

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No.1100

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at The Old Rectory,
Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk**

41821 CBN

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Location: The Old Rectory, Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk
District: South Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 237 040
HER No.: 41821 CBN
Date of fieldwork: 4th and 8th July 2005

Summary

An archaeological watching brief at The Old Rectory, Caistor St Edmund was undertaken to monitor the excavation of a swimming pool and associated service trenches. Two linear features, probably drainage ditches, were observed cut into the clay natural, one containing post-medieval tile and brick fragments as well as fragments of an 18th-century shoe buckle. One sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the general spoil of the trenches.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

A watching brief was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) on the machine excavation of a swimming pool, soakaway and associated service trenches (c. 90 sq. m) in the grounds of The Old Rectory, Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk.

Majestic Pools Ltd, Norwich on behalf of the landowner, Mr David Calder, commissioned the work.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: AJH/24/06/05).

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 approximately 300m to the south-east of the River Tas and was located at a height of c. 7.5m OD. The water table in the area of the site was observed at a depth of c. 1.35m.

The underlying solid geology of the region is Upper Chalk. This is overlain by Boulder clay, mainly Lowestoft and other Anglian tills and some glacial sands and gravels. Some river alluvium appears in the vicinity from the course of the River Tas running close to the north-west (Funnell 1994).

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The area of Caistor St Edmund has long been associated with the Roman town of *Venta Icenorum* (Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) 9786; Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) 148; Davies 2001) that lies c. 700m to the south-west of the Old Rectory. This was established as the tribal centre for the *Iceni* after the Boudican revolt of AD60-61 and later (by the beginning of the 3rd century) developed into a major fortified town. A possible amphitheatre and temple have been located to the south of the town (Cott 1995). Traces of an Anglo-Saxon settlement and cemetery have also been recorded to the east and north-west of the Roman town.

Within the walls of the Roman town is the church of St Edmund (NHER 40830) that has traces of 11th-century fabric in the south wall with the main part of the church 14th century and later (Pevsner and Wilson 1999, 238).

Other buildings of historical interest in the vicinity include the Old Hall to the south-west which dates from the early 17th century and the Old Rectory itself which contains elements of late 18th-century fabric. Both buildings are mentioned in Pevsner and Wilson (1999).

Previous archaeological work carried out in the area includes a series of excavations undertaken within the Roman town between 1929 and 1935, partly published some thirty-six years after the event (Frere 1971). Two fieldwalking and metal detecting surveys have also been carried out, locating coins and pottery dated between the 1st and 4th centuries AD (Bellinger and Sims 1996; Percival 1994).

Three watching briefs have also been undertaken by NAU in Caistor St Edmund. One during excavation of service trenches south of the Roman town (Penn 1999a), another of trial pits at Markshall Farm (Penn 1999b) and the third at the church of St Edmund for a soakaway (Phillips 2005).

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the machine excavation of a swimming pool and service trenches.

The building contractors used a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m ditching bucket to excavate the swimming pool and soakaway and a smaller tracked 'mini-excavator' with a 0.4m wide toothed bucket for the service trenches. Spoil was removed from the immediate vicinity of the swimming pool and distributed *via* a dump truck to the edges of an adjoining field to the east where it was spread out. The spoil from the service trenches and soakaway was used as backfill.

The pool and trenches were opened immediately north of the main building and stable block of the house in an area of lawn. The hole for the swimming pool measured approximately 12.6m by 6.5m (81.9 sq. m) and was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.3m at the west end, rising midway to a depth of 0.80m to the east for the remainder of the pool. In addition the topsoil surrounding the pool area was stripped to an average depth of 0.25m for the installation of paving slabs.

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 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.

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

Site conditions were wet with intermittent heavy rain, the clay base of the hole for the pool retaining all rainwater. After excavation of the ground over 1m in depth, entry into the pool was restricted due to occasional soil slippage from the sides of the hole.

