A GUIDE TO
THE ARCHIVES OF
ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS
CARRIED OUT IN EXETER, 1970–90

Prepared for English Heritage,
Devon County Council and
Exeter City Council

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PART I

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INTRODUCTION

In the years 1970–1990, Exeter Archaeology carried out excavations on 89 sites within the boundary of the City of Exeter, and also undertook 64 building recording projects. The work was of the greatest importance, fundamentally altering understanding of the Roman occupation of the city, and adding greatly to knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and later town. In some respects (such as the Unit’s early development of techniques for detailed building recording, and in the application of a wide approach to the past, integrating excavated evidence with that from documentary, cartographic and other sources), this work was in the forefront of urban archaeology in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Collectively, the excavations still amount to the largest archaeological project by far ever undertaken in Devon. Some of those of the early 1970s were conducted with large teams of labour – 50 or more people, mainly volunteers, in the style of contemporary excavations at Winchester, Norwich and York. Excavation continued with a smaller team of professional staff, with hardly a weekday without excavation over the entire 20-year period. The enormous volume of artefactual and ecofactual material recovered from these excavations is of primary importance in the study of such topics as the Roman and medieval economy of Devon, or the material culture of South-West England since Roman times. Subsequent excavations in the city have not matched the remarkable volume of material recovered in these years.

During that 20-year period only one of the 89 excavations (Cathedral Close: Bidwell 1979) and two of the building projects (St Martin’s church: Blaylock and Westcott 1989; the Guildhall: Blaylock 1990) were published, although monographs presented studies of the animal bones, the medieval and later finds, and the Roman finds (Maltby 1979; Allan 1984; Holbrook and Bidwell 1991). In other cases the researcher wishing to gather information from these excavations will need to examine summary accounts, or work from the archives forming their primary records. The present document has been prepared to guide the researcher through this very substantial body of material. It lists and maps the sites excavated, indicates what has appeared in print relating to each one, briefly outlines the principal findings, records the locations and reference numbers of the different components of the archive, and offers a summary of the artefactual and ecofactual material, now held almost entirely by the RAMM.

The document is presented in two parts, with the list of RAMM material (Appendix 1) included on disc in Part I. Part II is in A3 format and comprises the maps and table of sites excavated.

THE SITE ARCHIVES

Location of the archives
Site archive material is either held by RAMM or at EA offices. Much of the paper archive held by RAMM is currently stored at the Devon Record Office as RAMM is closed for refurbishment. RAMM has provided a detailed listing of the finds & paper archive they hold, which is included as Appendix I. A thorough search has been carried out at EA offices at the Custom House for archive material relating to these sites. (There are some discrepancies between EA and RAMM records relating to archive material held at RAMM. Notes to this effect are included in the table. It will not be possible to resolve these queries until RAMM re-opens, as access is very limited at present.)
Gaps in the record

Although the archive is almost entire, there are a few missing groups of record, mostly relating to minor sites. This material may in fact be at the RAMM, having been stored there (in Hems Basement) during the period when EA was part of the museum (Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit). There are a number of sites for which EA has old records stating that the paper archive was stored in Hems basement, but the sites do not appear on the current RAMM list of site archives. Some sites were known by several names, especially when long-term excavations extended into new areas; all known names for a site have been included in the table. In addition, there are boxes of material on the RAMM archive list for which no description of contents is given. It is likely that at least some of these contain ‘missing’ material. Notes to this effect have been included in the table where relevant.

Finds

All the finds from these excavations are held by RAMM. A detailed listing of the collection, and of the paper archive held by RAMM, is included as Appendix I.; a summary is included in the table. The number of entries for each site is stated; each entry consists of one bag or more contained within a box. The same box may have been listed several times for each site entry and the box may contain finds from multiple sites. The box numbers for the finds and the location at the DRO of the paper archive boxes are included in Appendix I.

Photographs at EA

Until recently EA kept the black and white film negatives and contact prints, and slides, of sites even if the archive was formally deposited with a museum; thus much photographic material is still held at EA. Black and white film negatives/contact prints are filed numerically by film (negative/contact print) number, whereas slides are usually stored by site on slide hangers in a filing cabinet, or in the original slide boxes. There are indexes for both film and slides.

Black and white negatives listed in the table are stored, with an attached contact sheet, in a filing cabinet on the ground floor of the Custom House. Some of the negatives listed may be for building recording work carried out at the same site.

Information given in the table about the black and white negatives was obtained from an alphabetical index; the numbers given in the table are the film numbers. In each case the presence of the negatives and contact prints was checked. A rapid search through the folders containing the photographic registers (containing descriptions of each photograph) suggests that some of these are missing or contain very basic information.

For about a third of the sites no information has been found as to the whereabouts of negatives and corresponding photographic registers. The current cataloguing system at EA for black and white film appears to have been devised in the late 1970s/early 1980s, although it includes some earlier sites that were catalogued retrospectively. It appears that other early sites were not entered into this system and it is not known what happened to the photographs.
The majority of colour slides located relating to the sites are stored on hangers in filing cabinet 2, which also contains box files of slides relating to the sites. Slides have only been located in detail for about a quarter of the sites. It is possible that others are with the paper archive at RAMM.

