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29 WIDE BARGATE,
BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
REPORT

PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

Site Code: BAR 94
CCM Accession No.: 3.94

29 WIDE BARGATE BOSTON

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

FOR

PEARCE CONSTRUCTION LTD. (ON BEHALF
OF ASDA STORES LTD.)

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1.0 Non-Technical Summary

An intermittent archaeological watching brief was maintained on the site of a new petrol filling station at 29 Wide Bargate, Boston, Lincolnshire (Fig. 1). The works were undertaken as a condition of planning, and were preceded by a desk-based assessment, field evaluation and excavation.

The watching brief will add to an archive of data which has been generated over the past twelve months or so; though it is regretted that, for reasons beyond the control of Pre-Construct Archaeology, several sensitive areas within the site of redevelopment were not monitored.

Overall the site has yielded significant information concerning later medieval development at Boston, and has raised important questions regarding the expansion of the town in areas where previous assessments have revealed very little by way of medieval settlement remains.

2.0 Introduction

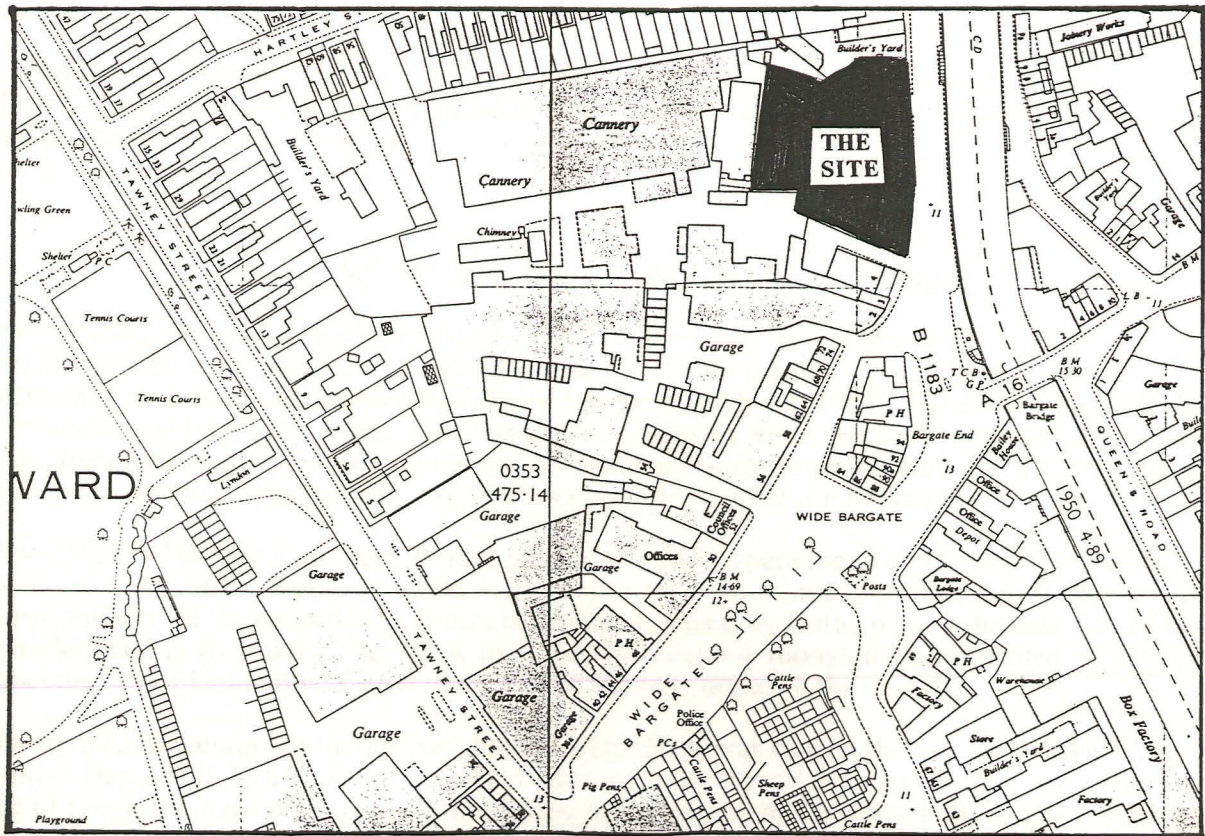
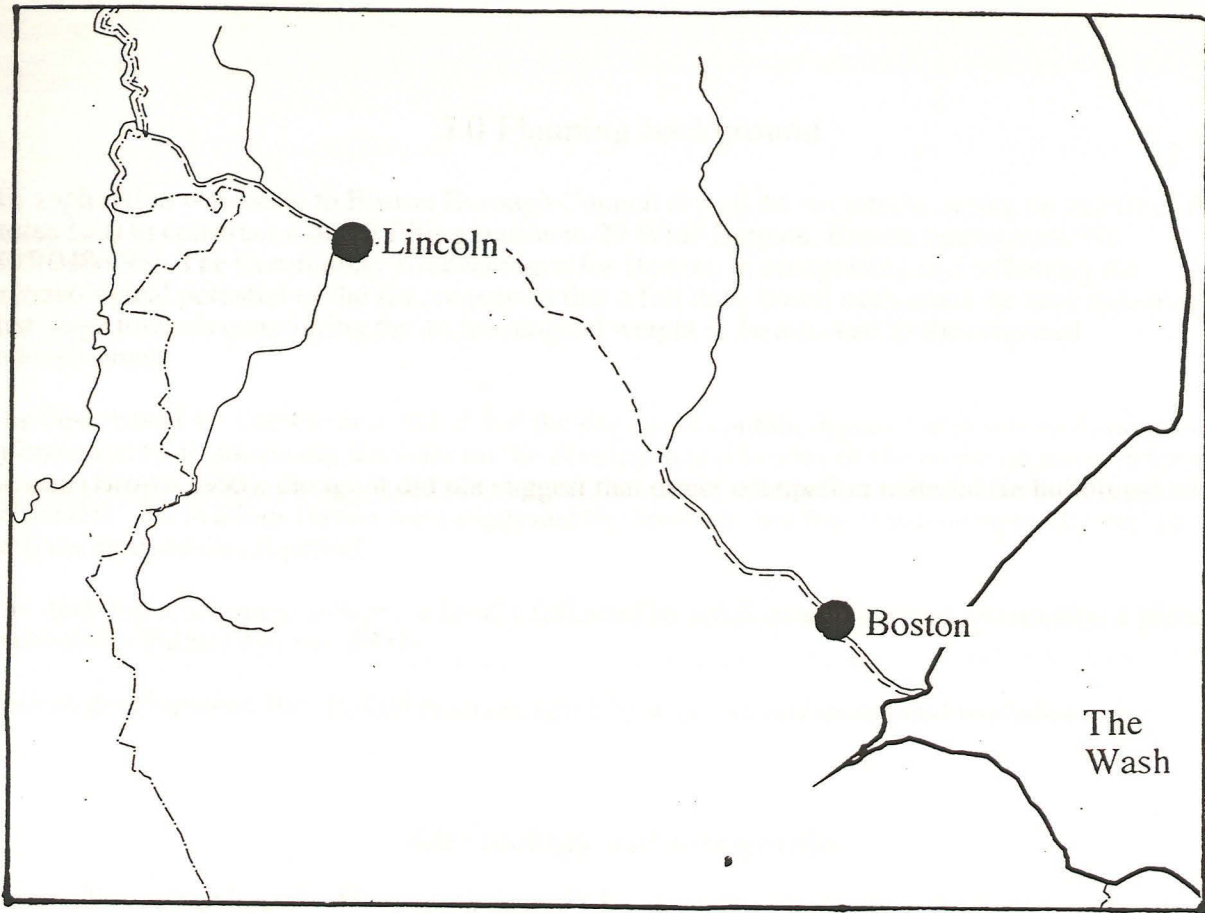
An archaeological watching brief took place between October 10th, 1994 and January 13th, 1995 on the site of a new petrol filling station, recently constructed by Pearce Construction Ltd on behalf of ASDA stores Ltd. The works were based on a project brief issued by the Community Archaeologist for Boston Borough Council, and a specification submitted by Pre-Construct Archaeology in May 1994. A total of fourteen visits were made to the site.

