

WEST QUAY, BRIDGWATER, 1973

A REPORT BY MEMBERS OF THE BRIDGWATER AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A trench for a new sewerage scheme (ST 300373) was dug 2 metres wide and 3-4 metres deep along West Quay from a point 200 metres south of the telescopic bridge, known locally as the Black Bridge, to a point in line with the north side of the Town Bridge. This area of the town is of historical and archaeological importance. It was hoped that the trench works might throw some light on medieval and 18th-century structures on the west bank of the river Parrett.

The Castle was built by William de Briwere in 1202,¹ and bordered the river on the west bank. The Water Gate of the Castle (Fig. 1) is now 13 metres from the quay wall. If, however, outworks or landing places had existed, built out into the river, traces might be revealed. A new quay is referred to during the building of Castle Street and Chandos Street, c. 1725, in the Chandos Papers.²

A bridge existed in 1286,³ and John Leland writes in 1538 of a bridge 'begon of Wm. Bruer'.⁴ Jarman in his *History of Bridgwater* states that Sir John Trivett in the reign of Richard II contributed 300 marks to the cost of a bridge.⁵ A three-arched bridge with the Trivett arms was demolished in 1795. An iron bridge from Coalbrookdale followed this and was in turn replaced by the present bridge in 1883. It is not known if the early bridge begun by Briwere was on or near the site of the present bridge, or as suggested by Jarman, a little to the north.

With the help and co-operation of the Bridgwater Borough Engineer's Department and the Contractors, it was possible for members of the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society to measure and photograph features as the opening of the trench proceeded. The Society expresses its gratitude to the above.

The observation and recording was conditioned by the 'cut and cover' method of trenching, the immediate removal of spoil to a tip at Saltlands and the depth and unconsolidated nature of the soil which necessitated the shuttering of trench walls immediately after excavation. A number of stone structures was observed and the positions are shown in Fig. 1. Descriptions under map numbers are given below.

Feature 1. An area of deep grey mud, depth not revealed, extended from the north end of the trench to a point roughly in the centre of the junction of Chandos Street and West Quay. The Contractors reported lias stones apparently forming a flight of steps, opposite the Lions House. Borings made in 1972, 30 metres west of the present river bank north of the Lions House indicate that at some previous date, water with a gravel bottom at 8 metres existed in that area. Abraded sherds of Romano-British and unglazed medieval pot were found in the gravel.

Feature 2. A wall 60 cms. wide of hard red clamp-fired brick probably of early 18th-century date ran east-west opposite the centre of Chandos Street and across West Quay. This wall was capped with flat slabs of Ham stone and its top was 80 cms. below the present road level at the Quay. The bottom of the trench at 3 metres did not expose the base of the wall. The bricks were bonded with yellowish mortar. This brick wall, apparently a retaining wall with a flat top, may have formed part of the 'new quay'.

Feature 3. Abutting the brick wall on the north side and running in the same direction towards the river, a brick culvert 60 cms. across and 40 cms. deep lay approximately 1 metre below the road surface. The type of brick used indicated a late 18th or early 19th-century date. Mud, apparently river mud, lay below the drain and between the brick wall (Feature 2) and the stone wall (Feature 4) described below.

Feature 4. A wall, 1.5 metres wide, constructed of undressed lias stone with white mortar, crossed the trench and turned direction to the south to run parallel with the Quay. The base of the wall was below the bottom of the trench, the top was 1.7 metres below road surface. This wall was separated from the brick wall (Feature 2) by 80 cms. of mud. To the south and west of the stone wall was reddish made-up ground.

