

Wessex Archaeology

Former Vauxhall Garage Bury Road, Thetford, Norfolk

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Ref: 55490.01

March 2004

**FORMER VAUXHALL GARAGE
BURY ROAD, THETFORD
NORFOLK**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared for:

CgMs Consulting

by

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REF 55490

March 2004

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by CgMs Consulting to carry out an archaeological Watching Brief on geotechnical investigations at the former Vauxhall Garage on the Bury Road, Thetford, Norfolk centred on NGR 586715/282880.

Work was carried out during February 2004 and involved the excavation of ten test pits of varying sizes and depths.

Modern deposits varied in thickness from between 0.38m and 1.74m, however in the northern and eastern part of the site the average thickness of modern overburden was approximately 0.5m.

Six of the ten test pits contained archaeological deposits. These comprised layers and ditch/pit features. Pottery sherds recovered from deposits in three test pits date to the Late Saxon/Early Medieval period.

Considerable quantities of bone displaying butchery marks were also recovered from deposits in six of the test pits. This reflects the findings of a previous evaluation of the site.

Overall, the evidence from the watching brief and previous archaeological investigations show probable archaeological deposits present in all but the southern corner of the Site and in the vicinity of the former garage fuel tanks where it is assumed any archaeological remains have been destroyed.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Rob Bourn of CgMs Consulting for his help and assistance during the course of the project.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Hugo Pinto and the report was prepared by Robert Wardill with contributions from Lorraine Mephram and Stephanie Knight (finds) and Mark Roughly (illustrations). The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Robert Wardill.

**FORMER VAUXHALL GARAGE
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by CgMs Consulting to carry out an Archaeological Watching Brief on the excavation of ten geotechnical test pits at the former site of the Vauxhall Garage on the Bury Road, Thetford (the Site) centred on NGR 586715/282880. This report details the results of fieldwork undertaken on the 2nd, 3rd and 24th February 2004.
- 1.1.2 The Site is the proposed location for sheltered accommodation for the elderly. The geotechnical test pits were excavated to provide information to assist with design of the development.
- 1.1.3 The archaeological works were carried out in accordance with a Project Specification prepared by CgMs Consulting (2003) and approved by the Local Planning Authorities Archaeological Advisor, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.
- 1.1.4 All works were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (1994 as amended).

1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 The Site is located to the south-east of the town centre, south of the Little Ouse River, at the corner of Newtown and St Mary's Road. It comprises approximately 0.2 ha of level ground at a height of c.13m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 1.2.2 The Site has been cleared of former garage buildings but four 18,000 litre fuel tanks are buried at the eastern end of the St Mary's Road frontage.
- 1.2.3 Natural geological deposits within the trenches were found to comprise of sand and gravel.

1.3 Archaeological Background

- 1.3.1 The town of Thetford originated during the Saxon Period and appears to have quickly grown into one of the largest and most important towns in England. It was located primarily to the south of the Little Ouse with an annexed area to the north of the river (CgMs Consulting 2003).
- 1.3.2 By the Medieval period the town was in decline with its focus shifting to the north of the Little Ouse (CgMs Consulting 2003).
- 1.3.3 The site has been the subject of a previous evaluation (Archaeological Project Services 2001) and a desk-based assessment (CgMs Consulting 2003) both of which demonstrate that there is high potential for well preserved Late Saxon remains to be found at the Site.
- 1.3.4 The evaluation was carried out in 2001 and comprised the excavation of two 3m x 3m trenches (**Figure 2**). Trench 1 revealed a large feature which contained a large quantity of butchered animal bone, 10th century pottery and a coin dated between 890-905AD. Trench 2 revealed a linear feature containing 11th century pottery. In both trenches the deposits were found at a shallow depth (trench 1 c.0.25m below ground level).
- 1.3.5 The results of the evaluation suggested that the Site was clearly part of the Late Saxon town and contained reasonably well preserved 10th – 11th century deposits. It was possible that the Site was on the periphery of settlement to the west. Although there were indications of occupation nearby, the findings did not suggest that occupation occurred within the Site itself (CgMs Consulting 2003).

