

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON  
LAND EAST OF PEPPER HILL FARM,  
NORTH DROVE BANK,  
DEEPING ST. NICHOLAS,  
LINCOLNSHIRE  
(DND96)**



**A P S**  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
PROJECT  
SERVICES



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON  
LAND EAST OF PEPPER HILL FARM,  
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LINCOLNSHIRE  
(DND96)

Work Undertaken For  
Eastern Electricity

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Report Compiled by  
N.A Herbert

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## 1. SUMMARY

*A watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of footings for a communication tower on land east of Pepper Hill Farm, North Drove Bank, Deeping St. Nicholas, Lincolnshire.*

*The site lies in an area of archaeological activity dating to the Romano-British period (AD 43 - 450). A series of cropmarks and a significant gravel roadway have been recorded to the immediate south and east of the area of development. The cropmarks have been interpreted as the remains of enclosures, droveways and paddocks that are likely to be associated with Roman settlement. Sherds of Roman pottery have been found in the fields surrounding these features.*

*Archaeological investigation of the site revealed a stratigraphic sequence incorporating natural silty clays and a single layer of peaty organic material to a depth of c. 14m. A small pit had been cut into the uppermost layer of silt, though it was impossible to ascribe a function or date to this feature. Modern ploughsoil sealed these deposits.*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Background

On 13th, 14th and 20th November 1996, an archaeological watching brief was carried out during ground work for the erection of a communication tower on land east of Pepper Hill Farm, North Drove Bank, Deeping St. Nicholas, Lincolnshire (National Grid Reference TF 1919 1896). The archaeological work was commissioned by Eastern Electricity and was undertaken by Archaeological Project Services.

### 2.2 Topography and Geology

Pepper Hill Farm is located approximately 10km east of Bourne, in the civil parish of Deeping St. Nicholas, South Holland District, Lincolnshire (Fig. 1).

Located at a height of c. 3m OD, the area of investigation is situated on the north side of North Drove Drain, approximately 30m east of Pepper Hill Farm (Fig. 2). Centred on National Grid Reference TF 1919 1896, the development site covers an area of 7m x 7m (Fig. 3).

Two soil regimes occur in close association to the development. Wallasea 2 Association pelo-alluvial gley soils and Wisbech Association calcareous alluvial gley soils occur over stoneless marine alluvium (Hodge *et al* 1984, 338, 361). These soils are extensive on the reclaimed Flandrian marine alluvium in the marshlands of Lincolnshire. Silts and a single layer of peat lie beneath these deposits, sealing a layer of gravel that directly overlies a solid geology of Upper Jurassic clays.

### 2.3 Archaeological Setting

Pepper Hill Farm is located in an area of archaeological activity dating from the Romano-British and post-medieval periods. Prehistoric activity has not been identified in the vicinity of the site, though any remains of this period are likely to have been sealed by deposits of silts and peat.

A significant Romano-British trackway, the Baston Outgang, lies approximately 90m south and 40m east of the site (DSN 8). This route is believed to have linked the Roman settlements of Baston and Spalding. Cropmarks, recorded by aerial photography, are located in the fields northeast of the area of investigation (DSNU8). These features form distinct

morphological patterns that have been interpreted as droveways, enclosures and field boundaries (Fig. 2). Although they remain undated, the rectilinear pattern of cropmarks is typical of field systems that were developed during the Roman period.

An undated palaeochannel is located *c.* 100m north of the area of investigation. The alignment of a suspected Romano-British ditch respects the position of this feature. It is therefore likely that the channel was a feature of the landscape prior to the excavation of the ditch.

In the post-Roman period, it is understood that substantial freshwater fens developed across this area, making the land unsuitable for settlement (Hayes and Lane 1992, 172). No evidence for Saxon occupation has been recovered in the locality and it is believed that there was a substantial hiatus of settlement until the post-medieval period.

The Romano-British trackway, known as the Baston Outgang, continued to be used as a droveway during the medieval period. Disagreements exist over the extent of the track's use and function following the post-Roman flooding. Enclosure and drainage of the peat fen caused the road to emerge during the 19th century, whence it was believed to have been a routeway for the medieval priory of Spalding (Marrat 1814, 33). Records of grants made during the 12th century infer that the Baston Outgang then existed as a route onto the common fen. It is therefore likely that the thoroughfare would have continued to function until this date (Hayes and Lane 1992, 172). Hallam (1965, 113) has recovered historical references written by Pseudo-Ingulph, a monk of Crowland Abbey, who wrote of a causeway that was in existence around *c.* 1400 and which ran across Deeping Fen to Spalding (Hayes and Lane 1992, 172). It is therefore

probable that the route continued in use until at least the 15th century.

A major programme of fieldwalking across the fields surrounding the area of investigation has concluded that although the Baston Outgang may have continued in use, the lack of pottery from the medieval period is indicative that there was no permanent settlement in Deeping Fen at this time (*ibid* 173).

During the post-medieval period the drainage of the fen began in order that the area could be turned to arable production. The present landscape is a result of the continuing drainage and enclosure of what would have been a significant area of peat fenland (*ibid*, 164).

### 3. AIMS

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

### 4. METHODS

A mechanical excavator and auger were used to excavate four boreholes to a depth of 13m. Foundations for the development were then excavated to a depth of 2m below ground surface. Deposits removed by the augering were examined and recorded in sequence. The sides of the foundation trench were then cleaned by hand, and inspected for archaeological remains, prior to recording the sections. Health and safety regulations prevented the sections within the foundation trench from being recorded at a depth greater than 1.2m (Fig. 5).

Each archaeological deposit or feature revealed was allocated a unique reference number (context number) with an

individual written description. Thereafter, to assist analysis, a stratigraphic matrix was created and phased. A photographic record was compiled and sections and plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20. Additionally, the natural geology was recorded.

