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## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

Archaeological Advisory Committee, <sup>March</sup> April 4th 1988

## Report to Committee

## Magdalen Street / Southernhay excavations

The last report to the Committee outlined the main results of the excavations on this large site, which adjoins the City Wall outside the South Gate. It was possible to continue excavation on a small scale up to Christmas, and a watching brief has been maintained subsequently on the contractors' excavations for the foundations of the new hotel. A number of useful new observations were made in the final stages of the excavation.

The butt end of the outer Roman ditch, associated with the earliest period of the City Wall, was located close to the South Street frontage. The ditch terminal curves outwards in the manner seen, for example, in the defensive ditches surrounding the Roman fort at South Shields. Very few finds were recovered from the ditch but the likelihood remains that it was filled in before the end of the 3rd century. It is not clear whether an outer ditch existed in the 4th century. The ditch found on the SW side of Holloway Street in 1978 and published as late Roman in Roman Exeter: Fortress and Town corresponds closely in its line with the large Saxo-Norman ditch, running about 34m from the City Wall, which has been traced for about 200m at Magdalen Street and Southernhay.

Examination of the finds from the upper fill of the Saxo-Norman ditch suggests that it was filled in during the late 12th century. Houses were built over the line of the ditch next to the Magdalen Street frontage from the early 13th century. No evidence was found for Roman or earlier occupation next to the street, and its date of origin remains uncertain. A sizeable V-shaped ditch which cut through the remains of medieval houses on the street frontage and probably curved round the corner to run along the South Street frontage towards the South Gate. This ditch contained early 15th-century pottery in its fill. It may possibly have been dug as a defensive feature at the time of the French raids at the beginning of the 15th century, or it may simply have been a large drainage ditch. Whatever the case, the presence of this ditch probably implies a period in the 15th century when the Magdalen Street and South Street frontages were not built up.

A broad, shallow late medieval hollow way, up to 7m wide and lying on the SE side of Trinity Lane, was traced in excavation through the whole length of the site. It varied in depth from 1.2m to over 2m. This feature is probably to be identified with the 'footway' mentioned in late 16th century deeds, which must have followed roughly the line of Trinity Lane. Southernhay proper was referred to as a 'horseway' at this time. The hollow way was cut through by the ditch of a Civil War 'flanker' battery, probably installed early in 1643 to protect the approach to the South Gate. Both features were covered over and buried by spoil from the large Civil War trenches dug later in 1643. The true width and line of the covered way in front of the inner trench was clarified in the later stages of the excavation. It is hoped to recover more of the plan of the supposed redoubt outside the Bishop's Postern when an office block is built on its site in the near future.

Much work has been carried out by Tony Collings on documentary evidence relating to the Magdalen Street / Southernhay area. Post-excavation work on this site is now well under way and a full series of period plans will be available in the near future.

### Hayes Barton excavation, Flowerpot Field

The 16th- and 17th-century buildings of Hayes Barton were described in a previous report to the Committee. Further excavation was undertaken on this site late in 1987 and in January this year. The succession of alluvial deposits, boundary features and occupation evidence dating from medieval and earlier times is still being analysed but the main conclusions are reasonably clear. Some aspects of the results are of outstanding interest.

The site lies close to the west bank of the Exe about 350m above the medieval Exe Bridge, at the head of the riverside section of Okehampton Street. The pre-19th century deposits here consist of layers of alluvium (fine silt deposited by the river waters in numerous flood episodes) totalling about 1.8m in thickness. In dry summer conditions most of the earth-cut structural features and boundary ditches occurring within the alluvium sequence were almost impossible to detect. By careful observation in moist overcast winter conditions it was possible to distinguish about seven main activity or occupation horizons, separated by major episodes of alluviation, between the late prehistoric period and the 18th century.

