NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 802

An Archaeological Evaluation at Manor Farm, Wells-next-the-Sea

38048 WNS

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Local Authority No.076759

Location:	Manor Farm, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk
Grid Ref:	TF 9051 4212
HER No.:	38048 WNS
Date of Fieldwork:	21st and 24th to 26th February 2003

Summary

A series of twenty-one evaluation trenches across the location of a proposed reservoir recorded an absence of archaeological features or finds, a result which is consistent with the map evidence of this area on the edge of Wells Heath and probably peripheral to the main body of the medieval cultivated land of Wells.

1.0 Introduction

Fig. 1

The site lies in arable land some 2km to the south-west of Wells and immediately outside the wall of Holkham park. It lies at *c.*20m OD and the field is presently fallow. The evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Coke Estates Ltd of Holkham.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: DG 12/08/02) and a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: JB 1519 Jan 2003).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

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 proposed reservoir site, some 210m x 180m, straddles a very shallow ‘valley’ (there is no stream), with the 20m contour at its highest point to the east, north and south, with a fall into the centre and at the west of about 2m. This valley appears to correspond to a geological change, with the contour virtually defining the general change from the underlying Chalk (to the west and centre) to the overlying glacial Boulder Clay of the Boulder Clay plateau.

Excavation, however, showed that the whole site lay within the area of glacial sands, with pockets of chalk (and solid chalk some 2m below (M Turner, Farm Manager, pers comm)).

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

The site lies in the parish of Wells-next-the-Sea, but at its extreme west edge, next to the wall enclosing Holkham park (which is also the boundary between the parishes of Holkham and Wells). This general area around Wells and Holkham was formerly open field and heath, taken into regular fields upon Enclosure in the early 19th century, (although this process happened some time before that in Holkham). Various boundaries and tracks remain of the earlier arrangements. The track (Site 36862) which runs into the site from the north-east and continued across the site to the south-west, recorded in cropmarks, may be one of these since it is also on Faden's map of 1797. This cropmark can also be seen on air photograph OS 70008 117 of 1970 and is interpreted as a road between two ditches.

Faden's map of 1797 is at too small a scale to be entirely clear with regard to details, but appears to show this field as part of *Wells Heath;* the south part of the field lying within the Heath, the north part in the adjacent arable. A reconstruction map of Wells in the 16th century (RF Gerken: NRO MC 1763/1) indicates that the present site lay on the edge of *Wells Lings* and just (but wholly) within the area of cultivated land.

The origin of the extensive heaths in this area may be related however, to early land clearance and subsequent cultivation until exhaustion of the poor soils, was followed by degradation into heath and grass. It is possible this change in land usage may have happened in prehistoric times, although the lack of any artefactual evidence found during this evaluation may be significant.

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that twenty-one trenches, each some 40m long, be excavated in a pattern as indicated across the site. Each trench was 1.8m wide and excavated down to the natural subsoil. Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled Case 888 360˚ excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

A record was made of the depth of the subsoil in each trench and the character of the natural subsoil.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations and plans were recorded at appropriate scales and colour photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

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

Site conditions were very good, with dry spring weather and sunshine during the work.

5.0 **Results** (see Appendix).

Within each trench, excavation was taken down to the natural subsoil, which everywhere lay below a ploughsoil of mid red-brown sandy loam, with occasional stones: this was between 0.30m and 0.40m thick. The natural subsoil across the site was generally a mid-red brown sandy gravel of glacial origin, with pockets of chalky material visible as irregular patches in several trenches.

No archaeological features were seen in any of the twenty-one trenches, except for a modern waterpipe in Trench 19 and a large feature of glacial origin in Trench 12 (see Table 1).

Trench	**Features**
1	None
2	None
3	None
4	None
5	None
6	None
7	None
8	None
9	None
10	None
11	None
12	Large feature of glacial origin
13	None
14	None
15	None
16	None
17	None
18	None
19	Modern waterpipe
20	None
21	None

Table 1: Trenches and Associated Features

The glacial feature appeared distinctly against the bright sand, with quite sharp edges. Its fill was a darker soily gravel with many flints and flecks of chalk. Within the trench it measured some 18m across. It may be interpreted as a natural feature: the contours in the field fall into its possible centre and the fill is essentially a gravel with small fragments of glacial material. The lack of any archaeological features within the other twenty trenches also supports to this conclusion.

It was anticipated that some evidence of the cropmark seen in 1970 might be found, but nothing was seen in any of the trenches.

The absence of archaeological features across the site is also matched by a complete absence of finds (of any date) from the trenches and from a cursory scan of the field surface. Although the presence of a few prehistoric flints might be expected in such a large area, in fact, none was found.

6.0 Conclusions

The absence of archaeology here may seem remarkable, but one might note that the early maps show this area as close to *Wells Heath,* which is likely to have been of very ancient, even prehistoric origin. Not until Enclosure in the 19th century was this heath brought into arable cultivation and the current field layout and field barns established. The field lies on the edge of the parish, possibly outside the main area of open fields and probably brought in from the heath in the medieval or early post-medieval period.

