

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological
Desk-Based Assessment at Embleton Grove,
Buckland End, Birmingham:
Site of Coleford Moat**

B.U.F.A.U.



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**An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
at Embleton Grove, Buckland End, Birmingham:
Site of Coleford Moat**

by
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Summary

A desk-based assessment, commissioned by Birmingham City Council was carried out ahead of proposed development of land at Embleton Grove, Buckland End, Birmingham, the site of Coleford Moat. The assessment examined the available documentary, cartographic and photographic evidence and identified potential surviving below-ground archaeological remains.

1 Introduction

The following report outlines the results of a desk-based study undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in June 1999 at Buckland End, Birmingham (SP 142 886 - Figure 1). The work was commissioned by Birmingham City Council's Housing Department, ahead of a proposal to demolish existing housing in Embleton Grove and the surrounding estate and redevelop the area with new houses. The proposed development area includes the site of Coleford Moat (SMR 02965) and any development in the area of the moated site may result in the disturbance of buried archaeological remains. This assessment follows a brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council (Appendix), and adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

2 Site Location

The site of the moat is located at the southeastern end of Embleton Grove and is residential in character, currently occupied by houses surrounding an oval grassed area. To the southeast of the site of the moat, the River Cole runs through a large playing field/open space.

3 Objectives

The assessment is intended to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains relating to Coleford Moat, in order to assess the impact of the development proposals upon such remains, and aid the formulation of appropriate mitigation measures. More specifically, the assessment aims to determine:

- 1 The precise location of Coleford Moat in relation to existing features, as accurately as possible from its representation on historic maps.
- 2 The likely effect of the construction of the existing houses and roads on archaeological remains of the moat, the platform and features under the platform.

- 3 The potential survival of organic remains in the infilled moat.
- 4 The expected form of archaeological remains, by comparison with other moated sites.
- 5 The potential of the site to contribute to an understanding of the historic development of this part of Birmingham.

4 Methodology

The assessment consisted of a search of published and unpublished written records, maps and photographic sources, held by the Birmingham SMR and Birmingham Reference Library. The archive for an ongoing research project into moated sites in the West Midlands by BUFAU was also consulted. All sources of information used have been listed at the end of the report. A field inspection of the site of the moat was also undertaken. Historic maps consulted have been included in the report (Figures 2 - 7), and the precise location of the moat was determined as accurately as possible by scaling historic maps up to the same scale as modern maps.

5 Geology and Topography

The land in the area of Embleton Grove is low-lying and relatively flat. The geology consists of Keuper Marl, with some areas of glacial sand and gravel, as well as narrow alluvial deposits next to the River Cole. The River Cole is a relatively minor waterway, with most of its tributaries being little more than streamlets. However, it is sizeable enough to form a barrier to travel, making crossing places such as that at Coleford of some significance.

6 Archaeological and 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 for horticulture, or for both. Moats may be situated in open countryside or within rural settlements."

(English Heritage 1988, 4)

Moated sites form probably one of the most significant and numerous classes of monuments within the West Midlands. It has been estimated that there are about five and a half to six thousand moated sites in Britain, and around two hundred in the West Midlands County (Litherland 1994). The function of moats is a much debated topic, with suggestions including defence, drainage, fishponds, fresh water sources and status symbols. A moat can surround a variety of structures, but most often they surround a manor house or a farmstead, and these homesteads were first and foremost dwelling areas (Nichol 1996).

Coleford Moat lay in the parish of Aston, very close to the southern border of the parish, which is demarcated by the River Cole. However, this extensive parish was broken up in the nineteenth century and most of the historical information pertinent to the Coleford area is included in documentation relating to Castle Bromwich. The area

lies on the edge of the historic, and once heavily wooded, Forest of Arden region of Warwickshire, which was subject to a vigorous colonizing movement between 1086 and 1350. It has been suggested that the concentration of moated sites in this region is linked to this late colonization (Roberts 1978, Nichol 1996).

7 Cartographic Evidence

A map of Hemlingford Hundred from 1725 (not illustrated) shows 'Coleford' marked as a crossing point over the River Cole, although the direction of the crossing does not seem to match up with the later road pattern. The earliest map depicting the moat itself is a survey of Castle Bromwich in 1802 by William Hitchcock Junior (a copy of this map is reproduced as Figure 2). The moat is depicted as a square enclosure to the northeast of the River Cole, sitting on a field boundary along the west side. The river crossing at Coleford, to the east, is also marked. Later maps based on Hitchcock's survey (Tucker) show the present day Bucklands End Lane as 'Magotty Lane' and the road from Buckland End to Cole Ford as 'Black Mire's Lane'. The accompanying details of this survey (Hitchcock 1802) list the field containing the moat as 'Moat Meadow' owned by William Thomlinson, and the field to the west, adjacent to the river, as 'Sweetmore Meadows' owned by Mr Henry Ward. It is significant that although much of this survey relates to the estates of Lord Bradford, these fields were clearly not owned by the Bradford Estate, and were listed in the particulars under the 'Abstract of Castle Bromwich' section and not the 'Abstract of Lord Bradford's Estate' section. This may well have implications for documentation levels.

