LAND ADJACENT TO 46 NORTHONS LANE, HOLBEACH, LINCOLNSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

PCA Job No:	599
Site Code:	NLHS 09
NGR:	TF 3540 2517
Museum Accession No:	LCNCC:2009.160

Report prepared for PJK Consulting
on behalf of Mr P. Brown

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by

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Summary

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd carried out an archaeological evaluation for PJK Consulting on behalf of Mr. P. Brown on land adjacent to 46 Northons Lane, Holbeach, in the South Holland district of Lincolnshire (centred on NGR: TF 3540 2517). This work was undertaken to support a planning application for the construction of 46 new houses.

Five trenches were excavated within a grassed area covering the southern and eastern part of the site. The northwestern part of the site is currently still occupied by modern industrial buildings and the centre of the site covered with concrete hardstanding. All five of the trenches were excavated down to the top of clean alluvial silts, with deeper sondages excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m below the existing ground level to more fully investigate the nature of the alluvial deposits, which were demonstrated to be consistent throughout.

In all five trenches the same depositional sequence was recorded, with the slight exception of one of the northeastern trenches, which contained a layer of re-deposited material sealed by the modern topsoil. No artefactual material was identified within this and although undated it is concluded here that this deposit probably originated as a result of disturbance caused by clearance of the drain that formerly defined the eastern boundary of the site, or was deposited during the early stages of construction of either the houses of Chestnut Avenue or the industrial buildings of that occupy the northwestern part of this site.

Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the former cultivation soil within the middle of the southern part of the site.

Further archaeological intervention at this site is unlikely to be productive.

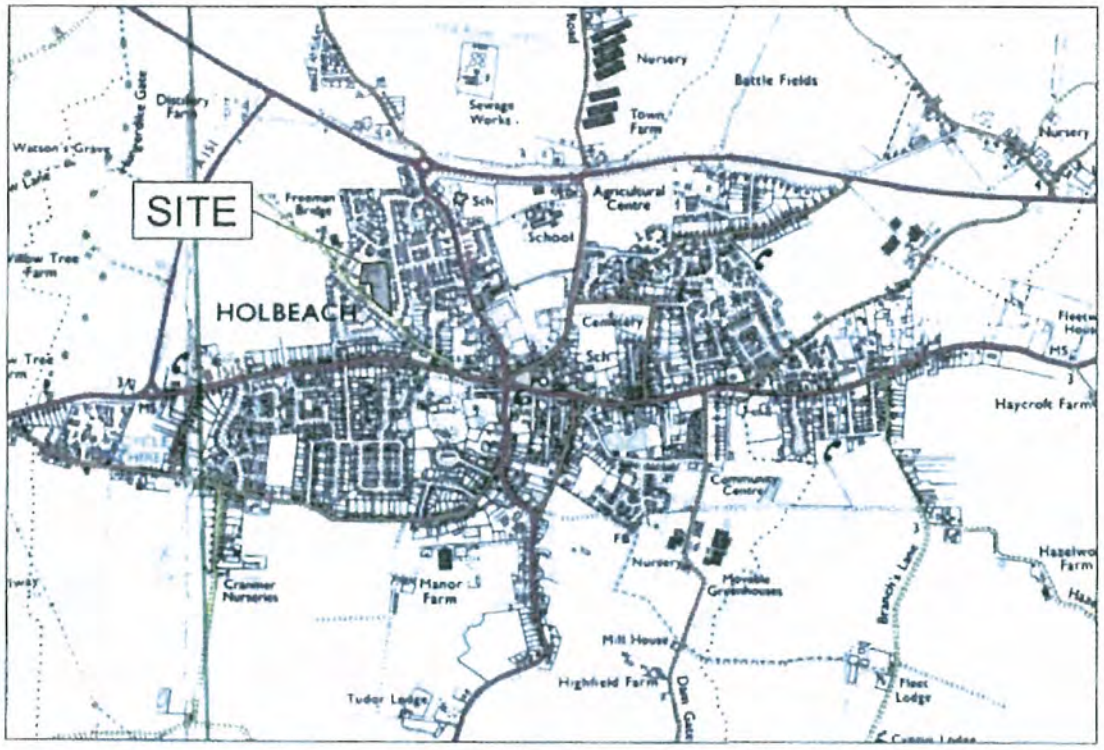


Fig. 1: Site location map. Scale 1:25 000 (O.S. copyright licence no: 100049278)

1 Introduction

Between the 12th and 17th November 2009 Pre-Construct Archaeological Services (PCAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching for PJK Consulting, on behalf of Mr. P. Brown, on land adjacent to 46 Northons Lane, Holbeach, in the South Holland district of Lincolnshire.

