

**LUDLOW COLLEGE SPORTS HALL,  
LUDLOW**

**An Archaeological Evaluation.**

by  
E.G. Hughes

# Ludlow College Sports Hall, Ludlow: An Archaeological Evaluation

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## 1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out between 30 August and 5 September 1990, prior to the construction of a sports hall for Ludlow College (N.G.R. SO 511 742). The work was commissioned by the governors of Ludlow College and undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit according to a brief prepared by the Department of Leisure Services, Shropshire County Council.

## 2.0 The Site

The site of the evaluation was located to the south of Ludlow town centre and to the rear of the east frontage of Lower Mill Street (Fig. 1). The medieval town plan of Ludlow has been the subject of considerable analysis, most notably by M.R.G. Conzen (1968, 122-127 and 1988, 253-272; Hindle 1990, 57-61; Slater 1990, 60-82). Conzen observes that it has been largely spared extensive modern redevelopment and possesses an "historically well-stratified and richly textured landscape". It had previously been suggested that medieval Ludlow appeared to have been laid out according to a rectangular grid (Hope 1909, 384). Conzen observes that it in fact possesses a composite town plan resulting from the establishment of a succession of distinct plan units. He suggests that Mill Street belonged to a central and southern plan unit dating from the beginning of the 13th century. Broad Street and Mill Street would appear to have formed the main residential streets with associated east-west burgages and internal back and cross lanes.

Raven Lane/Lower Raven Lane (formerly Narrow Lane) formed an internal back lane and may have originally extended as far as the River Teme (Lloyd 1990). Soon after the occupation of the burgages associated with the Broad Street-Mill Street unit, several appear to have become sub-divided transversely, providing Raven Lane/

Narrow Lane with its own set of 'pseudo-burgages' (Conzen 1988, 269; Slater 1990, 76). This may also have been the case for the projected extension beyond the town wall as evidenced by the transverse sub-division of several plots in the series to the west of Lower Broad Street, formerly to the east of Lower Raven Lane (Slater 1990, 71). Lloyd suggests that if this was the case they would have become redundant following the construction of the town wall during the mid 13th century, and the plots absorbed into the ownership of adjoining landlords (Lloyd 1990).

The site of the proposed development is to the west of the projected extension of Lower Raven Lane and the 1:500 O.S. map for 1885 provide few clues as to how this area was sub-divided during the medieval period. By the time the map was produced the area lay to the rear of Orchard House, constructed during the 18th - early 19th Century (Conzen 1988, Fig. 17.1/C). This was demolished prior to the construction of a new science block for Ludlow College in 1966 (Gaydon and Price 1973, 150).

## 3.0 The Evaluation

### 3.1 Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation were i) to locate any archaeological deposits likely to be affected by the proposed development, ii) to assess their quality, condition and significance, and iii) to make recommendations for any further archaeological provision that might be considered necessary.

### 3.2 Method

The proposed development will involve the construction of a sports hall c. 32m by 22m within an open grassed area to the south of the College science laboratories (Fig. 2). The natural, gradual slope across this area, dropping from the north

down towards the River Teme, has been distorted by the terracing of the area to the north during the construction of the laboratories. Much of the material removed during this levelling was redeposited across the area intended for the sports hall, creating a steep bank c.3m high. It is intended to remove much of this redeposited material to provide a level terrace on which to build the sports hall. Some of the removed material will be used to raise the ground level on the southern side of the development. The floor level of the proposed sports hall will be 46.20m (relative to a datum for the floor level of the existing laboratory of 50.00m). The foundations for the walls of the proposed building will be cut to a depth of between 1m and 1.6m below this floor level.

The location of the initial evaluation trench (Trench 1) was intended to incorporate an area where this development was likely to cause significant ground disturbance within the area of archaeological potential.

A 2m-wide and 10m-long trench was located on the line of the original proposal for the eastern wall of the sports hall. It was subsequently discovered that the plans had been slightly amended by relocating the proposed new building slightly to the west to avoid disturbing a nearby sycamore tree. Consequently, the effective location of Trench 1 was now immediately to the east of the proposed eastern wall of the sports hall. Therefore, two subsequent extensions were excavated to test whether archaeological deposits extended into the threatened area. The southern extension (Trench 2) measured 8.2m by 4m and the northern extension (Trench 3) measured 7m by 2m (Fig. 2).

