

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 769

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at
Sprowston Manor Golf Course, Sprowston, Norfolk

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Location: Sprowston Manor Golf Course, Sprowston, Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 2600 1270 (centred)
SMR No: 36799 SPR
Date of work: 18th to 29th April 2002

Summary

An archaeological watching brief at Sprowston Manor was carried out during soil stripping and landscaping for a golf course extension. Special attention was paid to areas around three evaluation trenches previously excavated during an archaeological evaluation. Although no archaeological features were detected, several sherds of Victorian and modern pottery and some iron slag were recovered during soil stripping.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was conducted within the grounds of Sprowston Manor Hotel (Fig. 1) during the creation of a golf course extension. The aim of the work was to observe topsoil stripping and extensive landscaping of areas of archaeological potential identified during an archaeological evaluation on the site. The watching brief was concentrated into three main areas, two in the western half and one on the eastern boundary (around evaluation trenches 1, 2 and 19; Fig. 1).

This archaeological work was undertaken to the specifications set out in Norfolk Archaeological Unit's Project Design for Watching Briefs and in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: 17/04/02/ARJH).

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

The site is located near the northern edge of the Sprowston parish boundary and consists of two adjacent fields on an east-to-west axis lying to the south and east of the Manor. To the north of the Manor the existing golf course continues up to the A1151 Norwich to Wroxham Road.

The underlying geology is grey sand with outcrops of Norwich Brickearth, and natural subsoils of glacial sands and gravels. The site is situated in a slight depression at an elevation of 25m OD, rising gently to the north, south-east and west to 30m OD.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site is situated near the northern edge of the Sprowston parish boundary and lies in an area dotted with sites of archaeological interest as recorded in the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record.

The use of this area in the prehistoric period is attested to by the discovery of worked flint and traces of early monuments found in several locations in the area. These include a grey flint Mesolithic axe-head found across the road at the south-western end of the site, and a purported ring ditch monument within the north-east

corner of the site itself. Several other prehistoric sites are recorded in the wider vicinity ranging from struck flint find spots to enclosure monuments.

The Romano-British period is represented in the main by the Roman road that previously linked the settlement of Brampton, located to the north, and Thorpe St Andrew riverside. Cartographic evidence suggests this followed a straight course through the grounds of the Hall. Pottery and coins of the period have been recovered from areas to the north-west and east, while an Iron Age pit containing pottery was located close to the line of the Roman road some 2km to the north-west.

Finds from the Anglo-Saxon period have been located in areas on average 1.2km from the site, the nearest being 1km to the south and consisting of Middle Saxon dress components, furniture fittings and a box. The local SS Mary and Margaret's church has an arch remaining from a Late Saxon tower. Although Sprowston is not in the Domesday Book, the presence of the tower indicates a pre-conquest settlement. This may have been recorded incorporated into surrounding named parishes.

Medieval occupation of the area is again mainly indicated by find spots, the nearest to the Hall being a scatter of pottery sherds along with some iron slag which might indicate a metal working site just to the south-east. Monuments include the nearby church and the route of a road to the south.

The Hall itself was constructed by John Corbett, prior to his death in 1559. To create the associated grounds an area of Mousehold Heath was cleared. After passing through the hands of the Lord Mayor of London, four Baronets and several successive landowners, the original hall was pulled down and rebuilt in 1876 by John Gurney, Mayor of Norwich. It was constructed in red brick on an irregular plan, perhaps preserving the original layout.

Previous archaeological work in the area consisted of a field survey and evaluation excavation of twenty-two trial trenches across the area of land covered by the proposed development. Four of the trenches exhibited archaeological features including pits, ditches and post-holes. Most of these features were undated, but sherds of prehistoric pottery were recovered from two features in the eastern half of the site (Trimble 2002).

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during topsoil stripping and landscaping in the vicinity of the areas of archaeological interest located by evaluation. The development involved stripping topsoil from all areas of the site to a depth of approximately 0.10m to 0.15m, removing a proportion of the spoil to other areas of the site and landscaping the remaining spoil into mounds. Certain areas were also excavated up to a depth of 2m to create hollows and bunkers for the golf course. In the west half of the site several water features (in the form of large lakes) were excavated to a depth of approximately 3m.

