

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF
THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY
BAMPTON MINOR IMPROVEMENT PROJECT,
BAMPTON, DEVON**

by

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Exeter Archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) at Bampton, Devon (site centred on SS 9594 2220) during May 2006. The archaeological fieldwork was commissioned by the Environment Agency in connection with the Bampton Minor Improvement Project, as required under condition attached to the grant of planning permission (No 06/00277) by Mid Devon District Council. The scope of the works was agreed with the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES).

1.1 **The site** (Fig. 1)

The site is located on the south-east edge of the historic town of Bampton, and lies on east sloping ground that falls from 130m to 100m AOD. The underlying drift geology of the site is alluvial deposits lying along the course River Bathern, set within the solid geology of the Bampton Limestone Group, composed of cherts, limestones and mudstones (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1974).

The Bampton Minor Improvement Project includes the construction of two earth embankments, a drainage ditch and a flood gate with stone-faced wall on land to the north of the bridge linking Brook Street and Briton Street.

1.2 **Project aims**

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence, date, character and extent of any archaeological material or palaeoenvironmental deposits, within the area of the proposed development, and to inform the development of possible mitigation strategies in response.

2. METHOD

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Exeter Archaeology for Mid Devon District Council in April 2006 (Gent 2006). Three evaluation trenches were excavated. Trench 1 was 30m long and 1.5m wide, with an extension, 0.5m wide and approximately 22m long, excavated as part of the a temporary drainage ditch. Trenches 2 and 3 were 1.5m wide, with a combined length of 40m (Fig. 2).

2.1 **Trench location** (Fig. 2)

2.1.1 ***Trench 1***

Trench 1 was positioned along the line of a temporary drainage channel within an area of open pasture. This trench was intended to investigate the survival of palaeochannels in the vicinity of the proposed developments.

2.1.2 ***Trench 2***

The trench was located within a former orchard on the line of the proposed western flood-defence bank. This trench was intended to investigate the survival of palaeochannels on the line of the bank, and any remains associated with the early use of the town, or activity pre-dating the establishment of the settlement.

2.1.3 *Trench 3*

Trench 3 was located within the garden and car parking area to Town Mill, and intended to investigate the survival of palaeochannels on the line of the proposed bank, floodgate and associated walling, and to identify any archaeological remains associated with the industrial use of the area, or activity pre-dating the establishment of the town.

2.2 **Excavation method**

Each trench was excavated using a mechanical excavator, fitted with a 1.5 metre wide toothless grading bucket, under archaeological supervision. Material was removed in spits approximately 0.1m deep. Each trench was excavated to formation level for the development, with limited excavation beyond that depth to clarify the nature of exposed deposits and to establish the character of underlying material. Both the trench base and sides were carefully inspected and the presence of any potential archaeological or palaeoenvironmental evidence investigated and cleaned by hand and recorded.

2.3 **Recording**

Standard EA recording system was employed. This included the preparation of evaluation trench record sheets, standardised single context recording, accompanied by plans and sections at appropriate scales and a photographic record consisting of both black and white and colour slide photographs. Any finds recovered were labelled and bagged on site and assessed by the EA finds officer.

3. RESULTS

Excavation of the three evaluation trenches revealed no archaeological deposits other than land drains. Each trench did contain evidence of former fluvial activity.

3.1 **Trench 1** (Figs 2 and 3)

Trench 1 was aligned approximately east-west, and measured 30m x 1.50m in plan. An extension, 0.5m wide, was excavated as part of the required temporary drainage ditch.

The trench was excavated to a uniform depth of 0.85m. A topsoil (101) and subsoil (102) with a combined depth of 0.35m overlay varied alluvial clays. These included north-south aligned banding, representing probable evidence of former edges to river channels or their fills (fig 3).

The most easterly band (109) contained a mid to dark grey silt (109), and this feature, with a distinct edge, is considered to represent the westerly extent of a recent course of the River Bantham. Two other bands of clay (105 and 107) may also represent discrete infilled former river channels, although the limited exposure precludes any certainty. Both were filled with pale silt clays with no organic content.

3.2 Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was aligned north-south, and measured 20m x 1.5m in plan. Topsoil (201) and subsoil (202) to a combined depth of 0.3m overlay two distinct deposits; a light yellowish brown silt clay (204) in the southern half of the trench, and a light greyish brown clay silt (203) containing 19th century glass and ceramics. The southerly material had been cut by an east-west aligned stone capped drain (209), which contained 19th century pottery and glass.

A waterlogged dark grey clay (205), containing well-preserved organic material, was exposed at a depth of 0.9m within a small sondage, dug at the northern end of the trench.

3.3 Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 3)

This approximately NE-SW aligned trench measured 20m x 1.5m in plan, and was excavated in two connected parts; the western half dug to a depth of 0.9m in the area intended for a floodgate and associated walling, and the eastern half, on the line of the proposed defensive bank, to a depth of 0.5m. The western half also corresponded with a car parking area for the mill and associated housing.

