

Conservation
Services

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Highways & Planning
Directorate

**LAND OFF CHURCH STREET,
SOUTH WITHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

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Report prepared for Mr. J.A. Parker



by

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Summary

- An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for a house with adjoining garage on the north side of Church Street, South Witham, Lincolnshire.
- The centre of South Witham is approximately 1km west of the major Roman road of Ermine Street. The development site lies towards the north side of the old village, approximately 60m south-west of the 12th century parish church.
- No archaeological remains exposed during the course of this watching brief could be identified as medieval or earlier: the only features observed were an undated pit and the corner of a stone building which appears on the 1890-91 Ordnance Survey map.



Figure 1: General location map at scale 1:25 000. The present development site is shown in red, and the area detailed in figure 2 is outlined in blue. (O.S. copyright licence no. AL 515 21 A0001)

1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) was commissioned by Mr. J. A. Parker to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a detached house with adjacent garage on land off Church Street in South Witham, Lincolnshire.

These works were undertaken to fulfil the objectives of a formal project brief issued by the South Kesteven Planning Archaeologist, and a project specification prepared by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln). This approach is consistent with the recommendations of '*Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook: A Manual of Archaeological Practice*' (LCC, 1998), *Archaeology & Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (Department of the Environment, 1990), *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991) and *Standards and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (IFA, 1999).

Copies of this report have been deposited with the commissioning body and the County Sites and Monuments Record. Reports will also be deposited at Lincoln City & County Museum, along with an ordered project archive for long-term storage and curation.

2.0 Site location and description (figs. 1 and 2)

The village of South Witham is within the administrative district of South Kesteven, approximately 15km north-west of Stamford. It lies on the eastern side of the Lincoln Edge limestone ridge, near the source and on the south bank of the River Witham.

The development site lies towards the north side of the old village, with a large modern housing development extending towards the north-west. The site is on the north side of Church Street, approximately 60m south-west of the church of St. John the Baptist; a stone-built farmhouse and farmyard, now in use only as a house, lies to the east, and a group of more recent brick houses to the west.

The British Geological Survey records no drift geology in the area: South Witham lies on an exposed solid geology of Lower Lincolnshire Limestone (BGS, 1972).

Central National Grid Reference: SK 92663 19368.

3.0 Planning background

Full planning permission was granted for the erection of a residential property with access off Church Street and associated groundworks including two soakaways. This permission was subject to the undertaking of an archaeological watching brief during the construction groundworks.

