

Marches Archaeology

Proposed Accommodation Block Concord College Acton Burnell Shropshire

**A report on an
archaeological desk based assessment**

May 2005

Marches Archaeology Series 384

Archaeological Consultants and Contractors

This report is produced by

Marches Archaeology

**Marches House
6 High Street
Clun
Shropshire
SY7 8JB**

Tel:- 01588 640976

Fax:- 01588 640796

e-mail:- archaeology@marches.plus.com

For:-

Concord College
Acton Burnell
Nr Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY5 7PF

Marches Archaeology is the trading name of Marches Archaeology Limited (Registered in England and Wales: 4095678). The directors are Nic Appleton-Fox and Richard Stone, who have worked in close association since 1991. All principal members of staff are members of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and abide by its code of practice and other regulations. *Marches Archaeology* provides a full range of archaeological services to a client base of architects, local authorities, national bodies and private individuals. Our standard services include; excavation, watching briefs, building survey, building analysis, planning advice, landscape survey, photographic recording and historical research. Specialist consultants are available to provide environmental, geophysical and finds advice and analysis.

VAT Reg. No. 656 0767 15

**Proposed Accommodation Block
Concord College
Acton Burnell
Shropshire**

**A report on an
archaeological desk based assessment**

NGR: SJ 537 021

**Report by
Jo Wainwright**

Contents

Summary

1	Introduction	1
2	Aims and objectives	1
3	Methodology	2
4	Site description	2
5	Archaeological and historical background	2
6	Discussion	5
7	Recommendations	5
8	Acknowledgements	5
9	References	5
10	Archive	6

Appendix I: Relevant SMR sites in the vicinity of the study area

Figures and plates

May 2005

Marches Archaeology Series 384

List of illustrations

- Fig. 1 Location of the site showing relevant SMR sites
- Fig. 2 Tithe Plan of the townships of Acton Burnell and Acton Pigott, 1845
- Fig. 3 Detail from the 1882 25 inch 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Plan
- Fig. 4 Detail from the 1902 25 inch 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Plan
- Fig. 5 Detail from the 1954 6 inch Ordnance Survey Plan (not to scale)

List of plates

- Plate 1 Acton Burnell Hall from the north-east
- Plate 2 View of the site from the south-east
- Plate 3 View of the site from the south-west
- Plate 4 View of the site from the north-east

