

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY*  
*FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological  
Desktop Assessment of  
Willstock New Village,  
Bridgwater, Somerset**

*B.U.F.A.U.*



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Desktop Assessment of  
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by

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# **An Archaeological Desktop Assessment of Willstock New Village, Bridgwater, Somerset**

## **Summary**

**An archaeological desktop assessment was undertaken of land to the south of Bridgwater, Somerset in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area and recommend options for the formulation of appropriate mitigation strategies. Data was collated from the Somerset County Sites and Monuments Record, aerial photographs and documentary and cartographic evidence. The results indicate both the presence of a number of prehistoric and Saxon/medieval sites, and the potential presence of Romano-British sites, within the study area. These sites are likely to represent the survival of a wider archaeological landscape which will require further definition and clarification through means of, firstly, non-intrusive archaeological work.**

## **1 Introduction**

The following report describes the results of a desk-based study undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in October 1999. The work was commissioned by Pro Vision Planning and Design on behalf of J. S. Bloor Ltd, Swindon, who have submitted an outline application for the development of the land for housing. The proposed development area (hereafter called the site) incorporates an irregularly-shaped area of land bordered by Rhode Lane to the north-west, Wills Road to the north, Daws Farm to the south-east and Willstock Farm to the south-west, (centered on NGR 295 348 Figure 1), lying to the south of the town of Bridgwater, Somerset. The study area examined for the purposes of this desktop assessment includes land ranging up to 400m outside the immediate development site, so as to encompass recorded archaeological sites located in the near vicinity of the development site (Figure 2).

## **2 Objectives**

The assessment is intended to determine the nature, extent, survival and significance of archaeological features and deposits within the study area and site. The results will be presented in order to summarise the archaeological background of the study area and inform an assessment of the impact of the proposed development upon archaeological remains. On the basis of these results, options for the formulation of appropriate mitigation measures will be described. These measures conform to those outlined in chapter 7.2 section 3, part 2 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volume 11 Environmental Assessment. This report will follow standards and guidance set out by the Institute of Field Archaeologists for the preparation of Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments (IFA 1995).

### **3 Methodology**

The work comprised a search of the Somerset County Council SMR database for known sites within the study area (Figure 2), followed by a study of primary and secondary sources at the Taunton Library Local Studies Section and the County Records Office. The sources of information used include documentary, cartographic and photographic evidence and have been listed at the end of the report.

### **4 Site Description, Land Use and Geology**

The study area, (centered on NGR 295 348), lies on the western edge of the Somerset Levels to the west of the River Parrett. It straddles the parish boundary of Bridgwater and North Petherton (Figure 1). The underlying geology of the northern, western and southern tips of the study area consists of Upper (Keuper) Marl while the tongue of land known as Stock Moor is situated on alluvium. The land is low-lying, with Stock Moor comprising the lowest point. As late as the late-18<sup>th</sup> century, this area was prone to extensive flooding for four months of the year. Willstock Farm, Daws Farm and the site of the former Hadworthy Farm are all situated on slightly higher land. The development area is at present characterised by agricultural fields – nearly all under grass, apart from two fields of wheat - interspersed with a network of drains and water channels. Willstock Farm and Daws Farm remain in operation. Hadworthy Farm was demolished in 1989 (SMR 10598).

### **5 Archaeological and Historical Background**

It is likely that the valley of the River Parrett formed an attractive location for prehistoric settlement. The collation of archaeological evidence from the Somerset Levels to the west of the study area over recent decades has testified to the extensive exploitation of this type of environment during prehistory (Coles 1986). Closer to the study area, evidence for the occupation of the area during the Mesolithic has been found to the south of the study area in North Newton (VCH vol 6, 278). By the later prehistoric period, it would appear from the evidence of aerial photography that there existed a clear focus of activity around Stock Moor (SMR 12731, 12732, 11887, 11888, 11890 Figures 7-9).

Settlement during the Romano-British period in the vicinity of the study area is represented by the presence of two sites, one near North Newton and the other at West Newton (VCH vol 6 278). To the west, sites have been discovered at Chedzoy and Westonzoyland (Leech 1982). Furthermore, an analysis of the patterns of Roman settlement in the valley of the River Parrett has demonstrated that, unlike their counterpart settlements on the eastern side of the river which were frequently abandoned at the end of the Roman era, the farmsteads on the western side of the river continued in occupation into later periods. It is therefore hypothesised that there is a strong element of continuity in the pattern of landscape from the Roman to early Medieval periods and that many known medieval sites overlie much earlier ones (*ibid*). A possibility therefore exists that the medieval settlements located within the study area have earlier than anticipated origins.

In the Anglo-Saxon period, the landscape pattern of west Somerset was, again, characterised by dispersed settlement, the principle components comprising scattered farmsteads and hamlets (Aston 1988). The farmstead of Hadworthy is likely to have been one such settlement. It is listed in the Domesday Survey of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, while the *worthy* name element, meaning *enclosure* or *homestead*, suggests early origins (VCH vol 6, 279). The estate of Hamp, to the north of the study area (presumably deriving from *ham* meaning *river meadow* or to denote marshy ground (Gelling 1988), also has early origins and is the subject of charters dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Willstock Farm was also in existence and belonged to Buckland Priory (VCH vol 6, 293).

During the medieval period, Stock Moor consisted of common pasture which, in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, was shared between the manors of Woolmersdon, Hadworthy and Hamp. A causeway was created across the moor, possibly as early as 1502, and certainly by 1603, to facilitate communications on the principal route between Bridgwater and Taunton (VCH vol 6, 278). By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Domesday settlement of Hadworthy had receded and the process of enclosure appears to have been virtually complete.

This area of the river valley was subject to on-going attempts to drain the land throughout the medieval period (VCH vol 6 302). However, by the late-18<sup>th</sup> century, despite attempts to improve the drainage, areas of North Petherton Parish adjacent to the River Parrett, including North Moor and Hay Moor, were still subject to flooding. Much of Stock Moor was under water for four months of the year (*ibid*). In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the landuse comprised pasture, meadow, the cultivation of arable fields and occasional orchards. Hadworthy persisted in the form of a farm. The majority of the field boundaries appear to have remained largely unchanged during the last two centuries. Twentieth century urban expansion of Bridgwater extends immediately to the north of the development site. Hadworthy Farm was demolished by 1989.

