

Nos 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter

NGR SX 92652 93185

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation and historic building recording

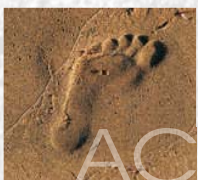
Exeter City Council planning permission ref. no. 10/1906/03, condition no. 7

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On behalf of
Opco Construction

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archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological trench evaluation and historic building recording were undertaken by AC archaeology during April and July 2012 at Nos 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter prior to and during construction of a new mixed-use development. An archaeological assessment and historic building appraisal had highlighted the site's proximity to a Roman road and the location of Romano-British cremations. The site lies within a medieval and later suburb of the city and close to the line of a medieval aqueduct. The present buildings were of early 19th-century and later date.

The evaluation demonstrated that any archaeological deposits at the front of the site had been truncated when the early 19th-century houses were constructed. No features were exposed and no finds recovered. A record of No. 69 was made and it was concluded that the building formed part of a group with Nos 70-72. A contemporary coal store was also recorded, along with a later rear outbuilding.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation and historic building recording were undertaken in April and July 2012 by AC archaeology during development of the former Stoneman & Bowker store at Nos 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter (SX 92652 93185). The development involves the demolition of the existing retail buildings, and their replacement with a new build mixed use development, comprising student accommodation and a retail unit. No. 69 will be retained and refurbished. The site lies at a height of approx. 50m aOD and the underlying geology comprises sandstone of the Whipton Formation. The investigations were commissioned by Opco Construction, in response to a condition (No. 7) of planning permission (Exeter City Council No. 10/1906/03) granted for the work, and were undertaken in accordance with a project design (James 2011) approved as the "written scheme of archaeological work" required under that condition.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A detailed archaeological assessment and building appraisal has previously been undertaken of the proposed redevelopment site by Exeter Archaeology (Manning and Passmore 2010). (Note that when the assessment was prepared it was proposed that all buildings on the site would be demolished. Since then the proposals have changed and No. 69 is to be retained.) The assessment established that the site lies within the southern part of the St Sidwell's Conservation Area, on the northwest side of Sidwell Street, which is believed to have originated as a Roman road. This road may have formed the principal route into the eastern gate of the legionary fortress and later, the main road leading into the east gate of the subsequent Roman and Medieval city, some 330m to the southwest. Traces of a compacted metalled surface, some 0.50m below ground surface were recorded during a watching brief at Nos 149-153 Sidwell Street. A Medieval aqueduct is known to have once run down Sidwell Street into the east gate of the city. It was part of the water supply for the Blackfriars precinct, which was completed by 1259. The site also lies within an area identified as potentially containing a Romano-British cemetery. During the 19th century cremations were recorded as having been discovered in the York Road/Well Street/Well Lane area. While the potential for buried archaeological deposits is therefore considered to be high, no archaeological deposits were identified on the site or in the vicinity during recent monitoring. However, it is also worth noting that the present buildings have been terraced into the natural slope, which rises gradually from south to north, away from the street frontage. Although this terracing will have

removed any buried remains towards the rear of the property, there was a possibility of some remains surviving close to the street frontage, where there is less obvious evidence of truncation by terracing.

2.2 The proposed redevelopment site is located within the ancient parish of St Sidwell, which derives its name from St Sidwella, who according to tradition was martyred and her body interred within the parish church. By 1050 the church had been endowed with St Sidwell's Fee, an area that encompassed most of the parish. Sidwell Street is believed to have been built up during the 12th century. Hooker's plan of 1590 shows the street frontage occupied by buildings. Many of the original buildings are likely to have been destroyed during the English Civil War and subsequently rebuilt.

