

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

SCCAS REPORT No. 2011/090

**Cable Ducts, Shire Hall Carpark, Bury St Edmunds
BSE 364**

HER Information

SMC ref	S0006228
Date of Fieldwork:	March 2011
Grid Reference:	TL 8584 6402
Funding Body:	Suffolk County Council
Curatorial Officer:	Keith Wade
Project Officer:	David Gill
Oasis Reference:	Suffolkc1-103246

Digital report submitted to Archaeological Data Service:
<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit>

Summary

A continuous monitoring was carried out during the excavation of cable trenches in the car park of Shire Hall, Bury St Edmunds. The continuation of the southern precinct wall of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds and two probable 19th century garden walls were found. All of these walls had what is believed to be worked garden soil built up around them.

1. Introduction

A continuous monitoring was carried out in the Shire Hall car park, Bury St Edmunds, while cable trenches were excavated (Fig. 1). This happened over a number of weeks during March 2011. Scheduled Monument Consent was required for the work as the trenching ran across the line of the southern precinct wall of Bury St Edmunds Abbey (Scheduled Monument no. SF 2). The trench was excavated through an existing break in the wall to minimise the impact on the monument. The entire Shire Hall complex lies within the area of archaeological importance as defined in the local plan. The monitoring was a condition placed on the Scheduled Monument Consent. The work was carried out to a Brief issued by Keith Wade, Suffolk County Council, Archaeological Service Manager, and approved by the regional commissioner of English Heritage. The fieldwork was carried out by staff of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (SCCAS) Field Team.

The wall was probably constructed in the early 12th century under Abbot Anselm (1120-48) and was the southern most boundary for the Bury Abbey complex. The wall still stands, to the east and west of the trenching, at a height of 2.12m above the modern road surface.

2. Methodology

The trench was excavated using an angle grinder, a breaker and a mechanical digger with a 0.5m wide toothless bucket. The angle grinder and breaker were used to penetrate the overlying layers of tarmac and concrete. Once the road surface was