The earliest deposits on the site comprise coarse gravels deposited by the main channel of the Exe, which are generally encountered at about 6.3m O.D. The basal gravels are overlain by layers of sandy alluvium, about 0.5m in thickness, into which are cut boundary ditches of two periods. A curving length of ditch, presumably later prehistoric in date, was succeeded by two phases of straight ditches flanking a trackway leading towards the river. One ditch section next to the trackway produced a few unabraded sherds of late 1st- or early 2nd-century black-burnished ware pottery.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from this sequence of deposits is that the River Exe has remained close to the east side of the floodplain since at least the beginning of the first millenium A.D. This raises the possibility that Cowick Street, a very straight road leading to the western bridgehead opposite Exeter, is Roman or earlier. Cowick Street appears to cut across a number of boundaries at a slightly oblique angle, suggesting an early origin for at least some elements of the field pattern in St Thomas. In addition, the line of the early Roman trackway excavated at Flowerpot Field can be traced right across the floodplain as a hedge boundary (now largely gone) which is recorded on the St Thomas Tithe Apportionment Map of 1838. Within the excavation site, the alignments of two lengths of the trackway which meet at an obtuse angle appear to have determined the alignments of much later medieval boundaries nearby. These include a trackway leading from the river's edge to Exwick which is known in early modern documents as the Greenway.

The earliest medieval finds from the site of Hayes Barton date from around 1200. Habitation in this area probably commenced in the 12th century, perhaps when the Prebend of Hayes was created out of part of the Domesday manor of Cowick. By c. 1200 about 0.25m of alluvium had accumulated since the late 1st century A.D. This material was cut through by boundary ditches (no doubt associated with hedges which have left no trace) and smaller features - some structural, others possibly plant holes. Two rows of such holes which seem to be relatively early in the medieval sequence are thought possibly to mark the lines of hedges planted to either side of a trackway. A later ditch on this alignment may have bounded a trackway flanking a 'ladder' field system of small closes. Such closes would have been appropriate to a farming regime based on the fattening of cattle brought down from the hinterland for sale in Exeter. This was an important aspect of the economies of manors on the floodplains of the Exe and its tributaries in the late medieval period, as demonstrated recently by the research of Maryanne Kowaleski and Harold Fox.

