

NAU Archaeology

Report No. 1215

Interim Report on an Archaeological Evaluation at the Former L C Jay Works, Oak Street, Norwich, Norfolk

NHER 48921N

Report prepared on behalf of:

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Location: Former L C Jay Works, Oak Street
District: Norwich
Grid Ref: TG 2274 0902
HER No: 48921N
Dates of fieldwork: 18th to 13th October

Summary

NAU Archaeology was commissioned by Hopkins Homes Ltd to undertake the archaeological evaluation at the site of the former L C Jay Works on Oak Street in Norwich, prior to development. This work was requested as a planning condition by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

The site is located in a part of Norwich where important archaeological remains of Late Saxon and medieval date have previously been recorded.

The evaluation comprised 4 trenches that each measured 4m by 4m in plan.

Trenches 1 and 2 were located close to the site frontage onto Oak Street. In Trench 1 gravel surfaces thought to be of Late Saxon date were recorded while in Trench 2 the presence of post-holes indicated that Late Saxon structures, presumably buildings were present. A beaten earth floor revealed in this trench is also thought to be Late Saxon in date.

Cutting these Late Saxon remains in Trenches 1 and 2 were several pits of probable medieval date. In both these trenches, clay surfaces also of possible medieval date were present, though no associated structural features were identified. Overlying these surfaces were tips and dumps of soils interpreted as levelling up deposits. Post-medieval walls were present in both trenches, and a modern concrete beam recorded in Trench 1.

In Trenches 3 and 4 natural gravel deposits were overlain by grey alluvial silts. Cutting these silts were medieval pits. The recovery from these pits of horn cores from sheep/goat and cattle is taken to indicate an industrial use, probably for the procurement of horn from the cores or other related activities such as tanning. The few datable artefacts recovered from these pits suggested that these features were in use during the medieval period. Sealing these pits were layers of soils that seem to represent levelling up of previous ground levels. A wall of possible early post-medieval date was present in Trench 4 and a series of floors were associated with this wall. Victorian structures present in these two trenches included a large circular tank in Trench 4 and cellars and other walls in Trench 3.

Due to the levelling and making-up of the site, Late Saxon and medieval remains were present below a minimum 1m of modern overburden.

This interim report is provided in advance of the evaluation report. Its aim is to provide information about the archaeological evaluation at the Former L C Jay Oak Street site so that decisions regarding the satisfaction of planning conditions in respect of archaeological remains on the site can be made.

This interim report does not include specialist reports of the artefacts or environmental samples recovered by the evaluation. These will be included in the evaluation report along with the further illustration and description of the archaeological remains

present on the site. References to particular periods, purpose and identification of remains referred to in this interim report are based entirely on field observation and must be regarded as provisional comment.

1.0 Introduction

The site was located on the Former L C Jay Works on Oak Street, Norwich and covered a total area of 1780m².

The Programme of Archaeological Works (PoAW) has been commissioned and funded by Hopkins Homes Ltd.

The PoAW was undertaken in accordance with a Project Design prepared by the NAU Archaeology (NAU A Ref :AS/1954) in response to a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: AH 10/3/05).

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.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The site is located on the edge of the Wensum Valley, with the line of Oak Street delineating an area of slightly higher ground to the east (Fig 1).

The underlying geology is chalk, occurring at some depth below the limits of excavation. Sands and gravels of a glacial and fluvial origin overlie this chalk. These form the naturally derived soils present on site.

It has been suggested that Oak Street lies at the edge of a natural terrace; it is possible the church of St Michael's Coslany was built on higher ground, set within an area that was originally marshy and low-lying in character. The evaluation was located within this lower lying area between Oak Street and the River Wensum. The River Wensum has been considerably altered and canalised during the post-industrial period and originally its course would have been considerably closer to the study area.

Site surveying was carried out using an Ordnance Survey benchmark located at the west end of St Michael's church. This had a value of 5.11m OD. Two temporary benchmarks were established on site.

