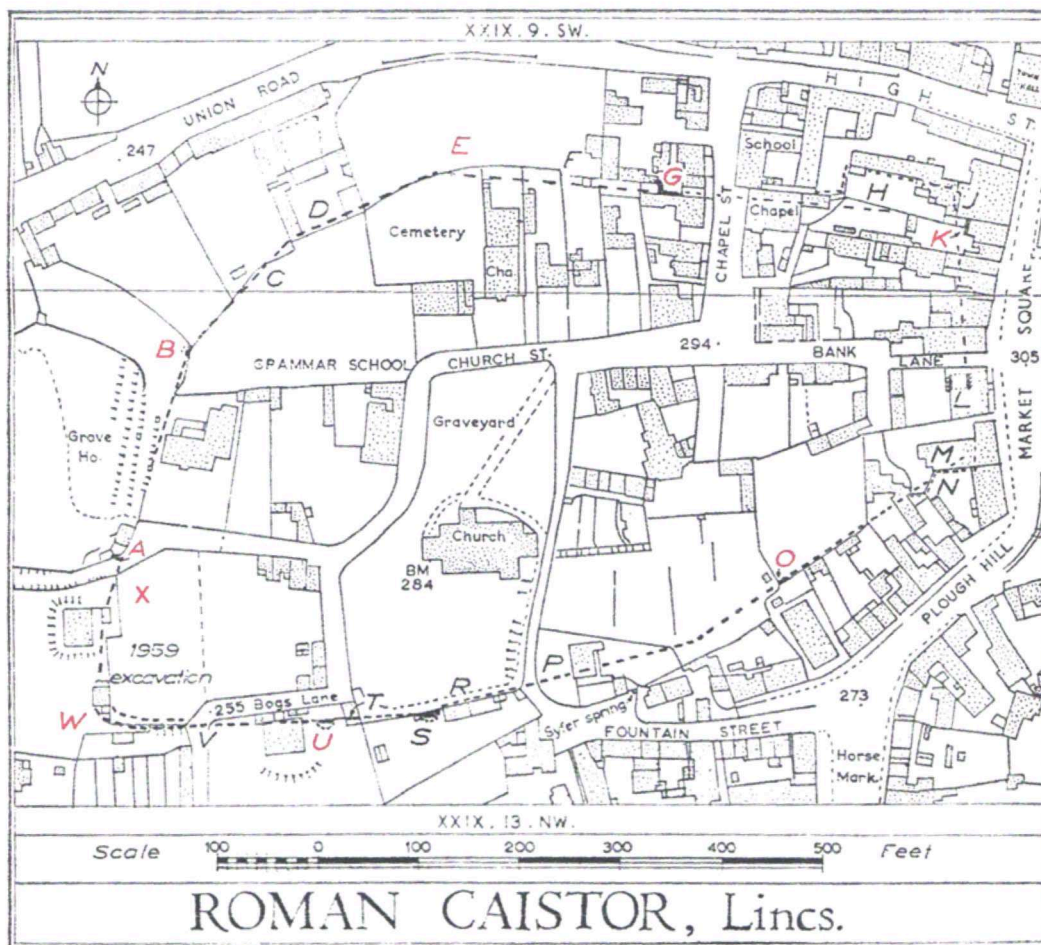


# Caistor on the Wolds, Lincolnshire,

Provisional Survey of the Roman Walls, 2nd May, 2014



Rahtz, 1959 plan of Caistor. Sites mentioned in this text are in red.

This account attempts to summarise what was observed during a visit to some of the possible remains of the Roman defences at Caistor on the Wolds, Lincolnshire on the 2nd of May, 2014. The remains were subjected to only cursory examination and it was not possible to visit some significant locations.

With one exception, the possible remains examined and rejected at W, all of the locations examined had been recorded by Philip Rahtz in his 1959 study and his comments or, in the case of the excavated area, a synopsis, are included here along with his plans and photographs.

