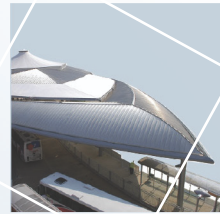


**Report № 1952**

## **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Felbrigg Great Hall, Norfolk**

NHER 6633

Prepared for  
 **THE NATIONAL TRUST**



Andy Phelps

December 2008

BAU1952

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Location:	Felbrigg Great Hall
District:	North Norfolk
Grid Ref.:	TG 19420 39445
HER No.:	6633
Client:	The National Trust
Dates of Fieldwork:	6–10 October 2008

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was conducted during drainage works to the rear of Felbrigg Great Hall, Norfolk. The watching brief recorded no archaeological remains of any note in either of the two excavated areas. A few pieces of late 19th–early 20th-century pottery were recovered during excavations through the flowerbeds to the rear of the property, but these were not retained. Only a small area within the courtyard appeared to be undisturbed by services, but even this was probably of 18th-century or later date.*

*The observed height of the natural deposits suggests that, prior to construction of Gardiners Cottage, the area to the south of the current garden was terraced. This would have removed any archaeological remains. Similarly, within the courtyard modern services were found to have disturbed the surrounding deposits.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by NAU Archaeology at the request of Paul Coleman of the National Trust during the alteration and installation of drainage systems to the rear of Felbrigg Great Hall, Norfolk (Fig. 1). The objective of the work was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of drainage ditches by Ovamill Construction Ltd.

Two areas were monitored: Area 1 lay within the garden to the rear of the Gardiners Cottage (Fig. 2). The drainage works comprised the excavation of a 2m x 2m hole in the lawn to the north of the cottage for the installation of a soakaway and an adjoining trench 0.65m wide, 5.60m long and 0.4m deep leading south to the cottage. Area 2 lay at the north-eastern corner of the service wing courtyard (Fig. 2). These works encompassed the excavation of a trench against the eastern wall in the north-eastern corner of the courtyard. This trench measured between 0.45m and 0.65m wide, ran for a length of 3.66m and varied in depth from 0.40m at its northern end to 0.50m at the southern end. A further trench was to have extended east–west from the southern end of Area 2, but was found to be unnecessary and was not excavated.

The Area 1 soakaway was excavated using a 2-tonne rubber-tracked excavator; the remainder of the Area 1 and Area 2 excavations were undertaken by hand. Soils arising were used as backfill with the surplus being removed in a skip.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the 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.

