LAND AT LOWER WARSTONE FARM, WARSTONE, STAFFORDSHIRE.

An Archaeological Desk-top Assessment 1996

1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological desk-top assessment of a possible medieval moated site, undertaken in advance of proposed mineral extraction at Lower Warstone Farm, Warstone, Staffordshire, (hereafter referred to as the study area: Fig. 2).

Although the morphology of the site is suggestive of a possible medieval moat, photographic, cartographic, and documentary sources suggest this feature is of recent origin possibly associated with drainage.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological desk-top assessment of a large pond with a central island located at Lower Warstone Farm, Warstone, in Staffordshire (NGR SJ92403355: Figs. 1 and 2). The work was commissioned in February 1996 by Baggeridge Brick PLC and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

A planning application for the extraction of clay highlighted the presence of a large, rectangular, man-made pond with a central island. The morphology of this is comparable to that of medieval moated sites, of which several are recorded in the locality by the Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record. In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for a desk-top assessment of the impact of planning proposals on the possible moated site and any associated features was made by the County Archaeology Office of Staffordshire County Council.

The desk-top assessment involved the consultation of primary documentary and cartographic sources held at the Staffordshire Records Office, as well as an examination of the archive held at the Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Aerial photographs held by Staffordshire County Council for planning purposes were also consulted (Appendix). 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. A visual inspection of the site was made on February 12th 1996.

3.0: THE STUDY AREA AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

"A moat is a wide, water-filled ditch partly or completely enclosing one or more islands of dry ground which provided the site for one or more buildings (domestic, religious or agricultural), or a site for horticulture, or for both. Moats may be situated in open countryside or within rural settlements".

(English Heritage 1988,4)

The study area is located in the parish of Saredon, approximately 3.5km to the southwest of Cannock and approximately 9km north of Wolverhampton (Fig.1). Immediately to the southeast of the study area is Lower Warstone Farm. The possible moated site occupies an area of low-lying ground in a valley with gradual decents from the northwest to the southeast. To the southwest of the study area a small watercourse forms the ancient boundary between the parishes of Saredon and Shareshill, part of the former Hundred of Cuttlestone (Eastern Division).

Little Saredon, to the south of the parish, appears in the Domesday book as Seresdon, assessed at a hide and held by Udi, a thane of King William who succeeded to the lands from Gamel after the Conquest (V.C.H. 1959, 176). Shareshill and Saredon formed part of the Royal forest of Cannock, which was under forest law between at least 1167 and 1301 (V.C.H. 1959, 178). This imposed strict legal controls prohibiting hunting, assarting and settlement. In 1290 the central area of the forest was granted to the Bishop of Coventry as a private chase presumably with strict ecclesiastical controls restricting settlement and land use (Larkham 1982, 13). The study area, however, was outside these ecclesiastical restraints and this may account for the clustering of moated sites on the fringes of the forest in areas such as Saredon parish.

Two moated sites are recorded within the immediate vicinity of the study area; one approximately 0.8km to the north (Holly Bush Farm: SJ 965064: SMR No. ST1083) and another approximately 1.3km to the southwest (Hilton Hall: SJ952052: SMR No. ST1690). A clustering of medieval moated sites is not unusual, and is often due to legal constraints and favourable geological conditions.

Current land use

The water course to the east of the study area appears to have been diverted into the 'moat' with the result that adjacent ground to the west is totally waterlogged, under approximately 15 to 20cm of water. The study area consists of a very wide, well defined 'moat', approximately 20m to 30m across. In the middle is a small central island, ovoid in shape, approximately 20m by 25m. Generally moats are usually not less than 4m wide and are rarely wider than 12m (Wilson 1985, 7). A width of over 20m would, therefore, be very unchacteristic for a medieval moated site. Similarly, although the sizes of central islands within recorded moated sites vary greatly from one site to another, the dimensions of the island in the study area would appear to be unusually small. No internal platform characteristic of some later medieval moated sites was evident. Any further inspection of the central island would require a boat to facilitate access.

The moat has an external rampart on three sides. This is in the form of a bank approximately 1.5m high and 3m wide, which is clearly up-cast from the 'moat'. This bank is located approximately 3m back from the edge of the 'moat', and has been planted with a variety of deciduous trees approximately 20 to 25 years old. No boundaries of 'ancient hedgerow' enclosing the study area could be identified. Older field boundaries (evident on the 1754 estates map: Fig.4) to the northeast of the study area, however, form a 'dog-leg' which appears to take account of the northeast corner of the 'moat'.

