

**NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

Report No. 1095

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Dersingham Hall  
(Old Hall), Dersingham, Norfolk**

41734 DER

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October 2005

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Location: Dersingham Hall (Old Hall), Dersingham, Norfolk  
District: West Norfolk  
Grid Ref: TF 6920 3048  
HER No.: 41734 DER  
Date of fieldwork: 23rd to 31st May 2005

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## **Summary**

*A watching brief was undertaken at Dersingham Hall, a manorial building with 17th-century origins, on groundworks for new buildings immediately adjacent to the Hall.*

*Deep sandy subsoils below modern surfaces were recorded, but no archaeological features. Several modern soakaways and a 19th-century drain culvert were encountered. It is likely that this area, although adjacent to the Hall, had remained open and cultivated (lightly gardened). Remarkably few finds were retrieved, all of which were modern.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

(Fig. 1)

Dersingham Hall (Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) 8375) lies in the core of Dersingham, north of the church and a moated site (NHER 1579), which may represent the medieval predecessor of the Hall. The Hall lays a little further upslope from the moat, whose proximity to the church hints at some connection.

This watching brief (NHER 41734) was concerned with the development of these grounds for dwellings; the grounds extend to c. 1.75ha.

The work was commissioned by Paul Hamilton of Davis Langdon LLP on behalf of Teal Developments Ltd. This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ER 07.09.04).

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

## **2.0 Geology and Topography**

The site lay on a gentle south-facing slope, just above the 15m contour, on a band of Lower Cretaceous natural subsoil (sands, sandy clays, carstone). On the site itself, the natural subsoil was a pale cream-grey sand (exposed only in places), encountered at c. 1.3m to 1.5m below the present surface. Above this was a deep dark red/brown sandy subsoil, below a deposit of the same material intermixed with flecks of brick, chalk and some mortar. The uppermost layers represented car park surfaces of modern date.

To the south runs a stream, which fed the moat of the earlier Hall (NHER 1579).

