

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

16 Northgate Street, Bury St. Edmunds BSE 324

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION, 2008
(Planning app. no. SE/08/0880)



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Field Team
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Acknowledgements

This project was funded by Mr R. Todd and the archaeological work was specified and monitored by Jess Tipper (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team).

The excavation was carried out by Nick Taylor from Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Field Team.

The project was directed by Liz Muldowney, and managed by Andrew Tester, who also provided advice during the production of the report.

Finds processing was carried out by Cathy Tester and Gemma Adams, and the specialist finds and environmental assessment reports were produced by Richenda Goffin. Other specialist identification and advice was provided by Colin Pendleton. Post excavation assistance was provided by Gemma Adams.

Summary

An archaeological evaluation and monitoring programme took place at 16 Northgate Street, Bury St. Edmunds in September 2008 in advance of the construction of a basement level extension to the property. A single linear trench was excavated and the mechanical excavation of the basement footprint was monitored. Although the evaluation trench encountered no archaeological features the quantity of medieval and post-medieval artefacts retrieved from the subsoil indicated activity within the vicinity. The subsequent monitoring recovered evidence for a large late Saxon/early medieval domestic refuse pit containing a residual prehistoric flint tool, and a small modern (19th or 20th century AD) ash pit.

HER information

Planning application no.	SE/08/0880
Date of fieldwork:	15.09.08 to 18.09.08
Grid Reference:	TL 8550 6455
Funding body:	Mr R Todd
Oasis reference	Suffolkc1-49399

1. Introduction

An archaeological evaluation and monitoring programme was carried out in the rear garden of Number 16 Northgate Street, Bury St. Edmunds over four days between the 15th and the 18th September 2008. The work was carried out in accordance with an outline brief provided by Robert Carr (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team). The work was carried out before and during the excavation of a basement level extension to the existing property (Planning Application SE/08/0880). The work was funded by the property owner Mr R Todd, the main contractors on site were Carters Ltd.

1.1 Topology and Geology

The site lies at TL 8550 6455 on the west side of Northgate Street, on a slight slope from the west down to the east, ground works associated with construction of the Victorian house had removed the eastern part of the slope and levelled the area in order to create a basement for the property. This 19th century disturbance extended west from the retaining wall of the basement for a distance of about 1m, beyond this there was little evidence for landscaping of the natural levels. The site was at approximately 40m OD, no levels were taken on site. The county soil maps suggest that the development area should be within a band of chalky drift and chalk, however the geology encountered comprised yellowish orange sands and gravels.

1.2 Archaeological and Historical background

The development area lies within the medieval core of Bury St. Edmunds and Northgate Street was one of the major Anglo-Saxon routes into the town. Therefore there is a high potential for Anglo-Saxon and or medieval remains, likely to be associated with structures fronting on to Northgate Street. No archaeological interventions have been carried out in the immediate vicinity and little is known of the land use in this area in these periods.

