

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title Newport, Shropshire	Details Archaeological Evaluation
Road Number	Date March 1991
Contractor B.U.F.A.U.	
County Shropshire	
OS Reference SJ 41	
Single sided <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Double sided	
A3 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Colour <input type="checkbox"/>	

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

Report No. 151

March 1991

NEWPORT, SHROPSHIRE

An
Archaeological Evaluation

1991

by A.E. Jones

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux (Manager), Peter Leach or Iain Ferris (Assistant Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 021 414 5513

NEWPORT, SHROPSHIRE
An Archaeological Evaluation 1991

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	The site and its setting
3.0	The archaeological results
4.0	Discussion
5.0	Implications
6.0	Acknowledgements
7.0	References

Figures.

- Figure 1A The Shrewsbury area
- Figure 1B The Newport area
- Figure 1C The site
- Figure 2 Simplified sections: Trenches I and II

NEWPORT, SHROPSHIRE

An Archaeological Evaluation

1991

1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.1: The evaluation

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of a length of a linear bank earthwork (Shropshire SMR No. 803) at Church Aston, near Newport, Shropshire (centred on NGR. SJ 4741752), and their archaeological implications (Figure 1A). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned by the Highways and Transport Department of Shropshire County Council in March 1991 to undertake the archaeological evaluation in advance of the construction of the Newport Bypass.

The bank measures a maximum of 1.8m in height, and is visible for a total length of 170m on a north-south alignment, east of The Knoll (Figure 1C). ~~The bank has been interpreted as a manmade earthwork defining an estate boundary described in a 10th-century Saxon charter.~~ The bank marks part of the present boundary between the parishes of Church Aston to the west and Chetwynd Aston to the east. The wooded bank forms a scarp, approximately 5m wide at the top, dividing modern arable fields to either side. It is more steeply defined to the east, where slight traces of a ditch are visible at the base of the scarp in places. Proposed road construction works involve the levelling of a length of approximately 60m of the bank.

The aims of the evaluation were to assess the survival, quality, condition and archaeological significance of the linear earthwork, and to make recommendations for further archaeological input, if appropriate (Watson 1991).

1.2: Method

Two trenches (I and II) were dug within the line of the proposed road corridor, perpendicular to the line of the bank, to investigate its composition, profile, and the sequence of deposits (Figure 1C). Trench I, 3m wide, was dug in two stages. A 1.5m wide trench was dug by JCB under archaeological control to expose the natural bedrock. Topsoil along a further width of 1.5m to the north was also removed by JCB, prior to the systematic excavation of archaeological deposits, and the cleaning and recording of the machined sections. Trench II, 25m north of Trench I, was dug inside the northern road margin to provide an additional profile of the bank deposits. This trench was dug by machine to a maximum depth of 1m below the modern surface of the scarp, and the sections were cleaned and recorded.

~~Recording was by means of pro-forma recording sheets, supplemented by plans, sections and photographs comprising the archive, which will be deposited with Shropshire County Council.~~

2.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

The site is located 1km south of Newport, to the east of the village of Church Aston (Figure 1B). The underlying geological solid deposit is red Triassic sandstone, overlain by shallow glacial sands and gravels. Around Newport, these sands and gravels take the form of eskers - ridges and mounds formed by subglacial streams during the retreat of the ice-front across the district (Whitehead 1927, 7).

Perhaps the first mention of Church Aston is in a charter of 963 (Birch, (ed) Cartularium Saxonum No. 1119), which mentions a grant of land in a place called 'Eastun', identified by Finberg (1961, 28) as Church Aston. Finberg (1961, 29-30) has attempted to retrace the estate boundaries described in this charter on the ground, using modern topographic and place-name evidence, but he did not include the bank at Church Aston in his account of the charter's boundary perambulation. If Finberg is correct the 'great dyke' or 'boundary dyke' referred to in the charter may not refer

to the bank at Church Aston, but to other earthworks, of possibly similar form. Finberg's interpretation is convincing because the village name 'Eastun', refers to its position in relation to Edgemond (Figure 1B), from where it was settled, and the proximity of Lilleshall, referred to as 'lil saetna' in the charter. The cartographic evidence is unclear: a map dated 1681 shows the manorial boundary following the line of the bank, but the bank itself is not shown. A tithe map of 1842 shows the bank dividing pasture to the west from arable land to the east.

