

Archaeological evaluation at land off Pershore Road, Upton Snodsbury, Worcestershire WSM 47394

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land to the west of Pershore Road, Upton Snodsbury, Worcestershire in September 2012 by Mike Napthan Archaeology. The project was intended to provide an indication of the presence or absence of archaeologically significant buried deposits prior to the proposed construction of housing

The project produced no finds of note, only a small number of sherds of later post-medieval to modern pottery being recovered. The intended development area was historically part of a field known in the early 19th Century a "Whiting Yard", whilst it has been suggested that the name may relate to the Whiting family present in the village in the 20th Century, they do not appear in the 19th Century Census locally, and the link remains unproven.

The stripping of the three trenches exposed no archaeologically significant features, and indeed very few more recent intrusions other than areas of recently dumped soil and a mid 20th C watermain trench. The paucity of artefacts of all periods probably reflects a long period as pasture and as orchard.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Upton Snodsbury by Mike Napthan Archaeology. The site is located to the west of the vicarage and church (SO 94234 54474). The project was based upon a brief supplied by Emma Hancox of WHEAS (August 3rd 2012 Planning reference W/12/1475) as amended by correspondence with Mike Glyde. An outline planning application for four residential units has been submitted by John Cottrill (the Client).
- 1.2 This report represents the findings of the evaluation trenching. The project was designed to provide an assessment of the historical and archaeological significance of the site recorded as WSM 47394 on the County HER. The project design was prepared in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994). Codes of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists were followed and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire December 2010.

2 Aims

- 2.1 The aims of the archaeological project were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of the below ground archaeological resource in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature of the resource within the site (including presence or absence, character, extent, date, state of preservation and quality)

These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

- i) to define and identify the nature of any archaeologically significant deposits present on the site of the new houses, and to date previous phases of historic activity where possible;

ii) to attempt to characterize the depositional sequence and recover as much information as possible about the any discrete archaeologically significant features or structures surviving .

iii) Identify any significant features threatened by the proposed development and to indicate appropriate mitigation strategies.

3 Methodology

3.1 Cartographic and published historical sources were searched for information relating to the site and its environs.. A search of the County Councils' HER database revealed several records of archaeological interventions in the vicinity but none directly pertinent to the present site. Searches at the County Record Office revealed that the plot was formerly part of the Estates of the Earls of Coventry, the estate records are almost entirely still in private hands, but copies of some of the historic estate maps are held by WRO,. There is no Inclosure award plan for this parish, but estate mapping of 1813 and a tithe plan of 1838 (Figs 2, 3 and 4) was obtained.

3.2 The evaluation was conducted in September 2012. The trenches were stripped by tracked 360° excavator working under archaeological supervision. The three trenches, totalling 140m² were stripped of topsoil and turf down to the top of archaeologically significant deposits or the top of natural deposits as appropriated. No features other than minor modern intrusions were observed, and recording was therefore restricted to plans and sections of the extent of the observed trenches (Fig 1). The trenches were hand cleaned where necessary, with small sondages to confirm the nature of deposits, and the observed deposits recorded. The photographic archive accompanies this report on DVD.

4 Background

4.1 *Archaeological background*

4.1.1 Only limited archaeological work has occurred in the immediate vicinity – the nearest archaeological observation at the Old Red Lion (just to the east) produced no archaeological evidence. The watching brief at the Red Lion was undertaken by Martin Cook in 1997 (WSM 24502). Other than a watching brief in Church Lane (Vaughan 2002) , which was also negative, work within the area of archaeological interest (WSM 20637) has been restricted to several observations of building fabric at the church (WSM 02950, WSM 02951 and WSM 23278). Very little has been found in this part of the parish despite the documentary evidence that there was a Saxon settlement within the present parish of Upton Snodsbury. As the recorded Saxon cemetery lay well to the west outside the present village area it is quite probable that the settlement gradually refocused around the church in the later medieval period. In the near vicinity of the present property the vicarage has been suggested as possibly lying near a former moated site WSM 02971, but the evidence for this appears to have been confused by the presence of several separate small water features in the immediate area. The water feature indicated on the HER, whilst locally known as “the moat” appears rather unconvincing. A more convincing “moat shaped” squarish body of water with central island is shown on early 19th C mapping west of the present site, south of Newton House.

