

**Archaeological Evaluation at the site of  
Caister Brick Pits, Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk**

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<b>Project name</b>	<b>Caister Brick Pits</b>
<b>Client</b>	<b>Halcrow Group Ltd</b>
<b>NHER No</b>	<b>8688 CAJ</b>
<b>Grid reference</b>	<b>TG 5125 1019</b>
<b>Date of fieldwork</b>	<b>23rd - 25th May and 7th - 8th June 2007</b>

### **Background to the project**

Planning permission granted to Halcrow Group Ltd, for flood alleviation work on the north bank of the Bure between Stokesby and Caister, required an evaluation of the archaeological potential of the site known as Caister Brick Pits (TG 5125 1019) (Fig. 1). A *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief* was issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (16th May 2007) and work followed a Project Design submitted by Heather Wallis (May 2007).

### **Nature of the development proposal**

The development works to be undertaken form part of the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project, a major project which will renew and strengthen banks and dykes along the Bure, Yare and Waveney valleys. In the area of Caister Brick Pits this work will take the form of the excavation of new soke dykes, the infilling of the existing soke dyke and the strengthening of the bank. This work will affect a 20m wide linear segment of the archaeological site adjacent to the present flood defences.

### **Archaeological Background**

Earthworks on the north bank of the River Bure at TG 5101 1017, possibly relating to a medieval or post-medieval brick works, have been identified from aerial photographs (RAF, 1955, RAF 58/1674 (F22) 0334-5 04-MAR-1955 (NMR) and RAF, 1963, RAF 543/2531 (F22) 0016-7 14-NOV-1963 (NMR)). It has been suggested that this brick pit may be the source of the bricks used in Caister Castle, which was constructed between 1432 and 1443 for Sir John Falstaff. Bricks could have been transported from the site to the Castle via the River Bure and the Pickerill Holme which, during the medieval period, connected the two sites. Glendenning (1952) also suggests that the 'shallow workings in a stratum a few feet thick, of estuarine clay' is associated with the building materials for Caister Castle.

The aerial photographs indicate that the majority of the field was utilised as a single large extraction pit (Fig.2 blue outline) with a series of possible 'raised

platforms' (Fig. 2 hatched red) surrounding it. These observed 'platforms' however, may not have been deliberately constructed but could represent areas from which there was no extraction. Several ditches have been cut through these external areas, probably for drainage purposes. Other individual features were also noted (Fig. 2 hatched green).

The earthworks were finally levelled in the later part of the 20th century (possibly 1970s) and the area has since been used for arable farming. The site lies at 0m OD.

### **Aims of the work**

Very little archaeological investigation has been undertaken on rural industrial sites of a medieval date in East Anglia, and work which has been undertaken has tended to focus on the pottery industry (Wade 1997). One exception to this is the excavation of a tile kiln at Shouldham. Evaluation of the site was therefore important, particularly in identifying the presence of any structural elements associated with the brick pits.

The principal aim of the evaluation was, therefore, to recover as much information as possible on the extent, date, phasing, nature, function and significance of the site, as well as determining the states of preservation of archaeological features or deposits within the area.

### **Evaluation methods**

Records held in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record were consulted prior to this evaluation and an assessment of the archaeological impact made (Halcrow Group Ltd 2007, Compartment 10, Norfolk Broads, East Anglia, Archaeological Desk Based Assessment).

A 5% sample excavation of the area to be disturbed was required. This took the form of 6 trenches, each c.2.m wide and c.17m long. These were located behind (to the north of) the present soke dyke, on the line of the proposed new dykes. The river Bure lays c.40m to the south of the present soke dyke, the river and the dyke being separated by a large bank. The trenches were positioned evenly along the site and were numbered 1 to 6 starting in the west (Fig. 2).

Initial excavation was by machine utilising a flat-bladed ditching bucket, operating under archaeological supervision. Topsoil was removed until an archaeological horizon was identified. Further excavation was by hand, with the exception of two sondages which were machine excavated. Trenches 1-5 were excavated and recorded in bright dry conditions in late May. Trench 6 was excavated and recorded a fortnight later in semi-waterlogged conditions following an extended period of heavy rain.

The locations of the trenches was recorded on the 4th of July by Edmund Nuttall Ltd, using the Global Positioning System.

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 Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2001).

Disturbed and *in situ* deposits were metal-detected.

## **Recording and Sampling Methods**

Records comprise written, drawn and photographic data. A single context planning methodology was adopted, with plans of archaeological deposits being drawn at 1:20 and sections at 1:10. The written record comprises context descriptions on *pro forma* context sheets. The photographic record consists of digital photographs together with black and white prints and colour slides.