It is impossible, in this brief review, based on a short visit, to say anything definitive about the Roman re-

mains at Caistor but two points can be made: the identification of some parts of the walls are poorly founded and need to re-evaluated. Rahtz's concluding comments remain as prescient as they were 50 years ago:

*'These problems can only be answered by excavation; at least two-thirds of the walled area is still garden or open ground, and there is ample space for the recovery of the exact wall line, and for the discovery of buildings within it. It is to be hoped that Caistor will not have to wait long for a further extension of its history'*

**Wall on Castle Hill forming part of the boundary of the Grammar School. (Rahtz A)**

Coursed blocks of rectangular stone forming a short section of wall. The width seems correct for the Roman wall but, at this point, the section, not the face of the wall should be seen and there is no sign of a rubble core. Across the road from this wall there are stones in the earth bank which might represent part of the wall.



Rahtz, 1959 wrote:

*'A A modern wall on the east side of Church Lane (?) exhibits in 17 ft. of its length good dressed stone blocks in its lowest 2 ft. that were probably derived from the Roman wall, which should cross Church Lane hereabouts. The bank on the opposite side of the lane is also revetted with stone for some distance below this point.'*

**Grounds of Caistor Grammar School (Rahtz B)**

Little to be seen but at one point a block of mortar and masonry suggests the presence of the wall or a bastion.

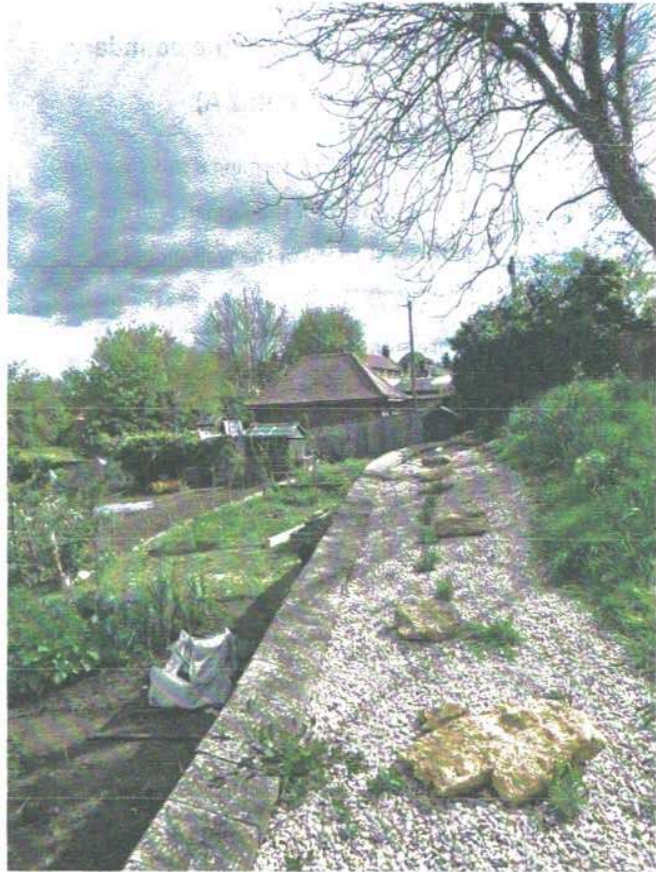


Rahtz, 1959 wrote:

*B 'At the west end of the Grammar School grounds the line of the wall is marked by a mass of hard mortared rubble core several feet in length, similar to that of Cooper's Bastion; this is the piece noted by Richmond and Corder in 1946. It lies under ivy on the slope below a brick and stone wall which delimits the change in level of some 10 ft. at this point, which can be followed back to point A as the upper of a series of artificial terraces in the garden of Grove House. The concrete cannot be traced at any other point under the ivy in this area, and its differential survival at this point suggests the possibility that it may be a fragment of a bastion. It may well have been the fragment of wall seen 'behind the school-house in the pastures' by Stukeley.'*

### Allotments viewed from the non-conformist cemetery (Rahtz E)

While it is not possible to see anything that is even potentially Roman it is likely that the terrace wall follows the line of the defensive scarp and that the allotments will be significant in our understanding of the defences.



