

Report 2237



nau archaeology

**An Archaeological Evaluation at the proposed  
Thetford Bus Interchange, Thetford, Norfolk.**

ENF 125407



**Prepared for**  
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BAU2237

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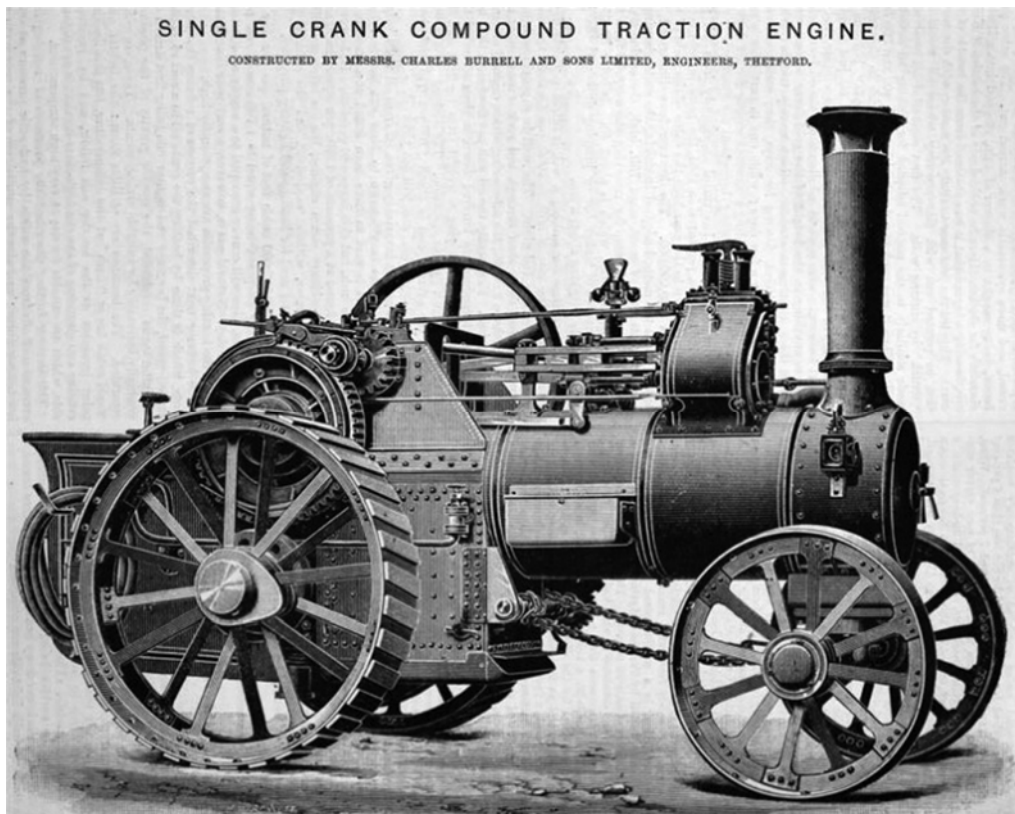
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Late 19th-century Steam Engine built at the Charles Burrell Works, St Nicolas Street (Image source, Graces Guide)

Location	Proposed Bus Interchange, Thetford, Norfolk
District:	Breckland District Council
Grid Ref.:	TL 6790-3291
HER No.:	ENF 125407
OASIS Ref.:	89142
Client:	NPS South-East Limited
Dates of Fieldwork:	2-4 November 2010

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## **Summary**

*NAU Archaeology conducted an archaeological evaluation in early November 2010 for NPS South-East Limited in Thetford, Norfolk ahead of the proposed development of the site for a bus interchange.*

*The site lies in the core of the historic town to the north of the River Little Ouse between St Nicholas Street and Minstergate.*

*The evaluation consisted of two trenches, each measuring 15m by 1.80m in plan and located within the proposed development footprint.*

*The earliest evidence of human activity provided by this evaluation was residual finds of a worked flint and single sherd of Roman pottery. The earliest archaeological features recorded were medium- to large-sized pits of Late Saxon or early medieval date which were present in both evaluation trenches. Industrial activity associated with the Charles Burrell traction engine works was also identified in both evaluation trenches. These works occupied part of the redevelopment area from the early 19th century to the 1930s.*

*Though the evaluated area lay close to the site of medieval church of St Nicholas, the proposed development appears to lie outside the burial grounds of this church as no human remains, graves or evidence of cemetery deposits were recovered during these works.*