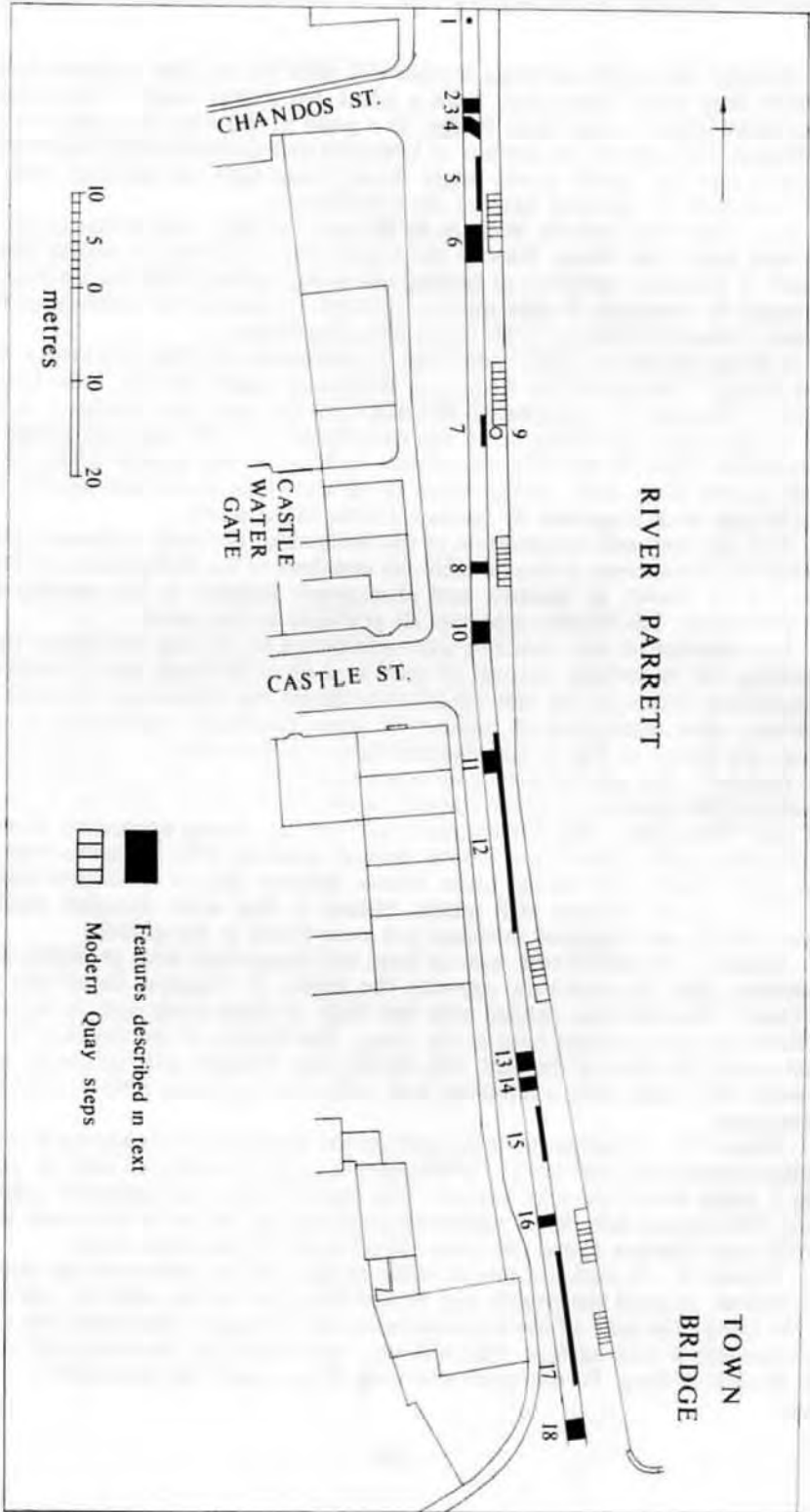


Fig. 1. West Quay, Bridgewater.

Feature 5. A wall of blue lias ran parallel to the sewer trench for 10 metres between the sewer trench and the present Quay wall. The base of this wall, 3.30 metres down, rested on soft alluvial mud. The top was 1.2 metres below road level.

Feature 6. The base of a wall, 4 metres wide, was not exposed. The top was 60 cms. below the present road level.

Feature 7. A mass of mortared sandstone and Ham stone, bonded with hard pink mortar, may have been the footing for a crane. It was 4 metres wide and 35 cms. below the road. No date can be assigned to this feature. An existing crane is situated at Feature 9.

Feature 8. A wall, 1.20 metres wide, of poor quality undressed lias stone and sandstone, with sandy mortar, crossed the trench. The top was 2 metres below the road surface.

Feature 10. A wall of lias and red sandstone with a very hard and durable mortar crossed the trench, its top approximately 1 metre down.

Feature 11. A wall of dressed sandstone, 1.20 metres wide, on a foundation of blue lias with hard grey mortar was capped with Ham stone and crossed the trench at right angles. Stones projecting from the side of the wall may have formed steps. The top was 2 metres below present road level and the base was not exposed. It may have been a quay or retaining wall of medieval date, but no dating evidence was found.

Feature 12. A wall of lias stone faced with dressed sandstone ran parallel to the sewer trench between the trench and the present quay wall, on the same alignment as wall Feature 5 for a distance of 30 metres. The top was covered with a coping of flat stones and was 30 cms. below road level.

Feature 13. The base of a wall of red sandstone was observed crossing the trench at 3.5 metres depth. Slabs of blue lias stone, up to 1 metre square were lying at the base of the trench at 4 metres depth below the base of this wall.

Feature 14. A double wall of lias stone, each side 25 cms. thick with a fill 1 metre thick of red earth, crossed the trench towards the river. This was probably a drain, date unknown.

Feature 15. A 5-metre stretch of large well-laid lias blocks ran along the river side of the trench on the same alignment as walls 5 and 12. The top of this wall was covered by 30 cms. of red marl and 1 metre of modern fill. The base was seen at 3.2 metres. Grey mud was observed on the landward side of this wall.

Feature 16. A wall 1.2 metres wide made of large lias stones with sandy mortar crossed the trench. The base was still unexposed at 4 metres depth. The top was 1 metre below road level.

Feature 17. A wall of lias on the same alignment as walls 5, 12 and 15 ran for a distance of 20 metres along the trench between the trench and the quay wall.

Feature 18. At the south end of the trench a mass of solid lias masonry 4 metres wide and at 2 metres depth may have formed the footings of supports for a previous bridge or part of the outworks of the Castle.