*Rahtz (1959) Recorded:*

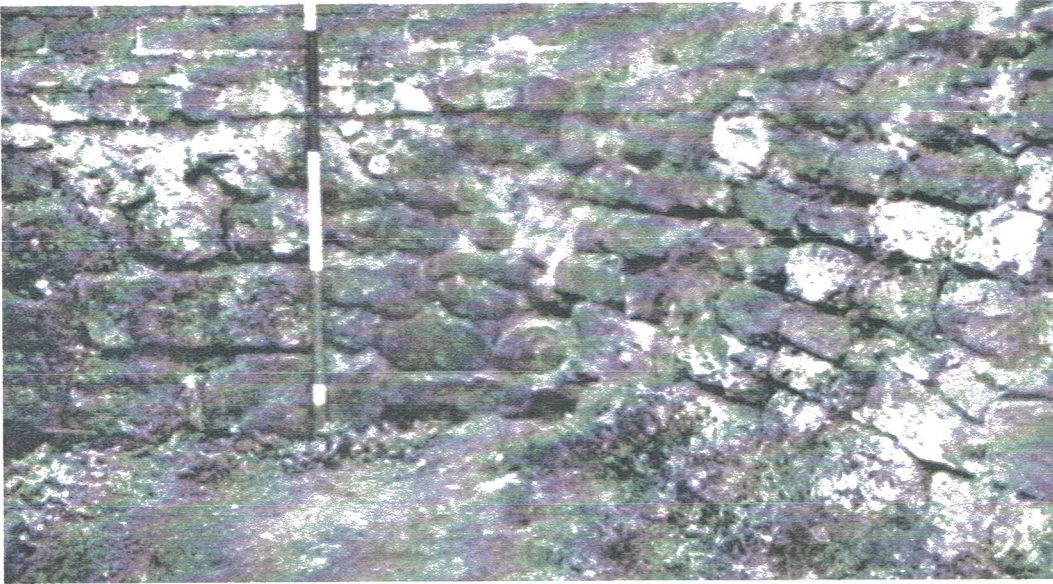
*E 'Below the cemetery (where many finds have been made according to local information) the cliff is much degraded by allotment gardening, and the change in level is barely 6 ft., with some brick revetment at the west end, and again at the east end of the cemetery.'*

### Chapel Street, 'North Bastion' (Rahtz G)



#### Chapel Street, 'North Bastion'

Irregularly laid coarse masonry, some blocks rectangular, forming the bastion, nothing to suggest that it was Roman although the location and its curving line supports this interpretation.



Rahtz, 1959, G, Detail of North Bastion



The wall section in an adjacent outbuilding is better coursed with more rectangular stones but it lacks any features that could confirm a Roman date. It is, however, difficult to see what other role it could have fulfilled and it is likely to be a relic of earlier activity.

Rahtz, 1959 wrote:

G *This is the North Bastion, provisionally thus named for the first time, and not previously noted (pi. xxxv). The west side of the bastion is destroyed, but its east side, and the Roman wall-face continuing eastwards, survive for several courses. The bastion is first seen in the back wall of a row of garages 6 ft. west of their east end; here it survives to a height of 5 ft. above present floor level, and projects slightly from the brick wall of which it is a continuation. Dr. Corder and Mr. Sheppard Frere considered it to be wholly of Roman work here. Emerging from the garages the outer face of the bastion continues for a further 5 ft. then turns inwards at an angle of some 110 degrees, now 4 ft. high. The next 9 ft. on this new alignment is rebuilt in very rough work, but the apparently original coursing is then resumed until it reaches the main wall, with which it appears to be bonded. The bastion as thus defined is partly original, and is capped by modern brickwork which follows its line. Inside the bastion the ground level is some 3—4 ft. higher than that outside, and forms an annexe to one of the gardens of Chapel Street.*

*The main wall alignment, of good dressed Roman work for at least its three lowest courses, continues for a further 13! ft., partly behind an outhouse, before it is cut by brickwork.*

*The North Bastion has been so named; but Mr. Sheppard Frere suggests that it may represent the east tower of a gateway.*

*Chapel Street has largely destroyed the change in level; only a slight scarp is visible in the road surface where the wall should cross it. The cliff is next seen at H, following a rather ir-regular course, which may not be its original one. At the back of a yard there is a change of level of 10—12 ft.; this swings north<sup>1</sup> to enclose a long garden which may be made-up ground, and not likely to represent a turn of the wall'.*

### Cellar of Pizza takeaway (Rahtz K)

Large, vaulted brick cellar the end wall of which is made up of coursed blocks of masonry, the details of which are hidden by rendering. In the centre of this wall are the truncated remains of a door or window, blocked off with large, rectangular stones. Some concerns were felt over the Roman dating of this walling. It is more than 1.5m high and appears to consist of laid stone from top to bottom. Even with the rise in ground levels since the Roman period it might have been expected that we should be seeing traces of the wall's foundations at this level. However, it is clear that it predates the cellar, the blocked door opening could have fulfilled no role in the cellar and must be a relic of previous use. Whether or not a window would have been appropriate in a Roman defensive wall is open to question particularly if the walls were as thick as those



View of the end wall of the cellar of the pizza take away.

