

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
WATLING STREET NORTH, CHURCH STRETTON,
SHROPSHIRE**

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1. Introduction

In late December 1989, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by G.C.W. Architects, of Stoke-on-Trent, to carry out an archaeological investigation on Watling Street North, which was thought to run through existing amenity land, on the northern edge of Church Stretton, Shropshire (NGR SO 447925), in advance of the building of a new road to service a development scheme to the east.

The evaluation was to consist of a hand dug trench, c.1m wide x 4m long, cut transversely across the shared line of the old and proposed roads, from the centre to the hedge line on the western side. The purpose of the trench was to confirm the line of the Roman road and to ascertain the depth and survival of any associated archaeological deposits, to the maximum stated depth of 1.40m.

2. The Evaluation Trench (Figure 1)

The present track was, at the time of excavation, under constant use by farm machines and as it was therefore impossible to excavate a trench across the track in the position initially considered, the evaluation trench was relocated approximately 40m south, to the road and track junction.

Because of the nature of the uppermost deposits, a Kango hammer was used to break up the tarmac and hardcore that was covering the area. A temporary bench mark was situated at the bottom of the north facing wall of the public services building to the south west of the trench, and all levels given in this report relate to that T.B.M. (value 100m) rather than to Ordnance Datum.

Trench A (Figure 1)

A sealing deposit (1000) of tarmac and hardcore was removed with the help of a Kango hammer to a depth of 0.20m below the present surface level. This layer thinned out towards the eastern end of the trench, where an area of modern dumped soils and rubbish was contacted. Growing along this side of the track was a well established thorn

hedge, and a fence, which were to mark the most eastern point of the excavation. Beneath (1000) and the dumped soils was a layer of brown clay/loam (1001) which was cut by two features; (F1) a modern rubbish pit containing an iron bucket and a bicycle (1002) and (F2) which at first appeared to be a possibly earlier hedge line, but upon further excavation was found to be the trench for a large main electrical cable supplying the public services building. The fill of the latter feature (1003) was excavated to a depth of 0.30m. For safety reasons it was thought to be unwise to further excavate in the immediate area of F2, and upon the discovery of a second electric cable, approximately 1m from the hedge line, this area of the trench was abandoned, except for the necessity of the digging of a sump to allow the excavation to continue on the eastern end of the trench.

Upon the excavation of (1001) towards the eastern end of the trench was revealed a thin band/layer of purple clay (1004), approximately 0.10m in depth, which itself overlay a thick deposit of grey leached clay (1005). It was impossible to see any surface detail in this small area, 2m x 1m wide. And, upon excavation of the clay to a depth of 0.70m and after subsequent cleaning, it was confirmed that no features were present in the sections to the north, east and south.

Beneath the clay was a very compact layer of pebbles (1006) ranging in size from 15mm to 50mm diameter. Heavy leaching had occurred over the area from both iron in the soil deposits above, and from oil leaching down from the road and track surfaces. As no finds were recovered from any of the above layers or from the make-up of the cobbles, it is not possible to say whether this was a Roman road surface or indeed in such a small area, a road surface at all, although when seen in section there is a slight curve or possible camber? to the upper surface of the cobbling. This layer of pebbles (1006) was excavated to a depth of 0.83m below the present surface.

Sealed beneath this was another layer of grey clay (1007) similar in texture to (1005). Again no finds were recovered from this layer and this was excavated to a depth of 0.95m at the western edge of the

reduced trench. Finally, beneath (1007), a layer of fairly compact grey black stone was exposed. It was thought that this was possibly natural material though it could have been hardcore, and no further excavation of the trench was undertaken. Deposits therefore can be defined as being present only to a depth of 1m below the present ground surface.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation exercise revealed that a possible Roman road or track does exist intact, and very possibly in a good state of preservation, at a depth of 0.70m below the present ground surface on the projected line of Watling Street North to the south of the threatened area. As already stated, the lack of finds to date the cobbled layer (1006), and the very limited opportunity to view the layer in plan, makes interpretation very difficult. It was noted by I.D. Margary that where examined, the stretch of Watling Street between Wroxeter and Leintwardine was of a massive construction, on a footing of sandstone lumps, the uppermost surfacing being a thin deposit of rammed gravel (Margary 1973, 318-319). The latter may be represented in the evaluation trench by the layer (1006). It is therefore recommended that any larger area opened across the width of the line of Watling Street North, before the new road is built, be examined by archaeologists to enable a more detailed examination of the stratigraphy and features in the area. Further recording work could then be carried out swiftly if any substantial remains are contacted.

Jon Sterenberg
January 1990

Reference

Margary, I.D. 1973 (3rd Edition). Roman Roads in Britain. London.

