Thetford Priory Security Project



Archaeological
Watching Brief Report



March 2009

Client: English Heritage

OA East Report No: 1073 OASIS No: 56539

NGR: TL 8653 8336



Thetford Priory Security Project

Archaeological Watching Brief

By Jonathan House BA

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Report Date: March 2009

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Report Number:

1073

Site Name:

Thetford Priory Security Project

HER Event No:

NHER 5748

Date of Works:

2008

Client Name:

English Heritage

Client Ref:

N/A

Planning Ref:

3PL/2007/1669

Grid Ref:

Norfolk TL 8653 8336

Site Code:

XNF THP 08

Finance Code:

XNF THP 08

Receiving Body:

Norfolk Museum Service

Accession No:

Prepared by:

Jonathan House

Position:

Archaeological Supervisor

Date:

.....

Checked by:

Position:

Paul Spoerry

Date:

Manager OA East

Signed:

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Summary

English Heritage commissioned improvements to site security at Thetford Priory (ocated at TL 8653 8336), due to increasing vandalism at the monument. The work took place in stages throughout 2008. These included improvements to the perimeter fencing, a new gateway, and strategic tree planting. As the site has Scheduled Ancient Monument status (SAM 5748) all sub-surface works were either carried out by, or conducted under, archaeological supervision.

No archaeologically significant remains were impacted on by the tree planting, and perimeter fence improvements. In the vicinity of the new gateway archaeological remains were encountered, including a length of wall, potentially of medieval date, and a collection of finds representative of the priory and its continued use within Thetford.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 As a result of increased vandalism at Thetford Priory, English Heritage decided to secure the perimeter of the site. The increase in the site security required the addition of perimeter fencing, a new gateway to the site, and strategic tree planting.
- 1.1.2 As the site is of Scheduled Monument status all the ground works were observed under archaeological supervision or carried out by archaeologists.
- 1.1.3 This archaeological investigation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Ken Hamilton of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, supplemented by a Specification prepared by Oxford Archaeology East (formerly Cambridgeshire County Council's CAM ARC).
- 1.1.4 The work was designed to ensure proper identification of archaeological remains, and enable mitigation of development impact, principally through excavation and recording. The aims are in accord with the requirements of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological areas Act 1979, and with the provisions outlined in PPG16 (Planning and Policy Guidance 16 Archaeology and Planning, Department of the Environment 1990).
- 1.1.5 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums Service county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies within the flood plain of the river Little Ouse and is located on river terrace gravels and alluvium deposits (Fig. 1). The river runs east west to the south of the site. The immediate area of the site is relatively flat, although the land surface rises progressively away from the river to the north ranging from 8m to 13m OD. The river acts as the southern boundary of the site, and had been utilised in various ways for the benefit of the priory.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Thetford Priory is a large monastic ruin (Our Lady's Priory) and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, (NMR 383035), founded between 1107-14. The earliest surviving monastic buildings date to the 12th century, although later additions and alterations occurred until the Dissolution in the 16th century.
- 1.3.2 The present day priory remains comprise extensive ruins of the lower walls of the church, cloister, Prior's lodgings and gatehouse. Closest to the main area of these works is the 15th century infirmary with associated chapel, that itself was laid out with a cloistral arangement (Barrett and Tuck 2006)
- 1.3.3 Thetford Priory has been subject to remedial and investigative works since at least the 1930s although few of the investigations were published in any meaningful way. Most recently a summary of the evidence for the monastery was collated on behalf of English Heritage by Touch the Earth (Barrett and Tuck 2006). Their description and conclusions will not be revisited in full here, although where appropriate this work will be referenced.

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1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 The Author would like to thank English Heritage, and Haymills. The author would also like to thank the fieldwork team, Tom Phillips, James Fairbairn, and Steve Graham.

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2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The archaeological work was designed initially to establish the presence/absence, condition and significance of any archaeological remains encountered as part of the ground works associated with the project.
- 2.1.2 In the event that archaeological remains were present the watching brief was designed to ensure proper mitigation of impact through record, as appropriate.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that all sub-surface ground works should be monitored or excavated by an experienced archaeologist.
- 2.2.2 The nature of the work required periodic visits to the site, either for excavation or for the observation of ground works.
- 2.2.3 Much of the works were carried out by hand excavation. When machine excavation was necessary the excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.4 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metaldetected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.
- 2.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Ground works locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.6 The overall site conditions did not inhibit the archaeological work, however tree roots made excavation difficult in places.

