

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON
LAND TO THE EAST OF THE BOUNDARY,
GORSE LANE, GRANTHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE**

Lincolnshire County Council
Archaeology Section

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON
LAND TO THE EAST OF THE BOUNDARY,
GORSE LANE, GRANTHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE**

Site Code: GLG98

Lincoln City & County Museum Accession Number: 8.98

NGR: centred on SK 9050 3325

**Report prepared by Rebecca Casa MA
& Mark Wood BA MA**

October 1998

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COMMISSIONED BY

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1.0 SUMMARY

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In view of the known Bronze Age round barrows present in the wider area surrounding the site, particular attention was paid to the identification and interpretation of the undated 'ring-ditch' type cropmark features present on the site itself. Their potential archaeological significance being that they could represent a Bronze Age barrow cemetery albeit that evidence compiled for the DEA highlighted these cropmarks as probably being 20th century AD features associated with the former airfield RAF (Spitfire) Grantham.

The watching brief confirmed such a modern date and duration for the cropmark features revealed during the course of the development.

No evidence was recovered for land use prior to the 20th century AD other than for agricultural purposes. Remains of structures and other features associated with the airfield are the only significant remains of any period present on the actual development site.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

PISA Ltd. was commissioned to undertake this work by Mr. W. Wesson of 'The Boundary', Gorse Lane, Grantham, Lincolnshire. PISA staff, Mark Wood and Rebecca Cave, carried out the field work.

We should like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Jon Bonnor (AAO) and the Client, Mr. W. Wesson, for discussing aspects of the project with us.

1.0: SUMMARY

From the 12th to the 16th of January 1998, P.I.S.A. Ltd. carried out an intermittent watching brief during the development of land adjacent to 'The Boundary', Gorse Lane, Grantham, Lincolnshire.

As a result of the findings of a previous desk-based assessment (DBA) which incorporated an assessment of cropmark features identified from aerial photographs (Wood 1997), the Assistant Archaeological Officer (AAO) for Lincolnshire requested that a watching brief take place. The principal aim of the watching brief was to record the nature and date of the cropmark features present in the southern and eastern areas of the site.

In view of the known Bronze Age round barrows present in the wider area surrounding the site, particular attention was paid to the identification and interpretation of the undated 'ring-ditch' type cropmark features present on the site itself. Their potential archaeological significance being that they could represent a Bronze Age barrow cemetery albeit that evidence compiled for the DBA interpreted these cropmarks as probably being 20th century AD features associated with the former airfield RAF (Spittlegate) Grantham.

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2.0: INTRODUCTION

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We should like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Jim Bonnor (AAO) and the Client, Mr. W. Wesson, for discussing aspects of the project with us.

2.1: Planning Background

A planning application submitted to Lincolnshire County Council's Planning Office (Ref: [AC] 35/0112/97) and referred by them to the County's Archaeology Section in 1997 gave rise to both the previous DBA and this subsequent watching brief. The application concerned a proposed change of use of land to provide storage space for disused motor vehicles situated adjacent to the existing Vehicle Breaker's Yard located at 'The Boundary', Gorse Lane, Grantham, Lincolnshire (Fig. 3).

The DBA was produced as a pre-determination requirement in respect of the planning application. In view of the fact that this work determined that there were likely archaeological remains present on the site but that the date and nature of these remains was uncertain, the AAO requested that an intermittent watching brief be carried out during the development process in order to record the nature and date of the known cropmark features.

Evidence produced for the DBA suggested that the cropmark features present on the site were likely to be 20th century AD in date and associated with the former airfield on which the present site is known to have been located. (Wood 1997,2). However, given the known archaeological background (summarised in the DBA) there still remained the possibility that the cropmarks present within the application area represented Prehistoric Bronze Age barrows; hence the requirement for this further work.

There being no formal project brief issued, the watching brief was undertaken in January 1998 during the development of the site in line with discussions with the AAO and following a verbal commission from the Client to carry out the work.

2.2: Site Location, Topography and Geology

The area of the proposed development is situated 2km to the south-west of Grantham centre (as defined by the Railway Station) in the south-western area of Grantham parish near to the boundary with the civil parish of Harlaxton in the west, South Kesteven District, Lincolnshire (Figs. 1 & 2). The village of Little Ponton in the civil parish of Little Ponton & Stroxtun is situated some 2.5km to the south-east of the site and to the east is the A1 road and the River Witham at distances of some 500m and 2km respectively from the site.

Situated immediately to the south of Gorse Lane and adjacent on the eastern side to 'The Boundary' property (which currently comprises a private residence and a

vehicle breaker's yard), the proposed development area is fairly level, rectangular in shape covering some 1.2 hectares at a height of approximately 123m AOD at National Grid Reference centring upon SK 9050 3325 (Fig. 3).

