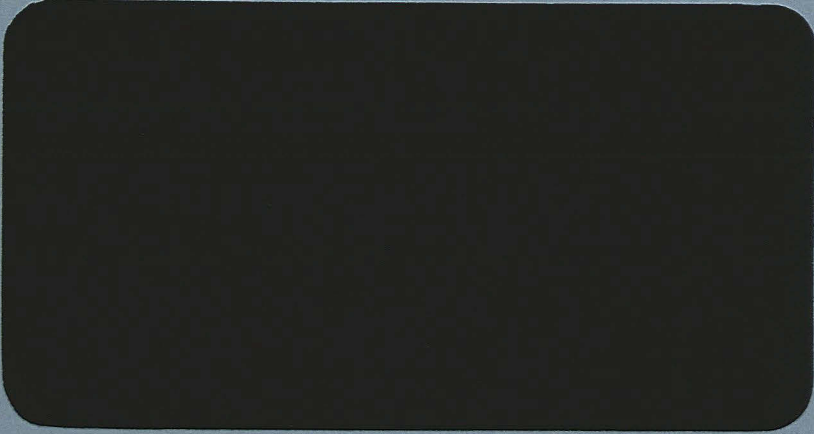


Ro 54147 9713

**ABBAY FARM, NORTHORPE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

Site code: AFN97  
LCNCC Acc. No.: 15.97



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SLI 5098 1454

Ro 54147 9713

**ABBEY FARM, NORTHORPE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

Site code: AFN97  
LCNCC Acc. No.: 15.97

Prepared for Premier Poultry Ltd. by R Mouraille and CPH Palmer-Brown

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March 1997

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## *Summary*

- \* *An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of Premier Poultry Ltd during the construction of six new poultry sheds at Abbey Farm, Northorpe, Lincolnshire*
  
- \* *A potentially large, high status, and hitherto unknown settlement was sampled during the brief which appears to have been occupied between the 1st and 4th centuries AD*
  
- \* *The watching brief was successfully concluded, with strategies being implemented to ensure the longer-term preservation of the site in situ*

## **1.0 Introduction**

A moderately intensive archaeological watching brief was carried out for Premier Poultry Ltd at Abbey Farm, Northorpe, during excavations for eight new poultry sheds and an associated irrigation lagoon. The works were undertaken to fulfil a planning requirement issued by West Lindsey District Council, and centred on NGR SK 883 962.

Entries at the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) are limited within the immediate area surrounding the development, though the proximity of a redundant military airfield has (in the past) limited access to the environment (ie the low density of archaeological data could reflect limited access to, rather than archaeological sterility in, an historical environment which is generally rich with remains dating principally to the Romano-British and medieval periods).

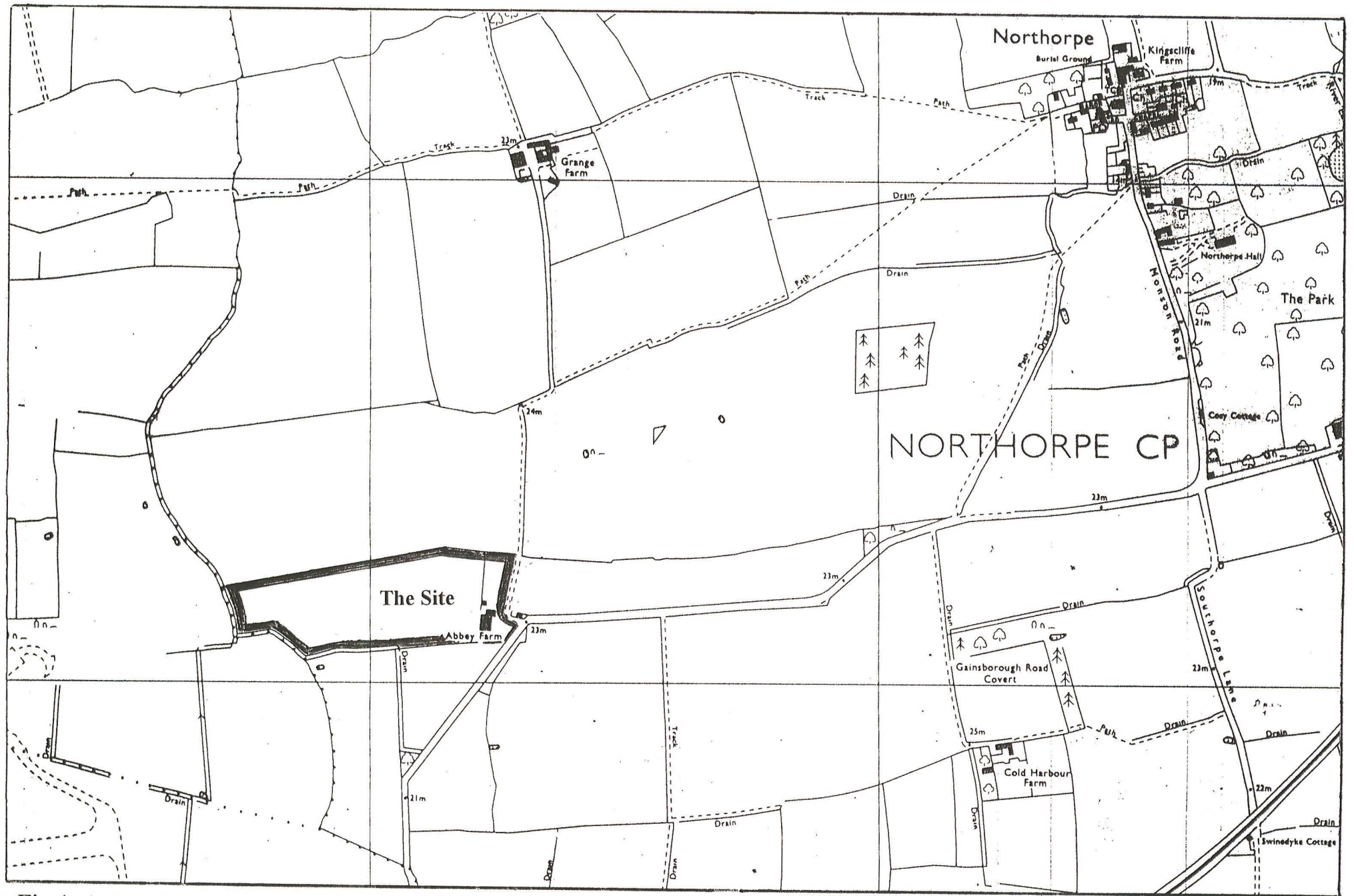
The discovery of a hitherto unknown Romano-British settlement, possibly of some considerable size and status, will add significantly to records held at the SMR, and the work commissioned by Premier Poultry Ltd should help to ensure the long-term management and protection of the monument.

