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Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire
An Archaeological Watching Brief

by

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at The Brays Car Park,

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1.0 Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out within the boundaries of Kenilworth Castle during the laying of a new water pipeline by Severn Trent Water Limited (Figure 1). The pipeline extended west from Castle Road, cut through the Brays car park and terminated at the Meadows Cottage (Figure 1c). Severn Trent Water completed the groundworks within a four week period (8 February - 3 March 1994) and these were monitored archaeologically by staff from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

2.0 Kenilworth Castle in a Historical Context

A timber and earth fortress was founded at Kenilworth in the Norman period and was replaced in the twelfth century by a stone structure. An outer bailey with a protective curtain wall was added by King John in the thirteenth century and defences were further strengthened by a large moat created by utilising the natural flow of nearby streams. Nearly a century later John of Gaunt was responsible for upgrading the castle to almost palace status. This high status construction programme was continued by Henry V. In the Tudor Period the Earl of Leicester sponsored extensive structural development within the castle, but following the Civil War Kenilworth Castle was allowed to fall into decay. Today it is under the guardianship of English Heritage (English Heritage 1991).

3.0 The Archaeological Watching Brief

The Brays car park is located within the outer grounds of Kenilworth Castle and represents an archaeologically sensitive area. The Brays (the name is a corruption of "bays"), a large flat enclosure, is surrounded by the castle moat which survives as an irregular bank and ditch. The Brays enclosure was used in the late medieval period for mass tournaments and a pavilion, which would have housed the knights' during these tournaments, is still visible as an earthwork immediately south of the car park exit to Castle Road. To the north of this exit are the masonry foundations of a water system which would have controlled the flow of water around the moat. Further to the west, at the site of a modern bridge, the foundations of a medieval floodgate are still visible. This sluice controlled the water level of the Mere, a defensive lake which at one time almost surrounded the medieval castle. Earthworks marking the geographical limits of the Brays survive to the southwest of the modern car park (English Heritage 1991).

3.1 Objective

The survival of earthworks within the Brays (outlined in Section 3.0) suggested there was a strong possibility that archaeology would be encountered. The principal objective of the watching brief was to obtain a comprehensive record of any archaeological deposits exposed by Severn Trent Water during the groundworks operation.

4.0 Methodology

Severn Trent Water originally hoped to re-use an existing pipeline which would have minimised the impact on any archaeological stratigraphy within the Brays. Four test pits were excavated mechanically to locate this pipe and clearly demonstrated that the existing pipeline did not follow the predicted route and could not be reused.

A new pipe trench was excavated mechanically in approximately 15m long stretches by Severn Trent Water to a depth of 0.9m-1.10m. Each stretch was closely monitored by archaeological staff in order to identify any deposits of archaeological importance. Measured drawings, a written record and, where appropriate, a photographic record were made of the stratigraphy uncovered in each section.

5.0 Results (Figures 2 and 3)

Archaeological deposits were present in four stretches of the pipeline (Figure 1c), elsewhere the stratigraphy consisted of natural sandstone deposits. Unless stated otherwise all features were seen in section only.

Section 1 (Figure 2)
A ditch (F1), filled with black silt-sand was truncated to the west by a modern pipeline (F3). The cut of a later and smaller ditch (F2) was seen to the east. The gradual silting up of F2 was represented by five layers of black silt. Both features cut the natural sandstone and were sealed by a layer of sandstone rubble (1001) which provided a foundation for the modern tarmac road.

Section 2 (Figure 2)
A bank of sand, irregular stones and clay (F6), 7m long, was constructed over the natural sandstone horizon. The bank's western limit was marked by a charcoal-lined cut filled with large irregular sandstone blocks and three faced stones (F7).

Section 3 (Figure 3)
The foundations of a sandstone wall (F8) set into the natural horizon were seen at the base of this stretch, surviving to a height of 0.2m. The limits of F8 were represented by large sandstone blocks, whilst the central body of the wall was filled with smaller irregular stones. The outer blocks were not faced and so may not represent the original limits of F8. It proved possible to lay the water pipe over these wall foundations so causing no disturbance to the surviving archaeology.

