

Report 2459



nau archaeology

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Captain Mainwaring's Statue, Bridge Street, Thetford

HER ENF 124749



Prepared for
The Friends of Dad's Army Museum
Belmont House
20 King Street
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 2AP



Rebecca Sillwood BA, PIFA

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PROJECT CHECKLIST		
Project Manager	Nigel Page	
Draft Completed	Rebecca Sillwood	02/06/2010
Graphics Completed	David Dobson	11/06/2010
Edit Completed	Jayne Bown	14/06/2010
Signed Off	Nigel Page	14/06/2010
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NAU Archaeology

Scandic House
85 Mountergate
Norwich
NR1 1PY

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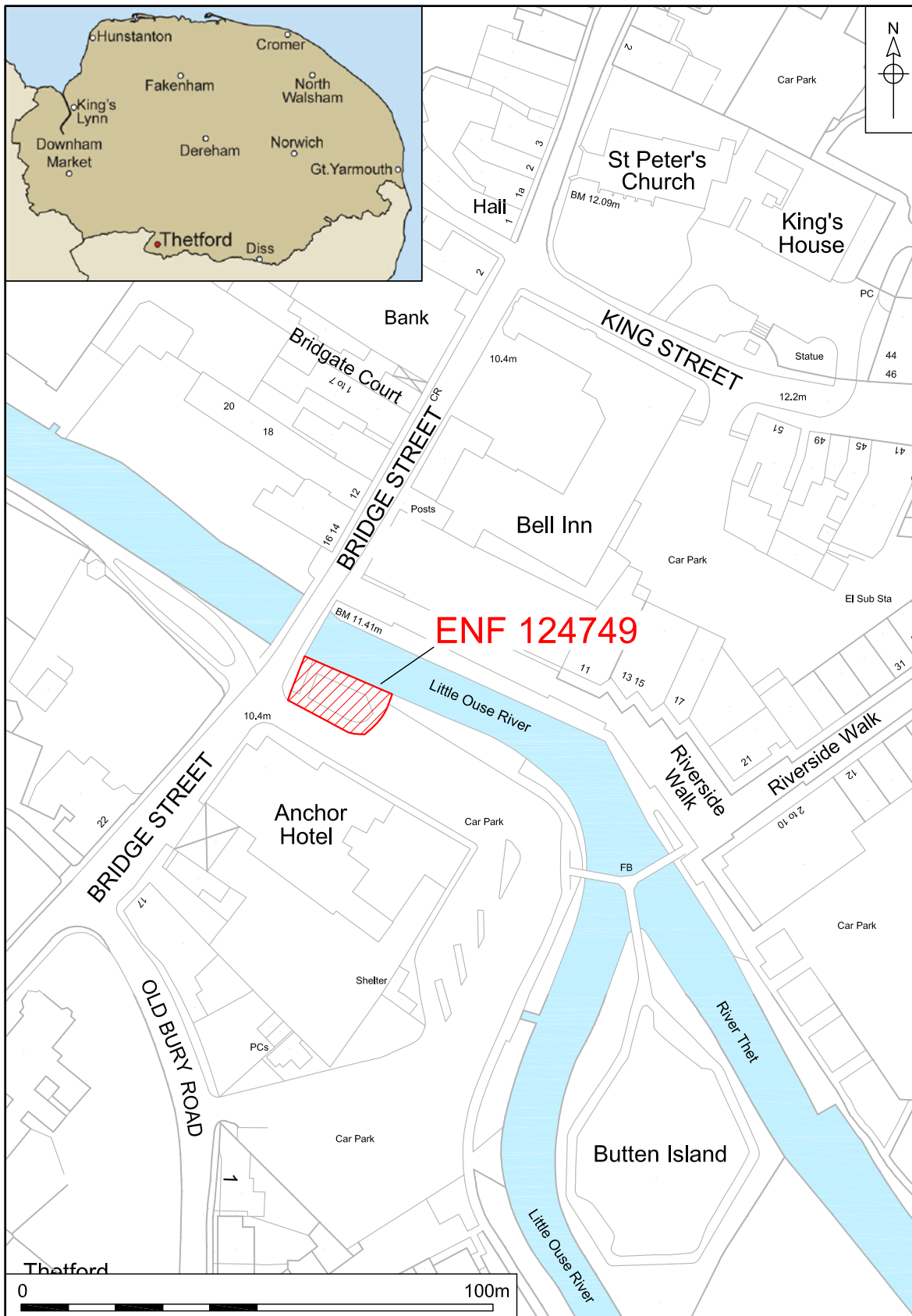
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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:1250

Location: Bridge Street, Thetford
District: Breckland
Grid Ref.: TL 8686 8306
HER No.: ENF 124749
SM No.: Norfolk 298
Client: Friends of Dad's Army Museum
Dates of Fieldwork: 1st June 2010

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted for The Friends of Dad's Army Museum ahead of the erection of a statue to the 'Dad's Army' character Captain Mainwaring.

