

LAND TO THE REAR OF NOS 95-96 FORE STREET, EXETER

NGR SX 91846 92446

Results of archaeological monitoring and recording

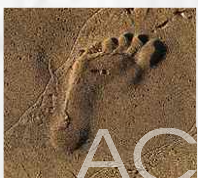
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On behalf of:
Mr Barkell-Schmitz

Document No: ACD1562/2/0

Date: August 2017



archaeology

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Client	Mr H. Barkell-Schmitz
Report Number	ACD1562/1/0
Date	23 August 2017
Status	Version 1
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Acknowledgements

The document was commissioned by the owner, Mr H. Barkell-Schmitz, and managed by Tim Capps of Oxenham Consult and Andrew Passmore of AC archaeology. The fieldwork was carried out by Alex Farnell. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore and Leon Cauchois. The finds were assessed by Charlotte Coles.

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

A series of geotechnical test pits was monitored, excavated and recorded by AC archaeology in May 2017 in the yard to the rear of nos 95 and 96 Fore Street, Exeter. The investigations took place in advance of an application for redevelopment of the area.

The work confirmed the presence of a basement in the south corner of the site, and less extensive truncation elsewhere. Archaeological deposits were exposed in all pits but were poorly dated. They include several walls, and may date from the Romano-British period onwards. The only securely datable deposits and features were from the later post-medieval and modern periods. It is concluded that other than in the south corner and adjacent to the rear of nos 95 and 96 Fore Street sequences of archaeological deposits will be present across the site.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 Archaeological monitoring and recording of geotechnical test pits was undertaken by AC archaeology during May 2017 at the rear of Nos 95 and 96 Fore Street, Exeter (SX 91846 92446; Fig. 1). The investigations were commissioned by Oxenham Consult on behalf of Mr Hans Barkell-Schmitz, and were carried out as part of proposals for the development of the land.
- 1.2 The site lies to the rear of Nos 95 and 96 that are located on the southeast side of Fore Street, close to the junction with Market Street. It was formerly used as car parking and at the time of the investigation was a compound associated with a redevelopment of nos 95 and 96 Fore Street. It is accessed from Smythen Street, a road that runs parallel to Fore Street. The area comprises a flat terrace at 35m aOD on land that more generally slopes downward towards the southwest. The underlying solid geology comprises sandstone of the Whipton Formation (British Geological Survey Online Viewer).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is located within the former Roman military fortress and subsequent civil city. Numerous investigations in the vicinity of the site have exposed extensive Roman remains, with many of these carried out following clearance to bomb-damaged plots to the northeast between Market Street and South Street (Fox 1952). Nevertheless, prior observations had also exposed remains, including records made during the re-building of the next door property, nos 93-94 Fore Street, in 1938. Here, the presence of walls made of volcanic trap stone, a material often associated with Roman structures were observed (Exeter City Historic Environment Record ref. 1816593): however, the possibility that these remains may have represented the re-use of masonry during the medieval period should not be ruled out. To the south, excavations carried out on Smythen Street by the Exeter Excavation Committee in 1931 exposed Roman stone building remains including what was thought to be a hypocaust (Fox 1952). More recently, excavations carried out in the 1990s associated with the re-development of the properties on the south side of the junction of Market Street and Smythen Street exposed Roman remains. These included a consistent levelling deposit thought to relate to the period following military occupation, which had then been cut by stone and timber buildings (1816782, 1816584 and 1817331). In addition to these, a Roman street surface was also recorded (1817336). This exhibited a sequence of four phases of use, the first of which was thought to have Roman military origins, but was latterly considered to represent the roadway that had previously been plotted as extending from the basilica and forum to the northwest.

- 2.2** Occupation of the site during the medieval period relates to properties that would have fronted Smythen Street. Formerly named Butcher's Row, buildings of medieval origin would have lined Smythen Street until they were largely redeveloped in the 19th century (1816924). Observations carried at no. 104 Fore Street, formerly 30 Smythen Street, recorded some surviving medieval fabric that was exposed during refurbishment (1816763). A drawing dating from 1830 of the neighbouring nos 97-98 Fore Street properties prior to subsequent demolition shows that these former structures had 17th century facades, while to their rear a surviving late medieval fireplace in the retained party wall between these properties at first floor level, again demonstrates yet earlier origins to many of the buildings in the vicinity (1817144).
- 2.3** Historic Ordnance Survey maps indicate that during the 19th century the site was occupied by a series of buildings and yards, whose layout appears to indicate they formed part of the rear of the Fore Street properties, rather than separate properties on Smythen Street. The block of nos 93-99 High Street was redeveloped in 1938, and most of the buildings to the rear were demolished, including all of those within the present site.

