

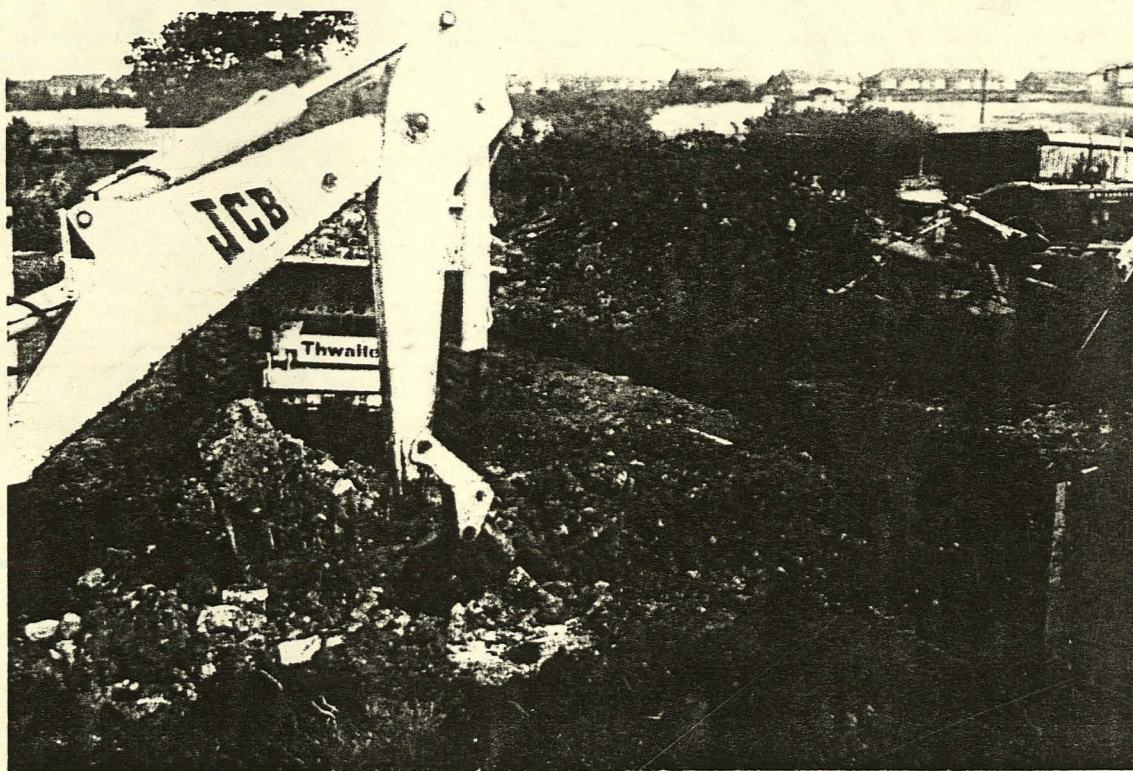
ELI 10912 PRN 39049
SU 13092/3.

SICGS.14
SMR34813
93/5

SOUTH WITHAM, Lincolnshire

Report on an archaeological watching brief

August 1993



Hilary Healey NDD. M.Phil., FSA
Friest Cottage, Drury Lane, Bicker, Boston, PE20 3EB Tel: 0775/820464

An Archaeological Watching Brief

SOUTH WITHAM, Lincolnshire

Summary

A watching brief carried out on a South Witham building site noted stone wall footings of two types; no dating evidence was recorded, on site, but they are likely to be no earlier than the eighteenth century. The location adjacent to the river and the find of a fragment of millstone suggest that there had been a watermill in the vicinity at some period.

Purpose

The brief was undertaken on behalf of South Kesteven Community Archaeology. The aim was to establish whether there were any archaeological remains on the site that would be disturbed by the building and to record any such remains.

History and Background

South Witham is a small village in the district of South Kesteven (Fig. 1). Part of the manor and church of South Witham was at one time held by the medieval military monastic order of the Knights Templars, whose Preceptory lay only 1km north of the village.

