

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT THE EYRIE,  
BACK LANE,  
CASTLE ACRE,  
NORFOLK  
(40712 CAA)**

**Work Undertaken For  
Mrs M. Eagle**

May 2007

Report Compiled by  
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National Grid Reference: TF 8137 1507  
Planning Application No: 05/01256/F  
OASIS Record No: archaeol1-25679

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT SERVICES**



APS Report No. **41/07**



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## 1. SUMMARY

*A watching brief was undertaken during groundworks at The Eyrie, Back Lane, Castle Acre, Norfolk. The watching brief monitored the excavation of foundation trenches for a new extension to an existing building.*

*The site lies close to the core of the medieval (AD 1066-1540) planned town of Castle Acre, north of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Cluniac priory. Other remains include the motte and bailey castle and the 14<sup>th</sup> century church of St. James. Five Late Saxon (AD 850-1066) graves were revealed at the site. A Romano-British (AD 43-410) thoroughfare, the Peddars Way, once went through the town and a Neolithic (4200-2200 BC) stone axe was retrieved from the vicinity.*

*The watching brief revealed a sequence of natural and recent deposits. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts retrieved.*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Definition of a Watching Brief

An archaeological watching brief is defined as “*a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.*” (IFA 1999).

### 2.2 Planning Background

Archaeological Project Services was commissioned by Mrs M Eagle to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with a new extension to existing buildings at The Eyrie, Back Lane, Castle Acre, Norfolk.

Approval for the development was sought through the submission of planning application 05/01256/F. The watching brief was carried out on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

### 2.3 Topography and Geology

Castle Acre is located 6km north of Swaffham and 20km southeast of King’s Lynn in the administrative district of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk (Fig. 1).

The site is located 280m west of the village centre as defined by the parish church of St. James at National Grid Reference TF 8137 1507 (Fig. 2). The site lies on the south side of Back Lane at its junction with Priory Road at a height of c. 45m OD on land that slopes down to the south, towards the valley of the River Nar.

Local soils are of the Newmarket 2 Association, typically brown rendzinas (Hodge *et al.* 1984, 268). These are developed on the boundary between glacially derived till and Cretaceous Upper Chalk Formation (BGS).

### 2.4 Archaeological Setting

Castle Acre is located in an area of known archaeological remains dating from the prehistoric period to the present day. A fragment of a Neolithic flint axehead was found to the east of the village in 1959.

Castle Acre sits astride the Peddars Way, a Roman thoroughfare that once connected Ixworth and Holme-next-the Sea (Margary 1973, 258). Roman coins have been found in the parish.

In 2001, five graves were found at The Eyrie which are believed to be Late Saxon in date.

Acre is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of c. 1086. Referred to as *Acra* and *Acre*, the name is derived from the Old English ‘*æcer*’ meaning a field (Ekwall

1989, 2). At the time of Domesday, Acre was held by William de Warenne, the abbey of Ely and Ralph of Tosny and contained 19 acres of meadow, 6 and a half mills, 2 fisheries and a number of salt-houses (Brown 1984).

Castle Acre was a planned settlement centred on the de Warenne, earls of Surrey holdings. A gridded street pattern was enclosed by a rampart and ditch and a motte and bailey castle constructed immediately south of the town (Wade-Martins 1994, 72). The ruins and earthworks of the castle still survive and are a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

William de Warenne also founded the Cluniac priory dedicated to St Mary and SS. Peter and Paul, located south of the site, between 1087 and 1089, making it subject to his earlier foundation at Lewes, Sussex (Page 1906, 356). The surviving remains include the ruined monastic church, primarily of 12<sup>th</sup> century date with 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century additions, including the west range and the gatehouse.

Other extant medieval remains include the church of St. James which has origins of c. 1300 with 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century additions (Pevsner 1990, 111), and the 15<sup>th</sup> century gable of Abbey Cottage (*ibid.*).

Prior to this watching brief an evaluation was undertaken to the immediate east of the site. No further evidence for Saxon burial was encountered and only modern make-up for a bowling green was identified (Holt 2004, 1).

