

Bicton College New Animal Care Building, Devon

SY 07466 86429

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Planning ref. East Devon District Council 11/2808/MFUL

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AC archaeology

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## Summary

*A metal detector survey and an archaeological watching brief were carried out by AC archaeology in August 2012 and February 2013 prior to and during construction of a new Animal Care Building at Bickton College, Devon (SY 07466 86429). The investigations were required by East Devon District Council under condition 6 of planning permission 11/2808/MFUL. The site lies within the grounds of Bickton House that are a designated (Grade I) registered park and garden. Metal detecting in the area around the estate has produced finds dating from the late Iron Age through to the post-medieval period.*

*Apart from a possible pit, from which a single flint was recovered, no early features were exposed. A stone and brick culvert probably relates to early 19th-century agricultural improvement of the estate. All the finds from the metal detecting were of post-medieval date and included a 16th- or 17th-century book fitting, and a number of lead plant labels.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 A metal detector survey and an archaeological watching brief were carried out by AC archaeology in August 2012 and February 2013 prior to and during the construction of a new Animal Care Building at Bickton College, Devon (SY 07466 86429; Fig. 1). The investigations were commissioned by Norman Rourke Pryme on behalf of Bickton College, and were required by East Devon District Council under condition 6 of planning permission 11/2808/MFUL. Guidance on the scope of the archaeological investigations has been provided by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Service (hereafter DCHES).

1.2 The site lies on an east-facing hillslope on the west side of the River Otter at a height of around 30m aOD. The underlying solid geology comprises Triassic Sandstone of the Otter Formation. The development site is located within Bickton College, which occupies the house and part of the grounds of Bickton House. The site is located to the east of the house and is divided into two areas by an estate road. The southern, smaller part of the site contains agricultural buildings and lies within Bickton Parish, whilst the northern, larger area is woodland and lies within Colaton Raleigh Parish. The archaeological investigations were carried out in the northern, less disturbed part of the site.

### 1.3 Archaeological background (Fig. 2)

The Devon Historic Environment Record (HER) holds details of some evidence for prehistoric activity in the area, including a possible barrow south of Bickton Church (MDV10550), and finds of a flint scraper (MDV17611) and a Bronze Age palstave (MDV58041), the latter found to the north of the site.

The area has been extensively searched by metal detectorists who have uncovered a large number of artefacts to the north, east and south of the site. These include Roman brooches and coins (varying in date from the 1st century (military period) through the 1st-2nd centuries, and into the fifth century (MDVs 58301-58034, and 58037). A post-Roman stirrup mount has also been located (MDV58039). Finds from the medieval period include dress fittings such as buckles, loops and straps (MDVs 58035, 58036, 58042, and 58043), a coin (MDV 58038), as well as a pendant (MDV58044) and a gold ring (MDV69464). Post-medieval finds include coins, a jetton, a pommel, an ammunition pouch, a horse boss and belt plates (MDVs 58045, 58089, 58090, 58091 and 58094).

The placename of Bicton can be traced back to the Domesday Book and was used throughout the medieval period (MDV38064). A medieval church (MDVs 10592 and 10593) stood to the west of the present church and has been partially demolished and converted into a mausoleum. The present Bicton House was constructed in c. 1800 for Lord Rolle (MDV10604), but lies within an earlier deer park (MDV19789). The area was emparked in the 16th century, and allegedly later had a mansion attached. The grounds around Bicton House (incorporating the earlier deer park), which date from the 18th century, have been described as some of the finest in the Westcountry, and have Grade I status as a registered park and garden (National Heritage List number 1000338). Many of the buildings and garden features within the estate are Listed Buildings.

The 1844 Bicton tithe map and its associated apportionment of 1839 show the southern part of site to have been located immediately east of the deer park in a large meadow called Eastern Outer Field. A small area of woodland was depicted in the northwest corner of the field within the development site (later described as an oak plantation), along with another plantation immediately to the west. The 1842 Colaton Raleigh tithe map shows the northern area to have been part of a larger field under pasture called Halse's Field. The 1:2500 Ordnance Survey maps surveyed in 1888 (Fig. 2) and 1903 depict the site as fields, with two small enclosures and a building along the north edge of the site. The maps also show the bank of the former deer park boundary, which unusually has an external ditch. This must relate to a later field boundary forming the west side of Halse's Field, rather than the original park pale. (The present boundary of the former park is a stone wall of unknown antiquity. A further bank is depicted forming the parish boundary.