A map of Aston from 1833 (Figure 3) shows the moat in more detail. It is still depicted as a square moat sitting on the same field boundary, but an entrance gap is clearly shown at the northeast corner. No buildings are depicted within or anywhere near the moat. The shape of the road from Bucknall End may be significant - it heads south towards the moat and then turns quite sharply eastwards to the river crossing point. The implication is that the road may once have branched at this point, with the western branch continuing all the way to the moat, presumably disappearing some time after the site was abandoned.

The moat is not depicted on the Aston Tithe Map and Apportionment from 1845 (Figure 4). By this time, the field where the moat once lay is still marked as 'Moat and Meadow' and is listed as being under pasture. No buildings are marked within this field. The field to the west, adjacent to the river, is now marked as an arable field called 'Brook Croft' and the field to the south is called 'Brook Meadow'.

The Ordnance Survey First Edition 25" map of 1888 (Figure 5) shows the same road and field pattern as the tithe map, and again the moat is no longer depicted. The Fourth Edition 25" map of 1938 (Figure 6) retains the same road and field pattern in the area of the moat as that of the nineteenth-century maps, but it also shows housing and other developments that still exist today. It is, therefore, a very useful map because it provides reference points between the 1833 map depicting the moat and modern maps, thus allowing reasonably accurate mapping of the moat in relation to the housing and roads that now exist in the area (see Figure 7). Since the 1938 map, the River Cole has been fairly heavily modified, with many of the meanders now straightened.

8 Aerial Photograph Evidence

The 1950 RAF AP shows the area of the moat before the housing estate was built, but the photograph is very dark and no evidence for the moat could be seen. The field boundary against which the moat was situated can be seen, and the land to the east of the river appears to be scrub and rough grass. The 1990s Cambridge University AP is too small a scale to be of much use, but it does show parts of the former course of the river.

9 Geotechnical Data

There is a considerable quantity of borehole data for the development area held by Birmingham City Laboratories, due to the presence of the sewage works in the area. Full assessment of such a quantity of data is outside the scope of this study, but should be included in any further archaeological assessment that may be required.

10 Field Evidence

The area of Embleton Grove, and the Glebe open space/playing field through which the River Cole runs were visited as part of the field inspection. Although Embleton Grove retains a relatively large amount of open space in the form of gardens and open grassy areas, there was no visible field evidence for the moat. No earthworks could be seen in the gardens or in the central grassed-over area around which the houses are set. The only feature of possible significance was a pronounced slope up to the road frontage visible in the front gardens of the houses from number 53 northwards. The land between Embleton Grove and the River Cole was covered with shoulder-high grass and nettles, through which no landscape features could be seen.

11 Discussion

In the Arden, the construction of moated sites seems to have been either associated with already established settlement or with colonizing homesteads within assarted and reclaimed areas. It has been suggested that a significant proportion of moated sites in the Arden can be associated with the latter, somewhere between c.1150 and c.1350 (Roberts 1962), and it seems likely that Coleford moat may have been constructed in this context, possibly as a result of the freer tenorial conditions associated with colonizing waste areas. Investigation at other moated sites has revealed evidence for such woodland clearance. For instance, at Gannow Green in Worcestershire, a comparatively complex moated settlement, excavation revealed a former ground surface 2m below the moat platform, composed of decayed vegetation, brushwood, and charred wood chips (Roberts 1962, 33).

One of the main problems with moats from this late colonization in the Arden is that they are often associated with the lesser landowners, who lacked the elaborate estate administrations of the larger landowners, and as such are poorly documented. The documentary evidence relating to Coleford moat is indeed scant, thus bearing out

Roberts' assertion that 'there is a relative absence of evidence bearing directly on individual homesteads' (Roberts 1978).

Coleford Moat appears to have been a simple moated site. According to the historic map representation (see Figures 3 and 7), which is probably not accurate enough for fine measurement, the platform would have measured approximately 20m across, enclosing an area of 0.2 hectares. This represents a small moated site, which may well have contained only a single house. With a small moat such as this, ancillary buildings such as those for crop storage or livestock housing are likely to have been situated beyond the house enclosure. The lack of any buildings on the early maps indicates that the site went out of use at a relatively early stage.

Ditches on such sites would normally be expected to be between 3m and 6m across (Taylor 1978), and the gap at the northeast corner of Coleford Moat represents the entrance causeway common on most moated sites. There would probably have been an approach track to this entrance (see section 7 above). It is worth noting that on the modern map, the field boundary against which the moat was depicted on earlier maps is actually a wet boundary marked as a drain. It is possible, therefore, that this boundary was actually a leat to and from the River Cole, from which the moat was fed, although it will have been heavily modified since the medieval period.

12 Significance and Potential

Moats are one of the most significant and numerous classes of monument in the West Midlands region. Despite this, they are poorly understood, and of the estimated 3 percent that have been excavated, very few have been extensively investigated (Litherland 1994). Although Coleford moat suffers from a lack of documentation, the links between small manors and moated sites are clear, and any archaeological fieldwork carried out on this site will considerably enhance knowledge and understanding of this type of site in the region. It will also feed into the ongoing research project into moated sites in the West Midlands by BUFAU.

