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LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES
FRANCIS HOUSE SILVER BIRCH PARK GREAT NORTHERN TERRACE LINCOLN LN5 8LG

Ashby de la Launde to Bloxholm
Mains Replacement Scheme:

Ashby de la Launde and Bloxholm

Digby

Archaeological Watching Brief

*NGR: **TF 0550 5490 - 0652 5360***

TF 0650 5444

Site Code: **ADL 96**
LCNCC Museum Accn. No. **76.96**

Report prepared for Anglian Water

August 1996

Lincolnshire County Council
Archaeology Section
12 Friars Lane
LINCOLN LN2 5AL
TEL. 0522 575292 FAX: 0522 530724
28.8.96

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Summary

No trace of the expected Roman road (King Street) was found in any of the anticipated locations; this supported previous fieldwork in this vicinity despite cropmark photographs apparently showing a road to the NW. Frequent localised variations in the geology were noted.

Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services (LAS) was commissioned by Anglian Water in May 1996 to conduct an intermittent watching brief of trenching for a 90mm diameter replacement water main between Church Avenue, Ashby de la Launde and The Round House, Bloxholm (Fig. 1). The archaeological monitoring had been requested by the Lincolnshire County Archaeology Section because of archaeological remains previously reported from close to the NW limit of the planned scheme, and the alignment of the Roman road King Street which from cropmark evidence was expected to be cut by the new pipe trench in two locations.

The first inspection visit by the author was made on June 2nd 1996 although two earlier visits had been made before work started. A total of 11 visits were made up to July 23rd, including a visit by Naomi Field.

Archaeological Background

Bloxholm Hall grounds include the deliberately cleared medieval village site; the present village has developed around the eastern side of the grounds on Bloxholm Road. The Roman road 'King Street' has been thought to pass through the village on an alignment now followed to the SE by farm tracks and field boundaries. Field and parish boundaries north of the village suggest a continuation towards Scopwick Heath, and air photographs close to Rowston Top seem to show a metalled road with adjacent ditches. A road along the parish boundary alignment would pass 250m east of a Roman building east of Ashby Hall.

At Ashby de la Launde, an Iron Age and Roman occupation site is recorded SE of the church and cropmark features have been noted south of Ashby Hall grounds.

The Watching Brief

Church Avenue

1. The sequence of deposits present in the road leading towards Ashby de la Launde Church consisted of the modern tarmac and underlying stone chippings above a 0.25m thick layer of large limestone lumps. From the size of these lumps it is unlikely that they were a post-medieval road surface and they had probably been laid at the same time as the existing road.

Beneath the stone lumps was a 0.45m thick deposit of stony dark brown soil, which may have been topsoil but from its depth may best be interpreted as backfill of a ditch cut into the undisturbed yellow/brown clay.

The pipe trench, laid at the western edge of the road, seems likely to have been sited in an area of road extension across a backfilled ditch that ran beside the previous lane serving the church. The soft ditch fill would explain the need for the large limestone road foundation material.

Main Street

Trenching along Main Street was not observed within the residential area. Monitoring began 200m east of The Old Vicarage in order to identify any change in the stratigraphic sequence (such as the Roman road) in the vicinity of the parish boundary.

2. 150m west of the boundary, the topsoil in the roadside verge sealed a layer of irregular limestone pieces in a dusty light brown soil (Pl. 1). This layer was traced for about 75m to the east, thinning gradually. There was little compaction to the deposit and it did not seem to be a metalled surface; it could have been spread from the construction of the existing road. Beneath the layer was 0.7m of orange clay loam which sealed a similar clay layer containing much more stone. This underlying deposit appeared to be sloping downwards to the east and may have been within an ancient stream channel.

3. The parish boundary coincides with a gap in the roadside ditch and was readily located. The orange clay loam layer continued, sealing a more gravelly version of the stony clay deposit beneath at 0.8m beneath the surface.

