

**FORMER HP FOODS FACTORY SITE, WHITEHORSE LANE, BOSTON,
LINCOLNSHIRE.**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
REPORT**

Site code	WLBL 09
NGR:	TF 3284 4361
Planning Ref:	B/06/0313
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PCA Ref:	09/578

Report prepared for

Chestnut Homes Ltd

by

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Summary

- The excavation of four evaluation trenches took place at the site of the former HP Foods factory on land to the south of Whitehorse Lane, Boston, Lincolnshire.
- The trenching confirmed a sequence of demolition and made ground deposits, previously observed during the monitoring of trial pits in September 2006. This comprised the remains of the recently demolished HP Foods factory and former 19th century or earlier shipyard buildings, plus phases of probable land reclamation dating from the 15th century.
- Significant archaeological deposits have not been identified at the site, which is likely to have been something of a wasteland in the earlier medieval period, remaining so until the implementation of a land reclamation programme which may have commenced in the later medieval period and involved the wharfing of the river frontage.

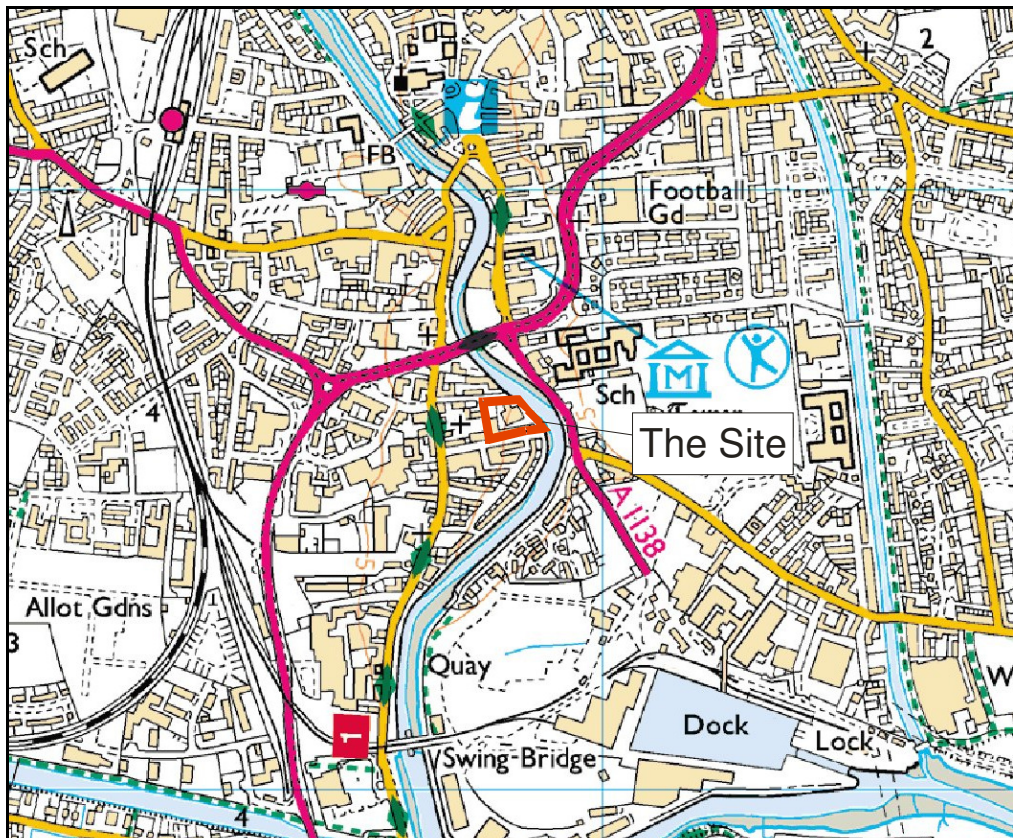


Figure 1: Site location at scale 1:12,500 showing the site location highlighted in red.
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1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd (formerly Pre-Construct Archaeology [Lincoln]) (PCA) was commissioned by Chestnut Homes Ltd, to undertake the investigation of four trial trenches on land at the former HP Foods factory, Whitehorse Lane, Boston, Lincolnshire.

These investigative works were undertaken in response to a brief issued by the Planning Archaeologist of Boston Borough Council. This report has been compiled to meet the requirements of the 'Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook: A Manual of Archaeological Practice' (LCC, 2009); Archaeology & Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment, 1990); Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE), and Standards and guidance for archaeological evaluations (IFA, 2008).

Copies of this report will be deposited with the commissioning body, the Boston Borough Planning Archaeologist and the Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Reports will also be deposited at *The Collection*, Lincoln, along with an ordered project archive for long-term storage and curation.

