

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**FORMER MECO SITE, NORTHWAY LANE,  
TEWKESBURY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

An Archaeological Desk-top Assessment 1995

by  
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## 1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological desk-top assessment undertaken in advance of proposed redevelopment at Northway Lane, Ashchurch near Tewkesbury (hereafter referred to as the study area: Fig. 2). The study area currently contains offices and industrial units.

No archaeological structures or deposits were suggested by any of the records or maps that were consulted. However, the geological maps of the area suggest that the second terrace sands and gravels extend into the study area. This type of geology is known as a focus of activity in the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, and a number of sites have been recorded in the vicinity. However, more detailed borehole surveys indicate that the majority of the site geology is in fact characterised by clay. A site inspection also suggested that considerable landscaping associated with the construction of the existing industrial buildings has occurred. Consequently, it is felt that the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits in the study area is low.

## 2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological desk-top assessment of an area containing a number of offices and industrial units, located at Northway Lane, Ashchurch, near Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire (NGR SO92403355: Figs. 1 to 3). The work was commissioned in November 1995 by Bayley Donaldsons Chartered Surveyors, on behalf of Caradon Doors and Windows Ltd, and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for a desk-top assessment was made by the County Archaeology Office of Gloucestershire County Council. The methodology of this evaluation conforms to a brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office of Gloucestershire County Council.

The desk-top assessment involved the consultation of primary documentary and cartographic sources held at the Gloucestershire Records Office, as well as an examination of the archive held at the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Sites of historical significance within one kilometre of the study area were examined, setting the study area into its local context. Secondary and published sources were also consulted.

This report also examines the records and conclusions from two independent borehole reports, Wardell Armstrong (February 1995) and Aspinwall and Company (June 1995). These borehole studies were conducted to assess the environmental liabilities resulting from the former use of the study area as a Bronze Plating Works and Effluent Treatment Plant. A site visit was made on November 24th 1995.

### 3.0: THE STUDY AREA AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The study area is located approximately 2.4km to the east of Tewkesbury and approximately 16km north of Gloucester, on the northwest periphery of Ashchurch (Fig.2). Immediately to the southeast of the study area is Northway Lane, beyond which is the Bristol to Birmingham railway line. The line of the former Ashchurch, Tewkesbury and Malvern Railway lies immediately to the south. Land to the north has been developed for housing.

The British Geological Survey (sheet 216, 1988) indicates the drift geology in southern half of the study area as consisting of second terrace sands and gravel. This type of geology typically exhibits intense archaeological activity. Archaeological sites identified to the south and southwest of the study area (Fig. 2) indicate that the area has been a focus for settlement from the prehistoric period onwards. A number of ditches aligned north-south, located approximately 0.3km southwest of the study area, are of possible Romano-British origin. Other finds include quantities of Romano-British pottery, probably from the 2nd-3rd centuries, and two human inhumations (SMR No. 13980). These features probably represent outlying enclosures and a small cemetery belonging to the Romano-British settlement observed during the construction of the M5 (SMR No. 5481).

Two evaluations in 1992 identified further possible settlements. Occupation debris of probable Iron Age date was recovered (SMR No. 13981) approximately 0.9km to the south of the study area. Slightly to the west of this pits and gullies were identified which may represent prehistoric occupation (SMR No. 13982). A number of cropmarks have also been noted in the vicinity of the study area. Approximately 0.6km to the west of the study area the Sites and Monuments Record indicates the presence of a cluster of rectangular enclosures. Further cropmarks are recorded approximately 1.0km to the southeast of the study area (SMR No. 6344 ). To the northeast of the study area are a system of rectangular earthworks, identified from aerial photographs (SMR No. 6345 ). A summary of sites of archaeological interest registered on the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record are listed in Appendix 1 of this report, and their locations indicated on Figure 2.

During the Middle Ages Ashchurch was incorporated as part of the parish of Tewkesbury. As part of Tewkesbury Manor, Ashchurch established its independence soon after the dissolution. From the late 15th century onwards the parish was divided into four separate tithings, the boundaries each roughly a quarter of the parish.

