

81 MEDDON STREET, BIDEFORD, DEVON

(NGR SS 4509 2633)

Results of historic building recording and an  
archaeological trench evaluation

Condition 5 of Torridge District Council planning  
reference 1/0542/2011/EXTM

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Prepared by:  
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On behalf of:  
Greendale Investments Ltd

Document No: ACD969/2/0

Date: September 2014



AC archaeology

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## Summary

*A retrospective survey of a former, demolished dispensary and infirmary at 81 Meddon Street, Bideford was prepared by AC archaeology in September 2014. The building was constructed in 1887 and enlarged in 1895. It became a nursing home in the 1920s. The survey has included the production of a phased floor plan.*

*A trench evaluation was also undertaken to investigate the potential for survival of earlier remains at the front of the site. A single, heavily truncated ditch, which produced a single sherd of medieval pottery, was exposed below levelling deposits associated with the dispensary. The evaluation confirmed the below-ground presence of walls of and services associated with the dispensary. Extensive disturbance was found within the footprint of the building, and it is concluded that there is limited potential for the survival of archaeological deposits.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of the historic building recording and an archaeological trench evaluation carried out by AC archaeology in September 2014 at 81 Meddon Street, Bideford, Devon (SS 4509 2633; Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Greendale Investments Ltd and was required under condition 5 of the grant of "Extension of time of planning permission 1/0751/2007/OUT – demolition of existing nursing home and dwelling and erection of 42 new flats and houses" (Torridge District Council planning reference 1/0542/2011/EXTM). Guidance on the scope of works was provided by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team (HET), archaeology advisors to Torridge District Council.

### 2. THE SITE

- 2.1 Meddon Street is located on the southern side of the historic core of Bideford. The site occupies 0.49ha on the south side of the street, and is bounded to the east and west by properties fronting the street and later residential developments behind these. To the south of the site lie allotments. The topography of the site comprises a central east-west coombe situated at around 32m aOD rising steeply to c. 44m aOD to the south and c.39m aOD to the north where there is a terrace along the street frontage. Along the northwest edge of the site an access track to the rear of the property has been cut through the terrace. The underlying geology comprises Carboniferous mudstone and siltstone of the Bude formation.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A desk-based assessment of the site was prepared by AC archaeology in 2007 to support the application 1/0751/2007/OUT (Cox, Cottam and Chandler 2007). The results are summarised below.
- 3.2 The south side of Meddon Street appears to have been laid out as planned medieval burgrave plots. Houses had been constructed in the area by 1646 when they formed endowments of Strange's Almshouses (which was located to the east of the present site). Early 19th-century mapping indicates that the eastern half of Meddon Street had been developed by that date. From the 1830s historic maps depict two structures on the frontage towards the eastern end of the site.

### **3.3 The Bideford and District Dispensary and Infirmary**

The new 14-bed Bideford and District Dispensary and Infirmary was opened on 31 March 1887, replacing earlier premises in Buttgarden Street and the Quay. The building was set back from the street frontage and its plan form comprised a large rectangular building with projecting rooms at each corner. Those on the north side were larger than those at the rear which were separated from the main block by short corridors. It also incorporated two central projections, the rear one being slightly wider than the northern one.

The building was enlarged in 1895 with the provision of a children's ward. The 1903-4 25-inch Ordnance Survey map shows that this involved the extension of the central northern entrance to the street frontage.

Plans to enlarge the hospital were proposed in 1919, and land was purchased to accommodate the extension. However, it was not possible to evict the sitting tenants, and a new hospital was constructed in Abbotsham Road, opening in 1925. The Meddon Street site was sold for £1228, and became a private maternity and nursing home; the latter use continuing until October 2007. The 1930s Ordnance Survey mapping depicts an infilling along the eastern side of the building between the two projecting rooms. Maps from this date onwards also depict a scarp behind the building, reflecting the rear of the terrace on which the dispensary was constructed. More recent extensions were added to the rear of the building and on the northwest side against the street frontage.

### **3.4 Culm mining**

The carboniferous rocks around Bideford contain a poor quality coal seam known as culm, which was mined during the 19th and 20th centuries. On the east side of the River Torridge there is archaeological evidence for shaft mining and an associated engine house, as well as opencast mining. On the west side of the river there is a reference to an accident in 1827 apparently involving a horse.

The firm of Cole Haw & Co who were mineral black paint manufacturers had premises in Meddon Street in 1830. An oral tradition in 1907 recalled a paint mine in Meddon Street where the dispensary stood. The plot was apparently called paint field, and the underground workings were drained by a 1000m long adit issuing behind the building. No evidence of mining was noted on any of the maps inspected as part of the assessment.

## **4. AIMS**

### **4.1 The aims of the investigations were threefold:**

- firstly, to undertake a trench evaluation on the street frontage to identify the presence or absence of medieval and post-medieval deposits;
- secondly, to undertake a ground-penetrating radar survey and trench evaluation to identify the presence or absence of a mine adit; and
- thirdly, to prepare a record of the dispensary and infirmary prior to and during demolition, to record any historic fabric and any significant fixtures and fittings.