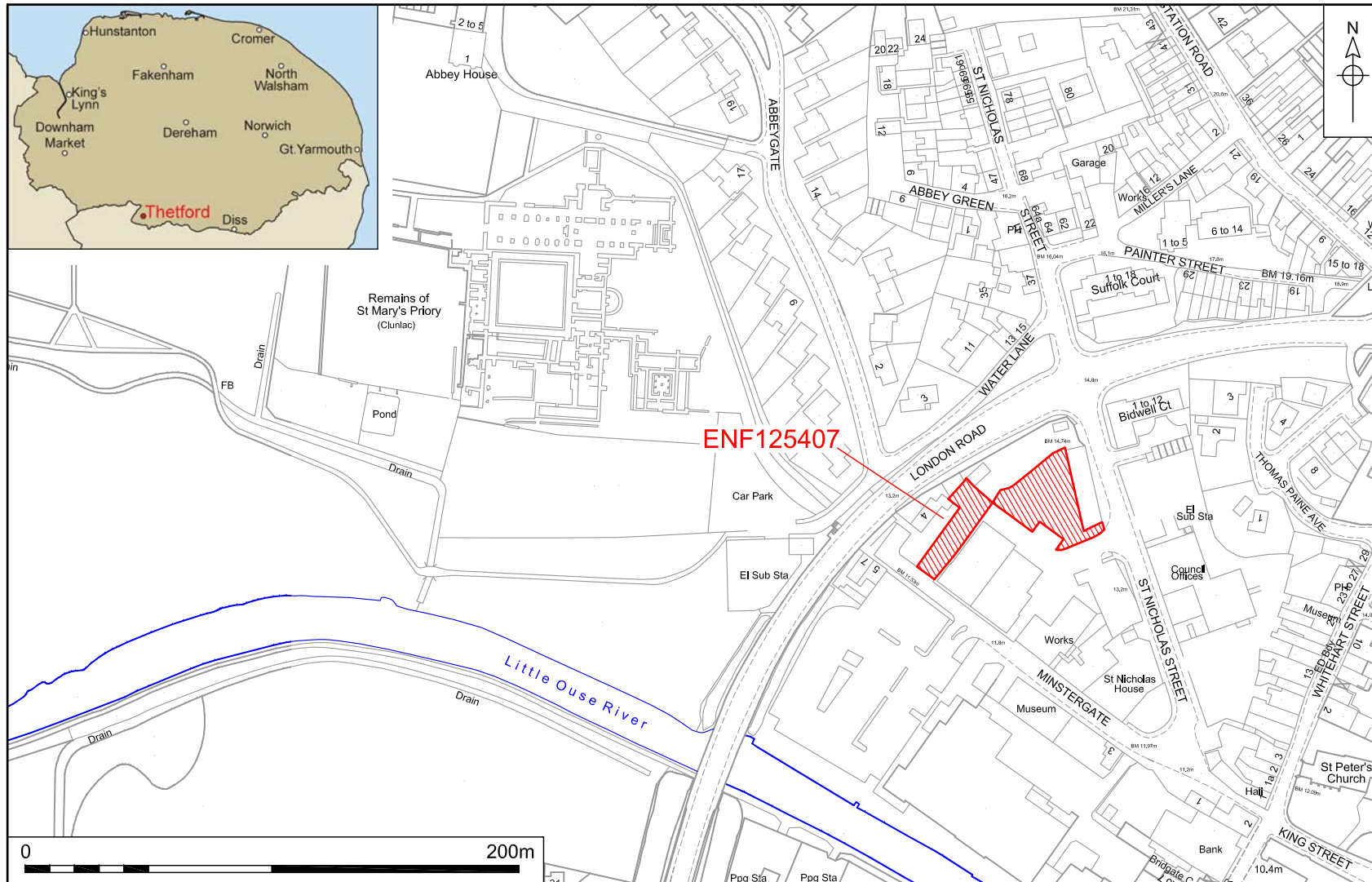
## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

(Fig 1)

Proposals to construct a new bus interchange on land between St Nicholas Street and Minstergate, Thetford, Norfolk (TF 98792 13276) required a programme of archaeological evaluation to assess the likely impacts of the proposed development on the archaeological resource and to assist in the determination of the level of archaeological risk prior to the submission of a planning application.

The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2237/DW). The fieldwork and report production was commissioned and funded by NPS South-East Limited.

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 evaluation site was located in the north-west of Thetford within the arc of London Road and between St Nicholas Street and Minstergate. The site slopes gently down from north to south towards the River Little Ouse which lies some 170m south of the site.

The solid geology in this part of Norfolk comprises Upper Chalk (British Geological Survey 1985) overlain by sandy fluvio-glacial drift (Lawes Agricultural Trust 1973).

Natural at the site was variable, mostly consisting of sand with chalk and less commonly areas of coarse angular gravels.

Site Survey was undertaken using a temporary benchmark from an origin of 12.09m OD located on the south west of St Peter's Church on Whitehart Street.

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The proposed development lies within the historic core of Thetford town between the frontages of Minstergate and St Nicholas Street and within an area thought to be contained by a Late Saxon defensive ditch circuit.

