

**An Archaeological
Evaluation at Land
Adjacent to 193,
Droitwich Road, Fernhill
Heath, Worcestershire**

WSM 30119

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at land adjacent to 193, Droitwich Road, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8647 5581, WSM 30119), prior to the construction of eleven new houses with associated groundworks, in the period 13th – 16th September 2000.

Archaeological fieldwork undertaken during the construction of a pipeline from Astley to Worcester on behalf of Severn Trent Water plc, revealed spot-finds of Prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval date close to the proposed development site (WSM 20864-66, 20869).

An initial stage of investigation comprised the assessment of documentary and cartographic sources, published and unpublished written records, and an on-site inspection of the proposed development site. The assessment did not identify any archaeological remains within the development site.

A total of five trenches was excavated within the development site. No archaeological features or deposits were identified. The lack of archaeological evidence reinforces the results of the desk-based assessment.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken at land adjacent to 193, Droitwich Road, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8647 5581, WSM 30119). The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Bryant Homes Central Ltd to provide archaeological information in advance of proposed development of the site. The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999), a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, County Archaeological Service, Worcester County Council (2000) and a Specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Mould 2000). This evaluation conformed to Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1990).

2.0 The Site and its Location (Figures 1 and 3)

The site is located within the village of Fernhill Heath, approximately 2 kilometres north of Worcester. Two houses were demolished and cleared in advance of archaeological investigation, whilst the remainder of the site was represented by former domestic gardens.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background (Figure 2)

All sites referred to in this section lie within a 1000m radius of the development site. The majority of SMR numbers and their locations are shown in Figure 2.

3.1 Prehistoric

Three findspots of Prehistoric lithics have been identified in the surrounding landscape (WSM 20854, 20865, 20873). These were at sites located along the Astley to Worcester Aqueduct, which were identified during salvage recording and field walking associated with the construction of the pipeline that passed to the south and west of the site. The paucity of prehistoric artefacts along the line of the Astley to Worcester Aqueduct was interpreted as reflecting the scarcity of settlement in the area, suggesting that prehistoric occupation was concentrated on the gravel terraces of the River Severn (Dalwood *et al.* 1996).

3.2 Roman

Excavated deposits near Linacres Farm, approximately 1km to the north-west of the development site, were interpreted as peripheral features of a rural settlement, dated between the 1st and 4th centuries AD (WSM 20854, Dalwood *et al.* 1996). Findspots of Roman pottery were identified approximately 300-500m south-west of the development site, again along the alignment of the Astley to Worcester Aqueduct (WSM 20858, 20864, 20865, 20866). It is also suggested that the Roman road from Metchley to Droitwich (the modern A38) continues to Worcester passing 500m south of the site (HWCMS 3317). This has not been tested archaeologically.

3.3 Medieval

Two moats have been identified in the vicinity of the development site, both surviving as earthworks and dated to the Medieval period (WSM 07887, 07886). Holy Claines Farmhouse (WSM 20474), which is situated approximately 500m south of the development site, has been dated to 1500-1599AD. Records for WSM 22190 describe a Deserted Medieval Village at Holy Claines Farm – this is based on conjectural evidence. Medieval pottery was recovered from various points along the line of the Astley to Worcester Aqueduct (WSM 20854, 20859, 20863, 20864, 20688, 20869), and ridge and furrow earthworks which also dated to the medieval period have been identified in the area (WSM 15901).

3.4 Post-medieval

Post-medieval ridge and furrow earthworks, dated to 1540-1900AD, have been identified to the south of the development site (WSM 20870, 20871, 20872). Findspots have also been recovered at these locations as well as at WSM 20873, 04157, 20855, 20857, 20858, 20860, 20862, 20863, 20865, 20866). Most of these were identified during the salvage recording along the path of the Astley to Worcester Aqueduct. Several buildings in the area are also listed in the Worcestershire SMR. These are mainly farm buildings and associated barns, some of which are still standing, and some which are known only through documentary evidence. There is also documentary evidence for a windmill at Porters Hill (WSM 22978).

In the Victoria History of the Counties of England, Fernhill Heath is described as a “hamlet in the north-east (of the parish of North Claines) on the Droitwich Road near the railway station, the greater part of which adjoins Hindlip and is the property of

Lord Hindlip" (VCH Worcestershire vol. iii). Fernhill Heath also contained the kennels of the Worcestershire Hunt (*ibid.*).

