



**Monitoring of Works under Archaeological
Supervision and Control**

**West Acre Theatre
West Acre**

**Prepared for
West Acre Arts Foundation**

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HW Report No. 128**



Project name	West Acre Theatre (Phase 1)
Client	West Acre Theatre
NHER Event No	ENF 129714
Grid reference	TF 7788 1488
Date of fieldwork	25th September 2012 – 13th March 2013

Introduction

West Acre Theatre is a thriving community theatre located in central Norfolk. A plan for the long term future of the Theatre includes the building of new facilities for both the public and performers. This will create a new bar and entrance foyer as well as new performance and rehearsal facilities. The works will be phased over several years Phase I commenced Autumn 2012 and is due for completion Autumn 2013. A timetable for Phase 2 works has yet to be finally confirmed. Due to the Theatres location in an archaeologically and historically rich landscape Norfolk Historic Environment requested that a programme of archaeological works be undertaken. In this instance it was required that all groundworks for the development be carried out under archaeological supervision and control.

Geology and Topography

The site lay within the Nar Valley and sits close to the north bank of the river with the land gradually rising to the north. The present village of Westacre lay just half a kilometre to the north-east on slightly higher ground (Fig. 1).

The British Geological Survey (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk>) indicates that the underlying bedrock geology of the region is chalk overlain by alluvial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel.

Historical Background

West Acre is a parish with a long history; over 150 sites are listed in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record for this parish and 59 lay within 1km of the Theatre. Our knowledge of this area is greater than for many other parishes as a systematic field survey consisting of both fieldwalking and metal detecting has been carried out, the results of which have been published in Norfolk Archaeology (Davison 2003). In a complementary article the

documentary evidence for late medieval and post-medieval West Acre has also been reviewed (Davison and Cushion 2004).

Finds dating from the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age are known from across the parish. The majority of these are worked flints dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Age although a few metal artefacts have also been found. A notable scatter of these is located c.1km west of the present site. Both Iron Age and Romano-British finds have been made across the parish; again any notable concentrations of this material lay over 1km distant from the development site.

Two Early Saxon cemetery sites are known in West Acre one close to the present village centre and the other on the parish boundary with Castle Acre. Despite several finds of this period having been made there is no obvious concentration making it difficult to pinpoint any possible centre of settlement. During the Middle Saxon period the number of known finds falls only to increase again in the Late Saxon period with a concentration located in and around the present village centre. Occasional finds of Early, Middle and Late Saxon date have been found a short distance to the north of the Theatre site.

During the medieval period West Acre became a place of some religious importance with the founding of the Augustinian Priory in 1102. This remained in use until the Dissolution in 1538. Pieces of medieval stonework, reused from the Priory, have been recognised in several of the post-medieval houses within the village.

Archaeological Methods

Work was undertaken in phases. Phase 1a consisting of a small extension to the west of the present building and the insertion of a new sewerage tank to the south west. Phase 1b consisted of a larger extension to the north of the building and the construction of a consolidated track around the north, west and south perimeters of the plot.

An archaeologist was on site when excavation for these works was being undertaken. During the excavation of footings and service trenches the excavation was closely monitored in order to identify any archaeological features. Spoil removed from the trenches was mainly kept on site and was metal detected in order to maximise finds retrieval. The footings trenches were excavated through soils and into the underlying natural to a depth of at least 1.2m. Recording of sample sections was undertaken, but due to several trench collapses and the possibility of further such collapses some of the recording was undertaken from the top of the trench.

For the creation of the track just 0.2m of topsoil was removed, not revealing the underlying subsoil/natural. The line of the track was metal detected and the

soils detected a second time once removed and spread to the south of the site.

Written, drawn and photographic records were made of all the works.

Results

The results from the monitoring work were unexpectedly poor, a large proportion of the development areas having been disturbed in the past, most recently by building works undertaken within the last 20 years. Water pipes, sewerage pipes, drainage pipes and electricity cable trenches crossed the footing trenches in several places (Fig. 2). The old sewerage tank lay on the line of the footings as did another larger and deep disturbance which was reportedly a pit dug for the now defunct sewerage tank, but which was not used due to trench collapse. Between many of the recent interferences it was apparent that topsoil had also been removed in the past down to the top of the natural. Undisturbed deposits were noted in isolated areas between these intrusions and in the north and north eastern footing trenches.

