

Report No. 805

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Middleton VC Primary  
School, Middleton, Norfolk**

38049 MDT

**NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

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School,  
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B. P. Hobbs

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Location: Middleton VC Primary School, Middleton, Norfolk  
Grid Ref: TF 66351 15792  
HER No.: 38049 MDT  
Date of Fieldwork: 17th and 18th February 2003

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation at Middleton VC Primary School excavated two holes within the footprint of a proposed building extension. No features or finds of archaeological interest were observed in either of the two trial excavations.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Norfolk Property Services as part of a programme of building work including an extension of the main school building. The programme of archaeological work was partly instigated due to a previous discovery approximately 100m to the north of the school of human skeletal remains that suggested an early Saxon burial. Two evaluation trenches were to be excavated within the footprint of the proposed extension, both 3m by 3m in size.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: AJRH 26/11/02) and a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: MS/Eval/JB/1522).

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**

Fig. 1

The underlying natural of the area along the ridge at Middleton is a yellow-brown clay and sand marl located beneath homogenous brown sandy subsoils and a dark loam topsoil.

The site is located to the east of School Road in the village of Middleton, 4km to the south-east of Kings Lynn in West Norfolk. The village occupies a ridge between two canalised rivers, the Nar to the south and the course of the Middleton Stop Drain to the north. The slope to the south of the village drops approximately 40m OD to the valley floor which is open to the main fenland basin at its west end.

The soil is quite well drained in the area of the site, the water table being encountered at the line of the natural at a depth of c.0.90m from the surface.

### 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

There has been little previous archaeological work in the village of Middleton itself however, there have been several interventions within the parish notably at Blackborough End, to the south of Middleton. The NAU have undertaken surveys and investigations in advance of quarrying operations in the Blackborough End area (Penn 1995; Crowson 1998; Bates 2003), while the NAU and others have undertaken other research (Bates & Crowson 1991) as well as excavations of Romano-British Roman (de Bootman 1983; de Bootman 1984; Gurney 1990) and medieval (Rogerson and Ashley 1985) pottery kilns, also a late Roman saltern (Crowson 2001).

In Middleton itself several finds of archaeological interest have been found and listed in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER). These include Romano-British pottery sherds located approximately 300m south-west of the school (HER 3389); early medieval pottery from 100m to the north-east (HER 31614), and an extended human skeleton, purportedly lying in a north-south position denoting a pagan burial, located c.100m north of the present site (HER 3392) found in 1967.

### 4.0 Methodology

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 two machine excavated holes, both 3m by 3m, be dug within the footprint of the proposed extension to the depth of the underlying natural, or to a level displaying archaeological features.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision, removing the soil horizon in 100mm spits. All spoil was retained on site and the holes backfilled at the close of the excavation, the ground and broken asphalt from the playground being consolidated by the machine and fenced off.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

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.

Site conditions were clear and bright.

### 5.0 Results

Fig. 2

#### ***Trial Trench 1***

Trial trench 1 located approximately 5m to the south-east of the school was excavated to a depth of 0.98m whereupon the natural marl clay was uncovered. Root traces were observed within the natural deposit as narrow fairly linear striations running north to south filled with an orange-brown sandy subsoil. No features of archaeological interest were observed. Above the natural marl was a deposit of



orange-brown silty sand subsoil containing occasional small to medium flints. The depth of the subsoil was an average of 0.58m across the trench.

Above the depth of subsoil of an average depth of 0.40m was dark brown loam topsoil containing occasional small flints and organic material. From the interface between this topsoil and the underlying sand subsoil, one fragment of animal rib bone belonging to a young sheep or goat was recovered. This rib had been cleanly severed midway indicating butchery. The bone was not located within a feature nor associated with any artefactual evidence to determine its provenance. It was regarded as residual material, probably post-medieval in date. No other finds were recovered from the trench.

### ***Trial Trench 2***

This trench was located 5m to the east of the school building on the hardstanding of the playground. The 0.15m thick asphalt surface was lifted and a 0.20m thick layer of crushed concrete and pebbles was encountered. Beneath this was the same orange-brown silty sand subsoil containing moderate small flints as found in the first trench, but with the addition of broken modern brick fragments in the upper layer. The topsoil in this area appeared to have been removed and replaced by the crushed concrete bedding material when the hardstanding was laid.

The subsoil was, as in the first trench, devoid of features and artefactual evidence. Beneath this the marl clay natural was reached at a total depth of 0.90m. Within the natural were two irregularly shaped depressions, to the west and south sides of the trench, one to the west being c.2m long and the one to the south c.1.5m long. There were also several smaller individual sub-circular depressions within the natural base which appeared to be root holes.