## **6 Recorded Archaeological Sites**

A gazetteer of recorded sites in the study area appears below (Figure 2) together with an assessment of the value of each site. The assessment criteria employed in determining the value of the sites are those laid out in the non-statutory criteria for the scheduling of ancient monuments. These are as follows:

Period  
Rarity  
Documentation  
Group Value  
Survival and/or condition  
Fragility and/or vulnerability  
Diversity  
Potential

There are no scheduled monuments either within the site or the study area. The sites have been assessed in terms of their local or regional importance.

**SMR number:** 11888 (Figure 8)

**Site Name:** Cropmark enclosure, south-east of Willstock Farm, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 291 345 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Aerial photographs clearly show a large circular enclosure. Too large for a ring ditch; could be a later prehistoric defended enclosure or possibly a hengiform monument. It may date to the late prehistoric period (Neolithic – Iron Age).

**Value:** Regional importance

**SMR number:** 11890 (Figure 9)

**Site Name:** Cropmark enclosure, north of Compass, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 298 343 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Aerial photographs clearly show an oval enclosure. It may date to the late prehistoric period (Neolithic – Iron Age).

**Value:** Regional importance

**SMR number:** 11887 (Figure 7)

**Site Name:** Cropmark enclosures, west of Willstock Farm, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 286 351 (ST 23 NE); ST 286 349 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Aerial photographs clearly show an irregular enclosure or field attached to a linear feature, and a sub-rectangular enclosure separated by an area of unsympathetic crop. This may date to the Iron Age or Romano-British period.

**Value:** Regional importance

**SMR number:** 12731

**Site Name:** Cropmark enclosure, north of Compass, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 297 340 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Aerial photographs clearly show a sub-rectangular enclosure. This may date to the Iron-Age or Romano-British period.

**Value:** Regional importance

**SMR number:** 12732

**Site Name:** Cropmark enclosure, north of Compass, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 298 341 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Aerial photographs clearly show a rectilinear enclosure with possible sub-divisions. This may date to the Iron-Age or Romano-British period.

**Value:** Regional importance

**SMR number:** 11891

**Site Name:** Hadworthy Farm, Compass, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 2965 3435 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Farm marked and named on 1978 map. Had been demolished by 1989 when enclosures visible as cropmark on aerial photographs (SMR nos 12731 and 12732). Earliest references to this farm date to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Value:** Regional importance

**SMR number:** 10598

**Site Name:** Fishpond, Willstock Farm, North Petherton

**Grid Reference:** ST 2895 3485 (ST 23 SE)

**Description:** Annotation on the 1962 Ordnance Survey 6" map says "Fish-pond – non-manorial"

Large rectangular pond with small island in the centre. The date is certainly post-medieval, possible even 1950s, when the gardens attached to the house were extensively landscaped. The tithe map shows three ponds and it is likely the one to the north-east is now infilled – the area is rough ground consistent with an infilled pond. This again was possibly done at the same time as the other landscaping works. At the south-west end is the remains of the third pond shown on the tithe map. Now it is connected with the extant pond by a stone-lined channel but there are the remains of another channel, now mostly-infilled and used for drawing boats in, which may have also connected the ponds, making a larger island. The system of water supply is not readily apparent, but clearance of the banks and draining of the ponds as part of an improvement project may help to clarify this. The farm dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Value:** Local importance

A single findspot of a Bronze Age penannular gold ring located nearly 1km from the study area (SMR 12421/2) has not been included within the gazetteer.

## **7 Aerial Photographic Evidence**

As described above, many of the recorded archaeological sites located in the study area comprise cropmark features which show clearly on aerial photographs (Figures 6-9). They cluster in an approximate north-west to south-east linear alignment to the south of the study area immediately outside the development site. The precise nature of these sites cannot be inferred from the evidence of aerial photography alone, although the presence of two circular crop-marks may indicate that the remnants of a Neolithic-Bronze Age ritual landscape survive in this locality. Closer inspection of the aerial photograph of SMR 11890 indicates that there is at least one more circular cropmark located immediately to the north of the main cropmark (Dodds pers. comm.). The other cropmarks within the study area exhibit linear and sub-rectangular forms which indicate the early settlement of the land and its division into field-systems. Dates cannot be inferred, although the northern-most cropmark of SMR 11187 is suggestive of an Iron Age 'D-shaped' enclosure (Figure 7) (Palmer 1984).

## **8 Cartographic Evidence**

Tuthill's 1779 map depicts the ownership of land between Rhode Lane (here *Road Lane*), the Taunton-Bridgwater road and Stock Moor Drove (Figure 3). Only the fields belonging to the manor of West Bower and Hamp are illustrated, while the names of adjacent landowners are printed at the boundaries. Arable, pasture and orchard fields are differentiated.

An enclosure map of North Petherton dating to 1812 (not illustrated) shows in detail the field boundaries pertaining to the southern half of the study area. The tithe map of the same parish prepared in 1840 is virtually identical (Figure 4), except for several small plots of land which have been enveloped into a larger field to the east of the study area. Slightly more detail of Hadworthy and Willstock Farms is also given. The 1847 tithe map of the parish of Bridgwater represents land in the northern half of the study area (Figure 4). A preliminary examination of some of the field names from the



tithe apportionment lists reveals little of archaeological value, although names such as 'Duck Mead' illustrate the waterlogged nature of some of the land within the study area. The pattern of field boundaries may hold more information, for example small, narrow fields may represent the early enclosure of medieval strip field. Field 263 on the Bridgwater tithe map, to the north-west of the study area and called 'Longland', may be an illustration of this. The study area contains two locations where the characteristics of the field boundary pattern set them apart from the majority of rectangular, evenly-shaped and sized plots of land. At points A and B (Figure 5), the boundaries curve and demarcate oval-shaped areas, reminiscent of a distinctive landscape feature which occurs in the higher coastal parts of all the Severn Estuary Levels. Known as 'Infields', they occupy higher banks of land and are assumed to represent some of the earliest reclamations/settlement sites of the Saxon period (Rippon 1997, 172-3). These two field patterns may therefore represent a survival of a field system which pre-dates the surrounding farmland.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1889 shows very little alteration from the tithe maps (Figure 5). It does, however, illustrate more topographic detail, such as ponds, footpaths, and individual farm buildings. Two earthworks are demarcated immediately to the north-west of Hadworthy Farm, adjacent to the lane.

