

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

No. 6 St Mary's Square, Bury St Edmunds BSE 299

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING, 2008
(Planning app. no. SE 07/0944 AND 0946LB)



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David Gill
Field Team
Suffolk C.C. Archaeological Service

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Lucy Robinson, County Director of Environment and Transport
Endeavour House, Russel Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX

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Summary

Monitoring of footings for an extension at the rear of No 6 St Mary's Square, Bury St Edmunds revealed a concentration of cut features sealed beneath a layer of re-deposited clay. The features included large rubbish pits, a posthole and possible ditch; features typical of a backyard within medieval urban Bury. The features produced very few finds and the only datable material was two sherds of coarseware pottery dating to the 12th-14th century. The clay was an even depth and rectilinear in plan and thought to be a floor or surface probably dating to the early post medieval period. A flint and brick lined well, dating to 16-17th century was also recorded.

HER information

Planning application no. SE/02/3165/P
Date of fieldwork: September 2003-May 2006
Grid Reference: TL 8580 6382
Funding body: Mr and Mrs Storey (property owners) through Nicholas Jacob Architects
Oasis Ref Suffolkc1-38884



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Introduction

A series of visits was made to monitor the excavation of the footings for an extension at the rear of No. 6 St Mary's Square, Bury St Edmunds. The monitoring was a condition on planning and listed buildings consents SE 07/0944 and 0946LB. The work was undertaken during February 2008 in accordance with an outline brief by Bob Carr of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Conservation Team and funded by the applicants Mr and Mrs Storey.

The site is situated within one of the oldest parts of the town, predating the gridded 'new town' that was laid out in the 11th century. It lies on the 40m contour at the top of a slope overlooking the Lark Valley. Nos. 5 and 6 were formerly a single house, a jettied timber-framed building constructed in the early 16th century; and is Grade II* listed (listing no 639-1/11/625). The building was enlarged in the early 18th century when it was updated with a brick built façade and was later divided in two, probably by Francis Sandys who owned the property from 1803 to at least 1816 (online listing). The timber-framed origins of the building are still apparent from the back of the house and a relatively modern extension off the rear of the building was demolished to make way for the development.

