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LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

Kirkgate, Whaplode:

Archaeological Watching Brief

NGR: TF 3241 2411

Site Code: WHK97

LCNCC Museum Accession No: 257.97

on behalf of

Mr S Welch

Report No: 263

November 1997

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the site of a two-bedroom cottage being built on the east side of Kirkgate, Whaplode, Lincolnshire. The whole site proved to be covered by a considerable depth of made ground, probably dating from the 19th century. This was cut by a number of 19th or 20th century rubbish pits, and by a brick-lined well.

Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services was commissioned by G R Merchant, on behalf of S Welch, to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the development site on the east side of Kirkgate in Whaplode village. Planning permission for a two bedroom cottage had been granted by South Holland District Council, subject to a number of conditions. Because of the potential archaeological interest of the site, these included arrangements being made for a recognised archaeologist to monitor all stages of development involving ground disturbance. This watching brief covers the excavation of the trenches for the house foundations, on Monday 27th October 1997.

Site Location

The site lies approximately 60m to the north of the gate to churchyard of St Mary's, Whaplode (Fig 1). The axis of the site runs due east-west, fronting onto Kirkgate (Fig 2). The back gardens of a row of late 19th century semi-detached cottages on Churchgate form the eastern boundary of the site. To the south is the garden of a modern bungalow. A single storey brick building, used as a fishing-tackle and gun shop, runs along its northern side. Beyond that is the staff car park of a structural steel merchant whose large warehouses and yard occupy the west side of Kirkgate (Pl 1, 2).

The village of Whaplode is on a bank of relatively high ground which rises to 5 or 6 metres above sea level. This old sea bank, curving in a broad arc from Spalding through Holbeach and Long Sutton to Wisbech would have defined the coastline in early medieval times. The main road between Spalding and Holbeach, the A151, follows roughly the same line. Whaplode lies at a junction of this road with a minor road running to the south.

Background

Various interpretations of the first element in the name of Whaplode have been attempted. Ekwall (1960) quotes a number of early spellings to support a derivation from *quap*, meaning an eel-pout or burbot. The second element, *-lode* implies a stream or watercourse. As elsewhere in the fens, reclamation work has long obscured the original pattern of land drainage, but the surviving drain running north of Cross Street, then turning west beneath

Churchgate to the previously flooded area known as the Broads may mark the approximate line of the original lode through the village. Extending its line southwards would mean that it ran close to, or through, the site.

At the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 there were two manors with land in the village. One of these, probably the larger, was held by crown and was later acquired by Crowland Abbey.

The most notable feature of the modern village is St Mary's parish church. This has a fine 12th century Norman nave, and is one of the earliest surviving churches in the Lincolnshire fens. Its size would imply that Whaplode was a thriving village at this time.

The common pattern of settlement in the fens was for villages to expand to sea-ward and land-ward as the marshes were reclaimed, giving a series of long, narrow parishes. Satellite villages formed when the distances involved made routine travel to the original village impractical. This has happened at Whaplode Drove, about 12 km south of Whaplode itself. The tendency to expand in to the fens, exploiting the excellent agricultural potential of newly drained land, perhaps explains why the growth of the village has occurred along the roads to the south, as well as along the main Spalding to Holbeach road.

The existing roads presumably largely preserve the medieval street plan. The fork in the road immediately north of the church, giving Kirkgate to the west and Churchgate to the east, is reminiscent of many villages that have a triangular market place or village green, although there seems to be little evidence of either in the present case. Given the pattern of drainage in the north part of this triangular area of land, it seems more likely that these streets represented alternative ways to by-pass a marshy hollow. A similar explanation may account for the fork in the east-west road, leading to Middle Road, south of the main A151. The existence of Anglo-Saxon 'Churchgate' side by side with the Scandinavian form 'Kirkgate' is intriguing, and could hint at separate centres of settlement for two co-existing communities.

Apart from the church and the pattern of roads and possibly of land division, there seem to be very little else remaining of the medieval village, at least in the vicinity of the site. The 1904 Ordnance Survey map shows terraced cottages along both sides of Kirkgate. These had all gone by 1970, when the site housed a lorry depot. Immediately before the start of the present development, there was a large shed against the southern boundary of the site, and a glasshouse on its northern side.

