

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 921

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
Thetford Grammar School,
Coach House Area,
Norfolk**

40168 THD

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Location: Thetford Grammar School, Thetford, Norfolk
District: Breckland
Grid Ref: TL 8679 8306
SMR No.: 40168 THD
SAM No.: 64
Date of fieldwork: 17th and 18th February 2004

Summary

A watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of eight trenches within the area of the Coach House and Coachman's House, Thetford Grammar School, Thetford.

Three of the trenches revealed structural elements including wall footings and wall cores, while five trenches showed evidence of flooring. Four of the trenches provided evidence for demolition. These structural elements were thought to be associated with the Dominican Friary (SAM 64) known to have existed on the site.

One trench, however, produced evidence of a possible structure post-dating the Friary, perhaps demolished to make way for the Coach and Coachman's Houses.

1.0 Introduction

(Figs 1 and 2)

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in the vicinity of the Coach House and Coachman's House within the grounds of Thetford Grammar School, Thetford, Norfolk. This work was undertaken by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) in advance of the development of a drama studies centre and sixth form centre for Thetford grammar school.

The work was commissioned and funded by AC Architects Cambridge Ltd, 23 St Andrews Street, Cambridge.

The site consisted of a brick built Coachman's House with adjacent wall connecting it to a flint built Coach House with a yard and surrounding wall and wooden fence. It was situated in the north-east corner of the school grounds and measured c. 14m by 21m (294 sq. m). A total of eight trenches were excavated adjacent to the existing walls and to a depth level with the bottom of their foundations.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: DCO/ 2003/ 531).

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

2.0 Geology and Topography

(Fig. 1)

The site lies on flat ground approximately 20m to the south and within the flood plain of the River Little Ouse.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

The site lies within an area of known archaeological and historical interest with several entries in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER), the most relevant of which are discussed below.

The site was located within the known grounds of a Dominican Friary (SAM 64), founded in 1335 by Henry, Duke of Lancaster. The partial remains of which, notably of the Friary church, have been preserved within the Grammar School walls.

In 1959 the remains of several, probably medieval, human skeletons were recovered and reported on by Dr C. P. B. Wells.

Other work within the grounds of the Grammar School includes excavations by Edwards and Whittingham in 1964 and the Time Team in 1998, neither of which are fully published but remain on record in the HER.

The 1964 excavations determined the size of the cloister garth and uncovered buttresses along the south, west and north garth walls. Foundations of the west range were uncovered with a possible external stairway. At the south-west corner a passageway between the north aisle and cloister walk was uncovered and east of this a room adjacent to the south cloister walk and a newel stairway. East of the stairway was another room between the cloister walk and the north aisle.

The Time Team excavation included a trench immediately south-east of the present site which uncovered remains of wall footings. Time Team produced a projected outline of the Friary buildings which has been used in this report (Fig. 2).

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of eight trenches, adjacent to existing walls within the area of the Coachman's House and the Coach House. The trenches were excavated by employees of the school.

These trenches were all small, of various sizes within a c. 1m x1m footprint, and were excavated by hand down to the bottom of the standing building foundations.

The Brief required that an archaeologist be in constant attendance at the site during works that may affect surviving archaeological remains and that the groundworks should be unimpeded by the monitoring.

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 *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.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions were mainly wet but not bad enough to disrupt the digging of the trenches. Due to light conditions most photography was carried out using a flash. The area had been previously cleared of vegetation and concrete surfaces had been broken to allow excavation.

5.0 Results

(Appendix 1)

5.1 Trench 1

(Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was situated on the western side of the garden wall to the east of the Coachman's House. It was 0.8m long by 0.7m wide and 0.85m deep. The trench was excavated down to a layer of pale yellowish brown mortar ([6]). In the southern half of the trench was a linear feature ([9]) aligned north-west to south-east and running under the southern edge of the trench. It was filled with a solid deposit of yellowish brown mortar and flint ([8]). Overlying the mortar and the mortar and flint layers was a yellowish brown sandy silt ([5]). This was cut by the footings trench for the garden wall ([7]). Above layer [5] was a dark brown silty loam topsoil ([4]).

5.2 Trench 2

(Figs 2 and 7)

Situated inside the Coachman's House, to the east of the doorway, this trench was 0.7m square by 0.7m deep. The trench was excavated down to a layer of pale yellowish brown mortar ([66]). This was sealed by a pale grey mortar deposit ([65]), much more compact than layer [66]. Above this was a thick deposit of loose brick, flint and chalk rubble ([64]). This was overlain by several alternating deposits of brown sand ([63] and [61]) and greyish brown mortar ([62] and [60]). Above layer [60] was a deposit of yellowish brown sand ([59]) overlain by a layer of compacted chalk rubble ([58]). The two uppermost layers made-up the modern floor of the Coachman's House. Layer [57] consisted of concrete mixed with brick fragments overlain by the concrete floor ([56]).