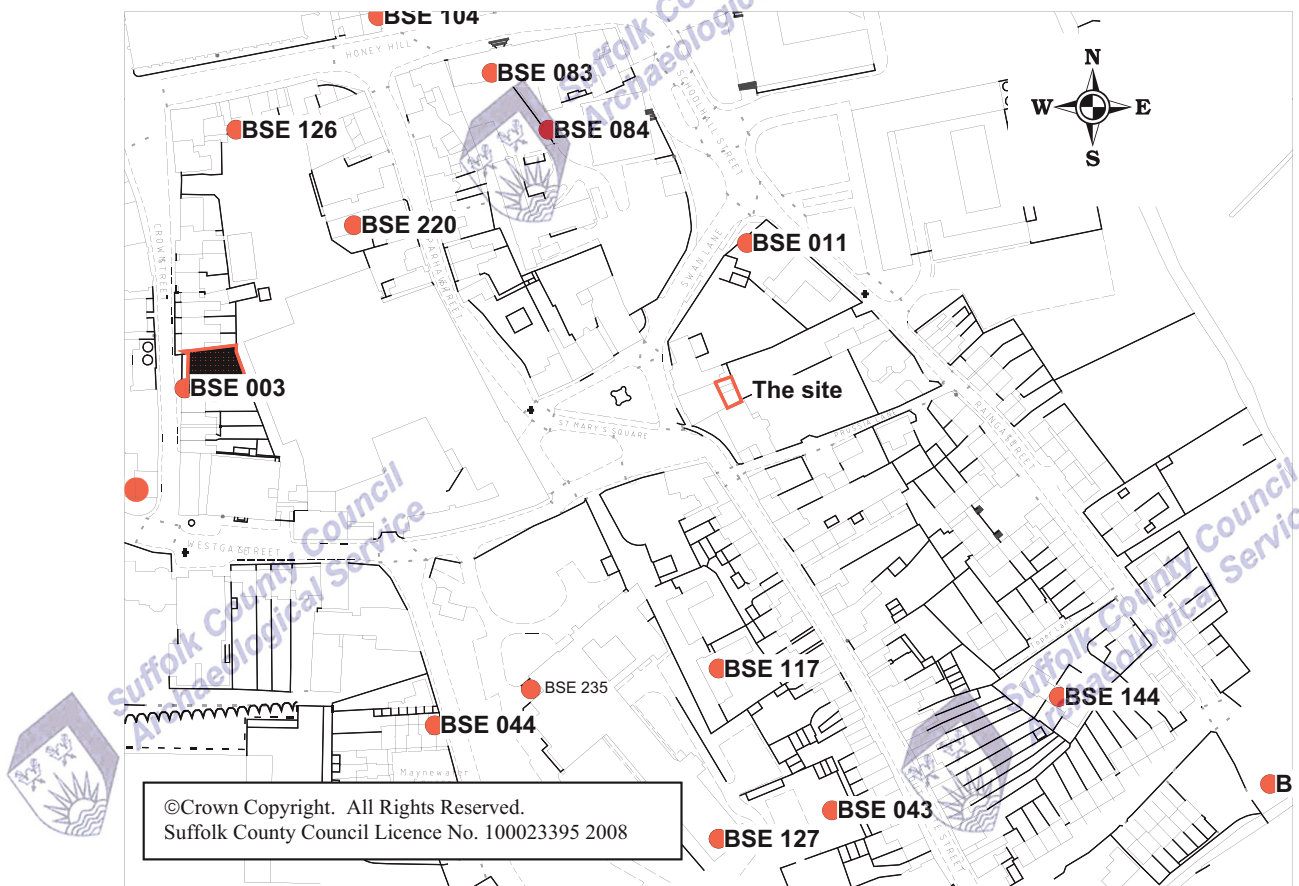


Figure 1. Site Location Plan

Historical background

The site lies just behind the frontage of St. Mary's Square (Fig.1) which is thought to have been at the centre of the original Saxon settlement of *Bedericsworth*, and is sometimes referred to in medieval documents as 'the old market'. The area of Saxon occupation is thought to have extended along the west bank of the River Lark, and around St. Mary's Square and following the line of the pre Norman Southgate and Raingate Streets (Carr 1975).

In the late 13th century, Southgate Ward was the richest in the borough. 'It was densely settled, and was industrial in addition to being residential....[and] commercial, as well, and because it was the original Anglo-Saxon *burh* from which the late medieval town would develop, it was the one ward which came closest to being self-contained' (Gottfried 1982). In a survey of 1295, St. Mary's Square was already known as *Eldmarket*, suggesting that it had been superseded by the marketplace in the Norman new town laid out to the west of the Abbey. By 1433 it was called *Horsmarkette* (Statham 1992).

The County's Historic Environment Register lists evidence of the Middle and late Saxon occupation at sites BSE 011, 084, 117, 127, 144 and 235 (Fig. 1).

Methodology

The Archaeological Service was alerted to the start of work by the discovery of a well, by the contractors, during the grubbing out of the footings of the previous extension. By the time of the first monitoring visit the former extension had been completely removed and the ground over the development area had been lowered to the 'reduced dig' level.

Five of the six pad foundations were excavated, by machine, in the presence of the monitoring archaeologist. The pads were approximately 1m x 1.4m across and up to 1.6m below the former ground surface and were situated at the corners and at the mid-point of the extension. Those at the southern half of the development cut through a clay floor. Excavated spoil was scanned for finds before being loaded into skips, the sides of the excavated holes were cleaned by hand and recorded.

The finds and site records have been archived in the small and main stores of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service at Bury St Edmunds and with the County Historic Environment Record under the parish code BSE 299. A copy of the report has also been lodged with the OASIS on-line database (ref suffolkc1 3884).

Results

Archaeological features were recorded in every observed hole and these are listed in Table 1 and the findings summarised below.