Section 4 (Figure 3)
A solid bank of red sandstone blocks and fragments (F9) was encountered 55m to the west of the modern footbridge. The bank (1.4m long and 0.2m high), had a flat upper surface and included one block which could have been faced, no mortar was present. This bank was partially truncated to permit the laying of the water pipe.

6.0 Discussion

Although the only finds recovered from F1 and F2 were post-medieval (pottery, a leather shoe and part of a bone toothbrush), it is highly likely that these two ditches represent a surviving part of the moat which would have encircled the Brays. The position and alignment of F2 corresponds exactly with that of a now grassed over ditch and masonry remains of a former dam to the north of the modern car park exit.

Further west, the position of a bank (F6) seen in section 2 corresponds with surviving earthworks to the north and south. The latter represent a pavilion used during late medieval tournaments, and if F7 may be interpreted as the robbed out remains of a wall abutting the bank, these could represent a similar structure.

A sandstone wall (F8) recorded in section 3 is certainly related to the medieval floodgate which once controlled the water level of the Mere and which is still relatively well preserved. However it was impossible to establish whether this wall belonged to the sluice itself or to a tower which originally protected the water defences.

The solid sandstone bank (F9) ran at approximately the same angle as an existing earthwork to the south of the modern track - this alignment may be coincidental, however its flattened surface and proximity to quarry sites to the southwest of the castle suggest that the bank could have been used as a sledge ramp for the transportation of sandstone blocks from the quarries to the castle.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was undertaken by Jon Sterenberg, Catharine Mould and Edward Newton for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. All illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. We are grateful to English Heritage and to Severn Trent Water Limited for their assistance and co-operation, especial thanks are due to their groundworks team.

