

NAU ARCHAEOLOGY

Report No. 1214

An Archaeological Evaluation at 28 King's Arms Street, North Walsham, Norfolk

48910WLN

John W. Percival

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BAU 1338



Looking east across the site towards King's Arms Street,
Trench 2 is on the left

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Frontispiece

Looking east across the site towards King's Arms Street, Trench 2 is on the left

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Location: 28 King's Arms Street, North Walsham, Norfolk
District: North Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 2819 3012
HER No.: 48910 WLN
Date of fieldwork: 11th and 12th September 2006

Summary

In September 2006 two trenches were excavated at 29 King's Arms Street, North Walsham. The site was a rectangular plot aligned east-to-west. It lay west of the street frontage and sloped steeply to the west adjacent the street frontage. No archaeological features or finds predating the late 18th or early 19th centuries were found. In both trenches excavations stopped at the surface of an homogenous layer of mid brown silty sand with a high gravel content. This material was devoid of any anthropogenic inclusions and was possibly ancient colluvium, or some other naturally derived deposit.

1.0 Introduction

The area that was the subject of this archaeological evaluation was located c. 150m south-west of the Market Place and St Nicholas's church, North Walsham (Fig. 1). The plot was until recently occupied by the former Picturedrome cinema building (see below), which had latterly used as commercial premises. It measured approximately 32m east-to-west and 11m north-to-south and because of its somewhat irregular outline covered an area of 334m².

The evaluation was carried out on behalf of Vince Kiddell who funded both the fieldwork and this report.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: BAU1338/KJP) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: 12/11/2005/ARJH)

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 NAU Archaeology, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The drift geology of the North Walsham area is made up of glacial sands, gravels and brickearths (Funnel 2005, 5). The town centre lies on low, basically flat terrain. The site itself was rectangular and in general sloped from east-to-west. The site frontage on King's Arms street of lay at an elevation of c. 33.3m OD, the modern ground surface levels adjacent to Trench 1 (Fig. 2), c. 7.5 west of the frontage, were c. 31.8m OD and west of Trench 2 31.1m OD.

It is possible that a north-to-south aligned stream once flowed close to the western edge of the site and that the presence of this watercourse may have influenced the early development of the town (Penn 2005, 3).

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

It is likely that during the Middle Saxon Period (AD 650-850) North Walsham became an important settlement within a large landholding or multiple estate whose boundaries may have been the rivers Bure and Ant.. The proto-town would perhaps have been a combined economic, administrative and ecclesiastical centre (Williamson 1993, 153; Penn 1996, 45; Penn 2005, 5) The Domesday Book (1086) indicates that during the Late Saxon (850-1066) period North Walsham was connected to St. Bennet's Abbey (Brown 1984). It is likely that by the early 11th century the church and the Market Place were in existence in their present locations. The present St. Nicholas's church contains fabric dating from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries The tower collapsed in 1724 revealing remains of an earlier tower of probable 11th century date (Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 622-624).

Although it probably had its origins in the late Saxon Period the market was first recorded in the late 13th century and had been granted a Royal Charter by 1323 (Dymond 2005).

By the mid 13th century the cloth industry had become an important part of the economic life of the town. This importance was boosted by the arrival of immigrant Flemish weavers in the 14th century. In 1600 a fire devastated the town destroying 118 houses. (Penn 2005, Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 622).

It is likely that following the fire the topography of the town centre, in terms of plots and landholdings was somewhat altered. The most obvious example of this was the creation of the Paston School, now the Paston Sixth Form College 'Griffons' site in 1604. The oldest building within the Griffons site dates to 1765-1766 (Penn 2005, Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 626). The former girls High School, now the Paston Sixth Form College 'Lawns' site was based around Scarbrugh House, a substantial house with both 18th and 19th century elements, and its extensive grounds . (Penn 2005). The 'Lawns' lies west of site that formed the subject of this evaluation.

Probably the earliest detailed cartographic representation of the site itself is an Enclosure Award map of 1808. It shows a scatter of small buildings occupying the western frontage of Kings Arms Street and the area to the west. The central northern part of the site was occupied by a large rectangular barn-like building which measured approximately 13m east-to-west and 8m north-to-south.

The Tithe Map of 1843 shows that the street frontage had been infilled a little more by that time.

The most plausible interpretation of the OS first edition six-inch map of 1885 is that the Thomas Cubit's iron works (Penn 2005, 6) lay north of the site within the area now occupied by 10-20 King's Arms Street. The cottages north of Trench 2, 1-3 Lower Coats, were in place by this time. In general exterior outline they have remained unaltered into the 21st century. The large barn-like building first seen on the 1808 Enclosure map was still extant and largely unaltered in 1885.

