

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1103

An Archaeological Desk Top Assessment on Lind BMW Ber Street sites, Ber Street, Norwich

for

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November 2005

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Location: Lind BMW Ber Street sites, Ber Street, Norwich
Grid Ref: TG 233 079
Date of work: September 2005

Summary

This assessment of proposed development at the Lind BMW Ber Street sites addresses the likely impact of those proposals upon the known archaeology of the site. This includes evidence for probable early Norman development of Ber Street and occupation of this date along the street frontage.

Although Ber Street is often stated to have origins as a Roman road, it is here argued that Ber Street (and possibly three other streets) may have had origins as planned Norman expansion of the town, subsequent to the creation of the Market Place but perhaps still before 1086. If so, Ber Street may be a deliberate creation as a market street, possibly connected with the bishop, and later with the new cathedral priory.

The two sites (referred to in this assessment as 'West Site' and 'East Site') lie either side of Ber Street and together occupy about 175m of street frontage (west 50m, east 125m). The two sites therefore represent perhaps 35 medieval burgage plots (based on later maps).

Except for part of St Bartholomew's churchyard on the East Site, north end, the sites would appear to have been in secular and domestic use in the middle ages. It is likely that extensive rebuilding in the 16th and 17th centuries took place, making timber-framed jettied buildings a feature of Ber Street, as elsewhere in Norwich, with gradual replacement, but not complete loss, over the next three centuries or so.

On the East Site, some buildings were lost to bombing in 1942, but any remaining older buildings were swept away in development of the two sites in the 1960s and later. On the east, the site contains a known cellar and the impact of former fuel tanks; other cellars might be anticipated.

On the East Site, the proposed development area is now level, but this may result in part from dumping in the medieval period and later. Except for the cellar, all buildings are modern.

On the West Site, the area lies in two terraces, but the relationship to the natural slope is not entirely clear. There are small modern offices on part of the site.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

This archaeological desktop assessment was undertaken on behalf of Les Brown Associates and their client, Lind Automotive Group. This report follows a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH 07.06.05) and a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: 2021/DW July 2005).

The redevelopment of the garage site (c. 7000 sq. m) site lies within the walled area of Norwich, at the south end of Ber Street, inside the medieval gates, and lies in two parts, east and west, fronting Ber Street. To the south is the church of St John Sepulchre, which in effect, closes the south end of Ber Street.

This report presents the results of research undertaken into the archaeological and historical background of the site and its immediate environs. This was done to identify and summarise the archaeological potential of the site, and provide the information for this report.

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 that may be present.

No detailed fieldwork has been carried out in connection with this study, nor has reference been made to Listed Buildings information or any other present planning constraints.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The study area lies on the steep valley slopes of the River Wensum, to the east, with Ber Street itself running along the crest of the ridge. Although the site on the east is level, with drops of around 5m-7m to the rear (east), the natural slope runs from around 115 ft (35m) at the street down to around 50ft (15m) at the northeast, to the rear of the site, where the ground is then steeply scarped. The scarp is therefore partly natural but also enhanced by dumping and terracing.

The sites lie on Norwich Crag, a pre-glacial deposit up to 10m thick, with sands and clays in its upper parts. This rests on Upper Chalk, exposed further down the slope. A band of overlying brickearth (a glacial deposit) lies immediately to the west but probably just beyond the West Site (British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Geological map sheet 161).

It might be noted that the Ber Street area, including the general area of the two sites, has been prone to subsidence, though not with any single cause (*Subsidence in Norwich* 1993, 6, fig. 3).

The hillside to the east has been much quarried in the medieval period for building material.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Ber Street: a Roman road?

Theories about the origins of Ber Street have had a profound effect upon understanding of the town and its development. In the late 19th century W. Hudson suggested that Ber Street was of Roman origin, and therefore pre-dated the growth of the town.

This idea has been stated many times and has been restated recently (Ayers 2004, 3) where it is suggested that a Roman road came up Long John Hill, along Ber Street and across the river to travel northwards. There is, however, no evidence for the road to the south or to the north (for example is not shown on historical atlases for this period). There is also no reason to suppose that a Roman road survived in such use as to become incorporated into the expanding Norman town some 700 years later, whilst its other stretches then disappeared from use and view. Furthermore the sites

of known Roman finds do not support this idea, being found along the river valley with no close relationship with Ber Street itself.

The 'street' suffix was part of Hudson's argument, being held to be 'extremely unusual' in Norwich and therefore of Roman origin (see Ayers 2004, 3): however this

