

0000/5529

6/E/2

EXCAVATIONS IN NORWICH – 1975/6

THE NORWICH SURVEY – FIFTH INTERIM REPORT

by M. W. Atkin, B.A. and A. Carter, M.A. with M. Baxter, Ph.D.,
P. Donaldson and J. P. Roberts, B.A.

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Six sites were excavated in 1975 and two early in 1976: two in the western, extramural, part of St. Benedict's parish (Westwick); two north of the river (Coslany); two on King Street and two inside the Cathedral Close (Conesford). Excavation of the Blackfriars (176N) continued throughout this period and will be reported on when finished; extensive observation of commercial work was also carried out along the line of the City wall at Chapelfield, and at the Benedictine nunnery at Carrow. The sites were made available through the courtesy of Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council, the Dean and Chapter of Norwich, the governors of Norwich School, A. E. Plumpstead and Son Engineering Ltd., and Town and City Properties Limited. The work was financed by grants from the Department of the Environment, Norwich City Council, and the Norfolk Research Committee. Valuable help in kind was received from Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council and the University of East Anglia. A personal debt is owed to Ken Davis, Christopher Howes and Bernard Feilden for having negotiated permission to excavate particular sites. In addition to all the Supervisors and volunteers we wish to thank Mary Karshner both for her administration of excavation and post-excavation work and supervision of work on the finds.

With the exception of the two sites in Westwick (brief notes on the excavation of which are included in the sectional introduction) the pattern of this report is as in previous interims. The location of the sites is given on Figure 1, which also shows the 1974 sites for which no location map was given in the last interim report.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE EXCAVATIONS – CONESFORD

Of the four sites excavated in this area two lay on Lower King Street and two within the Cathedral Close. Those on King Street were designed to test the hypothesis¹ that St. Etheldreda's church was the focus of a Middle Saxon (650-850) settlement. This suggestion was based as much on the apparently early dedication of the church as the peculiarities of its medieval tithing pattern; no evidence to support it was found, and the earliest occupation on both sites was of the late 11th or early 12th century. This, with the absence of stray Roman finds from either site and the lack of evidence for Roman or even Saxon surfaces of King Street, suggests (contrary to what has previously been published²) that the street, at its southern end at least, may only have existed from the late 11th century onwards. This date would be consistent not only with the stylistic evidence for St. Julian's church³ (which could easily be post-conquest) and the dedications to SS. Olaf and Edward (which are unlikely to be earlier than c. 1130-50) but also with the pottery evidence: only two sites (78 and 88N, Fig. 1A.) south of the castle have produced more than fifteen sherds of Late Saxon pottery, and both sites are north of St. Julian's. At this late date, and in an undeveloped

