

95-101

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE, 21st MAY 1976

1. REPORT TO ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Perhaps the most notable event of the past year was the departure in October of Michael Griffiths to take up a new appointment as County Archaeologist for North Yorkshire. He leaves behind him a record of exceptional achievement which it will be difficult for his successor to match. I know the Committee will wish to join me in wishing him every success in his future career.

The vacancy resulting from Mr Henderson's appointment will remain unfilled until April 1977, as it is the policy of the City Council, during the present economic situation, not immediately to fill posts which fall vacant.

On a brighter note, the DoE have provided funds to enable the Unit to employ a draughtsman on a one-year contract. Mrs Susan Hill was appointed in March; during her year she will clear the backlog of small finds drawing and finish the plans for Exeter Excavations, Volume 1.

There is every reason to believe that the coming year will see a major landmark in the Unit's history: the publication of Volume 1. We also intend to produce a series of inexpensive booklets on aspects of Exeter's history and archaeology. The format will be similar to the revised Cathedral Close booklet; topics will include : The Legionary Fortress, The Roman Town, Exe Bridge and Exe Island, Saxon and Mediaeval Exeter.

An application has been made to the Manpower Services Commission Job Creation Programme, for a grant to excavate the claustral ranges of St Katherine's Priory, Polsloe, with a view to putting the remains on public display. The proposed scheme includes provision for excavation, consolidation, and landscaping. No funds will be diverted to the scheme from the rescue excavation budget. A second application, relating to a rescue excavation, will be made later in the year, when the excavation programme is finalised.

The list of sites which may require excavation during the next year is long:

1. Beedles Terrace (Roman and Mediaeval defences)
2. Magdalen Street (Legionary buildings, civil defences, Roman cemetery)
3. Mermaid Yard (Legionary defences and building, civil Roman buildings)
4. Waltons, High Street (Legionary buildings, ? defences)
5. Star Jeans, High Street (Via principalis frontage)
6. Broadgate (Via principalis frontage)
7. North Gate (all periods)
8. 47-48 North Street (? principia)
9. Melbourne Place (Roman cemetery)
10. Sidwell Street/Blackboy roundabout (Roman cemetery)

We will certainly not be able to deal adequately with all of these sites; hopefully not all will materialise.

Finally, I would like to thank the members and officers of the City Council for their continued wholehearted support for the Unit. Without their goodwill our task would be infinitely more difficult.

2. EXCAVATIONS CARRIED OUT IN THE PAST YEAR

Roman

Broadgate (SX 9197 9260)

The edge of the via principalis, seen in a temporary section next to the High Street, continued in use throughout the Roman period. It is now clear that the spacing between the three E-W roads in the central part of the fortress was two actus.

Rack Street (SX 9188 9227)

A 10m length of the fortress defensive ditch was exposed during building work. This sighting now enables us to predict with some confidence the line of the western defences.

198 High Street (SX 9196 9262)

Observation work showed that civil timber buildings fronting a N-S road in the early second century were replaced in masonry c. 200.

Cathedral Close (SX 9205 9255) (P. Bidwell)

On 12 April, work was recommenced in the Cathedral Close. An area of 625 sq. m. is to be reduced in depth from between 0.375 m and 1.75 m in order to make a granite-paved square in front of the west end of the Cathedral. Excavation in the shallowest part has already produced some interesting information. The removal of a modern drain has exposed a section across a major north-south road whose continuation may form the eastern boundary of the forum insula; the remains of domestic buildings of late Roman date have also been recorded on its north side. A number of burials, probably of C14 and C15 date have been excavated; the majority were laid out in 'vaults' lined with masonry. A stone-lined channel which crossed the site, and can be shown to pre-date the sixteenth century, may well have supplied fresh water from St Peter's Conduit to the Bishop's Palace and Deanery.

