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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT  
BOSTON GENERAL HOSPITAL,  
BOSTON,  
LINCOLNSHIRE  
(BGH95)**

Work Undertaken For  
Meldrum Lee and Gillatt

May 1995



**A P S**  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
PROJECT  
SERVICES

LINCOLNSHIRE  
COUNTY  
22 MAY  
CITY AND COUNTY  
MUSEUM

**Contents**

1. SUMMARY . . . . . 1

2. INTRODUCTION . . . . . 1

    2.1 Background . . . . . 1

    2.2 Topography and Geology . . . . . 1

    2.3 Archaeological Setting . . . . . 1

3. AIMS . . . . . 3

4. METHODS . . . . . 3

5. RESULTS . . . . . 3

    5.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits . . . . . 3

    5.2 Phase 2 Medieval deposits . . . . . 3

    5.3 Phase 3 Post-medieval deposits . . . . . 3

    5.4 Phase 4 20<sup>th</sup> century deposits . . . . . 3

6. DISCUSSION . . . . . 4

7. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNIQUES . . . . . 5

8. CONCLUSIONS . . . . . 5

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . . 5

10. PERSONNEL . . . . . 5

11. BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . 5

12. ABBREVIATIONS . . . . . 6

Appendix 1 Context Summary

Appendix 2 The Archive

## List of Figures

- Fig. 1 General Location Plan
- Fig. 2 Site Location Plan with Archaeological Sites and Finds
- Fig. 3 Test Pit Location Plan
- Fig. 4 Representative Sections of Test Pits

## 1. SUMMARY

*A watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of test pits at the General Hospital Site, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

*Previous investigations at the site undertaken during 1994, which included a desk-top assessment and subsequent evaluation, identified well preserved remains dating from the medieval period (1066-1500 AD) and later. Imported pottery and exotic stone associated with the remains indicated high status occupation of the site. Additionally, evidence for medieval industrial activity was recovered*

*Layers of glacial clay and alluvium occurred as natural deposits across the entire area. Deposits of presumed medieval date developed over these.*

*A brick floor, possibly with an associated wall and buried topsoil constitute the earliest archaeological deposits. This floor probably relates to a medieval brick structure identified during the former evaluation. Overlying the floor was a layer of river alluvium, probably deposited during the post-medieval period. Above this were two buried soils, probably of modern origin, which were sealed by demolition deposits.*

*Located at the western extent of the area was evidence for the destruction and removal of a cellar that had been beneath the Nurses Home.*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Background

Archaeological Project Services were commissioned by Meldrum Lee and Gillatt, on behalf of de Montfort Housing Society Ltd, to undertake an

archaeological watching brief on test pits at the General Hospital site, Boston, Lincolnshire. This work was subsequent to an archaeological evaluation undertaken during 1994 to determine the archaeological implications of proposed development at the site, as detailed in planning application B05/0028/94. The work was undertaken in accordance with a brief set by the Community Archaeologist for Boston Borough Council.

### 2.2 Topography and Geology

Boston is situated 45km southeast of Lincoln and approximately 7km from the northwest coast of The Wash, among the fens of south Lincolnshire. Bisected by the River Witham, the town is located in Boston District, Lincolnshire (Fig. 1). Situated on the east bank of the Witham, the proposed development site is on ground that is slightly higher than the surrounding area, the river looping around this slight elevation.

The hospital site is located at a height of c. 6m OD, 750m south of the town centre defined by St. Botolph's parish church. Centred on National Grid Reference TF32904340, the General Hospital site covers approximately 2.9 hectares (Fig. 2).

Local soils are the Tanvats Association typical alluvial gley soils (Hodge *et al.* 1984, 319) and Wisbech Association calcareous alluvial gley soils developed in marine alluvium (*ibid.* 361). Beneath this marine alluvium is glacial drift that was deposited in a geological basin between the Lincolnshire Wolds and the East Anglian Heights (Harden 1978, 5). These glacial deposits in turn overlie a solid geology of Jurassic clays.

### 2.3 Archaeological Setting

A neolithic stone axe (SMR12674; B05/025), found *c.* 200m northwest of the proposed development site, provides the only evidence for a prehistoric presence in the area. Similarly, Romano-British activity in the vicinity is restricted, with a single occupation site, indicated by a spread of artefacts, located approximately 300m northeast of the General Hospital. However, this apparent paucity of early exploitation is probably due to burial of the evidence by alluvium, rather than genuine absence.

