

**Land adjacent to Oak  
House, Oak Road, West  
Bromwich, Sandwell,  
West Midlands:**

**an archaeological desk-based assessment  
and watching brief 2002**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**Land adjacent to Oak House, Oak Road,  
West Bromwich, Sandwell, West Midlands:  
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**1.0 Summary**

*An archaeological assessment and watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), of land adjacent to Oak House, West Bromwich, Sandwell, West Midlands (SO 99809090), in January and February 2002. The work was commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, as part of a condition of planning consent for the removal of a grassed mound. The desk-based assessment was undertaken in advance of an archaeological watching brief carried out during the removal of the mound. The mound was thought to be made up of the rubble which resulted from the demolition, in 1977, of two Grade III listed buildings, formerly known as Nos. 184-186 Oak Road, which occupied the site. The aim of the assessment was to gather evidence which might help to determine the date, character and extent of these buildings and to aid the interpretation of any archaeological deposits recorded during the watching brief.*

*The assessment identified cartographic evidence for a complex of buildings in the area of the present mound depicted on maps from 1804 onwards. It would appear that Nos. 184-186 had been built in the late eighteenth century and used from the early nineteenth century as the farmhouse attached to a working farm with accompanying ancillary buildings set around a farmyard. Nos. 184-186 may have been built as a gentrified farmhouse to replace the existing Oak House, which had up until then functioned as a farmhouse. The main 'L'-shaped building in this complex corresponded with listing information describing the building as being 2-storey stucco of late eighteenth century date and divided into two dwellings, one of which had two later bays. This building formed the northern part of a complex of structures ranged around a central courtyard including two large barns to the south and west, suggestive of a farmstead. These seventeenth and nineteenth century grade II listed barns (SMR 1689 and SMR 1419) are still standing.*

*The layout of the buildings appears relatively unchanged until the 1970's, apart from some minor additions and the construction of a large workshop to the rear of the southern barn in the early twentieth century. The map and Census evidence indicates a change of use from a farm to a subdivided dwelling leased out to several families, many of whom worked in the nearby collieries. This appears to coincide with Jane Whyley passing on the estate to John Edwards Piercy, who owned a colliery to the southwest of the study area, in 1837. Another change of use took place in the early twentieth century when the buildings were in use as industrial workshops. Other structures forming this complex of buildings are no longer in existence, presumably demolished at the same time as the main building. Archaeological trial-trenching carried out in 1991 revealed an undated cobbled yard surface in one trench, located close to the centre of the former*

*courtyard. Another trench situated near the eastern side of the former building complex revealed evidence for structures of probable eighteenth and nineteenth-century dates, which are probably the structures depicted on the historic maps, and an undated stone wall possibly relating to an earlier farm structure.*

*The watching brief revealed evidence of brick footings, which corresponded to the position of the demolished 'L'-shaped buildings known as 184-186 Oak Road. No clear dating evidence was obtained, due to the fact that the mound sealing these brick structures appeared to be composed of a dump of material, containing relatively small quantities of demolition rubble and mainly nineteenth and twentieth century finds, probably brought in from another location.*

*The archaeological remains of 184-186 Oak Road have been preserved in-situ.*

## **2.0 Introduction**

This archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), during January and February 2002. The work was commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, as part of a condition of planning consent for the removal of a grassed mound, in order to create a level area, at land adjacent to Oak House, Oak Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell, West Midlands (Fig. 1). The desk-based assessment was undertaken in advance of the archaeological watching brief carried out during the removal of the mound. The mound was thought to be made up of the rubble which resulted from the demolition, in 1977, of two Grade III listed buildings, formerly known as Nos. 184-186 Oak Road. The work conforms to a written scheme of investigation (BUFAU 2001) and a brief prepared by the Sandwell Borough Archaeologist (SMBC 2001).

This report comprises desk-based research into the site of the mound; (hereafter referred to as the study area) and the results of the watching brief. The work is in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999) and the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

The paper archive, which comprises one A4 file of context and feature cards and photographs and one A3 wallet of maps and plans will be deposited with Sandwell Community History and Archives Service, Smethwick Library.

## **3.0 Study area location**

The study area lies in a residential area to the southwest of West Bromwich town centre, beside Oak Road (centred on NGR SO 99809090, Fig.1). It is immediately to west of Oak House, now a museum run by Sandwell MBC. The study area comprises the site of a low mound which was grassed over, and which was thought to be made up of rubble

from the demolition of two Grade III listed buildings, formerly known as Nos 184-186 Oak Road.

#### **4.0 Objectives**

The objectives of the archaeological work were:

- to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains below or within the mound.
- to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To provide an understanding of the history and the significance of the archaeology of the site as a whole, including recovering and interpreting information on the development of the buildings formerly occupying the site, and the lifestyle of the inhabitants.

These aims were achieved through map regression analysis and consultation of primary and secondary sources followed by archaeological supervision of the removal of the mound, and recording of any remains and artefacts identified.

#### **5.0 Method**

##### *5.1 Desk-based assessment*

The objectives of the desk-based assessment were achieved through map regression analysis and consultation of primary and secondary sources held at:

- Lichfield Record Office
- Staffordshire Record Office
- The William Salt Library, Stafford
- Sandwell Community History and Archive Service, Smethwick Library
- National Monuments Record, Swindon
- Black Country Sites and Monuments Record, Wolverhampton
- Birmingham University, School of Geography, Map Library

##### *5.2 Watching brief*

Initially, a trial-trench was excavated through the mound using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket operating under archaeological supervision, in order to determine the nature, extent, depth and quality of any surviving remains. Surviving wall footings were left in situ. A meeting then took place with the Sandwell Borough Archaeologist to examine the results and determine future strategy. The archaeological deposits within the trial-trench were recorded before proceeding with the

removal of the mound. If appropriate, the exposed subsoil or archaeological horizon was to be defined and hand cleaned as necessary. A representative sample of surviving features was to be excavated in order to understand the structural record and stratigraphic relationships of deposits.

All stratigraphic sequences were to be recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were to be planned at a scale of 1:20, and sections were to be drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context cards. A monochrome print and colour slide photographic record was also maintained in accordance with the details specified in the brief.

Following the meeting, the rest of the mound was mechanically removed under archaeological supervision, down to the surrounding ground level. The surviving wall footings were left in situ.

Only a selective, but representative, sample of finds such as ceramic building tile, ceramic brick, post-medieval ceramics and architectural fragments were processed and recorded. All modern and late nineteenth century finds, which were recovered from mound material and thought to be derived another site were recorded but not retained.

## **6.0 Archaeological background**

Located to the east of the study area, Oak House is a timber-framed Grade II\* listed building, dating to c.1600. It is now managed as a museum by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The site of the mound occupying the study area was formerly occupied by Nos 184-186 Oak Road, which were listed as Grade III.

Nos 184-186 Oak Road were described at the time they were listed as:

*Late eighteenth century. Stucco. 2 storey. The left-hand building has 3 windows with channelled lintels, moulded wood doorcase with pediment and plain gable. The right-hand has two later 3 light angular bays and central moulded wood doorcase. Slates throughout.*

Because of their poor condition Nos. 184-186 Oak Road were demolished when the Queen visited Oak House in 1977. The resulting rubble was thought to have been used to create the low mound, which was grassed over.

The dwelling at Nos. 184-186 and ancillary buildings may originally have been the location of a farm, of which only two Grade II listed seventeenth and eighteenth century brick barns (Black Country SMR Nos. 1419 and 1689) now survive. The late eighteenth-century barn (referred to as being nineteenth-century in the Council's booklet on Oak House (SMBC n.d.)) has roof timbers which may have been re-used from a timber-framed building of a similar type to the adjacent timber-framed barn. The timber-framed seventeenth century barn, to the west, has a brick lean-to workshop at its north end, added

during the early twentieth century. A small nineteenth century brick outhouse, to the northeast of this, was probably built against the west wall of No. 186, and survived the demolition of the main building. John Turton, who owned the house from 1635, left an inventory in 1705, which refers to crop stores, livestock, horses, farm implements, and a shed and stable close by. It is perhaps possible that one of these buildings corresponds to the seventeenth-century barn.

Several trial-trenches were excavated around the barns in the early 1990s (Hughes 1990; Dingwall 1991), including one to the south of the mound and another to the west (Fig. 2). These trenches revealed a cobbled yard surface and the remnants of brick walls probably relating to structures on the east-side of the courtyard, depicted on maps from the late nineteenth century. The lower courses of an undated northeast-southwest aligned stone wall, revealed in the trench to the south of the mound, was made of dressed stone blocks, and had been used as the foundations for a later brick wall. This stone wall may have been part of an earlier building, perhaps similar to the listed seventeenth-century barn still in existence, on what would have been the opposite side of the courtyard. These features were sealed by at least 1m of recent levelling dumps and demolition layers. Pottery of eighteenth to twentieth-century date was recovered.

