

Report 2803



nps archaeology

## Archaeological Evaluation of Land Off Hall Road, St Peter's Church, Smallburgh, Norfolk

ENF127001



**Prepared for:**  
Smallburgh St Peter's Church PCC  
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Location:	Land off Hall Road, Smallburgh, Norfolk
District:	North Norfolk
Grid Ref.:	TG 3334 2391
HER Event No.:	ENF127001
OASIS Ref.:	107524
Planning Ref.:	PF/10/1019
Client:	Mr. G. Dixon
Dates of Fieldwork:	21 July 2011

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## **Summary**

*In July 2011 NPS Archaeology completed an archaeological evaluation of land adjacent to St Peter's Church, Smallburgh; this work taking place within the area of a proposed extension to the graveyard.*

*Although Smallburgh church now stands in relative isolation it is likely that this area was once the centre of the village, before the settlement dispersed during the medieval period. The archaeological potential of this site, which is currently uncultivated grassland, was therefore thought to be reasonably high.*

*The single trench excavated revealed little of archaeological significance. The only feature exposed was a shallow ditch that was likely to represent a medieval field boundary. In light of these results it seem unlikely that this site saw any great degree of past activity, particularly as very few finds were recovered during the excavation of the trench.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

(Figure 1)

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by NPS Archaeology of land off Hall Road, Smallburgh, Norfolk. This evaluation took place within a small field adjacent to St. Peter's Church and was undertaken in response to proposals to extend the existing graveyard. The proposed graveyard extension will incorporate the northernmost part of the field, an area of approximately 1050m<sup>2</sup>. At present this land is rough, uncultivated pasture.

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by North Norfolk District Council (planning ref. PF/10/1019) and was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. BAU2803/NP).

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the principles set out in Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

