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Report № 1724

An Archaeological Watching Brief in Browne's Meadow Car Park, Norwich

NHER 51050N

Peter J. Watkins BA AIFA

January 2008

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Project checklist		Date
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Edit complete	Richard Hoggett	04/01/08
Signed off	Jayne Bown	04/01/08

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Location:	Browne's Meadow (off Recorder Road), Norwich, Norfolk
District:	Norwich
Grid Ref:	TG 2375 0872
HER No:	51050 N
Date of fieldwork:	10–11 December 2007

Summary

In December 2007, NAU Archaeology monitored the implementation of a new lighting scheme within Browne's Meadow car park, a site which lies within the precinct of Norwich Cathedral. The excavation of footing holes and cable trenches for three new lampposts revealed no archaeologically significant features or deposits.

Most of the groundworks associated with this lighting scheme did not penetrate a thick topsoil deposit that lay beneath the car park surface. The lamppost holes themselves were slightly deeper and revealed subsoil layers and make-up deposits beneath this buried topsoil. A sandy gravel revealed in one lamppost hole, at a depth of c. *0.72m OD, was potentially a natural deposit.*

These largely negative results were not unexpected, as historical sources record this area as having been open ground, at least during the post-medieval period. The scope of these works was not sufficient to establish whether Anglo-Saxon or medieval remains survive within this area.

1.0 Introduction

In December 2007, an archaeological watching brief was carried out by NAU Archaeology in Browne's Meadow car park, Norwich. This watching brief monitored groundworks associated with the erection of three new lamp-posts.

Browne's Meadow is a relatively large area of open ground (*c*. 4500m^2), located between Recorder Road and Ferry Lane, at the southern edge of Norwich cathedral precinct (Figure 1). This area is surfaced with tarmac and is currently used as a private car park.

The monitored groundworks included the excavation of footing holes for the lampposts themselves and three associated cable trenches.

This fieldwork was commissioned and funded by Norwich Cathedral. The watching brief was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Norfolk County Council and was conducted in accordance with a brief issued jointly by the Norwich Cathedral Archaeologist and Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (Harris and Hamilton 2007).

