

REEDS, THE RETREAT DRIVE, TOPSHAM, EXETER,  
DEVON

(Centred on NGR SX 95749 88820)

Results of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

Planning Permission Ref. Exeter City Council 18/0790/FUL  
(Condition 3)

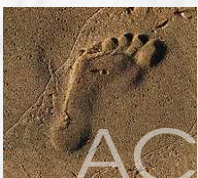
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Simon Hughes

On behalf of:  
LSN Architects

Report No: ACD1988/2/1

Date: October 2019



archaeology

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Client	LSN Architects
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Checked by	Paul Rainbird
Approved by	John Valentin

## **Acknowledgements**

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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 June and July 2019 at Reeds, The Retreat Drive, Topsham, Exeter, Devon (SX 95814 88740). The archaeological works comprised of monitoring groundworks associated with an extension to the property. The Retreat bounds the site to the southeast and is a large late 18th century house that was converted from an existing sugar refinery. Reeds, which was built in 1969, is situated on the site of an earlier building range of The Retreat that is depicted on a painting dated to 1773 and subsequent historic mapping.

The monitoring and recording exposed the remains of a structure and two undated pits. The structural remains comprised a wall and associated surface that predated landscaping associated with the current Reeds property. Although not conclusive, it was likely that the remains represented part of a yard surface with revetment wall associated an earlier range of the The Retreat house arrangement.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Archaeological monitoring and recording associated with the construction of an extension to Reeds, The Retreat Drive, Topsham, Exeter, Devon (SX 95814 88740) was undertaken by AC archaeology during June and July 2019. The investigations were required under condition 3 of planning consent granted by Exeter City Council (planning reference: 18/0790/FUL), following consultation with the Exeter City Council Principal Project Manager (Heritage) (hereafter ECC PPMH).
- 1.2 The Reeds property lies towards the northwest extent of Topsham on land to the northwest of The Retreat house, with the River Exe bounding the site to the southwest and the Retreat Boat Yard to the northwest (Fig. 1). It lies at 4m aOD (above ordnance datum) on ground that slopes towards the River Exe (Plate 1). Prior to commencement, the position of the extension was occupied by a garden and garage. The underlying solid geology consists of sandstone of the Dawlish Sandstone Formation, beneath clay, silt, sand and gravel tidal flat deposits ([www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)).

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Retreat, which bounds the site to the southeast is Grade-II listed (National Heritage List for England reference 1103993). It comprises a large late 18th century house that was converted from an existing sugar refinery. The Reeds, which was built in 1969, is situated on the site of an earlier building. It is depicted on a painting dated to 1773 by M. Blackamore (the date The Retreat was completed) as a northwest to southeast pitched-roofed building with five chimneys. Probably representing a building that predated the construction of The Retreat, this had the potential to have been part of the former sugar refinery (Fox 1991). Based on a contemporary description, this building was probably converted to a pavilion and bath house (*ibid* 1991). To the northwest of the site is the Grade-II listed late 18th century former stable block to The Retreat (1103994), which is now used as premises for the Retreat Boat Yard.
- 2.2 The 1843 Topsham parish tithe map depicts The Retreat with the site of Reeds to the northwest occupied by a connecting range that extended up to the former stables. This arrangement is the same on the subsequent 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps of 1888, 1904 and 1936. The 1981 edition then shows Reeds as the current detached property overlying the site of the earlier range.

- 2.3** Earlier activity in the area has been demonstrated by numerous sites of prehistoric and Romano-British date, many of which have been recorded during developments of the adjacent plots. Evidence for prehistoric activity in the vicinity includes Late Neolithic pits and flints from the excavations in the adjacent M5 corridor (Jarvis and Maxfield 1975) and during recent improvements to the Newport Mobile Home Park also situated to the northwest (Hughes 2017).
- 2.4** To the northeast, the Exeter/Topsham Road represents the alignment of a Roman road extending from a probable Roman port at Topsham to the legionary fortress at Exeter. Excavations carried out at nearby Wessex Close recorded evidence for occupation throughout the later 1st to early 4th centuries AD (Farnell and Rainbird 2017). Investigations immediately northwest of the M5 on the site of the Aldi supermarket identified the remains of Roman military timber buildings, set back from the line of the Roman road (Garland and Orellano 2018). Evidence for Roman occupation immediately adjacent to the site has been suggested by roof tile fragments and pottery sherds that were recovered during the rebuilding of garages at The Retreat (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record reference MDV71562).