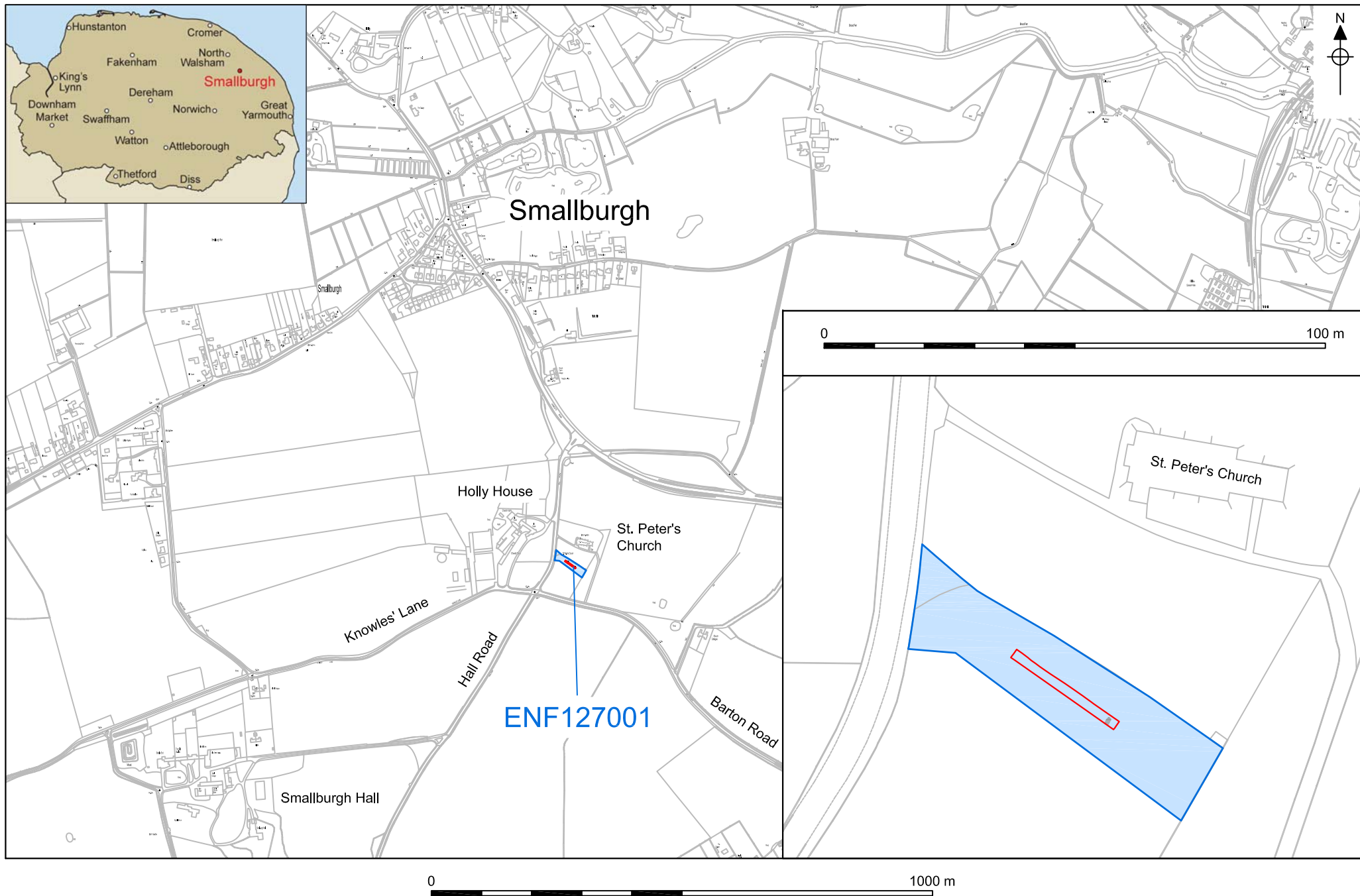


Figure 1. Site and trench location. Scale 1:10,000 (inset 1:1000).

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums Service, following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

This work was commissioned by Mr. G. Dixon, on behalf of St. Peter's Church Parochial Church Council.

## **2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

Smallburgh lies on the upland margin of the Norfolk Broads, overlooking the River Ant and Barton Broad to the east. In the north of the parish this land is dissected by a minor tributary of the Ant known as The Carr. This watercourse is flanked by two areas of wetland (Smallburgh Fen and Broadland Fen), both of which were themselves once Broads. These manmade lakes, the remains of medieval peat cuttings, are visible on the earliest maps of the area and were drained following the construction of the North Walsham and Dilham Canal in the early 19th century. The site itself, located in the centre of the parish, occupies relatively flat, dry ground with a maximum elevation of approximately 12m OD.

Across much of this area the underlying geology is principally Cromer Till and Norwich Brickearth sandy clays, although sand and gravel Crag formations are also present in the vicinity of the site (BGS 1991). These various quaternary drift deposits overlie a solid geology of Upper Cretaceous chalk (BGS 1985). The soils present within and around the site are mostly stagnogleyic argillic Brown Earths, reflecting the nature of the underlying geology (Lawes Agricultural Trust 1973).

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Information on past archaeological discoveries near St Peter's Church comes primarily from the Norfolk Historical Environment Record (NHER). As in most Norfolk parishes, finds have been recovered that document at least a degree of activity during most prehistoric periods, although none of the more significant discoveries have come from near the site in question.

A straight stretch of road to the west of the site, known as Anchor Street, is believed to follow the line of a Roman road (NHER 2796). Although the course of this road is not clear within the vicinity of the site, it presumably ran to the north of the church, heading towards a ford across the River Ant known to have existed near Wayford Bridge. Early Ordnance Survey maps once marked a 'Roman Camp' on the north side of the Ant at this point, although there appears to have been no direct evidence for this. Road works near Wayland Bridge in the 1970s did however uncover timbers that appeared to form part of a wooden causeway leading towards the river (NHER 8259). Although the date of this structure was not established, further timbers thought at the time to represent the remains of a boat were radiocarbon dated to the early 3rd century AD. The nature and intensity of Roman activity within Smallburgh parish remains uncertain at present, although a number of sites have produced coins and small amounts of pottery.

Smallburgh was well-established by the Late Saxon period, its entries in Domesday suggesting that it was, by this time at least, a reasonably populous and successful settlement (Brown 1984). The nature of the early village is largely unknown, with relatively few finds of Saxon date having been recovered. In 1856 workmen levelling a mound on Toad's Green (approximately 400m to the east of

the site) recovered Saxon beads and Late Saxon pottery, leading to the suggestion that this was the site of a burial mound or cemetery (NHER 8277). If this was indeed a burial ground it was not necessarily contemporary with the later Saxon village, the available evidence being more indicative of pagan Early Saxon burial customs.

