

THE FIRS, HIGHER MILL LANE, CULLOMPTON, DEVON

(NGR ST 02188 07478)

Results of archaeological works

Mid Devon District Council planning ref. 17/00453/FULL

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On behalf of:
XL Planning & Design Ltd.

Report No: ACD1588/2/0

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archaeology

LAND AT THE FIRS, HIGHER MILL LANE, CULLOMPTON, DEVON

CENTRED ON NGR ST 02188 07478

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The archaeological works were commissioned by XL Planning and Design Ltd and managed for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The site works were carried out by Chris Caine and Abigail Brown with the assistance of Tom Etheridge and Laura Greed. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Leon Cauchois. The collaborative role of Stephen Reed of the Devon County Historic Environment Team is duly acknowledged.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Summary

Archaeological works were undertaken to provide supporting information for a planning application for residential development on land at The Firs, Higher Mill Lane, Cullompton, Devon (NGR ST 02188 07478). The evaluation comprised the machine-excavation of four trenches totaling 45m in length, with each trench 2m wide with one expanded to an area of 7m by 4.5m.

Archaeological features were present in one of the trenches, comprising an undated plot boundary ditch and a quarry pit of post-medieval date. A small assemblage of post-medieval pottery dated to the 16th and 17th centuries was collected from the backfill of the quarry pit.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Archaeological works on land at The Firs, Higher Mill Lane, Cullompton, Devon (NGR ST 02188 07478; Fig. 1), were undertaken by AC archaeology during April 2017. They were carried out to provide supporting information for a planning application for residential development. The works were commissioned by XL Planning and Design Ltd following consultation with the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team, advisors to Mid Devon District Council.
- 1.2 The proposed development site lies on the north side of Cullompton and on the southeast side of the junction between Forge Way and Higher Mill Lane. It consists of an approximately square plot, which was previously occupied by a detached house and its associated gardens. The site lies on flat ground at 59m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) above low-lying land adjacent to the Cullompton Leat to the east. Its underlying solid geology comprises sandstone of the Cadbury Breccia Formation beneath a superficial deposit of Diamicton colluvium (BGS 2017).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site lies close to the historic core of Cullompton. A settlement at Cullompton is recorded as early as AD880, when it was 'Columntune'. Throughout most of the medieval period it was a royal holding. The parish church dates to the 15th century, but is probably on the site of an earlier complex dating to the late Saxon period. A number of historic buildings line Cullompton High Street and has been the site of markets since the 14th century (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record ref MDV43869). The proposed development site lies in an area historically recorded as having been used for orchards (MDV 61282), with this to the west of the Higher Mill (MDV18703), which is thought to have operated from the early 18th century on the Cullompton Leat (MDV65780).
- 2.2 Earlier activity in the area is associated with Roman settlement in Cullompton, including a fort on St Andrew's Hill to the northwest (MDV73707). Here evidence for two phases of defensive ditches have been recorded from aerial photos and excavation with associated pottery dating from the 1st century AD. Recent excavations undertaken to the southwest of the site at Shortlands recorded evidence for Romano-British settlement remains associated with finds including a complete Black-Burnished Ware jar with associated shale gaming board (Morris 2014).
- 2.3 The earliest map depicting the location of the site is an estate map that dates from 1633 (DRO 26502/1). On this, the proposed development area is positioned within a possible orchard plot to the rear of the High Street. The 1841 Cullompton parish tithe map shows the site in more detail, with it positioned within a large plot (number 993) that borders the Cullompton Leat to the east and the rear of plots that front High Street to the west. In the accompanying apportionment the

plot is named as 'Orchard'. The first-edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1887 depicts the same arrangement as shown on the tithe map.

