

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1062

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Swardeston Farm,  
Swardeston, Norfolk**

41283 SWD

B. Hobbs

April 2005

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Location: Swardeston Farm, Swardeston, Norfolk  
District: South Norfolk  
Grid Ref: TG 19910282 (c)  
HER No.: 41283 SWD  
Date of fieldwork: 31st March and 1st April 2005

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation on ground at Swardeston Farm, Swardeston located a single drainage gully running in a north-west to south-east direction towards ponds adjacent to Swardeston Common. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

(Fig. 1)

The Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) was commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Swardeston Farm, Swardeston, approximately 6km to the south-west of Norwich city centre. The area of proposed residential development comprised 2800 sq. m., of which 1955 sq. m was free of extant buildings. Two trenches were opened in the area of proposed development comprising slightly more than 5% of the land that had not been previously built upon, a total sample area of 108 sq. m.

This archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Mr R. Jenkinson of Jenkinson Properties Ltd.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Method Statement prepared by NAU (NAU: WAB 24/01/05) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH 01/10/02).

The 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 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

## **2.0 Geology and Topography**

(Fig. 1)

The site is located on the mid-Norfolk Boulder clay plateau, consisting of mainly Lowestoft Till and other Anglian tills. A thin clay silt subsoil beneath a tilled loam topsoil covers the Boulder Clay (Corbett and Dent 1994, 18). The underlying solid geology is Upper Chalk (Funnell 1994, 12).

The site appears to drain to the north-east and to the south-east where ponds are located. The elevation of the site is at approximately 28m OD. The water table was observed in both trenches at a depth of approximately 0.60m.

### 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

The village of Swardeston is located in a rich historic landscape, with prehistoric monuments to the north (Ashwin and Bates 2000, fig. 1) and the Roman town of *Venta Icenorum* at Caistor St. Edmund 2km to the west (Davies 2001).

The village of Swardeston is known to date from the Late Saxon period and is mentioned in Domesday as *Suerdestuna*. The remains of the Common, which was the *foci* of the settlement in the Late Saxon and early medieval period, are located to the north of the modern village. During the post-medieval period the settlement shifted towards the main road (now the B1113).

The church of St Mary (HER 9474), located in an isolated position to the south-west of Swardeston, has a Norman nave with the rest of the fabric dating from the 14th century. Its position away from the centre of the modern village is probably an indicator of how the settlement has moved through time.

Several post-medieval buildings survive within the village. Swardeston Farm, where the evaluation trenches were located, dates from c. 1730 with 19th-century additions (HER 35405). While approximately 300m to the south of the site is a 16th-century building and stables (HER 34071/40685). Located 200m to the east is a 17th-century timber-framed house (HER 34073), with a public house dating from c. 1690 lying approximately 350m to the south-east (HER 14665).

Several instances of archaeological finds have been made to the west of the Common including Romano-British pottery and coins; Early Saxon buckle and strap fittings; Late Saxon box fittings; medieval pottery, coins and seal matrix, along with post-medieval pottery and metalwork (HER 17648).

Previous archaeological work in the vicinity consists of a single evaluation trench excavated approximately 400m to the south-east of the current site (Bates 2001).

### 4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

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 5% of the site (98 sq. m) excluding areas previously built over (1955 sq. m) was to be sampled through trial trenching. Initially, three trenches were to be excavated, each 20m long and 1.8m wide. However, due to restrictions including underground and overhead electricity and telephone cables, contaminated ground, property access and tree roots at the front of the site, the most northerly trench was abandoned, following verbal agreement from NLA. To compensate for this, the middle trench (Trench 1) was extended by the equivalent distance to the south to retain the required sample size.

The trench situated in the southern half of the site (Trench 2) was initially sited adjacent to an orchard, in an area of ground outside the demolished abattoir site. This location was found unsuitable for access, being waterlogged, with the machine excavator getting stuck in silty clay. With permission from NLA, the trench was relocated approximately 8m to the west where the ground was more solid due to

building rubble, this being adjacent to the north-east edge of the demolished abattoir site, but in a position where the machine could work without sinking.

Trench 1 measured 40m x 1.8m and was excavated to an average depth of 0.70m. Trench 2 measured 20m x 1.8m and was excavated to a depth of 0.95m.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type using a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Levels were taken on the existing ground surface and on the base of the excavated trenches. These were referred to an Ordnance Survey datum spot height mark of 28m on the Common Road at the front of the site.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions were warm and dry although the underlying soil was wet in places. Access to parts of the site was restricted by undergrowth.

