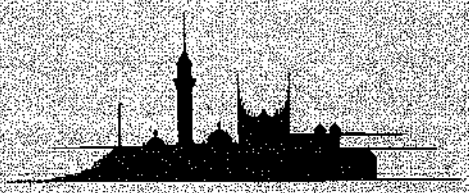
No. 539

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

Castle Old Fort, Stonnall, Walsall

An Archaeological Watching Brief June 1998

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 539
October 1998

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by
S.J.Linnane

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1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of an archaeological watching brief located (Fig.1) within the Scheduled Area of Castle Old Fort, Stonnall (NGR SK062 033). The watching brief was undertaken on the 29th June 1998 and was intended to ensure that disturbance to archaeological deposits was kept to a minimum and that where it was inevitable a complete record was maintained. The work was occasioned by the desire to construct a double garage on the site, some 8.0m. to the east of the utility building constructed in 1991 and reported in BUFAU Report No.175.01. Scheduled Monument Consent for the new construction was granted under HSD 9/2/1753/pt11.

2.0 Results

A flimsy wooden shed had previously occupied the site and this had been removed. The area intended to take the new building was first levelled and then the foundation trenches were inserted. An archaeological presence was maintained throughout the process and the spoil was examined for relevant finds, although none was observed. The area of greatest potential lay to the east where the foundation trench most obviously cut into the tail of the outer bank. The exposed section was drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig.2) and recorded photographically. The exposed stratigraphy consisted of, from the top:

1 a thin (0.10m. maximum) layer of grey/brown loam with roots, overlying

2 a layer of red/brown sand with very slight loam admix. This layer could be the tail of the outer bank and slopes down to north, south and west whilst increasing to the east. This layer is a maximum of 0.50m. deep where it appears in section. This layer, in turn, overlay

3 a layer of loam with a very high concentration of roots. The layer appears to be a buried topsoil which attracted root activity due to moisture content. This overlay, in part,

4 a lens of pale grey/brown sandy loam (a subsoil) which overlay

5 a thin layer of darker grey sandy loam which, in turn, overlay

6 a layer of orange/red sand which is the natural.

The southern part of the section was more disturbed by tree root action and recent activity connected with the construction of the shed, where a layer of burnt material, containing modern debris, underlay a deep deposit of loam.

At the far southern end of the section the ground level begins to rise, sloping up the outer face of the inner bank. No undisturbed material from this bank was observed in section.

An additional piece of work involved the excavation of a sump measuring some 2.0m by 2.0m and c3.0m deep. The sump was located some 4.0m to the north of the garage development and was located by the eastern edge of a trackway which ran north between the garage and utility store. There stratigraphy consisted of churned topsoil overlying the natural sands.

3.0 Conclusions

The lack of any finds leaves the dating of the two key layers in doubt. Layer 2 could be the degraded remains of the outer bank of the Iron Age hillfort, but equally it could be a more recent layer of re-deposited natural. There is a significant dip within the bank to the east separating the bank here investigated from the main bank alignment. Layer 3, containing a high concentration of tree roots could likewise have been a compressed turf line but its lack of compactness and the presence of the roots might suggest that it was a more recently buried layer of topsoil. Excavation in so limited a space frequently leaves questions unanswered and this is the case here. It seems probable that both layers 2 and 3 are recent whilst layers 3 and 4 are parts of the normal soil development. Could layer 2 be connected to the construction of the impliment store as reported in BUFAU internal report 175.01?

It is interesting to note that no trace of a ditch was observed at the foot of the inner bank.

4.0 Acknowledgements

This watching brief was undertaken by S.J.Linnane for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Thanks are due for the co-operation of the architect, Mr D. Saunders, the contractors and to K.D.Jones, the landowner. J.Halsted prepared the illustrations and this report was edited by E.G.Hughes.