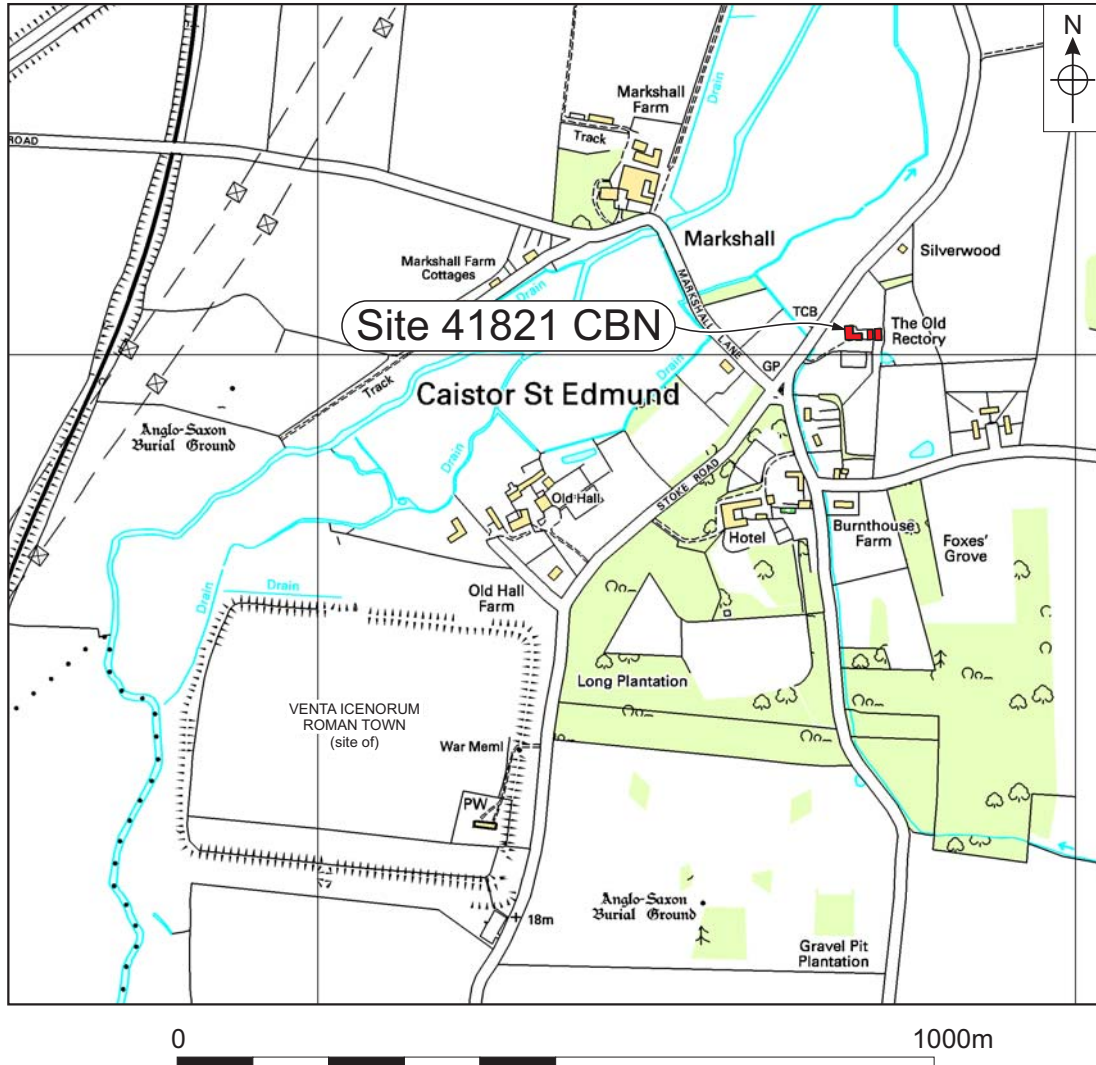


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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5.0 Results

Pool area

(Figs 2 and 3)

The excavation of the pool area was undertaken by reducing the soil in spits using a 2m wide ditching bucket. The topsoil ([1]) was a dark brown sandy loam, up to 0.50m in depth. A small pit ([3]; not figured) was uncovered at the base of the topsoil in the north-west corner of the pool area containing butchered animal bones. The subsoil ([2]) consisted of mid brown clayey silt with occasional patches of clay between 0.3m and 0.5m in depth. The upper deposits were removed initially down to natural boulder clay at an average depth of 0.8m. During this process two ditches were observed cut into the subsoil and underlying clay.

