



Planning, Transport
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**A30/A303 HONITON-MARSH
TRUNK ROAD SCHEME
PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
OF A358 ALTERNATIVE ROUTE**

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared at the request of Rendell Palmer and Tritton on behalf of the Department of Transport, to assess the archaeological implications of the suggested A358 improvement which has been put forward as an alternative route in response to the proposals to improve the A30/A303 through west Somerset and east Devon. This is a preliminary assessment and follows the guidelines set out in the Department of Transport's *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges* (Vol. II section 3 Cultural Heritage). It is equivalent to the Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment described in the manual.

1.1 The assessment

The objective at this stage is to undertake sufficient assessment to identify the archaeological constraints associated with the proposed route corridor. The procedures to be followed are:

- (i) contact the County Archaeologist and obtain, from the Sites and Monuments Register (SMR) information on the location of designated sites and other recorded sites within the study area;
- (ii) identify any potential archaeological constraints associated with route corridors. These will include all Scheduled Ancient Monuments, other notable individual recorded remains, or groups of remains of lesser importance. Sites of previous finds should also be noted where they might indicate that an area could contain potentially important buried remains.

The results of the archaeological assessment at this stage should consist of:

- (a) a map of the study area showing route corridors, all designated sites and areas, and all areas where, based on a study of the SMR, there might be potentially important remains;
- (b) a statement on the archaeological content of the study area and the archaeological constraints associated with route corridors. If possible, it should also give a provisional indication of which areas would require additional surveys, how detailed those surveys would need to be in each case, and whether there were particular timing constraints (for example, a walkover survey would need to be done before crops were planted in ploughed soil).

1.2 The proposed route corridor

The proposed corridor consists of a series of improvements and additions to the existing A358 between the M5 at Junction 25 (Taunton) and the A303 at Southfields Roundabout (near Ilminster). It is proposed to dual or upgrade most of this route except for the northern section where a new road to bypass Henlade is suggested. Nine new junction arrangements will also be required along the route.

The route passes through the parishes of Taunton, Ruishton, Thornfalcon, West Hatch, Hatch Beauchamp, Ashill, Broadway and Ilminster (without).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Previous archaeological work

The preliminary assessment has not identified any major sources of archaeological surveys in the form of fieldwork or research. The only exception to this is the fieldwork and observations undertaken during the recent improvement of the A358 which was completed in 1992. The construction of the Hatch Beauchamp Bypass was monitored to a limited extent but the finds from this work have not been published. There appears to have been a certain amount of aerial photography of an archaeological nature although this has not formed part of a planned programme. No systematic fieldwalking has been carried out in the area and there is no background information in the form of surface finds which might indicate the presence of archaeological sites.

2.2 Geology and soils

The underlying geology can be broadly divided into two zones, north and south. To the north are the Mercia Mudstones of Permian and Triassic age. These extend as far as Hatch Beauchamp. The southern area is mainly underlain by Jurassic rocks of the Lower Lias which consist of interbedded shales, limestones, mudstones and clays. The clays have been extensively exploited around the village of Donyatt just south of the A303 to support a very important pottery industry. Locally around Taunton including the Black Brook valley are deposits of the first river terrace of Quaternary date. Valley gravels also occur south of Capland, at Ashill and to the north and east of Horton Cross. An outcrop of Rhaetic beds extends south-westwards to Hatch Beauchamp. This contains white limestones, shales and marls. Finally at the southern end are substantial alluvial deposits in the valley of the River Isle.

The soil types in the area generally reflect the underlying geology and local topography. The mudstones produce soils of the Worcester Series which are most suitable for pastoral uses. The Jurassic rocks are overlain by soils of the Evesham Series which are capable of arable cultivation. In the areas to the south where drift deposits overlie the rocks, Wickham 2 soils are present. These are more prone to seasonal waterlogging. The alluvial soils (Fradbury or Compton Series) are generally restricted to use as permanent grassland.

