

Report 2391



nau archaeology

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
Bure Valley School, Aylsham, Norfolk**

HER 124823

Prepared for
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Location:	Bure Valley School, Aylsham, Norfolk
District:	Broadland
Grid Ref.:	NGR: 619406 326335
HER No.:	ENF 124823
OASIS Ref.:	79319
Client:	NPS South East Limited
Dates of Fieldwork:	15 and 16 June 2010

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted for NPS South East Ltd ahead of proposed redevelopment at The Bure Valley School, Aylsham in Norfolk. The site lay to the south of the town of Aylsham at a height of approximately 35m OD.

The two evaluation trenches investigated at the site measured 10m by 1.8m and 20m by 1.8m in plan, and were located within the footprint of the proposed redevelopment.

The only feature of archaeological interest recorded by the evaluation was a ditch located at the north end of Trench 2. The small portion of this feature visible in plan suggested it was aligned approximately south-east to north-west. Interpreted as a field boundary, the artefacts recovered from this feature hinted that it had gone out of use in the 19th or 20th centuries. A small numbers of other features examined during the evaluation are considered to be of natural origin.

The evaluation provided little evidence for human activity within the area examined and that perhaps it had served as agricultural land.

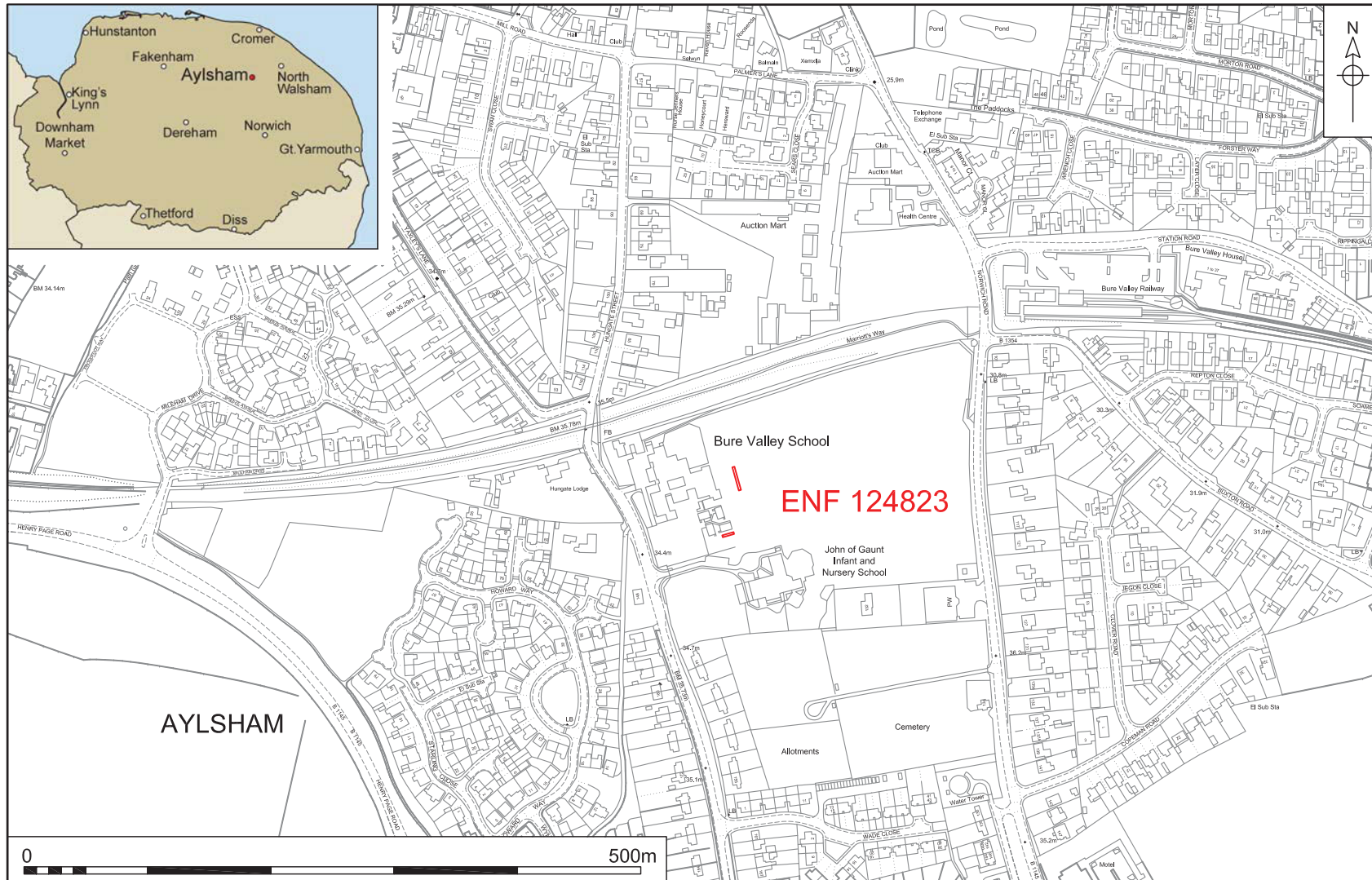
1.0 INTRODUCTION

(Fig. 1)

