

2 THE MEDE, TOPSHAM, EXETER, DEVON

(NGR SX 96272 88420)

Results of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

Planning Permission Reference: Exeter City Council
17/1350/FUL (Condition 2)

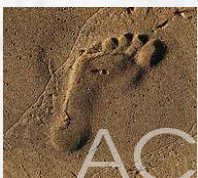
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On behalf of:
Burley Partnership Ltd

Report No: ACD1717/2/1

Date: May 2018



archaeology

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Client	Burley Partnership Ltd.
Report Number	ACD1717/2/1
Date	14 May 2018
Status	Version 2
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Acknowledgements

The watching brief was commissioned by Burley Partnership Ltd on behalf of their client and coordinated for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The site works were carried out by Abigail Brown with the illustrations for this report prepared by Leon Cauchois. The advice of Andrew Pye, Principal Project Manager (Heritage), Exeter City Council 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 monitoring and recording was undertaken by AC archaeology during April 2018 at 2 The Mede, Topsham, Exeter, Devon (SX 96272 88420). The archaeological investigation comprised of monitoring groundworks associated with the construction of a new extension to the rear of the property. The property lies over the projected circuit of the 1st-century Roman double-ditched military base at Topsham, which was first exposed in the adjacent Topsham School site ahead of development in 2000. Groundworks comprised the excavation of a footings trench and associated soakaway pit.

The groundworks for the new extension exposed a broad ditch that was located in close proximity to the projected continuation of the previously-recorded outer ditch of the Roman military base. No finds that could confirm a date were recovered from the fill of the ditch and, due to constraints, it was not possible to excavate the feature to establish its full profile. Despite this, it was considered that the ditch had the potential to be related to the previously-recorded Roman activity.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Archaeological monitoring and recording associated with the construction of an extension to 2 The Mede, Topsham, Exeter, Devon (SX 96272 88420) was undertaken by AC archaeology during April 2018. The investigations were required by under condition 2 of planning consent granted by Exeter City Council (planning reference: 17/1350/FUL), following consultation with their Principal Project Manager (Heritage).

1.2 The Mede is located on the northwest side of Topsham and comprises a short cul-de-sac bounded by Topsham Primary School to the southeast and above a sharp break of slope down to Ferry Road and the River Exe flood plain to the southwest. The position of the new extension lies on flat ground at 7m aOD, (above Ordnance Datum) on what was part of an existing conservatory and gardens to the rear of the property (Plate 1). Its underlying solid geology comprises sandstone of the Dawlish Sandstone Formation, which is overlain by sand and gravel river terrace deposits (www.bgs.ac.uk).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The principal archaeological interest in the site was its position as adjacent to the projected extent of a Roman military base that was partially exposed in 2000 during the construction of Topsham School to the southwest (Sage and Allan 2004). This work recorded the periphery to a defensive enclosure that comprised double V-shaped ditches surviving at around 2.25m and 2.7m wide and up to 2m in depth. Finds recovered from the ditches suggested that the site was occupied around the mid-1st century AD. The exposure of a corner to the defensive circuit, which lies adjacent to the current site, was used to provide an interpretation that the probable military base incorporated a rectangular area, which extended to, and perhaps originally beyond, the current break of slope to the southwest and Ashford Road to the northwest. Further exposure of probable associated features were recorded during gas pipeline works in 2006. These works included the recovery of Roman Samian pottery and Roman tile from a cut feature in The Mede roadway; a location that would be internal to the probable military base (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record ref. MDV67998).

- 2.2** The excavations at the school site also exposed a range of activity from other periods. These comprised evidence for prehistoric activity, graves from a later Roman cemetery (present immediately on the other side of the plot boundary with the school), possible Civil War defences as well as post-medieval quarry pits and field boundaries.
- 2.3** The 1843 Topsham parish tithe map depicts the position of the site as within one of a number of narrow strip fields that occupied the area to the southwest of the current Ashford Road. These have been interpreted as representing probable burgage plots of probable medieval origin (MDV76189).