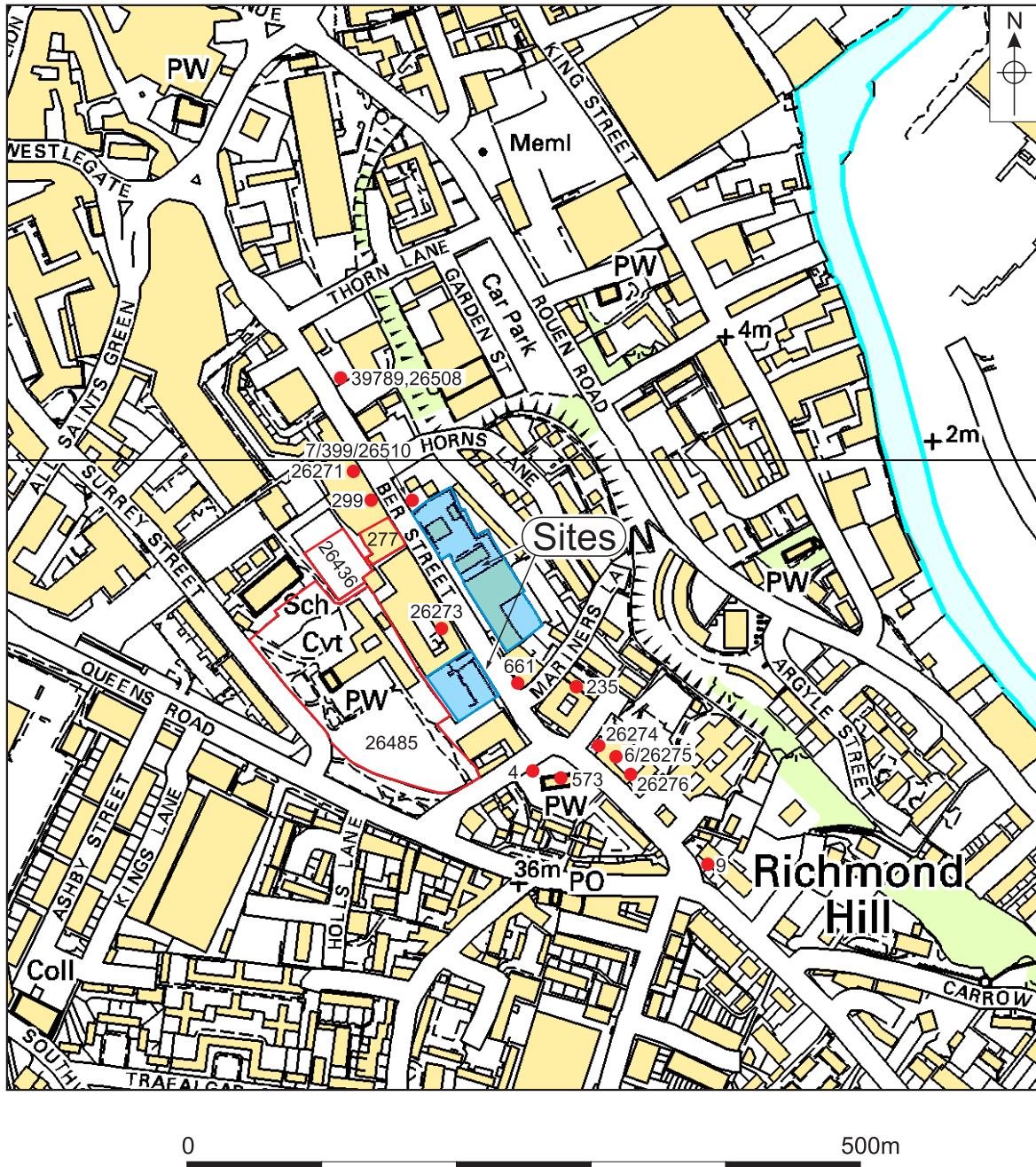


Figure 1. Site location, showing the development site. Selected NHER sites marked. Scale 1:5000

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argument is not made for King Street, St Giles' Street, St Stephen's Street or any other of the 'streets' of Norwich.

In Carter's essay on Norwich (Carter 1978), he notes the likelihood of an east-to-west Roman road but not a north-to-south road. However, he does tacitly place Ber Street in the Middle Saxon period (fig. 8a), whilst allowing it to be occupied in 11th-century expansion (fig. 8d; but compare his fig.7, which omits Ber Street from the map of Late Saxon Norwich). Carter also notes that St John de Sepulchre church, at the southern end of Ber Street (recorded in Domesday Book) must be of the period 1066 to 1087.

The place-name Ber Street means 'Hill Street' reflecting its situation on the ridge (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 28). Horns Lane to the north was anciently 'skygate' or 'rood on a ridge' (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 112) whilst Mariners Lane to the south was anciently 'holgate' or 'hollow way', from its deep cutting into the natural slope (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 118).

The Early Town

Norwich was an important Anglo-Saxon trading port (a *wic*) and the River Wensum has clearly influenced and, in part, determined the character and course of its growth throughout its long history.

Although its early origins lay north of the River Wensum, the focus of the Late Anglo-Saxon town probably lay south of the river, around the great market-place at Tombland and the long north-to-south street (what has become King Street and Magdalen Street) that linked the two parts of the town. The Late Saxon town had ramparts, or a defensive bank, on the north side of the river and probably a corresponding set of defences on the south also, but well to the north of the Ber Street site.

Norwich was one of the foremost towns in Late Saxon and Norman England, acquiring a royal castle (c. 1067), a new market and associated church (St Peter Mancroft) and a cathedral by the end of the 11th century. Both market and church were entirely new, forming elements of a 'French Borough' laid out just outside the Late Saxon town in the 1070s (Percival and Hutcheson in prep). The expanding town was later enclosed by the building of the present walls around 1300.

Town fields

The Late Saxon enclosed town was much smaller than the medieval walled city, whose post-conquest expansion encroached upon the town fields (and any extra-mural settlement). In Domesday Book (1086) references to the city's agricultural lands indicate that they either lay or had lain mostly in the south-west and north-east. They had probably included the area of Ber Street, and areas even closer to the medieval city centre: *Mancroft* (a name which may mean 'common croft') to the north implies that open fields existed, whilst Surrey Street was formerly *Thewardscroft* (Campbell 1975, 7 n75; Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 144).

