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Highways & Planning
Directorate

Ball Court, Monks Abbey, Lincoln Archaeological Watching Brief

NGR: SK 98878 71324
Planning Application: 2005/0168/F
Site Code: LIMR05
LCNCC Accn No. 2005.249

Report for
Groundwork Lincolnshire

by G. Tann and D. Young

LINCOLNSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

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Summary

Groundworks at the Ball Court, Monks Abbey, Monks Road, Lincoln, exposed limestone wall foundations thought to be part of the Priory of St Mary Magdalene, below an extensive spread of demolition material which probably derived from dismantling of the priory buildings. The site has been disturbed by various twentieth century service trenches and investigatory holes.

Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services was commissioned by Groundwork Lincolnshire in November 2005 to undertake a watching brief at the above site. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the brief set by the Archaeological Officer of Lincoln City Council dated August 24th 2005 and the general requirements set out in the *Standard Brief for Archaeological Projects in Lincolnshire* (Lincolnshire County Council Archaeology Section, August 1997). The watching brief was conducted by Mike Garrett, Geoff Tann and Doug Young between 28/11/05 and 25/01/06.

Site Location

The Site is located on the south side of Monks Road, east of Tempest Street, and within the confines of the Monks' Abbey Recreational Ground. It forms part of Scheduled Ancient Monument 24 (Lincoln) Monks' Abbey. The ball court lies to the south of the remaining upstanding priory ruins.

Planning Background

Planning permission was granted for improvements to the existing ball court, including removal of existing fencing and walling; erection of new steel mesh fencing and goal ends; installation of new drainage and other works.

A Condition of the grant stated that

"No development groundwork shall commence on site until advance written notice (minimum 14 days) of the date of commencement of works on site and the confirmation of appointment of a competent archaeological body to conduct a 'watching brief' has been given to both the Local Planning Authority and the nominated archaeology body. Provision shall then be made for the nominated archaeology body to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the course of all groundwork associated with the development (including any geotechnical investigation of strata, any site clearance or other enabling work and the excavation of foundation and services trenches). Access shall be afforded at all reasonable times to the nominated archaeological body."

The above condition follows the advice of the Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage, who confirmed by letter that the scheme could proceed without formal SMC provided that a watching brief was carried out.

Archaeological Background

The site is located some 1.5km east of the Roman city defences but the extensive remains of a fourth century villa (UAD Monument 455) were uncovered during ironstone mining in the 1880s and 1890s to the east of the site. There was a bath house suite as well as several mosaic floors. These were of such a high quality that it has been suggested the villa must have belonged to a very wealthy citizen, possibly even the provincial governor (Jones, Stocker, and Vince 2003, 97,130).

The site lies beside the ruins of the Priory of St Mary Magdalene (Monk's Abbey). The Priory was a cell of the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary in York, which had begun to acquire land in Lincoln soon after the Conquest. The cell itself was founded in c.1110-1118 and was situated in St Mary's estate to the east of the city, covering land between the River Witham and the top of the hill to the north. The Cell was a minor house manned by two or three monks under a Prior, all of whom were sent from York. By the early fifteenth century it was said that no monks had resided there for ten years and that the property was let to laymen. The cell was dissolved, along with St Mary's in York, in 1539, and passed rapidly into lay hands. An analysis of the fabric remaining visible in 1983 described the three walls forming the choir at the eastern end of the priory church, a separated length of wall which may represent part of a late phase of an aisleless nave and some much later fragments to the north-east. Evidence of removed structures was also noted, particularly a respond and arch at the western end of the south wall of the choir which indicate that this was not the southern limit of the building (Stocker 1984).

A series of twelve 1m square archaeological evaluation holes were excavated by the Lincoln Archaeological Trust in February 1983 in advance of the construction of a 'kick-around area' on the site of the existing ball court (Stocker 1984, 103-105). Only deposits up to about 0.5m depth from the ground surface were investigated at most locations, although some holes were up to 1m deep. Stone foundations with associated limestone rubble and ceramic roof tile fragments were identified close to the centre of the eastern edge of the ball court area. Virtually all the other evaluation holes cut into a sandy horizon with broken brick, tile, mortar and window glass, with occasional modern artefacts. The sandy material was interpreted as being the result of modern dumping, and the foundations were interpreted as either part of a cloister or a separate dwelling house beside the priory. The published note expressed regret that 'modern disturbances may have destroyed the evidence which would suggest whether or not there was a formal cloister to the south of the church'.

