

*A Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at West Bank,  
Crowland*

Planning Application No. H02/0129/99

By  
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For:  
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HOUSING & PLANNING  
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Ref: 0381/00

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Lincolnshire County Council  
Archaeology Section

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## 1.0 Summary

*Site name:* Westbank, Crowland.

*Client:* Mr K Steels, 64 North Street, Crowland.

*Client's plant contractor:*

*Archaeological Contractor:* Soke Archaeological Services Ltd.

*Archaeological Project Manager:* Dr Francis Pryor MBE MA PhD FSA MIFA

*Planning Application Number:* H02/0129/99

*National Grid Reference:* TF 234 107

*Planning Authority:* South Holland District Council

*Nature of Development:* Private residential building

Acc No?

Planning permission for the proposed development has been granted by South Holland District Council subject to the condition that an archaeological watching brief was carried out during ground works.

A borehole survey was commissioned prior to construction work in order to determine ground conditions and load bearing capacities. Piled foundations supporting reinforced concrete ring beams were used resulting in a minimal amount of disturbance on any possible archaeological deposits.

Intensive archaeological monitoring provided confirmation of the upper layers described in the borehole survey, as well as identifying both medieval and post-medieval occupation layers. Dating evidence was provided by a small pottery sherd, the only archaeological artefact of the project, suggesting that medieval settlement may have exceeded the area immediately surrounding Crowland Abbey.

## 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 Planning history and circumstances of the project

A planning application was made by Mr K Steels (application number H02/0129/99) for the development of a single storey residential building at West Bank, Crowland. Outline planning permission was granted by South Holland District Council subject to the condition that an archaeological watching brief was carried out during ground penetrating works.

### 2.2 The client

Mr K Steels, 64 North Street, Crowland, Peterborough, PE1 2XE.

### 2.3 *Archaeological staff*

Project Director: Dr Francis Pryor MBA MA PhD FSA MIFA  
Archaeological Supervisor: David Britchfield BA HNC OND  
Archaeological Assistant: Michael Bamforth

### 2.4 *Project dates*

18th November 1999 to 22nd November 1999.

### 2.5 *Design brief specification*

South Holland District Council, Housing and Planning Services Department (October 1999).

### 3.0 *Background*

Crowland is located approximately 12km South of Spalding in the administrative district of South Holland, Lincolnshire. The proposed development is situated to the west side of the medieval centre of the village and abbey, at NGR TF 234 107, on a gravel island in the fens of South Lincolnshire at an elevation of approximately 5m OD. Soils at the site are of the Ireton Association, with alluvium over glacio-fluvial deposits of marine/estuarine sand and gravel, or *Abbey gravel* (BGS, Sheet 158: 1984; & Hodge *et al* 1984, 229).

A borehole survey was carried out prior to construction (John Setchell [Consulting] Limited 1999). Due to the amount of brick rubble and fill present at the western end of the proposed development, it was only possible to take one sample to a depth of 3m. This revealed 300mm on topsoil overlying 600mm of dry, firm sandy clay. A similar material continues to a depth 1.6m, although this had a higher water content. Between the depths of 1.6m and 1.8m, a dark brown/black silty clay with organic content was encountered possibly representing a layer of prehistoric buried soil. From this level wet silty clay with an organic content continued down to Abbey gravel situated 2.9m beneath ground level. The water table was encountered at 2.8m (John Setchell [Consulting] Limited 1999).

Crowland is an area of considerable archaeological interest, although little modern systematic archaeological work has been carried out in the area. Several prehistoric burial mounds have been identified in the vicinity of the village, as well as Roman pottery, although there is no clear evidence for Roman settlement. Crowland came to prominence during the early medieval period. Crowland Abbey was founded in 716AD, by King Ethelbald, in honour of St. Guthlac. The medieval Benedictine Abbey, dedicated to St. Bartholomew, St. Guthlac and St. Mary was founded during the thirteenth century and was dissolved in 1539, although part of the building remains in use as the parish church. Medieval settlement is confined to the area immediately surrounding the abbey.

## **4.0    *The Archaeological Excavations***

### **4.1    *Aims and objectives***

The aims of the watching brief were to locate, record and interpret any archaeological features exposed during ground disturbance. In particular:

- i)        To determine the form and function of any archaeological features encountered.
- ii)       To determine the spatial arrangement of any archaeological features encountered.
- iii)      To recover dating evidence from any archaeological features.
- iv)      To establish the sequence of any archaeological remains.

### **4.2    *Project constraints***

There were no project constraints.

