

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Burgh Castle: Watching Brief for Norfolk Archaeological Trust, March 1996

Trevor Ashwin

No archaeological observations were made during the cleaning-out of a drainage ditch along the edge of the reed beds adjacent to the Saxon Shore fort. The location of a possible structure was recorded during monitoring of fencing works in the field immediately to the south-east of the fort.

1. Dyke Clearance (Site 10486) 10471.

At the request of English Nature, the Norfolk Archaeological Trust undertook the re-excavation of a fouled drainage ditch running along the eastern edge of the Glebe Marshes, Burgh Castle. The dyke was situated immediately to the west of the Roman fort and alongside the Angles' Way long-distance footpath. The work was necessary to establish a clearly-defined boundary feature to deter walkers and visitors from entering the reed beds and causing disturbance to this sensitive wildlife habitat. To this end, the redefinition of the dyke was accompanied by the stripping-out of all causeways and access-routes which previously crossed it.

Under the terms of an Archaeological Brief issued by the Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Section a continuous Watching Brief was maintained from 4-9 March by Trevor Ashwin (NAU), who supervised mechanical ditching to minimise any disturbance to archaeological deposits. A total length of c. 650m of the ditch's length was re-excavated. As well as the length marking the eastern edge of the reed beds a short east-to-west aligned extension at the north end alongside the former staithe was also monitored.

The ditch was overgrown by mature reed, and was very heavily fouled by silt and organic matter throughout its length; indeed in some places (especially at the north end alongside the staithe) it was difficult to see its original line at all before excavation began. A 360° hydraulic excavator was used; the dyke was cleaned out - as requested by English Nature - to its original flat base (usually encountered at a depth of c. 1 - 1.2m) and to a width of approximately 3m. Wherever possible spoil was dumped on the landward side (*i.e.* alongside the footpath) to ensure that it was not rapidly washed back into the ditch by high tides.

No archaeological evidence was recorded. Prevailing water-levels, with the cleared ditch nearly full to the brim with opaque grey water at all times, meant that there were very few opportunities to examine the sides or base of the 'new' feature as it was excavated. However the spoil removed from the ditch was virtually all dark silty material admixed with reed roots and other plant matter. This showed that the supervised cleaning operation was successful in ensuring that the line of the redefined ditch remained within the feature's previous alignment(s) and did not disturb either archaeological or natural deposits. Two pre-existing causeways across the dyke were machined out, one at the northern end and another close to the north-west corner of the Saxon Shore fort. This work revealed no obviously natural or undisturbed material, suggesting that these areas too had in fact been ditched-out in the past.

No artefacts were found with the exception of modern brick, bottles and other rubbish. The conditions were most un conducive to metal-detector use, and no metal items of any archaeological interest were recovered.

2. Fencing works (Site 10471) 10486

Observation of dyke clearance coincided with the erection of new stockproof fencing by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust in the vicinity of the Saxon Shore fort, and works in the field immediately south-east of the fort were observed intermittently. Preliminary work here involved

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