## **2.0 Location and description**

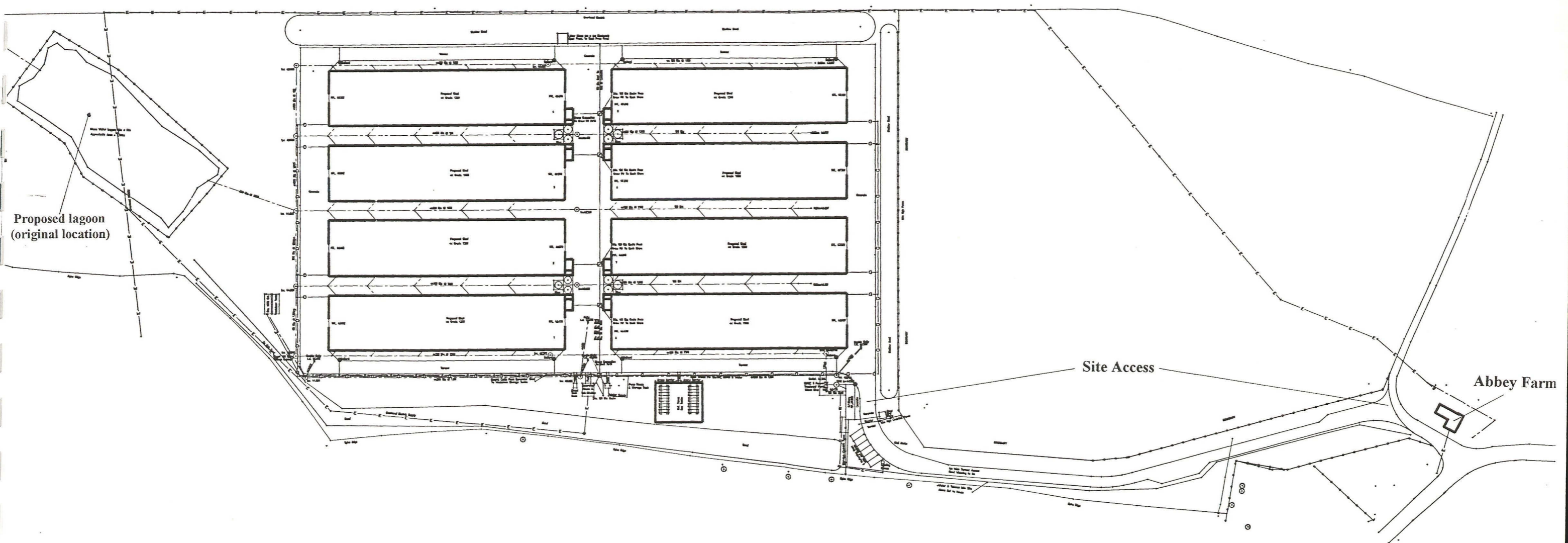
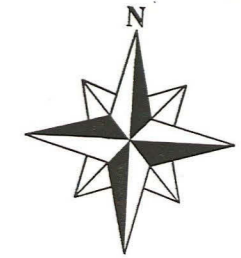
The hamlet of Northorpe lies in the administrative district of West Lindsey, approximately 10km north-east of Gainsborough. The site of development, which measures approximately 4.5 hectares in extent, comprises an irregular parcel, the boundaries of which are defined largely by ditches and hedges: the west boundary is marked by a beck, and the east boundary is defined by a north-south track which leads to Grange Farm. Access is via Kirton Road, the B1205, and the site is approximately 1.3km south-west of the Northorpe village (Fig. 1).

Relief does not vary greatly, and the land lies at an altitude approximately 20m ODN. Recent land use has focused on agriculture, producing a humic dark brown clay-silt ploughsoil of approximately 30cm depth. This overlies natural deposits of pre-Ipswichian glacial till - stiff yellow silty clay containing fossilised shells and fragments of limestone.

Planning permission was granted by West Lindsey District Council for the erection of eight poultry sheds, as well as the improvement to, and widening of, the existing farm access from the B1205. The permission was granted subject to the undertaking of an archaeological watching brief during development (planning reference W74/397/95).



**Fig.1: 1:10,000 Site Location**  
 (OS Copyright Licence No. AL 51521 A0001)



Proposed lagoon  
(original location)

Site Access

Abbey Farm

**Fig. 2: 1:2000 Proposed development Plan**  
(Based on U.C.S. Drawing No. 96-22-3c)



### **3.0 Archaeological and historical background**

The archaeological evidence for and background to the medieval settlement of Northorpe itself has been discussed in some detail by Everson et al (Everson et al 1991) following a detailed survey of the extant earthwork and the cropmark remains which proliferate on all sides of the modern village.

Originally, there were two medieval settlements, Northorpe and Southorpe, though the modern parish now encompasses both. Whilst Northorpe appears to have been partially abandoned in the medieval period, Southorpe was completely deserted.

An archaeological evaluation took place on the south-east side of Northorpe in 1996 (Palmer-Brown 1996), within an area of extant earthworks which had not been mapped by Everson. Stone structures (including a well) and earthwork remains were exposed which date to the medieval period, and late Saxon pottery was recovered from residual contexts.

The above noted, there are no entries in the County SMR which indicate the presence of sites (of any period) in the direct vicinity of the present development. The archaeological project brief rightly notes, however, that this dearth of evidence may be due to the fact that the site is adjacent to a disused airfield; the activities of which may have precluded or hampered access.

RAF Blyton (located at SK 874953) first became operational in 1942 and was closed only four years later following the ending of World War II. It was reactivated in the 1950's as a satellite training field attached to RAF Finningley and was closed for good in 1954. In the early 1960's, the land was sold in piecemeal fashion to civilian buyers.

