



THE UNIVERSITY  
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**The Manor, Hollycroft  
Crescent, Hinckley,  
Leicestershire:**

**an archaeological desk-based  
assessment**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



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**The Manor, Hollycroft Crescent, Hinckley, Leicestershire:  
an archaeological desk-based assessment**

by  
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## **The Manor, Hollycroft Crescent, Hinckley, Leicestershire: an archaeological desk-based assessment**

### **Summary**

*An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in June 2001, of a site at the Manor public house, off Hollycroft Crescent, in Hinckley, southwest Leicestershire (SP 422 945). The assessment was carried out on behalf of Fairclough Homes (Midlands) Limited as part of a planning application for residential development of the site. The assessment found that the site lies within a landscape rich in prehistoric activity, including many finds of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age date and, together with its location on topographically and geologically favourable ground, it was considered that, although parts of the site have been disturbed, the potential for the existence of buried remains of this date was relatively high.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

This archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in the context of a planning application to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council for proposed residential development by Fairclough Homes at The Manor public house, off Hollycroft Crescent, in Hinckley, Leicestershire (SP 422 945). The development proposals comprise the demolition of The Manor pub and associated outbuildings, and the erection of 38 residences and an access road. The assessment comprised desk-top research into the archaeological potential of the proposed development site (hereafter, the Study Area) and adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999). It conforms to a Brief provided by the Leicestershire County Archaeologist.

### **2.0 Study Area Location**

The Study Area is located off Hollycroft Crescent about 1km to the northwest of Hinckley town centre in the southwest of Leicestershire (SP 422 945, Fig. 1). The Study Area is irregular in shape, bordered by Hollycroft Crescent to the south, residential development and allotments to the west, and residential development to the north and east (Fig. 2).

### **3.0 Objectives**

The objective of this assessment is to determine, as far as possible and based on existing information, the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, and the impact of the proposed works on the site. The assessment also makes provisional recommendations for further archaeological mitigation work prior to development. As required by the Brief, the assessment places particular emphasis on the potential for prehistoric remains within the Study Area.

### **4.0 Method**

Primary and secondary sources, including historical maps, were consulted at Leicestershire County Record Office, the Local Studies section of Hinckley Library, and the Leicestershire County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), the primary source of known archaeological and historical sites for the county. A brief site visit was carried out to ascertain current conditions within the Study Area, and to identify any visible archaeological remains.

For the purpose of this report, the Study Area has been divided into four Zones, 1-4 (Fig. 3).

### **5.0 Geology and Topography**

Triassic rocks are entirely concealed by drift deposits, and include Polesworth and Bromsgrove Sandstone formations, and Mercia Mudstone. The glacial drift comprises clays, sand and gravels. The post-glacial drift includes First River Terrace deposits and alluvium. The river terrace deposits comprise clayey gravel with flint and Bunter quartzite pebbles (British Geological Survey 1990). The ground investigation undertaken by Geotechnical Developments (UK) Ltd in 2001 found 'Made Ground' deposits to a depth of 0.40m-1.00m. These deposits comprised sandy, ashy silts, gravelly sands, sandy clays with charcoal, ash and bone fragments, angular sandstone gravel subbase and occasional layers of crushed brick gravel and slag gravel. All the boreholes sunk as part of their assessment were dry. Subsequent groundwater monitoring indicated the standpipes were dry to between 4.00m-4.10m depth.

The northern site boundary drops from about 121mAOD to 114mAOD at the southern boundary.

## **6.0 Study Area Inspection**

A brief inspection of the Study Area was carried out in order to ascertain whether there were any visible archaeological remains or features of historical importance.

### **Zone 1 (Fig. 3; Plate 1)**

This area is grassed over and serves as a beer garden to the Manor pub. It has three pronounced slopes down to the south, and has probably been landscaped at some point. From the southern end of the pub, the land slopes about 4m down to the south. The eastern edge of the Zone lies against the access driveway and is lined with mature fir trees. No visible archaeological features were noted. The Manor pub is a two-storey redbrick late 19<sup>th</sup>-century building with later additions. It is not listed.

### **Zone 2 (Fig. 3; Plates 2-3)**

Zone 2 comprises a tarmac driveway and carpark for the pub. This is surfaced with tarmac and has small areas of landscaping, comprising kerbs and shrubbery. The land slopes down to the south. No visible archaeological features were noted.

### **Zone 3 (Fig. 3; Plates 4-6)**

This is a yard area to the north of the pub building. It is surfaced in rough hardstanding and overgrown with vegetation including nettles, brambles and other weeds and shrubbery at the western edge. A row of outbuildings, including a high boundary wall, lies against the northern border of the zone, against the lane leading to the allotments to the west. These buildings are of redbrick and appear to be out of use. Most of the buildings are single-storey outbuildings, perhaps storage buildings. The easternmost building is a more imposing two-storey building. No visible archaeological features were noted.

### **Zone 4 (Fig. 3)**

This zone comprised an overgrown area of mature trees and shrubbery and was not easily accessible.

## **7.0 Archaeological and Historical Context**

### ***Prehistoric***

Fig. 4 shows the location of prehistoric finds listed in the SMR within a 5km radius of the Study Area.

### **Palaeolithic**

During Upper Pleistocene times (128,000 - 10,000 years ago) Leicestershire was, at different times, either covered in coniferous forest, birch scrub, steppe, or full arctic tundra (Martin 1982). The Study Area is on an area of high ground, and this

topographical advantage, together with its geology of sand and gravel, makes it similar to other local areas, particularly to the south and west, where evidence of Palaeolithic activity has been discovered. The gravel contains flint, making it rich in material for the manufacture of implements in prehistoric times.

During construction of a sewer, a peat bed was found beneath about 1.20m of clay near Hollycroft Park, just to the southeast of the Study Area. The peat bed contained prehistoric oak and birch and auroch bones, a species of woodland cattle. (More auroch bones were found near Granville Road, about 1.80m below the surface, less than 1km south of the Study Area.) Also found were a worked flint and a pot boiler. The flint was considered to be Palaeolithic in date (Knight 1998). The remains suggest the existence of water-laid deposits after the retreat of the glacier that covered Leicestershire over 125,000 years ago. This ice sheet deposited clay and gravel, which contained flint deposits, which were used to manufacture implements. Other finds dating from the Palaeolithic era have been found in surrounding villages and towns, including Burbage to the southeast, and the hamlet of Wykin to the northwest; these finds have included hand-axes, scrapers and choppers.

A substantial quantity of Palaeolithic stone tools has been recovered from fieldwalking in the Hinckley area by Ron Waite. North of Battling Brook in Hollycroft Fields, about 1km southwest of the Study Area, he recovered 25 tools, including quartzite handaxes and quartzite cores, choppers, flakes, and scrapers, and a Palaeolithic quartzite split pebble (SMR 49SW BD). Most of the finds were Palaeolithic, but Mesolithic, Neolithic and possible Early Bronze Age tools were also represented. Quantities of Roman finds were also noted in the fields, although these were not collected.

Less than 1km west-northwest of the Study Area, at Wykin Spring Sands, about 16 flints were recovered, including a tanged arrowhead (SMR 49SW BA). Half a kilometre to the northwest of here a Palaeolithic quartzite chopper was also found by Waite (SMR 49SW BR). About 1.7km southwest of the Study Area, a stone axe, two Palaeolithic choppers, a flake and a scraper were found at SP 405 940 (SMR 49SW BQ). A Palaeolithic flint flake was found to the west of Harrow Brook, associated with some streaks of gravel uncovered by building preparations about 0.90m below the surface (SMR 49SW AX). This findspot lies about 2.3km to the southwest of the Study Area.