### **4.2 The results of the trial trenching and ground-penetrating radar survey will be used by the HET to determine the significance of any archaeological remains present, and if necessary, to determine the nature and extent of any archaeological mitigation before or during development.**

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 General methodology**

The project was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (Passmore 2014), including a trench plan, that had been approved by the HET.

### **5.2 Historic building recording**

The dispensary was demolished in 2010/2011 without any archaeological record being prepared. Following discussions with the HET, it was agreed that a retrospective survey report would be prepared based upon the archive created by AC archaeology for the 2007 assessment, and any other readily available sources. Due to the use of the building as a nursing home at the time of the site visit, limited access was available to the interior of the building. No new relevant material has been identified at the North Devon Record Office.

### **5.3 Trench evaluation**

The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of 3 trenches totalling 31m in length, with each trench measuring 1.55m wide. The trenches were located to target the front of the site where there was potential for medieval and post-medieval settlement. They were positioned in areas least likely to have been disturbed by the construction of the dispensary, as well as to identify the depth and extent of any truncation within the footprint of the building.

The removal of soil overburden was undertaken under the control and direction of the site archaeologist. 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 2* (revised August 2012).

The results of the evaluation are summarised in section 7 below with full details of contexts tabulated in Appendix 1.

## **6. BUILDING SURVEY (Fig. 2; Plates 1-6)**

### **6.1 General description**

In 2007 the building was described as a two-storey structure with (presumably) stone walls under render, painted white, with bricks chimneys and slate roofs. Following demolition, the foundations have been left *in situ*, and primary stone footings are visible, along with brick and concrete block walls of the later additions. All windows had been replaced with double-glazed units. Either side of the central block, the site was defined by rendered boundary walls, partially topped with cast-iron railings incorporating vehicular openings at the east and west ends. There was no cellar at street level, but a semi-basement is believed to exist at the rear.

### **6.2 Exterior elevations**

The central front (north) entrance was finished with a Dutch gable in front of a steeply-pitched roof topped with ceramic ridge tiles (Plate 1). The central doorway had been blocked and converted to a window. It was flanked by a pair of windows. All were set within round-headed openings rising from a pair of square columns either side of the doorway topped with Tuscan-style capitals – the same decoration being present on a string course at the base of the windows. Tall keystones on each opening terminated within a string course at first-floor level. Above this there was a

further string course on which two tall, round-headed, centrally-set windows sat. Around these was a thin applied, mainly plain but slightly decorated finish comprising columns and horizontal bars terminating in a string course. Above this was a circular blind opening in the top of the gable. The very top section of the gable had been removed (see below). The top of the vertical edges to the gable were finished with spherical finials.

The north elevation of the northeast room was largely plain, and incorporated a single modern window, a thin string course at ceiling level and a thick Tuscan-style string course from which the gable elevation rose (Plates 2-3). The finials above this string course had been removed. Unlike the entrance gable, the top of the gable survived and comprised a semi-circular element finished with a larger spherical finial. The roof was shallower than the entrance range and finished with plain ceramic ridge tiles. It incorporated a dormer window on its east pitch.

The north elevation of the original northeast room was obscured by a late 20th-century flat-roofed extension. This was rendered and incorporated three windows. The visible upper section of the gable of the original northeast room was identical to the northeast room described above.

At the front of the building the floor level of the original northeast room was raised above the ground level, reflecting the drop in land to the east. Its east elevation incorporated three windows of varying heights – two original and one addition – and a doorway accessed via a flight of steps (Plate 3). Behind this room, there was a gap in the elevation, then a wall incorporating a doorway, possibly a remnant of the extension depicted on the 1930s mapping, then a higher length of wall incorporating a pair of windows, one above the other, under a flat roof.

The central section of the rear (south) elevation was of a similar design to the north elevation, although slightly plainer (Plate 4). The central section projected out from the rest of the gable. On the ground floor it incorporated a wide open entrance leading into a narrow lobby, and a pitched slate-roofed porch supported on pairs of tall brackets with scroll moulding on their side faces. A pair of flat-headed windows lit the rooms either side of the doorway. On the first floor, the tall windows had slightly arched heads. A further pair of tall flat-headed windows provided light to the rooms on either side.

The remainder of the historic south elevation was obscured by 20th-century additions. On the east side this was two storeyed incorporating a veranda on the ground floor with a room above under a pitched roof. On the east side the extension was single storied with a flat roof.

Limited evidence for the west elevation is available. At the front of the site there was a single-story wall and lobby within the 20th-century extension, under a flat roof. Beyond this, the original northwest room was single storied, and incorporated a window opening. The front part of the pitched roof survived, beyond which the building had been raised to two storeys under a pitched roof.