This work was carried out in accordance with a Specification for a Scheme of Archaeological Evaluation Trenching produced by PCAS (PCAS 2009) and approved by Ms. Louise Jennings, Lincoln County Council Planning Archaeologist, on behalf of South Holland District Council. The Specification was based upon a detailed brief issued by the Lincolnshire County Council Historic Environment Team (27th October 2009) in order to determine the archaeological potential of the site with regards to a submitted planning application for the construction of new housing (Planning Application: SHDC H09-0667-09).

The scheme of investigation complies with the recommendations of *Archaeology and Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (Dept. of Environment 1990) and also follows the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 2008) and Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook (Lincolnshire County Council 2009).

2 Site location and description (Figs. 1 and 2, see Photographs Nos. 1 and 2)

The site is located within the town of Holbeach, in the South Holland district of Lincolnshire, *c.* 10km east of Spalding and *c.* 55km southeast of Lincoln. It is situated to the north of Northons Lane, a minor road which radiates from the town centre towards the north-west, within a suburban area of 20th century housing (NGR: TF 3540 2517).

The site is located within the historic fens, *c.* 9km east of the modern course of the River Welland, near to the north edge of the so-called Townlands, an extensive silt bank upon which older settlements are located within the eastern fens. The modern regional landscape is largely artificial and is characterised by flat reclaimed arable land interspersed by wide, deep drains and numerous smaller subsidiary ditches.

The site itself comprises two distinct areas. The northwest part is covered with concrete hardstanding, upon which numerous modern industrial buildings remain in use, located along the northern and western edge of the site. In contrast, the southern part and eastern edge of the site are covered with tuffed grass and dispersed ornamental trees. A chain link fence separates the two areas from each other.

The site is flanked to the southwest by the minor road, Northons Lane, with late 20th century houses beyond. The eastern side of the site is defined by the rear gardens of houses of Chestnut Avenue, also of late 20th century date. The north of the site is flanked by a dense evergreen tree screen which extends around to the western edge of the site, with sparse housing beyond. Within the angle of the southwestern corner of the site is a pair of post-war semi-detached houses and a late 20th century office building, formerly part of the same industrial site.

The site is flat where mean elevation is *c.* 3m OD. The drift geology of the area is mapped as alluvium (British Geological Survey 1992).

3 Archaeological and historical background

Prior to the onset of receding sea levels in the early medieval period the coastline of prehistoric and Roman Lincolnshire was considerably further inland that at present and the area around Holbeach was likely to consist of low islands surrounded by salt marshes penetrated by creeks and areas of open water (Simmons 1993).

Although there is no evidence for early occupation within the immediate vicinity, there is some evidence for occupation within this wetland environment during the Iron Age around Whaplode, to the west. The British Geological Survey indicates that the inner limit of the 'probable Saxon Coastline' may have coincided with Northons Lane and that the site may have still lain within the tidal zone for much of the first millennium AD (*ibid.* 1993).

Although the Saxon period remains poorly understood in this part of the fenland it is assumed that the Middle Saxon tribe, the *Spalda*, one of the local tribes listed in the *Tribal Hidage*, gave their name to the nearby town of Spalding, which may have been a tribal centre at this time, indicating occupation along the 'townlands' bank and established settlement within the area from this period (Hayes 1988).

Holbeach is first documented in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and as such indicates that a settlement had been established here at least by the Late Saxon period. The small settlement here was clearly subordinate to nearby Spalding with its Benedictine Priory, market, fisheries, salt-houses and direct access to the River Welland (Morgan and Thorn 1986).

The land to the north of the former Saxon shoreline was reclaimed in the late 12th century as part of an extensive land reclamation/flood defence scheme. Most of the patchwork of defensive clay banks constructed at this time still survive and are identified as 'Roman bank'. It is notable that many of the identified Saxon and medieval salt making sites, such as the one at Holbeach Hurn, to the northeast correspond with Roman bank, although the nature of this relationship remains unclear.

Salt making in Lincolnshire ceased in the early part of the 17th century and the fens continued to be enclosed and drained throughout the 17th – 19th centuries, with a subsequent shift in the local economy from coastal to agricultural. Holbeach continued to develop as a rural market town during the industrial period.

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence/absence, character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development site. This information would assist the Local Authority Planning Archaeologist in making an informed judgment on the potential impact on archaeological resources of the proposed development, and to provide suitable information with which to construct a

strategy that would, if required, mitigate any adverse effects that development may have.

5 Methodology

The evaluation methodology required the excavation of five trenches outside the area of hardstanding, including one close to the Northons Lane frontage. Trenches 1-3 were 20m long by 1.6m wide and Trenches 4 and 5 were 10m long by 1.6m wide. The locations of the trenches were altered slightly, from their originally proposed locations, to avoid identified services.

