

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Totnes, South Hams	National Grid Reference: SX 8009 6019	Number:
Subject: Archaeological evaluation and watching brief at Leechwell Gardens, Totnes, Devon.		Photo attached: Y
Planning Application no: 56/2251/05/DC	Recipient museum: Royal Albert Memorial Museum	
OASIS ID: exeterar1-71345	Museum Accession no: 14/2010	
Contractor's reference number/code: EA7164	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 27/01/, 01/02-03/02, 05/02, 08/02, 11/02 & 30/03/2010	
<p>Background</p> <p>The site of Leechwell Gardens (Figs. 1-2) lies 100m to the northwest of the St Mary Magdalene leper hospital, a medieval foundation in existence by at least 1200, and 45m east of the Leechwell holy well. The development also includes the putative site of a 'dipping pool' (Scheduled Monument No. 36031), although a desk-based assessment produced by Exeter Archaeology (EA Report No. 07-61) has raised serious concerns about the identification of the pool as a medieval lepers' immersion pond for the palliative treatment of leprosy and argues instead that the pool is associated with late 19th century control of the water courses. The development area was nevertheless considered to have clear archaeological potential (evidence for medieval deposits has been found to the east of the site) and the scheduled area within the site is protected by statutory designation.</p> <p>Description of works:</p> <p>A programme of archaeological work was called for by South Hams District Council, as advised by the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES), in fulfilment of a condition for the granting of planning permission for landscaping works within Leechwell Gardens. No works were envisaged which would impact upon the scheduled monument or its setting. However, several areas of groundwork disturbance were located along the central and western edge of the site. In order to investigate, excavate and record any surviving below ground archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks, two trenches totalling 50m were excavated to a width of 1.8m. A subsequent watching brief monitored excavations for wall and footpath foundations, drainage runs and tree pits.</p> <p>Evaluation:</p> <p><i>Trench 1</i> (Figs 2-3; Pl. 2)</p> <p>The principal length (18m) of the trench was aligned E-W (with two N-S doglegs of 7.5m length at each end) providing a total length of 33m of trench (Fig.2). The trenching was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.25m. However, two sondages of restricted width (approx. 0.9m.) were placed at either end of the trench to a further depth of approximately 0.35m (Fig.2). Throughout the trenching a mixed modern deposit including a topsoil (100), with a maximum depth of 1m at the west and 0.32m at the east, was observed. This overlay a mid orange brown loamy clay colluvial subsoil (101) which varied in depth from a maximum of 0.88m at the east to 0.38m at the west. Slightly lower exposures of deposits were visible in the two sondages at either end of the trench. In Section 1 (west) a bright orange-brown clay (102), considered to be natural subsoil was exposed below (101) at a depth of 1.4m below ground level (Fig. 3. Trench 1, Section 1). In Section 2 (east) a mid grey silty clay alluvial deposit (103) was located between the natural subsoil (102) and the colluvial subsoil (101) at a depth of 1.2m below ground level; it was 0.2m thick and is likely to represent the natural run-off from the Leechwell spring (Fig.3, Trench 1, Section 2).</p> <p><i>Trench 2</i> (Figs 2-3; Pl.3)</p> <p>The principal length (13.5m) of the trench was aligned N-S (with an E-W dogleg of 4m length at its southern end) providing a total length of 17.5m of trench (Fig.2). The trenching was excavated to a</p>		

maximum depth of 1.25m. However, two sondages of restricted width (approx. 0.9m.) were placed at either end of the trench to a further depth of approximately 0.55m. Throughout the trenching a mixed modern topsoil (200), with a depth of 0.3m was observed. This overlay a mid orange brown loamy clay colluvial subsoil (201) of similar if not identical composition to (101) seen in Trench 1; it varied in depth from a maximum of 1.5m at the south to 1.3m at the north. Slightly lower exposures of deposits were visible in the two sondages at either end of the trench allowing observation of the depth of natural subsoil. In Section 1 (north) a mid-grey silty clay alluvial deposit (202) was located between the natural subsoil (203) and the colluvial subsoil (201). This deposit (202) was 0.1m thick and is likely to represent a continuation of the natural run-off from the Leechwell spring identified in the eastern end of Trench 1 (Fig. 3, Trench 2, Section 1). In Section 2 (south) a natural subsoil (203) was exposed beneath (201) at a depth of 1.8 m below ground level (Fig.3, Section 2); the natural subsoil was that described in Trench 1 (i.e. a bright orange-brown clay).

