



LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

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**Roman Bank
Moulton Seas End**

Archaeological Watching Brief

**NGR: TF 3265 2768
Site Code: MSE97
LCNCC Accession No. 272.97**

Report prepared for H H N Farms

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Lincolnshire County Council
Archaeology Section

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Summary

A watching brief was carried out during excavation of the foundation trenches for a house being built on the north side of Roman Bank, Moulton Seas End, Lincolnshire. No archaeologically significant remains were found.

Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services (LAS) was commissioned in November 1997 by HHN Farms to carry out an archaeological watching brief on the site of a new house at Moulton Seas End. The watching brief was to cover the excavation of foundation trenches and other associated groundworks.

The Site

The house plot is on the north side of Roman Bank, the road which runs from the cross-roads at the north end of Moulton Seas End village towards Saracen's Head, where it joins the A17 Sleaford to Kings Lynn road (Fig. 1). The eastern boundary of the plot is formed by a 3 - 4 m high untrimmed *leylandii* hedge along the side of a farm access road. To the north and west are open fields. The front of the plot is separated from the road by a machine-dug drainage ditch approximately 2.5 m wide and 1.5 m deep, except in the region of the site entry next to the farm access road. The house is set well back from the road, allowing for a front garden around 28 m long.

Background

Before drainage work occurred, this part of the fens would have been salt marsh or estuarine mud flats. Probably the earliest sea defences are represented by the bank which is on roughly the same alignment as the road. This is generally assumed to be Roman in date, although there is also evidence for sea bank construction in the early medieval period. The line of this bank is now no longer clear on the ground but the 1904 Ordnance Survey map shows it as an earthwork about 30 m to the south of the road in the field opposite the site (Fig. 3). It had already been lost from the fields on either side by this date.

Unusually for this area, the fields south of the road show a variety of relief features, some of which are probably elements of the natural topography. The land dips down into a shallow depression, with a drain at the bottom. This has a winding course, probably representing the line of a stream or creek before the land was drained. The presence of this creek would explain why the sea bank deviates to the south at this point. North of the road, a

straight dyke, forming the eastern boundary of the farm yard, continues this watercourse.

There is a slight rise of less than 1 m to the road from the surrounding land, which may simply be build up for the road, or may represent a later straightening of the sea bank.

About 120m to the north-west of the site, a low hill forms a prominent feature in an otherwise very flat fenland landscape. This was probably a site of salt production in the Roman and early medieval periods. The saltern itself, where concentrated sea water was boiled and crystallized, would have occupied this higher ground. It would have been surrounded by large shallow lagoons, where initial evaporation of the sea water was allowed to occur.

The original Anglo-Saxon village of Moulton developed on the low bank of land which probably formed the natural coastline before drainage work took place and which stretches in a broad arc from Spalding to Holbeach. The name of the village is *Multune* in Domesday Book, the first element probably derived from an Anglo-Saxon personal name, giving a meaning of 'the enclosure of *Mula*'. Ekwall (1960) gives an alternative derivation as an enclosure where mules were kept. Growth of the village onto the reclaimed marsh would have resulted in the satellite settlement of Seas End whose name is obviously descriptive.

The Watching Brief

The watching brief was carried out on Wednesday 12th November 1997. Trenches for the house foundations were excavated using the backhoe arm of a JCB fitted with a 60 cm wide bucket, which was changed to a 45 cm bucket for the internal walls (Fig. 2, Pl. 1, 2). The depth was generally around 0.60 m, although a section through the darker clay deposit, to confirm that it was natural, was extended to a depth of around 0.95 m in the north-west corner (Pl. 3).

The topsoil layer was about 0.25 m thick, and consisted of a mid-grey, friable, clayey silt. It had remains of roots and ploughed stubble, with occasional charcoal flecks, but was otherwise very homogenous, with few inclusions. Below was a layer of pale orangey yellow sandy silt, with some greyer silt mottling. At a depth of around 0.55 m to 0.65 m, this gave way to a thick band of buff-grey compact clayey silt. Again, this was very homogeneous, apart from occasional yellow sandy mottling. Where the trenches were excavated to greater depth, at around 0.90 to 0.95 m the base was a mottled sandy-buff hard sandy silt, with black streaks characteristic of iron in chemically reducing conditions (Pl. 4).

A modern field drain, with machine-made, dense, straw-coloured, longitudinally-ribbed pipe sections crossed the centre of the site in a north-south direction, at a depth of around 0.75m.

No other cut features were visible in the based or sides of the trenches, and no archaeological artefacts were noted.

Discussion

The site would have been on the seaward side of sea bank in the Roman and medieval periods, and probably consisted of salt marsh or salt flats subject to flooding. The presence of salterns nearby suggests that it could have been used as an evaporation lagoon, but no tangible evidence of salt production was found. The clay silt layer among the paler sandy silts may reflect change in hydrology, perhaps the establishment of salt marsh on previously more open water. This change could be related to the construction of the sea bank, but in the absence of dating evidence, this is highly conjectural. Reclamation probably occurred in the late 18th or early 19th century and the land seems to have been used only for agriculture since that time. The relatively thin topsoil suggests that the land may subject to erosion, which frequently occurs in reclaimed marshland. This would tend to obliterate any archaeological features, but the lack of artefact scatters in the topsoil implies that this has not happened to any great extent here.

