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BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

Pelsall Hall, Pelsall

An archaeological evaluation

1989

By Alex Jones

B.U.F.A.U.



PELSALL HALL, PELSALL
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Report

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1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation at Pelsall Hall, Pelsall, near Walsall (Figure 1A: Figure 1B). Despite the examination of extensive areas by hand excavation, no archaeologically sensitive deposits were contacted within the areas proposed for development. A geophysical survey of part of the grounds produced negative evidence which confirmed the results of excavation of part of Area E (Figure 1C: Figure 2A/B).

2.0: INTRODUCTION

In March 1989 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (B.U.F.A.U.) was commissioned by Mr A. Baugeerutty, the landowner, to undertake an archaeological evaluation in the grounds of Pelsall Hall, centred on N.G.R. SK 01600324. The areas investigated form part of the Hall's ornamental gardens and are proposed for development as new residential care and housing units (Figure 1C). The purpose of the evaluation was to provide information on the nature, survival and location of archaeologically sensitive deposits, to establish the implications of the impending development on the surviving archaeology.

Eleven trenches in five areas were excavated in the east and south-west of the grounds, providing an extensive examination of the areas affected by the development (Figure 1C). In the east area, trenches were excavated close to modern brick-built outbuildings, (Trenches A-C: Figure 1C). A 1m square sondage was dug to the north of the Hall (Trench D: Figure 1C). Five trenches were dug in the south west of the grounds (Trenches E1-E5: Figure 1C), in the area more widely examined by geophysical survey (Figure 2).

In each case the deposits encountered were hand excavated to a natural base, and a detailed photographic and written record made to achieve an understanding of the sequence and nature of the layers found.

This report presents a summary of the information obtained by excavation and geophysical survey, supplemented by background documentary research.

3.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

Pelsall Hall (West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record No. 2660) is located 3km north east of Walsall, in the centre of the modern village of Pelsall (Figure 1A), within the area of the South Staffordshire Coalfield. Surrounding coal seams, located at ca. 50m below the surface were extensively mined in the 19th century. Overlying the coal is a deposit of boulder clay and Bunter-derived pebbles (Barrow, 1919). The site occupies a naturally formed plateau, with land falling away to the south-west.

Little is known of the early history of the area. An Anglo-Saxon road, known as 'Alde strete', crosses Bloxwich and Pelsall on its way between

Wolverhampton and Lichfield (Baker, 1989). At the time of the Domesday Book the area was densely wooded, forming part of Cannock Chase until the 13th century. The earliest settlement was probably concentrated in the area of the Clockmill stream, to the south-west of Pelsall Hall. A church was built in Paradise Lane around 1300, when the Pelsall area was still sparsely populated (Hammond, 1981). The disused graveyard adjoining the Hall is comparatively recent, dating from 1763 (Figure 1C). Archaeological excavations at Moat Farm 1 km north-east of Pelsall Hall have uncovered evidence of a settlement site dating from the 17th century (Milln and Hodder, 1988). The existence of a second moated site in the vicinity (West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record No. 2643) was noted by local antiquary Stebbing Shaw (Shaw, 1801):

'In Parkfields, opposite what is now called Pelsall Hall, is a grove in which are the evident traces of an ancient moated house, the sides of the moat being pretty perfect but the others mutilated by old local pits'

The exact location of this site is uncertain. It is probable that this moated site was only a short distance away from the present Pelsall Hall (Figure 1C). The reference to Pelsall Hall relates to an earlier building (the present structure dates from 1891). Cartographic evidence indicates an L-shaped structure recorded in the 1841 Tithe Map, and described earlier by Shaw (Shaw, 1801), in substantially the same position as the present Hall. The earliest reference to a Pelsall Hall is in a perambulation of 1634 (Hammond, 1981): it may relate to the same structure as that noted as being 'ancient and decrepit' in The Gentleman's Magazine in 1799.

