

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

Bury St Edmunds Police Station, Modular Cell Accommodation. BSE 285

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF GROUNDWORKS FOR THE
CONSTRUCTION OF MODULAR CELL ACCOMMODATION,
BURY ST EDMUNDS.

Planning Application No. SE/06/1652/FUL

NGR: TL 858 638

OASIS Ref. Suffolke1-22899

Funded by: Suffolk Constabulary

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Summary

An archaeological monitoring of trenching during the construction of modular police cells exposed a series of features cutting natural sand and gravel. The trenches were unstable and were not examined in detail but finds of brick and tile seen in the sides of the trenches suggests the majority of these features were post-medieval.

Introduction

The construction of modular police cells behind Bury St Edmunds Police Station was monitored during November 2006. The work was carried out to an Outline Brief and Specification by R.D.Carr (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team) to fulfil a planning condition on application SE/06/1652/FUL. Suffolk Constabulary funded the work. The site is located on the western side of the flood plain of the River Lark at c. 33m OD.

Interest in the site is generated by its location close to the Abbey and the original Saxon settlement and also its position within the floodplain.

Methodology and Results

The site was recorded during the excavation of the existing tarmac from the police car park. The trenches were c. 1.6m deep and c.80% of them were seen. Two sections were drawn (Fig. 2) and features annotated onto a plan (Fig. 1). The sections were recorded from the surface, because of the depth and instability of the trenches, which were subject to collapse.

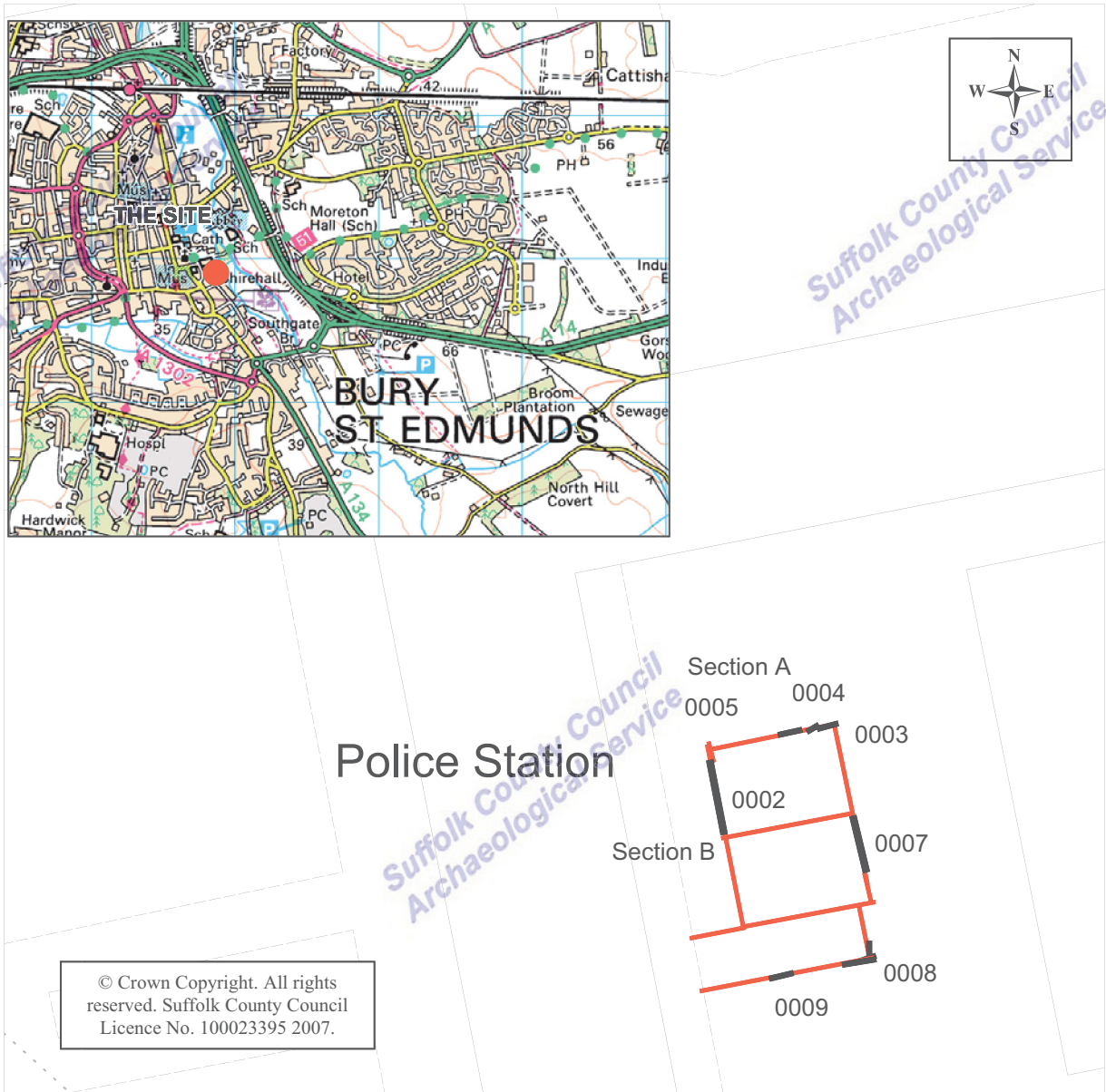


Figure 1. Site location plan

The trenches were 0.45m wide, interspersed with 1m pads. The pads appearing within Sections A and B have been marked, but for clarity have been flattened into the section.