3. AIM

- 3.1** The main aim of the programme of archaeological works was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the scheme. This is with particular reference for the presence medieval and post-medieval activity to be present on the site.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2017) and were conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2014). It comprised the machine-excavation of four trenches totaling 45m in length and with each trench 2m wide, with one trench (Trench 4) expanded to approximately 7m by 4.5m. These were positioned in relation to anomalies interpreted from the previous geophysical survey (Fig. 1).
- 4.2** All trenches were located with a Leica Net rover GPS accurate to 1cm. The removal of ploughsoil within the trenches was undertaken in 20cm spits under the control and direction of a site archaeologist. Stripping by mechanical excavator ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural subsoil was exposed.
- 4.3** The archaeological works and 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 and plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate. All site levels relate to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Trenches 1, 2 and 3 were blank with natural subsoil composed of mid yellowish-brown sand with abundant river pebbles exposed at depths of between 0.25m and 0.48m below current ground surface. All of the trenches had an overlying deposit of topsoil composed of a dark reddish-brown silty loam and in trenches 2-4 this overlay a subsoil composed of mid brownish-grey sandy loam. Trench 4 contained two features and these are described in detail below, with descriptions for all trenches presented in tabulated form in Appendix 1.

5.2 Trench 4 (Plan Fig. 2a, Sections Figs 2b-c; Plates 1-3)

This trench measured 16m long and was expanded to 7m by 4.5m at its east end. Natural subsoil (context 402) was exposed at a depth of 0.76m below existing levels comprising topsoil (400) and subsoil (401). The trench contained a linear feature (F403) and a pit feature (F405).

Ditch F403

At the west end of the trench this ditch measured 1.1m wide by 0.27m deep, with moderately sloping concave sides and a concave base. It contained a single fill (404) composed of mid brownish-grey sandy loam, that likely represented a period of gradual sedimentation. There were no finds from this feature.

Pit F405

This pit was a large irregular feature in plan that, despite the trench being extended, was not fully exposed in the trench. It cut subsoil (401) and had exposed dimensions of 4.7m by a minimum of 4.5m and was 1.52m deep with moderate to steeply sloping straight sides and a concave base. It had a single fill (406) composed of a mixed deposit of mid brown to mid red silty loam to clay which contained 34 sherds of post-medieval pottery dated to the 16th and 17th centuries, 21 pieces of clay tobacco pipe and animal bones and appeared to represent a rapid backfilling of the pit.

6. THE FINDS *by Charlotte Coles*

6.1 All finds recovered on site during the evaluation have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They have been quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage examined to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. All of the finds were recovered from context 406, the fill of pit F405. The small collection of finds are summarised in Table 1 below.

Context	Iron		Post-medieval pottery		CBM		Slag		Clay tobacco pipe		Glass		Animal bone	
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
406	3	122	34	874	4	306	1	20	21	151	1	109	20	911

Table 1: Summary of finds (weights in grams)

6.2 **Post-medieval pottery** (Plate 4)

A total of 34 sherds of post-medieval pottery were found (874g). The vast majority of the pottery is South Somerset ware. The only other pottery type found were two imported sherds these are a Westerwald tankard base and a sherd of white ware, possibly border ware. The South Somerset ware include a mixture of different vessel types, including dishes, jugs and plates. Seven of the South Somerset sherds were sgraffito wares, including a moulded plate rim and two rim sherds from jugs. These all date to the 16th and 17th centuries.

6.3 **Ceramic building material**

Four fragments of CBM were retrieved (306g), these are coarse tile fragments, made from a local fabric.

6.4 **Animal bone**

The animal bone consists of 20 pieces (911g), these include 11 whole or fragmentary cattle horncores, possibly from horn working waste. The other animal bones are a cattle calcaneus, two maxillary cattle teeth, a sheep/goat metacarpal, a large mammal rib and two other pieces of unidentified bone. These all come from adult animals and only the large mammal rib had signs of butchery with several chop marks on the medial surface.

6.5 **Clay tobacco pipe**

A total of 21 clay tobacco pipe pieces (151g) were also recovered. These are all plain stem pieces, two mouthpieces were identified within this collection. It is not possible to ascertain a date as no bowl fragments survive.

6.6 **Other finds**

A single shard of green bottle glass (109g) from the base of a bottle was recovered, as well as three unidentified iron pieces (122g) and a small piece of slag (20g).

