

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF AT GRACE ROAD,
MATFORD, EXETER**
prepared for The Environment Agency

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Exeter Archaeology

Report No. 09.97

Project No. 6914

September 2009

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Plate 1 Trench 6: ditches 601 and 602, looking east

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology during August 2009 at Grace Road Playing Fields, Matford, Exeter. Eight sample trenches were excavated through the area of the proposed fishing ponds. These revealed a series of mostly E-W aligned ditches and banks, probably of late medieval or early modern date, marking the former boundaries of the strips of open fields boundaries. A larger ditch, aligned N-S and NW-SE, is likely to represent a former field boundary which defined the extent of the E-W aligned ditches and banks. No dating evidence was recovered from the fills of the ditches, but historic map evidence demonstrates that these boundaries had been removed by 1888.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for the Environment Agency, and presents the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Exeter Archaeology in August 2009 on land at Grace Roads Playing Fields, Matford, Exeter (NGR SX 930 901). The work was required under condition 9 attached to the grant of planning permission (Exeter City Council no. 08/2025/03) for the construction of fishing ponds. The scope was agreed with the Exeter City Council Archaeology Officer (ECCAO) and set out in a written programme of archaeological work (see appendix 1) that was approved by the local planning authority.

2. THE SITE

The site (fig. 1) lies between the Alphin Brook and the River Exe and is *c.*1 hectare in size. It is located within the flood plain of the River Exe and previous archaeological recording in the flood plain has identified silted former river channels. Dates obtained from these works range from the Mesolithic period (10th millennium BC) through to the medieval period

Trial pits excavated within the development area in September 2006 and monitored by Exeter Archaeology revealed layers of clayey loam, silty clay and gravels, with some evidence of paleochannels.

3. AIMS AND METHOD

3.1 Aims

These included to

- identify and record any remains lying within the footprint of the proposed fish ponds, including remains of former field boundaries that may indicate when the area was first enclosed,
- record any remains or significant environmental material within the potential palaeochannels previously identified on the site, if and where the ground works were deep enough to affect them, and
- analyse, report and archive the results and finds as appropriate.

3.2 Method

Owing to impracticalities involved with monitoring the entire topsoil strip, it was agreed that a series of sample trenches would be excavated by the developer prior to work commencing. The eight sample trenches were located in the area of the fishing ponds. The trenches were dug using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket (fig. 2). Machine excavation continued until either natural subsoil or the top of archaeological deposits was reached (whichever was higher). Where archaeological deposits were exposed, areas were cleaned back by hand, and the deposits investigated and recorded.

Standard Exeter Archaeology recording procedures were employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* single context record sheets, a drawn record was compiled in plan and section at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a

photographic record was prepared in black and white film and digital (colour) format. The location of the trenches was recorded using a total station.

After completion of the trenches final details of the proposed depth of excavation for the fishponds was received, and it was apparent that this would be too shallow to affect any remains of palaeochannels. It was therefore agreed with the ECCAO that no further formal archaeological attendance on site was necessary.

4. RESULTS

Linear cut features were observed in each of the eight sample trenches. The features in trenches 4 to 8 were clearly contemporary and represented the remains of four former field boundaries. In each instance the boundaries consisted of a bank, which could be observed in section, and two adjacent, parallel, ditches which were identifiable in plan. The ditch to the north of the bank tended to be slightly shallower than the ditch to the south of the bank. The location of the four boundaries corresponds well with the positions of strip fields marked on the 1842 tithe map (fig. 5). The layer sequence of each bank and pair of ditches was the same in each instance, so the stratigraphy of a group in trench 8 will be described as an example.

4.1 Trench 8 (fig. 2, 3.3)

Two E-W aligned ditches (801 and 805) were located at the northern end of the trench. Both cut through natural subsoil.

Ditch 805 was aligned E-W and measured approximately 1.4m wide and 0.5m deep with a steep side to the NE and a more gently sloping side to the SW. The base was concave. It contained a narrow lense of material (803) along the NE edge, which consisted of mid reddish brown, friable silty clay and appeared to be the result of subsidence from bank 804. Sealing 803 was a layer of mid greyish brown clay. No finds were recovered.

Parallel to 801 was a second ditch (805) which was 1.7m wide and 0.25m deep. The sides of the ditch sloped gently to a rounded base. The single fill (806) of 805 consisted of a mid greyish brown friable clay. No finds were recovered.

Between ditches 805 and 801 was a bank of material (804) 0.7m high. It consisted of mid brown sandy clay and almost certainly represents the remains of a former field boundary.

The bank and ditches were sealed by a layer of mid reddish brown sandy clay (809) which probably represents a buried ploughsoil. This deposit was sealed, in turn, by a layer of dark greyish brown sandy clay (800) which represents the existing topsoil.

A small, circular, steep-sided, flat-bottomed feature (807) was observed to the north of ditch 805 and possibly represents the remains of a posthole. The fill consisted of a greyish brown, firm clay (808). No further features of a similar type were identified near any of the other boundary ditches so it is possible that 807 represents tree root or animal disturbance.

4.2 Trench 3 (fig. 2, 3.2)

A large (3.5m wide), steep-sided feature (301) aligned N-S was observed in trench 3. The basal fill (304) consisted of a yellowish brown clay. It was sealed by a greyish brown clay (303). A bank of material (305) to the NE is likely to represent the remains of an associated field boundary. The bank was also identified above ground as a slightly raised earthwork to the north of trench 3 (fig. 2). The ditch and bank were sealed by a mid brown silty clay (306) which probably represents a buried ploughsoil.

