

Lincoln

West Common

Graham Brown



ENGLISH HERITAGE

An earthwork survey and investigation of Lincoln

West Common

ISSN 1478-7008

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/11/2003

County: Lincolnshire
District: Lincoln
Parish: Lincoln
NGR: SK 965725
NMRNo: SK 97 SE 181
Date of survey: February 2003
Surveyed by: Graham Brown, Mark Bowden, David Field
Report author: Graham Brown
Illustrations by: Deborah Cunliffe
Photography by: Graham Brown

© English Heritage 2003

Applications for reproduction should be made to English Heritage NMR services:
National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon. SN2 2GZ
Tel: 01793 414700 **Fax:** 01793 414707 **e-mail:** nmrinfo@english-heritage.org.uk

Comments or queries regarding the content of the report should be made to the author at the NMR

World Wide Web: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>

CONTENTS

1 Introduction	1
2 Brief historical background	4
3 Earthwork survey and interpretation	7
3.1 Earthworks on the northern side of the road	7
3.2 Earthworks on the southern side of the road	11
4 Methodology and Acknowledgements	13
5 Bibliography	14

LIST OF FIGURES

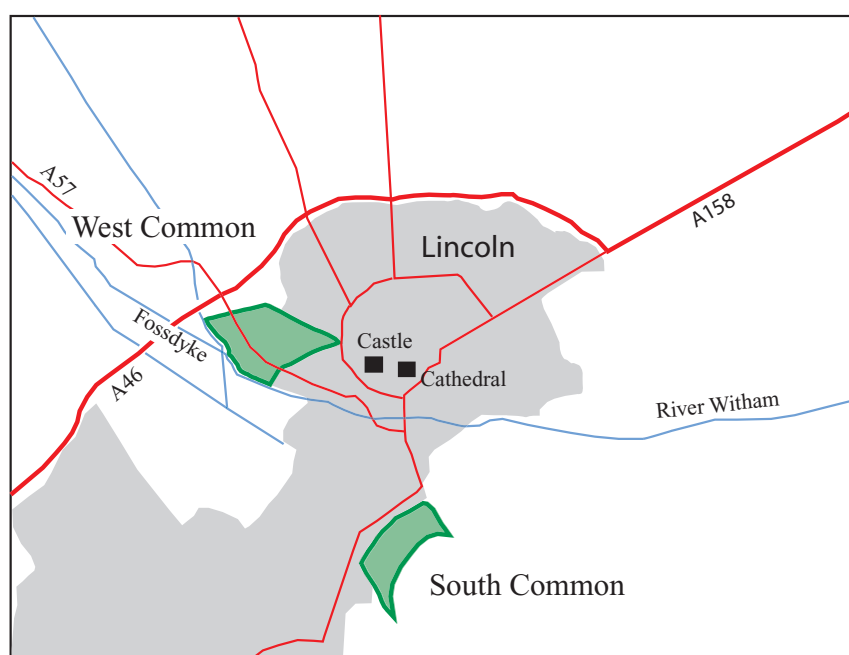
1 Location diagram	1
2 View of the grandstand	2
3 Lincoln West Common	3
4 Sketch plan of the first racecourse on Lincoln West Common	5
5 Earthwork survey of Lincoln West Common (1:2,500)	8
6 Aerial photograph of West Common (3G/TUD/UK 197. Part 4, dated 10 May 1946)	9

1. INTRODUCTION

An earthwork survey of Lincoln's West Common (NMR No SK 97 SE 181) was undertaken in February 2003 by staff of the Field Investigation team of English Heritage (EH) based at Swindon. The survey was carried out as a Level 2 survey at a scale of 1:2500 and provides a plan and a basic descriptive and interpretative record (RCHME 1999). The survey and investigation is part of an EH national project on urban commons and, being the first survey in the project, was used as a pilot. In addition, the results of the survey will form part of the city's urban database (UAD) and the Lincoln Archaeological Research Agenda (LARA), and will feed into the Townscape assessment.

The Common lies on the western outskirts of Lincoln and is bounded in the north and east by housing and in the west by a ditch and fence. Before the early 19th century West Common (also known as Carholme) included the common pastures known as Ox Pasture, Short Leys, and Carholme. A road, the A57 Saxilby road, slices through the southern part of the Common (fig 1). The effect of this is that the Common has quite discrete uses. The northern side, the larger of the two, is mainly used for public recreation and sporting activities such as football, cricket, tennis, golf and bowls. Although tennis and bowls are confined within a fenced area in the south, the remainder of the Common is 'open' ground with unrestricted access. Tree plantations and numerous isolated trees have been planted, presumably to encourage a more aesthetic appearance. Horses are also pastured here under common rights agreement and three wooden windbreaks are provided as shelter. The county show was also held here during the 20th century.