Ber Street and St John Sepulchre

Rather than being of Roman origin, a Norman origin for Ber Street may be proposed, as follows.

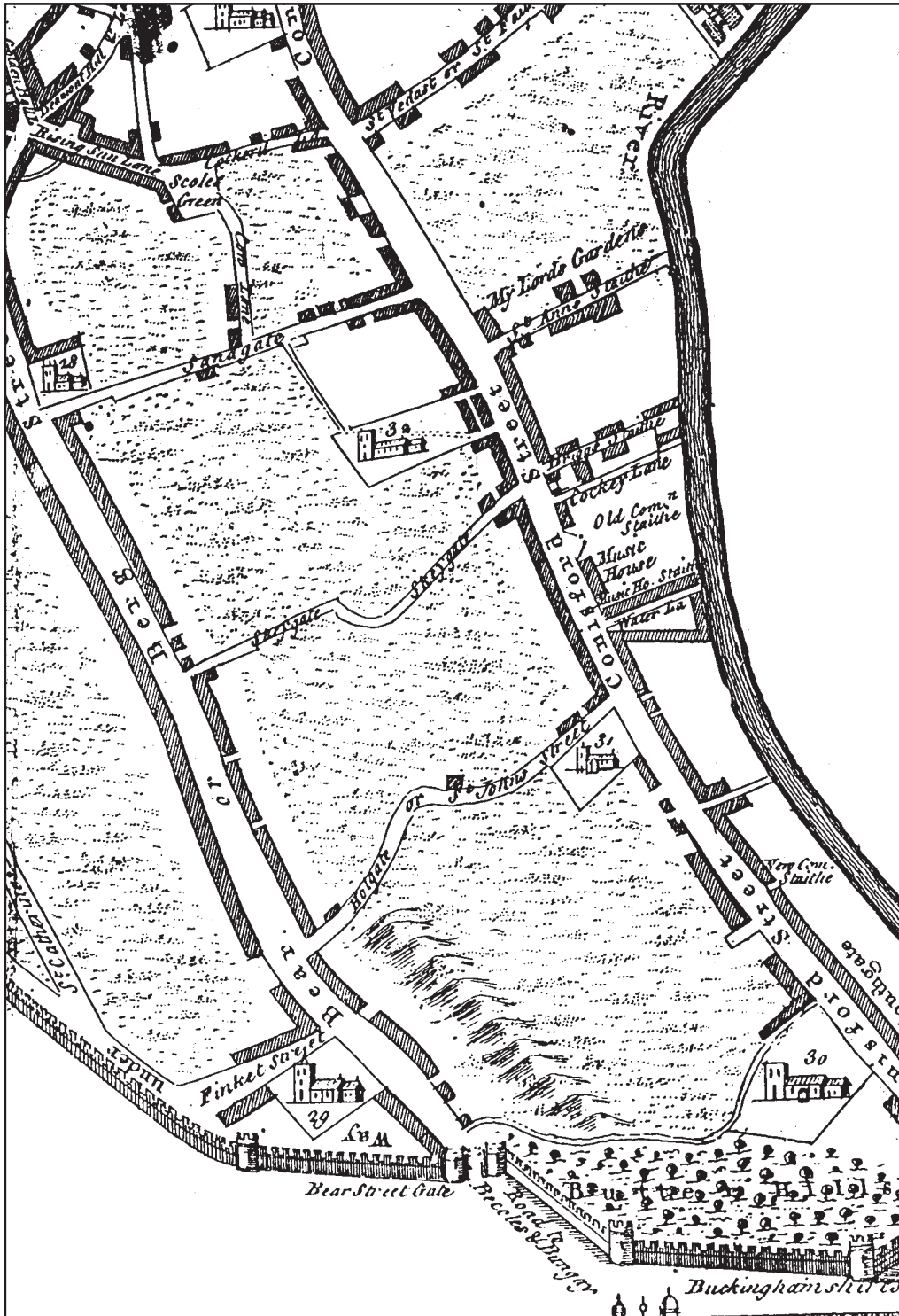


Figure 2. Samuel King's map of 1766 (detail), showing the south end of Ber Street

The origins of Ber Street and the establishment of St John Sepulchre church as part of the urban landscape may follow the creation in the 1070s of the French Borough itself. This appears to have had three main elements, each of them associated with Norman authority (cf. Blomefield Vol 4 1806, 125, 130, 134 and 137):

1. St Peter (Mancroft) and market place developed jointly by King and Earl, 1070s.
2. St Giles' Church and St Giles' Street held by the Cathedral Priory. Founded by Elwin the priest and given to the monks, in the time of Bishop Eborard (1121-1145) (Blomefield 4, 238; *First Register*, pp 41, 75).
3. St Stephen's Church and 'vicus de Needham'; held by the Cathedral Priory. A rectory given by Henry 1 (1100-1135) to the convent, appropriated to the priory and monks for clothing (under the bishop) (Blomefield 4, 145-6; *First Register* p. 41).

It may be argued that Ber Street made up a fourth planned element of the developing French Borough: the church of St John Sepulchre at its southern end, apparently founded by 1075 (and mentioned in Domesday Book 1086), was bought by Bishop Eborard (1121-1145) and passed to the Cathedral Priory for its infirmary (Blomefield 4, 137-8; Saunders 1939, 41, 61).