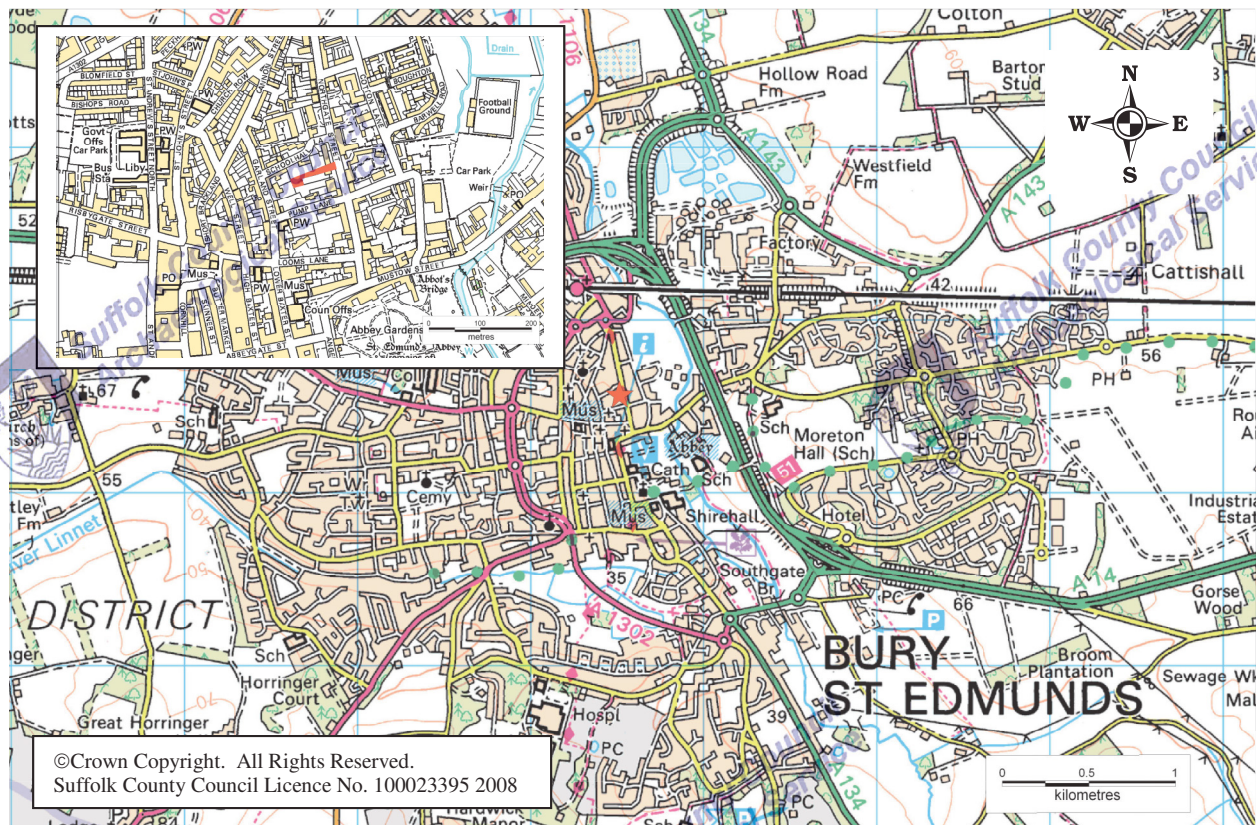


Figure 1. Site location (marked with red star and shaded in red)

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to determine the nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any archaeological remains within the area in order to mitigate the impact of the proposed development.

2. Methodology

A programme of evaluation and monitoring was carried out in accordance with the outline brief provided by Robert Carr. This required monitoring of the excavation of the access ramp (Fig. 2), an evaluation of at least 5% of the 103m² area subject to construction by linear trenching and the subsequent monitoring of the machine stripping and excavation of the footprint of the basement extension. A single evaluation trench (Fig. 2) was excavated within the area to be stripped, this trench covered 10.54% of the available area. The work was carried out using a 1.6 tonne tracked mini excavator fitted with a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

The excavation and recording were carried out in accordance with SCCAS guidelines. Plans and sections were produced at appropriate scales, all records were created using SCCAS proformas, and photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits on 35mm black and white print film and as high resolution digital images. The trench and features were located by triangulation in reference to Ordnance Survey mapping.

All finds were retained for inspection, no environmental samples were taken.