The Watching Brief

Trenches to take the foundations of the house were excavated with the backhoe arm of a JCB to a depth of about 1.50 m throughout (Fig 3, Pl 3). A 60 cm smooth-bladed bucket was used for the external wall trenches, and a 45 cm bucket for the two internal walls. The area of the front porch was totally excavated and extended to the north after the brick-lined well was

uncovered, to make room for subsequent capping work. An oversite layer up to 0.15 m thick was skimmed between the foundation trenches.

Deposits were fairly similar throughout the excavated area. A 0.25 - 0.40 m thick layer of mid to dark brown silty loam topsoil overlay a layer of ash and brick rubble in a matrix of dark grey silty loam. This rubble layer was around 0.15 m thick and was particularly distinct in the trenches for the north side of the house (PI 4). A thick dark silty layer, similar in composition to the topsoil extended for at least 0.50 m below the rubble layer. Especially on the west side, this then gave way to bands of yellow sandy silt (PI 5). Up to 0.20 m thick, these were interleaved with the dark silty deposits. At a depth of around 1.20 m, the silty layer rapidly graded into a dark blue-black clay. Modern pottery types, including brown-glazed earthenware and transfer-printed willow pattern were present in the silty layer, together with fragments of brick. Similar artefacts were also noted from the top of the clay layer, although at the bottom of the trenches, around 1.50 m below the existing surface level, it was fairly clean and homogenous.

A number of modern features were cut into the silty layer. The trench for the north wall of the rear extension of the house cut through two large pits around 1.20 - 1.30 m deep containing bottles and other rubbish (PI 6). A similar pit cut by the main back wall contained mostly brick rubble, while a shallower pit, less than 1 m deep, near the north-west corner had modern crockery. An earthenware pipe in a 0.5 m deep pipe-trench showed in the south east corner of the rear extension. All of these features seemed to be sealed by the rubble layer beneath the topsoil.

In the area of the north wall of the porch, a concrete slab, approximately one metre square and at a similar depth to the rubble layer, capped a brick lined well (PI 7). At the level of the bottom of the trench, this was around 1 m in diameter, but higher up it had tapered sides, giving a truncated conical top. The water level inside was just below the level of the trench bases, at around 1.60 m below present ground level. When found, there was a depth of water of at least 1.30 m. The lining consisted of a single thickness of unmortared bricks. The red clay bricks were hand-made and were fairly dense but crudely finished. Curving indentations on their sides probably arose from handling after removal from the mould. The size of the bricks, a typical specimen being 219 x 101 x 60 mm, is thinner than a standard modern brick, and the ratio of these dimensions is more typical of 17th to 19th century examples. The cut corresponding to the original excavation of this well, extending 0.2 - 0.3 m beyond the brick lining was visible in the base of the trenches, and was back-filled with a silty material of similar composition to the topsoil (PI 8).

Discussion

The proximity of the parish church, suggests that the site was close to the heart of the medieval village, but nothing was found which would suggest occupation earlier than the 19th century. It was not clear whether the clay observed at the bottom of the trenches was natural sub-soil, but the higher

deposits were all of relatively recent date. The present ground level would seem to be the result of considerable make-up over the entire area. If the original ground level was lower, it would have been wet and marshy, or even under water.

The build-up in ground level may have begun as a result of water-borne deposition of clays and silts, but the higher deposits are almost certainly the result of deliberate filling. This probably occurred around the time that the row of terraced cottages shown on the 1904 map were built. The brick-lined well would have been at the back of this row of cottages, and was presumably contemporary with them. The various rubbish pits would also date from the lifetime of these cottages, while the rubble layer could be associated with either their demolition, or the subsequent demise of the lorry depot which replaced them.

Conclusions

No evidence of any early occupation of the site was found during the course of this watching brief. The thick layer of made ground may cover deposits of archaeological interest, but it seems likely that the main areas of settlement in the medieval village were elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

LAS would like to thank G R Merchant and S Welch for their support. Thanks also to the builders working on the site for their co-operation.

The comments about the bricks from the well are based on a discussion with Mick Clark. Jane Frost helped with the production of this report. The work was co-ordinated by Naomi Field.