2.0 Site location and description (Figs. 1 and 2)

The town of Boston is situated in the administrative district of Boston Borough, and is approximately 53km east-south-east of Newark and 49km north-east of Peterborough. The HP Foods site is to the south of the town centre, within an area of mixed industrial and residential use, and at a height of approximately 4m AOD. The site is bounded to the north by Whitehorse Lane, to the east by the west bank of the River Witham, to the south by residential properties, and to the west by the site of a former Nonconformist burial ground and other residential dwellings.

The land is currently occupied by a number of buildings of the former HP Foods factory, with intervening areas of concrete hardstanding, and a gravelled former car parking area in the western portion. The north-western area of the site is occupied by a former burial ground, but this was not included within the scope of the present works.

The drift geology of the area consists of Barroway Drove Beds of the Quaternary consisting of silty clay saltmarsh deposits (British Geological Survey, 1995).

National Grid Reference: TF 3284 4361.

3.0 Planning background

The post-determination evaluation was undertaken to inform planning permission B/06/0313 for the construction of 27 new dwellings with associated access roads, footpaths and car parking facilities.

An archaeological condition attached to the planning consent (No.13) required the undertaking of an archaeological evaluation based on a 5% trenching scheme.

A programme of archaeological monitoring and recording has already been undertaken during the excavation of trial pits by contractors (Hall 2006).

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

Boston was founded shortly after the Norman Conquest by the Earl of Richmond who established a port and a series of fairs in AD 1071. The early town developed to the east of the River Witham. The chief export from the medieval port was wool, with Lincolnshire being one of the richest wool producing areas in Europe at that time. The rapid expansion of the woollen trade throughout the early medieval period saw the contemporary town develop also to the west of the river.

With the increasing prosperity of the port there was a corresponding increase in the volume of production of allied trades such as shipbuilding, which became established on both banks of the river. By the late 13th century Boston had become one of the most important national commercial ports, second only to London. However, from the beginning of the 14th century, the port underwent a gradual decline as the River Witham, its main outlet, gradually silted up (Clay 2005).

By the 16th century, the western side of the River Witham had been extensively occupied with both residential and commercial activity. Whitehorse Lane, which forms the northern boundary of the current site, was first documented in 1564. The burial ground was in use from 1763, and was finally closed in 1856.

The extract from the First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey (O.S.) maps of 1889 and 1905 (Figs. 7 and 8) show the northern area of the site occupied by several structures of a shipbuilding yard, and to the south by a slipway that extended eastwards to the adjacent River Witham. The burial ground to the north-west is also detailed, but is marked as 'disused'. The O.S. maps of 1968 and 1985 (Figs. 9 and 10) detail the development and layout of the HP Foods factory complex, while a building in the southwestern part of the site is featured as a 'cannery'.

5.0 Methodology

Four trial trenches were mechanically excavated under controlled archaeological supervision using a JCB 3CX mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.80m toothless ditching bucket. The trenches (1-4, Fig 2) were excavated to a variety of lengths and depths. Trench 1 was 13.50m long, Trench 2 20m long, Trench 3 was 17.5m long and Trench 4 was 18.5m long. Each trench was excavated to a depth 1.20m below ground level, with further interventions to check the depths of made ground, and locate natural sediments down to a maximum of 2.40m below ground level.

The trenches were excavated by machine and hand cleaned. Where discrete archaeological features were encountered these were hand excavated and recorded and artefacts were recovered for identification and assessment. Entry into the deeper parts of the trenches was not permitted, and the client, for health and safety reasons, affected a strict no-lone-working policy.

Each of the trenches was located in open ground, outside of the standing buildings. Trenches 1 and 4 were situated on a concrete yard surface, Trench 3 on a hardcore layer. The east end of Trench 2 was located on the concrete surface, the west within the hardcore. Where the concrete surface was present this was broken out using a mechanical digger in the week prior to archaeological investigation.

The evaluation took place between 14th and 22nd September 2009, and was carried out by Jeremy Mordue, assisted by Jo Gray, Simon Savage and Phil Chevasse. Trench and Context numbers were assigned for recording purposes, and reproduced in the text (Appendix 2). Selected photographs are attached (Appendix 1).

6.0 Results (Figs 3 - 6, Appendix 2)

Trench 1 was in the northern part of the site, to the immediate west of the main factory building, and overlapping with the location of Trial Pit 1 (Plates. 1 and 2). It was excavated to an average depth of 1.15m below existing ground level, to a maximum of 2.00m, and it was shortened at its southern end to avoid a modern sewerage pipe.

The modern factory yard surface, consisting of reinforced concrete (100), sealed a redundant water and sewage pipe which ran along the entire western edge of the trench towards a drain grating immediately north of the trench. This cut a perpendicular linear feature [106], 1.50m wide and 1.52m deep. Its single fill, a coarse dark grey sand-silt (107), produced late 18th-19th century pottery (Appendix 3).

