

**7 Corbett Avenue,
Droitwich:**

**An Archaeological
Desk-Based Assessment**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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an archaeological desk-based
assessment**

by
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Summary

A desk-based assessment was carried out in advance of proposed development of land on the site of number 7 Corbett Avenue, Droitwich. The site lies close to the medieval centre of Witton to the south of Droitwich. The assessment examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence and identified areas of potential archaeological interest. The site was found to have the potential for archaeological deposits, dating from the medieval or post-medieval periods.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) ahead of development proposals by Bryant Homes Mercia Limited. The proposed development consists of the construction of an apartment building for 21 flats and associated car parking. The report sets out the results of an archaeological desk-top study of the site. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of known and potential archaeological information for the area, based on existing data. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

2.0 Site Location

The site is located at NGR SO 9005 6296 off Corbett Avenue, Droitwich, and comprises an area of approximately 0.39 acres (fig. 1). The planning application states that the current land-use on the site is a residential nursing home and associated parking. Demolition of the buildings presently occupying the site is in progress.

3.0 Objectives

The objective of this assessment was to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within and around the proposed development site, in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate. The desk-based assessment was the first stage of evaluation ahead of trial trenching intended to identify the need for any further archaeological work in advance of the planning application, and to identify potential requirements for any *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains, or for their recording in advance of, or during, development. Final mitigation decisions, however, rest with the Planning Archaeologist at Worcestershire County Council.

4.0 Method

Documentary research was undertaken of primary and secondary records and maps held by Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record, Worcestershire Record Office and County Hall Record Office.

5.0 Geology and Topography

Droitwich lies between 25m and 40m AOD on both sides of the River Salwarpe valley. The underlying geology consists of Mercia Mudstone (formerly known as Keuper Marl) and third river terrace deposits (Buteux and Hurst 1996, 1-2).

6.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Prehistoric

The earliest evidence for human activity in the area is a collection of flint tools dating from the Mesolithic period (Buteux and Hurst 1996, 2). The archaeological record suggests that salt production began in earnest in the middle Iron Age (c. 500-100 BC) when it was concentrated on the northern bank of the River Salwarpe. The focus of production shifted to the southern bank in the late Iron Age (c. 100 BC-AD 43) (Hurst nd, 6).

Roman

Roman settlement began in Droitwich with military occupation, and the main Roman road, the modern A38, was also probably of military construction. The Roman small town dates to the mid-1st century (Buteux and Hurst 1996, 2). The Roman focus lies to the north of the study area.

Saxon

One of the first references to the manor of Witton was when it was given to Evesham Abbey by Ethalbald son of Alewi, King of the Mercians in 716. Anglo Saxon charters confirm that Droitwich developed into an important centre of salt manufacture for the West Midlands during this period. Pottery from excavations in the town also reflect its associations with the Cotswolds and East Midlands. Brine pits and over 230 salt pans are recorded for 'Wich' in the Domesday Book, reflecting the strength and size of the industry at the end of the Anglo Saxon period (Freczer 1978, 9).

Medieval

The church of St. Mary de Witton (HWCM 257), also referred to in the sources as St. Mary de Wich, was the focus of a small manorial settlement during the Medieval period. A medieval floor-tile kiln, found during grave digging in the early-19th century (Ibid, 13), may have produced tiles with which to rebuild the church which was in "bad repair" in 1349 (VCH 1913, 88). According to Nash, the rents of the parishioners were insufficient to support either a minister or the fabric of the church

(1799, 318). Due, in part at least, to the dilapidated state of the church, the parish of St. Mary de Witton was united with St. Andrew's in 1662 when the advowson was held by the crown. The parish is described in 1427-8 as not having more than ten inhabitants (VCH 1913, 88). Nash wrote that the church had been demolished and part of the graveyard had been cut away when the turnpike road from Droitwich to Worcester was widened, (1799, 325).