A 1929 edition Ordnance Survey map again shows the continuity of field layout. A clay pit is located to the north-west of the study area by Rhode Lane. The 1982 Ordnance Survey map illustrates the expansion of Bridgwater to the north of the study area.

## **9 Discussion of significance and potential**

The evidence deriving from aerial photography of the crop-marks within the study area is indicative of prehistoric activity around Stock Moor. There is a cluster of rectilinear and circular enclosures in an approximate north-west to south-east linear alignment to the south of the study area, immediately outside the development site. Some if not all of these are very likely to represent important sites, and furthermore there is a strong likelihood that a continuation of the prehistoric archaeological landscape as represented by the crop-marks extends into the development site. It is possible that further interrogation of the aerial photographic resource at the NAR archive at Swindon may result in the location of further cropmarks within the study area.

Although no archaeological evidence relating specifically to the Romano-British period was identified within the study area, it may be surmised that given the research models proposed for Roman settlement in this region of Somerset (Leech 1982), it is highly probable that archaeological remains dating to the Romano-British period may be located in the area. The existence of crop-marks indicating field-systems in the study area and the presence of several other Roman sites in the region emphasises the probability of the Romano-British settlement of this area.

There is also a likelihood that archaeological remains relating to the Saxon and early medieval occupation of the site may be situated within the study area. Documentary and cartographic sources give a good indication of the longevity of settlement at Willstock Farm and Hadworthy Farm. In the case of the latter, it would appear that the

farmstead had at one time been a more substantial settlement, the earthworks denoted on the first edition Ordnance Survey map may represent buried archaeological remains of this settlement. It is likely that further archaeological investigation may clarify the precise nature and extent of early medieval landscape features and precursors to the present farm buildings.

There is a good chance of survival of archaeological deposits within the study area as there has been considerable continuity in terms of landuse. Much of the land was used for meadow and pasture during the late and post-medieval period. Furthermore hypotheses presented for this region suggest that patterns of settlement in existence during the medieval period may well owe their existence to a landscape of Anglo-Saxon and possibly Roman origin (Leech 1982, Aston 1988).

## **10 Implications for Development and Impact on Archaeological Remains**

So far this report has discussed the study area rather than the development site. In some cases, archaeological sites actually extend over the boundaries of the development site. These include part of the cropmark depicted in Figure 9 (SMR 11890) and another potential circular cropmark identified to its north, the northern part of the oval area surrounding Willstock Farm and the site of the former Hadworthy Farm (SMR 11891). It is suggested that mitigation measures are provided for these archaeological sites. As regards both these and the other potential archaeological sites discussed above, it is likely that individual 'sites' may just represent parts of a wider archaeological landscape which may well extend over the development site. For sites which do lay beyond the development boundary it should be noted that development would have implications for the environmental status of the wider landscape and would affect the drainage systems currently in operation. This could degrade buried archaeological remains in the near vicinity of the development site, such as those exhibited by the aerial photographic evidence, through dewatering, thus reducing the potential for the preservation of environmental remains.

## **11 Further Stages of Archaeological Assessment/Evaluation Works**

Second stage non-intrusive measures which can be employed to further define the nature and extent of archaeology in the study area include:

- i. Further interrogation of the Aerial Photographic Archive in order to define more precisely the exact location of known cropmarks and to check whether further cropmarks exist within the study area. It may also be appropriate to prepare a digitally-rectified plot of the cropmarks in the area.
- ii. A Walkover Survey through which a visual impression of earthworks, boundaries, open ditches and vegetational patterns which may indicate the presence of buried archaeological deposits would be gained. An instrument survey of any noted earthworks would follow. This would cover most of the development site which is now largely under grass.

iii. A Geophysical Survey through which buried archaeological features may be defined and located. This could be firstly extensive utilising scanning, and then targeted.

iv. A programme of Fieldwalking over the two fields under crop (wheat) within the development site. One of these cultivated fields lies to the north of cropmark 11887 and may be particularly conducive to this type of survey, following ploughing of the field.

## **11 Mitigation Measures**

Depending on the results of the above, methods of below-ground investigation may be appropriate. This in the first instance would take the form of evaluation trial-trenching.

It should be emphasised that preservation *in situ* is always the preferred option for archaeological remains (PPG 16 Department of the Environment 1990). If the proposed development does threaten archaeological deposits the objective should be preservation *in situ* where possible, and otherwise preservation by record; i.e. the excavation and recording of archaeological remains and/or an archaeological watching brief during the course of the development work. Further stages of archaeological work may comprise one or a combination of the above mitigation measures.

## **Acknowledgements**

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- 1812 Enclosure map of the parish of North Petherton
- 1840 Tithe map of the parish of North Petherton
- 1847 Tithe map of the parish of Bridgwater
- 1889 First edition Ordnance Survey map
- 1929 Ordnance Survey map
- 1982 Ordnance Survey map

Aerial Photographic Sources (Supplied by Somerset County Council and Taunton Library Local Studies Section)