The remainder of the excavation will involve the investigation of late Roman levels; it is hoped that additional dating evidence for the final period of alterations to the basilica will be recovered, and that more will be revealed of the plan of the buildings and courtyard to its rear. The present work should also confirm the eastern limits of the pre-Norman cemetery, and may produce evidence for early religious buildings. The chancel of the mediaeval church of St Mary Major (demolished in 1867) will also be investigated, and the plan of the charnel chapel will also be determined in detail. The excavation of a large number of mediaeval burials will also take place.

The Fortress Garrison (P. Bidwell)

Until recently there was no material evidence to show which legion had garrisoned the Roman fortress at Exeter founded in c. AD 55, although on historical grounds its identification with the Second Augusta Legion was virtually certain. This has now been proved by the find from the Bathhouse of two antefixes (roof ornaments) moulded in high relief with a motif showing a rosette flanked by two dolphins. Careful examination has demonstrated that they were produced from the same mould as antefixes found in the legionary fortress at Caerleon which was occupied by the Second Augusta Legion from AD 74. The mould obviously formed part of the stock-in-trade of a legionary craftsman who must have accompanied the legion when it was transferred to its new base in South Wales.

Medieval and Post-medieval

Exe Bridge/Frog Street (SX 9168 9221)

Most of the past year has been devoted to work on this site. Documentary sources suggest that the bridge was started c.1200, or a little earlier. The east abutment was founded on a mudbank at the edge of the main channel. St Edmund's chapel, first mentioned in 1214, spanned arch two with its E and W walls resting on cutwaters one and two respectively. The N wall was supported on two small arches between the cutwater points. A tower was added in the fourteenth century, when the church was extended to cutwater three. A north aisle was added c.1500. The water ceased to flow beneath the church in about 1550 when the riverfront was pushed forward to the west side of cutwater three. The church was completely rebuilt after a fire in 1832.

Timber buildings were erected c. 1275 on the mudbank to the west of Frog Street. These were replaced in stone after a fire in the early fourteenth century. The tenements were rebuilt a number of times before the houses were demolished to make way for a brewery in 1920.

From c.1350, houses with masonry foundations fronted the bridge on both sides of the church.

Evidence was found for bone, horn and bronze working, and possibly tanning.

The remains will be consolidated for display in the setting of a public park.

Shilhay (SX 9191 9208)

A late eighteenth century barge quay was located next to Coney Lake. Debris from a pipe kiln, c.1700, occurred over a wide area between Coney Lake and Commercial Road.

Star Jeans (formerly Hinton Lake), High Street

A full record of this pair of timber-framed houses, built 1556, was made during renovations. Most notable was the information recovered on the original internal decor. Nine wall paintings were recorded, including two with human figures.

198 High Street

The tenement was occupied, c.1450, by a building with front cellar and side passage. A hall house, built perhaps c.1500, was replaced, c.1575, by a three storied timber framed house.

A number of other buildings were also recorded.

3. PUBLICATION

The Cathedral Close and Guildhall drafts should be ready for editing in September or October. We hope to go to the printers early in 1977, with a view to publication in mid-year.

Estimates have been obtained from a number of printers, but as yet no decision has been reached on how the volumes will be published. Whatever method is adopted, they will presumably qualify for a 75% grant from the DoE. There appear to be three alternatives:

a. Exeter University

Unofficial soundings indicate that the University may be able to publish the volumes. However, it seems unlikely that they will be able to make more than a nominal contribution towards the printing costs.

b. Council for British Archaeology

CBA intend to produce a monograph series for major excavation reports. A meeting was held in February with Mr Henry Cleere at which he seemed optimistic that the Exeter volumes could be accommodated in this series.

c. Exeter Museums

Although the museum has no tradition of publications on the scale envisaged, there seems no reason in principle why it should not publish the volumes.

Publication programme timetable :

Vol 1, Roman 1971-2	October 1976
Vol 2, Roman finds 1971-6)	
Vol 3, Medieval finds 1971-6)	October 1977
Vol 4, Medieval 1971-6	April 1978
Vol 5, Roman 1973-7	October 1978

Friday 16th July

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE, 22 OCTOBER 1976

REPORT TO ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. EXCAVATIONS

Exe Bridge

Excavation of St Edmunds Church and three Frog Street riverside tenements was completed in May. The first church, built with the bridge c. 1200, was the same length as the nineteenth century church but not as wide. The north wall was supported above the water on a row of four arches.