For most of its history Ashchurch appears to have been agricultural, as suggested by the tithe map of 1841. Also much of the pasture in the parish of Ashchurch, recorded in the Victoria County History (Vol VIII, 1966), shows evidence of ridge and furrow ploughing, not only in areas where land had been enclosed in the early 19th century but also where it had been enclosed previously. It therefore seems likely that the study area has been used as arable farm land since the medieval period. Newton, lying approximately 0.3km to the south of the study area was established by A.D.1004, and was probably a small group of houses not noted as a township (V.C.H. Vol VIII, p 172). Lying approximately 0.5km north of the study area, Northway was recorded as a township from A.D.1205. The parish church of Ashchurch was established by A.D.1145.

The Bristol to Birmingham railway line was opened to Cheltenham in June 1840, and to Gloucester 5 months later. There was a branch line to Tewkesbury (adjacent to the southern boundary of the study area, tithe map Fig. 4), horse worked from Ashchurch (SMR 11268). This branch line to Tewkesbury was closed in 1964.

#### **4:0 CURRENT LAND USE**

The study area currently consists of brick built offices, and industrial/factory units constructed from a variety of materials including brick, steel and asbestos (Fig. 3). Much of the remainder of the study area is comprised of hard standing, of either concrete or tarmac. It was noted that the hard standing towards the rear of the study area was approximately 1.1m below the level of the gardens adjacent to the study area (immediately to the north, belonging to properties on Fairway and Ash Road). This may be the result of a levelling down and terracing of the site during the construction of offices and factory space in the middle and northeastern sections of the study area. A distinct difference in ground level is also evident between units 10 and 24 (Figs. 6 and 7), which may also represent some former levelling or terracing of the study area.

#### **5:0 GEOLOGY**

Published geological plans show the solid geology within the study area as lower lias clays of the Jurassic period (British Geological Survey sheet 216, 1988). These deposits are overlain in the southern half of the study area by second terrace sands and gravel associated with the River Avon. These drift deposits of sands and gravel appear as a continuous band approximately 0.3km wide to the south of the study area.

Two borehole studies of the study area were conducted for the purposes of determining the extent of the contamination (in particular cyanide and bronze) caused by the former use of the site as a Bronze Plating Works and Effluent Treatment Plant. The first by Wardell Armstrong (February 1995) was concentrated within the main area of the Bronze Plating Works in unit 24 (Fig. 3). This highlighted the principal areas of contamination within the effluent plant, the plating shop and areas of drainage. Examination of the borehole logs from this report indicate the geology within the vicinity of the Bronze Plating Works (towards the middle of the study area), consists entirely of clay. This was generally overlain by approximately 0.45m of made ground (hardcore and concrete).

The second borehole report by Aspinwall and Company (June 1995) encompassed more of the study area and indicated that the underlying solid geology across the entire site was lower lias clay. Some drift deposits were evident in the southwest corner of the site. However, these appeared as irregular pockets of sand and gravel rather than a continuous band of river terrace gravels indicated by the British Geological Survey sheet No. 216. Examination of the borehole logs generally show lower lias clays overlain by made ground (hardcore and concrete) at depths of between 0.5m and 0.7m.

#### **6:0 CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE**

The Tithe Map and awards for the parish of Ashchurch, dated to 1841 (Fig. 4), indicates that the study area was owned by a Mr John Pugh. This encompasses the western half of a field formerly known as "part of Farm Leasow" (Tithe award No. 113), and the whole of a rectilinear field formerly known as "Middle Ground" (Tithe award No 114). The two fields are shown divided by a small stream, the Northway Brook, aligned northeast-southwest. The land use of the study area at this time is described as pasture. Along the eastern side of Field 113 is what appears to be a small trackway. Aligned north-south along the side of the Birmingham to Bristol Railway, this trackway continues to the junction with the Ashchurch, Tewkesbury and Malvern Railway, possibly providing an access

between Northway and the main Ashchurch Road, before the construction of Northway Lane.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1882-83 (Fig.5) shows that there were no changes to the western field (114). The eastern field (113) shows the development of Northway Lane with the addition of railway sidings and buildings to the east. An ovoid feature on the line of the Northway brook, possibly a former pond, is also depicted. The 1923 Third Edition Ordnance Survey map suggests that no significant changes occurred in the study area between 1882 and 1923. Development of the study area began in the field to the east of the Northway Brook during the 1940s, with development to the west of the Northway brook occurring in the late 1950s/early 1960s.

