97/6

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON LAND NORTH OF ERMINE CLOSE, ANCASTER, LINCOLNSHIRE (AEC97)

A P S
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON LAND NORTH OF ERMINE CLOSE, ANCASTER, LINCOLNSHIRE (AEC97)

Work Undertaken For
Ablehomes Ltd

April 1997

Report Compiled by
Neil Herbert BA (Hons)

A.P.S. Report N° **14/97**

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1. SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of trial pits on land to the north of Ermine Close, Ancaster, Lincolnshire.

Ancaster is the site of a Roman fort and town with associated remains including a cemetery. Prehistoric, Anglo-Saxon and medieval remains have also been found in and near the present village.

Archaeological investigation of the site included the supervision of the machine excavation of 26 of the 41 trenches that were opened. Deposits of natural angular limestone were recorded at variable depths across the site. These had been overlain by thick deposits of loose sands and sandy clays. A possible layer of buried soil was recorded within some of the trenches on the upper slopes of the site, at a depth of approximately 0.9m below the ground surface.

A single sherd of Romano-British pottery dating from the 3rd century AD was recovered from the spoil heap of a trench that had been excavated without archaeological supervision.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

On the 25th March 1997, an archaeological watching brief was undertaken on land north of Ermine Close, Ancaster, Lincolnshire. The work was commissioned by Ablehomes Ltd and was carried out by Archaeological Project Services in accordance with verbal instructions given by the the Community Archaeologist for South Kesteven (Appendix 1).

2.2 Topography and Geology

Ancaster is situated 10km west of Sleaford and approximately 10km northeast of Grantham, in South Kesteven District, Lincolnshire (Fig. 1).

The site is located *c.* 600m to the northeast of Ancaster village centre as defined by the parish church of St. Martin (Fig. 2). Situated at a height of *c.* 45m OD on land to the east of Ermine Street (National Grid Reference SK9879 4392), the investigation site covers an area of approximately 1.4 hectares (Fig. 3).

Located on the south side of a river valley, the site rises sharply from a height of *c.* 40m OD to the highest point at *c.* 48m OD. Locally the topography forms an undulating series of small ridges and hollows across the surface of this slope.

Local soils are predominantly of the Blackwood Association, deep permeable sandy and coarse loamy soils in glaciofluvial drift with Ruskington Association gleyic brown calcareous earths, and Elmton 1 Association, shallow brown rendzinas (Hodge *et al.* 1984, 127; 179 and 304). These form an unstable, soft surface geology that is masked by a thin layer of weak turf. These deposits have variable thickness and colouration, though have a consistent sandy texture, and form a sequence that is between 0.5m and 2.5m thick across the surface of the site.

These soils are developed on glaciofluvial sands and gravel, beneath which is a solid geology of Great Oolitic Limestone and Upper Lincolnshire Limestone. At the base of the slope this occurs approximately 0.5m below the present ground surface. Further up the slope, these deposits occur at a depth of 2.5m below the ground surface.

2.3 Archaeological Setting

Prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval archaeological remains have been recorded in the vicinity of the modern town of Ancaster (Fig. 2). Stone artefacts of Neolithic date (3500 - 2000BC) and later settlement during the Iron Age (600BC - AD43) present evidence for prehistoric activity in the area.

Romano-British occupation of the region has been identified in the immediate vicinity of the investigation area. Approximately 400m southwest of the development is the site of the Roman walled town of Ancaster (Scheduled Ancient Monument 105). To the north is a Roman marching camp, or temporary fort, and to the south and west was a large Romano-British cemetery. This cemetery overlies a 1st century AD Roman fort. To the west of the investigation area is Ermine Street, a major Roman road that ran between London and the Humber Estuary. A further Roman road lies to the south and a Roman milestone was found to the north of the village.

Anglo-Saxon activity is limited to the discovery of a cemetery which overlies the Romano-British burial ground to the south of the village. On the basis of the funerary evidence it is possible that occupation of the town did continue in the Anglo-Saxon period, but no settlement evidence has so far been found.

No mention of Ancaster is made in the Domesday survey of 1086. However, the Domesday Book records West Willoughby as having two churches, one of which may have been located at Ancaster (Foster and Longley 1976). Ancaster is first referred to by name in a charter of Henry II (1154-1189 AD). Recorded as *Anecastre,* the place-name means 'The Roman fort of *Anna* (personal name)' and is of Old English derivation (Ekwall 1974, 9).

Physical evidence of medieval activity is otherwise scarce, though the church of St. Martin contains 12th century stonework (Pevsner 1989) and the chapel of St. Mary stood in the field opposite. There is also a medieval cross in the village centre.

Divided between the parishes of Sudbrook and Wilsford, Ancaster became a parish in its own right in the 19th century.