The well was found beneath the north wall of the former extension. The shaft had been bridged by the previous concrete footing which itself had replaced an earlier domed brick cap (Figs 2 and 3). The well had an internal diameter of 0.8m and was in excess of 8m (27ft) deep, the same as the height difference between the ground level on the site and river valley floor that it overlooks.



Figure 2. 16th-17th century brick and flint-lined well

The well was lined to its full depth and there was approximately 0.5m water in the bottom. The lining was constructed of largely bonded flint but included soft, handmade bricks. The bricks occurred mainly around the top of the well but were present throughout its visible depth. The size of the bricks and character of the mortar dated the well's construction to around the 17th century. Sockets within the lining suggested that an internal timber superstructure had been removed but it was unclear whether this was shoring associated with the construction or fixings for a pipe to draw the water.

The 'reduced dig' exposed an area of re-deposited clay, 0004, which was interpreted as a floor (Fig.3). In plan the clay was straight edged and rectilinear suggesting the limits of a room or building and it predated the existing 18th century range at the rear of the house. The clay was recorded in the sections of four of the foundation holes, it was a homogenous well-packed layer and had an even 400mm depth across its extent. Hole A was excavated against the back wall of the house exposing the shallow footings. The base of the footing and the base of the clay were at the same depth and sat on the geological surface. The clay butted against the rear wall of the house and there was no obvious cut for the footing (Hole A, Fig 5).

Directly beneath the clay was a thin spread of charcoal 0003, which was recorded in Holes A, B and C, the soil beneath the charcoal was burnt red indicating that the charcoal was the result of burning *in situ* (Fig.5).

