



**Pye's Lane
Castle Acre**

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

ENF 142528

**Heather Wallis
August 2017**

HW Report No. 215



| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Project name | Pye's Lane |
| Parishes | Castle Acre |
| Event No. | ENF 142528 |
| Grid Ref. | TF 8196 1525 |
| Date of Fieldwork | 21st and 22nd August 2017 |

Summary

A small excavation for a new soakaway was undertaken on the south verge of Pye's Lane, Castle Acre. This was located immediately adjacent to the earthworks of Castle Acre castle. One feature, a possible small extraction pit, was recorded. No dating evidence was recovered, but it is likely that this pit dated to the medieval period.

Introduction

Works were undertaken by Norfolk County Council Highways Department to improve drainage in Pye's Lane, Castle Acre (Fig. 1). Pye's Lane is a narrow road which runs east to west from High Street, along the northern edge of the castle earthworks, before turning north to join Town Lane. Surface water run-off was a localised problem at the eastern end of the road, and in order to address this a new soakaway was excavated in the verge opposite Friars Croft house (Fig. 2).

As the site was located on the perimeter of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Castle Acre castle, both Historic England and Norfolk Historic Environment Service were consulted prior to the works, by Norfolk County Council Highways Department. A Brief for the Monitoring of Works under Archaeological Supervision and Control was issued by Norfolk Historic Environment Service. Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of the soakaway were undertaken over two days in August 2017.

All works were undertaken 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 *Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).

Geology

The bedrock geology of the area is chalk overlain by Lowestoft formation chalky till with outwash sands and gravels.

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

Summary Archaeological Background

A search of the Historic Environment Record was carried out for a 500m radius centred on the soakaway site. This returned 105 records of which 30 were Find Spots, 47 Monuments and 28 Buildings. This included the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of Castle Acre Castle and Castle Acre Priory, the remains of which dominate the village. Of the buildings, the Castle, the bailey gate, the Priory gatehouse, other Priory buildings and St James Church are all Grade 1 listed buildings. In addition to this one Grade II* building and 17 Grade II buildings lay within the search area.

The earliest evidence relates to the prehistoric period and include flint flakes and flint tools dating to the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age. Standing out amongst the finds are flint cores, a Neolithic polished hand-axe and a copper alloy socketed axe-head dating to the Bronze Age.

No Iron Age artefacts have been found but occasional finds from the Roman period have been recorded, including coins and pottery. This is perhaps not unexpected as Peddars Way, one of the main Roman roads across the region, runs through the present village.

Evidence for a timber built Late Saxon hall was revealed during excavations within the castle precinct in the 1970s and 80s. Beyond this, within the village, occasional sherds of pottery have been found and small scale archaeological works have recorded Late Saxon ditches and features.

After the Norman Conquest the Late Saxon hall was replaced by a stone building, which in turn was replaced in the 12th century by a stone keep, the remains of which we see today. The keep was set on a motte with a barbican to the west and a bailey to the south. At this time, a planned town was laid out to the west of the castle, the northern gateway to which still stands, spanning Bailey Street. On the south west edge of the village is Castle Acre Priory. This Cluniac Priory was founded in 1089, but the remains there today of the 12th-century and later church and claustral buildings. These are set within a larger enclosure which includes earthworks of other buildings and features, such as fishponds. Earthwork surveys of both the castle and priory have previously been undertaken (Cushion and Davison 2003). One Norman architectural feature is also present in St James' Church although most of the present building dates to the 14th and 15th centuries.

Small quantities of medieval pottery have been found throughout the village, unusual finds include a complete costrel and a copper alloy ampulla. Where there have been archaeological interventions medieval ditches, post-holes and pits have been recorded along with a probable kiln. Medieval buildings include a possible 15th-century Almonry Chapel near to the church and two sets of 16th-century buildings towards the south end of Bailey Street, which were undoubtedly high-status buildings. Many of the later buildings within the village have re-used medieval stonework incorporated in their fabric.

During the relaying of the sewer system throughout the village in 1985-6, medieval and post-medieval surfaces were recorded below the modern roads. One of these trenches ran along Pye's Lane, adjacent to the present site, but no finds or features were noted at this location (Leah 1993). Other post-medieval evidence takes the form of artefacts and buildings; several 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century buildings have been recorded in the village.

