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The Moat House
Chasewood Lodge Residential Home, Exhall, Warwickshire
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

by
H. R. Martin

For further information please contact:
Simon Butcux or Iain Ferris (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.bufau.bham.ac.uk>

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Moat House
Chasewood Lodge Residential Home, McDonnell Drive, Exhall, Warwickshire

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Summary

A desk-based assessment was carried out in November 2002 on a site formerly known as the Moat House at Chasewood Lodge, Exhall, Warwickshire (NGR SP434793, 284797, SMR WA 1650) ahead of the proposed erection of a residential/nursing home. The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential which contains a moated site of possible medieval date. The assessment involved examination of available maps and other documentary sources, in addition to a walk over survey. Information relating to the history of the parish and manor of Exhall was obtained, although no direct mention of the Moat House itself was made. The map evidence available was limited due to the closure of the Warwick County Record Office. The walk over survey highlighted areas around the moat and on the platform where there were associated earthworks, substantial external banking and other features associated with water management. Evidence of later landscaping to create garden features were noted on the western side of the moated complex.

1.0: Introduction

This archaeological assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Chasewood Lodge Residential Home, ahead of the proposed erection of a residential/nursing home across one arm of the existing moat. The site is centred around national grid reference SP434793 284797 (Fig. 1), in the parish of Exhall, Warwickshire. The assessment involved consultation of available maps and other documentary sources, in addition to a walk over survey. The assessment was prepared in accordance with a Brief prepared by Edward Wilson, the Warwickshire County Archaeologist (Wilson 2002) and a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU 2002).

The site of the proposed development lies on the site of a moated complex which may have its origins in the medieval period. Typically moated sites are associated with higher status occupation in the medieval period and often contain waterlogged deposits. Though little is known about the history of this monument it survives well in plan and has the potential to include important archaeological remains. The proposed development is likely to have a major impact upon the moat earthwork, any waterlogged remains within the moat channel and the remains of any structures within the moat platform (Wilson 2002).

2.0: Background to the project

2.1: Objectives

The desk-based assessment was aimed at obtaining information relating to the following:

- possible pre-moat phases
- the date and origins of the moated complex
- the date and nature of any associated structures
- ownership and status of the moated complex
- its relationship to a moated site located just to the northwest
- its relationship to associated land use and estate boundaries during the medieval and post-medieval periods
- its position within the wider historical and archaeological context of moated complexes as a site-type, especially within the moated 'colonisation' of the Arden during the medieval period

2.2: Method

The Warwickshire County Record Office is currently closed and, therefore, only the SMR could be accessed. All relevant historic maps and secondary sources held by the SMR were consulted.

The subsequent walk-over survey involved an examination of the moat platform, the existing arms of the moat itself and the immediate vicinity around the moat in order to identify any surviving earthwork and/or other evidence which could relate to phases of activity contemporary with the use of the moat. In addition, any later landscaping and building activities which could have impacted on any early archaeological features and deposits were noted.

3.0: Historical Background

A full account of the history of Exhall parish and Exhall manor is to be found in the Victoria County History (VCH, Warks. 1951) and is only summarised here. During the medieval period the parish of Exhall was situated in the Knightlow Hundred ceasing to exist in the nineteenth century when various portions were detached and amalgamated into Foleshill and the Borough of Coventry, and in 1932 it was transferred to the parish of Bedworth. Exhall was not mentioned in Domesday but was probably included in the 9 hides of Ansty and Foleshill which formed part of the lands of the Countess Godiva. During the eleventh century the estates of Countess Godiva and her husband, Earl Leofric, including Coventry and Exhall, passed to the Earls of Chester. During the reign of King Stephen, Ranulf, Earl of Chester, granted a portion of wood and waste in Exhall and Keresley to Coventry Priory, an important Benedictine house founded in 1043 by Earl Leofric. The lands of Coventry Priory in Exhall were considerably enlarged at various times and in 1332 the Prior had received a licence to impark an area of waste and wood in the manor of Newland just to the west of Exhall. By 1535 the value of the priory estates in Exhall was £8 9s. 9d. In 1346 Exhall manor was recorded as being one of the places subject to the jurisdiction of the manor of Cheylesmore (the main manor of Coventry) which was itself part of the honour of Chester. The earldom of Chester had been appropriated by the Crown in 1265 and in 1542 it was stated that Exhall was held of Prince Edward as part of his manor of Cheylesmore. In 1549 Edward VI granted Cheylesmore to the Earl of Warwick, who immediately leased it to the corporation of Coventry who then became the lords of Exhall. From 1243 to 1329 the manor of Cheylesmore was in the possession of the de Montalt family and from 1243 until 1535 the tenants of Exhall

manor were the Butler or Boteler family of Warrington (Lancs) (Lea 2002 p. 21). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the manor of Exhall was held or leased by a number of families and as late as the early 1900s the Startin family were lords of the manor of Exhall.

During the medieval period Exhall was situated in the wooded part of Warwickshire known as the Arden. This area extended across the whole of the northeastern part of the county, reaching as far east as Weston-in-Arden beyond Coventry and as far south as Henley-in-Arden (Hooke 1993 p. 10). The Arden was characterised by dispersed settlement in hamlets and farmsteads with only limited parcels of open-field arable, in contrast to the south of the county, known as the Feldon, where open-field farming and nucleated villages predominated. From the around the twelfth century the much less densely populated Arden became the focus of colonisation from the south of the county where the Feldon and Avon valley could not absorb the expanding population of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The large areas of uncultivated land and the more liberal system of manorial control found in the Arden made it able to deal with its own growing population in addition to that of the southern part of the county (Smyth 1994 p. 35). Characteristic of this process of colonisation was the proliferation of moated sites throughout the Arden (Fig. 2).

