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**Land off Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire, Phase 2:
an archaeological desk-based assessment**

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Contents

Summary.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Study Area Location.....	1
3.0 Objectives	2
4.0 Method.....	2
5.0 Geology and Topography	2
6.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.....	2
6.1 Prehistoric.....	2
6.2 Roman.....	3
6.3 Saxon	3
6.4 Medieval.....	3
6.5 Post-Medieval to 20th Century	4
7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations.....	5
8.0 Acknowledgements.....	6
9.0 References.....	6

List of Figures

- Fig.1: Location Map
- Fig.2: The Study Area
- Fig.3: 1841 Tithe Map
- Fig.4: 1903 Ordnance Survey
- Fig.5: 1925 Ordnance Survey
- Fig.6: 1938 Ordnance Survey

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Summary

A desk-based assessment was carried out as a condition of planning permission for Hinckley and Bosworth District Council in conjunction with their archaeological advisors at Leicestershire County Council, ahead of development proposals by Miller Homes (West Midlands). The assessment concerned Phase 2 of residential development off Coventry Road in Burbage, Leicestershire (NGR SP 433 913), and examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence in order to identify any areas of potential archaeological interest. On the basis of the assessment and a watching brief carried out on the Phase 1 site to the west, the Phase 2 site was deemed to have a low archaeological potential, as it appeared to have comprised farmland on the outskirts of Burbage throughout its mapped history and probably prior to this. However, it was considered that there may be some potential for the recovery of flintwork, as Bronze Age flint flakes were found on the Phase 1 development site.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) as a condition of planning permission by Hinckley and Bosworth District Council ahead of proposed residential development by Miller Homes (West Midlands). The assessment comprised desk-based research into the potential of the development site, hereafter referred to as the study area. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999). The desk-based assessment follows a previous assessment (Watt 2000) and a watching brief (Krakowicz 2000) carried out by BUFAU for Phase 1 of the development, immediately to the west of the study area.

2.0 Study Area Location

The study area is located in Burbage, Leicestershire (NGR SP 433 913, Fig.1). Burbage is situated about 14 miles south-west of Leicester and 1 mile south of Hinckley. The study area is located just east of the junction of Coventry Road and Rugby Road. The backs of residential plots form the northern and eastern boundaries of the study area, Phase 1 of the development forms its western border, and fields lie against its southern border.

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 study area, and the impact of the proposed works upon them.

4.0 Method

Documentary research was undertaken on primary and secondary records and maps held at BUFAU and in the Leicestershire County Record Office and The University of Birmingham Library. The Leicestershire County Sites and Monuments Record provided information for the study area and the surrounding area within a c.500 metres radius.

5.0 Geology and Topography

The County of Leicestershire contains a large section of the great central plateau formed by Trias and Lower Lias. The western half of the county, in which Burbage is situated, is mainly covered by Trias, with small patches of older rocks here and there. Mercia Mudstone (formerly known as Keuper Marl) covers the county west of Leicester, with the exception of these small areas. It forms an undulating plain, well suited to cultivation. Burbage is situated on a ridge and the study area itself slopes up to the north, the difference in height from south to north being about 3.7m.

6.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

6.1 Prehistoric

Neolithic flints have been found at Mickle Hill near Aston Flamville, about 3km to the east of the study area, and also at Burbage. To the northwest of Burbage, around Hinckley, many flint implements of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic date have been found (Watt 2001). Hinckley, like Burbage, is situated on a ridge, which would have been a topographically favourable location during prehistoric times. During the watching brief carried out during groundworks on the Phase 1 site adjacent to the study area (Krakowicz 2000), a total of 32 worked flints was recovered from the surface of the exposed subsoil and from the topsoil; these comprised mostly struck flakes and chunks, possibly indicating a Middle to Late Bronze Age date. In a ploughed field at Burbage a bronze axe was ploughed up by a farmer (Campton, 1937). In the housing estate c.500m to the west of the study area, a large Iron Age pot sherd was unearthed in a private garden (SMR 49SW AH), which may suggest some Iron Age occupation in this area. A Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age occupation site (SMR 49SW BY) is known to exist within the medieval village core of Sketchley, which is situated about 1.5km to the northwest of the study area.