5.3 Trench 3

(Figs 2 and 4)

Located against the outside of the north-west wall of the Coach House this trench was 0.8m long by 0.7m wide and up to 0.85m deep. The trench was excavated down to a layer of pale yellowish brown mortar ([16]). Three quarters of the trench was filled with a solid, 'L'-shaped deposit of mortar and flint ([15]). It was running perpendicular to the Coach House wall then turning north-east and running parallel to it. Sealing both the mortar and the mortar and flint layers was a deposit of pale greyish brown sandy silt ([14]). This was cut by the Coach House wall footings trench ([17]). Above layer [14] was a deposit of crushed chalk and pale greyish brown silt ([13]), sealed by a dark brown silty loam topsoil ([12]).

5.4 Trench 4

(Figs 2 and 7)

Positioned in the south-west corner of the Coach House yard against the yard wall, this trench was 1m long by 0.9m wide and up to 0.45m deep. The trench was excavated down to a solid layer of mortar and flint ([72]). Sealing this layer was a dark yellowish brown sandy loam ([71]). This was cut by the footings trench for the yard wall ([73]). Above layer [71] was a loose deposit of mortar, chalk, flint and brick rubble ([70]) sealed by a concrete yard surface ([69]).

5.5 Trench 5

(Figs 2 and 7)

This trench was situated against the outside of the north-east wall of the Coach House within a lean-to. It was 0.5m square and up to 0.9m deep. The trench was excavated down to a pale yellowish brown mortar ([35]). Above this was a thin deposit of dark brown sandy silt ([34]). This was sealed by a deposit of pale yellowish brown mortar with flint ([33]) overlain by a layer of yellowish brown sandy silt ([32]). This was cut by the footings trench for the Coach House wall ([29]). Above layer [32] was a mixed deposit of mortar and gravel ([31]) underlying the remains of a brick floor ([30]).

5.6 Trench 6

(Figs 2 and 7)

Situated in the north-west corner of the Coach House yard against the inside of the yard wall and a wooden fence this trench was 0.8m long by 0.7m wide and up to 0.85m deep. The trench was excavated down to a pale yellowish brown mortar ([26]). Above this was a thin deposit of dark brown sandy silt ([25]) sealed by a yellowish brown, mortar rich sandy silt ([24]). Above this was a layer of pale yellow mortar mixed with chalk and flint ([23]) sealed by a pale greyish brown sandy silt ([22]). This was cut by the footings trench for the Coach House yard wall ([20]). Above layer [22] was a dark brown silty loam topsoil ([21]).

5.7 Trench 7

(Figs 2 and 5)

Located against the outside of the south-east wall of the Coach House. It was 0.8m by 0.8m and up to 0.95m deep and 'L'-shaped due to the presence of a brick wall in the southern half of the trench. The trench was excavated into a deposit of mortar, brick and flint rubble ([52]). Above this was a layer of yellowish brown sandy silt ([51]) which was cut by an north-west to south-east aligned wall footings trench ([50]). The footings trench contained a chalk and brick footing ([49]) overlain by the remnant of a brick and mortar wall ([48]). This was running perpendicular to and butting up against the Coach House wall. Overlying wall [48] was a layer of dark brown silty loam topsoil ([47]).

5.8 Trench 8

(Figs 2 and 6)

Positioned in the north-east corner of the lean-to at the northern end of the Coach House, it measured 0.8m by 0.8m and up to 0.85m deep. The trench was excavated down to a layer of dark brown sandy loam ([43]). Above this was a pale yellowish brown sandy silt ([42]) containing a large amount of building debris. This was cut by the lean-to wall footings trench ([38]). Above layer [42] was a yellowish brown sandy silt ([41]) overlain by a deposit of yellowish brown mortar with flint ([40]). Above this was the remains of a brick floor ([39]).

6.0 The Finds

(Appendix 2)

The site produced a small quantity of post-medieval finds including pottery, ceramic building material, ceramic tobacco pipe, animal bone and iron.

6.1 Pottery

(Appendix 3)

Three pieces of post-medieval pottery were recovered from three separate contexts. A small piece of possible Pearlware (0.001kg), a piece of Transfer printed ware (0.038kg) depicting a landscape and a Yellow ware fragment of probable mixing bowl (0.006kg).

6.2 Ceramic Building Material

(Appendix 4)

The site produced five pieces of post-medieval ceramic building material (0.126kg), that consists of four fragments of flat roof tile (0.081kg, [5], [14]), and one fragment of brick (0.045kg, [32]).

