

2016/10/2

EXETER ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE, 27th JUNE, 1980

Report to Committee

1. EXCAVATIONS

41-2 High Street (Star Jeans) see plan, p. 2 .

The excavation took place in January and was successful in its main objective: to locate the position of the fortress via praetoria (one of the principal streets). As expected, some Roman levels were preserved, though over much of the area they had been removed by later disturbance. Star Jeans Ltd. contributed £319 towards the cost of excavation.

Roman Military Period (c. 55/60-75): A 2m wide strip of the via praetoria (60) lay within the excavated area. The earliest street level consisted of a layer of compacted gravel 7cm thick. This was bounded on the south-east by a ditch (57) .85-1.05m wide and c. 25cm deep. A second street level sealed the surface of the first, infilled the ditch and extended at least 80cm beyond it to the south-east. The edge of the street could not be traced (due to later disturbance) but its position may be marked by a second ditch (36), 3.4m from the first, which was 60-80cm wide and c. 45cm deep. A wall foundation (18), 75cm wide and 70cm deep, containing layers of volcanic rock packed in clay, ran parallel to the second ditch 2m to the south-east. The finds from the wall suggest that it dates to the fortress period; if this is correct, it represents the only masonry building known in the fortress other than the bath-house. However, the finds may be residual and we should not rule out the possibility that the building was constructed in the early civil period.

Later Roman Period: Two post-pits (53, 55) which cut the first street-side ditch are likely to belong in the early civil period, since they were relatively shallow and do not appear to be associated with a military building. Pits 52 and 46 were only partially excavated and contained only small groups of finds. Wall 15 (running south-east to north-west) was likewise not closely dateable. Although no trace remained of the civil street on the line of the via praetoria, the position of the post-pits and wall probably indicate the line of its south-east edge.

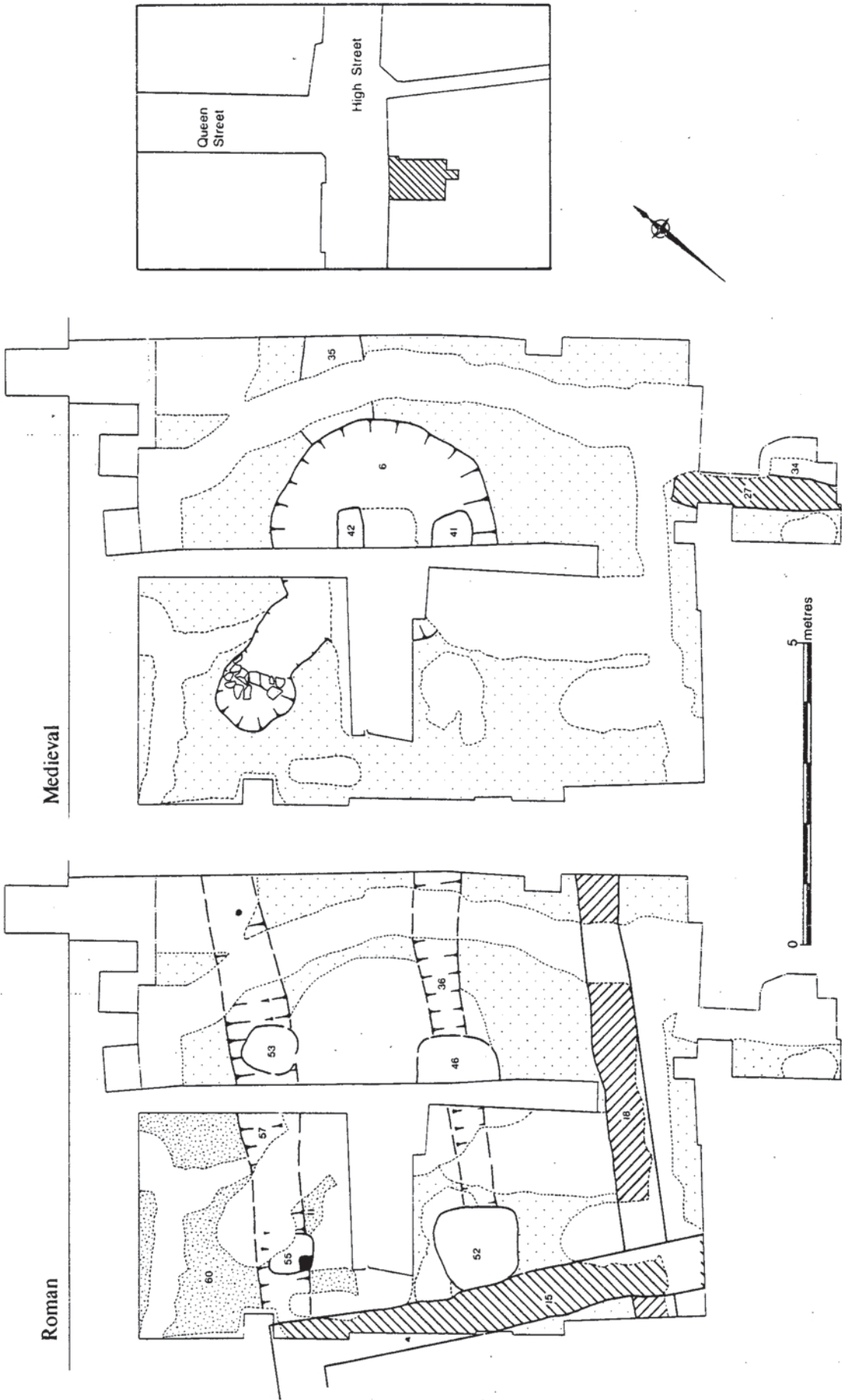
Medieval: In the middle of the tenement, less than 2m from the street frontage, was a circular lime-burning pit (6) 3.8m in diameter with a tunnel flue, 2.2m long, on its western side. This type of kiln, consisting simply of a large unlined pit, is familiar from other sites in Exeter and elsewhere (e.g. Portchester). This example was probably thirteenth century in date and must have been operated for a

INTERIM PLAN

41-42 HIGH STREET

Roman

Medieval



short time on a temporarily vacant plot. It is interesting that lime-burning - a most unpleasant activity - should have been tolerated so close to the main street of the town.