## 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 the recognisable relationships between them. A total of three phases were identified:

- Phase 1 Natural deposits
- Phase 2 Undated deposits
- Phase 3 Modern deposits

### Phase 1 Natural Deposits

Deposit (010). Visible at the base of section 1. Firm, greenish-grey laminated silty clay. No depth was established. Natural deposit.

Deposit (009). Overlying deposit (010). Firm, mottled yellowish-grey silty clay containing decayed fibrous roots. 1.1m thick. Natural deposit.

Deposit (008). Overlying deposit (009). Stiff, mottled greenish-grey silty clay containing occasional fine sub-rounded chalk fragments. 0.7m thick. Natural deposit.

Deposit (007). Overlying deposit (008). Firm, yellowish-grey silty sand containing organic matter. 0.9m thick. Natural deposit.

Deposit (006). Overlying deposit (007). Soft, grey silty clay containing brown

organic inclusions. 1.1m thick. Natural deposit.

Deposit (005). Overlying deposit (006). Soft, dark brown peat. 0.6m thick. 0.3m thick. Natural deposit (Fig. 7).

Deposit (004). Overlying deposit (005). Soft, grey silty clay. 2.35m thick. Natural deposit.

Deposit (003). Overlying deposit (004). Soft, brownish-grey silty clay containing decayed chalk and limestone fragments. 0.35m thick.

Deposit (002). Overlying deposit (003). Firm, dark-brown silty clay containing organic material and roots. 0.15m thick. Natural deposit.

Deposit (014). Visible at the base of section 2. Soft, mid to light-brown silt. 0.5m thick. Natural deposit.

### Phase 2 Undated Deposits

Cut (013). Cutting deposit (014). Cut with steep, slightly concave sides and a concave base, approximately 0.7m wide x 0.3m deep x unknown length. Small pit.

Deposit (012). Contained by (013). Firm, dark brownish-grey silt containing organic material. 0.3m thick. Fill of (013).

### Phase 3 Modern Deposits

Deposit (011). Overlying deposit (012). Soft, dark brownish-grey silt containing organic material and plastic fragments. 0.4m thick. Modern ground surface.

Deposit (001). Overlying deposit (002). Friable, dark-brown silty clay containing organic matter and a single fragment of animal bone. 0.9m thick. Natural deposit.



## 6. DISCUSSION

Layers of silts and silty clays formed a thick sequence of natural deposits (Phase 1). It is likely that these were formed in a wet or waterlogged environment. A layer of peat reflects an episode of freshwater inundation within these deposits (Fig. 7).

Previous borehole surveys have been conducted across the area of Deeping Fen (Smith 1970, 155) and have located a similar sequence of deposits to those encountered during the watching brief. It is likely that the peat bed recorded during the investigation of the site is part of a substantial layer, recorded by borehole survey, that stretches across from Spalding to Morton at a depth of *c.* 3m from the ground surface. Dating of a similar peat layer in the area of Spalding and Cowbit (*c.* 5km east of the investigation) has suggested that peat accumulation on the pre-Flandrian surface had commenced by *c.* 4290 BC, during the late Mesolithic period (Shennan 1994, 281).

The accumulation of silts and silty clays, that directly overlie the layer of peat (Fig. 7), can be dated by the comparative study of a similar sequence in the area of Bourne and Morton Fen. Evidence recovered by boreholing and environmental sampling in the area of Bourne and Morton Fen has revealed that during the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age periods water levels appear to have been progressively rising, and the peat was overlain by marine or brackish water silty clays (*ibid*). Pollen evidence from this survey reveals the transitional nature of this change as fen woodland communities are replaced by freshwater reedswamp and then coastal communities (*ibid*).

Although no evidence for the date of the deposits was retrieved during the archaeological investigation of the site at

Pepper Hill Farm, it is possible to suggest that the stratigraphy encountered is a result of deposition within a similar sequence of environmental change.

A small pit containing a layer of organic silt, possibly deposited as a dump, was recorded cutting into the latest natural silts (Phase 2, Fig. 5). This feature is likely to represent human activity on the site, though it was not possible to ascribe a function or date.

Modern deposits (Phase 3) consisted of a thick layer of dark silt, containing fragments of plastic and a single piece of animal bone. These layers are likely to have formed during the occupation of the modern farm buildings (Figs. 5 and 7).

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological investigations were undertaken on land east of Pepper Hill Farm, near Spalding, because the site fell within an area of suspected archaeological activity. Aerial photography had identified the presence of cropmarks, interpreted as Romano-British enclosures and a gravel routeway, on land immediately northeast and south of the area of investigation. Consequently, it was possible that archaeological deposits dating to the Romano-British period might be disturbed as a result of the development.

The watching brief recorded a sequence of natural, undated and modern deposits. A series of natural silts and silty clays had formed, probably as a result of deposition within a marine environment. An organic peat layer within the stratigraphic sequence is likely to represent a period of deposition in a freshwater environment, dated by comparative sequences to the late Mesolithic period.

Undated deposits consisted of a small pit that contained an organic fill. This feature may represent human activity on the site, though the absence of any artefactual material or diagnostic fills prevents a more detailed interpretation.

Modern deposits consisted of a thick deposit of silt containing the remains of plastics and a single fragment of animal bone. This probably relates to the occupation of the present farmhouse.

Evidence of suspected human activity, in the form of a small pit, may suggest that the remains of occupation extends beyond the range of the plotted cropmarks. The remains of wood and organic materials (particularly within the layer of peat) are likely to be able to provide extensive environmental evidence should future works be undertaken to this depth.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr P Harding of Eastern Electricity who commissioned the fieldwork and analysis. The work was co-ordinated by Tom Lane, and this report was edited by Gary Taylor and Tom Lane.