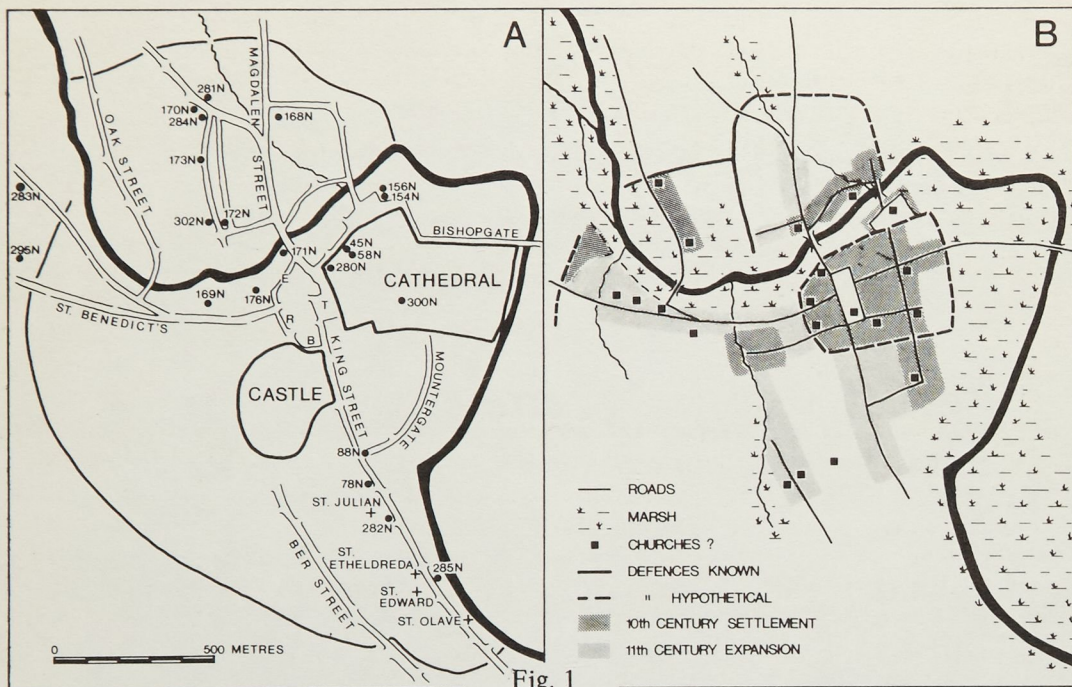


Fig. 1
 A. Location (within outline of medieval walls) of 1974-5 sites, and churches, streets, and sites mentioned in the text.
 B. Hypothetical reconstruction plan of the 10/11th century town

area where larger blocks of property were perhaps more easily available, wealthier people may have been attracted to settle. By the 1160's for instance there were both the large stone house (Jurnet's) opposite St. Etheldreda's and, just to the south of this, the town-house of the Abbess of Carrow; while the church itself was not only almost as large as it ever became, but larger than many late medieval churches in Norwich.

The growing probability that the King Street/Magdalen Street line was not Roman led to a re-examination of the evidence of Roman activity in Norwich and its neighbourhood. The suggestion⁴ that there were two N-S, and one E-W, Roman roads in Norwich was based largely on their medieval names: King Street/Magdalen Street and Oak Street/Ber Street with Holme Street were, with the exception of Goat Lane (Stone Street), the only roads in medieval Norwich ever referred to as *street* rather than *gate*.⁵ Roman finds have been concentrated only along the line of Holme Street (now represented by St. Benedict's Street and Bishopgate) while, despite an increased amount of field work, there is no indication for a Roman continuation of the N-S roads beyond the walls: there is evidence neither for a road leading to the Roman town at Caistor (three miles to the south), nor to the small town and industrial complex at Brampton (nine miles to the north). There is, however, evidence⁶ for a road leading S.S.E. from Brampton to a point less than two miles east of Norwich, where it would join the E-W road (continuing Holme Street) leading to the suspected river crossing of a known road running east from Caistor.

Until work on all the, often dubious, records of Roman material found in Norwich⁷ is completed there is little to be gained from this source. Many of the finds were made before the distinction between Roman and Late Saxon grey

wares was recognised; and a number of isolated coins unassociated with pottery appear to be modern collectors' losses. An attempt is now being made to locate the material on which the records are based, as until this is done any distribution map would be positively misleading.

It was hoped that the first of the two sites in the Cathedral Close (280N, at the N.E. angle of Tombland) would produce information about the extent of the Middle Saxon (650-850) settlement, and the line of Holme Street in the 11th to 14th centuries. The greatest concentration of Middle Saxon Ipswich ware so far known from Norwich came from Tony Baggs' 1956 excavation and observation of sites 45 and 58N. In contrast, little 7th to 9th century material was found on sites 154 and 156N which suggested that the focus of the settlement lay to their south and west. The possible extent of this settlement was further circumscribed by this season's Tombland and Lower Close excavations, neither of which produced other than a scatter of Ipswich ware. The site must lie largely beneath the Cathedral, and can hardly be more than 150m. across (i.e. covering *c.* 2 hectares or 5 acres).

