

**The Moat-House**  
**Acton Trussell, Staffordshire**  
**An archaeological evaluation**  
**August 1989**  
**By Anthony Clarke**

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**INTERIM REPORT**  
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## THE MOAT-HOUSE

### ACTON TRUSSELL, STAFFORDSHIRE

#### An archaeological evaluation 1989

##### 1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation at the Moat-House, Acton Trussell, Staffordshire, in advance of development (Figure 1A). No archaeologically sensitive deposits were contacted within the limited area available for evaluation. The majority of the deposits encountered probably derive from successive dumping following recent construction in the adjoining service yard (Figure 1C).

##### 2.0: INTRODUCTION

An archaeological assessment was undertaken in August 1989 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit of land adjacent to the Moat-House, Acton Trussell, Staffordshire (Figure 1B), (centred on NGR. SJ 317 393). The work was commissioned by Mr J, Lewis, the landowner, to provide an assessment of the archaeological implications of the development prior to the consideration of an application for planning consent.

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide information on the nature, depth and extent of archaeological deposits within the threatened area, and in particular to recover evidence for the construction of the moat platform, the possible remains of a palisade, moat revetment or ancillary buildings at the south edge of the platform.

The area available for archaeological investigation was limited. A trench (Trench I) was dug on an east-west alignment between the southern boundary of the service yard and a temporarily located marquee (Figure 1B). Efforts were concentrated at either end of Trench I following the definition of modern service trenches in the centre of the trench. This trench was later extended northwards to form Trench II (Figure 1C).

In both trenches the deposits encountered were systematically excavated to a natural base where possible. Recording was by means of written proformas, drawn sections, plans and photographs.

The following report is an assessment of the archaeological results and the implications of the impending development for the survival of archaeological deposits.

### 3.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

#### 3.1: Acton Trussell.

The name of Acton Trussell derives from Acton (Actone), an Anglo-Saxon word meaning oaktown. Trussell is the name of a Norman family who held lands in Staffordshire and were early lords of Acton (Duignan 1902).

The village is situated 4.8 km south-east of Stafford, in the valley of the River Penk. The surrounding countryside is low lying but rises in the north-east at Acton Hill to 110 metres. The local drift geology is a fine orange sand.

The church of St James, 0.5m km to the south of the village, dates originally from the 13th and 14th century and is situated on high ground. Recently the remains of a Roman apsidal-ended stone building were discovered adjacent to and continuing beneath the northern boundary of the churchyard (Haberley 1986).

#### 3.2: The Moat-House

The moat-house stands on the site of the former Manor House of the Trussell family at the south end of Acton Trussell village. The Public House which now occupies the centre of the moat-platform is a conversion of earlier manorial buildings.

The oldest part of the present structure, on the east side, dates from the late 15th century and is a very fine close-studded cross wing with a

double-arch braced roof. A brick wing at right angles to the original block was added to the west side c. 1700, and the building was later converted to a hotel. Two large external chimneys, with stone bases and later brickstacks, are probably additions of the early 17th century and much of the exterior has been faced with brickwork.

Redundant joints at the junction of the Georgian structure and the cross-wing indicate that the Georgian building replaces a 13th-14th-century medieval building, possibly a base-cruck open hall. The cross-passage of the hall would have been at the end opposite the cross-wing, with service buildings beyond. Excavations undertaken by the Tong Archaeological Group prior to the construction of an extension onto the Georgian building uncovered a series of post-holes parallel to the brick building. This evidence may suggest that the 13/14th-century medieval hall replaced an earlier post-built hall.

### 3.3: The Moat

The moat, originally large and oval in shape, was probably of early medieval date. The west side was destroyed in the 18th century by the construction of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal, and was later re-aligned to run south-north through the western edge of the village (Figure 1B). The south-west corner of the moat platform may be defined on the ground by a gentle slope to the west of Trench II (Figure 1C). The north arm, fed from the canal, and the eastern arm remain visible and are filled with water. The southern arm of the moat has been filled in and the area is now occupied by a tarmac car park and marquee. The moat was formerly supplied by a small stream from the east.

## 4.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

### 4.1: Trench I (Figure 1C)

A trench, 14 metres long X 1.5m metres wide, aligned east to west was excavated along the outside wall of the Moat-House service area and a sondage dug at each end. The trench was then extended northwards by one

metre at its eastern end, up to the outside wall of the service yard.