The site area of 1.2 hectares is part of a larger single field of modern arable land with a total area of approximately 5 hectares; the site itself represents roughly 1/5th of the whole field and is situated on its extreme western flank (Fig. 3; Plate 1).

Escrick 2 and Marcham soil associations comprise the shallow well-drained soils of the area; this drainage propensity being determined by the underlying geology consisting of an 'island' interface of glaciofluvial drift and Jurassic limestone (SSEW 1983).

3.0: AIMS

The overall objective of the watching brief was to determine the date and nature of any archaeological remains exposed within the application area during its development. Particular attention would be addressed to locating and interpreting the curvilinear cropmark features known to exist from aerial photographs in the southern and eastern areas of the site.

4.0: METHODOLOGY

A series of four visits were made to the site on January 12th, 14th, 15th and 16th 1998 in order to monitor ground-work during topsoil stripping and to record exposed archaeological remains as the development occurred.

The whole of the area was mechanically excavated using a 360° tracked vehicle fitted with a toothless ditching bucket for the removal of topsoil and subsoil to an average depth of 40cm. A gentle rise in the natural towards the centre of the site necessitated slightly deeper excavation into the glaciofluvial sand in order to create a more level ground surface over the whole site.

Linear spoil heaps for the excavated soil (and to serve to screen the site) were created parallel with and offset from the northern, eastern and southern perimeters of the site thereby reducing the area of the watching brief considerably.

Exposed features were rapidly excavated by hand in order to assist with the determination of their nature and date. A scale plan (at 1:1250; see Fig. 4) of the area was produced together with a photographic record which includes colour slides and colour prints (the latter taken by means of a digital camera). Due to the absence of recognisable archaeological remains other than the 20th century AD features associated with the former RAF base on which the site is located, no further recording was considered necessary.

The significance of the features encountered during the watching brief was considered and has been integrated with all the available information including both the aerial photographic survey for the site and the archival research documented in the DBA (Wood 1997).

5.0: HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The evidence presented below is a synopsis of that which was produced for the DBA (Wood 1997).

The Lincolnshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) records that the cropmarks (SMR 35028) visible on the actual development site could possibly be interpreted as Bronze Age round barrows. The mapping and interpretation of aerial photographs carried out for the DBA interprets the features as being associated with the military airfield (the former RAF Grantham) rather than being round barrows of Prehistoric date (Wood 1997, Appendix 1). Moreover, the cropmark features in and around the site would appear to correspond to areas of bare soil, craters, linear features that probably represent vehicle tracks, a dugout, small buildings and a possible communications area or bomb target (*ibid.*, 8).

Notwithstanding the uncertain nature and date of the known features on the development site itself, there is evidence for potential Prehistoric activity elsewhere in the immediate vicinity of Gorse Lane but the closest known definite archaeological site is of Roman date and is situated some 1000m to the south-west (Wood 1997, 8). However, with reference to the former Prehistoric activity, the sites are neither concentrated nor securely located. Situated beyond the proposed development site and within a 1km radius of it are two further cropmark features visible on aerial photographs. The more distant one from the site (c. 1km away), located at NGR SK91400 33400 (Fig. 3, SMR 33848) on the eastern side of the A1

shows faint cropmarks of an undated (but possible prehistoric?) double-ditched circular enclosure.

The second cropmark feature described as a 'ring ditch' is located 250m to the north-east of the proposed development site on the east side of Wyville Road¹. In the wider area beyond the investigation site, the only certain Prehistoric feature is The Salt Way (later a Roman Road) to the south of the site located near the Warren Plantation (Fig. 3) to which can possibly be added the finds made in 1724 AD of grain and querns located 'somewhere' in the western area of the Spittlegate Lordship. Further afield, there are definite Bronze Age barrows in the parishes of Harlaxton and Little Ponton & Stroxtun; some of the latter having been excavated (Greenfield 1959).

It would appear from cartographic evidence (Bryant 1828) that during the Medieval period the site was part of an extensive area of open ground (pasture?) which was then sub-divided during the later 19th century (Wood 1997, 7). With the exception of the boundary to the west of the development area which may be of some antiquity, the only potential Medieval site known to date is represented by the possible location of the deserted village located on the present site of Walton Farm (SMR30507).

For the post-Medieval period there is significantly greater evidence for sites as well as structures though most are some distance from the proposed development site. While many of these can only be said to have been in existence by 1828 due to their depiction on Bryant's map, farms such as Walton and Warren Farms as well as Gorse Lane and Wyville Road may well have had longer histories. The same may be true of the Warren Plantation, Harlaxton Wood and the copse depicted to the north of Gorse Lane.