3. AIM

- 3.1** The aim of the investigation was to monitor the excavation of the test pits, and to archaeologically excavate and record any exposed archaeological deposits. They were excavated with the general aims of establishing the presence or absence, extent, depth, character, date and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits, and where possible to expose natural subsoil for geotechnical purposes. Test pit 6 had the additional aim of exposing the foundations of the rear wall of nos 95-96 Fore Street.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The investigation was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for An Archaeological Watching Brief* (published 2014), with all recording undertaken 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*. Site plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and baulk sections at 1:10. The location of the test pits was tied into a new survey drawing of the site. All finds recovered were assessed by AC archaeology's Finds and Archives Officer.

5. RESULTS (Figs 1-2; Plates 1-12)

Introduction

- 5.1** A total of six test pits was excavated across the site, with the pits located to provide sample coverage, avoiding known services and minimising disruption to the site which was in use as a storage compound and car park.

Test Pit 1 (Plan, Fig. 1; section, Fig. 2a; Plates 1 and 2)

- 5.2** This pit was located along the southeast boundary of the site adjacent to Smythen Street, and measured 1.4m long by 0.7m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.78m below the existing ground surface. Natural deposits were not encountered. Deposits of archaeological interest (110 and 111) were exposed at the northeast end of the pit, from a depth of 0.35m below the surface, below post-medieval and modern deposits; they continued below the maximum depth of excavation. These comprised volcanic trap stones and river cobbles (111) set in or below soft sandy clay with mortar inclusions (110). To the southwest, these had been truncated by a substantial northwest-southeast aligned post-medieval wall (106) constructed of breccia

and red sandstone bonded in buff mortar. Further to the southwest a brick basement wall (108), of late 19th- or early 20th-century date, was encountered. Brick rubble infill (109) was exposed on its southwest side but was not excavated. All the above deposits and features were overlain by modern levelling and surfaces (100-103). No finds were recovered from any of the historic layers.

Test Pit 2 (Plan, Fig. 1; section, Fig. 2b; Plates 3 and 4)

- 5.3** This pit was located in the east corner of the site, and measured 0.9m long by 0.7m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.92m below the existing ground surface. Natural deposits were not encountered. A deposit of archaeological interest (205) was exposed from a depth of 0.47m below modern levelling and surfaces and continued below the base of the excavation. It comprised lenses of reddish clay and pinkish sandy clay with frequent white painted plaster fragments of possible Romano-British origin; the plaster was small and highly friable, and was not recovered. No datable finds were recovered. A modern intrusion (F206) had cut into the east side of this deposit, and was sealed by modern levelling and surfaces (200-204).

Test Pit 3 (Plan, Fig. 1; section, Fig. 2c; Plates 5 and 6)

- 5.4** This pit was located close to the rear of nos 95 and 96 Fore Street, and measured 1.25m long by 0.52m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.98m below the existing ground surface. Natural deposits were not encountered. Deposits of archaeological interest (308 and 309) were exposed from a depth of 0.5m below probable post-medieval levelling (307 and 306) and continued below the maximum depth of excavation. The earliest layer (309) was a soft mottled reddish clay and yellowish sandy clay with occasional mortar and slate fragments, from which a piece of probable Romano-British tile was recovered. This was overlain by a mid greyish-brown, soft sandy clay with occasional sub-angular pebbles and cobbles including volcanic trap fragments, occasional mortar fragments and flecks, and slate fragments (308), from which two fragments of possible Romano-British tile were recovered.

- 5.5** Overlying these deposits were two layers – a lower reddish-brown stony clay (307) and an upper mixed stony deposit (308). No finds were recovered from these layers. They were disturbed to the northwest by a modern service trench (F302), which was sealed by a layer of brick (301), which itself was disturbed by a large modern pit (F305) filled with loose, partially charred, brick rubble (305). This feature was present across the southern half of the pit, and continued down almost to the base of the pit. This modern pit was overlaid by the current concrete surface of the yard.