Preliminary intrusive investigations, which took place in January 1994, demonstrated that on the (then) proposed redevelopment site, there were few deposits of archaeological significance on the west side of the site (Palmer-Brown, 1994). However, in one of three areas excavated (Trench 1), a complex inter-cutting sequence of pits and ditches were exposed, suggesting the proximity of late medieval structural remains closer to the Horncastle Road/Wide Bargate frontage. For this reason, the Community Archaeologist issued a project brief requiring the excavation of two areas which are now occupied by payment kiosks (Fig. 2). In these areas, archaeological deposits were removed to a depth approximately 1.0m lower than the modern ground surface; to coincide with the threat posed by construction trenches.

The two kiosk areas aside, no major impacts to archaeological resources were anticipated within the parameters of the original redevelopment programme: information supplied by HLM Architects indicated that petroleum storage tanks would be sited too far west of the frontage to necessitate further excavation in advance of construction, and that service trenches could be monitored within the scope of a recording brief only. However, due largely to unforeseen circumstances, large-scale earth-removal did occur within sensitive areas and, regrettably, Pre-Construct archaeology were not always informed of these developments in advance.

The central national grid reference is TF 3308 4463

Fig. 1 Site Location



3.0 Planning background

An application was made to Boston Borough Council (by HLM Architects, acting on behalf of ASDA stores Ltd) to construct a petrol filling station at 29 Wide Bargate, Boston (application No. B05/0486/93). The Community Archaeologist for Boston, in recognising and reflecting the archaeological potential of the site, requested that a full desk-based assessment be undertaken as a first stage towards quantifying the archaeological weight to be attached to the proposed redevelopment.

The desk-based assessment concluded that the site could contain deposits which would add useful information to an advancing database on the developmental history of the medieval town and port of Boston (Brown 1993), though it did not suggest that direct occupation material (ie buildings) would be present - excavations further west suggested the area may not have been occupied by buildings until the post-medieval period.

The desk-top assessment was procedurally followed by a full evaluation and, eventually, a phase of excavation (Palmer-Brown, 1994).

Prior to development, the site had been occupied by a garage and associated workshops.

4.0 Geology and topography

Boston lies approximately 45km south-east of Lincoln within the Lincolnshire Fens, c. 7km from the north-west coast of the Wash. The River Witham bisects the town, and the redevelopment site lies on its east side at a point approximately 13.0m OD.

Local soils comprise Tanvats Association alluvial gley clays (Hodge et al 1984) and Wisbech Association calcareous gley soils, developed in marine alluvium. The solid geology consists of Jurassic clay.

Archaeological features within the redevelopment site overlay, or cut through, thick deposits of clean yellow silt, interspersed with occasional horizons of clean blue clay; the products of seasonal and prolonged episodic flooding.

5.0 Archaeological and historical background

Boston began life as a trading centre in the early 11th century, though the pre-Norman origins of the settlement, which became one of England's most significant medieval ports, have not been sufficiently demonstrated, archaeologically or historically (Owen, 1984). The early settlement may have developed largely by chance, encouraged by numerous small creeks around the Wash which gave direct access to major settlements such as Lincoln via the River Witham. Such access was no doubt attractive to foreign traders, eager to seek-out new markets and resources.