A programme of archaeological evaluation at the Bure Valley School, Aylsham resulted from proposals to construct new classrooms and a hard play area at the site. An assessment of the sites archaeological potential (Whitmore 2010) indicated the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource would require an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in accordance with the principles set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results of the archaeological evaluation will be submitted with the Planning Application to allow an informed decision to be made regarding further mitigation that may be required once the results of the archaeological evaluation are known.

The assessment document, evaluation and subsequent report production were commissioned by Mark Kenney of NPS South East Ltd.

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.



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Aylsham is a market town in the north east of Norfolk. The archaeological evaluation was located within the grounds of Bure Valley School approximately 650m to the south of the town centre. The site lay at approximately 35m OD on a highpoint with the ground sloping gently away downwards on its northern, eastern and western sides and located some 1.2km to the south east of the River Bure, the largest water course in the vicinity.

The underlying geology comprises Upper Chalk (British Geological Survey Sheet 52N 00 Solid Geology) overlain by glacial sands and gravels (British Geological Survey Sheet 52N 00 Quaternary). The sands and gravels are in turn overlain by brown earths of the Hall, Sheringham, Wickmere and Burlingham soil series (Soil Survey of England and Wales: Soils of Norfolk 1:100,000).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The main source for archaeological information for the county of Norfolk is the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER), a database maintained by Norfolk County Council's Museums and Archaeology Service. A search of this database revealed that the mapped extents of 131 Historic Environment Records fell within a 750m radius of Bure Valley School.

The earliest evidence of human activity in Aylsham is provided by finds of Prehistoric flintwork along with Roman and medieval pottery that was recovered by fieldwalking before construction of the Aylsham bypass some 600m south-east of the current site (NHERs 15078, 15079 and 15080).

A Neolithic polished flint axehead (NHER 7405) has also been recovered approximately 100m to the south of the School, while the construction of a new pond 650m to the south-east of the site uncovered sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery (NHER 29878).

Further Roman, medieval and post-medieval finds, including coins, have been recovered during metal-detecting to the south (NHER 50543), south-west (NHERs 41100 and 37126) and west (NHERs 39985 and 51216). Cropmarks of an undated rectangular enclosure and trackway have been identified from aerial photographs in fields 700m to 1,000m south of the school (NHER 11541).

The majority of NHER records (a total of 97) examined in respect of the current site relate to Listed Buildings and buildings of historic interest. Most of these buildings are of 16th-century date or later, and all lie to the north of the study site.

St Michael's and All Angels' Church (NHER 7402) in the centre of the town, and a manor house (NHER 12217) 450m to the north east of the study area, are of medieval origin.

Historic Environment Records in close proximity to the proposed school extension include the site of two Second World War pillboxes to the east (NHER 13478 and NHER 13480)). Aylsham public cemetery (NHER 33532), located 150m to the south, is considered to be of national importance because unlike many such cemeteries the original planting design still survives intact.

To the north of Bure Valley School an archaeological evaluation of the site of the former livestock market, undertaken in 2006, produced no evidence for archaeological remains (NHER 44465). However it was considered likely that the construction of the livestock market buildings had truncated or removed any features that may have been present.

Within the centre of Aylsham most Historic Environment Records relate to isolated findspots recovered during building works. An archaeological excavation carried out at 8–12 Red Lion Street has produced evidence of medieval buildings as well as ditches and artefacts suggestive of Roman settlement nearby (Shelley 2002). Residual sherds of Bronze Age pottery were also recovered by this work.

The northern boundary to the school and its playing fields is defined by the Aylsham Branch of the East Norfolk Railway line (NHER 13587) that went out of use in 1952. A Roman figurine was found on the railway embankment in 1988, approximately 450m to the east of Bure Valley School (NHER 24510). This artefact may indicate Roman occupation in the area, but it is more likely that the figurine was redeposited in the material used to construct the embankment, the original source of which is unknown.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

(Fig. 2)

The Programme of Archaeological Work (PoAW) at the Bure Valley School was required to recover, by archaeological evaluation, information relating to the extent, date, phasing, character, function, status and significance of any archaeological remains within the area of proposed development. A determination of the state of preservation of any features, deposits and structures is also required. The evaluation comprised two trenches that examined a total area of 54m square, equivalent to 3% of the proposed development footprint.

