

Report 2827a



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Archaeological Evaluation at the Thetford Academy, Croxtan Road, Thetford, Norfolk

ENF127740



Prepared for
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Frontispiece. General view of site looking north-east

Location:	Thetford Academy, Croxton Road, Thetford
District:	Breckland
Planning Ref.:	-
Grid Ref.:	TL 8764 8461
HER No.:	ENF 127740
OASIS Ref.:	113451
Client:	NPS South East Ltd
Dates of Fieldwork:	24th-26th October 2011

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted for NPS South East Ltd ahead of the proposed redevelopment of the Thetford Academy (formerly the Rosemary Musker School) on Croxton Road, Thetford.

The site is to be evaluated in two separate phases; two trenches in this phase with a further six trenches required in an area to the north of the site at a later date.

Two trenches, each 30m by 1.80m in plan were positioned within the footprint of proposed development located c.1.70km to the north of Thetford.

These trenches revealed only one feature of archaeological interest, a possible quarry pit of perhaps 17th-century date. Modern plough scars were also present within both trenches.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As the proposed development of new school buildings and sports facilities (to be called the Thetford Academy) at Rosemary Musker School, Thetford, Norfolk (TL 8764 8461) (Fig. 1) lay in an area of archaeological potential, Norfolk Historic Environment Service (NHES) recommended an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching was carried out in accordance with principles set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).

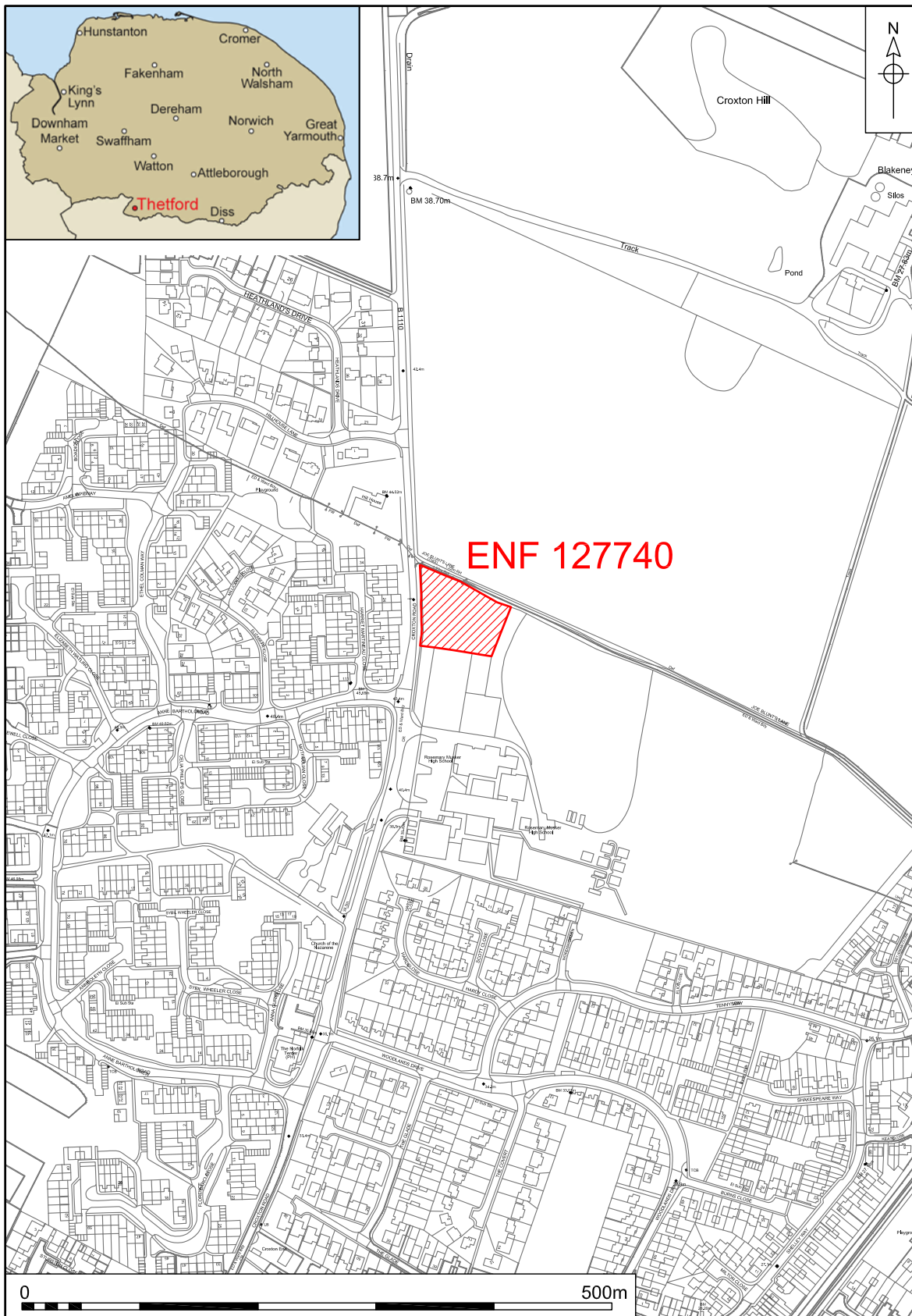
The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. No: NAU/BAU2827/DW). This work was commissioned and funded by NPS South East Ltd.