No cropmarked sites or other sites of archaeological interest were identified within the study area during a search at the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record. The absence of any archaeological information from aerial photographs is perhaps not surprising given the fact that the whole of the study area had been developed by the early 1960s.

## **7.0: DISCUSSION**

The desk top survey was not able to provide any direct evidence for the survival of archaeological deposits or structures within the study area. However, a number of archaeological sites are known on the sands and gravels to the south of the site including a possible small Romano-British cemetery and features of possible Iron Age date. In fact this type of geology is known as a focus for archaeological activity particularly from the prehistoric and the Romano-British periods. According to the British Geological Survey, a similar drift geology of second terrace sands and gravels appears to extend into the southern half of the study area. By contrast, the more detailed geological information provided by the borehole surveys, suggest that the gravel deposits are not very extensive within the study area and only appear as small pockets (Wardell Armstrong, February 1995, and Aspinwall and Company, June 1995). Most of this area appears to be characterised by clays. This would suggest that the study area lies on the very edge, or just beyond the edge, of the gravel terrace. However, there remains a possibility that potential archaeological sites could extend into the clay areas where they are less likely to be visible on aerial photographs.

The current industrial buildings on the site appear to date from between the 1940s and 1960s. A visual inspection of the site indicated that the construction of these buildings involved a considerable amount of landscaping. Much of the northern part of the site appears to have been terraced with the former ground surface lowered, possibly by as much as 1.0m, in the vicinity of Unit 10 (Fig. 7). Many of the borehole logs also indicate a considerable depth of make-up deposits (between 0.5m and 0.7m) including hardcore and concrete. In addition, numerous pipelines and other service trenches are likely to criss-cross the site. It seems unlikely that any substantial archaeological deposits would have survived this degree of truncation and disturbance.

## **8.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This project was commissioned by Bayley Donaldsons Chartered Surveyors, on behalf of Caradon Doors and Windows Ltd. The desk-top assessment was researched by Richard Cuttler. The report was edited by Gwilym Hughes, and the drawings prepared by Nigel Dodds.

## 9.0: REFERENCES

Aspinwall and Company, June 1995 Assessment of environmental liabilities.

British Geological Survey, Solid and Drift Edition, Tewkesbury Sheet 216, 1:50,000, Published 1988.

Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 5, 1:250,000, Published 1980.

Victoria County History of Gloucestershire, Vol. VIII, 1966.

Wardell Armstrong, February 1995. Longwall International Limited, Bronze Plating Plant, Ashchurch Phase 1 Report. Ref. No. SSH/GA/BK/WM1047

### *Maps referred to.*

1841 Tithe Map for the Parish of Ashchurch, by Robert Page, 4 Chains to 1 inch. Illustrated as Figure 4.

1882-83 (surveyed), First Edition, 1 to 10,560. Illustrated as Figure 5.

1923 Third Edition 25 inch, (not illustrated).

1924, 1 to 10,560, (not illustrated).

1955, 1 to 10,560. Illustrated as Figure 6.

1967, 1 to 2500, (not illustrated).

1968 (surveyed in 1955 and revised in 1968), 1 to 10,560, (not illustrated).

1972, 1 to 10,000. Illustrated as Figure 2.