It is likely that the earliest village was very different to the scattered settlement that exists today, most likely being focused in the vicinity of St Peter's church, which now stands virtually isolated in the centre of the parish. Although the present church is of 15th-century date (NHER 8275), 12th-century sources confirm that it replaced an earlier church, which may well have had Saxon or Norman origins.

A remarkably detailed estate map produced by John Darby in 1582 (one of the earliest to-scale parish maps in the country) gives a clear impression of how the parish looked at the end of the medieval period<sup>1</sup>. A number of large common open fields were still present, although much land had clearly already been enclosed by this time. The distribution of dwellings and farms within the parish is very similar to that seen today, suggesting that, as in many Norfolk villages, the dispersal of the village from its early core was not a recent development but something that occurred gradually during the medieval period (Williamson 1997). As elsewhere the need to stake a claim to the few remaining areas of common grazing land appears to have been key factor in this shift, the map showing that most dwellings lay on the fringes of three large commons. The map does however also provide some evidence to support the assertion that the village core once lay in the vicinity of the church. Hall Road was not a significant routeway at this time, it being Knowles' Lane that ran past the church, slightly to the west of the present road. Both Knowles Road and Barton Road appear to have been significantly broader in the vicinity of the church and there are clusters of buildings shown on both sides of the former. By the time an enclosure map was produced in 1814 (NRO C/Sca 2/262) only one set of buildings survived within the vicinity of the church, these being replaced by a grand brick dwelling known as Holly House (NHER 8301) approximately twenty years later. Local tradition has it that this site was once associated with Catt's manor, one of the parish's two medieval manors, although it appears that this assertion may be inaccurate. Although Holly House was built by the wealthy Postle family, who were indeed lords of the manor in the 19th century, their principle seat appears to have lain in the west of the parish, at Smallburgh Old Hall (NHER 14130). This much-modified 16th-century tower house, itself replaced by a new building in the early 19th century (Smallburgh New Hall NHER 13185), is much more likely to have been associated with the medieval manor, particularly as it lies close to the remains of two medieval moats (NHERs 8302 and 22183).

The site in question appears on Darby's map in much in present form, drawn as a small sub-square close, its colouring suggesting that it was fallow arable land rather than pasture (although this is not certain). At this time it was bounded to the east by a narrow lane that ran northwards, past the church. By the time the enclosure map was drawn this land had largely acquired its present character; the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/unvbrit/e/001mapdep001741u00000000.html>



lane to the east terminating at the church and main road having been shifted eastwards, towards the church. Subsequent maps show few additional changes, the only notable exception being the addition of a belt of woodland along the eastern edge of the field (present by the mid 19th century).

At present there is only limited archaeological evidence for the nature of past activity within the vicinity of St. Peter's church. The realignment of Yarmouth Road in the mid 1980s, to the north of the church, saw the recovery of a variety of finds, including Iron Age, Roman and medieval pottery. However few records of this work survive, although it would appear that no sub-surface remains were encountered. The excavation of a water main trench to the west of the church in 1999 was also subject to archaeological monitoring, although no features or deposits of note were observed along this stretch of its route (Hobbs 1999). More recently, the examination of aerial photographs as part of the English Heritage National Mapping Programme has identified a range of archaeologically significant cropmark features within and around Smallburgh. Unfortunately few cropmarks have been identified in the vicinity of St Peter's church, the nearest being a series of medieval and post-medieval boundaries visible in fields to the south of Barton Road (NHER 49459).

#### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

In order to achieve a 5% sample of the proposed development area a single trench was excavated, measuring 25m x 1.8m.

Machine excavation was carried out with a mini-digger-type excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all archaeologically significant features and deposits.

The temporary benchmark used during the course of this work was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark with a value of 14.48m OD, located on a buttress on the north side of St. Peter's church.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits no environmental samples were taken during this evaluation.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine, dry weather.