4.2 *Historical background*

4.2.1 The modern parish of Upton Snodsbury, 1,691 acres in extent, lies between Piddle Brook on the east and Bow Brook on the west The parish is on the Lower Lias clays and gently undulating, the present site lying on a slight eminence alongside the Worcester road. The highest part of the parish is some distance north of the road at Bow Wood, 200 ft. above the ordnance datum. “*Snoddleslea*” was mentioned in 840 among the boundaries of Crowle (Birch, Cart. Sax. ii, 2). Upton and Snodsbury were in early times distinct, the former being known as *Upton Stephani* and probably including Cowsden.. In 1086 the woodland at Snodsbury was a league square, while that at Cowsden was 3 furlongs in length and 2 furlongs in width. Woods called Broke Vallett, Bonney Wood Vallett and Bryar Vallett belonged to the manor in the 16th century.. In the 17th century the farmers and tenants of Upton Snodsbury had the right of pasturing their cattle on certain common land in Upton Snodsbury, and Richard Payne of Cowsden was indicted for inclosing a portion of this ground for his own use. The common was inclosed under an Act of 1774, the award being dated 13 January 1775 (VCH).

- 4.2.2 The village lies to the south of the high road from Worcester to Alcester. It retains a number of 17th C timber framed cottages, none of which appears to have been the subject of any detailed study. In 1725 an Act was passed for the repairing of certain roads leading to Worcester, and amongst them was the road from the yew tree in Spetchley parish to Upton Snodsbury, a distance of about 2 miles. The road was re-aligned in the 20th C.
- 4.2.3 Ten manses in Snodsbury are included in the charter said to have been granted by King Edgar in 972 to the church of Persnore, restoring to that abbey property which had formerly been given to it by King Coenwulf. Like so many of the other manors belonging to the abbey of Persnore, Snodsbury was afterwards taken from it by Edward the Confessor and given as part of the manor of Persnore to the abbey of Westminster. In 1086 the abbey of Westminster held 11 hides at Snodsbury, of which 3 hides and 3 virgates representing Cowsden were held by Urso. The part of the estate held by the abbot in demesne probably continued to be so held until the 12th century, when Abbot Lawrence (c. 1160) granted it as the vill of Snodsbury to Peter de Wick. The overlordship of the manor was held by the abbey until its dissolution. After the sale of the manor by Sir Hugh Burnell in 1417 some confusion seems to have arisen as to its tenure. In 1463 it was said to be held of John Aldbury, lord of Sheriff's Naunton, but in 1467 the tenure was not known.
- 4.2.4 In 1485 Upton Snodsbury was granted with Wick Burnell to Sir John Mortimer. Upton then passed with Wick Burnell until the death of Anthony Kingston. It was leased in 1556–7 for forty years to William Babington, and in 1576–7 to Thomas Burroughs for twenty-two years. At his death some seven years later his executors sold the lease to Robert Burbage, who in 1583–4 obtained Letters Patent granting him the manor for his life and the lives of his three sons. In 1590 the lordship of the manor was purchased by Sir William Walshe for the sum of £839 11s. 3½d., and in 1632–3 it was sold by his nephew and heir William Walshe to Thomas Lord Coventry, lord keeper of the great seal. It has since followed the same descent as Croome D'Abitôt, George William Lord Coventry being lord of the manor in the early 20th C.
- 4.2.5 A mill in the manor of Upton Snodsbury is mentioned in 1258 and in 1448, and 'le Nete' called 'le Milnenete' was granted to William Walshe with the manor in 1590, but no mill is subsequently mentioned.
- 4.3 *Cartographic evidence*
- 4.3.1 The earliest dated mapping available for the area is the 1813 Estate plan of the estate of the Earl of Coventry (Fig 2) A related undated map (also in the Coventry Archives) is possibly a little earlier or later (Fig 3) but both show the present site in a similar form as part of a larger field known as Whiting Yard, abutting the glebe lands to the west and south, with the highway to the north and east. The Tithe mapping of 1839 also shows a similar arrangement, the present property remaining as part of the Coventry Estate, let as pasture to William Bullock, who lived a short distance to the west along the Worcester road. The field name may possibly relate to the Whiting family subsequently present in the village in the 20th Century, however they do not appear in the 19th Century Census returns for the parish, and the evidence therefore does not seem to support the supposition. As mentioned above, immediately to the west of the "Whiting Yard" the historic maps show a water filled feature lying in the area of former Glebe that is now the back garden of the modern Newton House. The feature appears to have been roughly square, with a possible central island. It is unusually small for a moat, but sufficiently large to have encircled a single building. The shape of the now infilled feature is still detectable on modern LIDAR imaging as a shallow depression very similar to the shape surveyed in the 1830s within the glebe. The unusual field name "Whiting Yard" (if not a personal name) possibly relates to the preparation or use of lime based products or pigments (including whitewash), though in more recent times the "Yard" was used to store wagons and other vehicles awaiting repair by the nearby wheelwright (J Cottrill pers comm.). The land parcel formerly known as Whiting Yard has been subdivided in the 20th C, the NW corner having been acquired as the garden of "Goldings" and the southern boundary has been moved to accommodate the creation of a driveway to the Vicarage. The western end is now a small paddock, which was cultivated by the present owner's father. The line of four walnut trees across the site is first marked on the 1880s Ordnance Survey mapping (Fig 5) - previous mapping shows no indication of an earlier boundary along this line. It would appear likely that they were planted as a landscape feature, possibly to screen the then recently built Victorian vicarage from the main Worcester road (which then ran directly along the northern boundary of the present plot).

