

Land to the rear of 1-2 High Street, Ilfracombe, Devon

Results of historic building recording and an archaeological
watching brief

NGR SS 51946 47710

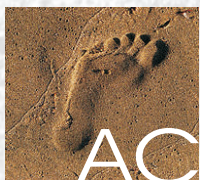
Planning ref. North Devon District Council 48364

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On behalf of
Mr and Mrs Izzard

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AC archaeology

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Summary

Historic building recording and an archaeological watching brief was carried out on land to the rear of 1-2 High Street, Ilfracombe, Devon (NGR SS 51946 47710), prior to and during groundworks associated with the partial demolition of an outbuilding and the erection of a single dwelling. The work was carried out by AC archaeology between December 2010 and February 2011.

The building recording has established the presence of a former small domestic stable, which would have been attached to a large town house. The stable was originally constructed to accommodate at least three horses, but the building seems to have been reconfigured in the late 19th century to house only two. By the late 19th or early 20th century this had been reduced to one.

The watching brief identified the presence of deep (in excess of 2m) 20th century made ground and beneath this was a former boundary wall and stone-capped drain, both of probable 19th century date.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** This report sets out the results of a historic building recording and archaeological watching brief carried out on land to the rear of 1-2 High Street, Ilfracombe, Devon, prior to and during groundworks associated with the partial demolition of an outbuilding and erection of a single residential dwelling. The building recording and watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology from December 2010 to February 2011, and was commissioned by the site owners Mr and Mrs Izzard.
- 1.2** The site is located within the rear garden of the property at 1-2 High Street, Ilfracombe, which comprises two houses standing on the northwest side of the High Street, close to the junction with Fore Street and Portland Street. The site measures approximately 10.5m long by 6m wide and is situated on ground sloping down to the north at around 30m OD (Fig. 1 and Plate 1). The underlying geology comprises sandstones and slates of the Devonian Ilfracombe Beds.
- 1.3** The programme of works included the historic building recording of a former stable outbuilding abutting the north-eastern boundary wall of the site and an archaeological watching brief during ground reduction within the footprint of the proposed dwelling.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** A settlement at Ilfracombe is recorded at the time of Domesday when it is recorded as the Manor of *Alfreincoma*, although its origins are potentially much earlier. During the medieval period, Ilfracombe was a small fishing and market town and by the 19th century, with the arrival of the railway, the town expanded, becoming a popular seaside resort.
- 2.2** The main buildings of 1-2 High Street are Grade II listed and originally date to the early 19th century. The Ilfracombe parish tithe map of 1840 shows the layout of buildings on the site more or less as they are today, including the outbuilding to the rear. By 1888,

the first-edition Ordnance Survey map shows a number of extensions to the rear of 1-2 High Street and the outbuilding in its current form.

3. AIMS

- 3.1** The aim of the building recording was to establish the site layout, organisation and function of the outbuilding, together with its method of construction, and evidence of internal arrangements, original fixtures/fittings and architectural features.
- 3.2** The aim of the watching brief was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The building recording of the outbuilding was undertaken in accordance with specifications applicable to Level 2 in English Heritage (2006) *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practices*. It comprised a detailed and general photographic record supplemented by a written description.
- 4.2** The watching brief was carried out during ground reduction works within the footprint of the proposed dwelling. The work was carried out using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket and working under intermittent archaeological supervision.
- 4.3** The site was recorded in accordance with the AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC Archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 1*. All plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50 and sections at 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate. All spoil heaps were scanned for displaced finds. All levels relate to nominal values as shown on the architect's drawing (see Fig. 1).

5. RESULTS: HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

5.1 Context

The outbuilding is approached from Arcade Road by a back lane which continues to the west and south to meet the High Street. The northwestern elevation of the building butts directly onto the lane and its southeastern elevation is almost entirely buried in the ground. The building seems always to have been partially terraced into the hillside, but the present ground levels are almost certainly to be the result of levelling up of the gardens at the rear of the High Street houses.

- 5.2** The structure contains no obviously dateable features, but its most likely origin is as a stable serving the houses on the High Street. It may date from the late 18th or early 19th century, and possibly predates most of the other buildings in the area, which appear to be of late Victorian date, reflecting the expansion of the town at that period (Cherry & Pevsner 1989, 499).