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

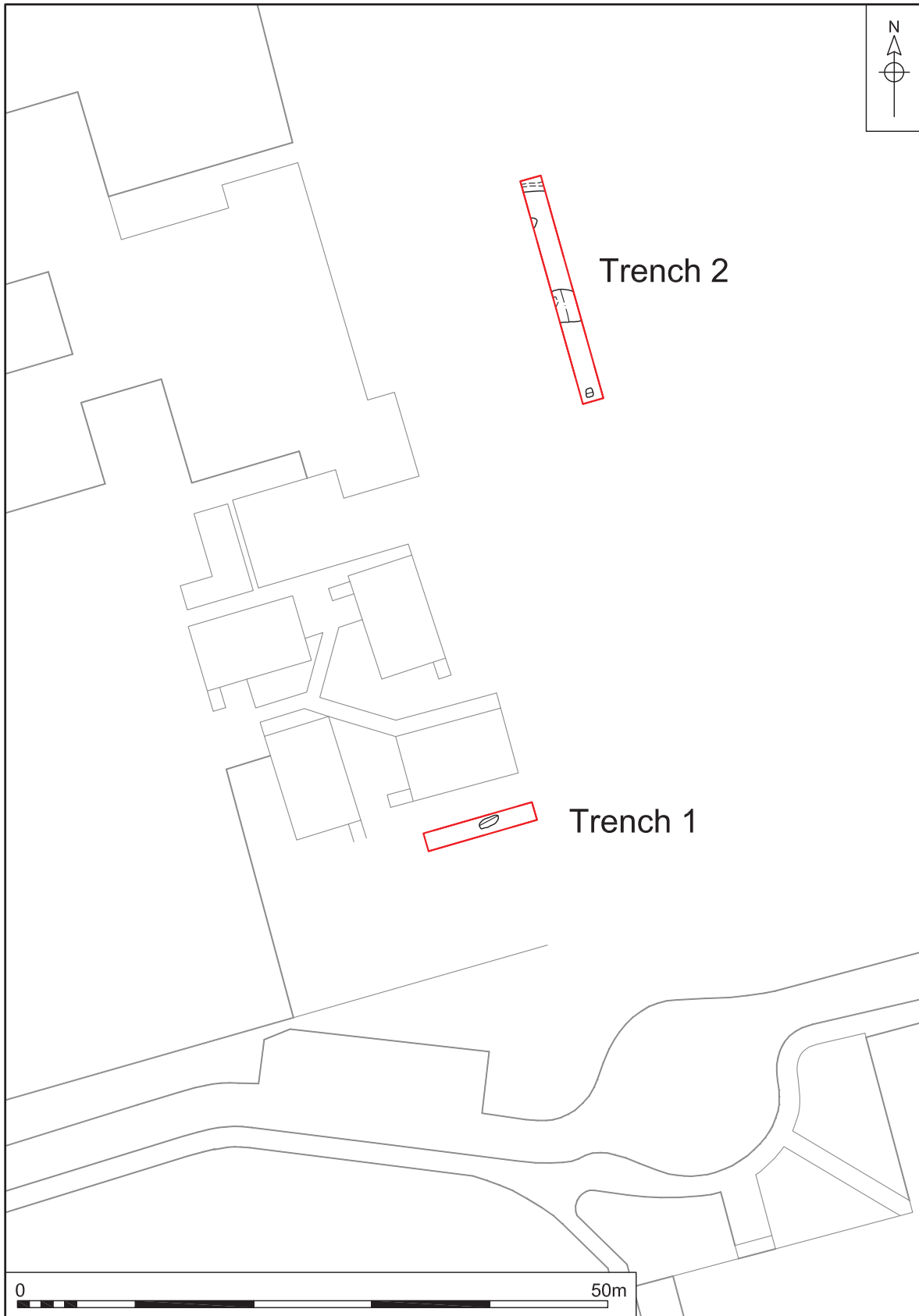
Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

No environmental samples were taken.

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.

Site survey was undertaken using a temporary benchmark with a value of 35.83 O.D. The origin of this value was from a GPS survey of the site.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine weather.