The cartographic evidence (and apparent age of the over-mature trees) tends to disprove local rumours that the trees were planted as a war memorial (unless it was the Crimea), as they were clearly present several decades prior to the Great War.

5 Results

- 5.1 The stripping of an area of approximately 140m² indicated a very low level of residual artefacts in the topsoil despite the proximity of the site to the centre of the village. The majority of the recovered artefacts (all likely to be 18th C or later) were recovered from material dumped on the site in the 20th C to level it up. The dumped material reportedly derives from a number of local properties (including from the excavation of a drive to the neighbouring vicarage) and has been spread and levelled during the occupation of the present owner and his father. The area of dumping represents a levelling up of the eastern third of the plot, plus infilling of the edge of the former roadway, which skirts the NE boundary.
- 5.2 The earliest deposits encountered were natural blueish grey clay intermixed with bands of clean natural red sand (Figs 6 and 7). Where undisturbed these deposits were overlaid by a brown clay, which appeared to be oxidised natural clay. The subsoil consisted of a gravelly brown silty clay which gradually merged with the overlying loamy grey brown sandy clay topsoil. There were no indications that the field had ever been deeply cultivated, and no sign of artificially improved drainage. The topsoil was variable in depth from 0.3m to 0.1m, but this appears to partially reflect relatively recent shallow landscaping.
- 5.3 The eastern third of the plot appears to have been extensively affected by relatively recent landscaping resulting from the spreading and smoothing of dumped soil and a little building rubble. Towards the eastern gate there is apparently more dumped brick rubble derived from local building operations including material from the former public house opposite – this rubble was not encountered in the evaluation trenches, but was deposited in recent memory (J Cottrill pers comm.). Within Trench 3 the layer of dumped material was principally mixed topsoil with occasional brick and tile fragments, rare Lias fragments, and occasional nails, slate and lime mortar – this deposit directly overlay blue natural clay in places indicating that the topsoil and subsoil were probably stripped prior to the dumping episode, and the topsoil was subsequently re-spread over the deposited material. The dumped material within the trenches contained no modern building materials, and this indicates that the site may have been used for informal dispersal of surplus topsoil over a long period.
- 5.4 The area of the former tree-line was examined in Tr 3 for signs of any former boundary ditch – whilst there is a slight surface declivity along this general line no below ground indications of a ditch cut were present. On the ridge of slightly higher ground towards the northern end of Tr 3 there was a small area of more concentrated gravel overlying the subsoil (which itself was moderately gravelly). This patch seems to follow the alignment of the former roadline immediately to the north, and may possibly reflect the presence of a former footway.
- 5.5 The only cut feature seen on the site was in Trench 1, where a straight linear feature filled with light grey clay with very rare brick and tarmac/tar fragments was present (Fig 6). The feature was of an almost consistent width of 0.4m and cut from within the topsoil. The landowner identified the feature with a former watermain (of tarred pitch-fibre pipes) laid in his father's time (circa 1950s) and previously encountered during building work to the west of the present plot. The pipe reportedly lies at a depth of circa 1m, and was not exposed.
- 5.6 The artefacts recovered were all residual material present in the dumped deposits and topsoil, so cannot be firmly related to any activity on the present site. The dumped material does, however, reportedly all derive from locations within the village. The small assemblage weighs a total of 283g. The predominant pottery fabric was brownish-black glazed redware of the 18th-19th C (six sherds weighing a total of 129g, mainly from Tr 3 dumping horizons). Other fabrics were represented by single sherds, - one sherd of Staffordshire slipware weighed 11g (recovered from topsoil Tr 1), and a sherd of blue and white glazed stoneware weighing 4g from Tr 3 dumping. The Staffordshire slipware sherd may be provisionally dated to the later 18th-early 19th C, and the other sherd more probably to the 19th C. None of the pottery would appear to have any significance in aiding interpretation of the site as it is extremely common in the county. The remaining retained artefacts consist of a single fragment (120g) of handmade ceramic common roof tile (medieval or later, but still in widespread use) and two small wrought iron nails of "rose head" type (19g) dating between the 17th and early 20th C. Brick, tile, slate

and occasional fragments of Lias (possible building stone) were also observed, but not retained. The presence of occasional animal bone within the topsoil was noted, but this appeared to relate to modern usage of the field as sheep-pasture.

