

LAND TO THE REAR OF MOORS YARD, SOUTH STREET,  
SOUTH MOLTON, DEVON

(NGR SS 71262 25693)

Results of an archaeological watching brief and trench  
evaluation

North Devon District Council planning reference 58629

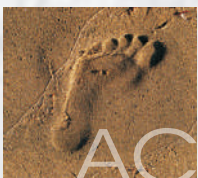
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Prepared by:  
Paul Cooke

On behalf of:  
CgMs Consulting

Document No: ACD1058/4/0

Date: February 2015



archaeology

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## CONTENTS

<i>Summary</i>		
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Archaeological background	1
3.	Aims of the work	1
4.	Methodology	2
5.	Results of the watching brief	2
6.	Results of the trench evaluation	3
7.	The finds	6
8.	Discussion	7
9.	Archive and OASIS entry	7
10.	Acknowledgements	8
11.	Sources consulted	8

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1: Site location  
Fig. 2: Trench plan showing archaeological features  
Fig. 3: Trench 1, plan and sections  
Fig. 4: Trench 2, plan and section  
Fig. 5: Trench 3, Plan and section  
Fig. 6: Trench 4, Plan and sections

## LIST OF PLATES

- Plate 1: General view of site, looking northeast  
Plate 2: General view of trench 1, looking west.  
Plate 3: Section through F2006 and F2009, looking west  
Plate 4: General view of trench 3, looking northwest  
Plate 5: General shot of trench 4, looking west  
Plate 6: Section through F4004, looking north

## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief and trench evaluation was carried out by AC archaeology in January 2015 on land to the rear of Moors Yard, South Street, South Molton, Devon (NGR SS 71262 25693) in advance of a proposed residential development. The site lies within an area of burgage plots close to the centre of the historic town.*

*A probably later prehistoric roundhouse was exposed in one trench, although no other features of this date were exposed, or any finds pre-dating the medieval period recovered. A series of medieval and post-medieval ditches was located, probably representing subdivisions of the medieval fields.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief and trench evaluation carried out by AC archaeology in January 2015 on land to the rear of Moors Yard, South Street, South Molton, Devon (NGR SS 71262 25693; Fig. 1). The evaluation was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, and was requested by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team (HET) to inform proposals for redevelopment of the site.

1.2 The site is located in central South Molton on land to the rear of properties fronting South Street and to the south of Raleigh Mead. It occupies a roughly square plot measuring approximately 0.4 hectares on what was recently mixed hard standing, garages, wasteland and scrub. The site is positioned on broadly level ground at around 131m aOD, with the underlying solid geology consisting of mudstone and siltstone of the Bude Formation (British Geological Survey Online Viewer).

1.3 The proposed development will comprise the construction of 34 retirement living apartments including communal areas, car parking and associated landscaping.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The site has been the subject of a previous archaeological desk-based assessment (Lord and Weaver 2007). This established that it is located on the periphery of the historic core of South Molton, with the majority of the proposed development site formally occupied by agricultural land until the early 20th century. The east portion of the site lies within the rear of former tenements that extend back from South Street that are likely to be medieval in date.

### 3. AIMS OF THE WORK

3.1 The aim of the work was twofold. Firstly, to monitor the groundworks associated with the demolition of the existing buildings and removal of the hardstandings, to identify and record any exposed archaeological deposits or features. Secondly, to establish, through a trial trench evaluation, the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site. The results of the evaluation will be reviewed by the HET and used to inform the requirement for any further investigations.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)**

- 4.1** The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2015a), and adhered to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance, Archaeological Watching Brief* (revised 2014). The monitored groundworks comprised the machine removal of footings, concrete slab and tarmac surfaces associated with a former garage that occupied the site. All exposed deposits were recorded 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 2*.
- 4.2** The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2015b), and adhered to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance, Archaeological Field Evaluation* (revised 2014). It comprised the machine excavation of four 1.8m wide trenches totalling 120m long. This represents an approximate 5% sample of the area to be affected by development. Due to anticipated soil depths, all trenches were excavated down to a depth of approximately 0.3m to 0.5m through modern overburden at double trench width in order to provide a step. Trench locations are shown on Fig. 2 and are located to provide representative coverage across the site. All trench positions were recorded using a Leica Net rover GPS, with 1-2cm accuracy.
- 4.3** The removal of soil overburden was undertaken under the control and direction of the site archaeologist. Non-archaeological overburden was removed by mechanical excavator in spits no greater than 20cm in depth, using a toothless bucket and stored alongside the trench. Stripping by mechanical excavator ceased at the level at which natural was exposed.
- 4.4** Following completion of overburden removal the trench bases were cleaned by hand and any archaeological deposits identified. Spoil heaps were scanned for displaced artefacts. All exposed archaeological features and deposits were excavated by hand to the sample levels outlined in the project design, and recorded 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 2*.