## **2. AIMS**

- 2.1** The groundworks had the potential to expose and destroy any surviving archaeological deposits or artefacts. The aims of the investigations were twofold. Firstly, through a metal detector survey to recover any artefacts from the topsoil, prior to and during construction, and secondly, to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological artefacts and deposits across the area affected by the development.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1** The investigations were undertaken in accordance with an approved written scheme of investigation (Passmore 2012).
- 3.2** A metal detector survey was carried out in the northern part of the site prior to development commencing. However, due to the unearthing of a hand grenade the survey was suspended and was not continued at either this stage or during the construction phase. The locations of all finds were recorded using a survey-grade GPS, with details logged on special finds registers. A summary of the results is presented in section 5 below.
- 3.3** Attendance by the site archaeologist was 'comprehensive' in accordance with the meaning of the term as defined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for An Archaeological Watching Brief* (published 1994, revised 2008) section 3.2.10. All artefacts or deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology *pro-forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and digital photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 1*.

#### 4. RESULTS (Fig. 3; Plates 1-2)

- 4.1 The whole of the phase one works area was bulk reduced to varying levels to form a terrace at the level of the adjacent College access track; these excavations were fully monitored. Topsoil (100) comprised mid-light brown compact silty sand, and measured between 150-300mm thick. Large quantities of 18th- to 20th-century brick and tile, as well as 19th- or 20th-century transfer-printed wares, blue and white transfer-printed tile, industrial white wares, and single fragments of a stoneware jar and glass bottle, were noted but not retained. Six pieces of flint were recovered. They are four waste flakes and two retouched flakes, the larger of which is possibly a crude end scraper. The topsoil overlaid subsoil (101) comprising soft light orange-brown silty sand, which was 200-300mm thick. Natural subsoil (102) comprised fine compacted yellow-brown slightly silty sand.
- 4.2 The area was heavily disturbed by tree roots and no convincing early archaeological features were exposed. A possible pit (F103), which was not excavated since it was present below the required formation level, was recorded (Plate 1). It measured 2.64m long by 1.54m wide and contained a fill of light grey-brown loose very sandy clay containing common small stones (109). Part of a flint multi-platform core fragment of possible late Neolithic or early Bronze Age date was recovered from the surface of this feature.
- 4.3 The only other feature exposed was a post-medieval culvert (F107). This was aligned northwest-southeast, and was located in the centre of the site (Plate 2). The culvert had been constructed in a 1.3m wide trench (F108) excavated through the subsoil and into the natural. The full depth of the feature was not exposed, and its interior had silted up. The culvert was constructed with vertical stone sidewalls and an arched capping of standard orange bricks laid in Flemish bond, all bonded in a hard pink lime mortar with large lime inclusions. The trench had been backfilled with yellow-red silty sand (106).

#### 5. FINDS, By Naomi Payne and Andrew Passmore

- 5.1 All finds from the metal detector survey (except the hand grenade) were retained, cleaned and quantified. They are summarised in Table 1 below. Other than the flints, no finds were retained during the watching brief, and these have been described in section 4 above.

SF No	Description	Material	Co-ordinates
1	British North Borneo Company one cent coin dating from 1894. Pierced.	CuA	E 307349, N 86344
2	Metal fragments		E 307428, N 86333
3	Possible coin fragment. Not identifiable.		E 307443, N 86314
4	2 lead fragments	Pb	E 307410, N 86381
5	Aluminium (?) fragment	Pb	E 307436, N 86370
6	Lead dross	Pb	E 307415, N 86385
7	Lead fragment comprising a square-section 'leg' adjoining a flat, smooth element.	Pb	E 307451, N 86386
8	Flat, tear-drop shaped lead fragment	Pb	E 307413, N 86409
9	2 large flat lead fragments	Pb	E 307424, N 86419
10	Incomplete post-medieval book fitting. 16th-17 century.	CuA & Fe	E 307463, N 86401

11	Lead dross	Pb	E 307436, N 86453
12	Nail	Iron	E 307416, N 86392
13	Lead dross	Pb	E 307450, N 86344
14	Incomplete lead plaque inscribed '... RED/...S' on one side and (more faintly) 'BEU.../STERK...' on the other. Pierced with a hole to top left of letter B.	Pb	E 307405, N 86404
15	Lead plaque inscribed 'PIERRE NOTTING' – plant label for the Souvenir de Pierre Notting rose	Pb	E 307391, N 86415

Table 1: Special finds recovered during the metal detector survey.