## **Results of the Evaluation**

(See Fig. 3 for plans and Fig. 4 for sections)

### *Trench 1*

Topsoil c.0.35m deep was observed. A single change in soils was noted, which indicated the line of the edge of the clay extraction pit (13). The fill of the pit (03) was a mid orange/grey silty clay with occasional shell inclusions, and was both crumbly and laminated.

### *Trench 2*

Topsoil depth was up to 0.4m in this trench. Again a single change in soils was noted indicating the location of the edge of the clay extraction pit (17). The fill (16) of the pit was the same as that seen in Trench 1.

### *Trench 3*

Topsoil was 0.3m deep. The south c.6.5m of the trench revealed a clay deposit through which a sondage was excavated by machine in order to establish if this deposit was natural or fill. The sondage indicated that the clay was natural. One possible cut (22) 3.5m wide with a flatish base was recorded. The fill (20) was of redeposited clay into which a few fragments of ceramic building material had been incorporated. Excavation showed this to be just 0.15m deep.

### *Trench 4*

A topsoil depth of 0.35m was noted. On removal a single deposit of orange/grey sandy clay was revealed. This was the natural subsoil.

### *Trench 5*

On removal of the topsoil, which was 0.35m deep, the majority of the trench was seen to be a grey/orange slightly sandy clay. A sondage was dug through this to a total depth of 1.35m in order to help establish the nature of this deposit. It proved to be the natural clay. Towards the south end of the trench a linear band between 0.4 and 1.2m wide of redeposited clay with occasional

ceramic building material flecks was recorded. Investigation showed this to be a maximum of 0.2m deep.

### *Trench 6*

This trench was distinctly different from the other five. Topsoil was 0.5m deep and below this was a further subsoil (12) 0.10m deep. This band of subsoil was made up of a mix of the underlying clay and the topsoil. Beneath these soils four features were identified.

Two linear features (09 and 10), with similar fills (08 and 06) of dark grey/brown clayey loam with occasional brick fragment inclusions crossed the trench and would have met beyond the north-east edge of excavation. The larger of the two was 1.2m wide up to 0.2m deep, while the other was 0.55m wide and 0.15m deep.

To the south of these a further linear feature (07) was investigated. Its long axis was orientated north-to-south, and it could have been a rectangular pit or the butt end of a linear feature as it extended beyond the eastern limits of excavation. It was 1.85m wide, 0.45m deep with near vertical sides. The lower fill was of silty clay with sparse flecks of ceramic building material. A single piece of pottery of 11th- to 14th-century date was recovered from this fill. The upper fill was a firmer clay from which thirty-four brick fragments were recovered. These all appeared to be waste material being either under-fired and soft or heavily-fired and very hard.

In the south-east corner of the trench part of a small pit (29) was visible. Its fill (28) was an orangey grey sandy clay with charcoal and brick flecks. From this one animal bone was recovered. This was part of the mandible of an adult sheep.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery*

A single sherd of Local Medieval Unglazed pottery weighing 47g was recovered. This is part of a jar/bowl with upright, pierced lug handle, dating to the 11th to 14th centuries.

### *Ceramic building material*

A total of seventy-eight fragments of brick, weighing 8.792kg, was recovered from the site. Of this nineteen pieces (1.242kg) was unstratified material from the topsoil.

All of the material was of the same fabric, a slightly sandy clay with brick grog temper. There was no surface decoration or makers marks, but many of the brick pieces had impressions of cereal stalks on one side. No complete bricks were recovered. Of the measurable elements the average width is 0.18m and average thickness is 0.51m. These therefore fall into Drury's Early Brick, Group B, Class 7.

The majority of the material was under-fired as indicated by its pale orange colour and soft texture, while other pieces were heavily-fired being very hard and a deep pink/red in colour. This indicates that the recovered material represents wasters or seconds from brick manufacturing.

#### *Animal Bone*

One piece of animal bone, a sheep's mandible, was recovered. It is estimated that the animal was c.6 years of age at death, indicating that it had probably been kept for its wool.

### **Conclusions and Interpretation**

The evaluation uncovered very little evidence of structural activity on the south fringe of the clay extraction pit. Two shallow linear features running perpendicular to each other were located in Trench 6 along with two pits. The earliest of these features was probably pit 05 from which a single sherd of pottery of 11th- to 14th-century date was recovered along with brick wasters. This feature was contemporary with the area being utilised for clay extraction and/or brick manufacture.