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Figure 2. Trench locations. Scale 1:500

4.1 Aims

Period resource assessments set out in the document Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties (Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000) pose specific research questions for periods ranging from the palaeolithic to modern. Existing information (Whitmore *ibid*) indicates that the site of the proposed development at the Bure Valley School has the potential to contain archaeological evidence for the immediate hinterland surrounding the town of Aylsham during the medieval period, as well as archaeological remains of prehistoric or Roman date. Thus the site has the potential to answer research questions regarding, settlement hierarchies, the relationship between a small town and its hinterland and information regarding the agricultural and economic basis of small towns. The aims of the archaeological work are summarised as follows:

- i. *To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed area.*
- ii. *To determine the extent, condition, nature, quality and date of any archaeological remains occurring within the site and the possible impacts of the proposed development on them.*
- iii. *Ensure that any archaeological features discovered during trial trenching are identified, sampled and recorded and, where it is desirable, recommendations for their preservation in situ are made.*
- iv. *To establish, as far as possible, the extent, character, stratigraphic sequence and date of archaeological features and deposits, and the nature of the activities which occurred at the site during the various periods or phases of its occupation*
- v. *To establish the palaeoenvironmental potential of subsurface deposits by ensuring that any deposits with the potential to yield palaeoenvironmental data are sampled and submitted for assessment to the appropriate specialists.*
- vi. *To explore evidence for social, economic and industrial activity.*
- vii. *To disseminate the archaeological data recovered by the evaluation in the form of a formal report which will provide the basis for decisions regarding further archaeological intervention and mitigation proposals.*

5.0 RESULTS

Trench 1

(Fig. 3, Plates 1 and 2)

This trench measured 10m by 1.80m in plan, was aligned approximately east to west and was located to the south of the site.

Current ground level at north end: 35.61m OD

Undisturbed deposits present at: 34.90m OD

Base of feature [1] present at: 34.66m OD



Plate 1. Trench 1 Post excavation looking east, 2 x 1m scales

Stratigraphic Description

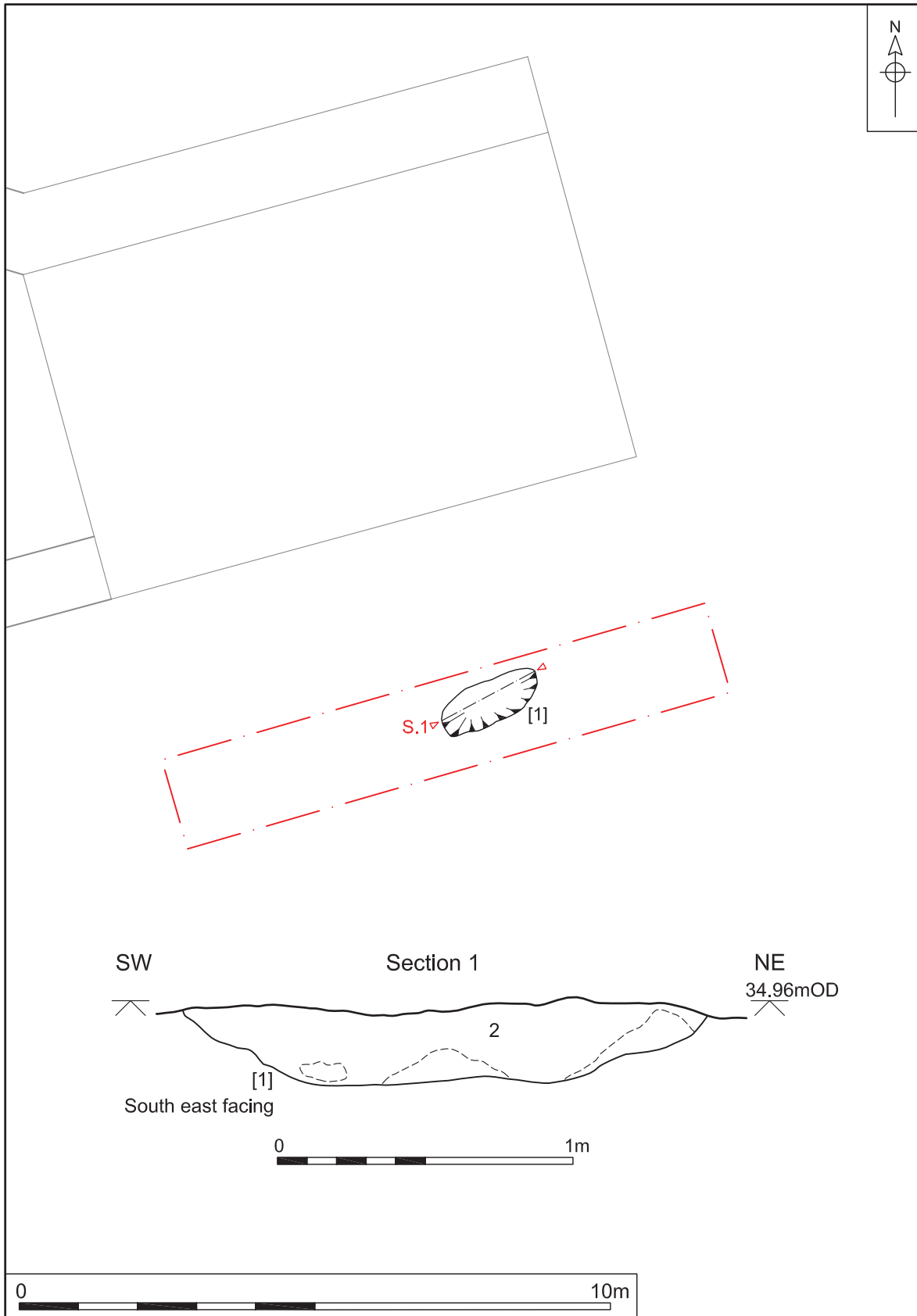
Undisturbed deposits [5] within Trench 1 consisted of medium to coarse ferruginous sands containing occasional gravels and small stones. Patches of pale brown silt were also present on the surface of this material.