#### Mesolithic - Neolithic

Scattered finds from the Mesolithic period have been found at Burbage, Hinckley, Stoney Stanton and Potters Marston, where a mace head was found (Knight 1998). A concentration of flints has also been located at Sharnford, to the southeast of Hinckley, at the confluence of two small streams, by Pickering and Waite, including cores, flakes, microliths, a scraper and a micro-burin. The topography of the Study Area, being situated on high ground, makes it a favourable location for prehistoric activity. Mesolithic flint scatters have been found at other sites in Leicestershire which are on high ground or on an escarpment, such as at Ridlington and Burrough Hill. A possible early Mesolithic flint blade core and two Mesolithic or Neolithic flint flakes were found in Hollycroft Fields

(SMR 49SW BD) along with several Palaeolithic finds, about 1km southwest of the Study Area.

It is not clear what kind of occupation these finds represent. They could represent hunters' camp sites or more long-term settlements. It is also possible that some small-scale forest clearance had begun to take place in the Mesolithic period, transitional to early Neolithic agriculture (Martin 1982).

The Early Neolithic period saw agriculture introduced into Britain, and the associated clearance of forested land. Neolithic flints are fairly abundant in the area around Hinckley. Axe heads have been found at Burbage, Stoke Golding and Stoney Stanton, perhaps used to clear woodland, and hearths, pot boilers, flints, and ox and red deer bones were found at Barwell. A flint chipping floor at Wykin, to the west of the Study Area, may indicate some settlement there. Also found by Waite were a knife, scraper and point of either Neolithic or Bronze Age date. A polished Neolithic stone axe (SMR 49SW BB) was found at SP 413 924, north of Watling Street and over 2km to the southwest of the Study Area. The distribution of Neolithic stone axes in Leicestershire probably reflects the over-representation of finds from built-up areas due to the larger amount of earth disturbance in these areas, which has led to the recovery of 'stray' finds (Liddle 1982). One of the densest concentrations of these is in the Soar Valley to the east of Hinckley. A survey of the area east of Hinckley was begun by A. J. Pickering in 1913-17 and continued more recently by R. Waite. This survey has found indications of settlement sites, including a site to the northwest of Sharnford which revealed 70 to 80 artefacts including discoidal scrapers and a point; Mickle Hill, between Sharnford and Burbage, where over 80 artefacts were picked up, some of which may have been Mesolithic; a scatter lying at the confluence of the River Soar and the Soar Brook, which produced Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age flintwork; and a scatter on the Sapcote/Aston Flamville border representing a large flint working area, including the Early Bronze Age arrowhead referred to below (SMR 49SW AZ). The material found here was spread over about a dozen fields (Martin 1982).

### Bronze Age

At SP 405 939, about 1.7km southwest of the Study Area, and close to a find of Palaeolithic flints, a tanged arrowhead with very small barbs, of a type most commonly found on Early Bronze Age sites, was found by M. Underwood (SMR 49SW AZ). Some of the flints found in Hollycroft Fields (SMR 49SW BD) may also have been of Bronze Age date. At Barwell, just northeast of Hinckley, Arthur Pickering found implements dating to the Neolithic and a Late Bronze Age urn containing a few ashes of calcined bones dated to 900-700BC.

An archaeological evaluation south of Coventry Road, just over 2km southwest of the Study Area (Thomas 1999) found intercutting linear ditches and gullies and some possible pits (SMR 49SW BV). Although no firm structural evidence was uncovered, many of the features contained charcoal and burnt stones, and the finds indicated a lifespan ranging from the Late Bronze Age through the Iron Age and into the early



Romano-British period. Another evaluation, about 0.5km to the north of this site (SMR 49SW BW) found more gullies, postholes, and pits. The few finds were not dateable, although medieval ridge and furrow was noted. However, the proximity of this site to the evaluation site south of Coventry Road, (SMR 49SW BV) may indicate a similar occupation range (Browning 1999). One and a half kilometres southeast of the Study Area, in Burbage, a Middle Bronze Age side-looped spearhead and a Polden Hill-type pre-Flavian Romano-British brooch were found by Underwood and Conner (SMR 49SW X). About 0.90km to the southeast of the Study Area, a possible Late Bronze Age copper alloy loop was found (SMR 49SW BC).

### Iron Age

No known archaeological sites of this date exist in the vicinity of the Study Area. Beavin (1983) suggests that the population of the area was sparse at this time.

### Romano-British

Miscellaneous finds from the Romano-British period have been discovered in Hinckley, which however do not appear to relate to any permanent settlement but perhaps instead to transient populations. The somewhat sparse population in West Leicestershire until medieval times may be attributable to the dense forest covering and heavy clay soils in some areas. It is perhaps significant that two Roman roads bypass Hinckley rather than going through it. The Fosse Way ran on the western side of the county of Leicestershire, and provided a good communication route with Warwick. It could also have carried traffic from Hinckley, the latter being cut off from the Roman town of Leicester, or *Ratae Coritanorum*, by a substantial belt of forest. Watling Street (SMR 49SW Y) runs from northwest to southeast along the southwestern edge of the present town. With the exception of Leicester the district contained no important town and it has been considered that there were few villas in the county, which was not considered to be as well suited to agriculture as other parts of the country (Page 1969). In the last 20 or so years, programmes of fieldwalking, much of this carried out by Community Archaeology Groups, has greatly increased the number of known Roman occupation sites in the county.

In 1871, labourers digging for the railway northeast of Harrow Farm, which lies about 2.3km to the southwest of the Study Area, discovered a buff pottery vessel about 0.45m below the surface. The vessel contained a substantial quantity of silver coins which represented every emperor from Otho (AD 69) to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (AD 161-80) (SMR 49SW AG). Unfortunately, most of the coins were quickly dispersed amongst the finders, or sold on, but estimates of the amount of coins contained in the vessel varied from 200 to 1000.

Two Roman coins, of Trajan and of Titus respectively, were found in gardens to the rear of West Terrace, Coventry Road, by Jim Pickering in 1987 (SMR 49SW AP) less than 1km to the south of the Study Area. Around 1905, a glass tear-bottle, pottery fragments and a portion of tessellated pavement (SMR 49SW AJ), all of Roman date, were said to

have been found on allotments near Priory Barn, about 1.2km east of the Study Area. In 1930, a Roman portrait bust was found on a rubbish heap in the same area. Trenches revealed Roman pottery and wall plaster amongst modern rubbish, but no structures, and it was discovered that the rubbish had all been removed from a site at Hunter's Row, close to the church where demolition of cottages had taken place. Roman pottery, tile fragments and tesserae, and a fragment of a flat quern were found further to the east near Park House (SMR 49SW U).

### Anglo-Saxon

By AD653, the kingdom of Mercia covered west Leicestershire, with its capital at Tamworth. There is little or no archaeological evidence for Saxon occupation in Hinckley (as is the case for much of the county), except for the find, c.1820, near Watling Street, of two spearheads and a shield boss (SMR 49SW AQ). By the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, the area around Hinckley had been settled where small islands of sand and gravel had been exposed as the overlying clay had worn away. The area known as The Borough in Hinckley, 0.70km to the southeast of the Study Area, was a forest clearing which contained an Anglo-Saxon settlement (Beavin 1983). 'Hinckley' comes from *Hynca*, a personal name, and *leah*, 'clearing.' As Gelling (1984) says, 'Among names of important places in which *leah* is qualified by a personal name may be instanced...Hinckley.' The settlement is known to have been included in Offa's kingdom (AD 757-796).

In 1066, William Fitz-Osbern built a castle on the hill overlooking The Borough at Hinckley. The castle was a temporary motte-and-bailey fortification of earth and timber. Immediately after the Conquest, Hugh de Grantmesnil, the Lord High Steward of England, came into the ownership of Hinckley. He erected a castle on the same site, laid out a park, and built the parish church. He granted the appropriation of the parish church to the abbey of Lyra in Normandy, for whom he also founded an alien priory at Hinckley (SMR 49SW E). He died in 1094, whereupon the manor passed to the earls of Leicester.

