

Clare House, Tiverton, Devon

(SS 95495 12779)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Planning ref. Mid Devon District Council 12/01086/FULL

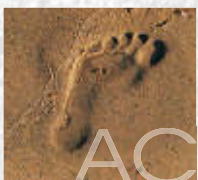
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Prepared by:  
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On behalf of:  
Holdens Ltd

Document No: ACD590/2/1

Date: February 2013



AC archaeology

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## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AC Archaeology in November and December 2012 during groundworks associated with the construction of a new extension to the rear of Clare House Surgery, Clare House, Tiverton, Devon (NGR SS 95495 12779). The property lies within the historic core of the town and was constructed in the early 19th century. It was extended in the later 19th century and in the 1920s or 1930s converted into a surgery. The Town Leat, now culverted, runs through its grounds.*

*The watching brief has shown that there was a considerable depth of garden soil, demolition material and made ground extending across the site, which probably dates to the late 19th-century alterations to the house or to the conversion of the property into the present surgery. Below these deposits there were a number of possible archaeological features. Although un-dated, these features may relate to 18th/19th-century gardening activity, possibly the planting of trees. There was no evidence of earlier activity present, or conclusive evidence for an early line of the leat.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC Archaeology between 27 November and 5 December 2012 during groundworks for a new extension to the rear of Clare House Surgery, Clare House, Tiverton, Devon (SS 95495 12779). The work was commissioned by Holdens Ltd on behalf of the Clare House Surgery and was required Mid Devon District Council under condition 3 of the grant of planning permission (reference 12/01086/FULL). Guidance on the scope of the investigation was provided by the Devon County Historic Environment Team. The location of the site is shown on Fig. 1.
- 1.2 The extension was situated to the rear of the property, which in turn is located on the south side of Newport Street, within the historic medieval and later core of the town, and close to St Peter's Church and Tiverton Castle. The existing land use was gardens and the existing surgery car park. The site lies at a height of 50m aOD.
- 1.3 The underlying geology across the site comprises Permian sandstone of the Exeter group.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Rectory of Tiverton was anciently divided into four portions, named Pitt, Tidcome, Priors and Clare, each of which had its incumbent. It has been suggested that the site of the house was glebe land allocated to the Clare portion of the parish and that the present building may occupy the site of the parsonage of Clare portion (Kent 2012, 4). The parsonage, along with 120 houses in Newport Street and St Peter's Street, is reputed to have been levelled to provide a clear field of fire during a Civil War siege of Tiverton Castle in the 17th century (Gillard *et. al.* 2009, 8). Traces of early buildings may remain below ground, as has been established by excavation of the adjacent site (*Ibid.*), but no fabric obviously earlier than the early 19th-century is now visible in the present structure. If the present building was ever occupied as a parsonage, this use had ceased by the mid-19th century, when White's *Devon* records it as being occupied by William Hole Esq.; the incumbent of Clare portion at that time being the Revd. J. D. Lloyd, M.A., then residing in Bridge Street (White

1850, 310, 316) (There is unfortunately no apportionment associated with the 1842 tithe map to provide earlier information on the property's owner/occupant). The house was converted into a surgery in either 1923 (Kent 2012, 7) or 1932 (*ibid.*, 2).

- 2.2** Clare house was formerly set within large landscaped grounds, forming an inverted 'L' shape, bounded by the gardens of houses on Peter Street to the west and on Newport and Bampton Streets to the east. The property extended as far south as the cattle market. Historic map evidence from Tozer's map of c.1790 and William Richard and Sons' map of 1843 shows that the Town Leat from Castle Street, formerly Frog Street, at one time ran diagonally across the plot. The leat was later diverted down the eastern side of the plot (and perhaps made into an ornamental garden feature) during the early 19th century. This alteration may have been made in the context of the construction of the present building. The leat was reconfigured again, less picturesquely, in the later 19th century and is now culverted. A new access road to the market car park now runs along the eastern side of the plot; the southern and eastern parts of the gardens are either alienated or occupied as hard standing and only a small part immediately to south of the house remains as lawn. It is highly likely that the earlier course of the Town Leat runs through this lawn area, which forms part of the development site. Service buildings relating to the house, also now alienated from it and forming a private dwelling known as 'Clare Corner', lie to the west.
- 2.3** An historic building appraisal of Clare house has been prepared (Parker 2012). This concluded that Clare House was constructed in the early 19th century, and by 1889 had been extended and altered. The residence was converted into a surgery in the early 20th century, and this change was sympathetic to the historic fabric and fittings. The excavation of two geotechnical pits was also monitored (and reported in the same document) and this demonstrated that within the garden of the house only 19th-century soils were present overlying natural deposits. It was suggested that this may be due to terracing and landscaping associated with the construction of Clare House.