### **4.3    *Methodology***

Prior to any work being carried out at the site, a borehole survey was conducted in order to determine load bearing capacities for the foundation design. This survey provided a valuable insight into the stratigraphic soils matrix towards the eastern end of the site, which was subsequently confirmed during excavation.

The initial stage of development, the piling, started on the 11th November 1999. Due to the specific nature of the drilling, i.e. no spoil, it was not necessary to have an archaeologist present at this time. The excavations for the ring beams started on 18th November 1999 and were subject to intensive, intermittent archaeological monitoring.

A 0.5m toothed bucket was used to excavate the trenches starting in the south-eastern corner of the site. All stages of excavation were archaeologically monitored, with screening of the spoil carried out both within the dumper and on the spoil heap.

Due to the difference in levels between the western and eastern extents of the site, it became necessary for the groundworks contractors to strip of approximately 200-300mm of deposits from the western end. This provided an adequate opportunity for confirming the upper soil types, as well as the possibility of revealing any further inclusions (see Plate 2).

Profiles were trowel cleaned to establish the stratigraphic relationship between the soil types and subsequently recorded and photographed. Five profiles were recorded with profiles 1, 2, 3 and 5 orientated east/west along the length of the building, and profile 4 orientated north/south.

#### 4.4 Results

Levels of stratigraphy noticed during the previous borehole survey were readily identifiable i.e. 300mm on topsoil overlying 600mm of dry, firm sandy clay. The description of the Engineers' first two layers of deposits can therefore be attributed to the archaeological context numbers (001) and (002). The lowest of these two layers, (002), contained small inclusions of brick and root, as well as glass, slate and porcelain, suggesting at this point that little archaeology would be threatened by the development. The design of the foundations meant that the maximum desired depth need not have exceeded 800mm and therefore failed to reach the remaining deposits illustrated by the borehole survey. However, it may be assumed that the layer described as 'moist, medium, mottled dark brown, orange sandy clay' (John Setchell 1999), situated 1.6m - 1.8m below the ground, represents the prehistoric layer of buried soil indicative to this area of the fens. If this is indeed the case, then the impact on any potential archaeological remains is very low due to the depth of disturbance. According to the borehole survey, natural gravel is not encountered until a depth of 2.9m, approximately the same level as the water table.

Profile 1 (see figure 3, plate 3), the closest to the borehole, confirms the existence of the first two layers, (001) and (002). As one progresses further west, however, it is possible to recognise dramatic changes, mainly due to recent uses of this area of the site. The existence of a former truck park near to West Bank accounts for the increase in ground level due to the depositing of hardcore standing platforms and temporary access routes. Profiles 2 and 3 (see figure 3, plates 3 & 4) illustrate the extents of the modern deposits with (003), (004) and (005) partially responsible for the increase in ground levels. In a similar manner to (002), inclusions within the deposits, such as the glass and brick, confirmed the assumption that these deposits had been recently imported and therefore of little archaeological value.

The most westerly record of stratigraphy is visible from profile 4 (see figure 4, plate 4) which once again confirms that some sort of modern industrial/building activity occurred at the site. Layer (011) indicates the extent and thickness of the hardcore base, as well as providing further evidence for modern deposition with the presence of burnt/hardened plaster (007), crushed brick (010), porcelain and charcoal (008).

Profile 5 (see figure 4, plate 5), in the northern area of the site, provides the only evidence for ancient occupation, with a single piece of medieval pottery. Contemporary with a small, shallow pit, this artefact was the only substantial piece of pottery that could be lifted. Other traces within the deposit were far too fragile to move, and far too small to accurately record. Beneath this layer was a deposit of organic material (014) with inclusions of shell and charcoal, while above it was a layer of silty clay (013).

#### 4.4.1 Context numbers

Context number	Profile	Description	Munsell Colour
(001)	1/2/3/4	Topsoil with inclusions of root and small deposits of stone and brick.	2.5Y 2.5/1
(002)	1/2/3/4	Sandy clay with deposits of modern rubbish including: brick, glass, slate and porcelain. Also evidence of root intrusion.	2.5Y 4/3
(003)	2/3/4/5	Silty clay with modern elements of modern debris similar to (002). Flecks of yellow ochre also present.	IGley 4/10Y
(004)	3	Silty clay with inclusions of sand, root and sub-angular stone.	7.5YR 2.5/1
(005)	2	Clayey sand with inclusions of flint, brick, charcoal and glass.	2.5YR 3/3
(006)	4	'Topsoil' type material, possibly redeposited, with pea gravel inclusions.	2.5Y 2.5/1
(007)	4	Crumbly white/grey chalky deposit indicative of modern building refuse such as hardened, or burnt, plaster.	2 7/1
(008)	4	Silty clay with frequent inclusions of charcoal. Porcelain also deposited in this layer.	-
(009)	4	Sandy clay with pea gravel inclusions.	10YR 5/8
(010)	4	Small lens of crushed brick.	-
(011)	4/5	Sandy hardcore with sub-angular gravel, modern house bricks and flint inclusions.	-
(012)	4	Charcoal	-
(013)	5	Silty clay with small sub-angular flint inclusions. Also small traces of friable pot.	2(Gley) 6/1
(014)	5	Sandy clay layer similar to (002) although little evidence of root action. Small fragments of shell and charcoal visible.	2.5Y 3/2
(015)	5	Small layer of organic material with inclusions of charcoal and friable pottery, as well as a more substantial piece of pottery (small find 01) and root.	

