

Report 2610



nau archaeology

## An Archaeological Evaluation at Micklebring, Church Lane, Great Bircham

ENF125611



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January 2011



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<i>Issue 1</i>		

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Location: Micklebring, Church Lane, Great Bircham, Norfolk  
District: Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk  
Grid Ref.: TF 7696 3256  
HER No.: ENF125611  
OASIS Ref.: 91219  
Client: J.D. and I. Maiden  
Dates of Fieldwork: 21 December 2010

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation of land at Micklebring, Church Lane, Great Bircham, was conducted for J.D. and I. Maiden ahead of the development of the land for a single dwelling and its curtilage. The development plot is located close to and just west of St Mary's church.*

*This evaluation produced evidence of two linear archaeological features (a parallel ditch and ditch/furrow) of probable Saxo-Norman to medieval date perhaps representing activity during this time.*

*The subsoil and topsoil deposits indicated a subsequent period of openfield-type arable agriculture with intensive horticultural activity in the modern period.*

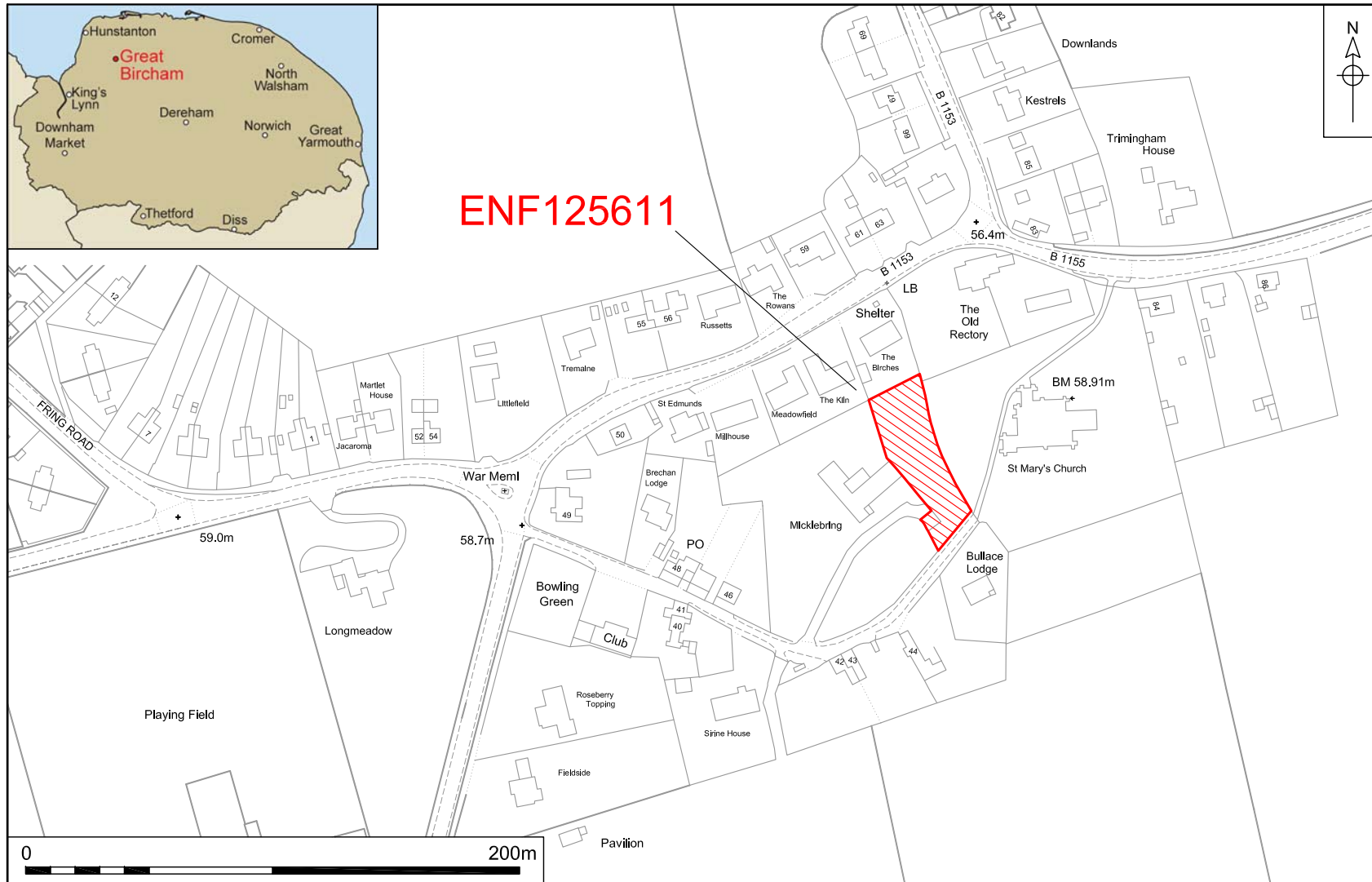
## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

One 15m trench was dug within the footprint of the proposed dwelling to provide a suitable sample of the development area which covers 0.61ha (Fig. 1).

