

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
LAND ADJOINING THE OLD MANOR
GARDENS, COLYFORD, DEVON**

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief on land adjoining the Old Manor Gardens, Colyford, Devon (NGR SY 25086 92563), was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) during November 2010.

The site is located in the historic core of Colyford, on the north side of the A3052, which is thought, at least in part, to follow the course of a Roman road. Eighteenth and nineteenth century maps of the site show that it lies within an area of former agricultural land and an orchard. Previous archaeological work in the vicinity of the site has identified evidence of prehistoric activity, dating from the Palaeolithic period onwards and a trench evaluation in 2007 revealed the presence of localised Neolithic-early Bronze Age activity within 'alluvial' deposits. Significant quantities of medieval pottery have been found during previous work adjacent to the site.

A significant amount of worked flint was recovered during the watching brief. The flint was residual in later deposits and no associated features were observed. A continuation of the post-medieval boundary wall observed during the evaluation was observed (1003) and upon investigation it was found that it appeared to replace an earlier boundary ditch (1004). A second boundary ditch 1013, also aligned north-south and of medieval date, was recorded to the west of 1003/1004. A medieval gully (1010), aligned east-west, and a medieval pit (1008) were earlier than the two north-south boundaries.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

This report sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in November 2010 on land adjoining the Old Manor Gardens, Colyford, Devon (NGR SY 25086 92563). The work was required by East Devon District Council under condition 8 attached to the grant of planning permission development (Planning ref. 07/1693/FUL). Guidance on the required monitoring was provided by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Service (DCHES).

1.1 The site

The site (Fig. 1) is situated in the historic core of the village of Colyford, on the north side of Snow Hill Road, the main route through the village. It covers an area of approximately 3,500m², lying at around 15m AOD on land that slopes moderately down to the south and southeast. The present land-use consists of an area of former orchard. The underlying natural subsoil is recorded as comprising colluvial valley gravels above Keuper Marl (BGS 1974). Natural clay was exposed across the site during the groundworks.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Colyford was founded (probably between 1225 and 1238) by Thomas Basset as a ‘new town’ on land which had formerly been part of Colyton manor. It was sited where the Charmouth-Exeter coastal road crossed the River Coly by ford. This road (now the A3052) is thought, at least in part, to follow the course of a Roman road. It is described as the *herepæd* (highway) in a charter of AD 1005 for lands *æt Fleote*. The derivation of this name ‘Harepath’ survives in modern place-names. Probable Roman make-up and metalling were recorded in 1993 beneath the A3052 further west during the construction of a SWW pipeline on the Southleigh/Branscombe boundary at SY 1984 9098.

Prior to the building of the road, the immediate area around Colyford was almost certainly utilised in the prehistoric period. A scatter of mesolithic flint tools (*c.* 9500–4000 BC) from the floodplain of the River Axe near Colyford was reported in the 1970s (SY 25 92; precise location uncertain). Palaeolithic flint implements are also reported from the floodplain gravels immediately north of Colyford Station at SY 2543 9275.

Colyford never appears to have been incorporated as a borough, but is almost always referred to as such in the documentary record. In 1238 it was represented as a vill by six jurors at the eyre, and in 1274 there were 112 burgage plots. In 1340 a charter was granted to the burgesses by Hugh de Courtenay. The town declined in the 15th century.

Donn’s Map of 1765 shows the surviving burgage plots spread typically along the main road. Archaeological work in other parts of the Southwest (e.g. Newton Abbot) has shown that these types of plots were often adapted from the amalgamation of earlier medieval open field strips.

Limited investigations were undertaken by the Devon Archaeological Society Roads Committee within two burgage plots (at SY 2507 9251 near the present site) in 1971, during the widening and straightening of part of the A3052. This work demonstrated the archaeological potential of the now deserted plots in the town. Although the observations

were limited by the construction techniques, large quantities of mainly 13th-century and locally produced pottery were retrieved, predominantly from a 0.3m thick clayey soil layer beneath the topsoil (0.15m). No Roman finds were reported from this exercise.

