

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

18 JANUARY 2007

ARCHAEOLOGY RESEARCH PROGRESS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report advises Members as follows:
Item 2: progress with archaeology reports and projects funded from the Economy & Tourism budget.
Item 3: information relating to archaeological projects carried out in the City both for ECC and external clients.

2. ECONOMY AND TOURISM FUNDED WORK

Work to date

- 2.1 The purpose of this programme of work is to make available, in a range of formats and media, the results of archaeological and historical investigations and research undertaken by the City Council on a variety of topics.
- 2.2 In 2005-06 it was intended that work would be undertaken on the theme of medieval religious houses in Exeter, with the end-product intended as a booklet or series of booklets in the style of the Roman Fortress publication. Work was also continuing on a similar booklet dealing with the later Roman town development. Due to the demands of the Princesshay programme these were not completed but the basic information has been compiled on the main sites. A great deal of new information about the Dominican Friary (the Blackfriars near Bedford Street) and the extent of later Roman occupation in the east of the city, has been recorded as a result of the recent Princesshay work. It is proposed to complete this work in the coming year.

Proposed Future Work

- 2.3 Following discussions with the Portfolio Holder and Director of Economy and Development, proposals for work in 2007-08 will include the following:
- Input towards the updating of the Underground Passages leaflet, using information from the Princesshay investigations (including work in Longbrook Street).
 - Preparation of exhibition on the archaeology and history of Exeter Quay and Canal Basin for display in the Custom House. This will be completed by June 2007, when AFU are due to relocate to the building.
 - Continuation of preparation of booklets on aspects of medieval and Roman Exeter

3. PROJECTS FUNDED BY OTHER CLIENTS

- 3.1 The following is a summary of the main archaeological projects carried out in the City in the last six months. The bulk of the report deals with the

Princesshay project where the fieldwork element is now effectively complete. The items following relate to various development schemes, or other projects, within Exeter, which are funded, managed or co-ordinated by the City Council and finally those which are entirely funded by external clients.

Princesshay

- 3.2 The final programmed Excavation Area (D) was completed in March this year, though additional excavation was required for an attenuation tank excavated next to the new Debenhams store in the autumn. The excavation project has been managed over the 18 months or so by Peter Stead with Paul Pearce as on-site director and co-ordinator. It is to their credit, as well as that of the excavation team of up to 40 staff, that each stage of the programmed work has been completed within or ahead of the agreed schedule. However, no compromises have been made on the quality and thoroughness of the work and we are extremely grateful for the support given by the City's Archaeology Officer in helping to maintain the high standard of excavation and recording. Additional financial support has also been readily made available by Land Securities to deal with unforeseen archaeological works which were not identified in the Written Scheme of Investigation. The relations with the main contractor have generally been very good, though not surprisingly they have been tested, as the pressure on the development programme has grown.
- 3.3 The public viewing gallery was an enormous success with an average of 3000 visitors per week. Staff from the archaeological team were on hand at specified times during the day to talk to members of the public. Many of the visitors were local residents who expressed a keen interest in the work. The Heritage Open Day events and the public open day also proved very popular. An open invitation to tour the site was given to all Council members, as well as those with a special interest such as this committee. Visits have been made by a number of organisations including English Heritage and representatives from various south-western local authorities, all of which drew favourable responses from participants.
- 3.4 ***Results: Areas B and C: Roman Military (c. 55-75AD)***
Although the Princesshay site lies over 100m beyond the northern limit of the legionary fortress, clear evidence for contemporary, extra-mural Roman military occupation was found. The most significant feature was a wide deep ditch with a 'V'-shaped profile, typical of the military period. It was aligned north-east to south-west, broadly parallel with main axis of the fortress and is likely to represent an enclosure; quite possibly for an ancillary compound. Such compounds have previously been identified to the south-east and south-west of the fortress. The ditch had been completely re-cut over its entire exposed length, a significant undertaking suggesting a realignment or expansion of the enclosure. The evidence for early Roman buildings was limited and consisted entirely of a series of postholes or deeper, squared post pits (to take larger timbers). The remains of at least three timber structures were found. One consisted of four pits defining a square. The second comprised a gradual arc of five pits equally spaced, all other associated pits having been removed by later activity. The third structure comprised three postholes, surviving in between areas of extensive deep truncation. Although

the nature of these features is entirely consistent with a 1st century military date, it is equally possible that some (or all) of them date to very early beginnings of the Roman town (late 1st/early 2nd century).

