

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

No. 2 Southgate Street, Bury St Edmunds BSE 284

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF GROUNDWORKS

Planning Application No.: SE/06/1367

NGR: TL8582 6377

Oasis Ref. Suffolkc1-46037

Funded by: Mr K Horton

SCCAS Report no. 2008/184

Summary

A small oven was found during monitoring of footing trenches at the rear of No.2 Southgate Street, a medieval timber-framed building in the core of old town. The oven was sealed beneath a medieval clay floor which was cut by later rubbish pits. The pits were dated by pottery to 16th-18th century.

Introduction

Three monitoring visits were made to No.2 Southgate Street, Bury St Edmunds as a condition of the consent on planning application SE/06/1367 to refurbish and alter the house, and to construct a garage. The observing archaeologist examined excavated trenches for new drains and the footing for a replacement range at the rear of the house. The work was completed in accordance with a brief and specification issued by Bob Carr, Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Officer dated 14th June 2006 and undertaken by members of SCC Archaeological Service Field Team. The applicant Mr K. Horton funded the work.

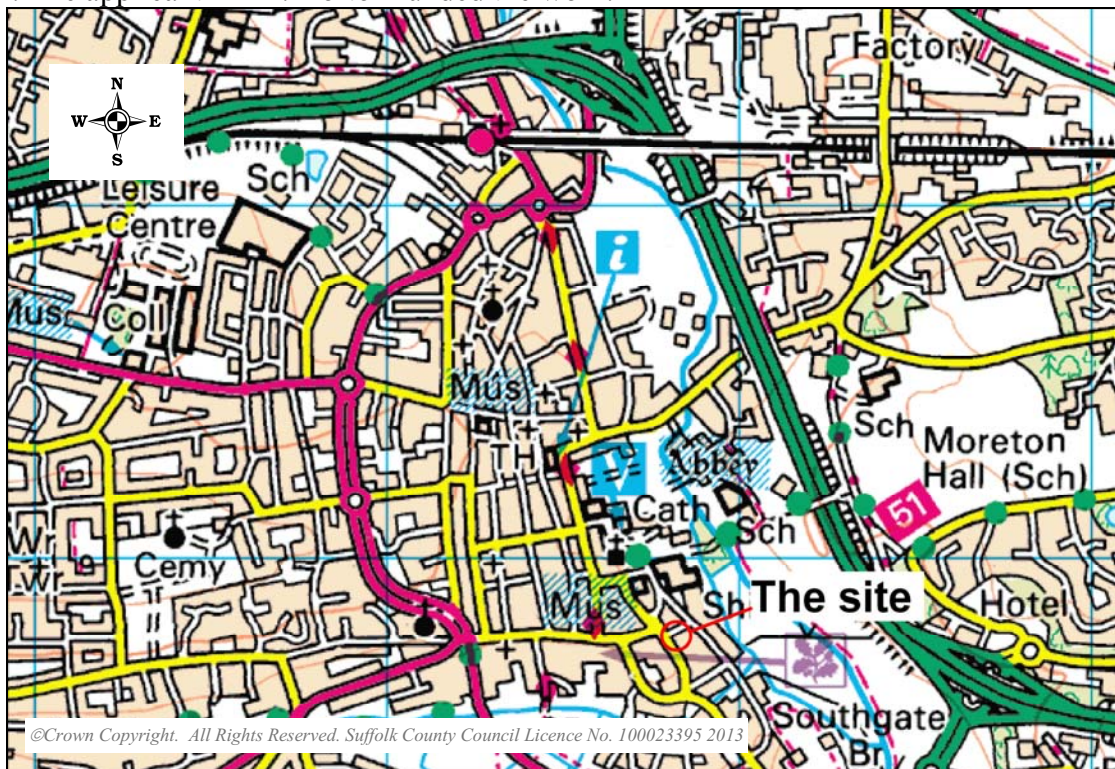


Figure 1. Site location plan

The site is at TL8582 6377 and is within the Area of Archaeological Importance as defined in the local plan. Southgate Street is one of the oldest roads in the town and was one of the main streets of the Late Saxon settlement of Bedericsworth from which the town of Bury originated. It became one of the axial roads of the medieval town and lead to one of the five town gates. No.2 is close to St. Mary's Square which is thought to have been at the centre of the original Saxon settlement, and is sometimes referred to in medieval documents as 'the old market'. The house is Grade II listed (LBC No. 467400) and described as 'House, C17 and later, Timber-framed and rendered with traces of lining; pantiled roof'. The inside of the house was not inspected during the listing and it has not been revised since 1972.