Planning reference: S05/1131/68

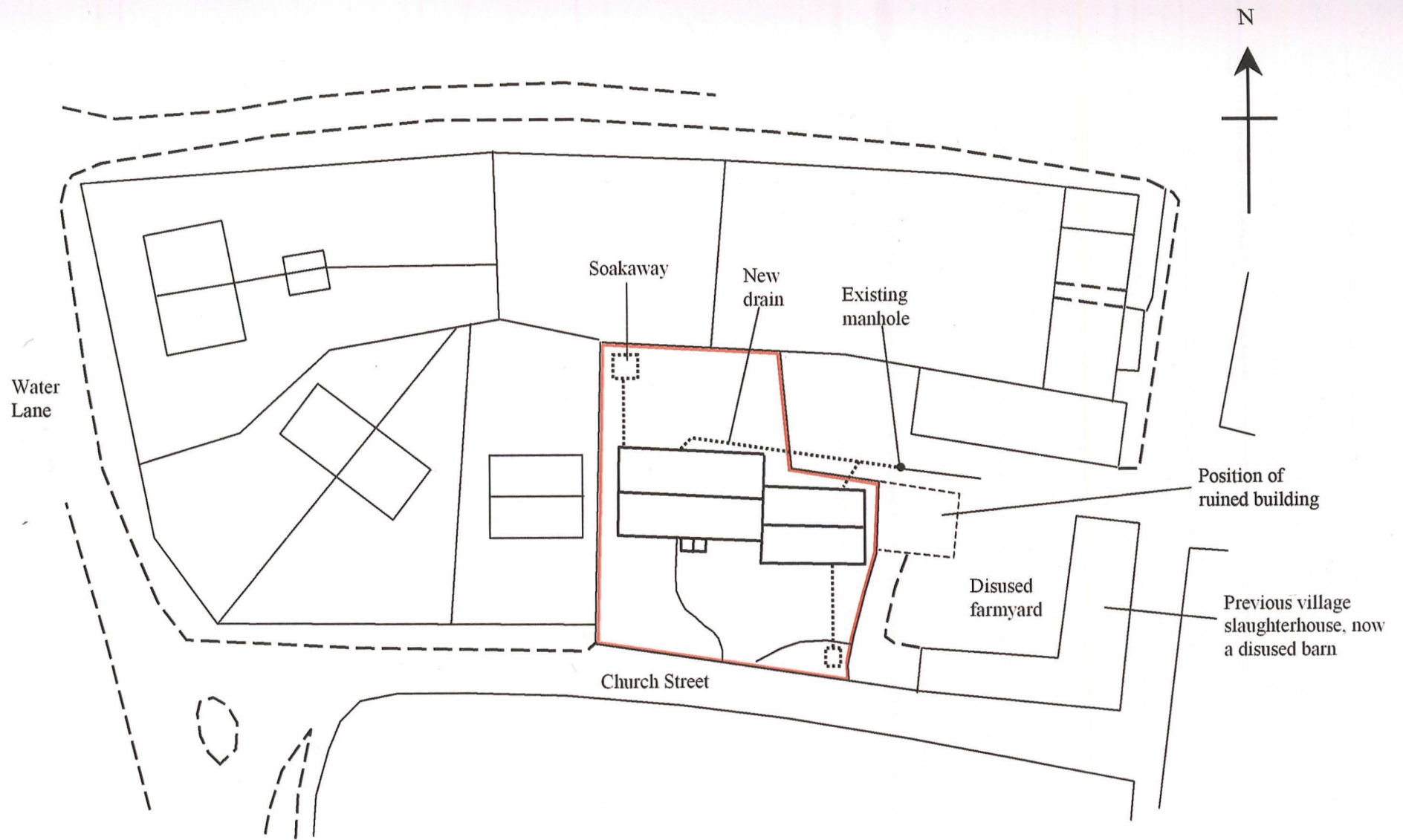


Figure 2: Plan of the development site (outlined in red) and surrounding area at scale 1:500, based on a plan supplied by the developer.

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

Pre-Roman activity in the area of South Witham is represented only by small quantities of artefactual material, including a flint axe discovered at Manor Farm, outside the village to the east.

The centre of South Witham is approximately 1km west of Ermine Street, a major Roman road (here overlain by the modern A1) running between the Roman regional capitals of London and Lincoln, and northward from Lincoln to the Humber ferry crossing; a minor Roman road leaves Ermine Street to run north-westward through the parish (Whitwell, 1992). The spacing of known Roman settlements along the course of Ermine Street indicates that a settlement is to be expected within South Witham parish (*ibid.*), but no definitive evidence has yet been uncovered, although burials of Romano-British date have been found to east and west of South Witham village, and artefactual material from within the village itself. A stone coffin attributed to a Roman burial is on display within the parish churchyard (cover photograph).

North and South Witham are first referred to by name in the Domesday Survey of AD 1086. South Witham was divided between the manorial lands of Alvred of Lincoln and Countess Judith: it was a farming settlement, with listings for acreage of ploughland, meadow, woodland and woodland pasture, and a population of 29 taxable households (the actual population would have been considerably larger). Countess Judith received half the revenues of the church. Two salt manufacturing sites are also listed, although it is unclear if these belong to North Witham, along with other salt pans definitely attributed to this village, or to South Witham; how salt was produced here, so far from the coastal marshes where saltings are usually to be found, is also unclear (Williams and Martin, 1992).

The present church of St. John the Baptist (cover photograph) contains no trace of the church listed in Domesday Book: the earliest surviving masonry dates from the late 12th century, while the majority of the structure ranges from the early 13th century to the 14th or later, the continual renewal of sections of the church indicating the prosperity of the parish throughout the Middle Ages (Pevsner and Harris, 1989).