3. AIMS

- 3.1** The aim of the archaeological monitoring and recording was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the scheme. This was with particular reference to the potential for Roman activity to be present on the site.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The monitoring and recording was carried out in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2017) and with reference to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 4.2** All groundworks were undertaken using a mechanical excavator working under constant archaeological supervision. This comprised the monitoring of footings trenches, which measured 0.5m wide and the excavation of a soakaway pit with associated trench (Fig. 2). The soakaway pit measured 0.8m square and 1.8m deep.
- 4.3** 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 1:20 and 1:50 as appropriate.

5. RESULTS (Detailed plan Fig. 2a and sections Figs 2b-c; Plates 1-3)

- 5.1** Natural subsoil (context 102), which consisted of river gravels in a red and yellow sand, was exposed in the footings trench and soakaway pit at a depth of approximately 1.2m below existing levels. This was overlain by a 0.8m thick mid brownish-red sandy-silt loam subsoil (101) and a mid greyish-brown silty-loam topsoil (100). On the north side of the house, the topsoil was overlain by a tarmac path. The excavation of the footings trench exposed two portions of the same probable approximately northwest to southeast aligned ditch (F103 and F105). This was cut into the natural subsoil and sealed by subsoil 101. Due to depth and unstable ground, it was not possible to enter the footings trench.
- 5.2** Probable ditch F103 was partially exposed on the south side of the footings trench and continued beneath the rear of the house. It measured at least 1.7m wide and was filled with a mid reddish-brown clayey loam (104), which had occasional small to medium sub-rounded pebble, cobble and charcoal fleck inclusions. Probable ditch

F105 measured 2.6m wide with steeply-sloping sides that flared out at the top. It contained a similar clayey-loam fill (106) as 104 to the south. No finds were recovered from the ditch fills.

6. THE FINDS by Naomi Payne

- 6.1** Two finds were recovered from the topsoil (context 100). The first was a fragment of stem from a post-medieval clay tobacco-pipe (2g) which cannot be closely dated. The second find was a farthing coin (4.5g) of William IV dating from 1837.

7. COMMENTS

- 7.1** The groundworks for the new extension have exposed an approximately northwest to southeast aligned ditch. This was located in close proximity to the projected continuation to the previously-recorded Roman military ditch extending from the Topsham School site to the southeast (Fig. 1).

- 7.2** No finds that could confirm a date were recovered from the fill of the ditch and, due to constraints, it was not possible to excavate the feature to establish its full profile. However, based on its position, as sealed beneath 1.2m of soils, it demonstrates that it was unlikely to be of recent origin. Furthermore, based on its northwest to southeast alignment, it is also unlikely to have been associated with the former field pattern as depicted on the 1843 Topsham tithe map (which was almost-certainly based on medieval burgage plots extending perpendicular from High Street). Therefore, given the proximity of the ditch to the known outer military ditch, it has the potential to not only represent additional evidence for Roman activity, but perhaps also a continuation of the same ditch.

- 7.3** If the ditch that was exposed within the current work represented a continuation of the previously recorded outer ditch, then it presents a variation to the currently projected circuit to the base (Sage and Allan 2004) (Fig. 1). As a continuation to the perimeter of the base, the angle of the new section of ditch would not only suggest that a larger area was covered but also that it would represent an unusual form for a military site in projecting a very broad curved corner or indeed a multi-angled boundary. Despite these possibilities, due to the very limited exposure of the ditch and the lack of confirmed dating, it would be difficult to conclude on its relation to the known military base. Nevertheless, given the prospect for the ditch to be of a comparable 1st century date, the results from this work have the potential to contribute to a revised interpretation on the area either immediately covered by the base or any associated activity, especially should any future exposures be made.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 8.1** This report forms the sole archive for the project.
- 8.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed using the unique number **316384**, which includes a digital version of this report.

