

PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

L I N C O L N

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION REPORT;
CHURCH ROAD,
BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE**

NGR: TF 3360 4360
SITE CODE: CRB02
LCNCC ACC. NO: 2002.9



Event W2796
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13601

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appl 8/01/0673/Full

Report prepared for
John Merrett Architects
by Chris Clay
February 2002

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Summary

- *An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken for John Merrett Architects in advance of residential development on land east of Church Road, Boston, Lincolnshire.*
- *Previous fieldwork in the area revealed Romano-British pottery scatters, as well as two Middle Saxon Grubenhauser, and a series of undated ditches and palaeochannels.*
- *A programme of trial excavation exposed a single east-west ditch or palaeochannel, and a series of deposits representing natural accumulation of fenland silts and evidence of periodic episodes of flooding.*

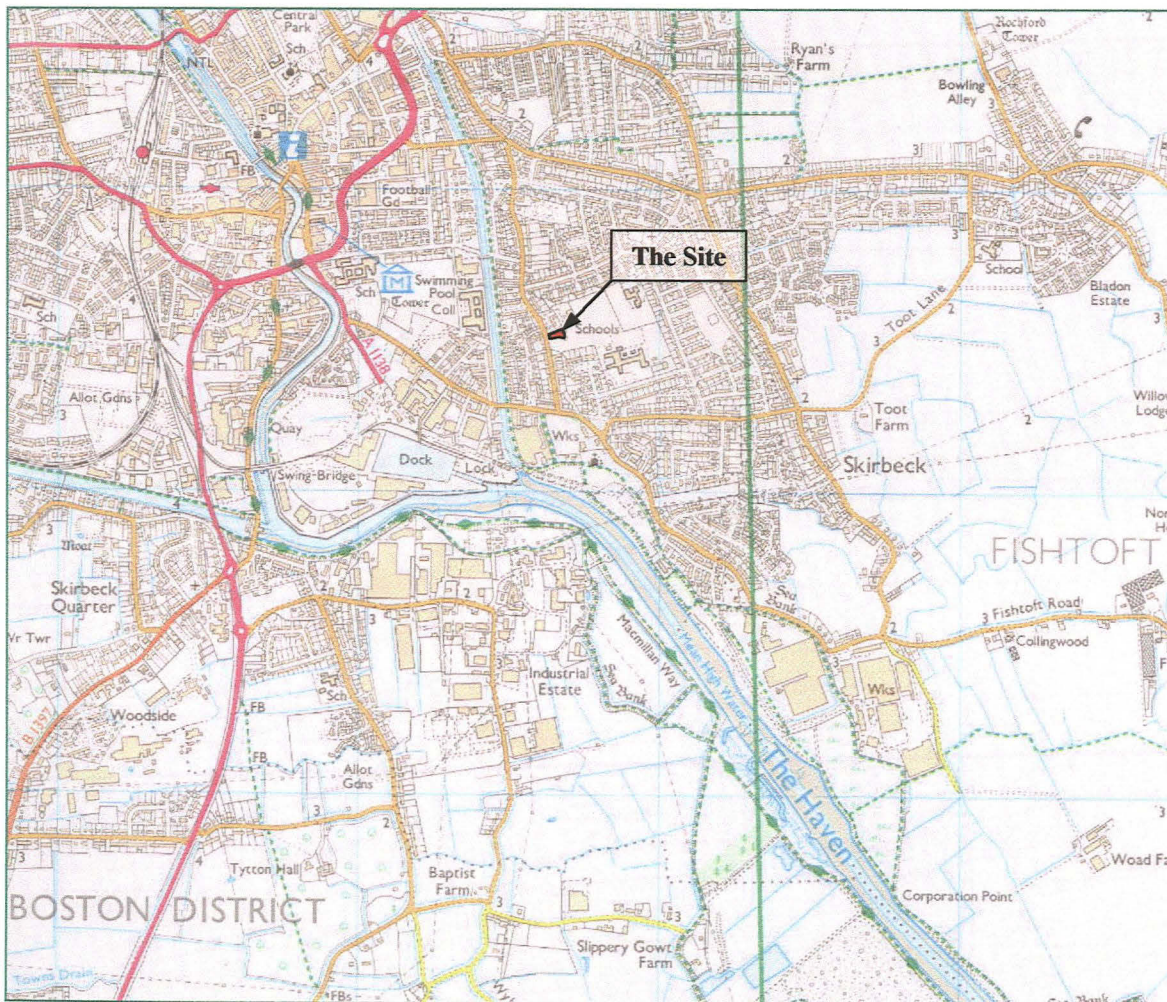


Fig.1: General site location (scale 1:25,000)
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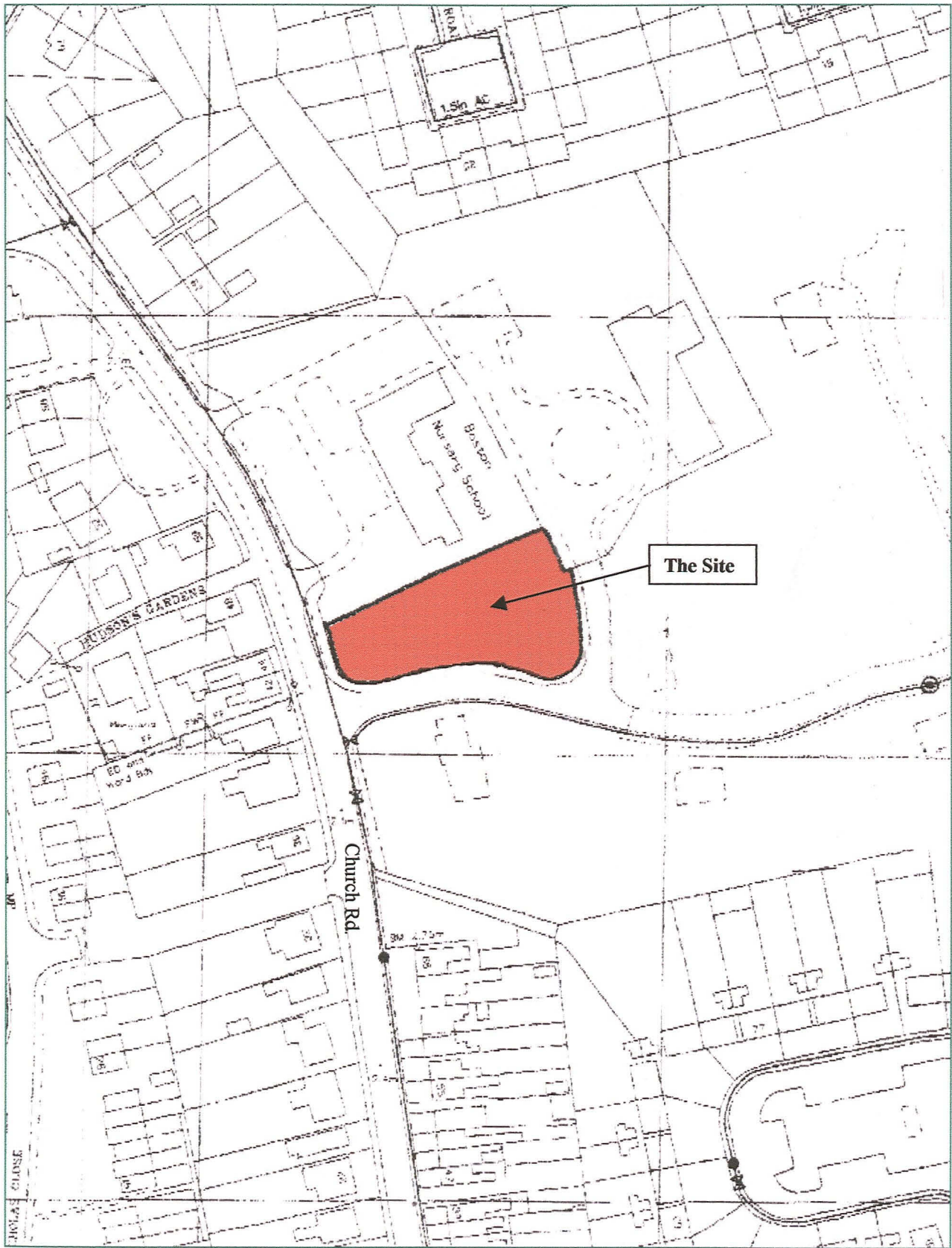


Fig.2: General site location (scale 1:1000)