Results

The first site visit was made after the existing rear range had been demolished and the floors within the building removed. The ground over the footprint of the proposed extension had already been reduced to formation level, removing an overburden of relatively recent build up. The excavation of the footing trenches was observed and recorded, and on a second visit the excavation of a soakaway and the drain run was observed.

Evidence of two large pits, an oven and a clay surface were recorded in the sides of the footing trenches at the rear of the house. The trench sides showed that the present ground surface is at the top of a deep stratigraphy of previous surfaces and accumulated occupation debris layers with the subsoil occurring at a depth of 900mm (Fig. 3).

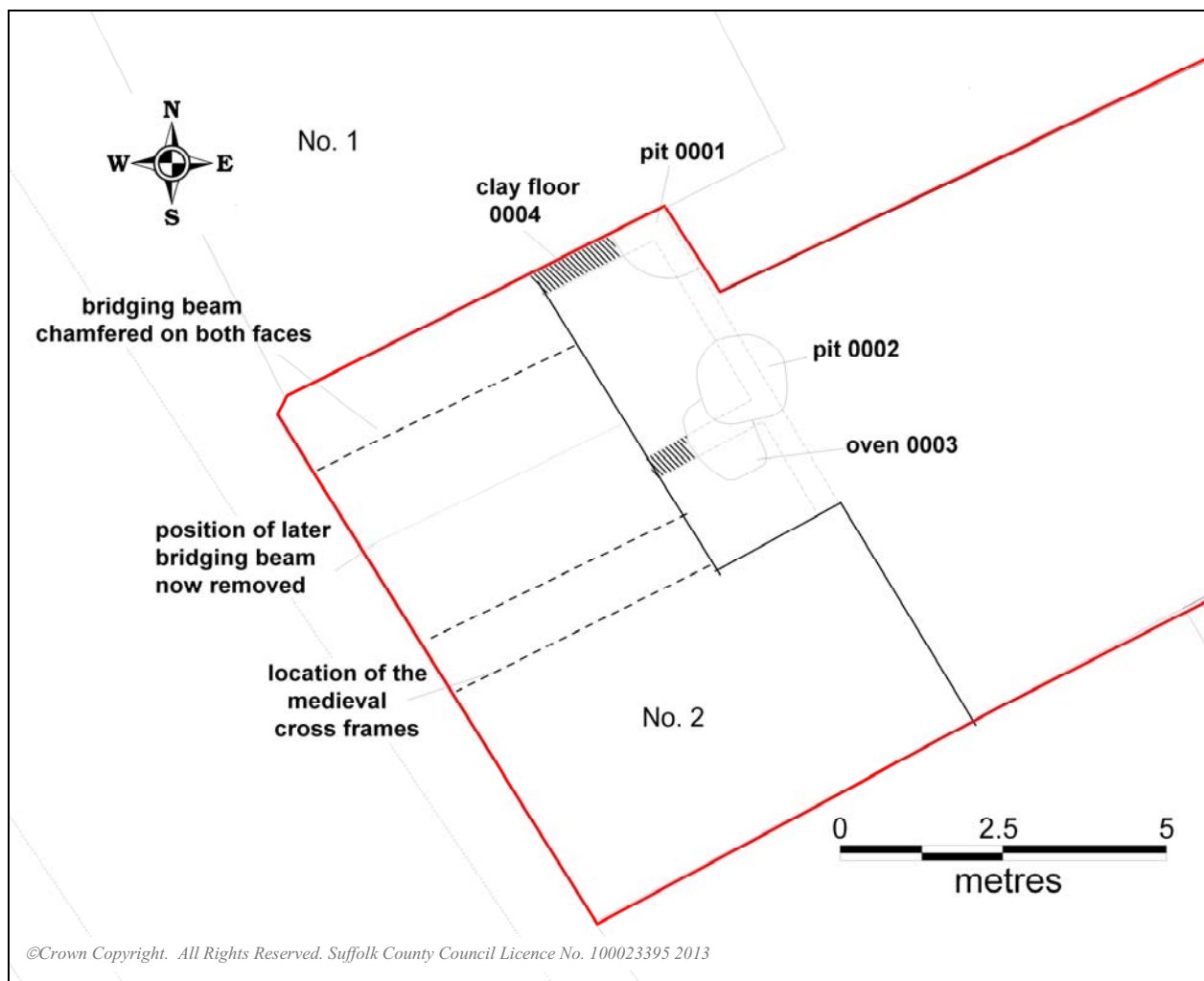


Figure 2. Site plan

The pits, 0001 and 0002 (Figs. 2 and 3), were the latest of the archaeological features and were cut from below the overburden layer through the earlier deposits. The pits were large rubbish pits

measuring over 1.5m across and were at least 1m deep, they were in excess of the depth of the footing trench and were not fully excavated. The pits were filled with dark organic silts indicative of decomposed domestic debris and pit 0001 produced pottery, tile fragments, animal bone and oyster shell. The pits were both post-medieval and the pottery from 0001 consisted of a fragment of a heavily sooted sherd of small glazed red earthenware bowl dated to 16th-18th century and a sherd of unglazed LMT dated to 15th-16th century.

