NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1088

An Archaeological Watching Brief at 'South Wind', Gooderstone, Norfolk

41823 GDS

John W. Percival

August 2005

Frontispiece. An extract from the 1839 Tithe Map of Gooderstone. The site is towards the eastern side of the large plot east of the church. Not to scale.

Contents

Location:	'South Wind', The Street, Gooderstone, Norfolk
District:	Breckland
Grid Ref:	TF 7644 0216
HER No.:	41823 GDS
Date of fieldwork:	8th July 2005

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of the footing trench for a single house. A pit or gully was recorded which contained pottery dated to the Late Saxon period. This feature cut the upper fills of a large predominantly peat-filled feature at least 9.5m wide and 2.4m deep. It is most likely that the large feature was a palaeochannel of the River Gadder of ancient, probably early Holocene, date.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of strip foundation trenches for a two storey house at 'South Wind', The Street, Gooderstone. The plot in which the new house is being built lies in the south-western part of the gardens of 'South Wind', the new dwelling itself is to be set back *c.* 13m from the street frontage. The area observed was *c*. 9m by 11m (99 sq. m).

The archaeological work was commissioned and funded by Mrs Margaret Abbey of 'South Wind' Gooderstone.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: 01/03/05/EJR).

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 solid Geology of Gooderstone (along with most of the rest of Breckland) consists of chalk. This is overlain by sand and locally in the north of Breckland by boulder clay. Local place names indicate that outcrops of chalk are probably not uncommon in the vicinity of Gooderstone The site itself lay in the base of very gentle valley of the River Gadder a tributary of the River Wissey. It was therefore always possible that more recent geological deposits of riverine or alluvial origin may be present in the base of the valley.

The site itself was generally flat with no perceptible slope towards the moat (see below) and river to the north and lay at an elevation of round 13m OD. Although the site was visited in high summer when the water table was at its lowest, the presence of the nearby water gardens indicate local ground conditions are damp most of the time.