3. AIMS

3.1 The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

- Establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains, and establish whether or not any further archaeological work was required to record them;
- Determine the extent, condition, nature, character, date and significance of any archaeological remains encountered, in particular features associated with the Roman road, cemetery, the Medieval aqueduct, and Medieval and early Post-Medieval deposits/remains associated with the pre-Civil War suburb;
- Establish the nature of the activity on the site;
- Recover any environmental evidence from archaeological features;
- Identify any artefacts relating to the occupation or use of the site;
- Provide further information on the archaeology of Exeter from any archaeological remains encountered; and
- Report the results of the above.

3.2 The aim of the building recording was to identify and record any earlier fabric or original features present in the upper floors of No. 69, the party walls and the 19th-century gymnasium building to the rear of No. 69. These areas were not recorded during the earlier assessment.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The investigations were carried out in line with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (James 2011).

4.2 Evaluation

Following demolition of Nos 70-73 and removal of the underlying concrete slab, four trenches, each measuring 1.6m wide, were excavated across the site in the positions shown on Fig. 1. Due to the presence of stockpiled demolition rubble, which occupied the entire site to the north of the trenches, the average trench length achieved was 9m, rather than the 10m specified in the project design. All excavation was carried out under direct supervision of the site archaeologist, using a tracked machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation continued until the top of natural subsoil was reached at which point the base and one side of each trench was cleaned by hand.

All deposits revealed were recorded in line with the project design and using the standard AC archaeology *pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic

and photographic records in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 1* (Revised April 2005).

4.3 Building recording

A record of the buildings outlined in section 3.2 was prepared. This comprised a written and photographic record to level 2 as set out in English Heritage's 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practices*. The photographic record was prepared using a high quality digital camera. A photographic register was compiled and a scale used for all photographs where appropriate. The record was prepared prior to demolition, but after some initial stripping out had taken place to investigate the fabric of the buildings.

5. RESULTS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (Figs 1-2, Plates 1-5)

5.1 Throughout all four trenches, crushed modern brick and concrete rubble was found to directly overlie natural subsoil. The subsoil comprised mixed sandy clay and gravel and was encountered at between 0.15m and 0.35m below ground level (48.39m aOD and 48.07m aOD respectively) within Trenches 1-3, and at 0.5m below ground level (47.96m aOD) within Trench 4. No archaeological features or stratified deposits were present. A number of irregular modern intrusions (F102, F202, F203, F302, F303, F402 and F403) were identified within each of the trenches and all contained brick, concrete rubble and mixed re-deposited clay. No pre-modern finds were recovered. The deposit sequences of each trench are described in Table 1 below and representative sections of each trench are shown on Fig. 2.

Trench	Context no.	Depth below ground level	Interpretation
Trench 1	9.1m long x 1.6m wide.		
	100	0-0.15m	Bedding for floor slab
	101	0.15m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 2	9.1m long x 1.6m wide		
	200	0-0.35m	Bedding for floor slab
	201	0.35m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 3	9m long x 1.6m wide		
	300	0-0.15m	Bedding for floor slab
	301	0.15m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 4	8.8m long x 1.6m wide		
	400	0-0.5m	Bedding for floor slab
	401	0.5m+	Natural subsoil

Table 1: trench descriptions.

6. RESULTS: HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING (Plates 6-14)

6.1 No. 69 Sidwell Street

At the entrance to the property is a small lobby giving access to the shop and a corridor. The latter leads to a small rear courtyard and a staircase to the upper floors (latterly No. 69a). Over the corridor is an arch, and there is a second arch with a glazed light over at the base of the stairs. The main elevations are constructed of brick; the street elevation is laid in Flemish bond with alternating red and blue/grey burnt bricks used for the stretchers and headers respectively. The partitions are timber-framed with a mixture of brick nogging as well as lath and plaster, covered by modern cladding. The rear room of the shop contains a blocked doorway in its rear

elevation. There is an under-stairs cupboard with a 2-panelled door set within a double ovolo-moulded frame (Plate 6).

The stairs are continuous from the ground floor to the attic and are furnished with turned newel posts, slender balusters and a ramped handrail (Plate 7).