#### **5. RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 2)**

- 5.1** The removal of the concrete footings, concrete slab and tarmac surfaces were undertaken using a machine to depths of between 0.2m to 0.7m. A localised area of deeper excavation was also carried out to remove a mechanical anchoring point, where a pit measuring approximately 2.5m deep was excavated.
- 5.2** From the exposed profiles within each intrusion, the soil stratigraphy consisted of a mid to light yellowish-brown silty-clay loam (101) that was sealed beneath between 0.7m and 1m of modern humic topsoil (100). With the exception of the single deeper pit, the concrete footings had been excavated to a maximum of 0.7m into layer 101 or were within overlying layer 100. There was no visible truncation into any deposits below 101 including the natural. The latter (102) was only exposed within the deeper pit and consisted of a light reddish-yellow weathered bedded slate.

- 5.3** One archaeological feature – a possible pit or ditch (F103) – was exposed within the north side of the deeper excavation. Due to health and safety constraints it was not possible to investigate the feature. It measured approximately 2m wide by 1m deep, and contained a single mid grey clayey-loam fill.

## **6. RESULTS OF THE TRENCH EVALUATION** (Figs 2-6; Plates 1-6)

### **Introduction** (Plate 1)

- 6.1** Trenches 2-4 were excavated down to level of natural, which was exposed at a depth of a depth of between 0.45m and 1.4m below the ground level. The only exception was the extreme west end of trench 1, where the modern deposits were in excess of 2m deep, at which level the excavation ceased. The natural varied from well-bedded shale to patches of pale yellow to pale reddish-brown clay.
- 6.2** All trenches contained cut archaeological features that were excavated and recorded. These are described in detail below. Trench 4 exposed a possible prehistoric ring gully and associated post-hole, whilst trenches 1 to 3 revealed a series of medieval and post-medieval ditches with one post-hole exposed in trench 2.

### **Trench 1** (Plan, Fig. 3a, sections, Fig. 3b and 3c; Plate 2)

- 6.3** This trench was located in the northeast corner of site and was aligned roughly east-west. The top of the natural sloped downwards from east to west, with a very sharp slope at the extreme west end where its level dropped dramatically. It was encountered at a depth of 1m from the surface at the east end of the trench, dropping to at least 2m below the ground level at the west end of the trench. Two ditches were exposed, F1004 and F1008, at the northeast and southwest ends of the trench respectively.
- 6.4** The natural was overlain by buried subsoil 1002, a moderately compact mid yellowish-grey silty clay loam, measuring up to 0.38m thick, and containing common sub-angular shale up to 60mm long. Ditches F1004 and F1008 were cut through this layer.
- 6.5** Ditch F1004 was aligned approximately north-south and had steep straight sides (with a slight concave lip on southwest edge), and a flattish base. It measured 0.70m wide by 0.55m deep, and contained three fills (1005-1007). Basal fill 1005 was a compact, pale grey silty-clay containing frequent sub-angular shale up to 75mm long, deriving from weathering of the feature edges. It measured 0.19m thick and produced a sherd of 18th-19th-century pottery, and two residual sherds of medieval pottery. Middle fill 1006 was a 0.10m thick friable, grey-hued, mid-brown silty clay loam, containing rare coarse stone. It was very similar to 1002, and appeared to also be naturally derived. Upper fill 1007 was a 0.28m thick friable, mid to dark grey silty clay loam, containing common sub-angular shale up to 25mm long. It probably derived from natural soil-based infilling.
- 6.6** Ditch F1008 was aligned north-south and measured 1.16m wide by 0.47m deep. Its east edge had a shallow to moderate straight slope, while the west edge was a steep straight slope. It had a narrow concave base, and contained two fills (1009 and 1010). Basal fill 1009 was a 0.16m thick moderately compact, mid yellow-grey silty-clay, containing frequent sub-angular shale up to 40mm long. This was clearly distinct from 1010 and derived from erosion of the ditch edges. Upper fill 1010 was a 0.31m thick moderately compact, yellow hued pale grey silty-clay, containing rare

sub-angular shale up to 60mm long and rare charcoal flecks. It represents a gradual soil-based natural infilling of the ditch.