8.0 References

English Heritage 1991 *Kenilworth Castle*

KENILWORTH CASTLE 1994

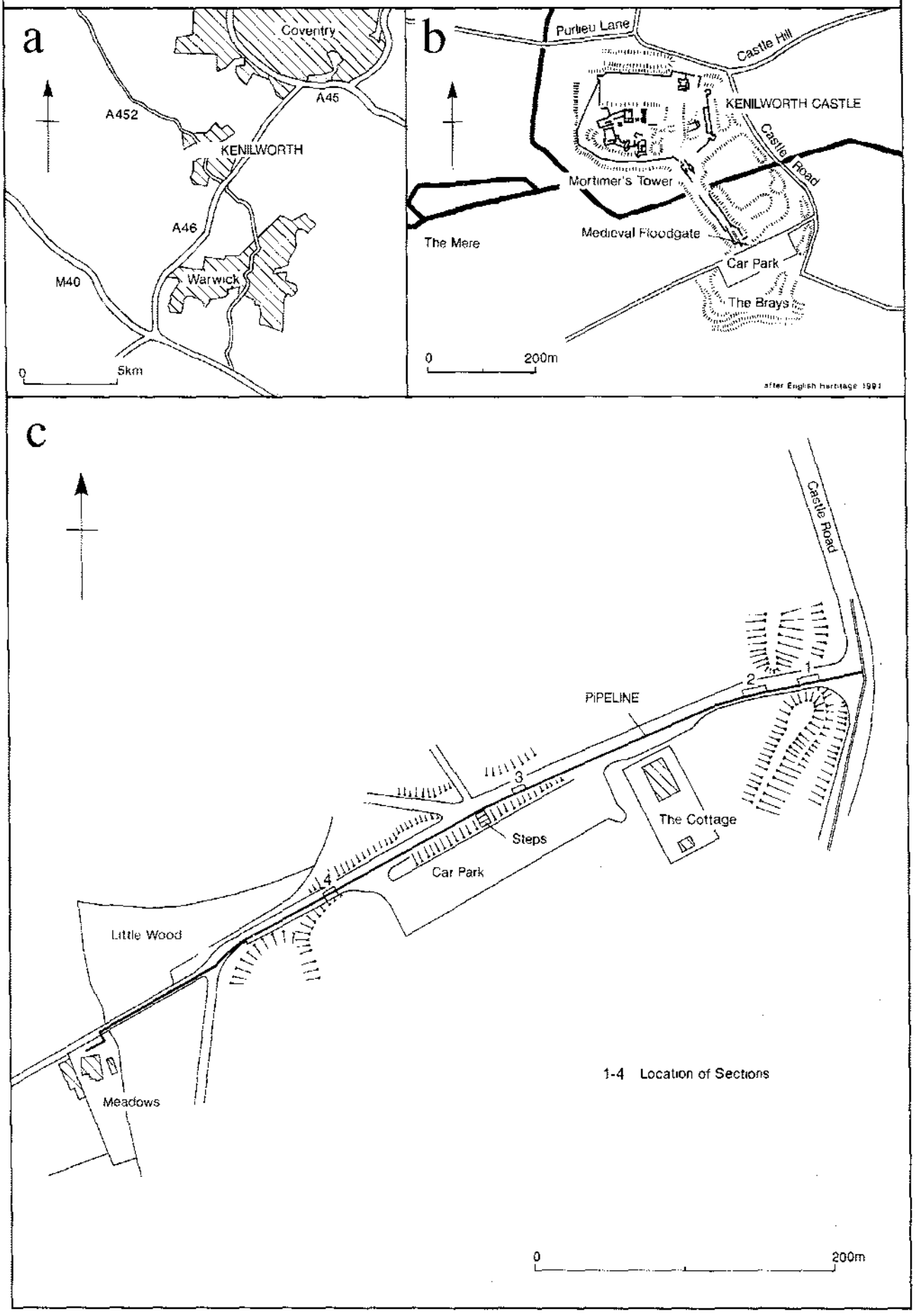
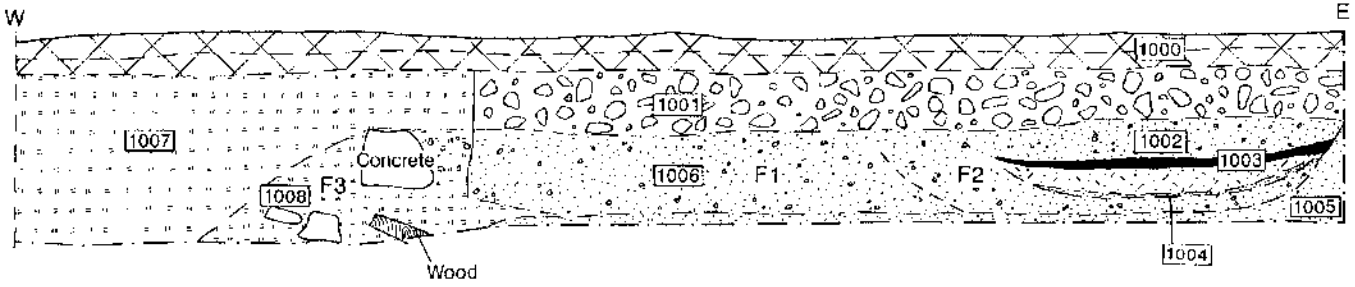


Fig. 1

SECTION 1



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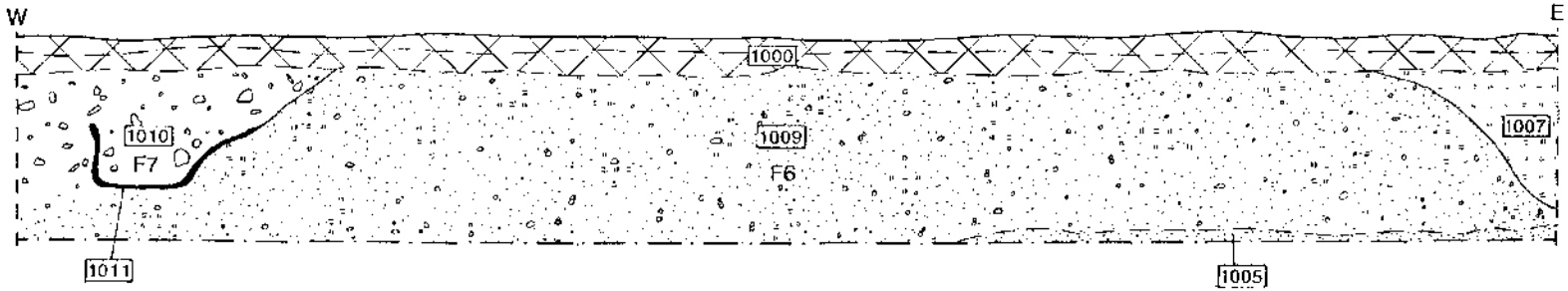