The moat itself is likely to have survived well below ground, outside the footprints of the existing houses. The land use history for this area, as far as it can be deduced, has been favourable to archaeological survival. The field was under pasture, with no traces of building until the existing houses were constructed in the 1960s. The houses in Embleton Grove have quite large front and rear gardens with a high proportion of lawn, and there is a central grassed-over area around which the houses are set. Survival is likely to be good for the northeastern arm, which lies under the front gardens of numbers 53-59 Embleton Grove, under the road and under the grassed-over central area, and for the southwestern arm, which lies in the rear gardens of the same houses. The ditches have high potential for waterlogged deposits which preserve wood, seeds, pollen and other organic remains.

Archaeological remains relating to structures and other associated features on the moat platform are likely to be more fragile and vulnerable to damage by later building. Features such as postholes, gullies and beam slots may be all that survive, and these are likely to have been removed in the area where the houses have been constructed. However, there may be pockets of survival in the front gardens of

numbers 53-59. It is also possible that traces of a pre-moat buried ground surface may survive under the platform, which may produce evidence for woodland clearance. However, this is more likely on sites where the platform was raised, and there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case at Coleford Moat. Traces of exterior ancillary buildings may survive in the surrounding gardens and in the grassed-over central area.

13 Impact on Archaeological Remains

The proposed development for the area will consist of demolishing existing houses and constructing new ones. Any ground disturbing activity such as foundation trenches, service trenches, lowering of ground surfaces for roads and paths, tree planting and landscaping will damage or destroy below-ground archaeological deposits. Also, new sewerage and drainage arrangements may affect the water table and consequently the stability of waterlogged deposits.

14 Recommendations

Due to the finite nature of the archaeological resource, preservation *in situ* is always the preferred option for archaeological remains. This could be achieved via design solutions, by designating an archaeologically sensitive zone within which no ground disturbing activities would take place. The archaeologically sensitive zone would need to include a sufficiently large area around the moat to avoid damaging any possible exterior ancillary structures. This approach could be enhanced by incorporating the moat into an open space/amenity area amongst the housing, and putting up interpretation boards to educate and raise awareness in the local community.

If it is not possible to avoid ground disturbance in the designated area of sensitivity, then a second stage of archaeological assessment should be carried out. This should consist of the excavation of trial trenches within the archaeologically sensitive zone, to establish the nature, extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains. The trial trenching should be preceded by a full assessment of the available borehole data held by Birmingham City Laboratories, in order to help inform trench location. The field evaluation will enable decisions to be made regarding any further stages of archaeological recording that may be necessary.

Assessment of the Bradford Estate Papers in the Staffordshire Record Office (D1287) may produce more documentary evidence relating to the site. However, the papers have not yet been fully catalogued, and the ability to carry out this research would be dependent on the progress made by the head archivist in cataloguing the papers.

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Library for their assistance. Thanks are also due to Jamic Peart of Birmingham University Geography Department for his assistance with historic maps.

References

Maps (Sutton Coldfield Local Studies Library and Birmingham Reference Library)