The site lies within the historic core of the borough within former post-medieval orchard land, now surrounded by modern buildings. There were two separate plots forming the site as shown on the Colyton Tithe Map (1843) and the OS 1:2500 Sheet 83.8 (1889), divided by a north-south field boundary. The orchards are shown to the south of The Old Manor Hotel (Listed Grade II) with its associated parkland. In 1841/3 the site occupied orchard *No. 523* and part of orchard *No. 522*. These, and the orchard to the west (*No. 524*; now occupied by modern buildings), were separately owned and occupied. This is a possible indication that the orchards were originally formed from earlier (13th-century) burgage plots that were amalgamated after the decline of the borough and around the time the mansion house (to the north, *No. 494* on the Tithe Map) was constructed in the early 16th century. This house was later enlarged to incorporate the adjoining cottage range (built at an obtuse angle at the west end) and the 18th-century stable and cart shed range to the south-east.

Prior to the establishment of Colyford in the 13th century, the site was agricultural land (and possibly part of a large medieval open field system). The DCC Historic Landscape Characterisation maps characterise the area immediately surrounding the site, and mansion house with parkland to the north, as either post-medieval or late medieval agricultural enclosures formed from either earlier medieval strip fields or common/marshland.

A trench evaluation in 2007 revealed the presence of localised Neolithic-early Bronze Age activity within alluvial deposits in the northern part of the site (Best and Steinmetzer 2007). The footings of a small wall were exposed in the southeastern corner of the site which probably formed part of the boundary of the site as illustrated on 19th-century maps. The layer sequence recorded within the trenches indicated that the overwhelming majority of the site had remained undeveloped.

3. AIMS

The aim of the watching brief was to investigate and record any buried archaeological deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the development, and to report on the results of the project, as appropriate.

4. METHODOLOGY

The DCHES required that a watching brief be undertaken during groundworks, and that monitoring should take place on all excavations (topsoil stripping, foundation trenches and new service trenches) that were likely to expose archaeological deposits.

Excavations for the site access (and driveways), along with topsoil stripping for the house plots and where required foundation trenches, were undertaken by a machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket under the supervision of the site archaeologist. Where archaeological deposits were exposed these were excavated and recorded as per an agreed *written scheme of investigation* (Passmore 2010) and in accordance with the *Standards* of the Institute for Archaeologists.

All features and deposits were recorded using the standard EA recording system. Sections and plans for each trench were drawn at 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate. A detailed black and white print and colour digital photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings and context sheets on *pro forma* sheets. Finds were labelled and bagged on site and taken to the EA offices for processing and cataloguing.

5. RESULTS (Figs 2-4; Photos 1-4)

Features

A narrow, east-west aligned ditch (1010) was observed in the southeast corner of the site (Figs 2 and 4; Photo. 1). It cut through the natural clay and was filled with a pale bluish grey clay (1011). The fill (1011) had been cut by a large pit (1008) which varied in depth from 0.4m to 0.75m. This feature measured 4.3m long by 1.6m wide. The sides were angled at 45 % and the base was narrow and slightly concave. The single fill (1009) consisted of a mid to dark reddish brown silty clay with frequent small to medium sized stone inclusions. The feature was sealed beneath 0.6m of mid brown silty clay subsoil (1001).

Near the eastern boundary of the site a north-south aligned ditch (1004) was observed cutting through the natural (Figs 2 and 3; Photos 3-4). It was 3.80m wide by 0.9m deep. The basal fill (1006) consisted of a mid greyish brown silty clay containing occasional charcoal flecks. It was sealed by a secondary fill (1005) which consisted of a mid reddish brown silty clay containing occasional small and medium sized stones. The construction cut (1007) for a wall (1003) had been excavated into the top fill 1005 and respected the alignment of the ditch. The foundations of the wall were 0.4m wide and constructed of roughly shaped stone blocks with smaller pieces of stone rubble in the centre. It was bonded with yellowish white lime mortar and survived to a depth of 0.34m. It was sealed by topsoil (1000).