In 1086, at the time of the Domesday Book, Earl Aubrey held Hinckley, or *Hinchelie* as it was then. The village, a small farming settlement, contained 14 carucates of land. There were 42 villeins with 16 bordars and 3 sochmen with 9.5 ploughs.

### Medieval

The Study Area lies outside the medieval historic core of Hinckley (SMR 49SW BH) as defined by R.F. Hartley on the SMR mapping.

The 'borough' of Hinckley is first mentioned in 1209, and 'burgesses' in the town are referred to at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It was perhaps brought into existence in order to develop markets for the agricultural produce of the surrounding area (Hoskins and McKinley 1954). The first clear reference to a market in Hinckley was in 1311 (Beavin 1983). The land at Hinckley was farmed using the three-field system, common in the East Midlands during the medieval period. The three main open fields were Hyde Field, which lay south of the Coventry Road, from Watling Street almost to Burbage Road,

Middlefield, which extended from Coventry Road northwards to the top of Hollycroft Hill, and Mill Field, which had Hollycroft as its southern boundary, thereby incorporating the Study Area (Beavin 1983).

The castle built by Grantmesnil was a ruin by at least 1622. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it had comprised several acres of earthworks but had ceased to be a defensive position by the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Beavin 1983). Nichols (1811) stated that the 'Castle-hill [had been] considerably lowered by taking materials from it for repairing the roads; till, in 1770 Mr. Hurst caused a handsome modern dwelling house to be built.' The southern and eastern parts of the mound remain in part.

A medieval windmill site (SMR 49SW Q) and two medieval wells exist in Hinckley. Hinckley mill and fines are referred to in 1326 in a roll de Banco (Nichols 1811). Near to St. Mary's Holy Well (SMR 49SW AN) a medieval coin hoard including a coin of Edward III dating to 1353 was also found (SMR 49SW AT). During enlargement of a sewer in 1913-14, Arthur Pickering found a possible medieval pavement made of a double row of 'kidney stones,' about 1.50m below the surface, and an undated quern of coarse millstone grit (SMR 49SW AK).

#### Post-medieval

In 1640, William Iliffe introduced the first stocking frame into the town and, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the three-field system was no longer appropriate. Changes in the town's economy meant that farming was giving way to industry in the form of stocking-knitting, and frameshops were replacing the farmhouses. In 1604, Thomas Sansome, Thomas Smith, Ralph Robinson and Thomas Whiteman, acting on behalf of the town's inhabitants, bought the manorial rights to Hinckley (Henderson 1981). The name Thomas Sansome can be seen on a map of 1818, indicating the family still owned land in the town. In 1759, an application for enclosure was made. Although the Award of 1760 exists, no map was available to consult. Neither the tithe map for Hinckley nor for Wykin showed the Study Area, it being situated on the outskirts of the then town. In 1768, there were 697 houses in the town. This number had risen to 750 by 1782, and 4,500 inhabitants.

Nineteenth-century writers described Hinckley as a place of abject poverty. This was due to the failure of the town's principal industry, trade-stock making, to fully support its population.

A map of 1765 (Fig. 5) is not detailed enough to show the Study Area closely. It shows Hinckley set in a landscape of small villages and parkland, with the two Roman roads bypassing it to the south and the east. An 1818 map (Fig. 6) shows the Study Area to contain no buildings and to be owned or occupied by Cooper. The surrounding area is made up of mostly rectangular fields. The 1863 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 7) is again not detailed enough to show the Study Area, and nothing can be seen in that area. The picture is similar to that shown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; Hinckley appears to be the largest settlement in the immediate area, surrounded by villages and farmsteads. The growth of

Hinckley would have been aided by the railway which had, by this time, been constructed. The Study Area lay outside the main town, on its northwest side.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 (Fig. 8) shows Hollycroft House in the Study Area; this appears to be of similar form to the current Manor pub building. The plot in which the house stood had an irregular 'bulge' on its western side, which corresponds to Zone 4 of the Study Area. The landscaped slopes are shown as lines of hachures, and trees had been planted along the southern and part of the western borders. The landscaping had no doubt been carried out to terrace the hill on which the house stood, in order to create a garden. The current outbuildings had been built, probably together with the house. The eastern edge of the plot was a path named Black Walk; this path more-or-less followed the field boundary shown on the 1818 map. This path, now gone, went through the carparking area in Zone 2. Another building, outside the southeastern corner of the Study Area, is the Lodge. This building still stands. The Study Area lay just outside the northwestern edge of Hinckley town and, to the north and west, was surrounded by field enclosures, lanes and pathways. Battling Brook flowed towards the Study Area from the southwest. The site remained largely unchanged in 1905 (Fig. 9), although trees are shown in Zone 4 and along the western edge of Black Walk. The town had begun to expand slightly to the northwest.

By 1924 (Fig. 10) the outbuildings had been expanded to the north, outside the Study Area, with two additions to the south within Zone 3. Some of the outbuildings are shown to be glasshouses. Pathways are shown around the garden. Allotment Gardens lay in a large field to the northwest. By 1938, the town had begun to encroach on the land around the Study Area. New roads had been laid out to the north and east of it. By 1961, the recreation ground to the southeast of the Study Area had become Hollycroft Park. Pronounced ridge-and-furrow, a survival from medieval open-field cultivation, can still be seen in the northern part of the park, against the Hollycroft road. By 1977, the Study Area was surrounded by suburban development.

## 8.0 Discussion

It seems clear that the Study Area lies within a landscape of prehistoric activity, evidenced by the substantial number of finds of artefacts dating from the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods within the surrounding area. Prior to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, not a great deal was known about prehistoric Leicestershire and no systematic programme of archaeological work had been undertaken in the area under consideration here, although fieldwalking had been carried out by interested local parties, including Arthur Pickering, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the 1980s onwards, this work has been greatly supplemented by further fieldwalking, much of it carried out by Ron Waite who, during fieldwalking, has picked up many prehistoric flint implements. These finds have indicated several potential areas of prehistoric settlement and possible hunting-camps. The Study Area, as shown on Fig. 4, is surrounded to the south and west by findspots of prehistoric artefacts and, given the location of the Study Area, in what is a favourable

topographical location on high ground, it is likely that other such finds may exist here. The Manor pub together with its associated outbuildings and section of boundary wall, represents a group of late-19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, originally constructed as Hollycroft House. Although parts of the site have been disturbed by building and landscaping, it has not seen extensive development due to its situation outside the main conurbation of Hinckley town.

## **9.0 Provisional Recommendations**

All recommendations made here are subject to approval or amendment by the Leicestershire County Archaeologist.

### **Below-ground archaeology**

Due to the relatively high potential for the existence of archaeological remains within the Study Area, particularly those dating from prehistoric times, it may be considered appropriate to conduct a programme of archaeological trial-trenching in those areas to be affected by proposed development. This stage would represent an evaluative measure, which would attempt to determine the survival and extent of any archaeology, and may lead to further archaeological mitigation work.

### **Above-ground archaeology**

Although no documents relating specifically to Hollycroft House were found during this assessment, it may be considered appropriate to undertake further research intended to locate possible building plans, and to conduct a brief photographic survey of it and the outbuildings prior to demolition.

## **10.0 Acknowledgements**

This report was written by Sarah Watt and edited by Simon Buteux. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Richard Knox at the Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record and to the staff of the Leicestershire County Record Office.