The upper, recent deposits within these trenches, including the redeposited material dumped during the construction of the College laboratories, were removed by machine. The exposed features and associated deposits were then cleaned and recorded.

In addition to the trenches, the sections of four widely spaced sondages, excavated by one of the building contractors, were recorded.

### 3.3 Results (Fig.3)

The brown gravel and clay natural subsoil (1004) was overlain by up to 0.2m of silty clay and gravel (1003) a sample of which was excavated at the southern end of Trench 1. This in turn was overlain by a series of stone features exposed along the eastern side of the excavated area. A north-south wall (F2) was visible in the eastern section of Trench 1 and extended into Trench 2 to the south. This appeared to have been a well-built structure of limestone blocks, bonded with a friable, orange-brown silty clay, and with only two surviving courses. A rectangular, stone structure (F4) butted against the southern end of this wall, and was again a well-built feature constructed of limestone blocks bonded with a similar friable, orange-brown silty clay. It measured 1.4m by 1.1m, with only two surviving courses. A possible return to the wall (F2) may be represented by a less well-built feature (F3) running into the eastern section of Trench 2. This was constructed of smaller limestone blocks, with three surviving courses. The inner faces of the two walls (F2 and F3) could not be located, possibly due to a disturbance created by a suspected feature (F6), which was not fully excavated, filled with a gravelly clay (1005).

Another poorly-built structure (F1) partly obscured the northern end of the north-south wall (F2) and may represent a later rebuild. This was orientated at an angle slightly at variance with the earlier wall, and extended into the eastern end of Trench 3.

No structures or features were identified in the western parts of the three trenches apart from a feature containing modern pottery (F5) in Trench 2, which was not fully excavated.

The various stone features (F1-4) were overlain by a series of clayey and sandy silts (1001a-d) containing frequent, small pebbles and lime and charcoal flecks. The total depth of these deposits was between 0.6m and 0.7m. These in turn were overlain by the bank of redeposited clay and rubble (1000) created during the construction of the College laboratories.

No structures or features were identified in Sondages 1, 2 or 4; however, they did give an indication of the depth of the deposits (mostly grey-brown clayey silts) overlying the clay and gravel natural, which ranged from 1.1m to 1.2m. Several brick structures were recorded in Soudage 3 which corresponded with the former location of Orchard House.

### 3.4 Discussion

None of the stone structures recorded during the evaluation appear on the 1885 1:500 O.S. map, suggesting that they predate Orchard House and its associated orchards. A small assemblage of pottery recovered from the possible disturbance (F6, 1005) between walls F1 and F2 included three jug-handle fragments with thumb impressions and pierced, rectilinear decoration which, together with several body fragments, had an irregularly-applied, green glaze. Several fragments of coarse cooking vessels including a sandy ware rim and a white ware rim were also recovered. This assemblage appears to be largely 14th–15th Century with some residual 12th–13th-Century pieces, although most of the sherds were abraded. The associated clayey gravels (1003 and 1006) also contained several sherds of medieval ceramics, including fragments of sandy, coarse-ware cooking vessels and a fragment of late-medieval pipkin handle. The pottery assemblage suggests that the walls may be medieval and, if so, would appear to have been located in the proximity of the western frontage of the projected former extension to Lower Raven Lane. The excavation was too small to determine whether they formed a component of a larger building, and it is possible that they simply formed part of a boundary wall fronting onto the lane. The general abraded and residual appearance of the pottery tends to suggest an area under cultivation rather than occupation, perhaps indicating an extra-mural area of garden plots during the late-medieval period.

The grey-brown soils (1001a–d), overlying the stone features, contained numerous fragments

of post-medieval pottery and clay pipe, and possibly indicate continuing use of the area for cultivation (again supported by the abraded nature of the pottery) culminating in the orchards indicated on the 1885 O.S. map.

The uppermost deposits (1000) are clearly the result of redeposition during the construction of the College science laboratories.

### 4.0 Implications and Proposals

Fortunately, the amendment to the original development proposals, designed to protect the sycamore tree, will mean that the stone features recorded along the eastern margin of the evaluation are now also likely to survive.