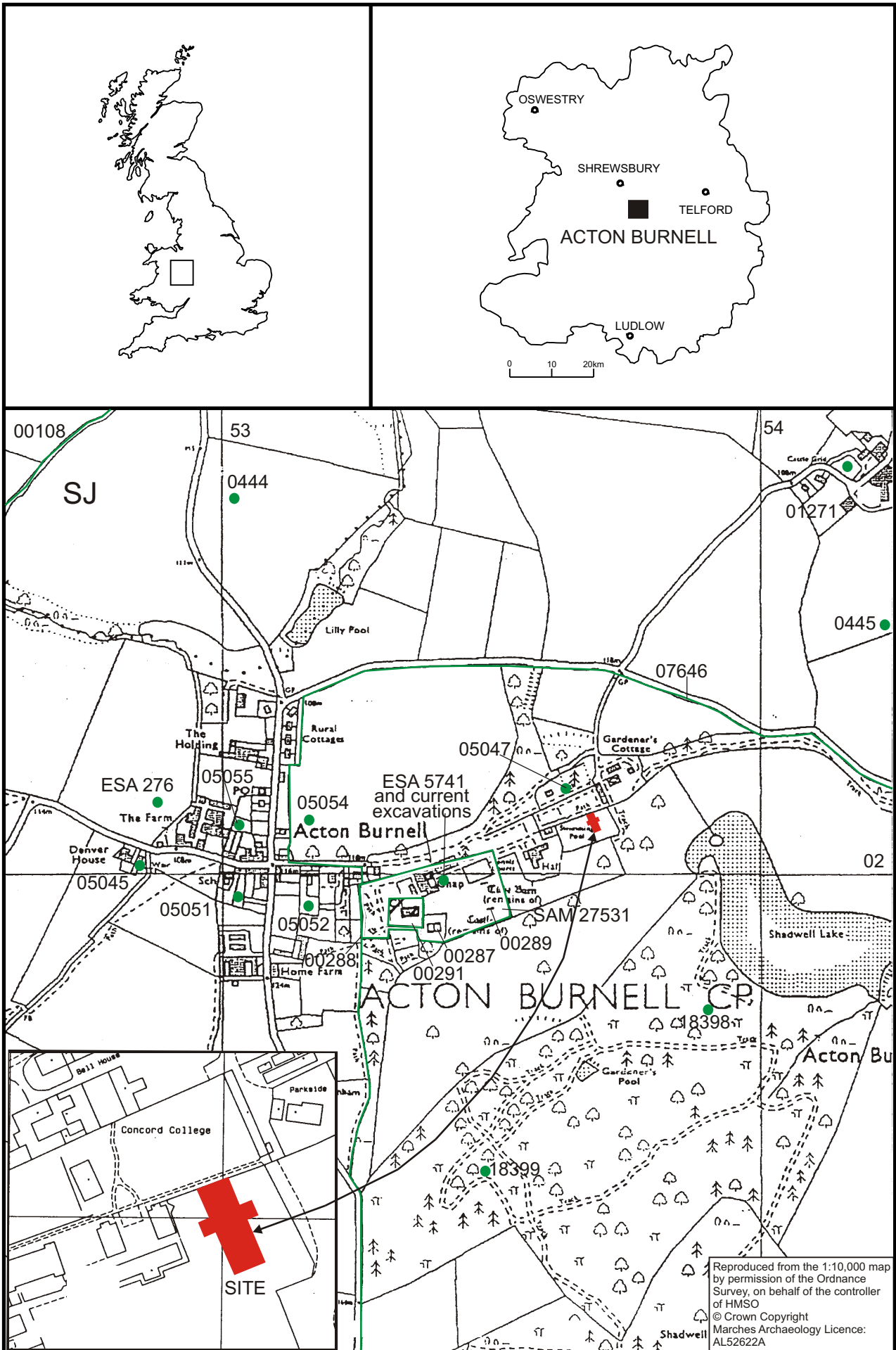


Fig. 1: Location of the site showing relevant SMR sites

**Proposed Accommodation Block
Concord College
Acton Burnell
Shropshire**

NGR: SJ 537 021

**A report on an
archaeological desk based assessment**

Summary

A desk based assessment on a proposed accommodation block at Concord College, Acton Burnell, Shropshire revealed that the site has probably been part of a park since about 1270. Formal gardens were probably laid out in the 18th century when Acton Burnell Hall was built and the cartographic evidence suggests that the study area is situated directly to the south of these gardens. The manorial complex of Acton Burnell Castle, which was built in the late 13th century is situated some 200 metres to the west of the site and it is unlikely that any features or deposits associated with this complex will be encountered this distance away.

1 Introduction

A planning application has been submitted to Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council for permission to erect an accommodation block at Concord College, Acton Burnell, Shropshire. The site is situated at NGR: SJ 537 021 (Fig. 1).

The site is situated close to a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 27531) and to sites registered on the local Sites and Monuments Record as sites of archaeological interest. The Trustees of Concord College have commissioned Marches Archaeology to carry out a desk based assessment on the site. There is no prepared brief for the work.

2 Aims and objectives

The purpose of Desk-based Assessment is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as “to gain information about the known or potential archaeological resource within a given area or site (including presence or absence, character and extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and relative quality of the potential archaeological resource), in order to make an assessment of its merit in the context, leading to one or more of the following: the formulation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource; the formation of a strategy for further investigation, whether or not intrusive, where the character and value of the resource is not sufficiently defined to permit a mitigation

strategy or other response to be devised; the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research”.

3 Methodology

Documentary research

Initially a site visit was made, the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record was consulted and a visit was made to the Shropshire Record Office. The following sources were considered:

Ordnance Survey maps; Tithe maps; Estate maps and other historical maps;
Previous published and unpublished archaeological reports and archive work;
Written non-archaeological sources; Air photographs and geological maps.

4 Site description

The site lies within the grounds of Concord College to the east of the main college building of Acton Burnell Hall (Fig. 1, Plates 1-4). The study area is part of a lawn which slopes down from the east to the west and is at approximately 120 metres O. D. There are several hollow areas within the lawn. Directly to the north is a brick wall (ha ha) which forms the southern boundary of a partially walled garden. The wall is about 700mm high but towards the east the ground rises until the top of the wall is level with the land to the south. A path runs along the top of the ha ha.