FINDS

Pottery was found in the mud fill of the trench at Feature 1:—

Fragments of a dish with yellow glaze and brown trailed slip ornament, Midlands or Derbyshire manufacture, 18th century (Fig. 2).

Fragment of chamber pot and bottle base of blue and grey ornamented Westerwald German stoneware, 17/18th century (Figs. 3 and 4).

Chamber pot of Delft ware with grey-blue tin glaze and brown metallic overglaze, possibly Spanish make, 17th century (Fig. 5).

Fragments of dishes with brown and yellow stripes typical of Bristol and Midlands 18th-century manufacture.

Spoil from the trench was taken to the Corporation Depot at Saltlands. From this Depot clay pipes dated to 1789 were recovered (Fig. 6). (Clay pipes found in

Bridgwater will be the subject of a separate report.) Also found in the spoil were a bronze farthing of Charles II; the rim of a bowl in pink fabric with matt black glazing outside and greenish brown glaze and yellow trailed slip inside, 18th century (Fig. 7); the base of a bowl in pink sandy fabric, black burnished outside with yellow splashed green glaze inside, 18th century (Fig. 8); a sherd of Donyatt pottery with lead glaze, trailed slip and clear yellow overglaze, 18th century (Fig. 9); and a fragment of Delft ware with blue leaf decoration, 16/17th centuries. Finds have been deposited in Bridgwater Museum (Acc. No. 76/4).

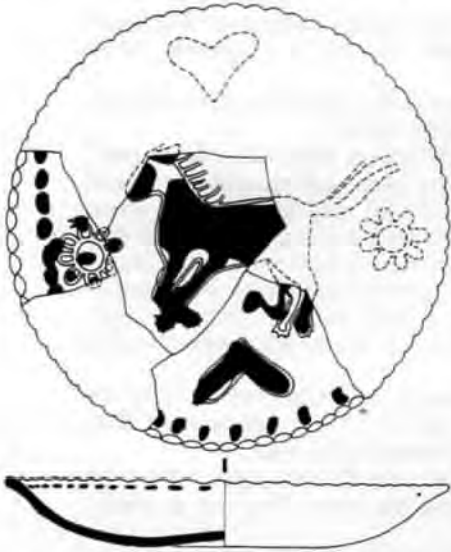


Fig 2



Fig 6

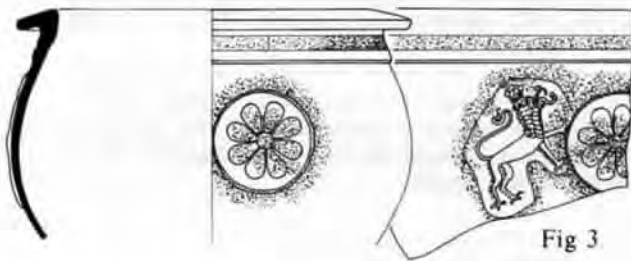


Fig 3

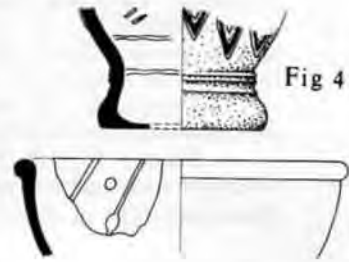


Fig 4

Fig 7

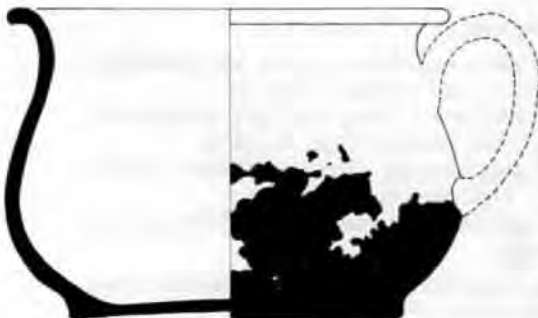


Fig 5



Fig 8



Fig 9



CONCLUSION

No pottery of pre-17th century date was recovered from the trench. The walls could not be dated. However, those walls with sandy mortar, Features 8 and 16, the wall and lias slabs at low level (Feature 13) and the mass of masonry at Feature 18, may be medieval work relating to the outworks or quay of the Castle. The walls with dressed lias and Ham stone may be 18th-century work in connection with the Duke of Chandos' development of the area in the early 18th century, using materials from the demolished Castle. Although it is not possible to date the features on present knowledge, this report has been compiled in the hope that any future discoveries in the area will add to the picture and at some time enable us to understand the layout and development of the Castle area.

1. Charter from King John to William de Briwere in 1202 to fortify a castle in Bridgwater (*Rot. Chart.*, p. 70).
2. Chandos letters in the Stowe Manuscripts, Huntington Museum, San Marino, California, and on microfilm in Bridgwater Library. Also C. H. Collins Baker and M. I. Baker, *The Life and Circumstances of James Brydges, First Duke of Chandos* (Oxford 1949).
3. *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1281-92, p. 244.
4. John Leland, *Itinerary* (1538), Vol. 1, p. 162 (Centaur Press 1964).
5. S. G. Jarman, *History of Bridgwater*, p. 22.
6. See n. 2.