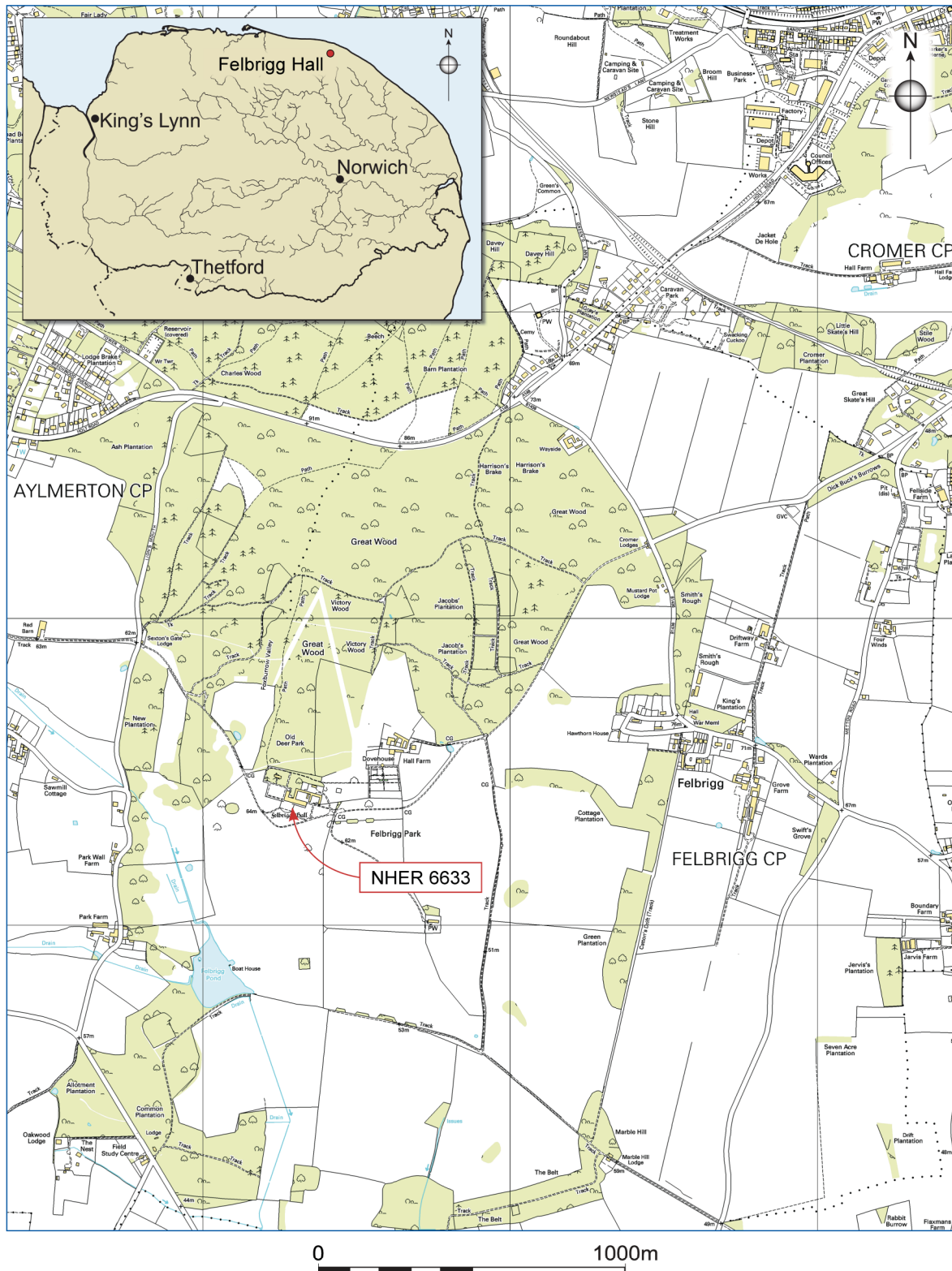
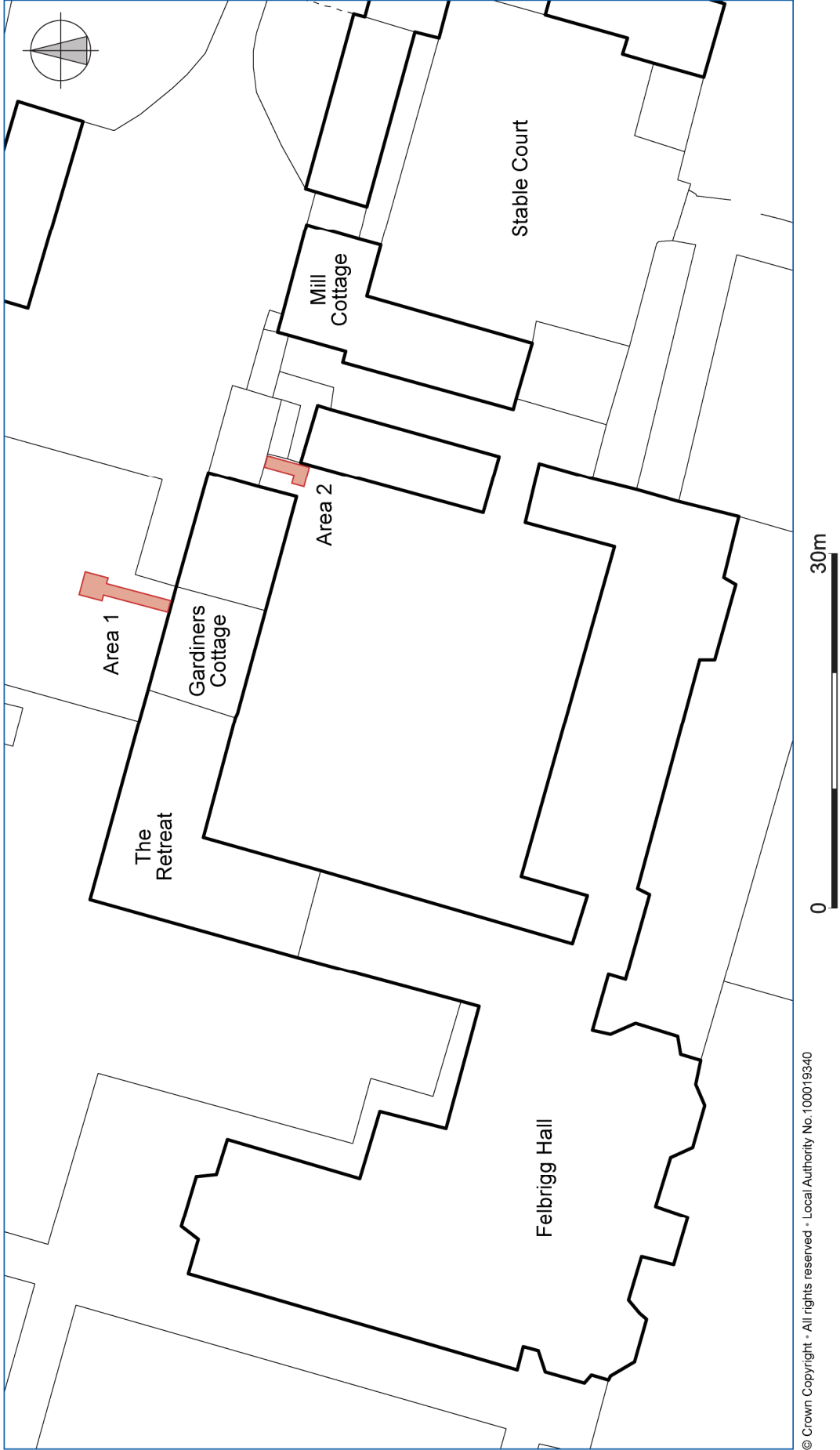


Figure 1 Site location

Local Authority No.100019340

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**Figure 2** Trench location

All hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

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.

