

# PAIGNTON PARISH CHURCH HALL, CHURCH PATH, PAIGNTON, DEVON

(NGR SX 88646 60790)

## Results of an archaeological excavation

Torbay Council planning ref. P/2014/0544, condition 1

The Bishop's Palace: Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List no. 1020764)

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## Summary

*An archaeological excavation was undertaken by AC archaeology during July 2015 in the grounds of the former Bishop's Palace, Paignton, Torbay. The former Bishop's Palace is a Scheduled Monument. The excavation occupied an area of 12 square metres adjacent to the Paignton Church Parish Hall, which had been subject to extensions and external landscaping. The excavation was carried out as mitigation for contravention of a planning condition, and to ameliorate the architect's failure to obtain (Scheduled Monument Consent) SMC; to reveal features buried by the new build to the hall; and to estimate the destruction caused by that new build. The work took place in an area previously subject to SMC issued 11 January 2012, and varied 25 April 2012, whose validity is 5 years.*

*The excavation exposed the stepped foundation courses of the curtain wall, and wall footings perpendicular to the curtain wall. A small demolition dump contained a significant deposit of medieval ceramic floor tiles.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken by Exeter Archaeology on 15 July 2015 following building works at the Paignton Parish Church Hall and within the grounds of the former Bishop's Palace, Paignton, Torbay (SX 88646 60790). The investigations were commissioned by Paignton Parish Church and were required by Torbay Council following the contravening of condition 1 of the grant of planning permission (reference P/2014/0544) for "extensions and alterations to the Parish Church Hall". Guidance on the scope of the archaeological investigations was set out by Hal Bishop, the Senior Historic Environment Officer for Torbay Council.

1.2 The planning condition stipulated that:

*No development shall take place within the application area until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in accordance with a written scheme of investigation submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.*

1.3 Construction began without the implementation of a programme of archaeological works, or a valid SMC (a clear breach of AMAA Act 1979, S.3). As a result, the mitigation reported here was required by Torbay Council. It involved the partial demolition of building works previously completed, which in particular involved the dismantling of a ramp constructed from the north landing at the top of the steps providing access from Church Path to the Church Hall. Following the excavation the area of the ramp was reinstated as a flower bed.

1.4 The archaeological works were commissioned by Paignton Parish Town Council and carried out by AC archaeology on the 15th July 2015.

1.5 The site is located within the bounds and on the east side of the former Bishop's Palace, presently used as the Vicarage Garden and grounds of the Church Hall. The Palace is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Heritage List no. 1020764) and the upstanding boundary walls are a Grade II\* Listed Building (National Heritage List no. 1208109).

1.6 The site generally lies on level ground at around 13m aOD, although there is a drop in level between the Church Path to the north and the grounds of the Church Hall and Vicarage. In addition, the Church Hall has been terraced into the hillside, and is situated on the site of a

former tennis court. The underlying geology comprises Permian conglomerate, breccia and sandstone.

## **2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The Bishop's Palace is first documented in 1258 and the earliest surviving fabric is of 13th- and 14th-century date (Bishop 2012). This appears to have been the period when the palace was most heavily used; John Grandisson, Bishop from 1327 to 1369, is known to have stayed there ten times, including a period of three months in 1329. By the 15th century use of the palace had declined, with Bishop Lacy staying on only three occasions; the last known visit is believed to have been in 1447.
- 2.2** At the Reformation Bishop Veysey was subjected to severe pressure from the Crown to part with his more valuable manors and in 1549 he granted Paignton to Sir Thomas Speke. By this time the palace was said to be ruinous. In 1577 Speke conveyed the manor to Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (*ibid.*).
- 2.3** The later history of the palace site has recently been published by Bishop (*ibid.*). The 1841 Paignton tithe map depicts the palace as a rectangular enclosure with a diagonal track or path running southeast from the end of Palace Place. By 1864, when the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of the area was published, land to the east of the palace had been developed for housing, serviced by new roads and alleys. The earlier path, depicted on the tithe map was replaced by a new path (Church Path) running along the north side of the enclosure, having been taken out of the churchyard. The southern limit of the former path was marked as a boundary. The map also shows the area occupied by the present (1910) vicarage as being enclosed.
- 2.4** The Palace was investigated by Colonel Ridgeway of Blackawton in the late 19th century. He is said to have uncovered remains of buildings, although his work was not published and unfortunately the whereabouts of any records he made is unknown.
- 2.5** In 2001 an architectural investigation of the palace walls was carried out by English Heritage (Jones 2001). A plan of the site, along with a profile of the Coverdale Tower, was prepared. The walls were described and a phasing of the masonry put forward. Further recording of the Coverdale Tower was carried out by Exeter Archaeology in 2007 prior to repairs being carried out. This confirmed Jones' observation of the tower being lit by a series of 14th-century windows, some of which had been replaced during the 15th century.
- 2.6** In 2003 a building within the southwest corner of the churchyard was excavated by Exeter Archaeology. This had previously been referred to as a 'chapel'. However, the building was reinterpreted as the ground-floor remains of a two-story lodging block with attached garderobe block (Passmore 2004). Later observations made during the relaying of a gas pipe in Church Path identified the presence of a north-south aligned wall linking the lodging block with the palace enclosure to the south.
- 2.7** In 2003 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Exeter Archaeology around the Church Hall (Whiteaway and Stead 2003). This demonstrated extensive modern truncation, and no medieval archaeological deposits were exposed.
- 2.8** In 2012 the history, architecture and development of the palace was reviewed by Bishop. As part of his analysis of the site he reinterpreted the lodging block as an early hall or chamber block of mid-late 13th century date, with the garderobe being a 14th century addition (Bishop 2012).