SMR 11887 DAP SMH14

SMR 11888 DAP WW/10, DAP WW/11

SMR 11890 & 11891 DAP SI Z, DAP MX5

SMR 12731 & 12732 DAP AAZ35

RAF Vertical Air Photograph 1947 CPE/UK1924 F/20./MULTI (4) 58 SQDN  
Frame 4041

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Section 3 Part 2

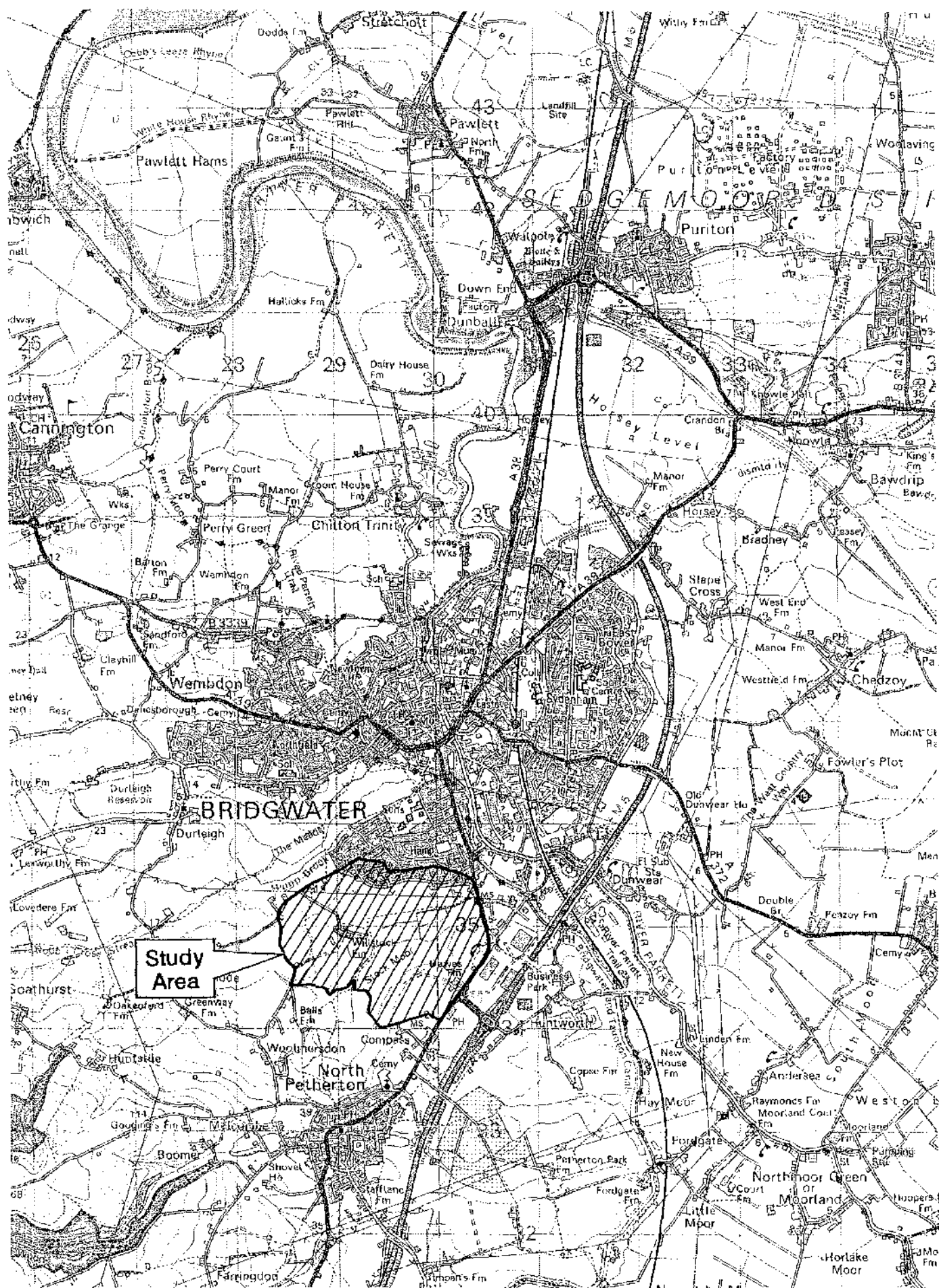


Fig.1



**Fig. 2**

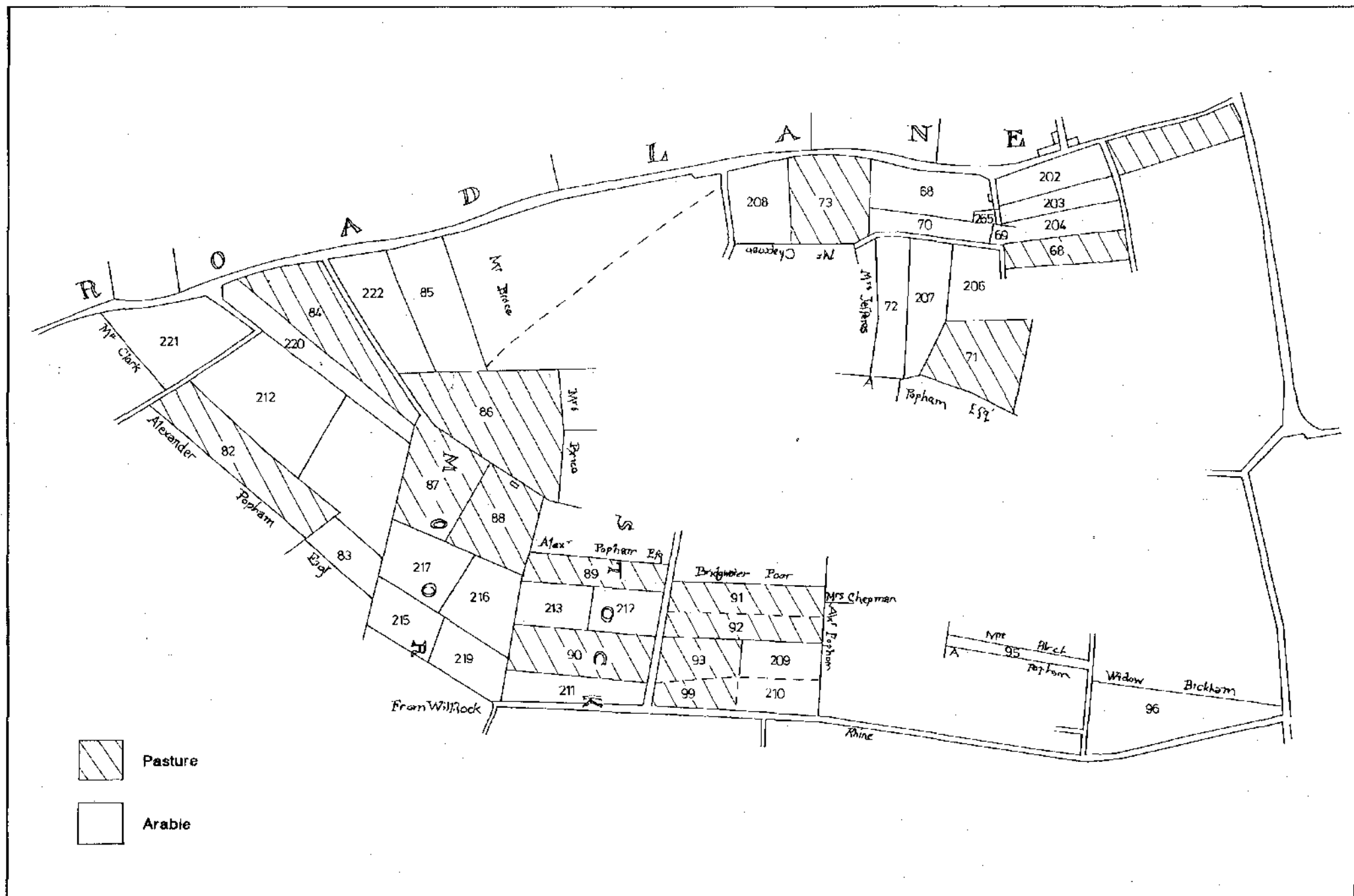


Fig. 3

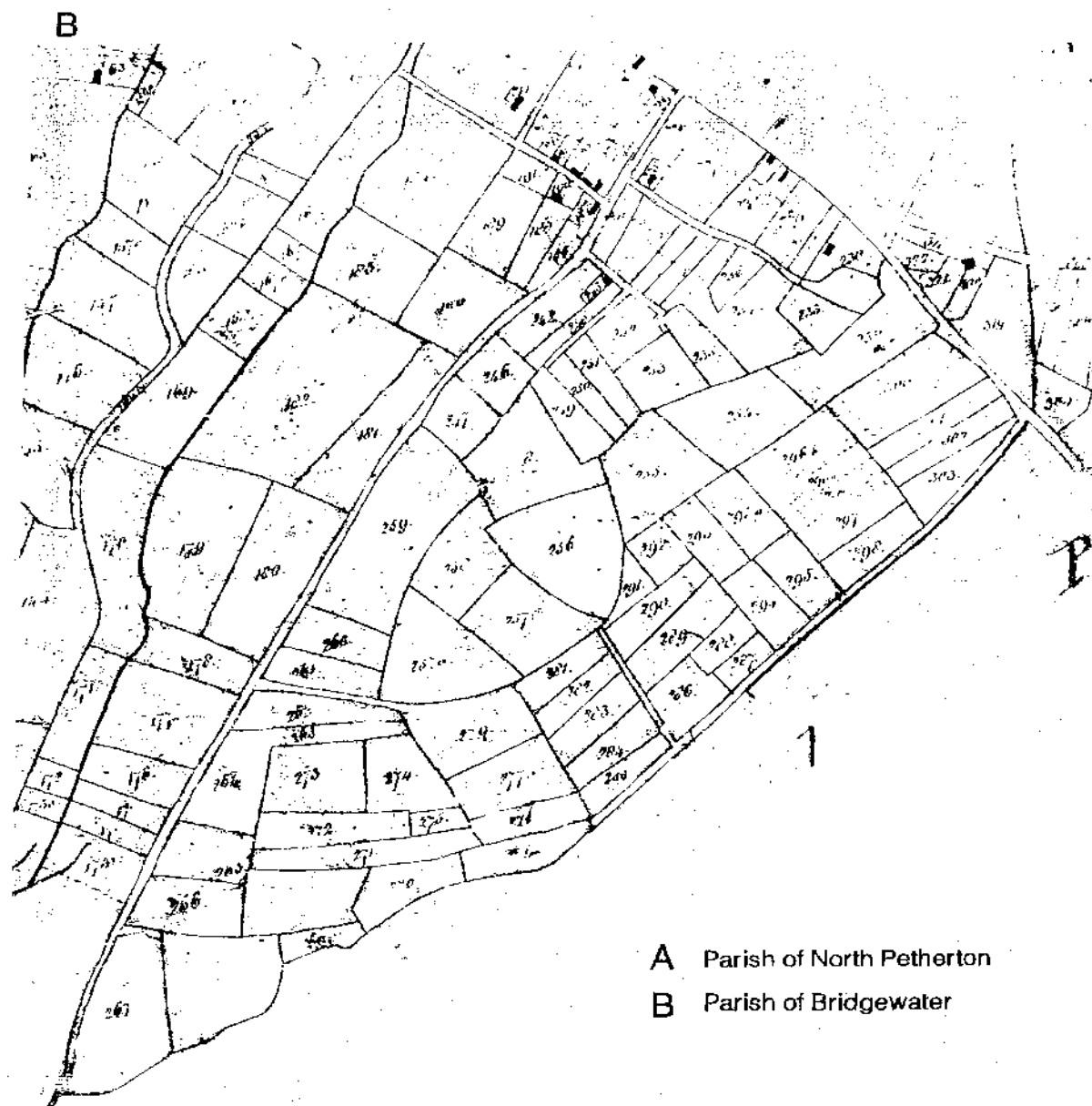