- 6.7** Both ditches were sealed by deposit 1001 (only very thinly and sporadically in the case of F1004), a moderately compact mid grey-brown, silty clay loam subsoil, containing common sub-angular stone up to 60mm long. It measured up to 0.35m thick at its maximum extent, and contained post-medieval pottery and a brick fragment. This was overlain by a former topsoil (1000), a moderately friable dark blackish-grey silty clay loam, containing common sub-angular stone up to 60mm long. It measured up to 0.35m thick and contained a small quantity of post-medieval pottery. This was sealed by a modern levelling deposit 1011, a moderately friable but sticky dark blackish-grey, humic silty loam. This layer extends across most of the site, with the exception of those areas until recently containing buildings (essentially the eastern quarter of site), becoming even thicker at the backfilled western end of the trench. It was formed from continuous dumping of 20th-century rubbish and organic waste including for example car parts, glass bottles, plastic and fence posts.

**Trench 2** (Plan, Fig. 4a, section, Fig. 4b; Plate 3)

- 6.8** This trench was located in the northeast corner of site, and was aligned north-south. Natural was exposed at depths of between 0.70m and 0.81m below the ground surface at the south and north ends of the trench respectively. Two archaeological features were exposed; a ditch (F2006) with a post-hole (F2009).
- 6.9** Overlying the natural was 2002, a 0.15m thick moderately friable, dark reddish grey silty clay loam buried subsoil, containing frequent moderately sorted small to medium sub-angular shale. Features F2006 and F2009 cut through this layer.
- 6.10** Ditch F2006 was aligned east-west, and measured 0.90m wide by 0.41m deep. It had steep near-straight sides with a flat base and contained two fills (2005 and 2004). Basal deposit (2005) was a 0.17m thick compact, mid brownish-grey silty-clay, containing moderate small to medium sub-angular shale, and produced a single sherd of medieval pottery. It derived from erosion of the edge of the feature. Upper deposit 2004 was a 0.24m thick friable, dark brownish-grey silty-clay containing moderate small to medium sub-angular shale.
- 6.11** Post-hole F2009 was only partially exposed in the west edge of the trench, 1.43m north of ditch F2006. It measured a minimum of 0.40m long, 0.64m wide and 0.23m deep. It had straight, vertical sides, a flat base and contained two fills (2007 and 2008). Fill 2008 was a friable, pale brownish-grey silty-clay, containing moderate small to medium sub-angular shale, and represents initial soil-based packing around the post. It contained one piece of animal bone. Deposit 2007 was a friable, mid brownish-grey silty-clay 'post-pipe', containing moderate small to medium sub-angular shale. This deposit represents the *in-situ* decay of the original post.
- 6.12** Overlying both features was subsoil layer 2001, a 0.26m thick moderately friable, pale brownish-grey silty clay loam, containing moderate small to medium sub-angular shale. It was overlain by topsoil 2000, a dark blackish-grey friable silt-loam, containing moderate small to medium moderately sorted shale. This was up to 0.65m thick and was mixed with some of the modern overburden observed more clearly in trenches 1, 3 and 4. A single sherd of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the layer.

**Trench 3** (Plan, Fig. 5a, section, Fig. 5b; Plate 4)

- 6.13** This trench was located in the centre of site, on a northwest-southeast alignment. The trench became significantly deeper at its northwest end, with natural subsoil being exposed at depths of between 0.70m and 1.60m below the surface. Two archaeological features, ditches F3005 and F3007, were exposed.
- 6.14** The natural was overlain by deposit 3003, a slightly compact, reddish-hued mid brown clay-loam, containing common poorly-sorted angular shale up to 40mm long. This layer was generally 0.08m thick, becoming deeper to the southwest. Ditches F3005 and F3007 had been cut through the layer.
- 6.15** F3005 was an east-west aligned ditch measuring 0.67m wide by 0.55m deep. It had a narrow concave base and moderate convex sides which flared out to a shallower slope. It contained a single fill (3006), a compact, mid grey-brown silty-clay containing sparse well sorted sub-angular to sub-rounded shale up to 30mm long. Medieval pottery was recovered from the upper half of the deposit. The fill appears to have derived from natural erosion of the feature's edges.
- 6.16** F3007 was a north-south aligned ditch which was not excavated due to being interpreted as a continuation of ditch F1008 recorded in trench 1. It was a similar width and contained a similar fill to F1008.
- 6.17** Overlying F3005 and F3007 was subsoil layer 3002, a friable, mid grey silty clay loam, containing moderate well-sorted angular to sub-rounded shale up to 50mm long. The layer was up to 0.46m thick and was overlain by topsoil layer 3001. This was a 0.30m thick friable, dark grey humic silt-loam, containing sparse moderately sorted mixed stone, as well as brick and plaster. This was overlain by the modern overburden layer (3000), of the same character as 1011. It varied in thickness between 0.31m at the southeast end of the trench to 0.80m thick at the northwest end of the trench.

