

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

## Replacement Storm Drains, Cathedral Precinct Yard, Bury St Edmunds BSE 327

NGR: TL 85591 64137  
Oasis Ref. Suffolke1-50832

Commissioned by the Dean and Chapter of St James Cathedral

SCCAS Report no. 2008/265

### Summary

Monitoring of excavations for replacement storm drains in the Cathedral Precinct Yard confirmed the depth of overburden sealing the medieval archaeological horizon in this area. Deeper excavations for a new manhole identified sealed medieval deposits at 1.4m below the existing ground level. This produced building flint, tile and the remains of food waste within a dark soil; natural subsoil was not encountered during the excavations, and the depth of deposit (greater than 2.1m), suggested that this was infilling a large pit or medieval cellar.

### Introduction

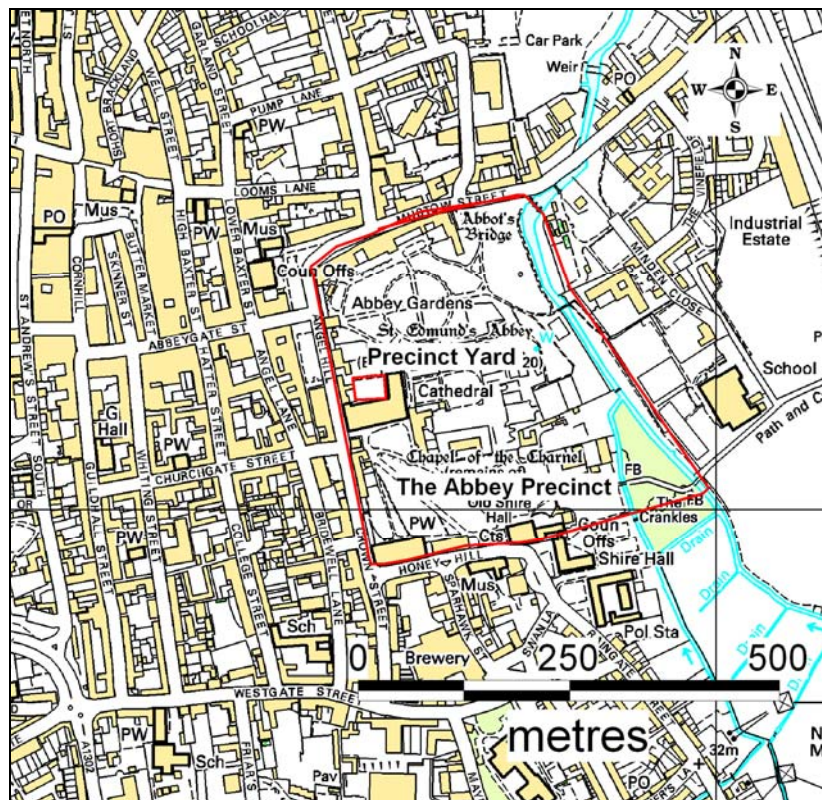
The excavation of trenches to lay new storm water drains within the Cathedral Precinct Yard (Fig.1) was monitored continuously by members of the Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service, Field Team during May 2008. The former drains which collected water from the north side of the cathedral roof and the Cathedral Centre discharged into soakaways which during heavy rain were unable to cope, leaving the low-lying lawns within the cathedral yard waterlogged. The new scheme would divert the overflow along new north-south pipes and into an east-west main drain that had been laid in 1988 to serve the Cathedral Centre.

Excavation prior to the construction of the Cathedral Centre and new North Transept identified the depth of overburden at the east end of the yard and suggested a safe depth of c.600mm into which the drain could be excavated without disturbing the underlying archaeological levels. However the depth of overburden is variable; the ground rises to the west and close to the precinct wall the overburden was thought to be less. Evidence at the Abbeygate suggests that, here at least, the existing ground level is unchanged. It was hoped that this excavation would provide an opportunity to record the depth of overburden across the precinct yard and record any archaeology that might be encountered.

The monitoring was completed in accordance with an outline brief by Bob Carr of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service Conservation Team and archaeological advisory to the Diocesan Committee. The work was commissioned by the Dean and Chapter of St James Cathedral.

The site is to the north of St James' Cathedral and is bounded by the Cathedral Centre to the east and the 'north precinct wall', the remains of a former abbey building (possibly a guest hall) to the south. The site lies within the precinct of the medieval abbey in an area of former claustral buildings. When the abbey was dissolved in 1538 it passed into civil ownership. The ground

levels were raised in the 18th century and on the early maps of the town dating from 1747 it is shown as a bowling green and later, gardens.