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The archaeological works have shown that the site was located outside of the main focus of settlement of Cullompton in the medieval and post-medieval periods. This is confirmed by a fire insurance map of 1831 (DHC ref ZAHS) which shows the area between the Higher Mill and the town as blank and the 1841 Cullompton tithe map also shows the site as under cultivation as an orchard, a situation that remained into the 20th century.

7.2 Ditch F403

Ditch F403 likely represents a former boundary ditch. This boundary is undated and does not appear on historic mapping.

7.3 Pit F405

This pit was backfilled with rubbish and this event is dated by the pottery to the 16th and 17th centuries, a date which is not contradicted by the other finds from the pit. The types of rubbish indicate that domestic activity, and possibly the processing of cattle products, was being conducted nearby, but no evidence was found to indicate that this was taking place on the site itself. It appears, instead, that the waste was probably derived from the known nearby settlement of Cullompton. This feature was most probably dug as a quarry pit for the extraction of river terrace gravel, perhaps for cobbling or other surface making. The Walronds is a large townhouse in Cullompton Fore Street dated to 1605 and contains a cobbled yard (National Heritage List for England no. 1105902); it is located approximately 200m to the southwest of the site.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The evaluation has revealed a small number of archaeological features. Part of a small ditch probably represents a former plot boundary of unknown date. A small quarry pit, probably for gravel extraction was re-used as a rubbish pit, probably a short time after it was dug, which dates its digging and filling to the 16th and 17th centuries.

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, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ under the unique project code of **ACD1588** and temporary reference number **RAMM: 17/19** received from the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) Exeter. It will be offered to the museum and dealt with under their current accession policy.

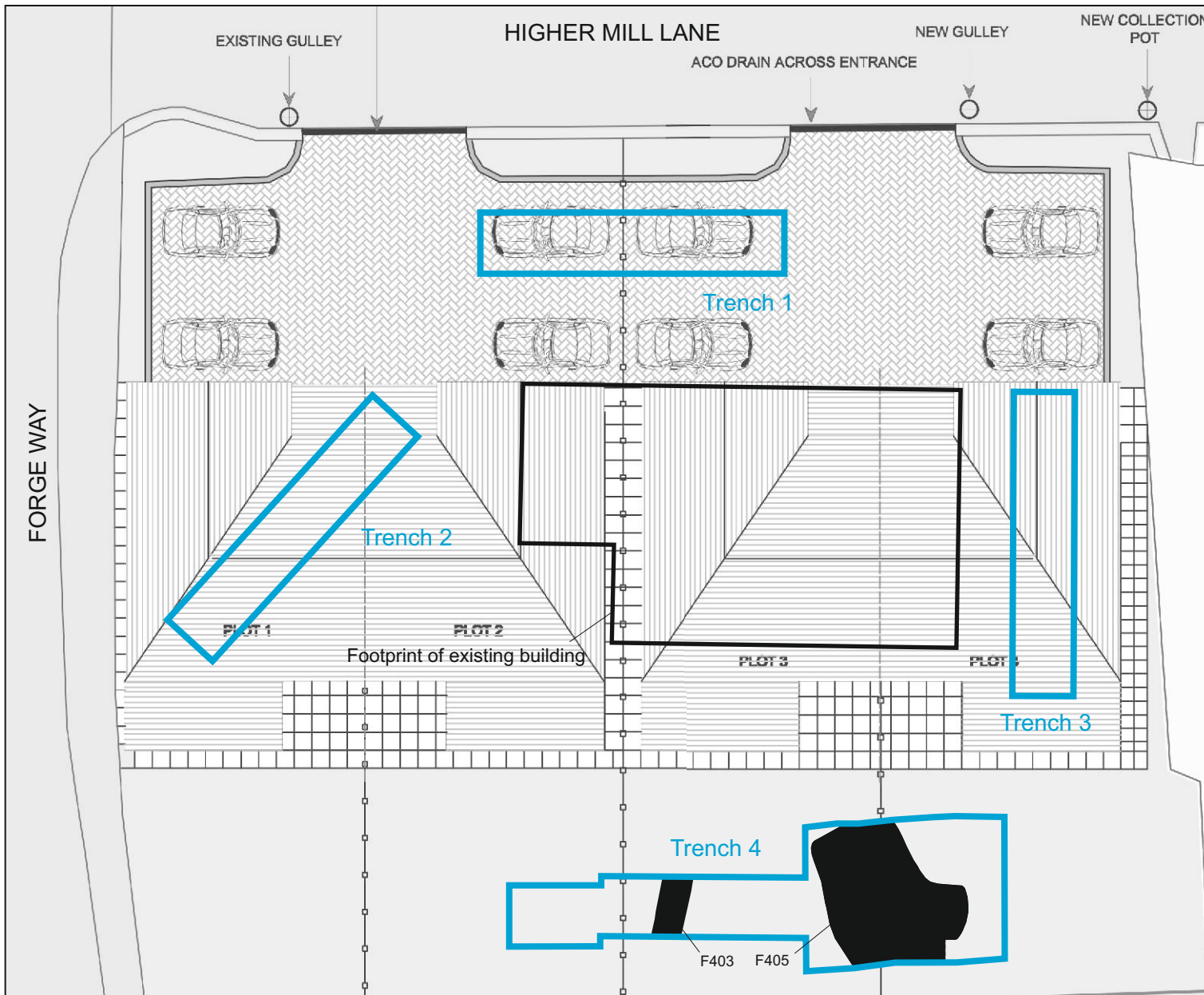
9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **280781**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. REFERENCES