## 9. PERSONNEL

Project Coordinator: Tom Lane  
Research: Fiona Walker  
Supervisors: Fiona Walker and Chris Moulis  
Finds Processing: Denise Buckley  
Illustration: Neil Herbert  
Post-excavation Analyst: Neil Herbert

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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

Marrat, W., 1814 *The History of Lincolnshire 2*, Pt.1 (Boston)

Phillips, C.W., 1970 *The Fenland in Roman Times* R.G.S. Research series: N° 5

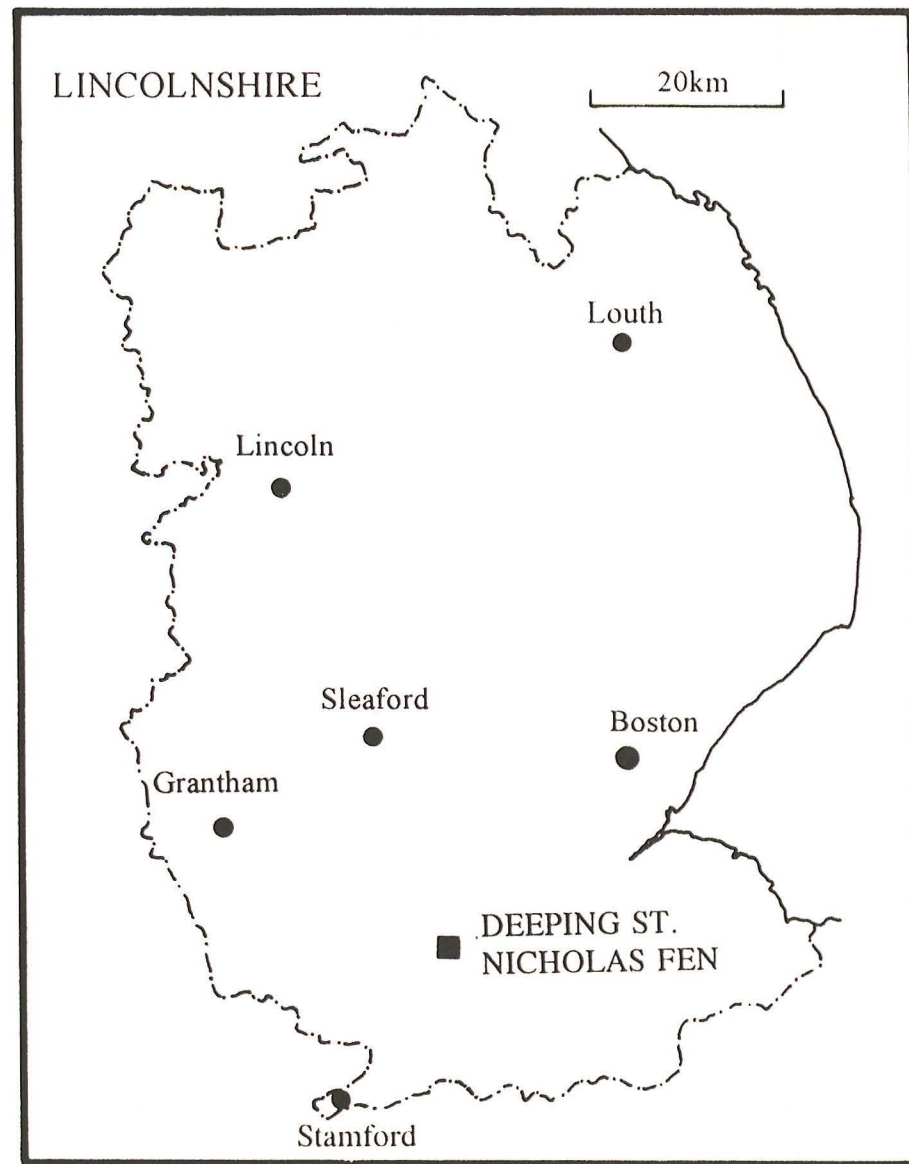
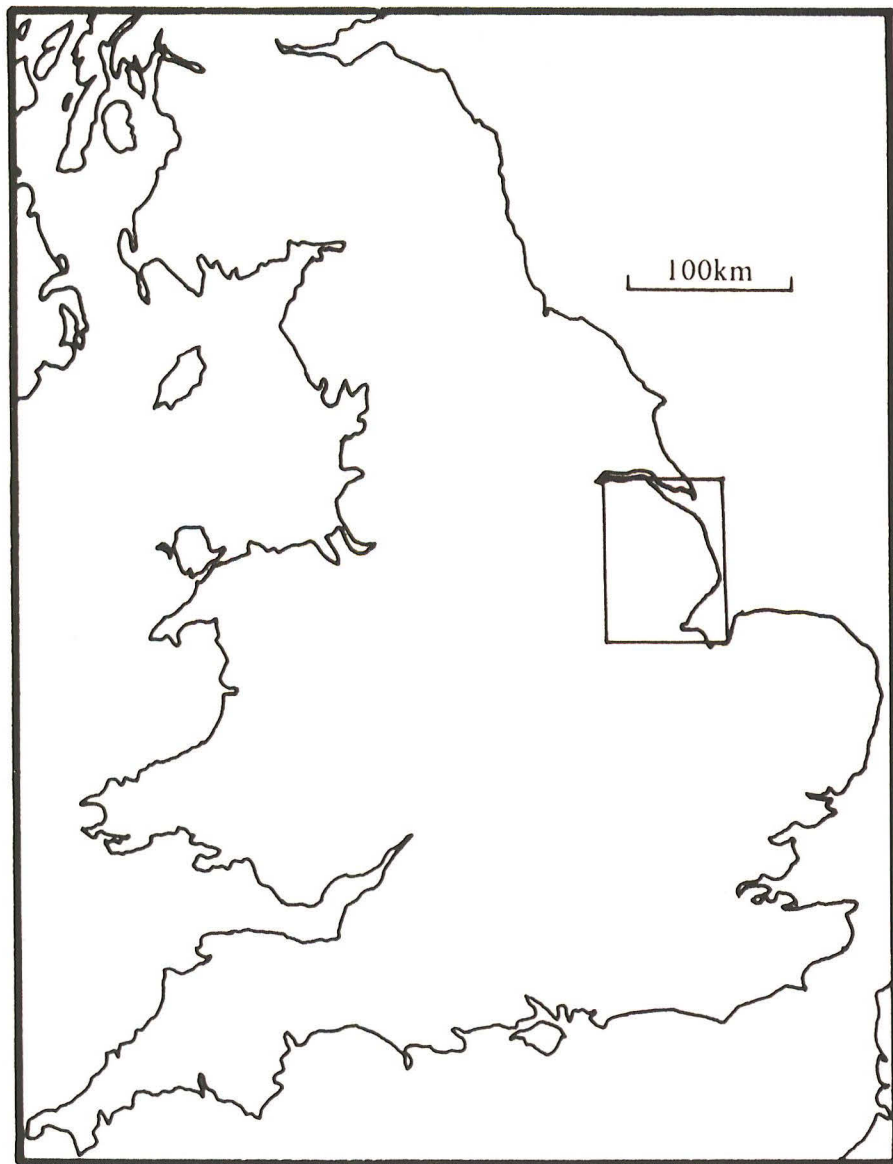
Shennan, I., 1994 *The Development of the Western Fen Edge* in Waller, M., 1994 *The Fenland Project Number 9: Flandrian Environmental Change in Fenland*, East Anglian Archaeology Report N° 70

