



**River Nar Restoration
West Acre Swale**

**Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample
Excavation**

ENF134503

**Heather Wallis
July 2014**

HW Report No. 149



Project name	River Nar Restoration – West Acre Swale
Parish	West Acre
Event No.	ENF 134503
Grid Ref.	TF 7832 1525
Date of Work	17th – 20th June 2014

Introduction

The Norfolk Rivers Trust is undertaking restoration works along the River Nar to improve the ecological condition of the river. The works at Fuller's Lane, West Acre (Fig. 1) address the problem of sediment pollution from soils washed through the village and into the river at West Acre ford. The works have diverted run-off water into a newly created swale to the west of the road; a site within the precinct of West Acre Priory, a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Due the archaeological importance of the site a Brief for an Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample Excavation was issued by Norfolk Historic Environment Service and Scheduled Monument consent was applied for, and granted by English Heritage.

Location, Topography and Geology

The development area lay within West Acre Priory between the eastern precinct wall and an earthwork hollow which once formed one of the priory ponds. The ground to the north was firm and dry, but as the land slopes down to the river, to the south, the soils become soft and waterlogged.

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.

Archaeological Background

West Acre is a parish with a long history; over 150 sites are listed in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record for this parish of which over 20 lay within 500m of the site. Our knowledge of this area is greater than for many other parishes in Norfolk 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. 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. Occasional finds of Early, Middle and Late Saxon date have been found a short distance to the north of the 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. Many of the buildings are visible as earthworks, along with a hollow way and monastic fishponds (earthwork survey Cushion 2003, 154-6). The site of the proposed swale lay between the eastern most fish pond and the precinct boundary. Stonework survives along several length of the precinct boundary indicating that the precinct was once enclosed by a wall. However, evidence for a wall in the section adjacent to the development has not yet been identified. To the north-east of the site further earthworks have been recorded representing part of the deserted medieval village and post-medieval chalk pits (Cushion 2003, 76-7). Pieces of medieval stonework, reused from the Priory, have been recognised in several of the post-medieval houses within the village.

The development

The swale was designed in order to minimise the impact on the scheduled ancient monument of West Acre Priory. It was located adjacent to the present low banked field boundary, which was also the medieval precinct boundary, and away from any other known earthworks, the nearest being those of a fishpond which lay a few metres to the west. Consideration was given to the design so that it will be clearly identified as a modern feature and not, in the future, be confused with earthworks of the medieval priory.

The proposed works consisted of three elements

1. A pipe from the road to a new channel

A pipe was inserted through the field and precinct boundary. This sloped from the present ground surface to the east of the boundary down into a newly created channel to the west of the boundary.

2. A narrow channel

This channel was cut adjacent to present field boundary and is 15m long, 1m wide and 0.5m deep. It carries the piped water to the swale.

3. A swale

Beyond the channel a wider, deeper pool was excavated to allow sediment settling. This is 10m long, 2m wide at ground level, shelving to a narrower base, and is 1m deep. The base of the swale has been lined with 0.15m of

chalk. This will clearly mark the base of swale and is intended to prevent over excavation during future maintenance of the swale.

Methods

Access to the field was via a gate some 10m north of the proposed works. Movement of machines and other vehicles was limited to a narrow corridor adjacent to the field boundary and the proposed channel and swale. There are no earthworks in this area. Machine mats were used in the southern, wet part of the site in order to minimise ground disturbance.

Prior to work commencing (Plate 1) the site was laid out and the machine movement corridor defined. Initial excavation was by machine using a flat-bladed bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision. Soils were removed in spits until a good archaeological horizon was reached, which in this case was the underlying natural deposits. During this process metal detecting was undertaken. Following the removal of the upper soils by machine the site was monitored by the Norfolk Historic Environment Service.

All spoil from the excavations was removed from site and spread in a field some 0.5km to the north of the site. This has avoided the creation of new earthworks and the possible obscuring of surviving medieval earthworks within West Acre Priory site.

The archaeological record comprise written, drawn, photographic and survey data. A single context recording methodology was adopted, with plans of being drawn at 1:50 and sections at 1:10. The written record comprise context descriptions on *pro-forma* sheets. Both black & white negatives and digital colour photographs were taken.

