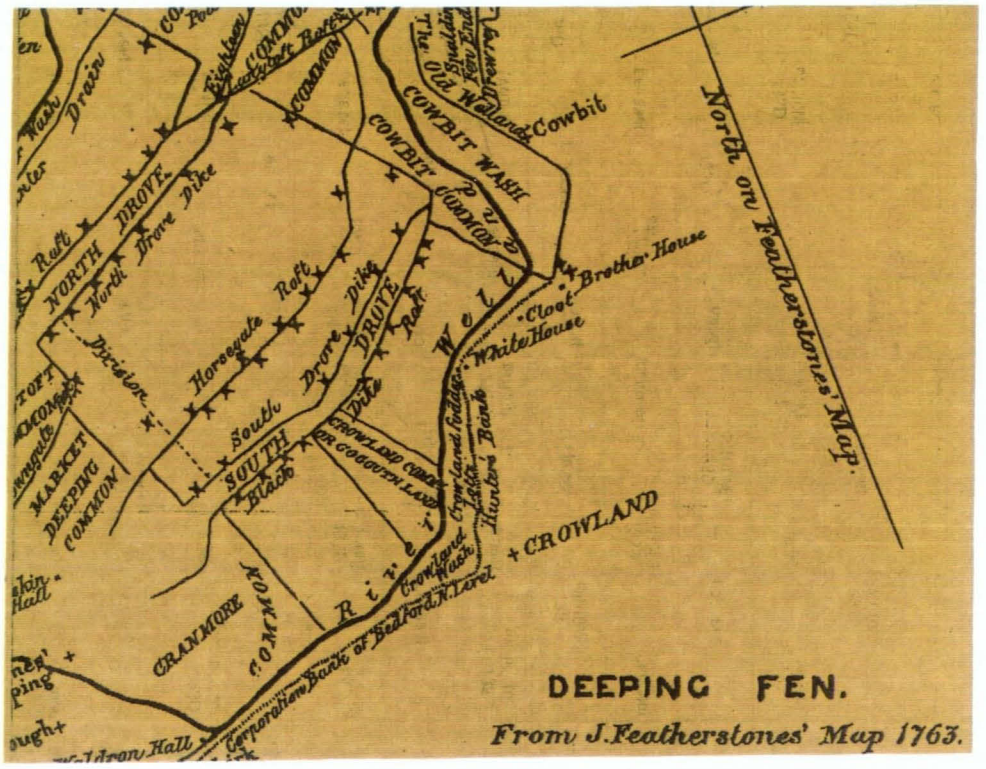
LITTLEWORTH DRIVE, DEEPING ST NICHOLAS

LINCOLNSHIRE



AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT
BY
PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

Littleworth Drive, Deeping St Nicholas, Lincolnshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief Report

for

Anglian Water Services Ltd.

by

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Site Code: DNLD94
CCM Accession Number: 124.94

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1. SUMMARY

An intermittent archaeological watching brief was maintained during the water main replacement in Litleworth Drove, Deeping St Nicholas. A total of 34 visits took place from the end of July to the beginning of October, 1994. With the exception of one or two places there was very little of archaeological merit in spite of the previously recorded finds in and around Deeping St Nicholas. Part of the reason, perhaps, for this disappointing result was due to the type of machine employed to cut the trench (see Plate 1). Briefly, the teeth on the continuous belt tended to smear the sides of the trench to the extent that all strata were masked by this smearing. The only realistic solution to this problem would have been to clean completely one side (or both, if necessary) by hand, a long and costly process. In the event, only a token cleaning was accomplished and the best that was achieved was no more than a random sample. From this sample, there appeared to be a fairly consistent record comprising the road, with its foundation, over a peat layer. Often but not always, there was a orange sand/gravel layer between the two (see Plate 2). Inevitably, there were variations to this sequence which are given in 9 below.