## 11.0 References

### Maps

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1818 Plan of the parish of Hinckley in the counties of Leicester and Warwick  
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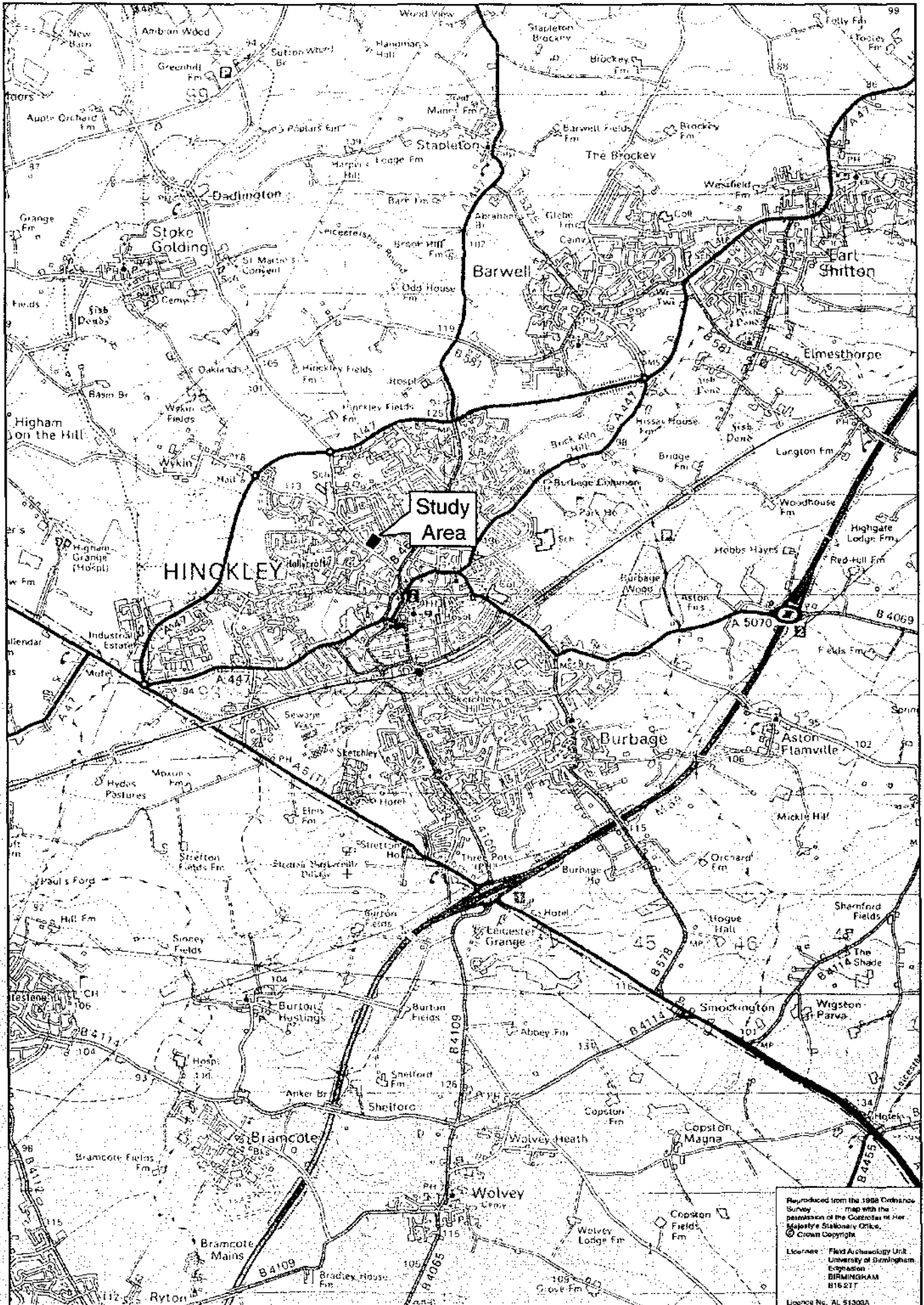


