



**Report on an Archaeological Watching
Brief at 'Abbey Cottage, Priory Road,
Castle Acre, Norfolk'**

NHER 30919

Prepared for:
Mr and Mrs Fisher
Abbey Cottage
Priory Road
Castle Acre
Norfolk
PE32 2AA

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at 'Abbey Cottage, Priory Road, Castle Acre, Norfolk (NHER 30919) on 02 and 03 December 2008 for Mr and Mrs Fisher. Archaeological monitoring was carried out during excavations associated with the construction of an extension to the rear of Abbey Cottage. No archaeological finds, features or deposits were present.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 An Archaeological Watching Brief was carried out during development at 'Abbey Cottage, Priory Road, Castle Acre, Norfolk' (Grid refs. TF 81455 15054, centred at) and was requested by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA ref. CNF42023, James Albone/31 October 2008).
- 1.2 Planning Application 08/01997/F applies.
- 1.3 Norfolk Historic & Environment Record 30919; OASIS ID: chrisbir1-51635
- 1.4 This report, CB157R, details how Chris Birks undertook these works and summarises the results. A *draft* copy of the report was submitted to Norfolk Landscape Archaeology for consideration. This *final* report has been prepared and distributed following approval of the *draft* report received on 20 January 2009.

2.0 Project Background

- 2.1 A proposal for the construction of a residential extension was made by Mr and Mrs Fisher. Permission was granted by the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk subject to a condition for a Programme of Archaeological work. An Archaeological Watching Brief (constant attendance) was required to determine the presence/absence, date, extent, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological layers or subsoil archaeological features.
- 2.2 This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA ref. CNF42023, James Albone/31 October 2008) and a generic Project Design for Watching Briefs by Chris Birks (Birks 2004). Full details of research aims, methodology and standards are provided in the Project Design.
- 2.3 The site archive will be held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, in accordance with the relevant policy on archiving standards. An OASIS record has been raised – reference number chrisbir1-51635.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 3.1 A great number of entries exist in the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record (NHER) for Castle Acre and the surrounding area and only those within the immediate vicinity of the site are described in this report. Full details of these and all other entries can be seen at the NHER office based at Gressenhall, near Dereham, by prior appointment.
- 3.2 Abbey Cottage is recorded under NHER 30919 and is described in the record as 19th century housing containing reused medieval stonework, almost certainly from the priory and may include some from the castle. A further

Abbey Cottage lies closeby (NHER 5270), at the junction of Priory Road and South Acre Road. It is described as a 15th century building, now a residential property. The building may have been used as an almonery chapel during the medieval period and it is described on 18th century maps as 'Almoner's garden' or 'Chapel Close'.

- 3.3 The site lies to the north/northeast of the substantial remains of a Cluniac Priory (NHER 4096, *Plate 1*) founded in 1089 and desolved in 1537. The ruins include remains of the Romanesque façade of the 12th century church and claustral buildings in addition to earthworks of other monastic buildings and enclosures.

Plate 1. Castle Acre Priory, looking southwest



- 3.4 Two findspots lie in the vicinity of the site (NHER 24635 and 17510) from which fragments of medieval and Post-medieval pottery were recovered in 1988 and 1981 respectively.
- 3.5 A number of finds dating from the prehistoric, Late Saxon, medieval and Post-medieval periods were found during excavations for a new sewage system in 1985/6 and parts of the medieval and Post-medieval roads were revealed on Priory Road (NHERs 25925, 25926, 25927).

4.0 Geology and Topography

- 4.1 The southern two thirds of Castle Acre parish lie upon a solid geology of Lower and Middle Chalk. The Lower and Middle Chalk is often harder and greyer than higher levels in the Chalk, but it does not contain the characteristic flint nodules of the Upper Chalk to the east (Funnell 2005). The remaining, northern third of the parish lies upon a solid chalk geology of the Upper Chalk series (Funnell 2005). Centrally within the parish are areas of Boulder Clays and Glacial sands and gravels (Funnell 1994).
- 4.2 The soil landscape of Castle Acre parish is quite varied and includes Chalk Scarp and Good Sand soils of High Norfolk and West Norfolk Lowland soils in

the south-eastern tip of the parish (Corbett and Dent 1994). The most common soils of the Good Sands are a brown earth with a dark loamy topsoil over a reddish clay loam (Corbett and Dent 1994). The Chalk Scarp soils are typified by a redzina with a dark loamy plough layer over chalk rubble (Corbett and Dent 1994). The West Norfolk Lowland soils include brown sands and podzels on the well drained swells and distinctive orange brown sands on the Carstone and heavy soils on the Boulder Clay (Corbett and Dent 1994).

- 4.3 The development site lies to the north of Priory Road, within the western part of Castle Acre (*Fig. 1*). It lies on reasonably level ground at an elevation of c. 50m OD.

5.0 Observations

- 5.1 Monitoring was carried out on 02 and 03 December 2008 during excavations associated with the construction of the new extension (*Fig. 2, Plate 2*).
- 5.2 All deposits, exposed surfaces and spoil arisings were scanned with a metal detector. Due to the lack of archaeological remains, no context numbers were allocated during fieldwork.
- 5.3 Site conditions were generally good and access was gained from Priory Road to the south of the site. The weather was cold and varied from bright and sunny to occasional rain and snow showers.