Following the Norman Conquest, Boston began to expand, encouraged by the establishment of organised trade fairs, a theme common in contemporary France, and one applied in Boston by Alan Rufus, the Earl of Richmond. The centre of the fair founded by Rufus was on the east side of the River Witham in Richmond Fee, close to St Botolphs church, though it also extended to the west bank (the fair of Holland was sited in the Fee of Creoun, opposite the church).

During the 12th century, a 'defensive' ditch, the Barditch, was dug on the east side of the Witham to connect Depol with Skirbeck, both of which encompassed natural defences of their own. The exact date of this work is not documented; the earliest historical reference being 1160 (Bagley, 1986). One

assumes the ditch to have 'contained' the bulk of the town on the east side of the Witham at about this time though there are records which demonstrate the presence of properties in close proximity to the earthwork and, by the early 13th century, a number lay beyond it.

The 13th century was something of a 'golden age' for Boston. It is not surprising to learn, therefore, that, at this time, its population had exceeded the scope of a 'defensive' circuit which may have been built less than a century earlier (this depends, to a great extent on the weight to be attached to the Barditch as a defence, as opposed to its other major function - drainage).

By the early 15th century, the importance of Boston began to decline, no-doubt influenced by the long-term effects of the Black Death of 1349 and the deterioration of the Witham (Dover 1972, 30).

The extent to which the medieval settlement developed east of the Barditch has proved an elusive problem, archaeologically. Excavations at the site of Corporation Yard/Old Poultry Market failed to produce structural material, though ground-raising dump deposits were identified (Trimble & Brown, 1990).

Documentary sources indicate that, by the mid-C16th, properties had been constructed in Wide Bargate: for example, an inn, The Ram, was in the possession of the manor of Hallgarth.

It was suggested in the desk top study that the archaeological potential of the Wide Bargate site was limited: that if medieval deposits were present, they would, in all probability, be in the form of ground-rising dumps associated with land reclamation and consolidation (Brown 1993). It was moderately surprising, therefore, when earth-cut features containing late medieval pottery were excavated during evaluation in January 1994 (Palmer-Brown 1994).

Excavation of the two kiosk sites associated with the present development demonstrated that the site was indeed occupied by at least one late medieval structure (pottery recovered from features beneath the earliest in a sequence of earth floors was dated to within the C14th). It was considered important, therefore, that further disturbance to the site be monitored; taking the form of an intermittent recording brief.

6.0 Aims

The principal objectives of the watching brief phase of work at 29 Wide Bargate were to ensure that any archaeological, artefactual or ecofactual remains exposed or retrieved during groundworks were recorded and interpreted.

Section 5 of the project brief reads:

5.3 While development is in progress an archaeological watching brief is to be undertaken on the site

5.4 The objective of the watching brief should be to ensure that any archaeological features exposed by the groundworks are recorded and interpreted

In response to the brief set by the Community Archaeologist, a project specification was submitted to all interested parties. Extracts from section 7.2 may be read as follows:

In essence, the watching brief is to include the following:

archaeological supervision of all machine stripping and excavation works

inspection of stripped and excavated areas for archaeological features

recording of archaeological features in plan

rapid excavation of features, if necessary

7.0 Methodology

Following completion of the excavation of the two payment kiosk sites in September 1994, arrangements were made with Pearce Construction Ltd to inform Pre-Construct Archaeology in advance of further excavations that would threaten archaeological or expose significant archaeo-environmental deposits. Superficially, the scope of work was calculated on the basis of a drawing supplied by HLM Architects (Drawing A93-059-12).

Although some areas within the site were suitably monitored, some design changes to those detailed on drawing A93-059-12 were made, without the knowledge of Pre-Construct Archaeology or the Community Archaeologist (most notably, the insertion of an interceptor tank on the north-east side of the site). On such occasions, Pre-Construct Archaeology were not informed until after excavation had taken place, often when obstructive shoring and other material had already been inserted.

Where possible, service and other trenches were cleaned by hand and photographed. A full written record (entered on standard pro-forma context sheets and watching brief daily log charts) was prepared and, where possible, scale drawings were also produced. As anticipated, much of the excavation centred on the removal of natural strata, though at least two sensitive areas close to the street frontage were not closely monitored due to poor communication and, on some occasions, night time working.

Archaeological recording was undertaken by Mr M. Otter and (on one occasion) by Mr S. Johnson.

8.0 Results

8.1 Petroleum storage tank area

On the extreme west side of the redevelopment site, a wide L-shaped trench was excavated by JCB to store five petrol storage tanks (Fig. 2). In advance of general ground reduction, a perimeter trench measuring c. 1.5m in width was excavated to a depth of c. 1.5m to insert a continuous wall of close shoring: thereafter, the centre of the trench was mechanically removed to approximately 5.0m.

