

**Coventry Outer Ring  
Main, West Midlands**

**Archaeological Desk-Based  
Assessment 2001**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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by  
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# **Coventry Outer Ring Main, West Midlands Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2001**

## **1.0: SUMMARY**

An archaeological assessment was carried out along the route of a proposed Severn Trent Water Limited pipeline to the southeast of Coventry. The aim of the assessment was to determine the survival and significance of any archaeological remains within an archaeological study area centered on the pipeline route, in order to enable an informed judgement to be made concerning any necessary archaeological mitigation fieldwork which might be required in advance of pipeline construction. The assessment identified artifacts and sites from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods within the study area. This report also includes proposals for an archaeological watching brief to be maintained during construction groundworks for the pipeline, with reporting of the results.

## **2.0: INTRODUCTION**

This assessment was undertaken by BUFAU during November 2001 under commission from Severn Trent Water Limited. The assessment was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by BUFAU (2001). The work was undertaken in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

## **3.0: LOCATION OF STUDY AREA (Figs. 1-2)**

The pipeline is located to the southeast of Coventry, and is approximately 4.4km in length, mainly on a southwest-northeast alignment. The pipeline runs from Brandon Road, Binley Woods at its northeastern end, to Siskin Drive at its southwestern end, near to Coventry Airport. The pipeline crosses a railway line. To the north of the railway, the pipeline easement crosses farmland, but to its south the pipeline mainly follows the line of Brandon Lane.

The archaeological study area for the assessment has been defined as a corridor 100m wide, centered on the proposed pipeline route. Other archaeological sites, located outside the study area are also included in this report, where the possibility exists that they may have formerly extended within the study area. The 'corridor' for the walkover survey was limited to a 50m zone, centered on the proposed pipeline route.

## **4.0: OBJECTIVES**

This assessment has two aims:

- 1) To identify and describe archaeological sites or historic landscape features located within, or immediately adjoining the study area.
- 2) To recommend an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy to be adopted during the construction of the pipeline.

## **5.0: SOURCES**

A number of sources were consulted during the course of this assessment:

- The Sites and Monument Record maintained by Warwickshire County Council (hereafter WSMR).
- Aerial photographs held by the Warwickshire SMR.
- Tithe and estate maps held by Warwickshire County Record Office (Warwickshire CRO)
- The Sites and Monuments Record maintained by Coventry City Council (hereafter CSMR).
- Secondary archaeological and historical sources held by Warwickshire County Record Office, and the University of Birmingham library.

A walkover survey of the pipeline route was conducted to identify above-ground earthworks of archaeological, or potential archaeological interest, and to locate any ploughsoil scatters of artifacts visible in ploughed fields.

Consultation of aerial photographs held by the National Library of Aerial Photographs (Swindon) was outside the scope of this assessment.

## **6.0: PIPELINE ROUTE**

### **6.1: Topography and geology**

The proposed pipeline route runs through three parishes, Baginton (Warwickshire), Willenhall (Coventry) and Brandon and Bretford (part of Wolston, Warwickshire). The River Avon meanders to the south of the study area, flowing roughly parallel, and to the south of, Brandon Lane. Along this section the land slopes downwards towards the Avon Valley. Where the pipeline turns northwards the land undulates gently. The underlying geology of the area is Mercia Mudstone and gravels.

### **6.2: Archaeological and historical background (Fig. 2)**

Evidence for prehistoric settlement in the area is fairly patchy and poorly understood, as it is across Warwickshire as a whole (Hingley 1996, 21). Ploughsoil flint scatters in the vicinity of Brandon Wood (W4418 and W4271), lie to the east of the study area. An Iron Age or Saxon enclosure was excavated at Brandon Grounds, during extensive quarrying (Bateman 1978; W1836, W5653, W5654), close to the eastern boundary of the study area. Romano-British artifacts were also identified in the same location (W5655). Approximately 2km from the southwestern end of the pipeline route is the Lunt Roman Fort (not illustrated), which was occupied from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Apart from the possible Saxon remains identified at Brandon Grounds (see above), there is no evidence for Saxon settlement in the study area. There is, however, a Saxon settlement and cemetery at Baginton to the southwest of the study area (not illustrated; VCH 1965, 22). The name Coventry itself is almost certainly of Old English origin, as is Willenhall (VCH 1965, 6).

Medieval activity and settlement in the vicinity of the pipeline is fairly well documented. The former hamlet and civil parish of Willenhall, two miles southeast of Coventry, was a detached part of the ancient parish of Holy Trinity, Coventry, but remained in Knightlow

Hundred and was not included in the county of the city in 1451 (VCH 1969, 115). In 1252, when Geoffrey Willenhall did homage for it, it was described as a house, a mill and a carucate of land. In 1340, when Geoffrey's grandson was in possession, the land consisted of four arable crofts, a meadow and a field of pasture, and the priory granted him another piece of woodland in 1342 (VCH 1969, 115), likely to be Willenhall wood (C4596), partly within the study area.

The parish of Baginton had an unusually large amount of meadowland in the Domesday Book. In 1086 Baginton was among the estates of Turchil and was held of him by Alwin; it had been held before the Conquest by Archil and was rated at 4 hides. There was also a mill here which was mentioned in later records. It was probably on the site of Baginton Corn Mill. Brandon and Bretford are two hamlets in the north of the parish of Wolston. In 1086 there was a mill recorded at Brandon, and in 1279 Theobald de Verdon was returned as holding a castle and a park at Brandon.