Fig 1. Location of Lincoln's two commons.



In contrast to the north, the southern part of the Common is more 'confined' and used predominantly as a golf course (part of which spills over onto the northern side). Although other leisure pursuits also occur they are less prevalent since the golfing infrastructure such as tees, bunkers and fairways, which are in constant use, punctuates the area. The former horseracing grandstand and stabling is also located on the southern side of the road (fig 2).

Fig 2. Grandstand on West Common



The ground gradually slopes from the east to south-west where it levels out in the area of the present football pitches (fig 3), it then dips again on the southern side of the road towards the Fossdyke Navigation. The underlying geology is divided into five bands, all orientated north-west/south-east through the Common. In the south, from the Fossdyke Navigation to almost mid-way through the golf course, the geology is of alluvium. North of this, and extending to a prominent boundary ditch (*see below*) it is of sand and gravel. Beyond the ditch there are four 'bands' of lias clays. Lower Lias Clays with beds of limestone lie from the boundary ditch and extend northwards to the line of present metalled footpath, with another band of Lower Lias without the limestone beyond. In the upper, eastern part of the Common, are two smaller bands of Middle Lias clays with shales and ferrogenuous nodular limestone, while upper lias clays lie in the eastern corner.

The place-name, Carholme, is of some interest since the second element derives from *holmi*, meaning 'dry ground amidst marshes, a water-meadow', or river meadow' while the first element may be a personal name (Cameron 1985, 20; Gelling 1993, 51). Carholme is therefore aptly named since the southern boundary lies against drains and the Fossdyke Navigation, while the northern side of the road is also prone to seasonal flooding.

*Fig 3. View across
West Common
towards the cathedral
and castle*



The survey of West Common has identified a range of earthworks: the most pervasive being areas of ridge-and-furrow cultivation of uncertain, but probably post-medieval, date. In addition, quarrying appears to be ubiquitous in the south. There is also fragmentary earthwork evidence of a horseracing track and 20th century military activity.

2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The area to the north, west, and east of Lincoln contained the town's medieval fields, which amounted to some 1,800a (c 750ha) at the time of Enclosure in 1803 (Hill 1948, 331, fig 22). Permanent pasture appears to have been confined to the hillside on the western side of the city and in the region of Low (or South) Field, Carholme, Long Leys, Short Leys and Oxpasture (ibid, 333).

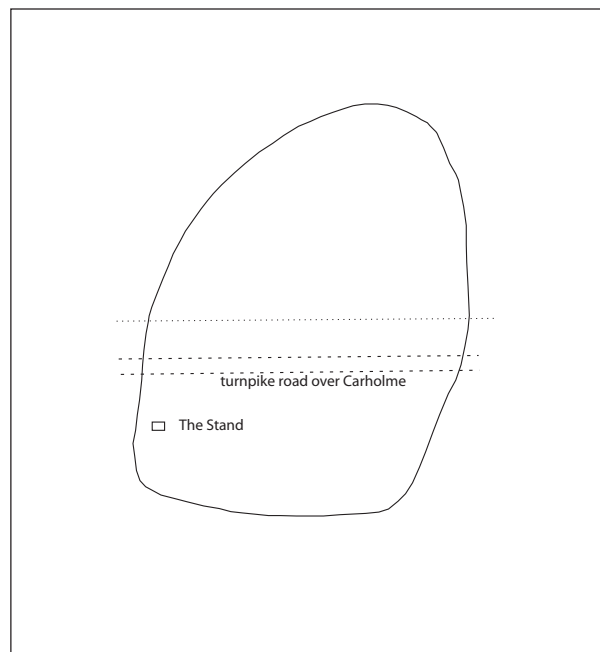
Jurisdiction and rights of pasture in the commons was vested in Lincoln's Common Council. In 1566, for example, the husbandmen were granted common of pasture on Carholme for their sheep for a specified period and the rent was to be devoted towards the dykes and fences (ibid, 334). In 1581 an agreement confirmed that the 'ancient' stint should be observed in the commons (including Carholme) and that 'no sheep were to come down to the pastures below the clay-pits on the hillside under the western mills before the morrow after All Hallows Day' [1st Nov] (ibid).

