

# Warham Burrows, Norfolk

A Programme of Archaeological Monitoring



Hayley Roberts

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Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

Event No: ENF132746  
Report No: 1196  
Cambridge Archaeological Unit  
University of Cambridge  
November 2013

## Contents

<i>Summary</i>	ii
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	1
<b>1.1 Location, topography and geology</b>	1
<b>1.2 Archaeological Background</b>	1
1.2.1 <i>Early Prehistoric</i>	
1.2.2 <i>Late Prehistoric and Romano-British</i>	
1.2.3 <i>Medieval and post medieval</i>	
<b>1.3 Methodology</b>	3
<b>2.0 Results</b>	4
<b>3.0 Discussion</b>	4
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	4
<b>References</b>	5
<b>List of Figures</b>	
<b>Figure 1: Location map</b>	6
<b>Figure 2: Photo showing extent of excavation</b>	7

### *Summary*

In compliance with a request from Edward Cross, on behalf of the Holkham Estate, Cambridge Archaeological Unit carried out a program of archaeological monitoring during the re-excavation of an old marl pit, at the Burrows, Warham. Aside from the marl pit no archaeological evidence was discovered during the course of the programme. A Crotal bell was discovered on the surface of the ploughed field outside the area of the monitoring programme.

## **1.0 Introduction**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2013 Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook a programme of archaeological monitoring at The Burrows, Warham. This was commissioned by Edward Cross on behalf of the Holkham Estate in response to a brief by Historic Environment Services, Norfolk County Council (Robertson 2013). The scheme monitored the re-excavation of a former marl pit, the purpose of which was to create diverse grassland of high wildlife conservation value.

## **1.1 Location, Topography and Geology**

The site is located approximately 600m south of Warham village in North Norfolk, and covers an area of 412 square meters, see Figure 1. Centred on grid reference TF 594532/341119 and with a height of 18.9m OD it is close to the top of a ridge of chalk, one of the highest in the near landscape. The river Stiffkey runs along the edge of the field. Marl and silts overlie chalk bedrock; this geology creates calcareous soils creating grassland of high conservation value.

## **1.2 Archaeological Background**

### *1.2.1 Early Prehistoric*

Close to the programme area several prehistoric artefacts have been interpreted as residual artefacts during the excavation of nearby (later) monuments. In particular Gray found a polished flint axe during excavations in 1914 (Gray 1933).

### *1.2.2 Late Prehistoric and Romano-British*

Within 200 metres of the area being monitored are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments; Warham Burrows (NHER No. 1827, SAM 1018061) and Warham Camp (NHER No. 1827, SAM 122). Both have seen limited excavation dating them tentatively to the late Iron Age (200BC- 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) although there is also evidence for Romano-British occupation within both monuments.

Warham Burrows is a rectangular ditched enclosure, one of a series across North and West Norfolk and is located on the top of the chalk ridge. Presumed to be of a religious or ritual

purpose (Gregory & Gurney 1986) it is only visible now as crop marks. The name 'Burrows' was first applied to the enclosure by Rainchild Clarke, although the name identified the area on the 1783 map by H.A. Bilderman. A description of the site in 1810 refers to entrenchments on the site, showing that it was partly visible at least until then.

Warham Camp is circular bivallate fort located on the 15m contour. Despite being overlooked by higher ground, it is still located within a defensive position, surrounded by marsh and river. The banks have also been built higher on the eastern side, compensating for the incline. 'The view from the top of the timber defences would have probably been more than adequate' (Davies et al 1992). The fort would originally have been circular however 'improvements' to the view from Warham Grove House in the mid 18th century caused the south-western side to be flattened when the river was rechanneled. All the present entrances are modern, some of which were made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the monument contained a plantation (Gray 1933).

The direct relationship between the Burrows and the Camp is unknown, although they are not alone within the landscape. There are undated crop mark features across the majority of the fields, some of which undoubtedly contain prehistoric and Romano-British activity, such as NHER No 38242.

