

**Land adjoining the Manor House
Public House,
Station Road, Stechford**

**An archaeological desk-based
assessment 2004**

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An archaeological desk-based assessment, 2004**

By

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For

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Land adjoining the Manor House Public House, Station Road, Stechford: an archaeological desk-based assessment

Summary

In February 2004 Birmingham Archaeology carried out a desk-based assessment for Westleigh Developments Ltd in advance of the proposed development of land adjoining the Manor House Public House on Station Road, Stechford, Birmingham (NGR SP128879). The study area is situated to the south of the River Cole close to the sites of a medieval mill and bridge and within an area of potential medieval tofts and crofts. Field name evidence suggests that flax may have been grown around the study area, and that there may have been a tile kiln in the vicinity. It is possible, too, that the site was occupied by a medieval toft and house site. The study area appears to have remained relatively free from post-medieval development, and any below-ground archaeology would have a high probability of survival. It is recommended that further archaeological evaluation be undertaken including a trench through the potential site of the medieval house and toft.

1.0 Introduction

In February 2004 Birmingham Archaeology carried out a desk-based assessment for Westleigh Developments Ltd ahead of the proposed development of land adjoining the Manor House Public House, Station Road, Stechford. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of known and potential archaeological information for the area, based on existing data. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999), and was carried out according to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (2004), which was itself based on a brief issued by Birmingham City Council (2004).

2.0 Site Location

The site is located at NGR SP 128 879, on the northeast side of Station Road, Stechford, Birmingham near its junction with Flaxley Road. It currently comprises wasteland (Plate 1) and part of the yard of the Manor House Public House, at present unoccupied (Plate 2). Stechford lies mostly to the south of the River Cole and is thus shown on most maps. It has now extended to the north of the river. It sits on sand and gravel deposits with a small area of clay to the north east of the site. Stechford also straddles the counties of Worcestershire and Warwickshire, and the parishes of Yardley and Aston. The south side of Stechford belongs to Yardley parish and the North to Aston. The study area under consideration is within the parish of Yardley.

3.0 Objective

The objective of this assessment was to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within and around the proposed development site, in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate. The desk-based assessment was the first stage of evaluation ahead of trial trenching intended to identify the need for any further archaeological work in advance of the planning

application, and to identify potential requirements for any *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains, or for their recording in advance of, or during, development.

4.0 Method

The assessment comprised a site inspection and a search of primary and secondary records and maps held by Birmingham Sites and Monuments record, Birmingham Local Studies Library and Birmingham University Library. Birmingham City Council Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted.

5.0 Archaeological and Historical Character

Prehistoric

The earliest evidence for human activity in the area is a Middle Bronze Age palstave found at 186 Flaxley Road in 1939 (SMR 02903). It has not been investigated any further and was donated to the museum.

Roman

There is a scattering of Roman coins from the area surrounding Stechford, mainly in Yardley. The Victoria Road Roman coin was found in Stechford and was dated to the third century (SMR 02907). Other coins found in the neighbouring areas of Hodge Hill and areas towards Birmingham are dated to the same period (SMR 02906, 020523, 20522). The River Cole served as a natural border between Coritani and Corvanii tribes and seems to have been used as a border from henceforward (Jones 1980).

Anglo-Saxon

References to Stechford itself are scarce and are only mentioned in conjunction with Yardley, or Gyrleah, which is recorded as early as 972 and is shown to have belonged to the Benedictine Abbey of Pershore (Skipp 1970, VCH Worc.Vol.2). If any settlement did exist at this time at Stechford it would also have belonged to the abbey. Yardley was settled by the Hwicce tribe, and in Domesday is mentioned as a 'member' or appurtenant manor of Beoley, which was well within Hwicca territory (Skipp 1970). The River Cole served as a border between Mercia and Hwicca and Stechford appears to straddle this border.

The presence of marl and sandy marl around this location suggests that the clearance of land would have included removal of dense deciduous woodland using a large group of men. The nature of the clearance would have meant the creation of common land as all hands had participated in the clearance. The name Stechford derives the medieval *Stichesford*, possible meaning 'sticky ford', alternatively it could derive from the word *stacchia* meaning dam made of stakes (Skipp 1970;Phelps 1881).

Medieval

Field name evidence suggests that Station Road follows the same line as the medieval trackway that cut through *Stycheford Felde* and *Churche Felde* passing over the river.

This trackway was over gravel and would have been the more practical route to the river crossing as it was firm ground with good drainage. A bridge existed in the fifteenth century, on the site of the current bridge right next to the study area (Skipp 1970, 92).

In the medieval period a mill stood on the north bank of the River Cole opposite the study area. It was first mentioned in 1250 as being held by Giles de Erdington. Yardley had at least seven water mills, mainly along the River Cole, which were probably dedicated to grinding corn.

Sticheford itself was described as a hamlet in 1275 with a small number of households living close together, and in the Lay Subsidy Roll of the same year two taxpayers were mentioned at *Stichford* (Skipp 1970, 32). In 1345 John atte Forde of Stycheford granted 'four plecks of land with *superstructures* in Stycheford lying in the field called Solerfelt' (Skipp 1970, 43), and in 1497 'Thorneton's tenement' at Stycheford was granted to trustees for charitable purposes.

Indications that flax was grown in the area come from a 1296/7 reference to 'land called Flaxbot in the common field of Yerdeley', and to a holding called 'Flaxleye abreast the sand patch at Stechford' (Skipp 1970, 44), possibly to be identified with the farm called Flaxleys which lies two miles south east of the study area.

A deed from 1497 refers to a 'Kelyn crofte' and 'Kelyn mede' at Stechford (*Ibid.*93). The suffix 'mede' would suggest a riverside site, and it is possible that there was a tile kiln with associated cottage close to or in the study area. Evidence for tiling and tile making seems to have been centred on Yardley, which lies directly on a Keuper marl deposit, but it is possible that the industry spread towards the more sandy areas such as Stechford. There is a small clay deposit to the east of the study area and as kilns tended to be near the source of clay it is possible that a small kiln was present here.