Situated about 20 metres to the west of the study area is a group of late 20th century accommodation blocks which have a courtyard in between them. A fence, forming the boundary of the college grounds, is situated about 20 metres to the east and south-east of the study area. The underlying soils are typical stagnogleys of the Clifton association developed in reddish till and glaciofluvial sand (Buteux, 1996).

5 Archaeological and historical background

Acton Burnell

Ongoing excavations, 300 metres to the west of the site, have uncovered a residual worked flint which is possibly a burin. This probably dates from the Bronze Age or early Iron Age. (Fig. 1, Wainwright, forthcoming). Although this is a residual find it cannot be discounted that prehistoric activity and perhaps settlement was taking place in the vicinity of the site.

There are several cropmarks attributed to the Iron Age or Romano British period situated within a kilometre radius of the study area (Fig. 1, SMR 0444, 0445). Both are classified as rectangular and it is likely that they were utilised for agricultural purposes.

The Roman road from Wroxeter to Fordon Gaer is situated about a kilometre to the north-west of the site and the remains of a Roman bridge have been excavated at Radnals Bridge (Fig. 1, SAM 152, SMR 00108, 00290).

The place name Acton is OE and usually translates as ‘farm built of oak’. However, Gelling has argued that Acton’s in Shropshire were places where the processing or distribution of oak timber was taking place (Gelling, 1990). Burnell is a later addition to the place name. The first documentary reference to Acton is in Domesday. The entry is as follows:

*Roger son of Corbet holds Acton (Burnell) and a certain Roger from him. Godric held it; he was a free man. 3 and a half hides which pays tax. In lordship 1 plough; 2 slaves;
1 villager, 4 smallholders and 1 rider with 1 and a half ploughs.
Value before 1066, 30s; later 15s; now 20s
1 more plough would be possible there (Thorn and Thorn, 1986).*

However, it is not clear where the settlement of Acton was situated. It has been suggested that the early settlement was about 400 metres west of the present village but the evidence for this is unclear (Buteux, 1996). It is likely that the Domesday settlement occupied the same site as the later town but there is no evidence of activity here until the 12th century. A watching brief on the levelling of a moated site in the 1960s uncovered evidence of walling, a stone drain and a bridge dating from the 12th-13th centuries (Fig. 1, ESA 276). It is possible that this was a manorial complex that predated the fortified manor house built in 1284 (Buteux, 1996).

By the late 12th century the manor was held by William Burnell. His descendent Robert created the town of Acton Burnell and was granted a weekly market and two annual fairs in 1269-70 (Hartshorne, 1845). Robert Burnell was responsible for the building of the castle which he began in about 1284 when a licence to crenellate and fortify a property was granted by the King (Fig. 1, SMR 0287). The deer park, within which Acton Burnell Castle is set, was laid out in about 1270 (Fig. 1, SMR 07646). Robert Burnell was one of the most influential men of his time. He served as secretary to Edward I, as Chancellor of England and Bishop of Bath and Wells. In 1283 Parliament apparently sat at Acton Burnell in the tithe barn (Fig. 1, SMR 0289, SAM 27531). St Mary’s Church was built in the 1250s but was extensively altered by Robert Burnell at the end of the 13th century (Fig. 1, SMR 00291). An anchorite cell is recorded at the church in 1280 (Buteux, 1996, SMR 05057).

Excavations are continuing within the moated enclosure of Acton Burnell Castle (Fig. 1, Wainwright, 2004 and Wainwright forthcoming). Medieval soil horizons and features cut into the underlying natural subsoils have been identified. Provisional dating suggests that cultivation on the site was taking place from the late 12th century. Cut features represent a non agricultural phase of activity, perhaps structural, dating from the late 12th-14th centuries. Although these dates are provisional it is possible that structures existed in this area before Acton Burnell Castle was built. Features dating from the late 13th and 14th centuries were presumably associated with the castle complex.

By 1301 there were 47 burgages in the town and fieldwork has identified tenement blocks and two routeways dating from the medieval period (Buteux, 1996, Fig. 1, ESA 4938, SMR 05046, 05051, 05052, 05053, 05054, 05055 and 06212). There is documentary evidence for a mill on the stream to the west of the settlement (Fig. 1, SMR 05045). By 1315 there were 36 burgages in Acton Burnell but the town was never successful and by the 15th century it was no longer functioning as a town. At the nearby hamlet of Acton Pigott a postulated deserted settlement has been identified (Fig. 1, SMR 01271).

