

Report 2525



nau archaeology

An Archaeological Watching Brief at the Former St Benedict's Street Public Toilets, Norwich

ENF125507



Prepared for
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Location:	St Benedict's Street Public Toilets
District:	Norwich
Grid Ref.:	TG 2242 0883
HER No.:	ENF125507
SM No.:	10
OASIS Ref.:	92015
Client:	Youngs Homes Ltd
Dates of Fieldwork:	30 November – 9 December 2010

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted for Youngs Homes during the removal of the foundations of the former public conveniences at the junction of St Benedict's Street and Grapes Hill in Norwich. The site was located on the line of Norwich city wall and adjacent to the site of the former St Benedict's Gate.

The area was heavily disturbed and no archaeological remains were present.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Norwich City Council (Ref. 08/01344) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Heritage Environment Service (formerly Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Ref. CNF42244). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2525/NP) for Youngs Homes Ltd who commissioned and 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* (Department for 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.

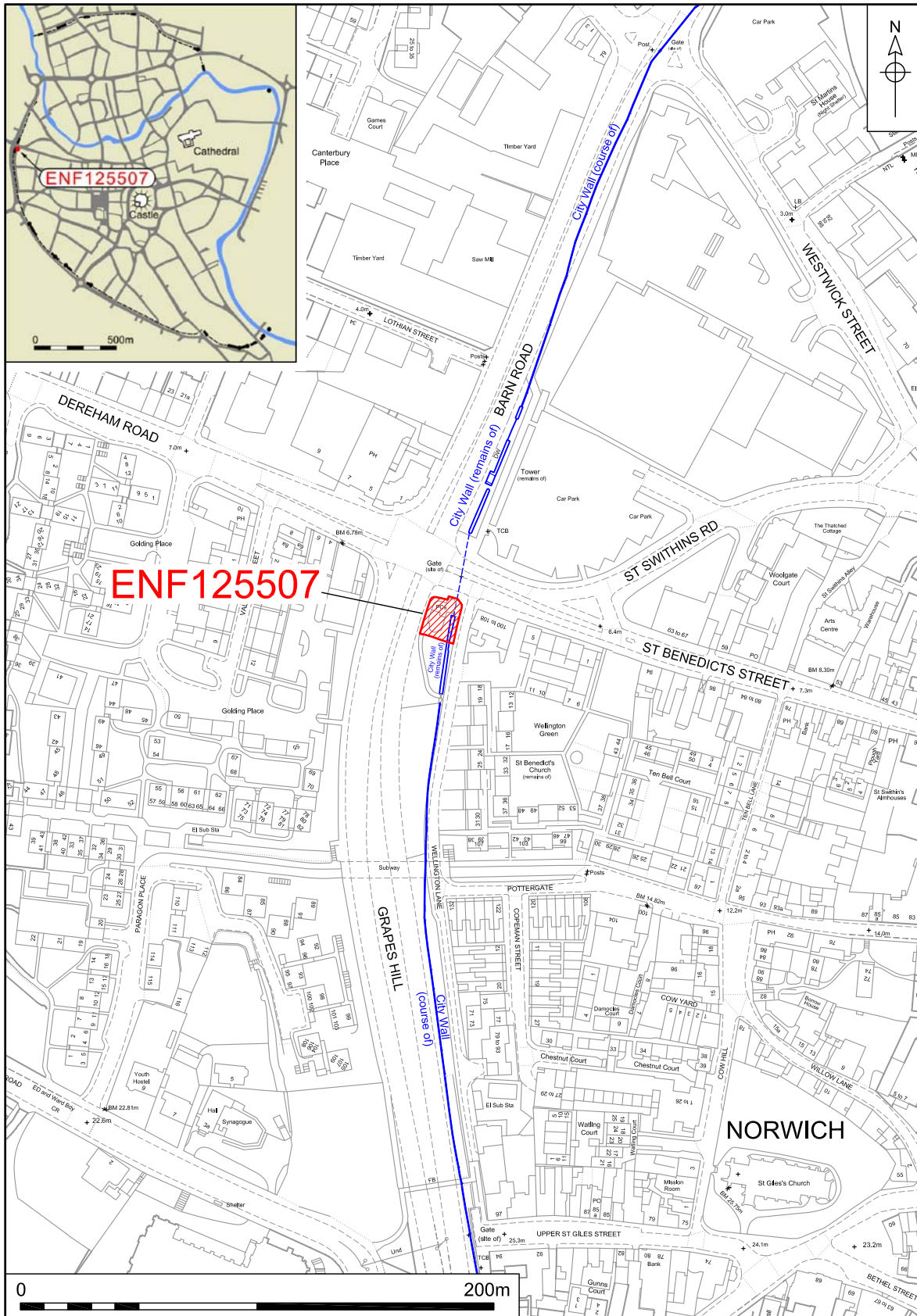
The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The natural geology of the site is gravelly sands overlying Cretaceous Upper Chalk. The site is located at the bottom of Grapes Hill in the west of Norwich with the River Wensum located 300m to the north-east of the site.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Norwich's defensive walls and gates were constructed of flint and brick and are designated as a Scheduled Monument (SM 10). The area subjected to archaeological monitoring is located on the east side of Norwich in close proximity to St Benedict's Gate (NHER 324) and over the line of the defensive walls (NHER