Post-Medieval

The earliest available map, Saxton's map of Warwickshire and Leicestershire (not illustrated), dates from 1576 and shows Yardley with a small picture of a mill but does not show Stechford as it is of a highly stylised manner with little detail. Speed's 1610 map (not illustrated) shows only the general location of Yardley, and only one of the seven mills we know to have existed there in the Middle Ages. Stechford is shown as a river crossing on the 1793 (Fig 3) map of Warwickshire, though scale is small it shows the mill and some buildings along Station Road.

By 1847 the study area and various pieces of land around Yardley were owned by Yardley Charitable Trust, though it is not known why or for what purpose this land was given to the Trust. The 1847 tithe maps for Yardley (Fig.4) and Aston show both sides of the River Cole and some cottages fronting the road within the study area. The mill is shown on the north bank of the river. Tile sheds were recorded at this date to the east and south east of the study area (Birmingham SMR 20238 & 202370).

The Yardley tithe map provides the first large-scale record of the hamlet of Stechford. The settlement was situated at a fork in the road from Birmingham (now Station Road). On the west side of the road, close to the river, is a series of three enclosures,

all of which border both the road and the river, two of them being L-shaped to achieve this end. It is possible that they represent medieval crofts. On the east side of the road, where the study area is situated, the land is made up of smaller divisions, but the shape of some of the plots suggests that properties of similar character may also have existed here. In 1847, Plot 1, the area around the bridge, was shown as an undeveloped field. The study area was occupied by plots 2 and 3. Plot 2, which is given as allotments in the Yardley tithe apportionment, contained a building fronting the road and comprised a roughly square enclosure divided internally into three smaller areas. Plot 3 was also given over to allotments, and plot 4, immediately south of the study area, contained the Bull's Head Inn, two cottages and three gardens. To the south and east of this lay Plot 5, a field known as Bull's Head Piece. Plots 6-10 to the south and east again were owned by Flaxleys, a farm further to the south east of the study area.

There is reference to the mill being in use as a paper mill in the later nineteenth century (Phelps 1881), but by the time of the first edition of the OS map of 1889 (Fig.5), it had been demolished. The Bull's Head is identified on the map to the southeast of the present Manor House, and there was a building on the study area, divided into two or three properties, probably the same building depicted on the 1847 map. The square enclosure to the northeast of the building remained with its division into three. The present Flaxleys farm, called Fir Tree Farm in 1889, is to the south east of the study area.

This arrangement persisted at least until 1916 (Figs 6 and 7), but by 1938 (Fig.8) the buildings and their associated enclosure were no longer in existence. By this time too the Bull's Head had been demolished and a new public house, also known as the Bull's Head, had been built on the site of the present Manor House. By 1955 (Fig.9) the Bull's Head had been remodelled or rebuilt to the current layout of the Manor House.

7.0 Discussion

There is evidence in the documentary record of there having been buildings at Stechford since the thirteenth century, when it was described as a hamlet, and the study area appears to lie close to and probably within the area occupied by the medieval settlement. It is adjacent to the main road through the settlement, and to the site of the fifteenth-century bridge across the River Cole. It also seems to be situated within an area of potential medieval crofts and tofts. Adjacent land to the north may have been meadowland.

References to specific sites occupied by buildings occur in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Of particular interest is the 1497 reference to Thornton's tenement when it was granted to a charitable trust, because in 1847 the land that comprises the study area was in the hands of the Yardley Charitable Trust. It is possible, then, that Thornton's tenement was located within the study area. In this respect the building recorded on the tithe map and its associated rectangular enclosure could represent a medieval dwelling and its toft.

Regarding industrial activity, the 'Kelyn mede' and 'Kelyn croft' references point to the study area as a possible location for a tile kiln, though further archaeological

evaluation would be required to identify such a site. It may also be possible to link the study area with the flax industry. The field name evidence certainly suggests that Flax was grown around Stechford in the Middle Ages, and if this were the case, then it is possible that processing may also have been carried out in the vicinity of the study area. It is likely that if retting were carried out within the study area archaeological evidence would survive.

As there has been very little post-medieval activity within the study area there is a strong possibility of any medieval below-ground archaeology being preserved. Any development of the site has the potential to disturb such remains, and any earlier deposits. Archaeological trenches over the site of the building fronting the road and across the boundaries of the former enclosure associated would assist in determining the date and character of the site. A series of test pits elsewhere within the site would confirm the character of the sub-soil and help to assess the probability of a tile kiln being situated in this locality, whilst at the same time giving the opportunity to locate evidence of industrial activity.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The research for this project was carried out by Kristina Krawiec, and the report was written by Kristina Krawiec in collaboration with Malcolm Hislop, who also managed the project. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Mike Hodder of Birmingham City Council, and to the staff of Birmingham Local Studies library for their help and co-operation.

9.0 Sources

Primary Sources

Yardley Parish tithe apportionment.

Secondary Sources

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VCH. 1913a. *The Victoria History of the county of Warwick* Vol. 2

VCH 1913b. *The Victoria History of the county of Warwick* Vol. 7

VCH. 1913c. *The Victoria History of the county of Worcester* Vol. 2

VCH 1913d. *The Victoria History of the county of Worcester* Vol. 7

Cartographic Sources

- 1576 Saxton's map of Warwickshire and Leicestershire
- 1610 Speed's map of Warwickshire
- 1793 Yate's map of Warwickshire
- 1822 Greenwood's map of Warwickshire
- 1847 Yardley and Aston tithe award maps
- 1889 O.S 1:2500
- 1904 O.S 1:2500
- 1916 O.S 1:2500
- 1938 O.S 1:2500
- 1947 O.S 1:2500
- 1955 O.S 1:500
- 1967 O.S 1:2500