## 7.0 Historical background

The study area was situated on the edge of Bromwich Heath, which was enclosed in 1804 (Baugh, Greenslade and Johnstone 1972). As Yates's 1775 map is too small-scale to show Oak House, the earliest larger-scale cartographic evidence, in the form of the Enclosure Map of 1804 (Fig. 3), depicts Nos. 184-186 Oak Road as an 'L'-shaped building, aligned approximately northwest-southeast. Another smaller, squarish building, which must represent Oak House itself, lay to the southeast of it. The location of the 'L'-shaped building is marked 'Oak' and the land is shown to have belonged to the Trustees of Mr. William Whyley, deceased. The latter was the illegitimate son of John Turton (grandson of William Turton of Oak House (1626-82)), and Anne Whyley of Charlemont (SMBC n.d.). The buildings are on the extreme edge of the map and nothing is shown to the southwest of them. It is curious to note that the seventeenth- and nineteenth-century barns are not depicted on this map. The northern elevation of Nos. 184-186 ran parallel to a curving boundary line, which perhaps demarcated the land owned by the Oak House Estate, rather than to the alignment of Oak Road.

By 1837, the estate appears to have been owned partly by John Edwards Piercy, who owned a colliery nearby, and partly by the Late Mrs. Whyley (presumably by her Trustees). Jane Whyley owned Oak House until this date. However, she leased it out, probably soon after her son's death in 1806, and moved into a newly built house nearby (Greenslade 1976), probably Nos. 184-186. After her death in 1837, it passed to Piercy, who was a relative of hers. His family leased it out until 1894, when it was purchased by Alderman Reuben Farley (SMBC n.d.). The same two buildings shown on the Enclosure map are shown on Wood's map of West Bromwich of 1837 (Fig. 4), although Nos. 184-186 had additional projections on its north and south elevations. Oak Cottage, on the



opposite side of Oak Road, was owned by William Izon. Again, the two barns are not shown on this map, despite being substantial structures as shown on the 1849 Tithe map.

The Tithe map of 1849 (Fig. 5), also shows the buildings. Two small projections from the northern elevation of Nos. 184-186 are visible, which were probably the bay windows mentioned in the listing description. A projection from the back wall could have been a back porch. To the south and west of this building, further substantial buildings (the two barns), stood around a central courtyard. To the north of the main building was an enclosed area, possibly gardens. Access to the courtyard was directly from Oak Road. The landowner was still John Edward Piercy and the area of the courtyard (559) was occupied by 'eight houses, stables and gardens'. It is not clear from the map whether '559' refers to the enclosure in which Nos. 184-186 stood, as well as to the courtyard buildings. The occupiers of these dwellings are listed as 'Various,' unfortunately, so their names cannot be checked against those on the Census (see below) to determine which buildings were being referred to. To the east Oak House (556) is shown surrounded by its gardens. It was occupied by Samuel Reeves. The land in the wider area around the study area mostly comprised enclosed fields at this time. The boundaries on the tithe map broadly follow those shown on the Enclosure Map with a few alterations.

No. 558 on the Tithe map was arable land occupied by Joseph Williams, whom the 1851 Census lists as a labourer living in 'Oak Building.' No. 560, two houses and gardens, was occupied by Samuel Boswell, who was an engineer at the colliery, also apparently living at 'Oak Building' in 1851. Again, it is not clear whether Nos. 184-186 were wholly a part of the complex of buildings around the courtyard as, despite forming the northern 'range' of the yard, they are separated from it by a boundary line on the Tithe map and set in an unnumbered enclosure. No.552, named *Brick Kiln Leasow*, was occupied by James Roberts, who was a master miner employing 21 men and nine boys, also of Oak Building.

The 1841 Census Returns refer to 'Oak House,' 'Old Oak House,' and 'Oak House Buildings,' so it is not clear which of these refers to which building. 'Old Oak House' was occupied by Joseph Whitehouse, a farmer, and three servants. 'Oak House' was occupied by Joseph Davis, a coal master, and another man of the same age (40), also a coal master. Listed with them are nine other people, ranging in age from three months to 23 years old. Also present in the house was the Page family, consisting of Thomas Page, an iron brazier, his wife, child and two servants. Oak House Buildings were occupied by four separate families, Needle, Matlock, Hill and Smith, and various lodgers. Their occupations included brick-maker, brazier, forgerman, wagoner and labourer. This information and the later map evidence seems to suggest Nos. 184-186 had already been divided into a number of separate dwellings. The name 'Oak House' being given to the range with the bay windows whereas 'Oak House Buildings' occupied the block to the east.

The 1851 Census Returns list Oak Road under two separate parishes, Christchurch and West Bromwich South West. In the latter parish, Nos. 1-10 Oak Road are listed as Oak Building, where ten separate families were living, with various lodgers (a total of 55 people). Their occupations included brick-maker, labourer, coal miner (several), pit

sinker, pit engineer, screw maker, colliery clerk, and colliery engineer. From this information, it seems likely that these were the people living in Nos. 184-186, which had been split into separate dwellings. It is clear from the majority of the occupations present that the building was no longer being used for farm labourers or as part of the farm infrastructure. As John Piercy owned a colliery nearby, as well as the estate, it would appear that some of his workers were housed here. Oak House itself (No. 11 at this date) was occupied by Samuel Reeves, a Registrar of Births and Deaths, his wife Esther and their family – their son was also a colliery clerk. The Reeves family were still in occupation at the time of the 1861 Census. No. 12 Oak Road housed an iron founder and his family, and Nos. 13 and 14 also housed coal miners' families. Again, there is some uncertainty over which buildings these house numbers then represented. In 1861, the house numbering had changed again and it is not clear who occupied Nos. 184-186. Oak House was No.100, and No.99 housed a blacksmith and his family.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1886 (Fig. 6) shows the large 'L'-shaped building in more detail. It appears to have been divided into two with the eastern building being further sub-divided into smaller units. Some alteration had been made to the building on the eastern side of the courtyard with the creation of a long extension on a north-south alignment, extending down towards the southern building. The buildings to the south and west had also undergone minor alterations but retained basically the same shape as shown on the Tithe Map of 1849. The main building still fronted onto an enclosed area of ground to the north. Access to the yard was still directly from Oak Road. To the east, Oak House is shown surrounded by its landscaped gardens. The wider area, again, is mostly shown as fields.

The OS 6" Map of 1890 (Fig. 7) and the Second Edition OS 25" Map of 1904 (Fig. 8) show basically the same layout and range of buildings as the First Edition OS 25" Map of 1886. By 1904 (Fig. 8), however, the wider area around the buildings was becoming more built up with residential housing and industrial workshops, and the adjacent Oak House was now a museum. Alderman Reuben Farley had bought Oak House in 1894, and had it restored for use as a museum.

The OS 25" Map of 1938 (Fig. 9) depicts some changes to the shape and extent of the buildings in the study area. The appearance of the eastern part of the 'L'-shaped building had changed with some apparent demolition and rebuilding. The area of land immediately to the north of the building was still enclosed, probably forming gardens. Yards or gardens appear to have been created to the rear of the building, dividing the courtyard and separating it from a workshop complex. The buildings forming the other sides of the former courtyard appear to have been incorporated into the workshop complex. The appearance of the large barn on the south side of the courtyard had been greatly altered, with the addition of a large workshop to the south. The buildings on the north side of the smaller barn, on the west side of the courtyard, had been replaced by a new structure. The changes to the structures at this time, may suggest a change in function from mainly residential and agricultural to industrial use during the early twentieth century. The encroaching residential and industrial buildings now completely surrounded the study area. This layout appears to have remained basically unchanged,

apart from construction of some small workshops or sheds in the post-war period (Fig. 10), until the demolition of Nos. 184-186 in the 1970's, and the subsequent demolition of workshops and outbuildings. The only surviving buildings, which occupy the site at present, are the two listed barns, formerly part of the south and west ranges, and a small brick outhouse which must have survived the demolition of Nos. 184-186.

