

**BARLINGS ABBEY,
BARLINGS, Nr LANGWORTH,
LINCOLNSHIRE.**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

Site Code: BAB05
NGR: TF 0903 7358 TF09037 73600
Planning Ref. HSD 9/2/7066
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Report prepared for Lincolnshire County Council

by

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Summary

- *Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) were commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a foundation trench for a replacement footbridge on land at Barlings Abbey, Lincolnshire.*
- *A single, undated archaeological deposit was recorded, believed to be a post-medieval ground improvement layer. It was dumped on the west bank of Barlings Eau, either as a flood prevention measure or to stabilize the ground at a crossing point.*

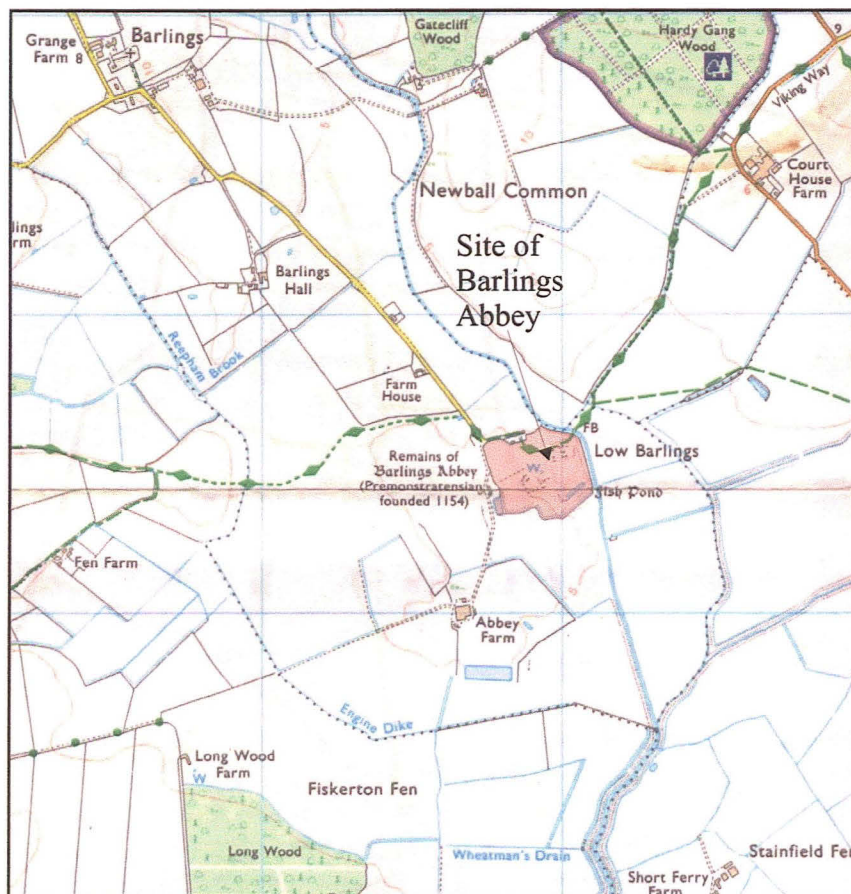


Fig. 1: Site location plan. 1:25,000
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1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) was commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a foundation trench for a proposed new footbridge at Barlings Abbey, Lincolnshire. This work was carried out to satisfy a condition issued by the Department of Culture Media and Sport. The approach complies with the requirements of *Archaeology and Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16*, Dept. of Environment (1990); *Management of Archaeological Projects*, EH (1991) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*, IFA (1999) and the LCC document *Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook: A Manual of Archaeological Practice*, 1998.

2.0 Location and description

Barlings is in the administrative district of West Lindsey, approximately 11km east of Lincoln city centre and 4km south-east of Langworth. The Abbey lies in an area of farmland, the Barlings Eau defining the eastern side of the abbey complex, with drains surrounding the other three sides. It is situated on a low island of till, standing some 5m above the surrounding fen. The site was previously known as Oxeney, meaning island where oxen graze. It is accessed via a 900m long causeway from the north west, probably of monastic construction, but with possible prehistoric origins.

Barlings Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument Number LI 103) as defined by the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (amended).

The work in question is located in the north east corner of the complex, National Grid Reference TF 0903 7358.

3.0 Planning background

Scheduled Monument Consent was granted (Department of Culture Media and Sport reference number HSD 9/2/7066) for the construction of a new bridleway footbridge to replace an existing bridge, under Section 2 of the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (amended), subject to the undertaking of an archaeological recording brief during all intrusive groundworks (Condition ii).