The identification of dense Romano-British remains during the present site investigation has resulted in the discovery of a hitherto unknown settlement, although pottery fragments and coins have been recovered over a number of years in a field opposite the main entrance to Northorpe Hall, approximately 1.4km east of the present development.

### **4.0 Objectives of the archaeological watching brief**

The purpose of the recording brief, in essence, was to identify and record any archaeological remains exposed or disturbed as a result of the development; effectively, to preserve 'by record' the archaeology; to create a comprehensive site archive (of both the object and paper elements), and to produce a report, both for the purpose of the clients and the local planning authority.

An archaeological watching brief may be defined as:-

“a programme of observation and investigation conducted during the destruction of archaeological deposits, resulting in the preparation of a report and ordered archive” (Institute of Field Archaeologists, *Standard Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*, 1994).

## **5.0 Methodology**

The project was monitored over a period of fourteen days, between January 28th and February 14th, 1997. Most of the work was carried out by R Mouraille, although the last four days were covered by R Mouraille and W Livesey.

Initially, the project centred on the monitoring of topsoil/subsoil clearance using D6 and D8 tracked bulldozers over an area measuring approximately 3.0 ha. During this process, the deep cleats of the vehicle tracks tended to confuse and smear the soil surface, making archaeological observation difficult, and attention (by necessity) was focused on a field walking methodology for surface or stray artefacts.

Following soil stripping of a wide area where the sheds were being sited, some ten exploratory trenches on the west side of the development were opened at the request of the archaeologist in an area earmarked for deep lagoon excavations. This change of direction was initiated to establish whether or not a protracted archaeological presence was required which, at the time, was looking doubtful (no artefactual or ecofactual evidence of any significance had been noted in the areas of the new poultry sheds). The results of this exercise are discussed below.

Recording was undertaken using pro-forma Watching Brief Record Sheets (incorporating physical descriptions, interpretations and stratigraphic relationships). Section and plan drawings were made at scale 1:20, and all records were cross-referenced to 1:500 development plans provided by Universal Construction Services Ltd. A detailed photographic record was maintained throughout.

Following the completion of fieldwork, all artefactual remains were washed and processed and were then submitted for detailed appraisal. The results of the pottery assessment are presented in Appendix 2. Only a few fragments of animal bone were recovered from stratified archaeological contexts: these items have been washed and marked, but have not been examined by a specialist.

## **6.0 Results**

### **6.1 The access road**

Preliminary earth-moving operations involved the re-cutting and widening of an existing site access. This involved excavating a swathe to c. 50cm below the modern ground surface and filling the resultant void with rubble, thereby providing a suitable access for heavy plant. The only remains exposed as a result of these works comprised a series of trenches filled with modern rubble and pottery. They were exposed close to Abbey Farm House and it is assumed, therefore, that they related to the farm complex.

### **6.2 The area of the poultry houses**

All of the topsoil in the areas of poultry sheds was stripped using bulldozers and box scrapers, making archaeological recognition difficult. Monitoring consisted largely of

following the machinery when the soil surface was fresh and scanning for traces of archaeological intrusion or surface artefacts.

No archaeological features of any period were exposed in any of the footprints of the poultry sheds.

### 6.3 The area of lagoon excavation

A change of strategy was initiated by the archaeologist and attention was focused on assessing the impact of a lagoon excavation which was scheduled to take place on the extreme west side of the site (Fig. 3). In all, some ten trenches were opened: these cuttings were excavated at intervals following the identification of potentially important remains at an early stage.

Initially, a staggered trench (Area 2) was opened, which exposed two parallel ditch-like features, orientated east-west, separated by a distance of c. 8.1m. Both were cut through natural light brown/yellow clay, and between them, protruding through the natural sub-stratum, were scatters of ?cobbles; suggesting the possibility that the ditches flanked a road (surface finds of Romano-British pottery recovered from a discrete zone close to Area 2 suggested that this road may have been of Roman foundation). Further cleaning revealed that the ?cobbles were in fact large eroded pebbles which occur naturally in the underlying till.

A section was excavated through one of the ?ditches, (008), exposing a shallow, indeterminate U-shaped profile of approximately 35cm depth (Fig. 's 3 and 4). It was filled with clean brown-grey silty clay, devoid of cultural inclusions such as pottery or charcoal, and may, therefore, have been a palaeochannel of natural origin. The other feature was not investigated in detail.

Areas 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were devoid of archaeological remains.

Approximately 41m east of Area 2, a longer north-south cutting was opened to assess the continuity of the linear features exposed in Area 2 (Area 11). Two, seemingly linear features were exposed (Fig. 's 3 and 5), but one did not project to the alignment in Area 2, and the fills of both features indicated that they were of a totally different character - they contained frequent inclusions of charcoal, Romano-British pottery and other typically domestic waste.

The northernmost of the two features in Area 11 was sampled for dating evidence, and a substantial quantity of Romano-British pottery (some potentially early) was recovered, suggesting that this part of the site was in fact close to, or set within, a settlement.

Following the exposure of the above, the Assistant Archaeological Officer for Lincolnshire was informed of developments at Abbey Farm, and a site meeting was held on February 10th to determine the future direction of the watching brief: at this time, there still remained some speculation that the linear features exposed in Area 2