Smith, A.G., 1970 *The Stratigraphy of the Northern Fenland* in Phillips, C.W., 1970 *The Fenland in Roman Times* R.G.S. Research series N° 5

## 11. ABBREVIATIONS

DSN Numbers prefixed with this code are the primary reference numbers used by the Fenland Project for identifying archaeological sites and finds.

Figure 1: General Location Plan



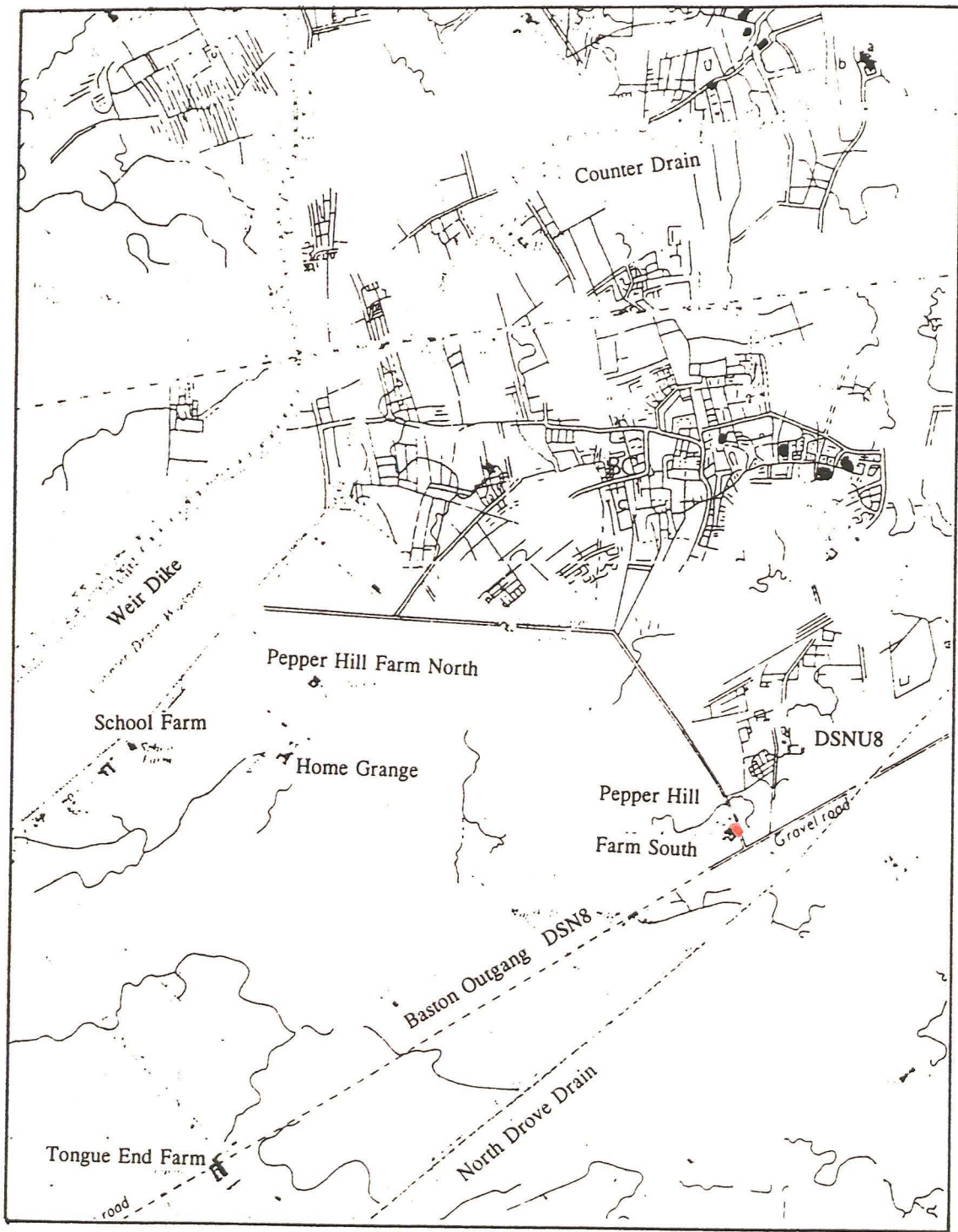
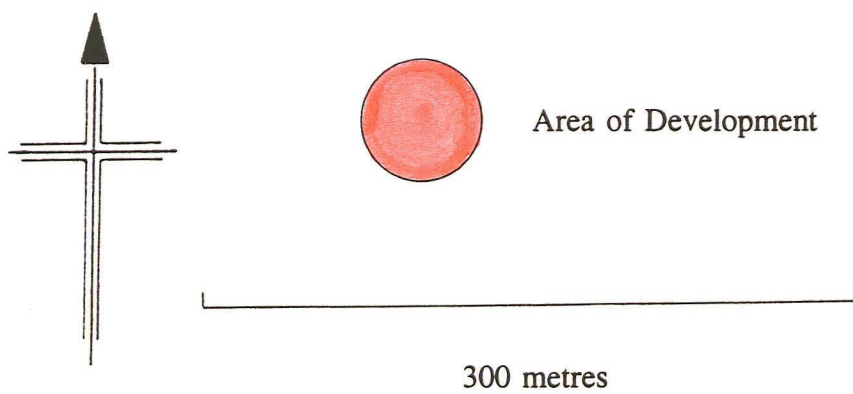
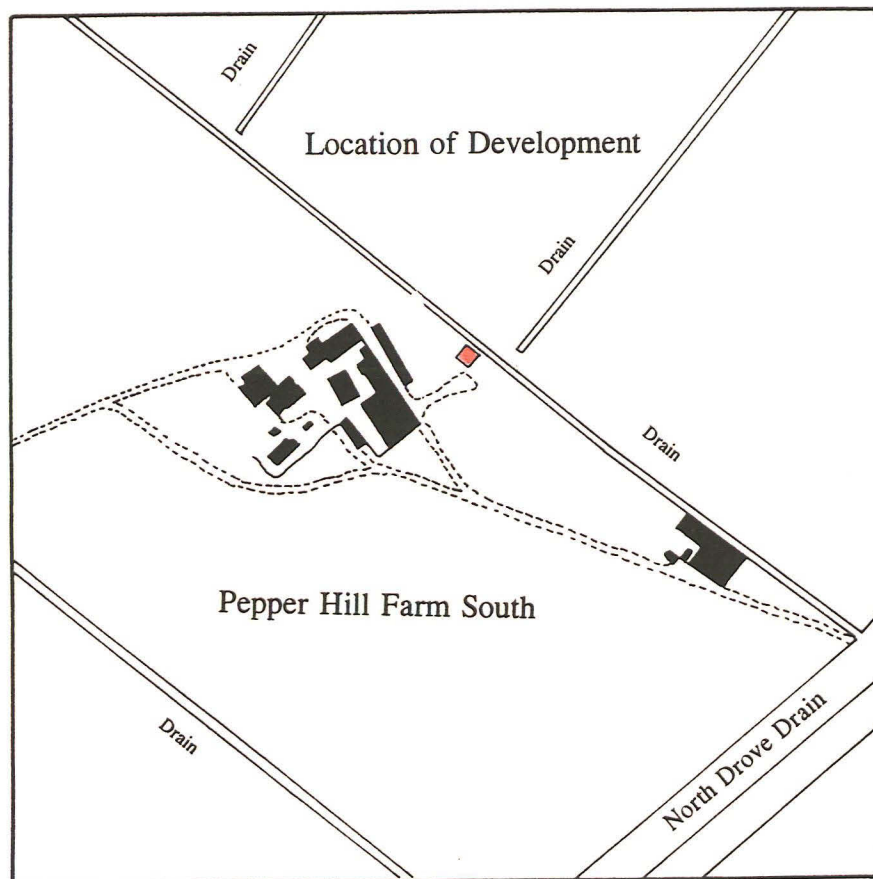


Figure 2: Site Location Plan: showing cropmark features (Phillips 1970)