A resistivity survey of available land on the Monks Abbey site was conducted by Engineering Archaeological Services for the Abbey Neighbourhood History Group in September 2004 (Brooks and Laws 2004). This identified a single anomaly which was confidently interpreted as part of a buried foundation extending the line of the chancel towards the nave. A probable spread of demolition rubble

was noted, and a feature interpreted as a pond (possibly a monastic fish pond or even mill pond) with an outlet to the south was recorded in the north-east corner of the Monks Abbey site.

The Watching Brief

Temporary Site Access

A new temporary vehicular access to the ball court site was created by the contractors at the start of the project. Turf and some topsoil was removed to a depth of up to about 0.35m from a 3.3m wide strip between the north-west corner of the ball court and opposite Nos. 8 and 9 Tempest Street. The modern topsoil layer across the development area was a dark brown sandy loam **100**, usually about 0.25m – 0.3m thick (except near the south-west corner of the ball court where it was up to 0.5m thick). In places, the topsoil had probably been used to level depressions. Elsewhere, patches of fine limestone brash **114** were exposed (Pl. 1). This material appeared to have no archaeological significance and incorporated fragments of bottle glass and modern rubbish. Where the stripped access was deepest, close to the ball court, a yellow/brown loam deposit with roof tile fragments **115** lay below the turf. This was interpreted as spread material derived from demolition and stone robbing from the adjacent priory ruins.

Perimeter Drainage Trenches

The contractors started excavation of the c.0.5m wide and c.0.55m deep drain trench around the outside of the surfaced ball court at the north-east corner, 10m from the priory church building. At the corner, a 1.2m x 1m irregular hole was excavated to a depth of 0.8m (9.36m OD) to house an inspection chamber.

At the north-east corner it covered a layer of brick rubble **111**, with a thin band of redeposited topsoil **112** beneath it; this appeared to be a dump of material possibly used for levelling but with no obvious derivation. This dump did not extend across the drain trench, and was probably fill of a small pit **108** containing a mixed dirty fill with redeposited limestone lumps **110** below the redeposited topsoil (Pl. 2). The pit was probably late-twentieth century in date, but had disturbed earlier remains.

A distinct yellow/brown sandy loam layer **105** (similar to **115** recorded in the site access) was seen in parts of the eastern, northern and western trenches below about 9.70m OD. The layer incorporated numerous fragments of medieval roof tile and some limestone rubble, and was interpreted as a demolition deposit derived from the bonding material cleaned from the abbey buildings during stone robbing. Although the layer was probably derived from a sixteenth century or later activity, previous observations on the site have suggested that its present extent is the result of late post-medieval and twentieth century earthmoving (Stocker 1984).

The most significant archaeological remains recorded during the watching brief were found immediately below the demolition spread **105**. An apparent west-east alignment of five pieces of limestone **106** was exposed in the west-east trench to the south of the choir ruins, beside the larger

hole for the drain inspection chamber (Pl. 3). The stones were not dressed and had no visible adhering mortar, but the northern edges of four were uniform and at a similar level about 0.55m below the ground surface (at 9.61m OD). Further similar stones were seen to the east and south-east in the return drain trench but these had either been disturbed or were not part of the feature. The foundation did not appear to have extended further east, but may have been robbed to the west. Theoretically it may have continued north and south of the trench, but an extension in these directions did not locate any further remains. The shallower trenches either side of the corner and across the pitch were not deep enough to demonstrate whether any more of the foundation was present. It seemed probable that it was the remains of the foundation of a small column or a buttress from a wall lying between the drain trenches and the ball court. However, a small evaluation trench had been excavated close to that position in 1983, and no archaeological remains had been found within about 0.5m of the then ground surface (Stocker 1984, 104-5).