- 3.5 A particular feature of the early use of the area is a number of quarry pits, often shallow irregular scoops, dug for the extraction of clay for use in tile production. The backfill of the pits invariably contained fragments of part-fired roof tile (tile 'wasters'), often mixed with ash from firings. These pits were found predominantly within the northern part of the site and were also regularly identified further to the north in the sides of the sheet piled wall guide trench. Within all excavation areas, the natural subsoil consisted predominantly of clean, firm plastic clay, eminently suitable for firing and for the production of the distinctive red tiles that roofed the barracks, bath house and other buildings within the fortress. The identification of this major tile production centre, effectively an industrial landscape, represents a major advance in our understanding of the development of Roman Exeter.

3.6 *The early civil town (c75 - c 200AD).*

This period saw the gradual expansion of the early town beyond the defences of the fortress and its enclosure initially by a bank and ditch (c.150AD) and ultimately by the town wall and rampart (c.200AD). During this period, the majority of buildings would have continued to have been built in timber rather than stone. The earliest feature datable to this period within this area was a metalled track or lane, 3m wide, which crossed the site north-west to south-east. The metalling consisted of a single layer of rounded gravel set onto the subsoil. The track survived over a distance of 13m and cut across the line of the infilled military enclosure ditch described above. It was flanked by ditches approximately 500mm deep which served to indicate the line of the track within the eastern part of the site (area C) where later truncation and pitting had removed the metalling. Significantly, the track showed very little sign of wear; no evidence of resurfacing or even patching which would suggest that it was in use for a relatively short period. Quite where the track fits into the Roman sequence is uncertain. It clearly post-dates the military enclosure and thus most probably dates to after the military period (assuming that the enclosure was in use until the departure of the legion). The absence of any of the local volcanic trap fragments within it indicates that it would have pre-dated the construction of the town wall (c200AD) as it was the construction of the wall that initiated the large scale quarrying of this material. If immediately post-military it may have served as little more than a haul road into the tile production centre, or a trackway leading out onto open ground. Given that the track appears to have been in use for a relatively short period and was replaced by one which may be associated with the construction of the town wall (see below), a plausible context would be an association with the ditch and bank that was thrown up, it is thought, in the mid-second century to provide an initial defensive circuit around the town. Within the eastern part of this area (area C) the ditches that flanked the track splayed outwards, to north and south, at a point approaching what would have been the tail of this initial bank, suggestive of a junction with an intra-mural patrol track. Throughout the early civil period this area continued to be exploited for the extraction of clay for tile manufacturing. This was most

clearly demonstrated during a limited area excavation to the north where it was evident that rampart deposits infilled a number of empty quarry pits.

3.7 The next major activity was the replacement of the metalled trackway by a parallel but more substantial surface set slightly further to the north. It was 9m wide, survived over a distance of 9.5m and was constructed throughout of volcanic trap stone rubble and chippings set onto a clay base with evidence of at least two major phases of resurfacing. Although much more durable and longer-lived than the metalled track that it replaced, it nevertheless was not retained as a main *insula* street; it was subsequently destroyed by the construction of a third century Roman town house (see below). The use of what must have been a huge quantity of volcanic stone is highly significant as it dates the track to no earlier than the construction of the town wall (c.200AD). Its removal by a building at some point in the third century points to the track's initial and primary purpose as having been a haul road during the construction of the wall.

3.8 *Early medieval (10th- 13thC)*

Although only limited structural remains of medieval date were found, abundant settlement evidence was found in the form of domestic and industrial pits. The pits were predominantly Saxo-Norman in date (10th-12th century), which is unusually early for Exeter. The principal reason for this was the establishment on the site by the 13th century of the Dominican Friary (Blackfriars) which prevented any subsequent medieval redevelopment of the site, thereby preserving the earlier pits. The pits were dense and often inter-cutting and indicate that during this period the site occupied what would have been the rear plots or gardens to properties fronting towards High Street. At least one medieval property boundary was identified, aligned approximately east-west. In addition to Roman features and deposits, the pits cut through soil layers. These were also Saxo-Norman in date demonstrating an initial period of cultivation which would have removed the 'dark soil' development characteristic of urban sites in the sub-Roman period. Industrial features included a bell casting pit (the earliest evidence for such in Exeter), bronze casting pits containing mould, and small scale hearths. The dating evidence also suggests that the majority of the Roman walls were robbed during the 10th-12th centuries.