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3 Results

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 As the project was undertaken in stages the results have been presented in that manner.

3.2 Stage 1

- 3.2.1 In the initial stage of work a security fence was installed along the extreme western boundary and trees were planted parallel with the fence. This fence was located approximately 10m to the west of any upstanding remains, immediately adjacent to a drainage ditch, orientated north to south.
- 3.2.2 Ground works here consisted of hand digging approximately twenty post holes for the fence posts. Each hole was 40cm² by 0.75m deep, and was separated from the next by 2.75m. In between the holes it was intended to excavate a trench for sleepers, approximately 0.3m wide and 0.4m deep.
- 3.2.3 No archaeology was encountered in any of the hand dug holes, which only penetrated through top soil. Excavation was complicated by dense roots from mature trees located next to the proposed fence line. Some of the post holes had to be moved because of the size of roots. Similarly, several sections of the sleeper trench were abandoned.
- 3.2.4 For the second part of the work, the laying of a beech hedge, it was decided a watching brief would suffice. This consisted of the monitoring of twenty holes parallel with the fence line, measuring 0.4m wide and 0.35m deep. Again, only top soil was disturbed and no archaeology was encountered.

3.3 Stage 2

- 3.3.1 The Stage 2 works concerned the ground work for the construction of a new gateway with associated fence, at the main entrance to the site to the south east (Figs 2 and 3). The ground works consisted of various post holes for both the gate and fence posts. The works also included a significant reduction in the ground surface. The post holes were hand dug by archaeologists, while the ground reduction was carried out by machine under constant supervision by an experienced archaeologist.
- 3.3.2 The first phase of this stage was to dig two 1m by 1m post holes, for the main gate posts, to an approximate depth of 1.2m. No archaeological features were identified, however due to the depth of the test pits various archaeologically significant layers were identified (see Fig. 3 Sections 1 and 2). The upper layers consisted of a top soil (1) (0.17m 0.19m,) and a sub soil (2) (0.5m 0.6m deep) These layers are interpreted as the spoil from previous archaeological works and priory maintenance. A mortar and stone lens was also observed (4) within the easternmost post hole (0.25m 0.05m) which may be remnant of later wall consolidation for preservation of the priory. A further layer (5) in the eastern post hole and (3) in the western post hole sealed below these layers was potentially of more interest, as it may have been a previous top soil. It contained fragments of green glaze roof tile dating from the 14th to 15th century (C. Fletcher, pers. comm.)
- 3.3.3 The second phase involved the excavation of smaller test pits for both posts and gate stays, as well as ground reduction represented by the excavation area seen in Fig 2. During the ground reduction an east to west aligned wall was observed (Fig. 2 and Plate 1) This wall appeared to be aligned with a wall footing running off the south



- eastern corner of the priory infirmary building approximately 15m to the west (see Plate 3). It also, however, aligns with the intervening modern priory perimeter wall and the sequence of association between the wall lines is not clear.
- 3.3.4 The wall was investigated within a 1m wide slot. The full depth of the wall construction was not observed for health and safety reasons, with excavation halted at 1m to limit the undermining of the existing wall.
- 3.3.5 The wall and its foundation, appear to consist of three main components, the block work (7), a bedding material at the base of the block work (19), and a foundation (18) (Fig 3. Section 7, Plate 2). The construction seems to have begun with a trench (8) on the course of the wall (full depth not observed), which was backfilled with a sand-based material containing a high frequency of flints (18). This material was then capped by a sandy mortar (19) containing smaller, finer flints and clunch inclusions 0.1m in thickness, presumably to form a base or level surface for the main block work to be constructed upon. At this base two to three rough courses of faced flints were set on the exterior of the wall, at what appears to be the former ground level, with very little block work below the original ground surface. The remainder of the surviving wall, consisted of roughly shaped, clunch blocks that varied in size. The surviving block work measured 0.7m in depth. The flint courses at the base of the block work may represent a form of damp coursing or at least a strengthening of the clunch wall at a vulnerable point such as the ground level.
- 3.3.6 No datable evidence was retrieved from the wall, or its construction make up. Datable evidence in the form of post-medieval roof tile was recovered from the layers beside the wall (2 and 15) however it is unclear if these layers have built up against the wall or the wall has cut down through these layers.
- 3.3.7 The post holes and gate stays, (Fig. 3 Sections 3 and 4,) were positioned at a similar depth to the 1m by 1m gate post and revealed the same layers that were identified by those works. No archaeological features were observed.