Fig.1



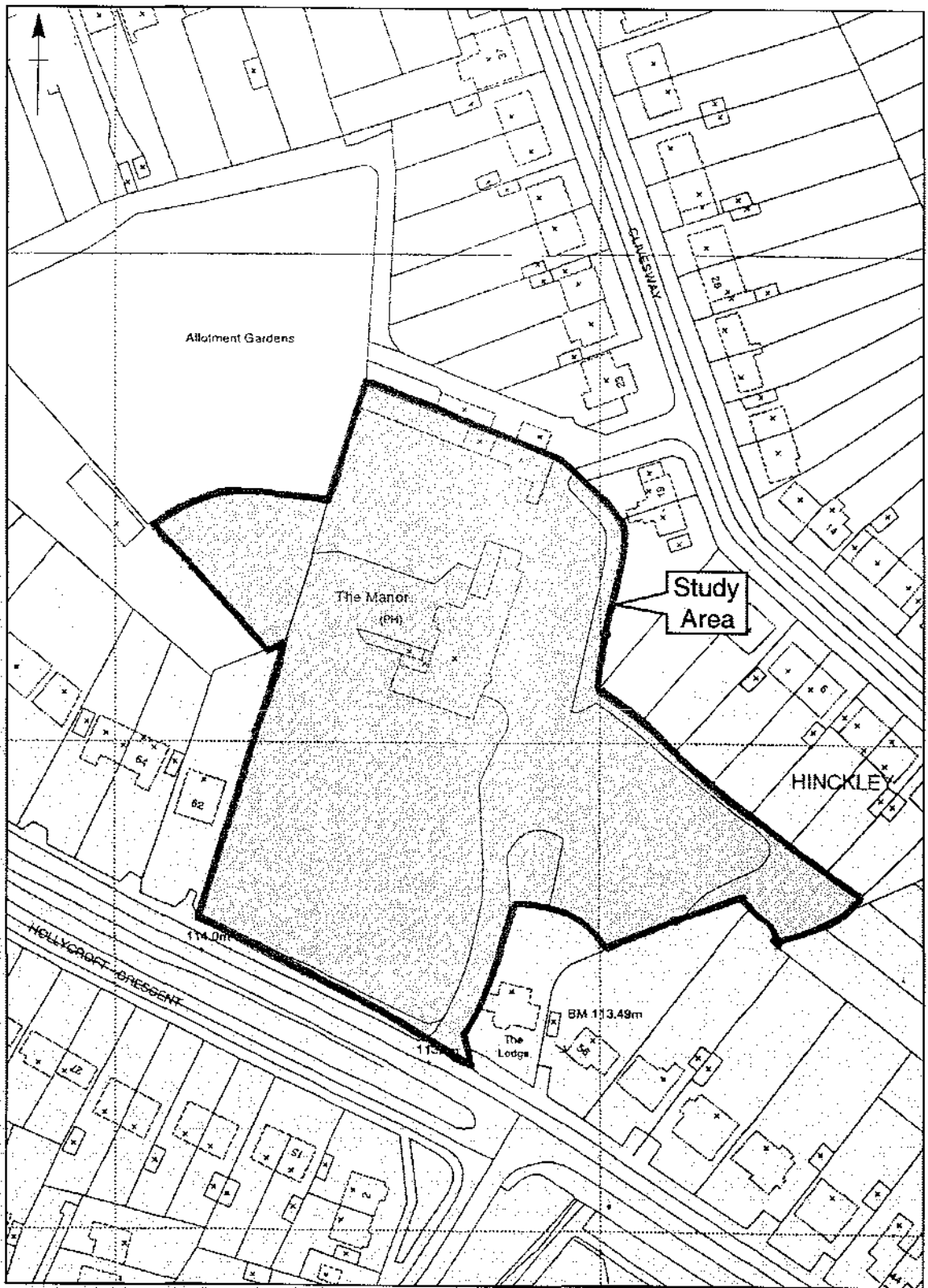


Fig.2

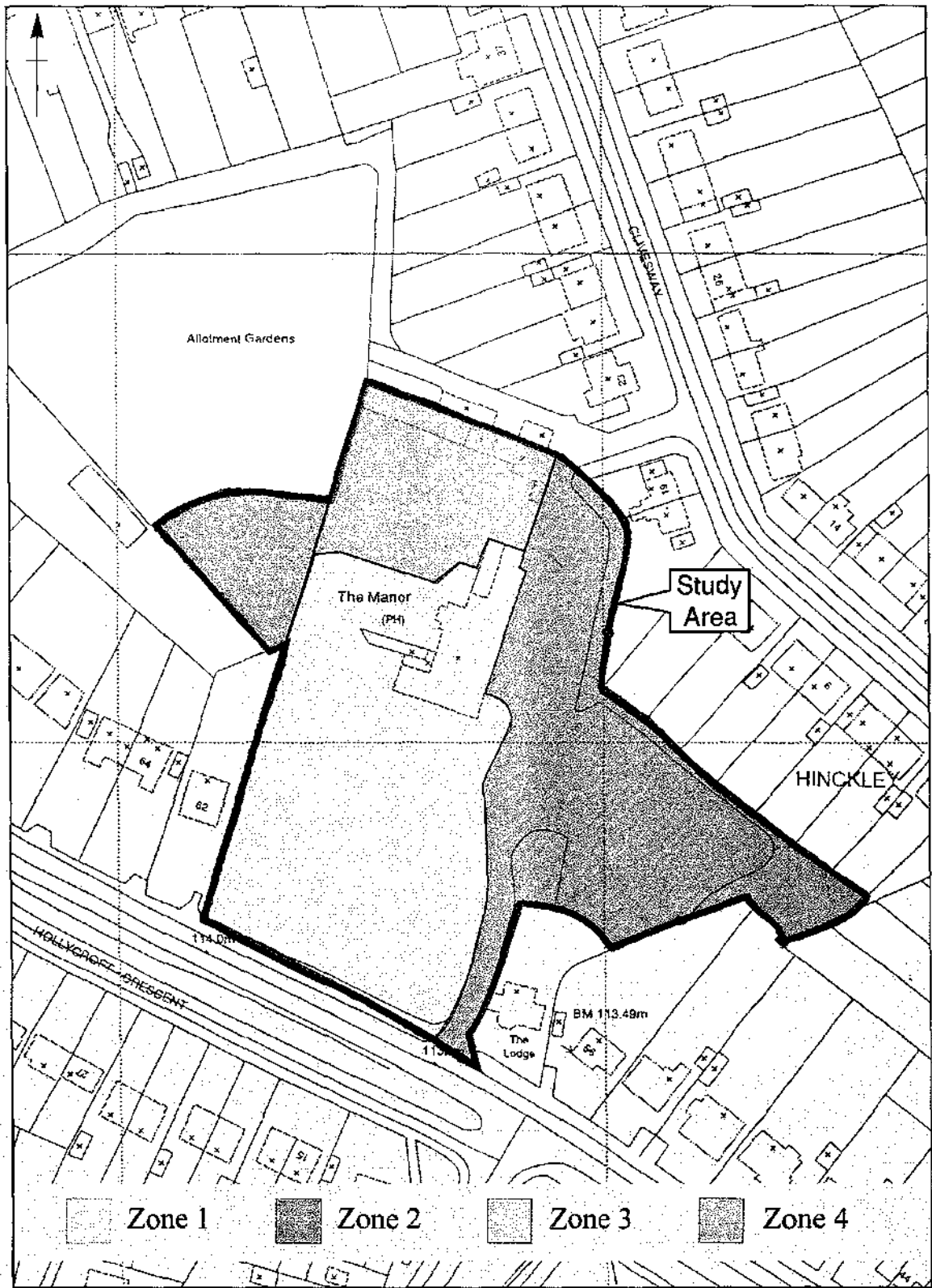


Fig.3

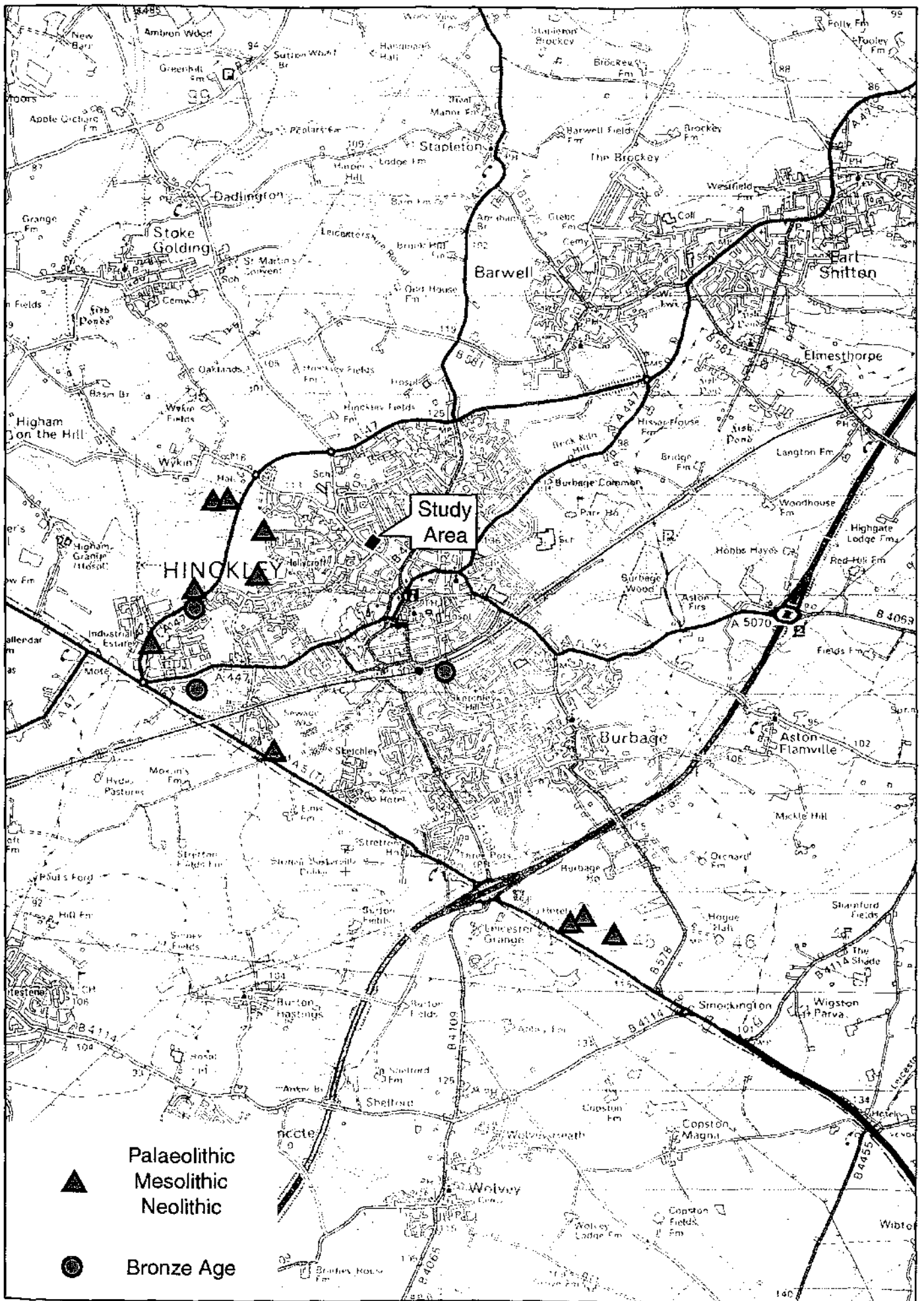