6.2 Roman

Walling Street Roman Road (SMR 49SW Y) runs northwest-southeast to the south of the study area and provides the county boundary between Leicestershire and Warwickshire. The line of the road is perhaps too far (c.500m) from the study area for there to be any real possibility of roadside Roman settlement evidence here. However, a Roman occupation site is known to exist about 500m to the east of the study area (SMR 49SW BG). In 1864 a large number of animal horns, believed to have been of the Roman period, was found in Burbage, 'three feet below the surface, in cutting a drain' (Berry, 1864) but it is not known where. This find would perhaps indicate the presence of some form of tanning industry, which may instead be datable to the medieval period. Some late 1st-century or early 2nd-century pottery was found at Lychgate Lane in Burbage (Pickering, 1934).

The watching brief on the Phase 1 site found no evidence for Roman activity.

6.3 Saxon

The name Burbage is thought to come from the Old English 'Burh' meaning fort, and 'baec' meaning ridge, or 'baece' meaning spring. Gelling (1984) suggests 'fort ridge' is appropriate to Burbage, as the town is situated on a low ridge. Other historians have suggested that the spring interpretation is appropriate, as underground springs are abundant in the area of the old village.

In 1043 Burbage was held by Earl Leofric, who was the ruler of the kingdom of Mercia. The monastery of Saint Mary's was founded at Coventry and, at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, the Abbey of Coventry held Burbage. The Domesday Book describes Burbage as having '...two ploughs; and twenty villeins with two bordars and two serfs have eight ploughs.' The population was recorded to be 24. The description shows Burbage to be a small farming community. In 1100, the Manors of Aston Flamville, Burbage and Sketchley were given to Robert de Flamville. The parish church of St. Catherine of Alexandria dates to the 13th century but the tower foundations are believed to date from the Saxon period. The original building probably has no other above-ground remains.

6.4 Medieval

After Robert de Flamville, the Hastings family held Burbage until their direct family line died out in 1374. In 1416 Reginald de Grey, who held the Manor at that time, was given the title of 'Lord of Hastings.' The Grey family remained Lords of the Manor from 1408-1935. In 1377 the Poll Tax Return records a population of 64. In 1563 the Diocesan Population Return records 57 households. Evidence for enclosure without Parliamentary Act in Burbage first dates from 1603-4 (VCH, II, 255).

In the 1960s the last of Burbage's medieval buildings was demolished. The Moat House, originally built in the late 16th century, was situated on the site of a homestead moat. Another building replaced this one at the turn of the 19th century and was used as the Rectory. Other buildings dating from the Elizabethan period were the Old Grange, the Elizabethan Cottage, and the Old Town Hall. Burbage appears to have remained a fairly thinly populated agricultural community. The medieval village core

of Sketchley (SMR 49SW BJ) exists about 0.2km to the northwest of the study area, as does the site of a medieval chapel (SMR 49SW W).

6.5 Post-Medieval to 20th Century

In 1670, 58 households in Burbage were eligible for paying the Hearth Tax. By 1801 there was a population of 1098. In 1811, of the 229 families in the village, 98 were working on the land and the remainder were involved in trade, manufacture or handicrafts.

A general large-scale map of the 'Country Five Miles Round Hinckley', taken from a book published in 1787 (Nichols, 1787), shows the study area. No enclosures are marked on this map. 'Three Potts' is marked south of the study area, along with several buildings along Watling Street.

In the 19th century, Burbage became one of the rural centres for the hosiery industry southwest of Leicester. Framework knitters were working in Burbage in 1812 and, in 1840, the manufacture of stockings began to increase steadily, although the majority of men were still working on the land. By 1844 there were 450 knitting frames in the village. By 1932 this operation had expanded into seven hosiery firms. In 1871, a decrease in population may probably be attributed to a migration to manufacturing towns.

