

## DRAGON HALL ARCHAEOLOGY: Excavation Results 1997/98

**SUMMARY of the Archaeology Report:** Andy Shelley (ed.): *Dragon Hall, King Street, Norwich: Excavation and Survey of a Late Medieval Merchant's Trading Complex* (East Anglian Archaeology Report No.112, 2005)

### Introduction

The Dragon Hall excavations were conducted between October 1997 and April 1998. The archaeological data would be used, along with Dragon Hall itself, and documentary evidence to study how the area was used from 900s until 1979.

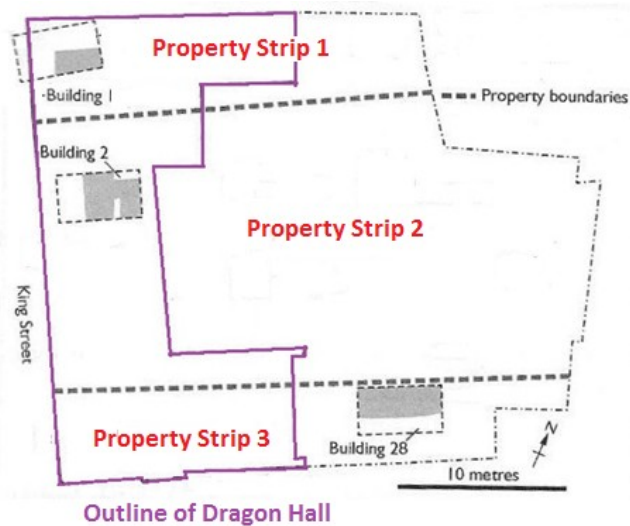
As there was a lot of data collected during the excavation the archaeology was divided in several ways to help make sense of it all.

Firstly it was divided into nine time periods.

- Period 1:** Late 10<sup>th</sup> – late 11<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 2:** Late 11<sup>th</sup> – late 12<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 3:** Late 12<sup>th</sup> - late 13<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 4:** Late 13<sup>th</sup> - mid 14<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 5:** Mid 14<sup>th</sup> – early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 6:** Early 15<sup>th</sup> – mid 16<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 7:** Mid 16<sup>th</sup> – late 17<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Period 8:** Late 17<sup>th</sup> – late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

The site was then divided spatially. During Period 1 there was evidence that the land on which Dragon Hall now stands was divided in to three property strips so these distinct areas were used for the first 2 periods. (From Period 3 onwards the property divisions are based on the more complex documentary evidence.)

The structures found during the excavation were given a building number. For example Building 1 was constructed during Period 1 in Property Strip 1. So Building 1 was erected between the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in the northern part of the site, under what is now Dragon Hall. Building 2 and its associated ovens were built in Period 1 in Property strip 2.



### Period 0 – Prehistory, Roman, Early and Middle Saxon

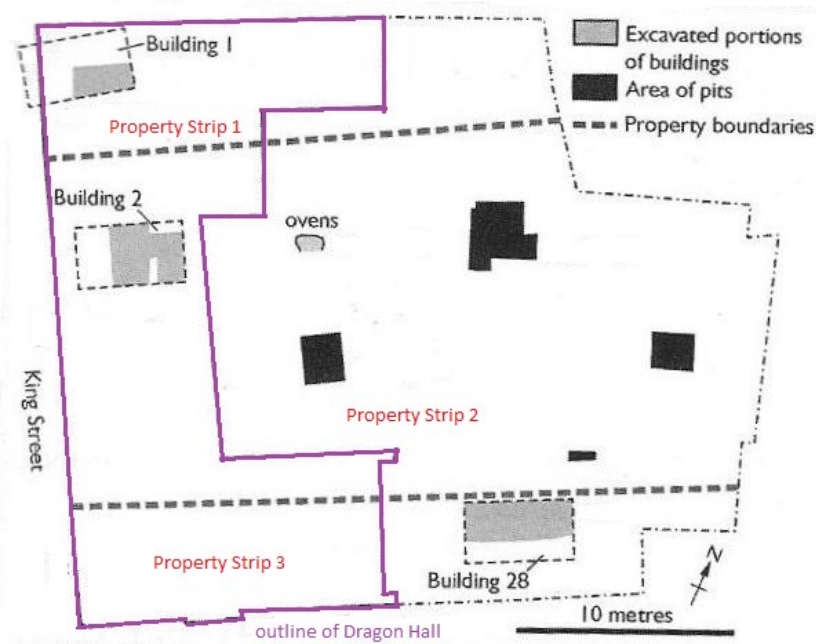
Although the amount of evidence is small there was some archaeology to indicate human activity before the Late Saxon period. This consisted of residual worked flints; seven blades or fragments of blades. The technique used to make them suggests a date of Mesolithic/Early Neolithic periods. There was also a scraper that had been retouched, indicating that it had actually been used, which may be from the later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age.

