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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT  
CHURCH FARM, BIDSTON  
1992 (SITE 31)**

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## Introduction

In July 1992 the Field Archaeology Section was asked to undertake an assessment of the archaeological potential of the standing structures and archaeological deposits around Church Farm, Bidston on behalf of the owner Mr I. Ross, in advance of his submission of a planning application to Wirral Borough Council for the redevelopment of the land and buildings.

The fieldwork took the form of detailed recording of the standing farm buildings, excluding the farmhouse itself, and excavation of a series of trenches to assess the nature, survival and extent of possible archaeological deposits in areas of likely development within the plot. The fieldwork was carried out between 20 July and 30 July 1992. The fieldwork was supplemented by a study of historic documents and maps relating to the farm and its outbuildings.

The 16th-century house and later farm buildings that constitute Church Farm are situated on the Hoylake road at the south side of Bidston village (NGR SJ 2829 9021), opposite the medieval church of St Oswald's.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND by Susan Nicholson

The place-name Bidston, 'dwelling or building at a rock' is first noted in a document of 1272 (Dodgson, 1972, 308), but the Old English components of the name suggest a possible pre-conquest settlement on this sandstone hill where the well-drained soil and prominent position above the boggy mossland to the north would have proved an attraction. At the time of the Domesday inquest of 1086 Bidston, in common with some other Wirral townships, was not important enough to be mentioned individually.

There has been a church at Bidston from at least 1288 when the living was held by Birkenhead Priory (Brownbill and Cheetham 1937, 1). The parish of Bidston originally extended to include Birkenhead, Cloughton, Moreton and Saughall Massie.

The Massey family of Dunham Massey in Cheshire held the township of Bidston from about 1150 to be succeeded by the Le Strange family in about 1350. Bidston's connection with the Stanleys (later Earls of Derby) commenced in 1397 and they remained lords of the manor until the Commonwealth Period. Lord Kingston acquired the manor in 1662, to be succeeded by the Vyners in the late 17th century. The manorial lords, however, rarely lived for any length of time in Bidston (Brownbill 1936).

The medieval settlement in the vicinity of the church and hall was not recorded in great detail, although there are various references to Bidston in the Forest Rolls, other County records and manorial deeds. The first list of names of the inhabitants of the village is contained in the Derby rental of 1521. Besides the Hall, five farms and two cottages were listed for Bidston itself. As yet, however, it is not possible to say exactly where each dwelling was or who lived in each one, though it seems likely that the villagers' seven dwellings noted on the 1665 Survey were on the sites of the seven earlier holdings.

It is quite clear, from a study of the documents relating to the various properties in Bidston from the mid 17th century to the late 19th century that, although the basic number of farms remained at seven for most of this time, the actual number of fields rented by each successive tenant could change. Holdings were merged or divided, temporarily or permanently. The enclosure of the Town Moss added more fields to most holdings, in lieu of the 'Cow Gates', (the right to graze cattle on the Town Moss). In addition, properties were sometimes sub-let, or were occupied by a relative of the main lease-holder. The sequence of occupation, therefore, is sometimes difficult to establish, though the actual lease-holder can usually be identified.

The Wirral Subsidy Roll of 1544 included a Ralph Taylor (Cheshire Record Office DFI 176), and a William Taylor paid 4 shillings rent in 1644 (Cheshire Record Office DFI 56). It is possible that they belonged to the same family as the William Taylor who was recorded in the Hearth Tax of 1663/4 as having

sion to graze up to nine cows on the Town Moss. A gradual process of mossland enclosure continued. By the time of the Tithe Apportionment in 1838, the Church Farm holding included four fields on the former Town Moss, two of which were called Higher Moss where hay and potatoes were grown, another called House Moss and the last one called Lower Moss, both being used as pasture (Cheshire Record Office EDT 47/1 and 2/1).

A later lease of 15 May 1772 between the same Robert Vyner and William Wilson renewed the one of 1749. It had become necessary to renew the lease because one of those mentioned in 1749, namely Matthew Wilson, one of William's sons, had died. The description of the property was exactly the same. (Appendix II; Cheshire Record Office DBC Acc 1063, Box 5).

The Land Tax records from 1778-1832 provide a useful sequence of land-holding and indicate changes in tenancy (Cheshire Record Office QDV 2/46). As the Wilson family had lived in Bidston for so long, their holding was known as "Wilson's" and was rated at £2 14s 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d for several decades. However, the names of the actual occupiers of "Wilson's" were not always entered and one tenant sometimes leased two or more separate holdings. The Land Tax entry for Bidston in 1786 does record that Hamlet Pearsey was now responsible for the tax on Wilson's tenement whereas before that date the property was simply entered as "Wilson's". Hamlet Pearsey continued to pay the same amount until 1799 when John Pendleton took over the tenancy. John Pendleton had already been paying Land Tax of 10s.2 1/2d. for another property in Bidston since 1782. A Thomas Pendleton assumed responsibility for the two separate amounts in 1823 to be replaced by a Johanna Pendleton in 1825. John Percey Junior in 1826 paid for the original holding only and the amount was £1 15s 0d. In 1827 Ellen Wharton paid a similar amount for the single holding, but by the time the Land Tax records ceased in 1832, she had evidently acquired extra land since the payment in that year was £2 11s 8d.

The Tithe Apportionment and Map of Bidston (Cheshire Record Office EDT 47/1 and 2, 1838 and 1842) provide a ground plan of the buildings and fields together with a complete list of the holding (Fig. 7 and Appendix III). By this time, Ellen Wharton had died and the farm and its land were in the hands of her executors. The Census Returns for Bidston for 1851 include a William Wharton, aged 50, a widower, whose occupation was described as "Farm Labourer". He may have been Ellen's husband and may have continued to live at Church Farm together with his widowed mother of 90 and his three children.

The 1861 and 1871 Census Returns for Bidston provide no obvious clues as to who lived at Church Farm, but in 1881 the Census Returns state that Thomas Lamb, aged 45, born at Weaverham, Cheshire, occupied "Church Farm" and farmed 116 acres. Martha Lamb, his wife, born at Great Sutton 22 years before, was evidently his second wife as Mr Lamb already had seven children by a previous marriage. Since moving to Bidston two children had been born, the older one being two years old. (Appendix V). By 1891, five more children had been born, the youngest being Benjamin aged seven months (Appendix VI). The Lambs continued to live at Church Farm until at least 1923 when "Mrs Martha Lamb and Sons" of Church Farm were listed as farmers in Kelly's Directory for that year (*Kelly's Directory* 1923, 74).

## **B: THE EXCAVATION by Robert Cleary**

### **Geology of the site**

The site lies within a region of Triassic deposits (Geological Survey map, sheet 96). The solid geology is of the Upper Mottled sandstone group, and consists entirely of Bunter sandstone. Overlying the sandstone are drift deposits of glacial boulder clay.

### **Topography and Recent History of the site**

The site lies on an artificially levelled area at about 13 m AOD. The house and farm buildings are set on the southern side of the village on the Hoylake road. A few metres to the south lies a modern housing estate, to the west the land falls away towards Bidston Moss, and to the east the adjacent property known as Ivy Farm is situated.

Today the site has been artificially covered by tarmac and gravel, and much of it has been given over for use as a private car park. The outbuildings and stables are temporarily utilised but largely remain empty, but not neglected.

### **The Excavation**

Five areas were excavated, the location of which was determined by the proposed development. All trenches were positioned to examine a representative sample of those areas to be developed at a later date. Trench I was located at the extreme south-east end of Church farm on ground now used as a car park. This trench measured c. 7.5 by 2 m and was excavated in part with the assistance of a JCB.

Trench II was located parallel to, and north of, Trench I at the south-eastern end of the site, adja-

directly over context 7 a mid brown silty sand, identical in composition to 4, 15 and 20, which was interpreted as an agricultural horizon. As elsewhere this deposit lay directly over the natural subsoil horizon.

It was decided to test the disturbed deposits to the west and north of Trench IV with the help of the JCB, to ascertain the depth and nature of the destruction. However, it soon became clear that all the archaeology at this end of the site had been irrevocably destroyed by modern disturbance.

### THE FINDS by Robert Philpott

The finds from Church Farm represent an interesting cross-section of the occupation history of the site. By far the largest category of find was pottery. In total 63 pottery sherds were recovered. The earliest sherds were three of Roman date, comprising a rim sherd of Gillam form 219 black-burnished dish (BB1, Fig. 15.1) of the period AD 125-150, a rim sherd of a jar in a slightly micaceous sandy orange fabric, which may be Severn Valley or Cheshire Plains fabric (Fig. 15.2), and a small body sherd in a light orange-brown sandy fabric.

Two medieval sherds were recovered. The earlier, a light purple glazed vessel with green splash-glazing (possibly a jug) and a light grey core, may be 14th-15th century in date (31.4). The other has a thin dark purple glaze over a very sandy body, probably of late medieval date (14th-15th century, although possibly a little later).

As usual on farm or village sites, the great bulk of the finds date to the post-medieval and later periods (16th to 20th centuries) when the use of pottery became firmly established (58 of 63 sherds). A small number of dark-glazed sherds representing four or five earthenware storage vessels of 16th and 17th century date, together with three fragments from different self-coloured ware bowls (dating to the 17th century) is followed by the usual explosion of pottery use in the 18th century. The principal form remains the storage vessel but a small number of thinner walled sherds in black wares are evident. The rim of a trailed slipware dish, of a type dated 1660 to 1720 in Stoke-on-Trent, but not necessarily a Staffordshire product (31.11), along with a single body sherd of agate-bodied ware (31.4), a rather superior earthenware which had a *floruit* in the period 1740-70, represent the only relatively sophisticated vessel in the collection. An unusual find was a candlestick with a very carefully applied dark brown glaze over a fine dark red body which probably dates to the 17th century (31.22, Fig. 15.3).

The virtual absence of exotic imports or finer earthenwares is not altogether surprising from such a small collection, and the overall impression from the 16th century onwards is of a predominance of storage or dairy type vessels.

Significant finds of other materials are scarce. One base of a mid 18th- to early 19th-century wine bottle was recovered (31.3), as were two fragments of clay tobacco pipe (31.3 and 4).

The finds are indicative of continuous occupation on the site from the late medieval period, but the stratigraphy demonstrates that the great majority of the pre-18th century finds were in soil layers which had seen considerable disturbance and mixing.

### Discussion

The earliest evidence for human activity on the site is provided by a mesolithic flint blade, dating broadly to the period 7000-4000 BC. Although indicative only of casual activity on the site.

The presence of three Roman pottery sherds as residual finds within later soil layers is suggestive of some occupation during the Roman period at or very near this site. A Roman coin was found in St Oswald's churchyard in 1977, within a few metres of the present site, but pierced coins such as this are highly portable and thus potentially introduced to the findspot long after the Roman period. Pottery sherds, however, are much less likely than coins to move far from the place where they were discarded, and consequently have a higher value as evidence of occupation on or near the findspot. The pattern of rural settlement in the Merseyside region during the Roman period is not well understood. However, it appears that the majority of sites are individual isolated farmsteads, which are usually located through air photography when the buried ditches of the surrounding farmstead enclosure are revealed through differential crop growth. Fieldwalking and limited excavation on Roman sites in the region suggests that the level of economic activity on these sites is low, with few coins or metal items and little pottery. The discovery of this small group of Roman pottery is of considerable interest since it represents a previously unsuspected site, presumably of a farmstead, located on a well-drained shelf of land below the rocky outcrop of Bidston Hill on the margin of the extensive mossland.

The picture of the site in the medieval period is revealed through documentary evidence, and suggests that the adjacent land was utilised for agricultural purposes. In the post-medieval period the immediate land surrounding the house was used as a garden.

Again, as in the case of the eastern gable end of Building 1, the western gable end has three evenly spaced, but blocked ventilation holes. There is also an opening in this apex, but unlike the opposing gable opening it has a moulded surround, a sill, a lintel and a fitted wooden door with cross and diagonal battens visible from the exterior. The southern edge of the western gable lacks well shaped quoins, and, as in the case of Building 1 and Building 3, there is no apparent attempt to key Building 1 in with Building 4.

The southern elevation of Building 1 (Photograph IIIa) originally had alternating doors and windows on the ground floor level but they have subsequently been altered. From the western end of the building moving eastward, there is a blocked doorway, (now a window), one unaltered window, one stable door, one unaltered window, one blocked doorway, (with a layer of white angular gravel stones set in the bottom of a step, 20 - 30 mm thick), and finally at the eastern end, one stable door. Each window is a sash window with a moulded surround and a large carefully finished ashlar block as a lintel. Each of the ground floor windows has a large sill which projects from the wall by approximately 0.15 m.

The eastern most door and window on this elevation are not as evenly spaced apart as those further along the elevation, or those on the east facing wall of Building 4 (Photograph IIIb). The window above this doorway also has a different appearance in that it has no sill, and has a modern rectangular concrete block as a lintel.

The first floor level has, from west to east, a pair of rectangular ventilation holes, a window (which previously had a wooden door similar to those on the eastern elevation of Building 4 (I. Ross pers. comm.)), a pair of rectangular ventilation holes, a single ventilation hole and the afore-mentioned window with a concrete block lintel.

The appearance of this elevation compares well with the eastern elevation of Building 4 (Photograph IIIb). Here the air vents form matching pairs, suggesting that Building 1 has lost an air vent in order to accommodate an additional window. On the ground floor of Building 1, during the same stage of reorganisation, a window has been blocked and an extra door 'squeezed' into the remaining space at the eastern end. This may also have been the phase when a brick wall was added to the interior of the eastern gable, between the fourth window and the added door, to form a small loose-box, tack room or quarantine at the eastern end. The present owners constructed a secondary floor to this room for use as a bird loft, but originally the added window on the first floor would have provided the light for the room.

Although the external evidence for the rest of Building 1 suggests a two storey building, there is no such vertical division internally. The first floor opening on the southern elevation and the gable openings would again have provided additional light and air, a particularly useful asset when the building was used as a shippon (see later note).

The interior of the western gable end is covered with a coat of white-wash and so makes the identification of the construction a little more difficult. However, no modern bricks have been used, and there is a thick layer of plaster around the lower half of the interior of the building.

The final exterior stone course just below the roof line, is made up of long, fairly narrow, rectangular blocks laid end to end. The roof itself is formed of thin cut slate, which has been replaced and repaired since Church Farm has been occupied by the present owners (I. Ross pers. comm.). There is also a line of coping stones along each gable edge and along the ridge.

There are several indications that this building was once used to house cattle, the first being the raised platform which extends the whole length of the building inside and covers about two-thirds of the width. The cattle would have been arranged in stalls or stanchions on this concrete platform (there could have been about four or five in the Church Farm example), in such a way as they could stand, eat, lie down or be milked without too much discomfort. The manure channel is now covered by a layer of concrete, but at one time would have extended along the full length of the shippon and would also have sloped slightly for drainage purposes, and escaped via a small opening in the base of the brickwork of the front elevation. The raised area at the rear of the building is still present, and would have been where the cow stood or lay. In addition, the concrete platform still has the remains of the stanchion divisions embedded in it.