3.5 Cartographic Information (Figures 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)

The Tithe map (Figure 4) and apportionment from 1843 show the site to be within a large rectangular-shaped field that lies directly south of the Droitwich Road. It is described as a 10 acre field used as arable, numbered 306. The centre of Fernhill Heath is slightly to the north along the Droitwich Road. The field boundaries remain mostly the same in both the Ordnance Survey first and second editions of 1885 and 1903 (Figures 5 and 6), with only the eastern boundary being altered to increase the area of the field up to the railway line. Despite the growth of the village after the construction of the Worcester to Wolverhampton railway line and station at Fernhill Heath, sometime before 1885, neither of these maps show that any buildings were situated in this area.

More recent maps (Ordnance Survey third and fourth edition, Figures 7 and 8) show that Fernhill Heath is heavily developed to the north of the Droitwich Road, but to the south of the road, near where the site is situated it has remained as fields. The field within which the development site is situated was divided up into plots of varying sizes aligned at 90 degrees to the road, and used mainly as residential dwellings with substantial gardens, the southern boundaries of which respect the original field boundary.

4.0 Archaeological Evaluation

4.1 Objectives

The objectives of this archaeological evaluation were to determine the likely presence or absence of any archaeological deposits and features within the proposed development site. The evaluation aimed to establish the extent, date and character of surviving archaeological deposits and to assess their quality and significance, in order to permit the formulation of a mitigation strategy, if appropriate.

4.2 Method

Five trial-trenches were excavated. As no known archaeological features were to be specifically targeted, the location of the trenches was chosen to provide a random sample of the whole development site, avoiding logistical problems such as live service cables, access routes and trees with preservation orders attached. The topsoil was mechanically removed, under archaeological supervision, to the top of any significant archaeological features or deposits, or to the top of the natural subsoil.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present, and contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

5.0 Archaeological Results (Figure 3)

Trench 1

(1.6m x 37m, aligned north-west - south-east, excavated to 49.58m AOD)

The orange-brown sandy-clay natural (1001) was exposed directly upon removal of approximately 0.5m of topsoil (1000). Three linear features were initially identified, but upon excavation were shown to be no more than 3cm deep, and were likely to be due to undulations in the natural. A sub-circular feature (F101) was also identified. The base of this feature was severely disturbed by root activity and the fill (1003) contained modern pottery and brick.

No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

A six metre section of this trench was left unexcavated to allow access through the site.

Trench 2

(1.6m x 17m, aligned east-west, excavated to 49.8m AOD)

The red clay and yellow silty-sand natural (1102) was sealed by a layer of light brown sandy-silt (1101) that varied in depth between 0.2m and 0.5m. A shallow, irregular feature, 5cm deep, was identified near the east end of the trench and was likely to be due to undulations in the natural. The subsoil (1101) in turn was sealed by 0.2m to 0.5m of topsoil (1100).

One fragment of clay pipe was recovered from the sandy-silt layer (1101). No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

Trench 3

(1.6m x 30m, aligned east-west, excavated to 50.84m AOD)

The red silty-clay and yellow sandy-silt natural (1202) was sealed by a layer of light red-brown sandy-silt (1201) that varied in depth between 0.2m and 0.5m. This was, in turn, sealed by 0.2m to 0.5m of topsoil (1200).

No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

Trench 4

(1.6 x 26m, aligned east-west, excavated to 51.51m AOD)

The orange-brown sandy-silty-clay natural (1302) was sealed by a thin layer of red-brown sandy-silt (1301) that was approximately 0.05m to 0.1m deep throughout the trench. This was, in turn, sealed by 0.1m to 0.3m of topsoil (1300).

No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

Trench 5

(1.6 x 30m, aligned north-east - south-west, excavated to 49.46m AOD)

The yellow sandy-silt with red silty-clay natural (1402) was sealed by a layer of light orange-brown sandy-silt (1401) that varied in depth between 0.1m and 0.4m. Two subcircular features (F140 and F141) were identified in the west end of the trench. These were no more than 0.05m deep, and were severely disturbed by root activity, suggesting they were not archaeological. The sandy-silt later (1401) was in turn sealed by 0.1m to 0.4m of topsoil (1400).

A fragment of modern pottery, a fragment of brick and a fragment of glass were recovered from the topsoil (1400).

No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

6.0 Discussion

Despite spot-finds of prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval date being recorded close to the development site, no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were encountered in any of the evaluation trenches. The cartographic evidence shows that the site was undeveloped until the 1950s and, even then, was mainly utilised as gardens, so the potential for archaeological survival would be quite high. Therefore, the absence of archaeological evidence must be interpreted as indicating the scarcity of archaeological and historical activity in the area.

7.0 Implications and Recommendations

7.1 Implications

No archaeological remains will be affected by the proposed development of the site.

7.2 Recommendations

Following discussions with Mike Glyde of the Planning Advisory Section of Worcestershire County Archaeological Service, no further archaeological work is recommended.