Test Pit 4 (Plan, Fig. 1; section, Fig. 2d; Plates 7 and 8)

- 5.6** This pit was located towards the northeast edge of the site, and measured 1.3m long by 0.8m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.74m below the existing ground surface. Natural deposits were not encountered. Deposits and features of archaeological interest (404-408) were exposed from a depth of 0.45m below the ground surface, and continued below the base of the pit. The earliest deposit (406) was a red clay with rare slate fragments. This had been cut (407) to the southeast by the construction a large wall footing built using roughly-hewn and random-shaped volcanic trap blocks measuring up to 0.28m by 0.2m bonded in loose yellowish sandy mortar (408). Above deposit 406 was a lens of soil (405) consisting of dark brown, soft sandy clay with occasional pebbles, slate fragments, charcoal and mortar flecks. This was in turn overlain by a layer (404) of crushed yellowish-brown sandy mortar. Layers 404 and 405 appeared to abut wall 408. No finds were recovered from these early deposits. These early deposits and wall 408 were overlaid by a series of modern levelling deposits and the yard surface (400-403).

Test Pit 5 (Plan, Fig. 1; section, Fig. 2e; Plates 9 and 10)

- 5.7 This pit was located on the southwest side of the site, and measured 1.35m long by 1.35m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.65m below the existing ground surface. Natural deposits were not encountered. A deposit of archaeological interest (510) was exposed from a depth of 0.45m below the modern surface and continued below the base of the pit. It comprised a mid-dark greyish-brown, soft sandy-clay with common fragments of volcanic trap (some with squared edges) and occasional mortar flecks, along with scraps of tile and fragments of animal bone. This had been disturbed to the south by the construction (504) of substantial northwest-southeast aligned post-medieval wall footing (505), which in turn was disturbed (507) by a northeast-southwest aligned 20th-century brick basement wall (508). The remainder of the deposits comprised modern levelling and the yard surface (500-503).

Test Pit 6 (Plan, Fig. 1; section, Fig. 2f; Plates 11 and 12)

- 5.8 This pit was located against the rear wall of nos 95-96 Fore Street, and was located here to assess the footings of the standing building. It measured 1.35m long by 0.5m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3m below the existing ground surface. Natural deposits were not encountered. A sandstone and volcanic trap stone wall (605) was exposed in the northwest-facing side of the test pit. It survived from a depth of 0.3m below the yard surface and continued below the base of the pit. This wall was not closely inspected as the test pit was not safe to enter. A deep deposit of post-medieval soil (604) was exposed to the northwest of wall 605. It comprised a soft, dark brown clay, from which a fragment of clay pipe stem and a sherd of 17th- or 18th-century pottery was recovered. The majority of the trench contained a modern northeast-southwest aligned feature (F602), that had been excavated through 604. This represents a large foundation trench for the construction of the rear wall of nos 95 and 96 Fore Street. The base of the feature, along with the base/foundation of the wall of nos 95 and 96 Fore Street, was not exposed within the pit. The construction trench was overlaid by a thick levelling deposit (601) and the current yard surface (600).

6. **THE FINDS** by *Charlotte Coles*

- 6.1 All finds recovered 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. The small collection of finds is summarised in Table 1 below.

Context	Context Description	Post Medieval Pottery		CBM		Clay tobacco pipe		Animal Bone	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
308	Deposit			2	104				
309	Deposit			1	498			1	7
510	Deposit			3	19			1	11
604	Deposit	1	5			1	3		
Total		1	5	6	621	1	3	2	18

Table 1. Summary of finds by context (weights in grams); CBM – ceramic building material

Post-medieval pottery

- 6.2 A single sherd of post medieval pottery was recovered from context 604. This is possibly a sherd of South Somerset ware with a black external glaze, dating to the late 17th or 18th century.

Ceramic building material

- 6.3 A total of six pieces of ceramic building material was retrieved from three contexts. These are three pieces of possible Roman tile from contexts 308 and 309; the remaining fragments are three small pieces of unidentified tile from context 510.

Other finds

- 6.4 The other finds were a single undecorated clay tobacco pipe stem from context 604 and two pieces of unidentified animal bone from contexts 309 and 510.

7. DISCUSSION

Survival and presence of archaeological deposits and features

- 7.1 The 1938 architect's plan for the rebuilding of nos 93-100 Fore Street and nos 1-2 Market Street recorded a basement within the southwest corner of the overall property. One of these basements extends into the current site, and was recorded as walls 108 and 508 along with associated infilling 109 and 511 respectively. It seems likely that here most, if not all, of the archaeological sequence has been truncated.