3.0 Methodology

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 the evaluation would concentrate on areas to be built over with two trenches on the street frontage and a further two located to the rear of the site (Fig 2)

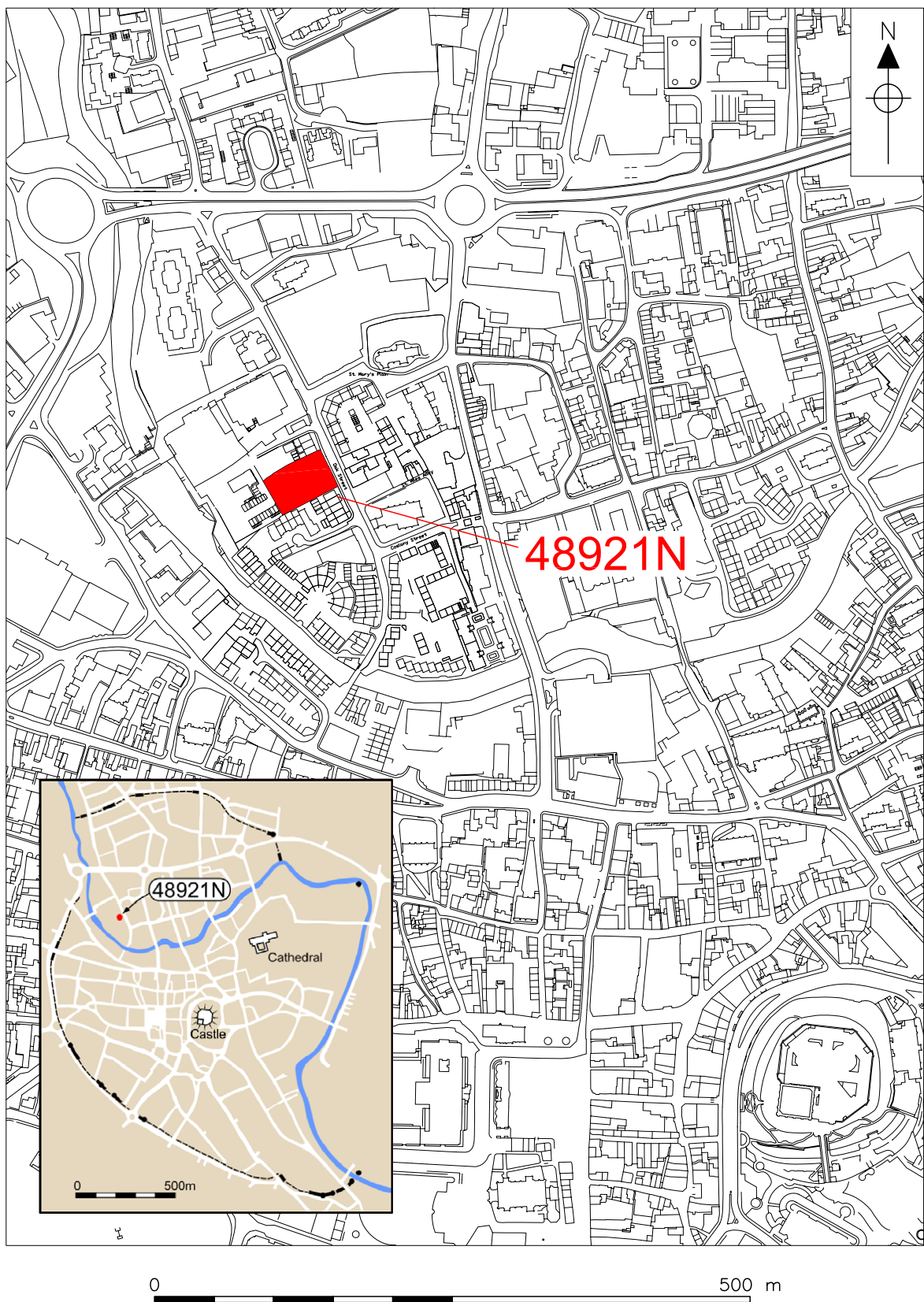


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator/hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. The depth of archaeological remains encountered by the evaluation required the trenches to be shored with sheet shoring and hydraulic waling beams below a depth of 1.20m.

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.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU A *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.

4.0 Results

Trench 1

Modern ground level present at 3.38m OD

Significant Archaeological remains present at 2.10m OD

Natural deposits present at 1.55m OD

The natural deposits in this trench consisted of coarse yellow sand and gravels.

The earliest deposit present in Trench 1 was a layer of metal working debris that appeared to directly overlay natural deposits. A sample of this material has been submitted for analysis. A series of what are interpreted as yard surfaces sealed this debris. These surfaces were broadly similar and formed from sands and gravels. Interleaved with these surfaces were dark soils that suggested use or accumulation between repairs or reinstatement of the gravel surfaces.

Within this sequence of surfaces, the presence of a circular post-hole and a possible hearth indicated a structure perhaps associated with the use of the surface as a yard. The small assemblage of pottery recovered from these deposits suggests they were in use during the Late Saxon period. Cutting the uppermost surface were several small pits of unknown purpose. What these pits seem to indicate is the disuse of the Late Saxon yard surfaces, presumably marking a change in land use or layout.

