Archaeological Watching Brief

River Wensum Restoration Strategy
at
Swanton Morley

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Project name	**Swanton Morley River Restoration**
Client	**Environment Agency**
NHER Event No	**ENF 129357**
Grid reference	**TG 0212 1843 to TG 0277 1776**
Date of fieldwork	**August – September 2012**

Introduction

The River Wensum flows eastwards across Norfolk rising to the west of Fakenham and flowing through Norwich where it converges with the River Yare. For most of its course the river is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation, however it has been identified as being in an unfavourable and declining ecological state (http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/wildlife/114676.aspx/). In order to improve its condition several sections of the river will be modified. The present scheme is located along the parish boundary of Swanton Morley and Bylaugh (Fig. 1).

The works, which took place on both banks of the river, included the re-excavation of a former loop of the River Wensum, the creation of new low banks and short stretches of dyke along with in-river channel improvements.

An archaeological watching brief was required to be undertaken during these works in order to identify and record any revealed archaeological deposits and finds. Archaeological monitoring was targeted at the areas where previously undisturbed soils were to the excavated. The restoration work was undertaken by the Environment Agency who commissioned the archaeological works.

Background

Prior to work commencing the Norfolk Historic Environment Record was searched in order to identify sites which lay close to the site.

A scatter of Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are known to either side of the river. These lie on the rising slopes of the river valley and include a number of ring ditches as well as individual finds. The study of aerial photographs has identified parts of an Iron Age or Roman field system and a number of finds of a Roman date have been made particularly on the valley slopes to the south of the river. About 0.5km downstream from the development works wooden piles along with Roman artefacts were found in 1951 suggesting that this may have been a bridging point in the river at this time. Saxon finds are fewer and lay mainly to the south of the river although a round towered church lay c.1km to the east. This may be of Late Saxon or early medieval date and incorporates Roman tile within its build.

The majority of sites known in the area are of a medieval or post-medieval date. To the south of the river lay Castle Farm the buildings of which date

from the 17th to 19th century. Within the grounds of the farm lay a medieval moated site. To the north of the river the earthworks of Bylaugh deserted medieval village have been recorded some of which extend to within 0.30km of the present works. The earthworks include a hollow way, tracks, field boundaries, enclosures and tofts. The River Wensum forms the boundary between the parishes of Swanton Morley and Bylaugh.

More recently in the mid 19th century Bylaugh Hall was built and it's associated park was laid out. The Hall was used as a military headquarters during WWII and a number of buildings and features of this date remain.

Methods

Visits were made to the site during the programme of works to monitor the topsoil stripping of previously undisturbed ground and the excavation of new sections of dyke (Plate 1). The re-opening of the old meander and the in-channel works were not monitored.

On each visit a visual inspection of the works and disturbed soils was made. Areas of topsoil strip were metaldetected and the nature of the revealed soils was recorded.

All work was carried out in full accordance with national and regional guidelines for the treatment of archaeological remains, and in particular the guidance set out in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2001).

Records of the watching brief consist of a site diary and digital photographs.

Results

Topsoil was stripped from two areas where soil was to be dumped to form new areas of slightly raised ground. Each of these was detected once topsoil had been removed. The only finds recovered (five in total) were of modern origin including shot gun cartridge and fragments iron probably derived from farming machinery. These have been discarded.

The sides of a short length new dyke were observed. No features were visible.

No other finds or deposits of archaeological interest were revealed by the works.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are expressed to the Environment Agency for sponsoring these works, particularly to Adam Thurtle, Mick Hicks and the site team whose help and co-operation was much appreciated.

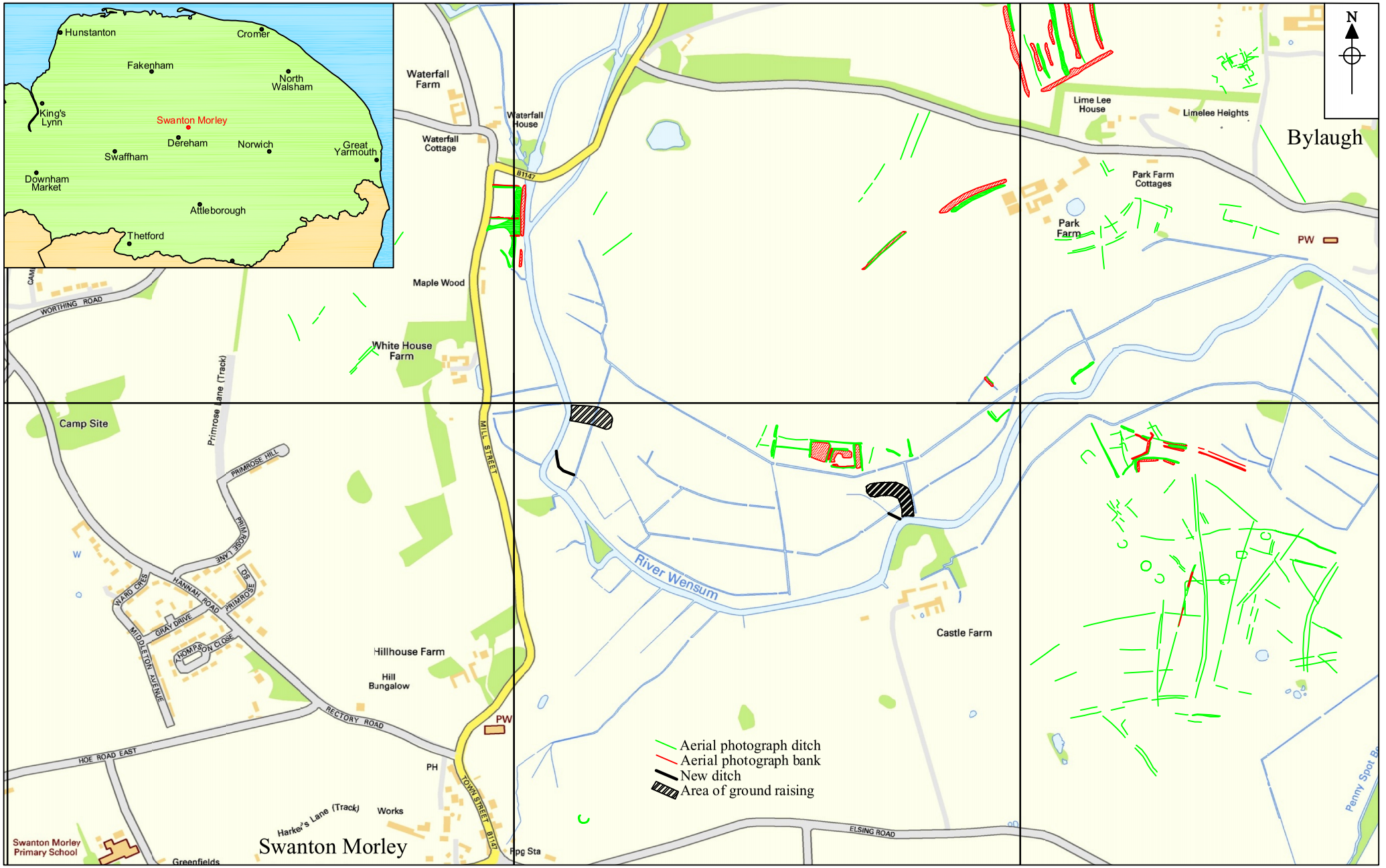

Figure 1 Site location plan showing location of monitored works and features plotted from aerial photographs. Scale 1:10000.

Aerial photograph mapping copyright English Heritage/Norfolk County Council

Plate 1. Work in progress