RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

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County East Sussex	
OS Reference TQ 92	
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

OF THE A259 RYE BY-PASS, EAST SUSSEX

(Project No. 1992/74)

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 South Eastern Archaeological Services of University College London was commissioned by Mr. Philip Masters, of Chris Blandford Associates, on behalf of the Department of Transport, to undertake an archaeological assessment of the proposed route of the A259 Rye By-pass, East Sussex.

1.2 The aim of the assessment was to locate in the field any sites/features of archaeological importance which may be affected by the construction of the new by-pass.

1.3 The assessment was to include not only the Preferred By-pass Route, but also other optional routes. These consist of the Preferred Camber Link Road; the Camber Link Eastern Alternative, Alternative Route 3 and Alternative Route 5.

1.4 The assessment was undertaken in two parts:

i) a walk-over survey to locate any archaeological earthworks, particularly in areas of pasture.

ii) a fieldwalking survey of all available arable land along the proposed by-pass routes.

This work was undertaken during November 1992.

2. THE WALK-OVER SURVEY

2.1 The walk-over survey consisted of walking the various routes of the proposed by-pass in order to locate any threatened earthworks/features which may be of archaeological importance. Particular attention was paid to areas of pasture where earthworks were expected to be less severely damaged by modern arable agriculture. Any earthworks located were sketch plotted onto 1:2500 maps of the area (see Figs. 1-8). A careful watch was also maintained for archaeological material in exposed ditch sections and disturbed ground.

2.2 Most earthworks noted during the walk-over were the result of land drainage. Most of the main drainage ditches along the route are still open and functioning, however, some, particularly the smaller examples, have been infilled/silted up leaving linear depressions. Much of this infilling has probably taken place in the recent past. Earthworks obviously falling into this category were not therefore sketch plotted as cartographic research would prove more reliable in a study of the drainage pattern of the area.

2.3 Walking down the Rother at low tide revealed a number of interesting maritime features in the bed of the river. A large rectangular area bordered by wooden stakes was noted opposite the mouth of the river Brede (Fig.3.A and Plate 1). This,

presumably representing some form of wharf/revetment, is only visible at low tide. Further south was a single line of similar wooden stakes extending out into the river (Fig.2.C).

2.4 A number of derelict boats lay around the river. Most are obviously very recent, although one earlier example was noted below the high tide mark (Fig.2.B and Plate II). This vessel is of clinker construction held with copper rivets. Only the base of the vessel was exposed although more could be buried under the mud.

2.5 Although both the stake features and the boat remains noted in the field are not to be directly affected by the by-pass, their presence stresses the likelihood of earlier vessels surviving deeply buried in the area (see below).

2.6 In the field to the east of the river (Fig.4) a terrace (D) and three linear ridges (E) were noted. The precise nature and date of these features is unknown although they are likely to be fairly recent as the field seems to have been disturbed in modern times with various tips and water pipes (a large mound, Fig.4.H, within the field had modern rubbish protruding from it).

2.7 An inspection of the exposed sections of a drainage ditch (Fig.4.G) revealed *circa* 30cm. of topsoil over *circa* 1.2m. plus of clay. No archaeological finds were located.

2.8 Very close to the proposed Camber Link Road, just to the north of the gravel pit is a 1939-45 reinforced concrete pill-box (Fig.4.F and Plate III). It is likely this coastal defence feature could be affected by road construction work.

2.9 To the west of East Guldeford the remains of two crossing sea walls were noted (Fig.4.I and J). Both these walls are mapped by Green (1968). The N.N.E. -S.S.W. wall (J) is truncated to the north and south, but survives up to *circa* 2m. high in places. The W.S.W - E.N.E. wall (I) survives to a similar height, and continues as an earthwork to the west of the railway. To the east this wall runs close to 'The Mount', a late Medieval/Tudor half timbered house (Plate IV). The house is on a slight rise itself and the relationship with the sea wall is unclear. Only excavation and/or detailed historical/cartographic research could date the sea wall. It is possible the wall is of late Medieval origin.