Excavation was carried out using a JCB excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision. The trenches were excavated in spits down to the top of the natural geological substrate. In each trench test sondages were excavated down to a maximum depth of 1.2m below the existing ground surface to confirm the undifferentiated nature of the alluvial deposits encountered.

6 Results (Figs. 3 and 4, see Photographs Nos. 3-6)

The initial attempt to excavate Trench 1 (at its originally intended location) was discontinued as a *c.* north-south aligned service trench was immediately identified. A subsequent attempt to excavate this trench further to the east encountered a second *c.* north-south aligned service trench. Consequently Trench 1 was excavated some 6.0m to the east of its originally proposed location.

Trenches 2 and 3 were similarly relocated to the west to avoid a detected live service. Trenches 4 and 5 also encountered services, but these ran perpendicular to the excavated trenches and work continued by passing over these services (although both trenches were relocated slightly to the east to accommodate spoil heaps and access).

The same basic stratigraphic sequence was observed within all five of the trenches, excluding one layer of re-deposited material, probably of recent origin, within Trench 4.

Trenches 1 – 5

The earliest encountered deposit identified within all five trenches was a clean mottled orange-grey brown sandy alluvial silt (variously recorded as contexts105, 205, 305, 405 and 505). In all areas, the deposit extended below the limit of excavation within the test sondages.

The sandy alluvial silt was sealed by a fine sand-silt deposit (104, 204, 304, 404 and 504 respectively). This consisted of material of a finer particle size of exactly the same colour and with identical patterned mottling. The two deposits merged imperceptibly, only differentiated by their particle sizes. These deposits were also consistent within all five trenches. Combined they were demonstrated to be at least 0.7m deep in Trench 3.

The fine sand-silt deposit was in turn sealed by a mid orange-red brown silt (103, 203, 303, 403 and 503), which also had a very diffuse horizon with the underlying deposits and was also consistent within all of the trenches. This deposit was on average *c.* 0.2m deep.

In Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 5 the mid orange-red brown silt deposit was sealed by a mid red brown silt (102, 202, 302 and 502) which had a sharp and very distinct interface with the underlying deposit. In Trench 4, the silt deposit (403) was sealed by what appeared to be re-deposited natural material mixed with a similar mid-red brown silt (402). This deposit also had a distinct interface with the underlying material. Deposits (102, 202, 302 and 502) were mostly *c.* 0.2m deep, except in Trench 3 where context (302) was only 0.06m deep. Deposit (402) was up to 0.46m deep.

Two sherds of medieval pottery and a cockle shell were recovered from context (302). These were the only artefacts, pre-dating the modern era, that were identified during the course of the evaluation.

All of the above deposits were sealed by modern topsoil (101, 201, 301, 401 and 501). This material appears to have been heavily disturbed or even imported as it contained within it a notable amount of modern building material, particularly along the eastern side of the site.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The earliest deposits encountered were natural alluvial silts, which extended below the limit of excavation within all of the test sondages. These deposits were consistent throughout the evaluation trenches. Silt layer (103, 203, 303, 403 and 503), was also consistent throughout the evaluation trenches and appeared to be the *in situ* naturally formed subsoil.

Silt deposit (102, 202, 302 and 502) was also consistent throughout the trenches although characteristically differing from the underlying deposits by a sharp interface horizon. These deposits appeared to be largely sterile, with the exception of the material recovered from (302) and very occasional charcoal flecks observed within context (502). These finds and the sharp interface with the underlying deposits clearly indicate that this material had been disturbed in some way.

It is suggested that this is probably the result of agriculture, and the inclusion of medieval material may indicate that cultivation began at this time, with artefactual material being deposited perhaps during the course of manuring. Alternatively, this may be residual surface material incorporated into the ploughsoil from cultivation of a much more recent date.

The possibility of saltern material, the by-product of recovering salt from tidal mud during the medieval period, may also be considered for this distinct deposit. However, there does not appear to be any evidence for the characteristic mounds of waste material, such as at Holbeach Hurn and there is no other evidence for salt making activities within the area or identified within the evaluation trenches. As such

it is considered that a relict cultivation soil is a more plausible explanation for this extensive, flat and largely sterile deposit.

The inclusion of re-deposited natural silt/sand material (402) at this horizon within Trench 4 is also enigmatic evidence of past human activity. Trench 4 was located within an area where numerous modern service trenches have clearly been excavated (including one within Trench 4 itself), and is flanked by a modern housing development to the east and a light industrial site to the west and thus the most probable explanation for the disturbance is that it occurred within the recent era and is associated with nearby construction. The inclusion of much modern building waste within the overlying topsoil may further support a modern rather than ancient origin for this material.