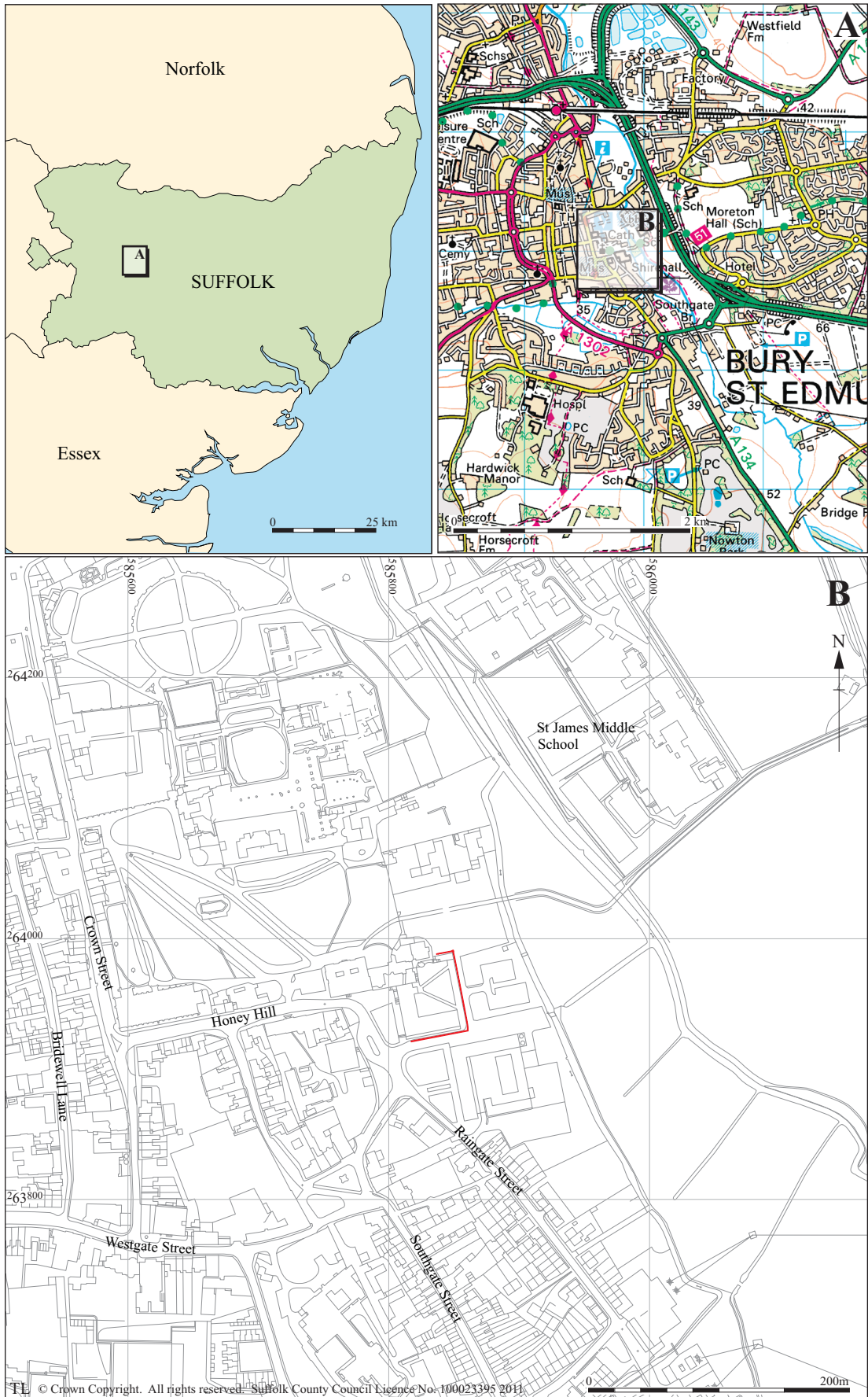


Figure 1. Location plan, showing investigation area (red)