## **Building 2**

This building measures 16 by 6 m and is parallel to and adjoins Building 3. It is a low, single-storey building with internal stone and wood subdivisions. It has a corrugated roof, two stable doors, and three long and narrow rectangular windows which have a wooden frame and a covering of wire mesh. The walls are built to a random coursing, set within a lime-based mortar with squared quoins at both the north and south ends. The southern quoin is approximately 0.92 m wide and projects slightly from the main wall by approximately 0.10 m.

As with Buildings 1 and 3, Buildings 1 and 4 have not been keyed in to one another. Instead the corners of both buildings meet, each with its own alternating corner quoins in order to form the 'L' shape (Photograph Va). This further suggests that Building 1 was the earlier of the two.

The external, east-facing elevation has four ground floor sash windows with moulded surrounds, large ashlar lintels and projecting sills. The upper floor level (from the southern end moving north) has alternating openings and pairs of ventilation holes. The second and third upper storey openings are now blocked, but the blocking is arranged so as to allow the continuation of the paired ventilation holes, and the stonework is slightly recessed. All the architectural features are arranged in a similar pattern to those on the southern elevation of Building 1, and perhaps provide an impression of the original arrangement of Building 1, and its overall length. Each of the lower windows has a sill which protrudes from the wall by approximately 0.15 m. Again each window has a worked stone lintel, as do the stable doors.

This elevation is slightly different from the other as none of the doorways have been blocked.

The southern gable exterior has a single rectangular ventilation hole in the apex, and three similar ventilation holes spaced a few courses below. There is a single door on the western side of this gable, giving access to the southern room which also has a loft, (the access to which was once by a series of steps but now is by a ladder). This room has a concrete floor, as does the main part of the building.

The northern gable of Building 4, is similar to the western gable of Building 1. It has the same opening in the apex of the gable, with the usual sill and lintel, but in addition this elevation has a wooden framed window in the western corner. It also has the remains of a section of white-wash, confirming the presence at some time of a small shed or other lean-to structure. The window of this particular elevation does not have a stone sill but it does have the usual stone lintel.

To the rear of this block is a partly built (roofless) and subsequently abandoned extension which is modern in date. This obscures the lower half of the western wall but a row of seven rectangular ventilation holes can be seen running the whole length of the wall, and reflect the arrangement on the eastern elevation. There is also a door which has a glazed window either side.

As in the case of Building 1, this block was once a shippon, with the additional feature of a dairy at the

southern end. There are two blocked doors which would originally have given access to the dairy into the shippon, and a blocked opening in the apex of the dividing wall would have provided additional light and air.

#### **Building 5; Extension to Building 4**

This block is a modern feature which remains unfinished (Photograph Vb). Again the construction is one of squared built to courses, and again, a lime based mortar has been used. At present the building has no roof. The incomplete nature of the building provides a good illustration of the way other buildings within the farm complex have been altered in the past. It can be seen from the map evidence that a smaller extension has existed at this point until the mid 1980s. The present structure makes use of the southern wall of this extension.

#### **Building 6: The Granary**

The granary at Church Farm is of a common arrangement, built over the cartshed, and measuring 16m by 6m including the adjoining shed. The two functions complement one another, as the granary needed to be raised from the ground, and the cartshed required an open-fronted roofed structure. The Church Farm example has a shallow arched lintel formed by a series of wedge-shaped stone blocks. Now complete with a shed door, it may have originally been open-fronted. It has a brick floor with an area of cobble stones in the entrance. This particular arrangement has external stone steps with an extended wall to accommodate a built-in dog kennel beneath (Photograph VIa).

#### **Building 7**

This block adjoins Building 6 to the west, and measures approximately 6 by 8 m. The construction of the western elevation shows a neat arrangement of well finished stone, and a greater use of small rectangular stone, as well as a large window with a concrete lintel. Inside this window has a double segmental arched head. The wall which divides the granary from this 'shed' has a pitch-hole in the apex of the gable which is larger than other such openings at Church Farm. There are several beams which extend from this dividing wall across to the western elevation of 7, one of which has corbelling beneath.

The northern corner of this elevation has a well built alternating quoin, but the southern corner (which is in fact the corner of the pigsty wall) has no such feature (Photograph VIb).

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1875 OS 1st ed 25" Cheshire sheet VII.14

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b) Wills Series: WS

c) Birch Cullimore Deeds: DBC Acc 1063 Box 5

d) Land Tax 1778-1832: QDV 2\46

e) Census Returns: 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891

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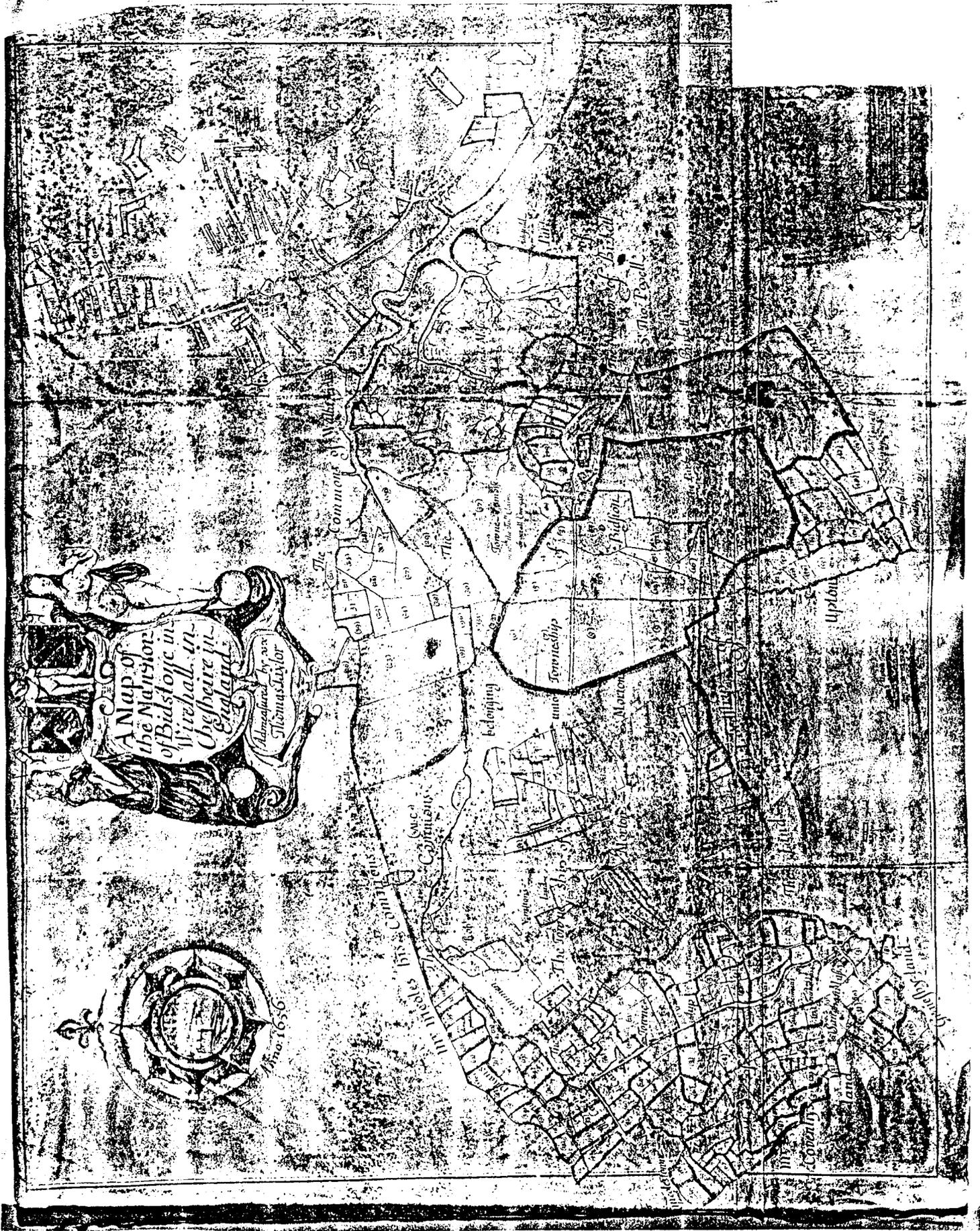
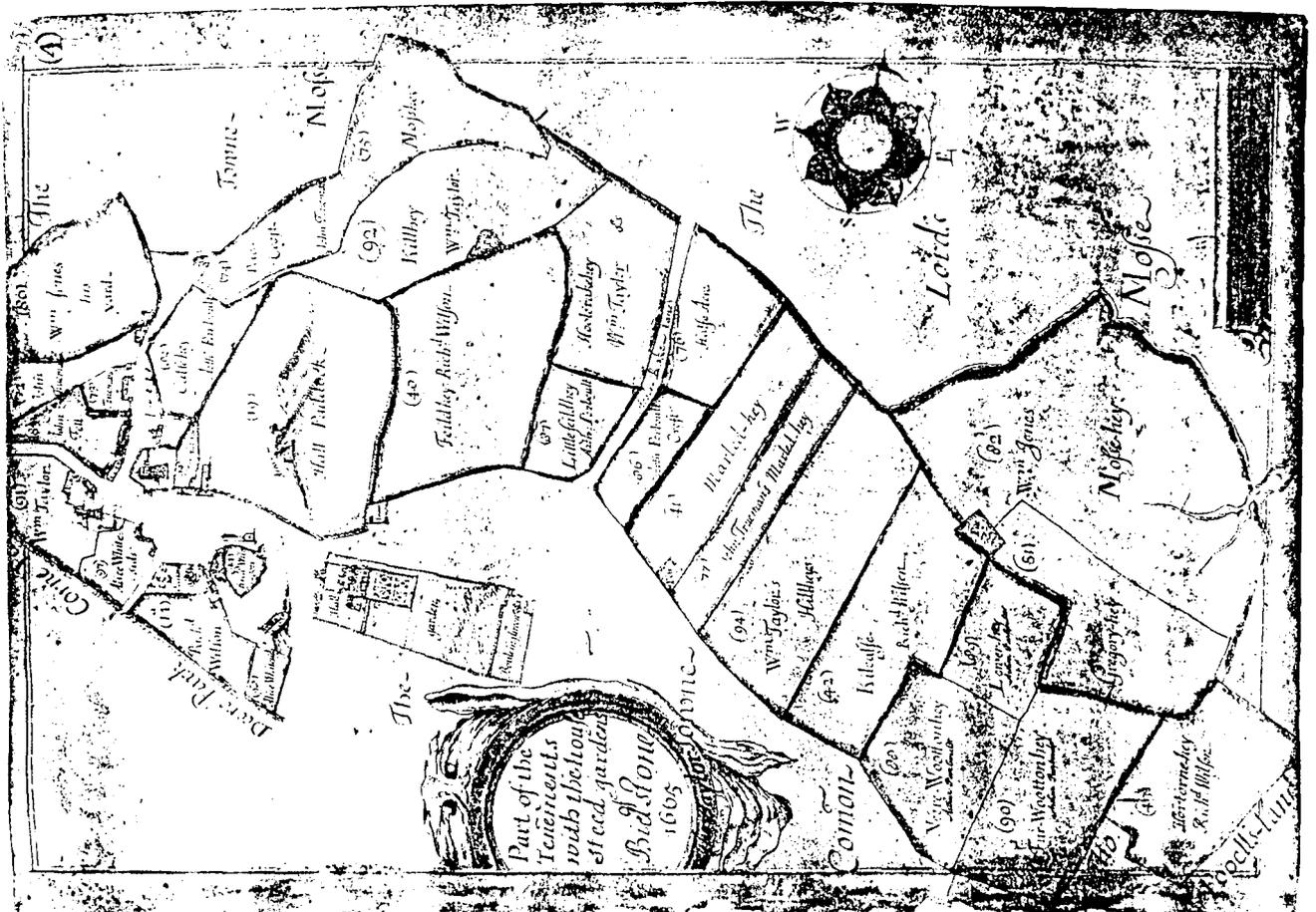


Fig. 1. 1665 Kingston Survey: Key Map



No.	The Tenements names	Dimensions of Land	By what Law they are held
72	Backside	3:07:31	01:21:02
73	The house-lead and garden	0:17:18	00:02:27
74	Rice-croft arable	1:32:07	00:03:14
75	Moose-hay pasture	3:14:59	01:22:09
76	Malle Acre	2:0:33	01:01:20
77	Malle-hay arable	2:3:32	01:15:22
78	John Tinsman's Backside	10:11:03	07:22:39
79	Stord-fall arable	3:27:30	01:32:01
80	Common	2:2:28	00:02:17
81	The house Backside & garden	3:1:37	01:21:22
82	Gregories-hay or croft arable	4:2:33	02:02:35
83	Moose-hay pasture	13:02:17	00:02:31
84	The house-lead Backside & garden	21:1:07	00:02:08
85	The house-lead & Backside & garden	3:0:32	00:02:14
86	Backside with the fall-hay	01:2:32	00:03:05
87	The fall-hay	01:1:11	00:02:19
88	Fauld-hay arable	01:2:14	00:03:00
89	near West-hay	05:0:58	01:27:04
90	Long-hay	02:0:39	01:08:59
91	North-hay	04:2:19	02:02:20
92	of 58-acre shanty	11:0:20	09:02:10
93	The house Backside & Backside	01:4:11	00:03:47
94	Kill-hay arable	02:5:32	00:06:38
95	Kill-hay arable	05:5:32	02:03:07
96	Share-hay arable	12:5:37	00:00:00
97	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
98	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
99	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
100	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
101	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
102	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
103	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
104	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
105	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
106	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
107	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
108	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
109	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
110	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
111	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
112	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
113	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
114	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
115	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
116	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
117	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
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121	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
122	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
123	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
124	The house Backside & Garden Backside	01:0:17	00:00:00
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Fig. 2. 1665 Kingston Survey: '... the Tenements ... of Bidstone'







Fig. 6. 1831 A. Bryant's Map of Cheshire



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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT  
CHURCH FARM, BIDSTON  
1992 (SITE 31)**

**Robert Cleary, Susan Nicholson,  
Robert Philpott and Lynn Smith**

**September 1992**

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# AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT CHURCH FARM, BIDSTON 1992 (SITE 31)

Robert Cleary, Susan Nicholson, Robert Philpott and Lynn Smith

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## Introduction

In July 1992 the Field Archaeology Section was asked to undertake an assessment of the archaeological potential of the standing structures and archaeological deposits around Church Farm, Bidston on behalf of the owner Mr I. Ross, in advance of his submission of a planning application to Wirral Borough Council for the redevelopment of the land and buildings.