- 1802(Copy) William Hitchcock's map of Castle Bromwich
1833 Fowler's Map of Aston
1845 Aston Tithe Map and Apportionment
1888 Ordnance Survey First Edition 25": Warwickshire Sheet XIV.4
1936 Ordnance Survey Fourth Edition 25": Warwickshire Sheet XIV.4
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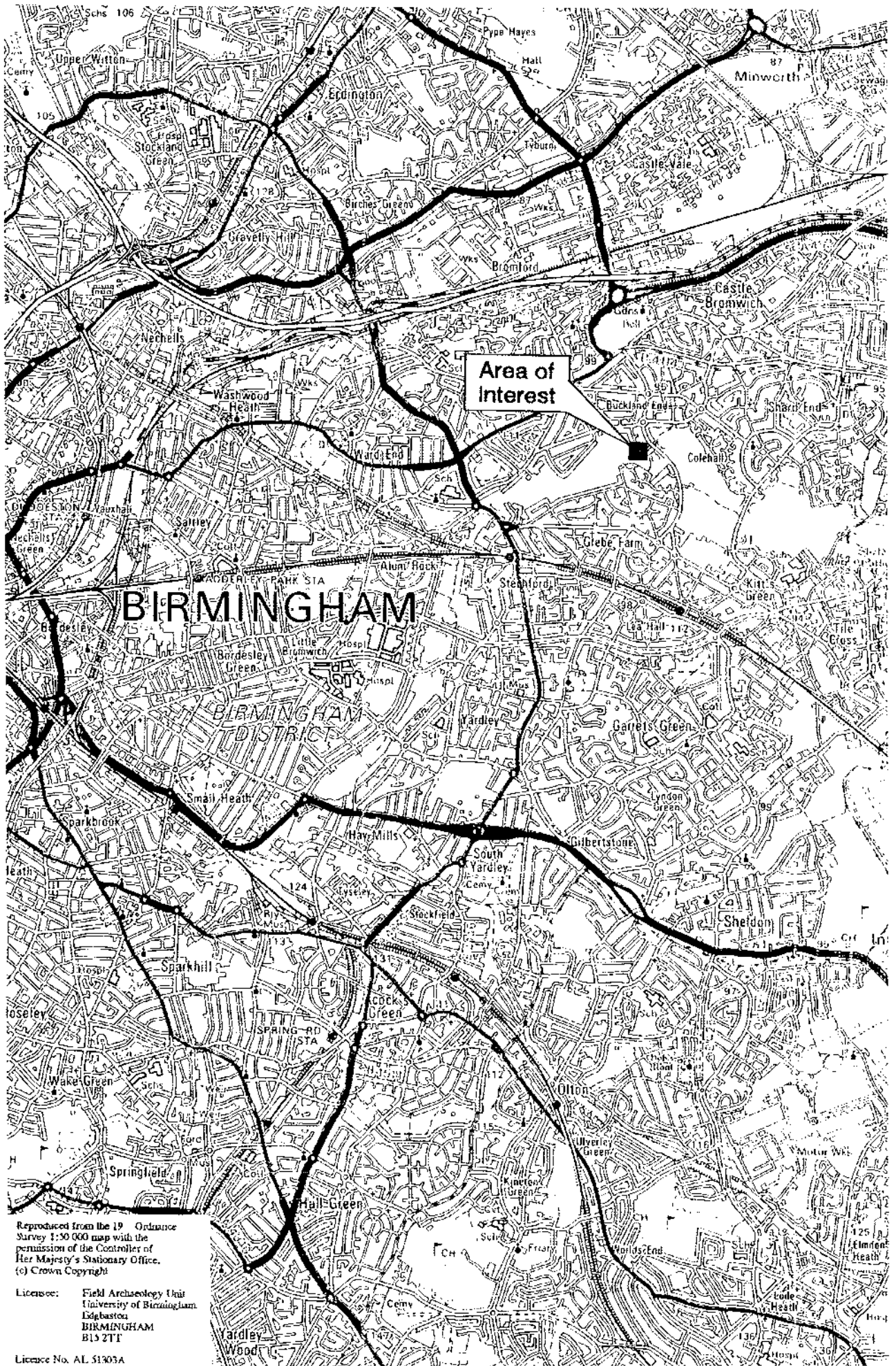
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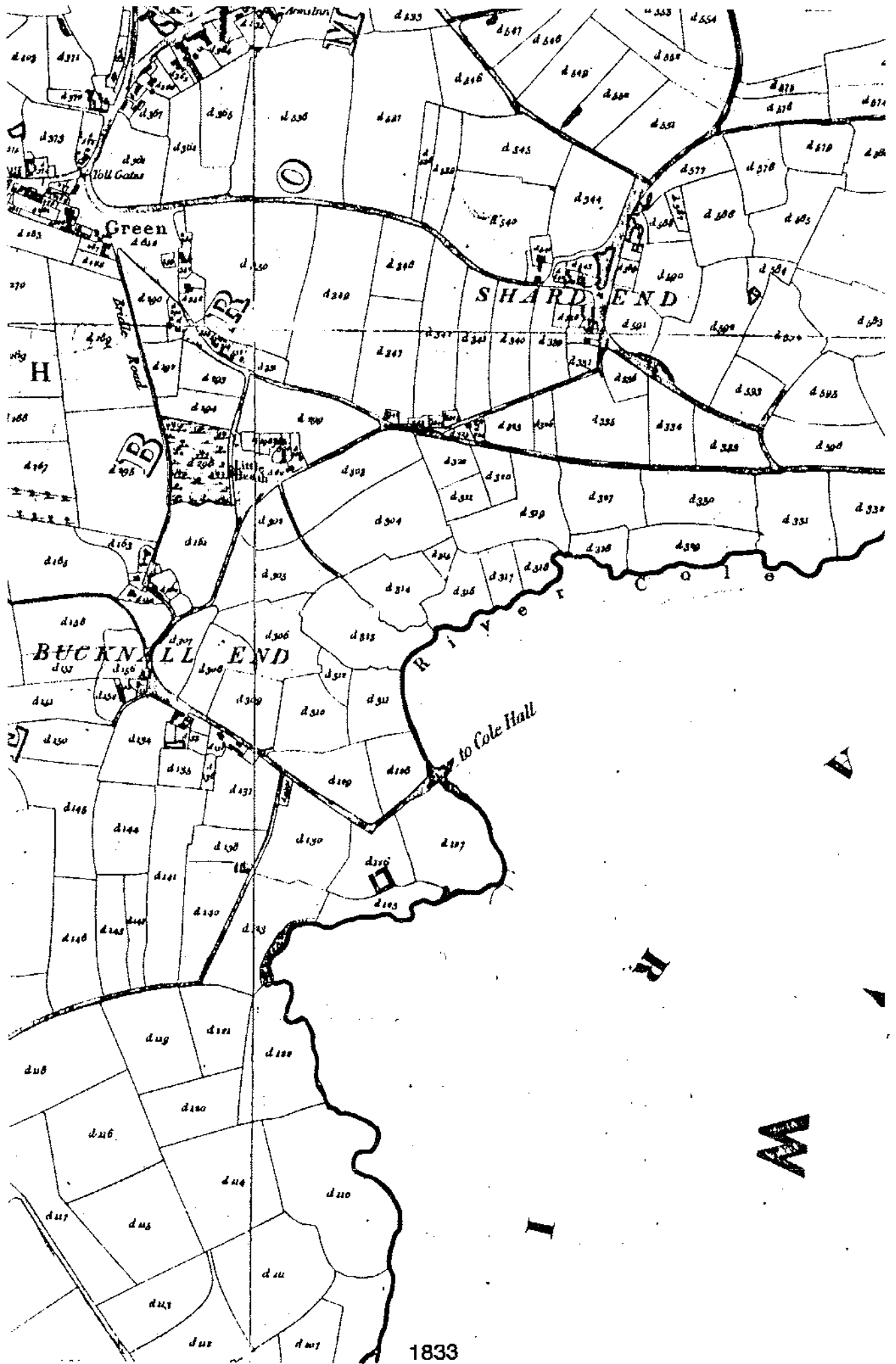