A small trench excavated beneath the church demonstrated the existence of a ford prior to the construction of the bridge. A layer of river gravel, c. 0.30 m thick, sealed a surface with an associated scatter of nails and horseshoe fragments. A second gravel layer, 0.2 m thick, overlay a sandbank upon which two thin wattle panels had been lain, presumably to consolidate the surface. No trace was found of the timber bridge mentioned by Hooker, though it may have been situated outside the excavated area.

During the thirteenth century the river bank was periodically flooded and in use as a sand quarry and rubbish dump. Shortly before 1300 a small timber building was erected next to Frog Street. This was succeeded after a fire by the first stone tenements and river wall. The subsequent history of the Frog Street tenements is long and complex. Up to at least the sixteenth century they appear to have been used for both domestic and industrial purposes. The river wall was rebuilt or repaired a number of times before 1600, by which date the area under the church had been reclaimed and a new wall built on line with the west end.

In June the complete northern elevation of the bridge was drawn at a scale of 1:20 before repointing and consolidation was carried out by the contractors. A good deal of information was gained about the way in which the bridge was built and the fabric was closely examined for later alterations. Much evidence relating to the structural history of the bridge is obscured by the repointing - particularly differences in the mortar. The consolidation and landscaping appears to be progressing well and should be finished by the end of the year.

Cathedral Close (Paul Bidwell)

The last two months of the excavation were mostly devoted to the examination of late Roman deposits which lay above the level of the new sunken square in front of the Cathedral. The south-east corner of the forum was located, and much light shed on the arrangements behind the basilica. From c. 80 AD to c. 250 AD, the area enclosed by the boundary wall appeared to have remained open, with the exception of a portico against the rear of the basilica; c. 250 the portico was enclosed, and may have been divided into a range of rooms. After c. 340, the boundary wall was demolished, and a range of rooms (?shops) was erected against the rear of the basilica. South of the forum the east-west road previously excavated was once more encountered; it can now be shown to have been resurfaced sixteen times during the course of the civil period, that is, on average once every twenty years. The upper surfaces of the road were

continuous with those of a lane or path 2.4 m wide, which ran along the east side of the forum; beyond it, there was an unmetalled area whose level was raised each time the road was resurfaced. When the boundary wall was demolished, the road was resited in front of the range of rooms at the rear of the basilica. This road was also encountered further south, where it divided two insulae adjacent to the forum. The corner of the western insula was occupied by a building of second century date, the narrow walls of which may have carried a timber super-structure. Its successor was a town-house of mid 3rd century date; in one of its rooms there was a mosaic floor with a guilloche pattern enclosing a meander motif.

As was suspected, the site proved to lie beyond the eastern limits of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery, in use from the late 7th or early 8th century. However the east end of the Anglo-Saxon church previously encountered was included within the area of the present excavations. An apse, represented by a robber trench 9.2 m in diameter, was found; taken in conjunction with remains to the east, it showed that the church was at least 35 m (115') in length. At a later date, an area around the apse, measuring 6.95 m (22.5') by at least 21.3 m (69') was terraced away to a depth of 1 m below the highest surviving Roman deposits. The area had a mortar floor bedded on a layer of pitched rubble, and its northern end was divided off by a wall; the foundation of the apse exposed by the reduction in level were underpinned by an encircling wall. A ramp or flight of stairs on the north side of the apse led down from the higher level to the west.

Demolition of the church occurred in two stages; first, the walls were reduced to ground level, and the sunken area beyond was gradually filled with successive working surfaces, probably associated with a mason's yard; in the second stage the foundations of both the church and underlying Roman buildings were robbed. A coin of William II from the robbing places these events in the Norman period.

All the evidence points to the identification of this building with the "Abbey Church", which from 1050-1133 served as a cathedral. Its size and complexity of plan are hardly appropriate to a church of humbler status.