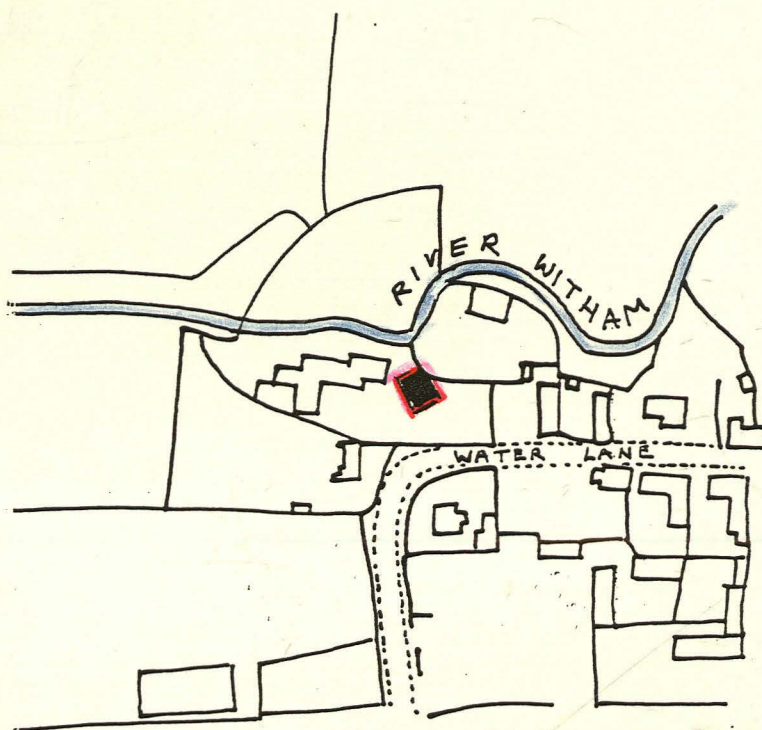
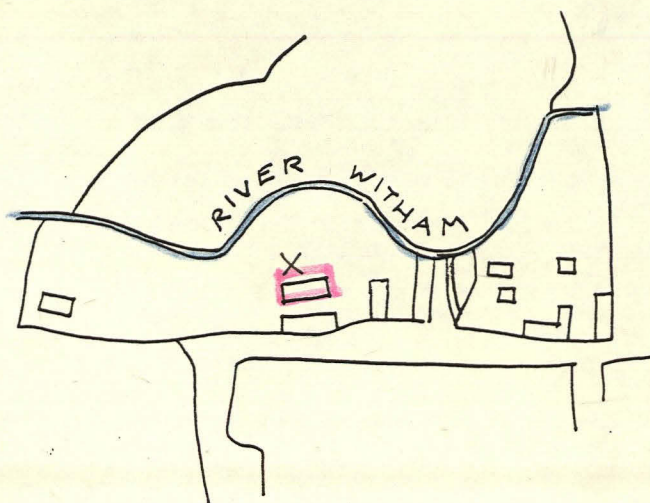
The development, a triple garage, was in the garden of a modern bungalow, 'Riverbanks', in the ownership of Mr. and Mrs. A. White. The location, at NGR SK 9256 1954, is just off Water Lane, at the north end of the village and some 200m north-west of the medieval church of S. John the Baptist, parts of which date back to the twelfth century. The site is on a low flat terrace on the south bank of the River Witham, here a small, but strong flowing stream.

No detailed documentary information on village topography exists, and there has been no archaeological fieldwork in or around the medieval village itself. The earliest document relating to the site is the Enclosure Map of 1795/6. This shows a relatively large close (in comparison with its neighbours) adjacent to the Witham, having four detached buildings within its curtilage. The 1931 edition of the 6" to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map shows the same plot with a the roadside block extended and an additional building on the east side. The last of these buildings were demolished relatively recently (Fig. 2).

The site was visited on 27 August in order to monitor the excavation of a rectangular foundation for a new garage block, size 10m x 8m. The foundation trenches were excavated by the building contractor using a JCB to an average depth of one metre and width of 80cm.

Results

The soil profile in the foundation trenches was consistent in all parts, having only three distinct layers with minimal variations in depth below the modern ground surface. The upper garden soil was 20cm thick. It had



1: 2500

Fig.2 Sketch copy of Enclosure Plan, 1795, compared with sketch plan of site today

been much disturbed, containing modern artifact fragments throughout. Below this was a thickness of 20cm blue clay and at a depth of 75cm below the surface a yellow/brown clay subsoil occurred.

Stone wall footings were encountered and cut through by the JCB in three places, as shown on the plan (Fig.), coded A, B, C, and D respectively.

Wall A, at the north-east corner, was an east/west wall of coursed limestone rubble 80cm wide, with some ironstone in the bottom course. Only two to three courses survived, the total depth of the wall being 23cm. The stones were bonded with yellow clay.

Wall B was set at right angles to wall A and extended southwards. It was bonded on to wall A and was of similar construction, but only 20cm in width. (?plate)

Wall C, cut by the south foundation trench, was of similar character, width and depth to wall A, and appeared to be a continuation of the same wall. In the area cut by the east and south trenches the topsoil contained a large amount of stone rubble.

