

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1060

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Abbey Farm, Weybourne,
Norfolk**

41266 WEY

Ben Hobbs

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Location: Abbey Farm, Weybourne, Norfolk
District: North Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 114 310 (c)
HER No.: 41266 WEY
SAM No.: 21390
Date of fieldwork: 17th and 18th March 2005

Summary

An archaeological evaluation within in the area surrounding a 17th-century barn at Abbey Farm, Weybourne was undertaken. The location of the barn was of particular interest as it is situated within the precinct of the Augustinian Priory of the Blessed Virgin and All Saints; a Scheduled Ancient Monument of national importance. Indeed the east gable wall of the barn is believed to be a remnant of the monastic buildings.

Only three features of archaeological significance were found. These consisted of the original 17th-century rammed chalk floor surface of the barn and beneath this an earlier feature (possibly an east-to-west ditch/gully or maybe a pit). As well as another undiagnostic large feature. Whether the features, other than the chalk barn floor, relate to the priory building is not certain as no dating evidence was recovered.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken prior to the conversion of 'Barn No. 1', at Abbey Farm, Weybourne for residential development. The site comprised 0.05ha. The barn was of particular interest as it lies within the precinct of the Augustinian Priory of the Blessed Virgin and All Saints (Scheduled Ancient Monument 21390). The barn is sited c. 80m to the north of the surviving priory buildings.

The archaeological evaluation was carried out to determine the extent of any surviving cultural deposits within the barn by the excavation of three trenches within the footprint of the barn conversion and one outside the standing building, close to the east gable wall.

This work was commissioned by Mr Nigel Smith of Sheringham.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH 07/01/05) and a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: WAB/1947).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The underlying solid geology of the area is Upper Chalk covered by glacial Boulder clay with thin Cromer Ridge soils (Funnell 1994, 12; Corbett and Dent 1994, 18). The site lies at approximately 12m OD on a slope running west, down a shallow valley. To the east of the site runs a mill leet that was utilised by the priory mill (Fairweather; 1930).

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Weybourne Priory (Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) 6278) was founded in c. 1190 by the Augustinian Canons around an existing Saxo-Norman church. The majority of the church and cloister buildings are, however, of 13th- to 15th-century date.

In the 17th century (after the dissolution) the remains of the priory were reused as a farmhouse, with later alterations taking place in the 19th century (Fairweather 1930). Substantial standing remains of the priory buildings survive within the gardens of the farmhouse, with parts of these upstanding remains having been utilised as outbuildings.

Barn No. 1 mainly dates from the 17th century, this includes the northern and southern sides and west gable end (the date 1671 is on the west gable end). The east gable end is older (medieval) and consists of a standing wall belonging to part of the priory building range, north of the church. It is possible this may have been a guesthouse. Barn No. 1 is also one of a pair of post-medieval barns within a courtyard area, which may reflect the positioning of an older priory outer court.

Previous archaeological work done at the site consists of the excavation of two evaluation trenches (Penn 2003) within the structure of the farmhouse and outbuildings; one in the base of a cellar and the other inside the surviving 'dark entry' of the priory. This work found construction features including stake- and post-holes and a floor surface. Layers of demolition rubble from the priory fabric were also recorded.

An archaeological watching brief (Hobbs 2005) was carried out when the floors of two rooms in the farmhouse were reduced and a trench was cut for a supporting wall immediately to the east of the house. Fragments of priory building rubble were observed in the make-up of the floors and in the footing trench. Pottery sherds recovered were post-medieval in date. Several fragments of disarticulated human skeletal remains were recovered from the spoil of the trench.

4.0 Methodology

(Figs 2 and 3)

The conversion of the barn involved lowering the ground level immediately to the south of the building for two wing extensions and the installation of two chimney stacks within the barn itself. The depth of the four evaluation trenches was initially set at the formation level of the building work (0.50m). The trenches were excavated by a small JCB-type mechanical digger equipped with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. The ground surface was reduced gradually in 100 to 150mm spits under constant archaeological supervision.

Trench 1 (2m x 3m x 0.5m deep) was centrally situated within the barn, positioned between the location of the two proposed chimney stacks. Part of a brick floor was removed by the machine before underlying deposits were reached.

Trench 2 (2m x 3.5m x 1m deep) was located to the south of the barn and the west of the south barn door. The surface in this area was composed of concrete and brick rubble which was removed to a depth of c. 0.25m before underlying soil was observed which could be gradually reduced to the required depth. The depth of the rubble make-up within this trench also meant that it was excavated slightly deeper (c. 1m) than the required (0.5m) depth to get a visible indication of the underlying deposits. Moreover, the trench length was slightly extended (by 1.5m to the south) both to compensate for the inclusion of a wall foundation and to allow the client to ascertain the depth of the concrete hard-standing in this direction.

Trench 3 (2m x 3m x 0.5m deep) was located to the south of the barn, east of the southern barn door.

Trench 4 (2.5m x 1.5m x 0.8m deep) was located to the east (and outside) of the footprint of the conversion, adjacent to the eastern gable wall. It was excavated to determine if underlying remains of the monastery still existed in the immediate vicinity of the development.

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.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Although a non-permanent peg was used as a temporary benchmark on site, a level (7.752m AD) was taken from a building surveyor's temporary datum level in the north-western corner of the barn wall.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions were dry, bright, clear and warm.