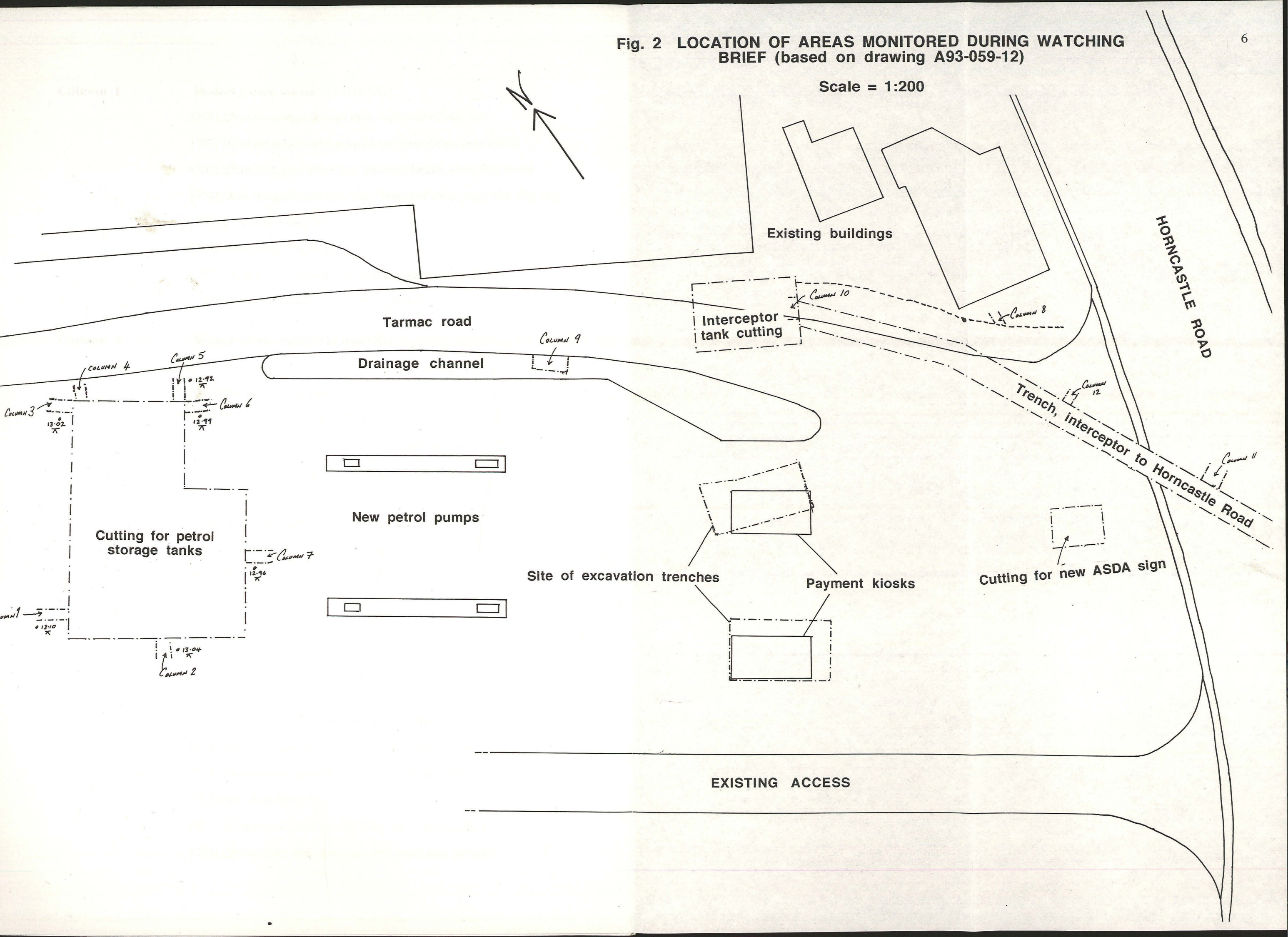
No archaeological features (excluding modern overburden) were exposed within the cutting, though a number of small sections were cleaned and photographed around the periphery of the pre-shoring excavation (Fig. 2, columns 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). A misunderstanding between the site manager and the on-site archaeologist resulted in no monitoring taking place of deposits buried beneath 1.5m.

Each column examined was cleaned and photographed, and detailed soil descriptions were entered on standard context sheets.

In each of the six columns examined, a largely uniform pattern of (mainly natural) stratification was recorded. The stratigraphy for each area may be summarised thus:

Fig. 2 LOCATION OF AREAS MONITORED DURING WATCHING BRIEF (based on drawing A93-059-12)

Scale = 1:200



Column 1

Modern ground surface (13.10m OD)
/

[701] 25cm modern make-up; dirty redeposited silty soil
/

[702] 20cm modern levelling/make-up (demolition debris/soil)
/

[703] 20cm dark grey silty clay, charcoal flecks, stone fragments
/

[704] 10cm orange/brown silty clay; lenses of clean grey/blue silty clay
/

[705] 2 -3cm of manganese
/

[706] 10cm clean blue clay
/

[707] 40cm yellow/brown (iron-panned) sandy clay-silt
/

[708] 15cm+ clean pale orange sand (sticky)

Column 2

Modern ground surface (13.04m OD)
/

[709] 5cm modern tarmac
/

[710] 30cm hard-core/make-up
/

[711] 22cm demolition debris/soil
/

[712] 20cm dark grey silty clay (stone fragments/charcoal flecks)
/

[713] 10cm mixed orange/brown silt; frequent blue/grey clay lenses
/

[714] 1cm manganese
/

[715] 12cm clean grey/blue clay
/

[716] 45cm yellow/orange sandy silt
/

[717] 20cm+ clean pale orange gritty sand

Column 3

Modern ground surface (13.0m OD)
/

[718] 5cm tarmac
/

[719] 30cm mixed modern destruction/make-up
/

[720] Black silty make-up/levelling
/

[728] loose rubble (modern) pit fill
/

[727] loose rubble and soil fill
/

[726] modern pit cut
/

[721] 20cm dark grey/brown charcoal flecked silty clay
/

[722] 10cm medium brown silty clay; blue/grey lenses
/

[723] 6cm clean blue clay
/

[724] 35cm mixed brown/orange silty clay; iron panning
/

[725] 25cm+ clean yellow/orange silty sand; iron panning

Column 4: Section cleaned and photographed but abandoned due to soil collapse

Column 5

Modern ground surface (12.92m OD)
 /
 [729] 5cm tarmac
 /
 [730] 28cm modern make-up
 /
 [731] 30cm modern hard-core
 /
 [732] 22cm dark grey silty clay; stone chips, charcoal flecks
 /
 [733] 10cm orange/brown sandy silt; lenses blue/grey clay
 /
 [734] 15cm clean blue/grey clay
 /
 [735] mixed yellow/orange sandy silt
 /
 [736] clean pale orange sand