3.9 *Later medieval (13th C - 1540)*

This phase of activity was largely represented by the surviving fragmentary remains of the Blackfriars (Dominican Friary) established in the mid 13th century. Part of the east end of the friary church was exposed, consisting of a short section of an east-west orientated wall, buttressed on its north (external) side. The east end of the wall returned to the south, defining either the eastern end of the church or the north-east corner of the north transept. Four burials were located within the church, aligned east-west against the wall. A 15th century gold enamelled ring inscribed in French 'mon couer entier' (my entire heart) was recovered from beneath the skeleton of a female. Although the greater part of the church had been destroyed by post-war development, a considerable amount of architectural fragments was recovered from demolition deposits and post-war overburden, including mouldings, window tracery and a small amount of gilded tomb sculpture. Amongst other finds

was a particularly rare example of a King John silver penny struck at the Exeter mint.

3.10 **Results: Areas D/E**

Area D & E lie outside the city walls, to the east of the East Gate, directly north of the Corner Bastion. Excavations revealed a series of ditches and other features ranging in date from the early Roman military period through to the post-medieval Civil War era. The earliest features present pre-date the construction of the city wall and comprise large amorphous clay extraction pits and an unlined well cut through the localised trap outcrop. This is in close proximity to two other wells, constructed almost 2000 years later, but presumably exploiting the same water source. The clay extraction pits are concentrated towards the SE of the site and were probably excavated during clay tile manufacturing in the Roman military period. The well can also be dated to this time, with numerous fragments of flagons of mid 1st/early 2nd Century AD date, found in its upper fill.

3.11 Four ditches of Roman date ran through Area E, around the outside, and following the line of the city wall. The inner ditch terminated around 10m from the corner bastion. It was extremely truncated and the base was 10m out from the wall. It would have originally run very close to it and was at least 6m deep. The middle ditch ran NW-SE across the entire site around 30m from the wall. It, and the outer ditches, are of a typical Roman V-shaped profile and would have presented a major obstacle to potential attackers. The outer two ditches are not contemporary and are on a slightly different alignment.

3.12 The middle and outer medieval ditches terminated within this area, both deepening steadily as they ran southward towards the corner bastion. Reasons for this are unclear but it does indicate that the defences in this area were more complex than was previously thought. The inner medieval ditch was wider, deeper, and more regular. It had a flat base and steep sides: a profile markedly different from the two U-shaped outer ditches. A very steep sided, narrow trench running along the outside of the city wall, truncated on its NE edge has been identified as part of the early medieval water system carrying water towards the cathedral precinct. The base of the trench was flat and lined with clay used as bedding for a lead pipe. This had been removed and the trench subsequently backfilled, perhaps when it was superseded by a later stone lined passage.

3.13 Two phases of civil war defences were found, close to the site of the East Gate. The first consisted of two ditches set approximately 25m apart, the larger (outer) ditch measuring over 8m wide and 4m deep. Together they formed part of an extensive ditch system designed to protect the vulnerable north and east sides of the town. The second phase was represented by part of a salient ditch that extended around a bastion (the East Angle Tower) within the town wall. It cut through the fills of the earlier ditch, demonstrating a significant remodelling of the defences. The two phases of ditch are likely to relate to preparations for two documented sieges in 1643 and 1645. Amongst the finds recovered from the fills were a considerable quantity of leather shoe fragments and butchered animal bone. Each ditch was observed over a

distance of approximately 20m, representing the best exposure of Exeter's civil war defences to date and the first significant observation within this particular area where until now the arrangement has been largely conjectural.

