Report 2385

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An Archaeological Watching Brief at Church Close, Hoxne, Suffolk

HXN 048

Prepared For
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BAU 2385

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Location:	1 Church Close, Hoxne
District:	Mid Suffolk
Grid Ref.:	TM 182 774
HER No.:	HXN048
OASIS Ref.:	79999
Client:	Mr Paul Somers
Dates of Fieldwork:	18 and 21 May 2010

Summary

Archaeological watching brief monitoring was undertaken in May 2010 on the site of a new bungalow at 1 Church Close, Hoxne.

This work followed trial trench evaluation of the site undertaken in January 2010 which revealed a series of intercutting and irregular ditches and the recovery of Romano-British pottery (Crawley 2010). During the watching brief additional sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered from within a layer of subsoil though no archaeological features were observed.

Evidence from two environmental samples demonstrated that although cereals and seeds were present, their remains were most likely derived from a scatter of detritus (charred cereal processing and/or storage waste).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

(Fig.1)

The site was located on a small plot of land at 1 Church Close on the north side of Hoxne, and the development consisted of a single bungalow. This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Mid-Suffolk District Council (Ref. 2729/08) and a Brief issued by Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Conservation Team (Ref. 23/02/2010). The project was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref.NAU/NP/BAU2385). The fieldwork and this report were commissioned and funded by Mr Paul Somers.

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 a*nd *Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990).

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The natural substratum is a glacial till overlying Liocene and Pleistocene Crag, (Wymer 1988). The till is overlain by deep clay of the Hanslope series (Tipper 2009) which itself is sealed by a dark brown humic clayey and sandy silt topsoil.

The plot is situated at a height of 38m OD on reasonably flat land on the north side of Hoxne, within 100m of the church and 500m south of the river Waveney.

A fuller description of the geology and topography can be found in NAU Archaeology's report of the archaeological evaluation of the site (Crawley 2010).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hoxne is an extensive parish, situated on the south side of the river Waveney, and includes the hamlets of Hilton and Thorpe Hall.

An Historic Environment Record search was conducted in advance of the evaluation stage of the project and the results were presented in the evaluation report (Crawley 2010). Those results are summarised very briefly below.

The site is situated within 100m of the 13th to 15th-century parish church of SS Peter and Paul, which was originally dedicated to St Ethelbert. The likely focus of a pre-Norman bishopric seat and monastery (Site HXN 018) is located in the vicinity of the church. A vicarage of late 15th- to 16th- century date is situated to the immediate north of the church and close, adjacent to the west side of the churchyard is site HXN 006 (a large rectangular moat thought to be the original site of the medieval palace of the Bishops of Norwich).

A number of historic buildings are located to the south-west of the site.

