

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF UNICORN HOUSE FOUNDATION STREET IPSWICH (IPS 441, IAS 4708)

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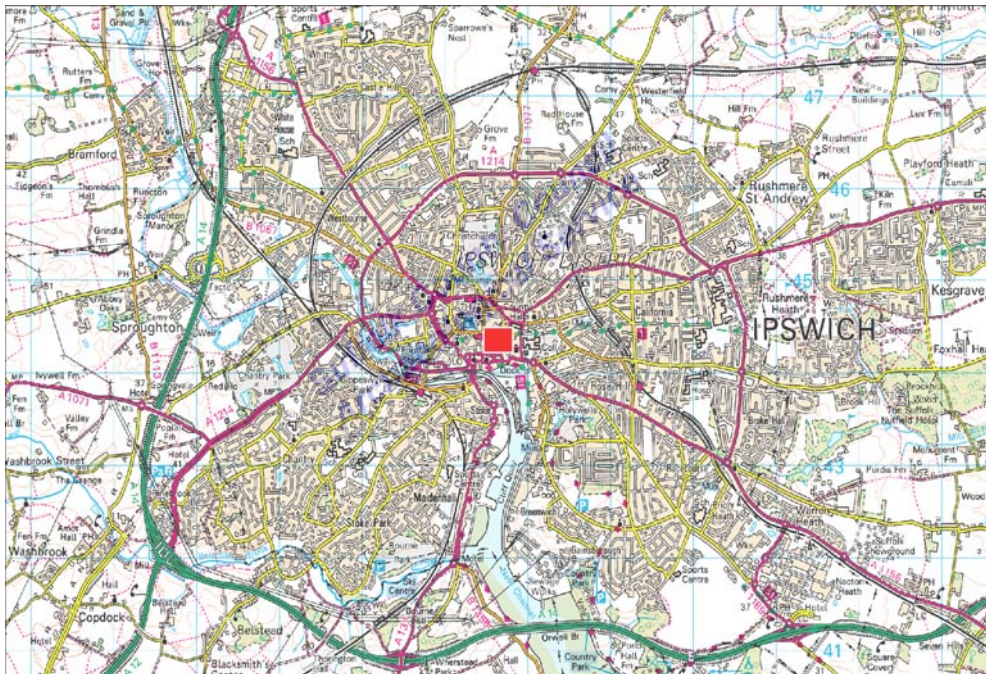


Figure 1: location of site within the town of Ipswich

## 1. Summary

Monitoring of footing trenches within a deep basement at the east end of Unicorn House revealed a number of archaeological features at a depth of nearly 2m below the present ground surface. Of the six features identified, four of them contained Thetford-type ware pottery of Late Saxon date (850-1066 AD). One pit contained a near complete Thetford-type ware jar associated with the lower halves of three other vessels. Another Saxon feature was a deep well or pit, excavated by contractors to a depth of c.4m below present ground level. This is an area to the immediate north of the large medieval Blackfriars church of St. Mary's. No evidence for medieval occupation was recovered, the late Saxon features probably representing earlier settlement before the establishment of the precinct for the Dominican friary.

## 2. Introduction

The planning permission granted for the development of this property was conditional upon archaeological monitoring visits made during the excavation of the footing trenches. The

archaeological potential of this site centres on its immediate proximity to the ruined medieval remains of the Blackfriars church (Scheduled Ancient Monument 32; IPS 224). Unicorn House lies to the immediate north of the friary church and the whole area under development is within the friary precinct (Victoria County History 1907, Plunkett 1996). The site is also within the Saxon core of Ipswich, so that earlier settlement belonging to before the establishment of the friary could be encountered.

Unicorn House was originally the 19<sup>th</sup> century Unicorn Brewery and is of considerable architectural merit, the majority of which has subsequently been converted into accommodation. The original construction included the digging of deep basements which would have destroyed most of any underlying archaeology. It was only at the eastern end of the site (where later additions to the Unicorn had been demolished) that footing trenches were dug below the level of the basement floor. It was these excavations which were monitored by the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service.

Monitoring visits were made on eight occasions between the 27<sup>th</sup> of January and the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2004 by various members of the Field Projects team.