2 WATCHING BRIEF OBJECTIVES

- 2.1.1 The aim of the project was to determine, as far as reasonably possible, the presence/absence, extent, date, character, condition and depth of any surviving archaeological remains located within the proposed development area.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Health and Safety

- 3.1.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety regulations (1992) and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation and regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.
- 3.1.2 A risk assessment was prepared by Wessex Archaeology before the commencement of fieldwork.

3.2 Fieldwork

- 3.2.1 All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (as amended 1999).
- 3.2.2 A total of ten test pits 1.10m wide and ranging from 1.9m to 4.7m in length and 2m to 2.65m in depth were excavated within the Site (**Figure 2**).
- 3.2.3 Removal of modern overburden and soils down to the depth required for construction was carried out by machine under the supervision of a Wessex Archaeology archaeologist.
- 3.2.4 Where archaeological deposits were exposed investigations are carried out by hand before machining was recommenced.
- 3.2.5 The excavations were not entered once they exceeded a safe depth of 1.2m.
- 3.2.6 Representative sections of each pit were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and described using Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording system. A photographic record of the works was maintained.
- 3.2.7 Recovered artefacts were washed and marked with site code and context number before suitable material (primarily ceramics and non-ferrous metalwork) was scanned to assess the date range of the assemblage.

4 RESULTS

(See **Appendix 1** for test pit summaries and **Figure 3** for section illustrations).

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 The geotechnical investigations revealed modern surfaces (concrete and tarmac) and make up levels across the entire site. Modern deposits varied in thickness from between 0.38m and 1.74m.
- 4.1.2 However, in the northern and eastern part of the site (test pits 3,5,6,7 and 8) the average thickness of modern overburden was approximately 0.5m. The western and southern parts of the site exhibited greater depths of make up (test pits 1, 2 and 9) with an average thickness of 0.7 – 1.0m. The very southern corner (test pit 10) had significantly greater depths at 1.74m with modern truncation down to the surface of the natural geology.
- 4.1.3 With the exception of test pit 10 there was an average depth of 1.0m of deposits overlying the natural. These deposits mainly comprised layers which were present in all test pits, except test pit 10, and three pit/ditch features located in test pits 2, 8 and 9. Layers and features identified as archaeological (i.e. containing quantities of animal bone and/or pottery) were found in test pits 1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 9. Layer deposits found in test pits 3, 4, 6 produced no identifiable material and so their date of origin is uncertain.
- 4.1.4 The following sections provide a brief summary of the findings for each test pit with details given in **Appendix 1**.

4.2 Test Pit 1

- 4.2.1 Modern concrete and overburden was removed down to a depth of 1.60m at the south-west end of the test pit. Three layer deposits were found beneath this. Only the lowest (**104**), located at a depth of 1.74m, produced finds including animal bone, mussel shells and Late Saxon/Early Medieval pottery. Natural geology was encountered at a depth of 2.06m.

4.3 Test Pit 2

- 4.3.1 Approximately 0.65m of concrete and overburden was removed to reveal archaeological deposits consisting of the upper fill (**202**) of a ditch 1.2m wide at a depth of 0.70m from the ground surface. The fill contained pieces of animal bone. A further three layers (**205 – 207**) were identified before natural geology was revealed at a depth of 1.97m. Two of these three layers (**205 & 207**) also produced pieces of animal bone.

4.4 Test Pit 3

4.4.1 Modern tarmac and levelling deposits were removed to a depth of 0.69m below ground level where a single deposit (**304**), containing a possible iron nail, was uncovered. This layer was situated above natural geology at a depth of 1.37m from the ground surface.

4.5 Test Pit 4

4.5.1 Tarmac and modern levelling deposit were present to a depth of 1.10m. A modern pit was located at this depth which cut two layers that produced no artefacts. Natural geology was encountered at a depth of 2m.

4.6 Test Pit 5

4.6.1 A layer of modern overburden was removed to reveal an archaeological deposit (**502**) containing pieces of bone and Late Saxon/Early Medieval pottery at a depth of 0.46m below ground level. Animal bone was also recovered from layer **503** (beneath **502**) along with a piece of Post-medieval tile. Natural geological deposits located at a depth of 1.44m.

