

Report 2180



nau archaeology

An Historic Building Recording Survey at The Great Hospital, Bishopgate, Norwich

ENF125049

Prepared for
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Location: The Great Hospital, Bishopgate, Norwich
District: Norwich
Grid Ref.: TG 2374 0905
HER No.: ENF125049
OASIS Ref.: 80513
Client: TGH Construction Ltd
Dates of Fieldwork: 20 July 2010

Summary

In July of 2010 NAU Archaeology undertook an historic building recording of the southern doorway of the eastern wall of the cloister at the Great Hospital in Norwich. The work was commissioned by Cowper Griffith on behalf of TGH Construction Ltd ahead of an application to widen the existing entrance and was designed to determine the presence or absence of an earlier doorway into which the current doorway may have been inserted. This survey suggests it is unlikely that any such opening existed to the south of the present doorway but cannot preclude its existence to the north.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

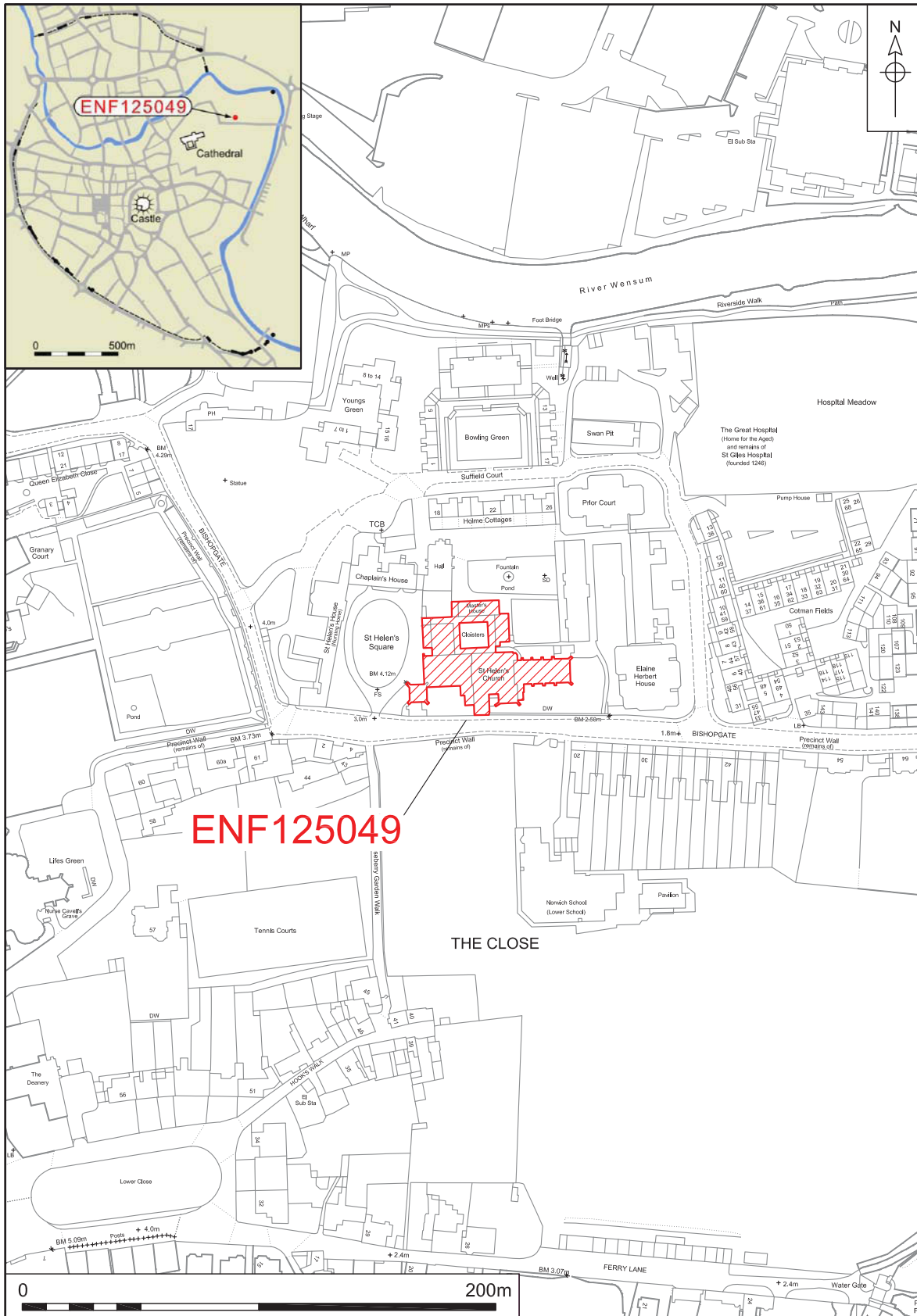
A planning proposal to widen an existing doorway at the southern end of the eastern wall of the cloisters at The Great Hospital, Bishopgate, Norwich, prompted Norwich City Council in consultation with Norfolk Landscape Archaeology to issue a brief (ref: 06/01005/F) requesting an archaeological examination of the doorway in order to determine whether the current doorway had been inserted into a larger and earlier opening. In response Cowper Griffith commissioned NAU Archaeology to undertake these works according to an approved project design as prepared by Nigel Page (ref NAU/NP/BAU2180). The brief required the removal of an area of plaster 100mm wide and up to 500mm long from the internal southern jamb in order to determine if the doorway had originally extended further in this direction.

