EXETER CATHEDRAL SCHOOL, NEW NURSERY, CATHEDRAL CLOSE, EXETER, DEVON

(NGR SX 92218 92535)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Exeter City Council Planning Ref: 13/5118/03

Prepared by:
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On behalf of:
Kensington Taylor Ltd

Document No: ACD909/2/1

Date: October 2015

AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AC archaeology between January and April 2015 in the grounds of Exeter Cathedral School, Cathedral Close, Exeter (SX 92218 92535). The development occupies an area of approximately 175m^2 within a former garden on level ground at approximately 40m aOD.

Garden soils, made ground and demolition deposits, two wall foundations and a stone drain were recorded during the evaluation. The walls may be associated with a medieval gatehouse identified in a previous excavation. Finds recovered were post-medieval in date and included pottery sherds, clay tobacco pipe fragments and building materials.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken at the Exeter Cathedral School, Cathedral Close, Exeter (SX 92218 92535) during the construction of a new nursery school. It reports on the archaeological works under required condition 7 of the grant of planning permission by the Exeter City Council (planning reference 13/5118/03). Guidance on the scope of works was provided by the Exeter City Council Principal Planning Manager (Heritage).

1.2 The archaeological works were commissioned by Kensington Taylor on behalf of the Exeter Cathedral School and carried out by AC archaeology between the 13th January and 2nd April 2015.

1.3 The site lies within the grounds of No. 15 Cathedral Close, currently called Hall House. The property covers an area of approximately 0.18ha and includes the house, formal gardens, a tennis court with further less-formal gardens and a vegetable plot beyond. The development covers an area of 175m^2. It lies at a height of approximately 40m aOD. The underlying geology is Permian Sandstone of the Whipton Formation overlaid by Quaternary river terrace deposits (series 6) comprising sand and gravel.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 A detailed discussion of the historical and archaeological background of the site is presented in the trench evaluation report (Rainbird 2013). In brief, the property is located between the east corner of the Roman fortress and within the later walled town. The line of the Roman town walls were reused as the defences for the medieval and later city and the southeast end of the property abuts and incorporates these defences. The Cathedral was founded in AD 1050 and in *c*. 1286 its precinct was walled. The property of No. 15 Cathedral Close was originally the residence of the Cathedral Chancellors, and was established between 1281 and 1321 on land that was formerly part of the Bishop's Palace gardens (Allan and Dyer 2005, 93); the palace lies to the south of the present site. Surviving fabric of this date includes the northwest boundary wall between the property and Cathedral Green. Much of the northeast boundary wall of the property – adjoining the site of the proposed nursery – has also been identified as being of medieval date and interpreted as the wall of the Bishop's Palace gardens (*ibid*.). Recording of, and excavation adjacent to, the northeast boundary wall in 2004 identified the presence of a late 15th- or early 16th-century gatehouse to the Chancellor's House. The identification of the gatehouse has given rise to the reinterpretation of the overall plan of the property to include two courtyards, with the gatehouse serving the outer, public court (*ibid*.).

2.2 Archaeological trench evaluation in support of the planning application for the current development was undertaken by AC archaeology in 2013. Garden features, demolition

deposits, cobbled surfaces, a wall foundation and a stone drain were recorded during the evaluation. Several of these features belong to a re-organisation of the garden by levelling and heightening it in relation to the Bishop's Palace gardens to the west. The garden makeover most probably relates to the Georgian works on the Chancellor's House, dated to *c.* 1740, with the new refaced or southeast extension facing on to the gardens. Demolition deposits in these layers indicate that a building, possibly only the gatehouse, or buildings were formerly situated in the area of the garden. Finds recovered were predominantly post-medieval in date and included pottery sherds, clay tobacco pipe fragments, metal objects, building materials and animal bones. Three sherds of medieval pottery, including one of Late Saxon date, were in residual contexts, but are rare finds from the Cathedral Close area.

3. AIMS

3.1 The objective of the works was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological deposits exposed during the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to observe any exposures of medieval or earlier date that may have been exposed in the deeper service trenches, below the post-medieval levelling deposits.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 All monitoring and recording were carried out in line with a method statement prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2014).

4.2 All excavations were undertaken with a 360^{o} mini-digger fitted with a toothless bucket or by hand. Material was removed to the required formation level or the top of significant archaeological deposits. Where possible 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). Detailed sections or plans were produced at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate.

