

MARIANS MAPLES, VICARAGE CLOSE, STOKE GABRIEL, DEVON

(NGR SX 84507 57313)

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

South Hams District Council planning reference 52/2081/15/F

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Document No: ACD1467/2/0

Date: November 2016



AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological trench evaluation was carried out by AC archaeology during October 2016 at Marians Maples, Vicarage Close, Stoke Gabriel, Devon (NGR SX 84507 57313). The development area covered approximately 0.26 hectares on the north-facing slope of a promontory above the River Dart, at between 45m and 50m aOD. It comprised the residential property Marians Maples and its grounds.

Iron Age and Roman finds in the vicinity of the site are recorded on the Devon Historic Environment Record and a number of local field names are indicative of an early enclosure. This has been cited as evidence of a putative hillfort on the ridge top.

Five trenches totalling 101m were excavated, targeting areas affected by the proposed development. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were exposed. The northwest corner of the site had been the location of a recently removed temporary structure, and Trench 5 demonstrated that the north-facing slope in this area had been subject to cut and fill excavations to form the present garden level. No pre-late 20th-century were observed. Based on the results of evaluation the archaeological potential is considered to be negligible.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1; Plate 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological trench evaluation carried out by AC archaeology in October 2016 at Marians Maples, Vicarage Close, Stoke Gabriel, Devon (NGR SX 84507 57313). The work was commissioned by Simon Oaff on behalf of Mr J. Godefroy, and was requested by the Devon County Historic Environment Team (HET) to support a planning application (South Hams District Council 52/2081/15/F) for "Demolition of existing dwelling and construction of new dwelling on footprint together with three additional dwellings within the grounds". Guidance on the scope of the works has been provided in the HET's consultation response and subsequent verbal advice.
- 1.2 The application area covers approximately 0.26ha hectares, and comprises the residential property Marians Maples and its grounds. It is situated within an area of 20th-century development to the west of the Stoke Gabriel Conservation Area. The Devon Historic Landscape characterisation project describes the application area as 'modern settlement', defined as an area of settlement developed in the 20th century.
- 1.3 The topography of the site is a north-facing slope dropping down from 50m to 43m aOD. It is situated just below, and on the north side of, a small hilltop, on a slight promontory above the River Dart. The land drops down to the river to the west, to a creek to the south and on the east side to a valley in which the historic village is situated. The underlying solid geology comprises Devonian Limestone of the Brixham Limestone formation (BGS viewer).

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Stoke Gabriel is documented from the early 14th century, and the spatial pattern of development prior to the 20th century was unusual; the main group of dwellings north of the church was separated slightly from neighbouring Combe Shute; the village was then arranged into four further small residential groups, respectively, at the bottom of Mill Hill, at the top of School Hill, around the present Baptist Chapel and around the present site of the war memorial. These groups of buildings lay on a road that formed an elongated loop culminating in the main church group. The reason for this dispersed arrangement seems to have been the presence of three farms and three large houses in the village.