The fever hospital, shown on an OS map of the early 20th century AD, to the north of Gorse Lane and situated opposite the proposed development site, was a short-lived

¹ The SMR reference (35028) to the cropmark features on the actual proposed development area are described as being located 'off Wyville Road' (rather than 'off Gorse Lane'). Therefore, there could be some confusion between those that do exist on the site and the single ring ditch recorded on the SMR overlay to the east of Wyville Road. SMR 35028 is located at SK 90700 33200 which does correspond to the cropmarks within the site as opposed to that 'off Wyville Road' in view of the grid reference locating them to the south of Gorse Lane.

phenomenon the remains of which have presumably been damaged or even obliterated by the construction of the existing houses along the lane in the 1960's.

An airfield located immediately to the south of the site became RAF Grantham in 1928. This 80 hectare base included structures and other features which were present on the proposed development site as extant remains until the 1950's. At that time, the present house (The Boundary) was built on the land adjacent to the site which itself was returned to arable use in the same period. The vehicle breaker's yard came into being in the 1980's (Mr. Bill Wesson, *pers. comm.*).

6.0: RESULTS (see Fig. 4; unless otherwise indicated)

A thin layer of topsoil (c. 30cm) was removed to reveal a very mixed layer of clay/sandy subsoil to a depth of 40cm. A high proportion of large pieces of gravel contained within the cultivated topsoil was noticeable and reflects the shallow nature of the soil and the proximity of the glaciofluvial drift material in relation to the ground surface.

Mr. Wesson informed us that during the construction of the vehicle breaker's yard adjacent to the site a cable was located which appeared to continue into the proposed development area; this cable was revealed during the course of the development along with a path leading from the vehicle breaker's yard into the site. The cable was presumably a communications or power cable linking Nissan Huts (some of which were certainly located on what is now 'The Boundary' property) of the military base with the structures that were previously extant in the proposed development area. We were also informed that small fragments of metal (possibly spent ordnance) were found from time to time in the field to the east of the site where munitions dispersal structures and a possible bomb target were identified in the Aerial Photographic Assessment produced for the DBA (Cox 1997).

During the watching brief, occasional brick rubble, bottle glass, scrap iron and glazed pottery (all modern in date) were found scattered beneath the topsoil and concentrated in what have been interpreted as small bomb craters (Fig. 4 & Plate 2); it is known that the site was bombed during the Second World War (see Section 7 below). Further craters, together with areas of bare soil were located in the northern and southern portion of the site. The craters encountered during the watching brief penetrated deep into the subsoil to scar the upper natural sandy layer beneath. The

concentration of modern debris within the craters themselves was interpreted as the result of intentional filling-in in order to level the ground-surface.

Rubble and modern finds were also observed within the homogeneous fill of a curvilinear ditch which coincided with the most southerly of the cropmarks (with the exception of the dug-out feature) in areas of bare soil and craters visible on aerial photographs. There was no apparent horizon boundary between the fill of the ditch and the subsoil. Their similarity in terms of texture, consistency and colour suggests that the ditch was cut through and then back-filled with the subsoil which was still unsettled and very soft at the time of the watching brief. The nature of the fill and the dating of the finds suggests a 20th century AD date for the feature, the function of which, though uncertain, is likely to be associated with the military airfield (Plate 3). A series of post-holes were found to be cut through the base of the ditch. These were primarily filled with scrap-metal and iron nails pointing to the presence of a fence with probable metal uprights.

Finally, rubble was concentrated in the proximity of the western boundary of the site. It appeared to result from disturbance of an original track-way c. 2m wide that was oriented NW-SE to join further tracks visible on aerial photographs. This feature cut through the subsoil and lay on the natural sand beneath. No other finds or concentrations of rubble were noted during the soil-stripping process or during the examination of the excavated spoil.

7.0: DISCUSSION

The absence of recognisable archaeological remains earlier than the 20th century AD features discovered in the investigation area can either be attributed to their having been destroyed² or that no others were ever present on the site.

The 1920's witnessed the creation of a grass landing strip for an airfield, itself originally situated to the south of the investigation site. During the period up to its closure (when the land to the east of 'The Boundary' returned to arable), this airfield was subjected to a number of expansion and contraction phases particularly in the years spanning the Second World War and subsequently. At its greatest extent, the airfield covered 80 hectares on which were located hangers, Nissan huts and other

² As a result of the long history of the site and its immediate vicinity being cultivated arable land (at least from Post-Medieval times up to the beginning of this century).

structures. A dug-out, munitions dispersal and associated features are recorded on the development area itself and extend eastwards beyond the site. There is some evidence for the airfield having been bombed during the Second World War and it has been noted that in comparison with Lincoln, Grantham was eight times more heavily bombed in the same period (Hunt 1994, 85). This was undoubtedly due to the large number of RAF bases, radio stations and factories in the immediate vicinity of Grantham.

