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Archaeological Watching Brief undertaken
during construction work for the upgrading
of the River Witham's Defences in Boston
on behalf of
The National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region
by
Heritage Lincolnshire.
(formerly The Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology)



SUMMARY

Archaeological Watching Brief undertaken during construction work for the upgrading of the River Witham's Defences in Boston

on behalf of

The National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region

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The upgrading of the River Witham's Defences in Boston was undertaken by the National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region, to improve the river's defences and to provide a more attractive environment for the river. The work was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved the upgrading of the river's defences, and the second stage involved the improvement of the river's environment. The work was carried out by Heritage Lincolnshire, formerly The Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology. The work was carried out on behalf of The National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region. The work was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved the upgrading of the river's defences, and the second stage involved the improvement of the river's environment. The work was carried out by Heritage Lincolnshire, formerly The Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology. The work was carried out on behalf of The National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region.

SUMMARY

During August of 1990 the Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology was commissioned by the National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region, to undertake a watching brief during construction work on Stage 9 of the upgrading of the River Witham's Tidal Defences in Boston, Lincolnshire. The area covered by the watching brief was situated on the east bank of the River Witham, opposite St. Bololph's Church (NGR TF326442).

The watching brief recorded the series of deposits that form the present day river bank. The earliest deposits are natural river silts overlain by a sequence of 19th century material bought in to stabilise the bank. This bank make-up is cut by late 19th and 20th century pipe trenches. No deposits earlier than 19th century were recorded, suggesting that the medieval waterfront lay further inland, to the east of the present day bank.

INTRODUCTION

From August of 1970 onwards, work was done on the upgrading of the contents of the book between the Grande Sionne and the footbridge to the south of St. Raphael's Church (NGR TQ128417-07355417).

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The site was visited by a representative from the Trust for the National Archives and several times during planning and driving of the piling, which constituted the main part of the defence works.

Circle is shown indicating the archaeological remains in this work. An earlier watching brief was carried out by the Trust for the National Archives and was completed in 1977. The main part of the present work was completed in 1977. This work was carried out on the final defence works. This watching brief recorded the remains of the defence works and the remains of the defence works.

INTRODUCTION

From August of 1990 onwards, work began on stage 9 of the upgrading of the tidal defences of the River Witham between the Grande Sluice and the footbridge to the south of St. Botolph's church (NGR TF328437-TF326442).

The Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology was commissioned by the National Rivers Authority, Anglian region, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during any earth moving work carried out during the upgrading.

The purpose of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits disturbed during the installation of sheet piling for the new river defences.

The site was visited by a representative from the Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology several times during pitching and driving of the piles, which constituted the main part of the defence works.

Little is known concerning the archaeological remains in this area. An earlier watching brief located slightly to the south of the present works was undertaken in 1979 for the NRA during work on the flood defence scheme. This watching brief recorded late burials associated with the church of St. Botolph.

All excavation of the banks of the River Witham within the confines of the Barditch (the ancient boundary of Boston town) has great archaeological significance as the structures relating to waterfront activity in this important medieval port may be exposed and destroyed. Specifically, evidence relating to the town's mills is thought to be present along the river banks towards the north end of the town. As for the insertion of steel sheet piling.

Throughout the watching brief, records of all soil layers were made, comprising a written description, sketch sections and where appropriate, photographs. Each archaeological layer or feature was allocated a unique record number.

4.3.

A watching brief, by its very nature, does not allow for the extensive or systematic excavation of the archaeological excavation. Invariably there are no safety reference points to work from, making the identification of layers and sections difficult. Section drawings are sketched and are, therefore, not as accurate as those that would be obtained during a formal excavation.

METHODOLOGY

The main area of disturbance was located on the east bank of the River Witham, downstream of the Grand Sluice, opposite St. Botolph's Church (NGR TF 326442). In total five sections along the bank were recorded (Fig. 1). The sections were recorded following machine excavation of the river bank to allow for the insertion of steel sheet piling.

Throughout the watching brief, records of all soil layers were made, comprising a written description, sketch sections and where appropriate, photographs. Each archaeological layer or feature was allocated a unique record number.

N.B.