Between the ground and first floors the stairs are separated by a small landing, from which there is a rear corridor leading to a toilet. The corridor is lit by a sash window with turned horns. The only other historic feature is a cupboard set into the north wall of the toilet.

The partitions of the first and second floors are timber frames, covered with lath and plaster. The east elevation is also timber framed, and abuts the plastered masonry of No. 68, indicating that no. 69 was constructed later. A large first-floor landing provides access into the two original rooms – a large front room and a smaller rear room. The rooms have six-panelled doors. The original large front room has been subdivided into two with inserted doorways connecting the spaces. The rear room contains a large fireplace opening in its east elevation flanked by two cupboards in the southern recess (Plate 8). The front room has a blocked fireplace, again in the east elevation. It also retains a picture rail and a two-part cornice rail. The upper section has bead moulding, whilst the lower part has necklace beads and what appear to be leaves (Plate 9). The room has sash windows with turned horns, plainer than elsewhere in the building.

The second floor layout is the same as the original first floor, with a large front room spanning the width of the building and a smaller rear room, although a large opening has been inserted between the two rooms. The original doors have two panels, and the sash windows are hornless. The front room has a fireplace in its east elevation; its cast-iron grate has been removed. There are cupboards in the recess between the fireplace and the front elevation. Above the cupboards is a cornice with both vertical and ovolo mouldings (Plate 10). The only historic feature in the rear room is a blocked fireplace, again in the east elevation.

The attic is above the eaves line of No. 68, and the gable elevation is timber framed with slate hanging. The attic staircase is lit by a window with a small bottom-opening light. A small landing gives access to a front room, and a small rear room. The front room is lit by sash windows with flat chamfered horns in a large dormer opening. One window is divided from the others by a big ovolo-moulded mullion that supports a boxed-in tie beam. Elsewhere, a single purlin with ovolo-moulded edges projects below the ceiling (Plate 11). Other features include a 4-panelled door, a metal vent in the eastern chimney stack and a light rose in the ceiling.

The south room has been converted into a kitchen and a toilet. The only historic fittings are the skirting board and a light rose in the ceiling.

The roof comprises principal rafters with secondary smaller rafters supported on a king post. The slate-covering is supported on a ridge purlin and side purlins.

6.2 Coal cellar behind No. 69 Sidwell Street

A street frontage level this coal cellar (Plate 12) comprises two rooms (as depicted on the 1876 and 1891 Ordnance Survey maps; Manning and Passmore 2010, Figs 6-7) with a small lobby. The outer face is constructed of brick. This is a re-facing of the original two-roomed rubble breccia structure incorporating an additional lobby and a rebuilt south elevation. The east elevation incorporates a coal chute (Plate 13). The

ceilings of the two rooms are brick vaulted, but with a sloping area of lath and plaster inside the coal chute. The east room has a concrete floor, whilst the west room has an earlier brick surface. In the southeast corner of the east room are the remains of a small stove. This may have heated the room/s above.

The first-floor, at the level of the rear outbuildings, originally contained two rooms. One of these is the mid-level toilet of No. 69 described above. The other room has been demolished and replaced with a larger modern storeroom. The only historic fabric is some rotten timber framing at the southwest corner. The remaining historic fabric has been heavily truncated by the insertion of services from the adjacent toilet, and repairs to the party walls.

6.3 Gymnasium

No new observations were made in the western rear outbuilding. In the eastern building, limited stripping out exposed red brick walls throughout incorporating piers that support the roof trusses. These comprise principal rafters with high-level cellars secured by steel ties (Plate 14). There is an additional diagonal steel tie below the collar fixed to the rafters. Above the collar is an open C-shaped strut providing additional structural support. Below the roof is pine cladding, which is supported on three rows of back purlins supported on cleats. The collars and lower ends of the rafters are chamfered.