No other features were noted during these works and only one modern horseshoe was recovered by metal detecting; this was discarded. Some variation in the undisturbed deposits were noted. To the south of the site (Fig 3, S1 and S2), close to the river the natural was made up of pale orangey brown soft sand (04 and 09) overlain by a dark orangey brown, heavily iron panned and compacted sand (03 and 08). This was overlain by an orangey brown sandy loam with some flints (02 and 07) which was part of the old soil horizon. To the north of the site north a pale yellow grey fine sand (13, 18 and 24) was the lowest natural deposit revealed (Fig. 3 S3, S4 and S5). In Section 3 this was overlain by a dark orange sand with iron-panning (12) while in Sections 4 and 5 there was a narrow band of gravel (17 and 23) above which were laminated and iron-panned orangey grey sands (16 and 22). Above this was a further thin deposit of very stony orangey brown loam (15 and 21) sealed by an old topsoil of sandy loam (11, 14 and 21).

In summary observation of the footing trenches revealed variation within the alluvial natural deposits. Where soils above this were undisturbed an old topsoil/plough soil was observed, although modern services and landscaping had severely truncated this.

The new sewerage tank was placed to the south of the building closer to the river. This was excavated through dark humic clay/silt/sands (25), a mixture typical of soils in low lying areas close to a river. No finds or features were noted.

The area of the new consolidated track was monitored. As only 0.2m of topsoil was removed any underlying features were not revealed and remain

undisturbed. Observation and metal detecting of these soils revealed one late 20th-century bottle top (discarded).

Conclusions

Despite being located in an area of high potential for the recovery of archaeological finds and features, nothing of significance was disturbed during this phase of the building works. Although there had been modern disturbance to much of the area, it is likely that this lack of evidence reflects the marginal nature of the lands adjacent to the River Nar and that from the prehistoric period through to post-medieval periods the higher ground to the north was favoured for settlement.

Acknowledgements

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Bibliography

BGS <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

Davison, A., 2003, 'The archaeology of the parish of West Acre. Part 1: Field survey evidence' *Norfolk Archaeology*, 44, 202-221

Davison, A. 2004, 'The archaeology of the parish of West Acre. Part 2: The documentary background' *Norfolk Archaeology*, B., 44, 456-481





Figure 1. Site location plan.