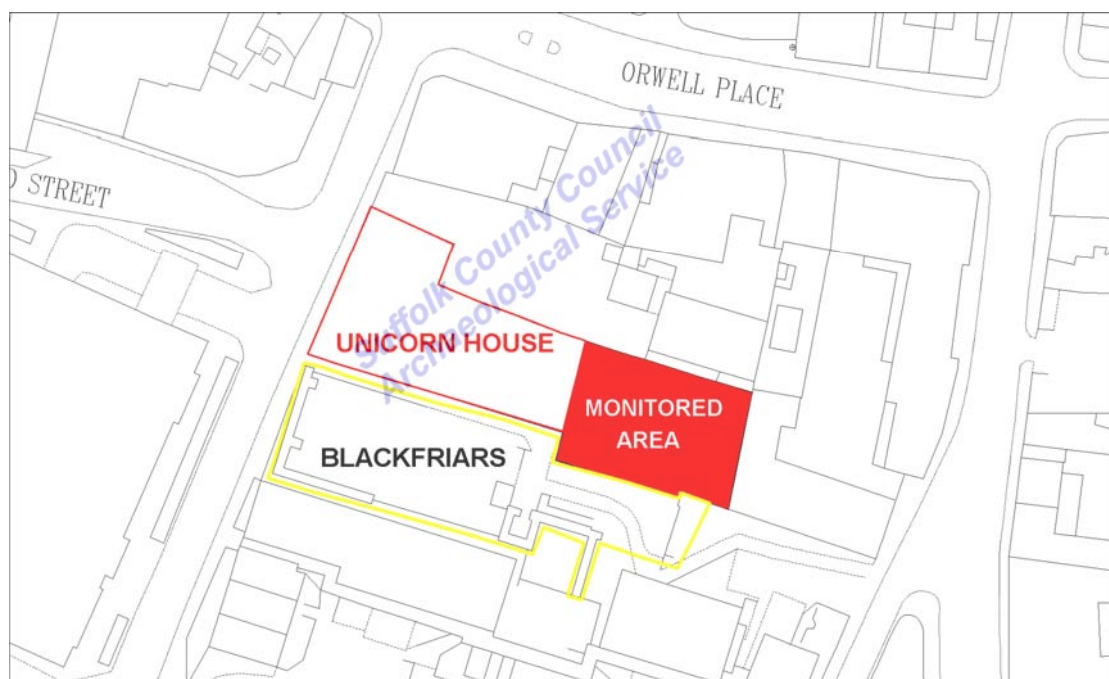


Figure 2: Showing position of the monitoring area (red) and the Scheduled Ancient Monument area of the adjacent Blackfriars church (yellow)

### 3. Results

Seven separate archaeological contexts were recorded (0001 to 0007) and these will be discussed below in numerical order.

#### Finds 0001

This context number was used for unstratified finds, e.g. for items of archaeological interest recovered from excavated spoil but without a precise location known. These finds include a rim sherd of Thetford-type ware (late Saxon) and an undiagnostic animal bone.

#### Well 0002

Positioned in the north-west corner of the site, this feature was c. 2.6m in diameter. Fully excavated by the contractors, this feature was bottomed at 2.2m below the concrete basement

slab (e.g. 4m below present ground level). Its water-logged fill consisted of dark grey sandy silt with frequent stones. Finds recovered from the spoil included Thetford ware pottery, animal bones and oyster shell. It is likely that this deep feature operated as a well.

### Pit 0003

This pit was encountered midway along the northern edge of the site. It was c.1.5m in diameter and extended to 1m below the top of the basement slab (e.g. 2.8m below present ground level). The pit fill consisted of silty sand and contained a considerable amount of pottery, some of which was excavated from below the slab. Of particular interest was a near complete Thetford-type ware jar found with the lower halves of three other vessels (see finds report below).

### Pit 0004

Located towards the north-east corner of the site, this feature was c.1.7m in diameter and extended below the level of the trench base (e.g. 800mm+ below slab level or 2.6m below the present ground surface). This pit contained deposits of dark wet loam containing abundant charcoal and included two sherds of Thetford ware pottery.

### Pit 0005

This pit was observed towards the south-eastern corner of the site and was c.1.7m in diameter. This feature extended below the level of the trench. Its fill consisted of brown sand and dark grey loam and included a piece of Thetford ware pottery and animal bones.

