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**An Excavation and Watching Brief at
Castle Old Fort, Stonnall, Walsall, 1991**

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1.0 Introduction

This short report outlines the results of a small excavation and the observations made during a watching brief within the Scheduled area of Castle Old Fort, Stonnall (NGR SK 062 033, SAM No. 2613) (Fig. 1). The excavation was carried out between July 31st and August 2nd 1991 and followed a small evaluation undertaken in March 1991 prior to the submission of an application to construct a private swimming pool to the southwest of the present house. A description of the site appears in the report on the evaluation (Hughes 1991). The watching brief was conducted on the 3rd and 9th of May 1991 during the excavation of the foundation trenches for an implement store and an associated service trench. The work was commissioned by Mr. K.D.Jones and undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

2.0 The Excavation

2.1 Objectives and Method

Nothing that was clearly of archaeological interest could be identified during the evaluation of the proposed site for the swimming pool. However, it was felt that the proximity of the natural sands and gravels to the present ground surface and the extent of the ground disturbance that would be necessitated by the development warranted a fuller investigation of the area to be affected. It was also felt that a shallow U-shaped gully identified in the northern part of the evaluation trench, might be archaeological rather than natural.

The topsoil was removed by machine from an area measuring 15m by 7.3m. This corresponded to the area that would be affected by the trench for the swimming pool and part of the area that

would be affected by the associated paving. The topsoil (1001) consisted of a thin deposit of humic soil and leaf mould, no more than 0.15m thick. The underlying gravel and sand (1003) was then cleaned manually in order to define any potential archaeological features. These were then sample excavated and recorded. The gravel and sand was then also removed by machine and the underlying sand (1004) was recleaned to ensure that no potential features were left unidentified.

2.2 Results (Fig. 2)

It soon became clear that much of the area had been considerably affected by tree root activity. The majority of the features that were tested by excavation proved to be root holes. Two modern service trenches (F3 and F4) were identified. F3, which contained a drain pipe, originated in the northeast corner of the excavation and terminated in the central area. F4 crossed the northwest corner of the trench. The sand and gravel (1003) varied between 0.1m and 0.4m thick and was found to be thicker towards the western edge of the trench (downslope). It also filled two shallow depressions cut into the underlying natural sand (F1 and F5). The southernmost of these (F1) was the feature identified during the evaluation and thought to be either a natural or artificial drainage gully. However, it was in fact found to terminate 0.8m beyond the edge of the evaluation trench. It seems likely that both features were geological rather than archaeological. A single sherd of black-glazed post-medieval pottery was recovered during the cleaning of the sand and gravel (1003)

No additional features were identified following the cleaning of the underlying fine red-brown sand (1004).

3.0 The Watching Brief

3.1 Implement Store

The site of the new building was located approximately 40m to the northwest of the existing house on the site of a possible slight earthwork indicated on the RCHME plan and just visible on the ground by a slight east-west ridge (Fig. 1). The site was formerly wooded and several trees had been removed by the time of the inspection. The development involved the construction of an L-shaped building, the northern arm of which measured 16m by 7m and the western arm 16m by 6m.

Five hand dug holes, 0.5m square and 0.6m-0.7m deep, corresponding with the corners of the intended building, were initially excavated by the building contractors. These were inspected and recorded on May 3rd 1991. The foundation trenches for the building were subsequently excavated by machine. These were also 0.6m-0.7m deep and 0.5m wide and were inspected on May 9th 1991. The north and west trenches were photographed, and measured sketches of the observed stratigraphy were produced (Fig. 3, S1 and S2). A very slight slope from north to south, corresponding with the 'bank' recorded on the RCHME survey, could be observed.

Four principal layers were distinguished. The natural subsoil (2004) comprised a compact, red-brown clay sand. This was located at a greater depth towards the southern end of the western trench (S2) and the eastern end of the northern trench (S1) and was overlain by a lighter red-brown sandy clay (2003), up to 0.7m thick. This was overlain by a similar sandy clay (2002), between 0.1m and 0.15m thick, which had become considerably disturbed by root activity. The uppermost layer comprised approximately 0.05m of humic topsoil (1001).

No finds or features were identified. A slight irregularity in the interface between the sandy clay (2003) and the clay sand (2004) towards the western end of the northern trench may be due to the action of tree roots.