Observations

A rectangular soakaway measuring 6.8m x 1.6m was excavated on the southern road verge (Fig. 2). In this location, the verge is banked, with a hedge and trees along its brow (Plate 1). The soakaway was 1.7m deep, as measured from the level of the road, and c. 2.6m deep from the top of the banked verge.

When the northern section of the soakaway had been excavated to a depth of c.1m the east facing section was recorded and a plan made of the trench. After this, access to the trench was not possible, so all further recording was undertaken from the top edge of the trench. Sections are shown on Fig. 3.

The underlying natural chalk with pockets of silty sand and large flints was, at its highest point, just c.0.5m below the road surface. In the eastern end of the trench (Plate 2) a pit (**06**), c.1m deep, had been cut into the chalk. It's lowest fill (**07**) was made up of chalk fragments, above which were deposits of mid orange brown sandy silt with frequent chalk fragments (**10**) and a 50/50 mix of mid orange grey fine silty clay and chalk lump (**05**). The upper fill of the pit consisted of fine, orangish grey sandy silt with moderate chalk fragments and medium sized flints. A layer of compacted chalk lump (**03**) sealed the top of the pit. Over this lay a deposit of mid orangish grey, fine sandy silt with occasional chalk fragments and medium flints (**02**), which may have once formed an old topsoil. This deposit had been cut away by re-profiling of the verge, and the upper part of the present bank now consists of brown grey fine silty loam (**01**) which was very heavily rooted from the adjacent tree and hedge.

Noted in the edge of the east facing section, and seen in plan crossing the site, was a linear trench (**09**). This was filled with orangish brown, slightly silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks and chalk flecks (**08**) and ran to a degraded wooden post, the top of which was visible below the topsoil. The linear feature was an old cable trench and the post the base of an old telegraph pole (Plate 3).

At the east end of the site the deposits were different. A orangish grey fine sandy silt with chalk fragments (**12**) lay on top of the natural chalk, and a layer of chalk fragments (**13**) lay over this. A small dump of mid brownish grey silty loam containing occasional chalk fragments and pieces of red brick (**15**) was recorded, above which was a topsoil of mid brownish grey silty loam (**14**).

Conclusions

One pit of unconfirmed date was recorded under the banked verge. It is probable that this was a small extraction pit and is likely to be medieval in date. There was no indication that the bank on the south side of Pye's Lane was deliberately constructed as part of the castle earthworks. It seems likely that the impression of a bank has been formed by the excavation of the castle ditch to its south and the creation of a hollow-way along Pye's Lane to its north.

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Bibliography

Cushion, B. and Davison, A., 2003

Earthworks of Norfolk, East Anglian Archaeology 104.

Leah, M., 1993

'Excavations and Watching Brief at Castle Acre 1985-6', *Norfolk Archaeology* 41, 494-507.