Fig.1

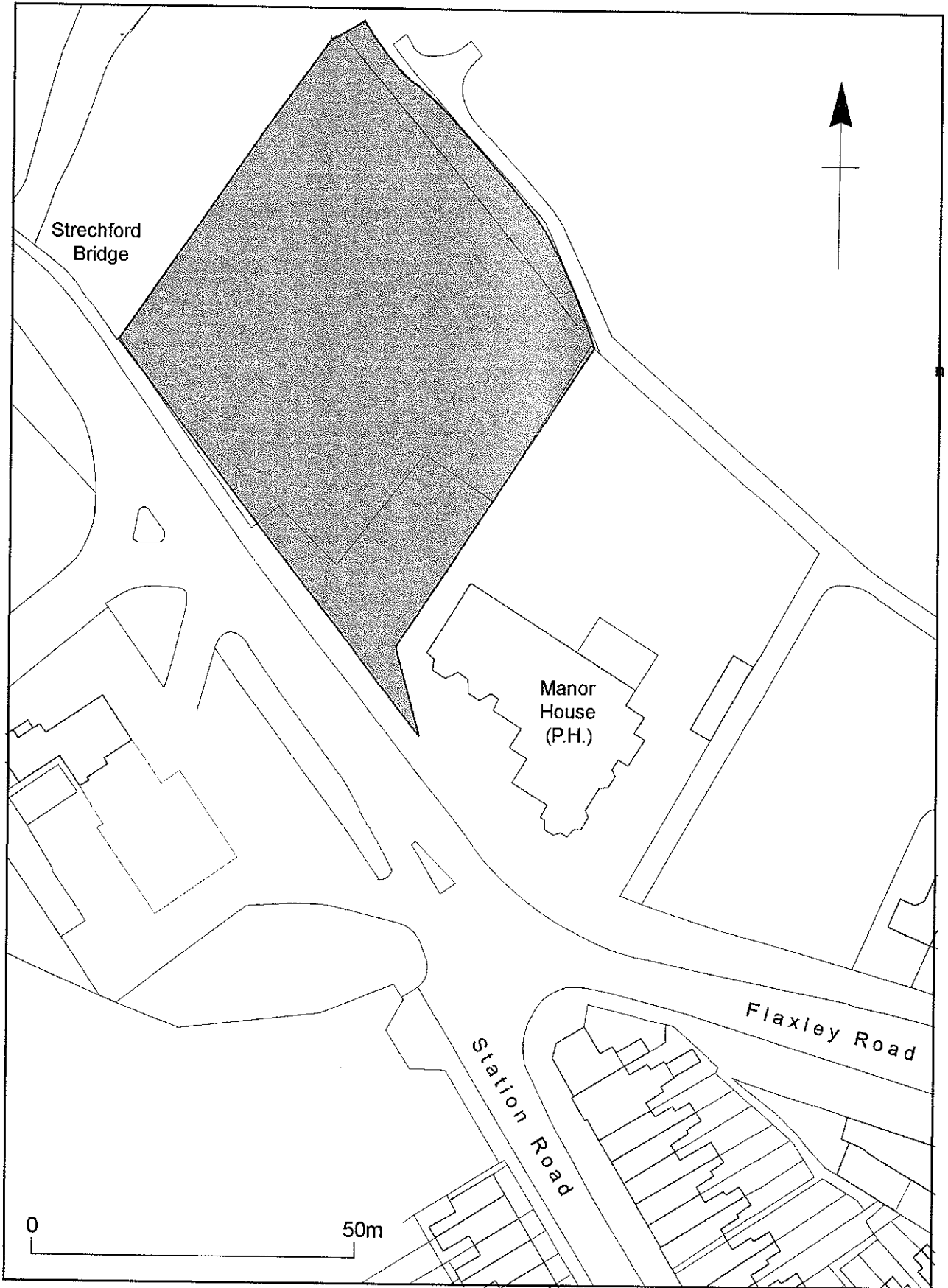


Fig.2

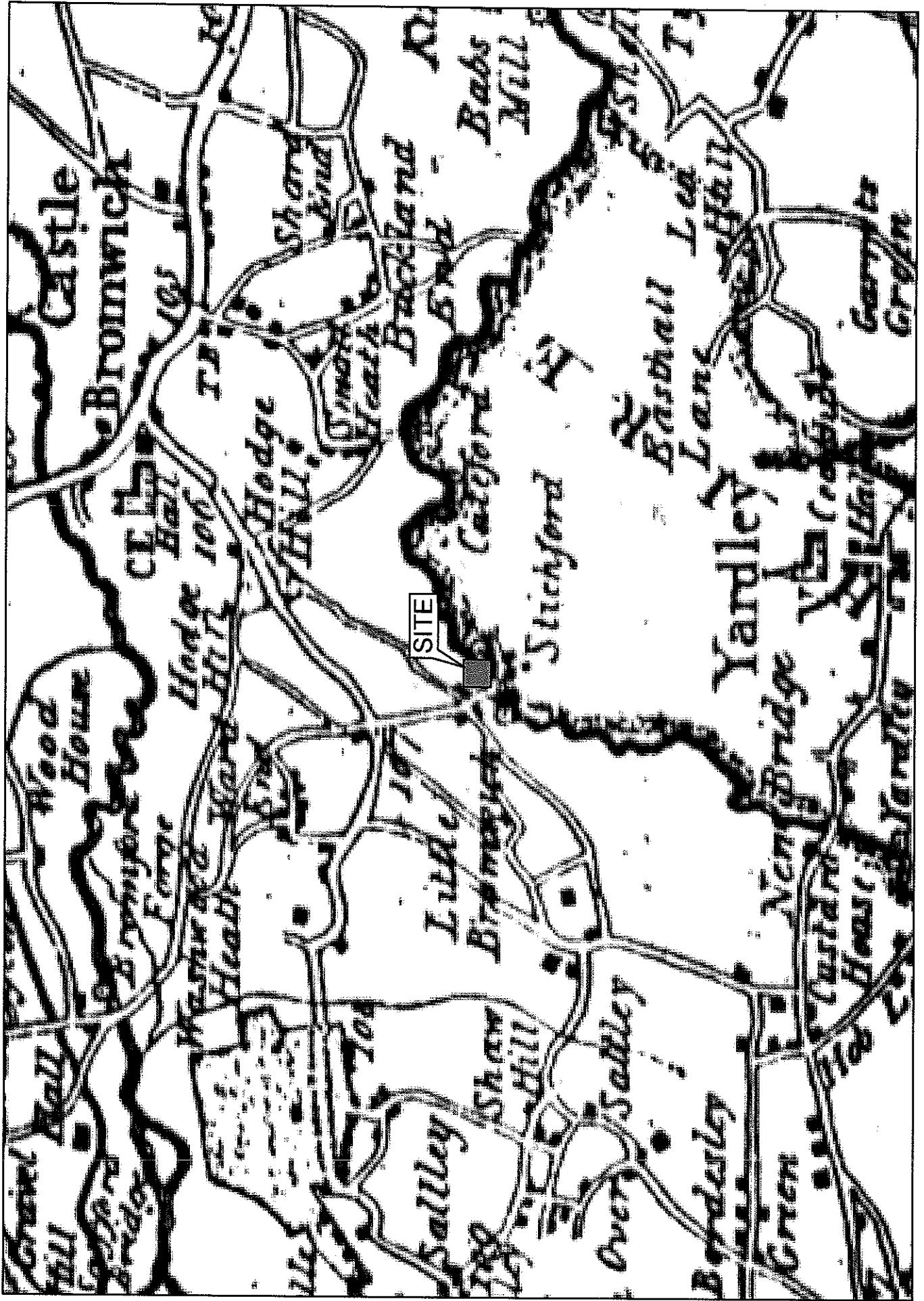


Fig.3 (1793 Yates Map)

