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## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Report to Committee, 3 July 1991

## 1. EXCAVATIONS AND WATCHING BRIEFS

## 1.1 Lower Coombe Street excavation and watching brief

Draft reports on the various aspects of the Lower Coombe Street excavation project have now been prepared and are undergoing editing at present. Separate limited-edition EMAFU reports will be produced on (i) the Roman stratigraphy, (ii) Roman finds, (iii) post-Roman stratigraphy, (iv) post-Roman finds, (v) medieval and later documentary evidence, and (vi) general summary and synthesis. *Report*

The samian pottery has been examined by Mr G.B. Dannell. The assemblage contains a significantly higher proportion of Claudian material than occurs on sites within the legionary fortress. There is therefore a distinct possibility that the Roman military compound lying between Holloway Street and the Exe was established up to five years earlier than the fortress: in the period AD 50-55 rather than 55-60. *Date*

Archaeological observations were made by Mark Knight in February when a contractor's trench was excavated linking the Lower Coombe Street site with a sewer at the back of the Custom House on the Quay. A probable medieval hollow way was noted at the foot of Quay Lane and cobbled surfaces are thought to represent the roadway leading from the 16th-century Watergate down to the Quay. The back wall of the Custom House was exposed to a depth of 3 m below the modern surface of Cricklepit Lane. The original ground level on completion of the building appears to have been about 2 m lower than at present. The lower parts of the rear windows were blocked when this area was infilled (initially c. 1700). One window was exposed in full by the excavation trench. In its primary form the opening framed by brickwork was 1.46 m high at the centre. *Quay*  
*Custom House*

## 1.2 Observations in Sidwell Street

In February a new layby was constructed on the SE side of Sidwell Street in front of Nos 161-179. The modern building frontage is set back about 9 m from the pre-War line in this area. The front walls of 18th- and 19th-century buildings were noted but no early street levels survived at this point.

In May, four contractor's test trenches were dug across the pavement outside Nos 149-153 Sidwell Street in order to locate services in advance of highways works to be carried out later this summer. A compacted gravel road surface was observed over a 55 m length at a depth of 0.5 m below the modern pavement level. This is thought to be the main Roman road leading NE from the East Gate (about 330 m distant). It is hoped that further archaeological observations will be made when the main works take place. *Road*

### 1.3 Observation in Post Office Street

*Tile Ramp*  
In May a gas-pipe trench on the W side of the street exposed a 0.7 m deep sequence of Roman deposits at a depth of 0.36 m below pavement level at a point 8.5 m from the rear face of the Roman City Wall. The natural subsoil was not reached. A series of interleaving Roman layers 0.5 m thick contained numerous tile wasters (mainly roofing tile with a few thicker fragments). This material included both underfired and overfired, mis-shapen tiles as well as charcoal and ash. A similar deposit was encountered by Lady Fox in a trench cut through the bank behind the City Wall in this area after the War. Overlying the layer containing the tile wasters there survived 0.2 m of much cleaner Roman layers that are thought to belong to the late 2nd-century rampart that preceded the Roman wall.

### 1.4 Observations in St Sidwell's Churchyard

*Hole*  
In January a large hole about 4 m deep and up to 3 m wide appeared suddenly in St Sidwell's Churchyard causing concern for public safety. Limited observation of the hole suggested that it resulted from the intermittent erosion of subsoil and graveyard deposits by water flowing periodically from a sub-surface spring nearby. The hole was eventually filled in with coarse hardcore. This observation provides the first well-documented evidence for a spring in close proximity to St Sidwell's Church, although several others are known in this area (having been tapped by the city's Roman and medieval aqueducts).

### 1.5 Evaluation excavation behind No. 18 North Street

*Pocket Park*  
A 1 m square evaluation trench was excavated to the rear of the ruined late medieval kitchen block (bombed in the War) prior to the landscaping of this area to form a 'pocket park'. No attempt was made to reach the natural subsoil. The trench demonstrated that 17th-century deposits survived at a depth of less than 0.3 m. The landscaping was subsequently re-designed so as to create the minimum possible disturbance to archaeological deposits.

### 1.6 Observations in High Street (outside Boots)

*Bristol Inn*  
A 1 m-deep trench was excavated by workmen in December to locate a leaking drain. This exposed a Heavitree and volcanic stone cellar wall of late medieval or early post-medieval date that is thought to have belonged to the Bristol Inn, which abutted the exterior of the East Gate on the NW side of the street.