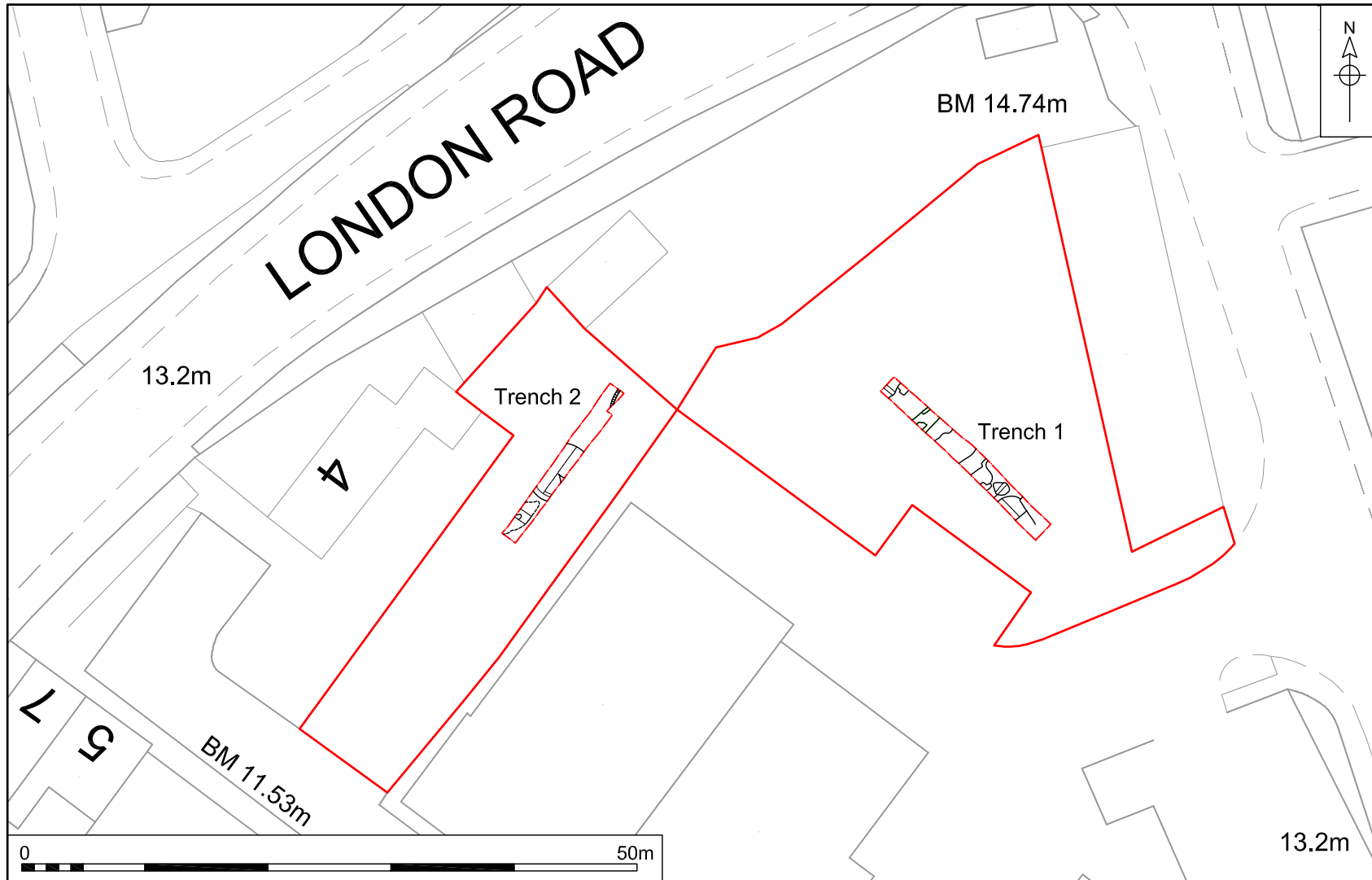
The site of St Nicholas Church and churchyard is thought to be located close to the area of the proposed bus interchange. This church is first documented in 1291 although probably was built earlier in the medieval period. The church was demolished in the late 16th century, although the tower stood until 1740. The exact location and extents of the church and churchyard are not known, although it is thought that they lay to the south of the proposed development. Rescue excavation and watching brief in 1990 south and west of the site (Andrews and Penn 1999a) revealed evidence for 11th- and 12th-century pitting as well as 36 burials related to the church. One burial of Roman date has also been found on the opposite side of St Nicholas Street.

Following the decline of the Late Saxon town of Thetford, the focus of occupation in the medieval period appears to have shifted north of the River Little Ouse. Excavations immediately west of the site in 1989 (Andrews and Penn 1999b) have revealed evidence of Late Saxon and medieval pitting. These excavations were primarily concentrated on the south-western side of the site. No evidence was found for burials in this excavation, indicating that the church and churchyard may not have extended northwards into the area of the proposed bus interchange.

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

(Fig 2)

Two trenches, each measuring 15m by 1.8m (total area of 54m<sup>2</sup>) were excavated to provide an approximate 5% sample of the development area (1,150m<sup>2</sup>) that had not previously been disturbed. Trench 1 was located in the east of the proposed redevelopment area and was aligned approximately north-west to south-east. Trench 2 lay in the west of the proposed development area and was aligned approximately north-east to south-west.



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Figure 2. Trenches location. Scale 1:500



The trenches were set out by the archaeologists and CAT-scanned prior to excavation. The trenches were positioned within the footprint of the proposed development to maximise the recovery of information.

The Programme of Archaeological Work (PoAW) sought to recover, by archaeological evaluation, information relating to the extent, date, phasing, character, function, status and significance of the site. A determination of the state of preservation of any features, deposits and structures was also required. The objectives set out in the PoAW are shown below.

