

Archaeological Field Unit

Archaeological Investigation of Land off St Mary's Court, Thetford, Norfolk

Aileen Connor

June 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. N24

Commissioned by Mr Anthony Yorke

Archaeological Investigation on Land off St Mary's Court, Thetford, Norfolk

Aileen Connor BA, AIFA

2003

Illustrator : Emily Oakes MA



Report No. N24

©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 5762014
Fax (01223) 880946

arch.field.unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
<http://edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu>

SUMMARY

On 6th May 2003 an archaeological investigation was carried out on land off St Mary's Court in the garden of No 60 Newtown by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The work was required as part of a planning condition placed on the construction of a single storey dwelling. The work involved the excavation of a 3m x 3m evaluation trench with the aid of a mechanical excavator. Deposits of approximately 1.2m in thickness were encountered overlying natural sand. The lower 0.4m of deposits contained small quantities of pottery dating from the Late Saxon period (Thetford ware), and included evidence for flint surfaces and a single pit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	3
RESULTS	3
DISCUSSION	6
CONCLUSIONS	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
BIBLIOGRAPHY	6
LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 Location Plan	1
Figure 2 Excavation Plan and Section Drawings	5

Archaeological Investigation on Land off St Mary's Court, Thetford, Norfolk

TL8674882794

1 INTRODUCTION

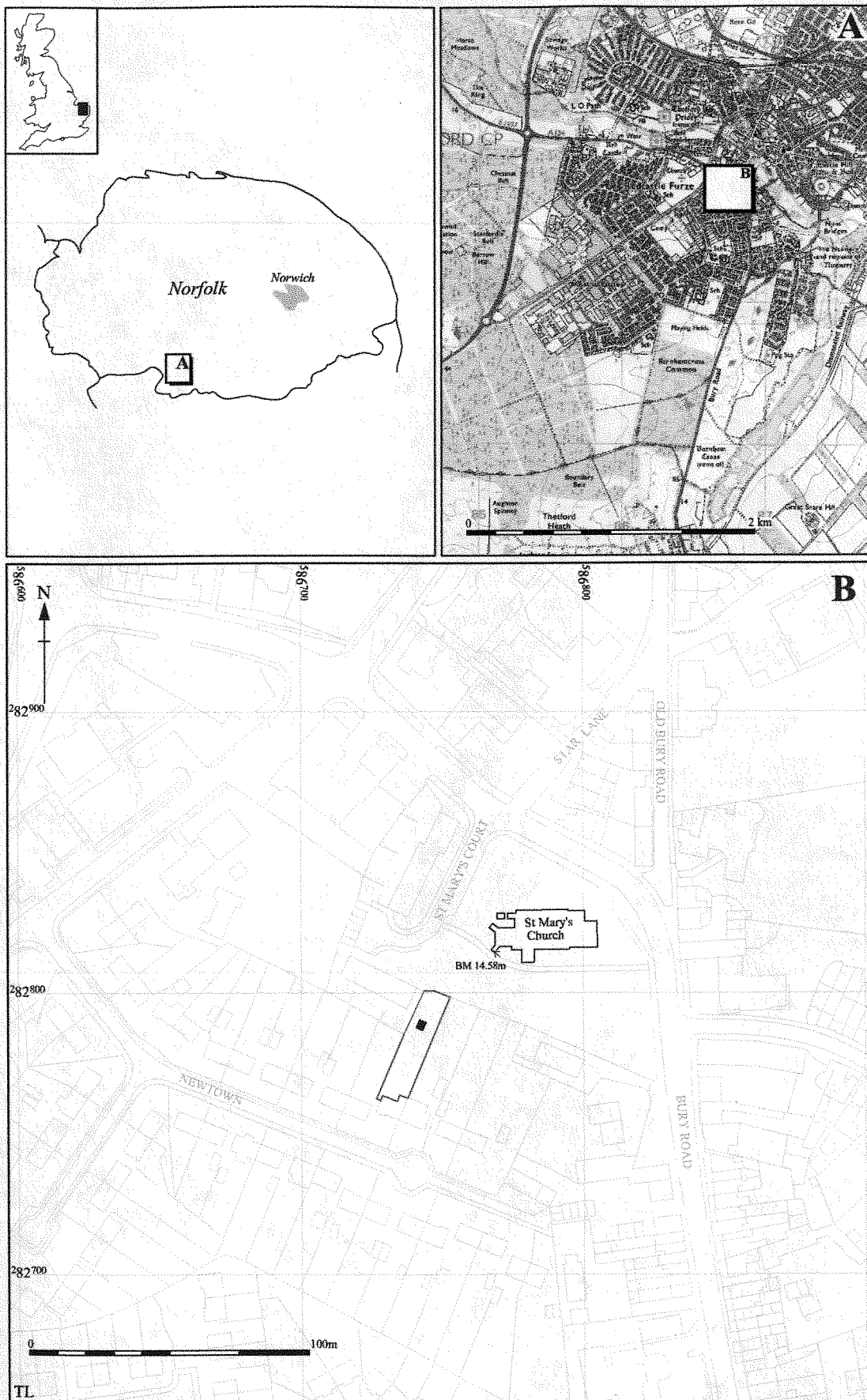
On 6th May 2003 an archaeological investigation was carried out on land off St Mary's Court in the garden of No 60 Newtown (fig.1) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The work was required as part of a planning condition placed on the construction of a single storey dwelling. The work was carried out in accordance with a specification written by A. Connor on behalf of Mr Anthony Yorke who commissioned the archaeological investigation, and in response to a Brief written by A. R. Hutcheson on behalf of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. The work involved the excavation of a 3m x 3m evaluation trench with the aid of a mechanical excavator. Deposits of approximately 1.2m in thickness were encountered overlying natural sand. The lower 0.4m of deposits contained small quantities of pottery dating from the Late Saxon period (Thetford ware).