In the eastern sondage natural orange-red sand was contacted 0.95m below the modern ground surface (1005). Several irregular naturally-formed depressions were cut into the contaminated upper horizon of natural and may be interpreted as bush-root holes. Above the natural was a dark organic black silt (1004) which contained brick and concrete rubble and mortar. The base of a 19th century bottle was also found. This area was very damp. A large quantity of recently buried wood was found, which along with other finds, shows this layer to be of modern derivation. Above 1004 was a more natural buff-grey silt which contained occasional sand lenses (1001). Above 1001 was a fine discontinuous layer of sand and mortar (1002). Layers 1001 and 1002 were cut by two modern service trenches (F101, F103). These features and modern dumping within this area would have destroyed any medieval deposits. Above 1001 was the modern turf and topsoil (1000) which contained brick rubble, late 19th and 20th century pottery sherds, modern water pipe fragments, wood, plastic and glass.

A similar sequence of deposits was encountered in the western sondage.

#### 4.2: Trench II (Figure 1C Figure 2)

An extension measuring 2m by 1m, was dug perpendicular to Trench I, to profile the natural and man-made deposits in this area.

The excavation of Trench II revealed a natural buff-orange sand (2005) 0.95m below the ground surface. The natural sand was of a clean fine nature and sloped 0.55m from north to south. This manmade cut was observed to align with a gentle slope of the ground surface between Trench II and the canal which may define the extent of the moat-platform in this area. Above natural sand was a layer of homogenous fine buff-grey silt (2004), similar to that found in Trench I (1001). Above this layer was a mixed deposit of mid-brown silt clay which contained small pebbles, flecks of mortar and coal (2003). This layer also contained modern uncorroded metal and a lens of unrotted vegetation which showed it to be a very recent deposit. Above

2003 was a layer of hard red silt clay (2001) which contained flecks of red-brown clay and occasional small pebbles. This layer was covered by a grassed topsoil (1001) which was notably shallow in this area.

## 5.0: DISCUSSION

The archaeological return from this evaluation was limited, due partly to the statistically small area of the site. The area evaluated has obviously undergone a great deal of modern disturbance, which may have destroyed any earlier occupation levels. The silt that lies immediately above natural sand is clearly a naturally formed deposit, but the layers above are debris deriving from recent building activity.

The location of the manmade cut into natural sand in Trench II may indicate that the alignment of the moat in the south west corner has been intercepted, just inside Trench II.

## 6.0: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1: Implications

On the basis of this evaluation the risk posed by the proposed development to archaeological deposits is considered to be minimal. However, the present evaluation has not neutralised or written off the archaeological potential of all the area proposed for development. The excavation of service trenches and wall footings will involve the disturbance of areas which could not be evaluated on this occasion.

### 6.2: Recommendations

It is recommended that a watching brief, in liaison with the developer, should be undertaken by a qualified archaeologist to monitor any groundworks in the area of the existing service yard and the area immediately to the south of Trench I. (Figure 1C). This will enable the recording of any archaeological features or deposits so uncovered.

#### 7.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Mr J. Lewis of the Moat House, Acton Trussell, for sponsoring this evaluation, and for his hospitality and assistance throughout. We are also grateful to Mr R Meeson, Staffordshire County Council Archaeological Officer, for his advice. Alex Jones directed the project and edited this report with Peter Leach. Simon Buteux was responsible for management of the project and Sonia Hodges prepared the illustrations. We are also grateful to Andrew Rutherford for his assistance on site.