These pits had been sealed below several spreads of ash, chalk and silt that are thought to represent a surface of medieval date. Visible on this surface was *in situ* burning with orange ash perhaps derived from peat. A thin spread of brown sand sealed this latter surface. A series of layers comprising soils and chalk sealed this brown sand, and it would seem these layers represented levelling up deposits of post-medieval date. A substantial Victorian cellar cut through the deposit sequence in the southeast corner of the evaluation trench to natural deposits. Victorian walls were also present in the upper level of the deposit sequence. A large modern concrete beam, part of the 20th century development of the site, was located along the northern limit of the trench.

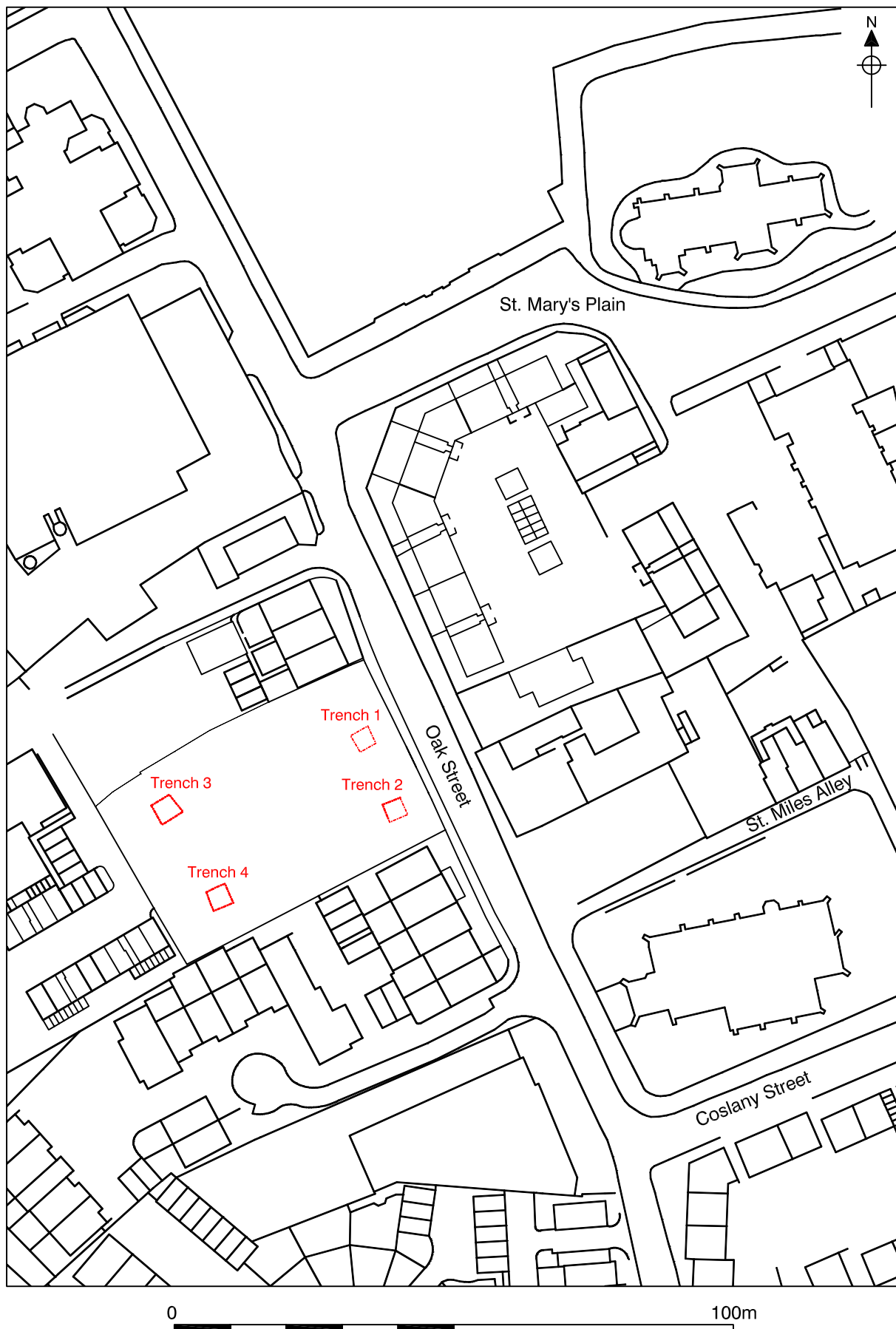


Figure 2. Trench Location. Scale 1:1000

Trench 2

Modern ground level present at 3.40m OD

Significant Archaeological remains present at 2.33m OD

Natural deposits present at 1.45m OD

Natural deposits consisted of yellow sand with frequent gravels and small angular stones. A layer of dark, silt-rich soils overlay these natural deposits.

