

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 886

**Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at
54-56 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich**

38185 N

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Location: 54 to 56 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich
Grid Ref: TG 2352 0864
HER No.: 38185 N
Date of work: 23rd, and 27th January, 5th and 11th February 2003

Summary

An archaeological watching brief at 54 to 56 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich observed trenches being excavated to replace sewer pipes as well as foundation holes drilled out for securing a new fire escape. The passages of a modern cellar or possibly underground shelter were revealed but no features or finds of archaeological interest were observed.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out due to redevelopment of residential premises at the rear of 54 to 56 Prince of Wales Road in Norwich. Part of the work involved the replacement of a sewer pipe which had originally run along the north side of the building and redirecting it further to the north by approximately 3m which involved the excavation of two new diagonal pipe trenches from each corner of the building. In addition, the installation of a new fire escape involved the boring of ten 16m deep holes for supporting stanchions. The work was commissioned by Targetfollow (Swanley) Ltd of Norwich and implemented with the assistance of J. S. Hay Ltd.

The aim of the watching brief was to record any features or finds of archaeological significance that might be disturbed by the development. Of particular interest is the close proximity of the site to structures associated with the medieval Greyfriars' monastery at the junction of Prince of Wales Road and King Street. These include a cemetery close to the north of the present site on St Faiths Lane and the existence of a Great Drain which led from the monastery to the River Wensum. Part of this drain has been traced running down the line of Prince of Wales Road although its direction was lost and excavations in the area may indicate further evidence of it.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH 6/02/01) and a Method Statement for watching briefs prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, in accordance with the relevant policy on archiving standards.

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.

Site conditions were clear and bright over the several days the site was visited.

2.0 Observations

The first pipe trench to be excavated was from the north-west corner of the building running to the north-east using a mini-digger with a toothed 0.25m bucket. Here, at approximately 3m to the north of the building was the location of a manhole from which the second pipe trench ran off towards the south-east corner. The depth of the

trenches were on average 0.85m, with a depth of approximately 1.0m near the corners of the building. The make-up was approximately 0.5m in thickness and was of modern building rubble in a mid brown sandy silt. At the base of the cut was patches of mortar and brick rubble. The underlying natural soil was not reached at this depth.

A brick wall footing was observed at approximately 2m along the first trench running parallel to and approximately 2.5m to the north of the building face. Some re-used sandstone blocks were mixed in with the brick but did not appear to be worked stone and could well date from the late 19th or early 20th century. The thickness of the base of this wall was between 0.50m and 0.55m wide and was likely to have been a supporting wall for a previously demolished structure extending beyond the main building.

The second trench was excavated to an approximate depth of 1.1m through modern building rubble in sandy silt. The end of the brick wall line noted in the first trench was observed in the second trench and a second parallel wall line was also observed approximately 1.8m apart from the first.

The two pipe trenches joined approximately 3m to the north of the building where a pit for a manhole was excavated. This was approximately 3m by 3m and 1.35m deep and this revealed the face of the parallel wall as well as a second adjoining passage of the same dimensions as the first heading under the carpark to the north. The depth of the passage was at least 1.3m as machining was continued to attempt to find a solid deposit to lay the pipes. The fill of the excavated area appeared to be building rubble and general rubbish from the 1960's or late 1950's.

The ten piling holes were all located within a 3.5m² area approximately in the centre of the north facing wall of the building. The holes had a diameter of 0.30m and were bored to a depth of 16m to provide a solid foundation for stanchions of a metal-framed fire escape leading from the upper stories of the rear of the building. The drill boring the holes was on an extendable vertical arm that was adjusted for depth as the hole was bored. The spoil from the holes was loaded into a container to be removed periodically from site. Due to the process required to drill the holes, wherein water was injected during the boring, inspection of the resulting spoil was limited.

The upper deposits drilled through were the same as previously seen during the excavation of the sewer trenches. The mixture of soil, building rubble and rubbish extended to a depth of at least 1.7m before a dark silt deposit with occasional small stones was reached. This appeared to be an original soil horizon, although no dating evidence was observed and no context number was allocated. Below this deposit was darker silty soil which appeared to have a greater moisture content than that above it. This was interpreted as an alluvial silt which extended for the most part of the depth of the boring until a suitable, more solid deposit was reached. All the deposits observed from the pile were of the same consistency and soil type.

