

Report 2269



nau archaeology

An Archaeological Evaluation on land south of Sir Edward Stracey Road, Rackheath, Norfolk

ENF 124221



Prepared for
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Location:	Sir Edward Stracey Road, Rackheath
District:	Broadland
Grid Ref.:	TG 2794 1325
HER No.:	ENF 124 221
Client:	Wherry Housing Association
Dates of Fieldwork:	25–26 February 2010

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Wherry Housing Association ahead of a small residential development on the northern side of Rackheath, near Norwich. The evaluation comprised four trenches. Trenches 1 to 3 contained no archaeology, while Trench 4, which was located closest to the road, contained two gullies and a small pit which were almost certainly modern and probably connected with the allotments situated there in the recent past. A fragment of concrete was found within one of the gullies. At the southern end of Trench 4 was an undated ditch which probably represented an earlier field boundary; it does not appear on any recent maps and would appear to predate 1887. At the northern end of the trench an Upper Palaeolithic flint tool was found in the top of the natural silt, suggesting that the natural silt may be of archaeological interest.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Wherry Housing Association ahead of a small residential development on the northern side of Rackheath, near Norwich. The development site is 0.3 hectares and is located just to the south of Sir Edward Stracey Road (Fig. 1). The development was designed and undertaken by Wherry Housing Association and consists of five dwellings with gardens.

This project was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Broadland District Council (Ref. 20090444) and a brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (Ref. CNF42388). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2269/DW). This work was commissioned and funded by Wherry Housing Association.

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 solid geology consists of Norwich Crag sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 2010). The superficial geology consists of rich loams, specifically of the Happisburgh Glacigenic Formation (British Geological Survey 2010).