One of the four former E-W aligned field boundary ditches (305) terminated at ditch 301. It was not possible to identify a relationship between the two ditches, so it is likely that they were contemporary, with ditch 301 defining the extent of the field system to the west.

4.3 Trenches 1 and 2 (fig. 2, 3.1)

The remains of a NW-SE aligned field boundary was identified in trenches 1 and 2. The boundary consisted of a single ditch (103/205) which was 0.6m deep and c.2.5m wide with fairly steep sides and a concave base. A single fill (104) was identified in 103 and consisted of a greyish brown clay. Two fills were identified in 205. The basal fill (206) was 0.15m deep and consisted of a mid brown gritty clay. The upper fill (207) was very similar and consisted of a mid brown clay. The remains of a bank 110/214 were identified on the NE side of 103/205 and consisted of a reddish brown sandy clay. The map evidence from 1819 and 1842 (Figs 4 and 5) suggests that this NW-SE aligned field boundary represents a continuation of 301.

A pair of ditches (105 and 108) with a central bank (107) at the southern end of trench 1, and a single ditch (208) with associated bank (212) are likely to represent former field boundaries. Shallow feature 204 had no associated bank and may represent a drainage ditch.

6. CONCLUSION

The archaeological watching brief revealed evidence for a series of former field boundaries. No dating evidence was recovered from the site but it is clear from historic map evidence that the field boundaries were in use by 1819 and removed by 1888. It is likely that the four narrow field boundaries identified in trenches 4 to 8 mark the former boundaries of the strips of open fields and are probably of late medieval or early modern date. The N-S and NW-SE ditch and bank identified in trenches 1, 2 and 3 is clearly contemporary with these four close-set field boundaries and it is likely, due to a similar stratigraphic sequence, that the remainder of the field boundaries identified in trenches 1 and 2 are also contemporary.

The excavations for the fishing ponds were not of sufficient depth to reveal evidence for palaeochannels. The testpits excavated by the Environments Agency in 2006 (fig. 2) revealed that any potential palaeochannels would be below the level of the gravels at >1.8m below ground level.

7. PROJECT ARCHIVE AND 'OASIS' REPORT

A project archive has been compiled and will be deposited at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, under museum accession number 242/2009.

A report of the evaluation (including a pdf version of this document) will be submitted to the on-line database OASIS (On-line Access to the Index of archaeological investigationS), under OASIS ID: exeterar1-64337.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency and was managed for Exeter Archaeology by John Allan. Fieldwork was supervised by Marie Leverett with assistance from Chris Smart, Alex Farnell and Paul Pearce. Report production was undertaken by Marie Leverett. The illustrations were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore.

APPENDIX 1:
METHOD STATEMENT FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT GRACE ROAD,
MATFORD, EXETER.

*Prepared by Exeter Archaeology
for The Environment Agency*

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out a proposed programme of archaeological recording to be undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) during groundworks for the construction of fishing ponds at Grace Roads Playing Fields, Matford, Exeter (NGR SX 930 901). This document represents the 'Written Scheme of Investigation' required under condition 9 attached to the grant of planning permission (no. 08/2025/03) for the proposed works. This work has been requested by the Exeter City Council Archaeology Officer (ECCAO), Andrew Pye.
- 1.2 The site lies between the Alphin brook and the River Exe and is *c.*1 hectare in size. It is located within the flood plain of the River Exe and previous archaeological recording in the flood plain has identified silted former river channels. Dates obtained from these works range from the medieval period through to the Mesolithic period (10th millennium BC).
- 1.3 Trial pits excavated within the development area in September 2006 and monitored by Exeter Archaeology, revealed layers of clayey loam, silty clay and gravels, with some evidence of paleochannels.
- 1.4 Groundworks for the development will involve an initial topsoil strip and stockpile followed by the excavation of the fishing ponds.

2. AIMS

- 2.1 The principal aim of the project is to record the exposed stratigraphic sequence; to determine the presence or absence of, and to record, any former silted palaeochannels or archaeological deposits. If any suitable deposits are exposed then appropriate samples will be taken for palaeoenvironmental analysis and/or dating.

3. METHOD

- 3.1 Liaison will be established with the main contractor prior to works commencing in order to obtain programme details, to advise on EA's requirements, and to ensure the efficient targeting of visits. The results of the 2006 trial pit excavations will be studied prior to site work commencing.
- 3.2 An archaeological watching brief will be maintained, as appropriate, during the topsoil strip and during deep groundworks (the excavation of the fishing ponds) likely to disturb archaeological or alluvial deposits. A grading bucket should be used during the topsoil strip and areas should be left open (and not tracked over by machinery) until the archaeologist monitoring the works has inspected the exposed areas. Any remains or deposits exposed will be recorded as per EA standard recording procedures (see 4.1 below).
- 3.3 Should significant archaeological deposits be exposed, works will temporarily cease in those areas to allow the archaeologist adequate time to investigate and record the deposits (safe working practice allowing). Spoil will also be examined for the recovery of artefacts.
- 3.4 Health and Safety requirements will be observed at all times by any archaeological staff working on site, particularly when machinery is operating nearby. Personal protective equipment (safety boots, helmets and high visibility vests) will be worn by EA staff when plant is operating on site.

