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BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

BLORE HEATH, STAFFORDSHIRE, PREES GREEN, SHROPSHIRE, WALCOT HALL, SHROPSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Briefs 1996

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Archaeological Watching Briefs 1996

by
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BLORE HEATH, STAFFORDSHIRE, PREES GREEN, SHROPSHIRE, WALCOT HALL, SHROPSHIRE:
Archaeological Watching Briefs 1996

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1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken during the excavation of three Severn Trent Water pipelines. The locations monitored comprised the 15th century battlefield at Blore Heath, Staffordshire, the projected alignment of a Roman road at Prees, Shropshire, and an area within the grounds of Walcot Hall in Shropshire. No features of archaeological interest were identified at any of these locations, despite inspection and hand-cleaning of the pipe trenches during the watching brief.

It was not possible to undertake a further archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a pipe trench across a further projected alignment of a Roman road at Weston Heath, Shropshire.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological monitoring undertaken at three locations, each in connection with a separate Severn Trent Water Limited water supply enhancement scheme. The results of these three archaeological watching briefs are described in a single report for simplicity, although they are not associated, either thematically, or geographically. The maintenance of an archaeological watching brief during, and immediately subsequent to, contractors groundworks, at a fourth site, Weston Heath, Shropshire was not possible.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to undertake the archaeological watching briefs by Charles Haswell and Partners, on behalf of Severn Trent Water. The methodology of the watching briefs conforms to a specification prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 1996).

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by photographs, sketch-sections and plans, all held in the archive.

The archaeological background, watching brief methodology and results of the three watching briefs is discussed in turn below.

3.0: BLORE HEATH, STAFFORDSHIRE (Figs. 1A-B and 2)

3.1: Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Blore Heath, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SJ 713352), during the Market Drayton water supply improvements programme. The objective was to record any features or deposits associated with this battlefield, and also to recover any associated finds.

3.2: Archaeological background

The battle of Blore Heath was fought on 23 September 1459 during the Wars of the Roses. A Lancastrian force of around 10,000 men, commanded by Lord Audley intercepted a Yorkist army of 5,000 men on Blore Heath (Fig. 1B). The smaller Yorkist force were positioned above the shallow, and partially hidden valley, to the north of the line of the pipeline. The advance of the Lancastrian troops was hampered by the marshy nature of the valley bottom, and those that reached the southern side of the valley were outnumbered, and large numbers died, including Lord Audley, leaving the Yorkists victorious.

The area of the battlefield (Staffordshire SMR No. 27), is designated as a Special Landscape area, and is included on the list of historic battlefields maintained by English Heritage.

3.4: Methodology

The archaeological watching brief at Blore Heath was undertaken in two stages. The first stage involved an initial inspection following the removal of the topsoil over an area measuring approximately 12m in width, to record any visible archaeological features, and to recover any artifacts. The subsoil surface exposed by mechanical excavation was scanned with a metal detector, in an attempt to locate any ferrous artifacts present. The second stage involved an archaeological watching brief maintained during the excavation of a length of approximately 900m of the pipeline which was located within the battlefield area. The mechanical excavation of the pipeline was monitored, and, where it was safe to do so, one side of the trench was hand-cleaned in an attempt to identify any archaeological features present. The width of the machined trench measured 2m; its depth varied according to the topography.

3.4: Results

No archaeological features were recorded following the completion of topsoil stripping, which was undertaken over the whole width of the easement. No artifacts were collected at this stage, with the exception of a horseshoe of probable modern date.

The natural subsoil exposed in the base of the pipe trench was a sand-gravel (1002), varying in colour from red to orange, and containing occasional bands of coarse gravel and stone. Bands of naturally-deposited grey silt, and grey silt-clay (1001) were

noted in the base of the trench, generally aligned perpendicular to the main axis of the valley. The subsoil was overlain by the topsoil (1000), here comprising a dark grey to black clay-silt, which measured an average of 0.4m in depth.

No archaeological features were located in the stretch of the pipeline which was archaeologically monitored, and no artifacts were collected.

3.5: Discussion

The bands of grey silt recorded in the base of the pipe trench may be interpreted as relict stream channels.