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

1415) where the main road westward exited the city. The wall and gate were constructed c.1343 and with an outer ditch formed part of the defences that encircled Norwich throughout the medieval period. St Benedict's gate was almost completely destroyed in 1793 in order to improve access into the heart of Norwich but also to avoid the increasing cost of repairs required to maintain the defences.

Terrace housing was built against the outside of the wall and is depicted at the location in a copy of a 1791 view by Ninham through St Benedict's Gate (www.norwich.gov.uk?webapps/citywall/17/Archive/17_Arc07); these buildings survived until 1930-1934 when they were demolished.

An aerial photograph from 1942 shows a bomb crater (NHER 59680) at the junction of St Benedict's Street and Grapes Hill; it measures 16m in diameter and centres on TG 2242 0886 which is in very close proximity to the watching brief site (TG 2242 0883). Photographic evidence indicates that the surviving portion of St Benedict's Gate at the time and part of the wall to the south of the gate adjoining the section of wall attached to the site were heavily damaged by enemy bombing in 1942. Indeed, much of this area was heavily damaged during World War II bombing raids and St Benedict's Church (NHER 157) to the south-east of the site was almost entirely destroyed with only the tower surviving today.

Trenches recorded to the south of the site on the west side of Grapes Hill (NHERs 26210 and 214) have revealed no finds or features of archaeological interest. In 1951 a section was cut through St Benedict's Gate and the town ditch examining both the southern section and a section of Barn Road (NHER 151). Three sherds of Saxon pottery were recovered; two fragments of Ipswich Ware and one sherd of 6th-century handmade greyware.

Public conveniences were constructed at the site in 1934 part of which were below-ground. Despite evidence of Saxon and medieval archaeology in the surrounding area, the significant truncation of sub-surface deposits resulting from demolition of the gatehouse and terraced housing, the WWII bomb damage and the 1960s subterranean public conveniences would suggest that there is a limited chance of locating archaeological remains *in situ*.

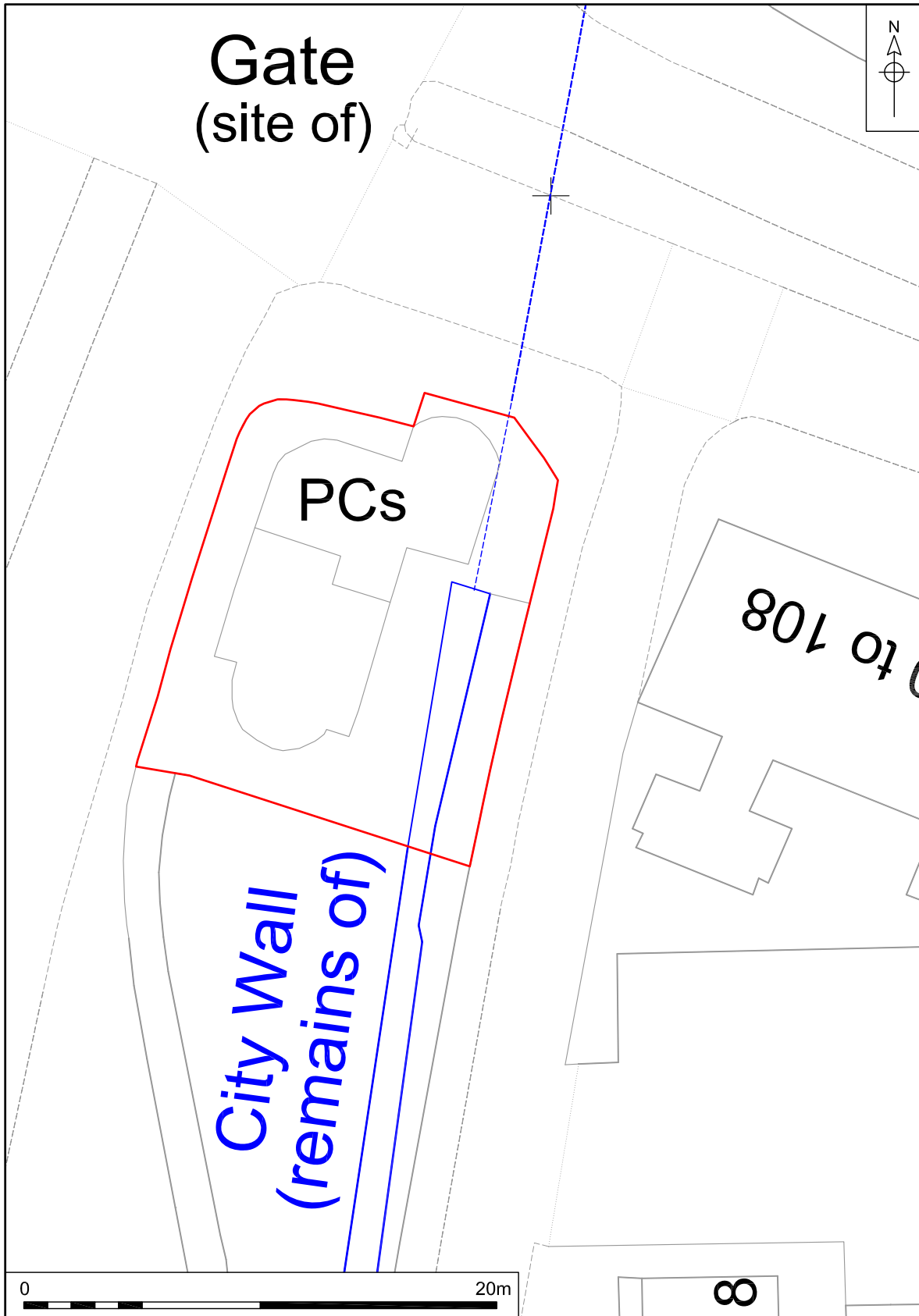
4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological remains exposed during the works and disseminate that information in the form of a report.