Acton Burnell Castle stayed in the Burnell family but the descent of the Lordship suggests it had ceased to be used as a residence by 1420. This would explain the absence of later medieval fortifications. Indeed, excavations within the moated enclosure have uncovered little evidence of occupation during the late medieval and early post-medieval periods (Fig. 1, Wainwright, 2004, Wainwright, forthcoming, ESA 5741).

In the 15th century Acton Burnell Castle passed by marriage to the Lovells of Titchmarsh. In 1485 it was confiscated by Henry VII and was later given to the Earl of Surrey in return for his services at the battle of Flodden in 1513. In the later 16th century it became part of the estates of the Duke of Norfolk and by the 17th century had passed to the Smythe family. Most of the original buildings had been demolished by this time (SAM 27531).

In the 18th century the estate was remodelled to create the parkland seen today and Acton Burnell Hall was built (SMR 13182). The medieval chamber block was incorporated into the park as an ornamental barn. Post-medieval buildings within the parkland include an icehouse and The Shell House (Fig. 1, SMR 18398 and 18399). In about 1900 a fire in Acton Burnell Hall led to the extensive refurbishment of the hall.

The site

The site lies within the bounds of the deer park of Acton Burnell Castle (Fig. 1, Plates 2-4, SMR 07646). The deer park was laid out in about 1270 by Robert Burnell and was remodelled in the 18th century to create the parkland seen today. Directly to the north of the study area is a ha ha which forms the southern boundary of a walled garden. To the west of this, leading to the hall, are a series of formal gardens. It is probable that this garden complex or at least parts of it date from the 18th century.

The earliest map evidence showing the site is the 1845 Tithe Plan of the townships of Acton Burnell and Acton Pigott (Fig. 2). This clearly shows the study area to be within plot 128, the parkland. The apportionment lists Acton Burnell Estate as owned and occupied by Sir Joseph Edward Smythe. Plot 116 is listed as being a mansion house, offices, pleasure gardens, buildings, fold, stables, yards and gardens. The boundaries of the formal gardens and some of the buildings to the north-east of the site are as they are today. Plot 134 is listed as pasture and is called Brick Kiln Paddock. Presumably this was the site of a brick kiln (Fig. 1, SMR 05047).

The 1882 First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Plan is more detailed and shows what can be interpreted as the ha ha (Fig. 3). The formal gardens are shown as are several buildings to the north-west of the site. These are presumably associated with the gardens. The 1902 Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Plan shows no change to the area of the site (Fig. 4). The formal gardens are largely unchanged except that less trees are shown. The 1954 6 inch Ordnance Survey Plan is little changed from the 1902 Plan (Fig. 5).

In the later part of the twentieth century parkland to the east of the site has been utilized for agricultural purposes and buildings have been erected to the east (Fig. 1-inset, Plates 2-4).

6 Discussion

There is evidence of activity taking place in the Prehistoric and Roman periods in the vicinity of the site but none within 200 metres.

The site is within the boundaries of Acton Burnell Hall Park. This park was originally a deer park and was created in 1270 by Robert Burnell and remodelled in the 18th century. It seems likely that the boundaries of this park have not changed significantly since it was created. The formal gardens were probably laid out in the 18th century and the cartographic evidence suggests that the study area is situated directly to the south of these gardens.

The 13th century manorial complex comprising of Acton Burnell Castle, Tithe barn and moated site is situated some 200 metres to the west of the site and it is unlikely that any features or deposits associated with this complex will be encountered this distance away. It is probable that settlement during the medieval period was situated to the west of the manorial complex.

On balance it seems probable that the study area has been within a park from 1270 and has been utilised for purely agricultural purposes until the present day. The site may have been partially landscaped by the creation of the formal gardens to the north in probably the 18th century.

7 Recommendations

It is likely that there are no significant below ground remains within the study area as it has probably only been utilised for agricultural purposes until the present day. At the north end of the site it is possible that landscaping has taken place when the formal gardens of Acton Burnell Hall were laid out in probably the 18th century and archaeological remains associated with landscaping of the gardens may be encountered here. However, these remains would probably not be significant enough to further the understanding of garden archaeology and it is suggested that no further archaeological work on the site should take place.