3.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS (Figure 2)

3.1: Trench I

Natural sandstone bedrock was exposed over almost the entire length of the trench. The bedrock forms a plateau at the western end of the trench, 1.8m below the modern surface, dipping gently and unevenly eastwards. The bedrock was overlain by laminated deposits of glacially-deposited, alternating sands and gravels, c. 1m deep and angled at approximately 30 degrees in the western part of the trench. The eastern edge of the sands and gravels was cut back to form a vertically-sided negative lynchet (F101), caused by earlier episodes of repeated ploughing against this side of the scarp. Sands and gravels mixed with patches of pink clay (1002) had slumped down this side of the scarp, filling the hollow in the negative lynchet.

A poorly-defined layer of stony brown silt-clay (1001), a maximum of 0.1m deep, and heavily disturbed by roots, was exposed above the sands and gravels. This layer corresponds both in position and width with the top of the modern scarp and may represent the base of a heavily truncated manmade bank (F100), built over the glacial scarp.

The silt clay deposit (1001) was sealed by a heavily root-disturbed dark grey topsoil (1000), which merged with the ploughsoil overlying the natural sands and gravels to the east and west of the bank. The topsoil was cut by a modern field drainage ditch (F102), on the east side of the bank, and

following its alignment.

3.2: Trench II

A similar sequence of deposits was encountered in Trench II, but bedrock was not exposed here. Natural banded sands and gravels were truncated on the east side of the scarp as a result of an earlier phase of repeated ploughing, and redeposited sands and gravels (2005) had accumulated over this negative lynchet (F204).

~~A layer of disturbed brown stony silt clay (F200: 2001), a maximum of 0.15m deep and 3m wide, exposed above natural sands and gravels, was equivalent to the possible bank (F100) in Trench I. In Trench II this layer was sealed by root-disturbed topsoil (2000), notably shallower than in Trench I.~~

~~A flat-based quarry pit (F201), 2m across, was dug through the topsoil and the base of the possible bank (F200) below, on the west side of the scarp. A single piece of 18th-century roof tile recovered from the fills of F201 was the only artifact recovered during the evaluation. The field boundary ditch recorded in Trench I (F102) was also recorded in this trench (F202) at the foot of the bank. The southern edge of a small ditch (F203), aligned approximately northeast-southwest was partially exposed at the eastern end of the trench.~~

4.0: DISCUSSION

Despite the undoubted continuity of the boundary defined by this scarp, dating from at least 1681, and maintained up to the present, its attribution, based on documentary evidence, as the Saxon estate boundary described in the document of 963 is doubtful. The evaluation has demonstrated the surviving scarp to be predominantly composed of sands and gravels, deposited during the retreat of an ice-front during the last glaciation.

The shallow layer of silt-clay encountered in Trenches I and II (1001,

2001) appears to be mostly confined to the top of this scarp, although some weathering down the east side was evident in Trench I. Too little of this heavily root-disturbed material survives to permit its clear identification. This silt clay may represent a relict overall subsoil layer beneath the topsoil, scoured-out by repeated deep ploughing on either side of the bank. Alternatively this layer may be the heavily truncated and root-disturbed base of a manmade bank built to take advantage of the prominent glacial scarp. This feature (F100/F200) cannot be directly dated from artifactual evidence, but the 18th-century tile fragment recovered from the quarry pit (F201) which post-dates it, provides an approximate terminus ante quem.

The negative lynchet (F101, F204), more pronounced in Trench I, was formed on the east side of the scarp. No counterpart was visible on the west side, where the ground level was higher, and ploughing may not have been underway for so long. The limit of ploughing to the east is currently 3-4m away from the buried negative lynchet, which now lies within the existing belt of woodland and scrub.