- 2.2 The archaeological interest in the area stems from a number of records relating to potential Iron Age and Romano-British activity in the area. Immediately east of the application area there is a record (MDV8403) for a midden identified within a crevice in the limestone bedrock. The Historic Environment Record (HER) includes two entries with field names 'Borough Park' and 'Berry Parks' (MDV58761 and MDV58762). Both are indicative of early settlement, and are often attributed to (defended) enclosures; one interpretation of this evidence is for a hillfort on the ridge top. The 'Berry Parks' field is recorded on the HER as within the application area, although is actually the next field to the northwest (see 2.5 below).
- 2.3 The finds from the midden along with other finds from the garden were published in 1965 within the excavation report for a Romano-British enclosure at Lower Well Farm, 1.9km to the east of the present site. They included 40 sherds of Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, parts of several glass vessels, part of a bone weaving comb, half of a stone spindle whorl, a slate counter, pebbles possible sling stones, bone, shell, nails and charcoal (Woolner and Woolner 1965, 31-34).
- 2.4 The historic roads and tracks (e.g. Vicarage Road and Ducannon Lane), and adjacent field boundaries follow the contour around the top of the hill, with later more regular fields abutting these landscape features. This could be simply fortuitous in following the contours but could be interpreted as representing fossilisation of an early enclosure in the historic field system.
- 2.5 The application area is located to the northeast of the historic settlement of Stoke Gabriel, to the west of the roads leading down to the church. The small-scale Ordnance Survey 2-inch to 1 mile map appears to show the application area forming part of land belong to a property – Stoke Gabriel House – that was constructed in 1798 (National Heritage List no. 1147601), although this is not borne out by the data in the 1839 tithe apportionment. On the 1840 tithe map the application area forms part of a larger field (plot 348) extending to the east incorporating the present dwellings 'Dart Lees', 'Cherry Trees' and 'Tree Tops'. It was called Lees and under arable cultivation. To the northwest plot 356 is the field called Berry Parks.
- 2.6 The 1888 25-inch Ordnance Survey map shows the application area as within the same larger field, surrounded to the south and west by the grounds of Maisonette House (i.e. Stoke Gabriel House). Historic maps record no change to the application area until 1954 when Vicarage Close had been constructed along with several of the properties to either side of the road; other than a small building close to the northern boundary, the application area remained undeveloped. 'Marians' was constructed in the late 1960s.
- 2.7 The Portable Antiquity Scheme holds six records within a 1km search radius of the application area. Prehistoric finds comprise a Mesolithic flint flake (DEV-1DFBF7) and strike a light (DEV-1DEBA8), a Neolithic flint scraper (DEV-1DCC72) and a Neolithic strike a light (DEV-1DB352). Two post-medieval copper alloy buckles are also recorded (DEV-D5FBA6 and DEV-A71444). Within the wider Stoke Gabriel area the scheme records a further 20 records, including an Iron Age brooch, two Roman brooches, twenty Roman coins and a sherd of Samian ware. There is also a medieval coin, a post-medieval coin, dresshook and a spur.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site, in particular those associated with the nearby recorded Iron Age and Romano-British activity. The results of the work will be reviewed by the HET, and should planning permission be granted, used if necessary to inform any subsequent conditioned mitigation.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with an approved project design prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2016), in line with the Chartered Institute for archaeologists 2014 *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation*.
- 4.2 An initial desk-based appraisal was carried out, and, tailored to the results of the evaluation, are set out in section 2 above. The appraisal comprised:
- Collation and assessment of archaeological data held by the Devon HER,
 - Collation of historic maps and plans, and
 - A review of published archaeological records.
- 4.3 The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of 5 trenches totalling 101m in length, with each trench measuring 1.5m wide. Trench locations are shown on Fig. 1 and (apart from the footprint of the upstanding Marians Maples) these were located in areas that would be affected by development to provide representative coverage. All trenches were located by GPS, with 100mm accuracy.
- 4.4 All features and deposits revealed were recorded in line with the project design using the standard pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012). All site levels relate to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS (Figs 2-3; Plates 2-4; Appendix 1)

- 5.1 The typical soil profile encountered across the site comprised natural subsoil encountered at a depth generally varying between 0.15m and 0.3m below existing levels, overlain by between 0.1-0.19m of subsoil, sealed by a thin spread of humic topsoil, measuring up to 0.15m, but more typically under 0.1m thick. Trenches 1-4 were archaeologically sterile and no finds were recovered from overlying deposits. In Trench 5, evidence of recent levelling for a former building was exposed and is described below. Context descriptions for all trenches are tabulated in Appendix 1.

Trench 5

- 5.2 This trench was aligned NNW-SSE, measured 20m long, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.25m. Natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 0.15m at the southern end of the trench and 1m at the northern end. Across the northern half of the trench, natural subsoil was overlain by overlain by a former subsoil (505) composed of mid brown sandy clay-loam. This was in turn overlain by limestone rubble levelling material (504) derived from redeposited natural limestone fragments. This levelling deposit created a broadly level terrace which extended almost the entire length of the trench to within 5m of the northern site boundary. At its northern extent the levelling deposit ended abruptly and had been overlain or infilled up to the hedge boundary with more recently deposited soil (503). To the northwest however, an extant ditch was still visible between the end of the terrace and the hedge. The deposits described above were sealed by 0.15m of loose humic topsoil. At the southeast end of the trench the level of natural subsoil was flat, representing part of a terrace cut into the hillside. No physical evidence of the former building was exposed. Modern pottery and plastic was noted within 503, and modern angle iron and polystyrene were present within 504; none was retained.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 A generally shallow soil profile was encountered across the application area, and no archaeological features were exposed. No pre-20th-century finds were present. The northwest corner of the site has been subject to modern levelling using the cut and fill method as identified in Trench 5. Terracing is visible in the topography of the hill slope to the south of Trench 5.
- 6.2 There was no evidence for any pre-modern activity, nor any residual finds that could be indicative of early settlement or activity. Based on the negative results of evaluation it is unlikely that significant archaeological remains are present within the application area, and the archaeological potential is considered to be negligible.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 7.1 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 268763 that includes a digital copy of this report.
- 7.2 The results of the fieldwork will be held by the HER in the form of this report and the OASIS entry.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 The work was commissioned by Simon Oaff on behalf of Mr J. Godefroy. The site works were carried out by Alex Farnell, with assistance from Shaun Johnson. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Leon Cauchois.