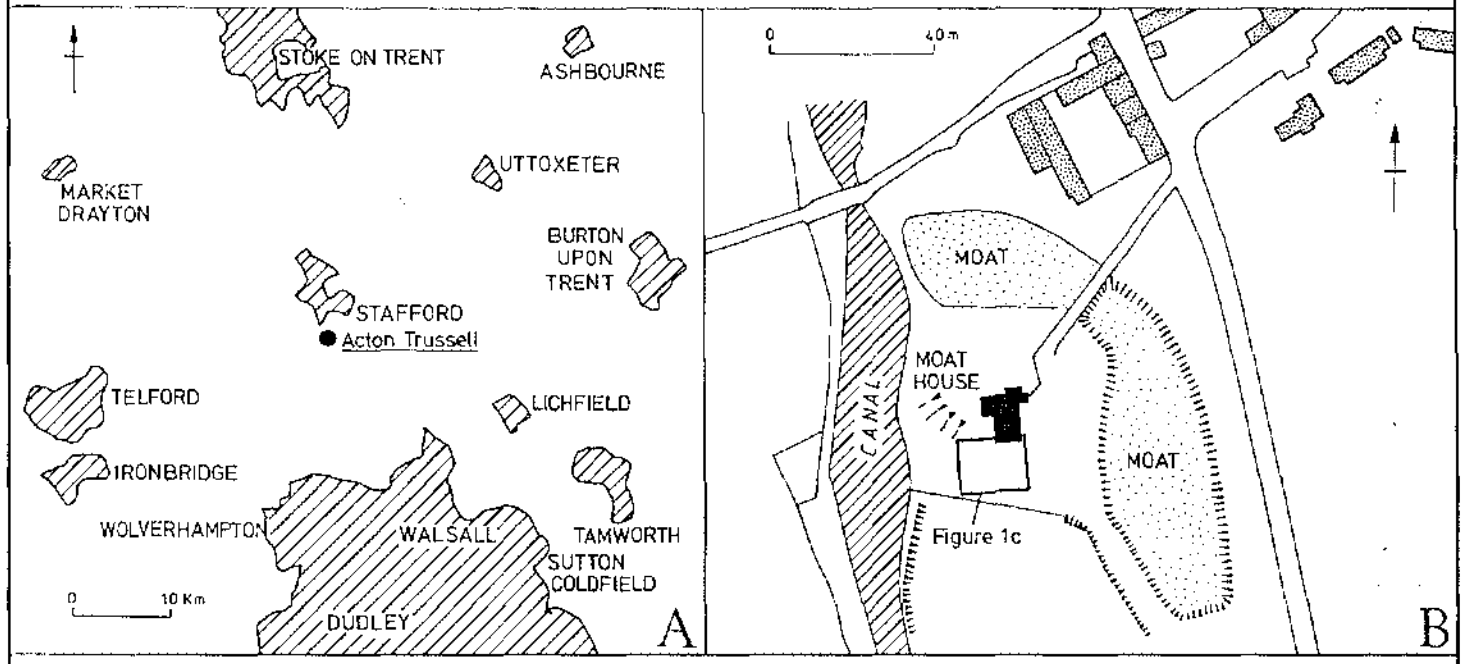
#### 8.0: REFERENCES

- Duignan, T. 1902. Staffordshire Place Names.  
Habberley, T. 1986. 'Roman Excavations at Acton Trussell' West Midlands Archaeology 26, 1986.

