

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 904

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
Sporle VC First School**

39858 SWP

Chris Birks
January 2004

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Local Authority No.076759

Fig.1 is based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 'Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings' Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Norwich (22/01/2004). **Reference copy: no further copies to be made.**

Location: Sporle VC First School, Sporle with Palgrave, Norfolk
Grid Ref: TF 849 115
NHER No.: 39858 SWP
Date of fieldwork: 13th and 14th January 2004

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Sporle VC First School, Sporle with Palgrave, in west Norfolk. The survey area was situated in an archaeological landscape where evidence dating from the Iron Age, Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods had previously been recorded.

Post-medieval and modern building rubble related to a farmhouse on this site demolished in the late 1950s or early 1960s was found in Trench 1 and an associated un-lined well in Trench 2. As a result of this evaluation, therefore, few archaeological features and no finds were retrieved.

1.0 Introduction

(Figs 1 and 2)

The archaeological evaluation consisted of two trenches within an area of proposed development at Sporle VC First School, Sporle with Palgrave, in west Norfolk. The area examined (16²m) constituted almost 4% of the development area.

The report was commissioned by RG Carter Limited on behalf of Jarvis Projects Ltd who were the funding body.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: 1707/JB) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH/18.12.03).

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 found.

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

(Fig. 1)

The site lies upon a solid chalk geology with overlying coversands and chalky boulder clay deposits (Funnell 1994). The site was generally level at an elevation of c.67m OD.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

The settlement of Sporle is known to date from the Late Saxon period and its name indicates an 'enclosure in a wood' (Hobbs 2003). It is thought to have belonged to Edward the Confessor, as mentioned in Domesday, who passed it to Earl Ralph who held it at the conquest.

A number of entries exist in the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record (NHER) for the area in and around Sporle with Palgrave. The school is situated less than one hundred metres north-east of St Mary's Church (NHER 4166). St Mary's is a medieval church which contains Romanesque (11th to 12th century) elements and some Romano-British brick. Curiously, the church is not marked on Faden's map of 1797 (Barringer 1989). Evidence of a medieval Benedictine Priory cell (1123 to 1414 AD) associated with the church is present south of the church (NHER 4185). It has been noted that at one time there were earthworks which ran parallel to the street in the vicinity of the school.

A large number of metal detected finds including artefacts of Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date have been recovered to the south-west of the site (NHER 28569).

The find spot of a medieval bronze key is recorded to the south-west of the site (NHER 19123). A further find spot lies south of the site (NHER 28325) and includes a Romano-British dolphin-type brooch, a 15th century bronze dragon-headed spout and a further medieval bronze key. A geophysical survey and evaluation was carried out in this location (Samuels 1995) and produced evidence of two linear features of medieval date containing several sherds of an early medieval handmade cooking pot. 19th to 20th century pits were also found.

Linear earthworks are identified in a field to the north-west of the site (NHER 16891) that may represent medieval drainage ditches or a small enclosure such as a toft.

The Old Rectory lies to the north-west of the site (NHER 8290) and dates from the 17th century.

A square enclosure marked as 'Old Hall Ruins' appears on Faden's map of 1797 to the north of the village. It remained on the Ordnance Survey One Inch maps but does not appear on the later 1:10000 or 1:25000 series.

Recent work in the vicinity, by the NAU, evaluated a small site 300m to the south (NHER 39677) located on The Street (Hobbs 2003). This work recorded two pits, one early medieval and one post-medieval in date.

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

After discussion with Andy Hutcheson (NLA) it was established that two 4m x 2m trenches be excavated, equating to almost 4% of the development area. Trench 1 was approximately north-east to south-west orientated and situated to the east of the existing Sporle VC First School buildings. Trench 2 was approximately north-west to south-east orientated and situated to the north of the school buildings.

Machine excavation was carried out with a 2-ton hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

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

Trench locations and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of sample trench sections.

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

Grass turf was carefully removed by machine, replaced by hand and tamped down by machine.

Site conditions and access were good. The weather remained dry, cold and sunny.

5.0 Results

Trench 1

(Fig. 2)

Trench 1 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m removing c.0.3m of very dark grey clayey sand topsoil. Beneath the topsoil lay c.0.3m of brick rubble and ironwork interpreted as the remains of a post-medieval (possibly modern) farmhouse. This rubble layer overlay c.0.2m light yellowish brown sandy silt colluvial subsoil. Underneath the subsoil lay undisturbed natural deposits of light grey sandy clay with frequent medium to large flint nodules over chalky boulder clay deposits.

No archaeological features or finds were recovered in this trench.