# HAYES BARTON, ST. THOMAS 1986-8

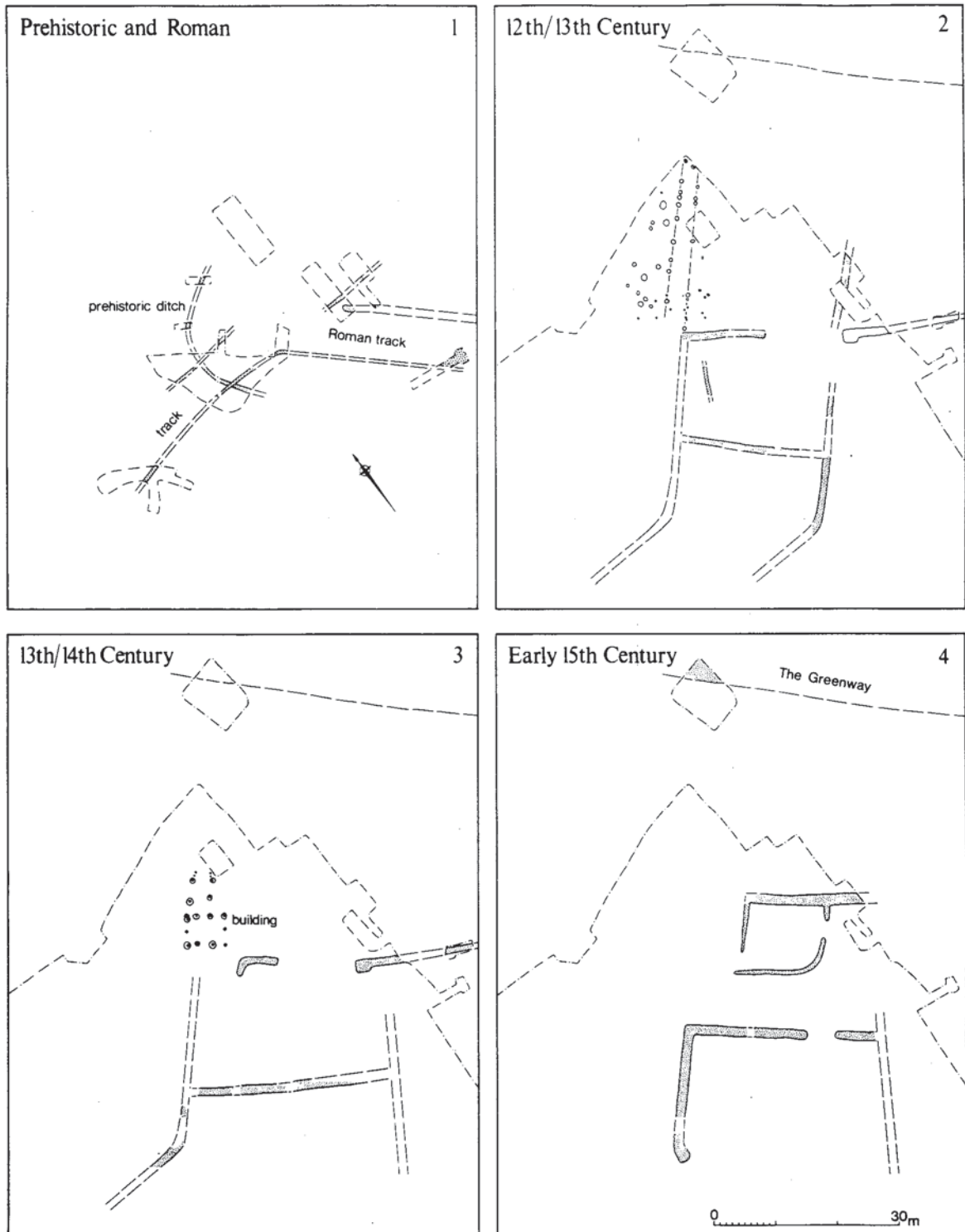


Fig.1



Very few finds from the site are attributable to the 14th century, and it is unclear whether a house existed in this vicinity at that time. Much of the site was not examined in detail at the medieval and earlier levels and it is quite possible that medieval timber or cob buildings were missed in the excavations. By the early 15th century, when a large group of pottery was dumped into one boundary ditch, a further 0.1m of alluvium had been deposited over the site and the layout of closes and boundaries had been quite substantially modified.

In the 15th and 16th centuries the rate of alluviation seems to have increased quite markedly, probably as a result of heightening of the weirs at Exe Bridge and Head Wear. This ties in well with documented floods at this period. During the first half of the 15th century St Thomas' Chapel and part of Exe Bridge were washed away and Okehampton Street was destroyed by the river. It was also at about this time that the monks of Cowick were complaining to the king that they were financially ruined and could pay no taxes because the Exe had flooded all their possessions in Cowick.

Very few finds recovered from the site belong to the period between the early 15th century and the mid 16th century. There may have been a period in the 15th century when the site was not inhabited. Some time in the late 15th or early 16th century a hall house was built within a pre-existing hedged and ditched close. The hall had an open hearth near one end and was associated with a small, detached rectangular building and a barn, set in a yard bounded by cob walls and ditches. From this nucleus grew the large mansion later occupied successively by the Peter and Gould families and finally destroyed in the Civil War.

Post-excavation analysis of the Hayes Barton excavation is now in progress and should be completed to archive report level by early summer. It is proposed to publish a summary report in the Exeter Suburbs volume.

#### **ABC Cinema Site**

The excavation of this site took place between September 1987 and February 1988. A watching brief is now being maintained on the contractors' foundation works. Only a brief account of the results will be given in this report.

The site lies just outside the East Gate. One or two Roman features were located but the earliest substantial remains date from the medieval period. The large Saxo-Norman ditch first discovered at Magdalen Street was again encountered here. It was found to butt-end against the projected line of Longbrook Street in New London Inn Square, demonstrating that Longbrook Street probably existed in the late Saxon period. The street is very straight, and may well be Roman in origin, but future work in the Sidwell Street area is required to test this theory.

The square in front of the cinema is crossed by the medieval Underground Passages. Further progress has been made in elucidating their history as a result of the excavations and recent documentary research. The line of the 12th-century Cathedral pipeline, first discovered in 1984 at King William Street, was located close to the High Street (in front of where McGahey's kiosk stood). The earlier of the two passages proper was probably built in the 13th century as the aqueduct of the Blackfriars, although it may eventually prove to be the case that this pipeline was also initially buried in a trench. The Cathedral aqueduct was rerouted in the later 1340s with the lead pipe now running in a passage. Finally the City laid its own pipeline in the 1440s, which occupied the same passage as the Cathedral aqueduct over most of its course outside the East Gate. The ABC site development incorporates a new interpretation room and entrance to the Underground Passages, which will re-open to the public in 1989.