The first of these was a slightly curved ditch ([5]) located in the south-west corner of the pool area that varied in width between 0.8m at its ends to 0.4m in the middle part. The ditch was visible for a length of c. 5m running roughly south-east to north-west. A slot dug into the ditch showed the feature to be on average 0.3m in depth. It contained loose gritty sandy silt ([6]) with occasional lumps of clay and small flints. Several pieces of orange-red tile and brick fragments were recovered from the fill of the feature as well as fragments from a buckle. The base of the ditch was concave in shape with several moderate-sized flints appearing in the bottom.

The second feature to be observed in the centre of the pool area was a slightly larger north-to-south ditch ([7]) that was on average 2m wide. This was observed when most of the subsoil had been stripped off cutting into the natural clay. The depth of the feature was on average 0.25m and it had a concave base. It did not appear to have been cut from the surface. The fill ([8]) was fine light brown soft and waterlogged sandy silt containing very occasional small flints and a fragment of orange-red tile that may have been residual from the subsoil. A fragment of post-medieval pottery was also recovered from the fill.

The curved ditch appeared to be running into ditch [7] on the south edge of the pool and although the relationship between the two features was unclear, were probably related in function.

No other features were observed during excavation of the pool area. Excavation of the pool continued to the required depth through the underlying boulder clay.

Service trenches

(Fig. 2)

Three trenches were excavated by 'mini digger' to the west and east of the pool area, along with a small soakaway pit to the east.

The service trenches were for the in and outflow pipes of the swimming pool and for an electrical cable to the pool pump. The first to be excavated ran north-east from an outbuilding designated as location of the pump house for the pool and being for outflow from the pool led to a soakaway. The trench, 0.7m wide, was excavated through topsoil to an average depth of 0.4m with no features or finds being observed along its length.

The soakaway pit was c. 4m in length by 2m (8 sq. m) wide and was excavated to a depth of 1.3m. The location of this pit was 20m from the east edge of the pool and

35m to the north-east of the main house. The depths of topsoil and subsoil here were consistent with that seen in the pool area with the natural boulder clay appearing at c. 0.8m from the surface. No features were observed during the excavation of the soakaway.

Of the remaining two service trenches the deepest was excavated running from the south-east corner of the pool to the outbuilding to serve as a pumping house. The trench here was 0.92m deep near the building rising to 0.62m nearer the pool and was consequently excavated through the subsoil and close to the natural clay. The width of the trench was extended to 0.95m to accommodate two water pipes. The ground close to the outbuilding had been previously disturbed for footings and contained fragments of concrete rubble.

The last trench to be excavated was from the west end of the pool and continued west and south-west round the west end of the house. This trench was for an electric cable was 0.7m wide and was machine excavated to a fairly uniform depth of 0.35m from the pool to a garden fence. It was hand dug across the front of the house through garden soil to the same depth. The extent of the trench was restricted to the topsoil and no finds were located in the excavated spoil along its length.