### **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 prehistoric and Roman activity and evidence for building remains relating to structures shown on historic mapping 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 (Valentin 2019) 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 the excavation of a construction terrace, footings trenches and bulk reduction (Fig. 1 and Plate 1).
- 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 (Plan Fig. 1)**

- 5.1** Natural subsoil (context 102), which consisted of river gravels in a red and yellow sand and grit matrix, was exposed at a maximum depth of 0.45m beneath an intermittent dark brown silty-sand garden soil (100). The excavation of a construction terrace to the southwest exposed some structural remains comprising of a wall footing (S104) and associated surface (106), while two pits (F108 and F110) were recorded within a footings trench to the northeast.

## 5.2 Wall footing S104 and surface 106 (Section Fig. 2a; Plates 2-3)

Wall footing S104 measured 0.4m high by 0.6m wide and was constructed from pale red lime-mortar bonded stone rubble and river cobbles. It was set within a construction terrace (F103), that was cut into the sloping ground and extended with a flat base to the northwest. The base of the terrace was lined with a mixed mid brownish-red silty sand and lime mortar bedding layer (105), which was then overlain by surface 106. Surface 106 abutted wall S104 and was comprised of sub-rounded river cobbles. The surface and wall were overlain by a dark reddish-brown silty sand demolition dump (107) that contained frequent roof slate and mortar fragments. This was then overlain by a dump of mixed topsoil and redeposited natural subsoil (101) that infilled the hollow occupied by the former structure. The northwest portion of the structure had been removed by modern landscaping.

## 5.3 Pits F108 and F110

Pits F108 and F110 were exposed in the northeast extent of the site. They measured 1m and 1.95m across and 0.68m and 0.51m deep respectively. Both the pits had moderately steep sloping sides and concave bases. Pit F108 contained a mid-brown sandy silt loam fill (109), while pit F110 contained a gravel-rich dump of redeposited natural subsoil (111). No finds were recovered.

## 6. COMMENTS

- 6.1 The monitoring and recording exposed the remains of a structure and two undated pits. The structural remains represented by wall S104 and associated surface 106 were undated but predated the landscaping associated with the current Reeds property. It was not established what the structure represented and no buildings in this position are shown on the historic mapping. Therefore, although the remains may have represented part of an outbuilding, it is perhaps more likely they formed a yard surface with revetment wall associated with the former The Retreat house arrangement.
- 6.2 The function and date of pits F108 and F110 was not established. As archaeological activity ranging from the Neolithic and Roman periods through to the post medieval period have been well documented in the vicinity of the site, it would be difficult to provide any further interpretation.

## 7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 7.1 This report forms the sole archive for the project.
- 7.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed using the unique number **370853**, which includes a digital version of this report.

## 8. REFERENCES

British Geological Survey Online Viewer, [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk).

