

EXETER FREE COTTAGES, MOUNT DINHAM, EXETER

(NGR SX 91487 92678)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

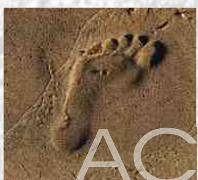
Exeter City Council planning reference 11/1906/03, condition 6

Prepared by:
Andrew Passmore BSc MIfA

On behalf of:
Cornerstone

Document No: ACD450/3/1

Date: November 2017



AC archaeology

EXETER FREE COTTAGES, MOUNT DINHAM, EXETER

(NGR SX 91487 92678)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Exeter City Council planning reference 11/1906/03, condition 6

Client	Cornerstone
Report Number	ACD450/3/1
Date	3 November 2017
Status	Version 2
Report Author(s)	Andrew Passmore
Contributions	
Checked by	Paul Rainbird
Approved by	Andrew Passmore

The document was commissioned by Cornerstone, and managed for them by Rick Williams, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was carried out by Chris Caine, Paul Cooke, Stella De-Villiers, Laszlo Leichtenstein, Kerry Kerr-Peterson, Paul Rainbird and Will Smith. The report illustrations were prepared by Stella De-Villiers.

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.

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Archaeological background	1
3.	Aims of the work	2
4.	Methodology	2
5.	Results	2
6.	Comments	4
7.	Archive and OASIS entry	4
8.	Sources consulted	4

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Location of monitored areas

List of Plates

- Plate 1: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block H, looking east
- Plate 2: Representative section of foundation trench in block H, looking southwest (1m scale)
- Plate 3: General view of drainage trenches situated to the southwest of block H, looking northwest
- Plate 4: Representative section in the northwest end of the drainage trench, looking southwest (1m scale)
- Plate 5: Representative section in the southwest end of the drainage trench, looking east (1m scale)
- Plate 6: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block J, looking southwest
- Plate 7: Representative section of foundation trench in block J, looking northwest (1m scale)
- Plate 8: General view of foundation trenches in block E, looking southwest
- Plate 9: Representative section of foundation trench in block E, looking northwest (1m scale)
- Plate 10: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block F, looking southwest
- Plate 11: Representative section of foundation trench in block F, looking south (1m scale)
- Plate 12: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block A, looking northeast
- Plate 13: Representative section of foundation trench in block A, looking southwest (1m scale)

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology between October 2012 and August 2017 during refurbishment of the former Exeter Free Cottages almshouses at Mount Dinham, Exeter. Previous excavations at the adjacent Discovery Quarter site and the St David's Primary School had exposed evidence for activity and settlement during the Romano-British period including a possible 1st-century AD praetorium, along with a cremation and mortuary enclosure.

The results of the investigation indicated that the hilltop at Mount Dinham had been truncated during the construction of the 1860s almshouses, with the new buildings constructed on a new raised flat terrace. The only archaeological feature exposed was a small post-medieval pit. No finds pre-dating the 19th century were recovered.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by AC archaeology between October 2012 and August 2017 during the replacement of structures at the rear of the former Exeter Free Cottages, Mount Dinham, Exeter (SX 91487 92678). The investigations were commissioned by Cornerstone, and were required under condition 6 of the grant of planning permission for the works (Exeter City Council planning reference 11/1906/03). Guidance on the required investigations was provided by the Exeter City Council Archaeology Officer (now titled the Principal Planning Manager (Heritage)) by email to the agent (Martin Hughes of Heighway Field Architects) dated 10 April 2012.
- 1.2 The Exeter Free Cottages are situated on the west end of Mount Dinham, a hilltop promontory located to the northwest of the historic core of the Roman and historic town at a height of approximately 31m aOD. The original groups of almshouses are all Grade II Listed buildings of special architectural or historic interest (National Heritage List for England nos 1380725, 1380695, 1380696, 1380730, 1380732, and 1380574). The underlying geology is Carboniferous interbedded mudstone and sandstone of the Crackington formation (British Geological Survey online viewer).
- 1.3 The almshouses were constructed in five groups of eight cottages, with each group comprising two terraces of four cottages backing onto each other and separated by rear gardens and a central path. The works have been carried out on a terrace-by-terrace basis (with each terrace referred to as a block), and involved the demolition and replacement of the existing rear structures of each almshouse, along with alterations to the associated drainage infrastructure.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Excavations and geophysical survey within the adjacent Discovery Quarter site (former Exeter College complex) and the St David's Primary School have exposed extensive evidence for activity and settlement during the Romano-British period (publication by AC archaeology forthcoming). The earliest features and structures date to the period then the 2nd Legion Augusta was based at Isca (Exeter), and includes a substantial structure (possibly a praetorium – a headquarters building), a cremation burial, and a number of rubbish pits. Later Romano-British features included a mortuary enclosure and further rubbish pits.