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by The Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk (Ref.n10/01475/F) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Historic Environment Service (formerly Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Ref. CNF41463). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2610/NP). This work was commissioned by Ian H. Bix and Associates Ltd on behalf of their clients J.D. and I. Maiden who funded the work.

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 Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5)* (Department of Communities and Local Government 2010). 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 (NMAAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

## **2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The natural geology of this area consists of glacial sands and gravels from the Anglian Glaciation (BGS 1991) over Upper Cretaceous Chalk (BGS 1985).

The site lies in the centre of the modern village, on flat ground at a height of c.59m OD and occupies part of the grounds of 'Micklebring' between the house itself and the church.

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER), old maps and the monograph series East Anglian Archaeology have been consulted during the preparation of this section.

During the 1960s, several Neolithic flint artefacts (NHER1696) were discovered 500m north-west of the development site.

In 1969 a Neolithic polished flint axe (NHER1703) was found 300m north-west of the proposed development.

Peddars Way – a Roman or earlier route lies 3km to the west.

A Saxo-Norman pottery kiln which produced Thetford-Type ware was excavated in 1975 (NHER6062) within the foundation trenches of a new bungalow in a plot adjacent to the present development site. Also present was a north to south aligned ditch and a pit, both of Middle Saxon date (Rogerson and Adams 1978).

A number of Early Saxon and Medieval artefacts (NHER13555) have been found 250m north of the development site.

Artefacts from a range of periods (NHER14169) have been found in a garden 400m to the south-west of the present development including a Neolithic flint axe, Late Saxon and medieval pottery (Thetford and Grimston type wares) and a post-medieval larva quernstone

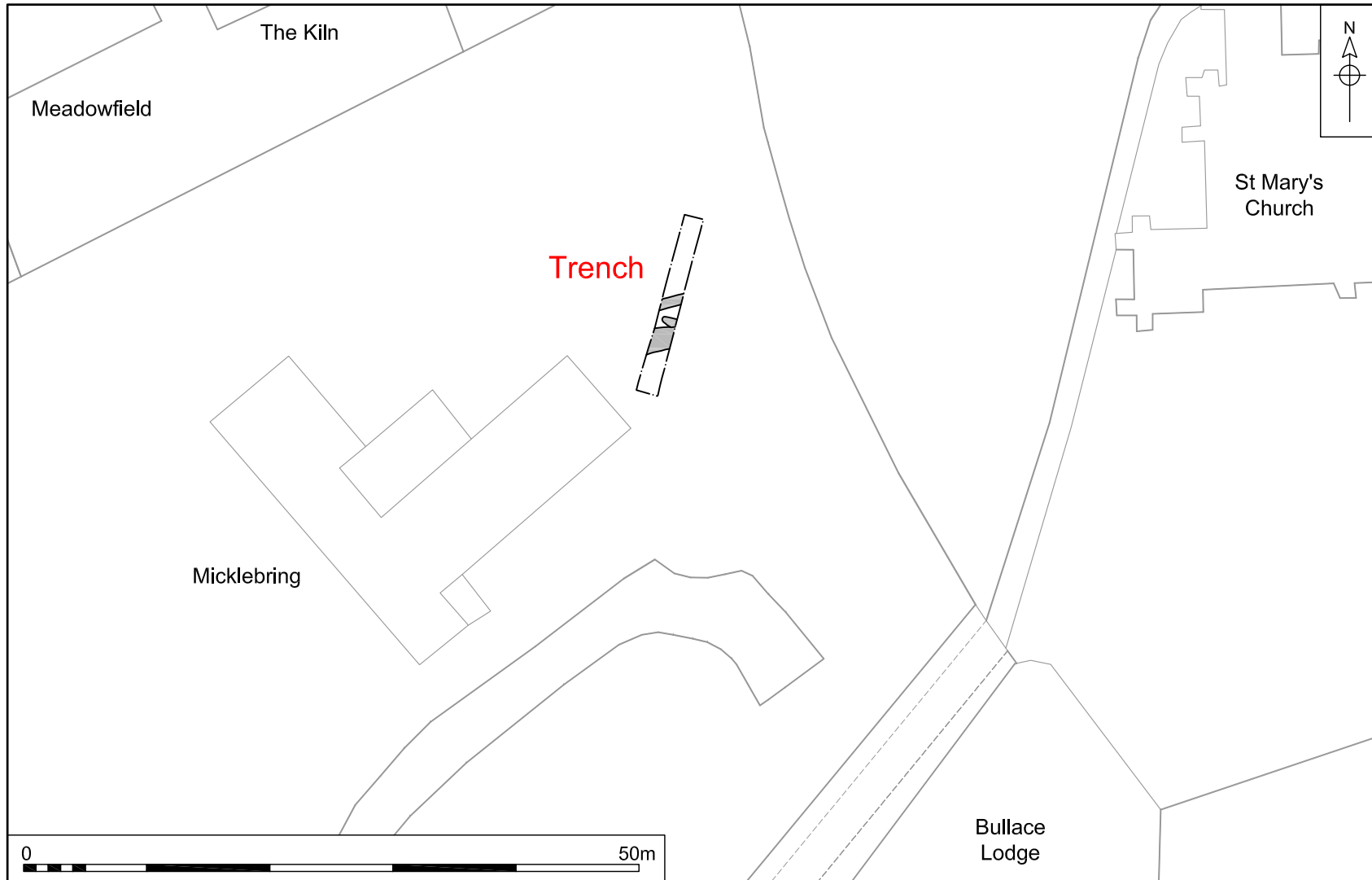
A 9th-century brooch (NHER16959) has been found 250m north of the present development.