The results of the evaluation will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

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

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Thetford lies within the Breckland district in the south-west of Norfolk, close to the Norfolk-Suffolk border. The location of the site is on the northern side of the town and its boundary with surrounding agricultural land (Fig. 1).



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

The underlying bedrock at the site consists of Upper Chalk (British Geological Survey 1985) overlain by sandy glaciofluvial drift (British Geological Survey 1991).

The development site straddles the boundary of two parishes (Croxtan and Thetford itself), the parish boundary being defined by Joe Blunt's Lane (Fig. 1). The northern (greater) part of the site lies within Croxtan and the southern part within Thetford. The whole development site lies on a gentle south facing slope from approximately 43m OD to 25m OD. The site lies some distance from any modern day water course, the closest river being the River Thet approximately 1.5km to the south east of the site.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As part of the current development proposal a desk based assessment (Sillwood 2011) characterised the archaeological potential of the site. This report collated information primarily from the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER), a database of archaeological sites and findspots. The assessment looked at NHER records which fell within approximately 1km of the current site. It is considered to be superfluous to repeat the information collated from this assessment here, and as a result a limited number of records are referenced below. The assessment identified forty NHER records within a 1km radius of the site, of which most were artefact findspots. No listed buildings are located within the area.

Thetford is a small market town in the south-west of the county of Norfolk close to the border with Suffolk. The town lies within an area of Norfolk and south Suffolk known as Breckland, characterised by light sandy soils and heathlands. The town of Thetford lies close to the confluence of the Rivers Little Ouse and Thet as well as the Icknield Way, an ancient trackway from north-west Norfolk to southern England. The presence of these routes is likely to have been instrumental in the early settlement of the area, providing access to the Fens, North Sea and inland to what is now Norfolk and Suffolk (Andrews 1995 pp 11).

Archaeological evidence indicates a longevity to human presence in the Breckland area with Middle Palaeolithic activity at Lynford Quarry, Upper Palaeolithic Long Blade sites along the river valleys and Neolithic flint mines at Grimes Graves (NHER 5640) some 8km to the north-west of the development site.

Isolated finds of prehistoric flintwork have been recovered from within 1km of the current site, with further evidence provided by the excavation of 'Beaker pits' and Bronze Age features at site NHER 25763 to the south-east of the development site. Undated cropmarks to the north-east of the site (NHER 53464) consist of ditches and field boundaries possibly of Iron Age to Roman date. The importance of the area in the Iron Age is highlighted by the setting of a fort near the River Thet dating from the fifth century BC (Andrews *ibid*).

