



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM

**Land at Anchor Meadow,
Aldridge, West Midlands:**

**an archaeological desk-based
assessment**

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Land at Anchor Meadow, Aldridge, West Midlands: an archaeological desk-based assessment

Summary

A desk-based assessment was carried out as a condition of planning permission for Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The assessment concerned land at Anchor Meadow, Aldridge, in the West Midlands, and examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence in order to identify any areas of potential archaeological interest. A site inspection was also made. The site was deemed to have a low archaeological potential, mainly due to the probable destruction caused by the building of the railway in 1879.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) as a condition of planning permission by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The proposed development (outline planning permission BC56381P) involves proposals for residential development. This, the first phase of archaeological assessment, comprised desk-top research into the potential of the development area and a site visit. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999), and *Written Scheme of Investigation* prepared by BUFAU (Appendix) and approved by Mike Shaw, the Black Country Archaeologist for Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.

2.0 Site Location

The site is located in Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands (NGR SK 0553 0052; Fig.1). It is bounded to the south by railway lines, to the east by the Walsall Road and Aldridge By-pass, and to the north and west by the remainder of the Anchor Meadow Playing Fields. The area of the site is 6.75 acres (Fig.2).

3.0 Objectives

The objective of this assessment was to determine, as far as possible, the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, and the impact of the proposed works on the site.

4.0 Method

A site inspection of the development area was carried out and documentary research was undertaken of primary and secondary records and maps held in Walsall Local Studies Centre and The University of Birmingham Library. The Black Country Sites and Monuments Record provided information prior to the production of the *Written Scheme of Investigation*.

When specific areas of the site are referred to, they will be termed as Zone 1 and Zone 2, Zone 1 being the area of the site comprising of the playing field (Plate 1) and Zone 2 the area covered by the embankment (Plate 2).

5.0 Geology and Topography

A geological fault divides Aldridge into two parts. The geology of the western part comprises heavy clay soils and the eastern part consists of light Bunter sands and gravels. Consequently, enclosed pastures and meadow land are commonly concentrated in the west and arable and common land in the east. The site currently consists of a flat grass playing field in the northern half (Zone 1) and, in the southern half, scrub-land on a low raised embankment, associated with the railway (Zone 2).

6.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

There is no evidence for any prehistoric settlement within Aldridge parish boundaries, apart from a mesolithic flint-chipping floor discovered in 1955 on the surface of a large field by the Bourne Brook, to the west of Bourne Pool. This is about 2km to the south-east of Aldridge. Similarly, there is no evidence for Roman settlement in Aldridge itself, apart from the remains of an encampment (known as the Barr Beacon) in the Great Barr area of the parish, about ninety metres away from Rykmeld Street, which runs along the eastern edge of the parish. However, this sparsity of evidence may reflect the relatively low level of archaeological exploration within the area.

The place name Aldridge is derived from the Saxon, *Alewwic*, which means the *wic* by the alders, a *wic* sometimes indicating a dairy farm. As alders need plenty of water to survive, this may indicate a dairy farm near water. Gould (1980) suggested that the most likely place for any Saxon settlement in Aldridge would therefore be in the vicinity of Pool Green (WM SMR 6369).

Pool Green is situated where a number of roads meet by a large pool of water, at the south-east corner of the site (Fig.3). However, the roads may simply converge by a convenient crossing point. While this pool was largely destroyed when the railway was built and land to the east of Walsall Road has been built over, the western edge of the pool area may slightly infringe the extreme eastern edge of the development site, but no archaeological finds of Saxon origin have been found either here or anywhere else in Aldridge. During the site inspection, it was noted that the land at the southern edge of Zone 1 was quite waterlogged, which might be explained by the vicinity of the pool. However, land prone to water-logging would not have been particularly

attractive to settle, and it is perhaps more likely that settlement would have been sited on the better-drained land to the east of Pool Green.

In the 11th century, the parish of Aldridge was part of the royal Cannock forest. Great Barr, lying to the south of Aldridge, was largely deforested in the 12th century, and Aldridge had followed by the end of the 13th century. From 1200, when the parish church is reputed to have been built at Aldridge, to 1849, the two townships of Aldridge and Great Barr made up the parish of Aldridge. The church, manor house, and three-field system to the south conform to the classic medieval pattern of rural settlement.

Anchor Meadow itself was probably originally a roughly-wooded meadow. As the area was gradually cleared by charcoal burners this then became moorland, which was later enclosed. The fields to the north and south of Anchor Meadow were named Middlemoor and Deepmoor in 1684, reflecting their previous land-use (Fig.4). The three fields at the south-east corner of Anchor Meadow operated as a three-field system with its own manor court. Middlemoor was also a common in the 17th century (Fig.4). Anchor Meadow, while also enclosed by this period, was not common land. The possibility of late-medieval and post-medieval industrial activity in the vicinity of Pool Green may also be considered. To the east, adjacent to Bourne Pool, was a 15th-century Iron Works, so it is possible that similar activity may have occurred near Pool Green.

By 1879, the railway branch from Aldridge to Walsall Wood Colliery was opened. Aldridge station was opened in 1879 but closed to passengers in 1965, although the line continued to be used for goods traffic. The station lay just outside the south-eastern corner of the development area, but is no longer there (Plate 3).

7.0 Cartographic Information

The 1817 map (Fig.5) showed Anchor Meadow with its enclosures and only four buildings, none of which is within the development area. The 1840 tithe map (Fig.6) showed only two buildings, in the approximate locations of the ones on the 1817 map, and no change to the enclosures.

The 1885 and 1886 Ordnance Survey (O.S.) maps showed the railway line running along the southern edge of Zone 2, and the station, plus another building associated with the railway. To the north of Zone 1 were shown a footpath and a brook, following roughly the same north-west – south-east alignment. In the south-west corner of Zone 2, another branch of the railway curved round to the north. The enclosure boundaries were still shown, except for where the railway had destroyed them. To the south-east of the site, the Pool Green area had been greatly disturbed by the building of the railway and the bridge associated with it.

The 1902 O.S. map shows no change to the site. Pool Green now houses a cattle market in the area just south of the railway and there is the beginning of residential development to the east of Anchor Road. The 1913 and 1914 O.S. maps showed a very small amount of continuing residential development to the east of Anchor Road.

By 1938, however, there had been a lot more development on both sides of Anchor Road. On the west side, along the eastern edge of Anchor Meadow, but outside the development site, there were buildings including a Methodist Church and a cinema. By 1966, most of the enclosure boundaries had disappeared and there was a football ground to the north-east of the site; the area directly to the north of the site was now named Anchor Meadow Playing Fields. Also, a line of trees had been planted along the line of the embankment in Zone 1, continuing to the north-west along the line of an old enclosure boundary. A few more buildings and a crane associated with the railway were situated in Zone 2. In the late 1980s, the Anchor Road By-pass was built, cutting through the north-east corner of Anchor Meadow

8.0 Conclusions

From both the documentary evidence and the site inspection, it would appear that any archaeology in the area of the development site was greatly disturbed or, more probably, completely destroyed by the building of the railway in 1879. The theory that Pool Green may have been the focus for Saxon settlement is only speculative and based on place-name evidence, there being no archaeological finds from the site. This does not conclusively rule out the possibility of the existence of archaeological deposits here, especially remains of any industrial activity beside the pool, but little now remains of this site. Zone 1 probably has better potential for survival of any archaeological remains, but levelling for the playing field may have decreased this potential. Although the ground has been raised in Zone 2 to create the railway embankment, it is more likely that any archaeological deposits were destroyed in the process rather than sealed beneath it.

9.0 Acknowledgements

This report was written by Sarah Watt, and edited by Steve Litherland. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Many of the Ordnance Survey maps were provided by Jamie Peart in the Geography Department, University of Birmingham.

10.0 References

Maps

Ordnance Survey:
1885 6" 63 NE
1886 25" 63.4 and 63.8
1902 25" 63.4 and 63.8
1913+1938 (combined) 6" 63 NE
1914 25" 63.4
1938 25" 63.4

1966 25" SK0400 & SK0500
1972 6" SK00 SW

Other:

1817 Map of the Parish of Aldridge, surveyed by James Gilbert
1845 Plan of the Parish of Aldridge, copied from the tithe map of 1840, by T.T. Fisher.

Textual Sources

- Fox, B. 1990 *Aldridge History Trail*
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Gould, J. 1983 *Men of Aldridge*
Alan Sutton
- Gould, J. 1980 'Settlement and Farming in the Parish of Aldridge (West Midlands) Prior to 1650' in *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. XX, 1978-9, 41-56
- J.G. Jenkins & M.W. Greenslade (ed.) 1967 *The Victoria County History of the County of Stafford*, Vol.2
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- J.G. Jenkins & M.W. Greenslade (ed.) 1976 *The Victoria County History of the County of Stafford*, Vol.17
Oxford University Press
- Willmore, F. W. 1972 *A History of Walsall and its Neighbourhood*
S. R. Publishers Ltd.

Appendix

Archaeological Assessment of Land at Anchor Meadow, Aldridge, West Midlands

SMR 6369

Written Scheme of Investigation

1.0 Introduction

This Written Scheme of Investigation concerns the archaeological assessment of land at Anchor Meadow, Aldridge, West Midlands. The following document is based upon information provided by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record dated 7 February 2000 and has been prepared in accordance with government advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16. The archaeological work is required as a condition of planning permission by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The proposed development (outline planning permission BC56381P) involves proposals for residential development. Development shall not commence until a programme of archaeological work has been approved by the local planning authority in writing, and has then been undertaken. Two phases of archaeological assessment are proposed. First, desk-top research into the potential of the development area accompanied by a site visit, leading to, second, limited trial trenching if the results of the desk-top study so warrant it. Should the assessment identify that significant archaeological deposits or features may be affected by the development then a final mitigation stage may also be required.

2.0 Site Location

The site is located in Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands (NGR SK 0553 0052). The site is bounded to the south by railway lines, to the east by the Walsall Road and Aldridge By-pass, and to the north and west by the remainder of the Anchor Meadow Playing Fields.

3.0 Archaeological Background

The SMR entry (6369) notes that a putative Saxon settlement at Pool Green, south of Aldridge was identified by Jim Gould in an article in *South Staffs. Arch. Vol. 20* (1978). In place name studies the name Aldridge, the wic by the alders, suggests a dairy farm near water, though wic does not always indicate dairy farming. The vicinity of Pool Green, where a number of roads meet by a large pool of water, is the best local site for a Saxon settlement. However, the pool was largely destroyed when the railway was built, and land to the east of the Walsall Road has been largely built over. In addition, no finds of Saxon date have been recorded.

4.0 Phase One: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

4.1 Objective

In view of the limited state of knowledge concerning this putative archaeological site, the objective of the archaeological desk-based assessment is to determine, as far as is possible, the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, and the impact of the proposed works on the site.

This phase of work will also suggest measures to mitigate the impact of the development works upon any identified archaeological remains. It is anticipated that this will initially take the form of trial trenching.

4.2 Method

The desk-based assessment will comprise a site inspection and an examination of published and unpublished written records, illustrations and maps. The assessment will include all sources recommended by the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

Sources consulted will include, where appropriate:

- Geological maps and relevant reports
- Trial pit and bore-hole data from the site and in the near vicinity, where available
- 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

5.0 Phase Two: Limited Trial Trenching

5.1 Objectives

The precise objectives of the archaeological trial trenching will be largely dependent upon the results of the desk-based assessment. However, as a minimum the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains would be recorded.

5.2 Method

For the purposes of this costing if limited trial trenching were required, a 1% sample of the overall development area has been assumed. If the development area is roughly equivalent to 2ha then trial trenching might consist of four trenches measuring 25m by 2m, i.e. equivalent to 200 square metres.

The topsoil or modern overburden will be removed by a machine-excavator using a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, to the uppermost archaeological horizon, or to the subsoil horizon if this is higher. The subsoil-

surface, or the uppermost horizon of archaeological deposits so exposed will then be hand-cleaned. A sample of each feature present will be hand-excavated in order to characterise and date it. Artifacts will be collected by context, and 20 litre soil samples will be collected for environmental analysis, where appropriate. All stratigraphic sequences will be recorded, even where no archaeology is present. Environmental samples will be taken where appropriate. Contextual information will be supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs that, together with recovered artifacts, will form the site archive.

A more detailed specification for a trial trenching phase can be provided if this stage of work is required.

6.0 Staffing

The desk-based assessment and trial trenching will be monitored for BUFAU by a Project Manager (normally MIFA or AIFA or equivalent) and the fieldwork will be carried out under a fully qualified Site Supervisor.

7.0 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
- Method
- Summary of archaeological results
- Development impact
- Conclusion
- List of sources consulted

A supplementary report would be prepared for the results of the trial trenching.

Copies of the reports will be forwarded to the local planning authority. They will be made publicly accessible, as part of the West Midlands/Black Country Sites and Monuments Record within six months of completion. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in West Midlands Archaeology and the appropriate national journals.

8.0 Archive

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

9.0 Timetable

A precise timetable is not available at present. However, it is anticipated that the Phase One desk-based assessment and reporting would be carried out between one and two weeks, following commissioning by the clients. A similar time-scale can be envisaged for the trial trenching, if this is necessary.

10.0 General

All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The project will follow the requirements set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) and the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
11th February 2000
P:Costings/Westmids/D-top/AnchorMeadow, Aldridge.*

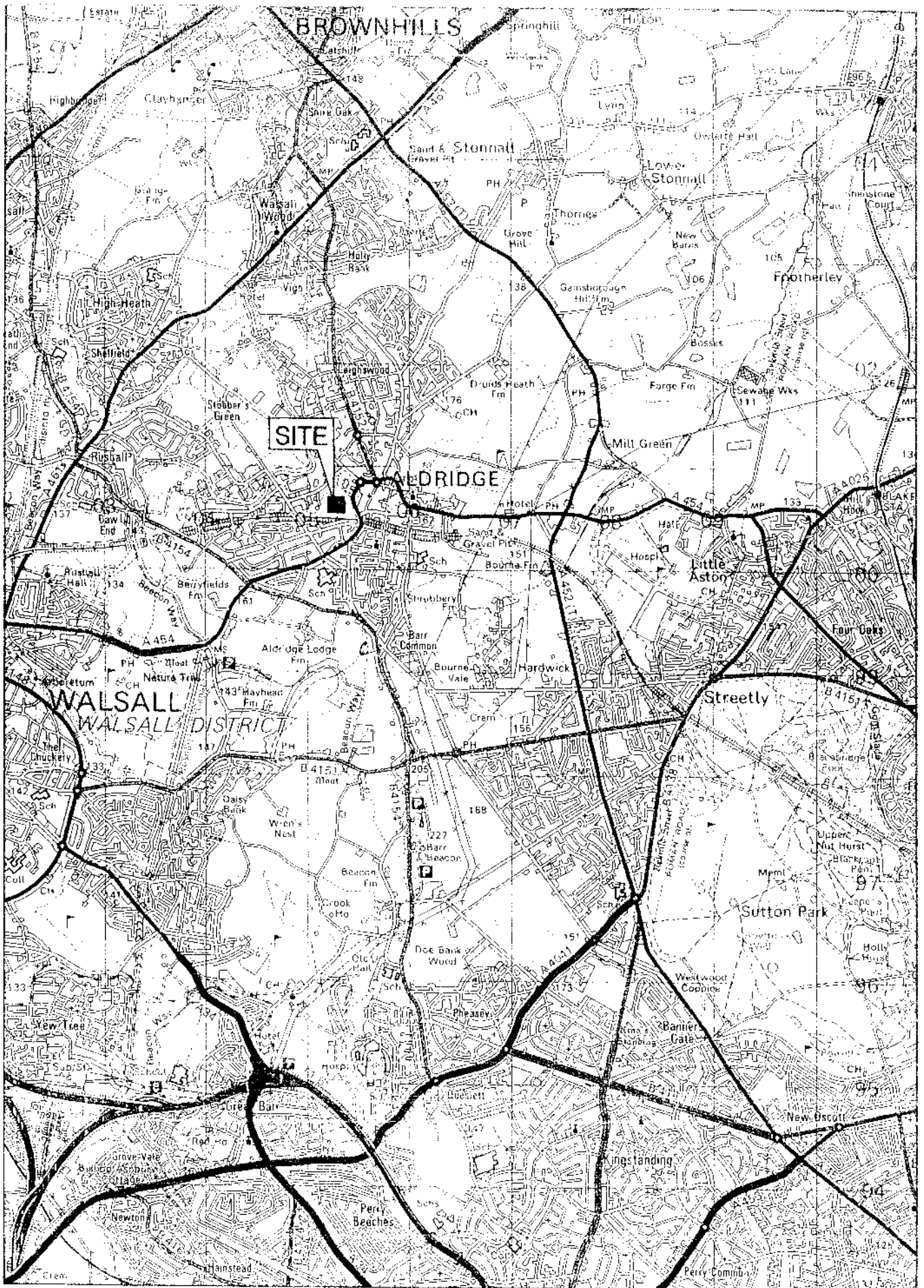


Fig 1

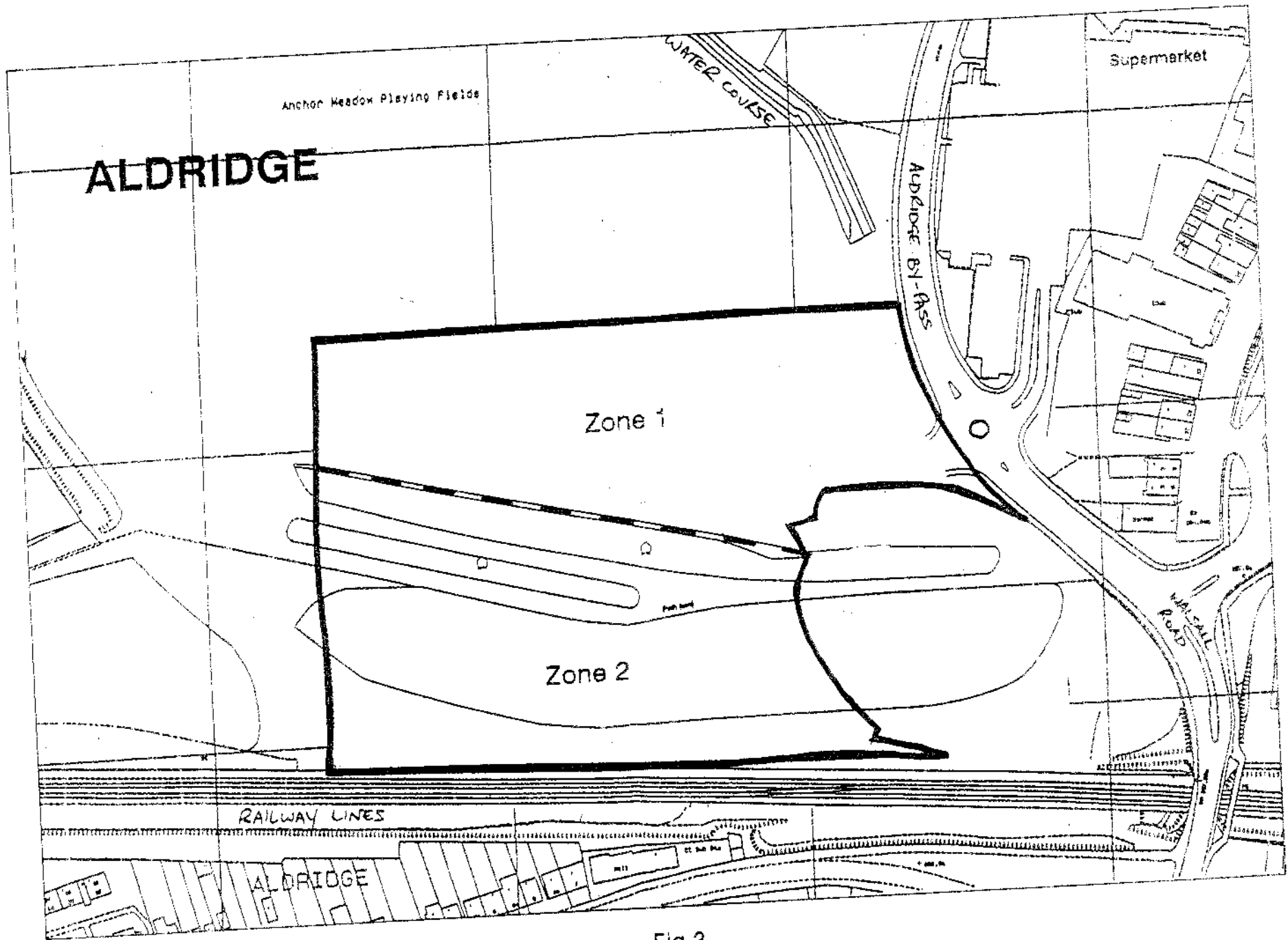


Fig 2

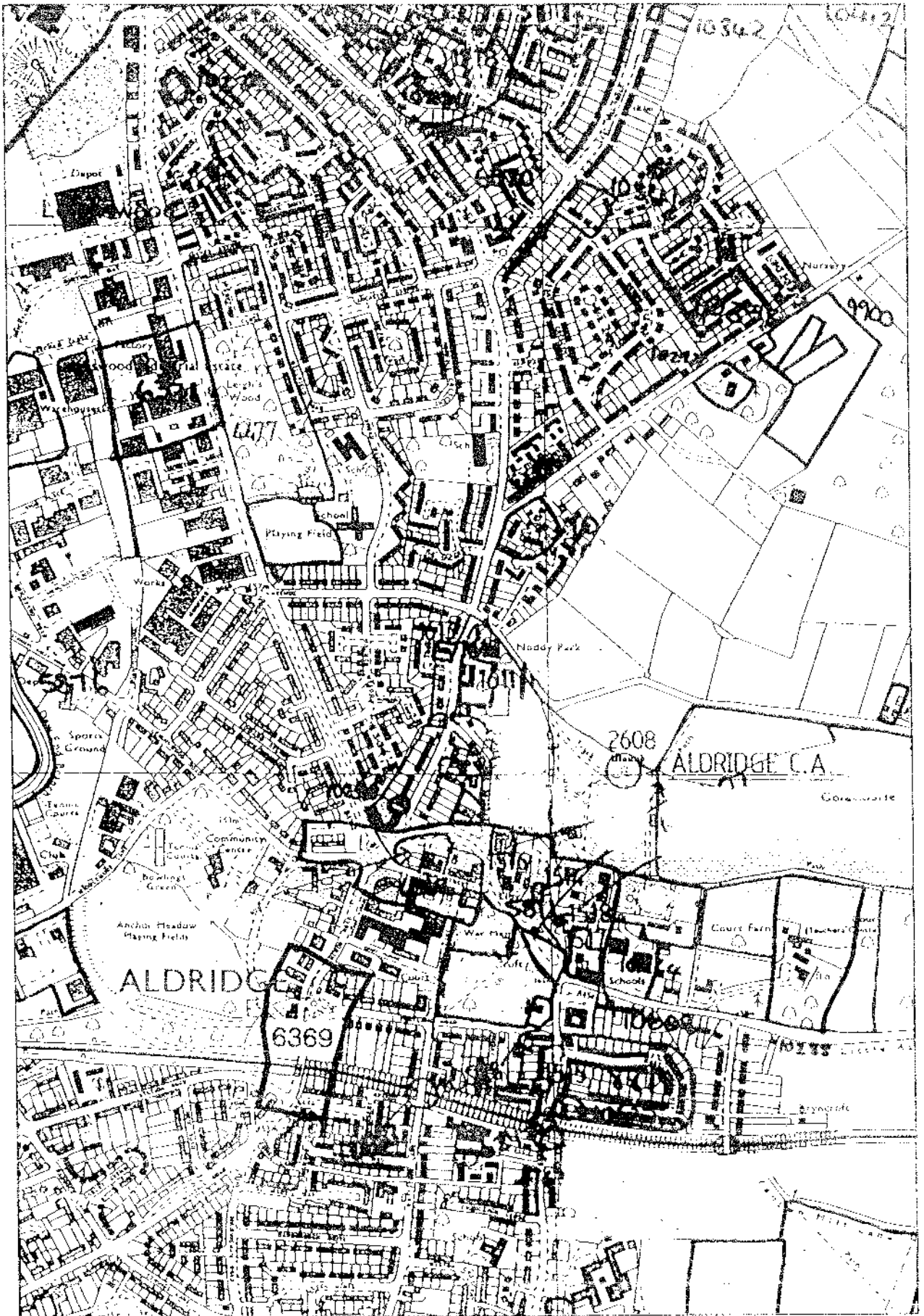


Fig 3

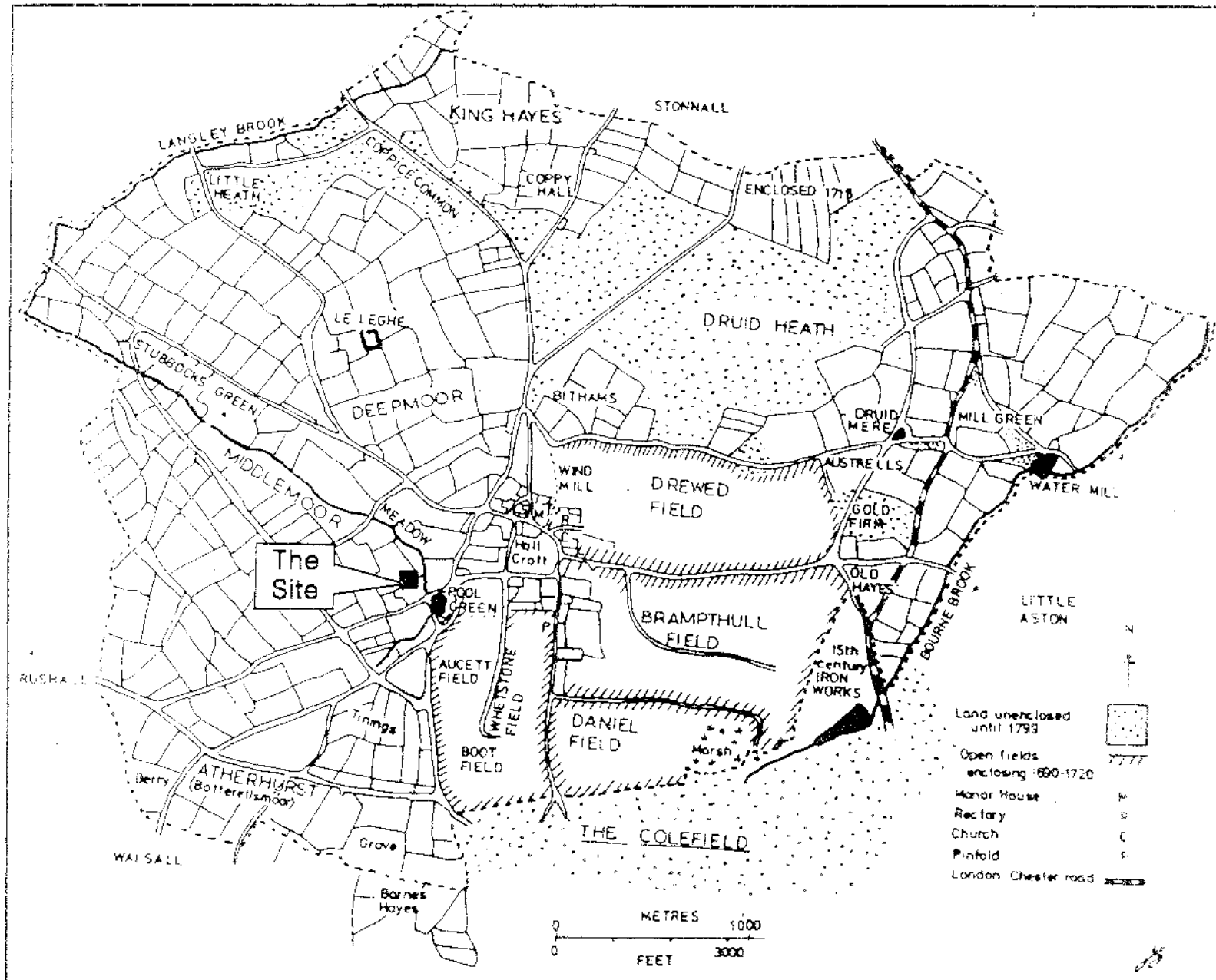


Fig 4

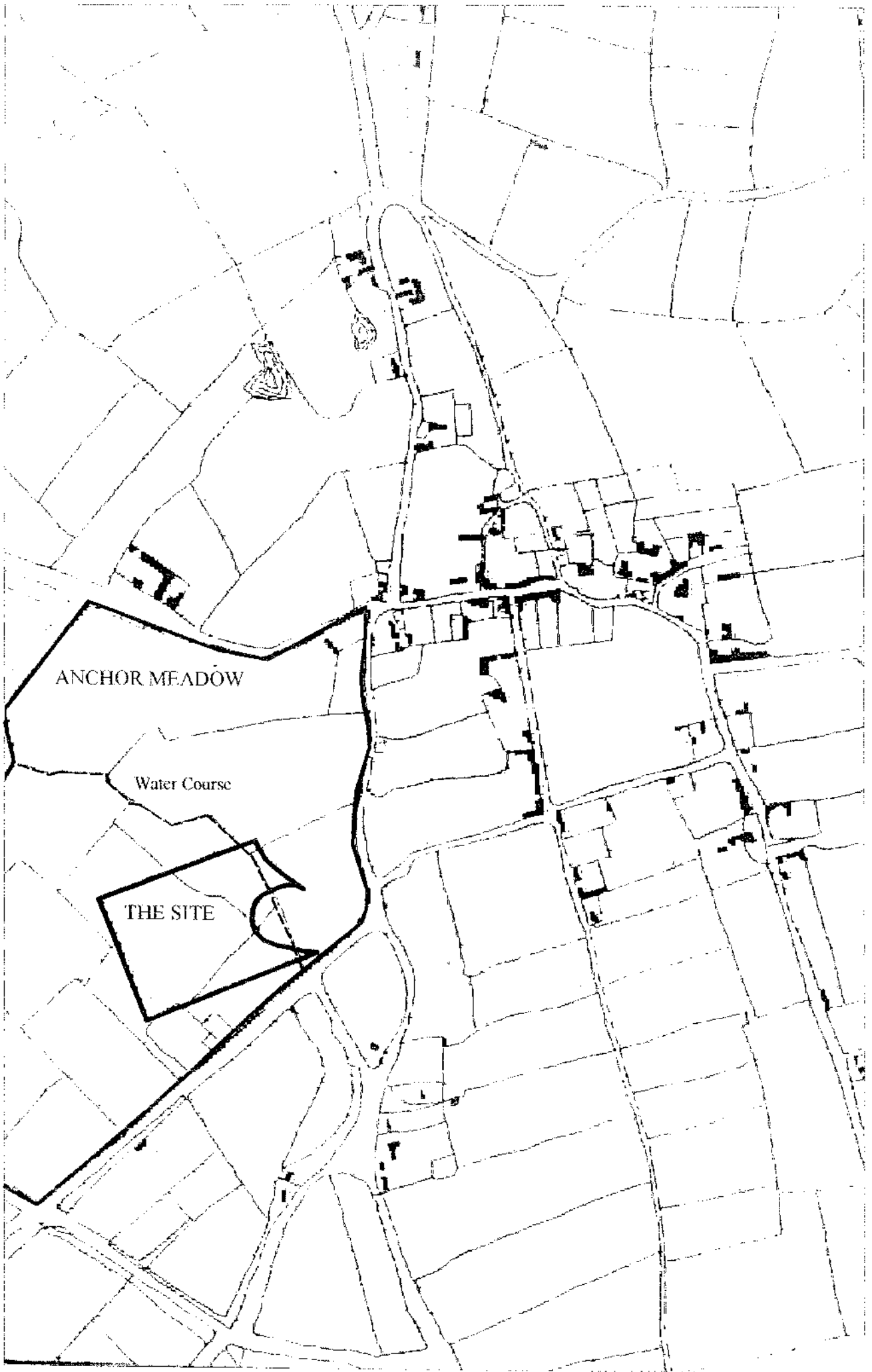


Fig.5 1817 map



Fig.6

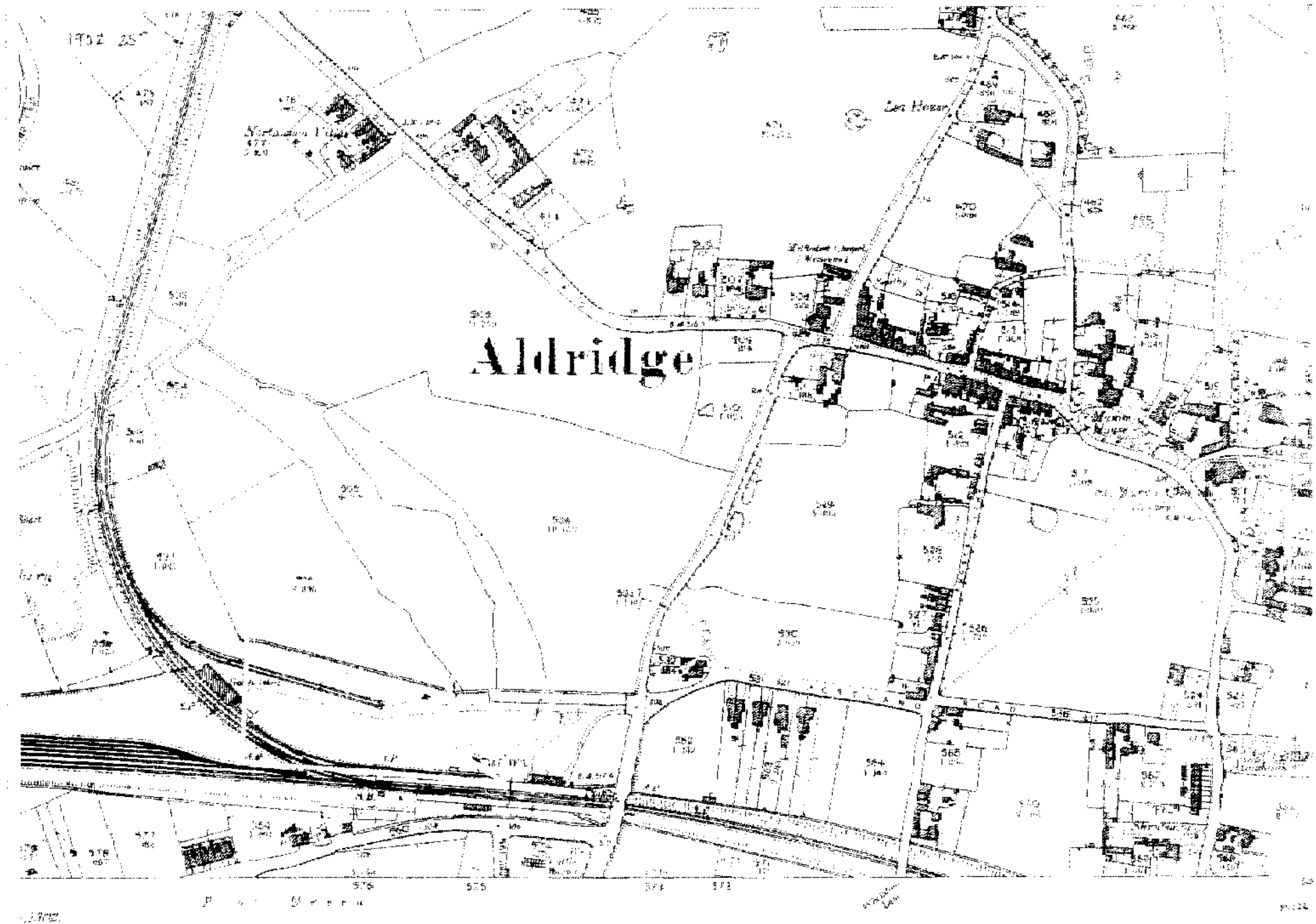
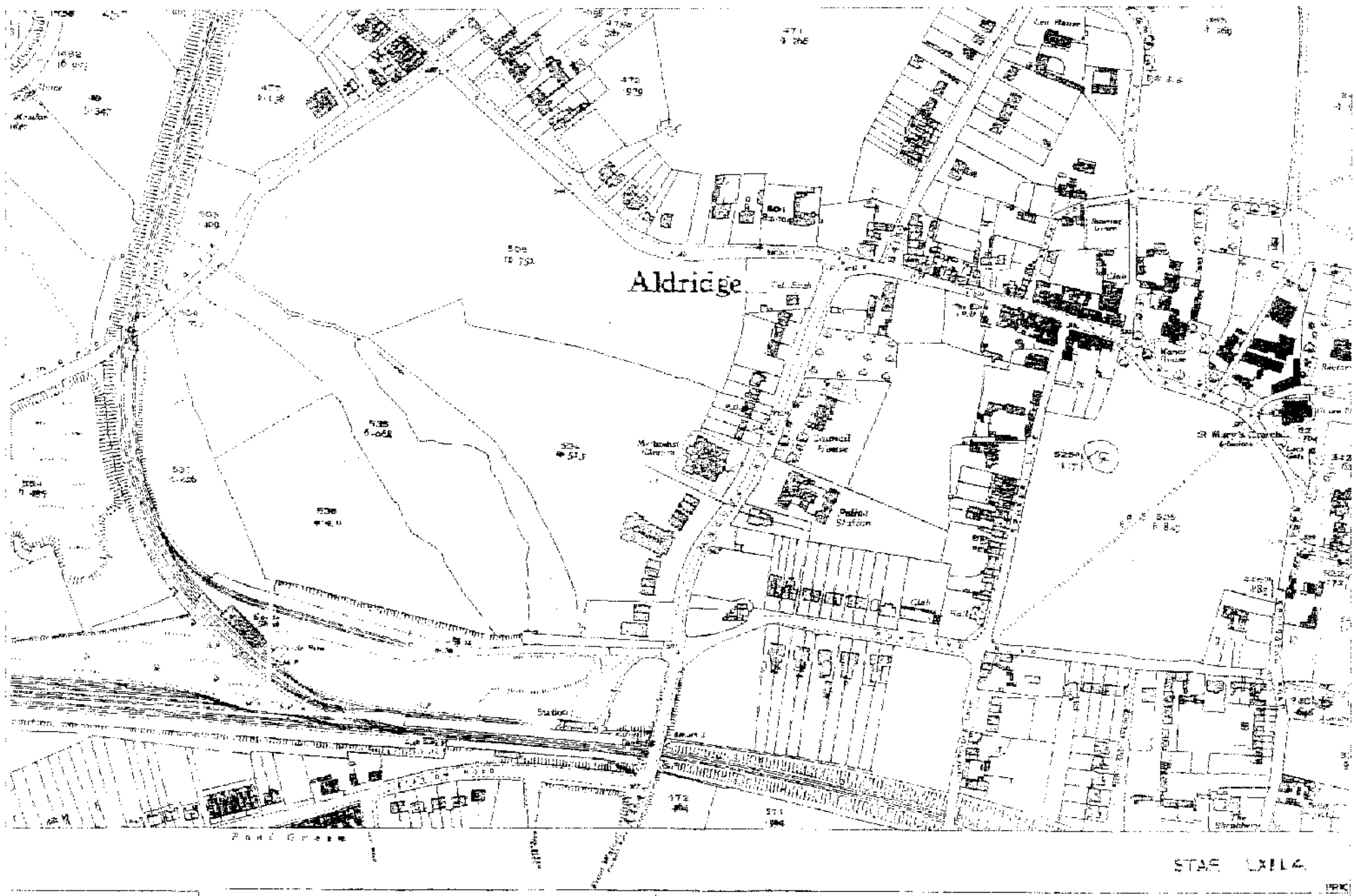


