ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES
WYAS

# Highfield Lane, Micklefield
# North Yorkshire

*Archaeological Watching Brief*

*August 1997*

CLIENT

YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY GROUP plc

Archaeological Services WYAS
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WYAS R503, 23 August 1997

# *Highfield Lane, Micklefield,*

# *North Yorkshire*

## *Archaeological Watching Brief*

**Contents**



*Summary*

*Archaeological features, including an ancient township boundary ditch, were identified during a watching brief along the length of a cable trench at Highfield Lane, Micklefield, carried out on behalf of Yorkshire Electricity Group plc.*

# 1. Summary

## 1.1 Client

1.1.1 Yorkshire Electricity Group plc, Wetherby Road, Scarcroft, Leeds LS14 3HS.

## 1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area and the nature of known cropmark features.

1.2.2 To determine the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.

## 1.3 Method

1.3.1 A cable trench, which measured approximately 425m in length, and intersected crop marks of known archaeological character, was mechanically excavated using a back-acting excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. All potential archaeological features revealed were cleaned by hand, where possible, and appropriately sized sections were drawn to establish the nature of features.

## 1.4 Results

1.4.1 An ancient township boundary ditch, corresponding to a surviving earthwork in Castle Hills woods, and a known crop mark of archaeological character, was intersected by the cable trench, and recorded accordingly. Although one of the cropmark features, thought to comprise a double-ditched trackway, was not observed, further archaeological features comprising probable linear ditches and discrete pits were also recorded. The narrow width of the machine trench precluded an exact determination of the nature, date and function of observed archaeological features. A number of geological features were also recorded, which comprised solution holes and palaeo-channels in the surface of the limestone bedrock.

## 2. Introduction

2.1.1 Archaeological Services WYAS were commissioned by R. Hancott on behalf of Yorkshire Electricity Group plc, to undertake an archaeological watching brief on a cable trench along part of Highfield Lane, Micklefield (Fig. 1). The cable trench ran from a telegraph pole adjacent to Highfield Lane, to a telecommunications mast in Castle Hills woods (Fig. 2).

2.1.2 The site lies to the south-east of the town of Micklefield, and to the immediate east of the A1. The site is centred at NGR SE 4550 3195.

2.1.3 From the A1, Highfield Lane slopes up through Castle Hills woods, then gradually down to the east from the point where it exits the woods. The eastern extent of Highfield Lane is bounded by cultivated land to the north and south. The western extent of Highfield Lane is bounded by Castle Hills woods to the north, and by a narrow row of mature trees to the south. The underlying geology comprises Magnesian Limestone with outcropping sands and gravels.

2.1.4 Two on-site archaeologists carried out the specified archaeological works between July 7th and July 9th 1997.

## 3. Archaeological Background

3.1.1 The site lies to the south of an extensive landscape of archaeological crop marks of unknown date, which are unique to Yorkshire. These cropmarks traverse cultivated fields from east to west, and comprise nucleated enclosures which respect, or are respected by, a large trackway. A further cropmark, interpreted as a double-ditched trackway, aligned at 90° to the south of the enclosures, appears to be truncated by Highfield Lane.

3.1.2 One of a number of earthworks within Castle Hills woods, an ancient township boundary, survives as a prominent earthwork ditch (Pl. 1). The earthwork is aligned north-west/south-east, then north-north-west/ south-south-east where it is bisected by Highfield Lane. The earthwork appears to have been partially truncated to the immediate north of Highfield Lane by groundworks associated with a nearby telecommunications mast. The course of the earthwork is marked on a number of late 19th century, early 20th century O.S. maps (Figs 5, 6 and 7). More specifically, it is marked on the 1908 edition 1:2500 map as a hollow track and a parliamentary county divisional boundary (Fig. 8).

3.1.3 A scheme of investigation was drawn up by North Yorkshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record, to determine the nature of the crop marks and the aforementioned earthwork, through a watching brief, carried out during groundworks undertaken by Yorkshire Electricity Group plc.

## 4. Methodology

4.1.1 The cable trench, which measured approximately 425m in length, was mechanically excavated using a JCB back-acting excavator, fitted with a

toothless ditching bucket. In accordance with the agreed scheme of investigation, a toothed ditching bucket was used temporarily only where the bedrock was difficult to excavate.

4.1.2 The topsoil and subsoil were removed in spits to a depth of 1m for the majority of the length of the trench. Where the trench intersected the ancient township boundary ditch, and in accordance with of the agreed scheme of investigation, it was necessary to excavate down further to obtain a clean profile of this feature, which was then photographed and drawn.