The topsoil was stripped using bulldozers and the spoil piled up into heaps. These were then landscaped with a 360-type machine excavator which also was used to

excavate the hollows in the required areas. Spoil was moved around the site by three large six-wheeled dumper trucks.

The Brief required that an archaeologist was in constant attendance during ground works in the vicinity of two evaluation trenches in the west half of the site (Trenches 1 and 2) and one to the east (Trench 19). Spoil and exposed surfaces were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

Deposits were recorded using the Norfolk Archaeological Unit's *pro-forma* sheets. Plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Site conditions were changeable with bright hot weather alternating with overcast skies and rain.

5.0 Results

In the western area of the site, in the vicinity of evaluation trenches 1 and 2 and between approximately 100m and 250m to the east of them, three large lakes had been excavated. These were about 3m deep and 60m to 100m in diameter. Within them, the natural below the sand subsoils varied between pale yellow sand in the west and a more clay soil in the east.

The topsoil strip exposed the top of the subsoils in the area around trenches 1 and 2 but no archaeological features could be discerned. Although the area of trench 2 was left intact, a large bunker (40m by 10m) was excavated to a depth of 1.10m at the north end of the location of trench 1. No features of archaeological interest were observed in the edges of this cut which was gradually shelved and smoothed by the machine. The excavated soil was piled up adjacent to the bunker to provide a landscaped mound as well as acting as a bund for the nearby hotel. It was noted that with the number of heavy vehicles running on the site the surface of the subsoil was quickly disturbed and obscured by ruts and tracks.

Several unstratified sherds of modern pottery were recovered from the vicinity of trench 1, along with several possible worked flint fragments. No finds were made from the area surrounding trench 2.

The eastern area was stripped over several days, the area around trench 19 on the far eastern boundary being cleared sporadically. The landscaping in this area was more extreme with a gully approximately 3m deep and 6m wide being excavated down slope from the south towards the northern boundary.

Approximately 150m to the west of the location of trench 19 two small fragments of iron slag and a modern coin were recovered from the topsoil using a metal detector. Two sherds of modern pottery were also found in the topsoil, as well as three possible worked flint fragments. Other finds of metalwork were made in the area but were all modern domestic rubbish. The soil strip near to the west of trench 19 removed approximately 0.10m to 0.15m depth of topsoil but no archaeological features were observed during this process. Trench 19 was eventually backfilled by the bulldozer without revealing any continuations of the features found during the evaluation phase.

6.0 The Finds

All of the sherds of pottery located during the watching brief were highly glazed modern earthenware or blue and white porcelain. The small fragments of iron slag had no associated dating evidence and therefore cannot be assumed to be of any great antiquity. It is likely that the fragments were part of the cluster found in the vicinity during the evaluation phase which was also undated; they may have provenance from any period from the Late Iron Age up to the post-medieval and modern periods.

Two pieces of flint, found in the vicinity of trench 19; exhibited slight retouching on their edges or utilisation as a scraper. They were edge damaged to various degrees, probably due to the topsoil context from which the flint was recovered.

7.0 Conclusions

No archaeological features were uncovered as a result of the topsoil strip during the watching brief at Sprowston. The features originally found in trenches 1, 2 and 19 of the evaluation phase were not evident in the subsoil left once the topsoil had been removed. Deeper excavations during landscaping in the area of the trenches also failed to reveal any features of archaeological interest. The finds from the topsoil made during the watching brief - the pottery and the metalwork - appeared to be representative of manuring the fields with domestic waste. The flints found provide no further evidence of prehistoric activity on the site than did the evaluation. The areas being developed are likely to have been always used as farmland during the existence of the Hall, prior to that being covered by heath.