5.0: IMPLICATIONS

The scarp does not merit preservation in situ as an archaeological feature. Further examination and recording of the base of the earthwork is however desirable to obtain a more extensive archaeological examination within the area threatened by road construction than was possible during the present evaluation. This work could ideally be undertaken during groundworks preliminary to road construction. It is recommended that a watching brief be maintained during the groundworks, with provision for salvage recording, to enable the identification and recording of other (possibly better preserved) parts of this enigmatic earthwork.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was sponsored by Shropshire County Council, Department of Highways and Transport. The project was supervised by Alex Jones, assisted by Ed Newton, Martin Lightfoot, Gigi Signorelli, Rob Atkins and Sally Finter. ~~Peter Leach advised and edited this report, which was produced at~~ BUFAU by Liz Hooper. The illustrations were drawn by Mark Breedon. I am grateful for permission to use the written summary of the documentary sources compiled by Mike Watson and William Fletcher. I am also grateful to the landowners, Mr and Mrs Fowler, Mr G.E. Marsh of Middle Farm and and to Mike Watson, Senior Archaeologist, Shropshire County Council for their assistance.

7.0: REFERENCES

- Finberg, H.P.R. 1961 'Three Anglo-Saxon Boundaries' Trans. Shrops. Arch. Soc. 28-33.
- Watson, M.D. 1991 Brief for an archaeological evaluation of a linear earthwork at Church Aston, Shropshire. unpub.
- Whitehead, T.H. 1927 The Country between Stafford and Market Drayton. Memoirs of the Geological Survey of England and Wales.