3.14 *Other discoveries*

Two major discoveries have been made as part of the later phases of work covered by the general 'watching brief' over the site. The first came to light as a result of the vigilance of one of the groundworkers who discovered a large amount of pottery during weekend working when archaeologists were not on site. The contractor temporarily fenced off the area in question to prevent any disturbance so that it could be investigated by one of the archaeological staff on the following Monday. This was in the area of the old service road behind the High Street, an area which was not identified for the watching brief as it had already been truncated below the level of natural subsoil. The investigation showed that the pottery was lying in the base of a well, the majority of which had been destroyed by post-medieval and later cellars. Just over 3000 sherds were found, virtually all dating from the early- to mid-15th century. The collection is the largest and most complete group of this date in SW England and ranks amongst the most important collections of this period in the country. It consists almost entirely of jugs, which would probably have been lowered into the well to draw water- these particular ones were either thrown into the well because they were slightly damaged or they may have been dropped accidentally into the water. The jugs were mostly made in Exeter but there are examples from the South Somerset area and from South-West France. The collection includes four virtually complete vessels and at least fifty more which can be fully reconstructed. The finder received a *Highly Commended* Certificate at the British Archaeological Awards ceremony in November.

3.15 The second discovery fell within the remit of the watching brief but became effectively a small excavation in its own right, with a team of up to 10 archaeologists at work on the site. This was on the location of an attenuation tank adjacent to the new department store, approximately 20m long by 5m wide. Following initial machine clearance under archaeological supervision here it soon became clear that significant archaeological remains were present and a small area excavation would be required. This revealed the west end of the Dominican Friary church including the north arcade of the nave and main external north wall. At least three phases of flooring were present including a section of original tiled floor overlying a plain mortar floor surface. The tiles were laid in a diagonal pattern and date to the late-14th or early-15th century. Remains of a later building (constructed after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries), were also found. This incorporated part of the arcade and had a clay floor. Some sixty medieval burials were located within this small area of the church, including some within the arcade, spanning a period of some 350 years, i. A number of finely carved architectural fragments, some painted and gilded, were also recovered..

3.16 The archive from the main excavation and watching brief to date has been quantified and work on the publication report is well underway. It is intended

to produce an interim illustrated summary report in the next month or so which will be for wider public circulation.

Tourism Unit

- 3.17 Much of the work carried out by AFU provides (both directly and indirectly) a useful source of material for Tourism and interpretation projects. AFU continues to provide input for the heritage trail projects, and the proposed work on the monastic houses described above will prove useful for the forthcoming medieval trail. We are also continuing to provide training for the Redcoat Guides, who have been updated on the Princesshay work.

Museums

- 3.18 Documentation for the Phase II HLF Project for the RAMM has been produced by AFU over the summer. This has included impact assessments of the proposals for both the Museum building and below-ground archaeological remains, including landscaping areas.
- 3.19 Some unexpected archaeological discoveries in the form of preserved wooden structures were uncovered during preliminary work on the redevelopment of the Exton Road site for the new store. These were dated to the period 650AD to 820AD and redesign of the scheme was subsequently undertaken to avoid destroying significant surviving remains.

Other projects

- 3.20 During the spring and summer AFU have been monitoring the construction work for the *Cathedral Yard Enhancement Scheme*. Archaeological deposits were not exposed across much of the site due to the shallow depth of the excavations, which in many cases only reached the tops of modern service ducts. Deeper excavations were required at the south-western end of the works where the former pedestrian access from South Street was altered to form the new vehicular access into the Cathedral Yard. Four graves were found in this area which is probably near the north-western extent of the medieval burial ground.
- 3.21 Evaluation excavations were carried out within *Rougemont Castle* to provide information about the nature and extent of buried archaeological remains, which may have a bearing on future uses (the site is a Scheduled Monument). One of the most interesting aspects was the discovery of human burials within the site. In the eastern part of the first trench a group of five graves was identified and these had been cut through earlier Roman deposits. The graves were backfilled with redeposited Roman material containing pottery, tile and painted plaster. They were orientated on an east/north-east to west/south-west alignment, with the burials laid with the head at the west. Three contained single extended burials, one grave had two extended burials and the fifth was not exposed. In three graves there were beds of charcoal near the base; where exposed, the skeletons were laid onto this charcoal. Burials of this type appear in the Cathedral Close from at least the 9th century AD. The burials here do not appear to relate to the medieval chapel of Holy Trinity and are likely to be associated with an earlier previously unknown Saxon church.

