

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1101

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Attleborough
Community Centre, Church Street, Attleborough, Norfolk**

41824 ATT

B. Hobbs

January 2006

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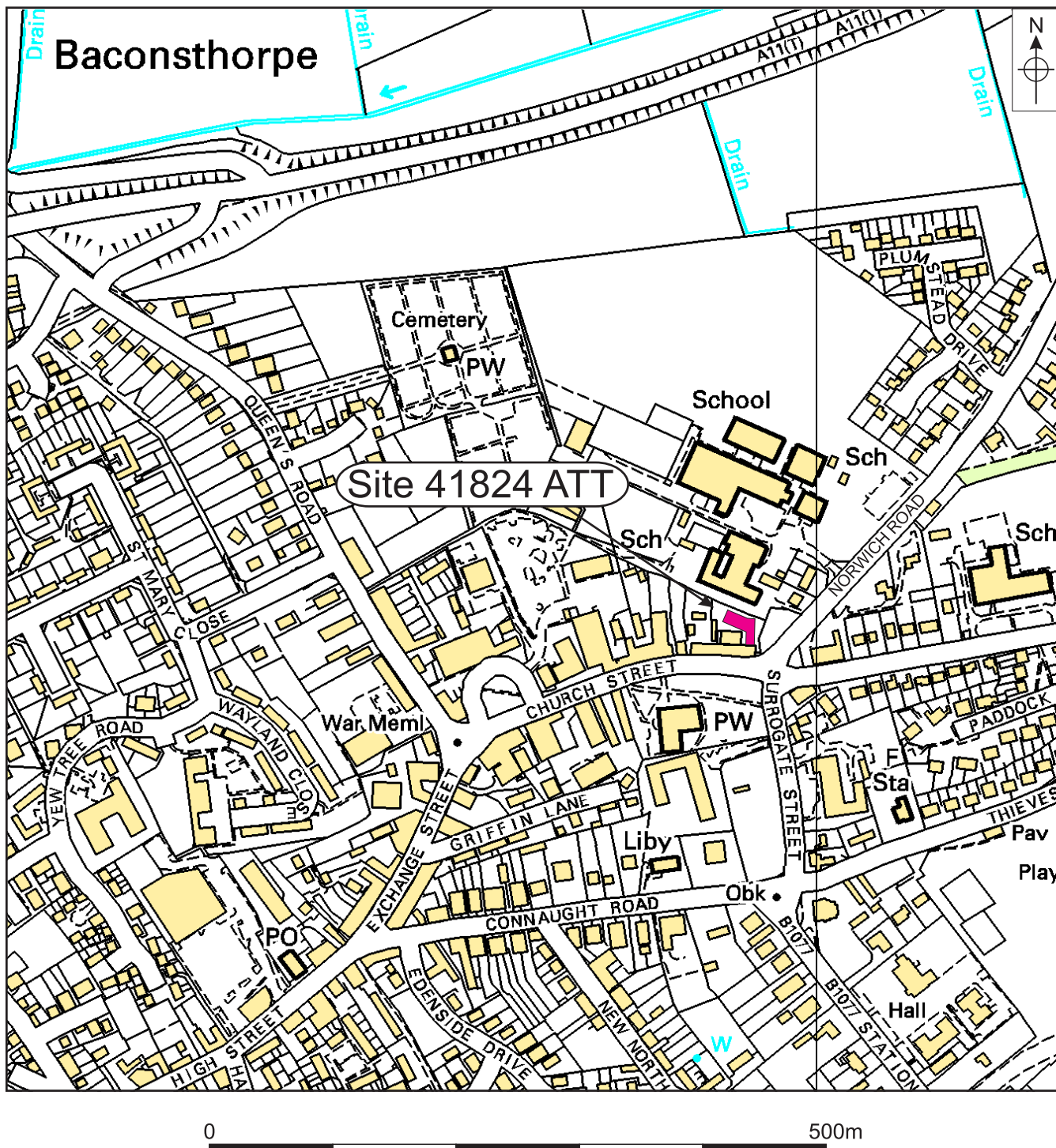


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

Local Authority No.100019340

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Location: Attleborough Community Centre, Attleborough, Norfolk
District: Breckland
Grid Ref: TM 0494 9546
HER No.: 41824 ATT
Date of fieldwork: 25th July to 19th August 2005

Summary

An archaeological watching brief during groundworks for a new building complex at the site of Attleborough Community Centre, adjacent to a (at the latest) 17th-century timber-framed building. Single sherds of Middle and Late Saxon pottery were recovered from the topsoil. A large rubbish pit was recorded containing several sherds of late medieval pottery, a fragment of medieval horseshoe as well as various animal bones, within a dark peat-like soil matrix. In addition a brick-lined well of post-medieval date was uncovered close to the location of the building.