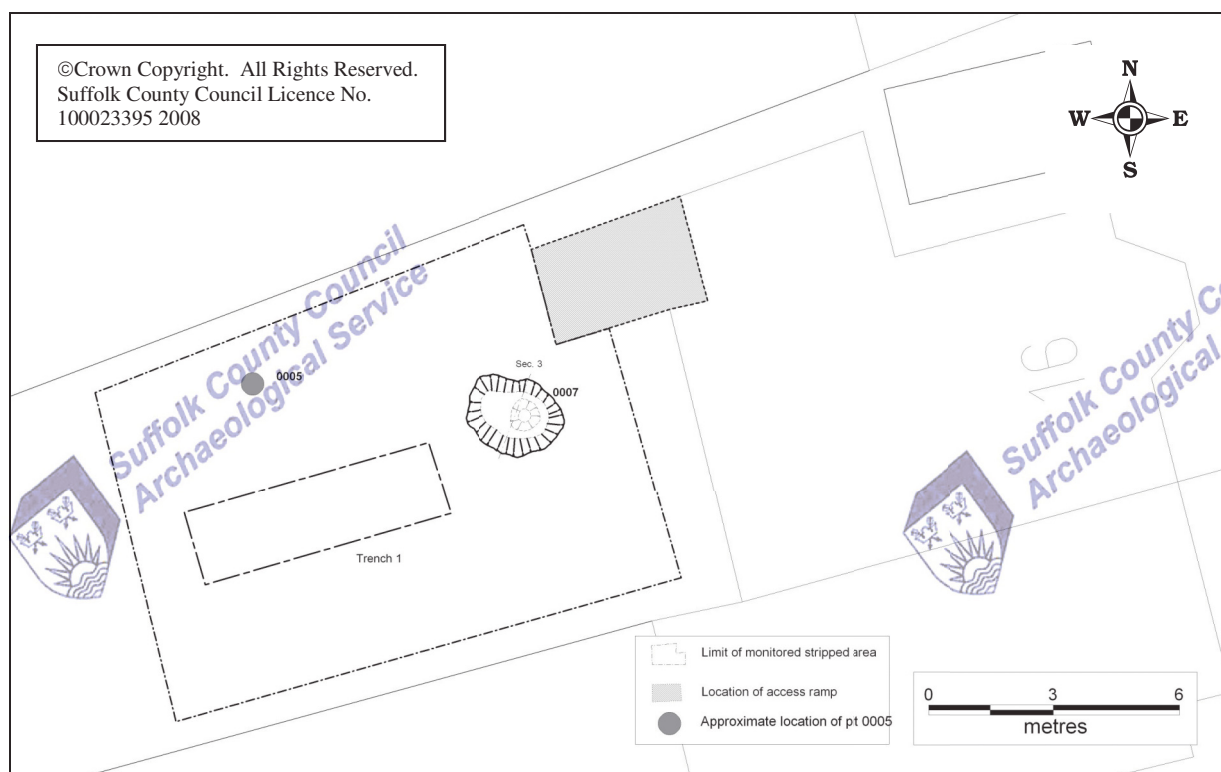


Figure 2. Monitoring and trench location plan showing archaeological features

3. Results

3.1 Access Ramp monitoring

Monitoring of the excavation of the access ramp (Fig. 2) encountered only modern disturbance associated with the foundations for the house and garage. No records of depth or extent were made.

3.2 Evaluation of basement footprint

Trench 1 was oriented east-north-east to west-south-west and measured 6.2m by 1.5m by 0.68m. 0.36m of loose subsoil (0003) was encountered, described as mid orangey brown silty sand with moderate flint fragments and occasional charcoal flecks. It contained two sherds of pottery dated to between the late 12th and 14th century AD, two pieces of clay pipe (one bowl fragment dated to the mid to late 17th century), twenty four bone fragments including cow long bones, sheep and two horn cores. This deposit was sealed by 0.32m of loose topsoil (0002) described as dark greyish brown silty sand with similar inclusions to the subsoil. It contained three flower pot fragments, three fragments of roof tile, three fragments of post-medieval bottle glass and the base of a wine glass and two sherds of modern pottery dated to the 19th century onwards. Although no archaeological features were encountered in the evaluation trench the subsoil layer contained animal bone, horn core, medieval pottery and 17th century clay pipe fragments. The quantity of the material present indicated that activity in the vicinity predating the Victorian dwelling was likely.

3.3 Monitoring of basement footprint

Following the evaluation a monitoring condition was applied to mitigate the impact of the excavation of the basement footprint (Fig. 2). The topsoil and subsoil were stripped by machine sequentially in 15 to 20cm spits across the stripped area. Two archaeological features were encountered during this phase.