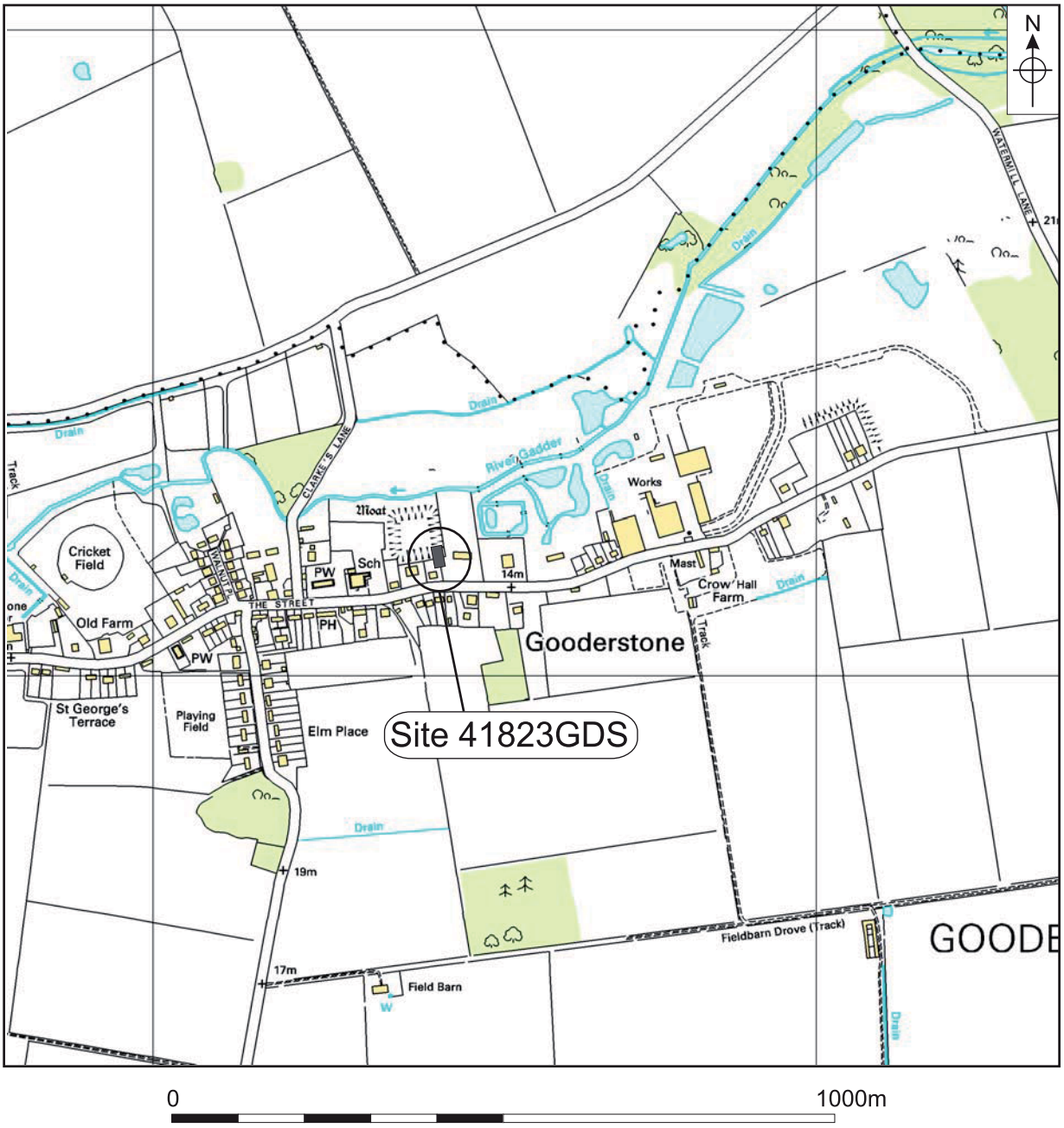

Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340
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3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site lay next to the south-eastern corner of a moated site (Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) 4579) which survives as an earthwork in grassland. There would seem to be little or no historical evidence to help date or interpret this monument but most moats in Norfolk date from the 13th or early 14th centuries (Rogerson 1994, 66).

Other monuments and artefacts found in the local area and listed in the NHER and described in broad chronological order below.

Prehistoric
Perhaps the earliest evidence for human activity in the vicinity of the site comes in the form of a Mesolithic tranchet axe (NHER 20942) found north-west of the moat adjacent to the river.

Fragments of two Neolithic flint axes (NHER 17684 and 20940) have also been recovered within the parish, along with a barbed and tanged arrowhead dated to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age (NHER 20940).

Romano-British
Coins and pottery have been recovered in small numbers in and around the village both north and south of the River Gadder (NHER 9641, 19411, 20940, and 32091). A 3rd-century coin was found within or adjacent to the moat.

Saxon
Early and Middle Saxon metal finds have been recovered north of the village (NHER 32091). To the south Middle and Late Saxon pottery has found (NHER 20940). Finds dating to the Late Saxon period including a sword (NHER 4578) and other decorative metalwork (NHER 4580) both found adjacent to The Street/Three Tuns Road.

The two previous archaeological interventions within Gooderstone have both produced pottery and other finds dated to the Late Saxon Period. Only 50m west of 'South Wind', work at the former village hall site uncovered features and finds dating to both the Middle and Late Saxon Periods (Birks 2001). Further west an archaeological evaluation at 'Waveney', Three Tuns Road also produced features and finds dated to the Late Saxon period (Adams 2001). In both cases it was thought that these features and finds represented occupation.

Medieval
Gooderstone is mentioned in the Doomsday Book (Brown 1984) and St. George's Church (NHER 4594) contains some Norman work. Both these factors indicate that Gooderstone has Saxon origins.