Cutting the undisturbed deposits was a shallow concave based feature [1], sub oval in plan that was aligned approximately east to west. It measured 1.88m along its longest axis with a width of 0.70m and depth of 0.24m. Its single fill was a pale

brown silt sand with occasional small stones. This feature is interpreted as a possible tree hole (Plate 2). Also recorded in Trench 1 was a pale brown subsoil [16] (not illustrated) that was 0.38m in depth that contained moderate small stones and occasional charcoal flecks. This was overlain by a dark brown humic topsoil [15] (not illustrated) that was 0.22m in depth. No artefacts were recovered from the deposits identified in this trench.



Plate 2. Trench 1 Feature [1] Looking north, 1m scale



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Figure 3. Trench 1, plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:20

Trench 2

(Figs 4 and 5, Plates 3 and 4)

This trench measured 20m by 1.80m in plan and was aligned approximately north to south. It was located to the east of the main school buildings

Current ground level at south end: 35.66m OD

Undisturbed deposits present at: 34.93m OD

Base of Ditch [10] present at: 34.33m OD



Plate 3. Trench 2 Post excavation looking north, 1m scale

Stratigraphic description

Undisturbed deposits within this trench [5] comprised ferruginous sands and gravels indistinguishable to those recorded in Trench 1. Overlying undisturbed deposits was a pale brown with a broadly consistent depth of c 0.40m. This was interpreted as a subsoil containing occasional inclusions of charcoal fragments and small stones. Overlying this subsoil was a humic soil [3] that was 0.22m in depth.

Three features ([7] [11] [13]) that cut the undisturbed deposits are interpreted as natural features. At the south of the trench a small feature [11] oval in plan with a

concave form measured 0.70m in length with a depth of 0.18m. Its fill ([12] not illustrated) was a dark brown sand with a small proportion of silt. Towards the centre of the trench was a poorly defined feature [13] with an irregular base that appeared to have been heavily rooted. It measured 2.60m in width with a maximum depth of 0.40m. It contained a fill of pale brown sand silt [14] that yielded no cultural material. This feature is interpreted as a possible tree hole. A further feature of likely natural origin was present towards the north end of the evaluation trench, where a small feature [7] of amorphous shape in plan that measured 0.92m in width and 0.22m in depth was filled by a clean pale brown silt ([6] not illustrated). The appearance of this feature in plan and section would seem to suggest it was a hollow within underlying sands infilled by weathered-in material.

At the northern limit of Trench 2 was a ditch [10] (Plate 4). Aligned approximately south-east to north-west, though quite well defined, it proved difficult to demonstrate the stratigraphic relationship of this feature to the subsoil within this trench. The upper fill of the ditch was a mid brown sand silt with occasional charcoal flecks, small fragments of brick or burnt clay and occasional small stones. The small number of artefacts recovered from this deposit suggested that at least the upper part of this ditch was in filled by the 18th century. The basal, primary fill [9] of this ditch was a pale yellow brown sand with a small silt content. At the very base of this deposit was a thin layer of what appeared to be mineralised sand of dark brown or ferruginous colour.