Approximately 1.1km to the north of the development site is a pattern of earthworks, shown on the Figure 1 location map: these are the remains of a preceptory of the Knights Templars, once one of its wealthiest estates, which was established in the 12th century and went out of use at the beginning of the 14th (*ibid.*).

The 1890-91 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows the site as being unoccupied at the end of the 19th century (fig. 4). To the north of the site, a row of cottages is depicted: these cottages were demolished approximately 50 years ago (Mr. J. A. Parker, *pers. comm.*), but a single wall remains, forming the northern boundary of the site (plate 2). A single building shown in the plot to the west of the site is no longer extant, having been replaced by a modern house towards the centre of the plot. The farmhouse and farmyard outbuildings on the east side of the site are little changed since this map was drawn: the building closest to the site is now ruinous, and the farmyard disused. The barn-sized building on the eastern side of the farmyard served as the village slaughterhouse in the early 20th century, and further farm buildings, including pigsties for general use by the villagers, occupied the area to the north of the

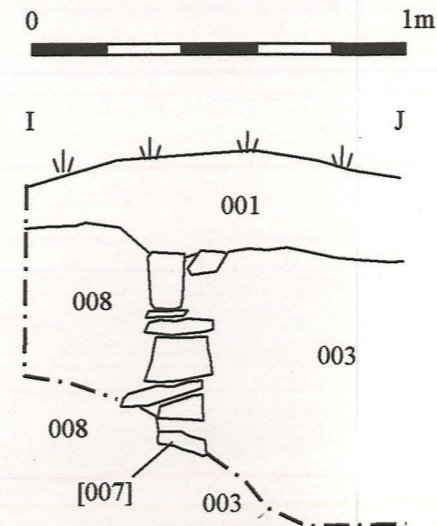
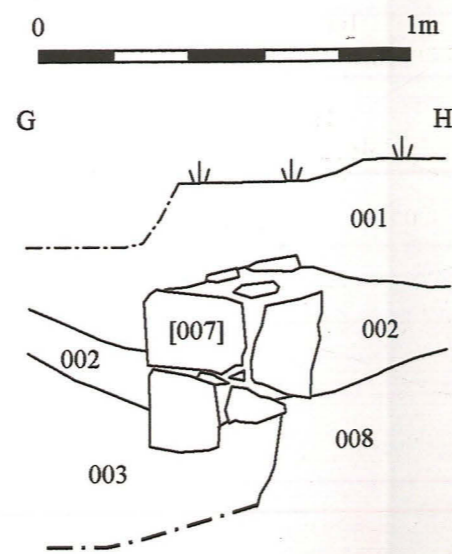
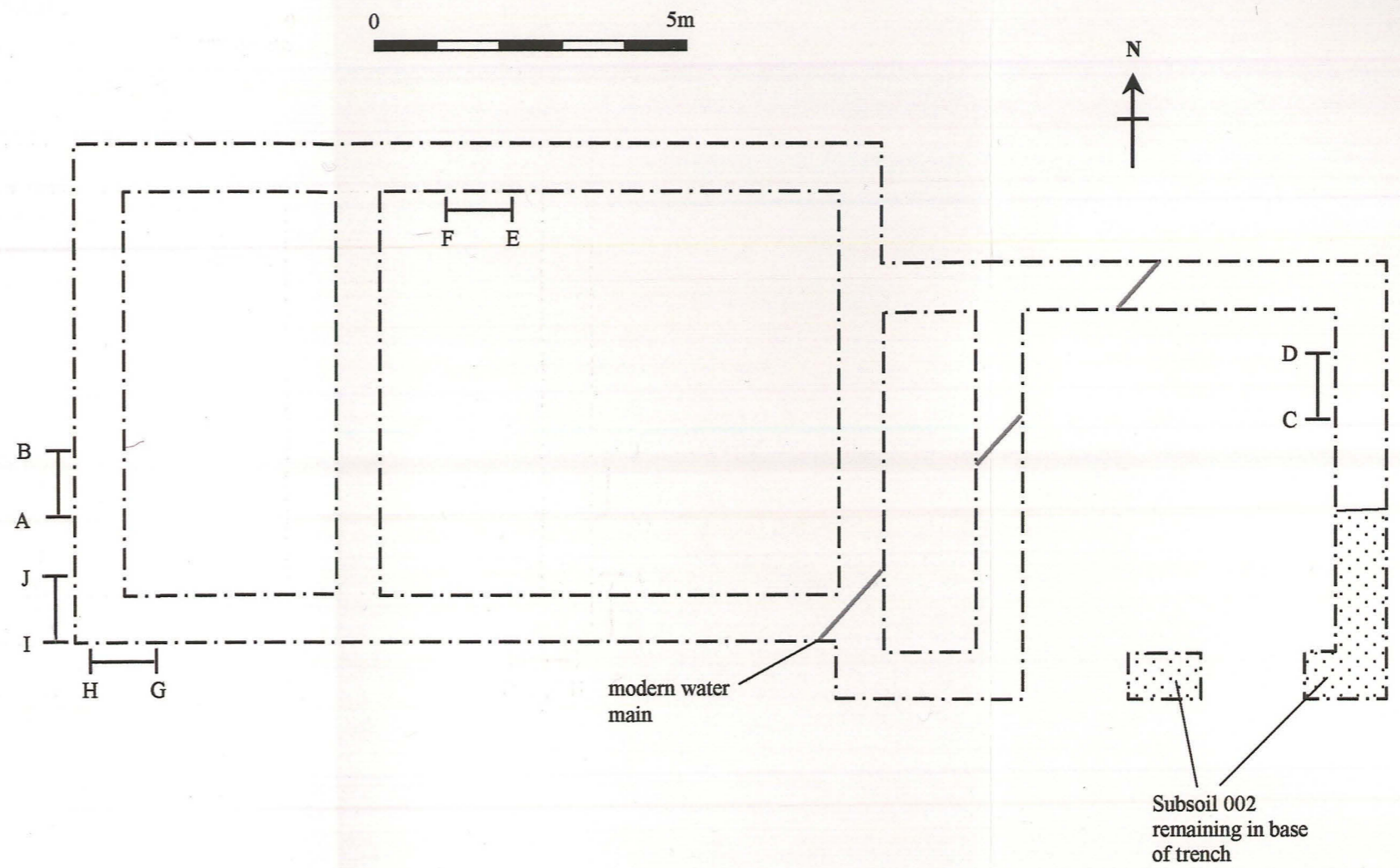
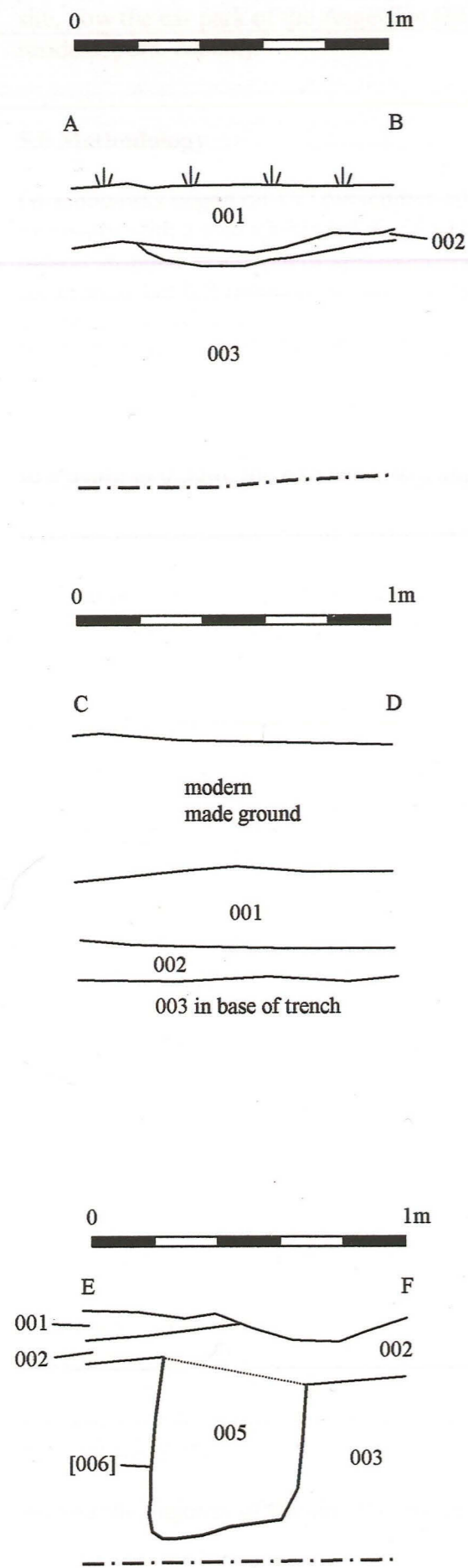