A waterlogged, grey, organic-rich alluvial clay (306), similar to layer 205 in trench 2, was exposed at a depth of 0.85m in the western part of the trench. A north-south aligned edge to this material was exposed where it overlay a clean yellowish brown clay (308), and clay deposit 306 is interpreted as the fill of a former river channel. A band of gravel and stone (309), including 19th-century pottery and glass, had been deposited within this eastern edge, presumably in order to raise levels above the water table. All the material above clays 306 and 308 comprised recent stone and gravel made ground.

The eastern half of the trench, beyond the parking area, revealed a different sequence of deposits, which did not include the made ground seen to the west. A 0.3m to 0.35m depth of topsoil (301) and subsoil (302) overlay two clay deposits; a uniform light grey silt (310) to the south, overlying an orange gravel (303).

4. CONCLUSION

Evidence of former fluvial activity survived within each of the three trenches, with alluvial deposits exposed at depths of between 0.35m and 0.4m. Below the topsoil/subsoil development, uniform alluvial deposits were encountered to depths of approximately 0.85m, in trenches 2 and 3, probably representing recent flooding events. The presence of 19th century material within these desiccated clays indicates the likely date of deposition.

In trench 1, below a depth of approximately 0.4m, banded alluvial clays illustrate episodes of river course movement within the floodplain. Although no date for this activity is indicated, depictions of the course of the river, which has remained static on all map evidence dating back to the early 19th century, suggest they must all have occurred more than 150 years ago.

Waterlogged alluvial clays, containing preserved organic material, have been exposed in trench 2 and 3, and these are considered to represent the fills of palaeochannels. An edge to one was exposed in trench 3, although no evidence of its date was recovered. This material had either lain close to the surface during the 19th century, or was revealed as part of an episode of groundworks requiring the raising of ground levels. Both organic-rich deposits demonstrate the palaeoenvironmental potential of the alluvial deposits in the area, which will contain evidence of past land-use and vegetational change in the form of preserved pollen, plant macro-fossils and organic artefacts such as wood and leather.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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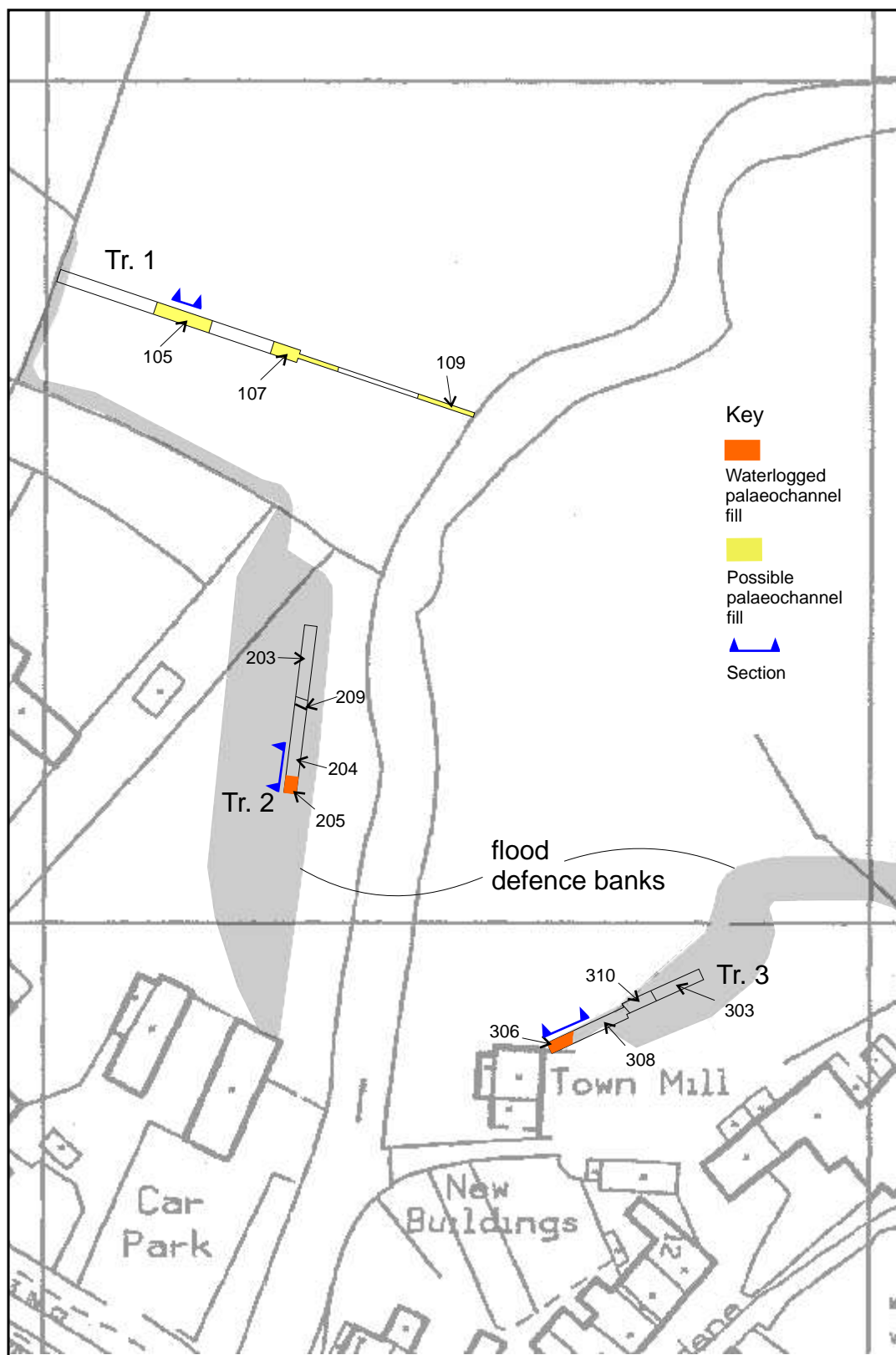