4. East of the boundary the sequence remained little changed. The higher stony layer was thinner but overlay yellow clay containing little stone. A much stony layer, in places with very little clay, was present below 0.9m (Pl. 2).

5. Sandy material was visible for about 75m east of **4**, beyond which it was replaced by yellow clay. This may have been a post-glacially filled stream channel (Pl. 3).

6. The trench was inspected where it crossed the track to the north of the lane from Bloxholm, in case it fossilised the alignment of the anticipated Roman road (Pl. 4). The modern track surface consisted of 0.28m of stone

above a thin tarmac layer. Beneath this was 0.2m of stony clay and 0.15m of more gravelly clay before clay with few stones was reached (Pl. 5). None of these deposits seemed suitable candidates for a Roman metalled surface and were interpreted as continuations of extensive naturally deposited layers.

Bloxholm Road

7. Very slightly east of the track, the stratigraphy beneath the road leading to Bloxholm was checked. Close to the road junction the 0.05m thick tarmac surface covered 0.1m of asphalt and stone chips of apparently recent date. Beneath this was a layer of gravel 0.12m thick which overlay yellow/brown sandy clay. The clay became noticeably sandier to the south.

The thin gravel layer was thought to be a road metalling surface but was not thought to be of great antiquity.

8. The trench along the roadside southwards to a poultry farm was not monitored; the contractors reported that an intermittent thin rock layer had been encountered 0.5m below the surface (Pl. 6). Further traces of this were observed close to Springwell Plantation and interpreted as a natural bedrock layer between natural clay deposits.

9. Monitoring recommenced as the trenching approached a small stream beside Springwell Plantation (Pl. 7). The tarmac road surface sealed a 0.05m thick gravel metalling layer above 0.38m of light brown loam. This sealed a yellow clay deposit containing a few rock lumps (Pl. 8).

10. Towards the stream, the soil became less rocky. In the verge, the topsoil sealed 0.2m of gravel which overlay dark brown loam; the dark loam extended beneath the trench base (Pl. 9). This may be a backfilled roadside depression but no dating evidence was seen.

11. South of the present stream course, the trench revealed a layer of sand at the trench base which rose gradually towards the south. This seemed to represent the edge of a filled former stream channel.

12. At the corner opposite South View, an area of disturbed ground containing 18th-19th century ceramic refuse was exposed, extending 0.3m north of the northern trench and visible in the south face (Pls. 10 and 11). This loose rock and soil backfill may have been the fill of a small stone quarry or a roadside ditch backfilled during realignment of the corner (Pl. 12). Considering the close proximity with the track junction it is less likely that it had been a quarry.

13. A spread of solid limestone about 0.5m thick was recorded immediately to the west of the track (Pls. 13 -15). It extended 10.3m to the west and lay 0.5m deep beneath brown loamy clay and above yellow clay (Fig. 2A); it appeared to have been naturally produced. The coincidence of lower hedgerow trees beside this point was noted but explained as the result of inpenetratable ground for tree roots (Pl. 16). The profile of the rock exposure here was

reminiscent of a Roman road, with a central roadway flanked by drainage ditches. Fig. 2B suggests an interpretation of it as a deliberate feature, with the rock probably spread over the underlying clay. Unfortunately, the evidence of such a narrow trench is not definitive and either a natural or an artificial feature may have been recorded. Were it not for the expected road, this would certainly have been dismissed as an apparently natural anomaly.

14. Further variations in the stratigraphy were seen to the west of **13**. A lead water pipe crossed the line of the trench, laid on limestone bedrock 0.65m below the surface. The limestone extended only 1.5m west-east on the southern side of the trench; it had been removed (probably by a roadside ditch) to the north. Similarly patchy rock was noted at **8** and at **16** where it was interpreted as naturally produced.