Richard Moore
Lindsey Archaeological Services
November 1997

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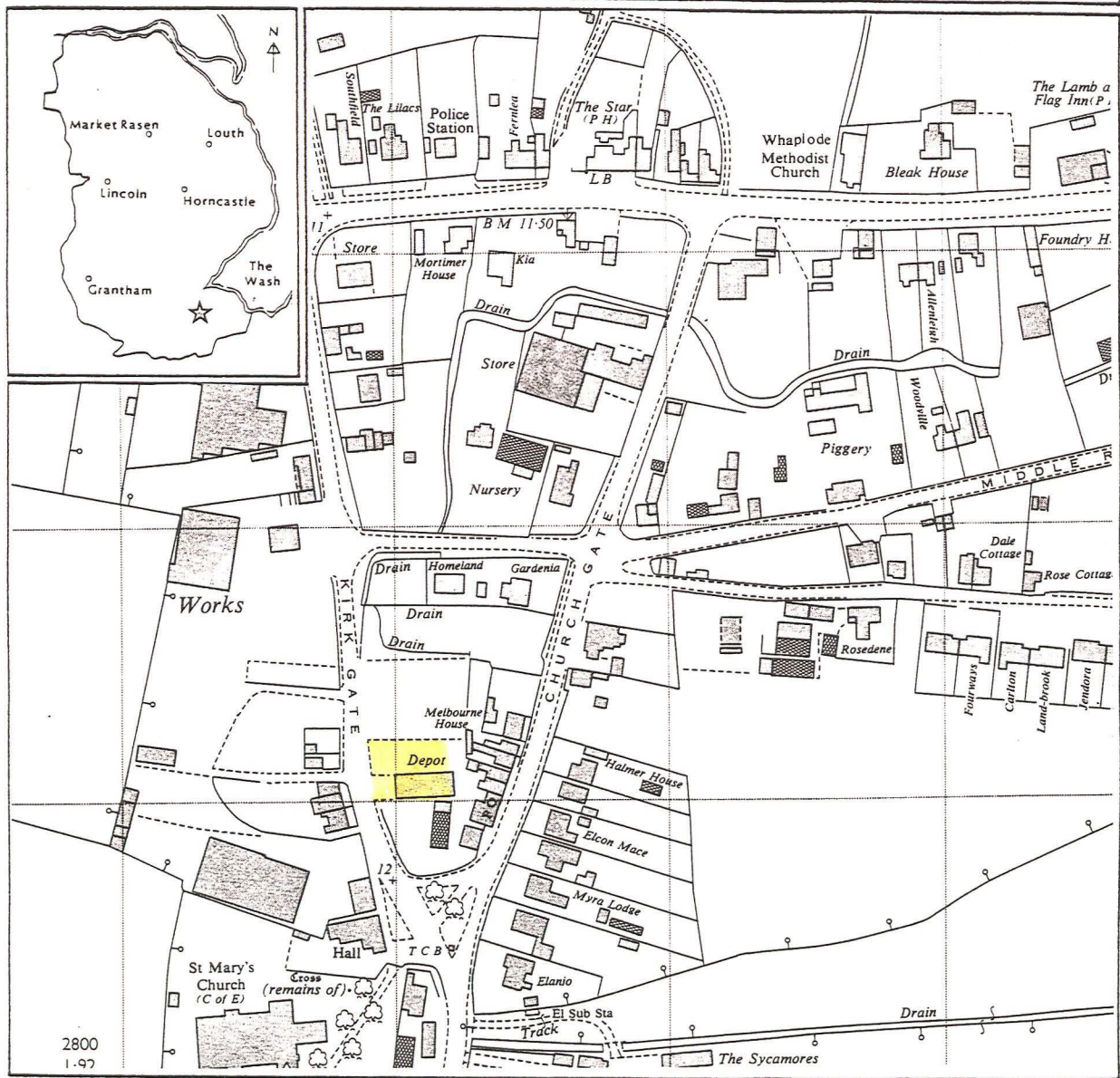
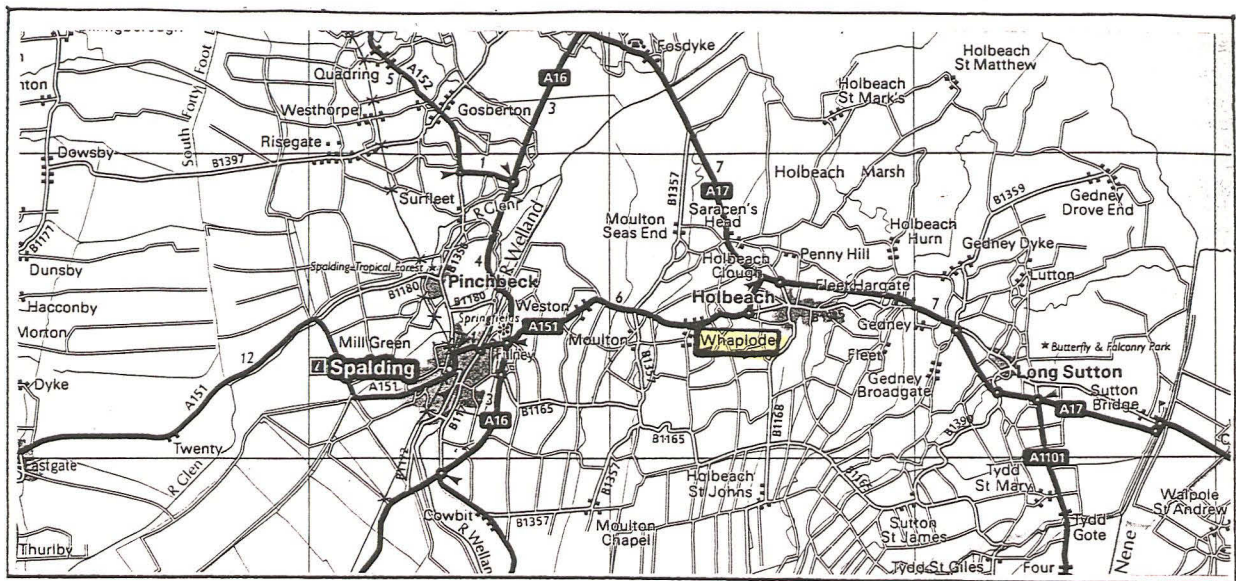