4.1.3 All potential archaeological features and deposits were investigated where possible by means of appropriately sized hand excavated sections at a scale of 1:20, and recorded according to the Archaeological Services WYAS standard method (Boucher 1995). A base line to locate drawn sections was established, running from the telegraph pole at 0m, to the telecommunications mast at approximately 425m (Fig. 2).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Linear Features

5.1.1 Ditch 125, was aligned north/south, and was observed in both sections of the machine trench, approximately 5m west of the point where Highfield Lane exits Castle Hills woods. The feature was cut into fragmented and solid limestone bedrock, and measured a maximum of 4.6m in width by 1.5m in depth. The ditch had a V-shaped profile, with a shallow shelf on its eastern side, which extended for approximately 1m at a depth of 0.3m, before sloping sharply to a rounded base (S.6, Figs 3 and 4, and Pl. 2).

5.1.2 The feature was filled by a homogenous brown silty sand deposit 126. Health and safety considerations prevented any cleaning of the exposed section face, and as a consequence, any differentiation of fills or tip lines within the feature were not observed. The fill was disturbed throughout its depth by concentrated modern root material.

5.1.3 Two further linear features, which appeared to be aligned north/south, were also observed in the machine trench. The more easterly feature, ditch 115, had a steep-sided profile. The ditch had a width of 1.75m and a minimum depth of 0.7m (S.3, Figs. 3 and 4). The profile of the ditch was not fully observed as the machine trench was excavated to a depth of 1m. Ditch 115 was filled by a single deposit 114 of orange brown sandy silt. Ditch 119 was observed to have a slightly irregular V-shaped profile, and measured 1.8m in width by 0.54m in depth (S.5, Figs 3 and 4). The ditch was filled by a single deposit 118 of orange brown silty sand.

### 5.2 Other Features

5.2.1 The width and depth of the machine trench prevented an exact determination of the nature and function of a number of additional features, which were only visible in the north facing section of the trench. Features 117, 121 and 123 were all observed to have steep-sided U-

shaped profiles, (S.4, S.8, S.7, Figs 3 and 4). Feature 123 was the widest and deepest of the three features, and measured 1.1m in width by 0.9m in depth. The feature was filled by three deposits of orange brown sand and silty sand. Feature 117 had a width of 0.4m and a depth of 0.45m, and was filled by a single deposit 116 of orange brown silty sand. Feature 121 had a width of 0.5m and a depth of 0.52m, and was filled by a single deposit 122 of greyish brown silty clay.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

6.1.1 Archaeological features corresponding to, and in addition to, a known crop mark of archaeological character and a surviving earthwork, were identified towards the western extent of the machine trench, where Highfield Lane exits Castle Hills woods. The majority of additional features identified comprised linear ditches and/or discrete post-holes/pits. No stratified artefacts were recovered to assist in the dating of these features. Pottery, slag, and flint artefacts were recovered from the ploughsoil and subsoil during machining, although the locations of these artefacts, in terms of identified archaeological features, were not significant. A number of geological features were also recorded, and comprised solution holes and palaeo-channels in the surface of the limestone bedrock.

6.1.2 Ditch 125 corresponds roughly to the line of a prominent earthwork ditch visible in Castle Hills woods, although it is slightly further west than expected. It seems likely that the point at which the earthwork changes alignment, from north/west-south/east to north-north-west/ south-south-east, has been masked above ground by disturbance associated with the building of the nearby telecommunications mast. No convincing evidence of a bank associated with this feature was observed in the machine trench, although this may have been removed if Highfield Lane was levelled, or by constant erosion of the track surface by vehicular traffic. The considerable root disturbance visible in the section of ditch 125 was caused by a row of mature trees to the immediate south of the machine trench

6.1.3 The width of the machine trench precluded an exact determination of the form and function of the additional features 117, 121 and 123. Feature 123 could represent either a ditch terminal or a large pit, whilst the features 117 and 121, could equally represent discrete post-holes/small pits, or linear gulleys/slots with terminals within the width of the machine trench.