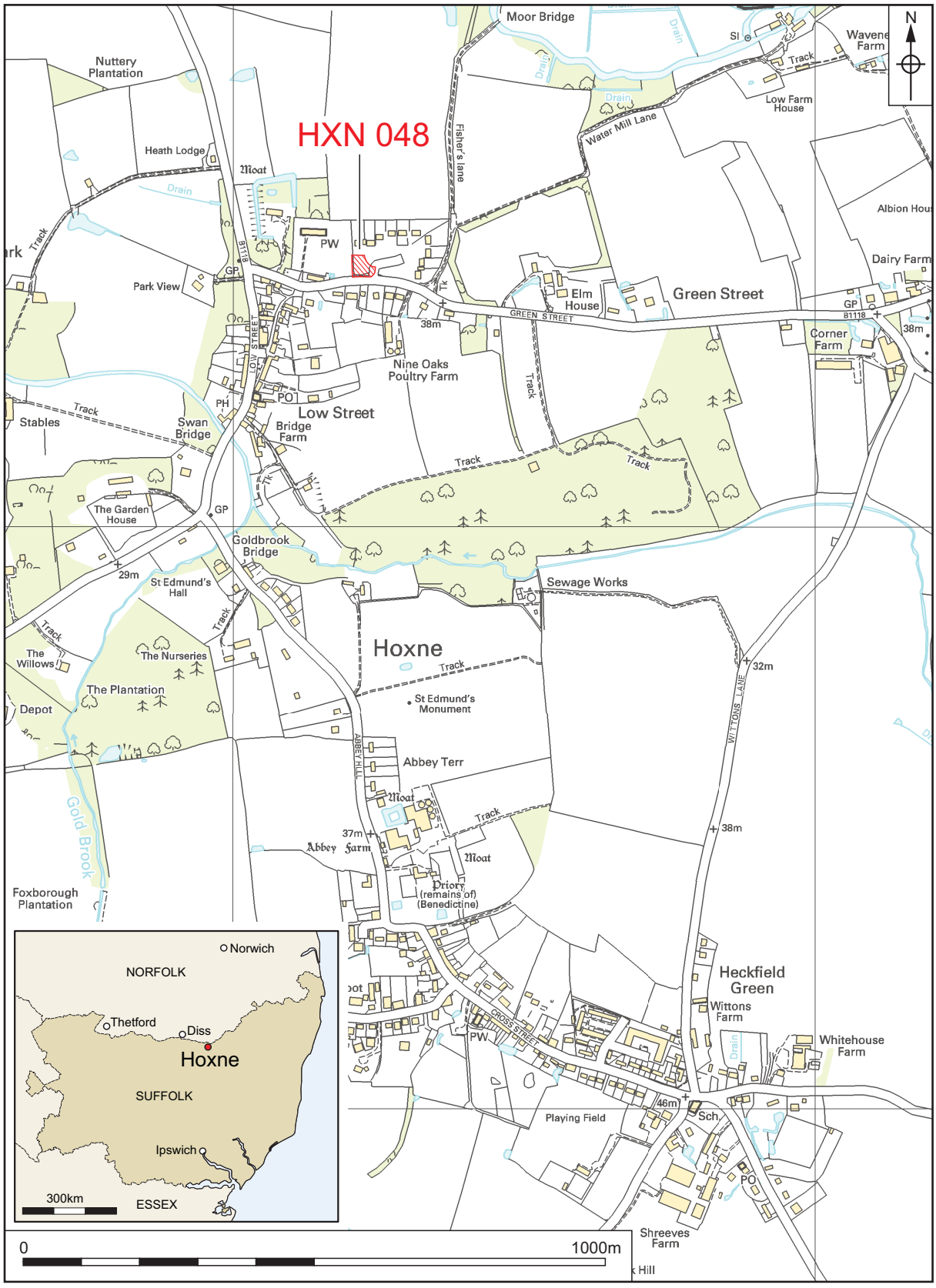

Figure 1. Site locatiion. Scale 1:10,000

4.0 METHODOLOGY

(Fig. 2 and Plates 1, 2 and 3)

A constant attendance watching brief was undertaken during the mechanical excavation of the foundation trenches for the new bungalow. A mini five-tonne digger was used by the developer to excavate the foundation trenches which were mainly 0.50m wide and generally over 2m deep. Due to the depth of the foundations, the sides of several of them collapsed and were re-excavated on the 19 May. Half of the bungalow foundations were filled with concrete on 20 May with the remainder being infilled on 21 May.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. No metal finds were found.

An environmental sample was taken from subsoil [26] and processed along with a sample taken from ditch [11] during the trial trench evaluation following recommendation by Jess Tipper of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Conservation Team.

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

The temporary benchmark used during the course of this work was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark with a value of 37.82m OD, located on the south-western corner of SS Peter and Paul's church immediately north-west of the site.

Site conditions were good with excellent access. The weather was hot and dry with bright sunlight and the ground was very hard.

