

1989

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

Archaeological Advisory Committee, January 20th 1989

### Report to Committee

#### EXCAVATIONS

##### St Catherine's Almshouses and Annuellars College

Excavation and fabric recording in advance of the landscaping and re-display of this monument was concluded in the summer of 1988. A number of important new discoveries were made in the final stages of the archaeological investigations.

##### Roman fortress defences

A small trench was dug at the front of the legionary fortress rampart at a point where a timber tower was thought to have stood (on the basis of metrical analysis of the planning of the defences in multiples of the standard Roman foot). Both sides of the 3m wide tower were found within the excavated trench, itself about 3m wide. This is a most useful observation, since it confirms the size of the fortress as about 41 acres or 16.6 ha.

Previous excavations on the front of the rampart, at the Mermaid Yard and Friernhay Street development sites, were conducted in rather rushed 'rescue' conditions. At Catherine Street, on the other hand, it was possible to excavate a length of the rampart front fairly slowly, layer by layer, making detailed records at each level. As a result, it is now apparent that the rampart face took a form different from that previously supposed. It had been thought that the structure was faced with a mixture of turves and clay blocks. The deposits interpreted on the earlier sites as the remains of a clay and turf facing were identified at Catherine Street as being secondary to the rampart proper, almost certainly representing slumped weathering products which probably accumulated after the defences had ceased to be properly maintained. Behind this material, which consisted mainly of fine clay layers interspersed with a few displaced turves (particularly near the base), there was found a narrow revetment of pure turf. As the turf squares had been obtained from areas overlying two different types of subsoil (one producing turves of a reddish-brown colour), it was possible to distinguish a high proportion of the individual turves making up this revetment.

The log corduroy observed at Friernhay Street was also present at Catherine Street, again overlying the foundation pits containing the tower corner posts. The logs ended on a line at the very front of the rampart and were overlain by the turf revetment, which was just one turf wide and served to retain the coarse clay core derived from digging the defensive ditch. Several courses of turves had been built up before the first of the core material was dumped in and tamped down. Further courses of turves were then added, and so on. In plan, the line marking the junction between the back of the turf revetment and the retained core material varied in position according to the size of the individual turves employed at any particular point. By contrast, the front face of the turf revetment was relatively straight and vertical, being set back from the front edge of the underlying log corduroy by about 0.2m. A slight linear depression of about the same width ran over the ends of the logs along the face of the turf revetment; this is interpreted as marking the position of a timber sole-plate or sill beam against which the lowest courses of turves had been stacked. The position of the putative beam was such that its back edge would have rested

against the front of the two tower corner posts. It is assumed that the front face of the rampart consisted of a vertical timber-framed revetment founded on the sole-plate and held in place at a higher level by one or more sets of cross beams buried within the body of the rampart, in an arrangement similar to that recently described from the contemporary fortress at Wroxeter.

The defensive ditches in front of the rampart were described in the October 1987 Committee report. It will be recalled that a V-shaped primary ditch was replaced by a ditch of Punic profile at a date thought to lie within the period AD 60-65. This dating was based on the relatively small amount of pottery recovered from all the sections that have been cut through the ditch since it was first discovered in 1975. A detailed report on the date of the samian pottery from the primary ditch on the Rack Street site has recently been received from G B Dannell. This shows that the V-shaped ditch is unlikely to have been filled in and replaced by the Punic ditch until the mid 70s, roughly the period when the main legionary occupation came to an end. This would suggest that the Punic ditch was open during the period c. 75 - 85/90. There is some reason to believe that the fortress lay empty for at least part of this period, probably being garrisoned only on a care-and-maintenance basis.

#### Roman town house (N.Holbrook)

The 2nd and 3rd century Roman structures on the site were dealt with in an earlier report. In the summer of 1988 further excavation took place in the late Roman stone town house, which was the latest Roman building on the site.

Remains of the town house have been recorded on two previous occasions: in 1945-7 Lady Fox excavated three rooms of the north-east range, and in 1951 she observed the walls of two rooms in the north-west range when a sewer was being laid along Catherine Street. The 1988 excavations uncovered further traces of the north-east range, which is at least 30m long and consists of a single row of rooms flanked by a corridor. The north-west range was at least 11.5m long and one of its rooms had an opus signinum floor. The house was therefore of considerable size and had either an L-shaped or courtyard plan. Its construction can be dated to the late third or early fourth century.

Undoubtedly the most spectacular find in the course of the excavations was a well preserved three metre length of a fine corridor mosaic. Mosaics are far from common in Exeter and this is the first major find since Lady Fox revealed fragments of two other mosaics in the same building some forty years ago. The building was thus very well appointed and there is evidence for at least four separate mosaics in the north-east range along with a pavement of plain red tesserae. Small fragments of decorated plaster in the demolition levels indicate that the walls were graced with painted scenes.

The corridor mosaic is without doubt the finest mosaic ever to have been found in Exeter. It was clearly an addition to the house as it overlay a plain mortar floor. The mosaic consists of a saltire cross flanked by mats of guilloche and budded Solomon's knots. The design does not easily fall into the style of any of the 'schools' of Romano-British mosaics, but rather shows a mixture of influences, the Solomon's knots being characteristic of the Corinthian (Cirencester) school while the guilloche mat shares affinities with the Durnovarian (Dorchester) school. The merger of the repertoires of these two schools can be paralleled elsewhere (Littlecote, and Olga Road, Dorchester, for example) where it is dated to



the later fourth century.

The mosaic subsequently became covered with a layer of dark occupation material, which was in turn sealed beneath a large roof-fall of slates. The date of this demolition is not precisely known.

#### Medieval topography

The earliest medieval activity attested on the Catherine Street site is represented by the robbing of Roman wall foundations in the 11th and 12th centuries. The site stands on the corner of Catherine Street (a back lane running behind tenements on High Street) and Chapel Street, which originally ran at right angles from High Street, through St Stephen's Bow and thence to the City Walls, delimiting the tenements fronting on St Martin's Lane (now The Close). Both of the streets flanking the excavation site are likely to have been laid out in the late 9th century when Exeter was made a burh by King Alfred. It is thought that the primary tenements in the Anglo-Saxon town were probably quite large - some perhaps several acres in extent. One such early tenement may have occupied a plot about 140m long lying between St Martin's Lane and Chapel Street and flanked on its north-western side by Catherine Street. The back part of this putative primary plot probably became subdivided by stages, resulting in the creation of a number of smaller tenements facing onto Catherine Street, with the little tenement on the corner of St Martin's Lane and Catherine Street taken up from 1065 by St Martin's Church. By the mid 13th century at the latest, the rear corner tenement eventually occupied by St Catherine's Almshouses had already been defined.