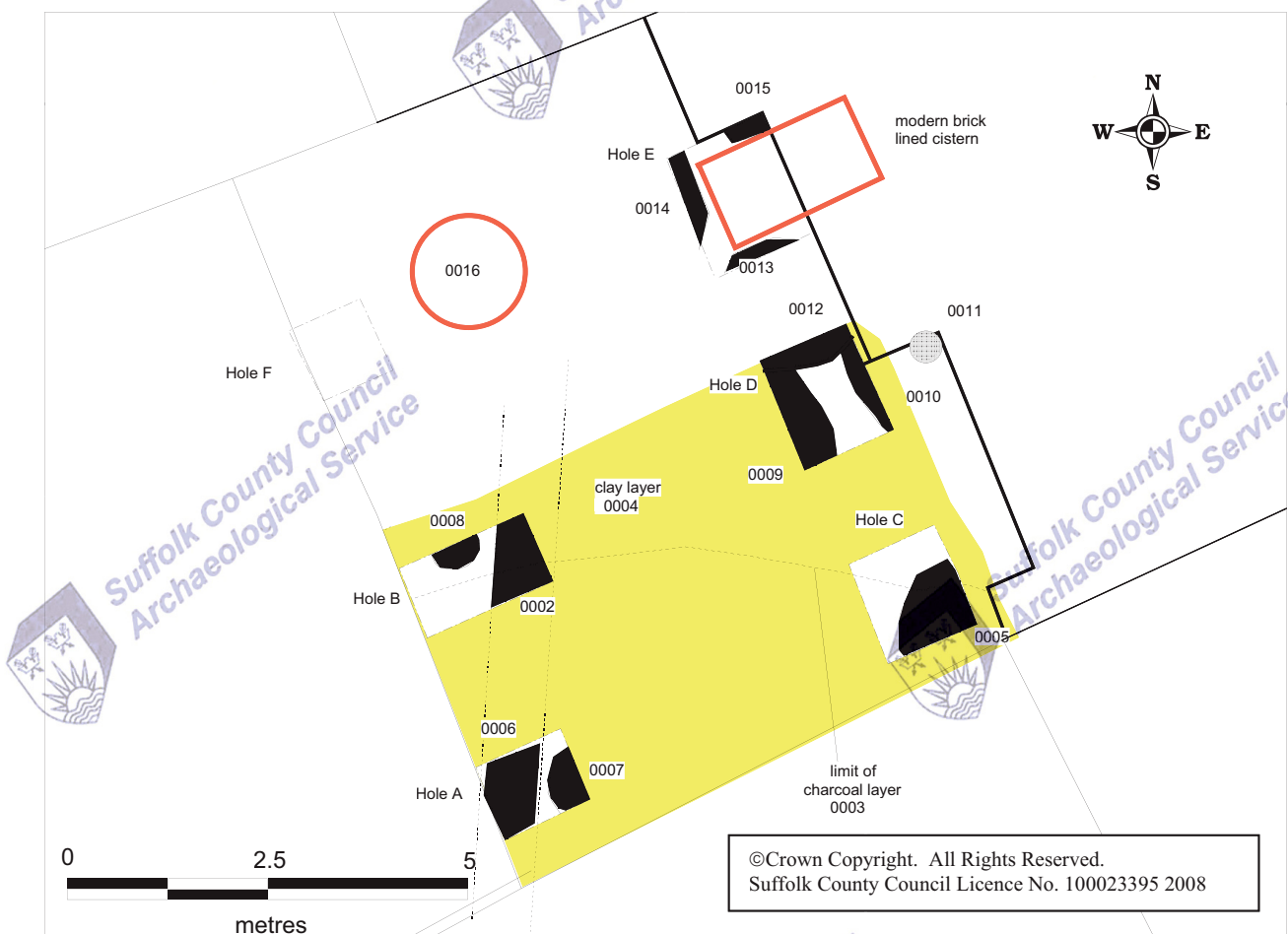


Figure 3. Site plan

Sealed beneath the clay layers and charcoal was a dense group of cut features which occurred in all the holes where the archaeological levels remained intact (Holes A, B, C, D and E). The features were all filled with dark, fine textured, silt loam and there was a distinct cut-off between these fills and the overlying layers suggesting that the features had been truncated when the clay

floor was laid (Fig. 4). Similarities in the fills of features 0002 in Hole B and 0006 in Hole A, implied that these were part of a single entity, possibly a ditch running north-south across the site. The ditch produced two sherds of Bury coarseware dating to the L12th-14th century and food waste in the form of animal bones. The features on the eastern side of the site consisted entirely of large rubbish pits; each of these was in excess of 2m wide and 2m deep. The fills comprised rich organic soils, typical of domestic refuse, over paler sand fills, (Fig. 4) the spoil was scanned for finds but none were recovered. In Hole E pits 0010 and 0011 could be seen to be earlier than pit 0012 indicating a succession of pit use, but the limitation of the excavation meant that the features generally could not be phased. A clay packed posthole, 0007 and pit/posthole 0004 were indicative of former timber structures on the site.