Figure 3: Section drawings, including two sample sections, showing features and deposits observed in the foundation trenches, at a scale of 1:20, with a location plan at a scale of 1:100.

site, now the car park of the Angel Inn (Mr. H. Dickinson, contractor and local resident, *pers. comm.*).

5.0 Methodology

Groundworks began on 15th November 2005. Topsoil was removed using a 180° excavator with a smooth-bladed ditching bucket (plate 1). The house footprint was topsoil stripped to a depth of approximately 0.25m, which exposed the subsoil in some areas but left remnant topsoil over much of the site; the rest of the development site was stripped more shallowly, removing the vegetation only. Spoil was initially stockpiled on the north side of the site, and subsequently removed by lorry.

The drainage groundworks on the north side of the site were completed first: the drain connecting to an existing manhole on the edge of the adjacent property was excavated to a depth of 0.55m, the soakaway to a depth of 0.80m. The house footings were excavated over the following two days, finishing on the south side of the site. All trenches were excavated using a 0.6m wide toothless bucket, but were in general between 0.7m and 0.8m wide, as the bucket pulled stones in from the trench sides; the foundation trenches ranged in depth from 0.7m to 1.0m, depending on variations in ground level and the hardness of the underlying limestone, and could all be safely entered.

The sections and bases of the foundation trenches were closely inspected, and cleaned by hand where any features were observed. All contexts seen were described on standard watching brief recording sheets and drawn in section at a scale of 1:20; where no features were present, sample sections were drawn. The drawn sections were located on a 1:100 sketch plan of the groundworks (fig. 3). A colour slide record was also maintained (appendix 1).

The watching brief was completed on 17th November 2005, and was carried out by the author.

6.0 Results

The natural geology across the site consisted of limestone brash – a mixture of loose slabs and fragments of deteriorated limestone with dark yellow sandy clay, becoming grey where subsoil 002 was present. At the base of the excavations, the limestone became bedded.

A single feature was identified cutting limestone natural 003. Pit [006] was 0.50m wide and approximately 0.60m deep, although its fill, brownish-grey sandy clay 005, could not be distinguished from the overlying subsoil 002, making both its depth and stratigraphic relationships unclear. The sides of pit [006] slanted slightly from east at the base to west at the top, as though it had contained an angled post or buttress, but no finds were retrieved from fill 005, and the purpose of this feature could not be ascertained (plate 4).

Across the majority of the site, the natural limestone brash was sealed by subsoil 002,