Watching Brief:

East-side perimeter wall foundation trench

This trench was aligned N-S and bordered the site on the east side adjacent the existing footpath that provides rear access to the flats facing Leechwell Lane. It measured c.25m and cut into the base of the existing battered slope to a maximum depth of 0.25m below the level of the footpath. The trench extended northwards from the site of a new water feature to the site of new steps and a change in angle towards the north-west. Natural clay subsoil (501) was exposed at a depth of 0.15m below the level of the path and 0.95m from the top of the upper ground level. The depth of this clay dipped gently and rose again at the north end of the trench. Overlying the clay throughout the trench was a mid orange-brown colluvial clay loam subsoil (500). At the base of this, at the interface with the natural clay, was a field drain taking the run-off from the Leechwell spring. Extending either side of the drain was a gently dipping area of dark staining. This followed the top of the natural clay and was presumably stained darker by alluvial deposits from the spring; this measured up to c.0.40m thick. The medium brown clay loam above (500) was also stained a darker tint, but was in every other respect the same soil as seen further south and away from the natural drainage channel. The land-drain, which was bedded in gravel, was situated at 3.70m north of the water feature at the base of the original stream bed. A pipe beneath the path takes the run-off away from site.

From c.5.00m northwards from the water feature the soil had been sealed with a layer of re-deposited natural clay shillet (502). This is likely to have originated during the recent construction of the flats and footpath at the bottom of the slope.

At the point where the trench turned to the north-west at c.18.50m from the water feature, a shallow level-bottomed pit was exposed. With a depth of c.0.50-0.80m from surface the pit-fill comprised dark brown clay loam containing lime mortar fragments and one piece of nineteenth century pot. The pit was sealed with c.150mm of re-deposited natural clay shillet. Beneath the pit and to the west the soil comprised a medium brown colluvial clay loam throughout.

This section of trench extended to a point c.7.30m from the west side boundary wall. At c.9.00m from the wall the trench exposed a 0.30m diameter plastic drain pipe running N-S. This lay at c.0.75m below surface, the same depth at which natural clay shillet subsoil lay. Above this was medium brown clay loam to surface.

West-side herb-garden wall foundation trench

Foundation trenches for the low-level walls of the herb garden were dug to a maximum depth of 0.80m. The soil consisted of medium brown clay loam throughout. At a point c.1.10m from the western boundary wall a slight rise of natural clay shillet protruded into the base of the trench.

Groundwork for footpath on west side of site

This trench was aligned NE-SW, measured c.9.00m long and was excavated from surface level at the north-east end to a maximum depth of 0.70m at the south-west end. Natural clay subsoil (501) was exposed at the base of the excavation at the south-west end with medium brown clay loam above containing frequent small to medium-sized sub-angular stones. Above this was a 0.20m thick layer of medium brown clay loam containing mortar, slate and brick fragments. In the west-facing section of the trench at a point c.7.00 from the western boundary wall, this deposit of demolition material had expanded to the full depth of the excavation (0.70m). Perforated brick was noticed which indicates this is a late deposit probably derived from the recently demolished bungalow. Another option is that the

bricks originate from former lean-to buildings against the north-west boundary wall. Remnants of perforated bricks were seen tied in to the boundary wall adjacent the gate at the north-west end.

Water-pipe trenches for water feature/ Leechwell spring overflow

Two drainage trenches were dug across the site taking water from the spring on the west side to the new water feature and an overflow manhole on the east side. The southern trench crossed the eastern tail of an evaluation trench (Trench 1). This was for a drain to feed the new water feature. The pipe trench was dug to a maximum depth of 0.85m. At c.0.5m west of the trial trench the remains of a shallow pond was exposed. A plastic liner over fine sand defined a modern shallow pond at a maximum depth of 0.50m from surface. Below this was medium brown clay loam throughout. The northern trench was set on a SW-NE orientation to tie in to an existing manhole just a few metres north-west of the water feature. An existing drain was uncovered running E-W connected to the same manhole. Apart from the pond, the new excavations cut through a single layer of medium brown clay loam with no archaeological features found and with only small amounts of nineteenth-century pot noticed.