Post-medieval/modern
Both the Tithe map of 1839 (frontispiece) and the OS 1st edition six inch map dated to the 1880's show most of the area east of St. George's Church as open fields. The area around the site north of The Street did not begin to be built up until the 20th century. 'South Wind' itself is a 1960s or 1970s structure.

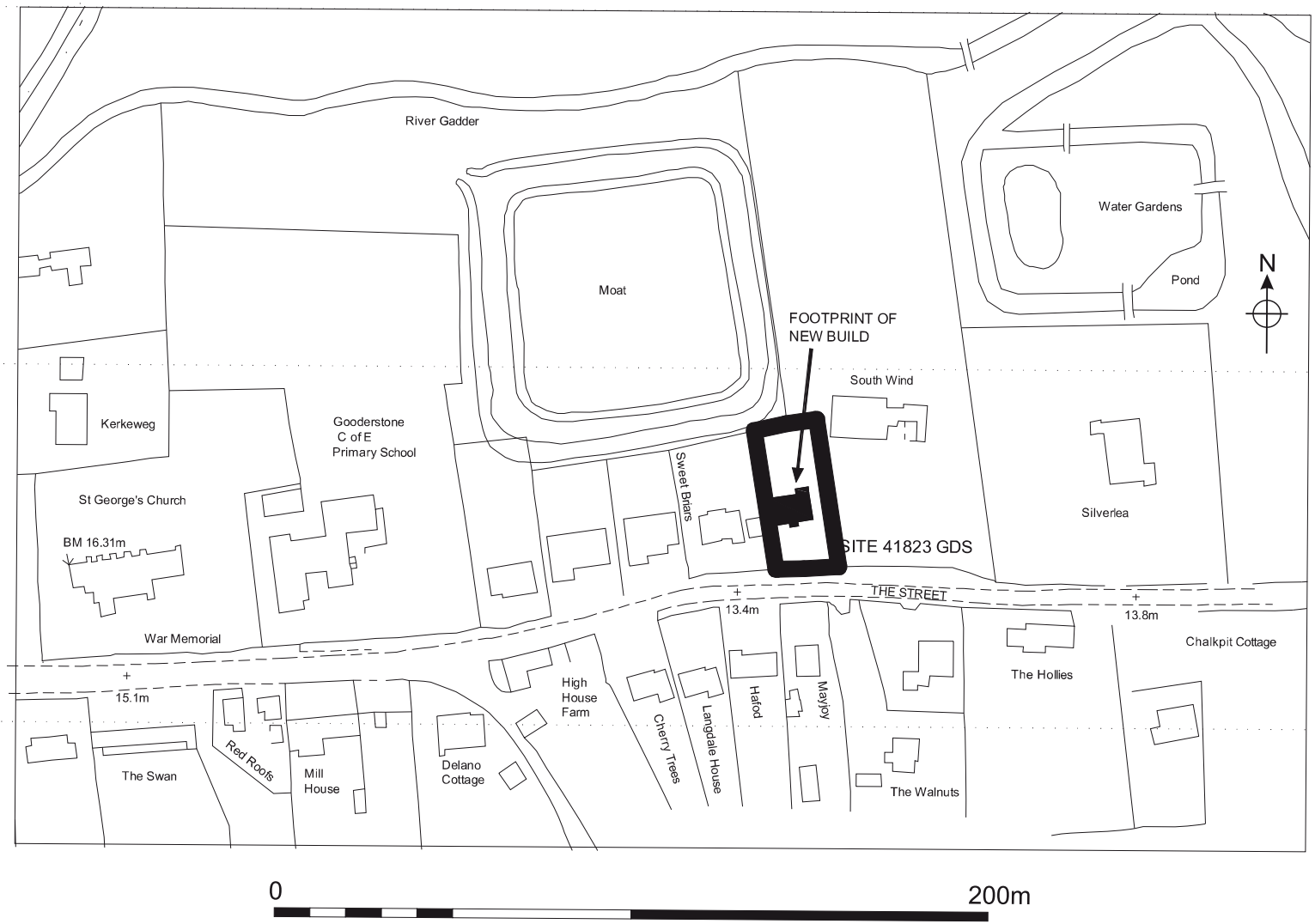


Figure 2. Detailed site location. Scale 1:2000

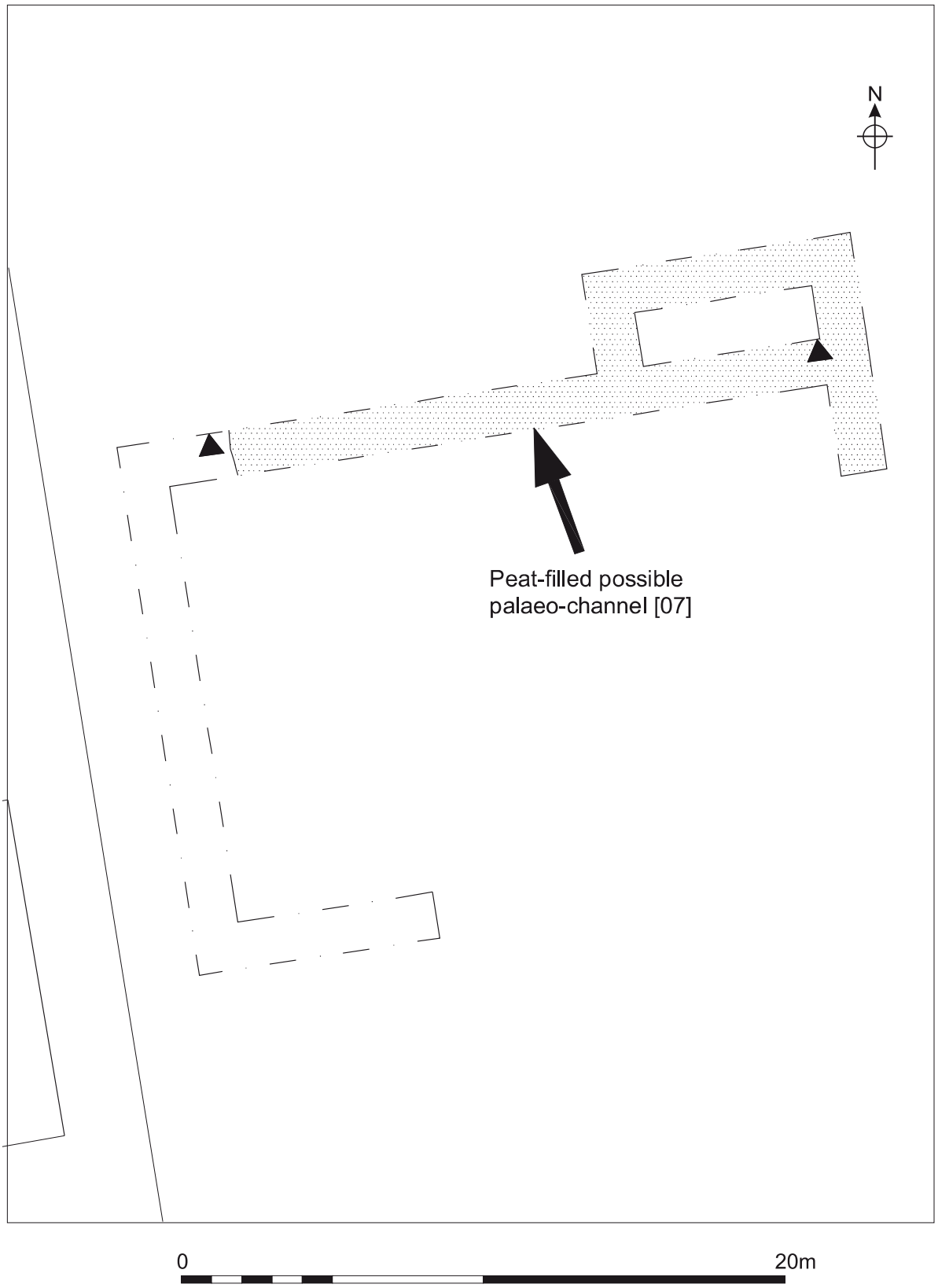


Figure 3. Foundation trenches observed. Scale 1:200

4.0 Methodology

(Figs 2 and 3)