In 1086 the parish of Wolston was among the estates of Roger, Earl of Shrewsbury (VCH 1965, 275). Piles Coppice, to the east of the pipeline, is within the area of Brandon and Bretford, and may have had early medieval origins. Stray, ploughsoil finds have been located to the south of the railway, to the west of the study area (W6970).

The largely agricultural character of the surrounding landscape continued until the last century. A turnpike road crosses the study area towards its southwestern limit, and forks to the south of Ryton Bridge (W4789 and W4771). This was built between 1750 and 1775, and a plan by T. Eagle dated 1795 (Fig. 3) of the stretch between the River Sowe and the River Avon shows improvements to the road and the location of a toll house on the corner of Brandon Lane. In 1833 the London to Coventry railway was opened, although this seems to have had little effect on the character of the surrounding lands within the study area as there was no station here. Although Tithe plans were not available for the whole of the study area, the available maps (dated 1841, Fig. 4; 1849, Fig. 5) show that the landscape at this time included pasture, meadow and woodland. A later 19<sup>th</sup> century Ordnance Survey map is also illustrated (Fig. 6). This toll house was still extant at the time of the Ordnance Survey Second Edition Map (1919, Fig. 7), but has subsequently been replaced by modern housing.

### **6.3: Present character (Figs. 2 and 8)**

The Brandon Lane section of the pipeline route is predominantly farmland, mostly pasture. A few fields, notably on the north side of Brandon Lane are overgrown and not actively in cultivation. To the south of Brandon Lane, between Brandon Grounds Farm and the railway is a nature centre (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Brandon Marshes). Fields to the north of the railway line have been used for landfill and are now under grass. The woodland in this area, Piles Coppice and Brandon Woods, is maintained by the Woodland Trust.

## **7.0: RESULTS (Fig. 2)**

### **7.1: Known sites**

This section of the report identifies those archaeological sites and find-spots recorded within the study area.

#### Stone axe (W1351)

Find-spot, located in the east of the study area. No associated finds or features are presently recorded.

#### Enclosure (W7179)

Possible Iron Age enclosure identified to the north of Piles Coppice (W7179; Wilson and Best 1994). Although presently recorded outside the pipeline easement, it is possible that associated features, such as field systems could be intercepted by the pipeline.

#### Romano-British settlement (W8278/C5482)

The settlement was identified and excavated prior to the construction of the Coventry Eastern Bypass (W8278/C5482; Rylatt 1987, 62).

#### Romano-British artifact scatters (W6969, W8279/C3945; pit W5860).

Ploughsoil scatters of Romano-British finds and an isolated pit have been identified in several locations. Romano-British coarsewares from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD were recovered along with a group of seven, part-fired, triangular loom weights.

#### Various Romano-British and medieval artifacts from Brandon Lane (W6625 and W6626)

These include coins from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, and metal artifacts dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century, reported by metal detectorists. Although at present only stray finds are recorded, the possibility that there may surviving associated features within the easement of the proposed pipeline should be considered.

#### Medieval ploughsoil finds (W5861)

Various stray finds from 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries have been recovered within the study area

#### Piles Coppice (W8763)

A coppice wood of 20.8 ha. Almost certainly identified in the 1279 Hundred Rolls, the wood can probably be identified as one of the two woods recorded in the Domesday Book. It may also be the Munechet (a Celtic wood name) recorded c. 1250, in which case it may have had its origin as early as c. AD 500 AD (Morfitt 2000).

A ditched and banked boundary identified during the walkover survey may relate to this medieval woodland. This identified boundary is transected by the path that skirts the western and southern sides of Piles Coppice. The pipeline route may also cross the banked and ditched boundary outside the wire fence boundary that delimits the area owned by the Woodland Trust.

#### Ryton Bridge (W4276)

Possibly medieval in origin.

### Finford Mill (C9375)

A medieval mill is situated immediately to the west of Ryton Bridge. It was first mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when Geoffrey Willenhall did homage for the Willenhall holding in 1252 (VCH 1969, 115). Survives as a depression/pond in the corner of the field. The walkover survey identified possible earthworks in the field approximately 50m from the suggested location of Finford Mill. These earthworks may either be associated with the mill or with former field boundaries or landscaping works at the northern end of the field. The route of the pipeline transects these earthworks.

### Railway from London to Birmingham (W7563/C6118)

Built under powers granted by Act of May 6<sup>th</sup> 1833, surveys of the route having begun in 1829. Opened from Rugby to Birmingham on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1838 and from London to Birmingham on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1838. It was merged into the LNWR from January 1<sup>st</sup> 1846 (Clinker 1954). The route of the pipeline will tunnel beneath the railway line. There are no structures associated with the railway in the vicinity of its proposed crossing with the pipeline.

### **7.3: Documentary research (Figs. 3-5)**

Research on documents held by Warwickshire County Record Office failed to yield any additional data. Tithe maps were available only for sections along the pipeline route, namely to the west of London Road at Tollbar End, and around Brandon Woods and the railway line. A plan of the turnpike road from the River Sowe to Ryton Bridge (the present London Road) showed the location of the Toll Gate on the corner of Brandon Lane and the course of the old road (Eagle map of 1795, Fig. 3).

### **7.4: Walkover Survey (Fig. 8)**

A walkover survey of the pipeline route was carried out in November 2001. Pro-forma record forms were filled out for each area included in the walkover survey. Earthworks possibly relating to Finford Mill at Tollbar End, and a ditch and bank boundary surrounding the medieval woodland at Piles Coppice were identified. No ridge and furrow was present in any of the fields surveyed. No additional earthworks were identified during the course of the survey. As all the areas surveyed were under scrub, grass or woodland, no artifact scatters were identified.