Sub-oval pit 0005 (Section 2, Fig. 3) cut into the subsoil 0003 and was sealed by the topsoil 0002, its exact position was not recorded but its approximate location is shown on figure 2. It was slightly irregular in profile though generally U-shaped, measuring 0.95m in length, 0.90m in width and 0.10m in depth. Its single fill (0006) was a dark greyish brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal flecks and a high percentage of ash/clinker present. It contained one flower pot fragment, some fish bones and two pieces of metalwork including an iron strip and a copper alloy object. Its stratigraphic position and finds assemblage indicate a 18th to 20th century date.

Pit 0007 (Section 3, Fig. 3) cut into the natural sands/gravels and was sealed by the subsoil 0003 (Fig. 2). It was sub-oval in plan with gradual sides and a flattish base, towards its north-east side it became deeper with steeper sides and a concave base. It measured 2.55m in length, 1.85m in width and 0.45m in depth. Two fills were recorded in the pit; lower fill 0009 was present on the south-west side of the pit only and comprised 0.12m of compact mid orangey brown sandy silt with frequent flint rubble and may have been deposited to consolidate the loose sides of the pit. Upper fill 0008 was 0.33m in depth and comprised soft mid greyish brown sandy silt with occasional flint fragments. It contained a substantial finds assemblage including animal bone from horses, pigs, sheep and fish, oyster shell, a small fragment of fired clay and forty nine sherds of pottery from numerous vessels (predominantly sherds of early medieval ware but also including examples of St. Neots type ware and unglazed Stamford ware), dating to the 11th to mid 12th century AD. A residual Mesolithic or Neolithic flint blade and undated flake were also recovered from the pit.

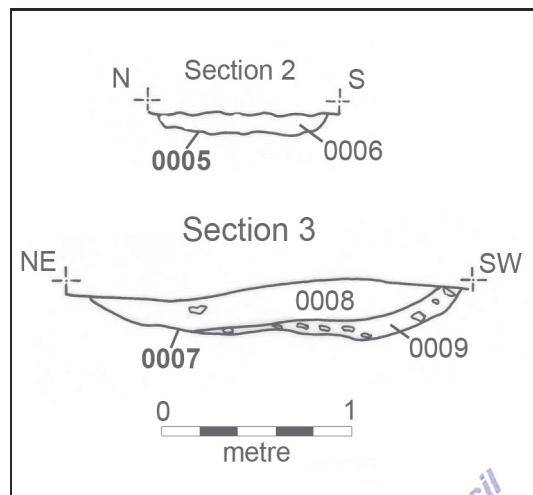


Figure 3. Sections

4. Finds and environmental evidence

Introduction

Finds were collected from 4 contexts, as shown in the table below.

Context	Pottery		CBM		Clay tobacco pipe		Animal bone		Miscellaneous	Spotdate
	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g		
0002	5	145	7	378						19th C+
0003	2	20			2	13	24	481		Mid-late 17th C
0006	1	6							1 burnt stone @ 30g, 4 post-med glass @ 162g, fishbone	18th-20th C
0008	47	327					102	752	2 flint @ 3g, 1 fired clay @ 3g, 7 oyster shell @ 88g	11th-12th C
Total	55	498	7	378	2	13	126	1233		

Table 1. Finds quantities

Pottery

A total of 55 fragments of pottery was recovered from the evaluation, (0.498kg). The assemblage was fully catalogued and the data inputted into the database as Appendix 2.

Small quantities of late post-medieval flowerpots and tablewares were recovered from topsoil deposit 0002 and pitfill 0006. Two fragments of medieval pottery including a highly decorated jug sherd of Hedingham Fineware with lead and iron oxide glaze were residual finds deposited into subsoil 0003. A fragment of a late post-medieval flower pot was identified in pitfill 0006, accompanied by other late post-medieval finds.