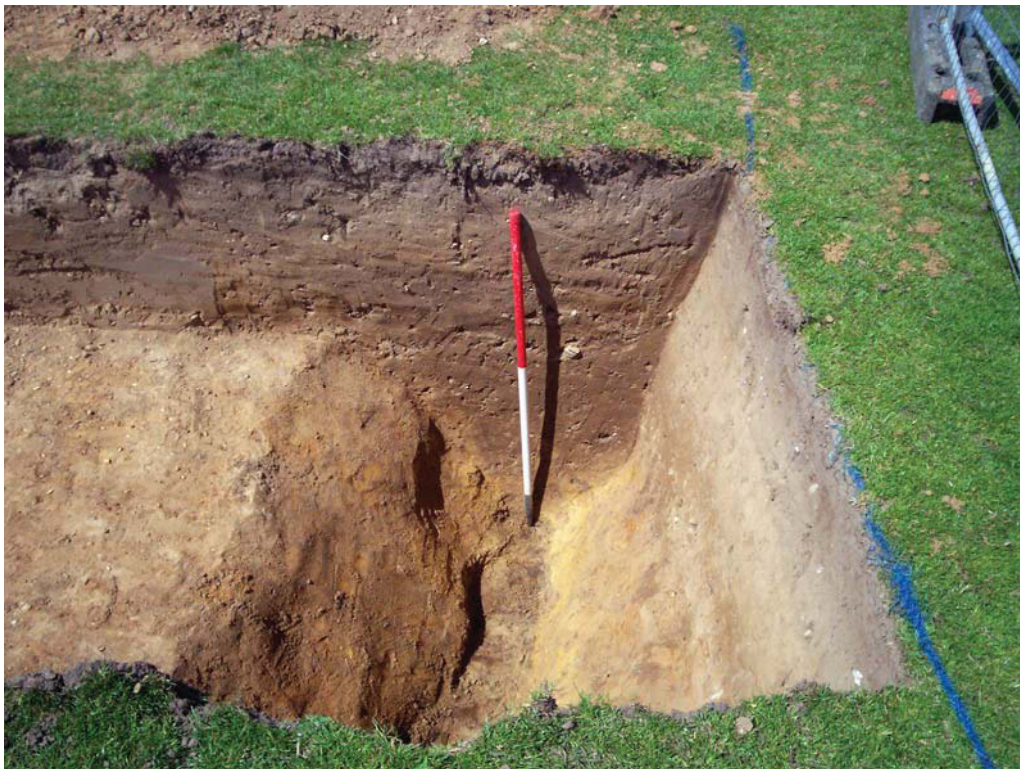
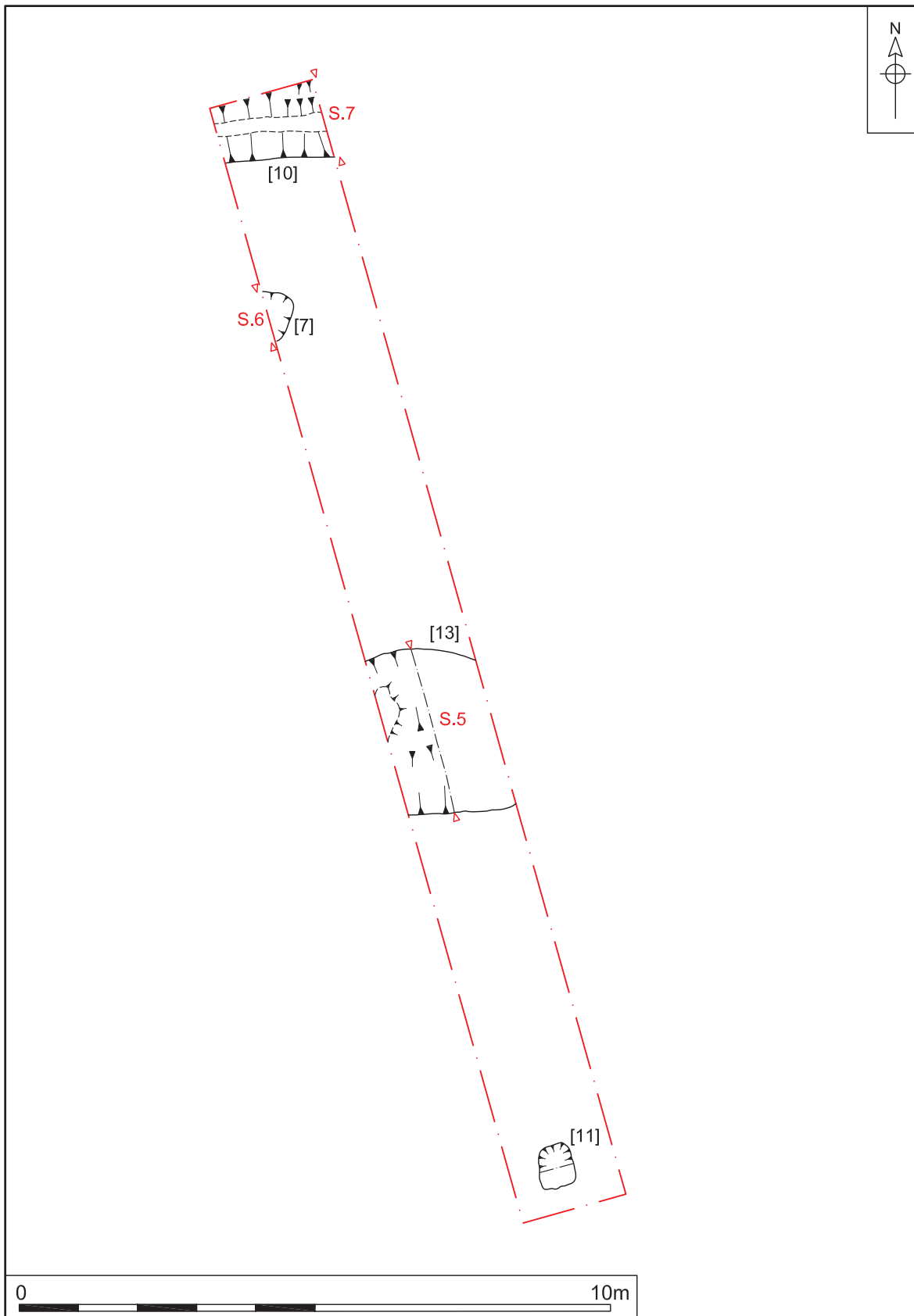


