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# LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

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## **Lindsey Court Enhancement Scheme**

NGR: TF 2596 6956

Site Code: HLF 96

LCNCC Museum Accn. No. 104.96

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

**for**

**East Lindsey District Council**

**September 1996**

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# **Lindsey Court Enhancement Scheme**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**

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### **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief carried out during resurfacing of a footpath at Lindsey Court established there was no disturbance to Roman or medieval archaeological remains. Machine excavation next the public library located the chalk foundation raft but all traces of the sandstone wall had disappeared at this point along its circuit. The position of the wall was determined by projecting the alignment of the existing wall fragment inside the library and marked in stone setts on the surface of the new path.*

### **Introduction**

Lindsey Archaeological Services was commissioned by East Lindsey District Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks, connected with resurfacing of a footpath at the above site. This was carried out in accordance with their requirements and those of the Brief set by the Archaeology Section of Lincolnshire County Council dated July 1996.

### **The Proposed Works**

The resurfacing comprised two elements:

- resurfacing of the footpath from Lindsey Court to the corner of the Library. This required the removal of c250mm of material to allow construction of the sub base and top dressing.
- The area east of the Library was to be finished to a higher specification requiring removal of c 450mm of material.

### **Archaeological Implications**

At the south end the new surfacing crossed the projected line of the Roman wall and it was estimated that from the height of existing remains inside the Library there was a high probability that the wall core would lie close to the present ground surface.

The Brief required that machine excavation should be carried out to locate the line of the Roman wall, digging to below the required depth of 450mm if necessary. The alignment of the wall would be marked by the archaeologists so that the contractors would be able to lay setts in the new patch to mark the alignment of the Roman wall.

It was considered that the area of path requiring excavation to a depth of only 250mm would pose less archaeological risk. However, since little is really known of relative levels of archaeological horizons a watching brief condition was also placed on this aspect of the works.



## **Archaeological Background**

The late third-fourth century Roman defences at Horncastle lie north of a large undefended settlement which originated at a much earlier date, possibly the first century AD. Together with the Roman walls at Caistor, they are unlike any other urban or military defences in England. Their unusual character is recognised in that sections of the wall are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Lincolnshire no. 44) which, by definition, indicates that they are considered to be of national importance.

Excavations carried out in 1968, in advance of building the new Public Library, located part of the south wall of the Roman defences. The wall, which was at least 4m wide, comprised an ashlar block facing with a rubble core. At this point along the circuit it survived to a maximum height of 1.5m above ground level. The internal facing blocks survived but the external face had been robbed and there was evidence of damage by water, presumed to have been caused by regular flooding of the River Waring.

An internal rampart consisting of alternating layers of sand and mortar was also recorded. This has been found to extend 7m into the interior at other points along the circuit.

Very little is known about features contained within the defences and only two, small-scale, excavations have been undertaken to date. In 1978 excavations in the Market Place on the site of, and to the rear of, the National Westminster Bank identified Roman gullies and post-holes but the limited extent of the investigations prevented interpretation of the features. A closely dated group of pottery and coins (late 3rd-4th century) was found. Even smaller-scale excavations at 3-4 Bridge Street in 1984 confirmed the wall construction and Roman pottery of the same date range was found. No Roman structures were found other than the wall and its rampart. Sealing the Roman horizon on both sites was a layer of dark brown sandy soil, up to 0.25m thick, which contained a mixture of Roman, Saxon and medieval pottery, into which were cut later medieval and modern features.

## **The Watching Brief**

### 1. Lindsey Court

Delay in the arrival of the mini-excavator on the first day provided an opportunity to clear a small area at the north end of Lindsey Court (Pl. 1). Removal of the tarmac revealed part of a sandstone foundation with brickwork adjacent on its east side (Pl. 2). The top of these features lay just beneath the 250mm horizon and the associated pottery finds were of recent date. Subsequent monitoring of tarmac removal confirmed that no significant archaeological horizons were disturbed by the resurfacing programme (Pl. 3).

### 2. Area adjacent to the library

On the first day excavation of a trench across the presumed line of the Roman wall by mini-excavator, to the required depth of 0.45m, failed to locate the wall. The excavation was deepened, in accordance with the project brief,



to a depth of 1.25m but nothing was seen. A second trench, parallel to the first, was excavated to ensure that the absence was not just localised (Pl. 4) .