The absence of features in the western areas of the evaluation suggests that the centre of medieval activity was to the east of the excavated area and, as suggested above, was related to the western frontage of the presumed former extension to Lower Raven Lane. The proposed development is located to the west of this area of potential archaeology and it appears unlikely that further substantial structures and deposits will be threatened. The slight raising of the ground level in the southern area of the development (indicated by the proposed floor level on the section of Trench 1 (Fig. 3)) will, in any case, limit the damage to any archaeology that might arise here, although the foundation trenches may cause some disturbance. Rather more disturbance may occur in the northern area of the development where the ground level will be lowered to a level corresponding to that of the suggested medieval archaeology. Watching briefs should be carried out during this levelling and while the foundation trenches are being excavated. It is possible that features corresponding to medieval property boundaries may be detected during the development but a careful watching brief should be sufficient to record their positions. This additional information is particularly important in an area for which little cartographic evidence is available.

## 5.0 Acknowledgements

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# LUDLOW COLLEGE

## Location of Development

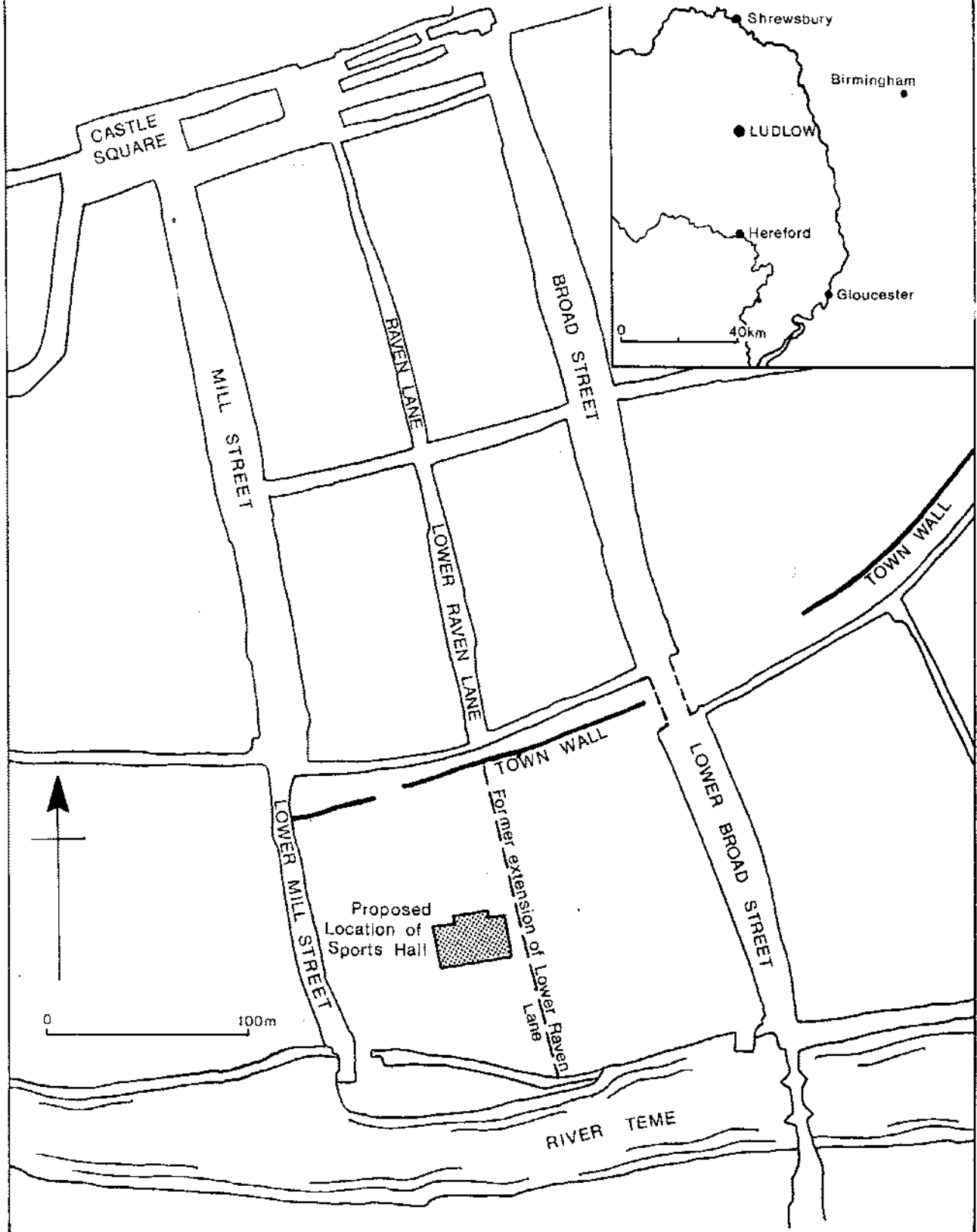


Fig. 1

# Trenches 1-3 Plan and Section

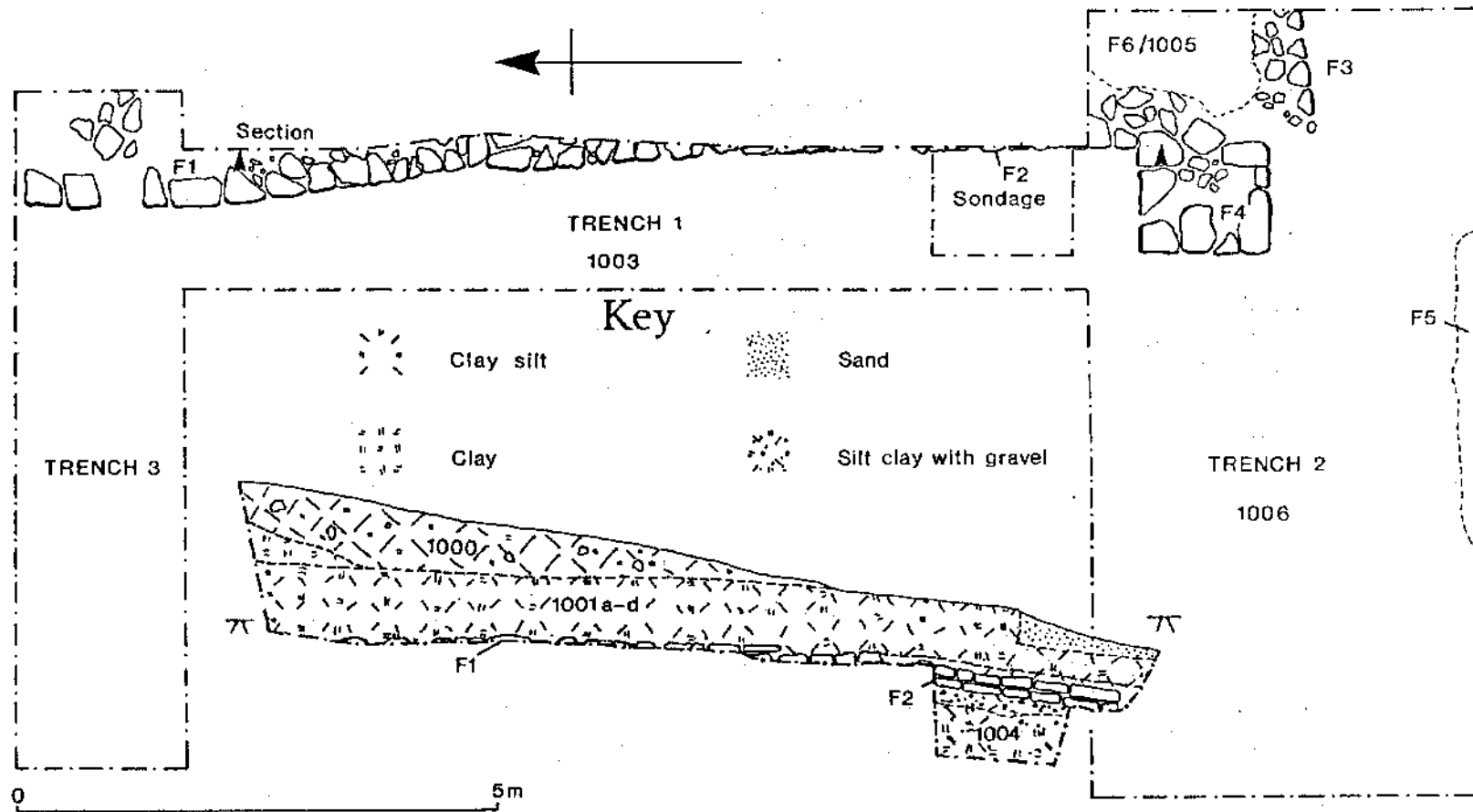


Fig. 3