

**A Landscape Survey of Rocester Parish
First Interim Report.**

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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Introduction and Methodology

An initial landscape survey of Rocester parish, Staffordshire (Figure 1) was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in November 1990. The aim of the survey was to identify every visible man-made feature within the present-day parish. Specific features will then be targeted for further study in future seasons of survey. The landscape survey forms part of a B.U.F.A.U. research project, centred on Rocester, initially instigated by a rescue excavation, which incorporates both field work and documentary research.

All fields were numbered with reference to a master plan of the study area, and each field was then described on a standard record card. Both features of natural and man-made origin were recorded and, where possible, sketched on the master plan. Substantial man-made features were recorded separately on a feature record card, and photographs taken of selected features.

The following narrative summary of the initial results of the landscape survey omits most details of recent man-made features recorded during the survey, especially those associated with landscaping around the J.C.B. factory. Certain areas within the parish were inaccessible at the time of the survey due to lack of permission for access or through difficulties in tracing landowners. Information held in the Staffordshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted and compared with existing features.

The Field Survey (Figure 2)

The survey notes below relate only to those fields or areas containing features of archaeological interest. Field names and/or landuse shown on the 1848 Tithe map are given in brackets.

1. Field 37 (Pasture)

Contained by well-established hedge boundaries, this field slopes down to the northeast. Moderately well-preserved ridge-and-furrow is apparent over much of the field; aligned northeast-southwest, it runs downhill towards a stream forming the eastern boundary of the field.

2. Field 36 (Plantation)

Sloping down towards the River Dove to the northwest, this field also displayed well-established hedge boundaries. Ridge-and-furrow, aligned northwest-southeast, extends across the field into the adjacent Field 35 to the north. This is not as clearly-defined here as in the surrounding fields. A large hollow some 10 metres x 10 metres, occupies the eastern corner of the field.

3. Field 35 (Pasture)

Again, sloping down towards the Dove to the northwest, this field contains some well-preserved examples of ridge-and-furrow, especially to the west, truncated by a linear depression extending across the field from the southeast towards a farmhouse in the northeast. Well-established, mature trees in line with this depression suggest its identification as a former field boundary. Ridge-and-furrow does not appear beyond this feature and the ground drops sharply away to the north, towards a stream.

4. Field 1 (Brimsholme)

This essentially flat meadow in the flood plain of the River Dove is bounded by the river to the south and east. It contains many deep, curving hollows which are easily recognisable as dried-up, former meanders in the course of the river. In the western half of the field is a slight ridge aligned northwest-southeast. On either side of this feature is a short stretch of five ridges at right angles to, and less clearly defined than,

the aforementioned feature. It was not possible to identify these features, although they may be related to some form of drainage system in a field obviously prone to flooding.

5. Field 4 (Coppingholme, Brimsholme Croft, Lower Flat, Upper Flat)

A large, L-shaped field sloping south and formerly divided into smaller individual fields, the boundaries of which are still visible. The Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record lists several features, plotted from aerial photographs, contained within this field. These include three possible ring-ditches, one with a double ditch and a pit alignment. No traces of earthworks can be observed; however, detailed examination was not possible as the field was under crop.

6. Field 5 (House Piece, West Piece – now called Orton's Pasture)

A narrow, elongated field, recently the subject of an archaeological evaluation (Ferris 1990) which revealed a concentration of Romano-British features at the northern end. No evidence of surface features was noted.

7. Field 14 (Frame Yard)

A field under pasture, south of St. Michael's Church and within an area designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument; formerly the site of a small Augustinian abbey. The western half of the field is occupied by a circular earthwork enclosed by two rectangular banks measuring approximately 50 x 50 metres. These earthworks bear the hallmarks of a classic, post-medieval formal garden feature.

Other features are less easily identifiable. Towards the southern boundary of the field, and parallel with it, is a slight bank approximately 1 metre wide and running virtually the entire length of the south side of the field.

The eastern half of the field contains numerous irregular undulations. A deep hollow with several associated ridges is situated near the eastern boundary.

