

Trial Hole for new Pipeline at Wixoe WIX 017

Archaeological monitoring report.

Planning Application No: Pre MWH
Grid reference: TL 7096 4313
Date of fieldwork: 23rd November 2004
Project Officer: Jo Caruth
Oasis reference: suffolkc1-5315
Funding Body: Essex and Suffolk Water Company

Introduction

An archaeological monitoring was undertaken during the digging of a trial hole in advance of a new Essex and Suffolk Water pipeline at Wixoe (Figure 1). A continuous monitoring condition was applied to the excavation of the hole as it was located within the area of a known Roman villa, WIX 001 and WIX 003, identified from aerial photographs and recorded metal detector finds (Figure 2).



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Figure 1 Site location

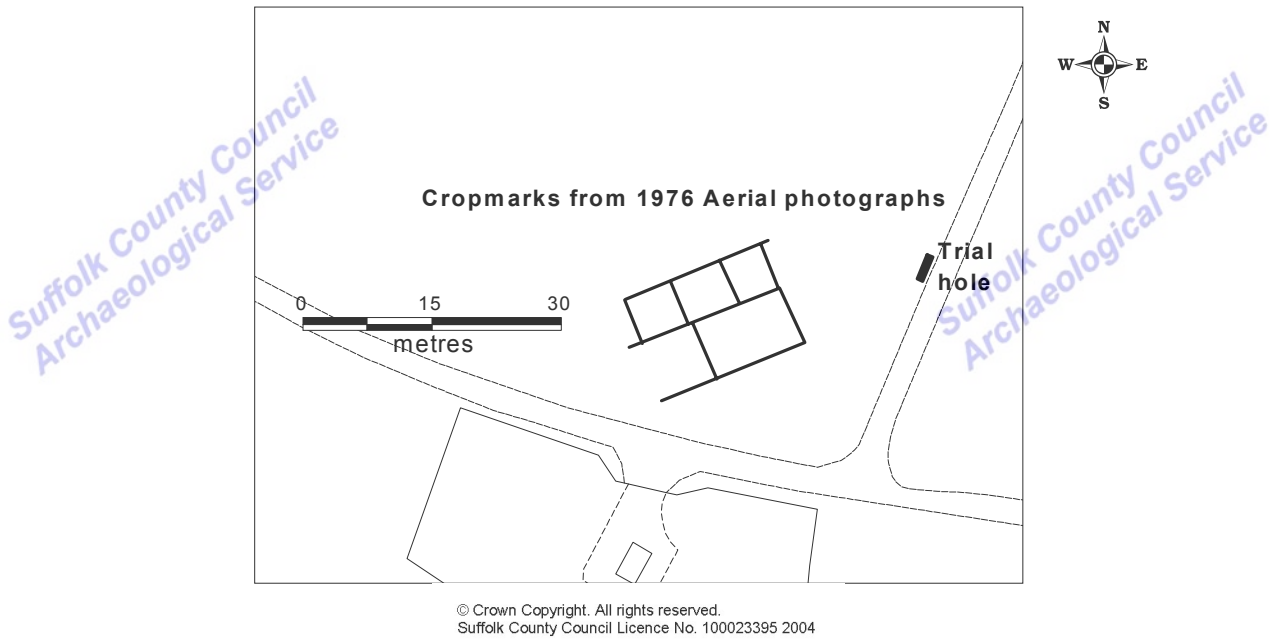


Figure 2 Transcription of cropmarks from aerial photograph

Method

Prior to the excavation a rapid survey of the field was carried out. This broadly identified differing densities of broken tile lying on the surface of the ploughsoil (Figure 3). Some pottery sherds were also seen and two interesting sherds collected and identified as part of a small whitewear mortarium, probably mid-late 2nd century and the base of a Roman flagon (C. Tester pers comm). The piece of mortarium was large and unabraded, demonstrating that archaeological deposits under the ploughsoil are still being newly disturbed (implying both the potential for deposits that remain undamaged and indicating that plough damage is increasing).



Figure 3 Sketch of tile distribution

The trial hole measured c. 3m x 0.7m and was excavated along the eastern edge of the field alongside a concrete track. It was located just outside the area of highest concentration of tile. The hole was excavated using a wheeled mechanical digger fitted with a 0.6m toothed bucket. Soil was removed in spits of c.0.1m and the soil changes recorded and upcast soil examined.