Excavations at 36 Corbett Avenue, less than 200m away from the proposed development site, revealed archaeological deposits dating to the 13th century. There was also good preservation of archaeobotanical remains, including cereals. It was suggested that the site had been part of a farmyard complex, although no structural remains were located within the plot (Napthan, Ratkai and Pearson 1997, 3).

Post-Medieval

Salt production in Droitwich increased rapidly from the 17th century, when c.3000 tons of salt was being produced per annum, the industry peaked at 120,000 tons, produced in 1872. It was during this period at the end of the 19th century that one man came to the fore of the salt industry; John Corbett. He moved the industry to Stoke Prior, 3.5 miles to the north-east of the town, and began redeveloping the town itself as a spa town. It seems likely, then, that it was from this man that the Avenue derived its name. Consequently there are many references in the documentary record relating to John Corbett. In general, records dating to before 1901 are associated with the estate of John, while records dated between 1901 and 1906 refer to Thomas Corbett who was responsible for the administration of his late brother's estate.

7.0 Cartographic Information

A map showing the town and borough of Droitwich drawn up in 1786 (fig. 2) shows Witton churchyard, with St. Mary's Church, a farmhouse opposite the church and the surrounding areas as fields. The only major route through Witton was the Droitwich-Worcester turnpike road. Other minor roads depicted include one running west from the turnpike road, now known as Corbett Road, and another east off the turnpike that becomes the northern part of Corbett Avenue. The situation is little changed by the time the Tithe map was drawn up in 1840 (fig. 3). However, there are more dwellings strung along the turnpike road, and the fields are generally smaller and more numerous. The First Edition OS Map (fig. 4) reflects a steady increase in the numbers of houses built along the turnpike and some minor roads. The area of the proposed development is still under pasture at this period.

It is not until 1927 when the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map (fig. 5) was drawn up that we see major changes occurring. Two new substantial roads were added to the east of the turnpike, road running parallel with the turnpike and each other; Corbett Avenue and Lyttleton Road. A substantial house set in spacious grounds occupied the corner plot at number 7. The house was L-shaped in plan, with several small out-houses and a large curving drive. The 1938 Ordnance Survey map (fig. 6) shows that additions to the house and out-buildings were made in the previous decade, but much of the plot remained garden. The house and gardens appear little changed up to the present.

8.0 Conclusion

Buteux and Hurst noted that the potential for survival of buried archaeological deposits in and around Droitwich is generally good (1996, 34). Excavation has shown that "Roman, Anglo Saxon, medieval and post-medieval deposits do survive to depths of 3m to 4m in some places, and...these contain datable artefactual and environmental assemblages....The destruction of substantial sections of these deposits by the 18th and 20th century canal works, and by 19th century and 20th century industrial developments, means that the deposits which have survived are even more important" (ibid). It has also been noted that the most significant destruction has taken place in the more recent past. Therefore, in areas where there has been little or no development since the 1800s there tends to be more opportunity of finding preserved archaeological deposits.

The documentary and cartographic evidence, combined with the results of the excavation at 36 Corbett Avenue, suggest that there is the potential of below-ground archaeology within the proposed development area. The fact that the site is located close to the known historic centre of Droitwich further emphasises this possibility. Due to the fragmentary and often speculative nature of the evidence for this district of Droitwich, the site is of importance for its potential contribution to this knowledge. Therefore trial-trenching will be needed to further clarify the nature of any below-ground archaeological resource.