9. REFERENCES

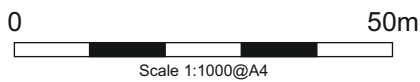
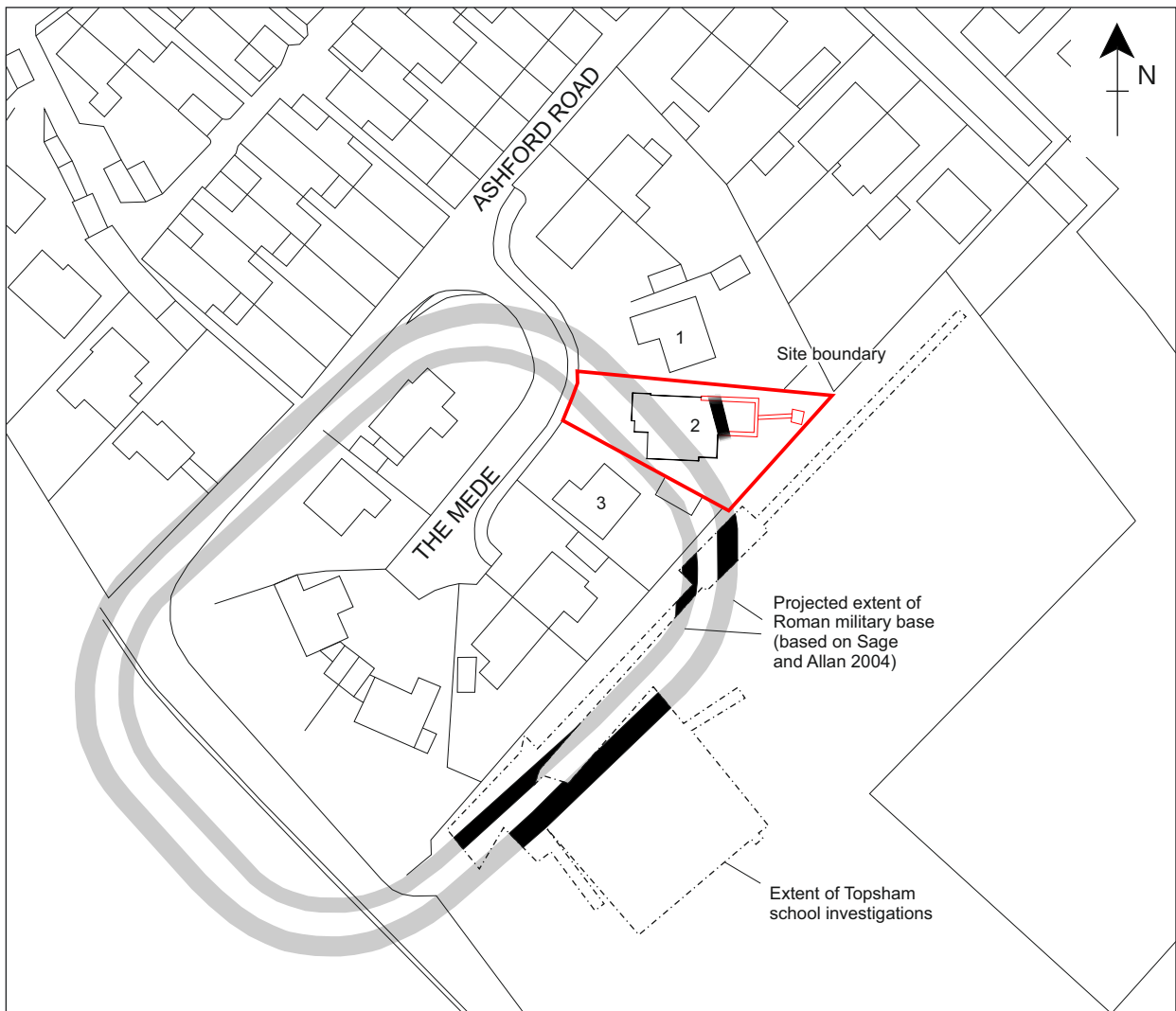
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Hughes. S., 2017. 2 *The Mede, Topsham, Exeter, Devon: Written Scheme of Archaeological Work for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording*. Unpublished AC archaeology document No. ACD1717/1/1

