

**Report on an Archaeological Evaluation  
by Trial Trenching at 'John Room House,  
London Road, Thetford, Norfolk'**

**NHER 52766**

Prepared for:  
LSI Architects  
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*on behalf of*

*Breckland District Council*

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation by trial trenching was carried out at 'John Room House, London Road, Thetford Norfolk' (NHER 52766) in April 2009 prior to proposed residential development of the site. A probable quarry pit of medieval date was identified. No further archaeological remains were present.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 A programme of Archaeological Evaluation resulting from development proposals at 'John Room House, London Road, Thetford, Norfolk' (Grid refs. TL 8620 8250) has been requested by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA ref. Ken Hamilton/05 August 2008).
- 1.2 Pre-planning application.
- 1.3 Project Design, CB170, details how Chris Birks (hereafter 'the Contractor') would undertake these works and has been prepared for LSI Architects on behalf of Breckland District Council (hereafter 'the Client') to provide a quotation and Project Design for undertaking works. A *draft* copy of the Project Design was submitted to Norfolk Landscape Archaeology prior to preparing costs for the Client in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' guidance. Approval was received on 23 February 2009.
- 1.4 This report describes the results of the archaeological evaluation and a *draft* copy was forwarded to Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA) for consideration. Approval was received on 06 May 2009.
- 1.5 NHER 52766 and OASIS ID chrisbir1-58350 apply.

## **2.0 Project Background**

- 2.1 The proposed development lies immediately outside the Saxon defences of Thetford. While it is unlikely that occupation deposits associated with the medieval town extended outside the Saxon defences, the proposed development does lie adjacent to an area used for industrial purposes in the medieval period.
- 2.2 An Archaeological Evaluation by trial trenching is required to determine the presence/absence, date, extent, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological layers or subsoil archaeological features. The evaluation may indicate a need for a further phase of Archaeological Excavation or an Archaeological Watching Brief during the development if features of importance are found and these cannot be preserved *in-situ*.
- 2.3 Details of the relevant planning policy background can be seen in the Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Brief (bullet 1, page 2).

## **3.0 Archaeological & Historical Background**

- 3.1 A great number of entries exist in the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record (NHER) for Thetford and the surrounding area. Only those within the immediate vicinity of the site are described and further details of these and all other entries can be seen in the NHER based at Gressenhall by prior arrangement.

- 3.2 To the east of the site a circular mound (NHER 5828), probably Bronze Age in date was recorded as demolished in 1855; finds of burnt bone and flint flakes are recorded and it is claimed that a number of early Saxon spindle whorls and Iron knives were found in the same mound in 1870. Also recorded is 12 early Saxon inhumations discovered in a barrow near the cemetery in 1868 by the Ordnance Survey.
- 3.3 The site lies to the south-west of the Iron Age settlement and Saxon town of Thetford (NHER 5756) and evidence for Iron Age settlement has been found in the area comprising a series of pits, post-holes and hearths, felt to represent a small domestic hut group. The remains of sunken-featured buildings, kilns and a flint road from the Saxon town area as well as large quantities of Thetford Ware pottery are also recorded from this area.
- 3.4 To the immediate north of the site on St Martin's Estate (NHER 5902) Roman coins of Nero and Drusus were found, A Medieval finger ring and a royal farthing of Charles II found on an allotment in 1960.
- 3.5 An Early Saxon burial (NHER 5860) is recorded from the modern cemetery to the north-east of the site, found in 1933 facing southwards with a shield boss, spearhead and six possible coffin irons. Excavations in 1948 at Williamson Crescent (NHER 20982) to the east of the site recorded four to six burials of Saxon date including one cist burial with carved stones. A 'vast quantity' of Thetford Ware pottery was also found on the site including wasters. Finds of Saxon metalwork were also amongst the finds recovered including rings and horseshoes. Post-holes and finds of the medieval period suggest continued usage of the site.
- 3.6 To the immediate east of the site trial trenching in 2003 by Cambridge Archaeological Unit revealed that the site had been used for sand and chalk extraction in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. A number of ditches, pits, gullies and slots, several of which contained material also dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. One feature on the eastern side of the site contained a large quantity of pottery and slag indicating both domestic and industrial activity in the immediate vicinity, but there was no evidence of extensive occupation on this site. A large finds assemblage was recovered from both stratified and unstratified contexts. The majority of this assemblage has been dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century, with occasional residual Roman material, and a small quantity of late Neolithic or Bronze Age worked flint. The presence of worked flint, an adjacent barrow, and nearby Iron Age settlement indicates that some of the undated pits could date to the Late Prehistoric period, but no pottery of this date was recovered.
- 3.7 To the east of the site the Church of St Margaret and Leper Hospital (NHER 5908) is recorded as a pre-conquest foundation and confirmed to Lewes in 1230, and was recorded as a Leper Hospital in 1304 but had disappeared by 1368.
- 3.8 To summarise, there is a potential that remains from the prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and medieval periods in particular survive as sub-surface archaeological finds, features and/or deposits. The recovery of such information would contribute to Research Topics for the Eastern Counties.