Acknowledgements

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Bibliography

Trimble, G. 2002 *Report on an Archaeological Evaluation at Marriot Sprowston Manor Golf Course, Norwich, Norfolk* NAU Client Report 688 (unpublished)

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context No.	Category	Description/interpretation
576	Deposit	Topsoil
577	Deposit	Subsoil

Appendix 2: Finds

Context No.	Material	Description	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Spot date
576	Flint	Flake	2	0.012	Prehistoric
576	Slag	Iron slag fragments	2	0.018	Unknown

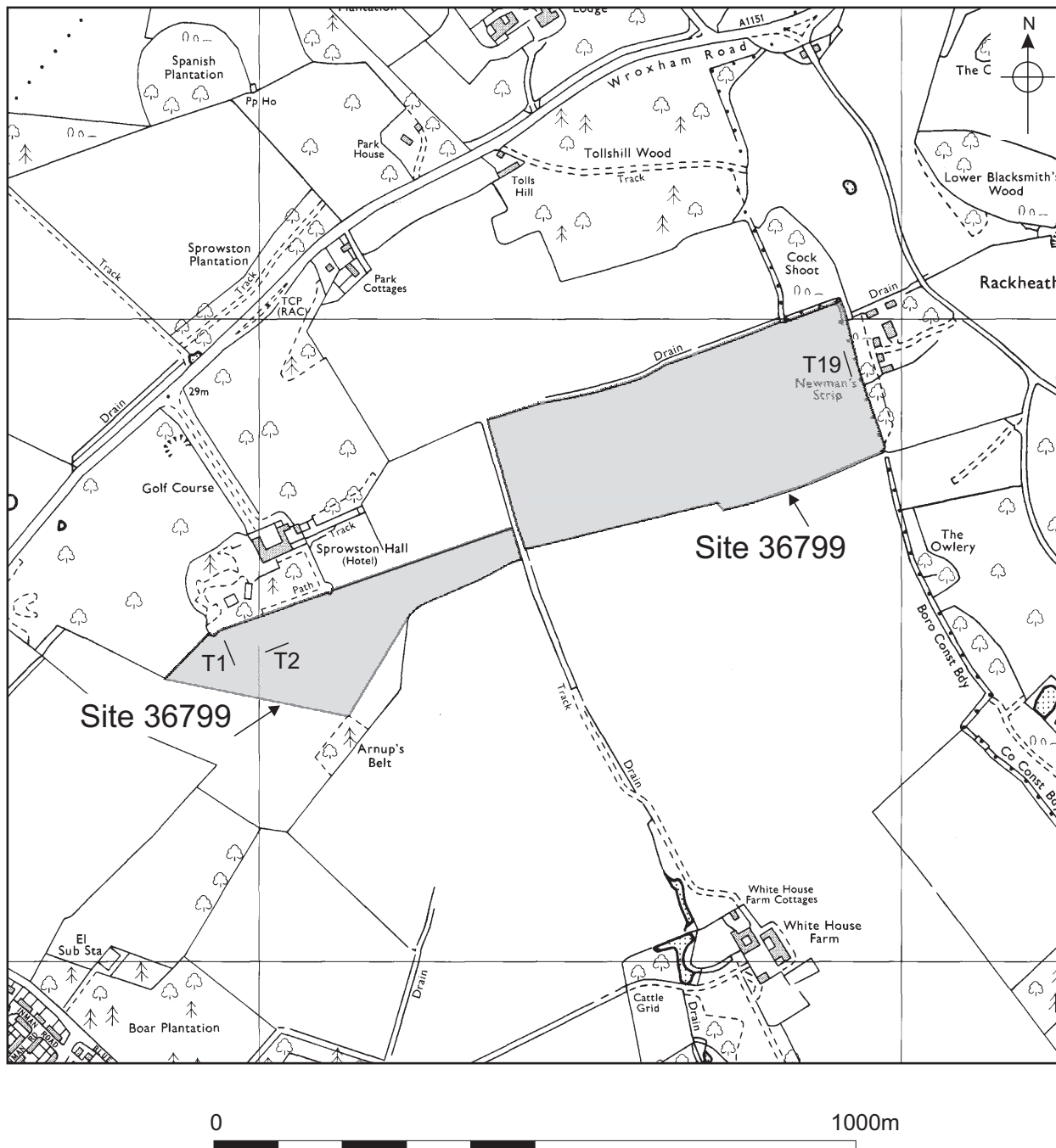


Figure 1. Site location, showing evaluation trenches 1, 2, and 19. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No. 076759

Fig. 1 is based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 'Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings' Norfolk County Council County Hall Norwich (07/11/2002).

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