8.0 References

Dalwood, H., Buteux, V., Hurst, D. and Pearson, E. 1996 *Salvage Recording on the Astley to Worcester Aqueduct: Archive Report* HWCC Report 382

Mould, C. 2000 *Land Adjacent to 193, Droitwich Road, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation.*

Planning Advisory Section, County Archaeological Service 2000 *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief at Land Adjacent to 193, Droitwich Road, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire.*

Victoria County History. 1913 Worcestershire Volume 3.

9.0 Acknowledgements

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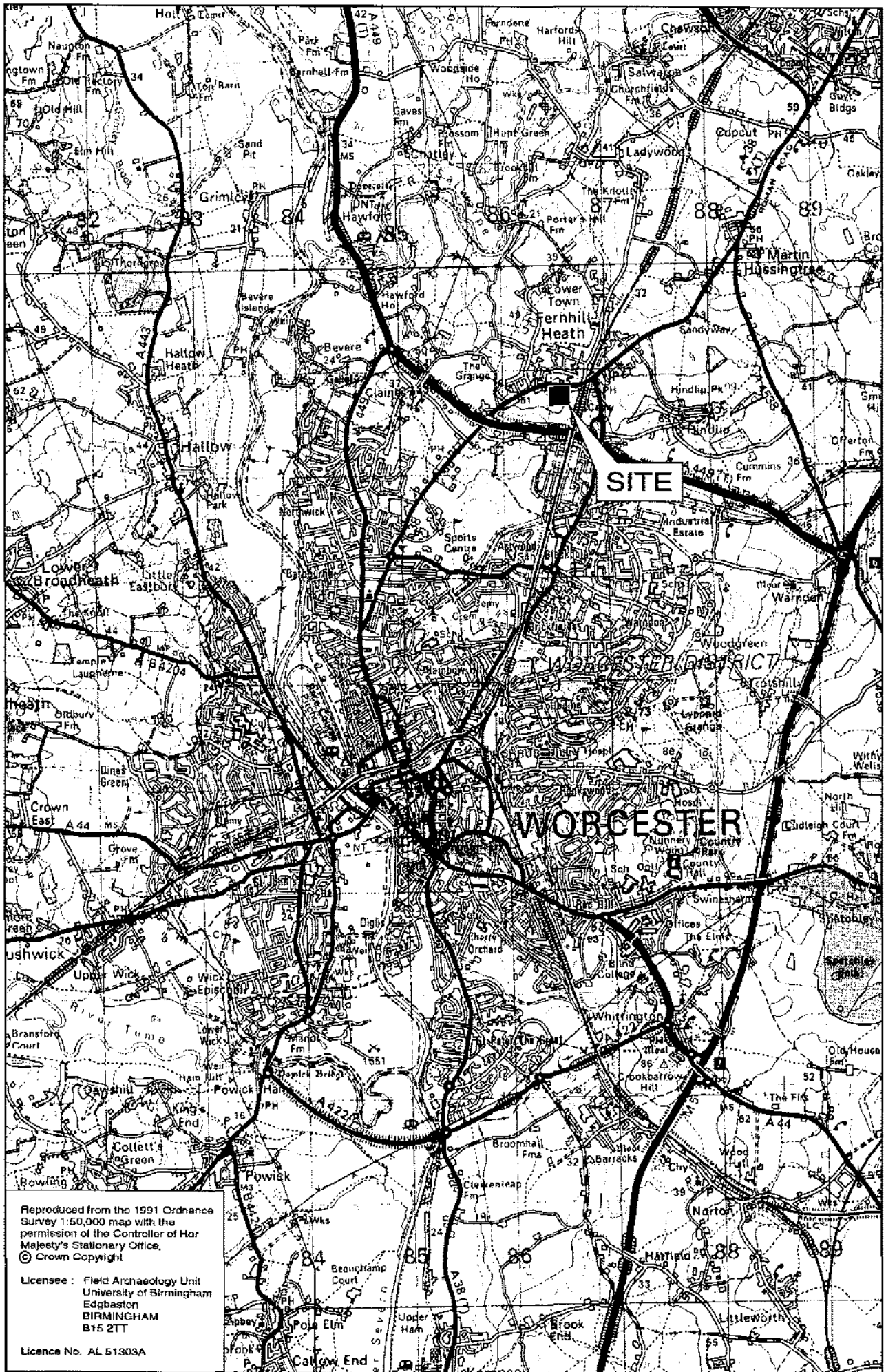