## 4.0 Geology and Topography

- 4.1 The site lies upon a solid Upper Chalk geology containing characteristic flint nodules (Funnell 2005) with an approximately south-east-to-north-west meandering band of blown sand, shingle and river gravels extending through the parish (Funnell 1994). Thetford lies within the Breckland soil landscape typified by soils developed in coversand over a chalk-sand drift (Corbett and Dent 1994). Breckland is a low plateau with gentle slopes to the lower lying areas. The dominant soil on the plateau is a brown sand with a thin red line of clay enrichment at the boundary with the underlying chalky-drift (Corbett & Dent 1994). A sandy colluvium that can develop a distinctive podzol can be seen in the low lying areas. The tendency for these soils to maintain water has made farming practices much harder.
- 4.2 The development site lies to the south of the town adjacent to a modern industrial development, residential properties and allotments and to the south of London Street (*Fig. 1*). The site was generally level at c. 22m OD

## 5.0 Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 As much information as possible is sought on the extent, date, phasing, character, function, status and significance of the site.
- 5.2 Specific aims are to establish the states of preservation of archaeological features and/or deposits within the area indicated. These form part of the research agenda for the eastern counties of England in *Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties, 1. Resource Assessment* (Glazebrook, J. (ed) 1997) and *Research and Archaeology; a Framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (Brown, N., and Glazebrook, J. (eds) 2000)
- 5.3 Generic Aims of the project are to;
- 5.3.1 Determine the presence of archaeological remains during investigation of the site by trial trenching. A 4m by 4m trench within the footprint of the proposed dwelling is required.
- 5.3.2 Establish the extent, condition, nature and date of any such archaeological remains.
- 5.3.3 Create datasets relating to the stratigraphic, artefactual and environmental information recovered during excavations for analysis.
- 5.4 The specific aims of the project are;
- 5.5 The specific aims of the project are to seek information regarding Research Topics in *Research and Archaeology; a Framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (Brown, N., and Glazebrook, J. (eds.) 2000)) through this programme of archaeological works.
- 5.6 Contributions may also be made to environmental archaeology research aims (Murphy 2000);

## 6.0 Method Statement

### 6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The required archaeological works identified in the *Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Brief* specify that the primary purpose of the evaluation is to excavate one 4m by 4m trench within the footprint of the proposed new building in order to recover as much information as possible on the extent, date, phasing, character, function, status and significance of the site. The states of preservation of archaeological features or deposits within the area indicated will be determined. This will be achieved through the following methodology.

### 6.2 Archaeological Evaluation

- 6.2.1 An OASIS online record was initiated and key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators forms.
- 6.2.2 The Historic and Environment Record (HER) Officer of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology was contacted to obtain a HER number for the site.
- 6.2.3 Consultation of a service plan and CAT-scan of the area was carried out prior to any excavations. Any service runs were clearly marked on site using spray line marker, and avoided during excavations.
- 6.2.4 One trench measuring approximately 4m by 4m was excavated within the development site (*Fig. 2*). The precise location of trench was established on-site and lay further to the southeast than originally planned due to the upstanding part of the present building scheduled for demolition still being *in situ*.
- 6.2.5 A tracked hydraulic-type excavator with qualified driver and toothless ditching bucket was used for the mechanical excavation of the trench.
- 6.2.6 Topsoil and subsoil deposits were removed in spits of no more than 0.1m under constant archaeological supervision and direction until archaeological remains or undisturbed 'natural' deposits were encountered.
- 6.2.7 Topsoil, subsoil, archaeological features & deposits and spoil were metal detected during machine and manual excavation.
- 6.2.8 Spoil arisings were stored at a safe distance of c. 1m from the trench.
- 6.2.9 Where archaeological remains were encountered, no further machine excavation was made and archaeological features were sample excavated by hand, using appropriate tools, as below;

Linear features	10%
Pits, post-holes	50%
Structural remains	20% (depending upon extent of remains)
Human Burials	*

\* No burials were encountered.