Magdalen Street (Trinity Lane) (Paul Bidwell)

During the course of excavations, which are still in progress, two successive Roman ditches, each about 2.5 m deep and at least 5 m wide were sectioned. The later ditch contained a few sherds of 2nd century Samian, the earlier was undated; judging by their position, they must have formed part of the ditch system of the Roman civil defences. Another ditch with a V-shaped profile is being excavated at the time of writing; its fill contains pottery of 13th or 14th century date.

Bartholomew Street (Beedles Terrace) (Paul Bidwell)

A bank of rubble against the city wall was removed in three places, showing that the wall had been cut back and re-faced in post-mediaeval times. A machine trench revealed a quarry pit whose fill contained pre-Flavian material, and a mediaeval feature, possibly a small defensive ditch.

2. BUILDINGS RECORDED

15, 16 Preston Street

The earliest part of the building appears to be the sole surviving unit of a terrace of shops built in the early seventeenth century. The frontage and roofline originally continued to either side, the present side walls serving merely as internal partitions. The plan comprised a single ground floor room, 5.2 m wide by 4 m deep, with jettied upper room and cockloft. Enough evidence remained to show that the ovolo-moulded front door occupied a position to one side of a large window divided by a central mullion. An external rebate in the window jamb was probably intended to accommodate removable shutters. The lower termination of the rebate coincided with an external mortise interpreted as the seating for a horizontal timber forming part of an outside counter. Later in the seventeenth century a narrow two storey block was added to the rear of the terrace.

This building is of considerable interest as it represents the only example of a timber framed terrace known to survive in Devon. Appropriately it was situated one street away from the famous Butcher Row on Smythen Street.

71-73 Fore Street, Topsham

This group of properties originally formed three cells of an L-shaped two storey building, with its main axis parallel to the street and a projecting rear block at the northern end. The walls were of cob, containing a chimney stack in the north gable and two newel staircases in the back wall. The internal divisions, and possibly the original front wall, were timber framed, the roof being supported by pairs of jointed crucks. A panelled through passage between 71 and 72 contained matching opposed doorways which presumably connected a service room on the south side with the small parlour in the middle of the building.

This building was recorded after it had been partially gutted by fire; consequently there are certain difficulties of interpretation. The front block probably belongs in the late sixteenth century; the rear block may also be of this date but is perhaps more likely to have been added in the early seventeenth century.

3. POLSLOE PRIORY JOB CREATION SCHEME (John Allan)

The Benedictine nunnery at Polsloe was founded in the 1150s and dissolved in the 1530s. It was a small foundation, with endowments of land in the surrounding rural area and in Exeter city. After the Dissolution the Priory passed into the hands of a series of prominent families, who occupied its west range. In the eighteenth century the status of the building apparently declined and the residence became a farmhouse.

In the 1930s the original west range was threatened with demolition but was eventually preserved and opened to the public. Mr A. W. Everett excavated much of the church and parts of the cloister in 1933-4, and the results of this work were published (D.A.E.S. II, 110-119). More extensive excavations during 1935-9 in the east and south ranges and the kitchens remain unpublished, although

outline plans of the walls found were deposited in Exeter City Library.

After the War the Priory became a City Council works depot. The state of preservation of both the standing building and the archaeological deposits has deteriorated considerably in the last thirty years. Plaster ceilings have collapsed in various rooms, a fireplace has disappeared and traces of wall paintings have been lost. The cloister and the east and south ranges have been subjected to allotment digging, and the site of the church has been covered with up to a metre of rubbish.

In the Job Creation Scheme it is intended to excavate the surviving archaeological deposits; record the standing range; consolidate and display any surviving masonry, and landscape the surrounding area. Although at present there are no immediate plans to re-locate the works depot, it is hoped that eventually the building will become a branch museum within the City Museums Service.