3.4 Finds Summary

3.4.1 Finds were recovered dating to various periods (see Appendix A), prehistoric, medieval, and post-medieval, with a large amount of post-medieval roof tile (not all retained). The most notable finds are the two stone architectural fragments, and the possible medieval crenellated finial.

3.5 Environmental Summary

- 3.5.1 A small assemblage of animal; bone was recovered (Appendix B).
- 3.5.2 No plant macro-fossils were recovered from the samples taken.

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4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Small scale ground works

- 4.1.1 Both stages of ground works were largely restricted to the top soil, with only some of the deeper intrusions impacting on potentially medieval deposits. The provenance and extent of the layers identified is difficult to establish in such small observations, and finds are also of limited use in such disturbed layers, aside from artefacts with any potential intrinsic research value.
- 4.1.2 No archaeological features were identified within any of the smaller observation holes. It is likely that in these areas of potentially significant remains will be covered by at least 0.4m of overburden.

4.2 The Wall

- 4.2.1 The investigation of the wall retrieved no datable evidence, with the only dating coming from the surrounding layers. This gives no definitive date for its construction or period of use. On the map by John Miller of c. 1720 (Fig. 4) a perimeter wall for the priory grounds is visible which appears to use the alignment of the former southern priory structures and continues on the course of wall seen in this investigation. The wall continues with its course returning to the priory gate house. This appears to remain largely unchanged as seen on Browne's 1837 map (Fig 5). It is possible on this map to see the kink in the southern boundary wall at the location of the infirmary. This kink can be seen on the plan of the priory ruins in Fig 1. By the time of the 1863 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 6) the perimeter wall had been diverted to follow the wall location currently seen.
- 4.2.2 The wall is a substantial build, which would suggest an origin at a time when larger scale construction may have been taking place at the site. However the wall's fabric does not appear to match that of any of the priory buildings. The only slight evidence is on the eastern side of the priory gatehouse where a remnant of the former circuit wall can be seen and this seems to be mostly of clunch construction, although masked by some later flint consolidation. The newly discovered wall would have required considerable effort to construct, a task that could be considered rather more plausible with the infrastructure of the priory, rather than a later construction dividing the land.
- 4.2.3 The wall does align with a small section of wall which forms a spur attached to the priory infirmary. It is also on the same alignment as the present day boundary wall; whether either association can be taken to imply a specific construction date is, however, uncertain. The visible construction material for the spur consists of worked stone and flints, however it is difficult to differentiate between original wall and reconstruction. The wall is highly likely to be either contemporary with or later than the infirmary, as it appears that it butts the infirmary wall and is slightly staggered from the building's corner.
- 4.2.4 It is not clear whether the wall was cut through layers **2** and **15**, or whether the deposits built up against it. If the former is correct then it is no doubt of comparatively recent build compared with the priory buildings themselves. Alternatively if the latter is correct, and the wall was built in a construction cut at ground level represented by the top of layer **16**, then it is far more likely that this is a medieval or earlier post-dissolution construction.

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4.3 Significance

- 4.3.1 If the wall investigated during this project is part of the medieval priory, it represents a feature which has, above the modern ground level, been all but removed. The later post-dissolution boundary walls seen in the maps may have precisely followed the former priory perimeter walls, utilising surviving remains and the existing wall foundations.
- 4.3.2 Without definitive dating the wall could still have been first established after the priory, although it must at least pre-date John Miller's 1720 map. If the wall is not medieval it is still archaeologically significant as It would have been constructed at a period which is under-represented within the archaeological record in Thetford.

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APPENDIX A. FINDS ASSESSMENT

By Alasdair Brooks, with Carole Fletcher

1 Introduction

Slightly over 20 kilos (20.907kg) of finds were recovered from the watching brief at Thetford Priory (NHER 5748). These included bone, tile, architectural stone, pottery, shell and flint. The readily dateable finds appear to be from all periods of site development, from prehistoric lithics through to a 19th-century stoneware bottle.