## **8.0: DISCUSSION**

Many of the archaeological find-spots identified within the study area, including finds of prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval date, are not presently recorded as being associated with any features or deposits, and the extent of the artifact scatters is not presently known. A cropmarked enclosure of Iron Age date (W7179), and a settlement of Romano-British date (W8278/C5482) was excavated in advance of road construction. Piles Coppice (W8763) may have been Saxon in origin. The possibly associated earthworks noted during the walkover survey are presently undated. During the medieval-early post-medieval periods the character of the area was predominantly rural. To the south of the railway the pipeline follows the approximate line of Brandon Lane, around which ploughsoil scatters of Romano-British and medieval finds have been recovered. The extreme southern end of the pipeline lies close to the site of the medieval mill of Finford (C9375).



## 9.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

### 9.1: Implications

Although the Iron Age enclosure (W7179), located to the north of Piles Coppice is presently recorded outside the pipeline easement, associated features, such as field systems could extend within the working corridor. The undated earthwork boundaries identified within Piles Coppice (W8763) would be crossed by the pipeline. While a number of stray finds have been recovered from the area adjoining Brandon Lane, it is not clear if these finds represent settlement in the adjoining areas, or if they merely derive from manuring scatters. The walkover survey identified earthworks adjoining the site of medieval Finford Mill (C9375), which will be affected by the pipeline.

### 9.2: Proposals

A watching brief should be maintained during the pipe trench groundworks, to observe and record archaeological features within areas where archaeological features or find-scatters are known or suspected. The watching brief should be maintained in the locations noted below: (1) during the initial topsoil removal, to record any features exposed, and (2) during excavation of the pipe trench, to record archaeological features and deposits exposed in section.

An archaeological watching brief is recommended along the followings lengths (see Fig. 8 for field numbers) of the pipeline:

**Field 3:** adjacent to the location of Romano-British artifact scatters (C3945/W8279) identified during the construction of the Coventry Eastern Bypass, and adjacent to the cropmarked, possible Iron Age enclosure (W7179), to locate any associated features, such as field systems.

**Field 35/36:** around the earthwork boundary of Piles Coppice (W8763), which may be medieval or earlier in origin.

**Field 37:** in the area of the identified earthworks which may be related to medieval Finford Mill.

*Additionally, the precise alignment of the Brandon Lane section of the pipeline is not presently known. If the pipe trench is to be laid within the existing carriageway, the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief along this stretch of the pipeline would probably not be justified. However, if the pipe trench is cut along a roadside verge, the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief in the vicinity of the identified artifact scatters (Fields 6, 10-11) would be worthwhile, particularly if the pipe trench was cut through any roadside earthwork banks, where archaeological deposits may be particularly well-preserved.*

Following the completion of the watching brief an illustrated report would be compiled detailing the findings, and appropriate brief report would be prepared for period journals.

## 10.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A plan of the turnpike road from the River Sowe to Ryton Bridge by T. Eagle 1795

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Ordnance Survey Second Edition 1919

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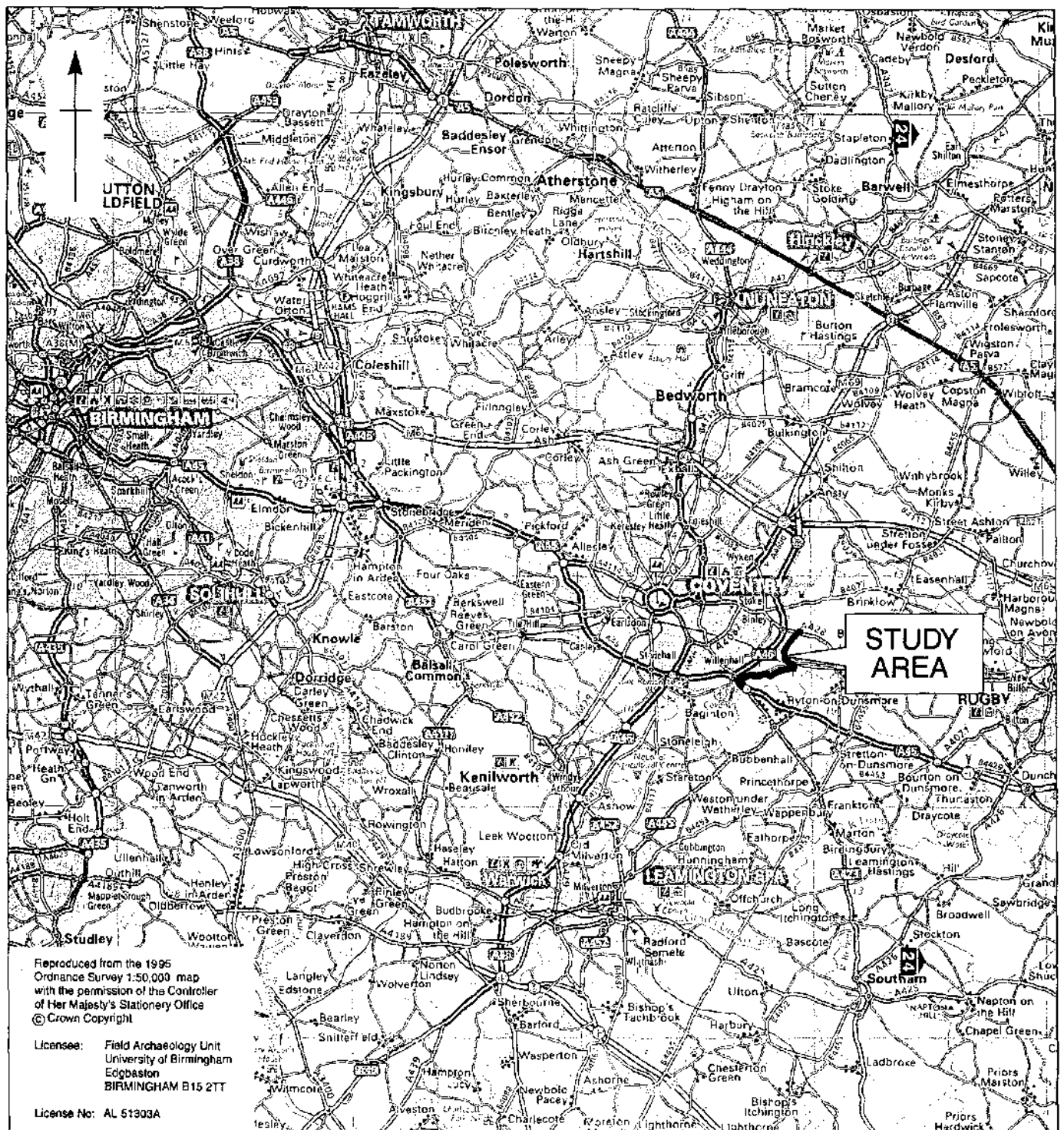