The trenches were backfilled at the end of the day for safety reasons and re-excavated using a JCB with a wider bucket on the following morning with extending the trench to 7.5m long and 1.5m wide (Fig. 2). The JCB operator was asked to excavate to the top of surviving wall remains; no wall was found but the underlying foundation raft comprising compact crushed white chalk (6 and 10) was encountered at a depth of 1.35m (28.33m OD). The northern edge of the raft was 1.1m from the NW trench corner extending beyond the southern limit of the trench so that its full width could not be recorded (Pl. 5) .

The northernmost 1.8m of the chalk raft contained inclusions of limestone and sandstone fragments up to 0.1m diameter, giving a grubby appearance to the material (Pl.6). When the alignment of the internal edge of the Roman wall inside the library was projected through to the trench, the junction between the clean and discoloured chalk corresponded with the calculated position of the facing stones. The discolouration of the chalk raft at this point may therefore be the result of rampart material mixing with the wall foundation material of the wall whilst the cleaner part of the raft is presumed to have been beneath the wall itself.

Part of a modern service trench 12 extended 0.7m into the eastern side of the trench and along its full length which meant that the archaeological sequence of deposits could not be recorded in the east side of the trench. The deposits on the west side of the trench had been disturbed, at an earlier date, making interpretation difficult.

At the base of the trench were the remains of the chalk raft (6,10) which formed the foundation for the Roman wall. The service trench had cut through the upper chalk layer of the raft which was a minimum 0.2m thick. This matches the sequence of deposits found in 1984 at 3-5 Bridge Street where the foundation trench contained alternating layers of flint cobbles and rammed chalk.

The wall construction trench 15 cut into an orange brown sand with decayed sandstone inclusions 9 which has been interpreted as undisturbed natural. There was a dark sandy silt layer 11 lining the edge of the trench, possibly soil which had fallen into the hole when it was dug.

A grey sandy layer, 8, 0.05m thick, was recorded overlying the chalk raft which may represent a trampled surface. This was sealed by red chalk fragments (chippings?) within a red matrix, 0.10m maximum depth, 16. A compact yellow sand 5 overlay 16 and in turn was below a mixed grey sand and flinty layer 4. These may represent debris associated with the construction of the wall. Undulating layer 21, a brown grey sand, with overlying layer 3, a compact yellow sand, a maximum of 0.26m thick, may be the surviving remnants of the associated rampart, which was recorded at the



library site in 1968, 3-5 Bridge Street in 1984 and Church Lane in 1985. A brown silty sand layer **26** was noted in the section sealing **3**.

A trench or pit, **23**, was dug through layer **3**, to the top of the chalk raft, removing the all trace of the wall at this point along its circuit. The layers recorded to the south of this disturbance comprise material used to backfill the hole. Immediately overlying the Roman chalk raft **10** was a thin layer of grey sand with brick and tile inclusions, **7**, confirming the late date of this material. The sequence of overlying deposits comprised **29**, a compact yellow sand, **28** red chalk fragments, and **22** a compact grey sand with flint and pebble inclusions, which are very similar to the rampart deposits to the north suggesting that some degree of slumping occurred prior to the infilling of the robber pit. Fill **20** a blue grey clay with charcoal flecks, brick fragments and white chalk sealed **22**. This deposit was itself sealed by **27** a brown sand containing stone and brick fragments. No finds were retrieved from the robber trench fills.

The upper fills of the robber trench and the rampart were apparently truncated, before being sealed by **2**, a layer of brick rubble 0.10m thick. This layer would seem to represent a phase of levelling and landscaping which may have been associated with the construction of the eighteenth century warehouse with the carriage arch at this spot.

Further grading of the land took place when compact brown sand **19** was spread over brick layer **2**. A maximum depth of 0.18m was recorded at its southern limit petering out to almost nothing at the north end of the recorded section, raising the ground level closest to the River Waring. Bands of yellow sand containing flint inclusions and brown silty sand containing brick fragments **18** formed a series of metalled surfaces which overlay **19**, presumably representing repairs to the roadway which ran between the warehouse and the pub. The new surface raised the ground level a further 0.08m.

Layer **17**, a compact grey brown sand with brick fragments indicates that the ground surface was returned to its former gradient at a later date.

A U-shaped pit **24**, c0.80m wide, c0.60m deep, was seen to cut layer **17**, c1.94m from the NW trench edge. No finds were retrieved from its fill **25**, a mid brown silty sand, though the feature is undoubtedly late.

Sealing pit **24** and layer **17** was modern tarmac **1** whose depth varied from 0.03m to 0.07m.

