

Report № 1988

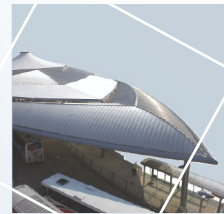
An Archaeological Evaluation at 3 Norwich Road, Thetford, Norfolk

NHER 51844 THD

Produced for
Abel Homes Limited

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Contents

<i>Summary</i>	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Geology and Topography	1
3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.....	3
4.0 Methodology	3
5.0 Results.....	5
5.1 Trench 1	5
5.2 Trench 2	5
6.0 Conclusions	7
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	7
<i>Bibliography</i>	7
Appendix 1: Context Summary	8

Figures

- Figure 1 Site Location
- Figure 2 Trench Location
- Figure 3 Sketch Section

Location:	3 Norfolk Road, Thetford
District:	Breckland
Grid Ref.:	TL 8701 8336
HER No.:	51844 THD
Dates of Fieldwork:	13–14 October 2008

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at 3 Norwich Road, Thetford, Norfolk. Two trenches were excavated within an area restricted by existing services, including mains gas and electricity. Both trenches revealed a shallow topsoil, a mixed modern subsoil and a thick deposit of loose brick demolition rubble. This rubble lay almost directly above the solid chalk natural. No archaeological features or finds were revealed in either trench.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 3 Norwich Road, Thetford, Norfolk, on an area of proposed residential development (Fig. 1). The site was located in the corner of the area between Croxton Road to the west and Norwich Road to the south (Fig. 2). The size of the area was 633m² and was also bordered by residential buildings to the north and east.

This archaeological programme was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Breckland District Council and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref: BAU1302/DW). The work was commissioned by Abel Homes Limited.

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 NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The site is located to the north of the valley of the River Little Ouse, Thetford, at a height of c.23m OD. The ground is noticeably higher than the surrounding road and pavement surface, with moderate slopes to the south and west. A large tree is located in the centre of the northern border of the site and an electrical substation occupies the north-western corner.

The natural geology in this area is a solid Upper Chalk bedrock (Funnell 2005). A layer of mid-brown soft sandy silt, 0.70m thick, lay directly above this. Within the evaluation area this layer was truncated by modern rubble deposits.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site was located at a pivotal point on the approach into Thetford, where the roads from Norwich, Croxton and the Fens converge. This area is just beyond the northern limits of the Saxon and medieval core of Thetford, at a location that only became substantially developed from the 19th century onwards.

Although Thetford first developed into a major centre during the Late Saxon period, with defended circuits on both the north and south banks of the river, there is also evidence for settlements along the river valleys from the Iron Age and Roman periods.

The area immediately to the north of the site was excavated by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) in 2003–5. A number of early medieval features including pits and ditches were revealed, and two possible ovens. Additionally, seven graves were uncovered, aligned west–east, also dating from this period and appearing to be have been buried outside consecrated ground (NHER 40819; Wallis 2004, 2005 and 2006). It has been suggested that this area was used as a cemetery for the church of St Andrew during the 14th century, when a high death-rate caused by plague resulted in an extension to the burial ground. A sewer pipe installed during the 1970s also disturbed some human remains within this area.

4.0 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 a 5% sample of the development area be taken. Two 4m x 4m trenches were to be excavated in the areas which did not contain modern services and did not lie within 6m of the tree to the north. There was also a 3m exclusion zone around a north–south mains sewer in the centre of the site.

Machine excavation was carried out with a tracked hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. During the excavation of the first trench an east–west mains gas pipeline was revealed. The trench could not be completed because of the surrounding obstructions and was reduced to 3m x 4m. A sondage was excavated in order to ascertain the depth of the substantial rubble deposit above the natural.

The second trench also had to be reduced (after permission from NLA) due to the mains gas pipeline. Trench 2 became a single small slot, excavated to reveal the depth of the natural chalk and to confirm the presence of the modern rubble.

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 Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits. No environmental samples were taken.