In the 13th century a large hall-house was erected on the tenement to the west of the Almshouses plot. The house extended at least 23m towards the St Martin's Lane frontage. Documentary evidence indicates that it was occupied in the last quarter of the 13th century by successive canons of the Cathedral. At this time or subsequently, the house was acquired by the Dean and Chapter and it remained in their possession down to the Reformation. This appears to be the period when the Cathedral Chapter acquired the majority of its houses on the east side of the Close. Several bequests of tenements in St Martin's Lane by prominent canons are recorded in the late 13th century and other properties were obtained by purchase. Hence it was probably in the 13th century that the eastern limit of the Chapter's jurisdiction became fixed along the line of Chapel Street. The six gates leading into the Close were erected at the Cathedral precinct boundaries in the 1280s. One of these, St Catherine's Gate (formerly known as Erkenesk Gate), was situated on Catherine Street at the eastern limit of the excavated 13th-century house. A gate was also built at the head of Chapel Street in 1297 by the Black Friars, whose precinct lay on the eastern side of that street. Known by the 16th century as the Bickleigh Gate, its western side wall appears to have been abutted by the front and eastern walls of St Catherine's Almshouses.

#### Annuellars College

Several walls at the east end of the 13th-century hall-house to the west of the Almshouses still stand up to ten feet high. Before the recent excavations these walls were believed to date from the early 16th century, when the Annuellars College, established for chantry priests serving in the Cathedral, was founded on this site. It is now apparent, however, that the college was created by the conversion of a group of buildings of much earlier date. The principal surviving walls belong to the kitchen, the buttery and the pantry of the medieval house and to adjuncts to the main building. A 13th-century triple doorway which formerly stood at the lower

end of the hall, within the monument area, was cleared away after the War. The large hall itself also survived until the War; its remains now lie beneath The Milkmaid and Watty's. The hall measured approximately 10m by 7.5m internally.

#### St Catherine's Almshouses

Further useful observations were made in the Almshouses, built c. 1450, during the closing stages of the excavations. The preparation of an archive report on the results of all the archaeological investigations is well advanced, and a series of summary plans is currently being prepared. Two interpretation panels will be put up on the site in the near future. These contain a brief outline of the site's history, as well as drawings illustrating the layout and likely appearance of the various buildings that have stood there, including a new reconstruction of the Roman fortress defences, an illustration of the mosaic and a reconstructed view of the Almshouses. The mosaic was lifted by the Museums Conservator and will be placed on display in the R.A.M. Museum later this year. Consideration was given to the feasibility of displaying the mosaic on site, but this would have resulted in damage to the mosaic as well as being problematic in other ways. About 3000 people attended the site Open Day near the end of the excavations.

#### **Riverside sites**

Building is currently taking place on several sites close to the river, mostly for housing developments. Small excavations have been carried out on a number of these sites and watching briefs are being maintained during construction work.

At Haven Banks, excavation and documentary research has led to the identification of a large artificial channel probably built to divert water from the river so as to facilitate the construction of a new deep-water approach channel and wharf at Exeter Quay in 1698-1701, when the Exeter Canal was deepened to allow sea-going ships of 100-200 tons to reach the city. The by-pass channel would have had the capacity to carry a significant proportion of the river's flow in summer when the water level was at its lowest. Its construction must have represented a fairly major engineering project. The water would have been diverted into the channel by a weir about 250m above the Quay. The entrance to the channel was at Shooting Marsh, on the inside of the river bend opposite Shilhay. The cut seems to have been at least 20m wide, about 500m long, and roughly followed the line of modern Haven Road to join the Exeter Canal near its head close to the Welcome Inn. Further excavation will be undertaken shortly on the Alplington Street part of the Haven Banks development.

Fairly thick alluvial overbank deposits have been observed at Shooting Marsh, but the area of Haven Banks within the bend of the river at the head of the Basin seems to have been a low-lying shingle bank until relatively recently, suggesting that at this point the main river channel lay further to the west in late medieval or early modern times. Information from the various sites excavated along the waterfront is being plotted on plans showing the position of the river at different times over the last two millennia. Some interesting conclusions are beginning to emerge. As noted in the last report to Committee, it is now clear that the main channel has remained close to the Exeter side of the floodplain since at least late prehistoric times, presumably having been to some degree 'managed' throughout this period in the setting of an organised landscape. Map evidence suggests that a Roman or early medieval road coming from the north-west (across modern Exwick Fields) was aligned on a bridgehead or fording



point at the head of Cowick Street. Probably in early medieval times the course of the river in the vicinity of the crossing point shifted westwards towards St Thomas, cutting across the head of Cowick Street and the road coming from the north-west. An early river channel found at the Albany Road site in 1984, near the head of Cowick Street, has been radiocarbon dated to the 8th/9th century.

It now seems fairly likely that some Roman field boundaries on the floodplain in St Thomas survived into the later medieval period, suggesting that in the lower Exe Valley farming may have continued uninterrupted through the so-called Dark Ages. The mid to late Anglo-Saxon river channel found at Albany Road produced cereal pollen from its waterlogged fill. A report on the contents of the channel deposit has been published by Vanessa Straker and others.

Further small-scale excavations and watching briefs undertaken at Exeter Quay in 1988 and early 1989 have added significantly to our understanding of the natural topography of this area and have produced important new sightings of the late 17th-century quays. It is now clear that downstream from the 1680 Quay House there was an open quay about 80' long which was probably built at the same time as the Quay House and the Custom House. In a contractor's trench dug in the early 19th-century fish market, the quay wall on the outer side of the 1680 dock was observed, making it clear that the dock was much longer than had been supposed and that its mouth was relatively wide, so that the dock became progressively narrower towards its head next to the Quay House.

### **Cricklepit Street**

An excavation against the face of the City Wall at Cricklepit Street was started under the Community Programme but remained unfinished when the Exeter CP scheme ended in December last year. The AFU is endeavouring to complete the excavation, initiated originally as a rescue response to a proposal, since deferred, for repaving the street.

At this point the Roman City Wall runs along a steep hillside overlooking Cricklepit Mill and Lower Mills, just above the edge of the floodplain. Excavations behind the wall in 1973-4 showed that a long portion of the Roman wall in the stretch between the West Gate and the Quay had been entirely replaced in late medieval times. Documentary evidence and examination of the masonry suggest that a major programme of rebuilding took place in this area at the beginning of the 15th century, probably in response to the threat then posed to south coast towns by the French. A number of scars in the masonry mark the positions of primary buttresses. A larger scar near the Watergate is believed to represent one wall of a projecting tower which stood at the southern corner of the walls. The Coombe brook is thought to have been channelled through this tower, which served as 'common jakes' (public latrines) in the 15th century, at which period the latrines are mentioned on a number of occasions in the City Receiver's Accounts.

The recent excavations in Cricklepit Street have uncovered the remains of a row of small, low status houses, dating from c. 1700 to the mid 19th century. Two of these houses were converted to a soap-house in the third quarter of the 18th century, and this in turn became a woollen-calendaring shop a little before 1800. A series of leases and other documents relating to these properties enable their ownership and occupants to be studied in some detail through the 18th and 19th centuries. An information panel on



the archaeology of the Cricklepit area will be erected soon at the rear of the Custom House.