2.3 The Forest of Neroche

This subject is worthy of special mention since the forest and its laws have had a strong influence on human activity within west Somerset. A forest in the medieval sense meant a tract of land where the King had deer and which was subject to special laws to protect them. In the 11th century the forest consisted of some 15,000 acres of nearly continuous woodland and was the largest forest between Salisbury and Land's End. It extended as far east as Ashill and southwards to Horton and Donyatt. Its status as a royal forest was probably established in the 12th century but before this it was almost certainly a common.

As a common it would have been administered by several manorial courts and this status is unlikely to have been affected by the royal afforestation. The common land status would in fact have done more to maintain the stability of the woodland, since commoners' rights were jealously guarded. Manorial customs are unlikely to have allowed industrial exploitation. Disafforestation was begun in 1635 by Charles I and at this stage enclosures were established which subsequently became permanent farms. All that was left of the physical forest was enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1830 and was converted to farmland. Documentary evidence from the Domesday Book suggests that iron-smelting may have been carried out within some of the forest parishes. Both Bickenhall and Whitestaunton rendered blooms of iron as payments to the Crown at this time, and it has been suggested that there was an established iron-working industry in the area.

3. THE SITES

Sites marked with an asterisk (*) are directly affected by the route of the proposed corridor. Sites with the reference ABP were identified during observations on the construction of the Ashill Bypass. The sites with reference SMR have been recorded in the Somerset County Sites and Monuments Register, County Hall, Taunton.

1. **Enclosure** (ST25142487; SMR ST22SE-43077)

Cropmark enclosure visible on aerial photograph but no trace found on the ground.

2. **Cropmark enclosure** (ST25202468; SMR ST22SE-43087)

Rectangular enclosure with two concentric ditches, which may be an infilled pond.

3. **Fishponds** (ST273234; SMR ST22SE-43531)

'Fishpond' printed on OS 6" map (1938 Sheet 71SW), showing three long sinuous ponds leading from the stream.

4. **Shrunken village of Capland** (ST302193; SMR ST31NW-43808)

Collinson describes the hamlet as having only ten houses in 1791. A few scattered houses and farms are all that remain of this settlement believed to be of medieval origin. The decline of the settlement may have been due to the Black Death, however its proximity to the forest of Neroche may have also had an effect. The site of the former church of Capland can be identified at ST320193 which is on the eastern boundary of the ancient Forest of Neroche. The Register of Bishop Bubwith (1419) recommended the union of the parish of Capland and Beer Crocombe. It is not recorded whether this took place as the position of Rector of Capland was continued until at least the Reformation; however Capland church was left to ruin.

5. ***Deerpark** (ST323182; SMR ST31NW-53514)

There are a number of references including Park Farm Cottage, Park Barn and Park Lane on the OS 6" map (1938) and 'Park' field names on the tithe map which can be associated with a deer park. It is believed to have dated from the 15th century and there are a number of continuous field boundaries which could resemble pales, the original high banks and fences which would have been the boundaries of a park. There is a long bank on the east side running from ST322183 to the stream at ST322178. There are also

earthworks to the south of Radigan Farm and an east-west ditch at ST323185 and two pollarded oaks near a marl pit at ST321183. The proposed route around Ashill would cut through the southern boundaries of the deer park which could show evidence of any original pales.

6. Boundary ditches (ST32231760; ABP 1.0)

Two similar ditch boundary features, with stream adjacent.

7. Boundary features (ST327174; ABP 2.0)

Two boundary features believed to be clay pipe-drains.

8. *Boundary feature (ST32861740; ABP 3.0)

Boundary feature consisting of a bank with a ditch on either side.

9. *Finds (ST33041715; ABP 02)

Two fragments of undated (probably medieval) pottery and seven of 12th-century date found here.

10. Finds (ST33041715; ABP 03)

A large end scraper (prehistoric tool) made of chert or low-grade flint was found at this location. In addition pottery fragments dating possibly from the medieval period, and two pieces from the 17th and 18th centuries.