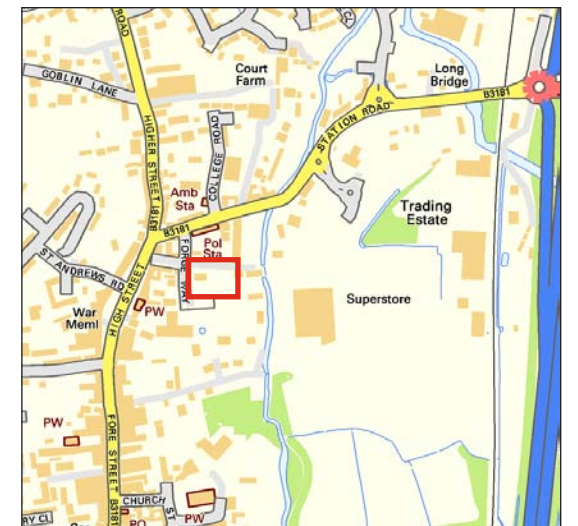
BGS 2017, *British Geological Survey Geology of Britain On-line Viewer* (www.bgs.ac.uk).

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Morris, B., 2014, *Land at Shortlands Lane, Cullompton, Devon: Results of a Desk-Based Assessment and Archaeological Excavation*. Unpublished South West Archaeology report no. **20140815**.



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PROJECT

The Firs, Higher Mill Lane,
Cullompton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location and trench plan



AC archaeology

0 10m

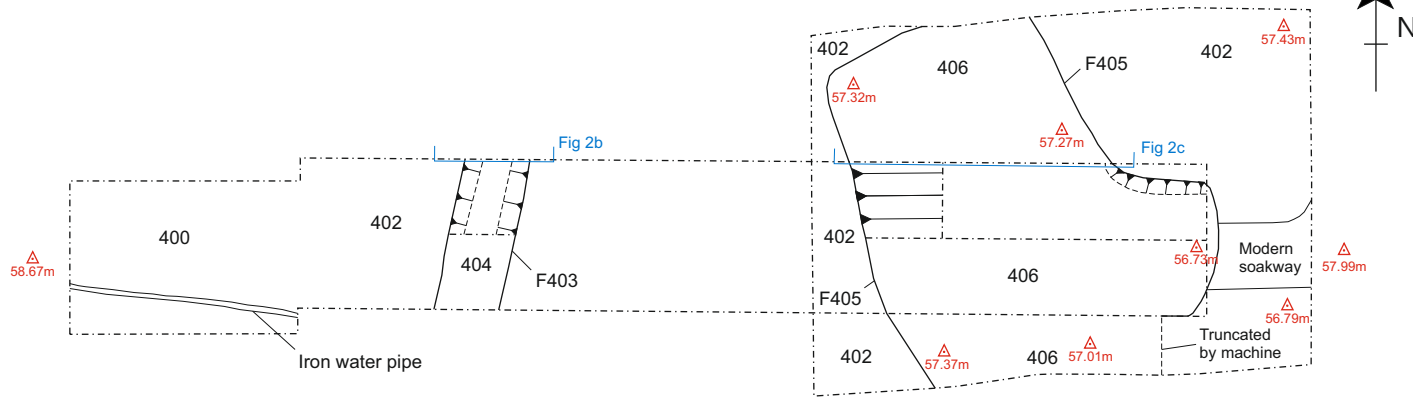
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Trench 2