3.0 Conclusions

The archaeological potential of the site was to possibly conform the presence of the line of the Great Drain from the site of the Greyfriars monastery. During the watching brief it was observed that there were no features of archaeological interest from the area of ground disturbed by the sewer pipe or the boreholes. All masonry detected in

the intervention was modern and there was no evidence of re-worked stone having been incorporated into the foundations observed.

It appears that the ground has been heavily disturbed by the construction of brick lined underground passages, both along the east to west line of the building and towards the north to an estimated depth of 1.5m. The purpose of these structures was unclear and they may have been cellar passages or air raid shelters. The passages were back filled and the ground was thereafter made up with landfill and building debris. The new sewer trenches and manhole excavated through the line of the passages did not expose any undisturbed deposits.

The piling holes, although excavated to a substantial depth, did not appear to strike any underlying masonry below the existing modern makeup. The dark silt deposit observed from beneath the modern fill probably represents an early soil but no evidence of dating was recovered from it.

Acknowledgements

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Bibliography

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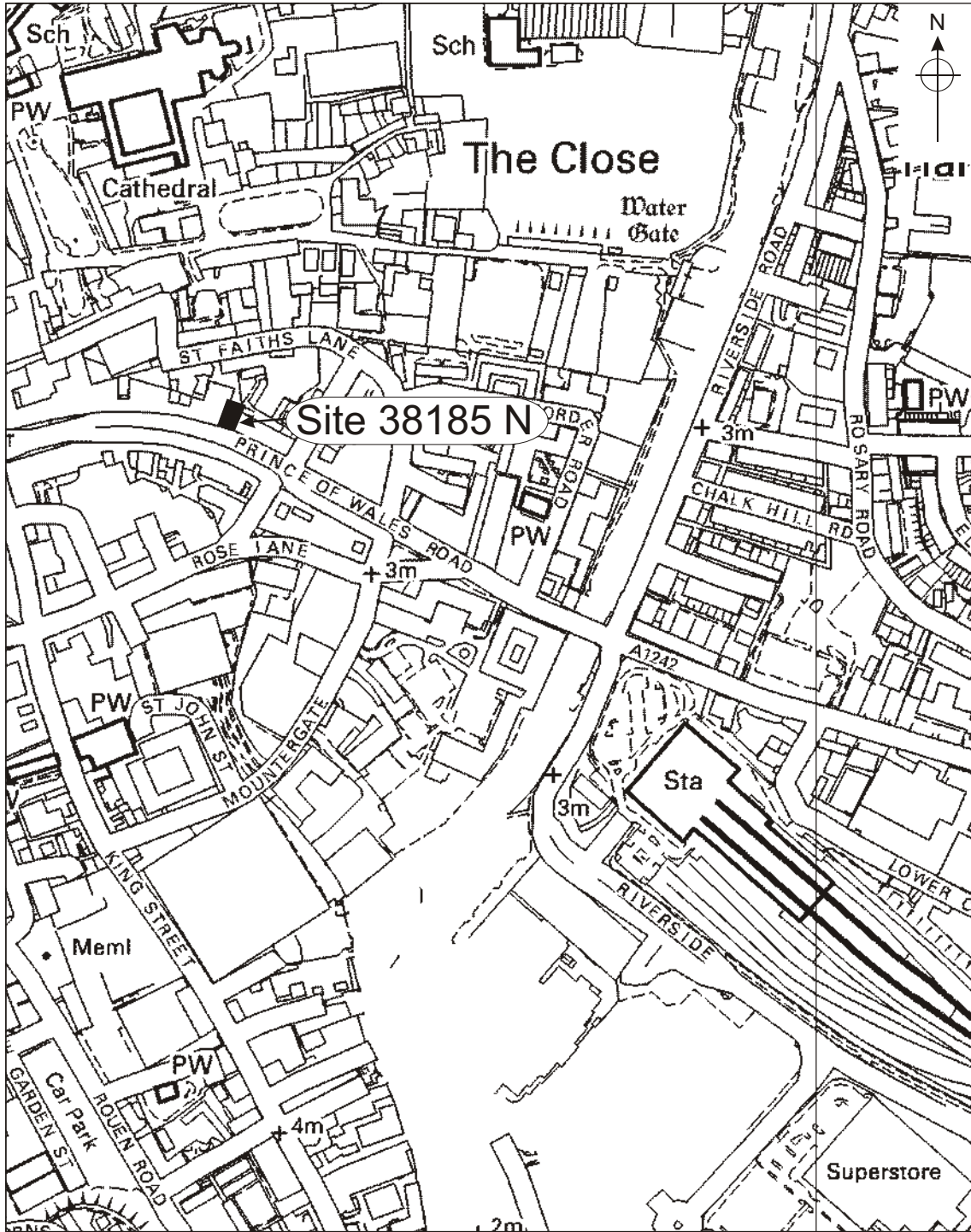