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 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Great Hospital was founded in 1249 by Bishop Walter de Suffield as a refuge for the sick and poor although it has since undergone extensive rebuilding and much of what survives dates from the 14th and 15th centuries. The church of St Helen's forms the main focus of the religious complex with the claustral range located to the north projecting from the northern aisle of the nave which forms its



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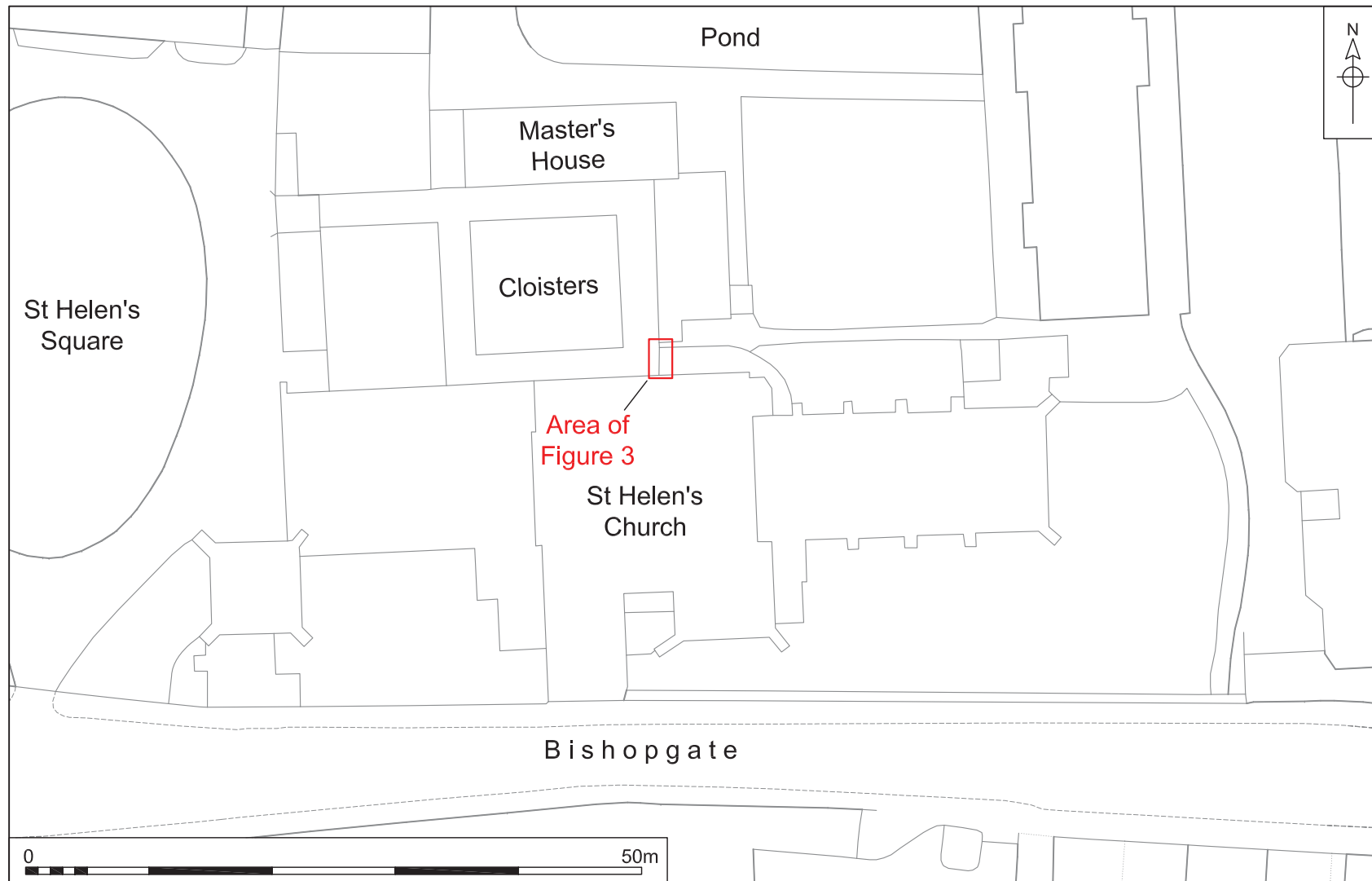
Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