5.0 Results

Trench 1

(Figs 2, 4 and 5)

This trench was located in the centre of the barn on the threshing floor, between the north and south doorways. It measured 3m by 2m and was excavated to a depth of 0.50m. The surface of the barn threshing floor area consisted of close set bricks ([1]), c. 0.08m in thickness, with varying states of coverage. The bricks were bedded in a 0.07m thick layer of loose yellow sand ([2]). Directly below this was a 0.08m thick layer of greenish yellow compacted (rammed) chalk ([3]) containing small flint pebbles and fragments of straw, continuing beneath the sand and brick floor in all the sections of the trench (Fig. 4). This chalk layer was interpreted as the original floor surface of the barn.

Below the compacted chalk in the south-facing section of the trench was a mid brown sandy silt deposit ([5]) which extended to the base of the trench with a depth of 0.34m. This deposit was visible in plan in the base of the trench, against the south-facing section, for a width of 0.36m. The cut ([4]) of this deposit ran from west-to-east, clearly defined at each end of its visible length, with apparent disruption in the centre, evidenced by displaced lumps of underlying marl mixed with the silt. The cut was also clearly seen in the west-facing section of the trench (Fig. 5). The depth of this deposit was not determined, as it was located at the base of excavation.

The remainder of the trench base consisted of a pale yellow marl clay ([6]) which contained moderate small flints and chalk fragments and through which feature [4] was cut.

No finds were recovered from any of these deposits.

Trench 2

(Figs 2 and 6)

This trench was located to the south of the barn, to the west of the southern doorway. It was placed within the footprint of the extension wing of the development. Part of a concrete hard-standing ([10]) was first broken-up and the underlying rubble removed. An adjacent concrete support half way along the trench created a difference in the height of the concrete hard-standing along the length of the trench.

The deposit beneath the brick rubble was the same pale yellow marl ([6]) as seen in Trench 1, with irregular patches of naturally occurring dark brown silty clay within it.

In the southern half of the trench a mid brown sandy silt deposit containing brick and mortar fragments ([11]) lay directly beneath the rubble of the hard-standing and was interpreted as a relatively recent make-up layer. This overlay the pale yellow marl ([6]) at the base of the trench.

An east-to-west aligned brick wall ([9]), which bisected the length of the trench, was uncovered and was left intact. The wall line was probably part of a brick enclosure located at the front of the barn. It is unclear whether this was associated with the original barn or was a later addition. The cut for the wall ([7]) was observed in the west-facing section with a fill of mixed grey, green and yellow clay ([8]) within which the wall was seated. In the east-facing section of the northern half of the trench the brick wall was seen to be considerably thicker and probably represented part of a brick platform of unknown purpose.

No finds were recovered from the trench deposits.

Trench 3

(Fig. 2)

This trench was located to the east of the southern barn entrance, within the footprint of the proposed east extension wing. It measured 2m by 3m. A thin layer of topsoil/pea gravel was removed down to reveal the underlying marl clay ([6]).

A cut ([12]) for a large feature could be seen to run east-to-west down the centre of this trench. The southern part of the trench was entirely covered by the fill ([13]) of this feature. Fragments of chalk, occasional small flints and snail shells could be

seen within this fill. Excavation demonstrated that this feature continued to the base of the trench; the edges and base of the feature were not located.

Within deposit [13], at the base of the trench, a small feature ([14]) 0.10m in diameter was recorded. This possible stake-hole contained pale brown silt (unnumbered).

No dating evidence was recovered from the trench.

Trench 4

(Fig. 2)

This trench was located 3m to the east and approximately central to the east gable wall of the barn (outside the development footprint). The trench was 2.5m long by 1.5m wide and was excavated in 150mm spits to a depth of 0.80m.

The topsoil ([15]) was 0.40m thick and consisted of a dark brown organic loam containing occasional small stones and modern detritus such as agricultural metal fittings, glass and rubble etc. This overlay the same yellow marl ([6]) as was observed in the previous trenches and which was consistently present throughout the trench section. Some tree root disturbance was recorded.

No dating evidence was recovered from the trench.

6.0 Conclusions

The location of the barn was important as it is situated within the precinct of the Augustinian Priory of the Blessed Virgin and All Saints; a Scheduled Ancient Monument of national importance. Indeed the eastern gable wall of the barn is believed to be a remnant of the monastic buildings. It was possible, therefore, that floor surfaces or traces of masonry related to the priory may have survived in the vicinity.

Only three features of archaeological significance, however, were found. These consisted of the original 17th-century rammed chalk floor surface of the barn and beneath this an earlier feature (possibly an east-to-west ditch/gully or maybe a pit), also found was another undiagnostic large feature. Whether the features, other than the chalk barn floor, relate to the priory building is not certain as no dating evidence was recovered from their fills.

The lack of archaeological evidence from Trench 4 – located specifically to look for monastic remains - indicated that any floor surfaces that might have existed relating to the priory building have been lost in this area. The subsequent use of the ground for tillage is indicated by the 0.40m depth of topsoil observed in the trench section.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Trench	Category	Description	Period
1	1	Masonry	Brick floor	Post-medieval
2	1	Deposit	Sand bedding for [1]	Post-medieval
3	1	Deposit	Rammed chalk floor	Post-medieval
4	1	Cut	Cut of ditch or gully	?Post-medieval
5	1	Deposit	Fill of [4]	-
6	1, 2, 3 and 4	Deposit	Marl clay	Natural
7	2	Cut	Cut of wall [9]	Post-medieval
8	2	Deposit	Fill of cut [7]	-
9	2	Masonry	Brick wall	Post-medieval
10	2	Deposit	Concrete hard-standing	Modern
11	2	Deposit	Makeup deposit	Post-medieval
12	3	Cut	Gully or ditch	?Post-medieval
13	3	Deposit	Fill of [12]	-
14	3	Deposit	Possible stake hole	?Post-medieval
15	4	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern