

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of Land at Lower High Street/Giles Hill  
Stourbridge, West Midlands**

by  
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# **An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of land at Lower High Street/ Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands**

## **Summary**

*A desk-based assessment was carried out in advance of the proposed development of land bordering the Lower High Street and Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands (NGR SO 9084 8984). The assessment examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence in addition to a site visit. The Study Area contains the ruins of an early-19<sup>th</sup> century Congregational Church and an associated grave yard, which seems to have been used for internment's for a span of approximately 50 years in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A Grade II listed building, No.8 Lower High Street, is to be retained within the proposed development. The Study Area lies almost entirely within the Stourbridge Town Conservation Area. Situated in the historic core of Stourbridge several zones of potential archaeological interest were identified within the Study Area, which together have the potential to shed new light upon the medieval and post-medieval development of the town.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

This archaeological assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) ahead of development proposals by Allen Homes (West Midlands). The report sets out the results of an archaeological desk-top study of land adjacent to the Lower High Street/Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands, (NGR SO 9084 8984) (Fig. 1). The aim of the report is to provide a summary of known archaeological information and to assess the archaeological potential of the Study Area.

The assessment was carried out in accordance with the guidelines laid out by the *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999). A Written Scheme of Investigation was submitted to and approved by Peter Boland, the Principal Conservation Officer and Borough Archaeologist for Dudley M.B.C.

## **2.0 Site Location**

The Study Area is at the northern end of the Lower High Street where it slopes down towards the River Stour. It is bordered to the west by the Lower High Street and to the south by Giles Hill, a public footpath (Fig. 2). The area contains a derelict property at No. 8 Lower High Street; a Grade II listed building (which is to be retained), and the remnants of a United Reformed Church and its former graveyard. The site lies almost entirely within the Stourbridge Town Conservation Area.

### **3.0 Objective**

The objective of this archaeological desk-based assessment is to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within and around the Study Area, in a local, regional or national context as appropriate. The desk-based assessment will attempt to identify the archaeological implications arising from the proposed development, but will not itemise any requirements for further work. This is the remit of the Conservation Officer of Dudley M.B.C.

### **4.0 Method**

A site inspection of the development area was carried out in February 2000. This was followed by documentary research undertaken of relevant primary and secondary records and maps held by Dudley Records and Local History Service, Stourbridge Local Studies Library and the West Midlands Sites and Monument Record. All sources consulted during the assessment are listed in Section 10 below. The significance of the archaeological remains was considered in local, regional and national contexts.

Each zone of the study area has been allocated a 'zone' number (i-viii) while the buildings have been labeled alphabetically, (A-D). These are shown on Figure 3. Throughout the report zones and buildings will be treated in separate sections. Summary assessments of the archaeological potential of the land zones will be given and this will be followed by summary descriptions of the standing buildings.

### **5.0 Geology and Topography**

The site is located upon beds of Triassic Bunter Sandstone, which occur across a large area of the locality from Stourport in the south to Stourbridge in the north and east to west from Bromsgrove to Hagley. Bunter sandstone is usually soft and fine grained, brick red in colour and mottled with yellow or white. It is usually unsuitable for building stone although some of the lower beds are locally hardened by carbonate of lime and stand out in a rocky form. This is demonstrated here and locally at Kinver Edge where dwellings are cut into the sandstone cliff.

The Study Area generally slopes from south to north, as does the High Street, and is broadly divided into two levels. Terracing in the western half of the site along the High Street has left the eastern half several metres higher, divided by a sheer sandstone face running from north to south, (Fig. 3).

### **6.0 Historical Background to Stourbridge**

The earliest known reference to the town of Stourbridge occurs in 1482 when King Edward IV granted permission for a weekly Tuesday market and two annual fairs at the town of Old Swinford and Stourbridge. The Stour is first thought to have been bridged in

the mid-15th century and by the late medieval period a chapel and several houses existed on the site. The occupation centered on a portion of the Wolverhampton to Bromsgrove road, which was later to become the High Street, with the settlement expanding north towards Wollaston and south towards Old Swinford.

Glassmakers exiled from Lorraine, France, first arrived in the town in the mid-17th century drawn by the high quality sources of local sand and clay. By the late-18th century Stourbridge had grown to be a prosperous centre of glass production.

## **7.0 Detailed Description of the Study Area**

### 7.1 Cartographic Information

*John Wood's Survey, 1837* (Fig. 4)

This early plan of the town shows the Study Area in some detail including the names of some of the property owners. The property on the corner of the Lower High Street and Giles Hill was owned by Thomas Cooper who is described in, 'Bentley's History, Guide and Alphabetical and Classified Directory of Stourbridge' (1841) as a surgeon. This residence is then bounded to the north and east by the land of Joseph Pitman whose property faces on to both the Lower High Street and Giles Hill. Bentley's Directory lists Mr. Pitman as a skinner and tanner and his works can be located to the northeast, adjacent to the River Stour on Mill Lane. While Giles Hill appears to be a narrow alley where it joins the High Street, further up slope to the east it becomes a wider road serving the rear of Joseph Pitman's home/shop. To the north of the Pitman property is a neighbouring structure facing the Lower High Street with another unidentified structure behind it. Beyond these to the north is the Independent Chapel, which is set some way back from the street like the Unitarian Chapel opposite. No burial-ground is depicted behind the Independent Chapel at this time. Instead the unidentified structure mentioned earlier seems to be intruding on this area. To the north of the chapel are other structures including the present listed building, No. 8 Lower High Street, Stourhurst House. These structures are set in a small rectangular plot of terraced ground with the sandstone face between the two levels indicating the rear boundary.

Another anomaly of note are the series of boundaries running back from the High Street then curving southeastwards towards Giles Hill. This unusual plan form may have arisen in order to maximise the access to Giles Hill and the industrial activity concentrated around the Stour. Therefore, some finishing trades may have been carried out within the Study Area, which would have had good access to the market on the High Street in the post-medieval period.

Several interesting features of the historic town can be highlighted with reference to John Wood's map. Firstly the Lower High Street is clearly the primary route around which Stourbridge developed. The already broad road widens noticeably just to the south of the Study Area, and may well have been the site of a specialised marketplace with the town centre. However the Study Area is also close to the periphery of the historic core. Consequently, the width of the properties in the Lower High Street is markedly wider

than those in the centre of the town. This type of peripheral property has often been shown to provide crucial archaeological evidence concerning the changing fortunes of towns; being colonised when times were good, or conversely abandoned when times were hard. By the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Wood's map was surveyed, the Lower High Street may well have developed the prosperous commercial character it retains to this day. The choice of the area for the siting of two non-conformists Chapels may also be significant.

#### *Ordnance Survey Map 1885 (Fig. 5)*

This survey shows that Joseph Pitman's property was by 1885 a post office and that the structures fronting on to Giles Hill has been greatly reduced. Several cottages had also been added to the rear of the property. The Chapel has been extended at the front with the addition of a schoolroom in 1841. This Independent Chapel was by then known as a Congregational Church. The burial-ground is also recorded for the first time with a building on the land to the north. Stourhurst House also seems to have been extended to the rear and on to the upper terraced area.

#### *Ordnance Survey Map 1903 (Fig. 6)*

The 1903 survey shows little change other than the further reductions to the rear of the Pitman property leaving an open space behind it with the rear of the building against the sandstone face of the terrace. The street frontage of the building at this time can be seen to the right of the church in Plate 1. The structure to the north of the burial ground has been replaced with two separate buildings.

Later Ordnance Survey maps show the Study Area to remain largely unchanged until the early 1980s when the church was destroyed by fire and the neighbouring structures were demolished.

## 7.2 Descriptions of Zones of Land Within the Site

For the purposes of this assessment the site has been divided into eight zones. The zones are referred to as Roman numerals i to viii and their locations can be seen on Figure 3.

### *Zone i*

This is an area in the southeastern corner of the site bounded by the Giles Hill public footpath and a tall steel fence. The zone is covered with low undergrowth and young trees no more than a few metres in height.

In John Wood's 1837 survey of Stourbridge (Fig. 4) this zone was occupied by the structure at the rear of the High Street property of Joseph Pitman. By the time of the 1903 O.S. map the structures in this zone appear to have been demolished and the area then seems to have remained undeveloped to the present day. There is a good chance of surviving archaeological deposits within this zone.

#### *Zone ii*

This is an area containing a complicated series of ruined structures built in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in clamped brick against the terraced sandstone bedrock (Plate 2). The 1837 map shows this zone to be the area behind the property on the corner of the High Street and Giles Hill. The structures appear to be facing on to Giles Hill and this is supported by the presence of a bricked-up doorway.

#### *Zone iii*

This area is adjacent to the High Street at street level and is several metres lower than Zones i and ii. This is clearly the result of the cutting of a terrace platform into the bedrock to accommodate a structure, (Plate 3). The steep slope of Giles Hill gives a good idea of the natural slope of the hillside from east to west prior to any terracing, (Plate 4). The Zone is covered with undergrowth and dumps of demolition material are located at the northern and southern edges of the area. The 1837 survey shows that this is the area of the Cooper and Pitman properties. This area then seems to remain relatively unchanged until the demolition of the structures in recent years.

There is a good chance of archaeological survival in this area as there is no apparent evidence of modern intrusion nor are there any signs of cellars. The corner of the Pitman property/Post Office remains today and can be seen on the right of Plate 1.

#### *Zone iv*

This zone of the site was occupied by the former church and school room. The Congregational church was constructed in 1810. Following the extension to accommodate the schoolroom in 1841 the building remained broadly the same until it was damaged by fire and partially demolished in 1983. The zone is covered with demolition material and heavy undergrowth but there is potential for archaeological survival beneath the floor of the church.

#### *Zone v*

Zone v is the area of the former burial ground located behind the remains of the church on the upper level of the site. It is bounded to the west by a surviving wall of the church and to the north, south and east by an ivy covered brick wall that has partially collapsed on the northern side. The wall is built of heavily fired clamped bricks and dated to the early 19th century. One grave marker is visible in the northeastern corner of the zone but others that are known to be present are obscured by a heavy ivy groundcover. Several large mature trees are also present within the area.

The archaeological potential of the area is likely to be limited to 19<sup>th</sup> century burials of which there are estimated to be 75. Any earlier archaeology is likely to have been destroyed by the later activity.

#### *Zone vi*

This zone is located on the lower terraced area fronting on to the High Street. The area is very similar to Zone iii and is covered in demolition debris and heavy undergrowth. The 1885 O.S. map shows properties on the area fronting on to the High Street with



outbuildings behind and the sandstone face between the two levels as the rear boundary. This zone is of strong archaeological potential unless the former properties were associated with cellars.

#### *Zone vii*

This zone is on the higher level behind Zone vi, but lower than the burial ground, Zone v that borders it to the south. The area is level and grassy with two structures built of corrugated iron along the southern edge of the site. One has collapsed and the other is in a poor state of repair, (Plate 5). Both are visible on the 1903 O.S. map. An earlier structure is visible in the 1885 edition while the 1837 survey shows as open ground. As this zone was developed at a later date than the others were, any archaeology is likely to be no earlier than mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Zone viii*

This area is the location of Stourhurst House, Number 8 Lower High Street. Only the listed facade of the structure survives with a very recent but unfinished brick addition to the rear of the property, (Plate 6). The presence of cellars means that there will be no archaeological deposits in this area.

### 7.3 Summary Description of Standing Buildings

The following buildings are referred to by letter (A-D), the locations of which can be seen on Figure 3.

#### *Building A*

Stourhurst House, No 8 Lower High Street, is located in the northwestern corner of the assessment area. It is a grade II listed building abutted to the north by another similar listed structure. Stourhurst House is described as a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century town house built of red brick with stone dressing, and of two storeys with a cellar and an attic.

When visited in February 2000 the structure was in poor repair with only the façade and part of the gable surviving. On the southern wall of the structure the scar of the gable of a once adjoining property is clearly visible, (Plate 6), while to the rear was an unfinished modern breezeblock extension.

#### *Building B*

Building B is the remains of the former Congregational Church. The church was opened as the Independent Chapel in 1810 and was extended on its High Street side in 1841, (Plate 1). The church became redundant in 1978 when it was closed as a result of declining congregations. The structure was in commercial use for a while before being damaged by fire and partially demolished in October 1983.

When visited in February 2000, walls were present on all four sides up in first floor level. Only the rear eastern wall survived close to its original height and featured a large arch and two blocked up windows, (Plate 7). The ground floor of the Lower High Street

frontage survives, built of red brick then faced with stone and plaster to create a classically influenced panel and pier rustification. It was impossible to view the interior of the structure but it was clearly heavily overgrown.

#### *Building C*

Building C is a corrugated iron structure in Zone vii, first apparent on the 1903 O.S. map. At the time of the site visit it had largely collapsed.

#### *Building D*

Building D is another corrugated iron structure in Zone vii, located to the west of building C. When visited it was in poor repair but largely intact.

### **8.0 Implications for Future Development of the Study Area**

Lying almost entirely within the Stourbridge Town Conservation area, several zones of potential archaeological interest were identified within the Study Area. Together they may have the ability to shed new light upon the late-medieval and post-medieval development of the town. The location at the periphery of the historic core of the town and the possible linkage of the Study Area between the market frontage and late-medieval and post-medieval industrial areas backing on to the river Stour as of particular interest. Should archaeological deposits survive, and the assessment has not identified any areas of definite destruction, they may potentially be of local, or even regional importance.

Retention of the listed building (Zone viii) will minimise the archaeological implication of development here but a survey of the structure would be required as part of any listed building consent. Equally, the decision to landscape the former burial ground may minimise any archaeological response here (Zone v) although this would be dependent upon a careful consideration of the design of the proposed scheme and an adherence to the laws concerning the disturbance of burial grounds. From the viewpoint of archaeological research late-19<sup>th</sup>-century burials are probably not of particularly high research value. Probably the key issue here is that of respect for the human remains.

The proposed development indicates that the frontages of Zones iii, iv and vi, which face on to the High Street, will be highly disturbed. The implication is that it will be highly necessary to evaluate the character and survival of the archaeological deposits along the entire street frontage. Dependant upon the design level of the car park behind and the intrusion of any below ground services a smaller archaeological response may be required to the rear of these zones. Cellaring and terracing may have destroyed archaeological deposits here but it is not possible to confirm this from a desk-based assessment alone.

Zones i and vii will each be affected by the proposed development. Their archaeological character will be different to the street frontage, being less intensively occupied in the past, but some evaluation will be necessary.

Finally, further recording of the church and the remnants of back-plot structures in zone ii may also be anticipated, as these will both be affected by the proposed development.

## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

This report was researched written by Chris Patrick and edited by Gwilym Hughes. Mark Breedon prepared the figures and Steve Litherland provided advice on the site and the historical buildings. Thanks are due to Peter Boland, the Conservation Officer for Dudley M.B.C. for providing background information on the Study Area and the staff of Stourbridge Local Studies Library and Dudley Archives and Local History Service for their assistance during research

## **10.0 References**

Bentley, J.1841 *Bentley's History, Guide and Alphabetical and Classified directory of Stourbridge.*

B.U.F.A.U. 2000, Document No 9 *Archaeological desk-based assessment of land at Lower High Street/ Giles Hill, Stourbridge, a written scheme of investigation*

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments.*

Willis-Bund, W. and Page, W.1906 *The Victorian History of the Counties of England, Worcester, Volume 1.*

Willis-Bund, W. and Page, W. 1906 *The Victorian History of the Counties of England, Worcester, Volume 2.*

Willis-Bund, W. and Page, W. 1906 *The Victorian History of the Counties of England, Worcester, Volume 3.*

### **Maps**

#### **Ordnance Survey**

1885 6" Edition

1903 6" Edition

1920 6" Edition

1938 6" Edition

1955 1: 2500 Sheet 8984/9084

#### **Others**

1837 Survey of Stourbridge by John Wood of Edinburgh

## Appendix

### Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of Land at Lower High Street/Giles Hill, Stourbridge

#### Written Scheme of Investigation

##### 1.0 Introduction

Development proposals have been made by Allen Homes (West Midlands) for a site defined on its west side by Lower High Street and on its south side by Giles Hill public footpath, Stourbridge (Figure 1). The proposed development comprises a mix of housing and office development (Figure 2). The site contains a derelict property at No 8 Lower High Street, a grade II listed building (which is to be retained), and the remnants of a United Reform Church and its former graveyard. The last burial in the graveyard was in 1899.

In view of the potential archaeological impact of the development, Allen Homes have requested that an archaeological desk-based assessment be undertaken on the site. This document provides a written scheme of investigation for that assessment.

##### 2.0 Objective

The objective of this archaeological desk-based assessment is to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within and around the proposed development site, in a local, regional or national context as appropriate. The desk-based assessment will identify the need for any further archaeological work, and will identify requirements for any *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains, or for their recording in advance of, or during, development.

##### 3.0 Method

The desk-based assessment will comprise a site inspection and an examination of relevant primary and secondary sources. All sources consulted during the assessment will be listed in the report. Surviving aboveground structures will be assessed during the site inspection but detailed recording of such structures is outside the scope of this assessment.

Sources consulted will include, where appropriate:

- Geological maps and relevant reports
- Trial pit and borehole data from the site and in the near vicinity, where available
- Survey drawings of existing buildings on the site and, where available, previous buildings.
- Manuscript maps and plans of the site and its environs

- Ordnance Survey maps (first and subsequent series)
- Other published maps and plans
- Historical documents, drawings, photographs and other material held by local and regional libraries and record offices.
- The Sites and Monuments Record
- The National Monuments Records
- Listed building lists
- Records of the United Reform Church

The significance of the archaeological remains will be considered in local, regional and national contexts. A specific question to be addressed is:

- The archaeological significance of the remains of the church and of the churchyard.

The assessment will be carried out in accordance with the guidelines laid out by the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

#### **4.0 Report**

The results of the archaeological desk-based assessment will be presented in an illustrated report, which will include the following:

- Non-technical summary
- Introduction
- Aims and objectives
- Methodology
- Summary of archaeological results
- Development impact
- Conclusion
- List of sources consulted

Copies of the report will be submitted to the Borough Archaeologist, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, the Sites and Monuments Record and the National Monuments Record. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology*.

#### **5.0 Archive**

The archive will conform to the guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects and will be deposited with an appropriate repository, approved by the Planning Archaeologist, within a reasonable time of completion.

## **6.0 Timetable**

*Approximate time breakdown of tasks:*

Site inspection: 0.5 days

Consultation of primary and secondary sources: 2.5 days

Preparation of report text: 2 days

Preparation of illustrations: 0.5 day

## **7.0 General**

All project staff will adhere to the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* and the *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology*.

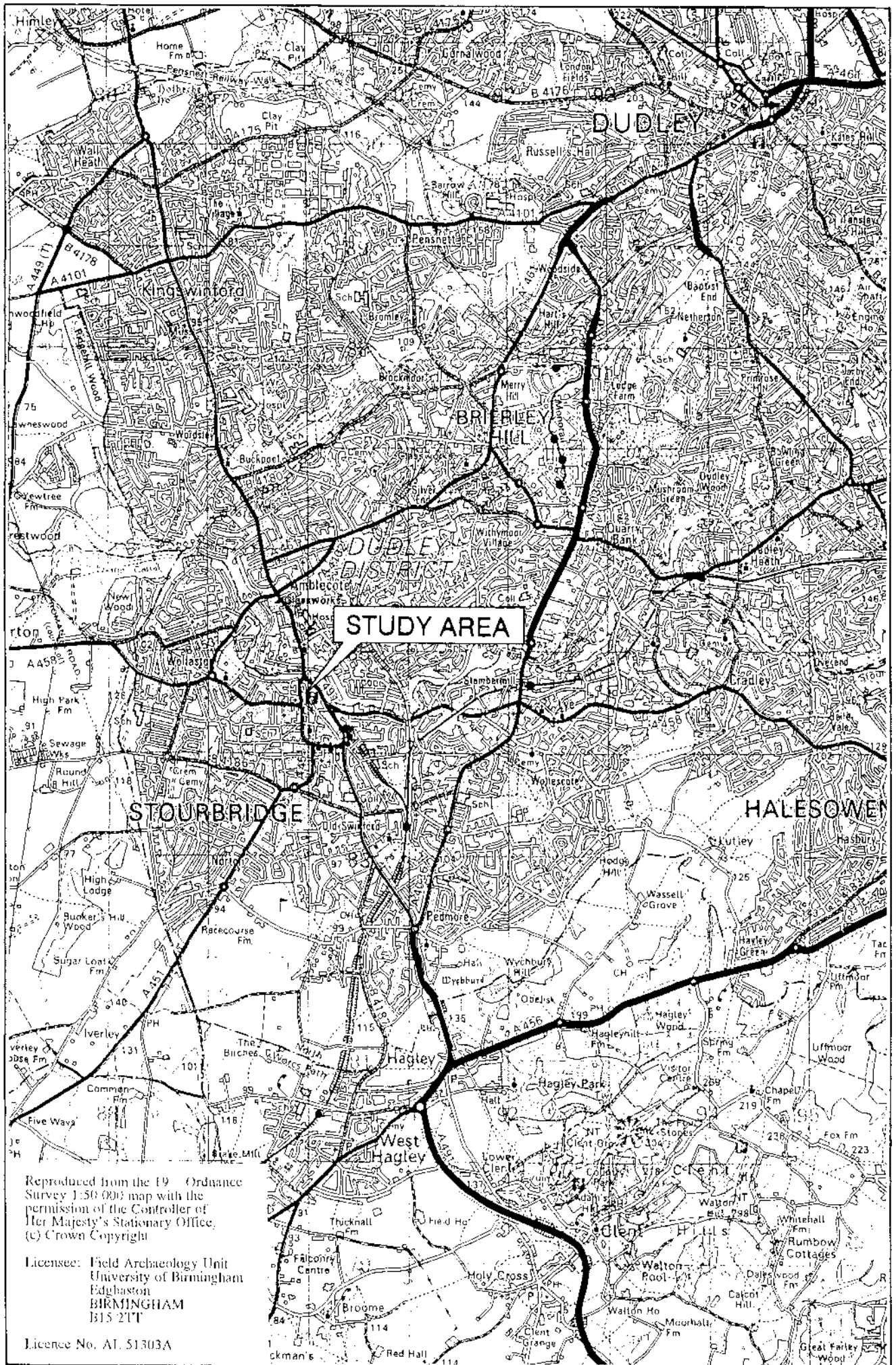
*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2000.*

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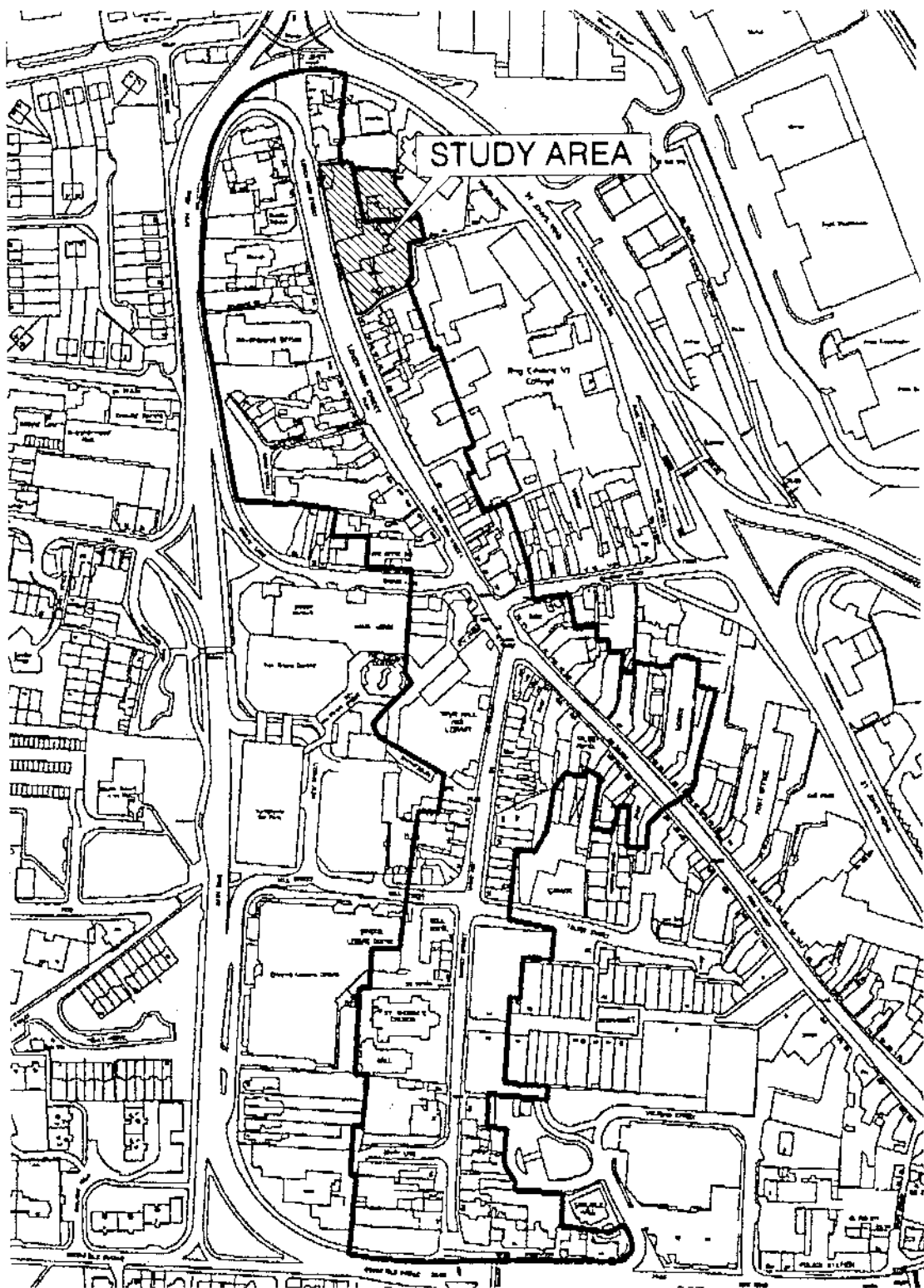
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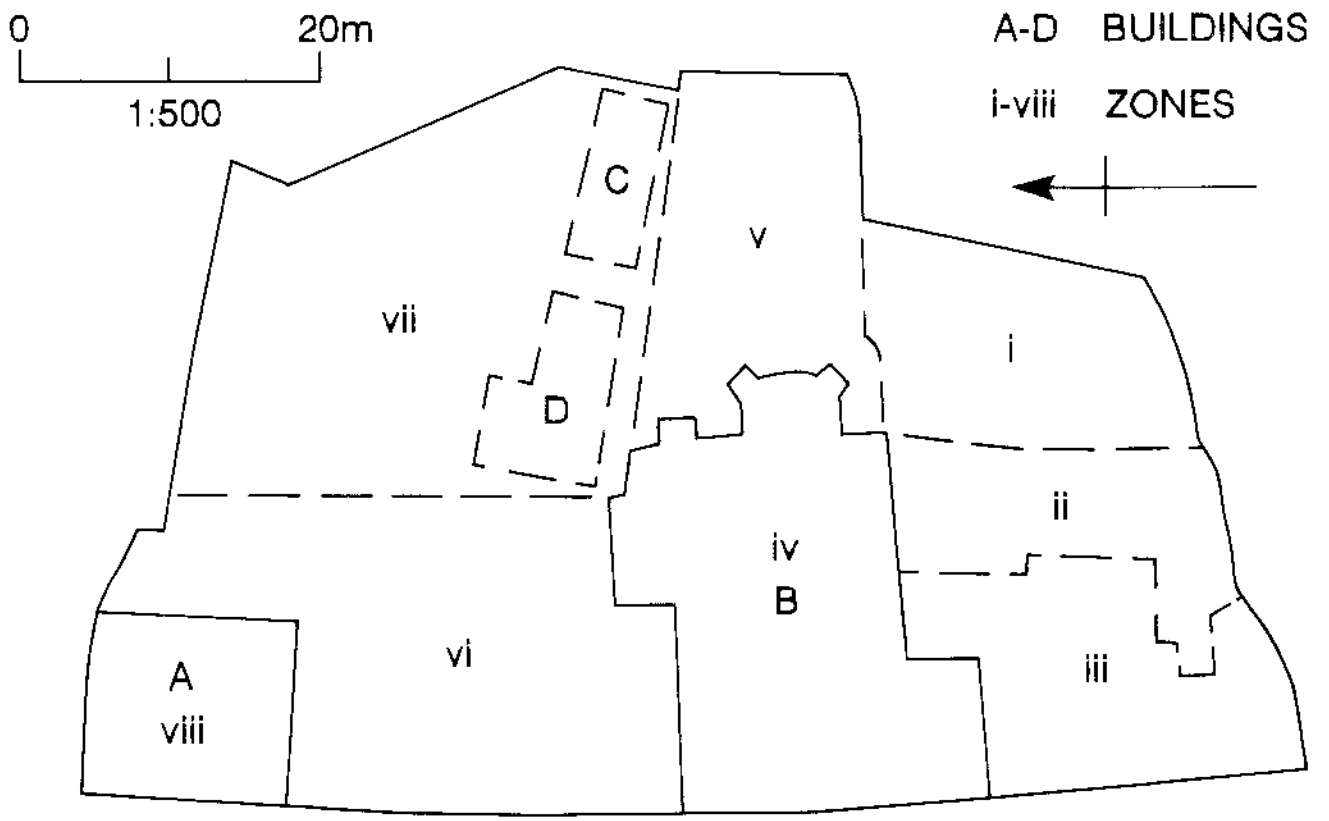
Fig. 1



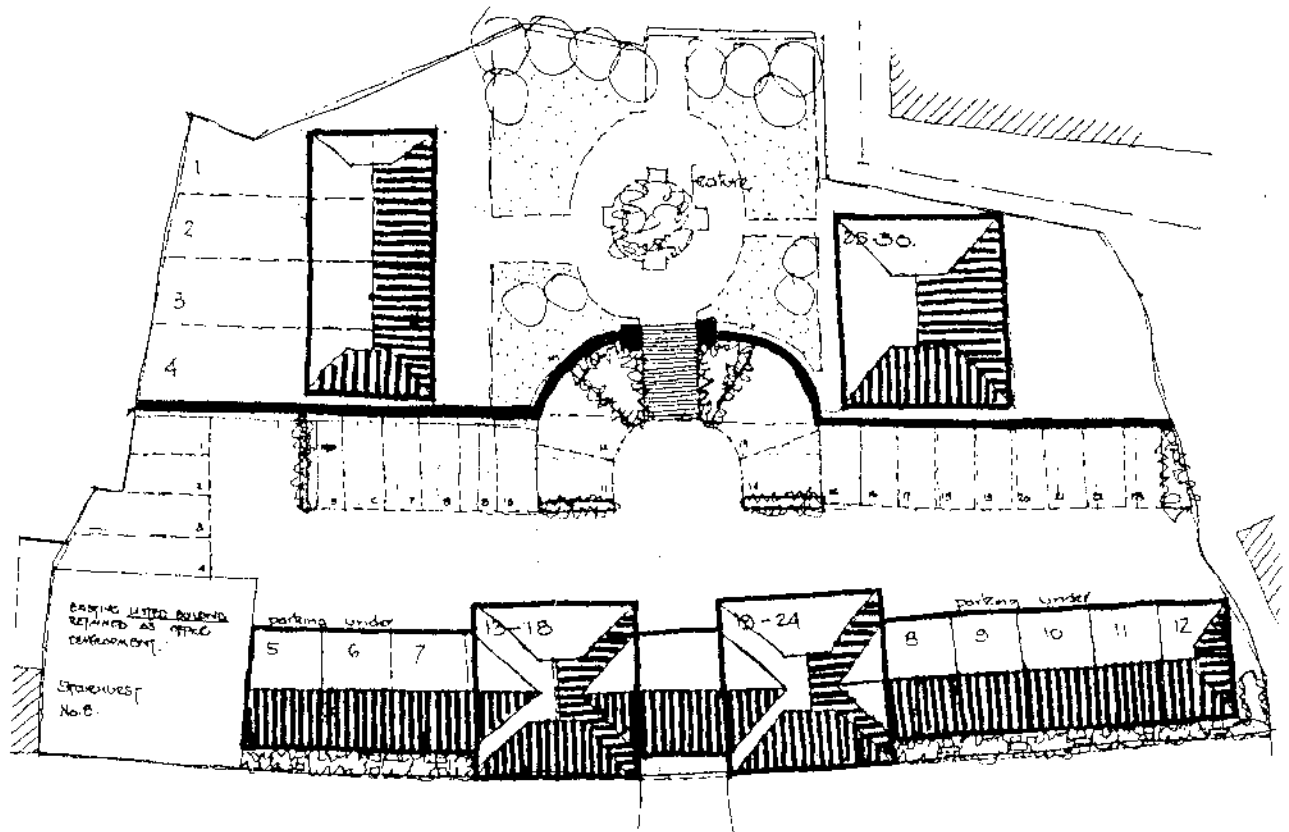


Stourbridge Conservation Area and Study Area (c. 1:3000)

Fig 2



Zones of Archaeological Response



The Proposed Development

Fig 3

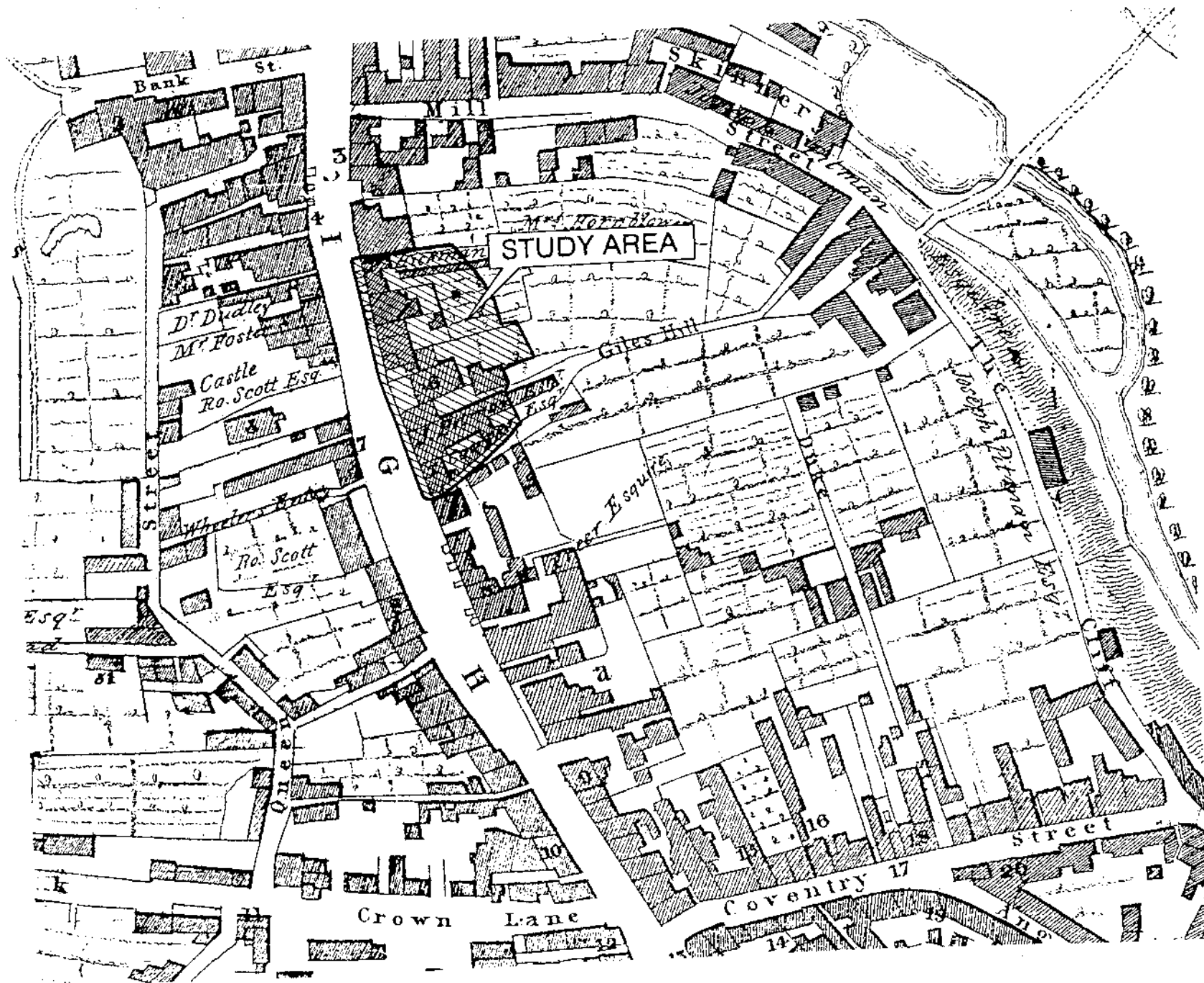


Fig. 4



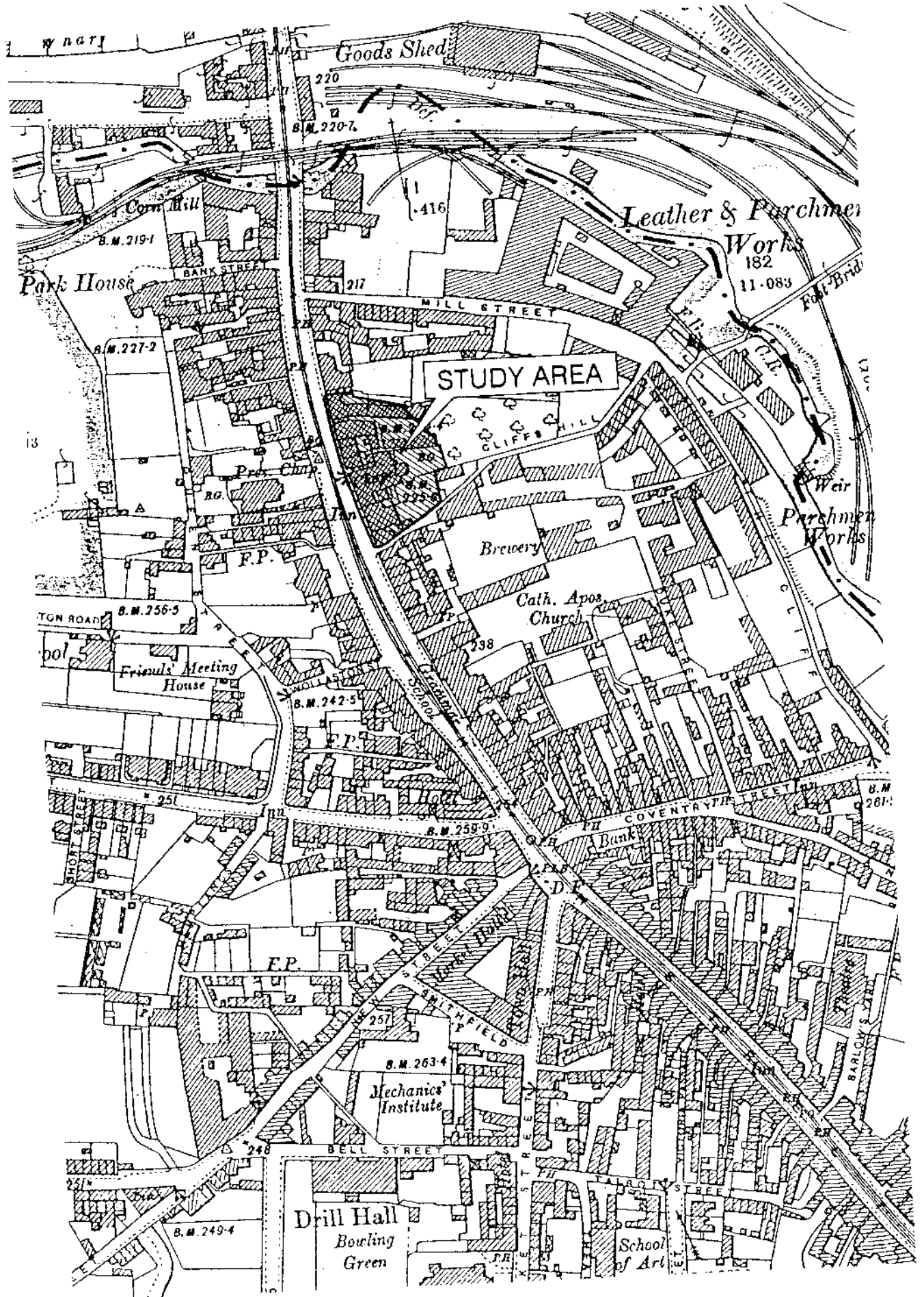


Fig. 6



Plate 1: The Congregational Church circa 1900



Plate 2: Zone ii ruined area