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies in central Thetford to the south of the rivers Little Ouse and Thet, at approximately 14m OD, the nearest Bench mark is located on the southwest corner of St Mary's Church, a short distance to the north of the subject site. The site lies on relatively level ground and the geology is sand with intermittent gravel pockets.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Thetford is located at the confluence of the rivers Thet and Little Ouse, and the ancient route of the Icknield Way also passes through the town. The continuous development of the town is usually taken to begin in the later 9th century (Davison, 1993), flourishing in the 10th and 11th century, possibly resulting from the Danish settlement. This boom can be seen clearly from archaeological evidence. Evidence of crafts and industries including the well-known Thetford pottery industry are well attested.



Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office Crown Copyright.
 Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 2003)

Figure 1 Location of Excavation (black) with Development Area outlined (red).

The town was home to a mint by the mid 10th Century, and in the late 11th Century it was the seat of a Bishopric (*ibid*). Excavations to the east of the subject site along Brandon Road in the 1960's were of particular importance to the increase in knowledge about the Town's history. Of these, site 5756 was the location of dense archaeological features including sunken featured buildings, post built halls, ditched enclosures and associated pits. Other important archaeological sites in the vicinity include the excavation of Thetford ware pottery kilns.

St Mary's Church is the only surviving church on the south side of Thetford. It is thought to have been the focus of a built-up area at the time of *Domesday* (Davison, 1993). The location of this site is, therefore, potentially very significant to the understanding of the growth of Saxon and Medieval Thetford.

4 METHODOLOGY

¹ One 3m x 3m square evaluation trench was excavated with the aid of a wheeled mechanical excavator fitted with a flat bladed ditching bucket. The machine was supervised by the author. Garden soil deposits were excavated by machine to a depth of 0.7m below the modern ground surface at which point a loosely packed layer of flint cobbles was encountered. The layer was recorded and then approximately half was removed in order to identify whether features were sealed beneath it. Removal of the cobbles revealed a layer that incorporated burnt material; thereafter hand excavation only was undertaken.

Plans and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20, monochrome and colour slide photographs were taken, contexts were described using the AFU context sheets.