**Trench 4** (Plan, Fig. 6a, section, Fig. 6b; Plates 5 and 6)

- 6.18** This trench was located at the south end of site, on an approximate east-west alignment. The ground sloped downhill to the west where natural was encountered at an overall depth of 1.4m; it rose to 0.9m below the surface at the east end of the trench. Within the trench two curving features (F4004 and F4006) and a posthole (F4007) were exposed.
- 6.19** Ditch F4004 was curvilinear measuring between 1.25m and 1.7m wide by 0.52m deep, with an overall diameter of 7m. Within the excavated section its west edge was straight and vertical, to the point of undercutting, whilst its east edge was more irregular with a very wide taper dropping into a steep concave slope, which then shallows into a convex step to a flat base. It was open to the south and one terminus was partially exposed within the trench. It contained a single fill (4005), a compact, orange-hued mid-brown silty-clay, containing moderately sorted sub-angular to sub-rounded shale up to 40mm long.
- 6.20** Possible post-hole F4007 was located against the inside edge of the terminus of F4004, and had been cut through F4004. It was only partially investigated. The feature was circular and measured 0.4m in diameter. A single fill was exposed (4008), a slightly compact, mid brownish grey silty clay loam, containing sparse moderately well sorted sub-angular to sub-rounded shale up to 20mm long, and relatively frequent charcoal flecks.

- 6.21** Both features were overlain by 0.13m thick buried subsoil layer 4002, a moderately compact, reddish-hued dark grey brown clay loam, containing common sub-angular shale up to 40mm long. This was overlain by subsoil layer 4001, a 0.29m thick moderately compact, mid grey silty clay loam, containing common sub-angular shale up to 50mm long.
- 6.22** Ditch F4006 was aligned north-south, measured 1.3m wide, and had been cut through the subsoil 4001. It was not excavated due to its relatively modern stratigraphic position, and the presence of clearly later post-medieval finds within the upper part of its fill, a mid grey-brown silty-loam containing common sub-angular mixed stone up to 60mm long.
- 6.23** Ditch F4006 was overlain by a 0.3m thick former topsoil deposit (4000). This was a friable, mid blackish-grey humic silt-loam, containing moderate sub-angular stone up to 40mm long. This was overlain by modern overburden (4009), of the same character as 1011.

## 7. THE FINDS, by Charlotte Coles

- 7.1** All finds recovered on site were retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. The assemblage consists of a small collection of medieval and post-medieval pottery and single pieces of brick, slag and animal bone.

Context	Context Description	Medieval Pot		Post-Med Pot		Brick		Slag		Animal Bone	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
1000	Buried topsoil			2	40						
1001	Buried subsoil	1	5	5	268	1	14				
1005	Fill of ditch F1004	2	5	1	5						
2000	Topsoil/modern overburden			1	87						
2005	Fill of ditch F2006	1	4								
2008	Fill of posthole F2009									1	1
3006	Fill of ditch F3005	4	20								
F4006	Unexcavated ditch			4	26			1	84		
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 1. Finds quantification

### Medieval pottery

- 7.2** A total of eight sherds of medieval pottery was recovered from four contexts. These are all North Devon medieval courseware unglazed body sherds, dating from AD 1200-1450.

### Post-medieval pottery

- 7.3** A total of thirteen sherds of post-medieval pottery was recovered from five contexts, eight of which are from buried historic topsoil or subsoil deposits. The vast majority of the post-medieval pottery is North Devon gravel-tempered and North Devon gravel-free wares, dating from 18th century. This includes two chamber pot rims from contexts 1001 and 2000. The exceptions to this are a rim sherd of a South Somerset Sgraffito ware dish from context 1000, dating from the 17th-18th centuries, and a jug handle with a green glaze from context 1001, dating from the 17th century. A piece of



industrial ware dating from the late 18th-19th century was recovered from context 1005, and two pieces of 19th-century pottery were recovered from F4006.

#### **Other finds**

- 7.4** A single piece of brick was recovered from 1001; this is of 19th-20th century date. A piece of iron slag was recovered from ditch F4006. A small fragment of burnt animal bone was retrieved from context 2008; this is too small to identify.