A watching brief, by its very nature, does not allow for the standards of recording expected from full archaeological excavation. Invariably there are no survey reference points to work from, making the measuring-in of plans and sections difficult. Section drawings are sketched and are, therefore, not as accurate as those that would be obtained during a formal excavation.

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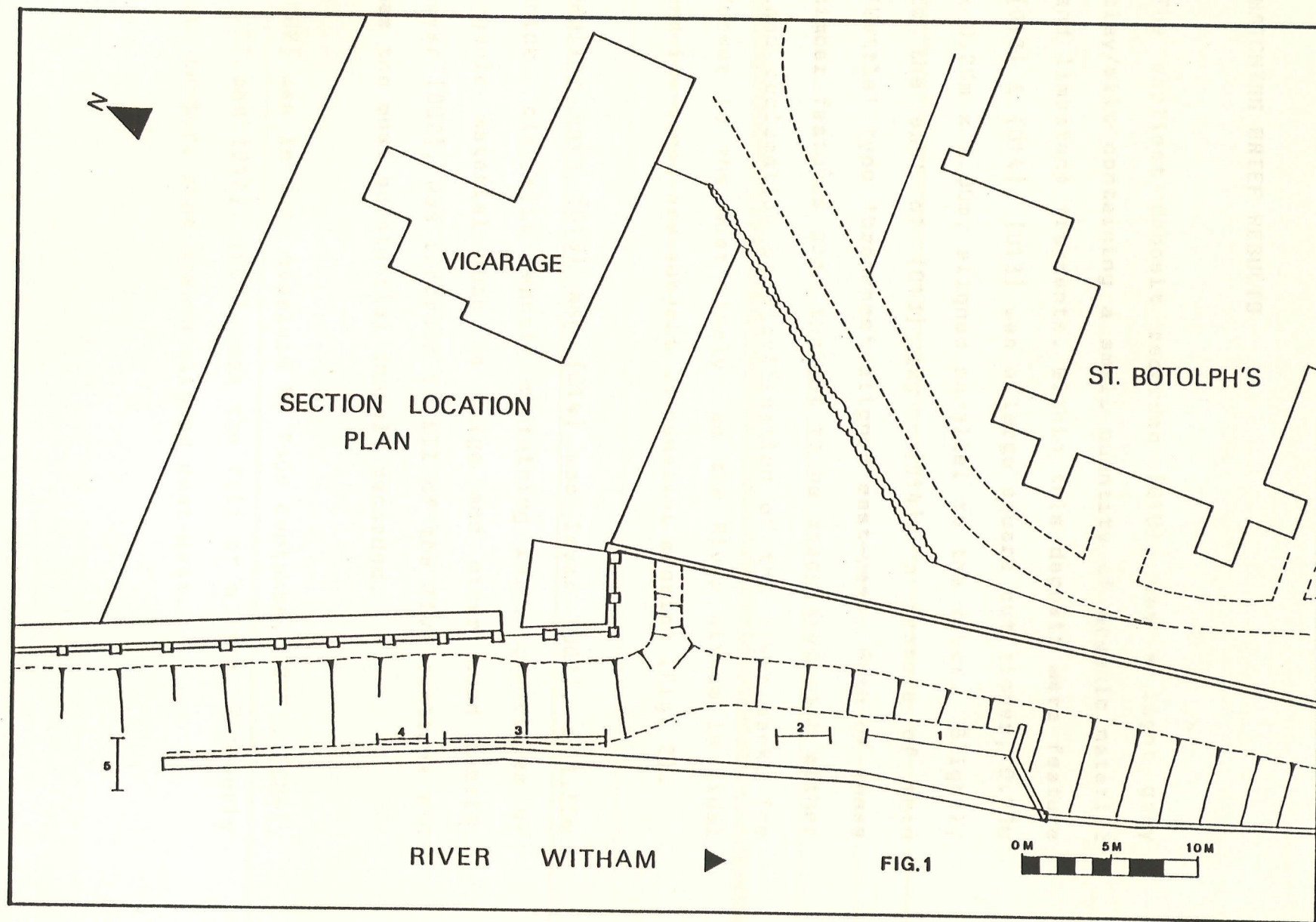


FIG.1

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

The earliest deposit recorded [010], was a light grey clay/silt containing a small quantity of organic material and limestone fragments. Within this deposit were feature [013] & [014]. [013] was a large square cut timber, 0.20m x 0.20m x 2.00m, aligned parallel to the river. Slightly to the east of [013] lay [014], a feature of thin 'Wattle' type 'branches' aligned east-west. Both of these timber features are thought to be associated with either land reclamation or stabilisation of the river bank. The former is the most likely as the River Witham is tidal and its banks are subject to constant erosion (Fig. 2).