3. AIMS

The aim of the watching brief was to examine the trenches opened without archaeological supervision, and to supervise the machine excavation of the remaining trenches. Archaeological deposits were to be recorded where exposed, and a contour survey of the area was to be completed, in order to allow for a comprehensive appreciation of the topography of the site.

4. METHODS

A total of 41 test pits were excavated by machine, 26 of them under direct archaeological supervision (Fig. 3). Following the excavation, the sides of the trenches were cleaned by hand, examined and recorded. Individual context sheets were completed for each identified layer and these contexts were compiled together to form a stratigraphic matrix. This matrix was used to interpret the sequence of events that had caused the site to develop into its present state.

Photographic records were made, using a 35mm colour print camera, of all of the recorded sections. General photographs, showing the site within the context of the development were also taken.

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 recognisable relationships between them. A total of two phases were identified:

Phase 1 Natural deposits
Phase 2 Modern deposits

Archaeological contexts are listed below and described. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field (Appendix 2).

Phase 1 Natural Geological Deposits

A layer of sub-angular limestone fragments (020) was intermittently encountered during the investigation. Interpreted as natural, this deposit occurred at variable depths across the site. Trench 2, located at the lower, northern, end of the site, exposed the limestone fragments (020) at a depth of 0.44m. Further up the slope of the site, Trench 29 revealed (020) at a depth of 2.9m below the ground surface.

Overlying the layer of fragmented limestone was a sequence of loose sandy deposits. These are believed to have formed naturally as a result of water or possibly wind action. Varying from brownish-grey to orange in colouration, these contexts (002-014) and (016-020) were consistently recorded as coarse sands. The variability in the colouration of these deposits mitigated against the interpretation of the deposits in the wider context of the site. Instead, the matrix of the site has remained 'trench specific', as no broad trends within these deposits were recorded.

Although the aforementioned deposits were of the same consistency (coarse sand), occasional inclusions allowed for an appreciation of the deposit formation process to be attempted. Context (005), a loose light orange-brown sand, contained occasional charcoal and limestone flecks. The presence of these inclusions suggests that the remains of burnt organic material were deposited as a part of the formation of this layer. Limestone flecks are likely to have formed as a result of the erosion of the underlying deposit (020).

Deposit (011), comprising a thin layer of loose sandy limestone gravel recorded between the sandy layers of (010) and (012), is likely to reflect a mixture of re-deposited sands and limestone originally eroded from the underlying bedrock (Fig. 5, Section 7).

The composition of (014), a loose yellowish sand containing mid reddish-brown lenses of clayey sand, suggests formation within an environment that was occasionally influenced by the depostion of waterlogged sediments. Lenses of clay are associated with depostion in shallow or slow-moving water.

At the base of Trench 14, deposit (019) was exposed. An orange sand containing frequent sub-angular limestone fragments (5mm-45mm), this layer is likely to have formed as a result of the erosion of the underlying limestone. Fragments of the limestone have become incorporated within a later sandy deposit, possibly formed as a result of water or wind action.

Several layers, exposed within Trenches 17, 27, 31 and 34 have been interpreted as possible buried soils. Although there is no stratigraphic link between these layers (010), (004) and (008) it is possible to suggest that their proximity to each other may reflect a single layer, sealed beneath later layers of natural yellow sand deposits (Fig. 4). No artefacts were retrieved from these layers, and they are unlikely to reflect the presence of human activity. It is more likely that these deposits are the result of the burial of an

organic soil layer.

Phase 2 Modern Deposits

Two deposits, (001) and (015), contained material that was conclusively modern in date, though none of these artefacts were kept. Fragments of plastic and metal are likely to have been deposited as a result of sporadic refuse disposal within these layers. Context (001), composed of a very loose, light brownish-grey sand with turf, formed the topsoil over most of the site.

Overlying (001), and exposed only in the vicinity of Trench 35, was a layer of very loose yellowish-grey sand. Approximately 0.35m thick, this deposit is believed to have formed as a result of excavation, or possibly wind action, causing a freshly disturbed sand to be re-deposited over the topsoil. No artefacts were retrieved from this deposit.

A single piece of Roman pottery was recovered as an unstratified artefact from the spoil heap of Trench 4.

6. DISCUSSION

Archaeological investigation of the site revealed a sequence of loose sandy deposits to a depth of approximately 1m below the present ground surface. However, the surface of a fractured limestone bedrock was exposed within limited areas during machine excavation of the site.

At the most northerly extent of the site, and at the base of the main slope, the bedrock was encountered at a depth of approximately 0.5m below ground level. In contrast, at the southern limit of the site, at the top of the rise, bedrock was exposed at a depth of between 2m and 3m below the present ground surface. The variation in depth at which the bedrock was located is probably due to more pronounced erosion of the overlying sands lower down the slope. As the slope is one side of a river valley it is therefore probable that this erosion was due to water action.