The fieldwork took the form of detailed recording of the standing farm buildings, excluding the farmhouse itself, and excavation of a series of trenches to assess the nature, survival and extent of possible archaeological deposits in areas of likely development within the plot. The fieldwork was carried out between 20 July and 30 July 1992. The fieldwork was supplemented by a study of historic documents and maps relating to the farm and its outbuildings.

The 16th-century house and later farm buildings that constitute Church Farm are situated on the Hoylake road at the south side of Bidston village (NGR SJ 2829 9021), opposite the medieval church of St Oswald's.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND by Susan Nicholson

The place-name Bidston, 'dwelling or building at a rock' is first noted in a document of 1272 (Dodgson, 1972, 308), but the Old English components of the name suggest a possible pre-conquest settlement on this sandstone hill where the well-drained soil and prominent position above the boggy mossland to the north would have proved an attraction. At the time of the Domesday inquest of 1086 Bidston, in common with some other Wirral townships, was not important enough to be mentioned individually.

There has been a church at Bidston from at least 1288 when the living was held by Birkenhead Priory (Brownbill and Cheetham 1937, 1). The parish of Bidston originally extended to include Birkenhead, Cloughton, Moreton and Saughall Massie.

The Massey family of Dunham Massey in Cheshire held the township of Bidston from about 1150 to be succeeded by the Le Strange family in about 1350. Bidston's connection with the Stanleys (later Earls of Derby) commenced in 1397 and they remained lords of the manor until the Commonwealth Period. Lord Kingston acquired the manor in 1662, to be succeeded by the Vyners in the late 17th century. The manorial lords, however, rarely lived for any length of time in Bidston (Brownbill 1936).

The medieval settlement in the vicinity of the church and hall was not recorded in great detail, although there are various references to Bidston in the Forest Rolls, other County records and manorial deeds. The first list of names of the inhabitants of the village is contained in the Derby rental of 1521. Besides the Hall, five farms and two cottages were listed for Bidston itself. As yet, however, it is not possible to say exactly where each dwelling was or who lived in each one, though it seems likely that the villagers' seven dwellings noted on the 1665 Survey were on the sites of the seven earlier holdings.

It is quite clear, from a study of the documents relating to the various properties in Bidston from the mid 17th century to the late 19th century that, although the basic number of farms remained at seven for most of this time, the actual number of fields rented by each successive tenant could change. Holdings were merged or divided, temporarily or permanently. The enclosure of the Town Moss added more fields to most holdings, in lieu of the 'Cow Gates', (the right to graze cattle on the Town Moss). In addition, properties were sometimes sub-let, or were occupied by a relative of the main lease-holder. The sequence of occupation, therefore, is sometimes difficult to establish, though the actual lease-holder can usually be identified.

The Wirral Subsidy Roll of 1544 included a Ralph Taylor (Cheshire Record Office DFI 176), and a William Taylor paid 4 shillings rent in 1644 (Cheshire Record Office DFI 56). It is possible that they belonged to the same family as the William Taylor who was recorded in the Hearth Tax of 1663/4 as having

sion to graze up to nine cows on the Town Moss. A gradual process of mossland enclosure continued. By the time of the Tithe Apportionment in 1838, the Church Farm holding included four fields on the former Town Moss, two of which were called Higher Moss where hay and potatoes were grown, another called House Moss and the last one called Lower Moss, both being used as pasture (Cheshire Record Office EDT 47/1 and 2/1).

A later lease of 15 May 1772 between the same Robert Vyner and William Wilson renewed the one of 1749. It had become necessary to renew the lease because one of those mentioned in 1749, namely Matthew Wilson, one of William's sons, had died. The description of the property was exactly the same. (Appendix II; Cheshire Record Office DBC Acc 1063, Box 5).

The Land Tax records from 1778-1832 provide a useful sequence of land-holding and indicate changes in tenancy (Cheshire Record Office QDV 2/46). As the Wilson family had lived in Bidston for so long, their holding was known as "Wilson's" and was rated at £2 14s 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d for several decades. However, the names of the actual occupiers of "Wilson's" were not always entered and one tenant sometimes leased two or more separate holdings. The Land Tax entry for Bidston in 1786 does record that Hamlet Pearsey was now responsible for the tax on Wilson's tenement whereas before that date the property was simply entered as "Wilson's". Hamlet Pearsey continued to pay the same amount until 1799 when John Pendleton took over the tenancy. John Pendleton had already been paying Land Tax of 10s.2 1/2d. for another property in Bidston since 1782. A Thomas Pendleton assumed responsibility for the two separate amounts in 1823 to be replaced by a Johanna Pendleton in 1825. John Percey Junior in 1826 paid for the original holding only and the amount was £1 15s 0d. In 1827 Ellen Wharton paid a similar amount for the single holding, but by the time the Land Tax records ceased in 1832, she had evidently acquired extra land since the payment in that year was £2 11s 8d.

The Tithe Apportionment and Map of Bidston (Cheshire Record Office EDT 47/1 and 2, 1838 and 1842) provide a ground plan of the buildings and fields together with a complete list of the holding (Fig. 7 and Appendix III). By this time, Ellen Wharton had died and the farm and its land were in the hands of her executors. The Census Returns for Bidston for 1851 include a William Wharton, aged 50, a widower, whose occupation was described as "Farm Labourer". He may have been Ellen's husband and may have continued to live at Church Farm together with his widowed mother of 90 and his three children.

The 1861 and 1871 Census Returns for Bidston provide no obvious clues as to who lived at Church Farm, but in 1881 the Census Returns state that Thomas Lamb, aged 45, born at Weaverham, Cheshire, occupied "Church Farm" and farmed 116 acres. Martha Lamb, his wife, born at Great Sutton 22 years before, was evidently his second wife as Mr Lamb already had seven children by a previous marriage. Since moving to Bidston two children had been born, the older one being two years old. (Appendix V). By 1891, five more children had been born, the youngest being Benjamin aged seven months (Appendix VI). The Lambs continued to live at Church Farm until at least 1923 when "Mrs Martha Lamb and Sons" of Church Farm were listed as farmers in Kelly's Directory for that year (*Kelly's Directory* 1923, 74).

## **B: THE EXCAVATION by Robert Cleary**

### **Geology of the site**

The site lies within a region of Triassic deposits (Geological Survey map, sheet 96). The solid geology is of the Upper Mottled sandstone group, and consists entirely of Bunter sandstone. Overlying the sandstone are drift deposits of glacial boulder clay.

### **Topography and Recent History of the site**

The site lies on an artificially levelled area at about 13 m AOD. The house and farm buildings are set on the southern side of the village on the Hoylake road. A few metres to the south lies a modern housing estate, to the west the land falls away towards Bidston Moss, and to the east the adjacent property known as Ivy Farm is situated.

Today the site has been artificially covered by tarmac and gravel, and much of it has been given over for use as a private car park. The outbuildings and stables are temporarily utilised but largely remain empty, but not neglected.

### **The Excavation**

Five areas were excavated, the location of which was determined by the proposed development. All trenches were positioned to examine a representative sample of those areas to be developed at a later date. Trench I was located at the extreme south-east end of Church farm on ground now used as a car park. This trench measured c. 7.5 by 2 m and was excavated in part with the assistance of a JCB.

Trench II was located parallel to, and north of, Trench I at the south-eastern end of the site, adja-

directly over context 7 a mid brown silty sand, identical in composition to 4, 15 and 20, which was interpreted as an agricultural horizon. As elsewhere this deposit lay directly over the natural subsoil horizon.

It was decided to test the disturbed deposits to the west and north of Trench IV with the help of the JCB, to ascertain the depth and nature of the destruction. However, it soon became clear that all the archaeology at this end of the site had been irrevocably destroyed by modern disturbance.

### THE FINDS by Robert Philpott

The finds from Church Farm represent an interesting cross-section of the occupation history of the site. By far the largest category of find was pottery. In total 63 pottery sherds were recovered. The earliest sherds were three of Roman date, comprising a rim sherd of Gillam form 219 black-burnished dish (BB1, Fig. 15.1) of the period AD 125-150, a rim sherd of a jar in a slightly micaceous sandy orange fabric, which may be Severn Valley or Cheshire Plains fabric (Fig. 15.2), and a small body sherd in a light orange-brown sandy fabric.

Two medieval sherds were recovered. The earlier, a light purple glazed vessel with green splash-glazing (possibly a jug) and a light grey core, may be 14th-15th century in date (31.4). The other has a thin dark purple glaze over a very sandy body, probably of late medieval date (14th-15th century, although possibly a little later).

As usual on farm or village sites, the great bulk of the finds date to the post-medieval and later periods (16th to 20th centuries) when the use of pottery became firmly established (58 of 63 sherds). A small number of dark-glazed sherds representing four or five earthenware storage vessels of 16th and 17th century date, together with three fragments from different self-coloured ware bowls (dating to the 17th century) is followed by the usual explosion of pottery use in the 18th century. The principal form remains the storage vessel but a small number of thinner walled sherds in black wares are evident. The rim of a trailed slipware dish, of a type dated 1660 to 1720 in Stoke-on-Trent, but not necessarily a Staffordshire product (31.11), along with a single body sherd of agate-bodied ware (31.4), a rather superior earthenware which had a *floruit* in the period 1740-70, represent the only relatively sophisticated vessel in the collection. An unusual find was a candlestick with a very carefully applied dark brown glaze over a fine dark red body which probably dates to the 17th century (31.22, Fig. 15.3).

The virtual absence of exotic imports or finer earthenwares is not altogether surprising from such a small collection, and the overall impression from the 16th century onwards is of a predominance of storage or dairy type vessels.

Significant finds of other materials are scarce. One base of a mid 18th- to early 19th-century wine bottle was recovered (31.3), as were two fragments of clay tobacco pipe (31.3 and 4).

The finds are indicative of continuous occupation on the site from the late medieval period, but the stratigraphy demonstrates that the great majority of the pre-18th century finds were in soil layers which had seen considerable disturbance and mixing.

### Discussion

The earliest evidence for human activity on the site is provided by a mesolithic flint blade, dating broadly to the period 7000-4000 BC. Although indicative only of casual activity on the site.

The presence of three Roman pottery sherds as residual finds within later soil layers is suggestive of some occupation during the Roman period at or very near this site. A Roman coin was found in St Oswald's churchyard in 1977, within a few metres of the present site, but pierced coins such as this are highly portable and thus potentially introduced to the findspot long after the Roman period. Pottery sherds, however, are much less likely than coins to move far from the place where they were discarded, and consequently have a higher value as evidence of occupation on or near the findspot. The pattern of rural settlement in the Merseyside region during the Roman period is not well understood. However, it appears that the majority of sites are individual isolated farmsteads, which are usually located through air photography when the buried ditches of the surrounding farmstead enclosure are revealed through differential crop growth. Fieldwalking and limited excavation on Roman sites in the region suggests that the level of economic activity on these sites is low, with few coins or metal items and little pottery. The discovery of this small group of Roman pottery is of considerable interest since it represents a previously unsuspected site, presumably of a farmstead, located on a well-drained shelf of land below the rocky outcrop of Bidston Hill on the margin of the extensive mossland.

The picture of the site in the medieval period is revealed through documentary evidence, and suggests that the adjacent land was utilised for agricultural purposes. In the post-medieval period the immediate land surrounding the house was used as a garden.

Again, as in the case of the eastern gable end of Building 1, the western gable end has three evenly spaced, but blocked ventilation holes. There is also an opening in this apex, but unlike the opposing gable opening it has a moulded surround, a sill, a lintel and a fitted wooden door with cross and diagonal battens visible from the exterior. The southern edge of the western gable lacks well shaped quoins, and, as in the case of Building 1 and Building 3, there is no apparent attempt to key Building 1 in with Building 4.

The southern elevation of Building 1 (Photograph IIIa) originally had alternating doors and windows on the ground floor level but they have subsequently been altered. From the western end of the building moving eastward, there is a blocked doorway, (now a window), one unaltered window, one stable door, one unaltered window, one blocked doorway, (with a layer of white angular gravel stones set in the bottom of a step, 20 - 30 mm thick), and finally at the eastern end, one stable door. Each window is a sash window with a moulded surround and a large carefully finished ashlar block as a lintel. Each of the ground floor windows has a large sill which projects from the wall by approximately 0.15 m.

The eastern most door and window on this elevation are not as evenly spaced apart as those further along the elevation, or those on the east facing wall of Building 4 (Photograph IIIb). The window above this doorway also has a different appearance in that it has no sill, and has a modern rectangular concrete block as a lintel.

The first floor level has, from west to east, a pair of rectangular ventilation holes, a window (which previously had a wooden door similar to those on the eastern elevation of Building 4 (I. Ross pers. comm.)), a pair of rectangular ventilation holes, a single ventilation hole and the afore-mentioned window with a concrete block lintel.

The appearance of this elevation compares well with the eastern elevation of Building 4 (Photograph IIIb). Here the air vents form matching pairs, suggesting that Building 1 has lost an air vent in order to accommodate an additional window. On the ground floor of Building 1, during the same stage of reorganisation, a window has been blocked and an extra door 'squeezed' into the remaining space at the eastern end. This may also have been the phase when a brick wall was added to the interior of the eastern gable, between the fourth window and the added door, to form a small loose-box, tack room or quarantine at the eastern end. The present owners constructed a secondary floor to this room for use as a bird loft, but originally the added window on the first floor would have provided the light for the room.

Although the external evidence for the rest of Building 1 suggests a two storey building, there is no such vertical division internally. The first floor opening on the southern elevation and the gable openings would again have provided additional light and air, a particularly useful asset when the building was used as a shippon (see later note).

The interior of the western gable end is covered with a coat of white-wash and so makes the identification of the construction a little more difficult. However, no modern bricks have been used, and there is a thick layer of plaster around the lower half of the interior of the building.

The final exterior stone course just below the roof line, is made up of long, fairly narrow, rectangular blocks laid end to end. The roof itself is formed of thin cut slate, which has been replaced and repaired since Church Farm has been occupied by the present owners (I. Ross pers. comm.). There is also a line of coping stones along each gable edge and along the ridge.

There are several indications that this building was once used to house cattle, the first being the raised platform which extends the whole length of the building inside and covers about two-thirds of the width. The cattle would have been arranged in stalls or stanchions on this concrete platform (there could have been about four or five in the Church Farm example), in such a way as they could stand, eat, lie down or be milked without too much discomfort. The manure channel is now covered by a layer of concrete, but at one time would have extended along the full length of the shippon and would also have sloped slightly for drainage purposes, and escaped via a small opening in the base of the brickwork of the front elevation. The raised area at the rear of the building is still present, and would have been where the cow stood or lay. In addition, the concrete platform still has the remains of the stanchion divisions embedded in it.