A part of the evidence for a planned development lies in the great width of Ber Street, and its ending at the church, whose site clearly blocks its further passage; one might also note the single burial found to the immediate north, also within the street and suggestive of a once larger burial ground (NHER 4). Post-conquest 'market streets' like this may be seen at Sudbury, Thetford and Northampton, in the local region (those at Sudbury and Northampton also with an associated church).

It could be argued that other churches were later established along Ber Street and their parishes cut out of a large primary parish, belonging to St John Sepulchre (Domesday Book mentions Earl Ralf's men taking land (*i.e.* before 1075) from St John Sepulchre: perhaps for such a scheme?).

- All Saints', Timberhill for Swinemarket: known as 'at the door of the castle' and 'in Ber Street' (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 42): was this the church given by the king to Carrow Abbey; in existence before 1086? (Jope 1952, 320; Blomefield 4, 130; Saunders 1939; Finch 2004, 50).
- St John the Baptist, Timberhill: founded by Wodowen the priest (temp William 1), who gave it to the monastery for the infirmary (Blomefield 4, 126-7; Saunders 1939).
- St Michael at Thorn: given by William 1 to FitzWalter, who gave it to the priory of Horsham St Faith (Blomefield 4, 134). It is known to have had a Norman doorway (NHER 2).
- St Bartholomew: the advowson was given to Wymondham priory by John, son of Robert the Mason; parish united to St John Sepulchre post-1549 (Blomefield 4 136).

It seems clear that the medieval town expanded with new streets laid out as extensions to the French Borough. For example, the medieval name for Surrey Street (north of All Saints' Green), Great Newgate (new street), was first mentioned in 1257. Before this date it was known as *terram de Thedwardscroft* (1157), and later *Newgate* (1232, for the whole of Great and Little Newgate). This suggests that the street was only laid out and developed by the Cathedral Priory in the 13th-century onward (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 144). The name *Thedwardscroft* (compare *Mancroft*) may indicate enclosed land between the City and the town's open fields (Campbell 1975, 7 n75).



Figure 3. Anthony Hochstetter's map of 1789 (detail), showing the south end of Ber Street

The creation of the French Borough and urban growth

Following the suggestions above, one can postulate, the town's expansion in the early medieval period, first with the creation of a new Norman French Borough west of the Anglo-Saxon town, led to the development of the parishes of St Stephen and St Giles, with associated streets deliberately laid out at some time as 'market streets' with associated church. These new parishes were neither Late Saxon urban parishes nor separate 'rural' parishes (like Eaton, Heigham or Lakenham) but were Norman creations, perhaps cut out of a large primary parish of St Peter Mancroft (and with a church built to serve, and possibly supervise, a new market street).

Ber Street/St John Sepulchre may be another such creation.

The City Wall

The wall still surrounds the historic core of the city. Although the masonry walls date from the grant of murage 1297, some evidence for earlier earth defences comes from excavations on the line of the wall. Excavations in Barn Road, some way to the north-west, in 1948 and 1954 recovered remains of an early bank with a ditch in front. This may have dated to the mid 12th century and perhaps formed part of a more extensive fortification (Campbell 1975, 10). It has also been suggested that the curious line of the walls in the vicinity of Ber Street Gates (Fig. 1) reflects an earlier defensive line (E. Shepherd Popescu, *pers. comm.*), although excavations in the vicinity failed to locate a bank or ditch here (Jope 1952). If Ber Street dates from the Norman period, some gate or barrier may have existed hereabouts, if only to define liability to tolls and taxes.

The gates are also to be dated with any wall and not before; an apparent 12th-century reference is probably of later date (Campbell 1975, 10, n30).

The line of the walls was probably determined largely by tactical considerations, rather than by any pre-existing legal boundary, and by the limits of contemporary occupation. The odd line of the walls at Ber Street Gates is probably so as to cross the street at a right angle.

4.0 Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence for the site and its vicinity comes from the Enrolled Deeds for Norwich, especially for the period 1285-1340, by which time Ber Street was well-developed. The Deeds are in effect a land register covering the period from the height of medieval expansion to the Black Death. From the work done on reconstructing the ownership of land and tenancies recorded in the Enrolled Deeds, it is possible to say that this area was well-developed by 1300, and probably laid out with regular burgage plots.

The Enrolled Deeds mention the two alleys or routes that help define the block where the site lies: Holgate (now Mariner's Way) to the south, and skygate (now Horns Lane) to the north. Holgate Lane is recorded in 1288 (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 118).

The Enrolled Deeds do not allow much precise identification of properties with the modern map, but show clearly that Ber Street was built-up, possibly not continuously, by around 1300.