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BUFAU, August 1989.**



# ACTON TRUSSELL, STAFFORDSHIRE 1989



## Areas of archaeological investigation

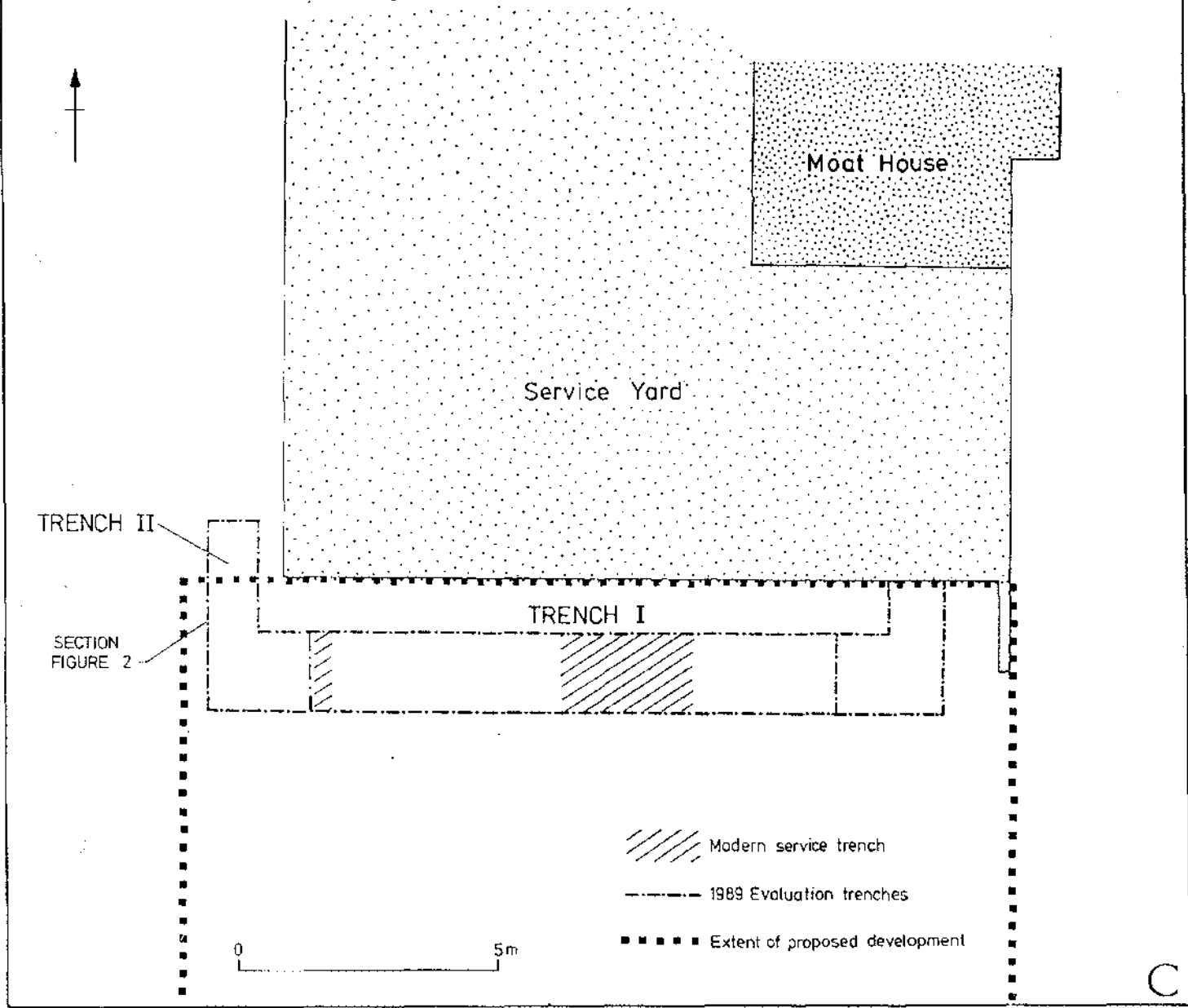


Figure 1

Trench II East Facing Section

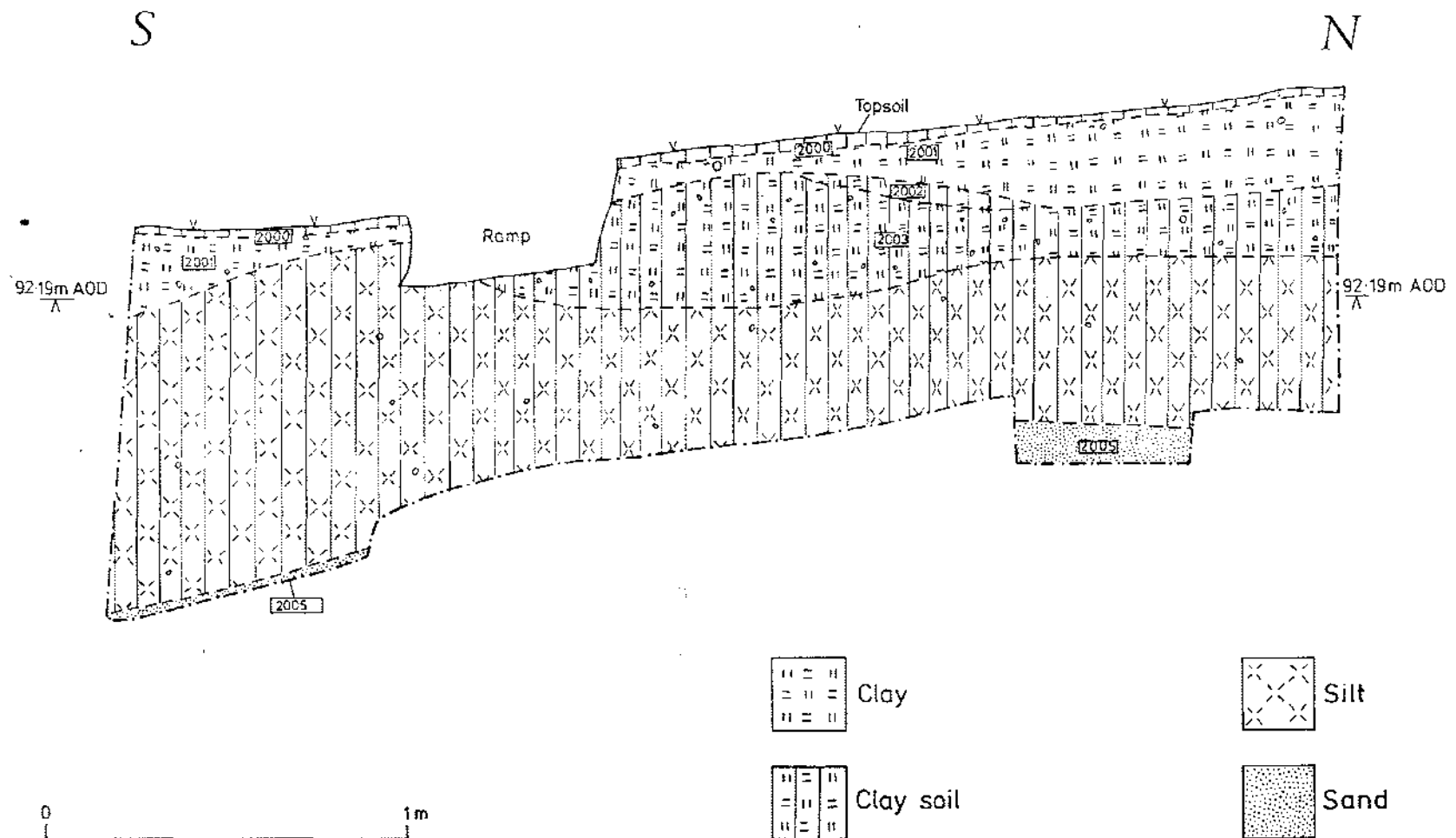


Figure 2