

THE NAB, FERRY ROAD, TOPSHAM, EXETER, DEVON

(NGR SX 96319 88177)

Results of archaeological trench evaluation

Exeter City Council planning ref. 21/0254/FUL (condition 5)

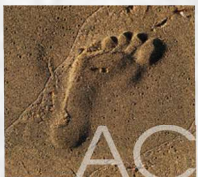
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On behalf of:
16a Architecture Ltd

Report No: ACD2609/1/0

Date: January 2023



archaeology

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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

An archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by AC archaeology during September 2022 at The Nab, Ferry Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon (NGR ST 96319 88177). The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of two trenches totaling 30m in length with each 1.2m wide. Trenches were positioned within the footprint of a proposed replacement dwelling. The site lies on the site of a historic wharf as shown on 19th century mapping.

The trial trenches exposed a generally consistent sequence of made ground deposits sealing an estuarine clay. The dumping of material represented the creation of the wharf platform over a former riverbank. Finds recovered from the made ground indicate a 19th century date for this activity, with pottery sherds present in the lower made ground deposits indicating probable deposition in the first half of the century.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological trial trench evaluation carried out by AC archaeology during September 2022 ahead of the construction of a replacement dwelling and garage on land at The Nab, Ferry Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon (SX 96319 88177). The work was required as condition 5 of planning consent reference 21/0254/FUL granted by Exeter City Council, following consultation with their Principal Project Manager (Heritage).
- 1.2 The site comprises a sub-square plot set back from Ferry Road to the northeast and bounded to the southwest by the Exe Estuary. It was occupied by an existing house and garage set within associated lawn and gardens. The site lies on level ground at around 3m aOD (above Ordnance Datum), with the underlying solid geology comprising sandstone of the Dawlish Sandstone Formation, overlain by superficial sands and gravel river deposits (British Geological Survey Online Viewer 2022).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site lies on the site of a historic wharf (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record ref. MDV110605). This is likely to have previously been known as Holmans Upper Yard, a shipyard and wharf, which was owned by the Davy family in 1800 and transferred to Holmans in 1842 (MDV17267). The transfer of the yard to Holmans was followed by the construction of a Grade-II listed house on Ferry Road (No. 20) for the shipyard manager (National Heritage List for England 1306148) and the conversion of a sail loft (No. 19) to a now Grade-II listed house named 'Furlong' (1103961).
- 2.2 The 1843 Topsham parish tithe map shows the site as an open plot. This arrangement is broadly the same on the 1888 25-inch First-Edition Ordnance Survey map although it depicts a number of short jetties extending further into the estuary to the southeast as well as the infilling of an inlet to the north of the site. The plot is annotated as 'Wharf' and there is a small building shown against the northwest boundary.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The main aim of the archaeological investigations was to preserve by record any features, deposits or finds exposed that would be disturbed for destroyed by the

scheme. This is with particular reference to the potential for evidence of post-medieval wharf front structures and deposits to be exposed.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Project Design by AC archaeology (Hughes 2021) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation* (Revised 2020). It comprised the machine excavation of 2 trenches totaling 30m in length, with each trench 1.2m wide. These were positioned to target areas of the site that would be impacted on by the proposed development (Fig. 1).
- 4.2** All trenches were located with a Leica Net rover GPS accurate to 1cm. The removal of overlying soils within the trenches was undertaken in 20cm spits (maximum) under the control and direction of the site archaeologist. Stripping by mechanical excavator ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural subsoil was exposed.
- 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 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50, while all site levels relate to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS (Plan Fig. 1a and sections Figs 1b-c; Plates 1-6)

5.1 Introduction

Trenches 1 and 2 exposed a series of made ground layers overlying sealed riverbank deposits. These are described in detail below, while tabulated context descriptions for both trenches are provided in Appendix 1. Context numbers are prefixed by the relevant trench number (e.g. 100 for Trench 1).