The monitored excavations were for the concrete foundations of the base of the statue, and the location of the site, within a Scheduled Monument and within the Late Saxon town, meant that constant archaeological monitoring was required.

The excavations did not locate any archaeological features or finds. It is thought that the depth of the trench (0.45m) was insufficient to interfere with any buried deposits of antiquity. The deposits within the trench consisted entirely of modern made-ground.

The statue itself is a figure of Captain Mainwaring sitting on a bench, with an arrowhead-shaped Union Jack coloured base, made of brick. A path is to lead up to the statue, and the location, near to the Town Bridge, and with the former Home Guard Headquarters of the town in the background, is to present an ideal photograph opportunity for visitors. The town of Thetford was used for on location filming for the series, which ran from 1968 to 1977. The cast and crew used the nearby pubs, The Anchor and The Bell.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was required to monitor the excavation of a foundation trench for a statue of Captain Mainwaring, of the television series 'Dad's Army'. Constant archaeological supervision was required on the area, due to its location within a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and within the limits of the Late Saxon town. An area measuring 2.0m by 1.1m, with a depth of 0.45m was excavated.

The work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Breckland District Council and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (Ref. CNF42839). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. BAU2459). This work was commissioned and funded by the Friends of Dad's Army Museum.

This programme of 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 Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology of the development area is Upper Cretaceous Chalk, which in the Thetford area contains many flint nodules¹. Within the study area this is overlain by drift geology of river terrace gravels². Due to the developed nature of the area, the Soil Survey of England and Wales have found that the soil on the site comprises the permeable sandy and peaty soils of the Isleham 2 Association³.

Previous test pits excavated within the car park of the Anchor Hotel (Phillips, 1998) found that layers of rubble and post-medieval make-up were present to depth of around 0.6m.

The area was previously a patch of unused grass at the northern corner of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. Until the current works there were several trees growing there, which have since been removed. The River Little Ouse runs along the north of the area, with the confluence of the Ouse with the River Thet nearby. Bridge Street borders the north-western edge of the site, and the car park and disused Anchor Hotel lie to the south.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Thetford contains a sparse amount of prehistoric activity, within a 200m radius of the site there are only three sites with evidence of the period. An excavation to the north-west of the site in 1999 (NHER 34338) recovered a deep homogenous soil, which contained some possible Neolithic struck flints. Some possible re-deposited Iron Age pottery was found in the garden of 32 Bridge Street (NHER 5829) in 1894. And, again in Bridge Street, in the garden of number 30, an excavation recovered several sherd of Iron Age or Early Saxon pottery.

It is during the Late Saxon period that Thetford really came into its own, enjoying a population boom and increased activity. It is thought that the southern bank of the Ouse River is where the occupation was centred, and the river crossing at Bridge Street is likely to have been the main crossing into the town. The town was enclosed by defensive earthworks, encompassing an area of c.75 hectares. The origin and dates of two sets of defences (northern and southern) are unknown; Hoggett (2009) states that 'perhaps the West Saxons built a new 'burh' here when they took East Anglia from the Danes in 917'. Various excavations around Thetford have revealed further details of the Late Saxon town, including an excavation in 2004 on land nearby, behind 30 Bridge Street (NHER 40942). This evaluation recovered deeply stratified deposits of the period, with no evidence for

¹ British Geological Survey. 1985. *East Anglia* Sheet 52N 00 Solid Geology. Southampton: Ordnance Survey.

² British Geological Survey. 1991. *East Anglia* Sheet 52N 00 Drift Geology. Southampton: Ordnance Survey.

³ Hodge, C.A.H., Burton, R.G.O., Corbett, W.M., Evans, R. and Seale, R.S. 1984. *Soils and their use in Eastern England*. Harpenden: Soil Survey of England and Wales.

buildings, but with certain evidence for occupation nearby in the form of refuse pits. This site also discovered evidence for metalworking, and recovered over 1,300 sherds of pottery, a 10th-century glass-inlaid pewter brooch and a Viking arrowhead.

The medieval town of Thetford developed on the northern bank of the Ouse, whereas the Saxons had also occupied the southern area. By the early medieval period the town had declined in importance, being somewhat in the shadow of Norwich. The archaeological evidence points to a gradual abandonment of the town to the south of the river and by the 12th and 13th centuries large areas of what was once the Saxon town were used for agriculture. The hospital of SS Mary and Julian, which stood on the northern side of Town Bridge, was established in c.1135 for travellers and pilgrims (NHER 1 1945). Within the area that Thetford Grammar School (NHER 5750) now occupies lies an area of important ecclesiastical sites, including a possible minster site, that of the church of St. Mary the Great, which is thought to be located somewhere in the vicinity. A Cluniac priory was founded on the Grammar School site in c.1104, by Roger Bigod, which incorporated St. Mary's church. By 1107 the site was already deemed to be too small for the needs of the monastery, and a new site was begun on the north-eastern bank of the river. In c.1114 the original site was abandoned, and the monks transferred to their new buildings (NHER 5748). In 1335 the original site was granted to the Dominican Friars by its founder, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, and a Friary was founded. The Friary had an attached hospital, one of six such buildings in Thetford. The Prior surrendered the Friary to Henry VIII in 1538, at the Dissolution, who granted the site to Sir Richard Fulmerston. After this the buildings were probably robbed and abandoned, and the 17th-century school buildings incorporated what was left of the Friary buildings.