8. Field 40

This field slopes down towards the River Dove to the south. Ridge-and-furrow, orientated north-south, was observed across much of its length. A linear depression, aligned east-west, and running across the field was also noted.

9. Field 15 (House and Orchard)

A fairly flat field, under grass. Ridge-and-furrow, in a rather degraded condition, was noted across the whole field, on a north-south orientation.

10. Field 17

A southward-sloping field with fairly well-preserved ridge-and-furrow, aligned north-south, towards the southern boundary. The eastern portion of the field, nearest the River Churnet, seems to have been terraced. There also seems to be some evidence of earlier divisions of the land into north-south strips, discernible by the positions of mature trees.

11. Field 16

A southward-sloping field, again with north-south-orientated ridge-and-furrow, in a fairly well-preserved state.

12. Field 18

Ridge-and-furrow is, again, apparent here. It curves markedly at the northern and southern ends of the field, forming a classic inverted-S shape.

13. Field 29

What may be the vestiges of ridge-and-furrow are discernible to the south, possibly a continuation of the feature noted in Field 18. The land is essentially parkland fronting Barrowhill House. A second hedgerow, 3 metres from the existing one, was also noted.

14. Field 23

This field, at the top of Barrow hill, drops away fairly sharply on three sides, except to the south. Its southern boundary has been terraced to accommodate a 19th-century, or earlier, farm and its associated buildings. It also exhibits a double hedge on its eastern boundary, similar to that noted in Field 29. The second line of hedging is accentuated by a slight bank, 3 metres from the present boundary.

The Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record notes the existence of a possible Roman marching camp in this area. Plots from aerial photographs show two linear cropmarks thought to represent the western and southern ramparts. A plan of features thought to be associated with the "camp", appears in The Victoria County History of 1908.

A very degraded, north-south-aligned bank was discernible near the western side of the field, seeming to turn towards the east and then stop abruptly. It is possible that this feature may belong to the possible marching camp. Other parts of the field seem to have been altered by 19th-century gravel extraction, shown on the 1950's 6 inch Ordnance Survey map.

15. Field 24

The southern boundary of the field also marks the northern boundary of the present parish. Sloping down to the south, the field shows irregular hollows, possibly the result of gravel extraction. No earthworks corresponding with a cropmark plotted from aerial photographs, thought to be the northern rampart of a Roman marching camp, were located. The remains of a small stone building were noted (see below).

16. Field 27

Many hollows were observed in this field, possibly associated with gravel extraction in Fields 23 and 24.

17. Field 28

This south-sloping field contains moderately well-preserved ridge-and-furrow, aligned north-south.

18. Field 19 (Upper Dove Flat)

This field contained ridge-and-furrow, aligned north-south, as in the adjacent Field 28. However, the preservation of these features was poor overall. A former field boundary was noted, orientated north-south and marked by oak trees.

19. Field 20 (Little Dove and Plough Field)

Sloping down towards the River Dove in the east, this field showed very slight traces of what could be much-degraded ridge-and-furrow. However, the features were so ill defined, it was not possible to identify them with complete certainty.

20. Field 61 (Long Croft)

Fairly well-preserved ridge-and-furrow can be seen, aligned east-west, along this narrow strip of land alongside the present road.

21. Field 63 (Good Helps Gate)

Nabb Lane forms the western boundary of this field, with the road between Rocester and

Upper Tean to the south. Ridge-and-furrow, aligned north-south, was noted here in a fair state of preservation.

22. Field 68 (Shoulder Mutton and Lane Field)

The lane to Combridge forms the northern boundary of this field, accentuated by a steep bank. Slightly curving ridge-and-furrow, orientated northwest-southeast and running parallel with the lane, was noted.

23. Field 70 (Broken Brigge)

Nothill Brook, which marks the boundary of the present parish, flows along the southern boundary of this field. North-south aligned ridge-and-furrow was noted in the field.

24. Field 69 (Corn Hill and Gorse)

As with adjacent Field 70, north-south aligned ridge-and-furrow was present.