- 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.*

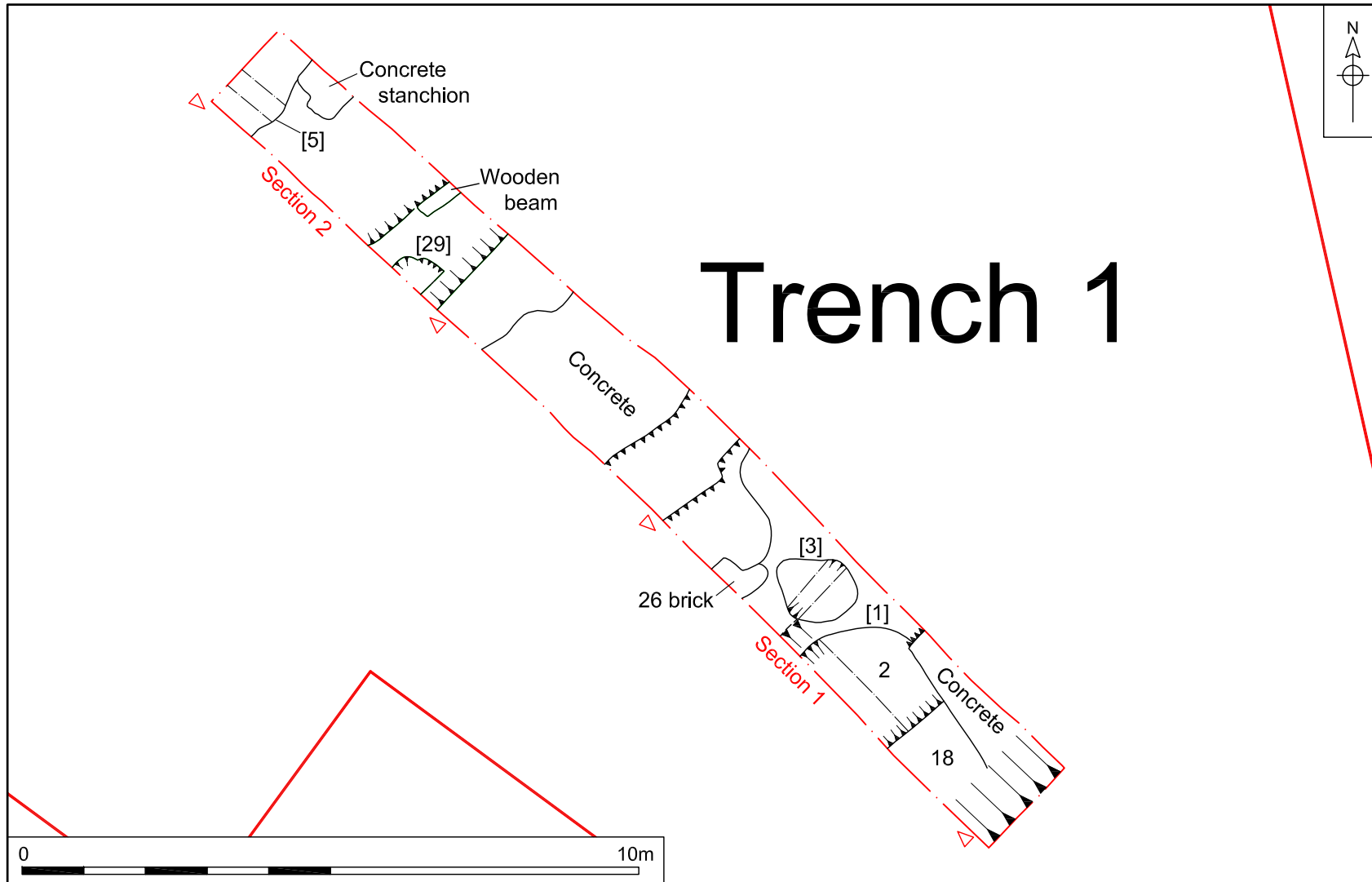
Machine excavation was carried out with a hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. A breaker attachment was used to break out parts of a modern concrete stanchion present in Trench 1

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. Monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

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



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Figure 3. Trench 1, plan of excavated features. Scale 1:100

## 5.0 RESULTS

### Trench 1

(Figs 3 and 4; Plate 1)

- At the time of the survey, ground level was at 12.82m OD
- Natural deposits were present at 12.47m OD

A considerable part of this trench, particularly at the southern end and centre was affected by construction of concrete stanchions. While some were removed by machining, a block within the centre of the trench was left as it proved too difficult to remove.

Natural deposits [25] consisted of pockets of medium sands within degraded chalk, this chalk occasionally containing flint.

The earliest feature identified was a large pit [1] located at the southern end of the trench. Though not fully excavated, it measured a minimum of 2m in diameter and was apparently circular in plan. The fill of this feature [2] was a mid brown silt sand containing a small quantity of pottery and animal bone. The small assemblage of pottery recovered from this feature was of Late Saxon/early medieval date.

Another pit [5] at the north end of the trench might also be of similar Late Saxon or early medieval date, again based on dating the small assemblage of pottery recovered from its fill. The excavated portion of this pit measured at least 0.80m in width, but little of this feature appeared to be present within the evaluation trench. The fill of this pit [6] was a mid brown silt sand. An undated layer of silt sand [34] overlay natural deposits in the north of the trench.

Overlying these pits were features considered to date to the use of the St Nicholas Street by the Charles Burrell Works. These remains consisted of a layer [31] comprising interleaving sand and ash deposits, a pit [35] at the north end of the trench with a fill [36] containing asphalt and with a similar pit [29] with fill [30] nearby. This latter feature lay below layer [28]. At the south end of the trench a small, shallow circular pit [3] was also present. A masonry structure [26] constructed of brick might also be part of the 'industrial' phase at the site.

A characteristic of these features was that they contained ash, cinders and metal working debris.

Overlying these remains were features considered to be of 20th-century date; pits [21] [24] [32] and layers and spreads [17], [18], [19], [20] and [27]).