A stone-lined industrial pit (27/34) was partly overlain by the rear wall of the standing building. Similar pits, ranging in date from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, have been found on a number of sites in the Guildhall area. Their function is unknown, but may have been connected with tanning. It is hoped that samples from these pits will be examined by an environmental specialist in the near future.

Post-medieval: The standing building dates to the later sixteenth century (possibly 1564) and was thoroughly recorded by the Unit three years ago.

Colleton Crescent (see plan, p. 4)

A trial excavation was carried out in late March and early April prior to redevelopment by Costain Homes Ltd.. A 44m long machine trench across the north-east side of the site revealed a concentration of Roman and medieval features in one area. It was possible to dig a small extension to the original trench but further work was prevented by lack of funds. Costains were asked to make a financial contribution but declined to do so. They are the first firm to refuse a request for financial assistance in the last six years.

Roman: One of the main objectives of the excavation was to locate the ditch which was presumed to enclose the military establishment (? works depot) on the south-west side of Holloway Street. The ditch was not found in the trial trench, though in one place there was an extensive disturbance which could have removed all trace of it. For other reasons, however, it now seems unlikely that the military establishment was enclosed by a ditch. In a recent re-assessment of the 1974 Holloway Street excavation, I reached the conclusion that the ditch found beneath the South Gate in 1964 by Aileen Fox is unlikely to have been directly associated with the Holloway Street military site. The site seems to have been enclosed by a shallow palisade-trench only.

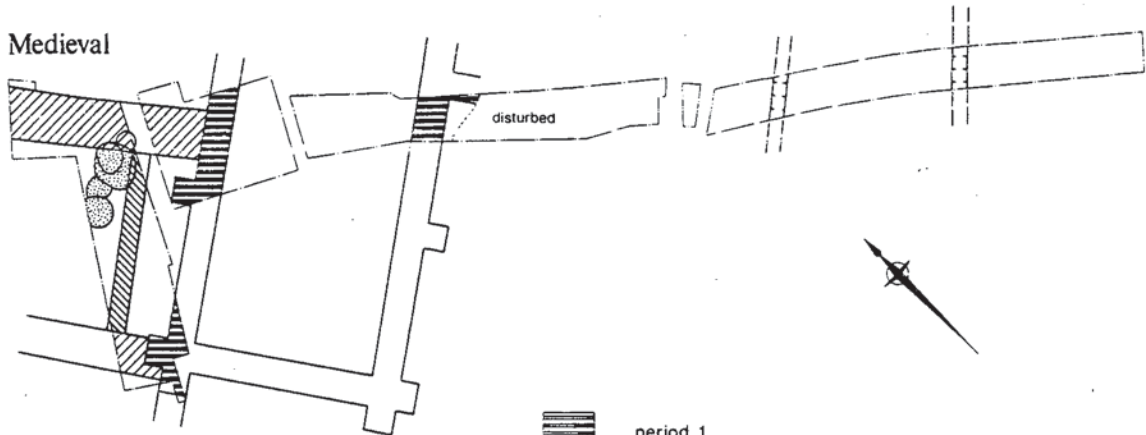
Four pits, three of them certainly military in date, were found at the north-east end of the excavation. They presumably lie within, or are associated with, the military enclosure.

Medieval: All the medieval features found on the site probably belong to the Franciscan friary. The first record of the Exeter greyfriars occurs in about 1240. During the thirteenth century they occupied a site in the western corner of the city at Friernhay. This area proved to be damp and unhealthy and 1285 it was reported that in the previous two years nine members of the community had died as a result of the insanitary conditions. It was therefore decided to find a new