During the early 16th century piecemeal enclosure was recorded on the commons, which met with limited success. It was not until the Enclosure Award in 1811 that the rights in the common pastures were restricted to certain citizens and Carholme became known as West Common (ibid 337). The rights, which were set out in 1836, stipulated the number of cattle each individual was allowed on the Common. Householders were permitted to pasture one head of cattle each while freemen were allowed two (however, if they were also householders, they were allowed three). The Lincoln Corporation Act extinguished these rights in 1915 when it became the corporation's responsibility to let the rights of pasture (ibid 338).

The 17th and 18th century was a period of increased interest in sporting and recreational activities among the gentry, such as shooting, hunting and fishing (Williamson 1995) and Lincoln was no exception. Horseracing is first mentioned here in the City Registers for 1597, which records 'the mayor's charges for a scaffold at the horse race' to be allowed (Rickman 1952, 128). Where this event took place is unclear since racing occurred at a number of places to the north and south of the city and West Common did not become the home of horseracing at Lincoln until much later (Hill 1966, 17). The monarchy took a keen interest in racing at Lincoln. During the reign of James 1(1603-1625), for example, he suggested that rails should be erected around the course (Longrigg 1975, 30). One of the earlier racecourses was on Waddington Heath, which was a round course of four miles and included part of Harmston parish. It appears to have been the main venue by the 1740s.

Racing is again mentioned here in 1756 and continued until 1770, despite the enclosure of Harmston in 1759 (LRO: M.C.D. 57) Following the enclosure of Waddington Heath in 1770, Welton Heath became the home of racing for a short while until it too was enclosed (Hill 1966, 17). In 1773 it was proposed that a racecourse should be set out and a stand erected at Carholme (including Long and Short Leys). The council persuaded the local aristocracy and gentry to pay the costs. The first racecourse was an ovoid circuit that extended both sides of the Saxilby road and to the south of the grandstand (fig 4). According to Hill (1966, 17), a stand was built in 1806; however, it may not have been erected until 1827 (LARA notes: RAZ ID: 11.77). The present grandstand dates to 1897 (Pevsner & Harris 1989, 509) and is still one of the earliest and most important structures of this type in the country (fig 2).

Fig 4. Sketch plan of the first race-course on West Common.



How long the 1773 course continued in use is unclear, but by at least the early 19th century another one had been laid out. This later course was in two parts; the first was a straight mile, effectively following the line of the Saxilby road, while the second was a circular course and included part of the mile course. Racing initially lasted for five days but this was reduced to three by the later 19th century (Hill 1966, 17; Rickman 1952, 127). The first meet at Carholme was in March, which marked the start of the flat season in the country. Lincoln's course was particularly popular with trainers for, although it was a rather austere and windswept

place, it enabled them to test some of the horses they had been training during the winter (Rickman 1952, 127).

Other sporting activities that occurred on the West Common included golf, swimming, football and cricket. Cricket was played on the racecourse in 1834 (LRO: M C DON 156), while golf has been played here since at least 1932 (OS 2nd edition map 70-2).

Although there are currently six football pitches, the number and location has fluctuated. In 1953, for example, three pitches are evident on the eastern side of the metalled track and another on the western side. In addition, there appears to have been an athletics track to the north of the present tennis courts at this time (NMR AP: V 82 RAF 76.7 Pt 1 21 Apr 53, No. 0126).

The West Common was also host to a testing ground for military aircraft during the 1st World War. A number of Lincoln's engineering firms had contracts to manufacture military equipment, such as aircraft and engines, and the West Common was one of two testing grounds near the city. The airfield was known as No4 Aircraft Acceptance Park and was in use from 1915 until 1919 when it closed and the buildings were dismantled and disposed. Manufacturers assembled and tested their aircraft here before they were taken into service. The Park was situated on the south-eastern side of the Common beside Alderman's Walk. It comprised two turf landing strips, each measuring 150yd x 20yd. One of the landing strips lay parallel to Alderman's Walk; however, it was a little difficult to land here because of the sloping ground. There was also a landing circle measuring 250yd diameter in the area of the present football pitches, which was bordered with lime (Walls & Parker 2000, 75-76).