5.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 10m long, aligned east-northeast to west-southwest and located to the southeast of the existing dwelling. The trench was excavated to a general depth of 0.4m and with a deeper sondage dug at the northeast end. Within the sondage, a dark greyish blue alluvial estuarine silty clay (context 105) was present from a depth of 1.4m below existing levels. This was overlain by a dumped brownish red silty clay with occasional gravel and pebbles (104), which was in turn sealed by three dumped layers of clay loam that contained brick fragments, roof slate, clay tobacco pipe stem pieces and frequent cobbles and gravels (103, 102 and 101). Upper made ground layer 101 was exposed throughout the trench and was sealed by a 0.18m thick dark brownish red sandy silty clay topsoil (100). Finds recovered from made ground deposits 101-104 included thirteen sherds of 19th century pottery, an 1861 Queen Victoria penny, three iron objects, 8 pieces of window and vessel glass, three fragments of clay tobacco pipe and a piece of ceramic floor tile (retained as a sample).

5.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 20m long, aligned northeast to southwest and located close to the northwest boundary of the site. It was excavated to a general depth of 0.3m below existing levels, while a sondage was dug to a depth of 1.3m below existing levels at the southwest end of the trench. Alluvial estuarine clay (206), as exposed in Trench 1, was exposed from a depth of 1.15m and was sealed by a series of dumped made ground deposits (205, 204, 203, 202 and 201). Lower deposit 205 comprised a

compact dark grey clay loam with coal and clinker inclusions. This was sealed by two deposits of mid reddish-brown clay loam with frequent river pebbles inclusions (204 and 202) that were interleaved by dark grey oily silty clays with frequent gravels and occasional coal and clinker inclusions (203 and 201). Upper made ground 201 was overlain by topsoil (200). Two sherds of post-medieval pottery and two fragments of clay tobacco pipe were recovered from the made ground deposits.

6. THE FINDS *by Naomi Payne and Charlotte Coles*

6.1 Introduction

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. The collection of finds is summarised in Appendix 2.

6.2 Finds were recovered from two evaluation trenches. All are post-medieval to modern in date and, although they are useful for dating the archaeological deposits encountered, they are not of great significance. A Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Level 1 type (descriptive) report as per their online guidance *Toolkit for Specialist Reporting* is therefore considered appropriate.

6.3 Post-medieval/modern pottery *by Naomi Payne*

A total of 17 sherds (662g) was recovered from six deposits. All of the pottery is late 18th or 19th century in date. The assemblage comprises redware (one sherd), stoneware (two bottles and one small sherd of white salt-glazed stoneware), mocha ware (one sherd), transfer-printed wares (six sherds), plain white wares (two sherds), plain white porcelain (two sherds), yellow kitchen ware (one sherd) and flower pot (one sherd). The stoneware bottle base from made ground deposit 204 features part of a stamp which reads as follows:

BELPER & DENBY [POTTERIES, DERBYSHIRE]
VITREOUS [STONE BOTTLES]
J. BO[URNE,]
PATE[NTEE.]
WARRANTED NOT [TO ABSORB]
EX 4

This is likely to be a ginger beer or mineral water bottle. EX is short for excise. The presence of such an excise mark indicates a date for this bottle between 1817 and 1834.

6.4 Metal *by Naomi Payne*

A copper alloy coin weighing 3g was recovered from the made ground layer 101 in Trench 1. This is a farthing of Queen Victoria dating from 1861. Three pieces of structural ironwork (629g) were recovered from made ground deposit 102. They comprise two very large nails and a slightly S-shaped wall anchor.

6.5 Glass *by Charlotte Coles*

Ten pieces (228g) of glass were recovered from three contexts. The glass finds consist of a piece of late 19th to early 20th century clear bottle base and a piece of undated window glass from Trench 1 made ground deposit 101, a piece of late 18th or 19th century green cylindrical bottle base and five pieces of window glass from made ground deposit 103, and the base of a lead crystal goblet and base of a green wine bottle from

made ground deposit 104. The lead crystal goblet has a single beaded ring below the cup, the stem is circular in cross-section and there is cut-glass decoration on the cup. This is likely to date from the 19th century. The base of the wine bottle from this context has a very deep punt or kick up base and a mamelon present, implying that it is a champagne bottle. It is likely to date from the 1840s onwards.