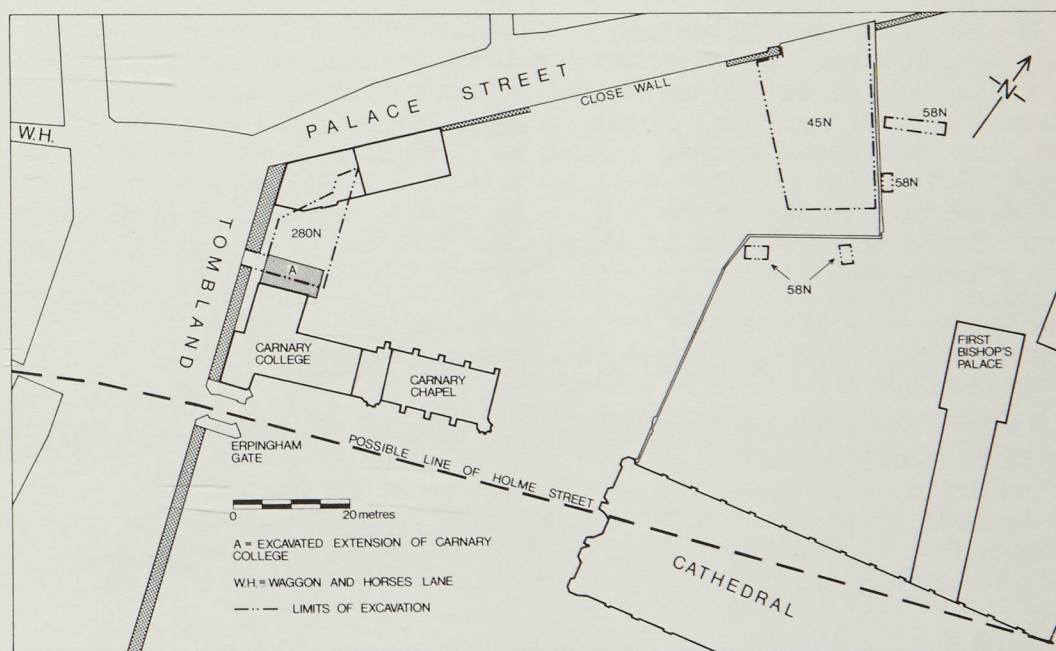


Fig. 2

Location of sites excavated in 1956 and 1975 within the N.W. angle of the Cathedral Close

Arthur Whittingham's suggestions⁸ for the line of Holme Street were based on the assumption (not shared by the writer) that it ran across the north end of Tombland. From the N.E. angle of Tombland he thought that: until the building of the first Bishop's Palace in 1107 it ran immediately north of the cathedral's north transept; between 1107 and the extension of the Close in 1318 it ran north of the palace; and that only after 1318 was it diverted to the line of the present Palace Street. No street surfaces were found in either the 1956 or Tombland excavations, which suggests that a possible original line between the sites of Erpingham Gate and the west front of the cathedral was either truncated or immediately diverted via Palace Street.

The second trench in the Close (300N, location Fig. 1) was dug to see whether, as suggested in 1972,⁹ the lines of St. Faith's Lane and Hook's Walk reflected that of a defensive ditch. No ditch was found and three possibilities have now to be considered: that (as shown on Fig. 1) while the western end of the defences was correctly identified the ditch lines to the east were located too far to the north; that the 10/11th century nucleus, which presumably developed from the Middle Saxon core, was undefended; that the defences were located elsewhere. The third possibility raises again¹⁰ the question of where *Northwic* was located. It had been assumed by the writer that it was an alternative place-name for *Conesford* (the area around, and to the south of, the Close) which lost its localised meaning early on. The identification of a defended area to the north of the river (pp 196-8) might suggest, however, that this was *Northwic*. Why in this case, unlike *Westwick*, the name did not survive is unclear. If the defences are to be looked for elsewhere, one circuit at least that can no longer (because of a number of negative exposures) be entertained is that continuing west and north from the great curve of Mountergate (Fig. 1A.)

The possibility that the topographical indications of the defences' course were only partially misinterpreted is strengthened by the discovery, north of the river, of a ditch close to, but not on, the line originally predicted. The peculiarities of the N.E. angle of the castle's defences, and the lines of Elm Hill, Redwell Street and Bank Street, still seem to demand an explanation in terms of other than chance factors. The existence or otherwise of a ditch can only be demonstrated by further excavations; but the Lower Close excavation did, at the least, demonstrate that in the vicinity of St. Mary in the Marsh was an area of intense Late Saxon occupation.

M. W. A., A. C.

282N. 129 KING STREET. TG 2356 0811

An area of 10 by 6m. was excavated on the street frontage, and sections extended from this into the back yard of the tenement. Only a few sherds of Late Saxon pottery were found. The earliest surviving feature was a 13/14th century, flint-packed, foundation trench running parallel to, but just inside, the modern building line. The building to which this belonged was derelict and demolished by the 15th century, when a storm gully was dug E-W across the south end of the site.