### **8.0 Watching brief results (Fig. 2)**

A trial-trench measuring 10m x 1.8m was excavated across the mound in order to determine the nature, extent, depth and quality of any surviving remains. At the north end of the trench northwest-southeast orientated brick wall footings (F1), 0.5m wide, were revealed at a depth of 2.6m (161. 5m AOD) below the top of the mound. At the south end of the trench northwest-southeast orientated brick wall footings (F2), 0.5m wide, were revealed at a depth of 2.8m (161. 3m AOD) below the top of the mound. These footings were interpreted as the remains of the buildings shown as 184-186 Oak Road on nineteenth and twentieth century maps. Between the two wall footings was a deposit of crushed brick rubble (1002). To the north and south of the wall footings was a reddish brown clay (1003). These footings and deposits could not be recorded in detail, due to safety reasons, and were left in situ. They were not affected by the subsequent removal of mound material, as they were below the level at which removal of mound material ceased. The wall footings F1 and F2, crushed brick rubble deposit 1002 and the clay layer 1003 were sealed by a dark brown silty clay loam (1001), 1.8-2.8m thick, containing nineteenth and twentieth century pottery and other artefacts of recent date and brick and tile. Context 1001 formed the mound make-up and was sealed by 0.3m of topsoil (1000).

The mound was subsequently removed by machine under archaeological supervision, down to the surrounding ground level. Sherds of nineteenth and twentieth century pottery, eighteenth-twentieth century bricks, tile, slate, glass, an iron ring and a fragment of wood were recovered from the mound make up (1001). The relatively small amount of demolition rubble and the loamy topsoil-like nature of the mound make up 1001, indicated the mound was unlikely to be composed of material derived from demolition of buildings on site. It is more likely to have been composed of material dumped on the site and imported from another location.

During the removal of the mound, brick footings (F3), 0.50m wide, were revealed (Fig. 2), forming a right angle, aligned northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast. These footings were made of bricks measuring 9.5" x 3.5" x 4.25", and although they had been extensively damaged by machine demolition, they appeared to be of probable nineteenth century date. The footings were in a location consistent with the position of the corner of the back wall of a part of the now demolished building, depicted on the 1965 OS map as no.178 Oak Road (Fig. 10). The building may also have been depicted on the Enclosure and Tithe maps. Topsoil, 0.30m deep, was dumped over these footings to provide a buffer to protect them from damage.

## 9.0 The finds

Only a selective, but representative, sample of finds such as ceramic building tile, ceramic brick and post-medieval ceramics were processed and recorded. All the eighteenth/nineteenth century brick, nineteenth century and modern finds, which were recovered from the mound material, and thought to be derived from another site, were recorded but not retained. The majority of the finds were of nineteenth or twentieth century date with the exception of two hand clamped bricks which probably dated to between 1700 and 1850 AD. All the finds have been discarded.

Table 1: finds quantification

Context	Description	Date range
1001	9 x post-medieval pot	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century
1001	4 x ceramic tile	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century
1001	2 x 2.5" hand clamped bricks (one with lime mortar)	1700-1850 AD
1001	3 x 3" clamped bricks	19 <sup>th</sup> century
1001	2 x 3" yellow bricks	Post 1850 AD
1001	11 x bricks	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century
1001	1 x iron ring	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century
1001	2 x bottle glass, 6x glass slag, 1x sharpening stone x 1 x slate and 1x wood	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century

## 10.0 Discussion

The map evidence demonstrates the existence of a large building or a short row of buildings in the location of the present mound, formerly occupied by Nos. 184-186 Oak Road. It formed the northern part of a complex of buildings positioned around a central yard. The buildings sat back from Oak Road and were not part of the surrounding later nineteenth and early twentieth-century terrace development. The buildings in the study area may pre-date the enclosure of Bromwich Heath in 1804. Oak Farm to the north may be an enclosure farm, as it fits the road layout much better. This possible pre-enclosure date adds to the evidence of an earlier farmyard arrangement, perhaps suggested by the presence of a seventeenth century barn and a stone wall recorded during the 1991 evaluation. Various small alterations appear to have been made to the complex of buildings over time, but it retained basically the same shape and dimensions and remained of a substantial nature well into the twentieth century. The buildings forming the south and west parts of the complex are the two barns still in existence and dated to the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, both of which are Grade II listed buildings (Black Country SMR Nos. 1419 & 1689). The adjacent Oak House to the east of the study area is a timber-framed building of c.1600, erected by a prosperous Yeoman.

The ground plans of the former Nos. 184-186 are relatively large, but not as large as Oak House itself. It is likely that they formed a gentrified farmhouse, built to replace Oak House as a farmhouse in the very late eighteenth century (although the house is described as 'newly built' in the early nineteenth century (Greenlade 1976)). This pattern has

regional parallels with farms of this size, located close to urban centres such as the Old Farmhouse and Dairy, Merridale, Wolverhampton (Litherland and Watt 2001).

The original Oak House, built c. 1600, and accompanied by ancillary buildings of varying dates, including the still extant seventeenth-century barn, may have ceased to function as a working farmhouse in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, in favour of a more fashionable Georgian farmhouse (Nos. 184-186) with the farm buildings to the rear (it is not clear, given the date of the barns, why they do not appear on either the 1804 or 1837 maps). This possibility may be reflected in the terms used in the 1841 Census, which include an 'Oak House' and an 'Old Oak House'. This in itself is confusing, as it seems unlikely that the name of the original Oak House would be changed – perhaps this was just for the purposes of differentiation in the Census. However, from examination of the occupants (including their professions and numbers) of these various buildings, it would seem possible that here 'Old Oak House' was the original seventeenth-century Oak House, with the Georgian farmhouse (Nos. 184-186) having been divided into 'Oak House' and 'Oak House Buildings'. At this time, a farmer, Joseph Whitehouse, was in occupation of 'Old Oak House', but he was then 65 years old and had only three servants living with him. The occupations of those who may have been living in Nos. 184-186 do not appear to have been explicitly farm-based.

Therefore it is probable that, before 1841, Nos. 184-186 functioned as a farmhouse (built anew to provide a new farmhouse in favour of Oak House), attached to a working farm with accompanying ancillary buildings set around a farmyard. Evidence of a possible earlier stone structure was revealed during an archaeological evaluation (Dingwall 1991), on what would have been the opposite side of the courtyard to the listed seventeenth-century barn still in existence, which may have been evidence for another early barn, perhaps in use when Oak House functioned as a farm. Nos. 184-186 Oak Road may have been located in the position of an earlier structure, possibly of a similar date to the listed seventeenth century barn. However, it appears that they were newly built around 1806 (Greenslade 1976). The Tithe Award also indicates that by the 1840s the complex of buildings, as well as being residential, was also being used for stables, which may mean that the barns had changed their function from farm buildings used for dairying and storage etc., to stabling.

The listing information on the buildings which stood in the study area, describes a two-storey, stucco building of late eighteenth-century date with a number of architectural embellishments (SMBC 2001). It also indicates that the main 'L'-shaped building was of a domestic/residential nature. The Tithe Award of 1849 records that the complex of buildings around the yard consisted of eight houses and stables, the occupiers being recorded as 'various'. The distribution of the houses and stables within the complex at this time is not specified, although the subdivisions within the southeastern part of the building shown on the 1886 OS map probably corresponds with the "eight houses". The Tithe and 1851 Census indicate that Nos. 184-186 had been subdivided into a number of smaller dwellings, the majority of which, rather than being occupied by farm-workers, were occupied by people who worked at a colliery or collieries, possibly the Piercy colliery (Philip Williams and Company) to the southwest, which was certainly in

operation in 1837. This colliery may be the same one as that referred to as Oak House Colliery in the 1841 Census. The impression given is that John Edwards Piercy, who then owned Oak House, may have leased out the buildings, mainly to people who worked at either his or other collieries in the area. It must have been a cramped community, with ten families squeezed into the subdivided sections of the building. The relative status of the men's occupations is interesting - coal miners and brick makers appeared to be living alongside pit engineers, clerks and a master miner employing many other men. Oak House itself at this time was inhabited by the registrar of births and deaths.

In summary, it seems to be the case that Nos. 184-186 had taken over the role of farmhouse from Oak House by the early nineteenth century, when it appears that Jane Whyley moved from Oak House, which she leased out, to a new house nearby, presumably Nos. 184-186. The new farmhouse (if indeed Nos. 184-186), if still used as such, would no doubt have re-used the barns that had originally been part of the Oak House farming complex. However, certainly by the mid-nineteenth century (perhaps coincident with the death of Jane Whyley in 1837 and the subsequent ownership of the estate by John Edwards Piercy), the function of Nos. 184-186 had changed; no longer part of a working farm, the buildings were subdivided and leased out to families, many of whom relied on nearby collieries for their income.

The information available during the rapid desk-based assessment, which pertains to the building formerly known as Nos. 184-186 Oak Road, is limited. The cartographic evidence has allowed some deductions to be made, but a fuller understanding of the former building may only be gained by further excavation. The watching brief demonstrated that the foundations of 184-186 Oak Road survive and ensured that they were not disturbed during the removal of the mound and were protected beneath a buffer of at least 0.30m of topsoil. It seems likely that the mound was formed by the dumping of material from another location, rather than as a result of the demolition of the buildings demolished in the 1970's.