2. INTRODUCTION

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Pre-Construct Archaeology was invited by Anglian Water Services Limited to conduct a watching brief on the new pipeline which was to be installed along Littleworth Drove, Deeping St Nicholas. Unfortunately, the construction of the water main had already begun at a point almost opposite the Mission Room and had reached Lonsdale Farm, a distance of about 700m, before Pre-Construct Archaeology was asked to conduct the watching brief. It is possible, therefore, that some archaeology had been missed before the monitoring commenced.

3. LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

(Figs 1 & 2)

Anglian Water's replacement of the water main in Deeping St Nicholas was intended to follow Littleworth Drove for about 2 km from the centre of the village (TF 2100 1537 - close to the railway station) to the point where Cradge Bank crosses Littleworth Drove (TF 1741 1288).

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4. REASONS FOR THE WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 The Planning Background

4.1.i. South Kesteven District Council's local plan contains statements relevant to the watching brief for the water main replacement in Deeping St Nicholas. (South Kesteven District Local Plan, 1992, 79 & 80).

4.1 ii. There are various Acts and guidelines which are helpful to developers and, in particular, appropriate to Anglian Water's replacement water main in Littleworth Drove, Deeping St Nicholas. Chief among these documents are: *The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1970; The National Heritage Act 1983; The General Development Order 1988;* and *Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG 16) on Archaeology and Planning 1990.* The latter, especially, is most useful in its application to the planning background.

5. GEOLOGY AND SOILS OF THE IMMEDIATE AREA

(by D. R. Robson)

Deeping St Nicholas stands on a broad silt ridge which is the site of a former north-east to south-west trending creek. The soils are calcareous coarse silty Wisbech series developed on Terrington Beds material which post date the Barroway Drove Beds deposits to the south and east. Aerial photograph evidence suggests that this ridge may mark the position of an old course of the river Welland.

On the western side of the A16 (Littleworth Drove in Deeping St Nicholas), clayey Wallasea soils are dominant with silty over clayey Pepperthorpe soils on the low creek ridges, a pattern often noted on Terrington Beds deposits. The lower ground to the east of the village has an intricate pattern of Wallasea soils in low places and calcareous silty Wisbech soils on the ridges.

The land east and south of South Drove Drain has a complex pattern of humose clayey Downholland soils in low places and calcareous humose silty Chatteris soils on the ridges. This clayey material, formerly called Fen Clay, has been named the Barroway Drove Beds by the British Geological Survey. Borehole evidence near Deeping St Nicholas indicates that here these beds overlie Abbey Sand and Gravels, marine/brackish deposits of sand and gravel with an intervening lower Peat layer. Deposition of the Barroway Drove Beds ended between 2130 and 2650 BP and was succeeded by the formation of fen car peat, the Nordelph peat. Subsequent peat wastage resulted from drainage, cultivation and wind erosion and soils with more than 50cm of peat uncommon and restricted to some low places. Drainage also resulted in the formation of some very acid subsoils due to the oxidation of sulphides so a pattern of Downholland and acid sulphate Tydd soils occurs towards Deeping St James. A system of major silty ridges is present between South Drove Drain and the Welland.

Some soils on river alluvium to the west of the Welland have acid subsoils while the washland between the banks has clayey over peaty Midelney soils and calcareous clayey over peaty Windrush soils.

6. BACKGROUND - Sites of Known Archaeological Significance

Deeping, as a place-name, is entirely descriptive of the area in and around Deeping St Nicholas. The Old English *deoping* is eqivalent to 'deep fen', that is, a place located in a region subjected to freshwater incursions. (Ekwall, 141). Of the various settlements in this region which include the name Deeping, Deeping St Nicholas is the most recent foundation: "Only by the 1840s was the land sufficiently well drained for the building of a church." (Pevsner and Harris, 249), but not formed into a civil parish until 1856 (Wheeler, App. 1;11). The reason for this relatively late development, in modern terms, is not difficult to find. Much of the land until very recent times had been covered by deep peat, now much weathered and generally destroyed (see also 5. Geology and Topography of the Area). The nature of peat is not usually conducive to settlement until drainage takes place. Indeed, the land comprising Deeping St Nicholas was a recent drainage scheme; a description of the drainage is to be found in Wheeler, 331-2.