#### 4.5 Finds

Although it was possible to detect the presence of pottery within layers (013), (014) and (015) (see figure 4, profile 5, plate 5), the majority of this was far too friable to either lift, or accurately record. However, one small piece of pottery was recovered within a shallow pit of organic material (015),

providing the only real evidence of ancient occupation in this area. The piece has been attributed to the medieval period (Francis Pryor *pers comm*), possibly contemporary with the medieval settlement associated with the Abbey.

Samples of bovine bone and teeth were also detected in the spoil heap during excavation. They would have originated from the northern most area of the site although it was unclear as to their context.

### **5.0 Confidence Rating**

Excavation was carried out in both bright and cloudy, cold conditions. Morale of all those involved was very high.

### **6.0 Discussion**

The primary purpose of the watching brief was to locate, record and interpret any archaeological features exposed during ground disturbance. However, due to the design of the piled foundations, it was not necessary to exceed a level of *c.*3.60 OD, therefore causing little disturbance to any possible archaeology.

As previously mentioned, it is possible that the prehistoric buried soil layer was identified during the borehole survey. Previous work in Crowland has indicated that the buried soil horizon lies at approximately 3.00m OD, with a depth of approximately 200mm (Britchfield & Redding 1999). Medieval settlement is clear within the Crowland area and there is little reason to believe that it did not extend out to the location of development. Layers (013), (014) and (015) seem to suggest domestic occupation. Shell inclusions within (013) and (014) possibly represent floodbank material caused by the seasonal inundation of the fens prior to drainage, while (015) is indicative of dryland practices.

In summary then, the development at West Bank, Crowland, provided very little impact on any possible underlying archaeology. The ringbeams, which provide the structural stability between the piles, do not exceed a depth of 3.60m OD thus bear down on modern soil deposits. Medieval layers were encountered although these were incredibly vague, providing the possibility that medieval settlement exceeded the immediate area surrounding the Abbey.

### **7.0 Archive**

The documentation, finds, photographs and other records and materials generated during this watching brief will be sorted and distributed to the City and County Museum, Lincoln, for long term storage and curation.

## 8.0 *Miscellaneous*

Due to a breakdown in communications between the client and archaeological contractor, the service trenches were not monitored. However, the main drain runs at the eastern end of the bungalow did not exceed the depth of the previously inspected ringbeam trenches. The main catchpit/inspection chamber did (at .1400mm below ground level), although this was positioned at the same point as the borehole.

## 9.0 *References*

Britchfield, D. and Redding, M. (1999) *A Report on Archaeological Excavations at Chuttons Close (Rear of 65 North Street), Crowland, Peterborough*. Soke Archaeological Services Ltd.

British Geological Survey. England and Wales, 1:50,000. Sheet 158. Solid and Drift Edition (1984)

Hodge, C.A.H., *et al* (1984) *Soils and their use in the Eastern England*. Soil Survey of England and Wales 13.

John Setchell (Consulting) Limited (1998) *Borehole Report on Proposed Dwelling at West Bank, Crowland*. (07/10/1998)

South Holland District Council (1998). *Archaeologists Watching Brief at West Bank, Crowland, Peterborough*. (Condition 4 of H02/0129/99)

