

Bath's Big Dig

SouthGate | Bath™

SouthGate excavations Summer 2007

The much needed redevelopment of Bath's Southgate shopping centre and bus station has led to the development of an extremely complex archaeological project in what, as a World Heritage Site, is one of the UK's most important cities.

The archaeological project is funded by Morley and Multi Development UK Ltd and is being carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service working closely with Bath & North East Somerset Council's Archaeological Officer, English Heritage and the Roman Baths Museum.

The aims have been to preserve much of the most important archaeological material for the future whilst excavating some of the site to ensure that a high quality, sustainable development can be built. The archaeological works will fall into three zones:

→ A new basement under the site of the former bus station where there is an important Mesolithic (10,000-4,000 BC) site

→ The new bus station

→ The Southgate Shopping Centre where there is evidence of medieval buildings, a mill, the so-called Horse Bath and buildings dating from the 18th century onwards. Behind the medieval buildings once lay the 'Bum Ditch' which carried Spring water and sewage down to the River Avon. The waterlogged nature of the ground means that there is a huge potential for understanding the environment of Bath over the last 10,000 years.



1 SouthGate siteplan
2 Core sampling of archaeological layers
3 Evaluation January 2007
4 Stone sluice gate base in Bum Ditch
5 View of excavations
6 18th Century cellar



Prehistoric

As the climate warmed at the end of the last Ice Age, 13,000 BC, birch and pine woodland covered most of Bath and North East Somerset.

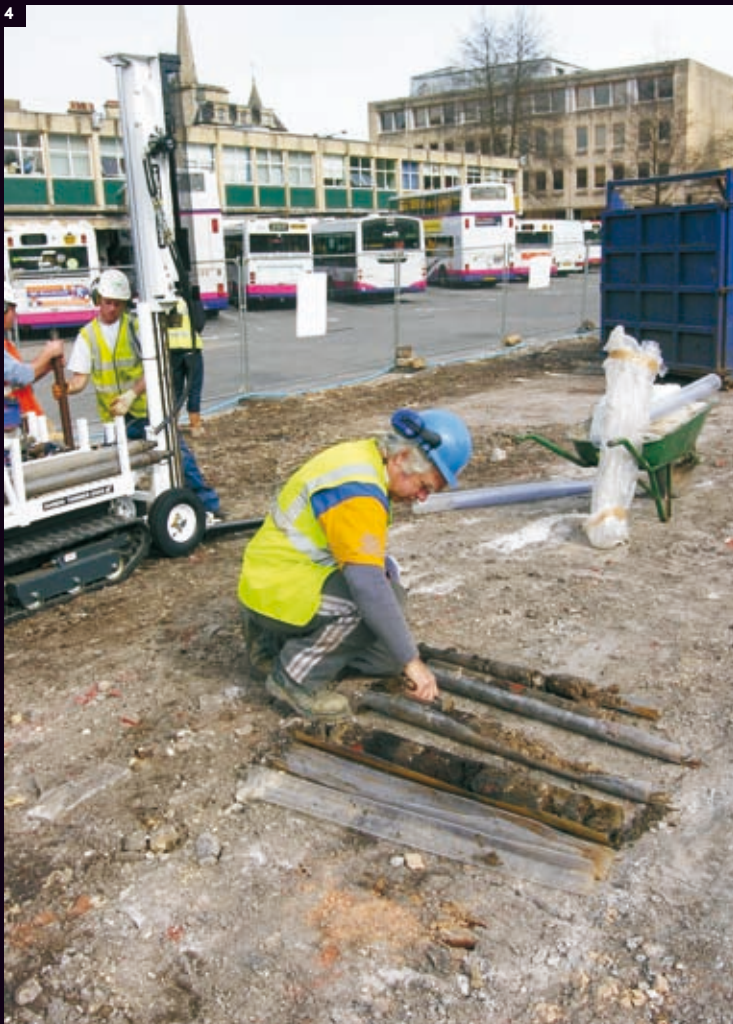
Hunter-gatherers roamed the region, hunting and fishing and using the river valleys and coast as a means of transport and communication.

The hunter-gatherers used flint tools in their daily lives. These have been found in the Kings Bath Spring area (350m north-west of the site) and it seems the Hot Springs have attracted people from this very early date.

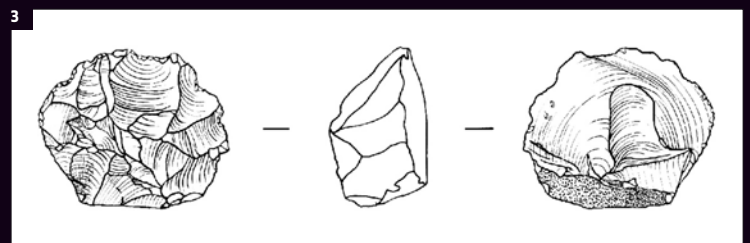
The nature of the tools and flint working waste from the Hot and Cross Bath Spring suggest temporary hunting camps were sited on the localised areas of high ground (possibly former islands) within the floodplain of the Avon.

