

Report 2415



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**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
29 Belstead Avenue, Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk**

HER 124439



Prepared for
Louise Firth and Jack Atkinson



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October 2010



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Location: 29 Belstead Avenue, Caister on Sea
District: Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Grid Ref.: TG 5169 1213
HER No.: ENF124439
OASIS Ref.: 83932
Client: Louise Firth and Jack Atkinson
Dates of Fieldwork: 9 April 2010

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted for Louise Firth and Jack Atkinson ahead of the construction of a new bungalow adjacent to 29 Belstead Avenue. The watching brief followed from a single-trench evaluation undertaken on 9 March 2009 by NAU Archaeology.

There appeared to be a continuation southwards of the linear feature seen in the evaluation and two new features were also observed. There was a possible Iron Age ditch running north-west to south-east across the site and a further possible undated ditch in the west part of the house footprint.

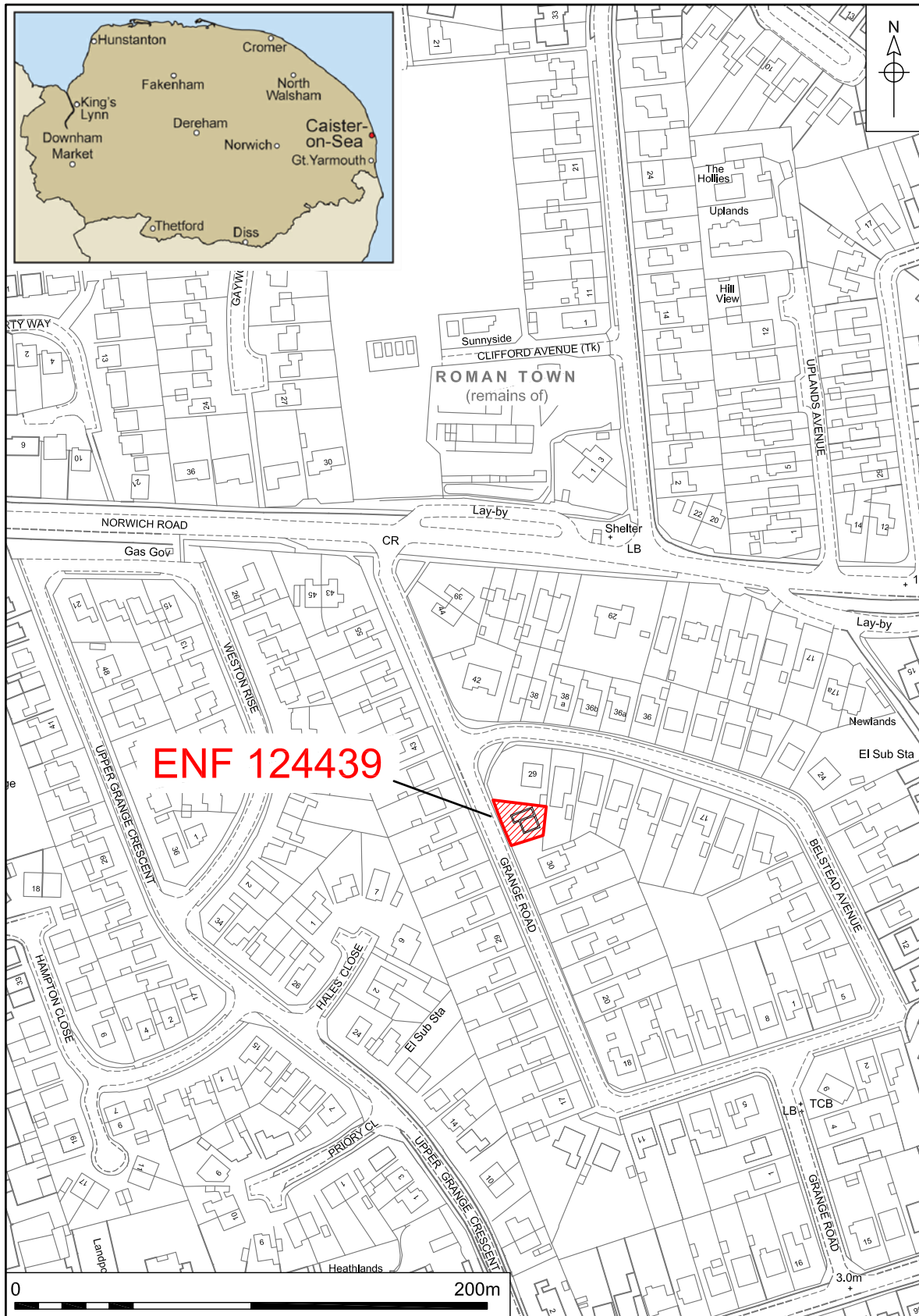
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The site was situated in the centre of Caister-on-Sea near Norwich Road, in an archaeologically sensitive area south of the Roman fort (Fig. 1). The total development plot was 235m² in size; the garden of 29 Belstead Avenue had been subdivided to allow for a new bungalow with associated driveway and garden. A single evaluation trench was excavated on the 9 March within the footprint of the proposed house in order to give a 5% sample of the development plot and to examine the area that was to be directly impacted by the building. This trench measured 3m by 4m (Fig. 2). The results of the evaluation required that a watching brief be undertaken whilst the footing trenches were excavated.