## **11.0 Acknowledgements**

This report was written by Helen Martin with contributions by Laurence Jones and Sarah Watt. Laurence Jones also edited the report and managed the project. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Steve Litherland for his advice and comments on the report. Thanks are also due to the staff of Oak House Museum. The work was monitored by Shane Gould, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Archaeologist.

## 12.0 References

### Maps

Enclosure Map, 1804 (Staffordshire Record Office)  
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Ordnance Survey 6" map published 1921 (Staffordshire Record Office)  
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Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 map published 1965 (University of Birmingham, Geography Map Library)

### Textual sources

Baugh G. Greenslade M.W. and Johnstone D. 1972 *A History of West Bromwich*

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Greenslade, M.W. (ed.) 1976 *The Victoria County History of the County of Stafford, Vol. 17*. Oxford University Press

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Litherland S. and Watt, S. 2001 *An archaeological assessment of the Old Farmhouse and Dairy, Merridale, Wolverhampton*, BUFAU Report no. 777

BUFAU 2001 *Land Adjacent to Oak House, West Bromwich. Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Recording: Phase 1 2001*

SMBC 2001 *Archaeological Watching Brief. Land Adjacent to Oak House, West Bromwich 2001 Phase 1*

SMBC n.d. *Oak House West Bromwich: A History and Guide*. Technical Services Department

### Other

Census Returns for 1841, 1851 and 1861 (Staffordshire Record Office)

## **Appendices**

### Context and feature register

- 1000- topsoil
- 1001- dark brown silty clay loam make-up of mound
- 1002- deposit of crushed brick rubble
- 1003- reddish brown clay, natural?
- F1-brick footings
- F2-brick footings
- F3-brick footings

### Photographic register

#### Colour slide

1. trial-trench from NE
2. trial-trench from NE
3. trial-trench from SW
4. trial-trench from SW
5. general view of site looking SW
6. view of 17<sup>th</sup> century barn looking SW
7. view of 18<sup>th</sup> century barn looking SW
8. view of brick outhouse looking S
9. view of north wall of brick outhouse
10. view of north wall of brick outhouse

#### Monochrome print

11. trial-trench from SW
12. trial-trench from SW
13. trial-trench from NE
14. trial-trench from NE
15. trial-trench from SW

### Archive

The paper archive, which comprises one A4 file of context and feature cards and photographs, together with a copy of the report, and one A3 wallet of maps and plans will be deposited with Sandwell Community History and Archives Service, Smethwick.



**SANDWELL MBC/BLACK COUNTRY SMR**

**SUMMARY SHEET**

<b>Site name/Address:</b> Land adjacent to Oak House, Oak Road, West Bromwich	
<b>Borough:</b> Sandwell	<b>NGR</b> S0 99809090
<b>Type of Work</b> Desk-Based Assessment/ Watching brief	<b>Site Code:</b> GGOH 02
<b>Archaeological Contractor:</b> Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit	<b>Date of Work:</b> January - February 2002
<b>Location of finds/ Curating Museum</b> Sandwell Community History and Archives Service, Smethwick	
<b>Author, Title, Date of Report:</b> Helen Martin with contributions by Laurence Jones and Sarah Watt. Land adjacent to Oak House 2002. BUFAU Report No. 884	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results: an archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief</b> The desk-based assessment identified cartographic evidence for a complex of buildings in the area of a grassed mound within the study area. The mound was thought to be made up of rubble resulting from the demolition of two Grade III listed buildings known as 184-186 Oak Road. The buildings were depicted on maps of 1804 onwards and were of late 18th-century date, forming the northern part of a complex of structures. These structures were ranged around a central courtyard, including two barns to the south and west, suggestive of a farmstead. These Grade II listed 17th and 19th-century barns are still standing. Archaeological evidence suggested the existence of a possible earlier farm structure. Documentary evidence suggested that Nos. 184-186 had taken over the role of farmhouse from Oak House by the early nineteenth century, continuing to use the barns that had originally been part of the Oak House farming complex. However, certainly by the mid-nineteenth century, after the death of Jane Whyley in 1837 and the subsequent ownership of the estate by John Edwards Piercy, the function of Nos. 184-186 had changed; no longer part of a working farm, the buildings were subdivided and leased out to families, many of whom relied on nearby collieries for their income. Another change of use to industrial workshops took place in the early 20th century. A watching brief during the removal of the mound revealed evidence of brick footings, which corresponded to the position of 184-186 Oak Road. No clear dating evidence was obtained due to the fact that the mound was probably composed of a dump of material brought in from another location. The archaeological remains of 184-186 Oak Road have been preserved <i>in situ</i> .	
<b>Authors of Summary:</b> Laurence Jones and Sarah Watt	<b>Date of Summary</b> June 2002