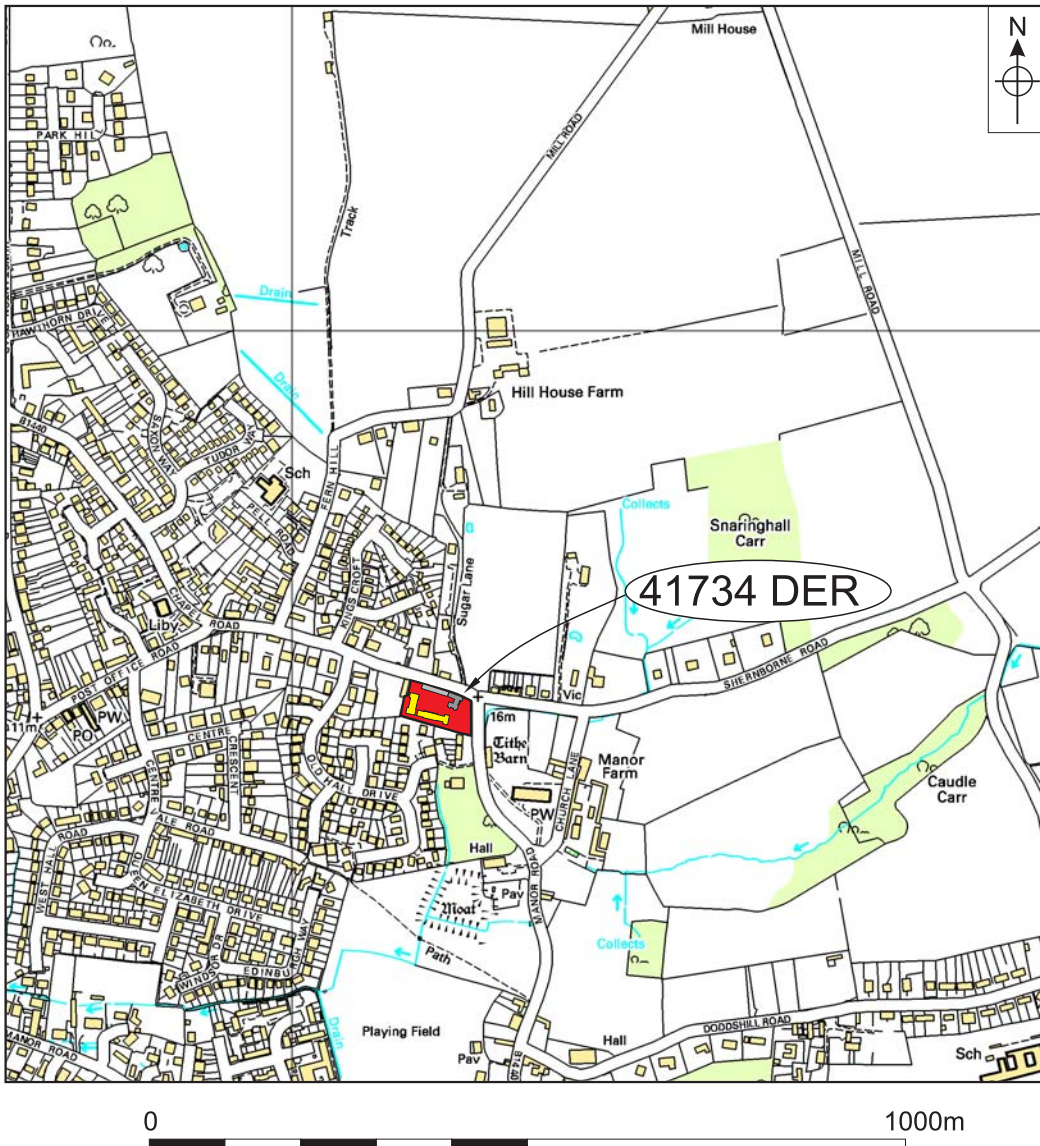


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

**Local Authority No.100019340**

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### 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The Hall or Old Hall (NHER 8375) may be a manorial site, the successor of the moated site to the south and close by the church. The Hall appears to have 17th-century origins, but with extensions and alterations in 1824 and at later dates, including a modern block containing a swimming pool.

A prehistoric flint axe (NHER 17919) has previously been retrieved from the development site and represents the oldest evidence for human activity in the area.

Besides the moated site (NHER 1759) to the south, and the church to the south-east, there are other indications of medieval activity. Early medieval pottery and some oyster shells have been found to the south and to the west (NHER 10831 and 14354) suggesting occupation. In addition another medieval moated site (NHER1576) known as Gelham Hall located to the south-west was examined during water pipe-laying in 1996. The line of the infilled moat ditches and other possible features were recorded (Crowson 1996).

Previous archaeological work in the vicinity also includes a negative watching brief at 63 Chapel Road (Phillips 1999).