The pits cut a thick clay layer 0004; this was an extensive spread which was recorded in both of the trenches that ran at right angles to the house (Fig. 2). The clay was 0.18m deep and was laid in a level, compact homogenous layer, and was interpreted as an earlier internal floor surface. Although the east limit of the clay was cut by the two later pits the absence of it in the trench for the east wall suggests that the clay extended no further than 1.3m west of the current building.

The footing trench at the centre of the extension cut across a clay oven, 0003, this was sealed beneath the clay layer 0004 recorded in both faces of the trench (Figs. 2 and 3). The trench cut across the width of what would have been the domed firing chamber of the oven and the section shows the burnt clay of the oven floor forming a shallow basin and a thin layer of charcoal from the final firing. Above the charcoal is unfired clay, possibly the remains of the collapsed dome itself. The degree of burning to the clay was not great indicating that the oven was fired at a low heat.

The oven is constructed over a horizon of mixed dark loam; this is a well worked dark soil and was recorded at the base of the soil profile in all of the trenches. Within this layer building material debris consisting of degraded clay and chalk was observed.

The soakaway and the drain run to it were excavated entirely through disturbed dark soil. The depth of soil suggested that the soakaway had been excavated into an earlier pit and the presence of clay pipe stems and peg-tile indicated a date of at least 17th century for this deposit (Fig. 3).