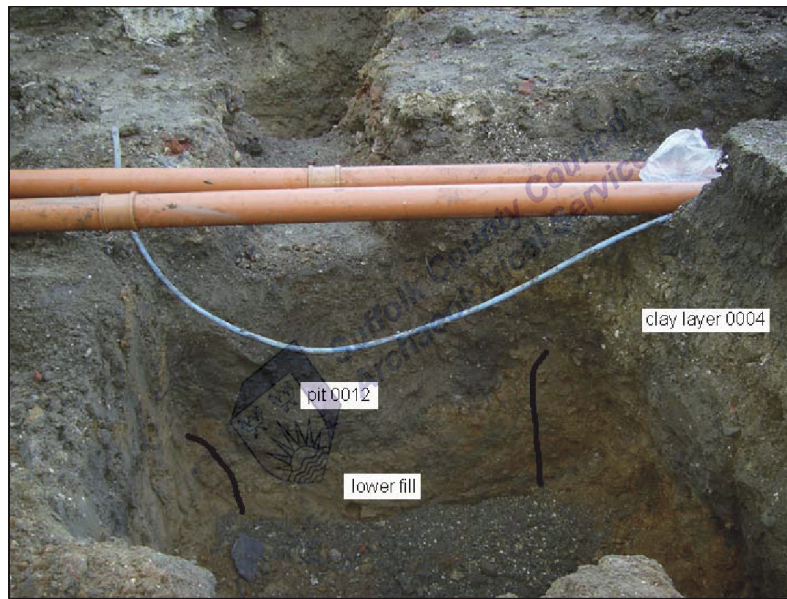


Figure 4. Hole D showing pit 0012 and overlying clay layer 0004

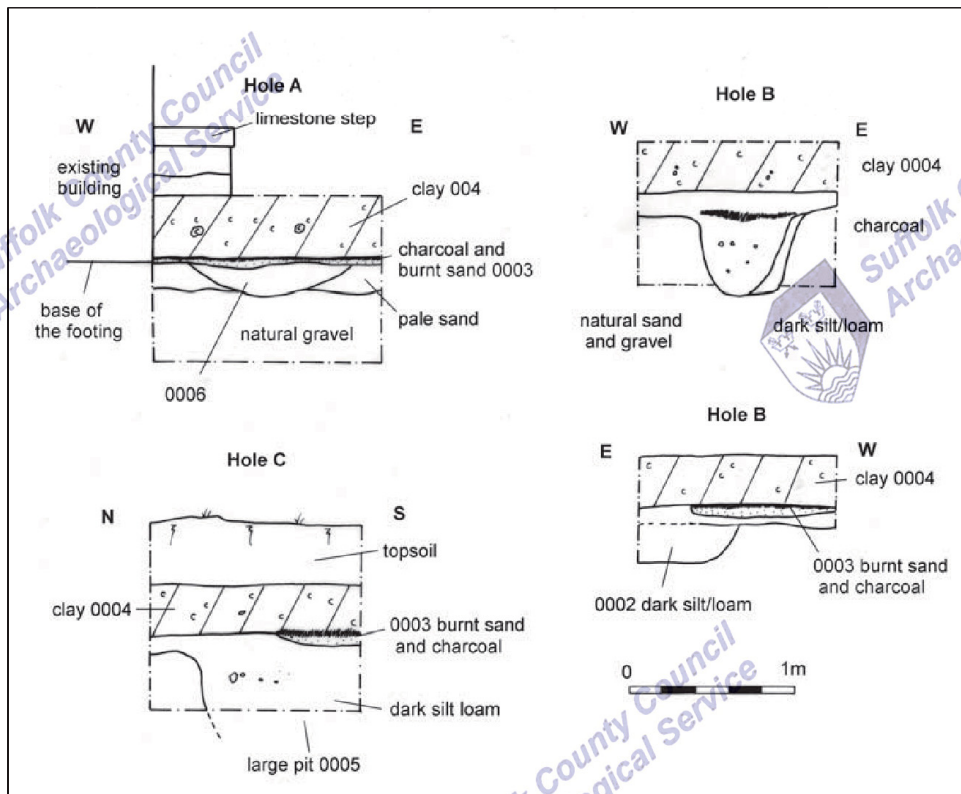


Figure 5. Sections of Holes A-C

OP No	Identifier	Description
0001		Unstratified finds
0002	ditch	Small ditch filled with dark silt loam. Same as 0006, sealed beneath 0003, dark loam fill
0003	layer	Spread of charcoal over burnt sand. Recorded in Holes A, B and C
0004	layer	Clay floor, 40cm deep rectilinear in plan cover the south end of the development. Seals charcoal layer and medieval features.
0005	pit	Large pit sealed beneath 0003 and 0004
0006	ditch	Small ditch filled with dark silt loam, (?)same as 0002. Sealed by burnt sand 0003 and clay 0004
0007	pit	Shallow pit sample in Hole A. 1m across and 60cms deep filled with dark silt loam sealed by 0003 and 0004
0008	posthole/pit	Small pit or posthole 50cms across and 60cms deep. Dark silt central fill with darker charcoal fill on the edge of the cut. Sealed beneath buried topsoil layer and clay layer 0004.
0009	pit	Large rubbish pit seen in side of Hole D. Full width of the Hole and in excess of 2m deep, filled with dark loam fill, no clay in the fill earlier than 0012 and below clay 0004.
0010	pit	Large rubbish pit 1.5m deep seen in Hole D, similar to 0009 in the opposing section face. Dark silty loam fill. Earlier than pit 0012 but relationship with 0009 unknown.
0011	posthole	Possible clay packed posthole seen in plan only
0012	pit	Large pit seen in the section of Hole D wider than the excavated Hole and 2m deep dark silt loam fill cuts pits 0009 and 0010.
0013	pit	Probable large pit over 2m deep and filled with dark loam with charcoal, seen in the section of Hole E. Most of the pit removed by later brick cistern/tank.
0014	pit	Probable large pit over 2m deep seen in the section of Hole E. Most of the pit removed by later brick cistern/tank.
0015	pit	Small undated pit 80cm deep and 1m across filled with sandy loam paler fill than other recorded features.
0016	well	Flint lined shaft 80cm wide and 8m deep. Bricks within the make up of the fabric of the well. (?)17th century.