Apart from the landing strips there were also aircraft hangers. The earliest hangers were two sheds situated in the area of the bowls/tennis courts clubhouse. Later, two further sheds were built alongside Alderman's Walk; these were subsequently linked to form one long shed. Finally, five 'Bessoneau' sheds were built: one was located opposite the Grandstand, with two on either side of the metalled footpath through the Common by Alderman's Walk. The racecourse buildings were used for accommodation (ibid).

3. EARTHWORK SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION

The A57 road effectively divides the earthworks into two distinct parts. Letters in the text refer to letters on the plan (fig 5).

3.1 Earthworks on the northern side of the road

Extending in an approximately north-east/south-west direction over much of the northern side of the Common is a swathe of ridge-and-furrow. It extends from the Common boundary in the north bordering Long Leys Road and a relatively new housing development, to a bank and ditch (a). The ridge-and-furrow is most prominent in the north-west along a golf fairway, where the ridges survive to a maximum height of 0.2m and c8m wide. It is also pronounced to the east of a metalled footpath (linking Long Leys Road and Rosebery Avenue), and the area of the Jubilee Pond, north-westwards to the Common boundary where it survives to similar proportions to that along the fairway. South-west of the path, in the area of the football pitches, the ridge-and-furrow has been levelled. It is also fragmentary to the south-west and west of Jubilee Pond. Three areas of flooding were encountered, but it is probable that the ridge-and-furrow extended through them.

Overlying the ridge-and-furrow on the north-eastern side of the metalled footpath are the fragmentary remains of the horse racecourse (b). It describes a curvilinear arc 18m wide and is defined by a bank and internal ditch on the outer side and by a bank on the inner side. The banks measure c0.1m high. A slight ditch (c), c160m long and parallel to the racecourse, lies 4m beyond the outer bank. This ditch possibly marks a spectator fence line. The racecourse can be traced beyond the metalled footpath, first along the northern side of the Common as a broad vegetation mark, and then along the north-western and western sides by the metal fence-line and roadside. In the south, along Alderman's Walk, there are no indications of the racecourse, but presumably it followed the course of the present metalled track.

Two slight hollow ways, or tracks, are evident. The first is in the north-eastern corner of the Common (d), while the second (e) overlies the ridge-and-furrow on either side of Jubilee Pond. This latter hollow way extends 130 m north-west from the edge of the football pitches towards the Jubilee Pond. On the north-western side of the pond the hollow way continues for a further 175 m where it is overlain by the racecourse; however, it continues beyond the



racecourse to the Common boundary. Overall, the hollow way measures 5 m wide and up to 0.1 m deep.

On the eastern side of the racecourse are three near-circular or ovoid ditches (f), with a fourth lying to the north-east of Jubilee Pond. These ditches measure between 24m and 34m diameter, and are c0.1m in depth; they were probably part of a horse-riding school and used as riding circuits (pers comm local resident).

Fig 6. Aerial photograph of West Common. Note the white circular mark, which is probably one of the former military airstrips. The white linear marks probably represent anti-glider trenches. (English Heritage, NMR photography. RAF: 3G/TUD/UK 197.Pt4 10 May 46)



Within the racecourse, and east of the metalled footpath, are a series of what appears to be slight quarry scoops overlying the ridge-and-furrow (not shown on plan). These scoops are the remains of a Second World War anti-glider ditch system that can be traced elsewhere on the northern side of the Common (fig 6).

On the southern side of the Common, beside Alderman's Walk, are two rectilinear depressions (g) and a more amorphous depression. The western depression, which is the larger of the two, measures 60m x 28m with a rectangular ledge, or terrace at its eastern

end. The second depression measures 30m x 15m. This area was used as a First World War dispersal airfield and the depressions probably represent hangers and administrative buildings. Within the plantation there are three linear scarps and a slight mound, possibly a dump. Whether the scarps are associated with the rectilinear depressions is unclear. To the east of the metalled track, and overlying the ridge-and-furrow, are a series of six short scarps measuring 18m long x 0.1m high (h). These scarps may represent the location of further hangars.

Within a plantation to the west of the football pitches, are the brick and cement foundations of two buildings, which were probably either related to the racecourse or used as sports changing rooms. Alternatively, they may have been associated with the airfield.

On the northern side of the Common, and overlying the ridge-and-furrow, there are a number of golf tees, some of which are redundant.