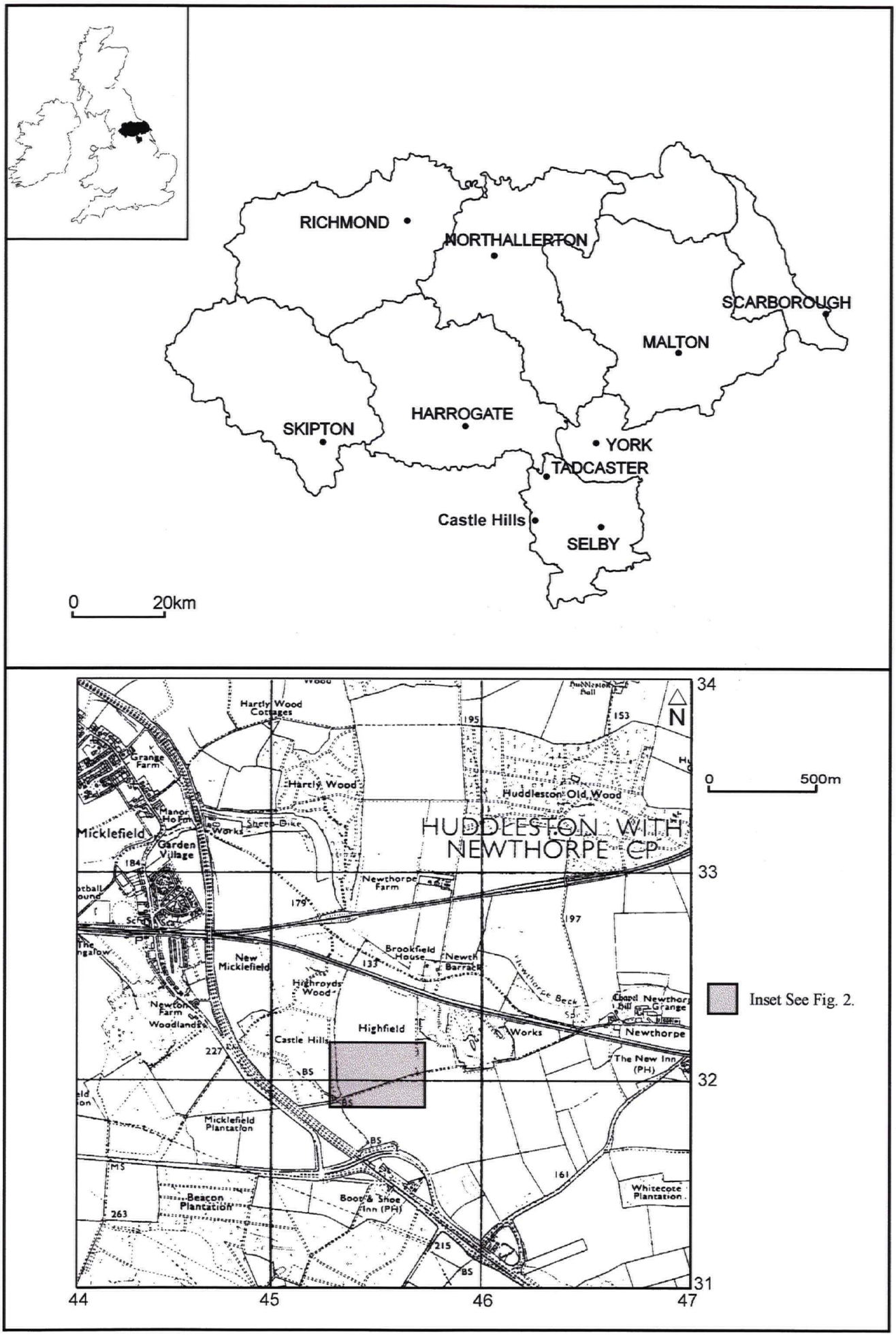


*Fig. 1. Site Location*

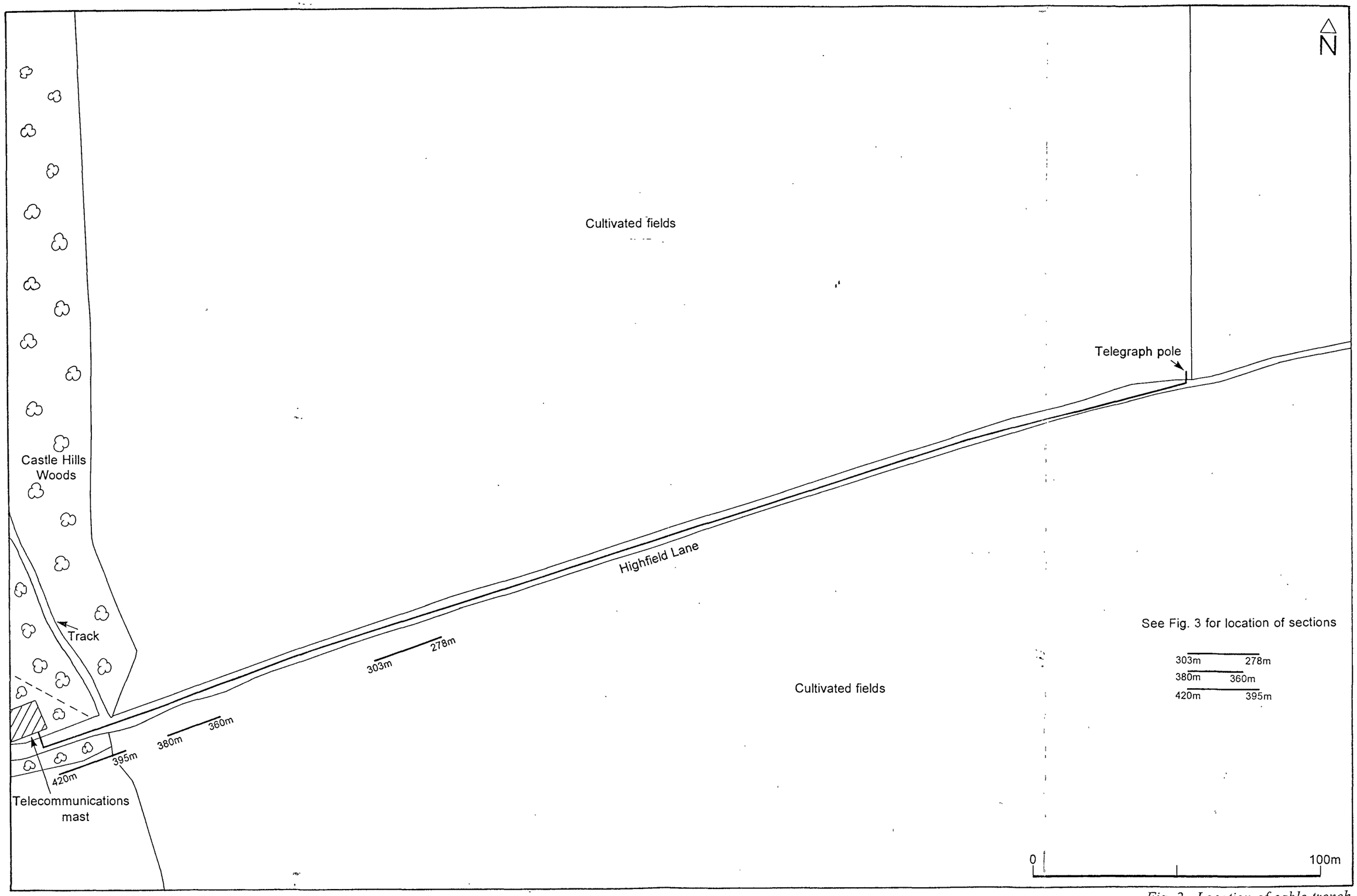


*Fig. 2. Location of cable trench at Highfield Lane*