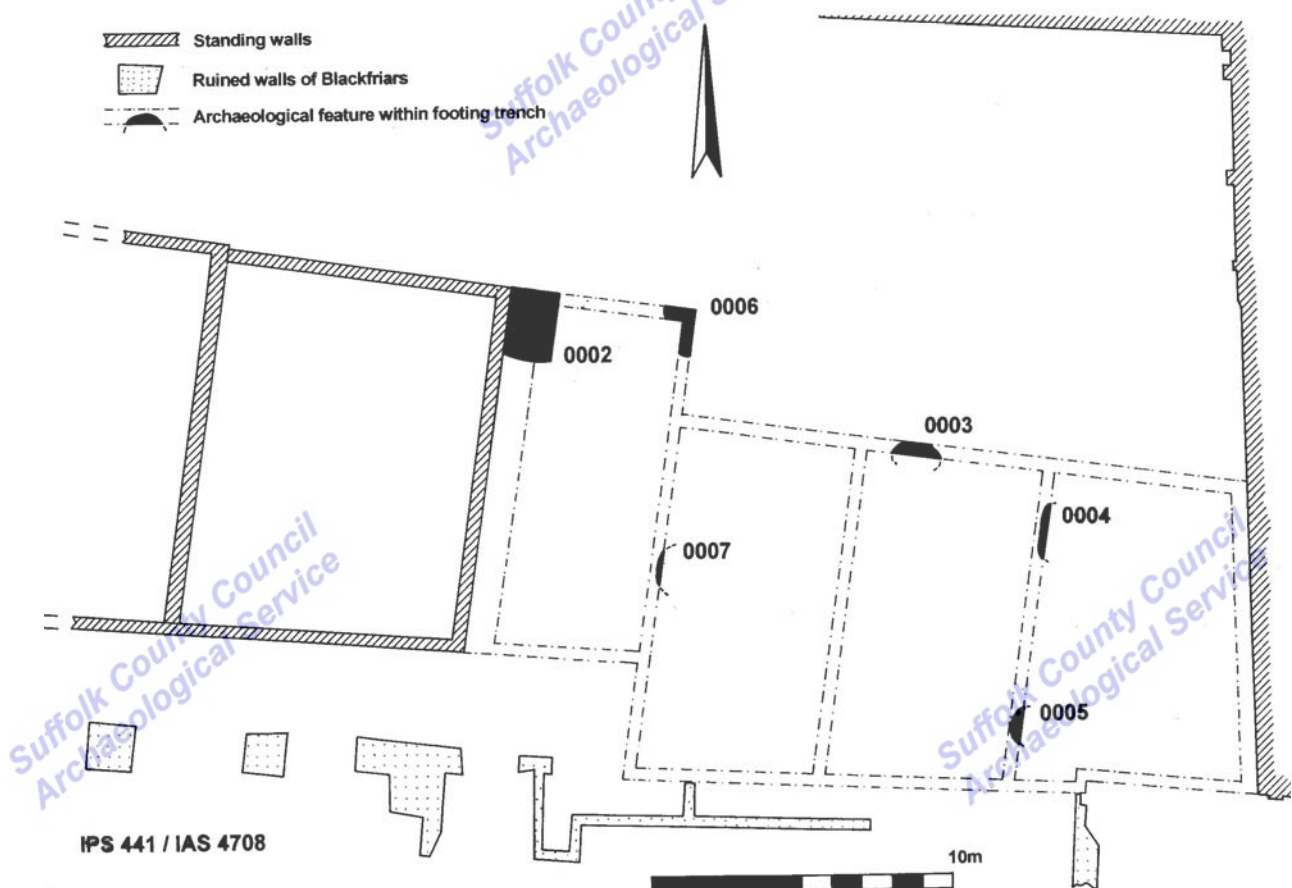


Figure 3: Showing position of archaeological features observed within footing trenches.

## Pit 0006

This pit was encountered towards the north-west corner of the monitoring area, close to well 0002. This feature was c.1.5m in diameter and extended to below the base of the footing trench. The fill consisted of stratified orange gravelly sand and darker grey silts. No finds were recovered from this feature.

## Well 0007

A brick-lined well of probable Victorian date, and thus possibly contemporary with the brewery use of the site, was observed within the western half of the site.

## 4. The Finds

Sue Anderson, March 2004.