- 3.5 As appropriate, the EA Scientific Officer will assess deposits on site, with advice as necessary from the English Heritage Regional Science Advisor, to determine the possible yield (if any) of environmental or microfaunal evidence, and its potential for radiocarbon dating. If deposits of potential survive, these would be sampled using the EH Guidelines for Environmental Archaeology (EH CfA Guidelines 2002/1), and outside specialists organised to undertake further assessment and analysis as appropriate.
- 3.6 Initial cleaning, conservation, packaging and any stabilisation or longer term conservation measures will be undertaken in accordance with relevant professional guidance (including *Conservation guidelines No 1* (UKIC, 2001); *First Aid for Finds* (UKIC & RESCUE, 1997) and on advice provided by A Hopper-Bishop, Specialist Services Officer, RAM Museum, Exeter.
- 3.7 Should any human remains be exposed, these will initially be left *in situ*. If removal at either this or a later stage in the archaeological works is deemed necessary, these will then be fully excavated and removed from the site in accordance with Ministry of Justice guidelines. If required, the necessary license will be obtained by EA on behalf of the client. Any remains will be excavated in accordance with Institute of Field Archaeologist Technical Paper No. 13 (McKinley and Roberts 1993). Where appropriate bulk samples will be collected.
- 3.8 Should items be exposed that fall within the scope of the Treasure Act 1996, then these will be removed to a safe place and reported to the local coroner. Where removal cannot be effected on the same working day as the discovery, suitable security measures will be taken to protect the finds from theft.
- 3.9 The ECC Archaeology Officer (ECCAO) will be informed of the start of the project, and will monitor progress throughout on behalf of the planning authority and will wish to inspect the works in progress. A date of completion of archaeological site work will be confirmed with him.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

- 4.1 Standard EA recording and sampling procedures will be employed, consisting of:
- (i) standardised single context record sheets; survey drawings, plans and sections at scales 1:10, 1:20, 1:50 as appropriate;
 - (ii) black and white print and colour digital photography;
 - (iii) survey and location of finds, deposits or archaeological features, using EDM surveying equipment and software where appropriate;
 - (iv) labelling and bagging of finds on site from all excavated levels, post-1800 unstratified pottery may be discarded on site with a small sample retained for dating evidence as required.

5. REPORTING AND ARCHIVING

- 5.1 The reporting requirements will be confirmed with the ECCAO on completion of the site work. If little or no archaeological deposits are exposed, then only a completed Devon County Council Historic Environment Record is likely to be required. This will be compiled and submitted in digital and hard copy form to the ECCAO and the Devon County Council Historic Environment Service (DCCHEs) within 3 months of the completion of field work. More significant archaeological exposures would require the production of a summary illustrated report and of other reporting as set out below.
- 5.2 The summary report, if required, will contain the following elements as appropriate:
- i) location plan;

- ii) a written description of the exposed remains and a discussion and interpretation of their character and significance in the context of any locally available historical evidence;
- iii) copies of relevant historic maps and images;
- iv) plans and sections at appropriate scales showing the exact location of any significant archaeological deposits; and
- v) specialist reports as appropriate.

5.3 Copies of the report will be produced for distribution to the Client, the local planning authority and DCCHEs, within three months of the completion of the fieldwork. A copy will also be deposited with the site archive.

5.4 An ordered and integrated site archive will be prepared with reference to *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991 2nd edition) upon completion of the project. This will be deposited with RAM Museum, Exeter in consultation with the Curator of Antiquities, within 18 months of the completion of the fieldwork, or within 6 months of this date if no wider publication is required (see 5.6 & 5.7 below). The guidelines in the *Procedures for the Deposit of Archaeological Archives from Developer Funded Fieldwork to Exeter City Museum (2006)* will be followed. The museum accession number is 242/2009.

5.5 Details of the project, including a .pdf copy of the summary report, will be submitted to the national OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological investigationS) database within 1 month of the completion of any required reporting.

5.6 A short report summarising the results of the project will be prepared for inclusion within the “round up” section of the appropriate national journal, if merited, within 12 months of the completion of site work.

5.7 Should particularly significant remains, finds and/or deposits be encountered, then these, because of their importance, are likely to merit wider publication in line with government planning guidance. If such remains are encountered, the publication requirements – including any further analysis that may be necessary – will be confirmed with the ECCAO, in consultation with the Client. Exeter Archaeology, on behalf of the Client, will then implement publication in accordance with a timescale agreed with the Client, and the ECCAO. A final proof copy will be produced within 18 months of the completion of field work.

5.8 Any amendments to the method or timescale set out above will be agreed in writing with the ECC Archaeology Officer before implementation.

6. PROJECT ORGANISATION

6.1 The project will be undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced EA archaeologists, in accordance with the Code of Conduct and relevant standards and guidance of the Institute For Archaeologists (*Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation*, 1994, revised 2008, and *Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, 1994, revised 2008). The project will be managed by John Allan F.S.A. Exeter Archaeology is managed by a full Member of the Institute for Archaeologists.