15. 60m west of the track junction, the modern road surface and its underlying chipped stone bedding overlay 0.1m of brick rubble and post-medieval flat roof tiles. This had been used to consolidate a former unmetalled surface but the localised nature of this material may possibly also indicate the repair or demolition of a nearby building.

16. Monitoring extended close to The Round House. Here a thin layer of apparently undisturbed natural limestone, only about 0.08m thick, was seen at a depth of about 0.65m sandwiched between clay layers.

Conclusion

A continuing concern running throughout most of this watching brief was whether any of the observations were actually of the anticipated Roman road King Street. The problem was complicated by a number of factors: the existence of a continuous metalled road is not certain, the precise alignment is conjectural and based on the projection of infrequent confirmed locations or air photographic indications; lack of local information about the road construction of King Street, the frequently varying geology and the narrowness of the pipe trench.

Although the solid limestone at **13** would have made a good road surface it appeared to be a natural outcrop. The ground conditions elsewhere were not obviously sufficiently solid to produce a well-drained road. It was concluded that no recognisable Roman road was present in the trench faces or base at any point within this scheme. The same conclusion was made after informal observation of the stripped easement of another watermain on the southern side of the Ashby de la Launde - Digby road by a local archaeologist in about 1993 (Hilary Healey, pers. comm.).

No other observations of archaeological significance were made from watching this scheme.

Acknowledgements
LAS was grateful for the co-operation received from Anglian Water (in particular Kathy Gilliatt and Paul Renshaw [Project Engineer]) and the two teams of contractors (M.P. Burke plc.).

The author acknowledges assistance from Kate Orr (North Kesteven Heritage Officer), Hilary Healey and the County Archaeology Section and SMR.

Finds were processed and the illustration prepared by Mick McDaid; the report was collated and produced by Jane Frost.

Geoff Tann
Lindsey Archaeological Services
20th August 1996

Archive Summary
Post Roman pottery
Field notes and section drawing
AW plan (annotated)
Correspondence