Fig.1

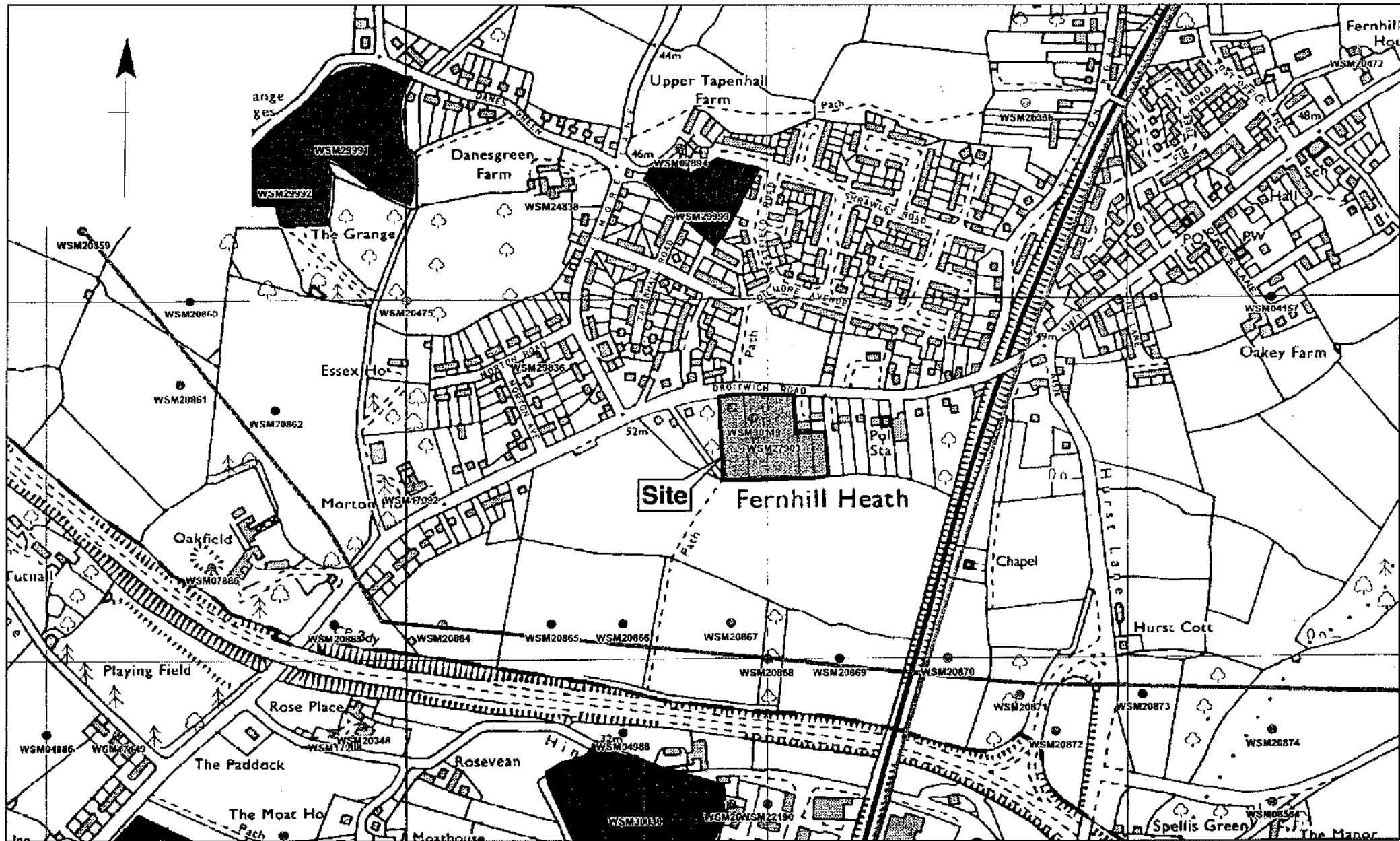


Fig.2