5. RESULTS (Figs 2-5; Plates 1-6)

5.1 Introduction

The watching brief comprised the observation of the excavation of trenches for services and drainage; these had the potential to expose medieval or earlier deposits and features. The majority of this was to the northwest of the new building which was constructed on a shallow concrete slab on piles in order to minimise the impact on buried remains, and as a result the relatively shallow groundworks in this area were not observed. The deeper excavations outside this footprint included the excavation of a large trench to accommodate an attenuation drain structure. The service trenching also extended beyond the limits of the property where a cable trench was excavated crossing the cobble surface of the lane (New Cut) in Cathedral Close and a pit was dug to receive this cable within the bounds of the development. A further trench for drainage was also dug. The relevant plans and sections are included as Figs 2-5.

5.2 Cable trench in Cathedral Close (Fig. 3; Plate 1)

This trench measured approximately 4m long by 0.3m wide and 0.65m deep where it crossed the cobbled lane, and was enlarged to a pit 2m long by 1m and 0.85m deep within the pavement on the northeast side of the lane. The overlying deposits consisted of the cobbles (100), which were set on concrete (101), overlying a layer of tarmac (102). The underlying deposits were disturbed by a series of 20th-century services. The main exposed deposit (103) consisted of dark slightly greyish brown silty clay loam which contained two sherds of flower

pot, brick, tile, slate, clay tobacco pipe, animal bone, an oyster shell, plaster, charcoal and decaying wood. At the base of the trench two brick-built drains (F104 and F105) and four electricity cables were revealed. The drains F104 and F105 were approximately 0.3m wide and aligned NW-SE although F105 may turn to the SE as a probable extension reappears in the larger part of the trench in the pavement.

A possible ditch or pit (F106) cutting a thick deposit (103) was partially revealed in close proximity to the extension to drain F105. The cut was quite apparent and although its fill (107) was slightly darker it was otherwise undifferentiated from 103 and contained three sherds of post-medieval pottery.

5.3 Cabling pit (Fig. 3; Plate 2)

The trench for cabling was continued by breaking a hole in the wall at 0.3m below the internal ground surface into a pit measuring 1m by 1m and approximately a maximum of 1m deep. The wall continued below this depth. Four layers (109-12) were identified against the wall. The uppermost layer (109) is a garden soil consisting of brown silty sandy loam. Below this was a possible levelling layer (110) of brown silty sand above a buried former garden soil (111) of greyish brown silty sand. The basal deposit revealed (112) appeared to be a demolition layer consisting of mixed stone, slate and pebbles in a brownish red sandy silt matrix. It contained a fragment of tobacco clay pipe stem which was noted but not kept.

5.4 Storm water attenuation facility trench (Fig. 4; Plates 3-4)

The works for the storm water attenuation facility were started by the excavation of a pit measuring 1.6m by 1.3m and 2m deep to locate the current drainage system for connection. This hole revealed a sequence of deposits with the modern ceramic drain pipe present at a depth of 1.3m below the ground surface. The uppermost layer was a garden soil (113) over made ground deposits (114-16), overlying demolition deposits (117-18) and these in turn overlay deposits (119-21) of probable post-medieval date. The details of the deposits are set out in Table 1 below:

113	Garden soil – reddish brown silty clay loam
114	Made ground – reddish brown sandy clay
115	Made ground – reddish brown sandy silt containing three sherds of post-medieval pottery
116	Made ground – band of red clay
117	Demolition deposit – dark grey sandy silt showing evidence of burning
118	Demolition deposit – dump of yellowish white sandy mortar
119	Reddish brown sandy silty clay
120	Dark reddish brown sandy silty clay
121	Reddish brown sandy silty clay
124	Possible natural – yellowish red clay

Table 1: deposits within the attenuation facility trench.

A large trench for the storm water attenuation facility tank was dug in a southeasterly direction from the original pit and measured approximately 12m long by up to 1.5m wide and 1m deep. After approximately 1.5m from the original pit the deposits became less complex and very unstable, being dominated beneath the garden soil (113) by a deposit (equivalent to 115) rich in demolition-related material including fragments of mortar and slate (123). Approximately halfway along the trench wall foundation 122 was revealed at the base of the excavation on an NE-SW alignment. It measured 0.4m wide and 0.60m high, and was constructed of sub-rounded large breccia stone blocks measuring up to 0.6m by 0.4m by 0.2m, with remnants of lime mortar bonding. To the southeast of wall 122 further along the trench a drain (F212) originally seen in evaluation test pit 2 was exposed and a further wall foundation (125), also NE-SW aligned, was revealed. Wall 125 was constructed of sub-angular breccia stone blocks

measuring up to 0.8m by 0.3m by 0.2m with no bonding material visible. At this end of the trench the overlying deposit (126) was a different garden soil consisting of dark brown silty loam containing finds of modern date which were not retained.