### *1.2.3 Medieval and post medieval*

Medieval and post medieval archaeological features also very common within the landscape, southeast of Warham camp medieval tofts and crofts are visible (NHER No. 18560). Northeast of the area is the site of a possible post medieval bridge (NHER No. 12931). The monitoring programme is sited within a marl pit (see methodology below). Marl pits are common post medieval features across the North Norfolk landscape. They were originally excavated in order to extract marl that was then spread on the fields as fertiliser. The earliest written reference to marl pits in Norfolk was probably in 1276 when a 'madman jumped into a flooded marl pit' (Prince 1964 in Rackham 2000), although the majority were dug in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Marl pits are classically characterised as an isolated depression in the centre of a field. This example is typical.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The work was carried out in full accordance with Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs and Excavations (Gurney 2003). The program of works consisted of monitoring the exposure and removal of chalky marl within the area of a former marl pit. A 29 tonne machine was used with a flat bladed bucket to remove the overburden. The areas excavated down to the marl were geographically surveyed and any archaeological remains recorded. The spoil heaps were searched for artefacts and the base of the excavation monitored for archaeological features.

## **2.0 Results**

The area excavated was entirely within the perimeter of the old marl pit; as a consequence the areas monitored were unlikely to contain any archaeological features. The excavations were only deep enough to expose the marl in a few small areas along the edges of the old pit, see figure 2. All marl and the soil above were monitored however, apart from the marl pit, no archaeological evidence was found. No archaeological features or artefacts were observed during the monitoring programme.

Outside of the monitored area a crotal bell was discovered on the plough soil at grid reference TL594753.0/341180.9. Located via GPS and recorded by the HER this is now in the landowners' possession. It probably dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is a relatively common find. These bells are assumed to have been worn by animals such as sheep, goats or cows so that their movements can be tracked by their owner.

## **3.0 Discussion**

The two monuments located close to this project are unlikely to be completely isolated, and are not very well understood. Therefore any possible opportunity that could shed light on their surroundings should be taken. It was sensible that the earth moving works took place within the perimeter of the old marl pit, in order to prevent any damage to any archaeological remains, however this has resulted in very limited new archaeological knowledge.

## **Acknowledgements**

Cambridgeshire Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Edward Cross on behalf of The Holkham Estate. Emma Beadsmore was the Project Manager, Jon Moller surveyed the site and the graphics for this report were produced by Bryan Crossan.