All works were carried out in full accordance with national and regional guidelines for the treatment of archaeological remains, and in particular the guidance set out in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) and the *Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (1995 revised 2001 and 2008).

On completion of the archaeological works the sides of the swale were shaped to a sloping profile but remained within the archaeologically excavated footprint (Plate 2).

Archaeological results

The topsoil (01) was removed across the site. This was dark grey brown silty loam with occasional small flint and extended to a depth of c.0.5m. It had been heavily disturbed both by roots and through being trampled by cattle. Directly underlying the topsoil were the undisturbed natural deposits of the Nar Valley. At the south end of the site this consisted of mid grey clayey silt, oxidising to brown grey, with moderate chalk fleck (02). A small sondage was excavated through this which showed this deposit to be 0.2m deep overlying a further alluvial deposit of dark grey brown silt with very fine sand and occasional chalk fleck (07) (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Section 1 and Plate 3).

The natural in the northern, dryer part of the site (Plate 4) was mid orange brown clayey silt with some fine sand with moderate medium flints and moderate chalk fleck (03). At the north end of the trench this became greyer in colour with larger patches of chalk. No archaeological features were identified within this trench.

Excavation of a cut through the bank and hedge to the east was also undertaken. This was c.0.8m wide and excavated to formation level (Fig.2, Fig. 3, Section 2 and Plate 5). It cut through the present fence and hedge line, behind which was a heavily silted ditch (08, 09). Beyond this was a bank made up of dark brown silty loam with occasional medium flints (04). This was probably created from up cast of the ditch. Both the ditch and bank are likely to be 20th-century in date. The bank has since slumped and now overlies the edge of the ditch to the west and a former surface to the east (06). This surface was made up of compacted flints and chalk within a dark brown silty loam (06). Over this lay a mixed deposit of dark brown silty loam with loose medium flints (05) which represents eroded material from the track. The present track has a gravel/flint compacted surface the edge of which lay under an encroaching verge.

Finds

A small number of finds was recovered from the topsoil removed from the swale most of which are building material. These consist of one chalk block, one piece of coarse grained limestone and four fragments of ceramic building material. Two of these pieces form a single peg tile, made of estuarine-type clay and is probably 13th-15th century in date. This had been re-used as mortar adheres to the reverse of the tile obscuring the peg hole.

Also recovered was one tiny fragment of medieval pottery (<1g) and one modern iron bar.

Conclusions

Excavation within the precinct of West Acre Priory did not reveal any buried archaeological features, nor was there any disturbance to any of the surviving earthworks.

It was hoped that excavation through the line of the precinct boundary may reveal parts of the precinct wall. However, all deposits revealed here were of Post-medieval or Modern origin. The track which leads to a ford across the River Nar is of some antiquity and is clearly shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. The antiquity of this was shown by the presence of earlier metalled surface.

Overall the project can be deemed a success in that the desired improvements to the water quality of the Nar should be achieved without

impacting on important archaeological deposits or disturbing the medieval earthworks of West Acre priory.

Bibliography

- Cushion, B., 2003, *Earthworks of Norfolk*, East Anglian Archaeology 104
- Davison, A., 2003, 'The archaeology of the parish of West Acre. Part 1: Field survey evidence' *Norfolk Archaeology* 44, 202-221
- Davison, A. and Cushion, B., 2004, 'The archaeology of the parish of West Acre. Part 2: The documentary background' *Norfolk Archaeology* 45, 456-481





Figure 1. Site location plan showing scheduled area (red).