- 6.2.10 Archaeological features and deposits were recorded on Chris Birks *pro-forma* context sheets. Section and plan drawings were recorded at an appropriate scale (1:50;1:20;1:10) depending upon the level of detail required.
- 6.2.11 A photographic record was made using digital, 35mm colour transparencies and 35mm black & white film.

- 6.2.12 Appropriate registers for contexts, drawings, photographs and environmental samples were made.
- 6.2.13 No environmental samples were taken due to the lack of suitably well-sealed and dated archaeological features/deposits.
- 6.2.14 A single-context planning methodology was employed and a matrix of the sequence of deposits was made on-site.
- 6.2.15 Norfolk Landscape Archaeology monitored the project during fieldwork and provided advice accordingly.
- 6.2.16 Suitable temporary fencing was used to secure the site and appropriate signage was displayed.
- 6.2.17 The trench was backfilled without reinstatement as per the agreed scope of works detailed in the Project Design.
- 6.3 **Post-excavation Analysis and Report**
  - 6.3.1 Artefactual remains recovered during excavations were cleaned, catalogued and analysed by Chris Birks following fieldwork, in accordance with *Standards and Guidelines for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (Institute for Archaeologists 2001).
  - 6.3.2 An assessment of the recorded evidence was made in accordance with *Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2)* (English Heritage 1991).
  - 6.3.3 The analysis of stratigraphical/structural records, Artefactual and environmental materials was made for inclusion in a final site report.
  - 6.3.4 A *draft* copy of the report was submitted for consideration by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. Approval was received on 06 May 2009 prior to submission of this *final* report.
  - 6.3.5 Decisions will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology regarding any further works that may be required should remains of importance be found that cannot be preserved *in-situ*. This may involve further evaluation or excavation and recording. A further brief would be provided by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology and a Design Brief would be required from an archaeological contractor. Costs & timescale for additional work would need to be agreed with the Client.
  - 6.3.6 Three copies of the *final* report will be submitted to Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, two copies to the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record, one copy to the Local Planning Authority, one copy to the Client, one copy to archive and one copy to the Science Advisor for English Heritage.
  - 6.3.7 The OASIS online form will be completed and submitted to the Norfolk Historic Environment Record, including an uploaded .pdf version of the report.
  - 6.3.8 The archive will be prepared in a form suitable for microfilming, if required. It will be prepared consistent with the principles of *Management of Archaeological Projects* ('MAP2', English Heritage 1991) and submitted to the Norfolk Museums Service for long-term storage.

- 6.3.9 Excepting those covered by the Treasure Act of 1996, all archaeological materials will remain the property of the landowner/s. A formal agreement will be sought regarding any items of local, regional or national significance for donation of finds to an appropriate Museums Service.

## **7.0 Results**

### **7.1 Introduction**

- 7.1.1 Fieldwork was carried out on 02 and 03 April 2009 and access was gained from London Street to the north of the site. The weather remained dry and sunny.
- 7.1.2 Context numbers were allocated during fieldwork and are summarised in *Appendix 1*.

### **7.2 Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching**

- 7.2.1 The trench measured c. 4m by 4m and was located within the southeast part of the footprint of the proposed new extension to the present building (*Fig. 2*).
- 7.2.2 The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m removing c. 0.3m of grass covered dark grey silty sand topsoil [1] with moderate flint inclusions and c. 0.5m of light to mid orange brown silty sand subsoil [2] with occasional rounded flint inclusions (*Plate 1*). Subsoil overlay light yellow brown sand and white chalk undisturbed 'natural' deposits.

**Plate 1.** Southwest facing sample section of trench, looking northeast



Scale is 2m in 0.5m segments

- 7.2.3 An approximately southeast-to-northwest sub-oval shaped feature [3] was present within the western part of the trench (*Fig. 3, Plate 1*). It measured c. 2m in length by c. 1m wide at its northwest end narrowing to c. 0.7m at the southeast.