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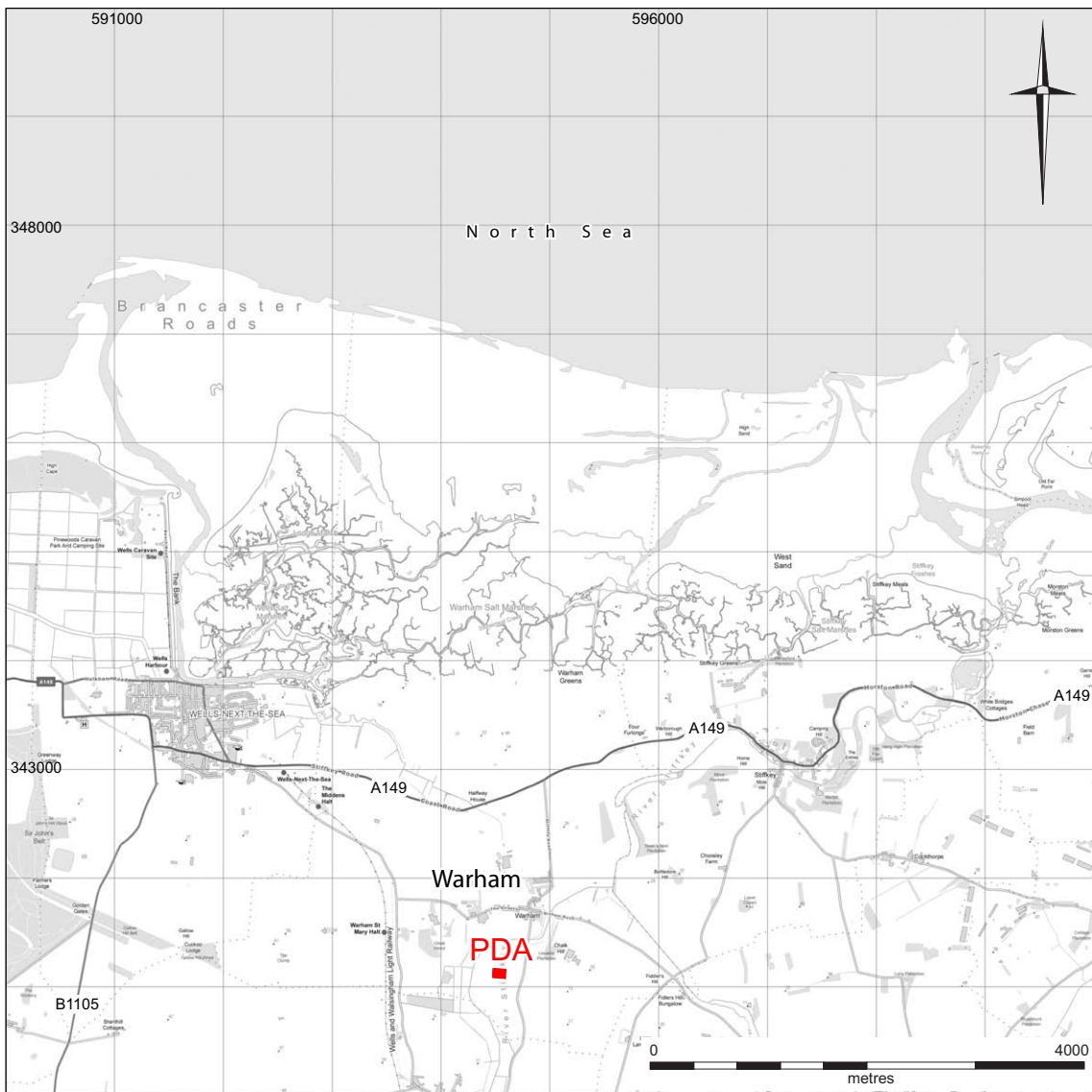
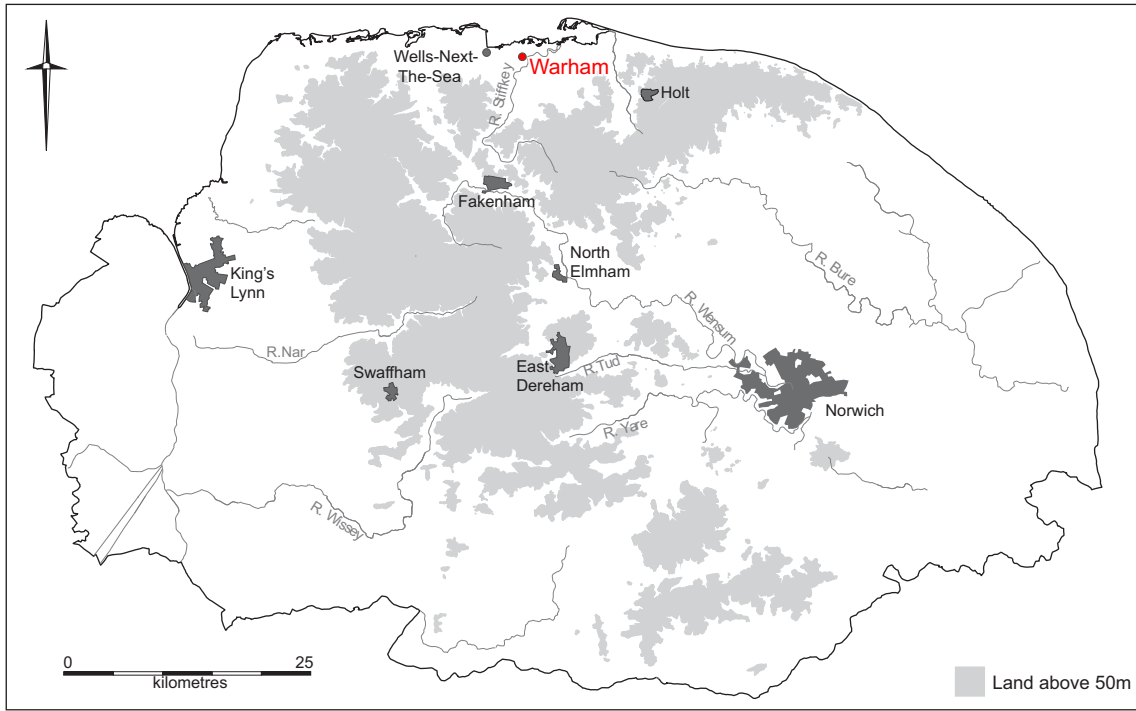


Figure 1. Location Plan.



Figure 2. Photograph of re-excavation of marl pit.