However, the peat is of fairly recent deposition, in geological terms, which sometimes obliterated evidence of earlier human activity now buried beneath the peat, but which was presumably once sited on more stable soils. However, this supposition is not necessarily universally true and particularly so as it relates to one or two discrete areas of settlement. For instance, although the main nucleus of Deeping St Nicholas is of recent origin, there is good reason to suppose that there were certain specific pockets of land, maybe like small islands standing proud through the peat, which had attracted modest occupation before the nineteenth. A cursory examination of the relevant Ordnance Survey map of the locality immediatley suggests such a place, Hop Pole, where at least one of the buildings, The Bell, is clearly much earlier than the nineteenth century. Indeed, this part of Deeping St Nicholas stands higher than much of the rest, a fact which may account for its apparent attraction before the rest of the parish.

Other known settlers in this part of the Deepings belong to the Romano-British period. Almost all the recorded evidence of the past can be accorded to this age. Throughout Deeping St Nicholas, there is a general

scatter of information relating to the Romans. A useful summary of this information can be found in *The Fenland in Roman Times* (mainly on pages 279-81 and on the maps published separately). Here, the descriptions of enclosures, roads and trackways, watercourses forming part of an agricultural system, pottery and so on are extensive and can be augmented by a study of further accounts in the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in the County Museum. These, together with the frequent mention of marks of sites noted on aerial photography, present a bewildering display of quite dense activity in the period from about 150 - 400AD. Interpretation of this activity is difficult to decide upon although some attempt has made at it (Simmons, 1975, 155-6: & Hayes and Lane, 1992, 2, 136, 164).

Very little, if anything is known of the time before or after the Roman occupation and up to very recent years. Perhaps some of this obscurity of knowledge is to do with the inundation of the land by worsening weather and rising tides, along with the formation of peat although the latter phenomenon would have had to commence at a time slightly later than that given in 5. GEOLOGY AND SOILS OF THE IMMEDIATE AREA (q.v.) in order to satisfy this presumption.

7. OBJECTIVES OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

In general terms, all archaeological remains should be seen as finite, and a non-renewable source (PPG 16; see also The Planning Background 4.1. above). Ideally, it is necessary for archaeologists to be able to discuss projects with potential developers before any earthmoving work commences. The policy which Anglian Water Services Limited has adopted with regard to conservation is laudable, and particularly so when much of the work is outside the control of Planning Acts. With this well founded policy it is possible to formulate a practical programme of archaeological investigation before the start of any groundwork. The water main replacement in Littleworth Drove, Deeping St Nicholas presented such a chance.

8. REQUIREMENTS FOR WORK

8.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology, as the chosen archaeological contractors for the work, undertook to comply with the requirements of PPG 16, to observe the standards suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists with regard to watching briefs, and to adhere to the County Archaeologist's brief. In this way, not only were those areas of archaeological importance, designated as such by the County Archaeologist, observed, but also much of the entire length of the pipeline was inspected. The work included the examination of the subsoil for archaeological features together with their recording, and the observation of natural deposits, again recording details wherever necessary. Nevertheless, as mentioned in 1 above, time did not always allow for this criterion to be resolved to the ultimate.

8.2 After completion of the fieldwork, Pre-Construct Archaeology arranged with the City and County Museum, Lincoln for the long term storage of all artifacts, and the deposition of the site archive, as well as a copy of the report commisssioned by Anglian Water Services Limited.

8.3 The site code used by Pre-Construct Archaeology is DNLD 94 and the Archive Number for reference at the City and County Museum Lincoln is 124.94.

9. RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

In view of what has already been said about the archaeology of Deeping St Nicholas (6. BACKGROUND - Sites of Known Archaeological Importance), the result of the watching brief is disappointing. Much of the negative result may well be to do with the effect the trenching machine had on the sides of the trench (see comments in 1. SUMMARY). This is not the entire truth, however.