Column 6

Modern ground surface (12.99m OD)
 /
 [737] tarmac
 /
 [738] Modern make-up/levelling
 /
 [739] 30cm med. brown silty soil containing brick fragments
 /
 / [741] loose rubble/soil fill of modern pit
 /
 / [742] pit cut
 /
 [740] 23cm dark grey silty clay; limestone fragments/charcoal flecks
 /
 [743] 12cm orange/brown sandy silt; occasional blue clay lenses
 /
 [744] 2cm manganese
 /
 [745] 14cm clean grey/blue clay
 /
 [746] 40cm mixed orange/yellow sandy silt; iron panning
 /
 [747] 25cm+ clean pale orange sand

Column 7

Modern ground surface (12.96m OD)

[748] tarmac

[749] 20cm modern make-up

[750] 35cm modern levelling/make-up

[751] 16cm brown silty clay with minute specks of blue clay (?dump)

[752] 6cm light grey silty clay

[753] 20cm light brown silty clay; occasional lenses of clean grey clay

[754] 12cm brown silty clay; lenses of pale yellow sand

[755] 10cm brown clay-silt; lenses of light grey sand

[756] 40cm+ orange/yellow sand; slim, small lenses of pale orange clay

The sequence exposed in each of the seven cleaned areas may be broadly compared with natural stratigraphy exposed in the three evaluation trenches which were excavated in January 1994. An inspection of these deposits by DJ Rackham suggested that accumulation occurred as a result of seasonal flooding. The fine yellow and orange silts were the end product of successive seasonal accumulations. The reduced clays (blue/grey in colour) are indicative of more substantial periods of flooding, which this part of Boston was prone to prior to the cutting of drainage channels such as the Maud Foster Drain, built in 1568. A date for these events has not been determined; the associated deposits being archaeologically sterile.

8.2 The interceptor tank and associated trench leading to Horncastle Road

As noted earlier, Drawing A93-059-12 (the drawing on which the scope of the watching brief was determined) contained no details of an interceptor tank and, only after its associated trench had been dug, were Pre-Construct Archaeology informed of the excavation. At this time, the cutting was inspected by the writer and the Community Archaeologist, which was partly backfilled. A field archaeologist was then asked to inspect the trench, though most of it had been backfilled and only a small part of the east section face was re-excavated to a depth of c. 1.0m. (Column 10, Fig. 2). The exposed sequence (which was not very informative, taken in isolation) was as follows:-

[758] 65cm dirty silty soil containing brick, tarmac, mortar etc: modern debris below floor of former garage building

[[759] 45cm mixed grey/brown silty sand; lenses of blue clay and orange sand

The interceptor tank cutting was located approximately 18.0m west of the Horncastle Road frontage. It is possible, therefore, that important building/occupation remains (comparable to those examined further south in the two kiosk areas) would have existed. However, the archaeological 'window' that was made available was simply too small, and the time available too limited to allow adequate recording and interpretation. There were no associated finds from the area.

A trench measuring approximately 1.5m in width was excavated from the site of the interceptor tank to the east side of Horncastle Road, taking a south-easterly direction (Fig. 2). It was excavated to a depth of c. 2.0m. Much of the work took place under nightfall and it was, again, possible only to provide scant archaeological coverage in an area which may have yielded valuable information regarding structural development on the frontage, as well as establish whether or not the Maud Foster Drain was preceded by a water course of purely natural origin (the occurrence of fresh water mussel

shells within natural strata suggested this was possible.

Two areas within the trench were roughly cleaned and inspected for archaeological remains; columns 11 and 12 (Fig. 2). This work was undertaken by the building contractors as the site manager (for reasons of health and safety) would not allow the on-site archaeologist to enter the trench. All of the recording took place, therefore, on the outside of the cutting with the assistance of the contractors. Some pottery was recovered from discreet contexts and soils were described in the usual way on standard context sheets. The stratigraphic sequences may be summarised thus:

Column 11 (within Horncastle Road)

- [760] 40cm of modern tarmac/make-up
/
- [761] 45cm dark brown sandy silt mixed with modern building debris
/
- [762] 42cm black silty peat-like soil containing decayed wood fragments
?land reclamation dump
- [763] 45cm brown silty sand; large charcoal fragments, oyster shells, pottery
?reclamation tip
/
- [764] 30cm+ mixed light grey sand; pockets of silt + blue/grey clay, with
pottery and animal bone

Column 12 (on eastern edge of redevelopment site)

- [769] 40cm modern demolition debris/make-up
/
- [770] 60cm pale brown silty sand; tile, shell fragments
/
- [771] 30cm: 50mm bands of orange silt/grey sand (seasonal wash)
/
- [772] 12cm clean grey/blue clay
/
- [773] 20cm+ dark orange silty clay; thin bands of pale grey sand

In relative isolation, the above sequences are difficult to place within the broader scheme of events (ie to inter-link with and make sense of in relation to controlled excavations elsewhere on the site). The archaeologist responsible for monitoring the recording brief believed that he had identified deposits associated with land reclamation and consolidation within column 11. Indeed, this may be the correct interpretation, but in the absence of more detailed stratigraphic information (for example, a complete section drawing of one of the exposed faces between the interceptor tank and Horncastle Road) these interpretations are tenuous and difficult to substantiate.