**10.0 Appendix. A - Illustrations**

Figure 1 Site location plan

Figure 2 Plan of Site

Figure 3 Profiles 1-3

Figure 4 Profiles 4 & 5

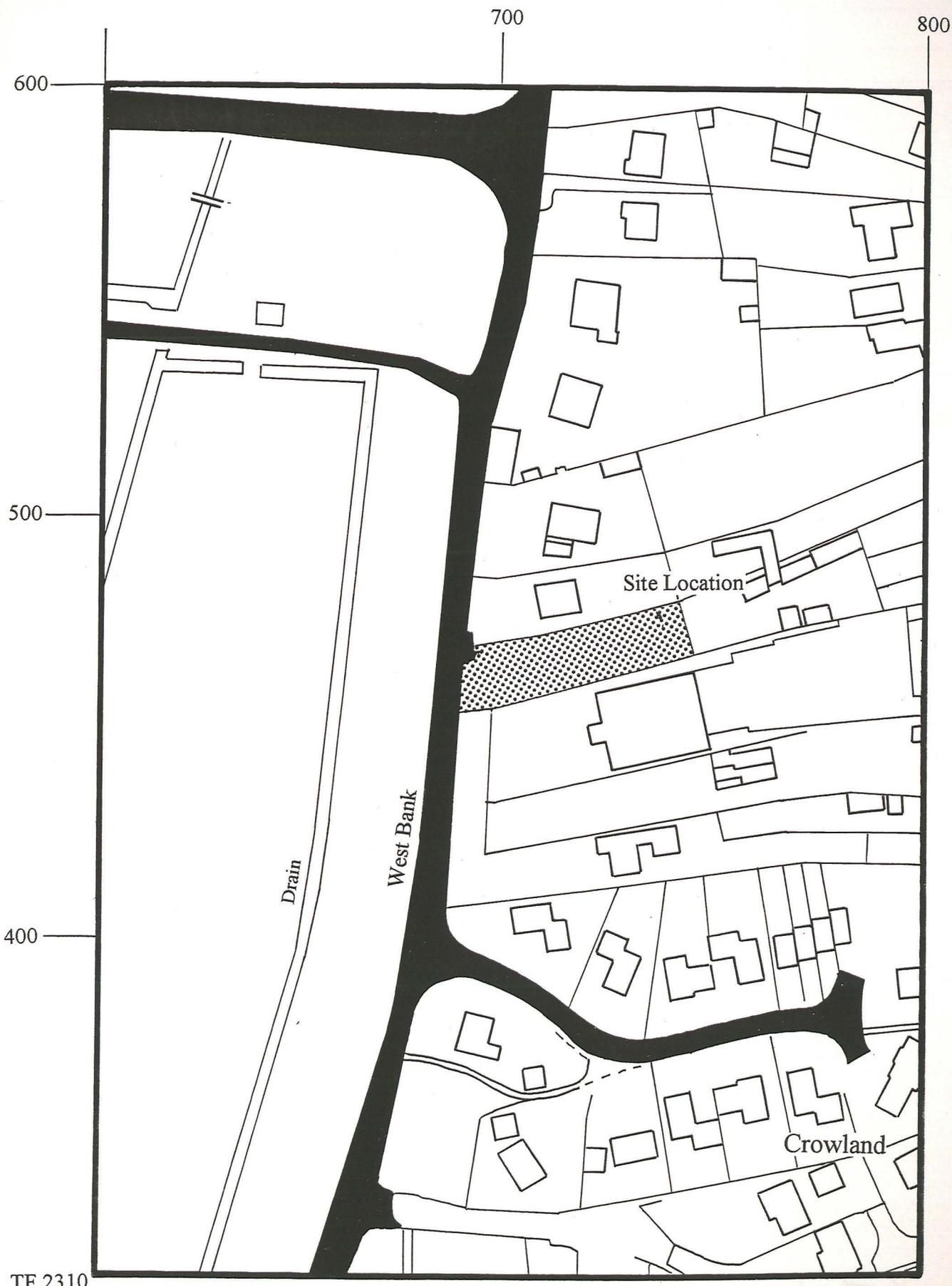