**Figure 3: Site Location Plan**

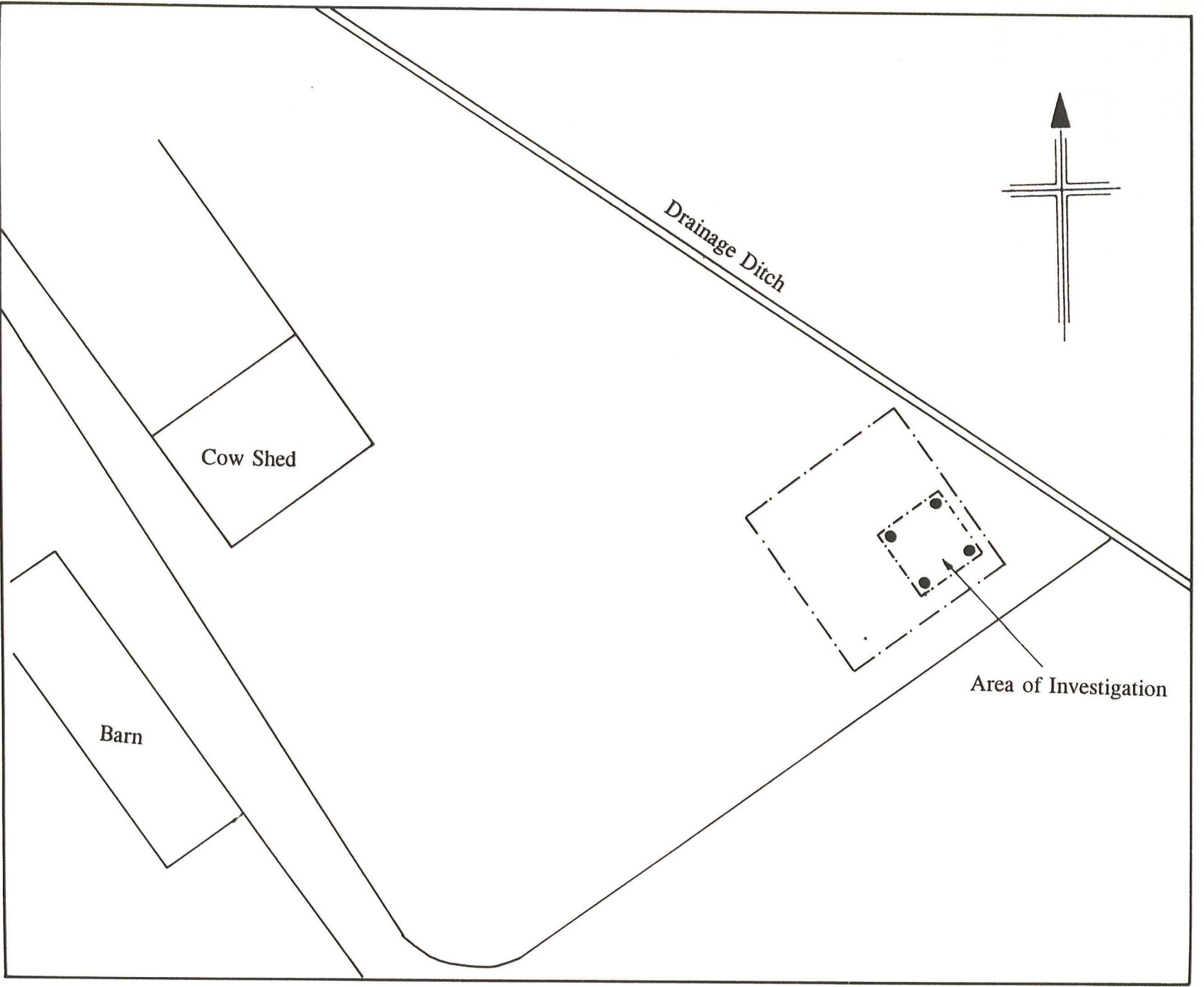
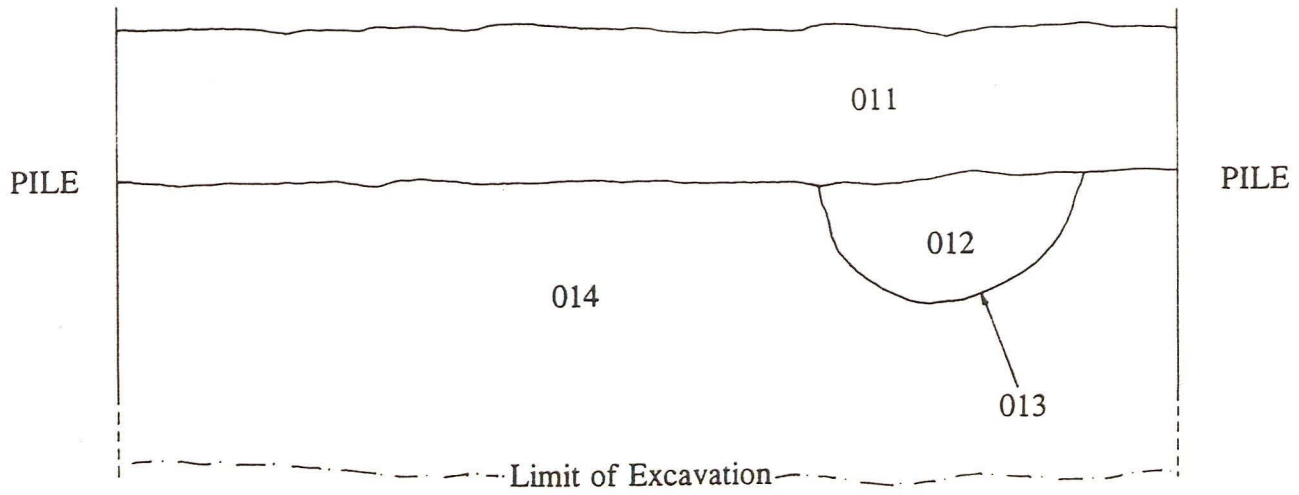