Trench 2

(Figs 2 and 3)

Trench 2 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.68m removing c.0.6m of very dark grey clayey sand topsoil and c.0.08m of light yellowish brown sandy silt colluvial subsoil. These overlay undisturbed natural deposits of chalky boulder clay.

A modern well [1] lay to the south-east of the trench. It was sub-circular in plan and what was revealed measured over 1m diameter. It was cut into the chalky boulder clay natural and excavated to a maximum depth of c.0.5m. It contained a very dark grey clayey sand fill [2], identical to the present topsoil and was not lined. A local

information source provided confirmation that the well was backfilled in 1959/60 and was associated with the farmhouse, traces of which were found in Trench 1.

No further features and no finds were present in this trench.

6.0 Conclusions

Despite the potential for sub-surface features of Iron Age to post-medieval date, only post-medieval and modern evidence was present, and no finds were recovered.

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

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to staff at Sporle VC First School for their assistance. Thanks are also due to the staff at the Norfolk Historic and Environment Records office based at Gressenhall.

The excavations were carried out by the author and Neil Moss. The report was illustrated and formatted by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

| Context | Trench | Category | Description | Period |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------|--|-------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | Cut | Well | Post-medieval to modern |
| 2 | 2 | Deposit | Very dark grey clayey sand fill of [1] | Post-medieval to modern |