2.2 During the medieval period the area was largely undeveloped, although by the late 16th century there was some settlement to the west of the present development site. During the English Civil War defences were constructed on St David's Down and above Head Weir Cliffs (Exeter Historic Environment Record Monument Number 10346.00). Later 17th- and early 18th-century maps depict the area being used for cloth drying on outside racks.

2.3 The Exeter Free Cottages almshouses were constructed by John Dinham in 1860-62 – a total of 40 were originally constructed. A further two flats were added after Sidney Row bequeathed funds in 1963 (Passmore 2010, 39-44). The rear structures are believed to have been added in the 1930s, although they may have incorporated fabric from the original rear sculleries.

3. AIMS OF THE WORK

3.1 The aim of the work was to monitor the groundworks during the construction of the new rear structures, and to excavate and record any archaeological deposits exposed, and analyse and report on the finds and results as appropriate. This was with particular reference to the potential for Romano-British activity to be present.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Archaeological Work prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2012), and in accordance with the then applicable Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for An Archaeological Watching Brief* (2008 version). It involved the monitoring of groundworks for the new foundation trenches as well as service trenches. In view of the low-level results it was agreed with the Exeter City Council Principal Planning Manager (Heritage) that monitoring could be intermittent, and following groundworks on block A monitoring completely ceased.

5. RESULTS (Fig. 1; Plates 1-13)

5.1 The new groundworks were partially located on the line of existing walls, and here below-ground deposits had been almost entirely removed by previous excavations. Only the deposits sequences in the undisturbed rear gardens are described below. Across the site the foundation trenches measured 0.60m wide, and were excavated to between 0.60m and 1m below the ground level, into natural deposits. Depths of deposits are recorded from ground level.

Block H

5.2 The full extent of the new foundation trenches for this block was monitored (Plate 1) The general deposit sequence was as follows (Plate 2):

- 100 – 0-100mm dark brown friable humic silt;
- 101 – 100-250mm/400mm dark brown-red firm silty clay with frequent small-medium sized angular sandstone fragments, brick, slate and mortar fragments; and
- 102 – 250mm/400mm + natural firm light red clay with lenses of yellow and blue clay, and abundant small-large angular sandstone fragments (exposed at

the southwest end of the excavations, and towards the bottom of the trenches).

- 5.3** The foundation trench (103) for the rear of the cottages was visible across the site and its backfill (104) contained fragments of clay tobacco pipe and industrial china (not retained).
- 5.4** In addition to the foundation trenches at the rear of the buildings, the excavation of three drainage trenches situated within the landscaped grounds to the southwest of the block were monitored (Plate 3). These passed through the path in front of the cottages and down the slope in front of the path.
- 5.5** The following deposit sequence was exposed in the northwest end of the trenches adjacent to the cottages (Plate 4):
- 0-200mm tarmac path and hardcore make-up;
 - 603 – 200-250mm purple-red sandy silty clay with moderate angular gravels, occasional sub-angular pebbles, and very occasional charcoal fragments;
 - 604 – 250-350mm red plastic silty clay with occasional angular pebbles and sub-angular pebbles, and very occasional CBM and plaster fragments; and
 - 605 – 350mm + purple-red plastic silty clay with occasional mixed gravels.
- 5.6** To the southwest the following deposit sequence was exposed (Plate 5):
- 600 – 0-180mm turf and topsoil of purple-red plastic silty clay;
 - 601 – 180-400mm red plastic sandy silty clay with moderate very small gravel and pebbles, and very occasional charcoal and CBM; and
 - 602 – 400mm + light purple-red plastic sandy silty clay with moderate slate fragments and mixed gravels.
- Block J**
- 5.7** The full extent of the new foundation trenches for this block was monitored (Plate 6). The general deposit sequence was as follows (Plate 7):
- 700 – 0-350/500mm medium reddish-brown silty clay with frequent brick, slate and mortar fragments; and
 - 701 – 350/500mm + natural firm light red and yellow clay.
- Block E**
- 5.8** The full extent of the new foundation trenches for this block was monitored (Plate 8). The general deposit sequence was as follows (Plate 9):
- 400 – 0-500mm medium black-brown silty clay with occasional brick and slate and mixed gravel;
 - 401 – 500-800/1100mm reddish-brown clayey-loam subsoil; and
 - 402 – 800/1100mm + natural compact mixed light red and yellow clays and angular sandstone fractured bedrock.
- 5.9** A small pit was partially exposed within the excavations (F403). This was cut into the natural (402) and measured 1.10m long by 0.30m wide and a minimum of 0.20 deep. It contained a single fill (404) tightly packed angular gravel with some flecks of charcoal, as well as post-medieval pottery.