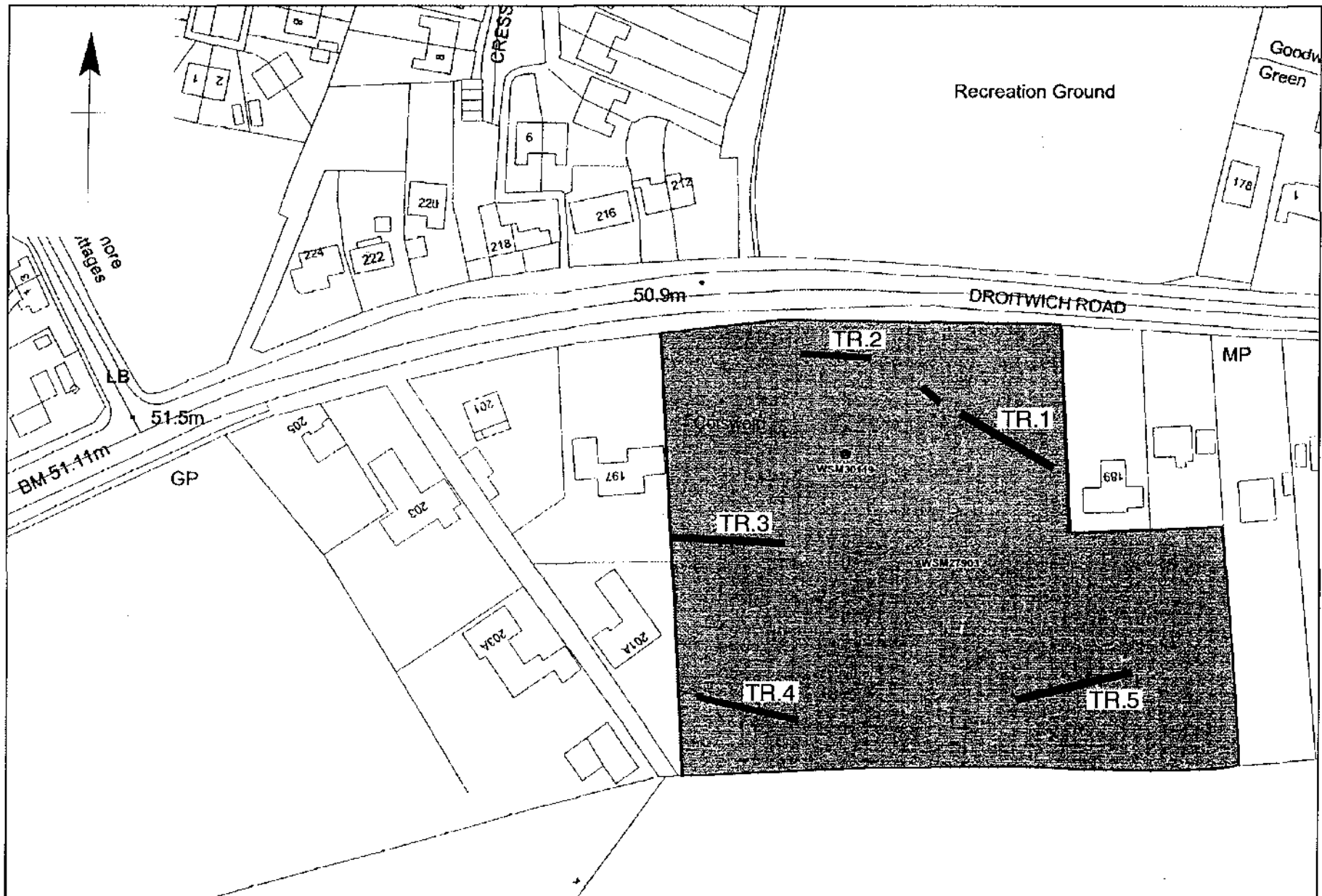


Fig.3

