

NAU Archaeology

Report No. 1189

**An Archaeological Watching Brief on Land Adjacent to
Long Acre, at Church Lane, Cley Next The Sea,
Norfolk**

NHER 44785 CLY

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Location: Land adjacent to Long Acre, Church Lane, Cley Next The Sea, Norfolk
District: North Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 0466 4353
HER No.: 44785 CLY
Date of fieldwork: 19th to 20th June 2006

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on a plot of land adjacent to Long Acre, Church Lane, at Cley Next The Sea in Norfolk. A series of wall foundation trenches were excavated to the natural chalk bedrock, under constant attendance as stated in the brief. These trenches, of varying depth, revealed a relatively modern subsoil which contained, in places, layers or rafts of redeposited chalk. Underlying these was a layer of medieval silt, which contained a small quantity of bone, mollusc shells and burnt material, a small refuse pit containing fish bones, and some pottery fragments of Grimston-type ware.

It is concluded that this area was close to the river tide-line during the medieval period. To the south of this site there is evidence of medieval and/or post medieval settlement with the presence of built remains recorded in 1961. The presence of redeposited chalk platforms here in this plot suggests that this area too had been built on in the post-medieval period. To the north the present building is pre-1800 and may be significantly earlier than that date. It seems that this part of Cley consisted of a number of 'burgage' plots by the post-medieval period, perhaps pre-dated by river-side activity.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on a private plot of land, directly adjacent to Long Acre on Church Lane, Cley Next The Sea (Fig. 1). This development consisted of a single large timber-frame house, the construction of which required a series of foundation trenches. The work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition requiring an archaeological programme and was undertaken in accordance with a brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: 18/01/2006/EJR).

These trenches were laid out according to the architectural designs, following all external and interior supporting walls, and were intended to reach the chalk natural in order to provide a solid foundation. The area covered by these foundations was approximately 400m² (Fig 2.).

The report was commissioned and funded by Mark Hickling.

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and will be deposited with Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

Cley Next The Sea is located on the north Norfolk coast, on the eastern bank of the River Glaven, between Blakeney to the west and Salthouse to the east. The site is situated on a plot of land to the rear of the Long Acre property on Church Lane. This plot is surrounded by other residential properties on all sides except the west,

the direction in which the plot slopes gradually down, from a height of 5.58m OD, towards Holt Road, situated on the other side of a flint wall at a height of 3.19m OD.

The area of excavation overlies a solid Upper Chalk geology, and is made up of primarily sandy-silt deposits, which increase in thickness from 0.50m to 1.20m towards the lower part of the site. The subsoil consists of a dark brown sandy silt, and the topsoil, although mostly removed prior to the trench excavation, was a shallow, mid-brown sandy loam approximately 0.15m thick.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Although much of the history of sea trade in medieval Norfolk is dominated by the ports at King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth, the Blakeney Haven complex, including Cley, Wiveton and Snitterly, also played an important part in the trading and fishing industries. Up until the 17th century the Blakeney channels were large enough to accommodate a large quantity of merchant shipping, enough to rival that at King's Lynn, with regular trade between ports in the Bay of Biscay, the Baltic, and Iceland. Wool, salt fish and agricultural products were traded with King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth, for local consumption and transhipment (Rutledge 2005, 78-79).

A decline began when Cley itself suffered a major fire in 1612, which resulted in the destruction of most of the buildings around the church and led to the expansion of the settlement to the north. Shortly after this, in 1638, a bank with a sluice was built across the mouth of the River Glaven, which effectively prevented the merchant shipping from accessing the river. Following a two-year legal battle, the bank was eventually removed – however, this seems to have been too late to prevent the end of Wiveton functioning as a port (Hooton 1996).

By the 18th century trade was in decline, and the construction of a new bank in 1824, in conjunction with the increasing build-up of silt in the river, ended the use of Cley as a port. The last recorded shipment was unloaded at Cley in the 1870s. (Hooton 1996, 38)

Present-day Cley Next The Sea contains evidence of its past connections with French and Dutch ports, in the French names of many of the houses and the Dutch roofing tiles and bricks that were originally brought over the Channel as ship ballast, and incorporated into some of the buildings (*Ibid*).