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

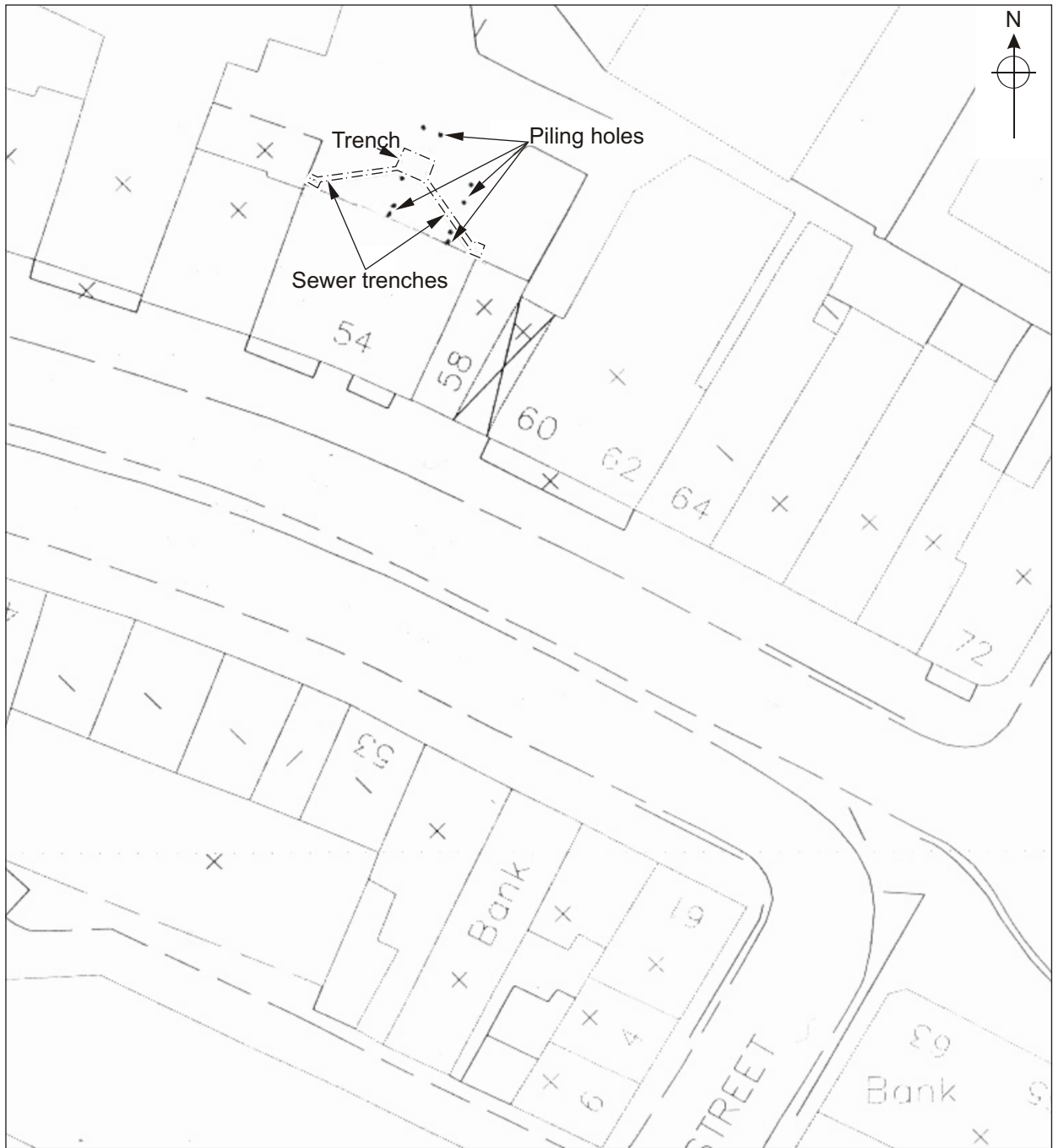


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500