

# Exeter City Council Historic Environment Record

<b>Civil Parish &amp; District:</b> Exeter	<b>National Grid Reference</b> SX 918 933	<b>Number:</b>
<b>Subject: Archaeological monitoring at</b> Howell Road Fire Station, Exeter.		<b>Photo attached?</b> N
<b>Planning Application no:</b> 07/0467/03	<b>Recipient museum:</b> RAMM	
<b>OASIS ID:</b> exeterar1-58707	<b>Museum Accession no:</b> 141/2008	
<b>Contractor's reference number/code:</b> EA6431	<b>Dates fieldwork undertaken:</b> 27.08.08 – 31.07.09	
<b>Description</b> <p>An archaeological watching brief was carried out on groundworks associated with the replacement of the existing fire station. This work was required by Exeter City Council under a condition attached to the grant of planning permission (ref: 07/0467/03).</p> <p>A desk-based assessment of the site and immediate surrounding area was carried out prior to the commencement of site work. The principal findings included the close proximity of the medieval earthwork, Danes Castle - located c. 100m to the south-east of the development site, and the presence of a 19th-century reservoir, which occupied the majority of the site until the construction of the present fire station in 1932. The full results of this assessment are presented in EA Report No. <b>06.88</b>.</p> <p><b>Results</b> (Figs. 1 &amp; 2)</p> <p>The excavation of a series of test pits within the approximate footprint of the existing fire station was monitored. These revealed natural red shale bedrock below up to 1.5m of recent made ground associated with the existing fire station building and 19th-century reservoir.</p> <p>Two areas of deep drainage were observed on the line of the new road extending along the west side of site. The first of these; a manhole pit (MH1) and length of drainage trench, was positioned in the centre of the new road, adjacent to the southwest corner of the new fire station. It totalled approximately 6m in length and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.44m. Natural yellowish clay subsoil was encountered at a depth of 900mm. It was cut by an approximately east-west aligned linear feature (103) with an asymmetric profile; steep on the southern side and gently sloping on the northern side. The backfill of this ditch (104) consisted of dark grey brown silty clay loam with frequent charcoal and rare volcanic trap inclusions. The fill was homogenous and weathered with a faint anaerobic odour. A single sherd of pottery was recovered from the fill, of probable 1st/2nd century date. Ditch fill 104 was sealed by a soil layer (105) of virtually identical composition, up to 250mm thick, directly overlying natural subsoil to either side of the ditch. There was no distinct interface between 104 and 105; the ditch fill merging into the layer above. Layer 105 was in turn overlain by a layer of clean redeposited natural clay (102) varying in depth up to a maximum of 500mm in the east facing section of the pit (not shown). This soil layer is likely to represent levelling of the site prior to the construction of the former reservoir. Layer 102 was sealed by 600mm of stone chippings associated with the current development.</p> <p>The second area of deep drainage comprised a further manhole pit (MH2) and a length of associated trench, positioned in the centre of the road beyond the northern extent of the adjacent new fire station building. Excavation exposed a profile comprising natural yellowish clay subsoil encountered at a depth of approximately 500mm, directly below modern stone chippings associated with the new build.</p> <p>In addition to the test pits and drainage, an area approximately 300m squared at the northern end of the site was stripped of topsoil, but remained entirely within recent overburden.</p> <p>EA were not notified of the excavations for the foundations of the new fire station which subsequently proceeded without archaeological monitoring.</p> <p><b>Finds</b></p> <p>A single undiagnostic sherd of probable wheel thrown gritty grey ware of 1st/2nd century date from ditch fill 104. Although suggestive of a Roman date for the feature, it is equally likely that the sherd is residual and that the ditch is post-Roman.</p> <p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>The site has been subject to a degree of levelling broadly comprising the truncation of deposits within the northern half of site and the deposition of material (principally redeposited natural subsoil) to make up the ground level across the southern half of site. It seems likely that this levelling occurred prior to the construction of the 19th-century reservoir.</p>		

There is some evidence, albeit very limited, for potential for the survival of archaeological deposits of possible Roman date within the southern half of the site as demonstrated by the presence of ditch 103 and associated layer 105. Within the truncated northern half of site the potential for survival appears minimal, although the bases of deeper cut features may still survive.