1.0 Introduction

(Figs 1 and 2)

The archaeological watching brief was carried out on an area to the rear of the Attleborough Community Centre, Church Street, Attleborough during groundwork for a new building. The area encompassed c. 520 sq. m in three main linked sections of footing trenches. The new building was to be incorporated into the existing community centre on the junction of Church Street and Norwich Road.

The watching brief was commissioned by NPS Property Consultants Ltd.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: EJR/27/05/05).

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

2.0 Geology and Topography

The underlying solid geology is Upper Chalk that is overlain by Boulder clays, mainly Lowestoft Till and other Anglian tills, with some alluvial deposits along the course of the River Thet (Funnell 1994). The soil landscape within the parish is predominately that of Boulder clay plateau, with an outcrop of Breckland type soils intruding from the south-west.

The elevation of the site was approximately 40m OD, well drained with sand and gravel subsoil and sandy silt disturbed topsoil.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Little archaeological excavation has been carried out in Attleborough, despite being an historic town probably well established in the Late Saxon period. It is mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086 as a manor along with other holdings (Morris 1984). The church of St Mary, formerly collegiate and partly demolished at Reformation, stands to the south of the Community Centre. It has possible Late Saxon origins with Middle Saxon pottery found to its west (Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER)

9096). The surviving fabric of the church is thought to be Norman with 13th-century extensions and 15th- to 16th-century additions (NHER 5565).

A number of Small Finds, located through metal detecting and including Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval artefacts have been found c. 350m to the north-west of the site (NHER 30098). More medieval finds have been made in a similar manner c. 300m to the east of this last site (NHER 30101).