Fig.4

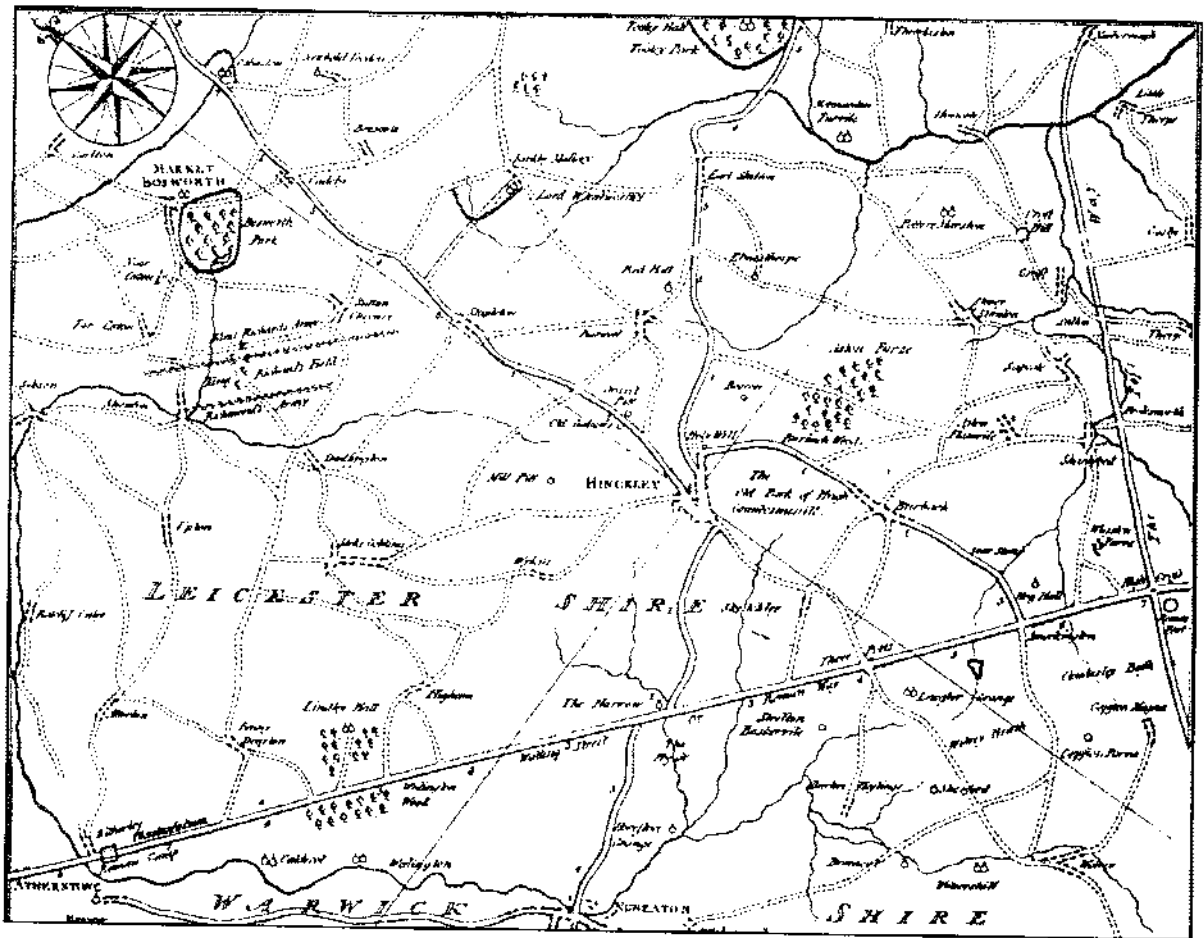


Fig.5



Fig.6

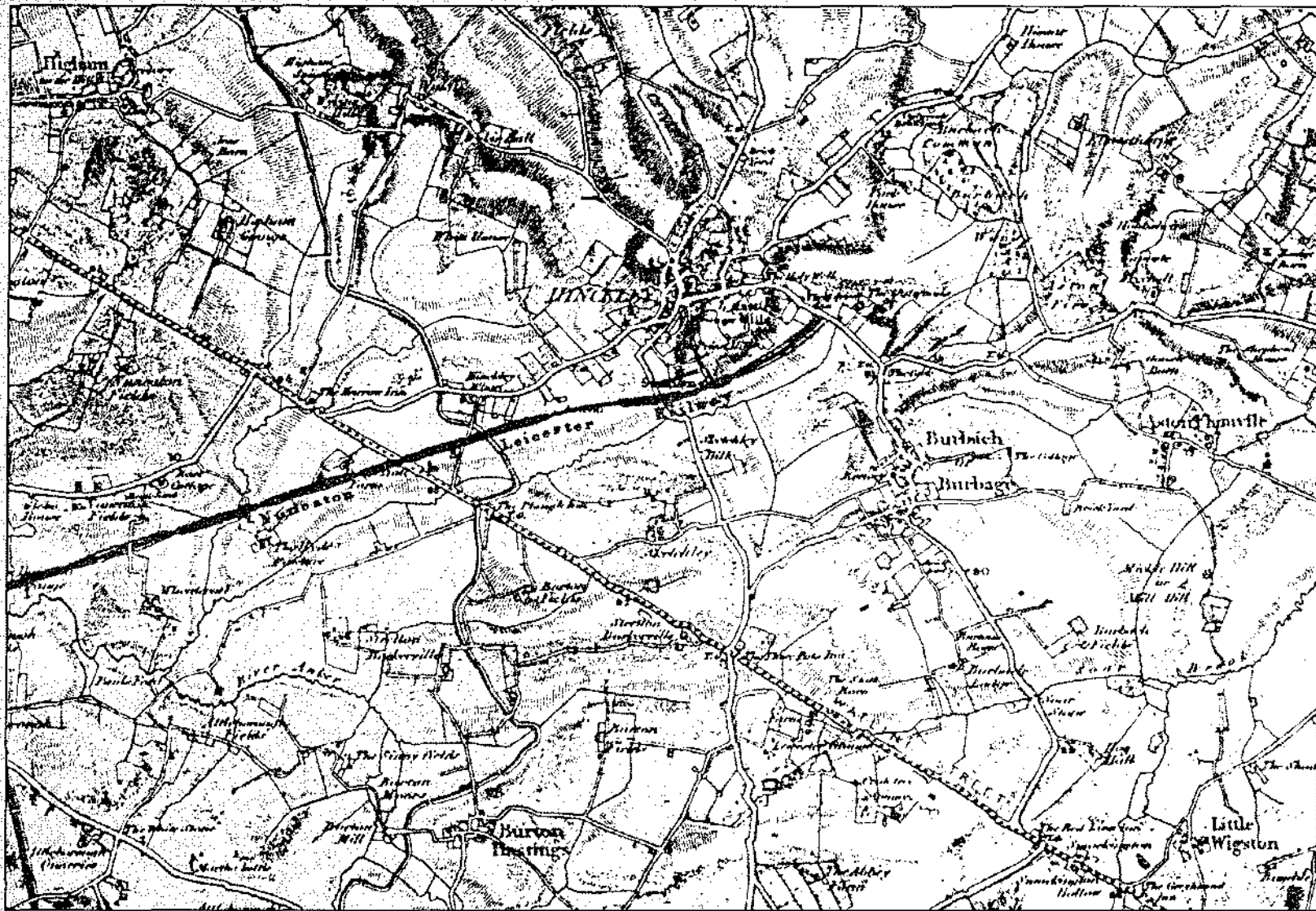


Fig.7