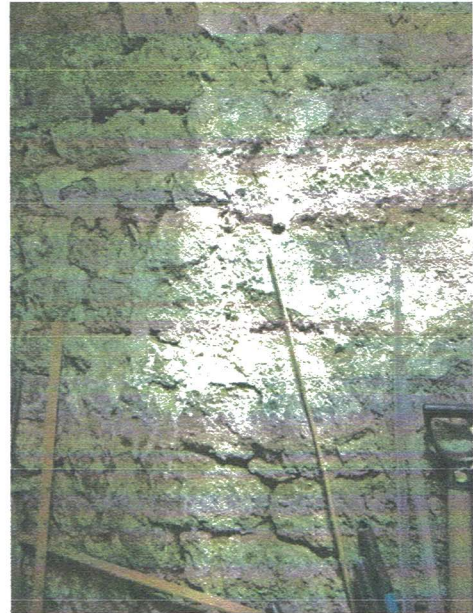
*Rahtz, 1959 wrote:*

*'K The Co-operative Society's premises have a long cellar under the greater part of their Market Square frontage, and most of this is of brickwork, but the rear wall is entirely of large dressed stone blocks. If this was the front face of the wall, it would make too sharp an angle for the north east corner of the wall; it may be rebuilt work, or associated with a bastion or corner tower. It should be noted that the present west side of the Market square is in two alignments; if the Roman east wall is straight, as we have suggested, it follows the alignment of those frontages south of Bank Lane, to judge by the alignment at (point) L. Some cracks in masonry may be seen at the back of adjoining properties, but none of the shops between (point) K and Bank Lane itself has cellars extending far enough back to reach the line of the wall, and all of brick. Bank Lane itself has a distinct hump in its surface west of its junction with Market Square, and the hump in this case is probably the remains of the wall and gatehouses.'*

## Rear of a cottage off Plough Hill (Probably Rahtz O)



Large section of wall at the back of an outhouse built up against the terraced churchyard wall. Coarse masonry, some rectangular stones, wall appears to have been rendered. Nothing that would support a Roman date. The location of this wall, which retains the terrace above, might suggest that it is of post-Roman date. This could only be tested by excavation.



## Garden of the Old Vicarage (Probably Rahtz O)

Section of wall forming a terrace and overlooking the above mentioned section. Some stones can be seen but nothing to confirm the presence of the Roman defences.

*Rahtz, 1959 wrote:*

*'O. The scarp continues in a rather degraded form at the back of buildings on the line shown, revetted partly by banks and partly by brick walls, with a stone footing behind the Spring Chapel at O. From here it continues to the ground behind the Syfer Spring. Stukeley mentions its existence behind this spring, which is some 15-20 ft. below the ground level inside the line of wall here'.*

Timber store in the garden of 1, Cromwell View

(Rahtz U)

(Bogs Lane on the plan)



Possible walling

Section of coursed masonry walling, large stones, rectangular, nothing to confirm a Roman date. Near to this was a lump of stone and mortar which looks like the core of the Roman wall or of a bastion.