6.6 Clay tobacco pipe by Charlotte Coles

Five pieces (18g) of clay tobacco pipe were recovered from three contexts. This material comprises three stems from Trench 1 made ground deposit 101, one stem from made ground deposit 204 and a piece of spur and stem from Trench 2 made ground deposit 201. This spur dates from the 18th or 19th century, but no closer dating is possible.

6.7 Ceramic building material by Naomi Payne

An unglazed redware floor tile fragment (411g) was recovered from made ground deposit 102. This has a thickness of 39mm and is likely to be of 19th century date.

7. COMMENTS

7.1 The evaluation trenches exposed a generally consistent sequence of made ground deposits sealing an estuarine clay. These dumped layers have shown that the ground level above the former extent of the River Exe Estuary as represented by the exposed alluvial clay had been elevated by around 1.2m to create a flat platform. Material used for the made ground comprised a mixture of redeposited river gravels, cobbles, clays as well as waste including clinker and structural demolition rubble. The compact upper deposits may have represented a rough surface, although this was not conclusive. No evidence for *in situ* structural remains were exposed.

7.2 The dumping of material represents the creation of the wharf, which is likely to correspond with that shown on the 1843 Topsham parish tithe map and in more detail on the subsequent 1888 Ordnance Survey First Edition map. The finds recovered indicate a 19th century date for this activity, with pottery sherds from the lower made ground deposits (104 and 204) indicating probable deposition in the first half of the century. The wharf and shipyard, which was latterly known as Holmans Upper Yard, had been in existence at least by 1800 (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record ref. MDV17267), suggesting that the period of made ground recorded represented a later extension to operations, perhaps around the time of its transfer to the Holmans.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

8.1 An online OASIS entry has been completed using the unique identifier 511765, which includes a digital copy of this report.

8.2 This report represents the archive for the project.

9. SOURCES CONSULTED

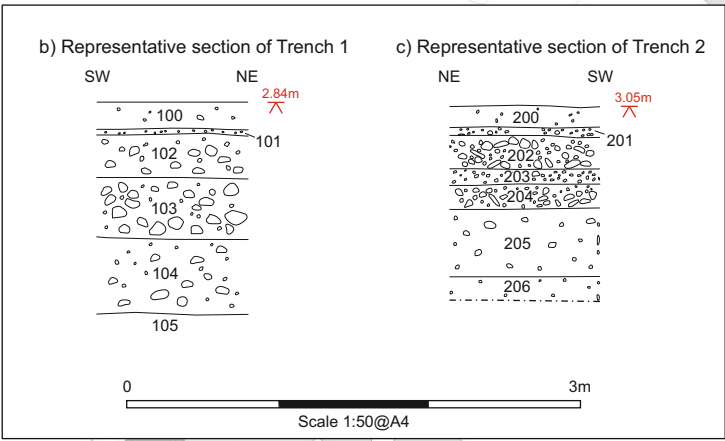
British Geological Survey online viewer www.bgs.ac.uk

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, accessed 2022:
www.archaeologists.net/reporting-toolkit/using-the-advisory-checklist