Health & Safety

6.2 EA operations are subject to Health and Safety policies prepared by Exeter City Council which include all aspects of work covered by the *Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)*. All monitoring works within this scheme will be carried out in accordance with current *Safe Working Practices*.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Specialists contributors and advisors

The expertise of the following specialists can be called upon if required:

Bone artefact analysis: Ian Riddler;

Dating techniques: University of Waikato Radiocarbon Laboratory, NZ; Alex Bayliss (EH);

Charcoal identification: Dana Challinor ;

Diatom analysis: Nigel Cameron (UCL);

Environmental data: Vanessa Straker (English Heritage);

Faunal remains: Southampton University Faunal Remains Unit and sub-consultants, Dale Seargantson, Polydora Baker (EH); Lorraine Higbee (Taunton);

Fish bone identification: Alison Locker;

Foraminifera analysis: Mike Godwin;

Finds conservation: Alison Hopper-Bishop (Exeter Museums); Salisbury Conservation Centre;

Human remains: Louise Loe (Oxford Archaeology); Dr. James Steele (Centre for Human Ecology, Southampton);

Lithic analysis: Dr. Linda Hurcombe (Exeter University); John Newberry (Paignton);

Medieval and post-medieval finds: John Allan (Exeter Archaeology) and sub-consultants;

Metallurgy: Chris Salter (Oxford University); Ancient Monuments Laboratory (English Heritage) Peter Crew (Snowdonia National Park), Gill Juleff (Exeter University);

Molluscan analysis: Terrestrial-Paul Davis (Bristol); Marine- Jan Light (Godalming);

Numismatics: Norman Shiel (Exeter);

Petrology/geology: Roger Taylor (RAM Museum); Dr R. Scrivener (British Geological Survey);

Plant remains: Julie Jones (Bristol); Wendy Carruthers (Llantrisant)

Pollen: Dr Heather Tinsley (Bristol); Elizabeth Huckerby (Lancaster University Archaeological Unit);

Prehistoric pottery: Henrietta Quinnell (Exeter);

Radiocarbon dating: University of Waikato, New Zealand: Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre, East Kilbride

Roman finds: Paul Bidwell & associates (Arbeia Roman Fort, South Shields);

Soil Science: Matthew Canti (EH) and sub-consultants;

Textiles: Penelope Rogers (York)

