

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 804

**A Watching Brief at
4, Elm Hill Norwich, Norfolk**

38109N

David Adams

May 2003

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Contents

Summary

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Archaeological and Historical Background
- 3.0 Methodology
- 4.0 Observations
- 5.0 Conclusions

Bibliography

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Figures

- Fig.1 Site Location
- Fig.2 East-facing Section

Local Authority No.076759

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Location: 4, Elm Hill Norwich, Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 62318 30879
HER No: 38109N
Date of Fieldwork: 10th March and 12th March 2003

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of two foundation trenches to the rear of 4, Elm Hill Norwich. The observation of these trenches revealed natural chalk bedrock, overlain by an undated sandy soil. A sloping brick structure of post-medieval date, probably associated with the construction of the present property, and a 19th century cellar wall were also recorded. The modern garden soil which sealed these features was cut by a 20th century drain and a set of steps that incorporated a re-used gravestone. The gravestone may have originated from the 14th-century Dominican friary; Blackfriars Hall is situated close-by to the north-west.

1.0 Introduction

Fig. 1

Excavation of a foundation trenches to the rear of 4, Elm Hill required a watching brief to be undertaken by an approved archaeological contractor. The Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) carried out this work in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: AH/28/03) and a NAU Method Statement for watching briefs.

The work was funded by Discovery Contractors Ltd.

The internal structure of the property at 4, Elm Hill has been monitored by the Norwich City Council Building Conservation and Design section during the current renovations.

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

2.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site is located within the historic core of Norwich as defined by the medieval city walls. The immediate vicinity is dominated by the imposing presence of Blackfriars Hall, part of a Dominican friary founded in early 14th century and amongst the finest surviving examples in the country. The western extent of the friary appears to have been bounded to the east by Elm Hill.

Reference to Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER 194, 428, 462, 746, 827, 26331 and 26370) show that little archaeological work has taken place within the area, mostly constituting small scale evaluations and watching briefs (Ames 1999).

Observations of the adjacent building at 2, Elm Hill (HER 26370) suggest it was built in the early 17th-century. During works at 2, Princes Street moreover, the presence of a vaulted undercroft was conjectured (P. Insley pers comm) which has implications for all properties in the vicinity, where evidence for undercrofts or cellars might survive.

3.0 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during building works at the property.

The Brief required appropriate archaeological observation and that a record of the following should be made:

1. All areas of underground disturbance, including excavations, foundation trenches, drains and soakaways
2. Above ground remains when the development affects a building of historic importance
3. Pipeline and cable trenches

This involved a constant attendance by an archaeologist at points when any such work was to be undertaken.

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.

The watching brief observed two hand-excavated foundation trenches, for an extension to the property, located in the rear garden. NAU staff monitored this work on the 10th March and 12th March 2003.

Access to the site was through the street frontage of 4, Elm Hill.

4.0 Observations

Fig. 2

The watching brief monitored two foundations trenches aligned approximately north-to-south and east-to-west. The larger of these, the north-to-south trench, measured 3.80m x 0.40m x 1.40m (maximum) in depth. In the base of the southern end of this trench a solid chalk deposit ([10]) was observed, the clean nature of which suggested it was natural bedrock. This was overlain by a mid brown sand silt ([9]), measuring 0.30m in depth, with inclusions of occasional charcoal flecks. This deposit was sealed by a sloping brick structure ([7]). The sloping brick structure was constructed of red/orange brick (measuring 0.20m in length and 0.05m in depth) in three courses and the whole structure sloped down from south to north. The only other standing masonry observed was a red brick 19th to early 20th century cellar wall ([5]) that was cut away by the foundation trench. This wall continued below the base of the foundation trench. Sealing both walls ([5] and [7]) was a dark brown humic garden soil ([2]) with inclusions of brick and plaster. This was cut by modern features consisting of a set of steps ([1]) and brick drain ([3]). A fragment of stone slab measuring 0.56m in length and 0.44m in width and 0.10m in depth formed part of these steps. One edge of the slab had a clear bevel, while the stone had a swirled appearance similar to Purbeck marble. This was thought to be a fragment of a medieval grave slab most likely originating from Blackfriars Hall.

The east-to-west foundation trench measured 0.75m in depth and the deposits observed consisted of modern soils with plastic debris.

5.0 Conclusions

The observation of natural chalk deposit ([10]) is significant in relation to the wider topographical background of the area. While the deposit ([9]), that overlay the chalk, is of potential archaeological interest.

The broken re-used grave slab is the only artefact potentially associated with the friary site at Blackfriars Hall. Despite the location of the area under observation, no deposits or features associated with the friary were identified.

The form of structure [7] offers no obvious interpretation, although its components suggest it is of relative antiquity, possibly dating to the 18th century or earlier. A 17th-century date is ascribed to the adjacent property (HER 26370) so it is a realistic inference that this structure ([7]) might relate to the construction of 4, Elm Hill at a similar date.