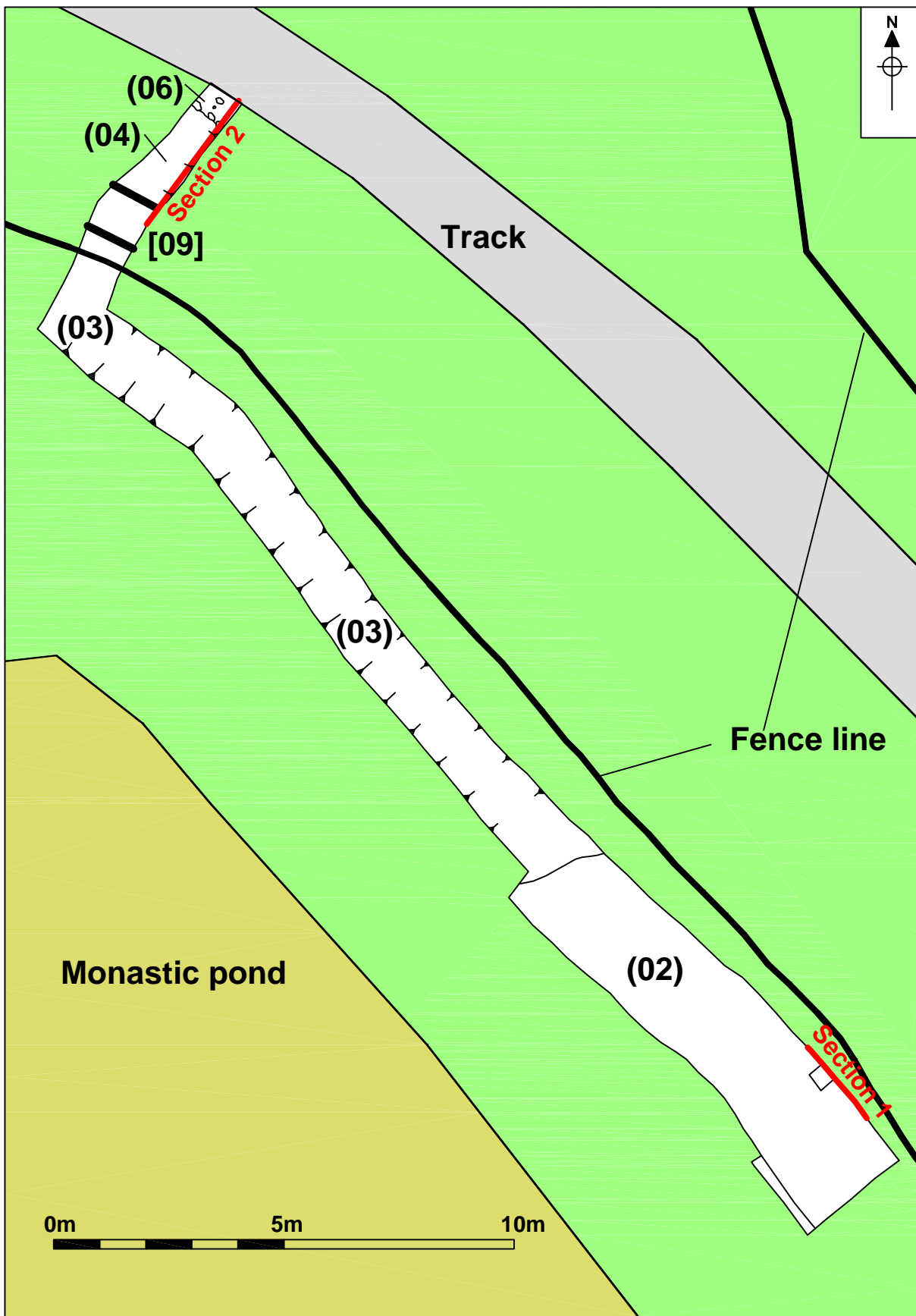
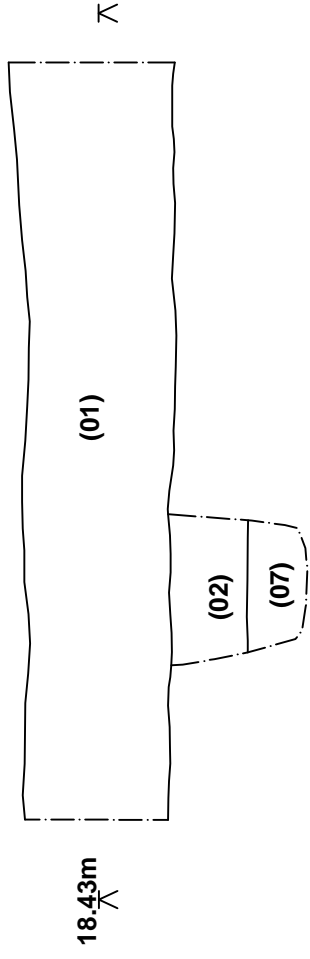
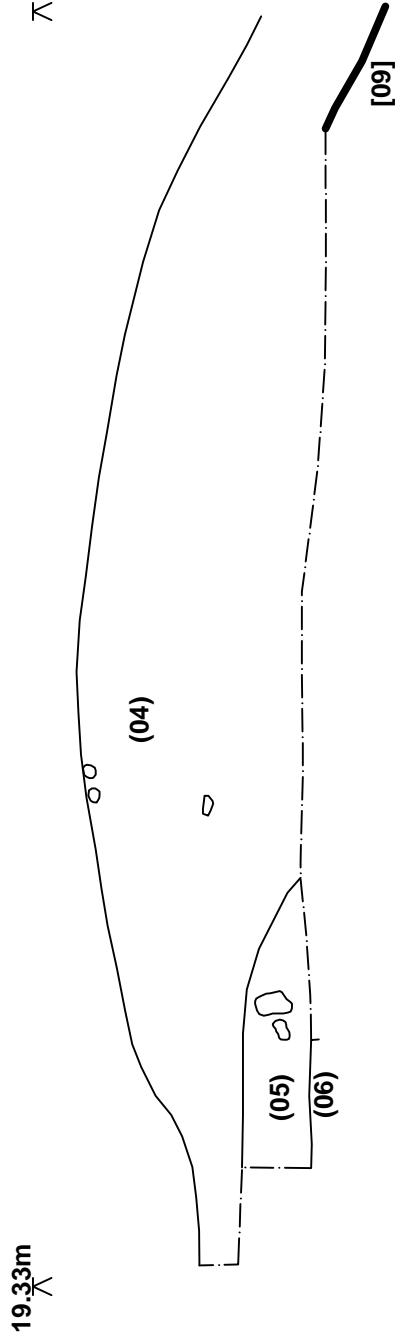