In the northwest corner is an additional pier with a high-level vent. This may indicate the position of a stove or fireplace below.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The evaluation

The exposure of natural subsoil directly beneath the bedding material for the recently removed concrete floor slab demonstrates that the site had been subject to a significant degree of terracing prior to the construction of the most recent buildings, which has resulted in the removal of any archaeological deposits that might have been present. The degree of truncation is likely to be greater to the rear of the site where the topography rises and a number of 19th- and 20th-century buildings have been terraced into the hillside. This concrete floor slab and associated bedding was associated with the conversion of the buildings into a showroom in the 20th century.

Although it had been identified that the site occupies a favourable position for a Roman cemetery, and that discoveries of apparent cremation urns within this area were reported in the 19th century, no evidence for burials within the site has been found. The complete absence of post-Roman deep-dug features such as rubbish pits is not surprising given that the Sidwell Street frontage is thought to have been built up from the 12th century. Such features would have been located outside the original building footprints to the rear, and will have been removed by the terracing for the later 19th- and 20th-century buildings in that area.

7.2 The historic building recording

No. 69 Sidwell Street is one of a number of early 19th-century buildings on the north side of Sidwell Street; the adjacent Nos 70-73 were demolished as part of the development. The arrangement of architectural features in the party wall between Nos 69 and 70 indicates they were probably part of a contemporary development, although the street frontage of No. 69 was grander. The building is later than No. 68.

The ground floor had been converted into a shop, and although the first floor had been altered, original architectural fittings survived here as well as on the second floor. As with the adjacent buildings, the attic space was also utilised from the outset.

The coal cellar was the only such feature to have survived the 20th-century alterations to the complex. The original layout and function of the rear first-floor structure is not known. The building had been rebuilt and extended with the addition of a lobby, probably in the early 20th century.

8. OASIS ENTRY AND ARCHIVE

8.1 An entry to the OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological investigationS) database has been completed, and has the identifying code 132796.

8.2 The paper and digital archive and finds are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, in Unit 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, Nr Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, but will ultimately be deposited under the relevant accession number at the RAMM, Exeter, at the earliest in 2013 when the current museum non-acceptance policy will be reviewed. A temporary reference number from the museum is 11/7.

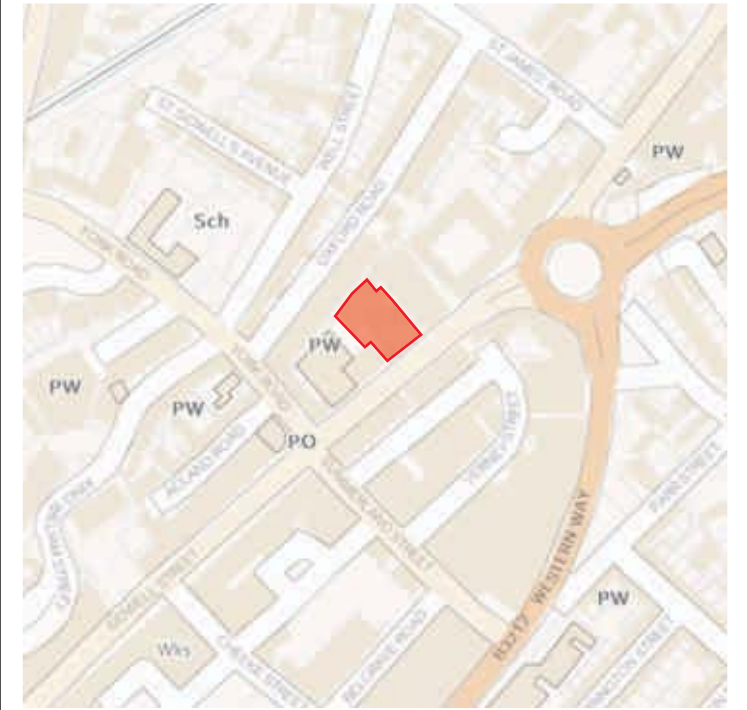
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

9.1 The project was commissioned by Opco Construction, and was monitored on behalf of the city council by their Archaeology Officer, Andrew Pye. The fieldwork was undertaken by Peter Stead and Naomi Hughes (evaluation) and Andrew Passmore (historic building recording). The report was prepared by Andrew Passmore and Peter Stead, with the illustrations prepared by Sarnia Blackmore and Elisabeth Patkai.