- 7.2 Deposits and features of archaeological interest were encountered in all six test pits demonstrating that there is consistent survival of archaeological remains across the rest of the site from a depth of 0.45m below the existing ground surface. However, some localised truncation will have occurred as modern structures and pits were also recorded in every test pit. These included features along the northwest side of the site associated with the construction of nos 93-94 Fore Street, along with other more discrete features.

The nature and date of the archaeological deposits and features

- 7.3 The recorded archaeological deposits and features were not well dated due to a lack of datable finds. However, probable Romano-British tile was recovered from test pits 3 and 5, whilst the volcanic trap walls in test pit 4 (408) and 6 (605) are also likely to be early. Although a Roman date, certainly for wall 408, cannot be ruled out, a medieval date seems more likely, and the walls broadly correlate with the pre-1938 buildings depicted on historic maps, in particular wall 608 that appears to represent the rear wall of the historic property fronting Fore Street.

- 7.4 Deposits and walls of post-medieval or probable post-medieval date were encountered in four of test pits where they were stratigraphically later than the potential Romano-British and medieval deposits. Only walls 106 and 505 provide evidence of buildings to the rear of the Fore Street properties, which are known from historic maps.

Conclusions

- 7.5 In conclusion, the site contains archaeological deposits and features (walls), which survive below 20th-century levelling deposits. Whilst there has been some truncation, particularly by the construction of a basement in the south corner of the site and adjacent to the rear of nos 95-96 Fore Street, it is likely that good sequences of post-medieval, medieval, Roman civil and Roman military period archaeology are present across the site.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

