

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 953

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
Church Hill, Saxlingham Nethergate,
Norfolk**

40166 SXN

B P Hobbs

August 2004

© Norfolk Archaeological Unit

Contents

Summary

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Geology and Topography
- 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background
- 4.0 Methodology
- 5.0 Results
- 6.0 The Finds
- 7.0 Conclusions

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Figures

- Fig.1 Site location
- Fig. 2 Trench location



Location: Church Hill, Saxlingham Nethergate
District: South Norfolk
Grid Ref.: TM 2314 9719
HER No.: 40166 SXN
Date of fieldwork: 17th February and 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 10th May 2004

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on a small outbuilding at Church Hill, Saxlingham Nethergate. It was proposed to convert the small brick built structure into a church room. The excavation of footings, a pit for a septic tank and service trenches were observed.

No archaeological features were seen, however, although several sherds of modern pottery were recorded.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

A watching brief was undertaken by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) to observe the excavation of footings, a pit for a septic tank and service trenches for the conversion of a small brick built outbuilding into a church room. The site lay adjacent to a recently installed car park (Hutcheson 2000) to the east of St Mary's church in Saxlingham Nethergate.

This watching brief was commissioned by Mr G Blyth on behalf of Saxlingham Nethergate Parish Council.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref.: EJR/22/10/02).

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 underlying natural deposits consist of glacial till and fluvial sands and gravels. The parish is located on the Norfolk boulder clay plateau at the interface between the solid Upper Chalk and London Clay. The topography of the site is generally level and lies at around 30m OD, sloping gently down to the north.

The area under consideration is possibly within the in-filled moat of the Old Hall and as such might exhibit associated deposits such as disturbed clay silts, cess and other infill material.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

The proposed development of the site is located in an area close to both the church of St Mary (Historic Environment Record (HER) 10124) and the site of the moated Old Hall. The church is largely Perpendicular (15th to 16th century) in style with Victorian (19th century) additions, but has earlier origins. There is evidence of a south 12th-century doorway and 13th-century stained glass survives in the south chancel window (Pevsner and Wilson 2000). Romano-British tiles can be seen in the fabric of the building, probably robbed from the Romano-British settlement of Shotesham (HER 10099) c. 2.5km to the north-west.

An earlier church (HER 10115) of the same name, now ruined, lies c. 1km to the south and dates from the late 11th century.

The Old Hall (HER 11917) lies c. 120m to the south-east of the site. It is a timber-framed mansion that was constructed between the 16th and 17th centuries, situated on an older moated site which is now mostly infilled. A pond, as shown on the 1906 Ordnance Survey map (now infilled) occupied a large part of the area immediately to the west of the current site. An earlier map (Faden 1989, 28) shows both the church and the Old Hall but is not detailed enough to show the moat or pond.

Previous archaeological work (Hutcheson 2000) in the vicinity consisted of an evaluation in the area of the present car park just to the east of the church. The results of this evaluation indicated the presence of a leet or channel, probably connected with the moated site or later pond.

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The Brief stipulated that constant attendance by an archaeologist was required during the groundworks. The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of footing trenches, a pit for a septic tank and service trenches across the site.

Three adjoining footing trenches were excavated by a mini-digger with a bucket width of 0.70m to an average depth of 0.80m, the footings to the south-east being up to 0.90m deep. The trenches were excavated immediately to the west of the standing farm building.

The trenches running east to west measured 5.5m in length, the single north to south return trench being 4m long. The depth of the trenches was reliant on the type of deposit located at the base of the trench and whether it was suitable for concrete footings.

Service trenches were excavated from the new building for sewer and water services. A pit for a septic tank and foundations for a small pumping station were excavated to the north of the site and an electrical cable trench was excavated around the north edge of the car park and through the churchyard to the east side of the porch.

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.

A level for a temporary benchmark was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark of 30.83m on the south-east corner of the church of St Mary.

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

Site conditions were reasonably dry, although a constant cold drizzle made the edges of the trenches slippery underfoot. The water table was not reached during the excavation of the footings. The exposure of underlying clay meant that on several occasions the mini-digger lost traction and became temporarily immovable.

A large number of roots were exposed and these could be traced to several small ash trees immediately to the north of the site as well as the stumps of two elms which were removed during the excavation of the trenches.

5.0 Results

No features of archaeological interest were observed in the sections of any of the footing trenches, septic tank pit or service trenches during the excavation. A number of post-medieval and modern artefacts, such as bottles and door fittings were recovered from the subsoil of the trench sections and from the spoil but these were discarded as having no archaeological interest. Similarly, the pottery found in the spoil consisted of fragments of modern domestic china.

The depth of topsoil ([1]) and subsoil ([2]) in the area of the footings was quite shallow with the dark loam topsoil being an average thickness of 0.3m. The subsoil was of a similar colour and make-up to the topsoil and both contained many small to medium roots.