The main aim of the watching brief was to establish whether the curvilinear features visible as cropmarks and tentatively interpreted as the remains of past military activity could represent Prehistoric round barrows. Particular attention was paid to an undated cropmark in the southern part of the site which was located and is interpreted as representing a curvilinear ditch for the setting of metal fence-posts associated with the known military activity on the site. The same interpretation may also apply to a further circular cropmark feature located beneath (and obliterated by) the present eastern boundary of the development area.

In addition to the curvilinear ditches, small (bomb) craters and part of a paved track (made of limestone slabs and concrete) were the only features identified on the site. These features all appear to be recent, having been cut through (and back-filled with) the subsoil. Modern finds scattered within and beneath the topsoil and concentrated in the fills of both the ditch and the craters confirmed a 20th century AD date. The partial removal of the track-way, together with the nature of the fills from the features, may imply clearance and levelling of the area before it was converted back to agricultural use sometime in the immediate post-war period when the military airfield fell into disuse. The absence of thick soil cover would conform with the interpretation of the area as having been re-landscaped for agricultural purposes in recent times.

10.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

8.0: CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from the watching brief conform with evidence for occupation on the site itself as being 20th century AD in date and principally entailing military activity. The structures and other features related to the airfield no longer exist above ground but only as cropmark features visible on aerial photographs. Airfields are a characteristic feature of the Lincolnshire landscape as well as other southern

and eastern areas of Britain. RAF Grantham belongs in the general category of those bases which were particularly active during the Second World War period.

Notwithstanding the presence of Prehistoric features beyond the proposed development area (in particular the 'ring-ditch'-like cropmark mentioned above in Section 5), the potential for the existence and survival of such period remains on the site itself has been demonstrated to be very low and none may ever have been present. Definite Post-Medieval activity, in addition to modern plough action and the construction of a military base at the beginning of the 20th century AD are likely to have hampered the survival of any buried remains of archaeological and environmental significance which may have existed previously.

9.0: REFERENCES

- Bryant A., 1828 *Map of the County of Lincoln*
Cox C., 1997 (July) *Gorse Lane, Grantham: Aerial Photographic Assessment*. In Wood, M 1997
Greenfield E., 1959 *Five Bronze Age round barrows at Ponton Heath, Stroxton, Lincolnshire*, (article in SMR parish file for Grantham)
Hunt F., 1994 *Lincolnshire in The Wars*, Lincoln
SSEW 1983 *Soil Survey of England and Wales*, 1:250 000 Sheet 6 South East and Legend, Harpenden.
Wood, M., 1997 (August) *Desk-Based Assessment of the Archaeological Implications of the Proposed development of Land to the East of the Boundary, Gorse Lane, Grantham, Lincolnshire*.

10.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PISA Ltd. should like to thank the following people for their valued assistance in respect of this report: Messrs. Bill and Robert Wesson of 'The Boundary' who commissioned the work and provided information and Mr. Jim Bonnor (Lincolnshire County Council Assistant Archaeology Officer) for advice on the project.