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PROJECT

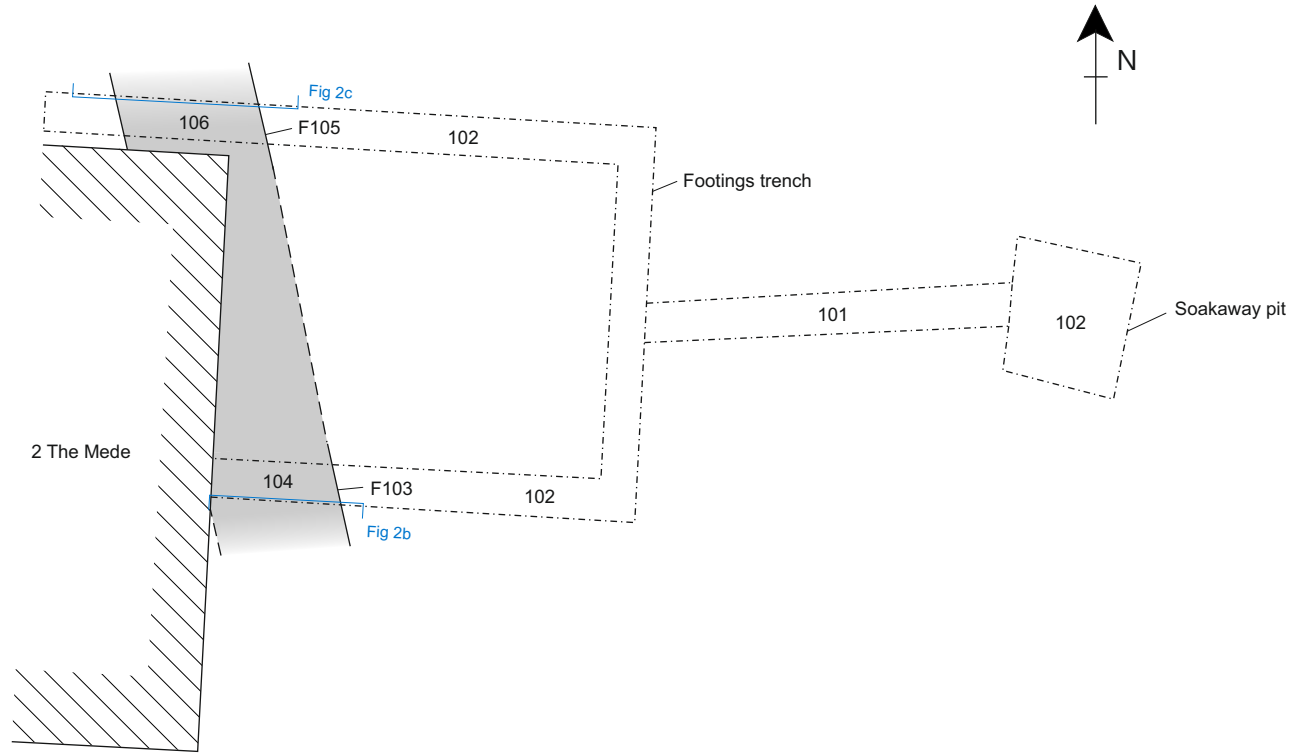
2 The Mede, Topsham, Exeter

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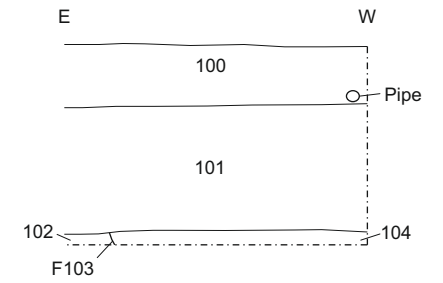
Fig. 1: Location of site with projected line of ditch F103 and F105 shown



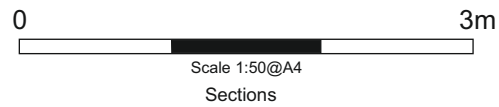
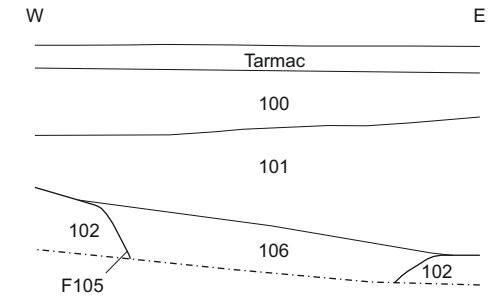
a) Plan of footing trench and soakaway pit



b) Section of ditch F103



c) Section of ditch F105



PROJECT

2 The Mede, Topsham, Exeter

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Fig. 2: Footings trench and soakaway pit, plan and sections





Plate 1: General working view of site, looking north



Plate 2: Probable ditch F103, view to south (Scale 1m)



Plate 3: Probable ditch F105, view to south (Scale 1m)

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