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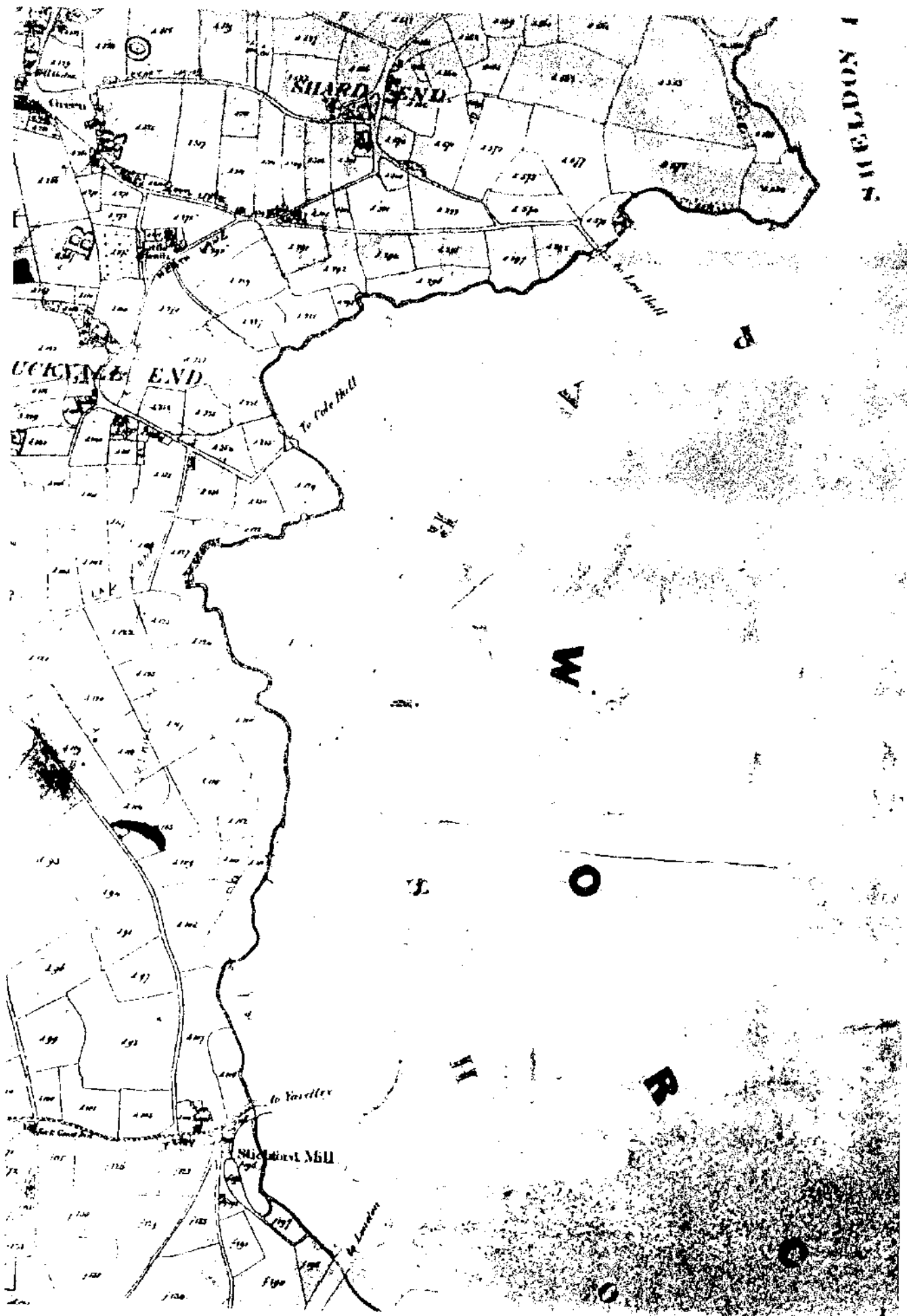
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Fig.1