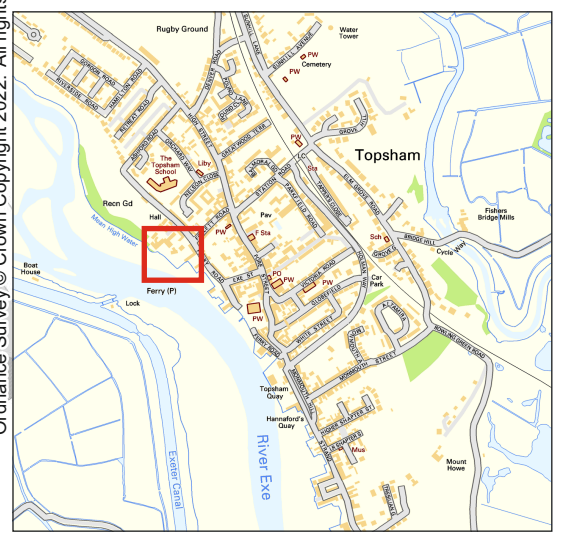
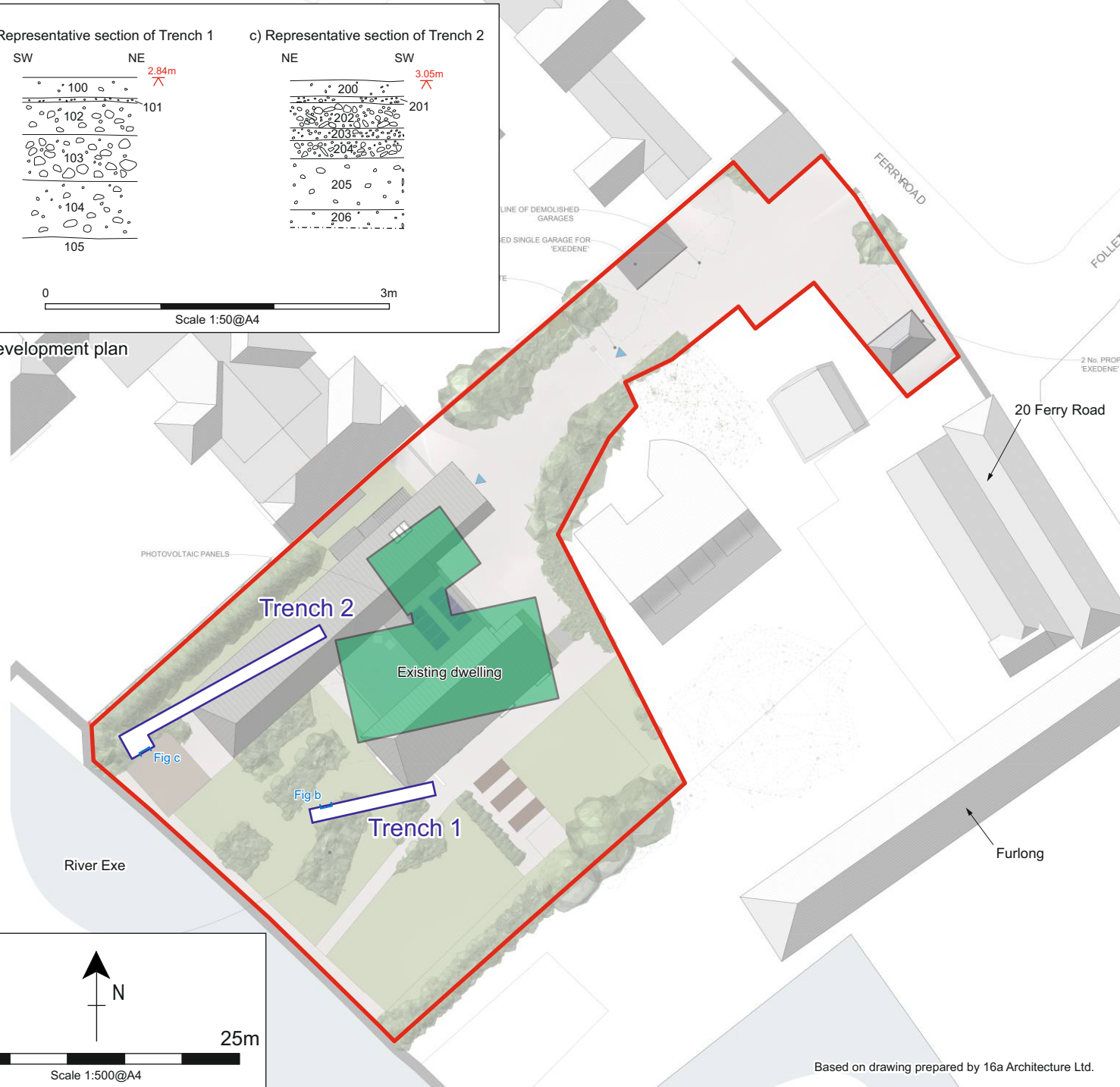
Devon County Council Environment Viewer [www.http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccviewer/](http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccviewer/)