A possible buried soil was identified at depth on the upper valley sides. The presence of this material may indicate that deposition of the overlying sands was, in these areas, a fairly gentle affair unaccompanied by erosive forces that would otherwise have removed the fragile substrate.

The single worn fragment of Roman pottery probably entered the area as part of manuring scatter.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The methodology employed during the excavation of the trenches achieved the aims of the watching brief. No archaeological remains were recorded within the trenches.

Due to the comprehensive coverage of the trenches that were excavated, it is possible to state that it is unlikely that the site has been subject to any occupation. This is unusual as the site lies in close proximity to the Roman town of Ancaster.

Environmental material may survive in the possible buried soil identified during the investigation. However, the soil is undated and without any chronological indicators the value of any environmental evidence is significantly reduced.

Although no archaeological remains were recorded during the watching brief, the absence of archaeological material is useful because it provides a limit for occupation of the area, most importantly during the Romano-British period.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services wish to acknowledge the assistance of George Hill of Ablehomes Ltd who commissioned the fieldwork and post-excavation analysis. Tom Lane coordinated the work and Tom Lane and Gary Taylor edited this report. Jenny Stevens, the South Kesteven Community Archaeologist, kindly provided information pertaining to the archaeological setting of the site.

9. PERSONNEL

Project Manager: Tom Lane
Site Supervisor: Neil Herbert
Site Assistant: Robert Ashford
Illustrations: Neil Herbert
Post-excavation Analyst: Neil Herbert

10. SOURCES

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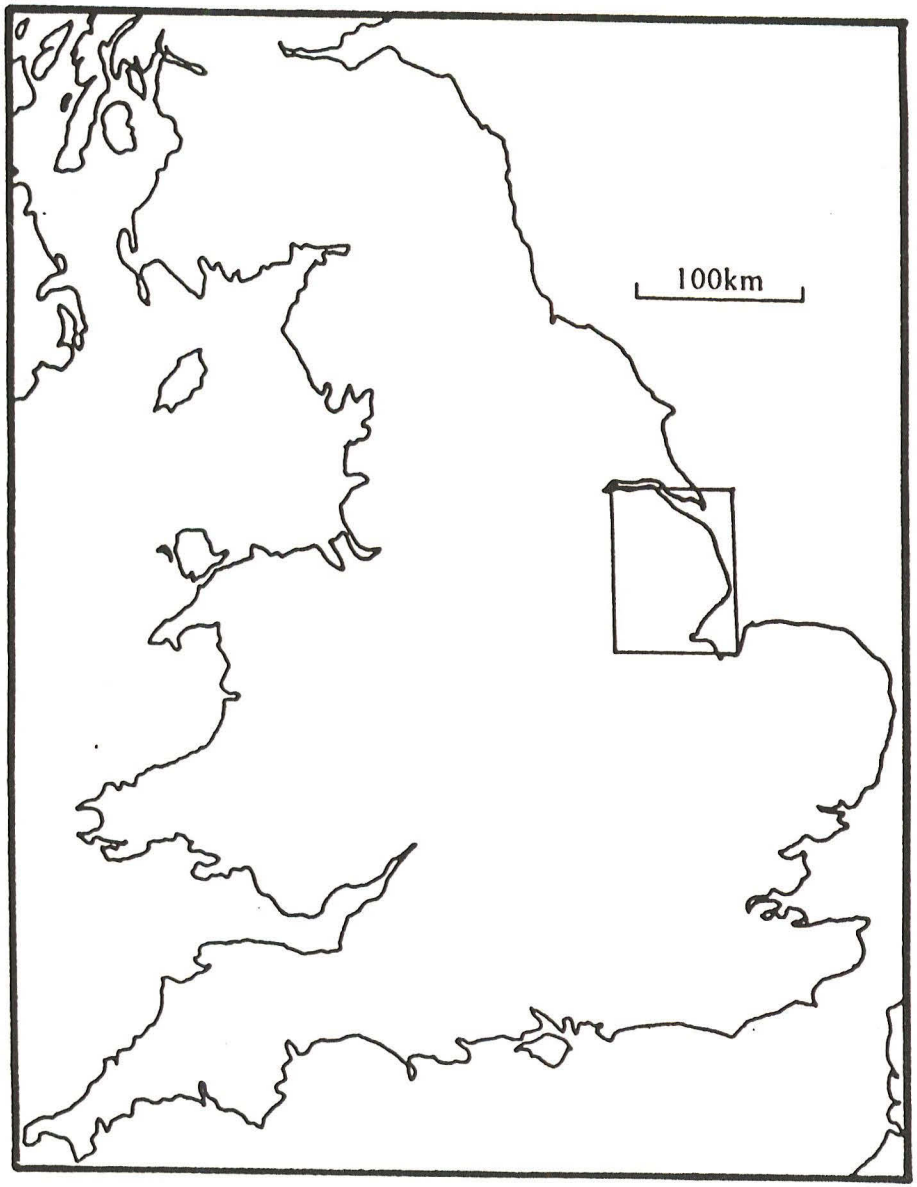