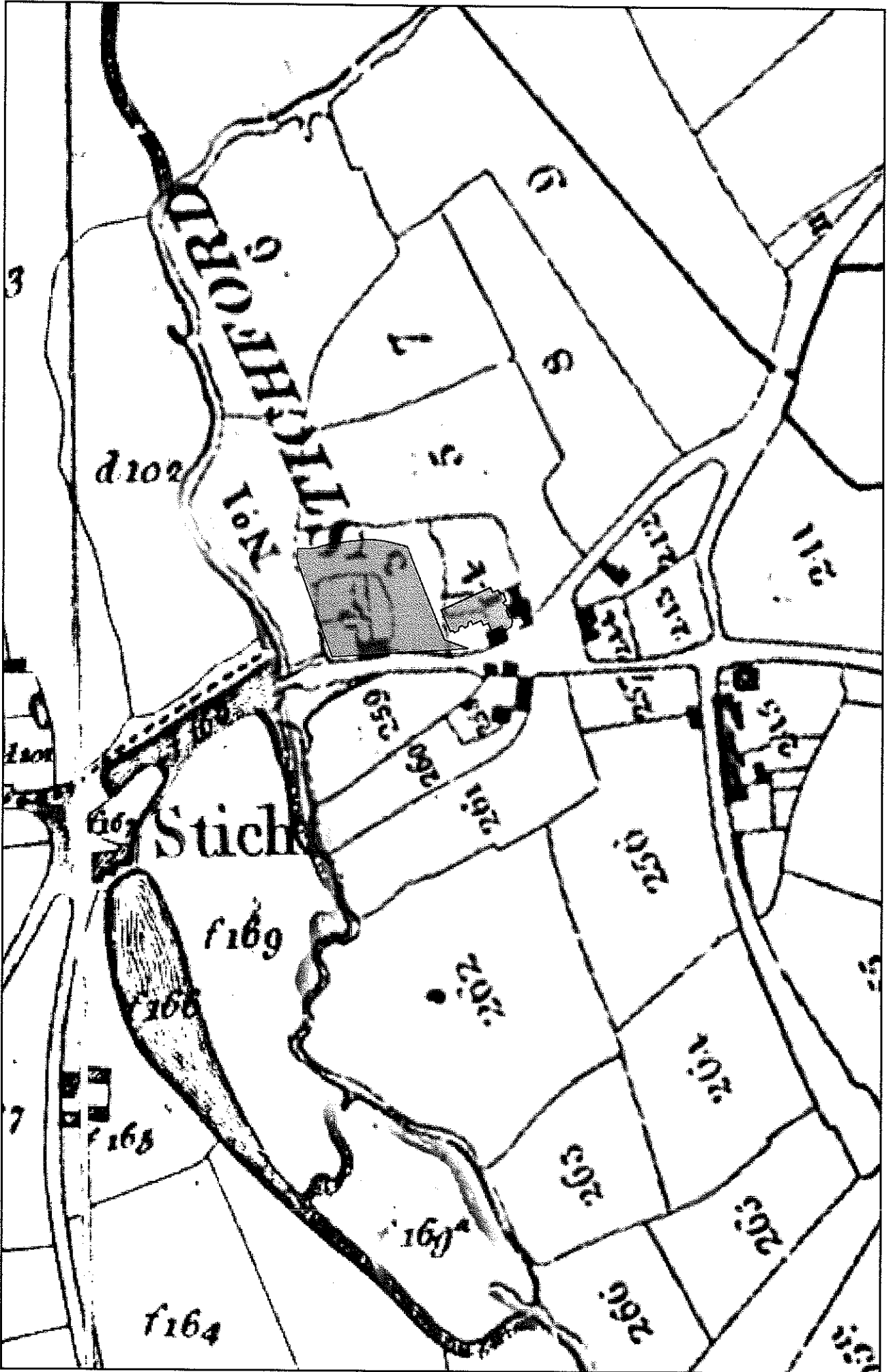


Fig.4 (1847 Aston and Yardley Tithe Maps)