Evidence from the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic periods in Norwich in general is fairly sparse. However, a level of peat was found in an excavation on Fishergate, near the Wensum, in 1985. Environmental evidence from this layer suggests that in the later Mesolithic (7000 BC) the Wensum valley was wooded and suitable for human occupation. Brian Ayres (2009) suggests that the river may have been exploited for fish and fowl.

There were a few examples of Roman pottery, Early and Middle Saxon pottery found at Dragon Hall but not enough to indicate actual occupation of the site.

### Period 1 – Pre-conquest, late 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries

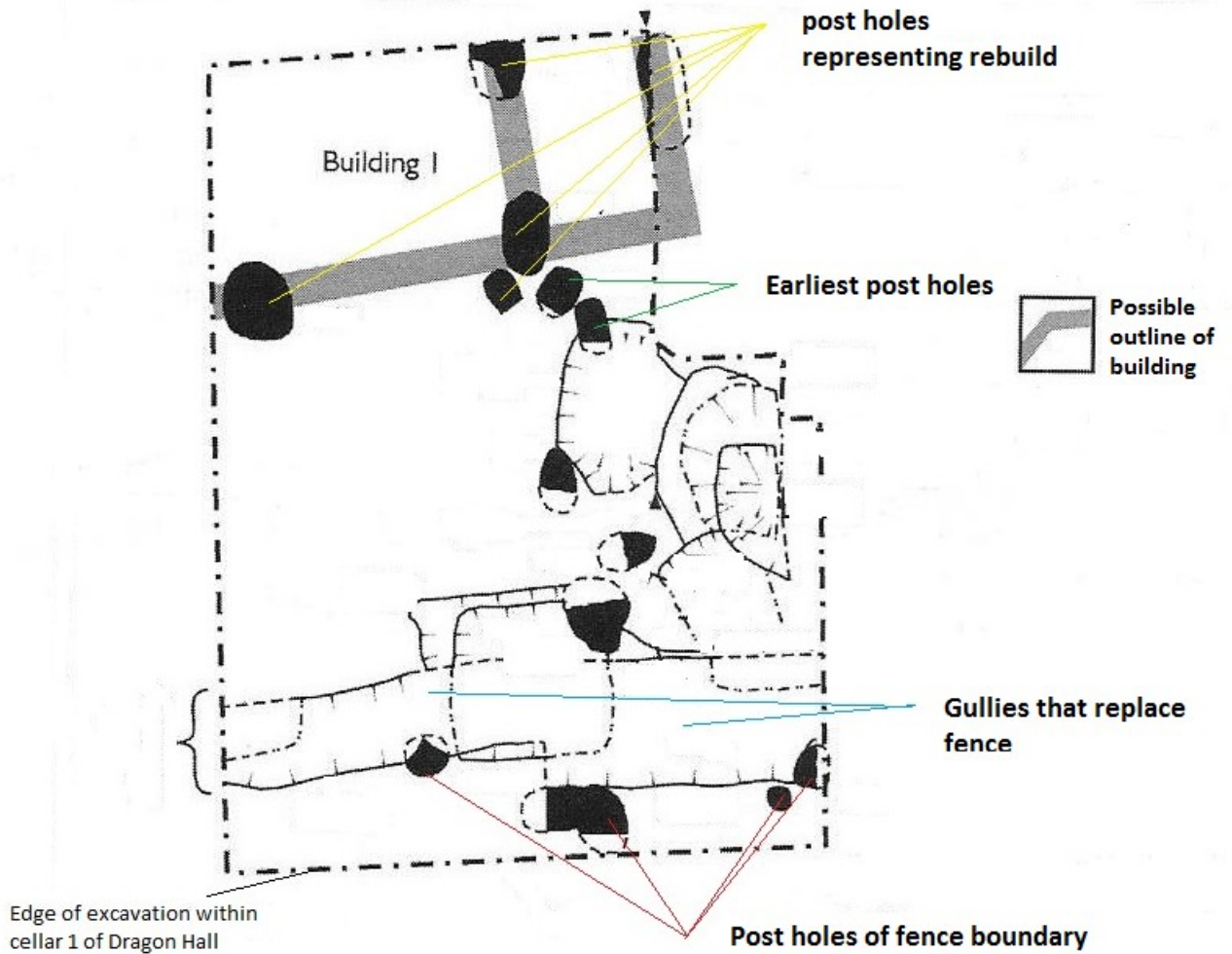
During the first period of occupation at Dragon Hall there is evidence that the area was divided in to three distinct plots and that in each of these plots a structure was built. The buildings in Property Strips 1 and 2 probably sat right up against the street front.