As has been mentioned previously, much of the stratification revealed by the cutting of the pipe trench was of a regular nature, the road surface with its foundation, on top of a layer of peat (sometimes it was possible to distinguish more than one layer of peat), frequently there was also an orangesand/gravel layer beneath the road foundation (see Plate 2). The depth of the trench was reasonably consistent, between 1m and 1.20m with the the peat layer(s) being rarely more than 50/60cms thick and disappearing into the base of the trench making the true thickness of the peat an unknown measurement. Only rarely was this sequence broken. Two points can be discussed from this statement a) the peat as it relates to the surrounding countryside, and b) those places where the stratigraphical norm was interrupted.

Littleworth Drove no doubt takes its name from the land it cut through, that is the soggy, derelict land of the peat fen before drainage took place, land which, at that time, had very little worth to the farming community. Once it had been drained, Deeping St Nicholas became good agricultural land, much sought after by farmers. Eventually, the onset of almost total arable farming destroyed to a greater or lesser extent destroyed the peat, the very commodity which had made the land so valuable after drainage. The double effect of constant ploughing and drainage brought about the comparatively rapid diminution of the depth of the peat until the land is considerably lower now than it was 50 or more years ago. On the other hand, Littleworth Drove stands high above the adjoining fields, often by a metre or more (see Plate 3). This is surprising for the concensus among those who work in, and study peat land is that once drainage and ploughing takes place even those areas which are not directly affected by the twin operations lose their moisture and gradually collapse

to the common level of the land around and about. Although almost all the peat has disappeared from the fields this does not appear to have happened to the peat beneath Littleworth Drove. No explanation can be given for this occurrence, but the fact is that Littleworth Drove stands on a ridge of peat above the fens.

Secondly, during in the course of the monitoring there were recorded from time to time one or two anomalies in the layer of peat beneath the road. One in particular could be important. At a point close to the entrance of Wensor Farm there was a distinct change in the subsoil. Here, the peat gave way to silty clay for a distance of about 70m. The change had the hallmark of an intrusive creek probably running at right angles, more or less, to Littleworth Drove. If this silty clay is the remains of a creek it must postdate the peat and, therefore, be after the Roman occupation. Unfortunately, there was no corresponding soild change to be seen in the surrounding fields. Wensor Farm is on the eastern limits of the area known as Hop Pole, an area which has been suggested as an 'island' protruding through the peats. As the pipe trench porceeded through this part of Deeping St Nicholas (i.e. from east to west) it became clear that peat had either not formed here at all, or had not survived later erosion, or had been buried by later silt and clay inundations. For the next 400m or so the peat gave way intermittently to clays, sometimes the clays being over the peat and sometimes not. Whether the 'island' of Hop Pole had been created in post Roman times is difficult to say from the paucity of information received from the pipe trench. One point which can be made with some confidence is that this particular spot, Hop Pole, could reveal some interesting archaeology if more time and effort were given to it.

At a point 150m to the west of Stonehouse Farm and on the edge of Hop Pole (opposite Stonehouse Cottages) a layer of worked limestone was encountered about 55cm below the road surface. Whether this stone layer was to do with the original construction of Stonehouse Farm or to do with the foundation of the raod is unclear.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pre-Construct Archaeology would like to thank Anglian Water Services Limited for the opportunity to conduct the watching brief and for taking an interest in the work as it progressed, especially the site engineer involved (Mr P. Holdich). Thanks are also due to the staff of the County and City Museum, Lincoln who gave assistance when required. None of the work could have been done without the co-operation of the two crew leaders (Mr John Hill and Mr Andrew Hill) and their teams and PCA would like to show its appreciation, too, in this respect.