The earliest features identified in this trench were post-holes and small pits that cut this silty soil. Two slot-like cuts were clearly visible cutting into natural deposits, both these features being aligned approximately east-to-west. One of these slots contained two post-holes. These post-holes and slots are thought to have been structural elements of a wooden building. The method of construction and supporting dating evidence suggest this building was of Late Saxon date.

A second building of possible Late Saxon date was evidenced by the presence of a beaten earth floor, seen in plan but better viewed in section. This floor appeared to seal post-holes associated with the earlier phase of building. While no further structural elements associated with this floor were identified, it demonstrates the presence of a second building and continuity of occupation. Dark soils overlay the earth floor, and overlying these soils along the eastern edge of the evaluated area was a pale brown clay and silt floor. Dating evidence from it suggested it was constructed/used in the medieval period, perhaps during the 13th to 15th centuries.

This surface was cut by several pits also of probable medieval date. Sealing these pits were further layers of soils that might represent levelling deposits. The footing of what appeared to be a medieval wall was located in the extreme northeast of the evaluation trench. This wall had been mostly robbed out, but what had survived was constructed from flint bonded by a sandy lime mortar. Post-medieval layers and a north-to-south-aligned wall of Victorian date completed the stratigraphic sequence within this trench.

Trench 3

Modern ground level present at 3.55m OD

Significant Archaeological remains present at 1.46m OD

Natural deposits present at 0.44m OD

Water Table present at 0.5m OD

Natural deposits comprised coarse gravels and sands. Any remains overlying natural had been removed by the cutting of several pits of possible industrial use and perhaps medieval in date. The excavator has suggested these pits might be associated with tanning, and the original depth of these pits would have placed their bases below the water table. Sealing these pits were layers of silt soils that seem to have been put down to raise the ground level. A pit cutting these layers contained pale silt mixed with straw. This deposit might therefore be plaster or daub in preparation or storage.

Overlying this pit were further make up deposits cut by a flint and mortar wall of a building of possible 16th to 17th century date. A later wall followed the same

east-to-west alignment use and appeared to utilise the earlier wall within its footing. A sequence of what seemed to be internal floors was associated with this wall. Sealing the remains of this wall were layers of building rubble and other debris that originated with the destruction of these buildings. Modern layers of rubble completed the stratigraphic sequence.

Trench 4

Modern ground level present at 3.35m OD

Significant Archaeological remains present at 1.84m OD

Natural deposits present at 36m OD

Water Table present at 0.54m OD

Natural deposits consisted of coarse gravels and sands. Overlying natural deposits were interleaving waterlogged alluvial deposits of silt with occasional small stones and organic inclusions. Cutting these alluvial deposits was a small scoop-like pit that contained a small quantity of metalworking debris and a sherd of medieval pottery. A pair of similar pits also cut the alluvial deposits, and these both contained primary fills of what appeared to be compressed plant material. Ceramic building material of medieval date was recovered from these fills. Sealing the fills of these pits were layers of sand-silts that seem to have been tipped as make-up deposits.

These layers were notable for containing very few artefacts and were cut by large pits of medieval date filled with a mixture of clay, chalk, crushed mortar and stones, with occasional brick and tile fragments. One of these features had a lining of crushed chalk, perhaps indicating an industrial use. Further layers of make-up soils sealed these features, with a large, circular, Victorian tank cutting these layers. Sealing this structure were spreads of building rubble associated demolition of standing buildings that occupied the site during the 20th Century.

5.0 Conclusions

Archaeological Remains

The earliest archaeological remains identified by the evaluation are believed to date to the Late Saxon period (920AD–1065AD) These remains were of yard surfaces in Trench 1 and post-holes with associated construction slots in Trench 2. A beaten earth floor in Trench 2 might also be of Late Saxon date. A phase of medieval activity was also demonstrated in both these trenches with surfaces and pits of this date identified.

In trenches 3 and 4, no evidence of human activity prior to the medieval period has, so far, been identified. Here, activity to the rear of the site appears influenced by the proximity of the River Wensum and the opportunity to undertake activities such as horn preparation in pits that cut the water table. Following this phase of medieval industry/craft, it appears that widespread levelling up of the site took place.