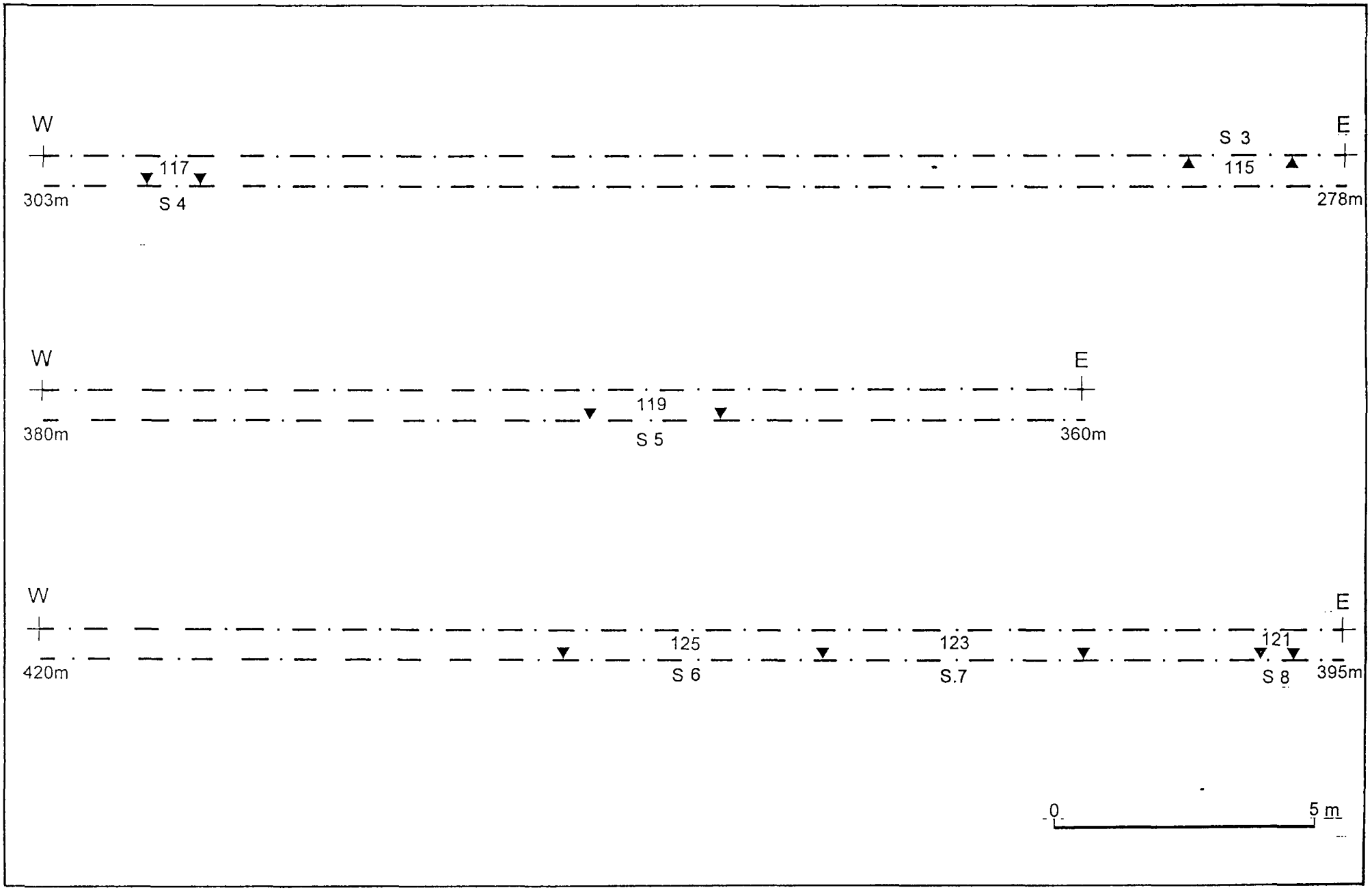


*Fig 3 Location of sections along length of cable trench*

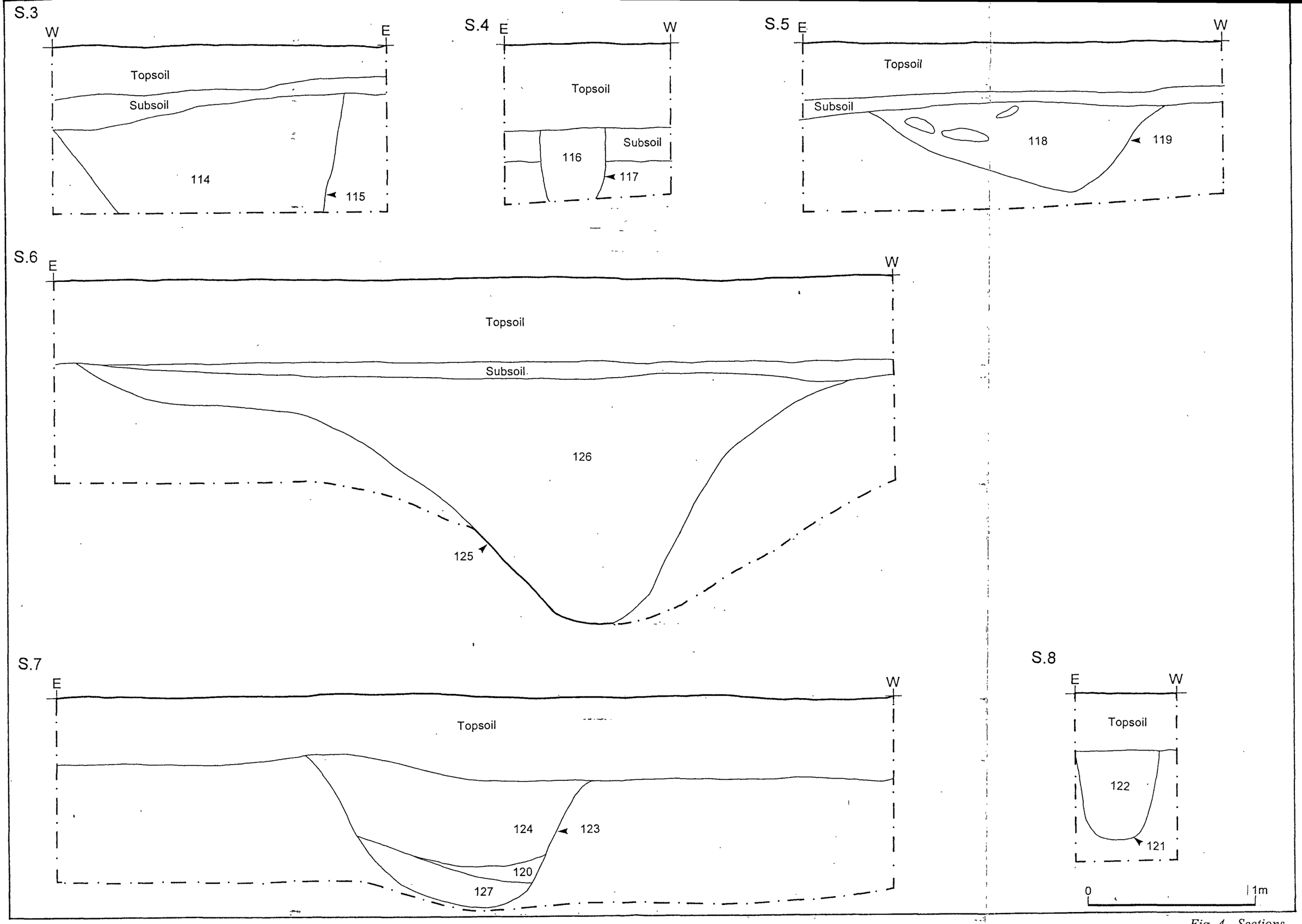


*Fig. 4. Sections*


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*Fig. 5. O.S. 1842-44 map, 1" to a mile (not to scale)*