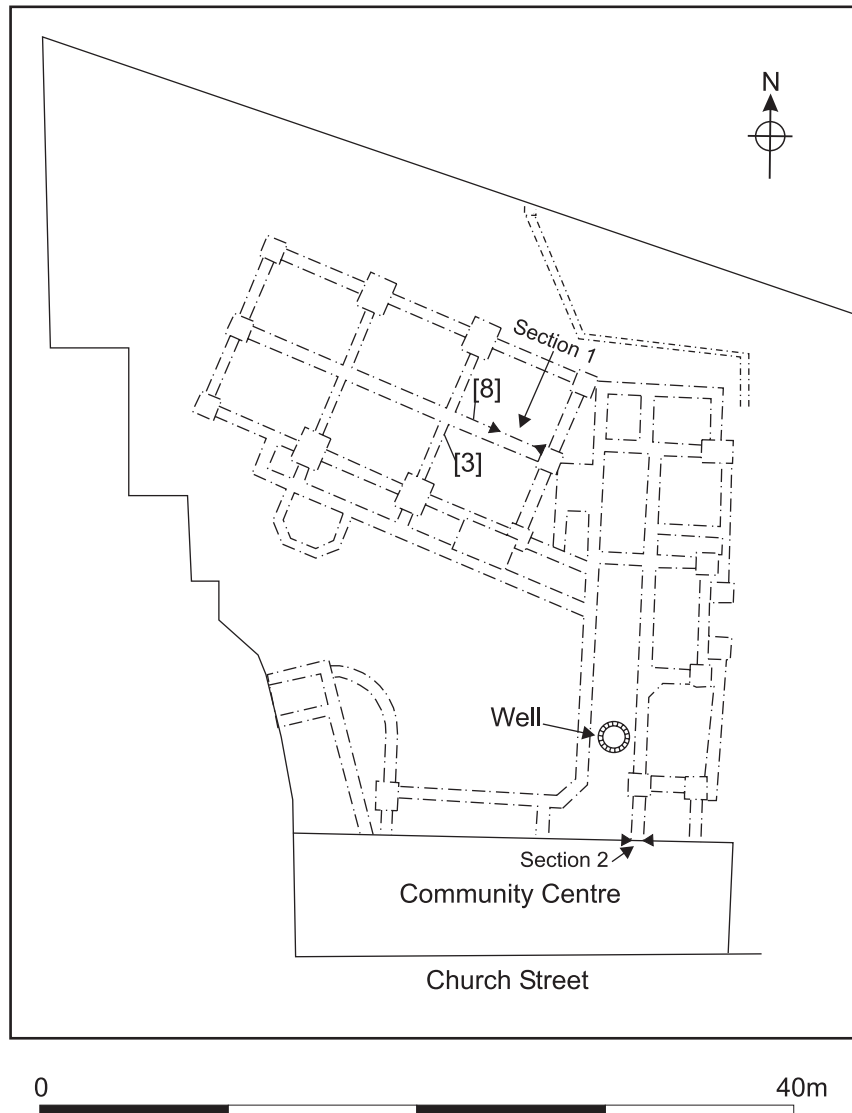


Figure 2. Plan of footing trenches with location of features [8] and [3], the well and Sections 1 and 2. Scale 1:400

Attleborough, located on the Norwich to London route, was granted market status in 1226, a status that it retained into the early post-medieval period. Trade had expanded by 1695 when the first turnpike road in Norfolk was opened between Attleborough and Wymondham, which increased traffic still further and established the town as the thirteenth largest in Norfolk by 1851 (Pevsner and Wilson 2000).

Several buildings with structural elements dating to the 17th century can be found in the town. Approximately 150m to the west of the site the Griffin Inn (NHER 5564) has a late 16th-century frontage and 17th-century panelling and staircase. A little further to the west (300m) is a former inn with a mid 17th-century timber-frame (NHER 36189), while 200m to the north-east there is a 17th-century house with 19th-century extensions (NHER 5566).

The remaining building of the Community Centre fronting Church Street is a timber-framed house with an off-centre stack. It is at least early 17th-century in date and is possibly older, although any earlier architecture is concealed (E. Rose, NHER entry). The building has had additions to the structure made in the 18th to the 20th centuries and may have been an inn during its history (NHER 41241).

Previous archaeological work in the vicinity of the site includes a watching brief in Queen's Road (Tremlett 2000), an excavation at St Mary's Church (Moss 2001) that recorded Middle Saxon pottery and an excavation at Attleborough Hall (Penn 2003).

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of footing trenches across the site.

The Brief required that an archaeologist be in attendance during groundworks for footings, service trenches and soakaways. Before excavation the north side of the existing modern community building was demolished and the rubble removed.

The whole site was initially stripped of modern overburden and garden soil to a depth of c. 0.15m using a 360° tracked excavator with a toothed bucket. All spoil was removed from the site. The process of digging the footing trenches involved the marking out of the trench lines by the site engineer, excavation by machine, removal of spoil and then filling the trenches with concrete. The removal of spoil and delivery of concrete necessarily precluded any excavation by the machine during these times. Groundworks were, however, undertaken every day during the watching brief.

Over the period the watching brief took place the excavation of three main areas of linked trenching was carried out covering an area of c. 520 sq. m. The footing trenches were of a consistent width of 0.70m with a depth that varied between 0.70m in the majority of the trenches, up to over 1m where an area of soft natural sand was encountered. At the junctions of several of the trenches larger areas were excavated to enable the installation of pillar bases. These areas varied in size between 1m by 1m and 2m by 1.5m, all being excavated to the same depth as the adjoining trenches.

Several of the trenches in the south and west ends of the site were excavated up against the north and west walls of the remaining, older, part of the community centre whereby the base of the walls could be observed.

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 and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Site conditions were good with excellent access and facilities. The weather was variable, although mostly fair.

5.0 Results

(Figs 2, 3 and 4)

The topsoil was machine stripped to an average depth of 0.15m across the site. The northern-most areas were under grass while the south half of the site consisted of rubble-strewn bare earth. The stripping revealed several lumps of modern brick rubble and old wall lines embedded in the topsoil that may have been the result of levelling of the site prior to the construction of the recently demolished community centre.

