

Witham Archaeology

A Report to Mr Martyn Sexton

July 2013



NEW GARAGE AND STORE ROOM AT OAKHILL BARN, BILLINGFORD, NORFOLK

Archaeological Watching Brief

G Trimble

NEW GARAGE AND STORE AT OAKHILL BARN, BILLINGFORD, NORFOLK

Event Code: ENF 131409
Museum Accession No. : To be confirmed
Planning Application No.: 3PL/2013/0043
NGR: TG 0069 2054
OASIS ID. Withamar1-150684

Archaeological Watching Brief

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Fig. 1 Site Location Map

Fig. 2 Site Location Plan

Fig. 3 Plan of foundations showing drawn section locations

Fig. 4 Section Drawings

NEW GARAGE AND STORE AT OAKHILL BARN, BILLINGFORD, NORFOLK

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Witham Archaeology during groundworks relating to the construction of a garage and store room at Oakhill Barn, Billingford, Norfolk. The work was commissioned by Mr Martyn Sexton to satisfy the requirements of a condition of planning permission imposed by Breckland District Council.

Previous archaeological work in the surrounding area in the form of excavation, and evidence from cropmarks has revealed the presence of the Scheduled Monument of Billingford Roman town. The distribution of cropmarks indicates that field boundary ditches associated with the Roman town extend to within 50 metres of the southeast of the development site. Other cropmarks which may also be Roman in date occur to the east and north of the development site. Two previous watching briefs at Oakhill Barn, carried out during 2005 and 2006, produced no evidence of significant archaeological remains in the area.

The current watching brief failed to identify archaeological features or artefacts of any date. However, considering the relatively small scale of the development area, the possibility that features associated with the settlement occur in the area cannot be discounted.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Witham Archaeology during groundworks relating to the construction of a garage and store at Oakhill Barn, Billingford, Norfolk. The work was commissioned by Mr Martyn Sexton to satisfy the requirements of a condition of planning permission imposed by Breckland District Council. Attendance on site was on Tuesday 23rd April 2013.

The information in this document is presented with the proviso that further data may yet emerge. Witham Archaeology cannot, therefore, be held responsible for any loss, delay or damage, material or otherwise, arising out of this report. The document has been prepared in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Archaeologists.

2.0 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY (see Figs. 1&2)

The site lies at NGR TG 0069 2054, c. 650m northwest of the village of Billingford in the administrative district of Breckland, Norfolk. The town of Dereham is located 11km to the south.

Oakhill Barn is set within gently undulating agricultural land, on slightly sloping ground near the top of a low hillock. The ground gradually slopes away to the south, west and east beyond the site boundaries. The new buildings are located within the property boundary of Oakhill Barn on ground which is currently laid to lawn.

The site is located on drift geology of Mid Pleistocene Diamicton Till formed of glacial outwash sand and gravel. These superficial deposits are formed on bedrock geology of the Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation. (British Geological Survey, England & Wales Sheet 147, Solid & Drift, 1:50 000).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric activity in the parish is suggested by several artefact findspots on the high ground overlooking the River Wensum. These include a number of Neolithic axeheads and flint tools as well

as a Bronze Age axehead. The site of at least one Bronze Age barrow is known within the parish and a large circular enclosure visible as a cropmark (NHER 36394) north of Oakhill Barn has been variously interpreted as a barrow or as a hengiform monument.

The Fen Causeway Roman road (NHER 2796) runs through the south of the parish. A substantial Roman settlement was established here which spans the 1st and 4th centuries. Excavations in advance of gravel extraction in the southern part of the settlement revealed the remains of buildings, enclosures, a cemetery and a field system associated with the town (NHER 7206). Further enclosures (NHER 50976), and the line of another road close to the site of the town are visible as cropmarks on aerial photographs. Oakhill Barn is situated to the north of the settlement, flanked by probable Roman field systems to the east (NHER 50868) and northwest (NHER 50866).

The Roman town was a foci for Saxon settlement as evidenced by traces of Early Saxon buildings which were situated close to a site used for iron working in the Middle Saxon period. Late Saxon pottery sherds have also been found.