The make-up of the soil in the trench down to the level of the natural clay ([3]) suggested that the ground had not formed part of the infilled moat feature found previously to the west. Similarly, no deposits were observed that might indicate that the old pond, mapped in 1906, extended into the area of the footings.

6.0 The Finds

The finds from the watching brief consisted entirely of late post-medieval and modern items including brass door fittings, glass bottles and iron artefacts such as nails, bolts and fragments of farm machinery. The only pottery located from the spoil of the footings were sherds of coloured modern domestic china. These objects were not retained as they were of no archaeological value.

7.0 Conclusions

The negative results of this watching brief suggest that the archaeological features recorded in 2000 (Hutcheson) on the adjacent (to the west) site did not extend into this area. It is probable, therefore, that the line of the moat lies further to the south-east, nearer to the hall.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Ms Gibson for her interest and providing background information. Mr Blyth who commissioned this report and Saxlingham Nethergate Parish Council who funded the project. Mr Jessett, the builder, for his co-operation during the watching brief.

Historic Environment Record information was supplied by Jan Allen. The report was illustrated, formatted and produced by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

Bibliography

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|---|
| Faden, W., | 1989 | <i>Faden's Map of Norfolk</i> Larks Press |
| Hutcheson, A., | 2000 | <i>Report on an Archaeological Evaluation at Church Hill, Saxlingham Nethergate, Norfolk</i> , NAU Report 487 (unpublished) |
| Pevsner, N. and Wilson, B., | 2000 | <i>The Buildings of England: Norfolk 2: North-west and South</i> Penguin Books |