In the south-east, the fragmentary bank and ditch (a) forms the boundary for much of the ridge-and-furrow. It extends for 470m from a plantation in the south to an L-shaped scarp that defines the southern boundary of an area of denser earthworks. A modern drain lies along part of the course of the bank and ditch. Lying 8m to the south-west of the bank and ditch, and parallel to it, is a scarp (j) that measures 60m in length and 0.1m in height. Despite its fragmentary nature, it may mark the edge of a track. Further south is another scarp, which is closer to the bank and ditch and extends for 60m. This boundary bank and ditch corresponds to the boundary between Ox Pasture and Short Leys (which lay to the north) from Carholme (*above*), and may mark the course of a former route from the city.

On the western side of the bank and ditch (a), and extending towards the racecourse, are further traces of ridge-and-furrow that extend almost as far as the racecourse boundary. The ridge-and-furrow is slight and confined to a small area between, in the north, two scarps that define the edge of a natural linear depression, and in the south by a prominent platform. Overlying the ridge-and-furrow are four parallel linear ditches (k), or cuttings, set 50m apart. The ditches measure 195m in length and c0.1m deep, and extend in a northerly direction from a prominent platform. Overlying the eastern cutting are two amorphous scoops. The purpose of these ditches is unclear, but may be related to the golf course.

To the south of the ridge-and-furrow, and set against the racecourse, are two prominent platforms. The southerly one, (l), is largely covered in building debris, which is defined on fig 7 by a pecked line. South of this debris are two building platforms, one measuring 7m² while

the second is L-shaped and measures 10m x 4m, with internal divisions, probably a toilet block. To the west of these two buildings is a long scarp that may mark the location of another building. The second platform lies to the north-west of (l). It is more amorphous with a deep cutting on its northern side. This platform may also have accommodated buildings, which, in a similar manner to the other platform, were either associated with the horseracing or the First World War airfield.

In the north-west there is an area of dense earthworks defined by small scoops, mounds and scarps. They are contained in the south by an L-shaped scarp (m), which also forms the southern edge of a raised natural platform above the lower-lying ground to the south-east. Although the nature of these earthworks is not entirely clear, they are best seen as representing small-scale quarrying. Within this area, however, there are three circular depressions (n) measuring 10m in diameter and c0.1m deep. These latter earthworks are more sharply defined than the others and may represent some form of military activity, possibly searchlight positions dating to the Second World War. Other features close to these positions were possibly the location of their ancillary equipment.

3.2 Earthworks on the south side of the road

To the south of the A57 road the Common is bordered in the north and west by the bank of a catchwater drain (which drains into the Fosdyke Navigation further south). The bank, which measures 3m high and 8m wide at the top, extends along the northern side of the Common for 340 m before turning south-east for a further 400m to the area of a former swimming pool (p). The pool is a brick-lined structure and heavily overgrown; a golf tee adjoins its northern side. At this point the bank curves south-west for c200m to the Fosdyke Navigation. From this point the northern bank of the Navigation marks the Common boundary. Along much of the course of the bank there is an internal ditch (q). In the north, the ditch measures up to 10m in width at the western end but tapers to 4m in the east. On the western side of the bank, the internal ditch measures up to 4m wide and extends as far as the former swimming pool.

Cutting through the Common in a north/south direction is a modern sinuous drainage ditch. The ditch, which measures c2m wide and c1m deep, has vertical sides, and extends for 250m to meet the internal ditch along the western side of the Common. There are four footbridges over the ditch.

The most prominent and ubiquitous earthworks on the southern side of the Common are the bunkers and tees of the golf course: some of these earthworks are redundant, while many

are still in use. The course was created sometime before 1932 (*above*). As a consequence of the development of the course over the years, other earthworks have been extensively 'manipulated', or destroyed, thus obscuring their nature and extent. Covering much of the northern half of the Common, for example, are what appears to be quarry scoops. The scoops have been largely back-filled or 'sculptured' into the golf course and analysis is almost meaningless. In addition, the area of the former isolation hospital, which lay near the swimming pool and existed until at least 1907, is not identifiable as an earthwork. However, despite the creation of the golf course some earthworks are identifiable.

Extending in a south-westerly direction from the A57 is a substantial bank (s), which measures 160m long x 4m wide, and c1 m high at its north-eastern end. The bank extends to an area of dense amorphous earthworks covering an area of c2.5ha; broken bottles protruding from this area indicates that it is the site of a former rubbish dump (indicated as Disturbed Area on fig 5). The bank itself, which is almost parallel to the northern boundary bank, lies at the mid-point along the south side of the Common (there is no evidence of it continuing on the northern side of the road), and defines the southern edge of the main area of extant small quarry scoops. It may therefore represent the limit of a particular phase in quarrying.