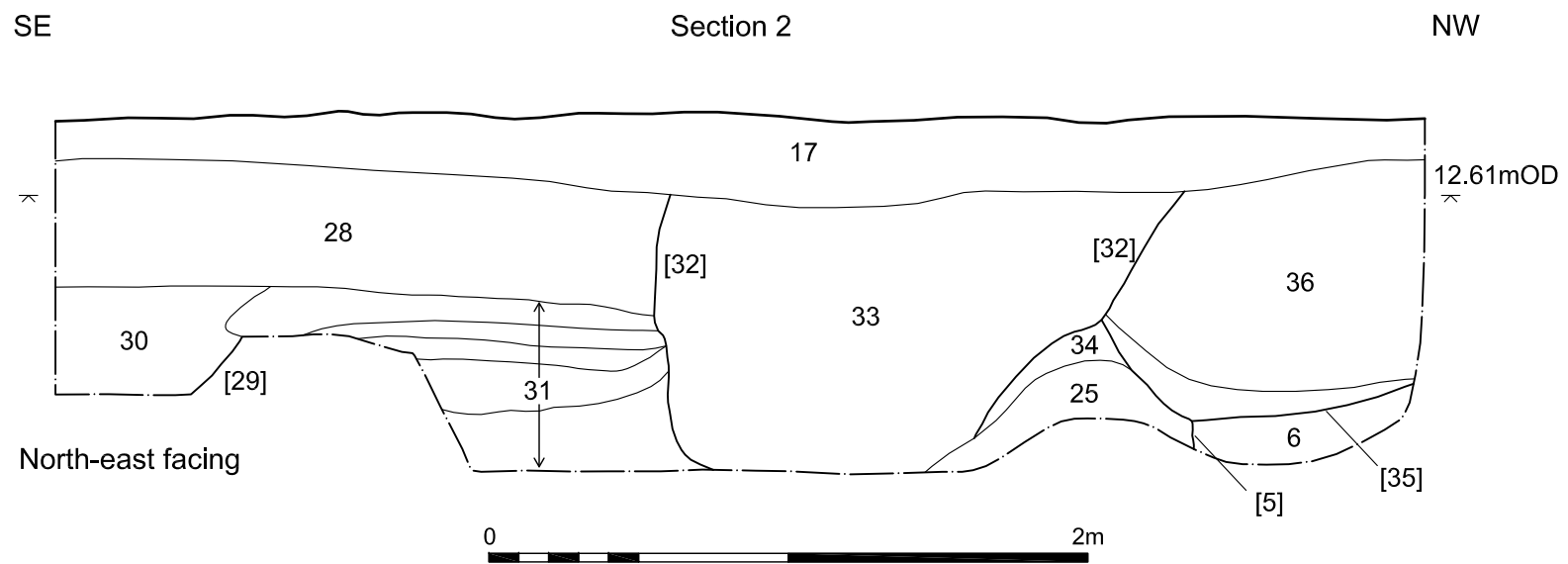
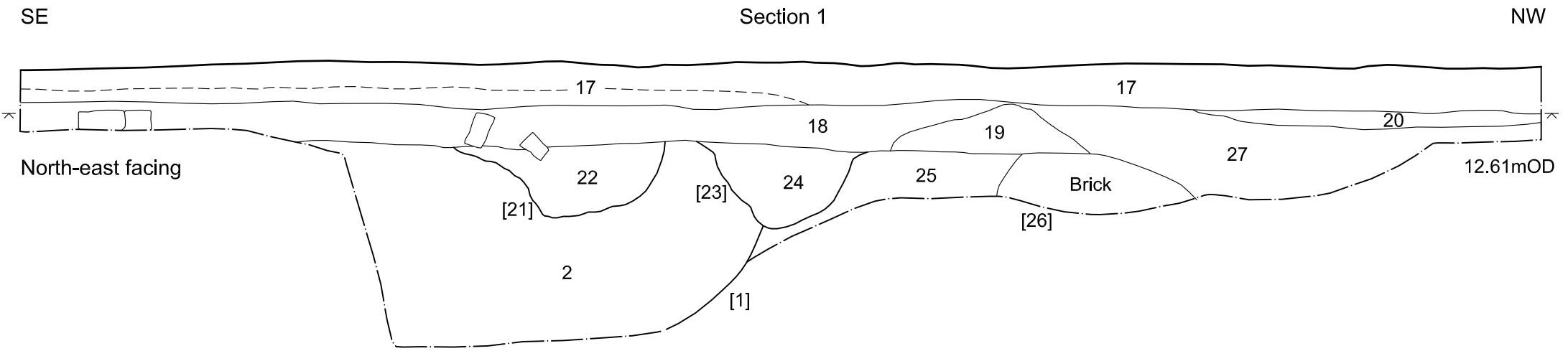
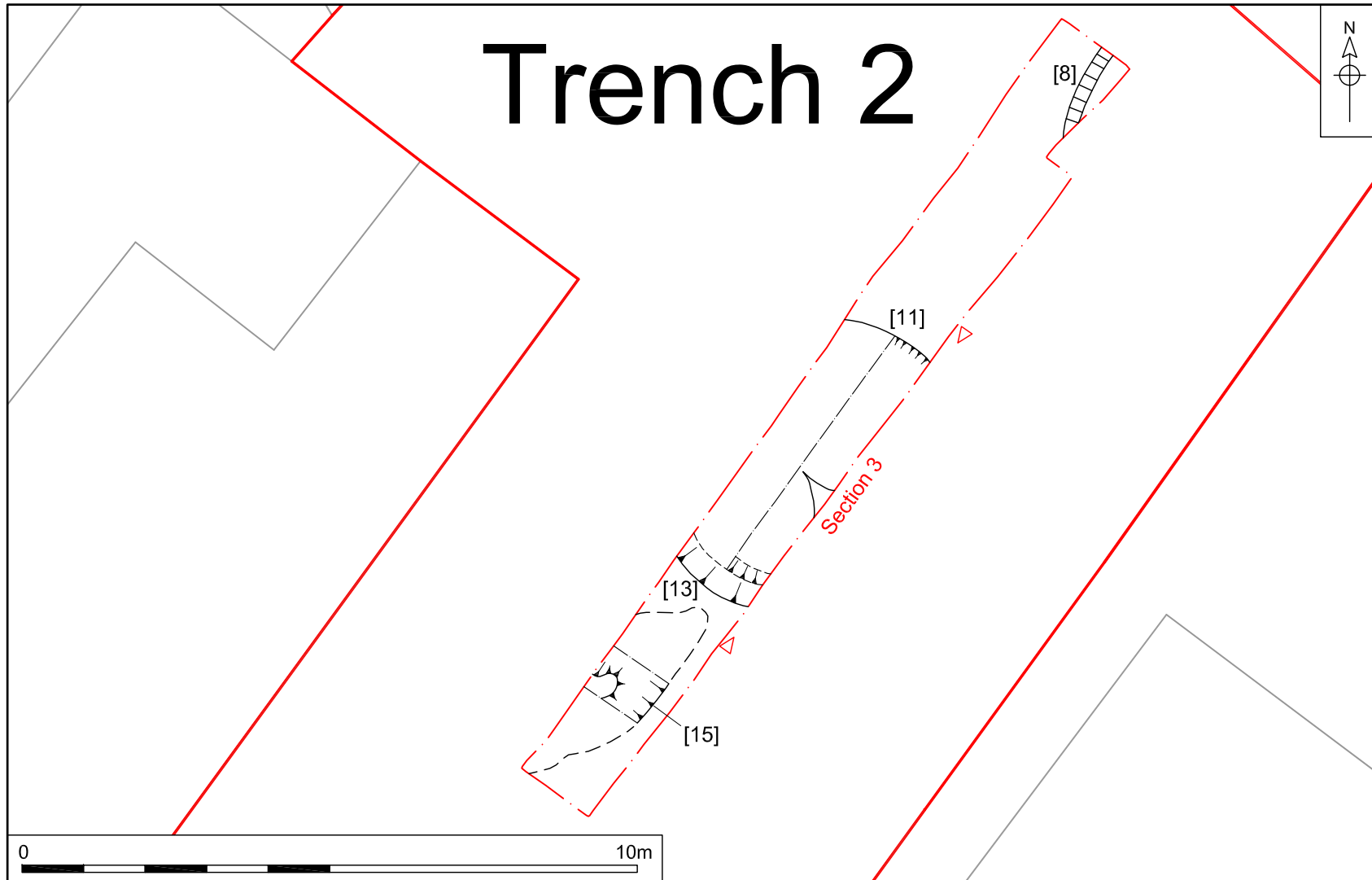