A fragment of glazed medieval pottery (NHER1709) was found 300m north-east of the present development.

The parish church of St Mary (NHER1722) is of mostly 14th-century date but contains a tower door of c.1200 and a 13th-century font and sherds of medieval pottery (NHER42844) have been found during grave digging. It is located immediately east of the present development.

Metal detecting in 1985 produced a medieval bronze harness mount (NHER21449) 450m north of the present development.

In the 1960s or 1970s, before the building of the bungalow that currently occupies the site, the area was allotment land (1946 aerial photograph, <http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/Emap/EMapExplorer>).



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Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500



## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

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 a single 15 x 1.8m evaluation trench be excavated (Fig. 2).

Machine excavation was carried out with a hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

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 as no suitable deposits were encountered.

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 used during the course of this work was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark with a value of 58.91m OD, located on the side of St Marys Church.

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

## 5.0 RESULTS

This evaluation revealed a thick layer of subsoil sealing one ditch, one ditch/furrow and one possibly natural feature (Fig. 3).

Ditch [3] was aligned roughly south-west to north-east and measured 0.75m wide and 0.2m deep with a concave base and gently sloping sides. Its fill (4) was a mid greyish brown silty sand with occasional flint gravel and rare charcoal and chalk flecks. It contained one sherd of pottery of late 12th- to 14th-century date.

Feature [5] was oval in plan and was thought to be natural in origin, perhaps created by animal disturbance. It was 1.41m wide and 0.57m deep with an uneven base and sides. Its fill (6) was a loose, pale brown sandy silt with occasional flint gravel.

Ditch or furrow [7] was also aligned roughly south-west to north-east and was 1.83m wide and 0.53m deep with a concave base and gently sloping sides. Its fill (8) was a pale brown sandy silt with occasional flint gravel.

Sealing all three features was a layer of subsoil (2), 0.45m thick, which was a mid brown silty sand with occasional flint gravel, rare chalk and charcoal flecks and rare oyster shell. It contained three sherds of pottery of 10th- to 11th-century date.

Above this was the modern topsoil (1), which according to the landowner had lain under lawn probably since the 1970s just after the house was built. The topsoil was a 0.55m thick layer of dark brown silty sand with occasional flint gravel and infrequent amounts of chalk flecks and modern brick fragments. It contained three sherds of 19th- to 20th-century pottery.