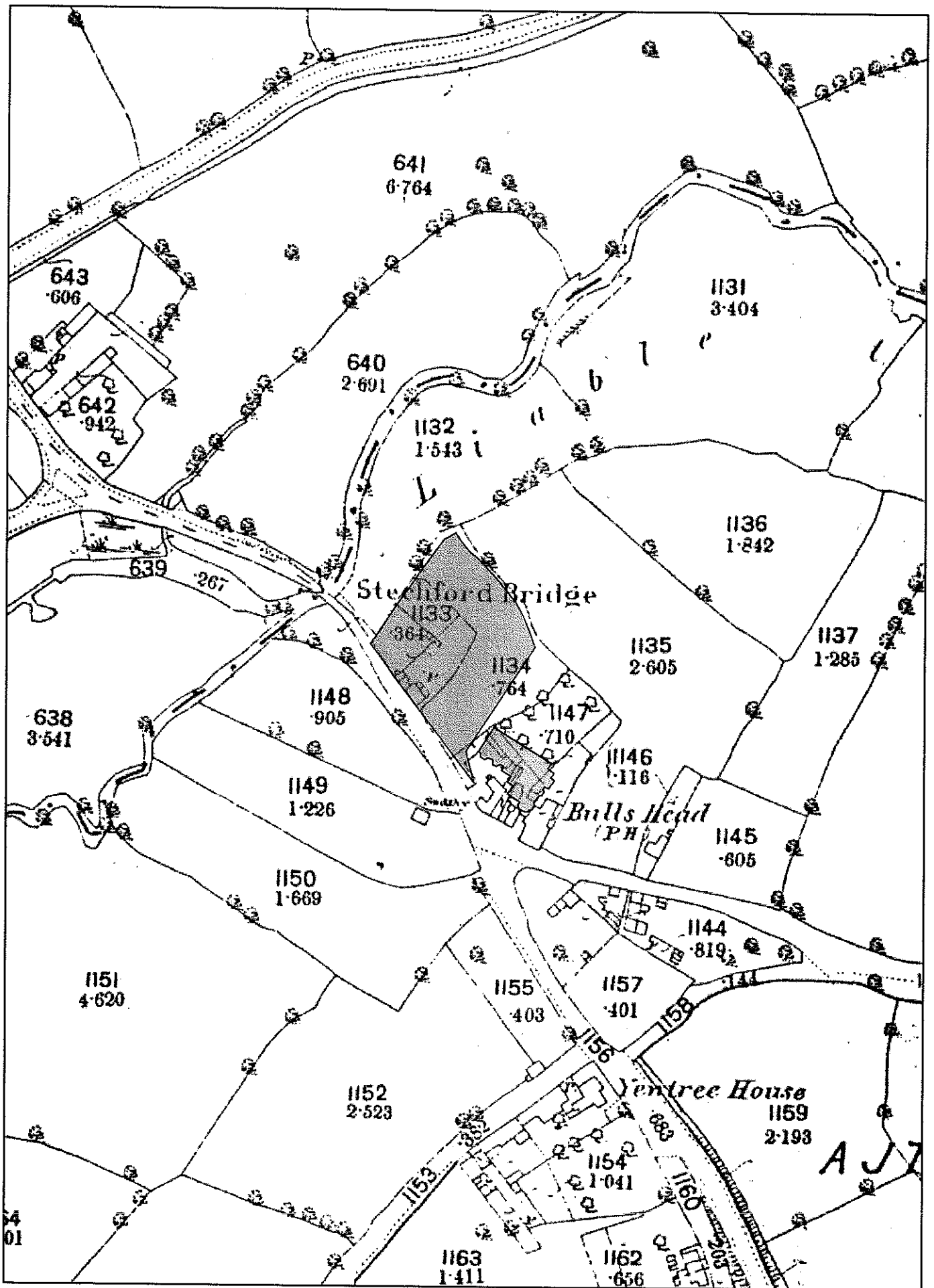


Fig.5 (1888)

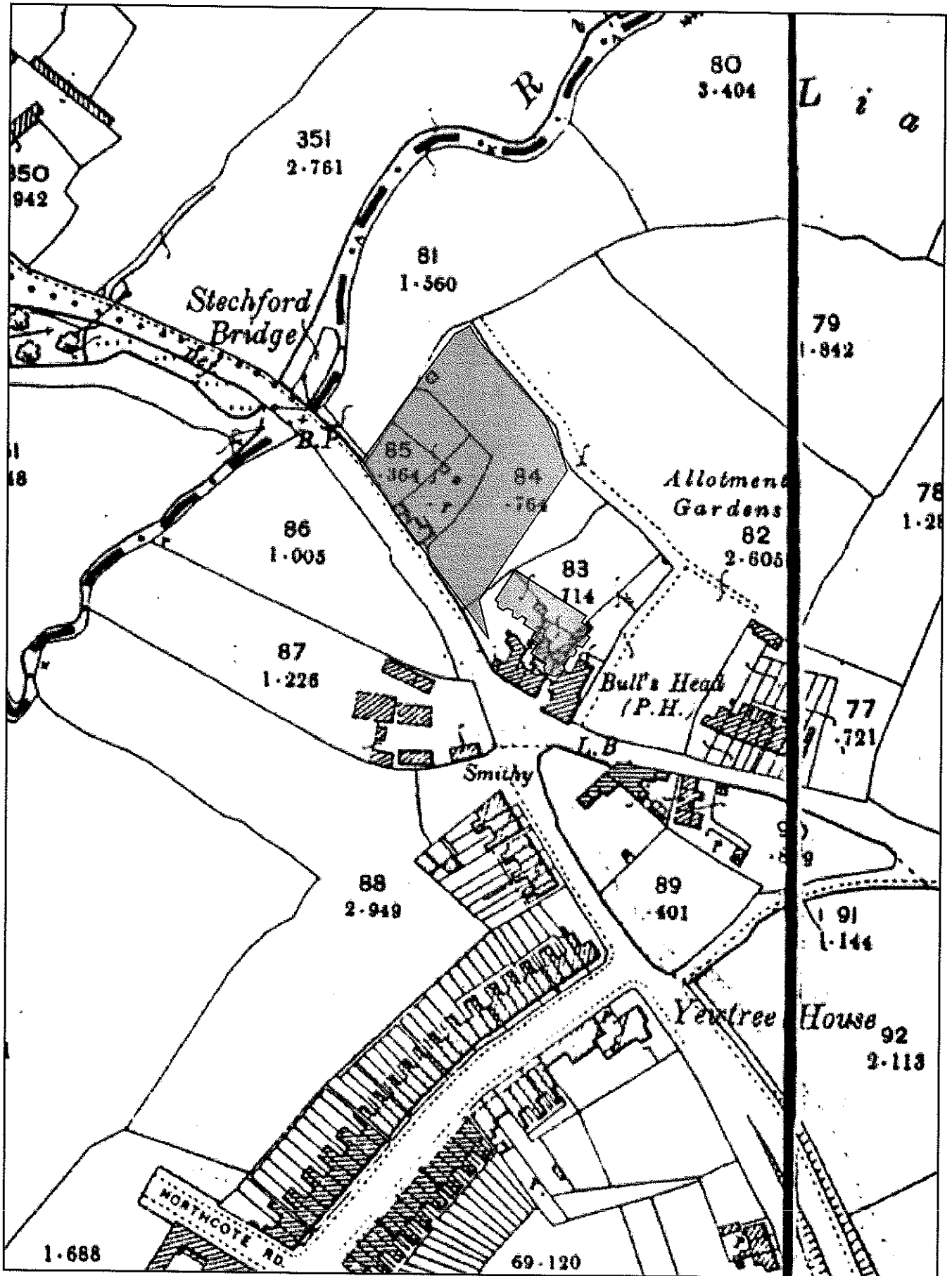


Fig.6 (1904)