In the centre of the site a ditch (1013), a slightly curving ditch generally aligned north-south, was observed cutting the natural (Figs 2 and 3; Photo. 2). It varied in width from 1-1.3m and was c.0.5m in depth. The ditch was filled with greyish yellow loam (1014). A shallow ditch/gully (1017) had been subsequently excavated on the same alignment as ditch 1013 and cut through fill 1014. It contained a single fill (1018) which consisted of a greyish brown silty clay. A posthole (1015) was visible at the base of 1017. The post-hole was oval-shaped, steep-sided with a flat base and contained a bluish grey silty clay (1016).

Other deposits

Across most of the site, the natural clay was overlain by subsoil 1001 consisting of a mid brown silty clay. This deposit ranged in depth from 0.2m in the northern part of the site, to 0.6m in the central and southern parts of the site. This deposit probably formed, at least partially, as material washed downslope from the northwest, following the natural topography of the site which slopes from northwest to southeast. The thickness of 1001 in the central and southern parts of the site suggests that it filled a natural hollow. It did not extend as far east as wall 1003 and hence is not marked on section 2.

In some parts of the site (mainly to the west and south) the subsoil was overlain by a buried topsoil *c.*0.1m in depth (1019) which was sealed, in turn, by redeposited clay (1012) 0.3m in depth, and more recent topsoil (1000) measuring 0.2m in depth. These deposits may have been deliberately deposited on the site when the orchard was planted. The southern part of the site had been entirely disturbed during widening of the road in 1971.

6. THE FINDS

6.1 **Flints**, *by T.H. Gent*

A total of 90 worked lithics were recovered. The majority of these were from subsoil 1001 although 3 flints were recovered from the fill (1009) of feature 1008. Although two pieces of Portland chert and a single piece of greensand chert are included, the assemblage is dominated by mid-grey mottled flint – a small proportion from pebble flint sources, but the majority being chalk derived. Cortex is present on two-thirds of the collection, and it is evident that the initial reduction of nodules is taking place locally. A relatively untouched nodule and four cores are included. Although a small number of blades are present, the assemblage is dominated by flakes, and a significant number that have been modified. An impressive 37% have been either retouched or altered by use. Of these, 12 have been worked to produce scrapers of varying forms and sizes, with a tendency to composite tools with multiple faces, some with scraping, cutting and awl features included in one tool. At least two, possibly three pieces have strong points or awls. One largish flake has been deliberately denticulated to produce a small saw or serrated knife.

Despite the size of the assemblage and the high proportion of modified pieces, there are no distinctly diagnostic items. The collection as a whole does however display the general characteristics of a late Neolithic or Bronze Age technology, with a later rather than an earlier date within that range seeming most likely. It is possible that some of the more bladey elements hint at use of the site over a longer period.

The high levels of modification suggest an economical use of a possibly scarce raw material, brought to site in an unprepared form. The mix of debris from initial preparation and the high proportion of tools is intriguing, and it is possible that the flint was being prepared for a particular industry, such as carpentry, leatherwork or food production. A small but still significant proportion of burnt material adds to a picture of relatively settled activity. The absence of associated archaeological features on the site may hint at activity with little subsurface disturbance, or may simply be the result of relatively intensive subsequent cultivation practices.

6.2 **Pottery**, *by J. Allan and C. Coles*

102 pieces of Medieval pottery were recovered during the watching brief. These break down to roughly equal numbers of jugs and cooking vessels; the jugs are made up of highly decorated vessels, one with painted white slip lines and another with applied curvilinear lines and iron pellets. The assemblage is generally late 13th/14th-century in date with a striking lack of 16th/17th-century pottery and nothing definitely 15th century. Some coarsewares are undatable and could be earlier than 1250AD.

This is a similar picture to the finds published by Trevor Miles in the 1970's from Colyford which also included a few imported French sherds. The Manor Gardens

collection is likely to be locally made with the exception of one sherd which could be fabric 40 from Exeter. Three small scraps of blackened pottery were also found these could possibly be Prehistoric. In a regional context this is an interesting collection of Medieval pottery.