We expect there to be evidence of hunter-gatherer camps on the high ground within the eastern area of this development. These types of archaeological sites are incredibly rare and so are particularly important for our understanding of the period.

Iron Age coins have been found at the King's Bath Spring, perhaps suggesting at least an occasional human presence in the central area to deposit votive offerings at the Springs in the decades prior to the Roman Conquest.



- 1 Iron Age coins from Sacred Spring (© Roman Baths Museum)
- 2 Mesolithic flints from King's Spring (© Roman Baths Museum)
- 3 Mesolithic flint scraper
- 4 Examining cores showing archaeological layers



Romano-British period (AD43-410)

Many questions still remain regarding the settlement of Roman Bath. The walled area of Roman Bath (Aquae Sulis) was centred around the world famous baths and associated temples.

On higher ground around Bath, villas (fine residences or rural estate centres) overlooked the river.

The SouthGate site lies to the south of the built-up area of the walled town.

Early Ordnance Survey maps indicate the Roman road the 'Fosse Way' runs through the site but there is no actual evidence to suggest its presence here.

Typical land-uses outside a Roman town might include cremation and burial, quarrying, agriculture, waste disposal and milling or other industrial activities.

In the vicinity of a navigable river, port facilities, waterfronts and land reclamation might also be anticipated, but only a few fragments of Romano-British pottery and brick have been found previously on the SouthGate site though unexpected discoveries are still possible.



- 1 1932 OS showing Fosse Way
- 2 Roman Bath reconstruction by J Ronayne
(© Roman Baths Museum)
- 3 Roman offerings found in King's Spring
(© Roman Baths Museum)
- 4 Head of Agrippina found 1960
(© Roman Baths Museum)



Later medieval period (AD1066-1485)

When the Roman economy and administration collapsed Bath suffered an abrupt decline.

Bath regained its status as an important urban, monastic and political centre from the late 9th century and after the Norman Conquest (1066), Bath became a city.

The King's Bath was re-built and Bath became an important resort for those seeking healing in the Spring waters.

Southgate Street is first mentioned in documentary sources in the early 13th century. Lined with domestic, commercial and industrial properties, drinking water was brought to the area from springs to the south of the Avon in a lead conduit known as the 'Magdalen Conduit' which was eventually renamed 'St James's Conduit'.

On the site we hope to find traces of a rectangular pond on the east side of Southgate Street, known as the 'Horse Bath' from at least 1600, which may have originated as a medieval millpond from Isabel's Mill and been fed by an outflow of the King's Bath Spring.

Forming the rear boundary of properties on the east side of Southgate Street was a feature known as the 'Bum Ditch' which functioned as an open sewer for local inhabitants. It should contain a wealth of information about the diet and lifestyle of the medieval population!



- 1 Medieval city wall in Orchard Street service trench
- 2 Excavated remains of medieval road surface
- 3 1610 Speed (© Roman Baths Museum)
- 4 1951 excavations city wall and culvert (© Roman Baths Museum)
- 5 Excavation of the Bum Ditch deposits



Post-medieval period (AD1485-present)

The earliest map to show the SouthGate site dates to 1588. It is a simple and stylised view of the city, which shows the city wall, Southgate Street and the bridge.

The SouthGate site may have been the location of pans used to produce saltpetre for the local gunpowder industry. These were ponds or troughs for mixing urine with stable waste, manure and animal by-products.

The bridge, its gate and chapel, Southgate Street and, to the east, the 'Bum Ditch' can all be seen on Gilmore's map of 1694.

The Ham is shown as open meadow. Racks in the north of the Ambry show that the meadowland was in use as a 'tenter ground' (an open area used for drying cloth) by the local cloth production/finishing industries.

In the 18th-century a stone-lined conduit replaced the 'Bum Ditch' foul sewer.

The Georgian redevelopment of Bath is world famous, providing the city with many of its most famous landmarks. The Southgate area was redeveloped in the latter part of the 18th century and housing was built on the Ham in the 19th century.

The most important structures on the SouthGate site were probably the Stothert and Pitts iron foundry, which lay in Southgate St (previously Horse St) from the end of the 18th century until the company moved premises in 1857.



- 1 1793 Harcourt Master's map
- 2 1853 Cotterell map
- 3 Post 1866 map
- 4 1940's OS map showing WWII bomb impacts with site
- 5 1843 Godwin map



Bath's Big Dig

With construction of the new £360 million retail-led SouthGate development well underway in the Southgate area of Bath, an extremely complex archaeological project has been underway on the development site since February 2007.

To create awareness of Bath's Big Dig to the local community, Multi Development, together with MoLAS and Bath & North East Somerset Council, have opened an excavation centre, at the corner of New Orchard Street, Bath to display information about the work that archaeologists have been carrying out in the trenches in the Southgate area.

As well as being able to look at the information panels that will be available for viewing, volunteers from the Museum of London will be on hand each day from 12-2pm to answer your queries and to display any archaeological finds.

So to learn more about Bath's Big Dig visit the archaeology centre at:

New Orchard Street
6th – 31st August 2007
Monday – Friday: 9am – 5pm

The archaeology centre will be staffed from 12-2pm

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