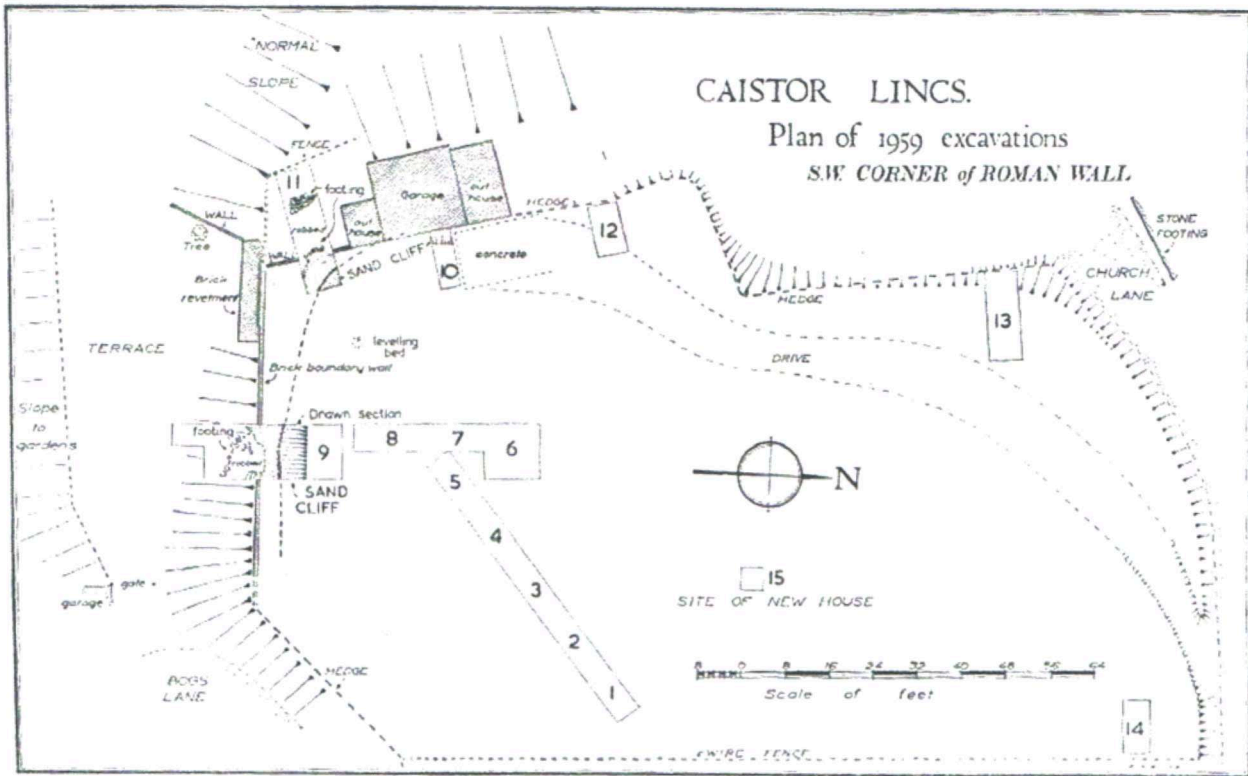


Stone and concrete possibly representing the core of a bastion.

Rahtz, 1959 wrote:

*'U West of this building a rough line of rebuilt stonework forms the southern edge of a raised platform constructed within living memory; this continues the alignment at (point) R for a further 12.5 ft., and then, in a garden, a ragged mass of hard mortared rubble core projects about two feet. The stones composing it are roughly pitched, of rather smaller stone than those in Cooper's Bastion, but the mortar is similarly hard and cream-coloured (see p. 185). The survival of this awkward obstacle, and its relation to the alignment of wall-face at T, makes it very probable that this is another bastion, now named Williams's Bastion, 100 ft. from the previous one at S. It is 14 ft. wide as it exists at present. Beyond it to the west, the raised platform edge extends a further 2 ft., then the line of wall is wholly destroyed by a large house and its surrounding area cut back into the slope.*

**Site of the 1959 Excavation. (Rahtz W)**



Nothing now to be seen but it is worth reviewing the results of the Philip Rahtz's 1959 excavation in what was considered to the south-west corner of the wall. In brief:

**Trenches 1-5** Thought to be on the line of the wall, but were found to be blank with few Roman finds

**Trenches 6-9** were located to find the line of the wall which was found in Trench 9 .

**Trench 9** was cut through the field boundary and provided Section 2. This is in line with visible fragments to the east but the wall must have turned to meet the remains in the Grammar School grounds