In the late 15th century the site was levelled down to the natural chalk, and a two roomed range constructed parallel to the street. This appeared to consist of an open hall to the south with a chamber above a semi-basement undercroft to the north. The undercroft, which could not be reached directly from the 'hall', was entered by a large, brick-built, newel staircase on its rear wall.

At the rear of the site, below extensive late 16th century dumps of chalk waste, was an isolated 13th/14th century burial – perhaps an outlying grave of the Friary of Our Lady (founded c. 1290). Similar chalk waste, perhaps from the pits serving the Ber Street lime kilns, had been used to backfill the street-frontage undercroft before its conversion, together with the hall, into two cottages. These, although small, were well built. A wide range of post-medieval imported pottery suggested that, unlike many inhabitants of the socially mixed King Street, the occupants were fairly prosperous.

M. W. A.

285N. SCHOOL MEALS STORE, KING STREET. TG 2368 0792

The site was that of the former 'Rainbow' public house, the street frontage cellars of which incorporated a late 15th century vaulted undercroft. At the rear of the site natural gravel was cut by a complex of late 11th and 12th century post-holes and foundation slots. The 12th century levels, which produced a quantity of Andenne-type wares, were heavily disturbed by 13th/14th century pits. Above these were the fragmentary traces of an early 15th century rear range, extensively remodelled when the undercroft was constructed later in the century. The rear-range of the resultant L-plan building appears to have been in decay when it was rebuilt in the late 17th or early 18th century. It was in this period also that the street frontage, above the early undercroft, was (from the evidence of photographs) rebuilt. Interpretation of the site was complicated by massive 19th century foundations which had destroyed the structural relationships between the street frontage and the area to its rear.

M. W. A.

280N. NORWICH SCHOOL, TOMBLAND. TG 2234 0891

Below extensive modern disturbance much of the site was dissected by 11th to 19th century pits. Structural evidence survived for only four features: a) a 12th century building parallel to the old line of Palace Street; b) the earliest, apparently late 13th century, Close Wall on the Tombland frontage; c) a 10 by 5m. building, possibly a parlour and chamber block, to the north of and almost certainly associated with the Carnary College of 1318; d) a 17th century building perhaps fronting on Palace Street but certainly parallel to it. The site was not rich in finds but these included a scatter of Ipswich ware, some unusual Andenne-type forms (including a lid), and good groups of late 14th and 15th century material.

J. P. R.

300N. THE LOWER CLOSE. TG 2359 0880

A 3 by 12m. trench running N.W. to S.E. was dug perpendicularly across the supposed line of the ditch around the 10th/11th century town. No ditch was found; and the earliest, 11th/12th century, features were three E-W gulleys cut into the surface of natural gravel. The alignment of these, presumably dug for drainage, was that of the monastic buildings (but as these apparently respect Late Saxon street lines the significance of the co-incidence is reduced). Overlying the gulleys was a 60cm. depth of soil which, in addition to a scatter of Ipswich ware, produced a quantity of 11th/12th century material including Badord (Reliefband amphora), Pingsdorf and Andenne-type wares. Above this the remains of a 12th century house (post holes, hearth and oven) associated with a midden had been all but destroyed by later pits. Sealing these were a series of 13th/14th century road or track surfaces, and above these was an accumulation of over 1.5m of 18th century soil.

M. W. A.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE EXCAVATIONS IN WESTWICK AND HEIGHAM

It was suggested in the 1973 and 1974 interim reports that the focus of the Late Saxon settlement of Westwick might be found in the vicinity of Heigham Gate. To narrow the possible area of settlement down, two peripheral sites were excavated: 29 Heigham Street (283N), located *c.* 180m. to the N.W. of the Gate and the same distance from the wall; and 20 Lothian Street (295N), *c.* 150m. to the S.W. of the Gate but only *c.* 70m. from the wall. Nothing other than, probably medieval, quarry pits beneath a post-medieval top soil were found at Lothian Street. On Heigham Street the earliest material found was a scatter of 13th century sherds in the soil immediately above natural gravel. This might suggest that the first settlement of this area was contemporary with the establishment of the extra-mural boundary of St. Benedict's parish, (which after running N.W. along Heigham Street, turns sharply to the S.S.W. immediately to the west of the excavation).