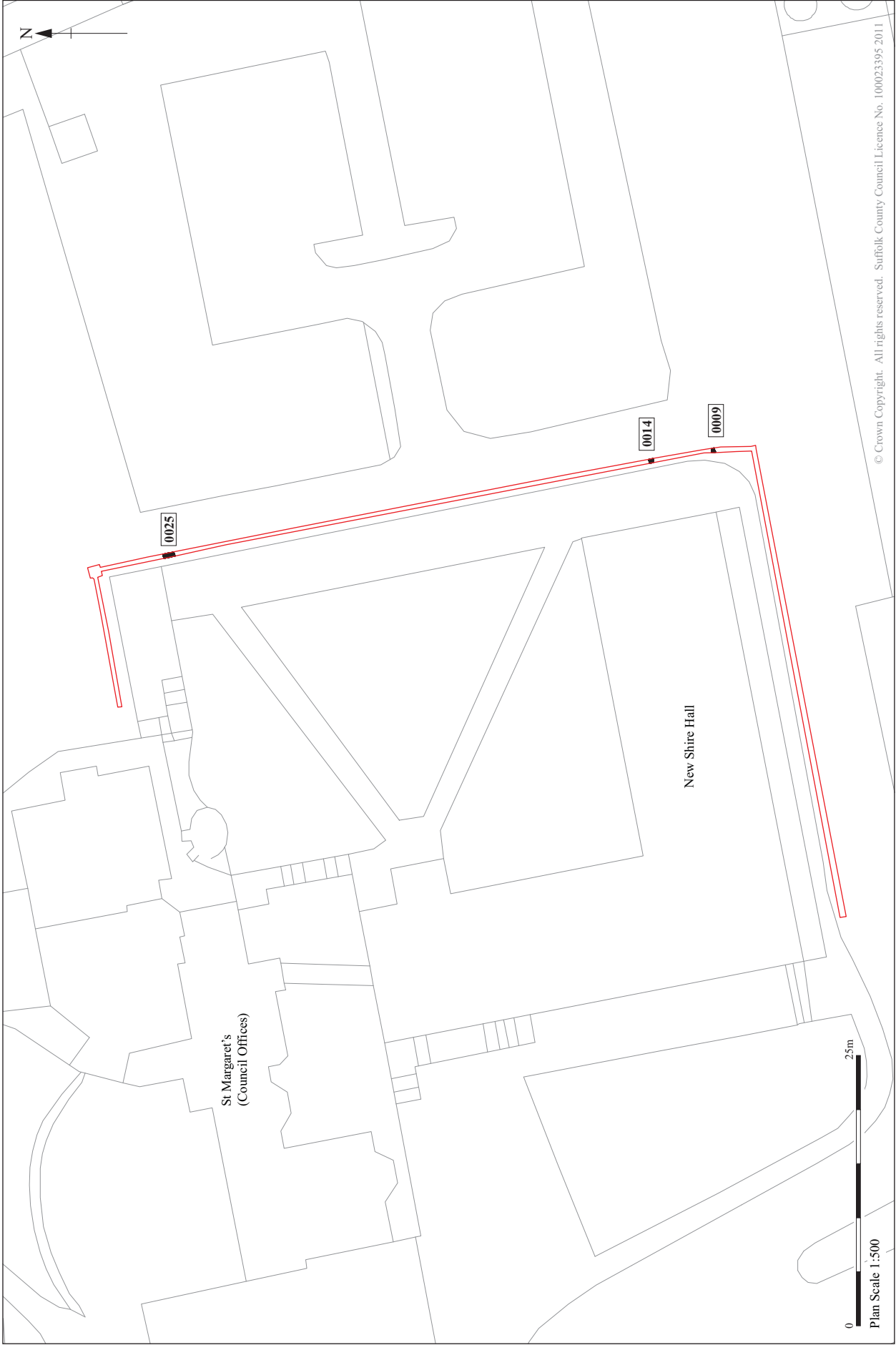


Figure 2. Trench location plan

removed the excavation of the trench was completed under continuous observation of the monitoring archaeologist. Where bonded fabric was uncovered this was excavated by hand by the monitoring archaeologist. Where necessary selected trench sections were cleaned by hand and recorded. Sections of all the excavated structural features and the depth and nature of the overburden were drawn at a scale of 1:20. These features were also planned at a scale of 1:50 or 1:20 where appropriate. The overall site and location plan were recorded using a Real Time Kinematics Global Positioning System and a Total Station Theodolite. The site records were made on SCCAS proforma context sheets using a unique continuous numbering system. A photographic record was produced using digital images (Plates 1,2 and 3) and monochrome print in a 35mm format. No finds were retained as they were all 19th century or later.

3. Results

Introduction

The cable trench was 0.5m wide, covered 120m in length (Fig. 2) and reached a maximum depth of 0.6m (Fig. 3). The excavation uncovered a section of the southern precinct wall of Bury Abbey (0025). It also uncovered two E-W aligned probable garden walls of a significantly later date, 0009 and 0014. Apart from these walls the trench was wholly filled with post-medieval garden soil and the natural ground surface was not reached.

Precinct wall 0025 was found directly in line with the known standing wall (Fig. 2) and at a depth of 0.4m from the road surface (Fig. 3). The soil was hand excavated around the wall to record it and the cable conduit was raised to be laid over the wall so that none of the wall fabric was removed. Wall 0025 had a very similar make up to the standing wall but did not have the facing flints. It consisted of very densely packed mixed black and brown flints bonded with a pale yellow brown mortar. The mortar was made from a coarse gravel sand with large grits, measuring <1.5mm. The wall was sealed beneath the modern road surface, a layer of hogging and concrete 0020 and a layer of 19th century brick rubble 0021 (Fig. 3). Deposits 0020 and 0021 both reached a depth of 0.1m and appear to be hard core for the road