The two sherds of medieval pottery were not associated with any recognisable feature, but rather included within what has been interpreted as the former cultivation soil. As such they were probably deposited with waste material from an original unknown location. This material does at least appear to indicate that the underlying silts are of ancient origins and are unlikely to be material (possibly deposited during coastal storms) sealing earlier land surfaces. This is also supported by the homogenous nature of the underlying alluvial silts.

8 Effectiveness of methodology

The adopted methodology has successfully demonstrated the homogenous nature of alluvial deposits within the site, and established the probable level of the medieval land surface. It has further demonstrated that numerous services are present throughout the site and that the surface material covering the site has been heavily disturbed in the recent past.

9 References

British Geological Survey 1992 *Spalding: England and Wales Sheet **144***. Solid and Drift Edition. 1:50,000 Provisional Series. Keyworth, Nottingham.

Hayes, P. P. 1988 'Roman to Saxon in the South Lincolnshire Fens' *Antiquity* 62, 312-6.

Morgan, P. and Thorn, C. 1986 *Domesday Book: Vol. 31: Lincolnshire*. Phillimore & Co. Ltd. Chichester.

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services 2009 *Land adjacent to 46 Northons Lane, Holbeach, Lincolnshire: Specification for a Scheme of Archaeological Evaluation Trenching*

Robinson, D. 1993 Natural Regions, in Bennet, S. and Bennet, N. (eds.) *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire.* The University of Hull Press. Hull.

Simmons, B. 1993 Iron Age and Roman Coasts around the Wash, in Bennet, S. and Bennet, N. (eds.) *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire.* The University of Hull Press. Hull.

10 Site Archive

The documentary and physical archive for this scheme is currently in the possession of Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd. This will be deposited at The Collection in Lincoln within six months of completion of this report under Accession Number LCNCC:2009.166.