NEWPORT, SHROPSHIRE

Evaluation 1991

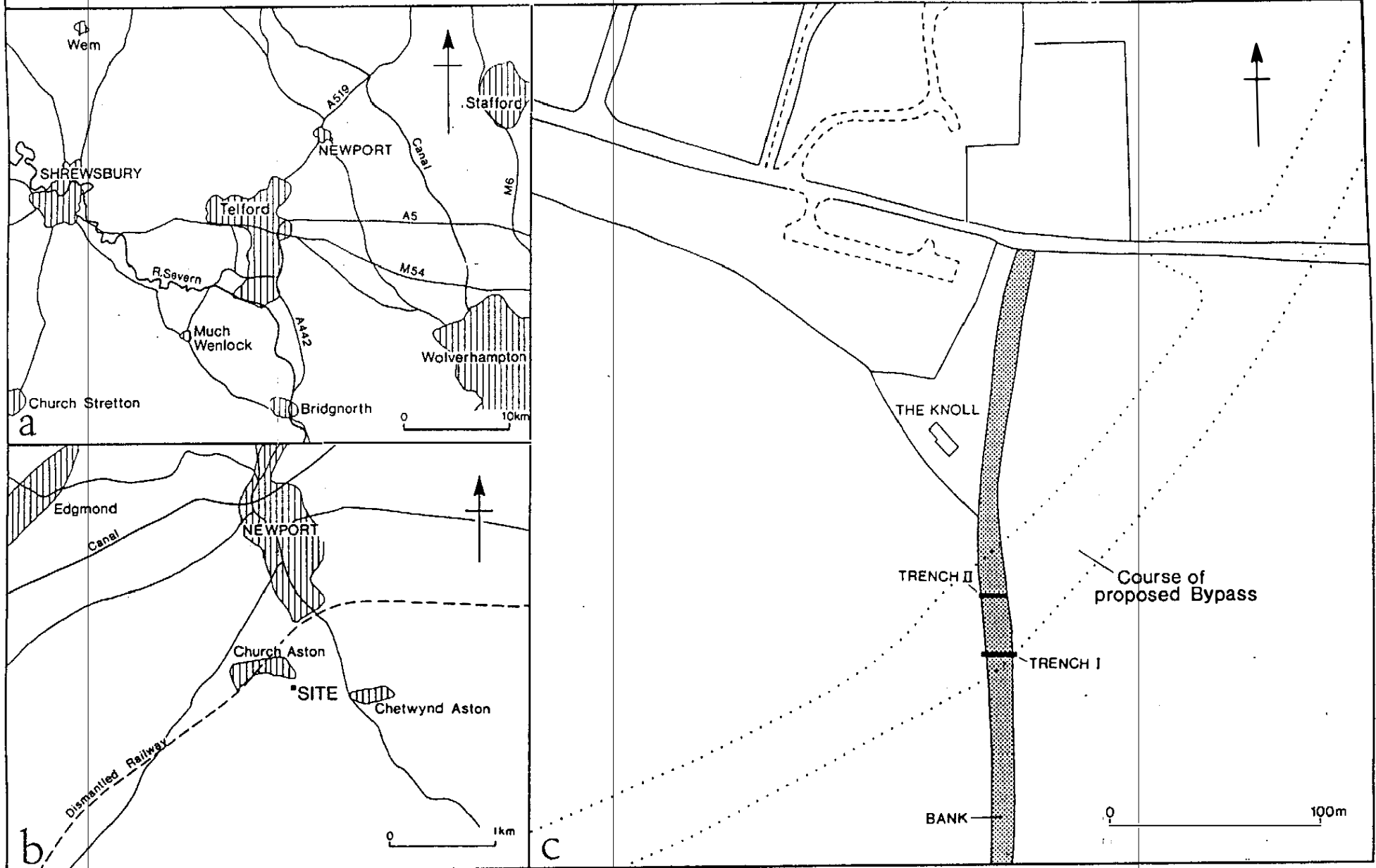


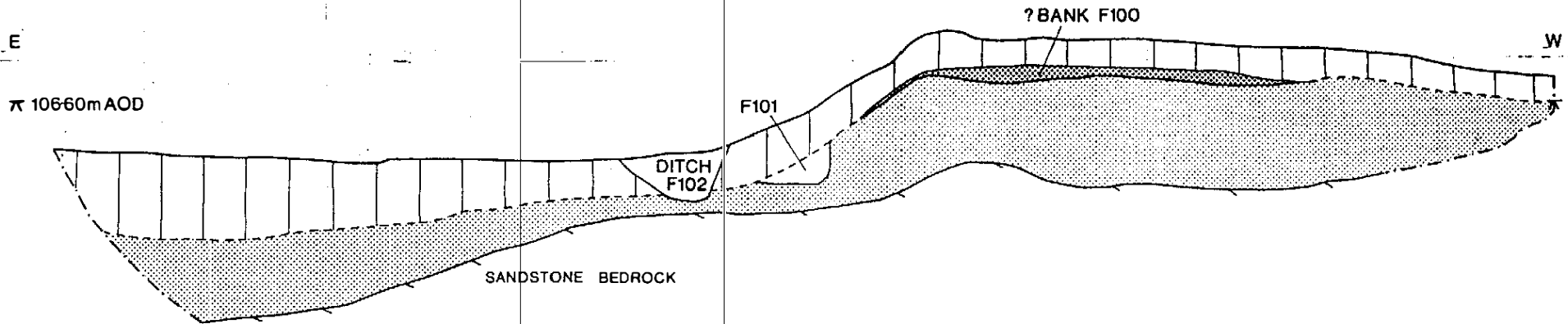
Figure 1

NEWPORT 1991

Simplified Sections

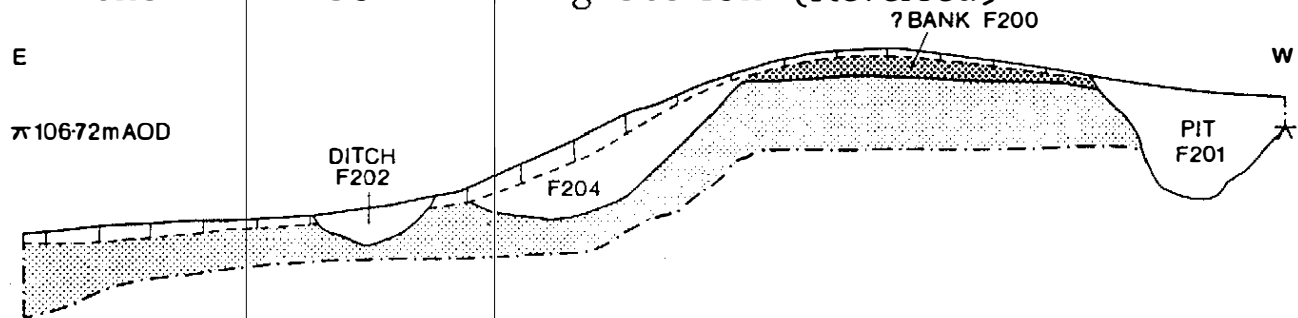
Trench I

North facing Section



Trench II

South facing Section (Reversed)



Key

||| Topsoil

■ Natural Banded Sands and Gravels

0 5m

Figure 2