Figure 1: General location plan

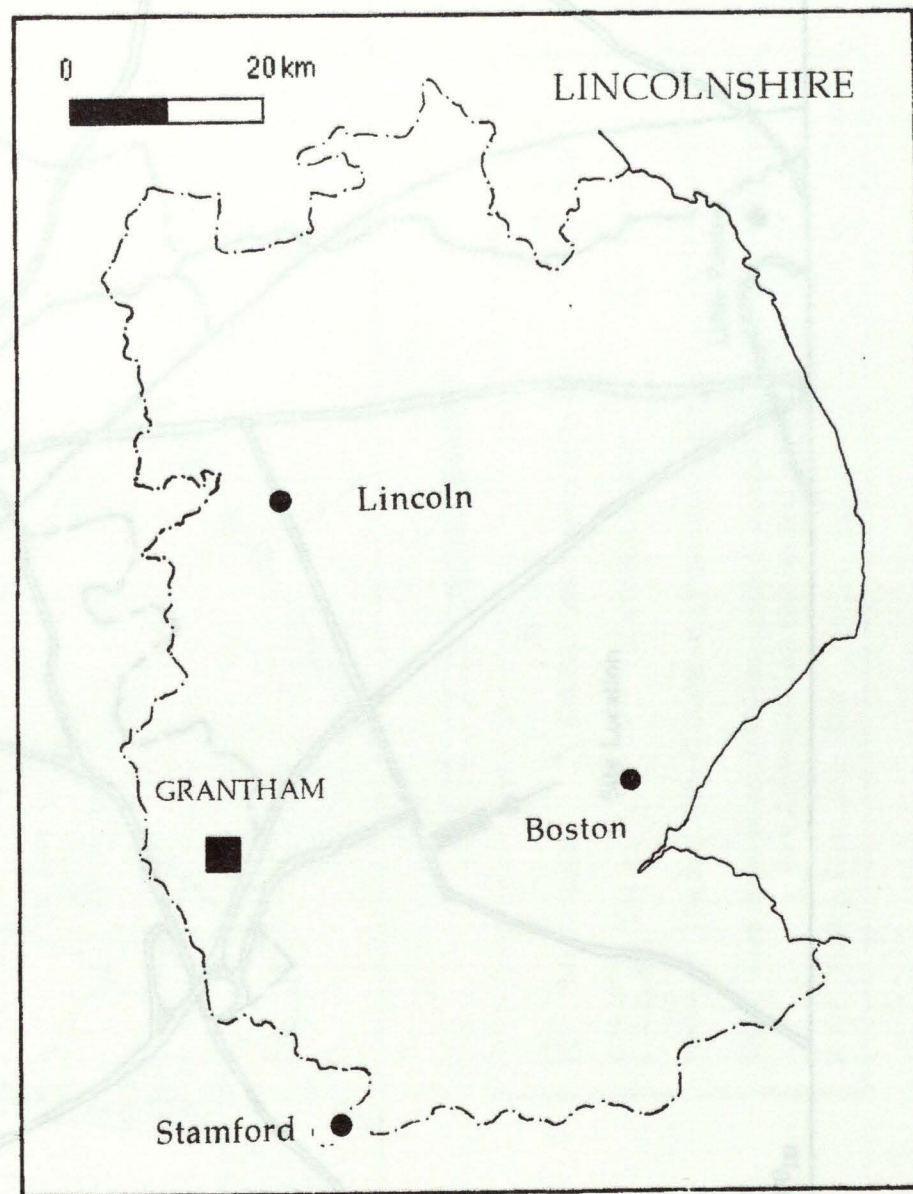
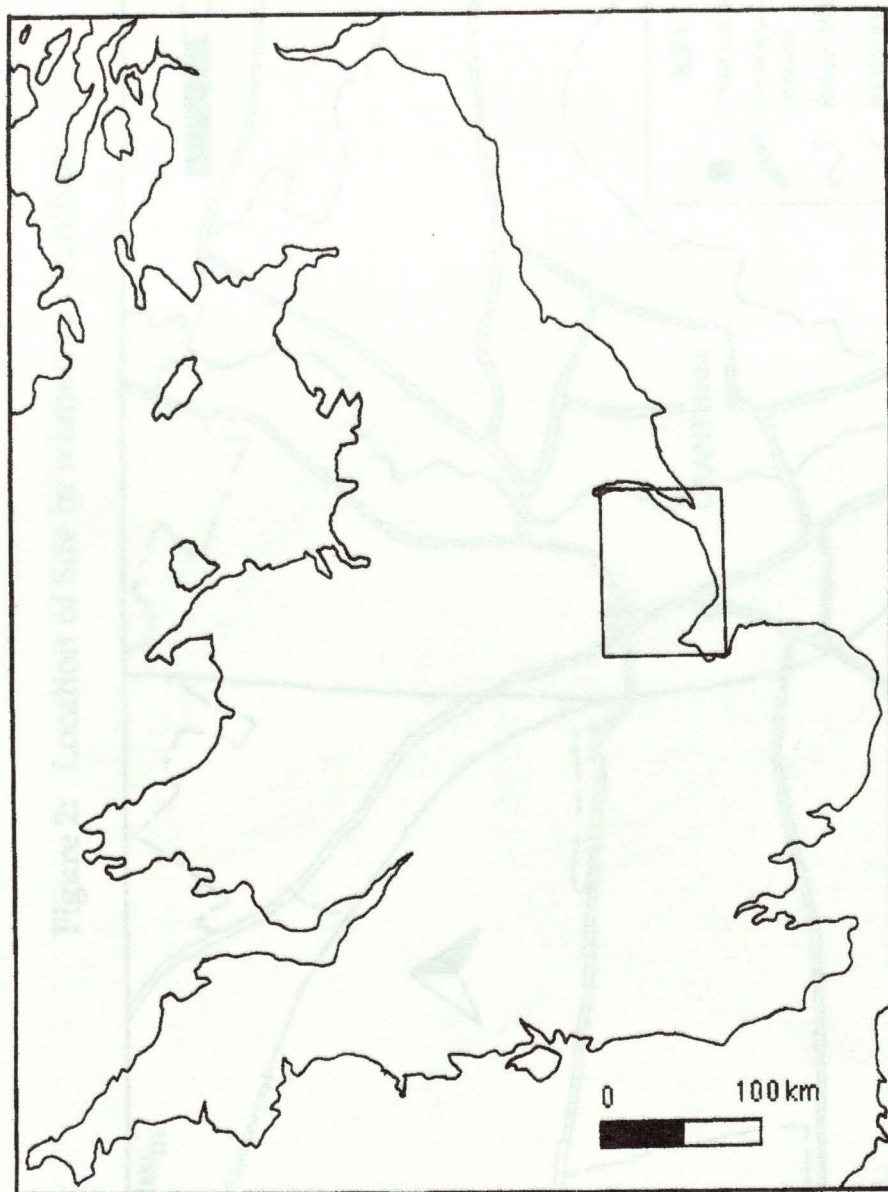