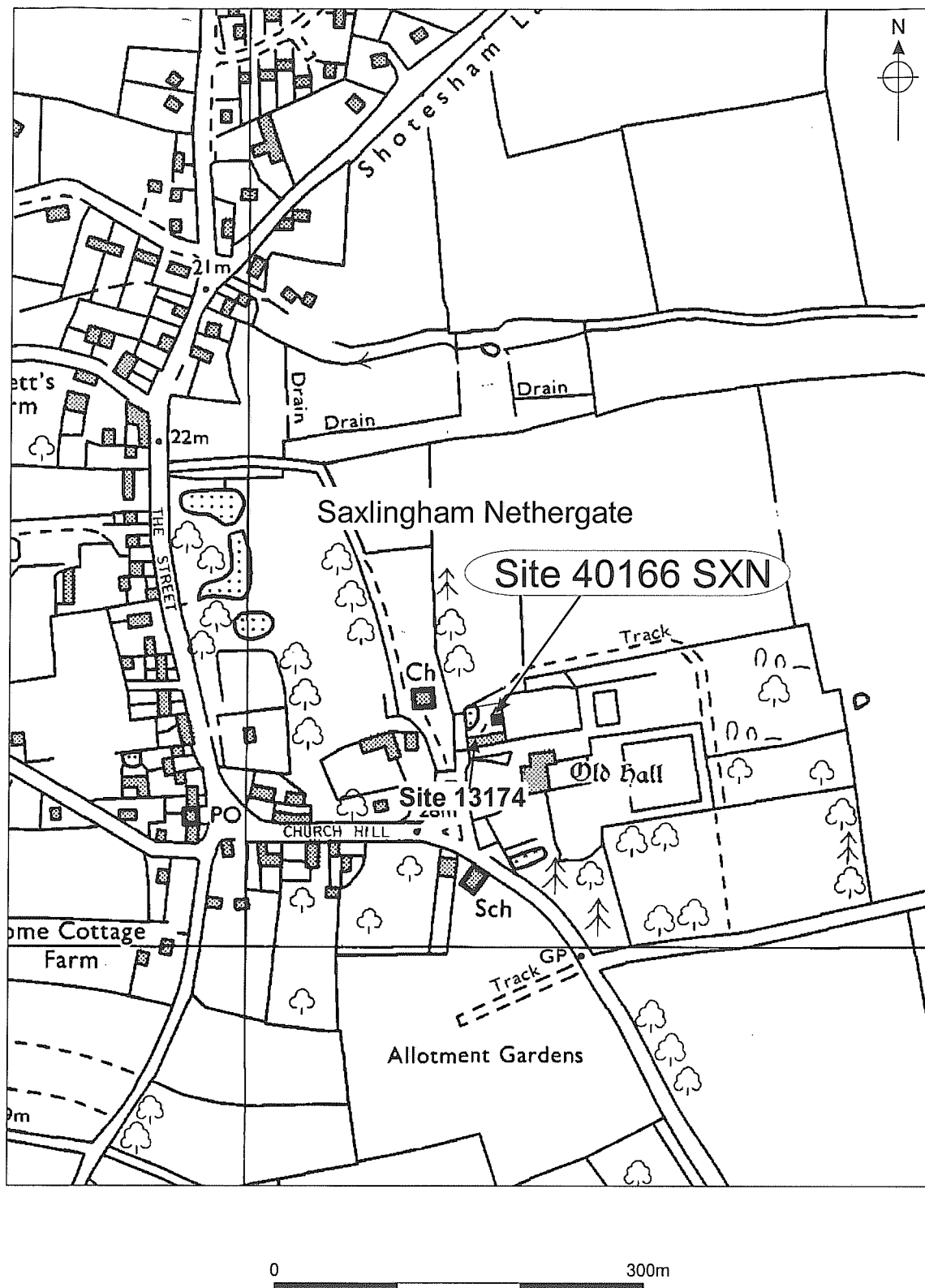


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

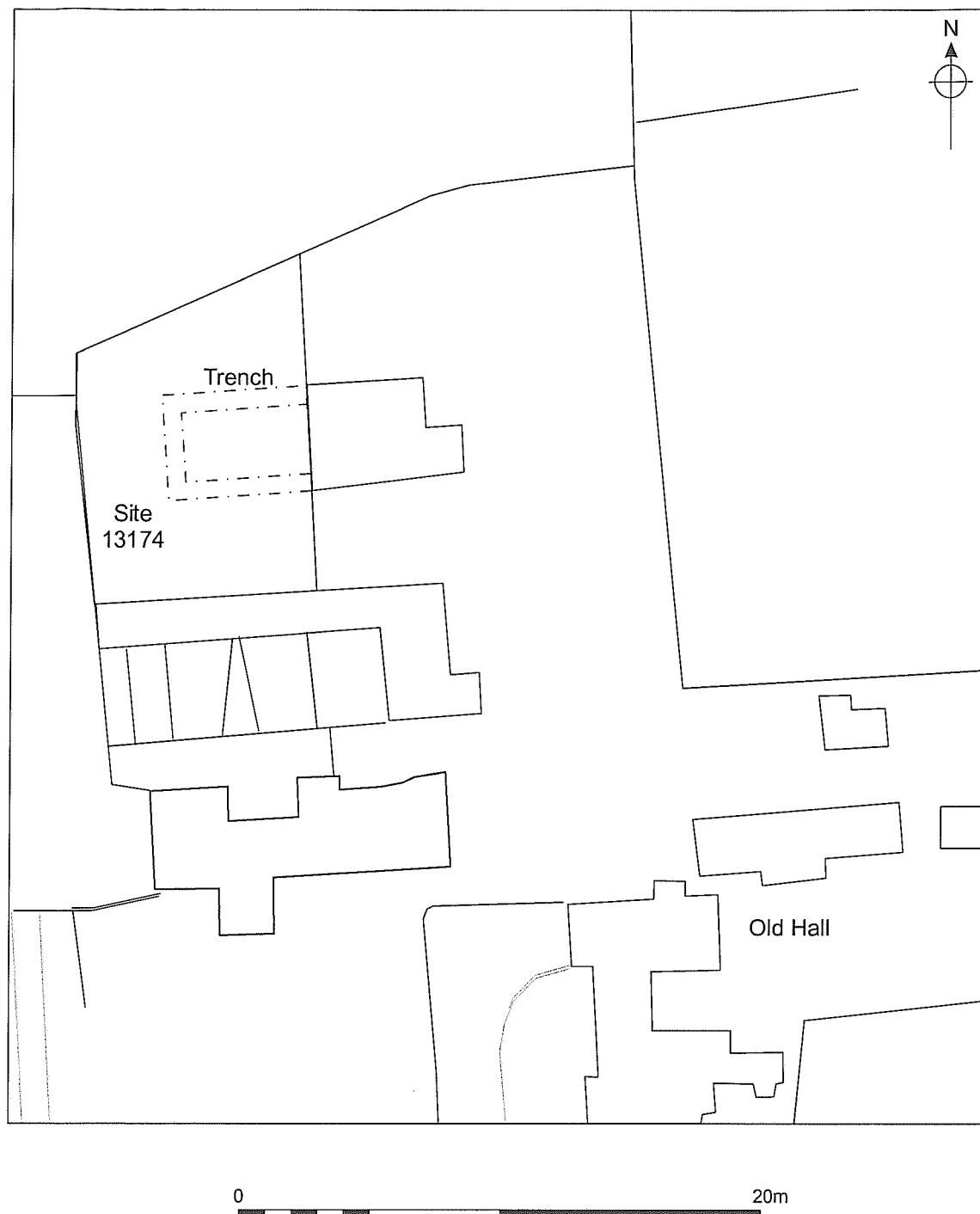


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:250