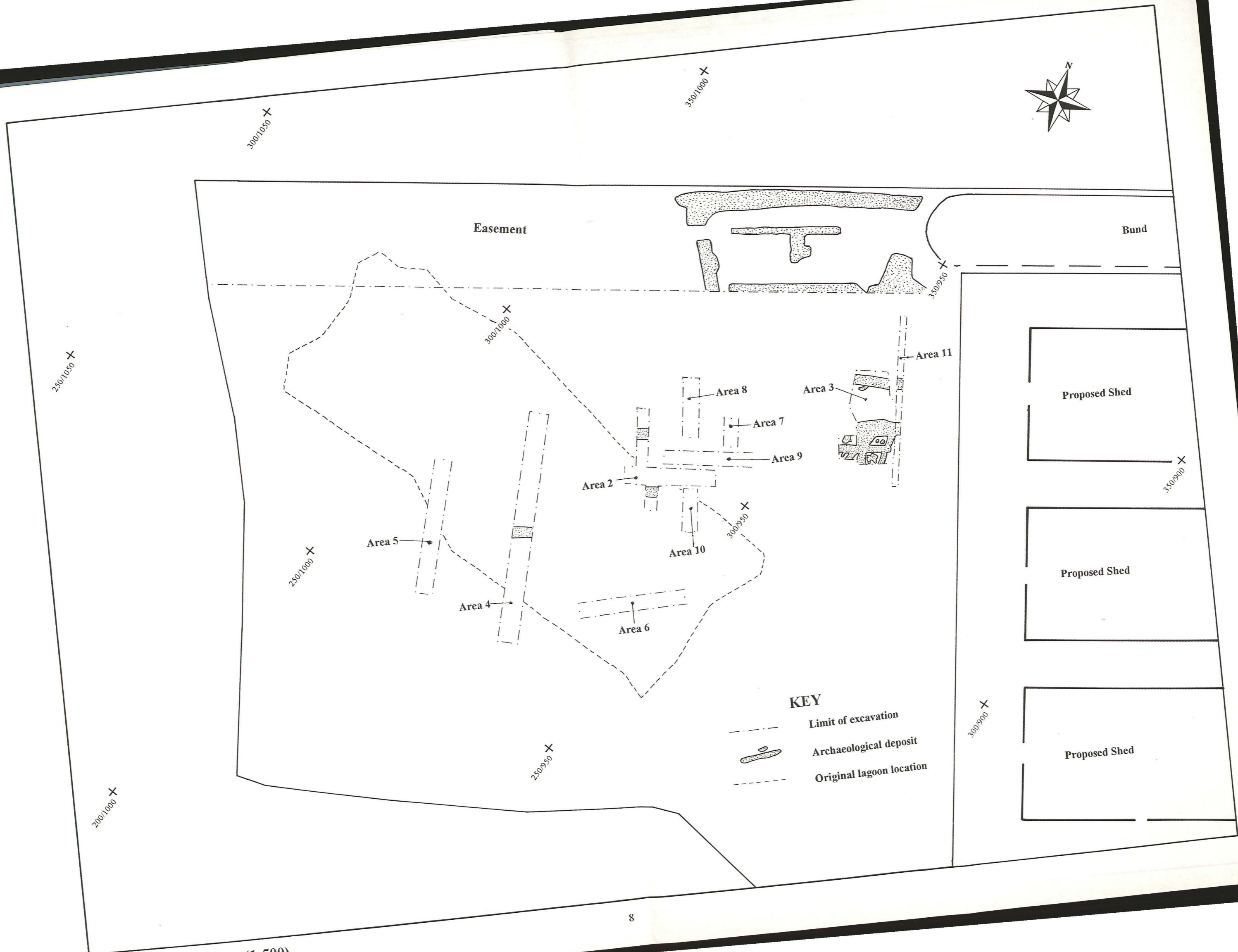
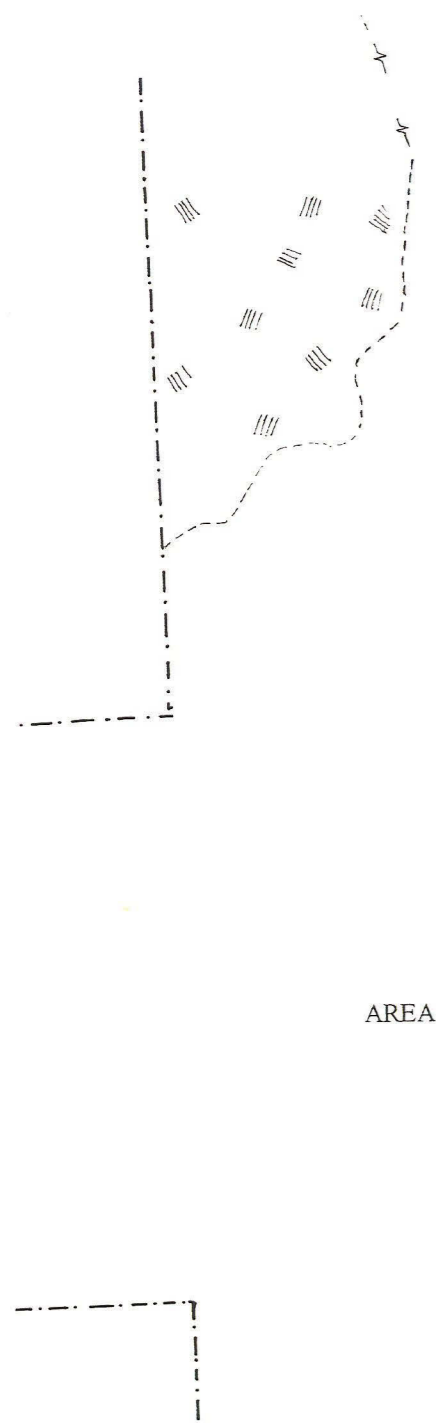


Fig. 3: Area Locations (1:500)