5.0 References

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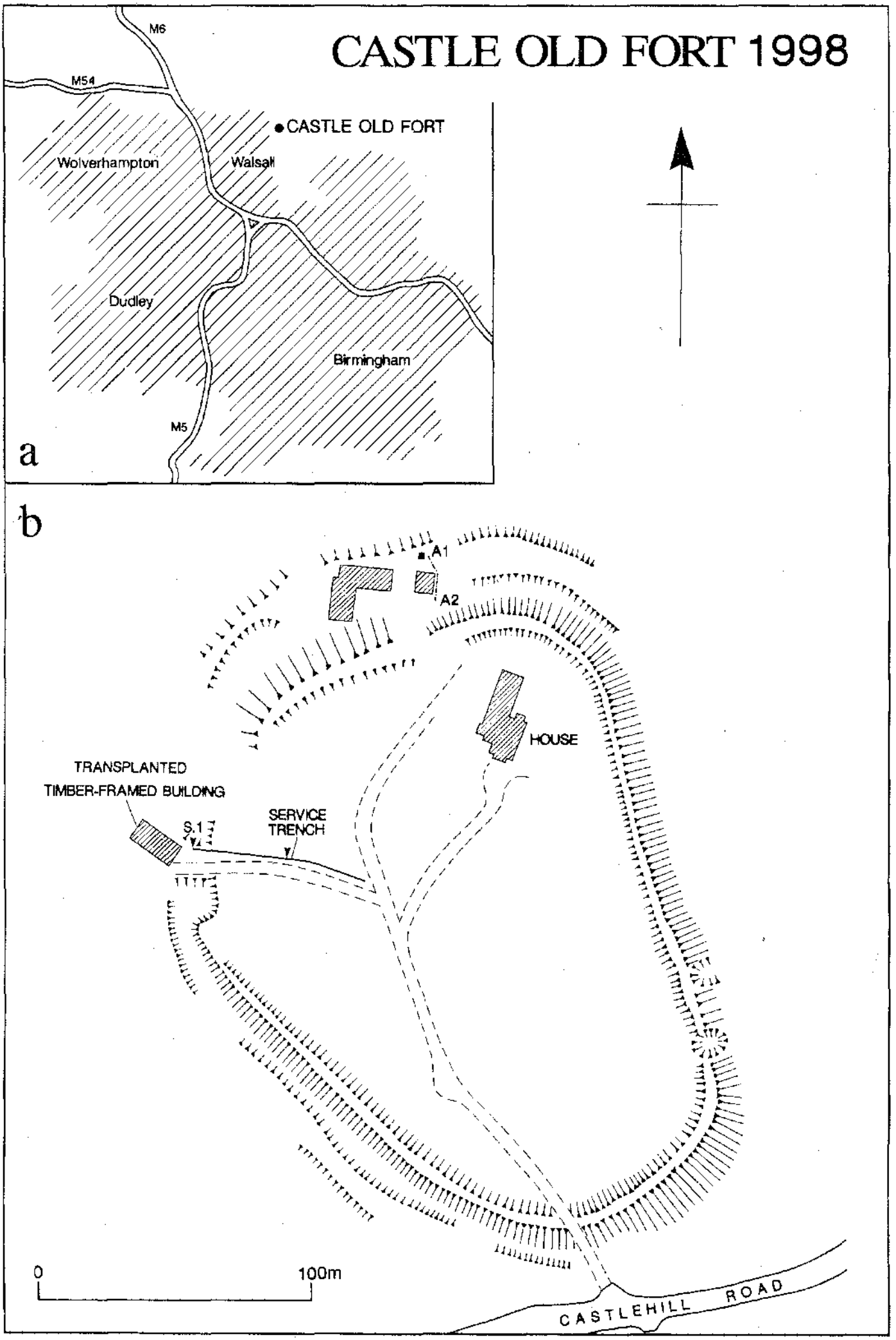
CASTLE OLD FORT 1998
M6
M54
CASTLE OLD FORT
Wolverhampton
Walsall
Dudley
Birmingham
M5
a
b
A1
A2
HOUSE
TRANSPLANTED
TIMBER-FRAMED BUILDING
S.1
SERVICE
TRENCH
0
100m
CASTLEHILL ROAD