A site of national importance spanning the Iron Age and Roman periods lies at Fison Way c.850m to the west of the proposed development. Here the excavation of a Roman temple complex (NHER 5853) in the 1980s also revealed earlier activity from the later Neolithic through to the Iron Age with Bronze Age cremations and Iron Age domestic activity. A nationally important hoard, the Thetford treasure, was recovered from this site. Much of this hoard, comprising jewellery and tableware, was in pristine condition, stylistically dating to second half of the 4th

century AD. Cropmarks of undated ditches (NHER 53464) located to the north-east of the evaluation site may be Iron Age to Roman in date.

Early Saxon occupation in Thetford probably developed around a fordable point on the south bank of the River Little Ouse close to the Red Castle, with Middle Saxon occupation mainly to the west of this (Andrews *ibid*) though the extent of this occupation in the vicinity of the town is not well understood. Documentary references identify Thetford as the winter quarters of a Viking army which overran East Anglia in 870 AD, taken to demonstrate the town was already of some significance by this time. From perhaps then at least the late 9th century Thetford appears to have developed with some rapidity, benefiting from geographical position and the growth of other towns in the region such as Bury St Edmunds and Norwich. By the time of the Norman Conquest of 1066 Thetford was one of the six most important towns in the country with an enclosed area north and south of the river of perhaps sixty hectares, a mint and the expansion of extra mural suburbs. From the late 11th century Thetford however started to decline, with occupation in the town contracting to a smaller area north of the river. Finds of Early, Middle and Late Saxon objects have all been recovered from within 1km radius of the proposed development site with the Early Saxon finds being of a type usually associated with burials. The nearest cemetery of this date however is at Brunel Way (NHER 25154), to the west of the school and outside the 1km study area.

Two NHER records for the medieval period occur within 1km of the school site. One of these in the proposal area to the north of Joe Blunt's Lane consists of an earthwork bank (NHER 54531) identified from aerial photographs in 1986. This record is viewed with caution as the earthwork is visible on one set of aerial photographs only, and may not be of archaeological origin. It is interesting to note; however, that this earthwork lies close to the parish boundary that runs along Joe Blunt's Lane. Emery and Hogget (2009) noted that 'traces of ancient boundary ditches and banks have been observed at the edges of the parish' and that 'earthwork banks associated with the county boundary also served to delineate the medieval and post-medieval Thetford Warren'.

The second record within the 1km study area is of find spot NHER 17952 - two 13th-century seal dies and a medieval English jetton (trading token), recovered by metal detecting. The school had not been built when these were found; the location for this record reads 'field south of Joe Blunt's Lane'.

Activity associated with this period might also be identified by cropmarks to the south-east of the site (NHER 53463). These broad bank and ditch marks are thought to relate to medieval field division rather than settlement.

The nearest NHER record of post-medieval date is for a multi-period collection of Roman, medieval and post-medieval artefacts (NHER 38083) found adjacent to the school's eastern boundary. The NHER also identifies several kilns including a tile kiln (NHER 14002) and a brick kiln marked on Bryant's map of 1826 and the Ordnance survey map of 1836 (NHER 16861). An excavation in 2000-1 located a Suffolk-type brick kiln (NHER 25763) which appears to have been built between 1700 and 1780, but is not depicted on any contemporary maps. A large pit nearby, now infilled with modern material, is possibly the clay source for the kiln. The kiln appears to have been used for a relatively long period of time as a large quantity of post medieval brick and tile was recovered from in and around the brick kiln. A possible lime kiln (NHER 54876) has also been recorded in the vicinity to the east

of the school site. The possible lime kiln is a subterranean structure constructed from what appears to be chalk block. Modern development in the area of the site began at this time, and the site itself was not developed until the 1980s.