Section A ran east – west. The general profile consisted of:

- c. 0.35m of tarmac and hardcore.
- 0.35m-0.90m of black silty/loam with brick and tile.
- 0.90m-1.10m of a lighter, dark layer with no obvious brick inclusions.
- 1.10m-1.25m gravel 0006 (this layer extended to 1.5m at the east end of the section).
- 1.25m- 1.8m yellow sand 0010.

Three cuts were visible at the north end: 0003, 0004 and 0005, they were all filled with a similar dark silt. No bricks or tile were visible in the fill but they were not dissimilar to the overlying silty loam.

Section B ran north-south and was similar to Section A:

- c. 0.35m of tarmac and hardcore.
- 0.35m-0.70m of black silty/loam with brick and tile.
- 0.70m-1.25m natural gravel 0006. This layer extends to 1.5m at the north end.

1.25m- 1.8m yellow sand 0010.

A large pit was visible in the sides and bottom of the trench, 0002, which was 4m wide and not bottomed. It was overlain by dark loam and contained dark loam within the fill although it was largely made up of mixed gravel.

These sections are representative of the site as a whole. Features 0007,0008 and 0009 that appear on Figure 1 were filled with dark loam and both 0008 and 0009 contained finds indicating a 19th or possibly 18th century date.

0002	Pit, cut/fill	Large pit c.4m wide, not bottomed. Fill of coarse gravel with dark loam.
0003	Pit, cut/fill	Pit c.1m across, dark loam fill, small fragments of peg-tile (not recovered) cut to base of gravel.
0004	Pit, cut/fill	Small pit, 0.75m across. Cut to base of gravel.
0005	Pit, cut/fill	Pit, profile suggests it may not be circular.
0006	layer	Up to 0.75m of coarse gravel mixed with sand and heavily stained with iron pan. Natural subsoil layer? Common to all trenches.
0007	Pit, cut/fill	Shallow ditch with dark loam and gravel fill.
0008	Pit, cut/fill	Pit cut into natural sand. Bricks (c.19th century?) and peg-tile.
0009	Pit, cut/fill	Small pit cut to top of sand. Dark loam fill.
0010	Sand	Coarse sand layer beneath 0006; common to all trenches.

Table 1 Context list

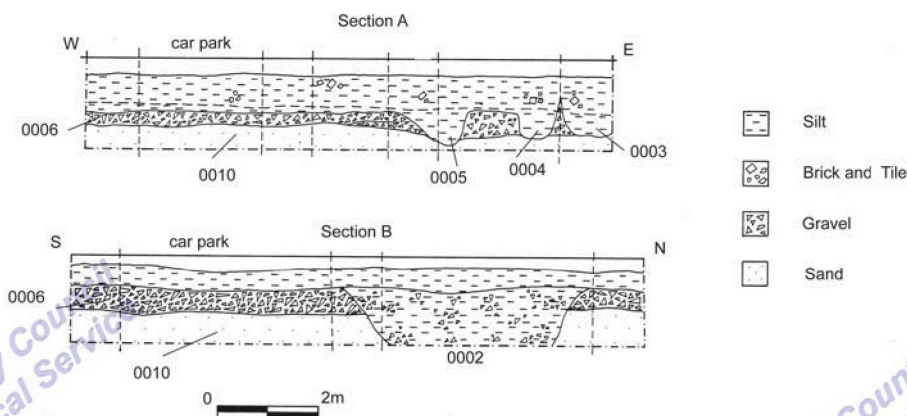


Figure 2

Discussion

The construction of new police cells offered an opportunity to investigate an area of the floodplain of the river Lark close to the southern boundary of the medieval Abbey. Earlier evaluations and monitoring have identified pit digging along the valley floor from the medieval period, probably for the extraction of gravel for the construction of stone buildings. These include: an evaluation and monitoring to the rear of 64 Southgate Street (SCCAS Report Nos.2005/104 and 2006/83) and similar work to the north of the Abbey along Cotton Lane, 9SCCAS Report No.2002/92 and 2004/600. The police station is sited only c.100m from the south side arm of the precinct wall and there is evidence that Abbey buildings extended beyond this boundary (David Gill pers.com).

Except where later pits cut, the subsoil layer of coarse gravel with iron panning, 0006, was undisturbed. The monitoring therefore provided contrasting evidence to earlier visits. This may indicate that the site was too close to Abbey buildings to warrant excavations or that the quality of the gravel was poor; the evidence is limited. There was no evidence of medieval activity but this may have been partly due to difficulties in examining the trench closely as only finds of red brick or tile were seen which are easily identifiable.

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