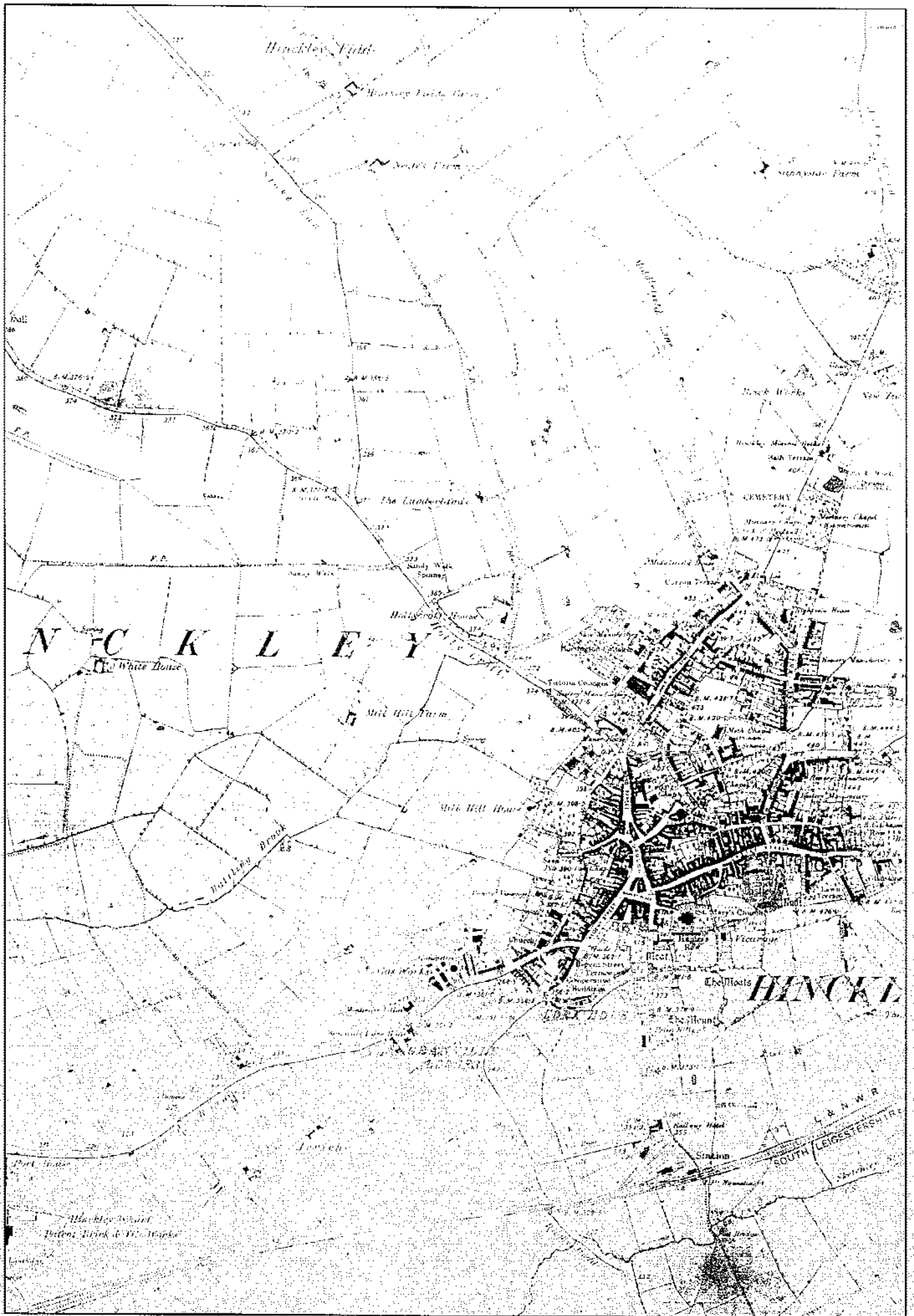


Fig.8



Fig.9



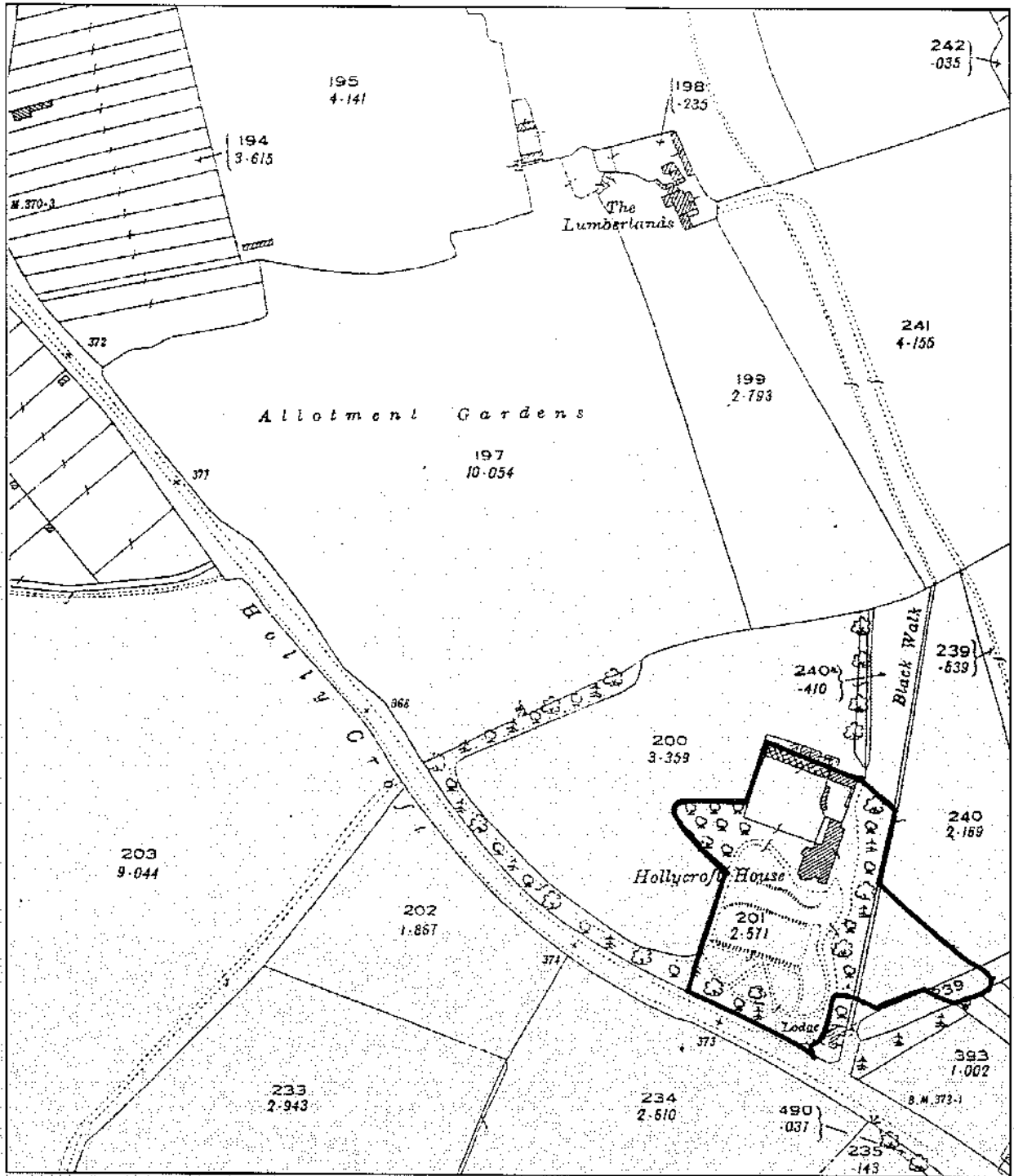


Fig.10



Plate1



Plate 2



Plate 3