## **Building 2**

This building measures 16 by 6 m and is parallel to and adjoins Building 3. It is a low, single-storey building with internal stone and wood subdivisions. It has a corrugated roof, two stable doors, and three long and narrow rectangular windows which have a wooden frame and a covering of wire mesh. The walls are built to a random coursing, set within a lime-based mortar with squared quoins at both the north and south ends. The southern quoin is approximately 0.92 m wide and projects slightly from the main wall by approximately 0.10 m.

As with Buildings 1 and 3, Buildings 1 and 4 have not been keyed in to one another. Instead the corners of both buildings meet, each with its own alternating corner quoins in order to form the 'L' shape (Photograph Va). This further suggests that Building 1 was the earlier of the two.

The external, east-facing elevation has four ground floor sash windows with moulded surrounds, large ashlar lintels and projecting sills. The upper floor level (from the southern end moving north) has alternating openings and pairs of ventilation holes. The second and third upper storey openings are now blocked, but the blocking is arranged so as to allow the continuation of the paired ventilation holes, and the stonework is slightly recessed. All the architectural features are arranged in a similar pattern to those on the southern elevation of Building 1, and perhaps provide an impression of the original arrangement of Building 1, and its overall length. Each of the lower windows has a sill which protrudes from the wall by approximately 0.15 m. Again each window has a worked stone lintel, as do the stable doors.

This elevation is slightly different from the other as none of the doorways have been blocked.

The southern gable exterior has a single rectangular ventilation hole in the apex, and three similar ventilation holes spaced a few courses below. There is a single door on the western side of this gable, giving access to the southern room which also has a loft, (the access to which was once by a series of steps but now is by a ladder). This room has a concrete floor, as does the main part of the building.

The northern gable of Building 4, is similar to the western gable of Building 1. It has the same opening in the apex of the gable, with the usual sill and lintel, but in addition this elevation has a wooden framed window in the western corner. It also has the remains of a section of white-wash, confirming the presence at some time of a small shed or other lean-to structure. The window of this particular elevation does not have a stone sill but it does have the usual stone lintel.

To the rear of this block is a partly built (roofless) and subsequently abandoned extension which is modern in date. This obscures the lower half of the western wall but a row of seven rectangular ventilation holes can be seen running the whole length of the wall, and reflect the arrangement on the eastern elevation. There is also a door which has a glazed window either side.

As in the case of Building 1, this block was once a shippon, with the additional feature of a dairy at the

southern end. There are two blocked doors which would originally have given access to the dairy into the shippon, and a blocked opening in the apex of the dividing wall would have provided additional light and air.

#### **Building 5; Extension to Building 4**

This block is a modern feature which remains unfinished (Photograph Vb). Again the construction is one of squared built to courses, and again, a lime based mortar has been used. At present the building has no roof. The incomplete nature of the building provides a good illustration of the way other buildings within the farm complex have been altered in the past. It can be seen from the map evidence that a smaller extension has existed at this point until the mid 1980s. The present structure makes use of the southern wall of this extension.

#### **Building 6: The Granary**

The granary at Church Farm is of a common arrangement, built over the cartshed, and measuring 16m by 6m including the adjoining shed. The two functions complement one another, as the granary needed to be raised from the ground, and the cartshed required an open-fronted roofed structure. The Church Farm example has a shallow arched lintel formed by a series of wedge-shaped stone blocks. Now complete with a shed door, it may have originally been open-fronted. It has a brick floor with an area of cobble stones in the entrance. This particular arrangement has external stone steps with an extended wall to accommodate a built-in dog kennel beneath (Photograph VIa).

#### **Building 7**

This block adjoins Building 6 to the west, and measures approximately 6 by 8 m. The construction of the western elevation shows a neat arrangement of well finished stone, and a greater use of small rectangular stone, as well as a large window with a concrete lintel. Inside this window has a double segmental arched head. The wall which divides the granary from this 'shed' has a pitch-hole in the apex of the gable which is larger than other such openings at Church Farm. There are several beams which extend from this dividing wall across to the western elevation of 7, one of which has corbelling beneath.

The northern corner of this elevation has a well built alternating quoin, but the southern corner (which is in fact the corner of the pigsty wall) has no such feature (Photograph VIb).

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#### **Unpublished Sources: Maps**

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1777 P.P. Burdett's Map of Cheshire

1831 A. Bryant's Map of Cheshire

1838 and 1842 Tithe Apportionment and Map Cheshire Record Office. EDT 47/1 and 2/1

1875 OS 1st ed 25" Cheshire sheet VII.14

1898 OS 25" Cheshire sheet VII.14

1911 OS 25" Cheshire sheet VII.14

1935 OS 25" Cheshire sheet VII.14

1954 OS 1:1250 SJ 2890 SW

1990 OS 1:1250 SJ 2890 SW

#### **Documents and Unpublished Sources**

Cheshire Record Office

a) W.F. Irvine Collection: DFI

b) Wills Series: WS

c) Birch Cullimore Deeds: DBC Acc 1063 Box 5

d) Land Tax 1778-1832: QDV 2\46

e) Census Returns: 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891

Liverpool Record Office

nd. Bidston notes by H. Hopps in the Brownbill papers Acc 031

Department of the Environment 1974. *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* County Borough of Birkenhead.