The objective of the watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of strip footing trenches for a new dwelling. These trenches were *c.* 0.6m to 0.7m wide and were excavated using a wheeled 'JCB' type mechanical excavator fitted with a narrow toothed bucket. An archaeologist was in constant attendance during the excavation of the footing trenches.

After excavation the trenches were selectively hand-cleaned and the sides and base inspected at close quarters by an archaeologist. The northern north-to-south aligned foundation trench was excavated to a depth of 2.4m below the modern surface and soon became filled with water. It was impossible, therefore, to clean or inspect closely this section of trench. Due to the nature of the deposits encountered in this deep section it was decided, after stipulations from Breckland District Council Building Control and upon the advice of a structural engineer to abandon the strip footings and change to a foundation scheme using concrete piles. Due to factors relating to the great depth of the northern trench only approximately 70% of the outer circuit of foundations were dug.

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

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the 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.

Apart from being unable to gain access to the deeper part of the footing trenches conditions for observation were good. No adverse weather conditions were encountered.

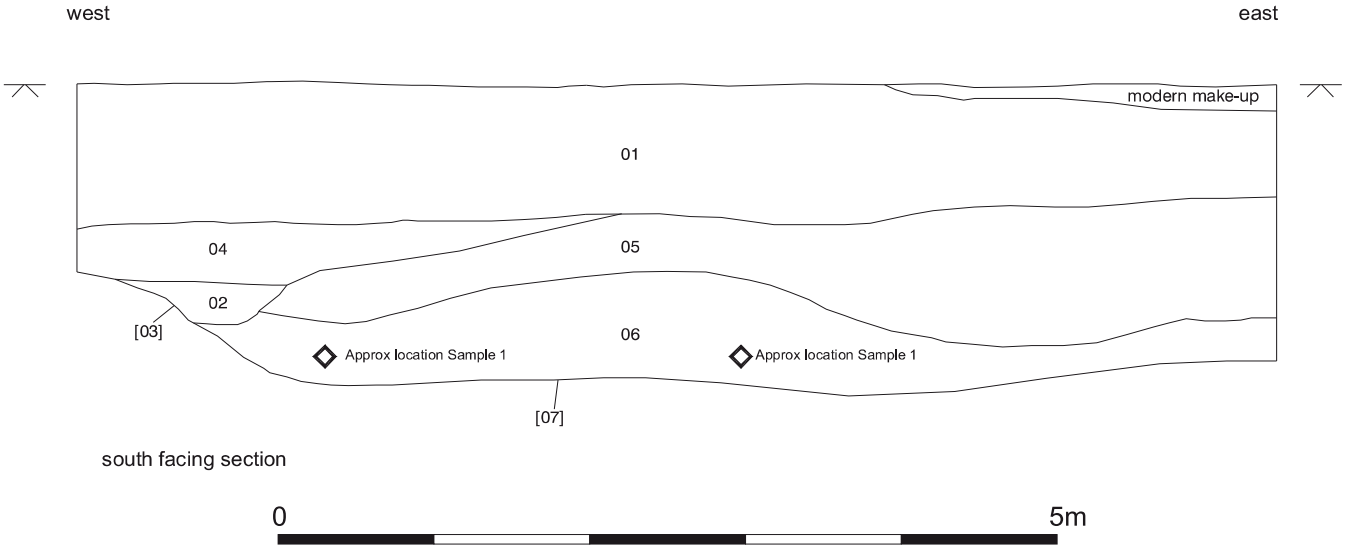
5.0 Results

(Figs 3 and 4)

In the south-western and western arms of the trench a uniform sandy loam topsoil ([01]) was seen directly overlying 'natural' geological deposits of degraded chalk or coarse grey sand. The topsoil was between 0.8m and 1.1m deep. This depth of topsoil can probably be explained by the agricultural and horticultural uses the site has been used for over the past few decades (if not centuries). No archaeological features or finds were seen in these parts of the trench.