5.3 Description

The stable was perhaps formerly larger, but has been reduced to a windowless trapezoidal structure of a single storey only. The walls are constructed of stone rubble

and support a modern flat roof of marine plywood and asphalt on modern joists. Of the earlier roof there is no sign; two cross beams remain, earlier than the present roof structure, but clearly cut into the masonry of the walls. These do not appear to be connected with the present roof structure and may relate to an earlier flat roof. The original building seems likely to have been at least a storey higher.

- 5.4** The northwestern elevation towards the lane is blind, and is constructed of a pale, grey/green limestone pointed with a coarse white lime mortar containing water-rounded gravels and flecks of coal (Plate 2). Some of the surface mortar may represent the remains of render. The wall facing the lane curves around to the southwest, where traces of a blocked opening may be observed (Fig. 1). This opening appears to have been narrowed before it was finally blocked. The doorway was narrowed by the addition of new masonry on a slightly different angle to that of the wall, forming the jambs of the narrowed doorway. The upper part of the eastern jamb incorporates large blocks of quartz, now much obscured by modern pointing in cement. Quartz was popular in 18th and 19th century garden buildings and ornaments and it may be that these blocks originally formed part of some such ornamental feature, or that they may have been set here for decorative effect. The doorway was finally blocked in concrete blocks in the twentieth century.
- 5.5** Oddly, the sequence appears differently when viewed internally and it seems that there are in fact two separate openings, a doorway opening from the building and a separate gateway, at right-angles to this, opening upon the back lane (Fig. 1). The doorway visible from within the building was originally a double doorway in the end wall of the building facing southwest. It has also been partially blocked, to form a narrower doorway with a window alongside, all within the earlier opening and beneath the lintel of the original doorway, which still remains *in situ* (Plate 3). Above the lintel, perforated brick is employed in association with the modern flat roof. The narrow doorway was finally blocked in concrete blocks in the 20th century. This doorway originally opened onto an alley running alongside the southwestern wall of the building which debouched into the back lane through the gateway described above. The alley seems to have run from southeast to northwest along the southwestern boundary of the property, probably linking the High Street with the back lane. The gradual descent of the alley is probably reflected in the boundary wall to the southwest side of the property, which may reflect the original slope of the land prior to any levelling.
- 5.6** In the centre of the north wall is a further doorway, now the sole entrance to the building. This appears to have been cut into the wall and its jambs have been rudely repaired in modern cement. The threshold of this doorway is formed of pale yellow bricks probably dating from the mid-to-late 19th century. In the stonework to either side of the doorway is a series of small sockets, two of which retain the stubs of timbers. The proximity of the lane would appear to preclude the presence of lean-to or other structures to the northwest of the building and there are no corresponding sockets in the rear wall of the building to show that these were joist sockets for timber structures internally. There remains a possibility that the sockets were provided to allow for scaffolding and that these represent a late occurrence of 'putlogs'; however, putlogs would be an unusual feature in a building constructed after 1700, and the northwest wall, which is approximately 0.37m thick, would seem to be too insubstantial to be very early. It may perhaps be conjectured that the building predates the adjacent lane and that it formerly

had timber buildings butting against it which were cleared away when the lane was made.