The contractors needed to lower the drain trench corner for an inspection chamber, and asked for some of the visible stones to be removed. LAS contacted the English Heritage Inspector, Dr Glyn Coppack, who agreed that this could be done after recording of the remains within the trench. After rapid planning and photography of the remains, the yellow material **105** to the east of the stones was removed to a depth of 0.75m below ground level. Below the soil was a dense layer of thin stones and roof tile fragments **107** which extended across all the deepened part of the trench. Although there was only a small area visible, the layer appeared to extend up to the stone foundation **106**, and to continue below it. It was interpreted as a deliberately created surface, probably an external yard area but possibly a coarse internal surface (Pl. 4). Roof tile fragments within the layer showed that the surface was thirteenth century or later in date.

It is possible that the findings at the north-eastern corner of the new drain trench form a tantalising glimpse associated with the 'interior space to the south' of the medieval choir which David Stocker predicted after his analysis of the upstanding fabric (Pl. 5; Stocker 1984). It is unfortunate that so little more could be recorded, and that the interpretations remain so vague.

To the immediate north of the foundation **106**, and at the western limit of its exposed extent, a small deposit of white lime mortar **109** was seen at the edge of the drain trench below **105**, and at about 9.66m OD (Pl. 6). As no other mortar was observed, this could have been either a construction spill or the waste from cleaning robbed stonework.

The drain trench was shallower around the sides of the ball court, and this may explain why no further structural remains were seen. Much of the ground had been disturbed during construction of the existing court and installation of the floodlighting cables, and it is possible that some of the disturbances represented the backfilled 1983 evaluation trenches. Greater concentrations of limestone rubble (which may have been in the close vicinity of unidentified foundations) were seen at **116** and **117** on opposite sides of the ball court. These might represent a single feature but should probably be

tentatively interpreted as separate features or dumps. Neither of these locations equate with the foundations recorded in 1983.

At the north-west corner of the ball court the trench cut into a limestone concretion **113** with a high iron component evident (Pl. 7). Samples of this were examined by Dr Alan Vince and identified as tufa, a natural product of iron-rich water percolation through limestone. Chalybeate (iron-rich) springs were recorded along the spring line beside Monks Road in the nineteenth century and these conditions would have produced the entirely natural concretion. More of this material was found at greater depth in the soakaway pit to the south.

South-western Soakaway Pit

The 1.6m deep and 2m x 1.5m soakaway was excavated by machine about 5m to the south of the south-east corner of the ball court, and connected to the perimeter drain trench (Pl. 8). The topsoil covered a 0.55m thick layer of dark grey soil **101** which contained limestone fragments and medieval roof tile. This material sealed a 0.65m thick lighter brown, very loose deposit **102** which also produced numerous twelfth to sixteenth century roof tile fragments. Both layers were interpreted as a demolition spread or levelling deposit, probably derived from destruction of the abbey buildings, but this may have been reworked at a later date.

Below these layers was a 0.2m thick band of the natural limestone concretion, recorded here as **104** but similar to **113**. An underlying natural layer of orange/brown sand **103** was only seen in this pit, where it was at least 0.7m thick; no limestone bedrock was seen.

Cross-Court Drainage Trenches

Three c.0.4m deep trenches were excavated across the existing ball court for drainage, connecting with the new drains (Pl. 9). These remained within the foundation material for the court and encountered no archaeological remains.

New Floodlight Post Holes

Four new 0.5m diameter holes were excavated by hand to about 1.2m deep, close to the corners of the ball court. The north-eastern hole was excavated first, and this was deliberately sited to avoid the stone foundations identified in the drain trench. The hole position was 3m south of the monument fence, and 3m west of the drain corner. The ground had been disturbed in the twentieth century to a depth of about 0.5m (0.85m at the northern edge of the hole), with a thick deposit of demolition material **105** below it.

The south-western hole exposed a possible stone foundation, **106**, in the northern and eastern sides 0.9m below ground level (9.26m OD), but this could not be related to any other observations. Apart from demolition material **105**, no archaeological remains were disturbed by the other holes. The tufa at

the north-western corner was present between 0.6m and 1.1m below ground level, with a buff sandy clay layer **118** at the base of the hole.

Replacement Cable Trench

A 0.4m wide trench was excavated by mini-digger alongside the southern, eastern and northern edges of the ball court for a replacement electricity cable serving the new floodlights. From the north-western corner of the pitch, the trench was cut across the grassed area to connect with an existing service beside Tempest Street.