Pottery sherds were recovered from the lower contexts of column 11 ([763] and [764]). Whilst late medieval pottery (C15th) was recovered from [763], most of the sherds forming the assemblage were post-medieval in date (C16th/C17th). This date may be a little late in terms of purposeful land reclamation (the site interpretation) if building construction had already taken place on the frontage.

8.3 Column 8

A wide swath of soil was removed on the north-east side of the redevelopment site, supposedly to remove contaminated soil (the contamination being sourced to leaking oil storage tanks; noted during field evaluation). The on-site archaeologist was not informed of this development in advance and the extent of excavation was not determined as large areas, that had been excavated to depths of approximately 1.0m, were largely backfilled with limestone hardcore at the time that inspection was made. A small area, column 8 was recorded prior to infilling. The exposed sequence may be summarised thus:

Fig. 3 DRAWN SECTIONS IN CUTTING FOR NEW ASDA SIGN

- [765] 40cm, comprising several layers of modern tarmac/make-up
/
[766] 1cm+ charcoal layer
/
[767] 20cm brown silty sand, shrouding pockets of dark brown silt/orange sand,
lenses of blue clay (?dump).

There were no associated finds.

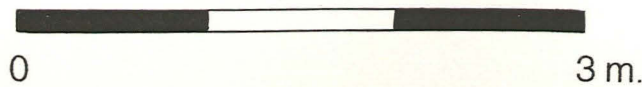
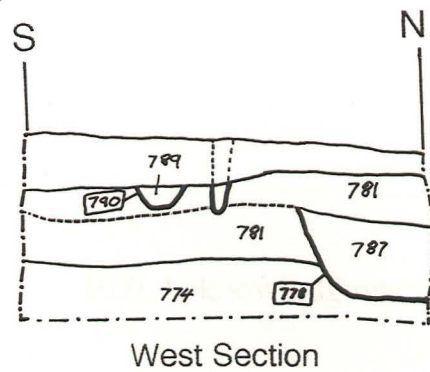
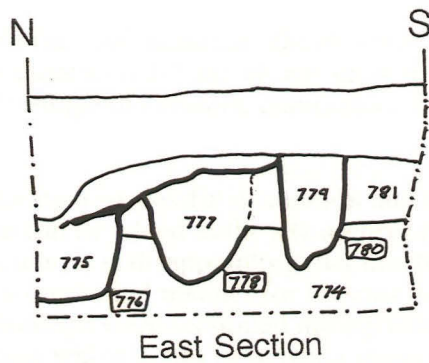
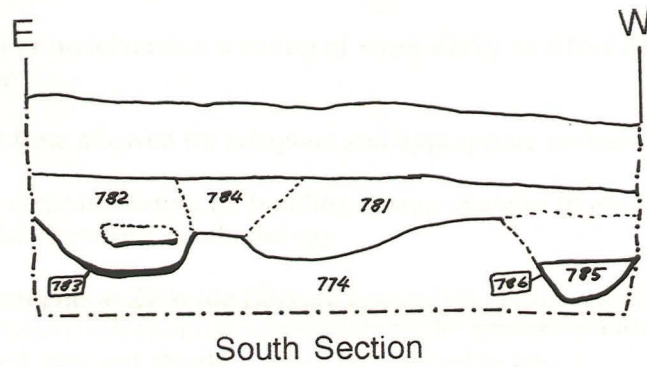
8.4 Excavation cutting for new ASDA sign

A final, relatively deep, excavation cutting (of potential archaeological interest) took place close to the Horncastle Road frontage, where a rectangular trench measuring 3.0m x 2.2m was excavated to a depth of approximately 1.2m (Fig. 2). Suitable time was allowed to inspect the trench, take photographs and draw the south, east and west faces of the exposed sections (Fig. 3).

The lowest deposits exposed, [774] and [781], comprised a series of successive silty lenses containing infrequent inclusions of red brick and shell. In colour, these lenses varied from yellowish-brown to grey and black. The excavator believed that their deposition had been influenced by flooding.

A number of pit-like features (the edges of which were sometimes difficult to clarify) were identified; each of which appeared to cut through the above: [776], [778], [780], [783] and [786]. With the exception of one pit, [786], quantities of pottery was recovered from each fill. For the most part, the pits have been dated within the post-medieval period (between the late C15th and C17th). One pit, [778] contained pottery of mid-C12th date, incorporating residual late Saxon sherds (late C10th).

Fig. 3 DRAWN SECTIONS IN CUTTING FOR NEW ASDA SIGN
(location on Fig. 2)



9.0 Conclusions

As a stated curatorial requirement, it is necessary for the contracting archaeologist to consider the effectiveness of any methodology applied within the parameters of development control archaeology. As such, it is clear that there have been problems associated with archaeological recording brief at the current site: which may be broadly defined, in the opinion of the writer, as follows:

insufficient or no advanced warning of work likely to affect deposits of archaeological significance

insufficient time allowed for adequate and appropriate archaeological recording

inadequate communication re. building design changes likely to influence archaeological deposits and, therefore, methodology

One of the principal problems at 29 Wide Bargate centred on communication: the failure of one or other party to inform/receive information appropriate to the smooth-running of the project. Such problems, it is suggested, can and should usually be resolvable between archaeological contractor and Client. Of greater concern to the curatorial archaeologist, however, is the **apparent** ability of the developer to alter building design (in this case, involving the location of an interceptor tank in an archaeologically sensitive zone) without notifying the archaeological contractor or the curator. In such circumstances, it would appear, superficially, that the curator has no means at his/her disposal to act since he/she may be the last to be informed.