6 Discussion and conclusions

- 6.1 The site would appear (on first impressions) to be one where some limited evidence of former habitation might be expected, however in the event the site proved to be almost entirely devoid of evidence of activity prior to the early modern period. Local residents have described the field as the historic division (or rather anachronistically “strategic gap”, as referred to in the planning objections) between the originally separate hamlets of Upton and Snodsbury. It would appear from the present evaluation that the site certainly fell between the Upton ribbon settlement along the Worcester Road and the more nucleated settlement of Snodsbury around the church. It is perhaps significant that the plot was part of the Coventry Estates, as these included much enclosed roadside waste and it is quite likely that a significant part of the present site was roadside waste until the late 18th C enclosures. Unfortunately no pre enclosure mapping appears to survive. The present plot is only the residual part of the former land parcel, substantial areas have been absorbed into the neighbouring domestic curtailages in relatively recent times.
- 6.2 The available documentary and cartographic sources indicate that the site is likely to have been pasture or roadside waste during the historical period, and the absence of any earlier artefacts indicates that there was little or no prehistoric activity or occupation in the immediate environs. There do not appear to be any specific historical associations with the present site, and suggestions that the original four walnut trees (now two) relate to some form of village memorial appear to be unfounded. Whilst the site is uneven there appear to be no indications of ridge and furrow extending into the present plot, and it is clear that the partially infilled depression along the northern side of the plot represents the edge of the old roadway cutting/hollow-way which was re-aligned in the latter half of the 20th C. Much of the surface topography at the eastern end of the field appears to relate to modern dumping and levelling, and is therefore of no significance.
- 6.3 The construction of the intended housing will have no detrimental impact on archaeological resources, and the archaeological potential of this particular plot appears to be extremely low. The site lies well away from the conservation area, and any development is very unlikely to adversely affect the setting of the Listed buildings and Scheduled Monument within the village as the site is well screened by trees, hedges and other buildings.

7 Bibliography

Cook, M, 1997, *Watching brief at Red Lion Inn (HWCMS 24502) Upton Snodsbury* HWCAS Internal Report **620**

Vaughan, T, 2002, *Archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to “The Old House”, Church Lane, Upton Snodsbury, Worcestershire WSM 32050* WCAS Internal Report **1122**

VCH II – Willis-Bund JW and Page W (eds) 1906 *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester*

8 Acknowledgements

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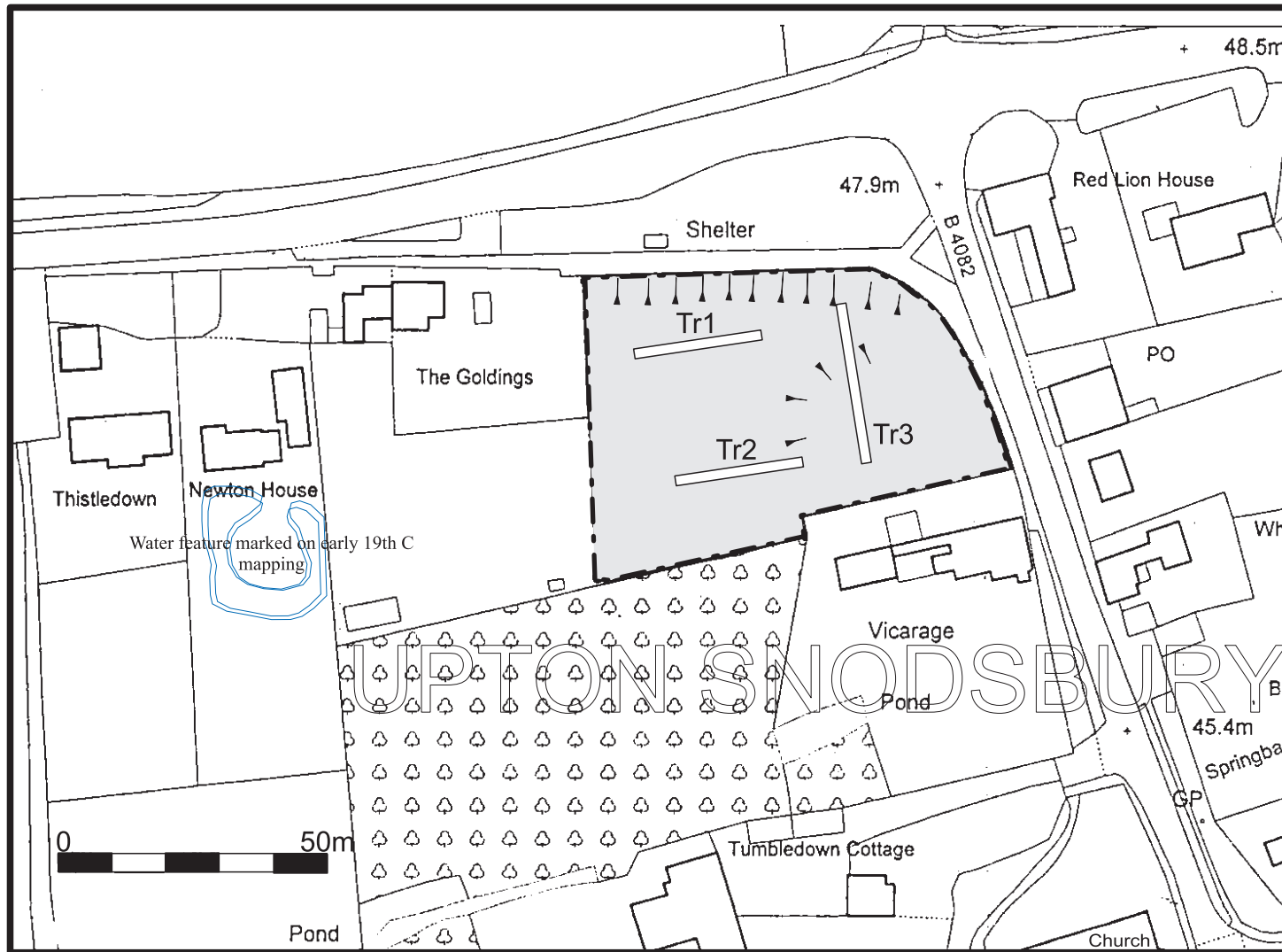