8 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the staff at Shropshire Record Office and Clare Gathercole at Shropshire Sites and Monument Record Office.

9 References

Maps

1845 Tithe Plan of the townships of Acton Burnell and Acton Pigott

1882 25 inch First Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, sheet XLIX.4

1902 25 inch Second Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, sheet XLIX. 4

1954 6 inch Ordnance Survey Plan, sheet SJ 50 SW

1972 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey Plan, sheet SJ 5202-5302

Unpublished references

Schedule Entry Copy of Acton Burnell Castle, Monument Number 27531

Tithe Apportionment of the townships of Acton Burnell and Acton Pigott, 1843

Wainwright, J, 2004, Concord College, Acton Burnell, Shropshire: A report on an archaeological evaluation, *Marches Archaeology Series 332*

Wainwright, J, forthcoming, Concord College, Acton Burnell, Shropshire: A report on a programme of archaeological works, *Marches Archaeology Series*

Published references

Barker, P, A, 1964, A moated site at Acton Burnell, *Shropshire Newsletter*, Vol. 25

Buteux, V, et al, 1996, Archaeological assessment of Acton Burnell, Shropshire, *The Central Marches Historic Towns Survey*

Gelling, M, 1990, *The place names of Shropshire, 1; the major names of Shropshire*

Hartshorne, C, H, 1845, On the ancient Parliament and Castle of Acton Burnell, *The Archaeological Journal*, 1845

Stanford, S, C, 1980, *The archaeology of the Welsh Marches*

Thorn, F and Thorn, C, 1986, *Domesday Book: Shropshire*

10 Archive

The site code is CCAB05A. The archive consists of:

1 set of digital photographs of the study area

This report

The archive is currently held by Marches Archaeology awaiting transfer to Shropshire Heritage Services.

Appendix I: Relevant SMR sites in the vicinity of the study area

The following list has been compiled from the Sites and Monuments Record. Listed buildings within Acton Burnell have been omitted unless they have relevance to the site.

Abbreviations

SMR	Sites and Monument Record Number
ESA	Sites and Monument Record Event Number
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument Number
LB	Listed Building (Grade) and Number

<i>SMR number</i>	<i>Site/ activity</i>	<i>Grid Ref</i>
-------------------	-----------------------	-----------------

Prehistoric

00444	Rectangular enclosure (cropmark)	SJ 5307 0264
00445	Rectangular enclosure (cropmark)	SJ 5437 0238

Roman

00108	Roman Road-Watling Street, (SAM 152)	SJ 520 020
00290	Abutment of Roman Bridge at Radnalls Bridge	SJ 5250 0255

Medieval

00287	Acton Burnell Castle (SAM 27531, LB (1)-1189-0/6/3)	SJ 5339 0188
00288	Acton Burnell Moated Site (SAM 27531)	SJ 5286 0214
00289	Tithe Barn NE of Acton Burnell Castle (SAM 27531)	SJ 5349 0196
00291	Church of St Mary, Acton Burnell (LB (1)-1189-0/6/1)	SJ 5334 0193
01271	Postulated deserted settlement at Acton Pigott	SJ 5425 0285
05045	Mill, Acton Burnell	SJ 5282 0200
05046	Holloway to south of Acton Burnell	SJ 5316 0154
05049	Churchyard of St Mary's Church, Acton Burnell	SJ 5333 0193
05050	Manorial enclosure, Acton Burnell (SAM 27531)	SJ 53330194
05051	Medieval street system, Acton Burnell	SJ 5291 0205
05052	Tenement plots in south-east quarter of Acton Burnell	SJ 5317 0194

05053	Tenement plots in south-west quarter of Acton Burnell	SJ 5303 0196
05054	Tenement plots in north-east quarter of Acton Burnell	SJ 5317 0206
05055	Tenement plots in north-west quarter of Acton Burnell	SJ 5297 0208
05056	The medieval town of Acton Burnell	SJ 5318 0202
05057	Anchorite cell, St Mary's Church, Acton Burnell	SJ 5335 0195
06212	Holloway to west of Acton Burnell	SJ 5297 0203
07646	Acton Burnell deer park and park	SJ 5415 0143
ESA 5741	Evaluation at Concord College	SJ 5342 0199
ESA 276	Watching brief at moated site	SJ 5280 0210
ESA 4938	Survey of Acton Burnell	SJ 5300 0200