The pipeline provided a continuous section through virtually the whole length of the battlefield site. The pipeline was located towards the base of the valley, closer to the position of the vanquished Lancastrian army (Fig. 1B). The absence of archaeological features may be explained in a number of ways. It is possible that any features cut during the battle, such as ditches, could have been located on the higher ground, away from the poorly-drained valley floor. Alternatively, ploughing may have scoured-out any shallow features. The absence of finds could suggest the site was systematically cleared.

4.0: PREES GREEN, SHROPSHIRE (Fig. 3A-C)

4.1: Introduction

The watching brief at Prees Green (centred on NGR SJ 555308), was undertaken during the excavation of the Ightfield/Calverhall/Market Drayton pipeline improvements programme. The aim of this watching brief was to record any features associated with a Roman road (Shropshire SMR No. 66), whose recorded alignment appeared to be intercepted by the pipeline immediately to the south of Yew Tree Farm (Fig. 3B-C).

4.2: Archaeological background

The objective of this watching brief was record evidence of the Roman road, aligned approximately north-south, between Wroxeter in the south and Chester (via Whitchurch) to the north (Shropshire SMR No. 66; Margary 1973, 298-9). From the north of Prees, the road ran due south, its course marked in places by a raised bank between 0.3-0.6m in height, with a wide hollow on its western side. At Prees (Fig. 3A), the modern road curves to the west, to avoid a hill. A line of hedge-rows, leading to the church, may define the course of the Roman road. A similar, approximately north-south alignment is followed by the Roman road for 3 km to the south of Prees. Where intercepted by the pipeline, the postulated line of the road followed, and lay slightly to the west of the modern B5065 road (Fig. 3B). This alignment has not been previously tested by archaeological fieldwork.

4.3: Methodology

Archaeological monitoring of a length of 110m of the pipeline, adjoining the suggested alignment of the Roman road, was undertaken in two stages. The first stage involved the inspection of the surface of the subsoil, following machine excavation of the topsoil overburden, to permit the recording of any archaeological features revealed overlying the subsoil within an easement measuring approximately 10m in width. The second stage involved inspection of the excavated pipeline trench, which measured an average of 1.5m in depth, and the selective hand-cleaning of the trench sides, in an attempt to locate and record the Roman road, and any associated features.

4.4: Results

On the western side of the modern B5065 road (Fig. 3B-C), was a yellow-brown sand (1001), sealed by a layer of dark brown sand-silt (1000), measuring an average of 0.3m in depth, which formed the modern topsoil. A similar subsoil (1003) was recorded on the eastern side of the modern road, sealed by a dark brown/black clay-silt topsoil (1002). The zone on the eastern side of the modern road appeared to be poorly drained.

No features were revealed following inspection of the easement after removal of the topsoil, nor were any features or deposits associated with the possible Roman road alignment identified within the pipe trench.

No inspection or cleaning was possible in respect of that part of the pipe trench which lay directly beneath the modern roadline.

4.5: Discussion

No evidence of the Roman road, or of any associated features was obtained during this watching brief. The absence of evidence of the Roman road may be due to a number of factors. It is possible that the Roman road lay directly beneath the modern road, an area not monitored during the watching brief. It is possible that the Roman road lay within the area monitored, but that all trace of its surface, and of any associated features had been removed by ploughing. An equally plausible alternative is that the Roman road lay outside the area monitored. A location to the west of the modern road may have been preferred to an alignment to the east of the B5065, where the land was marshy.

5.0: WALCOT HALL, SHROPSHIRE (Fig. 4A-C)

5.1: Intoduction

The watching brief at Walcot Hall, Shropshire (centred on NGR. SO 356843) was undertaken in connection with the Oakley Farm Nitrates pipeline. The objective of the watching brief at this site was to record any archaeological features or deposits associated with the landscaped grounds of the Hall.

5.2: Archaeological background

The Oakley Farm pipeline crosses the grounds of Walcot Hall to the west of Walcot Farm. The grounds of Walcot Hall (Shropshire SMR No. 7757) form part of a post-medieval deer park and ornamental garden, evaluated in 1990-1 by Paul Stamper of Shropshire County Council for the English Heritage Monument Protection Programme. The Hall grounds are also included in the draft English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest.