#### **St Loyes Chapel**

A small-scale trial excavation was undertaken recently on a proposed housing site adjoining the ruined medieval St Loyes Chapel in Heavitree. The chapel was found to overlie alluvial and colluvial valley-bottom deposits of considerable depth. Much of this material probably accumulated earlier in the medieval period as ploughwash derived from cultivated fields further upslope. No evidence was found for the existence of other structures near the chapel or for an associated cemetery. The line of the lost north wall of the chapel was located in the excavation, permitting the full ground plan to be reconstructed.

#### **Trinity Green/Southernhay**

The final phase of the excavations at Magdalen Street and Trinity Green was completed in the summer of 1988 prior to the erection of an office block next to the new Trust House Forte hotel on Southernhay. The excavation was useful in confirming the line of the Roman, medieval and Civil War defensive ditches in front of the City Wall. The Civil War redoubt postulated next to the Lollard's Tower was shown not to exist, although it is still likely that a communication trench ran to this point from the Civil War fortifications at Wynard's Almshouses and the Magdalen Hospital next to Magdalen Street. A new plan of the Civil War defences is in preparation which incorporates information from all the excavations outside the South Gate since 1973, including the most recent, at Acorn Roundabout.

#### **Acorn Roundabout**

In the autumn of 1988 an excavation took place prior to the construction of a new section of road across the Acorn Roundabout, outside the South Gate at the top of Holloway Street. The excavation costs were met in full by Devon County Council from the scheme budget. Part of the new road line crosses an area excavated in 1973-4, but a larger portion overlies a strip of ground not previously investigated. The site was considered to be especially important because a group of early Roman buildings was found here in the 1973-4 excavation. The preservation of deposits in the 1988 area was found to be good, and a further three early Roman buildings were discovered. A well-attended Open Day was held at the end of the excavation. Detailed archive drawings of the excavated structures have now been completed for all periods, and summary plans have been started. A new plan will be produced showing all the early Roman buildings known in this area on both sides of Holloway Street. Further discussion of the significance of this important group of buildings will be left until the new overall plan is available.

No further Roman cremation or inhumation burials came to light in the 1988 excavation. A later-Roman boundary ditch, running at right angles to Holloway Street, was traced across the site to a point close to the side of Magdalen Street, which probably overlies the ditch at an oblique angle, suggesting a late- or post-Roman origin for the street.

Medieval occupation in the suburb outside the South Gate probably commenced in the 10th or 11th century. Several Saxo-Norman pits were located in the excavation and an 11th-century building of this period was discovered nearby in 1973-4. A number of large pits of 12th- and 13th-century date produced some most interesting groups of pottery, including a few vessel forms not previously known from Exeter.

Substantial remains were preserved of a relatively rich house of late

15th- or early 16th-century date. This contained a very large garderobe (latrine) pit with a well-preserved stone-arched chute. Its late 16th-century fill contained a pair of brass candlesticks which are very rare survivals. The house was probably demolished in the Civil War.

Two ditches forming part of the Civil War earthwork salient built in 1643 to protect the South Gate were found running through the site. Their discovery completes the picture of the overall layout of the Civil War defences in this area. A reconstruction drawing of the 1643 defences is in preparation for use on an interpretation panel which will shortly be put up next to the South Gate. The panel contains information on the Roman gate and other features of archaeological interest in the vicinity. In addition, it is hoped soon to mark out more prominently the outline of the gate tower discovered in 1964 by Lady Fox.

#### **Guys Allotments, St Thomas**

A small trial excavation took place last spring on a dis-used allotment adjoining a proposed development site near the western edge of the Exe floodplain in St Thomas. The trench was placed next to a long hedge-line that aligns with a boundary ditch flanking a Roman trackway excavated at the Flowerpot site. A very interesting sequence of alluvial deposits, including waterlogged plant remains, was recorded. However it was not possible to extend the trench far enough across the line of the modern hedge to establish the date of origin of the boundary. It is hoped to undertake further excavation on the adjacent development site in due course.

#### **Friernhay Street**

A watching brief on a small redevelopment site in Friernhay Street revealed a section through the south-west fortress defences. Both the via sagularis and the primary fortress ditch were plotted. In addition, two stone walls belonging to a late Roman building were observed to the north-east of the Roman street.

#### **Colleton Row**

In a watching brief at Colleton Row, alluvial and colluvial deposits almost 4m deep were observed in the bottom of the Larkbeare Valley to the south-west of Holloway Street. Charcoal samples from two levels in the colluvial sequence were taken for possible radiocarbon dating.

Site B0

### **HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND ANCIENT MONUMENTS**

#### **Exeter Cathedral**

Fabric recording on the South Tower has continued throughout the past year in advance of stonework conservation. The work continues to be funded by the Dean and Chapter. It is planned to produce a new reconstruction drawing of the Norman Cathedral as well as drawings illustrating the former appearance of the West Front. An account of the development of the West Front by John Allan and Stuart Blaylock will be published in a forthcoming British Archaeological Association monograph on Exeter Cathedral.

#### **Bowhill House, St Thomas**

Recording in advance of restoration continued during 1988 on behalf of English Heritage. The Archaeological Field Unit has been asked to prepare a report on the DoE excavations carried out in the 1970s by Stephen Dunmore. Some further excavation and recording within the building will be undertaken early in 1989.



### **Friernhay Street**

In the summer of 1988 detailed records were made of a late 17th-century back-block standing in Friernhay Street to the rear of 150 Fore Street. Rows of tenterhooks for drying cloth were found on purlins in the attic, a most unusual occurrence in a domestic building.

### **Cricklepit Mill**

Surveys of the late 17th-century corn mill and the long cloth-drying shed which was probably built in 1731 were made by the Archaeological Field Unit in the autumn of 1988. The work was mainly funded by the developers, Renaissance Ltd., who required accurate survey drawings of the early buildings on the Cricklepit Mill site as well as an assessment of their age and historical significance to aid the preparation of plans for their conversion to new uses. Many hundreds of tenterhooks were found on timbers throughout the cloth-drying shed.

It is hoped to undertake further recording in the near future so as to complete the archaeological record of these important early industrial buildings. Limited excavation of areas where new buildings will be erected is planned for the spring and early summer of 1989.

### **St Loyes Chapel**

Three walls of the chapel are preserved almost to full height and several window openings survive. The monument, which is scheduled, requires consolidation work fairly urgently as it has suffered from vandalism in recent years, resulting, for example, in the loss of window tracery. An archaeological survey will be made in the near future and repairs are planned as part of the new building works which will shortly be started on the site.

### **Underground Passages**

The new Interpretation Room on the site of the former ABC Cinema will open in the summer of 1989. A number of reconstruction drawings are in preparation which show aspects of the site's archaeology, particularly concerning the East Gate and Exeter's early aqueducts. There will be display panels and a short audio-visual presentation in the room, which will become the new entry-point for visitors to the Underground Passages.

### **City Wall**

Archaeological survey and masonry conservation, grant-aided by English Heritage, were undertaken in 1988 on the stretch of wall between Maddock's Row and Lower North Street. An interpretation panel will be erected next to the wall in the Paul Street car park in the near future. This gives information on the Roman wall and the Roman tower found nearby in 1983, the early medieval street system, the Pennington bellfoundry and St Paul's Church.