- 5.7** The northeastern wall of the stable contains a further blocked opening. This is unlikely to be primary, since it opens into an area formerly occupied by stallwork. Its jambs could not be examined in any detail as they are rendered over both internally and externally (Plate 4). The doorway is blocked with concrete blocks laid on their faces, from which we may conclude that this wall is of some thickness, perhaps measuring as much as 0.4m. It may be contemporary with the north-western wall.
- 5.8** The southeastern wall measures as much as 0.5m in thickness at the base of the wall, but tapers upwards to about 0.45m in thickness at the summit where it is truncated, like the other walls of the building, by the modern roof. The greater thickness of this wall may be connected with its role as a revetment for the higher ground to the rear of the building. It is evident that the building was not originally buried to its present depth, because there is a central doorway in the wall (Fig. 2b) and two small, high-level windows on either side of this doorway which have been blocked as a result of the raising of the ground levels. The doorway retains chases for timbers, to allow the fixing of a door frame. It is possible that the doorway originally opened upon the gardens, presumably via a flight of steps. The two windows are small in size and have disturbed jambs, as though they have been cut in. Their small size suggests that they were for ventilation, rather than lighting, though there is little other provision for lighting unless the doorways contained built in windows, or there were high-level windows in the demolished upper parts of the walls. Both windows have been blocked in concrete blocks and perforated bricks.
- 5.9** Beyond the doorway in the southeastern wall is a strange walled recess or alcove (Fig. 2b, Plate 5), the walls of which butt against the walls of the building and which must therefore be of later date than the main structure. The lower parts of these walls are of rendered stonework, stepping upwards to meet the rear of the building. The upper parts of the walls are in later brick. It is possible that the lower parts preserve the remains of an external staircase to the upper floor and that the alcove below this was utilised as a tack room or store. This is perhaps confirmed by the traces of shelving and a recessed cupboard still visible here. Examination of early maps shows that by 1888 a glazed structure had been built over the alcove, presumably supported on the brickwork. The function of this structure remains unknown: the alcove might have been utilised as a light well with a glazed skylight or, alternatively, a garden building such as a cucumber frame or a glazed porch to the room in the upper storey might have been constructed above it.
- 5.10** The floor surfaces have been much disturbed, but some areas of historic flooring survive. In the northeastern section of the building is a 19th century floor of brick paviours or setts, with a drain and traces of two posts (Plate 4). This implies division of this area into two or three stalls, or perhaps two stalls with a passage to the eastern doorway alongside. These stalls were secondary, replacing an earlier set of stalls, the profile of which is preserved in the plaster of the northwestern wall (Plate 6). These stalls do not extend as far southwest as the brick floor and drain, showing that this floor and the stallwork associated with it are later. The remains of stable fixtures in this area include an iron manger, set high upon the wall, and a timber trough, lined with metal, which was fixed to the wall and supported by a short post with a notched end (Plate 4). These features lie across the line of the secondary stalls and presumably relate to a third

phase of reorganization of the stallwork in the late 19th or early 20th century, perhaps when two or three 19th century stalls were replaced by a single loose box.

- 5.11** The central and southwestern parts of the building retain an earlier floor, consisting of beach pebble cobbling, a large section of which is now damaged or missing. It is possible that this represents the earliest form of flooring; however, this could not be established with any certainty.

6. RESULTS: WATCHING BRIEF

- 6.1** The footprint of the dwelling was reduced to a total depth of 2.9m below ground level onto the top of undisturbed shillet natural subsoil (102). The overlying layer sequence comprised 2.5m of mixed made ground (100) comprising dark brown, dark grey and black silt, sand and clay, with frequent-common small-large stones and shale fragments, overlying 0.4m of light yellow brown silt clay subsoil (101) (Fig. 2a).

- 6.2** Two archaeological features were exposed within the base of the reduced building footprint; stone wall F104 and stone drain F107 (Fig. 2b). Wall F104 was northwest to southeast aligned, measured 0.75m wide and survived to a height of 0.25m. It was constructed of large, randomly coursed sub-angular stone blocks (103) which measured 0.10-0.25m in length and were set within a clay bond (Fig. 2c, Plate 7). Drain F107 was similarly northwest to southeast aligned and was 0.65m wide. It comprised two vertical, and parallel, built walls of large coursed shale stones (105), 0.08m thick and forming a 0.3m wide internal chamber which was infilled with loose dark grey silt sand (106). The base of the drain was not exposed (Fig. 2d, Plate 8). The drain was capped with large shale slabs up to 0.65m in length and 0.15m thick. Both the stone wall and drain were cut into subsoil layer (101).

7. THE FINDS

- 7.1** All finds recovered on site have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate, then quantified according to material type within each context. The assemblage has been scanned by context to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented, with this information briefly discussed below. Finds totals by material type are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Finds quantification table, weight in grams (g).

Context	Context type	Pottery			
		Medieval		Post-medieval	
		No	Wt	No	Wt
100	Made ground	1	2	2	94
103	Wall fabric	1	44	1	6
106	Drain infill			1	1
Totals		2	46	4	101

7.2 Medieval pottery

Two fragments of residual medieval pottery were recovered, both North Devon medieval coarseware sherds dating to between AD 1250 and 1450 and manufactured in the Bideford/Barnstaple area. One small abraded body sherd was recovered from the topsoil (100) and the other is a base fragment of a cooking vessel with exterior sooting, that derived from (103), the former stone wall fabric.