The cable trench was positioned close to the new drain trench except at the trench corners, and it cut through deposits previously recorded in that trench. A 1m wide concentration of stone rubble coinciding with the position of **116** confirmed the presence of a feature there; the stone was fairly dense but not horizontally laid, suggesting that this should be interpreted as backfill of the void created by 'robbing' of a west-east aligned stone wall.

At the north-eastern corner, the trench was carefully excavated in order to avoid further damage to buried foundations. In practice, the trench seemed to clip the western edge of the stone foundation **106**, with only demolition material **105** to its west, but a twentieth century disturbance to the immediate south may have removed the foundation. Closer to the upstanding priory choir, the ground had been disturbed in the past, and backfilled with concrete and brick rubble. The disturbance extended about 6.75m west of the fenced monument and had removed all trace of any foundations above the trench base.

New Fence Post Holes

Forty-six fence post-holes, 0.28m diameter, 0.86m deep, were excavated for a new fence to surround the ball court (Pl. 10). These holes cut through the deposits already recorded, and only one, post-hole 19, may have encountered any structural remains. A limestone block, **10**, 0.86m below ground level at the base of this post-hole (9.3m OD), could be part of a wall foundation the hole was too small to confirm that it was not a redeposited piece of rubble (Pl. 11). This lay c.5m north of wall **116**.

Conclusion

The watching brief has demonstrated that significant archaeological remains, probably associated with the priory, survive on this site. A thick layer of demolition material, probably mostly comprising the remains of tiled roofs, mortar and other wall bonding material left on site after reuse of the stone from the priory buildings, covers all except the western edge of the ball court. In the north-east corner, this had covered the stone foundation. The layer is probably the same as that noted in the 1983 investigations; it may contain modern material (although none was seen in this watching brief) but it is unlikely to have been imported from elsewhere.

This has been the second rapid archaeological investigation of the site in twenty five years. Each has reported the presence of undateable fragments of the plan of stone structures. It is evident that a

different archaeological response should be considered in advance of any further disturbance of the site. Open area excavation of the site could be expected to recover vestigial elements of foundations protected by the demolition material.

Acknowledgements

Martin Ely and Julie Watts (Groundwork Lincolnshire) and their contractors; Dr Glyn Coppack (English Heritage).

Illustrations were produced by Mick McDaid. Other help was received from Ian Rowlandson.

Mike Garrett, Geoff Tann and Doug Young

Lindsey Archaeological Services

27th January 2006

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Contents of Site Archive

Correspondence

Context sheets

Annotated developer's site plan

Field plan and sections

Photographs: colour prints, LAS film nos. 05/128; 05/137; 06/6; 06/7 (digital)

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

LIMR 05 Context Summary

Context No.	Type	Relationships	Description	Finds
10	?wall foundation	below 105	Single visible limestone block	
100	Layer	Above 101	Modern turf and topsoil	
101	Layer	Below 100, above 102	Very dark grey loam with limestone fragments and ceramic tile	13th – 15th C roof tile fragments
102	Layer	Below 101, above 104	Loose grey/brown loam with roof tile fragments	late 12th – 16th C roof tile fragments
103	Layer	Below 104	Natural sand	
104	Layer	Below 102, above 103 Below 112; cut by 108; above 106	Thin layer of iron coloured limestone/tufa	
105	Layer	Below 105, above 107	Yellow/brown loam with roof tile fragments	12th – 13th C roof tile fragments
106	Stone Foundation	Below 105, above 107	Limestone rubble blocks, single course Thin limestone pieces and roof tile fragments, laid horizontally and dense	
107	Stone surface	Below 106		
108	Cut	Filled by 110, cuts 105	Small sub-circular pit, 0.5m deep, c. 0.4m diam	
109	Layer	?below 105	small deposit of white mortar Loose mixed dark brown and yellow sandy loam: ?modern disturbance	
110	Fill	Fill of 108, below 100		
111	Layer	Below 100, above 112	Layer of brick rubble fragments and roof tile Dark brown loam; redeposited or buried topsoil layer	Roman or medieval roof tiles
112	Layer	Below 111, above 105		
113	Layer	?Same as 104	Layer of iron coloured limestone/tufa	natural
114	Layer	Below 100	Limestone fine rubble	
115	Layer	?Same as 105; Below 100	Yellow/brown sandy loam on access road	
116	Rubble spread	Below 105	?west-east wall foundation. 0.1m wide	
117	Layer	?Same as 105; Below 118	Yellow/brown loam with roof tile fragments	
118	Layer	Below 113	Buff-coloured sandy clay	natural