M. Leverett
Exeter Archaeology
Project 6914
8th July 2009

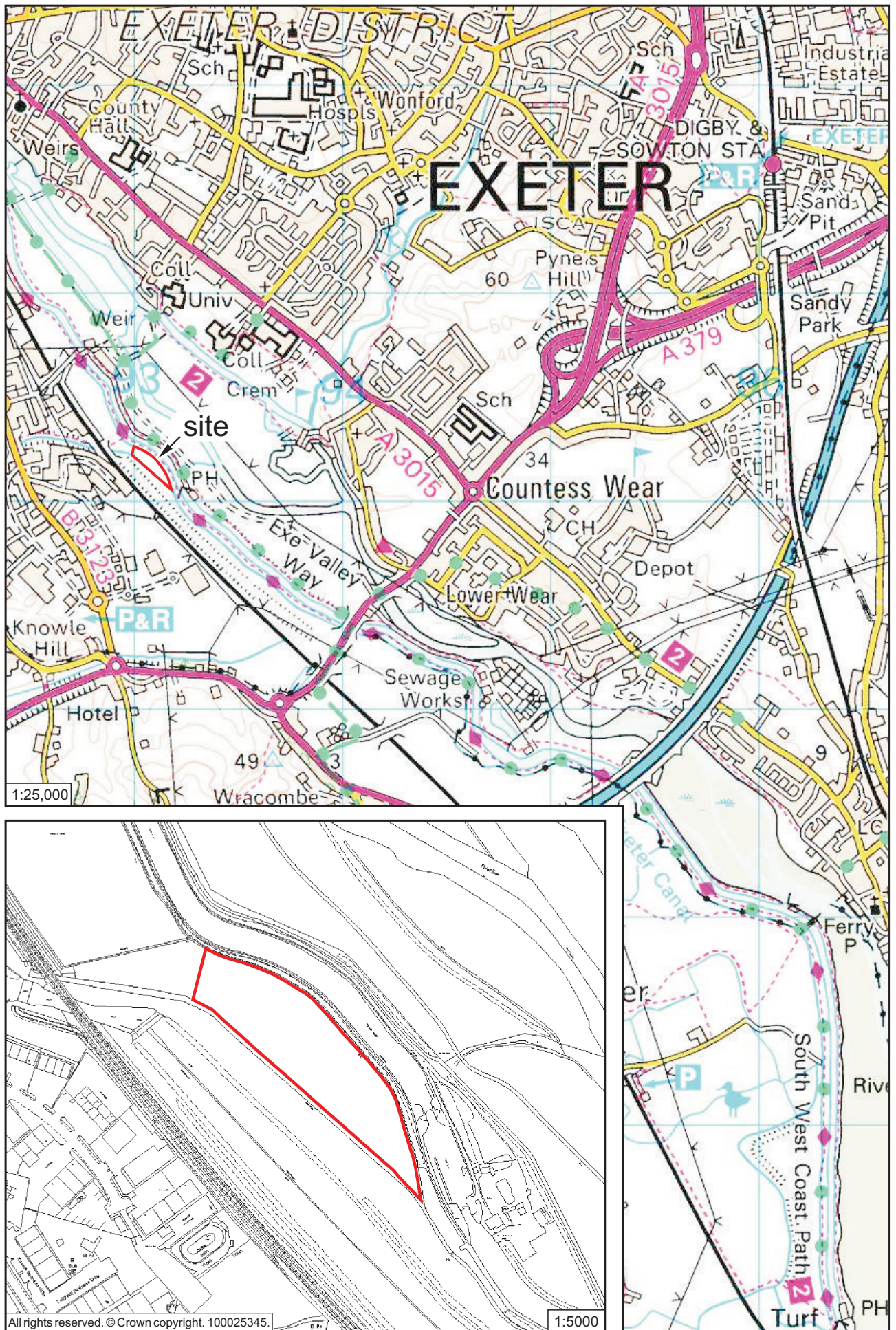
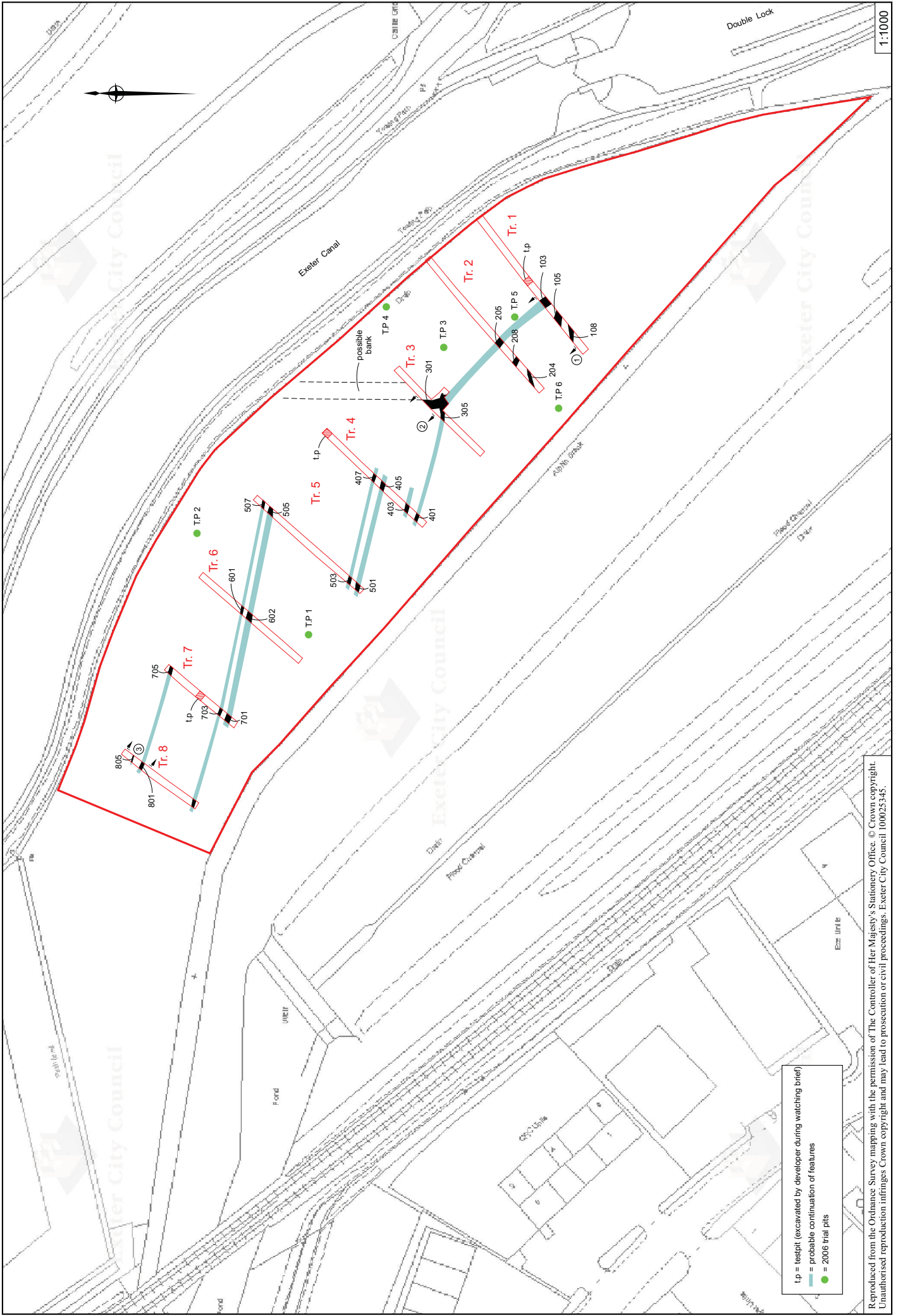