### **8. DISCUSSION**

- 8.1** All trenches were excavated down to natural, which was exposed at depths of between 0.45m and 1.4m. The trenches displayed a near-identical soil sequence, consisting of a buried subsoil of quite variable depth (between 0.08m to 0.38m thick), overlain by a later subsoil, then a topsoil, which was sealed (trench 2 to a lesser extent) by a thick, rubbish-filled modern overburden layer.
- 8.2** Based on its stratigraphic position (below the lower subsoil layer) and typology, it seems probable that ditch F4004 and post-hole F4007 form part of a prehistoric 'structure' of some kind. Whether this is domestic or symbolic is not totally clear. No finds were recovered from either feature, and no evidence of internal activity was exposed. However, it appears to have an entrance on its south side, perhaps partially defined by the posthole F4007. Although small, it fits within the known size range of prehistoric roundhouses within the county. There is no other evidence for prehistoric activity within the site.
- 8.3** In a local context, a number of enclosures have been recorded in the vicinity of South Molton (e.g. Historic Environment Record entries 29062 and 29582). To the north of the town, a pair of concentric circular ditches along with a smaller circular ditch are interpreted as being later prehistoric (probably Iron Age) features (Sims 2013).
- 8.4** Ditches F1004, F1008, F2006, F3005 and F3007 are likely to form subdivisions of medieval fields that probably have their origins as part of a medieval burgage plot or strip fields, some of which, based on the pottery from F1004, carry on in use into the post-medieval period. Post-hole F2009 probably dates to this broad phase of activity.
- 8.5** During the 20th century the ground level was raised significantly, sealing and preserving soils and earlier features.

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

- 9.1** The paper, digital and finds archive are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, where they will be retained until it has been established whether any further investigations are required.
- 9.2** An OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) entry has been created using the unique identifier 204485, and includes a copy of this report.

## 10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd, and managed for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The fieldwork was carried out by Paul Cooke, assisted by Luis Bermudo, Chris Caine and Stella De-Villiers. The report was written by Paul Cooke with the illustrations prepared by Sarnia Blackmore. Thanks are due to Wessex Demolition for providing the plant and driver.

## 11. SOURCES CONSULTED

Hughes, S., 2015a, *Moors Yard, South Street/Raleigh Mead, South Molton, Devon, (NGR SS 71262 25693), Project Design for archaeological monitoring and recording, Planning Reference: North Devon District Council ref. 58629, AC archaeology document no. ACD1058/1/1*

Hughes, S., 2015b, *Moors Yard, South Street, South Molton, Devon, NGR SS 71262 25693, Project Design for an Archaeological Investigation and Mitigation, Planning Reference: North Devon District Council ref. 58629, AC archaeology document no. ACD1058/3/0*

Lord, J. and Weaver, S., 2007, *Archaeological desk-based assessment: South Street Garage, South Molton, Devon*. Unpublished CgMs Ltd. report ref. JL/SW/8423

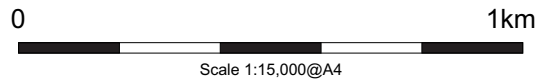
Sims, R., 2013, *Land off Gunswell Lane, South Molton, Devon, Centred on NGR SS 708 263, Results of an archaeological trench evaluation, AC archaeology document no. ACD582/1/0*



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Application area



PROJECT  
 Land to rear of Moors Yard, South Street, South Molton, Devon

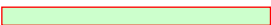
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 Fig. 1: Site location







**Legend**

 Application area

 Trenches 1 - 4

**Period**

 Possible Prehistoric

 Medieval and Post-medieval



**PROJECT**

Land to rear of Moors Yard, South Street, South Molton, Devon

**TITLE**

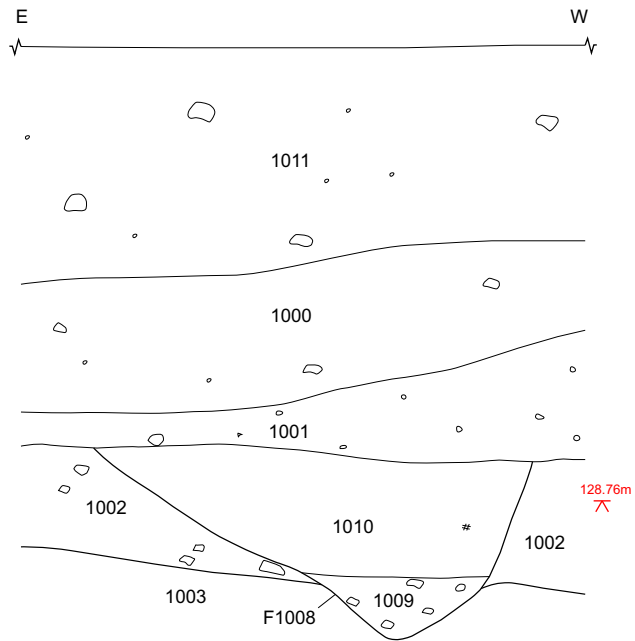
Fig. 2: Trench plan showing archaeological features