The 1841 Tithe map of the Parish of Burbage (Fig. 3) shows the study area to have comprised part of two fields, 667 and 668. In the accompanying Tithe Award, these fields were recorded as being owned by Thomas Warner and occupied by Richard Bromwich, and were known as *Second Burbage Field* and *First Burbage Field* respectively. The former was arable land and the other pasture. The fields to the west of 668 were covered by the Phase 1 desk-based assessment, and were known as '*First Saint Mary's*' and '*Second St. Mary's*'. These fields both comprised arable land. The field-name 'Saint Mary' may be an allusion to the ownership of the Manor of Burbage by the monastery of Saint Mary's in the 11th century. To the east of the study area were fields known as *Third Heathway Close*, meadow-land, which may once have been part of heathland, and *Little Field*, which was used for pasture. The latter field may have been named with some irony, as it appears to be one of the largest fields in this area. The fields to the south of the study area were mostly regular and rectangular in shape, although the eastern field within the study area cut into another field to the east. The fields to the east were separated from more irregularly-shaped ones by a lane, named on early 20th-century maps as Bull Furlong Lane.

A different road arrangement to the present one existed around the study area. Rugby Road and Coventry Road did not then exist. Instead, a road named Three Pots ran along the line of the present Wolvey Road then turned to the north-east to join the line of the present Coventry Road. It is not clear from where the name Three Pots (or *Potts*) originates. There was a Three Pots Inn in the late 19th century, but it is not known whether the inn was named after the road or *vice versa*.

Several major building programmes have taken place in Burbage, the first in the 1890s, and then in the mid-1920s-30s the areas around Sketchley Road, Coventry

Road, Three Pots and Lychgate Lane were developed. In 1903 (Fig. 4) the study area still comprised two separate fields (303 and 304). The fields were evidently still in use as farmland, as no buildings existed within them. Residential development had not yet taken place along the Three Pots road frontage to the north of the study area. A pond lay in the south of the study area. A collection of buildings existed at the junction of Three Pots with the present Rugby Road, just to the southwest of the Phase 1 site. Three Pots Inn, built in the 1890s or earlier and used as a coaching inn for travellers along Watling Street, was situated to the southwest of the study area.

By 1925 (Fig. 5), the stretch of the Three Pots road which ran to the north of the study area, was named Coventry Road. A footpath followed the eastern border of the study area, as is the case at the present time, and cut through fields to the southeast. By 1938 (Fig. 6) some residential development had taken place to the immediate north of the study area, within the two fields, which by that time had been combined to make one larger field. A corridor of land was left open between the houses, to allow access to the field behind them from Coventry Road. More development had taken place along the western side of Three Pots. Part of the land to the east of the study area had come into use as allotment gardens and Victoria Nursery. The Three Pots Inn was demolished in the 1930s when a new building was erected.

A further period of building took place in the 1950s and, by 1963, a few more houses had been built north of the study area, and the empty corridor of land had become a track through to the field. More residential development had taken place to the east of the study area. The north-south section of Three Pots was now known as Wolvey Road.

The 1982 Ordnance Survey map shows that the arrangement of the roads to the west of the study area had been altered. The section of Three Pots that cut across in a northeasterly direction had been replaced by a shorter east-west stretch, Three Pots Road, which linked Wolvey Road with a wide new road, Rugby Road.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the documentary and cartographic evidence, it would appear that the study area does not have great potential for archaeological deposits. It was in use as arable and pasture land in 1841, but no evidence could be found for its use prior to that. The field names do not give any indication of previous occupation or archaeological features. The evidence for archaeological deposits in the surrounding area are few and quite widely scattered. There is the possibility that an Iron Age occupation site may have existed to the west of the study area. However, this theory is based on the recovery of one Iron Age pot sherd. As the area to the northwest around Hinckley has produced substantial quantities of flintwork, and the Phase 1 site produced worked flint recovered during the watching brief, it may be considered appropriate to consider the maintenance of a watching brief by a suitably qualified archaeologist on the Phase 2 study area during groundworks.