Table 1. List of features

The finds by Richenda Goffin

Introduction

Finds were collected from a single context, as shown in the table below.

OP	Pottery		Animal bone		Spotdate
	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g	
0002	2	13	2	81	L12th-14th C
Total	2	13	2	81	

Table 2. Finds quantification

Pottery

Two fragments of medieval pottery were recovered from the monitoring (0.013kg). A single sherd of Bury Coarseware was identified from ditch fill 0002, and another fragment of Bury Coarseware made from in a Gritty variant. Both of these sherds date to the L12th-14th century.

Animal bone

A fragment of bovine metacarpus and the fragmentary remains of another bone which was stained with ?copper was also present in 0002.

Discussion

Only a small quantity of finds was recovered. Previous archaeological work in the vicinity has suggested the possible proximity of the Anglo-Saxon settlement which is thought to have been located along the western edge of the River Lark, and perhaps around the area of St Mary's Square and Southgate Street. Ipswich ware pottery has been identified at sites nearby such as the Nuffield Hospital (BSE 235), and Honey Hill (BSE 262). However, the pottery recovered from this monitoring dates to the medieval period.

Discussion

The monitoring has identified a dense archaeological deposit that pre-dates the late medieval timber-framing which is the earliest phase of the building that currently occupies the site. The finds demonstrate an occupation of the site that extends to at least the L12th-14th century, but no

evidence of the earlier Saxon activity was found. The earliest identifiable occupation is represented by a series of large pits; this is typical of a backyard in medieval urban Bury St Edmunds. The pits were used for the disposal of rubbish and would normally produce large quantities of finds, but the limited of the excavation meant that the features were only partially sampled. The pits close spacing and evidence of repeated digging demonstrates a longstanding and continuous occupation of the site during this time. There was no evidence of an earlier medieval building but this is likely to have been on the site of the current house.

The top of the pits and the medieval ground surface were truncated and sealed beneath a broad spread of charcoal and a thick layer of clay. Reddening of the soil beneath the charcoal indicated that this was the site of the burning and may relate to a clearance of the site prior to laying of the clay surface. The area of the clay was thought to be an early floor, but it is unclear as to



Figure 6. Thomas Warren's Map of 1747 with the site highlighted in red

whether the rear wall of the house butts against or cut through the clay and the depth of clay coincides with the depth of footing. Thomas Warren's map shows the extent of the house in 1747 and there is a long range running down the north side of the garden (Fig.6). Warren's outline of the building does not however cover the area of clay, which would lie in the angle of the L suggesting that the clay was an exterior feature. The well and clay surface may be contemporary which may imply that area functioned as a service yard. The well was sunk after the construction of the timber framed-house and is broadly contemporary with some of the modifications that occurred within the building, including the addition of a brick fireplace and chimney, during the 17th century.

Conclusion

While the sample exposed in the monitoring was too small to interpret the site meaningfully it does demonstrate that large areas of archaeological deposits are still persevered here and reinforces the potential value of Bury's back gardens to contribute to the understanding of the development of medieval town.

David Gill
March 2008



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