2.10 The field to the north of sea wall I, west of The Mount, (centred TQ935/215), contains a number of undiagnostic earthworks, some of which, may relate to former ponds etc.

2.11 A number of enigmatic mounds were noted to the south of the railway, east of East Guldeford (Fig.6.K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R,S and T). All were circular in plan (except L, which was sub-rectangular), and ranged from *circa* 5m. to 10m. in diameter, varying in height between 20 - 40cm. Most of the mounds have a gradual dome section, some however, have a flattened top. These mounds seem too small for salterns, and too small/numerous for windmills. The only explanation put forward was suggested by the farmer, Mr. Baker, who suggested they were the possible results of grubbing out

numerous anthills which existed in the area just after the last war. The exact nature of these mounds remains uncertain.

2.12 To the south of the proposed by-pass at TQ946/223 is a large earthwork enclosure (Fig.7.U) of unknown function. Medieval pottery was found in excavations there 'twenty or so' years ago (Mr. Baker pers. comm.). It possibly represents a stock enclosure (N.B. Fig.7 only has the northern bank marked on), but lies outside the threatened area.

3. THE FIELDWALKING SURVEY: METHODS

3.1 Much of the route for the Rye By-pass is pasture, therefore fieldwalking was restricted to certain areas. All arable land along the proposed routes was subjected to the fieldwalking survey. All transects which were walked are marked in red numerals (see Figs.2-8), those marked in black were not walked (i.e. they were pasture).

3.2 The length of the preferred route was divided up into lines of 20m. transects. One line of transects was placed down the approximate centre line of the road, with parallel flanking lines of transects at 20m. either side, thus forming a 20m. grid system along the proposed road. Further transects, again spaced at 20m. intervals, were added to cover wider stretches of road/road junctions. This procedure was carried out for all the alternative routes.

3.3 The Preferred Route had each 20m. transect interval independently numbered. Where optional routes cross/come close to the preferred route, the numbering system of the latter is extended to cover these areas (see Figs.2-8). The optional routes were then numbered separately using a continuation of the numbering of the Proposed Route. Although many fields were not available for fieldwalking, all transects were numbered to facilitate any further fieldwalking that may become available in the near future.

3.4 Finds were collected in marked bags for every 20m. transect before being taken for processing and recording. Fieldwalking record sheets were filled out for every field walked. These recorded the N.G.R., lighting, date and ground conditions etc. and form part of the Archive.

3.5 After sorting into categories (pottery, tile, bone etc.) the finds were counted, weighed and discarded, with the exception of pottery. All information on discarded finds was recorded on discard sheets which form part of the Archive.

3.6 The pottery was washed and recorded on pottery record forms by dated fabric group, sherd count and weight. Modern sherds (19th - 20th century) were then discarded. Only material pre-dating the 19th century was marked and retained.

3.7 The virtual absence of Medieval pottery meant the data was not loaded onto a computer for statistical analysis as this would prove extremely mis-leading with so little pottery involved.

4. THE FIELDWALKING SURVEY: RESULTS

4.1 The entire length of the by-pass route which was available for fieldwalking (red numerals Figs. 2-8) produced a single sherd of Medieval pottery (Fig.7 Transect 790). Two struck flintflakes were also found (Fig.5 Transect 356 and Fig.7 Transect 816). A few sherds of 16th - 17th century date were also located. Due to the low numbers of finds they have not been plotted on Figs.2-8.

4.2 Conditions for artifact recovery were fairly good in most transects, although some transects between 724 - 798, 1398 -1452 and 1596 -1669 (all Fig.7) had fairly dense crops coming through. Despite bad visibility in a few places, the absence of archaeological material here is difficult to explain as the area east of East Guldeford had been inned by the late Medieval period. Either there are not sites situated along the fieldwalked lengths of road, or the sites are well below the plough-line. The absence of Medieval pottery from land between Rye and East Guldeford is somewhat easier to explain as this was reclaimed between the 17th - 19th centuries (Green, 1968).

4.3 Sparse spreads of 19th and 20th century pottery were recovered from most areas. Most, however, was found close to Rye (transects on Figs.4 and 5).