## **5.0 Results**

### ***Trench 1***

(Figs 1, 3, 4 and 5)

Trench 1 was located c. 50m from the southern edge of Swardeston Common, between the access road to the abattoir site and an orchard. The north end of the trench was sited approximately 20m to the south of the nearest residential property, a cottage located on the edge of the Common (Fig. 1). Trench 1 measured 40m x 1.8m, and was excavated in c. 150mm spits down to a natural boulder clay at an average depth of 0.70m.

The topsoil ([3]) was a dark grey brown organic loam with frequent grass roots that measured between 0.20m and 0.30m deep. It overlay a mid brown silty clay subsoil ([4]), 0.40m to 0.45m thick, that contained moderate flecks of chalk and a continuation of the roots seen in the topsoil. The subsoil overlay natural yellow boulder clay ([5]) located in the base of the trench (0.70m). Root disturbance could also be seen the natural.

At the north end of the trench an irregular gully ([1]) was observed cut into the boulder clay. This feature ran roughly in a north-west to south-east direction and was visible for approximately 4m before disappearing into the west-facing section of the trench. The fill of this feature was a firm light brown silt clay ([2]) plastic in texture, containing moderate small flint pebbles and flecks of chalk and occasional snail shells. No finds were recovered from this feature which was 0.40m in depth. This was interpreted as a drainage gully.

Approximately 13m along the trench from the north a 0.30m wide modern pipe trench ([6]) was observed running east-to-west, perpendicular to the line of the trench. This was filled with a dark silt ([7]) containing modern red brick (or tile) rubble and lumps of re-deposited boulder clay.

No other features of archaeological interest were observed along the length of the trench.

### **Trench 2**

(Fig. 2)

Trench 2 was located adjacent and to the north-east of the demolished abattoir, where the ground was covered in rubble from the flattened building. This compacted layer of mainly brick rubble with ash, sand and cinders ([8]) was removed by machine to an average depth of 0.45m. In the centre of the trench an area approximately 2 sq. m of solid brick rubble survived, which may have represented a brick platform or other hard-standing. Trench 2 measured 20m x 1.8m and was excavated to a depth of 0.95m.

Beneath the brick rubble was a deposit of firm mid to dark grey brown sandy silt subsoil ([9]) with an average thickness of 0.50m that contained chalk fragments and moderate small stones. This overlay natural boulder clay ([5]) at an average base depth of 0.95m along the trench. The clay was pale yellow at the south and north ends of the trench but changed to a mid grey green colour in the centre, particularly in the area of the supposed hard-standing rubble. A strong odour was emitted from the clay during excavation, which might have derived from sub-surface drainage across the site.

No features were observed in the sections or the base of the trench, the natural boulder clay being apparent for its entire length.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

The gully located in the north end of Trench 1 was interpreted as a drainage feature, possibly leading to the nearby ponds in the lower-lying ground to the east. No artefactual evidence was recovered from the gully to date the feature. The remainder of Trench 1 was devoid of features apart from the modern pipe trench running from west to east across the trench line, which presumably served the same purpose of drainage as the excavated gully to the north.

The relocation of Trench 2 meant that much of the upper deposits encountered were as a result of disturbed ground. The subsoil that was observed here beneath the brick rubble may have been as a result of made ground, associated with the abattoir construction, but no specific evidence for this was seen in the sections.

The lack of artefactual evidence from the two trenches may imply that this area, to the south and west of the Common was undeveloped in terms of habitation. Alternatively, the distance of the site from the Common edge may mean that any previous settlement in this area was closer to the Common, with the evaluation area possibly used for agriculture or gardens.

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



## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Mr R. Jenkinson of Jenkinson Properties Ltd who commissioned and funded this work.

The archaeological evaluation was carried out by Sandrine Whitmore and the author. Thanks go to driver Stuart for his skilful handling of the machine during excavation. Norfolk Historic Environment Record information was supplied by Jan Allen (NLA). The report was illustrated and produced by Julie Curl and edited by Alice Lyons.