4. Acknowledgements

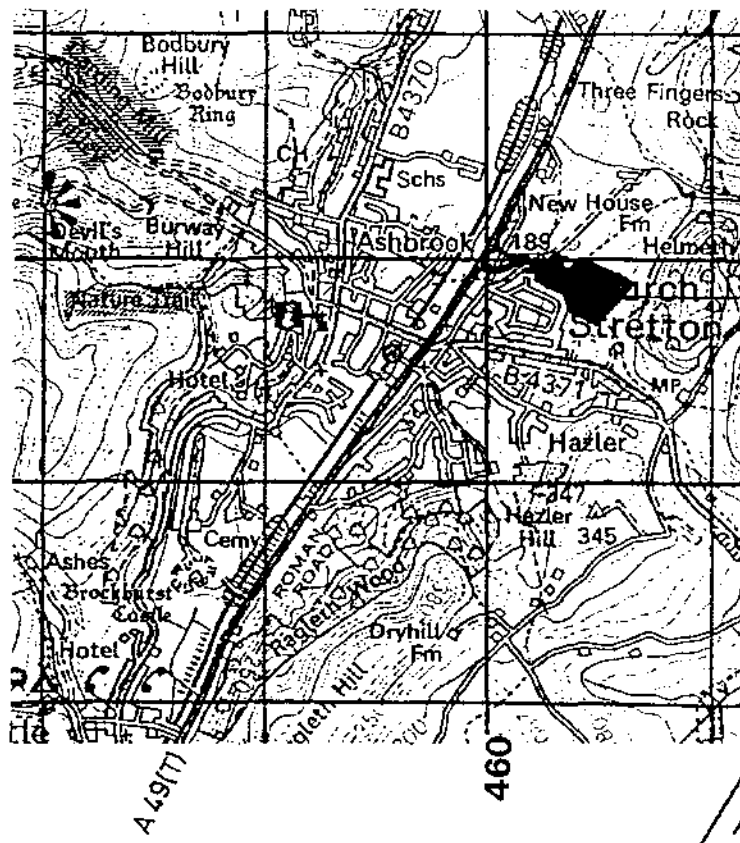
Thanks to Lucy Dingwall and Q Hutchinson who did the on-site work, and to Ann Humphries who typed the text. Iain Ferris monitored the project and edited the text.

5. List of Figures

Figure 1 Location Plan

Figure 2 South Facing Section Trench A

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PROPOSED AREA A FOR DEVELOPMENT

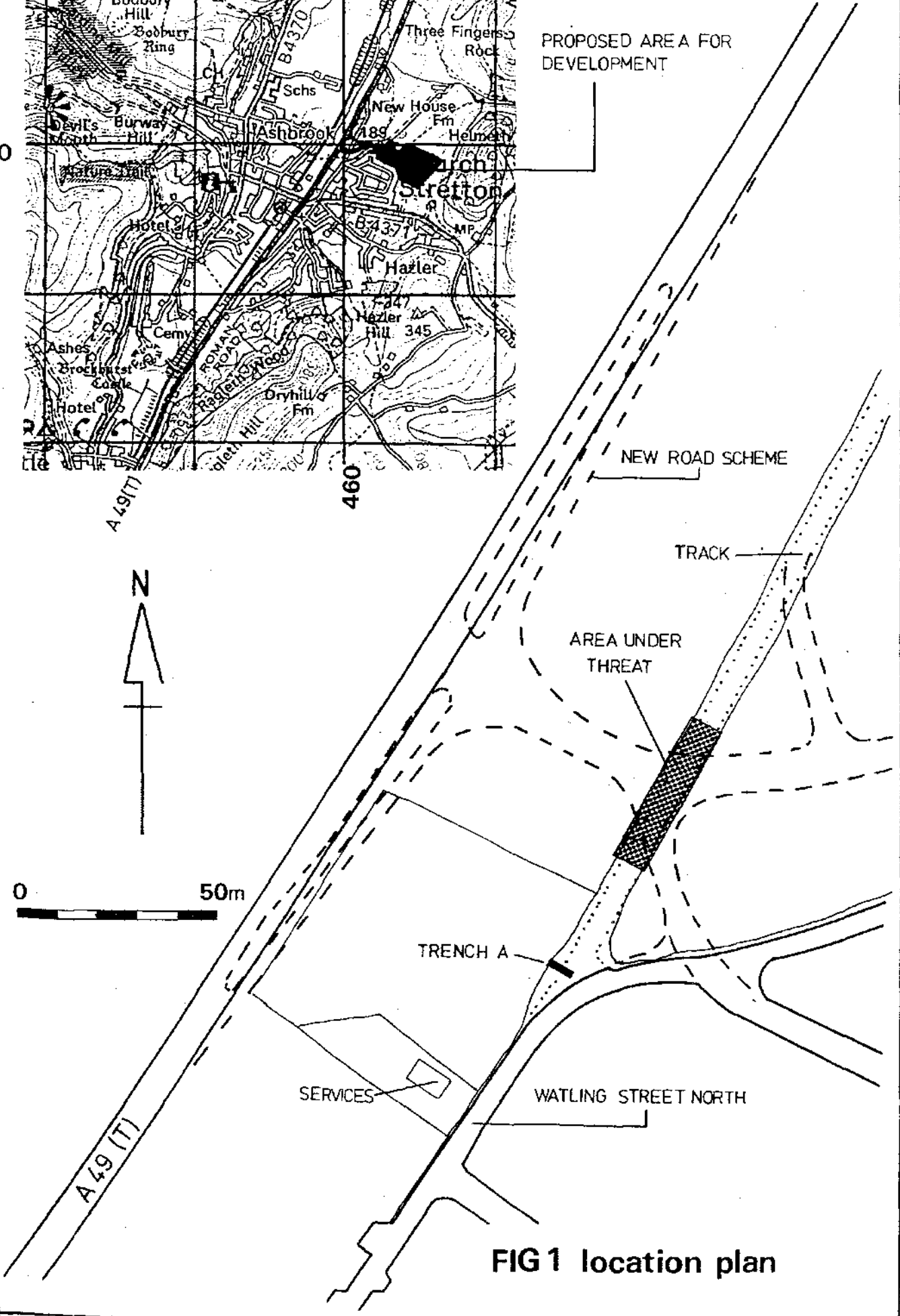
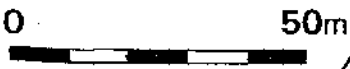