### **6.3 Interior description**

The layout of the building at the time of its demolition reflected its 20th-century use as a nursing home. The north front entrance had been replaced with the principal entrance now being the central rear door. Other entrances (or fire exits) had been created from the east and west elevations. The rear entrance lobby led into a corridor, which was flanked by pairs of rooms on either side. These (or at least one

room either side) appear to have been original features. Beyond these rooms was an east-west aligned corridor that provided access to the rooms on the east and west sides of the building (Plates 5-6).

The front rooms beyond the corridor have been extensively altered, a process which probably started when this part of the building was extended forwards in 1895. The presence of chimney stacks in the side walls here indicates that there were two rooms, probably either side of an entrance corridor giving a symmetrical central block. It is not known whether there was an original first floor in this central block, although this seems unlikely. When the building was extended in 1895 two further heated rooms were probably created on the ground floor, again separated by the corridor. The area beyond was reorganised with the insertion of a staircase leading to new first floor accommodation.

Historic mapping indicates that the external layout of the east and west side was symmetrical on a central axis but with a different arrangement of rooms at the front and rear. The front sides contained L-shaped spaces, which may have been divided into pairs of rooms, of differing sizes. There is evidence that at least one of these possible smaller rooms was heated. At the rear of the building there was probably a pair of large heated rooms from which short corridors led to smaller rooms at the southeast and southwest corners.

As noted above, it seems unlikely that the dispensary and infirmary was originally provided with first floor accommodation. There is certainly no evidence for this within the east and west wings. The children's ward provided in 1895 was probably within the new first-floor accommodation. The first floors elsewhere were almost certainly added after 1925 when the building was converted into a nursing home. The only elements of the roof structure visible in 2007 were principal rafters that were exposed below the ceilings.

## **7. TRENCH EVALUATION (Fig. 3; plates 7-10)**

### **7.1 Trench 1**

Trench 1 measured 9m long, was aligned north-south and located along the west edge of the site adjacent to the west side of the dispensary. Due to the presence of a manhole the trench was excavated in two halves. The northern half was 4m long and was excavated down to natural shale and clay at a depth of 1.7m from the surface (36.86, aOD). The southern half was 3.2m long and was excavated down to a depth of 1.4m (36.94m aOD).

The natural was overlain by up to 1.6m of 19th-century and modern dumped layers (104, 105, 109-111 and 102-103, 107-108 respectively), representing levelling deposits for the construction of the dispensary and for later alterations. These were sealed beneath a modern tarmac surface and sub-base (100 and 101). The 19th-century deposits were between 0.40m and 0.6m deep, and in the southern half of the trench these sloped down to the south, with the modern deposits above forming an extension to the terrace or platform on which the dispensary was constructed.

No archaeological features were exposed. A north-south aligned drain that passed through the manhole had been cut from partly down the sequence of modern layers. In the east side of the trench part of the west wall of the dispensary was exposed, comprising sandstone and mudstone foundations and concrete blocks relating to a 20th-century addition.

## **7.2 Trench 2**

Trench 2 was located along the north edge of the site, parallel with Meddon Street. It measured 11m long and was excavated down to fractured natural shale and clay at a depth of 0.58m (between 37.04m and 37.47m aOD).

The deposit sequence comprised three layers of 19th-century levelling deposits (201-204) (totalling 0.46m thick) overlaid by a layer of modern topsoil (200).

This trench contained an east-west aligned medieval feature, cut into the natural, which turned a right angle and was further exposed in trench 3 (F309 – see below).

In the west end of the trench wall F205 was exposed on a north-south alignment. It was constructed of blocks of sandstone, mudstone and siltstone bonded in a coarse rough mortar, and represents the east wall of the 1895 extension to the dispensary.

## **7.3 Trench 3**

Trench 3 measured 12m long, was orientated north-south, and located to the south of, and from the middle of, trench 2. It was excavated down to the natural shale and clay, which was present at depths of between 0.58m (37.25m aOD) and 1.85m (36.45m aOD).

The trench exposed two east-west aligned walls forming part of the former dispensary: F311 in the middle of the trench, and F312 towards the south end of the trench. They were constructed of mortar-bonded sandstone and measured 0.65m wide.

The deposit sequence above the natural to the north of wall F311 comprised the same layers as exposed in trench 2 (302-307 – see 7.2 above – with 301 and 300 representing modern demolition deposits overlying walls F311 and F312). A single residual base sherd, weighing 16g, from a North Devon coarseware vessel dating to 1200-1350 was recovered from layer 307. Between walls F311 and F312 deposits were heavily disturbed by a series of modern intrusions. To the south of wall F312 modern demolition deposits were present to below the level of the natural observed elsewhere within the trench.

To the north of wall F311 ditch F309 was exposed on a north-northeast to south-southwest alignment. It measured 0.59m wide by 0.15m deep, and had moderately sloping concave sides with a concave base. It contained a single fill (310) consisting of compact mid grey-brown clay loam with strong orange hues, containing frequent poorly-sorted angular shale up to 160mm long, derived from the natural. It also contained sparse charcoal flecks and during initial cleaning a body sherd, weighing 13g, from a North Devon coarseware vessel dating to 1200-1350AD was recovered from the top of the fill.