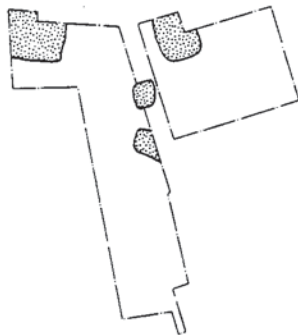
COLLETON CRESCENT





INTERIM INTERPRETATION

Medieval



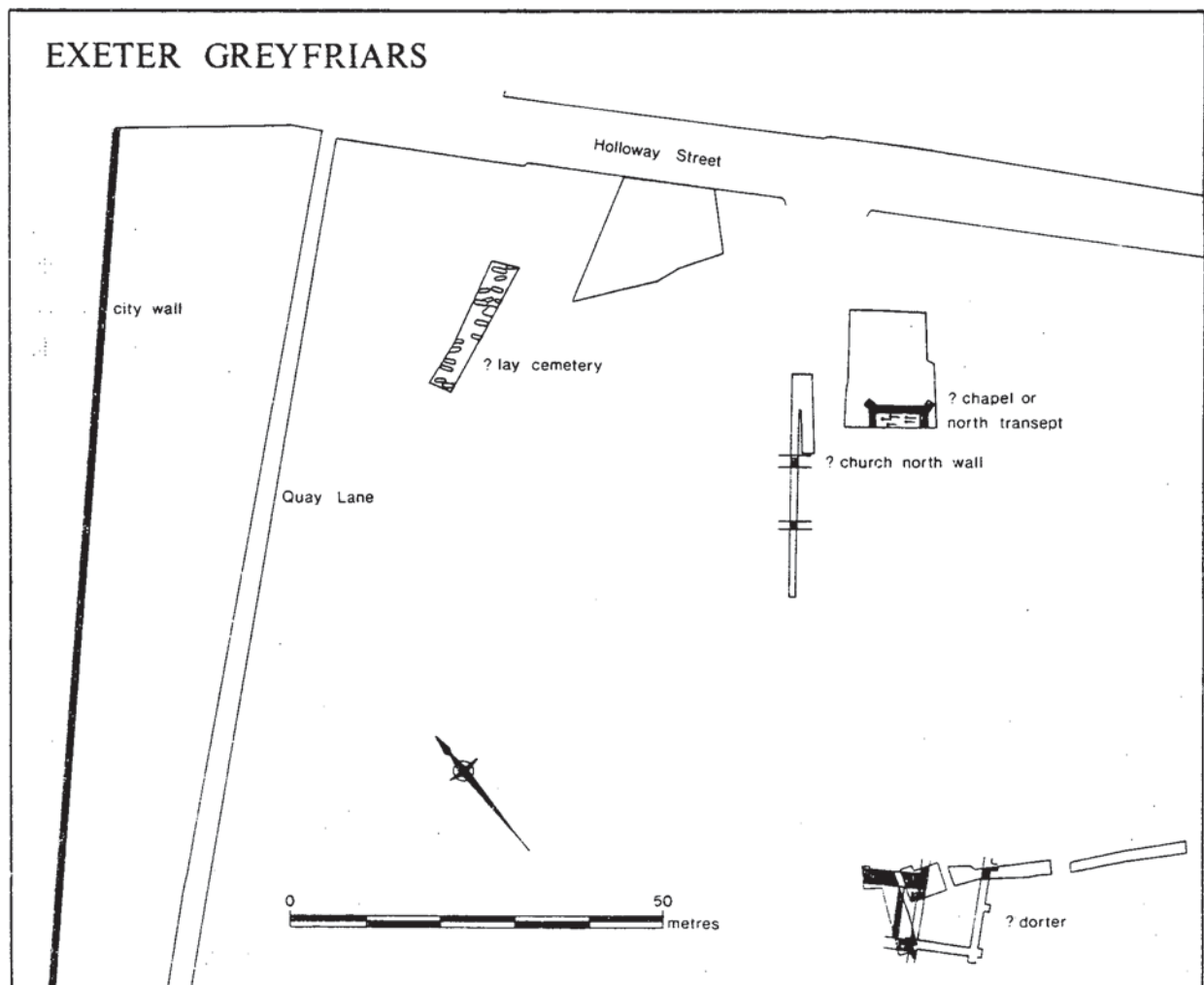
Roman



-  period 1
-  period 2 (primary)
-  period 2 (secondary)
-  pit

0 20 metres

EXETER GREYFRIARS



site, and in the 1290s over six acres of land was acquired between Holloway Street and the River Exe. Work on the new church, dedicated to John the Baptist, was in progress by 1303. In 1310 Bishop Bytton left £20 for the fabric of the church and £1 for the cloister. William Wenard, by will dated 1441, left his body to be buried in a new chapel which he had recently built in the church and bequeathed 100 marks to the friars to make a new cloister. At the Dissolution the house was surrendered to the King's Visitor on 15th September 1538, at which time there were ten brethren in residence. The site was leased by the Crown in 1541 to John Hull of Larkbeare House.

Period 1: With one exception, the walls found in the excavation had been entirely robbed of their stone at the Dissolution. The earliest building had foundations c. 1.2m in width set on a layer of tamped river gravel; it measured 7m wide internally and was at least 13m long. Two external buttresses, set 5m apart, fell within the excavated area on the north-west side of the building. No closely dateable finds were recovered to indicate a construction date. A group of five pits to the north-east of the building yielded few finds but can probably be assigned to the fourteenth century.

Period 2: Partly overlying the pits was a robber trench, almost 2m in width, apparently belonging to a range which abutted the first building. This is likely to be the 'south' wall of the southern claustral range.

A second robber trench, 1.5m wide and 7m to the south-west of the first, appears to represent the 'north' wall of another range abutting the period 1 building. Finally, a wall was inserted parallel to the original building to form a corridor linking the two 'east-west' ranges.

The finds from the robbing trenches are consistent with a date around the middle of the sixteenth century, suggesting that all the buildings were demolished shortly after the Dissolution. Several local bricks were found amongst the demolition debris. These are the oldest bricks known from Exeter, the next earliest being those found at Albany Road in contexts dated 1575-1624.

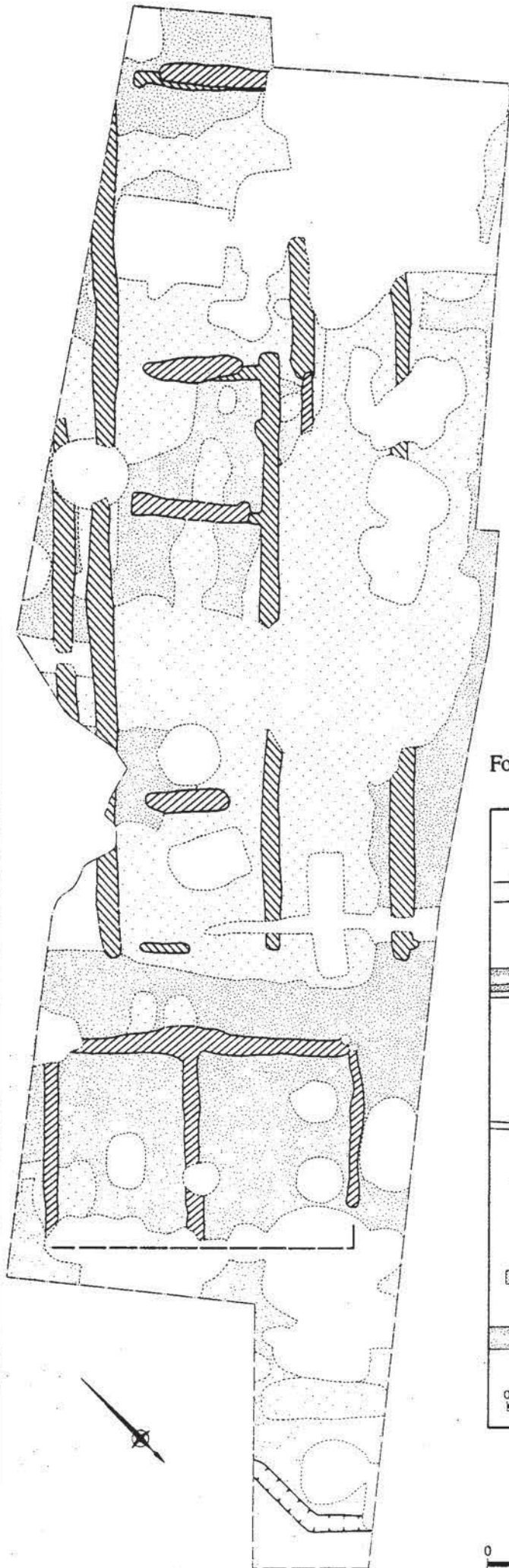
Bartholomew Street





The excavation has been in progress since March and the first part of the site is almost finished. Parts of three buildings within the legionary fortress have been found, two of them barrack blocks, the other unidentified. The long axes of the barracks run south-west to north-east rather than on the expected alignment of south-east to north-west. The latter alignment was predicted because it would not be possible to fit ^{two} ~~four~~ cohort-blocks across the estimated width of the ^{left} ~~retentura~~ (152m) if the breadth of each block was 84m, the estimated breadth of the group of barracks found at Goldsmith Street.

