

Archaeological Observation and Recording on the Site of a New Development at Bishop's Place, Paignton.

Parish: Paignton

NGR: Centred on SX88716078

Subject: Archaeological observation and recording carried out by Exeter Archaeology during initial groundworks for a new residential development on the site of a former garage between Bishop's Place and Palace Place, Paignton. The work was commissioned by Rodney and Stuart Howes Partnership on behalf of the Devon Community Housing Society as a condition of planning consent granted by Torbay Council (Planning Application No. 99/0163/PA). The work was carried out to a brief provided by the Torbay Council Archaeological Officer (dated 6th October 1999). The archaeological potential of the site lay in its position at the centre of the historic town of Paignton, close to the parish church and the Bishops Palace.

Ref: Exeter Archaeology Project No. 3815. Site visits were made on 02/03/00, 09/03/00, 10/03/00 and 13/03/00.

Description: (Fig. 1). The site was covered by hard surfacing in the form of concrete and brick paviers. This was removed together with its make-up to an average depth of 0.30m. No archaeological features were observed after the removal of the surfacing, apart from a stone-built culvert which was still carrying foul waste eastwards. The culvert extended WNW/ESE across the entire site, and continued on in both directions. The culvert had a rounded, arched top and vertical sides, and was built of sandstone rubble, bonded with a very hard, lime-based mortar. It was 0.60m high and 0.45m wide internally. Two rectangular access/inspection holes, constructed in the top of the culvert, were seen in the exposed section. These were covered by sandstone slabs. No dating evidence was obtained for the culvert. Its form suggests that it may be early, but the mortar appears to be nineteenth-century in character.

Six underground petrol storage tanks were present on the site, and these had to be cleaned and removed as part of the site preparation. The excavation of the tanks was monitored, with the exception of Tank 5, which was removed in advance by the contractor to give essential site access.

Tank 1

This was the largest tank, and a pit 5m by 4m, with a maximum depth of 2m, was excavated to remove it. Because the pit undercut the road, it had to be backfilled rapidly. The western section was the only one that it was possible to record safely. Here, a loose medium-brown loam (0.25m thick), possibly a cultivation soil surviving below the hard surface of the garage, overlay 0.45m of lighter reddish-brown, slightly loamy clay, stone-free apart from occasional fine gravel. This became shallower towards the eastern side of the pit, and may represent the fill of a feature. Below this was undisturbed red sandy clay natural.

Tank 2

A pit 3.5m by 3m with a maximum depth of 2m was excavated to remove this tank. Clean sections were seen in the north and west sides. Here, a layer of compact reddish-brown clay (0.35m thick), mixed with a little loam and containing occasional charcoal and frequent pieces of decayed brecchia, overlay undisturbed red sandy clay natural. No archaeological features were seen in the pit.

Tank 3

A pit 3.5m by 2m, with a maximum depth of 1.20m, was excavated. The southern edge undercut the pavement, and the only clean sections were obtained on the north and east sides. Here 0.10m of residual stone make-up for a concrete surface sealed 0.25m of medium-brown clay loam containing occasional small stones and charcoal flecks. This may have been a surviving cultivation soil. Below this was compact red sandy clay natural. No archaeological features were seen in the pit.

Tank 4

A 4m by 2m by 1.40m deep pit was excavated to remove this tank. Clean sections were recorded in the south and west faces of the pit. An 0.40m layer of red gravelly clay with occasional small to medium stones, frequent pieces of decayed brecchia and occasional black mineral staining overlay undisturbed red sandy clay natural. No archaeological features were seen in the pit.

Tank 5

Not observed.

Tank 6

A 4.9m by 4.6m pit was excavated and backfilled to a depth of 1.5m before it was observed. Homogenous compact red sandy clay natural was exposed in all four sides. No archaeological features were seen in the pit.

Recorders: M.J. Dyer, A. Passmore and C. Whitton (Exeter Archaeology).