4:0 GEOLOGY

The wide variety within the geology of South Staffordshire is largely due to drift from the last glaciation ending some 10,000 years ago, with a complex of deposits representing moraines, elskers and boulder clay. Published geological plans show

the solid geology within the study area as Etruria marl of the Carboniferous period (Geological Survey 1921). Moats occur mainly in the lowland areas of Britain, usually in areas with heavy clay subsoils and are normally filled by either streams or seepage. In areas of limestone, sandstone and gravels, moats are more infrequent and often require lining with clay to prevent the water in the moat from draining out. The geology of the area may explain, in part, the concentration of moated sites in the vicinity of the study area.

5:0 CARTOGRAPHIC AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

Yates' map of 1775 shows no settlement or site in the study area, recording the settlement at Warstone as Whorestones. The Tithe Map for the parish of Shareshill, dated to 1841 (not illustrated), indicates that the study area was owned by a Lord Hatherton. The moated site at Hollybush Hall is illustrated on this Tithe Map, with Warstone recorded as Worston. Unfortunately the study area was not mapped during the compilation of the 1841 Tithe Map, recording simply that the land belonged to the estates of Lord Hatherton. The earlier map of the Estates of Lord Hatherton, by M. Myatt 1754 (Fig.4), describes the study area as meadow, with adjacent fields entitled Well Leasow, The Boggs, Near Bank and Berwicks Leasow. No record of a moated site is made on the 1754 estates plan, although the function of estate plans was to facilitate the payment of rents, and field monuments are rarely recorded. No field monuments are illustrated on the 1820 Ordnance Survey 1 inch series.

The 1882 First Edition Ordnance Survey records both moated sites at Hilton Hall and Holly Bush Hall (Fig.3). No record is made of a moated site within the study area. It may possibly be that the study area was not identified as a field monument at this time. The 'moat' is, however, very substantial and it seems likely that had it not been recognised as a moated site, some record would have been made of it as a pond.

Later Ordnance Survey sheets (1903, 1921 and 1966) make no record of the presence of a moated platform or any similar features.

The examination of vertical aerial photographs from 1963 suggests that the study area was then woodland and scrub. In 1971, possibly due to vegetation, little can be discerned of the presence of the 'moat'. Aerial photographs from 1981 show a complete clearance of the area had been undertaken during the 1970s, possibly coinciding with the planting of trees currently on the periphery of the moat.

6.0: DISCUSSION

The location of medieval sites in lowland areas, and the geology of the study area might suggest this as a favourable location for this class of monument. The stream to the southeast provides a water source for the 'moat'. An inspection of the site, however, has revealed it to be poorly drained and very waterlogged. In view of the fact that no platform exists on the central island, it seems likely that any settlement would have experienced problems from flooding. This tends to imply that the island is unlikely to have been constructed for either domestic or agricultural purposes.

The general morphology of the site, being a very wide 'moat' with a small central island is not characteristic of medieval moated sites. The use of up-cast to construct an external rampart on three sides of a moat has been recorded on a number of sites (Smyth 1994, 5). However, since the bank is situated away from the edges of the

'moat' it seems unlikely that this is up-cast resulting from a hand-dug moat, where the banks would normally be located on the immediate outer edge of the moat. This would appear to concur with the cartographic sources which show no evidence of the feature on any plan prior to, and including the 1966 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey map. It seems unlikely that such a substantial feature would have been overlooked, with no record made of its presence prior to 1966 were it constructed during the medieval period.

7.0: IMPLICATIONS

As it seems very probable that the origins of this feature are recent rather than medieval, further archaeological investigation within the study area is not recommended.

8.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was commissioned by Baggeridge Brick PLC and researched by Richard Cuttler for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The report was edited by Steve Litherland, and the drawings prepared by Nigel Dodds.

9.0: REFERENCES

English Heritage 1988 *Monuments Protection Programme: Single Monument Class Description: Moats*

Larkham, P.J., 1982-1983 *Moated Sites in South Staffordshire. South Staffordshire Archaeological and History Society Transactions, Volume XXIV*

Roberts, B.K., 1965 *Moated Sites in Middle England, TBAS Vol 80, p26-37.*

Smyth, G.P., 1994 *Medieval Moated Sites in Warwickshire, M.A. Thesis, University of Birmingham*

Victoria County History of Staffordshire, *Vol. I, 1908.*

Victoria County History of Staffordshire, *Vol. V, 1959.*

Wilson, D., 1985 *Moated Sites, Shire Archaeology: 44, Shire Publications Ltd.*

Maps referred to.