AREA 2

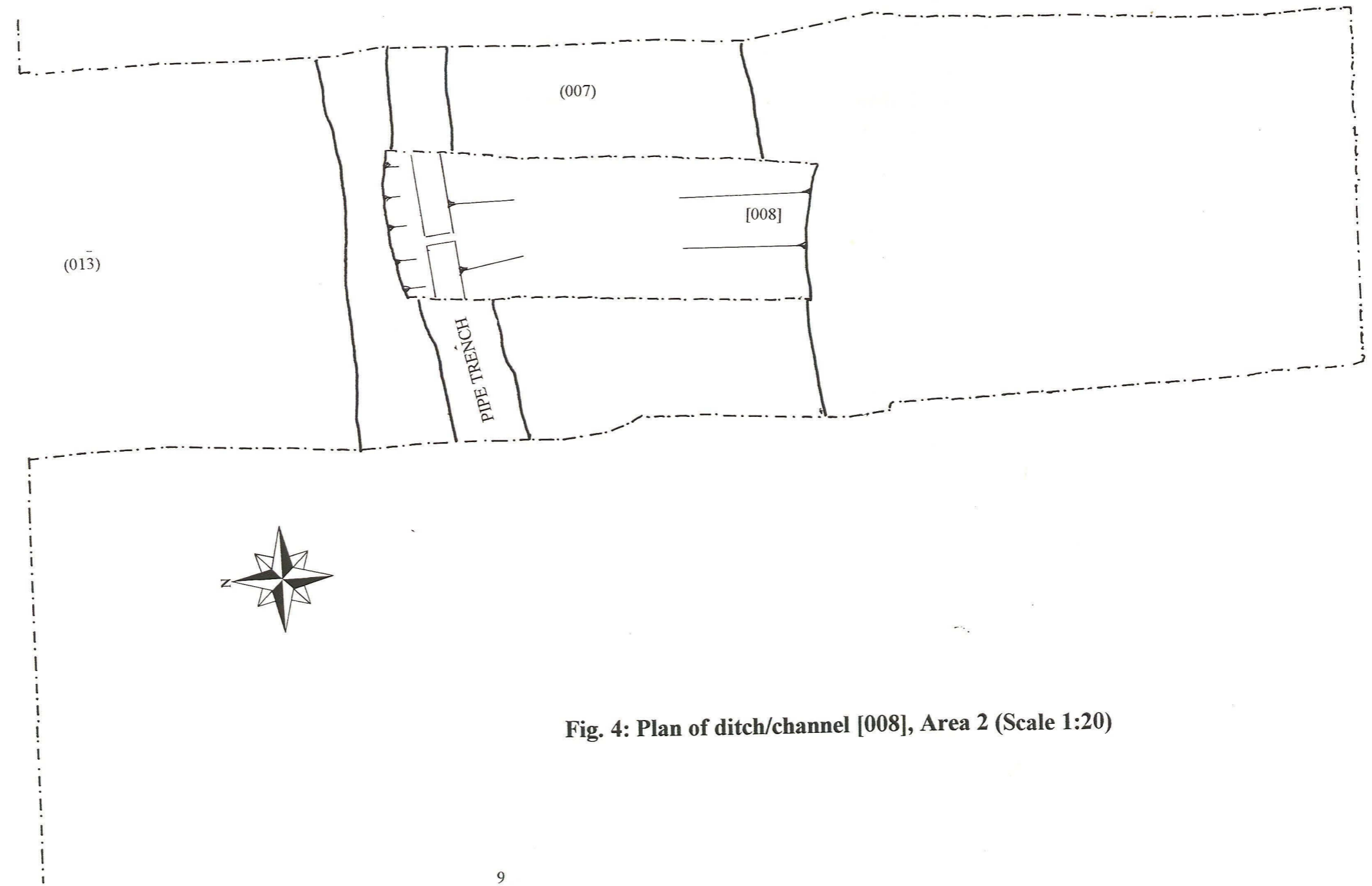
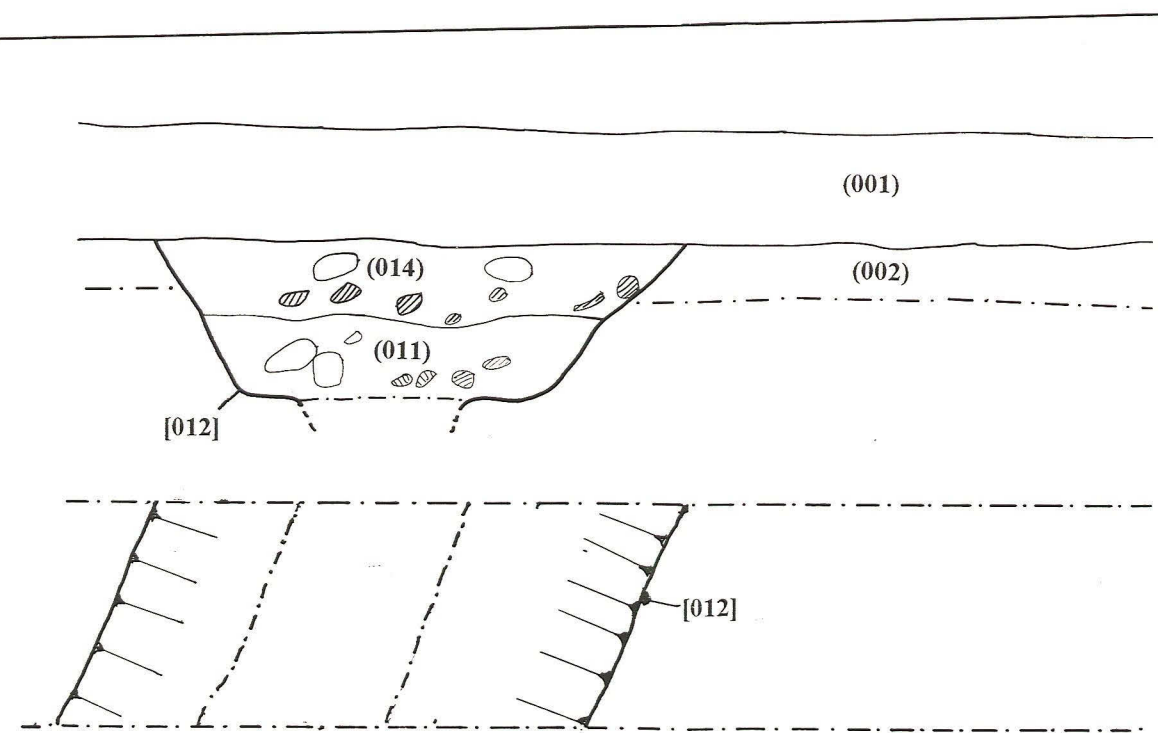
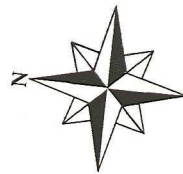
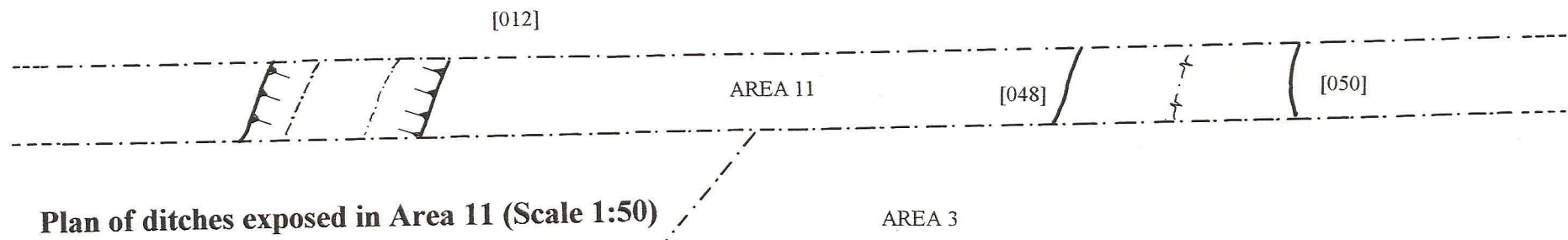