4.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

4.1: The east area (Trenches A,B,C1-C3)

Trench A, measuring 6m by 1m, was located in a flower-bed (Figure 1C). Natural red-orange silt clay, overlain by ca. 0.1m of stony gravel, was contacted 0.9m below the modern surface. A naturally formed steep-sided gully of irregular shape, aligned approximately north-south, up to 1m wide, cut into this clay and was filled with rounded quartzite pebbles. A dark brown stony silt above, ca. 0.4m in depth, contained flecks of charcoal and merged into the natural below. Above, a fine lens of orange silt clay was sealed by up to 0.2m of dark brown humic silt soil, which contained predominantly 19th-century artifacts.

A similar sequence of deposits was uncovered in Trench B. Natural orange silt-clay was contacted at ca. 1m below the modern surface, sealing a homogenous brown silt, ca. 0.4m in depth containing localised pockets of rounded pebbles. Three sherds of redeposited Medieval pottery were recovered from the base of the modern topsoil: two fragments of Buff-White Ware, and a rim-fragment of black ?cooking pot, all of probable 14th-century date, mixed with 19th-century artifacts.

Three 1m square sondages in the Tennis Court area, (Trenches C1-C3: Figure 1C) encountered a similar sequence of layers. Natural clay was contacted 0.8m below the modern surface, overlain by a dark brown silt (not seen in C3), sealed by an orange silt, flecked with charcoal, beneath the modern

topsoil which contained 19th-century artifacts.

No archaeological features or deposits were contacted in Trenches A, B, C1-C3.

4.2: Trench D

A sondage 1m square was dug to investigate the possibility of survival of an earlier structure beneath the present Hall (Figure 1C). The top of an intact brick-vaulted cellar was contacted ca. 0.2m below the modern surface. The cellar had been mostly backfilled, and ?recently blocked-off. The vault was sealed by make-up levels for the modern tarmac drive above. Further brick-vaulted cellars remain open on the south side of the house.

4.3: The south-west area (Trenches E1-E5) and geophysical survey

4.3.1: Excavation

A series of five discontinuous trenches (Trenches E1-E5) 1m wide and 2-4m in length were excavated in the area examined by geophysical survey (Figure 1C). The results reveal a similar sequence of deposits to that uncovered elsewhere. Natural stony gravel was encountered at ca. 0.5m below the modern turfed surface. In Trench E2 a small area of disturbance was noted in the gravel, but this was probably geological in origin. The orange-brown silt-soil above was sealed by a dark brown humic silt soil.

4.3.2: Geophysical survey

An area 28m by 15m was examined by resistivity survey to provide a rapid investigation of an area proposed for development in the longer-term (Figure 1C). A resistivity meter (Atlas Copco SAS 300 Terrameter) was employed to inject an electrical current into the ground via two metal electrodes mounted on a 1m square array frame, and the current, returned through the ground to the apparatus via the array's second pair of electrodes, was measured and recorded. Different soils vary considerably in resistance to the flow of electricity, depending on their constituents and wetness, and thus detailed and accurate measurements of soil resistivity can detect subtle changes (anomalies) in the near subsurface which may be due to natural processes or manmade features, such as walls and ditches. Measurements were taken at 1m intervals, at a depth of investigation ca. 0.45m below the modern surface.

The information obtained from the resistivity survey may be combined with the results of the limited trial-trenching, to build up a picture of the deposits over the wider area covered by the geophysical survey. The upper horizon of natural stony gravel was contacted in Trenches E1-E5, at ca. 0.5m below the surface, (approximately the depth of investigation of the resistivity survey). Readings of resistivity in the area of trenches E1-E5 were within the range 400-750 Ohm Metres, indicating a substantial depth of stony gravel (Figure 2A/2B). Readings increase to the north in a gradual, but discernible trend across the whole of the area surveyed, from ca. 500-2000 Ohm Metres. The results suggest the presence of a considerable depth of well-drained stony gravel. The range of readings may result from differences in the depth of topsoil above, and in the depth of the gravel

itself. Results from other excavated areas indicate variation in the depth of the naturally deposited gravel. No manmade features were noted within Trench E and the area of the survey.

5.0: DISCUSSION

No intact archaeological deposits or features were uncovered in the areas proposed for development, despite extensive examination. The gully located in Trench A, and the slight disturbance noted in Trench E2 almost certainly derive from geological processes of erosion, mixing and deposition.

