

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
PAIGNTON PARISH CHURCH HALL
CHURCH PATH, PAIGNTON**

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in November 2003 at the Parish Church Hall, Church Path, Paignton (SX 88656078).

The work was commissioned by W.G. Couldrey, Son & Partners on behalf of the Parochial Church Council as a condition of the grant of planning consent by Torbay Council for the demolition of the existing hall and the construction of a new hall on its site.

The site forms part of the Bishop's Palace complex, which is a Scheduled Monument (Devon 33048). Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) for the archaeological evaluation was obtained from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport prior to the fieldwork by Torbay Council's Archaeology Officer (Ref: HSD 9/2/585014, November 2003).

1.1 **The site** (SX 88656078; Fig. 1)

The site lies within the curtilage of the medieval Bishops' Palace, adjacent to the east curtain wall (which now forms part of the perimeter wall of the vicarage garden).

The present hall measures approximately 22.50m north-south by 10.50m east-west. It lies parallel to, and 2.10m from, the east curtain wall and immediately to the north of the 14th-century tower. The area that the hall occupies is approximately 1m lower than the level of the vicarage lawn to the west.

2. AIMS

The scope of the required archaeological works was agreed at a site meeting attended by the Client, the Torbay Council Archaeology Officer, and EA. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the presence or absence, nature, character, depth and date of archaeological deposits within the footprint of the new hall. The main requirements were:

- Hand-excavation of four test pits within the proposed footprint of the new building;
- Recording of any deposits/features exposed;
- Production of a summary report (this document).

The results of the evaluation may be used to inform a subsequent programme of archaeological work in mitigation of the new development.

3. METHOD

The work was carried out in accordance a method statement produced by EA (September 2003) and approved by the Torbay Council Archaeology Officer.

Four pits were excavated by hand in the positions indicated on Fig. 2. Stratigraphic information was recorded on standard EA single context sheets and a drawn record was compiled in plan and section at a scale of 1:20. A photographic record was made using black-and-white film and colour slide film. All finds were bagged and labelled on site.

4. RESULTS (Figs 2–3)

Test pit 1 (Pl. 1)

This pit was located to the north-east of the parish hall and measured 2.10m north-south by 1m east-west. Natural ground, consisting of red clay, was observed at a depth of 0.06m below the ground surface (at 12.53m AOD). This was overlain by a modern sand and cement.

Test pit 2 (Pl. 2)

This pit measured 1m by 2.20m and was located between the east curtain wall and the east wall of the hall. Natural ground, consisting of red clay, was observed at a depth of 0.70m below ground level (11.86m AOD). It was overlain by a 0.18m-thick deposit of stone and mortar rubble (516) which yielded fragments of 19th- or 20th-century brick and bottle glass. This deposit was overlain by a 0.15m-thick spread of dirty red clay (515) containing a single sherd of post-1800 transfer printed china. Above this was a 0.14m-thick soil deposit (514), into which had been set a stone path, 0.80m wide (510). The path was orientated parallel with the east wall of the hall at a height of 12.39m AOD and was sealed by make up (509) for the modern gravel path (511).

A service trench associated with the hall was exposed towards the centre of the trench cutting from the top of context 514. This trench appears to have slightly disturbed the footings of the east curtain wall (522). The top of the footings was exposed at a depth of 0.70m below ground level. They were constructed of mortar-bonded breccia, which projected 0.30m from the face of the wall. The footings were overlain by a 0.40m-thick deposit (519) probably representing construction trench backfill. The service trench had removed the construction cut and its relationship with all deposits to the west of the trench.

Test pit 3

This pit measured 1m by 1m and was located against the south wall of the hall close to its south-eastern corner. To the south of the pit, a wall or path (500) was visible at ground level, orientated north-south between the tower and hall. The pit had been sited, in part, to investigate whether this feature survived at a lower level beneath the hall.

The sequence of deposits exposed was very similar to that seen within pit 2. Natural ground, consisting of red clay, was observed at 0.74m below ground level (11.62m AOD). It was overlain by a 0.48m-thick deposit of compacted stone rubble (503), which contained post-1780 industrial china and 19th- or 20th-century glass. This was overlain by a layer of dirty mixed red clay (502). Overlying this material was a 0.10m-thick deposit of loam (501). The feature visible at ground level consisted of two courses of stone and was set within 501. The upper course was seen to continue northwards beneath the concrete raft of the hall. All deposits were cut through by a service trench associated with the hall.

Three residual sherds of Iron Age Glastonbury Ware pottery were retrieved from the backfill of the service trench.

Test pit 4

This measured 1m by 1m and was located on the west side of the hall adjacent to the vicarage gardens. Natural red clay was observed immediately below the modern path at a height of 12.48m AOD. The base of the raft beneath the hall was seen at a height of 12.22m AOD. No archaeological deposits survived within the pit.

5 DISCUSSION

The evaluation has not identified any significant archaeological structures or deposits. Natural ground, where exposed to the north and west of the hall (pits 1 and 4), has been shown to directly underlie the sub-structure of the hall.

Within pit 4, untruncated natural ground was encountered 0.26m higher than the underside of the raft. This shows that at this point the construction of the hall entailed significant terracing into natural deposits, with the consequent removal of any archaeological deposits that may have been present (with the exception of the fills of deeply dug features). Natural ground where seen within pits 2 and 3 was at a significantly lower level: 11.86m and 11.62m AOD in pits 2 and 3, compared with 12.53m and 12.22m AOD in pits 1 and 4.

The sequence of deposits exposed within pits 2 and 3 was markedly similar, and both yielded modern (19th/20th-century) pottery at depth. The shallow wall or path exposed at ground level adjacent to pit 3 appears to be very similar in form and construction to the path exposed within pit 2. Confirmation that the wall adjacent to pit 3 extended beneath the south wall of the hall must mean that the deposits exposed within these two pits pre-date the hall. There is at present no clear explanation for these deposits, but the disparity in the level of natural ground within the pits, and the similarity of the fills of pits 2 and 3, may indicate that these deposits represent the fills of a large, flat-bottomed, cut feature. One possible context is the archaeological excavations Colonel Ridgeway in the late 19th century, although this is by no means certain.

In conclusion, the evaluation has demonstrated that the construction of the hall, and earlier activity within the south-east part of its footprint, have probably combined to remove all deposits above the level of natural ground. The survival of any archaeological material that may have been present is therefore likely to be limited to deeply dug features, such as wall foundations, ditches, or rubbish pits.

The recovery of three fragments of Iron Age pottery, albeit from the backfill of a service trench, is of interest and may indicate activity of that period within the vicinity of the site.

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