From 1912 until 1934 28 King's Arms Street was the home of the Picturedrome cinema. The cinema was housed in a purpose-built structure complete with its own

gas turbine electricity generation system (Ling 2001). The construction date of 1912 probably makes the North Walsham Picturedrome one of earliest purpose-built cinemas in the county. The Picturedrome building utilised the sloping site, the screen and the lowest part of the auditorium being at the west end of the building. In 1934 when the Picturedrome building was converted for use as a shop/warehouse the original sloping floor of the auditorium was covered with a series of stepped concrete floors.

Very little is known of the below-ground archaeology of North Walsham. Occasional artefacts of Prehistoric, Roman, Late Saxon and Medieval date have been recovered from across the area of the modern town. These finds display no coherent spatial or temporal patterning with, for example, no significant concentrations around the presumed historic centres of the Market Place and church.

Prior to this evaluation only two formal archaeological fieldwork investigations had taken place in North Walsham.

In April 2000 four small trenches were excavated within the site of an early 19th century brick-works at 39 Cromer Road (Warsop 2000). Apart from two possible extraction pits little evidence of brick-making was found.

One month later another small trench was south of 38 Vicarage Road, adjacent to the north-east corner of St. Nicholas's Churchyard (Bates 2000). A number of archaeological features were found but all were of late 19th or 20th century date. A few finds of post-medieval date were also recovered.

4.0 Methodology

Following the demolition of the former Picturedrome building and the removal of the concrete floors the concrete foundations at the western end of the building were also removed. This left most of the surface of the site, with the exception of the street frontage (see below), covered in disturbed rubble and sandy loam soil.

Machine excavation was carried out with a 360° tracked excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

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.

The Brief required that two trenches measuring 4m by 4ms be excavated within the location of the two areas proposed for new build. In the event one Trench of c.4m by 4m (Trench 2) was excavated in the central northern part of the site (Fig. 2). Trench 1 measured approximately 2.9m east-to-west and 2.6m north to south was located 7.5m west of the King's Arms Street frontage. Although the second trench was smaller than originally intended, taken together both trenches represented just over 7% of the total area of the plot and therefore a much higher percentage of the footprint of the proposed new build.

It was not possible to place Trench 1 any closer to the street frontage due to a number of factors. The Street frontage still contained at least two levels of partially broken-up stepped concrete floors. Other structural elements also remained, some of which were possibly going to be incorporated into the new development. Health and Safety was also a consideration. Kings Arms Street is the main exit route from

North Walsham Market Place and carries many heavy goods vehicles. The position of Trench 1 was similarly constricted by the vehicle access to Lower Cotts.

Attempts were made to scan spoil, exposed surfaces and features with a metal detector. These attempts were hindered by the large amount of modern debris present on the site. No finds other than the obviously modern were found.

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.

A level was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark (34.32m OD) on the south-west corner of 17 King's Arms Street (Fig. 2). A non-permanent temporary benchmark of 33.28m OD was set up on the far eastern end of the site.

Weather conditions during the evaluation were favourable.

5.0 Results

5.1 Trench 1

Approximately 0.4m of soil and rubble overburden were machine excavated within this trench. Machine excavation ceased at the surface of an homogenous layer of mid brown sandy silt [03], with moderate to frequent well sorted round and angular flint gravel. This deposit contained no anthropogenic inclusions of any sort. This was either a 'natural' glacial geological deposit or possibly an ancient colluvium. It was cut by shallow scoop filled with dark sandy loam containing plaster fragments. It was probably associated with the construction of the Picturedrome building and was therefore early 20th century in date. No artefacts of any sort were found in association with this trench.

5.2 Trench 2

Between 0.4m and 0.6m rubble-rich overburden was machine excavated during the creation of this trench revealing, in the eastern half of the trench a brown silty sand deposit [05]. This material was characteristically similar in every way to deposit [03], apart from being slightly darker in colour. A small sondage measuring 0.8m by 0.7m was hand excavated into deposit [05] to a depth of 0.5m below the base of the trench (30.07m OD) confirming it contained no artefacts or inclusions.

In the eastern half of the trench deposit [05] was overlain by a thin layer of light yellow-brown sandy clay [04]. This was probably a make-up layer associated with the construction of the barn-like building seen on the Enclosure map. A fragmentary brick wall [10] and a disturbed pavement or quarry tile floor [07], also parts of this structure, were seen in the north-facing section of the trench. The characteristics of these remains indicated that the barn-like building was probably constructed in the late 18th century. It was still extant in the late 19th century and was probably demolished in 1912 to make-way for Picturedrome building.