### **The Roman Wall Alignment**

M. Clark

The 1968 excavation drawings had been illustrated in relation to the original layout proposal for the library (Field and Hurst, 1983, Fig. 5). According to



library staff the existing building is an alteration to these proposals. The internal face of the Roman wall was not visible from the path and it was therefore decided to re-survey the position and line of the Roman wall in relation to the existing library building rather than to rely on a map-based alignment. It was not possible to use the 1:100 scale survey supplied by the Engineering and Traffic Services section of Lincolnshire County Council because the computer-generated image was enlarged from a smaller-scale survey and was found to be inaccurate.

The library east wall was used as a base line; the corners serving as fixed references from which to triangulate the surveyed points. The Roman internal wall face visible in the library has a slight batter; the estimated projection of its line eastward was based on the lowest points of this face. A temporary sighting line was marked on the library east wall and the west wall of the building on the corner of the alleyway opposite showing the alignment of the north (internal) face of the Roman wall for the paving contractors. A southern line was marked 4m distant from the northern line to represent the original standing wall width. This was based on information from previous excavations, none of which record a precise wall width due to its fragmentary survival.

#### Position of the SE corner of the Roman Enclosure

It is not clear how the east wall of the present library relates to the east wall of the demolished eighteenth-century warehouse. Contractors exposed a few courses of the west face of a wall which coincided approximately with the position of the Vine and Tap tavern as marked on the OS 1:500 survey of 1888 (Fig. 4).

Slides taken by Pearl Wheatley (and kindly loaned for the purposes of this report) showed that the carriage-arch was an integral part of the four-storey warehouse and apparently separate from the butting west wall of the Vine and Tap. The south walls of these buildings appear to have followed the alignment of the Roman wall. The surviving cobbles and kerb alignments of the alley mark the position of the former buildings and carriage arch but there is no obvious clue as to the exact site of the corner bastion.

Fig. 3 shows a projected line of the Roman south wall and the projected position of the south-east bastion and east wall. This is based on the recorded lengths of wall in the library and west side of the old Corn Exchange (now Gateways supermarket). The size and shape of the bastion is also conjectural; it has not yet been confirmed whether the angle towers were circular, fan-shaped as suggested by Hurst (Field and Hurst 1983,55) or, as recorded by Stukely in 1722, square.

#### **Conclusion**

Archaeological observation during the recent renewal of the footpath in Lindsey Court has established that archaeological remains inside the Roman walls lie immediately beneath the existing ground surface. Investigations elsewhere in the town suggest that the post-medieval features excavated at



Lindsey Court overlies Roman deposits which remained undisturbed during the resurfacing work.

The foundations for the warehouse which was demolished c.1968 had disturbed deposits in the vicinity of the Roman wall. It was only prior knowledge of the Roman wall alignment and its method of construction which allowed confident interpretation of the surviving deposits. Horizons were particularly difficult to identify in the narrow machine-dug trench (which could not be left open overnight for safety reasons). More satisfactory results can be obtained only if the excavations can be placed in context, namely over a larger area.

Should further resurfacing work be carried out to the east of Lindsey Court, there would be considerable archaeological implications. This is one of the few remaining open areas lying within the Roman wall circuit and would provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between remains inside the walls and the defences themselves. Bastions at the three other corners of the walls have been recorded to a greater or lesser degree. The precise position of the south-east bastion is not known. Although it is suspected that the walls had a military function, little is known about what the walls contained. Excavations in 1978 beneath the National Westminster Bank in the Market Place located late 3rd-4th century Roman features but were too small to explain their character and function.

Whilst other parts of the open ground to the east of Lindsey Court and the Library may also have been disturbed the potential for archaeological remains is high. If further improvements to the townscape are carried out in the area of the south-east corner of the wall circuit, investigations should comprise full archaeological excavation and recording prior to commencement of building works. The current recording project has shown how difficult it is to interpret remains in narrow machine trenches, especially where there has been extensive prior disturbance.

The Archaeological purpose of the investigations would be to

- record the true alignment of the east wall
- locate the fourth bastion
- investigate the internal rampart and its relationship to features contained by the defences.

This may provide the last opportunity, for some years to come, to investigate this important Roman defence and its role in resisting Anglo-Saxon incursions into Lincolnshire.

Naomi Field and Mick Mc Daid  
September 1996



### **Acknowledgements**

LAS is grateful to Paul Barker at ELDC for setting up the project, Brian Glossop, Rod Garfoot, Mark Goddard and John Walker of Eastern Counties Contracting for their assistance and co-operation on site. Pearl Wheatley kindly loaned slides of the Vine and Tap tavern and the exposed Roman east wall now beneath the Gateway supermarket. The watching brief was carried out by Mick Clark, Naomi Field and Mick McDaid. The archive was prepared by Mick McDaid and the report produced by Jane Frost.