11. Boundary feature (ST331171; ABP 4.1-4.3)

Boundary feature with wet ditch and associated bank to the south.

12. *Finds (ST33161696; ABP 04)

A pottery fragment from the 12th or 13th centuries, and two from the 17th and 18th centuries were found.

13. *Thickthorn Lane (ST33171691; ABP 5.0)

A very straight overgrown lane probably dating from the enclosure period, adjacent to find-sites 12 and 14. The enclosure of Ashill and the neighbouring parish of Broadway did not take place until the 19th century. During the 1630s disafforestation of Neroche commenced and piecemeal enclosure took place until the Enclosure Act of 1833. At this time the forest parishes including Ashill and Broadway were enclosed. A pattern of rectangular fields and straight roads characteristic of Parliamentary enclosure can be seen in these parishes (Havinden, 1981, 175).

14. *Finds (ST33251685; ABP 01)

One piece of worked chert (prehistoric), and a late medieval pottery fragment were found.

15. Probable boundary feature (ST33201675; ABP 6.0)

Two negative features found with dark fill seen in two sides of a large sump.

16. Parish boundary between Ashill and Broadway (ST33161643; ABP 7)

The Cad Brook appears to have been channelled where it coincides with the parish

boundary. To the south is a hedge on a bank.

17. Boundary feature (ST332164; ABP 8)

Ditch boundary feature (no further information).

18. *Broadway (ST333163; ABP 9)

Broadway is a very straight road with large banks on each side. The predominantly oak hedges could possibly represent a relict woodland hedge. The Broadway is believed to have been a track of some antiquity, cutting through the ancient forest of Neroche. The church along this route is dedicated to SS. Aldhelm and Eadburga, which suggests an early foundation.

19. Deserted village, Broadway (ST329158; SMR ST31NW-53374)

Local tradition states that a village formerly stood around the isolated church; it was said to have been destroyed by the plague.

20. *Parish boundary between Broadway and Ashill (ST33461579; ABP 10)

The parish boundary between Broadway and Ashill is marked by a large bank.

21. Mound (ST33651580; ABP 11.1)

The sharp bend in the River Ding where it joins a mill stream (presumably the Jordan) has recently been bypassed, leaving the flow sluggish and the area liable to silting. In the bend is a large mound approximately one metre high. This mound could be related to the 12th-century pottery finds further east (see 25, 26). In addition the possibility of the mound being a round barrow should be considered.

22. Small mound (ST33631580; ABP 11.2)

This is the site of another much smaller mound, linear in shape and approximately half a metre high.

23. Earthworks (ST336159; ABP 11.3)

Collinson refers to the hamlet of Jordans in Ashill parish (Collinson, 1791, 10). These earthworks could represent the remnants of a medieval settlement. The area around Jordans had been emparked and a prominent parallel boundary bank can be found to the north of the present road.

24. Boundary feature (ST33801575; ABP12)

A ditch boundary feature is visible as an earthwork on the field.

25. *Pit (ST33791568; ABP 13.1, 05)

Pit containing dark soil and much burnt material, two scraps of flint and chert and 12th-century pottery were found here.

26. *Pit (ST33821566; ABP 13.2, 06)

Pit similar to above (Site 25) containing pottery from the 10th to 12th centuries. The pottery finds dating from the 10th to 12th centuries found at sites 25 and 26 could indicate some form of settlement.

27. *Negative feature (ST33931560; ABP 14)

Negative feature filled with stones in a dark loamy matrix; no finds.

28. Chapel, Horton Cross (ST33801518; SMR ST31NW-53355)

Medieval chapel possibly sited at this location.

29. *Boundary feature (ST34011555; ABP 15)

Boundary feature consisting of a bank flanked by two ditches.

30. Possible fishpond complex (ST34231555; ABP 16)

The copse situated to the north-east of Horton's Cross contains a number of ponds and watercourses which could be some form of fishpond complex.