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

The Abbey was founded in 1154 on land granted by Ralf de Haia by 13 cannons from the parent house at Newsham. It was originally sited approximately one mile to the north, on the site now occupied by Barlings Grange, but soon moved to the present location, originally known as Oxeney. A steady stream of benefactors ensured sustained growth, and by the end of the 14th century it housed some thirty-eight persons and had eclipsed the mother house to become one of the richest Premonstratensian houses in the country.

Barlings is one of nine abbeys along the Witham valley, situated to take advantage of the river transport that was so important to the wool trade on which they depended. Land access to the site across the fen was facilitated by a 900m long causeway from the north west, believed to be of monastic construction. The modern road still runs along this feature. Access to the site could also have been by ferry over the Eau, and river traffic could certainly have reached it. No evidence survives for a landing stage, and the hollow way that leads to the existing bridge relates to a post medieval trackway.

A number of ponds and other water-management features survive on the site as earthworks; those to the south are believed to date to the post-medieval occupation of the site by domestic buildings, but to the north they seem to represent the remains of monastic fish breeding facilities. Further medieval water management led to the canalizing of the Barlings Eau: a former, more sinuous channel is visible to the east on aerial photographs.

The monastic building remains are concentrated in the northeast part of the site, and comprise the abbey church, cloister, frater and possibly guest lodgings. Further remains may represent the reredorter, dorter and possibly the infirmary. To the south of the site most of the earthworks are thought to represent the early 17th century house of Sir Christopher Wray, (Everson *et al*, 1991, *passim*).

5.0 Methodology

A single site visits was made by the author on the 10th of June 2005 during which the excavation of a single footing trench was monitored, involving the inspection of all exposed sections for archaeological remains.

All archaeological deposits identified were subjected to limited excavation, in order to assess their nature, dimensions and to attempt to recover datable materials. These investigations resulted in the production of written descriptions of each deposit. Colour photographs and scale drawings, in both plan and section, compliment these accounts. No pottery or other finds were recovered during these works.

6.0 Results

The excavated trench was 3.5m long (aligned north west to south east) and 1.8m wide.

The earliest material encountered was context 004; an alluvial clay-silt layer, deposited by the Barlings Eau, which runs immediately to the east of the site. This was sealed by a deposit of sand, context 003; formed possibly by an over-bank flooding event.

The subsequent deepest layer recorded was context 002, a deposit of predominantly limestone rubble, some of which exhibited a single dressed face. A number of small fragments of unfrogged brick were also present. This deposit was interpreted as a dump of rubble, probably derived from former abbey buildings, and placed here as a ground improvement measure.

The uppermost deposit was sandy topsoil containing 19th century brick fragments, context 001.

No archaeological features were exposed during the course of this watching brief, and no finds were recovered.

7.0 Discussion and conclusions

Only four deposits were disturbed during the course of this watching brief, and two of these were naturally formed. The others comprised a modern topsoil and a substantial rubble-based deposit.

It was not possible to date the formation of the ground improvement layer 004, although the large amount of limestone rubble it contained, some of it dressed, almost certainly derived from the former abbey buildings, suggesting that it was deposited post-1537 (ie post-Dissolution).

It has been suggested that the hollow-way (shown on fig. 2) was established in the post medieval period, linking to a river crossing and track shown on a 1774 estate map (Everson *et al*, 1991). However it is equally likely to date to the redesign of the site by Sir Christopher Wray in the early 17th century. The presence of some sort of crossing may explain the function of rubble layer 004: it was possibly deposited to stabilise the bank for a landing stage. However it is also possible that this material was dumped in order to raise and strengthen the bank after the flooding event evidenced by context 003.

8.0 Effectiveness of methodology

The methodology employed allowed the sections of the intrusive works to be monitored for archaeological deposits and materials, and for a full record of the deposits encountered to be made. The methodology allowed this work to take place with minimal disruption to the primary scheme.

9.0 Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Lincolnshire County Council for commissioning this work, and Dick Evans for providing site drawings.

10.0 References

Everson, P.L., Taylor, C.C. & Dunn, C.J., 1991, *Change and Continuity in North West Lincolnshire*. RCHME, London

11.0 Site archive

The site archive (documentary and physical) for this project is in preparation and will be deposited with The Collection (formerly Lincolnshire City and County Museum) within six months.