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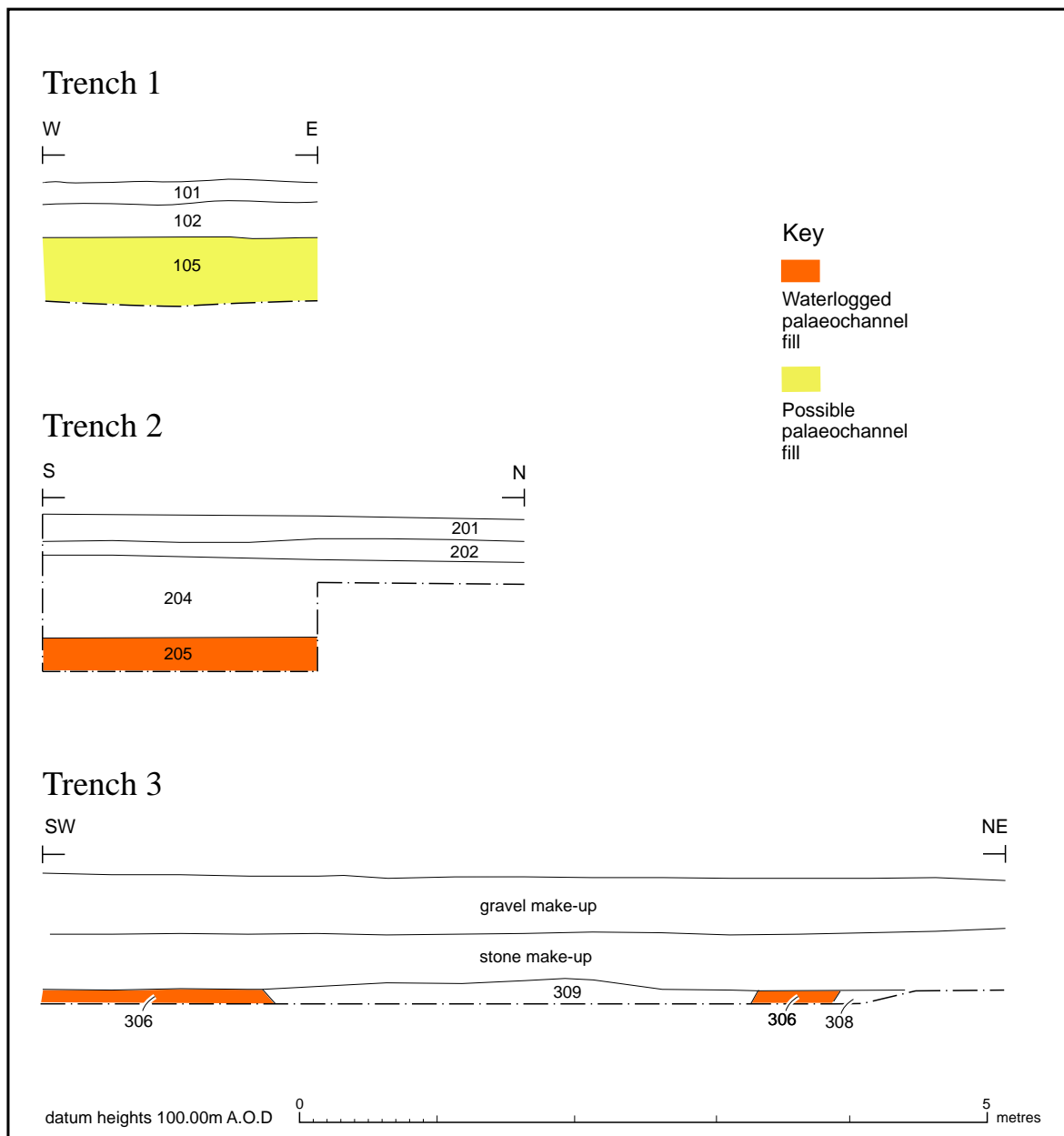


Fig. 3 Sections