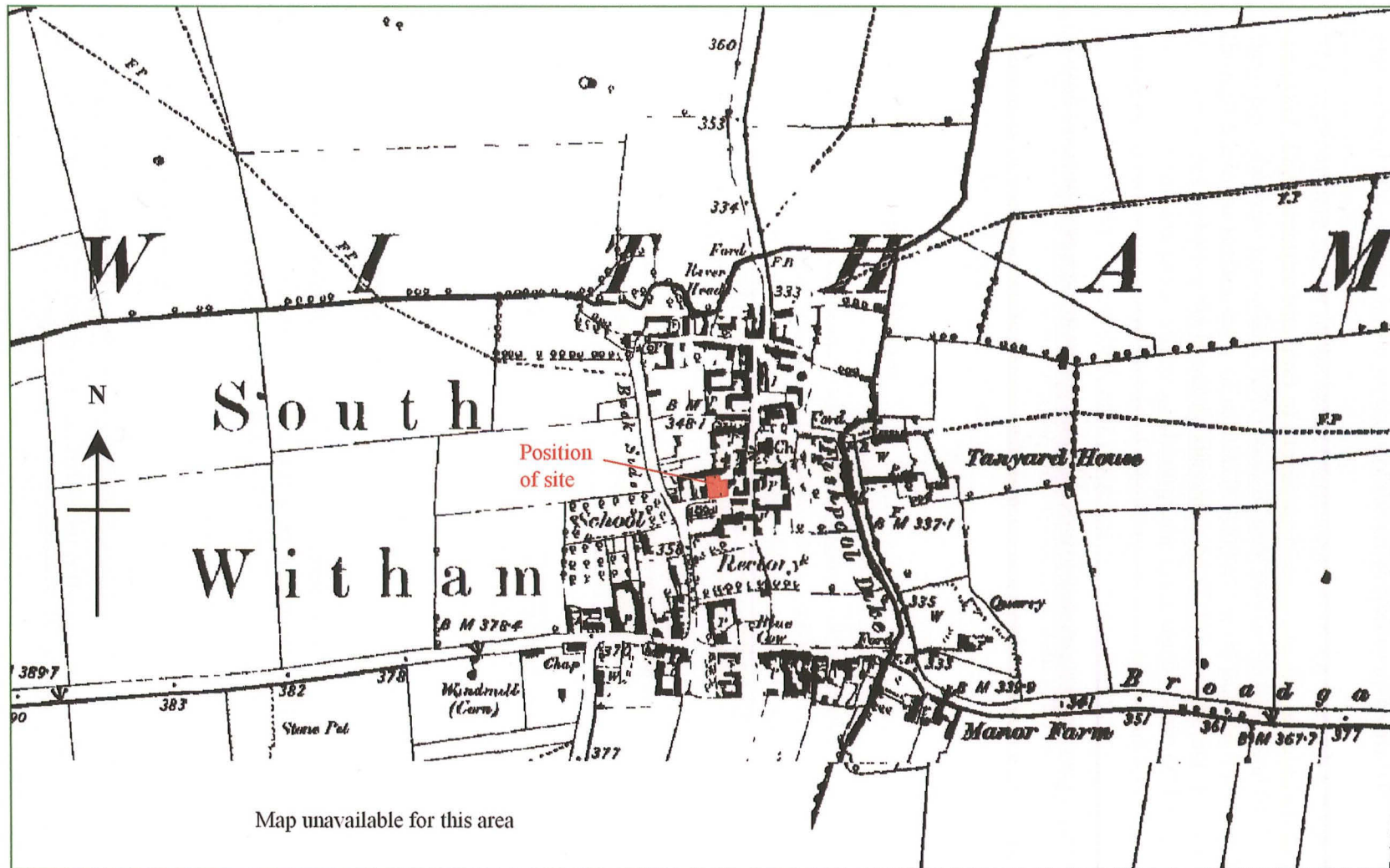


Figure 4: Extract from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1890-91 (not to scale). The present development site is marked in red: a row of buildings can be seen to the north, of which the northern site boundary wall is the only standing remnant, and a single building to the south-west. This building is no longer visible above ground, but its foundation was encountered during the watching brief. The farm buildings to the east are still recognisable.

a mid brownish-grey sandy clay some 0.25m deep, containing fragments of limestone. Occasional sherds of blue-and-white glazed pottery and small fragments of brick were noted in this layer, but were not retrieved. In some places, no subsoil was present, while in the north-west corner of the site, the natural was sealed by mid-brown sandy clay subsoil 004, visible in the sections of the north soakaway (plate 3).