### **Guildhall**

Further structural works will be carried out in 1989. A comprehensive archive is being compiled on the structural history of the building for which a great deal of documentary evidence has been assembled. It is hoped to produce a reconstruction drawing of the original form of the Elizabethan front block, for which new information has come to light recently.

## PREPARATION OF REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

### Recent excavations

Much work has taken place on the production of detailed archive plans and primary site archives for the larger sites excavated in the last 3-4 years; these include Flowerpot, ABC Cinema, Acorn Roundabout, Exe Street, St Catherine's Almshouses, Magdalen Street/Trinity Green, The Quay and Watergate. Much of this work was funded through the Community Programme, which finished at the end of last year. We are now in a position to prepare summary reports, plans and reconstruction drawings for most aspects of these recent excavations and it is intended to produce two new annual reports dealing with these sites early in 1989.

### Roman finds volume (N. Holbrook)

This monograph will appear in the Exeter Archaeological Reports series published jointly by the University of Exeter and Exeter City Council. Work on the volume is now nearing completion. Only two substantial contributions are still awaited and these are promised by April. It is therefore intended that the volume will be ready for refereeing by July and will go to press late in 1989 for publication in the spring of 1990. Mr George Boon has kindly agreed to act as the AFU's referee. The contents of the volume are as follows:

Roman Finds from Exeter 1971-1979

by

P.T. Bidwell and N. Holbrook

Exeter Archaeological Reports no. 4

### Introduction

#### Chapter 1 The Coins

- (i) Coin list by N. Shiel
- (ii) Analysis by R. Reece
- (iii) Byzantine and other exotic ancient bronze coins from Exeter by G. Boon

#### Chapter 2 The Samian

- (i) Potters' stamps by B. Dickenson
- (ii) Decorated ware by G. Dannell

#### Chapter 3 The Fine Wares

- (i) Pre-Flavian fine wares by K. Greene
- (ii) Gaulish imports & related wares by V. Rigby
- (iii) The other fine wares by N. Holbrook & V. Swan

#### Chapter 4 The Black Burnished Wares

#### Chapter 5 Other Coarse Pottery

#### Chapter 6 Mortaria & Amphorae

- (i) Mortaria by K. Hartley
- (ii) Amphorae

#### Chapter 7 Glass by D. Allen

#### Chapter 8 Small Objects by L. Allason-Jones et al.

#### Chapter 9 Building Materials

#### Chapter 10 Conclusion: the economy of Roman Exeter

#### Appendix 1 List of Stratified Contexts

#### Appendix 2 Gazetteer of South Western Sites

#### Appendix 3 Quantified data from selected deposits

#### Appendix 4 The Bartholomew Street West Kiln

Precisely how much of the contents will be relegated to microfiche is still to be decided, but the volume will probably be in the region of 200-250 pages including c. 100 illustrations. It is hoped that the publication



of this work will lead to a substantial reduction of the amount of finds which will require illustration in future Unit reports.

#### **Roman finds since 1979 (N. Holbrook)**

A catalogue of all the Roman pottery excavated before 1979 now exists on a computerised data base. Work will shortly commence on cataloguing and entering material excavated after that date. This will form the primary record of the assemblages, and print-outs will be available to interested persons. It is intended that publication of the post-1979 finds will occur in a number of specialist articles in the Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society. One article will deal with coins, samian and glass, another with small finds, and a third will summarise important advances in our knowledge of the coarse pottery. Some of the work for these pieces has already been done by specialists contributing to EAR IV, and all three articles should be ready for publication within one or two years.

#### **Exeter city defences volume**

Work on the preparation of this monograph continued in 1988. It will contain accounts of excavations carried out on or near the City Wall since 1973; a survey and analysis of the surviving masonry; a section on Exeter Castle and the Castle Gatehouse; and detailed discussion of the copious documentary evidence relating to the wall which is preserved from the 14th century onwards. It is hoped to undertake additional fabric survey in 1989 on sections of the City Wall and the Castle which have not been examined in detail previously. In addition, research will continue in the coming year on documentary sources. Draft sections of the proposed monograph are being produced in the AFU Green Reports series. Examples of these will be on display at the meeting.

#### **Roman legionary fortress volume**

It is intended to publish a monograph on the Roman fortress and its environs in about two years time. The bulk of the work for this volume is being undertaken in the current financial year with grant-aid from English Heritage. Archive reports on all fortress period sites are being completed to a common format. Detailed archive drawings and smaller-scale summary plans are being prepared at standard scales; indexes, matrix diagrams and descriptive text sections for all sites are being incorporated into databases and word-processed files for output in a variety of report formats. Summary reports for individual excavation sites will appear in the AFU Green Reports series. A general account of the fortress incorporating information available to early 1988 appeared recently in a chapter of the book Fortress into City edited by Graham Webster and published by Batsford.

#### **Roman Bath-house**

The AFU is currently undertaking a project, funded by the City Council, designed to evaluate the archaeological implications of re-excavating the Roman Legionary Bath-house for display within the setting of a major development at the west end of the Close. Less than a quarter of the area likely to be affected by such a development was investigated in the substantial series of excavations carried out in 1971-6, leaving a very large unexplored area to be excavated quickly and efficiently in advance of a new development, much of which is likely to contain deep basements. It is essential that such excavations should be meticulously planned, costed and programmed within the framework of an overall construction timetable. Careful consideration needs to be given not only to the efficient management of the archaeological investigations but, for example, how best to present the results to the public - on site and in the local and national media. The educational opportunities would of course be very considerable. The

project is designed to quantify and evaluate, as far as this is possible, the archaeological deposits contained within the site, and to develop appropriate strategies for the cost-effective investigation and sampling of the remains and the efficient processing, analysis and storage of the large quantities of records, artefacts and skeletal material which will be recovered from the excavations.

In addition, some preliminary research is being undertaken to identify possible themes for displays on the history of the Cathedral Close and a series of full-colour reconstructions of the Bath-house and the other major monuments in the Close is being produced.