Billingford was a small settlement by the time of Domesday Book (1086), when land in the parish was divided between Thored, a free man, and an unnamed free woman (Brown 1984). St Peter's Church (NHER 7222) dates mainly to the 14th and 15th centuries, and Beck Hall an 18th century farmhouse (NHER 7215), is built on the site of a moated medieval hospital. Billingford Hall is a large 18th century house (NHER 16984).

Two watching briefs carried at Oakhill Barn in 2005-6, initially during groundworks associated with the construction of the present house, and then during the installation of drains, service pipes and a septic tank, failed to reveal evidence of archaeologically significant features or finds (Hobbs 2006).

4.0 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of the project were to:

- *allow the preservation by record of any surviving archaeological deposits and artefacts exposed by the development groundwork within the constraints imposed by the contractor's working methods, programme and development design.*
- *produce a project archive for deposition with the appropriate museum together with a client report.*
- *provide information for accession to the County Historic Environment Record.*

5.0 METHODOLOGY

Excavations of the building foundations by a tracked 360° excavator were closely monitored for archaeological features, deposits and artefacts. One site visit was made, coinciding with the works.

A series of colour and black and white photographs details the subsurface geological horizons as well as the progress of groundwork operations. Drawings were produced at scale 1:10, while written context descriptions were made for each unit of stratigraphy.

6.0 RESULTS (Figs 3&4)

No features or deposits of archaeological interest were recorded during the watching brief. The underlying geological deposits comprised mid brownish orange coarse sand gravel which occurred at between 0.50m and 0.60m below the present ground surface (03). Immediately above deposit (03) was a subsoil deposit (02) which measured between 0.10m and 0.20m in thickness across the investigation area. The subsoil consisted of light reddish brown coarse sand. Above the subsoil deposit (02) was topsoil (01) which measured 0.40m in depth and comprised light to mid grey sand.

7.0 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Combined information from the current project and two watching briefs undertaken in 2005-6 indicates a low potential for evidence of occupation in the immediate vicinity of Oakhill Barn. While cropmarks on aerial photographs show a system of enclosure ditches just 50m southeast of the current site, the features are probably associated with field systems defined by widely dispersed boundaries and associated with a low densities of finds.

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author of this report would like to thank the owner of the property Mr Martyn Sexton for interest and support in ensuring the successful completion of this project. Thanks are also due to the groundwork contractor Mr Peter Rogers of D&R Builders, for cooperation extended during fieldwork.

9.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, P. (ed.), 1984, Domesday Book: Norfolk. Chichester, Phillimore
Hobbs, B., 2006, An Archaeological Watching Brief at High House Farm, Billingford, Norfolk. NAU Archaeology Report No. 1131
Hobbs, B., 2006, An Archaeological Watching Brief at High House Farm, Billingford, Norfolk (Addendum). NAU Archaeology Report No. 1163

10.0 PROJECT/ ARCHIVE DETAILS

10.1 Project Details

EVENT NUMBER: ENF131408

PLANNING APPLICATION No.: 3PL/2013/0043/

FIELD OFFICER: Gary Trimble

NGR: TG 0069 2054

CIVIL PARISH: Billingford

DATE OF INTERVENTION: 23/04/2013

TYPE OF INTERVENTION: Watching Brief

UNDERTAKEN FOR: Mr Martyn Sexton

10.2 Archive Details

PRESENT LOCATION: Witham Archaeology, Unit 6, Sleaford Station Business Centre, Station Road, Sleaford, Lincolnshire, NG34 7RG

FINAL LOCATION: Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

MUSEUM ACCESSION No.: Yet to be allocated

PROPOSED ACCESSION DATE: October 2013

The Site Archive Comprises:

Context Records	3
Section Drawings at Scale 1:10	3
Site Report	1
Day sheet	1

It is intended that transfer of the archive in accordance with current published requirements will be undertaken following completion of this project.