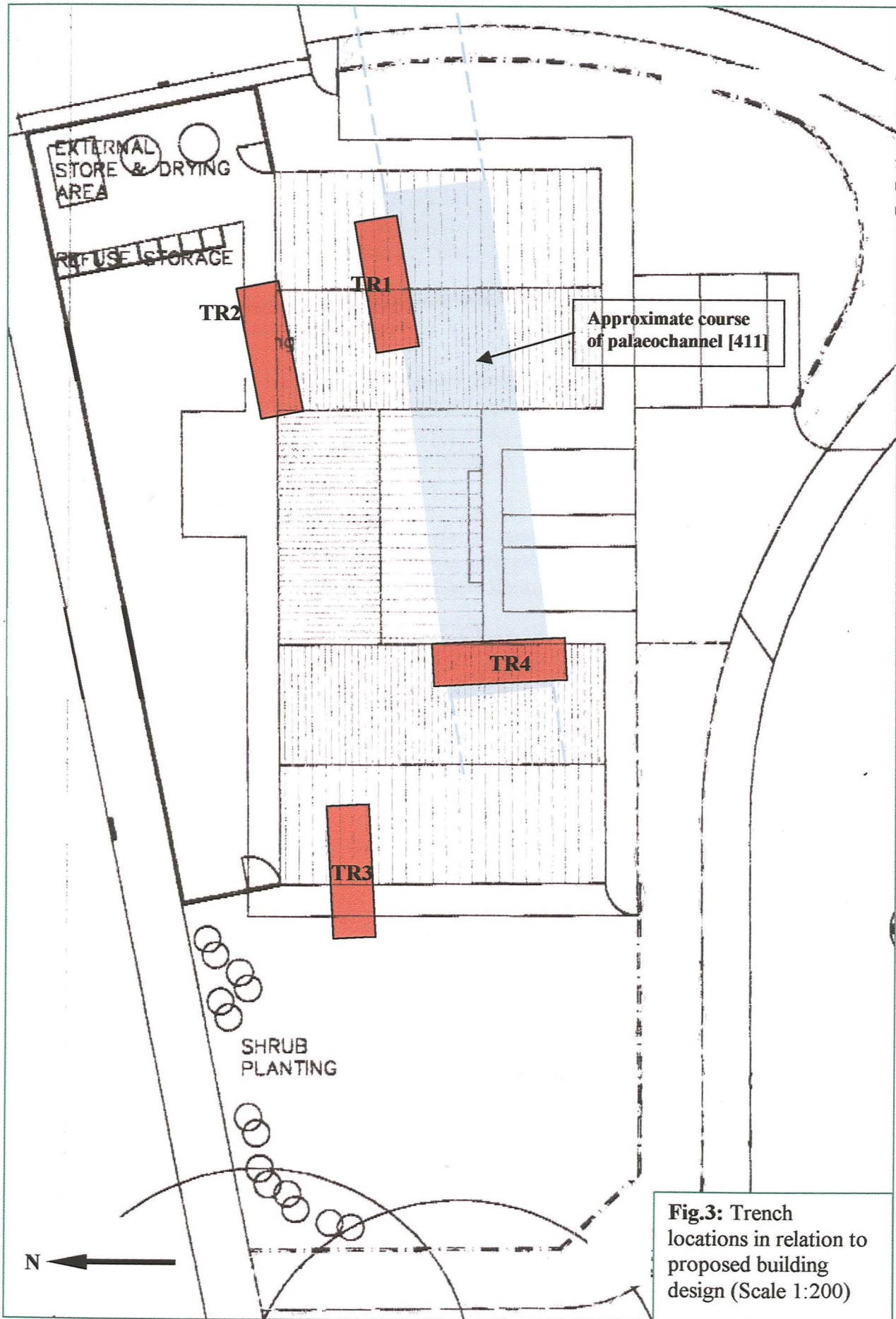


Fig.3: Trench locations in relation to proposed building design (Scale 1:200)

1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) were commissioned by John Merrett Architects (on behalf of Advance Housing and Support Ltd.) to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation in advance of residential development on land east of Church Road, Boston, Lincolnshire.

This report details the results of the fieldwork. It is written to conform to national and local guidelines as set out in the Lincolnshire County Council document *Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook: A Manual of Archaeological Practice* (LCC, 1998).

2.0 Site location and description

Boston is situated in the south Lincolnshire Fens, approximately 45km south-east of Lincoln. The site is to the south-east side of the town in the parish of Skirbeck, and consists of a sub-rectangular area of land, measuring approximately 1200m², on the east side of Church Road. It centres on NGR TF 3360 4360, and lies at a height of approximately 3m above Ordnance Datum.

A turf bank runs along the edge of the site, to approximately 1m above the adjacent access road. The interior of the site is also substantially higher than the surrounding land, suggesting that soil has been dumped here during recent building work.

The local drift geology consists of Barroway Drove Beds; older marine and saltmarsh deposits of silty clay, believed to have been deposited during the Neolithic period. The solid geology is represented by Jurassic clays of the Ancholme Group (British Geological Survey, 1995).

3.0 Planning background

Planning permission is sought for the erection of a two storey block of eight flats (planning ref B/01/0673/FULL). Prior to the determination of this application, the Boston Community Archaeologist has requested further information; in the form of an archaeological field evaluation that will establish the presence or absence, and significance of archaeological remains, which may be vulnerable to the development proposal. The results of this evaluation may form the basis of a subsequent mitigation strategy that will seek to address the archaeological interest, and the interests of the developer. This approach is consistent with the recommendations of *Archaeology and Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16)*, 1990.

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

Evidence for prehistoric settlement in Boston is limited to isolated finds: it is possible that early settlement activity has been masked and punctuated by periods of flooding and alluvial deposition. The record for the Romano-British period is equally sparse, although Romano-British pottery sherds were recovered in 1960, during the construction of St. Nicholas School, approximately 200m east of the current site

(Palmer-Brown, 1995a), and in 1970 during the construction of Woad Farm School (APS, 1996).

An extended watching brief and excavation during construction of a new school building and associated infrastructure revealed a series of undated linear ditches, palaeochannels, and two Saxon *Grubenhauser*, indicating localised settlement activity in the 8th century AD (Palmer-Brown, 1995a). The nearest of these was located approximately 30m north-east of the current site. A more substantial Saxon settlement of the 9th to 11th centuries was excavated at Whitehouse Lane, Fishtoft, c.1.5km to the south-east (Palmer-Brown, 1995b).

The above suggests that the focus for the later Saxon period settlement of Boston had its epicentre in the Fishtoft/Skirbeck area. Indeed, the Domesday Book does not have an entry for Boston itself. Much of the land in Fishtoft and Skirbeck formed jurisdictions of an estate of Count Alan, which was centred at Drayton. Land was also owned by Guy of Craon and Eudo son of Spirewic (Morgan & Thorne, 1986).

Boston emerged as a major port in the mid 11th century; its position on the Witham allowed imports to easily access to the large markets provided by the population of Lincoln, and an outlet for the export of locally produced salt, wool and corn (Owen, 1984).