In view of the likely proximity of a moated settlement (Figure 1C), the dearth of finds (except from Trench B) and archaeological deposits is surprising. It is possible that recent disturbance in the area of the outbuildings has destroyed earlier occupation levels. The build-up of deposits above natural was notably shallower in Trench E than that encountered elsewhere, suggesting the manmade truncation, or natural erosion of up to 0.4m of soil. No documentary evidence exists for building here, and the shallower depth may be best accounted by erosion down the nearby slope to the south-west.

The orange-brown sand-silt located in all the evaluation trenches may be a late Post-Medieval ploughsoil, or derive from the early cultivation of the Hall gardens.

The location of extensive cellarage both to the north and south of the present Pelsall Hall suggests a limited potential for the survival of earlier structures or occupation deposits within the immediate vicinity of the present Pelsall Hall. This area is not however threatened by the present development. The potential for such deposits both to the immediate east and west of the Hall remains untested.

6.0: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of this evaluation the risk posed by the proposed development to archaeological deposits can be considered to be minimal. However, the present evaluation has not neutralised, or written-off the archaeological potential of all of the areas proposed for development, nor the remainder of the grounds of Pelsall Hall. The excavation of service trenches and wall footings will involve the disturbance of areas, not all of which could be adequately evaluated on this occasion. We therefore recommend that a watching brief be undertaken by a qualified archaeologist during the initial phase of groundworks.

7.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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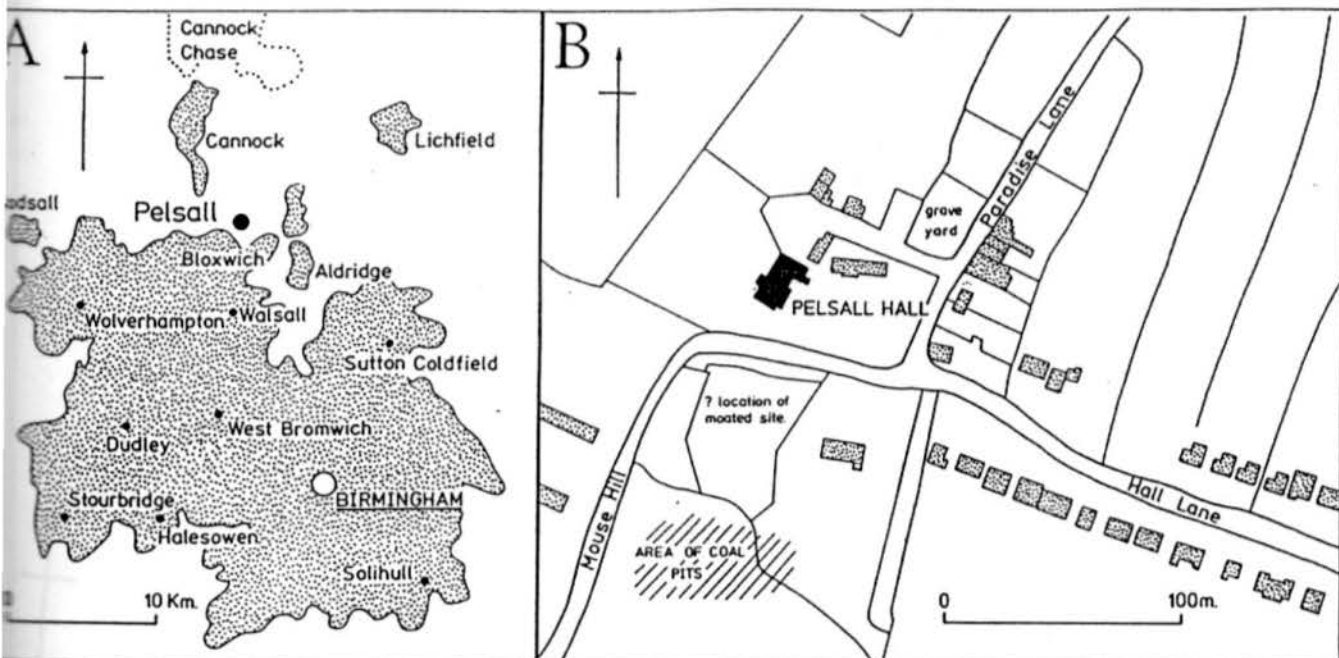
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C Areas of archaeological investigation