2 Methodology

Finds identification and dating was undertaken by Alasdair Brooks and Carole Fletcher. As this was a rapid assessment for a watching brief, no formal identification methodology from published sources was followed, though typologies follow those commonly used in OA East reports.

3 Quantification

A full quantification table may be found at the end of this report. Broken down by material type and context, the various finds types recovered were:

More than half of the assemblage weight (12.554 kg) consists of stone, eleven kilos of which is made up of two large fragments of architectural stone from context 1. The remaining small fragment came from context 10. The pieces were dressed Barnack limestone, and are of similar types to those seen in the remaining priory ruins.

Most of the remaining assemblage consists of ceramic building material, mostly tile, from contexts 1, 2, 3, 5, 12 and 15. The total weight of the CBM is 8.123 kg. While two fragments of green-glazed roofing tile and a possible crenellated finial from context 15 are probably late medieval (14th-15th century), the overwhelming majority of the tile would appear be post-medieval, and dating after the dissolution of the monasteries.

A small amount (6 fragments weighing .177 kg) of pottery was recovered from contexts 1, 3, 5, and 10. The items in contexts 3, 5, and 10 are all medieval; context 5 contains a c.1200-c.1400 fragment of local medieval sandy ware, context 3 contains fragments of developed St. Neots ware (c.1150-c.1350) and early medieval sandy ware (c.1050-c.1200) and context 10 contains an unidentified fragment of local medieval pottery. Context 1 contains a 19th-century saltglazed stoneware bottle, a fragment of late Grimston ware (c.1200-c.1400) and a fragment of Thetford-type ware (c.900-c.1200).

A total of 31 grams of flint were recovered from contexts 1, 2, and 15. The context 1 object shows some possible signs of re-touch along the edges, though more specialist analysis would be needed to confirm this.

Two small fragments of mortar weighing a total of 22 grams were recovered from contexts 12 and 15.

4 Research Potential and Further Work Statement

The materials recovered from the watching brief are mixed prehistoric, medieval, and post-medieval in date, but the presence of post-medieval tile in almost every context suggests that all contexts post-date the dissolution of the monasteries, and the totality of the assemblage is only of further research interest if the period of continued use of monastery buildings following the dissolution (Barrett and Tuck 2006: 20-21) is part of

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English Heritage's overall research plan for the Priory site. Otherwise, no further work is recommended on most of the assemblage.

Four objects might be of specific interest for research relating to the active use of the site as a Priory; these possibly include the three large fragments of architectural stone from context 1 and 10, and the roof tiles and the fragment of crenellated finial from context 15. This fragment is part of a decorative finial, with an over fired external green brown lead glaze, and a brown quazt tempered fabric (pers. comm. P. Spoerry).

Context	Material	Object Name	Weight in kg
1	Pottery		0.124
1	Flint		0.012
1	Ceramic	Tile	0.954
1	Stone	Architectural fragment	7.000
1	Stone	Architectural fragment	4.000
2	Flint		0.001
2	Ceramic	Tile	4.117
3	Pottery		0.035
3	Ceramic	Tile	0.394
5	Pottery		0.016
5	Ceramic	Tile	0.955
10	Pottery		0.002
10	Stone		1.554
12	Mortar		0.017
12	Ceramic	Tile	0.196
15	Ceramic	Ceramic Building Material	1.205
15	Ceramic	Tile	0.302
15	Mortar		0.005
15	Flint		0.018
		TOTAL	20.907

Table A.1: Finds quantification

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APPENDIX B. FAUNAL REMAINS

By Chris Faine

1 Introduction

Eight hundred and twenty grams of faunal material was recovered from the archaeological work at Thetford Priory , yielding 23 "countable" bones (see below). All bones were collected by hand apart from those recovered from environmental samples; hence a bias towards smaller fragments is to be expected. The contexts are mostly identified as post-dissolution make-up and therefor some mixing of date is to be expected. Faunal material was recovered from test pits, largely containing unstratified material. Fifty-nine fragments of animal bone were recovered with 23 identifiable to species (38.9% of the total sample).