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Potentially the most archaeologically sensitive area along the whole by-pass route is the section around Rye and the river Rother. Rye had a large and important harbour in the Medieval period which not only saw trade but was home to many industries such as shipbuilding.

5.2 The precise location and extent of this harbour is not known, and, with such a complex history of changing river courses in the area, it is practically impossible to predict its approximate vicinity through time. Indeed, the fact that the whole area between Rye and East Guldeford was underwater as late as the 17th century shows the vast area in which maritime archaeology could be found.

5.3 Any wharves/harbour installations will be well preserved in the anaerobic conditions of the area, and are likely to be deeply buried (see below). Boreholes undertaken by the British Geological Survey around Rye Harbour have shown riverine silts, sands and gravels to a depth in excess of 20m. below 00 (Lake and Shephard-Thorn, 1987).

5.4 The possibility of not only harbour installations, but ships (dating from at least the Medieval period onwards), surviving deeply buried in the area is very high. Two ships were found to the north of Rye, close to the railway level crossing, during pipe laying in May 1963 (East Sussex Maritime Sites and Monuments Record Nos. 258 and 259). These ships were found in water borne deposits, one at 12-13 feet from the surface, the second at 18 feet. The ships were not later than the late 16th century and may have been laid up for breaking (Lovegrove, 1964).

5.5 Such finds emphasise not only the potential depth of maritime archaeology in the area, but also the unpredictable areas in which it may occur: a ship could be left to rot in any number of creeks leading off the main river just as they are today. It is obvious that the location of such material cannot be predicted; trial trenching would be of little help. It seems essential therefore that any deep excavations around Rye and the Rother be closely monitored (i.e. by archaeological watching-briefs) in order to locate any maritime archaeology that may be present.

5.6 The 1939-45 pill-box located in the walk-over (see 2.8 above) should be adequately recorded if construction work endangers its condition in any way.

5.7 Practically the entire route of the by-pass has great potential for palaeoenvironmental studies. Areas of particular interest are around East Guldeford (where peat dated to the 2nd millennium B.C. has been located) (Green, 1968) and Rye. Detailed study could contribute a great deal to the reconstruction of the palaeoenvironment of the area and should seriously be considered.

5.8 Although many sea walls have been mapped in the area (Green, 1968) few now survive as standing earthworks. Many sea walls noted in the field have either been badly damaged or destroyed by modern agriculture. The two stretches of sea wall along the proposed route however survive as fairly substantial earthworks (Fig. 5.I and J and Plate IV). If historical/cartographic research cannot date these features they should be excavated/sectioned before the endangered portions are destroyed.

5.9 The pasture field behind The Mount, East Guldeford, through which sea wall I runs, (TQ935/214 Fig.4) contains a number of undiagnostic earthworks which could, in part at least, represent a pond. There is a possibility that domestic refuse from The Mount (dating to the late Medieval/Tudor period) could have been dumped in this vicinity. A similar situation was encountered at Old Place, Icklesham, when H.A.A.R.G. members uncovered an important group of 16th century material from a rubbish deposit by an old spring head (Vahey n.d.). This is obviously a tentative suggestion and only trial excavations/geophysical survey could prove any such deposits.

5.10 The areas of the by-pass covered by the fieldwalking produced little to suggest settlement activity. It should be remembered, however, that archaeological deposits could be buried below the plough-line and thus not register on a surface artifact collection.

5.11 It is impossible at present to accurately assess the extent of further trial investigations needed along the by-pass route. Once the results of the geophysical survey (and perhaps also palaeoenvironmental bore hole analysis) are available it may be easier to define the areas of archaeological interest, and thus gain some idea where, and to what degree, further work is needed.