Fig. 7 1902 O.S. 1:2500 (not to scale)



THE DEFINITIVE LAMBERTING OF THIS MAP IS TO BE DONE BY THE LAND OFFICE.

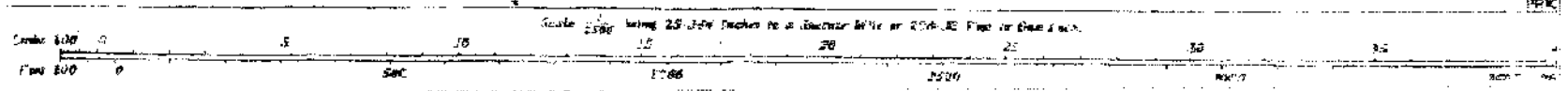


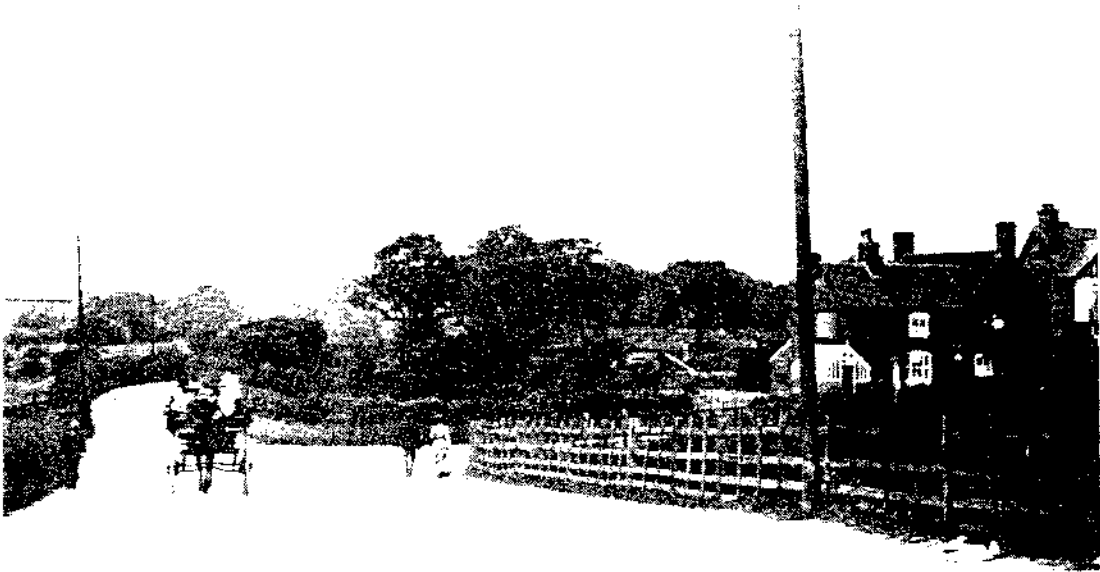
Fig. 8 1938 O.S. 1:2500 (not to scale)



Plate 1



Plate 2



Junction of Portland Road and Anchor Road c.1900

Plate 3



Aldridge Station c.1920

Plate 4