APPENDIX 2

Tile Archive LIMR05

Jane Young and Anne Boyle

context	cname	full name	fabric	sub type	frags	weight	description	date
101	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	19	flat roofer; abraded	13th to 15th
101	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	18	flat roofer	13th to 15th
101	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	62	flat roofer; square/rectangular post firing cut out	13th to 15th
101	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	hard orange		1	71	flat roofer; light firing striations in fabric; salt surfacing; mortar	13th to 15th
101	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	hard orange		1	63	flat roofer; common fe inclusions in fabric; roughly bedded including ca; finger marks; corner	13th to 15th
106	NIB	Nibbed tile	1/7	moulded and reapplied triangular nib type 1/2	1	253	flat roofer; left corner; mortar; salt surfacing?	Mid 12th to Early/Mid 13th
106	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	7		1	100	flat roofer; mortar	Mid 12th to Mid 13th
106	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1/7 (or new fabric as of LCMR03)		1	65	flat roofer; mortar	13th
102	NIB	Nibbed tile	1	applied circular cut back nib type 4a	1	81	flat roofer; left hand corner	14th to 15th
102	NIB	Nibbed tile	1	moulded circular nib type 3a	1	130	flat roofer; finger marks where removed from mould; right hand corner	Late 12th to Mid 13th
102	NIB	Nibbed tile	1	moulded and reapplied circular nib type 3a/4a/4e	1	154	flat roofer; finger impressions; mortar	13th
102	NIB	Nibbed tile	7	applied circular cut back nib type 4a	1	110	flat roofer	13th to 15th
102	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	49	flat roofer; mortar	13th to 15th

context	cname	full name	fabric	sub type	frags	weight	description	date
102	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	Near vitrified red		1	63	flat roofer; mortar; paw/finger marks; salt surfaces?	13th to 16th
102	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	66	flat roofer	13th to 15th
102	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	26	flat roofer; abraded	13th to 15th
102	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1		1	28	flat roofer; abraded	13th to 15th
112	RTMISC	Roman or post-Roman tile	local fabric		1	110	edge; looks like imbrex but sanded on exterior curve possible gutter tile	Roman or Medieval
112	RTMISC	Roman or post-Roman tile	local fabric		1	45	PNR or TEG	Roman or Medieval
112	RTMISC	Roman or post-Roman tile			1	55	PNR or TEG; mortar over break	Roman or Medieval
112	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1/7		1	70	flat roofer; mortar	13th
112	RTMISC	Roman or post-Roman tile			1	36	PNR or TEG	Roman or Medieval
112	RTMISC	Roman or post-Roman tile			1	33	TEG or PNR	Roman or Medieval
112	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	new fabric as of LCMR03		2	376	flat roofer; same vessel; roughly bedded; square/rectangular post firing cut out; mortar	13th