### 3. AIMS

The aim of the archaeological investigation was to ensure that any archaeological features exposed during the groundworks should be recorded and, if present, to determine their date, function and origin.

### 4. METHODS

Prior to the excavation of foundation trenches, overburden was stripped from the area. Foundation trenches were then excavated by machine to depths required by the development. Following excavation, the sides of the trenches were then cleaned and rendered vertical. Selected deposits were excavated further to retrieve artefactual material and to determine their function. Each deposit was allocated a unique reference number (context number) with an individual written description. A list of all contexts and their descriptions appears as Appendix 1. A photographic record was compiled and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Recording was undertaken according to standard Archaeological Project Services practice.

Following excavation the records were checked and a stratigraphic matrix produced. Phasing was assigned based on the nature of the deposits and recognisable relationships between them.

### 5. RESULTS

Archaeological contexts are listed below and described. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field.

The earliest deposit encountered during the watching brief was a layer of natural bluish grey clay (104). This measured in excess of 0.14m thick (Fig. 4, Section 1). Above this was a layer of reddish brown sand (103) that was sealed beneath yellowish brown clay (102).

Above these natural layers was a 0.4m thick subsoil comprising brown silty clay with gravel (101). This was sealed beneath the current topsoil of brown sandy silt (100).

## 6. DISCUSSION

Natural deposits of clay and sand relate to the underlying drift geology of glacial till. A subsoil and topsoil had developed upon these layers. The subsoil may indicate that the site was previously under an agricultural regime.

No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were retrieved during the investigation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Back Lane, Castle Acre, as the site lay close to previous discoveries of Saxon burial and close to the medieval planned town.

However, only natural, subsoil and topsoil deposits were encountered with no further evidence for Saxon burial. No archaeological features were identified and no finds were recorded.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Mrs M. Eagle for commissioning the fieldwork and post-excavation analysis. The work was coordinated by Mark Williams who edited this report along with Tom Lane. Dave Start kindly allowed access to the parish files maintained by Heritage Lincolnshire.

## 9. PERSONNEL

Project Coordinator: Mark Williams  
 Site Supervisor: Mary Nugent  
 Photographic reproduction: Sue Unsworth  
 Illustration: Paul Cope-Faulkner  
 Post-excavation analysis: Paul Cope-Faulkner

## 10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## 11. ABBREVIATIONS

APS Archaeological Project Services  
 BGS British Geological Survey  
 IFA Institute of Field Archaeologists