### Property Strip 1

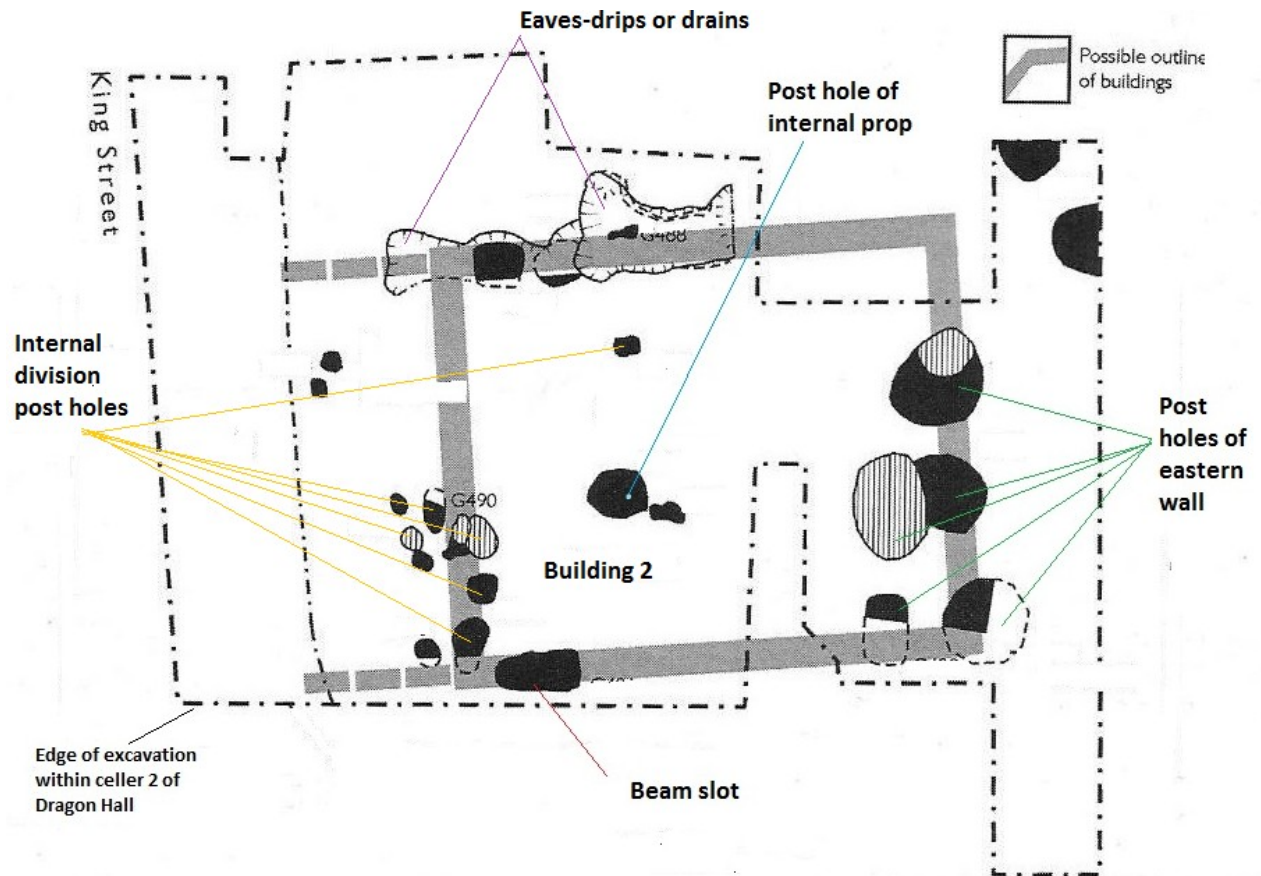
Property Strip 1 was divided from Property Strip 2 by a line of post holes, indicating a fence, which was later replaced by a series of gullies. The corner of a small structure was also found, represented by two number post holes and a clay floor. Other post holes and an area of ash and charcoal, left over from a hearth, indicate that it was rebuilt at least once. Vitrified clay was found in one of the gullies, which had lime washed surfaces suggesting that it was a piece of daub possibly from the walls of the building.