Figure 1 - Site Location Plan

West Bank

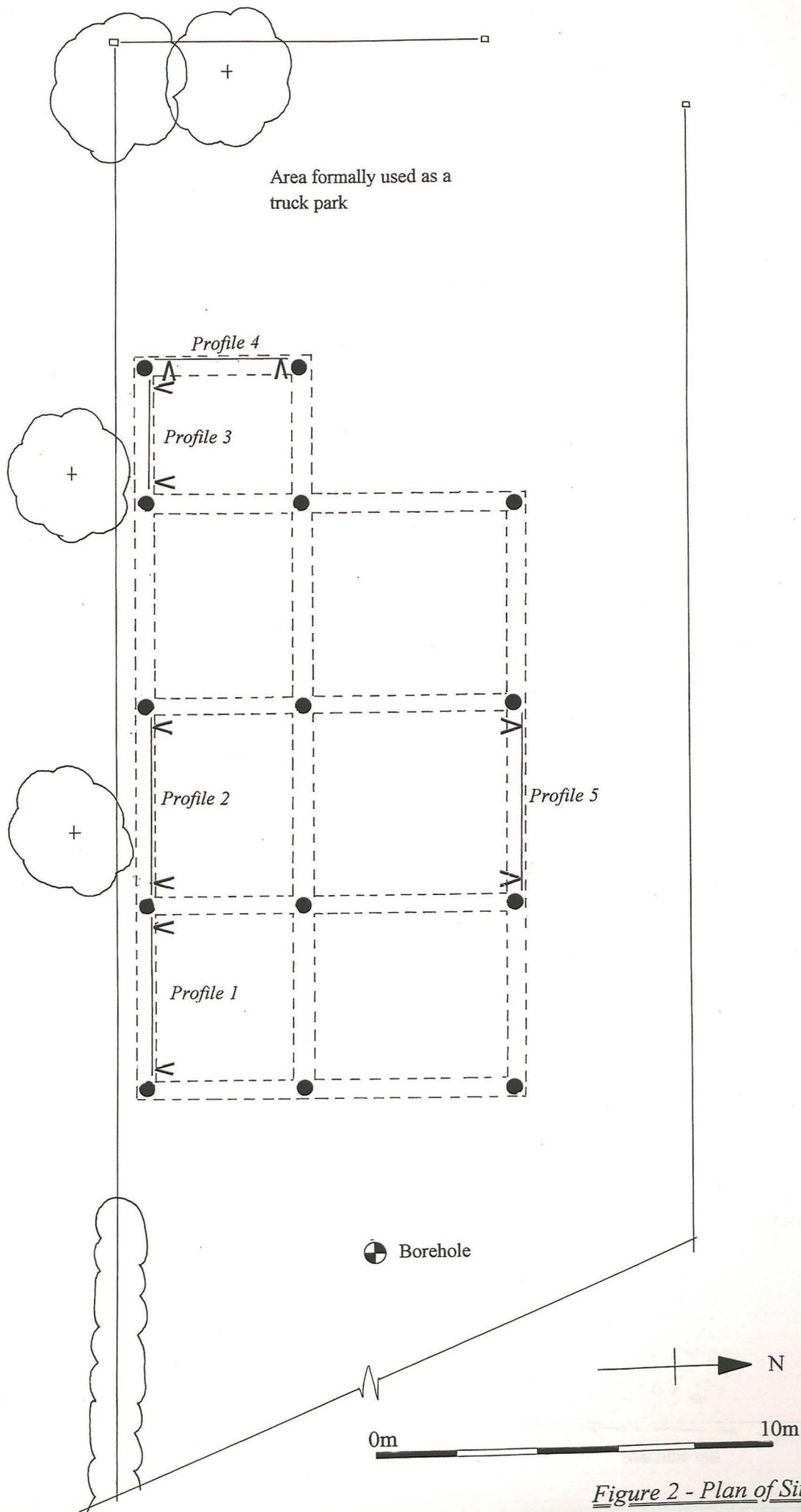
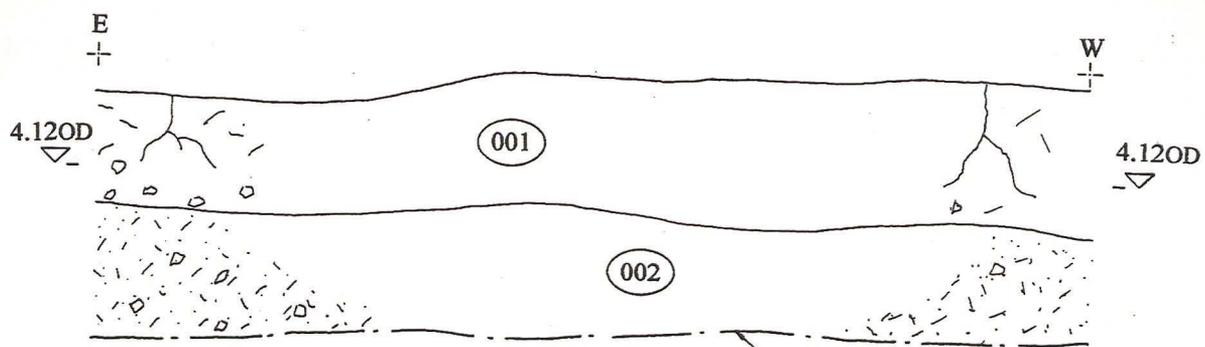
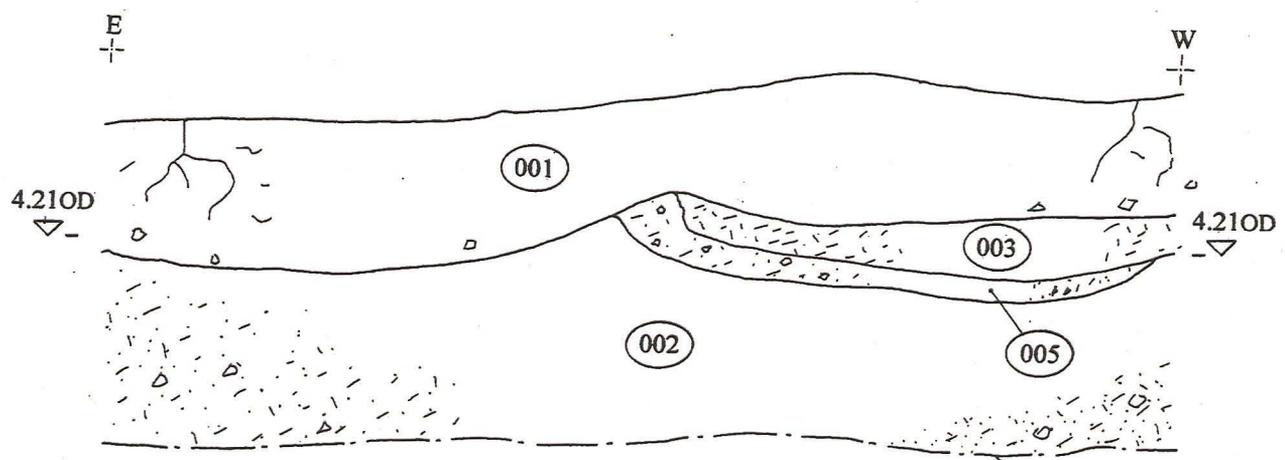