**5.2** All of the recovered metal finds are of post-medieval date, the earliest being the book fitting (SF10). Over half of the assemblage comprises lead objects including some that are identifiable as plant labels. These are unlikely to have been used within the development site, and were almost certainly brought in from elsewhere on the estate during manuring, and interpretation derived strengthened by the qualities of 19th- and 20th-century ceramics and building material noted in the topsoil.

**5.3** On inspection by the Bomb Disposal team the hand grenade was identified as inert and was probably a practice grenade. The context for its occurrence is unknown, since the college was used during the Second World War by St Ronan's School who had evacuated from Hawkhurst in Kent.

## **6. COMMENTS (Fig. 2)**

**6.1** With the exception of possible pit F103, no features or finds pre-dating the post-medieval period were present. The book fitting (SF10) adds to the corpus of post-medieval metalwork founds by detectorists within or close to the Bicton Estate.

**6.2** The majority of the finds are of 19th- and 20th-century date, and are likely to have derived from the estate and been manured into the field. Of interest are the plant labels, since Bicton is renowned for its flower gardens and parkland. The culvert is likely to date to the early 19th-century alterations to the estate, and improvements to the agricultural land surrounding the park and gardens. The land to the east of the development site forms a small coombe, and the 1888 Ordnance Survey map depicts a stream with small ponds (Fig. 2). The culvert may therefore represent drainage associated with a former watercourse within this coombe.

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

**7.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. It will be deposited at the RAMM, Exeter under an allocated accession number. A temporary reference number from the museum is 12/32.

**7.2** An OASIS entry has been completed under the unique identifier 151700.

## **8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**8.1** This report was commissioned by Norman Rourke Pryme on behalf of Bicton College, and managed for them by Simon Kealy, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The documentary appraisal was carried out by Kerry Kerr-Peterson and

Martin Dyer, with the HER data provided by Marinna Neophytou of Devon County Council. The metal detecting survey was co-ordinated by Kerry Kerr-Peterson and Paul Jones, and carried out by members of the East Devon Metal Detecting Club. The watching brief carried out by Simon Sworn, Kerry Kerr-Peterson, Fiona Pink and Chris Caine. The finds were catalogued by Naomi Hughes, the report prepared by Andrew Passmore, and the illustrations drawn by Sarnia Blackmore.

## 9. REFERENCES

### **Devon County Historic Environment Record**

Entries for 500m radius of Bicton House

### **Devon Heritage Centre**

DRO, Bicton parish tithe map (1844) and apportionment (1839)

DRO, Colaton Raleigh parish tithe map (1842) and apportionment (1842)