**Trench 10** Contained the edge of the sand terrace and traces of mortar similar to layer N shown on Section 2.

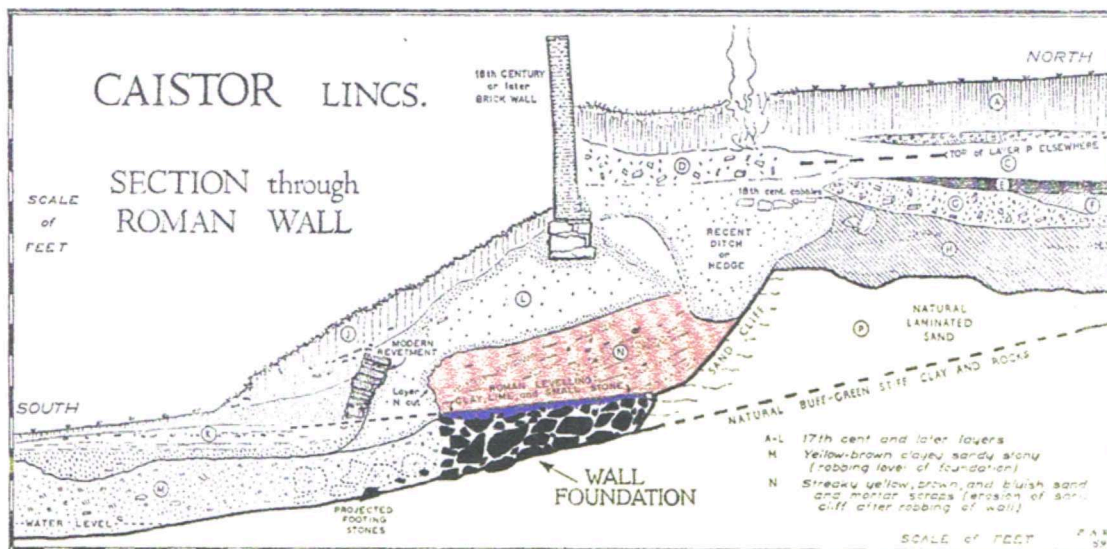
**Trench 11** contained robbed footings, similar to those in Trench 9, suggesting a 15 foot (4.6m) wide wall and an eroded sand terrace. The footings went diagonally across the area and represented a turning corner.

None of the trenches excavated within the walled area contained any trace of Roman building.

**Trenches 12 and 13** revealed no trace of the wall and must be behind its line

**Trenches 14-15**, Blank, no Roman finds





### 1959 Excavation, Section of Wall in Trench 9

The natural laminated sand (yellow on drawing) was cut back to form a building platform. This formed a terrace around the enclosure.

The wall footings (black) were at least 11 feet wide (3.4m) wide and consisted of large footing stones of undressed Tealby limestone rocks, slightly pitched with many spaces. Some robbing had occurred.

Over this was a compact layer of crushed red and white chalk and clay (levelling layer?, blue). This now slopes at 5 degrees due to slippage.

The base of the wall was 9 feet (2.7m) below the enclosure platform showing that it was at least this high.

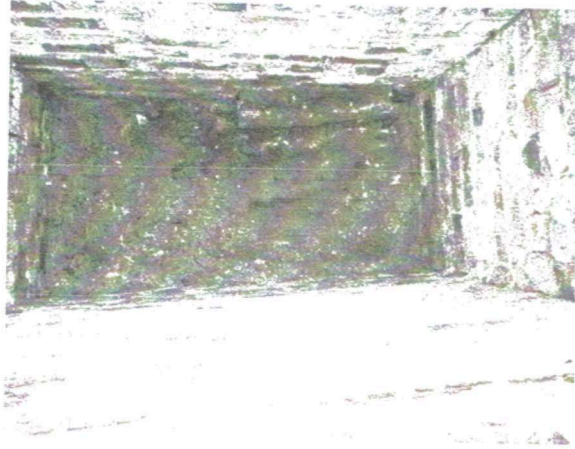
The wall was removed at some time before the 17th - 18th century and the dressed blocks used to build the church and old Grammar school

Layer N (pink) on the drawing represents slumping that occurred following the removal of the wall. The existing wall was built to stop soil creep down the slope.

Finds: 200 sherds of Roman pottery were found; not many in view of the amount of earth moved.