3.2 Service Trench

The service trench for the implement store was inspected and recorded on May 9th 1991. It had been machine excavated by the building contractors to a depth of 0.7m and was 0.5m wide and approximately 38m long. It followed a slightly curving course (to avoid obstructing trees) across a slight bank indicated on the RCHME plan (Fig. 1). It is possible that this corresponds with the line of the inner earthwork of the hillfort.

The red-brown clay sand (2004), observed in the sections of the foundation trenches for the implement store, could only be identified towards the northwestern end of this trench. Where the service trench cut through the top of the bank, the stratigraphy included two bands of brown sand and gravel, each approximately 0.2m thick (Fig. 3, S3; 2011 and 2012). These were overlain by a layer of blocky red-brown clay (Layer 2010), 0.2m thick and 0.05m of topsoil (1001). It is conceivable that these deposits correspond with dumps of material associated with the establishment of the earthwork although this conclusion must be tentative, given the limited depth and size of the service trench. No finds or features were identified in either section of the service trench.

4.0 Conclusions

The results of the excavation of the area for the swimming pool proved disappointingly negative. No features could be identified which could not be explained in terms of tree root or geological activity, apart from a couple of modern service trenches.

Although no archaeological features or finds were recorded during the watching briefs, the sections created by the development suggested that traces of the original earthworks survive in this area. However, the trenches were rather too shallow and narrow to confirm this.

5.0 Acknowledgments

The excavation was carried out by Gwilym Hughes, Ed Newton, David Redhouse and Mark Williams and the watching briefs by Gwilym Hughes and Lynn Bevan. Caroline Gait prepared the illustrations and Peter Leach edited the report, which was produced by Liz Hooper. Many thanks