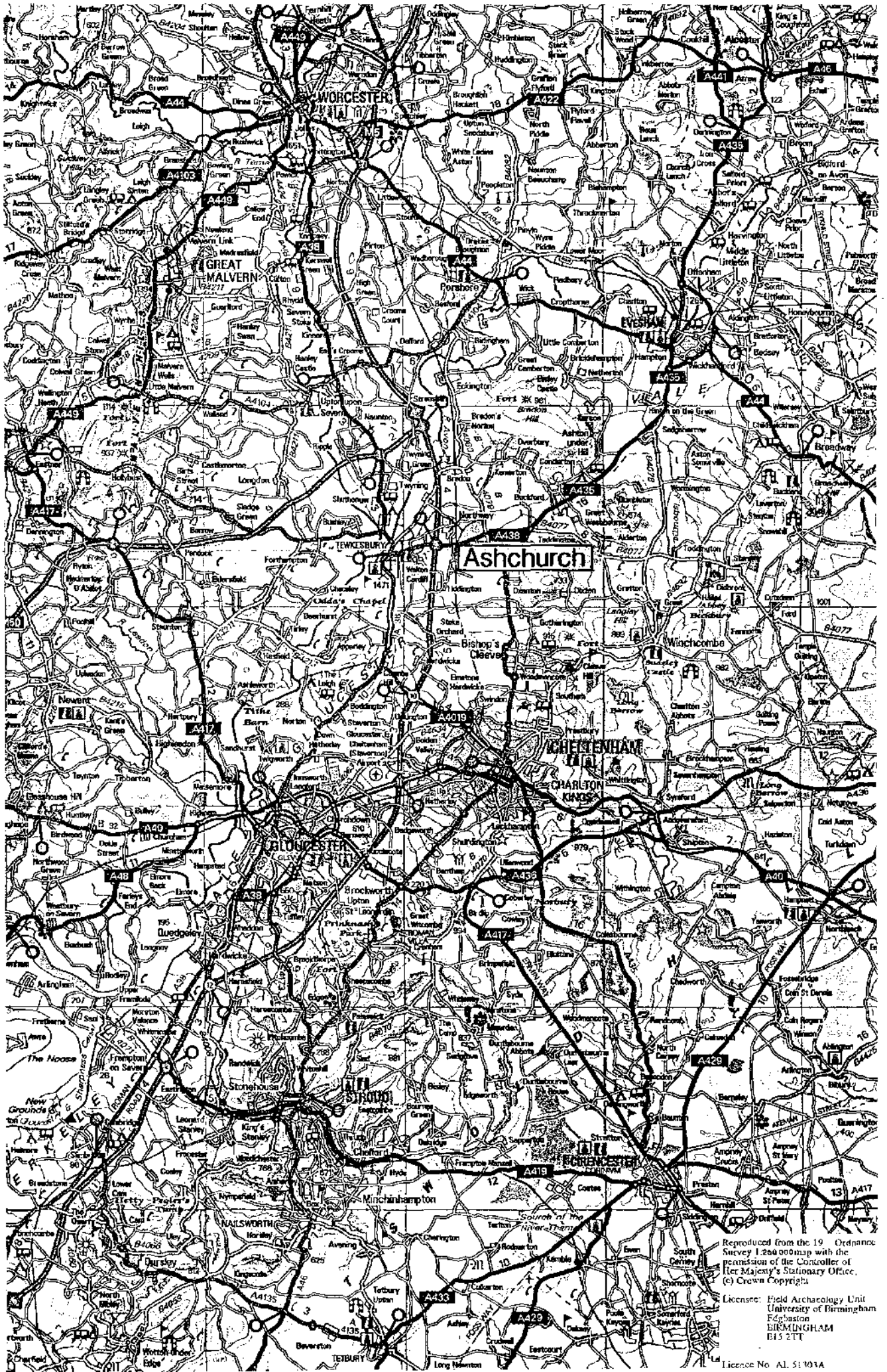
1984, 1 to 2,500. Illustrated as Figure 3.

## APPENDIX 1

### Sites and Monuments Record, Summary Report.

- SMR No. 4718 Possible moat.
- SMR No. 4719 Moated site - Northway Farm.
- SMR No. 5477 Moat - Cowfield Farm.
- SMR No. 5478 St Nicholas Church Aschurch.
- SMR No. 5481 Probable Romano-British Settlement.
- SMR No. 5483 Level crossing keepers house.
- SMR No. 5485 Romano-British pottery find.
- SMR No. 6340 Shrunken village.
- SMR No. 6343 Cluster of rectangular cropmarks.
- SMR No. 6344 Cropmark.
- SMR No. 6345 Rectangular earthworks.
- SMR No. 7582 Cowfield Mill.
- SMR No. 8506 The Feathers, field names.
- SMR No. 8507 Curborough field names.
- SMR No. 8509 The Parks field name.
- SMR No. 8759 Carantes Mill.
- SMR No. 8760 Town Close field name.
- SMR No. 11268 The Birmingham and Gloucester Railway.
- SMR No. 13979 Archaeological Evaluation.
- SMR No. 13980 Romano-British deposits.
- SMR No. 13981 Possible Iron Age occupation.
- SMR No. 13982 Possible pre-historic remains.
- SMR No. 15008 Cowfield Farm barn.