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Great Yarmouth Borough Council (Ref. 06/09/0458/F) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (Ref. CNF41880). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. BAU2415). This work was commissioned and funded by Louise Firth and Jack Atkinson.

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 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 1:2500

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lay at a height of 9.0m OD towards the centre of Caister-on-Sea, which is situated at the southern extent of the Isle of Flegg. The underlying geology consists of Sand and Gravel Crag (Williamson 2005). The specific upper geology consists of Happisburgh Glaciogenic Formation Sand (British Geological Survey).

The development plot was until recently being used as a garden for the property at 29 Belstead Avenue and, anecdotally, prior to that had been part of a nearby farm. The plot was relatively flat and well draining.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

An HER search was requested for the evaluation phase of the work and produced as part of the evaluation report (Crawley 2010). That historical background is reproduced here in full.

3.1 Prehistoric

Prehistoric pottery has been found in Caister and to the west of the site, three Bronze Age ring-ditches have been identified as cropmarks (NHER 27513 and 27395). Some Bronze Age remains were found on land off the Norwich Road/High Street, to the north-west of the site in conjunction with Roman and post-medieval features (NHER 35843). A number of Iron Age pottery sherds have also been found in the area of the Roman fort to the north (Darling with Gurney 1993). Elements of a preserved Iron Age or early Roman field system were also situated here. A series of ditches of unknown date may represent elements of prehistoric field system (NHER 27397).

3.2 Roman

The overwhelming majority of the HER entries close to the site are connected with the Roman period. The site is situated within the area of the Roman Saxon shore fort (HER 8675). Specifically the site lay to the south of the actual fort in the area of the related civilian settlement that sprang up adjacent to the fort. The road leading from the southern gate of the fort lay close to the site and a Middle Saxon cemetery was excavated just to the south of the fort.

The settlement of Caister began life as a harbour which controlled the sea trade on the coastline probably beginning in the late 2nd–3rd centuries, perhaps associated initially with the *Classis Britannica* supply system (Darling with Gurney 1993). Twelve large coin hoards have been recovered from within the fort's interior, all dating to the 4th century (Darling with Gurney 1993). The fort appears to have become disused in the late 4th century AD.

There is also some evidence for earlier Romano-British activity consisting of coins and some early Roman pottery, including earlier samian styles (NHER 8675). An east–west paved road is thought to run several metres north of the site, approximately 100m south of the fort (Darling with Gurney 1993).

Recent work has been undertaken by NAU Archaeology and APS at the northern end of Uplands Avenue in the area of the Roman fort (HERs 45329 and 52560

respectively). Roman remains related to the fort with possible Saxon and medieval features were found at these locations.

There have been some archaeological investigations around the present site in recent years. An evaluation was conducted to the east of the site in November 2002, which identified ditches and pits of Roman date (HER 37421) (medieval remains were also found). Further along Belstead Avenue to the east a watching brief was undertaken in January 2008 (HER 51057), where a pit which appeared to have been filled up in the 3rd century AD was recorded. Local sources suggested that tesserae have been found in the gardens of the houses in Saxon Gardens (HER 52689).