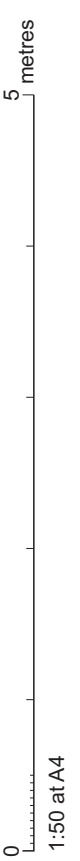
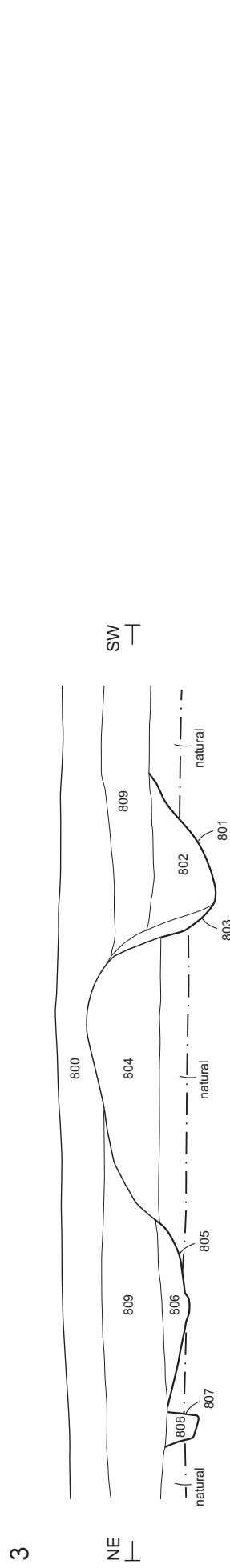
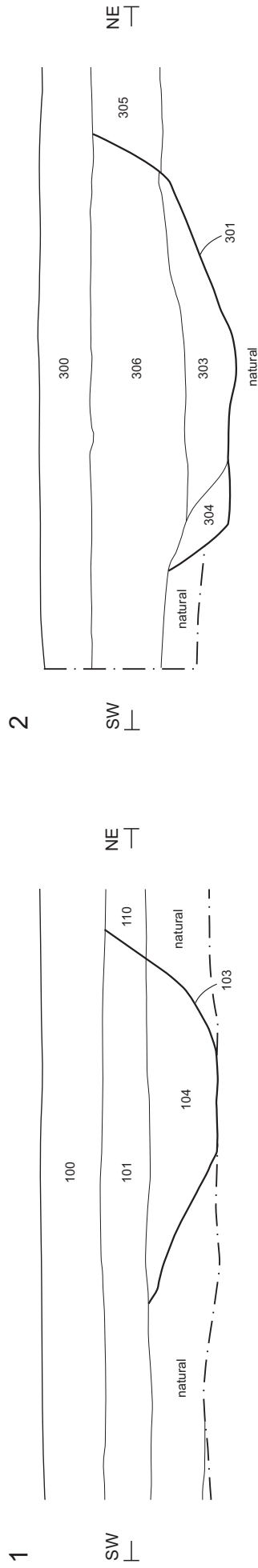
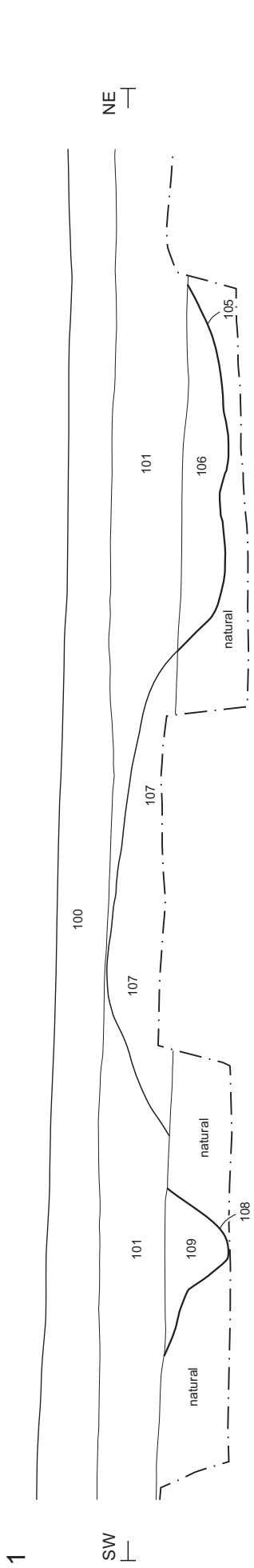
Fig. 1 Location of site.



Tr. = trench (excavated by developer during watching brief)
— = probable continuation of features
● = 2006 trial pits

Fig. 2 Trench location plan.

Sections



datum height arbitrary

Fig. 3 Sections.

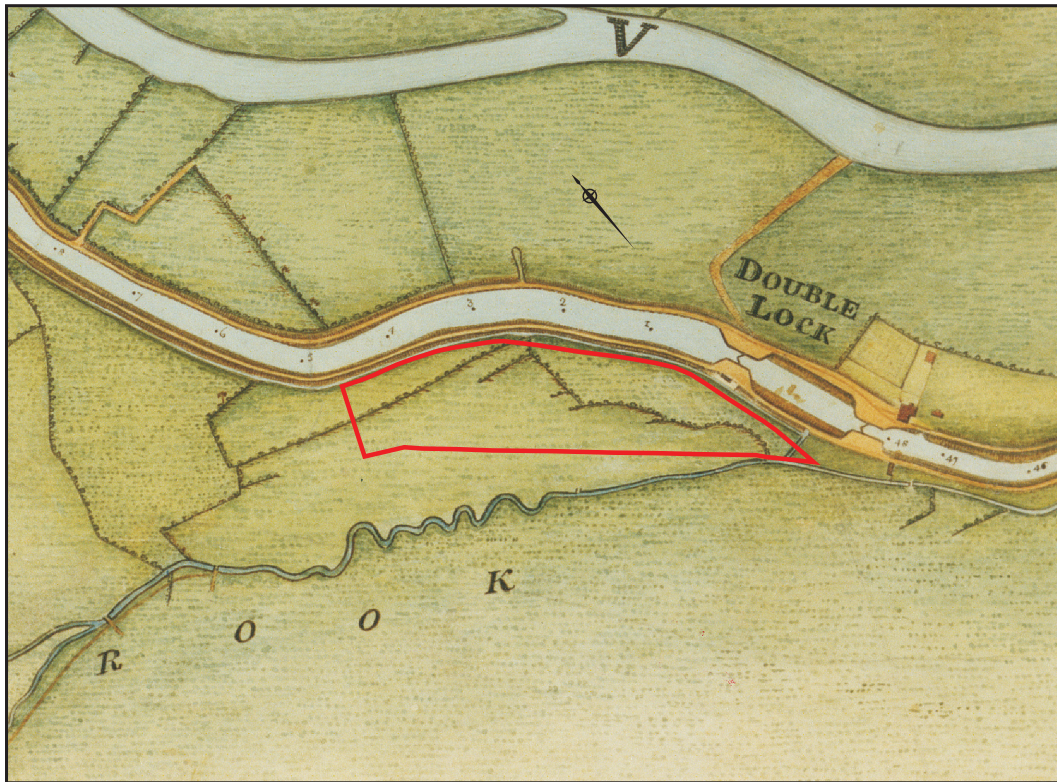


Fig. 4 Extract from the James Green plan of Exeter in 1819 (9041/2) enlarged to 1:5000. Site area outlined in red.