Wall D was cut into on the south side of the south foundation trench, 70cm west of wall C. Although also of coursed limestone rubble it was of a quite different character from the other walls. It was a narrower wall, of only c.35cm width, and appeared to consist solely of limestone, with no ironstone present.

There were no artifacts recovered other than modern pottery and metal items, and therefore no dating evidence. The only object of interest was a fragment of millstone grit built into wall C. It was a piece of approximately 15cm x 20cm x 14cm thick, with slight signs of pecked chisel marks on one surface. The opposite surface had been damaged by fire and was black and disintegrating.

Interpretation

Despite the lack of dating evidence it is possible to make some suggestions as to the nature of the remains found on the site. The garden area had been landscaped when the bungalow was built, and the rubble spread probably represented the waste from demolition of the stone buildings. This had effectively removed any earlier ground surfaces. The wall footings A/B and C have been interpreted as parts of the same building but may belong to separate ones. The blue clay deposit is alluvium in the small river valley.

It is not possible to speculate as to the structures represented by these wall fragments. Walls A B and C are likely to be part of one of the buildings shown on the eighteenth century plan, probably the building marked X (Fig.2). Wall D, with its deeper foundation, may represent an earlier phase of activity on the site.

The situation of these stone buildings and the form of the enclosure in which they lie is of some interest. The riverside location makes it worth considering the site as that of a watermill.