However, a decision on whether further archaeological field assessment will be a mitigation requirement ahead of development rests with the County Archaeology Service as advisors to the planning authority.

8.0 Acknowledgements

This report was written by Sarah Watt, and edited by Iain Ferris. The figures were prepared by Mark Breedon.

9.0 References

Maps

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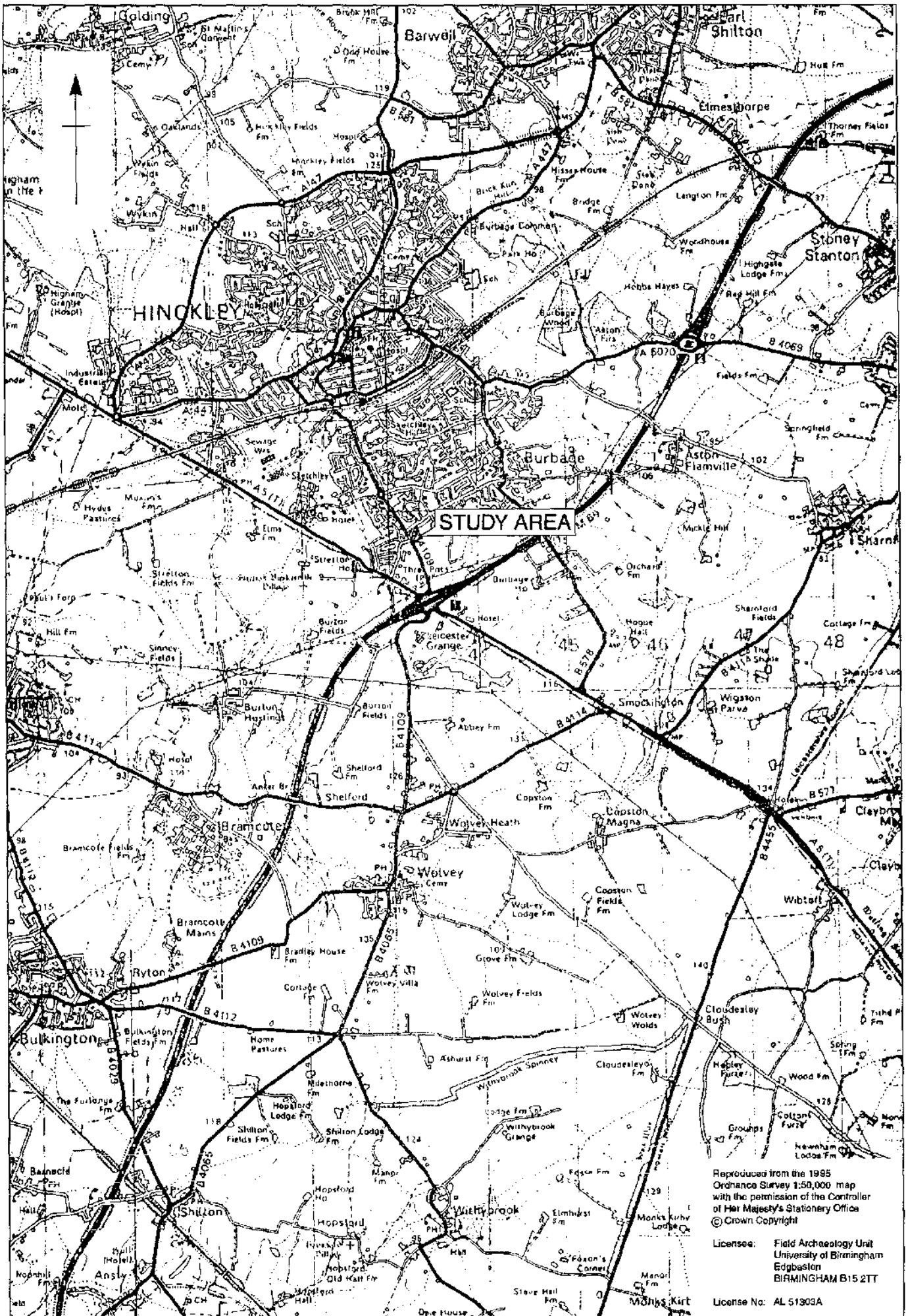