Figure 1: Location of evaluation

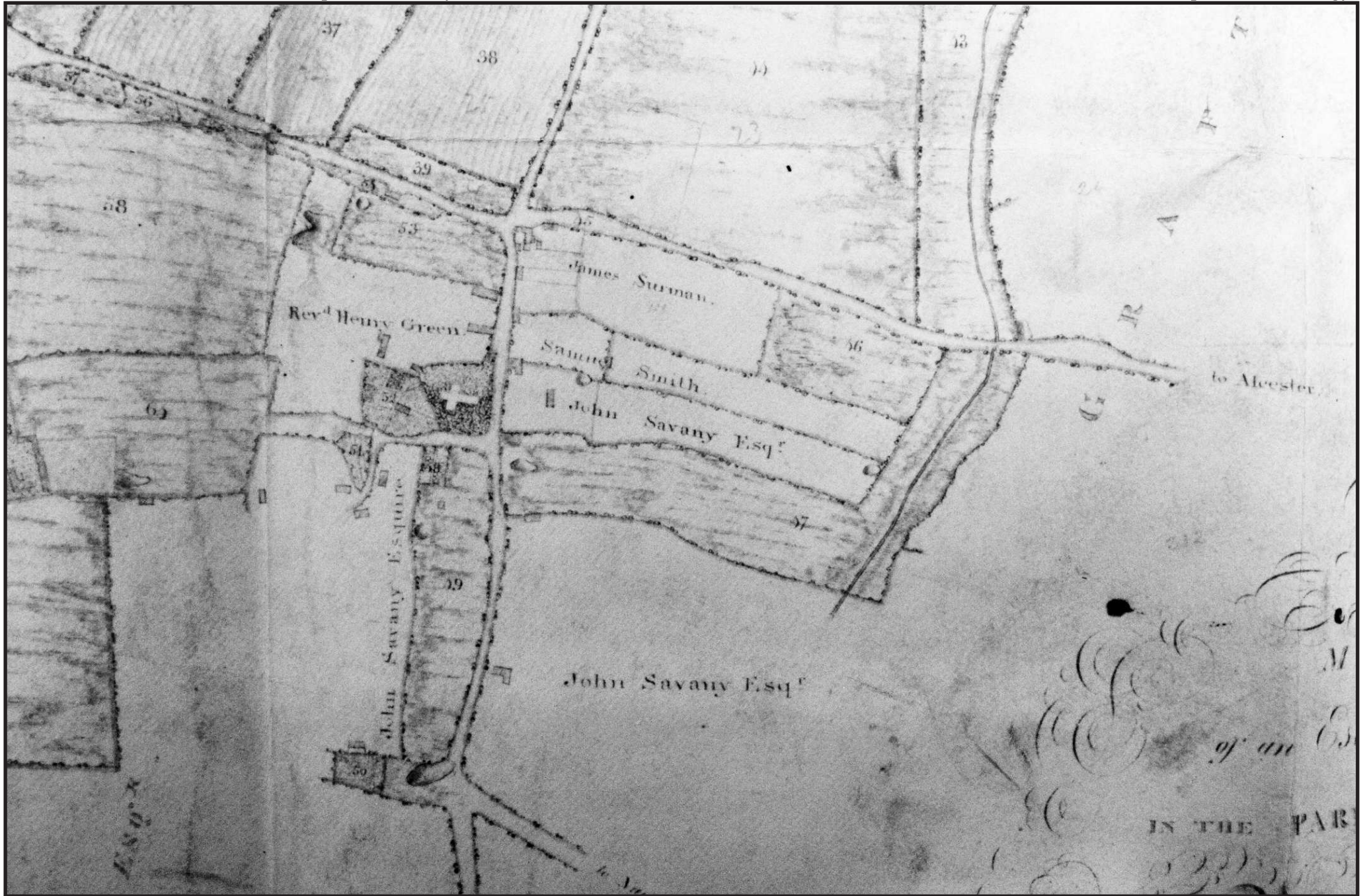


Figure 2: The earliest detailed mapping of Upton Snodsbury - estate map of George Earl of Coventry, surveyed 1813 by Thos. Harcrosse Junior (WRO BA 850 ref 970.5:73). The study area occupies the eastern half of Plot 53, listed as "Whiting Yard". *Nb Derived from poor quality photocopy, original in private hands.*