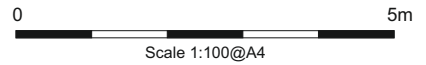
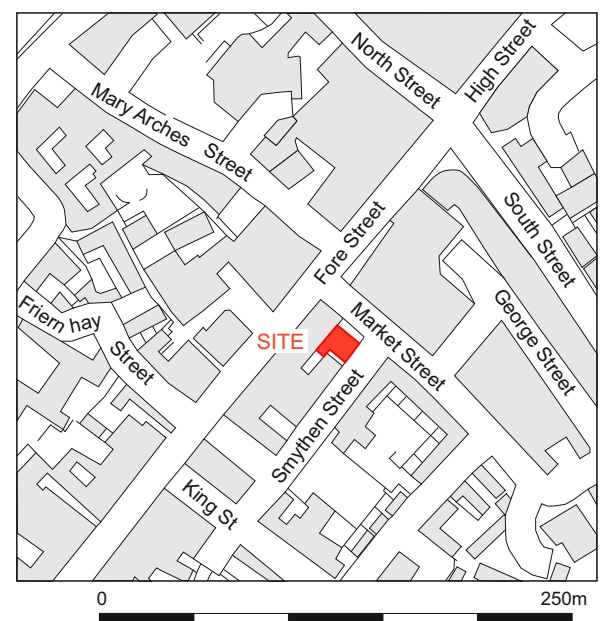
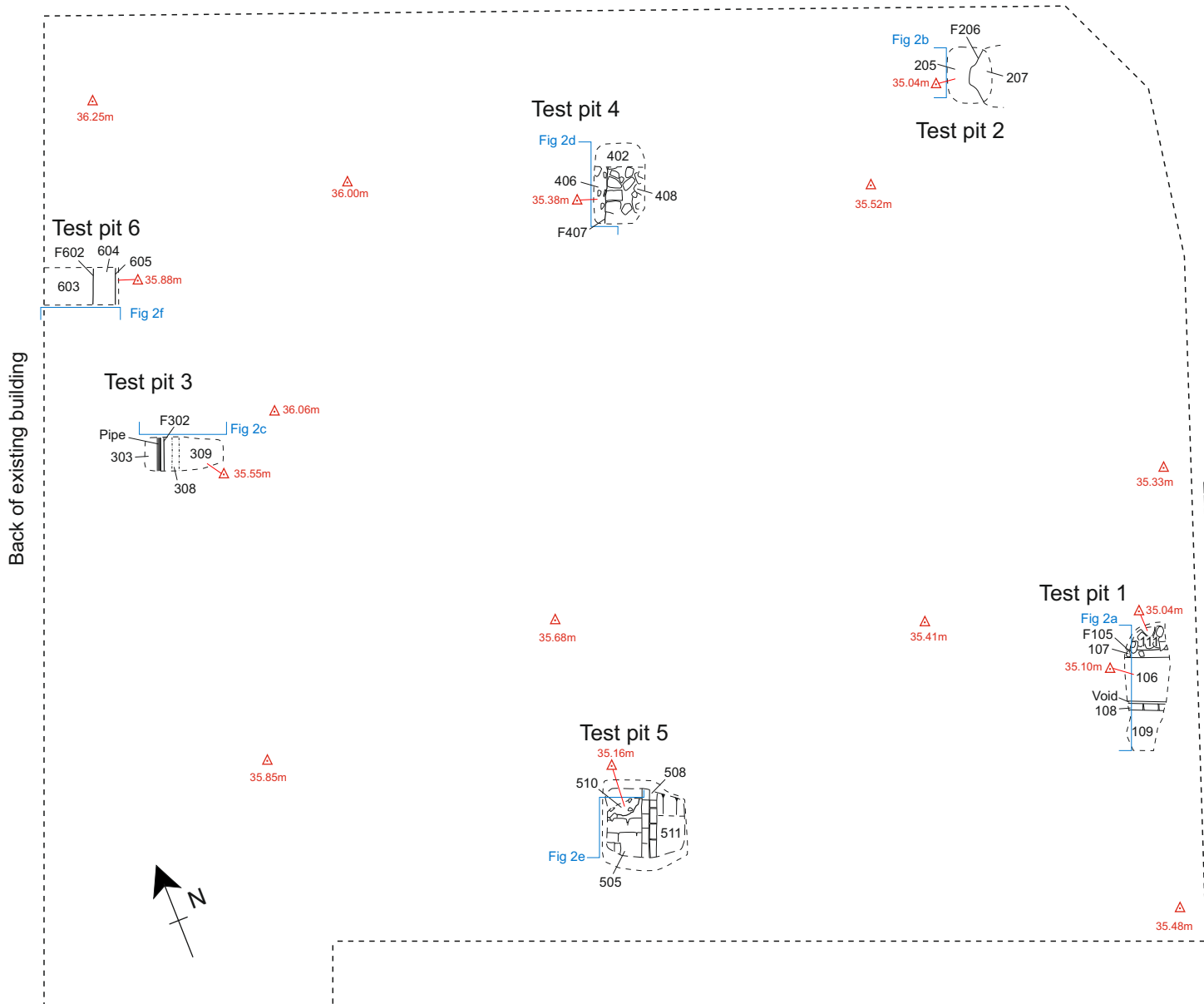
- 8.1 The finds, paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ under the unique project code of ACD1562. It will be held until the need for any further archaeological work on the site is established.

- 8.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 293897, which includes a digital copy of this report.

9. SOURCES CONSULTED


British Geological Survey Online Viewer www.bgs.ac.uk

Fox, A., 1952, *Roman Exeter: Excavations in the War-Damaged Areas*. University of Manchester

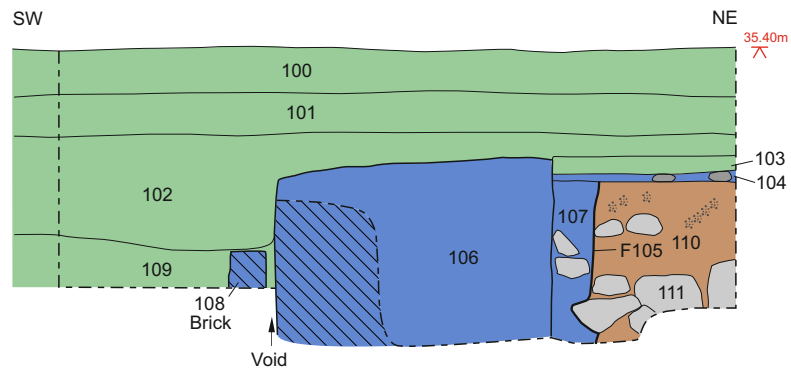


PROJECT
Land to the rear of 95-96 Fore Street, Exeter

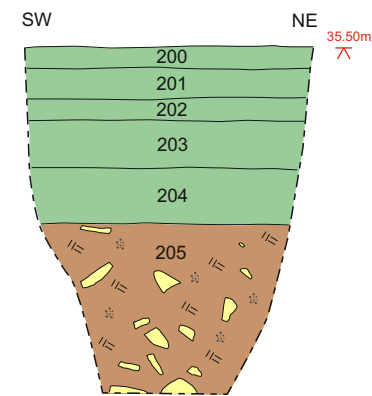
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Fig. 1: Location of site and test pits 1-6