C.G. Henderson

Director, Archaeological Field Unit



## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

Archaeological Advisory Committee, October 20th 1989

### Report to Committee

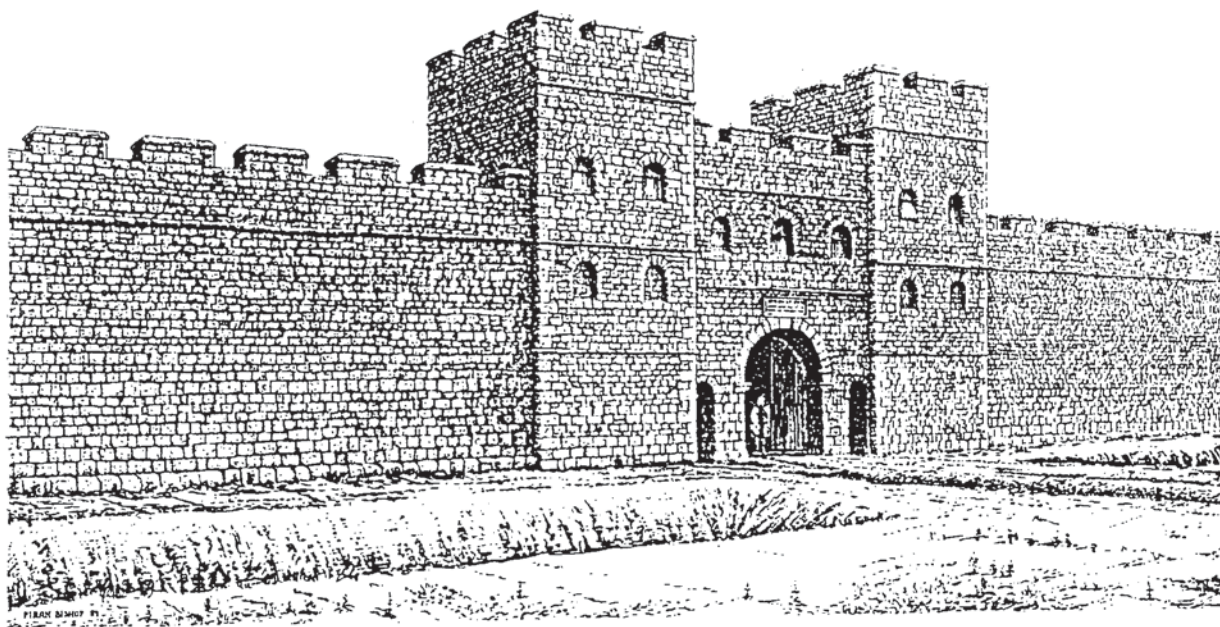
#### EXCAVATIONS

##### South Gate

Excavations funded by Devon County Council in advance of road improvements around the Acorn Roundabout were concluded early in 1989 when part of the Roman South Gate was uncovered. Although only a relatively small portion of the gate could be exposed, enough new information came to light to permit the Roman and medieval ground plans to be reconstructed with some confidence.

The most important discovery was however made beneath the construction level of the gate (which was first explored by Aileen Fox in 1964-5): a timber gate, associated with an earthen rampart, was shown to have existed on this site before the construction of the stone gate and the city wall.

Early Roman road: The earliest feature located in the excavation was the Roman road leading towards Topsham from the south gate of the mid 1st-century legionary fortress (situated further up South Street). This road, thinly metalled with fine gravel, was bounded on its SW side by a deep ditch found in Aileen Fox's excavation and identified by her as the defensive ditch of an early Roman fort. The purpose of this ditch remains uncertain: it may mark the boundary of a military compound or it may simply have been an exceptionally large roadside gully; further excavation in the area will perhaps eventually allow resolution of this matter. The road was resurfaced on at least three occasions before the late 2nd century, finally reaching a thickness of 0.45m.



Early 3rd-century Roman South Gate (Piran Bishop)

Late second-century earthen rampart and timber gate: In the late 2nd century a defensive earth bank, presumably associated with an external ditch, was thrown up on the line of the later Roman City Wall. The bank has been sectioned in about a dozen places over the past 60 years. Where well preserved, it is generally found to be up to 12m wide at its base, but its height barely exceeds 1.5m. Thus it is similar in width to the contemporary earthen rampart at Silchester but is very much lower, so that it would have been of limited defensive value. The explanation may be that the Exeter rampart was originally intended to be comparable in size to Silchester's (and to the earthen banks known from other Romano-British towns at this period) but that it was never finished. The recent excavations at the South Gate provide evidence that tends to support this suggestion (see below).

Cutting into the early Roman road surface behind the SW tower of the stone Roman gate was a large foundation pit 1.1m deep which had held a timber post about 0.3m thick. The post clearly formed part of a timber gate associated with the primary earthen rampart. The gate is considered likely to have taken the form either of a square four-post tower standing over the carriageway within the body of the rampart, or of a simple gateway set within a passage through the rampart. The excavated post stood on the SW side of the gateway about 7-8m back from the estimated position of the rampart front face. It therefore seems probable that the timber gate was set within a recessed entrance in the manner suggested recently for the putative timber SE gate at Silchester. One might envisage a wattled vertical face to the rampart as at Silchester, perhaps 1.5m high, revetting the foot of a relatively long glacis slope leading up to a wattle parapet. That at least the upper elements of such a scheme were never completed is suggested by the form of the primary rampart next to the gate which, as elsewhere on the circuit, stood to no great height. Behind the excavated gate-post, a second, smaller post was found which probably belonged to a timber revetment flanking the gate-passage. The primary rampart material, sealing the road surface and lying against the second post, was only a few centimetres thick, showing conclusively that the rampart was unfinished. The carriageway in front of the timber gate was resurfaced twice prior to the construction of the stone gate.

Roman South Gate and City Wall The full plan of the SW tower of the gate was established by Aileen Fox in 1964-5. In 1988 it proved possible to explore a little further into adjacent areas on the NW, SE and NE of the tower. This resulted in the discovery of a spine wall on the NE which separated a narrow foot passage from the main carriageway. A second foot passage must have existed on the other side of the gate.

See history

Notion of  
inter-passage

#### Lower Coombe Street

Excavations on the proposed site of a new multi-storey car park within the City Walls at Lower Coombe Street commenced this summer and will continue until next March. The work has so far been conducted on a relatively small scale since it will not be possible to gain access to much of the existing surface car park until next year. The results to date are however most encouraging. Four out of the five trenches excavated down to the natural subsoil have produced evidence for early Roman buildings and other features. These buildings have not been closely dated and could belong to the Roman military period or the early Roman town. It is intended eventually to excavate a high proportion of the early Roman land surface within the site so as to explore the topography of this area as fully as possible. The city defences were erected in the late 2nd century, with the stone City Wall probably being added to the unfinished primary rampart in the early 3rd century. It may be possible to establish a closer chronology for the defences by excavating rampart material and sampling deposits sealed underneath. The site occupies one side of the Coombe valley. The early Roman levels towards the bottom of the valley are overlain by colluvial deposits up to 2m deep which are thought to date mainly

Disturbance  
wall in the  
area

FCC finding



from the later Roman period, although this remains to be proved. This area of the town seems to have been sparsely built up in late Roman times and will perhaps eventually be shown to have been under cultivation. Early Roman levels seem to be well preserved over much of the site, and in the valley bottom there may well exist pockets of waterlogged deposits which could yield organic remains - a rare phenomenon in Exeter.

#### **Cricklepit Street**

The excavations against the City Wall at Cricklepit Street, started under the Community Programme, are now almost complete. The last report contained an account of the buildings found against the City Wall and a description of the medieval rebuilding of the wall. Further documentary study by Mark Stoye has elucidated more fully the history of the city defences in the Watergate/Cricklepit area. The conclusion that no medieval Watergate existed other than an outlet for the Coombe Street has been confirmed, but it is not now thought that a tower stood at this corner of the walls.