- 3.22 During May and June 2006 an excavation was carried out at **Cricklepit Mill** on the strip of land between Higher Leat and the City Wall, extending upstream from the gable end of Cricklepit Mill. The work was carried out for the Devon Wildlife Trust prior to the construction of their new offices. This provided an opportunity to record the development of the land around the mill. The site is known to have been occupied by a row of late 17th-century houses facing onto the leat, cleared in the early 19th century; a pencil drawing of these houses by E. Jeffrey survives in the Westcountry Studies Library. The excavation recovered fragments of the plan of an earlier house on the site, with an adjacent rubbish pit containing one of the largest groups of pottery of c. 1600 known from the city. This provides a dramatic contrast to the rich household goods of the wealthy houses in the centre of the city, with little glass and few imported ceramics. The first house was demolished in the mid 17th century, probably as part of the wholesale clearance of properties around the foot of the city wall during the Civil War. The fragmentary foundations of the row of houses recorded in Jeffrey's pencil drawing were recovered, with details of their fireplaces, floors and other internal features; the dating evidence suggests that these were built in the period 1660–90. Remains of the overlying industrial buildings of 19th- and 20th-century date were also recorded.

External clients

- 3.23 Excavations were carried out in advance of redevelopment at **Tudor Street** where four separate buildings, of 17th to 19th century date, were revealed. The site does not appear to have been built upon before the 17th-century and has provided evidence, although slight, of a small-scale industry most likely associated with a tanning operation. The principal feature of the excavated buildings was the presence of stone/brick troughs that may have been utilised as liming/de-hairing pits. The identification and excavation of a large 18th-century pit within close proximity to the southernmost buildings suggests that cattle and sheep-skins were all being processed.
- 3.24 At **Rydon Lane** a large area excavation was undertaken for Tesco in advance of extensions to the supermarket. These uncovered further evidence of later prehistoric land use in this part of Exeter, which appears to have begun in the Bronze Age. Field boundaries in the form of ditches and gullies were found over a wide area. Although the results from this project were not spectacular in themselves they do represent an important addition to the body of information about the development of the landscape of eastern Exeter. This has been accumulated over several years but notable since the development of the Digby residential area and Clyst Heath School.
- 3.25 Work has continued on the **Monkerton Link Road** on the eastern outskirts of the city; but no major finds were made. Observation and recording have been carried out at **Ashford Road** (Topsham), **Ashwood Road** (off Alphington Road), **Castle Street** (old Record Office site), **Marsh Barton**, **Okehampton Road**, **Pennsylvania Road**, **St Michael's** and **St Sidwell's Schools**, **University Innovations Centre** and **Wonford Methodist Chapel**, as well as the long term residential developments at **Digby** and **Wyvern Barracks**.

Other publication work

- 3.26 In 2006 a paper was published on the medieval gatehouse of the former Chancellor's House in *Cathedral Close* (No. 15). This drew upon the results of work undertaken by AFU in 2004 during the removal of a magnolia tree. A substantial report on the history and architectural development of the *Higher Barracks* has now been produced and a report on the excavations at *Broadgate* in the Close is near completion. Finally, a leaflet describing the Roman finds at *Topsham School* has been produced for Devon County Council.

Forthcoming work

- 3.27. The next phase of the *Cathedral Enhancement Scheme* is due to commence in the first quarter of 2007 and this will require archaeological monitoring similar to that described above. Construction work on the new Museum store at *Exton Road* is underway and although the identified areas of archaeological interest have been avoided, careful monitoring is needed to ensure no unexpected remains are disturbed. The commencement of the main contract works at *Cricklepit Mill* also means that a watching brief will be undertaken here during certain operations. Given the amount of archaeological work that has taken place here in recent years, there is much potential for future publication in a variety of formats.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 AFU operates as a trading undertaking and with Princesshay income is anticipated to have a turnover of just over £1.3 million in 2006-07. For Economy and Tourism projects the Archaeology in Exeter budget allocation for 2006-07 is £27,000. As Members have previously agreed, this will include:
- Continuing work on preparation of booklets on Roman Exeter and medieval religious houses
 - Preparation of material for Underground Passages
 - Preparation of exhibition material for Custom House.
- 4.2 Much of this work will be of benefit to the Tourism unit and individual interpretation projects which they are developing.

5. RECOMMENDED that Members:

- (1) note the progress being made with these projects.

PETER WEDDELL
HEAD OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD UNIT

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None