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Figure 1. Site location plan

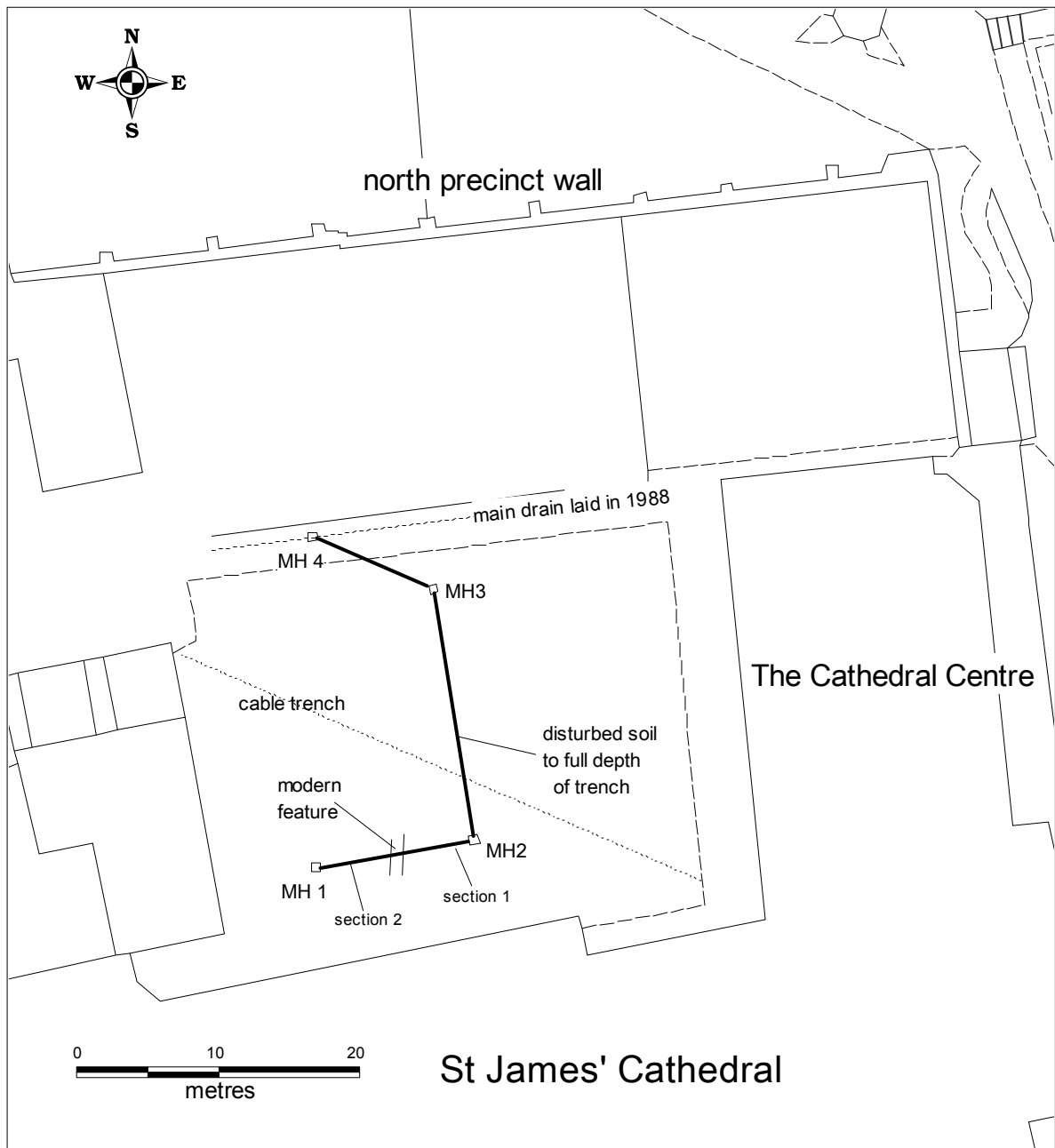
## Results

The entire length of the trench was observed by the monitoring archaeologist; the new drains connected existing manholes and were linked into an established main. Figure 2 shows the line of the trench excavation and the sections illustrate the depth of the soil profile and points along the route. Levels were taken using a 'dumpy level' and related to the door step at the south end of the east cloister. A cable trench was also excavated at this time but was so shallow that it had no impact on the archaeological level.

Where possible the trenches were excavated to a depth of no more than 600mm below the present ground surface and were designed to be as shallow as possible, whilst still allowing the necessary fall to the drains. Between manholes (MH) 2 and 3 the trench was excavated wholly within a recent reworked soil and bricks, concrete and other modern debris were recorded throughout. This was disturbed to at least 760mm below the level of the cloister steps.

The modern disturbance continued part way along the length of the trench between manholes 1 and 2 (Fig. 2) but had not impacted to the full depth. Here it sealed a clean close-textured dark silt, 0001 (Sections 1 and 2, Fig. 4). This soil was notable for having no stones in it and was interpreted as a worked garden soil. It produced occasional small fragments of post-medieval tile and a handmade, thin gauge iron bar or pin. A further soil distinction was identified at the base of the trench where a paler brown silt, 0002 was recorded with powdered lime mortar and small stones. This is likely to be archaeological but was not dated.