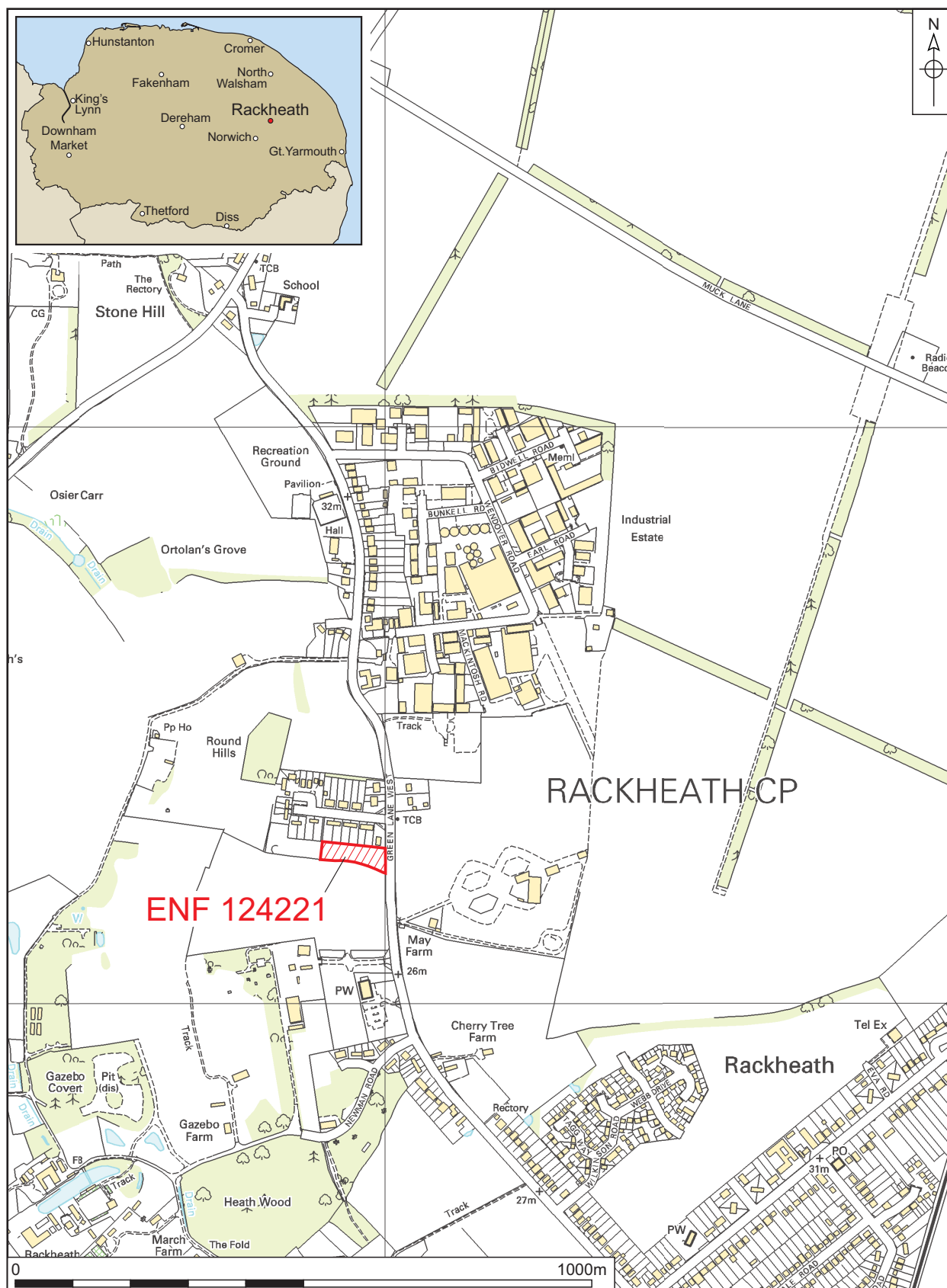


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

The topsoil observed on the site consists of a dark brown clayey silt which contained moderate amounts of flint. The topsoil depth varied between 0.20m at the western end of the site to 0.60m at the eastern end. There was often a thick subsoil present on the site which had almost certainly formed in recent years during the use of the plot as an allotment. The subsoil became thicker towards the southern end of Trench 2 due to colluvial accumulation in a natural hollow. It varied in depth between 0.15m and 0.20m and was generally composed of a mottled greyish-brown and light brown silt. The subsoil was not present towards the western side of the site in Trench 1. The natural substratum was a bright yellowish sand and gravel. It was present in the base of Trenches 1 to 3. The base of Trench 4 also contained a layer of naturally deposited silt above the sand and gravel.

The site is situated at 30m OD, on a slightly sloping, undulating spur of land immediately south of Sir Edward Stracey Road (Plate 1). Until relatively recently the plot had operated as an allotment, and due to this was still overgrown, with occasional garden sheds present. The nearest river is the Bure which runs through the town of Wroxham 4km to the north-east. Due to the clayey nature of the topsoil, drainage was not ideal, however the sandy substratum and gentle sloping topography mitigated this.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, Rackheath was formed out of two distinct villages, one called Great Rackheath, the other Little Rackheath, and each village had its own church. At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, the king was the principal landowner, with Godric acting as steward. There were 3 freemen who held 3 carucates of land, with 3 villans, 12 borderers, and 4 servi; and there were 5 carucates and 7 acres of meadow (Blomefield 1809).

There have been few finds or sites within Rackheath of the prehistoric period, especially close to the site. To the north-west of the site a Neolithic flint axe had been found (NHER 16104) and to the south-east at Sprowston Manor Golf Course there is record of some prehistoric pits with later features (NHER 36799). To the east of the site are the cropmarks of a possible Neolithic oval barrow or mortuary enclosure (NHER 18875).

Evidence for the Roman period is sparse, although a Roman road is thought to lie close to the Sprowston Manor Golf Course. Some Roman sherds were found during the laying of a new pipe to the west of the site in 1998 (HER 33750).

There is more evidence for the medieval period and the number of HER entries reflects this. Of most relevance to the site is NHER 31541 which is situated immediately to the south of the site and refers to a series of medieval burials which were probably located within the churchyard of Rackheath Parva church. The three or four burials were seen in 1995 during excavations for a new extension to a house and they were aligned west-east. Immediately to the south, NHER 12639 is thought to be the location of the possible site of Little Rackheath church. Documentary sources indicate that it had fallen out of use and decayed by the 16th century. The exact whereabouts for the church have never been pinpointed.

A medieval road (Ravensgate Way), running from Rackheath to Sprowston and Norwich, has been postulated (NHER 8127), and is recorded on maps of 1585 and

1906. Though the exact position of the road is unknown, parts of the route are visible as a hollow way. The road is associated with evidence of a settlement thought to be of medieval date to the east of the site (NHER 50730 and 39886).