Figure 3: Archaeological detail within and in the immediate vicinity of the Site

Figure 2: Location of Site in relation to Grantham

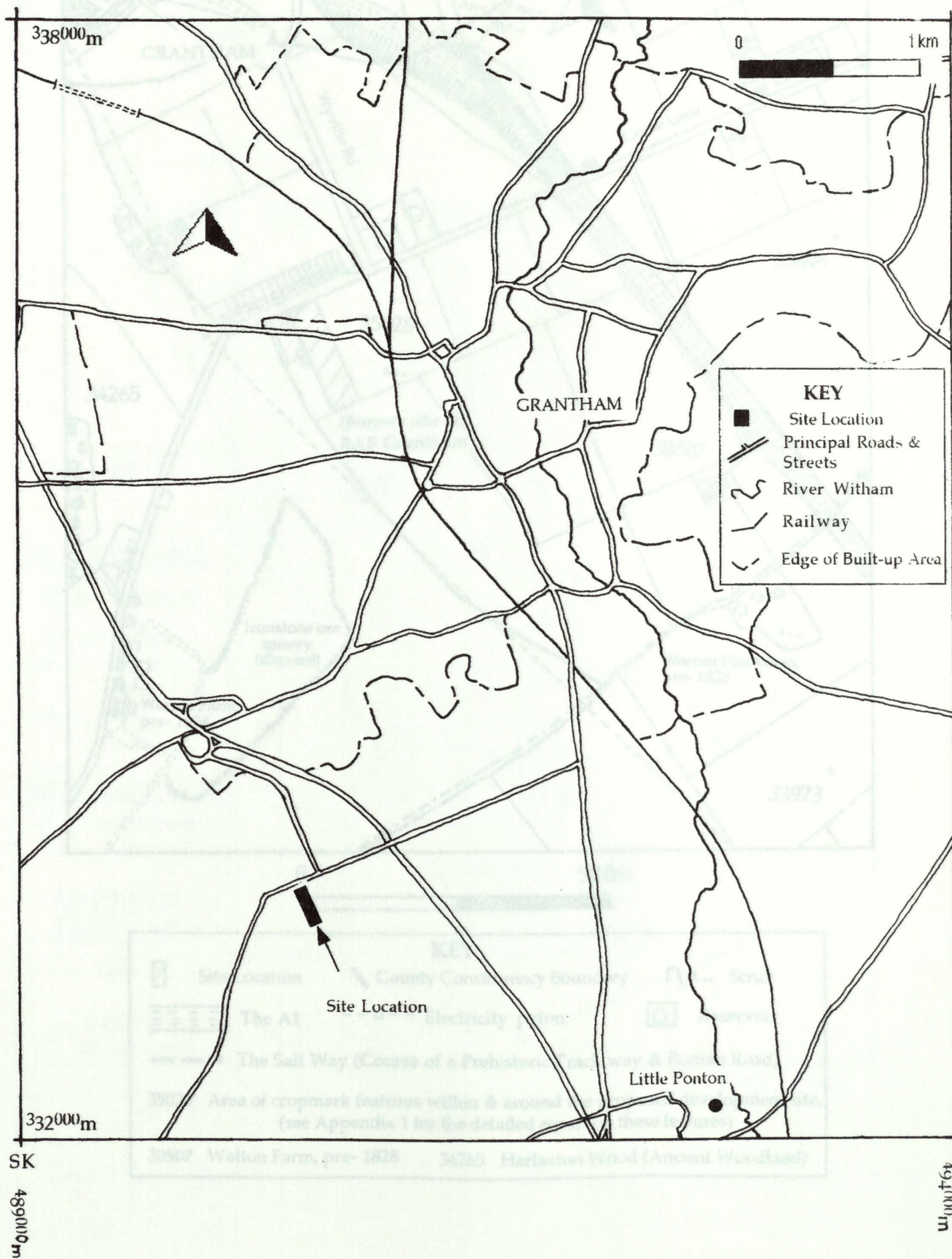
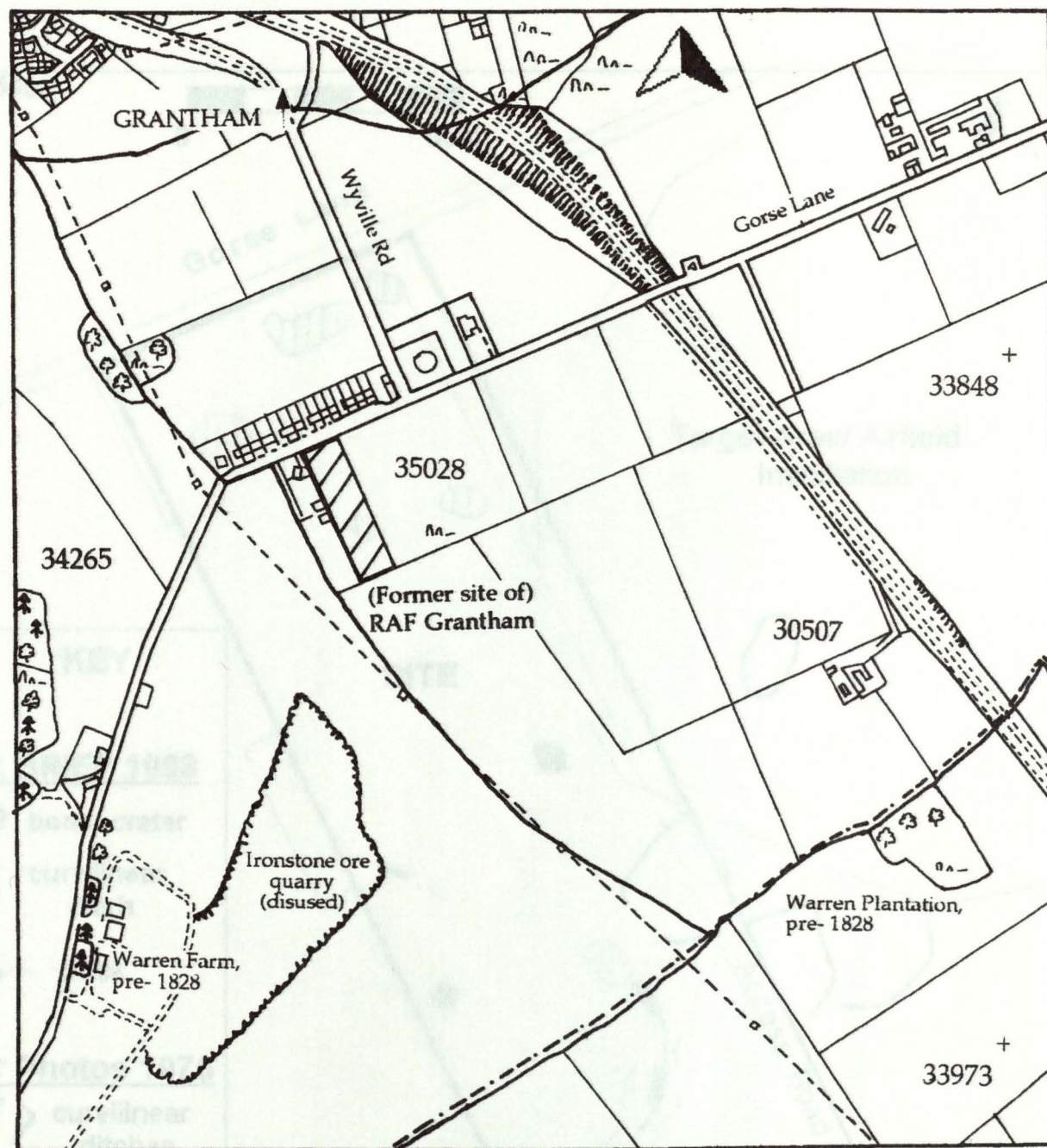


Figure 3: Archaeological detail within and in the immediate vicinity of the Site






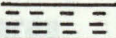



KEY				
	Site Location		County Constituency Boundary	 Scrub
	The A1		Electricity pylon	 Reservoir
	The Salt Way (Course of a Prehistoric Track way & Roman Road)			
35028 Area of cropmark features within & around the proposed development site (see Appendix 1 for the detailed report on these features)				
30507 Walton Farm, pre- 1828		34265 Harlaxton Wood (Ancient Woodland)		