The northern east-to-west aligned arm of the trench, however, was of more interest. Excavation of this part of the trench began at its western end where it became apparent that the chalk natural began to shelve away deeply to the east with a band of dark sub-soil like material ([04]) *c.* 0.4m deep contained within it. This material overlay a small pit or gully ([03]) that measured 0.8m wide and 0.3m deep. This feature contained sherds of Late Saxon Thetford-type ware and animal bone. Due the narrowness of the trench it was not possible to define the exact nature of this feature, although it is probably indicative of some sort of domestic activity.

As the excavation moved eastwards the chalk continued to shelve downwards forming a distinct edge ([07]). A thinner band of grey sandy material ([05]) similar in appearance to the grey sand 'natural' overlay a substantial deposit of peat ([06]). As the peat thinned and grew more silty in the eastern end of the trench the grey sandy deposit became thicker. The peat was sampled towards its western edge (Sample 1) and approximately in the centre of the trench (Sample 2). The results of an examination of these samples is discussed below.



There is little doubt that that the peat and overlying sand lay within a large feature of natural origin. It was at least 9.5m wide and 2.4m deep from the modern surface. It is most likely that the large feature was an infilled palaeochannel of the River Gadder. A possible alternative interpretation of this feature is that it was an infilled periglacial feature. Given its form and proximity to the river the former explanation seems more likely.

6.0 The Finds

Introduction

The finds and environmental material from the site is presented in tabular form with basic quantitative information in Appendix 2: Finds by Context.

In addition to this summary, more detailed information on specific finds and environmental categories is included in separate reports below. Supporting tables for these contributions are included in the Appendices.

6.1 The Pottery

By Sue Anderson

A total of four sherds of pottery, weighing 0.089kg, was collected ([02]) during the watching brief. They consist of one rim and three body sherds from four different

vessels, all probably Thetford-type ware. The rim is from a medium 'AB' jar (Dallas 1984) and has a type 4 rim, which in Thetford appears to date to the late 10th to 11th centuries (Anderson 2004). This small assemblage shows a diverse range of fabrics which is typical of the rural production centres of this ware, most of which belong to the 11th century. Rural Thetford-type ware production sites are known at nearby Grimston (Little 1994) and Bircham (Rogerson and Adams 1978) and further to the east at Langhale, Kirstead (Wade 1976). One body sherd is similar in appearance to so-called 'Early medieval sandwich ware', identified in Norwich by Jennings (1981), which is a wheelmade ware of 11th-century date.

6.1 Faunal Remains

By Julie Curl

A total of 0.128kg of bone, consisting of seven pieces, was recovered from one context ([12]).

A pelvis and humerus from an adult sheep/goat, which had been butchered. Scapula, metapodial and vertebrae fragments from cattle were also identified, these cattle remains had also been chopped and cut.

This is a very small assemblage, derived from butchering and food waste.

7.0 The Environmental Evidence

by Dr Frances Green

A total of two samples were taken from the peat infill of the possible palaeochannel. They were picked out from spoil that had been mechanically excavated from the footing trench. Care was taken to collect peat uncontaminated with other deposits.

7.1 Sample 1

This sample was collected from close to the western edge of the palaeochannel. It consisted of a firm very dark almost blackish brown, poorly humified detrital peat with frequent well preserved woody fragments. The peat was relatively firm and de-watered, when examined the layers peeled away in horizontal beds. Twigs of *Alnus* (alder) and *Betula* (birch) together with other unidentifiable woody fragments were found within a matrix of well-humified organic material. Rare *Carex* (sedge) and *Phragmites* (reed) remains were identified together with small areas of well-preserved moss remains which formed fibrous mats. Sand grains were occasionally observed but the overall inorganic content was very small.