25. Field 67 (Sheepway Dole)

The most westerly field in the present parish. A ditch forms the eastern field boundary, next to Wooton's Farm. Ridge-and-furrow here is aligned east-west.

Areas not visited

Most of the fields in the parish of Rocester were given a brief inspection during the survey. A few areas were unavailable for inspection, usually due to problems of access. The largest area of land remaining unsurveyed was situated south of the J.C.B. works, east of the B5030 and west of the River Churnet

Buildings (Figure 2)

A number of pre-19th-century buildings were encountered during the survey, outside the village of Rocester, which merit brief mention here.

Woodseat (N.G.R SK 9074/3850)

A principally brick-built, 18th-century country house, facing south-east and now in a state of partial collapse, the east and west wings being best preserved and surviving up to the roof line. The central part of the house has collapsed above ground-floor level. Victorian glasshouses in a good state of preservation are located toward the rear. Various other outbuildings also remain, some rebuilt as office accommodation by the owners, J.C. Bamford Ltd.

The house is set in formal gardens, now much overgrown. A ha-ha and terrace were still discernible in front of the house. A much-overgrown and collapsed ice-house was also visible to the south-east of the house, near the former canal.

Barrowhill House and Home Farm (N.G.R SK 1100/4054)

The 18th-century Barrowhill House is set in its own gardens, facing south. To the north is a much-decayed group of impressive agricultural buildings, built of red brick, one possessing a wooden cupola. The house itself is externally not particularly impressive, having been extensively modernised and rendered.

Northwest of the house are the remains of a ruined ice-house, and near to this a peculiar, small, one-storey building, constructed of ashlar masonry with a stone roof and guttering. It measured 5 x 8 metres externally. It is reputed to be a summerhouse, belonging to the nearby house, originally one of three scattered around the grounds. The other two were not located.

Outbuilding North of Dalesgap Farm (N.G.R SK 1115/4092)

Remains of a sandstone building, approximately 200 metres northwest of Dalesgap Farm, stand on the boundary of the present parish, near a small gravel pit. The building, 5 metres by 6 metres long, is in a state of collapse and truncated at the north end. It is built of large, faced, red sandstone blocks in regular coursing up to six courses high. Resting on top of this partially collapsed structure are a number of roof timbers, certainly of pre-19th-century date.

The purpose of this building is uncertain. It may be an agricultural building. The red sandstone blocks from which it is constructed seem to have been re-used from some other structure.

Summary

No prehistoric features were encountered during the survey. A possible Roman feature was located at Barrowhill, associated with a postulated Roman marching camp.

Medieval features were more plentiful. Ridge and furrow located during the survey provides some clues to the pattern of medieval settlement in the parish, broadly concentrated in three main areas; in the northeastern corner of the parish, between the Rivers Dove and Churnet; in the east of the parish around the Alders and Field Head Farm; and at Monk's Clownholme, in the extreme southeast of the parish.

These concentrations of ridge and furrow may reflect areas of activity during the medieval period or, alternatively, patterns of land use in the post-medieval period may explain their survival.

Recommendations for Further Survey

1. (a) A measured, hachure survey of Abbey Field (Field 14) should be undertaken to record features noted.
- (b) A measured, hachure survey of possible Roman features located in Field 23 should also be considered.
2. Cropmark features in Field 4 should be further investigated by fieldwalking. Some previous fieldwalking has been carried out here with positive results. An intensive plotting of artefact scatters in this and surrounding arable fields should be undertaken.
3. At The Alders, Fields 58, 59 and 60 probably represent a shrunken medieval hamlet, cut out of Stubwood. Intensive ground survey to locate and record possible building platforms, and fieldwalking to locate pottery scatters, should be considered if access can be arranged to this area.

Reference

Ferris, I.M.