Context	Prehistoric pottery	Medieval Pottery C13th-C14th	C18th/C19th Coarsewares	C18th/C19th brick fragments
1000		5		
1001		18	2	3
1005			1	1
1006		8	1	
1009		37		
1011	3 ?	15		
1014		19		

7. DISCUSSION

A significant number of worked flints were recovered from subsoil 1001, mainly in the northern part of the site. The assemblage strongly suggests that there was a prehistoric settlement in the vicinity. No prehistoric features were observed during the watching brief, the flints were all recovered from the subsoil or were residual within the fill (1009) of feature 1008. There are two possible explanations for this. The ground slopes from northwest to southeast so it is possible that the flints have washed down from a site situated on the higher ground to the northwest. The flints were mainly recovered from the northern part of the site, as was the case in the evaluation, which does suggest that the flint could have moved from a site slightly further upslope. However, given the quantity of flint recovered, it is more likely that any prehistoric features which may have been present on the site have been destroyed by later activity, probably ploughing, or were so insubstantial that they left no trace.

It is likely that gully 1010 and later ditch 1008 are medieval in date, since they underlay the subsoil 1001 and it is possible that they represent the remains of a boundary aligned east-west. The feature could represent a boundary between a house plot along the street frontage and agricultural land to the rear. Three tiny sherds recovered from the fill (1011) of gully 1010 could be prehistoric but they are too small to date accurately. The presence of medieval pottery within 1011 shows that the pottery, if prehistoric, is residual.

Ditch 1013 probably represents a medieval boundary division between two burgrave plots. The narrow ditch/gully 1017 cut into the fill of 1013 respected the same alignment. The presence of a posthole (1015), visible at the base of the gully, suggests that 1017 may represent the remains of a fenceline which replaced the earlier field boundary. The alignment of the features was retained until the modern period when a north-south field boundary is shown on the Colyton Tithe Map (1843) and the OS 1:2500 Sheet 83.8 (1889).

Ditch 1004 and wall 1003 share the same north-south alignment and may well represent another field boundary. Ditch 1004 was not finally infilled until the 19th-century when it was preplaced by wall 1003. (The present site boundary to the east is a modern wall erected when the adjacent housing development was constructed.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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SOURCES CONSULTED

- BGS Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1974 1:50000 Sheets 326 & 340 Drift (Sidmouth).
- Passmore, A 2010 *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording on Land adjacent to Old Manor Gardens, Colyford, Devon*. Exeter Archaeology unpublished document.
- Best, J. and Steinmetzer, M. 2007 *Archaeological Evaluation of Land adjoining the Old Manor Gardens, Colyford, Devon*. Exeter Archaeology Report No. 07.73