Not all features of Roman date have been included on the plan (p.6), which is intended only to illustrate the main features of the military buildings.

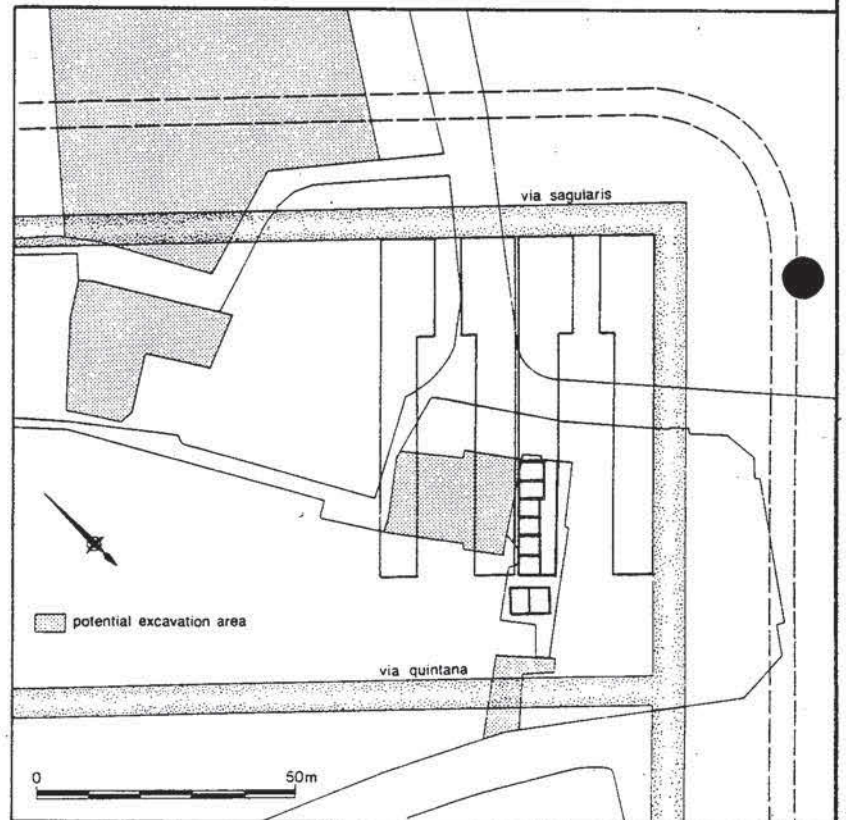
BARTHOLOMEW STREET

INTERIM PLAN



-  phase 1
-  phase 2
-  contemporary surface
-  reduced surface

Fortress left retentura



0 15m

The barrack-block occupying the main part of the site has been exposed for a length of 21.5m. The main longitudinal post-trenches contain one constructional phase only. The cross-trenches dividing the inner rooms of the contubernia, however, display two constructional phases, indicating that the partitions between the rooms were replaced during the life of the building. No cross-trenches dividing the outer rooms were found, but their absence may simply be due to their removal by later disturbance. The phase 1 cross-trenches were relatively shallow and would probably not have survived/^{had they been present}(see, for example, the division between rooms 1 and 2); the phase 2 trenches, on the other hand, would have left some trace had they been present, as they were generally deeper than their predecessors.

The length of the barracks can be estimated at 65m (compared to 62m at Goldsmith Street), but it must be stressed that the exact line of the south-west stretch of the via sagularis has yet to be established and could well lie several metres from the estimated position. (Likewise, the line of the north-western via sagularis will not be known accurately until the publication of Aileen Fox's 1959 Bartholomew Street excavation). Excavation of the Wheatons site will eventually allow a fairly accurate estimate of the length of the barracks to be made. The Goldsmith Street barracks seem to have possessed 14 contubernia with an average width of 3.15m. The average width of the Bartholomew Street contubernia is 3.58m, which is almost identical to the corresponding dimension in the Trichay Street barracks. It therefore seems unlikely that the Bartholomew Street barracks contained more than 12 or 13 contubernia in all. An unusual feature of the plan lies in the fact that the inner rooms of the four contubernia at the end of the building are not as deep as the rooms to the south-west of them (4.25m compared with 5m).

The building to the north-east of the barracks is still being excavated but its structural history has been established in broad outline. It is c. 5m wide and exhibits three phases of construction, having been rebuilt to roughly the same plan on two occasions. The phase shown on the plan is the first rebuild - i.e. phase 2. The earlier building apparently extended farther to the north-west, beyond the limit of excavation. The third phase seems to have been of cill-beam construction and extended beyond the excavation limits at both ends.

Finances permitting, it is hoped to excavate two further areas of the site: (a) a long trench to the south-east of the present excavation to establish the width of the barracks and of the street between them; and (b) a narrow trench to the north-east to locate the via quintana.

2. ANCIENT MONUMENTS

Polsloe Priory (with S.R. Blaylock)

In 1979 a survey of the fabric of the standing west range was made by Stuart Blaylock. This involved the preparation of detailed measured drawings of all elevations. The main periods in the development of the building are summarised below (see plan and reconstructions pp. 9-10).

Period 1: The present building was preceded by one of similar proportions on the same site. Only the foundations of the east and south walls remain visible beneath the walls of the later building; three buttresses (503-5) projected into the cloister on the east side.

Period 2: Around 1300 a new cloister was laid out and the ranges south and west of it replaced. The present building belongs to this period, although it has been much altered subsequently. The building is of five bays, with buttresses at the south-east and south-west corners and on the west wall. It is built mainly of Poltimore sandstone with dressings of volcanic stone; local breccia and Salcombe Stone also appear in small quantities.

The northernmost bay on the ground floor was originally divided from the rest of the building by a stone wall (now demolished) to form the outer parlour. Opposed doorways in the west and east walls gave access from the courtyard on the west side to the cloister within. The remaining four bays were occupied by the cellarium, (which could be) entered through a door at the southern end of the cloister walk.