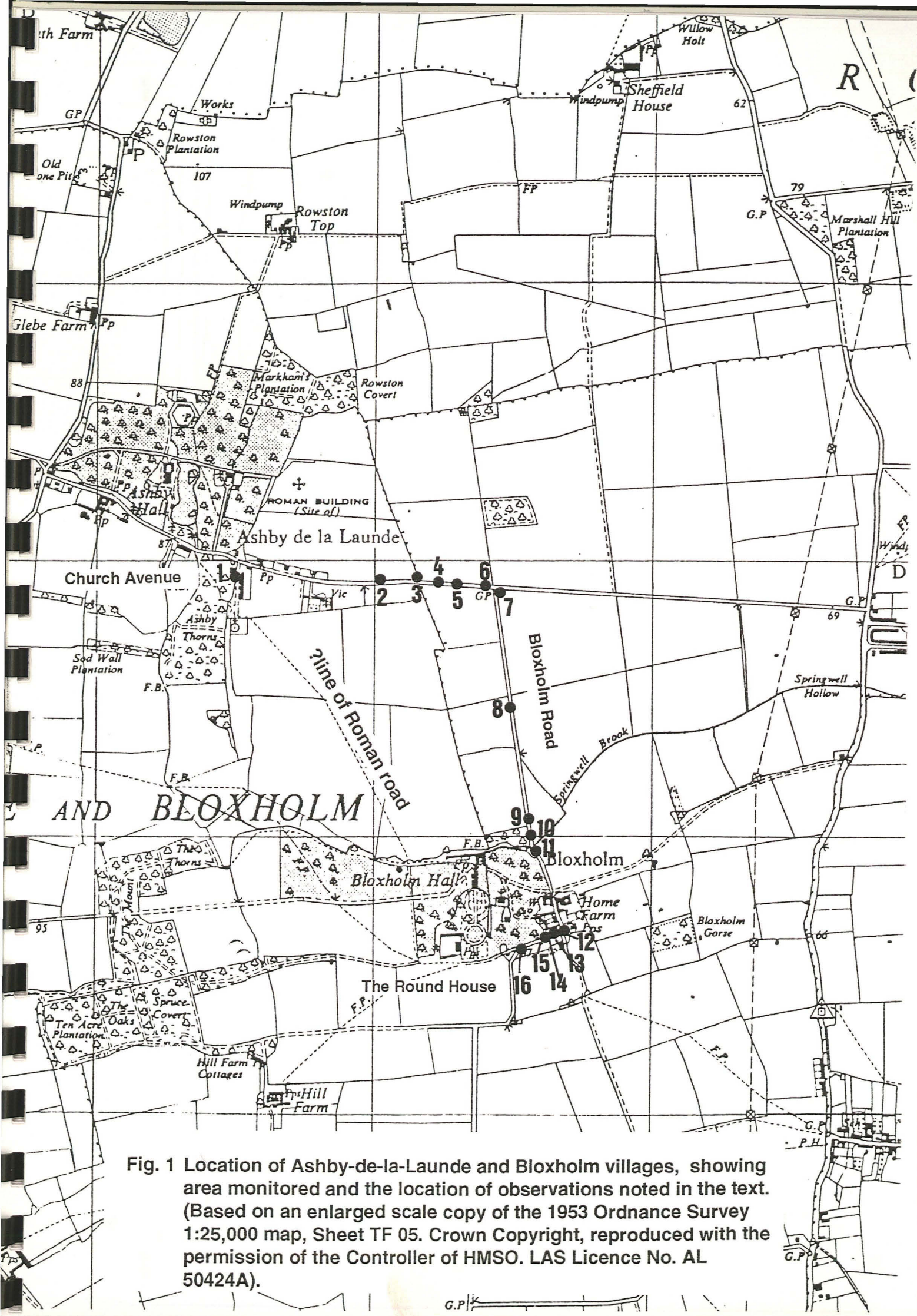


Fig. 1 Location of Ashby-de-la-Launde and Bloxholm villages, showing area monitored and the location of observations noted in the text. (Based on an enlarged scale copy of the 1953 Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 map, Sheet TF 05. Crown Copyright, reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO. LAS Licence No. AL 50424A).