The Hall was the seat of the Walcot family, until purchased by Lord Clive of India in 1764. Two ornamental avenues were depicted in a map of the grounds, dated around 1730, running to the northeast and northwest of the Hall. The main drive from the house, intercepted by the pipeline, looped northwards towards the village of Lydbury North (Fig. 4B). Later, the main drive was lined with trees, and an entrance, and lodge was constructed on the eastern fringe of the grounds, on the Lydbury-North Kempton road.

5.3: Methodology

The archaeological watching brief at Walcot Hall involved the inspection of the machine-excavated pipe trench, followed by the hand-cleaning of the trench sections for a length of approximately 90m, in an attempt to locate any archaeological features or deposits associated with the landscaped grounds of the Hall. In particular, it was intended to determine the possible westwards continuation of the tree-lined avenue, or of any associated features, such as ditches; the area selected for monitoring during the watching brief was chosen to include the possible westwards continuation of both the northern and southern alignments of tree-lined avenue. The pipe trench measured approximately 2m in width.

5.4: Results

The subsoil (1103), which comprised a dark brown sand-gravel was recorded at a depth of 0.5m below the modern surface. The subsoil was sealed by a layer of light brown sand-silt (1102), which measured between 0.4 - 0.5m in depth, which was overlain by the topsoil, a dark brown clay-silt (1001), measuring an average of 0.1m in depth. The gravel make-up (1100) of the present main drive, aligned approximately west-east was recorded overlying layer 1102, although the inspection and hand-cleaning of this area was restricted by the presence of road-plates.

With the exception of the modern main drive (1100) no archaeological features or deposits could be identified, and no artifacts were collected during the watching brief.

5.5: Discussion

The absence of features or deposits, with the exception of gravel surface (1100) suggests that the tree-lined avenue, and any associated features may not have extended

into the area examined during the watching brief. Layer 1102 may be interpreted as colluvium, or possibly make-up material.

6.0: WESTON HEATH, SHROPSHIRE

It was originally intended that a further watching brief be undertaken at Weston Heath (centred on NGR SJ 555280) during the excavation of the Ightfield/Calverhall/Market Drayton pipeline to record any features associated with a Roman road which was recorded crossing the pipeline alignment at this location. However, it was not possible to undertake the archaeological watching brief at this location because the trench was dug and backfilled without notification to BUFAU.

7.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This watching brief was sponsored by Severn Trent Water Limited. The assistance of staff of Charles Haswell and Partners, and of the appointed contractors at Blore Heath and Prees Green is acknowledged. We also thank Penny Ward of the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record for her assistance. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds and the report was edited by Gwilym Hughes.