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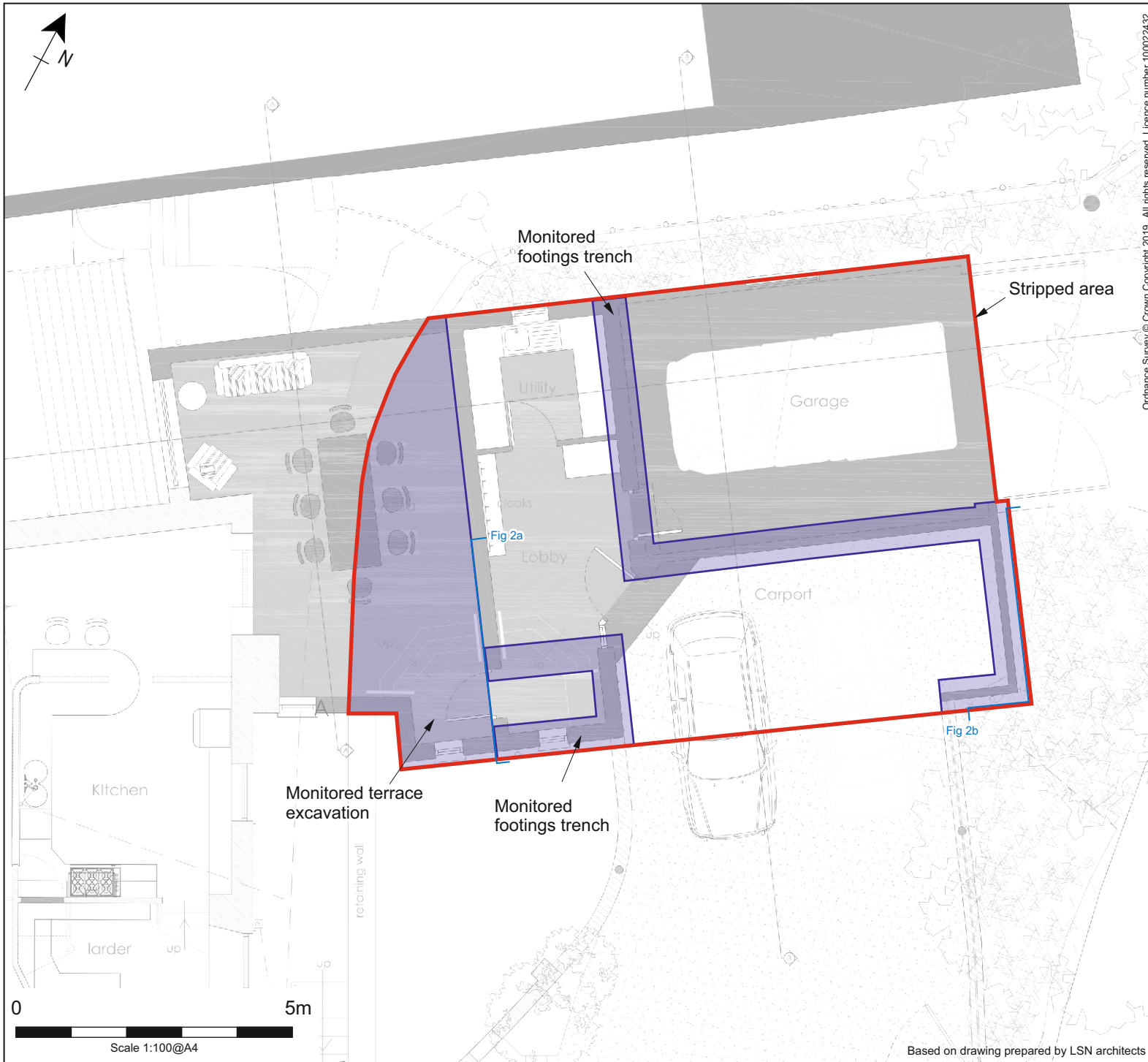
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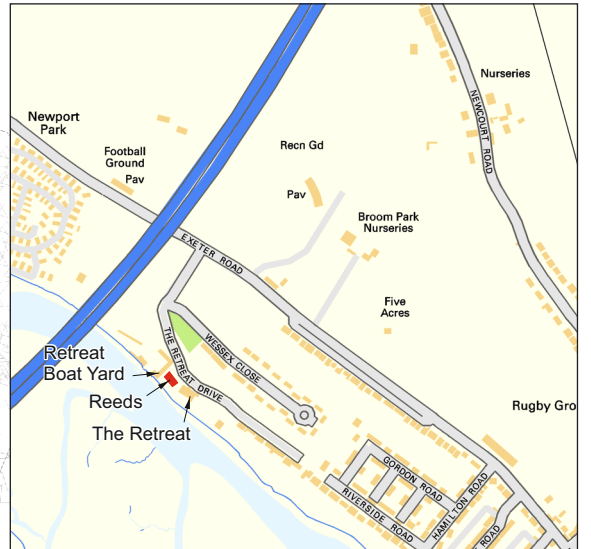
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PROJECT  
**Reeds, The Retreat Drive, Topsham**