6.3 Animal Bone

(Appendix 5)

Summary

A total of 0.076kg of faunal remains were recovered. The assemblage, although small, included butchering evidence, including that of Fallow deer.

Methodology

The bone was examined using a modified version of Davis (1992). The remains were scanned for basic information recording identifiable species, ages where possible and briefly noting butchery and pathological conditions. The total number of pieces identifiable to a species was recorded on the faunal remains record. The total weight and individual species counts for each context was also recorded. A summary of the information is included in a table with this report.

Results and conclusions

A chopped Fallow deer distal tibia was recovered ([5]). A young cattle calcaneus was also found ([71]); this bone had been chopped which would indicate the calf had been killed for veal production. A distal metacarpal from a sheep/goat was also found in the same context ([71]), this metacarpal had been chopped and exhibited canid gnawing. The sheep/goat metacarpal had also been gnawed by a large rodent (probably rat); this is quite common as rats gnaw bones to wear down incisor teeth and to obtain additional calcium.

7.0 Conclusions

In situ remains associated with the Friary were observed in six out of eight of the excavated trenches.

The mortar deposit observed in five of the trenches is probably either the floor of the Friary or a bedding layer for a more substantial tile floor. A later phase of mortar floor probably associated with the Friary was observed in Trench 2 but nowhere else on site. This deposit coincides with the inside of the Friary as projected by the Time Team.

The remains of two substantial flint and mortar wall cores were observed within two of the trenches and coincided with the projected line of the Cloister walls. In Trench 3 this wall core appeared to turn perpendicular to and east from the projected Cloister wall, possibly indicative of an internal division within this part of the Friary. In addition to this, Trench 1 showed the remains of a flint and mortar wall footing probably from an early phase of the Friary, running perpendicular to and west from the projected eastern wall of the building. Again this probably indicates a division within the Friary.

A thin sandy deposit containing flecks of charcoal, observed overlying the mortar floor in two of the trenches, could possibly be associated with the initial abandonment of the Friary.

A fairly thick layer of building debris, observed in four of the trenches probably indicates a major phase of demolition of the Friary.

Above this demolition deposit and covering most of the site was a layer that could either be evidence of a deliberate levelling of the site or simply the build up of topsoil during the period between the abandonment of the Friary and the construction of the Coach House and Coachman's House.

Indications of possible occupation after the demolition of the Friary were seen in several layers of mortar floor interspersed with sand bedding layers, observed in Trench 2. These could be associated with an earlier structure than the Coachman's House and were not observed in any other part of the site.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Bursar of Thetford Grammar School, P.J. McGahan, and his staff for excavating the trenches. Also John Farrow from Architects Cambridge Ltd. On site recording was carried out by the author. The finds were assessed by Lucy Talbot, Richenda Goffin and Julie Curl. HER information was provided by Jan Allen. The report was written and illustrated by Steven Tatler, produced and formatted by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

Bibliography

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- Pevsner, N., and Wilson B., 1962 *The Buildings of England. Norfolk 2: North-west and South*.

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Trench	Category	Description	Period
1	1	Masonry	Chalk block and cement mortar garden wall	Modern
2	1	Masonry	Flint and lime mortar garden wall	Post- medieval
3	1	Masonry	Chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
4	1	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
5	1	Deposit	Levelling/ earlier garden soil	Late medieval
6	1	Deposit	Mortar floor/ bedding layer	Medieval
7	1	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval
8	1	Masonry	Flint and lime mortar footing	Medieval
9	1	Cut	Cut for flint and lime mortar footing	Medieval
10	3	Masonry	Squared flint block Coach House wall	Post- medieval
11	3	Masonry	Banded chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
12	3	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
13	3	Deposit	Crushed chalk yard surface	Post- medieval
14	3	Deposit	Levelling/ earlier garden soil	Late medieval
15	3	Masonry	Flint and lime mortar wall core	Medieval
16	3	Deposit	Mortar floor/ bedding layer	Medieval
17	3	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval
18	6	Masonry	Flint, brick and lime mortar yard wall	Post- medieval
19	6	Masonry	Chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
20	6	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval
21	6	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
22	6	Deposit	Levelling/ earlier garden soil	Late medieval
23	6	Deposit	Demolition layer- flint, chalk and lime mortar	Late medieval
24	6	Deposit	Demolition layer- sandy mortar	Late medieval
25	6	Deposit	Abandonment layer- dark brown sandy silt	Late medieval
26	6	Deposit	Mortar floor/ bedding layer	Medieval
27	5	Masonry	Squared flint block Coach House wall	Post- medieval
28	5	Masonry	Chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
29	5	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval
30	5	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
31	5	Deposit	Mortar and gravel yard surface	Post- medieval
32	5	Deposit	Levelling/ earlier garden soil	Late medieval
33	5	Deposit	Demolition layer- flint, chalk and lime mortar	Late medieval
34	5	Deposit	Abandonment layer- dark brown sandy silt	Late medieval
35	5	Deposit	Mortar floor/ bedding layer	Medieval
36	8	Masonry	Brick and mortar lean- to wall	Modern
37	8	Masonry	Concrete with brick, flint and chalk footing	Modern
38	8	Cut	Cut for concrete wall footing	Modern
39	8	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
40	8	Deposit	Mortar and gravel yard surface	Post- medieval
41	8	Deposit	Buried topsoil	Post- medieval
42	8	Deposit	Levelling/ earlier garden soil	Late medieval
43	8	Deposit	Garden soil associated with Friary	Medieval
44	7	Masonry	Squared flint block Coach House wall	Post- medieval
45	7	Masonry	Chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
46	7	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval
47	7	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
48	7	Masonry	Remnant of brick wall- addition to Coach House	Modern
49	7	Masonry	Chalk, brick and mortar footing	Modern
50	7	Cut	Cut for chalk, brick and mortar footing	Modern
51	7	Deposit	Levelling/ earlier garden soil	Late medieval
52	7	Deposit	Demolition layer- flint, chalk and lime mortar	