Figure 1

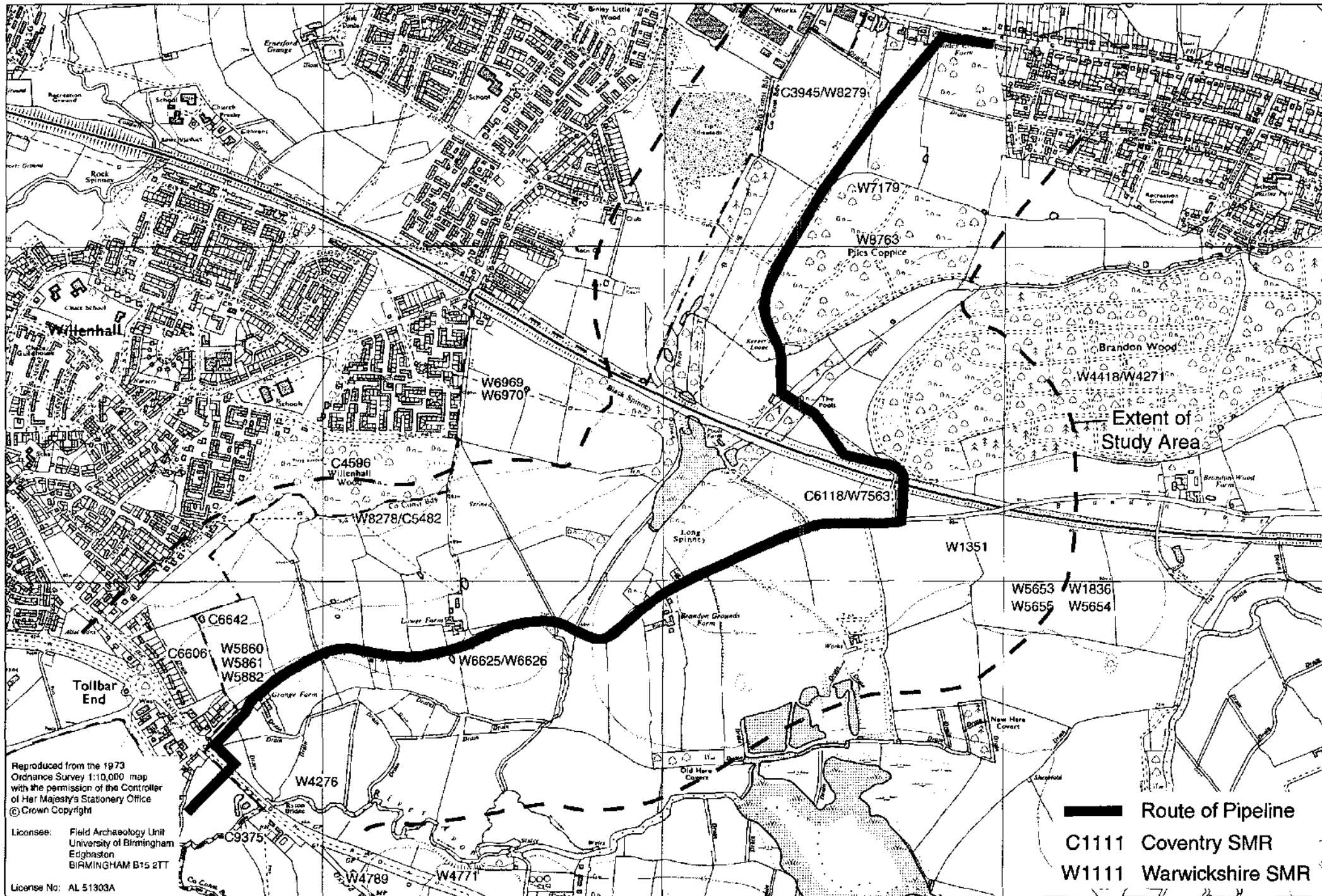
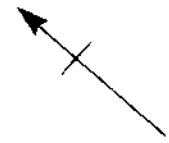