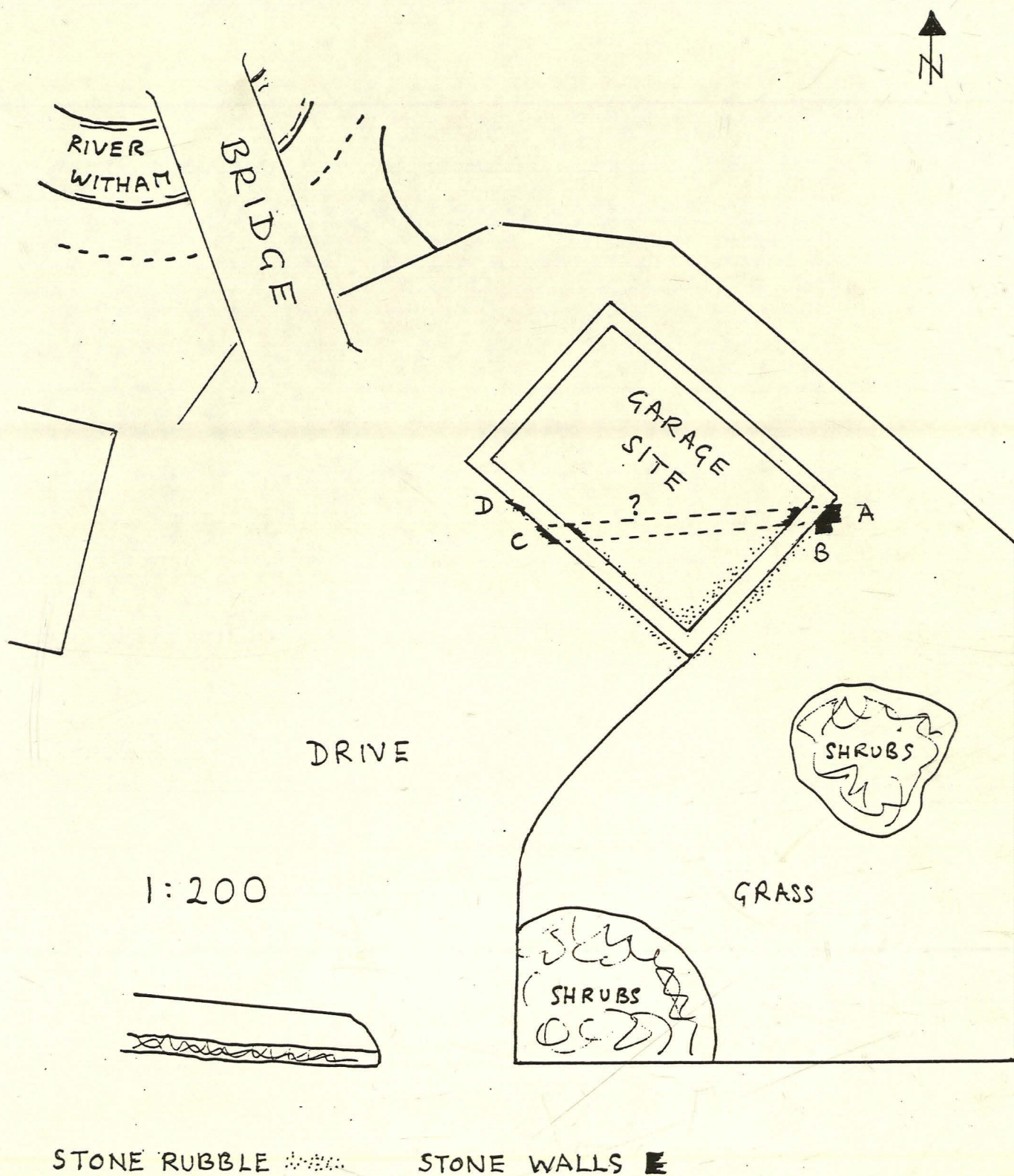


Fig.3 Site plan

There were a number of watermills recorded along these upper stretches of the Witham at the time of Domesday Book, 1087. These included one at North Witham and two at Colsterworth, though none at South Witham itself. A probable second one at North Witham was recorded on the Knights Templars site between North and South Witham, excavated in 1965-6. In a desk study of the river between South Witham and Grantham in 1986, carried out by the writer, it was observed that probable watermill sites could be identified from their ground plan. The site of Ponton Corn Mill, further north on the Witham towards Grantham, shows the layout required for the mill, including land both sides of the river as well as the additional channel which takes water not passing through the mill race. This form corresponds with the 'island' or 'bypass' type of layout, and can be compared with a similar plan of enclosures south of Bull Lane in North Witham, even though on the latter site the part of the river that would have gone through the mill race is no longer visible (Fig.4).

This characteristic form compares well with that at South Witham (Fig. 4). The site of 'Riverbanks' and a close on the north side of the river have been land in single ownership since the 1790s. The close north of the river is level ground and may be the 'island', with its northern boundary following the line of the extinct watercourse. At the time of the Enclosure the open field to the west was indeed known as Mill Field, and although this appears to be useful additional evidence the name could equally have been taken from a windmill. However, since it has been shown that this is an area where watermills are plentiful, one may perhaps treat this as the preferred interpretation. The map of 1796 shows no buildings in the close north of the river, and the remaining buildings on the south side are somewhat scattered. The two closes are not named other than by owners, being 'ancient enclosures' and of no interest as far as allocation of new areas was concerned.

One other piece of evidence is the fragment of millstone grit. Both the limestone and ironstone are available locally, but millstone grit has a Derbyshire origin, and would have been imported purely for milling purposes. Though hardly conclusive proof its presence reinforces the mill theory. Defunct millstones tend to be re-used as doorsteps and hearths (the latter case with this example) close to the original site of use, and would not necessarily be carted long distances.

Conclusion

Despite the slight information provided by the archaeological remains discovered on site, there are a number of other factors, not least the topography, which lead to the strong possibility that a watermill formerly occupied the site. On present knowledge it would have come into being some time after the eleventh century and had gone out of use again by the end of the eighteenth century.

Sources

South Witham Enclosure Award and Plan, 1794/5 (Lincolnshire Archives Office)

Discovering Watermills by John Vince (Shire Publications, Princes Risborough, 1993)

Front Cover: South Witham; general view of site, looking north. The piece of land north of the river is just visible as a hedged area behind the JCB.