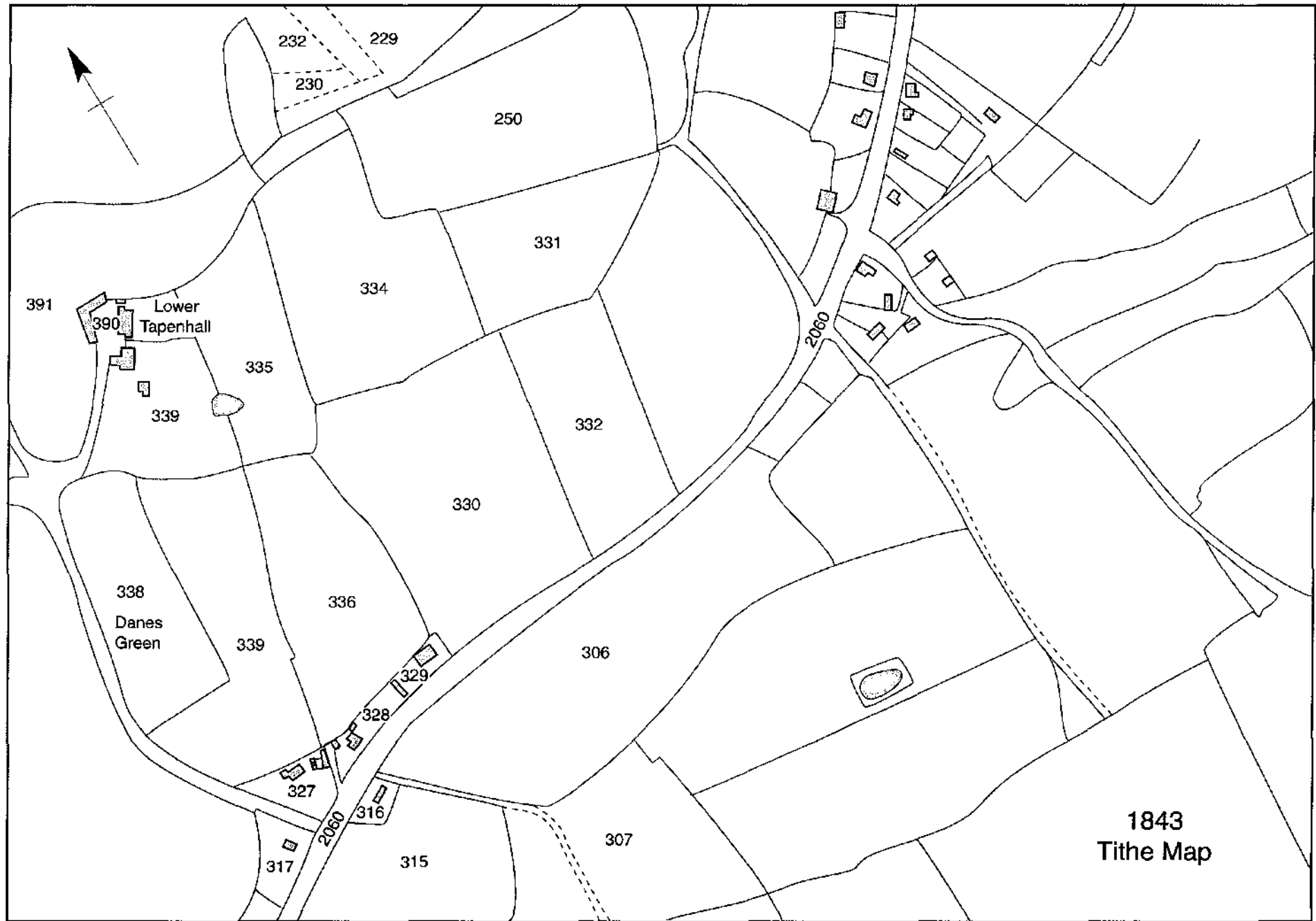


Fig.4

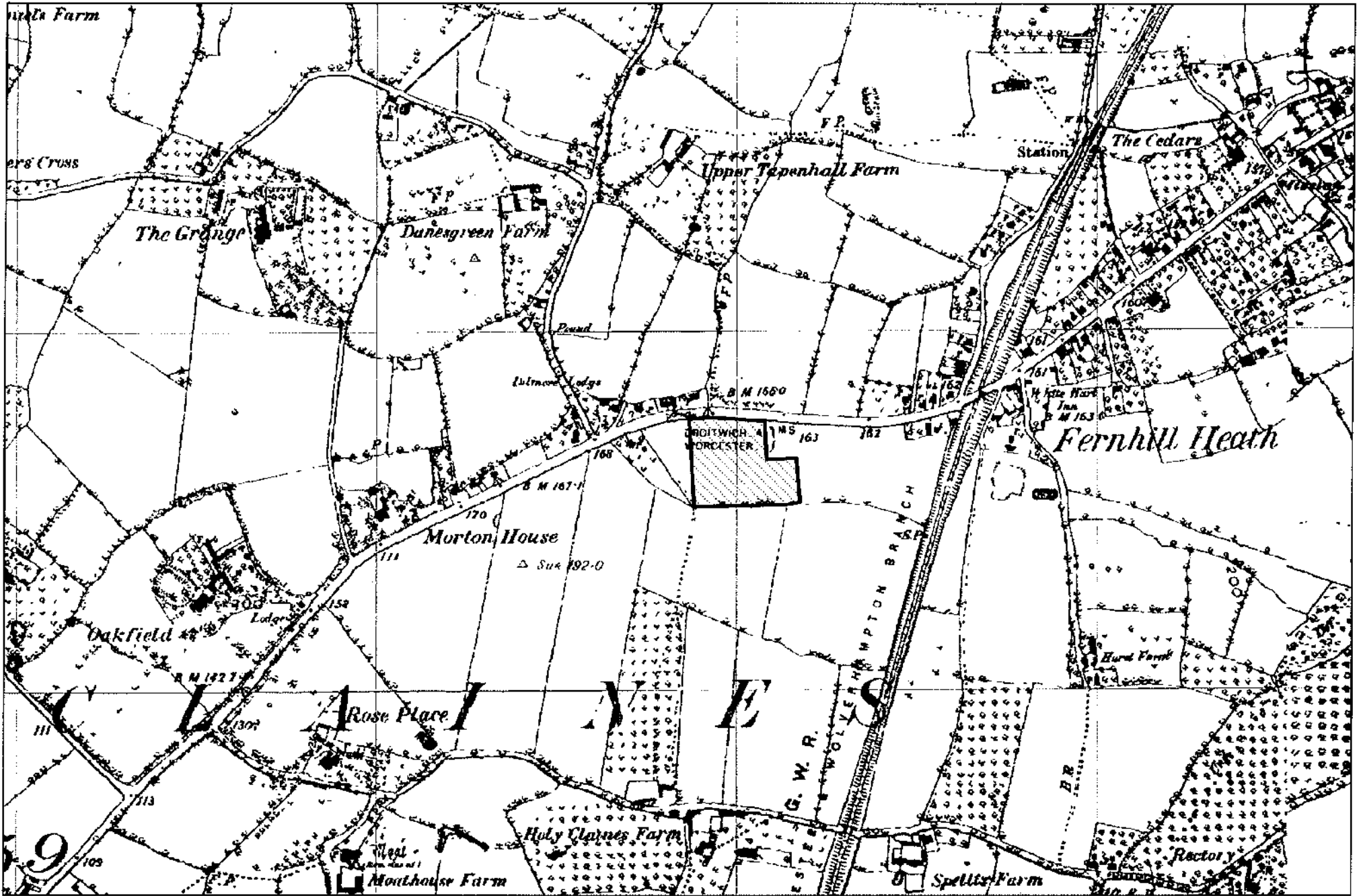