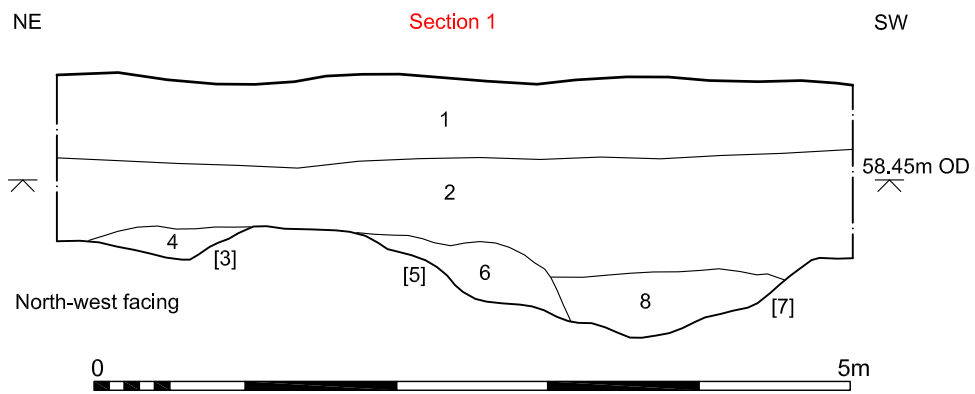
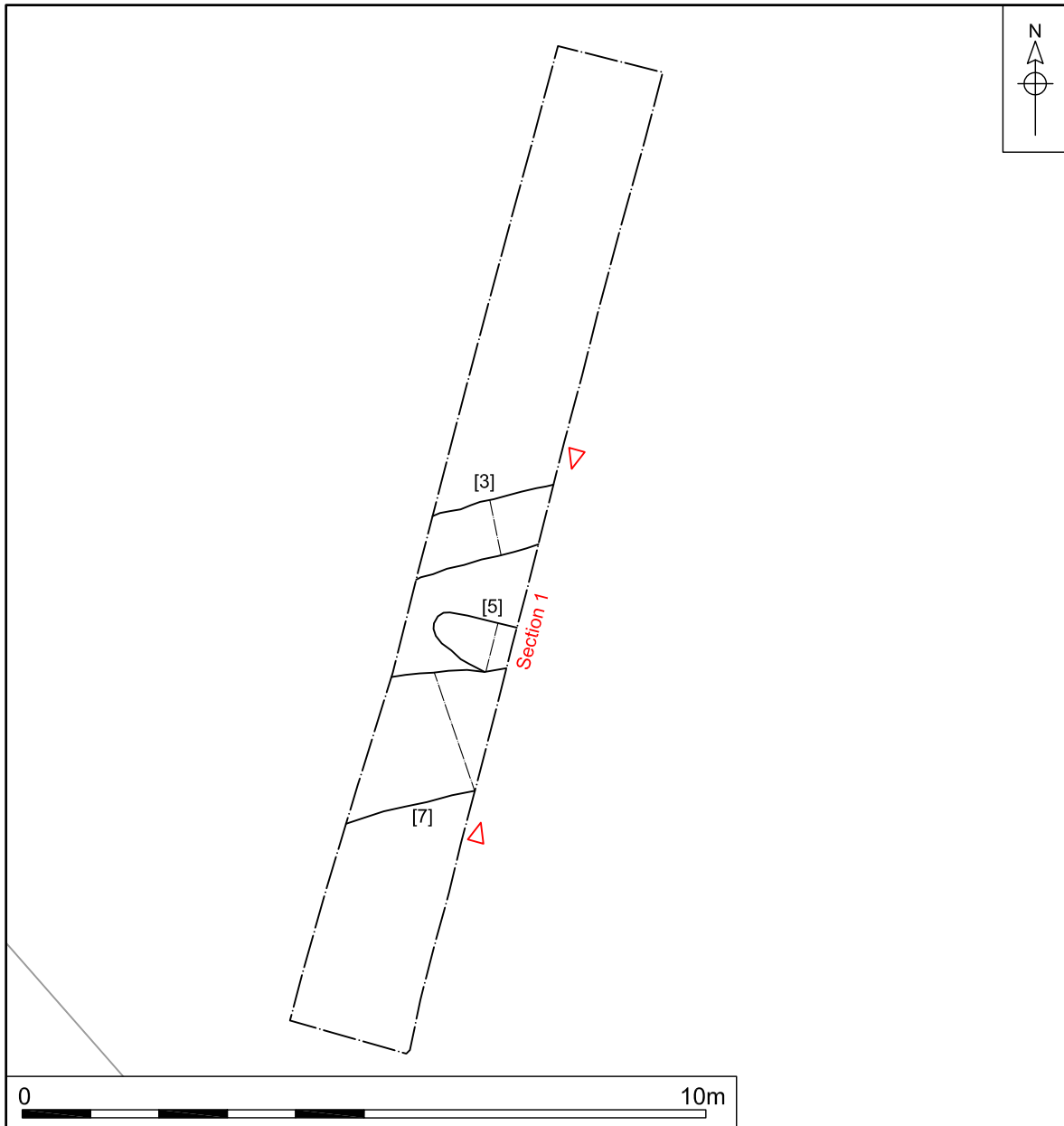


Figure 3. Trench plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:50



Plate 1: The trench facing north-east

## 6.0 THE FINDS

A list of all the finds ordered by context number is listed in Appendix 2a. Information on each category of find is presented below ordered by material.