Context	Trench	Category	Description	Period
53	2	Masonry	Brick and lime mortar Coachman's House wall	Post- medieval
54	2	Masonry	Chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
55	2	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval
56	2	Deposit	Concrete floor	Modern
57	2	Deposit	Concrete with brick, flint and chalk make up	Modern
58	2	Deposit	Compacted chalk rubble floor	Post- medieval
59	2	Deposit	Loose brown sand bedding layer	Post- medieval
60	2	Deposit	Mortar with flint and brick floor	Post- medieval
61	2	Deposit	Dark brown loose sand bedding layer	Post- medieval
62	2	Deposit	Mortar with flint and brick floor	Post- medieval
63	2	Deposit	Dark brown loose sand bedding layer	Post- medieval
64	2	Deposit	Demolition layer- flint, chalk, brick and lime mortar	Late medieval
65	2	Deposit	Mortar floor/ bedding layer	Medieval
66	2	Deposit	Mortar floor/ bedding layer	Medieval
67	4	Masonry	Flint and lime mortar yard wall	Post- medieval
68	4	Masonry	Chalk block and lime mortar footing	Post- medieval
69	4	Deposit	Concrete yard surface	Modern
70	4	Deposit	Chalk, brick, flint and mortar foundation layer for concrete yard	Modern
71	4	Deposit	Buried garden soil	Post- medieval
72	4	Masonry	Flint and lime mortar wall core	Medieval
73	4	Cut	Cut for chalk and mortar footing	Post- medieval

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
5	Pottery	1	0.001	Post-medieval
5	Ceramic building material	1	0.009	Post-medieval
5	Clay tobacco pipe	1	0.005	Post-medieval
5	Iron	1	-	
5	Animal bone	-	0.023	
14	Ceramic building material	3	0.072	Post-medieval
32	Pottery	1	0.038	Post-medieval
32	Ceramic building material	1	0.045	Post-medieval
32	Animal bone	-	0.005	
41	Pottery	1	0.006	Post-medieval
71	Animal bone	-	0.048	

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Date
5	Pearlware	Body	1	0.001	1800-1900
32	Transfer printed ware	Dish	1	0.038	1770-1850
41	Yellow ware	Body, mixing bowl	1	0.006	Late 18th to 19th century

Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
5	Roof Tile	1	0.009	Post-medieval
14	Roof Tile	3	0.072	Post-medieval
32	Brick	1	0.045	Post-medieval

Appendix 5: Faunal Remains

Context	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Species	Comments
5	2	0.023	Deer	X 1, Fallow deer distal tibia, chopped
			Mammal	X1, rib fragment
32	1	0.032	Mammal	X1, rib fragment
71	2	0.048	Cattle	X1, young calf calcaneus, chopped
			Sheep/Goat	X1, chopped distal metacarpal with both canid and rodent gnawing