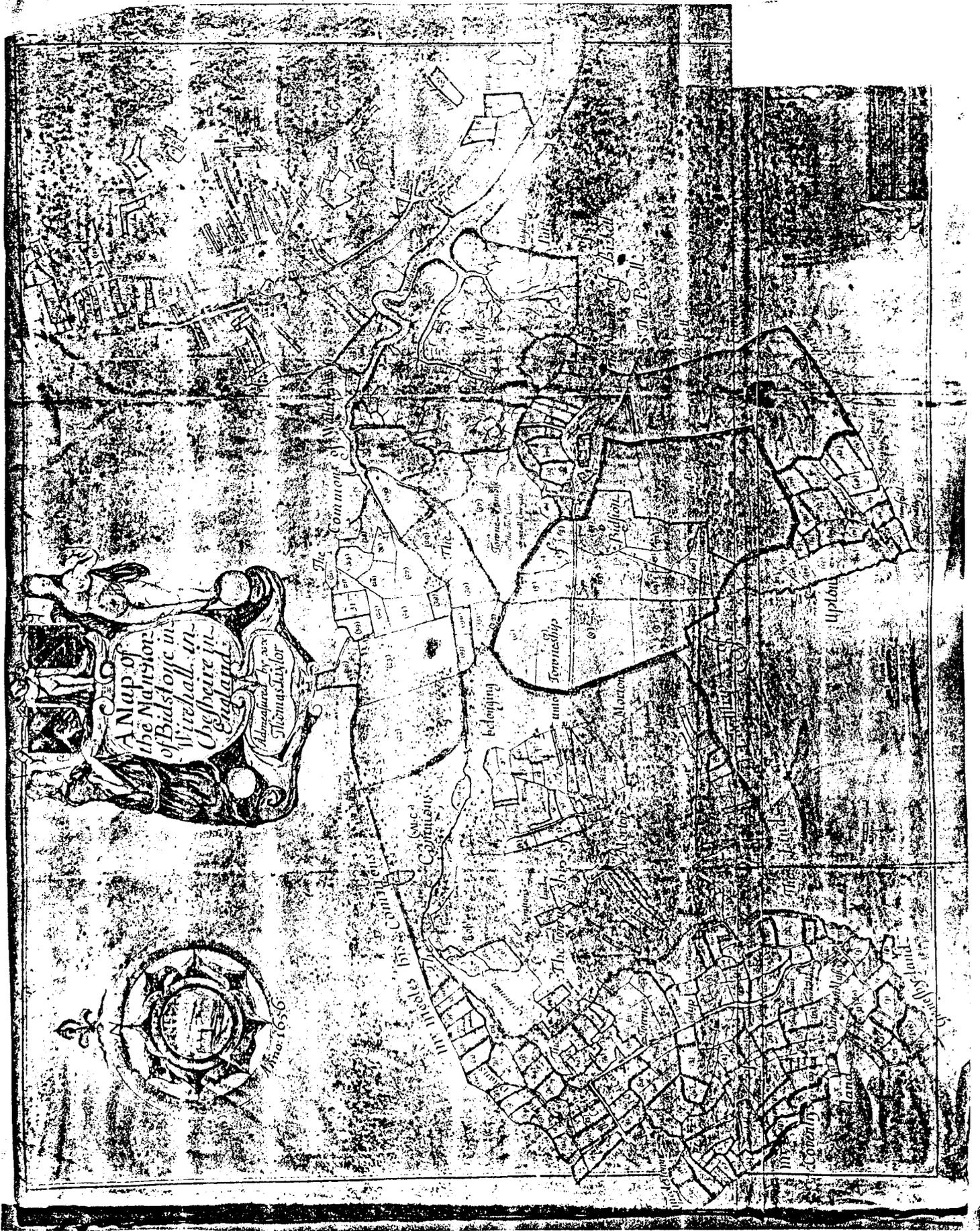


Fig. 1. 1665 Kingston Survey: Key Map









Fig. 6. 1831 A. Bryant's Map of Cheshire



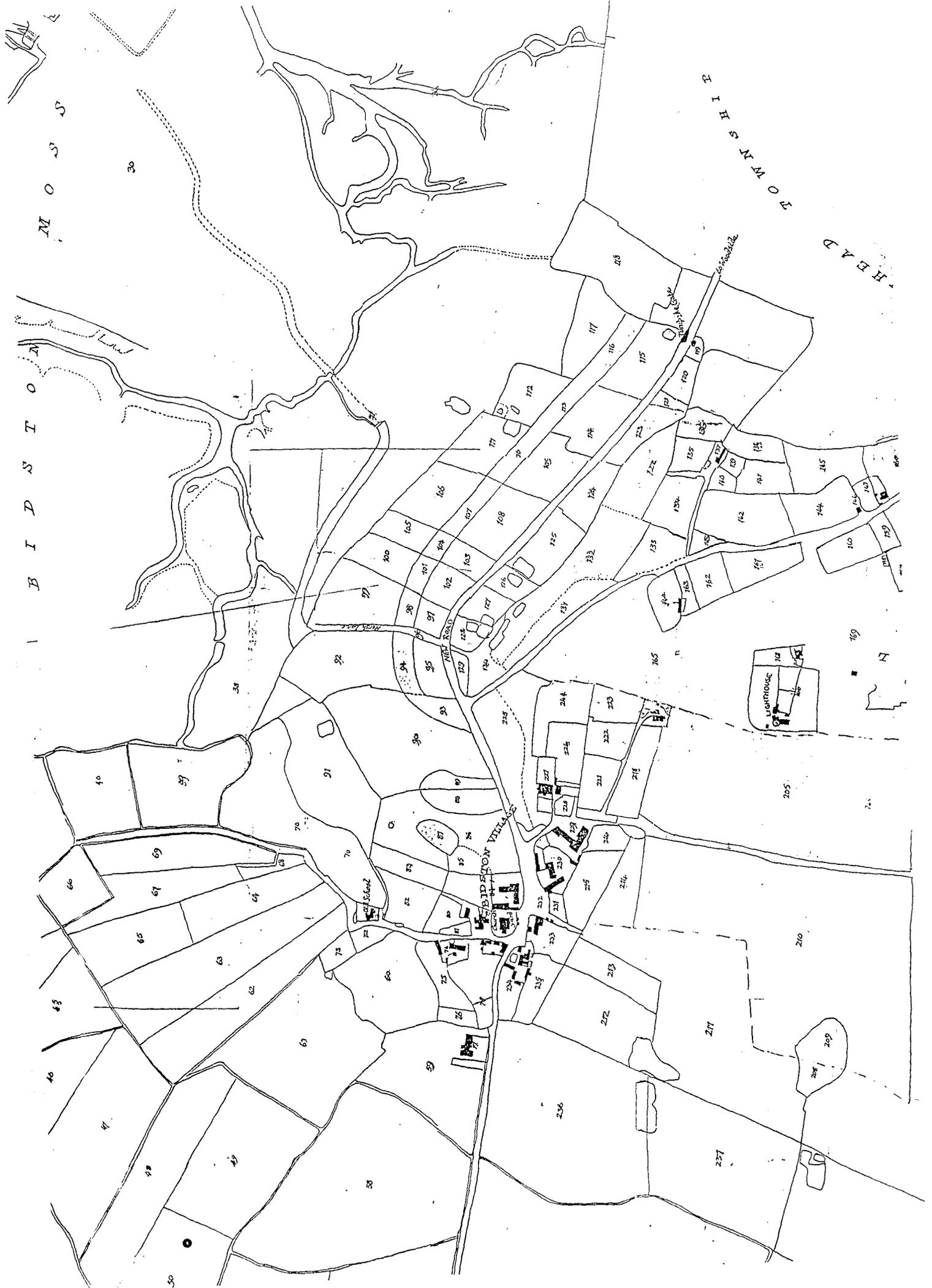


Fig. 7a 1842 Tithe Map

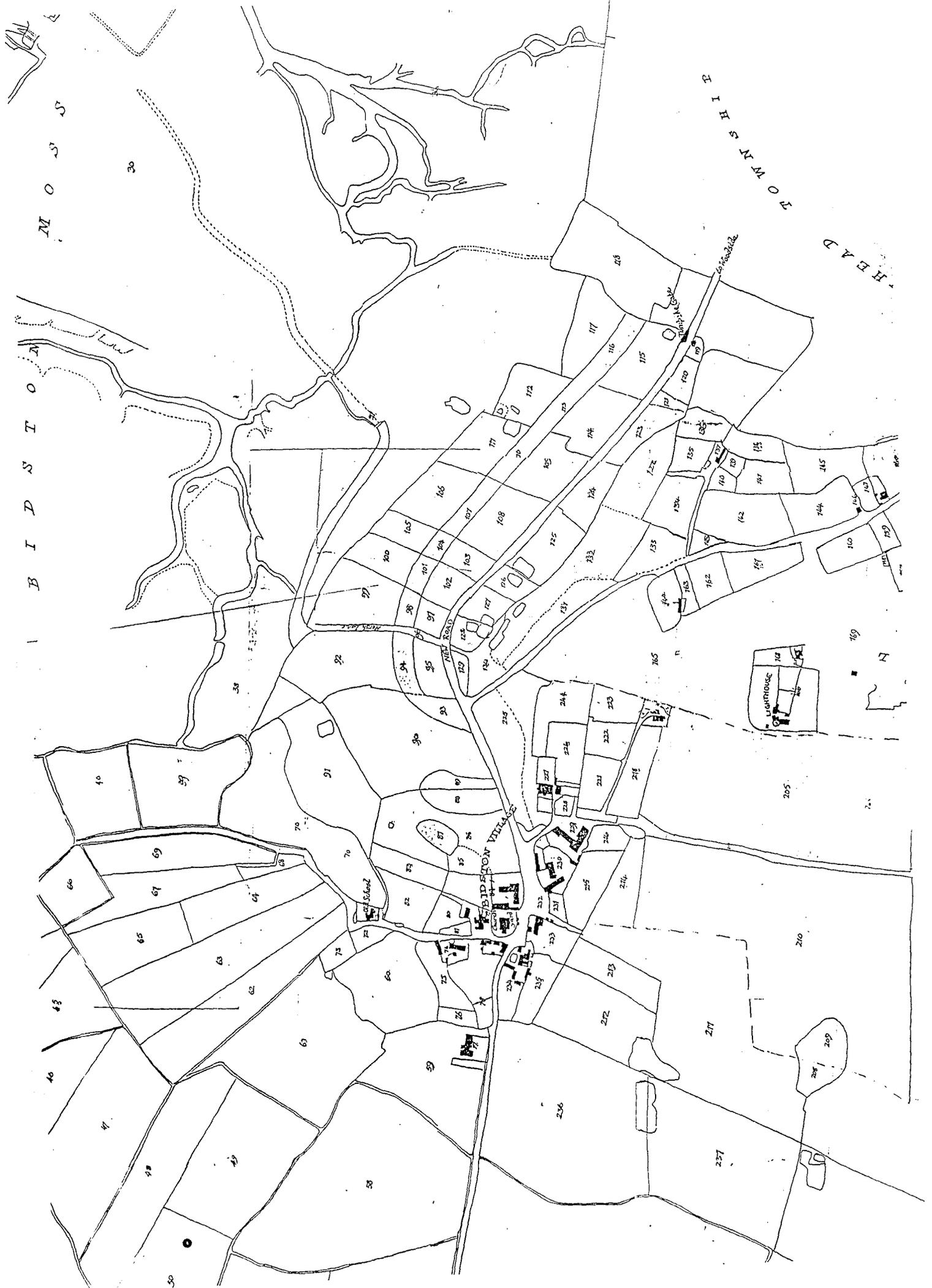


Fig. 7a 1842 Tithe Map

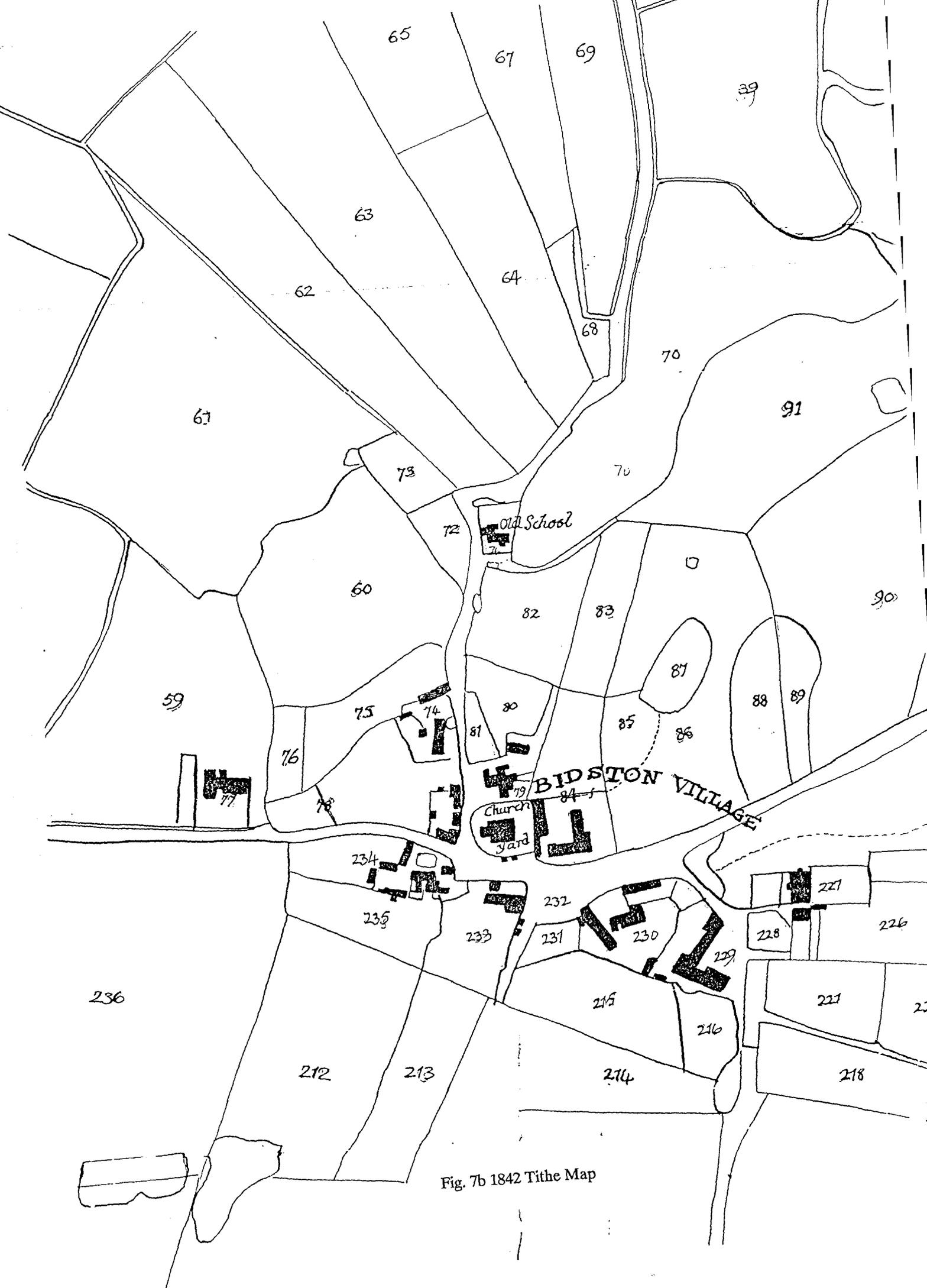


Fig. 7b 1842 Tithe Map

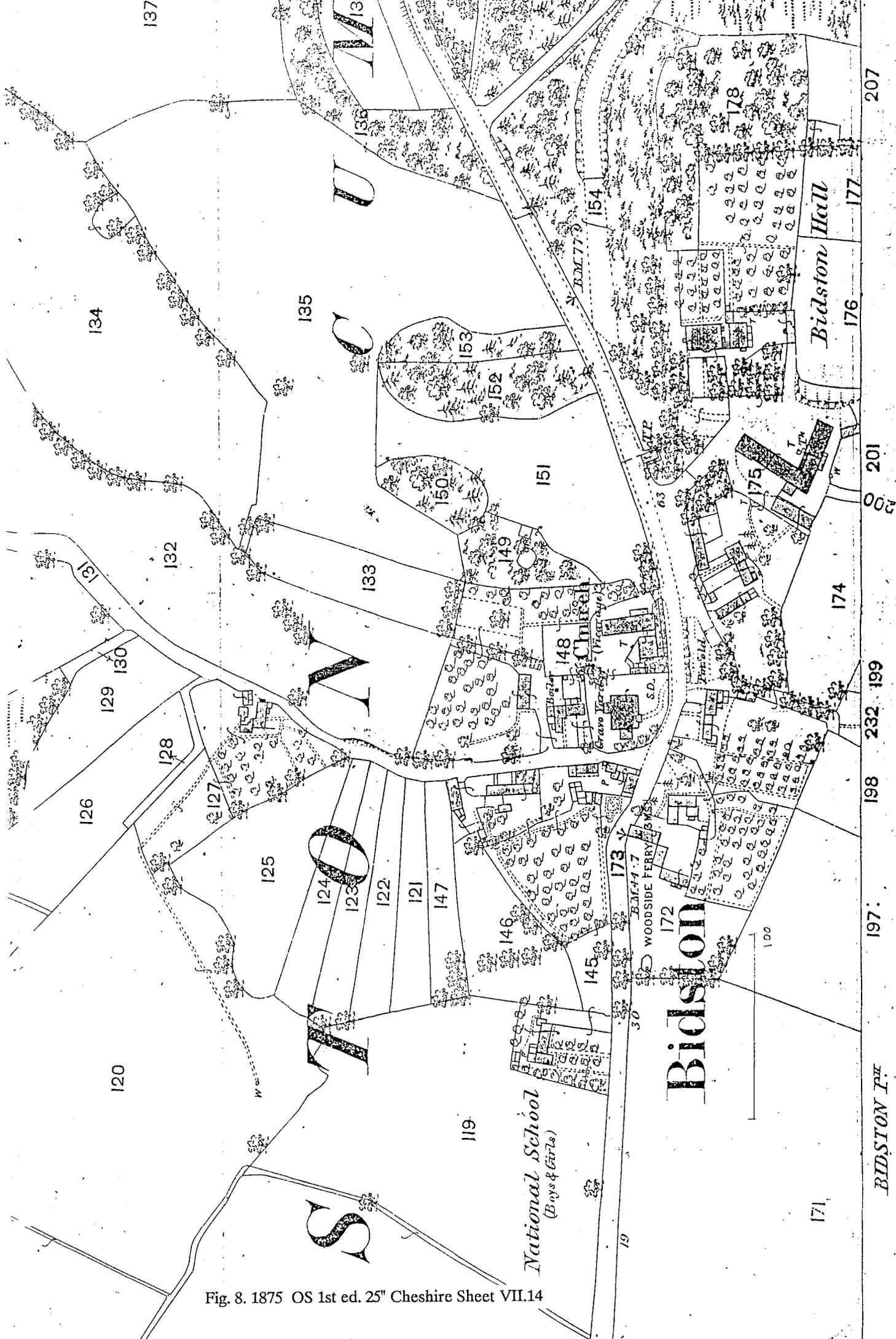


Fig. 8. 1875 OS 1st ed. 25" Cheshire Sheet VII.14

Surveyed in 1874 by Capt. J.C. Macpherson. R.F. Levelled by Lieut. W. Wynne & R.