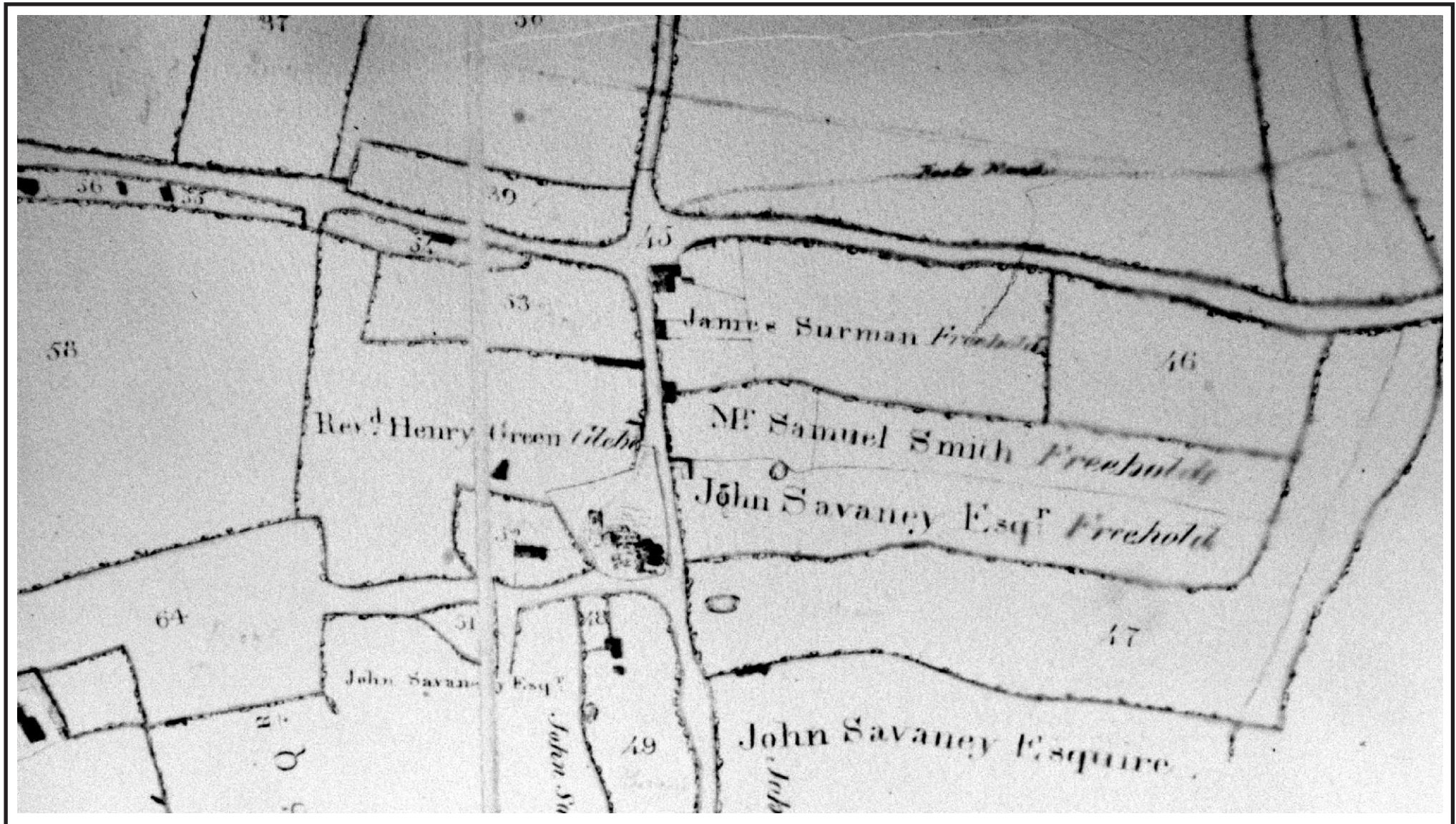


Figure 3: Undated estate map of George Earl of Coventry, (WRO BA 850 ref 970.5:73). The study area occupies the eastern half of Plot 53, listed as “Whiting Yard”. This survey has affinities with the 1813 survey, but is less detailed.



Figure 4: Tithe Awards map of Upton Snodsbury, surveyed 1839 by RC Herbert (WRO BA 1572) The study area occupies the eastern half of Plot 162, listed as “Whiting Yard”, pasture. Owner Earl of Coventry, occupier William Bullock. Note “moat shaped” water feature in 158 “Vicarage Close”.