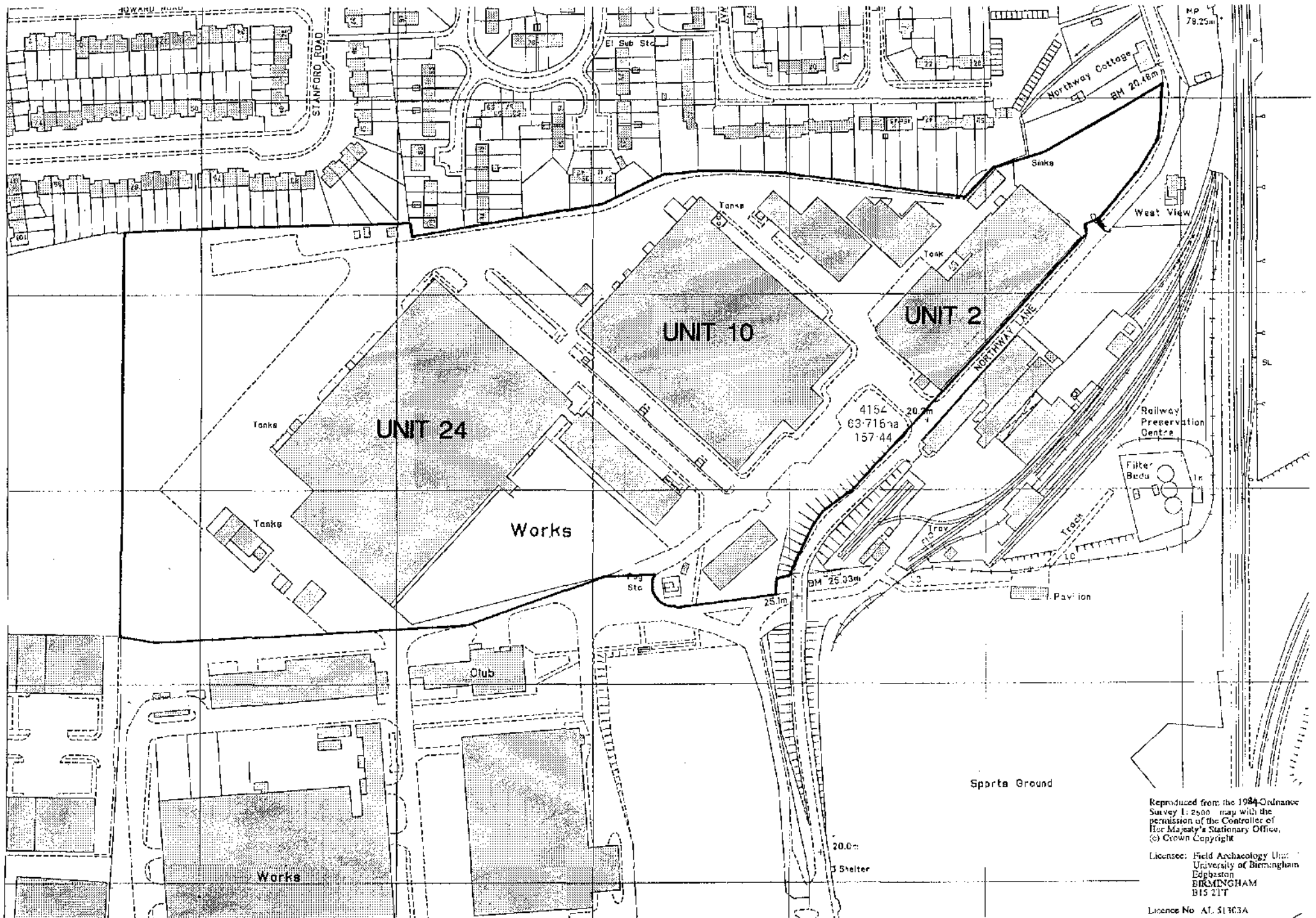


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FIG.1.