Most of the City Wall between the Western Way steps and the Custom House was rebuilt in the late 14th and very early 15th centuries. The ground slopes steeply down to the Exe floodplain at this point, making the wall liable to collapse - as occurred in 1973 at the foot of Lower Coombe Street. The recent excavations located a minor re-entrant combe beneath the stretch of the City Wall between Lower Coombe Street and Rack Street. This contains a pocket of early Roman deposits which have been a cause of instability to the wall footings since the City Wall's construction in the early 3rd century. The lowest course of stones at the face of the original Roman wall was located in the excavations about 3.5m forward from the present wall. The 3rd-century wall at this point had collapsed by the mid 4th century, when a new section of wall was built on a line about 1.5m further back. The construction date of the second Roman wall is given by pottery from foundation trenches at both its front and rear. This wall stood until the major medieval rebuilding which was initiated in the late 14th century.

#### **Cricklepit Mill, Lower Mills and the Coal Quay**

Archaeological investigations commenced this month on a large redevelopment site near the Quay at Commercial Road. The site contains at least four early mill sites, the Higher and Lower Leats and part of the late 17th-century Coal Quay. The development includes some new buildings but retains all of the older existing buildings. The scope for excavation is fairly limited, but it is hoped to establish the history of land reclamation in this area. It seems fairly clear that part of the site, which occupies the lower end of the extensive Shilhay/Exe Island alluvial bank, was not reclaimed from the Exe until the late medieval period, when the river shifted away from the City as Shilhay increased in size. No large-scale excavation will be possible, but it is hoped to sample the deposits at a number of places within the site to establish the date of the earliest deposits present.

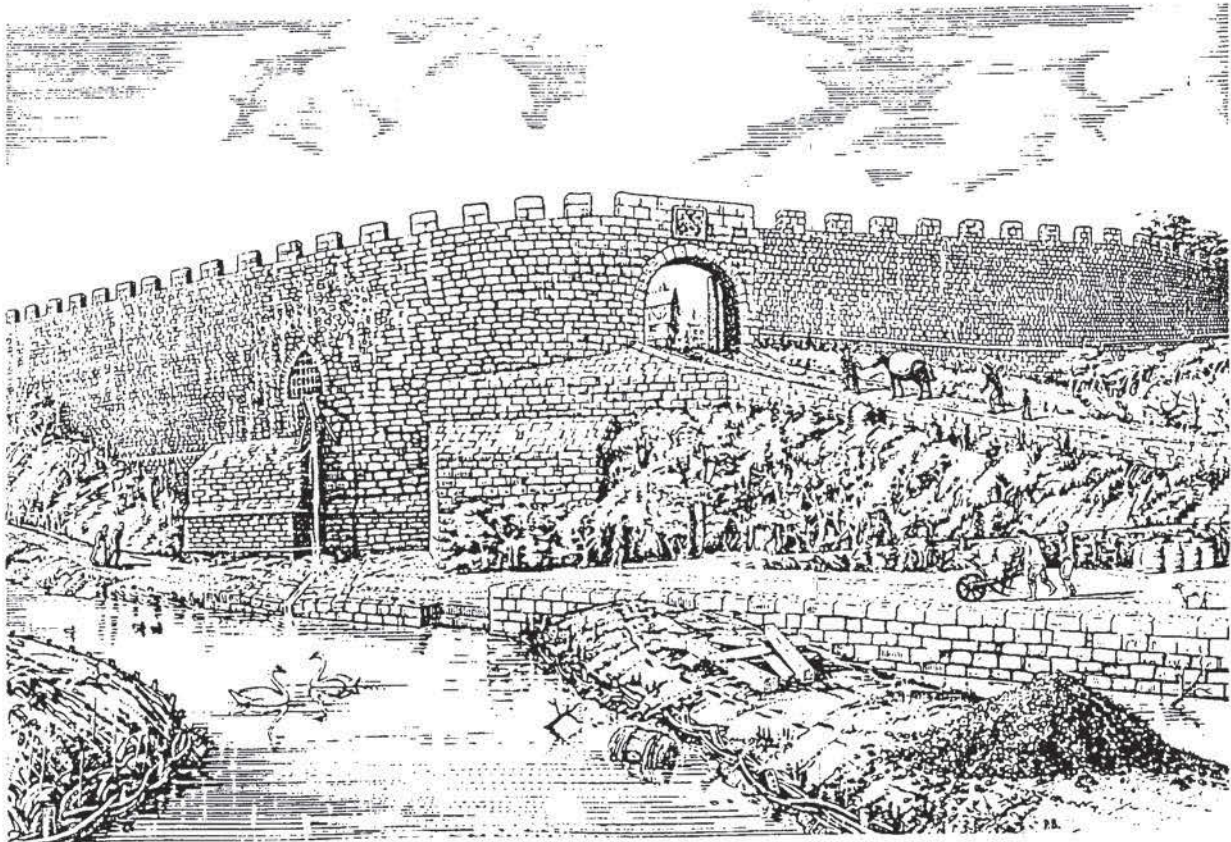
Detailed archaeological surveys have been made of Cricklepit Mill (built probably in 1689 on the site of a mill first documented in the late 12th century) and the Dryhouse, a cloth-drying shed erected in 1731 which represents a unique survival in Exeter and the West Country.

The archaeological investigations are being funded by the developers, Renaissance Ltd. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) will make an extensive photographic record of the buildings later this month.

#### **The Quay**

The results of recent excavations near the Prospect Inn and the Fish Market were summarised in the last Committee report. New plans have now been produced to show the topography of the Quay area at successive periods. These will appear as one of the illustrations in a fairly lengthy article on the

archaeology of Exeter Quay to be published in the proceedings of the Third North European Waterfronts Conference held at Bristol in November last year.



Reconstruction of the Watergate, about 1570 (Piran Bishop)

#### HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND ANCIENT MONUMENTS

##### Exeter Cathedral

Archaeological recording ahead of masonry conservation on the Norman South Tower continues. The work is funded by the Cathedral Dean and Chapter. All the accessible ornament has been recorded in three dimensions by means of latex moulds and fibreglass resin casts. The main record consists of photographs and measured drawings. The survey of the geological stone types present in the Cathedral West Front was completed this year. An article by John Allan and Stuart Blaylock, describing the structural history of the West Front, has been submitted for publication in the forthcoming British Archaeological Association monograph Art and Architecture at Exeter Cathedral.

Drawings  
Casts  
Photos  
West front  
Painting

##### Exeter Guildhall

Further extensive conservation repairs have been carried out this year on the Elizabethan front block. This has involved only limited archaeological recording because a fairly comprehensive survey was made by the AFU in 1986. However, some fresh information has come to light. A particularly fine discovery was a sculpted Beerstone fragment from a 15th-century angel which was re-used in the 1590s building and probably came from the Guildhall Chapel that originally stood on this site. A new booklet describing the history, architecture and contents of the Guildhall is planned for publication in 1990.

Repairs  
Fragments  
Booklet  
Further drawing



It is hoped that it may be possible to produce archaeological survey drawings of the fine hall roof in the near future. A survey of the evidence for original paintwork on the exterior of the front block by Eddie Sinclair has revealed a brightly-coloured scheme containing red and black.