**Drawings at EA**

The Drawing collection consists of original site drawings or later worked/inked versions. Some site drawings are with the paper archive (i.e. in a site file); others are rolled and stored in boxes. The Primary Archive spreadsheet at EA lists inked drawings stored in vertifiles. A set of photographic prints (bromides) of final drawings is stored by site number in lever-arch files labelled ‘Drawing Prints’.

**SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Mapping**

The mapping is derived from the Exeter UAD (Urban Archaeological Database), which was also checked for additional information relating to the sites.

**Bibliography**

The bibliographic information is based on a gazetteer compiled by EA which includes all annual summaries of Exeter excavations published in national period journals, with any locally published sources. It also incorporates EAAC (Exeter Archaeological Advisory Committee) reports, which are stored at EA unless stated otherwise. The crucial importance of these reports should be emphasised. Written by the Unit Director, they were compiled with much care, and offer very detailed accounts, supported by finished drawings. They will often be the best overall summary of an excavation or building record.

**WORK IN PROGRESS, 2011**

At the time of writing (March 2011) efforts are being made on a number of fronts to bring some of the most important material from 1970–90 to publication. In approximate order of completeness they are:

2. Volume on Exeter’s Elizabethan inventories (J. Crocker). Joint project with the Devon & Cornwall Record Society. Due for publication early summer 2011. See list of documentary studies.

7. Joint project led by Bournemouth University (Prof M. Maltby, Dr E. Hambledon) studying animal bones from Exeter, 1975-2010. Post-grad researcher in post from 2010, work proceeding, but eventual scope and product uncertain at this stage.

8. Joint project led by University of Exeter (Dr Chris Knusel) on entire collection of Exeter human remains since 1970. Due to begin late 2011.

THE FUTURE

This project has confirmed our opinion that, with a few exceptions, the Exeter Archaeology archive of 1970–90 is in an ordered state, and can be used with profit by future researchers. Some progress has been made towards publication of many of these sites. In this final section a subjective judgment is offered regarding the significance of selected aspects of this large body of work, drawing attention to matters which are especially deserving of future publication.

International significance

1. The Roman legionary fortress
A prodigious amount of work has already been invested in the fortress. Every fragment of its plan has been carefully mapped; finished site plans exist for most sites; detailed stratigraphic reports exist for 24 of the 26 sites with relevant features (The Acorn was not covered; Market Street was excavated subsequently) and the dating evidence and artefactual record have been drawn together. Overviews by Bidwell and Henderson record developing perceptions of understanding of the monument. What is lacking is a published report providing accounts of each site. This should be an achievable goal, and one of significance throughout the Roman Empire. This must also rank among the very highest among the desiderata of the region’s archaeology.

2. Late medieval and early modern housing
Those who have visited Exeter Archaeology over the years from other archaeological and conservation bodies have been astonished by the Unit’s building records; those of 1970–90 must rank as among the most important in any town or city in Britain. No equivalent record could be created nowadays: many were made in their most instructive state – as houses were being demolished. It is unthinkable that such losses would be contemplated today. The archaeological records of these many important structures, with their contribution to understanding of urban character, the development traditional building forms and practices, changing building materials, and many other themes, richly deserve publication.

3. The city defences
The exceptional research potential of the defences of Exeter has been spelled out by Professor Mark Stoyle; the combination of good preservation of the wall (70% survives) with one of the great urban archives, and with much excavation and fabric survey makes this an extremely rewarding field of study. Again, much detailed fabric survey has been carried out (perhaps as much as or more than in any other southern English town), and a wall survey has been submitted to English Heritage, but no publication exists which would communicate the results of archaeological study to a specialist or to a wider audience.
4. Post-medieval finds
It comes as a surprise to anyone from Devon engaged in historical archaeology in N. America that the artefacts of Plymouth and Exeter have strong international significance; indeed the audience for this sort of archaeology is larger over there than here. The sole publication on this subject (Allan 1984) has been out of print for 20 years; none of the finds since 1980 has been published. There is a need to provide an update, presenting a synopsis of material found 1980–2010; Duncan Brown’s updating of the original Platt & Coleman-Smith publication of the Southampton collection illustrates the kind of product to which we aspire.

5. The bell foundries
The succession of bronze foundries at Exeter, spanning the period from c. 1250-1720, is widely recognized as the finest series in Britain, and since the first national research priorities for post-medieval Britain were drawn up in the 1990s their publication has been identified on a number of occasions as a high research priority. This remains the case.

National significance
A selection of areas will be itemized briefly without detailed justification

6. The Roman town
Exeter is one of the most extensively explored of the Roman civitas capitals but the results have not been disseminated.

7. Evidence for the cloth industry and other industries
The Exeter evidence for the cloth industry, with rich documentary and cartographic sources alongside some major excavated evidence (for example from Cricklepit and the Dry House), is nationally significant, especially for the early modern period.

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The maps are the work of Tony Ives of Exeter Archaeology.
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ABBREVIATIONS

CBA      Council for British Archaeology
EA     Exeter Archaeology
EAAC     Exeter Archaeological Advisory Committee
EMAFU  Exeter Museums & Art Galleries Archaeological Field Unit

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