Significantly greater evidence is available for use of the area in the medieval period. The investigation site lies just beyond the southern end of the medieval town, defined by the Barditch (B05/001), in an area dominated by ecclesiastical foundations. St John's Church (SMR12690) lay just east of the general hospital site, and St John Baptist hospital (SMR12691) is presumed to have been located in the vicinity of this church. Less than 200m east of the general hospital is the postulated site of the Augustinian Friary (SMR12695). However, it should be noted that this location is contested and an alternative site within the Bar Ditch has been postulated (Harden 1978, 25). A Franciscan Friary (B05/009) and associated cemetery (B05/041) was situated *c.* 250m north of the proposed development area. In St Anne's Lane, on the west side of the river, immediately opposite the present investigation site, are the sites of the eponymous church (SMR12687) and cross (SMR12661), that stood at the entrance to the lane (Fig. 2).

From the late medieval period onwards, the area was used for riverine trade and vessel repair activities. Just north of the hospital site was the Steel-yard or Custom House (SMR12703), first mentioned in 1585. Cartographic evidence records ship yards immediately south of the proposed

development area, with further inlets apparently entering the General Hospital site. Plausibly identifiable with docks documented in the sixteenth century, these possessed little value and were probably natural creeks where boats could be taken for repairs.

A mill, first mentioned in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and later recorded on Hall's 1741 Plan of the Borough and Port of Boston, was located just south of the investigation area (Fig. 2).

Within the northern confines of the hospital site, a jail was erected in 1818, and demolished in 1853. Foundations encountered during the excavation of geotechnical trial pits possibly relate to this structure. Construction of Boston General Hospital commenced in 1874, with various expansions and alterations being undertaken into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (APS 1994a).

An archaeological evaluation of the site (APS 1994b) identified medieval occupation in the form of walls, ditches, pits and laid surfaces, although the nature of this occupation was unclear. However, associated artefacts suggested that high status habitation of probable domestic character covered most of the area, with some form of high-temperature industrial activity located in the northeastern part of the site. The area was divided into two land blocks, possibly separated by walls and ditches. During the post-medieval period part of the land was abandoned and the whole area was later subject to flooding, causing the area to become temporarily vacated. The site was reoccupied during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and construction of the hospital commenced in 1874. The medieval habitation and industrial remains are considered to be locally and regionally important.

### 3. AIMS

The aims of the watching brief were to locate and record archaeological deposits, if present, and to determine their date, function and origin, and to determine the depth of natural geological deposits.

### 4. METHODS

A total of four pits (labelled 1-4 - see fig. 3), each approximately 3m square, were mechanically excavated to a depth averaging 2.5m. The sides of the pits were cleaned and examined to identify any archaeological features. Each archaeological deposit or feature revealed was allocated a unique reference number with an individual written description. Natural geological deposits were also recorded. A photographic record was compiled and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10.

### 5. RESULTS

Records of the deposits and features identified during the watching brief were examined. Phasing was assigned based on the nature of the deposits and recognisable relationships between them. A total of four phases were identified during the watching brief:

- Phase 1 Natural deposits
- Phase 2 Medieval deposits
- Phase 3 Post-medieval deposits
- Phase 4 20<sup>th</sup> century deposits

#### 5.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits

A layer of blue-grey clay (7) containing soil wedges rich in organic remains (8) was identified in each of the pits examined (see fig. 4). This layer has been interpreted as a glacial or periglacial deposit. Overlying this in pits 1 and 4 was a layer of brown sandy silt (6 and 15)

interpreted as a deposit of alluvium.

#### 5.2 Phase 2 Medieval deposits

Overlying the alluvial layer in pit 1 was a single course of hand-made bricks (5) laid flat. This deposit has been interpreted as an indeterminate structure, and is almost certainly associated with an indeterminate brick structure investigated during the previous evaluation, in a trench located beside pit 1. Overlying the alluvium in pit 4 was a layer of brown silty sandy clay (14), interpreted as a buried soil, and probably contemporary with brick structure 5.

#### 5.3 Phase 3 Post-medieval deposits

Sealing the brick structure 5 in test pit 1 was a layer of brown sandy silt (4). This deposit has been interpreted as river alluvium, deposited during a period of flooding. Such a sequence of deposits indicates that the brick structure must have become, or become, redundant by this time.

Overlying the alluvium was a layer of brown sandy silty clay (3) containing frequent small pebbles. This has been interpreted as a buried soil, possibly modern in origin. Located in test pit 4, overlying 14 was a layer of brown sandy clay (13), interpreted as a buried soil. This layer is probably the same as, or contemporary with 3.