REFERENCES

Green, R.D.	1968	"Soils of Romney Marsh" *Soil Survey Bulletin No.4*
Lake, R.D. and Shephard-Thorn, E.R.	1987	"Geology of the Country around Hastings and Dungeness" *British Geological Survey.* H.M.S.O.
Lovegrove, H.	1964	"Remains of two old vessels found at Rye, Sussex" in *The Mariner's Mirror, Vol 50 No.2* 115-122.
Vahey, Z.	n.d.	"Old Place Ickelsham" *H.A.A.R.G. Report.*

FIGURE 1

LOCATION MAP

RYE : A259

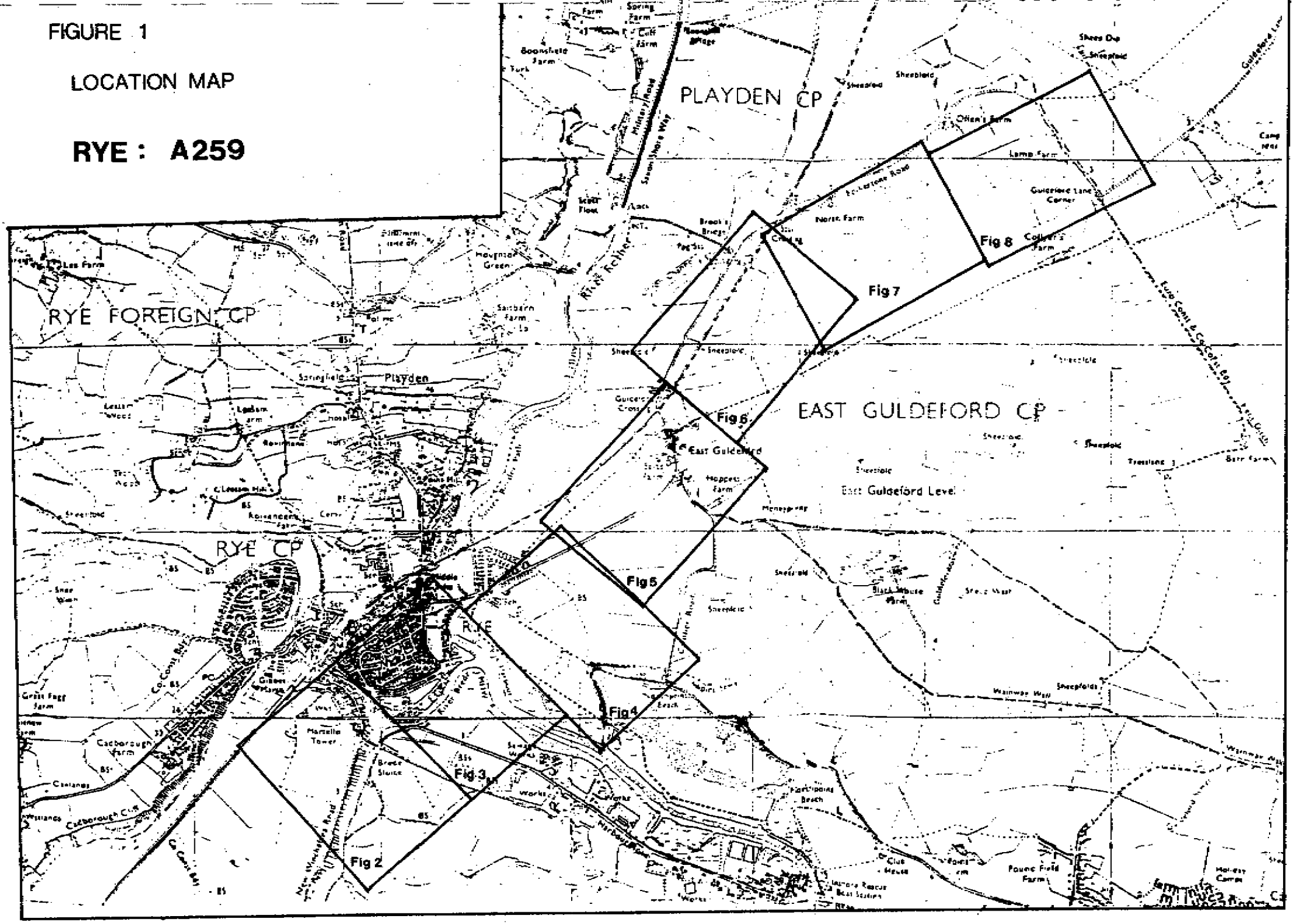
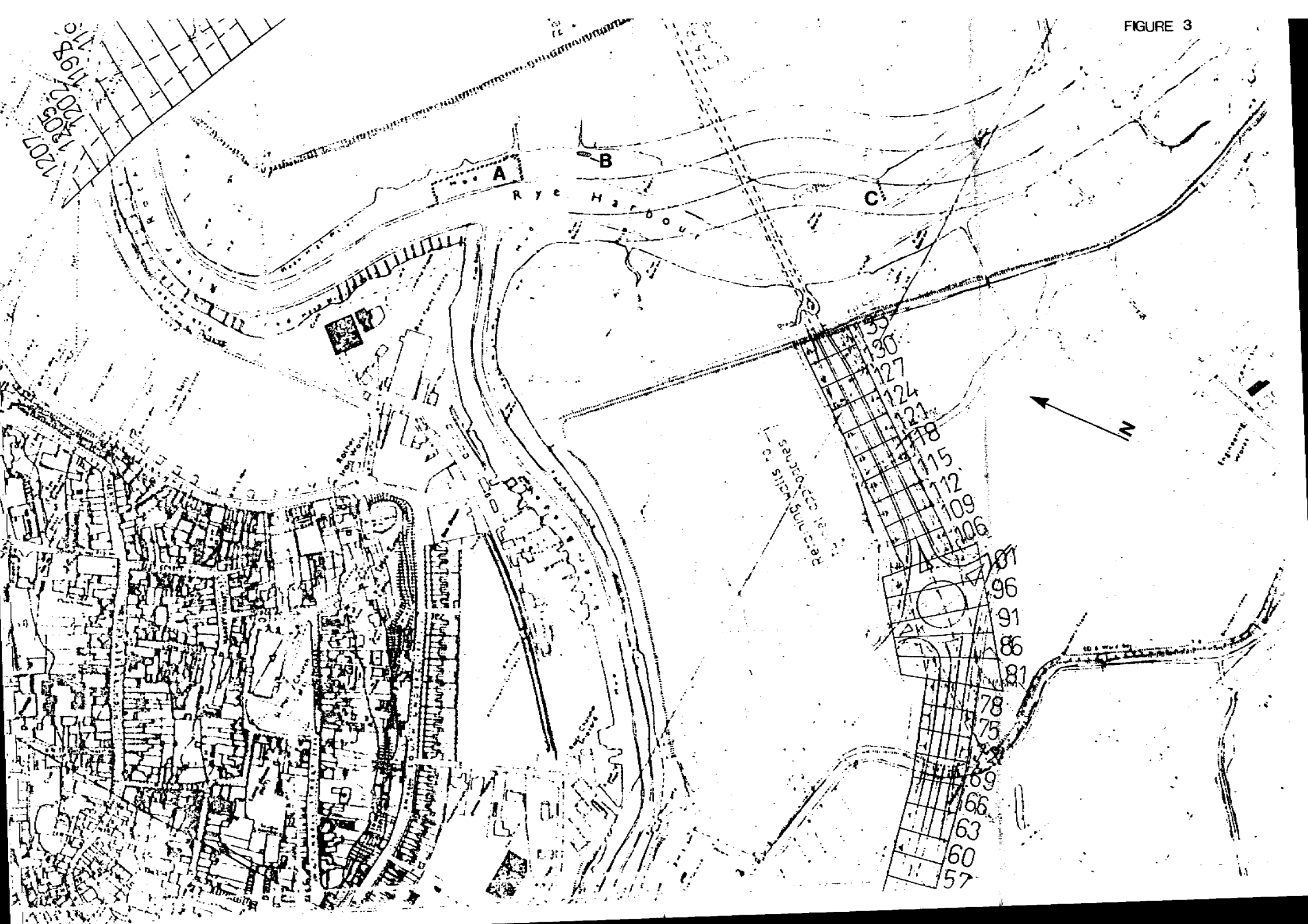


FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3


A
B
C
Rye Harbour
N
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130
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FIGURE 4

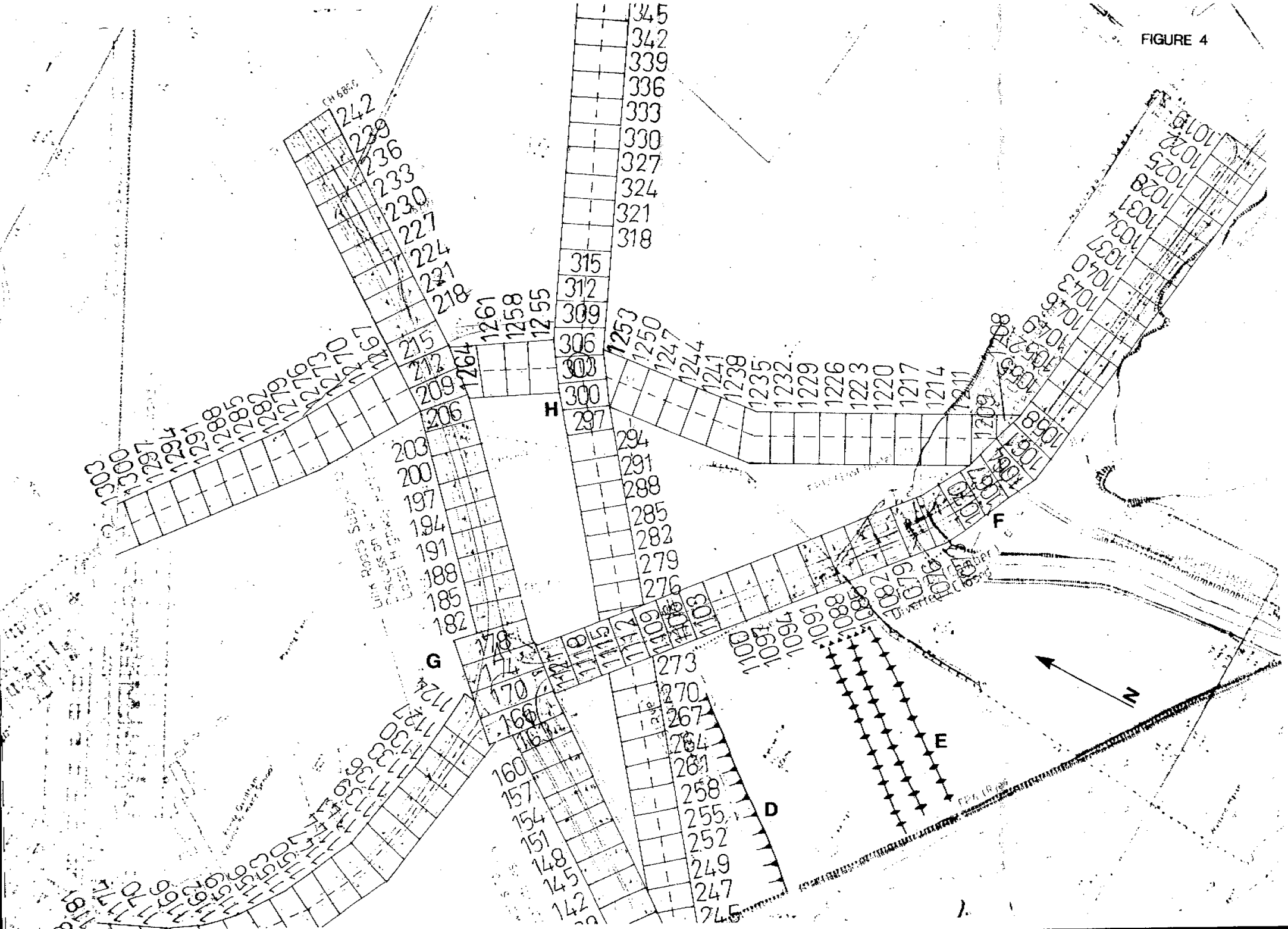