Fig. 4: Plan of ditch/channel [008], Area 2 (Scale 1:20)

Fig. 5



Plan and section of ditch [012], Area 11 (Scale 1:20)

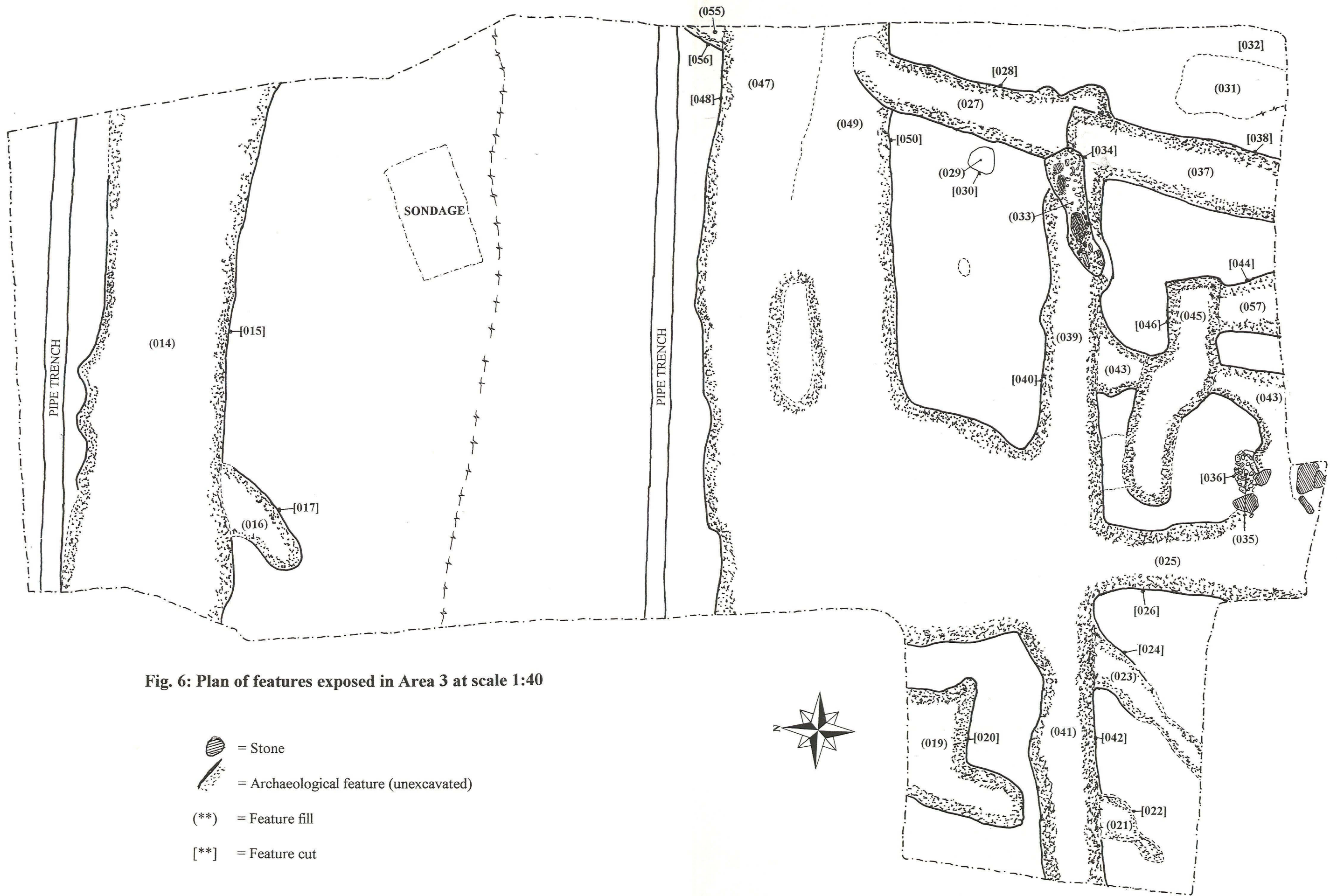




Fig. 6: Plan of features exposed in Area 3 at scale 1:40

-  = Stone
-  = Archaeological feature (unexcavated)
- (\*\*) = Feature fill
- [\*\*] = Feature cut

related to a Roman road which was orientated east-west. It was decided that the effort should be fixed, therefore, on exploring and recording this feature, and assessing the threat posed against it by the remaining elements of the development. The Assistant Archaeological Officer requested that another test area (coded Area 3) should be excavated at right angles to, and slightly west of, Area 11, and the request was agreed by the clients.

Soil stripping in Area 3 exposed a complex network of archaeological features, extending in all directions, beyond the limits of the cutting (Fig. 6). Detailed cleaning of the surface of these deposits revealed part of a settlement plan indicative of at least four discreet phases. Some of the linear features (eg [048], [050], [042]) were on the same alignment, and others were set at right angles. The regularity of these remains suggested that the complex related to a planned Romano-British settlement.

None of the features in Area 3 were excavated in detail, as negotiations with the client company and Universal Construction Services Ltd. resulted in an agreement that the remains could be preserved *in situ* by siting the intended lagoon excavation beyond the boundaries of the remains (which were determined by selective soil stripping in areas to the west and south-west). All of the features in Area 3 were cleaned, photographed and drawn, and artefactual remains found in the upper fills of individual features were removed for dating and appraisal purposes (Appendix 2).

There were suggestions that some of the features were structural: in the fill of an east-west trench on the south side of the cutting, [036], were areas of purposely laid stones which may have formed the base of a rubble foundation, perhaps for supporting timber or timber-framed walls. However, given that the development would no-longer affect these remains, recording was restricted to cleaning, photography and surface sampling, rather than detailed excavation, and many of the stratigraphic and interpretative relationships were not therefore clarified.