Cut by [106] were three demolition deposits: a coarse, black stony silt (101), a crushed charcoal band (102), and a silty daub-like clay-silt (103). These overlay an extensive and thick coarse dark grey soil, believed to be a make-up layer (104), which contained a possible coin (awaiting conservation and subsequent identification). The latter sealed another thick layer, a black silty deposit (110), and this post-dated a mixed brown clayey deposit (111). Each of these thick deposits extended beneath the base of the trench. Two possible small 'features' that were observed at this level, [112] and [114], may actually have been basal elements of layer (104).

Machine excavation ceased at the top of a relatively clean orange-brown clay-silt (105), which contained some building debris. It was the highest in a sequence of clean silty/clayey deposits (118) and (120) alternating with black organic horizons (117) and (119) which were recorded in a machine-cut slot at the north end of the trench. These represent the earliest sampled deposits in the trench. One feature cut from the top of context (105) could not be dated by any associated finds and its function remains unclear.

Trench 2 was to the west of the factory building, perpendicular to Trench 3 (Plates. 3 and 4). Its east end was excavated through a concrete surface (200), and its west end through a modern hardcore layer (219). At its deepest point, the trench was 2.10-2.20m deep (within two machine-excavated sondages), but elsewhere between 1.05m and 1.25m deep.

The concrete surface (200) butted a brick wall (211), which had a concrete footing within foundation cut [224]. Beneath the concrete floor was a layer of demolition rubble (201), cut through by a wall foundation trench [213], containing a brick wall foundation (214) and associated with 18th century pottery sherds. Wall (211) is presumed to have been built while (214) was still standing.

The demolition rubble (201) sealed an extensive black make-up layer (207) that contained clay tobacco pipe fragments and overlay a banded orange make-up layer (208) which contained a sherd of late 18th-19th century pearlware with a blue Chinese decoration (Appendices 3 and 6). These two layers were cut through by a linear feature [202], the creation of which truncated [213]. The layers were also cut by a

narrow soak-away [204], and drain [220] (located at the west end of the trench). The fill of [202], context (203) contained a single sherd of late medieval/post-medieval pottery and a clay tobacco pipe fragment, though the upper fill of [204] contained sherds from 18th-19th century creamware vessels as well as later 19th or 20th century transfer printed ware, probably indicating some residuality of earlier material.

Sealed beneath layer (208) was a pit [217], containing a mixed fill (218) which incorporated one medieval sherd but several of mostly 18th/19th century date. The pit had cut through layer (209), which extended over the base of the whole trench. This also was dated to the 19th or 20th century but contained residual pottery and several fragments of medieval and post-medieval roof tile, malting brick fragments, bottle glass, clay tobacco pipe, and part of a 19th-20th century drain end. Two pieces of sheep/goat sized animal bone (half of the animal bone recovered from the evaluation) came from this layer (Appendix 4).

A machine-excavated sondage in the trench base revealed a relatively clean greyish brown clay-silt deposit (210), underlying (209) and extending down to at least 3.35m OD. This was the earliest deposit exposed in the trench.

Trench 3 was situated to the immediate west of Trench 2, connecting with it to form a T-shape (Plates. 5 and 6). It was located entirely within hardcore surface (300), which sealed a brick surface (302). This floor comprised a mixture of 8 ¾ x 4 ¼ x 2 ½ inch pammets and 8 ¾ x 4 x 2 ¾ inch bricks, some of which were laid on edge and occasionally in two courses. A thin black trample layer (301) separated the floor from the hardcore overburden, and it was laid upon a bedding of crushed brick (303).

Beneath this was a buried topsoil-type layer (304), which extended along the whole length of the trench. Adjacent to the southern edge of the floor, and cut through (304), was a V-shaped feature [315], which did not extend into the opposite section. Its fill (316) contained bricks, but this was not believed to be a structural feature. Beneath (304), a make up layer (305) (the same layer as (207) in Trench 2) extended along the length of the trench.

Beneath (305) was a relatively thick pebbly layer (306), cut by a small feature [317] with a U-shaped profile and loamy fill (318). The pebbly layer sealed a sequence of grey and brown silty layers (307), (308) and (309). At the south of the trench these had been 'replaced' by black sand-silt (313) and crushed mortar/plaster (314). Beneath (309) and (314), a thick, coarse, black silt (310) extended the length of the trench. This contained the only artefacts recovered from the trench: sherds ranging from the medieval period to the 18th century (including an unusual slipware fragment, possibly from a Yorkshire kiln). A machine-excavated sondage revealed a thick brown-grey silt layer (311) and river sediments (312), down to a depth of 2.40m below ground level.