The south-western corner of the house foundation trench cut through a stone structure, wall 007. This structure was built of limestone blocks, roughly squared on their outer faces but otherwise unworked, with traces of lime mortar (plates 5 and 6). It cut through the loose surface layer of natural 003 to rest on the bedded limestone below; it was not clear whether the structure also cut subsoil 002, or whether this had formed after the demolition of the building, although the latter seems more probable. 007 appeared to be the north-east corner of a building occupying the adjacent plot: its external face could be identified, as it consisted of larger, more evenly set stones. Within the wall was a loose rubble fill, 008, consisting of limestone blocks similar to those forming 007, in a matrix of ashy, fine-sandy clay with patches of lime mortar; fragments of blue and white glazed earthenware and modern bottle glass were observed in this fill, but not retrieved.

7.0 Discussion and conclusions

Structure 007 can be confidently identified with the building shown in the plot to the west of the development site on the 1st edition OS map (fig. 4). There is no definite evidence for the date of construction of this building, as the datable material found within rubble 008 probably stems from its demolition, and no dating evidence was found within the wall itself.

The only other feature seen during the watching brief was an undated pit, feature [006], whose fill closely resembled the overlying subsoil, and whose purpose could not be ascertained.

It seems most likely that the development site has been used simply as a small field, probably pertaining to the adjacent farm, through much of the village's history, and that it lies outside any major areas of pre-medieval activity.

8.0 Effectiveness of methodology

The methodology chosen for this project was entirely sufficient for the recording and identification of such archaeological material as was present: a higher level of archaeological intervention would have been unnecessary.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) would like to thank Mr. J. A. Parker for this commission, and for his co-operation during the watching brief.

10.0 References

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Ordnance Survey Explorer Series 247: Grantham, Bottesford and Colsterworth.

Pevsner N. and Harris J., 1989, *The Buildings of England: Lincolnshire*. Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome & London.

Whitwell J.B, 1992, *Roman Lincolnshire, History of Lincolnshire II*. History of Lincolnshire Committee, Lincoln.

1st edition Ordnance Survey map extract from *oldmaps.com*

11.0 Site archive

The site archive is expected to be deposited at the Lincoln City and County Museum within six months of the completion of this report. Access can be gained to it by quoting the LCCM accession number 2005.248.

Appendix 1: Colour Plates

Plate 1 (right): Working shot taken during the initial topsoil strip, looking north-east across the development site towards the neighbouring farm buildings. The bell-cote of St. John the Baptist's Church can be seen in the background.

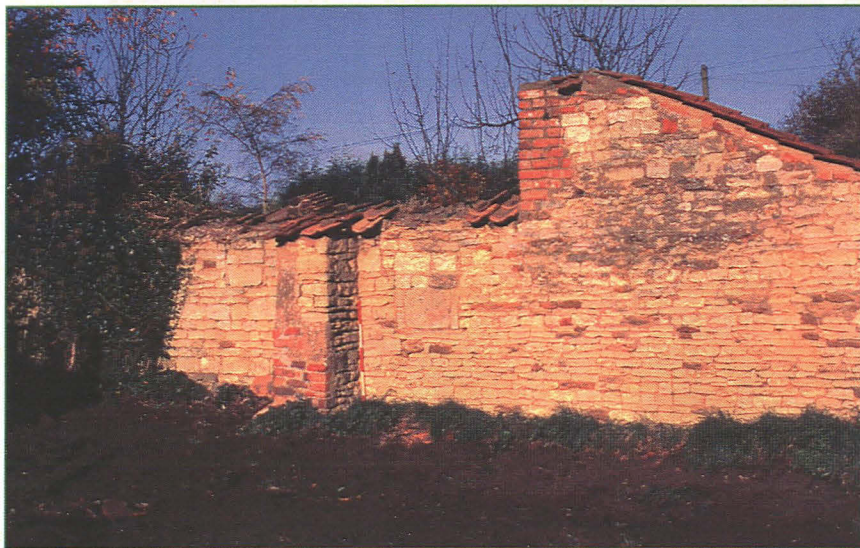


Plate 2 (left): The rear boundary wall of the development site, looking north-west. A blocked window can be seen to the right of the buttress. The buttress itself is an integral part of the wall to the right, but is butted by the wall to the left, and so may indicate the west end of a building.

Plate 3 (right): The eastern section of the north soakaway, largely cut through limestone brash.

