

FORMER BLUECOAT PRIMARY SCHOOL, WHITE'S LANE,
GREAT TORRINGTON, DEVON

(NGR SX 8104 5981)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Torridge District Council planning reference
01/0173/2013/OUTM

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On behalf of:
Trewin Design Architects Ltd

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AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology in April 2015 at the former Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon (NGR SX 8104 5981) during the construction of a residential development.

The watching brief identified a number of deposits, features and walls, none of which could be directly dated, but which are likely to be historic. The earliest deposits and structures probably present soils and remains of structures within plots to the rear of New Street. Later layers are probably associated with construction activity, perhaps of the present properties on New Street. Other walls represent property boundaries depicted on the 1844 tithe map and first edition Ordnance Survey maps, along with part of a building extending back from Church Stile, also depicted on the tithe map.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig.1)

- 1.1** This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by AC archaeology in April 2015 at the former Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon (SX 8104 5981; Fig. 1). The investigation was commissioned by Trewin Design Architects Ltd, and required under condition 6 of the grant of outline planning consent (Torridge District Council reference 01/0173/2013/OUTM) for 'conversion of redundant School building to form 5 dwellings and erection of 8 new dwellings with vehicular access'. Guidance on the scope of the works was provided by the Devon County Historic Environment Team (DCHET).
- 1.2** The site comprises the former Victorian school building and its surrounding asphalt playgrounds. It lies at approximately 100m aOD, with the underlying geology comprising sandstone of the Bude formation.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The archaeological interest in the site derives from its location within the historic core of the medieval town, immediately to the southwest of the parish church of St. Michael and All Angels, which dates to the 14th century, if not earlier. An archaeological watching brief carried out by Exeter Archaeology in 2000 during the construction of an extension to the school, identified a buried soil horizon containing medieval pottery (Higbee 2001).
- 2.2** An historic building survey of the school and a trench evaluation within its grounds were undertaken by AC archaeology in 2013 (Stead and Parker 2013). During the evaluation buried soil layers were exposed within all the trenches and produced pottery dating from the medieval period through the 19th century. Exposed features included a probable burgage boundary ditch, a pit, and the foundations of a demolished school outbuilding. No building remains pre-dating the school were found.
- 2.3** The Great Torrington parish tithe map of 1844 shows the site as mainly an open plot of land, surrounded by houses. A building is shown close to the White's Lane frontage and clearly must have removed prior to the construction of the school. The Ordnance Survey first edition 25-inch map of the 1886 shows the school, which was constructed in the 1870s.

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** The aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the project. At the request of the DCHET the monitoring principally focussed on the excavations within the northern and eastern parts of the site where archaeological features were exposed during the evaluation.
- 3.2** The investigations were carried out in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2014), with all recording carried out in line with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*.

4. THE WATCHING BRIEF (Figs 2-5; Plates 1-9)

- 4.1** The groundworks for units 6-8 were monitored and comprised the machine excavation of 0.70m wide foundation trenches, dug down to maximum depth of 1.40m. For health and safety reasons, in line with the AC archaeology health and safety policy, due to the depth, the trenches could not be entered.
- 4.2** During demolition of the modern school extensions the playground surface had been removed, and across the site was a thin demolition layer (001). The layer was up to 0.20m thick and consisted of mid brownish grey, clayish silt with common brick, slate, tarmac, concrete, glass and metal, and rare, small white china, charcoal and ceramic pipe inclusions. This layer was partially removed from the footprint of units 6-8 before excavation of the foundations began.
- 4.3** Natural subsoil (012) was exposed across the site between 1m and 1.20m below current ground level and comprised compact mid yellow silty clay with rare small to medium sub-angular stone
- 4.4** At the west end of the site an L-shaped wall (S003 and S005) was exposed following removal of layer (001). The west-west length of wall (S003) measured a minimum of 3m long, 0.50m wide by 0.90m deep, whilst the north-south aligned stretch (S005) measured at least 9m long, 0.60m wide by 0.90m deep. The walls were constructed of uncoursed roughly hewn stone, varying in size up to 0.30m long, 0.14m wide and 0.08m deep, bonded in light grey, fairly compact lime mortar. Both walls had been constructed in foundation trenches (F004) and F006) that had been excavated through earlier soil layers (described below)
- 4.5** At the east end of the site further walls were exposed following the removal of layer (001). The earliest element was an L-shaped wall (S024 and S026). The north-south aligned element (S024) was exposed for a distance of 4.80m and measured 0.50m wide by up to 1m deep, whilst the east-west aligned stretch was exposed for a distance of 0.80m and measured 0.56m wide by 1m deep. The walls were constructed of uncoursed roughly hewn stone, varying in size up to 0.40m long by 0.15m wide and 0.10m deep bonded in fairly compact, light grey lime mortar. Both walls had been constructed in foundations trenches (F025 and F027) that had been excavated through earlier soil layers. At the junction of walls (S024) and (S026) a further wall (S036) had been added to their south side. This measured up to 0.70m wide and was exposed for a distance of 3m on a roughly north-northeast to south-southwest alignment. It had the same construction as walls (S024) and (S026).

