
Short Report:

Medieval and 19th-century back-plot activity at Sun Street, Cambridge

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Illustrations by Dave Brown

Excavation in advance of the redevelopment of a former bus depot on the south side of Sun Street (64–68 Newmarket Road), Cambridge revealed evidence for the western fringes of the medieval lay settlement of Barnwell and the remains of 19th-century urban infill.

The small area (160m²) investigated by Oxford Archaeology East during November 2016 (ECB4819, TL 46038 58811; Fig. 1) was located on river terrace gravels at a height of c. 11.8m OD, in an area that had been extensively quarried in the past. Reports on the evaluation and excavation phases of the investigation, including full specialist reports, are freely available to download from the OA Library <<https://oxfordarchaeology.com/oalibrary>>.

The earliest phase of activity identified relates to the high medieval period (c. AD1200–1400) and comprised seven sub-circular pits scattered across the site and a possible ditch found during the evaluation. The latter was partly exposed in the north-east corner of the site and may relate to a former property boundary. Two adjacent pits (85 and 92) located in the western part of the site produced most of the pottery from this phase, with a combined total of 137 sherds (c. 2kg); all either jug or jar forms. The fabrics are predominantly Medieval Essex-type Micaceous Grey Sandy Wares and East Anglian Redwares, with smaller components of Medieval Sandy greyware, Medieval Ely Ware and Brill/Boarstall Ware amongst others (Fletcher 2019). A highly polished bone knife handle (SF 1; Fig. 1) which is missing the blade but retains the scale tang was also found in pit 92 and is of a common form from the mid 14th to early 15th centuries (Riddler 2019).

Slightly later activity was represented by a group of four sub-circular pits clustered along the western boundary of the excavation. Combined, the fills of these pits produced 118 sherds (c. 1kg) of mixed pottery including several residual Late Saxon and medieval fragments, although the main elements comprise similar East Anglian Redwares and other grey coarse wares found in the earlier phase. Although broadly datable to the 13th to 15th century, the latest sherd was from a 16th-century Surrey Whiteware transitional bowl. Pit 80, which contained the richest pottery as-

semblage, also produced environmental remains in the form of charred wheat grains along with mammal and bird (chicken) bone fragments. The latter included burnt and gnawed examples, with some elements displaying evidence for butchery.

Evidence for medieval occupation of the site, however slight, is a significant discovery for this part of Cambridge as it suggests that by the 13th century the lay settlement at Barnwell had extended westwards, beyond the junction of Newmarket Road and East Road, to incorporate part of the triangle of land later known as The Kite.

Brick foundations, floor surfaces and other deposits were exposed along the northern edge of the site, with a brick-lined well (possibly within a cellar), robbed-out foundation trenches and a chimney base of another building located to the south. These presumably related to buildings shown on early 19th century maps of the area, of which two were subsequently identified as (unnamed) public houses on the first edition Ordnance survey map (1885). The upper part of the well was infilled with large quantities of broken bottles and pottery (855 sherds, c. 43kg), including a notable assemblage of collegiate ceramics similar to those found at other sites in this part of Cambridge. Analysis suggests that these items may have been deposited around 1863 or slightly later (Fletcher 2019, 37).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Unex Group for commissioning and funding the work. Aileen Connor managed the project and Kasia Gdaniec of Cambridgeshire County Council monitored the works. The fieldwork was supervised by Chris Thatcher and excavated by Neus Esparsa Nogues, Amy Revans and Kelly Sinclair.

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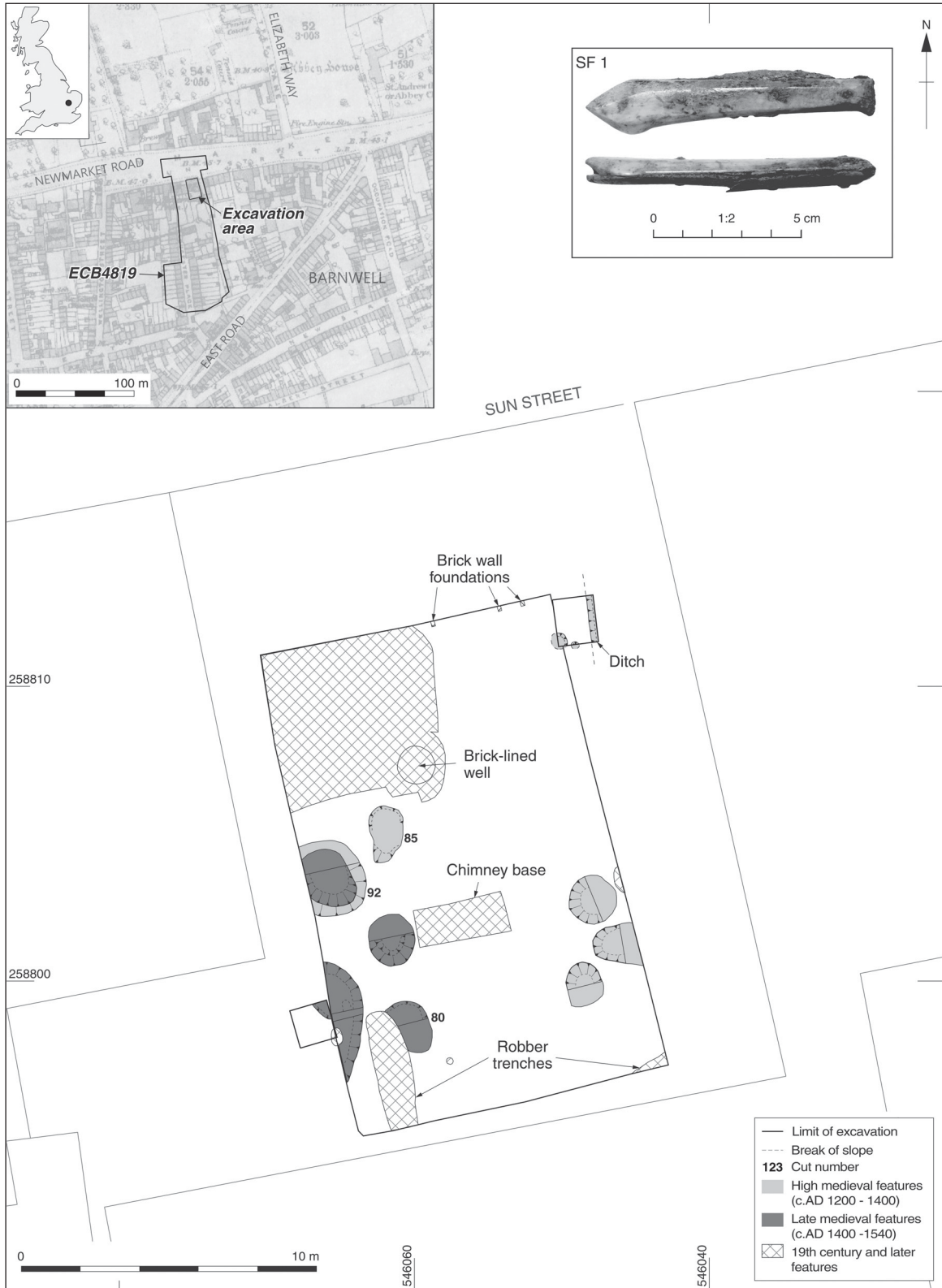


Figure 1. Location of Sun Street excavation overlain on 1885 Ordnance Survey map, with detailed site plan and inset of bone-handled knife (SF1). ©Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence no. 100019980