There are two NHER entries in the immediate vicinity of this site. NHER 6151, is located in the plot to the south. This consisted of the remains of a square flint and mortar building around 2.1m square, which was filled with charcoal. Sherds of 15th and 16th century pottery were found in this deposit along with animal bone and iron slag. Two plots to the north of this site is a building known as The Pyghtle. This structure occupies the street frontage onto Town Yard. It is not well dated but the rebuilt front is 1800 and the core to the building is clearly older.

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of a series of wall foundation trenches. These



Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

Fig. 1 is based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown Copyright
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trenches were marked out according to the architectural plans, and were machine excavated using a combination of tracked and JCB-type excavators, using both 0.80m and 0.60m toothed ditching buckets where required by the plans.

The trenches were excavated down to the solid chalk natural, in shallow spits, under constant archaeological supervision until the natural ground or archaeological features were identified. Any further cleaning was carried out by hand.

As the deposits and natural chalk were exposed, and could be seen in section to remain the same across the area of the site, it was decided to record these using a number of sample-sections in order to show this (Fig. 3). Any archaeological features were recorded, while the modern drainage pipe and brick-lined cess-pit were not.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were not scanned with a metal detector on this occasion due to the frequent disturbance by modern debris in the upper contexts. All hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those that were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Levels were taken from a temporary marker/station (4.539m OD) set up on the south-west corner of the proposed construction, using GPS by Anglia Survey and Design.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

The site was easy to access, although as the trenches blocked the main site exit as they were excavated, spoil was subsequently removed by machine over the wall at the back of the property. The weather remained sunny and dry, creating a dusty working environment.

5.0 Results

Foundation Trenches

The foundation trenches were located centrally within the rear plot of the Long Acre property, and were marked out according to the architectural plans in a grid-like manner. The trench width depended on the nature of the wall to be built over it, and varied between 0.60m and 0.80m.

The topsoil had been removed before the trenching began. The subsoil ([01]) was a dark brown sandy silt, containing chalk flecks, roots, small flints and modern brick inclusions. It varied in thickness from 0.30m at the top of the slope, in the east, to up to 0.50m to the west.

Underlying this was a greyish-brown sandy silt ([02], [12], [16]) which contained frequent chalk inclusions, as well as flint and a number of oyster shells. This deposit also contained charcoal in places, a iron object, and some fragments of Grimston-type ware. This deposit also appeared to cover the entire site, varying in thickness between 0.10m and 0.40m. In some areas it seems to have been disturbed by deposits of mixed chalk, approximately 0.20m thick ([05], [11], [19] and [21]).