Forty-seven fragments of pottery, many of them small sherds, were deposited into the upper fill 0008 of pit 0007. Several sherds of a St Neots type ware inturned bowl were present (900-1150), as well as fragments from other vessels made in this fabric. Three fragments of Stamford unglazed ware dating to c850-1150 were identified. The remainder of the group consists of many

fragments of Early medieval ware, including sherds from small finewalled jars or cooking vessels with plain flared rims. In addition a large thickwalled sherd with chalk inclusions is also Late Saxon/early medieval in date.

Ceramic building material

Six fragments of black iron-glazed pantile found in topsoil deposit 0002 are post-medieval. A small fragment of red-firing medium sandy rooftile was also recovered from this layer.

Fired clay

A small fragment of fired clay was present in pitfill 0008. It is made from a sandy fabric with horizontal organic impressions, but there is no indication of its function.

Clay tobacco pipe

Two fragments of clay pipe were collected from the subsoil 0003. The remains of the base of a pipe bowl is dated to c1640-1670, and a further stem fragment was not closely dated.

Post-medieval bottle glass

Three fragments of green bottle glass found in topsoil 0002 are post-medieval.

Post-medieval vessel glass

The base of a clear wineglass was identified in topsoil 0002 is post-medieval.

Flint (identifications by Colin Pendleton)

Two fragments of worked flint were redeposited into pitfill 0008. The largest is an unpatinated small blade with the distal end broken off, with parallel blade scars on the dorsal face. It is probably Mesolithic or Neolithic. A slightly patinated small flake or spall with hinge fracture also recovered from this feature cannot be closely dated.

Metalwork

Two metal objects were recovered from pitfill 0006 which also contained the fragment of late post-medieval flowerpot. One of these is a strip of iron. The second is a piece of flat copper alloy of overall cruciform shape, of modern appearance. Three of the arms are cusped and pointed, whilst the fourth is rounded with a perforation for suspension.

Shell

Seven fragments of oyster shell were recovered from pitfill 0008. These were quantified and discarded.

Animal bone

One hundred and twenty-six fragments of animal bone were collected from the evaluation (1.233kg). The twenty-four pieces recovered from subsoil deposit 0003 included two bovine horn cores, one of which has many cutmarks at the base, presumably for the removal of the horn itself. Other bones include the shafts of other split longbones, probably bovine, the mandible of a sheep, and a fragment of immature tibia, probably also from a sheep.

The largest quantity of bone was recovered from the fill of the medieval pit 0007. Most of the bone was represented by small fragments and splinters. Some better preserved pieces also present include the remains of a horse mandible, a pig mandible and two pig canines, and a sheep tibia.

A small quantity of fishbone was present in pitfill 0006 with further fragments found in pitfill

0008.

Discussion

The earliest artefact recovered from the evaluation is a flint blade dating to the Mesolithic or Neolithic period. Although redeposited, it provides further evidence of flint-working of this date found in the environs of the centre of Bury St. Edmunds. Other redeposited flints of this date have been identified on excavations at St Saviours (BSE013) (Caruth and Anderson, 1997), and at the Cathedral Precinct Yard (BSE 052) (Gill, forthcoming).

The small assemblage of pottery recovered from the upper pitfill 0008 dates to the early medieval period, c11th-12th century, and includes fragments of Late Saxon/early medieval wares such as St Neots-type ware, and Early medieval wares. As so few sites have been excavated along Northgate Street, one of the earliest of the town's thoroughfares, the pit provides valuable evidence of activity relating to the early medieval street frontage. Small quantities of Thetford wares and Early medieval wares have been recorded as residual finds at 107 Northgate Street further to the North (Duffy, 2007).

5. Discussion

The evaluation and monitoring at Number 16 Northgate Street produced evidence for activity on this site in the late Saxon/early medieval period as well as activity associated with the use of the modern house. Pit 0005 was modern in date and probably was the shallow truncated remains of a rubbish/ash pit in the garden of the house used for disposing fire rake out debris and some domestic refuse. Pit 0007 was similar in nature but about eight hundred years older. The finds assemblage retrieved from this pit represents a domestic refuse assemblage dating to the 11th or 12th century AD and as with the modern pit is likely to have been associated with a dwelling fronting onto Northgate Street itself. The groundworks associated with the construction of the Victorian house would probably have removed all remains of such a structure. However, the presence of this pit does hint at domestic occupation in the immediate vicinity and as such is a valuable addition to the archaeological understanding of this part of late Saxon to early medieval Bury St Edmunds.