1754 Plan of the Estates of Lord Hatherton, by M. Myatt.

1775 A Map of the County of Stafford, by William Yates

1820 Ordnance Survey 1 inch (including 2 inch original rough-outs held at the Staffordshire County Records Office)

1821 A Survey of Staffordshire by C. Greenwood.

1841 Tithe Map for the Parish of Saredon, by Thomas Peace.

1882-83 (surveyed), Ordnance Survey First Edition, 1:10,560.

1903 Ordnance Survey Second Edition, 1:10,560.

1921, Ordnance Survey Geological Sheet, 1:10,560.

1966, Ordnance Survey, 1:2,500.

1966, Ordnance Survey, 1:10,000.

APPENDIX

Aerial photographs consulted from a collection at the Staffordshire County Planning Office

Reference	*Date*	*Scale*
HSL UK 6362	June 1963	1:10,560
139/71/103	Oct 1971	1:12,000
32/81	Feb 1981	1:10,000
136/91/121	Sept 1991	1:10,000

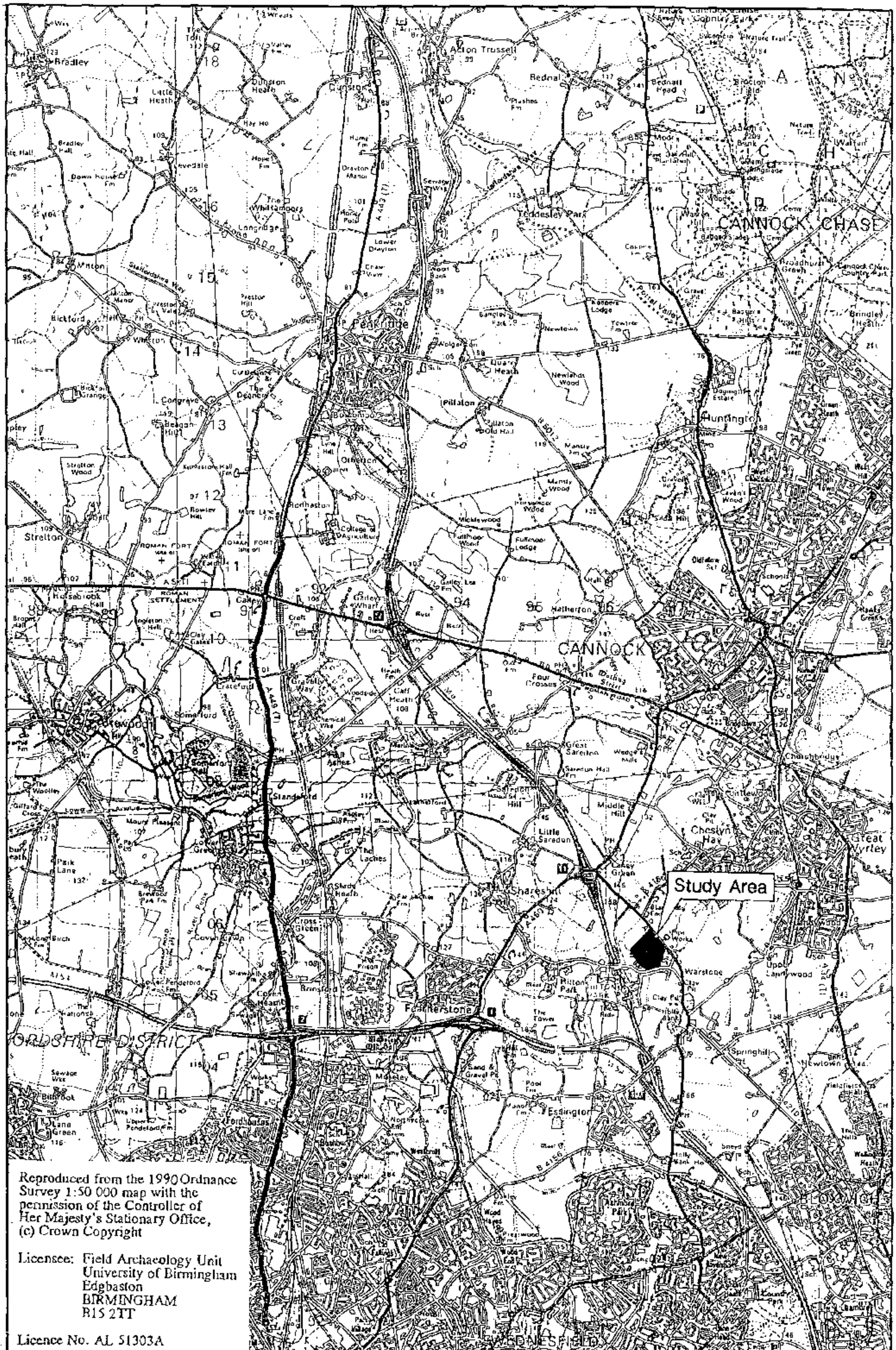


Figure 1

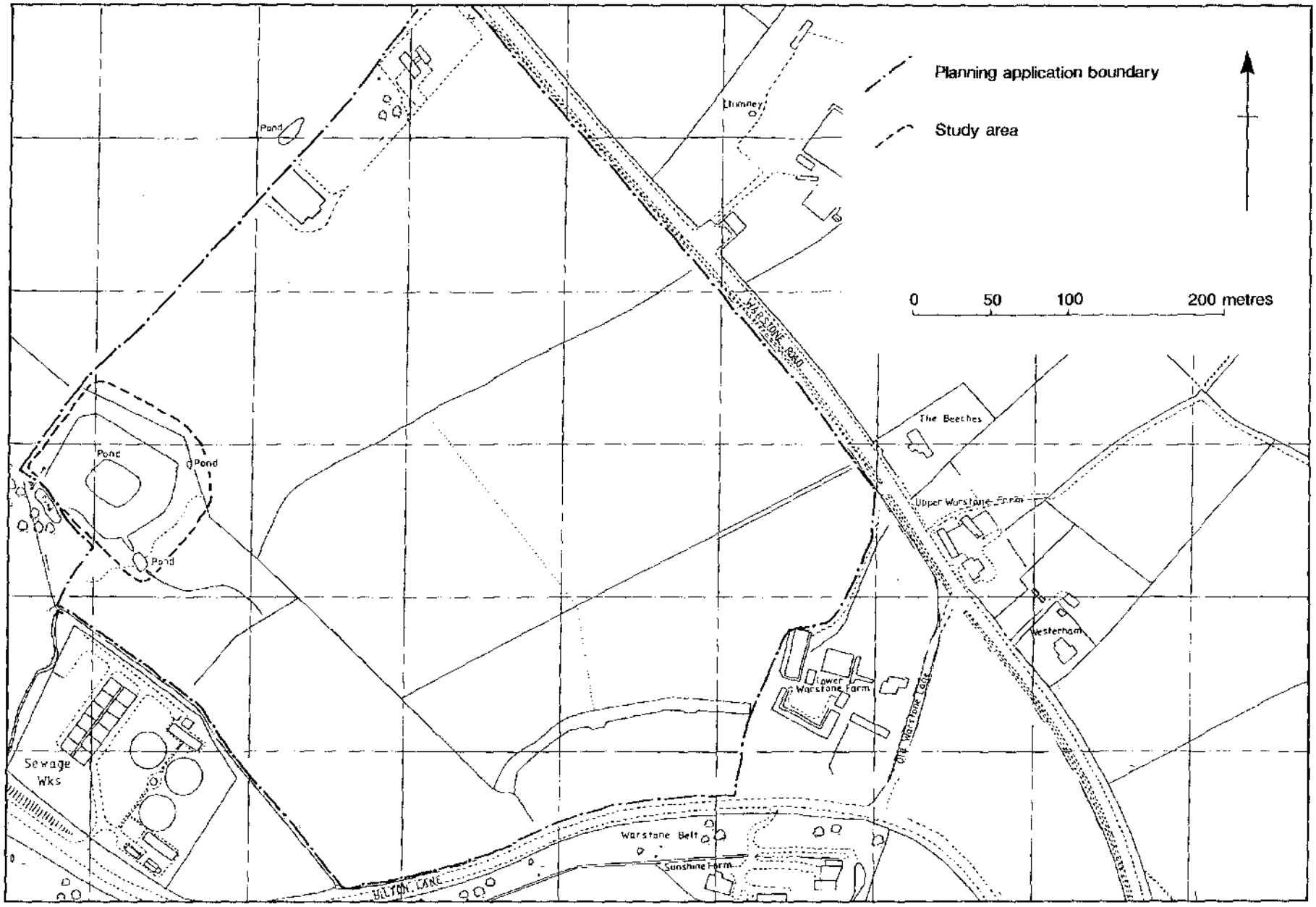
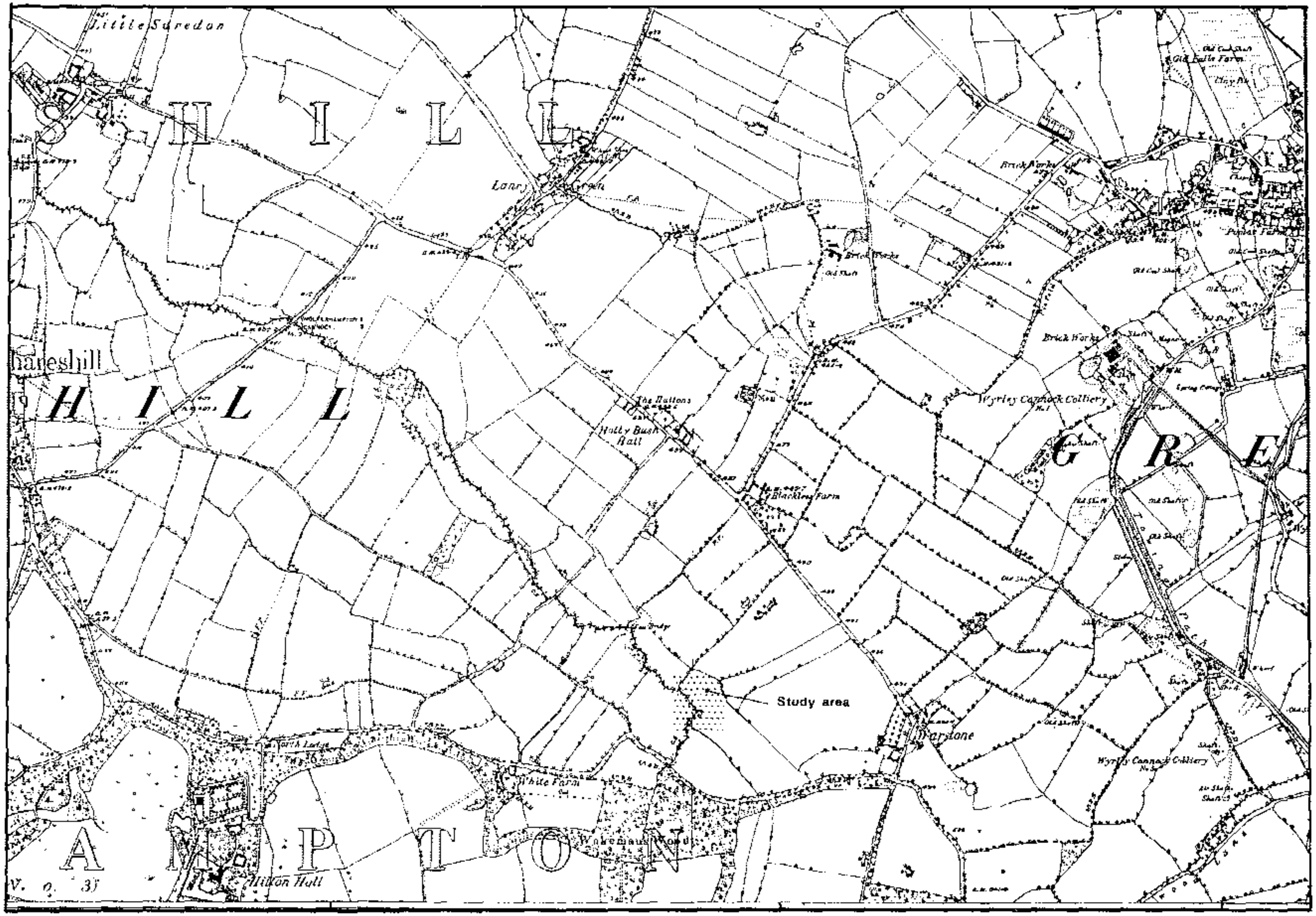