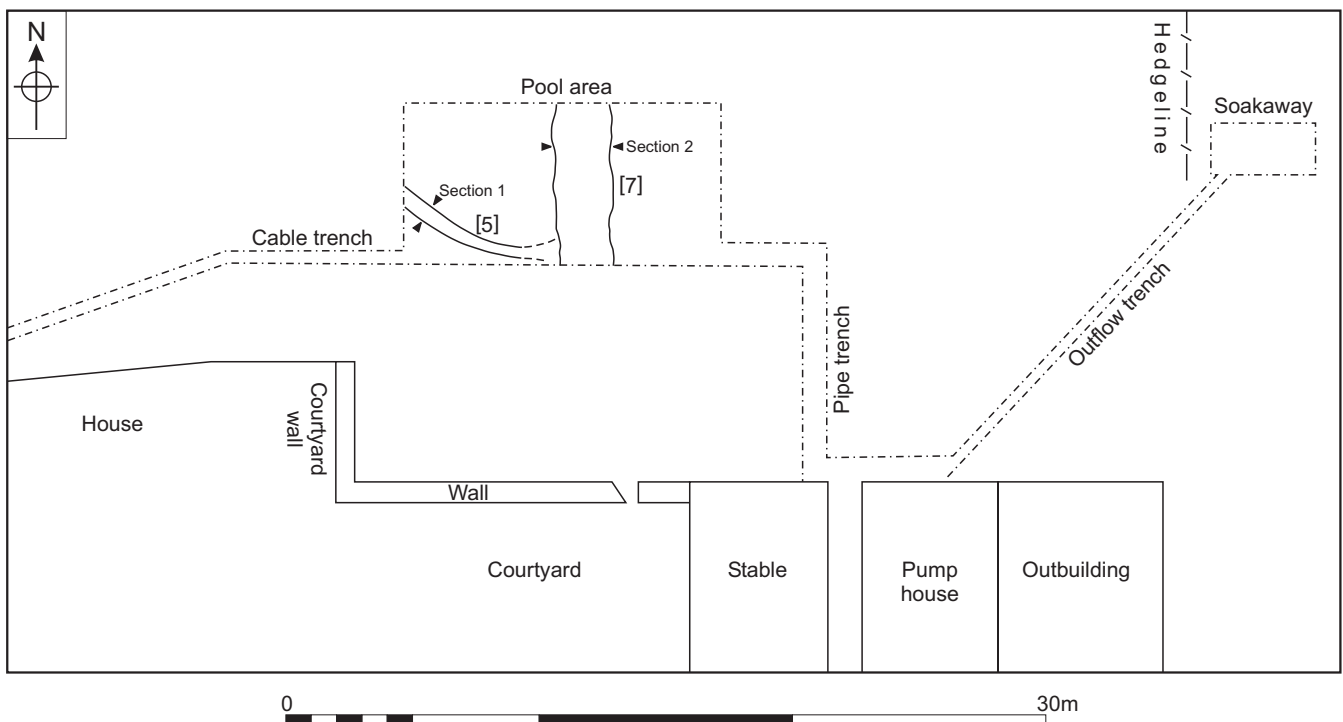


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:300

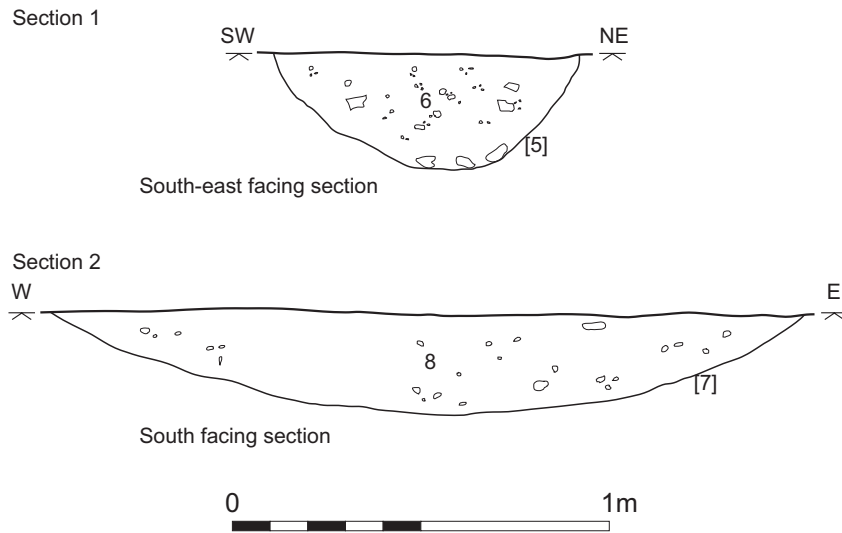


Figure 3. Ditch sections. Scale 1:20

6.0 The Finds

Introduction

The finds from the site are 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 is included in separate reports below. Supporting tables for these contributions are also included in the Appendices.