5 RESULTS (Fig.2)

The excavation revealed a stratigraphic sequence approximately 1.2m thick that comprised the following (earliest first):

Natural sand was encountered at 1.2m below modern ground level.

Overlying the natural sand was a very compacted layer of reddish-brown peagrit and small gravel 5, possibly consolidated by the effects of mineral salts (iron pan). A small segment of this layer was excavated by hand (0.5m x 0.8m). No finds were recovered from it, the layer was approximately 0.1m

thick and was noted across the whole east-west width of the trench, it is not known whether it continued over the north-south dimension as it was sealed by layer 4, which was not excavated.

In the area where 5 was excavated it was evident that the underlying natural sand was not level but appeared to undulate, a tentative interpretation would be that a cart wheel had compressed the layer to form a rut, however, insufficient was exposed to be able to confirm this was the case.

Overlying 5 was a layer of soft slightly silty sand 4, the colour of the layer varied over the width of the trench merging from mottled pink and dark grey at the east to a mid greyish brown, 8, at the west. The layer contained fragments of animal bone including several burnt pieces and a few sherds of Thetford ware pottery including a rim and some very small body sherds. The mottled colouring of the layer and presence of burnt bone indicates that burning may have occurred in-situ, although some fragments of bone showed signs of only partial burning.

Cutting through 5 and sealed by 8 was an oval pit 7, 0.3m deep and 1.05m long x 0.7m wide. The pit had steep sides and a flat base and was filled by 6 containing a few fragments of animal bone but no dateable finds.

Sealing pit 7 was layer 8 a mid greyish brown slightly silty sand, very similar in texture to 4 and apparently merging into it although likely to be overlying it. The layer was approximately 0.12m thick and only observed in section, no finds were recovered from it.

Overlying 8 was 3, an 0.2m thick layer of loosely packed large flint cobbles in a silty sand matrix very similar to 8. Finds including oyster shells, animal bones and post medieval pottery were recovered from the layer. It is likely that the cobbles had been deliberately laid to form a surface, although they were not well compacted.

Overlying 3 was 2 an 0.3m thick layer of silty sand topsoil mixed with flecks of chalk. Oyster shells, post-medieval pottery and a number of iron nails were recovered from this context.

Overlying 2 was 1, an 0.5m thick layer of mid greyish brown sandy topsoil containing occasional brick fragments and fragments of 19th century pottery. This modern garden soil may have been imported to provide garden soil when the houses along Newtown were built.