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

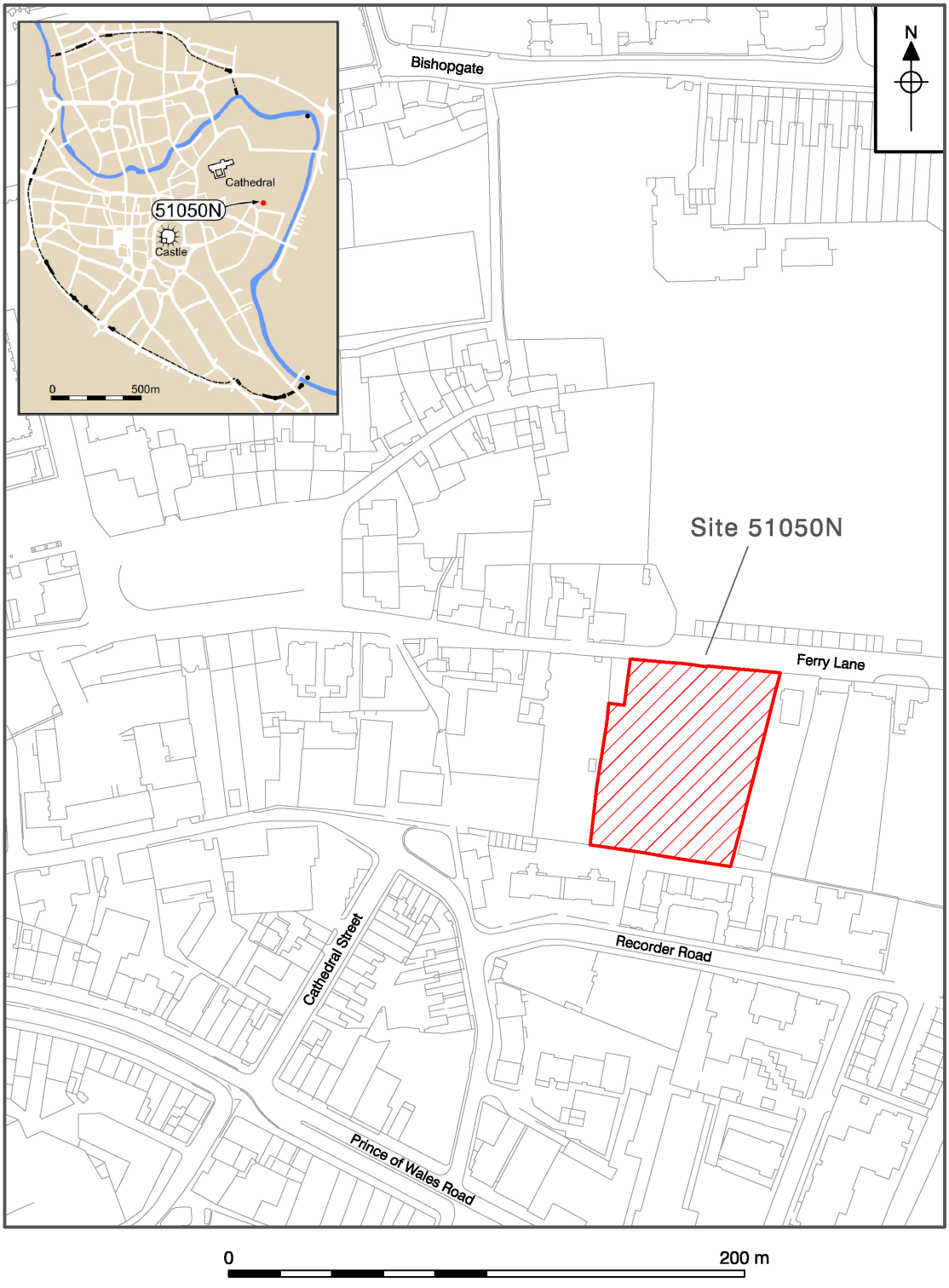

Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

2.0 Geology and Topography

The site comprises an area of relatively flat ground which slopes slightly from north to south, away from Ferry Lane. At its northern edge the surface height of the car park is approximately 1.75m OD.

This area of relatively low-lying ground is close to the southern bank of the River Wensum and would once have been a part of its flood plain, prior to the canalisation of the river and the construction of various flood defences.

The underlying geological deposits consist of Upper Chalk bedrock overlain by glacial sands and gravels (BGS 1985).

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The area known as Browne's Meadow falls within the precinct of Norwich Cathedral. Although the cathedral precinct is known to have incorporated land that was occupied and utilised during the Anglo-Saxon period, the early history of Browne's Meadow is uncertain. This is largely due to the lack of any previous archaeological work.

This block of land lay to the south of a canal that ran between the River Wensum and the cathedral's inner court. This canal is thought to have been dug to transport stone during the construction of the cathedral and it remained open until in was deliberately filled in *c*. 1780 (Gilchrist 2005, 48). The present-day Ferry Lane roughly follows the line of this infilled canal.

During medieval times it is likely that much of the low-lying land surrounding the canal was used as grazing meadow. Documentary sources suggest that a barge yard, slaughter yard, dove house and a smithy were all to be found to the south of the canal, although their precise locations are uncertain (Gilchrist 2005). A conjectural plan of the outer court produced by Gilchrist (2005, 60) suggests that Browne's Meadow is possibly the location of the cathedral's boatyard.

During the post-medieval period, the area south of the canal appears to have remained, or become, open meadow. Browne's Meadow takes its name from Sir Thomas Browne, a highly respected physician (author of the well-known *Religio Medici*) who practised in Norwich from 1637. A manuscript survives that records his lease of the meadow from the Dean and Chapter.

Although most early maps show this area as open ground, some later examples, such as Hochstetter's map of 1789 and the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (1882), depict the area in a manner suggestive of gardens and orchards. All of the available cartographic sources suggest that the area saw no major developments prior to the creation of the car park in the 20th century (Harris and Hamilton 2007).

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of the footings for the new lampposts and their associated cable trenches.