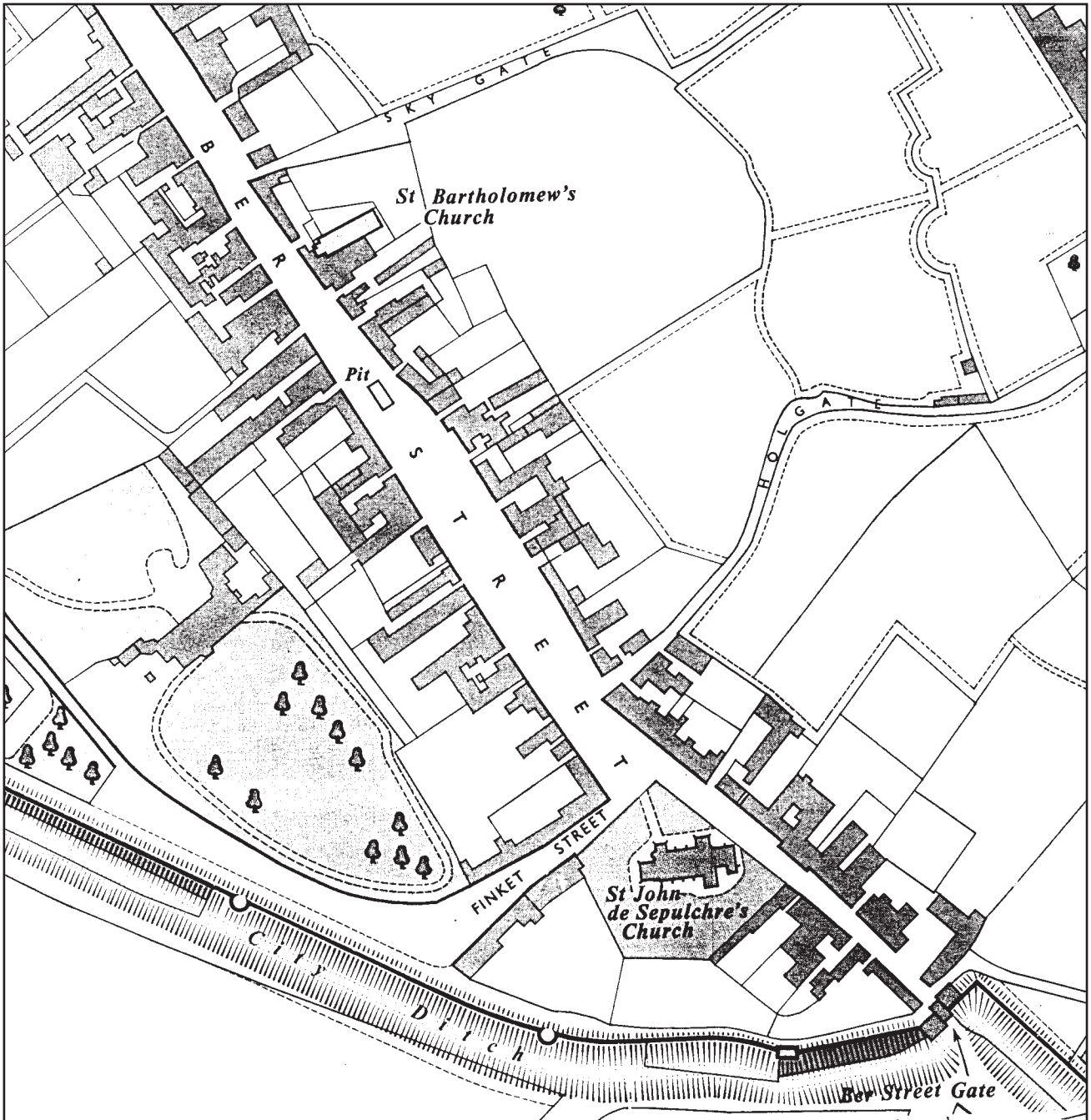


Figure 4. James Campbells's transcription (1976) of Hochstetter, showing the south end of Ber Street

According to Kirkpatrick, Ber Street was '...chiefly inhabited by butchers...and long has been so...' (Kirkpatrick and Hudson 1910, 10).

The Enrolled Deeds for this part of Ber Street have little to say about trades, but reveal a street full of people in the century before the Black Death. It is of interest that nearly all their names suggest origins in the villages around Norwich and further afield, including some from Suffolk. There are few names that suggest trade or occupation (and these may be of landowners rather than occupiers).

On the West Site, Copping was a notable landholder, and on the East Site, notable landowners include de Mundham, de Rockland and Fleming, a goldsmith.

Photographic Evidence

Photographs taken in the 1930s and later by George Plunkett (www.theplunketts.com) show 16th- to 17th-century timber-framed jettied buildings at several places along Ber Street, suggesting that (as elsewhere in Norwich) rebuilding had given the city a large stock of high quality timber-framed buildings, often in ranges along frontages. Few survived into the 20th century, and many of those have disappeared through redevelopment.

Photographs record such buildings at 102-104, 110-112, 120-122, 156-160 on the East Site and at 165 on the West Site, in the south part of Ber Street. Those on the two sites (east and west) have now gone.

The cellar under the former 106-110, although in modern brick, may have origins in an earlier range of buildings.

5.0 Cartographic Evidence

(Figs 2 to 7)

Norwich is provided with a good series of maps, beginning in the mid-16th century, which illustrate the growth of the town and the character of the occupied area. By Domesday (1086), the Late Saxon town had expanded westwards along St Andrew's Street (with its several churches) and Pottergate, and had been joined by a new town to the west, the French Borough. It is the creation of this borough by King and Earl and its development that may provide the key to understanding the origins of Ber Street (and also St Stephens and St Giles Street).

The maps show that Ber Street was completely built-up by the late middle ages, though with gardens and courtyards behind the frontages. They often show the narrowing of the street at St John Sepulchre church and the steep slope down to the river, though in a rather schematic way.