Located in test pit 3 and overlying the natural clay 7, was a layer of brown silty clay containing frequent inclusions of calcareous rock chips (limestone?). This has been interpreted as an indeterminate layer.

#### 5.4 Phase 4 20<sup>th</sup> century deposits

Located at the northern part of the site,

sealing the buried soil 3 in pit 1, was a layer of brown sandy silt (2). This has been interpreted as a layer of redeposited soil probably derived from demolition of structures on site. Overlying this and the buried soil in test pit 4 is a layer of variable brown silty clay (12 and 1) containing frequent inclusions of ceramic building material, tarmac and concrete. This layer has been interpreted as redeposited material derived from the demolition of structures on the site.

Sealing the brown silty clay 11 (phase 3) in test pit 3 was a layer of brown sandy clay (10) containing a high percentage of fragmented ceramic building material. This has been interpreted as redeposited material that is the same as, or contemporary with 12 and 1.

Truncating the natural clay 7 in test pit 2 was a cut feature (16) 3.8m long by 1.8m wide by 2m deep (as exposed), containing a primary fill of fragmented brick, concrete and tarmac (9). This feature is considered to be a cut (that was designed) to remove the concrete floor of a cellar located beneath the former Nurses Home, and subsequently backfilled with demolition material (Haynes, S. *pers comm.*).

## 6. DISCUSSION

Natural deposits are represented by blue clay (7) containing lenses of plant remains (8). The surface of these deposits occurs at c. 2.85m OD (see fig. 4). This height is comparable with the floors of the cellars at the former Nurses Home, the location of test pit 2. Moreover, natural blue clay was revealed directly beneath deposits (9) back-filling the basement. Consequently, it is established that, within the area of cellaring at the Nurses Home, all archaeological deposits have been removed.

Above the natural clay at the northern part of the development area, test pits 1 and 4, was a deposit of alluvium (6, 15). The upper surface of this deposit, which exceeded 0.5m in depth, occurred at c. 3.45m OD. In particular consideration of the depth of this material, it is possible that the layer actually comprises several separate alluvial deposits. Support for this suggestion was recovered during the earlier evaluation where two alluvial deposits (context groups 3001 and 3003 in Trench 3 - see Archaeological Project Services, 1994) could not be differentiated, except where there was an intervening layer of mortar.

At least in their upper levels, these alluvial layers encountered in the test pits are likely to be equivalent to the similar deposits, which were of 14th century date, revealed during the evaluation excavation (context groups 1001, 3001, 4001, 6001, 7001, 8001).

Above the alluvium in test pit 1 was a layer of hand-made bricks (5), probably constituting a floor. They were similar in nature, and at a comparable height to bricks that defined a rectangular structure (context group 1007) encountered in the adjacent Trench 1 of the earlier evaluation. In consequence, the floor observed in the test pit and the rectangular structure revealed during the evaluation are probably related and contemporary, both dating to the medieval period. Additionally, during mechanical excavation of the test pit, further masonry was detected but not exposed. This masonry deposit (perhaps a wall) may be associated with the brick structure.

Above the brick floor in test pit 1 was a layer of alluvium (4). This deposit is similar to the post-medieval alluvium recorded during the evaluation (context groups 2001, 3009, 4004, 6018, 7013,



8007).

Above the natural clay in test pit 3 (near to the earlier evaluation trench 7), was a 1.4m deep layer of mixed soil (11). It seems probable that this deposit actually comprised several separate layers. This suggestion is based on the layers observed in the adjacent trench 7.

Sealing the alluvial layers in test pits 1 and 4 were soil deposits (3, 13, 14). Interpreted as garden soils, these are probably equivalent to some of the phase 3 (modern) buried topsoils encountered during the earlier excavation. As noted in the evaluation report, these deposits may have originated in the post-medieval period (16-17th centuries) but were transformed later (Archaeological Project Services 1994, 11).

Recent topsoils and dumped deposits (1, 2, 10, 12, 13) provided the uppermost layers of test pits 1, 3 and 4.

## 7. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNIQUES

The methods and strategies employed in the investigation proved to be effective in establishing the presence of medieval and post-medieval archaeological remains.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief established the presence of deposits of medieval and later date.

A layer of periglacial or glacial clay, sealed by alluvium, occurred as natural deposits across the entire area. Deposits of presumed medieval date developed over these.

