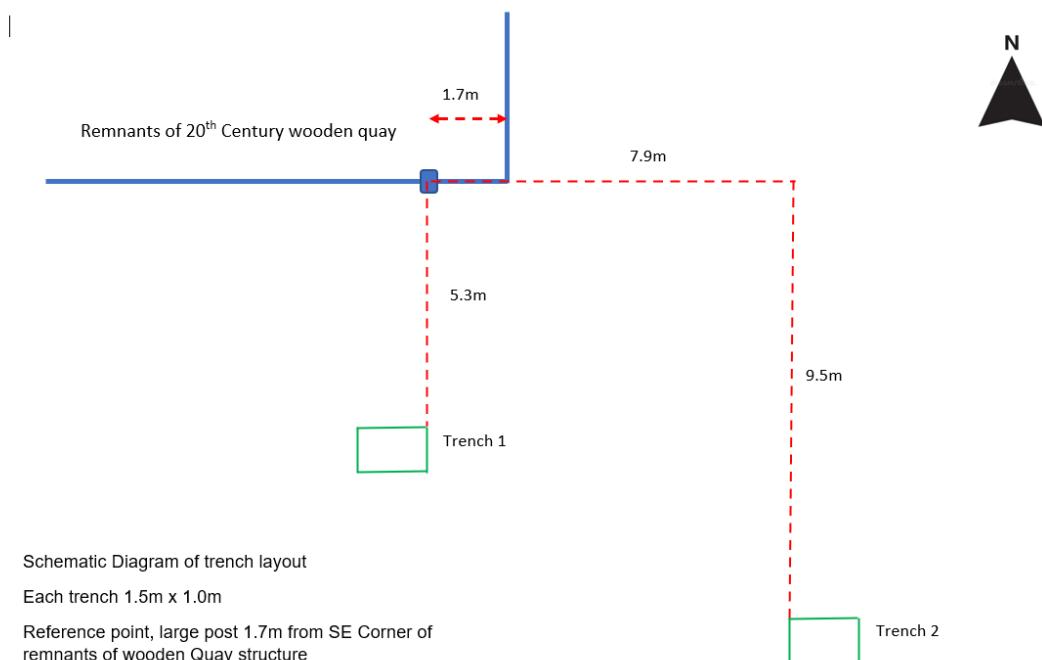


Fig 4 *Trench Layout*

The trenches were excavated by hand, spoil was collected on membranes adjacent to each trench. Finds were collected in a large tray for each trench and subsequently washed off site.

As the site is close to a popular coastal walk a number of CDAS Volunteers acted as Stewards to answer questions and discourage people from disturbing the excavators. Stewards' packs were prepared giving some background to the excavation

Volunteer Participation

16 CDAS members worked on the excavation on 1st April 2022.

Excavation results

The site is underwater for much of the tide cycle so it was always known that we had to work quickly. We had selected 1st April 2022 for the work due to the timing of the works and low level of the tide minimising the risk of the trenches filling with water. In the event things generally worked in our favour and the trenches remained reasonably dry with limited bailing/sponging required.

The volume of finds recovered from trench 1 nearest the Quay was much higher than from trench 2, (Fig 5). The nature of the finds was also very different. In trench 1 the majority of material retrieved was brick and tile, probable remnants of the fill of the 20th Century quay. In many ways it could be described as “builder’s rubble”. Small amounts of pottery and glass were recovered but nothing that could be dated earlier than the 19th Century.

The finds from trench 2 (Fig 5) were more as one might expect to find on a shoreline. There were a few shells and two bones later identified by Rob Symmons of Fishbourne Roman Palace as belonging to a “sheep sized” animal. Again, there was nothing in the finds to indicate a date earlier than the 19th Century.



Fig 5 finds from trenches 1 (left) and 2 (right)

In both trenches after digging through around half a metre of shingle and mud a hard chalky/clay layer was encountered which proved extremely difficult to penetrate. In trench 1 this layer was 0.5m below the surface and 0.4m in trench 2, (Fig 6).



Fig 6 View into trenches 1 (left) and 2 (right) showing hard chalky bottom layer

Discussion of Excavation Results

What is clear from the results is that we did not find any evidence of use of the Quay before the 19th Century.

However, in terms of the structure of the ground the hard chalky layer is intriguing. Looking at records of augering undertaken in 2006 by MoLAS the nearest borehole at Coniger Point 1.2kms east of Oyster Quay did not reveal such a layer.