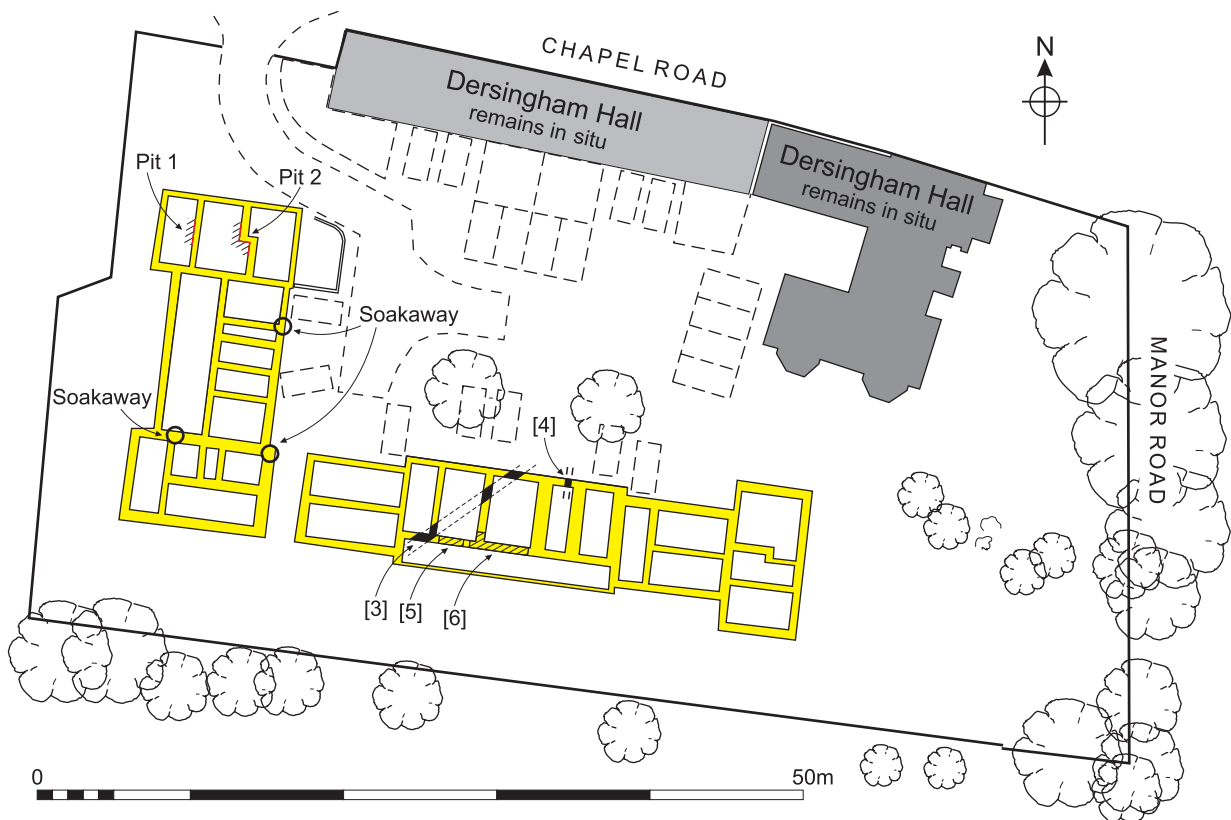


Figure 2. Plan of site showing location of trenches observed (shown in yellow) and features encountered. Scale 1:500

## 4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during groundworks at Dersingham Hall. The Brief required that all groundworks were observed. These were foundation trenches for a group of linked dwellings within the grounds of Dersingham Hall.

Trenches were excavated by machine, usually two at a time and concrete was then poured. Work was therefore intermittent. Trenches were mostly between 0.45m and 0.60m wide and c. 0.60m deep, with the natural pale sand subsoil seen only where deep modern features were cleaned out. The natural pale sand lay between 1.30m and 1.50m below the present surface. The western end of the site had been mostly used as a car park and the upper levels of the site surfaced appropriately.

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 that 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 photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

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

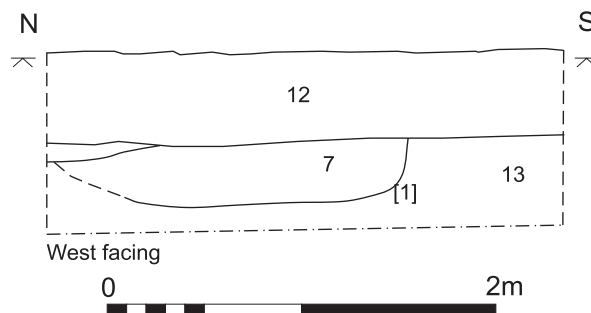
Site conditions were good, with good access to all trenches.

## 5.0 Results

(Figs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7)

The site was of the development of eighteen linked dwellings, whose foundations were the subject of this work. Most of the eighteen plots lay towards the western part of the site, where the car parking surfaces were to be found. The upper 0.30m to 0.40m were modern surfaces ([12]). Beneath the modern surfaces (and found across the site) lay a deep deposit of dark red sandy silt, containing fragments and flecks of brick, chalk and clay ([13]). Below this was a similar layer of dark red sandy silt, probably a natural subsoil. In the deepest sections of the foundations, trenching revealed a pale sandy silt, clearly the natural subsoil.