The extent of the settlement sampled in Area 3 was not determined. However, enough information was recovered to suggest that similar and related remains will be found in the field immediately to the north of that currently being developed: the extent of trenching in the lagoon section (ie on the west side of the site) demonstrated that the archaeology is restricted to a discrete zone within the overall development. However, easement stripping to the north of Area 3 showed that ditch and trench-like features of Romano-British date continue/extended northwards, beyond the limits of the present development (Fig. 2).

## 7.0 Conclusions and discussion

Clearly, given that the present investigation was restricted to watching brief status only, and that the majority of the remains exposed will now, hopefully, be preserved indefinitely, any conclusions drawn from the present data must, at best, be viewed as preliminary. That said, there are some useful comments which can be made now which may assist with a better understanding of the site and its setting.



The archaeology exposed during the present investigation expresses a degree of organisation and planning: in Area 3, the interconnecting nature of parallel and perpendicular ?trenches is reminiscent of building slots (as noted above, specific functional diagnoses were not possible due to the limitations of the brief). These observations are not in balance with an interpretation of native/peasant farm complex of the type recorded at sites such as Rampton (Ponsford 1992) or Staunton in Nottinghamshire (Todd 1975), or the large numbers of irregular cropmark enclosure sites which are known over wide areas of upland Lincolnshire from aerial photographs. Native settlements are usually simple, often consisting of small clusters of circular buildings set within irregular enclosures, perhaps serving the needs of domestic family or extended family units. Regrettably, in Lincolnshire, few such sites have been studied in detail, but the point being emphasised is the contrast which exists between this class of settlement and the better-known (or better-explored, perhaps) villa settlements of the second century and later.

The title villa has been popularly applied to any substantial Roman building in the countryside where stone was used for the walls and tiles covered the roof (Whitwell 1992, 79). Other material remains have also been cited as indications of villa status such as *tesserae* (mosaic floor fragments) or box flue tile fragments, indicative of hypocaust (under floor heating) systems. There are relatively few villa complexes known in Lincolnshire, with the majority occurring along the limestone belt from the south to the north of the county, and outliers along the eastern edge of the Wolds.

At Northorpe, no tile or *tesserae* fragments were recovered, and there is no reason to assume that the remains relate to a villa complex at all (the possibility, however, should not be dismissed). However, there is evidence to suggest that the Northorpe site was a settlement of more than purely utilitarian status: the archaeological/structural element has already been discussed and compared above, and there is some artefactual evidence for supposing the site was of a higher social standing than (for example) the humble farmstead, and that its foundation pre-dated the second century AD (the century which is usually associated with the emergence of villa estates within the province). One of the pottery sherds recovered from an east-west trench, (041), is a body sherd from a southern Spanish amphora (possibly Haltern 70 type), the original contents of which was probably *defrutum* or olives (Appendix 2). This type of amphora is usually confined to the first century in Britain and such a find on a rural site is extremely rare, and may be indicative of high status settlement.

Given the relatively small quantity of pottery recovered, it has not been possible to phase or date with any certainty (Appendix 2). The earliest ware-types recovered would appear to derive from a late Iron Age/native tradition, though the assemblage as a whole suggests occupation throughout most of the Roman period, from the first century to the fourth.

To a degree, the fact that it has not been possible to attach a functional interpretation to the settlement at Northorpe is immaterial. Prior to the current watching brief, no site of this period was recorded in the County SMR, and its recognition now will inevitably assist with its protection and preservation in the future.

## 8.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) express sincere thanks to Premier Poultry Ltd for commissioning the watching brief, and to Universal Construction Services Ltd for working so closely and positively within the archaeological framework. Thanks also to Mark Bennett and Sarah Grundy (County SMR) for allowing access to the parish files, and to Jim Bonnor, the Assistant County Archaeologist, for his curatorial guidance. PCA (Lincoln) wish to extend thanks to local residents, Mrs E. M. Eminson (Local Historian), and Mr and Mrs Nicholson of the Old Vicarage, Northorpe, for their hospitality and local knowledge.

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## Appendix 1 List of archaeological contexts

- 001 Ploughsoil.
- 002 Natural clay layer.
- 003 Cut for building foundation.
- 004 Silty clay fill of the above.
- 005 Natural sandy clay layer.
- 006 Natural sandy layer.
- 007 Upper ditch fill. ?Possible palaeochannel.
- 008 Cut for the above.
- 009 Modern field drain cut.
- 010 Silty clay fill of the above.
- 011 Soft silty secondary ditch fill of cut 012.
- 012 Stepped cut of ditch. Orientation: NW-SE.
- 013 Natural gravel layer.
- 014 Soft silty clay upper ditch fill of cut 015.
- 015 Cut of ditch. Orientation: E-W.
- 016 Fill of small pit. Truncated by ditch 015.
- 017 Cut for the above.
- 018 Cut for natural palaeochannel.
- 019 Silty fill of semi-rectangular feature. Orientation: N-S.
- 020 Unused context.
- 021 Silty fill of shall feature 022. Similar to 019 but less grey in colour.
- 022 Cut for the above.
- 023 Clayey silty fill of water borne deposit.
- 024 Cut for the above.
- 025 Fill of possible internal wall foundation trench.
- 026 Cut for the above.
- 027 North-south aligned fill of linear feature 028.
- 028 Cut for the above.
- 029 Fill of possible post-hole.
- 030 Cut for the above.
- 031 Fill of possible well or small pit.
- 032 Cut for the above.
- 033 Limestone wall, aligned east-west. Some burning on stones.
- 034 Cut for the above.
- 035 Limestone wall, aligned north-south. Some burning on stones.
- 036 Cut for the above.
- 037 Fill of possible foundation trench. Aligned north-south. Probably associated with 039 & 041.
- 038 Cut for the above.
- 039 Fill of possible foundation trench. Most likely same feature as 037.
- 040 Cut. Same as 038 and 042.
- 041 Fill of possible foundation trench. Same as 039 and 037.
- 042 Cut for the above.
- 043 Fill of semi-rectangular cut. Aligned mainly north-south.
- 044 Cut for the above.
- 045 Fill of foundation trench. Possible plaster fragments; ?internal wall.
- 046 Cut for the above.
- 047 Fill of possible boundary ditch. Orientation: east-west.
- 048 Cut for the above.
- 049 Fill of feature 1m x 4.6m. Orientation: east-west.
- 050 Cut for the above.
- 051 Deposit of sandy grits.
- 052 Fill of natural palaeochannel.
- 053 Fill of land drain cut. Orientation: east-west.
- 054 Cut for the above.
- 055 Fill of possible foundation trench or boundary ditch. Possibly an extension of 027.