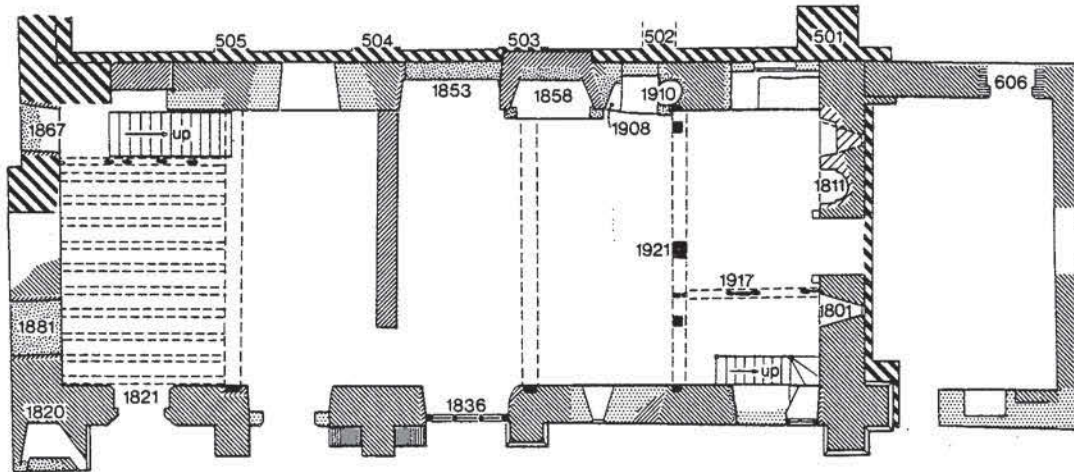
The guest hall occupied the middle three bays of the first floor and could be reached from the outer court to the west by an external stair. Lancet windows in the east wall took the form of dormers raised above the level of the cloister roof. The hall probably had an open hearth until the late fifteenth century, when a massive stone fireplace was inserted into the west wall. Screens A and B mark the ends of the hall and incorporate the spere posts of the roof trusses. The open roof over the hall was judged unsafe and removed in 1862, but enough evidence remains to show that it was of base-cruck form.

Screen A contains three arched doorways and is a particularly fine piece of medieval carpentry. The central opening gave access to a stair which led to a door on the ground floor in the centre of the south wall; this in turn connected with the detached kitchen block by means of a covered way. The other two doors were probably for the buttery and pantry. To either side of the spere posts were subsidiary doorways; that on the east led, via a passage, to a door in the south wall which afforded access to the first floor of the south (frater) range by means of a gallery. The doorway on the western side led to a second-floor room in the southern bay, reached by climbing some stairs; this room could have been used for lodging a guest, or perhaps as accommodation for a resident priest or possibly the