Rackheath Park (NHER 30518) is located reasonably close to the site. It was already in existence by 1588 and had major woodland belts. It was extended to the south in 1834 and was given a new southern entrance and avenue. The park was further enhanced and by 1877 it had further wooded areas, with deer and a lake. An orchid house was still present in the 19th century, but had been removed by 1919. Reasonably close to the site was a possible 17th-century flint building (NHER 8163).

There are several HER entries connected with the Second World War. To the east of the site was the airfield at Rackheath (NHER 8170). The airfield was operated by the USA 8th Airforce and opened in 1943. The related domestic site (NHER 50740) for the airmen and staff is visible on aerial photographs from the 1980s and 1990s as clusters of huts and other structures dispersed across Rackheath Park (NHER 30518). The important military site had its own defences in the form of spigot mortar emplacements.

To the east of the site, undated and post-medieval field boundaries and other cropmarks have been observed on aerial photographs (NHER 50725). To the west also are many undated cropmarks (NHER 50744)

A hydraulic ram which probably dated to the 19th century (NHER 8176) is still located close to the site. It is said to have pumped water to Rackheath Hall. The ram still exists (although disused) and is housed in a shed, with an inlet pipe from a nearby lake.

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 at least 5% of the development area be sample excavated.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. 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.

A single undated sample was taken from ditch [12], but after consultation with James Albone (Norfolk Landscape Archaeology) it was discarded.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Colour, monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

During the course of this work, each trench had its own temporary benchmark which was created when the trenches were laid out using a Leica GPS900 RTK rover device. The TBMs were respectively 27.66m OD (Trench 1), 25.95m OD (Trench 2), 26.68m OD (Trench 3) and 26.89m OD (Trench 4). During levelling of the site the TBM of Trench 2 was used.