2 Methodology

All data was initially recorded using a specially written MS Access database. Bones were recorded using a version of the criteria described in Davis (1992) and Albarella & Davis (1994). Initially all elements were assessed in terms of siding (where appropriate), completeness, tooth wear stages (also where applicable) and epiphyseal fusion. Completeness was assessed in terms of percentage and zones present (after Dobney & Reilly, 1988). Initially the whole identifiable assemblage was quantified in terms of number of individual fragments (NISP) and minimum numbers of individuals MNI (see table 1). The ageing of the population was largely achieved by examining the wear stages of cheek teeth of cattle, sheep/goat and pig (after Grant, 1982). Wear stages were recorded for lower molars of cattle, sheep/goat and pig, both isolated and in mandibles. The states of epiphyseal fusion for all relevant bones were recorded to give a broad age range for the major domesticates (after Getty, 1975). Measurements were largely carried out according to the conventions of von den Driesch (1976). Measurements were either carried out using a 150mm sliding calliper or an osteometric board in the case of larger bones.

3 The Assemblage

Table B.1 shows the species distribution for the assemblage. Pig is the most numerous taxon, consisting largely of mandibles and lower limb elements from animals around 1 to 1 ½ years old at death. Cattle and sheep/goat remains consist of a variety of butchered elements including meat bearing long bones. Context 15 contained portions of lumbar spine, pelvis and tibia from an adult dog around 45cm at the shoulder. Interestingly for the sample size a relatively large number of bird remains were recovered, including domestic fowl, goose and partridge. Crow remains were also recovered, along with a tarso-metatarsal from a large sea bird, possibly a Gannet (Morus basanus).

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	NISP	NISP%	MNI	MNI%
Cattle (Bos)	2	8.7	2	12.5
Sheep/Goat (Ovis/Capra)	4	17.3	3	18.9
Pig (Sus scrofa)	7	30.4	4	25.1
Dog (Canis familiaris)	3	13	1	6.2
Goose (Anser sp.)	3	13	2	12.5
Domestic fowl (Gallus sp.)	1	4.4	1	6.2
Crow (Corvus corone)	1	4.4	1	6.2
Partridge (Perdix perdix)	1	4.4	1	6.2
Gannet? (Morus basanus)	1	4.4	1	6.2
Total:	23	100	16	100

4.3.3

Table B.1: Species distribution for the entire assemblage

4 Conclusions

The extremely small nature of the assemblage and the unstratified nature of much of the material means that little could be gained from further examination of the material. The domestic mammal remains are characteristic of butchery waste, with pigs in particular being killed at physical maturity. Goose, fowl and partridge are common food species, with partridge being especially popular during the Medieval period (Albarella et. al. forthcoming). The remaining bird remains represent wild or (in the case of the gannet remains) migrant species.

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APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Study Area

1500m

APPENDIX D. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project D	etails		,					
OASIS Number ox		oxfordar3-56539	ordar3-56539					
Project Name Thetford Priory S			ecurity Project	<u> </u>				
Project Dat	tes (field	dwork) Start	02-08-2008			Finish 10)-08-200	08
Previous W	Vork (by	OA East)	No			Future W	ork _{Un}	known
Project Ref	ference	Codes						
Site Code	XNF TH			Planning /	Data dell'ED/OAGIONE		3PL/2	2007/1669
HER No.	NHER	5748		Related H			N/A	
T f D	:4/ T -	-1	_1					
Prompt	oject/ ie	Part II AMAA						
Please se	lect all	techniques	used:					
⊠ Field Obse	ervation (p	eriodic visits)	□ Part Excavation		Salvage Record			
☐ Full Excav	ation (100	0%)	Part Survey		Systematic Field Walking			
☐ Full Surve	y		Recorded Observation		Sys	tematic Metal Detector Survey		
Geophysic	al Survey		Remote Operated Vehicle Survey		Tes	t Pit Survey		
Open-Area	a Excavati	ion	Salvage Excavation		⊠ Wa	tching Brief		
List feature ty	pes using	/Significant Fi the NMR Mon r with their respect	ument Type	e Thesauru o features/find		-		ng the MDA Object type "none". Period
Wall		Post Med	lieval 1540 to 1901 Archte		Archtecutral Stone			Medieval 1066 to 1540
Select pe			eriod					Select period
Select pe			eriod					Select period
Project L	ocatio	on						
County Norfolk			Sit	Site Address (including postcode if possible)		postcode if possible)		
District Breckland			Monksgate, Thetford,					
Parish Thetford				Norfolk, UK. IP24 1BX				
HER Norfolk								