1990 *An Archaeological Evaluation at Orton's Pasture, Mill St. Rocester, Staffordshire*
BUFAU

LOCATION OF ROCESTER

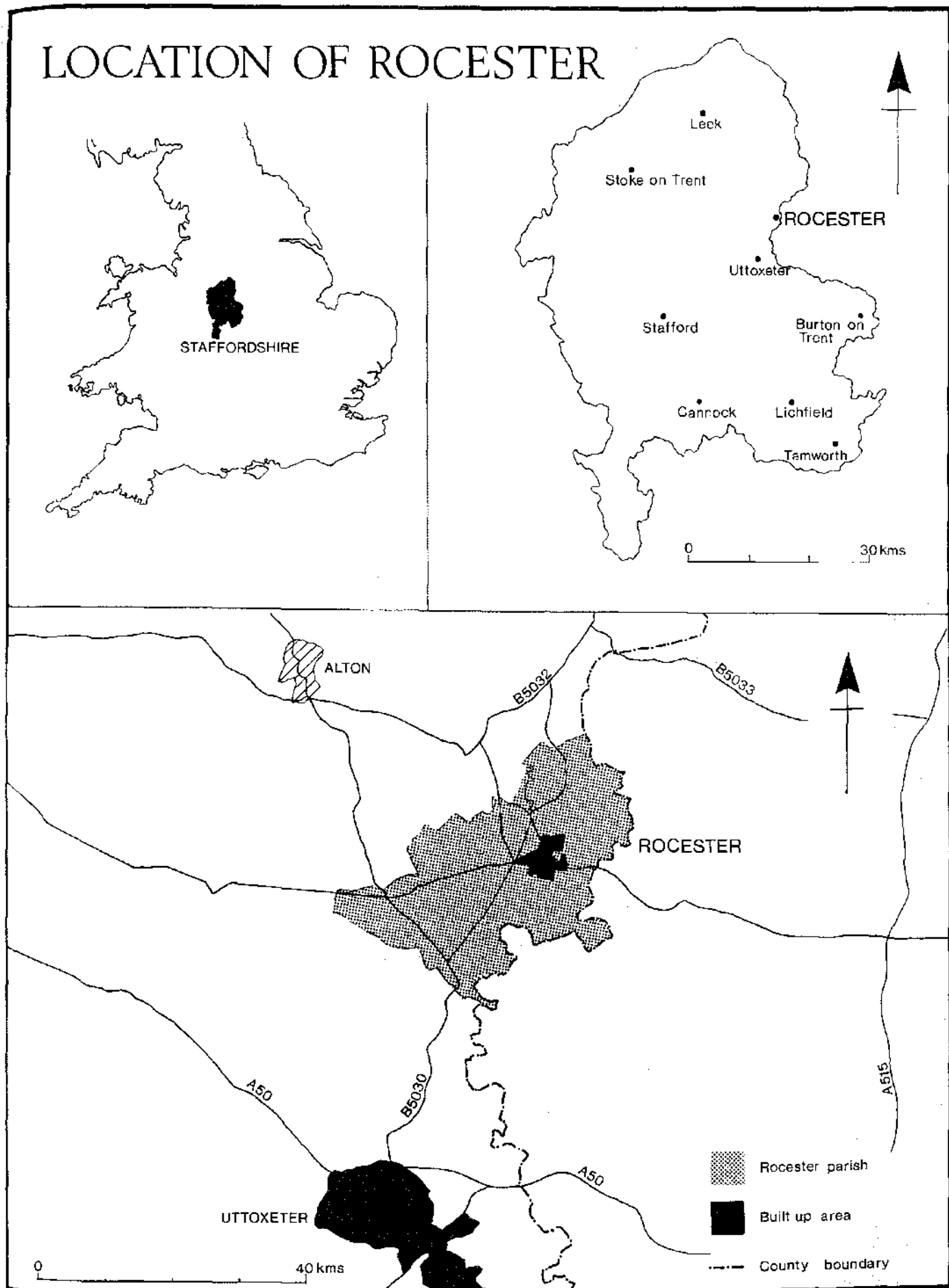


Fig. 1

ROCESTER PARISH 1990 Landscape survey

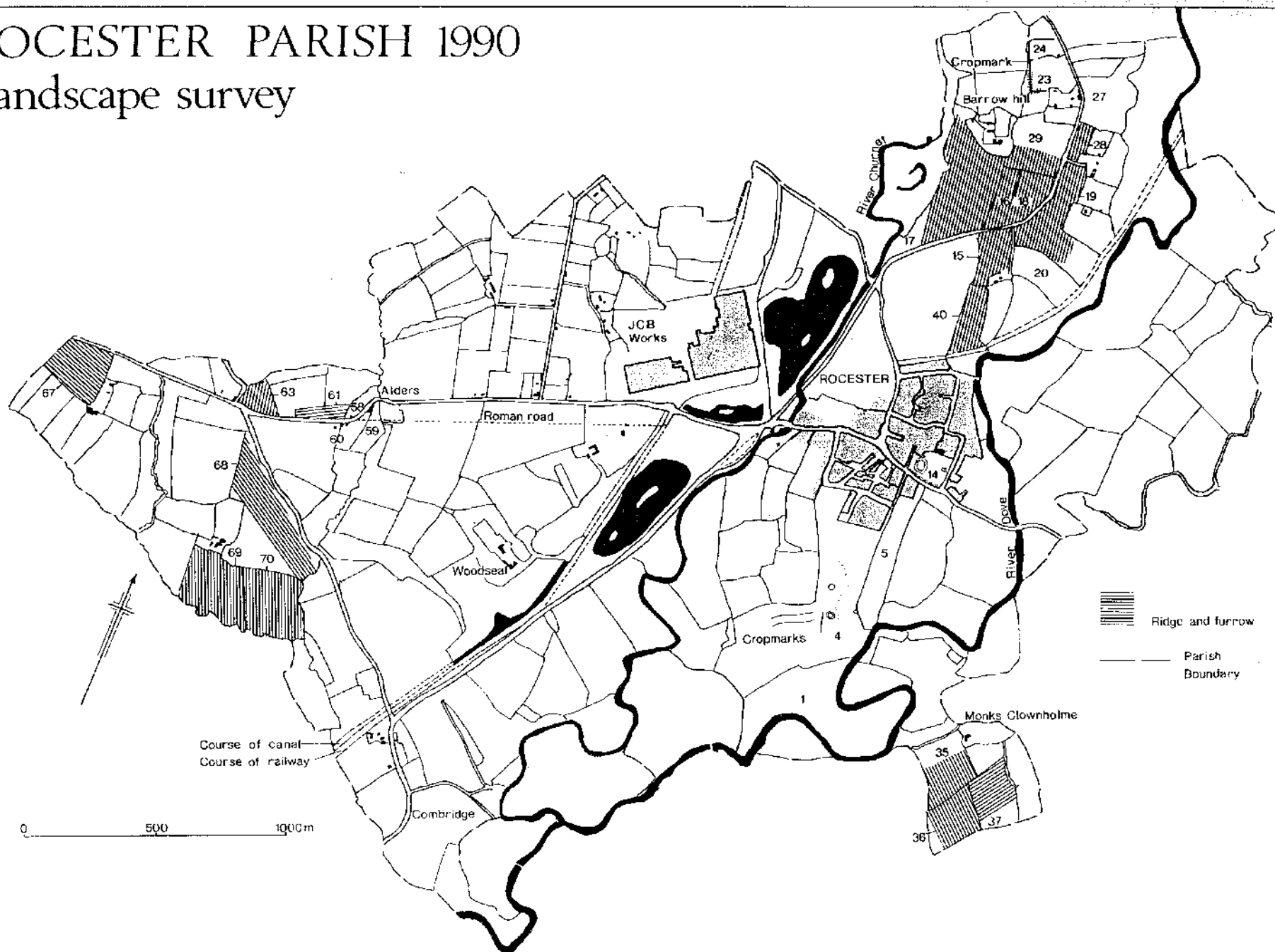


Fig. 2