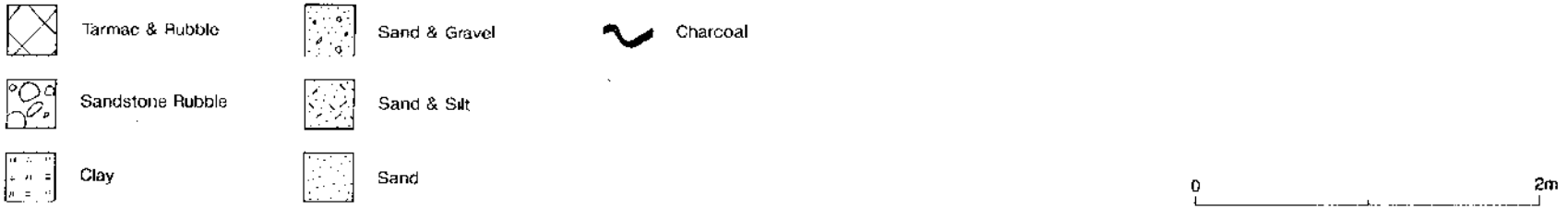
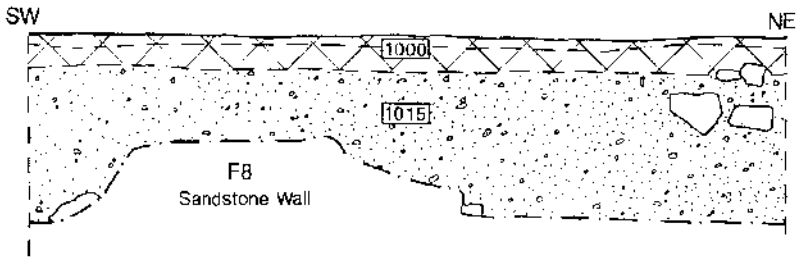
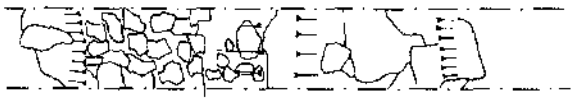


Fig. 2

SECTION 3



PLAN OF F8



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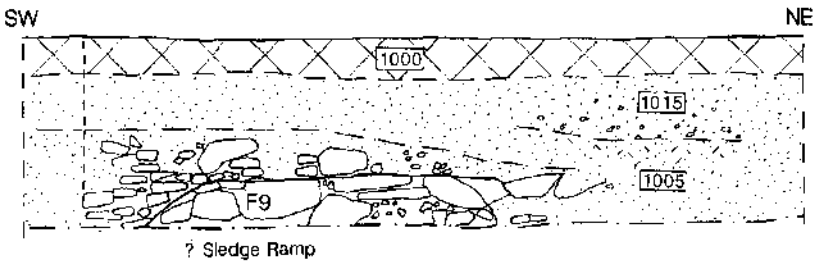
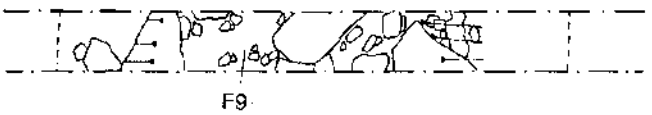


PLAN OF F9



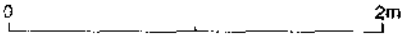


Fig. 3