Fig.5

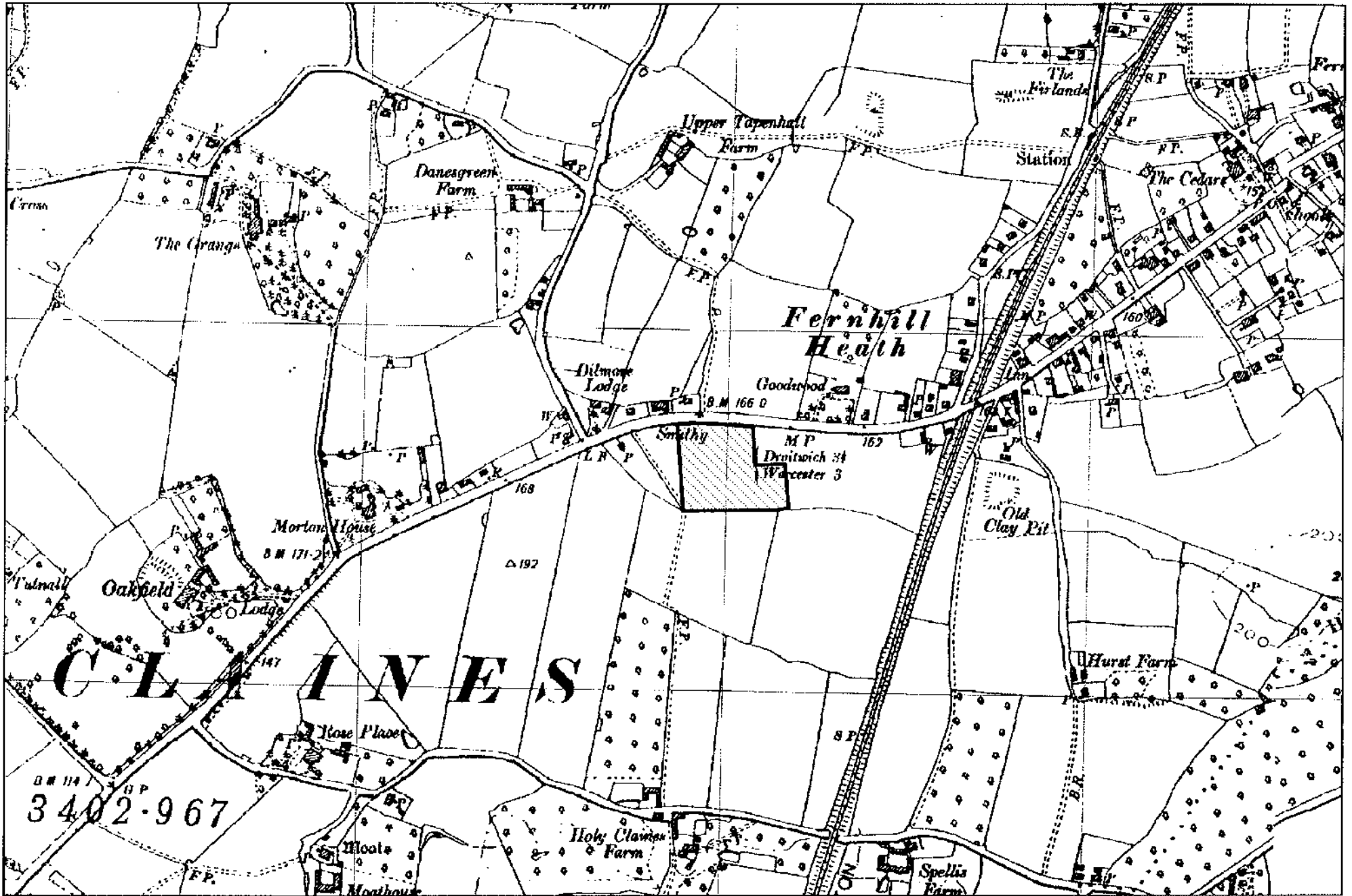