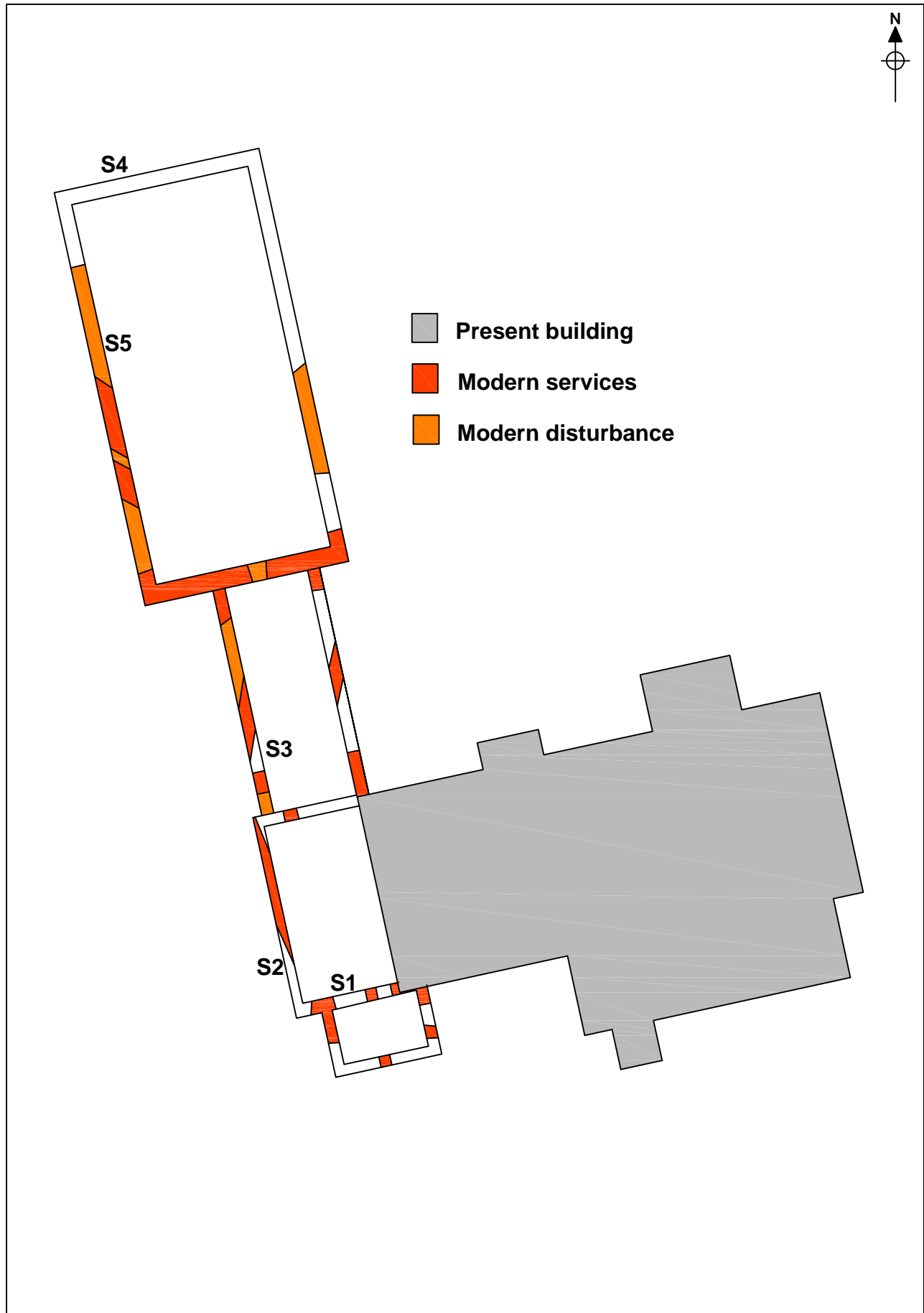


Figure 2. Site plan showing modern disturbance and location of sections. Scale 1:250.