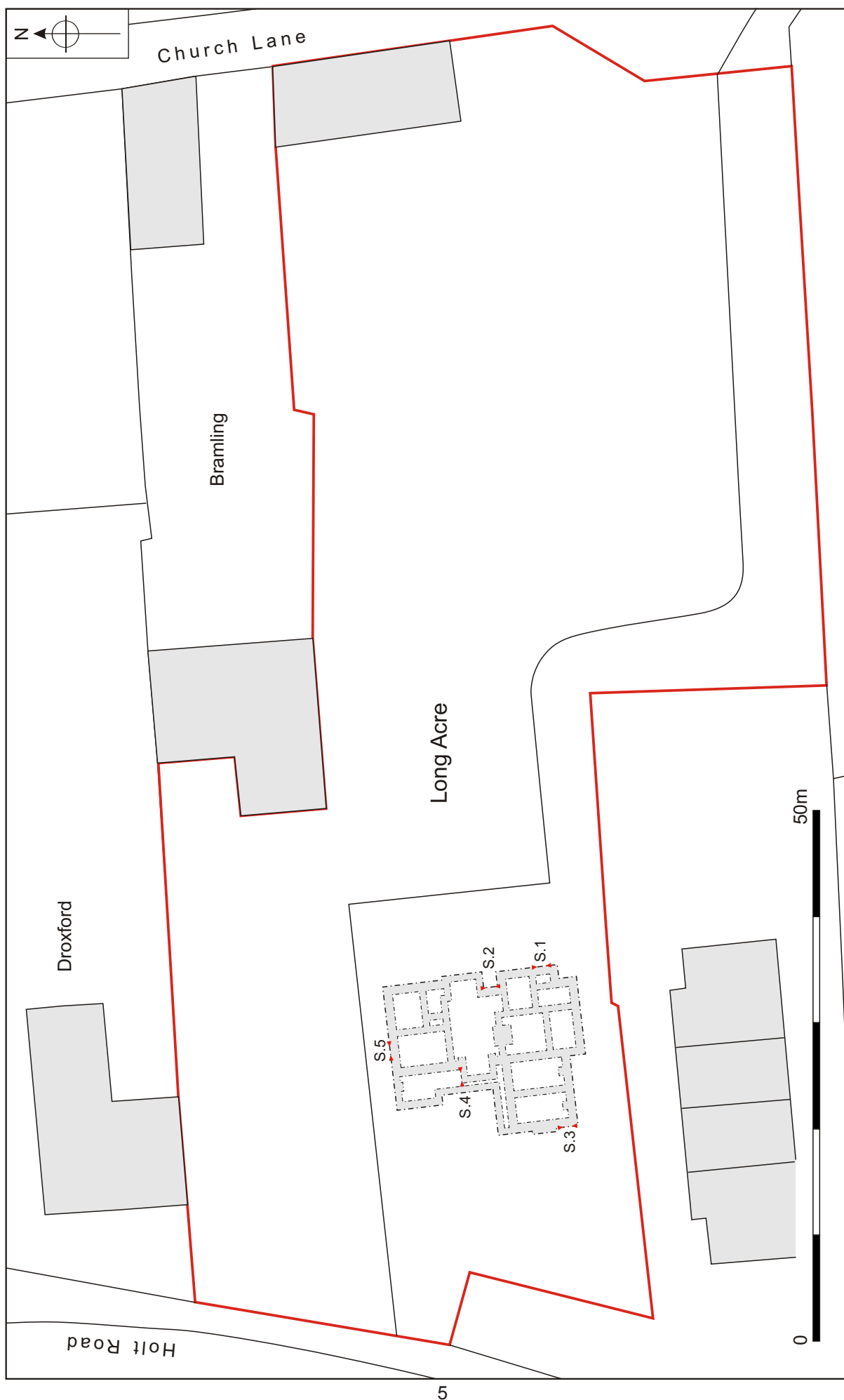


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500

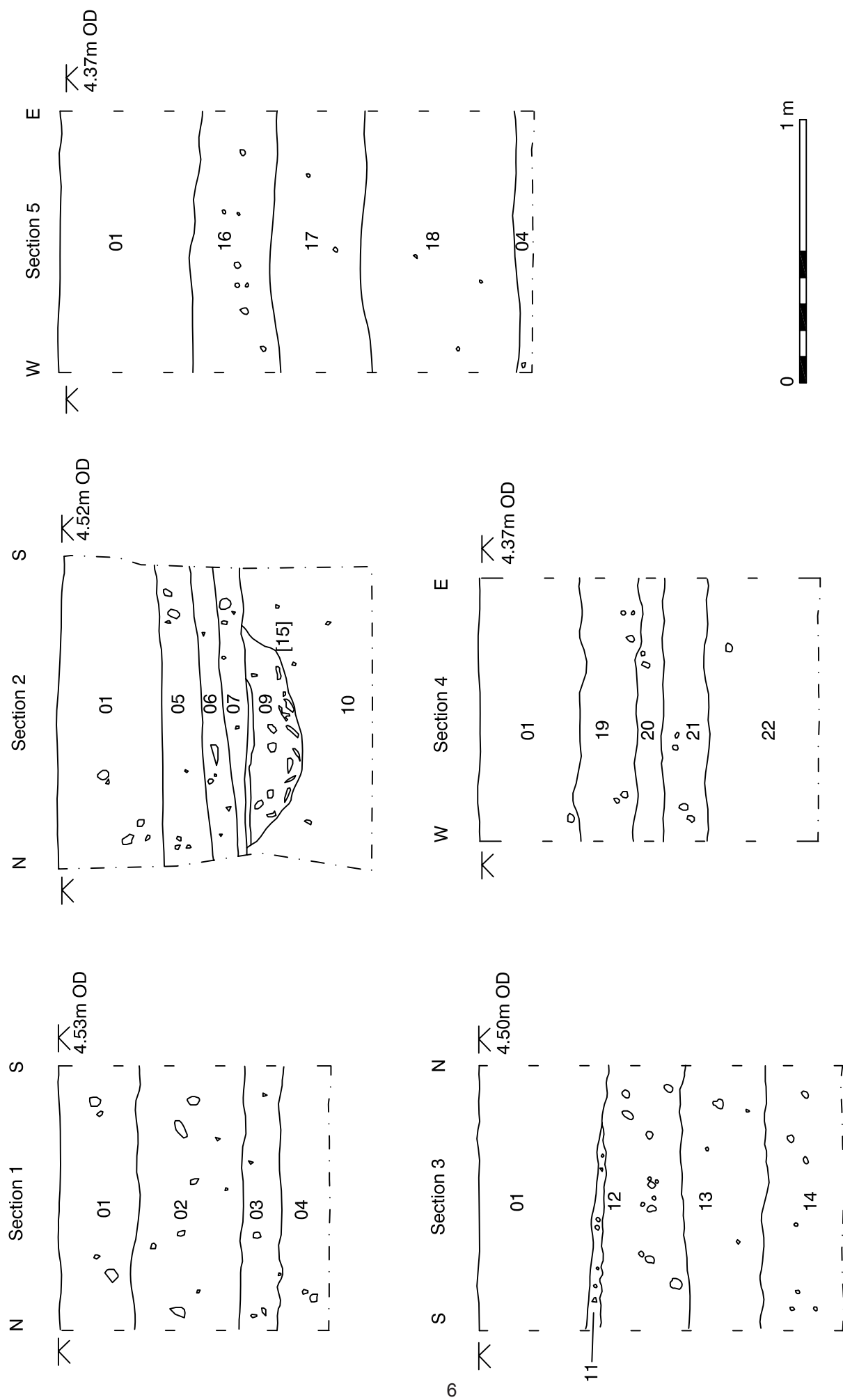


Figure 3. Sections. Scale 1:20

Beneath this was a mid-greyish-brown sandy silt ([03], [10], [13], [17]) which contained frequent chalk flecks and could also be seen across the site, lying directly over the chalk natural ([04]). This varied in thickness between 0.15m and 0.50m across the site and was slightly differentiated in places, particularly towards the base of the sequence. Other deposits were recorded in the sample sections, but generally the main deposits remained comparable across the area excavated, with the thicker part towards the west on the down-slope. From small views such as were available correlation was difficult.

A small pit ([15]) was cut into deposit [10] in the west-facing section of an outcrop left between two trenches, in the central part of the site. The cut was concave, with rounded sides, 0.20m deep from the top of the cut. The fill of this pit/feature ([09]) was a mid-grey sandy silt, containing frequent shells – mussels, cockles and oysters, as well as a number of fish bones in the base of the fill. Above this was a thin (0.02m) band of charcoal. Deposit [10] appears to be the same as [03] – a silty, mixed layer of what is possibly estuarine silts.

6.0 The Finds

Pottery

by Lucy Talbot

The site produced eight fragments of medieval pottery, weighing 0.088kg.

Methodology

The assemblage was quantified (counted and weighed) by form and fabric (see Appendix 3). Identification of the fabrics was based on the typology of Norwich ceramics established by Jennings (Jennings 1981).