As 283N was to be excavated more fully in 1976 only a small area of the 13th century levels was excavated; but neither in these nor in the overlying, presumably 14th/15th century, soil was there any evidence of buildings. The absence of any pottery other than that of the 13th and 16th/17th centuries suggests strongly that the site may well have been abandoned during the intermediate period.

From the late 16th century onwards, there was again evidence for occupation, this time associated with the remains of buildings. Constructed *c.* 1600, but perhaps as early as 1570, were two cottages: one of these was constructed of clay lump or cob (no signs of individual blocks of unbaked clay survived), the other of mortared flint. It is hoped that the full excavation of these, and other buildings on the site, in 1976 will provide further information about housing associated with the population explosion of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. A preliminary analysis of the documentary evidence suggests that it may have been on this, or adjacent sites, that at least part of the immigrant Dutch population was housed.

P. D., A. C.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE EXCAVATIONS: NORWICH NORTH OF THE RIVER

Two sites were dug in this area as an extension of that excavated in 1974 to the south of Botolph Street: 281N to the north of Botolph Street, and 284N in the angle of Botolph and St. George's Streets. The main purpose of the excavations was to recover further information about the development of the area in the period 1570-1630 and later; in the event important information about both the Roman and Late Saxon periods was recovered.

The Roman material from 281N was of much the same character and period as that previously found south of Botolph Street and at the north end of Magdalen Street.¹³ It seems possible that as the sites lie less than 200m. apart, lie on opposite banks of the Dalimund stream, and are the only ones north of the river to produce Roman pottery, they might represent a scatter from a small farm. If such was the case it would not (as is argued above, p. 192) be necessary to invoke a Roman origin for Magdalen Street in order to explain the sherds in its vicinity.

The discovery of a Late Saxon ditch north of Botolph Street confirms the outline hypothesis for the northern defences first put forward in 1973.¹⁴ At that time it was not realised that staff of the Castle Museum had already recorded, but

not realised the significance of, the west lip of such a ditch on the line of the inner link road (173N). The west lip of the ditch has also recently been seen immediately to the north of St. George's church in a commercial excavation (302N). Along most of its western side the ditch is thus sealed beneath St. George's Street, rather than Calvert Street as previously suggested. It is perhaps worth while stressing that although the existence, and general location, of the ditch was indicated by anomalies in the street and parish boundary pattern, its exact location was not. The parallel with the ambiguous situation south of the river is obvious.

The dating of the ditch within the late Saxon period is, because of the nature of the pottery evidence, uncertain. (There is, as yet, no way of distinguishing late 9th or early 10th century Thetford ware from its later 11th century forms). The probability is, however, that the ditch is not of *c.* 870-917 but dates rather from *c.* 991-1004. The speed of E. Anglia's conquest and re-conquest in the earlier period makes it unlikely that defences would have been constructed then;¹⁵ but the attack on Ipswich in 991¹⁶ might well have provided the impetus to defend the site; and it is clear that by 1004-16¹⁷ at least part of the town was defended. An early 11th century date for construction would be consistent with the archaeological evidence, which suggested that after having been twice recut the ditch was infilled by *c.* 1100-50.

Uncertainties similar to those caused by the vagueness of topographical indications or the dating of Late Saxon pottery were also raised by the discovery of iron-working on a fairly large scale to both north and south of Botolph Street. No indication that this might be found was provided by the medieval documents examined before excavation began. It is clear that neither archaeology nor documentary investigation will ever produce satisfactory results unless the two forms of research are fully integrated.

As on the area excavated in 1974 the evidence on these two sites was overwhelmingly for a fluctuating pattern of use: perhaps (on the evidence of pit-digging only) slight activity in the 11th/12th century; a short phase of iron-working in the 14th century; the first buildings in the late 15th century; partial abandonment in the mid 16th century; and either rebuilding or expansion onto fresh areas of the site in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Somewhat surprisingly the surviving evidence was for the continuity of property boundaries, but the evidence is clear only for the 15th century and later. It seems, for instance, to be an accident rather than design which led to the co-incidence of 11th/12th and 17th century boundaries between the sites of buildings L and M; and, where the evidence survived, medieval soils seemed to run uninterrupted across the lines of later boundaries.