Conclusion

The immediate area surrounding the site has considerable archaeological potential, with the sea bank and evidence of salt production. However, nothing of significance was noted from the site itself.

Acknowledgements

H H N Farms are thanked for commissioning and supporting this study, and Fenbank Builders for their help and co-operation on site. Naomi Field co-ordinated the work, and Jane Frost assisted in the production of this report.

Richard Moore
Lindsey Archaeological Services
November 1997

References

- Ekwall E. (1960) *The Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*, Oxford University Press

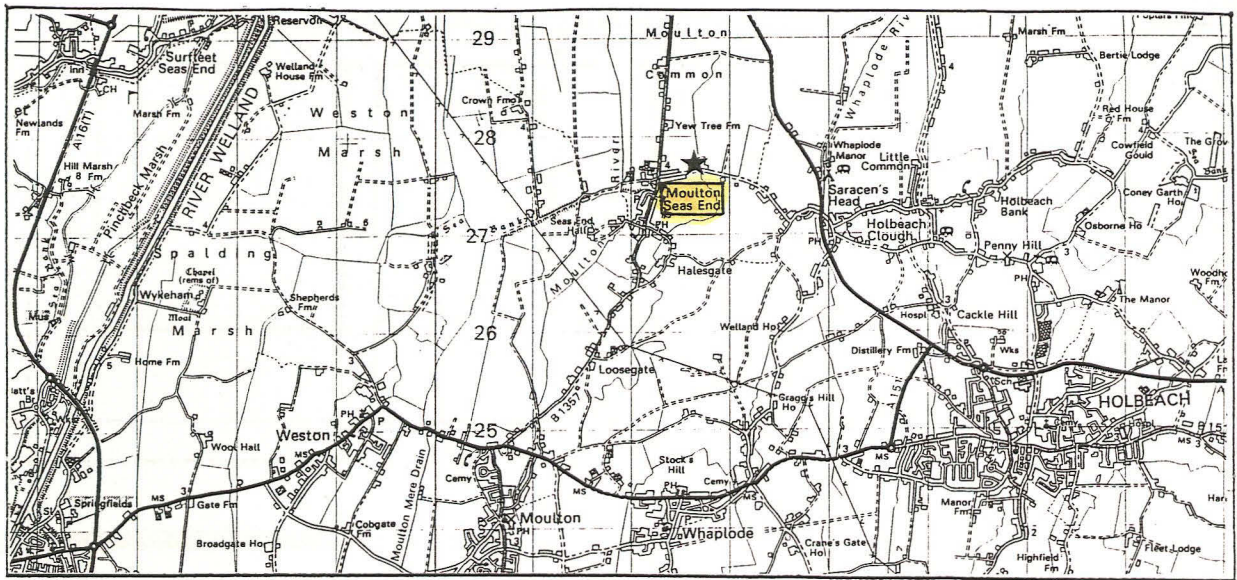


Fig 1: Site location

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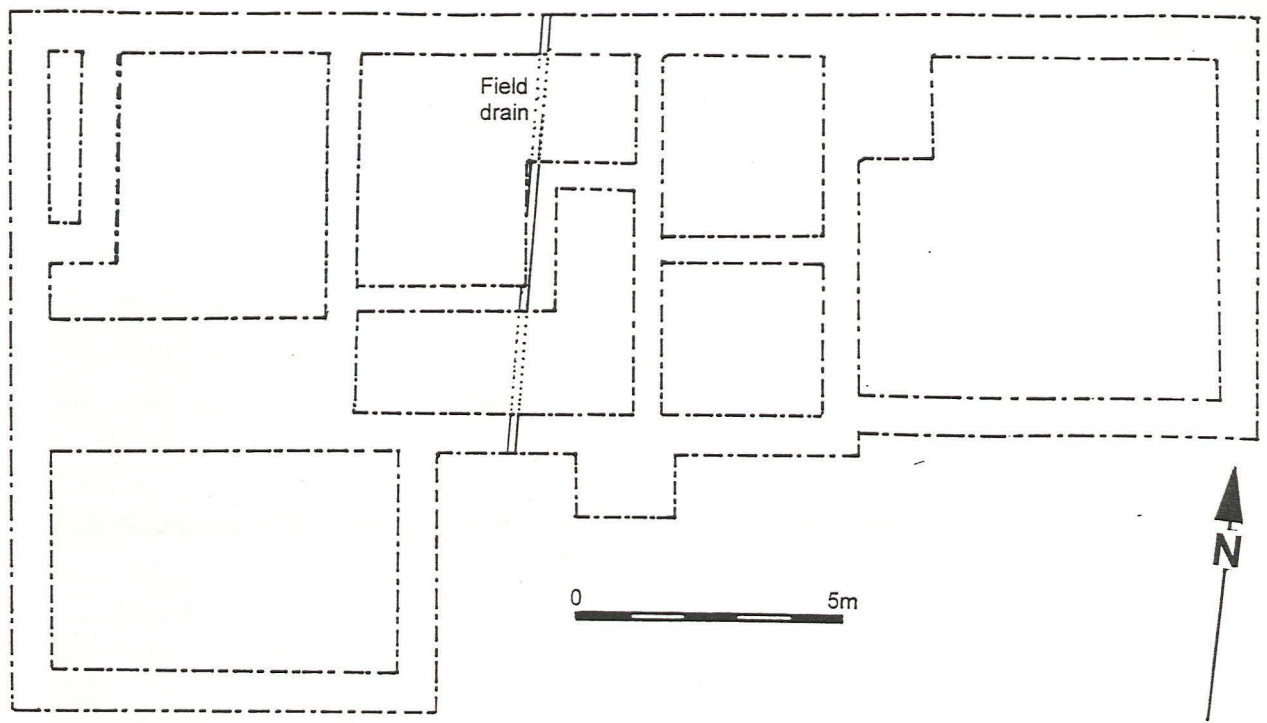