**Plate 2.** Feature [3], looking southwest



Scale is 2m in 0.5m segments

- 7.2.4 Initially, the southeast segment of [3] was excavated (*Fig. 3 Section 1, Plate 3*) then extended towards the northwest (*Fig. 3 Section 2, Plate 4*). The sides were very steep, undercutting at some points and the base was concave. It measured a maximum 0.9m deep and was cut into undisturbed 'natural' chalk and sand deposits. It contained a light to mid grey/brown silty sand [4] that contained a mid orange brown sand deposit [5] with moderate quantities of rounded flint inclusions centrally within the trench at a depth of c. 0.6m.

**Plate 3.** Section 1 of feature [3], looking northwest



Scale in 0.5m segments

**Plate 4.** Section 2 of feature [3], looking northwest



Scale in 0.5m segments

- 7.2.5 Feature [3] was 100% excavated to ensure it did not represent a grave cut (as indicated by the size and shape) and for maximum finds retrieval. No evidence of a human burial was present. Medieval pottery and animal bone was recovered from fill [4] of [3].

**Plate 5.** Feature [3] following excavation, looking southwest



Scales are 2m in 0.5m segments and 0.5m in 0.1m and 0.01m segments

- 7.2.6 The exposed base of the trench was carefully cleaned to investigate the presence of any discrete archaeological features, none were present.



7.2.7 No further archaeological finds, features or deposits were present.

## **8.0 The Finds**

### **8.1 Pottery**

#### **8.1.1 Introduction**

8.1.1.1 The pottery was identified by fabric, form and quantified by weight and sherd count. Details of condition such as abrasion were recorded, with other diagnostic details and an approximate date range is provided. The fabric codes are based upon the typology of Norwich ceramic assemblages (Jennings 1981).

8.1.1.2 Initial analysis and identification was carried out by Chris Birks and the assemblage is being sent to a pottery specialist for further examination. Any additional information will be provided as an addendum to the report.

#### **8.1.2 Medieval**

8.1.2.1 Five body sherds (0.039kg) of locally produced Early Medieval Ware were recovered from fill [4] of feature [3]. They have a dark grey fabric and orange surfaces. The assemblage includes 2 sherds (0.023kg) of Early Medieval Sparse Shelly ware, one with slight sooting on the exterior surface. The remainder of the sherds have sooting on one side and relate to cooking pots. They date to the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Jennings, 1981).

8.1.2.2 One body sherd (0.005kg) of possible Stamford ware was recovered from close to the base of fill [4] of feature [3]. It has a buff/cream fabric and a yellow/green glaze on one side and was initially interpreted on site as being of later, Post-medieval date. Stamford ware dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Jennings 1981).

#### **8.1.3 Post-medieval**

8.1.3.1 One body sherd (0.027kg) of probable Early Post-medieval Ware was recovered from subsoil deposit [2]. It has a pale cream/yellow fabric with a orange and green patchy glaze and has 3 horizontal line decoration. It is of 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century date (Jennings, 1981).

#### **8.1.4 Conclusions**

8.1.4.1 The pottery assemblage dates to the medieval and Post-medieval periods and is typical of assemblages from Thetford for these periods.

## **9.0 Faunal Remains**

### **9.1.1 Introduction**

9.1.1.1 A total of 0.459kg of animal bone remains was recovered from 2 contexts.

### **9.1.2 Methodology**

9.1.2.1 The bone was examined for basic information, primarily to determine species and elements present. Total counts were taken of the number of pieces by context.

### 9.1.3 Results

- 9.1.3.1 Five pieces (0.218kg) of animal bone were recovered from subsoil [2] and 45 pieces (0.241kg) were recovered from fill [4] of feature [3]. Twenty five pieces (0.073kg) from fill [4] comprise avian bones and fragments, probably chicken. The remainder of the assemblage comprises fragments of sheep and cattle bone and represent domestic food waste.

### 9.1.4 Conclusions

- 9.1.4.1 The animal bone is consistent with food waste typical of medieval/Post-medieval contexts.

## 10.0 Conclusions

- 10.1 No evidence for prehistoric, Roman or Saxon activities was present.
- 10.2 Although small, the feature identified within the trench almost certainly represents a chalk/sand quarry pit, the size probably indicating it was excavated for a specific requirement. One would expect a greater density of finds if the feature were a domestic refuse pit. The size and shape in plan when first revealed may have indicated a grave cut but no evidence to support this was found through excavation. Given the preservation of the faunal bone remains, any human remains would also have survived and none were present.
- 10.3 The feature is contemporary with similar features of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century date found in 2003 to the east of the site and contributes towards urban medieval industrial research topics for Norfolk.