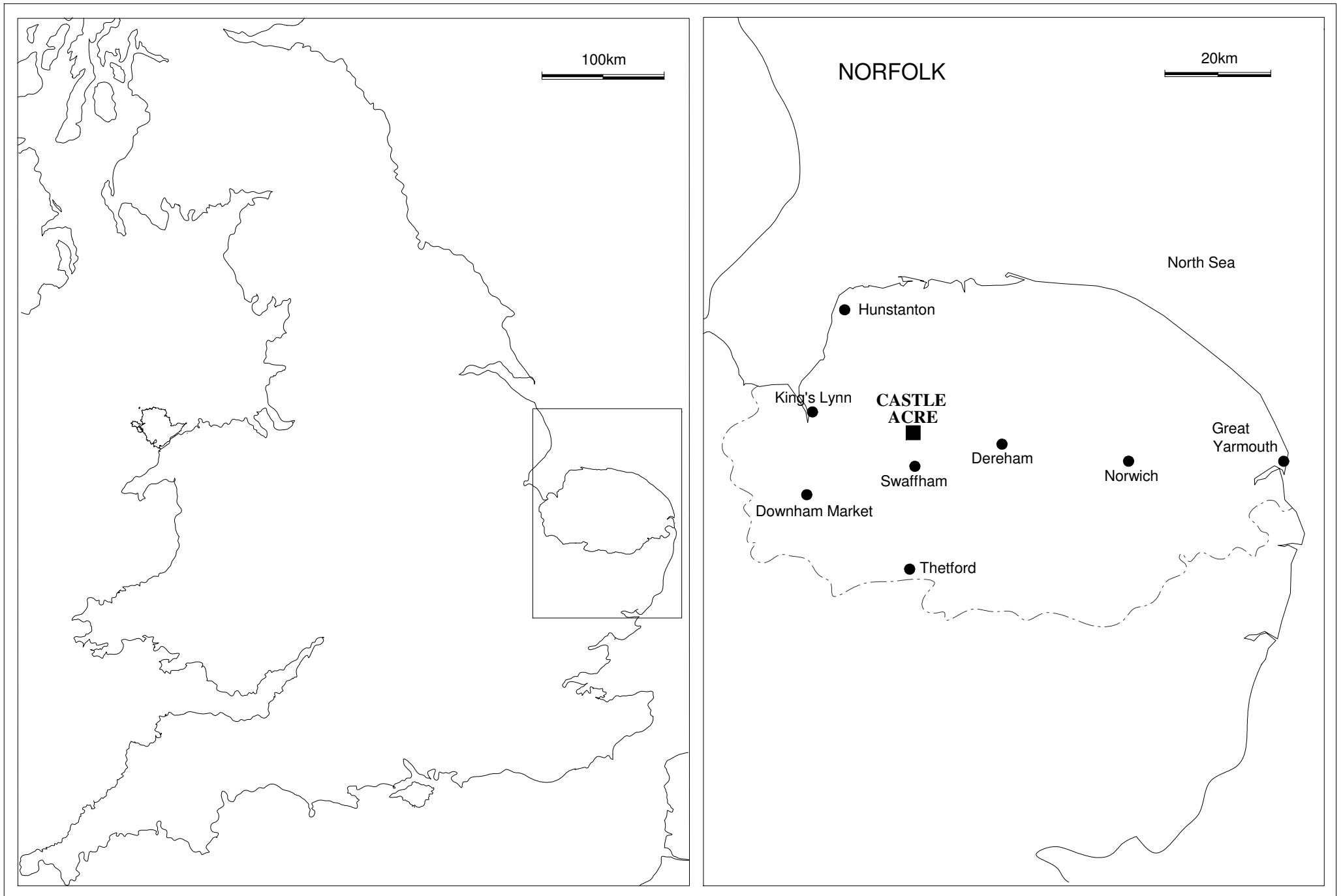