Figure 4: Area of Investigation

W

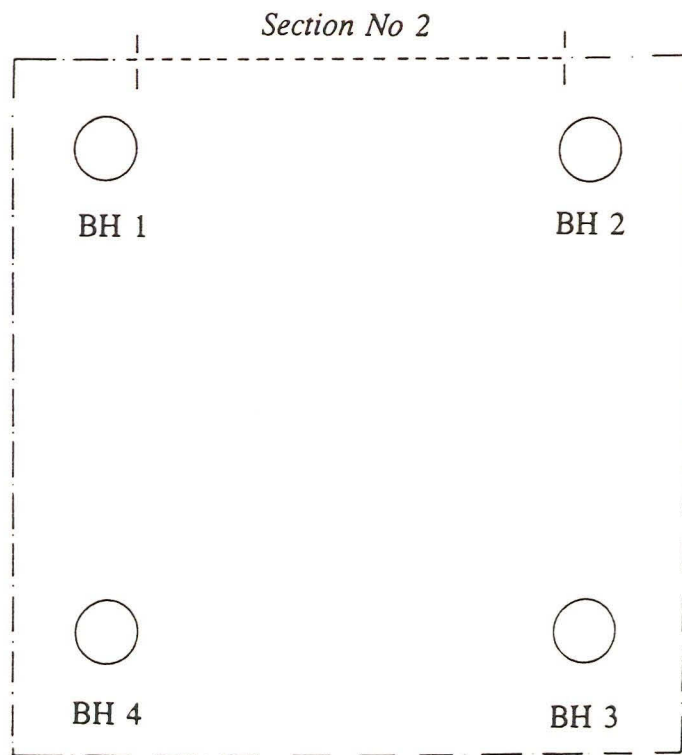
Ground Surface

E



2 metres

Figure 5: Section 2



3 metres

Figure 6: Plan showing locations of boreholes

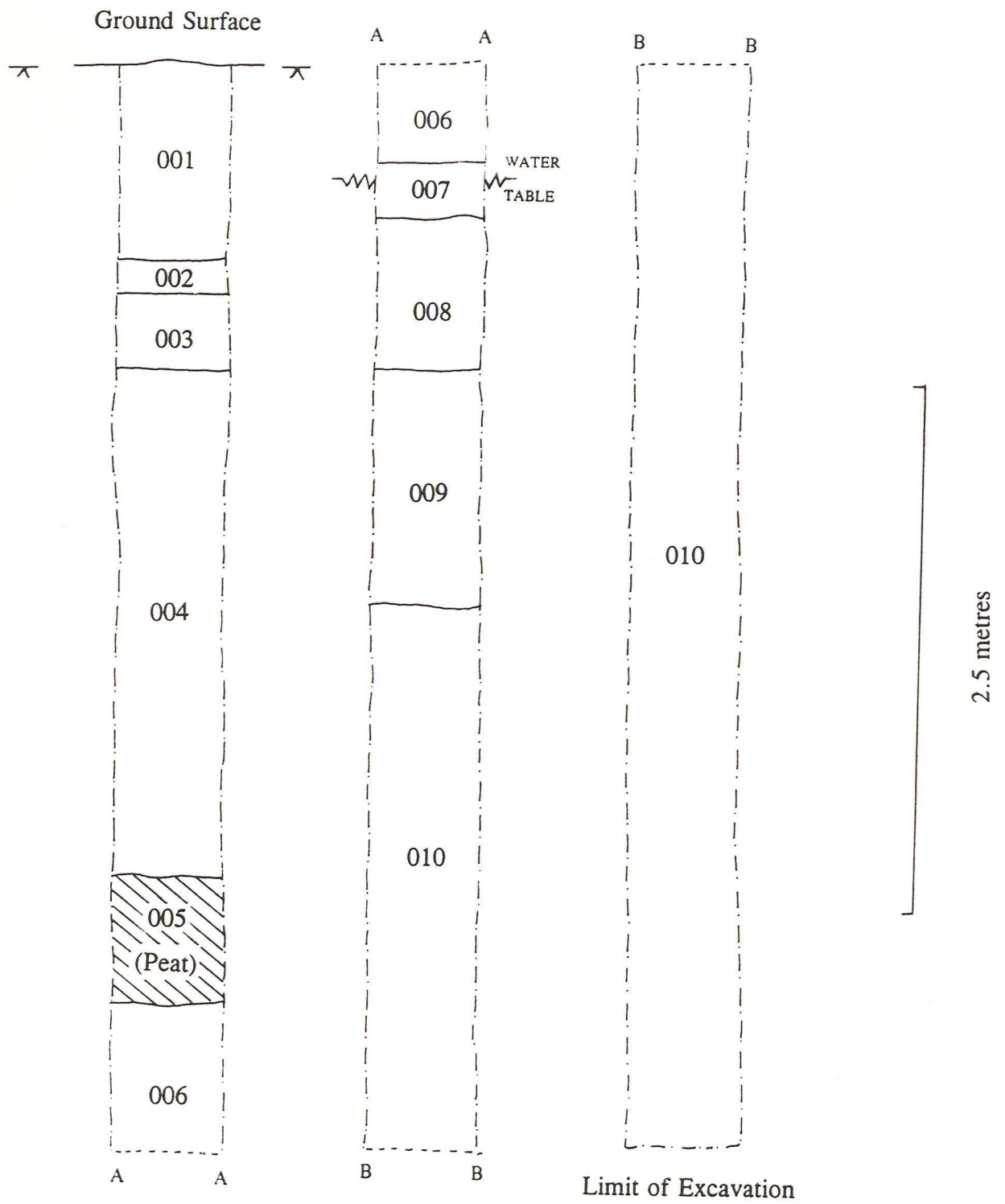


Figure 7: Section 1: deposits within borehole 2





Plate 1: General Site View

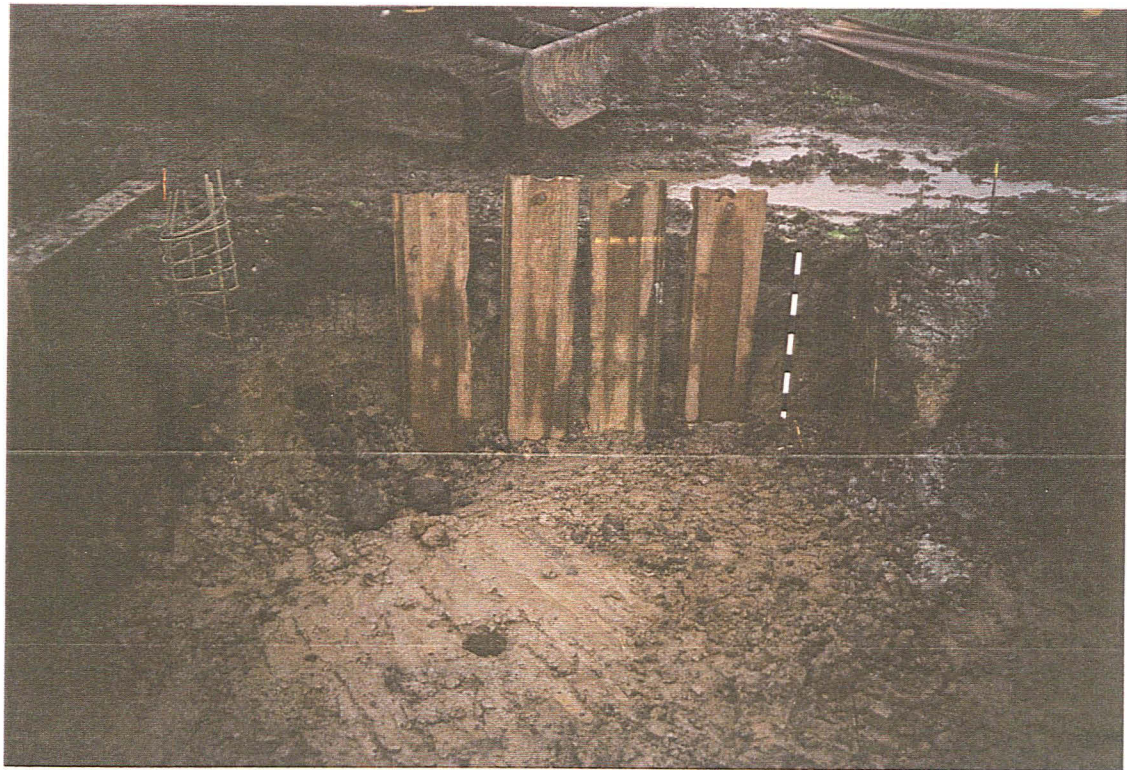


Plate 2: Section N° 2

## Appendix 1

### Context Summary

Context	Description	Interpretation
001	Friable, dark-brown silty clay containing organic matter	Modern ground surface
002	Firm, dark-brown silty clay containing organic material and roots	Natural deposit
003	Soft, brownish-grey silty clay containing decayed chalk and limestone fragments	Natural deposit
004	Soft, grey silty clay containing brown organic inclusions	Natural deposit
005	Soft, dark-brown peat.	Natural deposit
006	Soft, grey silty clay	Natural deposit
007	Firm, yellowish-grey silty sand containing organic matter	Natural deposit
008	Stiff, mottled greenish-grey silty clay containing occasional fine sub-rounded chalk fragments	Natural deposits
009	Firm, mottled yellowish-grey silty clay containing decayed fibrous roots	Natural deposit
010	Firm, greenish-grey laminated silty clay	Natural deposit
011	Soft, dark brownish-grey silt containing organic material and plastic fragments	Modern ground surface
012	Firm, dark brownish-grey silt containing organic material	Fill of (013)
013	Cut with steep, slightly concave, sides and a concave base, approximately 0.7m wide x 0.3m deep x u/k length	Small pit

## Appendix 2 The Archive

The archive consists of:

- 14 Context records
- 3 Scale drawings
- 5 Photographs
- 1 Stratigraphic matrix
- 1 Bag of finds

All primary records and finds are currently kept at:

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

Archaeological Project Services project code: DND96  
City and County Museum, Lincoln Accession Number: 177.96

## Appendix 3

### Glossary

<b>Bronze Age</b>	Period dating from 2,000 to 600 BC when more complex hierarchical agricultural societies developed.