Post-medieval

05047	Brick kiln, Acton Burnell	SJ 5364 0215
13182	Acton Burnell Hall (LB (II*)-1189-0/6/4	SJ 5339 0201
18398	Ice House, Acton Burnell Park (LB (II)-1189-0/6/18	SJ 5347 0143
18399	The Shell House, Acton Burnell Park (LB (II)-1189-0/6/20	SJ 5347 0143



Fig. 2 Tithe Plan of the townships of Acton Burnell and Acton Pigott, 1845

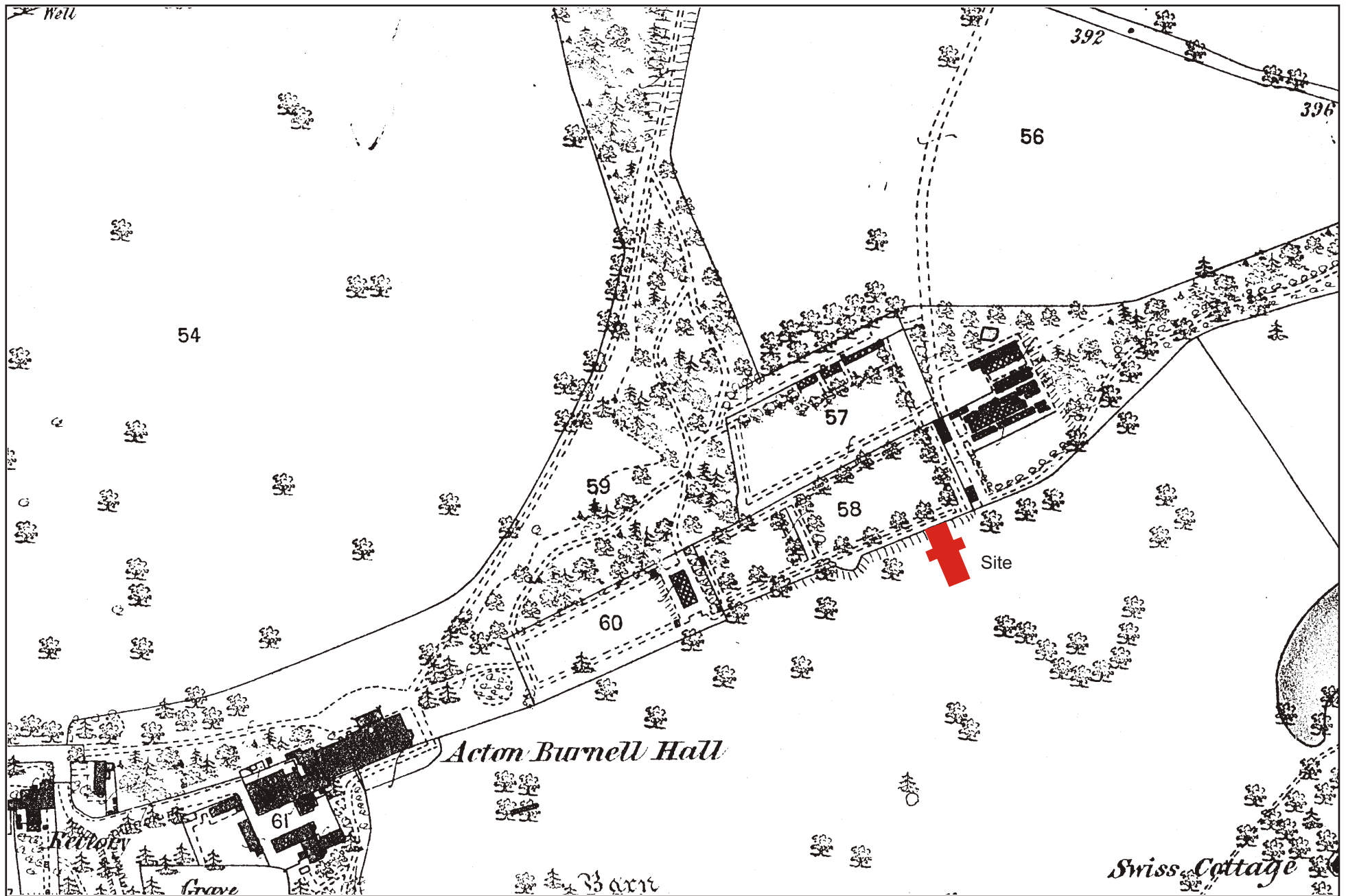


Fig. 3 Detail from the 1882 25 inch 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Plan