THE FIGURES

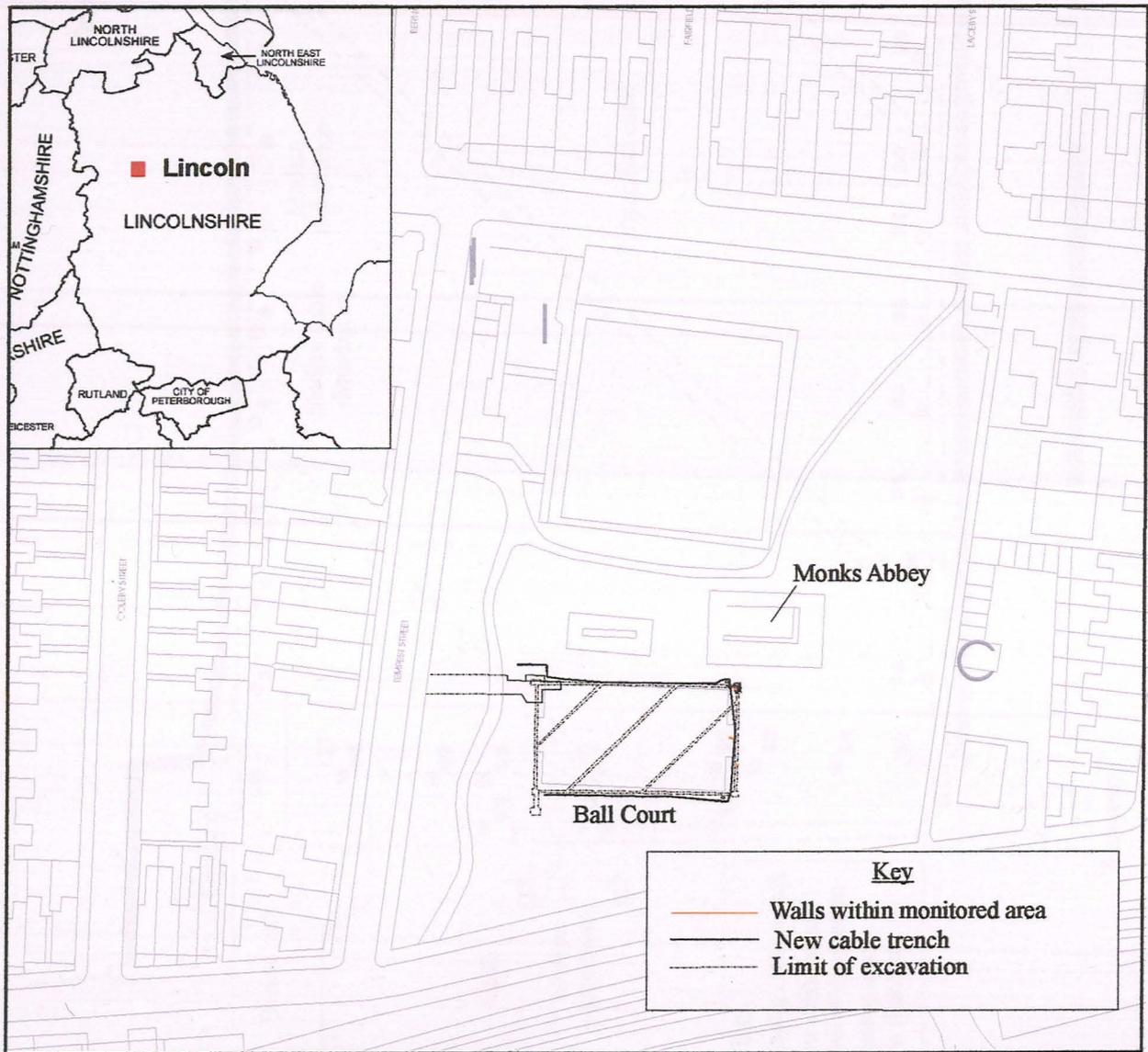


Fig. 1 Location of Monks Abbey and the Ball Court, Lincoln (insert C based on a 1:1250 map. © Crown copyright, reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO. LAS Licence No.AL 100002165).