8.0: REFERENCES

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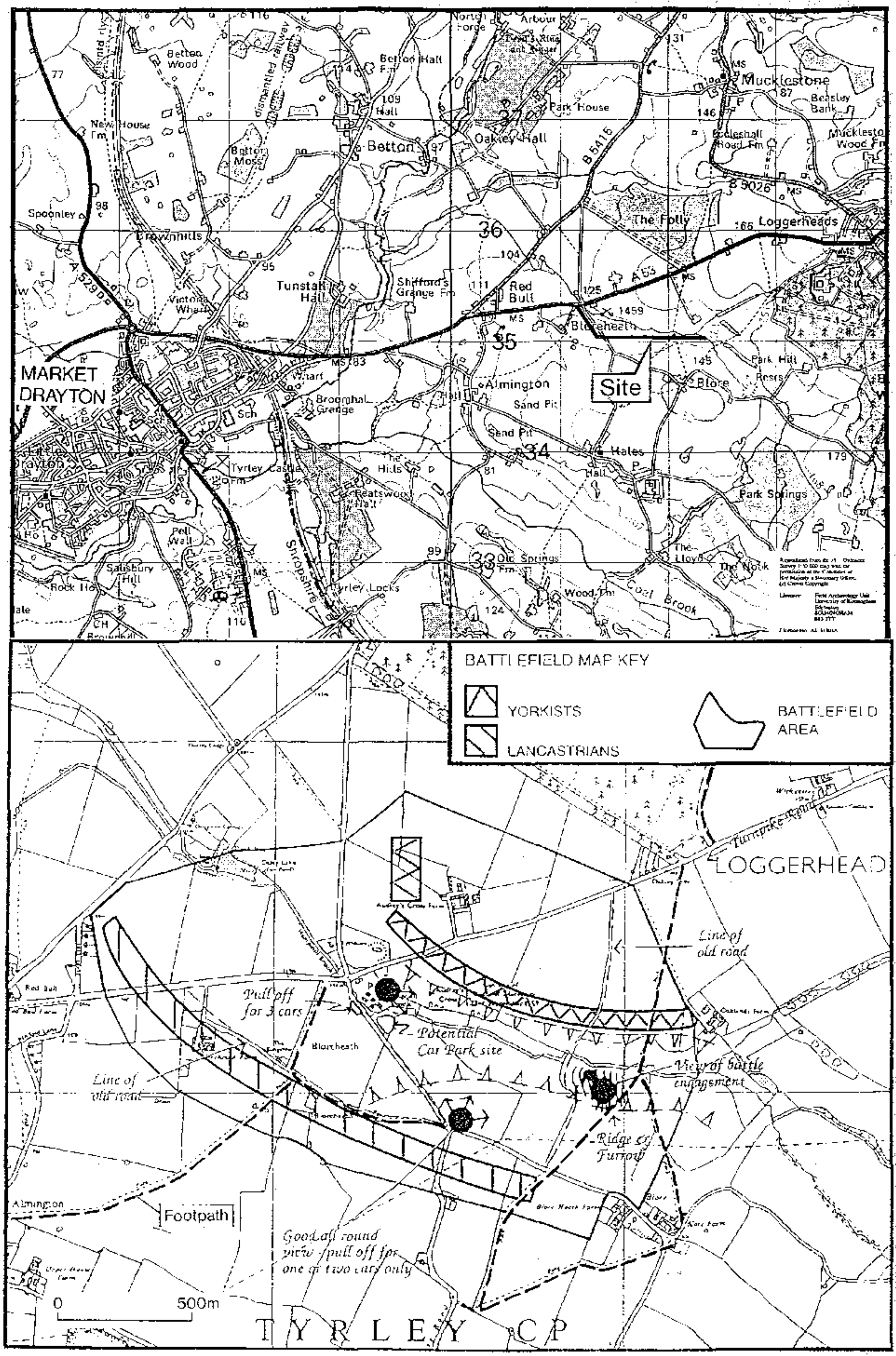