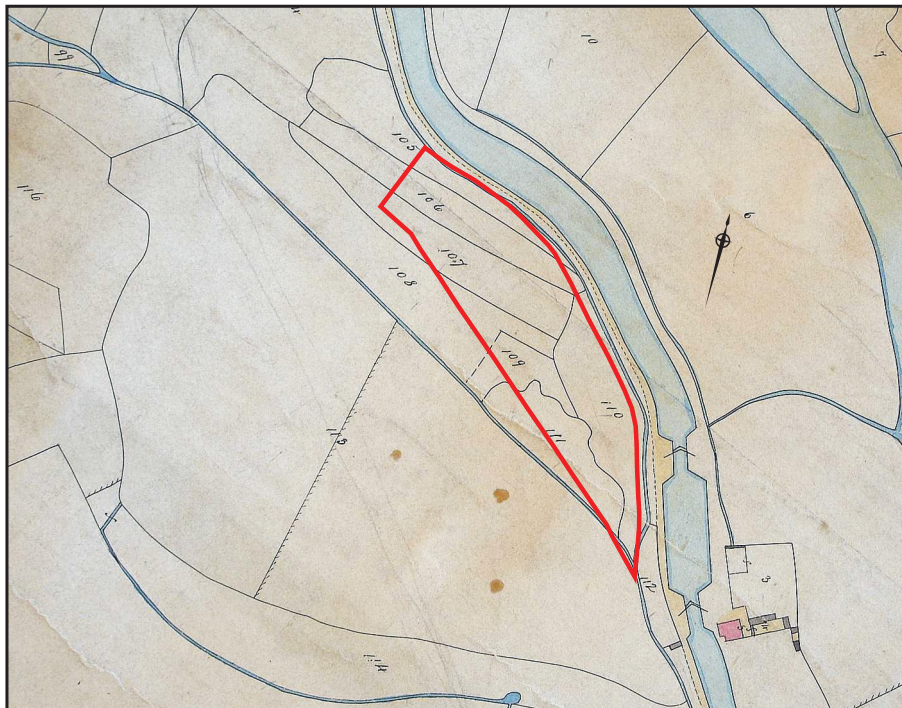


Fig. 5 Extract from the 1842 Alphington Tithe map (scale 1:5000). Site area outlined in red.

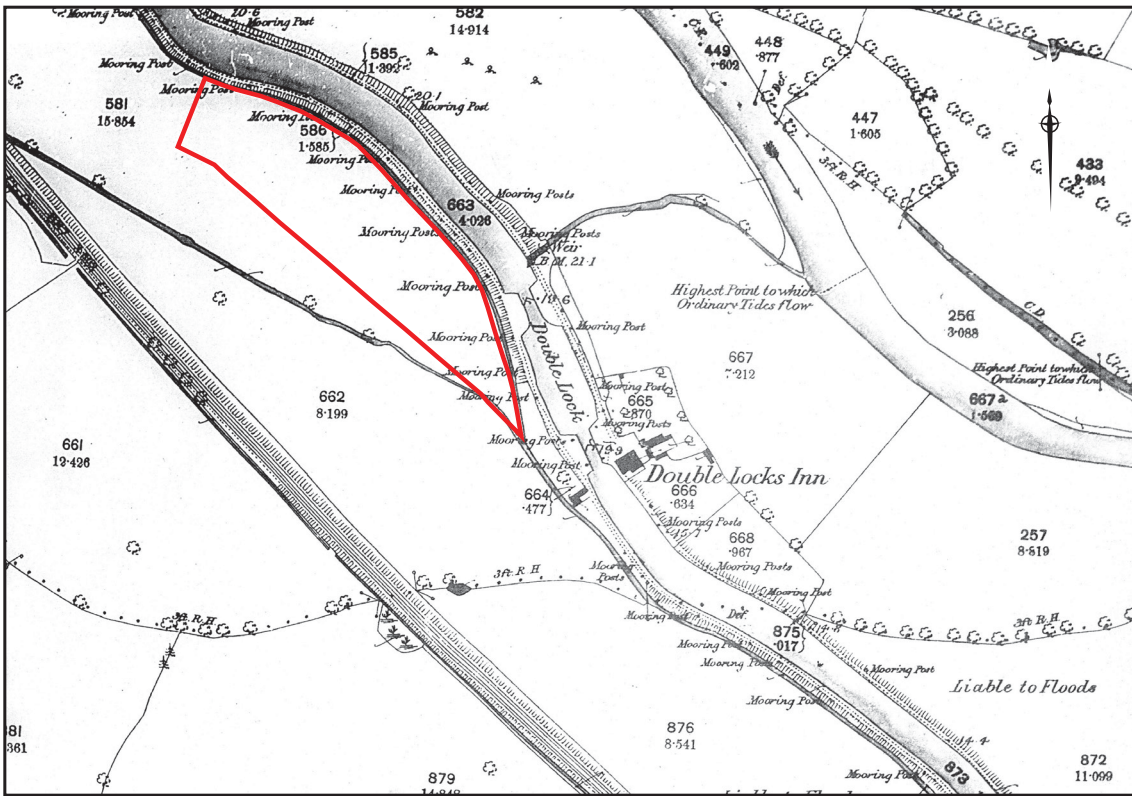


Fig. 6 Extract from the 1888 OS map Sheet LXXX.14. (scale 1:5000). Site area outlined in red.