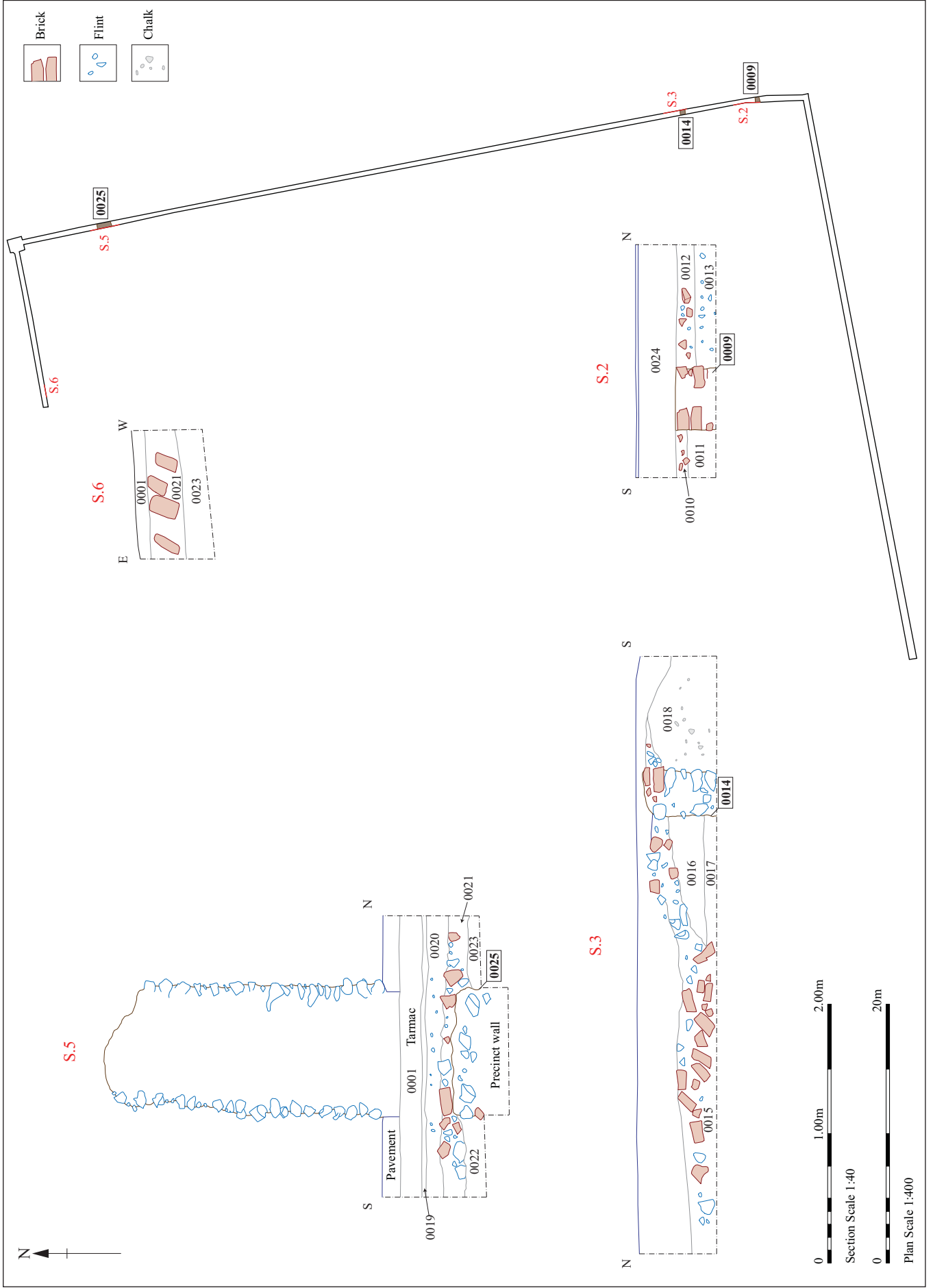


Figure 3. Trench plan and sections



Plate 1. Southern Precinct wall (0025)



Plate 2. 19th century wall (0014)



Plate 3. Late 18th/early 19th century wall (0009)

surface. To the south of the precinct wall was brown silt 0022, and to the north there was a layer of black silt 0023, containing coal dust, china and flower pots. These are probable garden soils, the difference in colour probably stems from differing cultivation practices on either side of the wall.

Wall 0009 was uncovered 3.75m from the SE corner of the trenching underneath layers of tarmac and road hard core at a depth of 0.3m (Fig. 3). It was made of brick which was bonded with lime mortar and was 0.48m wide. The bricks were hand-made in a pale grey brown fabric and did not have frogging. They were dated to the late 18th or early 19th centuries. Either side of the wall there were layers of brick rubble, 0010 (max. depth 0.08m) and 0012 (max. depth 0.16m) overlying dark silty deposits, 0011 (max. depth >0.22m) and 0013 (max. depth .0.16m) (Fig. 3). The brick rubble is thought to derive from the wall's destruction, the silty deposits are worked soil from the gardens, which are known to have existed in this area during the 19th century. These botanical gardens are shown in Lenny's map of Bury dated 1823 and the area continued to be used as gardens until 1831, when the botanical gardens moved to their current location. Wall 0009 was probably a garden wall.

Wall 0014 lay 5.25m to the east of wall 0009 (Fig. 3). This had a slightly different make up from 0009 but is believed to be of a similar date and function. The base or probable foundation of the wall was made of large flints bonded with lime mortar and reached a max. width of 0.38m (Fig. 3). The mortar was pale brown and made with coarse sand containing shell and coal. The upper part of the wall was made of frogged brick and bonded with the same mortar. The brick frogging suggests a date of somewhere in the 19th century for the construction of the upper section of the wall. The inclusion of coal in the foundation suggests a similar date. Leading from the wall to the north there was a layer of loose bricks and mortar 0015 (Fig. 3). The bricks were the same as the ones in the standing wall, suggesting that this deposit was formed during the wall's collapse and the road make up was just placed on top. Again this wall had silty deposits on either side, 0016 (max. depth 0.26m) and 0017 (max. depth .0.08m) to the north and 0018 (max. depth .0.32m) to the south. Deposit 0017 contained clay tobacco pipe and white china, while 0018 had glass. These finds again suggest that this is a worked soil from the 19th century gardens.

4. Conclusions

The monitoring confirmed that the southern most precinct wall of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds survives under the modern road surface at a depth of 0.4m and that these remains are very well preserved.

The continuous monitoring revealed two east to west aligned walls, one made with 19th century brick and the other made with bricks dating to the late 18th or early 19th century. These walls, and the rich organic deposits containing coal and clay tobacco pipes are likely to be associated with the botanical gardens that are known to have existed here in the 19th century. Apart from the precinct wall no medieval deposits were encountered within the depth of the trench.

John Sims
June 2011