#### **Underground Passages**

The new entrance and interpretation/waiting room on the former ABC Cinema site will be opened to the public later this year. The displays, sponsored by South West Water, comprise a video on the history of Exeter's water supply as well as graphics panels and photographs of the Underground Passages and the East Gate. A new archaeological survey of the passages has recently been undertaken by the AFU. In conjunction with documentary research and the results of the excavations on the ABC site, this has resulted in a greatly improved understanding of the monument's history and development. The new discoveries will be illustrated in the displays and described in a popular booklet. Two reconstruction drawings prepared for the interpretation room show the area outside the East Gate in the early 15th century (with the City aqueduct passage under construction) and during the Civil War siege of 1643, showing the defensive outworks found in the recent excavations.

#### **St Loyes Chapel**

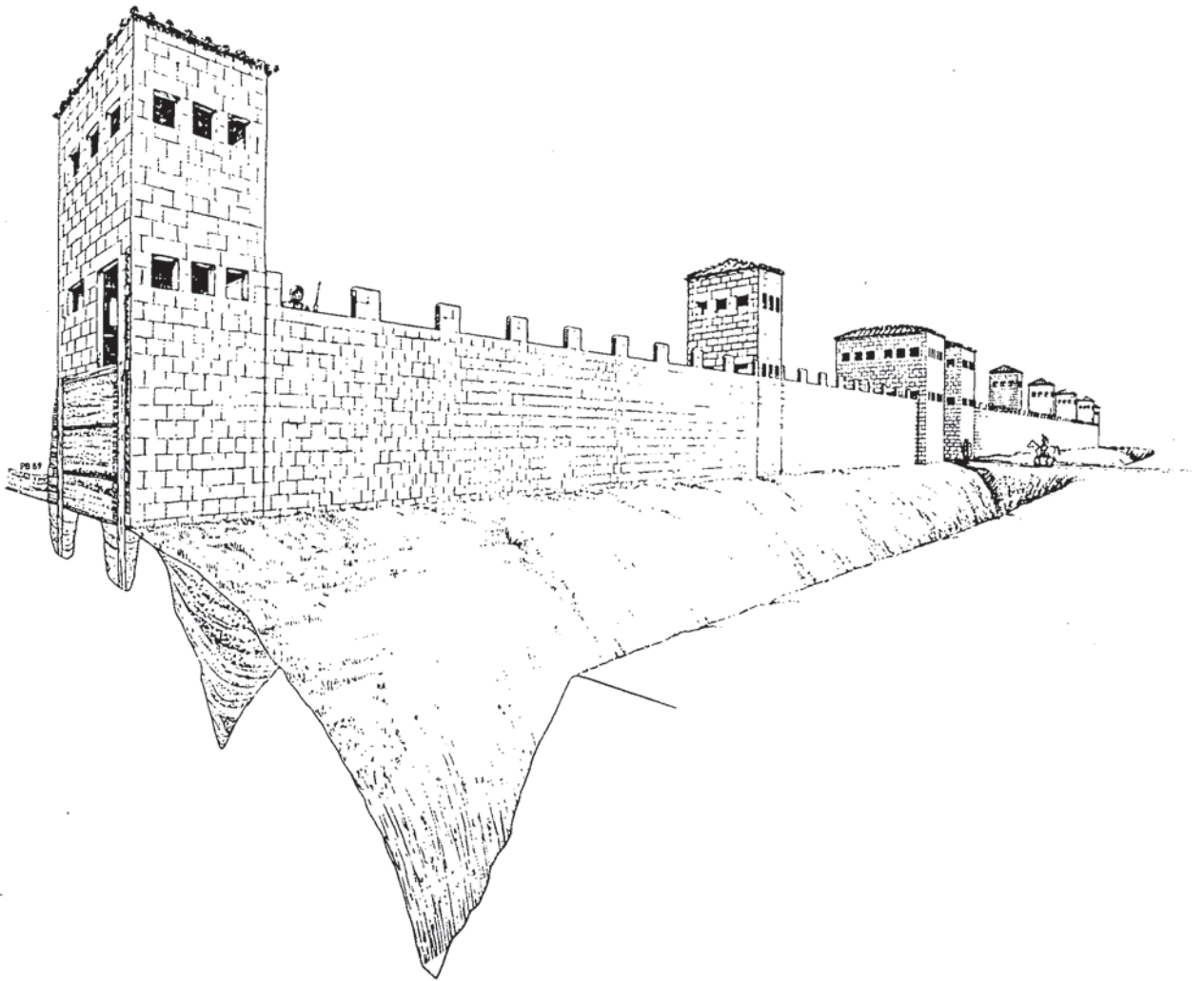
Small-scale emergency repairs were carried out last year at the medieval ruined chapel of St Loyes, Heavitree. More extensive conservation work will be required in the near future. It is proposed to undertake an archaeological fabric survey in advance of further work. The site is likely to be landscaped in the near future to improve the setting of the monument and the adjacent stone cross. A small interpretation panel next to the road would be a worthwhile addition once the site has been tidied up.

Trial trenching in 1988 in advance of a proposed housing scheme (now abandoned) revealed new information about the chapel and its setting. The original width of the building was established, and it was found to overlies deep medieval colluvial (hillwash) deposits which almost certainly represent soil washed down-slope in a large ploughed field. Documentary research suggests a 14th-century foundation date for the chapel on a virgin site. There is at present no evidence to indicate who built the chapel.