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E.G.Hughes,
May 1991

6.0 References

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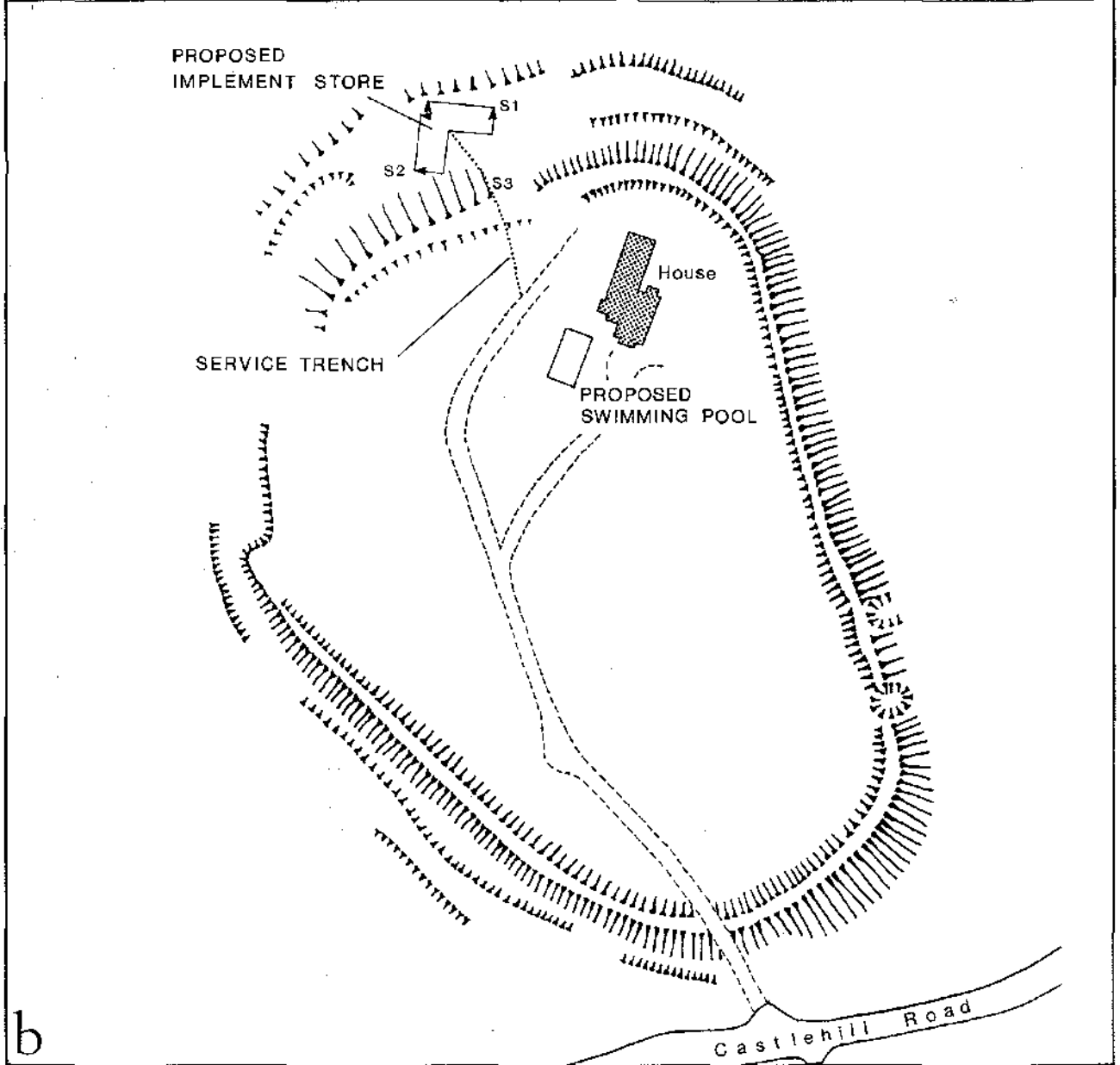
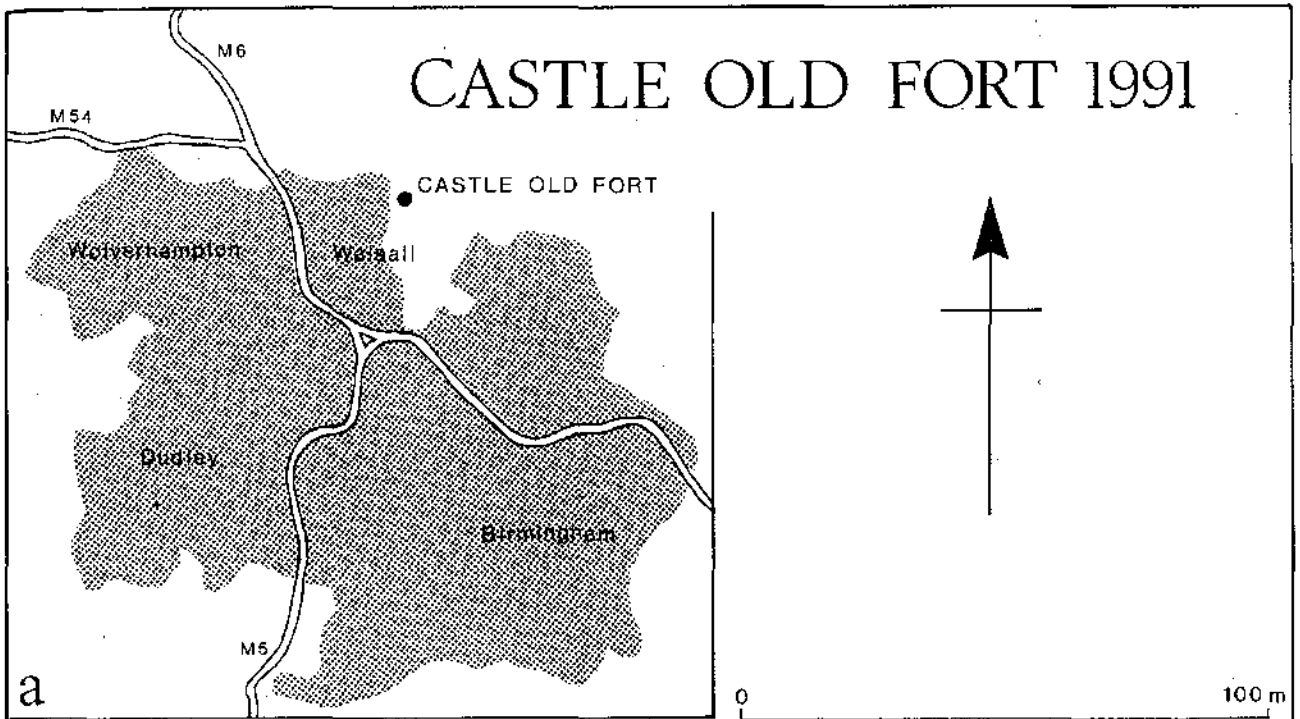
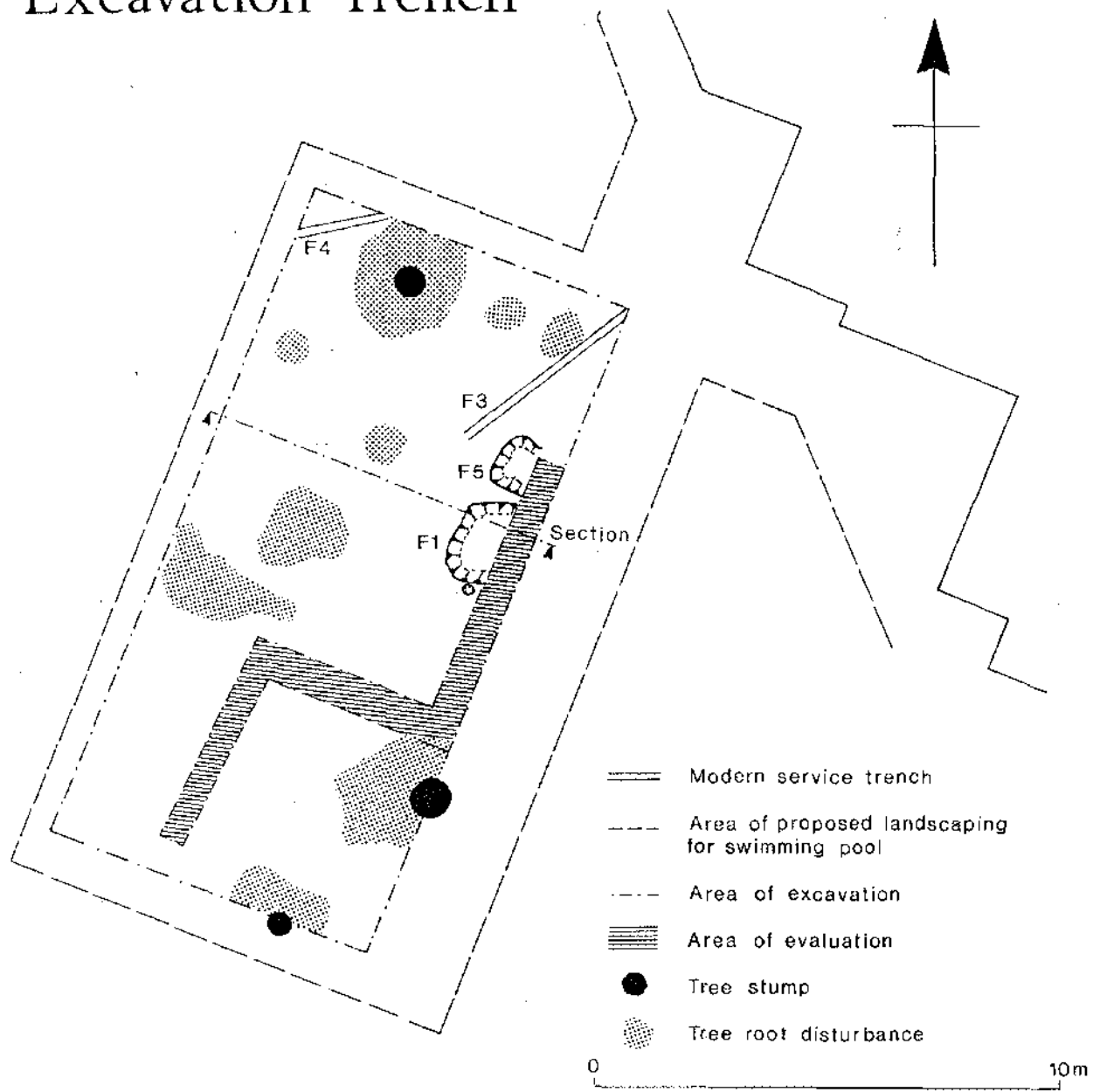