The resolution of the above, and the likelihood (or otherwise) of similar situations developing on future occasions is a matter for curatorial debate. However, it is suggested that some rewording of the project brief could be to the advantage of curators, contractors and, more importantly, the archaeological resource.

It is most regrettable that, following a successful evaluation and excavation at 29 Wide Bargate, relatively little new information can be added to the site archive (based on results obtained during the recent watching brief): in particular, it is disappointing that much disturbance close to the street frontage was not monitored in a controlled manner for reasons detailed above. At least two areas close to the Horncastle Road frontage were sectioned during redevelopment and, in both cases, it was not possible to record information which could have filled-in some of the gaps that were left following evaluation and excavation (specifically, the nature of late medieval structural development).

10.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are expressed to Pierce Construction Ltd. for contracting Pre-Construct Archaeology to undertake excavation and recording at 29 Wide Bargate. Thanks also to Malcolm Otter and Simon Johnson for undertaking this final phase of work and to Jim Bonnor, the Community Archaeologist.

11.0 Appendices

11.1 Colour photographs

11.2 References

11.3 Pottery data record sheets



Photo. 1 Natural strata beneath c. 0.7m of modern overburden in cutting for new petrol storage tanks



Photo. 2 Deep excavation cutting after shoring and insertion of new storage tanks.



Photo. 3 Trench from interceptor tank to Horncastle Road, looking south-south-east



Photo. 4 Looking south into phase II road trench.



Photo. 5 Backfilled swath, excavated on north-east side of redevelopment site (largely backfilled with rubble)