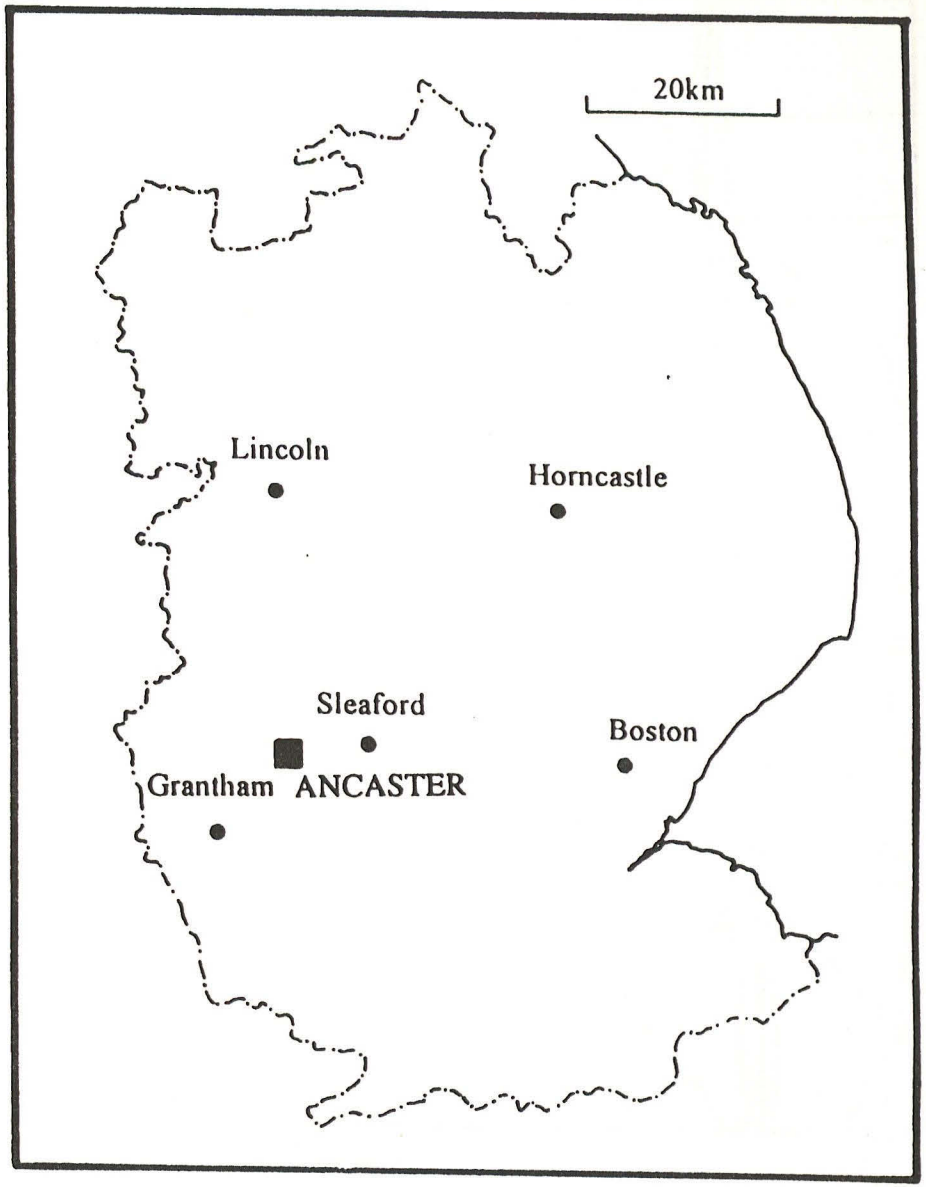


FIGURE 1: GENERAL LOCATION PLAN

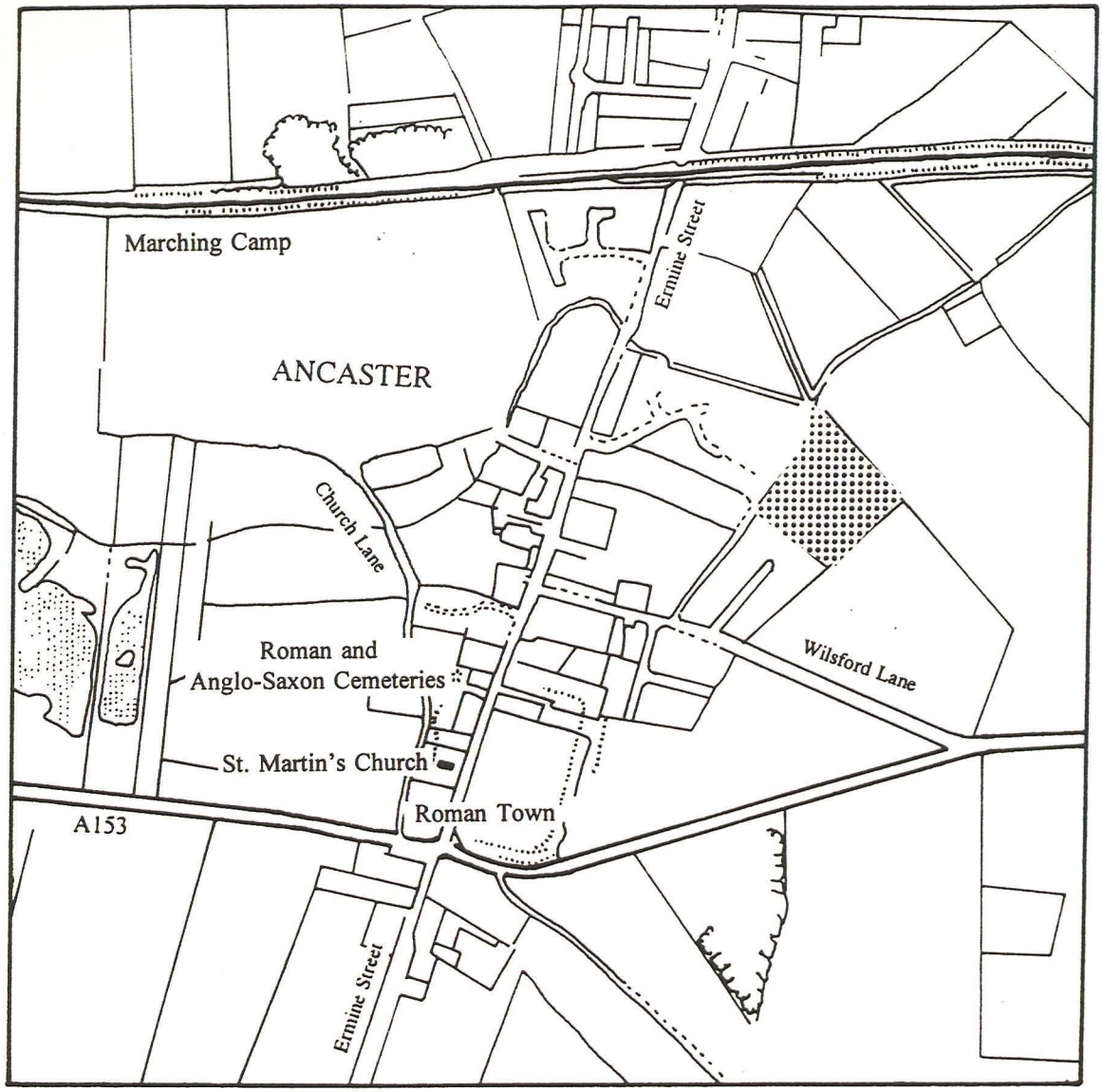


FIGURE 2: SITE LOCATION PLAN
SHOWING KNOWN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