southern wall. A cloister is believed to have existed on the site at least by the early 15th century (Rawcliffe 1999) but the current structure has been dated to around 1450 placing it within the tenure of Prior Molet and Bishop Lyhart. The cloister in common with other religious houses lay at the heart of the complex, being set apart from the external world where the monks could find an atmosphere conducive to quiet meditation and study. It also acted as a covered walkway linking the various structures that surrounded it such as the refectory, dormitory and kitchens. Typically the chapter house sat to the east of the cloister and it is likely that the surviving blocked doorways along the eastern wall opened into such a building. The cloisters at The Great Hospital represent the smallest surviving monastic cloister in Britain.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence of an earlier doorway at the southern end of the eastern cloister wall into which the current opening may have been inserted. In order to determine this, the brief required that a portion of plaster be removed from the internal southern jamb of the doorway in order to expose the walling materials beneath and perhaps indicate the location of an earlier jamb.

Plaster was carefully removed using a cold chisel and bolster with a hammer across an area measuring 0.5m x 0.1m at a height of approximately 1.64m above the internal ground surface. The doorway and exposed walling was then drawn to scale with annotations to include relevant observations upon the surrounding masonry along with a photographic record.



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Figure 2. Plan of the Great Hospital showing the location of the southern doorway. Scale 1:500

4.0 RESULTS

(Figs 2 and 3)

The topcoat of lime plaster visible at the surface had been applied to a depth of approximately 8mm with a haired base coat beneath varying in depth between 22mm and 40mm depending upon the wall surface upon which it was applied. Once the plaster had been removed it was evident that the red brick visible at the face of the jambs extended back into the wall by 0.16m (Plates 1 and 2).



Plate 1. Plaster removed from interior, facing east, 1m x 0.20m scale

These bricks exhibited horizontal skintlings and were pointed with a concrete mortar, however this appears to have been the result of re-pointing as beneath the render was a lime mix. These red bricks had been keyed into a softer orange brick also set in lime mortar but these (although probably lain down in courses) were not whole bricks and had the appearance of fillers between the jambs and the flint and lime mortar walling visible further to the south. A great deal of mortar had been used across this latter portion of walling obscuring much of the flint beneath. However at the southern edge of the investigated area a section of electrical ducting presumably feeding into the box beneath could be seen to run horizontally up the wall.