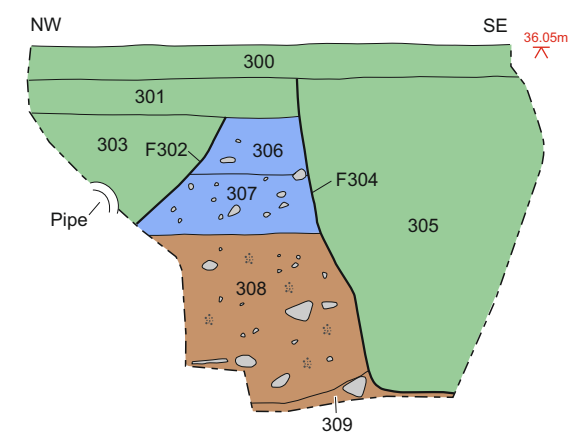
a) Test pit 1, section



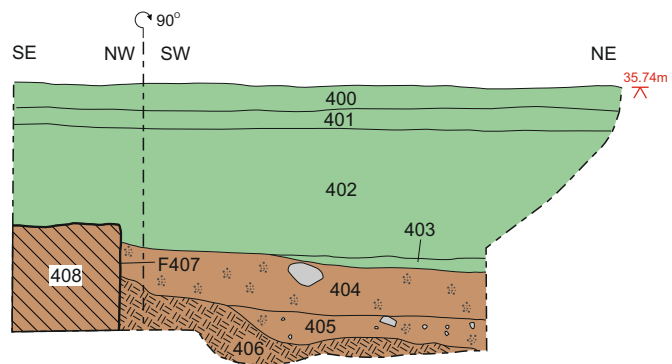
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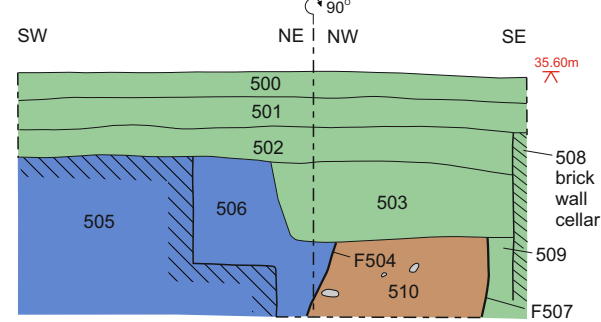
c) Test pit 3, section



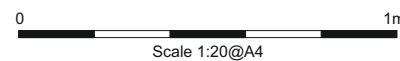
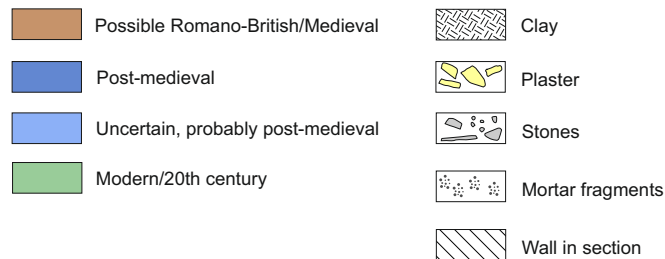
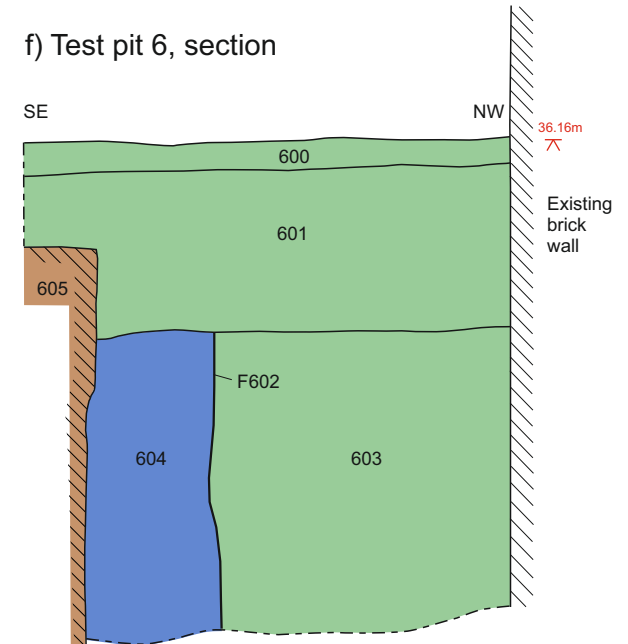
d) Test pit 4, section