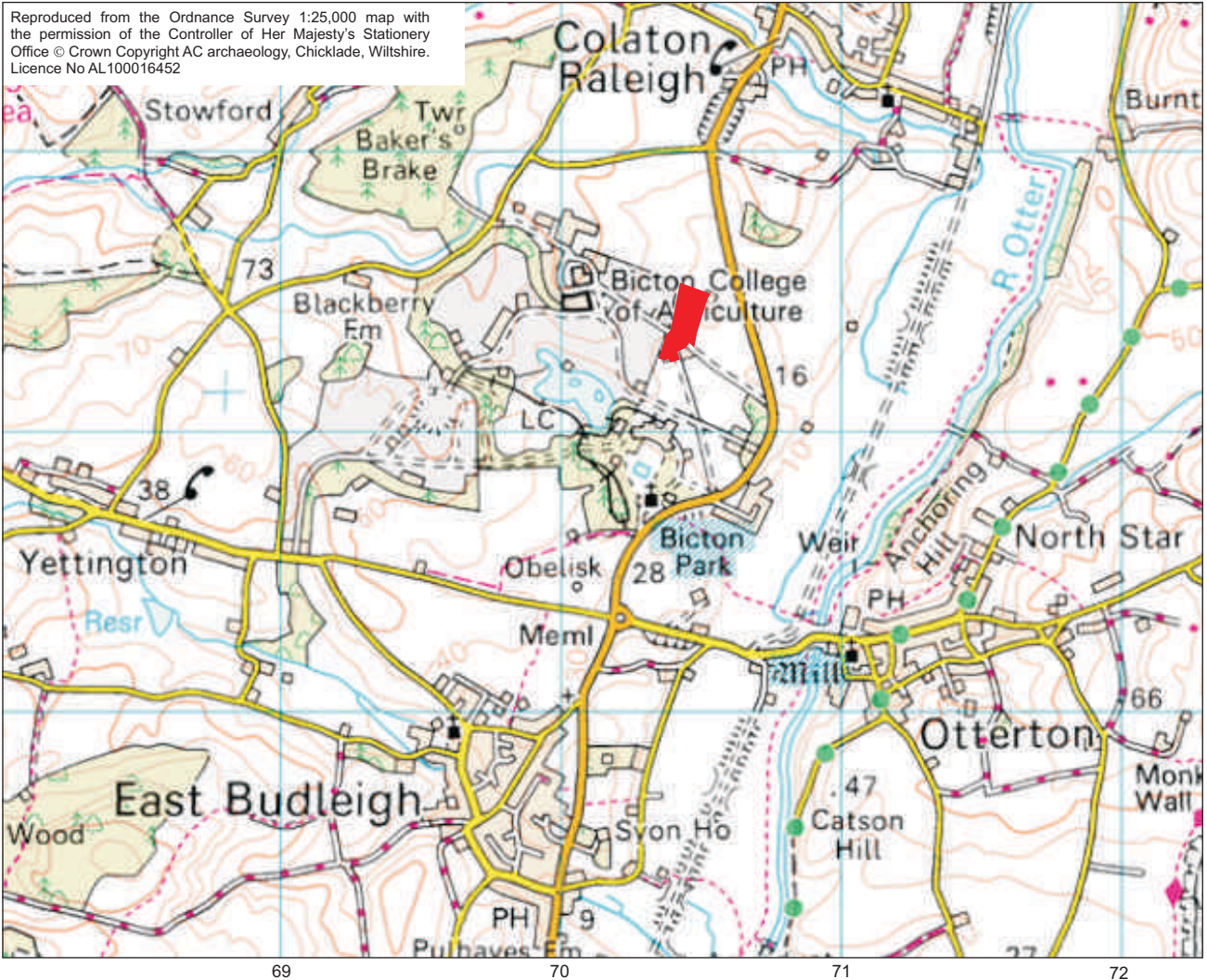
Ordnance Survey 25-inch map sheet Devonshire 93.8, surveyed 1888, published 1889

Ordnance Survey 25-inch map sheet Devonshire 80.9, surveyed 1888, revised 1903, published 1905

Passmore, A., 2012, *Bicton College New Animal Care Building, Devon, (SY 07466 86429), Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological watching brief, Planning ref. East Devon district Council 11/2808/MFUL, AC archaeology document no. 481/1/0.*