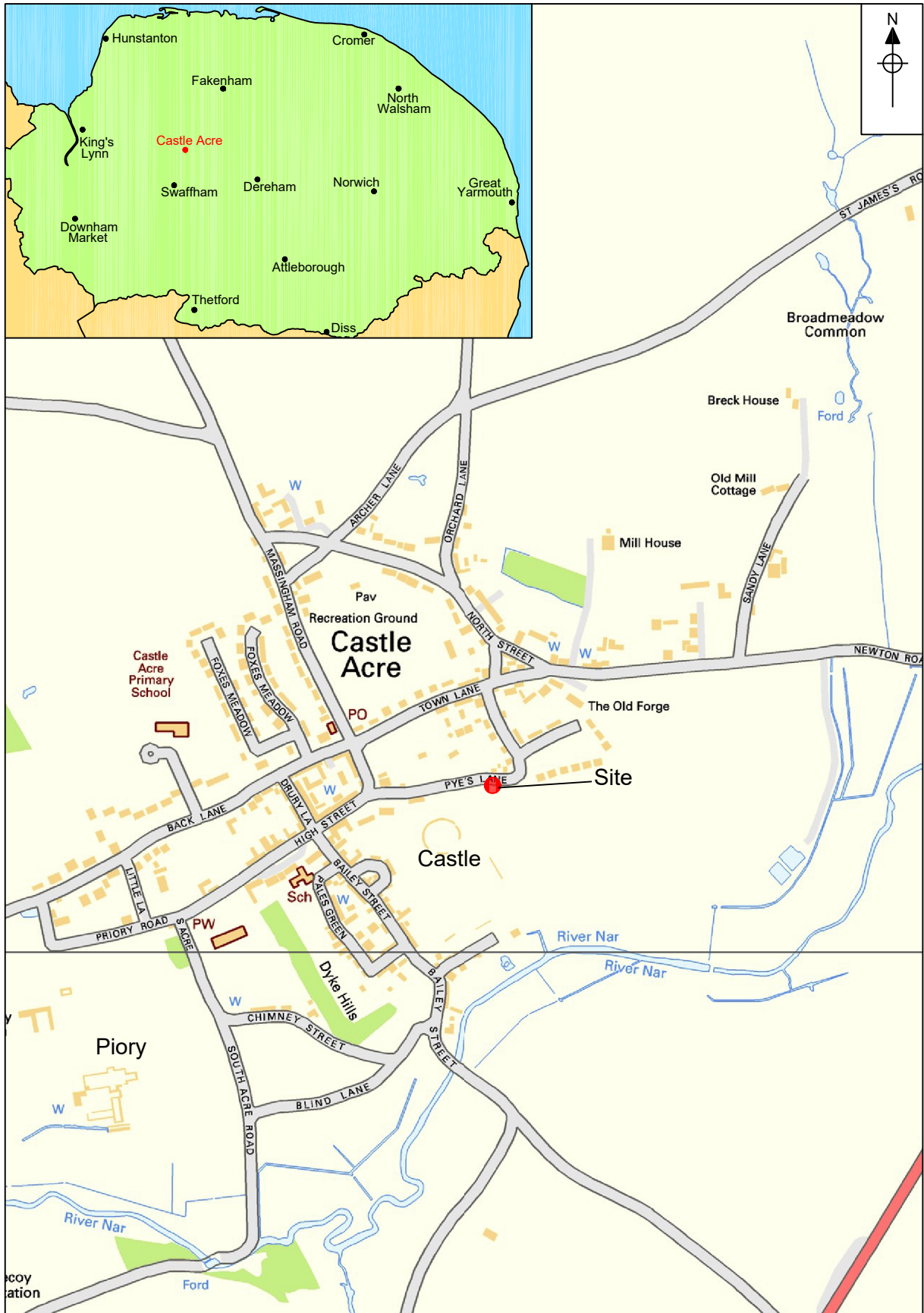


Figure 1. Site location.