The location of the 19th century cellar indicates that extensive underground remains are present, though no evidence for a medieval undercroft was observed during this watching brief.

Acknowledgements

The watching brief was undertaken by the author and David Robertson. The report was illustrated and formatted by Maggie Foottit and editing was by Alice Lyons. Thanks are due to the staff of Discovery Contractors Ltd. for their assistance and to Phil Insley of Norwich City Council for his contribution.

Bibliography

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An Archaeological Watching Brief at the Monastery car park,
NAU Report 462 (unpublished)

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description/interpretation	Period
01	Deposit	Steps	Modern
02	Deposit	Dark brown garden soil	Modern
03	Deposit	Infill of [4] and drain	Modern
04	Cut	Construction cut for [5]	Modern
05	Masonry	Cellar wall	Modern
06	Cut	Construction cut for [5]	Modern
07	Masonry	Sloping brick structure	Post-medieval?
08	Cut	Construction cut for [7]	Modern
09	Deposit	Brown sand silt soil	Unknown
10	Deposit	Chalk natural?	Unknown
11	Deposit	Rubble infill of [3]	Modern

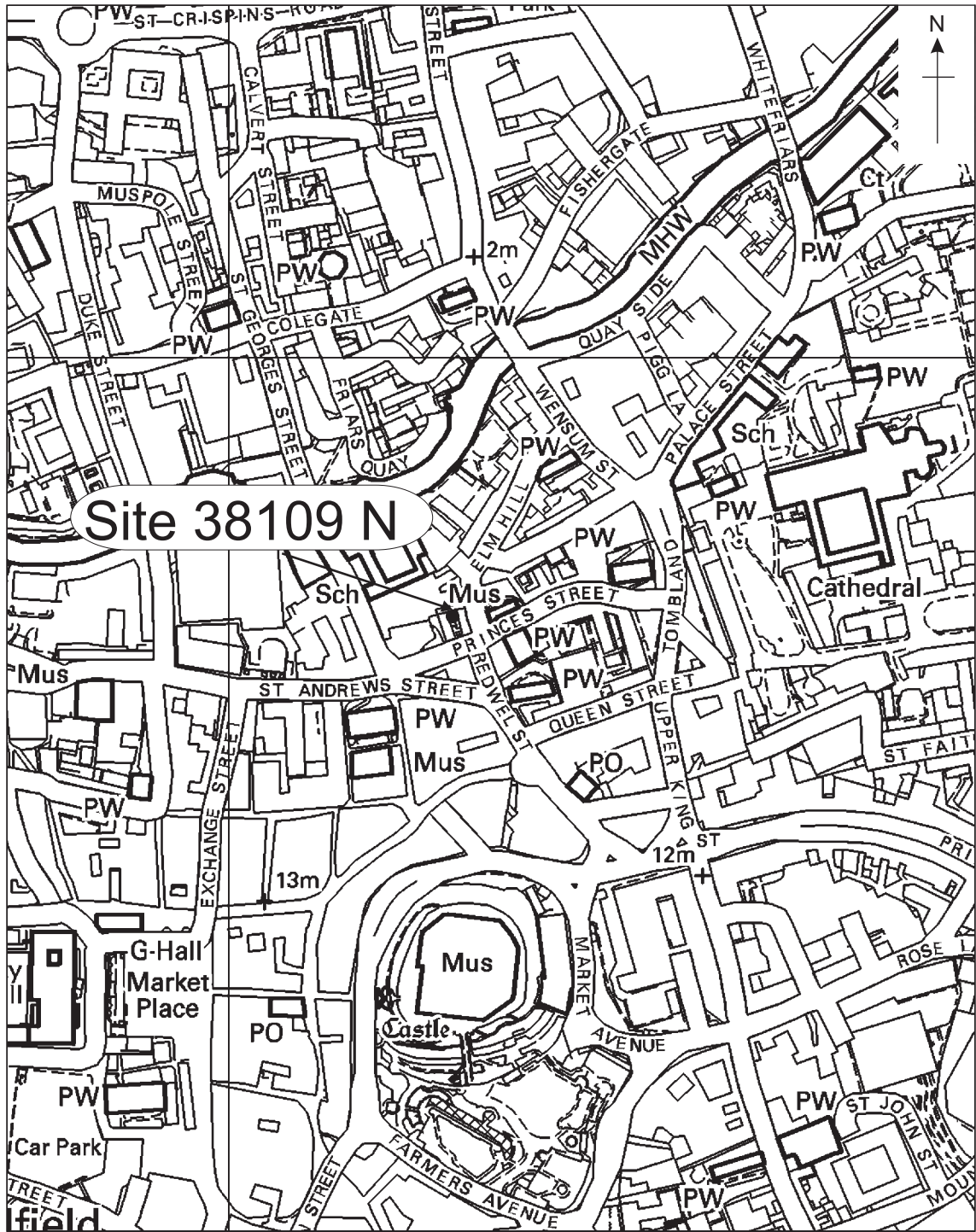


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:5000

S

N

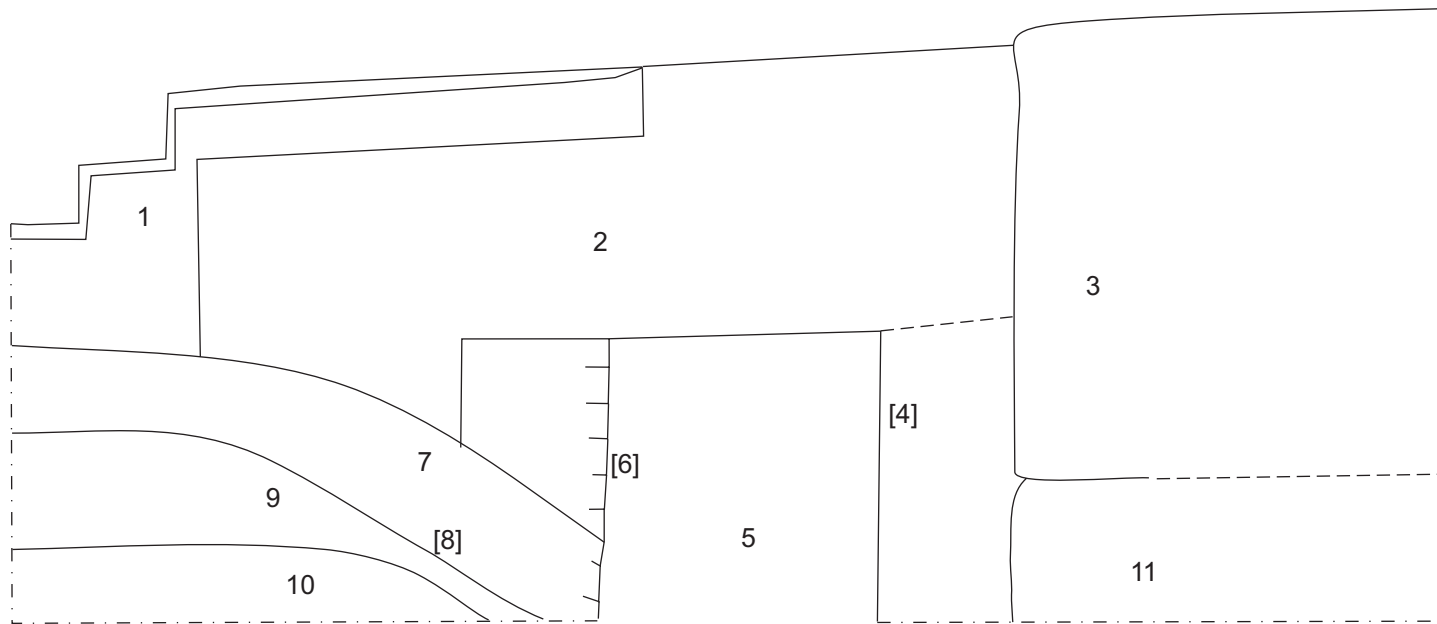


Figure 2. East-facing Section. Scale 1:20

S

This yellow mortar/concrete skin.

Yellow + pale red bricks 20thC.

(2)

(1)