5.5 Drainage trench (Fig. 4; Plates 5-6)

Running parallel to the northeast of the groundworks for the storm water attenuation tank a narrower shallower trench measuring 15m by 0.5m and 1m deep was excavated for internal drainage from the new nursery. This also exited at the original pit for the attenuation tanks works in a SE direction and after approximately 0.5m from the original pit the deposits became less complex and very unstable, being dominated beneath the garden soil (113) by a deposit (123) rich in demolition-related material including breccia stone blocks, fragments of mortar and slate, along with animal bone and three sherds of post-medieval pottery. The continuation of wall 122 was exposed although wall 125 and drain F212 was not.

6. FINDS by Naomi Payne

6.1 Introduction

Finds recovered on site during the watching brief were retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They were then quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage was scanned to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. The assemblage consists of small quantities of post-medieval pottery, ceramic building material, clay tobacco pipe, shell and iron. The finds are summarised in Table 2.

Contex	Context description	Iron		Clay tobacco pipe		CBM		Post-medieval pottery		Animal bone		Shell	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
103	Backfill deposit			1	2	1	75	2	13	3	66	1	15
107	Fill of possible pit F106							3	27				
113	Garden soil deposit	1	12										
115	Made ground deposit							3	86				
123	Demolition deposit							3	41				
Total		1	12	1	2	1	75	11	167	3	66	1	15

Table 2: Summary of finds by context (weights in grams)

6.2 The pottery

A total of 11 sherds (167g) of post-medieval pottery was recovered from four contexts. Three contexts produced sherds of South Somerset earthenware including a body sherd from context 107, a complete base sherd from a cup with an internal speckled copper green glaze from context 115 and three sherds from context 123, two of which are rim sherds from sgraffito plates or dishes. The remaining pottery included two sherds of Staffordshire-type yellow slipware from context 115, two sherds of flower pot from context 103 and two conjoining pieces of porcelain from context 107. Most of the pottery is 18th century in date, with the exception of the flower pot and the porcelain, which are probably 19th century.

6.3 Clay tobacco pipe

A post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem fragment (2g) was recovered from context 103. It has no distinguishing features and cannot be closely dated.

6.4 Ceramic building material (CBM) and slate

A post-medieval tile fragment (75g) was recovered from context 103. This is an edge piece, 15mm thick, which is probably from a roof tile.

6.5 Iron

A single iron nail (12g) was recovered from context 113, a garden soil deposit. This cannot be closely dated but the appearance of the corrosion suggests a date in the 19th or 20th century.

6.6 Animal bone and shell

Three fragments (66g) of animal bone and an oyster shell (15g) were recovered from context 103.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 It was not possible to date the well-built stone drain F212 found previously in evaluation trench 2, although it was found to be buried by deposits dating to the 18th century at the earliest (Rainbird 2013). The drain was found to be at a similar depth as the wall foundations 122 and 125 and perhaps indicates that these were buried at a similar time; probably during a garden makeover relating to the Georgian works on the Chancellor's House, dated to *c.* 1740. This re-organisation of the garden by levelling and heightening it in relation to the Bishop's Palace gardens to the west also accounts for the majority of the deposits, including demolition layers encountered during the watching brief.

7.2 The date and function of the wall foundations 122 and 125 could not be established, but their NE-SW orientation matches with the expected orientation of the medieval gatehouse, and any associated outer courtyard structures, and indicate the possibility that they may relate to structures in place prior to the demolition of the gatehouse prior to *c*. 1744 (Allen and Dyer 2005).

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The watching brief has largely confirmed the conclusions of the evaluation which revealed garden surfaces, made ground and demolition deposits all of post-medieval date. The fragments of wall foundation, both NE-SW aligned are indications of activity which may relate to buildings within the garden/courtyard dating prior to mid-18th century reorganisation of the area, but there were no finds or deposits to indicate any of the exposed deposits were anything other than of post-medieval date, although the possibility that these walls represent earlier structures cannot be fully discounted.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

9.1 The finds, paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, and will be deposited with the Exeter Cathedral School.