## **8. COMMENTS**

### **8.1 The Bideford and District Dispensary and Infirmary**

During the 19th century Meddon Street was home to a number of institutions and buildings associated with the welfare of Bideford's population. They included Strange's Almshouses (1646, rebuilt 1870) and Buck Almshouses (1857, now Morton Terrace), as well as undeveloped land owned by charitable trusts. The Bideford Union Workhouse was erected in 1837-9 on land to the west of the site. Welfare provision expanded during the second half of the 19th century and early years of the



20th century, and in Bideford a new larger infirmary range (now demolished) was added to the workhouse replacing existing accommodation.

The Bideford and District Dispensary and Infirmary was constructed in 1887 having replaced earlier facilities elsewhere in the town. The plan form and architectural detailing is typical of welfare buildings of the period. The probable layout of the building has been reconstructed (in Fig. 2). The uses of the rooms are not known but the central block probably housed administrative functions, including the dispensary, with wards, probably separated by gender, to either side. The smaller rear rooms may have housed water closets.

The building was extended in 1895 when a new children's ward was added. This was probably situated on the first floor over the central range. Alterations were made to the ground floor, probably comprising the addition of two further rooms and a new staircase. These rooms may have provided further offices or consulting rooms.

Later alterations during its use as a nursing home have involved small extensions giving the building a more regular plan and the provision of further accommodation on the first floor. Significant changes were made to the layout of the ground floor.

## **8.2 The trench evaluation**

A single medieval ditch was exposed within the northeast corner of the site. Its shallow profile and the nature of the underlying geology indicate that the ground level has been subject to historic truncation. The overlying deposits across the site are interpreted as levelling layers for the construction of the 1887 dispensary, with later deposits associated with 20th-century alterations.

The evaluation has, within its limited scope, confirmed the presence of the layout of the former dispensary including the position of an internal wall. The work has demonstrated that within different parts of the footprint of the building there has been either total removal of archaeological deposits or significant removal of the post-medieval deposits.

It is therefore concluded that there is limited potential for the presence and survival of archaeological features associated with settlement along Medden Street. The area of survival is limited to the northeast corner of the site, between the building and Meddon Street.

## **9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY**

**9.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. On acceptance of the report and completion of the OASIS entry, the archive will be digitised and deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.

**9.2** An OASIS entry has been completed under the unique identifier 190685, and includes a copy of this report.

## **10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

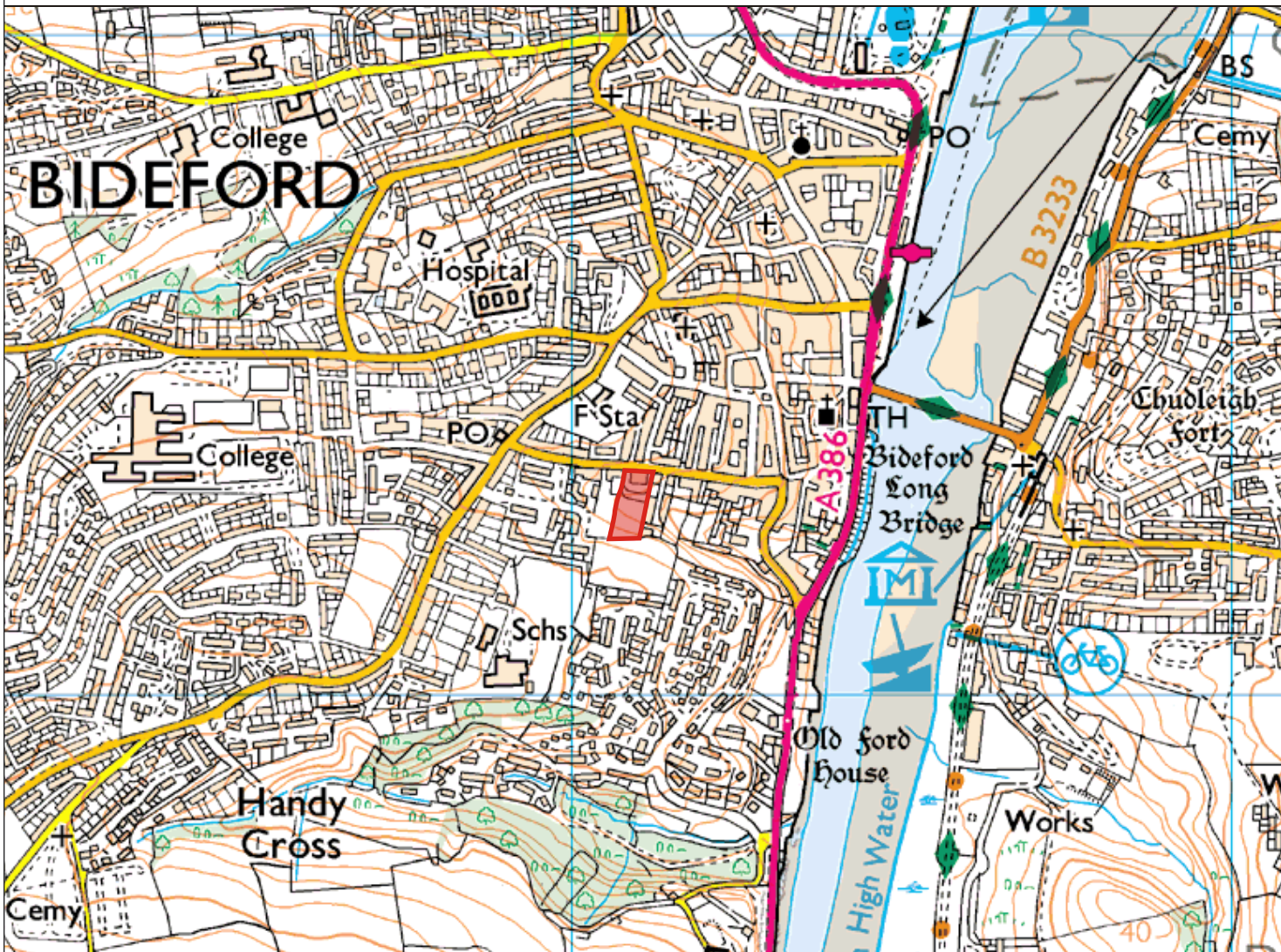
**10.1** This investigations were commissioned by Greendale Investments Ltd, and managed on their behalf by PCL Planning. The fieldwork was carried out by Ben Pears and