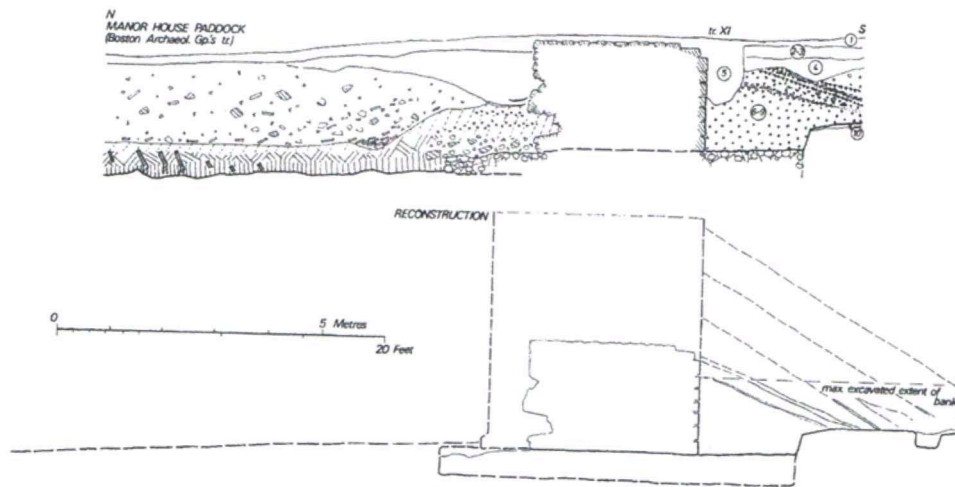


The 1959 section of Caistor's Roman defences. It is interesting to note that Health and Safety was a prime consideration.



Vehicle inspection pit at the back of a property on Castle Hill, not recorded by Rahtz. (X)

Pit lined pit with a large stone incorporated into one side. While this appears to have been dressed it would be difficult to argue that it represents part of the defences.



For comparison, the section of the Roman wall at Horncastle, from Field and Hurst

## Conclusions and further action.

Dressed stones were present on the sites visited but it was impossible to say how many of them were in-situ, the demolition of the Roman walls would have provided large amounts of dressed stone for reuse. Features which might have allowed these walls to be dated to the Roman period were absent; there were no signs of tile bonding courses (although these were also absent at Horncastle) and much of masonry was coarse and irregularly laid. It must also be recognised that some sections of walling were in areas vulnerable to landslips and needed retaining walls as Rahtz found with the recent wall above his excavation. Some concern was felt over the Roman dating of the wall in the cellar of the Pizza Takeaway in Market Square (K) which might be interpreted as being of the same date as the cellar. This might also be true of the walling in the cellar of Caistor House although this was not seen. The expedition was, however, most useful as it confirmed how little we know of Roman Caistor and its walls and it is clear that research is needed to resolve important issue relating to them.

The two most important issues to be resolved are nature of Caistor's Roman wall and its plan. It is vital to establish the form of the wall and its line. The wall at Horncastle was found to be 4m thick, ashlar faced, with a mortared rubble core and backed by an earth bank. It would be most useful to know if the Caistor walls were of similar configuration. A well preserved fragment of wall could be compared to the surviving remains and might confirm their Roman date. As a research and management tool it would be important to know how deeply buried are the Roman remains and the nature of the deposits that cover them. In order to interpret the possible surviving walls they need to be recorded to modern standards so that their lines and levels can be compared. In two places (Cromwell View and the School

grounds) we have what are likely to be the remains of the wall's rubble core. Limited excavations in these areas would be useful to resolve their nature and that of surrounding deposits.

The excavation carried out by Rahtz in 1959 suggests that the original line of the wall lay outside of its present perimeter, beyond the present retaining wall. This needs to be tested by means of small scale trial excavations. The section of wall forming the boundary of the garden of the Old Vicarage would be ideal as this area would allow trial trenching both inside and outside of the line of the wall. It might also be possible to obtain sections of the walls by cleaning the roadside banks on Castle Hill (A on the plan).

It would be useful to find traces of the ditches that surrounded Caistor's Roman walls. The best way to achieve this would be to carry out a geophysical survey in the area next to the non-conformist cemetery which remains undeveloped.

The recommended programme for the resolution of these issues would be a review of all of the documentary evidence for Roman Caistor: what is known, in archaeology as a 'desk top survey'. Other excavations and evaluations have been carried out in Caistor since 1959 and these data should be brought together. The desk top survey should provide a position statement on which a project design would be based and for which funding should be sought.

*To return to Rahtz's 1959 work, Caistor has surely waited long enough for a further extension of its history'*

### Bibliography

Field, F N and Hurst, N 1983. 'Roman Horncastle', *Lincs Hist Archaeol* 18, 47-88.

Rahtz, P 'Caistor, Lincolnshire, 1959', *The Antiquaries Journal*, Volume 40, July—October 1960, pp 175-187