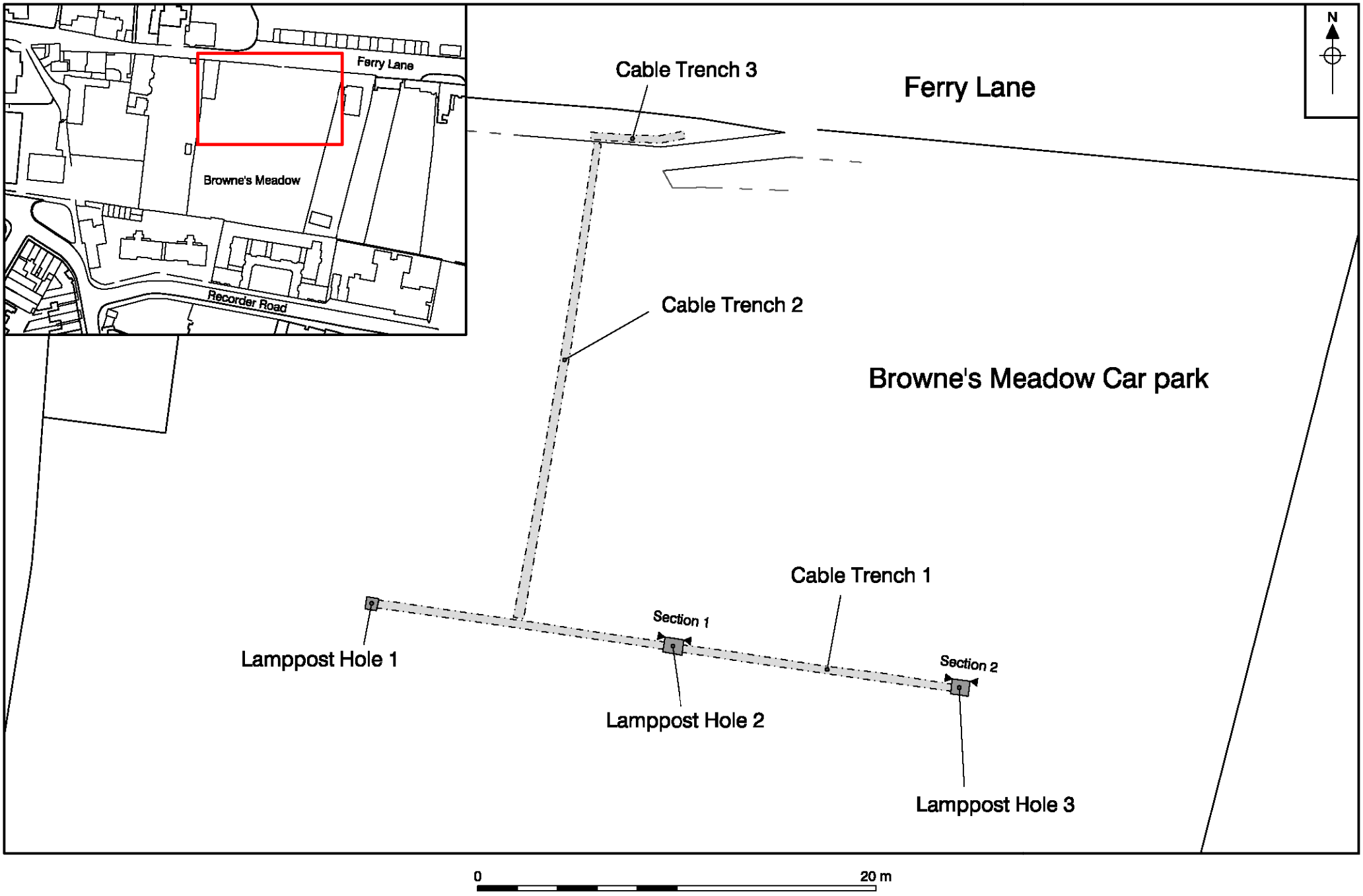

Figure 2. Location of monitored groundworks. Scale 1:250

The three new lampposts were placed in an east–west line just north of the centre of the car park. The footing holes for these lampposts were 0.9m wide and dug to a depth of approximately 0.9m.

The cabling for the lampposts was placed within three lengths of trench, each of which was 0.45m deep and 0.3m wide. Trench 1 ran in a line between the three lampposts and formed a T-shape with Trench 2, which ran north to the edge of the car park. Trench 3 was dug through a planted border at the edge of the car park and connected to an existing brick-built junction box (Figure 2).

The lamppost holes and two of the cable trenches were excavated using a mini-digger-type excavator equipped with a narrow, toothed bucket. Cable Trench 3 was excavated by hand.

The watching brief was carried out in full accordance with the appropriate sections of *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

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 which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology *pro forma*. Plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits. The precise location of the excavations was recorded, in relation to the OS grid, using a Total Station Theodolite (TST).

A site datum was transferred from an OS benchmark of 3.07m, located on the western gatepost of the entrance off Ferry Lane.