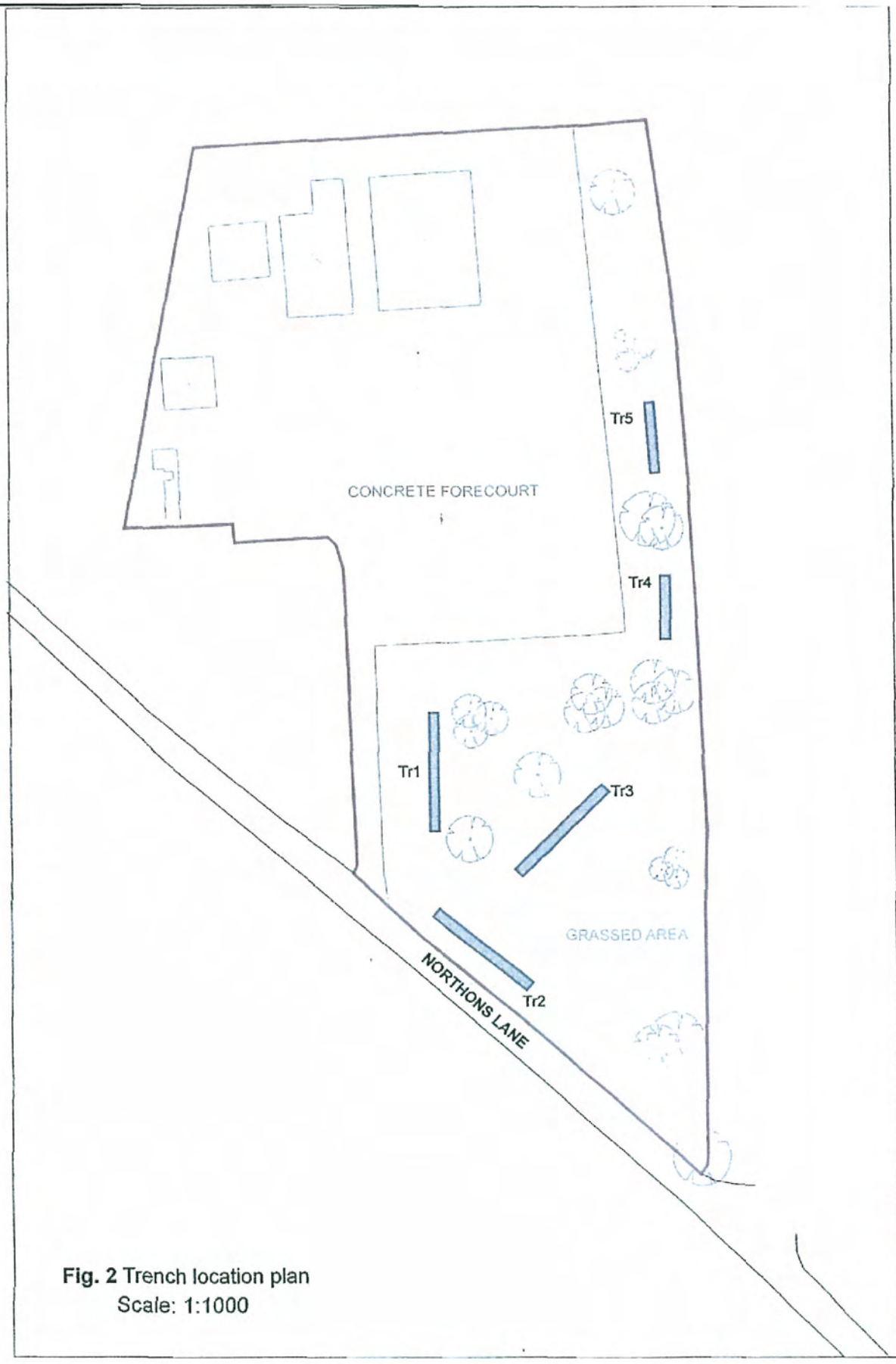


Fig. 2 Trench location plan
Scale: 1:1000

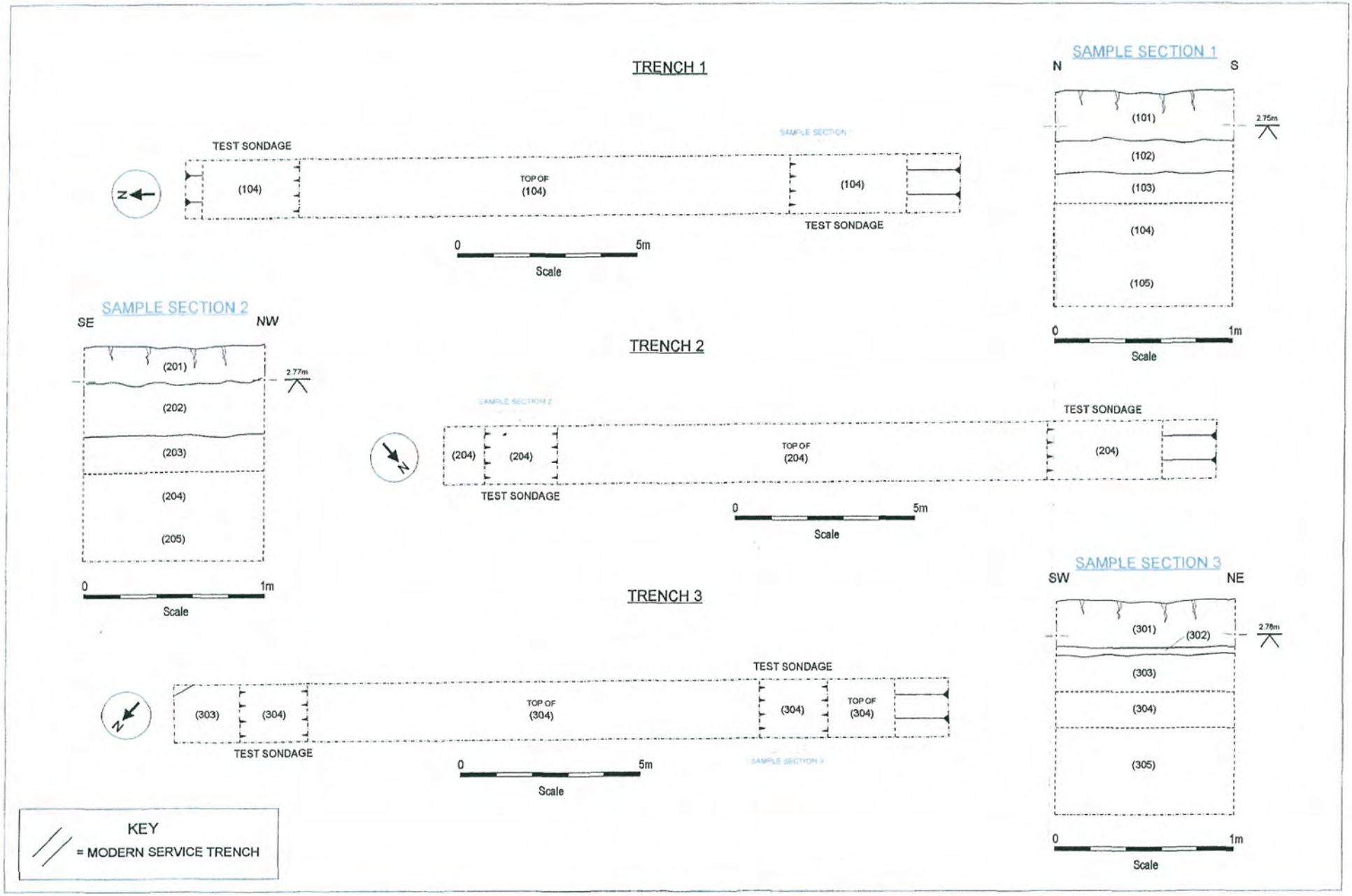


Fig. 3 Trenches 1, 2 and 3
Scales: Plans 1:100. Sections 1:20

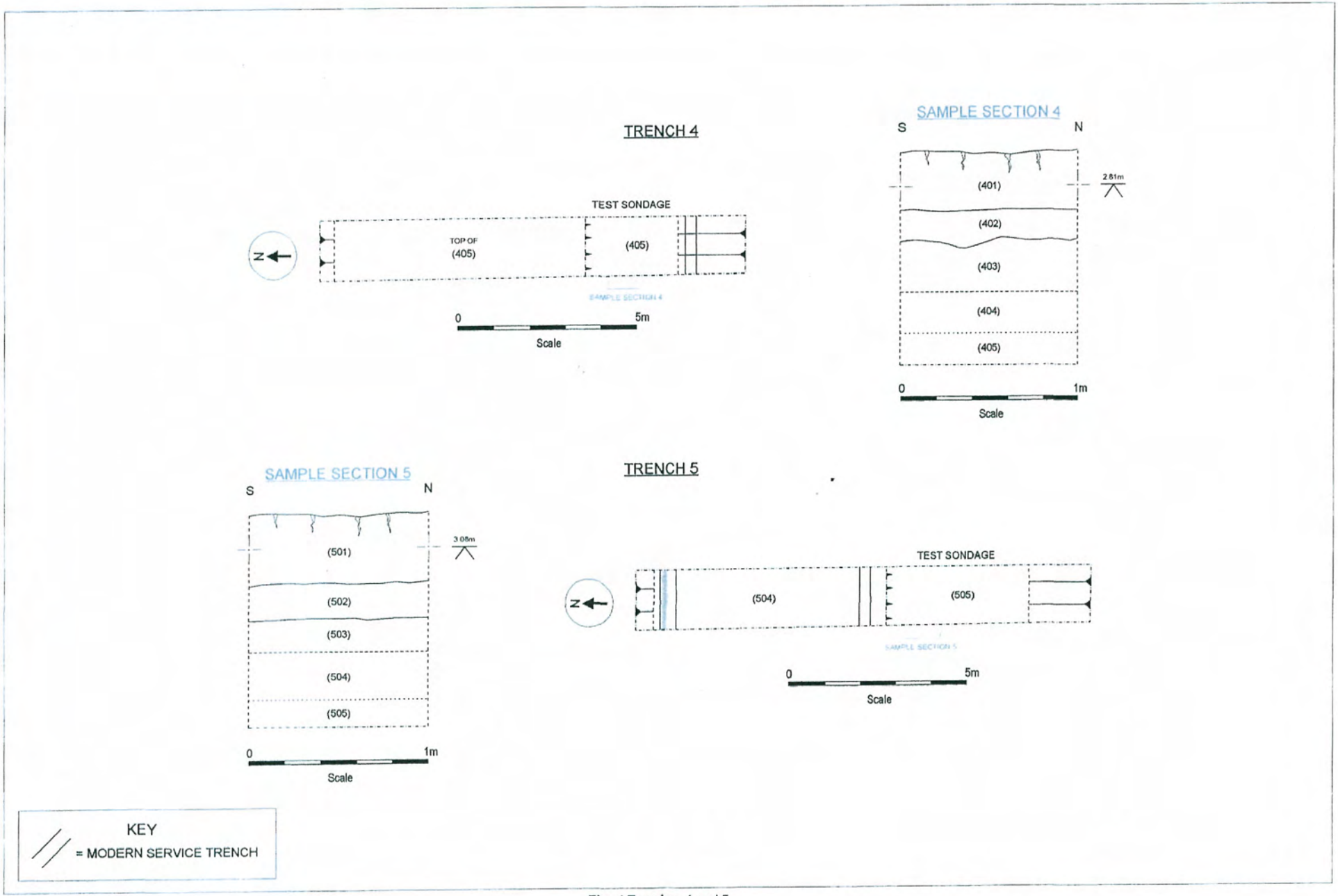


Fig. 4 Trenches 4 and 5
Scales: Plans 1:100. Sections 1:20

Appendix 1: Photographs



Photo No.1 The site; looking to the southeast. The location of Trench 1 is indicated between the ranging poles.



Photo No.2 Northeastern part of the site; looking towards the north. The location of Trench 5 is indicated between the ranging poles.