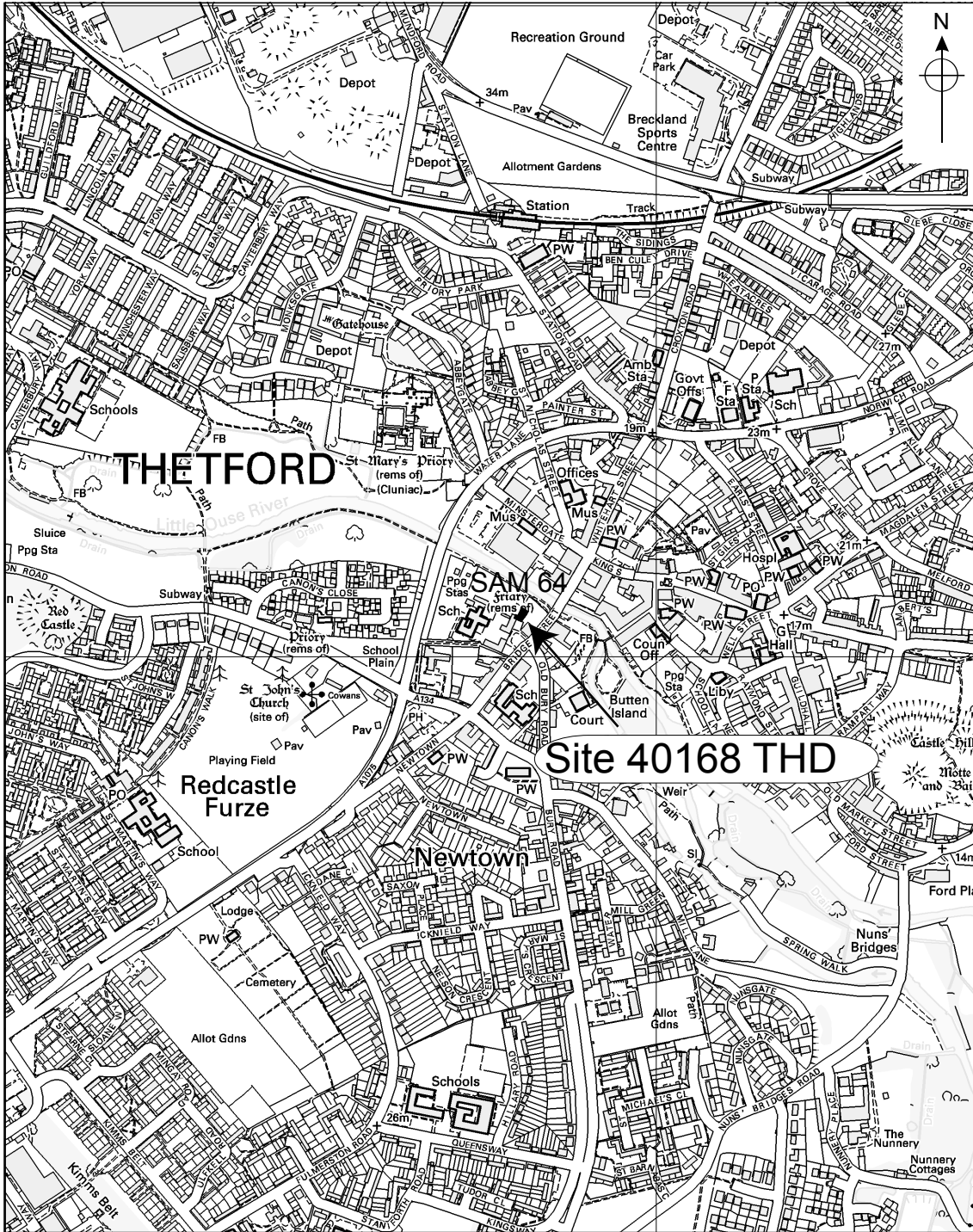


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

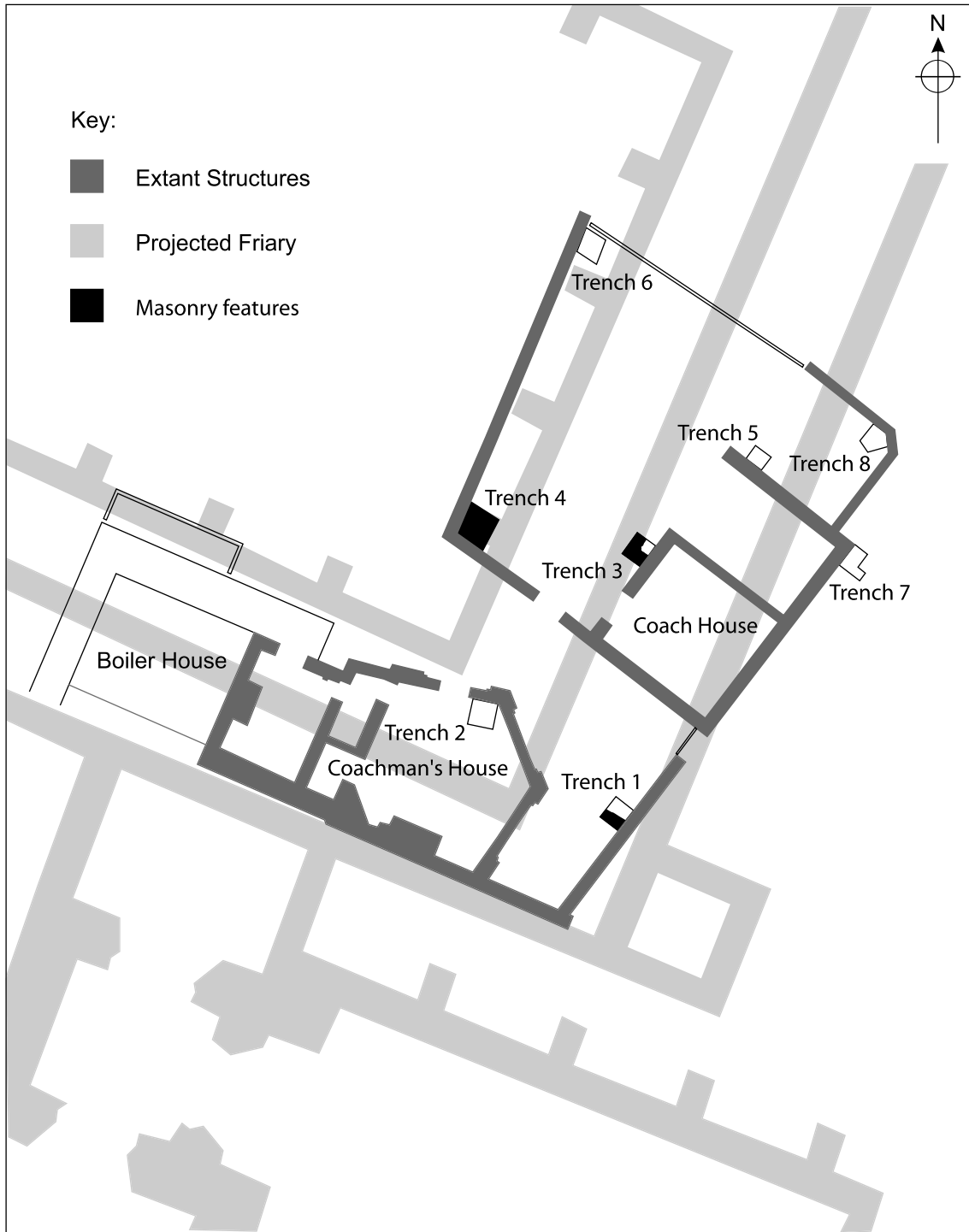