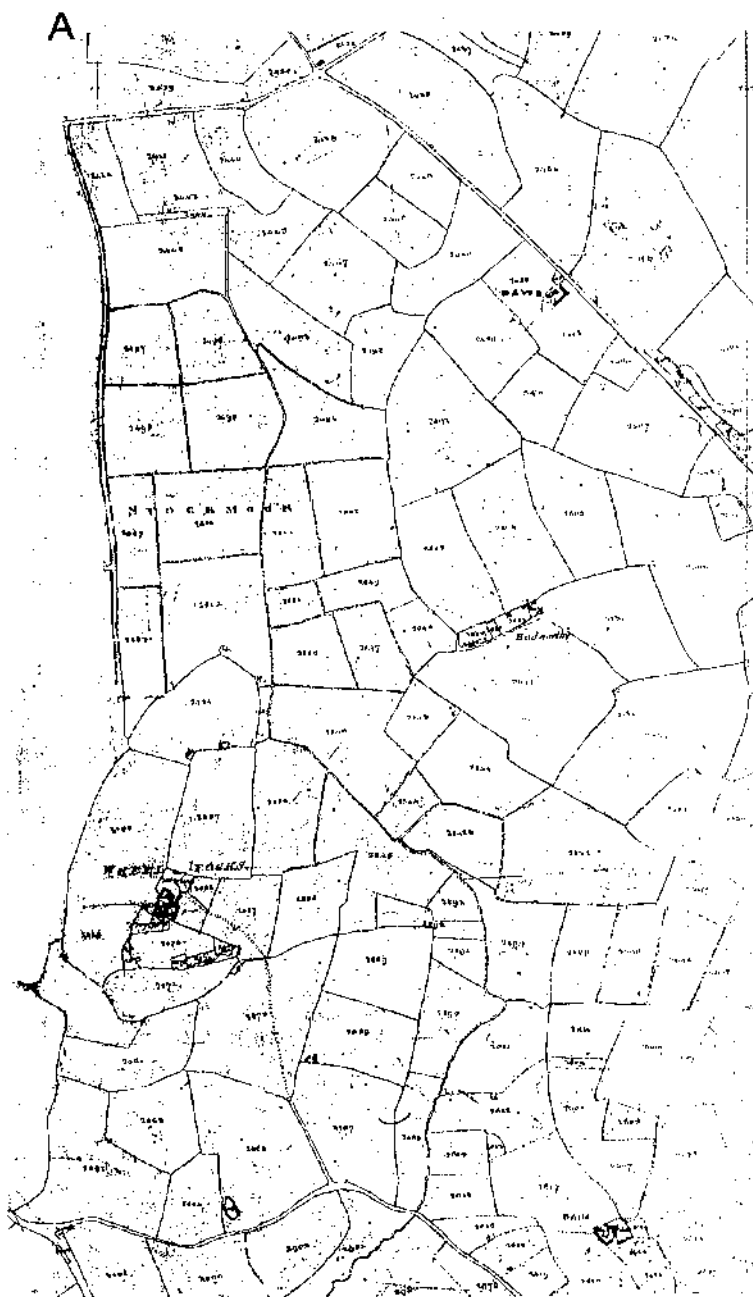
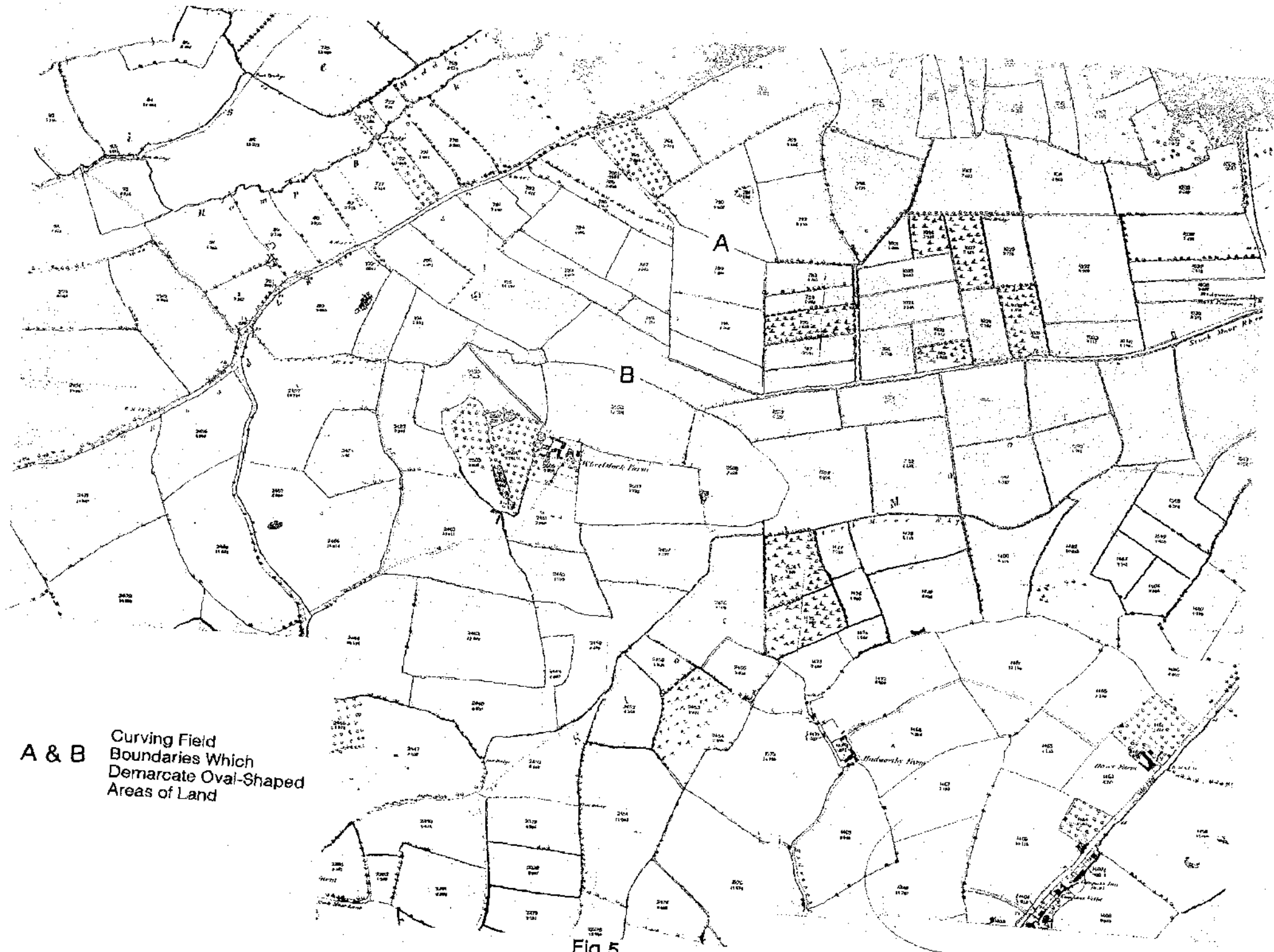
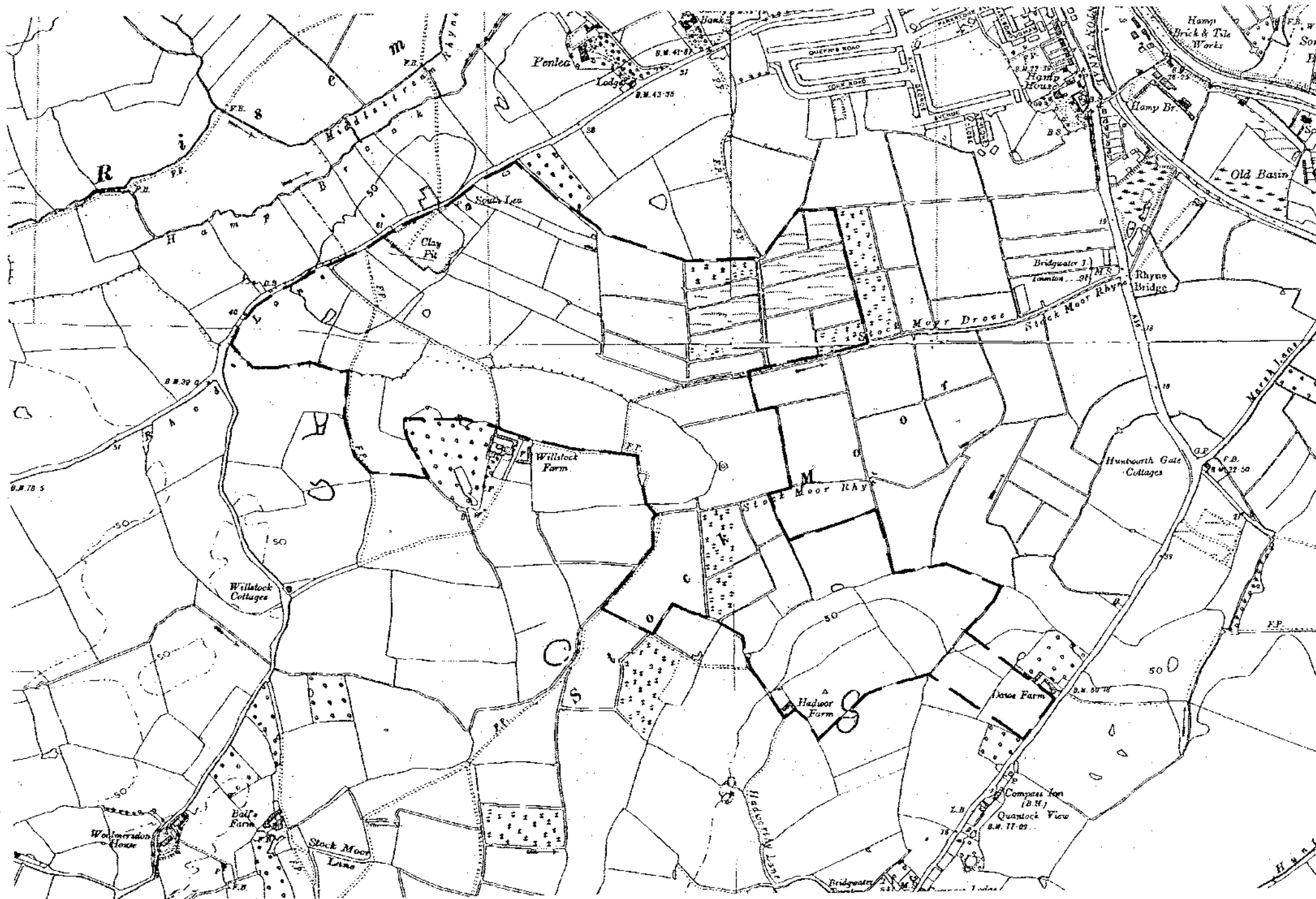