### 6.1 Pottery

by Sarah Percival

A small assemblage of seven pottery sherds weighing 77g was collected from topsoil, subsoil and from the fill of ditch [03] (Appendix 3). The pottery is of a range of dates spanning the Late Saxon to post-medieval periods.

#### 6.1.1 *Late Saxon and Medieval*

A total of three 10th- to 11th-century Thetford-type Ware body sherds weighing 27g were found in subsoil layer (2). A rim sherd from a late 12th- to 14th-century unglazed Grimston-type coarseware bowl (Leah 1994, fig.67, 41) came from the fill of ditch [3]. The assemblage indicates activity in the area from the Late Saxon to medieval periods.

### **6.1.2 Post Medieval**

Three sherds of 19th- to 20th-century domestic tableware weighing 25g were recovered from the topsoil (1). The assemblage comprises sherds from two refined white earthenware flatwares of which one is a saucer and a body sherd from a blue and white transfer printed earthenware vessel.

## **6.2 Lava**

by Sarah Percival

A piece of heavily abraded grey vesicular lava with no surviving surfaces was recovered from subsoil (2). Lava was imported into England from Germany for much of the Roman to medieval period and is not intrinsically datable; however as this piece was found with Thetford-type ware a later Saxon date seems likely.

## **6.3 Objects of Lead**

by Sarah Percival

A small, conical, lead spindle whorl was collected during topsoil stripping (1). The spindle whorl is 9mm high and has a diameter at the base of 25mm with an even, circular hole piercing the apex. Similar lead spindle whorls have been recovered from London particularly from 14th-century contexts although earlier examples have also been found (Egan 1998, fig.203, 804. 805).

## **6.4 Animal Bone**

by Julie Curl

### **6.4.1 Methodology**

The assessment was carried out following a modified version of guidelines by English Heritage (Davis 1992). All of the bone was examined to determine range of species and elements present. A note was also made of butchering and any indications of skinning, working and other modifications. When possible a record was made of ages and any other relevant information, such as pathologies. Counts and weights were noted for each context with additional counts for each species identified. Information was input into a spreadsheet and a basic catalogue produced in table form in Appendix 4.

### **6.4.2 The assemblage**

A total of 408g of faunal remains, consisting of fifteen pieces, was recovered from two contexts.

The bone in this assemblage is in good sound condition, although somewhat fragmented due to butchering and gnawing. Canid gnawing was seen on some bones from subsoil (2); the elements gnawed perhaps suggest off-cuts or lesser quality bones that may have been given to domestic dogs or scavenged from rubbish.

Subsoil (2) produced bones of at least two cattle including both adult and juvenile remains. The bones present, a foot bone, scapula, lower leg element and mandible, have all been butchered and suggest a wide range of cuts of meat in association with Late Saxon ceramics.

The remains from the fill (8) of furrow/ditch [7] yielded fragments of cattle, equid (horse) and sheep/goat. The cattle and sheep/goat show butchering; the equid is only represented by an adult molar.

#### **6.4.3 Conclusions and recommendations for further work**

This assemblage is largely derived from the butchering and food waste of domestic stock, with some scavenger activity seen.

Although a small assemblage, it does contain measurable and countable bones and evidence of butchering. The remains suggest suitable faunal remains are likely to be recovered from further work and this assemblage should be included in the analysis of material recovered from any future works that may take place at the site.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

This evaluation produced a reasonable density of archaeological features (ditches) of probable Saxo-Norman to medieval date perhaps representing *occupation* during this time followed by a period of openfield-type arable agriculture with intensive horticultural activity in the modern period.

Parallel ditch [3] and ditch/furrow [7] were observed to be perpendicular to the adjacent churchyard boundary wall which in turn was on the same alignment as many of the boundaries in the village. An excavation in 1975 on adjacent land revealed a Middle Saxon ditch on a similar alignment, suggesting a relic fieldsystem of Middle Saxon date or earlier. The lack of field boundaries on a similar alignment outside the village may be due to an episode of 'openfield' type arable agriculture in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

The subsoil layer and possibly the furrow may indicate the presence of openfield-type arable agriculture within the excavation area.