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1: 200

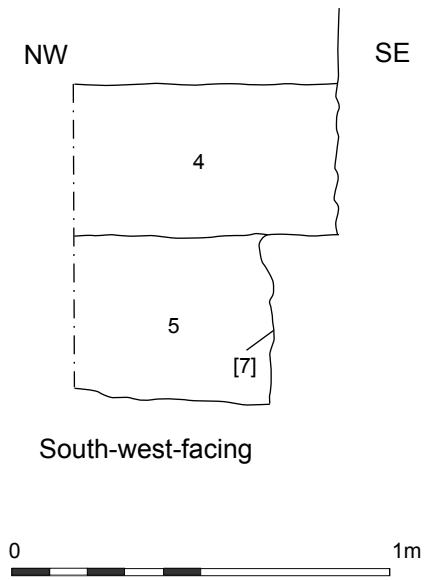
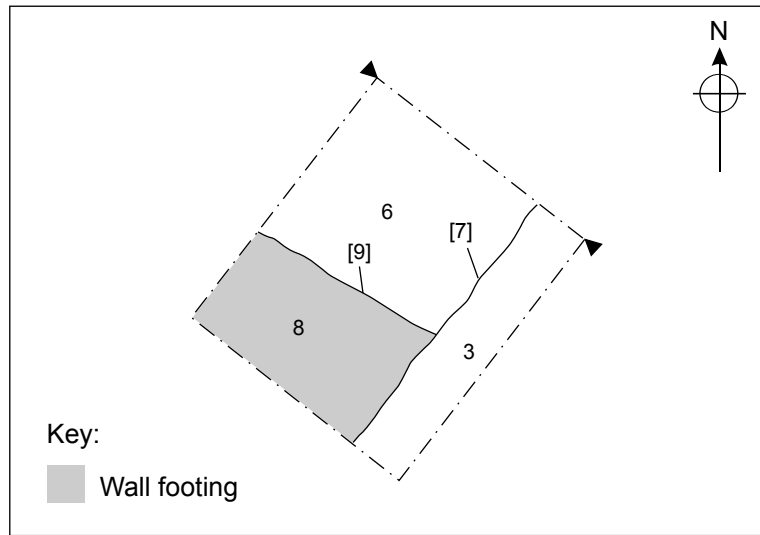