4.7 Test Pit 6

4.7.1 A brick wall was uncovered at a depth of 0.38m below modern concrete and levelling deposits. This cut layer **604** which overlay layer **605**. Neither of these layers produced finds. Natural geological deposits were uncovered at a depth of 1.82m.

4.8 Test Pit 7

4.8.1 Modern concrete and levelling deposits *c.*0.54m thick were removed to reveal layer **702** which contained Late Saxon/Early Medieval pottery sherds. Beneath this was layer **703** which produced pieces of animal bone and a probable iron nail. Natural geology was located at a depth of 1.72m.

4.9 Test Pit 8

4.9.1 Concrete and modern deposits were removed to a depth of 0.50m revealing deposit (**802**) containing animal bone and Late Saxon/Early Medieval pottery. This deposit may be the upper fill of a large ditch or pit feature (**804**) partially exposed within the test pit. Its primary fill (**803**) also contained pieces of Late Saxon/Early Medieval pottery and animal bone. The feature cut layer (**805**) beneath which was natural geology at a depth of 1.5m.

4.10 Test Pit 9

4.10.1 Concrete and modern levelling layers were excavated to uncover a pit/ditch feature (**903**) at a depth of 0.72m below ground level. The fill of (**902**) contained pieces of animal bone. This cut layer **904** which was located above natural deposits at a depth of 1.52m.

4.11 Test Pit 10

4.11.1 Only modern levelling deposits were found in this test pit. Natural geology was present at a depth of 1.74m below surface level.

5 FINDS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 A small quantity of finds were recovered during the watching brief, from archaeological deposits and features within seven of the ten test pits excavated – no finds were recovered from test pits 4, 6 or 10. All finds have been quantified by material type within each context, and this information is summarised in **Appendix 2**. On the basis of datable finds (pottery, ceramic building material), the assemblage potentially ranges in date from Late Saxon to Post-medieval.

5.2 Pottery

5.2.1 Apart from ceramic building material, pottery constitutes the only dating evidence from the Site. Most of the sherds came from test pits 7 and 8. All sherds are of Late Saxon or Early Medieval date.

5.2.2 Most of the sherds are in a similar reduced sandy fabric, handmade or wheelthrown, which can be identified as Thetford (or Thetford-type) Ware. There is only one diagnostic sherd, a slightly hollowed jar rim from the fill of pit/ditch **804**; this is a common rim form amongst the Thetford products (e.g. Rogerson and Dallas 1984, figs. 156-7), particularly in Late Saxon levels. The Thetford Ware industry has a date range from late 9th to early 12th century; the jar rim from **804**, and the absence of any Early Medieval Ware from these contexts, could suggest an end date for this small group prior to the 11th century, although the quantities here are too small to make definitive statements on chronology.

5.2.3 There is a single sherd of St Neots-type shelly ware (layer **703**) which has a probable date range of 10th to 11th century.

5.3 Animal Bone

5.3.1 Animal bone comprised the most commonly occurring material type encountered during the watching brief. This small assemblage includes a range of standard domestic species – cattle and sheep/goat, with a few pig, one horse and one domestic fowl. In general the bone is in good condition (fragments from layer **207** are in poorer condition, and a few fragments from layer **502** are burnt). Many of the bones have butchery marks, and helical fractures (caused by breaking up the bones while still fresh) are also in evidence. A range of body parts is represented, although it may be noted that head and foot bones of cattle and sheep/goat predominate in cuts **804** and **903**.

5.4 Other Finds

5.4.1 Other finds comprise fragments of ceramic building material (post-medieval roof tile), five pieces of marine shell (mussel and oyster), one small piece of undiagnostic fired clay, and two iron objects (both probably nails, uncertain date).

6 CONCLUSION

6.1.1 Six of the ten test pits (test pits 1, 2, 5 and 7 – 9) contained archaeological deposits. These comprised mostly what appeared to be layers in test pits 1-4 and ditch/pit features in pits 2, 8 and 9.