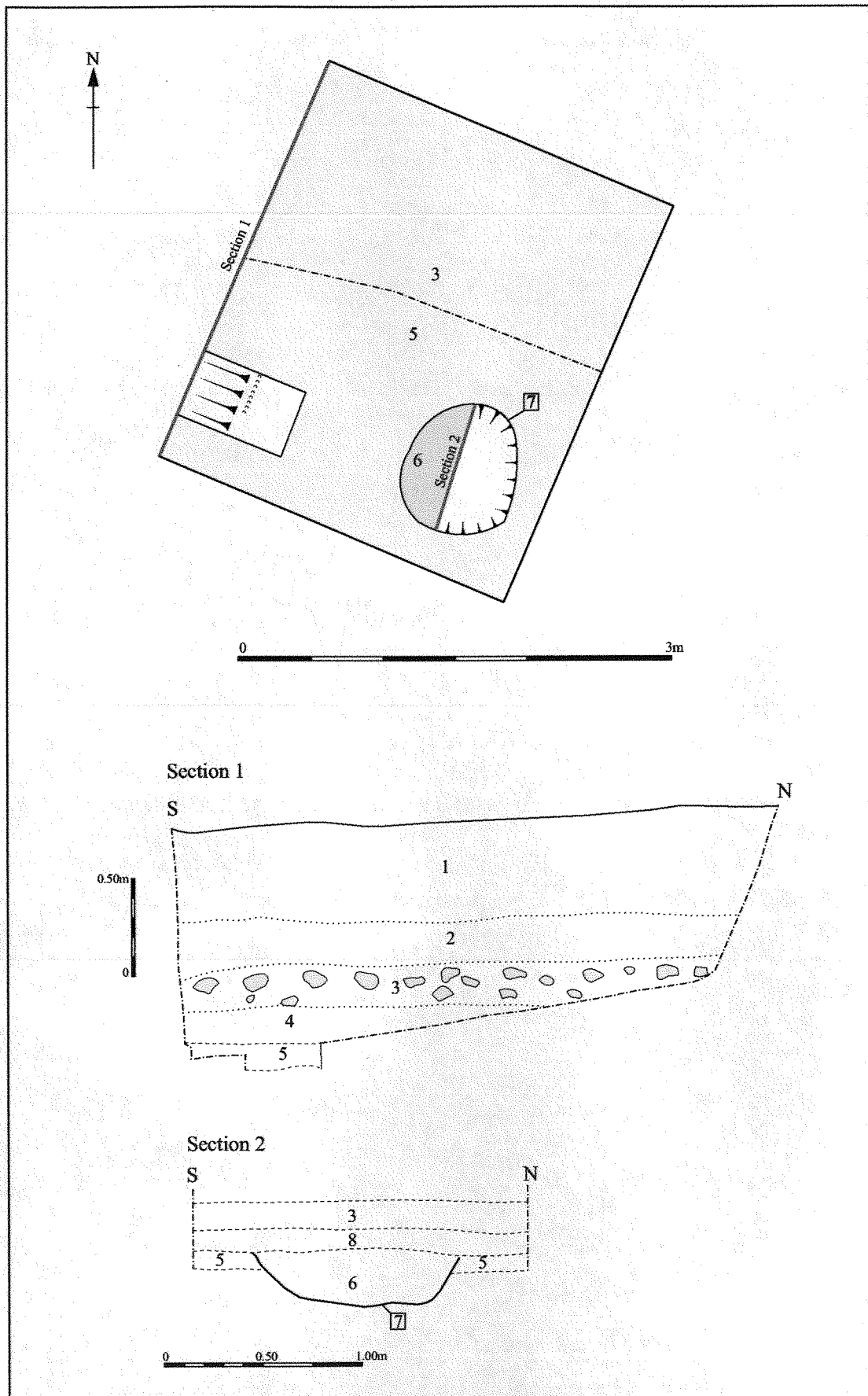


Figure 2 Excavation Plan and Section Drawings

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation trench has shown that a limited sequence of stratigraphy survives on the site. The modern overburden is 0.8m deep, this lies directly over a flint cobble surface of probable post-medieval date, pottery from the layer included post-medieval Red Ware. The earliest 0.4m of the sequence are of most interest. Layer 4 showed evidence of in-situ burning and if contemporary with the sherds of pottery found within it may be late Saxon in date. The small pit was sealed by 4 and must, therefore, be late Saxon or earlier, unfortunately there was insufficient evidence to tie this down further. The earliest layer encountered is interesting since its compacted character suggests a deliberately laid surface, and although containing no finds itself a possibly late Saxon layer sealed it so must be of similar or earlier date.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation has been successful in achieving the objectives as set out by the Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Brief. The investigation has shown that there was certainly some activity possibly associated with occupation in the late Saxon period on this site. The depth of deposits associated with this period of activity was relatively small and ephemeral by comparison to that associated with post-medieval and modern activity associated with possibly farming and later landscaping for housing. No deeply stratified urban deposits, burials or other complex and resource demanding archaeological remains were found at the site.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr Anthony Yorke who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Also thanks to Dr Paul Spoerry who identified the pottery and Tony Baker who assisted with the fencing.

The brief for archaeological works was written by A.R. Hutcheson of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology who also monitored the progress of the project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Davison, A, 1993 'The Documentary Evidence' in Davison B.K, Excavations in Thetford between 1964 and 1970. *East Anglian Archaeology Report No.62*



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Education, Libraries
and Heritage

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946