A brick structure, probably a floor, possibly with an associated wall and a

buried topsoil constitute the earliest archaeological deposits. The floor is considered to be external as it had been sealed by a layer of river alluvium, probably during the post-medieval period. Overlying the alluvium were two buried soils, probably of modern origin, which in turn were sealed by deposits of demolition refuse.

Located at the western extent of the study area was evidence for the destruction and removal of a cellar that had been beneath the Nurses Home. This was removed so as not to impede piling operations (Haynes, *S. pers comm.*)

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services wish to thank Mr J A Merrett of Meldrum Lee and Gillatt who commissioned the watching brief and analysis. The work was coordinated by Steve Haynes and this report was edited by Dave Start.

## 10. PERSONNEL

Project Manager: Steve Haynes  
Supervisor: Kate Hughes  
Finds Processing: Denise Buckley  
Illustration: Denise Buckley  
Post-excavation analysts: Gary Taylor and Mark Dymond

## 11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archaeological Project Services, 1994a *Desk-Top Assessment for the Proposed Construction at Boston General Hospital, Boston, Lincolnshire*. Unpublished report.

Archaeological Project Services, 1994b *Evaluation Excavation at the General Hospital Site, Boston, Lincolnshire*. Unpublished report.

Harden, G., 1978 *Medieval Boston and its Archaeological Implications*. South

Lincolnshire Archaeological Unit.

Hodge, C A H, Burton, R G O, Corbett, W M, Evans, R, and Seale, R S, 1984  
*Soils and their use in Eastern England*,  
Soil Survey of England and Wales 13

## 12. ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeological Project Services publications are referred to in the text by the initials 'APS'.

Numbers prefixed by 'B' are the reference codes used by the Community Archaeologist for Boston Borough Council.

Numbers prefixed with 'SMR' are the primary reference numbers used by the Lincolnshire Sites and Monuments Record, Archaeology Section, Lincolnshire County Council.