Figure 2



Little Saredon
SHILL
Lanry Green
Brick Works
Old Falls Farm
Clay Pit
Brick Works
Brick Works
Wyrley Cannock Colliery
Shareshill
HILL
The Huttons
Holly Bush Hall
Blackley Farm
GRE
Study area
Warstone
North Lodge
White Farm
Wyrley Cannock Colliery
Hilton Hall
AMPTON

Figure 3

Reproduced from the 1754 map of the estates of Lord Hatherstone by M. Myatt

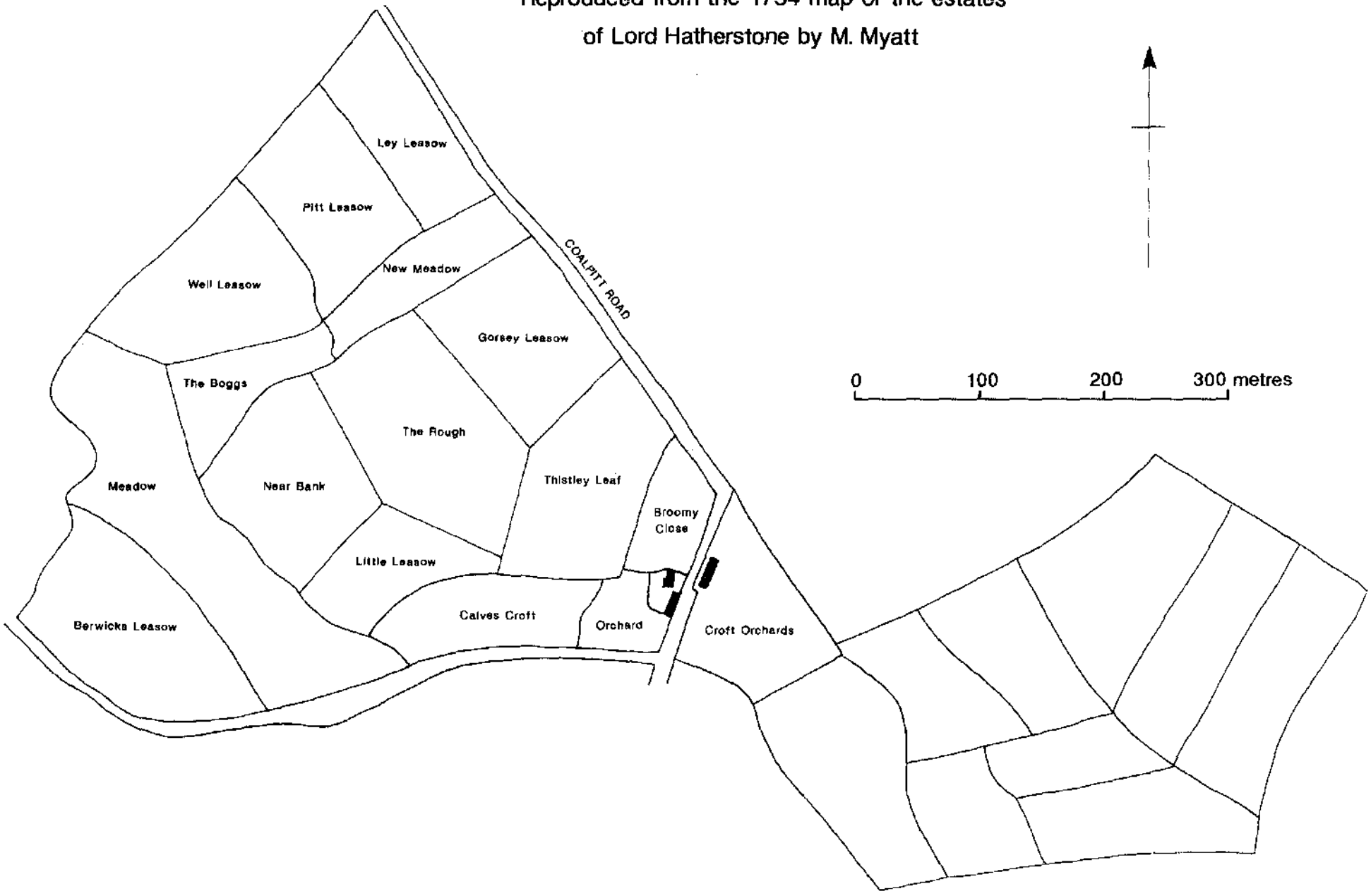


Figure 4