### ***Acknowledgments***

The project was undertaken by Chris Birks for LSI Architects Ltd on behalf of Breckland District Council who funded the work. Many thanks to Chris Heuvel at LSI Architects.

Fieldwork was undertaken by Chris Birks and John Simmons. The report was written by Chris Birks.

Many thanks to Alice Cattermole at the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record office based at Gressenhall. Thanks also to James Albone, Ken Hamilton, David Gurney, David Robertson and Andrew Rogerson at Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

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## Appendix 1. Context Summary

Context No.	Type	Description	Initials/Date
1	D	Dark grey silty sand topsoil with moderate flints	JS/02 Apr 09
2	D	Light to mid orange brown silty sand subsoil with occasional rounded flints	JS/02 Apr 09
3	C	Pit feature	JS/02 Apr 09
4	D	Light to mid grey/brown silty sand fill of [3]	JS/02 Apr 09
5	D	Mid orange brown sand with moderate rounded flints fill of [3]	JS/03 Apr 09

C = Cut

D = Deposit

## Appendix 2. Finds Summary

Context No.	Context Description	Material	Qty	Weight (kg)	Description	Period/date
2	Subsoil deposit	Pottery	1	0.027	Body sherd	Post-medieval
2	Subsoil deposit	Animal Bone	5	0.218	Cattle/sheep	
4	Fill of [3]	Pottery	6	0.044	Body sherds	Medieval
4	Fill of [3]	Animal Bone	45	0.241	Cattle, sheep and avian	

## Appendix 3. Pottery Summary

Context	Date Range	Fabric	No. of sherds	Weight (kg)	Condition	Comments
2	16 <sup>th</sup> /17 <sup>th</sup> century	EPW	1	0.027	Good	Body sherd
4	11 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> century	EMW	5	0.039	Average	Body sherd
4	11 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> century	STAM	1	0.005	Average	Body sherd

### Fabric Codes

EPW Early Post-medieval Ware

EMW Early Medieval Ware

STAM Stamford Ware

## Appendix 4. Faunal Remains Summary


Context	Total Qty	Weight (kg)	Species	Age	Significant Features	Comments
2	5	0.218	Cattle & Sheep	Adult		Domestic food waste
4	20	0.168	Cattle & sheep	Adult		Domestic food waste
4	25	0.073	Avian	Adult		Domestic food waste