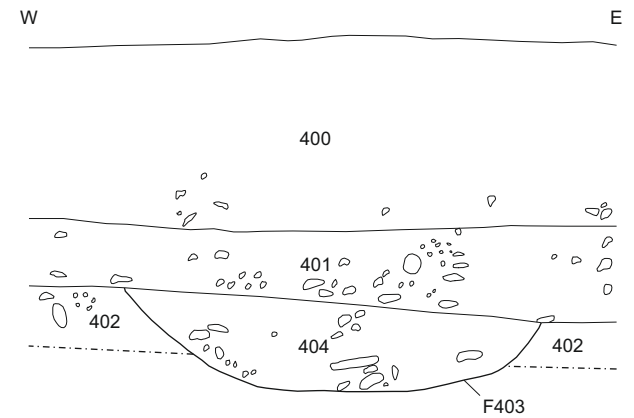
Excavated trenches



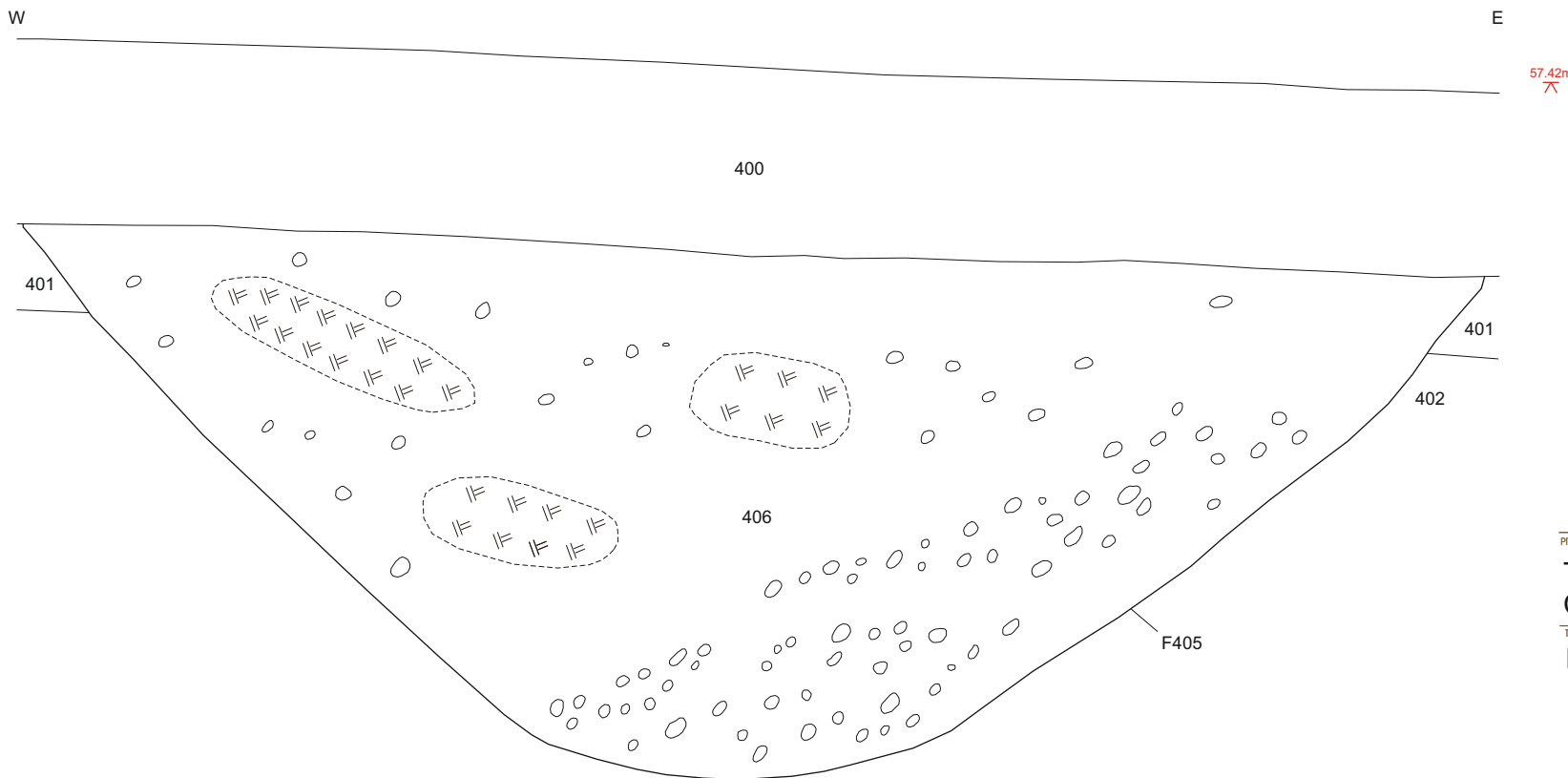
a) Plan of trench 4



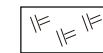
b) Section of F403



c) Section of F405



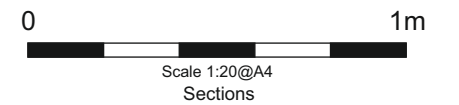
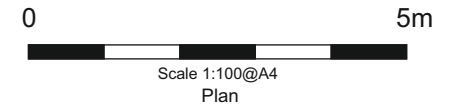
Key



Clay



Stones



PROJECT

The Firs, Higher Mill Lane,
Cullompton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 2: Trench 4, plan and sections



AC archaeology



Plate 1: Trench 4, south-facing section of ditch F403 (scale 1m)



Plate 2: Trench 4, pit F405, work in progress, looking northeast



Plate 3: General view of excavation area in Trench 4, showing pit F405, looking northwest (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Selection of post-medieval pottery from pit F405

Appendix 1

Tabulated Context Descriptions by Trench



APPENDIX 1: TABULATED CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Trench 1		Length 10m	Width 2m	Alignment E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
100	Dark reddish-brown silty loam	0-0.25m	Topsoil	
101	Mid yellowish-brown sand with abundant river pebbles	0.25m+	Natural subsoil	

Trench 2		Length 10m	Width 2m	Alignment NE-SW
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