3 courses - forming steps

Dark brown-black sandy loam - condensed soil
occ frags of mortar + brick
(Garden soil seen by Crest 10/3/2003)

3 courses
Orange-red bricks
Easier than cellar. Don't extend into trench.

Bricks 0.2m long by 0.05 high

mid brown sandy silt
soft shaly. loose
occ charcoal flecks.

(7) Base of bricks slope down

(9)

Chalk - solid, underlying ravine

(10)

Cellar cross wall - removed by workmen

Dark red 19thC brick. 6 courses

Back wall of cellar
Dark red 19thC brick
13 courses visible

Continues down
Set back 0.2m from cross wall

(5) CW

(6)

[4]

← Infill of drain

Loose blown loam, occ mortar + brick frags

(6)

[8] 3 courses

Loose blown loam, occ mortar + brick frags

ete shun.

bricks 20thC.

(2)

dark brown-black sandy loam - crumbly soil
frag of mortar + brick
- soil seen by Crest 10/3/2003

cellar
cross wall -
removed by
workmen
dark red 19thC
brick. 6
courses

Back wall of cellar
Dark red 19thC brick
13 courses visible
Continues down

Set back 0.2m
from cross wall

(5) CW [6]

[7] bricks slope
down

[8] 3 courses

[4]

Infill of
dram
Loose blown
loam, o.c
mortar + brick
frag

(3)

man hole

20thC brick build

pale yellow o.c below

Loose rubble, cellar infill.
reg mortar frags / Dark grey brown
loam mixed - Occ brick frags

(N)

PLAN SECTION NO.	
DRAWN BY	DK
CHECKED BY	
DATE	12/3/03
SCALE	1:10
NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT	

NOTES

(2)

20th C
with
old.

man
hole



NOTES

SITE

38109 A