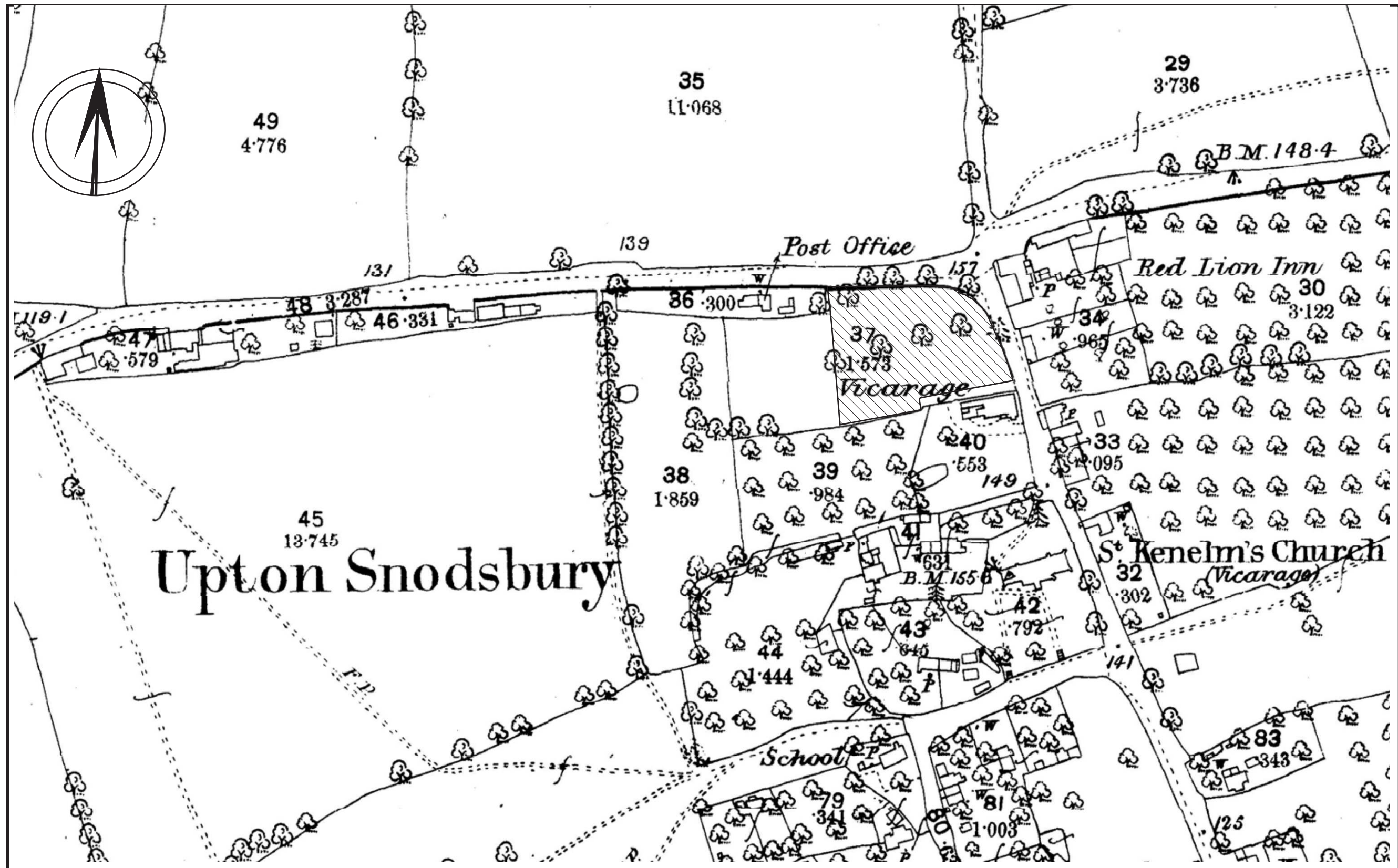


Figure 5: 1880s 1st Edition Ordnance Survey mapping

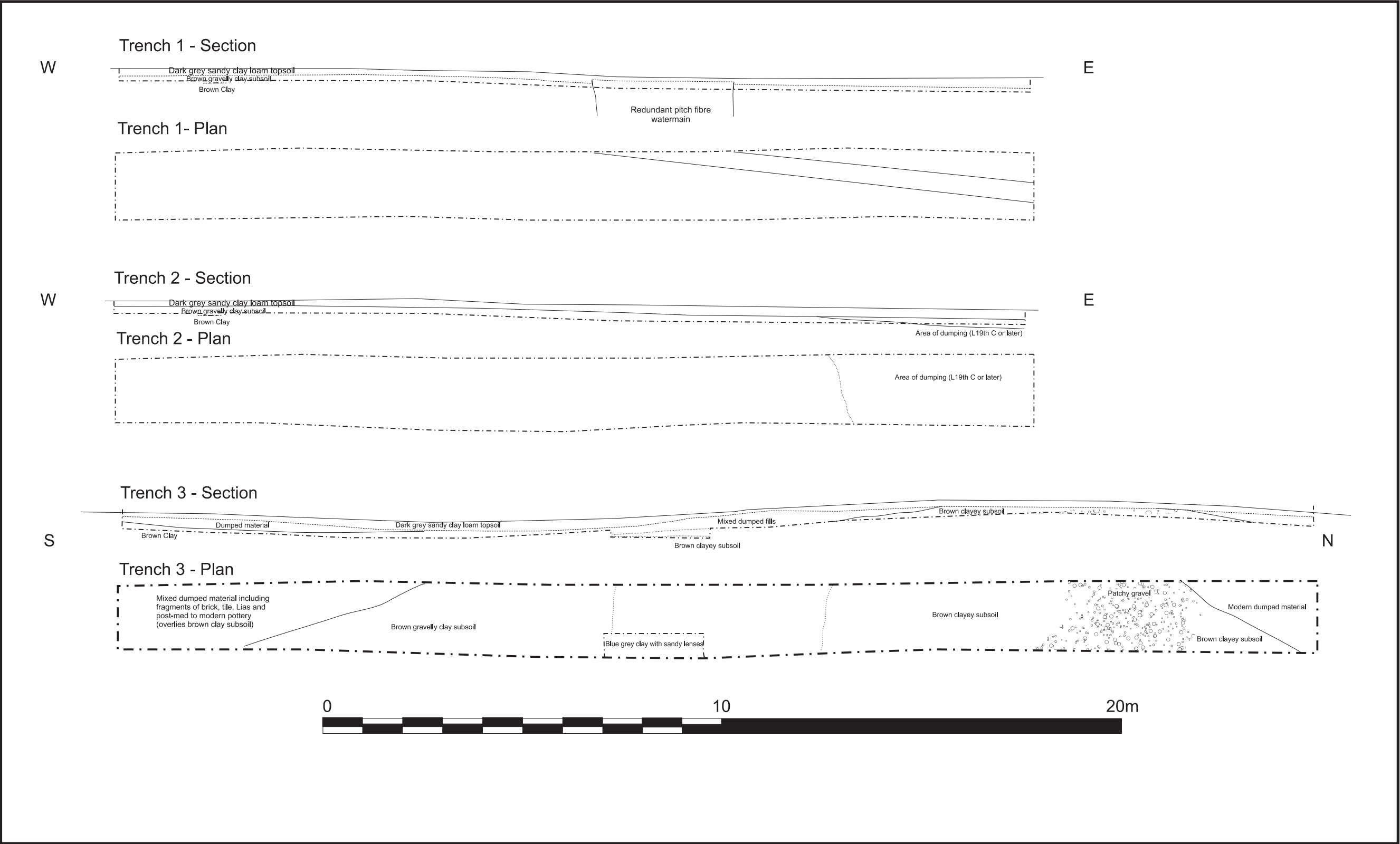


Figure 6: Trench plans and sections



Trench 1 view facing west (note watermain trench)
and detail of small sondage cut into watermain trench fill (below)



General view of Trench 3 facing north-west



Detail of section showing
layer of dumping over natural



View east
along
Trench 2

Figure 7: Site photographs