The evidence from both Botolph Street and King Street (pp 195,200) suggests that the pattern of building cycles suggested in 1973¹⁸ need to be modified. At that time there was evidence only for intense building activity in the periods *c.* 1470-1530 and 1670-1730. On these two sites, however, (with that excavated last year in Botolph Street) there is now clear evidence for building during the late 16th century period of population expansion. While much of this may have been housed in rebuilt medieval properties the evidence from Botolph Street at least is clearly in favour of the development of 'cottage' housing in yards. It is hoped that excavation north of the river in 1976 may produce further examples of this process.

A.C.

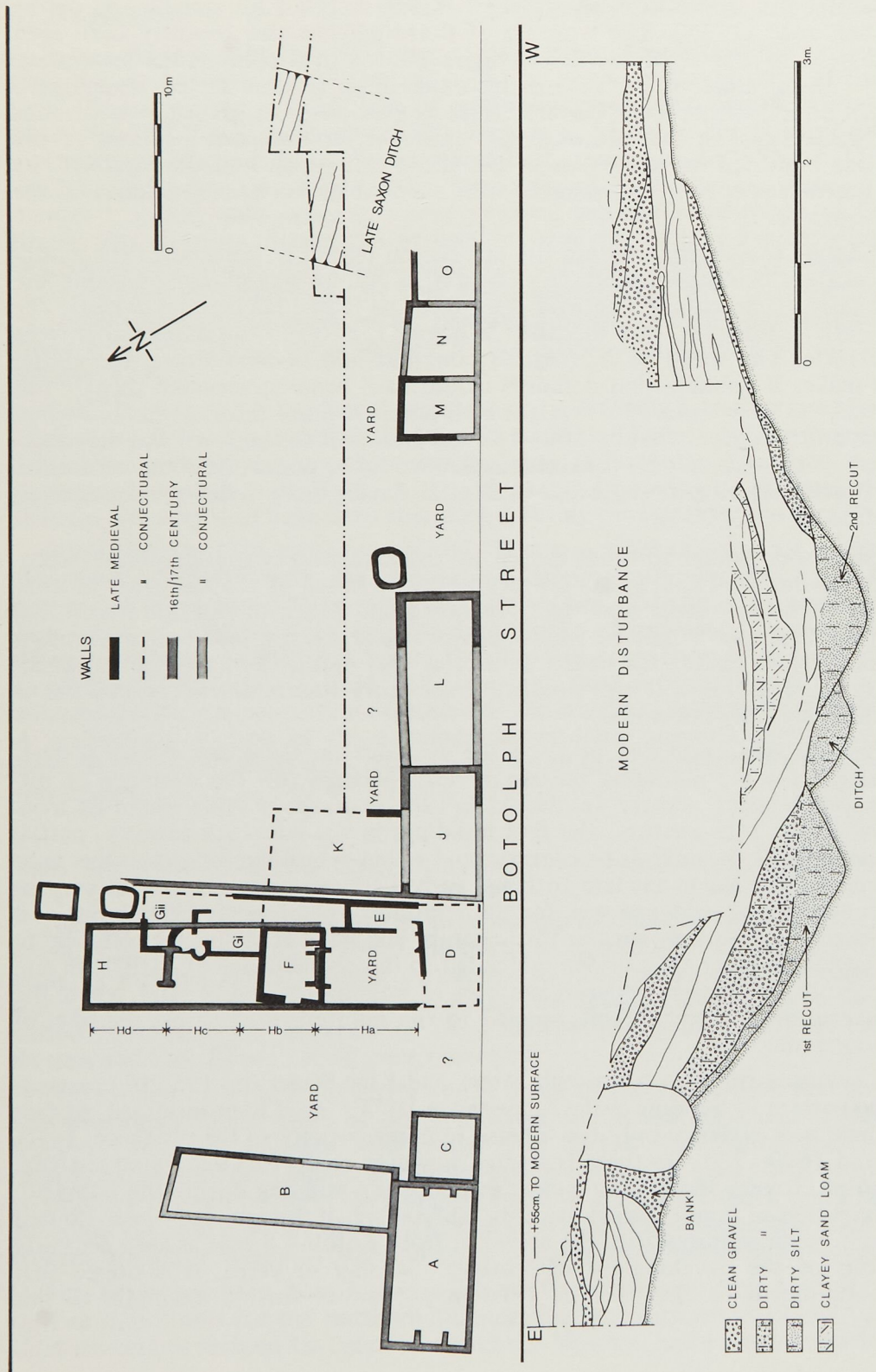


Fig. 3
 Outline plan of Botolph Street excavation (281N), and section through Late Saxon ditch.