**2.9** Also in 2012 historic building recording of the curtain wall on the north and east sides of the palace and four trial test pits were excavated at the base of the north wall by AC archaeology (Passmore 2013). The excavations revealed deposits of probable medieval date and three main phases of masonry were identified in the curtain wall.

### **3. AIMS**

**3.1** The aim of the archaeological investigation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features or deposits including structural remains within the area of the removed new ramp. A particular aim was to expose the foundations of a north-south orientated wall, aligned perpendicular to the curtain walls, to allow the wall to be displayed within the flower bed.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** All excavations were undertaken with a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Material was removed to the required level, which was just below the top of the foundations of the north-south orientated wall. 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, with reference to the results of the 2012 historic building recording, to enable the results of this exercise to be updated.

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

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The excavation comprised the removal of made ground and garden soils to a depth of 0.50m on to a deposit of soft red silty clay (1001). Very slighting projecting footings of the main curtain wall (303) were exposed just above the base of the excavation. The footings for the north-south wall (304) were exposed along with an early demolition deposit (1000). Where possible the context numbers have been retained from the 2012 recording (Passmore 2013), with 1000+ numbers allocated for newly exposed contexts; Figures 2 and 3 are also updated from the earlier report.

#### **5.2 The stone wall footing (304)**

Wall 304 was aligned N-S and exposed over a length of 1.35m. It was generally 1.0m wide with a step out on the west side. It was constructed of well-laid blocks of breccia and limestone. Wall 304 is the same build as curtain wall F303. Its base was not exposed.

#### **5.3 Demolition deposit (1000)**

A further deposit or feature (1000) was revealed but not excavated. It was located towards the west end of the trench above or cutting into 1001, and measured up to 1.1m wide. It contained small breccia blocks, small lime mortar and plaster fragments, slate fragments, and 10 pieces of glazed floor tile of medieval date.

## 6. THE FINDS *by Naomi Payne* (Plates 4-5)

6.1 The finds from the excavation comprised 10 fragments of glazed ceramic floor tile of medieval date, weighing a total of 1093g, all of which were recovered from a demolition deposit (1000).

### 6.2 Description

All of the tiles appear to have originally been square with the exception of the most complete tile, which was triangular. The triangular tile is a quarter of a square tile (of extrapolated original dimensions 133mm by 90mm by 90mm), which appears to have been scored to a depth of 6-8mm along the diagonals prior to firing and broken along these lines once fired. None of the square tile fragments has an original length preserved and none join together. Tile thickness varies between 17.5mm and 21mm. The base of one fragment has mortar adhering to it.

### 6.3 Fabric

The tiles are all fired to an orange-red. The fabric is generally well-sorted with abundant fine white quartz, sparse angular and sub-angular quartz up to 6mm long and sub-angular to sub-rounded sandstone up to 4mm long. One of the foliate design tiles has a broadly similar matrix but contains rare sub-angular flint up to 10mm long.

### 6.4 Decoration

The designs, which are inlaid with white slip, are summarised in Table 1. All of the identifiable designs come from the 'stock repertoire' seen on Wessex tiles. Comparable tiles from Exeter date from the late 13th and early 14th centuries (Allan 1984, 232-3).

Design	Tile shape	No. of fragments	Compare with Allan 1984
Royal arms of England	Triangular	1	No. 3, p. 237
4 x flower	Square	1	No. 65, p. 239
Arms of de Clare	Square	3	Nos. 10 and 11, p. 237
Two birds within a circle	Square	1	No. 23, p. 237
Curvilinear foliate/devolved fleur de lis	Square	2	No. 30, p. 238
Unidentified	Square	2	

Table 1: Summary of tile designs

## 7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The excavations confirmed the findings of the previous trial pit excavations (Passmore 2013) in that the surviving masonry in this part of the site includes a length of east-west aligned (curtain wall – 303) and the stub of a contemporary attached north-south wall (304). Footings of wall 303 have been identified for the first time. The north-south aligned wall (which includes a doorway at its north end) divides two buildings or rooms.

7.2 The excavation has established that in this part of the Bishop's Palace there has been substantial post-demolition landscaping, with at least 0.50m of ground reduction below the floor level of within the building attached to the inside of the north curtain wall. Deposit (1000) contained architectural material from an apparent demolition, with this event dated by ornate glazed tiles to the late 13th and early 14th centuries at the earliest. This demolition event may coincide with a known re-modelling of the palace dated by Bishop (2012, 181-2) to the mid 1330s to the late 1340s. It is considered that the Palace stopped being a major residence at this time (Bishop 2012, 180).

## 8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The excavation has largely confirmed previous investigations at the site. The small assemblage of glazed floor tiles has added significantly to the small corpus of medieval finds from the site (Passmore 2004) and provides an indication of the high status the site once enjoyed.

## 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 Torquay Museum.
- 9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 220004, which includes a digital copy of this report.

## 10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 10.1 The excavation was commissioned by the Paignton Parish Church Council and managed for them by Lee Cochran, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was undertaken by Stella De-Villiers, who also prepared the report figures. The collaborative role of Hal Bishop, Torbay Council's Senior Historic Environment Officer, is duly acknowledged.

## 11. REFERENCES

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