There was a large pit slightly to the south of the building which palynological analysis indicated contained plants such as heather and bracken, which could have been used thatching, bedding and flooring. (Palynology is the study of organic and inorganic particles.) This large pit was later cut by other shallower pits that contained Thetford ware pottery, worked flint, animal bone and a sawn piece of antler. The piece of antler was from a Red deer and as it was sawn suggests someone may have been working antler at the site.



## Property Strip 2

Property Strip 2 contained a building, pits and ovens. Evidence for the Building 2 consisted of five post holes that made up the eastern wall and a rectangular pit, which may have been a beam slot. Inside the structure a large central post hole indicates an internal prop and a collection of smaller post holes suggest it was internally divided. The structure would have measure 2.8m and at least 3.4m. The postholes on the north wall were cut by two gullies which may have developed as eaves-drips or drains.

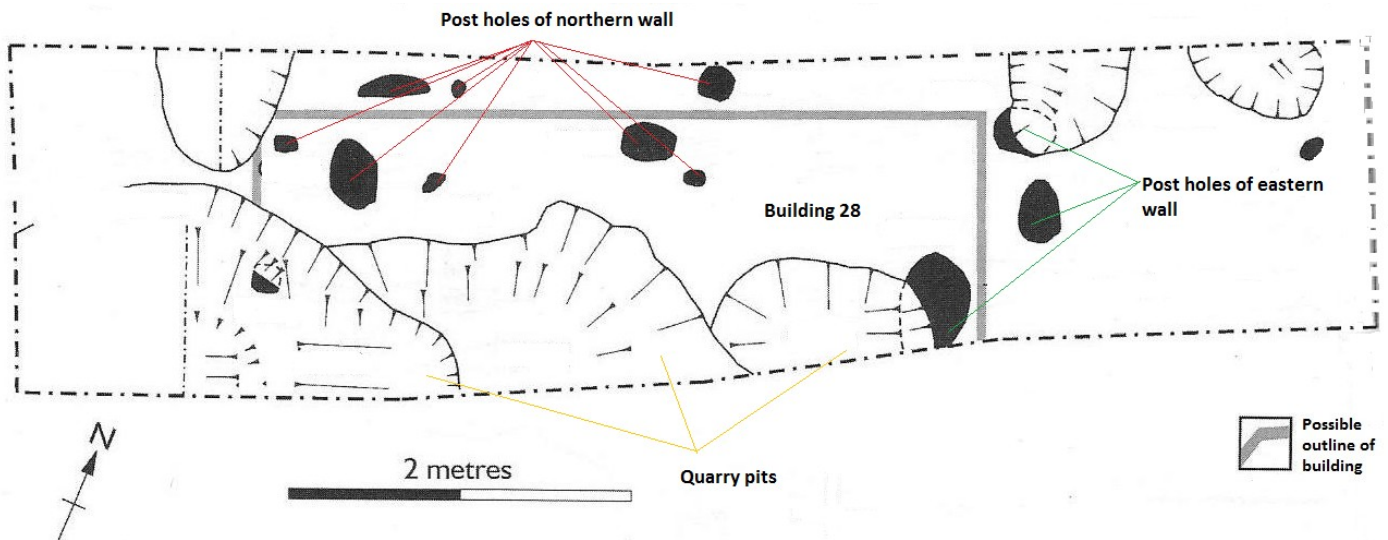


Behind Building 2 the occupant had built a small oven. The walls of this oven eventually collapsed and after an interval a second, larger oven was constructed.

A collection of refuse pits at the eastern end of Property Strip 2 were an excellent source of evidence of what materials and objects were being used and what was being eaten. They contained a large variety of objects including; pottery, a knife blade, nails and fittings, a whetstone and worked antler. Food evidence came in the form of fish bones, most of which were eel but also included cod, herring, pilchard, whiting. The fills also contained fig, apple, rowan, raspberry and bramble seeds as well as damson and sloe fruit stones. Cabbages, peas, beans and turnips were also present as was cannabis, which probably came from hops, suggesting the people were drinking beer. There were also parasite eggs such as whipworm, suggesting that the occupants had sporadic intestinal parasite problems. To the south of Property Strip 2 another collection of postholes and pits were found which could suggest another building although not enough was uncovered to be sure. There were also two more refuse pits that contained a lot of 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century pottery and a large amount of animal bone including a heavily polished cattle radius which could have been used as a skate or a roller. There was also more evidence of whipworm, some metal working debris and a spindle whirl (used in weaving).