Sealing both [013] and [014] was layer [002], a 1.50m thick clay/silt deposit containing large quantities of organic material such as twigs and other wood debris. Layer [002], was recorded in all of the five sections and was the most substantial deposit recorded.

[002] was in turn overlaid by four contexts, [003], [004], [011] and [012]. [003], was the fill of a late 19th/early 20th century pipe trench aligned east-west.

Layer [011], a thin deposit of sea shell and small pebbles, was visible in sections 5 and 1. [011], probably represents the 19th century foreshore as indicated by the small quantity of pottery of this date within the deposit (Fig. 3).

Layer [004], a dark grey silt, was recorded in section 3. Due to the large amount of rotting organic material present within the deposit, it had the appearance of being a burnt deposit. [004] also contained a small amount of 19th century pottery.

Layer [012], was recorded in section 4 and consisted of thin branches, laid flat, and aligned east-west. It is unclear whether [012] was lying within a shallow depression or was the lining of a man-made cut (Fig.3), as its southern side was truncated by the insertion of [009], a pipe trench. [012] gave the impression being a wattle type construction, possibly matting, associated with bank stabilisation (Fig. 3).

Sealing [012], was [007], a light brown clay/silt containing a small amount of organic (wood and twig), material. [007], appeared to be filling the depression made by [012]. Both [007] and [011], were sealed by [005], a dark grey clay/silt visible in sections, 1, 4 and 5. [005], was in turn sealed by [006], another clay/silt

deposit. [006], appeared in both sections 1 and 4. Cutting and sealing [006], was [009], the fill of an east-west aligned modern pipe trench.

The latest deposit recorded, and visible in all sections, apart from section 5, was [001], a deposit of limestone fragments mixed with topsoil and covered with turf, forming the bank that is visible today.