When the ABC excavation was planned, it was hoped that evidence would be found for the nature of the Civil War defences outside the East Gate. The results exceeded expectations. A number of trenches of the type previously encountered outside the South Gate were found on the site. The most interesting discovery however was a defensive redoubt positioned across Longbrook Street so as to cut off the direct line of approach to the gate. The full plan of this feature was recovered: it was rectangular in shape and measured roughly 6m by 8m between the inner lips of the enclosing ditches.

After the Civil War the old course of Longbrook Street at this point was built over, first by the Oxford Inn, later by the New London Inn. The square in front of the inns seems to be a post-Civil War creation, although there was probably a fairly large open area at the head of Sidwell Street at an earlier period.

The proposed redevelopment of Debenhams and the Bus Station should provide an excellent opportunity to gain further information about the St Sidwell's suburb, not least for the Roman period.

#### **St Martin's Church (S.R.Blalock)**

The recording work which took place in St Martin's Church in February 1987 has now been drawn up and a short report produced. The work was occasioned by conservation work on the perpendicular south window of the nave and repairs to masonry and guttering. The observation of distinctive 'long and short' quoins at the south-east angle of the nave by John Schofield, the job architect, provided an additional stimulus to the recording. Such work is typical of late-Saxon architecture and since there is evidence for a pre-Conquest foundation at St Martin's (a late-medieval document recording a consecration in 1065, as well as the dedication to St Martin of Tours, traditionally associated with early foundations) a close examination of the area associated with the angle of the nave was desirable in the hope of identifying more early work. Hitherto no architectural features of pre-perpendicular date were known and it had been assumed that, like so many of the churches of Exeter, St Martin's had been entirely rebuilt in the 15th century.

It was found that there had been numerous repairs to the south wall of the nave, mainly in the 19th century, but that there remained a substantial area of facework which was cut by the insertion of the 15th century window and which was associated with the long and short quoins and a fragment of a lancet window, probably round-headed (Fig.2). The masonry of this undisturbed facework was entirely of volcanic trap rubble, bonded with a variety of brownish mortars. Both of these are very similar to materials employed in the Gatehouse of Exeter Castle, erected in the 1070s and long known for its architectural details of Saxon type. On this basis it is suggested that the nave of the church is of 11th century origin and that the present walls represent alterations and additions to the ancient fabric rather than rebuilding, although the west wall and the chancel are entirely rebuilt. An area of similar facework is seen on the north wall of the nave, near the north-east corner (visible from Catherine Street), where behind many small repairs and patches the facework is entirely of trap. No quoins are visible as the corner is clasped by a 19th-century buttress, but it is possible that this area, too, is of 11th-century origin.

#### **Exeter Cathedral: South Tower (S.R.Blalock)**

Work continues on the recording of the masonry of the Tower in advance of conservation work by the Cathedral works department. During the autumn and