Three fragments of unabraded body sherd from a local medieval unglazed vessel were recovered (0.008kg [14]). The fabric is 14th-century, grey and highly micaceous.

The remainder of the assemblage consists of five examples of 15th-century green glazed Grimston ware (0.076kg [02], [07] and [14]). The majority of this group consists of the body sherds of one or more jugs, whilst the handle of a smaller jug was also recovered. It is worth noting that two conjoining body sherd fragments from context [02], part of a large jug, are decorated with iron-rich clay applied strips, scale pellets and an applied medallion. The medallion is in turn decorated with two complete and two partially impressed ring/dot decorations surrounding a central impressed rosette.

Metalwork

by Julia Huddle

Context [02]

Iron bar of rectangular section, corroded with nail fragment towards tapered (bent) end. Length: 113mm; Width: 19mm; max thickness: 12mm

One metal object was recovered on site – a sturdy nailed bar which may have been

used to secure timbers such as those on buildings or, given the location of the site, sea defences or boats. It was recovered from a context with 15th-century pottery.

7.0 Conclusions

The topsoil and subsoil are of largely modern make-up, containing roots from the garden, brick, ceramic piping and drainage, and a mixture of brick debris. The pads or 'rafts' of redeposited chalk appear to have been used, where required, to level this area, although it is not possible to determine when this was done.

The silty deposits below the subsoil and mixed chalk appear to be late medieval in date, based on the fragments of medieval pot found, among which were some of Grimston type with a centrally impressed rosette decoration, and a single green-glazed handle from a small jug. The small pit appears to have been used for refuse, and this contained a large quantity of mollusc shells (which were also found frequently throughout the above context) and a layer of fish bones.

The presence of a post-medieval building a couple of plots to the north on Town Yard (NHER 44420) and a medieval or early post-medieval building immediately to the south (NHER 6151), in conjunction with the chalk 'rafts' found here, suggest that this plot was part of a sequence of burgage plots established at the latest by the post-medieval period. The quantity of molluscs indicates an immediate relationship with the River Glaven either at this time or in the preceding period. The small pit filled with shell and fishbone may have been refuse from fishing activities, or boat waste. A soft, silty embankment would also seem to be a reasonable explanation as to why chalk 'rafts' were required to level this area and make it fit for construction of buildings.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
01	D	subsoil	
02	D	sandy silt	late medieval
03	D	sandy silt	
04	D	natural Chalk	
05	D	redeposited chalk	post-medieval
06	D	sandy silt	
07	D	sandy silt	
08	D	silt/charcoal	
09	D	fill of [15]	
10	D	sandy silt	
11	D	redeposited chalk	post-medieval
12	D	sandy silt	
13	D	sandy silt	
14	D	sandy silt	
15	C	cut of refuse pit	late medieval
16	D	sandy silt	
17	D	sandy silt	
18	D	sandy silt	
19	D	redeposited chalk	post-medieval
20	D	sandy silt	
21	D	mixed chalk redeposit	post-medieval
22	D	sandy silt	

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Period	Feature type	Quantity
medieval (1066 to 1539AD)	pit	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
02	pottery	3	0.055	medieval
07	pottery	1	0.013	medieval
14	pottery	4	0.016	medieval
02	iron	1	—	medieval

Appendix 2b: NHER finds summary table

Period	Material	Quantity
medieval (1066 to 1539AD)	pottery	8
medieval (1066 to 1539AD)	iron bar	1

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (g)	Object Date
02	Grimston glazed	body sherd	3	0..055	15th-century
07	Grimston glazed	jug handle	1	0.013	15th-century
14	unglazed	body sherd	3	0.008	14th-century
14	Grimston glazed	body sherd	1	0.008	15th-century
TOTAL			8	0.084	

Appendix 4: Catalogue of Other Metal Objects not Small Found (either late post-medieval or undiagnostic)

Context	Quantity	Material	Object Name	Description	Object date
02	01	Fe	iron fitting	nailed bar	?late medieval