Trench 4 was towards the south-eastern part of the site, cut through a concrete yard surface (400) and hardcore (401) (Plates. 7 and 8). Beneath this was an extensive sequence of make-up deposits, mostly dipping northeastwards towards the River Witham. At the eastern end of the trench, these layers had apparently been cut by a series of seven small stake- or post-holes [452, 454,447,443,456,458,445], identified 0.8m from the modern ground surface. One of these features, post-hole [447] contained a piece of brick, potentially as recent as the 20th century, with similarly dated pottery sherds.

The sloping deposits post-dated a black silt layer (426), which contained medieval pottery, including a piece of Early North French ware. Beneath it were other layers of

silt, including (427) and (428), but insufficient of these were visible to determine whether they were horizontal or also sloped down towards the river. Layer (426) post-dated a pit [435], which was filled with clean sand (434). The stratigraphic interpretation of this 1m deep feature was difficult to establish as its western edge was almost vertical and its base was about 2m below ground level, but it seems likely that it was a 19th century feature, possibly relating to industrial processes on the site; it is possible that the sand surrounded a pipe, situated slightly beyond the excavation edge.

Feature [435] had cut through much dirtier material (437), interpreted as part of an earlier phase of dumped layers falling to the east. The dumped material incorporated concentrations of brick and roof tile fragments, perhaps deriving from varied sources. Context (437) contained three medieval sherds and a piece from an 18th century Staffordshire bowl. The deposit below it, (439), contained further pottery fragments, and the assemblage has been dated as mid-late 15th century). The deposit also contained two large animal bones.

In the western part of the trench, deposits were more disturbed and interrupted by the presence of wall footings. The foundations pre-dated the factory and were probably associated with post-medieval boat-building.

7.0 Discussion and conclusions

The retrieved pottery assemblages date the earliest excavated archaeological horizons from the 15th century, although the lower layers which produced no dateable materials are possibly be earlier than this. Across much of the site, modern or 19th century intrusions have truncated remains to depths of at least 1.2m and, in places, to 1.5m or 2m. Part of the reason for this deep disturbance is the soft nature of the underlying deposits, mostly derived from river sediments and marine flood silts which may have been dredged from the adjacent Witham or excavated during the development of other sites in the area. The layers which may represent late medieval and earlier reclamation of this site contain small proportions of rubble, derived from the demolition of brick-built and tile-roofed structures. There is no evidence that any attempts were made to consolidate the site with any quantity of imported clean rubble before the 19th century – this was land where the primary aim had been to raise it with readily available waste material – no great surprise on the immediate west bank of the Witham, close to its outfall.

The range of wares demonstrated by the pottery assemblages is broad, and includes evidence of vessels from Staffordshire, Frechen and Langewehe (Germany), Raeren (Belgium), France, Holland/Netherlands and China, as well as Lincolnshire kiln sites. This variation is to be expected in Boston, which was the UK's leading medieval port and remained an internationally significant port, declining from the 15th century when the Haven silted.

Medieval features could be present on this site, depending on whether this is land which has been raised and drained, or was reclaimed from the river. The evaluation was unable to examine in detail sufficiently deep deposits to enable the early processes of land use here to be established. The sequence is first comprehensible from the 15th century, with the tipping of large quantities of unwanted soil mixed with domestic refuse; the observations from Trench 4 hint at extensive spreads of material across what may have been open, low-lying and uneven ground. This may have remained in agricultural rather than industrial use.

Dating of the sub-division of the land to the east of High Street is uncertain, but White Horse Lane and Pulvertoft Lane were in existence by the mid 16th century (Thompson 1856, 257-9).

By the 19th century, the site appears to have been used in a different way, indicated by the use of pits to dispose of waste rather than surface spreading. The 1824 Ordnance Survey 1:63,360 map shows the land as part of a larger developed area. Ship-building yards are depicted on the larger scale Ordnance Survey map of 1889, but the land to the south remained open with trees around the boundaries, perhaps attached to Bank House.

The earlier brick foundations encountered during the evaluation – and seen during the monitoring of the earlier trial pit excavations – are thought to be from structures related to the shipbuilding use of the site. The most recent foundations are from the recently demolished HP Foods factory.

8.0 Effectiveness of methodology

The evaluation trenching has succeeded in demonstrating the extent of modern disturbance and has provided useful detail on the nature of surviving archaeological deposits. The considerable depth of the archaeological deposits prevented the close examination of medieval contexts.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank Chestnut Homes for this commission.

10.0 References

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11.0 Site archive

The documentary archive for the site is currently in the possession of Pre-Construct

Archaeological Services Ltd. This will be deposited with *The Collection*, Lincoln, within six months from the completion of the project, accession number LCNCC 2009.140