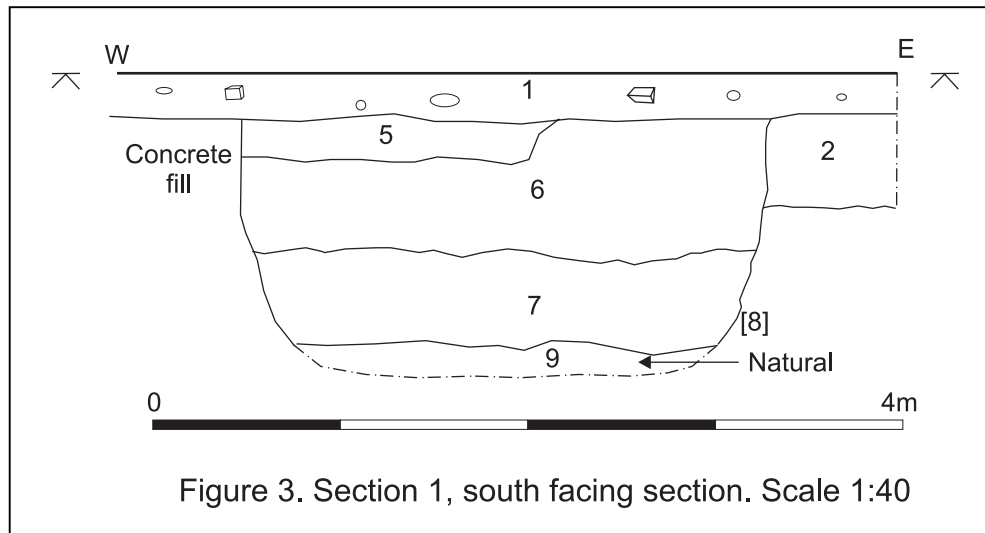
The trenches began in the north-west corner and extended across the site to the south and south-east following the sequence of surveying, excavating and finally filling with concrete.

The soil seen in section in the majority of trenches was fairly consistent across the whole site. The remains of the topsoil ([1]) varied between depths of 0.45m and 0.38m after stripping within the sections of the trenches and was a mid to dark grey-brown compact sandy silt that contained moderate small flints and brick fragments. Beneath this deposit was a mid orange sand subsoil ([2]) that varied between a gravely sand, particularly in the east of the site, and a more clay sand, towards the south. This sandy deposit extended to the base of all the trenches where they were excavated to the proscribed depth for the footings.

No features were observed in the sections of the trenches in the north-west area of the site. Near the centre of the site a pit (Fig. 2; [3]) was located in the west facing section of a north-south trench that contained grey gritty sandy silt with charcoal and brick fragments. Also in the pit was a length of wood connected to an iron bolt with similar dimensions to a railway sleeper. Approximately 3m to the east of this modern pit, in the centre east-to-west trench, a darker loam soil was uncovered by the machine, beneath a layer of compact clay and brick rubble. After further, monitored, machine excavation it was apparent that the soil was the fill of a large pit ([8]) that was to be truncated by the footing trench. As the soil was not suitable for the base of the footings, work was suspended in the trench awaiting consultation with a building inspector.

The amount of soil already removed allowed part of the south facing section of the trench to be observed (Fig. 3). The topsoil ([1]) was on average 0.25m in depth and contained more brick rubble than previously seen. Below this was a layer of 0.20m thick compact yellow clay ([5]) that extended halfway across the visible width of the pit. The clay overlaid a mid to dark grey organic silt ([6]) that contained a few brick fragments in the upper portion of the soil, some patches of sandy silt and also a number of animal bones. This deposit appeared to be organic in composition as well as fairly compact and was around 0.70m thick. Several patches of cess-stained soil were observed within the deposit.

Removing the remaining soil by hand, a darker, more homogenous deposit ([7]) was revealed, that contained black-stained animal bone, pottery sherds of 15th- to 16th-century date and part of an iron horseshoe. The organic silt was compact and compressed and smelt strongly of sulphides.



The steep north-west side of pit [8] was located adjacent to the edge of poured concrete and was seen to cut through the orange sand subsoil ([2]). The length of the exposed pit fill (running parallel to the line of the trench) measured 2.75m. The north-west edge of the feature was just visible in section as a reasonably steep cut.

Either side of the trench was covered by modern deposits that were not going to be disturbed, therefore the full extent of the pit in plan could not be ascertained but only estimated by the width of the feature in section.

It was decided by the site engineer to excavate the whole pit area within the trench down to natural and fill with concrete. This was carried out under archaeological supervision with the extracted fill of the pit being searched by hand and metal detector. Several more animal bones were located in the fill but no further pottery or other dating evidence.

The full machine excavation of the fill revealed the depth of the pit from the surface as being 1.48m at its deepest point. The lowest fill ([7]) was on average 0.50m thick and below this at the base of the pit was yellow orange natural clay sand ([9]). The remainder of the trenches excavated to the south and west did not reveal any other features of archaeological interest.