Based on a drawing kindly provided by Isl Architects

Figure 2. Site plan

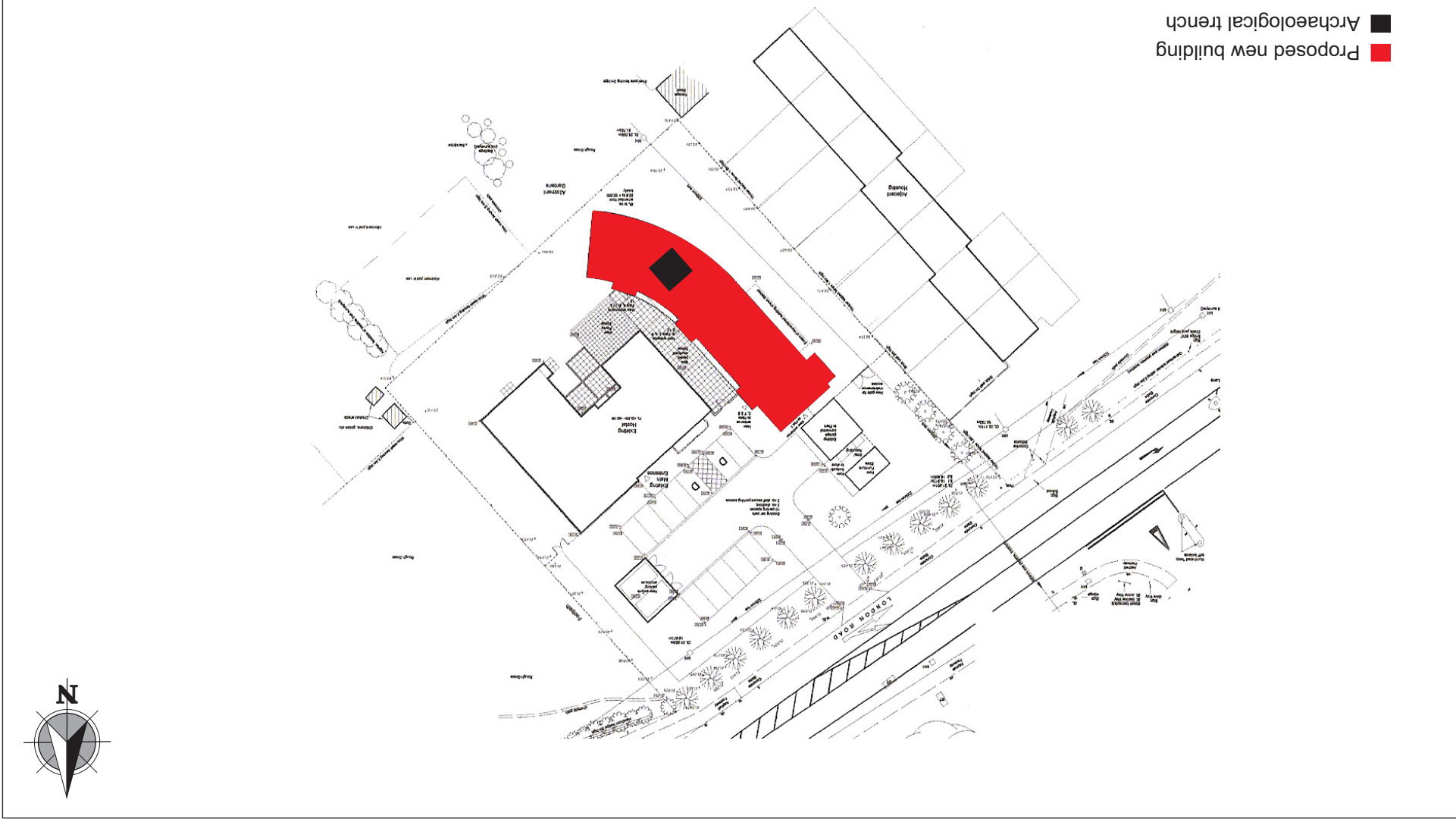


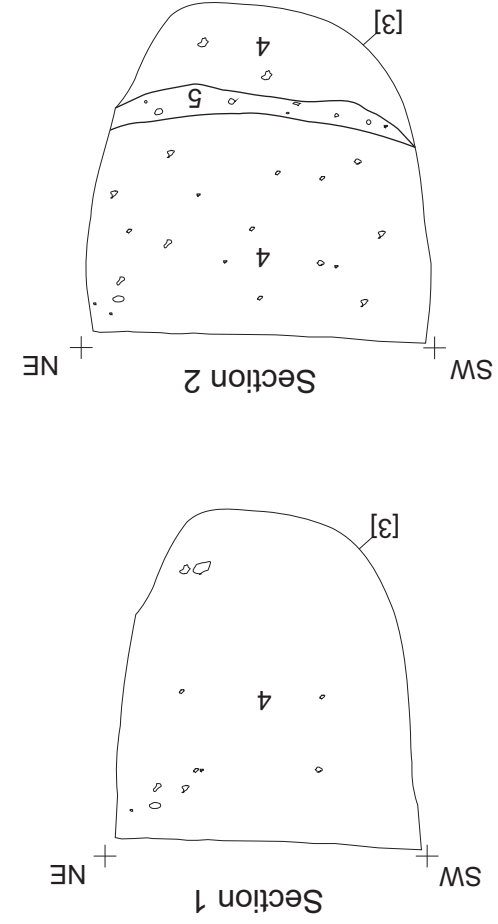
Chris Burke  
Archaeological Services – Urban & Rural

John Room House, London Street, Thetford, Norfolk

Report Number CB170R

Scale 1:750

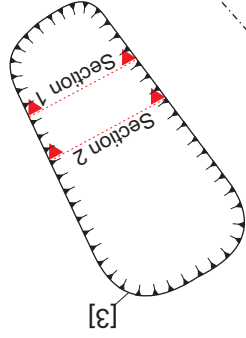




Scale 1:20

**Figure 3.** Trench section and plan drawings

0 2m



Scale 1:50

**Chris Burke**  
Archaeological Services - Urban & Rural

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Scale 1:20 and 1:50 Report Number CB170R