There are other Roman sites and findspots close to the site. To the north-west and south-west of the site, there are records of Roman pottery kilns and related pottery finds (HER 8679 and 8678 respectively). Several findspots lay to the south of the site including Roman roof tile and pottery sherds (NHER 13228), a Roman coin (NHER 30341) and another Roman roof tile (NHER 13229). A further findspot lay north of the site. Metal-detecting during 2003 recovered four 3rd-century AD coins (HER 38107). In 2002/2003 a watching brief led to the discovery of Iron Age, Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery sherds in the same area. A further watching brief in 2004 found an undated gully and a Roman pit (HER 40651).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

The relatively large amount of Middle Saxon coinage and other finds strongly suggest high-status occupation within the fort and in its vicinity. It has been postulated that Caister was perhaps *Cnobheresburgh*, the site of Fursa's monastery described by Bede. Another possible site of for this monastery is Burgh Castle across the estuary, although neither site may actually be the site. A large Middle to Late Saxon cemetery was excavated by Green immediately exterior to the southern defences and just to the north of the current site (Darling with Gurney 1993, 44–61). Two ephemeral structures of Middle Saxon date were also discovered in the interior of the fort in close proximity to the Roman buildings (Darling with Gurney 1993, 37).

During the medieval period the church of Holy Trinity became a focus for the village (NHER 8683). Reasonably close to the site lay Caister Castle, a 15th-century moated castle which was built by Sir John Falstoff.

3.4 Post-medieval

Some nearby buildings date from the later post-medieval period. To the south is 'The Grange' (HER 42868). It was originally a 17th-century farmhouse which was altered in the mid-18th century and again in the late 18th century.

A further historic house called 'The Farmhouse', which was indeed a farmhouse, was constructed in the mid-19th century. It was built using a Flemish bond. Later buildings include the cemetery chapel dating from 1902 (NHER 42867), and a post-medieval windmill shown on Bryant's map of 1826. In October 1861 this structure was dismantled and rebuilt in Rockland All Saints. Caister House (NHER 42866) was built in 1819 and served as a rectory between 1953 and 1980 at which point it was renovated.

To the south-west of the site an evaluation in 2003 found evidence that the ground level at this site was raised through dumping of material during the 18th century (HER 39596). This dumping was on top of peat layers dated to the Roman and Iron Age.

There are many HER entries for the period of the Second World War, when the area around Caister-on-Sea was heavily defended against invasion. A World War Two pillbox was situated to the north of the site (NHER 32674) and NHER 27485 records the position of a World War Two spigot mortar emplacement. NHER 29750 marks the position of a World War Two anti-aircraft battery and to the north-west there was NHER 27486, the site of World War Two air raid shelters. A further spigot mortar emplacement (NHER 27480) was built to defend Norwich Road and access from the beach, and a further pillbox (NHER 27481) lay just to the north of the site, again designed to defend the Norwich Road. To the east of the site there was considerable World War Two military activity at Caister Old Hall Holiday Camp (HER 27511). Many of the above installations were visible on aerial photographs taken between 1940 and 1945.