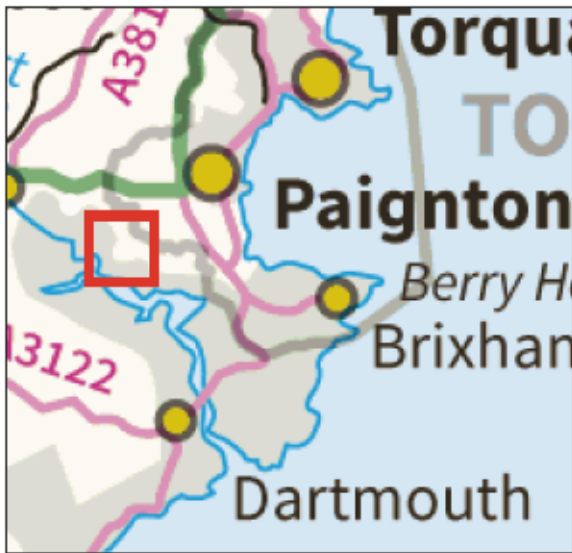
9. SOURCES CONSULTED

Passmore, A., 2016, *Marians Maples, Vicarage Close, Stoke Gabriel, Devon, (NGR SX 84507 57313), Project design for a desk-based appraisal and an archaeological trench evaluation, South Has District Council planning reference 52/2081/15/F, AC archaeology doc. no. 14671/2*

Websites accessed October 2016

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Devon County Council Historic Environment Record online viewer,
<http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccviewer/?bm=OSGreyscale&layers=Historic%20Environment;0;1&activeTab=Historic%20Environment&extent=210064;27188;338387;150088>