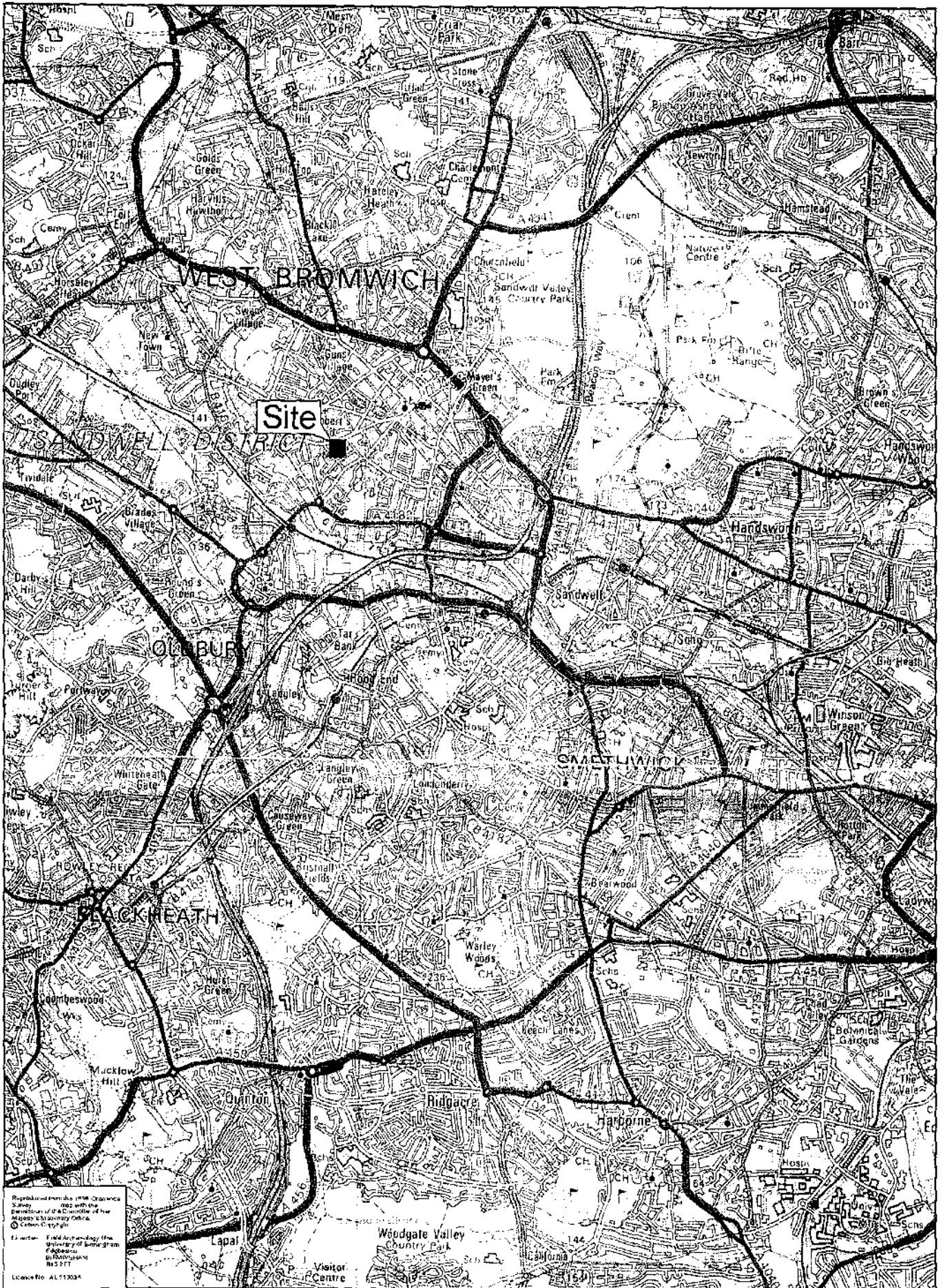


Fig.1

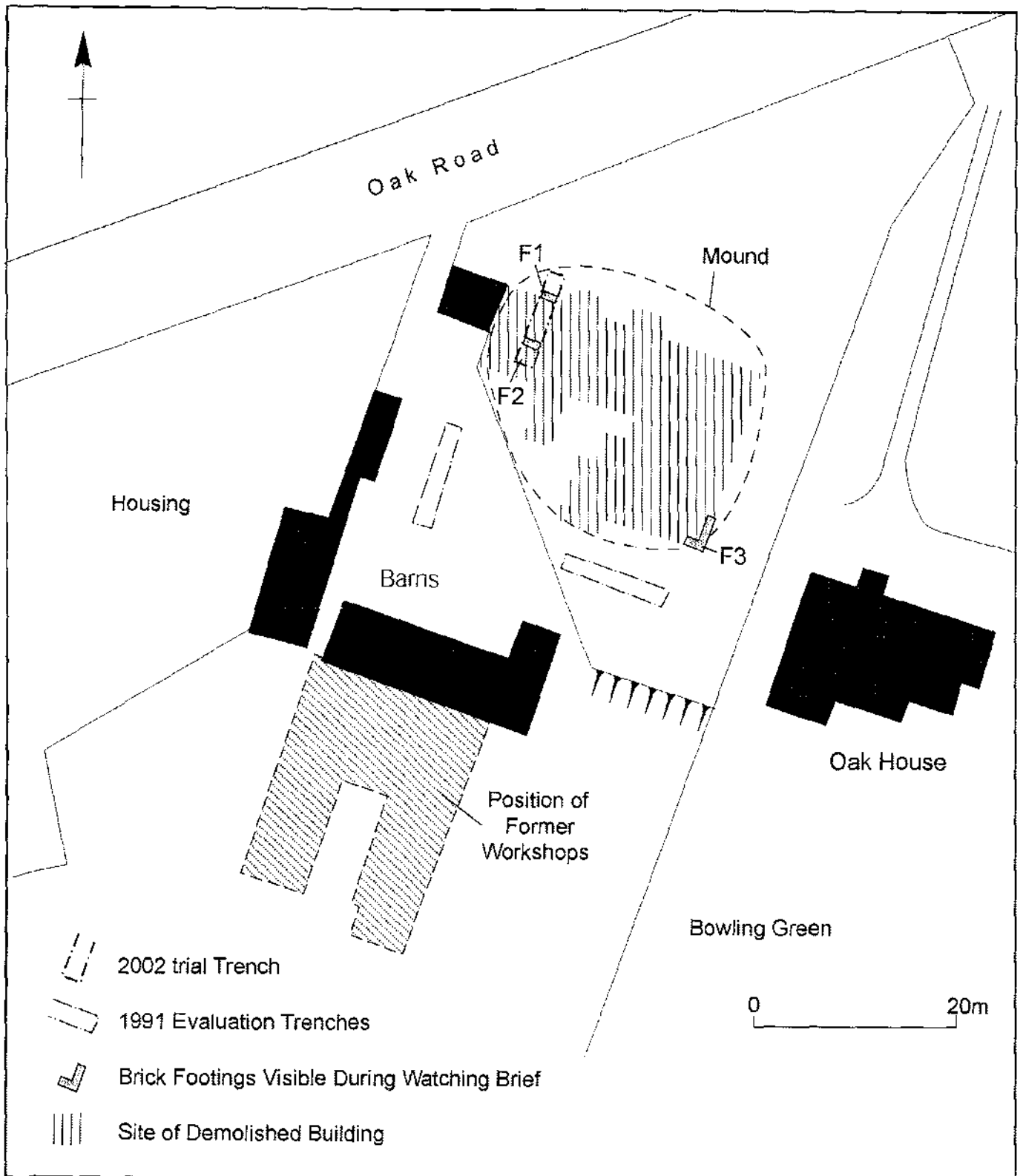


Fig.2

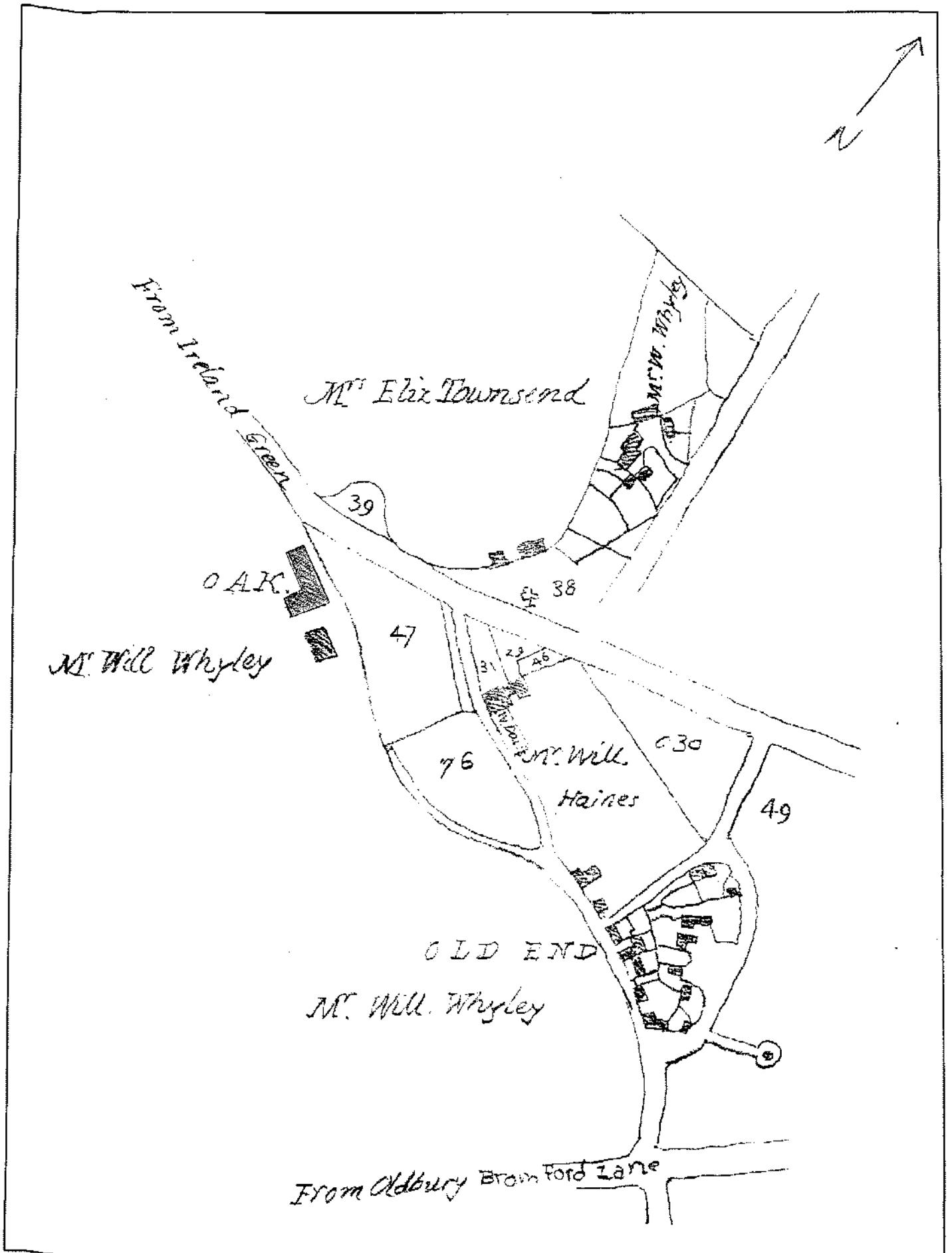