### **3. AIMS**

- 3.1** The aim of the watching brief was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological artefacts, features and deposits associated with the historic settlement of Tiverton across the area affected by the development.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1** The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of investigation prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2012). The monitored groundworks comprised the machine excavation of seven 1m<sup>2</sup> foundation pads for the compound cabins (A-G), followed by a general ground reduction across the site and the machine excavation of foundation trenches for the extension. Some of the compound cabin foundation pads were up to 1.70m deep, and were not entered for safety reasons, though any archaeological deposits present were recorded from the top of these trenches.
- 4.2** All features and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard 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*. Detailed sections or plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate, and all site levels relate to Ordnance Datum.

## **5. RESULTS (Figs 2-3; Plates 1-4)**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The general recorded layer sequence observed across the site comprised 0.20m of topsoil/garden soil (100), over 0.30m of subsoil (101), which in-turn overlaid a 0.40m deep deposit (102), which contained slate, brick and mortar fragments. This was interpreted during the watching brief on the test pits as being of early 19th-century date but on the basis of present observation may relate to later activity on the site, perhaps the construction of the 19th-century extensions. Prior to the foundation trenches being excavated, this overlying material was removed by machine, under archaeological supervision, to a depth of 0.90m. It was from this depth that the foundation trenches were excavated (Plate 1). Natural gravels (106) were exposed in all of the foundation trenches.

No finds were recovered from any of the archaeological features or deposits described below, and none were retained from the overlying deposits.

### **5.2 Deposit 105**

Below layer (102) was a 0.20m deep buried soil horizon 104, which appeared to be a subsoil layer. This overlaid a mixed deposit (105) consisting predominantly of silty clay and occasional stones. This deposit appeared to be derived from mainly natural material, although since this overlaid archaeological features (see 5.4 below), it may represent the prolonged turning of the soil through horticultural activity.

### **5.3 Cobbled surface F103 (Plates 2 and 3)**

In the centre of the site, below deposit 102 were the remains of a former cobbled yard surface. This surface (F103) consisted of a single course of well set cobbles up to 0.12-0.20m long, bonded with a silty clay matrix. This surface was heavily truncated, although its form was determinable. The cobbled area measured roughly 3m in length by 0.5m wide, forming a curved section, with edging stones on the western side. Due to the high level of truncation it was hard to determine if the surface originally formed a yard surface or a pathway. A further area of cobbles was exposed closer to Clare House adjacent to the location of the compound cabins.

### **5.3 Negative cut features visible within the foundation trenches**

A total of six features were recorded within the exposed during the excavation of the foundation trenches. The majority of these only appeared in section so their form and function remained unclear.

Feature F108, measured 2.00m wide by up to 1m deep. It appeared to be a large pit with near vertical sides, and contained two fills (109 and 110). Both the fills contained material similar to the surrounding natural, and no finds were recovered. This feature cut through a stonier variation (111) of the natural in this area.

Feature F112 measured a minimum of 2.40m wide by a minimum of 0.90m deep. It was irregularly shaped with steep sides, and contained two fills (113 and 114), both of which were sterile and homogenous deposits.

Feature F115 measured 2.94m wide by a minimum of 0.60m deep. It had steep sides and contained a single mid red clay fill (116).