### **References**

Field N. and Hurst H., 1983, 'Roman Horncastle', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 18, pp. 47-88.

### **Contents of the site Archive**

Context sheets 29

Site plan and section drawing (1:20)

Plans for proposed scheme supplied by Lincolnshire County Council (1:100)

Correspondence

Photographs

Film No. 96/51 nos. 1-25



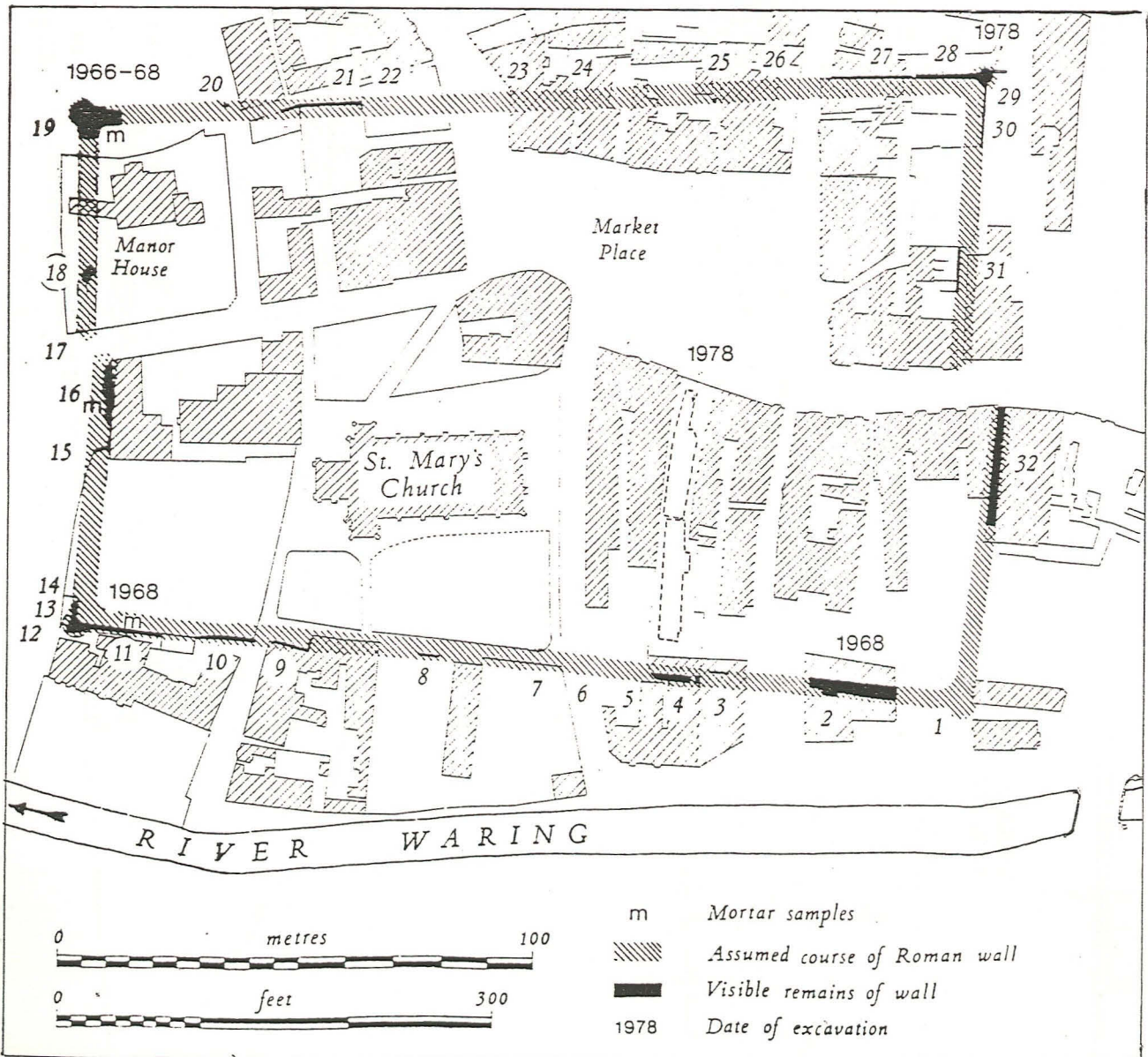
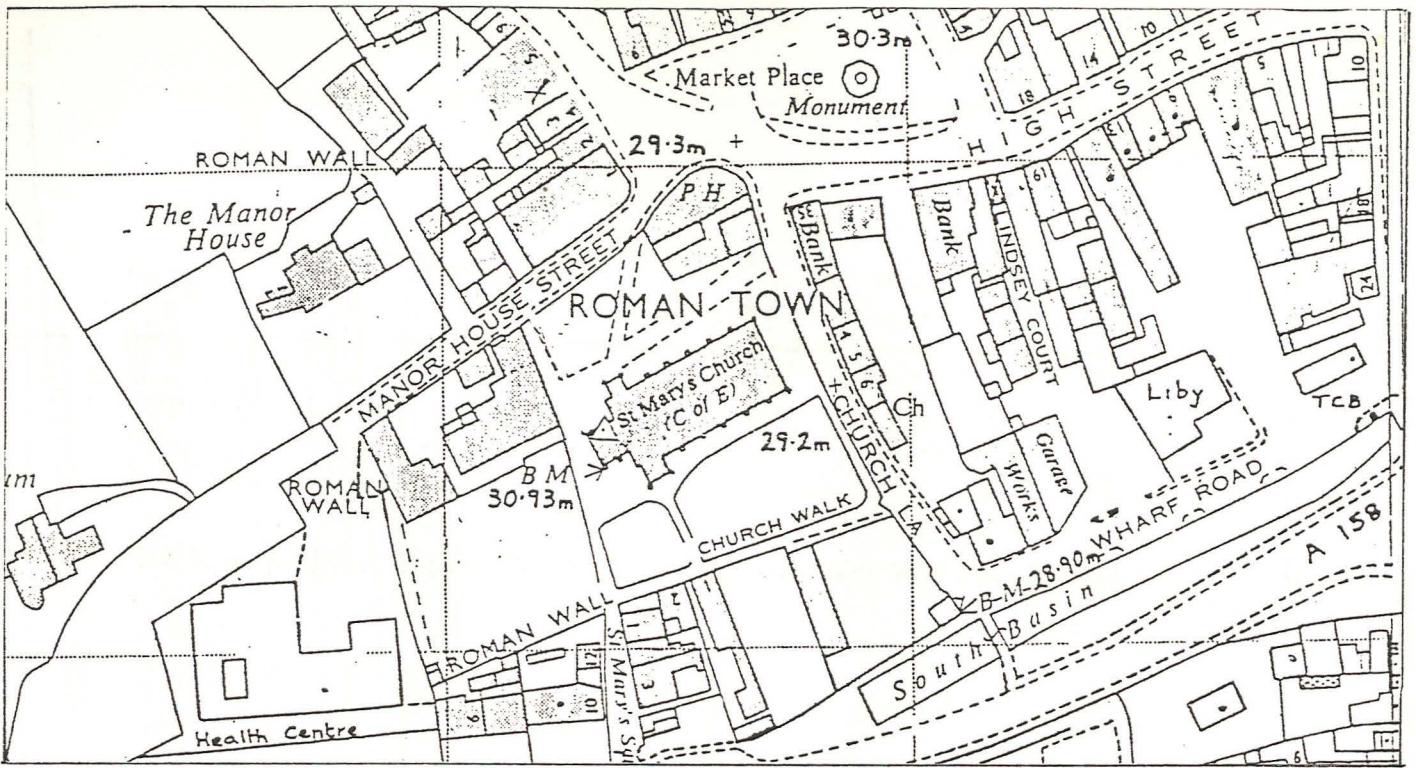