7.3 Post-medieval pottery

Four pieces of post-medieval pottery were recovered, ranging from the c.16th/17th century to the 19th/20th century. One residual body sherd fragment of 16th-17th century yellow/green lead-gazed earthenware was recovered from the topsoil (100), along with a rim sherd of c. 18th-19th century North Devon grit-tempered ware with a green/brown lead glaze. Another similar body sherd fragment of 16th-17th century yellow/green lead-glazed earthenware was recovered from 103, the former stone wall and a scrap of 19th-20th century creamware was retrieved from drain fill 106.

8. DISCUSSION

8.1 The stone outbuilding

The stable appears to predate most of the structures in its immediate vicinity; it appears on the Ilfracombe Tithe map of 1840, facing onto a back lane to the rear of the High Street properties. It has not been possible to accurately date the building; however, it is likely that it was constructed in the late 18th or early 19th century, and that it took the form of a three-stall stable, entered through its southwestern wall, with a loft over, perhaps for the accommodation of a groom or other servants.

At some point after the construction of the building an alcove was added to the southeast side of the original building, perhaps to provide a tack room, or to support an external stair to the loft.

In the late 19th century the stable was improved by the replacement of the original stalls with new stallwork, slightly larger than the originals, and with a floor of brick paviours. It is probable that the doorways in the northwest and northeast walls were made at this time, utilising one of the three stalls as a passage.

The 19th century stalls were in their turn altered, perhaps simply by removing one of the secondary stall partitions to create an enlarged stall or loose box served by a single manger and trough. The original entrance in the southwestern wall was partially blocked to form a doorway and window and the gateway to the lane was also narrowed.

In the 20th century the doorway and gateway were finally blocked and the ground raised to the rear of the building, obliterating the alley alongside the building and blocking the windows in the southeastern wall. The upper floor of the building may have been removed and replaced with a flat roof, possibly in order to improve the view from the garden. The building must by this time have become a store or workshop. It is uncertain whether the stallwork was removed at this time, or more recently.

8.2 Archaeological features

Wall F104, which cut centrally across the building footprint, represents a former stone boundary wall, of which little now survives. This is first shown on the first-edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888 and continues to the southeast up to the two properties at 1 and 2 High Street to divide the two rear garden areas. Whilst the boundary wall is likely to post-date the construction of the stable, its relationship with the small alcove (a later addition to the stable) along the southeast facing wall of the outbuilding is less clear

and could not be established on site. Sherds of medieval and early post medieval pottery recovered from the fabric of the wall are most likely residual.

Stone drain F107, located along the western part of the site, is fairly typical in design and are widespread features of the 19th century as a means of diverting waste water away from houses.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1** The stable building at the rear of Nos 1-2 High Street, Ilfracombe is a modest structure which, though severely altered, is yet of some interest as an example of a small domestic stable attached to a large town house. Although it may contain very little fabric of architectural importance, the stable does reveal the progressive decline of horse-powered transport in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was certainly constructed to accommodate at least three horses, but the building seems to have been reconfigured in the late 19th century to house only two. By the late 19th or early 20th century this had been reduced to one.
- 9.2** The curiously convoluted access to the stable down a narrow back lane and then through two doorways at right angles to each other (see 5.8 above) shows that it can never have served as a coach or trap house as well as a stable (any vehicles belonging to the owner must have been kept elsewhere) and, after the redevelopment of the adjacent land and the reduction of the lane to a mere footpath, the building could not feasibly be converted into a garage. It was thus utilised as a store, which happily resulted in the preservation of at least some of its fixtures and historic floor surfaces until the present day.
- 9.3** The boundary wall and stone drain were clearly cut into subsoil layer (101), present at a depth of 2.5m below the existing raised ground level, and both are likely to have been constructed when the stable was still in use as such. It is uncertain how the construction of the wall, however, related to any changes made to the layout of the stable, though it seems likely that the now blocked entrance within the southeast wall would have opened up into the western garden plot, to provide access to and from the house. Sometime during the 20th century, however, a change in the use of the stable block and a desire to establish a more practical, level garden area for 1-2 High Street saw the removal of the boundary wall and abandonment of the drain followed by the subsequent deposition of around 2.5m of made ground.

10. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 10.1** The paper and digital archive and finds are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. They will be deposited at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon under the accession code NDDMS 2009.49.
- 10.2** The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 105338.

11. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The evaluation was commissioned by the site owners Pete and Hazel Izzard. The building recording was carried out by Richard Parker and fieldwork by Richard Sims. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Cain Hegarty. The advice and collaboration of Stephen Reed, Devon Archaeology Officer, is duly acknowledged.