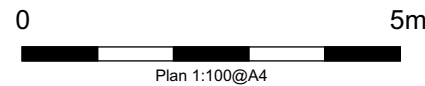
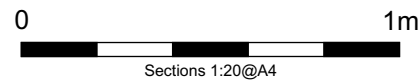
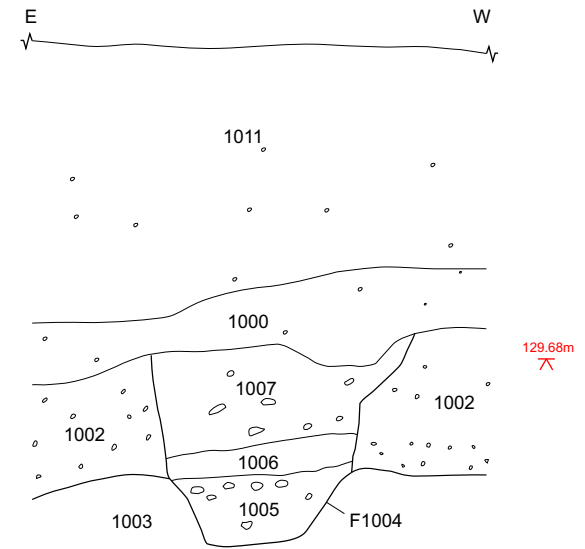
a) Trench 1, plan



b) Section of F1008



c) Section of F1004

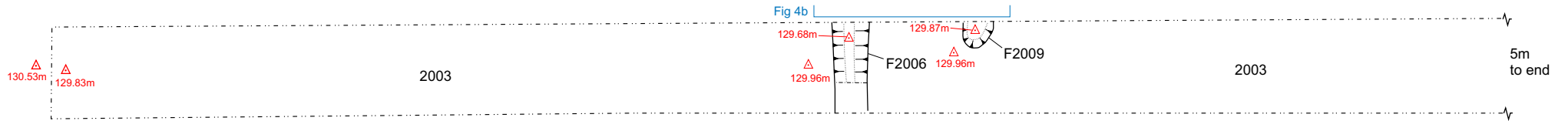


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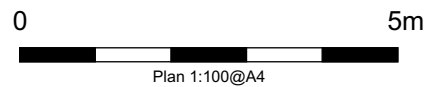
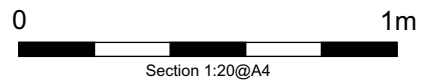
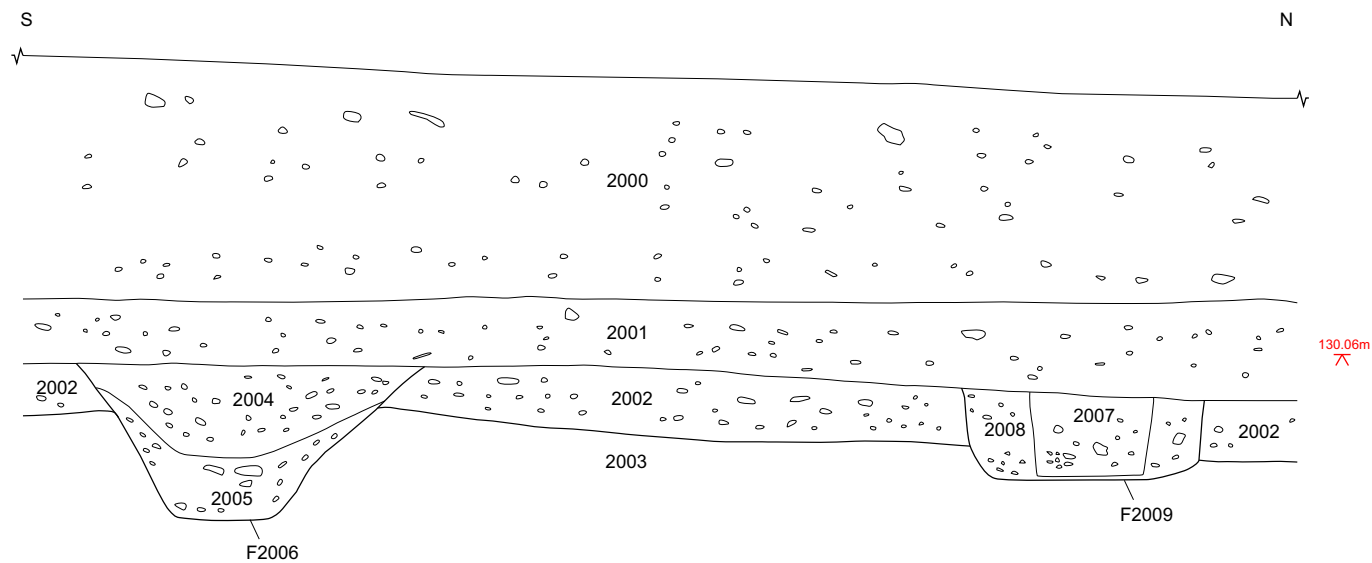
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Fig. 3: Trench 1, plan and sections