The expanding wool trade led Boston to become second only to London as a commercial port, with the Wool Staple being moved from Lincoln to Boston in 1369. However, this prosperity was not to last, and by the early fifteenth century, the decline of the wool trade and the silting up of the river led to a slow decline in Boston's prosperity (Pevsner & Harris, 1989).

5.0 Methodology

The Boston Community Archaeologist required the excavation of four evaluation trenches, each 5m long. This was carried out using a JCB fitted with a 1.6m wide smooth ditching blade. Topsoil and subsoil layers were removed in spits not exceeding 0.2m in depth. Where archaeological deposits were encountered, all further excavation was by hand.

Archaeological features were sample excavated to establish depth, profile, and, where possible date and function. All features were recorded in plan and in section at 1:20, and written accounts were prepared on pro forma context record sheets. A colour photographic record was maintained, and some prints are reproduced in this report (Appendix 12.1).

The fieldwork was carried out by a team of three archaeologists, supervised by the author, and took place over three days; January 22nd, 23rd and 24th, 2002.

6.0 Results

6.1 Trench 1 (fig.4)

The uppermost deposit in this trench was a topsoil layer, (100), approximately 0.25m deep. This sealed a 0.4m deep mixed deposit, (101), consisting largely of a compact mid brown clay, with frequent lenses of grey clay, sand and gravel, as well as fragments of brick, and occasional charcoal flecks. This was interpreted as a modern dump of redeposited material. Beneath this were three further, distinct layers of redeposited material; a brown silty clay, (102), and a darker brownish grey silty clay, (103), both of which contained fragments of brick and small amounts of sand and gravel. The third of these layers, (104) was sealed beneath (102) and (103). It consisted of a dark grey silty clay, upto 0.4m deep, with frequent inclusions of ceramic building material, gravel, charcoal flecks and grey clay. The interface between (104) and the underlying layers, (105) and (106), was a very clear distinct edge, suggesting that there had been a phase of topsoil stripping/ground levelling prior to the deposition of (104) and the overlying layers.

Directly below (104) was (106), a mid brown silty clay, approximately 0.25m deep, exhibiting some dark brown staining indicative of root disturbance, which suggests that this deposit is a former ground surface. This deposit contained a series of discrete 'blobs' of dark grey silty clay, (105). A slot excavated at the western end of the trench showed these two deposits to be sloping gently to the south. The relationship of these deposits is uncertain: (106) is indicative of a naturally accumulated deposit, and it is possible that the colour differences have been caused by differential oxidisation, (106) having formed in an oxidised atmosphere, and (105) in a reduced atmosphere.

Another possibility for the formation of these deposits is that (105) is the remainder of a truncated flood deposit removed by ground levelling (as suggested above). The surviving 'blobs' of material may be due to seepage through cracks in deposit (106), which had formed as it oxidised and dried out during its time as a former ground surface.

Beneath (105/106) were a series of natural alluvial deposits. A slot excavated through these showed them to be sloping gently downwards towards the south, following the profile of (105) and (106) above. These deposits consisted of two layers of mid brown silty clay, (106) and (108), separated by a thin band of light grey clay, (107). To the north, this was mixed with small amounts of mid brown silty clay, becoming a blueish grey clay as it sloped to the south.

6.2 Trench 2 (fig.5)

The trench was sealed by a dark brown/grey topsoil deposit, (200), which varied in depth from 0.3 to 0.7m, and contained fragments of modern ceramic building material and lenses of sand, gravel and clay.

At the eastern end of the trench were two further redeposited layers, consisting of a thin layer of brownish red sand and gravel, (207), and a dark brownish grey silty clay, (208), which contained small sub rounded gravels and occasional brick fragments.