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.

The evaluation scheme initially planned to examine a total of eight evaluation trenches each 30m by 1.80m set out in the footprint of the proposed development with Trenches 1 and 2 in the area currently occupied by the school and Trenches 3-8 in the plot of land to the north of Joe Blunt's Lane. As access to the plot north of Blunt's Lane was not feasible at the time of the project, and following consultation with NHER and the client, it was decided to undertake the work in two phases. The first element (which this report described) involved the excavation of two evaluation trenches (Trenches 1 and 2) south of Joe Blunt's Lane (Fig. 2) with the remaining six trenches in the plot to the north to be evaluated later.

Turf was removed from the each trench and replaced following reinstatement. Machine excavation was carried out with a 3-ton hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

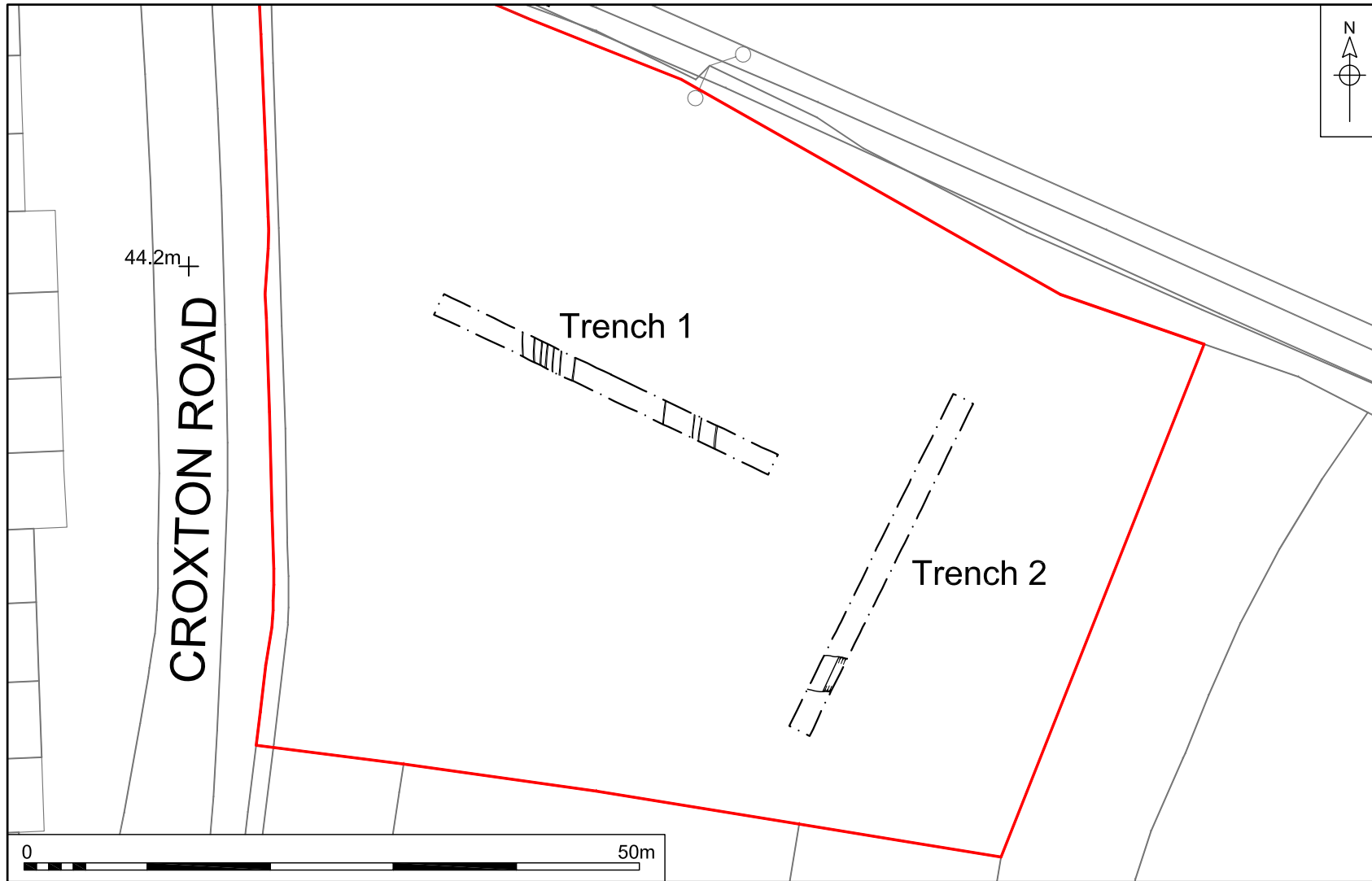
Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