9.0 Acknowledgements

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10.0 References

Maps

Ordnance Survey

1889 25" Worcester
1903 25" Worcester
1927 25" Worcester
1938 25" Worcester

Others

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Town & Borough of Droitwich in 1786

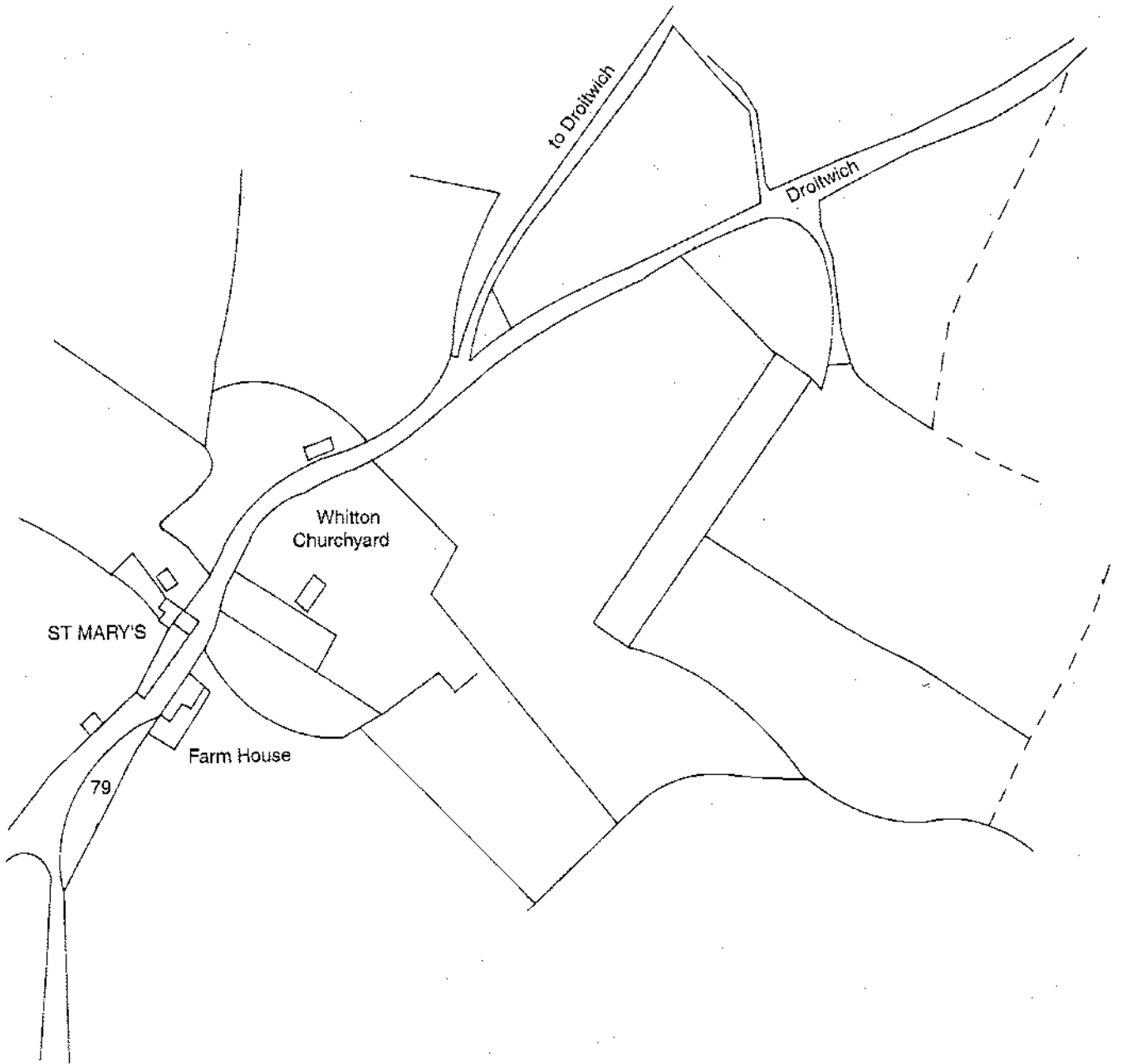
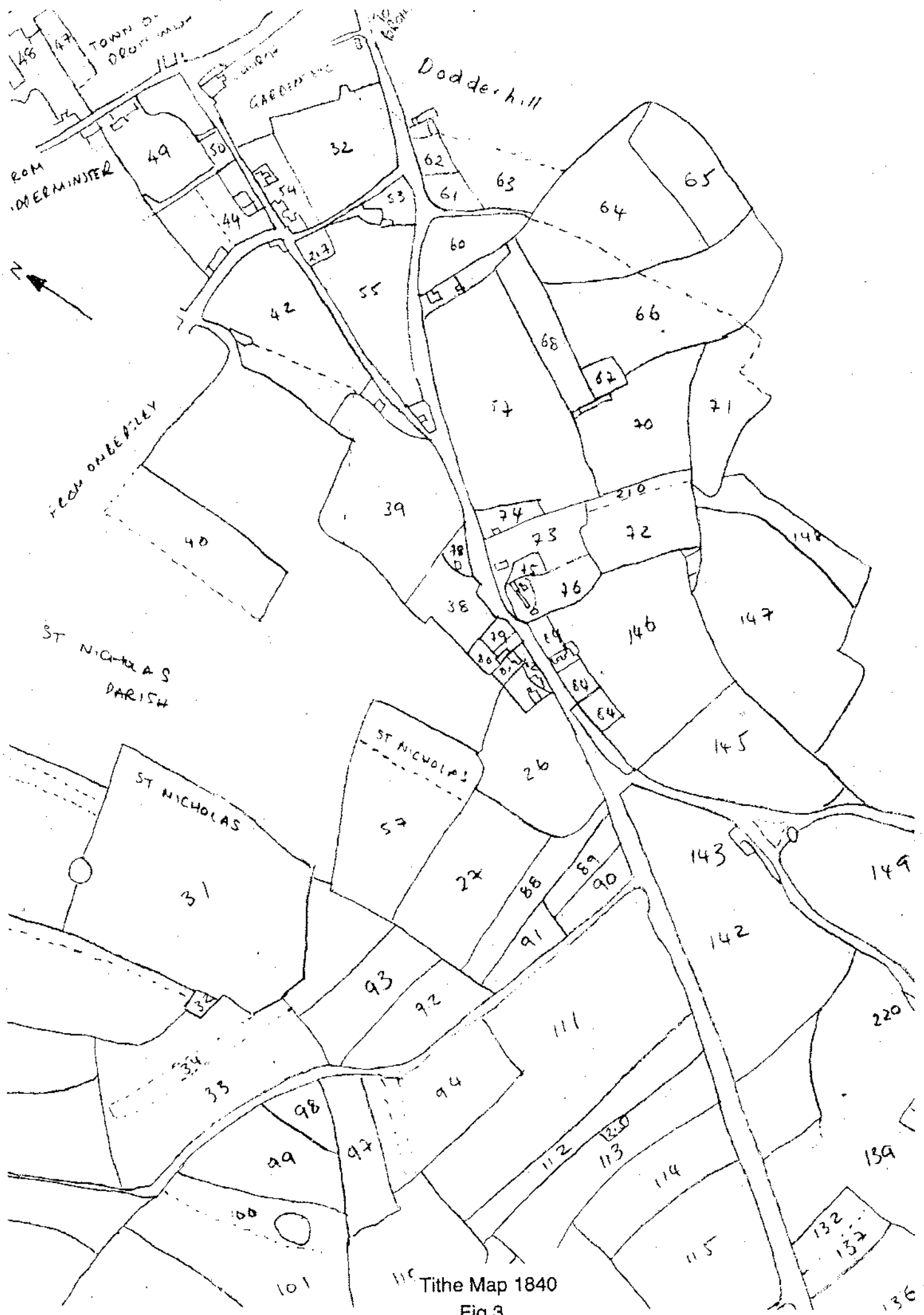
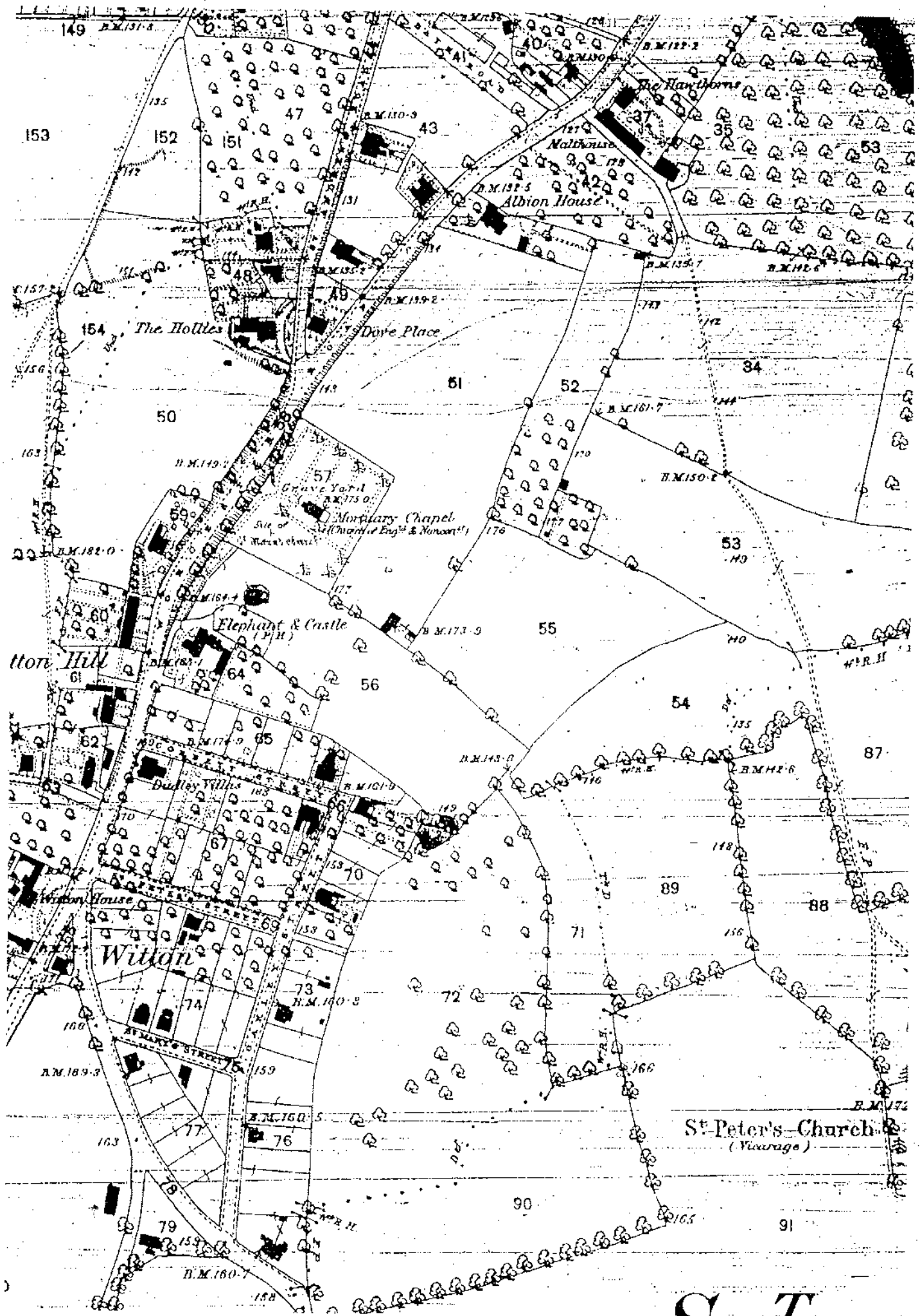