At the time of writing, the church, cloister and east and south ranges have been stripped of topsoil and the modern features removed. The sequence of events in the church is as follows:

- i) A few small features appear to pre-date the church. They contain no finds.
- ii) The church was a simple rectangle without transepts or apse. There is no surviving evidence of changes in its plan or of its internal arrangements. About 100 floor tiles have been recovered, but no flooring remains in situ.
- iii) Outside the east end of the church lies a cemetery with burials of infants and children. All the graves are shallow and lack coffin nails or stone linings. Within the church seven burials have been excavated. The graves are dug deeper, three have stone linings and most have coffin nails. They therefore seem to be of higher social status than those outside.
- iv) The foundations of the church on its south side were robbed in the sixteenth century.
- v) A room with a fireplace and clay floor was added at right-angles to the surviving west range in the late seventeenth century.
- vi) In the early eighteenth century a cobbled yard was laid adjacent to the room.

The plan of the cloister, with walkways c. 2.5 m wide, is now exposed. A wall bisects the garth and a small room lies in one corner of it. A small drain runs around the sides of the garth. The detached kitchen lies at the south end of the west range. The room which infills the space on the north side of the kitchen is still standing. Examination of its walls shows ten periods of construction of which at least four are medieval. This is at least an indication of the possible complexities in the standing range.

Excavation and consolidation will continue until late December.

4. POST EXCAVATION

Volume I : The text now seems likely to be finished by the end of November, although the illustrations will not be ready until a few weeks later due to difficulties in obtaining a draughtsman in the summer. The completed reports will first be sent for comments to John Collis and Michael Griffiths. This is

particularly important in the case of Dr Collis because the areas he excavated during the first six months of the 1971 season were not seen by the person writing the report.

Vernacular buildings : John Thorp is preparing a report on all the buildings investigated by the Unit over the last four years. It is hoped that text and illustrations will be ready by the end of December.

Exe Bridge : Stewart Brown has started work on the preliminary stratigraphic analysis; the full draft will take at least six months to prepare.

Rack Street: John Pamment recently completed an analysis of the Roman sequence and will shortly embark on the medieval and post-medieval levels.

5. ARTIFACT PUBLICATION PROJECT

The Manpower Services Commission have made a grant to enable the Unit to employ two publication assistants for a period of one year. They will be engaged principally on drawing pottery and glass for the finds volumes. Penny English and Simon McLoughlin joined the Unit at the beginning of October.

6. MINOR PUBLICATIONS

About 1800 copies of the Cathedral Close booklet were sold this summer and the booklet was recently reprinted with minor corrections. The University have kindly donated to the Unit the remaining 1500 copies of "Exeter in Roman Times" by Aileen Fox. These are now on sale with the Cathedral Close booklet in most local bookshops. Exeter Museum has just published an information leaflet entitled "Medieval Pottery in Exeter" written by John Allan.

7. FUTURE EXCAVATIONS

The main effort for at least the next year will be concentrated on the Preston Street/Mermaid Yard area, where flats are to be built by the Exeter Housing Society on a site of c. 1.5 acres. The site is situated midway between the centre of the Roman town and the City Walls, and most of it lies within the area of the legionary fortress. The Preston Street frontage was built up from at least the twelfth century and appears to be uncellared.

DEVON: EXETER. John Thorp recorded several structures for Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit.

198, High Street, (SX/ 9190 9262), recorded prior to demolition in 1975, was the much altered remains of a late 16th-century cellared three storey merchant's house, long buried under 18th-century cladding. Each floor had jettied over the street, but the frontage ~~had been~~ was rebuilt and the roof replaced. The ground floor had been entirely gutted, but much of the first floor remained. It was three bays deep with the front two occupied by a well appointed parlour, served by a stone hooded fireplace and with original panelling surviving over the opposite side wall. The smaller rear room was lit by an ovolo moulded window through the close studded back crosswall, also pierced on one side by a door, suggesting gallery access across the courtyard to a long demolished detached kitchen. The newel stair was also housed on this side giving access to the second floor chamber where a plain stone fireplace and a garderobe alcove were found. Evidence from the stone side wall showed the previous existence of a deeper 15th-century Hall-house from which a small fragment of wall painting had survived.