No environmental samples were taken, due to the lack of suitable deposits.

Site conditions were generally good and, although heavy rain showers occurred, these did not unduly hamper recording.

5.0 Results

(Figures 2 and 3)

The uppermost deposits encountered within the car park were modern make-up layers associated with the tarmac surface. These included an upper layer of rubble mixed with yellow sand and gravel [05] and a lower layer of compacted, pale brown-grey, sandy gravel [06]. These deposits sealed a very dark grey-brown, slightly sandy silt layer [07], which was presumably once a topsoil deposit. A single sherd of glazed medieval pottery was recovered from this layer. As is typical of such deposits, this layer was somewhat ‘dirty’, containing frequent inclusions of charcoal and mortar. Due to their limited depth, this buried topsoil was the lowest deposit to be encountered within most of Cable Trenches 1 and 2.

Additional information on the deposit sequence in this area was revealed by the slightly deeper lamppost holes. Lamppost Hole 1 demonstrated that the soil-like material continued to a depth of at least 0.85m below the ground surface, although no individual layers could be identified.

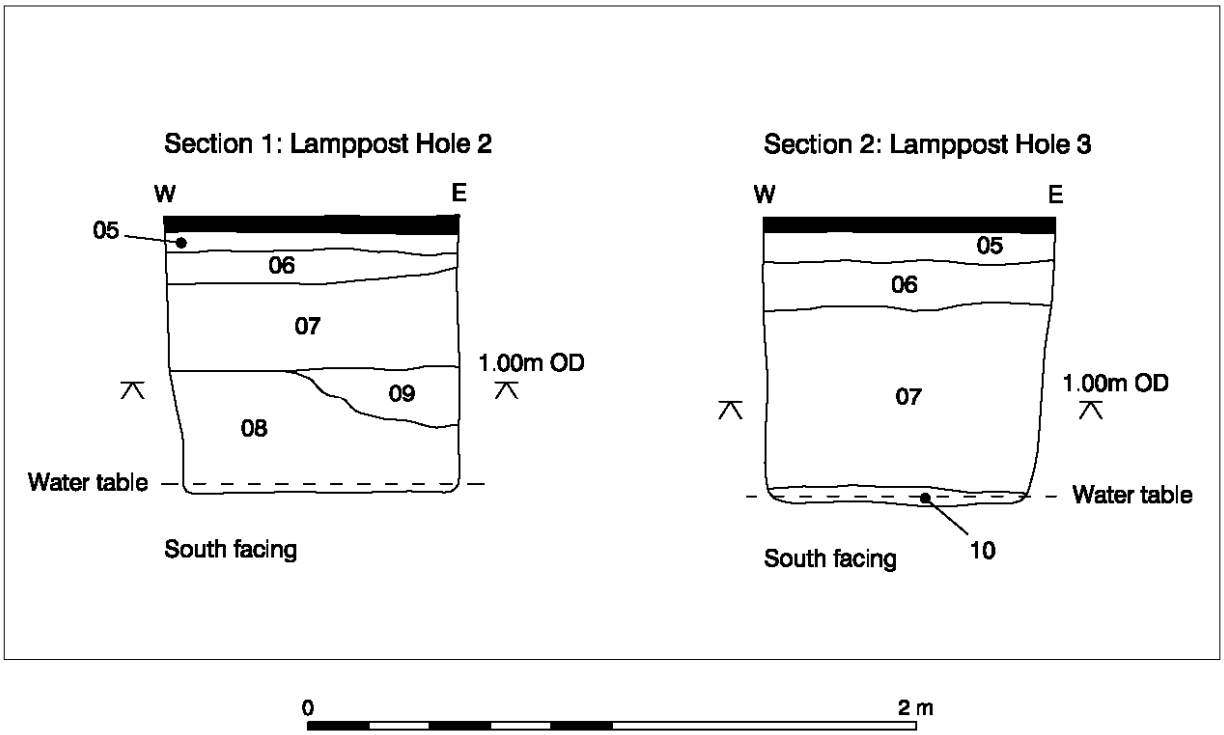

Figure 3. Lamp post hole sections. Scale 1:25

Lamppost Hole 2 (Figure 3, Section 1) revealed a slightly more complicated stratigraphic sequence. Here the lowest deposit encountered was a mid-brown, clay-silt sand [08]. This deposit may have been a subsoil layer and contained occasional mortar flecks and fragments of animal bone. Although this deposit may well have been medieval or earlier in date, no finds were recovered that could confirm this. Overlying this deposit in the eastern half of the footing hole was a 0.2m-thick layer of loose soil, mortar and ceramic building material [09]. Unfortunately, no diagnostic or datable fragments of ceramic building material could be retrieved from this deposit. A concentration of brick fragments in the base of Cable Trench 2 suggested that this deposit extended several metres to the east of Lamppost Hole 2. Although this may have been demolition debris from a nearby structure, it is equally likely that it was imported from elsewhere in order to consolidate the area.