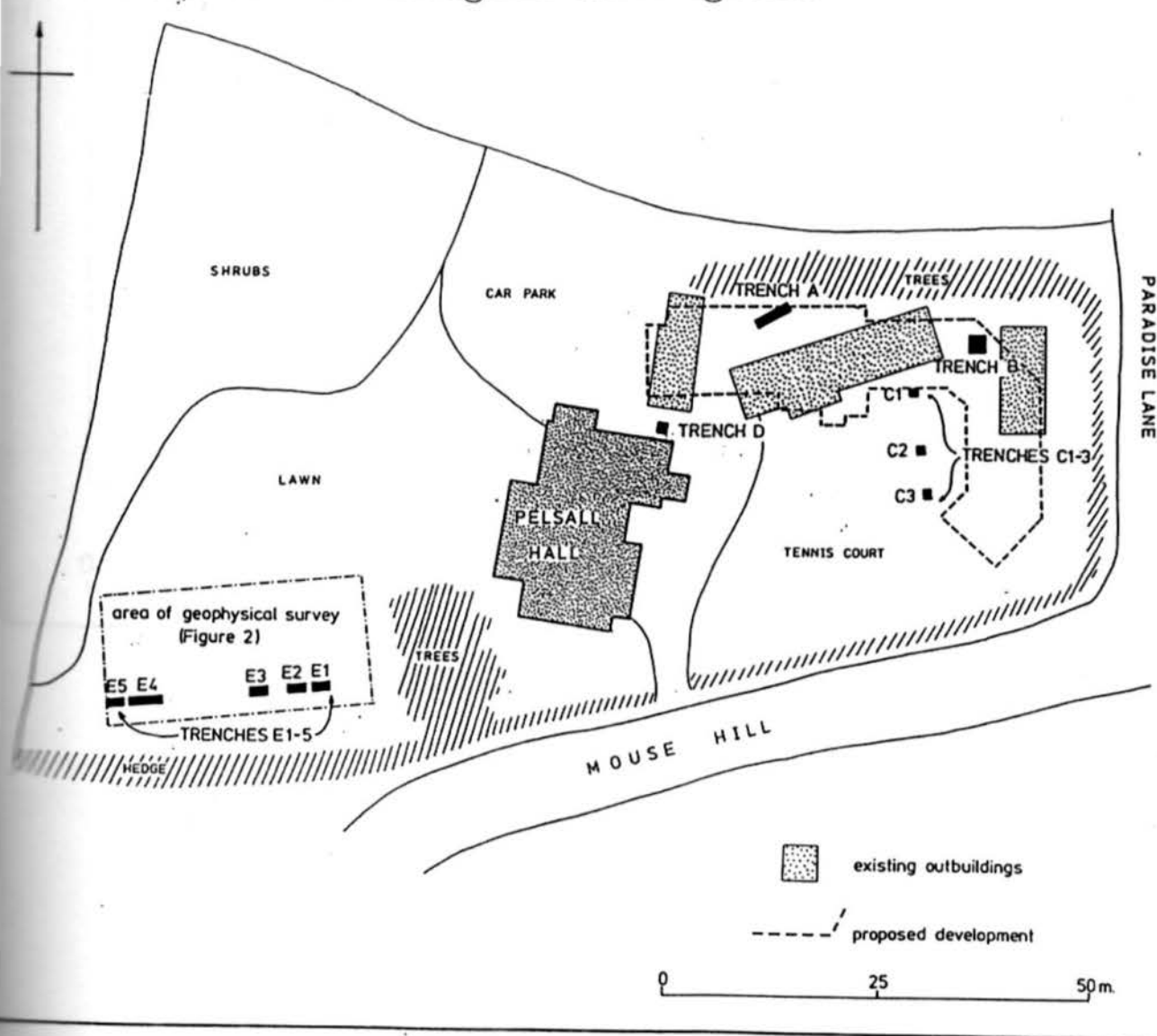
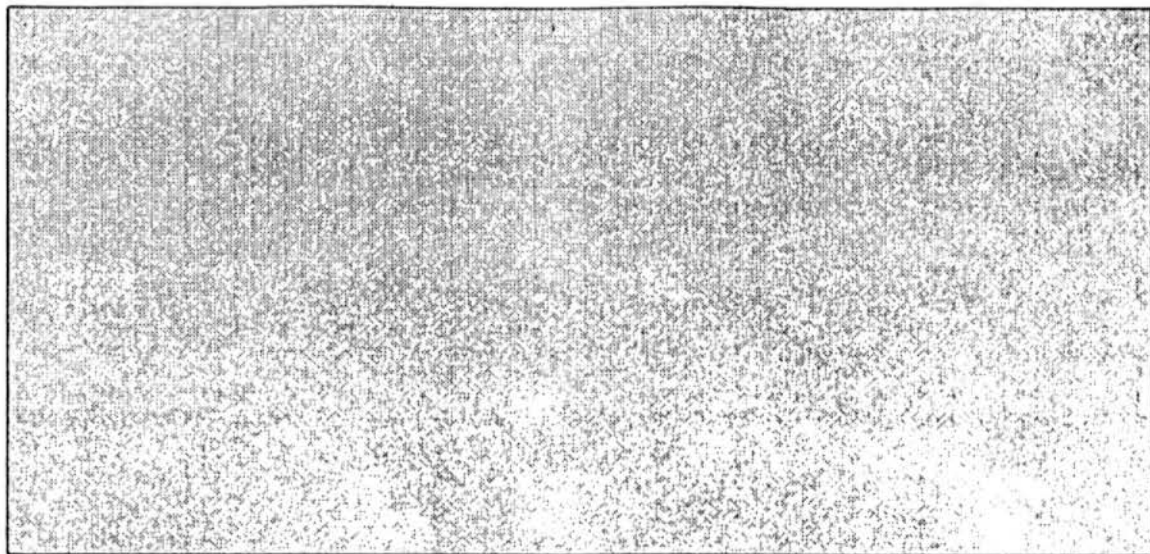