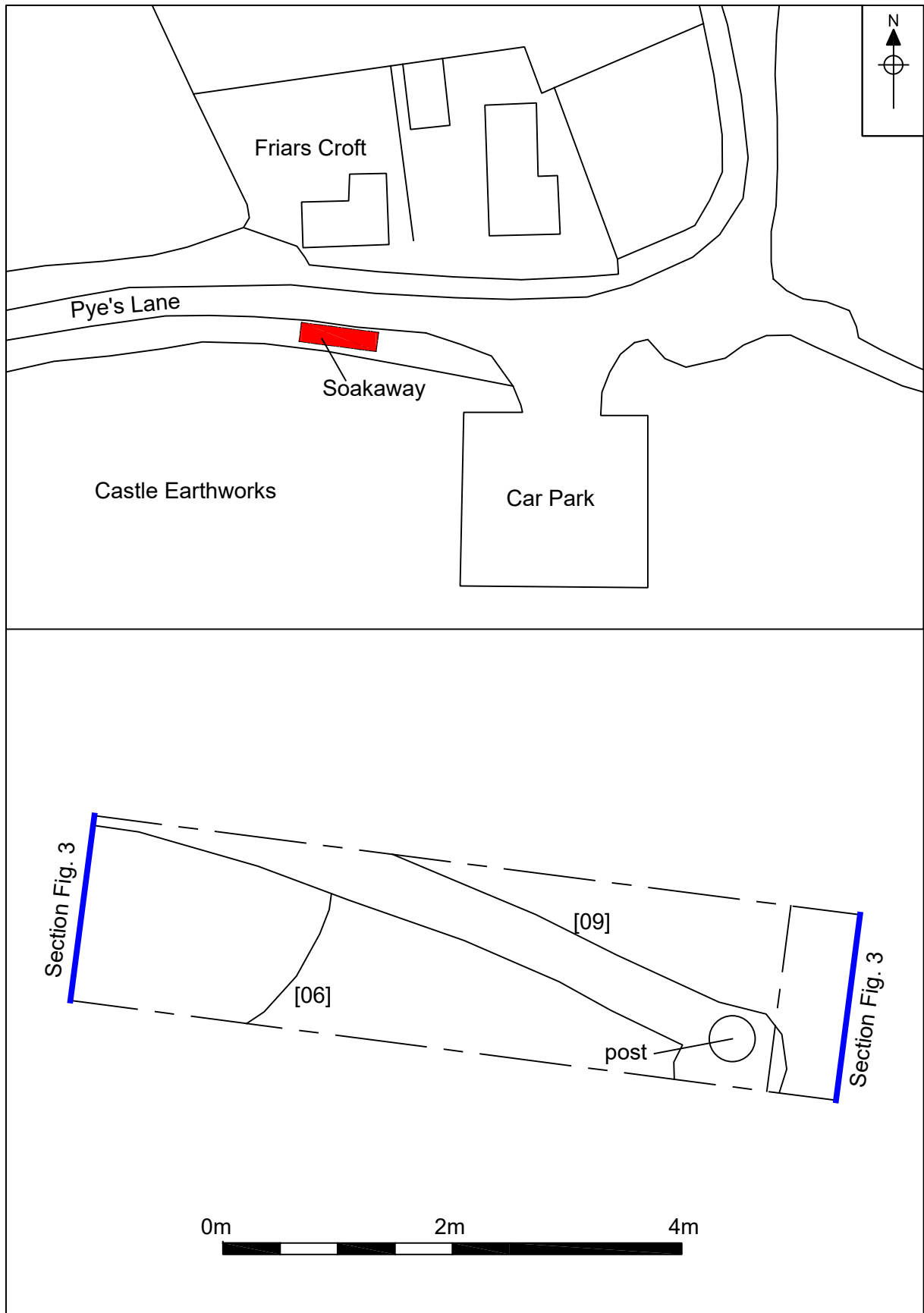


Figure 2. Top. Location of soakaway.
Bottom. Trench plan.