No finds other than a few of obviously modern date were found during the excavation of this trench.

6.0 Conclusions

If any medieval features or deposits did exist on the site they are likely to have been located towards the street frontage and have been completely removed by post-medieval and modern activity.

It is also possible that medieval occupation on the west side of King's Arms Street did not extend as far south as the site and that it remained unoccupied until the late 18th century.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Trench	Description	Period
01	Cut	1	Small pit or hollow	Modern
02	Deposit	1	Fill of [01]	Modern
03	Deposit	1	Possible natural or ancient colluvium	Geological
04	Deposit	2	Thin layer of yellow sandy clay	Post-medieval
05	Deposit	2	Possible natural or ancient colluvium	Geological
06	Deposit	2	Brick rubble demolition debris	Modern
07	Deposit	2	Disturbed pavement floor	Post-medieval
08	Deposit	2	Yellow sand bedding layer for floor [07]	Post-medieval
09	Deposit	2	Make-up layer below [08]	Post-medieval
10	Masonry	2	Brick wall	Post-medieval

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)	Wall	1
	Floor	1
Modern (1900 to 2050 AD)	pit	1

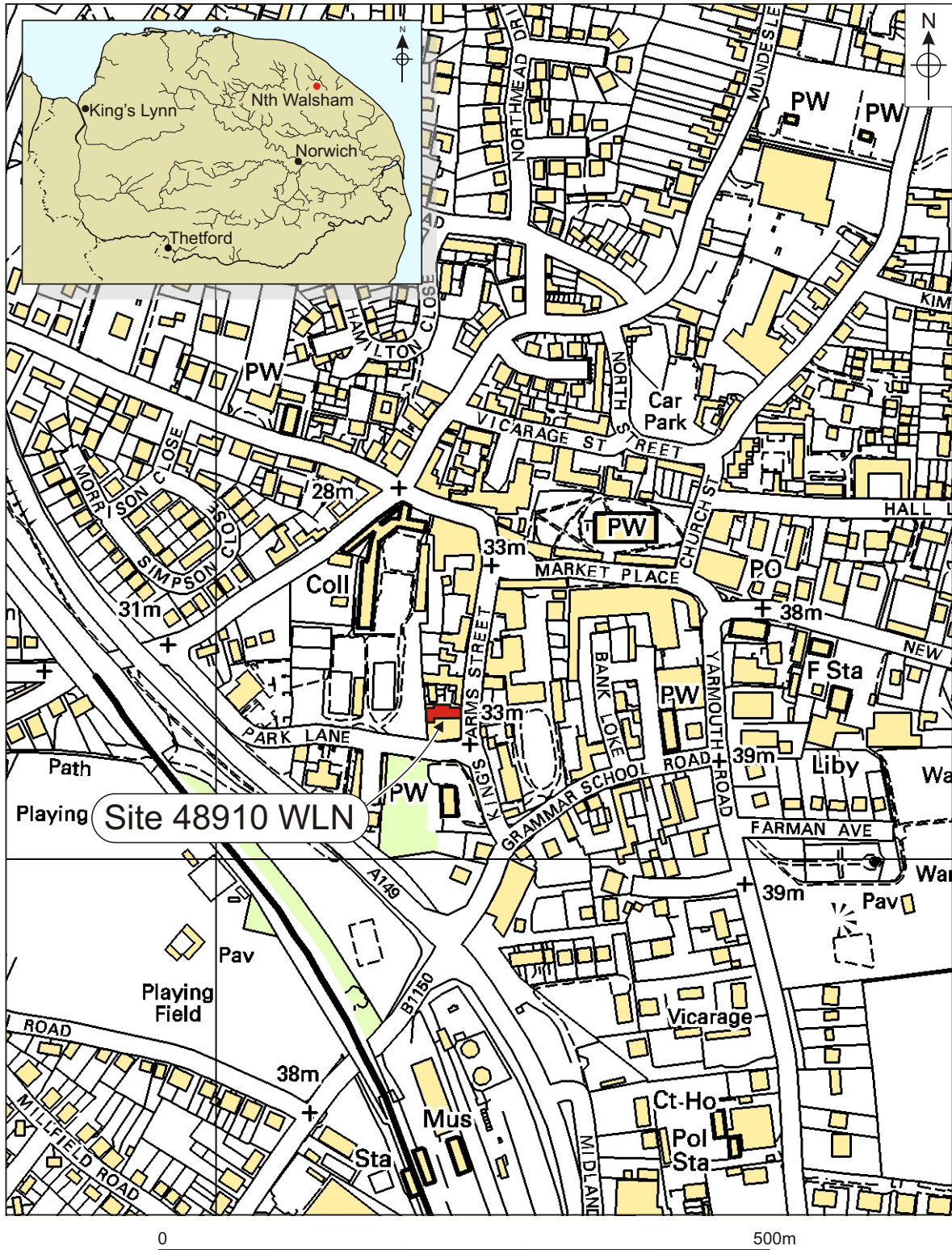


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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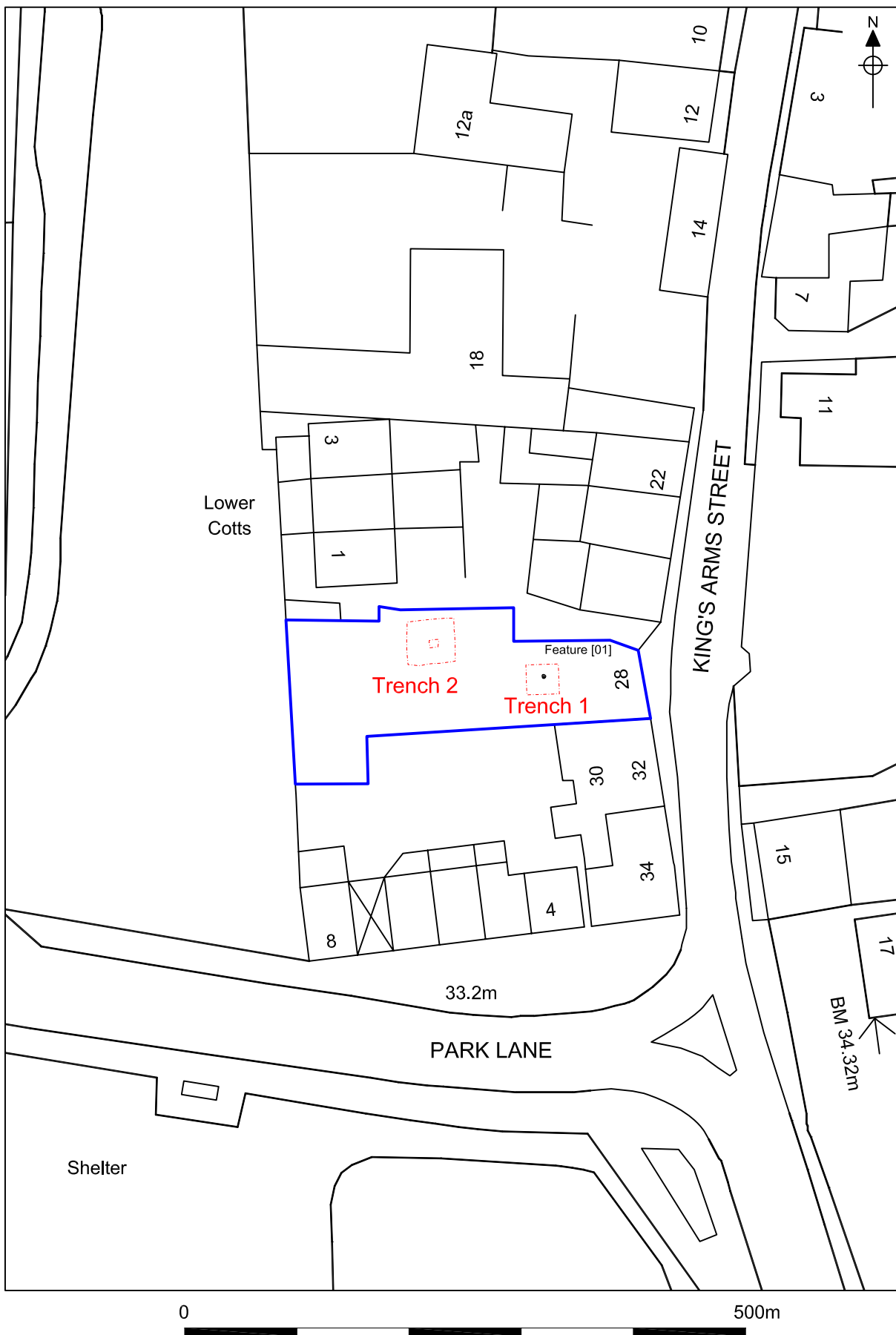


Figure 2. Trench location plan. Scale 1:500