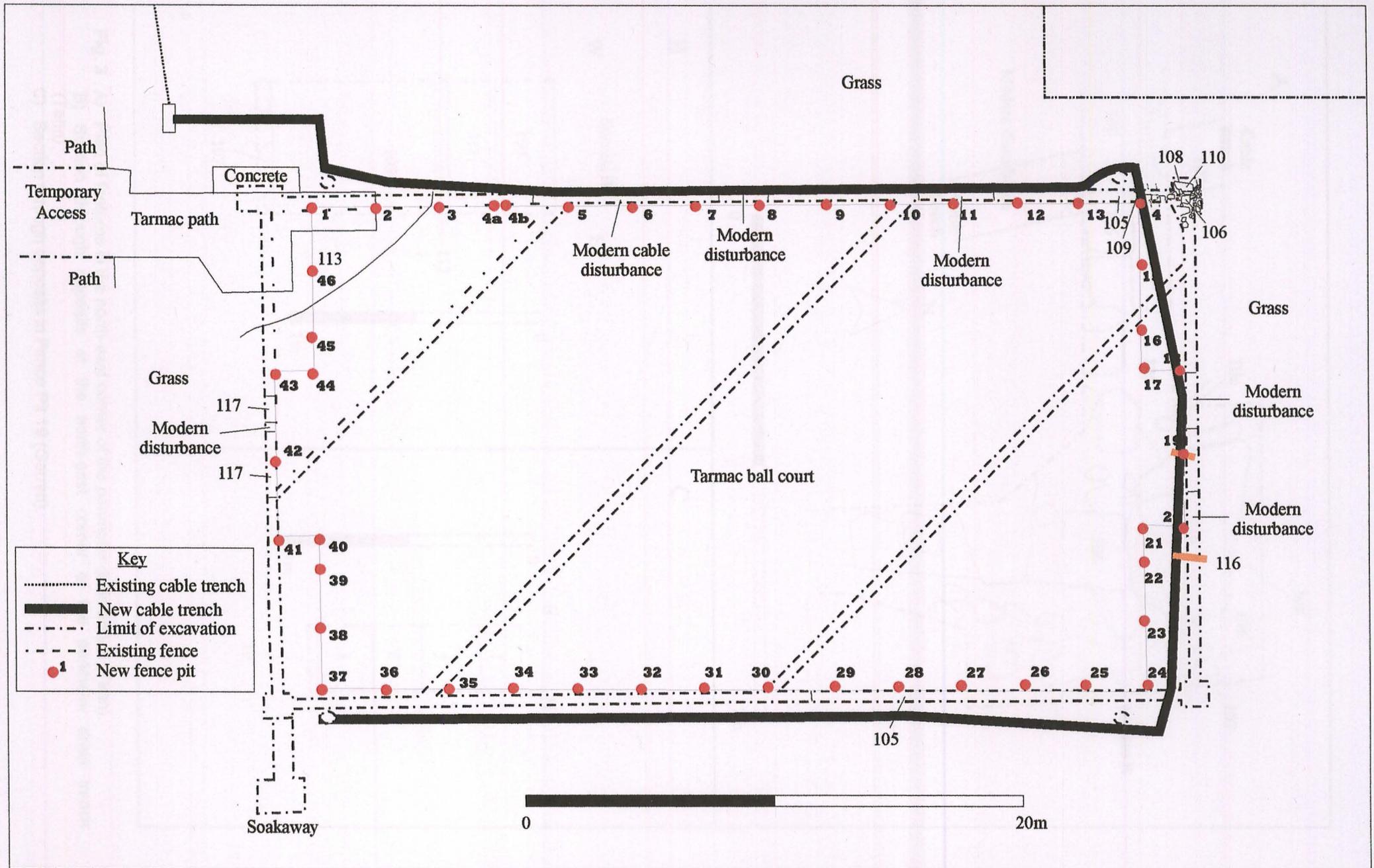


Fig. 2 Plan of the new ball court, showing the position of archaeological features (based on a plan supplied by the client, Smith Sports and Civils dwg. 3441/GA/01B).