A continuation into the site of the Norman defences of adjacent Danes Castle was not observed. The presence or absence of deposits associated with this medieval earthwork remains possible, but uncorroborated.

**Recorder:**  
A. Farnell (Exeter Archaeology)

**Date sent to HER:**  
10-08-2009



Fig. 1 Site plan and location. Areas monitored during watching brief shown as blue. Scale 1:500 and 1:10000 (inset).

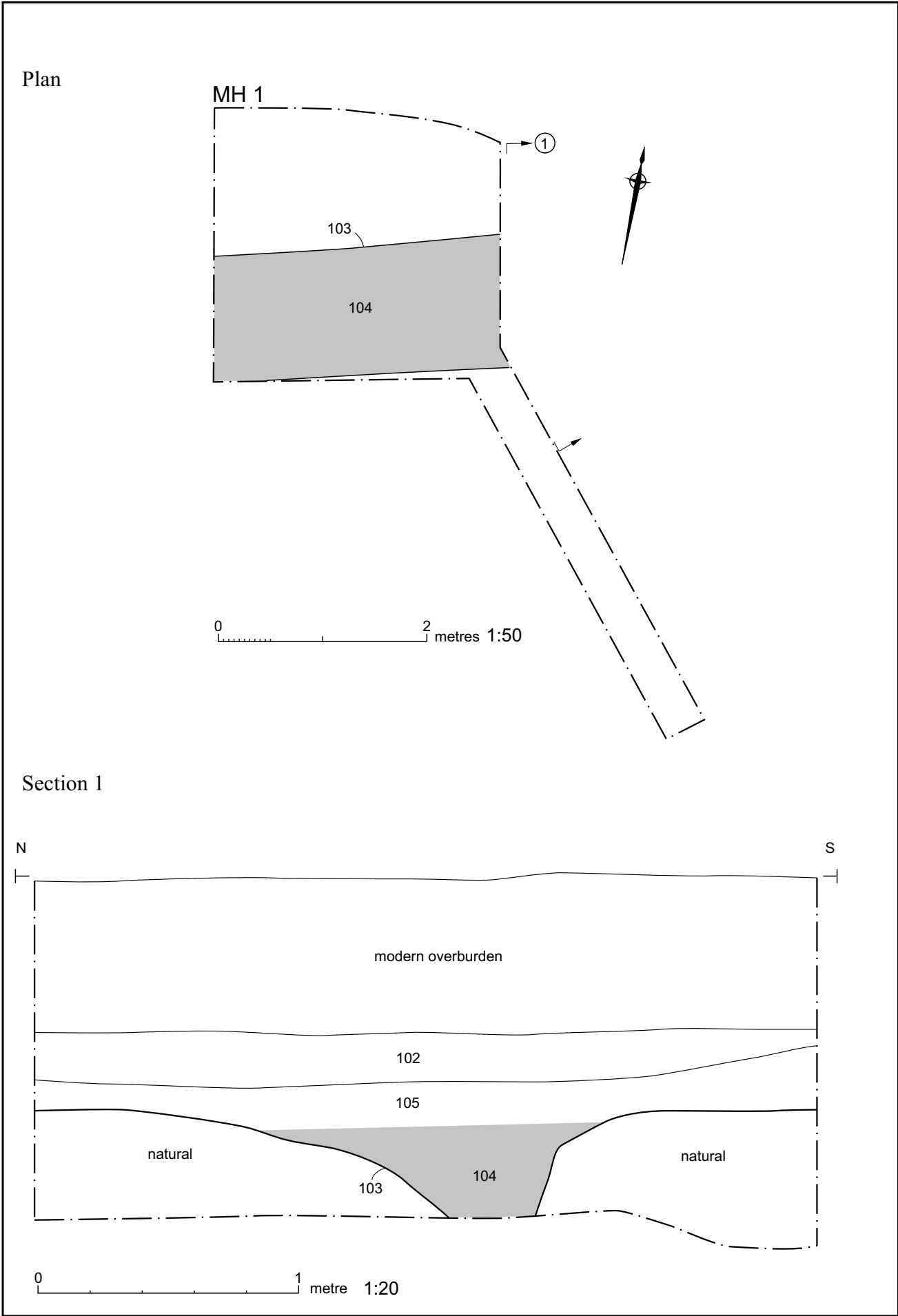


Fig. 2 Man hole 1: plan and section.