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■ Site area

PROJECT

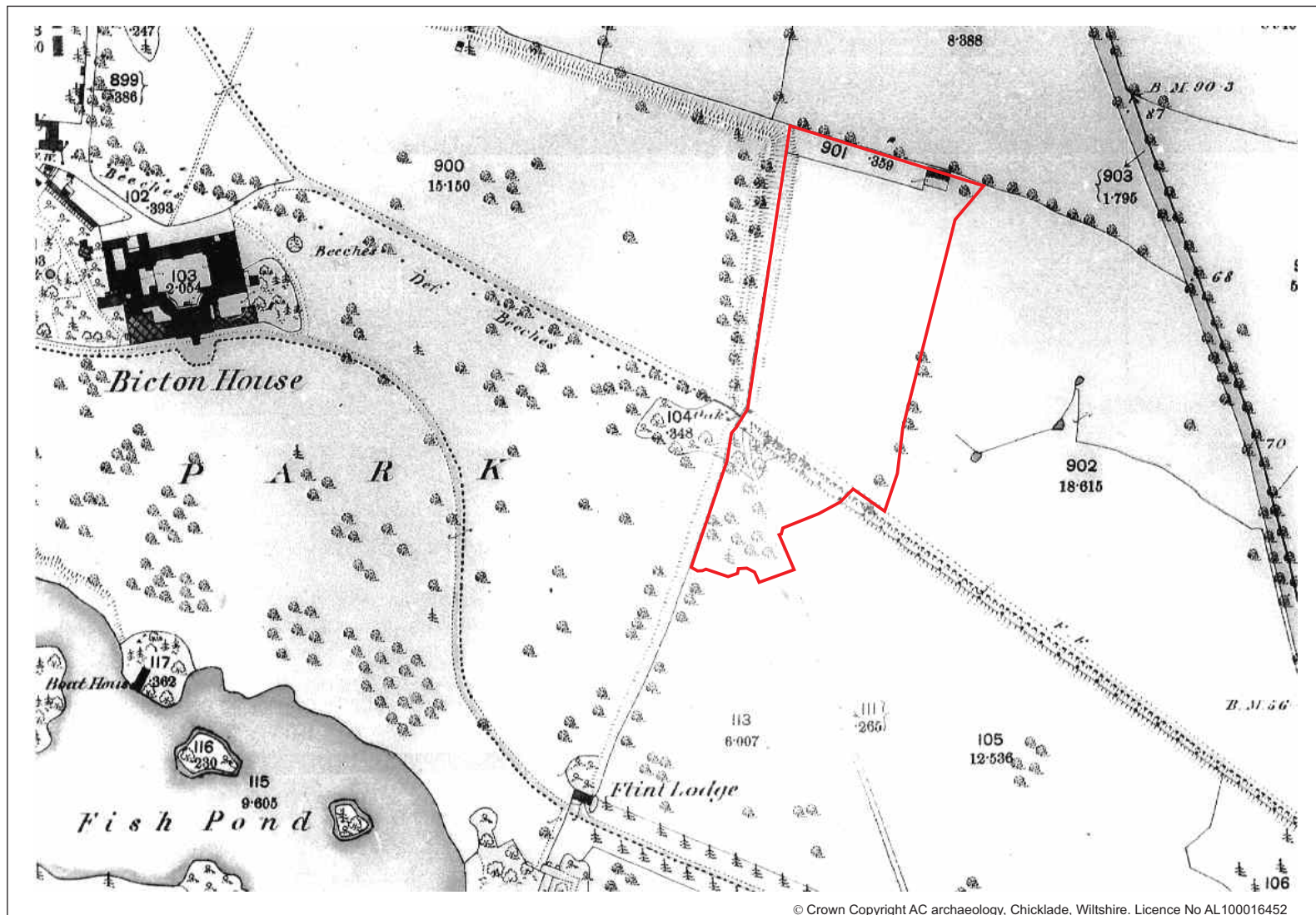
New animal care building, Bickton College, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site








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 Site area

PROJECT

New animal care building,  
Bicton College, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 2: Extract from the first edition  
25-inch Ordnance Survey map sheet  
93.8, 1889