Fig.6



Fig.7

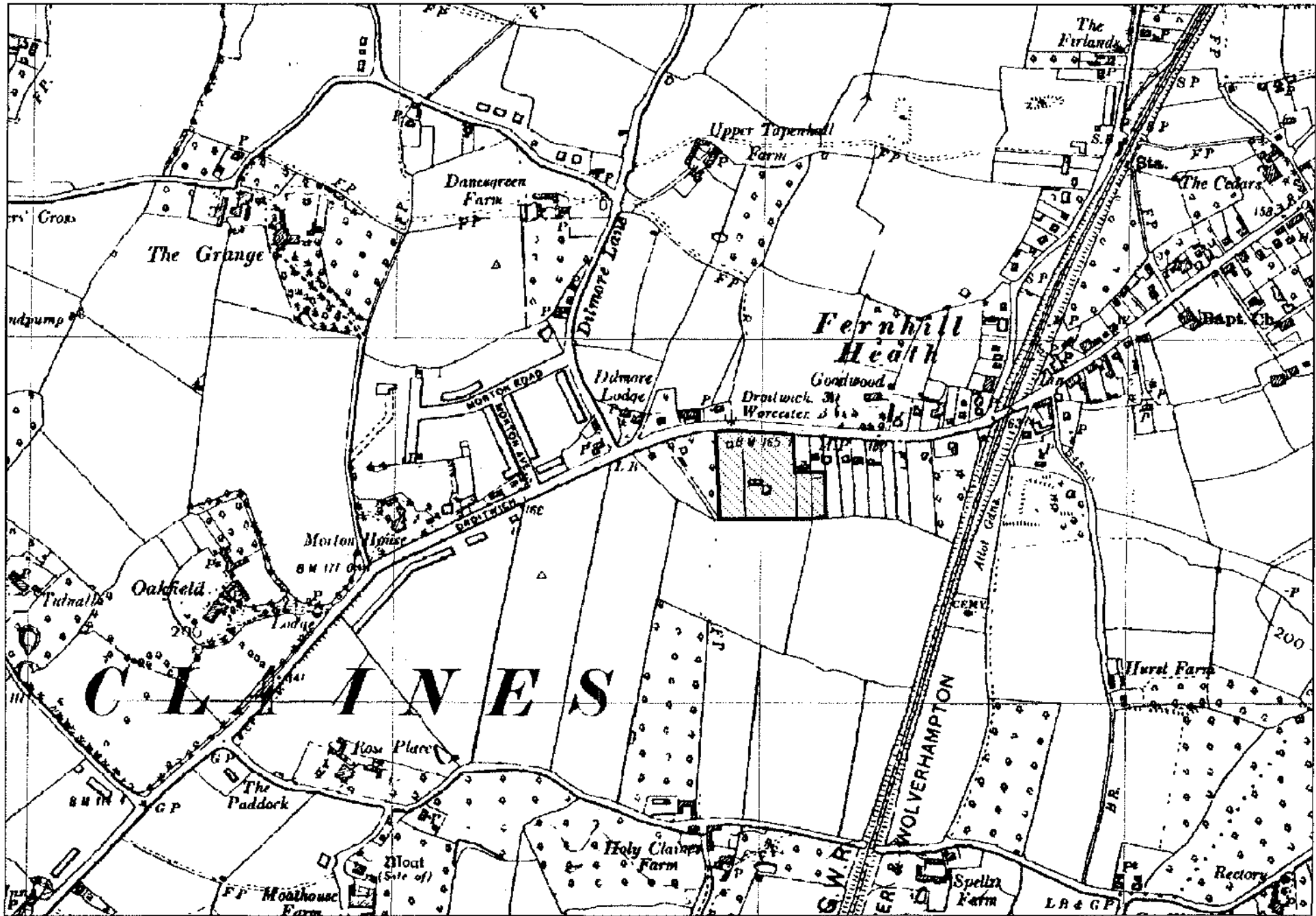


Fig.8