## 2. HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND ANCIENT MONUMENTS

### 2.1 Warehouse at Topsham Quay

Mark Knight recently made a detailed archaeological record and analysis of a former warehouse which lies along and between Monmouth Hill and the Strand at Topsham Quay. The warehouse has been extensively repaired and refurbished as retail premises.



These works involved the erection of scaffolding externally, making all areas of the fabric accessible for examination. In addition, a deep drain-trench provided a section across the made ground beneath the earliest part of the structure and also crossed the adjacent quay. Early deeds referring to these premises and others nearby were kindly lent for transcription by Mrs Barbara Entwistle of Topsham Museum. A full report of the results of the project is nearing completion.

The medieval Quay was situated in front of the present Lighter Inn. Its dimensions are given in a survey made in the 1670s and it is clear from this and deed evidence that until the late 17th-century the shoreline to the SE of the Quay lay close against Monmouth Hill, which originally followed the edge of a low cliff at this point. Probably in the 1690s, a small open quay about 6.8 m square was built against the cliff face in the first phase of waterfront reclamation next to Monmouth Hill. This was a private quay presumably constructed by a Topsham merchant for use by lighters. Subsequently a single-storey brick warehouse was erected on the quay. This had three doors, two at the rear of the side walls providing access from Monmouth Street, probably via steps cut in the sandstone cliff face, and one near the southern corner on the waterfront. There was a single window opening in the SW (waterfront) wall. Its small size and the construction of this warehouse on an initially open quay provide a parallel to the development of the first warehouse at Exeter Quay (built 1574).

In the first or second decade of the 18th century the foreshore between the little warehouse and the main Quay was reclaimed when a two-and-a-half-storey warehouse 22.6 m long was constructed against the cliff on a narrow quay which linked to the main public Quay and eventually became the street known as the Strand (Fig. 1). The new warehouse abutted the SE side of the first warehouse and oversailed it at first-floor level. It is built in limestone on the ground floor and in crude English-bond brickwork above. Three primary windows survived, two with their original shutters. The warehouse was divided into four distinct units each with separate access in a manner reminiscent of the early 18th-century arrangements in the Quay House at Exeter.

## **2.2 St Katherine's Priory**

The City Council recently carried out repairs and conservation works on the stairs in the standing West Range of the priory. It is hoped that the 16th-century painted partition on the first floor will soon receive specialist conservation treatment to stabilize and seal the surface.

## **2.3 The Cathedral (S.R. Blaylock)**

Recent work on the South Tower has comprised recording work on the south and east faces as far as the penultimate accessible levels (levels D, the tier decorated with roundels, and E with plain arcading). Casts are being made in June of well-preserved detail on the east face of tier D, especially a complete arch of a blocked window which it is intended to display in the R.A.M. Museum. On the south side the Norman arcading of tiers D and E was interrupted by the insertion of a window to light the South Transept of the reconstructed Cathedral in the 13th and 14th centuries. Careful examination of the masonry around the surviving window shows at least two and probably three phases

of work. The first window was inserted in 1286, an event which is documented in the Fabric Rolls (the contemporary financial accounts of the rebuilding). At some later period the window was heightened. The tracery and especially the mullions and transoms of the window are probably later still as they are constructed of a different type of stone and in places are shown to have been cut into the earlier work. Further work on the Tower in the coming months will, we hope, complete the survey of the lowest levels - down to the roof of the chapel of the Holy Ghost on the south side, and a strip at the south end of the east side, beside the inserted chapel of St John the Baptist.

#### 2.4 Bowhill (S.R. Blaylock)

Staff of the Unit have continued to be involved in the archaeological recording of this late medieval house in St Thomas that is undergoing extensive repairs by English Heritage. Recent work has comprised recording of the roof timbers in the south range as they have been dismantled for repair, and observation of details in other areas, particularly in the Great Hall (the east range) which English Heritage are to open to the public in August.