Figure 4. Trench 1, sections 1 and 2. Scale 1:25



Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north after machining, 1m scale



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Figure 5. Trench 2, plan of excavated features. Scale 1:100

## Trench 2

(Figs 6 and 7; Plate 2)

- At the time of the survey, ground level was at 12.49m OD
- Natural deposits were present at 11.65m OD

Natural [25] comprised pockets of a mid yellow brown medium sand within chalk that occasionally contained flint.

The most significant archaeological remains in Trench 2 were two large intercutting pits present in the centre of the trench. Due to their depth and health and safety considerations these pits were only partially excavated. The largest of these features [11] was broadly circular in plan with a diameter of 2.80m. Two fills within this feature were identified, the lower [37] consisting of a dark brown silt sand with occasional flecks of chalk and occasional small stones. Overlying this was a similar but paler brown fill [10] that contained occasional mortar flacks and small lumps, as well as an occasional small fleck of brick. A small quantity of pottery was recovered from this fill. Cutting this deposit (the upper fill of pit [11]) was a large pit [13] that measured 2.80m in diameter and contained what appeared to be a single fill [12] of mid brown silt sand with occasional chalk flecks and small stones as well as occasional small mortar inclusions. A small collection of Late Saxon/early medieval pottery was recovered from the excavation of this feature.

At the western end of the trench a feature [15] of uncertain form was tested by excavation. Amorphous and elongate in plan and with an uneven base, it was considered an archaeological feature of some type, perhaps best classified as a pit. It contained a single fill [14] (not illustrated) of coarse sands with minimal silt content, and was notable for containing some animal bone, though unfortunately only a single sherd of Roman pottery. This feature had been cut into an area of natural comprising angular gravels and flints, which might explain its rather poor definition as a feature in plan.

Part of a modern brick built structure [8] present at the east end of the trench had been in-filled with glass and other modern debris.

Overlying all these features was a layer [16] that comprised a discontinuous spread of purple brown cinders and metal working debris overlain by compacted building rubble put down as part of recent groundworks at the site.