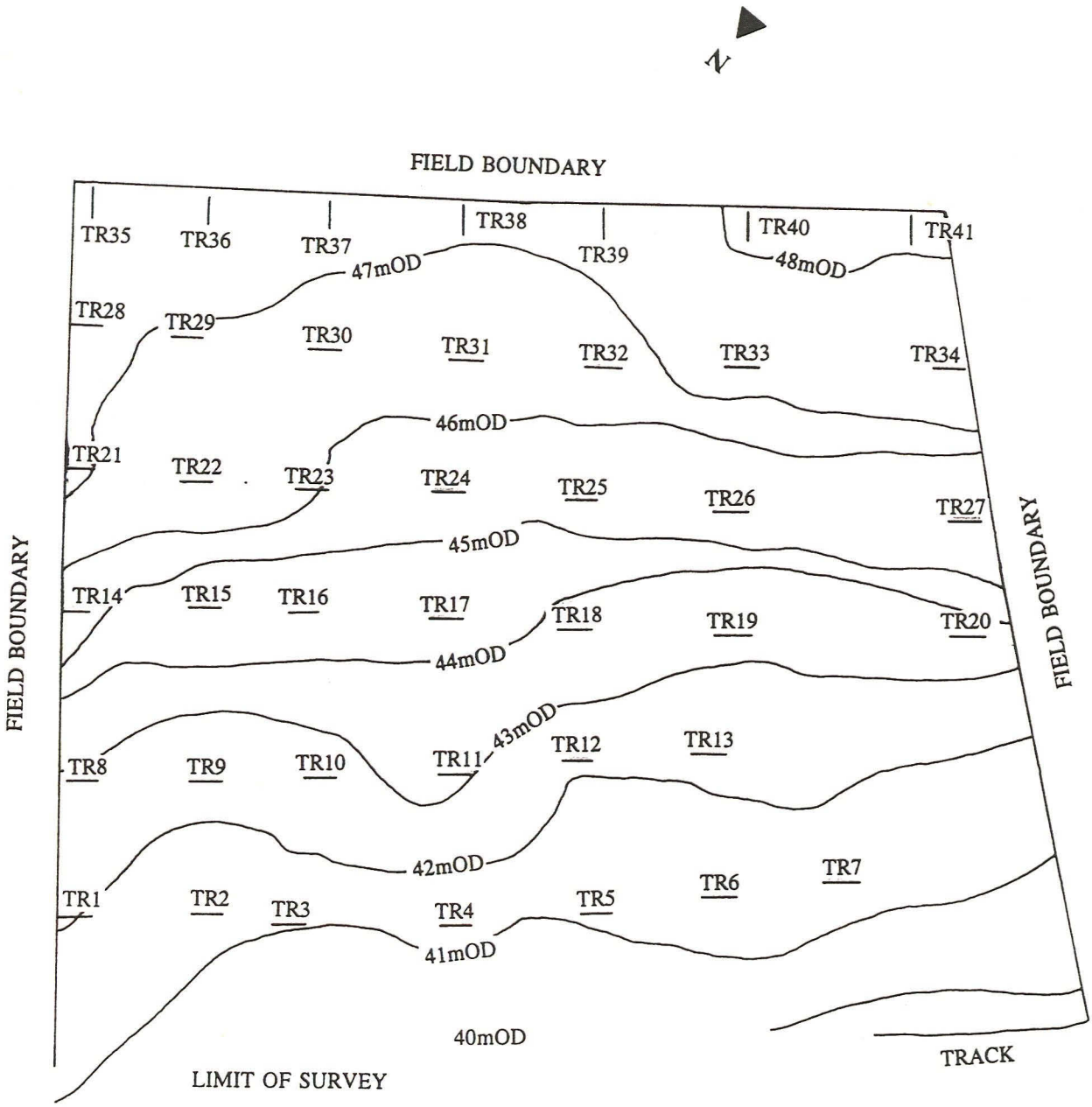
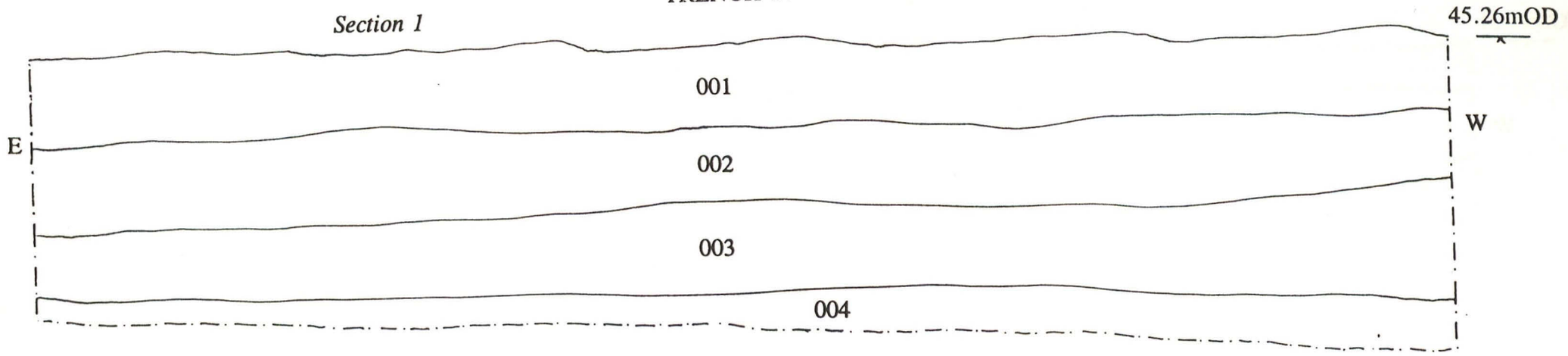


FIGURE 3: PLAN OF TRENCH LOCATIONS (SCALE 1:840)