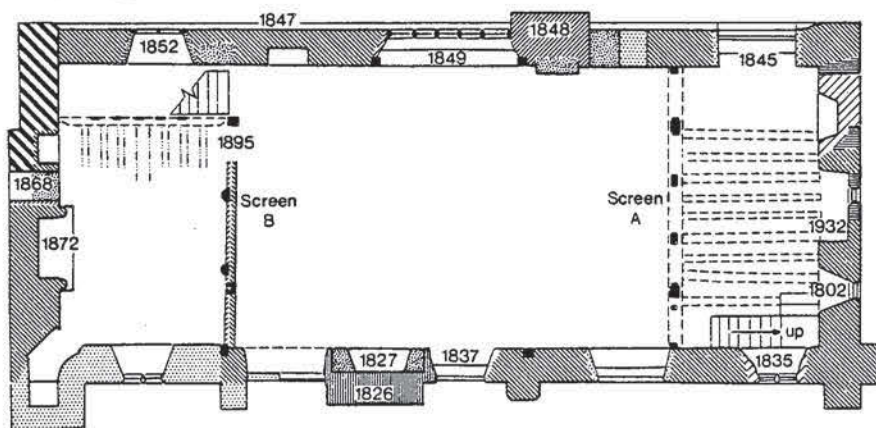
ST KATHERINE'S PRIORY, POLSLOE

Plan of West Range

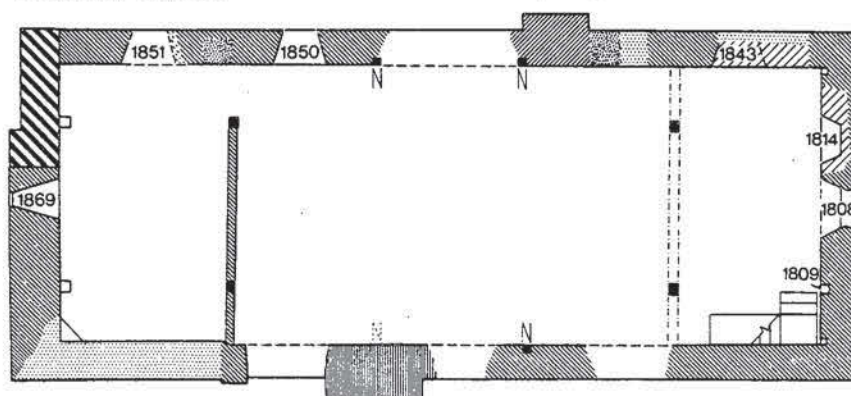
Ground Floor











First Floor



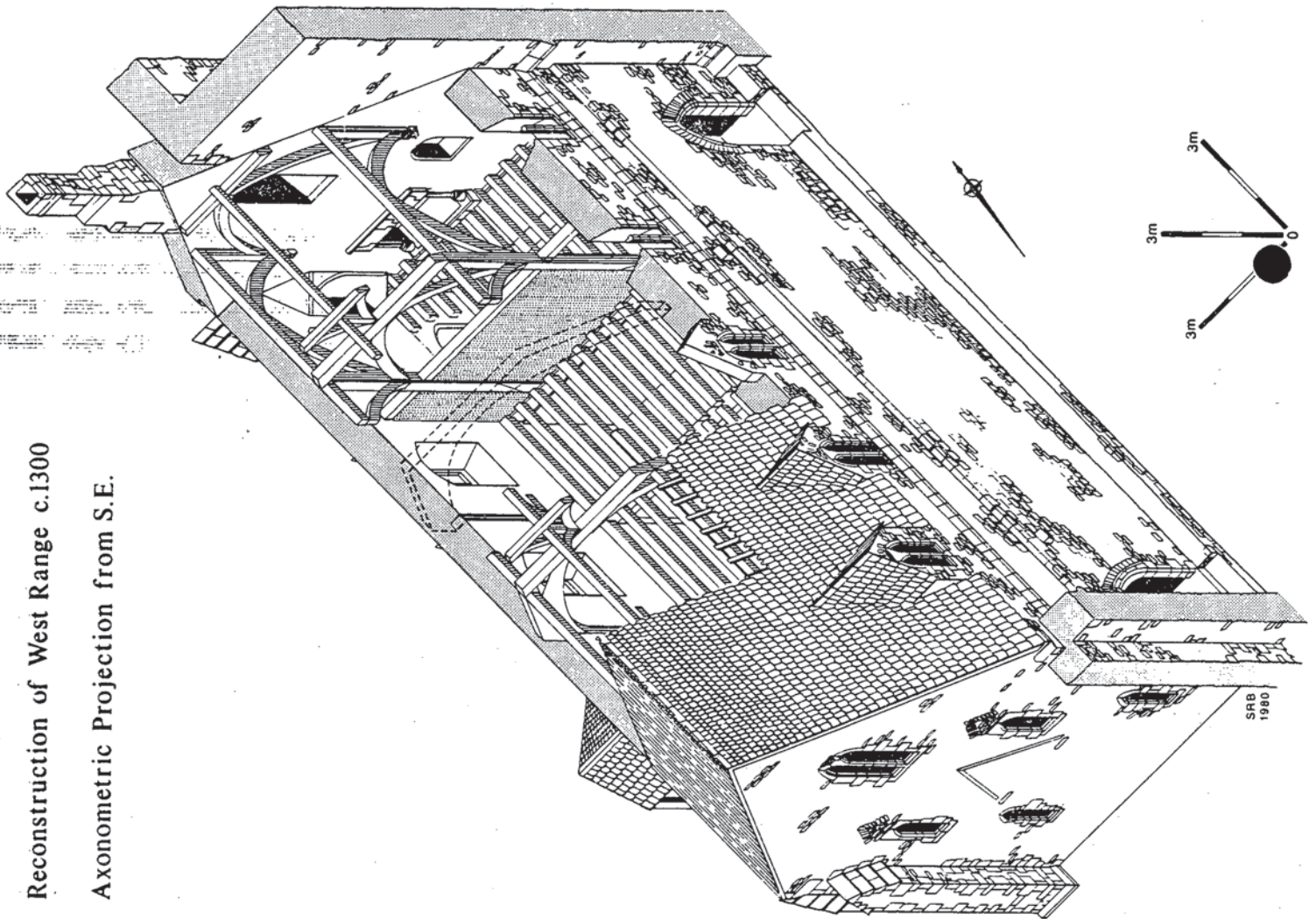
Second Floor



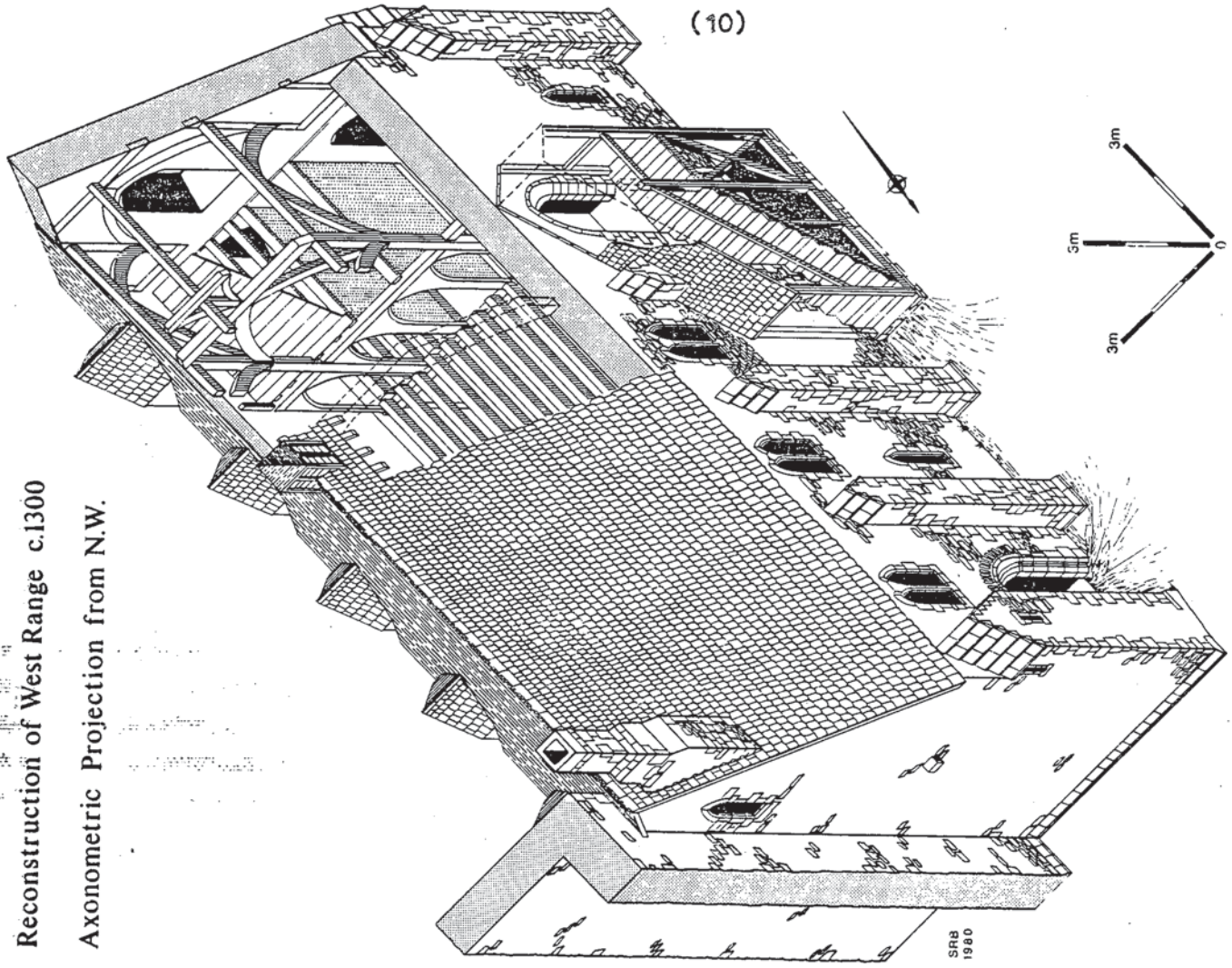
-  late 12th century
-  c.1300
-  late 14th century
-  15th/16th century
-  early 17th century
-  mid 17th century
-  18th century
-  19th & 20th century



Reconstruction of West Range c.1300
Axonometric Projection from S.E.