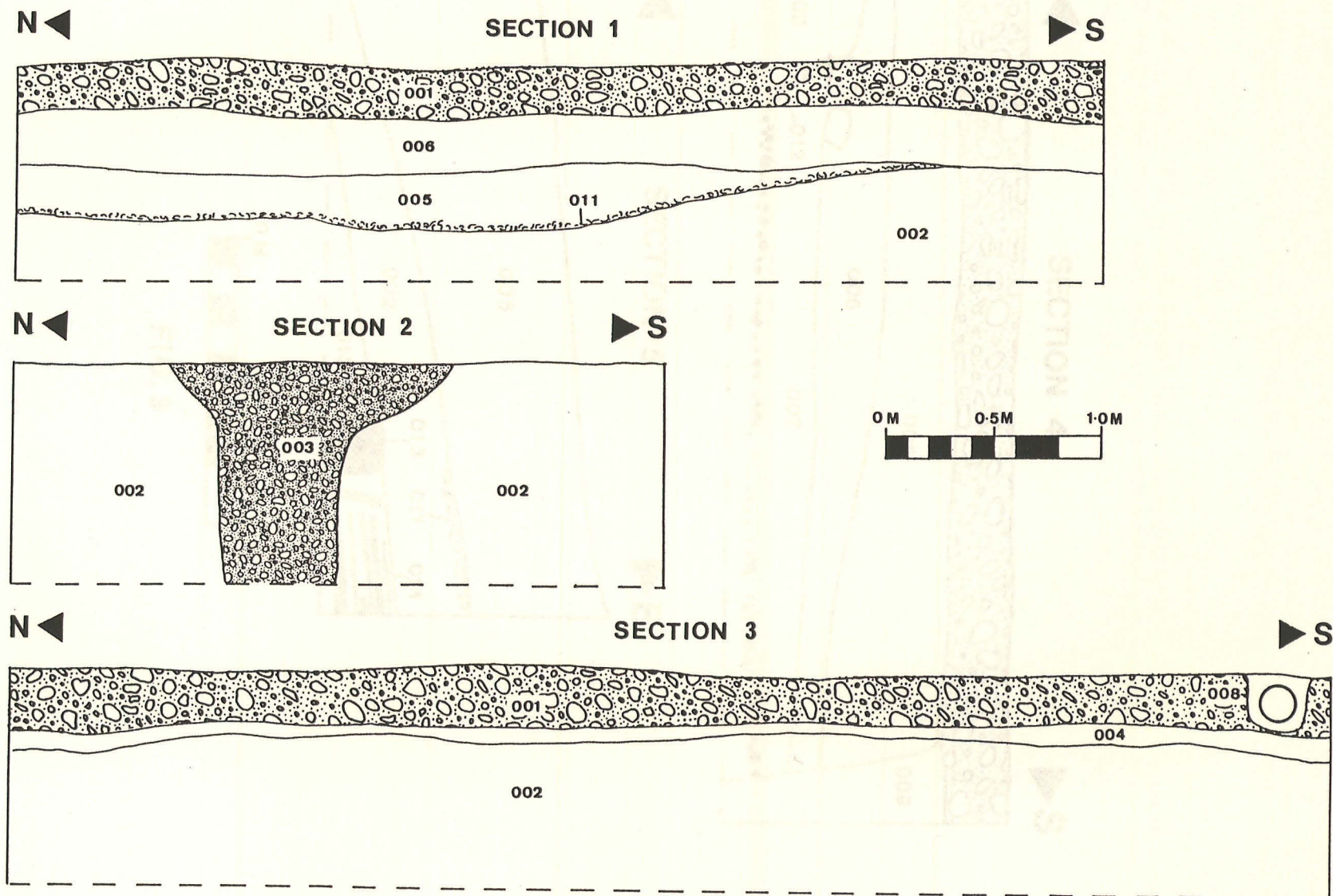
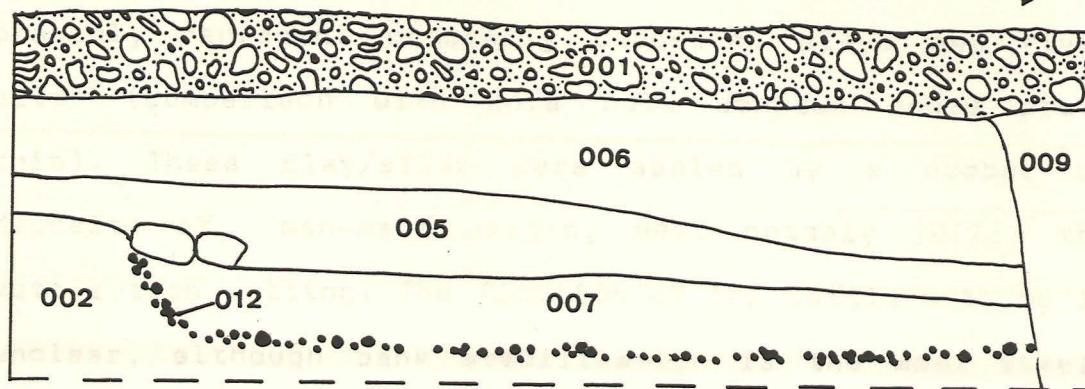


FIG. 2

CONCLUSIONS.