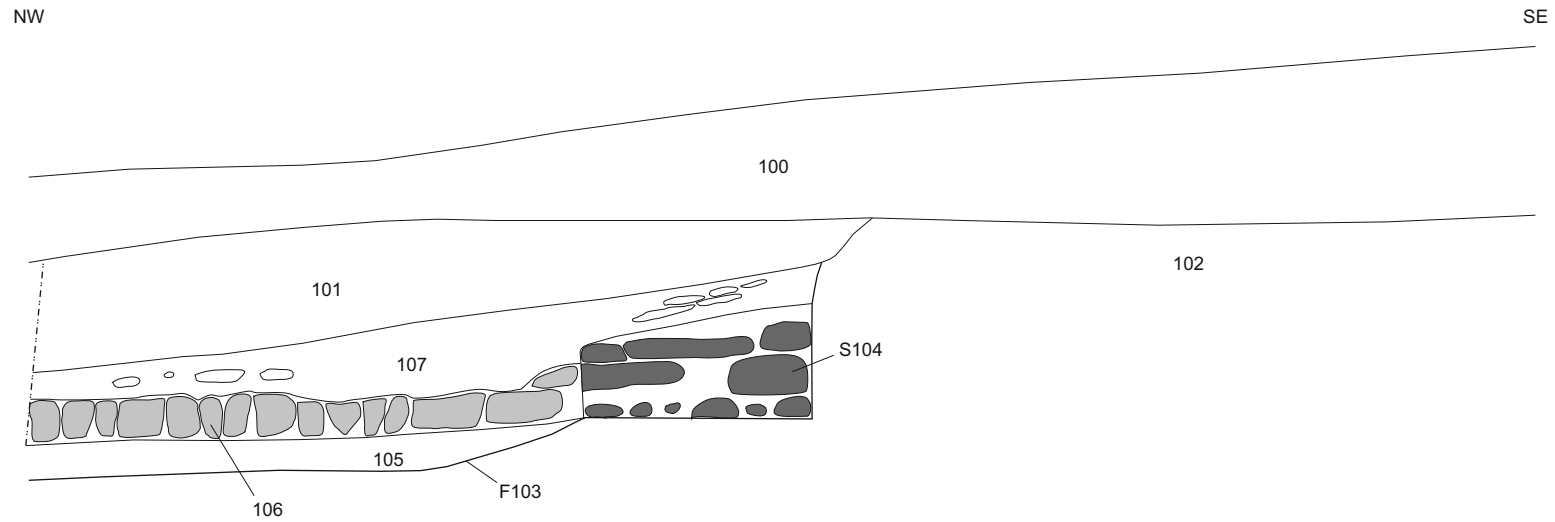
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**Fig. 1: Location of site and monitored groundworks**



Based on drawing prepared by LSN architects

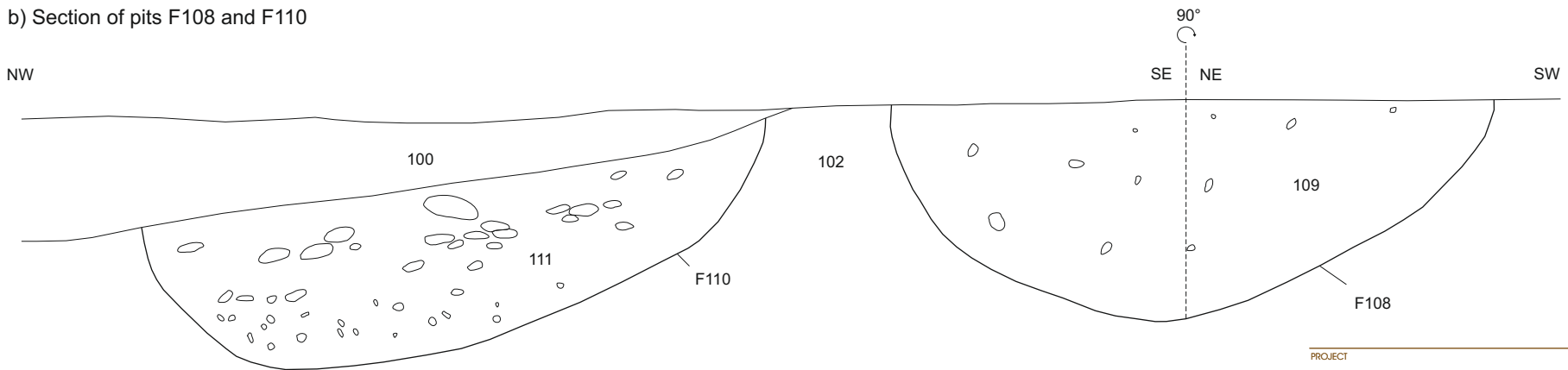


a) Section of terrace excavation



Key	
	Structure
	Surface
	Stones

b) Section of pits F108 and F110



PROJECT

Reeds, The Retreat Drive, Topsham

TITLE

Fig. 2: Sections

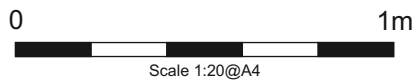




Plate 1: General view of site looking west towards Reeds and Retreat Boat Yard



Plate 2: Showing terrace excavation. View to west (scale 1m)



Plate 3: Section of terrace excavation, with wall S104 and surface 106. View to northeast (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Showing pits F108 and F110. View to east (scale 1m)

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