Within the area of the quarry scoops is a narrow linear embankment (t) measuring 48m long x 4m wide and standing c0.2m high. Parallel to this embankment, and lying 100m to the north, is a linear ditch (u). The ditch extends for 35 m from the Common boundary and is aligned on another, more sinuous ditch, c100m to its south-west; however, whether they are contemporary is unclear. Interestingly, the alignment also corresponds to the scarp (n) on the northern side of the Common and it is possible, therefore, that the resulting enclosure (the other sides being formed by the Fosdyke catchwater) defines another quarrying episode.

The south-eastern half of the Common is dominated by the former racecourse grandstand and stables, as well as the golf course. Quarrying is less evident in this area.

To the south of the bottle dump, and extending at right-angles along the side of the Navigation, are a series of ridges measuring up to 50m in length and c10m in width. Although it is not entirely clear what these features represent, they may be natural runnels: this area, and that to the north as far as the swimming pool, was appropriately known as 'The Waves' in 1841 (LQS A/1/615/51), presumably because of the ridging here.

Opposite the grandstand is a small crenelated earthwork (v). Morphologically it is similar to others elsewhere that have been identified as military trenches, possibly dating to the First World War.

4. METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

G Brown, M Bowden, and D Field undertook the survey and field investigation. A GPS base station was established, and two rovers were used to survey the archaeological and topographical detail. Where GPS could not be used (in areas of woodland or where the earthworks were less clear), a control network was established. From this network, taped offsets were used to measure the finer detail.

In addition, two days were spent on limited research at the Lincolnshire Record Office and Local Studies Library in Lincoln. Mick Jones, the City Archaeologist, and his team provided logistical support and advice. We would like to express our gratitude to Jason Wood for providing information on the racecourse. David Stocker also provided information on the Common as part of the LARS work.

The earthwork plan (fig 5), overlays the OS mapping, which is Crown Copyright reserved.

The report was researched and written by G Brown with additional comment from M Bowden and D Field. D Cunliffe drew the earthwork plans and G Brown took the photographs.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

5.1 Unpublished Sources

Lincoln Record Office (LRO)

Monson 7/10/36 – undated sketch plan of Lincoln racecourse

M C DON 156

M.C.D. 57 – letter written c1856 re Waddington Races

Lincoln Local Studies Library (LSL)

Abell Collection 2 Sports

5.2 Published Sources

Anon 1918, *Our Past in the Great War*, Lincoln: Ruston and Hornsby Ltd, Engineers

Anon, 1978 *Some Notes on the Lincoln Races*, Lincoln City Libraries

Bonney, G 1949 *Lincolnshire Handicap Centenary, 1849-1949, with an Historical Survey of Lincoln Races for the Past 352 Years*, Lincoln: Lincolnshire Pub Co

Cameron, K 1985 *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire 1*, Cambridge: English Place-Names Society

Chalmers, P R 1939 *Racing England* London: Batsford

Geological map of Lincoln 1885, revised 1904, 1920

Gelling, M 1993 *Place-Names in the Landscape* London: Dent

Hill, J W F 1948 *Medieval Lincoln* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hill, J W F 1966 *Georgian Lincoln* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Longrigg, R 1975 *The Turf: Three Centuries of Horse Racing*, London: Eyre Methuen

Pevsner, N and Harris, J 1989 *The Buildings of England: Lincolnshire* London: Penguin Books

RCHME 1999 *Recording Archaeological Field Monuments. Descriptive Specification*, Swindon

Rickman, J 1952 *Homes of Sport – Horse Racing* London: Peter Garnett

Walls, J 1972 'The Lincolnshire Aviation Industry' *Lincolnshire Life* **12/2**, 36-41

Walls, J 1975 'The Lincolnshire Aviation Industry' *Lincolnshire Life* **14/12**, 32-36

Walls, J and Parker, C 2000 *Aircraft made in Lincoln*, Lincoln: Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology

Williamson, T 1995 'Fish, fur and feather: Man and nature in the post-medieval landscape' in Barker, K and Darvill, T (eds) *Making English Landscapes: Changing Perspectives* Bournemouth University School of Conservation Sciences Occasional Paper **3**; Oxbow Monograph **93**