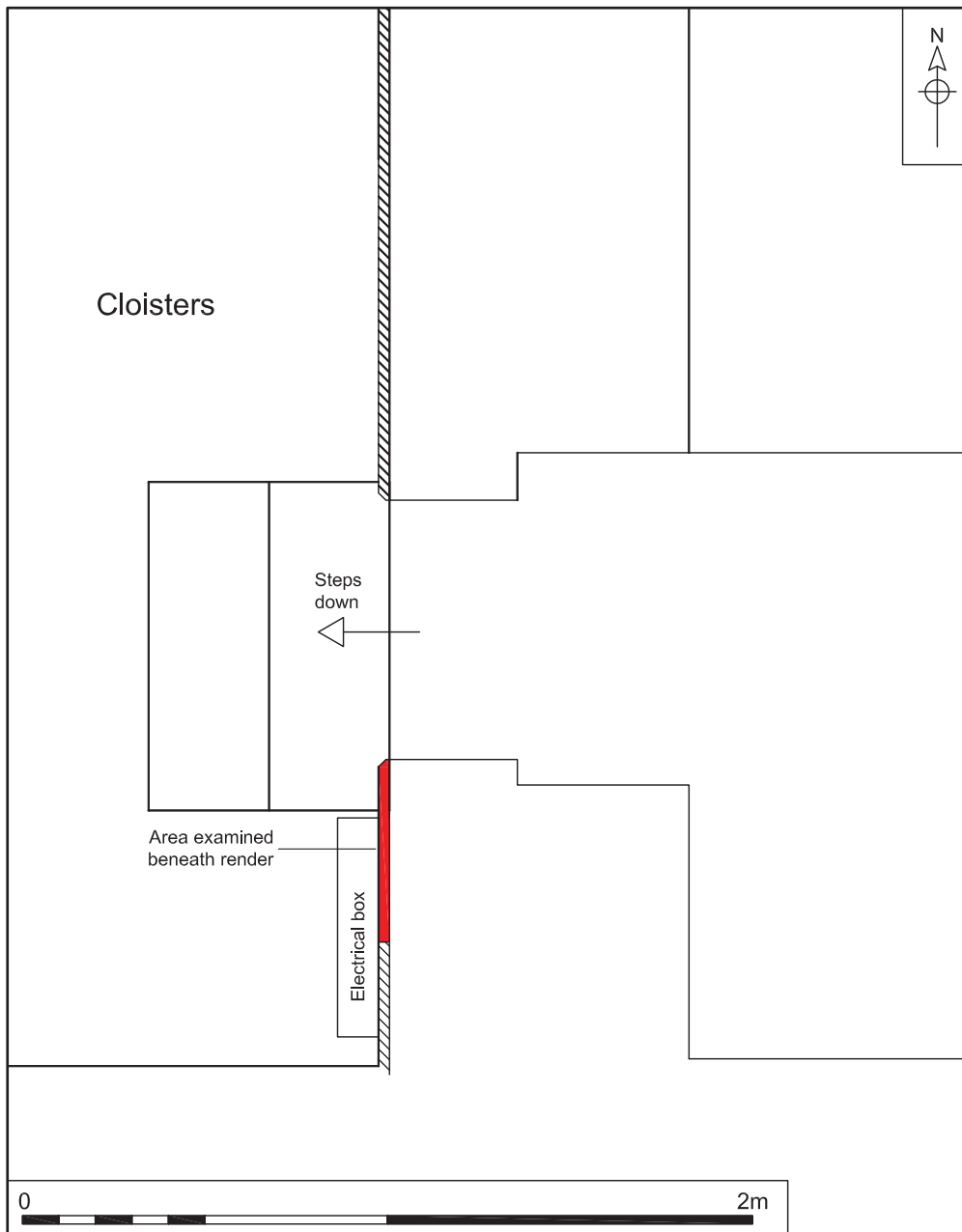


Figure 3. Plan of doorway. Scale 1:20



Plate 2. Close up of removed plaster, 1m x 0.20m scale



Plate 3. Blocked window obscured by later buttress

More general observations of the surrounding masonry revealed a small in-filled window approximately 2.4m above the ground surface on the north wall of the nave aisle wall (Plate 3).



Plate 4 View of buttress facing west

The window was only visible externally and had been constructed in medieval brick headers with thick joints between. It was partially concealed by the aisle buttress at the junction of the east wall of the cloister and north wall of the nave aisle (Plate 4). Although rendered on its internal face it was possible to discern a lighter area of mortar above the present doorway from the exterior that may have indicated some alteration in this area (Plate 5).



Plate 5. East side of opening facing west, 1m x 0.20m scale

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The limited size of the area where plaster was removed made firm conclusions difficult to make, however it is possible to construct the most likely scenario for the development of the present doorway. Pevsner (2002, 276) suggests that the nave of St Helen's church was rebuilt around 1470 but admits the style is of the later 14th-century. There seems to be good documentary evidence to indicate that the cloister was constructed around 1450 (Rawcliffe 1999).

The small in-filled medieval brick window observed on the northern nave aisle wall has clearly been obscured by the construction of the buttress and therefore must predate it. In addition the junction of the buttress with the east wall of the cloister suggests that the buttress probably predates the cloister's east wall and logically it would make little structural sense to insert a buttress into a pre-existing wall which would effectively already be carrying out the same role. The conclusion must therefore be that the nave's northern wall and the buttress pre-date the cloister's east wall thereby suggesting a date at least in the first half of the 15th century. Given this sequence of development, any doorway extending to the south of the present one would have necessitated cutting away a portion of the buttress thereby compromising its structural function. Although not an impossible scenario

it does seem an unlikely one and nothing revealed by the removal of the plaster argues in its favour.

It is of course entirely possible that a doorway was located further to the north but if this is the case then the portion of discoloured external walling above the current doorway maybe the only evidence of its existence. Any removal of render that may take place to the north of the present opening might resolve this question.

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

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by the author with graphics compiled by David Dobson who also produced the report; editing was carried out by Jayne Bown

Bibliography

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