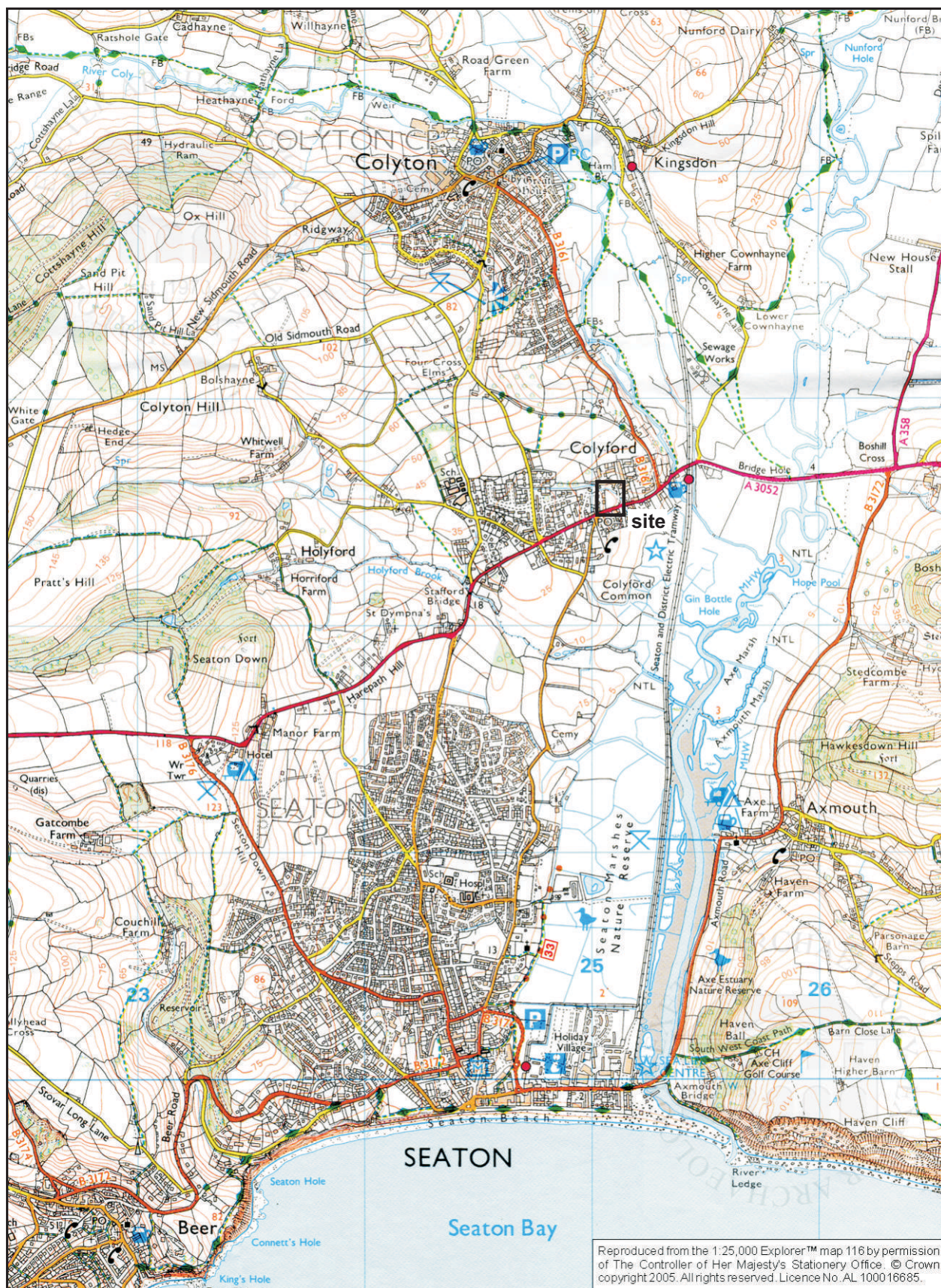


Fig. 1 Location of site.