41 - 42, High Street, (SX/ 9206 9267), were recorded during extensive shopfitting in 1976. This pair of ~~merchants~~ merchants' houses were built together in 1564, according to a date plaque. Each was two rooms deep, divided by a stone pier and newel stair; three storeys high, each jettied front and back; with cellars and individual cocklofts under a double gable ~~in~~ roof. They are of seminal local importance, being the earliest known houses to dispense with the Hall and to adapt to the pressure of space by the vertical stacking of the rooms. Also they show the first dated use of close studded framing in the area, and have the earliest ovolo moulded window mullions, used to particular effect on the front oriels. Remarkably, a great deal of the original painted decorative scheme was temporarily uncovered. It tended to be crude, simple and colourful, picking out the woodwork in orange, green, or blue. However simple repeating motifs, both abstract and floral, were found. The most sensational detail was a crude monochrome representation of a merchant with his hawk dressed in the "Venetian" style ~~popular~~ fashionable in the late 16th-century. Also a fragment of Elbeuf wall hanging from around 1700 was found used as a base for 18th-century cladding.

71 - 73, Fore Street, Topsham, (SX/ 9654 8715), recorded during demolition after a fire in 1976, began in the 16th-century as a high open L-shaped building. It was cob walled with a jointed cruck roof and internal divisions evidently of low post and panel screens, one of which was reused later. In the first half of the 17th-century it was floored throughout and the long wing ~~for~~ along the street front given a traditional three cell cross passage

plan on the ground floor. The ground floor partitions were post and panel screens whereas those above comprised of close studding up to the wall top with large framing above. Two newel stairs were intruded, that from the hall leading to the master chamber which had a new brick fireplace and panelled wall. The use of local brick and the structural detail provide a late date for such a traditional layout. Very soon afterwards the service end was entirely rebuilt in brick and extended into the street, possibly marking the first subdivision of the property. Still in the 17th-century the hall was extended on the ground floor to the street to provide a shop, and an attractive gabled porch added over the passage door supported on the shop wall and a turned oak post.

15, Preston Street, (SX/ 9190 9234), was recorded ahead of demolition. One small savagely altered timber framed structure was found to have originated from two ~~xx~~ separate structures. The rear cell, originally two storeys high, derived from a long range of early 17th-century buildings set back and parallel to the street to which it presented a high stone wall, since ~~x~~ demolished. Around the mid 17th-century the intervening 4m to the street was infilled by a terrace of single cell timber framed shops, one of which remained with positive evidence for identical structures on either side. It was two storeys high with a cockloft under the single bay roof running parallel to the street. The ground floor front was provided with a doorway to ~~xx~~ one side of a two bay shop front. The first floor chamber jettied into the street and was lit by a single window protected above originally by a pent roof at second floor level. No trace of either stairs or fireplaces were found.

DEVON: EXETER. John Thorp recorded several structures for Exeter Museums

Archaeological Field Unit.

39 - 40, Magdalen Street, (SX/ 9216 9226) was recorded prior to demolition. ^{in 1977}

It was the much altered remains of the fine early 18th-century Magdalen House, built for a Doctor Michael Lee Dicker, whose Quaker principles caused a singular lack of ~~extra~~ internal decoration although the stucco frontage was allowed ~~as~~ a richly carved pine frieze and eaves cornice. A grand late Georgian stair was built into the rear block lit from above by a round glass cupola. The surviving ~~block~~ structure was only a part of a large courtyard house, probably late 17th-century in origin, on the evidence of reused walling and a jointed cruck truss in the rear block.