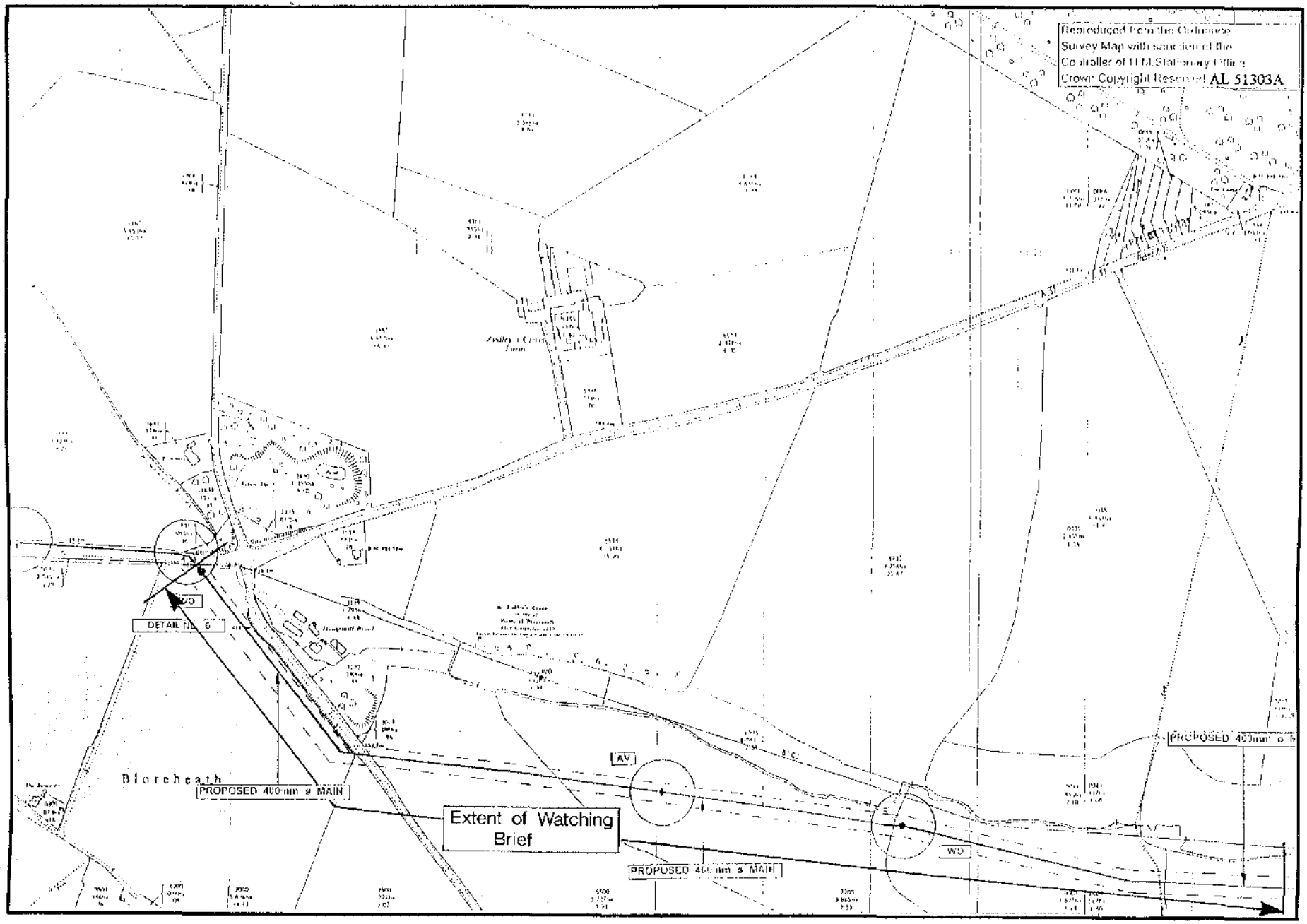
Margary, I. D. 1973. *Roman Roads in Britain.*