Fig 1 Location of the site

(Main map based on 1970 O.S. map.
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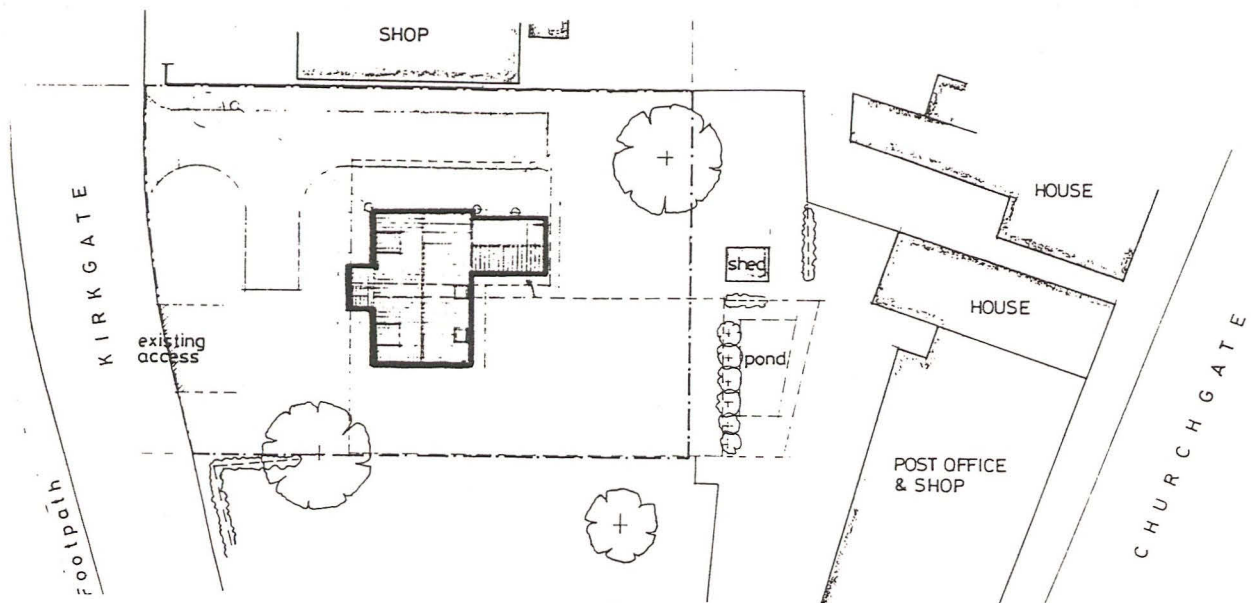