Fig.1



Fig.2

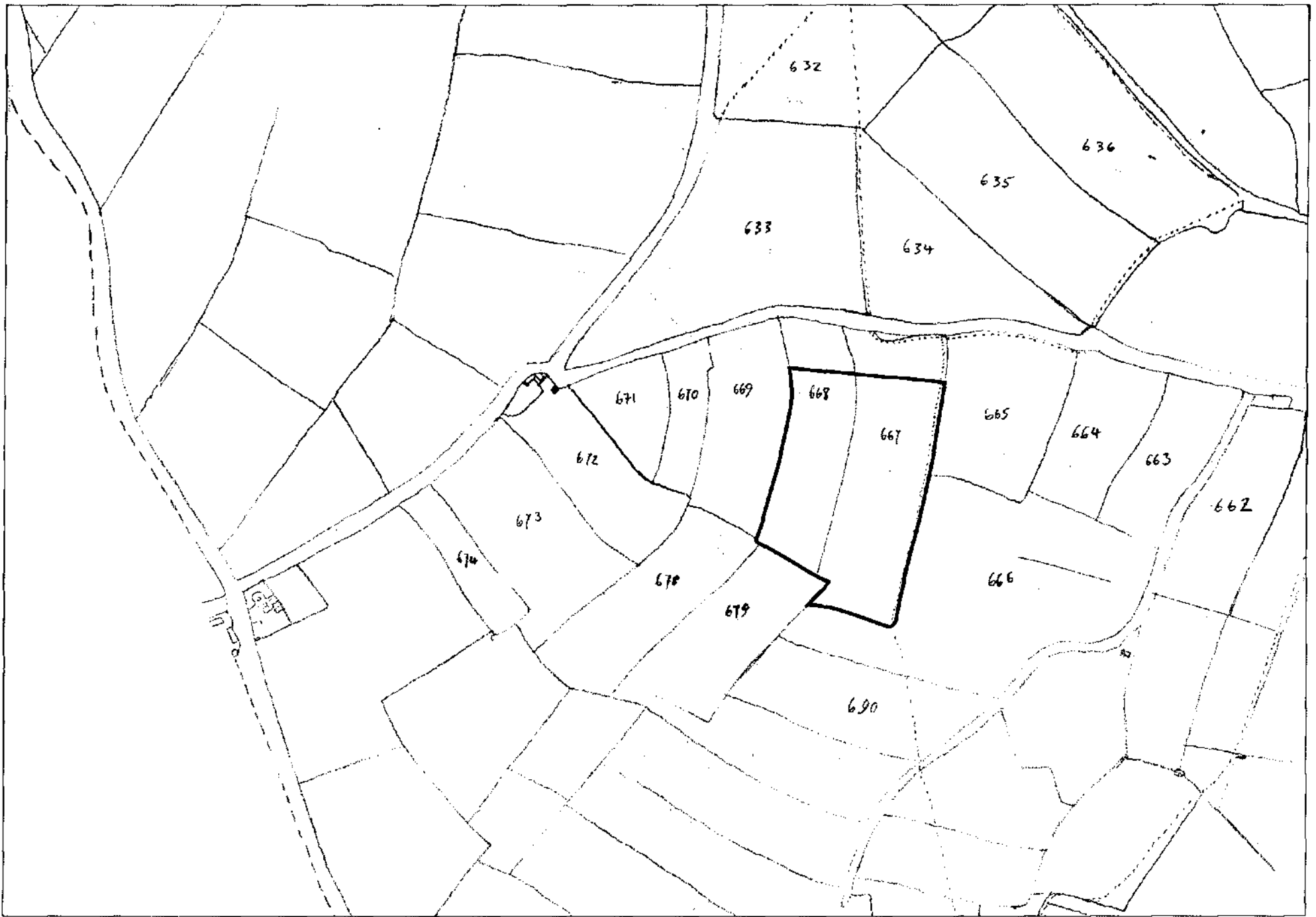