a) Trench 2, plan



b) Section of F2006 and F2009

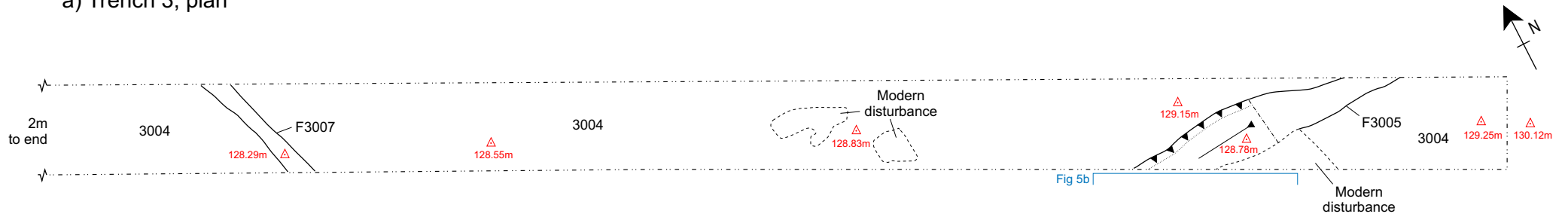


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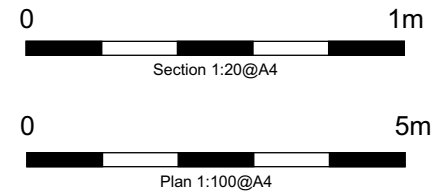
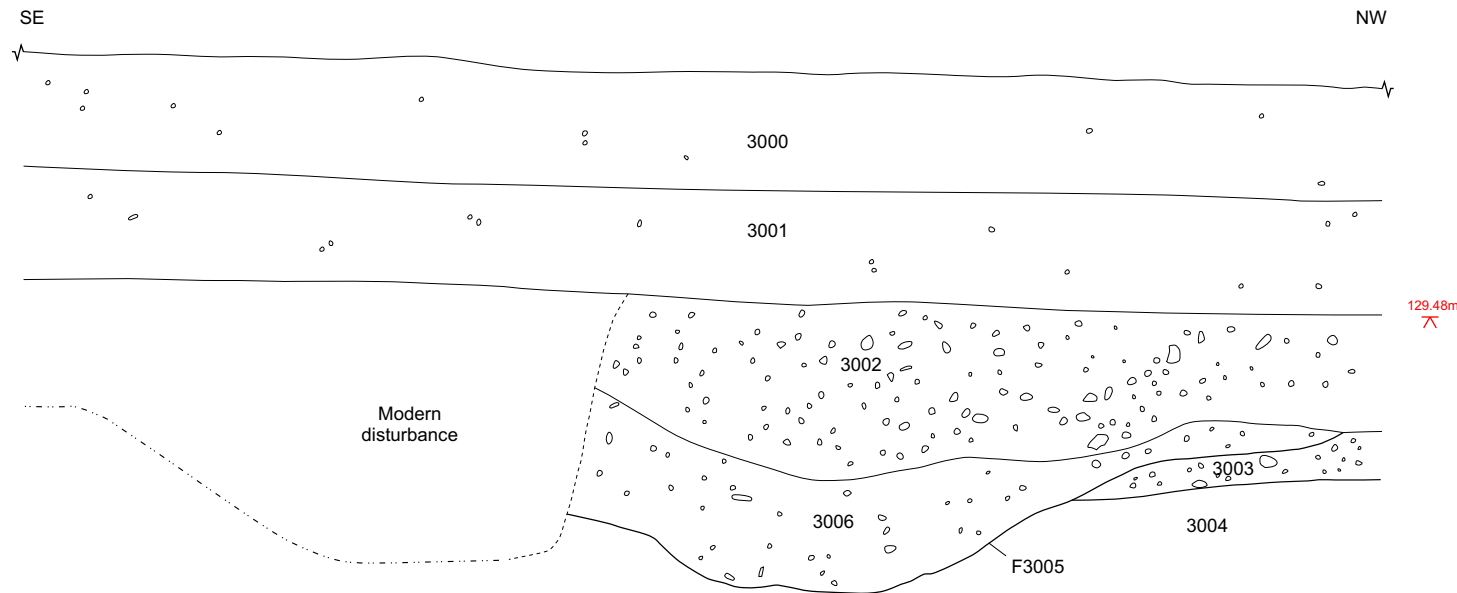
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Fig. 4: Trench 2, plan and section