Historic England 2023, National Heritage List for England
historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/

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a) Development plan



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PROJECT

The Nab, Ferry Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site and development plan with trial trenches shown and representative sections

AC archaeology

Based on drawing prepared by 16a Architecture Ltd.



Plate 1: General view of site looking southwest towards the River Exe (1m scale)



Plate 2: General view of site looking east towards The Nab with Trench 2 in foreground (1m scale)



Plate 3: Trench 1, view to east (1m scale)



Plate 4: Trench 1, representative section.
View to north (1m scale)



Plate 5: Trench 2, view to southwest (1m scale)



Plate 6: Trench 2, representative section.
View to southeast (1m scale)

Appendix 1

Tabulated context descriptions by trench



APPENDIX 1: TABULATED CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Trench 1		Length 10m	Width 1.2m	Alignment ENE-WSW
Context	Description	Depth b.g.s	Interpretation	
100	Dark brownish red slightly clay loam, frequent small gravel and pebble inclusions	0-0.18m	Topsoil	
101	Mid reddish brown clay loam, occasional charcoal, gravels and stone rubble inclusions	0.18m-0.21m	Made ground	
102	Mid to dark reddish brown compact clay loam. Frequent rubble, slate, CBM and gravel inclusions	0.21m-0.5m	Made ground	
103	Dark greyish brown loose clay loam, frequent cobbles and CBM and slate inclusions	0.5m-0.9m	Made ground	
104	Mid brownish red silty clay, occasional gravel and pebble inclusions	0.9m-1.4m	Made ground	
105	Dark greyish blue soft silty clay	1.4m	Alluvium	

Trench 2		Length 20m	Width 1.2m	Alignment NE-SW
Context	Description	Depth b.g.s	Interpretation	
200	Dark brownish red slightly clay loam, frequent small gravel and pebble inclusions	0-0.16m	Topsoil	
201	Dark grey loose oily silty clay, frequent sub-angular gravel and occasional coal and clinker inclusions	0.16m-0.22m	Made ground	
202	Mid reddish brown soft clay loam, frequent pebble and cobble inclusions	0.22m-0.46m	Made ground	
203	Dark grey loose oily silty clay, frequent sub-angular gravel and occasional coal and clinker inclusions	0.46m-0.52m	Made ground	
204	Mid reddish brown soft clay loam, frequent pebble and cobble inclusions	0.52m-0.7m	Made ground	
205	Dark grey firm to compact oily clay loam with coal and occasional river pebble inclusions	0.7m-1.13m	Made ground	
206	Dark greyish blue soft silty clay	1.13m+	Alluvium	

Appendix 2

Finds quantification

APPENDIX 2: FINDS QUANTIFICATION

Table 1. Summary of finds by context (weights in grams)

Cntxt	Context Description	Context spot date	Pottery		Copper alloy		Iron		Glass		Clay tobacco pipe		CBM	
			No.	Wt	No.	Wt	No.	Wt	No.	Wt	No.	Wt	No.	Wt
100	Trench 1 topsoil	N/A	2	5										
101	Made ground	1810-1900	5	10	1	3			2	28	3	11		
102	Made ground	1850-1900	1	12			3	629					1	411
103	Made ground	1825-1900	3	111					6	114				
104	Made ground	1830-1900	4	361					2	86				
201	Made ground	C18-19									1	2		
204	Made ground	1817-1834	2	163							1	5		
Totals			17	662	1	3	3	629	10	228	5	18	1	411

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