Plate 4. Trench 2 Ditch [10] looking west, 1m scale



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Figure 4. Trench 2, plan. Scale 1:100

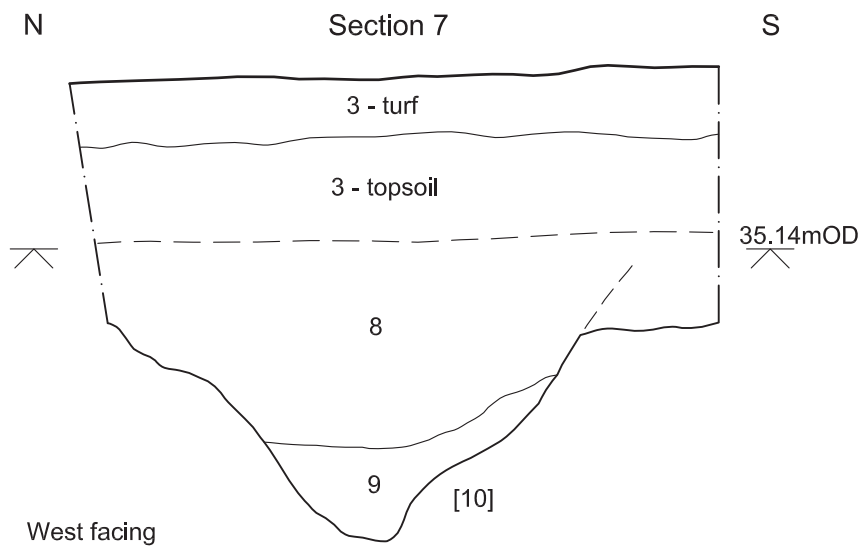
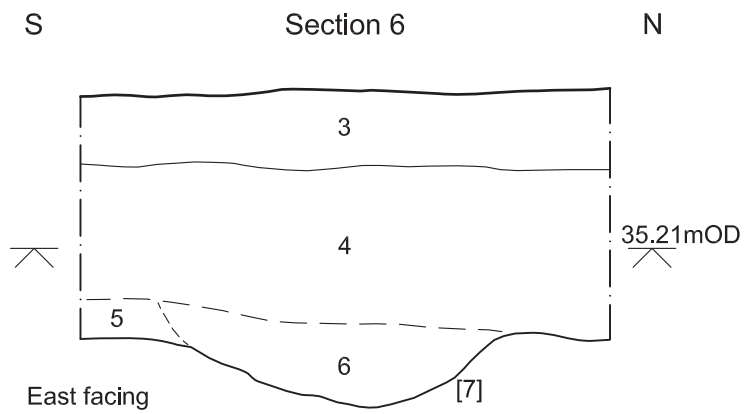
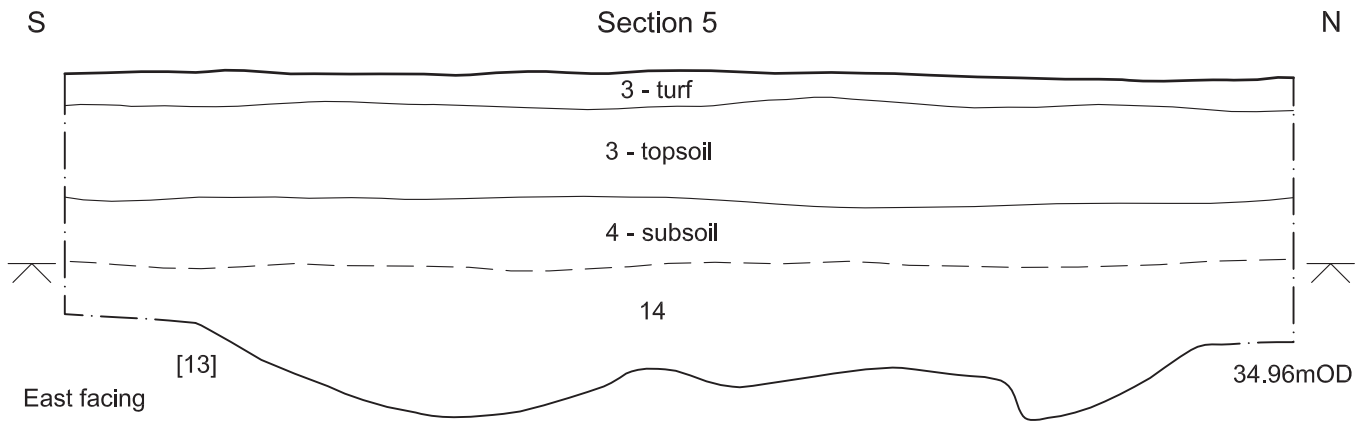