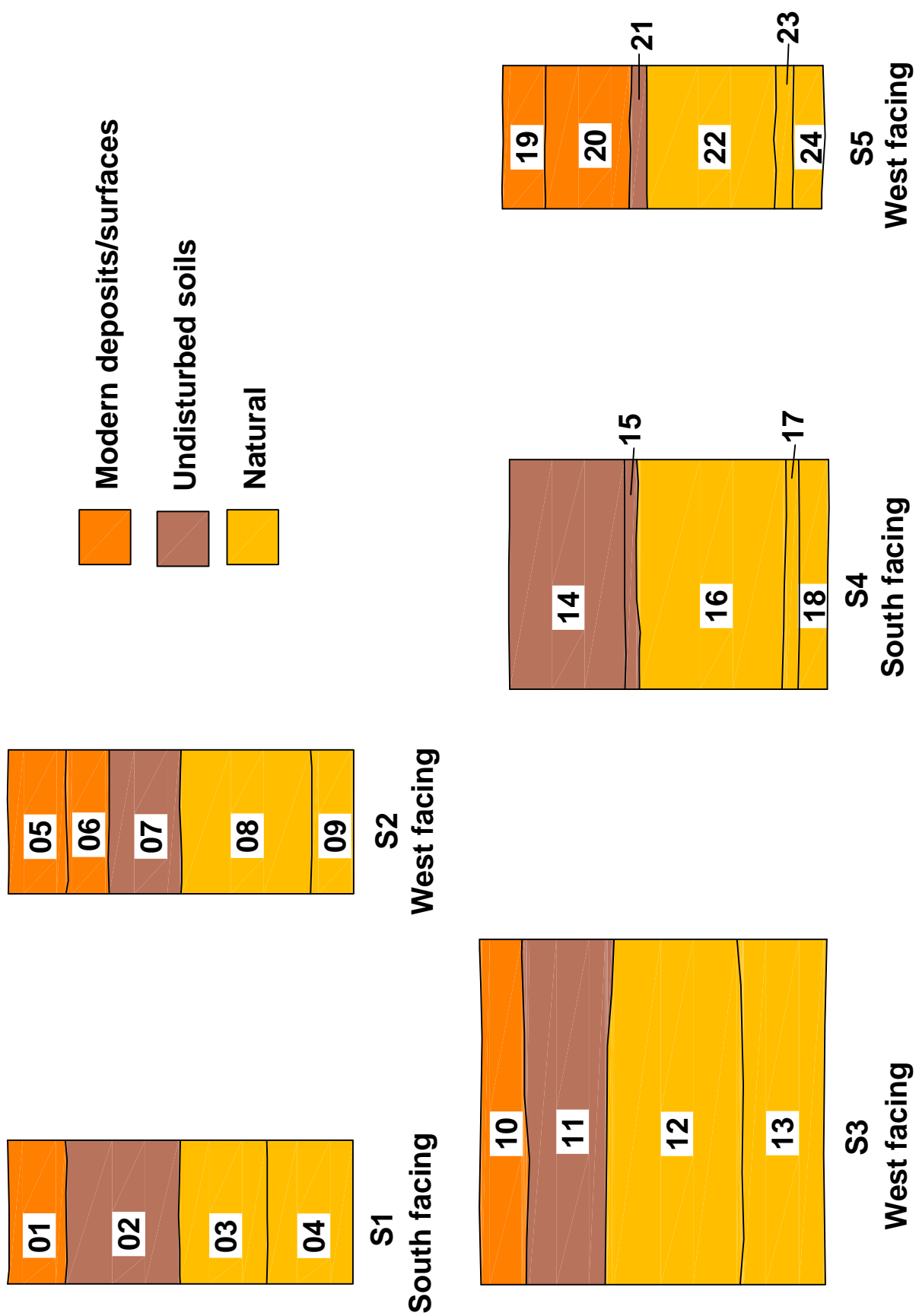


Figure 3. Sections. Scale 1:20.

Appendix 1
Context list

Context No.	Type	Section	Description	Category	Date
01	Deposit	1	Laminated gravels	Surface	Modern
02	Deposit	1	Orangey brown sandy loam	Topsoil/subsoil	
03	Deposit	1	Orangey brown sand, heavily iron panned, compact	Natural	-
04	Deposit	1	Pale orangey brown sand	Natural	-
05	Deposit	2	Hoggin	Surface	Modern
06	Deposit	2	Gravel	Surface. make up	Modern
07	Deposit	2	Orangey grey/brown sandy loam	Topsoil/subsoil	
08	Deposit	2	Ginger brown sand, heavily iron panned, compact	Natural	-
09	Deposit	2	Pale grey sand	Natural	-
10	Deposit	3	Hoggin	Surface	Modern
11	Deposit	3	Orangey brown sandy loam	Topsoil/subsoil	
12	Deposit	3	Dark orange sand, with iron panning	Natural	-
13	Deposit	3	Pale yellow grey sand	Natural	-
14	Deposit	4	Orangey brown sandy loam	Topsoil/subsoil	
15	Deposit	4	Orangey brown stoney loam	Subsoil	
16	Deposit	4	Orangey grey laminated sands	Natural	-
17	Deposit	4	Orangey brown gravel	Natural	-
18	Deposit	4	Pale yellow grey sand	Natural	-
19	Deposit	5	Brown stoney loam	Imported topsoil	Modern
20	Deposit	5	Brown loam	Imported topsoil	Modern
21	Deposit	5	Orangey brown stoney loam	Subsoil	
22	Deposit	5	Orangey grey laminated sands	Natural	-
23	Deposit	5	Orangey brown gravel	Natural	-
24	Deposit	5	Pale yellow grey sand	Natural	-
25	Deposit	-	Very dark grey humic mix of silts sands and clays	Naturally deposited	

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Project details

Project name	Westacre Theatre
Short description of the project	Watching Brief on Phase 1 of the development at West Acre Theatre. The site is located in the Nar Valley but close to West Acre Priory and areas where finds dating from the Neolithic through to the medieval period have been recorded. Monitoring of the footing trenches for the development however shoed that much of the present area of development had been disturbed within the last 20 years. Only features and finds of modern origin were noted.
Project dates	Start: 25-09-2012 End: 13-03-2013
Previous/future work	No / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	ENF 129714 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS

Project location

Country	England
Site location	NORFOLK KINGS LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK WEST ACRE Westacre Theatre
Study area	400.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TF 7788 1488 52 0 52 42 06 N 000 37 58 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Heather Wallis
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Heather Wallis
Project director/manager	Heather Wallis
Project supervisor	Heather Wallis

Type of sponsor/funding body	Other Charitable Trust
Name of sponsor/funding body	Westacre Arts Foundation Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service
Digital Contents	"other"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service
Paper Contents	"other"
Paper Media available	"Drawing", "Notebook - Excavation", ' Research', ' General Notes', "Unpublished Text"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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