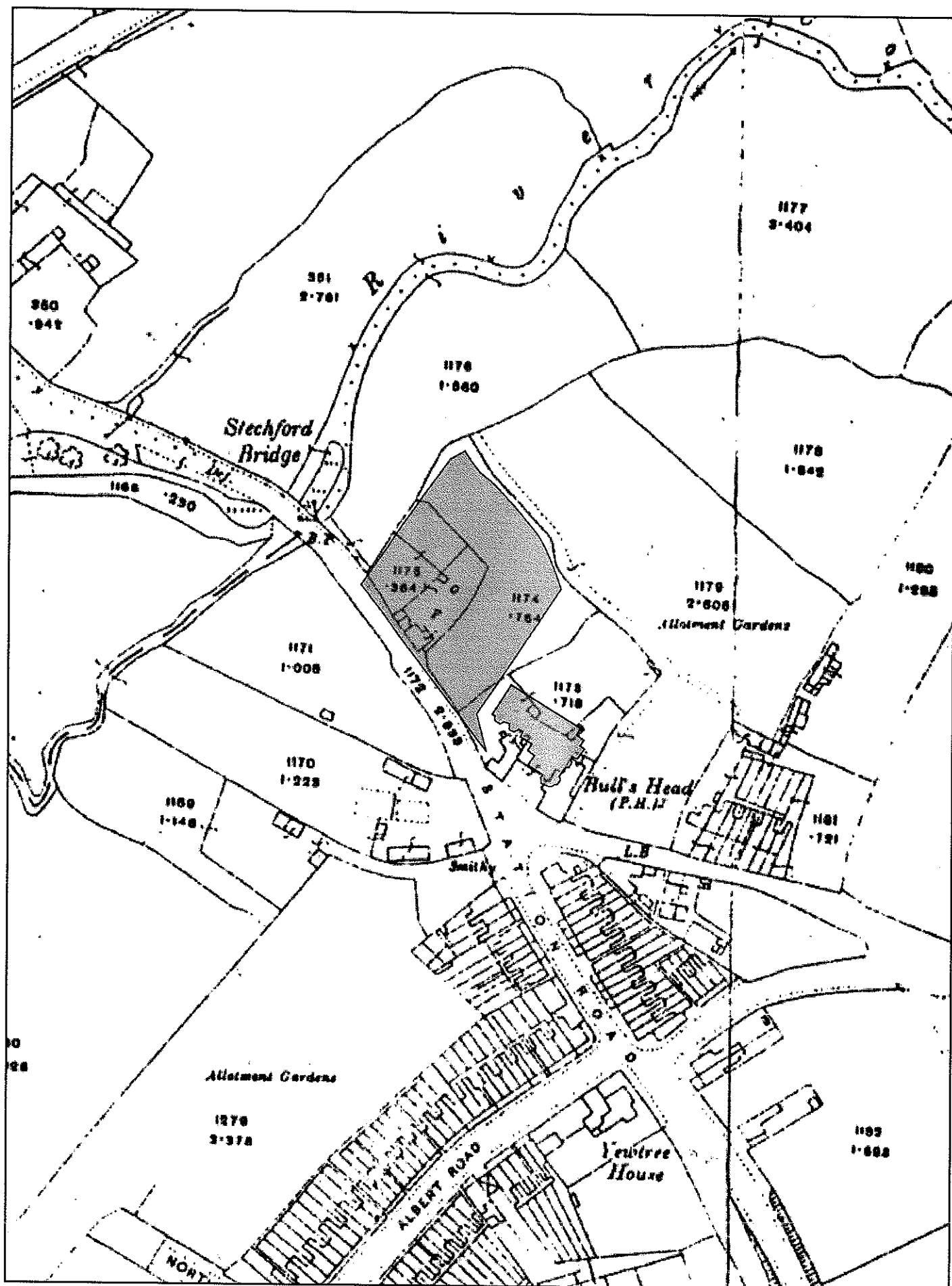


Fig.7 (1916)