344 Inches to a Statute Mile or 208.33 Feet to One Inch

BIDSTON T<sup>W</sup>

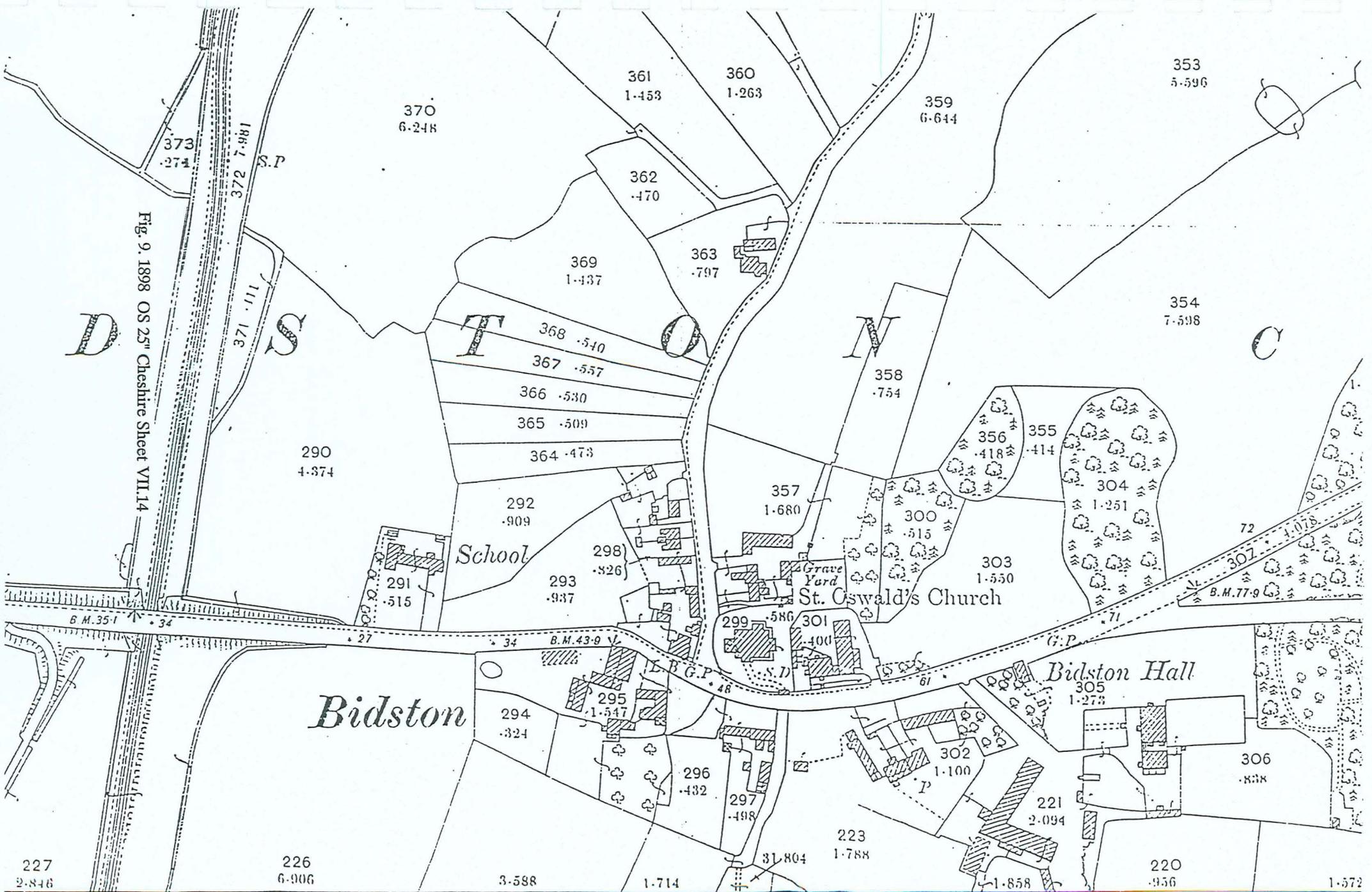


Fig. 9. 1898 OS 25' Cheshire Sheet VII.14

ORTH WALES & LIVERPOOL RAILWAY

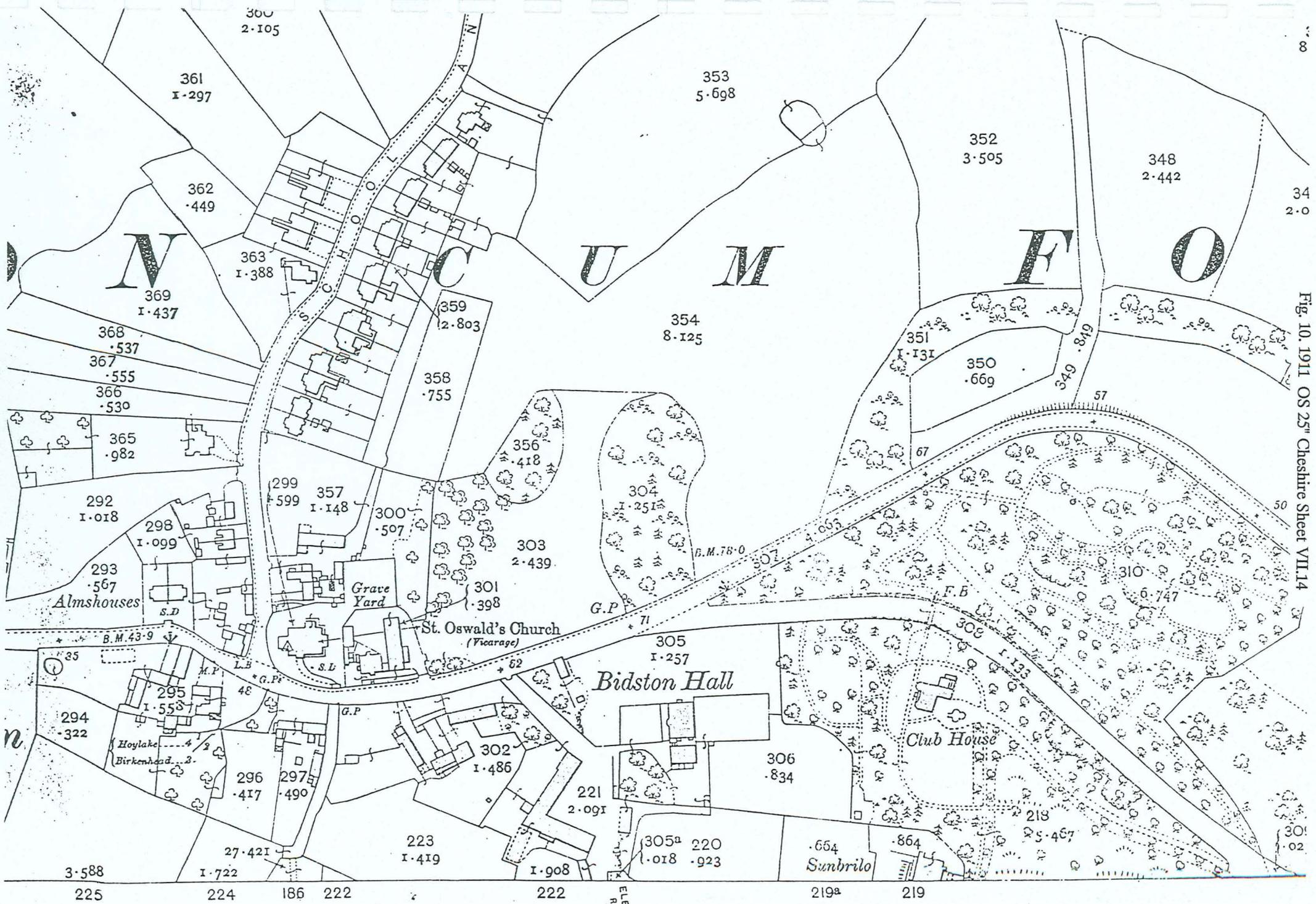


Fig. 10. 1911 OS 25" Cheshire Sheet VII.14

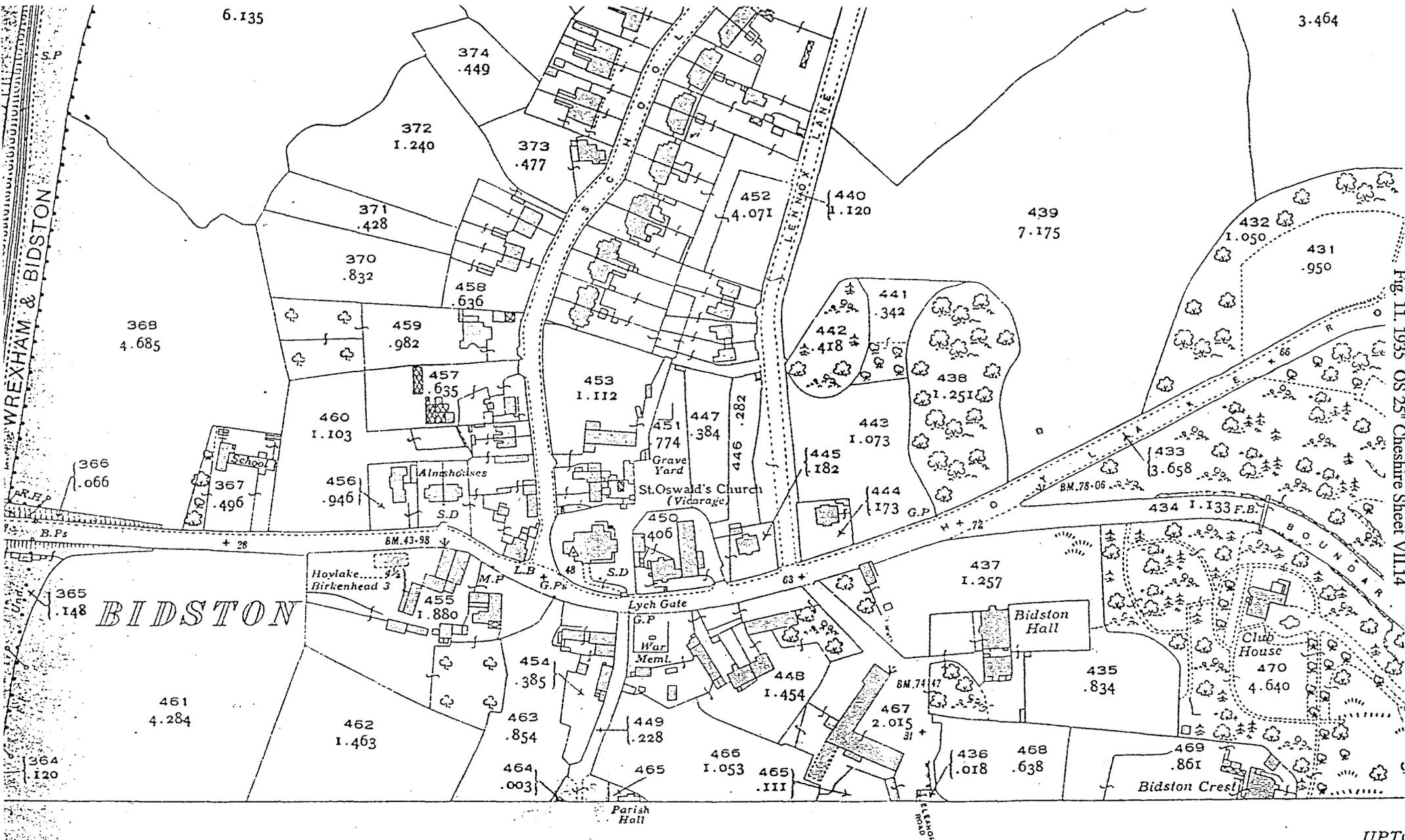


Fig. 11. 1935 OS 25" Cheshire Sheet VII.14

CHARACTERISTICS AND SYMBOLS FOR BOUNDARIES, &c.

W  
D  
S.S.  
G.S.  
Fort

Change of Boundary, indicating the point at which the character of a Boundary changes  
Antiquities (Site of) +

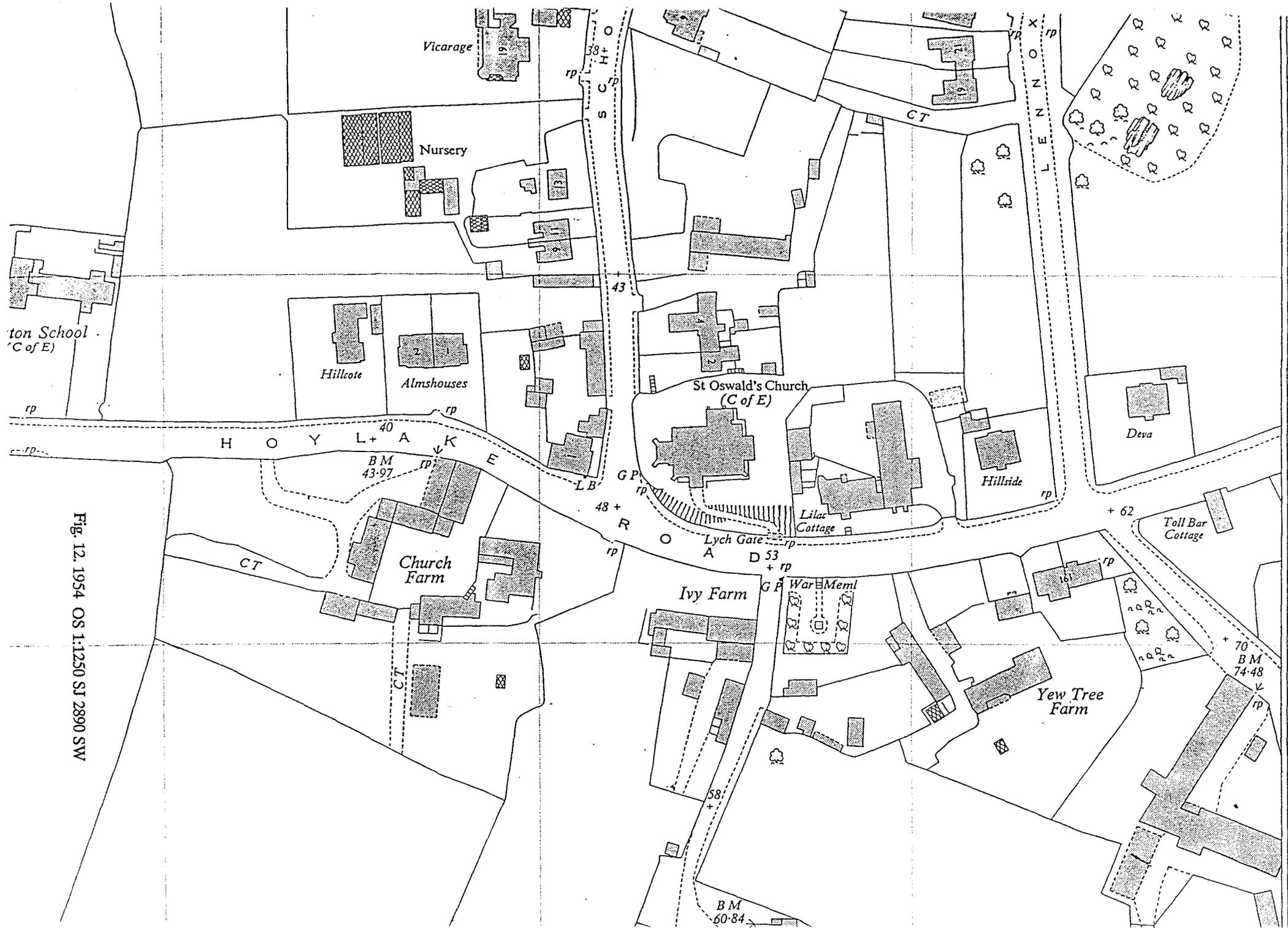
Every parcel is numbered thus  
Its area is given underneath in Acres. Thus  
Braces indicating that the spaces so connected

27  
4.370

The Altitudes of Bench Marks and surface heights  
To refer these to the obsolete Liverpool datum, see

Altitudes indicated thus (BM. 54.17)

Note—To convert Deeds multiply this



ton School  
(C of E)

Vicarage

Nursery

Hillcote

Almshouses

St Oswald's Church  
(C of E)