Fig.3

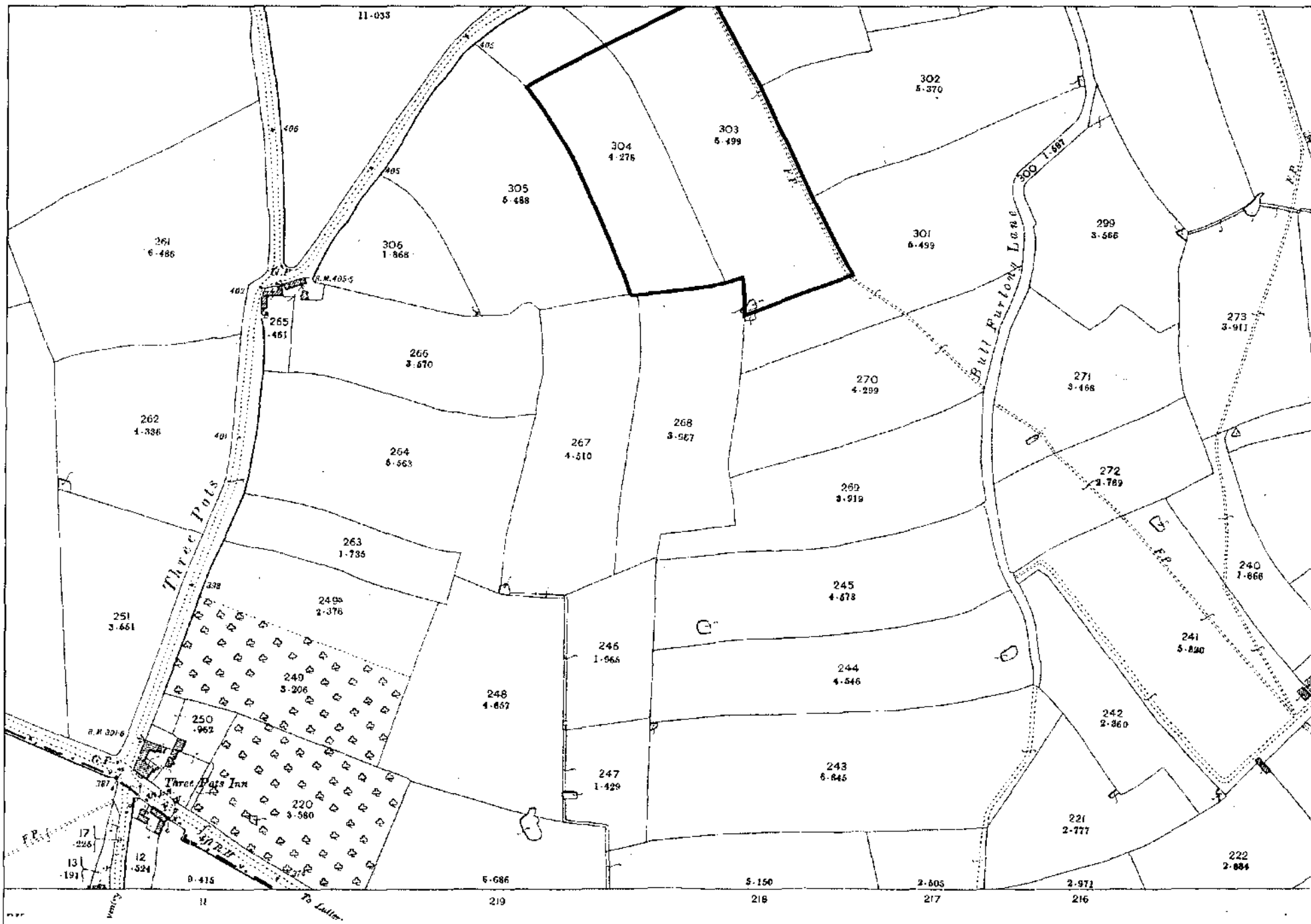