- 4.6** Two small features were exposed cutting into the natural. Pit F011 measured a minimum of 0.70m long, 0.50m wide by 0.18m deep; its western side had been truncated by construction trench F006. It had sharp, steep sides, becoming shallower, with a concave base. The feature contained two fills – a primary dark greyish brown moderate clayish silt with abundant charcoal inclusions (010), and an upper, secondary fill of mid greyish green clayish silt with very rare, small charcoal fleck inclusions (009).
- 4.7** Pit F023 was only recorded in section, and measured 1.15m long by 0.30m deep. Its north side was steep, but its southern side was gentler breaking into a slightly concave base. The pit contained a single fill (022) consisting of mid brown, moderate clayish silt with very rare small charcoal fleck inclusions.
- 4.8** Across the site a consistent soil layer (008)/(021)/(035) was present overlying the natural and sealing pits F001 and F023. This measured up to 0.70m deep and consisted of a moderate mid brown clayish silt with common small charcoal flecks, rare small mortar flecks and very rare small sub-angular stones.
- 4.9** A single feature was identified cutting into layer (021). This was an east-west aligned wall (S018) measuring 0.58m wide by 0.40m thick, and constructed of uncoursed roughly hewn stone, measuring up to 0.22m long by 0.12m wide by 0.08m deep bonded in fairly compact light grey lime mortar. The wall had been laid in a foundation trench F019 with vertical sides and a flat base.
- 4.10** Above (008)/(021)/(035), a series of thinner layers (013, 020, 028 and 029) was identified in various parts of the site. Layers (020) and (028) were 0.10m thick bands of light whitish grey lime mortar with very rare, small sub-rounded stone inclusions. Layer (029) measured 0.10m thick and consisted of moderate mid brownish grey clayish silt with abundant, small to medium slate inclusions. Layer (013) was somewhat thicker (0.72m) and consisted of moderate dark brownish grey silty clay with rare, small to medium sub-angular stone, very rare small mortar and very rare small charcoal flecks.
- 4.11** Two structures (S016 and S014) had been constructed into layer (013). Wall S016 was aligned north-south and exposed for a length of 0.80m. It measured 0.50m wide by 0.30m thick, and was constructed of uncoursed roughly hewn stone measuring up to 0.24m long by 0.16m wide and 0.10m deep bonded in fairly compact light grey lime mortar. The wall was constructed in an irregularly shaped foundation trench F017. Wall S014 was aligned east-southeast by west-northwest and exposed for a distance of 4.40m. It measured up to 0.45m wide by 0.72m thick, and was constructed of uncoursed unhewn stone measuring up to 0.36m long by 0.12m wide and 0.08m thick bonded in fairly compact light grey lime mortar. The wall was constructed in a foundation trench F015 that had vertical straight sides and a flat base.
- 4.12** Walls S016 and S014 were sealed by a further soil layer (007) that was present across the site also sealing the other, earlier soils layers. This layer measured up to 0.80m thick and consisted of moderate dark brownish grey clayish silt with rare, small to medium slate and sub-angular stone and very rare small charcoal flecks. It was overlain by the modern levelling 001.
- 4.13** No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