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## **Appendix 1: Context Summary**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Trench</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Period</b>
1	1	Cut	Drainage gully	?Post-medieval
2	1	Deposit	Fill of [1]	-
3	1	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
4	1	Deposit	Sandy clay subsoil	Post-medieval
5	1	Deposit	Boulder clay	Natural
6	1	Cut	Pipe trench	Modern
7	1	Deposit	Fill of [6]	-
8	2	Deposit	Brick rubble	Modern
9	2	Deposit	Sand silt subsoil/?made ground	Post-medieval



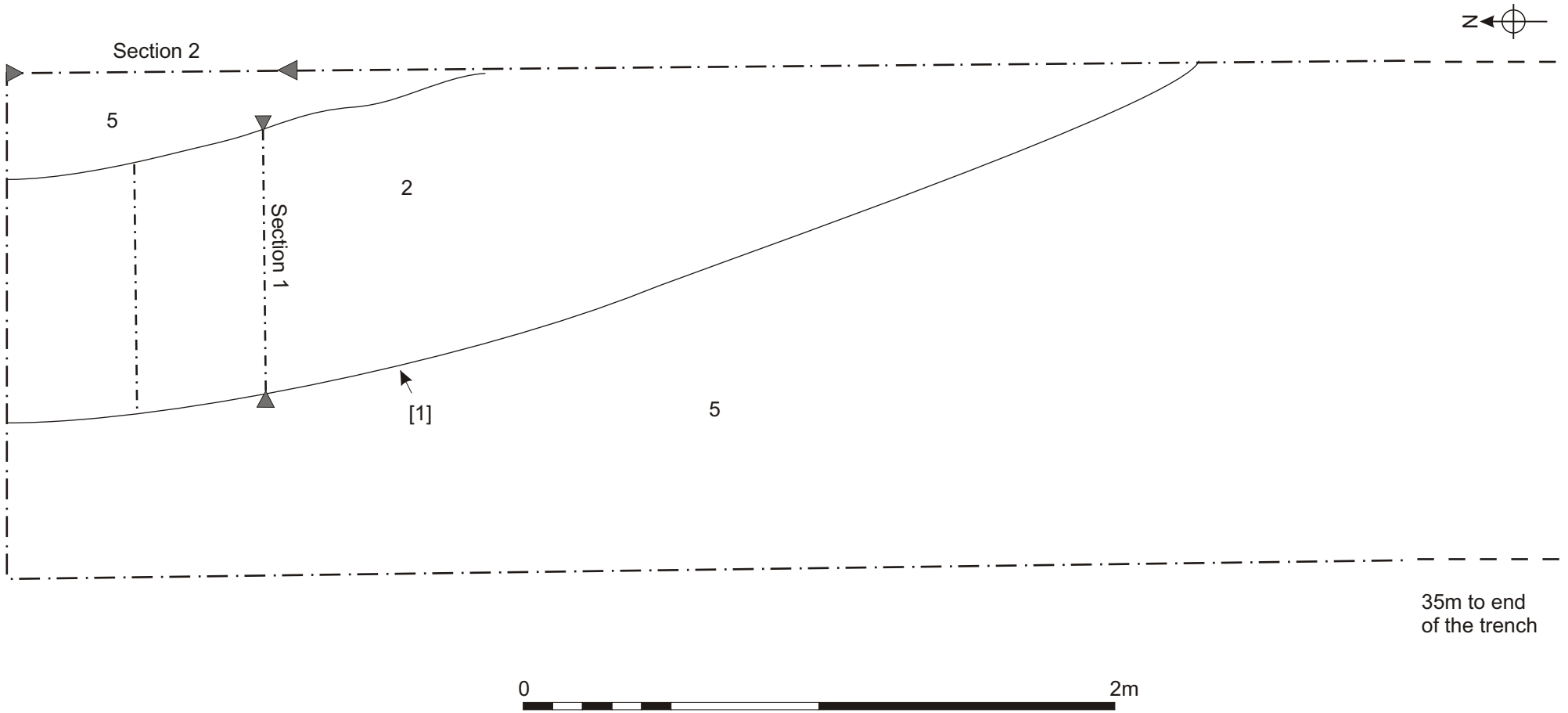


Figure 3. Trench 1, north end of trench (plan). Scale 1:20

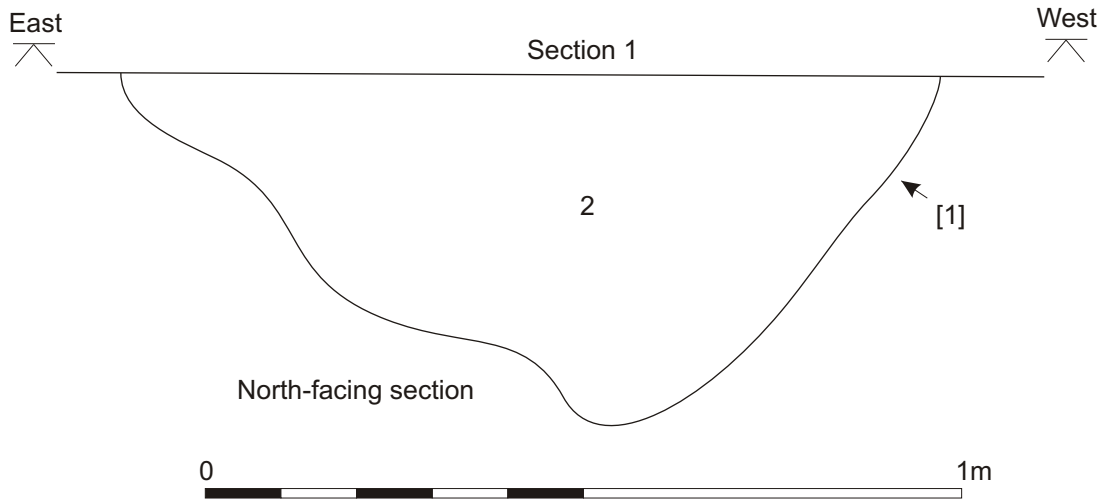


Figure 4. Trench 1, gully [1] (section). Scale 1:10

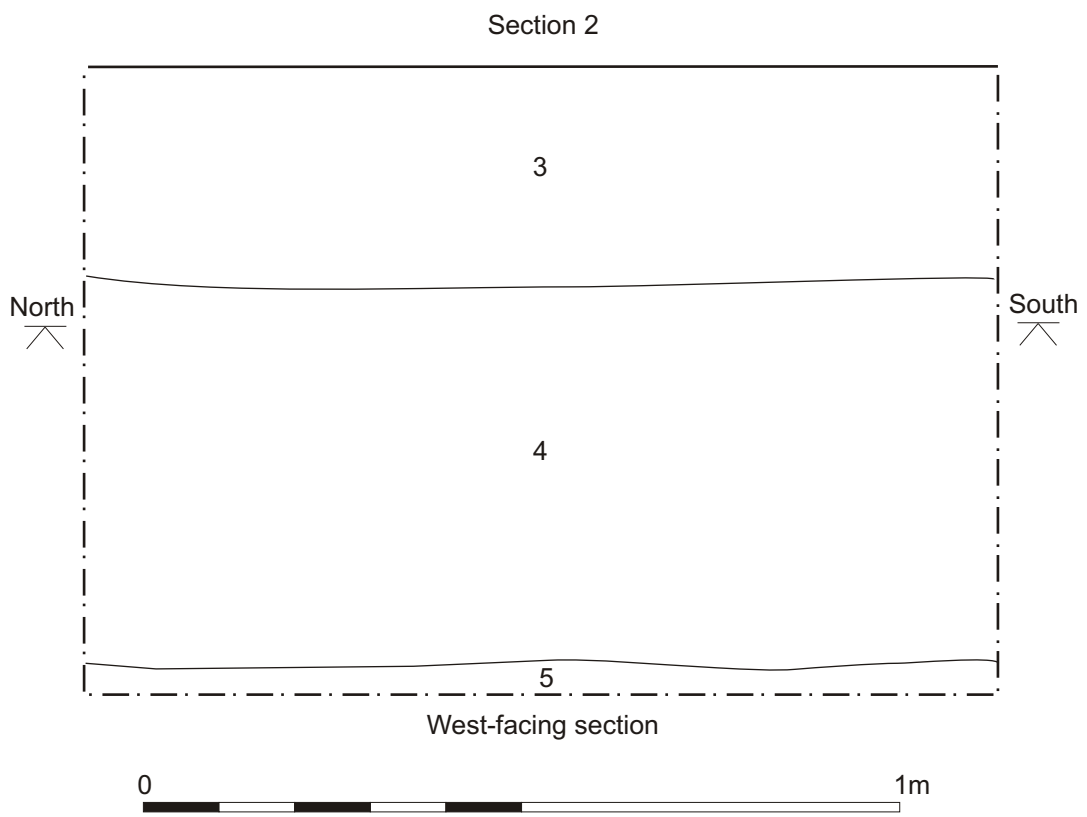


Figure 5. Trench 1 (section) Scale 1:10