Neither subsoil [08] nor layer [09] could be observed within Lamppost Hole 3, where a fairly homogenous soil, similar to that within Lamppost Hole 1, was revealed beneath the modern layers (Figure 3, Section 2). This hole was the deepest of the three and a mid-grey sandy gravel was exposed in its base [10]. This was reached at approximately 0.90m below the ground surface (0.72m OD) and may well have been a natural deposit.

The water table was reached in the base of Lamppost Holes 2 and 3.

A slightly different stratigraphic sequence was revealed in Cable Trench 3, which was dug through a planted border at the northern edge of the car park. Here the lowest deposit encountered was a dark grey-brown, silty-loam soil [03]. At the western end of the trench this soil deposit was overlain by a brick surface [04]. This surface consisted of a single course of bricks laid over a thin spread of sandy

yellow mortar. The dimensions of these bricks (6cm deep by 11cm wide) suggest that they were post-medieval. It is probable that this surface was some form of path running alongside the nearby boundary wall.

At the eastern end of the trench, a layer of flint cobble and brick rubble [02] lay above soil layer [03]. The base of this deposit coincided with the base of the nearby brick-built junction box and probably represents debris created when this structure was keyed into the boundary wall.

The uppermost deposit present in Cable Trench 3 was a heavily rooted topsoil [01], similar in composition to underlying soil [03].

6.0 The Finds

The only find to be recovered during this watching brief was a single sherd of medieval pottery. This fragment of green-glazed Grimston-type ware pottery was retrieved from the upper soil deposit [07] within Cable Trench 2.

7.0 Conclusions

Overall, it does not appear that archaeologically significant features or deposits were disturbed during the erection of the new lampposts within Browne's Meadow car park.

No evidence was revealed to suggest that the area had been anything other than open ground, as is suggested, at least for the post-medieval period, by the available cartographic and documentary sources.

Compared to other areas of former open ground that have been investigated within the cathedral precinct, the deposit sequence revealed by this watching brief appears shallow and relatively uncomplicated. Archaeological investigations within what would have been the cathedral's outer court (Leigh 2002) and along the southern riverbank (Watkins 2007a and 2007b) have shown these areas to have been consolidated with considerable quantities of imported material during the medieval and post-medieval periods. The apparent absence of such a depth of make-up material within Browne's Meadow may be further evidence that this part of the precinct was not heavily utilised. It is, however, possible that this area was simply less flood-prone that those areas to the north-east. Archaeological work at the eastern edge of the outer court has shown that natural sands and gravels lie approximately 2m below the depth of the gravel deposit recorded in Lamppost Hole 3 (Watkins 2007a).

It should, of course, be emphasised that this watching brief provided only glimpses of what lies beneath the Browne's Meadow car park. As the cable trenches did not reach the base of the soil deposits, assessing whether archaeological features were present was impossible. This work does, however, suggest that any archaeological remains present in this area are likely to be relatively well preserved, given that recent disturbance appears to have been minimal.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork associated with this report was undertaken by the author. The on-site surveying was carried out by John Percival. This report was illustrated by David Dobson and Julie Curl, and edited by Richard Hoggett.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
01	Deposit	Topsoil	-
02	Deposit	Rubble spread	Modern
03	Deposit	Buried topsoil	-
04	Masonry	Brick surface	Post-medieval
05	Deposit	Rubble make-up associated with car park surface	Modern
06	Deposit	Sand and gravel make-up associated with car park surface	Modern
07	Deposit	Soil layer	-
08	Deposit	?Subsoil layer	-
09	Deposit	Rubble and mortar layer	?Post-medieval
10	Deposit	Sandy gravel	-

Plates

Plate 1. Lamppost Hole 1, looking north

Plate 2. Lamppost Hole 2, looking north