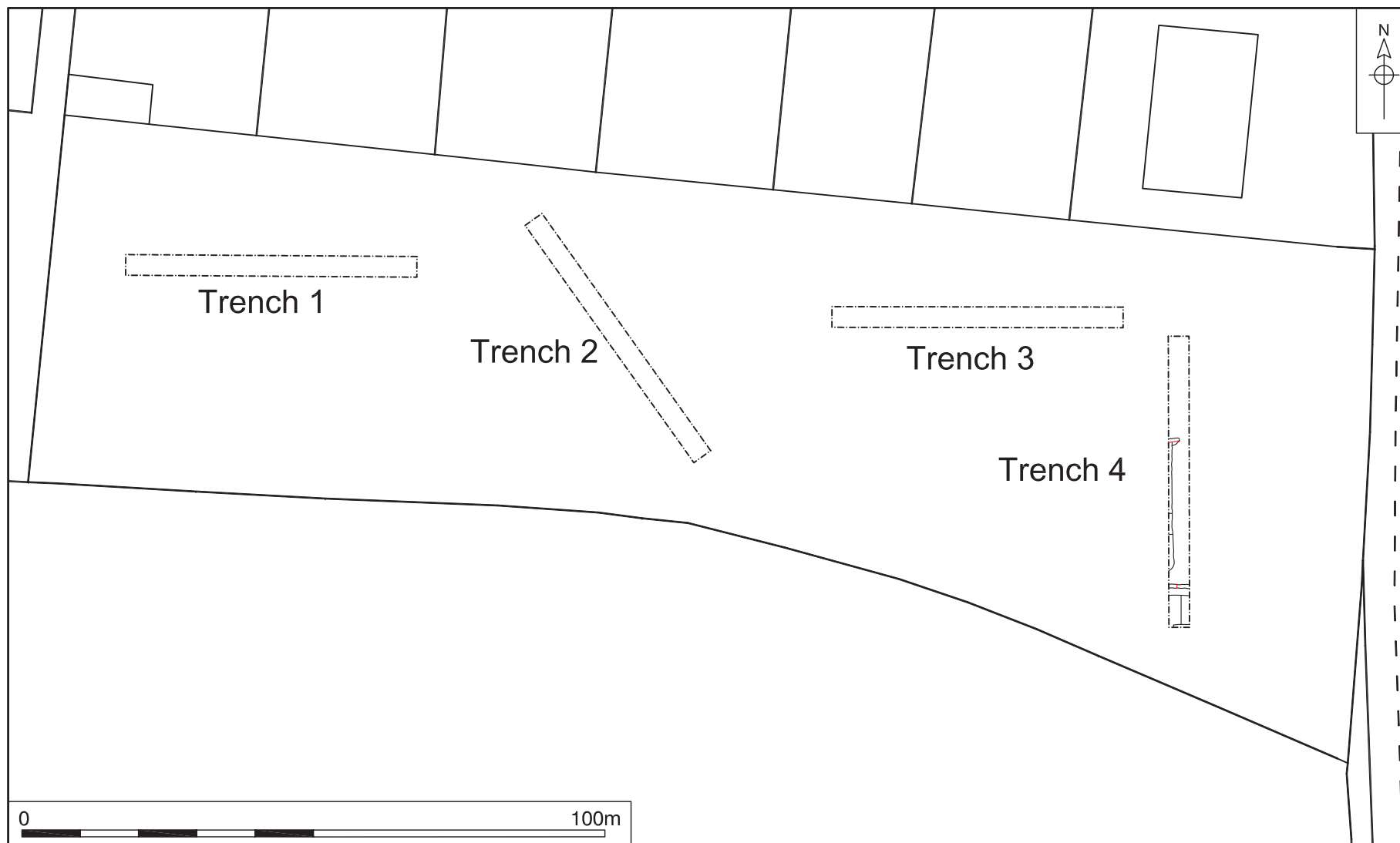


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500



Plate 1. View of the site, looking north-west.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was oriented east–west and was excavated to an average depth of 0.30m (Fig. 2; Plate 2). It measured 25m by 1.80m. The topsoil (01) lay directly above the natural (02) and no archaeology was present.

5.2 Trench 2

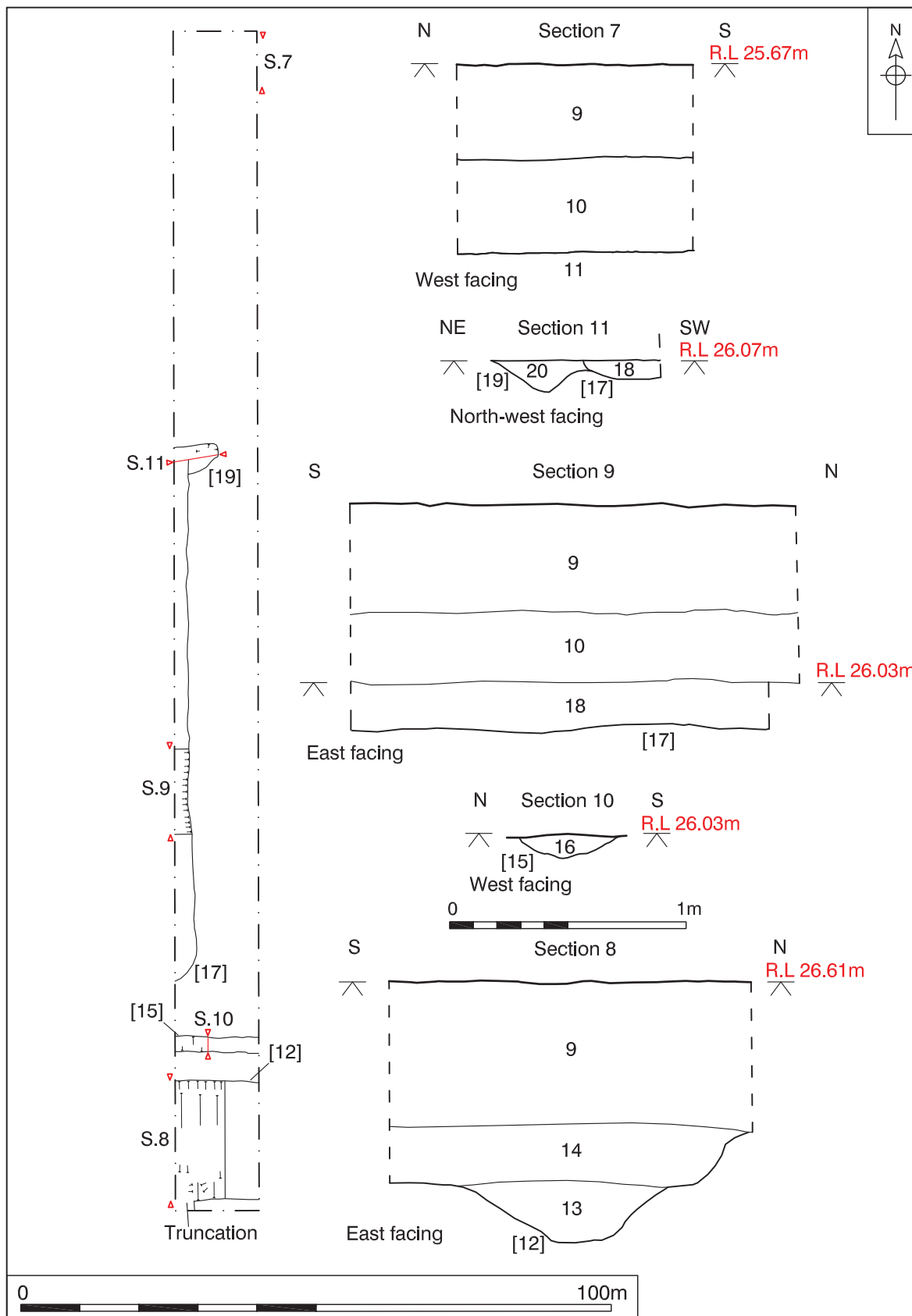
Trench 2 was oriented north-west to south-east (Fig. 2; Plate 3). It measured 25m by 1.80m. At the north-western end the trench was excavated to a depth of 0.40m, whereas at the south-eastern end the excavated depth was 0.90m due to the presence of a natural hollow. There was a topsoil (03) and subsoil (04) within the trench. No archaeological features were present.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was oriented east–west and was excavated to a depth of 0.70m (Fig. 2; Plate 4). It measured 25m by 1.80m. There was a topsoil (06) and subsoil (07) within the trench. The natural substratum was given the context number (08) and there were no archaeological features present.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was oriented north–south and was excavated to an average depth of 0.80m (Fig. 2; Plate 5). It measured 25m by 1.80m. There was a topsoil (09) and subsoil (10). The natural silt substratum was given the number (11) (Plate 7). There were four features within the trench, all of which appeared to have been sealed by the subsoil, suggesting the subsoil had formed in recent times (Fig. 3).