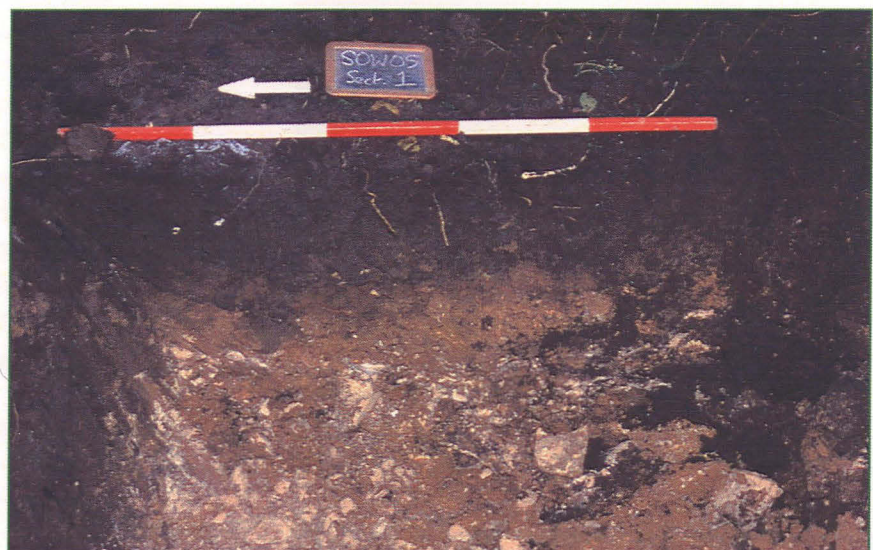
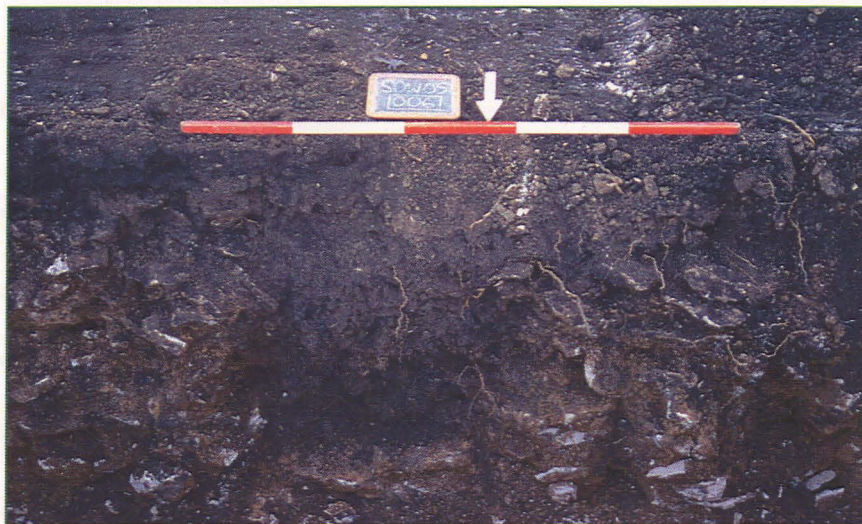


Plate 4 (right): Pit [006] in the foundation trench section, looking south.



Plates 5 (above) and 6 (right): Wall 007 in the sections of the south-west corner of the house foundations. Plate 5, looking south, clearly shows the larger facing stones on the eastern side of the wall, with rubble fill 008 at its base. In Plate 6, looking west, the facing stones are not so distinct, but rubble fill 008 can be seen on the southern side of the wall. The base of wall 007 rests on the natural limestone 003, visible in both photographs in the base of the trench.



Appendix 2: List of contexts

- 001** Dark brownish-grey sandy clay topsoil, containing rubble and modern material
- 002** Mid brownish-grey sandy clay subsoil containing limestone fragments
- 003** Natural: limestone brash overlying bedded limestone
- 004** Mid brown sandy clay subsoil in the NW corner of the site
- 005** Mid brownish-grey sandy clay filling pit [006]
- 006** Undated pit in the house foundation trench
- 007** Wall of limestone blocks in the house foundation trench
- 008** Rubble fill within wall 007