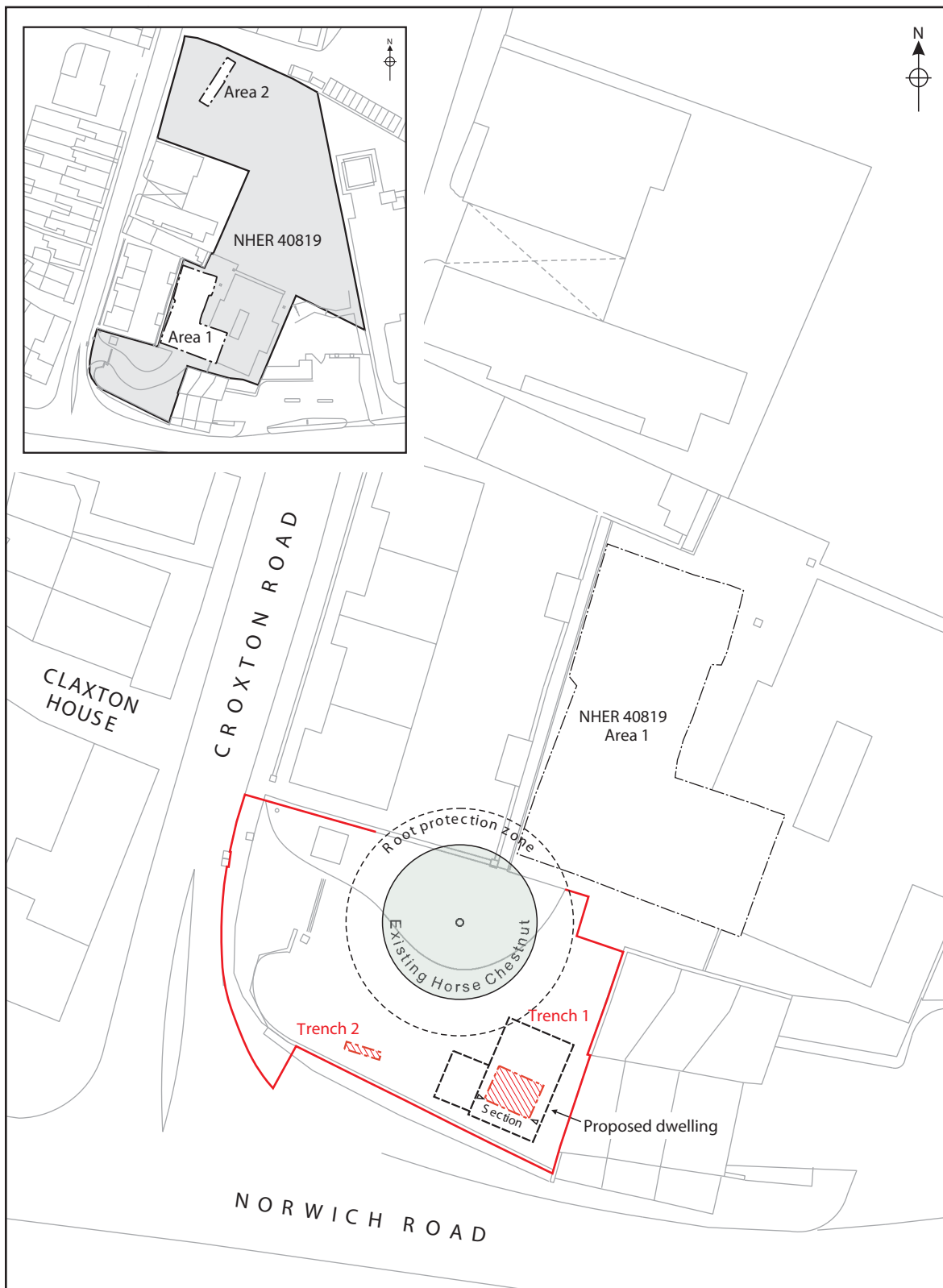


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500. Inset of location of adjacent excavation at scale 1:2000

The temporary benchmark used during the course of this work was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark with a value of 5.11m, located on the surface of Croxton Road.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine but overcast weather.

5.0 Results

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was excavated to a depth of 2.10m (Fig. 3). The solid chalk natural (05) was encountered at this depth, sloping downwards slightly to the west. Above this was a layer of mid-brown sandy silt (04) which was approximately 0.70m thick, but was only visible in the deepest part of the trench, where the natural was descending. This could not be explored further due to the proximity of live services and the depth of the trench.

Above this was a 0.60m-thick deposit of loose modern rubble (03). This consisted of whole and broken red and grey bricks, sections of broken up brick wall and pieces of tarmac. This deposit was consistent across the 4m width of the trench and extended across the trench with no edge visible.

Overlying the rubble was a 0.70m deposit (02) of mixed mid-brown sandy silt subsoil, with frequent medium stone and gravel inclusions, in addition to a large sheet of polythene towards the lower horizon.

The topsoil (01) was a shallow (0.10m) mid-brown sandy silt, with occasional small stone inclusions.

There were no archaeological finds or features within this trench.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was reduced in size to a single slot, approximately 1m x 3m. It was not possible to extend the trench further due to the boundary walls to the south and west, the gas main to the north and the sewer to the east. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.20m, at which depth the chalk natural was revealed. A thick (0.90m) deposit of loose rubble (03) lay directly above the chalk for the entire extent of the trench. This was made up of many loose bricks and brick fragments.

Above this was a mixed, disturbed topsoil (01), a 0.30m-thick mid-brown sandy silt, with modern discarded refuse inclusions.

There were no archaeological finds or features within this trench.