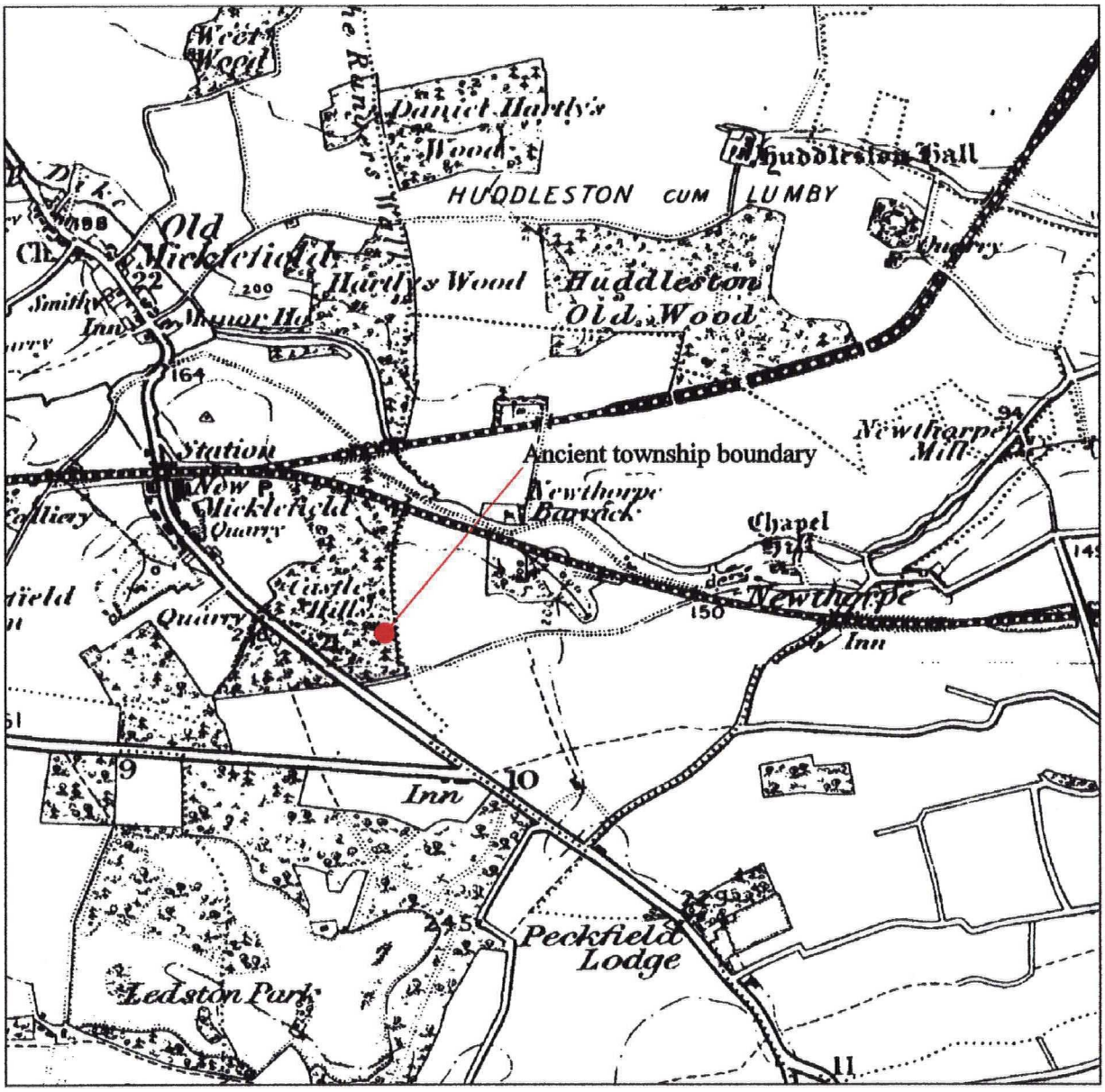


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*Fig. 6. O.S. 1889-92 map, 1" to a mile (not to scale)*