There is the possibility that this hard layer is man-made and used in some way to create the bank that predated the 20th Century quay.

In order to investigate this possibility further it was decided to make a number of boreholes using an auger in the vicinity of the Quay. This would allow us to get a better knowledge of the composition and extent of the hard layer

Borehole results and discussion

The author and Peter Murphy, formerly of English Heritage, made 4 boreholes using an auger in a line running west east just south of the existing Quay and extending 45 metres to the east of the current quay.

It proved difficult to penetrate the hard chalky layer however in three of the four boreholes we were able to capture a significant sample, (Fig 7). As before the top of the layer was around half a metre below the surface.

The hard chalky layer has been identified as a likely yellowish-brown clay including abundant chalk fragments. It is a periglacial sediment deposited by long-distance flow from the Downs. This formed a slightly raised lobe of deposit, upon which the quay was constructed. The overall extent of this layer along the shoreline is unknown however we know that it does not go as far as Coniger Point



Fig 7 example of auger results showing hard layer of yellowish-brown clay including abundant chalk fragments

Bearing in mind that the bank is natural in origin it could have been used as a landing point centuries before the 20th Century Quay was constructed. This natural chalky mixture has excellent load bearing properties. It would have been easy to beach boats and run carts up to them to unload heavy cargoes, for example some the materials used to build the Warblington Roman Villa.

Conclusion

The excavation and subsequent boreholes have established that the bank that preceded the construction of the 20th Century Quay is probably natural in origin. Although it could have been used for centuries before the current quay was constructed, we did not find any dating evidence earlier than the 19th Century.

It is likely that there are as yet undiscovered documents in the archives that will reveal more about the history of the site. Further archaeological activity is not recommended at this time.

References

Griffiths A, Lymbourne Manor Quay, unpublished article

Griffiths A, 2019, *Tales of a Quay, a Bathing Pool and a World War 1 Submarine*, The Langstonian, August 2019, the Langstone Village Association magazine

Acknowledgements

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Ruby Musgrove-Ward, Natural England

Alex Bellisario, Historic England

APPENDIX 1 CHICHESTER AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

SITE NAME: Oyster Quay	SITE CODE: WB 2022	ASSESSMENT BY: Mike Kallaway DATE: 24 th March 2022			PAGE 1 OF 2		
ACTIVITY: Excavation of Trial Trenches			No. of people present: up to 20				
HAZARD IDENTIFICATION							
HAZARDS IDENTIFIED	People at risk (tick)		Likelihood of injury (tick)			NOTES	ASSESSED BY
	Volunteers*	Public	Probable	Possible	Remote		
1. Beware ticks	✓			✓		From deer – can cause Lyme disease	
2. Avoid leptospirosis	✓			✓		An infectious disease that affects humans & animals	
3. Exposure to sun, wind and rain	✓			✓		No shelter available on sites	
4. Rough ground	✓			✓		Shoreline gravel and mud with obstacles	
5. Insect bites	✓			✓		Advised to bring repellent	

ACTION PLAN				
Hazard No.	MEASURES REQUIRED TO REDUCE RISK TO ACCEPTABLE LEVEL			NOTES
				All measures in place. Signed/dated by Site Supervisor
1	Check for skin for ticks			
2.	Wash hands before eating			
3.	Volunteers advised to bring and use suntan cream if sunny, and drink plenty of hot/cold fluid as appropriate. Use of hats and water/windproof jackets advised.			
4.	Volunteers advised			
5.	First Aid kit available			

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HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

HAZARDS IDENTIFIED	People at risk (tick)		Likelihood of injury (tick)			NOTES	ASSESSED BY
	Volunteers*	Public	Probable	Possible	Remote		
1. Muddy and water saturated ground	✓			✓		Appropriate footwear, rescue rope available in case of someone being stuck in the mud	
2. Cattle in field	✓			✓		Normally sedate. Not cows with calves.	
3. Multiple trip hazards	✓			✓		Uneven and possibly slippery concrete. Trip hazards from posts and other Quay relics	

ACTION PLAN

Hazard No.	MEASURES REQUIRED TO REDUCE RISK TO ACCEPTABLE LEVEL	NOTES	All measures in place. Signed/dated by Site Supervisor
1.	Boots/wellies to be worn		
2.	Volunteers advised to move steadily, not run. No dogs allowed.		
3.	Volunteers advised.		