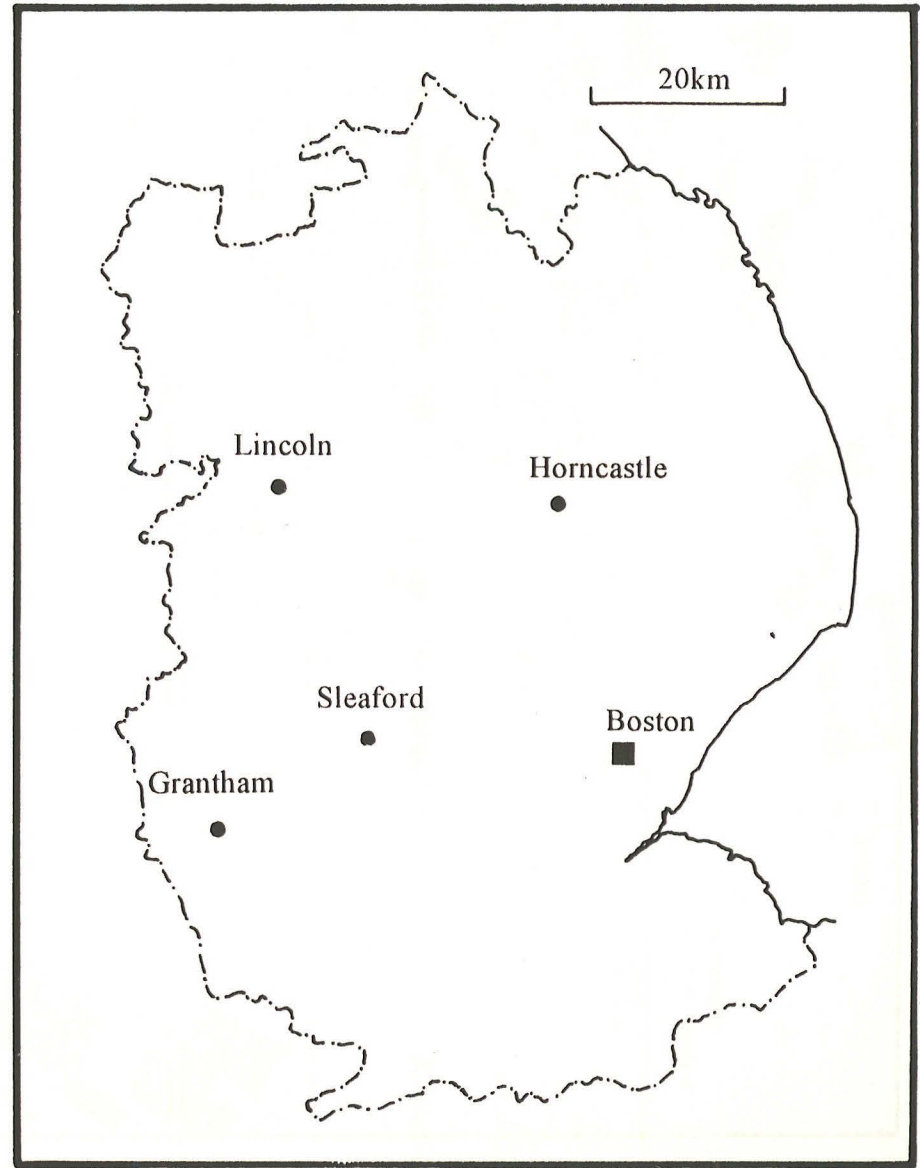
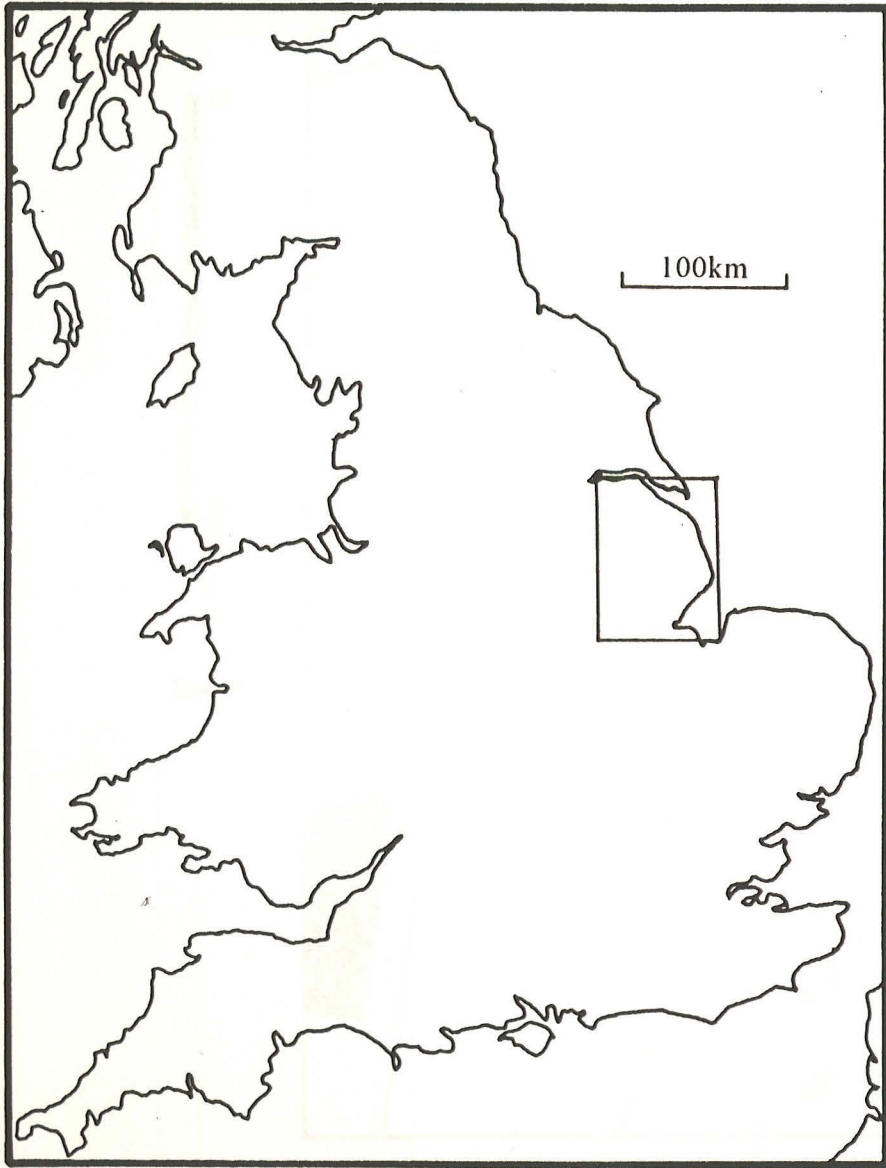