Other areas observed

On the main access road towards the north end of the site, traces of a structure were exposed at surface level. This comprised coarse grit, cement mortar, occasional stone and frogged brick. This twentieth century fabric is almost certainly derived from the demolished bungalow.

At the south end of the site the vegetation of the hedgebank was trimmed back and a new drystone wall was constructed just in front of the bank. No features or deposits were seen.

At the south end of the site a number of tree pits were hand-dug to a depth of 0.40m and with a diameter of 0.40m. The soil profiles comprised firm medium brown clay loam throughout

The watching brief revealed one small pit in the eastern wall foundation trench containing one piece of nineteenth-century pot. The alluvial deposit uncovered in the same trench represents the original stream bed from the Leechwell spring. No other features, finds or deposits indicating archaeological activity were found and no medieval deposits were recorded.

Recorder:

MFR Steinmetzer & G. Young (Exeter Archaeology)

Date sent to HER:

16/02/2010

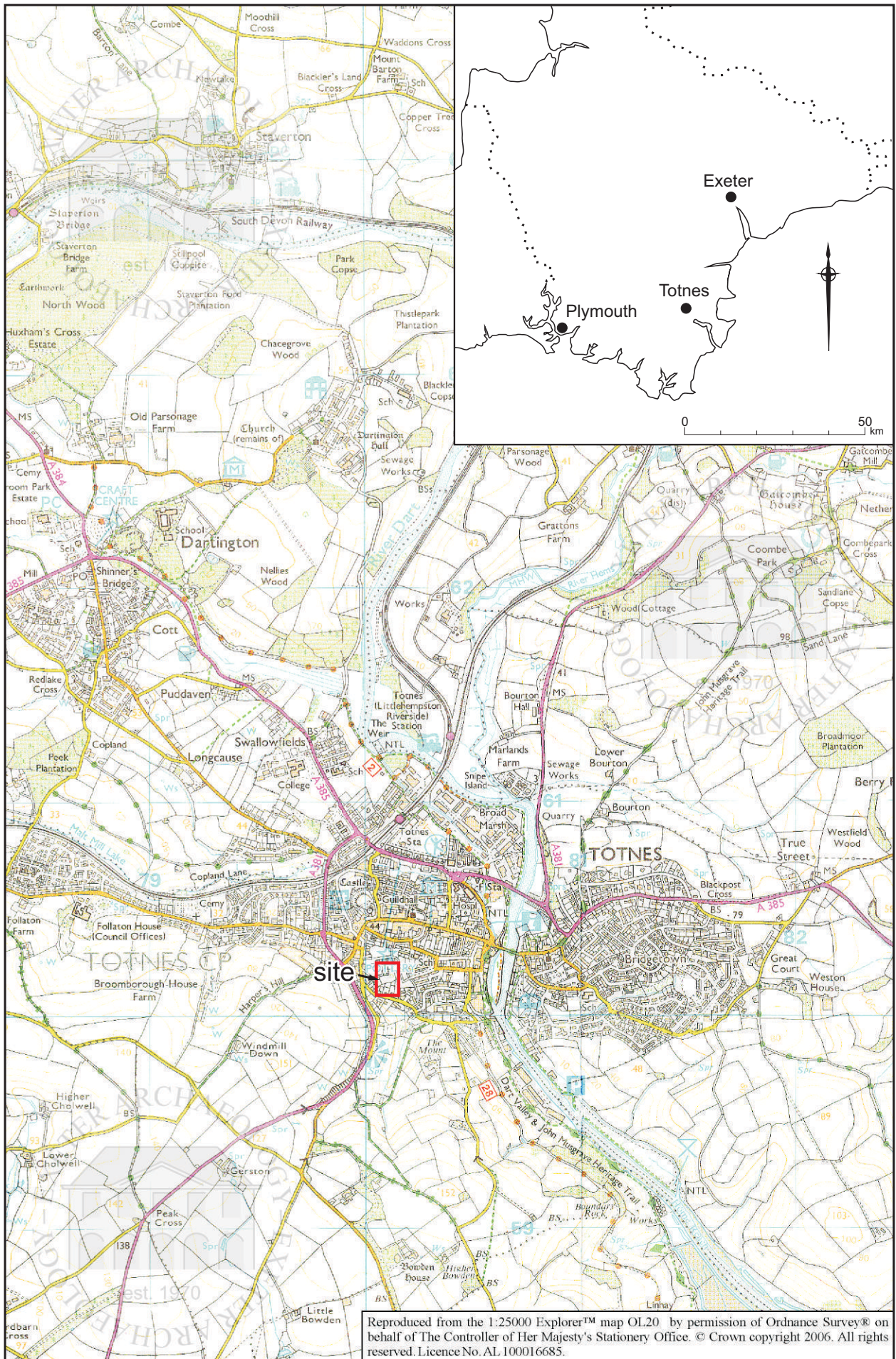


Fig. 1 Location of site.