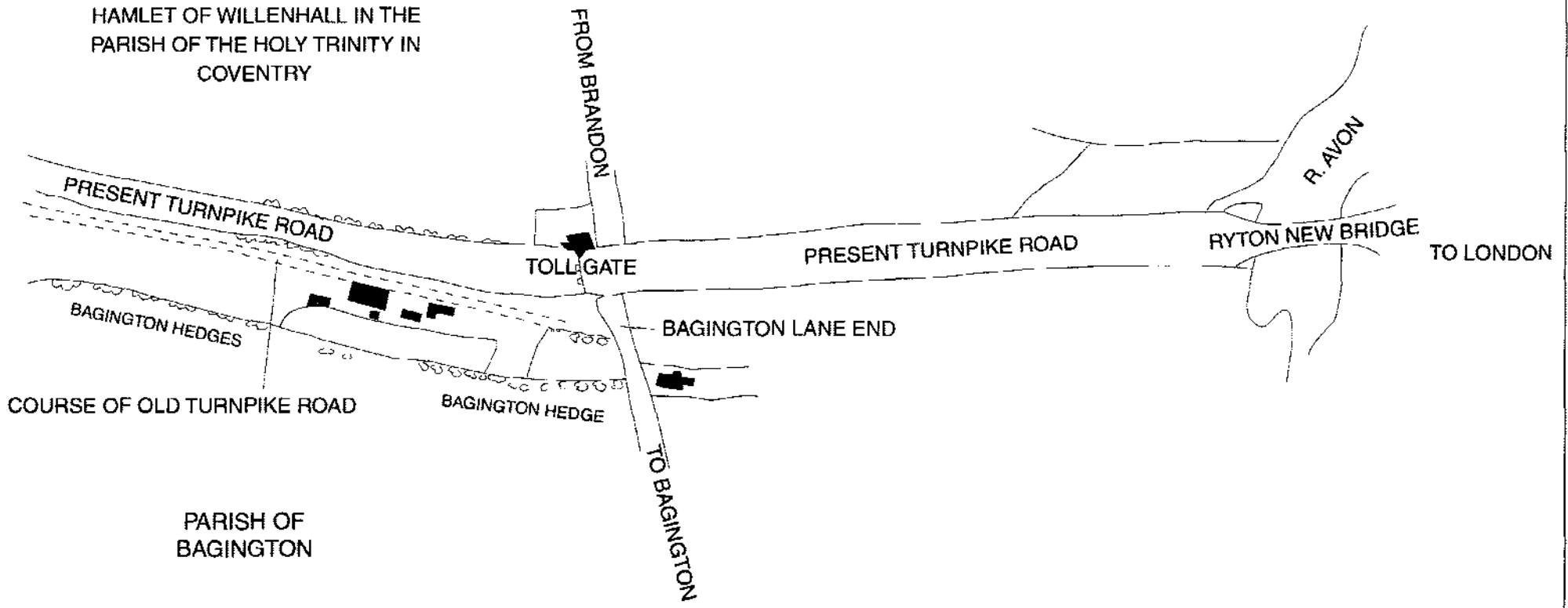
Figure 2

PLAN OF TURNPIKE ROAD

1795



HAMLET OF WILLENHALL IN THE  
PARISH OF THE HOLY TRINITY IN  
COVENTRY