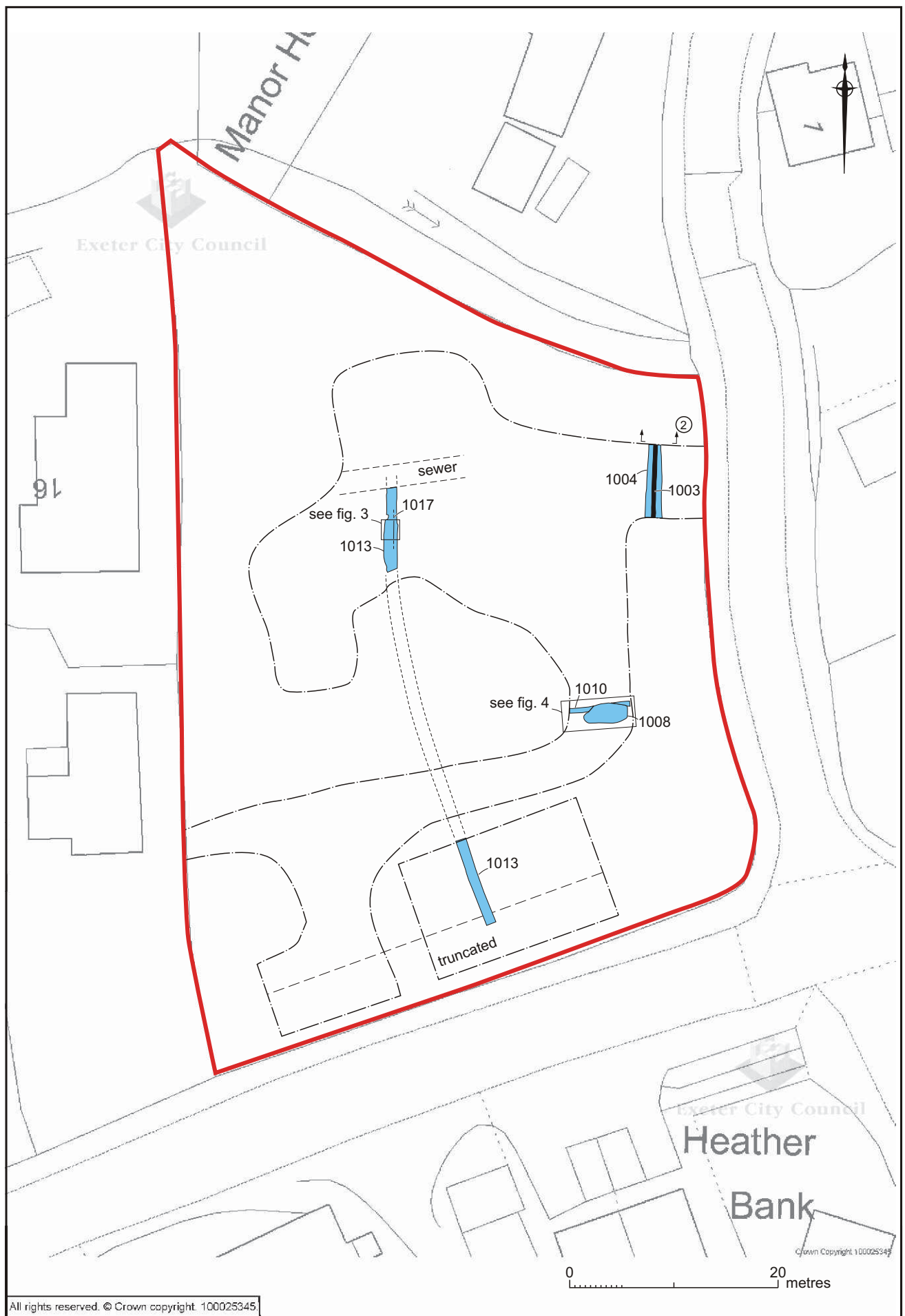
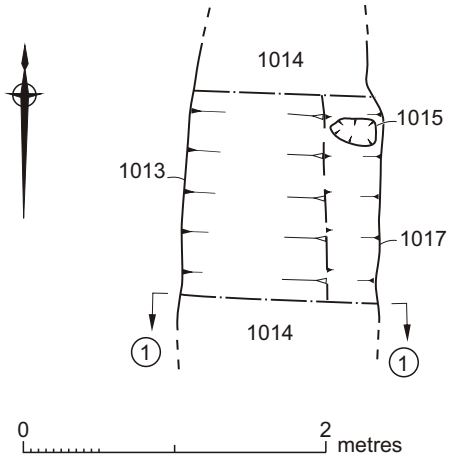


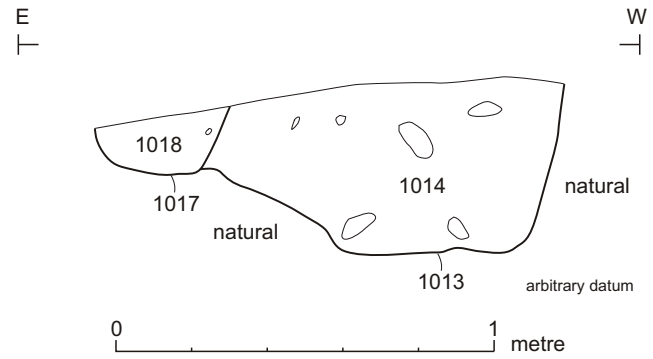
Fig. 2 Plan of features at 1:500

Ditch 1013

Plan



Section 1:



Ditch 1004

Section 2 (located on Fig. 2):

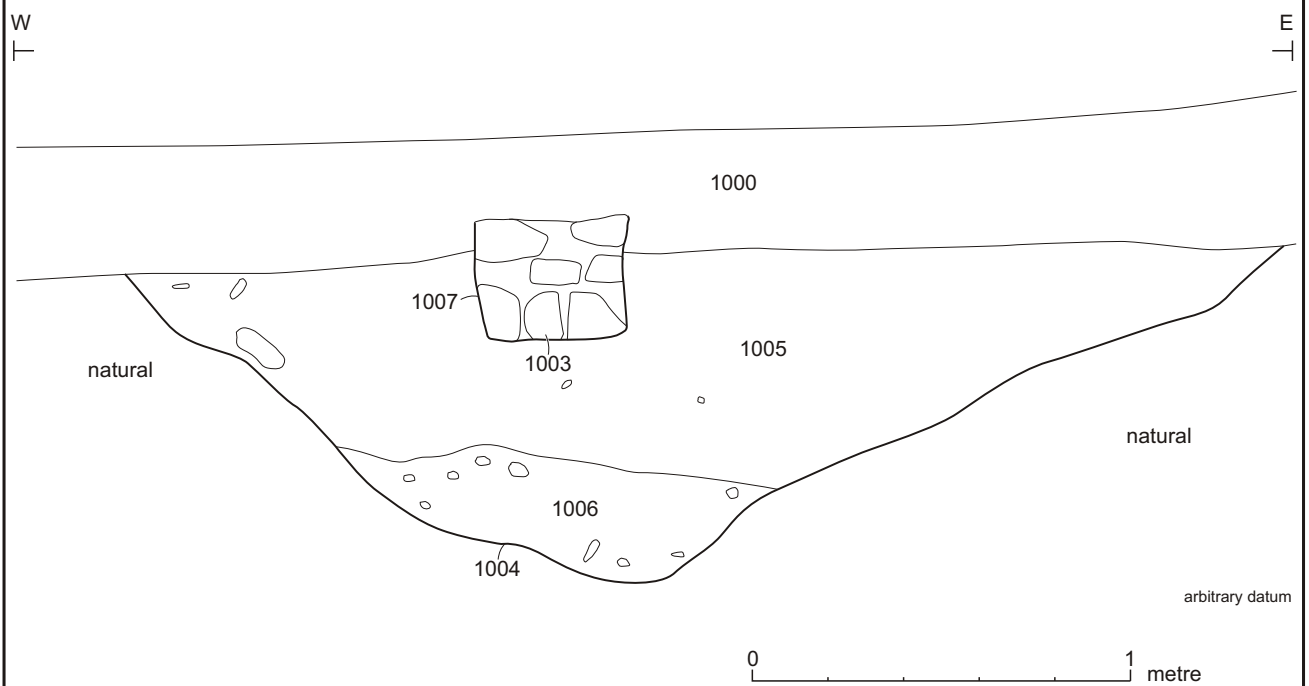
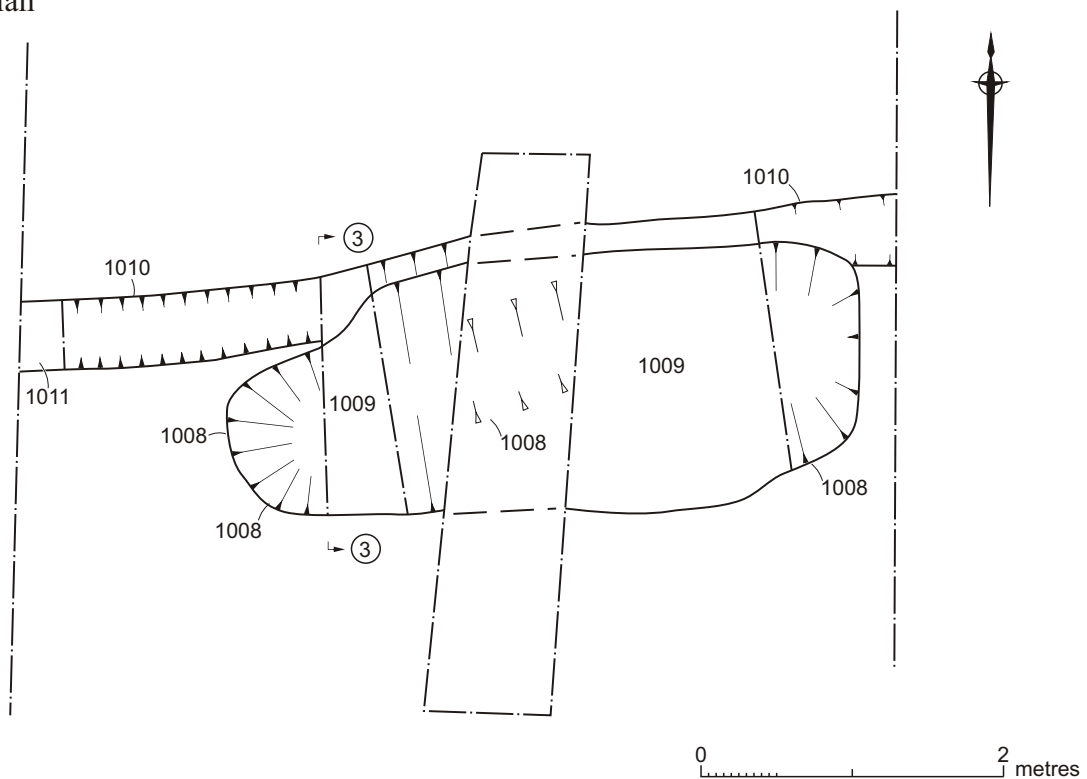