Block F

5.10 The northern half of the foundations (for cottages 23 and 24) were monitored (Plate 10). The general deposit sequence was as follows (Plate 11):

- 1100 – 0-200mm reddish brown plastic clayey clay with occasional brick and mixed gravel; and
- 1102 – 200mm + natural compact light orange-red clays onto angular sandstone fractured bedrock.

Block A

5.11 The full extent of the new foundation trenches for this block was monitored (Plate 12). The general deposit sequence was as follows (Plate 13):

- 1200 – 0-280mm Dark grey-brown silt topsoil
- 1201 – 280-340mm medium reddish-brown silty clay with occasional brick, slate and mortar fragments and mixed gravel; and
- 1201 – 340mm + natural firm brownish-red red clay with occasional angular sandstone fragments.

6. COMMENTS

6.1 The current topography of the area is broadly flat with the almshouses constructed on a terrace above the landscaped grounds. This would appear to indicate that the land has been raised up to form a platform on which they were constructed. This was borne out by the current excavations, in which all the exposed deposits were associated with the landscaping for and around the almshouses.

6.2 No earlier archaeological deposits were exposed, and the only feature was a post-medieval pit. No pre-19th century finds were present; the only noted finds were of 19th-century date and were found in the backfill of the foundation trenches of the 1860-62 almshouses, and from the pit. The 19th-century deposits directly overlaid the natural, and there were no thick historic cultivation soils as encountered during the adjacent Discovery Quarter excavations. Therefore, there must have been significant truncation of the pre-existing hilltop before the current flat terrace (onto which the almshouses were constructed) was created, removing any earlier Roman remains that may have been present

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

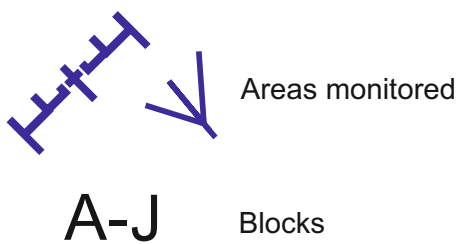
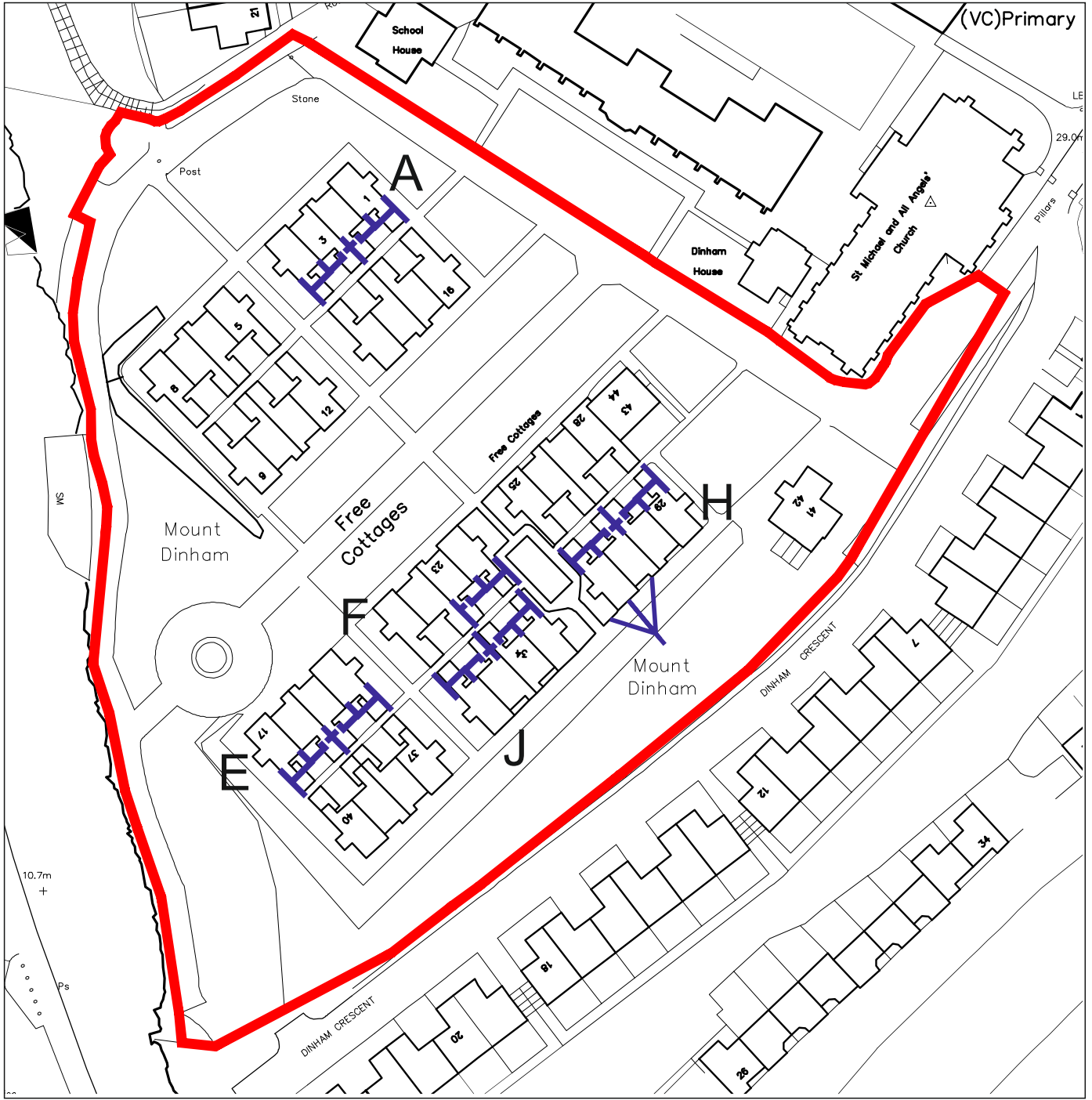
7.1 An archive entry has been created under the unique identifier 298861 and includes a digital copy of this report.