The depressions were filled with the same silty sand subsoil as could be seen in the trench section above them. The depression near the north trench section was partially excavated at its north end to provide a profile of the depression, which proved to have an irregular base with root holes. No dating evidence could be found in the excavated area and the soil was as archaeologically sterile, as was the deposit above it.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

Trench 1 exhibited no features or finds of archaeological interest and apart from the cut animal rib of probable post-medieval in origin retrieved from the topsoil.

In Trench 2, under the playground, the initial appearance of the edges of the subsoil-filled depressions gave the impression of features, but when excavated it was clear that these were natural features. From the evidence of separate root holes within the natural, as well as what appeared to be a deep taproot hole in the base of the excavated depression, it was concluded that the features were probably tree boles, the larger one possibly as the result of a fallen tree. No finds of archaeological interest were recovered from the trench and it can be assumed that prior to the construction of the school in the late 19th century the area now occupied was farmland.

The location of the human remains c.100m to the north of the school poses the question whether the internment was an isolated incident or was part of a cemetery, now lost. The lack of evidence retrieved during this project however, indicates that if

a Saxon cemetery did exist, then it did not extend as far south as the area under consideration.

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

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Mr David Logan, consultant architect dealing with the project for Norfolk Property Services, for his assistance during the evaluation.

The trial trenches were ably machine excavated by Middleton Aggregates. The evaluation was carried out by Chris Phillips and the author. The animal bone was examined by Julie Curl. The report was illustrated and produced by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

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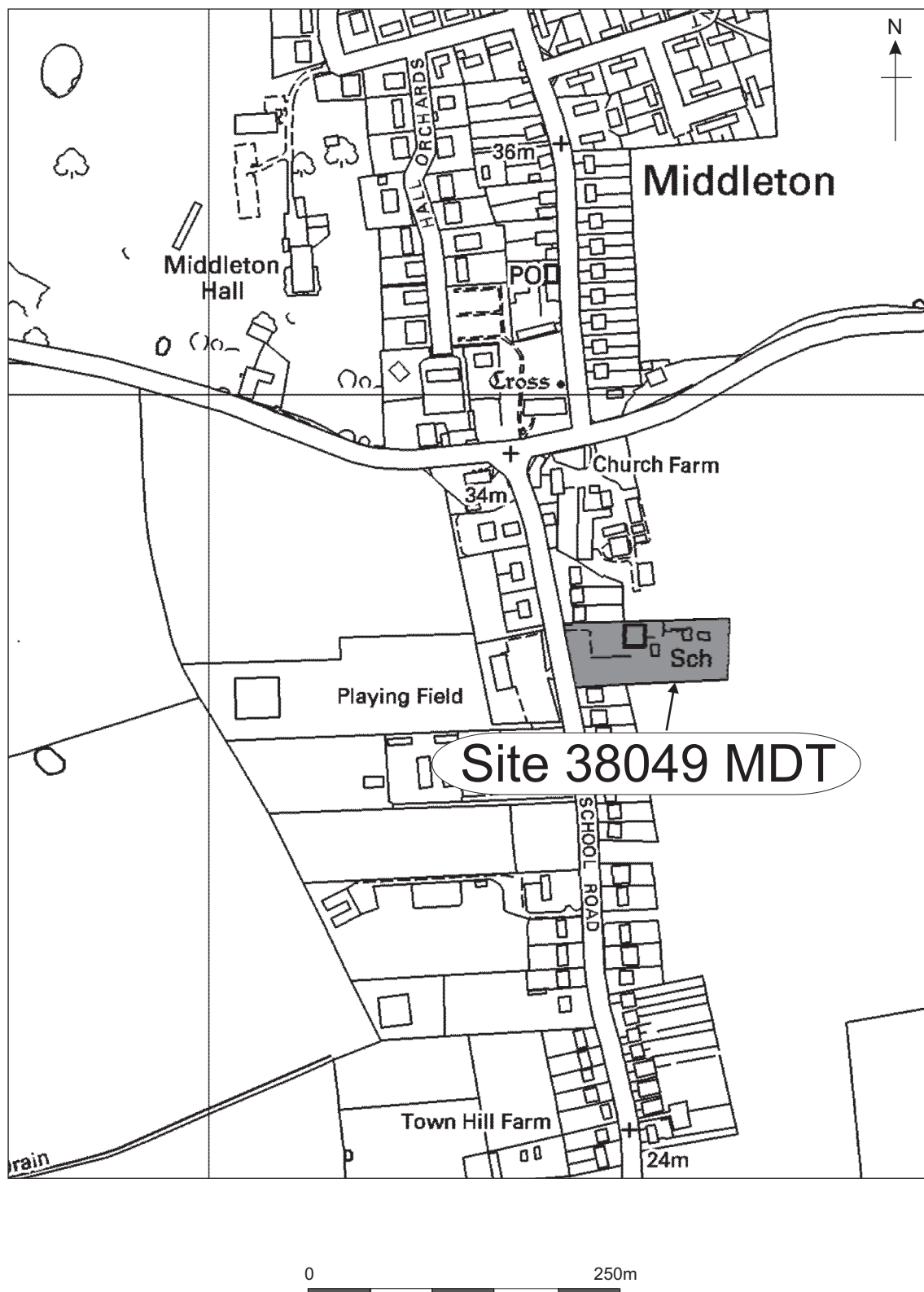