<b>Context</b>	An archaeological context represents a distinct archaeological event or process. For example, the action of digging a pit creates a context (the cut) as does the process of its subsequent backfill (the fill). Each context encountered during an archaeological investigation is allocated a unique number by the archaeologist and a record sheet detailing the description and interpretation of the context (the context sheet) is created and placed in the site archive. Context numbers are identified within the report text by brackets, <i>e.g.</i> (004).
<b>Cut</b>	A cut refers to the physical action of digging a posthole, pit, ditch, foundation trench, <i>etc.</i> Once the fills of these features are removed during an archaeological investigation the original 'cut' is therefore exposed and subsequently recorded.
<b>Dumped deposits</b>	These are deposits, often laid down intentionally, that raise a land surface. They may be the result of casual waste disposal or may be deliberate attempts to raise the ground surface.
<b>Fill</b>	Once a feature has been dug it may begin to silt up (either slowly or rapidly) or it can be back-filled manually. The soil(s) which become contained by the 'cut' are referred to as its fill(s).
<b>Iron Age</b>	Part of the prehistoric era characterised by the introduction and use of iron for tools and weapons. In Britain this period dates from approximately 700 BC - AD 43.
<b>Layer</b>	A layer is a term used to describe an accumulation of soil or other material that is not contained within a cut.
<b>Mesolithic</b>	Pertaining to the period dating from 10,000 to 3,500 BC when small bands of humans relied upon hunting and gathering to survive.
<b>Natural</b>	Deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity.
<b>Neolithic</b>	Dating from 3,500 to 2,000 BC when sedentary farming communities developed.
<b>Post-medieval</b>	The period following the Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1500-1800.
<b>Prehistoric</b>	The period of human history prior to the introduction of writing. In Britain the prehistoric period lasts from the first evidence of human occupation about 500,000 BC, until the Roman invasion in the middle of the 1st century AD.
<b>Romano-British</b>	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 43-450 when the Romans occupied Britain.
<b>Saxon</b>	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 450-1066, up to the time of the Norman conquest.
<b>Palaeochannel</b>	A defunct ancient stream or watercourse.