No environmental samples were taken.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Monochrome and digital photographs were taken of features and deposits where appropriate and to record the progress of works.

The temporary benchmark used during the work was established with GPS.

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




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Figure 2. Trench locations. Scale 1:500

5.0 RESULTS

The results from each trench are presented below in tabulated form. A photograph of each trench accompanies each individual Trench.

Trench 1				
		Figs 2 and 3		
		Location		
		Orientation	North-west – South-east	
		Dimensions		
		Length	30.0m	
		Width	1.80.m	
		Depth	0.45m	
		Levels		
North-west end top		41.80.m OD		
South-east end top		42.89.m OD		
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Thickness	Depth BGL
1	Deposit	Topsoil, pale to mid brown sand with small silt/humic content. Contained occasional chalk and charcoal flecks, with occasional brick fragments.	0.24m	0.00-0.24m
2	Deposit	Subsoil, pale brown sand with small silt content, occasional small angular stones.	0.18m	0.24-0.42m
3	Geological	Fine pale yellow sand with moderate small and medium angular flint. Occasional patches of pale yellow chalk till showing through in lower half of trench.	-	0.42m-
4	Fill	Fill of [5]. Modern? Topsoil fill of plough scars		0.42m
5	Cut	Plough scars, very clear in plan, all aligned approximately north –south and therefore probably aligned with Croxton Road		0.42m
Discussion				
No features of archaeological interest were revealed in Trench 1. Plough scarring was evident across the trench				
A single find of worked flint of probable late prehistoric date was recovered from topsoil [1].				