12. SOURCES CONSULTED

Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N., 1989, *The buildings of England: Devon*

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Ordnance Survey 25-inch Devonshire sheet 5.1, surveyed 1888, published 1890, revised 1903, published 1904

Ordnance Survey 1:500 map sheet 5.14, surveyed 1888, published 1889

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ILFRACOMBE

Capstone Point Cave

The Outfalls

AQUARIUM

LB Sta

Chapel

The Benricks Pier

Beaches

Ridge Rocks

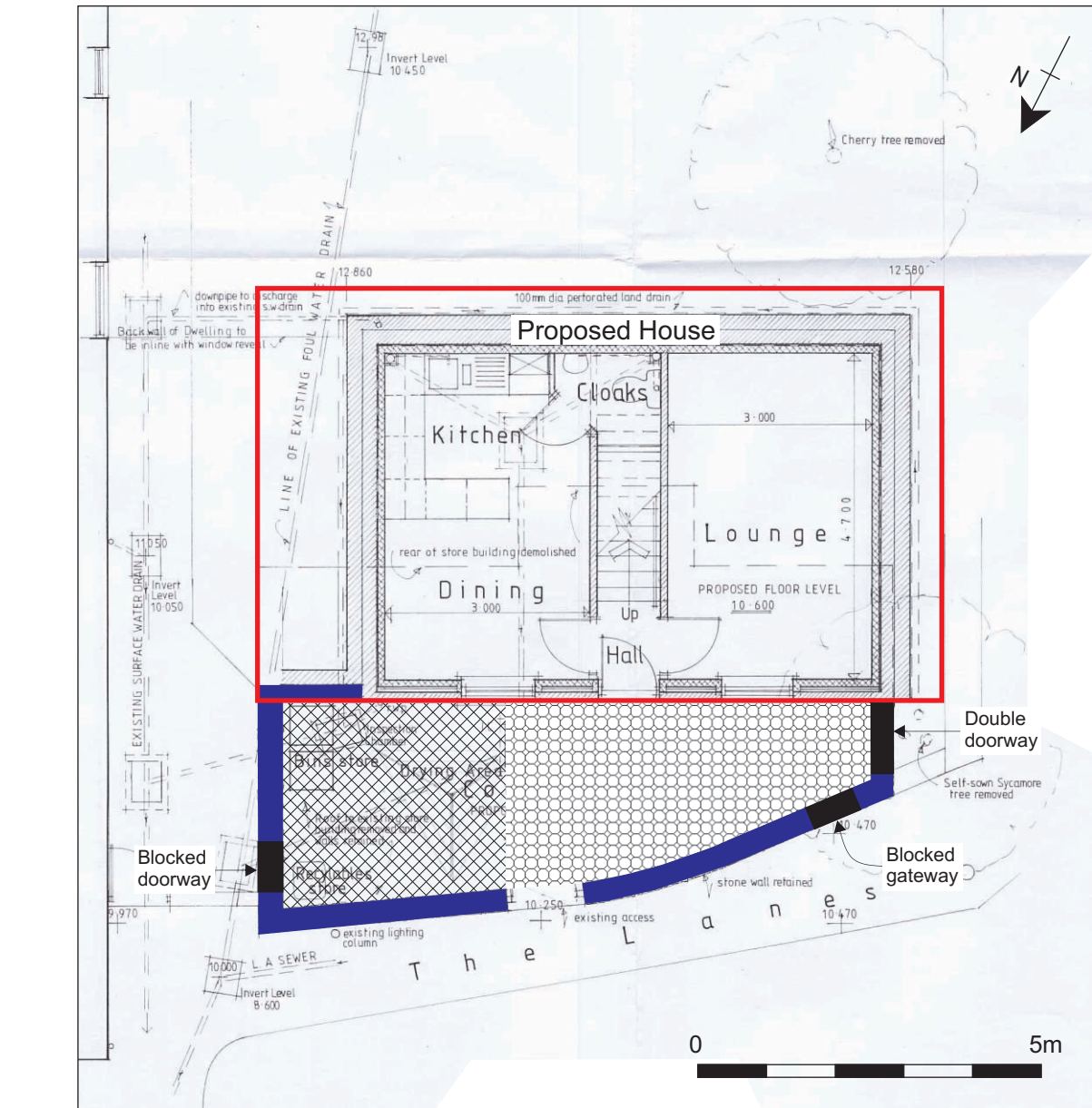
Seven Hills

Torrs Park

College

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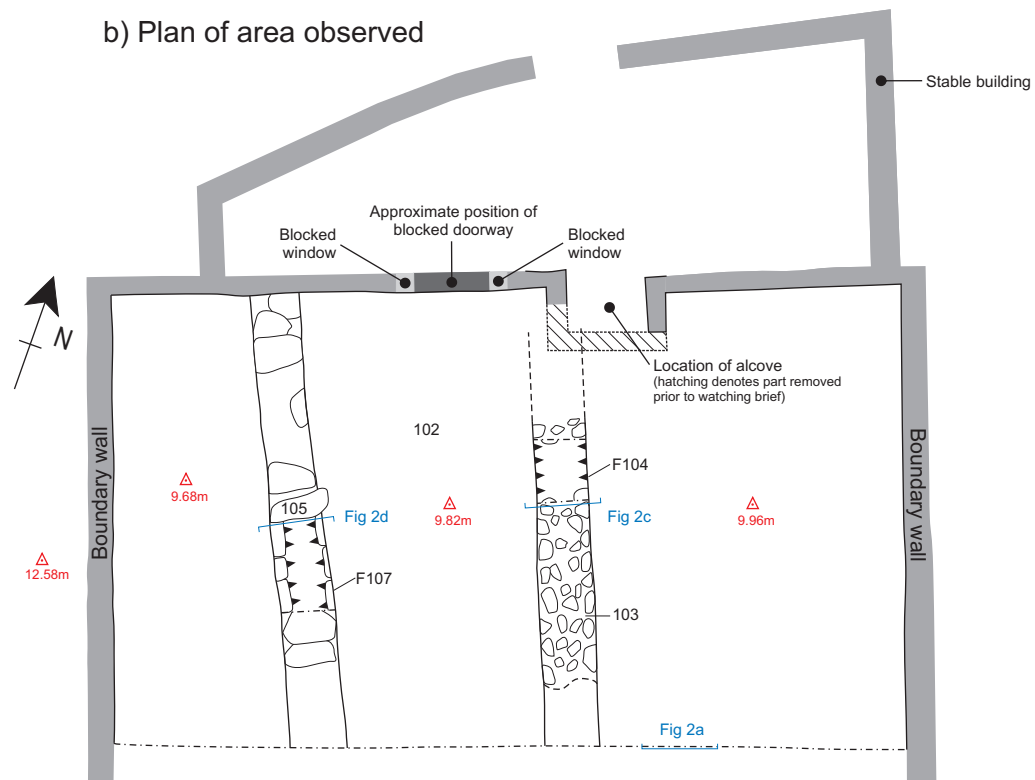
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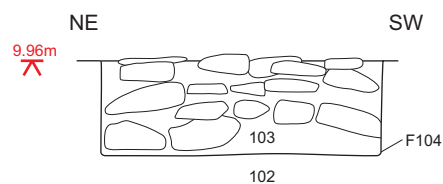
a) Section through complete sequence



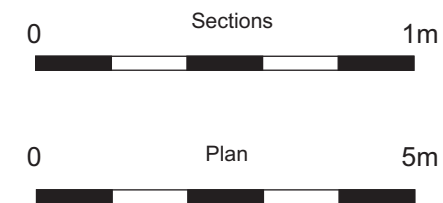
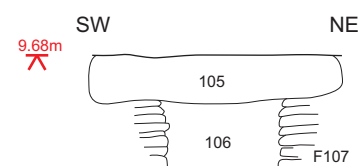
b) Plan of area observed



c) Section F104



d) Section F107



PROJECT

Land to the rear of 1-2 High Street, Ilfracombe

TITLE

Fig 2. Plan and sections



Plate 1. General view of site, facing northwest



Plate 2. Northwest external elevation of stable, view to south (Scale 2m)



Plate 3. Blocked doorway, southwest internal elevation, view to southwest (Scale 2m)



Plate 4. Northeast internal elevation showing blocked doorway, floor surface and original stable fittings, view to northeast (Scale 1m)



Plate 5. Southeast internal elevation showing alcove, view to south (Scale 2m)



Plate 6. Northeast internal elevation showing evidence of stalls, view to northeast (Scale 1m)



Plate 7. Stone wall F104, view to southeast
(Scale 0.25m)



Plate 8. Stone drain F107, view to northwest
(Scale 1m)



Plate 9. The recorded layer sequence, view to southeast
(Scale 1m)

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