Figure 3. Trench 1. Plan and section. Scale 1: 20

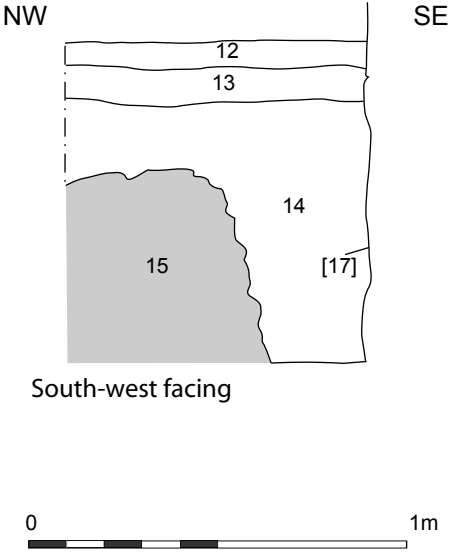
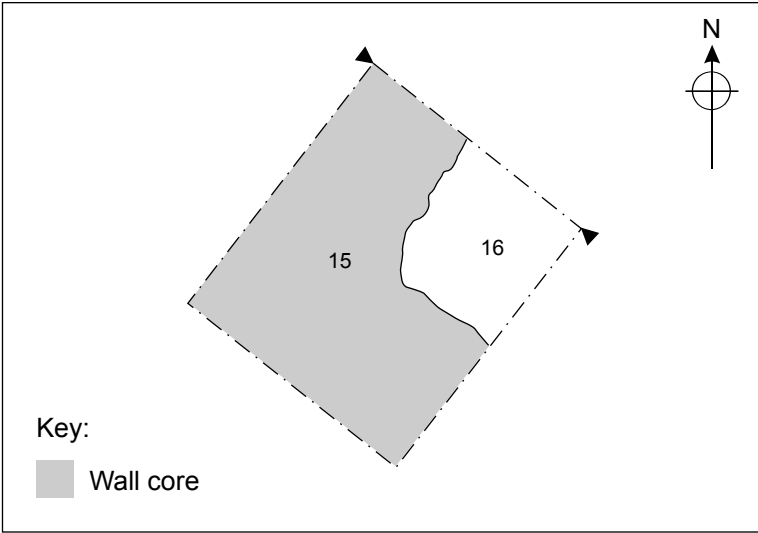


Figure 4. Trench 3. Plan and section. Scale 1: 20.

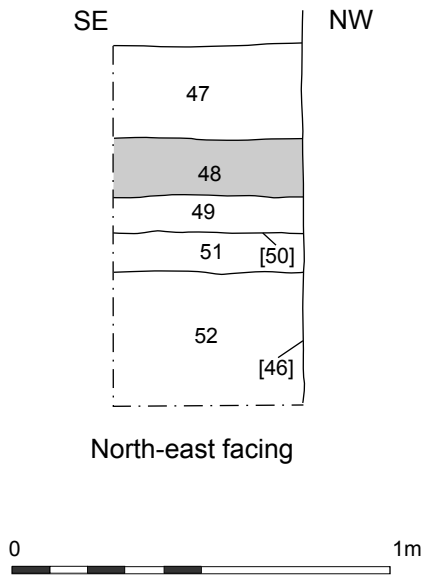
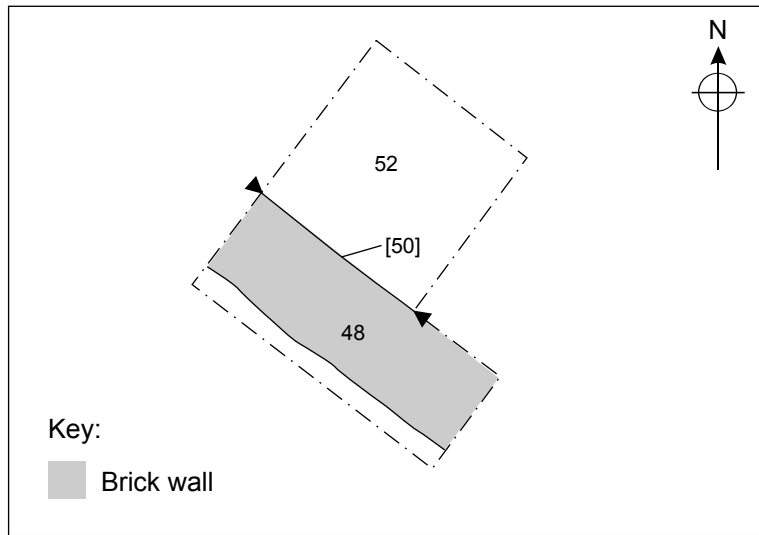