31. Hazel Well (ST34381529; SMR ST31NW-53354)

'Hazel Well (chalybeate)' is printed on the OS 6" map. The well, mentioned by Collinson writing in the 1790s, was supposed to have healing effects. It consists of an 18" square concrete shaft and iron lid flush with the ground. The water level is 2ft below the top and is culverted away.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Although a relatively large number of sites are recorded this need not be seen as a reflection of the archaeological potential of the route corridor. The majority of the sites were recorded during the Ashill Bypass watching brief and are of relatively low significance.
- 4.2 The southern section of the route might be expected to produce fewer sites as it lay within the bounds of the Forest of Neroche which was not formally disafforested until 1635. This is likely to limit the extent of medieval settlement and agricultural activity in the area. There is unlikely to have been much industrial activity since medieval manorial customs would not have permitted it. There is, however, every indication that ironworking and smelting was taking place before the afforestation in the 12th century (e.g. as at Bickenhall above).
- 4.3 No archaeological constraints have been identified in this assessment immediately within the proposed route corridor; there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments or other designated sites.
- 4.4 In the vicinity of the route corridor the sites which at present may be seen as potential constraints are site 19 (deserted village) and site 4 (shrunken village). The former lies to the west of the Catherine Wheel Junction and is not under threat from the current proposals. The latter lies to the north of Capland Junction but its extent is not known at present. Further survey and documentary research would be required to verify their potential.

Buried remains might also be anticipated in the vicinity of some of the more significant findspots, notably Nos 9, 25, and 26. The earthworks near Jordans, sites 21-23, were seen as meriting further detailed survey (ABP) and the

significance of the early road, the Broadway (18) was also noted.

- 4.5 The archaeological potential of the route corridor may be provisionally summarised as follows:

(i) *Taunton-Thornfalcon Works Roundabout*

This is the area which will require most detailed survey. It lies in an area which has produced archaeological cropmarks and may contain palaeoenvironmental material within the alluvial deposits here. Roman material was also uncovered during the construction of the M5 in the 1970s, although unfortunately this has not yet been published. This section includes the proposed Henlade Bypass which is the only major stretch of new road.

(ii) *Thornfalcon Works Roundabout - Capland Junction*

Within this section the archaeological potential is less certain, but it should be seen as meriting further survey. Most of the work along this stretch involves dualling or upgrading the existing A358.

(iii) *Capland Junction - Southfields Roundabout*

In this section the most significant sites identified were Nos 25 and 26 as these contained pottery of late-Saxon to early-medieval date. There is potential in this area for (a) pre-medieval industrial activity; (b) post-medieval settlement and industrial activity; (c) early medieval settlement as attested by sites 25 and 26. Further survey should be concentrated on the Ashill area, the area around Jordans and the new junction arrangements.

- 4.6 Further archaeological assessment should take the form recommended for Stage 2 Archaeological Assessments in DMRB Vol. 11. This would involve detailed desk-top assessment (including analysis of aerial photographs) and preliminary walkover survey for priority areas in consultation with the Overseeing Department's Project Manager. The assessment should also attempt to locate information on the finds from the M5 and Hatch Beauchamp Bypass watching briefs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The assessment was commissioned by Rendell Palmer and Tritton on behalf of the Department of Transport, under the direction of R.H. Austen. Thanks are due to C.J. Webster of Somerset County Council and staff at the County Sites and Monuments Register for their advice on the archaeology of the area. Information for the assessment was gathered by S.J. Simpson and C. Rance and the illustrations were prepared by T. Dixon.