e) Test pit 5, section



f) Test pit 6, section



PROJECT

Land to the rear of 95-96 Fore Street, Exeter

TITLE

Fig. 2: Trial pits 1-6, sections





Plate 1: Location of test pit 1, looking south



Plate 2: View of test pit 1, showing modern brick basement wall 108, post-medieval wall 106 and earlier deposits (110 and 111), looking north. (Scale 0.4m)

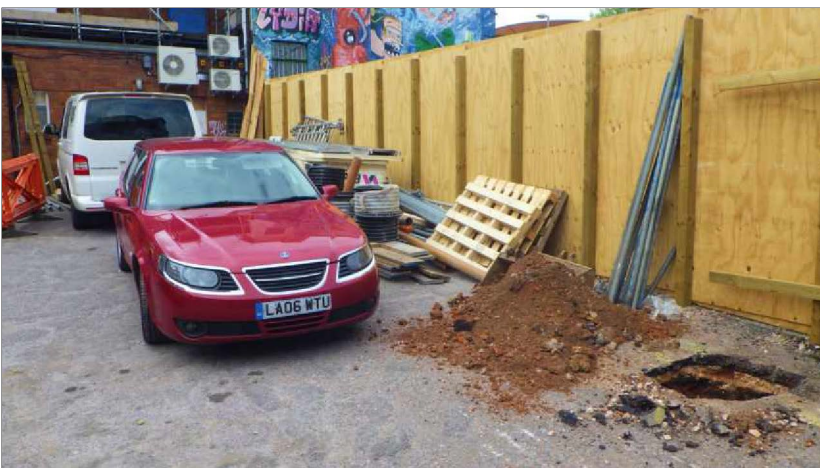


Plate 3: Location of test pit 2, looking northwest



Plate 4: View of test pit 2, showing clay deposit 205 containing wall plaster, looking west. (Scale 0.4m)



Plate 5: Location of test pit 3, looking northwest. (Scale 0.4m)



Plate 6: View of south-facing section of test pit 3, looking north. (Scale 0.4m)

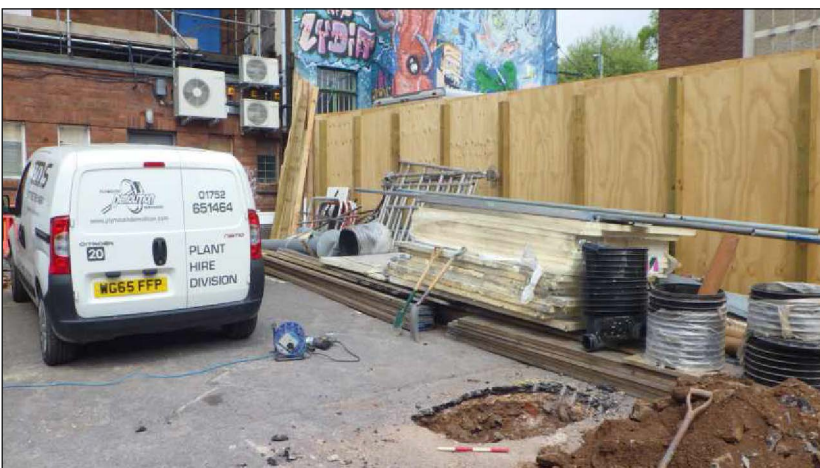


Plate 7: Location of test pit 4, looking northwest. (Scale 0.4m)



Plate 8: View of test pit 4, showing loosely-bonded volcanic trap wall 408. Looking northeast. (Scale 0.4m)



Plate 9: Location of test pit 5. Looking north



Plate 10: View of test pit 5, showing modern brick cellar wall (511), post-medieval masonry (505) and earlier deposit 510, looking northeast. (Scale 0.4m)



Plate 11: Location of test pit 6, looking southwest



Plate 12: View of north-facing section of test pit 6, looking south. (Scale 0.4m)

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