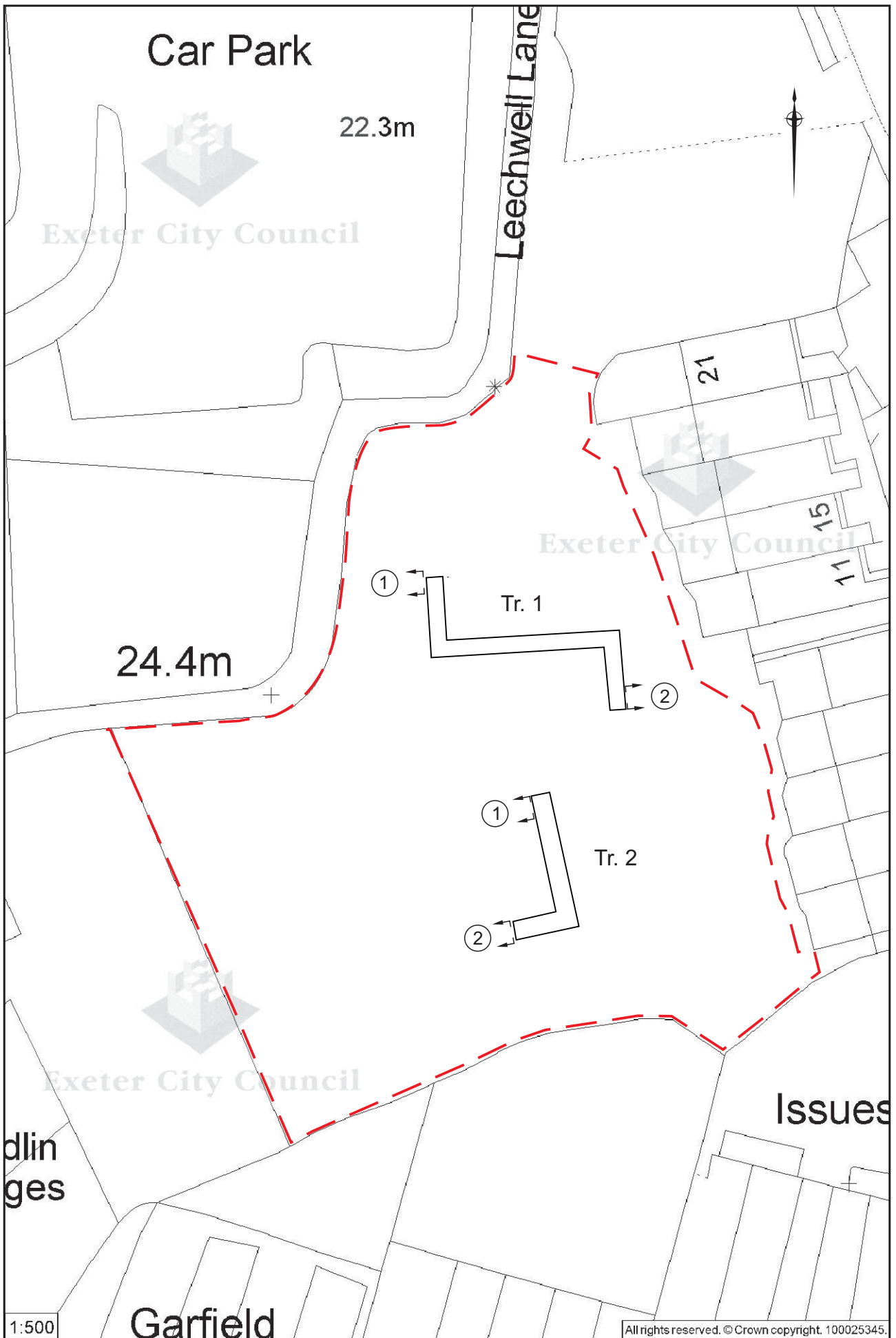


Fig. 2 Trench locations.