The maps

- Cunningham's plan of 1558 shows Ber Street as completely built-up, as far as the gates themselves (not illustrated).
- Thomas Cleer's map of 1696, Kirkpatrick's map of 1723, Blomefield's map of 1746 and Samuel King's map of 1766 (Fig. 2) are all too schematic to be of much use, but most show the lanes to north and south, the steep slope and the built-up frontage. The steepness of the slope may have inhibited development to the rear of the plots. Blomefield also shows the extent of the churchyard of the vanished St Bartholomew.
- Anthony Hochstetter's map of 1789 (Figs 3 and 4) depicts clearly and in detail the buildings then existing, with open gardens at the rear of the West Site and colonisation behind the frontage on the East Site. This map also shows how Ber Street narrowed at Horns Lane.
- Millard and Manning's map of 1830 (Fig. 5) and Morant's map of 1873 (Fig. 6) show little change on the West Site, with gardens behind the frontage, but on the

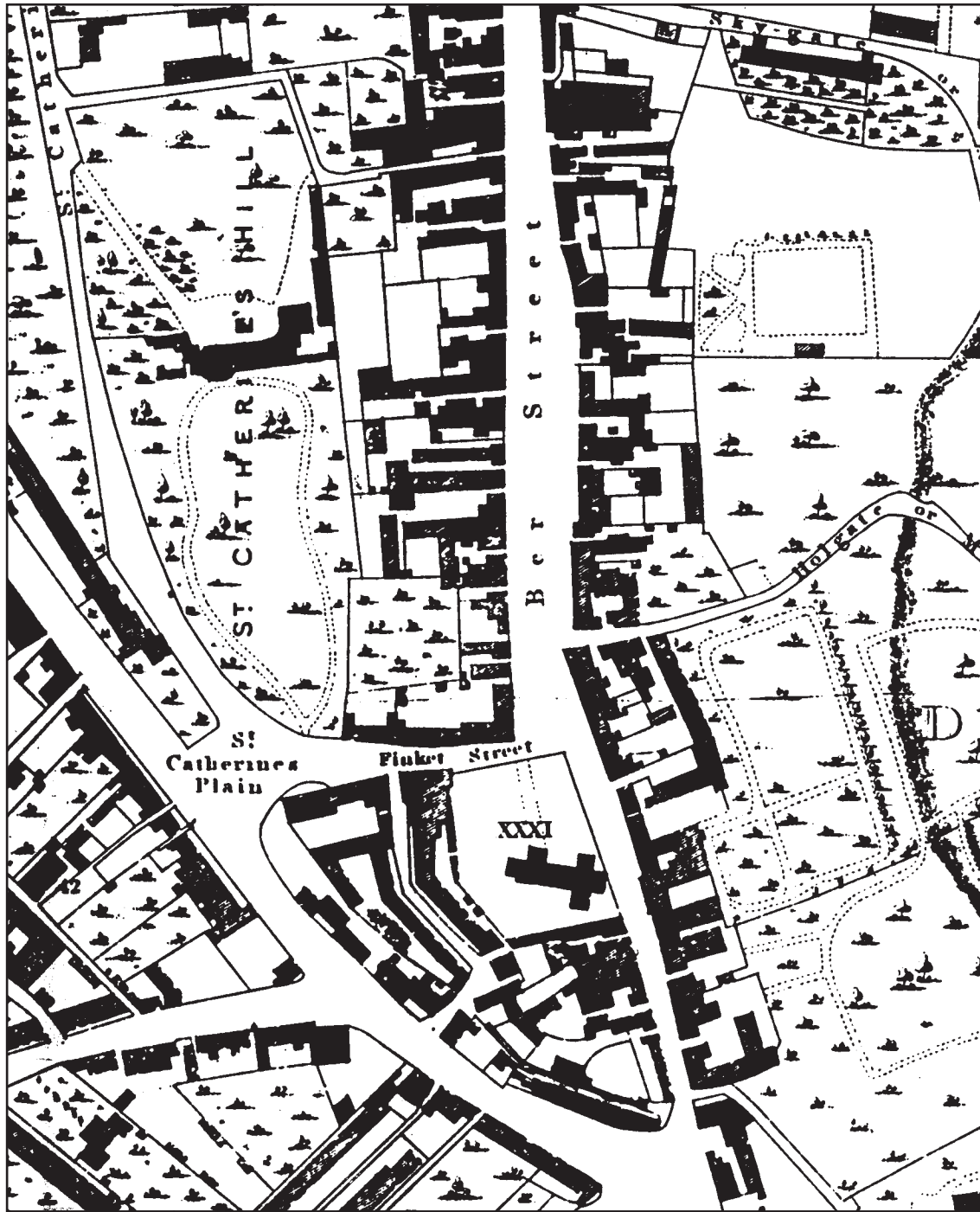


Figure 5. Millard and Manning's map of 1830, showing the south end of Ber Street

East Site, shows the creation of typical 19th-century terraces squeezed in behind the frontage and the existence of a Methodist Mission Chapel.

- The Ordnance Survey 1:1250 survey of 1885 (Fig. 7) shows the situation in the late 19th century, much like Morant's but with better mapping and detail.

The West Site was then quite fully built up around Fox and Hounds Yard. One might anticipate cellars below the Fox and Hounds PH itself (No 153).

On the East Site, the area was then almost completely built over, with terraces behind the frontage, the Chapel and two Public Houses.

It should be noted that the former building line, doubtless ancient, lay forward of the present line, a result of post-war road widening.