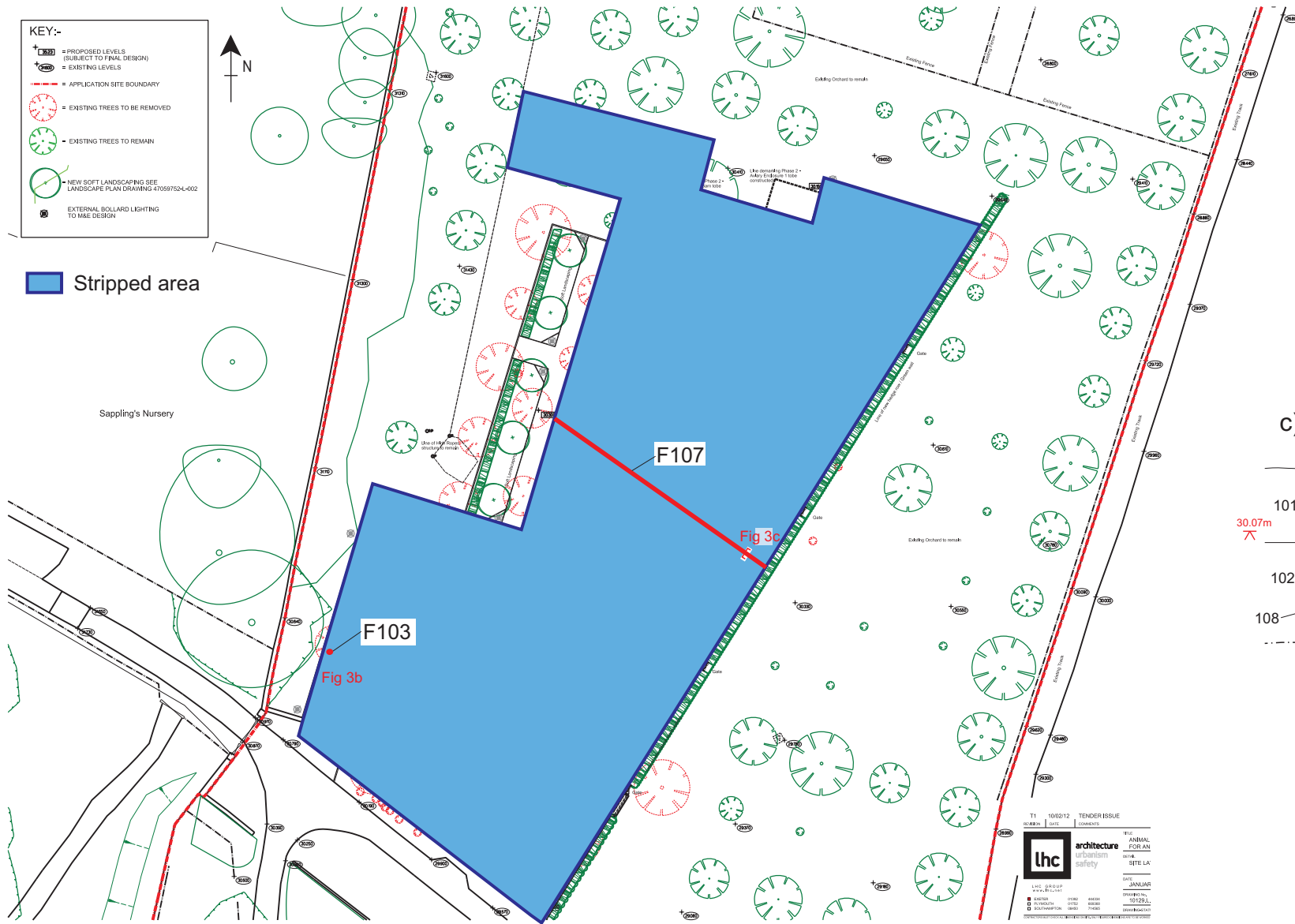
AC archaeology

# a) Site plan

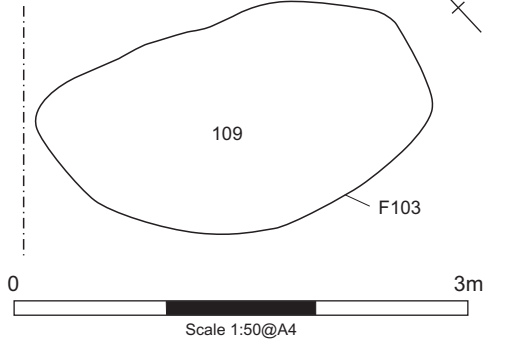
**KEY:-**

- PROPOSED LEVELS (SUBJECT TO FINAL DESIGN)
- EXISTING LEVELS
- APPLICATION SITE BOUNDARY
- EXISTING TREES TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING TREES TO REMAIN
- NEW SOFT LANDSCAPING SEE LANDSCAPE PLAN DRAWING 470597524-002
- EXTERNAL BOLLARD LIGHTING TO MAE DESIGN

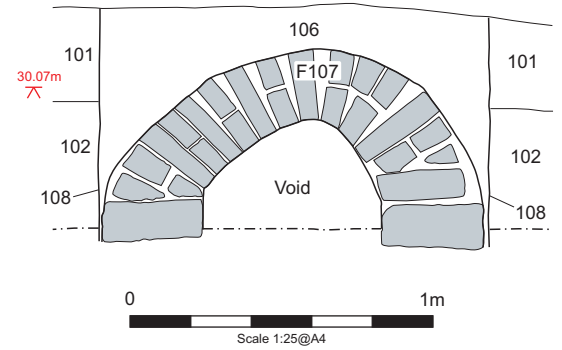
■ Stripped area



# b) Plan of F103



# c) Section through F107



T1 10/02/12 TENDER ISSUE

lhc architecture urbanism safety

TITLE ANIMAL CARE PLAN SITE LA

DATE JANUARY

DRAWN BY [REDACTED]

CHECKED BY [REDACTED]

DATE [REDACTED]

PROJECT  
New animal care building,  
Bicton College, Devon

TITLE  
Fig. 3: Site plan: plan of F103 and section through F107





Plate 1: Possible pit F103, viewed from the east. 1m scale



Plate 2: Culvert F107, viewed from the northwest. 1m scale

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