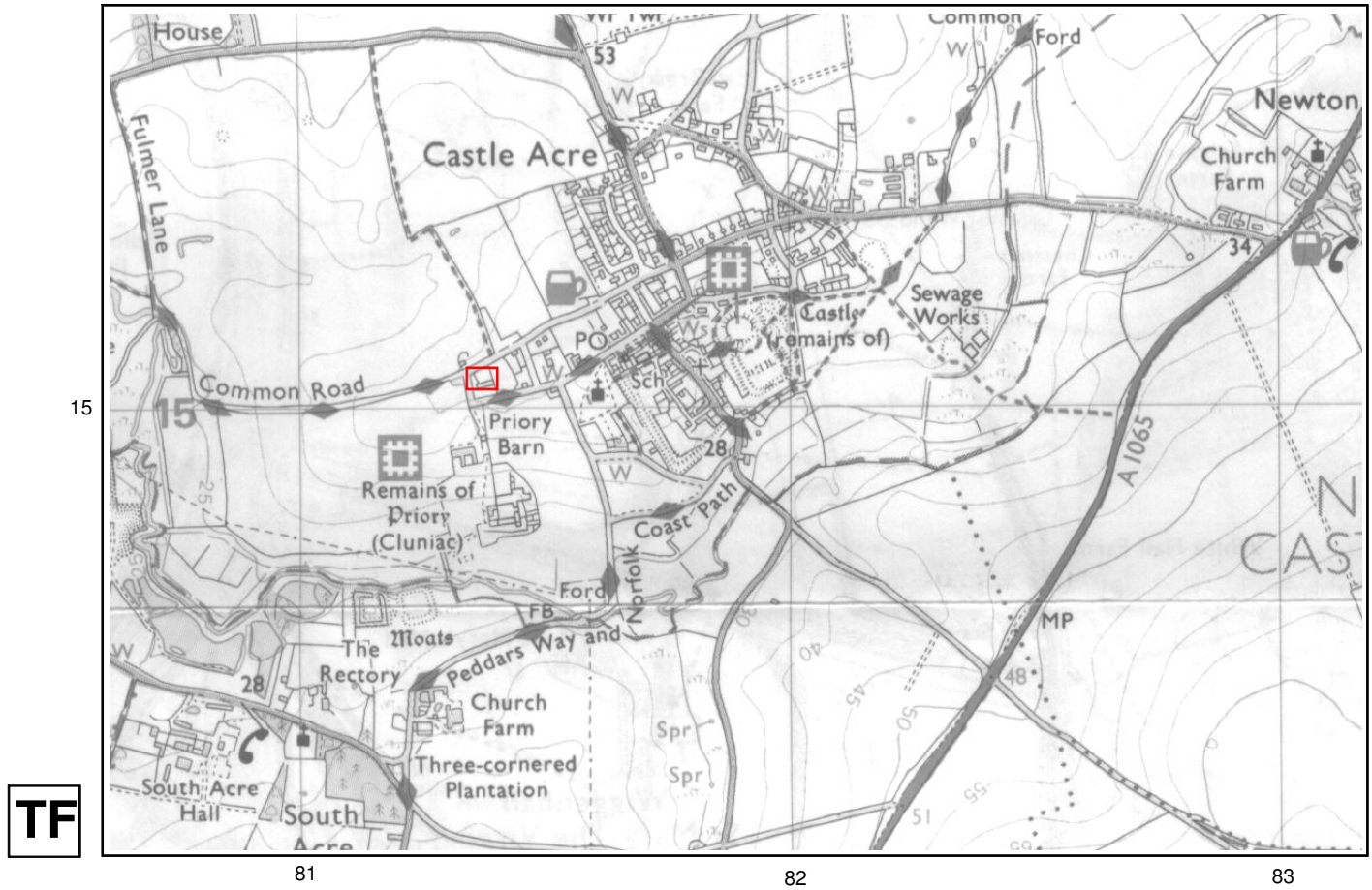