Plate 1. The site, looking north-west

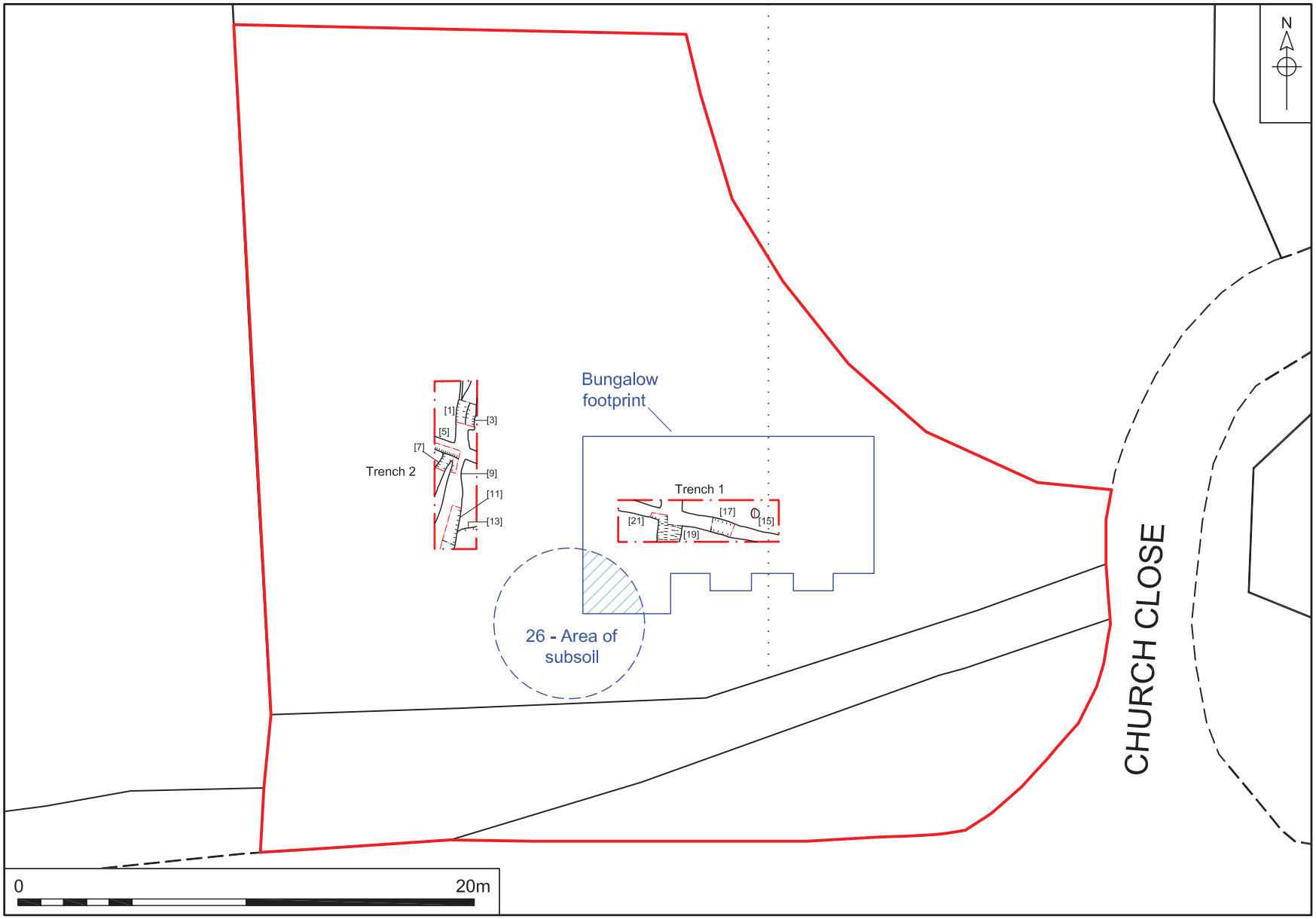

Figure 2. Bungalow footprint and general area of subsoil 26. Scale 1:250

5.0 RESULTS

There were no archaeological features observed in the edges of the foundation trenches, although two shallow ditches ([21]=[17] and [19]), observed in Evaluation Trench 1 were located in the vicinity of the bungalow foundations. Despite close examination of the edges of the foundation trenches where the two ditches were anticipated no evidence was observed (possibly because the features observed in the evaluation were shallow and easily seen in plan but more difficult in section). Observations were also affected by the baked nature of the ground and the bright sunlight.

In the south west corner of the foundation trenches there was a layer of subsoil ([26]) formed from a mid brown clayey silt which contained moderate charcoal flecks and occasional chalk flecks. It also produced a total of 10 sherds of Romano-British pottery. Layer [26] was 0.20m thick on average, though its full extent was unclear for the same reasons outlined above. There was no clear evidence that the layer was the fill of a feature. The layer was also situated in the south west part of the site, where the shallow ditch [11], which had been observed during the evaluation, was located. The environmental sample processing suggested that the subsoil may contain elements derived from the scattering of charred cereal processing and/or storage waste.

Plate 2. Foundation trench, looking east

Plate 3. Close up of the foundation trench edge, looking north

6.0 THE FINDS

(Sarah Percival)

6.1.1 Pottery

(Identified by Alice Lyons)

A total of ten small abraded body sherds weighing 40g were recovered from subsoil (26). All are from utilitarian jars in unsourced sandy greyware. The sherds are Roman but are otherwise not closely datable, falling within the broad date range of late 1st to 4th centuries. Surprisingly no micaceous sandy greyware was found which may be considered to be more typical of the Hoxne area.

6.1.2 Ceramic Building Material

A piece of modern brick weighing 347g was also found in the subsoil. The fragment is from a frogged brick and is of extremely recent date.

7.0 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Plant Macrofossils

7.1.1 Introduction

Two samples for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken:

- Sample 1 from a ditch fill (context [12] from the trial trench evaluation)
- Sample 2 from a probable subsoil layer (context [26] - collected during the watching brief)

The samples were processed by manual water flotation/washover and the flots were collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Appendix 4. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (1997). All plant remains were charred. The non-floating residues were collected in a 1mm mesh sieve and will be sorted when dry. All artefacts/ecofacts will be retained for further specialist analysis.