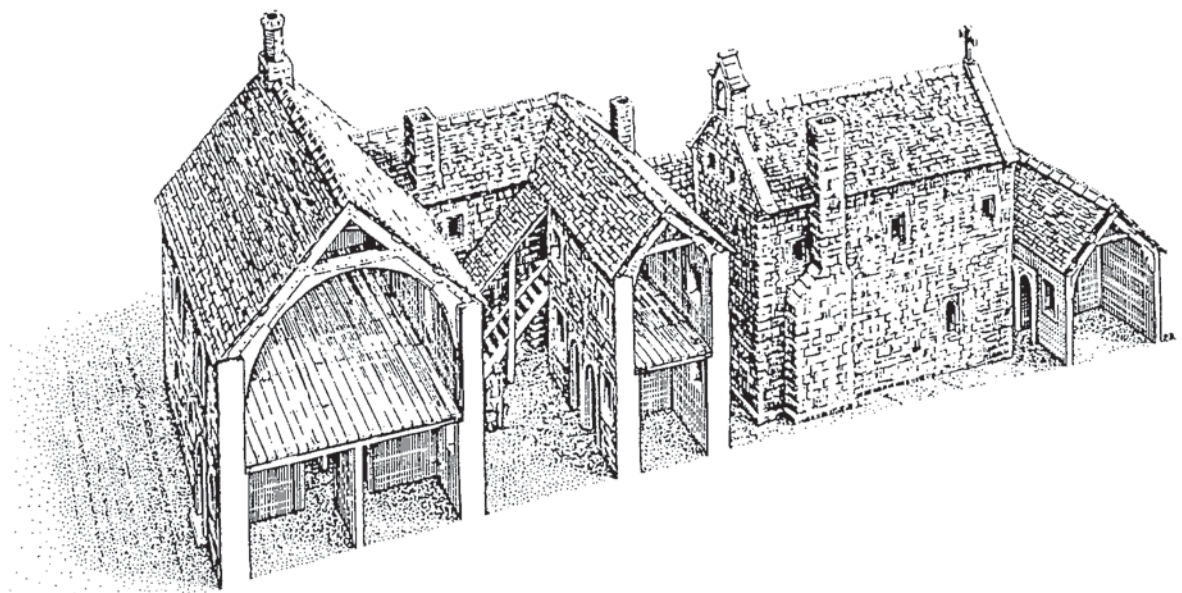
#### **St Catherine's Almshouses**

The monument has now been marked out to show the lines of medieval walls, and two interpretation panels have been erected outlining the history of the site from early Roman times. The lengthy process of digesting the results of the recent excavations continues. The preparation of a detailed archive report is nearing completion. Documentary research by A. Collings has produced additional information on the history of the almshouses and of the adjoining building, long known as the Annuellars' College. As noted in the last report to the Committee, it is fairly certain that this latter building, which contained a sizeable hall and kitchen, was built in the 13th century as the house of a Cathedral canon. Although it was identified by Ethel Lega-Weekes and others as having formed part of the Annuellars' House, established in 1528, no documentary evidence has been found to support this identification. The Annuellars' House lay on the frontage of The Close next to St Martin's Church.

The Roman passage mosaic lifted during the excavations in 1988 has been conserved in the Museum Conservation Laboratory and is now mounted on a wall in the Archaeology Gallery. Further work will be carried out on the mosaic before it is put on public view later in the year. A large-scale reconstruction painting by Luigi Thompson will be displayed alongside the Roman pavement. The painting shows the 1988 mosaic in relation to the fragments found by Aileen Fox in adjacent rooms after the War.



Roman fortress defences at St Catherine's Almshouses (Piran Bishop)



Reconstruction of St Catherine's Almshouses, about 1450 (Piran Bishop)



### **Bowhill House**

Archaeological fabric recording has continued in advance of restoration, funded by English Heritage. In addition, excavation inside the early 16th-century parlour, the service room to the west and the hall screens-passage has revealed two main periods of earlier medieval structures including the clay floors and wall footings of several rooms in a cob-walled building destroyed by fire prior to the construction of the present building. It is proposed to continue recording over the next few months and to complete the excavations outside the house next year. The AFU has been commissioned to prepare archive and publication reports on all the past excavations (including those conducted in 1977-8 by DoE) in 1990-91.

### **FUTURE EXCAVATIONS**

#### **Market Street/Smythen Street/Preston Street development**

The AFU is currently assessing the archaeological implications of a proposed large-scale redevelopment scheme in the West Quarter of the city. The site is about 100m long by 60m wide, approaching 1.5 acres in extent. It lies entirely within the Roman legionary fortress in an area where the early Roman levels have not been investigated previously. A small excavation on the Smythen Street frontage in the 1930s demonstrated the existence of a late Roman house containing a hypocausted room. From the description of this excavation it appears that Roman deposits up to 1.5m deep are likely to be preserved on this site.

In archaeological terms this is undoubtedly the most important site to be redeveloped in Exeter in the last 15 years - i.e. since the Guildhall Shopping Centre and the Roman Legionary Bath-house excavations of the early 1970s. This is because of the large size of the site and its relatively central location. It is estimated, for example, that elements of at least 15 major early Roman military buildings (10 of them barrack blocks) are likely to be encountered within the site; the frontages of four major streets in the Roman town fall within the area; and Smythen Street was one of the major thoroughfares in the medieval city, containing the meat shambles known as Butcher Row.

The site divides into three main zones. A large area next to Market Street between Smythen Street and Preston Street lies nearest to the Roman forum and probably contains few, if any, old cellars. This will be dug out entirely to provide for a deep basement car park, thereby removing all archaeological deposits. A second zone, adjoining the first, contains a large basement created in the 1930s; this will also fall within the proposed underground car park. Two islands of early stratigraphy survive in this zone but otherwise no later Roman or medieval deposits are likely to survive here; some early Roman features may however be preserved beneath the existing basement floor, although this remains uncertain. The third zone, furthest from Market Street, will have a car park at the present ground level beneath the new building. Foundation piers will nevertheless destroy a proportion of the early deposits in this area.

In view of the undoubted archaeological importance of this site, which lies within the statutory Area of Archaeological Importance, and the serious scale of destruction to archaeological deposits that will be entailed, it is clear that extensive large-scale archaeological investigations should be undertaken prior to redevelopment.

#### **Roman Bath-house**

The proposal to re-open and display the legionary bath-house is still under consideration by the City Council and the Cathedral Dean and Chapter. A consultant's feasibility study commissioned to assess the viability of the scheme will be completed in a few months time.

## PREPARATION OF REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

### Roman finds volume

The contents of the fourth monograph in the Exeter Archaeological Reports series, published jointly by Exeter University and Exeter City Council, were listed in the last report to the Committee. The manuscript is currently with Paul Bidwell, co-author with Neil Holbrook, and now lacks only one outside contribution: that by Mrs Kay Hartley on the mortaria. It is anticipated that final editing will be completed in December, when copies of the text will be sent to G.C. Boon and Dr K. Greene, the University's referees. The manuscript might therefore be sent to the printers in the Spring of 1990 for publication late in the year.

Neil

The book will be in A4 format, printed in double columns, comprising approximately 174 pages of text and 100 pages of line illustrations, with a total length including tables, bibliography, half tones, index and prelims of just over 300 pages. There will be one full microfiche in addition to the printed contents.

### Recent excavations

Work has continued during the year on the preparation of reports on sites excavated over the past few years, and considerable progress has been made towards clearing the backlog left on the withdrawal of MSC funding. Much however remains to be done. Every effort is being made to complete reports on current projects as soon as fieldwork is finished so as to avoid a large backlog in the future.

MSC sites

Current  
Adequate funding

### Exeter City defences volume

Further sections of this volume were completed in recent months and have appeared in the AFU green reports series. Copies of the reports produced to date will be on display at the meeting. The full edition and discussion of the recorded expenditure on the City Walls contained in the Receiver's Accounts between 1342-3 and 1700 has now been completed by Mark Stoyale and Jannine Juddery. Their work represents a major contribution to the study of medieval and early modern urban defences which is probably without parallel in Britain, since no other city preserves a virtually continuous run of financial records relating to expenditure on its defences. The general conclusions that can be drawn from these records are of great interest and will form the subject of a further report by Mark Stoyale.

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Survey

### Roman legionary fortress volume

Work on the preparation of reports on sites excavated within the legionary fortress has continued throughout the past year and it is intended that a number of summary accounts will appear in the green reports series in the near future. A paper dealing with aspects of the fortress planning was delivered at the 15th Roman Frontier Studies Congress held at Canterbury in September.

Archive 14 pr

Summary rep

11.1.

Info panels

Popul - publications

Northampton Gardens

Bathhouse and other monuments.

Castle Gatehouse

C.G. Henderson

Director, Archaeological Field Unit