6.1.2 Pottery sherds recovered from deposits in test pit 7 and 8 are dated to the Late Saxon/Early Medieval period. Four sherds of pottery of the same date, along with several pieces of animal bone, were also found in a deposit (**502**) in test pit 5 however, underlying this deposit was a layer to which is assigned a piece of Post-medieval tile. Given that no artefacts post-dating Late Saxon/Early Medieval period were found in **502** it is possible that the tile from the lower layer is a contamination from a higher level caused by machine excavation.

6.1.3 Considerable quantities of bone displaying butchery marks were also recovered from deposits in six of the test pits (1, 2, 5, and 7 – 9). This reflects the findings of the previous evaluation of the site described in section 1.3 above.

6.1.4 Overall, the evidence from the watching brief, the previous evaluation and desk based assessment show probable archaeological deposits are present in all but the southern corner of the Site and in the vicinity of the former garage fuel tanks where it is assumed any archaeological remains have been destroyed.

7 THE ARCHIVE

7.1.1 The project archive will be held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology at Old Sarum, Salisbury, under the project code 55490. In due course the archive is to be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

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- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------|--|
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| CgMs Consulting | 2004 | <i>Ex Vauxhall Garage, Bury Road, Thetford, Norfolk: Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief.</i> CgMs Consulting. |
| CgMs Consulting | 2003 | <i>Ex Vauxhall Garage, Bury Road, Thetford, Norfolk: Archaeological Desk Based Assessment.</i> CgMs Consulting. |
| Rogerson, A. and Dallas, C. | 1984 | <i>Excavations in Thetford, 1948-59 and 1973-80,</i> East Anglian Archaeol. 22 |

APPENDIX 1: TEST PIT SUMMARIES

Test Pit 1		Max Depth: 2.50m	Length: 4.70m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at s/e end of test pit)
101	Layer	Modern concrete and levelling deposit			0.0 - 0.40m
102	Layer	Modern levelling. Dark grey silty sand containing gravel, brick and concrete fragments.			0.40 – 1.60m
103	Layer	Yellow sand containing gravel.			1.60 – 1.74m
104	Layer	Dark Brown Sandy Silt containing animal bone, some pottery and mussel shells.		Yes	1.74 – 2.06m
105	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			2.06m -

Test Pit 2		Max Depth: 2.50m	Length: 3.50m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at centre of test pit)
201	Layer	Modern concrete and levelling deposit.			0.0 – 0.70m
202	Fill	Upper fill of feature 204. Dark green/grey sandy silt containing flecks of orange burnt material and fragments of charcoal and animal bone.		Yes	0.70 – 1.32m
203	Fill	Lower fill of feature 204. Dark brown sandy silt containing flecks of orange burnt material and fragments of charcoal.			1.32 – 1.58m
204	Cut	Ditch running n/e-s/w across the test pit. 1.20m wide at the top and 0.88m deep with steep sides and rounded base. Contains fills 202 and 203.			
205	Layer	Dark reddish brown sandy silt containing flecks of orange burnt material and chalk and animal bone.		Yes	0.70 – 1.70m
206	Layer	Light yellow sand containing gravel.			1.62 – 1.70m (at n/w end of pit)
207	Layer	Light greyish brown silty sand containing charcoal flecks and animal bone.		Yes	1.70 – 1.97m
208	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.97m -

Test Pit 3		Max Depth: 2.45m	Length: 2.90m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/e end of test pit)
301	Layer	Modern tarmac and levelling deposit			0.0 - 0.34m
302	Layer	Modern levelling layer containing fragments of concrete.			0.34 – 0.62m
303	Layer	Modern levelling layer containing fragments of concrete.			0.62 – 0.69
304	Layer	Dark grey sandy silt containing gravel, flecks of chalk and an iron object.			0.69 – 1.37m
305	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.37m -

Test Pit 4		Max Depth: 2.65m	Length: 2.60m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/e end of test pit)
401	Layer	Modern tarmac and levelling deposit			0.0 – 0.64m
402	Layer	Modern levelling layer containing crushed concrete			0.64 – 1.06m
403	Fill	Fill of modern feature 404 containing large fragments of concrete.			1.10 – 1.84m (at s/w end of pit)
404	Cut	Modern cut extending out from s/w end of test pit. 0.74m deep with vertical sides and flat base.			
405	Layer	Dark brown sandy silt containing flecks of charcoal			1.06 – 1.30m
406	Layer (poss. natural)	Dark brown sand.			1.30 – 2.00m
407	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			2.00m -