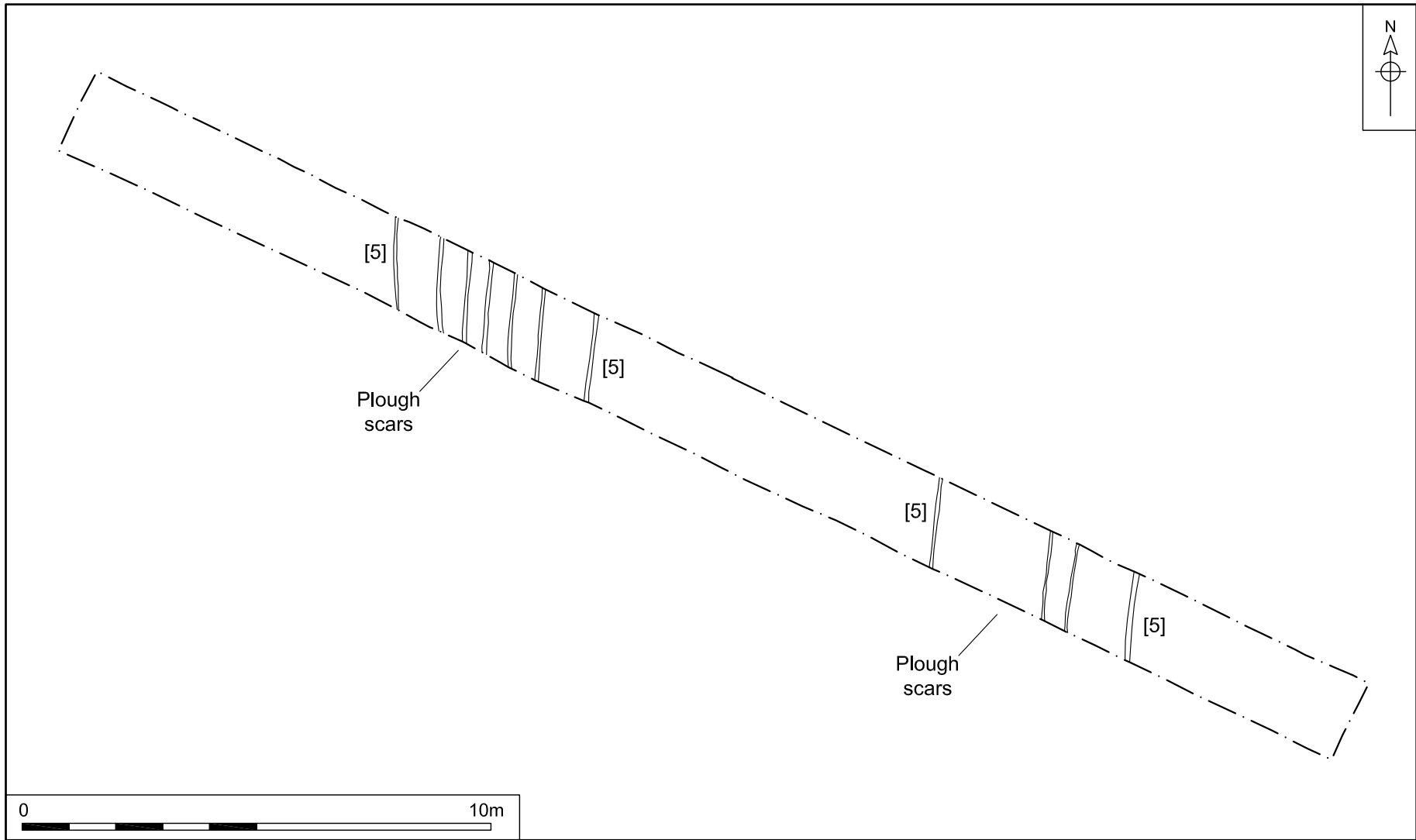


Figure 3. Trench 1, plan. Scale 1:125

Trench 2



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking north, 1m scale

Figs 2 and 4

Location

Orientation

North-east –South-west

Dimensions

Length

30.0m

Width

1.80.m

Depth

0.66m

Levels

North-east end top

40.83m OD

South –east end top

41.76m OD

Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Thickness	Depth BGL
1	Deposit	Topsoil, pale to mid brown sand with small silt/humic content, containing occasional chalk and charcoal flecks, occasional brick fragments. Slightly deeper than seen in Trench 1 .particularly at its southern end where topsoil might have been deposited during the modern construction of the adjacent tennis courts	0.50m	0.00-0.50m
2	Deposit	Sub soil, pale brown sand with small silt content, occasional small angular stones.	0.18m	0.50-0.68m
3	Geological	Generally fine pale yellow sand but much more variable than was seen in Trench 1, with areas of gravels and angular flints, yellow sand with occasional flints and at its northern end ferruginous pea grits and gravels with moderate small and medium angular flint.	-	0.68m-
6	Fill	Upper fill of pit [7] - a compact mid to pale brown sand with some silt content and occasional small chalk flecks and lenses of grey clay (more numerous at the base of the deposit). A small 17th century copper token was recovered from this deposit.	0.40m	0.68m
7	Cut	Possible quarry pit [7] was located at the south end of Trench 2. It measured 3.10m wide and 0.60m deep. It was aligned east west with gradually sloping sides and a concave base. It extended beyond the limits of the trench.	0.60m	0.68m

Trench 2				
8	Fill	Primary fill of pit [7] which consisted of fine pale brown sand with few inclusions (sparse chalk flecks and occasional small stones.	0.20m	0.68m
9	Fill	Fill of plough scares [10]		0.68m
10	Cut	Plough scars, similar to those seen in Trench 1, but with indication of co-axial arrangement.		0.68m

Discussion

The lateral deposits in Trench 2 were similar to those in Trench 1 but with a slightly deeper sediment sequence due to its down-slope location.