COLOUR PLATES



Plate 1: View showing site before groundworks. Facing South



Plate 2: View showing site during excavation of foundations. Facing South.



Plate 3: View showing excavated foundations. Facing northwest. Oakhill Barn in background.



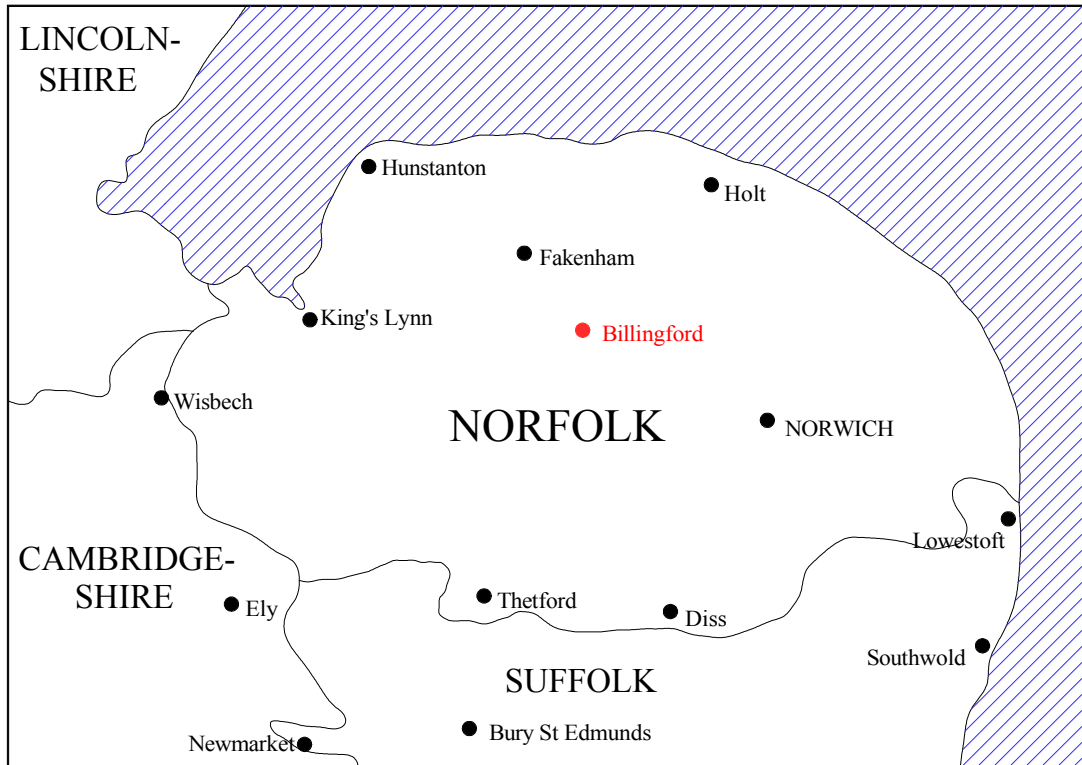
Plate 4: View of section 2. Scales 2 x 2m