5. COMMENTS

- 5.1 The watching brief identified a number of deposits, features and walls, none of which could be directly dated. However, all of the exposed archaeology is likely to be historic. The earliest soil (008)/(021)/(035) probably represents a cultivation soil within the open rear plots to the rear of New Street properties. Walls S014, S016 and S018 probably represent the remains of structures within these plots. None were particularly substantial with walls S016 and S018 being particularly small. They had been removed by 1844 when the tithe map was prepared.
- 5.2 The later layers – in particular the mortar deposits (020) and (028) – appeared to be associated with construction activity rather than occupation, and may be associated with building or rebuilding of surrounding properties in the early 19th century (for example, the Listed buildings on New Street to the north which are described as being of early 19th-century date).
- 5.3 Walls S005 and S003 form subdivisions of the plots behind New Street. Wall S005 is the earliest and is depicted on the 1844 tithe map. Wall S003 is first depicted on the 1880s Ordnance Survey maps forming part of a rectangular plot behind nos 13-17 New Street. It was probably constructed when the school was built in the 1870s. Walls S026 and S024 represent the west end of a building extending back from Church Stile. It is depicted on the 1844 tithe map, and on Ordnance Survey maps through to the later 20th century. The attached wall S036 is a boundary wall and from its alignment probably presents the wall depicted on the 1844 tithe map rather than its 20th-century replacement.

6. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

- 6.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology in Bradninch, and in due course will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.
- 6.2 An entry to the OASIS database, including a digital copy of this report, has been created using the unique identifier 237255.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 This project was commissioned by Trewin Design Architects Ltd, and managed for them by James Trewin, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The watching brief was carried out by Abigail Brown. The report illustrations were prepared by Stella De-Villiers.

8. SOURCES CONSULTED

Higbee, L. 2001, *Archaeological Recording at Bluecoat School, White's Lane, Great Torrington*, Exeter Archaeology report no. **01.20**

Passmore, A., 2014, *Former Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon (NGR SX 8104 5981), Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological watching brief*, AC archaeology document no. **ACD947/1/1**

Stead, P and Parker, R. 2013, *Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon (NGR SX 8104 5981), Results of an Archaeological Trench Evaluation and Historic Building Appraisal*, AC archaeology document no. **ACD626/2/0**



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19

SS

49

50

0 500m
Scale 1:12,500@A4



PROJECT

Former Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location



AC archaeology



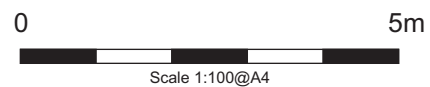
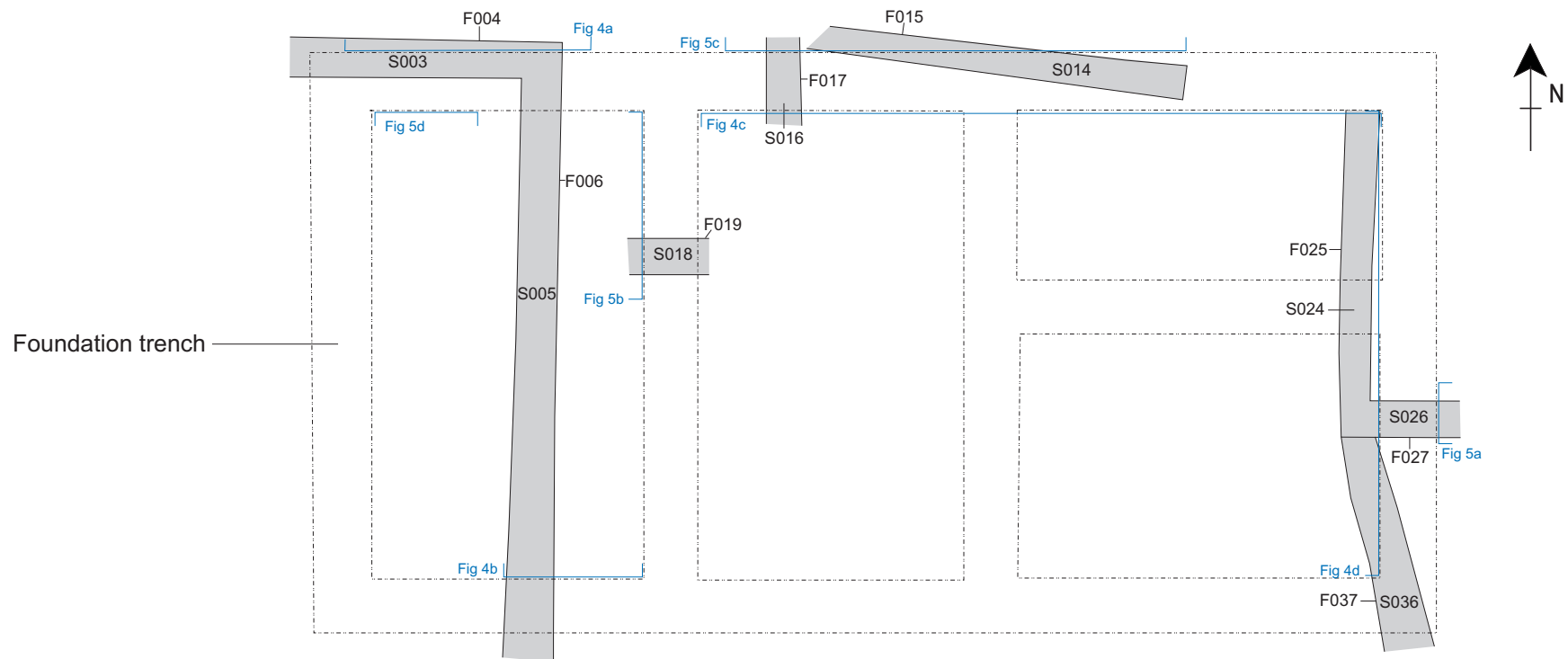
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PROJECT