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Figure 3. Trench 4, plan and sections. Scale 1:125 and 1:25



Plate 2. Trench 1, looking east.



Plate 3. Trench 2, looking south-east.



Plate 4. Trench 3, looking east.



Plate 5. Trench 4, looking north.

At the southern end of the trench there was an east–west ditch [12] of unknown date (Plate 6). The ditch was 1.50m wide, had an observed length of 1.80m (the width of the evaluation trench) and a depth of 0.50m. There were two fills within the feature. The lowest fill (13) was a naturally occurring slightly friable light brown fine sandy silt. The secondary fill (14) was a slightly friable grey-brown clayey sandy silt, which was also present due to natural deposition. The ditch was probably a relatively recent field boundary and appeared to be a continuation of the southern plot boundary. Its irregular sides suggest that it had a temporary nature.



Plate 6. Ditch [12], looking west.

A short section of gully [15] was observed to run parallel to ditch [17]. It was 0.40m wide and had a depth of 0.09m. The sides were irregular and it had a shallow slope. The single fill (16) was a friable dark grey-brown slightly clayey silt which due to its dark colour may have been deliberately dumped. The few recent looking CBM flecks within it and its mixed appearance suggested that it may be of comparatively recent date and was possibly a planting trench connected with the allotments.

Small pit [19] was truncated by gully [17]. The small pit was possibly a planting hole or it may have been caused by root action. In either case it probably reflected the last use of the plot as an allotment. The pit measured 0.90m by 0.50m and had a depth of 0.13m. The sides and base were irregular. The fill was a slightly friable dark brown sandy silt (20) which had probably built up through natural deposition.

A gully [17] was observed to extend 10.80m along the western side of the trench. It had an observed width of 0.30m. The depth was 0.20m and the sides were vertical. The single fill (18) was a slightly friable mottled grey-brown slightly sandy silt. The fill was probably derived from natural silting, with some mixing due to garden activities. A small fragment of concrete was found within the fill (and

discarded) which suggested the gully was of very recent date. It was possibly a garden drainage or planting trench which may have been a part of the allotment activities in recent years.