Photo No.3 Trench 2 fully excavated, looking towards the southeast.



Photo No.4 Trench 3 fully excavated, looking towards the northeast.

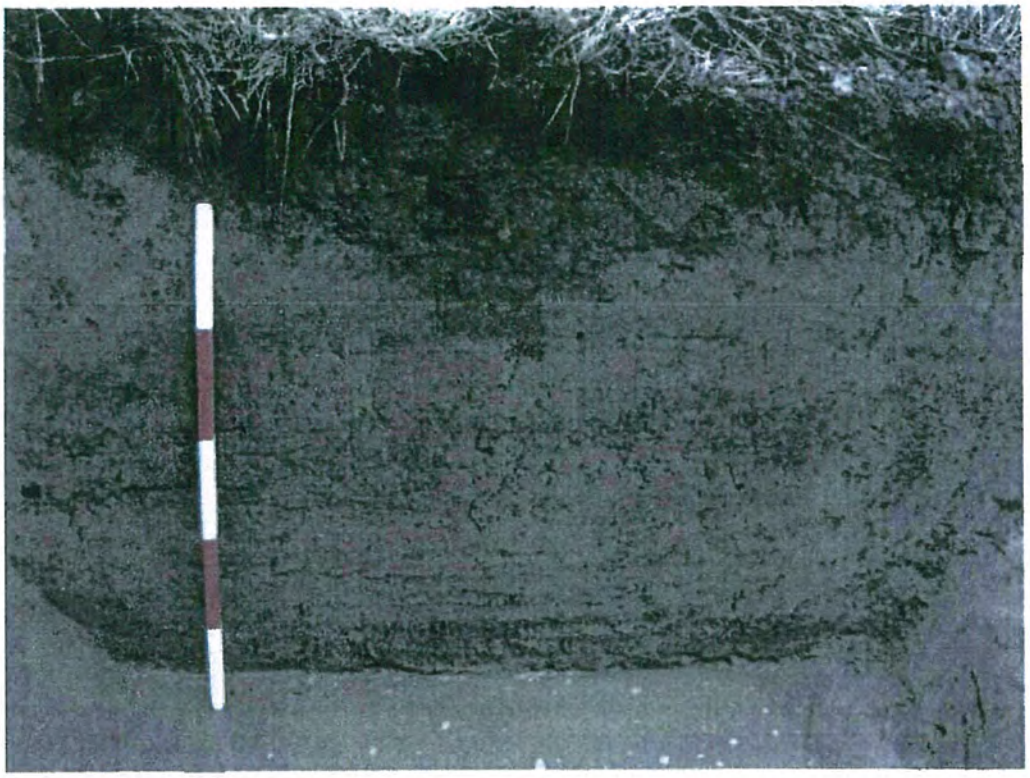


Photo No.5 Sample section through Trench 2. The same stratigraphy was observed in Trenches 1, 3 and 5.