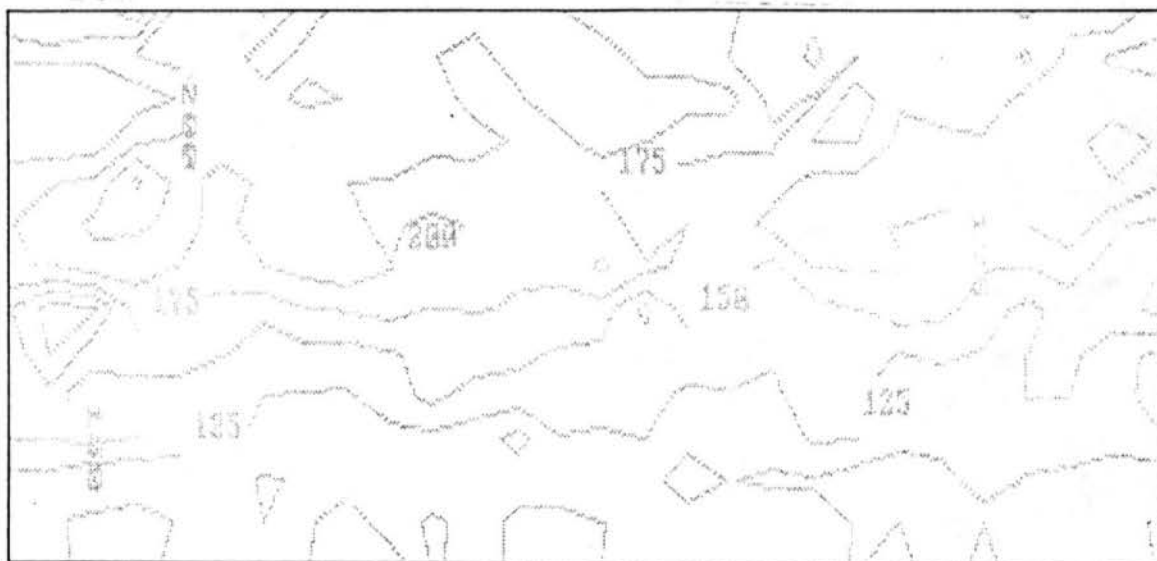


Figure 1

A



B



0 10m.

Figure 2