Pit 29 containing a single animal bone is undated, as are the two linear features. The latter of these though probably post-date the medieval period, the fragments of brick being small and the soil fills being loamier than others on the site.

Areas of redeposited clay containing some brick fragments were located in Trenches 3 and 5. These have been recorded as cut features, but may represent areas of 'trample' although the quantity of ceramic building material recorded was not sufficient enough to suggest it was deposited as a deliberate hardcore or path.

The fill of the clay pit itself lies largely beyond the area evaluated, however where it was recorded in Trenches 1 and 2 it was a clean silty clay deposit. This may have derived from river dredging which has been used to infill the hollow.

Considering this is the site of a clay pit and associated brick works the quantity of brick fragments found during the evaluation was very small. Brick fragments are only occasionally seen in the topsoil of the field. This evidence is contrary to the report made by Glendenning (1952) who noted that 'on the southern edge of the site next the river were found all the usual debris of a brickyard', including half-burnt bricks, fully burnt but broken bricks and over fired fragments. This area however, has been subject to disturbance on two known occasions in the past. The present bank and soke dyke, which probably date to the late 18th or early 19th century, cut through the area between the clay pit and the natural river bank. More recently (mid to late 20th century) the field containing the clay pit was levelled and returned to arable crops.

### **Acknowledgements**

Machining, surveying and site enablement was provided by Edmund Nuttall Ltd. Pottery was identified by Richenda Goffin, ceramic building material by Alice Lyons and the animal bone by Julie Curl. Many Thanks.

### **Bibliography**

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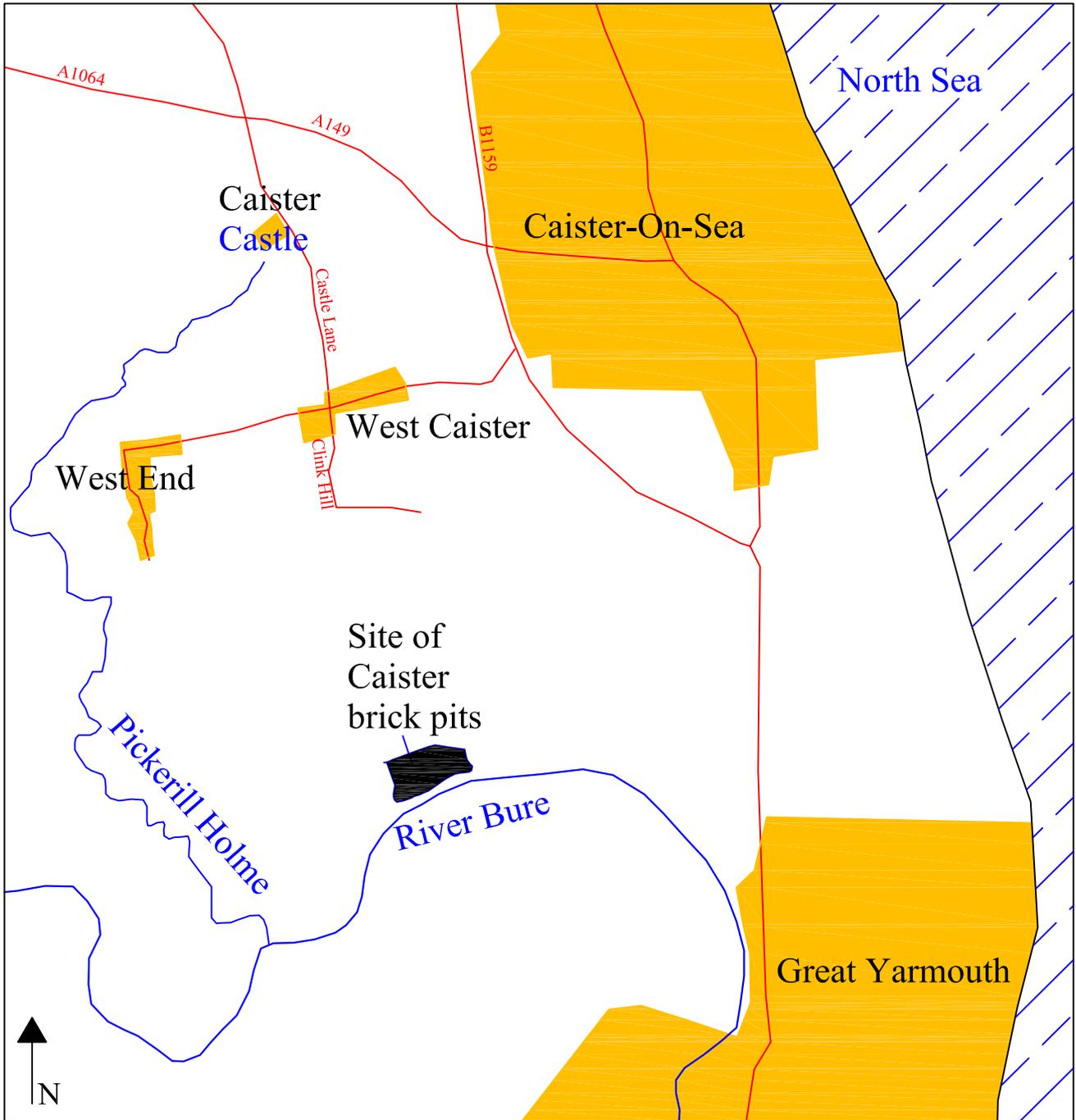