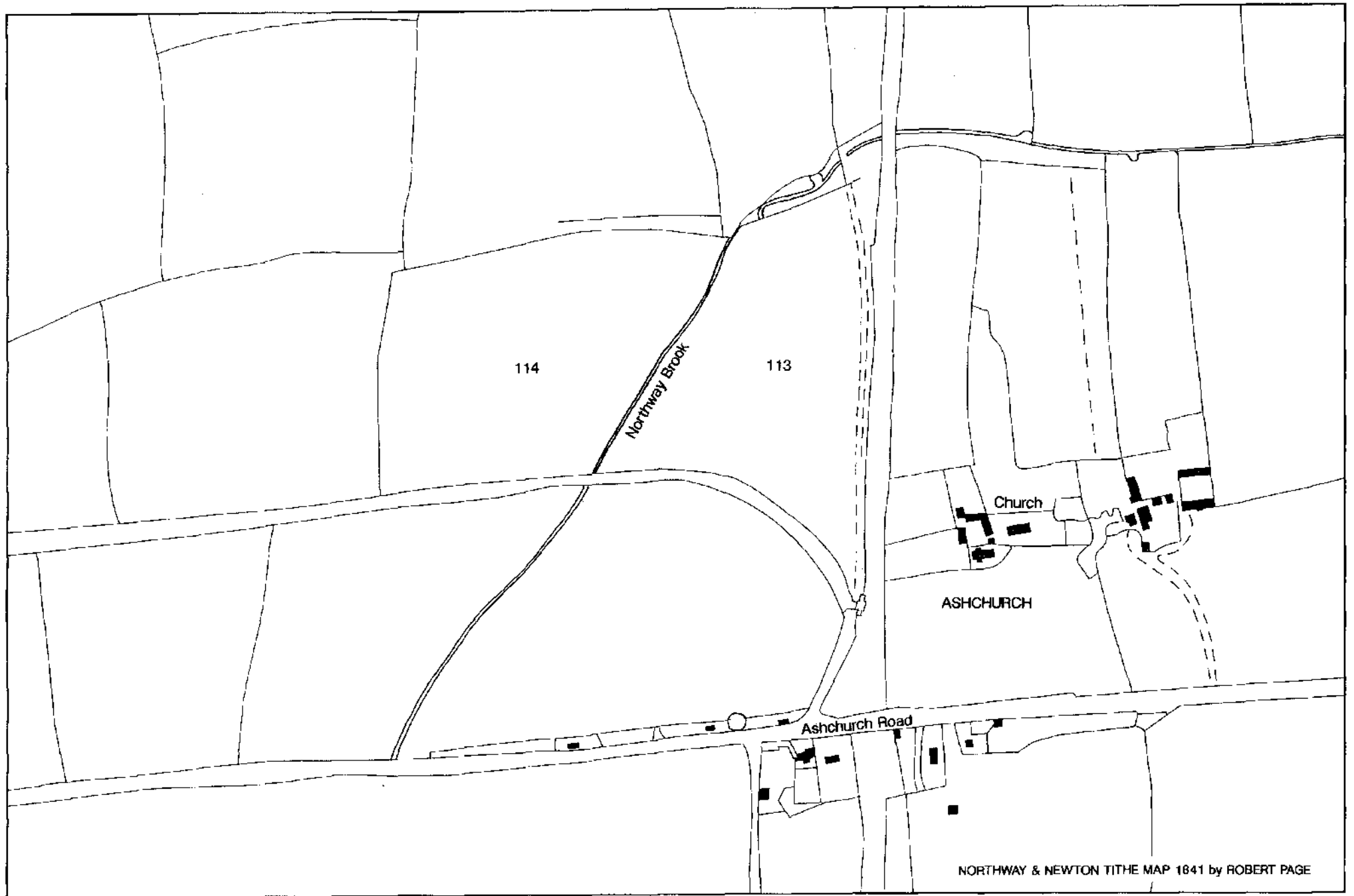


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FIG 2