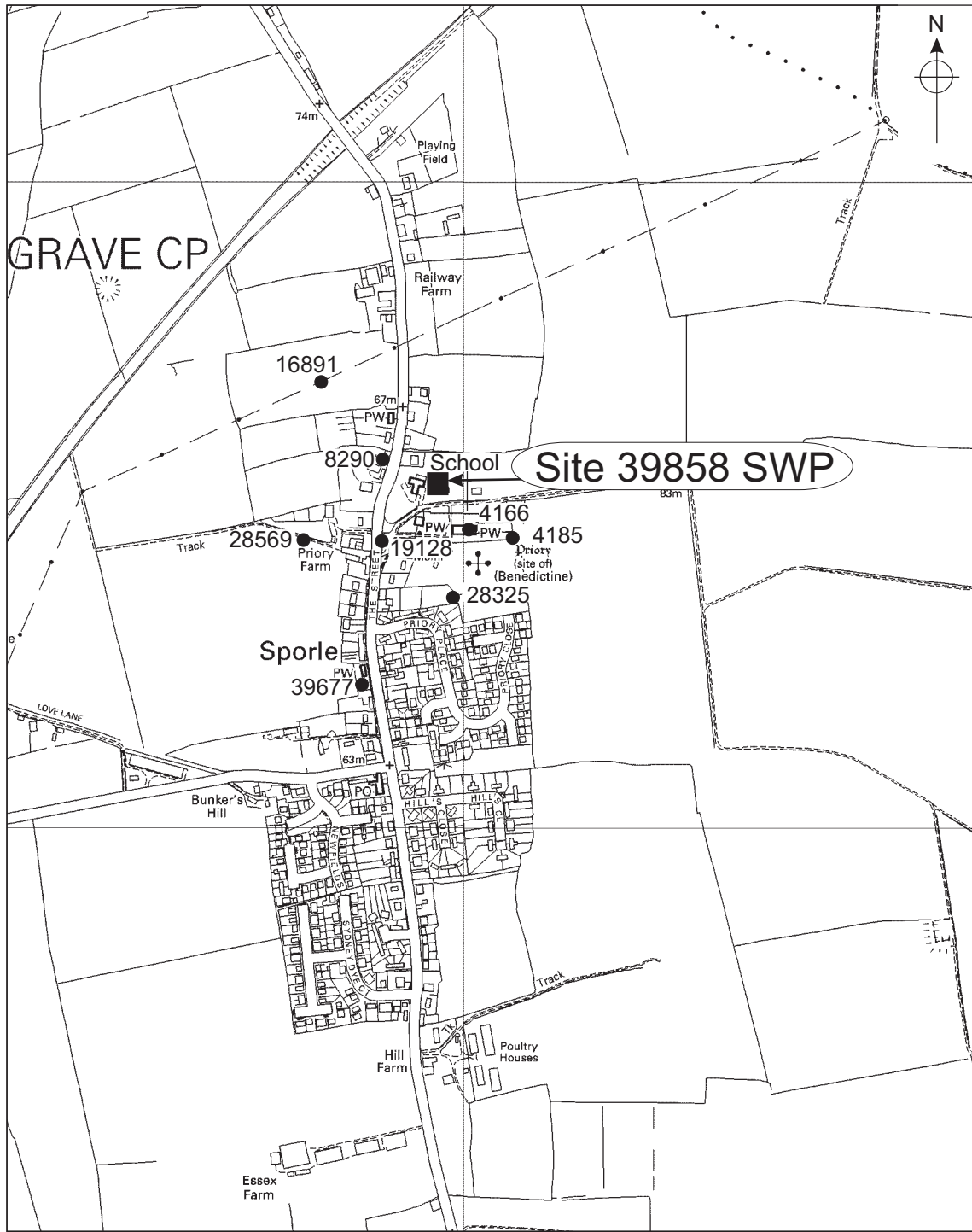


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

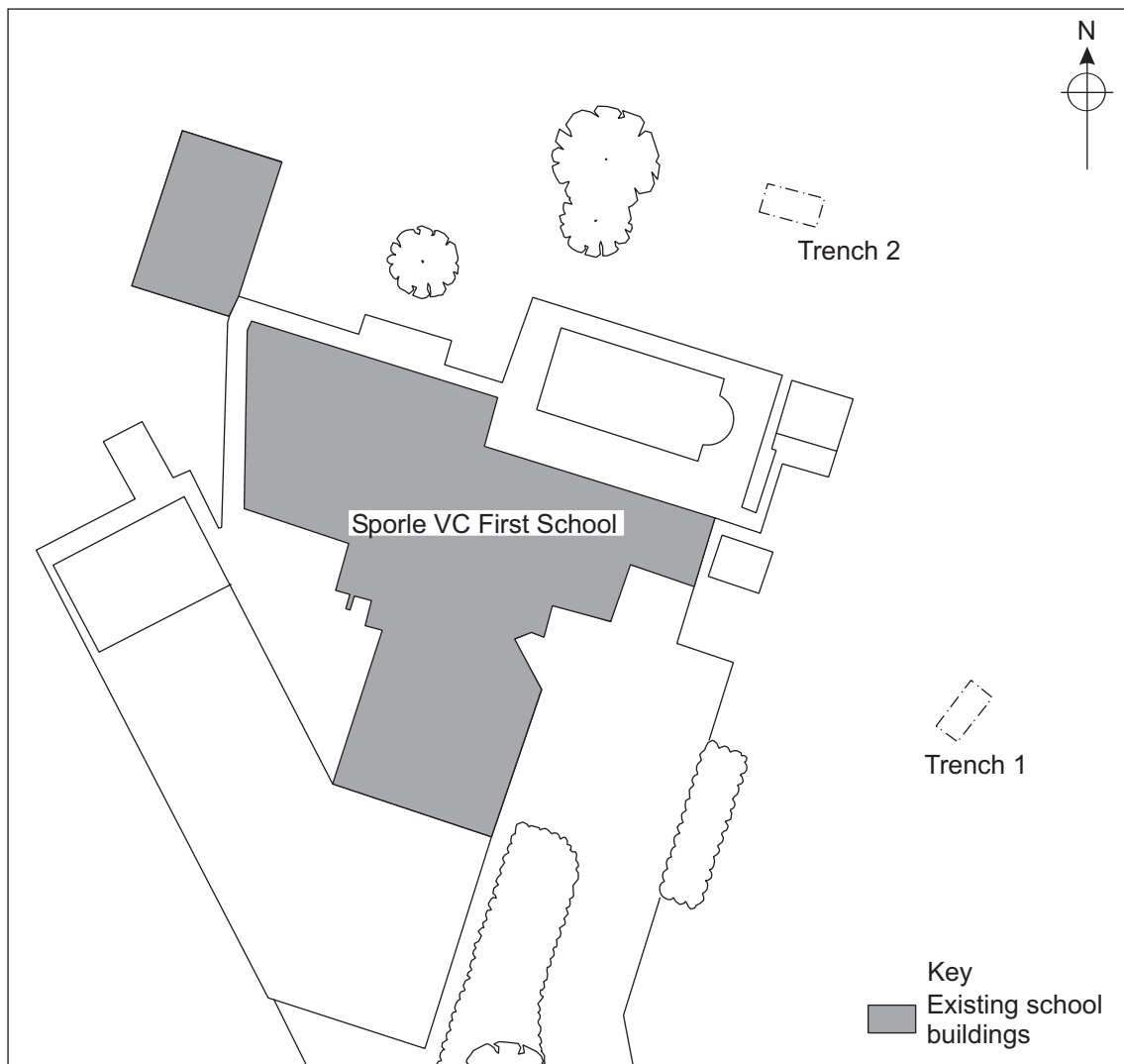
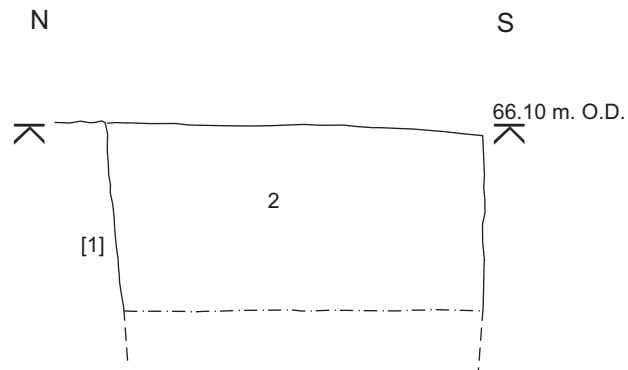