Reconstruction of West Range c.1300
Axonometric Projection from N.W.



prioress.

The principal chamber was undoubtedly the first-floor room in the northern bay; this was open to the roof, has a garderobe and fireplace, and is embellished with two stone corbels carved to represent the faces of a man and a woman.

Period 3: At the Dissolution (in 1539) all the conventual buildings were demolished with the exception of the west range, which was retained for domestic use. It would appear that no major structural alterations were made until early in the seventeenth century, when a new wing was constructed to the north and three communicating doorways made in the north wall. On the ground floor of the original building the south wall of the outer parlour was demolished and a replacement built one bay to the south. The more southerly of the rooms so formed, the new hall, was provided with a large new fireplace and furnished with oak panelling and a moulded plaster frieze. Large timber-mullioned windows were inserted to light the new rooms. The external stair was removed and the former hall on the first floor partitioned to form small chambers. The 'prioress' chamber' was extended westwards as a jettied, timber-framed porch, and a second-floor room created by the insertion of an elaborately moulded intersecting-beam ceiling. Minor alterations were also undertaken around the middle of the seventeenth century. New fireplaces were made in the first- and second-floor rooms of the southern bay.

Period 4: The last major period of change occurred in the eighteenth century and involved a decline in the status of the building. The north wing was demolished, windows were reduced in size or blocked completely and the hall was partitioned to make a kitchen. The building continued in use as a farmhouse until 1933.

Plans have been drawn up by the council's architects for the renovation of the building. It is hoped that these will be approved by the DOE in July and that work will start this year.

City Wall

Restoration of sections of wall at Quay Lane and Bartholomew Terrace will begin in August. The Quay Lane section was recorded by the Unit last year; the length of wall at Bartholomew Terrace will be photographed and examined in July and during restoration.

3. STANDING BUILDINGS

A number of buildings were visited or recorded in the past six months. Reports will be given at the December meeting.

4. POST-EXCAVATION

In the last six months considerable progress has been made with the post-excavation programme. Stuart Blaylock completed the publication drawings and first draft of his report on the West Range of Polsloe Priory at the end of February. Since then he has been helping John Allan finish drawing and mounting the medieval and post-medieval pottery and small finds. Several members of staff were involved for some time in preparing the manuscript and drawings for Roman Exeter: Fortress and Town. Work has continued on drawing and mounting the Roman finds for volume IV; and a start has been made on the drawings for volume V. Stewart Brown will return in October (after a year's absence) to finish his reports on the Exe Bridge and Holloway Street sites. The large backlog of standing building reports is now much reduced and should be eliminated by the end of the year. The recording and storage of finds is currently being re-organised, and the compilation of cross-referenced archives continues.

5. STAFF

Paul Bidwell left the Unit at the end of January to become Assistant Director of Excavations at Chesterholm/Vindolanda. He will continue his work on the Roman finds from Exeter on a freelance basis. John Allan has been appointed Assistant Field Officer in his place. The permanent establishment comprises the Director, two Assistant Field Officers and the council's photographer. One Assistant Field Officer post has been frozen since 1975, so effectively there is a permanent staff of two archaeologists. During the current financial year seven temporary salaried staff will be employed on contracts ranging from 4 to 12 months. Five of these staff will be engaged almost exclusively on post-excavation work.