Former Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane,
Great Torrington, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 2: Plan showing area
observed and features



Key



Walls

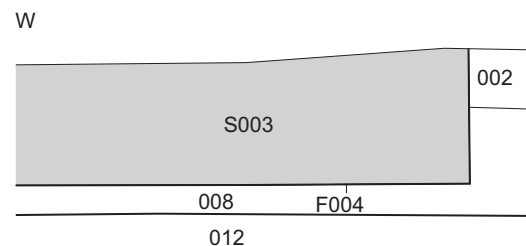
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Great Torrington, Devon

TITLE

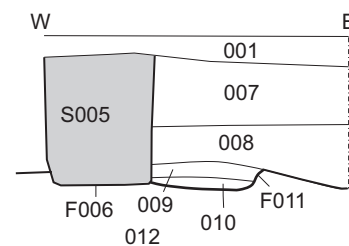
Fig. 3: Plan of foundation trench
and exposed features



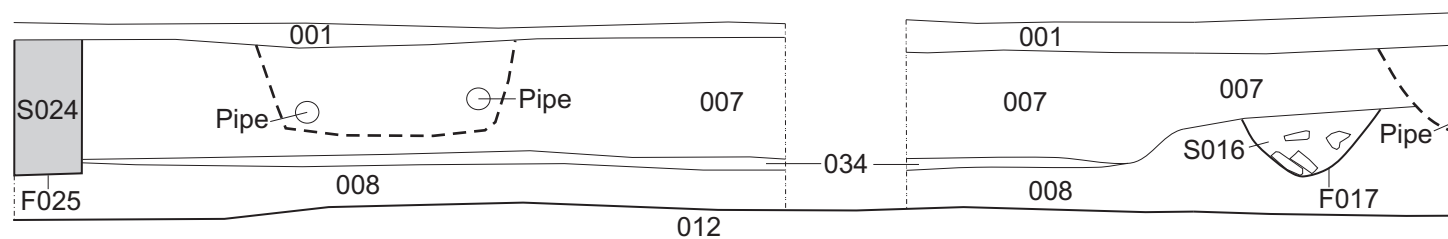
a) Section of S003



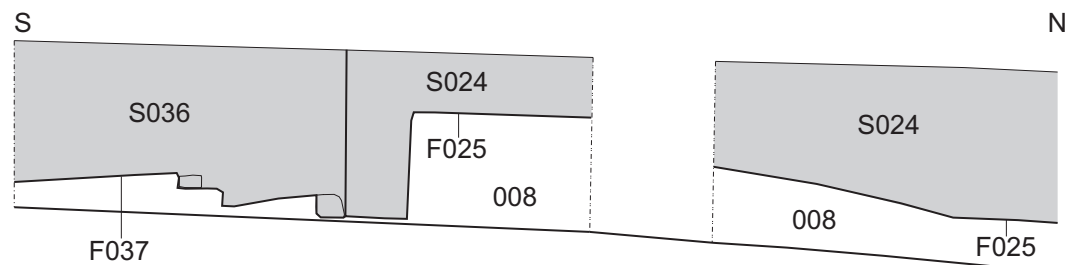
b) Section of S005 and pit F011



c) Section of S016, S024, F006, and F031



d) Section of S024



Key



Walls

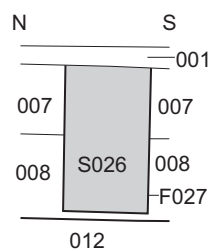
PROJECT

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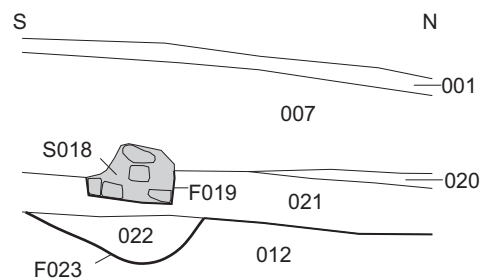
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Fig. 4: Sections