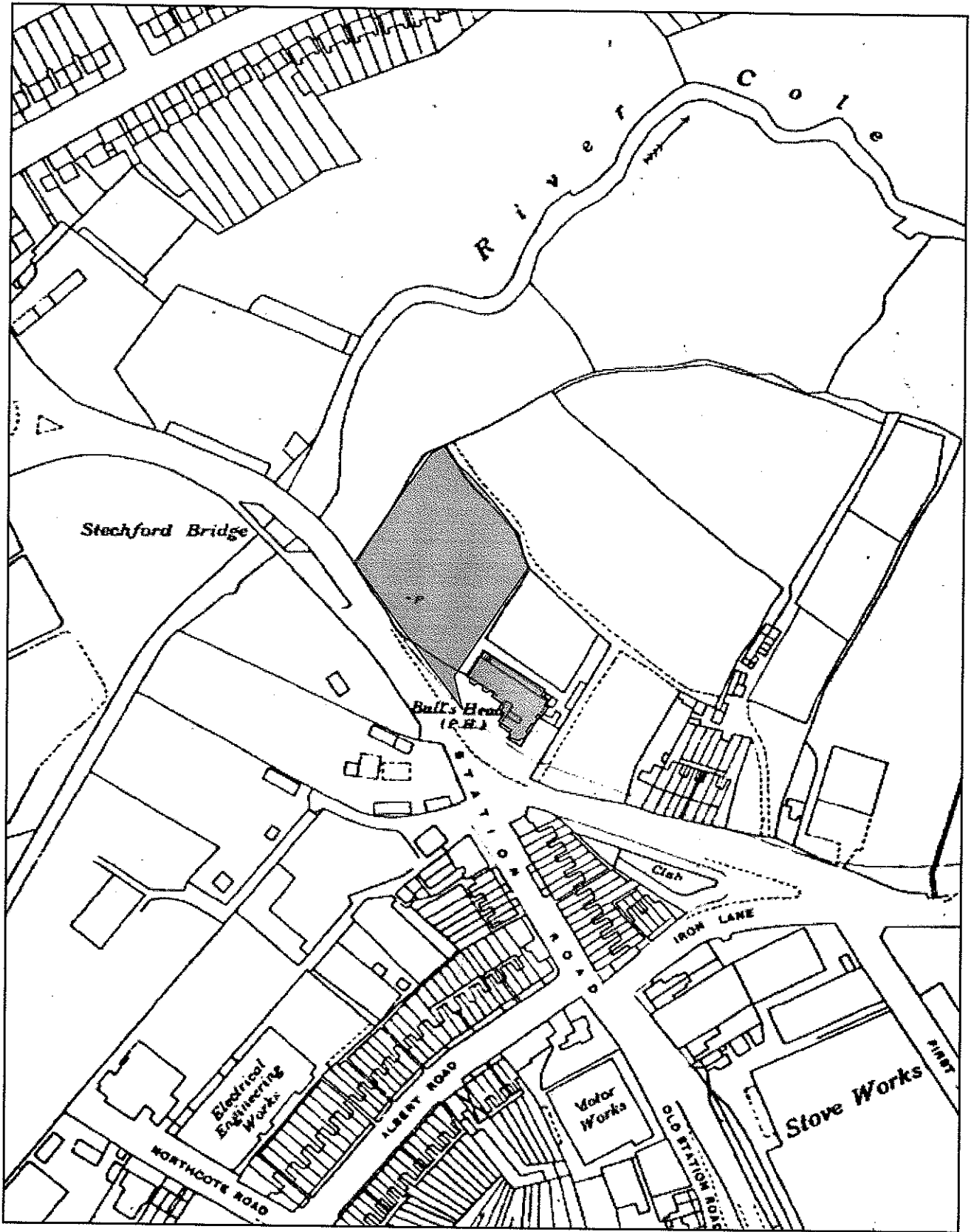


Fig.8 (1938)

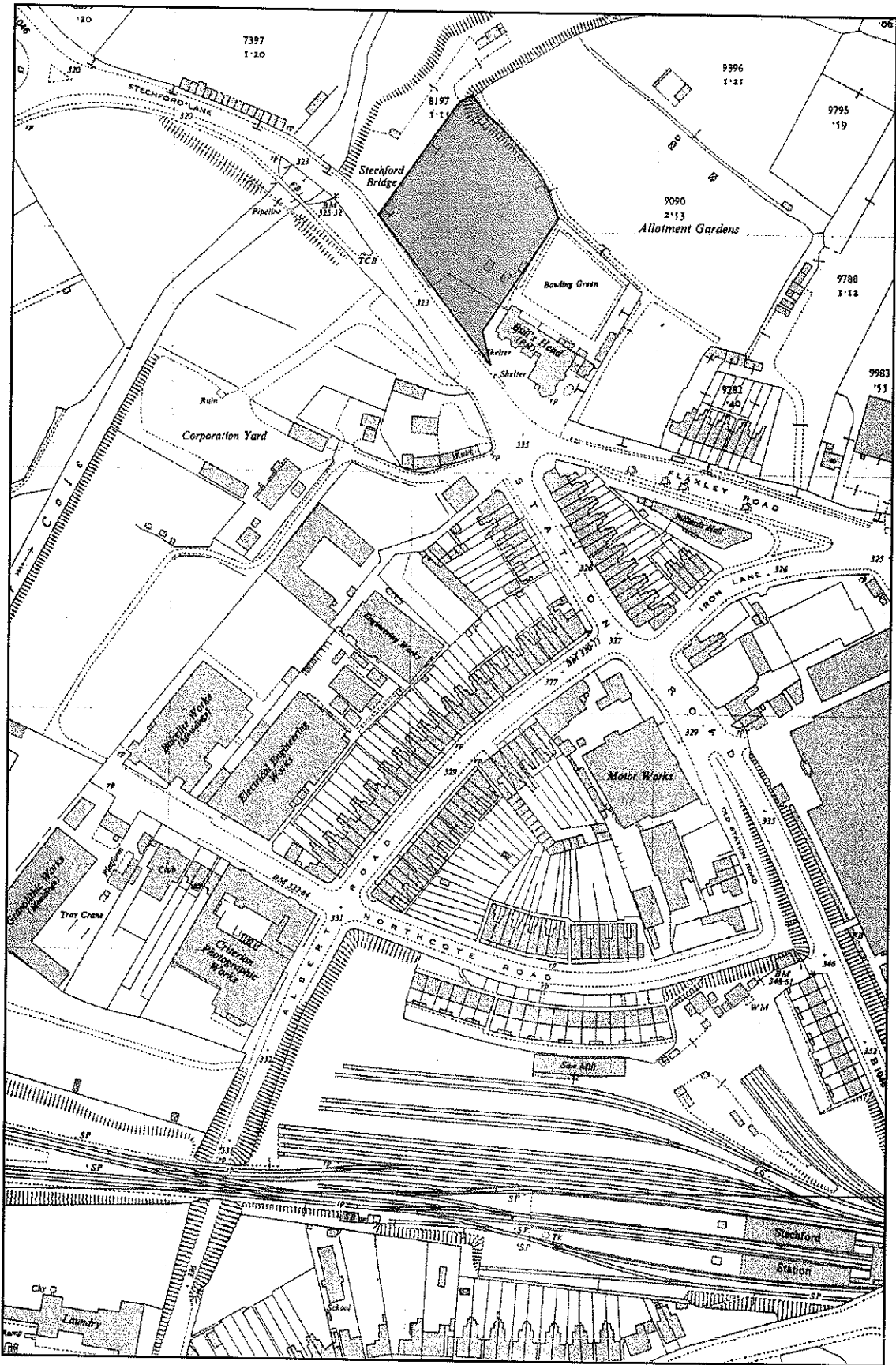


Fig.9 (1955)