Test Pit 5		Max Depth: 2.50m	Length: 3.00m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/e end of test pit)
501	Layer	Modern levelling deposit containing fragments of concrete and brick.			0.0 – 0.46m
502	Layer	Dark brown sandy silt containing flecks of chalk and orange burnt material, pottery and animal bone.		Yes	0.46 – 0.86m
503	Layer	Light yellow/brown sand containing animal bone and a piece of tile		Yes	0.86 – 1.44m
504	Natural Geology	Dark red/brown and yellow/brown sand.			1.44m -

Test Pit 6		Max Depth: 2.10m	Length: 3.20m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at s/e end of test pit)
601	Layer	Modern concrete and levelling deposit.			0.0 – 0.38m
602	Fill	Post Medieval/Modern foundation comprising several courses of yellow brick.			0.38 – 1.08m
603	Cut	Trench cut for wall foundation 602 extending out from s/e end of test pit. 0.70m deep with vertical sides and flat base.			
604	Layer	Dark brown/black silty sand containing gravel and flecks of chalk.			0.38 – 1.26
605	Layer (poss. Natural)	Mid yellow/brown sand.			1.26 - 1.82m
606	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.82m -

Test Pit 7		Max Depth: 2.10m	Length: 3.35m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/e end of test pit)
701	Layer	Modern concrete and levelling deposit.			0.0 – 0.54m
702	Layer	Dark brown sandy silt containing flecks of burn orange material and chalk, gravel, flints and pottery.		Yes	0.54 – 1.36m
703	Layer	Light greyish brown sandy silt containing flecks of charcoal, pottery, oyster shell, an iron object and animal bone.		Yes	1.36 – 1.72m
704	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.72m -

Test Pit 8		Max Depth: 2.30m	Length: 1.90m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/w end of test pit)
801	Layer	Modern concrete and levelling deposit.			0.0 – 0.50m
802	Layer/fill	Dark brown sandy silt containing gravel, flints animal bone and pottery. Possibly upper fill of feature 804.		yes	0.50 – 0.94
803	Fill	Fill of 804. Mid grey silty sand containing large quantity of large flint nodules, gravel, animal bone and pottery.		Yes	0.94 – 1.38m
804	Cut	Cut of ditch/pit partially exposed in test pit. Shallow slope to side, gentle break of slope to flat base.			
805	Layer	Dark brown sandy silt containing gravel and flints.			0.94 – 1.50m
806	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.50m -