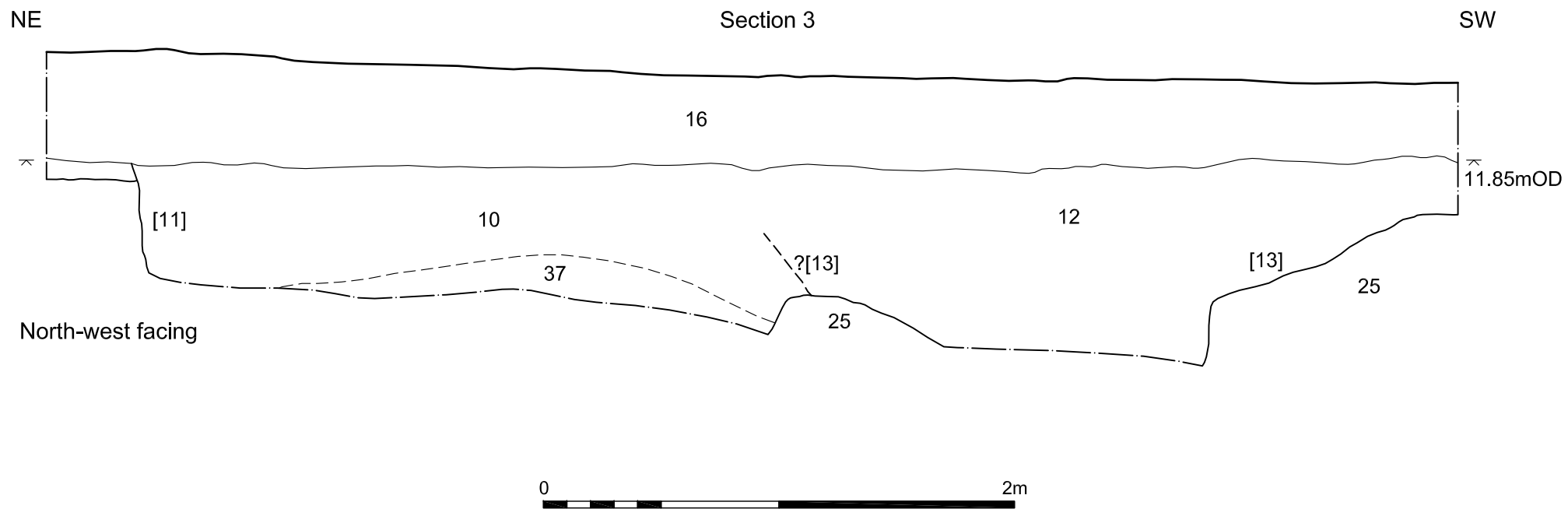


Figure 6. Trench 2, section 3, showing pits [11] and [13]. Scale 1:25





Plate 2. Trench 2, looking east at excavation of pits [11] and [13]. 1m scale

## 6.0 THE FINDS

By Sarah Percival

The finds from the site are listed below ordered by material and a listed ordered by context can be found in Appendix 2a.

### 6.1 Pottery

A total of nineteen sherds weighing 159g were recovered from seven contexts, all the fills of pits (Appendix 3). The assemblage is predominantly Late Saxon and includes sherds of locally made coarsewares and finewares imported from Stamford. The earliest pottery recovered is Roman and is likely to be residual. Single sherds of medieval and modern pottery were also found.

#### 6.1.1 Roman

A single sherd of micaceous sandy greyware was found in the fill of pit [15]. The sherd is likely to be a product of Roman pottery industries in the Waveney Valley but is not closely datable within the Roman period.

#### 6.1.2 Late Saxon

The Later Saxon assemblage comprises ten sherds of Thetford Ware weighing 135g, along with two sherds imported from the St Neots area and a single sherd of Stamford Ware. Thetford Ware was found in medium and fine fabrics (Rogerson and Dallas 1984, 118) and includes a heavily sooted rim with internal hollow from a medium AB jar from the fill of pit [5] (Rogerson and Dallas 1984, fig.153, 31) and a sherd from a sagging base found in pit [11]. Two body sherds of shell-tempered

St Neots-type ware weighing 5g came from the fills of two pits ([11] and [13]) and a rim from a small unglazed bowl in Stamford Ware fabric B (Mahany *et al* 1982, 56) was found in the fill of pit [1]. Both St Neots-type Ware and Stamford Ware date to around 850-1150 whilst Thetford Ware was in use from the 10th to the 11th centuries.

The pottery is almost certainly derived from domestic occupation and is typical of assemblages from Saxo-Norman excavations in Thetford, comparing well with those identified by Rogerson and Dallas (1984). The presence of small numbers of imported vessels from the St Neots area and from Stamford reflects 'growing trade between Thetford and Middle Anglia into the 11th century' (Rogerson and Dallas 1984, 126).

### **6.1.3 Medieval**

A small unglazed body sherd weighing 2g from the fill of pit [29] is of unsourced local medieval pottery.

### **6.1.4 Modern**

A single sherd of 18th- to 20th-century industrial slipware was recovered from the fill of pit [3].

## **6.2 Flint**

A piece of undiagnostic struck flint weighing 13g was found in the fill of pit [11].

## **6.3 Iron**

An iron nail weighing 6g was found in the fill of pit [11] which also contained Late Saxon pottery.

## **6.4 Animal Bone**

A small assemblage of eleven pieces of animal bone weighing 635g was collected. The presence of the animal bone along with the pottery sherds suggests that the pits excavated during the investigation contained material derived from domestic occupation. It is recommended that the animal bone be fully identified and catalogued as part of full analysis if appropriate at a later date.

## **6.5 Shell**

Oyster shell weighing 19g was collected from pits [1] and [29]. The shell was discarded following recording.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation demonstrated that on the eastern side of the site in Trench 1 earlier remains had been affected by modern disturbance in the form of concrete stanchions. Away from these stanchions the survival of archaeological remains appeared good.

The earliest evidence of human activity at the site is provided by a worked flint of broadly late prehistoric date, though as a residual find within a later feature this artefact indicates no more than a background level of activity during this period in the vicinity of the site.

The recovery of a single sherd of Roman pottery is a more significant finding as structural remains and a single inhumation burial of the Roman period were recorded nearby to the east of St Nicholas Street on site NHER 1134 (Andrews and Penn 1999a).

