An Archaeological Watching Brief at April Cottage
Church Road, Old Beetley, Norfolk

49770 BEY

B. Hobbs, April 2007

BAU 1477

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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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Location: April Cottage, Church Road, Old Beetley, Norfolk
District: Breckland
Grid Ref: TF 9719 1870
HER No.: 49770 BEY
Date of fieldwork: 10\textsuperscript{th}, 15\textsuperscript{th}, 16\textsuperscript{th} & 17\textsuperscript{th} January 2006

Summary
An archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to April Cottage, Old Beetley, to monitor the excavation of footing trenches for a residential development. Other than two late post-medieval or early modern rubbish pits no features or finds of archaeological interest were observed or recovered from the site during the groundworks.

1.0 Introduction
The archaeological watching brief was requested by Mrs. P. Taggart of Dereham, Norfolk in response to a Norfolk Landscape Archaeology brief stipulating archaeological monitoring during groundworks for a residential development at the site of April Cottage in Old Beetley, Norfolk.

The location of the site in Old Beetley was at a road junction on the corner of Church Road and School Road.

The site for the proposed house was the western half of the garden plot of ‘April Cottage’ and was located between the western property boundary and a recently laid shared drive between ‘April Cottage’ and the new house. The footing trenches covered approximately 98m\textsuperscript{2} in area from the road frontage with a garden area to the south.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: EJR 21/11/05). The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, in accordance with the relevant policy on archiving standards.

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the machine excavation of footing trenches and associated groundworks. The Brief required that the archaeological contractor be in constant attendance during the groundworks.

The site was initially stripped of topsoil using a JCB machine excavator with a 1m wide toothed bucket. A small, dilapidated brick and flint building on the road frontage of the site had been demolished prior to the arrival of the archaeologist and the rubble largely removed along with a shed and another lean-to. As the site sloped up slightly to the south the depth of stripped topsoil/garden soil increased to approximately 0.60m at the south edge of the footings.

After the part of the site designated for footings was stripped of topsoil a drive consisting of crushed concrete rubble was laid immediately to the south-east of the site.
The footing trenches were machine excavated using a 0.50m wide toothed bucket to an average depth of 0.75m. Some areas of the footings were excavated deeper due to softer deposits of subsoil or greater depths of topsoil.

Spoil and exposed deposits were scanned with a metal detector. No finds of archaeological interest were recovered from the site spoil from the footings. Spoil was removed from site to be stored locally and disposed of at a later date.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the Norfolk Archaeological Unit’s pro forma sheets. Plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour photographs were taken of relevant features and deposits.

Site conditions were difficult for machining the trenches. Delays were caused by heavy rainfall, which meant that mud on site was constantly in a liquid state and flooded trenches collapsed on occasion, necessitating partial re-excavation.

The site lies on a boulder clay plateau of glacial Anglian tills with areas of sands and gravels sealed with a thin coversand. The topsoil is overall a dark sandy clay loam (Funnell, 2005).

The site lay at a height of approximately 40m OD and sloped somewhat to the north-east which meant that groundwater from the slightly higher ground above probably drained through the lower natural deposits of the site. Access to the area of footings was from Church Road, directly adjacent to the plot.

The village of (Old) Beetley is mentioned in Domesday Book as having seven villagers and a Freeman, which would suggest a population of approximately forty people. The settlement is therefore of Late Saxon origin although it may have been settled from the Middle Saxon period (AD 600-900). Evidence for this comes from the discovery of a scatter of Middle and Late Saxon pottery along with medieval metalwork (Norfolk Historic Environment Record [NHER] No. 2812) to the north of the church. To the south of Beetley Hall more scatters of medieval pottery were found (HER No. 2813) and approximately 150m to the south-east of the site under development a prehistoric polished flint axe was recovered (NHER No. 28492).

Faden’s map of Norfolk from 1797 shows a building located immediately on the junction of the lines of Church Road and School Road, although this may be a representation of April Cottage as Bryant’s map of 1826 clearly shows some open ground between the cottage and the junction. The Tithe map of Beetley published in 1848 shows an outbuilding occupying the space on the north-west corner of the site between the western property boundary and the road frontage. The rest of the site is shown much as it is today; an area of open ground, presumably garden, between April Cottage and the western boundary. This spatial arrangement remains largely the same on the photographs of the 1946 and 1988 aerial surveys of the area.

Previous archaeological work in the vicinity of the site has consisted of an archaeological evaluation to the south-east of the present site which recovered Saxon and medieval pottery (Brennand, 2001).
Figure 2. Trench location, showing locations of Section 1 and Section 2. Scale 1:100
Figure 3. Sections 1 and 2. Scale 1:20
2.0 Observations
The topsoil ([1]) removed from the site was a dark-brown sandy loam garden soil containing occasional small stones and many plant roots. The soil at the road frontage contained moderate amounts of brick rubble and was indicative of post-medieval or modern made ground.

The excavation of the footing trenches began at the south of the site where boulder clay ([2]) had started to appear at the base of the stripped area. The clay was initially dry at the base of the trenches but groundwater was soon apparent and in places caused the trench sides to slip in. The boulder clay was yellow or cream in colour and quite firm in texture, containing moderate amounts of small flints and patches of chalk.

The sections of the footings were inspected during and after excavation for possible features. One feature was observed in the south-east corner of the footings; a shallow cut ([3]) with a concave base, containing a fill ([4]) that was slightly darker than the surrounding garden soil and with less inclusions of small stones.

The cut of the pit was 0.60m deep and 2.5m wide and was cut from the base of the topsoil into the subsoil. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature but the fill contained brick rubble and clinker and was presumed to be either post-medieval or modern in date.

Another shallow pit ([5]) was seen in the north-west facing section of the trench along the western property boundary. This was 1.5m wide and 0.70m deep, reaching almost to the base of the trench. It contained a fairly homogenous soft dark organic silt fill ([6]) with some brick rubble and several late post-medieval or early modern glass bottles and fragments of transfer patterned domestic china.

No other features were observed in the sections of the trenches over the remainder of the groundworks.

3.0 Conclusions
The site had largely been used as a lawn running down to the street frontage and had apparently been made up to level the ground, possibly by importing topsoil. This was visible during the excavation of the footings as a substantial covering of loamy garden soil up to 0.60m thick. Given the evidence of the layout of the site on early maps it appears that there had not been any previous development on the site other than the small building recently demolished on the street frontage.

The two features observed in the sections of the footings were post-medieval or early modern rubbish pits which were are found commonly in rural gardens before organised refuse collection. The cuts of the features could be traced approximately to the base of the current topsoil which indicated that much of the covering garden soil had been added since the pits were backfilled.

The watching brief was carried out in an area where previous finds had revealed Saxon, medieval and possibly prehistoric activity. In terms of archaeological interest, however, nothing was observed during the excavation of the footings of this site to add any further evidence of earlier occupation in the area.
Bibliography

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The report was produced by David Dobson and Julie Curl and edited by Martin Smith.

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## Appendix 1: Context Summary

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<td>Topsoil</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boulder clay subsoil</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>Post-medieval</td>
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<td>4</td>
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