

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Lickey Grange, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire
An Archaeological Evaluation 1992**

by
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1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.1: The evaluation

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of assumed lengths of Roman road (HWCM 1095, 15576) at Lickey Grange, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire (centred on NGR SO 98407430) and their archaeological implications (Figures 1A, 1B and 2). In October 1992 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned by Peter Hing and Jones, Architects, Landscape and Development Consultants, acting on behalf of the landowners, The Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind, to undertake the archaeological evaluation in advance of the proposed construction of a retirement village and golf course.

The line of a Roman road is presumed to run southwest-northeast through the site, though the exact line is not known. Such roads, acting as main communication routes in the Roman and medieval periods, attracted roadside settlement through ease of contact and trade.

The aims of the evaluation were to assess the location, survival, condition and archaeological significance of any existing Roman Road within the development area together with any possible associated settlement, and to make recommendations for further archaeological input, if appropriate (Buteux, V. 1992).

1.2: Method

Two trenches (A and B, Figure 2) were dug perpendicular to the assumed lines of Roman road to investigate the composition, profile and sequence of deposits. Trench A was positioned in an area of turfed lawn across the projected line proposed by the Ordnance Survey (Figure 2, X). Trench B was positioned across the projected Hereford and Worcestershire SMR line (Figure

2, Y), at the bottom of the hill slope. This was in the hope that hillwash would have buried any archaeological features, protecting them from ploughing and the terracing of the slope that had occurred to create the present school playing field. These trenches, 1.5m-wide, were dug by a JCB excavator under archaeological control to expose natural deposits. Trench A, 30m long was dug to a depth of 0.40m with a sondage, 1m wide, to a depth of 0.70m. Trench B, 50m long, was dug to a depth of 0.40m with a 1.5m wide sondage dug to a depth of 0.80m. Both trenches were cleaned in section and plan, then recorded.

Recording was by means of pro-forma recording sheets, supplemented by plans, sections and photographs comprising the archive. This will be deposited, following the consent of the landowners, with Hereford and Worcestershire County Council.

2.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

The site is located 3km northeast of Bromsgrove, by the B4096 road, on part of the crest and south facing slope of the Lickey Hills. It is presently consists of the grounds and buildings of a redundant school for the blind. The soil is of the Bromyard Association, deep, well-drained sandy and coarse loamy soils over glacial drift (Soils of England and Wales, 1:250,000, sheet 3, Soil Survey of England and Wales) with solid geology of Triassic basal conglomerate (British Geological Survey, 1:50,000, sheet 183 Redditch, Institute of Geological Sciences).

The route of the Roman road has two proposed lines from deduction and field survey carried out by I.D. Margary (the Ordnance Survey line) and

the Hereford and Worcestershire County Council Archaeological Service (Figure 1B). There also exists a report of an excavation across a Roman road to the north of the site.

Margary, in his work *Roman Roads of Britain* (1973), notes that a direct road to Gloucester through Droitwich branched from a road south of Birmingham, passed through Metchley Roman Fort (now in the grounds of Birmingham University) and along the Bournville and Longbridge main road.

This led straight up to the Lickey Hills at Rednal where, between here and Bromsgrove, a distance of 3 miles, the route could not be detected. If the line of the road was projected as a straight line it would run through Lickey Grange.

A record exists within the Hereford and Worcestershire County Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record of an observation of a linear cropmark in the field to the immediate south of Lickey Grange (HWCM 1095). This was presumed to represent a part of the missing segment of Roman road from which a new conjectural line of the road was surmised (Figure 1B and 2).

To the north of the site, excavations in the late 1950s (Figure 1B), attempting to trace this missing road, located at the then Hazy Hill Farm part of a buried road surface made of pebbles set in a sandy clay soil (centred on NGR SO987746). Its width was 14.5m, with a depth directly below the turf line of 0.40m, lying on top of natural deposits. No dating material was found nor were any ditches located to the sides of the surface (the normal accompaniment to a Roman road). However, other sections of this surface were found along a northeast line from Bromsgrove to Rednal, some again without ditches (Whitehouse 1959, 23 and 25). From these results it was surmised that the Roman road ran through Lickey Grange.

There is little historical and archaeological evidence for significant human activity on this site in other periods. The area was part of the Came Hundred, part of an early medieval estate owned by Earl Edwin up to the Norman Conquest of 1066. Following the Conquest the lands became the possession of William I and formed part of the Halfshire Hundred, a royal wooded estate (F.

and C. Thorn, 1982, 1/1a). The name 'Lickey' is formed from the Old English name of a forest enclosure (v.(ge)haeg), though the 'leac' stem has no known connection to woodland (Victoria County History, 1901, 342). It would appear, from the records that survive, that the area remained woodland open to public access for the collection of wood up to 1795, when they were enclosed for private cultivation. Prior to the establishment of the School for the Blind after the last war it had been the site of the grounds and house of Lord Austin, who created the Austin 7 (pers.comm. Tony Arthur). The house is now integrated into the school and will be retained under the current development proposals.