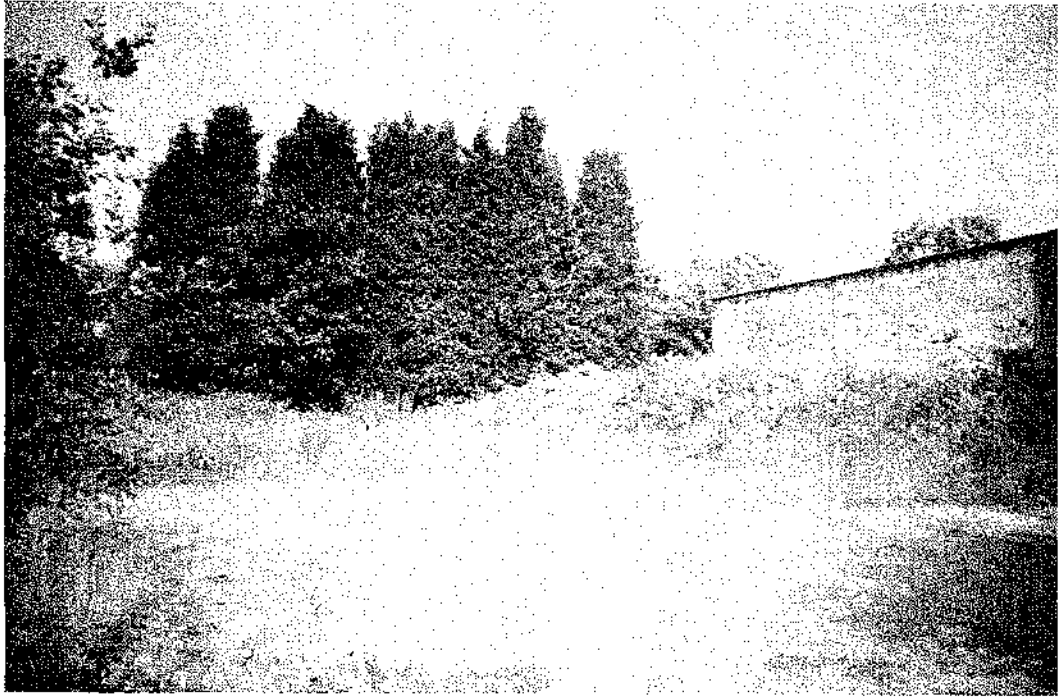


Plate 4

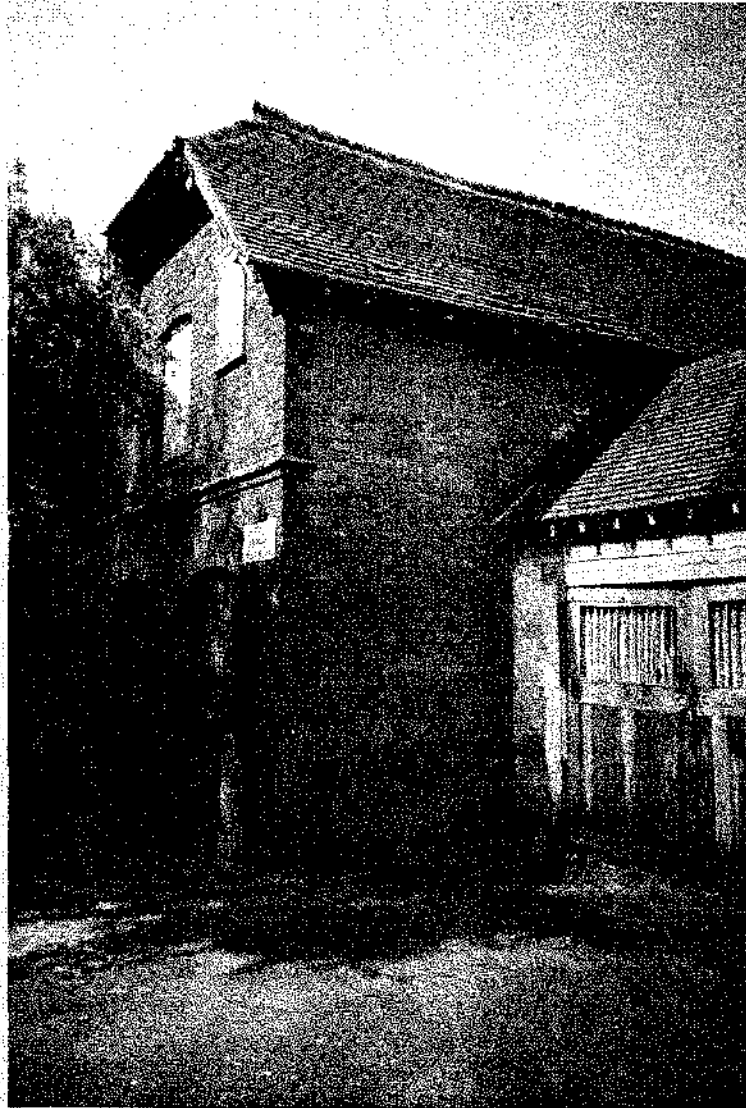


Plate 5

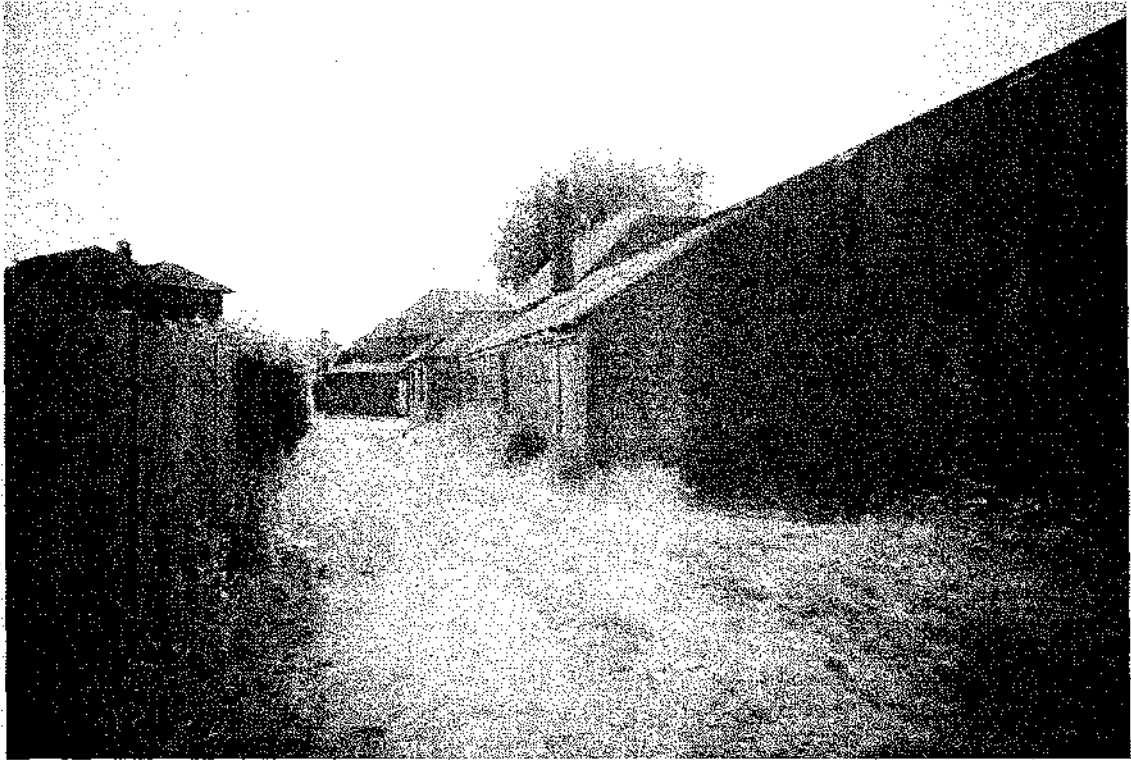


Plate 6