- The situation hardly changed, as can be seen from OS maps of 1906, 1929 1947 and 1956, until WWII and later. In 1942 bombing removed 84-102 on the East Site and in the 1960s and later the rest of the buildings on both sites, east and west, were removed. On the East Site was built a filling station and the West Site has remained more or less open, though with minor offices. The East Site was later redeveloped, with the removal of the filling station and the construction of the present two-storey offices and showrooms.

The maps indicate domestic development and infilling of the site, probably from the Norman period, until post-war redevelopment, when part of the building line was shifted to the east, resulting in the north part of the earlier frontage being under the present pavement. Modern intrusions include fuel tanks, two inspection pits and a cellar below numbers 106-110.

6.0 Archaeological Observations

(Figs 1 and 6)

There have been several archaeological excavations and observations along Ber Street.

- NHER 9: Ber Street gates. NB the supposed mention in 1146 is probably a later reference (see Campbell 1975, 10 n30); the walls and gate probably date to the later campaign of building following the grant of murage.

West Site

- NHER 4: burial just outside churchyard of St John Sepulchre.
- NHER 573: St John Sepulchre (Jope 1952).
- NHER 26485: late 18th century gardens (Norfolk Historic Gardens Survey).
- NHER 26271: 89-91 Ber Street. 17th century house.
- NHER 26272: 125 Ber Street (Public House), brick-built, with cellar.
- NHER 26273: 137 Ber Street: Horse and Dray Public House. A watching brief carried out by NAU (Percival 1997) in 1997 revealed post-medieval ?yard surface and brick culvert which may overlie earlier medieval deposits.
- NHER 299: NAU WB. natural sand seen immediately below tarmac surface.
- NHER 26436: NAU WB. natural surface found at varying depths.
- NHER 277: 113-119 Ber Street. medieval well.

[No 165 was a jettied building of probable 16th- to 17th-century origin].

East Site

- NHER 2: site of St Michael at Thorn church. Norman doorway, burials. (Not shown on Fig.1 but is shown on Fig. 6).
- NHER 235: post-medieval pottery.