3.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

3.1: Trench A

Natural orange-brown sands and gravels were exposed over the entire length of the trench. This surface was found to contain only natural intrusive features created by tree root disturbance, and areas of looser gravel. No archaeological features or material were found or recovered.

3.2: Trench B

Natural orange-brown sands and gravels at the ends, with light grey sands and gravels towards the centre, were exposed within the trench. In the centre of the trench, observed in plan and both sections was a very shallow U-shaped deposit of natural, compact, light grey clay silt (1003) directly beneath the turf line, bounded on each side by natural subsoil. This material (width 9.5m and maximum depth 0.20m) can be explained as a natural build-up both due to the gradient of the slope to the north and to the fact that the trench slopes in from its ends.

4.0: DISCUSSION

Despite the evidence for a Roman road in this area, neither proposed route was located within the excavated trenches. This is not to say that the route does not cross the site – surviving traces may have been removed by previous ploughing or landscaping at the points that excavation took place. The cropmark on which the Hereford and Worcestershire Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record is based (HWCM 1095) can perhaps be interpreted in the light of the excavations as a linear extension of the natural silt clay deposit observed in Trench B.

5.0: IMPLICATIONS

The evaluation has investigated two areas of the site where the Roman road either did not exist or has been subsequently destroyed. Therefore the current proposal, in its present form, would not appear to damage or remove significant archaeological information.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was sponsored by Peter Hing and Jones, Architects, Landscape and Development Consultants. The project was supervised by Lawrence Pontin, assisted by Sally Finter and

Bob Burrows. Simon Buteux advised and edited this report, which was produced at BUFAU by Liz Hooper. The illustrations were drawn by Nigel Dodds. I am very grateful to Hilary White, SMR Officer, and Simon Woodiwiss, Assistant County Archaeologist, of Hereford and Worcestershire County Council Archaeological Service for access to documentary references, assistance and advice. I am also grateful to Peter Hanlon of Peter Hing and Jones and Tony Arthur, Maintenance Manager at the site, for their assistance.

7.0: REFERENCES

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LICKEY GRANGE, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire

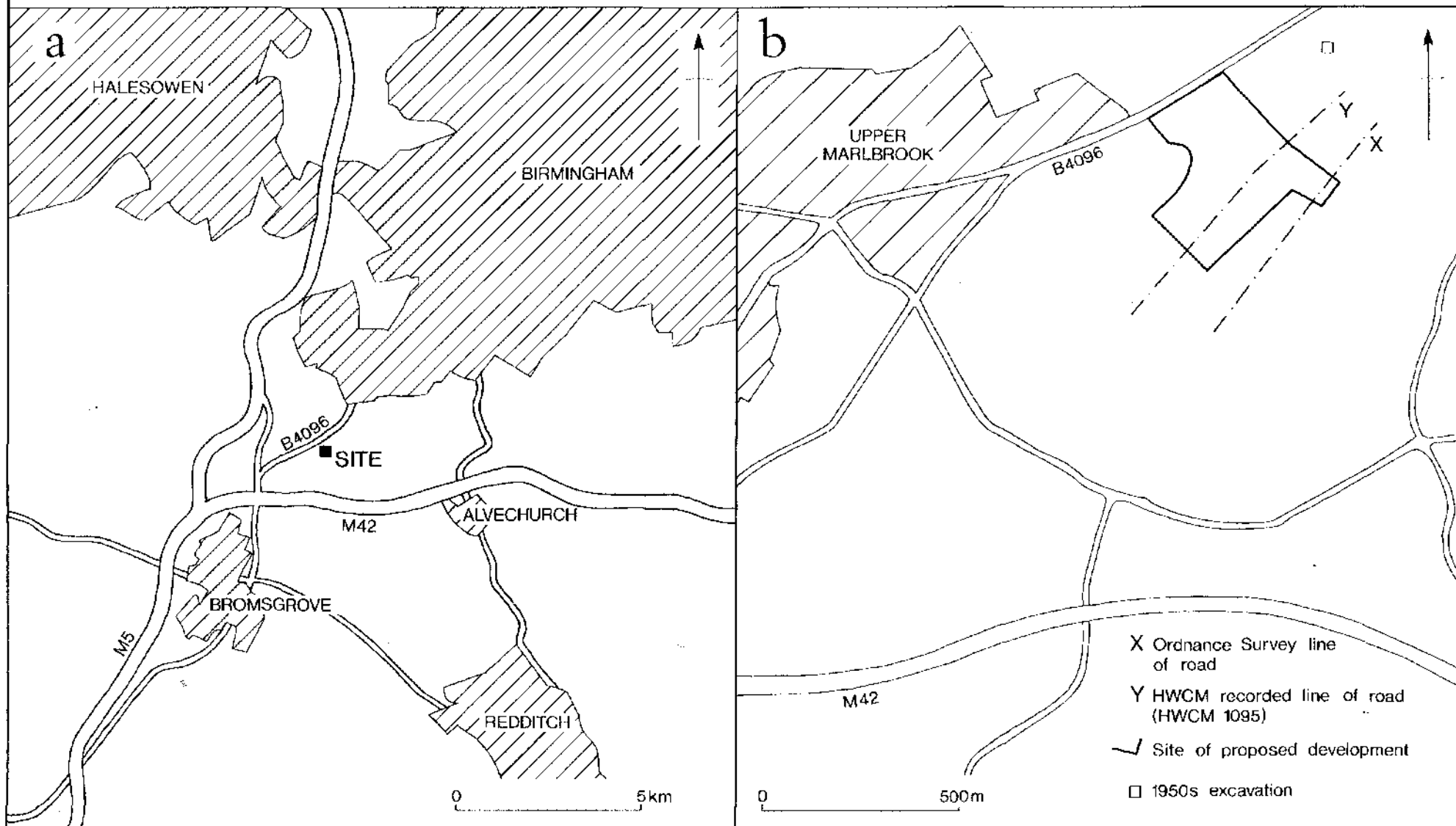


Fig.1

LICKEY GRANGE , Bromsgrove , Worcestershire

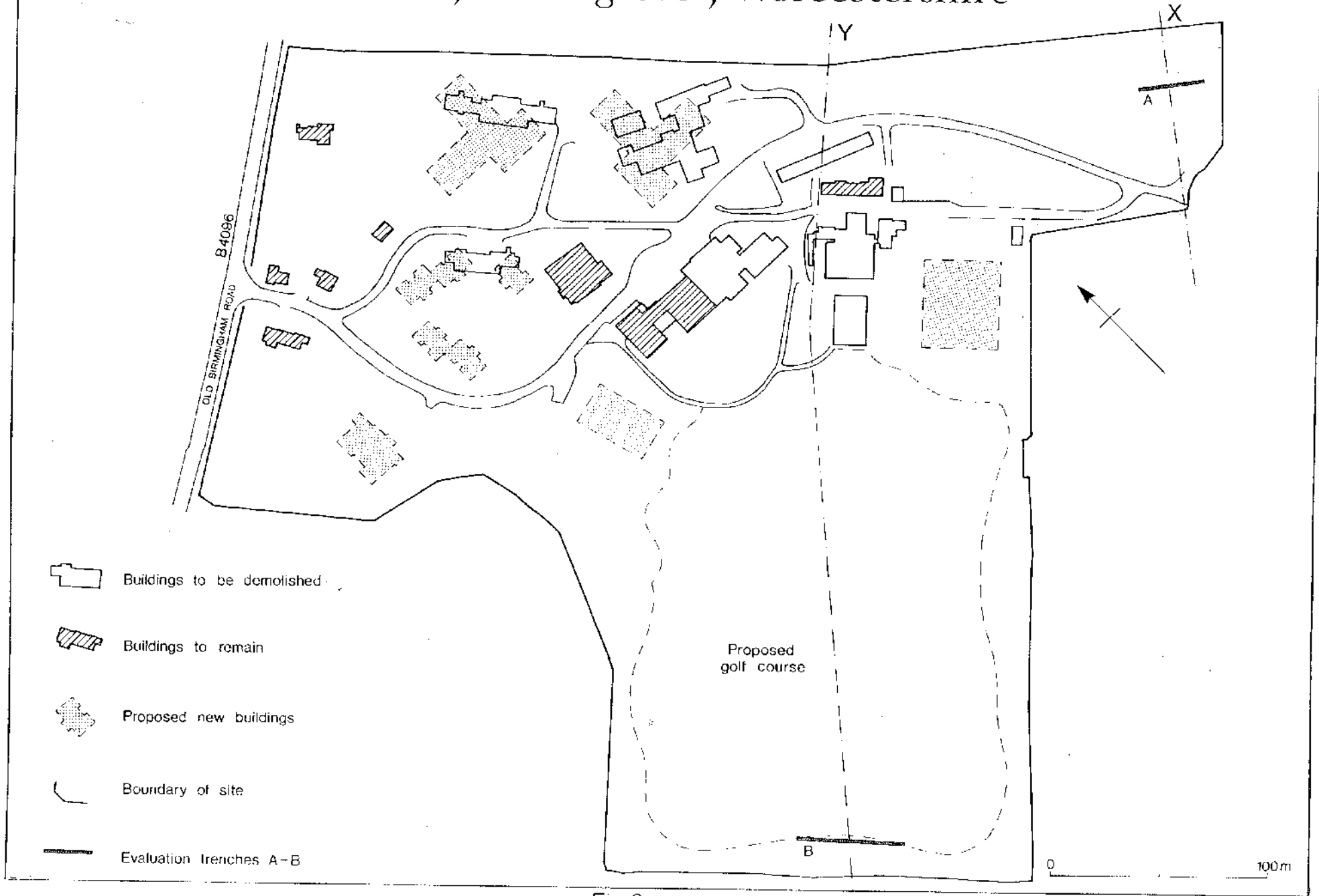


Fig. 2