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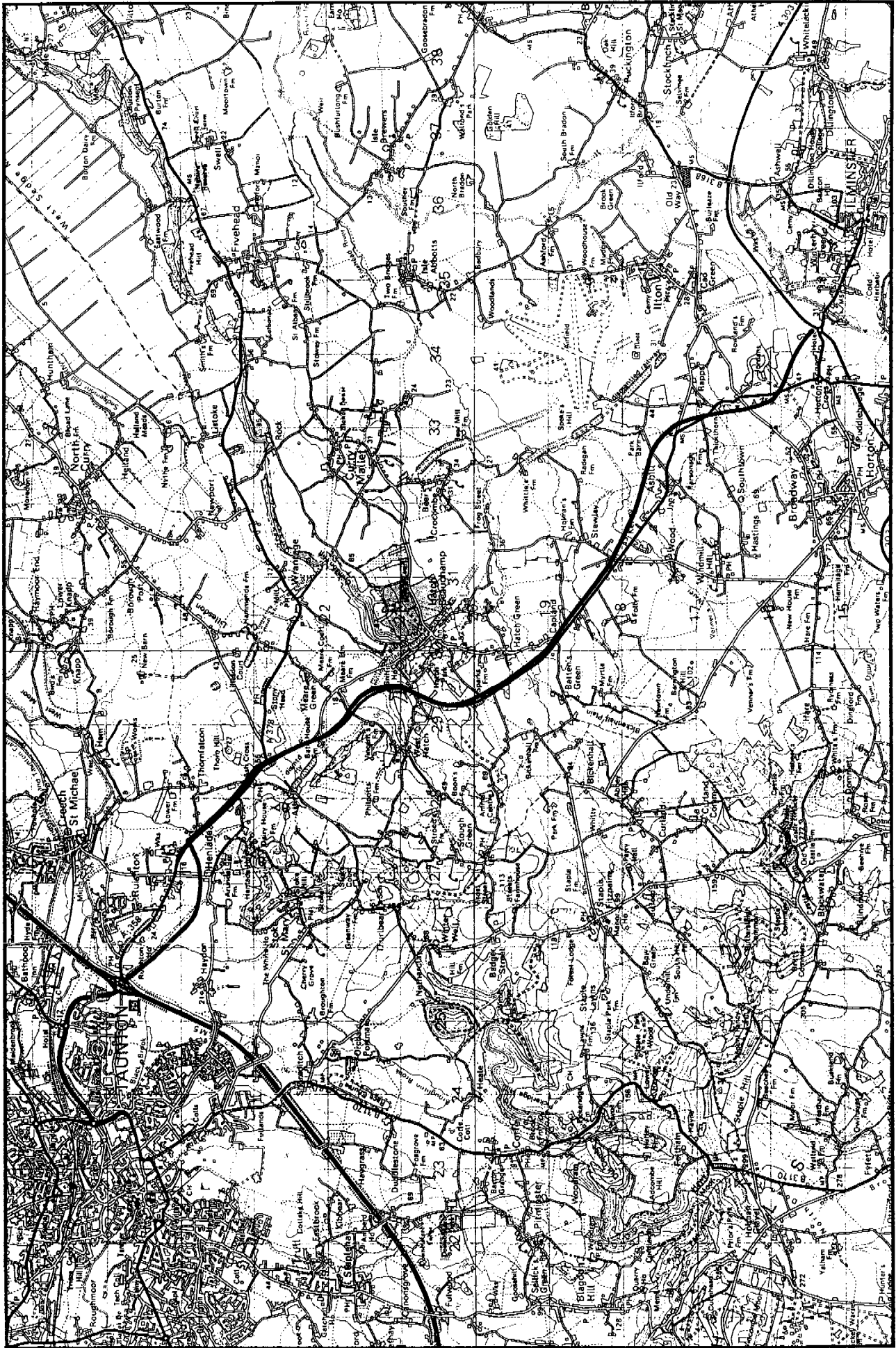