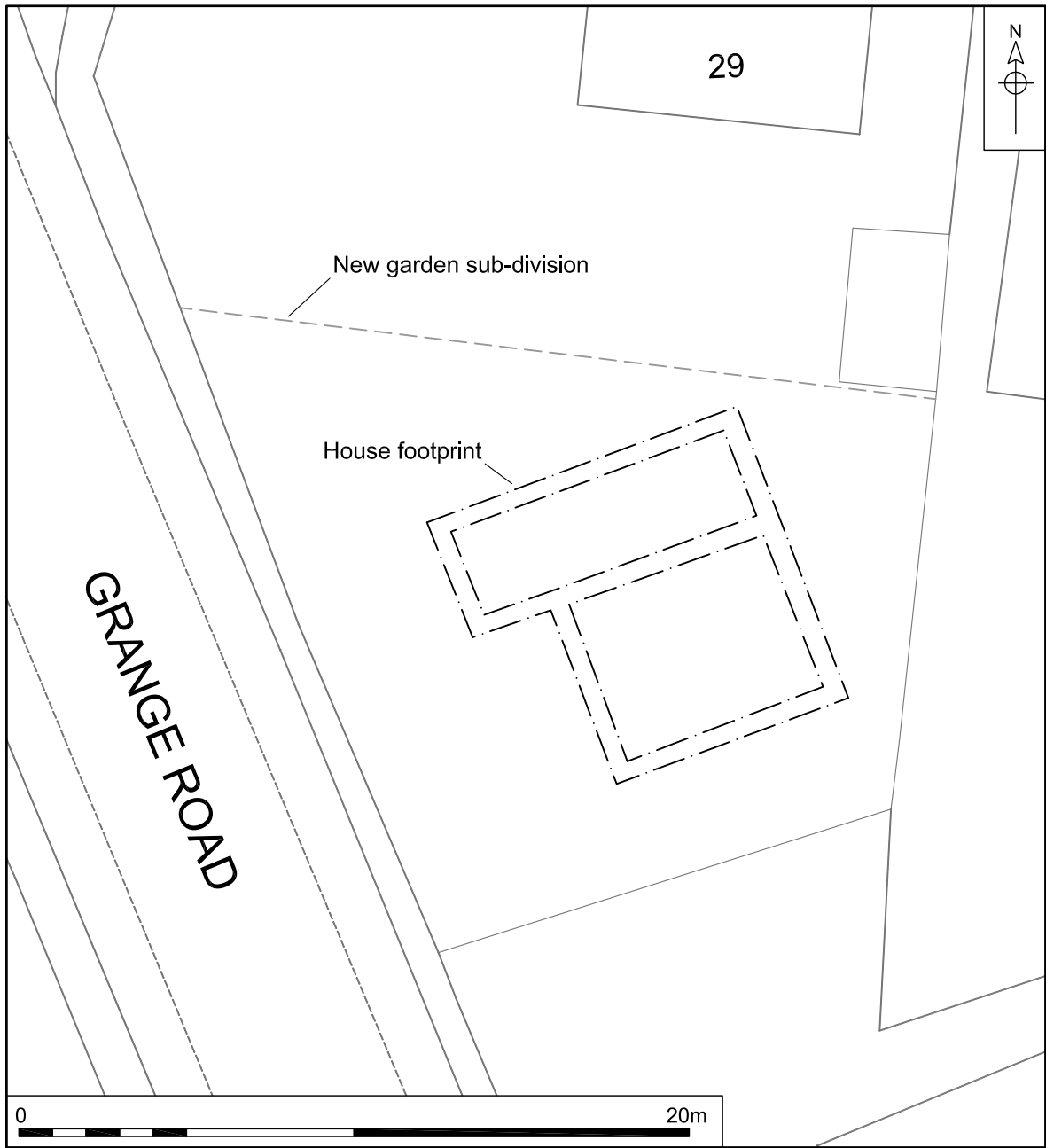
4.0 METHODOLOGY

(Fig. 2 and Plate1)



Plate 1 The site looking north-east

The objective of this Watching Brief was to preserve by record any archaeological deposits which were to be affected by the excavation of deep wall foundation trenches. There were no remains considered sufficiently important or structural to merit preservation *in situ*, and a full record was made of the archaeological remains observed. The wall trenches were excavated to a deeper level into the top of the natural, than had been reached in the evaluation, where excavation had



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Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:200

stopped at the top of the natural sand. Where features were observed it was generally in section rather than in plan - often only the last part of the fill was visible in the base of the wall trench, though they were clearly seen in section.

The wall foundation trenches were excavated with a 5 tonne hydraulic 360° excavator equipped with a 0.60m wide bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision. Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. There were no finds found with the metal detector. Some fragments of ceramic building material and pottery sherds were found within the topsoil.

None of the features were suitably well dated or sealed to sample for environmental data.

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.

The temporary benchmark with a value of 8.70m was used during the course of this work. It was situated adjacent to the new house plot and was provided by the developer.

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

5.0 RESULTS

(Fig. 3 and Plates 2 and 3)

The topsoil [1] consisted of a dark grey-brown slightly clayey silty sand with occasional stones and modern bricks. It was 0.70m thick with a diffuse boundary with the underlying subsoil [2], which was formed from a mottled light grey silt mixed with natural yellowish-brown sand. The subsoil undulated slightly but was on average 0.15m–0.20m thick. The natural substratum [3] was a firm yellow and orange sand which contained occasional silty and clayey patches.

What were presumably parts of the same ditch were observed across three wall trenches of the house footprint. The small amount of fill that was observed in plan at the base of the wall trenches indicated that the direction of each of the sections was the same i.e. orientated north-north-west to south-south-east across the site. This ditch was separately numbered as [4], [6] and [8], in order to keep separate any dating evidence. In the event, only two sherds of Iron Age pottery were found - from fill [9] from the middle of the feature [8]. The pottery was recovered from the side of the wall trench so it could be seen to be reasonably well located within the centre of the feature. At its deepest the ditch was observed to be 0.60m in depth and 1.50m wide. Due to the depth of the wall trenches it was not safe to excavate into the base of the feature. The fill (deposits [5], [7] and [9]) was a light greyish brown sandy silt which had probably naturally silted up.