FIG 1 location plan

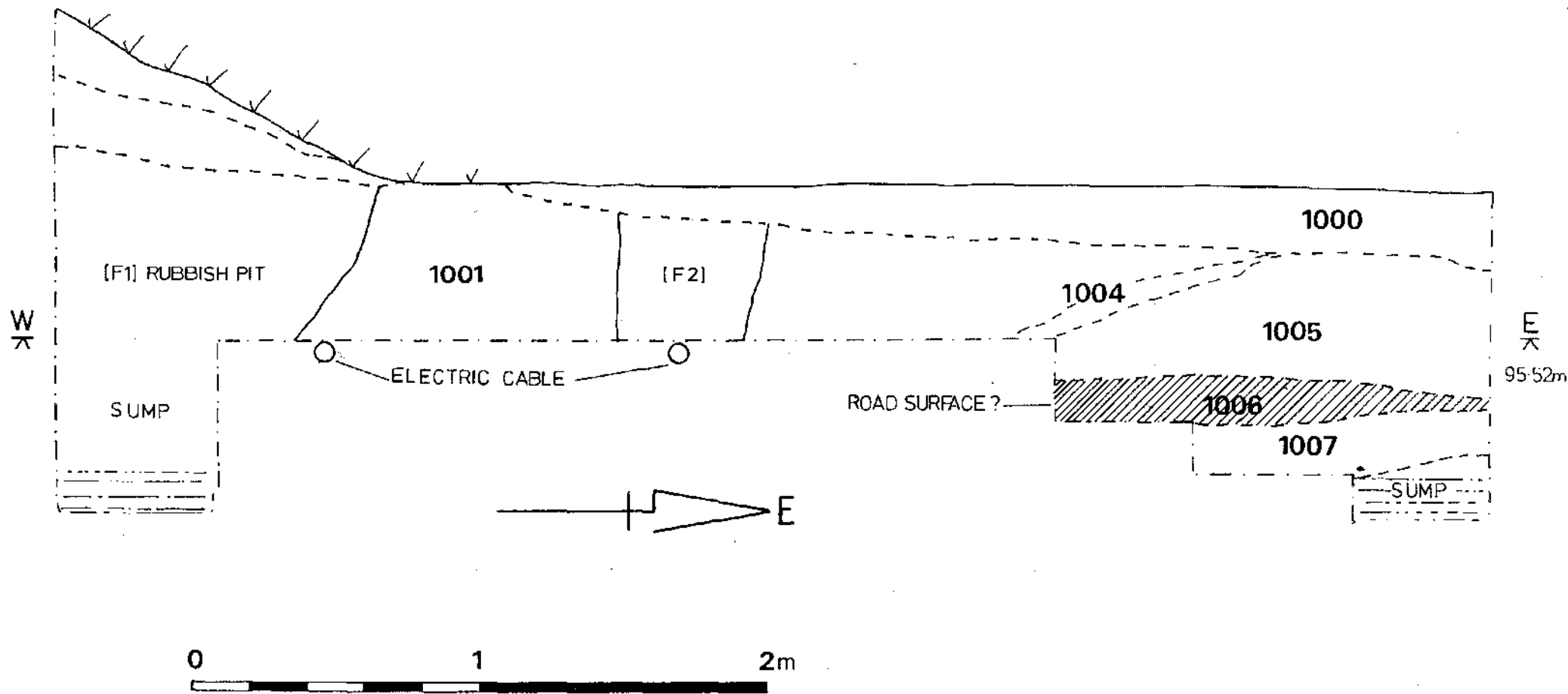


FIG 2 South facing section