Figure 4: Watching brief results in relation to known cropmark features

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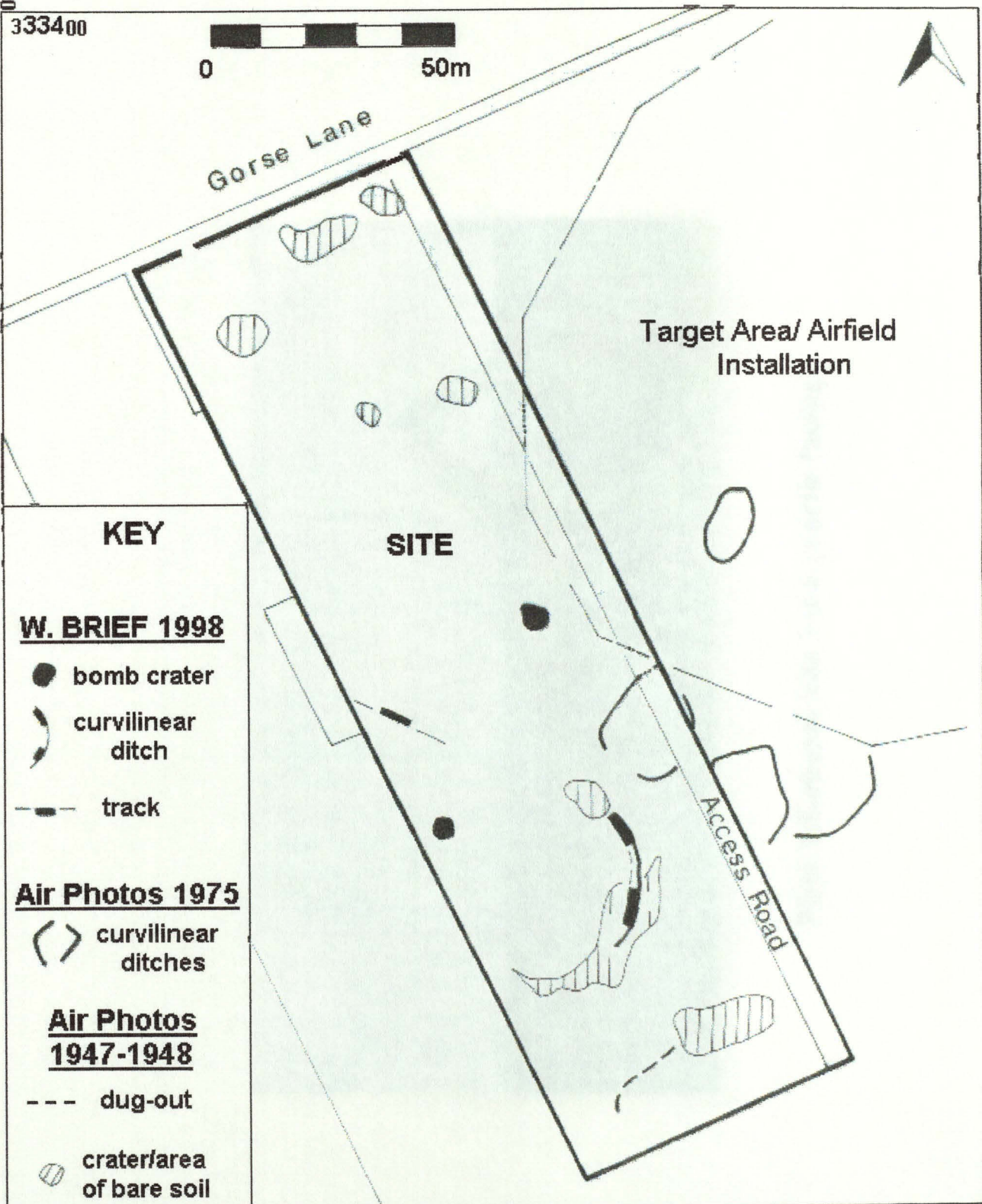




Plate 1: General Site View (north-facing)



Plate 2: Brick and rubble fill of crater



Plate 3: Southern end of curvilinear ditch (west facing)

APPENDIX

The Archive

This report constitutes the primary paper record and will be deposited with the Lincoln City & County Museum in due course; other archive material is presently located at:

P.I.S.A. Ltd.,
8 Fountain Court,
Main Street,
Ufford,
Lincolnshire,
PE9 3BJ

The archive also consists of the following items:

- 1 scale drawing at 1:1250.
- 1 photographic list: 15 colour slides & 9 digital colour prints.

Lincoln City & County Museum Accession No.: 8.98
PISA project code: GLG98