The unusually deep topsoil, with evidence of liming (chalk flecks) and modern pottery, is likely to be due to this area's use as allotments in the 20th century

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

## **Acknowledgements**

The fieldwork was conducted by the author assisted by Lilly Hodges. The finds were processed by Lucy Talbot and analysed by Sarah Percival and Julie Curl. The illustrations were completed by David Dobson and this report was edited by Jayne Bown.

The trench was excavated and backfilled by Bryn Williams of Bryn Williams Building and Civil Engineering. The site was monitored by James Albone of Norfolk Historic Environment Service. Thanks must also be given to Mr and Mrs Maiden for providing the fieldwork team with copious tea and biscuits which were most welcome. The fieldwork was commissioned by Ian H. Bix and Associates Ltd and funded by Mr and Mrs Maiden.

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## Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Deposit			Topsoil. Dark brown silty sand with occasional flint gravel and rare chalk flecks and 20th century CBM fragments	Modern
2	Deposit			Subsoil. Mid brown silty sand with occasional flint gravel and rare chalk flecks, charcoal and oyster shell	-
3	Cut	Ditch		East to west aligned, 0.75m wide and 0.2m deep with a concave base and gently sloping sides	Medieval
4	Deposit		3	Mid greyish brown silty sand with occasional flint gravel and rare charcoal and chalk flecks	-
5	Cut	Natural feature		Irregular base and sides	-
6	Deposit		5	Pale brown sandy silt with occasional flint gravel	-
7	Cut	Ditch/Furrow		East to west aligned, 1.75m wide and 0.5m deep with a concave base and gently sloping sides	Medieval
8	Deposit		7	Pale brown sandy silt with occasional flint gravel	-

## Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Cut Type	Total
Medieval	Ditch	2

## Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
1	Pottery	3	25g	Post-medieval	Domestic china
1	Lead	1	30g	Unknown	Spindle whorl
2	Pottery	3	27g	Late Saxon	Thetford-type Ware
2	Lava	1	37g	Unknown	
2	Animal Bone	11	254g	Unknown	
4	Pottery	1	25g	Medieval	Unglazed coarseware
8	Animal Bone	4	154g	Unknown	

## Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Late Saxon	Pottery	3
Medieval	Pottery	1
Post-medieval	Pottery	3
Unknown	Animal Bone	15
	Lava	1
	Lead	1

### Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Description	Qty	Wt	Period	Spotdate	Comment
1	TPE		Bodysherd	1	21g	Post-medieval	18th - 20th c.	Blue and white
1	REFW		Bodysherd	1	2g	Post-medieval	L.18th - 20th c.	
1	REFW	Saucer	Rim	1	2g	Post-medieval	L.18th - 20th c.	
2	THET		Bodysherd	3	27g	Late Saxon	10th - 11th c.	Thetford-type Ware
4	GRIM	Bowl	Rim	1	25g	Medieval	L.12th - 14th	Unglazed coarseware

**Key:** TPE Transfer-printed earthenware, REFW Refined white earthenware; THET Thetford-type Ware; GRIM Grimston-type coarseware

### Appendix 4: Animal Bone

Context	Qty	Wt	LDM	SMDM	Species	NISP	Age	MNI	Zones	Measure	Count	Butchering	Gnaw	R/C/F	Path	Comments	
2	11	254 g	y		Cattle	5	j + a	2	v, jaw, ll, f, scap	3	4	c, ch	2	c	1	strain on MC	
			y		Mammal	6			fragments								
8	4	154 g	y		Cattle	2	a		pel, jaw		1	c, ch					
			y		Equid	1			t								
				y	Sheep/Goat	1				ll			ch				

**Key:** NISP = Number of Individual Species elements Present.

Species Group: S-MDM = Small-Medium Domestic Mammal; LDM = Large Domestic Mammal, M= Mammal

Age = Estimate age based on fusion of bones and/or tooth wear; a = adult, j = juvenile

Zones = V = vertebrae, LL=lower limb, F = foot bone, Pel = Pelvis, Scap = Scapula, T = tooth

Measure/Count = measurable and countable bones following Davis, 1992

Gnaw = Gnawed R = Rodent/C = Canid (dog/wolf/fox)/F = feline

Butchering = c = cut, ch = chopped

Path = Pathology