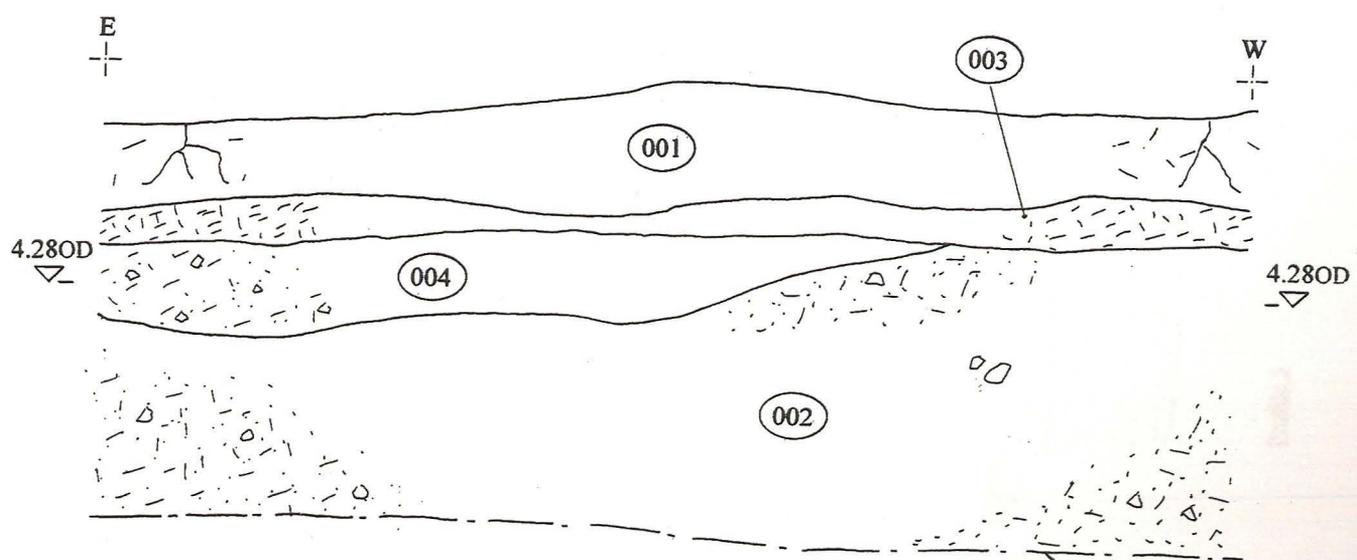
Figure 2 - Plan of Site



**Profile 1**



**Profile 2**



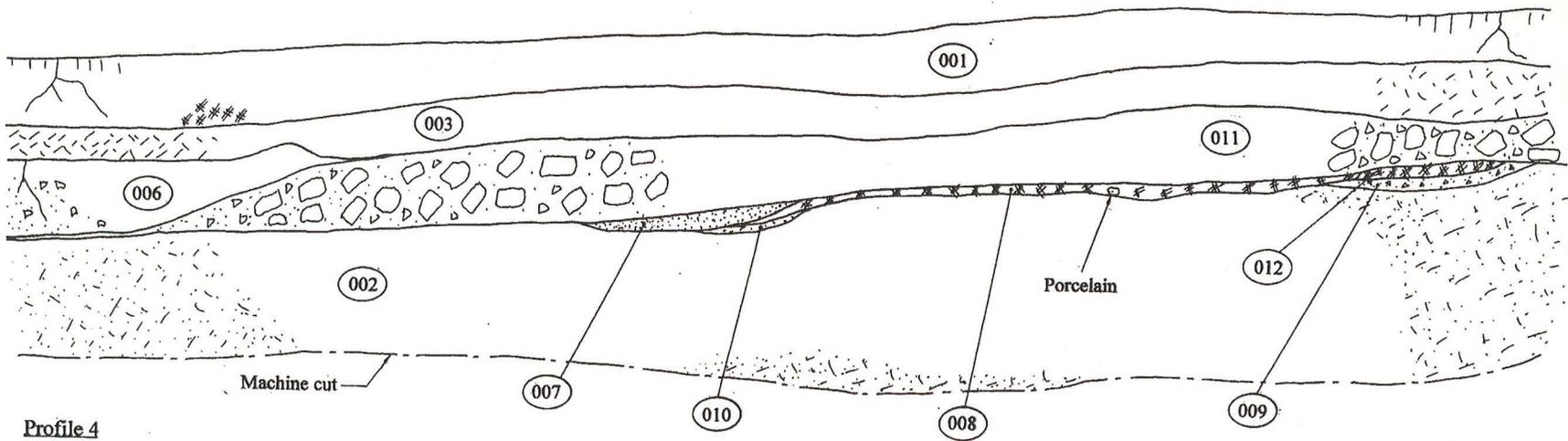
**Profile 3**



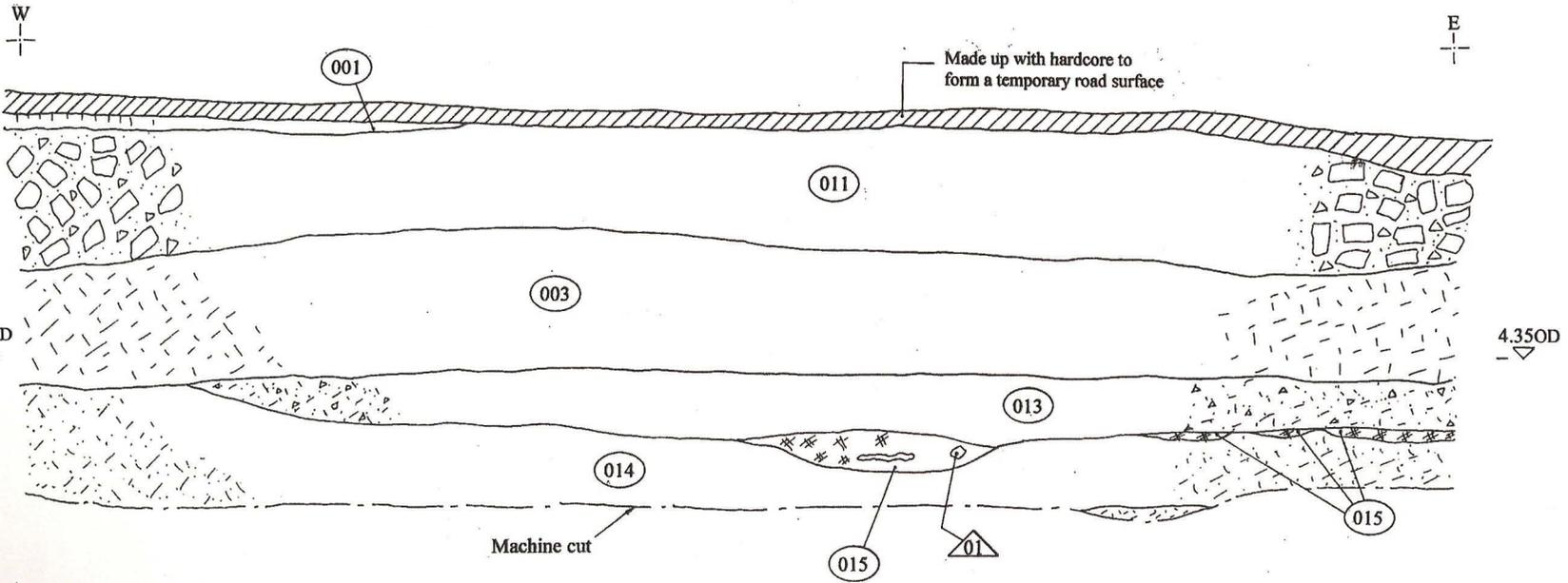
**Figure 3 - Profiles 1-3**

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N  
5.060D



Profile 4



Profile 5

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Figure 4 - Profiles 4 & 5