Fig. 1 GENERAL LOCATION PLAN

Fig. 2 Site Location Plan,  
with Archaeological Sites and Finds

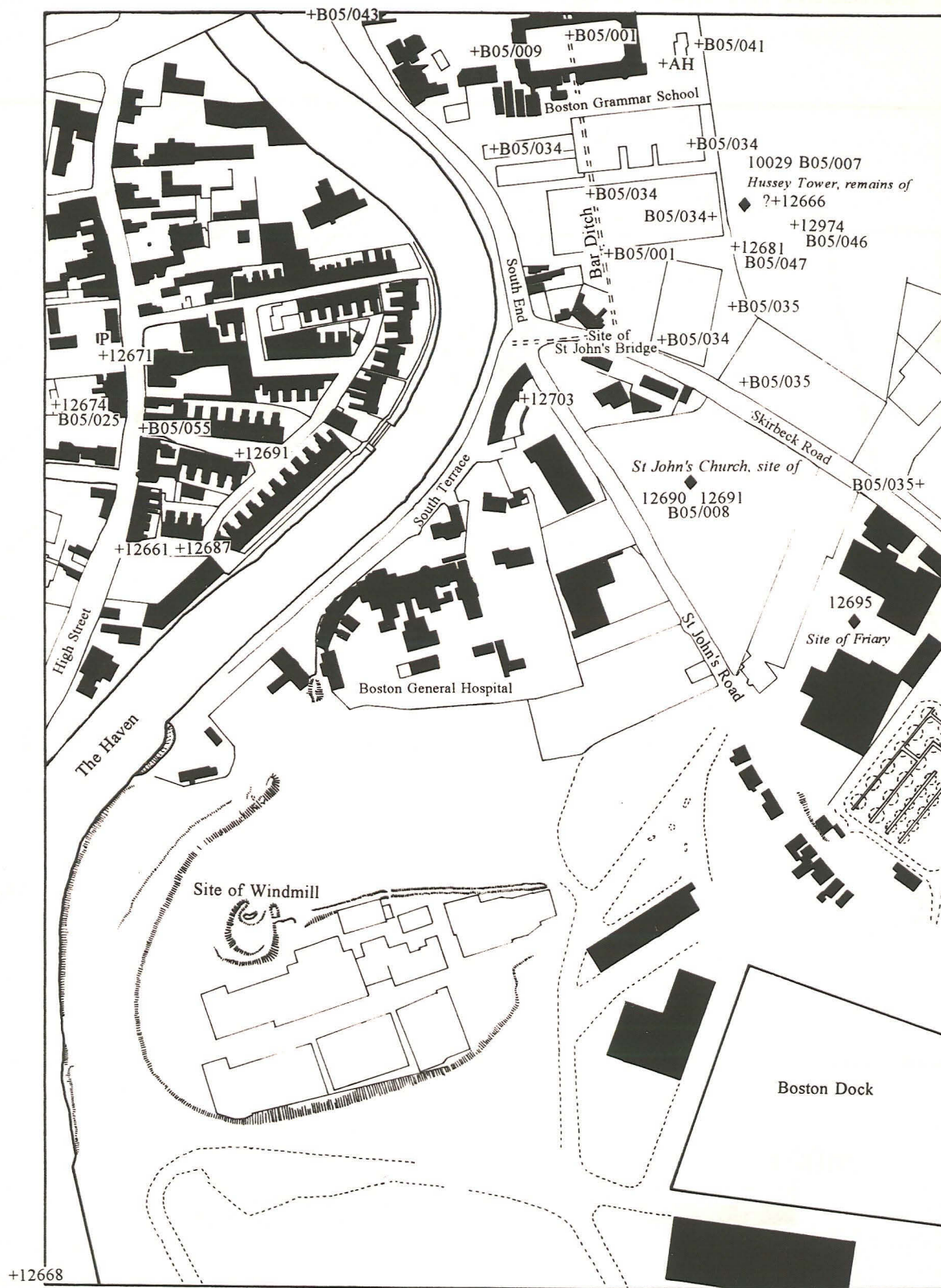
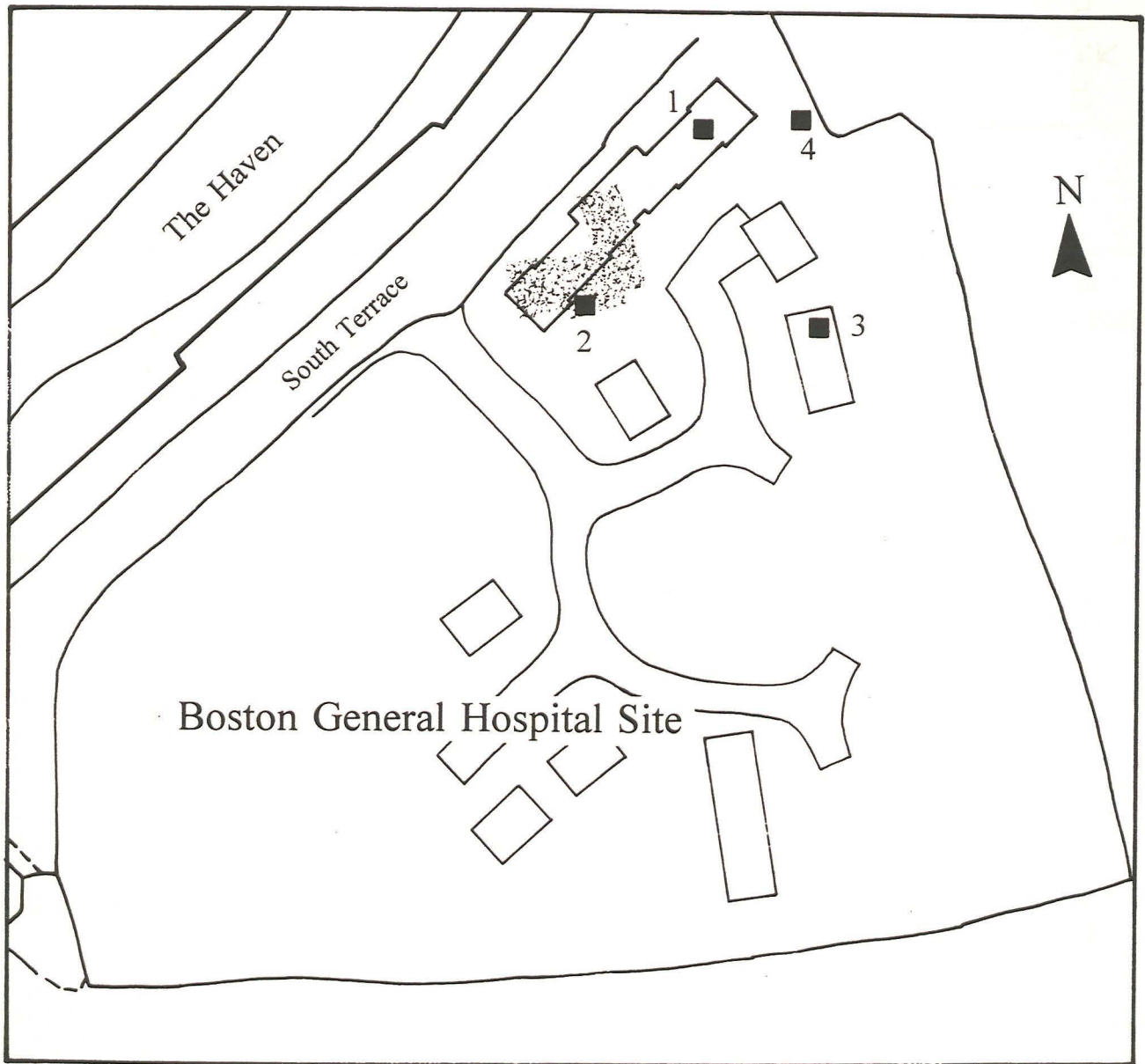