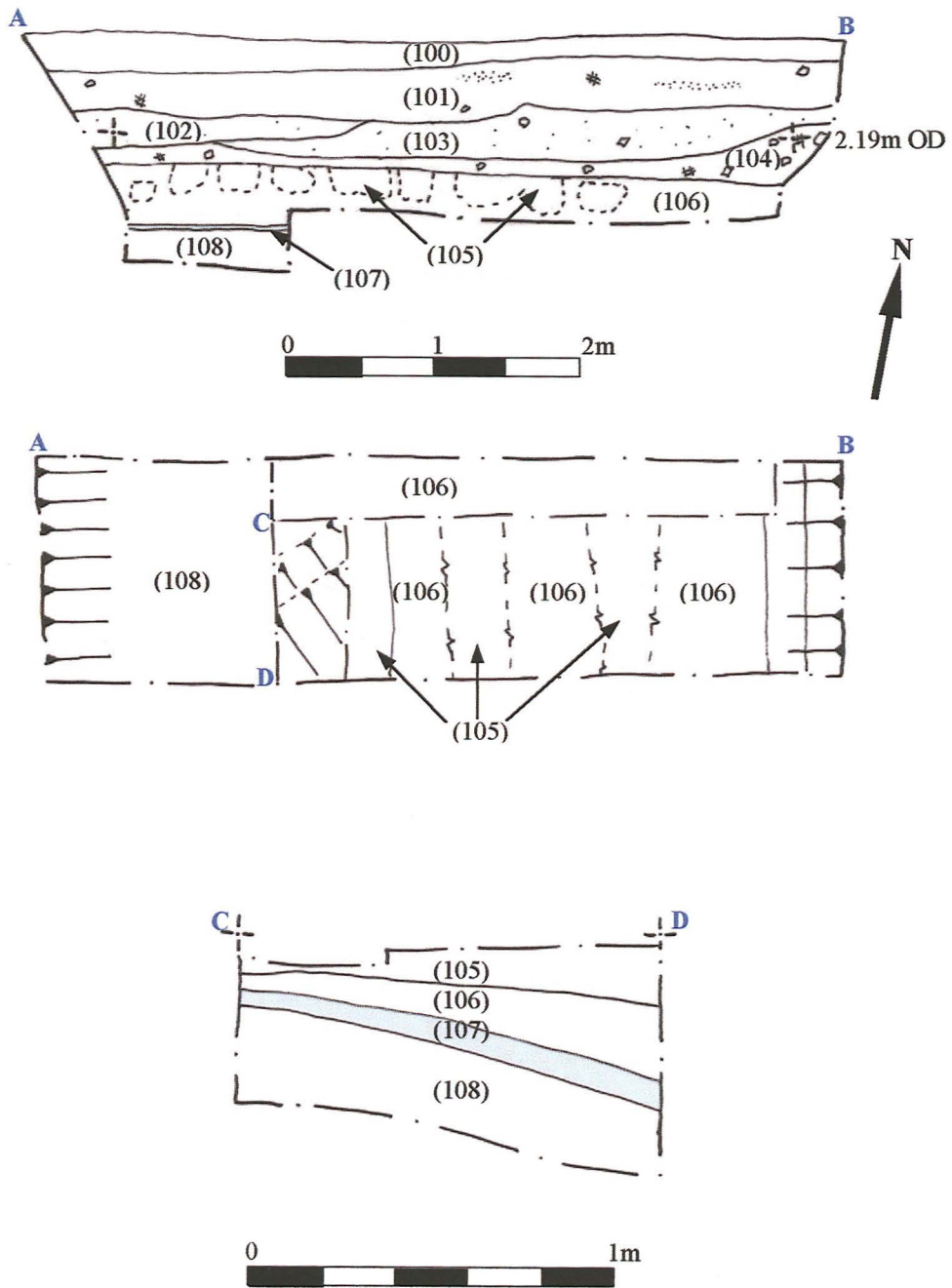


Fig.4: Trench 1 plan and section (scales 1:50 and 1:20)

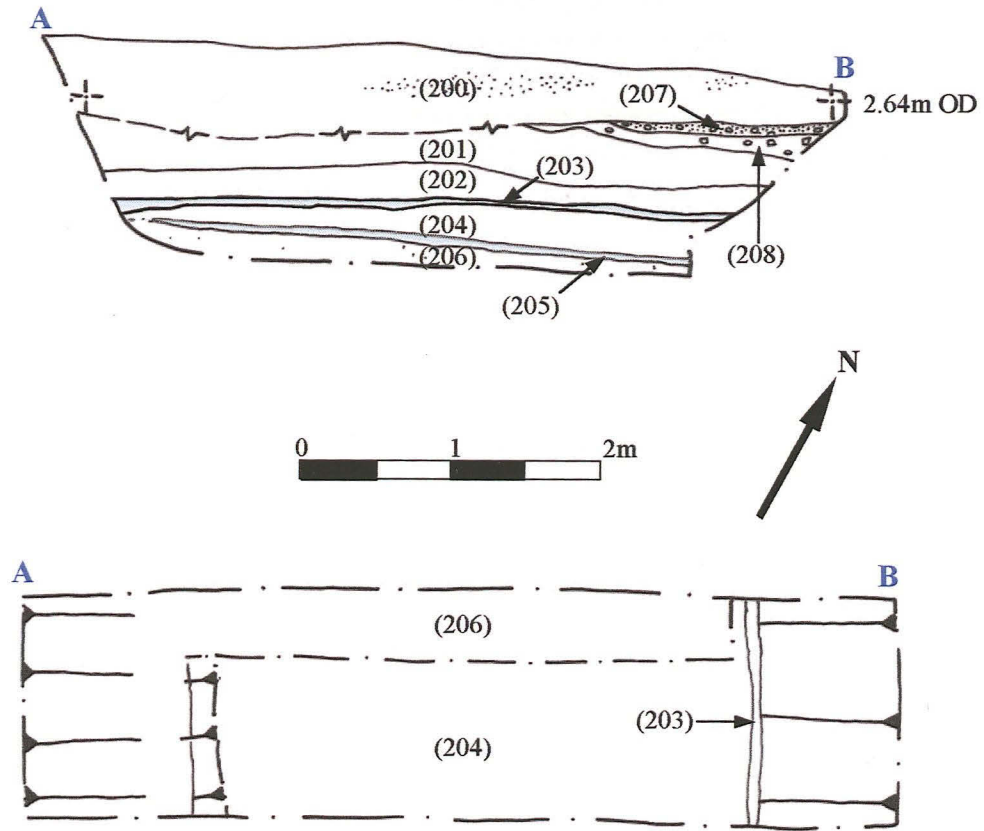


Fig.5: Trench 2 plan and section (scale 1:50)

A subsoil deposit, (201) was exposed beneath (200), being a mid brown silty clay, with considerable root disturbance causing an indistinct horizon with (200). This sealed a series of deposits, representing alluvial deposition. The uppermost of these was (202), a mixed deposit of orange/brown and light grey clay. This was followed by a 0.06m deep light blueish grey clay, (203), a mixed deposit of orange/brown and light grey slightly silty clay, (204) (which was very similar to (202)), a very thin band of light grey clay, (205), and a light brown silty clay, (206), which incorporated very occasional small gravel inclusions.