PARISH OF  
BAGINGTON

Figure 3

BAGINGTON

TITHE MAP

1841

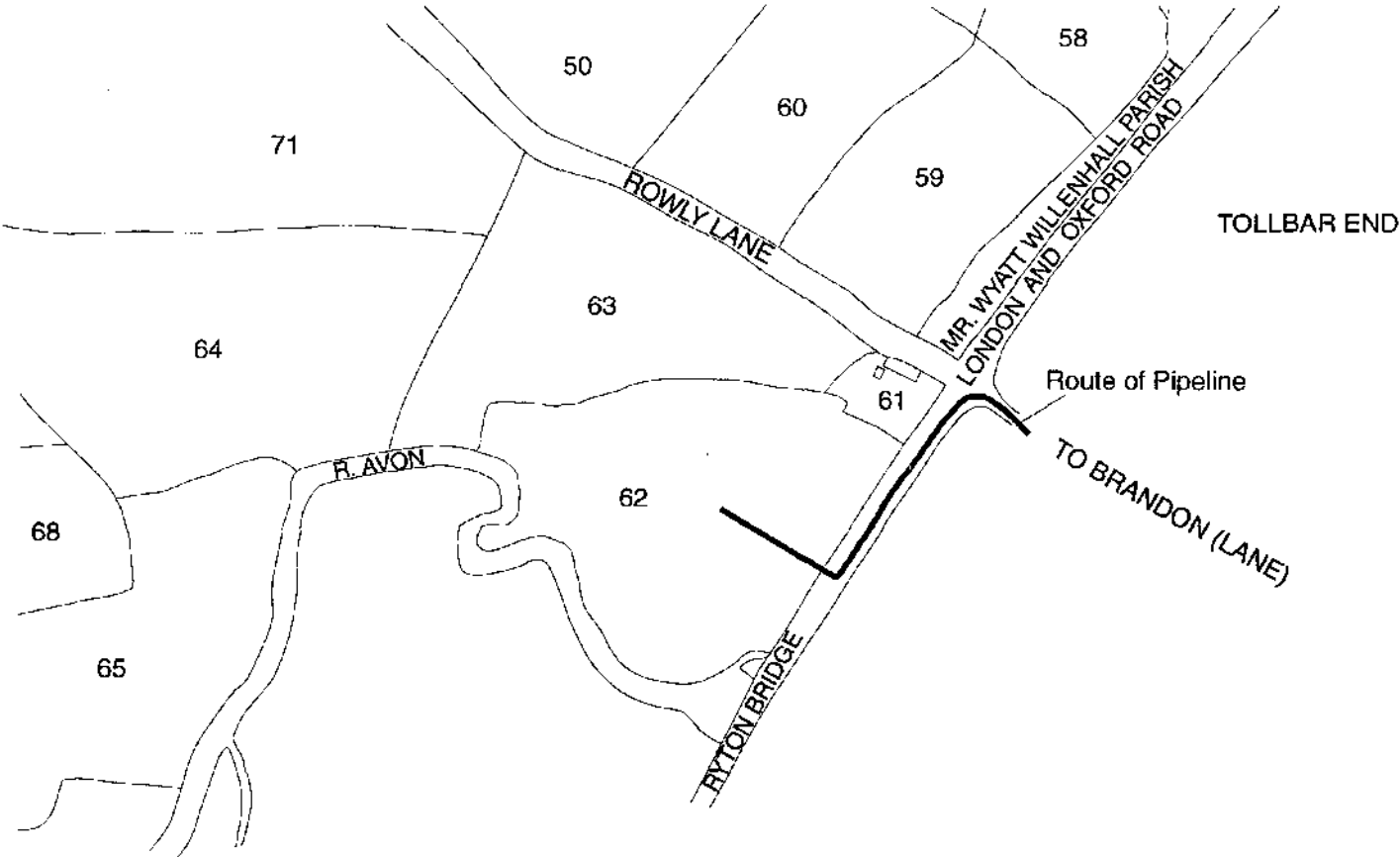
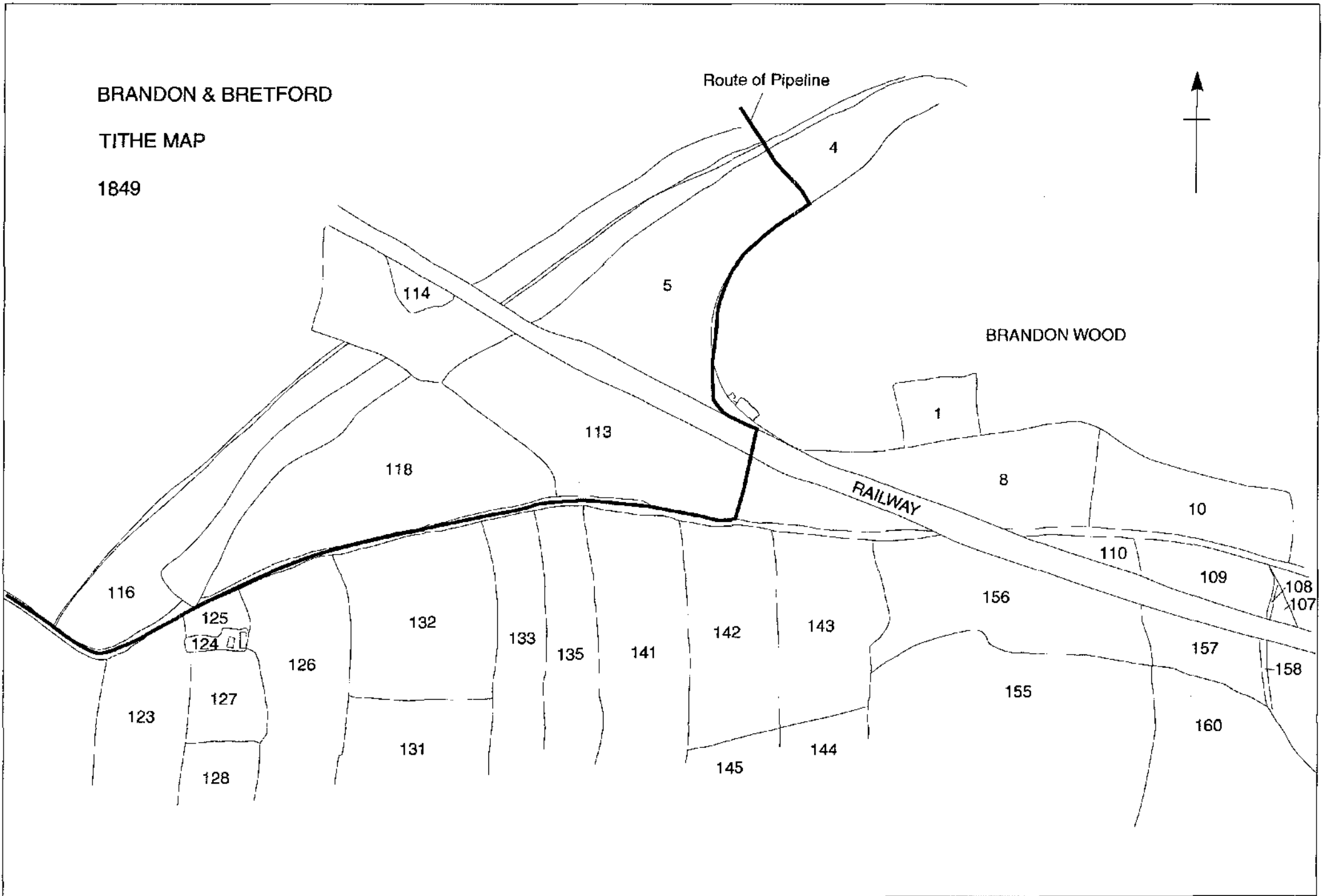