MARKET
DRAYTON
Betton
Mucklestone
Loggerheads
Oakley Hall
Tunstall Hall
Blore Heath
Almington
Hales
Site
Shropshire
Tyrley Locks
Coal Brook
BATTLEFIELD MAP KEY
YORKISTS
LANCASTRIANS
BATTLEFIELD AREA
LOGGERHEADS
Turnpike Road
Line of old road
Pull off for 3 cars
Potential Car Park site
View of battle engagement
Ridge & Furrow
Line of old road
Footpath
Good all round view - pull off for one or two cars only
0
500m
TYRLEY CP

Fig. 1


Reproduced from the Ordnance
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DETAIL NO. 6
PROPOSED 400mm ø MAIN
Extent of Watching
Brief
PROPOSED 400mm ø MAIN
PROPOSED 400mm ø M
AV
WD
WD

Fig. 2

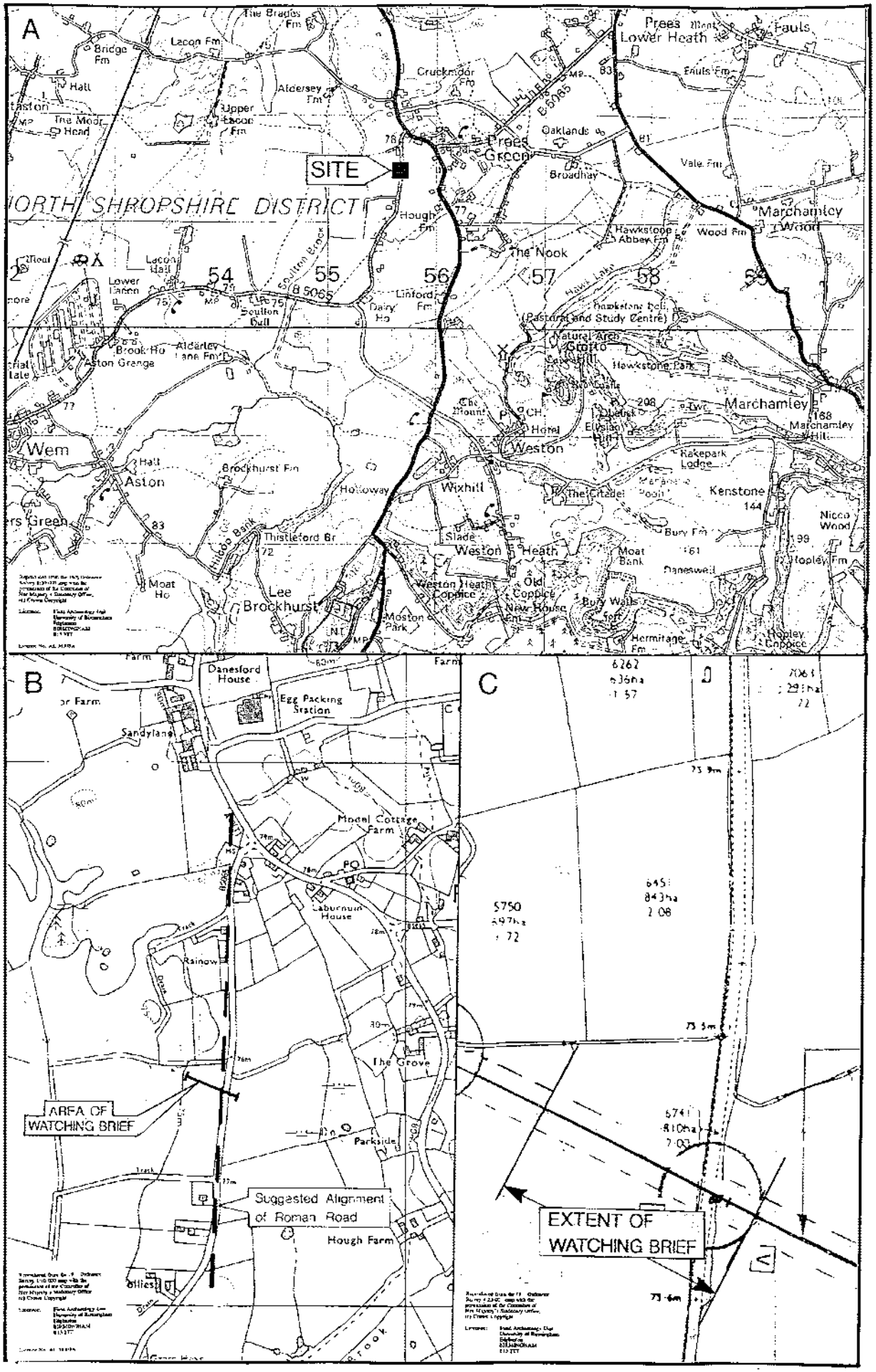
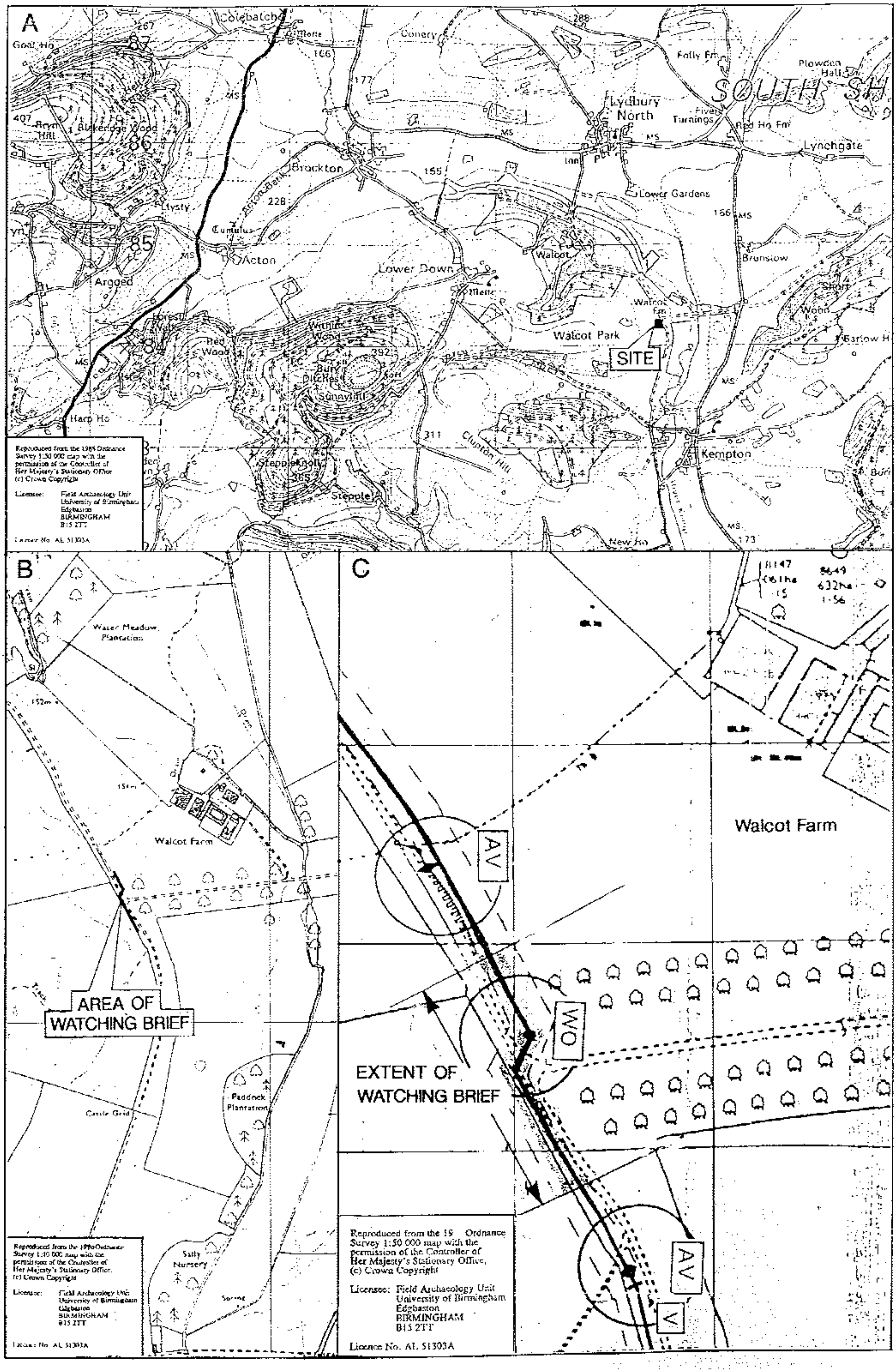

A
SITE
NORTH SHROPSHIRE DISTRICT
B
AREA OF WATCHING BRIEF
Suggested Alignment of Roman Road
C
EXTENT OF WATCHING BRIEF

Fig. 3


A
Colebatch
Motte
Conery
288
Folly Fm
Plowden Hall
SOUTH SH
Lydbury North
Five Turnings
Red Ho Fm
Lynchgate
Blakeridge Wood
Brackton
Lower Gardens
Llysty
Cumulus
Acton
Lower Down
Walcot
Brunslow
Argoed
Walcot Fm
Walcot Park
SITE
Barlow H
Bury Ditches
Sunnyhill
Clunton Hill
Kempton
Stepple Knoll
Stepple
New Ho
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B
Water Meadow Plantation
Walcot Farm
AREA OF WATCHING BRIEF
Paddock Plantation
Cattle Grid
Sally Nursery
Licensee: Field Archaeology Unit University of Birmingham Edgbaston BIRMINGHAM B15 2TT
Licence No. AL 51303A
C
Walcot Farm
AV
WO
EXTENT OF WATCHING BRIEF
AV
V
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Fig. 4