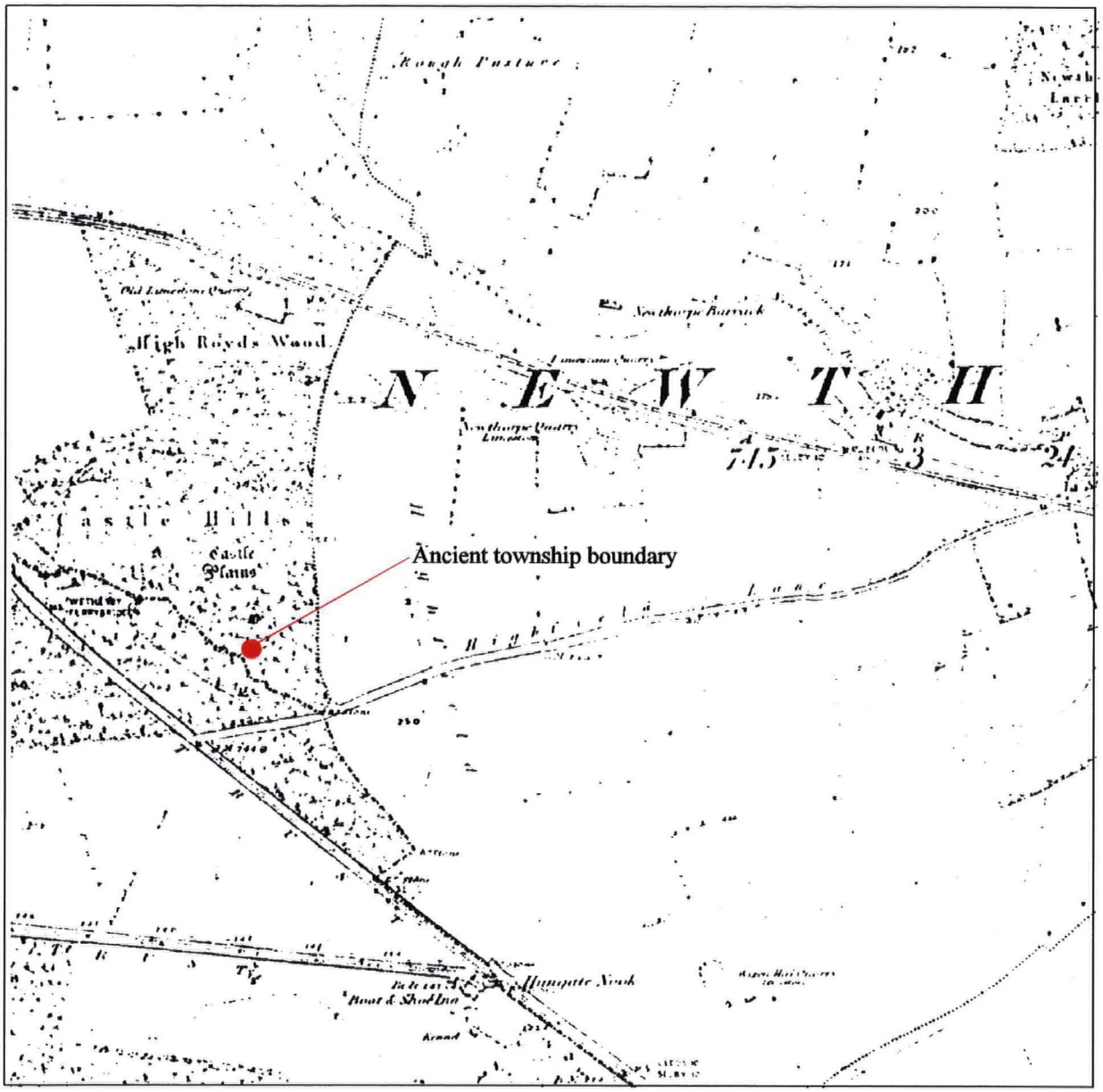


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*Fig. 7. 1st edition O.S. 1908 map, sheet 219, 6" to a mile (not to scale)*