Fig. 1 Site location. Reproduced from the OS 1:1250 map with the permission of the Controller of HMSO, © Crown copyright. (Reduced scale). Roman wall circuit (M. Clark)



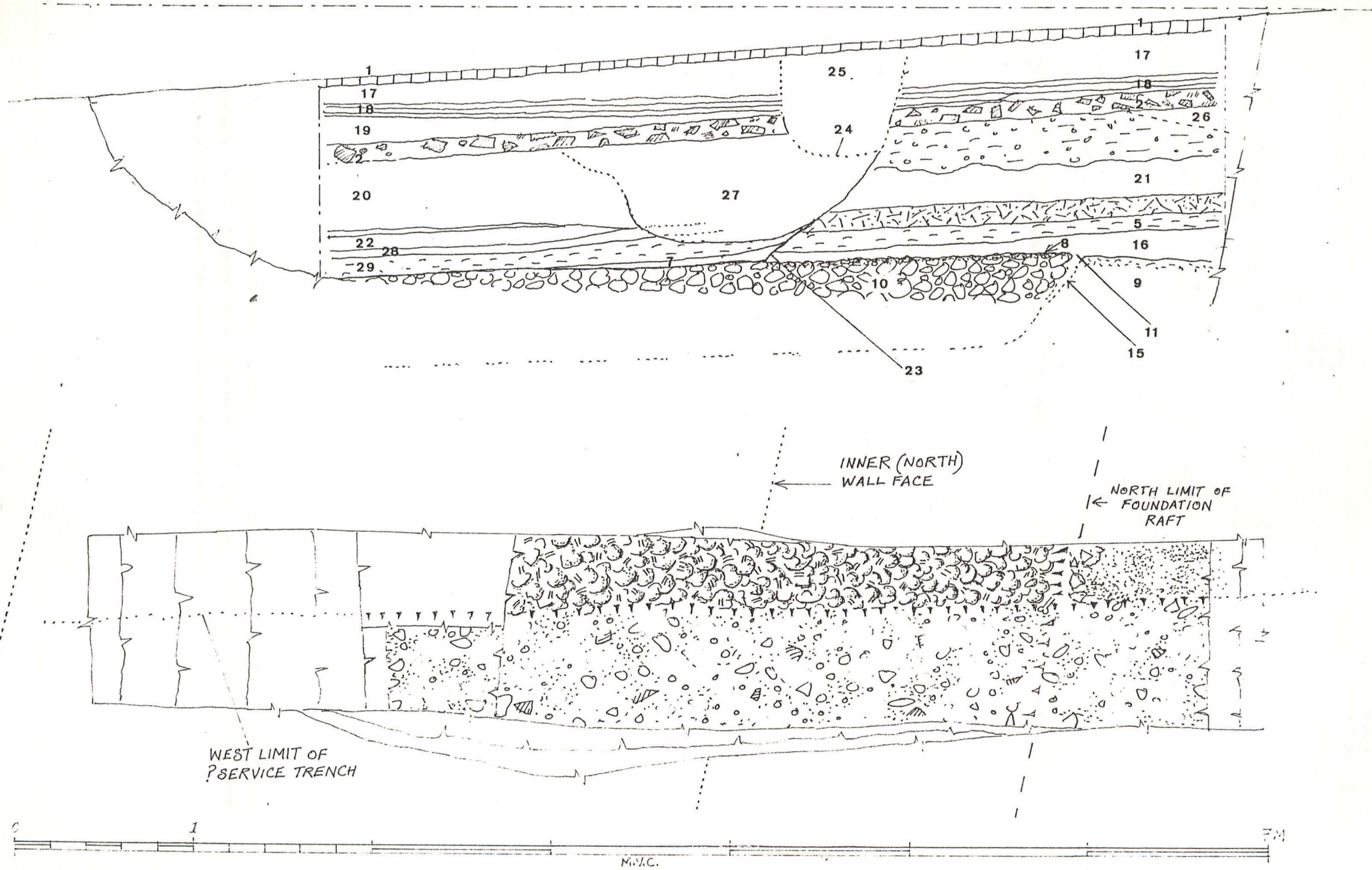


Fig. 2 Plan and west section of the trench next to the library (M. Clark and M. McDaid)