Access to the archive can be gained by quoting the universal accession number 2005.132

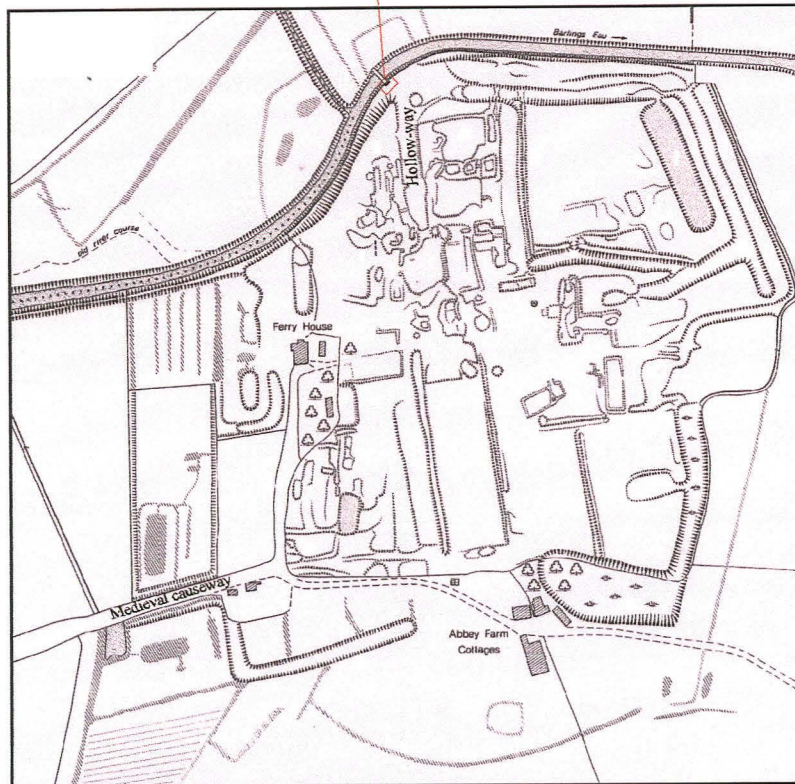
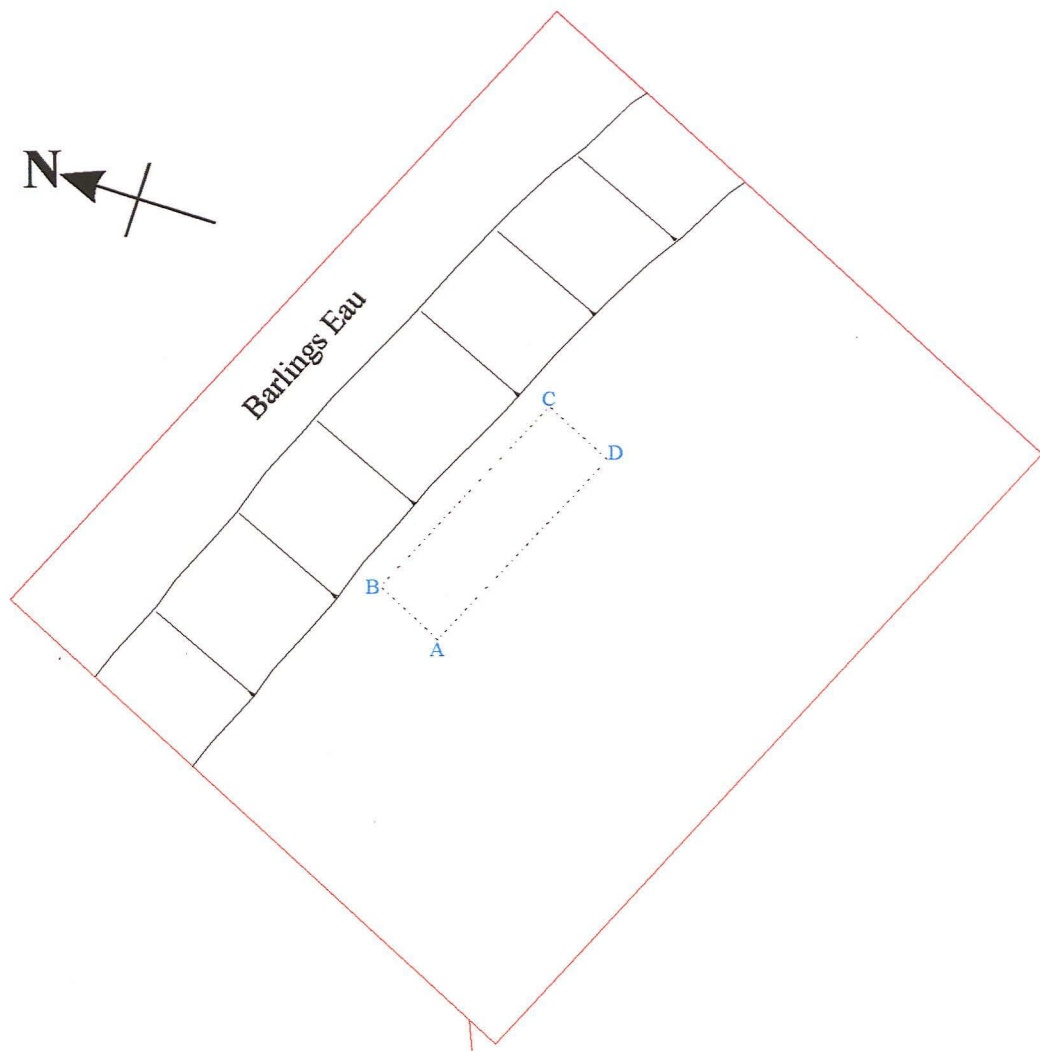
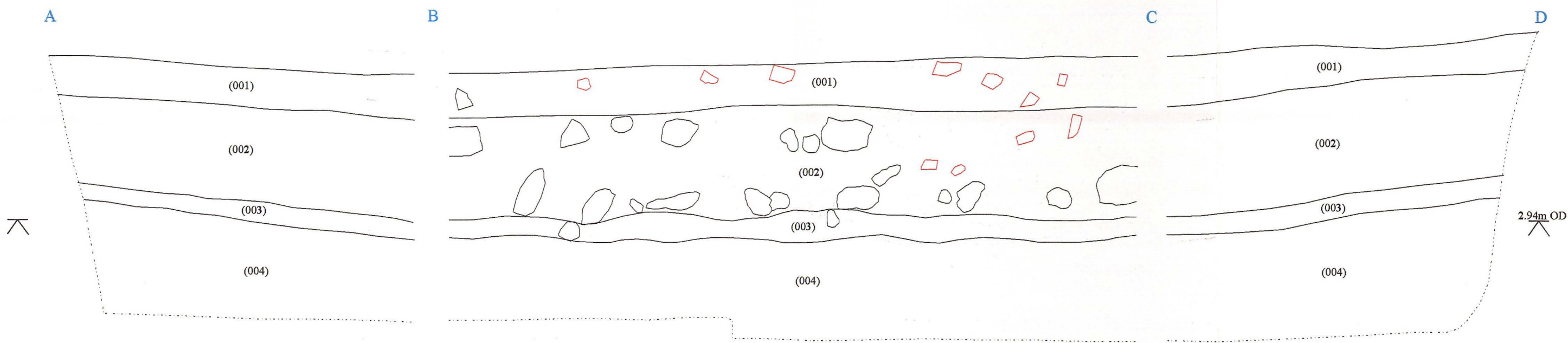