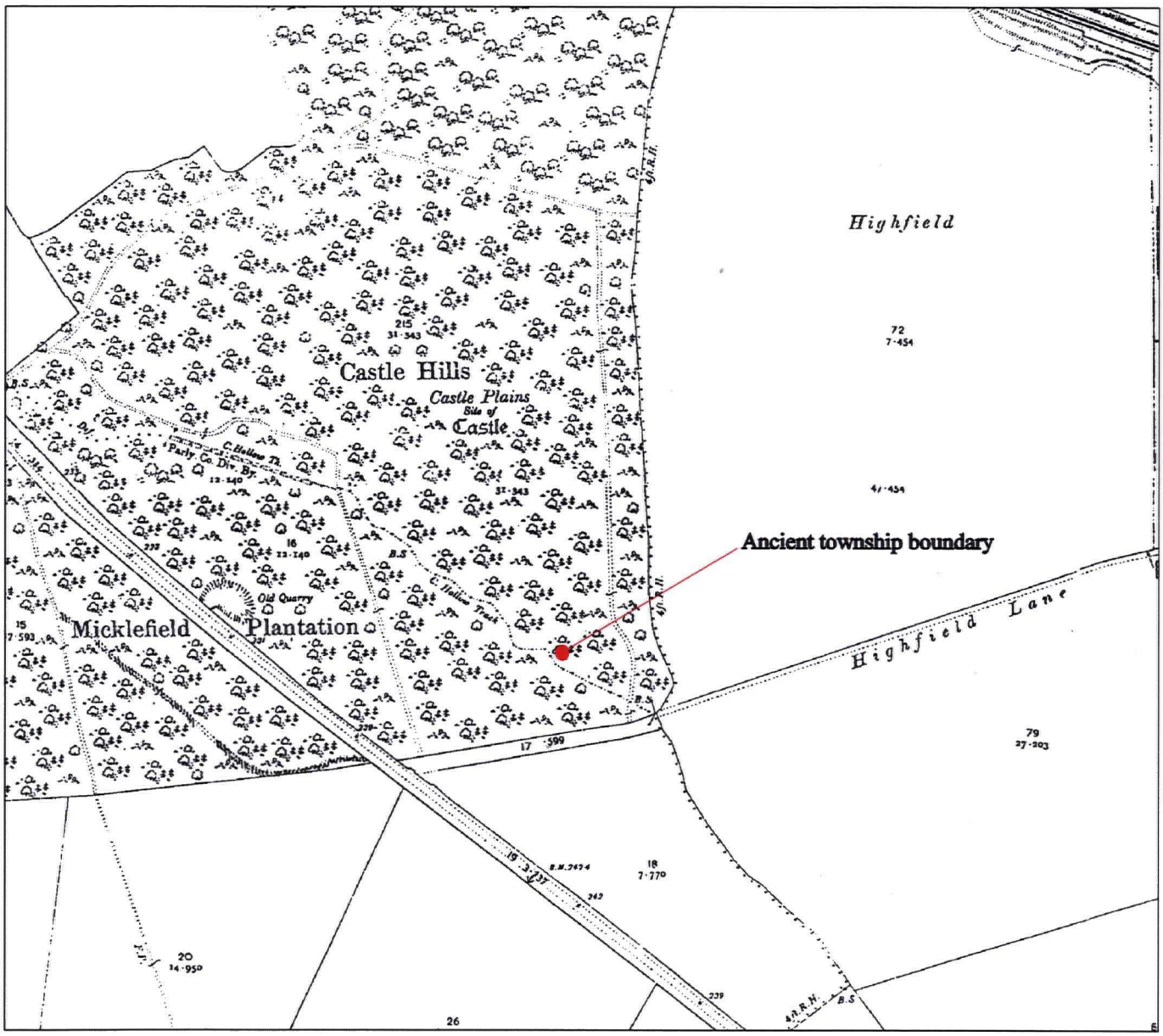


*Fig. 8. O.S. 1908 map, sheets 219-8 and 219-12, 1:2500 (not to scale)*

*Pl. 1. Ancient township boundary and prominent earthwork ditch within Castle Hills woods, looking south*

*Pl. 2. Ancient township boundary, ditch 125, looking south/east*

## *Bibliography*

Boucher, A. (ed.), 1995, 'West Yorkshire Archaeology Service Site Recording Manual'.

## *Acknowledgements*

| | |
|---|---|
| Project Management: | Ian Roberts BSc (Hons), MIFA |
| Report: | Richard O'Neill BA (Hons) |
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| | Suzanne Frankland HND |
| Survey: | Rob McNaught BSc (Hons), PIFA |
| Fieldwork: | Richard O'Neill BA (Hons) |
| | Kate Howell BSc (Hons) |
| | Chris Hurn |

# Appendix

## Primary Archive Inventory

| FILE NO | FILE | Contents | no of sheets A4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | CONTEXTS | Context register | 2 |
| | | Context cards | 28 |
| | | Finds reg. 'B' | 1 |
| II | DRAWINGS | Drawing register | 1 |
| | | Drawings | 6 (A3) |
| | | Colour transparencies | 2 films |
| | | Black and white prints | 2 films |
| | | Photo record sheets | 4 |
| III | PRE-EXCAVATION & | Location map | 1 |
| | POST-EXCAVATION | Archive inventory | 1 |
| | | Watching brief specification | 2 |
| | | Watching brief report | 1 report |

| Film Numbers | |
|---|---|
| **Black and white prints** | **Colour transparencies** |
| 4311 | 4312 |
| 4322 | 4267 |

## Inventory of Artefacts

| Material | Provenance | Amount | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| POTTERY | u/s | 1 | Medieval (Cistercian) |
| | u/s | 5 | Medieval |
| | u/s | 1 | Medieval |
| FLINT /CHERT | u/s | 3 | |
| GLASS SLAG | u/s | 1 | |
| SLAG | u/s | 2 | |