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:5,000

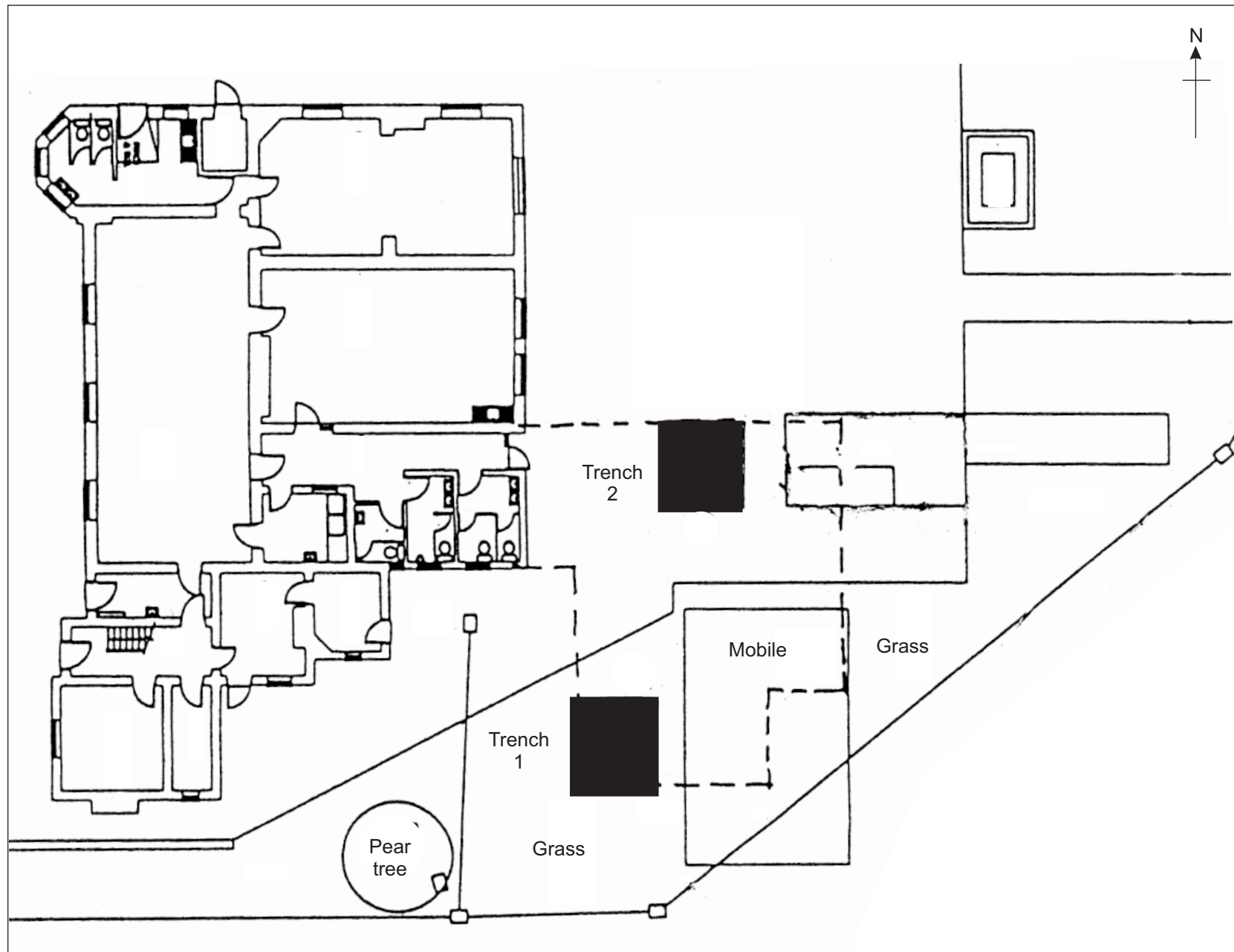


Figure 2. Trench Location. Not to scale