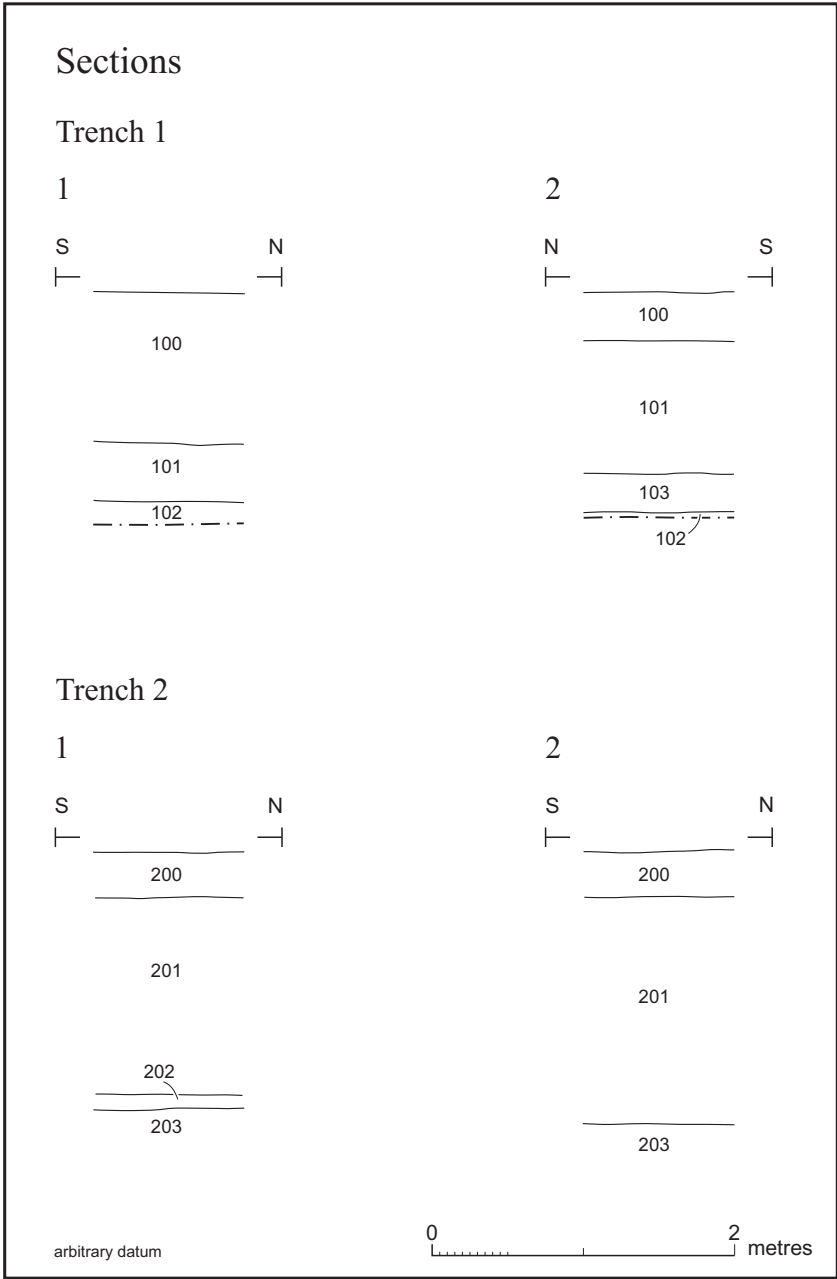


Fig. 3 Trench 1 and 2 sections.