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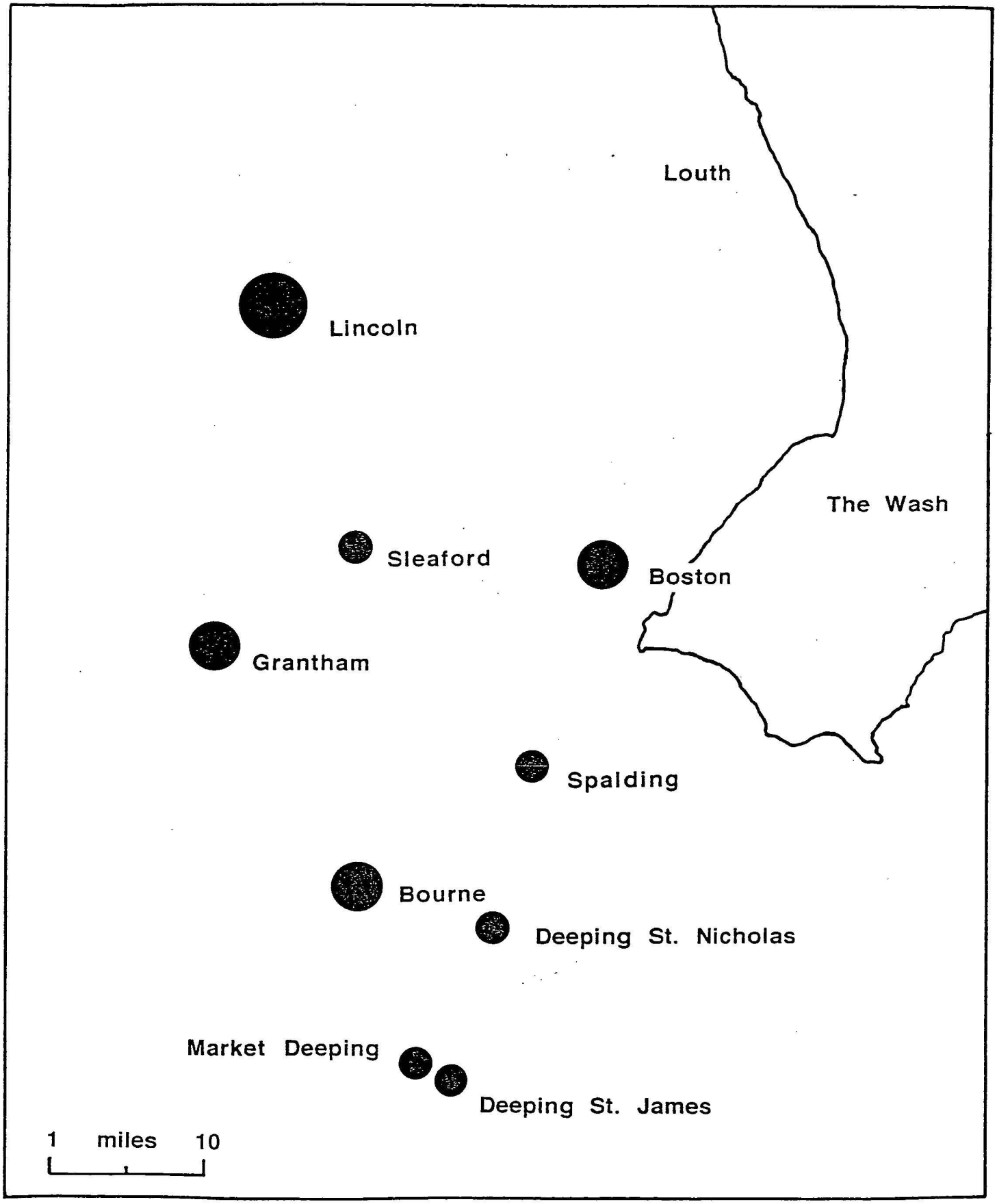
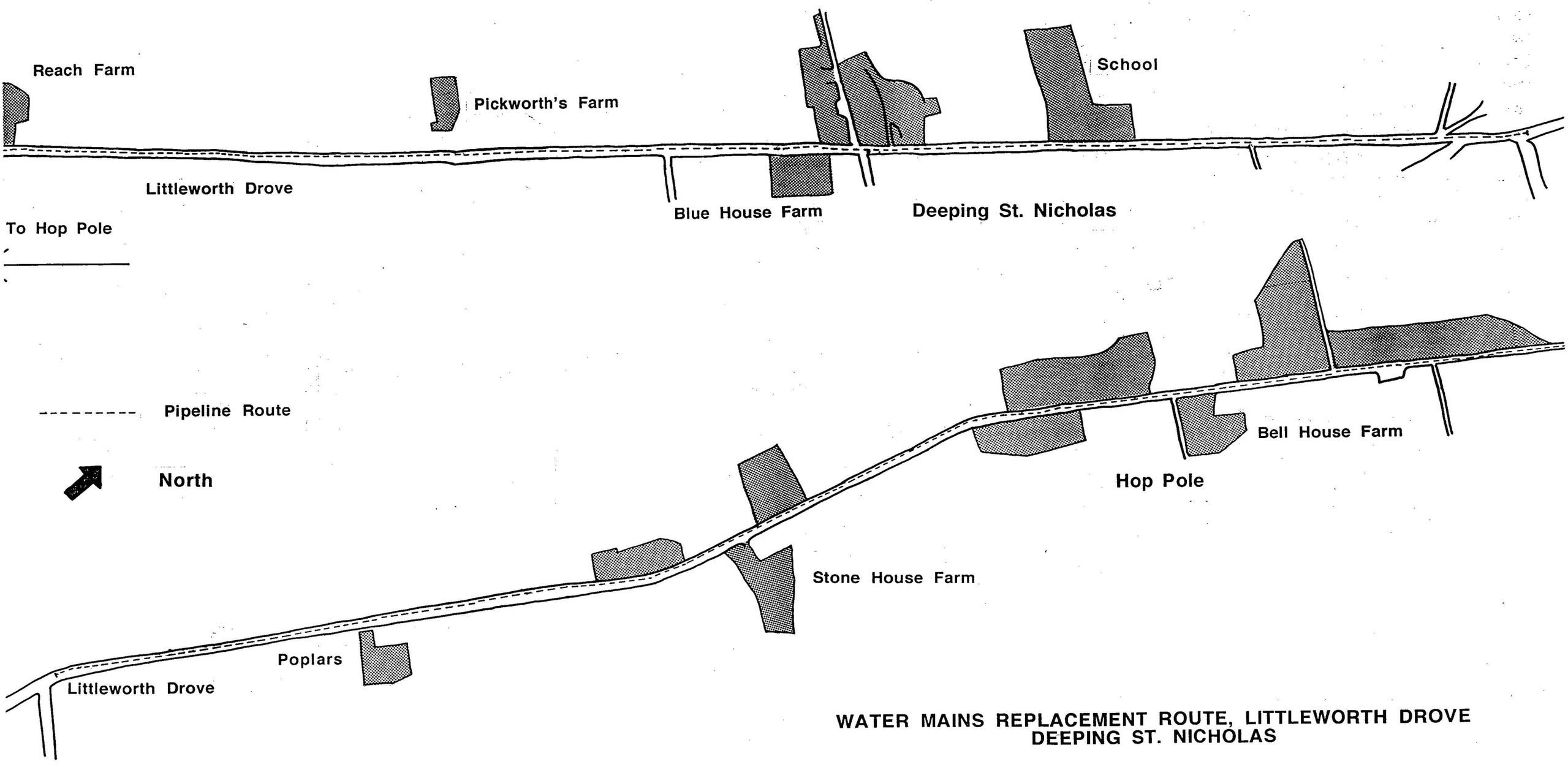


Site Location Map



WATER MAINS REPLACEMENT ROUTE, LITTLEWORTH DROVE DEEPING ST. NICHOLAS

Scale: 1: 2500

Fig 2 Site Plan

Plate 1 The trenching machine used in Littleworth Drove

Plate 2 A fairly typical section of strata: Road surface/
foundation/orange sand & gravel mixed/peat
(top of scale is at 1m)

Plate 3 Littleworth Drove as seen from the peat fen
(note the height of the road above the field -
the road is actually raised on peat)