Fig.4







**Fig.6**



Fig.7



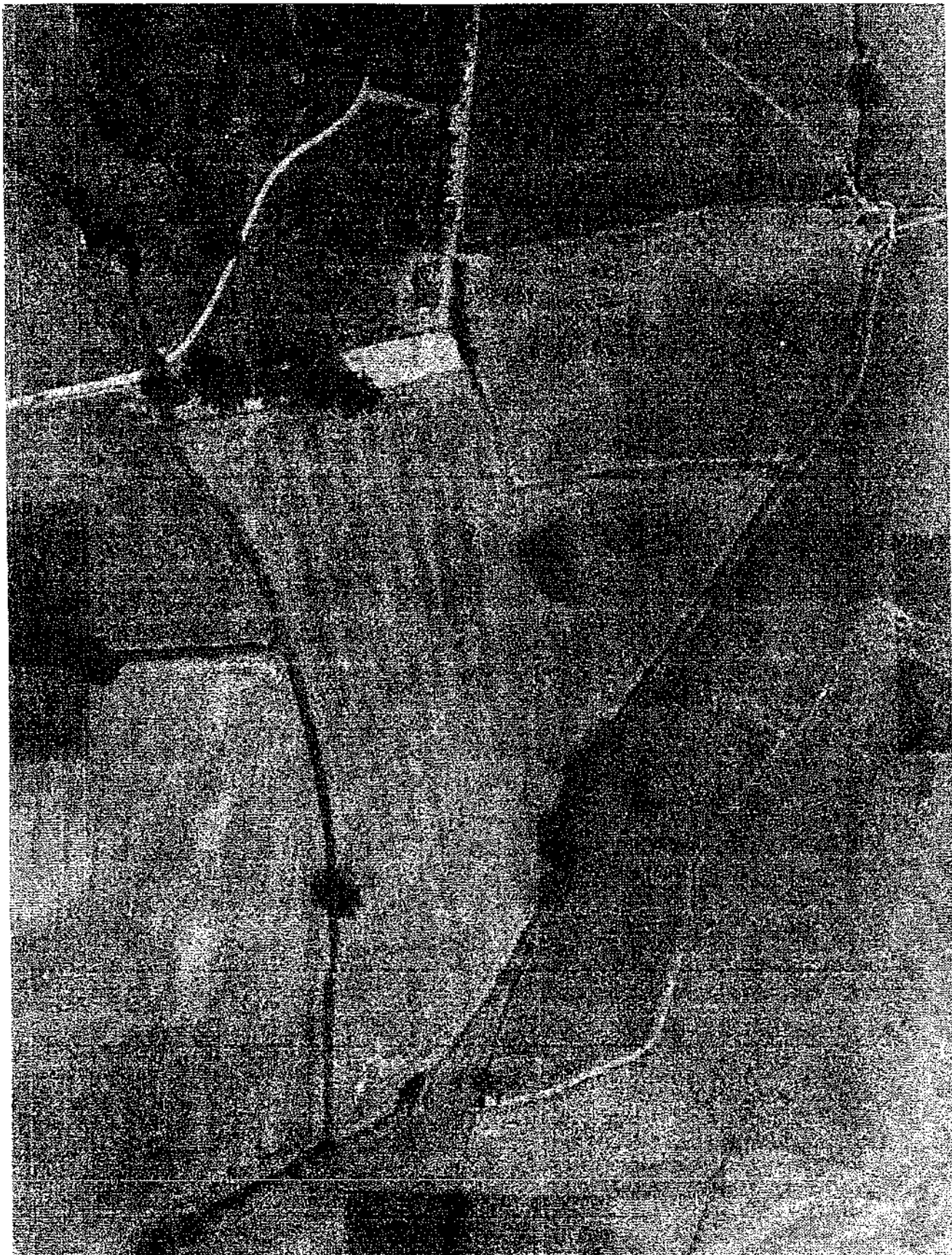


Fig.8

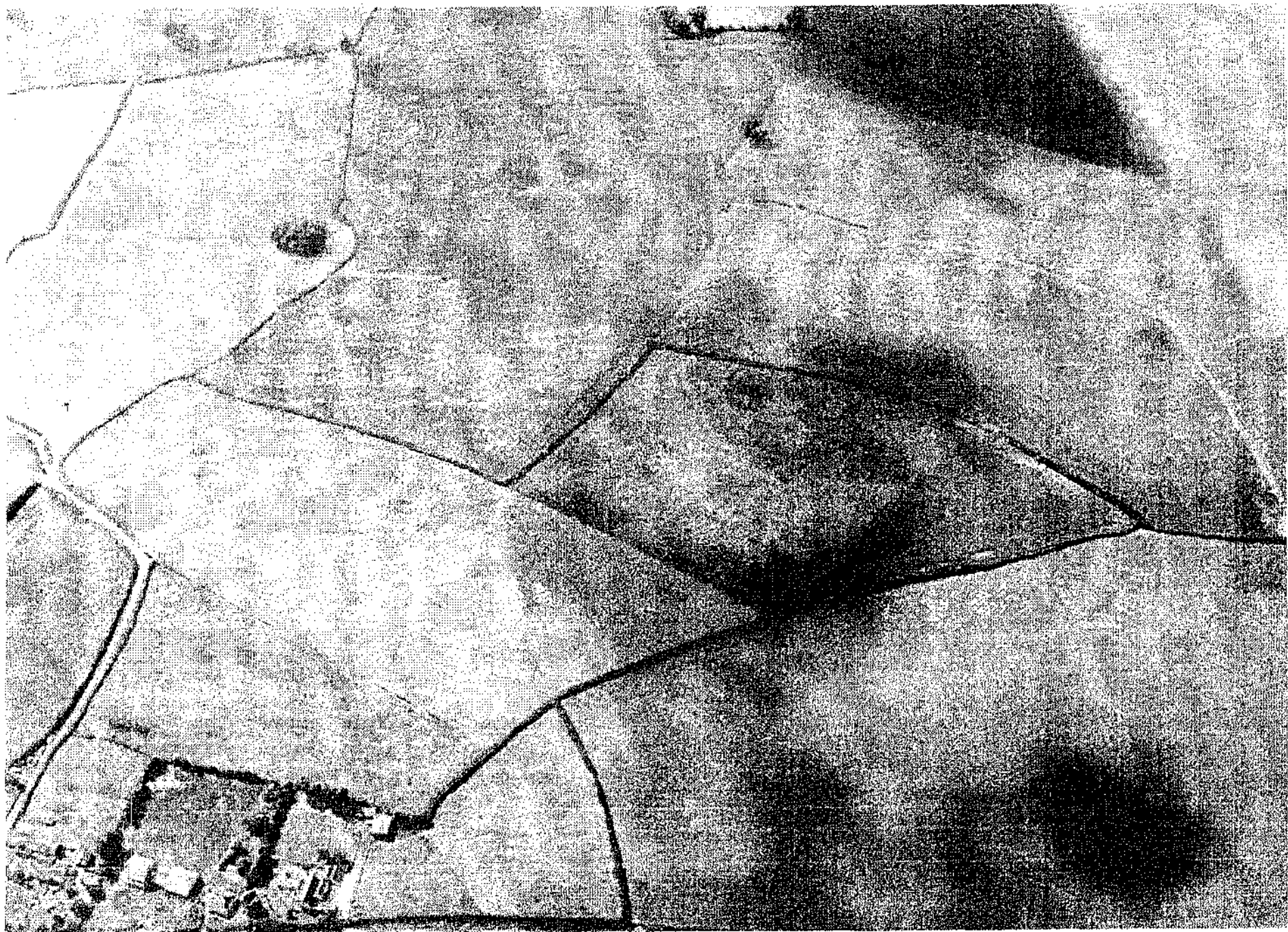


Fig.9