An Upper Palaeolithic worked flint was found in the upper part of the natural silt substratum at the northern end of the trench. This tentatively suggests that that natural silt may have been laid down in the Upper Palaeolithic period, and could therefore be of future interest.



Plate 7. Sample section at the northern end of Trench 4, showing deposits [09], [10] and [11], looking east. The natural silt [11] contained an Upper Palaeolithic worked flint.

6.0 THE FINDS

6.1 Flint

By Sarah Bates

Two struck flints were recovered from this site (Appendix 3). A broad blade-like flake has a wide platform which is battered on its dorsal edge (11). Its almost straight right edge has steep reverse retouch which could have been used as (side) scraper or may be 'backing' to blunt that edge; the opposite thin and sharp left side is slightly chipped and worn and may have been used as a knife. Otherwise the edges are quite sharp. The flint is a dull pale grey. The piece was recovered from a natural deposit.

The other flint is probably from the platform of a core (01); it has some incipient percussion cones – where it has been hit – on one face and flake scars on one edge. It was found in the topsoil and is quite heavily edge damaged.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

An examination of the earliest available large scale map, the 1887 1:10,560 scale map of Norfolk, suggests that ditch [12] is older than 1887, in that the ditch does not appear on it or any subsequent maps. The fill of the ditch is also less mixed and disturbed than the other modern features within Trench 4. It is likely that the plot, which kinks out towards the road on its southern side, had been altered at some time before 1887, possibly during the post-medieval period and it makes sense for the ditch to be a continuation of the original plot boundary. The original plot may have been more rectangular in shape. Faden and Bryant's maps of Norfolk of 1797 and 1826 respectively were also examined, but due to their scale, they could add little further information.

The probable Upper Palaeolithic flint tool, found within the top few centimetres of the natural silt substratum could suggest that that sterile silt seen at the base of the trench was laid down in that period. The flint tool was examined by Dr Peter Robins of Norwich Castle Museum who suggested that its age could range from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic, however its position within the natural substratum suggests an earlier date. If so it could have been deposited in an open and cold environment towards the beginning of the Flandrian interglacial. However, without further examination of the deposit itself using soil micromorphology this can only be a tentative suggestion. The flint tool itself ties in with the type of activity that has been found along the rivers Bure and Yare around Norwich in particular in the late Palaeolithic to Mesolithic period.

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

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was undertaken by the author with David Adams. Thanks also to Bob of G.B Digger hire who undertook the machining and to Peter Goodrick of Wherry Housing Association for his help and interest in the project.

The finds were processed by Sarah Percival and the flints were examined by Sarah Bates with a second opinion provided by Dr Peter Robins. The report illustrations were produced by David Dobson after initial digitising by the author, and this report was edited by Richard Hoggett.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Deposit			Topsoil in Trench 1	Unknown
2	Deposit			Natural in Trench 1	Unknown
3	Deposit			Topsoil in Trench 2	Unknown
4	Deposit			Subsoil in Trench 2	Unknown
5	Deposit			Natural in Trench 2	Unknown
6	Deposit			Topsoil in Trench 3	Unknown
7	Deposit			Subsoil in Trench 3	Unknown
8	Deposit			Natural in Trench 3	Unknown
9	Deposit			Topsoil in Trench 4	Unknown
10	Deposit			Subsoil in Trench 4	Unknown
11	Deposit			Natural in Trench 4	Unknown
12	Cut	Ditch		Ditch	Unknown
13	Deposit		12	Fill of [12]	Unknown
14	Cut		12	Fill of [12]	Unknown
15	Cut	Gully		Gully	Unknown
16	Deposit		15	Fill of [15]	Unknown
17	Cut	Gully		Gully	Modern
18	Deposit		17	Fill of [17]	Modern
19	Cut	Pit		Pit	Unknown
20	Deposit		19	Fill of [19]	Unknown

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Type	Total
Modern	Gully	1
Unknown	Ditch	1
	Pit	1
	Gully	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Type	Qty	Wt	Period
1	Flint – Struck	1	20g	Prehistoric
11	Flint – Struck	1	53g	Upper Palaeolithic

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Prehistoric	Flint – Struck	1
Upper Palaeolithic	Flint – Struck	1

Appendix 3: Flint

Context	Type	Quantity
1	core trimming flake	1
11	backed knife	1