TRENCH 27

Section 1



TRENCH 34

Section 2

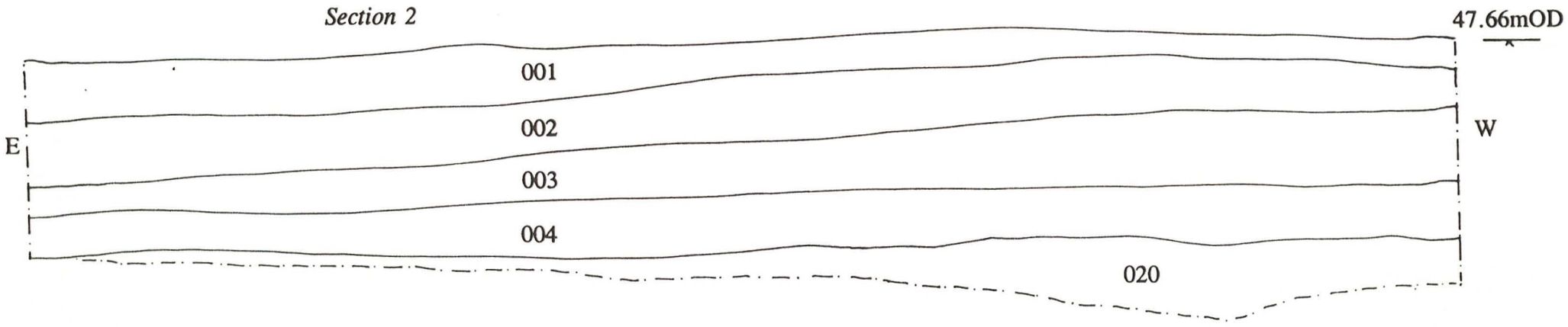
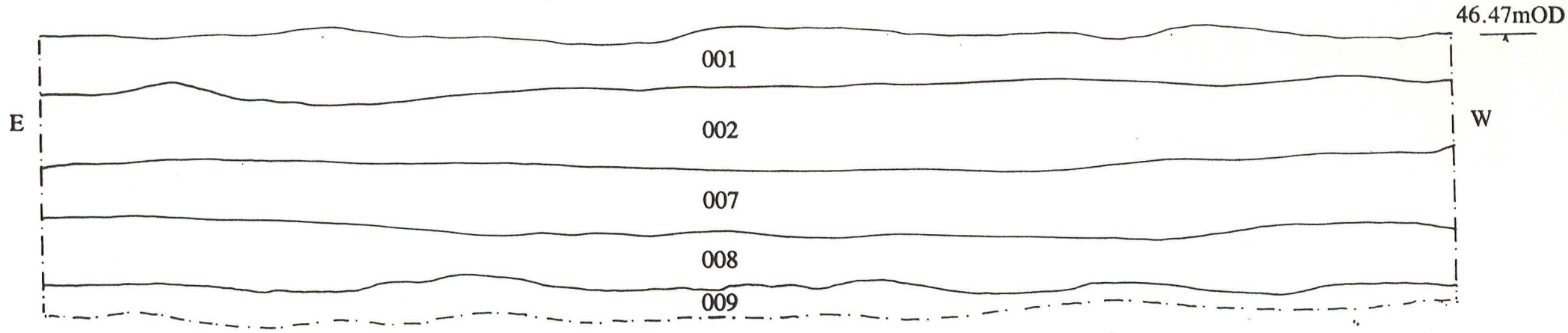


FIGURE 4: SECTIONS 1 AND 2 (SCALE 1:20)

TRENCH 31

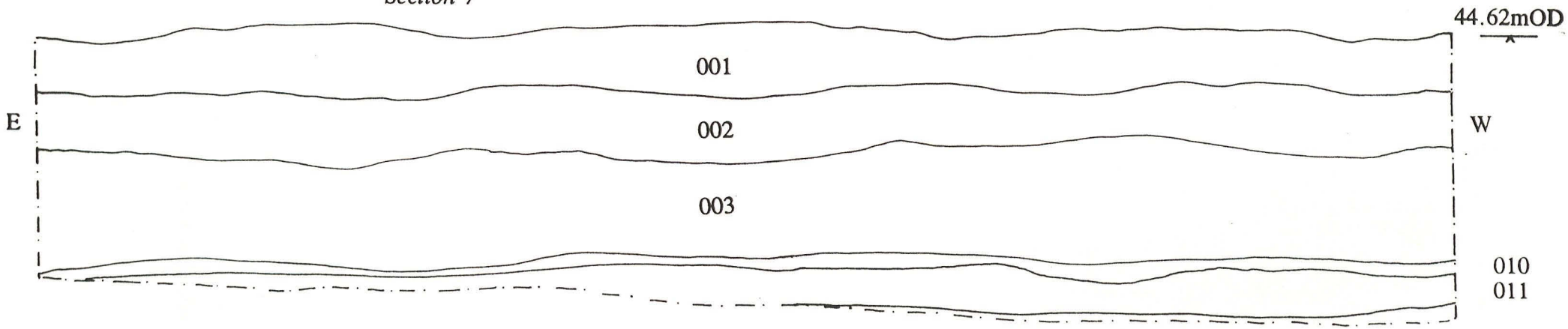
Section 5



Limit of Excavation

TRENCH 17

Section 7



Limit of Excavation

FIGURE 5: SECTIONS 5 AND 7 (SCALE 1:20)

(Above) Plate 1 :
Trench 28

(Left) Plate 2 : Trench 27,
showing buried soil (004)

APPENDIX 1

ANCASTER, ERMINE CLOSE,
REQUIREMENTS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL
OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

by Jenny Stevens,
South Kesteven Community Archaeologist

1. Trenches already excavated will be cleaned by hand and investigated for archaeological remains.

2. Spoil heaps from trenches already excavated will be examined for the presence of artefacts or other remains, and these will be collected.