Fig. 3 Plan and section of ditches 1013 and 1017 and section across ditch 1004.

Ditches 1008 and 1010

Plan



Section 3:

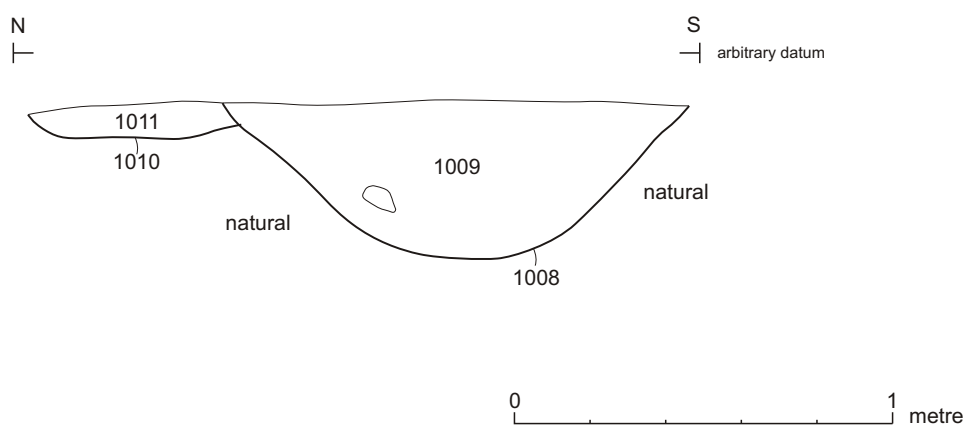


Fig. 4 Plan and section across features 1010 and 1008.



Photo. 1 East-facing section through ditch 1010 and pit 1008, looking west. 1m scale.



Photo. 2 North-facing section of ditch 1013 and gully 1017, looking south. 1m scale



Photo. 3 Wall 1003 after initial exposure, looking north. 1m scale.



Photo. 4 Ditch 1004 and wall 1003, looking north. 1m scale.