Plate 5: View of section 4. Scales 2 x 2m



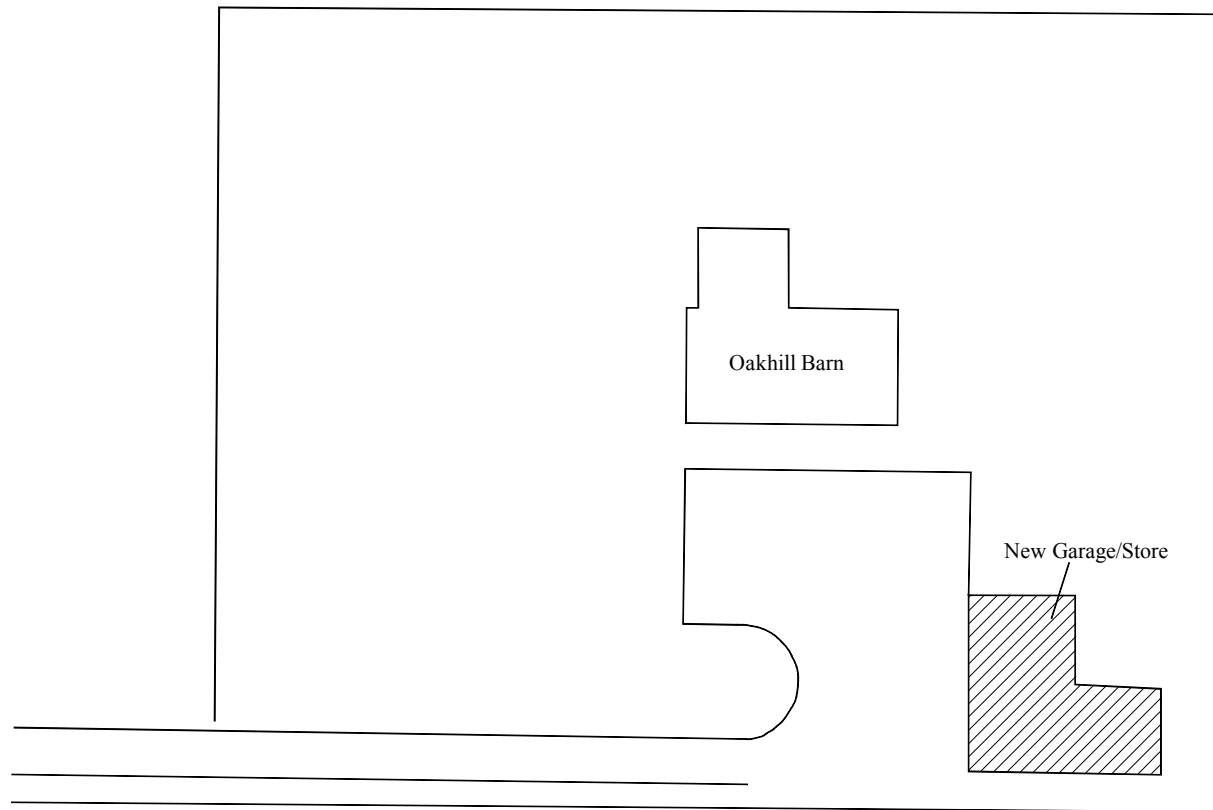
Plate 6: View showing north part of foundation