Pit [7], interpreted as a possible quarry pit was the only feature and contained a single, though significant, artefact suggesting a 17th-century date.



Plate 3. Trench 2 pit [7], 1m scale

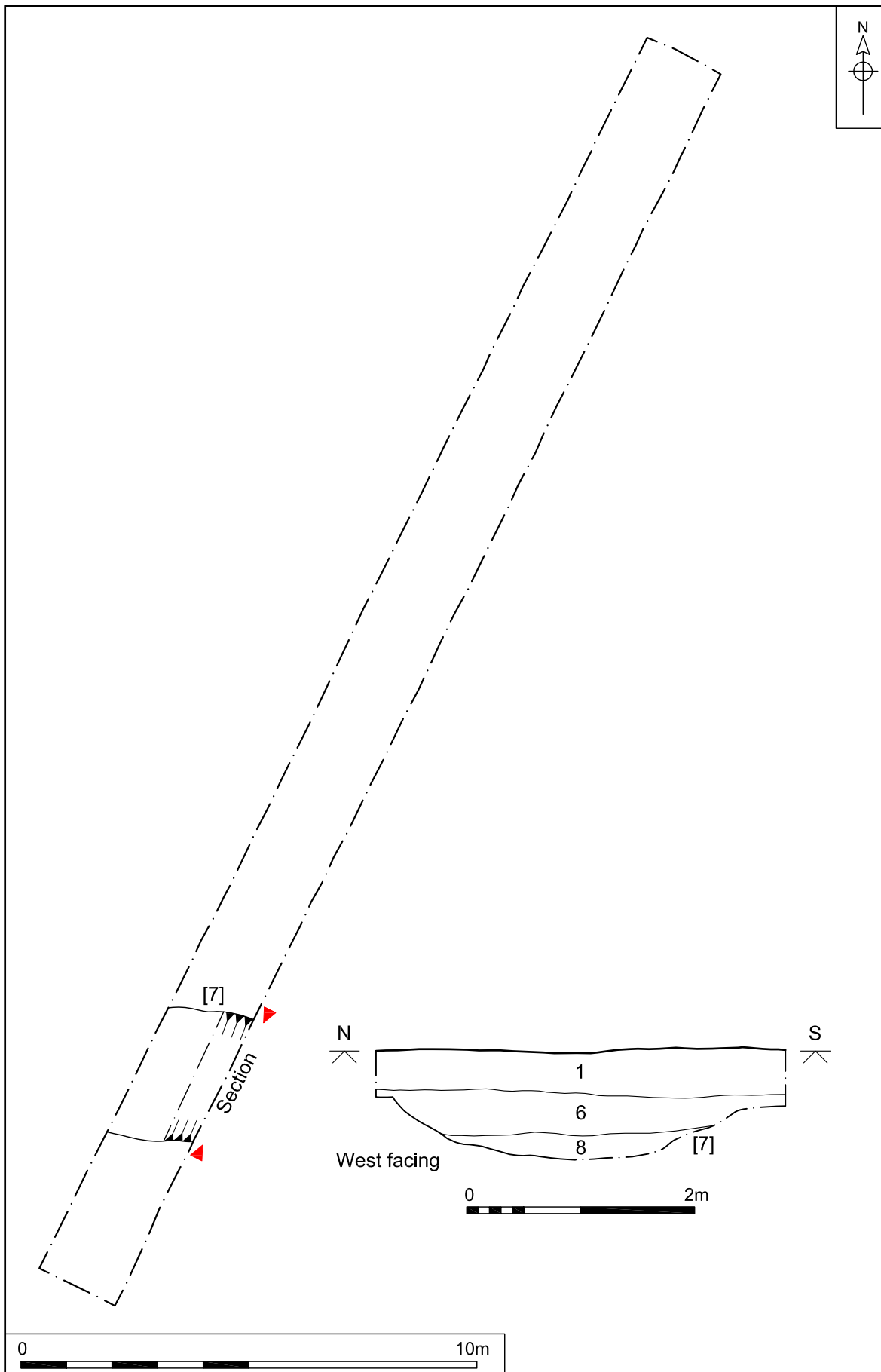


Figure 4. Trench 2, plan and section. Scale 1:125 and 1:50

6.0 FINDS

by Rebecca Sillwood

This very small assemblage (two objects) was processed and recorded by count and weight, and an Excel spreadsheet was produced outlining broad dating. Different materials have been considered separately and described below organised by material. See Appendix 2a for a tabulated summary.

6.1 Flint

A single dark grey partially corticated flint flake was recovered from topsoil [1] of Trench 1. Little more can be said about this piece, as it was recovered as an unstratified find, and as such does little more that indicate activity of probable late prehistoric date in the area.

6.2 Copper Alloy

A single find of copper alloy recovered from the upper fill of possible quarry pit [6] was a token with the name 'Thomas Young' and a row of three stars above and below the name on the obverse, and the grocers' coat of arms on the reverse with 'In East Harling' around the edge. It is of 17th-century date and there is a comparable example in the collection of Norfolk tokens held by the late Keith Freeman (http://www.spink.com/news/news_archive/norfolk.asp).

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The two trenches of the evaluation revealed only one feature of archaeological interest, and recovered only two artefacts. Despite what would appear to be a favourable setting of the site, on a south facing slope with free-draining soils, it is possible the distance of the site from any known water supply, (the closest being the River Thet some 1.5km away), was a factor in the seeming absence of human activity at the site.