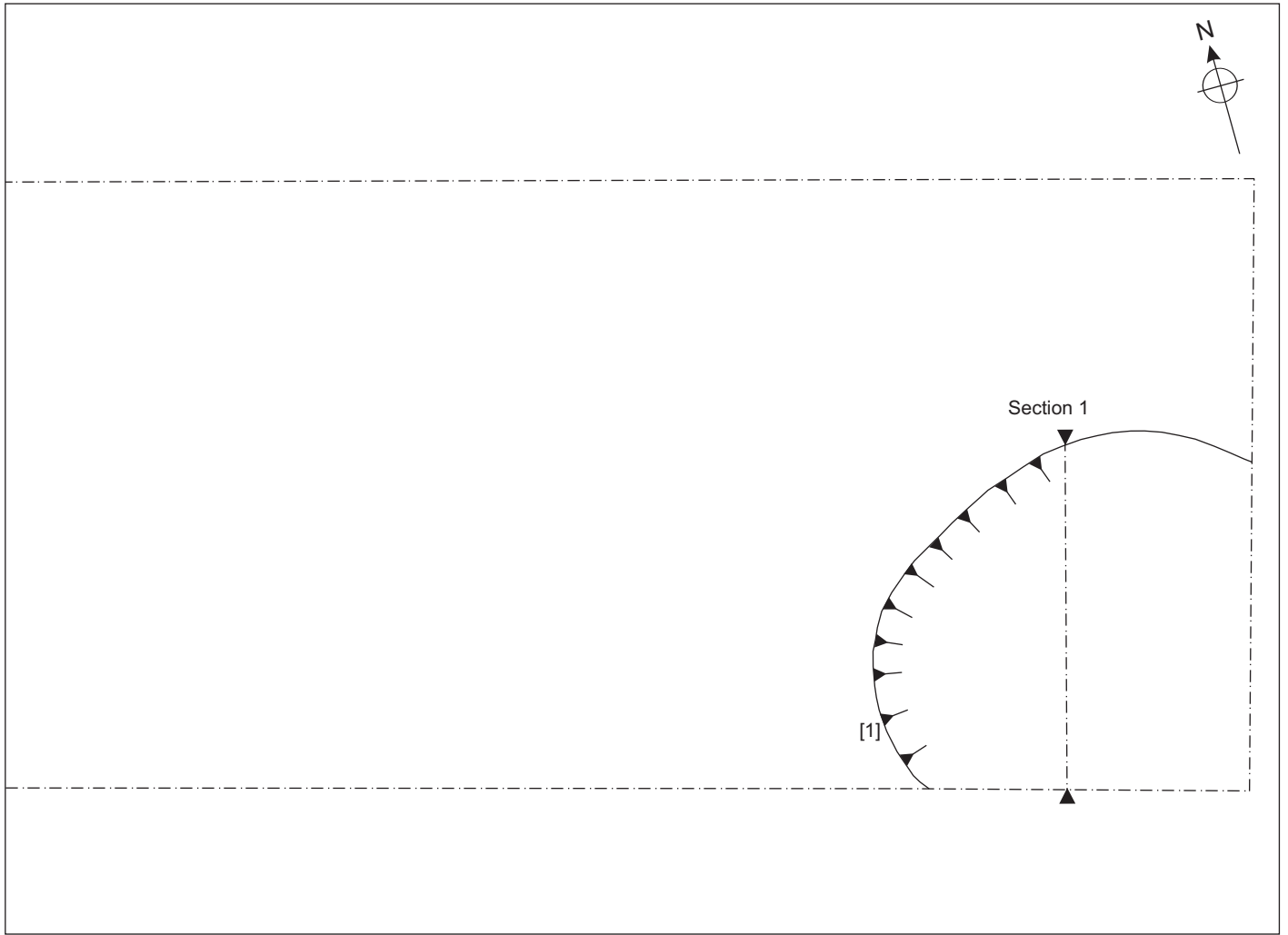


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500



West facing section 1



Figure 3. Trench 2, plan and section. Scale 1:20