Deva

Hillside

Toll Bar  
Cottage

H O Y L A K E

B.M.  
43-97

Church  
Farm

Ivy Farm

Lilac  
Cottage

War Meml

Yew Tree  
Farm

B.M.  
74-48

B.M.  
60-84

Fig. 12. 1954 OS 1:1250 SJ 2890 SW

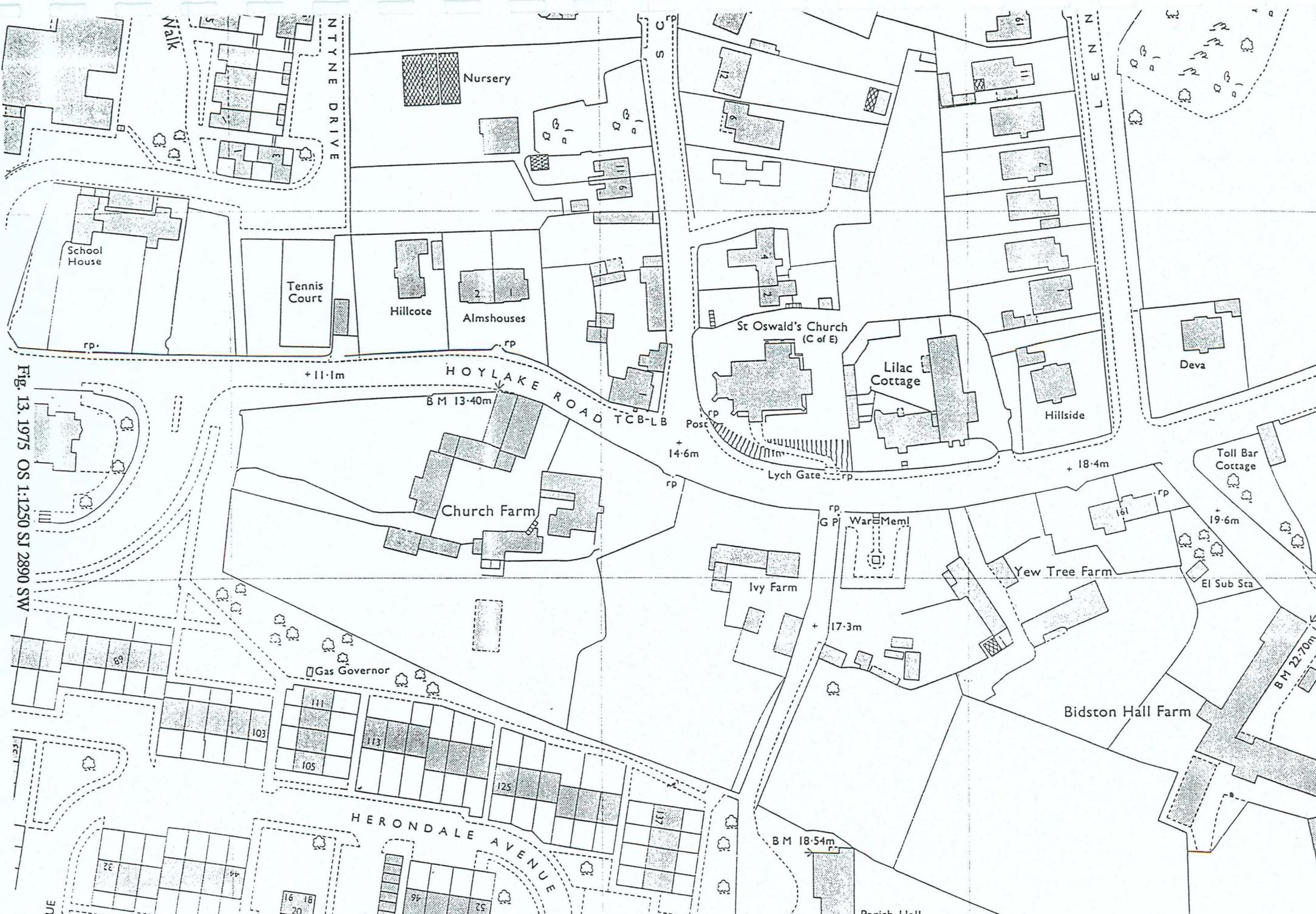


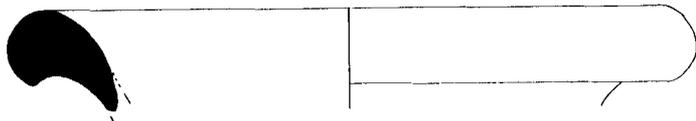
Fig. 13. 1975 OS 1:1250 SJ 2890 SW



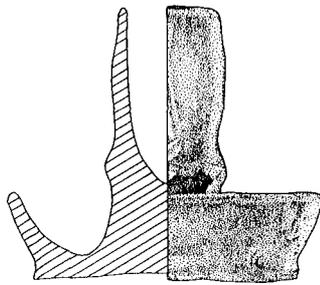
Fig. 14. 1990 OS 1:1250 SJ 2890 SW



1



2



3

0 5 cm

Fig. 15. Pottery from Church Farm, Bidston, 1992

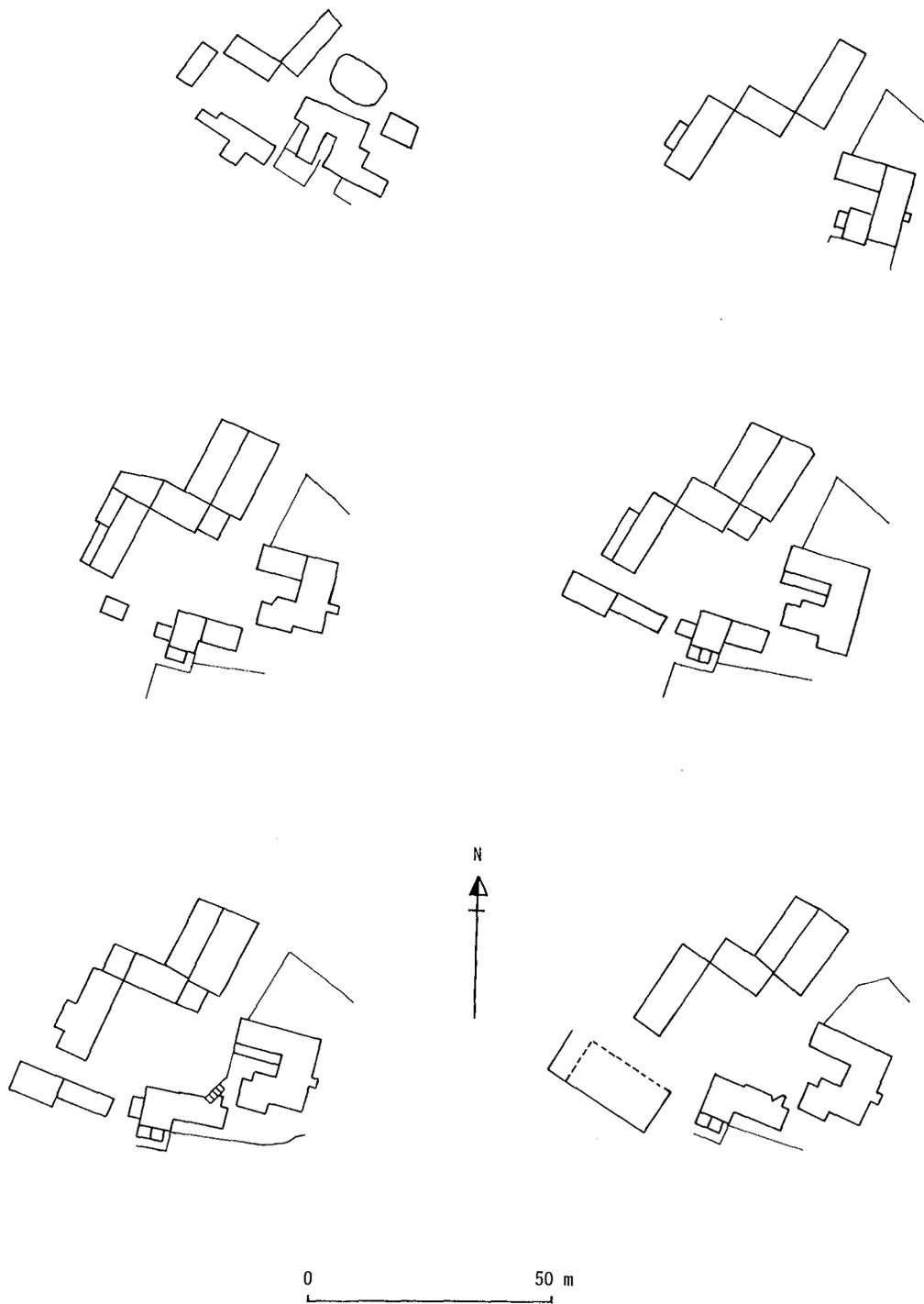


Fig. 16. The map evidence for the Church Farm buildings, a: 1842, b: 1875, c: 1911, d: 1935, e: 1954, f: 1990

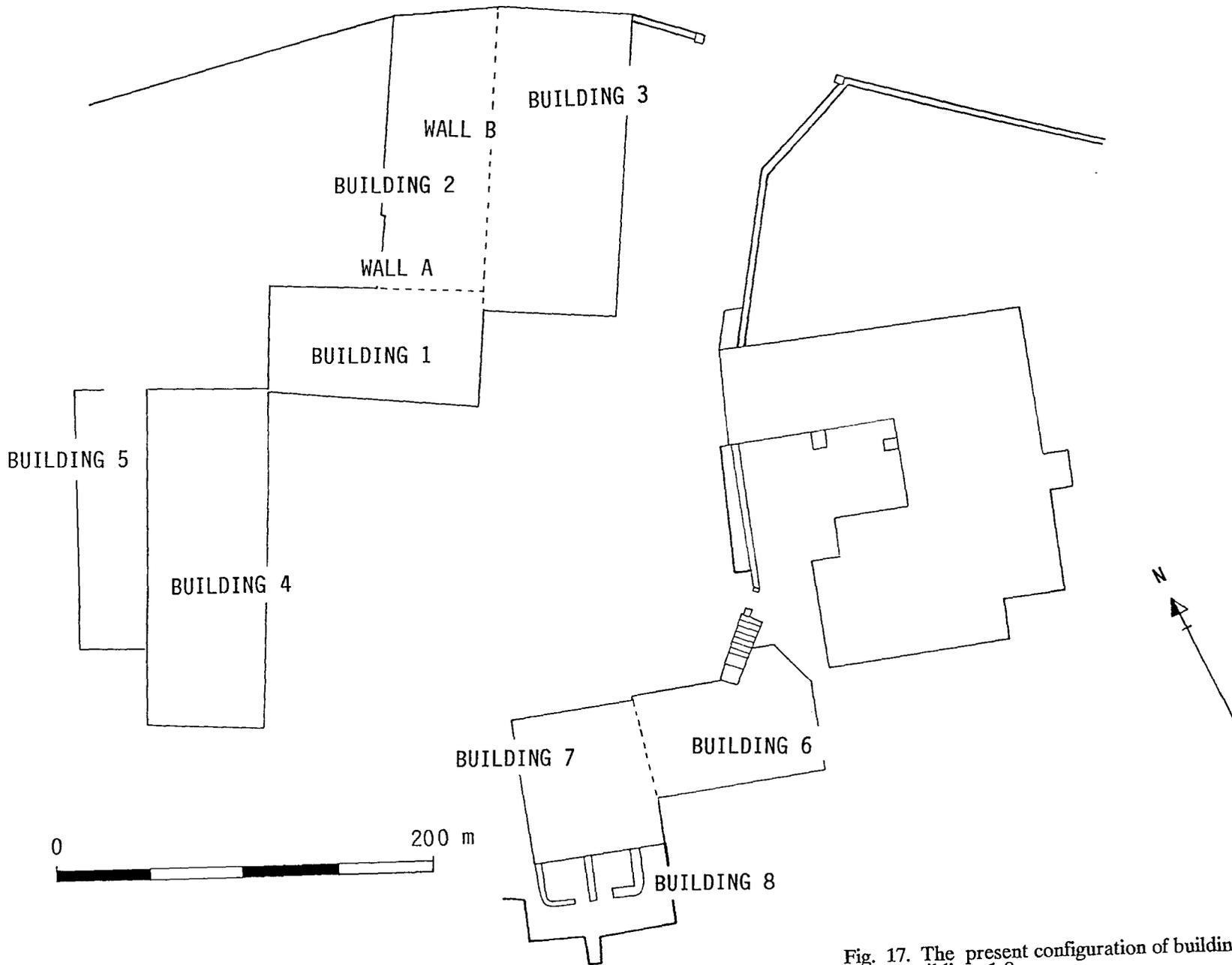
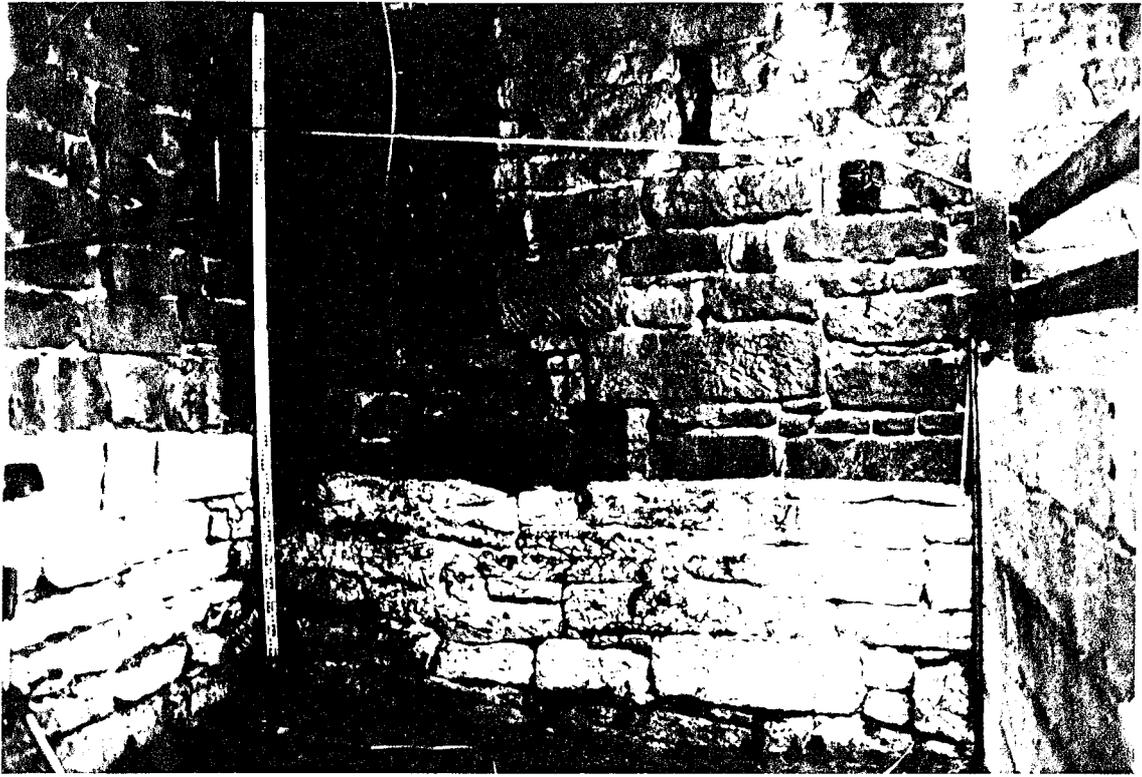


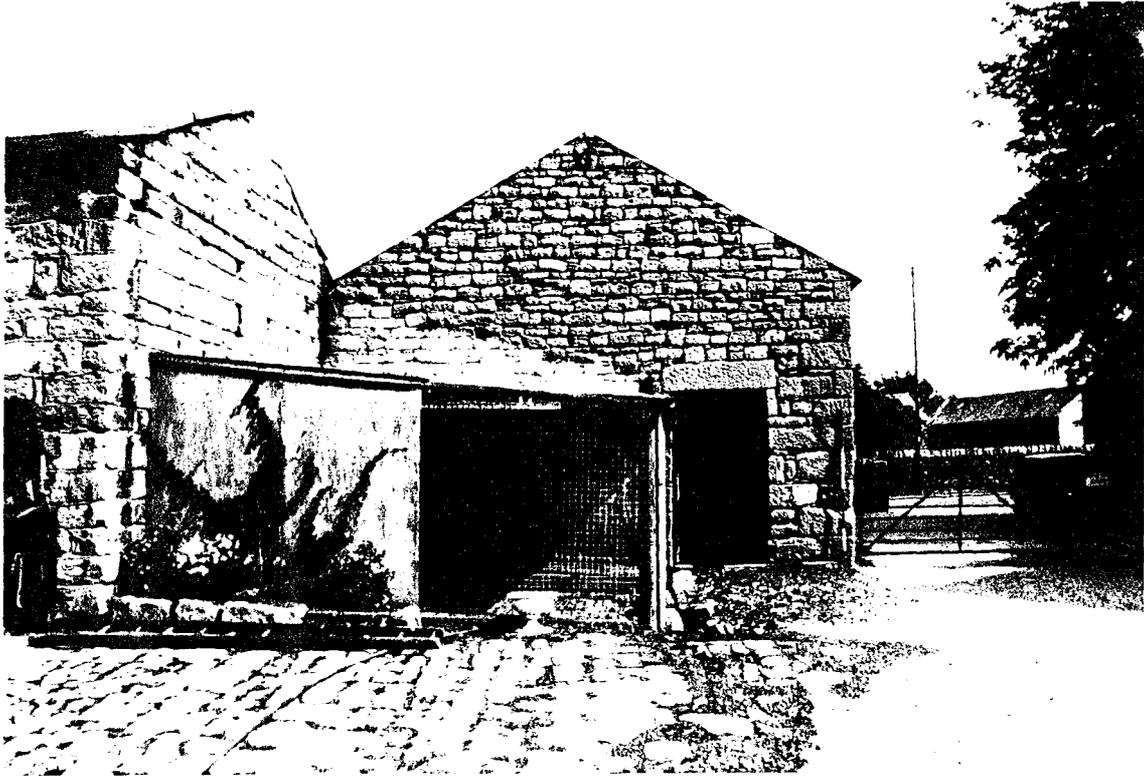
Fig. 17. The present configuration of buildings, showing the location of Buildings 1-8