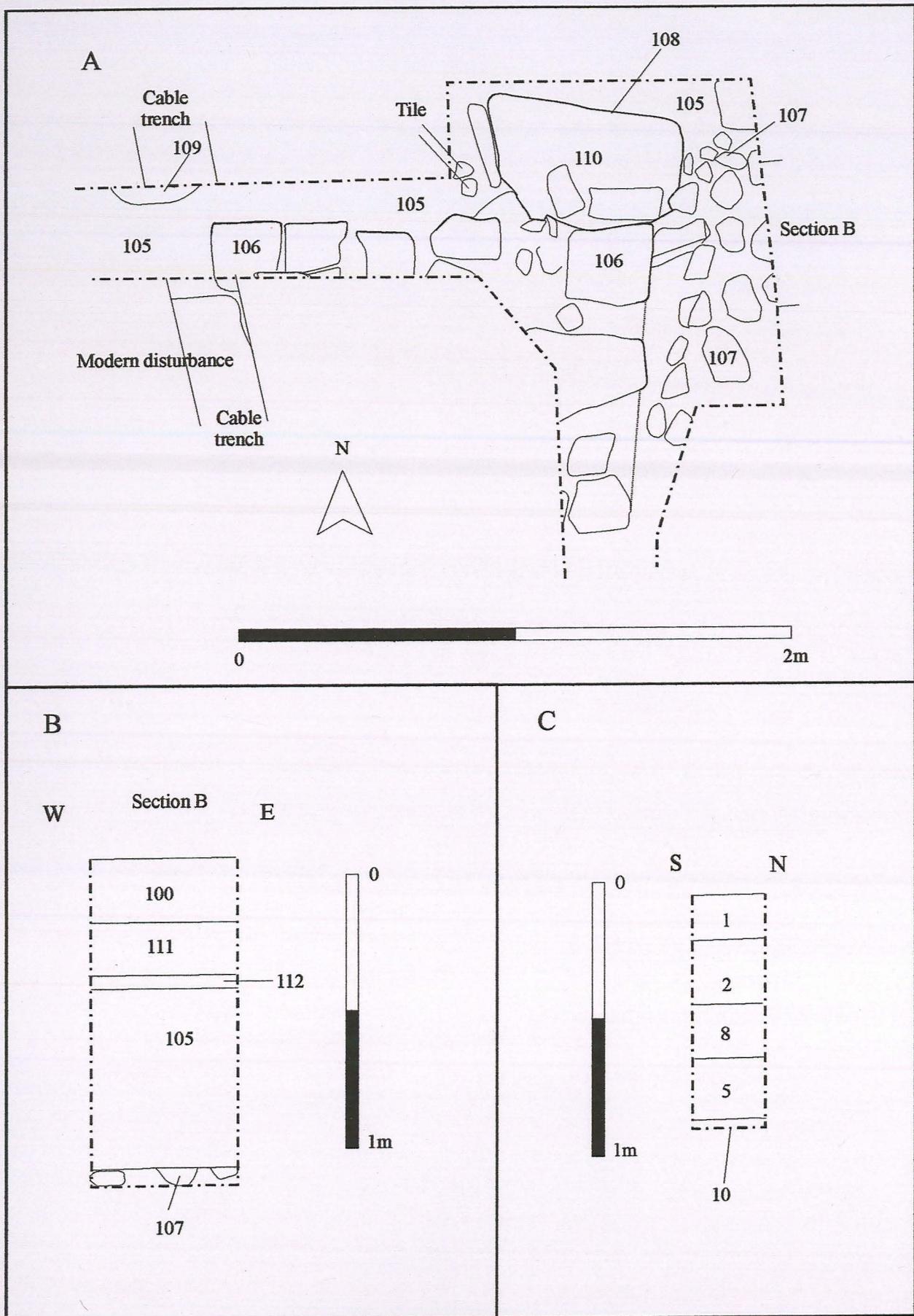


Fig. 3 A) Plan of features in the north-east corner of the perimeter drain trench (Tann).
 B) Section through deposits at the north-east corner of the perimeter drain trench (Tann).
 C) Section through deposits in Fence Pit 19 (Garrett).

THE PLATES



PI. 1 Temporary site access, during topsoil stripping (looking east).



PI. 2 Limestone rubble at the NE corner of the drain trench, disturbed by modern pit 110 (looking north; scale 0.5m).



PI. 3 Stone wall foundation 106 and mortar deposit 109 (looking east; scales 0.5m and 0.3m).



PI. 4 Location of the NE corner of the drain trench (looking north to the abbey choir).



Pl. 5 Surface 107 with roof tile fragments, to north and east of foundation 106 (looking north; scale 0.5m).



Pl. 6 Stone wall foundation 106 and mortar deposit 109 (looking east; scales 0.5m and 0.3m).



Pl. 7 Limestone 'tufa' concretion in inspection pit at the NW corner of the ball court.



Pl. 8 West and north sides of new soakaway trench (looking NW; scales 2m and 1m).



PI. 9 Location of the drainage trench across the existing ball court (looking NE).



PI. 10 Blue fence post marking the new fenceline around the ball court (looking west).



Pl. 11 Limestone block 10 at base of new post-hole 19.