Fig.4

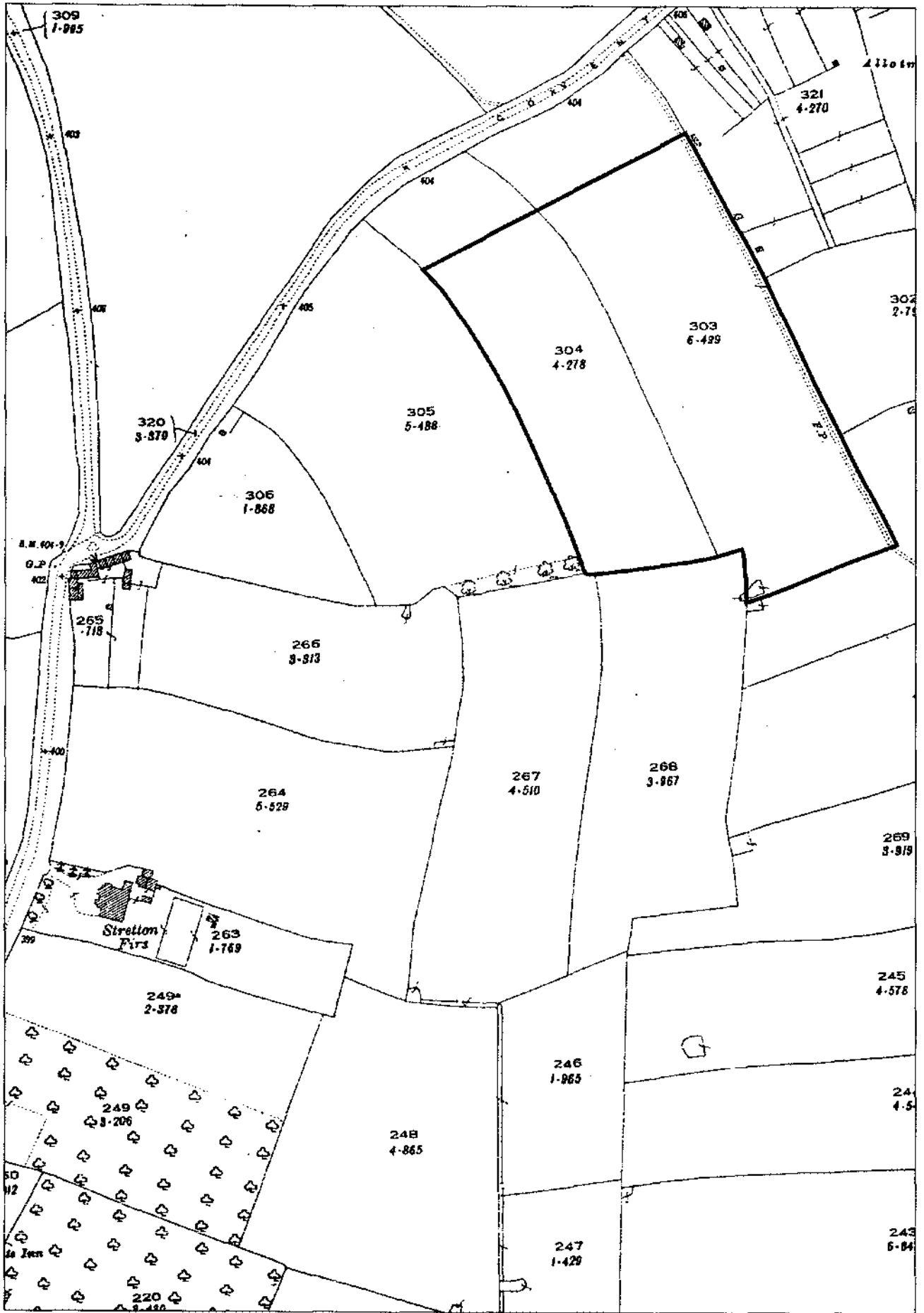