Fig. 1 The location of the proposed route corridor

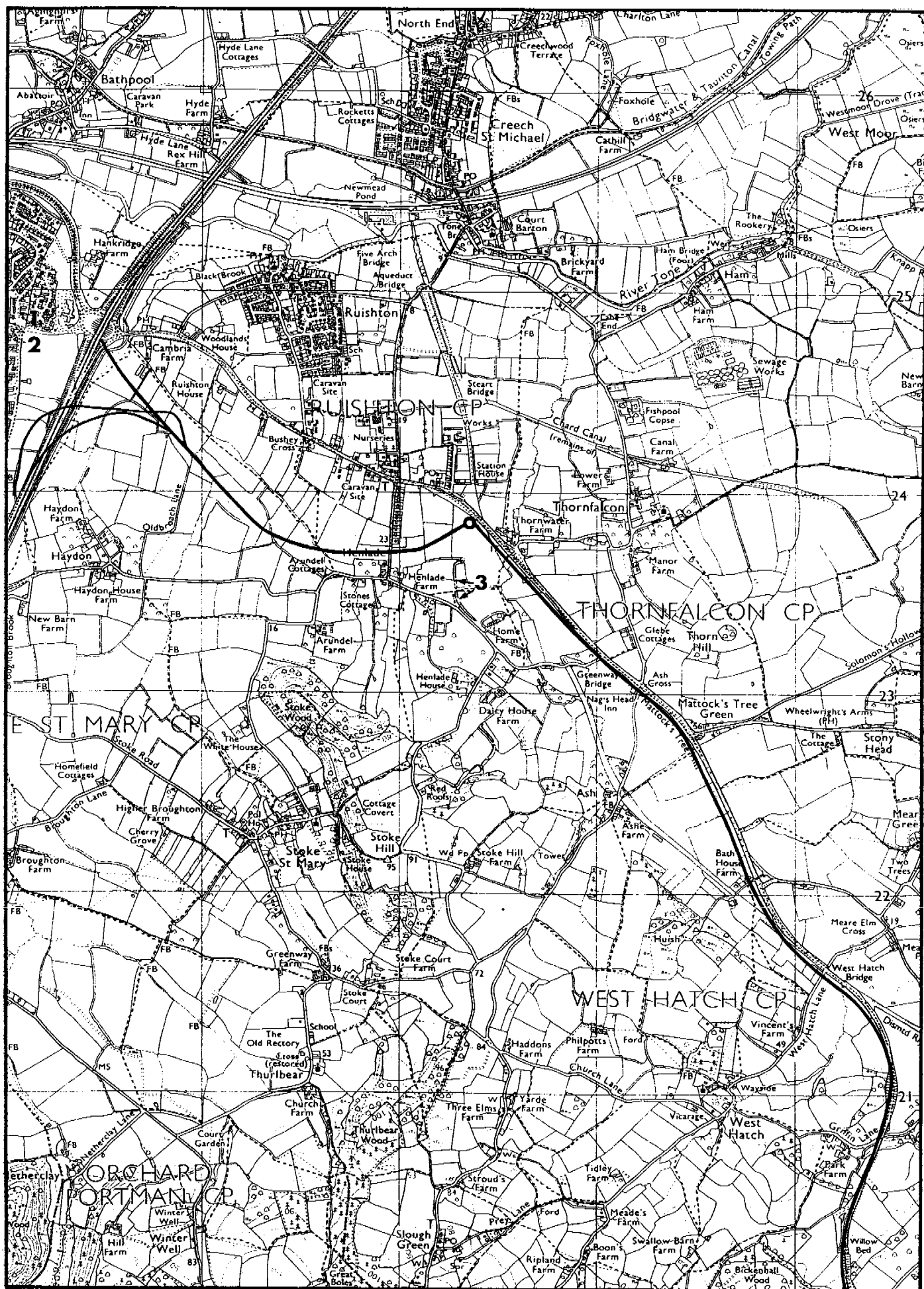


Fig. 2 Location of sites: Taunton-West Hatch.