- 056 Cut for the above.
- 057 Fill of cut 044. Truncated by pit cut 046. Unexcavated.

## Appendix 2

### REPORT ON THE POTTERY FROM NORTHORPE NEAR GAINSBOROUGH

#### for PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

by M.J. Darling, M.Phil., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.

3 March 1997

**QUANTITY:** 64 Sherds weighing 1.601kg from 6 contexts. The sherds include some abraded, and soil conditions have affected surfaces and hardness. Several sherds are relatively fresh, and context 011 includes joining sherds from single vessels.

**ARCHIVE:** This has been archived to the standard recommended by the *Study Group for Roman Pottery*; a copy of the archive is attached.

**FABRICS AND FORMS:** Most of the vessels represented came from fairly standard Roman GREY fabrics, none of which are particularly distinctive in terms of inclusions. These GREY vessels include curved rims likely to come from either bowls or jars, and most notably a wide-mouthed bowl with under-cut rim of a late Roman type, as seen in the Rookery Lane/Swanpool industry in Lincoln (011). Another bowl (014) is a simple form difficult to parallel, but more likely to be earlier Roman. There are also two rusticated body sherds, one nodular (011) and the other with discontinuous linear rustication (014), both more common in the later 1st and 2nd century.

There is a range of shell-gritted fabrics (SHEL), the most common one being wheel-made with sparse shell inclusions, occurring as 22 sherds of a single vessel with evidence for a countersunk lug-handle (cxt 011). There are three other vessels, a hand-made base (jar?) with fairly coarse common shell (041), a hand-made body sherd with a trace of a groove (014), and a bowl rim, wheel-thrown in an Iron Age tradition (011). Counter-sunk lug-handled jars occur in the Lea kilns, and simple bead-rimmed bowls similar to that from (011) also occur in the area. The other fabric type appears to contain grog particles (GROG), and includes two bowl or cooking pot rims, the forms again being in an Iron Age tradition (011).

A single oxidised sherd in poor condition is possibly from an amphora, in a light red-brown fabric, with scattered particles including gold mica, quartz ?sandstone (041); the interior surface has a flaking deposit which looks superficially like a glaze, but needs investigation.

#### DISCUSSION

The small quantity of pottery recovered had a wide date-range from the later 1st-early 2nd century through to the later 3rd or 4th century. The earliest vessels followed an Iron Age tradition, and the latest was a bowl of a type produced in the Rookery Lane kiln, Lincoln. An unusual occurrence was a bodysherd from a South Spanish amphora, possibly of the Haltern 70 type, the original contents considered to be *defrutum* or olives. This amphora type is normally confined to the 1st century in Britain. Such a find on a rural site is extremely rare, and while the sherd may have come from a re-used amphora, it suggests the site may be other than a normal rural homestead.

## AFN97 POTTERY DATABASE

3 March 1997

Cxt	Fab	Form	Manuf	Vess	DNo	Details	Shs	grams
011	GREY	BWM	-	-	2	RIMS/BSS U/CUT CF RL KILN;SKETCH	4	311
011	GREY	J	RNOD	-	-	BS W SPACED KNOBS	1	17
011	GREY	J?	-	-	-	PLAIN BASE	1	86
011	GREY	-	-	-	-	THINNER BS W GROOVES;J?	1	5
011	GREY	-	-	3	-	BSS;LTGRY;DKGRY	3	64
011	GROG	BJN	-	-	-	RIM D20;WHEEL;SKETCH	1	36
011	GROG	BJN	HMAD?	-	-	RIM FR;POOR COND;SIM.DIAM;SKETCH	1	14
011	SHEL	B	-	-	-	RIM D26+ & BS;WHEEL;SKETCH	2	51
011	SHEL	JLH?	-	1	-	BSS POOR COND;GRY/RB CORTEX;GRYBN SURF;SPARSE SHEL	22	520
014	GREY	BJ	-	-	1	RIM D30;DKGRY W LTGRYBN SURFS	1	96
014	GREY	JBCUR	-	-	-	RIM FR ONLY	1	13
014	GREY	J?	-	1	-	RIM FR ONLY;RIM BURNT;SKETCH	2	15
014	GREY	JCUR	-	-	-	RIM FR;ABR;SMALLER J	1	3
014	GREY	J	RLIN	-	-	BS;SHORT DIAG RUST	1	8
014	GREY	-	-	4?	-	BSS	5	68
014	SHEL	-	HMAD	-	-	BS;DKGRY RB CORTEX;TRACE GROOVE	1	26
039	GREY	-	-	-	-	PL.BASE	1	25
041	SHEL	CLSD	HMAD	1	-	PL.BASE;D10;F.COARSE SHELL ?CP	5	47
041	AMPH?	A?	-	-	-	BS LTRB;GOLD MICA;SCATTER QTZ;INT.DEPOSIT?	1	123
049	GREY	JBCUR	-	1?	-	RIM D18? & BS;SKETCH	2	28
049	GREY	-	-	-	-	BSS	2	23
049	GREY	-	-	-	-	BSS W RB CORTEX	3	10
049	SHEL	-	-	-	-	BS ABR SPARSE SHEL AS (011)	1	3
049	SHEL?	-	-	-	-	BS ?BURNT VESIC;WHEEL?;SMTH EXTERIOR	1	9
	Total						64	1601

Appendix 3 Colour plates



Plate 1: Oblique view of easement facing north-west.



Plate 2: Overhead view of Area 3 facing north.



Plate 3: Heat-affected stones in top of trench [036]



Plate 4: View of ditch [018] in Area 4. Facing east.



#### Appendix 4 Site archive

The site contains the following basic elements:-

- x57 context records
- x2 colour print films
- x1 colour slide film
- x6 site drawings
- x1 box of artefacts (Romano-British pottery)
- x1 copy of site report
- misc. notes and correspondence.

A detailed site archive is currently being prepared. This will be deposited at the City and County Museum, Lincoln, within six months. Access to the archive will be possible by quoting the global accession number, 15.97.