6.3 Trench 3 (fig.6)

The stratigraphy in this trench was similar to that in Trenches 1 and 2. The upper deposits consisted of a 0.25m deep topsoil layer, (300), sealing (301), a redeposited layer of brown/grey silty clay, containing fragments of brick, slate and modern wood. This sealed a second, similar, layer of dark grey silty clay, (302), which also contained fragments of modern building material.

Beneath (302) was a series of natural alluvial deposits, (304-308), representing the same stratigraphic sequence that was exposed in Trench 2; alternate layers of brown silty clays and thin blueish grey clays. A slot excavated through the base of the trench exposed a further layer of orange/brown clay, (309).

6.4 Trench 4 (fig.7)

As with the other trenches, Trench 4 was sealed by a topsoil deposit, (400), overlying a 0.5m deep layer of (redeposited) mid brown clay, (401), with frequent inclusions of sand and gravel, and a dark grey silty clay, (402), with occasional flecks of charcoal and brick fragments.

Beneath (402) was an orange/brown silty clay, (403), 0.5m deep, indicative of alluvial deposition. This sealed a substantial linear feature, [411]. It was approximately 4m wide, although the southern edge was beyond the limit of the trench. This feature contained six distinct fills, (404-409), none of which produced artefacts.

The most recent fill, (404) was a mid brown silty clay, 0.35m deep. Beneath this was (405), a band of pale grey clay, no more than 0.1m deep, followed by two bands of orange-grey silty clay (406), and brown clay, (407). (407) sealed a substantial deposit of blueish grey clay, (408). This was not fully excavated, due to flooding of the trench, but had a minimum depth of 0.4m. It overlay a mid brown compact clay, (409).

Feature [411] was cut through a mixed deposit of brown and brownish grey silty clay, (410).

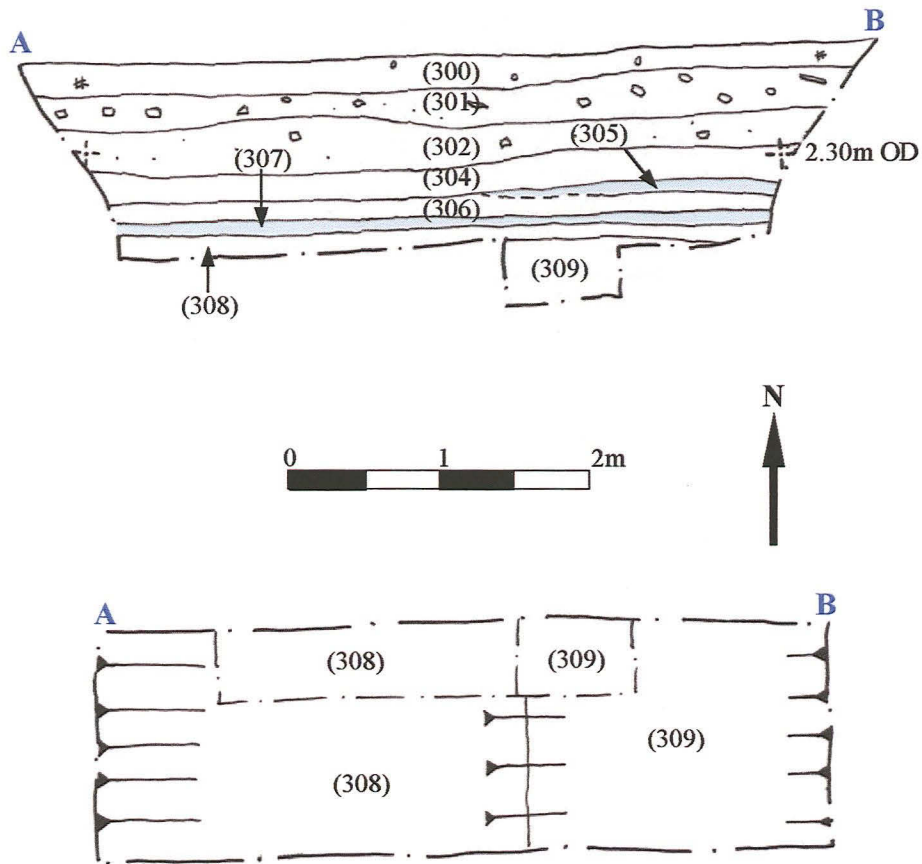


Fig.6: Trench 3 plan and section (scale 1:50)