Figure 1 General Location Plan





**TF**

 Area detailed in Figure 3

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Project Name: Back Lane, Castle Acre 40712CAA		
Scale 1:15000	Drawn by: PCF	Report No: 41/07

Figure 2 - Site location plan



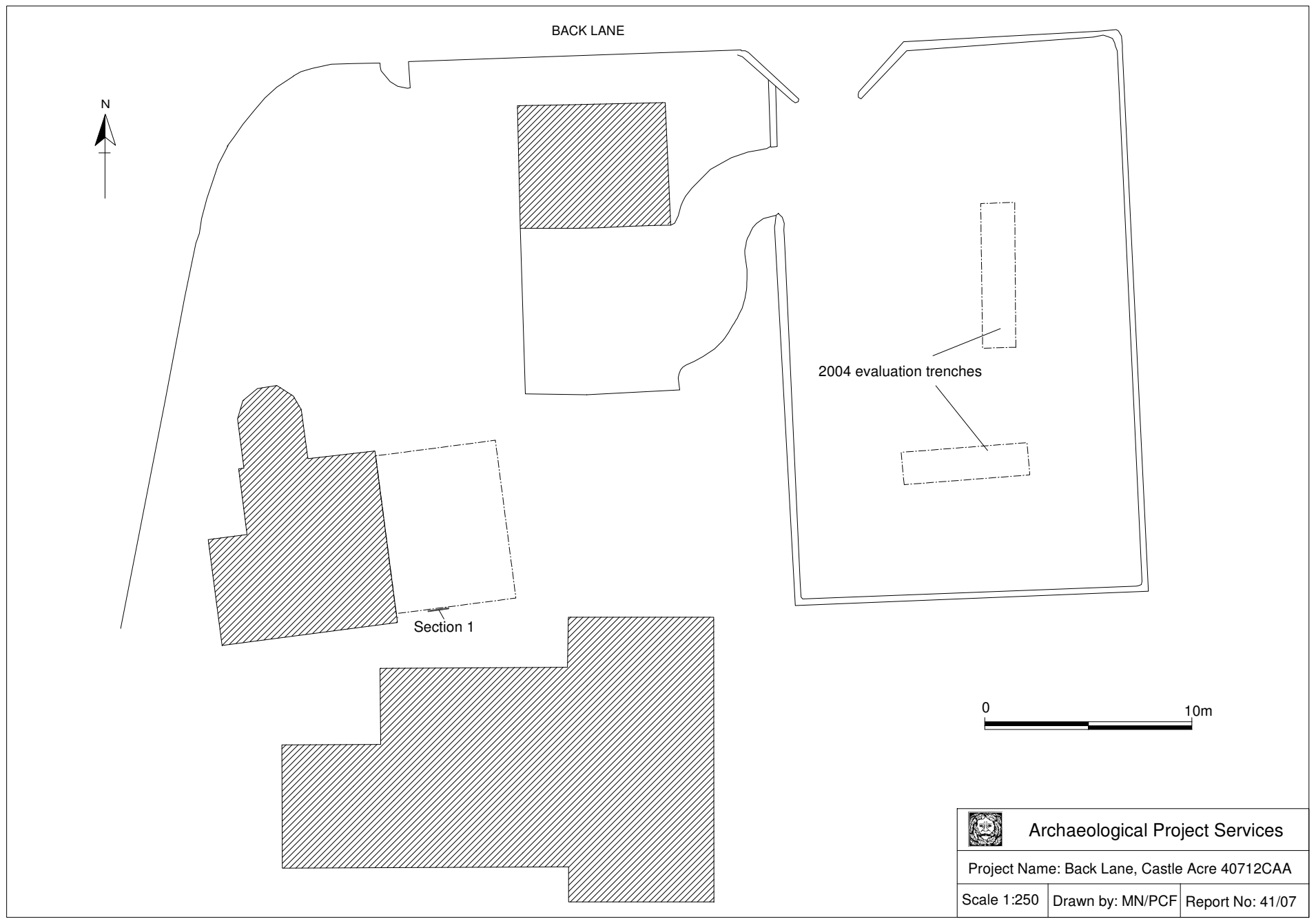
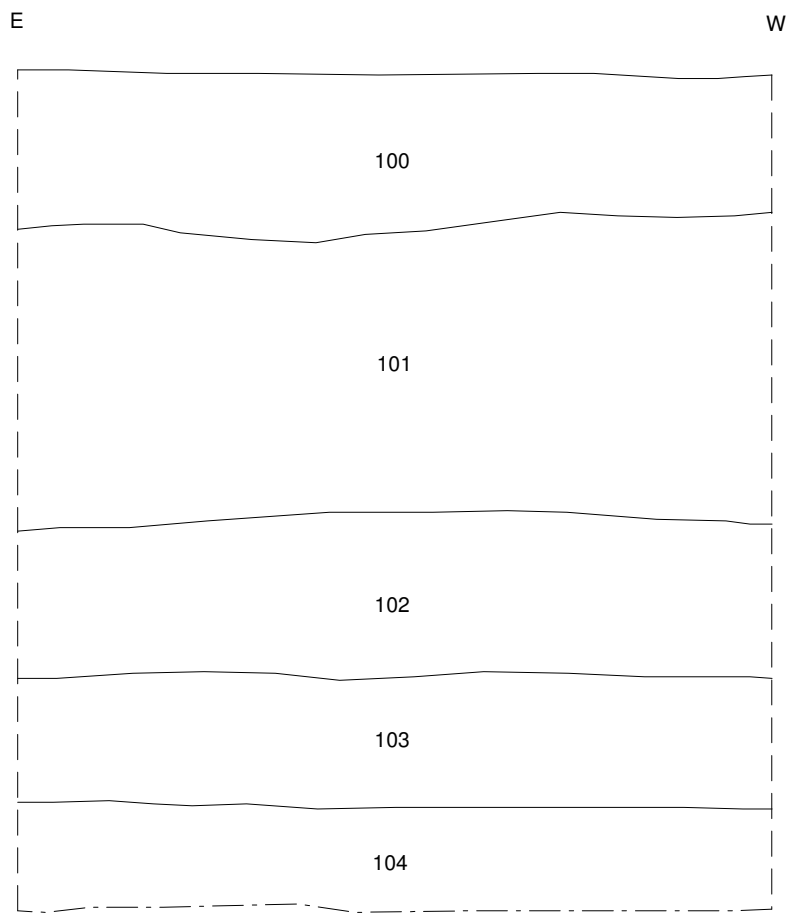