Besides three modern soakaways, six features were recorded, all relatively modern.





*Pit [1]* (Fig. 3) was c. 2.40m in length and 0.30m deep. The fill ([7]) was a reddish sandy silt, chalky towards the top. Only seen in the side of the trench.

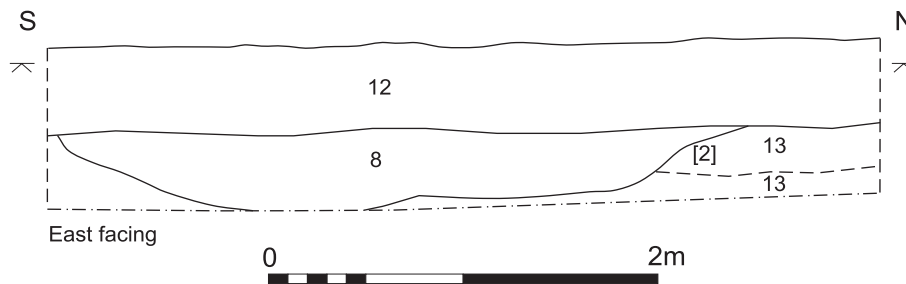


Figure 4. Pit 2. Scale 1:40

*Pit [2]* (Fig. 4) was c. 3m long and 0.40m deep. Its fill ([8]) was a sandy silt/clay with lenses of ash and fragments of brick. Only seen in the side of a foundation trench.

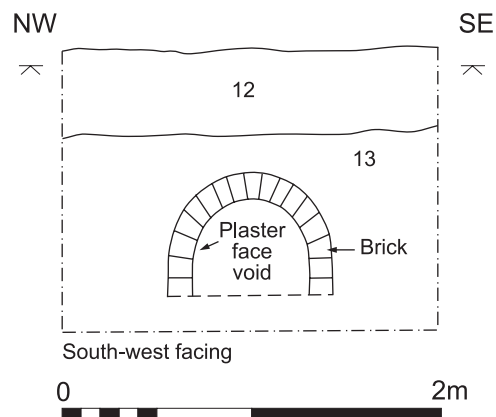


Figure 5. Culvert [3], section.  
Scale 1:40

*Culvert [3]* (Fig. 5) was constructed of brick, about 0.60m wide internally, with a plastered internal surface. It ran south-west to north-east and was aligned on the south-west corner of the Hall. The brickwork was probably of 19th-century date.

*Wall [4]* (Fig. 2) coarse and roughly mortared.

*Pit [5]* (Fig. 6) was c. 2m wide and 0.80m deep, containing chalk blocks and a mixed red sand/soil ([9]) with fragments of rubble.

*Pit [6]* (Fig. 7) was c. 4m wide, defined on the east side by a mortared chalk wall ([11]), with a fill ([10]) of chalky rubble towards the top and a dark loamy soil ([14]) at the base.