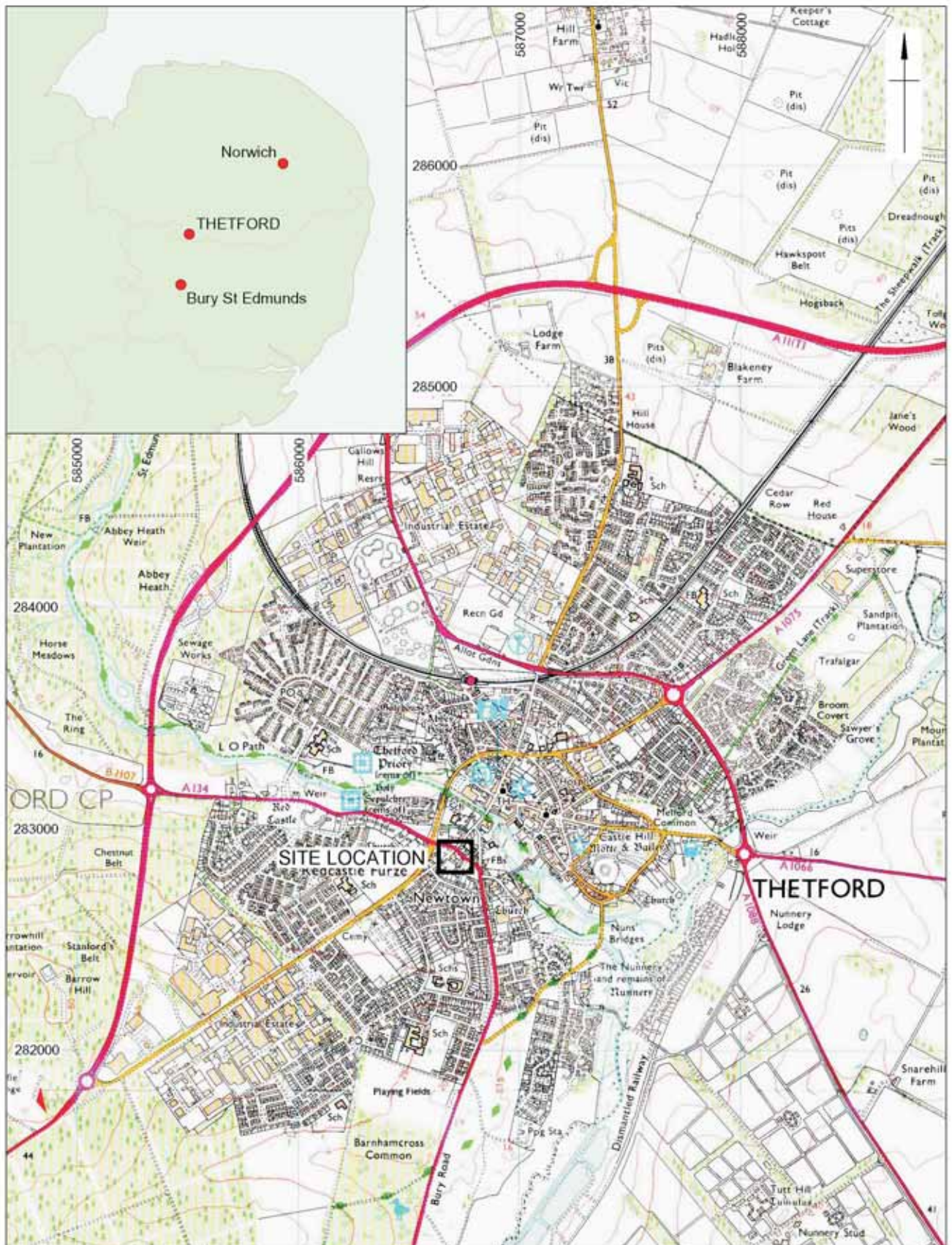
Test Pit 9		Max Depth: 2.00m	Length: 1.90m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/w end of test pit)
901	Layer	Modern concrete and levelling deposit.			0.0 – 0.72m
902	Fill	Mid grey silty sand containing large quantity of large flint nodules and some animal bone.		yes	0.72 – 1.38m
903	Cut	Cut of ditch/pit 0.66m deep extending out of n/w end of test pit. Moderate slope to sides, gentle break of slope to base.			
904	Layer	Mid to light brown silty sand containing gravel and flints.			0.72 – 1.52m
905	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.52m -

Test Pit 10		Max Depth: 2.20m	Length: 2.00m	Width: 1.10m	
Context No.	Type	Description		Finds?	Depths (at n/e end of test pit)
1001	Layer	Modern levelling deposit containing fragments of brick and concrete.			0.0 – 0.50m
1002	Layer	Modern levelling deposit containing fragments of brick and concrete.			0.50 – 1.74m
1003	Natural Geology	Yellow/brown sand.			1.74m -

APPENDIX 2: TABLE OF FINDS BY CONTEXT
(number / weight in grammes)

CBM = ceramic building material

Context	Description	Animal Bone	CBM	Late Sax/Med Pottery	Other Finds
104	layer	17/1102		4/19	4 mussel shell
202	fill of 204	3/96			
205	layer	2/44			
207	layer	3/21			
304	layer				1 iron
502	layer	9/73		4/70	1 fired clay
503	layer	2/40	1/13		
702	layer	10/304		3/65	
703	layer	2/22		3/35	1 iron 1 oyster shell
802	?fill of 804	13/244		1/42	
803	fill of 804	18/625		2/53	
902	fill of 903	14/734			
TOTAL		93/3305	1/13	17/284	