In the post-medieval period, as Hoggett states, 'Thetford was a small town dominated by its many religious houses', although after the Dissolution swept these away Thetford had little to revive its fortunes. The fortunes of the town waned further, and the site was under warehouses and tanneries in the 19th century.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this Watching Brief was to record and interpret any remains exposed during the works within the development area.

The Brief required that constant archaeological attendance during any groundworks was maintained.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled mini-digger equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision.

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.

No environmental samples were taken due to the lack of suitable archaeological deposits encountered.

Digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

Site conditions were fair, with the work taking place in cloudy but dry weather.



Plate 1. The site, looking north-west, Town Bridge in background

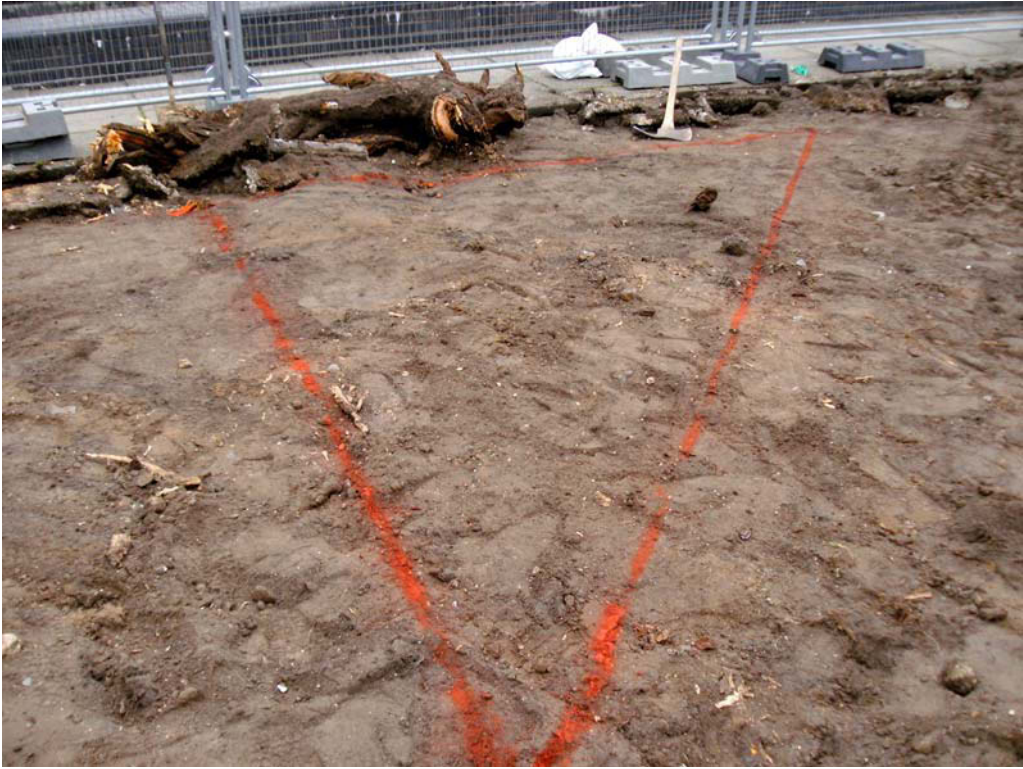


Plate 2. The arrowhead shaped area, marked out

5.0 RESULTS

The trench excavated within the arrow head-shaped area marked out (Plate 2), was a rectangle (the shape of the bench that the statue of Captain Mainwaring is depicted sitting on), measuring 2m by 1.1m, with a depth of 0.45m.

The area contained only one deposit, which was a mid brown silty-sand (1), with frequent chalk and flint inclusions of varying sizes. (Plate 3) The conclusion was reached that the area had been disturbed recently due to the finding of modern concrete and kerbstones towards the base of the trench.



Plate 3. The trench, post-excavation, looking north-east

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The area the statue was located in is full of archaeological potential, but it has been previously noted that any Saxon or medieval material is likely to be at some depth. The area has been disturbed greatly in recent years, and the use of the area surrounding the site as a car park is likely to have interfered with any below-ground remains.

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

Acknowledgements

The author also undertook the fieldwork and would like to acknowledge the help of Corrine Fulford, of the Dad's Army Museum, and TJM Groundworks who undertook the excavation of the trench. The graphics were produced by David Dobson and the report was edited by Jayne Bown.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Make-up layer	Make-up layer	Modern