*11.0 Appendix. B - Photographs*

Plate 1 View of the site looking towards the east.

Plate 2 Working shot at the western extent of the development.

Plate 3 Profiles 1 & 2

Plate 4 Profiles 3 & 4

Plate 5 Profile 5.



Note: It is possible to just notice the difference in ground levels between the western end, where the photographer is standing, and the eastern end. This higher ground was the former position of the hardcore stand.

*Plate 1. View of the site looking towards the east*



Note: Due to the increased height of ground level at the western end of the site, it was necessary to strip of approximately 200-300mm of deposits (see section 4.3).

*Plate 2. Working shot at the western extent of the development.*



Profile 1



Profile 2.



Profile 3.



Profile 4.

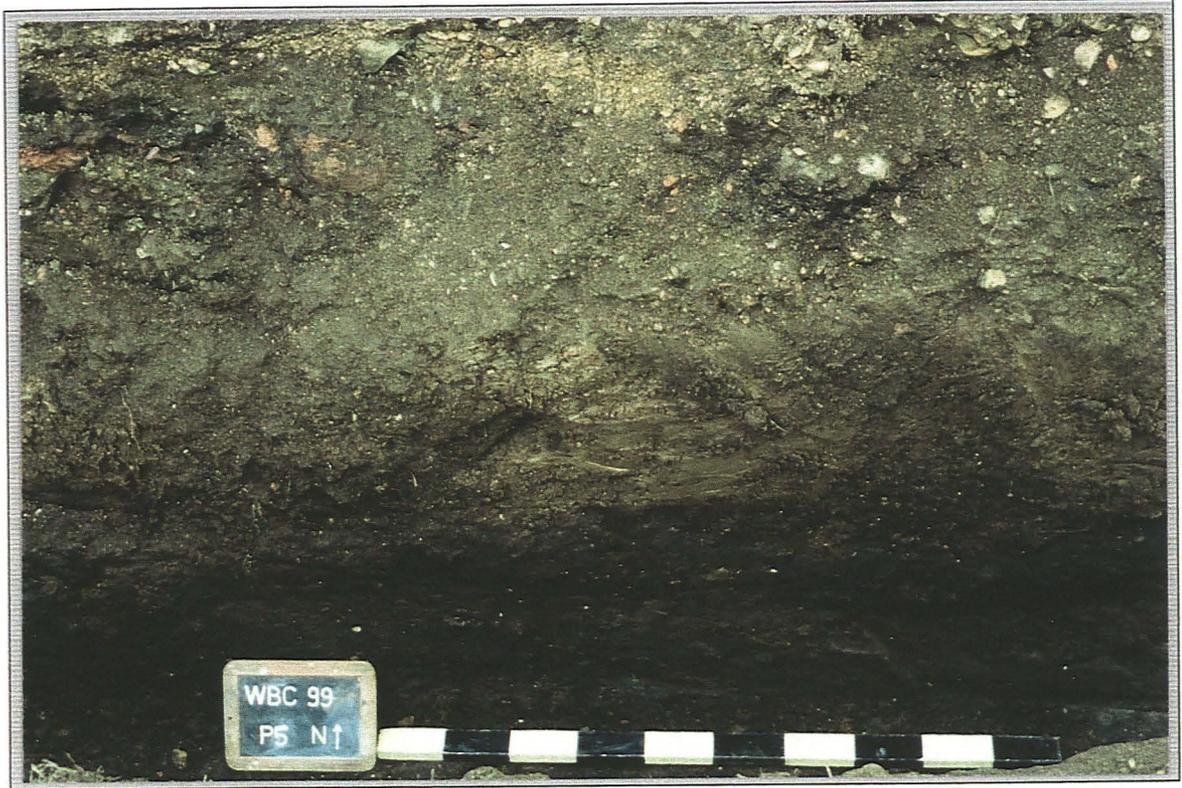


Plate 5. Profile 5