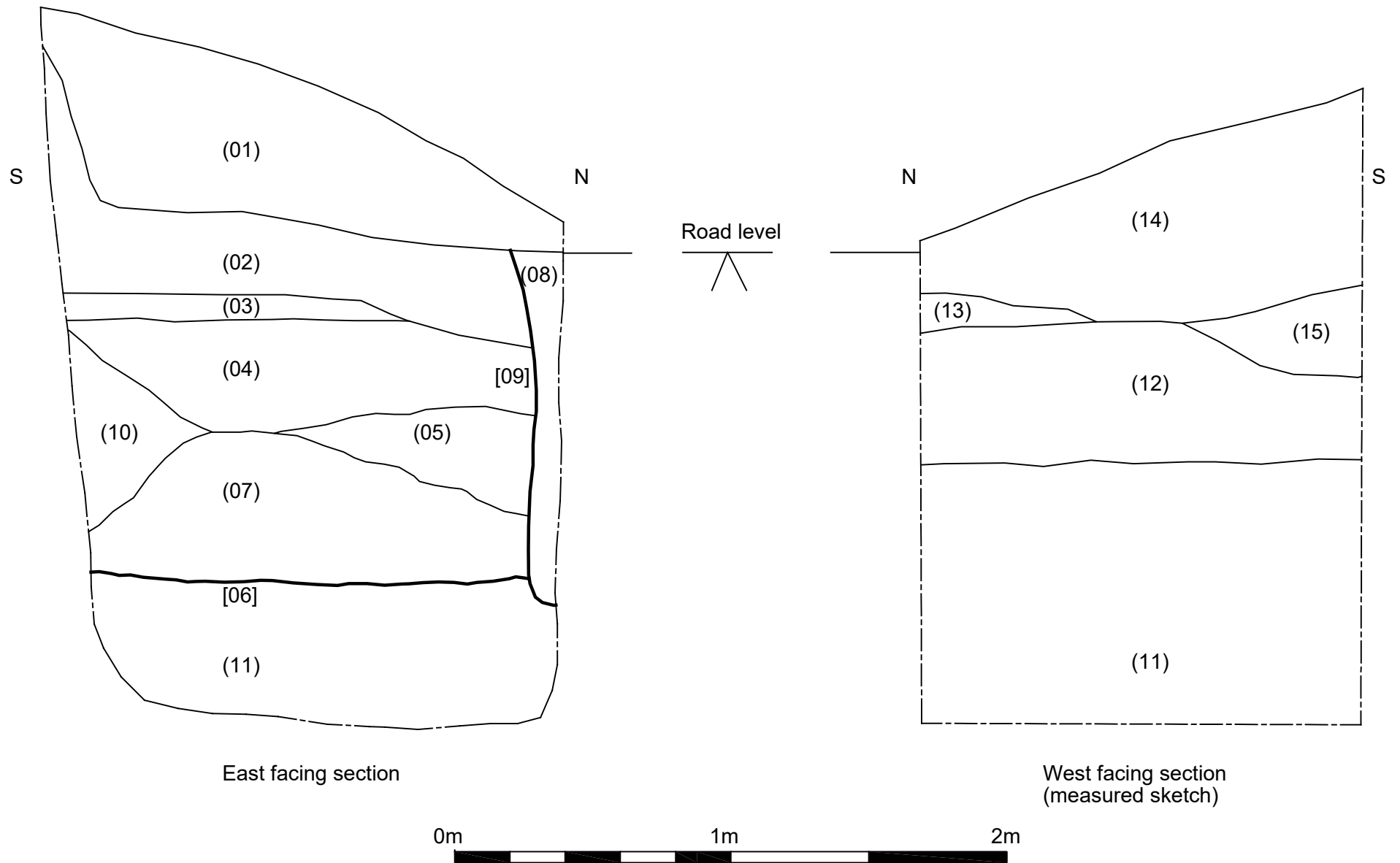


Figure 3. South and North facing sections.



Plate 1. Showing location of soakaway, looking south-west.



Plate 2. East facing section, scale 1x2m, looking west.



Plate 3. Works in progress, looking east.

Appendix 1

Context List

| Ctxt No. | Category | Description |
|----------|------------------|---|
| 01 | Topsoil - rooted | Mid brown grey fine silty loam, very heavily rooted from adjacent tree and hedge |
| 02 | Topsoil | Mid orange grey fine sandy silt, occasional chalk fragment and medium flint |
| 03 | Layer | White compacted chalk lump |
| 04 | Fill of 06 | Mid orange grey fine sandy silt, moderate chalk fragment and medium flint |
| 05 | Fill of 06 | 50% mid orange grey fine silty clay, 50% white chalk lump |
| 06 | Pit cut | Cut for extraction pit, c.0.9m deep. A high area of natural to the east suggests this is a large cut feature. Probably chalk/flint quarry pit. |
| 07 | Fill of 06 | White chalk fragments, redeposited natural |
| 08 | Fill of 09 | Mid orange brown, slightly silty clay with occasional charcoal fleck and chalk fleck. |
| 09 | Linear cut | Linear trench, 0.4m wide and 1.3m deep, crossing from north-east corner to wooden post near to south-east corner of trench. Wooden post was cut off old telegraph pole 0.35m in diameter. |
| 10 | Fill of 06 | Mid orange brown sandy silt, frequent chalk fragments. |
| 11 | Natural | White chalk containing occasional very large flint nodules, also pockets of orangey brown silty sand. |
| 12 | Layer | Mid orange grey sandy silt, moderate chalk fragment |
| 13 | Layer | White compacted chalk lump |
| 14 | Topsoil | Mid brown grey silty loam |
| 15 | Dump | Mid brown grey silty loam with occasional chalk fragment and brick fragment |

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Project details

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| Project name | Pye's Lane |
| Short description of the project | A small excavation for a new soakaway was undertaken on the south verge of Pye's Lane, Castle Acre. This was located immediately adjacent to the earthworks of Castle Acre castle. One feature, a possible small extraction pit, was recorded. No dating evidence was recovered, but it is likely that this pit was created in the medieval period. |
| Project dates | Start: 21-08-2017 End: 22-08-2017 |
| Previous/future work | No / No |
| Any associated project reference codes | ENF142528 - HER event no. |
| Type of project | Recording project |
| Monument type | PIT Uncertain |
| Significant Finds | NONE None |
| Investigation type | ""Watching Brief"" |
| Prompt | Planning condition |

Project location

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Country | England |
| Site location | NORFOLK KINGS LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK CASTLE ACRE Pye's Lane |
| Study area | 14 Square metres |
| Site coordinates | TF 8196 1525 52.703881870073 0.693493828445 52 42 13 N 000 41 36 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 archives

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|---------------------------|--|
| Physical Archive Exists? | No |
| 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

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|-------------------------------|---|
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