NORTHWAY & NEWTON TITHE MAP 1841 by ROBERT PAGE

FIG.4

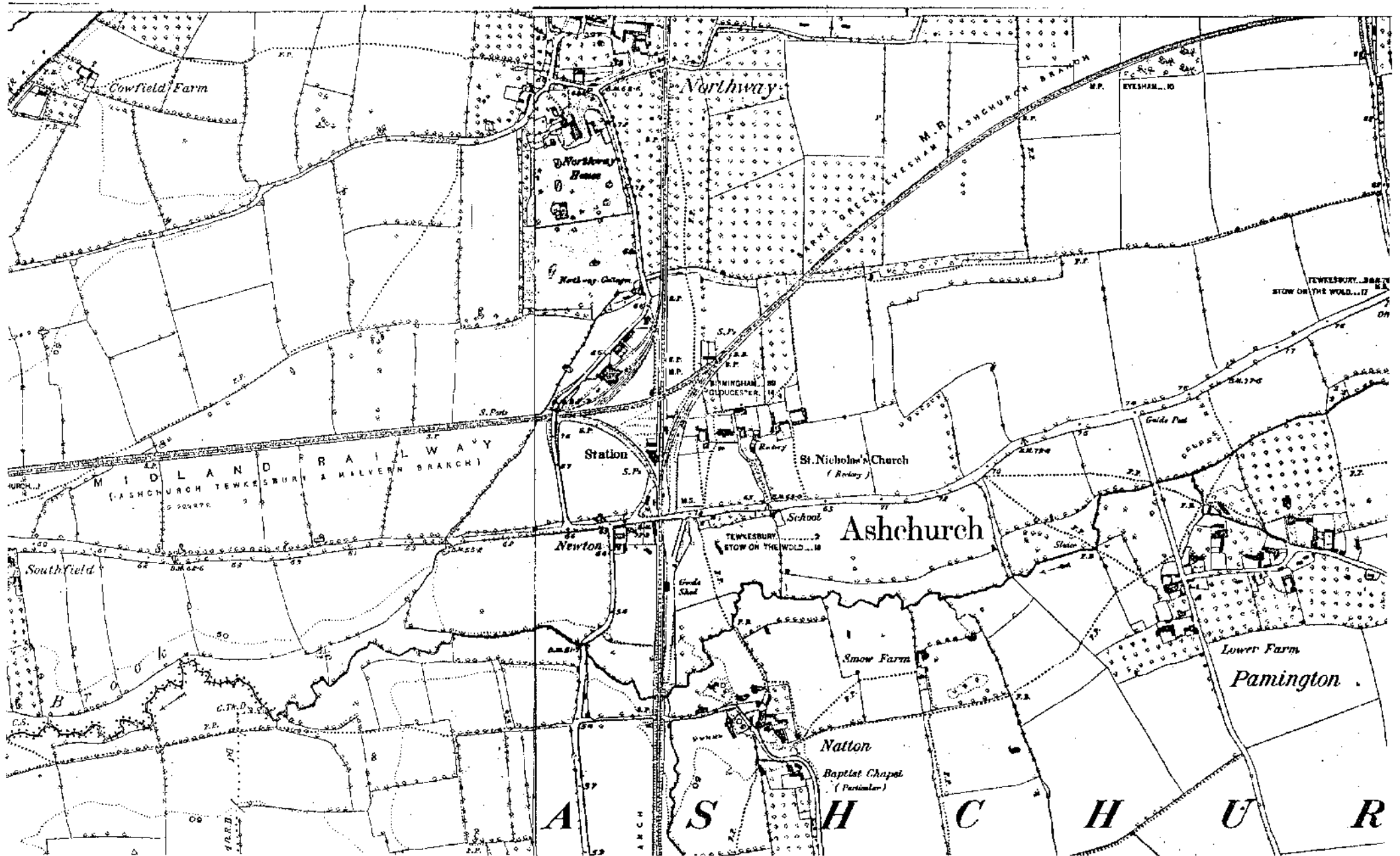