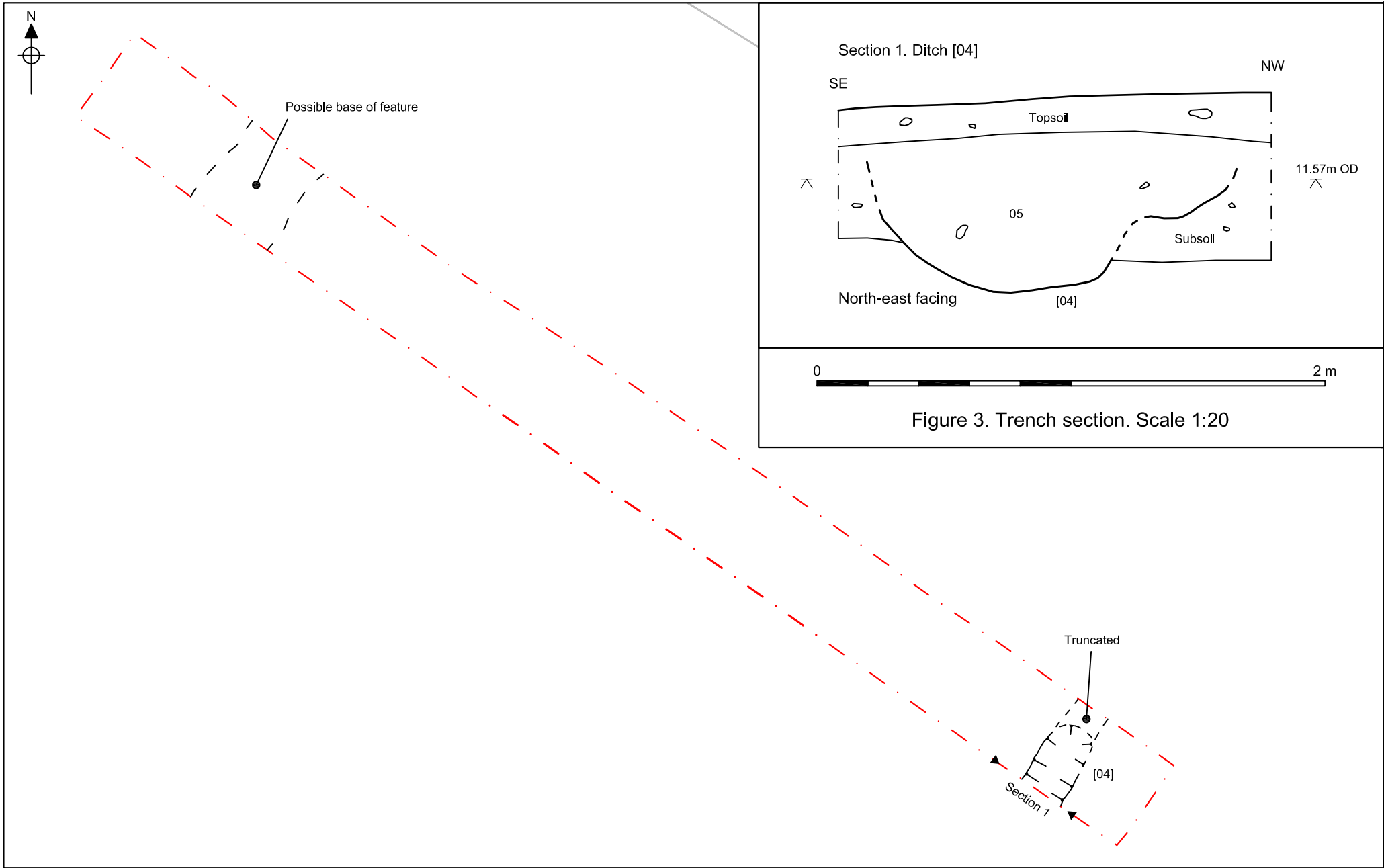


Figure 2. Trench plan. Scale 1:100

Section 1. Ditch [04]

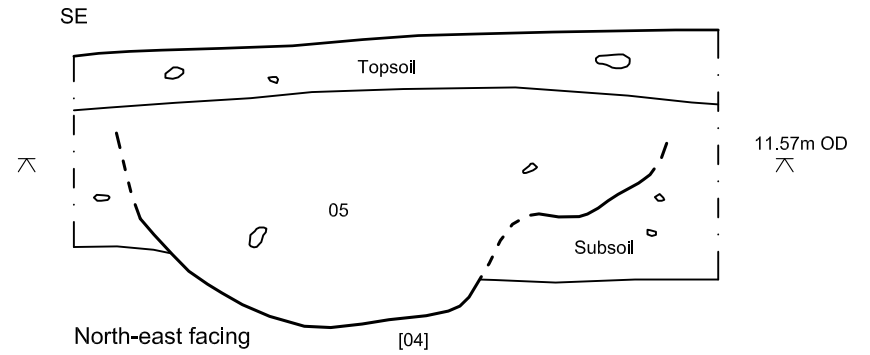


Figure 3. Trench section. Scale 1:20

Truncated

[04]

Section 1

## 5.0 RESULTS

(Figures 2 and 3)

The single trench excavated was positioned at the centre of the proposed graveyard extension and was aligned roughly north-west to south-east, parallel to the southern boundary of the existing graveyard (Figs 1 and 2, Plate 1).