Fig. 2: Plan of Barlings Abbey complex, showing major earthworks and location of bridge footings. 1:5000 (detail at 1:100)
After Everson et al, 1991.





-  Brick
-  Limestone

Fig. 3: South, west and north facing sections from bridge footings excavation. 1:20

Appendix 1. Colour plates



Pl. 1: Section from bridge footing.
Note frequent large limestones in
rubble layer (002).
Looking E (scale=1m)



Pl. 2: Completed footing, showing
alluvial layer (004) in base.
Looking N (scale=1m).

Appendix 2. Context summary

CONTEXT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
001	Mid grey sandy topsoil. Contains frequent shallow frogged bricks (early 19 th century) and occasional limestone rubble.
002	Rubble layer; predominantly limestone rubble <150mm but with some of the larger pieces <400mm. Some of the larger pieces having a single dressed face. Coarse components in a matrix of mid grey silty sand similar to the overlying topsoil. Also contained fragment of un-frogged bricks. Interpreted as a dump of material derived from the former abbey buildings and dumped here as a ground improvement measure, possibly on the site of a proposed bridge.
003	Mottled mid brown and dark yellow medium sand with occasional manganese flecking. The presence of manganese probably accounts for the varied colour of this deposit. This material was interpreted as an over-bank flooding event, formed rapidly when Barlings Eau (to the east) burst its banks and deposited a layer of higher energy alluvium than the underlying flood-plain silt.
004	Slightly greenish grey clayey silt with occasional iron panning formed in former worm channels. This is a naturally formed river alluvium deposited by Barlings Eau to the east.