Approximately 5m to the north of the main building a well was uncovered by machine stripping. The 0.5m thick concrete and brick cap was removed to reveal a brick-built shaft with a diameter of 1.55m and an approximate depth of 5.2m, including about 1m of water at the bottom. Apart from the upper courses of bricks, which were modern, the shaft appeared to be constructed of the same type of brick as seen in the north wall of the main building, although further investigation was necessarily restricted. The well was located between two footing trenches and was to be backfilled during a later phase of the site's development.

Several of the trenches to the south and west of the site were located to tie in with the remaining structure of the original community centre building. Two of these trenches were excavated to a depth below the level of the base of the wall and therefore exposed its foundation (Fig. 4). This consisted of brickwork ([10]) at the base resting on an irregular layer of yellow sandy mortar ([11]) approximately 0.20m thick. The mortar was laid onto a dark sandy loam ([12]) with an average depth of 0.45m, similar to the topsoil encountered over the rest of the site. This soil was more homogenous than the modern topsoil and did not contain any brick or tile fragments. Beneath this was the orange gravelly sand subsoil ([2]) as seen in the footing trenches. No dating evidence was recovered from the deposits beneath the wall.

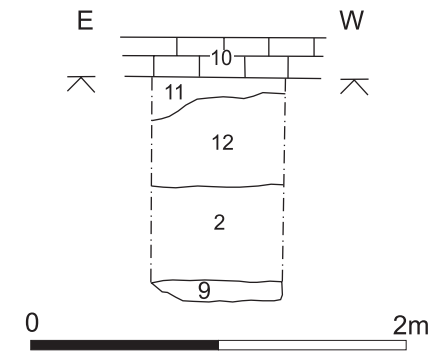


Figure 4. Section 2, north-facing section. Scale 1:40

To the south-west of the site, footings excavated near the south-west boundary wall close to the community building necessitated the investigation of the stability of the wall. This was built of flint rubble with lime mortar and covered with plaster containing horsehair. On top of this wall were several courses of clay lump building material.

The remainder of the footing trenches and a drainage gully excavated from the north boundary wall were devoid of features or finds of archaeological interest.

6.0 The Finds

Introduction

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

Pottery

By Sue Anderson

(Appendix 3)

Summary

A total of seventeen sherds of pottery, weighing 1.001kg, were collected from two contexts during the watching brief.

Methodology

Quantification was carried out using sherd count and weight. A full quantification by fabric, context and feature is available in the archive. All fabric codes were assigned from the Suffolk post-Roman fabric series, which includes Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Midlands's fabrics, as well as imported wares. Thetford ware fabrics are based on Dallas (1984) and forms on Anderson (2004). Local wares and

common imports were identified from Jennings (1981). Form terminology follows MPRG (1998).

Results

Topsoil ([1]) produced a sherd of an Ipswich ware hanging vessel and a Thetford ware jar rim. The majority of sherds from this context were post-medieval or modern, however, and included three German stoneware bottle bases and an English stoneware tankard base, and sherds of utilitarian modern wares.

Fill ([7]) of pit [8] produced one sherd of a Grimston ware jug and seven sherds of a late medieval and transitional ware large handled vessel, possibly a pipkin as the vessel was heavily sooted. This indicates a 15th- to 16th-century date for the primary fill.

The assemblage

Table 1 shows the quantification by context.

Context	Fabric	Sherd count	Sherd weight (kg)	Description	Spotdate
1	Gritty Ipswich ware	1	0.031	Type A rim sherd from lugged hanging vessel.	700-850
	Thetford-type ware	1	0.031	Medium AB jar rim, type 6, sooted	Late 10th to 11th century?
	Cologne/Frechen stoneware	3	0.367	Base sherds from 3 'tiger ware' bottles	16th to 17th century
	English stoneware	1	0.053	Base sherd of large ?tankard	18th to 19th century
	Yellow ware	2	0.128	Rim and base of a plain bowl with everted rim	Late 18th to early 20th century
	Post-medieval whiteware	1	0.038	Body sherd, coarse buff fabric, internal orange glaze	19th century?
7	Grimston ware	1	0.030	Thick base sherd with kiln scar	13th to 14th century
	Late medieval and transitional	7	0.323	Body, base and handle sherds from large vessel with green glaze and combed horizontal lines on upper half, sooted	15th to 16th century

Table 1. Pottery catalogue.