9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 214672, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

10.1 The watching brief was commissioned by Kensington Taylor on behalf of Exeter Cathedral School, and managed for them by Philip Thompson, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The site work was undertaken by Stella De Villiers and Paul Cooke, with the figures prepared by Stella De Villiers. Thanks are due to the staff of the main contractor, Build Care Plus Ltd, for their assistance during the fieldwork.

11. REFERENCES

Allan, J. and Dyer, M. 2005: 'The Medieval gatehouse of the Chancellor's House, Cathedral Close, Exeter', *Proc. Devon. Archaeol. Soc.* **63**, 93-102.

Passmore, A., 2014, *Exeter Cathedral School, Exeter, (NGR SX 92218 92535), Written Scheme of Archaeological Work for archaeological monitoring and recording, Exeter City Council planning reference: 13/5118/03, condition 7*, AC archaeology doc. no. **ACD909/1/1**.

Rainbird, P., 2013, *Exeter Cathedral School, Proposed New Nursery, Cathedral Close, Exeter, Devon (NGR SX 92218 92535) Results of an archaeological trench evaluation*, AC archaeology doc. no. **ACD761/2/1**.

0 250m

Scale 1:7500@A4

Location of site

PROJECT

Exeter Cathedral School, New Nursery, Cathedral Close, Exeter, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site

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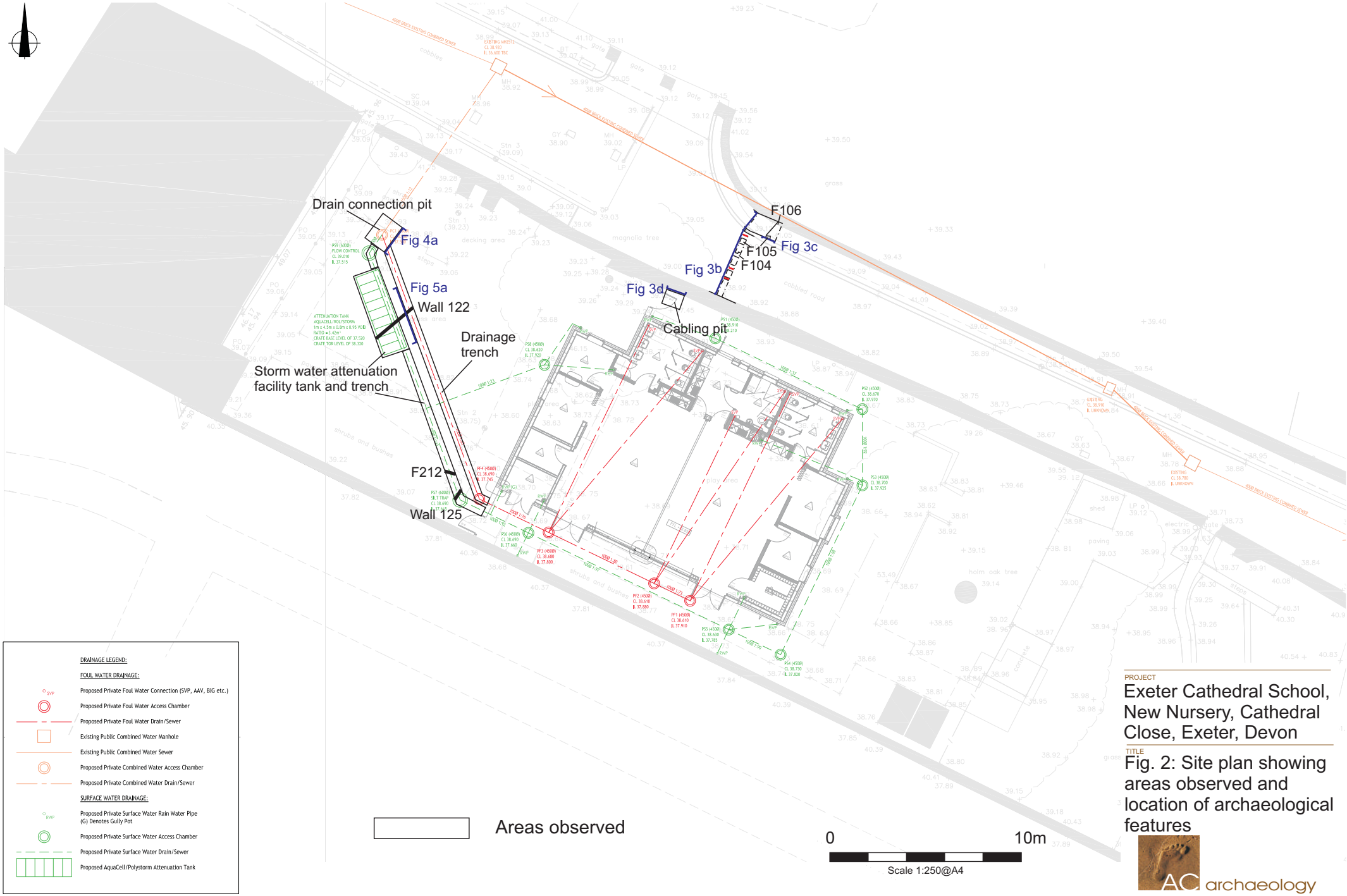