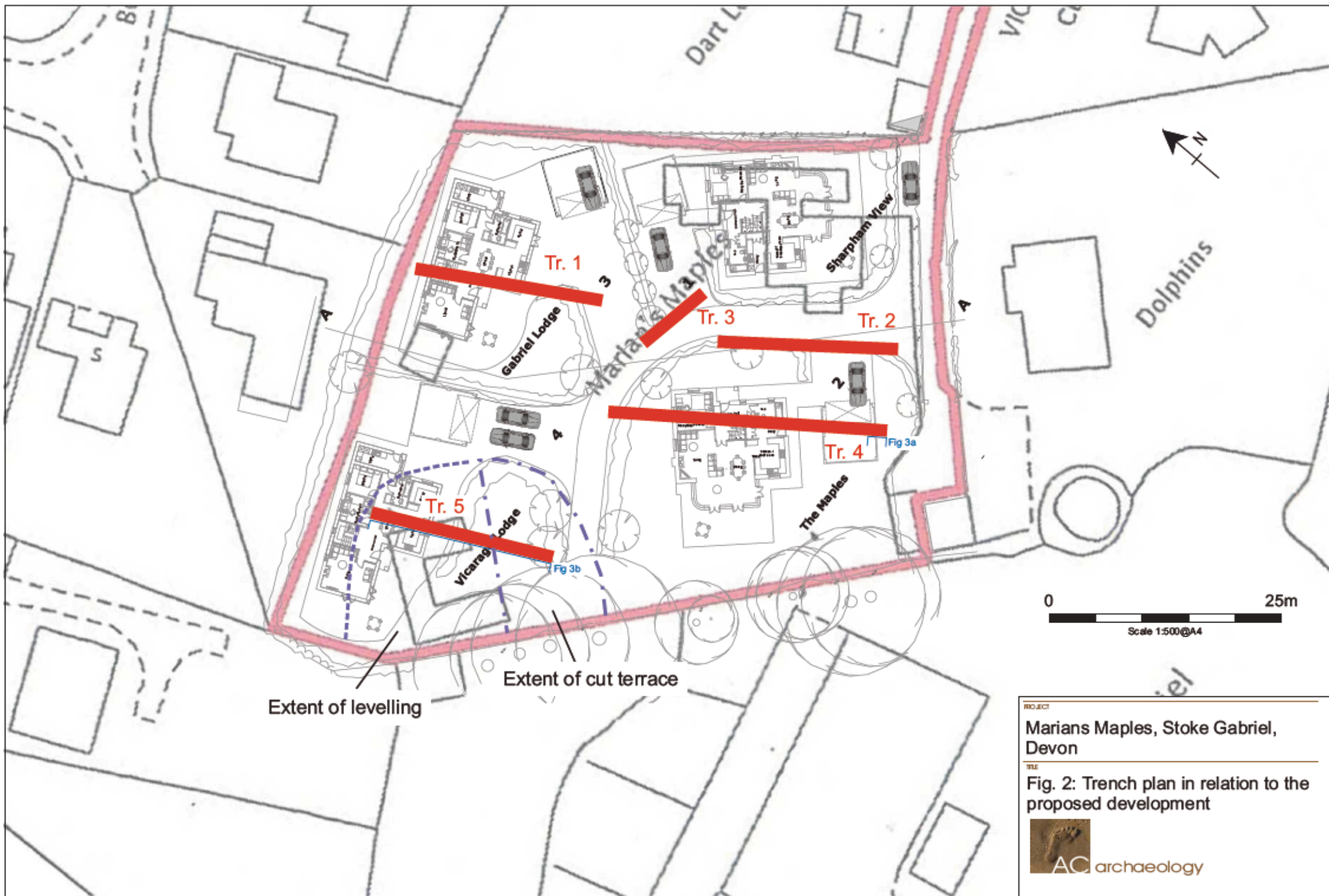


PROJECT

**Marians Maples, Stoke Gabriel,
Devon**

TRUS

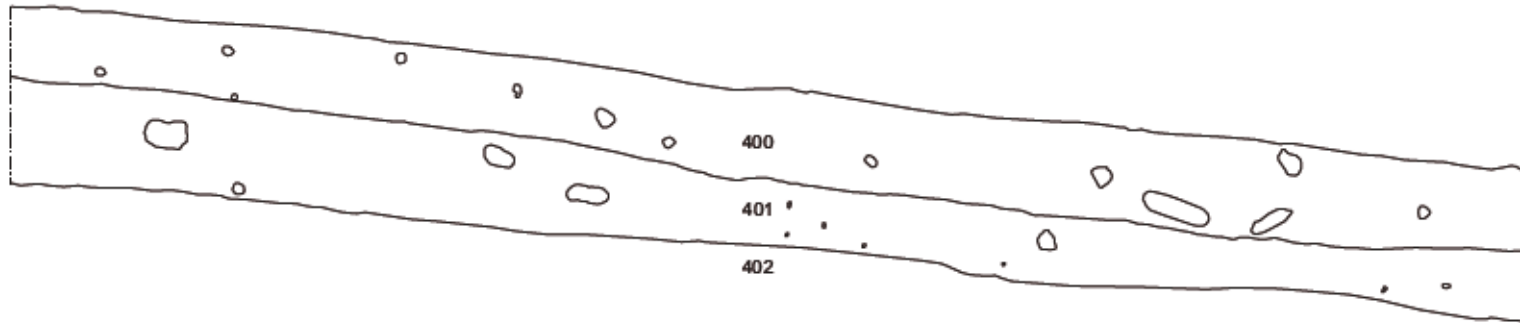
Fig. 1: Site location



a) Representative section of trench 4

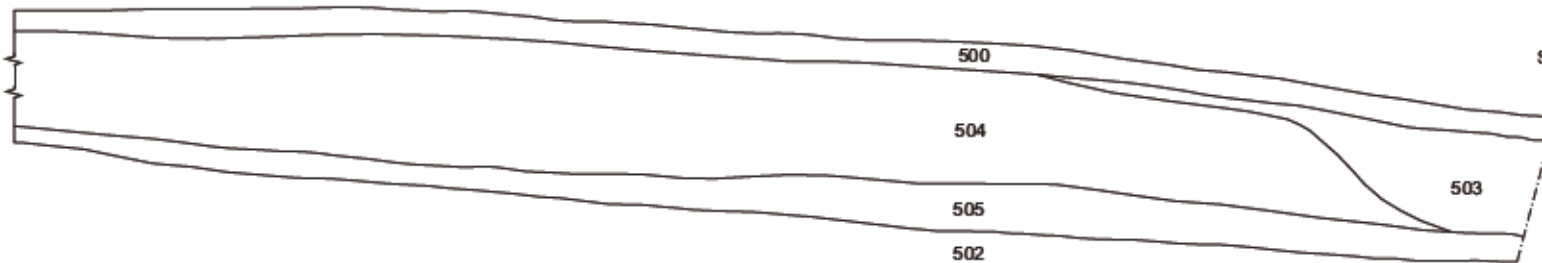
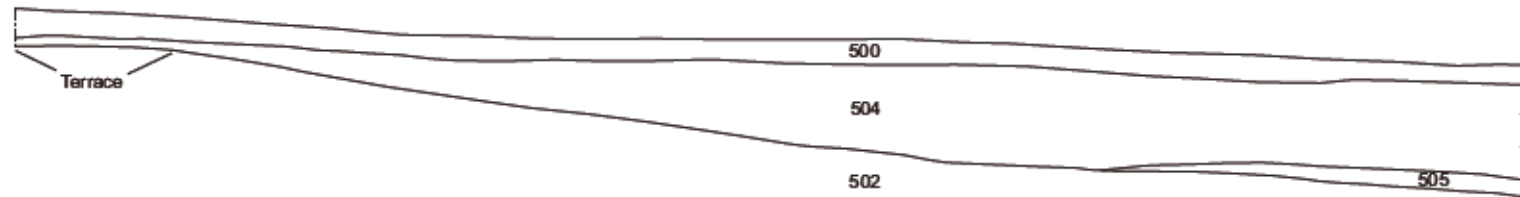
SE

NW 44.85m
X



b) Representative section of trench 5

NNW



SSE 46.10m
X

PROJECT
Marians Maples, Stoke Gabriel,
Devon

TITLE
Fig. 3: Sections of trenches 4 and 5





Plate 1: General view of site, looking east



Plate 2: Trench 3, representative section, looking east-northeast (Scale 1m)



Plate 3: Wide view of levelled area with Trench 5 in the background, looking northwest



Plate 4: Trench 5, showing levelling deposits, looking south (Scale 1m)

Appendix 1

Tabulated trench descriptions

APPENDIX 1: TABULATED TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

Trench 1		Length 11m	Width 1.5m	Alignment E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
100	Dark greyish-brown loose humic, silty loam with occasional sub-angular gravel	0-0.09m	Topsoil	
101	Mid reddish-brown soft silty clay-loam with common sub-rounded to sub-angular gravel and pebbles	0.09-0.3m	Agricultural subsoil	
102	Reddish brown silty clay with abundant limestone fragments from gravel to boulder size	0.3m+	Natural weathered limestone geology	

Trench 2		Length 20m	Width 1.5m	Alignment NW-SE
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
200	Dark greyish-brown loose humic, silty loam with occasional sub-angular gravel	0-0.11m	Topsoil	
201	Mid reddish-brown soft silty clay-loam with common sub-rounded to sub-angular gravel and pebbles	0.11-0.2m	Agricultural subsoil	