281 and 284N. 49-63 BOTOLPH STREET, TG 2297 0944 and 178-88 ST.
GEORGE'S STREET, TG 2298 0940

The earliest feature found on the St. George's Street frontage (location Fig. 1) was the lip of a ditch in the upper fill of which, with a human skull, was a small amount of 11th/12th century pottery. Above this, and overlying a 50cm. depth of 12th to 14th century soil, were the remains of four hearths associated with crude iron slag. These were probably ore-roasting hearths where low-grade iron ore (perhaps extracted from the underlying, iron-rich, gravel) was mixed with water and heated to expel sulphur. Iron slag, and another hearth, was also found north of the street; but there was no evidence for smelting on either site. The hearths were sealed beneath a further 40-50cm. of what appeared to be garden soil; and it was only above this that the first, probably late 16th century, evidence of buildings appeared. The foundations of these had been severely damaged by modern disturbance but their plans were probably similar to buildings C and M-O north of the street (Fig. 3).

North of Botolph Street the earliest features found were: a scatter of 11th/12th century pits (from which came a small amount of 2nd/3rd century Roman pottery and a Hod Hill type brooch); a shallow gulley of the same date running north to south through the yard between houses L and M – perhaps a property boundary similar to those found south of the street in 1974;¹⁹ and a twice-recut ditch (Fig. 3) which, unlike the pits (some of which contained distinctively 12th century Andenne ware), produced only Thetford ware – probably of the 11th century. Very little survived of either the original ditch cut or the gravel dump assumed to have been the bank. The 'bank' had been severely damaged by later rubbish pits and nothing can be said of its form. Both recuts of the ditch had a similar V-shaped profile, 7-8m. wide and about 2m. deep; like the original cut these were partially filled with a slightly dirty sandy silt which suggested fairly rapid infilling. Sealing the silting of the first recut was a massive tip of dirty gravel which might represent the collapse of the 'bank', particularly if its face had been revetted and subsequently collapsed. Above the final, probably 13th/14th century, infilling of the ditch was a further massive layer of gravel – in this case almost completely concreted with iron-pan, and probably associated with iron-working similar to that found south of the street,

Only small areas of the eastern end of the site escaped modern disturbance; the only iron working hearth that survived was at the west end, but a scatter of iron slag was found over the whole site. It was only in levels above those containing slag that the earliest evidence for domestic occupation appeared, and this consisted of no more than patches of a floor surface and a group of post-holes. The first substantial buildings, again at the western end of the site, were concentrated on two adjacent tenements and dated from the 15th century. Despite modern disturbance over the rest of the site it was fairly clear that nothing similar existed along the rest of the frontage at this period. Only a small part of the, probably L-plan, building J/K was excavated; but enough to show that its street frontage had been totally rebuilt in the 16th or 17th century. In contrast, building D had survived with modifications into at least the 17th century.

The tenements on which building D (with F and G) lay, was apparently entered, in at least its later stages, from the east side; the walls to either side of the passage E, however, were of secondary build and the purpose of the western one unclear. To the west of the passage was an open yard behind which was a small building

with a blocked door in its west wall; it is possible that this reflects an early stage in the development of the tenements when access was from either side. The street frontage building (D) was perhaps a shop/workshop with a chamber above; F would appear to have been a hall (although there was no evidence of a hearth within it); Gi, to the north of the hall, was a small bakehouse subsequently enlarged (Gii) to the north and perhaps the east; to the rear of the enlarged bakehouse, and probably contemporary with the bakehouse, was a large cess-pit. All walls of this period were of yellow-mortared flint with brick and tile only being used extensively in the bakehouse.