Fig 2: Plan of Excavated Trenches

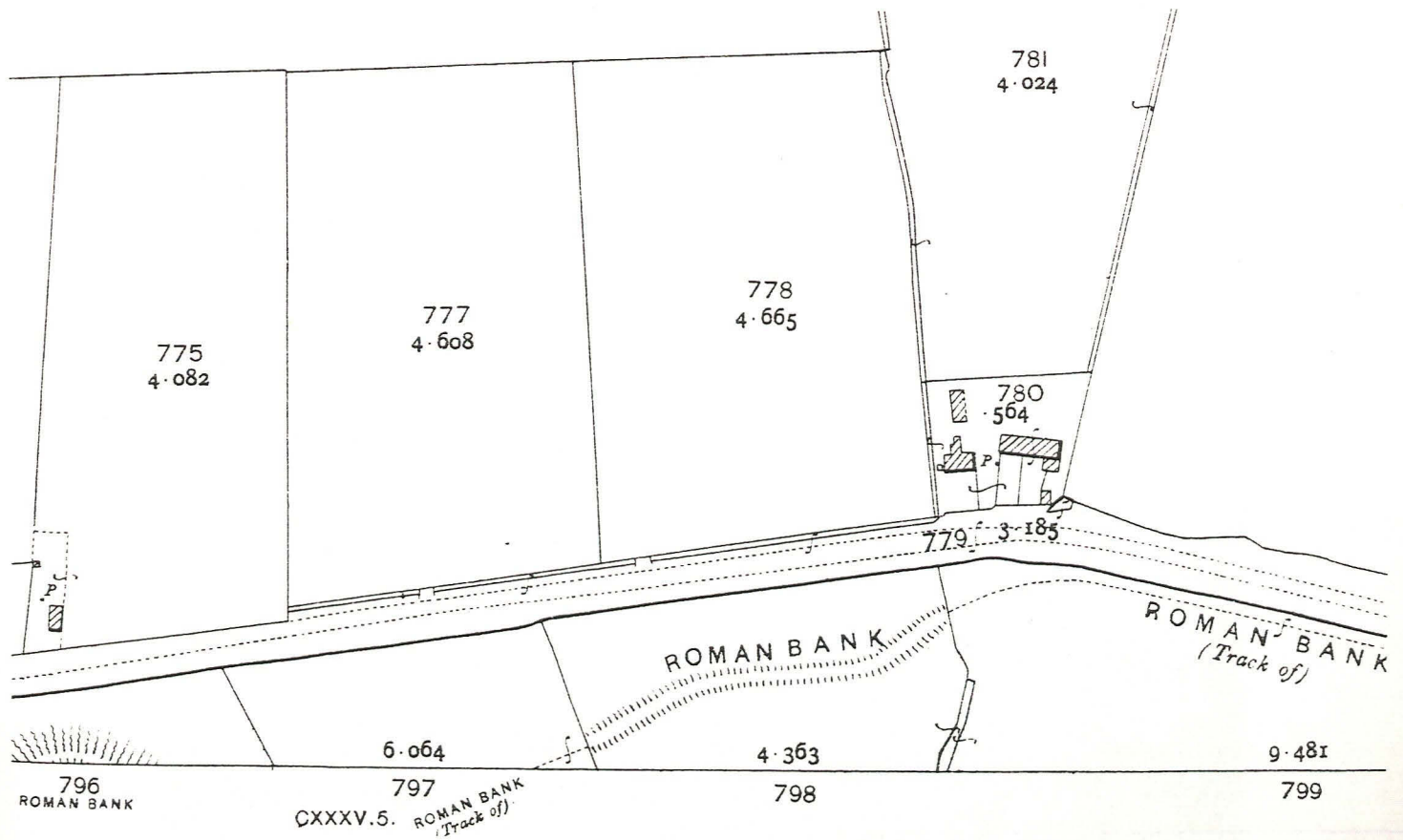


Fig 3: Extract from 25'' Ordnance Survey map, 1904



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Pl. 2: View of excavated foundation trenches, from centre of back wall, looking south-east.





Pl. 3: Section of trench in north-west corner, showing sand and silt layers. Scale 0.5 m.

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