The pottery

(Appendix 3)

Two sherds of pottery, weighing 0.088kg, were recovered. A fragment of 19th- to 20th-century glazed earthenware was recovered from the fill ([8]) of ditch [7]. While a piece of local medieval unglazed ware was recovered from the unstratified spoil ([9]).

Small finds

(Appendix 4)

One small find was recovered from the fill ([6]) of ditch [5]. It is a cast sub-rectangular copper alloy shoe buckle with elaborate moulded semi-circle and multifoil patterning that is dated to the 18th century. For parallels and discussion on ornate shoe buckles from this period see Read (1995, pp. 173-176).

The faunal remains

(Appendix 2)

The faunal remains consist of 0.499kg of animal bone all recovered from the fill ([4]) of pit [3]. The bone is bovine and consists of three butchered humeri with clean cuts

to both proximal and distal ends of the bone. The bone was smooth inside, probably the result of boiling to extract marrow. As there was no dating evidence from the context it is not possible to accurately date the remains, but the proximity of the pit fill to the surface certainly indicates a post-medieval and probably modern feature.

7.0 Conclusions

The two features located in the pool area were most likely drainage ditches running from south-to-north, taking ground water away from the site towards the Tas Valley. The fills of the two features differed markedly in texture and content. The fill of curved ditch [5] was gritty sand with flints and clay lump, whereas the fill of the wider linear feature ([7]) was finer waterlogged sandy silt. It is probable that the latter feature was a main drain for the area, the soft wet sand being evidence of continued flow of water to the north. The narrower ditch represents a drainage ditch leading into the first, likely taking excess water from the garden area located to the west of the house.

One fragment of pottery was recovered from the fill ([8]) of the central ditch ([7]). This was likely residual from overlying disturbed late post-medieval or modern deposits. The feature appeared to be too shallow to have been excavated in the recent past, the cut not being observed in the section of the pool area. It is also possible that this feature may have been a natural gully. Several fragments of broken tile and brick found in the smaller ditch ([5]) as well as the recovery of a broken 18th-century shoe buckle from the fill indicates a post-medieval date for this feature.

The general lack of features and finds of archaeological interest may indicate that the location of the plot lies further out from the original area of habitation associated with the Romano-British or Anglo-Saxon settlements located to the south. The presence of at least 0.5m depth of organic loam topsoil over the monitored site likely indicates that the area was used in the past for agricultural purposes and represents a region of previously open farmland.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
2	Deposit	Subsoil	Post-medieval
3	Cut	Pit	Post-medieval
4	Deposit	Fill of [3]	-
5	Cut	Ditch	Post-medieval
6	Deposit	Fill of [5]	-
7	Cut	Linear feature	?Post-medieval
8	Deposit	Fill of [7]	-
9	Deposit	Unstratified soil	?Post-medieval

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Object date
4	Animal bone (cattle)	3	0.499	-
6	Ceramic Building Material (roof tile)	2	0.043	Post-medieval
6	Copper alloy (SF1)	1	-	Late post-medieval
8	Pottery	1	0.068	Modern
8	Ceramic Building Material (roof tile)	1	0.041	Post-medieval
9	Pottery	1	0.020	Medieval
9	Ceramic Building Material (pan tile)	3	0.568	Post-medieval

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Date
8	Glazed earthenware	Bowl rim	1	0.068	19th to 20th century
9	Local medieval unglazed ware	Bowl rim	1	0.020	11th to 15th century

Appendix 4: Small Finds

Small Find	Context	Quantity	Material	Description	Object date
1	6	1	Copper alloy	Shoe buckle	18th century