Figure 5. Trench 7. Plan and section. Scale 1: 20

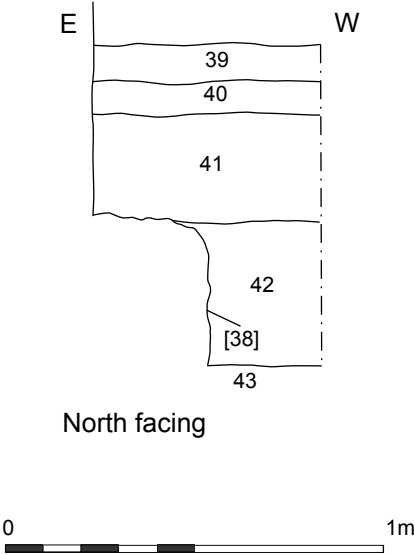
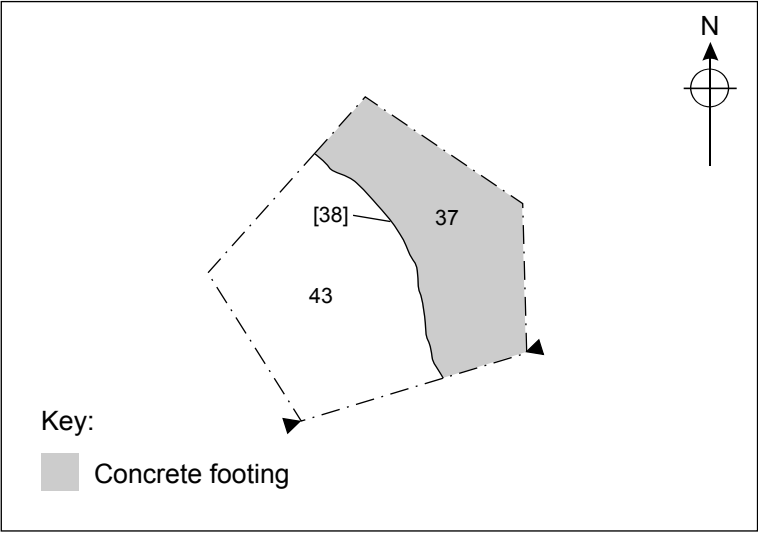
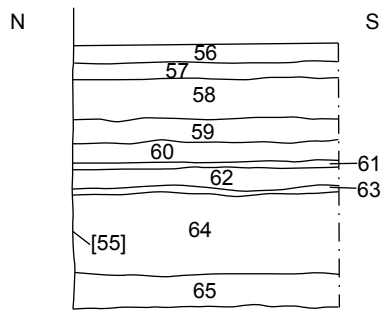
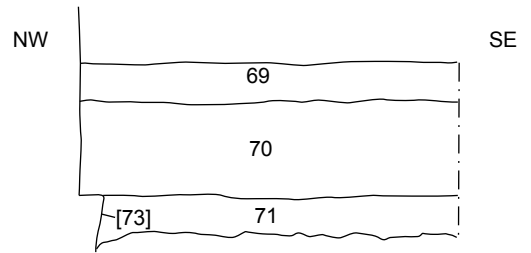


Figure 6. Trench 8. Plan and section. Scale 1: 20



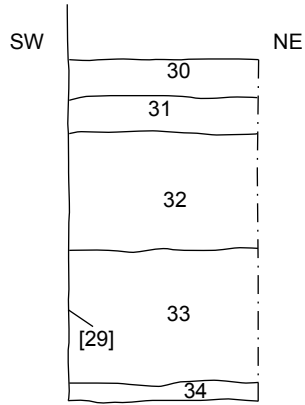
West facing

Trench 2.



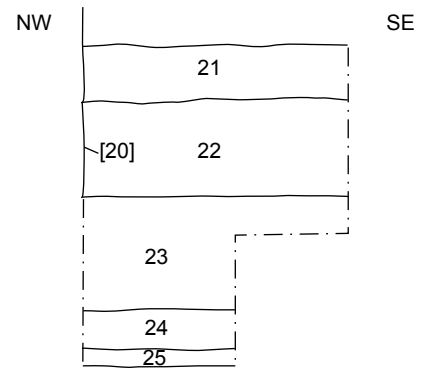
South-west facing

Trench 4.



South-east facing

Trench 5.



South-west facing

Trench 6.



Figure 7. Trenches 2, 4, 5 and 6. Sections. Scale 1: 20