Plate 1. Trench following excavation, looking north-west (ditch [04] in foreground)

The silty loam topsoil (01) proved to be poorly developed and very shallow, barely present beneath the roots of the rough grass that covered the site. A mid brown grey sandy silt subsoil (02) was present across much of the trench, although this was very thin at the north-western end of trench, where the underlying geological deposits were coarse sands and gravel. At the south-eastern end of the trench these coarse natural deposits gave way to pale, mottled clay silts, this finer material being overlain by a much thicker subsoil. Three sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from this subsoil layer.

A shallow ditch ([04]) at the south-eastern end of the trench was the only archaeologically significant feature exposed. Little of this ditch survived in the base of the trench, although its steep-sided 'u'-shaped profile could be clearly seen in the sides of the trench, cutting through the subsoil layer. Its unremarkable mid

orange brown sandy silt fill (05) produced a number of lava quern fragments (probably deposited as a single lump) and an unidentifiable iron object.

The sands and gravel present at the north-western end of the trench contained numerous small pockets of subsoil, presumably the result of past root disturbance. At one point these subsoil patches appeared to form a reasonably distinct band (see Fig. 2). Although this shallow deposit was clearly not a deliberately cut feature it is possible that it marked the line of a hedge.

## **6.0 THE FINDS**

The finds recovered from this site are described below by material, and ordered by date. A summary list of all finds ordered by context can be found in Appendix 2a

### **6.1 Pottery**

Three sherds of pottery, weighing 16g were collected from the subsoil layer, all of which are Local Medieval Unglazed Wares (LMU). With slightly sandy fabrics, sparse mica and few coarse inclusions, they are typical of locally produced 11th- to 14th-century cooking pots.

One sherd has reduced margins and is lightly sooted both internally and externally, whilst the remaining two, which join, are oxidised externally but burnt and heavily sooted internally.

### **6.2 Lava**

The fill of ditch [04] produced seventeen fragments of very abraded, grey, vesicular lava weighing 621g. It is noted that there is no surviving grinding surface remaining on any of the fragments. Although lava for quern stones was imported from the Rhineland during the Roman through to the medieval period, and with no other dating evidence from the ditch for these pieces, their proximity to St. Peter's Church suggests they may be of medieval date.

### **6.3 Iron**

A single iron object was recovered from ditch [04]. This item is possibly a sub-square buckle frame, although it is heavily encrusted making visual identification difficult.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

This evaluation revealed little in the way of archaeological remains, with only a single ditch present within the excavated trench. Although this ditch produced no clear dating evidence it seem reasonable to assume that it represents a medieval boundary, appearing on none of the available cartographic sources.

The lack of physical remains, coupled with the scarcity of finds within the soil layers suggests that this location saw little in the way of past activity. This is perhaps not as surprising as it initially appears. It is clear from the Smallburgh estate map of 1582 that the road adjacent to the church once ran some 60-70m to the west of its present position. The site was therefore previously set back from the main roads through the village, beyond were occupied sites are more likely to have been present.

The poor undeveloped nature of the soils in this field suggests that it has probably long been uncultivated pasture.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Historic Environment Service.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Smallburgh St Peter's Church PCC for commissioning and funding the project.

This project was managed by Nigel Page with the fieldwork being undertaken by Suzanne Westall and the author. The finds were washed, recorded and reported on by Lucy Talbot. Information from the Norfolk HER was provided by Sarah Howard.

This report was edited by Jayne Bown and produced by David Dobson. The illustrations were created by the author and finalised by David Dobson.

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### Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Type	Description	Date
1	Deposit	Topsoil	-
2	Deposit	Subsoil	-
3	Deposit	Natural	-
4	Cut	Cut of ditch	?Medieval
5	Deposit	Fill of ditch [04]	?Medieval

### Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Medieval	Ditch	1

### Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
2	Pottery	3	16g	Medieval	-
5	Lava	17	621g	Unknown	Fragments
5	Iron	1	22g	Unknown	?Poss. Square frame buckle

### Appendix 2b: Oasis Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Medieval	Pottery	3
Unknown	Iron	1
	Lava	17