At the same time a good deal of effort has been expended on the writing up of our previous work at Bowhill, and in the preparation of drawings. Four reports are now completed: two deal with EMAFU excavations in the parlour/service rooms and the screens passage; the third describes the interpretation of the building derived from fabric recording. The fourth report describes the post-excavation work carried out by EMAFU on the earlier DoE excavations of 1977-8. All of the recorded drawings have been drawn up to publication standard, and a series of synthetic and analytical drawings has been produced from these. Two drawings of the roofs, one of the most notable features of Bowhill, have been prepared to show the individual timbers in an 'exploded' form as an aid to the understanding of the carpentry. The drawing of the south range roof is included here (Fig. 2).

#### 2.5 St Loye's Chapel, Rifford Road (S.R. Blaylock)

*Clar Mr. Coates*  
This mid to late 14th-century (?) chapel was examined in September 1990, prior to structural repairs and repointing. Trial excavations on the site in November 1988 had located the position of the missing NW wall. Trenches in the vicinity of the chapel showed that there was no contemporary or later occupation around the chapel.

The heavy overgrowth of ivy had obscured the walls of the chapel for many years. The removal of the ivy showed that the SE wall contained three narrow lancet windows with Beerstone frames and that the NE wall (presumably the 'east' wall of the chapel) contained no window but a small quatrefoil in the gable. The SW wall now contains a broad window with remnants of Perpendicular tracery in its head, evidence for an earlier, narrower window in this position (presumably a lancet like those of the SE wall) survives on the exterior elevation.

Redevelopment of the northern half of the site is due to take place in the second half of this year. It is to be hoped that the landscaping of the area around the chapel which will follow this will include the marking out of the missing wall in the ground surface and



the removal of accumulated debris from the interior of the chapel which is c. 1 m deep. This will create a small amount of additional consolidation work.

## 2.6 Hall of the Vicars Choral, South Street (S.R. Blaylock)

Repointing and removal of vegetation on this ruined building have been planned for some time but have yet to be carried out. An outline record of the building was made by staff of the Unit in December 1990 so that when the works do begin the minimum of additional time is required for the completion of the archaeological record.

The hall is an interesting building, being the only remnant of the establishment for communal living of the Vicars Choral, that lay on the western side of the Close between the church of St Mary Major and the Deanery. The area was sometimes called Kalendarhay. The hall was probably built in the late 14th century, to which date the very fine windows that survive in the east wall belong. These are noteworthy for their delicate tracery, and cusped rere arches to the embrasures, all in Beerstone. Additions were made in the early 16th century, including an ornate fireplace probably given by John Ryse, Treasurer of the Cathedral (a photograph of this appears in *Some Studies of the Cathedral Close* by E. Lega-Weekes 1915, p. 53; the fireplace was destroyed when the hall was bombed in 1942).

To date outline drawings of all accessible elevations have been made, a photographic record taken and detailed drawings of ornamented work drawn. It is intended to complete the elevations when the building is scaffolded (the south-east corner was not examined as buildings belonging to the Cathedral School are built against it). One aspect deserving of close examination is the evidence for the form of the roof that survives in the east and south walls. Repair, in the form of resetting of the stone of the wall top, will endanger this evidence which, it is hoped, may be sufficient to provide a reconstruction of the roof.

## 3. POST-EXCAVATION PROJECTS

Work continues on the preparation of project archives and reports on the results of excavations undertaken by the Unit in the 1970s and 80s. Additional funds allocated by the City Council for this purpose in 1991/92 will enable significant inroads to be made into the backlog of unfinished reports. The prime objective this year is to finish off partially completed site reports and make the results available quickly in our limited-edition EMAFU (green) report series. At the same time we are systematically reviewing and quantifying the work required to complete reports on all backlog sites so that a phased programme can be planned and costed for execution in succeeding years. A number of EMAFU reports produced in recent months will be available at the meeting. It is anticipated that a considerable number of others, dealing with excavations, historic buildings and documentary studies, will appear during the year.

## 4. PUBLICATIONS

### 4.1 Exeter Archaeological Reports 4: *Roman Finds from Exeter*

This monograph, published jointly by Exeter City Council and the University of Exeter, will appear on July 3rd. It is produced in hardback and contains xx + 313 pages including 138 line illustrations (see leaflet enclosed). The full publication price is £40 with a pre-publication offer of £32 for orders placed before the publication date. The pre-publication offer leaflets were circulated in *Current Archaeology*, the Devon Archaeological Society *Newsletter* and also to members of the Study Group for Roman Pottery. The print run for the book is 500 copies.