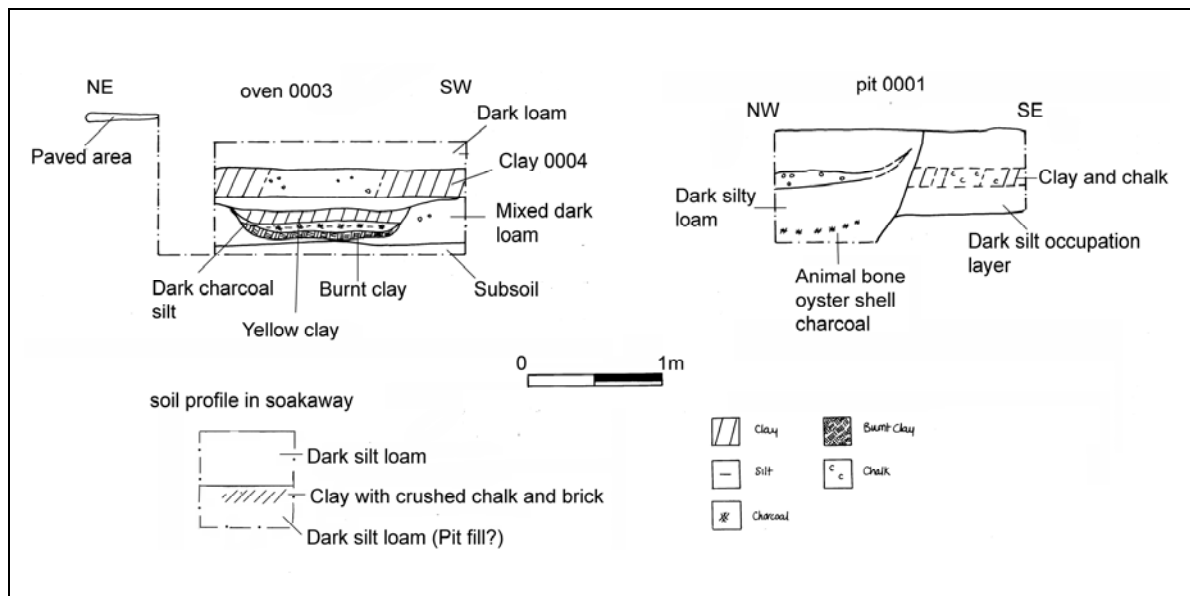


Figure 3. Sections

Conclusion

Southgate Street is within the medieval core of the town and the monitoring has demonstrated that evidence of occupation from this period survives, well preserved, on the site. The existing ground levels at the rear of the building have been raised and have buried what appears to be an intact medieval horizon.

The framing of the house, which was exposed during the work shows that the house, although much altered, is medieval in origin and earlier than the listing. The earliest pottery on the site

dates to the 15th-16th century and the building is certainly no later than this. The position of the final cross frame at the north end of the building and the truncated mid-rails which extend beyond it indicate that the house is a fragment of a larger building that formerly extended into what is now the neighbour's plot (No. 1). In addition the bridging beam across the ceiling at this end of the house is chamfered on both sides suggesting that it was once in the centre of a room.

A second bridging beam was inserted into what became the centre of the ceiling when the building was shortened and the frame reconfigured. This secondary timber has since been removed and the only evidence for it is a re-cut empty mortise in the timber above the living room window. These alterations probably occurred in around the 17th or early part of the 18th century, as by the time Thomas Warren drew his map of Bury, published in 1747 the building already appears to be divided (Fig. 4).

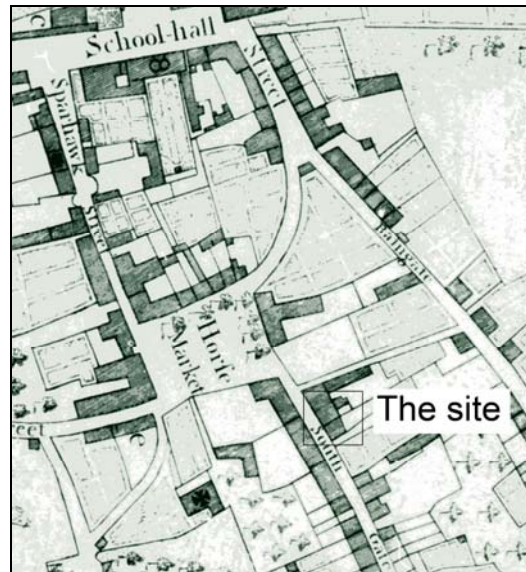


Figure 4. Extract from Thomas Warren's Map of Bury 1747

The clay surface found at the rear of the house was once an internal floor and is likely to have been contemporary with the early occupation of the present building. Alteration to the rear of the building means that it is unclear whether this was part of the rooms fronting the street or a range divided from them; Warren's map shows the building being wider and with some form of an outshot to the rear. When the rubbish pits were dug through the floor this area had clearly become external and the pottery from the pit dates to between the 16th-18th century, a date similar to that suggested for the alteration to the timber frame.

The oven feature although not dated by finds predates the clay floor and is likely to be an earlier, medieval feature. Only a small portion of the oven was seen but the low intensity of the burning within it suggests that this was a domestic structure for baking rather than an industrial furnace.

David Gill
July 2008