FIG.2



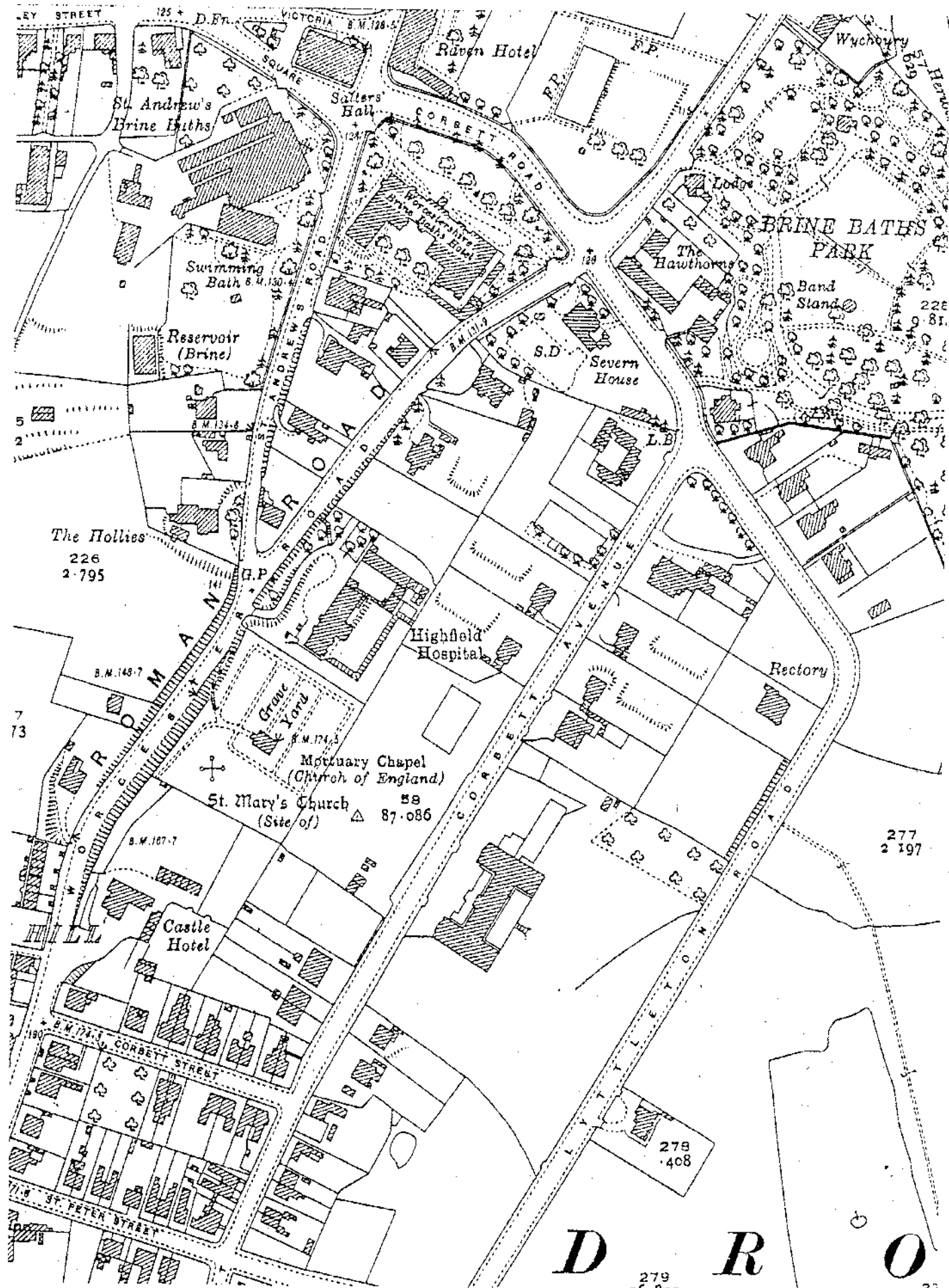
Tithe Map 1840
Fig.3