Plate 2. Ditch [8] seen in section, looking west

A section through a small ditch ([10]) was observed on the south side of the house footprint. It was seen to run in a north-east to south-west direction. It was only observed in the western wall trench and did not appear to continue into the northern wall trench where it might be anticipated to have appeared. Its fill ([11])

was composed of a light brown sandy silt which was also probably the result of natural infilling.



Ditch [10] seen in plan, from above

A further section of a small ditch ([12]) was observed in the south of the building footprint. It was located, and though only seen in the southern wall trench, it seemed to orientate north to south. It was probably a continuation to the south, of north-south orientated ditch [3] which had been observed in the evaluation. The fill ([13]) was a light greyish brown sandy silt which had probably naturally built up. The same ditch was not observed in the central wall trench of the foundations footprint, so it seemed that ditch [12] (i.e. ?ditch [3] of the evaluation) did not continue through to the north.

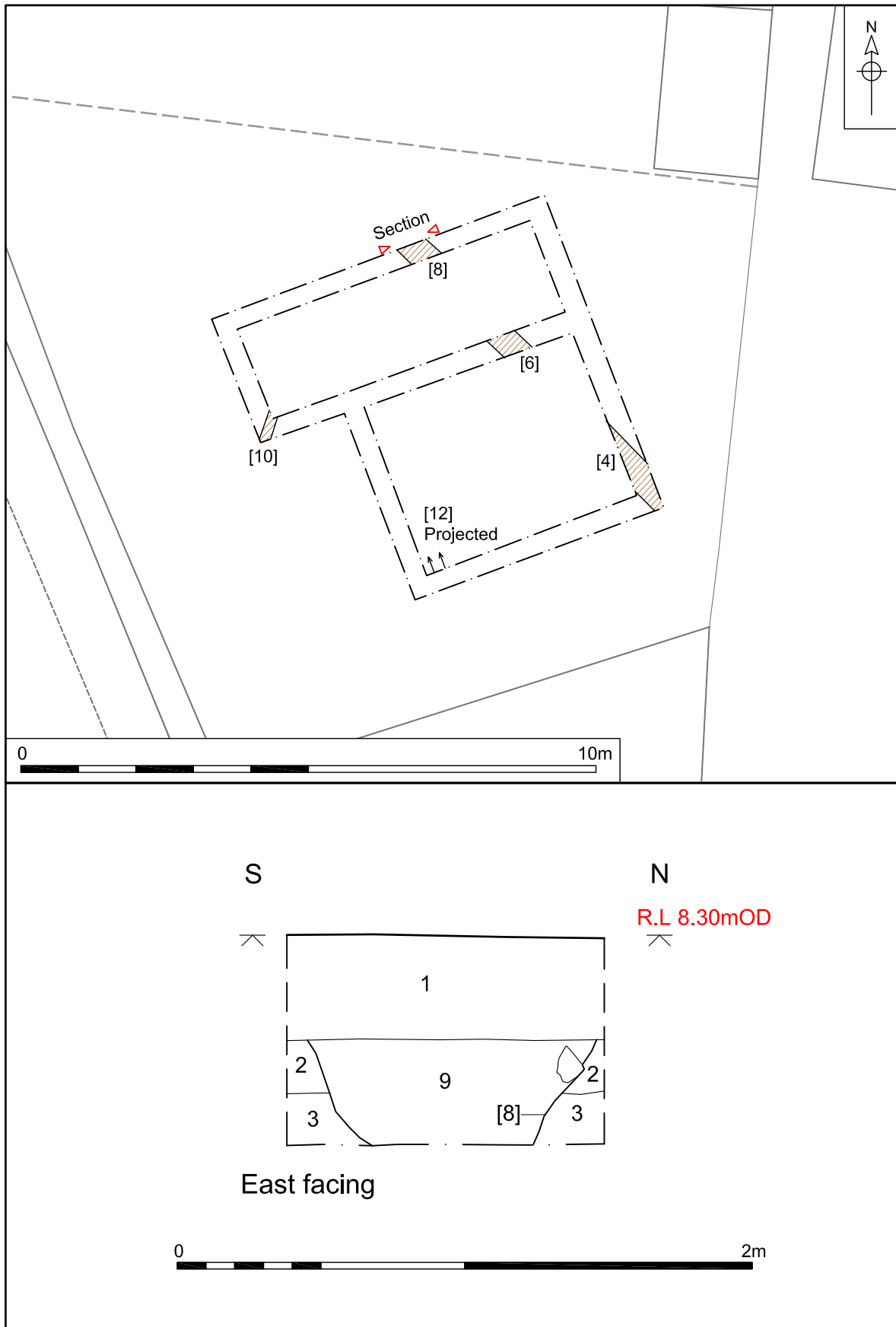


Figure 3. Trench plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:20

6.0 THE FINDS

6.1 Pottery

by Sarah Percival

Four sherds of pottery weighing 19g were recovered from two contexts (Appendix 3). Two are Roman and two later Iron Age.