Fig.3 Enclosure Map 1804

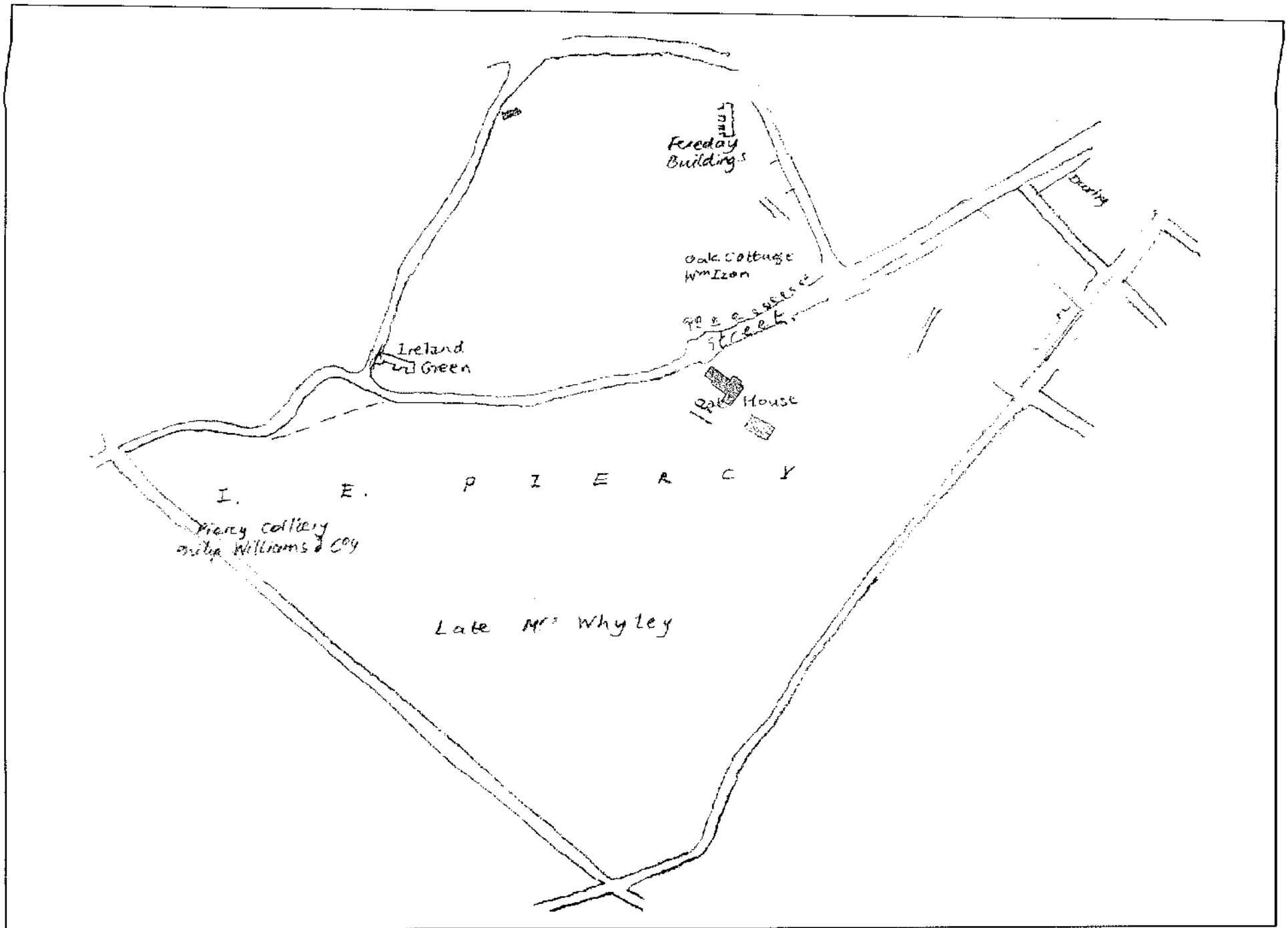


Fig.4 Wood's Map 1837

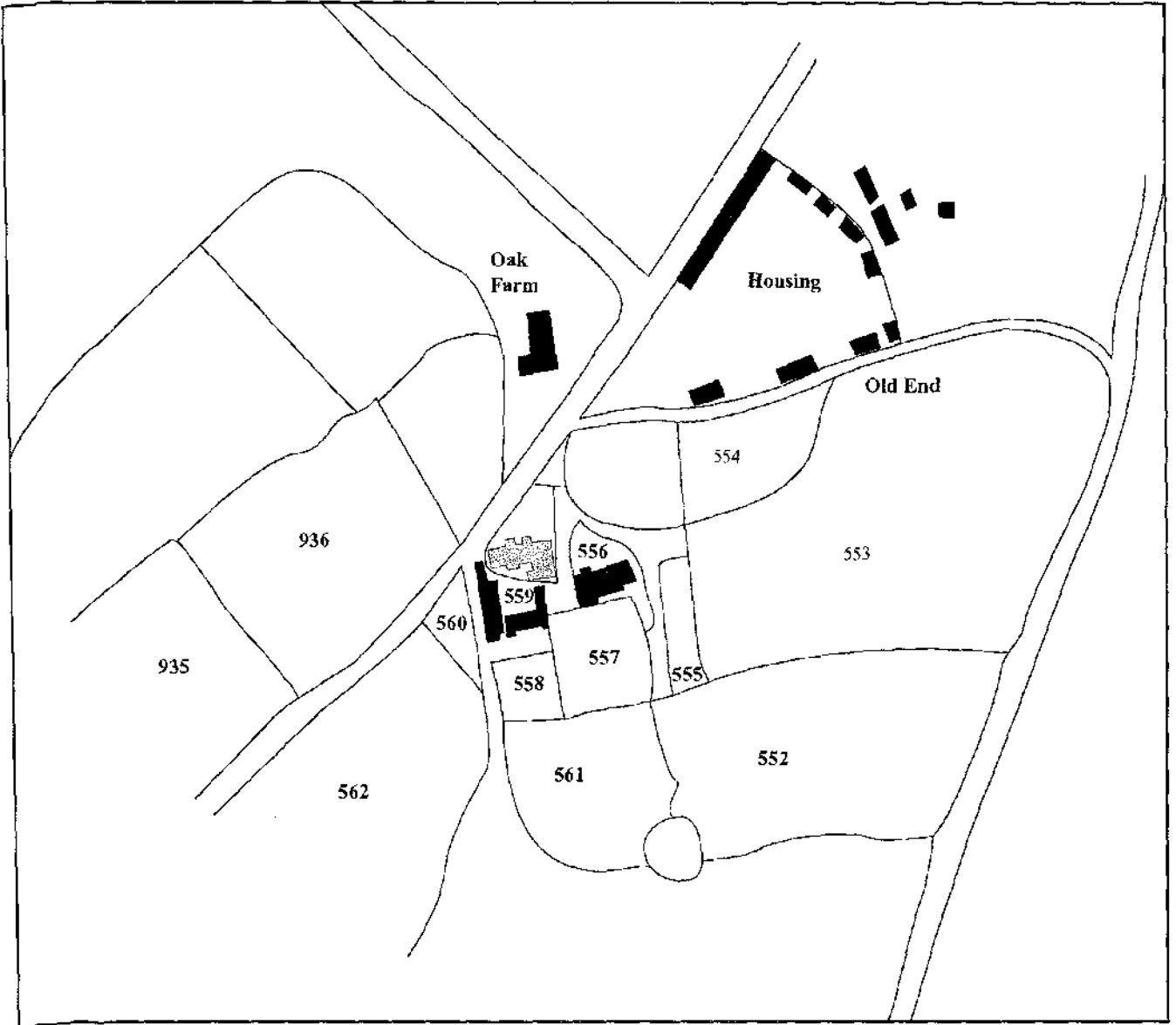