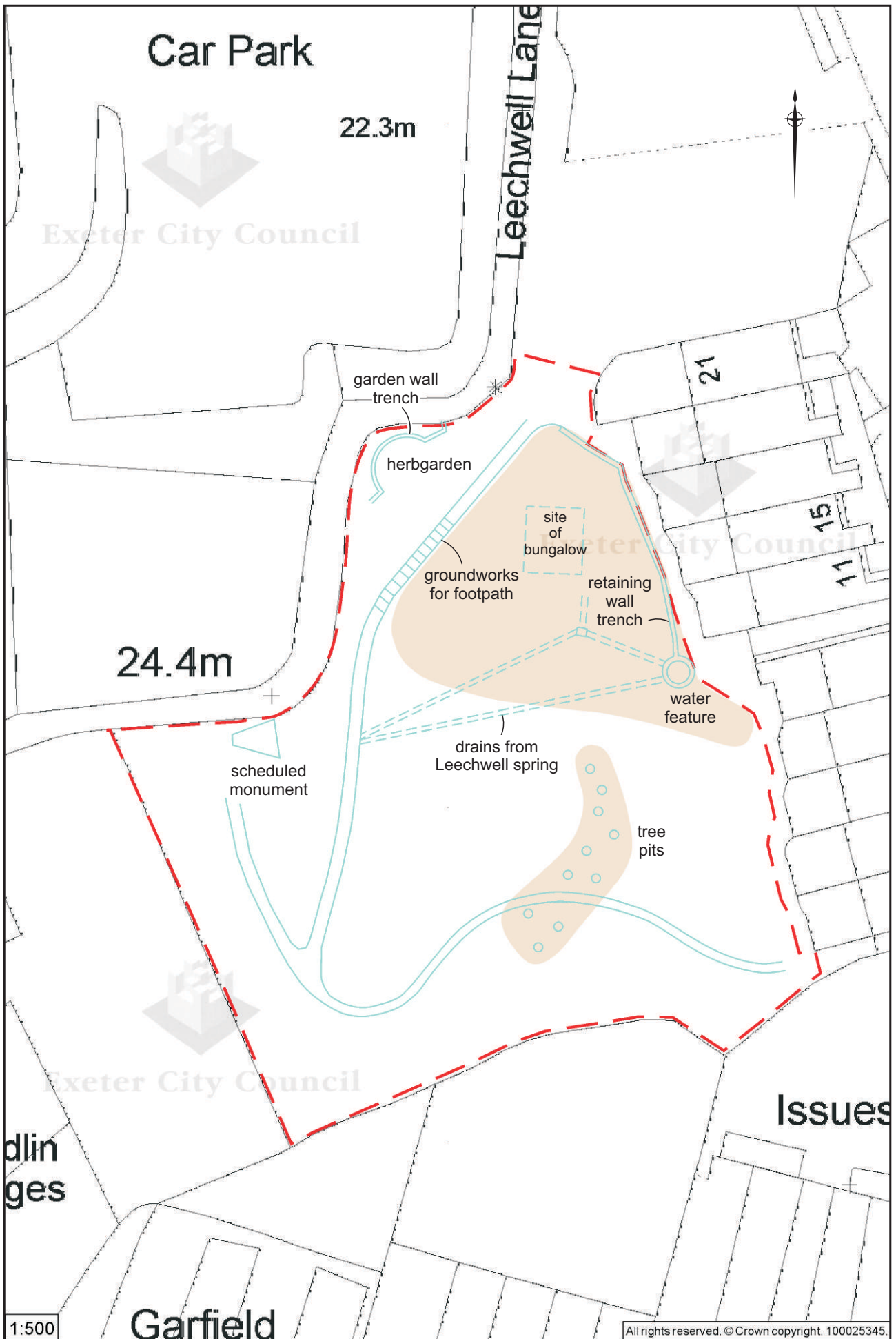


Fig. 4 Areas of archaeological monitoring.