The results of the current evaluation can be considered an adjunct to the findings of the excavation close to the west of the site (Andrews and Penn 1999c) where large pits of Late Saxon and early medieval date were identified. A similar pattern of activity seems to have been identified by the present evaluation, with large pits of Late Saxon to early medieval date recorded in both the evaluation trenches. The purpose of such large features is not clear, but they might originally have served as quarries to extract sands, gravel and chalk before being backfilled.

Large spreads of apparent metal working debris and pits of varying size also containing this material are thought to be associated with the Charles Burrell traction engine works, an industry that occupied much of the St Nicholas Street frontage from the early 19th century to the 1930s. In both trenches it appears the earlier topography had been truncated by this industrial activity, inferred by spreads of burnt sand, cinders and metal working debris directly overlaying natural deposits. It is archaeologically significant that much of this industrial site would seem to survive, particularly in the area of Trench 1.

One of the key objectives of this evaluation was to establish if the churchyard of St Nicholas church was present within the proposed development area. From what has been revealed by this work it appears the churchyard is located to the south and east of the redevelopment site.

## **Acknowledgements**

The site was excavated by the author assisted by Stuart Calow. The trenches were machined by Bryn Williams.

David Whitmore managed the project on behalf of NAU Archaeology and Ken Hamilton monitored the site on behalf of NLA. An NHER Site code was provided by Sarah Howard of NLA.

The finds were washed by Rob Brown and processed and analysed by Sarah Percival. 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	Pit		Pit	Medieval
2	Deposit		1	Fill of pit [1]	Medieval
3	Cut	Pit		Pit	Medieval
4	Deposit		3	Fill of pit [3]	Medieval
5	Cut	Pit		Pit	Unknown
6	Deposit		5	Fill of pit [5]	Unknown
7	Deposit		8	Fill of well [8]	Modern
8	Masonry	Well	9	Well?	Modern
9	Cut			Construction cut of (8)	Modern
10	Deposit		11	Fill of pit [11]	Late Saxon ?
11	Cut	Pit		Pit	Late Saxon ?
12	Deposit		13	Fill of pit [13]	Medieval
13	Cut	Pit		Pit	Medieval
14	Deposit		15	Fill of pit [13]	Medieval
15	Cut	Pit		Amorphous pit	Medieval
16	Deposit			Topsoil and rubble	Modern
17	Deposit				Modern
18	Deposit			Layer	Modern
19	Deposit			Asphalt	Modern
20	Deposit			Mortar fragments	Modern
21	Cut	Pit		Pit	Modern
22	Deposit		21	Fill of pit [21]	Modern
23	Cut	Pit		Pit	Modern
24	Deposit		23	Fill of pit [23]	Modern
25	Deposit			Natural Sand	-
26	Masonry			Brick wall	Post-medieval
27	Deposit			Silt	Modern
28	Deposit			Sandy silt with mortar and brick	Unknown
29	Cut	Pit		Pit	Medieval ?
30	Deposit		29	Fill of pit [29]	Medieval
31	Deposit			Layers	Post-medieval
32	Cut	Pit		Pit	Unknown
33	Deposit		32	Fill of pit [32]	Post-medieval
34	Deposit			Layer	Post-medieval
35	Cut	Pit		Pit	Post-medieval
36	Deposit		35	Fill of pit [35]	Post-medieval
37	Deposit		11	Fill of Pit [11]	Late Saxon?

## Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Type	Total
Late Saxon ?	Pit	1
Medieval	Pit	4
Medieval ?	Pit	1
Post-medieval	Pit	1
Modern	Pit	2
	Well	1
Unknown	Pit	2

## Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
2	Shell	1	7g	Unknown	Discarded
2	Pottery	4	23g	Late Saxon	
2	Animal Bone	6	411g	Unknown	
4	Pottery	1	4g	Modern	
6	Pottery	3	71g	Late Saxon	
10	Pottery	4	35g	Late Saxon	
10	Iron	1	6g	Unknown	Nail
10	Flint – Struck	1	13g	Prehistoric	
10	Animal Bone	1	2g	Unknown	
12	Pottery	2	20g	Late Saxon	
12	Animal Bone	1	1g	Unknown	
14	Pottery	1	4g	Roman	
14	Animal Bone	3	221g	Unknown	
30	Shell	1	12g	Unknown	Discarded
30	Pottery	1	2g	Medieval	

## Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Prehistoric	Flint – Struck	1
Roman	Pottery	1
Late Saxon	Pottery	13
Medieval	Pottery	1
Modern	Pottery	1
Unknown	Animal Bone	11
	Iron	1
	Shell	2

### Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Fabric name	Dsc	form	Qty	Wt	Period	Spotdate
2	THET3	Thetford Ware (medium)	U		3	14g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.
2	STAMB	Stamford Ware	R	Bowl	1	9g	Late Saxon	850 - 1150
4	INDS	Industrial Slipware	U		1	4g	Modern	L18th - 20th c.
6	THET3	Thetford Ware (medium)	R	Medium jar	1	29g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.
6	THET3	Thetford Ware (medium)	U		2	42g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.
10	THET3	Thetford Ware (medium)	B	Sagging base	1	24g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.
10	THET2	Thetford Ware (fine)	U		2	7g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.
10	STNE	St Neots Ware	U		1	4g	Late Saxon	850 - 1150
12	STNE	St Neots Ware	U		1	1g	Late Saxon	850 - 1150
12	THET3	Thetford Ware (medium)	U		1	19g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.
14	MSGW	Micaceous sandy greyware	U		1	4g	Roman	2nd - 4th c.
30	LMU	Local medieval Unglazed	U		1	2g	Medieval	11th - 14th c.

**Key:** U - undecorated body sherd; B – base; R - rim.