Fig.5 Tithe Map 1849

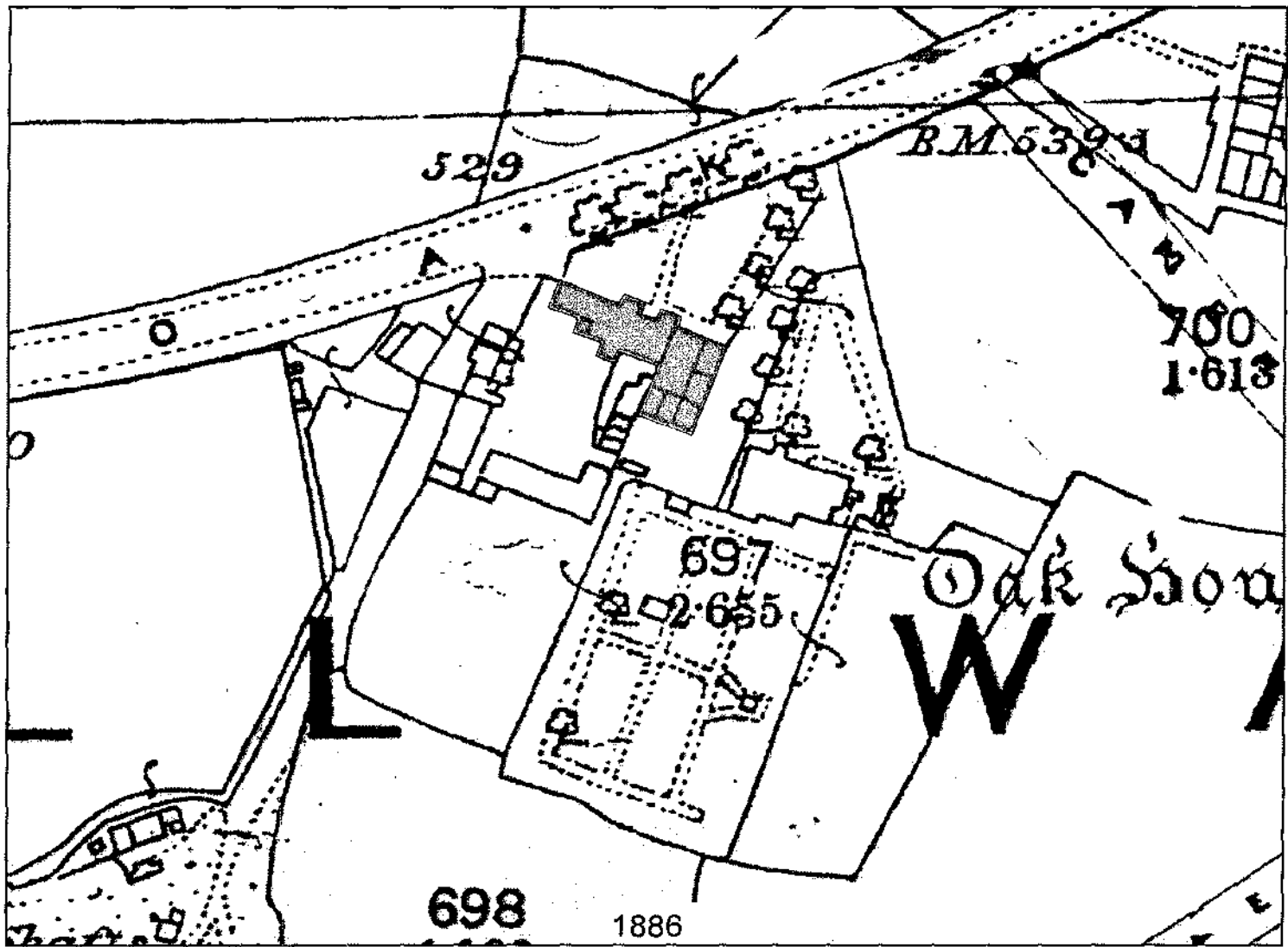


Fig. 6

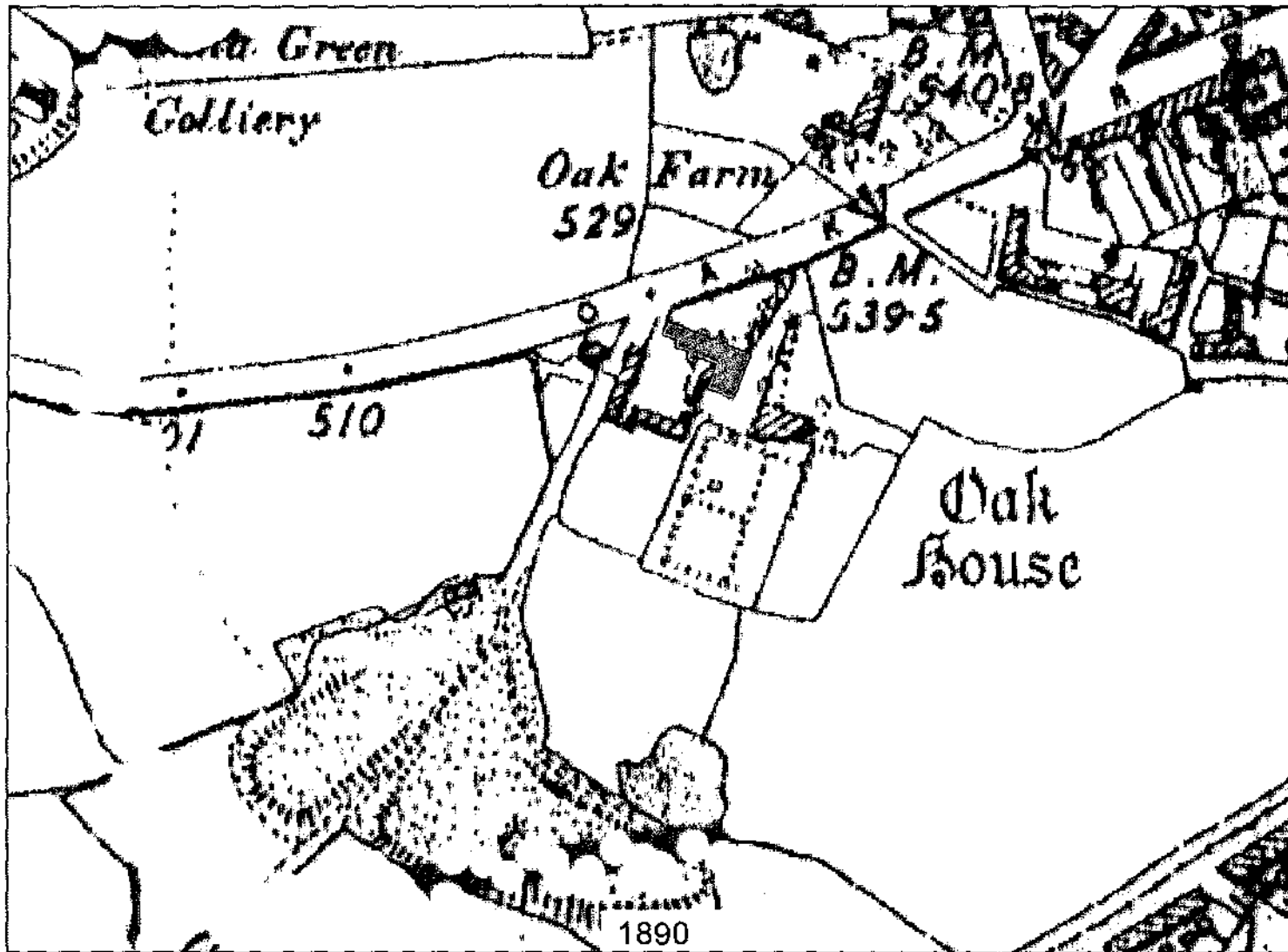


Fig. 7