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Fig. 2: Site plan showing areas observed and location of archaeological features

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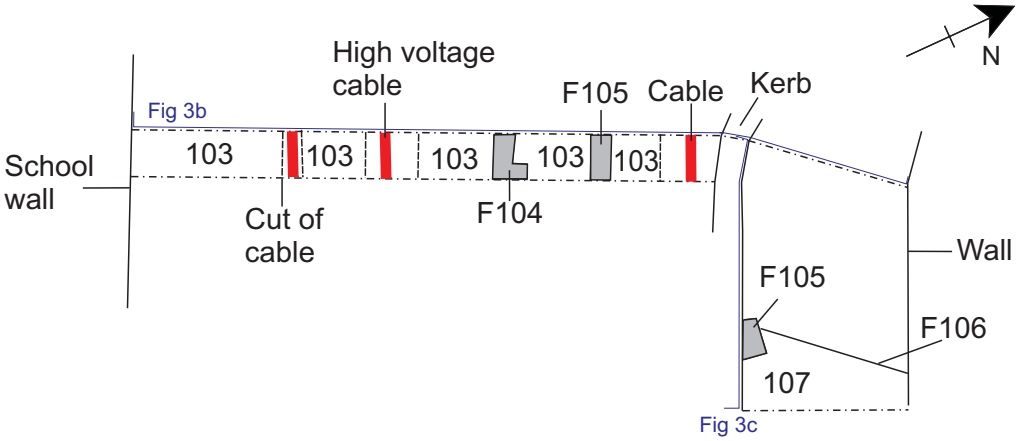
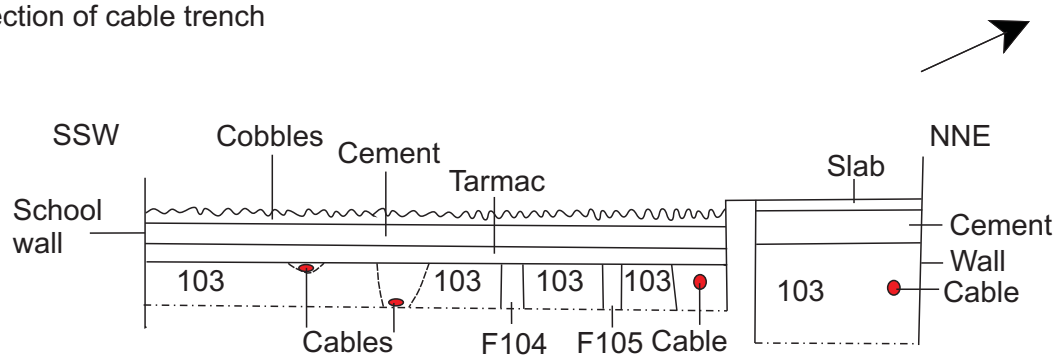
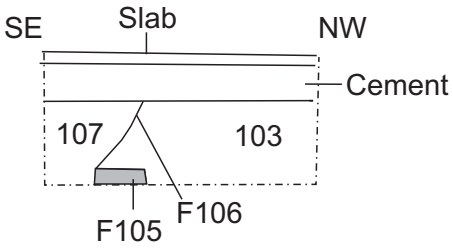
a) Plan of cable trench



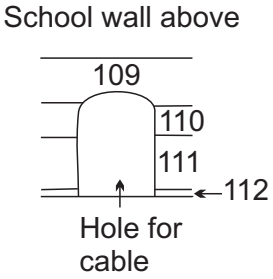
b) Section of cable trench



c) Section of cable trench



d) Section of cabling pit



0 3m

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Fig. 3: Cable trench in Cathedral Close, plans and sections and cabling pit section