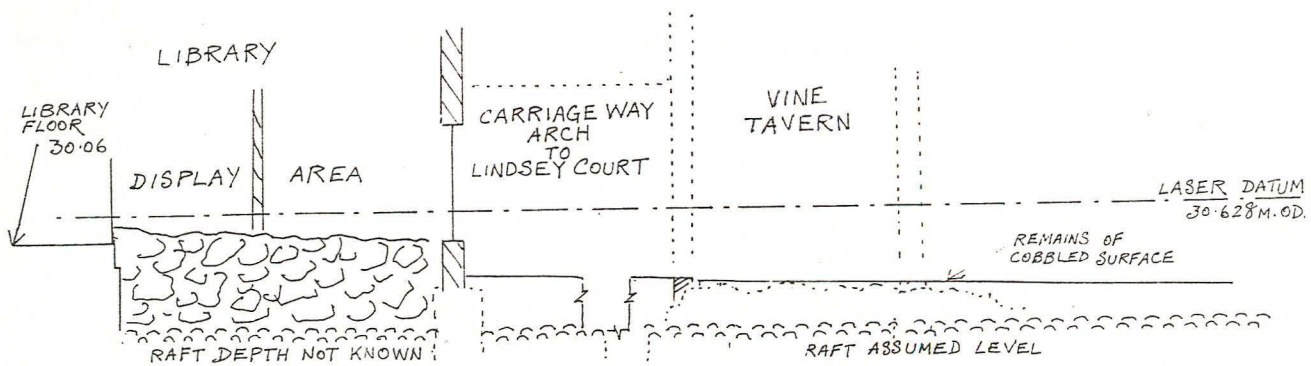
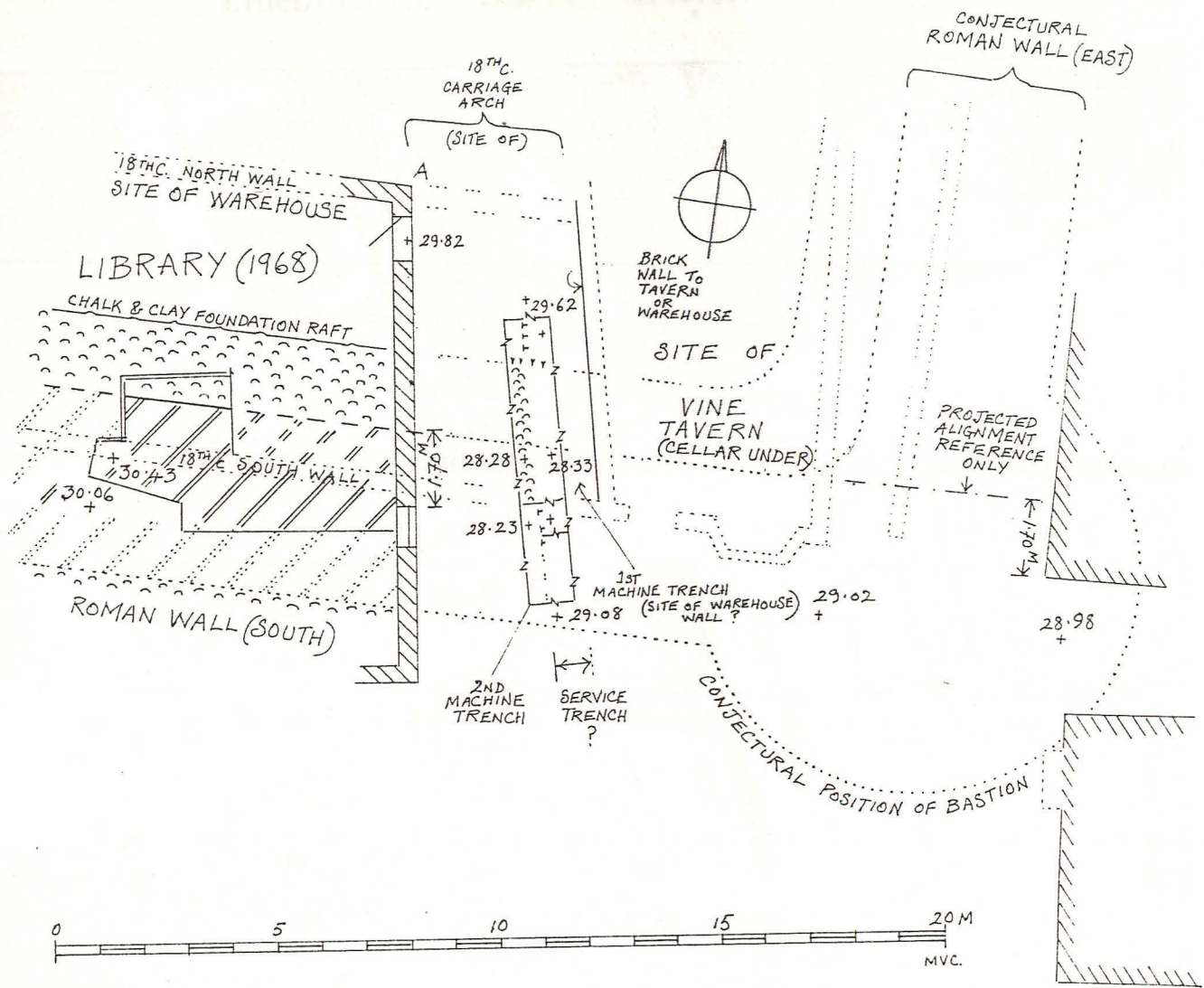


Fig. 3 Alignment of the Roman south wall in relation to the existing library, with conjectural position of the SE bastion and east wall. Position of machine trench also shown (M. Clark)