Fig.1 Site Location. Scale 1:25000

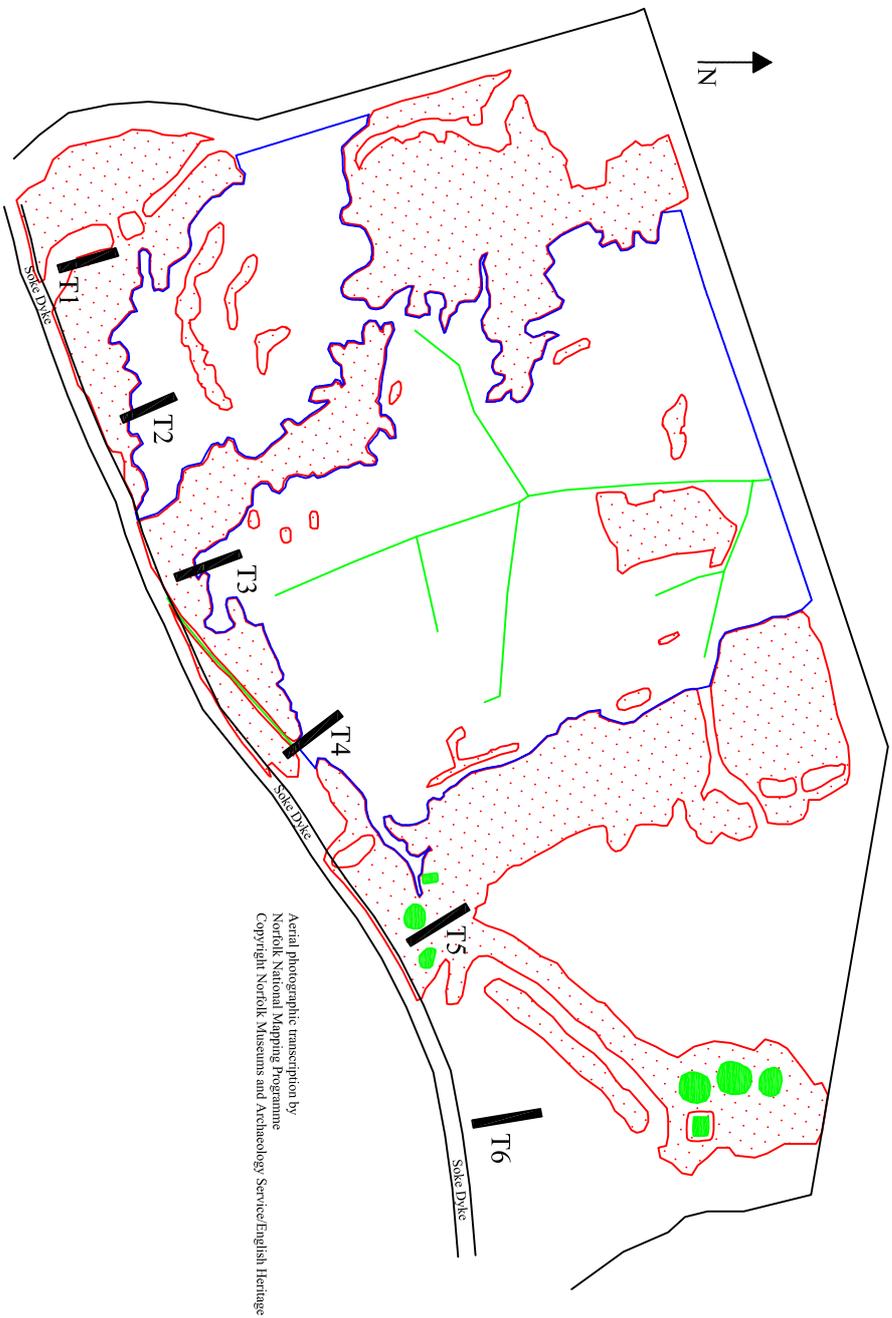
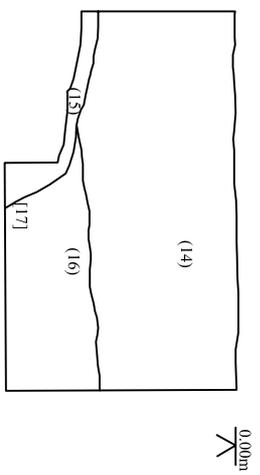