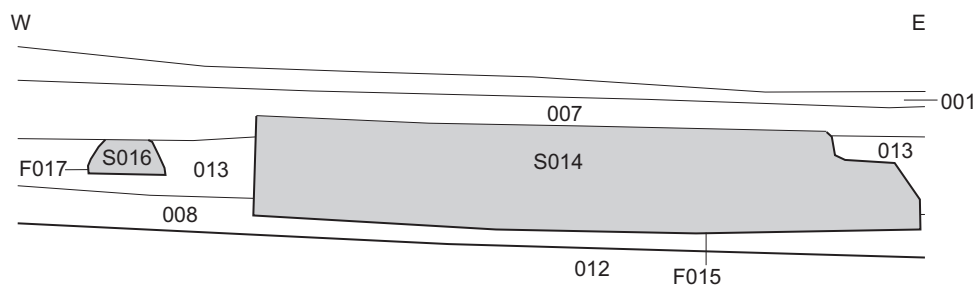
a) Section of S027



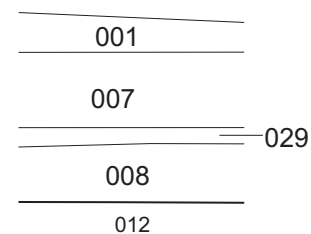
b) Section of S018 and pit F023



c) Section of S014 and S016



d) Section of 029



Key



Walls

PROJECT
Former Bluecoat Primary School, White's Lane,
Great Torrington, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 5: Sections



Plate 1: General view of site,
viewed from the southwest



Plate 2: Representative section,
viewed from the north. 1m scale



Plate 3: Section through S005,
viewed from the north. 1m scale



Plate 4: Wall S024, viewed from the northeast.
1m scale



Plate 5: Section through wall S026, viewed from the west.
1m scale



Plate 6: Wall S014, viewed from the southwest.
1m scale

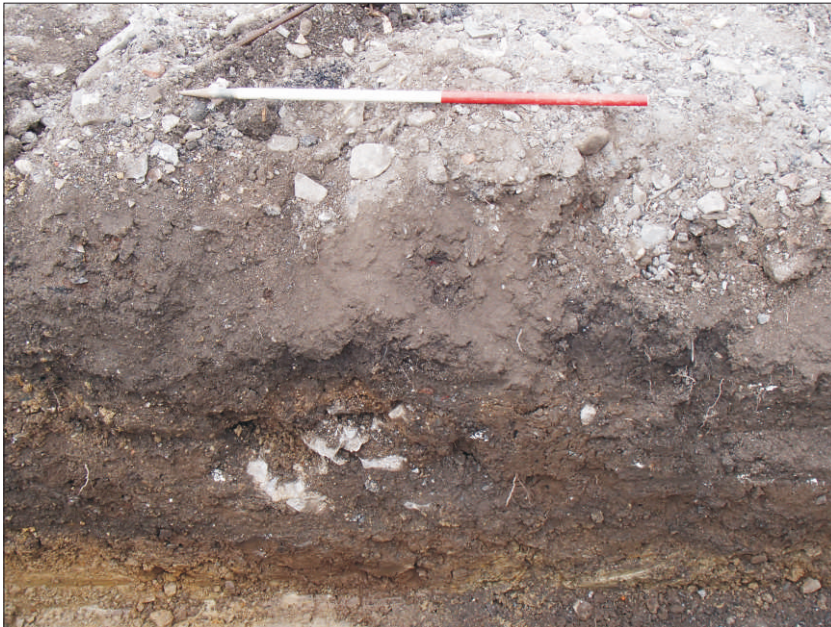


Plate 7: Wall S016, viewed from the east.
1m scale



Plate 8: Pit F023, viewed from the south.
1m scale



Plate 9: Post-excavation view of the site,
viewed from the northeast. 1m scale

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