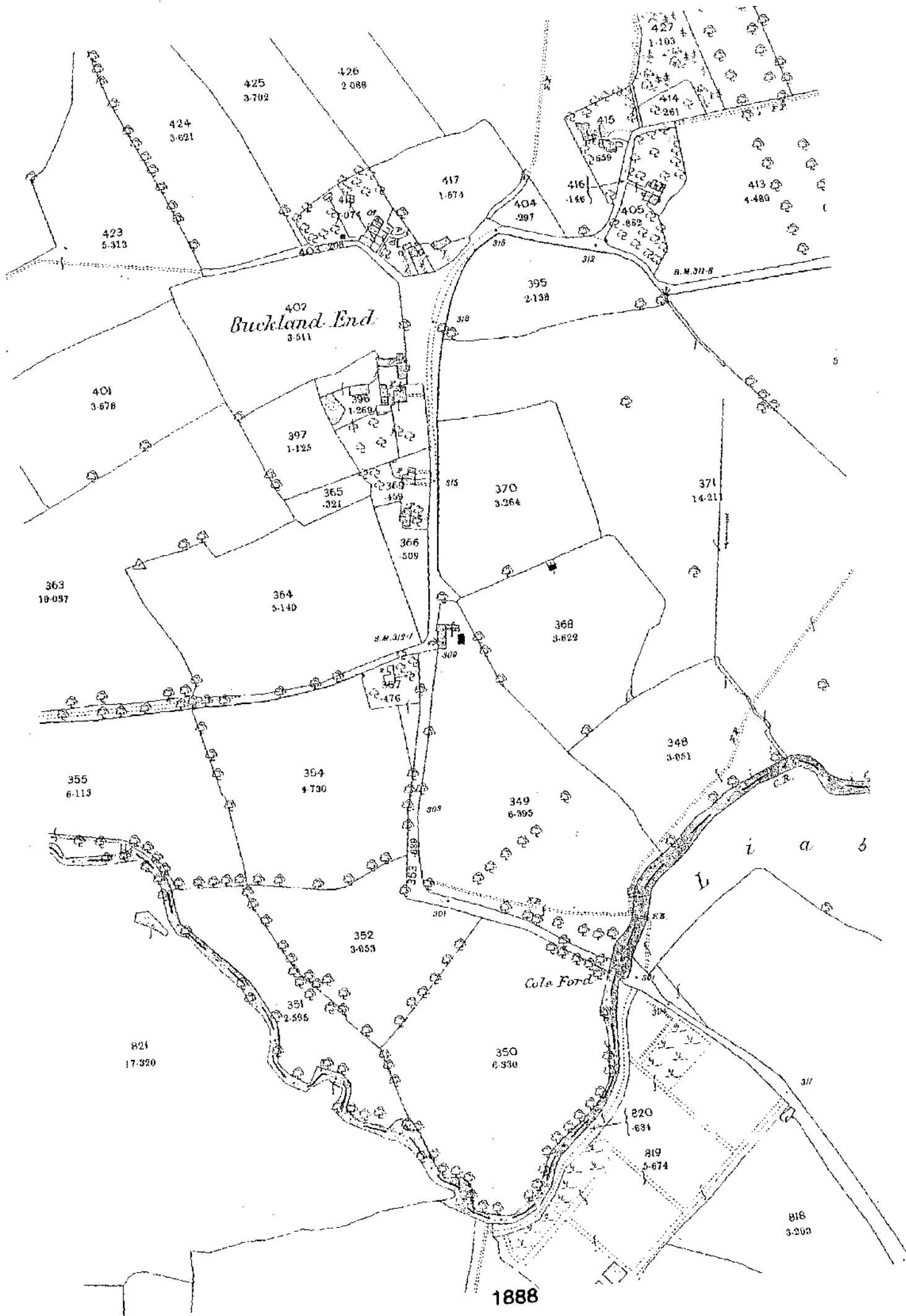
1833

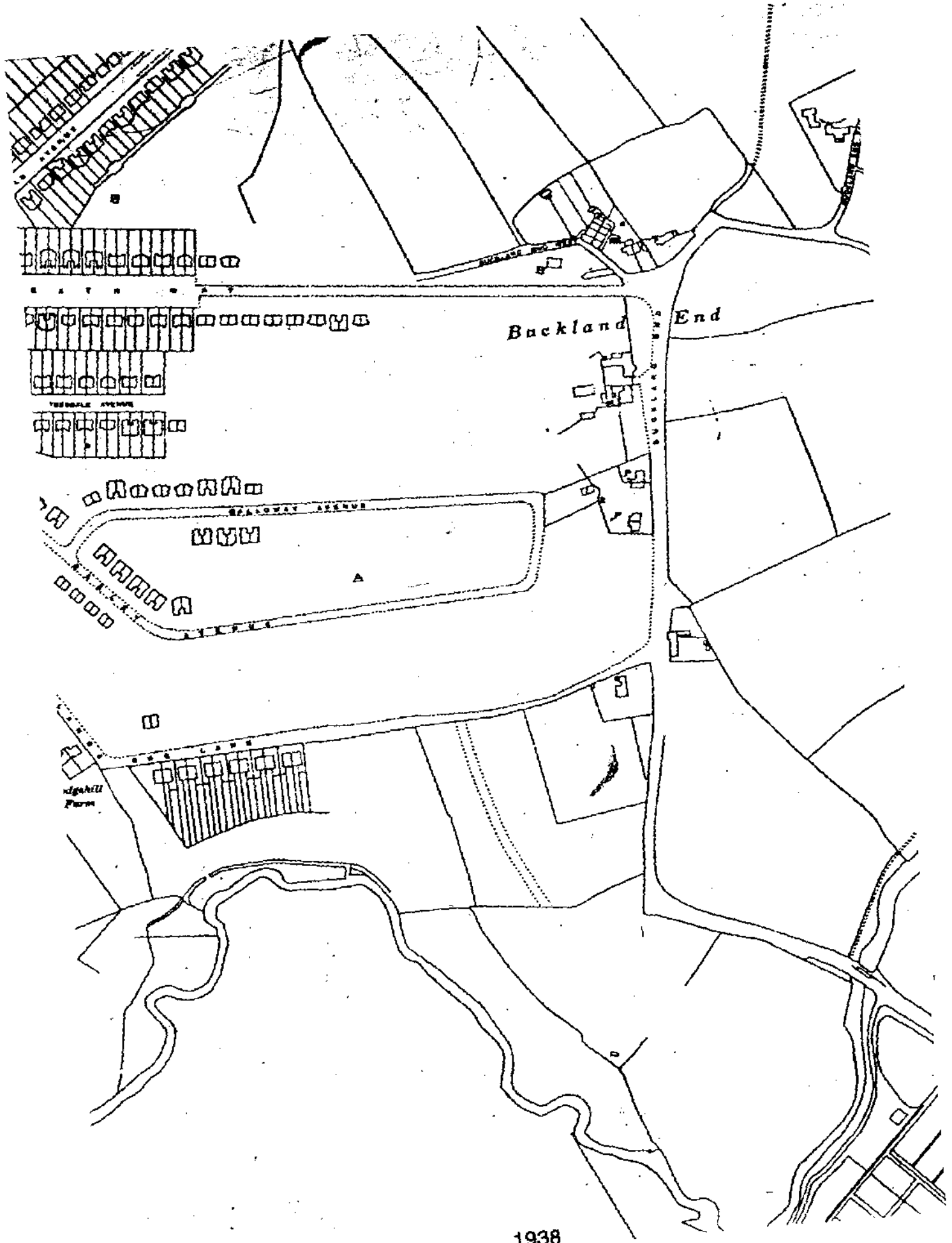
Fig 3



Aston Tithe Map
1845

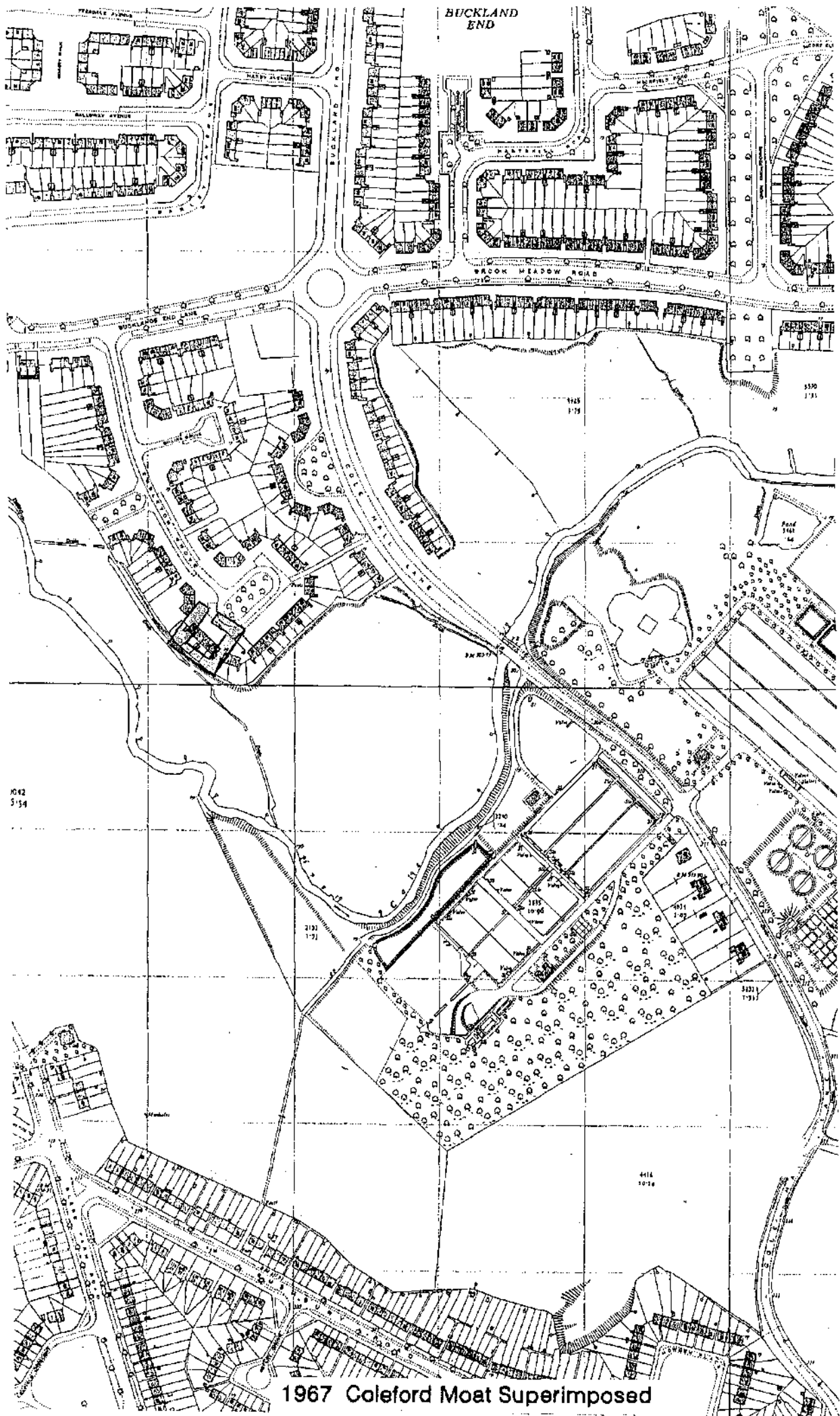
Fig. 4





1938

Fig.6



1967 Coleford Moat Superimposed

Fig.7

Appendix

Brief for Archaeological Desk Based Assessment

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE

Embleton Grove, Buckland End, Birmingham: site of Coleford Moat

SMR 02965; SP142886

Brief for *Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* in advance of design for proposed residential development

1. Summary

*Proposed development at Buckland End includes the site of Coleford Moat and is therefore likely to affect below-ground archaeological remains of medieval date, including buildings and other structures and domestic debris. Organic remains may survive in the infilled moat. This brief is for the first stage of assessment of the impact of the proposed development on archaeological remains, consisting of an **archaeological desk-based assessment**. This will inform the design of the proposed development and determine the need for further archaeological assessment by field evaluation in advance of consideration of development proposals.*

2. Site location and description

The site of Coleford Moat is close to and north-east of the River Tame. Its site is currently occupied by residential development, consisting of houses at the south-east end of Embleton Grove which surround an oval grassed area. The moat may also extend into a grassed open space alongside the River Tame.

3. Planning background

The City Council's Housing Department is proposing to demolish most of the houses in Embleton Grove and the surrounding estate because they are structurally defective and redevelop the area. Plans for redevelopment are about to be prepared. Because the site is likely to include archaeological remains which would be affected by the proposed redevelopment, an assessment of its archaeological implications is required in advance of consideration of the proposals. This is in accordance with Policy 8.36 of the City Council's Unitary Development Plan and government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, "Archaeology and Planning". The archaeological assessment will enable appropriate archaeological mitigation strategies to be devised. The mitigation strategies may involve modification of site layout or foundation design to ensure in situ preservation of archaeological remains, or, if this is not feasible, full recording of archaeological remains in advance of development.