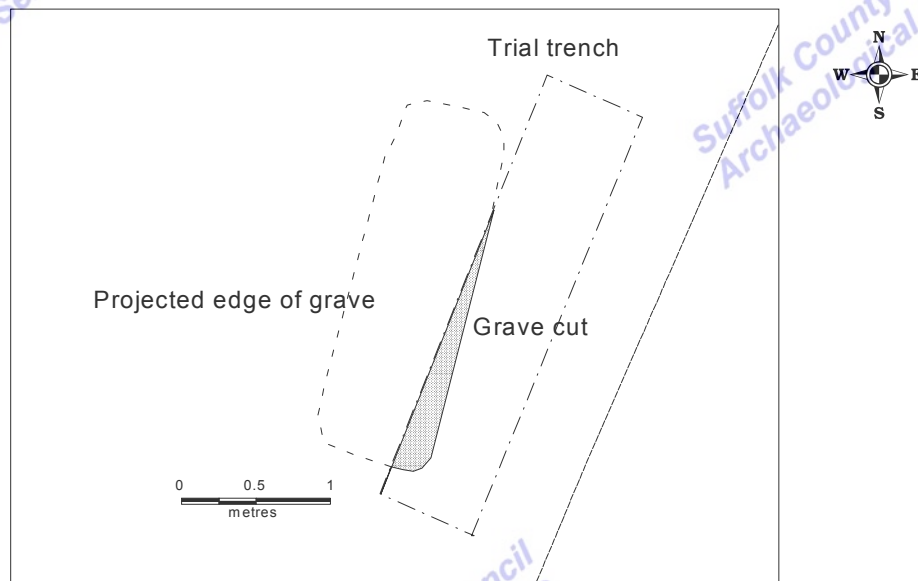


Figure 4 Site plan

Results

The topsoil was a worked brown loam, c.0.38m deep, which contained some stones and a few small sherds of Roman tile. This overlaid a brown sand, containing stones and gravel, which was surprisingly clean with few finds and little occupation debris. This could be seen to be c.0.35m deep over most of the trench coming down onto a very flinty dark orange sand natural between 0.74m and 1.08m and which overlay a coarse chalky sand containing a high concentration of large flints and coarse gravel. This initially appeared to be the profile across the whole trench until a human humerus was brought up by the machine at a depth of c.1.1m. Examination of the base of the hole and the upcast soil recovered part of a human skull and jaw and some unidentified fragments of bone. The south-west corner of a grave cut could be seen in the side of the trench and the section showed it to be filled with the same brown sand as that seen lying under topsoil. As so little of the grave was contained within the trial hole it was decided to move the hole slightly to the east to mitigate against any further damage. Home Office Licence Number 29724 was obtained to allow the removal of the remains found.

Context	Feature	Identifier	Description
0001		Unstratified finds	Unstratified finds recovered from the field surface in the area of the villa cropmarks
0002	0003	Skeleton	Skull fragments and humerus
0003	0003	Grave cut	SW corner of grave seen in western trial hole section
0004	0003	Grave fill	Stony brown sand fill of grave 0003. Clean fill with no finds.

Table 1. Context numbers

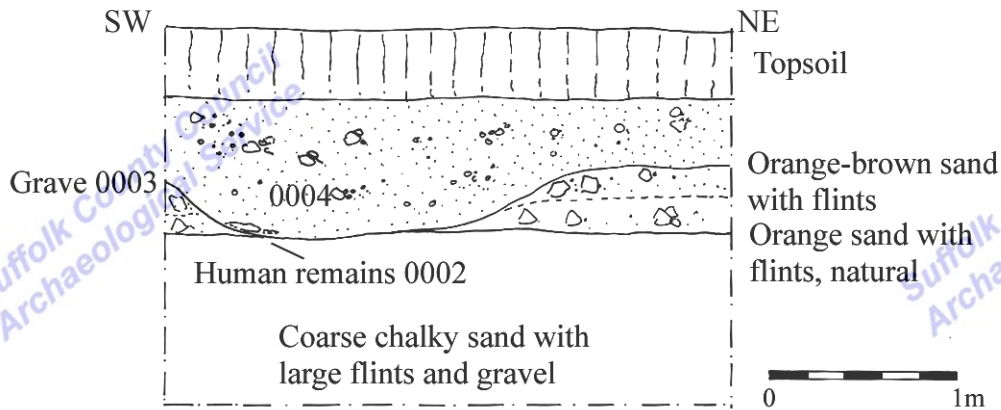


Figure 5 Trench section

Conclusion

This excavation has revealed the presence of a grave, probably of Roman date. It is common for rural Roman burials to be placed at the corners and edges of individual properties, and this is probably the case here, however the possibility that this represents part of a cemetery cannot be ruled out. The soil seen in this area was clean of occupation debris, which may suggest that this is beyond the most intense area of activity. However dense surface finds can be seen within 10m of this spot and therefore any conclusions about the likely nature of the archaeology within adjacent areas has to be tentative.

The identification of freshly disturbed finds on the surface of the topsoil indicates that damage is continuing to be done to this site and the noticeable concentration of finds that there is valuable evidence lying on the surface of the field.

Recommendations

This trial hole was part of a geological survey to establish ground conditions in advance of the construction of a new water pipeline. This area contains important archaeological deposits, including building evidence and at least one burial, and therefore will require further archaeological work, probably both before, and during construction.

A systematic fieldwalking survey of this field would be worthwhile, it would closely locate the concentrations of finds giving clues as to the extent of the villa complex. The evidence from the trial hole appears to indicate that it lies within the property boundaries of the villa, but outside the building itself, however structural elements of the building may lie within the immediate vicinity.

Any soil strip of the area would require an archaeological mitigation strategy which would probably involve a combination of survey work, excavation and monitoring. The remainder of the burial ought to be excavated archaeologically in order to reunite the skeleton.

Jo Caruth, December 2004

Reference

Aerial photograph, 1976, Cambridge University Collection BYZ 75