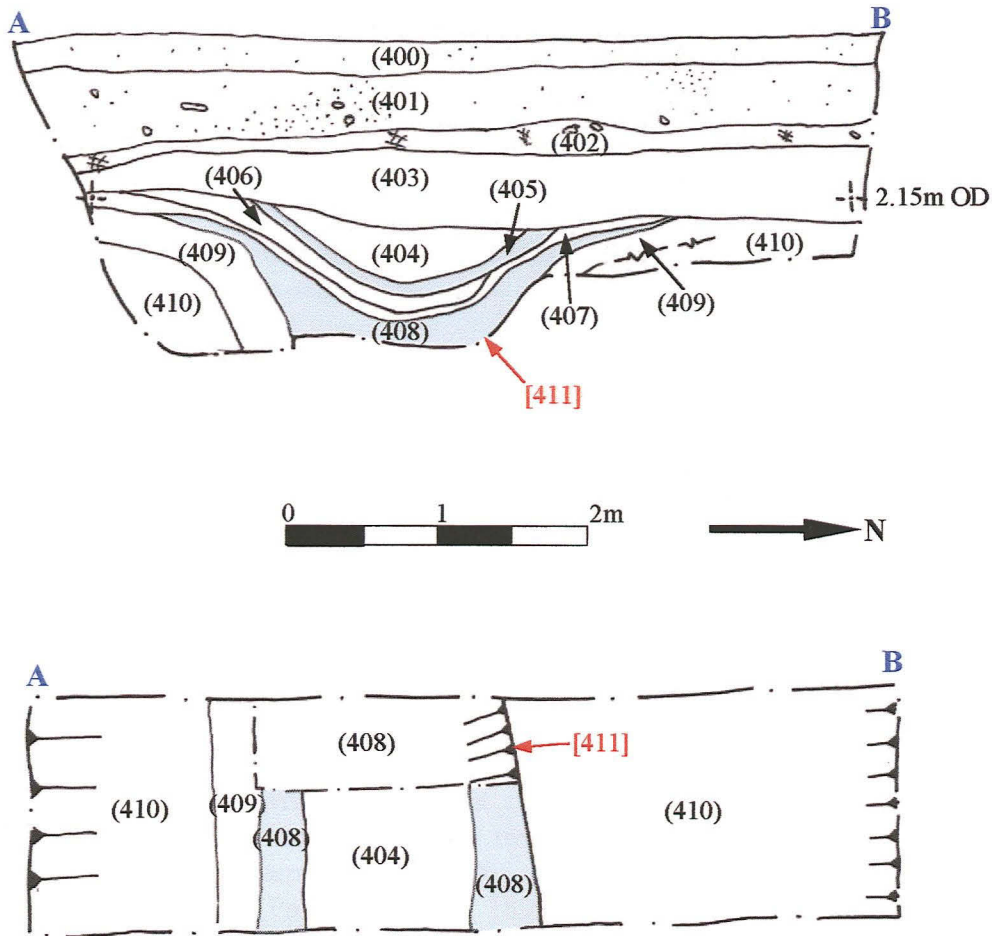


Fig.7: Trench 4 plan and section (scale 1:50)

7.0 Discussion and conclusion

Each of the four trenches exposed a similar stratigraphic sequence. The upper deposits were indicative of considerable ground disturbance, associated with the building activity which has taken place in the vicinity in recent years.

Beneath these modern layers, each trench exposed a stratigraphic sequence that is typical of this fenland environment; natural accumulations of alluvial silt and clay, interspersed with clearly defined dense clay deposits associated with flooding events.

The only significant feature exposed was the linear feature [411] excavated in Trench 4. The steep sides of feature suggest that it is an artificial drainage ditch. However, given the complete absence of associated finds, the possibility cannot be discounted that this is a natural palaeochannel.

Within [411], the grey clay deposit (408), consisted of very fine clay sediment, which would imply very slow moving or still water, and is likely to represent the residue left behind by an extended period of flooding; evidence for which is apparent within all four trenches.

In Trench 1, this flooding event can be associated with the blueish grey clay deposit (107), which slopes gently downwards to the south, mimicking the form of deposit (408) in Trench 4. This suggests that the ditch/palaeochannel [411] runs just beyond the southern limits of Trench 1. Following the alignment of this feature eastwards it is suggested that it is related to ditch [10], exposed in a manhole trench during a 1995 watching brief (Palmer-Brown, 1995a). This flooding event can also be related to deposits (205) and (307) in Trenches 2 and 3 respectively. Furthermore, the watching brief and excavation work carried out in 1995 recorded a ubiquitous blue/grey clay layer, (03), 0.1m deep (Palmer-Brown, 1995a), which can, with reasonable confidence, be related to the flood deposit exposed in this phase of work.

A more recent flooding event was also exposed. In all four trenches, the earlier flood layer suggested by deposits (107), (205), (307), (408), was sealed by a series of mid brown slightly silty clays; (106), (204), (306), (407). Overlying this in Trenches 2, 3 and 4 was a much thinner and paler deposit of grey clay (contexts (203), (305), (406)), indicative of a more localised inundation. It is possible that (105) in Trench 1 also relates to this phase of flooding.