### 4.2 Future Exeter Archaeological Reports

During the current year work will continue on the preparation of further monographs dealing with the legionary fortress, the waterfront sites, and the City defences. It is hoped that full texts will be completed for at least two of these during 1992/3.

### 4.3 Popular publications

Consideration is being given at present to the possibility of producing a successor to *Roman Exeter: Fortress and Town* in 1992, perhaps accompanied by two short A5 booklets dealing with the Roman fortress and the town. Other suggestions or comments would be welcome.

C.G. Henderson  
Director, Archaeological Field Unit

# TOPSHAM QUAY 1990 Internal Elevations and Profiles

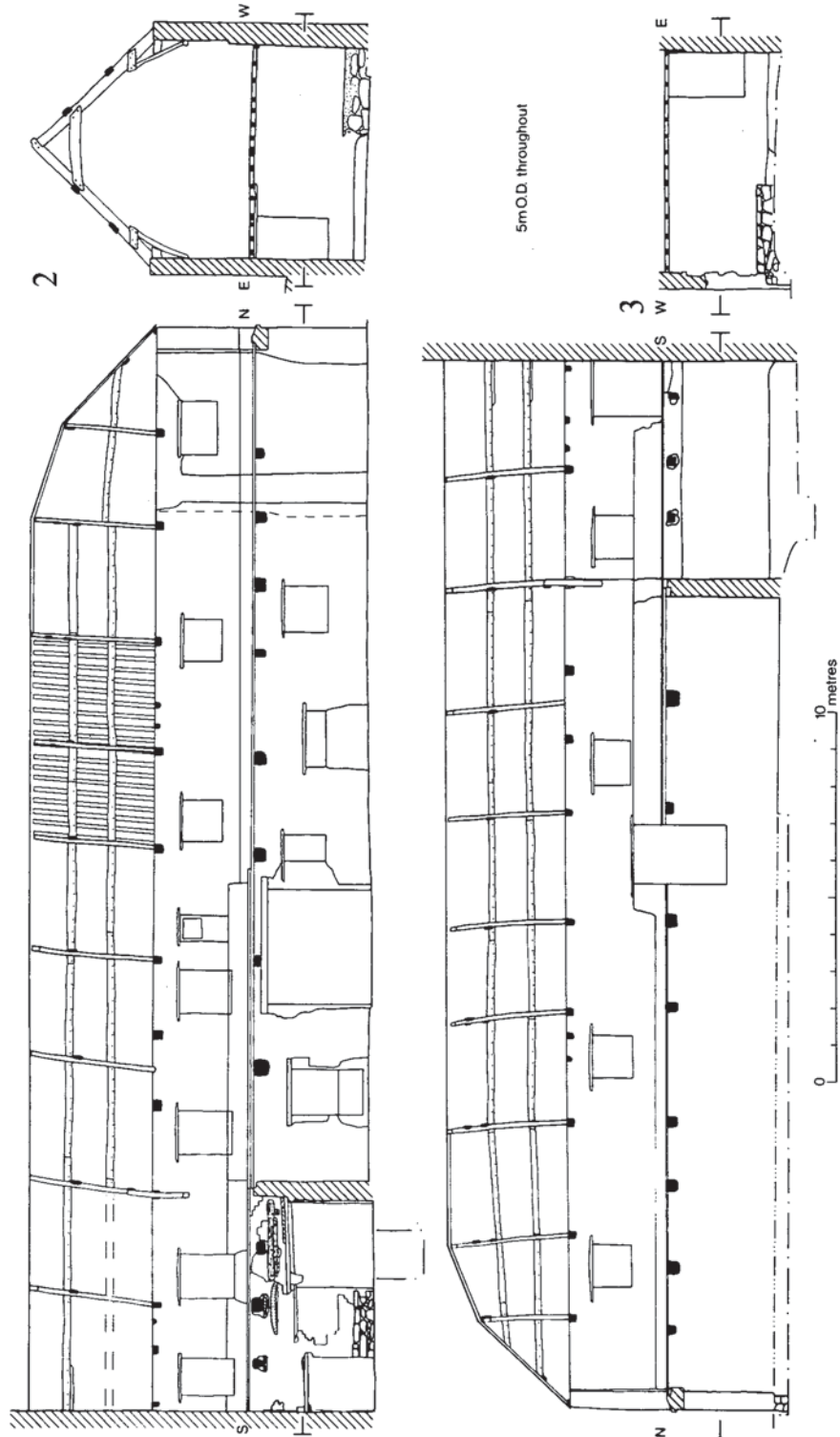


Fig. 1



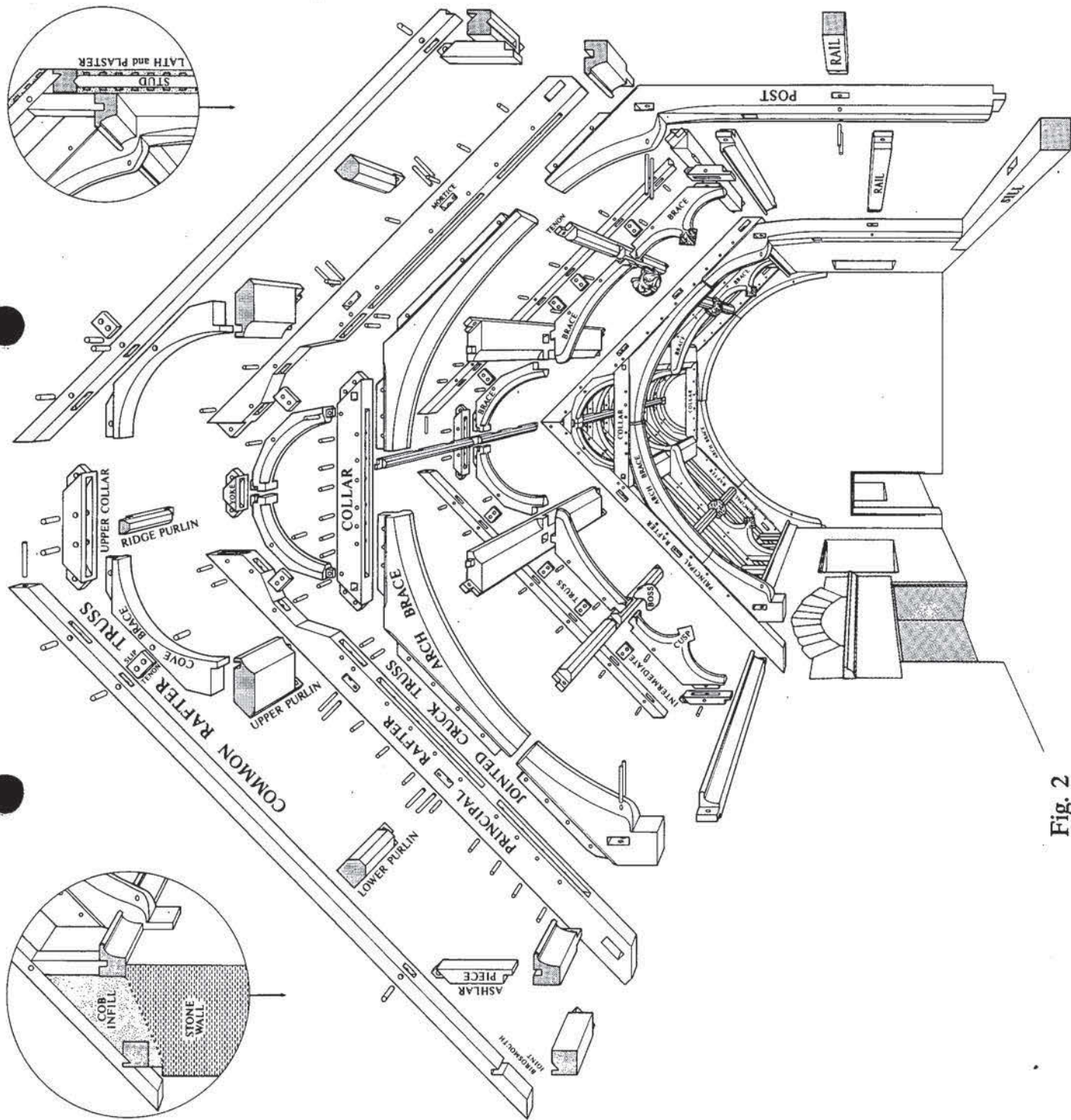


Fig. 2