Figure 5. Trench 2, sections. Scale 1:20

6.0 THE FINDS

by Sarah Percival

6.1 Pottery

A single sherd of pottery weighing 3g was recovered from the fill of ditch [07], the sherd is of later medieval transitional fabric and dates to the 15th to 16th centuries.

6.2 Ceramic building material

A total of three scraps of post-medieval brick weighing 32g in fine sandy red fabric were found in the fill of ditch [07].

6.3 Glass

Three shards of dark green clear glass from the domed bases of two late 18th- or 19th-century wine bottles were collected from ditch [07].

6.4 Iron

The highly corroded remains of an iron hand shovel were recovered, also from the fill of ditch [07]. The shovel is of 19th- or 20th-century date.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Of the small number of possible archaeological features visible in the evaluation trenches at the Bure Valley School, only one, a ditch [10] located at the north end of Trench 2 was of archaeological interest. The remaining features are considered to be tree holes, weathered-in natural hollows or other natural phenomena.

The ditch in Trench 2 might represent a field boundary of probable post-medieval date, the limited artefactual evidence from its upper fill hinting that this feature had been backfilled by the 19th or 20th century, perhaps following reorganisation of a field system. It presumably could have still served as a boundary despite not being maintained. The earliest datable material from this feature was a small abraded fragment of later medieval pottery, considered residual.

The small number of recovered artefacts and paucity of archaeological remains at the evaluation site suggests that human activity in the proposed development area was limited, and perhaps concerned with agricultural cultivation. One possible use for such land might have been as sheep pasture, the manufacture of woollen textiles being an important local industry in the medieval and early post-medieval periods.

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



Plate 5. Lilly Hodges (NAU Archaeology) talking to pupils of Bure Valley School

Acknowledgements

Field work was undertaken by Lilly Hodges, Stuart Calow and the author. The evaluation trenches were machined by GB Digger Hire.

Overall project management was by David Whitmore of NAU Archaeology. James Albone monitored the project on behalf of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Mark Kenney of NPS SE Limited commissioned the programme of archaeological works

Thanks are due to John Starling, Headmaster of Bure Valley School along with the teachers and pupils for their keen interest in the archaeological works.

The report was illustrated by David Dobson and edited by Jayne Bown.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Cut	Tree hole		Tree hole ?	Unknown
2	Deposit		1	Fill	Unknown
3	Deposit			Topsoil	Modern
4	Deposit			Subsoil	Unknown
5	Deposit			Natural	Unknown
6	Deposit		7	Fill	Unknown
7	Cut	Natural feature		Natural feature	Unknown
8	Deposit		10	Upper fill of ditch [10]	Post-medieval
9	Deposit		10	Primary fill of ditch [10]	Post-medieval
10	Cut	Ditch		Ditch cut	Post-medieval
11	Cut	Tree hole		Tree hole?	Unknown
12	Deposit			Fill	Unknown
13	Cut	Tree hole		Tree hole?	Unknown
14	Deposit		13	Fill	Unknown
15	Deposit			Topsoil	Modern
16	Deposit			Subsoil	Unknown

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Type	Total
Post-medieval	Ditch	1
Unknown	Tree hole	3

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Ctxt No.	Material	No.	Weight	Date	Item Description	Context descript	Context phase
8	Pottery	1	3g	Medieval		Upper fill ditch [10]	Post-medieval
8	Ceramic Building Material	3	32g	Post-medieval		Upper fill ditch [10]	Post-medieval
8	Glass	3	136g	Post-medieval	Bottle glass	Upper fill ditch [10]	Post-medieval
8	Iron	1	256g	Modern	Implement	Upper fill ditch [10]	Post-medieval

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Medieval	Pottery	1
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	3
	Glass	3
Modern	Iron	1