Fig.5

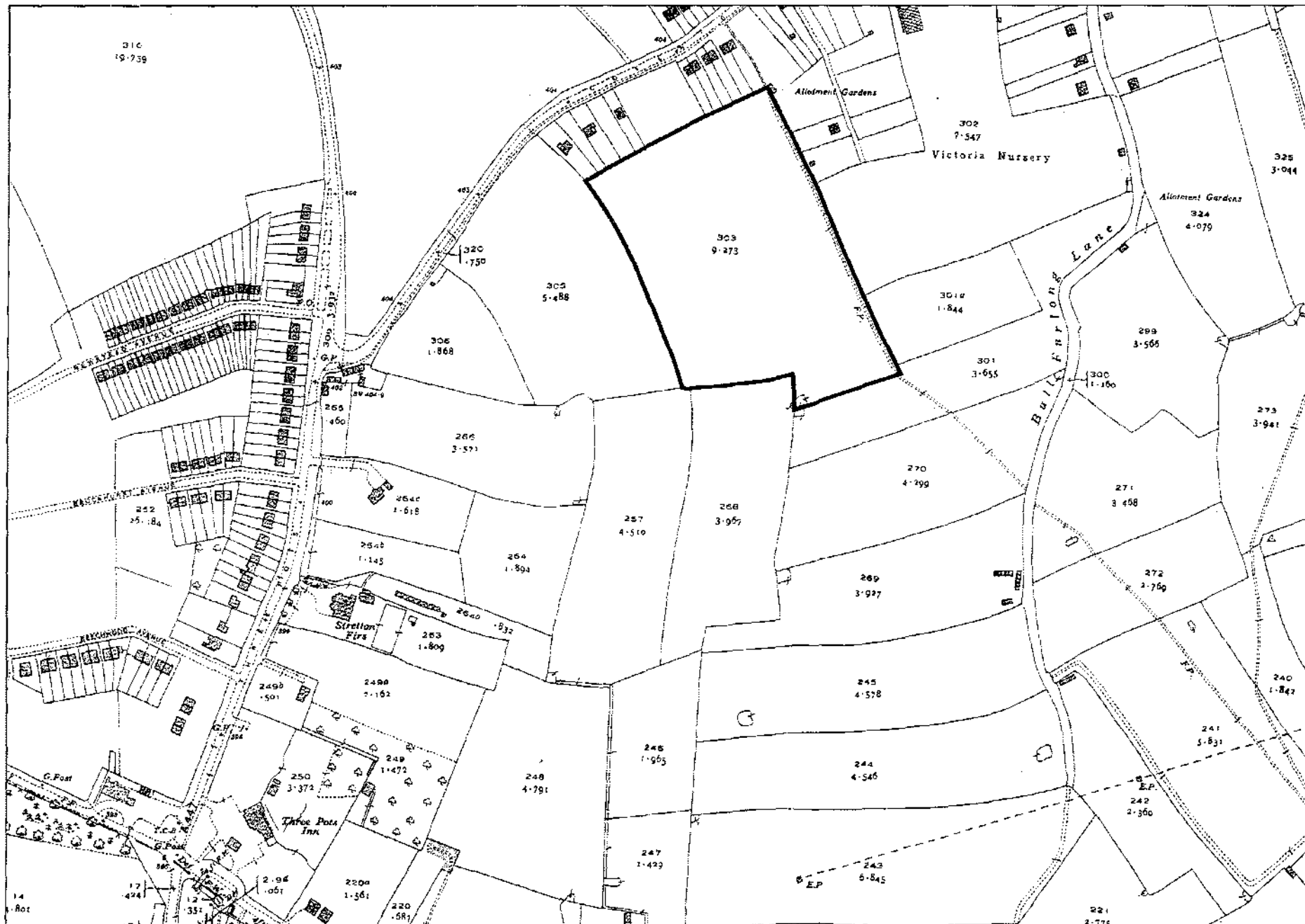


Fig.6