Site conditions were generally good with ready access to all of the areas concerned.

## **2.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

Felbrigg Hall is mentioned in the Paston letters when in 1461 it changed hands from the Felbriggs to the Wymondhams (later the Windhams). Nothing survives of the medieval house save some masonry and brickwork in the cellars. The present house was begun for Thomas Windham c.1621 and completed in 1624, making it contemporary with Blickling Hall, seven miles to the south. The house is noted for its largely unaltered Jacobean architecture and Georgian interior.

The original part of the house is the south range, built of brick with Ketton limestone dressings. A west wing was added in the later 17th century and further alterations, including the addition of a service range, took place in the 18th century. A crenellated stable block was added in the 19th century (NHER 6633).

The front of the hall rises to a tall parapet and on the balustrading of the porch and bays are the words GLORIA DEO IN EXCELSIS in cut-out 'grotesque' letters (Pevsner and Wilson 1997).

The house is surrounded by parkland in which are to be found an 18th-century walled garden, an 18th-century orangery, orchards and a dovecote (NHER 6633).

Felbrigg Hall was left to the National Trust by Robert Ketton-Cremer in 1969.

In 2007 NAU Archaeology undertook an archaeological excavation adjacent to the south front of the Great Hall. The foundations of an earlier hall and the vaulted roof of the cellar were revealed underneath the gravel yard, overlain by three phases of post-medieval and modern drains (Boyle 2008).

## **3.0 Observations**

### **3.1 Area 1**

The mechanical excavation of the soakaway pit in the lawn revealed modern topsoil (21) to a depth of 0.40m. Occasional pieces of ceramic building material contained within this deposit suggest that it is of relatively modern date. Beneath the topsoil natural glacial sands (22) were encountered to the base of the excavation at 2m below the present ground level (Plate 1).

Within the trench leading south from the soakaway to the rear of the house two east–west modern ceramic drains were recorded cutting through a dark grey brown silt material (20). This deposit was 0.26m thick and it contained no dating evidence; it overlay natural sands (22). At the southern end of the trench the foundations of the service wing were observed to be of flint and mortar construction (23) in foundation cut (24). They continued below the limit of the excavation (Plate 2).





**Plate 1** Area 1: Soakaway pit looking NW  
(1m scale)



**Plate 2** Area 1: Service trench looking south  
(1m scale)

### 3.2 Area 2

Upon the removal of the York slabs which form the current surface of the courtyard a fine rubble-mix backfill material (25) was observed across most of the trench. This layer contained no artefacts, but covered and surrounded four modern ceramic drains and an iron pipe of unknown function (Plates 3 and 4). This layer was at least 0.4m deep at the northern end of the trench.

Between the two most southerly drainage pipes lay an area of dark grey-brown sandy silt material (26). No finds were recovered this deposit, which was at least 0.5m deep and appeared to be the only deposit not disturbed by modern services.



**Plate 3** Area 2: Excavated trench looking north



**Plate 4** Area 2: Excavated trench looking south

## 4.0 Conclusions

### 4.1 Area 1

It would appear that the construction of the service courtyard in 1751 necessitated terracing to the north-east of the 17th-century buildings in order to provide a sufficiently level surface upon which to build. This would have resulted in the truncation of any archaeological deposits that may have survived in this area. The deposits to the south of the bank, between the soakaway and the house, are therefore likely to be of 18th-century or later date and this is supported by the pottery, brick and tile fragments contained within the garden topsoil.

### 4.2 Area 2

This area was heavily disturbed by modern services and the limited depth and extent of this trench provided little information, aside from the survival of a small patch of darker material at the trench's southern end (26). The remainder of the trench consisted of fine rubble backfill, probably contemporary with the installation of the earlier drainage system and forming a foundation layer for the slabs of the courtyard.

## ***Acknowledgements***

The fieldwork was carried out by the author with the cooperation of Ovamill Construction Ltd. The report was illustrated by Michael Feather and edited by Richard Hoggett.

## ***Bibliography***

- |                               |      |  |
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## Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
20	Deposit	Dark grey-brown silt	Post-medieval
21	Deposit	Mid-grey-brown	Modern
22	Deposit	Natural yellowish-orange fine sands	–
23	Masonry	Flint wall foundation	Post-medieval
24	Cut	Construction cut for flint wall	Post-medieval
25	Deposit	Mid-grey-brown sandy silt	Modern
26	Deposit	Dark grey-brown sandy silt	Post-medieval