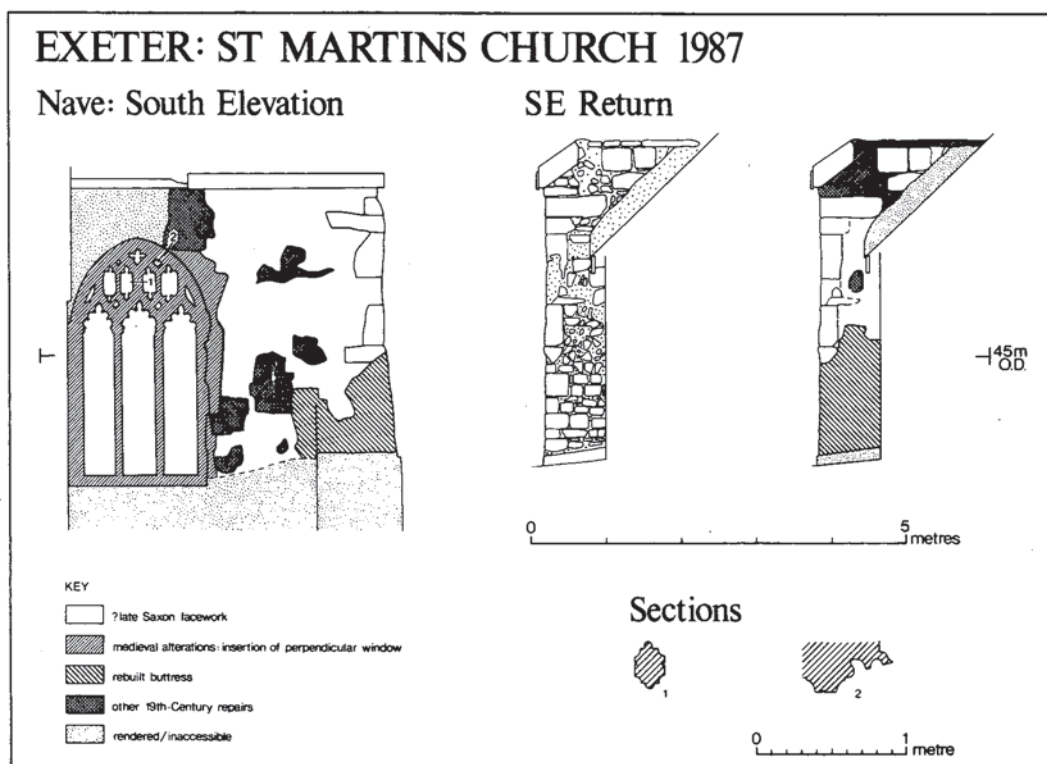
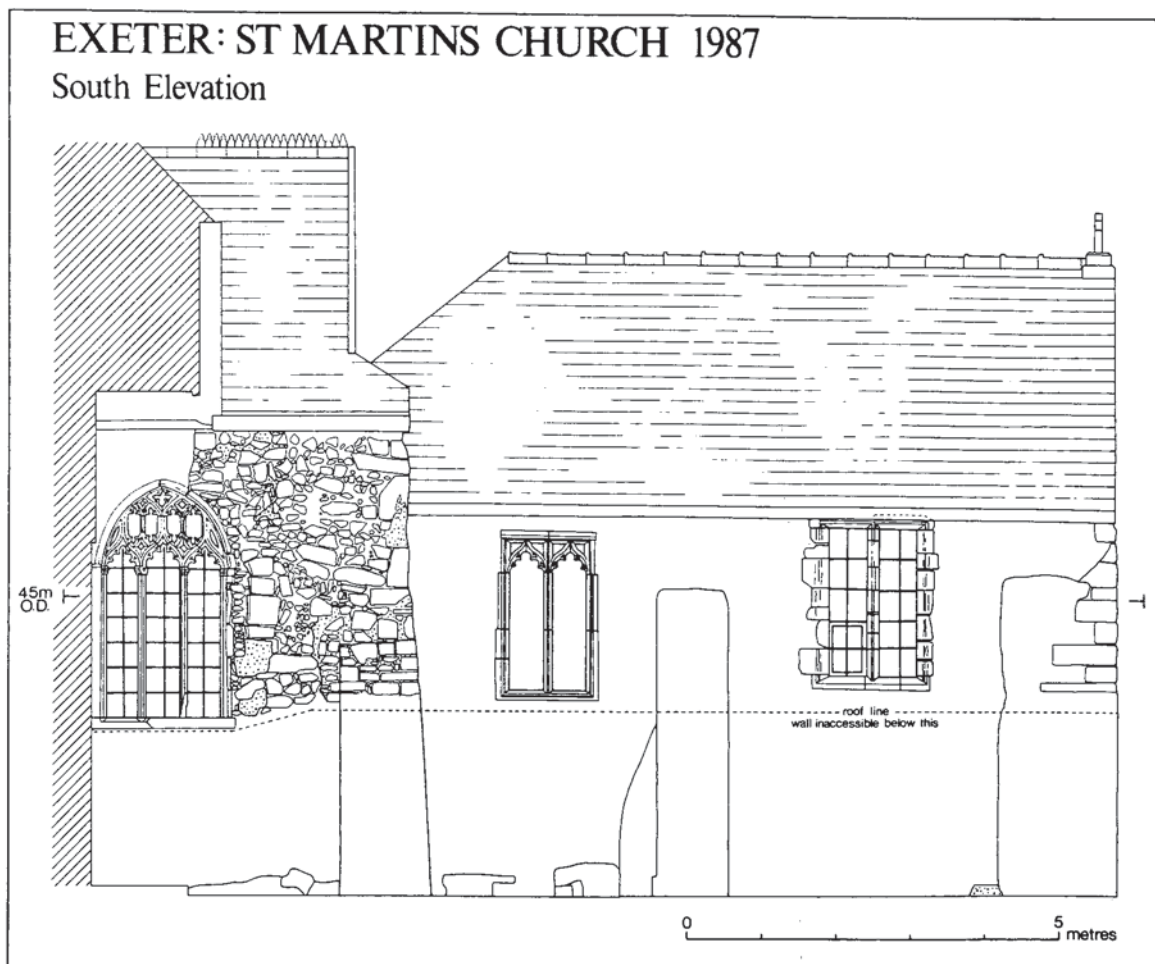