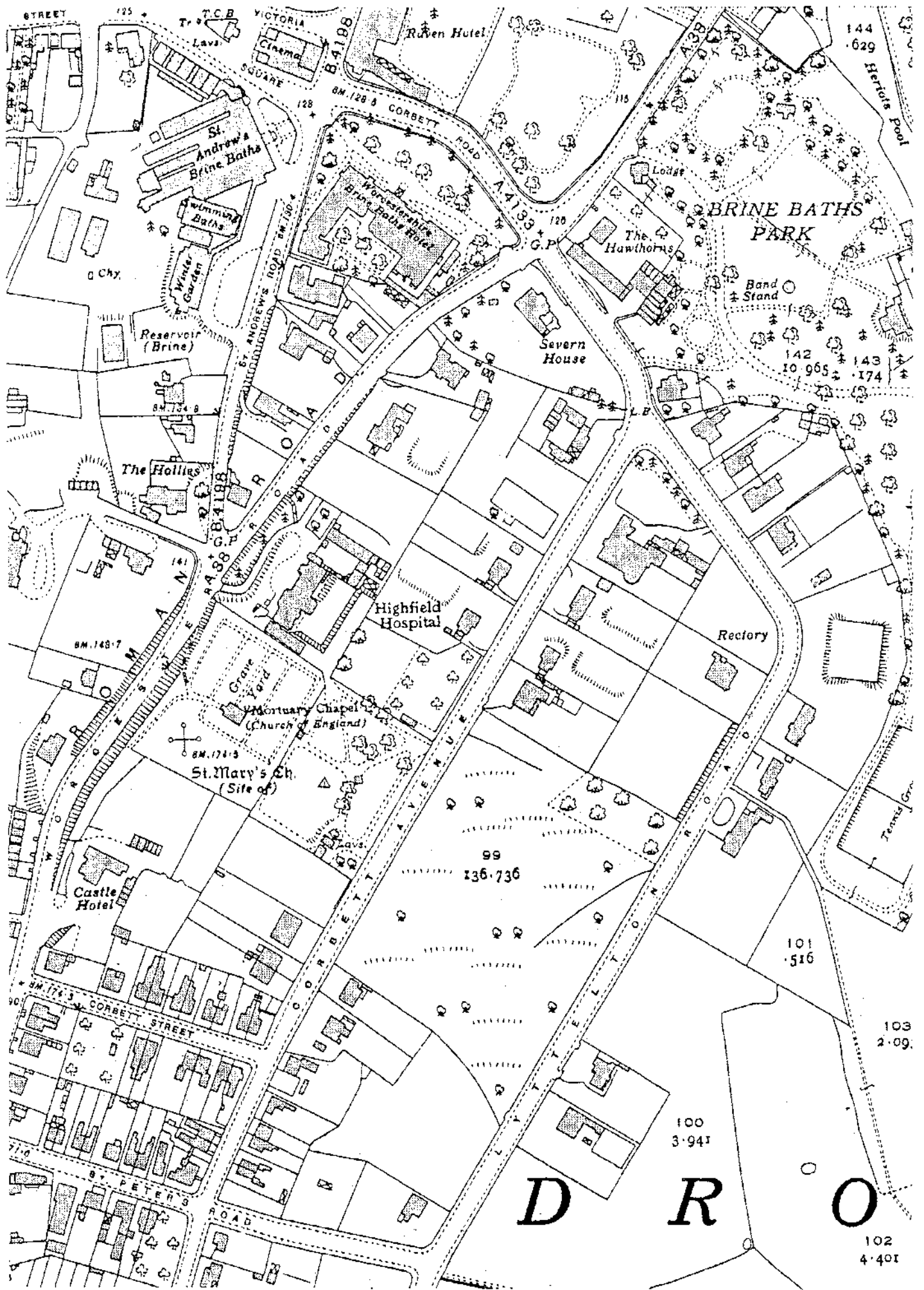
1st Edition OS.

Fig.4

OUT



1927 OS.
Fig.5



1938 OS.
Fig.6