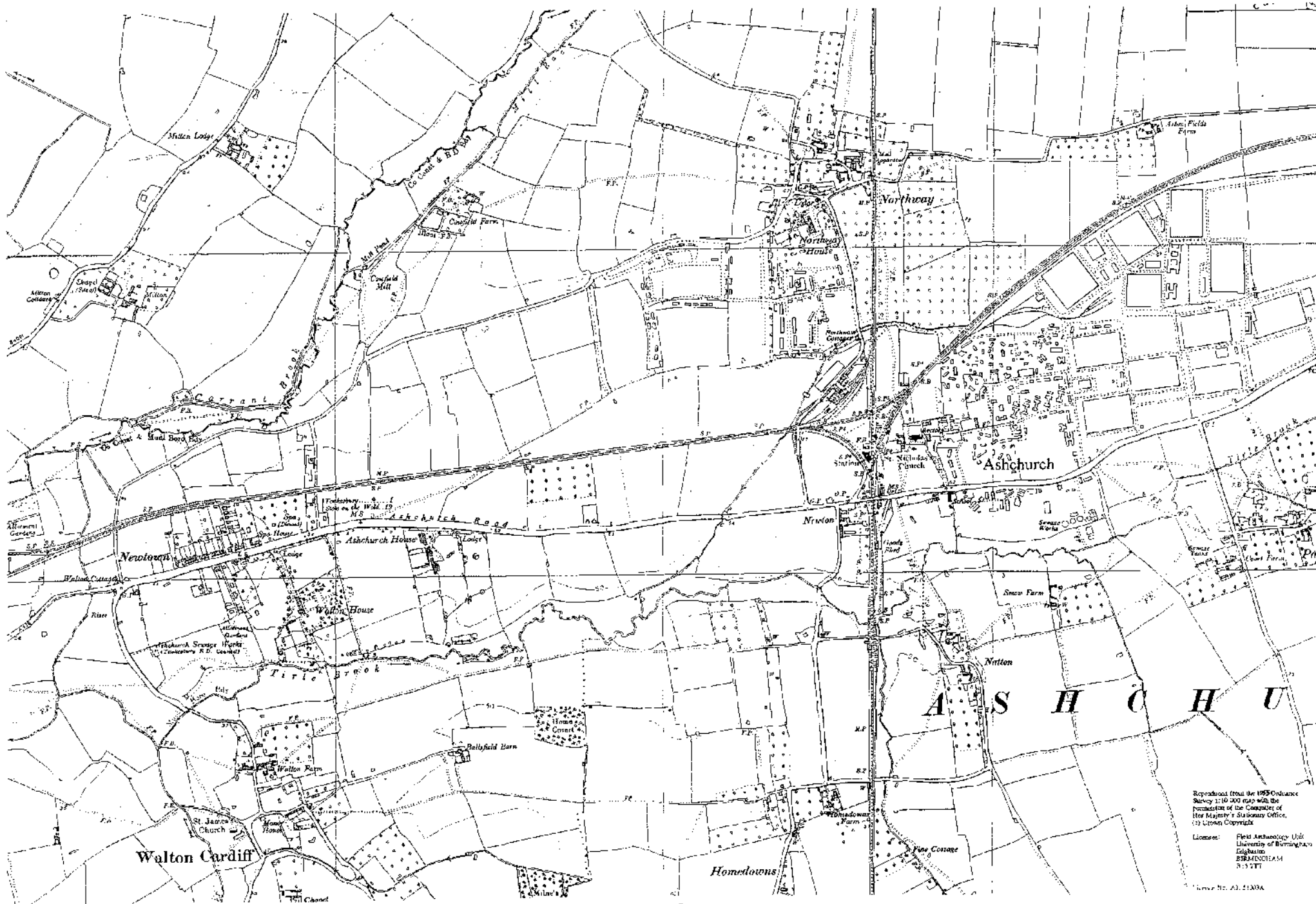


FIG.5



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FIG.6