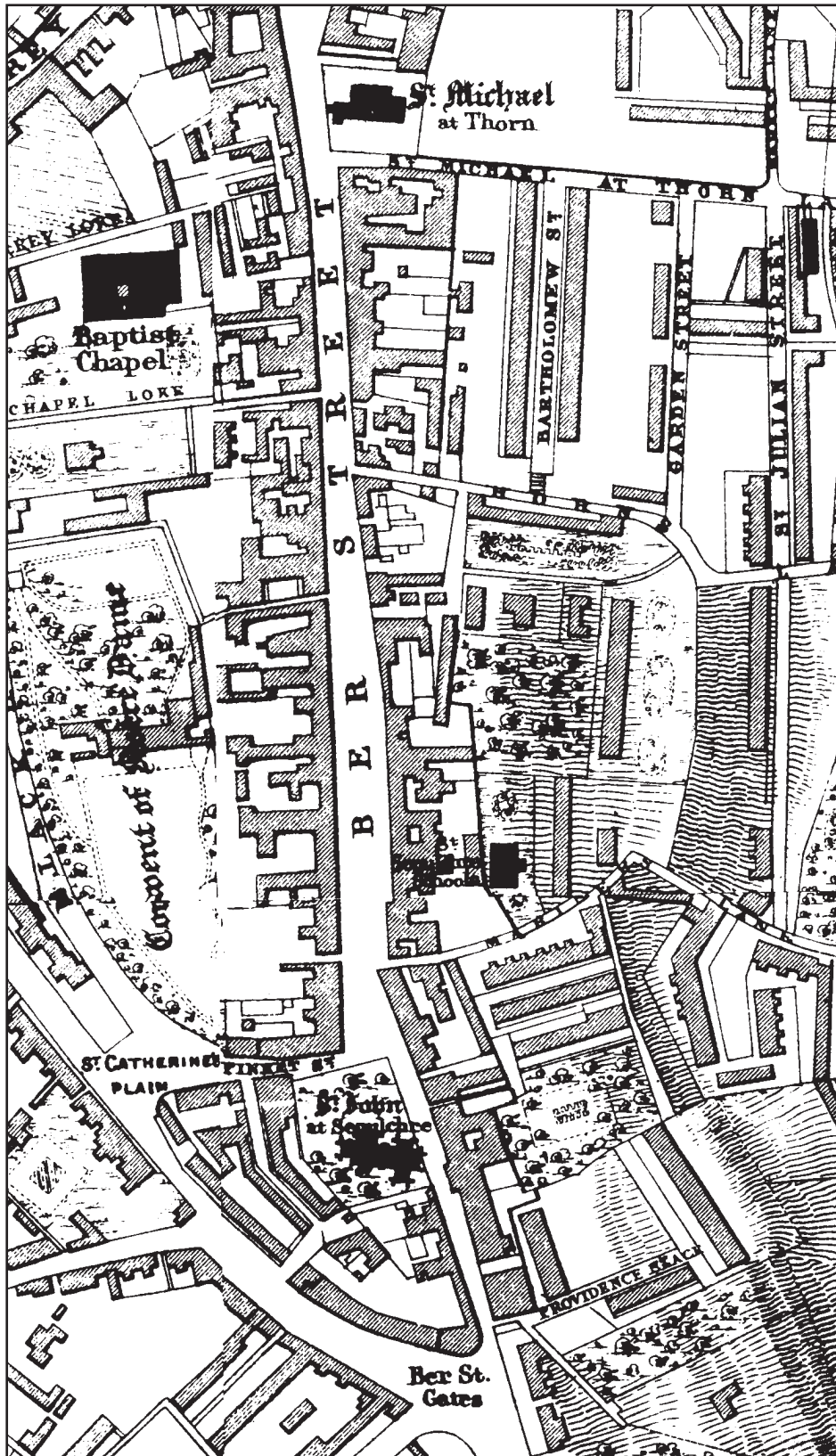


Figure 6. Morant's map of 1873, showing the south end of Ber Street

- NHER 7/399/26510: St Bartholomew church. Excavations in 1948 within the former churchyard found skeletons and part of the churchyard wall, some 50 feet south-east of the remains of the church [i.e. within the East Site] (Jope 1952).
- NHER 661: hoard of medieval gold coins.
- NHER 26274: 156 Ber Street: 17th-century house.
- NHER 6 and 26275: 158 Ber Street remains of 17th-century house in 18th-century brick building. Urn, uncertain date, found 1843.
- NHER 26276: 160 Ber Street: 17th-century house.
- NHER 26508 and 39789: 36-58 Ber Street. Evaluation (Shelley 1999) followed by excavation (Emery 2005), undertaken by NAU revealed roadside occupation with probable 11th-century beginnings (supported by the presence of Thetford ware pottery). There was evidence for a building at the street frontage with pits behind. Also found on this site was evidence for post-medieval industrial activity including bell and cannon making, also pottery production. Indeed the tin-glazed pottery waster sherds found, indicating early production in the vicinity are of national importance (Goffin 2005).

It may be noted that at NHER 26508 Trench 3 was excavated to some 3.75m with post-medieval material being found at depth, suggesting quite late levelling of the slope at that point (Shelley 1999).

One should also note that the church of St John Sepulchre and the burial to the north (NHER 4) show clearly that Ber Street in its 'wide' form ended at the church.

Nos 86-8, 90-100 were two large 18th-century brick ranges, possibly with cellars. Nos 102-104, 110-112 were probably jettied buildings of 16th- to 17th-century origins, as may have been 120-122, with The Recruiting Sergeant PH at No 120.

[The Butchers PH stood at No 88; a cellar is a possibility].

7.0 The Site Today

(Plates 1, 2, 3 and 4)

As noted above, Ber Street and the development site have seen several phases of activity:

- i. Creation of the street and the establishment of St John Sepulchre before 1086, perhaps before 1075.
- ii. Establishment of two further churches: St Michael at Thorn and St Bartholomew.
- iii. Building of houses in medieval/late medieval period, with ranges of timber-framed jettied buildings in 16th century rebuilding?
- iv. Piecemeal redevelopment, with terrace infill to rear of frontage and on the hillside to the east.
- v. 1942 bombing and loss of 84-102 (East Site).
- vi. Post-WWII redevelopment for a garage and offices, and further redevelopment with the construction of the present two-storey offices.

The present area on the East Site incorporates:



Figure 7. Ordnance Survey 25" map of Norwich (1885), detail, showing the south end of Ber Street, with development sites, (east and west) coloured

- Probable deposits to provide a level site (see NHER 26508 above), with a steep drop to the east.
- A known cellar beneath the former 106-110.
- A possible cellar below the former Recruiting Sergeant PH at the extreme south end of the site.
- Cutting for the former fuel tanks.
- Cuttings for two inspection pits.

The present proposals are for the construction of several blocks of flats (West Site: A-B; East Site: C-G) with associated car parking and other facilities on level-1 (and – 2 and –3 outside the indicated site outline). Figure 8 show the extent of excavation for these car parks below present ground level.

On the West Site, the car park is intended to be a full level (i.e. 3m) below the present surface, accessed *via* a ramp. It is likely that all except the deepest archaeological features will be lost over most of the west site.

On the East Site, the car parking (level –1) is intended to be a half-level (i.e. 1.5m) below the present surface. It is likely that this will have the most impact on archaeological deposits closest to the street, although the earlier building line now lies beyond the present building line. Levels –2 and –3 are on the present Mariners Lane CP, on the hillside below the indicated site outline.

8.0 Conclusions

The origins of urban development on Ber Street follow the creation of the French Borough of Norwich and may date to the 11th century. Occupation on the East Site may have been restricted to the frontage by the slope, until quite late, when dumping created a level site.

The sites are in an elevated situation, therefore with low potential for environmental remains. Besides the cellars known to exist, or those that may have existed below public houses, others may be presumed to have been present.

Besides the possibility of cellars, the survival of deposits at the frontage may be good, disturbed only be foundations for the 17th-century houses and by 19th-century buildings, with modern cuttings behind the frontage.

It should be remembered that the ancient street frontage lay a little way towards Ber Street.

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

Acknowledgements

NAU is grateful to Les Brown Associates who commissioned this report on behalf of their client, Lind Automotive Group. We are grateful to Les Brown for his advice and to Vince McGorry of Lind for access to the site. Chris Garner of Feilden and Mawson kindly supplied plans of the proposed development.

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Figure 8. The site (east and west), outlined, showing the area to be reduced for car parking. Not to scale



Plate 1. The East Site, from the north, looking towards the Ber Street frontage



Plate 2. The East Site, looking over the former filling station area towards the service area



Plate 3. The East Site, from the rear, showing steep drop from the site towards the east



Plate 4. The East Site, from the rear, showing steep drop from the site towards the east, close-up