Fig.2

winter the scaffolding on the west face of the tower has been reduced in height as the middle and lower tiers have been completed. The lowest ornamented tier (WE) was recorded in September 1987, bringing the detailed record of the west face nearly to completion. Two unornamented stages of plain ashlar work are currently being examined. The procedure here has been to use the photogrammetric survey drawings as a base for recording information. Whereas in the ornamented upper stages the photogrammetric survey was found to be deficient both in accuracy and in representation of detail, for the plain ashlar work of WF and WG it is adequate as a base for the recording of stone and mortar types, the positions of putlog holes, and other details. Nevertheless the drawings are being checked for accuracy and certain areas are being redrawn in order to ensure a standard uniform to that achieved for the rest of the tower.

In the course of this year work will commence on the east and eastern halves of the south and north faces of the tower. Scaffolding is being erected at present on this area and we look forward to inspecting the other half of the tower at close quarters.

#### **Bowhill House (S.R.Blalock)**

At the invitation of H.B.M.C. the Unit has become involved in the examination of the fabric of Bowhill House, in Dunsford Hill, which has been undergoing repair work by the Commission since 1978. A detailed survey of the south and east ranges is now in progress in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the structural history of this little known and rather complicated building. The primary phase of the building now standing was probably constructed in the late 15th century, with walls partly of stone and partly of cob; the former being used more extensively on the south elevation which, facing onto Dunsford Hill, is the more visible. Elsewhere cob is the main building material and the discrepancy between the two materials has resulted in numerous infelicities of construction.

New stone-for-stone drawings are being produced, to record observations of the structure and to form a base for informed discussion on reconstructions, and a detailed survey of the roof has been commenced as it is dismantled for repair. Observations to date include the elucidation of the complex structural history of the area around a garderobe in the south range, the identification of evidence for a pentice linking hall and kitchen (along the south side of the courtyard), and detailed examination of plaster, mortar, and cob types. Plotting of the surviving extent of original plaster has been particularly useful in that it has demonstrated that the roof is a primary feature of the building. Some evidence for an earlier structure beneath the east end of the south range has been located, in the form of the base of a cob wall (without footings) on an alignment at variance to that of the main build. Many insertions and additions of the 16th century and later have been identified and provisionally dated.

Work will continue at Bowhill in the coming months, as the roof is dismantled progressively from the east the survey of the timbers will continue; and the survey drawings and records to date will be drawn up into finished elevations and reconstructions.

#### **Roman Finds Volume (N.Holbrook)**

Computerisation of the Roman pottery excavated up to 1980 is now complete. This has enabled work to commence on the writing up of the type series, and this should be completed in the next six months. Of the outstanding reports Kay Hartley has scheduled the Exeter mortaria for the coming financial year,



and Val Rigby and Vivian Swan will both be visiting Exeter to deal with the terra nigra and fine wares respectively. Work has also continued on the other categories of material: the small finds are now largely drawn, a report on the brooches has been received, and one on the glass is expected shortly. The computerisation of the pottery excavated since 1980 will be undertaken over the next few months. It is therefore to be hoped that the great majority of the volume will have been completed by the end of the year.

#### Defences Volume

Work on the volume has continued over the past year. It is proposed to produce a number of 'green' reports over the next few months on aspects of the project. These will in effect be draft chapters or sections of the proposed publication volume. It is hoped that the volume will be fully edited by early 1989.

#### Legionary Fortress Volume

H.B.M.C. have offered a grant in the financial year 1988/9 for work on a volume dealing with the legionary fortress. This should enable this important aspect of Exeter's archaeology to be brought to publication within the next two years.



#### Future Excavations

A list of development sites likely to require excavation in the next two years will be tabled at the meeting.

C.G. Henderson  
Director, Archaeological Field Unit

Bartholomew Street East.  
Pamphlets — City Walls  
                  — Exe Bridge  
                  — Exe Road Houses  
Suburbs volume — Exe Bridge  
                      — Houses.  
Great Floor.