Figure 4



BRANDON & BRETTFORD

TITHE MAP

1849

Route of Pipeline

BRANDON WOOD

RAILWAY

Figure 5



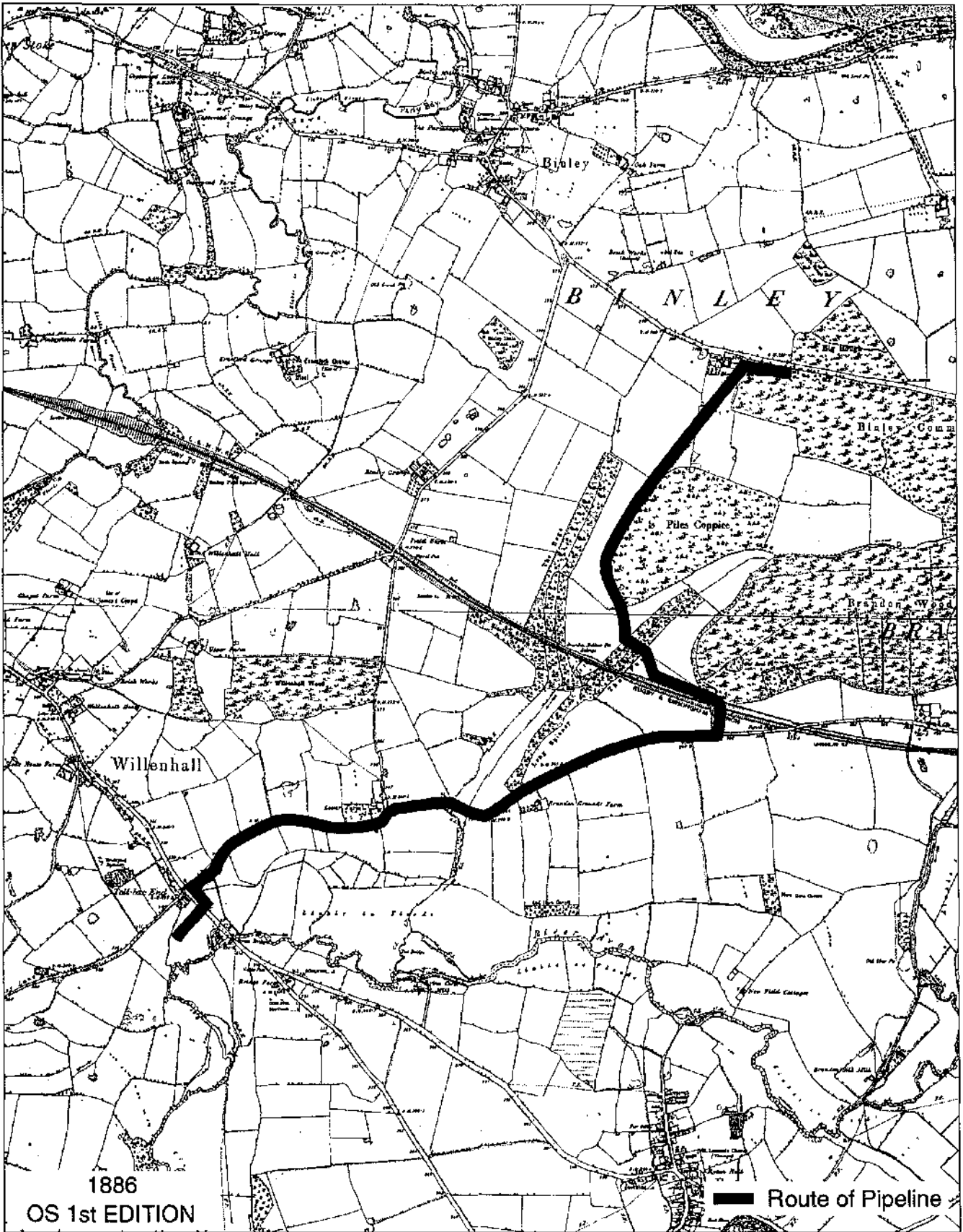