Paul Cooke. The report illustrations were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai and the finds identified by Kerry Kerr-Peterson.

## 11. SOURCES CONSULTED

Passmore, A., 2014, *81 Meddon Street, Bideford, Devon, (NGR SS 4509 2633), Written Scheme of Investigation for historic building recording, ground penetrating radar survey and an archaeological trench evaluation, Condition 5 of Torridge District Council planning reference 1/0542/2011/EXTM*, AC archaeology document no. **ACD969/1/0**

Cox, P., Cottam, S., and Chandler, J., 2007, *81 Meddon Street, Bideford, Devon (NGR SS45092633): Archaeological desk-based assessment*, AC archaeology document no. **AC1156/2/1**



Site location

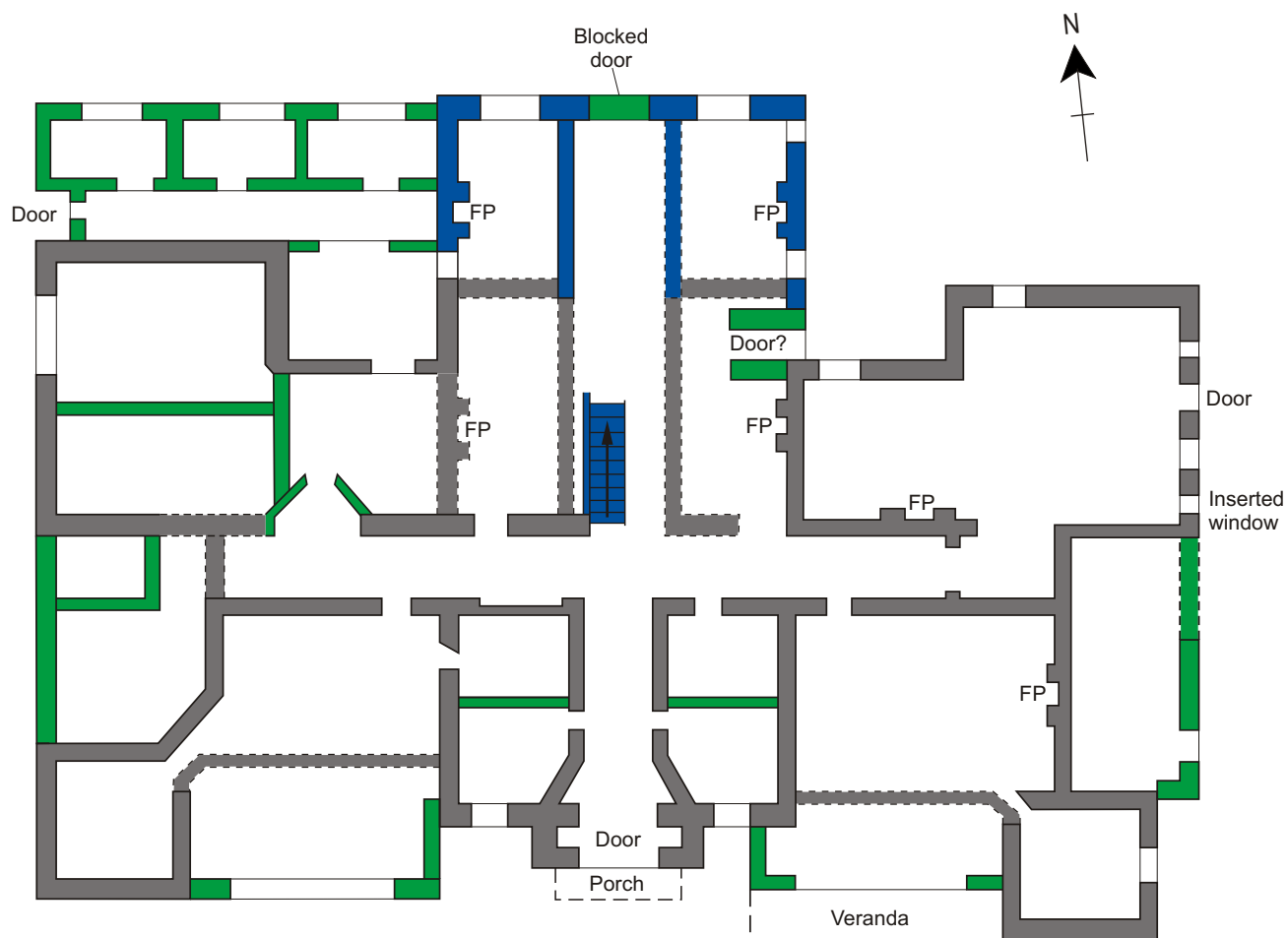
PROJECT

81 Meddon Street, Bideford, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site





0 10m  
Scale 1:200@A4

- 1887
- 1895
- Post 1925
- Demolished walls
- FP Fireplace

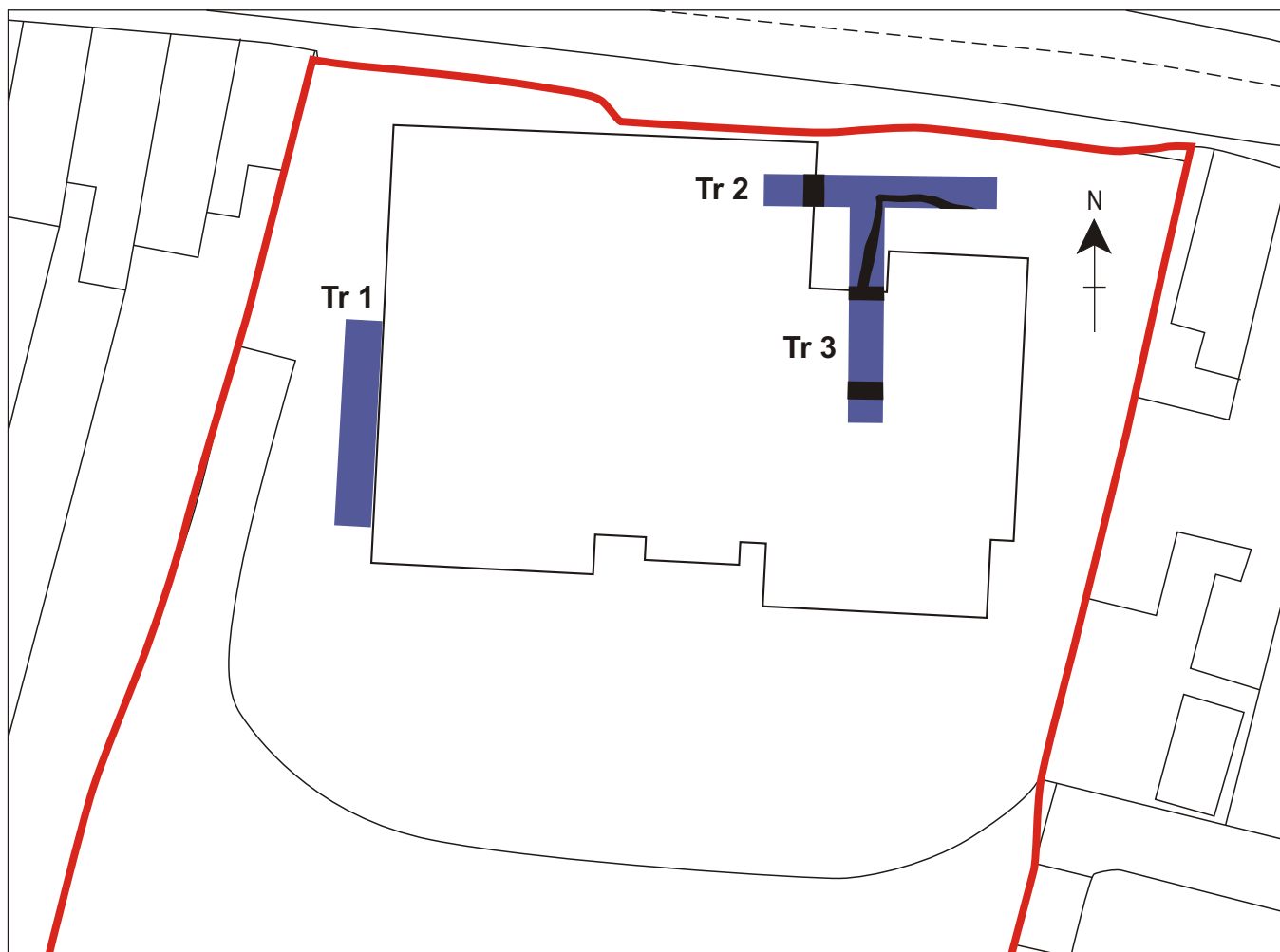
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81 Meddon Street, Bideford, Devon