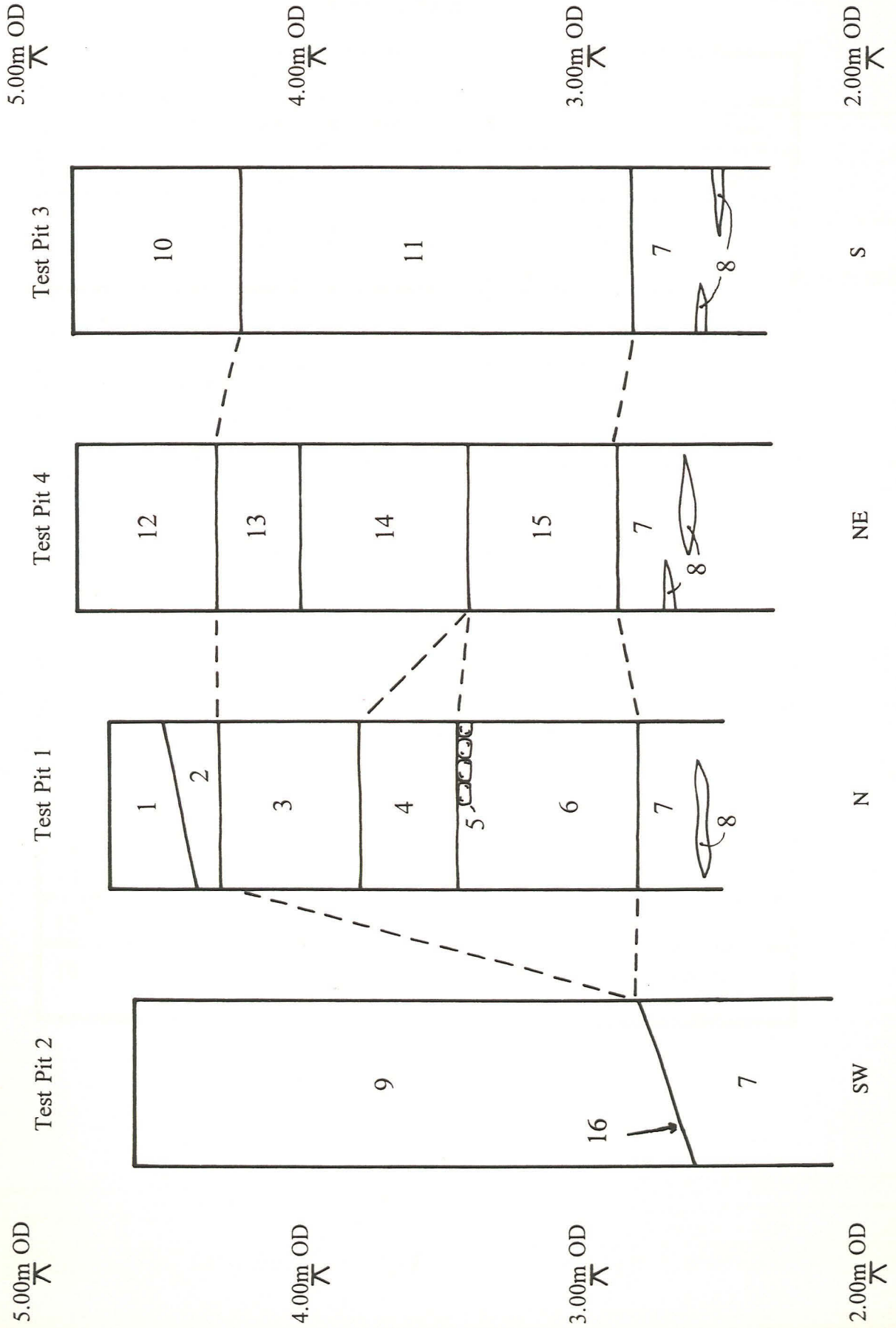
Fig. 3 Test Pit Location Plan



■ Location of Test Pits

▒ Previous location of Nurses Home

Fig. 4 Representative Sections of Test Pits



## APPENDIX 1

### Context Summary

Context	Description	Interpretation
1	Brown sandy silty clay.	Layer of demolition refuse.
2	Brown sandy silt.	Layer of demolition refuse.
3	Brown sandy silty clay.	Buried soil.
4	Brown sandy silt.	Alluvium.
5	Brick structure.	Floor.
6	Brown sandy silt.	Alluvium.
7	Blue-grey clay.	Glacial/periglacial clay.
8	Black humic material.	Organic rich wedges in 7.
9	Fragmented brick, concrete and tarmac.	Fill of 16.
10	Brown sandy clay with fragmented brick, concrete and tarmac.	Garden soil mixed with demolition refuse.
11	Brown silty clay.	Indeterminate layer.
12	Mixed brown sandy clay with fragmented brick, concrete and tarmac.	Garden soil mixed with demolition refuse.
13	Brown sandy clay.	Modern(?) buried soil.
14	Brown silty sandy clay.	Medieval(?) buried soil.
15	Brown sandy silt.	Alluvium.
16	Cut feature.	Modern cut designed to remove cellar.

## APPENDIX 2

### The Archive

The archive consists of:

- 16 . Context records
- 1 . . Photographic record
- 2 . . Scale drawings
- 1 . . Stratigraphic matrix

All primary records are currently kept at:

Archaeological Project Services  
The Old School  
Cameron Street  
Heckington  
Lincolnshire  
NG34 9RW

City and County Museum, Lincoln Accession Number: 51.94  
Archaeological Project Services project code: BGH95