FIGURE 5

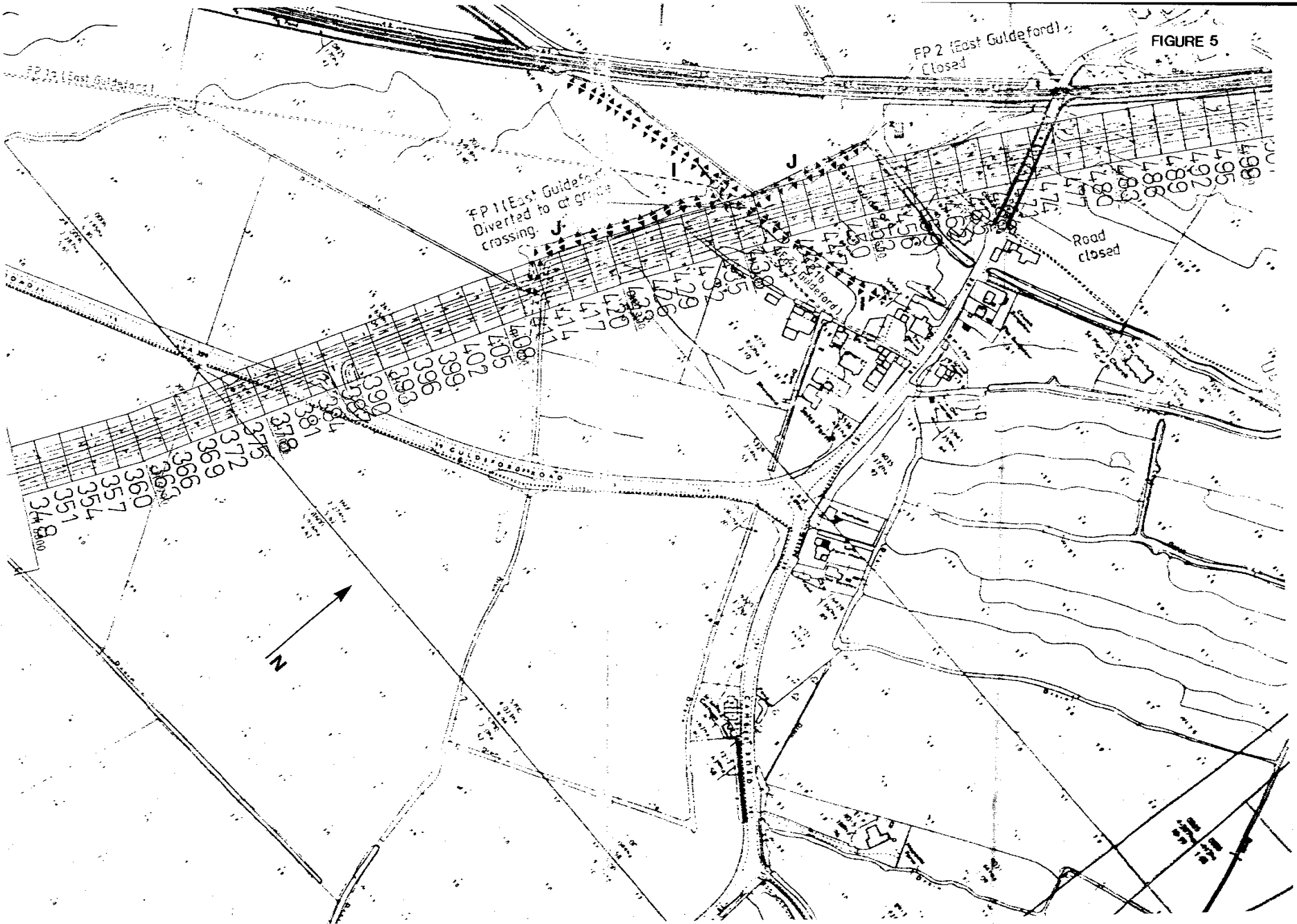
FP 2 (East Guildeford)
Closed
FP 1 (East Guildeford)
Diverted to at grade
crossing
Road
closed
GUILDFORD ROAD
N

FIGURE 6

FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8