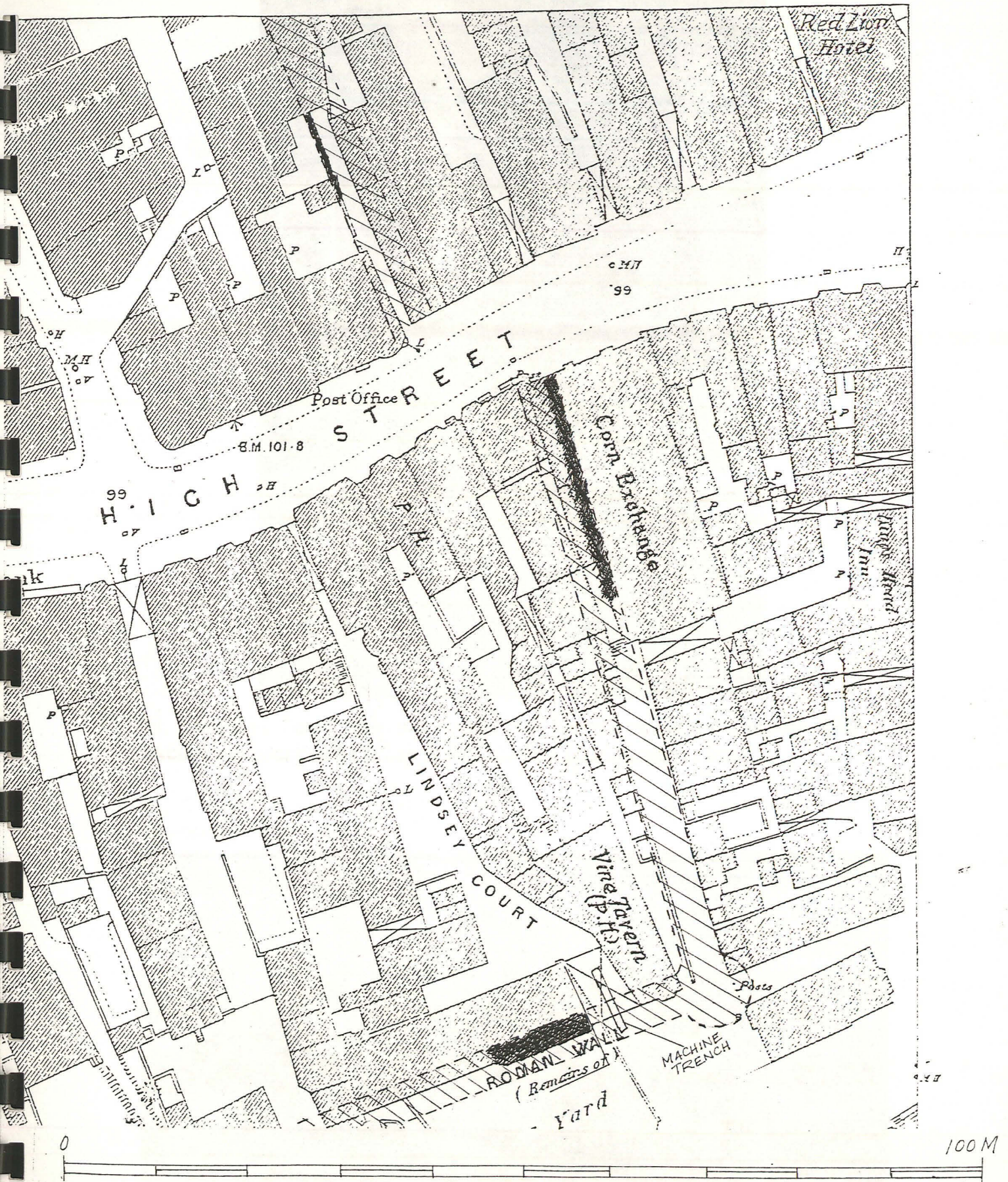


Fig. 4 O.S. 1:500 survey of Horncastle (1888) showing the Vine and Tap and Lindsey Court. Recorded Roman wall sections marked in solid black and conjectural alignment of south and east walls hatched lines (M. Clark).





Pl. 1 Lindsey Court, view north, showing tarmac ready for removal. Trial excavation marked by small red and white photographic scale.

Pl. 2 Lindsey Court, trial excavation view east, showing brick and stonework. Scale 0.5m.







Pl. 3 Lindsey Court, view south, clearance of tarmac in preparation for resurfacing. No visible archaeological remains.

Pl. 4. Excavation of second trench with mini-excavator east of library, view north.







Pl. 5. Enlarged trench east of library excavated by JCB, view north, showing remains of Roman chalk foundation raft, left, and modern service trench, right.

Pl. 6 Junction of clean and stained areas on chalk raft, marking presumed position of wall







Pl. 7 West side of machine trench, showing disturbed deposits containing brick rubble (left) and possible remnants of rampart at north(right) end. Scales 2m and 1m.