Plate 3: Zone iii looking north from Giles Hill

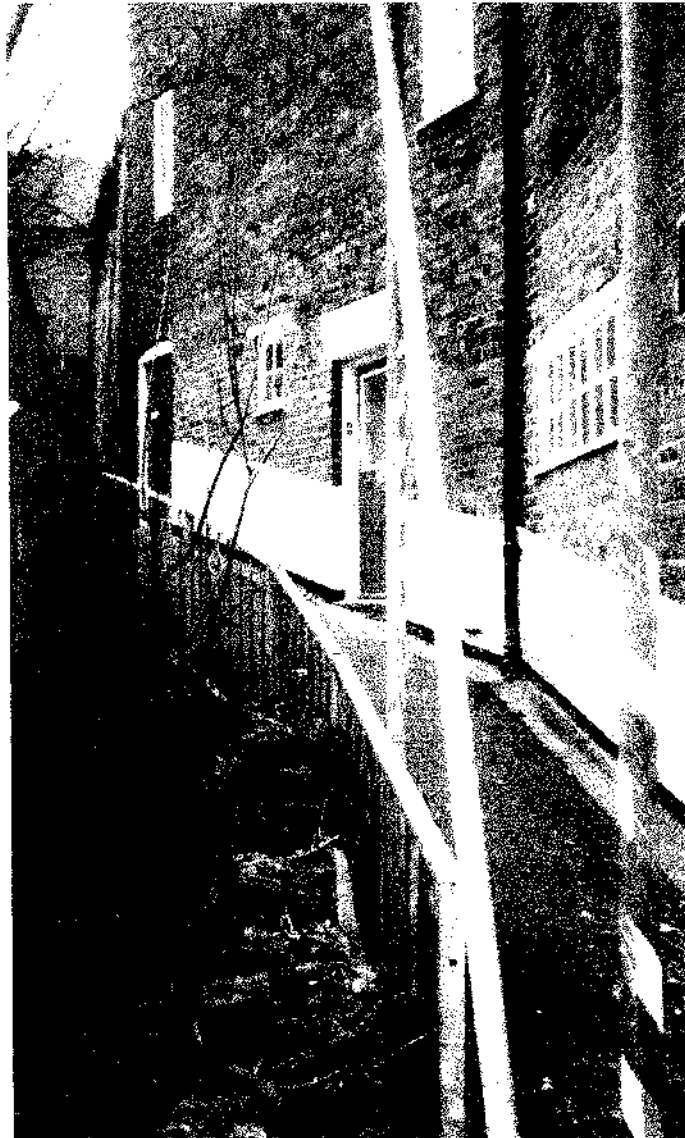


Plate 4: Giles Hill looking east



Plate 5: Zone vii looking west



Plate 6: Building A, Stourhurst House





Plate 7: Building B, remains of Congregational Church



Plate 8: Building B, remains of street frontage