a) Trench 3, plan



b) Section of F3005

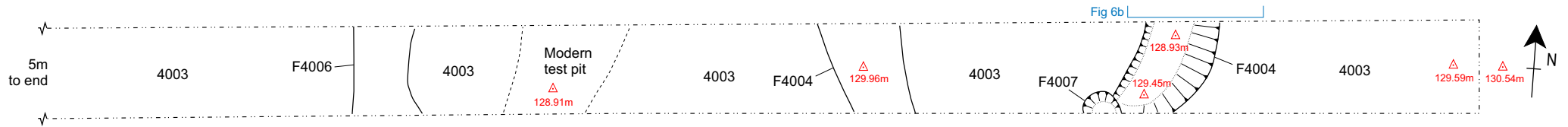


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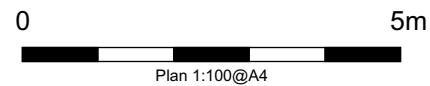
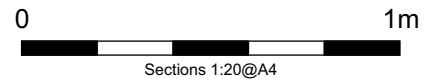
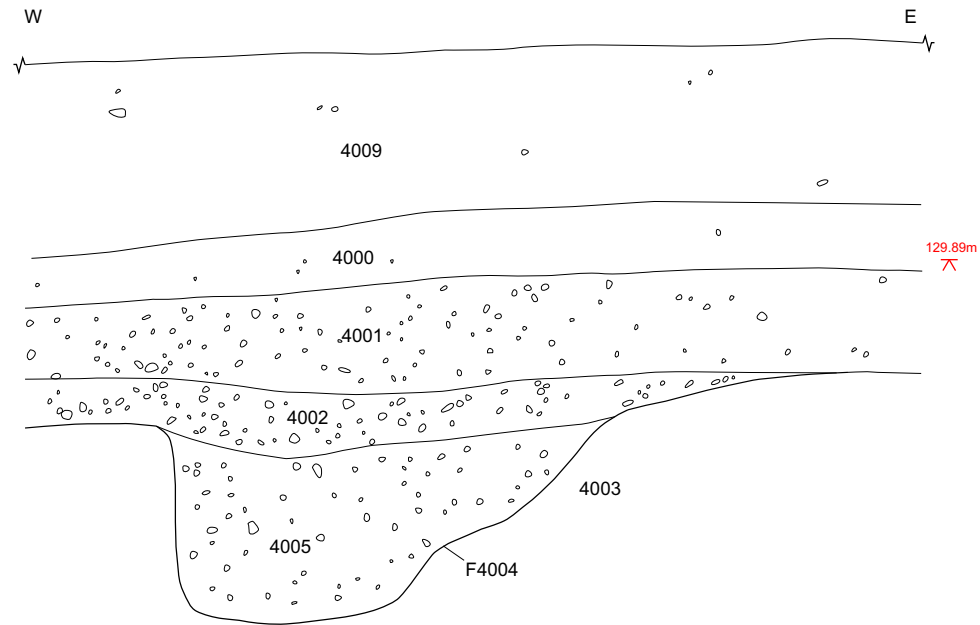
TITLE  
Fig. 5: Trench 3, plan and section



a) Trench 4, plan



b) Section of F4004



PROJECT

Land to rear of Moors Yard, South Street, South Molton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 6: Trench 4, plan and sections



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Plate 1: General view of site, looking northeast



Plate 2: General view of Trench 1, looking west (scales 1m)



Plate 3: Section through F2006 and F2009, looking west (scale 2m)



Plate 4: General view of Trench 3, looking northwest (scales 1m)



Plate 5: General shot of Trench 4, looking west (scales 1m)



Plate 6: Section through F4004, looking north (scale 2m)

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