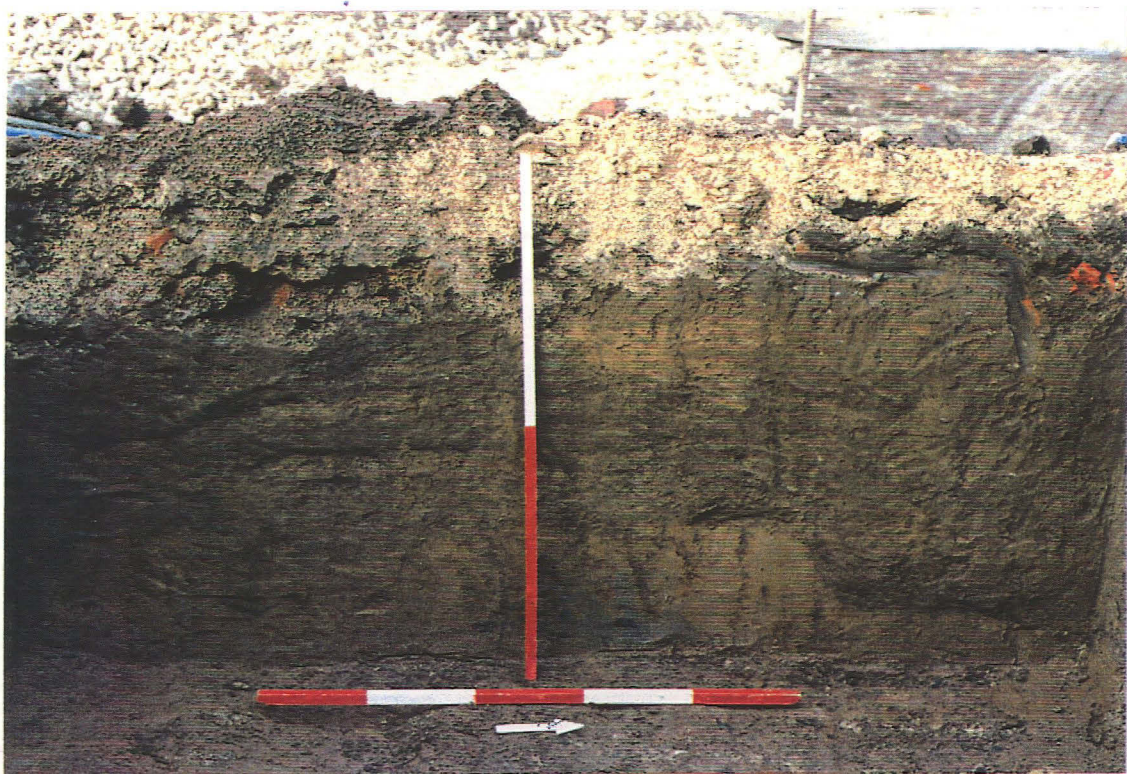


Photo. 6 West section face of trench excavated for new ASDA sign

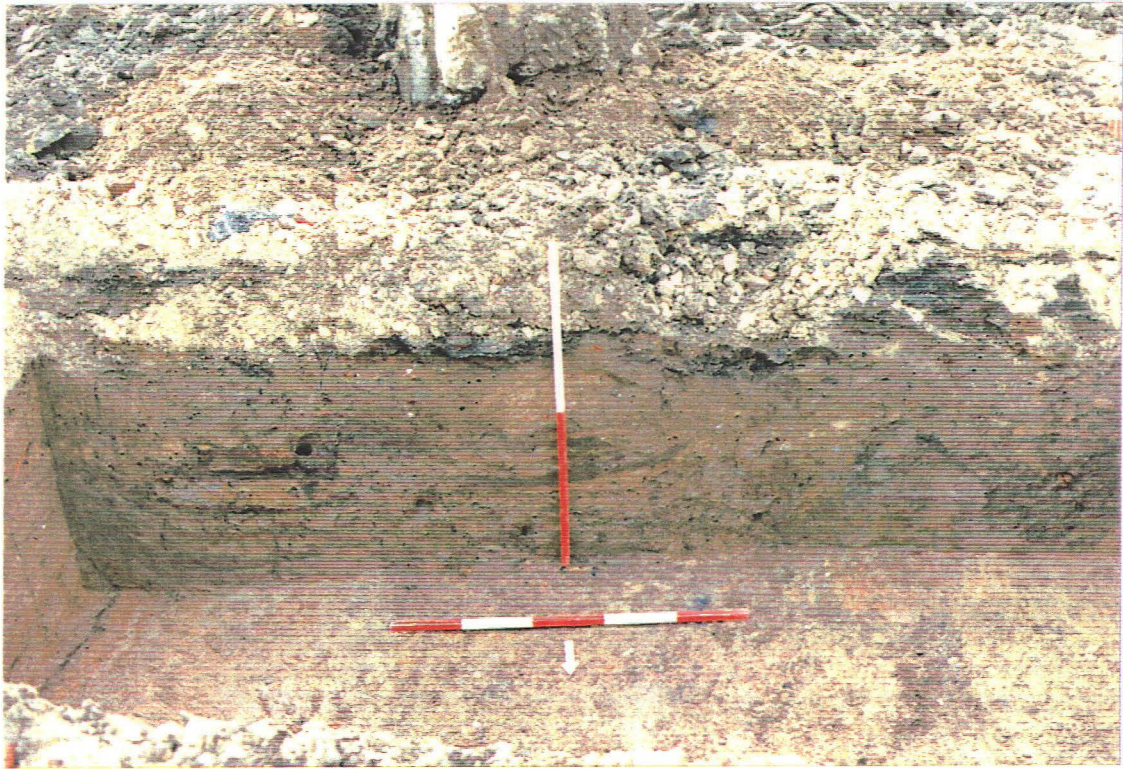


Photo. 7 South section face of trench excavated for new ASDA sign

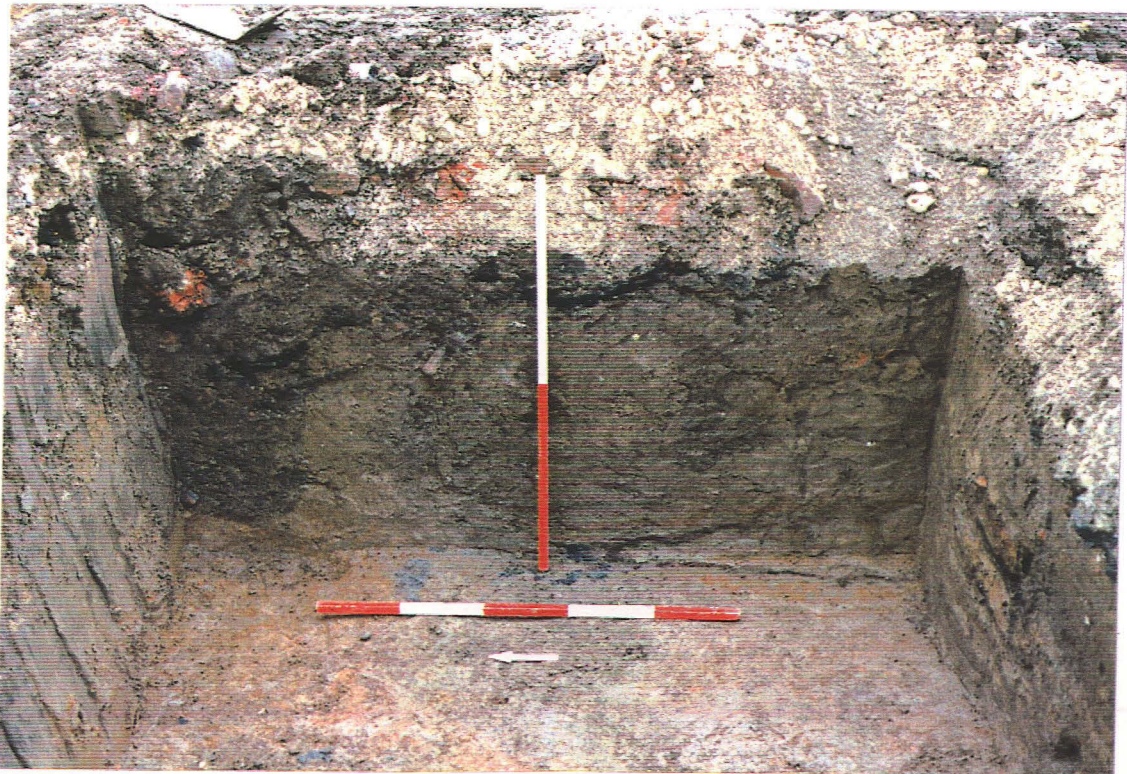


Photo. 8 East section face of trench excavated for new ASDA sign

11.2 References

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PHASE

SITE CODE
BAR 94

SITE
3.94

CONTEXT
76

Appendix 11.3 Pottery data record sheets

TB

1

Jug grooved
oval strap
handle.

1	Earliest date	MHI 0 ?
2	Latest date	PMH 8
3	Probable date	PMH 1 - 3
4	COMMENTS	

PHASE

SITE CODE
BAR 93

SITE
3.94

CUNTEA I
763

SIEG	2	Jacobkanna	15	1	bs jug		
LMLOC							
MELOC	1	bowl int glze					
MELOC	1	jug bs					
LMLOC	1	jug base					
HUM	1	jug?					
HUM	1	jug jar? ID					
LMLOC	1	INT GLZE BOWL					

1	Earliest date	MH10
2	Latest date	PMH3.
3	Probable date	
4	COMMENTS	imported siegburg is resid.