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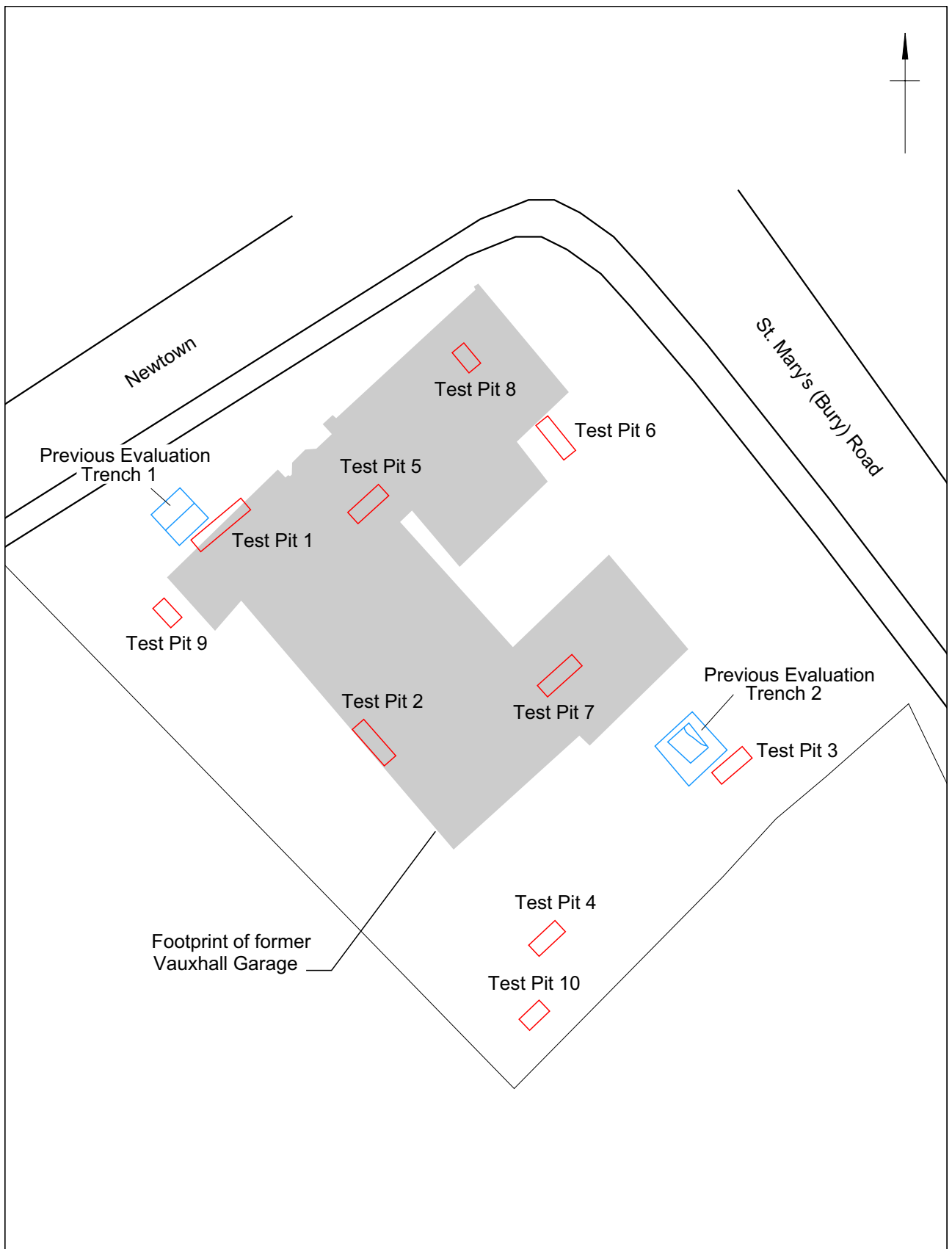
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Site location map