To the far southwest corner of the site, a 5m long section of the foundation trench exposed in section three separate features (Plate 4). All three appeared to be of similar nature, size and fills. The eastern feature (F123) was only partially exposed,

and measured a minimum of 0.35m wide by 0.45m deep. It contained a single fill (124) of dark red sandy clay. Features F117 and F120 were both c. 1.80m wide by a minimum of 0.60m deep. They had similar steep, slightly concave sides, and each contained two fills (118 and 119, and 121 and 122 respectively) of red clay and yellow-brown silty clay. Although the nature of the fills and the lack of finds suggest naturally formed features, the similarities between the three suggest the uniformity of man-made features.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

**6.1** The limited and constrained nature of the watching brief meant that only most of the features were recorded in sections as exposed by the foundation trenches. This meant that their full nature and extent was hard to determine. The six negative features produced no datable material, and contained material similar to the surrounding natural deposits, although all were clearly differentiated through the lack of gravel inclusions. Although the cuts for these features were generally clear and well defined, it was un-clear as to whether they represented genuine archaeological features.

However the similarity in both the dimensions and the nature of the fills of all of these features suggest deliberate cuts. The lack of any dateable material at all indicated that these were not rubbish pits. This is contrast to the pit features excavated on the adjacent Bingo Hall site (Gillard *et. al.* 2009) and recorded in the pannier market site to the south (Andrew Passmore pers. comm.). The similarity of the fills to the surrounding natural may indicate that they were dug and quickly backfilled. The location of these features, located in the former gardens to the rear of Clare House, may imply that these features are the result of holes dug for the planting of trees, either ornamental or as a fruit crop.

There is cartographic evidence to indicate that the former Town Leat flowed across the site in the late 18th century, and it is possible that some of the features recorded in the watching brief may relate to the leat. The nature of the foundation footings meant that only a small section of the archaeology could be observed, with none of the negative features being fully exposed to their base, so it was not clear if any contained organic material which may have been present if these had once formed part of the leat/watercourse system. The lack of correlation between the recorded features, however, is likely to preclude an interpretation that some of the features represent an early course of the leat.

The fragment of cobbled stone surface is likely to relate to the early 19th-century use of the property as a private house. The overlying demolition deposit that extended across the entire site may relate to both the extensions and alterations that took place to the house prior to 1889 or the building's conversion into the surgery in the early 20th century.

## **7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY**

**7.1** The paper and digital archive 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 Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter when the current museum non-acceptance policy will be reviewed.

**7.2** The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 142452.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 The watching was commissioned by Holdens Ltd on behalf of the Clare House Surgery. The fieldwork was carried out by Richard Simms and Naomi Hughes. The report was written by Simon Sworn with illustrations prepared by Sarnia Blackmore.

## 9. REFERENCES

### ***Devon Heritage Centre***

All Fours District tithe map 1842

14032/E1 Plan of the Town of Tiverton produced by William Richards 1843.

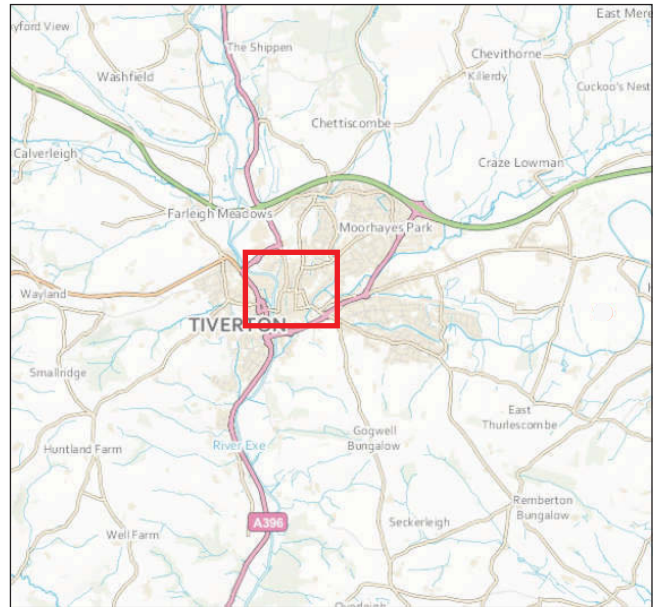
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White, W., 1850, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Devonshire.*



