

# Guildhall Square Car Park, Tavistock, Devon

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Tavistock Abbey: Scheduled Monument no. 29679

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Prepared by Peter Stead

On behalf of  
South Hams District Council

Document No: ACD421/2/0

Date: May 2012



AC archaeology

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# Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

<b>Civil Parish &amp; District:</b> Tavistock	<b>National Grid Reference</b> SX 4820 7440	<b>Number:</b>
<b>Subject:</b> Guildhall Square Car Park, Tavistock, Devon: Results of an archaeological watching brief		<b>Photo attached?</b> Yes
<b>Planning Application no:</b> N/A	<b>Recipient museum:</b> Plymouth City Museum	
<b>OASIS ID:</b> 125113	<b>Museum Accession no:</b> 2012.8	
<b>Contractor's reference number/code:</b>  ACD421	<b>Dates fieldwork undertaken:</b>  23 April 2012	
<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>A watching brief was carried out during the excavation by South Hams District Council of two trenches, positioned to locate a suspected leaking water pipe serving the Guildhall Square Car Park public toilets (Fig. 1). The site lies within the 'Great Court' of Tavistock Abbey, which was founded by the Benedictine Order in 974AD. The entire abbey precinct is designated as a Scheduled Monument (no. 29679) and consequently Scheduled Monument Consent for the works was required. The watching brief was carried out as a condition of that consent.</p> <p>Guildhall Square lies within the centre of the historic town at a height of approximately 81m aOD. The underlying geology is basaltic lava and tuff overlain by alluvium of clay, silt, sand and gravel.</p> <p>Recording during the installation of a sewer pipe across Abbey Place in 1997, approximately 30m to the west of the site, established that medieval ground level lies at a depth of 2.3m (78.6m aOD) below the present road level (Stead 1999). The ground level was raised during two periods of remodelling of the town centre in the 18th and 19th centuries. Wood's plan of 1842 shows that the site at that time was the location of Tavistock cattle market.</p> <p><b>Results</b></p> <p><b>Trench 1</b> (Fig. 2, plan and section, Plates 1 and 2) This trench was L shaped and measured 1.75m (E-W) by 1.75m (N-S). It was 0.55m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.25m.</p> <p>A cobbled surface F107 consisting of large and tightly packed water-worn stones, was exposed within a small area (measuring 0.42m by 0.50m) at the base of the trench. The surface was covered with a very thin (10mm) spread of clean lime mortar (106). Overlying deposits comprised a sequence of three mixed slate and clay layers (in ascending order 105, 104, 103) representing a single episode of levelling and raising of ground level. All of these layers were similar in composition although the base layer in the sequence, 105, contained a higher proportion of sandy loam: all contained mortar and charcoal flecks and occasional red brick fragments. A single sherd of 19th-century blue and white transfer-printed pottery was recovered from layer 104. Overlying layer 103 was a thin layer of dark brown sandy clay (102) that served as bedding material for a well preserved cobbled surface (F101). The cobbles had been cut through by a modern service trench (F108) and lay directly beneath the tarmac car park surface (100).</p> <p><b>Trench 2</b> (Fig. 2, plan and section) This trench was aligned N-S adjacent to the pavement outside the toilet block and measured 1.8m long x 0.55m wide. It was excavated to a depth of 0.52m at which point it was abandoned, as it was clear that the water pipe was not present.</p> <p>The deposit sequence was essentially the same as that seen in Trench 1. A cobbled surface (F201) was exposed directly beneath the tarmac (200), set into a thin bedding layer of sandy clay (202). Underlying deposits consisted of mixed clay and slate levelling material (203) approximately 0.20m thick over a similar layer (204) that contained lenses of coarse gravel. No finds were recovered from this trench.</p>		

**Discussion**

The excavations did not extend into medieval or dissolution deposits and have therefore had no impact upon the abbey remains.

The depth at which cobbled surface F107 occurs (79.4m aOD) is consistent with the late 18th-century ground level which resulted from the first major remodelling of Tavistock town centre. This development was largely financed by the Dukes of Bedford and saw the construction in 1763 of Abbey Bridge over the River Tavy some 60m to the southwest of the excavations.

The layers of mixed clay and slate that overlie the cobbled surface and which represent the bulk of the excavated material have been dated by the pottery evidence to the 19th century and are undoubtedly associated with the subsequent remodelling of the town centre in the 1820's, which resulted in the formation of Bedford Square and Abbey Place. The cobbled surface exposed beneath the car park tarmac is likely to relate to the 19th-century cattle market.

No evidence for the leaking water pipe was found, and no further investigations are currently proposed.