The evaluation at the former L C Jay works has provided compelling evidence of Late Saxon occupation along the western frontage of the site onto Oak Street. This is not surprising, as Oak Street is believed to be of some antiquity and the site is located in the parish of a probable Late Saxon church (St Michael's Coslany).

It has not proved possible to characterise activities taking place during this earliest phase of site occupation. Metal working debris was present within features of this period, but its occurrence might represent material imported from an off-site location. This does not preclude such activity taking place in the immediate vicinity, only that it was not apparent within the evaluated areas.

Medieval features provided better evidence of activities taking place on site with the presence of horn cores from contexts of this date an indicator of occupations that would be expected to take place close to the river foreshore such as horn processing and tanning.

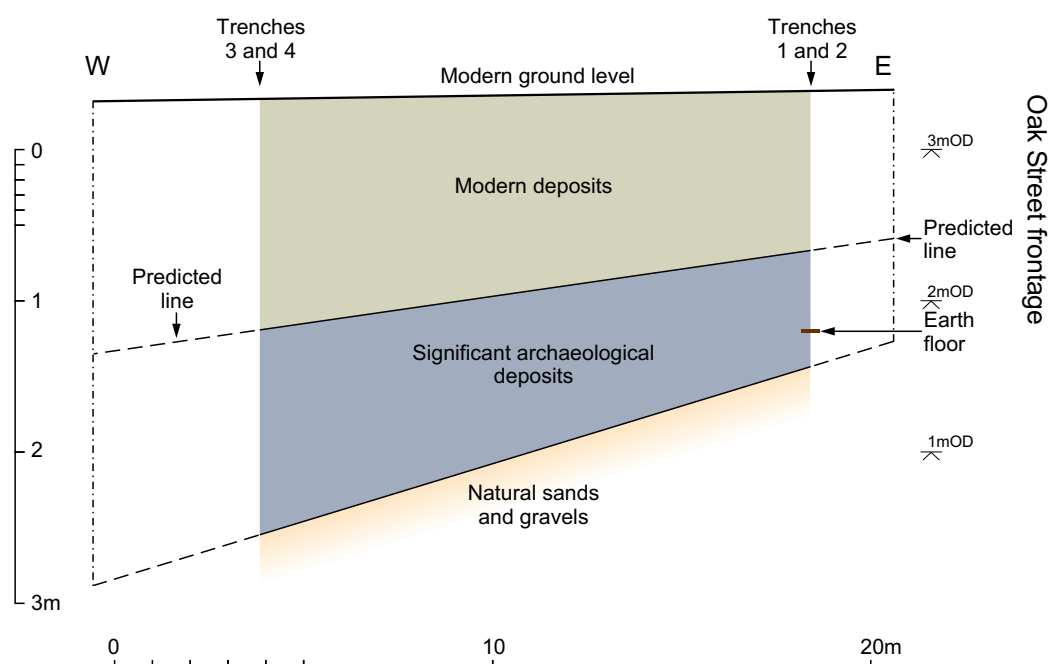


Figure 3. Deposit profile. Vertical scale 1:50, horizontal scale 1:200

Preservation of remains

It would appear that as the original ground level has been raised over the centuries by the importation and dumping of soils on the site. This has meant ephemeral features such as earth floors have survived within the archaeological record by being covered and subsequently protected by the depth of material overlying them. Medieval pitting seem extensive along the street frontage however, and this will have truncated earlier remains to some degree.

In all of the evaluation trenches, some intrusion and truncation by post-medieval structures had occurred, but this intrusion seems to have little affected the important historic remains of Late Saxon and medieval date.

The 1978 Ordnance Survey map of the area show the majority of this site to be covered by an engineering works, and the construction of these works is probably the source of the concrete beams noted in Trench 1. Other similar beams could be expected to occur across the site. A cellar located in Trench 1 might also be one

of several along the street frontage, and the example in Trench 1 had removed all remains down to natural.

The deposit profile (Fig. 3) is based on the findings of the evaluation trenches and attempts to illustrate of the depths and character of deposits that might be present across the site. Significant remains for the purpose of this report have referred to those believed to date to the early post–medieval (mid 16th century) and earlier.

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

Bibliography

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Plate 1. Working in Trench 3, with dark alluvial deposits visible as base of trench



Plate 2. Section in Trench 1 showing sequence of gravel surfaces. 1m scale



Plate 3. Plan shot of Trench 2 with post-holes and associated construction slots. 2m scale



Plate 4. Section in Trench 2 showing beaten earth floor sealing earlier phase of building. 1m scale