202	Reddish brown silty clay with abundant limestone fragments from gravel to boulder size	0.2m+	Natural weathered limestone geology	

Trench 3		Length 20m	Width 1.5m	Alignment SSE-NNW
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
300	Dark greyish-brown loose humic, silty loam with occasional sub-angular gravel	0-0.15m	Topsoil	
301	Mid reddish-brown soft silty clay-loam with common sub-rounded to sub-angular gravel and pebbles	0.15-0.28m	Agricultural subsoil	
302	Reddish brown silty clay with abundant limestone fragments from gravel to boulder size	0.28m+	Natural weathered limestone geology	

Trench 4		Length 30m	Width 1.5m	Alignment NW-SE
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
400	Dark greyish-brown loose humic, silty loam with occasional sub-angular gravel	0-0.09m	Topsoil	
401	Mid reddish-brown soft silty clay-loam with common sub-rounded to sub-angular gravel and pebbles	0.09-0.24m	Agricultural subsoil	
402	Reddish brown silty clay with abundant limestone fragments from gravel to boulder size	0.24m+	Natural weathered limestone geology	

Trench 5		Length 20m	Width 1.8m	Alignment NNW-SSE
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
500	Dark greyish-brown loose humic, silty loam with occasional sub-angular gravel	0-0.05m	Topsoil	
501	Not used			
502	Reddish brown silty clay with abundant limestone fragments from gravel to boulder size	0.15m+	Natural weathered limestone geology	
503	Mid brown soft sandy clay-loam with rare sub-angular gravel	0.15-0.75m	Modern infill	
504	Sub-angular limestone pebbles and cobbles	0.15-1m	Redeposited natural modern levelling	
505	Mid brown soft silty clay-loam with rare sub-angular gravel	0.75/1m-1.25m	Former subsoil	

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