10. REFERENCES

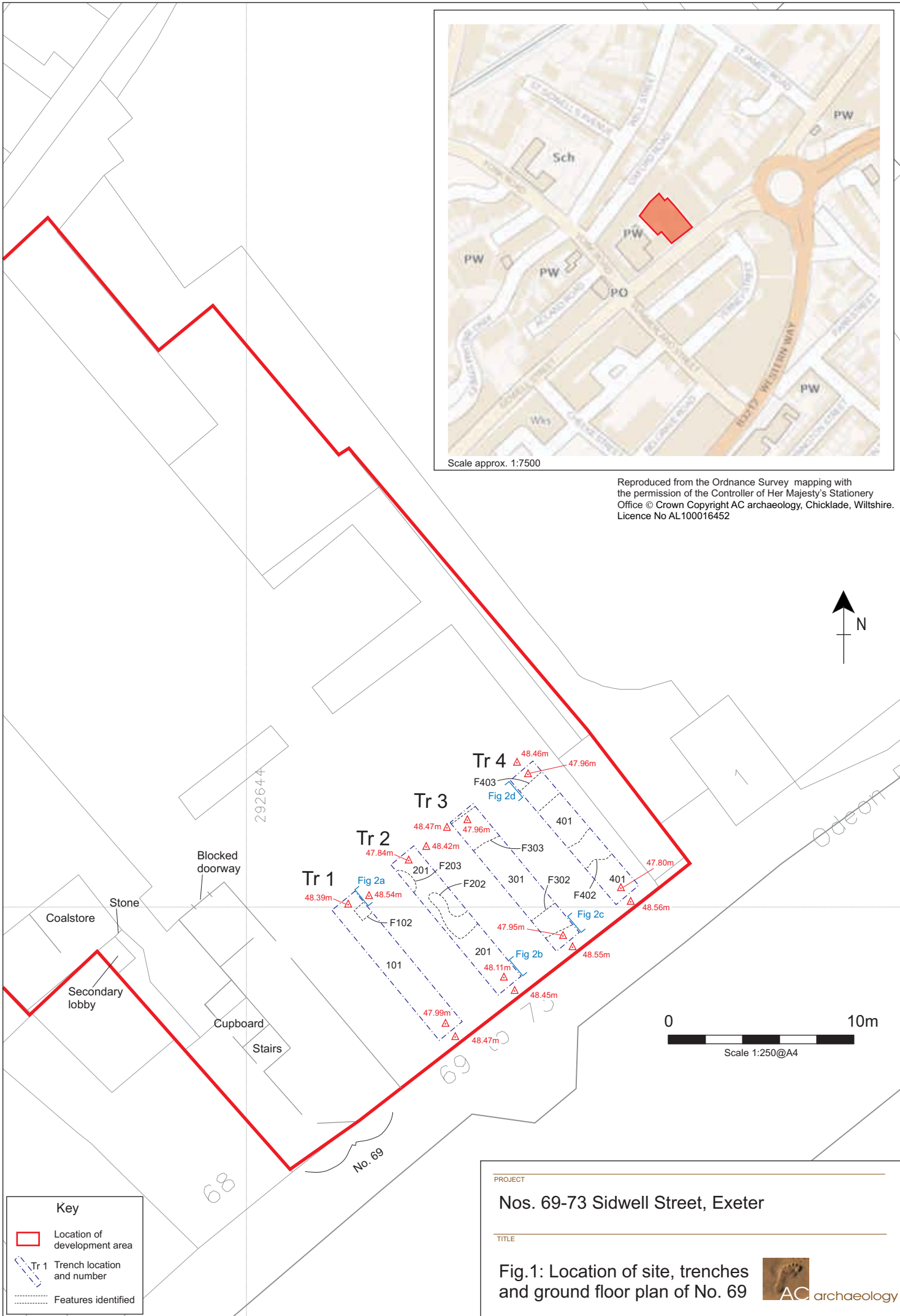
James, T., 2011, *Nos 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter (NGR SX 92652 93185) Project Design for a scheme of archaeological investigations Exeter City Council planning permission ref. no. 10/1906/03, condition no. 7*, AC archaeology document number **ACD303/1/2**.