National Grid Reference

TL 8653 8336



Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Ken Hamilton (Norfolk Landscape Archaeology)
Project Design Originator	Paul Spoerry
Project Manager	Paul Spoerry
Supervisor	Jonathan House

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive	
Norfolk Museun Service	OA East, Bar Hill.	Norfolk Museum Service	
NHER 5748	XNF THP 08	NHER 5748	

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents		
Animal Bones	\boxtimes		
Ceramics	\times		
Environmental			
Glass	$\overline{\times}$		
Human Bones			
Industrial			
Leather			
Metal			
Stratigraphic			
Survey			
Textiles			
Wood			
Worked Bone			
Worked Stone/Lithic	\boxtimes		
None		\times	X
Other			

Digital Media	Paper Media
Database	Aerial Photos
GIS	
Geophysics	
	☐ Diary
	☐ Drawing
☐ Moving Image	Manuscript
Spreadsheets	
Survey	Matrices
▼ Text	Microfilm
☐ Virtual Reality	☐ Misc.
	Research/Notes
	☐ Photos
	⊠ Sections
	Survey

Notes:

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Drawing Conventions					
Plans					
Limit of Excavation					
Evaluation Trench					
Deposit - Conjectured					
Natural Features					
Sondages/Machine Strip					
Test Pit					
Intrusion/Truncation					
Undercut	Cut				
Illustrated Section	S.14				
Archaeological Feature					
Excavated Slot					
Cut Number	118				
Sections					
Limit of Excavation -					
Cut -					
Cut-Conjectured -					
Deposit Horizon					
Deposit Horizon - Conjectured -					
Intrusion/Truncation -					
Top Surface/Top of Natural					
Break in Section/ Limit of Section Drawing					
Cut Number 118 Ord	dnance Datum 18.45m OD ⊼				
Deposit Number 117	Stone &				



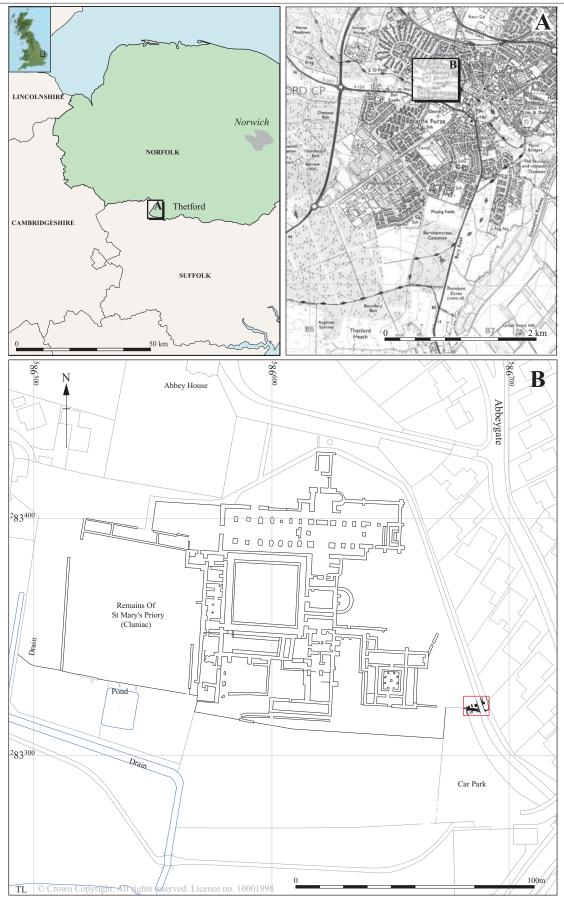


Figure 1: Location of excavation area (red) in relation to St Mary's Priory





Figure 2 Plan of archaeology showing clunch wall and location of excavated slots (Scale 1:50)