**Reference**

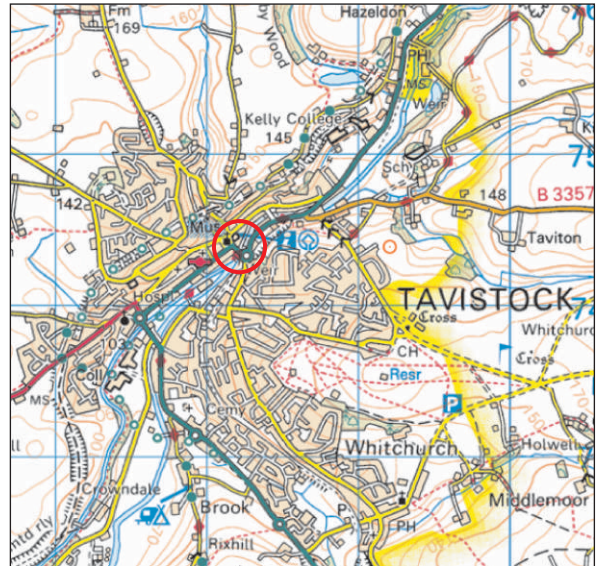
Stead, P.M., 1999, 'Archaeological investigations at Tavistock Abbey 1997-1999', Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society, **57**, 149-203.