The single archaeological feature recorded is interpreted as a possible quarry pit of perhaps 17th-century date, this date provided by the useful recovery of a token from its upper fill. The interpretation of this feature is based on its location within an area of gravelly sands, and a possible quarry shown within the same field parcel on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map, though this is a tentative conclusion and by no means certain.

Modern plough scars were present within both trenches.

Recommendations for mitigation work, should it be required, based on the evidence presented in this report will be made by Norfolk Historic Environment Service

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Duncan Stewart and Martin Rix of NPS South East who commissioned the project.

Fieldwork was undertaken by John Ames and the author; site machining was by Bryn Williams. The finds were processed by Lucy Talbot and reported on by Rebecca Sillwood.

The project was monitored by Ken Hamilton and a site event number provided by Sarah Howard (both of NHES). David Whitmore managed the project on behalf of NPS Archaeology.

The report was illustrated by David Dobson and edited by Jayne Bown

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Trench
1	Deposit			Topsoil	1,2
2	Deposit			Subsoil	1,2
3	Deposit			Natural	1,2
4	Deposit		5	Fill 5	1
5	Cut	Linear		Plough scars	1
6	Deposit		7	Upper fill	2
7	Cut	Pit		Quarry?	2
8	Deposit		7	Primary fill	2
9	Deposit		10	Fill	2
10	Cut	Linear		Plough scars	2

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Material	Total
Prehistoric	Flint – Struck	1
Post-medieval	Copper-Alloy	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
1	Flint – Struck	1	25g	Late Prehistoric	
6	Copper-Alloy	1	1g	Post-medieval	17th century trade token: THOMAS YOUNG rev. East HARLING

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Late Prehistoric	Flint – Struck	1
Post-medieval	Copper-Alloy	1