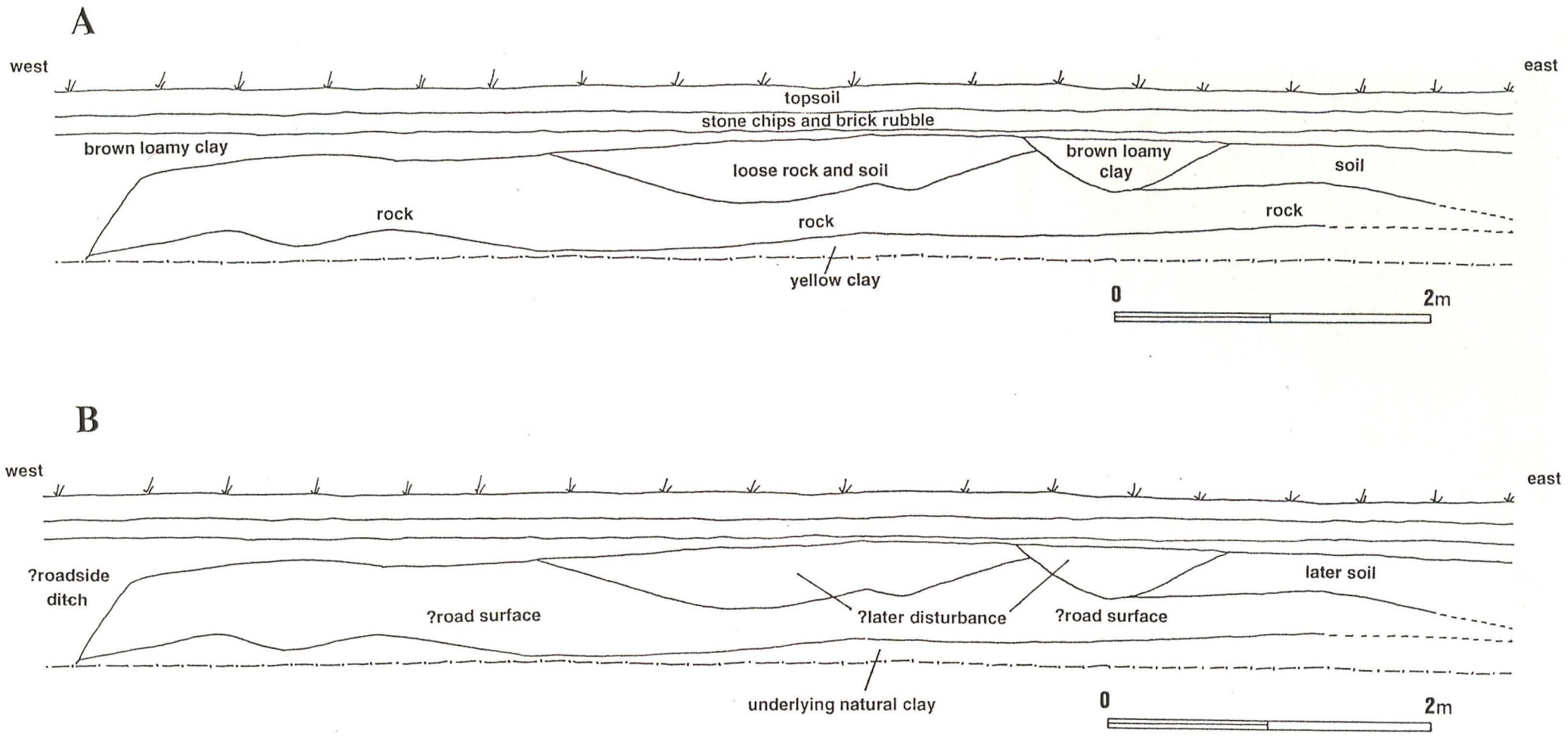


Fig. 2A Observation 13: section showing deposits visible in the trench face at Bloxholm (McDaid, after Tann)

Fig. 2B Possible interpretation of Observation 13 as a laid stone Roman road with flanking ditches

Pl. 1 Deposits visible in the trench face at 2. The light-coloured layer with limestone may be post-medieval road material.

Pl. 2 The trench face east of the parish boundary at 4. Stony clay was visible close to the trench base.

Pl. 3 Yellow clay at 5, perhaps filling a former stream course.

Pl. 4 View of the pipe trench cutting across the track at 6, north of the Ashy-Digby road (looking east). Scale divisions (h) 0.25m, v 0.5m.

Pl. 5 Deposits visible beneath the modern track at 6. Scale divisions (h) 0.25m, v 0.5m.

Pl. 6 View north along Bloxholm road from Springwell Plantation.

Pl. 7 Springwell Plantation (to right) with pipe trench approaching stream. Looking south.

Pl. 8 Section of the trench face at 9; vestigial traces of the intermediate thin limestone band are visible halfway down the trench.

Pl. 9 Dark brown soil thought to be a filled natural depression 10, north of the stream.