200	Dark reddish-brown silty loam	0-0.28m	Topsoil	
201	Mid brownish-grey sandy loam	0.28-0.33m	Subsoil	
202	Mid yellowish-brown sand with abundant river pebbles	0.33m+	Natural subsoil	

Trench 3		Length 10m	Width 2m	Alignment N-S
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
300	Dark reddish-brown silty loam	0-0.30m	Topsoil	
301	Mid brownish-grey sandy loam	0.30-0.48m	Subsoil	
302	Mid yellowish-brown sand with abundant river pebbles	0.48m+	Natural subsoil	

Trench 4		Length 15m	Width 2m	Alignment E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
400	Dark reddish-brown silty loam	0-0.50m	Topsoil	
401	Mid brownish-grey sandy loam	0.50-0.76m	Subsoil	
402	Mid yellowish-brown sand with abundant river pebbles	0.76m+	Natural subsoil	
F403	Linear feature measured 1.10m wide by 0.27m deep, with moderately sloping concave sides and a concave base	0.76-1.03m	Ditch	
404	Mid brownish-grey sandy loam	0.76-1.03m	Fill of F403	
F405	A large irregular feature in plan, it was not fully exposed, and it cut subsoil (401), it had dimensions of 4.7m by a minimum of 4.5m and was 1.52m deep with moderate to steeply sloping straight sides and a concave base	0.50-2.02m	Quarry pit	
406	Mid brown to mid red silty loam to clay	0.50-2.02m	Fill of F405	

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