Figure 2. Site Plan, area of works unshaded.



Section 1. Through deposits in swale. South-west facing.



Section 2. Through bank deposits. North-west facing.



Figure 3. Sections. Scale 1:20.



Plate 1. Site at start of works. looking south-east.



Plate 2. Site at end of works, looking south-east.



Plate 3. Deposits at south end of Swale.
Section 1, looking north-east.



Plate 4. Deposits at north end of trench, looking south-west.



Plate 5. Deposits through bank.
Section 2, looking south-east.

**Appendix 1
Context list**

Context No.	Type	Category	Date
01	Deposit	Topsoil	-
02	Deposit	Natural	-
03	Deposit	Natural	-
04	Deposit	Bank	Modern
05	Deposit	Surface	Post-medieval
06	Deposit	Eroded surface	Post-medieval/Modern
07	Deposit	Natural	-
08	Deposit	Ditch fill	Modern
09	Cut	Ditch	Modern

**Appendix 2
Finds List**

with thanks to Sue Anderson and Andrew Rogerson

Context No	Material	Quantity	Weight (g)	Date
01	Tile	4	604	Medieval
01	Pottery	1	<1	Medieval
01	Limestone	1		-
01	Chalk	1		-
01	Iron	1		Modern

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Project details

Project name	West Acre Swale
Short description of the project	Archaeological works undertaken ahead of the creation of a swale within the monastic precinct of West Acre Priory. Te swale was located adjacent to the east precinct boundary and near to the earthworks of a medieval pond. No archaeological features were revealed by the works.
Project dates	Start: 17-06-2014 End: 20-06-2014
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	ENF 134503 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	""Part Excavation""
Prompt	Scheduled Monument Consent

Project location

Country	England
Site location	NORFOLK KINGS LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK WEST ACRE West Acre Swale
Study area	40.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TF 7832 1525 52.7050980735 0.639674957453 52 42 18 N 000 38 22 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	John Percival
Type of sponsor/funding body	Norfolk Rivers Trust

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Norfolk Museums Service
Physical Contents	"Ceramics", "other"
Digital Archive recipient	Norfolk Museums Service
Digital Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Norfolk Museums Service
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Notebook - Excavation', ' Research', ' General Notes", "Plan", "Report", "Section"

Project bibliography

1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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