3. The machine excavation of proposed, but not yet executed, trenches will be supervised by an archaeologist.

4. All trenches will be examined for the presence of archaeological remains. All identified remains will be recorded and interpreted.

5. Where present, artefactual and environmental material will be collected.

6. The location of all trenches will be accurately planned.

7. A contour survey of the site will be required, with contours at 1m intervals.

APPENDIX 2

Context Summary

Context Number	Description	Interpretation
001	Very loose, light brownish-grey sand. Containing moderate small roots. Approximately 0.35m thick.	Topsoil, overlying (002) and (016).
002	Loose, light brownish-yellow sand. Approximately 0.35m thick.	Subsoil, overlying (003), (005), (007), (013).
003	Loose, light yellow sand. Approximately 0.45m thick.	Natural deposit, overlying (004) and (010).
004	Loose, light brownish-grey sand. Approximately 0.19m thick (minimum).	Possible buried soil, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 27.
005	Loose, light orangish-brown sand. Containing occasional charcoal and limestone flecks. Approximately 0.46m thick.	Possible natural deposit, overlying (006).
006	Very loose, coarse orange sand. Approximately 0.21m thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 34.
007	Loose, light greyish-yellow sand. Approximately 0.25m thick.	Natural deposit, overlying (008).
008	Loose, light brownish-grey sand. Approximately 0.23m thick.	Possible buried soil, overlying (009).
009	Loose, light yellow sand. Approximately 0.1m thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 31.
010	Loose, light to mid-brown sand. Containing occasional angular limestone fragments (5mm). Approximately 50mm thick.	Possible buried soil, overlying (011).
011	Loose, sandy limestone gravel. Approximately 0.1m thick.	Natural deposit, overlying (012).
012	Fine, very light-yellow sand. Approximately 50mm thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 17.

Context Number	Description	Interpretation
013	Loose, mid reddish-brown sand. Approximately 0.19m thick.	Natural deposit, overlying (014).
014	Very loose, light-yellow and mid reddish-brown lenses of clayey sand. Approximately 0.6m thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 11.
015	Very loose, light yellowish-grey sand. Approximately 0.45m thick.	Redeposited material, overlying (001).
016	Loose, light yellowish-brown sand. Approximately 0.39m thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 35.
017	Loose, light yellowish-brown sand. Approximately 0.29m thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 28.
018	Loose, light-yellow sand. Approximately 0.17m thick.	Natural deposit, overlying (002).
019	Loose orange sand. Containing frequent sub-angular limestone fragments (5mm-45mm), all poorly sorted. Approximately 0.24m thick (minimum).	Natural deposit, exposed at the limit of excavation in Trench 8.
020	Layer of subangular limestone fragments, over 0.3m thick.	Natural deposit, exposed intermittently across site.

APPENDIX 3

The Roman Pottery
by Barbara Precious

CONTEXT	TRENCH	DESCRIPTION	DATE
unstratified	4	1 x greyware jar	3rd century+

A single body sherd of a grey ware jar was recovered as an unstratified artefact from Ancaster, Ermine Close. The piece, which dates from the 3rd century AD or later, is water worn/weathered.

APPENDIX 4

Glossary

Anglo-Saxon — Pertaining to the early part of the Saxon period and dating from approximately AD 450-650.

Context — 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, *e.g.* (004).

Cut — A cut refers to the physical action of digging a posthole, pit, ditch, foundation trench, *etc.* Once the fills of these features are removed during an archaeological investigation the original 'cut' is therefore exposed and subsequently recorded.

Fill — Once a feature has been dug it begins 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).

Iron Age — 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 50.

Late Saxon — The latter part of the Saxon period, up to the time of the Norman conquest. The period dates from approximately AD 850-1066.

Layer — A layer is a term used to describe an accumulation of soil or other material that is not contained within a cut.

Natural — Deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity.

Prehistoric — 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.

Romano-British — Pertaining to the period dating from AD 43-410 when the Romans occupied Britain.

APPENDIX 5

THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of:

20	Context records
8	Scale drawings
14	Photographs (1 photographic record sheet)
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:	AEC97
City and County Museum, Lincoln Accession Number:	79.97