Figure 3 - Plan of the development showing location of drawn section





Section 1




 <b>Archaeological Project Services</b>		
Project Name: Back Lane, Castle Acre 40712CAA		
Scale 1:10	Drawn by: PCF	Report No: 41/07

Figure 4 - Section 1







Plate 1 - General view of the development area, looking southwest



Plate 2 - Section 1 showing the general sequence of deposits, looking south



## Appendix 1

### CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

No.	Description	Interpretation
100	Firm mid brown sandy silt, 0.2m thick	Topsoil
101	Firm light brown silty clay with moderate gravel, 0.4m thick	Subsoil
102	Firm mid yellowish brown clay, 0.2m thick	Natural deposit
103	Soft mid reddish brown sand, 0.16m thick	Natural deposit
104	Firm light bluish grey clay, >0.14m thick	Natural deposit

## Appendix 2

### GLOSSARY

<b>Context</b>	An archaeological context represents a distinct archaeological event or process. For example, the action of digging a pit creates a context (the cut) as does the process of its subsequent backfill (the fill). Each context encountered during an archaeological investigation is allocated a unique number by the archaeologist and a record sheet detailing the description and interpretations of the context (the context sheet) is created and placed in the site archive. Context numbers are identified within the report text by brackets, <i>e.g.</i> (004).
<b>Layer</b>	A layer is a term to describe an accumulation of soil or other material that is not contained within a cut.
<b>Medieval</b>	The Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1066-1500.
<b>Natural</b>	Undisturbed deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity.
<b>Neolithic</b>	The 'New Stone Age' period, part of the prehistoric era, dating from approximately 4500-2250 BC.
<b>Prehistoric</b>	The period of human history prior to the introduction of writing. In Britain the prehistoric period lasts from the first evidence of human occupation about 500,000 BC, until the Roman invasion in the middle of the 1 <sup>st</sup> century AD.
<b>Romano-British</b>	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 43-410 when the Romans occupied Britain.
<b>Saxon</b>	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 410-1066 when England was largely settled by tribes from northern Germany.
<b>Till</b>	A deposit formed after the retreat of a glacier. Also known as boulder clay, this material is generally unsorted and can comprise of rock flour to boulders to rocks of quite substantial size.

## Appendix 3

### THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of:

5	Context records
1	Sheet of scale drawings
1	Daily record sheet
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Stratigraphic matrix

All primary records are currently kept at:

Archaeological Project Services  
The Old School  
Cameron Street  
Heckington  
Sleaford  
Lincolnshire  
NG34 9RW

The ultimate destination of the project archive is:

Norfolk Landscape Archaeology  
Norfolk Museums Service  
Union House  
Gressenhall  
Dereham  
Norfolk  
NR20 4DR

Museum Accession Number: 40712 CAA

Archaeological Project Services Site Code: CAB 07

The discussion and comments provided in this report are based on the archaeology revealed during the site investigations. Other archaeological finds and features may exist on the development site but away from the areas exposed during the course of this fieldwork. *Archaeological Project Services* cannot confirm that those areas unexposed are free from archaeology nor that any archaeology present there is of a similar character to that revealed during the current investigation.

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