44 - 46, Magdalen Street, (SX/ 9219 9229), recorded prior to demolition, ^{in 1977} were

ostensibly part of a late 18th-century terrace given a new stucco facade in the early 19th-century. However, this modern work hid the major part of a large sixteen room three storey brick house, surviving sufficiently complete to enable the recovery of complete floor plans and a wealth of structural and decorative detail, dated to 1659 by an inscription on the lintel of the kitchen fireplace. It was an L-shaped house with a monumental stair housed in its own timber framed block set in the angle of the wings, ~~as a classic transitional plan form~~ to achieve a centralized circulatory pattern. There were eleven heated rooms, six of which were treated with sgraffito plaster decoration, the first found in a dated context. Around 1700 the entire eastern wing was divorced from the rest of the front and provided with a new door and staircase.

62, Fore Street, Topsham, (SX/ 9656 8808) was recorded during restoration, ^{in 1977} which

revealed the extensive remains of a ~~16th-century house~~ two storey cob walled house built gable onto the street. Although the rear cell had long been demolished the stone stack remained in the boundary wall. The ~~at~~ deep front cell retained most of the original ~~arch~~ three bay arch braced roof resting on wall posts, and two heavy ceiling beams thought to be original. The frontage was extended northwards in the mid 17th-century to provide two more ~~rooms~~ heated rooms. The upper fireplace, built of both local and imported "Dutch" bricks preserved the extensive remains of a geometric sgraffito plaster decoration.

Also at 38, Holloway Street, (SX/ 9233 9212) a small part of the 16th-century Larkbeare House remains and was recorded under threat of demolition. It was a three storey stone walled structure beneath an arch braced roof. The ground floor ceiling was of heavily moulded intersecting beams, and the entire structure was built over a stream bridged with a ribbed vault. At Pinbrook Farm, (SX/ 952 946) the stables, linhay and timber hay barn were recorded ahead of building alterations. They were all contemporary with the house, dated to 1679 on a plaque over the front door. At 144, Fore Street (SX/ 9177 9239) the original late 17th-century plan was recovered from the first floor after fire damage, comprising two heated rooms back from the street with a stairwell between, still containing the original stairs. The front room has a plaster moulded ceiling of unusual composition in which the two formal ovals of interlaced vegetation are confounded by a profusion of naturalistic creatures ranging from the mundane fish and dogs to fanciful camels, ~~elephants~~ elephants and lions. A group of 19th-century lime kilns on Glasshouse Lane (SX/ 9466 9239) were recorded prior to their demolition.

1976

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD UNIT: REPORT 1976/77

1. EXCAVATIONS

Cathedral Close

The construction of a new processional way and sunken square at the west front of the Cathedral, provided an opportunity to locate the NW corner of the Roman forum and to examine an area behind the basilica (the principle public building in Roman Exeter).

From about 80-250 AD the area between the basilica and the forum boundary wall appears to have remained open, with the exception of a portico against the rear of the basilica. After 340 AD, the boundary wall was demolished, and a range of rooms (?shops) was erected against the basilica fronting onto a lane 2.4 metres wide. The lane formed a crossroads with the main road on the SE side of the forum, which was found to have been resurfaced sixteen times during its lifetime of about 350 years. The corner site opposite the basilica was occupied by a town house of mid 3rd century date; in one of its rooms there was a mosaic floor with a guilloche pattern enclosing a meander motif.

The excavations have thrown more light on the fragmentary remains underlying the medieval church of St. Mary Major which were revealed in 1971-2. These can now be seen to belong to an earlier church with at least three structural phases. In its final state the church had a minimum overall length of 40 m. Beyond its apsidal east end there was a sunken area (? crypt) with a mortar floor laid on pitched rubble footings. On the north side of the church was a porticus and a square foundation, possibly the base of a free-standing tower. The structure must represent the Saxon Minister church which, from 1050 when the seat of the bishop was transferred from Crediton to Exeter, served as the cathedral. Demolition took place in the late 11th or early 12th century when work on the Norman cathedral was commenced on a site immediately to the east. The Saxon church was erected in a cemetery which showed at least two previous phases of burial; six burials from the earliest phase were cut into the demolished Roman basilica and have been dated to the mid 5th century by C14 tests carried out at Harwell. They represent the earliest evidence from Britain for Christian burial within a former Roman town.