4. Existing archaeological information

A square moat is marked to the north-east of the River Tame on a map of Castle Bromwich of c1802. It has an entrance gap on its north-east and no structures are marked within it. A map of Aston parish of 1833-35 also marks the moat and the field names Moat and Moat Meadow. The moat is not shown on the Aston Tithe Map of 1843 but the field names Moat and Moat Meadow are shown.

5. Requirements for work

The archaeological desk-based assessment is required to define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains in the area of the proposed development, so that appropriate mitigation strategies can be devised. If the desk-based assessment suggests that archaeological remains survive on the site, a second stage of archaeological assessment would be required through an archaeological evaluation consisting of excavated trenches.

In particular, the archaeological desk-based assessment must address the following:

- (i) The precise location of Coleford Moat in relation to existing features, as far as it can be deduced from its representation on historic maps;
- (ii) The likely effect of the construction of the existing houses and roads on archaeological remains of the moat, the platform surrounded by it, and features under the platform;
- (iii) The potential survival of organic remains in the infilled moat;
- (iv) The expected form of archaeological remains, by comparison with other moated sites;
- (v) The potential of the site to contribute to an understanding of the historic development of this part of Birmingham.

6. Stages of work

The extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains on the application site, as described in part 5 above, are to be assessed by site inspection and a search of published and unpublished written records, illustrations and maps, and archaeological and geotechnic records, and a comparison with other moated sites in Birmingham and the west midlands. The attached guidance note provides information on sources.

7. Staffing

The archaeological desk-based assessment is to be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standards, Guidelines and practices of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and all staff are to be suitably qualified and experienced for their roles in the project. It is recommended that the project be under the direct supervision of a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

8. Written Scheme of Investigation

Potential contractors should present a Written Scheme of Investigation that which details methods and staffing. It is recommended that the proposal be submitted to the City Council's Planning Archaeologist before a contractor is commissioned, to ensure that it meets the requirements of the brief.

9. Monitoring

The archaeological desk-based assessment must be carried out to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Architecture, Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored on his behalf by the Planning Archaeologist. At least five working days notice of commencement of the assessment must be given to the Planning Archaeologist, so that monitoring meetings can be arranged.

10. Reporting

The results of the archaeological desk-based assessment are to be presented as a written report, containing appropriate illustrations and a copy of this brief. A copy of the report must be sent to the Planning Archaeologist.

11. Archive deposition

The written, drawn and photographic records of the archaeological desk-based assessment must be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion, following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

12. Publication

The written report will become publicly accessible, as part of the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, within six months of completion. The contractor must submit a short summary report for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology* and summary reports to appropriate national period journals.

**DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE
BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

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