Plate 2. General photograph during excavation of footings trenches, looking south



- 5.4 The footprint of the L-shaped new extension measured c. 8.5m along its longest axis by c. 6m and was initially excavated to a depth of c. 0.1m from present ground level removing modern topsoil and rubble deposits. Concrete foundations of the former conservatory measured c. 0.4m wide by c. 0.3m deep and were removed. Footings (foundation) trenches for the new extension were excavated to a maximum depth of c. 0.6m removing c. 0.2m of dark brown sandy topsoil and c. 0.4m of mid orange brown sand subsoil that overlay chalk deposits at the base of the trenches that formed the undisturbed 'natural' deposits.

5.5 No archaeological finds, features or deposits were present.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 Monitoring during excavations associated with the construction of the new extension revealed no archaeological evidence despite the potential for remains associated with Castle Acre Priory in particular to have been present. The precise reasons for this are unknown though the development area lies some distance to the north of the known remains associated with the Priory and the scale of intrusive excavations was limited. A conservatory previously lay to the rear of Abbey Cottage at the location of the new extension and excavations associated with its construction would have truncated any archaeological remains that may have been present. Equally, activities may simply not have occurred at this precise location.

Acknowledgments

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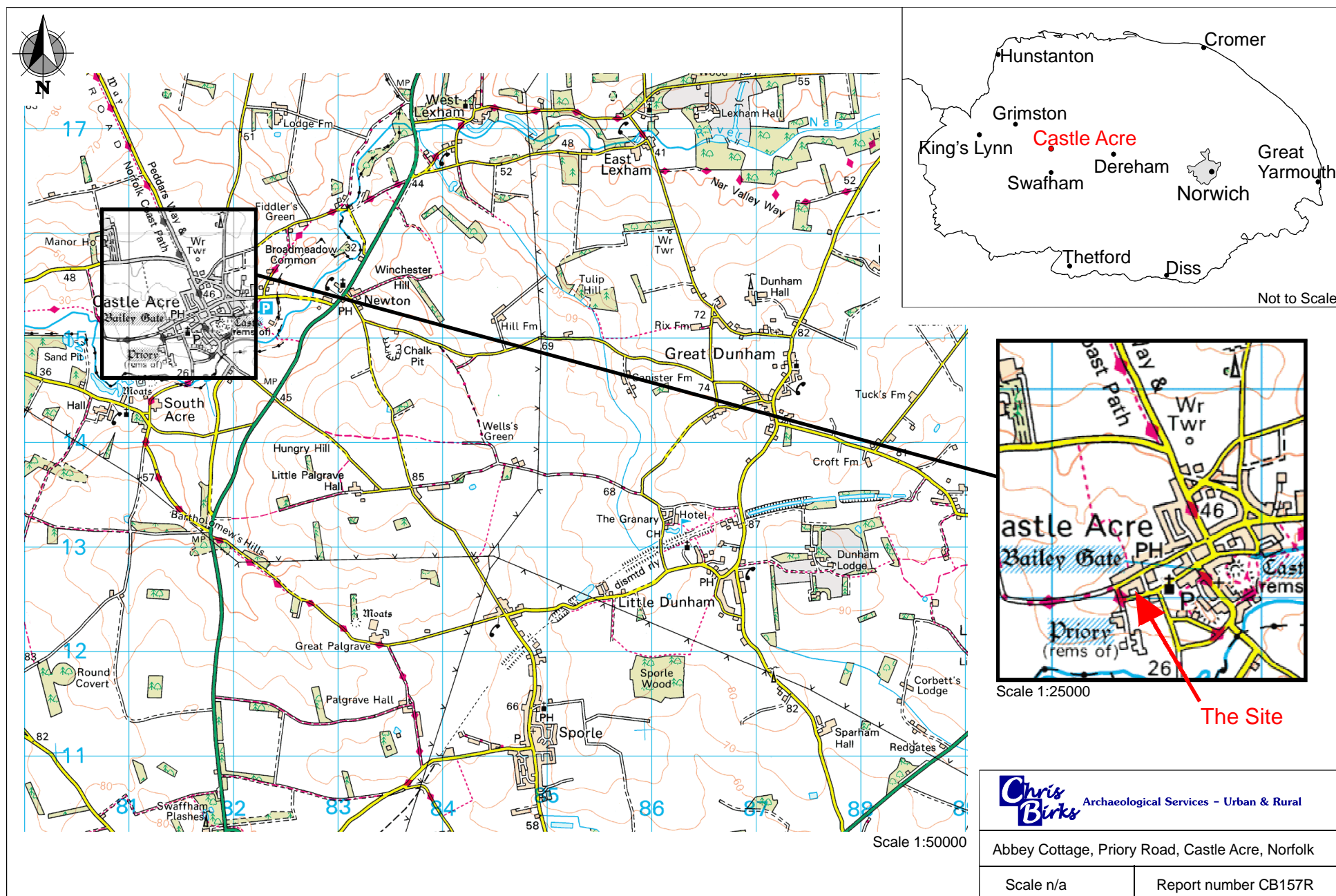


Figure 1. Site location



Figure 2. Site plan