Manning, P., and Passmore, A.J., 2010, *Archaeological assessment and building appraisal of 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter, Devon*, Exeter Archaeology Report No. **10.49**.



Scale approx. 1:7500

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Key

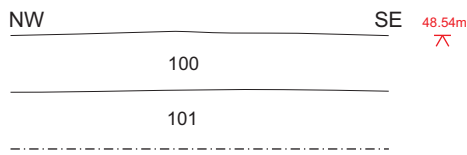
- Location of development area
- Tr 1 Trench location and number
- Features identified

PROJECT
Nos. 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter

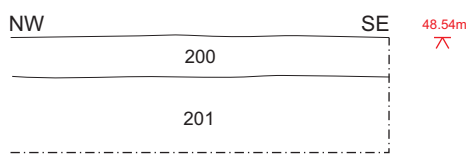
TITLE
Fig.1: Location of site, trenches and ground floor plan of No. 69



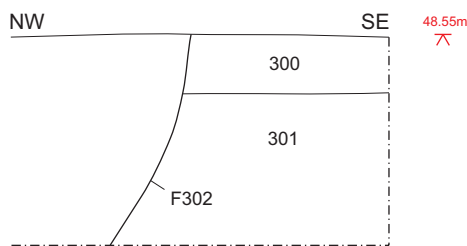
a) Trench 1, west-facing section



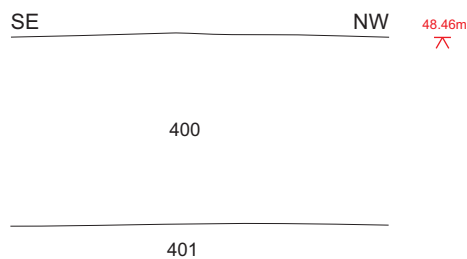
b) Trench 2, west-facing section



c) Trench 3, west-facing section



d) Trench 4, east-facing section



PROJECT

Nos. 69-73 Sidwell Street, Exeter

TITLE

Fig.2: Trenches 1 - 4,
representative sections





Plate 1: Trench 1, general view looking from the northwest. Scale 1m.



Plate 2: Trench 2, general view looking from the northwest. Scale 1m.



Plate 3: Trench 3, general view looking from the southeast. Scale 1m.



Plate 4: Trench 4, general view looking from the northwest. Scale 1m.



Plate 5: General view of site looking from the west.



Plate 6: Ground-floor cupboard door, viewed from the south. Scale 1m.



Plate 7: The staircase looking from the southeast towards the first floor. Scale 1m.



Plate 8: First floor, rear room showing fireplace and cupboards, viewed from the southwest. Scale 1m.



Plate 9: First floor, front room, close up of the cornice viewed from the southwest.



Plate 10: Second floor, front room, fireplace and cupboards viewed from the southwest. Scale 1m.



Plate 11: Attic, front room. Scale 1m.



Plate 12: Coal cellar and courtyard viewed from the southeast. Scale 1m.



Plate 13: Coal cellar, showing vaulted ceiling, and coal chute in the east elevation, and stove viewed from the southwest. Scale 1m.



Plate 14: Gymnasium, roof structure viewed from the southeast.

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