The general area is very dry and therefore unattractive to early settlement, which may be postulated lay along the valleys to the east and west (elsewhere closely focussed on meres: *e.g.* Egmere), rather than on this dry interfluve. The generally late beginnings of cultivation here may also be reflected in the relatively shallow depth of the ploughsoil, about 0.30-0.40m generally, resting directly upon the sandy gravels.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Coke Estates Ltd for commissioning this work. The writer was assisted on site by Richard Sims, Kerry Tyler and Claire Floyd. JT Plant Hire of Binham provided a machine. This report was produced and illustrated by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

Appendix: Trench Descriptions

Trench	Natural deposits	Date
1	Yellow-brown sand and gravel	Natural
2	Brown sand with patches of chalk and gravel	Natural
3	Orange-brown sand and gravel	Natural
4	Red sand with patches of chalk	Natural
5	Yellow-brown sand with chalk patches	Natural
6	Red brown sand, chalk bands at south-east	Natural
7	Orange brown sand	Natural
8	Orange brown sand and gravel	Natural
9	Red brown sand; patches of chalk	Natural
10	Red brown sand and chalk in bands north-west to south-east	Natural
11	Orange sand	Natural
12	Yellow sand containing a large glacial feature at least 18,000 years old	Natural (glacial)
13	Red brown sand, band of chalk north-south	Natural
14	Reddish-brown sand; bands of chalk	Natural
15	Orange brown sand; chalk patches	Natural
16	Orange sand; chalk patches	Natural
17	Orange gravel	Natural
18	Red brown sand; bands of chalk east-west	Natural
19	Orange sand containing a modern waterpipe	Modern
20	Red brown sand	Natural
21	Banded yellow-brown sand	Natural