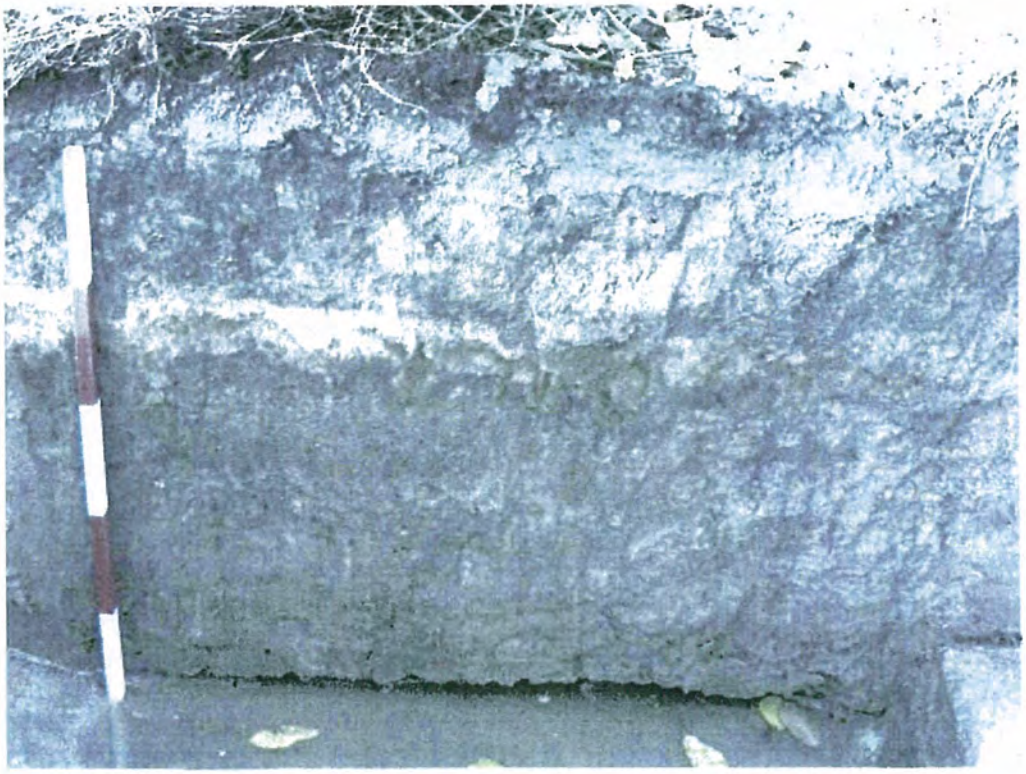


Photo No.6 Sample section through Trench 4, including layer of re-deposited natural sand (402).

Appendix 2: Levels and Context descriptions

Levels are recorded as meters above Ordnance Datum (OD), calculated from a spot height on the Spalding Road (B 1515) junction with Northons Lane: 4.3m OD.

Trench 1: Ground level 2.95m OD

Context No.	Type	Description
101	Topsoil	Mid brown silt-loam with occasional modern building waste material, including fragments of brick, concrete and wire. < 0.4m deep.
102	Former cultivation soil	Mid red brown silt. < 0.2m deep.
103	Subsoil	Mid orange-red brown silt. < 0.2m deep.
104	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown silt. < 0.3m deep.
105	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown sandy silt. > 0.3m deep. = Limit of excavation.

Trench 2: Ground level 2.97m OD

Context No.	Type	Description
201	Topsoil	Mid brown silt-loam. < 0.2m deep.
202	Former cultivation soil	Mid red brown silt. < 0.3m deep.
203	Subsoil	Mid orange-red brown silt. < 0.2m deep.
204	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown silt. < 0.24m deep.
205	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown sandy silt. > 0.2m deep. = Limit of excavation.

Trench 3: Ground level 2.98m OD

Context No.	Type	Description
301	Topsoil	Mid brown silt-loam. < 0.3m deep.
302	Former cultivation soil	Mid red brown silt including rare fragments of cockle shells. < 0.06m deep.
303	Subsoil	Mid orange-red brown silt. < 0.2m deep.
304	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown silt. < 0.2m deep.
305	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown sandy silt. > 0.5m deep. = Limit of excavation.

Trench 4: Ground level 3.01m OD

Context No.	Type	Description
401	Topsoil	Mid brown silt-loam with occasional modern building waste material. < 0.32m deep.
402	Re-deposited natural	Mixed deposit: Light-mid orange brown fine sand-silt, light grey brown silt and mid red brown silt. < 0.46m deep.
403	Subsoil	Mid orange-red brown silt. < 0.28m deep.
404	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown silt. < 0.24m deep.
405	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown sandy silt. > 0.16m deep = Limit of Excavation.

Trench 5: Ground level 3.28m OD

Context No.	Type	Description
501	Topsoil	Mid brown silt-loam with frequent modern building waste material, including fragments of brick, concrete and wire. < 0.4m deep.
502	Former cultivation soil	Mid slightly reddish brown silt with very occasional charcoal flecks and rare small fragments of mollusc shells. < 0.2m deep.
503	Subsoil	Mid orange-red brown silt. < 0.2m deep.
504	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown silt. 0.3m deep.
505	Alluvial silt	Mottled mid orange brown – light grey brown sandy silt. > 0.2m deep. = Limit of Excavation.

Pottery Archive for Land Adjacent to 46 Northans Lane, Holbeach, Lincolnshire (NLHS 09)

Jane Young

context	cname	full name	sub fabric	form type	sherds	weight	part	description	date
302	TOY	Toynton Medieval Ware	+ ca & fe	jug	1	18	BS	possibly not a Toynton product as too high ca & fe	late 13th to 14th
302	GRIMT	Grimston-type ware		jug/jar	1	7	BS	abraded;salt surfaced;abundant fine quartz with occ flint	13th to 14th

DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

Land adj to 46 Northons Lane, Holbeach, LINCS - Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln)

OASIS ID - preconst3-69101

Versions

View	Version	Completed by	Email	Date
View 1	1	Lisa	lisa@pre-construct.co.uk	8 December 2009

Completed sections in current version

Details	Location	Creators	Archive	Publications
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1/1

Validated sections in current version

Details	Location	Creators	Archive	Publications
No	No	No	No	0/1

File submission and form progress

Grey literature report submitted?	No	Grey literature report filename/s	
Boundary file submitted?	No	Boundary filename	
HER signed off?		NMR signed off?	

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