Figure 6

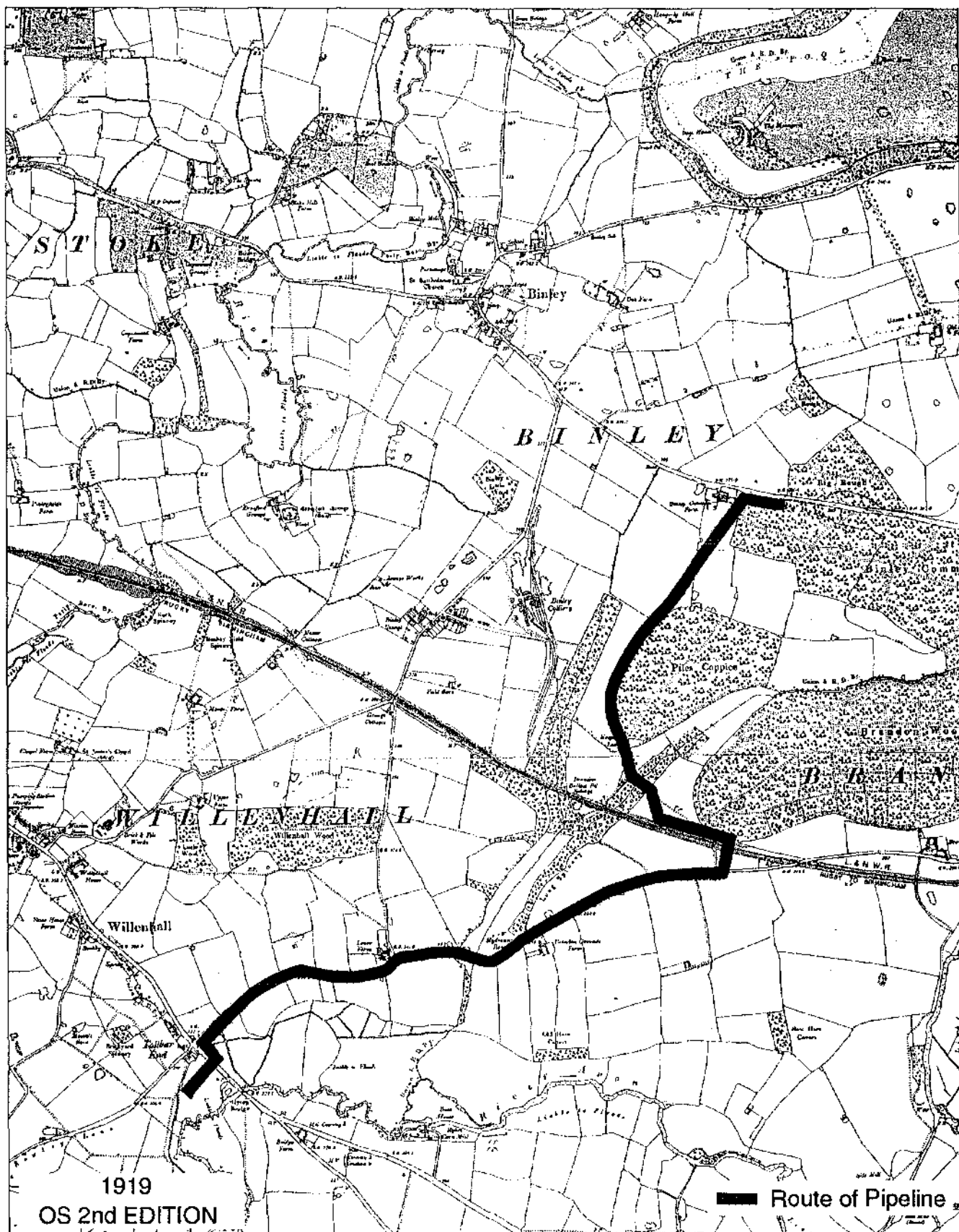


Figure 7

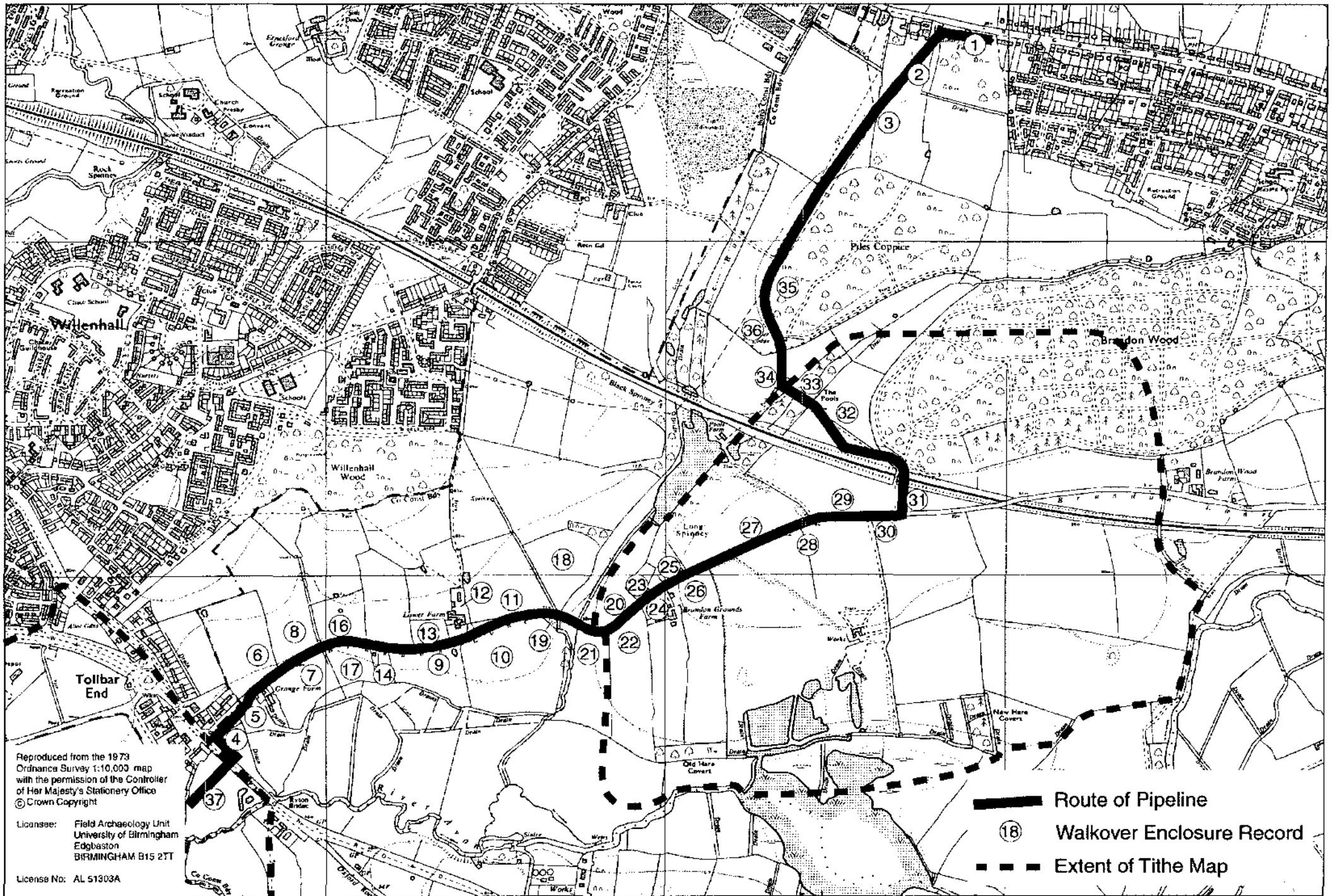


Figure 8