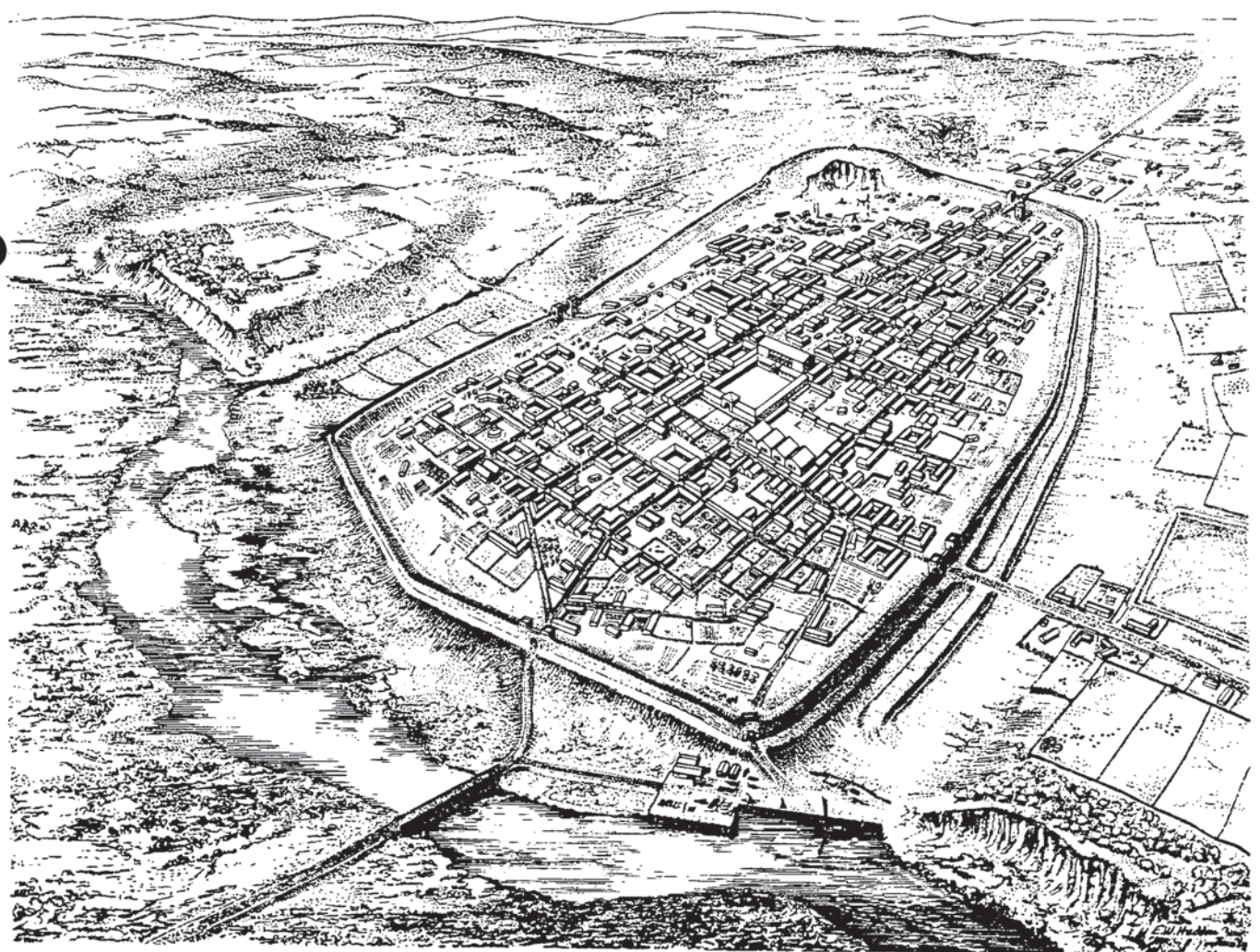
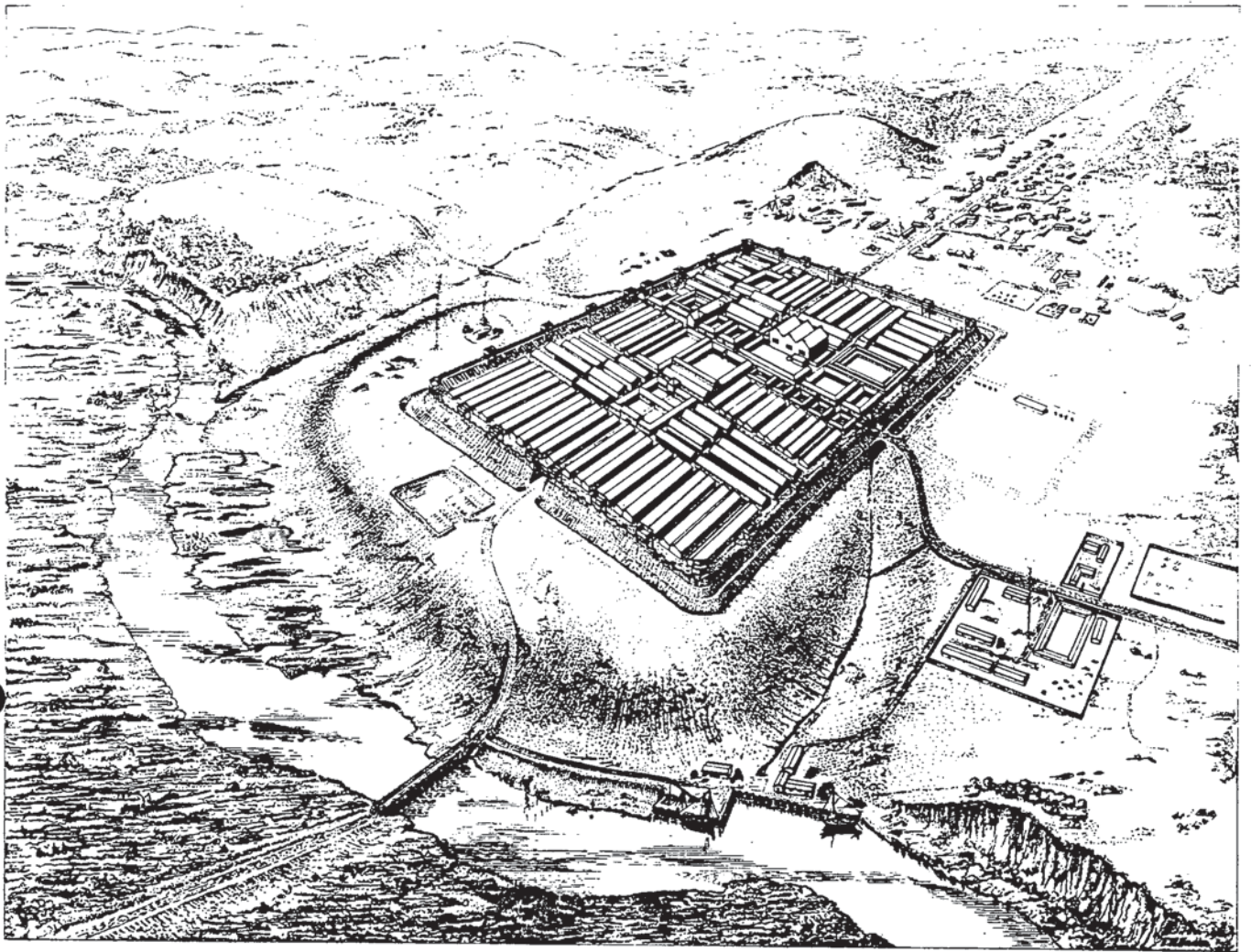
6. PUBLICATIONS

Volume I

273 copies have been sold to date. On 1st August the account held by Exeter University for proceeds from sales stood at £2611.78. No reviews have appeared yet.

Volume II

Mark Maltby's report on the animal bones from Exeter sites, 1971-5, was published in February. About 250 copies have been sold.



Volume III

The manuscript is very nearly complete but we still await the six specialist reports referred to at the December meeting. It is still hoped that the volume will be sent to the printer by the end of the year.

Volume IV

The bulk of the work for Paul Bidwell's report on the Roman finds was completed before he left. Paul has undertaken to try to finish the manuscript this winter.

Roman Exeter: Fortress and Town, by Paul Bidwell

The book went to the printers at the beginning of June. The publication date has not been decided but will probably be at the end of July or early in August. The retail price will be £3.40, with a pre-publication offer of £2.95. We have applied to Marks and Spencer Ltd. for £1000 in sponsorship which would allow us to reduce the retail price to £2.95. This would represent extremely good value.

Posters

Coloured paintings showing imaginative reconstructions of the Roman fortress and town have been made by Mr. Eric Haddon of the council's Planning Department. These will appear on the cover of Roman Exeter and will also be produced as posters measuring 47 x 31cm for sale at about 75p each. Black and white versions are illustrated on p. of this report. The paintings will also be available on post-cards.

Pamphlets

It is intended to produce four-page A4 pamphlets on the following topics in the near future:

- Recent excavations
- Roman Exeter
- The Exe Bridge
- Polsloe Priory
- The Underground Passages.

Director, Archaeological Field Unit.