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PROJECT

Clare House, Tiverton

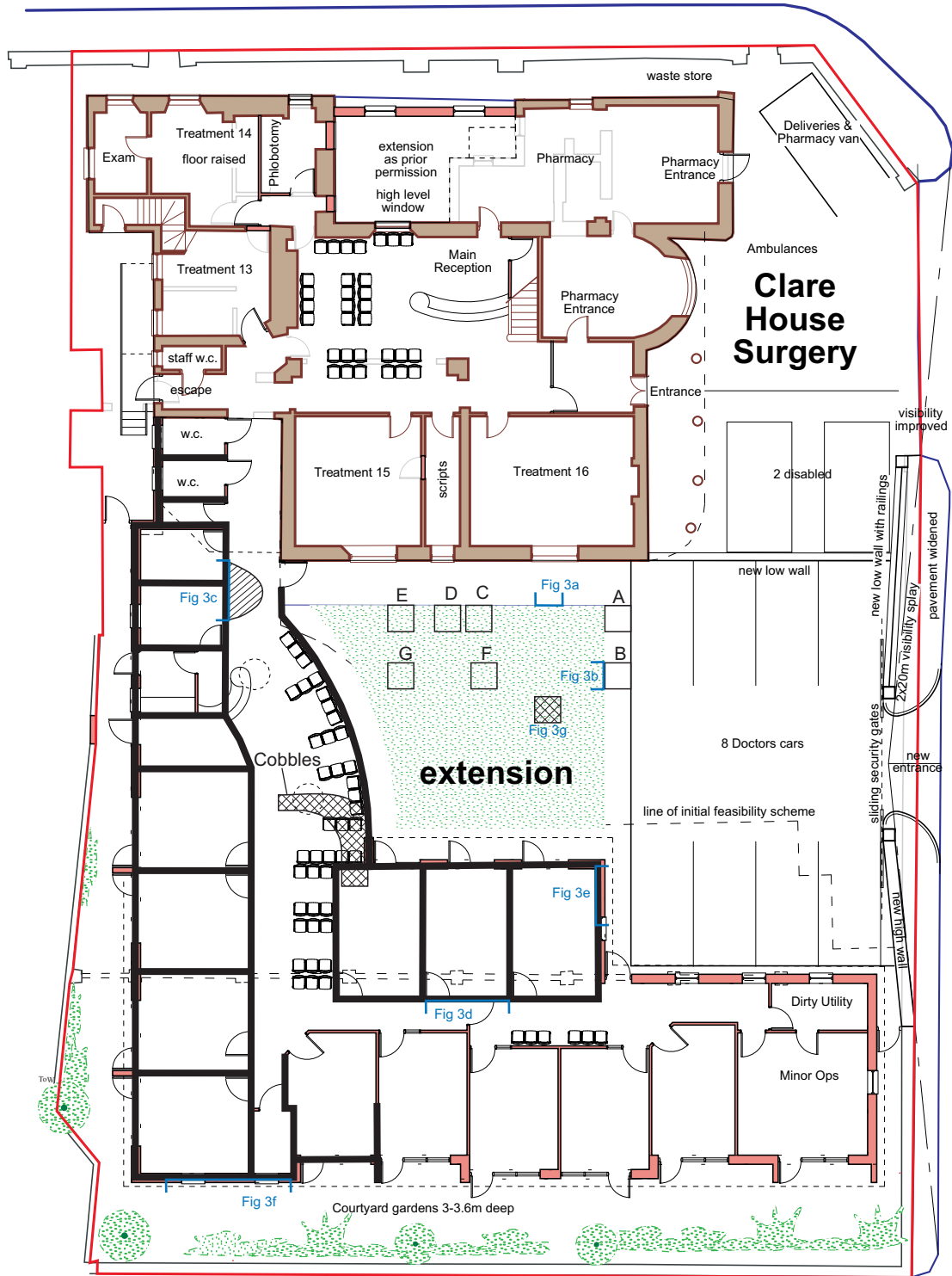
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Fig. 1: Location of site