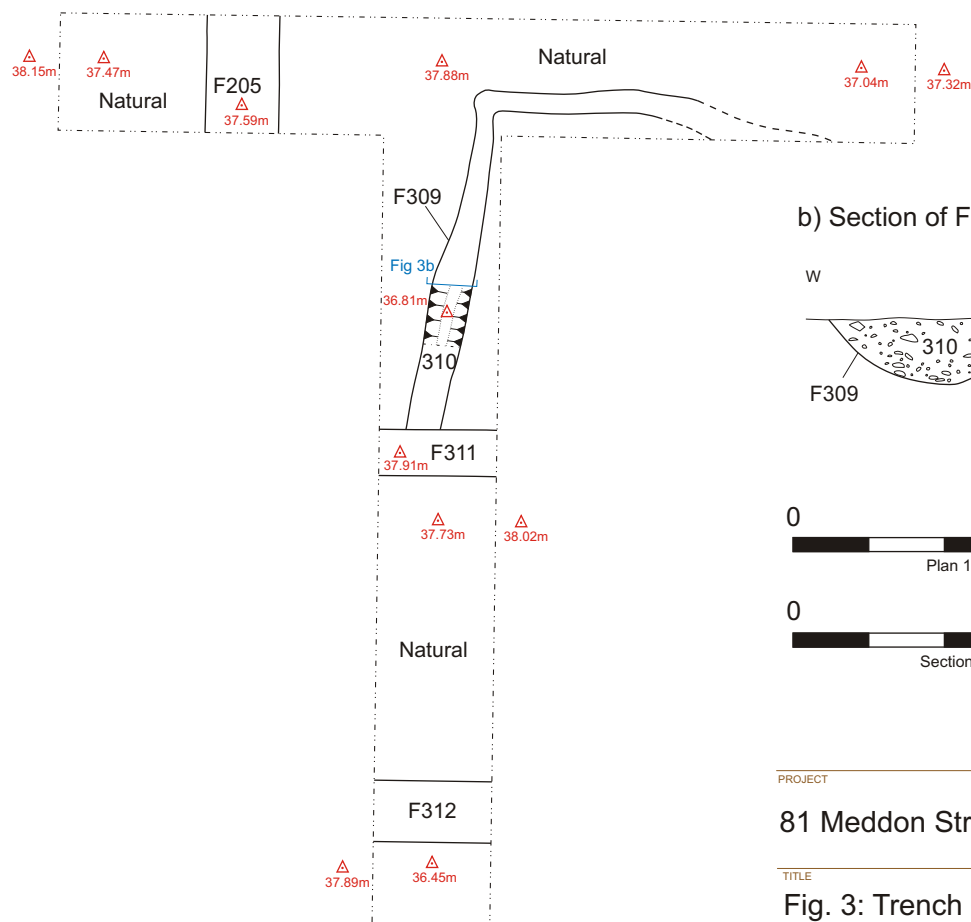
TITLE

Fig. 2: Tentative reconstruction of the ground plan and phasing of the dispensary and infirmary. Some modern partitions have been omitted.

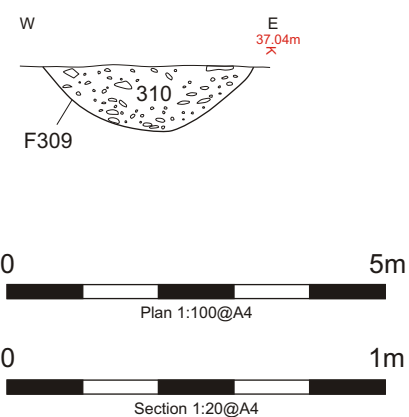




a) Trenches 2 and 3, plan



b) Section of F309



PROJECT

81 Meddon Street, Bideford, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 3: Trench location plan, plan of trenches 2 and 3 and section of F309



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Plate 1: The north elevation photographed in 2007, viewed from the northeast.



Plate 2: The gable elevation of the northeast room viewed from the first floor of the central block photographed in 2007, viewed from the northwest.



Plate 3: The northeast room, north and east elevations photographed in 2007, viewed from the northeast.



Plate 4: The south elevation photographed in 2007, viewed from the southeast.



Plate 5: The ground-floor central corridor photographed in 2007, viewed from the east.