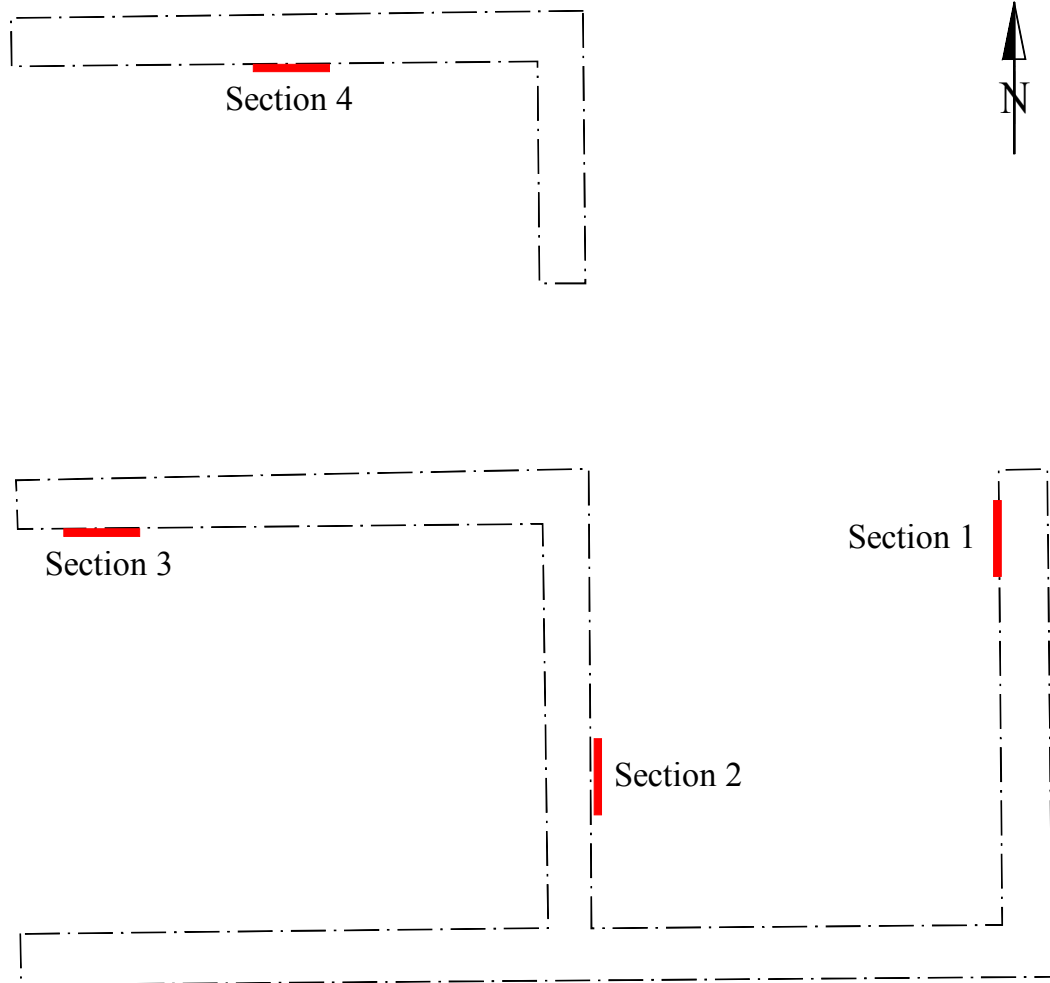
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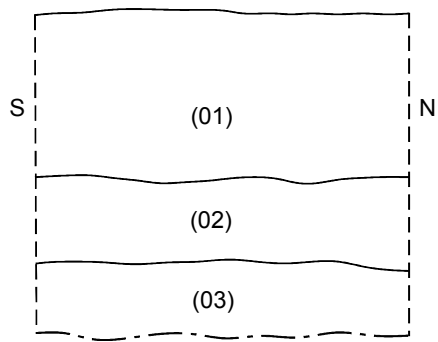


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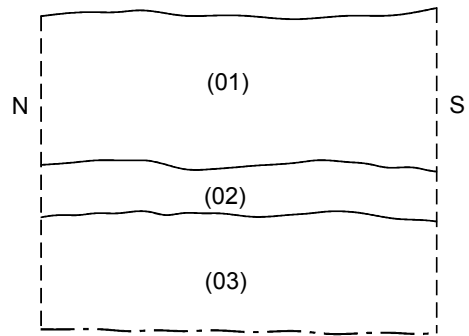


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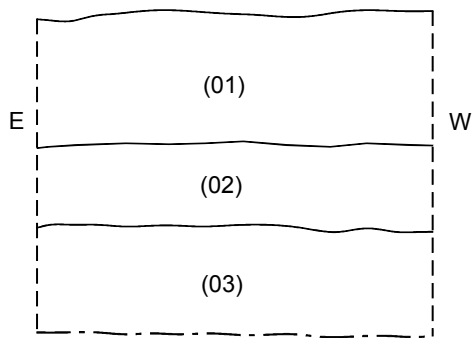




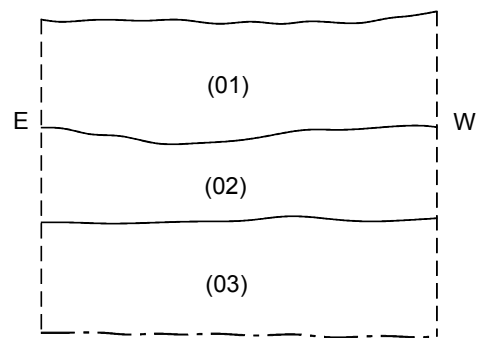
Section 1



Section 2



Section 3



Section 4



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