Discussion

Activity of Middle and Late Saxon date is indicated by the presence of two rim sherds of these periods redeposited in the topsoil.

A pit produced fragments of two vessels, one a high medieval type from Grimston near Kings Lynn, and the other a late medieval vessel from north Suffolk. There is a possibility that the Grimston ware sherd could be a late product of the industry, but it is more likely to be residual.

Later vessels included imported 16th- to 17th-century stoneware bottles and non-local utilitarian wares of probable 18th- to 19th-century date, all of which are common finds in post-medieval and modern contexts throughout the region.

Small Finds

By Julia Huddle

Iron horseshoe fragment

A branch from a horseshoe was recovered the primary fill of a pit ([7]) dated to the 15th or 16th century. The item is covered in corrosive products and the description is therefore taken from an x-ray. If correctly identified this horseshoe is similar to type 3 in Clark (1995, pp. 86-88, fig. 65) although due to the fact that all four nail holes on the fragment are filled with corrosive products it may be a type 4 horseshoe (ibid. 88, fig. 69). Both types are known from 13th- and 14th-century contexts in London.

Catalogue

SF1 Context 7

One branch of an iron horseshoe with four rectangular nail-holes with narrow rectangular countersunk slots; one with nail with rectangular expanding head and either double clenched or spiral clenched tip. Thickened heel. Maximum width of web=27mm.

7.0 Environmental Evidence

The Faunal Remains

By Julie Curl

(Appendix 4)

Summary

A total of 2.000kg of bone, consisting of twenty-six pieces, was recovered. The bone, produced from pit fills of medieval date, comprised of butchering and food waste.

Methodology

The bone was examined using a modified version of Davis (1992). The remains were scanned for basic information recording identifiable species, ages where possible and briefly noting butchery and pathological conditions. The total number of pieces identifiable to a species was recorded on the faunal remains record sheet along with the number of measurable and 'countable' bones for each species following guidelines in Davis (1992). The total weight for each context was also recorded. A summary of the information is included in a table with this report.

Results and discussion

The bones from context [7] were the most interesting. Both juvenile and mature cattle bones were seen; the juvenile mandible was about to lose the deciduous pre-molar, suggesting an age of around 10 months at death. It also has fine knife cuts on the inside of the jaw that indicate the tongue had been removed for meat. The adult mandible showed teeth that were extremely worn, indicating an age of at least 10 years old; the cattle jaw also showed advanced periodontal (gum) disease and the

teeth were loose, this disease is common in older animals which have also had a poor diet.

The cattle remains in [7] also include two proximal metatarsals that had been chopped, presumably to gain access to the marrow inside the bone; two humeri were also recovered which show numerous knife cuts from removal of the meat. A goat mandible was also found in this context that has extensive wear on all of the teeth, including the third molar, indicating an age of at least 8 to 10 years old at death; this would suggest a goat kept primarily for milking and breeding.

Adult and juvenile goose bones were recorded, which had been butchered. Geese were primarily kept in the medieval period for a supply of eggs and feathers so the presence of a butchered juvenile bird could suggest a cull of excess stock.

The remains in context [6] include a cattle horncore, this may have been from hornworking activities, but there was no obvious butchering observed.

The condition of the bones was generally good, although fragmentary due to butchering. The remains in context [7] were stained a dark brown and had an odour characteristic of bone from a rich organic deposit; some of the bone in this fill also showed insect damage on the surface, again suggesting an organic fill that created a suitable habitat for flies and beetles.

It is probable that whole assemblage is derived from primary and secondary butchering and food waste of domestic origin.

8.0 Conclusions

The scarcity of archaeological features across the site may indicate that the ground had been an area of garden or waste ground, despite being close to the historic centre of the town.

The sherds of Ipswich ware and of Thetford ware recovered from the topsoil ([1]) indicate activity from the Middle Saxon and Late Saxon periods. No associated features from these periods were observed during the groundworks. It is possible that the pottery may have been imported onto the site in the past within manuring or topsoil.

The single feature of interest, domestic rubbish pit [8], had a primary fill containing pottery that dates to the 15th or 16th century, thus pre-dating the existing (at the latest) 17th-century community centre building on Church Street. The fragment of iron horseshoe and medieval pottery found in the same context were residual.