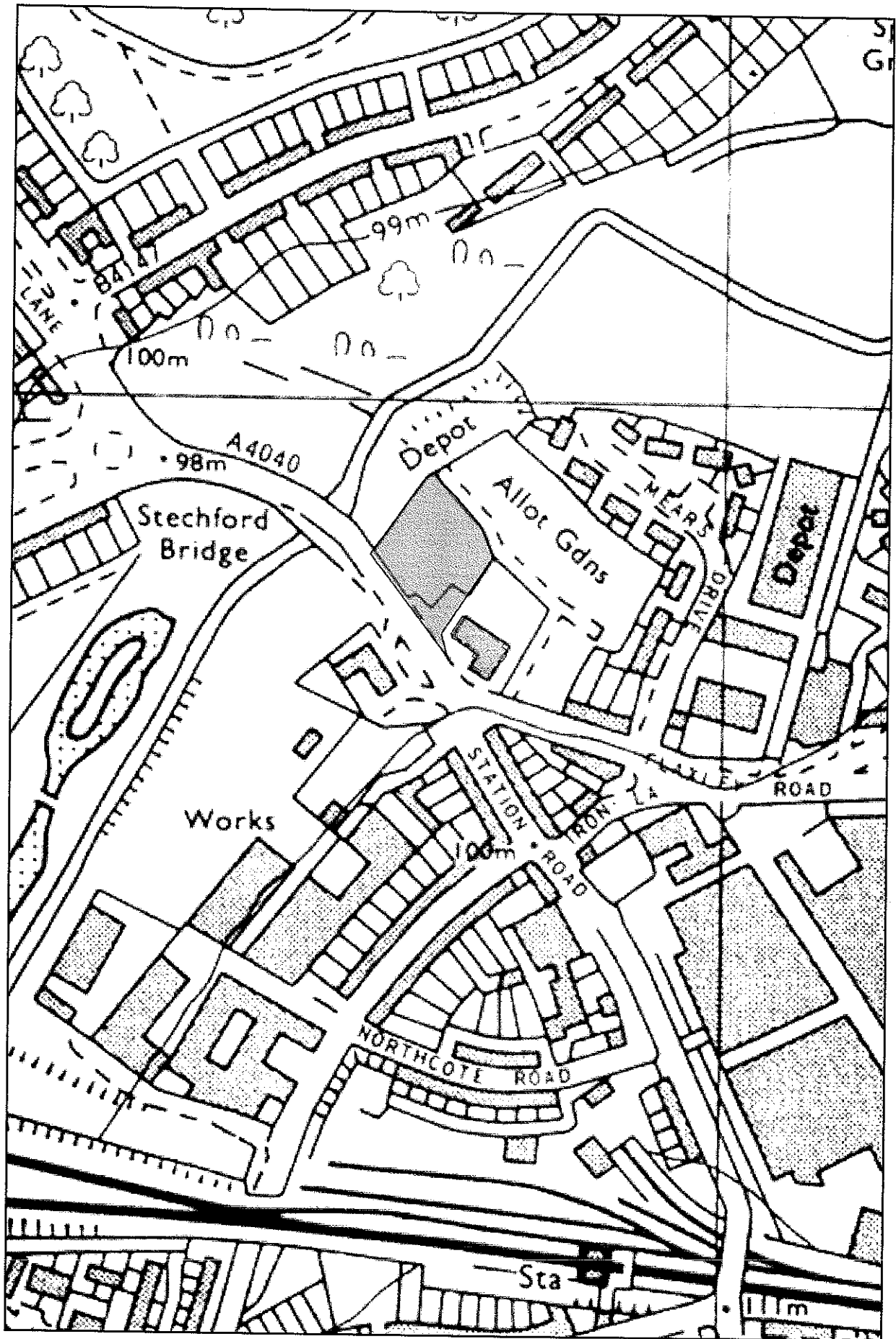


Fig.10 (1967)



Plate 1

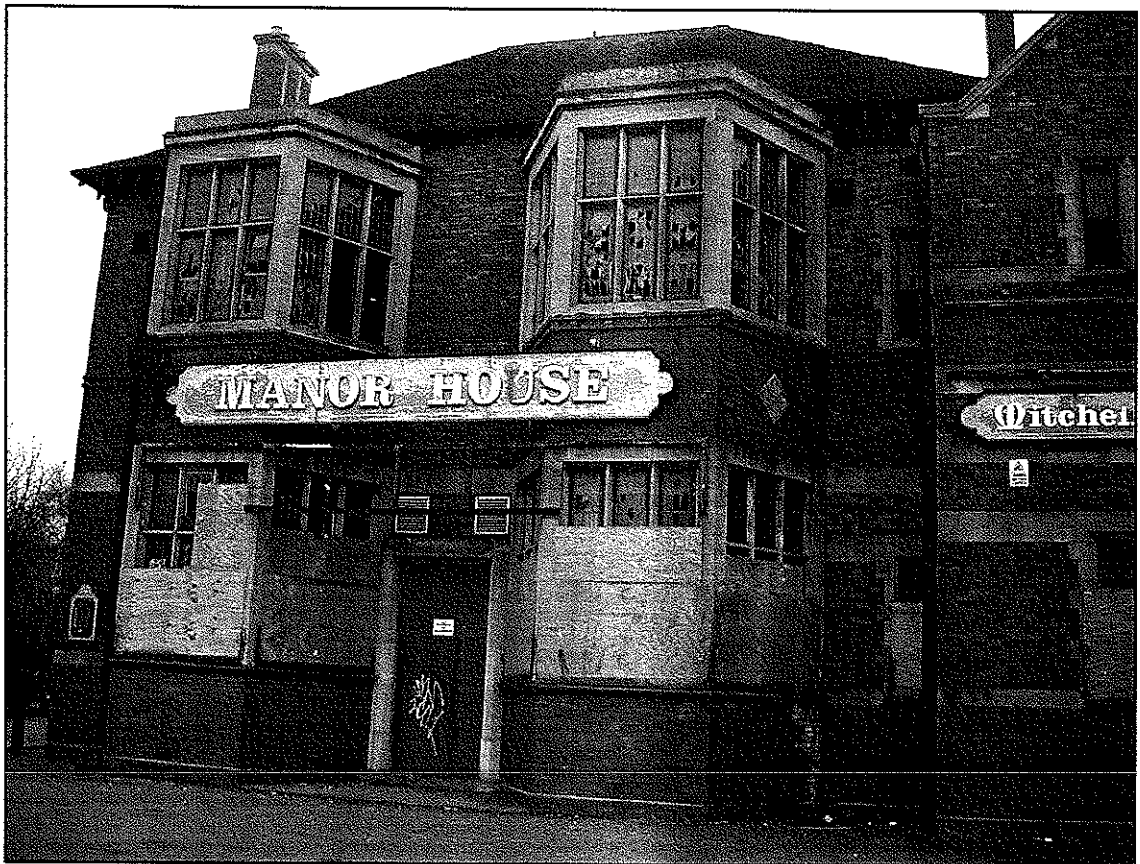


Plate 2