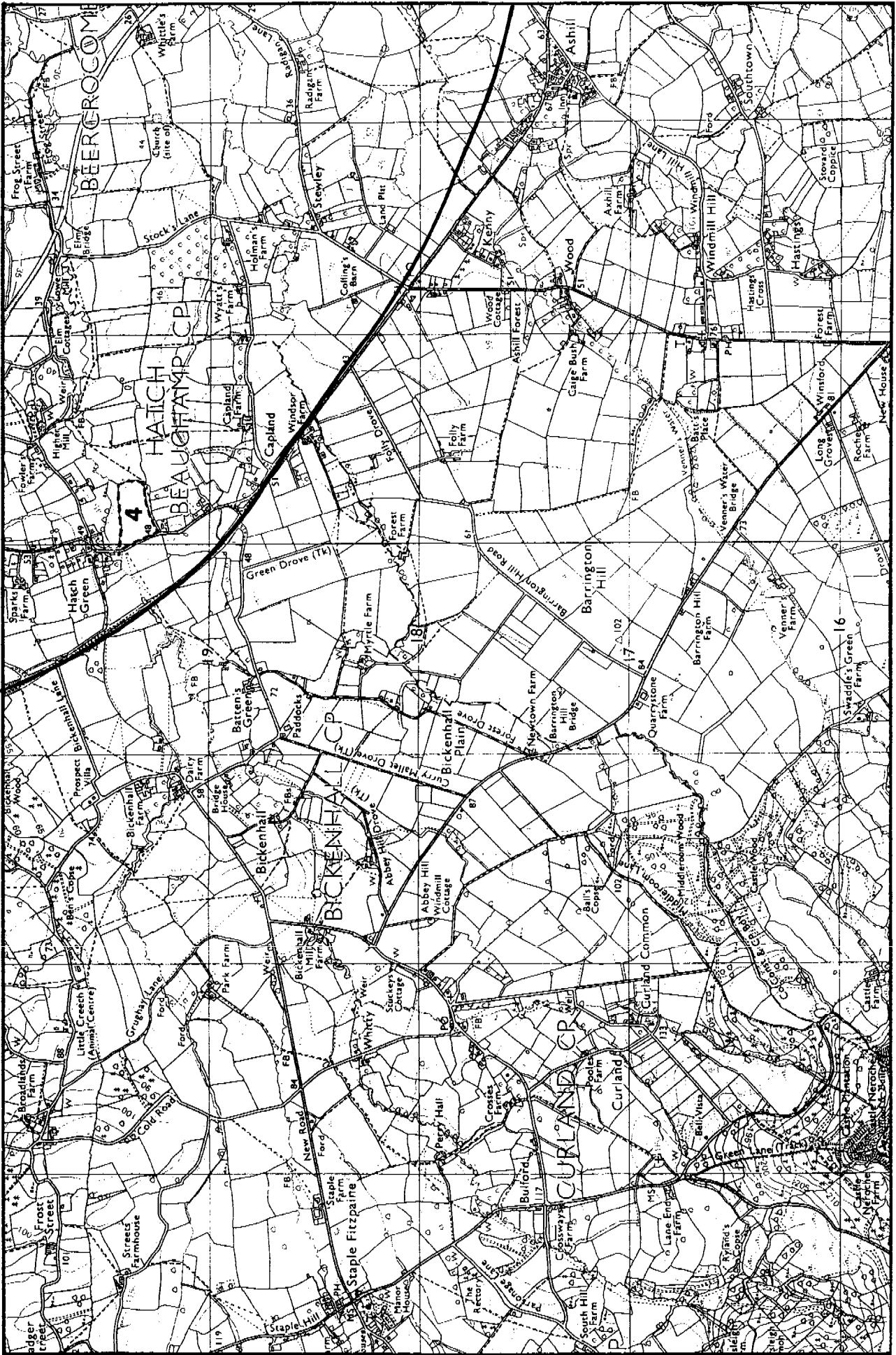


Fig. 3 Location of sites: Hatch Beauchamp-Ashill.