Fig 2 Location of the proposed building within the site

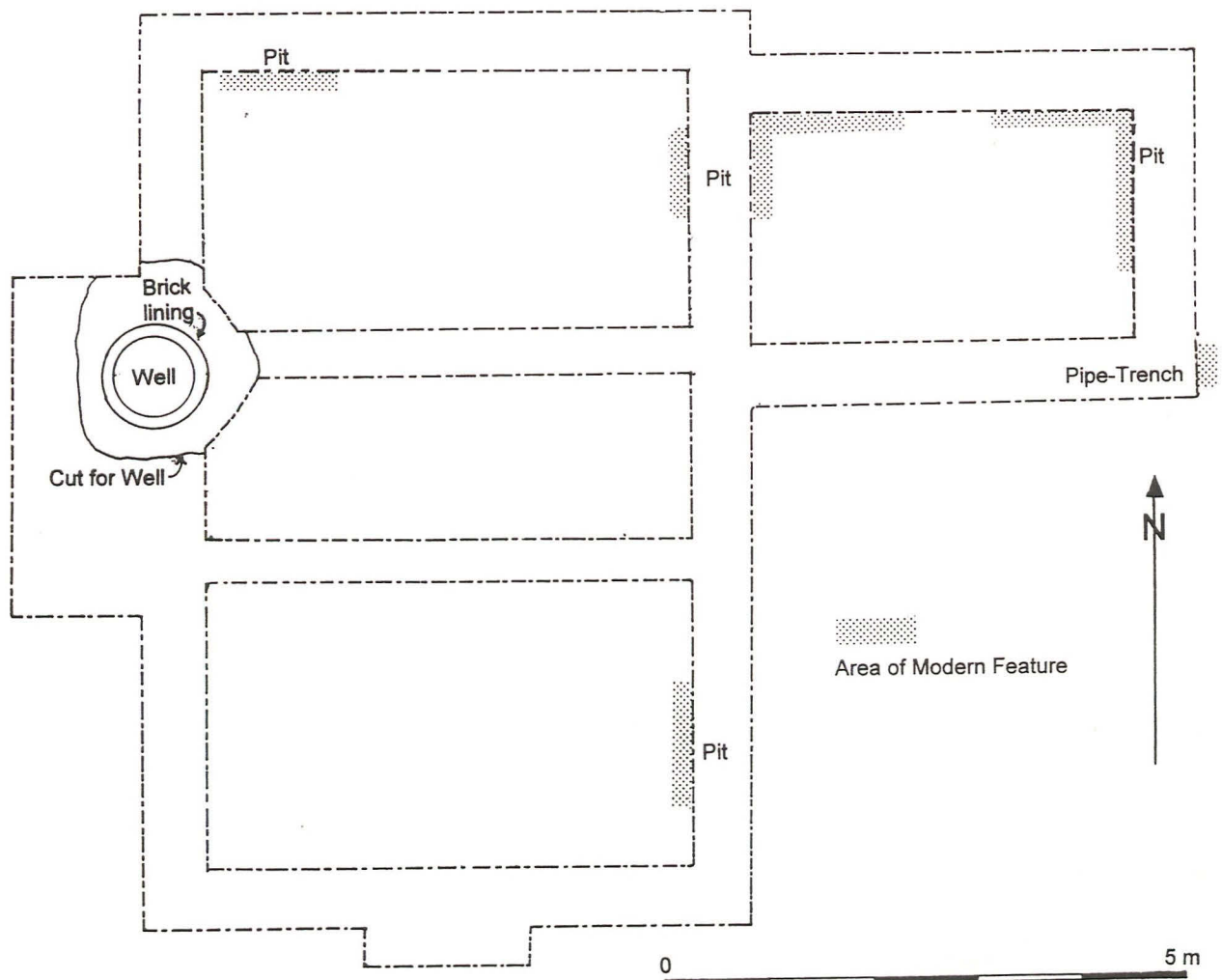


Fig 3 Plan of the excavated trenches

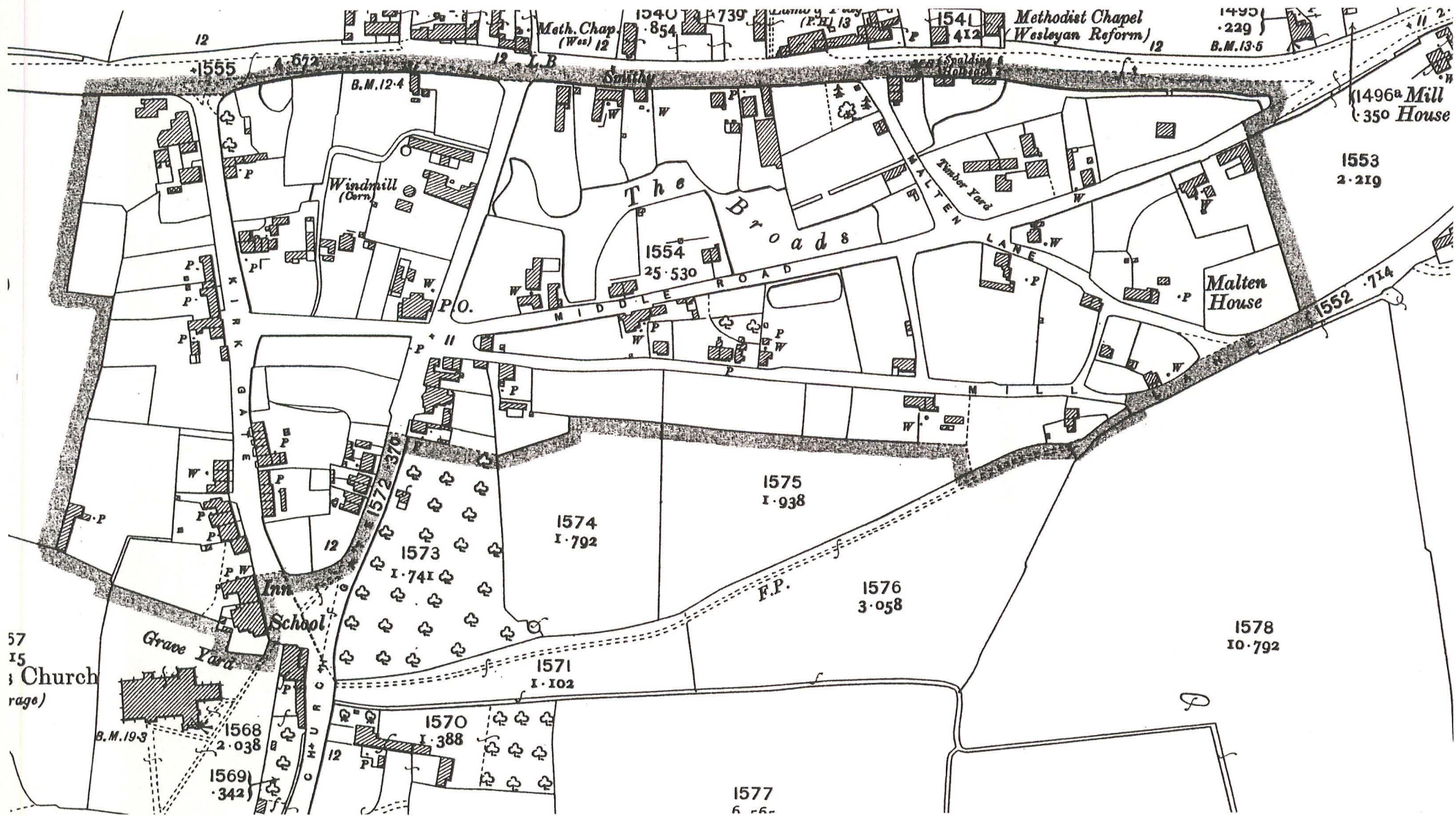


Fig 4 Extract from 1904 Ordnance Survey map



PI 1: View of the site, looking north.

PI 2: View of the site, looking west.





PI 3: Excavated trenches, looking north east.

PI 4: The trench for the main back wall of the house, looking north, and showing a typical section through the make-up layers.





PI 5: East facing section of the south western corner of the foundation trenches, showing the sandier layers on the western side of the site.

PI 6: Pit showing in the north end of main back wall trench, showing typical modern rubbish deposits.





PI 7: The brick-lined well, view looking west.



PI 8: South facing section of the trench for the porch of the house, showing the cut for the well.