A new manhole (MH 4) was constructed to connect the new system with the existing drain. The excavations for the manhole were 1m<sup>2</sup>, wider than the original trench in which the pipe was laid



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Figure 2. Site Plan showing the line of the trench and position of manholes (MH)



Figure 3. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS map 1890

and were therefore excavated through soil layers that had not recently been disturbed. This presented a deep cross-section of the soil profile (Fig 4). Just below the surface the excavation cut through a flint and brick rubble wall, bonded with lime mortar. The bricks were plain handmade ones and nothing in the wall fabric could be dated to later than mid 19th century. The wall however sat on a concrete footing suggesting that it had been either rebuilt or underpinned at later date. A building shown on the first and second editions of the Ordnance Survey (Fig. 3) and the wall in MH4 aligns with the rear of

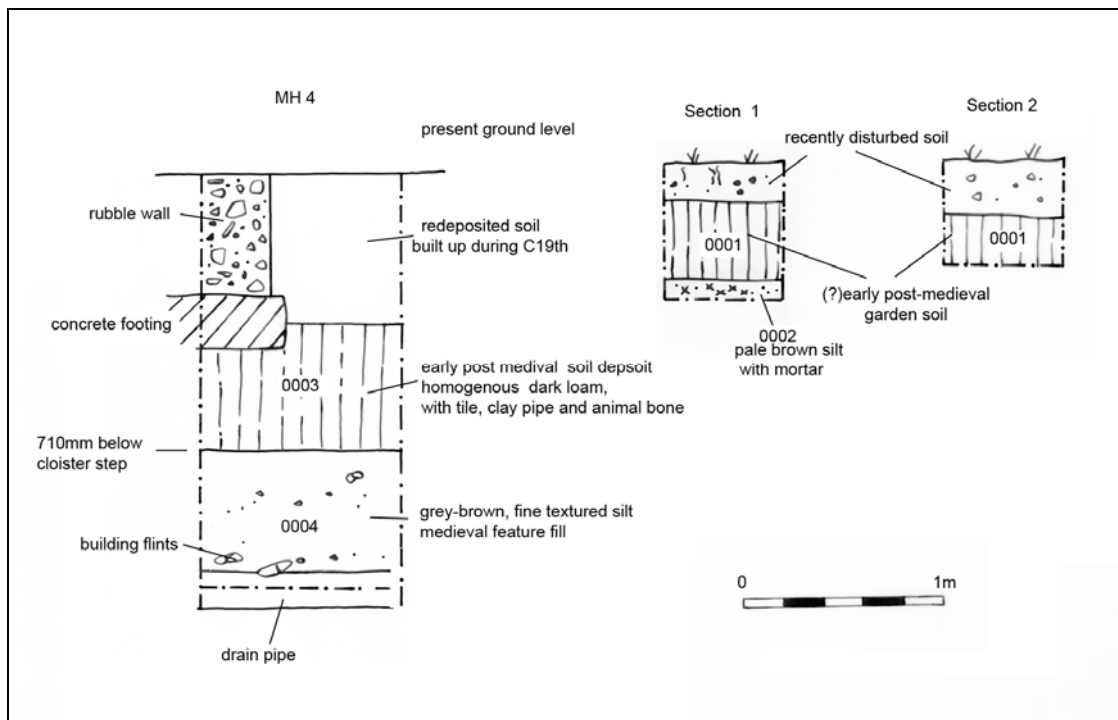


Figure 4. Sections of Trench and manhole, MH 4

this building. Below the wall was a 600mm deep buried soil horizon of dark loam, 0003, which produced domestic debris including tile, clay pipe and animal bone (Fig. 4). This soil was deposited during the early post medieval period and thought to be similar to the deposit that was recorded overlying the medieval layers during the 1988 and 1999 excavations. The top of this layer is likely to indicate the former ground level, was 780mm below the present ground surface and had been sealed beneath later imported soil.

Sealed beneath 0003 was a brown, fine-textured silt, 0004. The structure of the soil was closely bound suggesting a high content of ash or cess. The soil was streaked with mineral staining and became progressively closer textured and darker with depth. This deposit was excavated by the monitoring archaeologist and the up-cast spoil scanned for finds but no pottery was recovered. Nominal amounts of oyster shell and animal bone were recovered but it was otherwise free of finds. Towards the bottom of the excavation was a layer of large building flints, the flints were loose but had mortar attached indicating that they had once been part of a bonded structure. The manhole was excavated to a depth of 2.1m but even at this depth no undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered. This suggests that the excavation was entirely within the backfill of a substantial pit.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The monitoring has confirmed the depth of overburden that covers the site and identified the depth of the former ground level at between 200-780mm below the current surface. This lower level is the result of the ground levels being raised deliberately in the 17th or 18th centuries.

Archaeological levels identified positively as medieval were only recorded at a depth of 1.4m during the excavation for the manhole (MH4). The excavation here was entirely within a deep pit, no rubbish pits have been found within the yard previously but excavations have shown that the some of the buildings in this area were constructed with undercrofts, cellars or other subterranean structures and it is possible that the soil excavated in the base of the manhole is the fill within one of these.