FIG.1

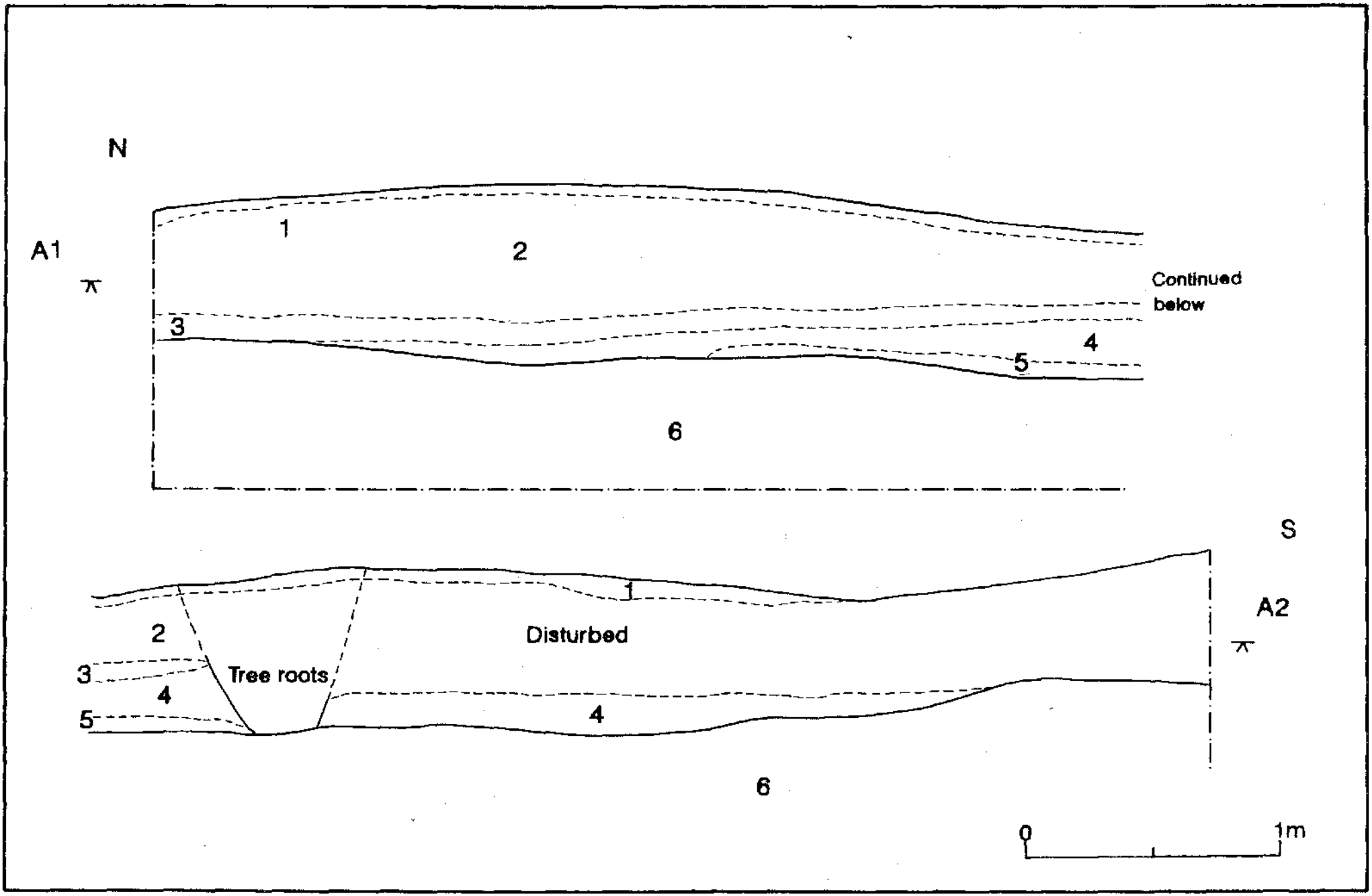
N
A1
1
2
3
4
5
6
Continued
below
S
A2
1
2
3
4
5
Disturbed
Tree roots
4
6
0
1m

FIG.2