FIG 1

CASTLE OLD FORT

Excavation Trench



Section

- ⌋⌋ Topsoil
- ⊙ Gravel
- ⊗ Silt
- ⊘ Sand

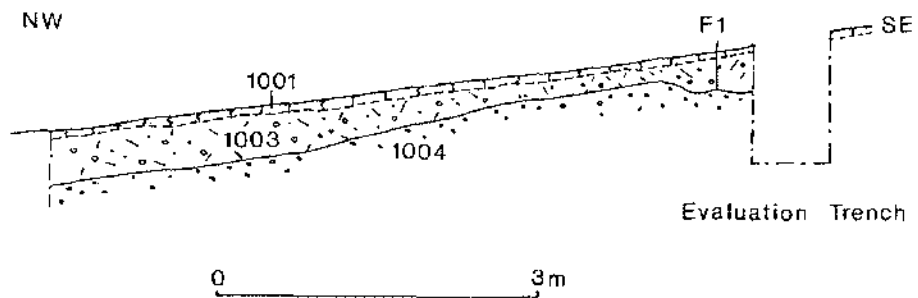
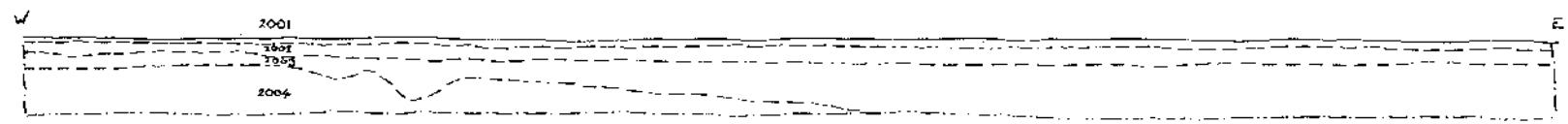


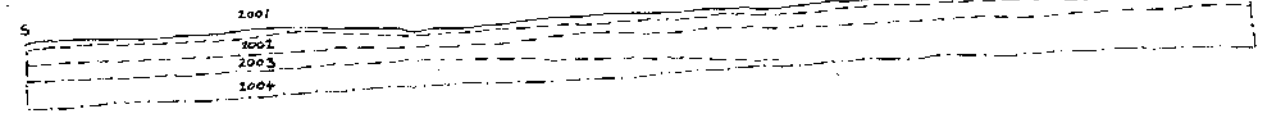
FIG 2

Castle Old Fort 1991
Implement Store Watching Brief
Sketch Sections

S1 North Section



S2 West Section



S3 Service Trench

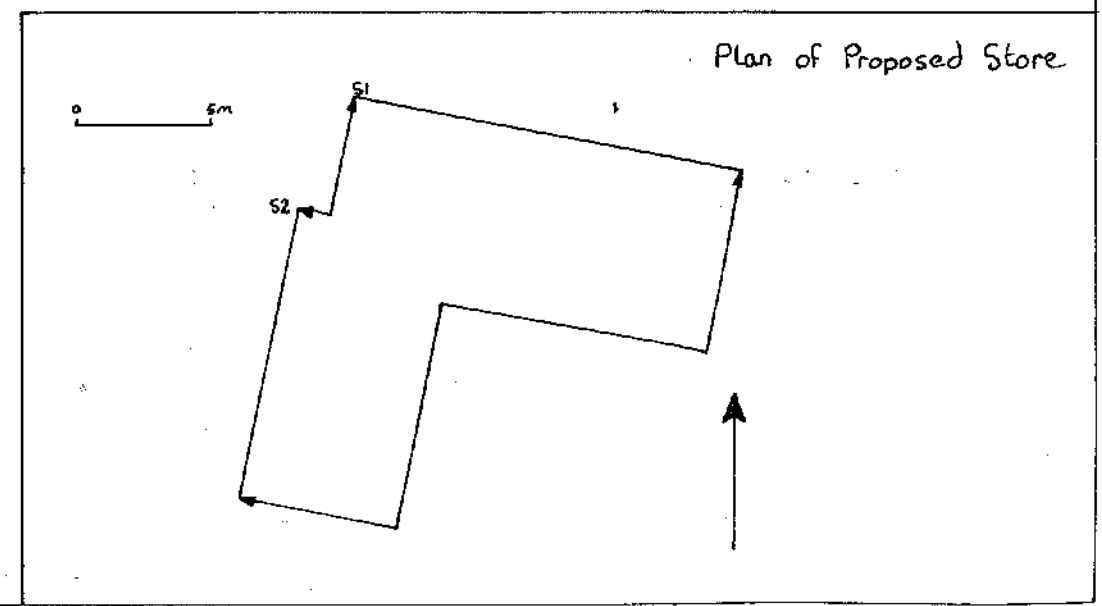
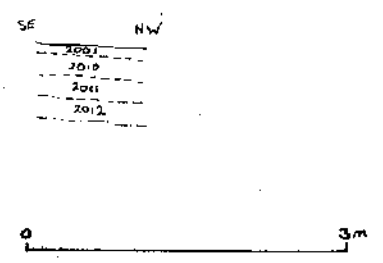


FIG 3