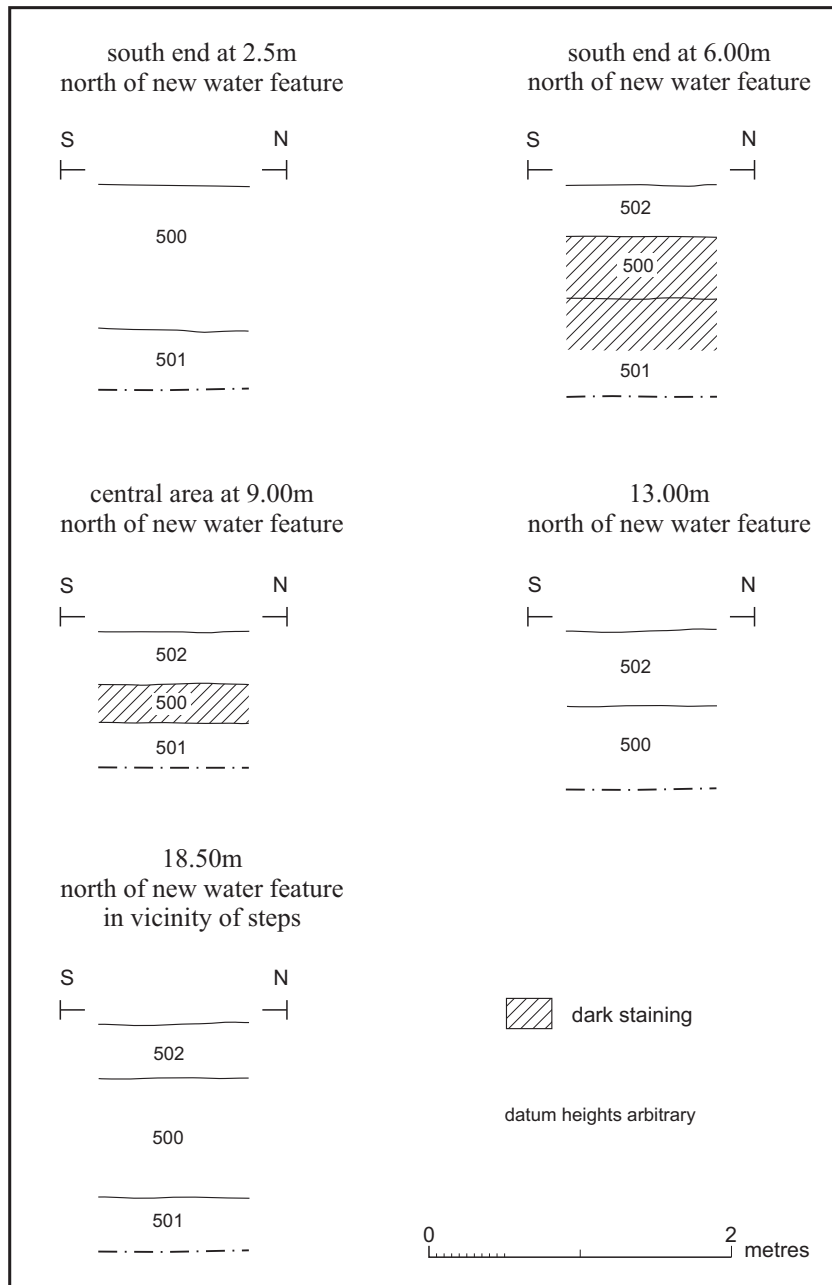


Fig. 5 Retaining wall foundation trench soil profiles.



Plate 1 General view of trenches. Looking southwest



Plate 2 General view of alluvial deposit in Trench 1. Looking north west.



Plate 3 Sample section showing depth of deposits in Trench 2. Looking west. 1m scale.