The stratigraphy of the sections observed was similar with little variation apart from the cilt features. The earliest

N SECTION 4 S



W SECTION 5 E

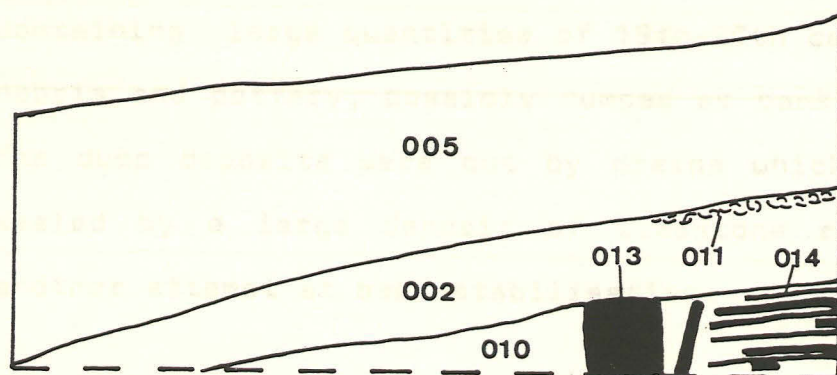


FIG. 3

CONCLUSIONS.

The stratigraphy of the sections observed was similar with little variation apart from the cut features. The earliest stratigraphic deposits recorded were clay/silts which probably represent naturally deposited clays and river silts (comparison with bore hole samples could prove this). These clay/silts were sealed by a number of deposits of man-made origin, most notably [012], the wattle type matting. The function of the wattle matting is unclear, although bank stabilisation is the most likely explanation. These features and deposits were in turn overlain by further accumulations of clay and silts containing large quantities of 19th-20th century building debris and pottery, possibly dumped as bank stabilisation. The dump deposits were cut by drains which were in turn sealed by a large deposit of limestone rubble, perhaps another attempt at bank stabilisation.

No deposits earlier than the 19th century were recorded. It is, therefore, unlikely that stratified medieval deposits exist this close to the present day river bank which may lie further to the east of the present day bank.

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

CONTEXT 001: Small/medium sized limestone fragments, no bonding apparent, mixed with a light brown topsoil. Interpreted as a relatively recent attempt to stabilize the bank from the effects of erosion. Thickness of the deposit; 0.40m average.

CONTEXT 002: Compact light blue clay/silt containing large quantities of organic material (Twig and other wood fragments), also small amount of small limestone fragments and occasional flecks of sea shell. Thickness of deposit: 1.30m.

CONTEXT 003: Tightly packed limestone rubble, average size 200mm x 300mm. Containing quantity of late 19th/early 20th century pottery. This was later revealed to be a pipe trench, the pipe discharging into the River Witham. Dimensions: Depth = 1.5m Width (east-west) = 0.50m.

CONTEXT 004: Dark grey moderately compact silt containing large amounts of various organic matter (grass, twig and branch fragments), with small fragments of limestone and 19th century pottery. Deposit gave the impression of being burnt but is probably just well rotted vegetation.

CONTEXT 005: Moderately compact dark grey clay/silt containing frequent small limestone fragments and rotted organic matter. Thickness: 0.30m average.

Deposit: average 20mm. This appears to be a foreshore.

CONTEXT 006: Compact light brown clay/silt, containing frequent small limestone fragments and occasional brick fragments. Thickness: average 400mm, but thickens upstream to 0.70m. Dump deposit. All the silt recorded is pointing

towards the river with none following the line of the

CONTEXT 007: Moderately compact light brown clay/silt, containing a small quantity of organic matter. Thickness: varies between 300mm - 100mm.

CONTEXT 008: Moderately compact light brown sandy silt containing occasional small limestone fragments, sealing a late sewer pipe. No of silt not known.

CONTEXT 009: Fill and cut of a late feature. Vertical sides and bottom not recorded. Fill was a light brown silty material mixed with a large concentration of brick rubble. Possibly the cut for the insertion of a drain below the high-tide level.

CONTEXT 010: Moderately compact light grey clay/silt containing occasional organic material and limestone fragments. Thickness; varies as it runs east west into the river. The bottom of the deposit was not excavated.

CONTEXT 011: Shell horizon, consisting of sea shell in various states of decay and very occasional 19th century pottery sherds. No other inclusions visible. Thickness of deposit: average 20mm. This appears to be a foreshore.

CONTEXT 012: Feature constructed using thin branches of wood laid side by side, wood sizes vary from pieces 3mm across to pieces 70mm. All the timber recorded is running towards the river with none following the line of the river. The length of the wood is unknown, as is its function. The feature is cut at its upstream end by the insertion of [009].