This peat is envisaged having developed within Alder Carr which contained at least seasonal standing water. The mosses probably developed on raised tussocks or during dryer periods. Given the location of this peat within a river valley it is likely that it developed within an abandoned palaeochannel of the River Gadder and this peat represents the final infilling of stage of such a palaeochannel.

The date of this peat is likely to be Holocene and cannot be more than 7000 or 8000 thousand years old, due to the presence of Alder which is only present in East Anglia after this date.

7.2 Sample 2

This sample was collected from the base of the peat deposits at the central part of the footing trench. At this point the peat was sealed by a grey sand.

This deposit was a dark brown, slightly ginger, moderately well-humified soft peat which contained some identifiable plant remains. The most common plant identified was *Phragmites*, most of which appeared to be detrital. Occasional fine rootlets indicated limited *in situ* plant growth within this peat. Rare small fragments of wood indicate the presence of woodland close by. No sand or silt was detected.

This peat developed within an open reed fen within shallow water. The absence of inorganic material indicates there was no connection with the river when this peat was accumulating and it was at some distance from the margins of the fen.

8.0 Conclusions

The peat and sand infilled palaeochannel was probably the result of a naturally cut off meander and almost certainly pre-dates the Late Saxon period and is possibly of very ancient Early Holocene date. On present evidence the feature is firmly dated to between AD 1000 and 6000 BC.

It is impossible to reconstruct any possible former courses of the Gadder. Firstly not enough of the edges of the palaeochannel were seen. In addition the extremely muted relief of the Gadder valley in the Gooderstone area will have meant that the river could have meandered all across the valley base perhaps only confined by the 15m contour (Dr Frances Green pers. comm). In addition to this it is likely that the very straight section of river between Clarke's Lane and the Water Gardens is a human creation. It is most likely the course of the river was altered either before or during the construction of the moat in the medieval period.

The Late Saxon pit or gully was possibly indicative of occupation along the street frontage and compliments the evidence from earlier investigations. It is likely that Late Saxon and possibly Middle Saxon occupation was centred around the church on both sides of The Street. East of the church, by the 11th or 12th centuries, occupation had migrated south of The Street, possibly due to increased flooding. This area was not reoccupied with building until the 20th century.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mrs Abbey who funded the work, Mr M. Savoury of Gooderstone for his help and co-operation. Dr Frances Green examined the peat and provided valuable advice. The finds were processed by Lucy Talbot. The pottery was examined by Sue Anderson, the faunal remains by Julie Curl. Illustrations are by the author, Julie Curl and David Dobson. This report was edited by Alice Lyons.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
01	Deposit	Top-soil in all parts of the footing Trench	Modern
02	Deposit	Fill of pit or gully [03]	Late Saxon
03	Cut	Pit or gully	Late Saxon
04	Deposit	Dark subsoil-like material overlying feature [03]	Late Saxon ?
05	Deposit	Grey sand secondary fill of palaeochannel [07]	Early Holocene
06	Deposit	Peat primary fill of palaeochannel [07]	Early Holocene
07	Cut	Palaeochannel of River Gadder ?	Early Holocene

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
02	Pottery	4	0.089	Late Saxon/early Medieval
02	Animal bone	7	0.128	-

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Total by context of sherd count	Total by context of sherd weight (kg)	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Ceramic date
02	4	0.089	Thetford-type ware	Jar	1		10th to 11th century
			Thetford-type ware	Jar	3		10th to 11th century

Appendix 4: Faunal Remains

Context	Total context weight (kg)	Total context quantity	Species	Species quantity	Comments
02	0.128	7	Sheep/ Goat	2	Pelvis and humerus, butchered
			Cattle	5	Scapula fragments, metapodial shaft, axis vertebrae, butchered.