During the 16th century, perhaps after *c.* 1530, buildings F and G fell into disrepair and a considerable quantity of soil accumulated against their north and west walls. Parts of these walls, however, were still standing when building H was constructed towards, or shortly after, the end of the 16th century. Sections of the early walls were incorporated in the later building and the southern end of it (Ha) apparently reused the still-standing walls to east and west of the yard. The east boundary of the tenement, and the cess-pit at its N.E. angle, were however, reconstructed entirely. No evidence survived for the original internal arrangements of building H but it is possible that the subdivision into what are presumed to be four separate cottages in *c.* 1620 reflects the earlier plan. The early 17th century alterations involved the insertion of two large chimney stacks, each providing two hearths, and the provision (in building Hb at least) of a staircase to the east of the stack.

A narrow trench linked the excavated building H with a group of still partially standing buildings (A - C) to the west. The southern end of building B, constructed (like building H), in a mixture of brick and flint still survived; mid 17th century pottery was found on its early floors at its north end; no evidence for subdivisions within it was found. The 19th century remodelling had removed all but the cellar of building C; the bricks in this were, however, almost identical to those used in the cellar of building A - the upper walls of which were partially encased by building B. Later 17th and 18th/19th century alterations had removed almost all dateable features from building A (including its roof) but the general character of its timber-framed walls appeared late 16th century.

Parts of a further five late 16th or early 17th century buildings were found at the east end of the site: building J was represented only by its cellar; building L, perhaps the same size as A, only by its east wall and a large cesspit; and buildings M-O, smaller buildings of the type of building C, by short lengths of their walls. The area between building J and the east end of L had been entirely destroyed; but there was no evidence to the rear of buildings L-O of rear ranges, and a large yard separated buildings L and M. Few rubbish pits were associated with any of the buildings on the site and, unlike the 1974 excavation south of the street, little Dutch material was found. As on the 1974 site, however, was the almost total absence of pits later than *c.* 1700. On this site, at least, the explanation probably lies as much in the disposal of rubbish on the waste ground to its north as in the deliberate carting away of refuse.

M. B., J. P. R., A. C.

May 1976

¹J. Campbell, *Norwich* (1975), 4,n35, hereafter: Campbell (1975).

²A. Carter *et. al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich - 1973 . . .', *Norfolk Archaeology* XXXVI, i (1974), 63, 65 hereafter: Excavations 1973

- ³H.M. Taylor and J. Taylor, *Anglo Saxon Architecture* (1965), 472-3.
- ⁴A. Carter *et. al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich - 1972 . . .', *Norfolk Archaeology* XXXV, iv (1973), 454, hereafter: Excavations 1972.
- ⁵J. Kirkpatrick, *The Streets and Lanes of the City of Norwich*, ed. W. Hudson (1889).
- ⁶Information about this and the other roads kindly provided by Edwin Rose from the Sites and Monuments Record of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit.
- ⁷For a full index of which I am grateful to James Campbell.
- ⁸A. B. Whittingham, *Norwich. Cathedral Priory of the Holy Trinity. A plan showing the disposition of priory buildings, and grants of land* (1938).
- ⁹Excavations 1972, fig 1, 447.
- ¹⁰Campbell (1975), 25 - Appendix IV (c).
- ¹¹Excavations 1973, 40; and J. P. Roberts *et. al.*. 'Excavations in Norwich - 1974 . . .', hereafter: Excavations 1974.
- ¹²Excavations 1974, 105, and n18.
- ¹³Excavations 1974, 60, and n 41.
- ¹⁴Excavations 1973, 57, and fig 1.
- ¹⁵A point made by James Campbell: Campbell (1975), 6.
- ¹⁶D. Whitelock (ed), *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle* (1961), *s.a.* 991, hereafter: Whitlock (1961).
- ¹⁷Whitelock (1961), *s.a.* 1004 (Swegn's attack on Norwich); M. Ashdown (ed), *English and Norse Documents relating to the reign of Ethelred the Unready* (1930), 139.
- ¹⁸Excavations 1973, 48-50.
- ¹⁹Excavations 1974, 106; features 73, 405 and 490 on fig. 3.

The Society is grateful to the Department of the Environment for a grant towards the cost of printing this paper.