It has already been recorded that the surviving Community Centre building may have earlier origins than the 17th century (see above), so it is possible pit [8] may be associated with that earlier phase given that the curtilage has remained the same. Alternatively the pit, which was located c. 20m to the north of the main building, may be associated with a previous plot or building that left no traces in the footing sections.

The dark loam soil ([12]) observed beneath the house foundation appears to be buried topsoil from the period prior to the construction of the house. Its composition indicates that it may be an accumulation of organic material representing garden soil or agricultural till levelled for construction. Lack of dating evidence from the small

area of soil observed gives no indication as to the period of deposition but obviously pre-dates the earliest foundation of the current building.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to NPS Property Consultants Ltd who commissioned this report.

The author would like to thank Tim Garner, Site Manager for Bluestone plc and Malcolm, Chris and Jimmy from Groundline Construction for their assistance and interest during the watching brief.

Lucy Talbot processed the finds. The animal bones were diagnosed by Julie Curl and metalwork inspected by Julia Huddle. Sue Anderson assessed the pottery.

Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER) information was provided by Jan Allen (Norfolk Landscape Archaeology).

The report was illustrated and produced by Julie Curl and edited by Alice Lyons.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
2	Deposit	Orange sand subsoil	Natural
3	Cut	Pit	Modern
4	Deposit	Fill of [3]	-
5	Deposit	Clay layer	Post-medieval
6	Deposit	Upper fill of [8]	?Post-medieval
7	Deposit	Primary fill of [8]	Medieval
8	Cut	Pit cut	Medieval
9	Deposit	Yellow clayey sand	Natural
10	Masonry	Brickwork foundation	Post-medieval
11	Deposit	Yellow sandy mortar	Post-medieval
12	Deposit	Buried topsoil	Post-medieval

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Feature type	Period
Pit	Medieval (1066 to 1539AD)
Well	Post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)
Footings	Modern (1900 to 2050 AD)

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
1	Pottery	9	0.648	Middle Saxon, Late Saxon and post-medieval
1	Ceramic Building Material	1	0.050	Modern
1	Glass-bottle fragment	1	-	Post-medieval
1	Animal bone	4	0.445	-
6	Animal bone	5	0.050	-
7	Pottery	8	0.353	Medieval
7	Flint-burnt	1	0.010	Prehistoric
7	Animal bone	17	1.495	-
7	Shell-oyster, cockle, mussel	-	0.037	-
7	Iron horseshoe fragment	1	-	Medieval

Appendix 2b: NHER finds summary table

Material	Period
Pottery	Middle Saxon (651 to 850AD)
Pottery	Late Saxon (851 to 1065AD)
Pottery	Medieval (1066 to 1539AD)
Iron horseshoe	Medieval (1066 to 1539 AD)
Pottery	Post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)
Ceramic building material	Modern (1900 to 2050AD)

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Total context sherd count	Total context sherd weight (kg)	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Ceramic date
1	9	0.648	Gritty Ipswich ware	Rim sherd	1	0.031	700-850 AD
			Thetford-type ware	Jar rim	1	0.031	Late 10th to 11th century
			Cologne/Frechen stoneware	Base sherds	3	0.367	16th to 17th century
			English Stoneware	Base sherd	1	0.053	18th to 19th century
			Yellow ware	Rim & base	2	0.128	Late 18th to 20th century
			Post-medieval whiteware	Body sherd	1	0.038	19th century
7	8	0.353	Grimston ware	Base sherd	1	0.030	13th to 14th century
			Late medieval and transitional ware	Body, base, handle	7	0.323	15th to 16th century

Appendix 4: Faunal Remains

Context	Total context quantity	Total context weight (kg)	Species	Species quantity	Butchering	Comments
1	4	0.455	Cattle	3	Cut/chopped	Humerus, scapula, unfused femur
			Sheep/Goat	1	Sawn	Humerus shaft
6	5	0.050	Cattle	4	Chopped	Horncore fragments, skull fragment
			Goose	1	-	Tibiotarsus
7	17	1.495	Cattle	7	Cut/chopped	Adult and juvenile jaws, humeri, metatarsals, juvenile metacarpal
			Sheep/Goat	1	Cut/chopped	Goat mandible, very worn M3, high calculus
			Goose	4	Butchered	2 Tibiotarses, tarsometatarsus, humerus shaft
			Mammal-no ID	5	Butchered	