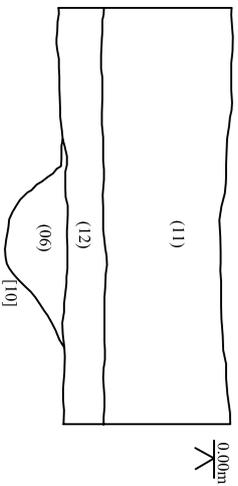
Fig. 2 Brick Pits Field, showing plot of aerial photographs, line of present soke dyke and location of evaluation trenches. Scale 1:2000



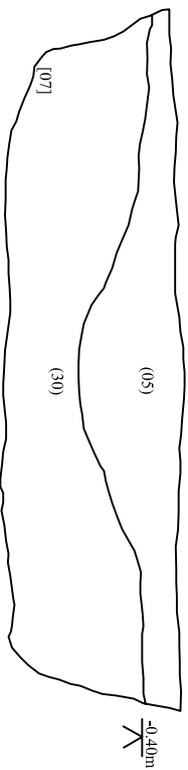
Section 1  
T2 North-east facing



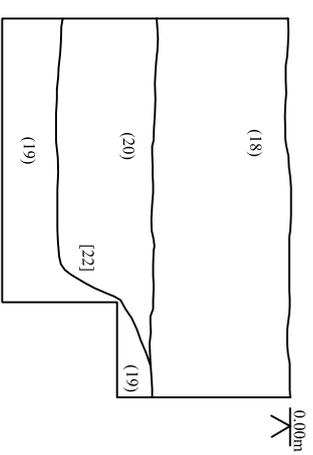
Section 3  
T6 South-west facing



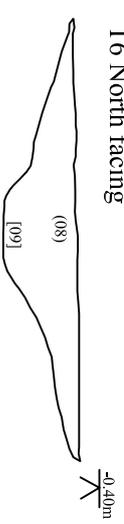
Section 5  
T6 South facing



Section 2  
T3 South-west facing



Section 4  
T6 North facing



Section 6  
T6 South-west facing

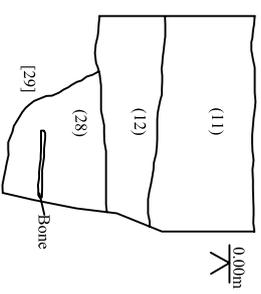


Fig 4 Sections. Scale 1:20

## Appendix 1 List of Contexts

Context	Trench	Category
01	1	Topsoil
02	1	Natural
03	1	Fill of extraction pit 13
04	6	Natural
05	6	Fill of pit 07
06	6	Fill of ditch 10
07	6	Pit cut
08	6	Fill of ditch 09
09	6	Ditch cut
10	6	Ditch cut
11	6	Topsoil
12	6	Subsoil
13	1	Extraction pit cut
14	2	Topsoil
15	2	Natural
16	2	Fill of extraction pit 17
17	2	Extraction pit cut
18	3	Topsoil
19	3	Natural
20	3	Fill of linear cut 22
21	5	Linear cut
22	3	Linear cut
23	4	Topsoil
24	4	Natural
25	5	Topsoil
26	5	Natural
27	5	Fill of 21
28	6	Fill of pit 29
29	6	Pit cut
30	6	Fill of pit 07

## Appendix 2 List of finds

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (g)	Period
01	Ceramic building material	7	154	Medieval
05	Ceramic building material	27	3661	Medieval
05	Ceramic building material	6	3184	Medieval
05	Ceramic building material	1	102	Medieval
06	Ceramic building material	4	74	Medieval
08	Ceramic building material	10	444	Medieval
14	Ceramic building material	1	24	Medieval
18	Ceramic building material	5	432	Medieval
20	Ceramic building material	11	182	Medieval
23	Ceramic building material	2	318	Medieval
25	Ceramic building material	4	314	Medieval
28	Animal bone	1	33	
30	Pottery	1	46	Medieval