Trinity Lane

Three successive defensive ditches, each about 2.5 m deep and 5 m wide, were sectioned. They belong to the defences of the Roman city at the period just after the construction of the City Walls in about 200 AD. A large medieval ditch, at a distance of 40 m from the wall, was dated to the 13th century.

Beedles Terrace

A rubble bank against the City Wall was removed in three places, showing that the wall had been cut back and refaced in post-medieval times. A machine trench revealed an early Roman quarry pit and a small medieval defensive ditch.

Exe Bridge

The excavations of St. Edmunds Church and three riverside tenements on Frog Street (now the Inner By Pass) was completed in May 1976 in time for the Civic opening by the Mayor. The first church, built with the bridge c 1200 AD, was the same length as the 19th century church but not as wide. The north wall was supported above the water on a row of four arches. The church had a long and complex history of successive enlargements, culminating in a complete rebuilding in the early 19th century after the medieval church had been largely destroyed by fire. A small trench excavated beneath the church demonstrated the existence of a ford prior to the construction of the bridge. No trace was found of the timber bridge mentioned by Hooker (writing in the 16th century) though it may have been situated outside the excavated area.

During the 13th century the river bank was periodically subject to flooding and was in use as a sand quarry and rubbish dump. Shortly after 1250 the first houses were erected, protected from flooding by a river wall. The river wall was rebuilt or repaired a number of times before 1600, by which date the area around the church had been reclaimed and a new wall built on line with the west end of the church. The complete northern elevation of the bridge was recorded prior to consolidation. A good deal of information was obtained about the way in which the bridge was built, and the fabric was examined closely for evidence of later alterations. Much evidence relating to the structural history of the bridge is obscured by the repointing.

Polsloe Priory Job Creation Project

The Benedictine nunnery at Polsloe was founded in the 1150s and dissolved in 1538. It was a small foundation with endowments of land in the surrounding rural area and in the City of Exeter. After the Dissolution, the Priory passed into the hands of a series of prominent families, who occupied its west range. In the 18th century the status of the building declined and the residence became a farm house. In 1936 the original west range - which mainly dates from c 1300 AD - was threatened with demolition but was eventually preserved and opened to the public. After the war the Priory became a City Council works depot. The state of preservation of both the standing building and the archaeological deposits has deteriorated considerably in the last 30 years,

The J C P scheme was designed to excavate the church and claustral ranges; record the fabric of the standing west range; consolidate and display any surviving masonry; and landscape the surrounding area. The excavation proved extremely interesting, producing the most complete plan of a Benedictine nunnery known from Britain. Although the stone foundations of many of the walls were well preserved, the wall tops were generally too far below the surface to permit consolidation and display. However, two lengths of wall at the west end of the church will be displayed, and the other main walls could be marked out at fairly low cost as part of any future improvements to the site.

2. STANDING BUILDINGS

A number of buildings were surveyed prior to demolition or major alteration. These include:

- (1) Great Moor Farm, Sowton - a late medieval farmhouse.
- (2) 15 Preston Street - the only surviving unit of a mid 17th century timber-framed terrace of shops.
- (3) 71-73 Fore Street, Topsham - a sixteenth century town house
- (4) Pinnbrook Farm - one of the earliest large brick houses in Devon, dating to 1679.

3. POST - EXCAVATION

A good deal of progress has been made towards clearing the backlog of unpublished excavations carried out since 1971. Grants from DOE and the Manpower Services Commission enabled the Unit to employ three additional staff during the year on drawing finds and plans for excavation reports.

4. PUBLICATION

The draft report on 'Excavations in the Cathedral Close 1971-77' is now complete. It will be published in 1978 as Volume I of Exeter Archaeological Reports, a monograph series to be published jointly by Exeter Museums and Exeter University. The Department of the Environment has agreed to make a grant to meet 75 per cent of printing costs; the balance will be funded by the County Council, the University and the City Council. A provision of £1000 for publication has been made in the estimates for 1977/78.

S. LOCKE

DIRECTOR OF MUSEUMS