Figure 1



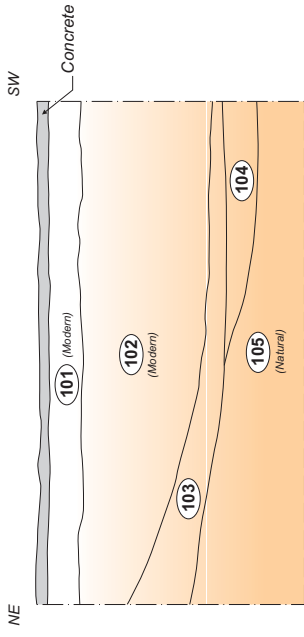
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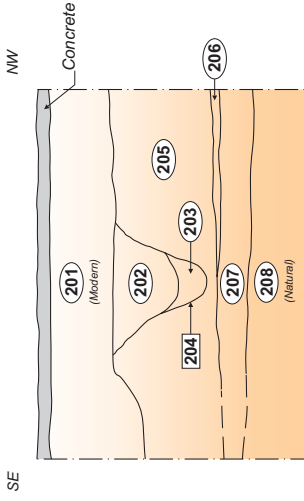
Test Pit location plan

Figure 2

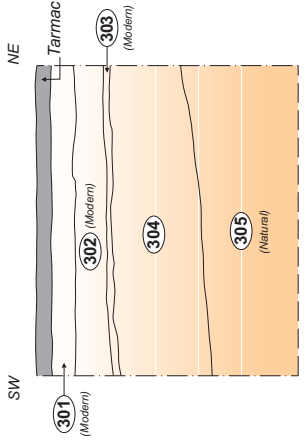
Test Pit 1 - Section



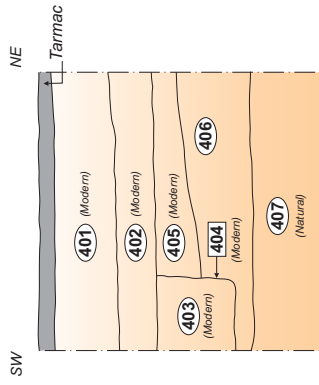
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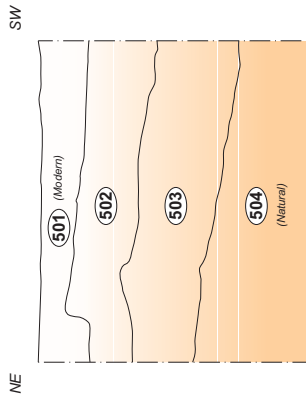
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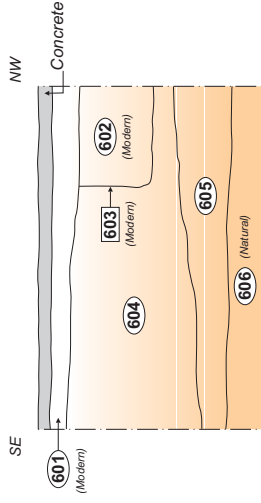
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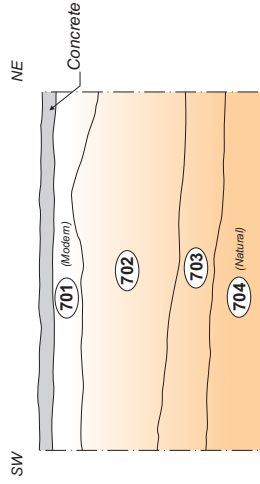
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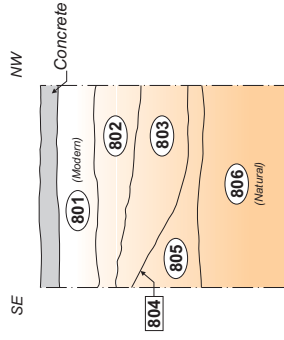
Test Pit 6 - Section



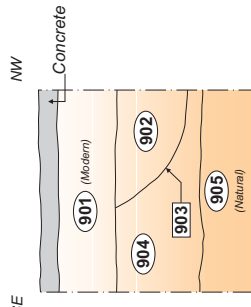
Test Pit 7 - Section



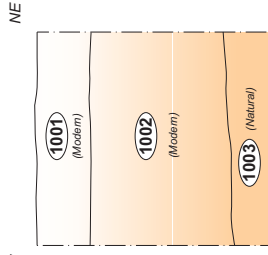
Test Pit 8 - Section



Test Pit 9 - Section



Test Pit 10 - Section



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