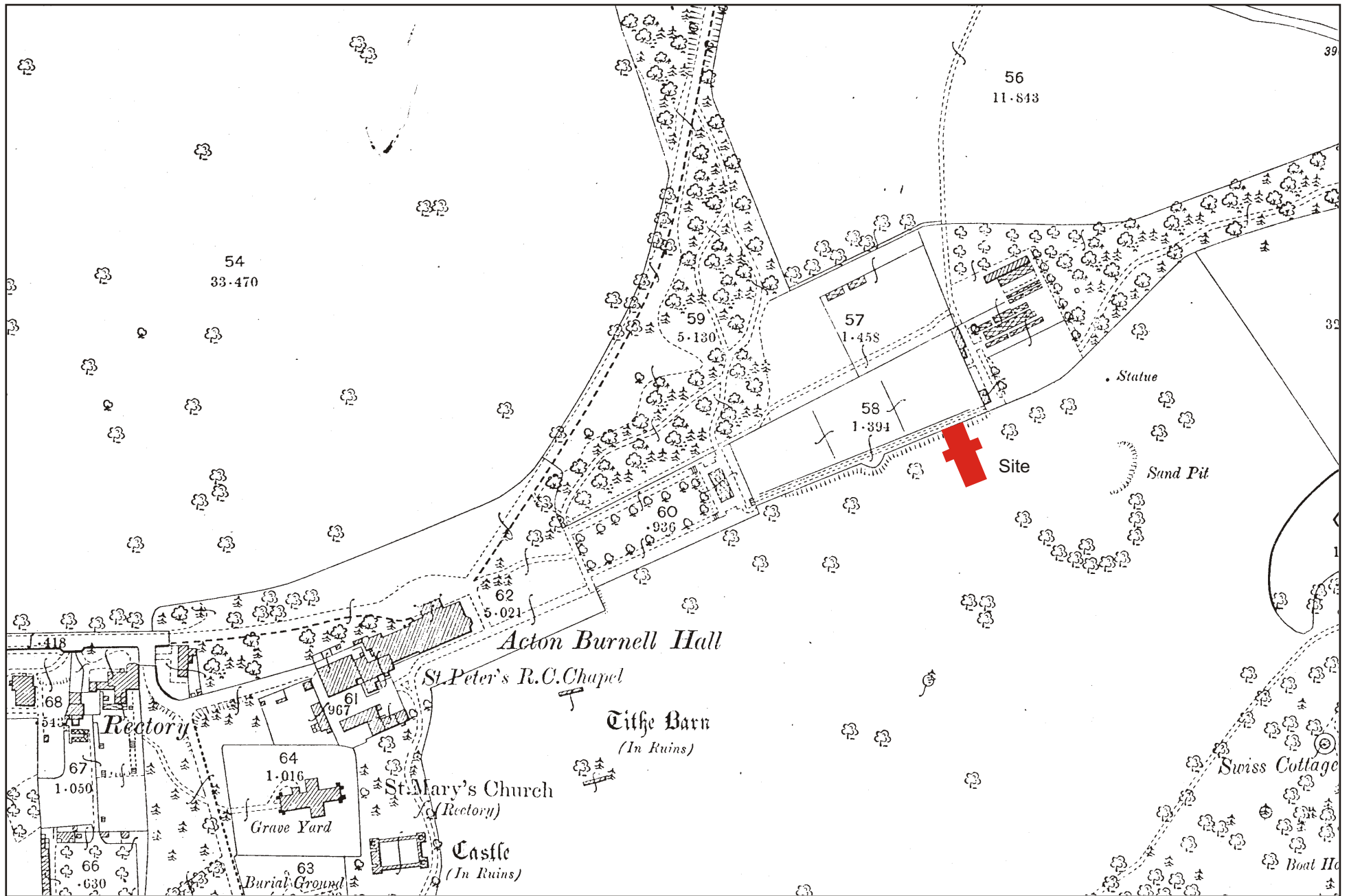


Fig. 4 Detail from the 1902 25 inch 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Plan