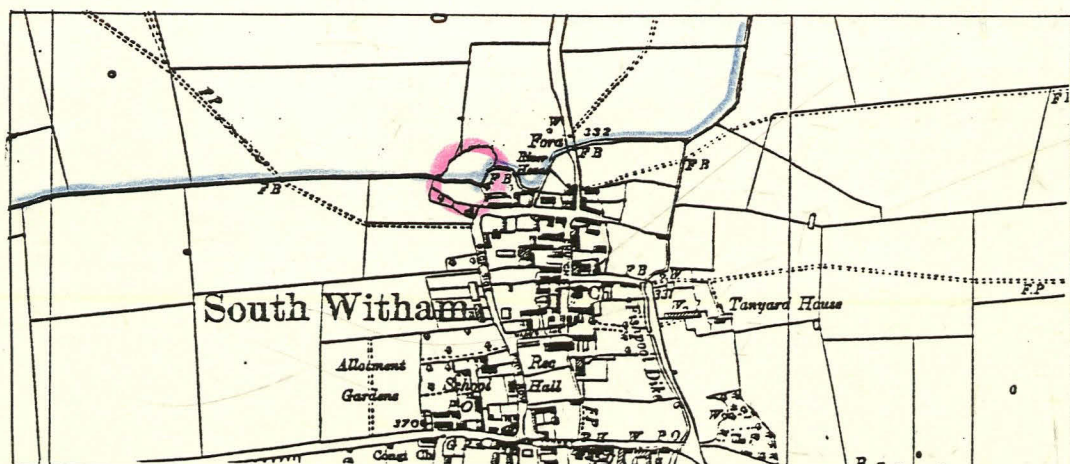
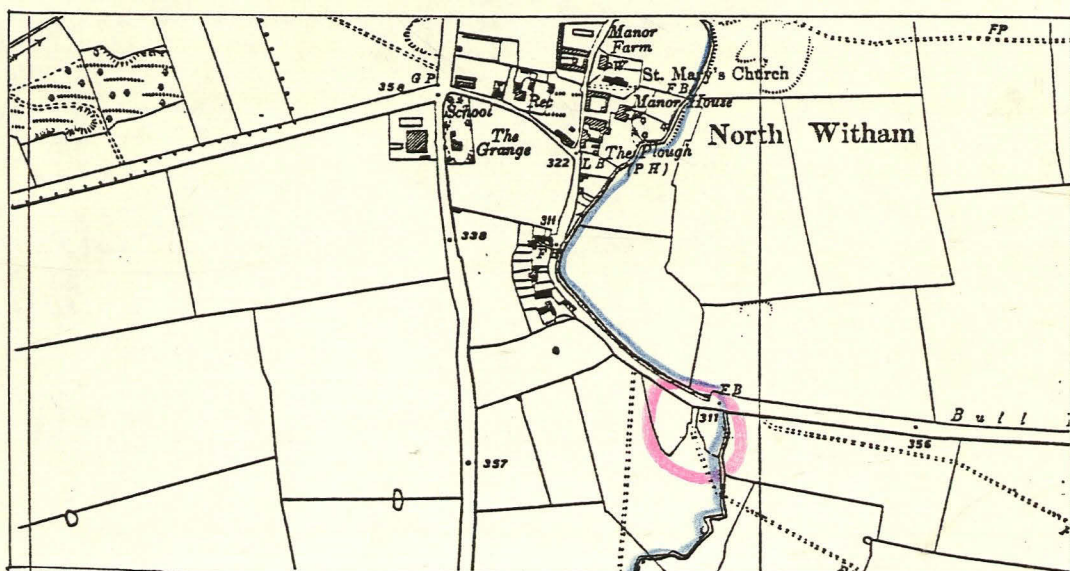
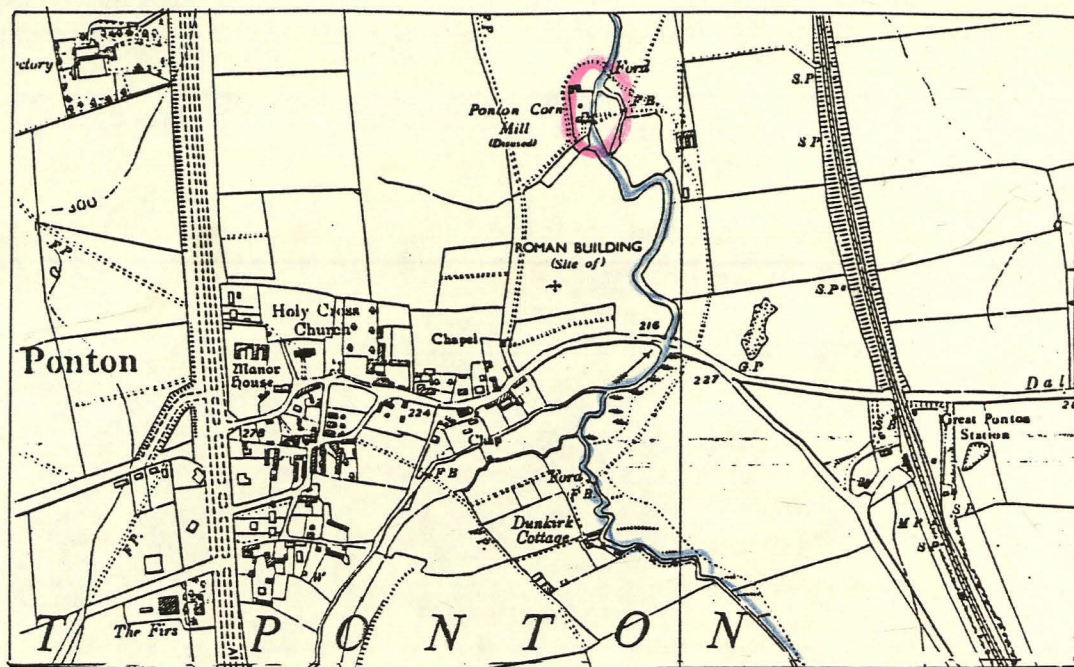


Fig.4 Watermill sites on the upper Witham Scale 6" to 1 mile