7.2 This report and the OASIS entry represent the archive for the project.

8. SOURCES CONSULTED

Passmore, A., 2012, *Exeter Free Cottages, Mount Dinham, Exeter, (NGR SX 91973 92896), Written Scheme of Archaeological Work for archaeological watching brief, Condition 6 of planning reference no. 11/1906/03, AC archaeology document no. ACD450/1/1*

Passmore, J., 2010, *Exeter's Almshouses* (Privately Printed, Exeter)



PROJECT

Exeter Free Cottages, Mount Dinham, Exeter

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of monitored areas

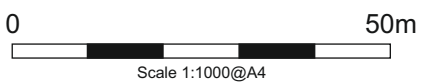




Plate 1: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block H, looking east



Plate 2: Representative section of foundation trench in block H, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 3: General view of drainage trenches situated to the southwest of block H, looking northwest



Plate 4: Representative section in the northwest end of the drainage trench, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 5: Representative section in the southwest end of the drainage trench, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 6: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block J, looking southwest



Plate 7: Representative section of foundation trench in block J, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 8: General view of foundation trenches in block E, looking southwest



Plate 9: Representative section of foundation trench in block E, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 10: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block F, looking southwest

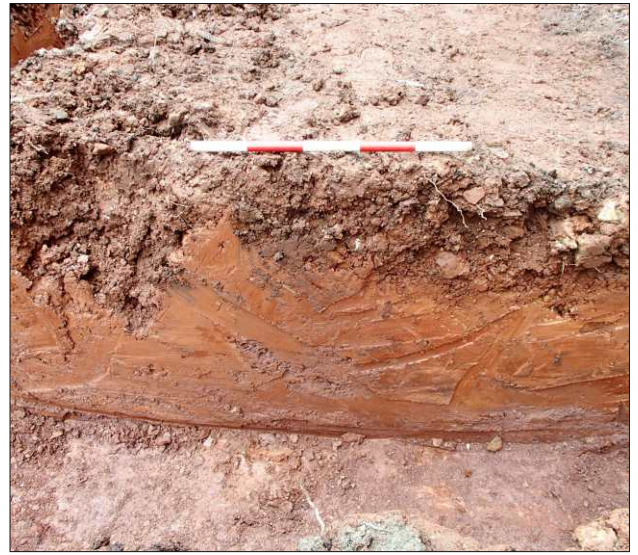


Plate 11: Representative section of foundation trench in block F, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 12: Working shot of foundation trenches being excavated in block A, looking northeast



Plate 13: Representative section of foundation trench in block A, looking southwest (1m scale)

Devon Office

AC archaeology Ltd
Unit 4, Halthaies Workshops
Bradninch
Nr Exeter
Devon
EX5 4LQ

Telephone/Fax: 01392 882410

Wiltshire Office

AC archaeology Ltd
Manor Farm Stables
Chicklade
Hindon
Nr Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP3 5SU

Telephone: 01747 820581
Fax: 01747 820440

www.acarchaeology.co.uk