8.0 Effectiveness of methodology

The methodology was for the most part, appropriate to the development. It allowed a rapid assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. A more detailed level of archaeological intervention was not necessary, as suggested by the limited archaeological significance of the deposits encountered. However, given that part of the archaeological requirement was to determine the presence or absence of further *Grubenhauser* within the footprint of the building, a more extensive trenching scheme may have been appropriate.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) would like to thank John Merrett Architects for this commission. Thanks also go to the excavation staff, Pete Barnes and Dave Bower.

10.0 References

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11.0 Site archive

The documentary archive for the site is currently in the possession of Pre-Construct Archaeology. This will be deposited at Lincoln City and County Museum within six months. Access to the archive may be gained by quoting the global accession number 2002.9.

APPENDIX 1: Colour plates



Plate 1: General view of the site, looking east-north-east

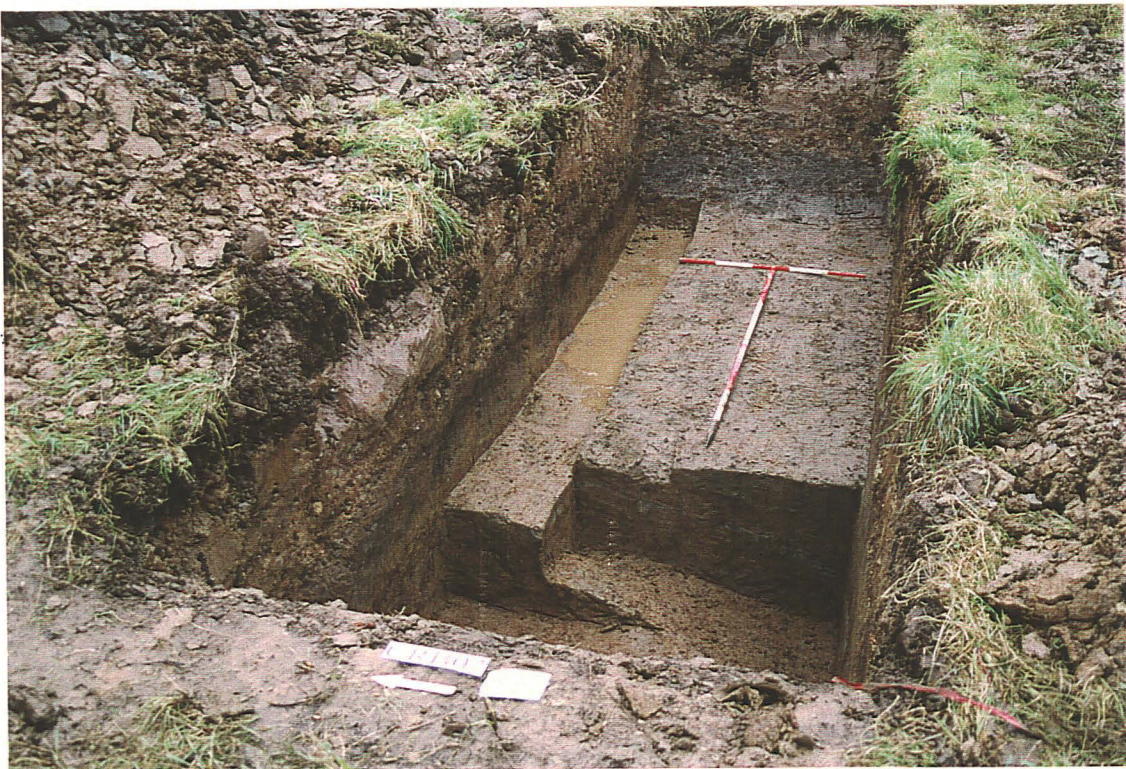


Plate 2: Trench 1, post excavation, looking east



Plate 3: Alluvial deposit 107, Trench 1, looking south-east



Plate 4: Trench 2, post excavation, looking east



Plate 5: Trench 3, post excavation, looking west



Plate 6: Trench 4, post excavation, looking north

APPENDIX 2: List of archaeological contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Trench 1		
100	Layer	Topsoil
101	Layer	Redeposited clay layer
102	Layer	Dump of redeposited material
103	Layer	Dump of redeposited material
104	Layer	Dump of redeposited material
105	Layer	Truncated flood deposit (?)
106	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
107	Layer	Flood deposit
108	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
Trench 2		
200	Layer	Topsoil
201	Layer	Subsoil
202	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
203	Layer	Flood deposit
204	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
205	Layer	Flood deposit
206	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
207	Layer	Dump of building material
208	Layer	Dump of building material
Trench 3		
300	Layer	Topsoil
301	Layer	Dump of building material
302	Layer	Dump of building material
303	Layer	Void
304	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
305	Layer	Flood deposit
306	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
307	Layer	Flood deposit
308	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
309	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition
Trench 4		
400	Layer	Topsoil
401	Layer	Redeposited clay
402	Layer	Dump of building material
403	Layer	Natural alluvial deposition/subsoil
404	Fill	Natural alluvial deposition, fill of [411]
405	Fill	Flood deposit, fill of [411]
406	Fill	Natural alluvial deposition, fill of [411]
407	Fill	Natural alluvial deposition, fill of [411]
408	Fill	Flood deposit, fill of [411]
409	Fill	Natural alluvial deposition, fill of [411]
410	Fill	Natural alluvial deposition, fill of [411]
411	Cut	Cut of ditch/palaeochannel