Plate 6: The ground-floor central corridor photographed in 2007, viewed from the west.



Plate 7: Trench 1, general view from the north. 1m scale.





Plate 8: Trench 2, general view from the east. 1m scale.



Plate 9: Trench 3, general view from the south. 1m scale.



Plate 10: Trench 3, section through ditch F309, viewed from the south-southwest. 0.5m scale.



# Appendix 1

Context descriptions



Trench 1		Length 9m	Width 1.55m	Alignment N-S
Context	Description	Depth below ground	Interpretation	
100	Tarmac surface.	0-0.05m	Modern tarmac surface	
101	Compacted stone base for 100.	0.05-0.10m	Modern sub-base for 100	
102	Mid yellow-grey silty clay loam, slightly compacted, containing frequent angular shale and stone up to 120mm long.	0.10-0.50m	Modern levelling layer	
103	Mid orange-grey silty clay loam, friable, containing rare CBM and frequent angular shale and stone up to 80mm long.	0.50-0.88m	Modern levelling layer	
104	Dark grey brown silt loam, friable, heavily rooted, containing abundant angular slate and shale up to 120mm long, and rare small CBM.	0.55-1.20m	Dumped deposit	
105	Mid yellow brown clay loam, compact, slightly rooted, containing abundant angular stone up to 140mm long.	0.96m+	Levelling layer	
106	Shale in fine pale clay.	1.48m+	Natural	
107	Pale yellow-brown silty clay loam, Friable, containing well sorted moderate angular stone up to 50mm long.	0.65-0.75m	Levelling layer	
108	Dark grey-black silt loam, friable, burnt material, containing glass, metal, CBM, charcoal.	0.79-0.88m	Dumped deposit	
109	Pale yellow-grey silty clay loam, friable, containing frequent angular stone and roof slate up to 150mm long, and rare mortar and or plaster.	0.88-1.08m	Levelling layer	
110	Dark blackish-grey silty clay loam, compact, containing moderate poorly sorted stone up to 80mm long and coal/coke, CBM, and charcoal.	1.08-1.36m	Levelling layer	
111	Dark yellow-grey compact silty clay loam, containing rare well-sorted stone inclusions up to 50mm long, and charcoal, coal/coke and bone.	1.24m+	Levelling layer	
112	Modern breeze block wall, east edge of trench.	0-0.20m	20th-century wall of nursing home	
113	Modern drain		Modern drain	

Trench 2		Length 11m	Width 1.55m	Alignment E-W
Context	Description	Depth below ground	Interpretation	
200	Friable mid-grey brown silty clay loam, containing sparse well sorted stone up to 5mm long	0-0.12m	Topsoil	
201	Friable dark black-grey sandy clay loam containing sparse moderately-sorted stone up to 30mm long, charcoal, mortar, and CBM.	0.12-0.44m	Levelling layer	
202	Soft dark olive grey-green silty sand loam with rare inclusions.	0.44-0.54m	Levelling layer	
203	Compact mid grey-brown silty clay with sparse sub-angular to sub-rounded stone up to 40mm long and fragments of brick and tile.	0.54-0.74m	Levelling layer	
204	Mudstone/sandstone/shale bedded in fine pale clay.	0.74m+	Natural	
205	North-south aligned wall from recently demolished property.	0-0.58m	Wall	

Trench 3		Length 11m	Width 1.55m	Alignment N-S
Context	Description	Depth below ground		Interpretation
300	Loose pale grey-brown silt loam with moderate well sorted sub-angular stone up to 60mm long.	0-0.2m		Topsoil
301	Demolition rubble	0.2-0.36m		Levelling layer
302	Dark black-grey silty clay loam containing moderate sub-rounded to sub-angular stone up to 5mm long, with charcoal, and coal.	0.36-0.56m		Made ground
303	Grey silty clay	0.56-0.61m		Silting layer
304	Dark black-grey friable silty clay, containing small sub-rounded stone and coal, charcoal, CBM fragments.	0.61-0.91m		Levelling layer
305	Dark greenish-grey silty clay loam, containing frequent degraded brick fragments along with charcoal and coal	0.91-1.14m		Levelling layer
306	Dark olive-green silty clay containing rare inclusions up to 5mm long.	1.14-1.30m		Levelling layer
307	Dark grey sandy silt clay, compact, containing moderate stone inclusions up to 30mm long.	1.30-1.50m		Levelling layer
308	Bedded shale in pale yellow clay matrix.	1.50m+		Natural
309	NNE-SSW aligned ditch, 0.59m wide.	1.50m+		Cut of ditch
310	Compact mid grey-brown clay loam containing frequent poorly-sorted angular shale up to 160mm long, with charcoal flecks and a sherd of medieval pottery.	1.50m+		Sedimentation fill of F309.
311	Wall aligned east-west	0.10m+		Exterior wall of demolished care home.
312	Wall aligned east-west.	0.10m+		Internal wall of demolished care home.

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