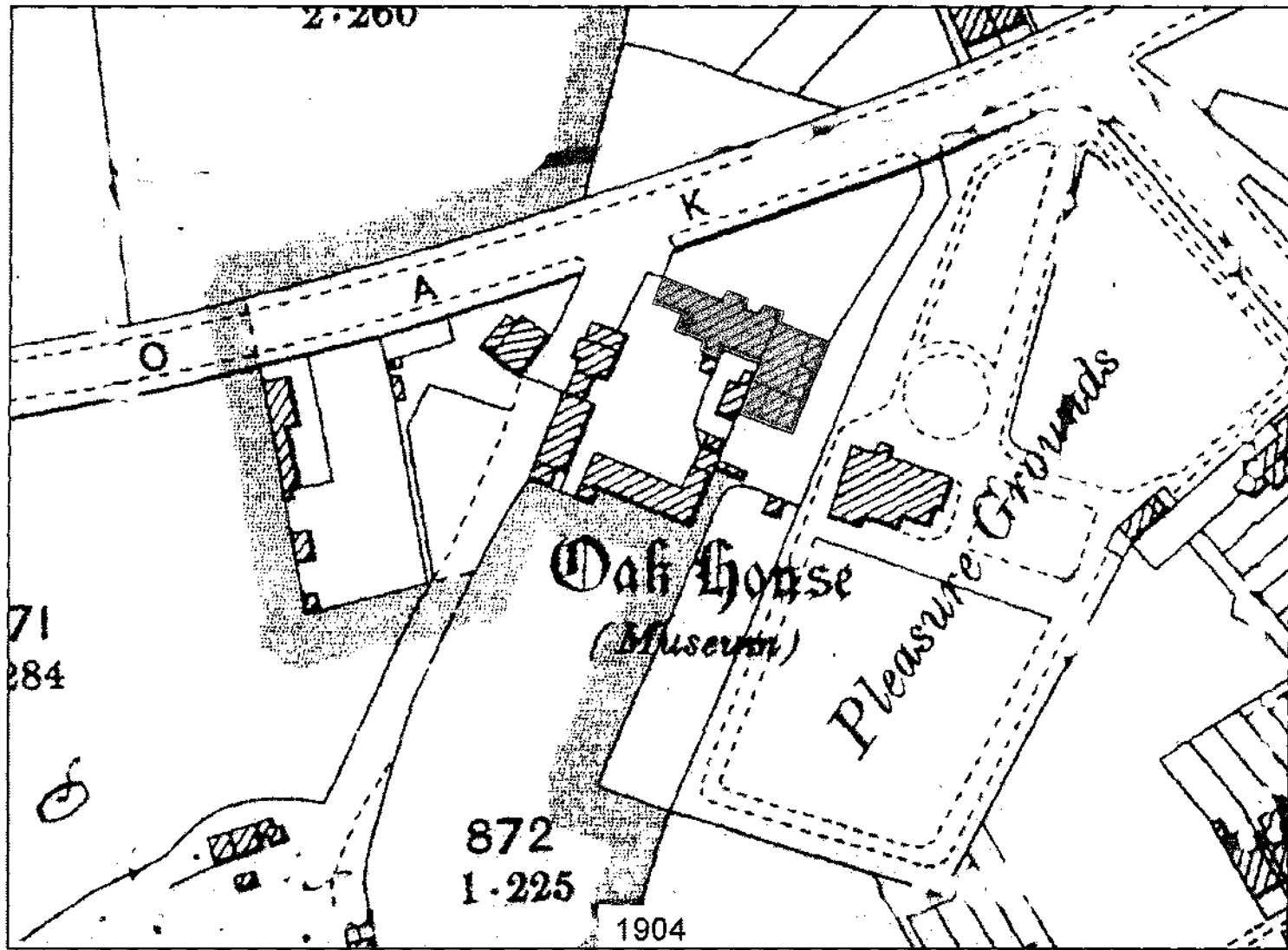


Fig. 8

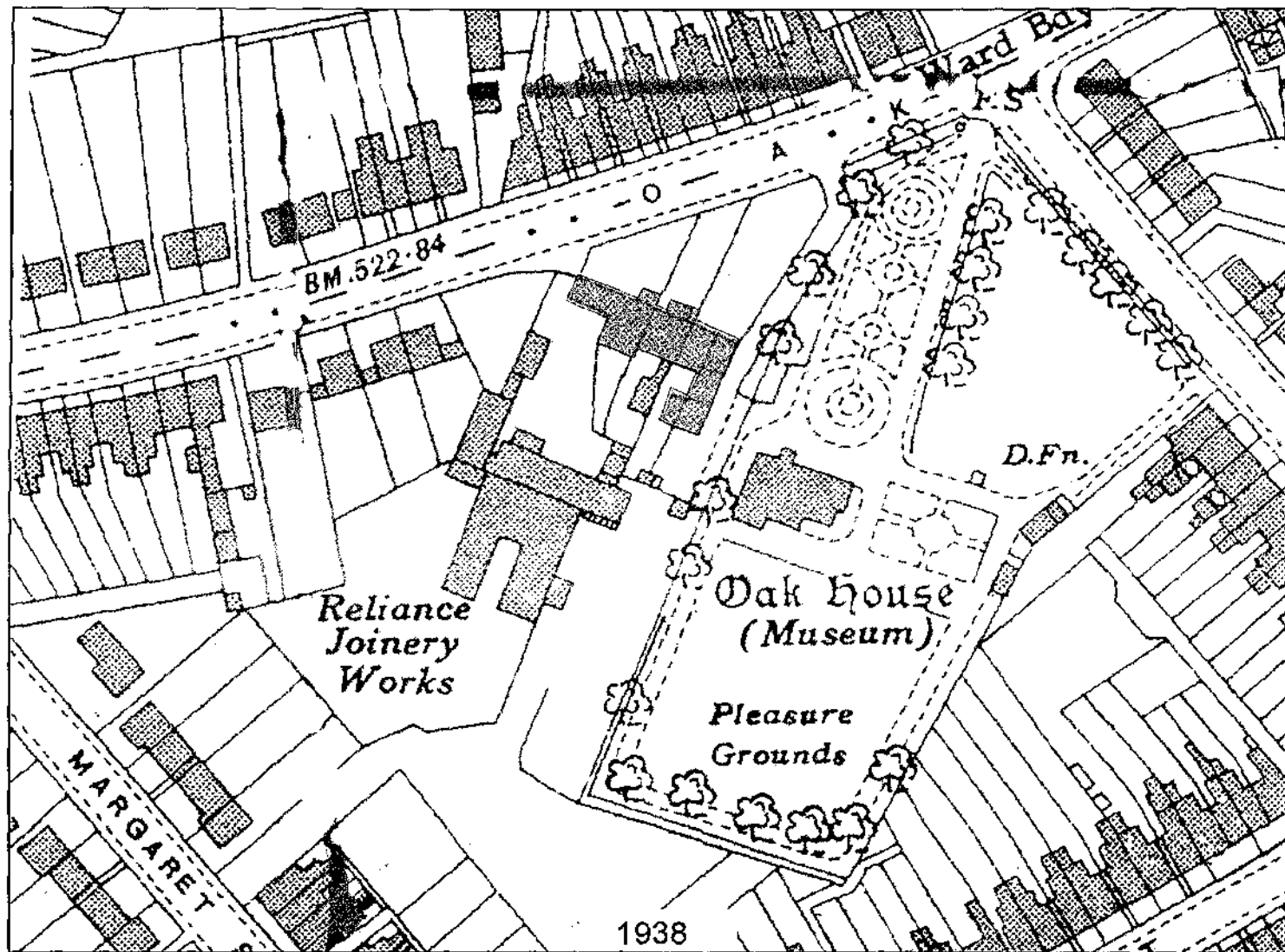


Fig.9

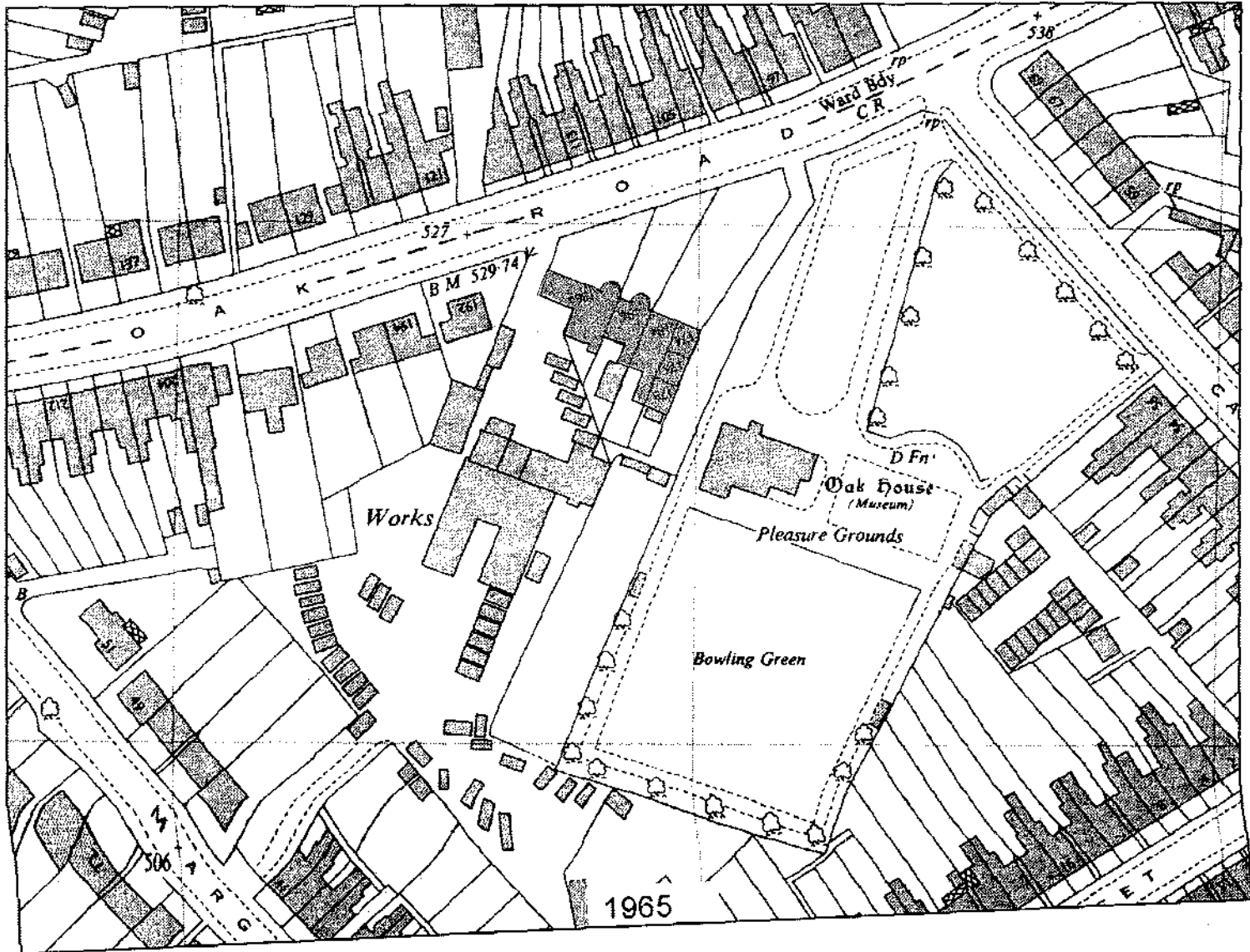


Fig. 10