### Introduction

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

OP	Pottery		Animal bone		Miscellaneous	Spotdate
	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g		
0001	1	42	1	19		LSax
0002	5	67	10	102	1 oyster shell (9g)	LSax
0003	1	3	17	211	1 slag (155g), 1 ?mortar (3g)	LSax
0003.1	34	1085				LSax
0003.2	1	490	1	11	14 frags charcoal	LSax
0003.3	3	685				LSax
0003.4	3	505	1	1	2 frags charcoal	LSax
0004	2	33	1	20		LSax
0005	1	33	3	96		LSax
Total	51	2943	34	460		

### Pottery

All pottery collected from this site was Thetford-type ware (rim typology follows Anderson forthcoming). One rim sherd (type 5/6, unstratified 0001) was oxidised red, and a base from pit 0005 was probably burnt, but all others were in the typical dark grey, hard, fine fabric of Ipswich Thetford-type ware. The five sherds from pit 0002 were two bases, two body sherds and a rim (type 4). Two body sherds came from pit 0004, and one of these was decorated with closely-spaced girth grooving. Pit 0003 produced the largest quantity of pottery, which consisted of a near-complete but fragmented AB jar with type 7 rim (0003.1), the lower halves of three other vessels (0003.2-4, one of which was inside another), and a single body sherd of an overfired small vessel. The bases of two of these vessels (0003.1 and 2) were burnt and spalled. The fills of 0003.2 and 0003.4 contained fragments of charcoal and two animal bones, but these were probably just accidental inclusions. The rim types suggest a date in the later phase of Thetford ware production, but given the small number in the assemblage, this is only a tentative suggestion.

### Building material

One small fragment of lime ?mortar was found in pit 0003.

### Metalworking debris

A fragment of ferrous slag attached to a stone was also found in pit 0003.

## **Animal bone and shell**

The majority of animal bone was collected from pit 0003 and included fragments of cow metapodials, phalanx and ribs, a sheep/goat horncore fragment, and some bantam bones, including a skull. A small fragment of bird mandible was found in pot 0003.4, and 0003.2 contained an abraded piece of ?sheep radius shaft. Pit 0002 produced cow phalanges, a sheep tooth, a pig metacarpal and fragments of large mammal and bird bones. Pit 0004 contained a large part of a ?sheep radius. From pit 0005 there was a small cow metapodial, an unidentified long bone shaft, and the shaft of a juvenile ?pig tibia with a pathological lesion at the distal end. One unstratified bone was collected, and this was a gnawed fragment of a medium mammal long bone.

One oyster shell was recovered from pit 0002.

## **Discussion**

Finds were collected from four pits and an unstratified context. Pit 0003 produced large parts of four Thetford-type ware jars, one of which had been deposited inside another. They showed evidence of sooting, burning and spalling, and had clearly been used for cooking. All four features could be dated no earlier than the Late Saxon period, but as Thetford-type ware is ubiquitous in Ipswich, there is a possibility that the material could have been redeposited. However, there was no sign of abrasion on any of the sherds. The small assemblage of animal bone shows that quite a wide variety of animals was being exploited for food in this part of the town. There was no evidence of bone working from the fragments, although some showed butchery cutmarks, but the presence of a fragment of horncore could be related to horn working.

## **5. Conclusions**

Despite the deep excavation for a 19<sup>th</sup> century basement a number of features were recognised below the level of the basement slab, c.1.8m below the present ground level. Of the six features recorded four contained late Saxon pottery (850-1066 AD). One other pit was undated and the sixth feature was a well of probable 19<sup>th</sup> century date. Pit 0002 was particularly deep and contained water-logged deposits and was likely to be a well.

As Anderson has indicated in the finds report, the presence of Thetford-type ware pottery is not conclusive evidence for the Saxon date of these features as this type of pottery is very common in Ipswich and could have been redeposited in later features. No later pottery or other datable finds however have been recovered from these features or other deposits and it therefore seems likely that a late Saxon date for at least four of the pits is probable. No evidence for features associated with or contemporary with the Blackfriars was observed.

The recorded archaeology from below the level of the basement slab is likely to belong to the late Saxon occupation of Ipswich and thus predates the foundation of the Dominican priory at Blackfriars in 1263 (Victoria County History 1907). It is probable that the Saxon levels were lower than those of today and that there has been some build-up of deposits since then. Only the deepest of features however would have survived at this depth, such as the probably Saxon well 0002. It is likely that any medieval remains associated with the Blackfriars, should they have existed, would have been destroyed by the insertion of 19<sup>th</sup> century basement associated with the Unicorn Brewery.

## References

Anderson, S., forthcoming, 'The pottery', in Wallis, H., *Excavations at Mill Lane, Thetford*, East Anglian Archaeol.

Plunkett, S. J., 1996, 'Skeletons in the Cupboard', *Ipswich Archaeological Trust News* 46.

Victoria County History, 1907, *VCH, Suffolk* 2: 122-123.

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