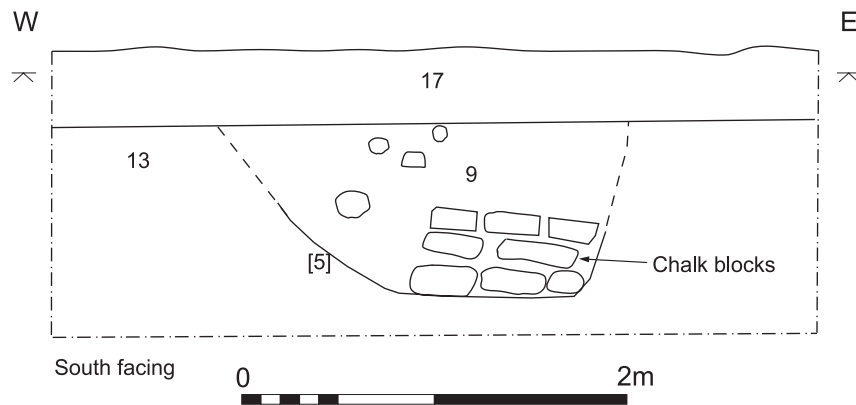


Figure 6. Pit 5, section. Scale 1:40

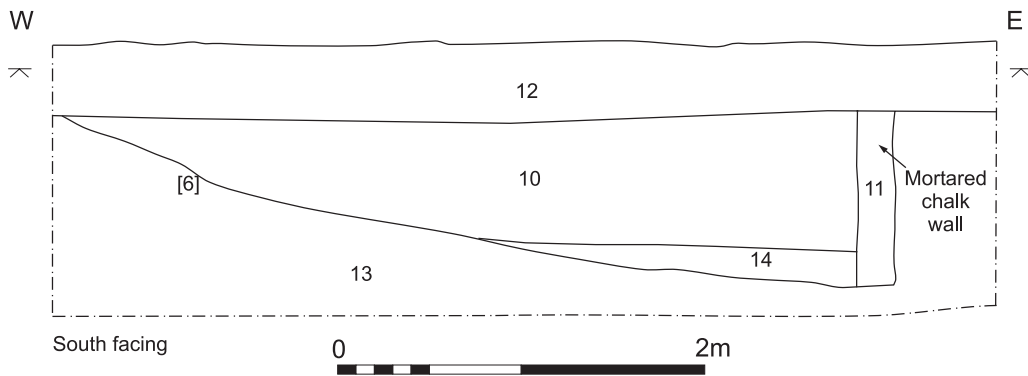


Figure 7. Pit 6, section. Scale 1:40

## 6.0 The Finds

Finds were remarkably few, given the late date of occupation here. Possibly the site had been gardens for the Hall and never received debris or rubbish from the house.

The finds all came from the red sandy silt ([13]). These were:

- 1 fragment of 18th- to 19th-century brick.
- 2 fragment of post-medieval clay tobacco pipe.
- 3 sherd of 18th- to 19th-century glazed red earthenware pottery.
- 4 a 19th-century stoneware inkbottle.

## 7.0 Conclusions

Although the grounds of the Hall lay between the earlier moated site (250m to the south) and adjacent to the later Hall, no significant archaeological features or finds were recorded. It would appear that this area had never been occupied but left open, but possibly cultivated for gardens.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Paul Hamilton of Davis Langdon LLP who commissioned this work on behalf of Teal Developments Ltd.

The author carried out fieldwork. The report was produced by Julie Curl and David Dobson and edited by Alice Lyons.

### **Bibliography**

Crowson, A., 1996 *Observations on Excavations at Gelham Hall, Dersingham*, NAU Report 186 (unpublished)

Phillips, C., 1999 *Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at 63 Chapel Road, Dersingham, Norfolk*, NAU Report 346 (unpublished)

### **Appendix 1: Context Summary**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Period</b>
1	Cut	Cut for pit. Fill [7]	Post-medieval to modern
2	Cut	Cut for pit. Fill [8]	Post-medieval to modern
3	Masonry	Culvert	19th century
4	Masonry	Wall	Post-medieval to modern
5	Cut	Cut for pit. Fill [9]	Post-medieval to modern
6	Cut	Cut for pit. Fills [11] and [14]	Post-medieval to modern
7	Deposit	Fill of [1]. Reddish sandy silt	Post-medieval to modern
8	Deposit	Fill of [2]. Sandy silt/clay, lenses of ash, fragments of brick.	Post-medieval to modern
9	Deposit	Fill of [5]. Mixed red sand/soil, rubble, chalk blocks.	Post-medieval to modern
10	Masonry	Wall, in pit [6].	Post-medieval to modern
11	Deposit	Fill of [6]. Chalky rubble.	Post-medieval to modern
12	Deposit	Modern car park surfaces; hogging, tarmac etc.	Post-medieval to modern
13	Deposit	Dark red sandy silt, with flecks brick, chalk and clay. Very chalky in places.	Medieval to modern
14	Deposit	Fill of pit [6]. Dark brown/black silty loam.	Post-medieval to modern