**Recorder:**

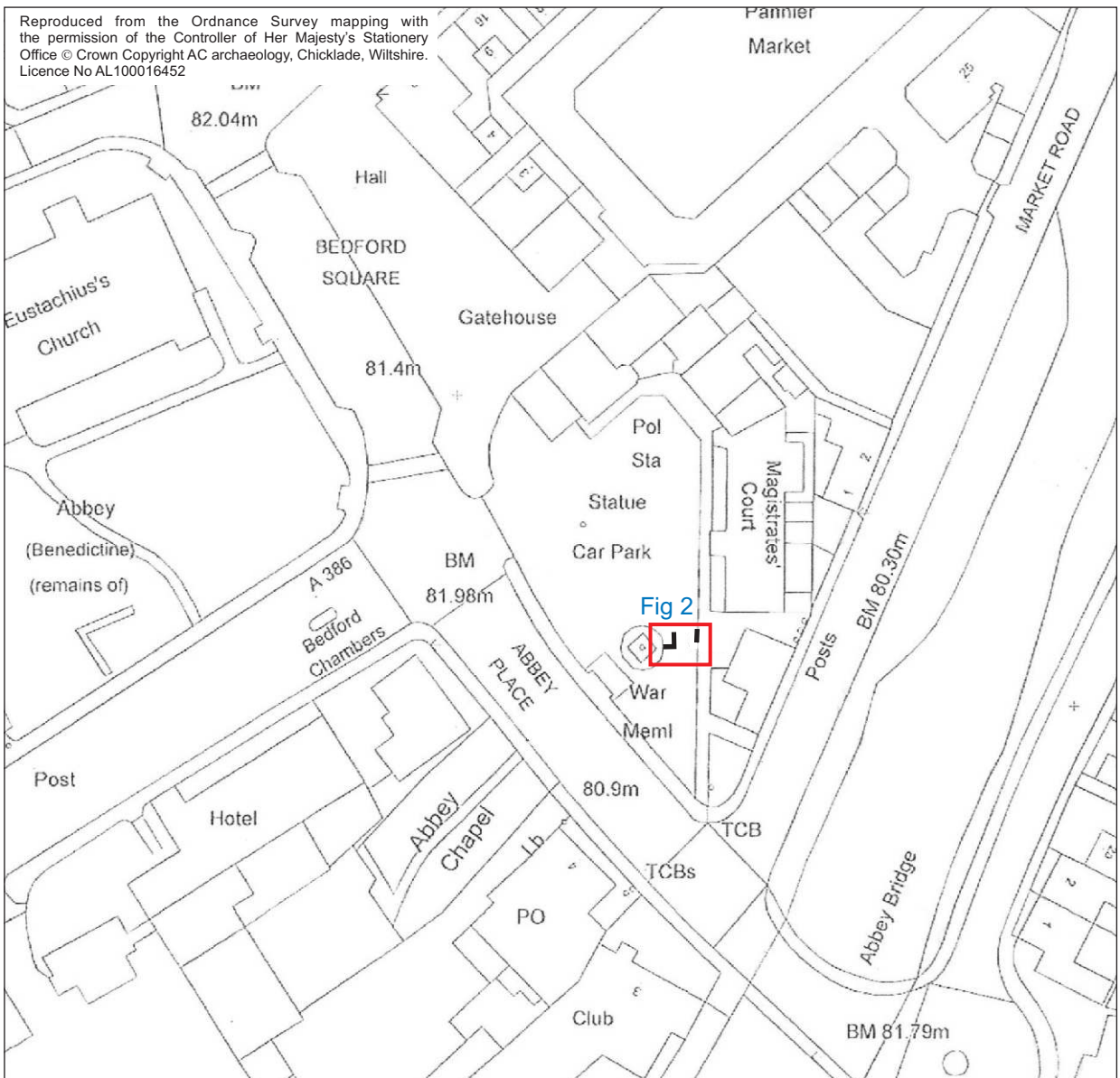
Peter Stead, AC archaeology

**Date sent to HER:**

23 May 2012



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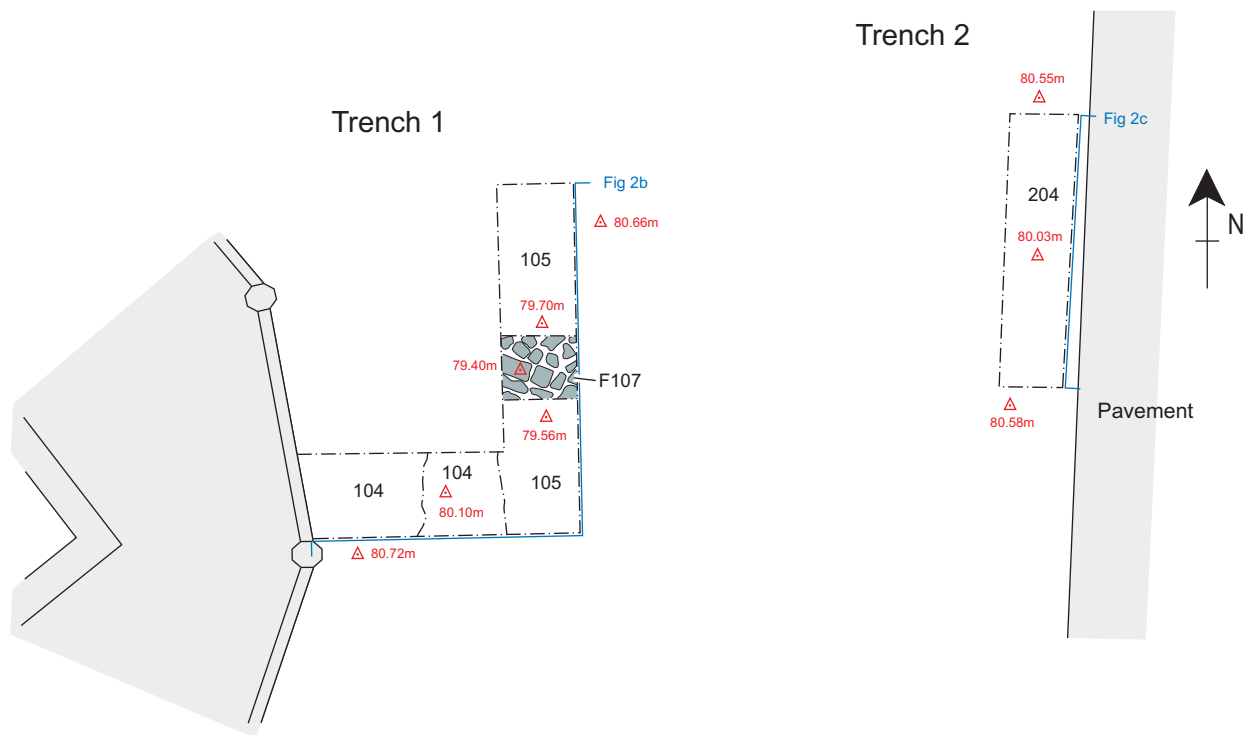
Guildhall Square, Tavistock, Devon

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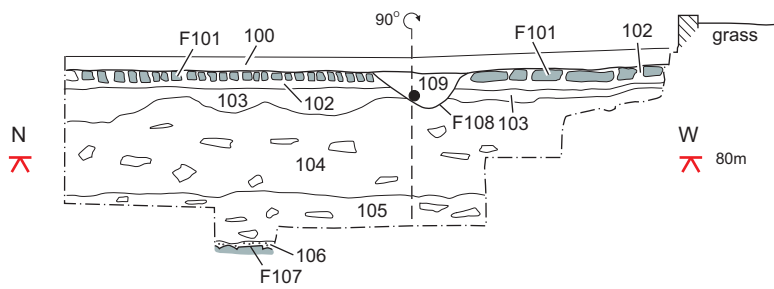
Fig. 1: Location of site



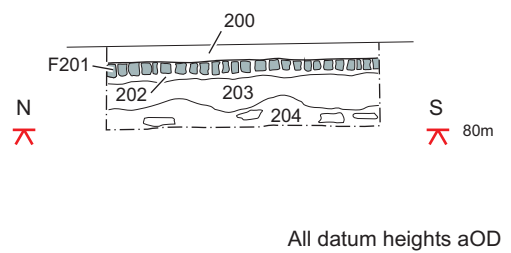
a) Plan of trenches 1 and 2



b) Trench 1: section



c) Trench 2: section



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Fig. 2: Trenches 1 and 2: plan and sections





Plate 1: Trench 1 under excavation. View to northeast



Plate 2: Trench 1, showing late 18th-century cobbled surface (F107). View to the north. Scale 1m

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