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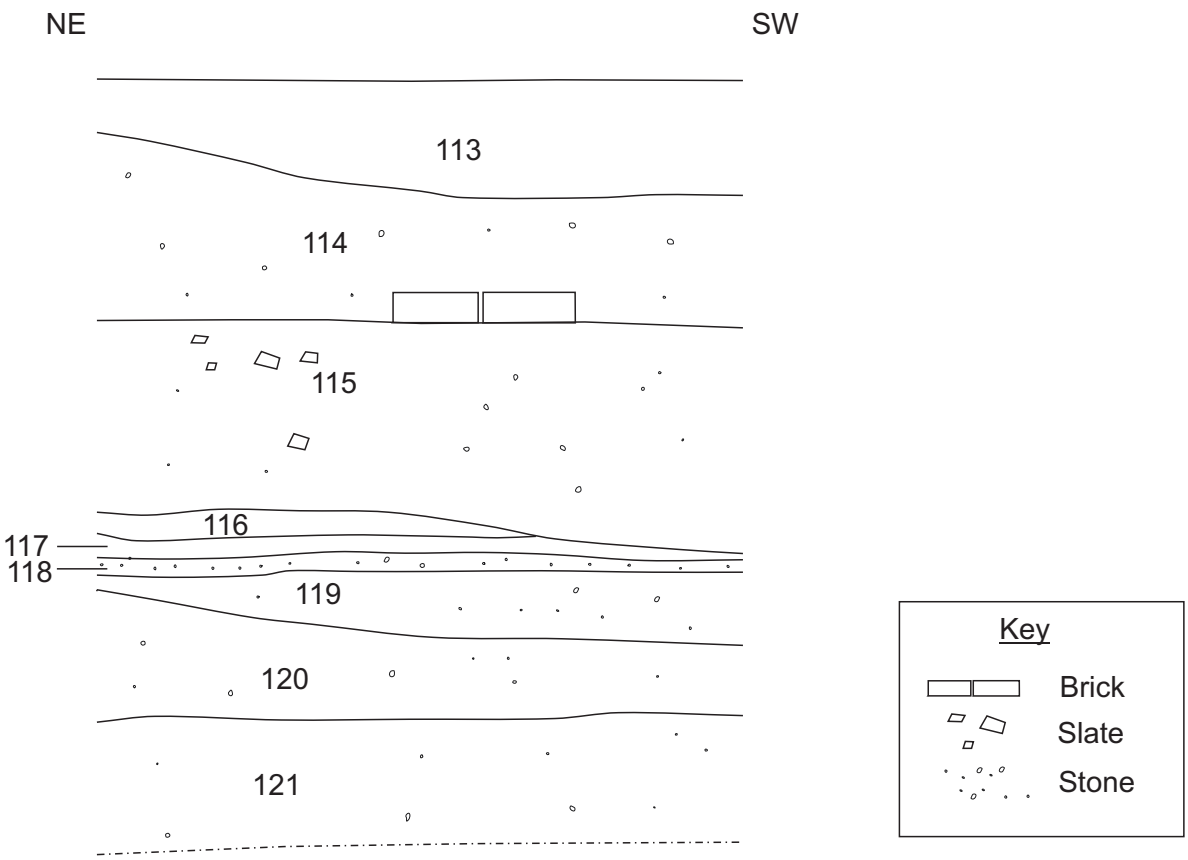
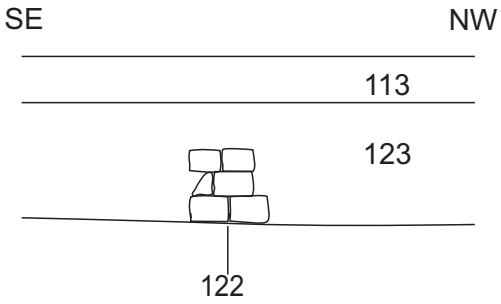
a) section of drain connection pit



b) Section of drainage trench



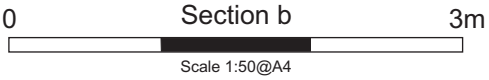


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Fig. 4: Sections

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Plate 1: Cable trench in Cathedral Close, viewed from the north

Plate 2: Cabling pit and hole beneath boundary wall, viewed from the southwest (scale 1m)

Plate 3: Storm water attenuation facility drain connection pit, viewed from the east

Plate 4: Storm water attenuation facility tank trench, viewed from the north

Plate 5: Drainage trench, work in progress, viewed from the north

Plate 6: Drainage trench, wall 122 and deposit 123, viewed from the northeast (scale 1m)

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