6.1.1 Roman

Two sherds in micaceous sandy greyware weighing 10g were collected from the topsoil. These sherds are unsourced and are not closely datable within the Roman period. The micaceous sandy Greywares compare well with the coarseware pottery found during Green's excavations and with those from evaluation of the present site (Darling and Gurney 1993, 208).

6.1.2 Iron Age

Two sherds of later Iron Age pottery weighing 9g were recovered from the fill of ditch [8]. The undecorated body sherds are made of dense, quartz-tempered fabric with small rounded quartz inclusions typical of later Iron Age pottery from Norfolk. A small assemblage of thirteen Iron Age sherds was recovered during Green's excavations, leading Darling and Gurney to speculate on the presence of pre-Roman occupation 'somewhere in the vicinity of the fort' (1993, 153). These sherds represent further 'background noise' and are also suggestive of later Iron Age activity close by.

6.2 Ceramic Building Material

by Sarah Percival

A fragment of bonding tile with thumbed signature in fine sandy fabric with sparse flint inclusions and a fragment of *tegula* in medium sandy, red fabric with few other inclusions were both found in the topsoil.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief added some useful extra information to the results of the earlier trial trench evaluation of the site.

The ditch ([4]=[6]=[8]) is likely to be Iron Age in date, as the pottery was found reasonably buried within the centre of the fill – the sherds are unlikely to be intrusive although they could be residual. The lack of any Roman pottery within the feature however does suggest that the feature had silted up by the time that there was Roman civilian settlement in the area giving more support to the idea that the pottery is not residual. If the ditch is Iron Age, it is highly likely to be a boundary associated with agricultural practices or husbandry. The lack of pottery suggests it was located away from a centre of settlement, and was not prone to any dumping of domestic waste. The position of the ditch may tie in with cropmark evidence in the area thought to preserve elements of an Iron Age/Roman field system (NHER 27397). Iron Age pottery has also been found in the vicinity of the Roman fort to the north of the site (Darling with Gurney 1993).

Ditch [12] appeared to be located the same general area as ditch [3] recorded during the evaluation. Though undated it may show that that ditch ran further to the south. The project also indicated that the same ditch did not run through to the north.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are due to Louise Firth and Jack Atkinson at 29 Belstead Road for funding the project and for their interest and help in completing it. And to Mr Warren Bensley for his interest during the Watching Brief phase

The fieldwork was undertaken by the author. The finds were processed and reported on by Sarah Percival. This report was illustrated and formatted by David Dobson and edited by Jayne Bown.

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Appendix 1a: Contexts

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Deposit			Topsoil	Unknown
2	Deposit			Subsoil	Unknown
3	Deposit			Natural sand	Unknown
4	Cut	Ditch		Ditch	Iron Age
5	Deposit		4	Fill of [4]	Iron Age
6	Cut	Ditch		Ditch	Iron Age
7	Deposit		6	Fill of [6]	Iron Age
8	Cut	Ditch		Ditch	Iron Age
9	Deposit		8	Fill of [8]	Iron Age
10	Cut	Ditch		Ditch	Unknown
11	Deposit		10	Fill of [10]	Unknown
12	Cut	Ditch		Ditch	Unknown
13	Deposit		12	Fill of [12]	Unknown

Appendix 1a: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Cut Type	Total
Iron Age	Ditch	1
Unknown	Ditch	2

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period
1	Pottery	2	10g	Roman
1	Ceramic Building Material	2	700g	Roman
9	Pottery	2	9g	Iron Age

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Iron Age	Pottery	2
Roman	Ceramic Building Material	2
	Pottery	2

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Qty	Wt	Spotdate
1	Sandy Greyware	U	2	10g	Roman
9	Dense quartz sand fabric with occasional rounded quartz	U	2	9g	later Iron Age

Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material

Context	Fabric	Type	Form	Qty	Wt	Notes	Spotdate
1	Fine sandy sparse flint inclusions	Brick	Bonding tile	1	147g	Signature mark	Romano-British
1	Medium sandy red fabric with few other inclusions.	Roof tile	<i>Tegula</i>	1	553g		Romano-British