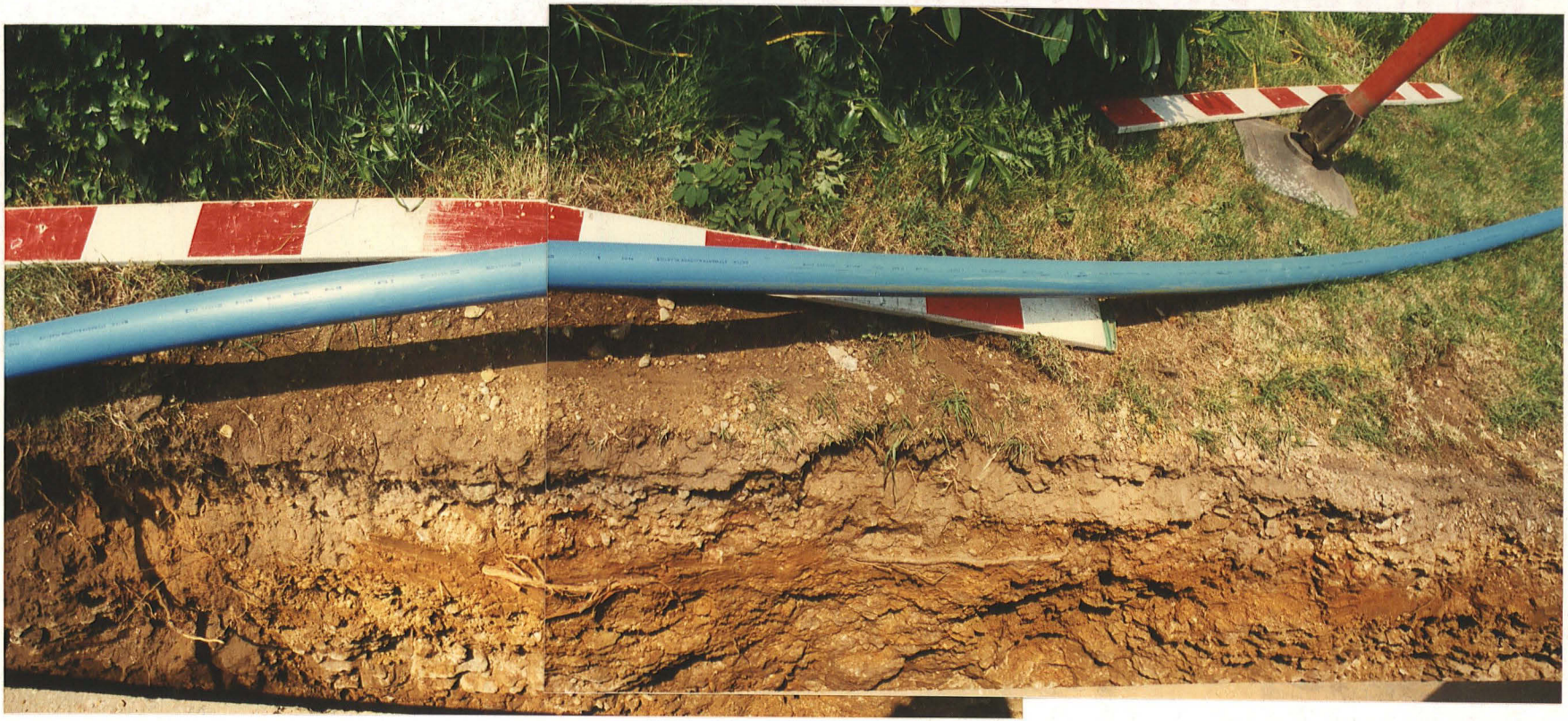
Pl. 10 Junction of the road through Bloxholm with a farm track thought to fossilise the route of King Street. Post-medieval feature 12 was beside the dumper. Looking SW.

Pl. 11 Position of the western corner of post-medieval feature 12 (looking west). From the position, this may have been a west-east roadside ditch.

Pl. 12 Loose rock fill of 12, with examples of recovered post-medieval pottery (looking NE).

Pl. 13 Detail of western edge of limestone deposit 13 (centre and right) with clay to the west. Looking north.

Pl. 14 View of limestone deposit 13 from west. Pl. 15 extends this view further east. Looking east.



Pl. 15 Limestone layer 13 beneath clay. This layer extended for 10.3m before a resumption of clay. Looking north.

Pl. 16 Location of limestone 13 behind and to the right of the dumper (looking north).