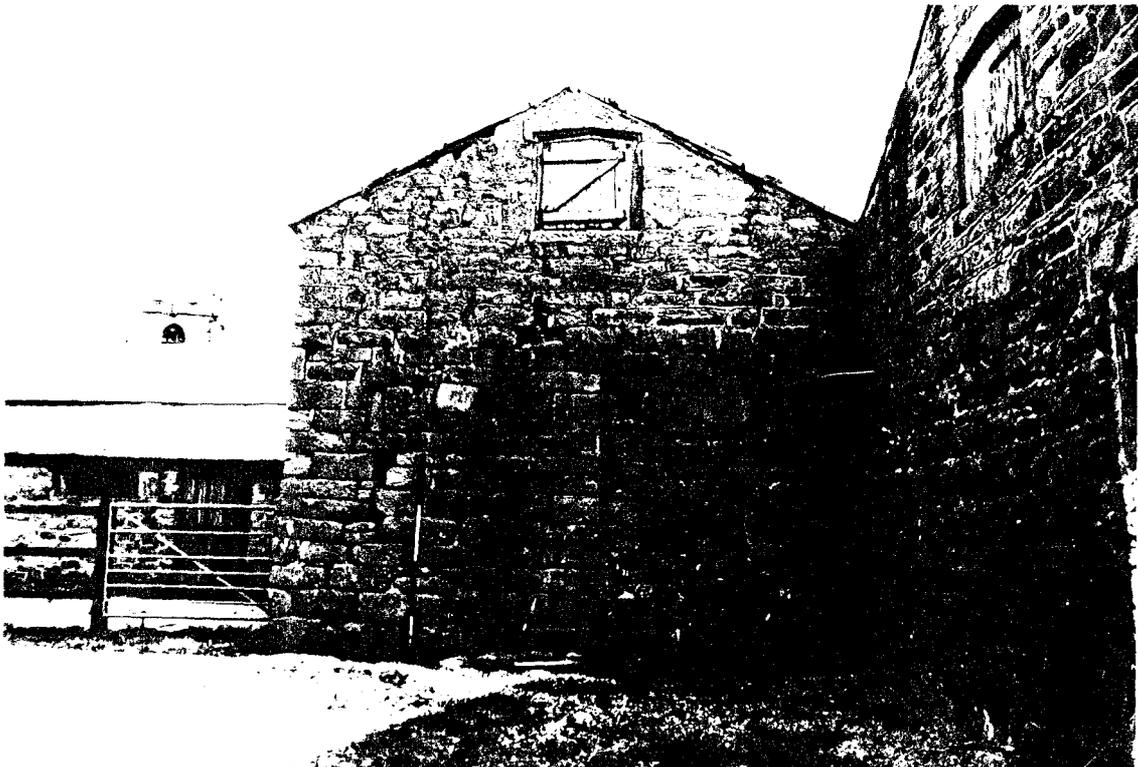
Ia The interior dividing wall (Wall A/B, Fig. 17) of Building 2



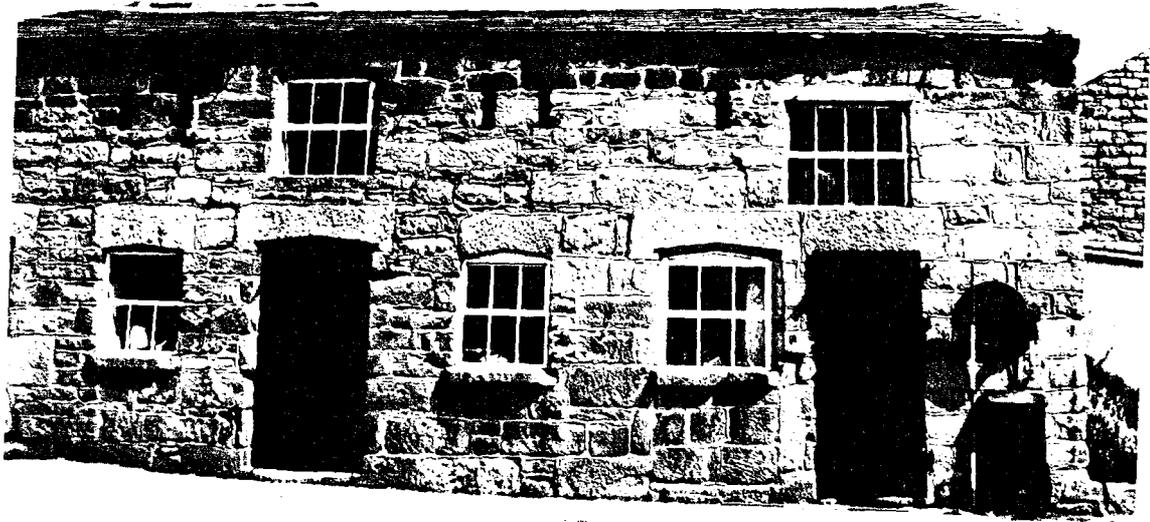
Ib The eastern gable end of Building 1



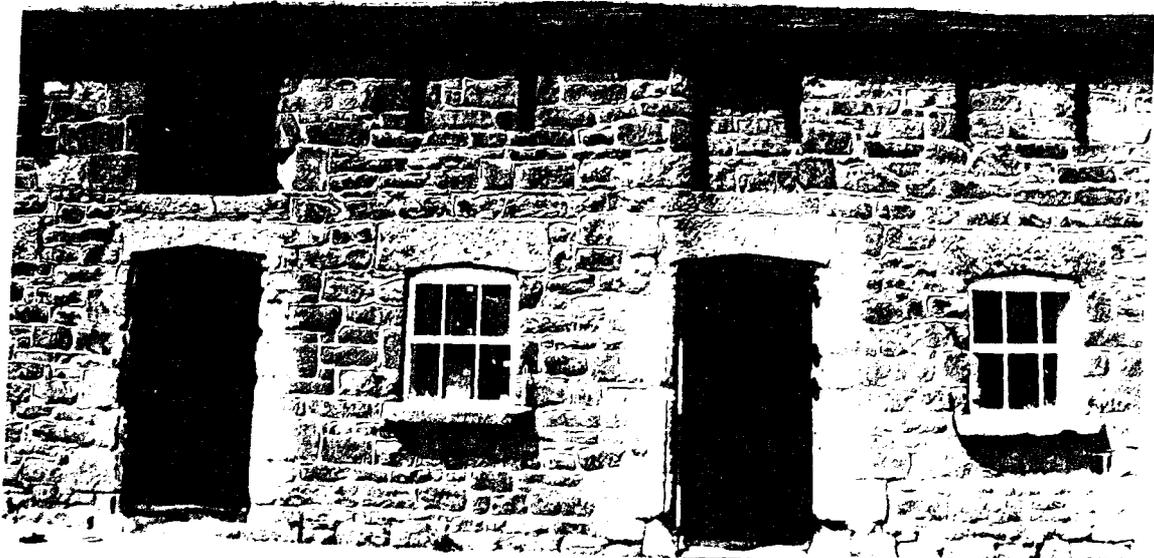
IIa The southern gable end of Building 3



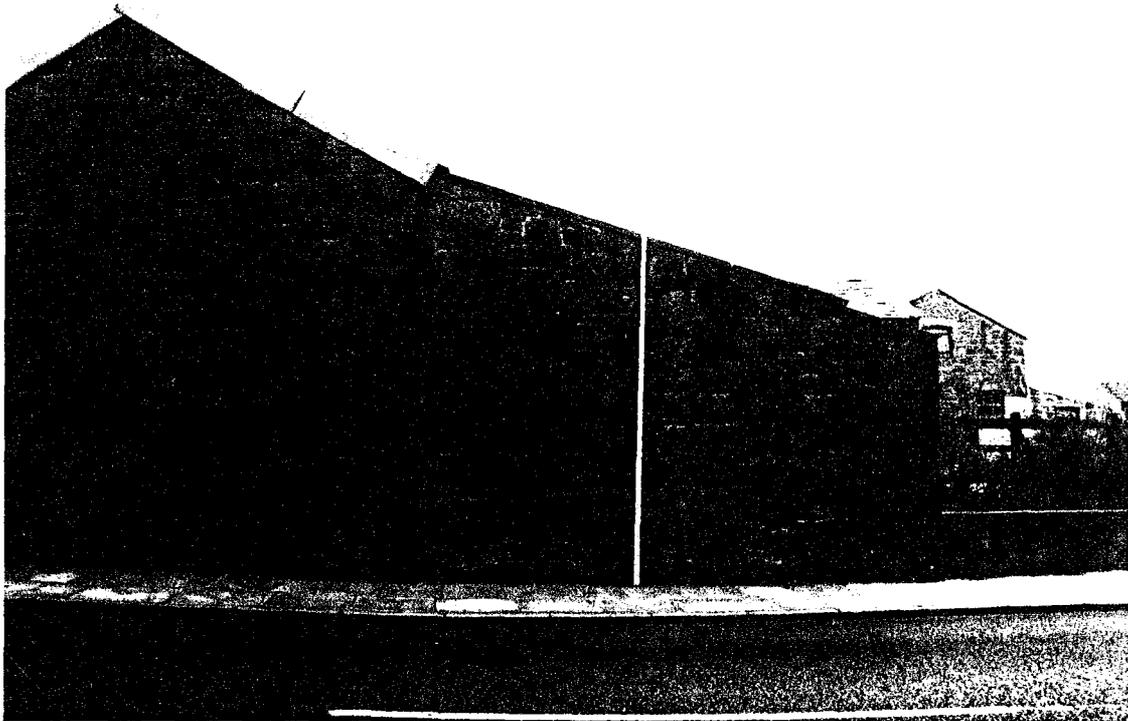
IIb The western gable end of Building 1



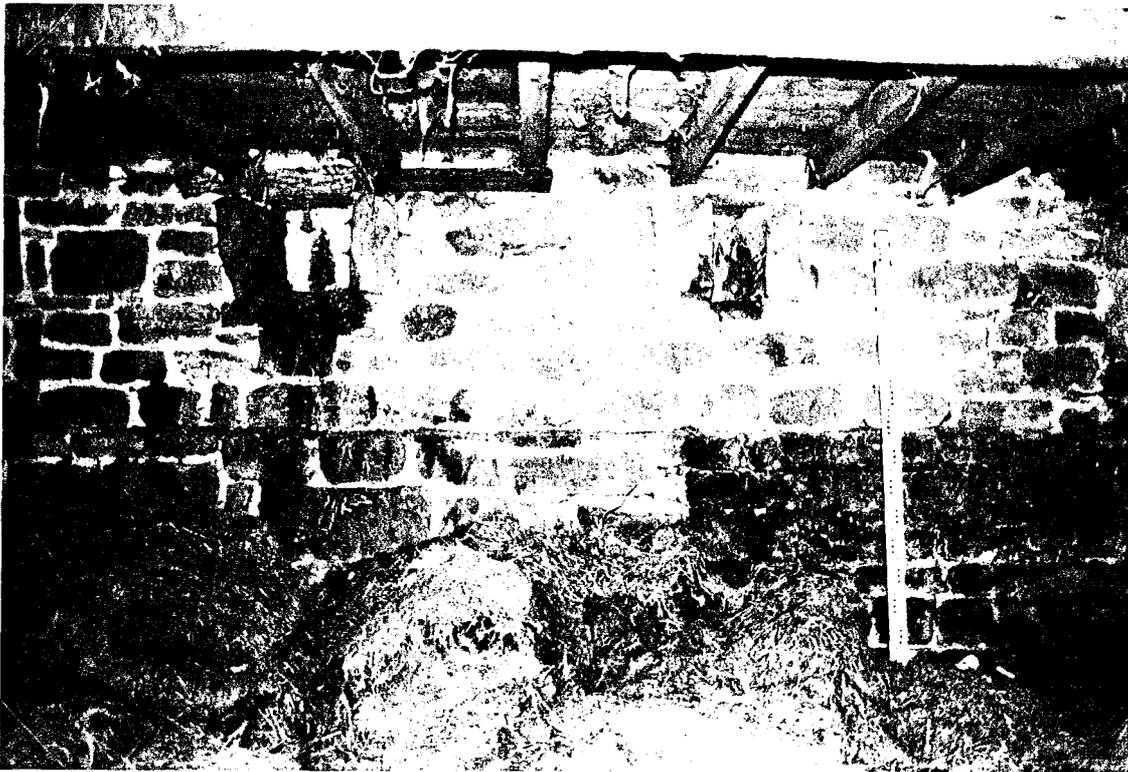
IIIa The south facing elevation of Building 1



IIIb The eastern elevation of Building 4



IVa The northern elevations of Buildings 2 and 3



IVb The internal detail of the lower half of the northern elevation, Building 3



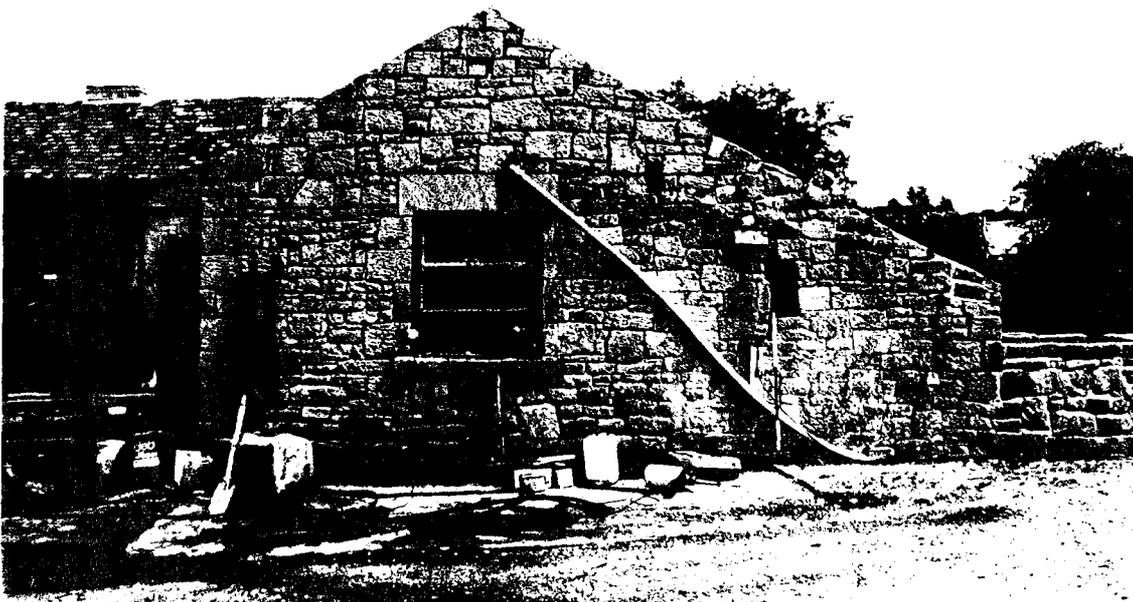
Va The northern end of the east facing elevation of Building 4



Vb The western elevation of Building 5



VIa The north facing elevation of Building 6



VIb The western elevation of Building 7



VII Building 8, the pigsty