# NEWPORT STREET



**Market access**



-  Observed trenches
-  Cobbles
-  Fill of pit feature F108

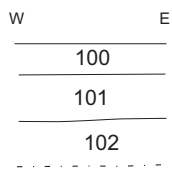
PROJECT

Clare House, Tiverton

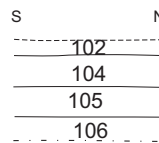
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Fig. 2: Site plan

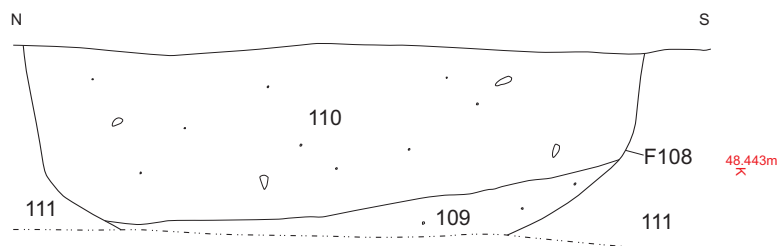
a) Representative section showing upper levels of deposits



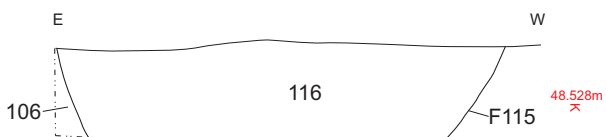
b) Representative section of foundation pad B



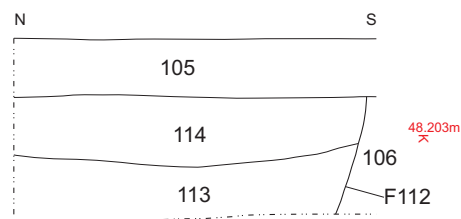
c) Section showing F108



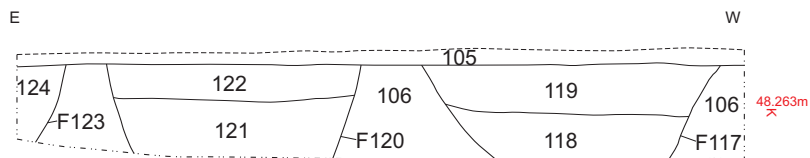
d) Section showing F115



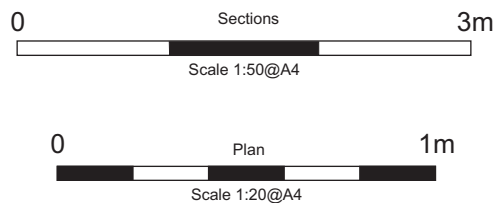
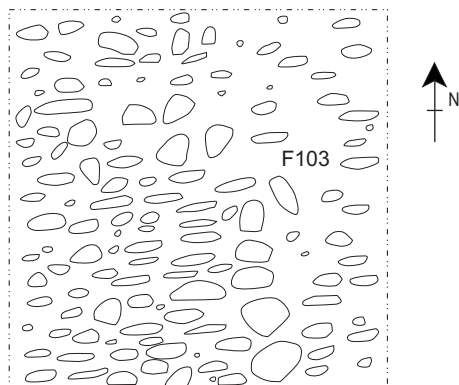
e) Section showing F112



f) Section showing F123, F120 and F117



g) Sample plan of cobbles F103



PROJECT

Clare House, Tiverton

TITLE

Fig. 3: Sections and plan of cobbles



Plate 1: General view of the site after ground reduction and excavation of foundation trenches, viewed from the northeast.



Plate 2: Cobbled surface F103, viewed from the southwest. 1m scale.



Plate 3: Detail of cobbled surface F103 showing edging stones, viewed from the west. 1m scale.



Plate 4: Features F123 to left, F120 centre, and F117 to right, all filled with red clay, viewed from the northeast. 1m scale.

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