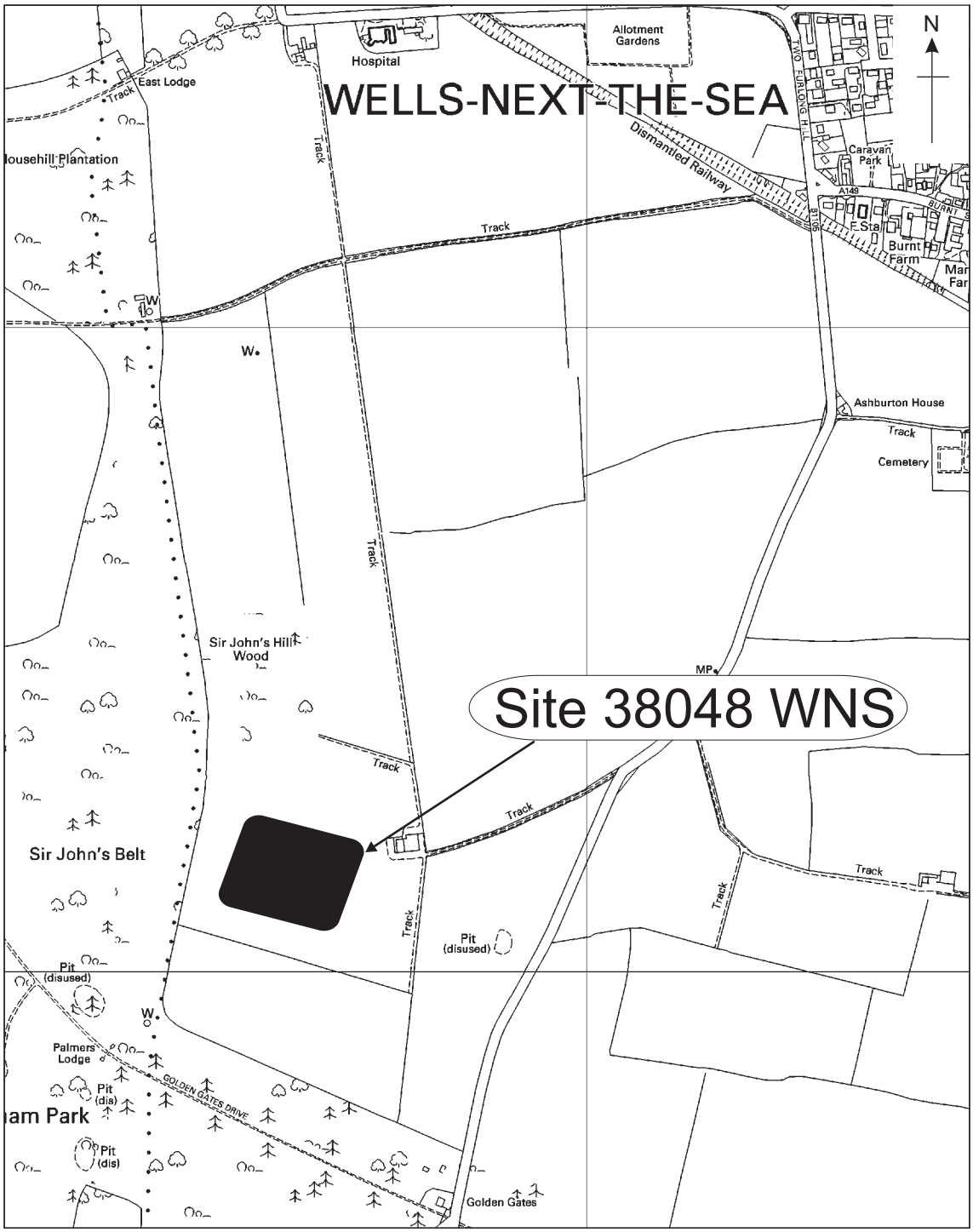

Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:10,000

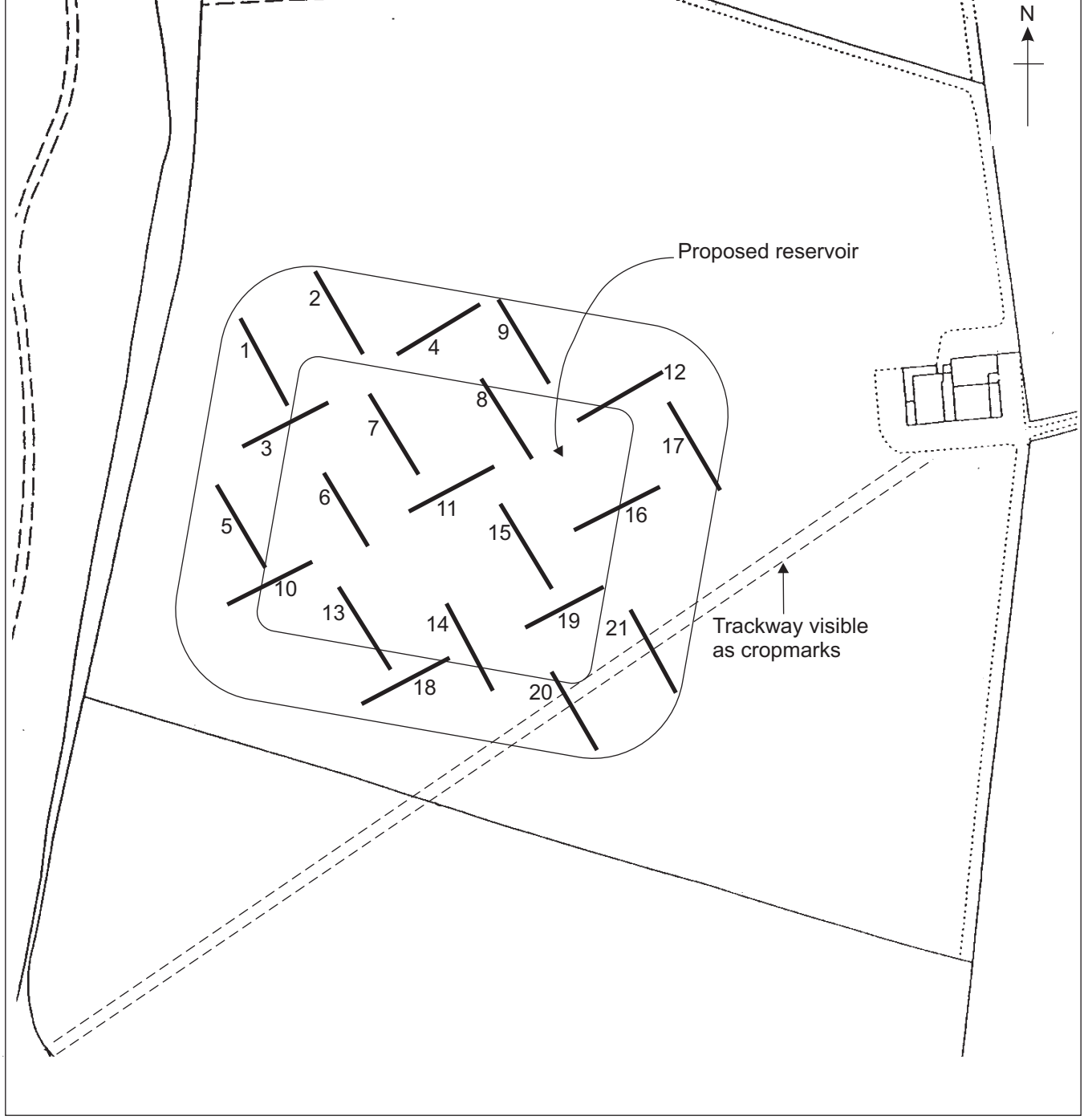

Figure 2. Location of Trenches. Scale 1:2500