The Brief required that the excavation of foundations of the public toilets be monitored due to the proximity of the site to a scheduled monument (the city wall) to ensure that any surviving elements of the wall were not damaged and that any archaeological evidence that was present was recorded.

Machine excavation was carried out with a seven tonne hydraulic 360° excavator equipped with a toothed ditching bucket and operated under archaeological supervision. Soil was extracted at depths varying from c.1m to c.2m deep and rubble materials filtered from it and removed from site and the soil replaced. Brick foundation walls and re-enforced concrete were removed and broken down by the machine using a breaker.

No environmental samples were taken.



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Figure 2. Detailed site location. Scale 1:250

Digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate. A sketch plan was made of relevant deposits.

Site conditions were reasonable however due to the constant moving of rubble heaps in the limited confines of the site, visibility and access were sometimes awkward. The work took place in snow, ice and freezing conditions with cold winds.

5.0 RESULTS

The eastern edge of the site along the medieval wall and the southern edge along the outside of the toilet block boundary wall show topsoil at a depth of c.0.15m which covers a demolition layer. Sections along the western edge of the site show a top layer of tarmac c.0.10m deep with a layer of sandy material followed by sand and pale greyish brown rubble and a soil demolition rubble layer that covered the site and contained large lumps of concrete, brick, drain pipes and the foundations of the public conveniences (Plates 1 and 2).



Plate 1. North end of site facing west showing brick rubble

No sub-surface archaeological remains were discovered on this site. The northern end of the site was heavily disturbed by the below-ground parts of the public conveniences built in the 1930s, parts of which were visible during the excavation to remove its foundations. The semicircular remains of a stairwell and the eastern and southern walls constructed from concrete and concrete block were present along with the concrete floor (Plate 3). The eastern wall survived to a height of c.1.37m and c2.30m long c.0.70m below the surface c.2.00m from the city wall. The eastern wall showed signs of having been tiled and remains of a couple of glazed white tiles were present. This area was filled with concrete and brick rubble.



Plate 2. South end of site facing east showing medieval wall and rubble layer



Plate 3. Below-ground elements of the former public conveniences, facing north-east,

Works to remove drains located c.0.90m from the north end of the upstanding part of the city wall in this location exposed a small section of wall and its foundation previously hidden below ground (Plate 4). It projected c.0.25m northwards from the visible section of the wall and was c.0.70m high (of which 0.20m was concrete

underpinning). The remaining 0.50m consisted of the same sub-angular and sub-round flint (some of which is faced) and creamy chalk flecked lime mortar from which the rest of the wall is constructed.



Plate 4 Medieval wall facing south showing base of wall exposed during excavation

Reinforced concrete foundations for the former public conveniences were deeper and thicker on the western edge of the site due to the volume of drains in this part of the site area.

Soft red brick rubble from the demolished terrace housing was observed.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Considerable below-ground disturbance had already been caused in this area of Norwich's defensive wall and St Benedict's Gate by construction of 18th-century terraced housing and its demolition in the 1930s, World War II bomb damage and the construction of public conveniences also in the 1930s (part of which were below-ground). The removal of foundations and preparation of the site for redevelopment has exposed the impact that these activities have had on the line of the city wall and any associated deposits.

A small section of the medieval city wall and foundation, previously hidden below ground was exposed on its northern upstanding side.

No other archaeological deposits or finds were recovered from this site

Acknowledgements

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