The flint blade and flake found within pit 0007 were undoubtedly residual but its presence does indicate possible prehistoric activity on the hillside leading down to the River Lark. Archaeological evidence for prehistoric activity within Bury St. Edmunds is sparse; however, Mesolithic and Neolithic flint scatters have been recorded on the river valley slopes in the northern part of the city.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The presence of a late Saxon/early medieval refuse pit on this site suggests domestic occupation in the vicinity in this period. Its good state of preservation and the general absence of modern intrusions/landscaping in the garden of the property might suggest that further archaeological interventions of a similar nature in this area are likely to be productive. No further work would be required within the constraints of this particular development, as the excavation of the basement has removed all deposits to a depth of approximately 2m below modern ground surface.

Liz Muldowney
October 2008

References

Caruth, J., and Anderson, S., 1997, St Saviour's Hospital, Bury St Edmunds, BSE 013, Archaeological Report, SCCAS Report No 97/20

Duffy, J., 2007, Land adjacent to 107 North Street, Bury St Edmunds, BSE 236, a report on the Archaeological Evaluation, Monitoring and Excavation 2005/2006, SCCAS Report No 2007/123

Gill, D., forthcoming, The Cathedral Precinct Yard Excavation, BSE 052

Disclaimer

Any opinions expressed in this report about the need for further archaeological work are those of the Field Projects Division alone. The need for further work will be determined by the Local Planning Authority and its archaeological advisors when a planning application is registered. Suffolk County Council's archaeological contracting service cannot accept responsibility for inconvenience caused to clients should the Planning Authority take a different view to that expressed in the report.

Appendix 1. Context Information

Context	Feature	Identifier	Type	Function/Notes
0001		Finds		Unstratified finds
0002	0002	Layer	Deposit	Topsoil
0003	0003	Layer	Deposit	Subsoil
0004	0004	Layer	Deposit	Natural
0005	0005	Pit	Cut	Modern rake out pit
0006	0005	Pit	Fill	
0007	0007	Pit	Cut	Late Saxon/early med rubbish pit
0008	0007	Pit	Fill	Upper fill
0009	0007	Pit	Fill	Lower fill

Table 2. Context Information

Appendix 2. Pottery Catalogue

Context No	Ceramic Period	Fabric	Form	Dec	Sherd No	ENV	Weight (g)	State	Comments	Fabric date range	Context date
0002	PM	LPME	FLOP		3	0	48				
0002	PM	REFW	TUREEN?		1	1	90		Knob handle		
0002	PM	IRON	BODY	BW	1	1	7				19th C+
0003	M	BSFW	BODY		1	1	4			L12th-14th C	
0003	M	HFW	BODY	IRON	1	1	16		Coarse variant, lead and iron oxide	M12th-M14th C	L12th-14th C
0006	PM	LPME	FLOP		1	1			Flower pot	18th-20th C	18th-20th C
0008	LS/M	SNTE	BOWL	CAR	3	1	109			900-1150	
0008	LS/M	SNTE	BODY		4	0	39				
0008	LS/M	STAMA	BODY		3	0	13 S			850-1150	
0008	M	EMW	CP/JAR		2	2	28 S			11th-12th C	1000-1150??
0008	M	EMW	BODY		32	0	118 S				
0008	M	EMW??	CP/JAR		1	1	5 S		Not typical rim, less flared	less 12th C	
0008	LS/M	SXNO	BODY		1	1	11 S		Thickwalled, has chalk		
0008	M	EMWSS	BODY	INCD	1	1	4		Incised crisscross	11th-12th C	

Table 3. Pottery by context