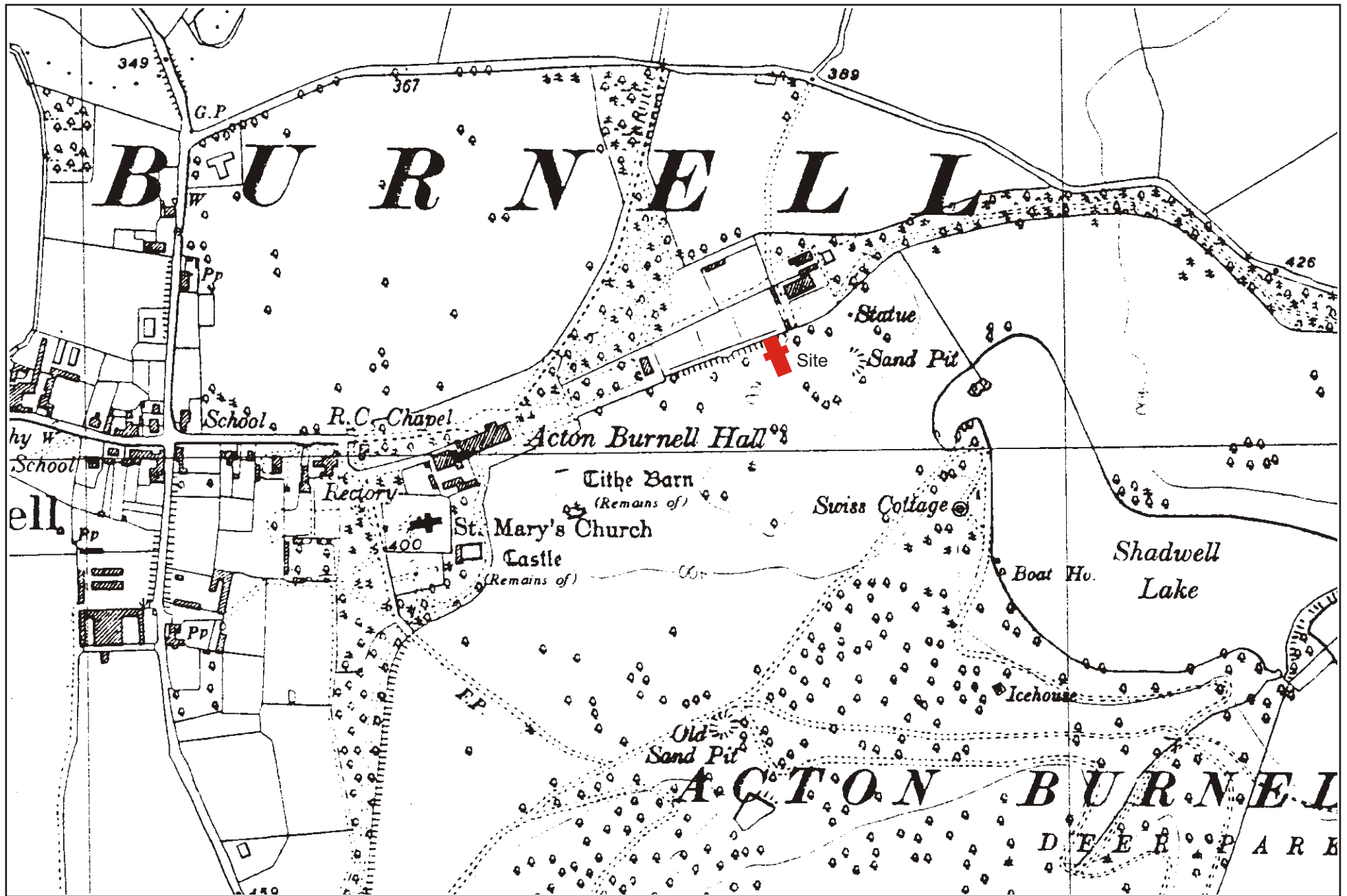


Fig. 5 Detail from the 1954 6 inch Ordnance Survey Plan (not to scale)



Plate 1 Acton Burnell Hall from the north-east



Plate 2 View of the site from the south-east



Plate 3 View of the site from the south-west



Plate 4 View of the site from the north-east