CONTEXT 013: Large piece of cut timber, 0.20m x 0.20m, with a visible length of 2.00m +, possibly contemporary with [014]. Species of timber not known.

CONTEXT 014: Feature, constructed using thin 'twigs' not dissimilar to [012], but the branches/twigs appear random and not laid flat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SITE MATRIX

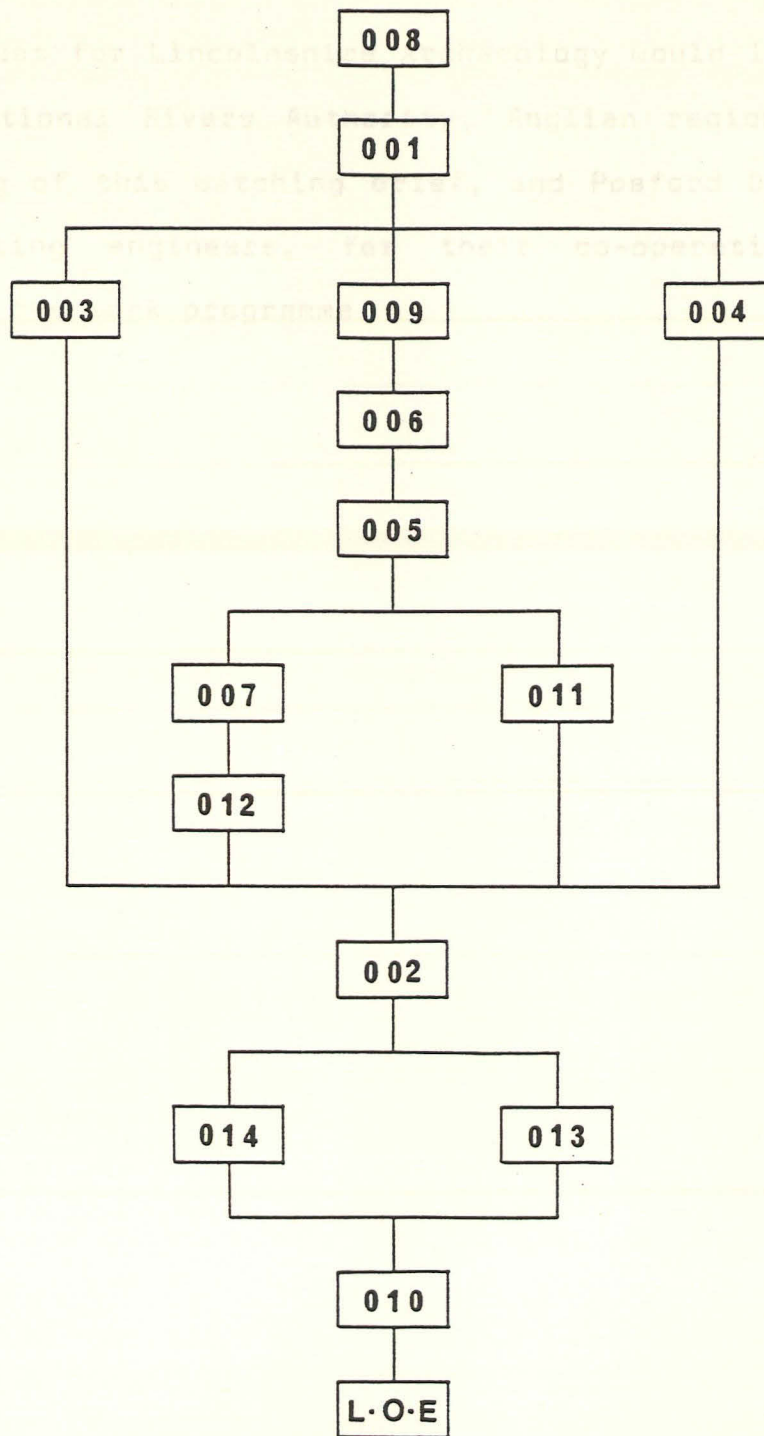


FIG. 4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology would like to thank the National Rivers Authority, Anglian region, for the funding of this watching brief, and Posford Duvivier, the consulting engineers, for their co-operation on site during the work programme.