### Property Strip 3

The third property strip also had a potential building (building 28) evidenced by the eight post/stake holes that may have made up the northern wall and three further postholes that may have made up the eastern wall. The posts could have supported clay walls or pegged sill beams. The rest of the structure has been destroyed by pits dug later for quarrying.



### Discussion

The earliest pottery found on the site was dated to the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, though the few sherds found in the structural features (eg postholes) were dated to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. There was no datable metal work or scientific dating of the deposits so the pottery was used to suggest the dating for the earliest occupation, between c. 975 and c. 1025.

The archaeology shows that at least two buildings were occupied at the site and the boundaries suggest that the idea of independent properties existed. They were small timber built structures with clay floors and daub walls and may have been roofed with heather and bracken. Peat ash suggests that this was used as fuel along with hard and soft woods. The remains of a Thetford-type ware pedestal lamp suggest the buildings were lit. Building 2 had its ovens and refuse pits outside the building and this may also have been the case with building 1.

The activities taking place on site included antler working, and the ovens and a fragment of quern stone suggest small scale cereal processing. The large pits in Property Strip 3 suggest quarrying, the material from which may have been used on nearby streets.

Almost all the pottery found was Thetford-type ware, foreign pottery only made up 1%. This suggests the occupants were involved in a local or possibly regional trade network. The fish remains suggest trade with coastal fisheries and possibly a riverine fishery, as although they

lived next to the river, there is no evidence that the occupants were engaged in fishing activities.

Amy Culwick Feb. 2014