7.1.2 Results

Both assemblages were very small (0.1 litres in volume or less). Cereal grains and weed seeds were recorded, but at a very low density, with most occurring as single specimens within the assemblage. Preservation was poor to moderate, with some grains being severely puffed and distorted, probably as a result of combustion at very high temperatures. Oat (*Avena* sp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.) and wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains were recorded, along with seeds of common cereal crop contaminants, namely small legumes (Fabaceae), goosegrass (*Galium aparine*) and an indeterminate large grass (Poaceae). A single fragment of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell was also noted within the assemblage from sample 2. Charcoal/charred wood fragments were abundant within sample 2, but were very scarce within the assemblage from sample 1. Other remains included fragments of black porous and tarry material (both of which were probable residues of the combustion of organic remains at very high temperatures), bone, a pellet of burnt or fired clay and small pieces of coal. The latter may be intrusive within the contexts from which the samples were taken.

7.1.3 Conclusions and recommendations for further work

In summary, the assemblages are both small and relatively sparse. Sample 1 contains an insufficient density of material to enable close interpretation, although it would appear most likely that the few remains recorded were probably accidentally incorporated within the pit fill. The assemblage from Sample 2 is moderately charcoal-rich and also contains cereals and seeds, all of which may be derived from a scatter of charred cereal processing and/or storage waste.

As both assemblages are small (i.e. containing insufficient material for quantification), and appear to be principally derived from scattered detritus, no further analysis is recommended.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Romano-British pottery found within subsoil [26] ties in with the date of the ditch ([11]) found during the evaluation and adds to the general findings of the evaluation. The subsoil may have formed in the Roman-British period, although it may have formed at a later date and pottery redeposited from a Romano-British feature could have become incorporated into it. The number of sherds within the layer however, strongly suggests that a Romano-British date is more probable. The fact that the pottery was found in the south-west corner of the bungalow footprint, in the same area as ditch [11], indicates that any Roman-British settlement or activity lay to the south-west of the present site.

The results of the examination of the environmental samples shows that burning episodes and cereal processing was taking place nearby, and although it is tempting to assign a Romano-British date to this, there is no clear evidence to allow a secure date to be assigned.

Although no archaeological features were observed in the foundation trenches during the watching brief it is possible that they were present but unobservable due to their diffuse edges, shallow form and the baked nature of the clay ground they were cut into.

The combined evaluation and watching brief evidence from the site reflects current knowledge of this part of Suffolk in the Roman period. Hoxne is situated reasonably close to a Roman road linking the Roman settlements of Scole on the Norfolk–Suffolk border and Coddenham in central Suffolk. The presence of the Hoxne hoard in the vicinity also confirms Late Roman activity in the area.

It could be tentatively suggested that activity in the Roman period in this northern part of the village may have been a contributory factor for the subsequent location of a bishopric in Hoxne in the Saxon period. (Crawley 2010)

Acknowledgements

The watching brief monitoring was undertaken by the author.

The finds were processed and analysed by Sarah Percival and the Romano-British pottery was identified by Alice Lyons. The illustrations were prepared by David Dobson after initial digitising by the author. The report was edited by Jayne Bown and formatted by David Dobson. The environmental soil samples were reported on by Val Fryer after processing by Rob Fryer.

Thanks to John who was undertaking the development on behalf of Paul Somers, for his interest in the project and help on site. And especial thanks are due to Paul Somers himself who commissioned and funded the project.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
25	Deposit	Topsoil	Unknown
26	Deposit	Subsoil	Roman
27	Deposit	Natural	Unknown

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
26	Pottery	10	40g	Roman	
26	Ceramic Building Material	1	347g	Modern	Discarded

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Roman	Pottery	10
Modern	Ceramic Building Material	1

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Fabric code	Description	Qty	Wt	Era	spotdate	form
26	Sandy greyware	SGW	Bodysherds	10	40g	Roman	LC1st - C4th	Jar

Appendix 4: Environmental Evidence

Sample No.	**1**	**2**
Context No.	**12**	**26**
Feature type	**Pit**	**Layer**
Cereals		
Avena sp. (grains)		x
Hordeum sp. (grains)		xcf
Triticum sp. (grains)		x
Cereal indet. (grains)	x	x
Herbs		
Fabaceae indet.		x
Galium aparine L.		x
Large Poaceae indet.		x
Tree/shrub macrofossils		
Corylus avellana L.		x
Other plant macrofossils		
Charcoal <2mm	x	xxxx
Charcoal >2mm		xxxx
Other remains		
Black porous 'cokey' material	x	x
Black tarry material	x	
Bone		x
Burnt/fired clay		x
Mineralised soil concretions	xx	
Small coal frags.	xx	x
Sample volume (litres)	**24**	**16**
Volume of flot (litres)	**<0.1**	**0.1**
% flot sorted	**100%**	**100%**

Key to Table

x = 1 – 10 specimens xx = 11 – 50 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens cf = compare