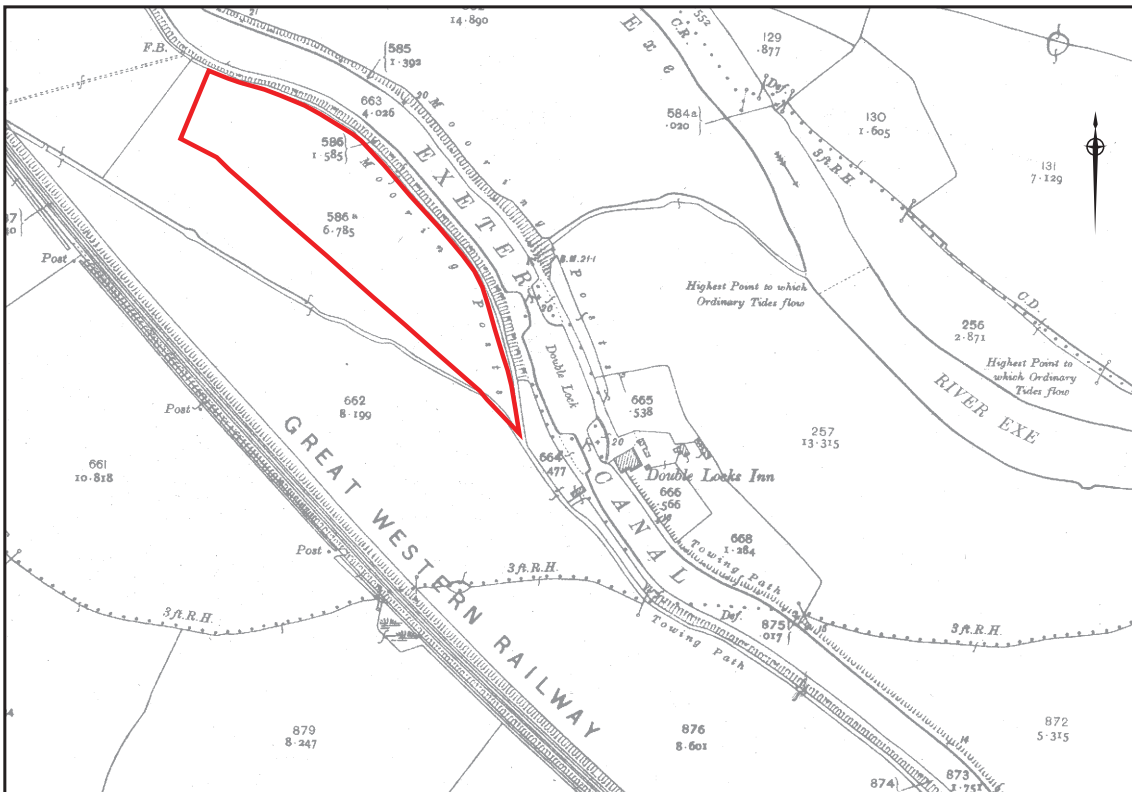
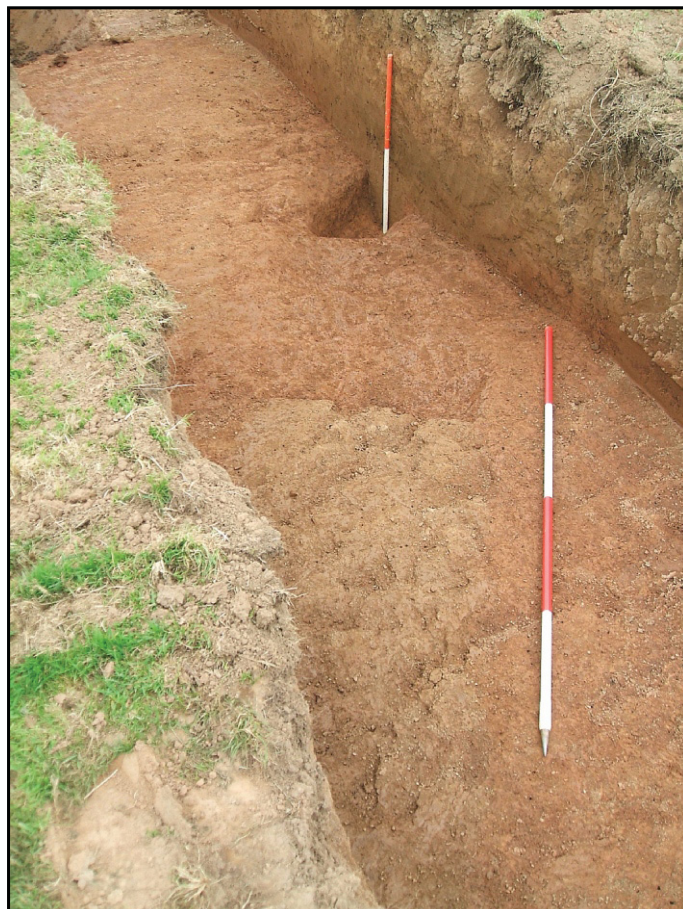


Fig. 7 Extract from the 1932 OS map Sheet 80.14. (scale 1:5000). Site area outlined in red.



Pl.1 Trench 6: ditches 601 and 602, looking east. 2m scale.



Pl.2 Trench 2: ditch 204, looking east. 2m and 1m scales.