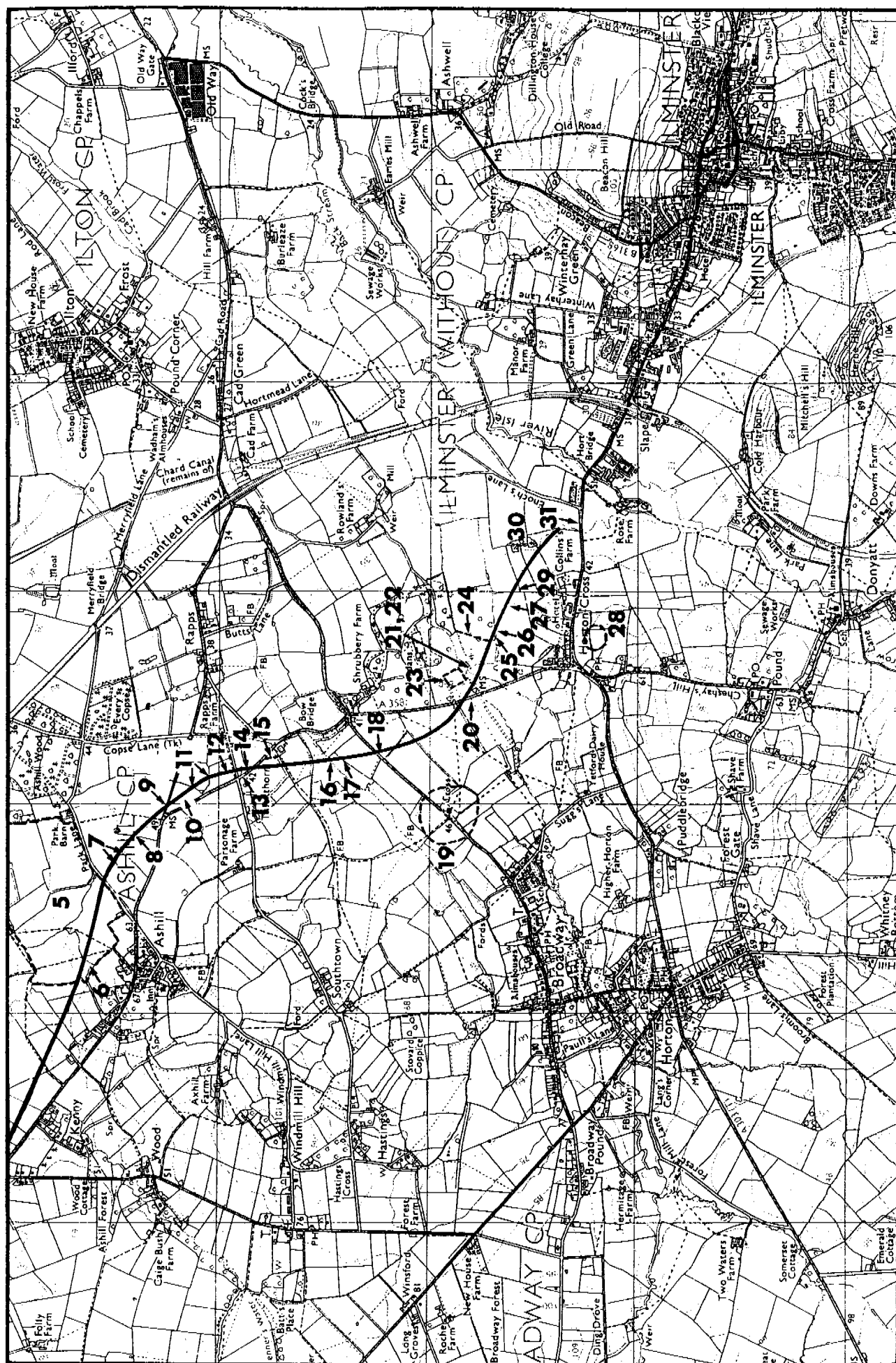


Fig. 4 Location of sites: Ashill-A303.