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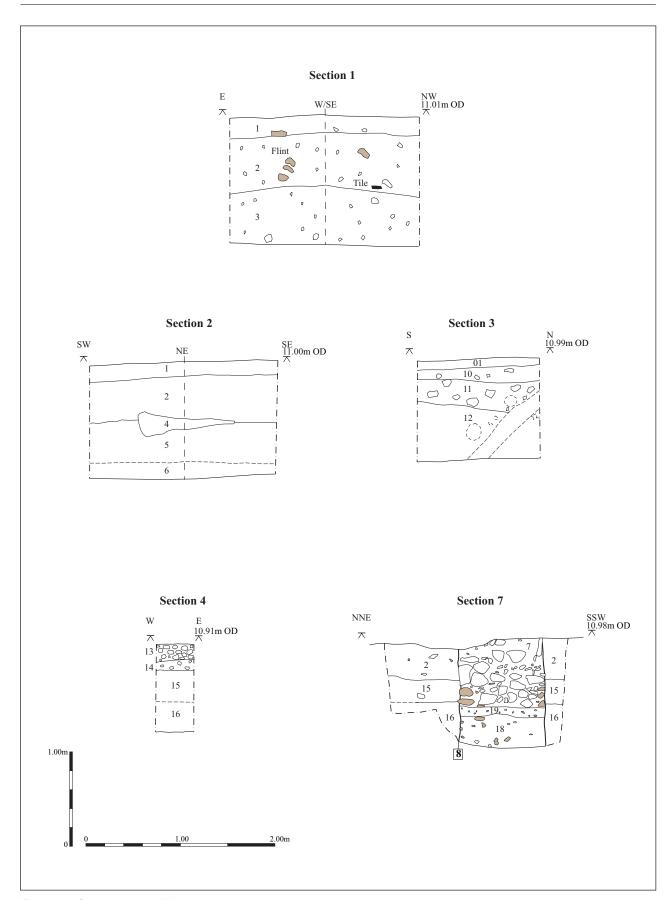


Figure 3: Sections at 1:40



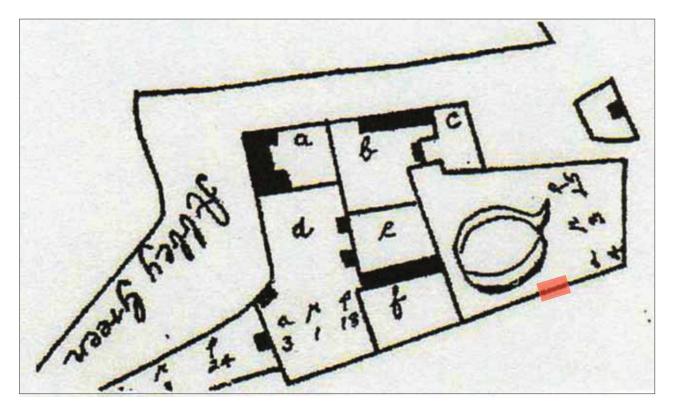


Figure 4: Miller's Map,1720, showing location of investigation area



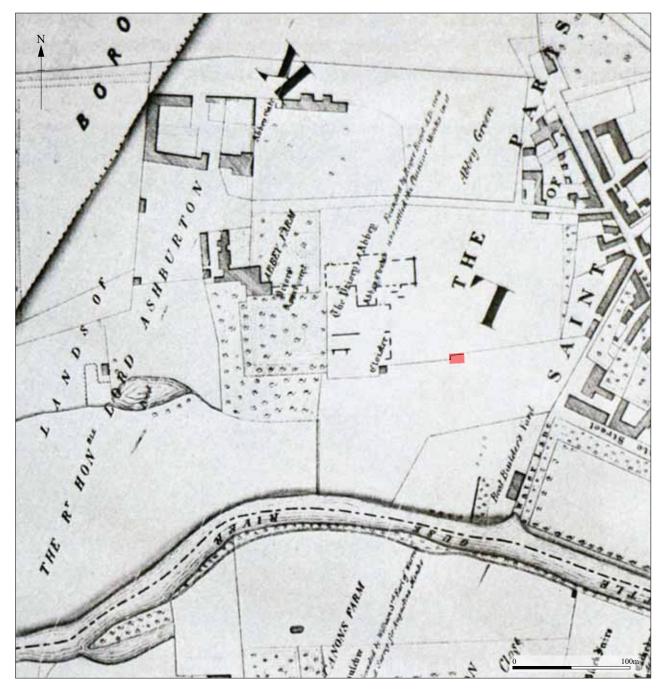


Figure 5: Browne's map, 1837, with excavation area (red)





Figure 6: Ordnance Survey, 1863, with excavation area (red)





Plate 1 Pre/Ex photo of wall, 2m scale



Plate 2 Wall section, 0.5m scale





Plate 3 Wall setting, no scale



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