There is great variation in size, shape and status of Arden moated sites and whereas in the south of the county moats are typically located within villages, representing manor-houses, in the Arden they are very often isolated and representative of single homesteads. The moated sites of the Arden show wide variations in status from those belonging to owners of aristocratic class, like the earls of Warwick and the Boteler family, to those belonging to the lesser gentry and wealthier peasant freeholder, and also to be considered along side such lay manorial sites are ecclesiastical ones (Smyth 1994 p. 46). The density and diversity of moated sites within the Arden resulted from processes of sub-infeudation and the granting of land to individuals who established farms on lands cleared by a lord, anxious to increase income from underdeveloped estates (Hooke 1993 p. 10), or on lands individuals claimed themselves from the waste. These grants could vary from large farms to small parcels of land, often attached to existing units (Roberts 1976 p. 64). It is against such a background of Arden colonisation that the moated site under discussion might be placed.

4.0: Detailed history of the study area

The earliest map depicting the moated site is a map of 1787 (Fig. 3) which marks the position of Moat House and indicates the presence of buildings, although in no detail. The Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6" (1890, Fig. 4) shows the moat to be sub-rectangular with a wide causeway infilled between the southern tips of the western and eastern arms of the moat. An L-shaped building was located in the eastern half of the platform with open ground/gardens occupying the remainder of the platform. An L-shaped wall runs parallel to the eastern range of buildings and appears to join a curved wall (part of which is still standing) located on the southern side of the platform. It appears that the moat was, for the most part, surrounded by trees with access across the western arm of the moat into the adjacent field. An east-west trackway (still in existence) skirts the moated complex to the south, leading from the road into the field. The Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1:2500 Map (1913, Fig. 5) shows that a number of changes had taken place. The southern tip of the western arm of the moat appears to have been widened to create a pond-like feature (see below). A

footbridge is now marked giving access over the western arm of the moat into the adjacent field. On the platform itself a central driveway has been constructed and, although the buildings maintain roughly the same orientation as on the 1890 map they no longer form a complete L-shape. The map evidence suggests that alterations had taken place to the buildings shown on the 1890 map, or even that the 1913 map shows a new set of buildings (see below). The moat is still shown in wooded surrounds and on the 1913 map the field adjacent to the moat, which is also shown on the 1890 map, is termed a park.

The map evidence, although limited in extent and restricted to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, still serves to provide indirect evidence of a potential medieval origin for the Moat House site. The L-shaped building shown on the 1890 map may be following the orientation of an earlier building. The L-shaped range, with hall and additional wing, was commonly used in the medieval period and perhaps pertinent to this is the fact that Exhall Hall moated site had an L-shaped building of probable medieval date (VCH Warks). The park shown on the 1890 and 1913 maps may also be of medieval origin and connected to the status of the Moat House site. It has been shown that there is a correlation between moated sites and medieval parks in the Arden, where they were either moated hunting lodges or residences within parks (Smyth 1994 p. 61). The boundary of the park adjacent to Moat House is characteristically sinuous, often an indication of early and piecemeal assarting of the Arden waste during the medieval period and the same irregularity is shown in the field boundaries of the area on the 1890 map.

The shape of the moat at Moat House is sub-rectangular with a straight, regular eastern arm and the northern and western arms forming a gradual curve. Such irregularity may have been due to a change in the original use of the site (involving different phases of construction) or, because the moat was fitted into existing features, for example field boundaries, trackways or roads. Irregularly shaped moats were very common in the Arden where sites were usually later than those in the Feldon, and therefore, more likely to be restricted by existing features (Smyth 1994 p. 70). Moat House may be a point in question where, in part, the moat follows the curve of the adjacent park boundary. The southern arm of the moat appears to have been backfilled, probably when the entrance was created but the remaining section shown on the 1890 and 1913 maps indicates that it would probably have been regular in shape like the eastern arm. It could, therefore, be inferred that the eastern and western halves of the moat represented different phases of construction.

5.0: Present character of the study area (Fig.6)

The moat is still clearly visible and waterfilled, although at a much reduced level. The sides of the moat appear to be largely intact although the profile is obscured to some extent by silting and vegetation. The northeastern corner of the moat has been canalised into a narrow channel joining the eastern and northern arms of the moat. This was most probably done when the embankment for the motorway was created and it is likely that this corner of the moat is preserved beneath the motorway bank. The outer bank of the western and northern sections of the moat becomes progressively higher as it curves round towards the north until it is much higher than the level of the moat platform. Likewise, a low bank is visible around the southeastern return of the moat. The surrounds of the moat are still quite heavily wooded and covered by undergrowth. A ditch feeds into the southeastern corner of

the moat and may represent the location of a leat. No evidence of associated fishponds, which were often integral parts of a moat system, were observed but this could be because any such earthworks are obscured by dense undergrowth.

The main building on the platform (Alderman McDonnell House) is that shown on the 1913 map and is probably early twentieth century in date. A preliminary examination of the exterior of the house suggested that it was a detached building *ab initio* rather than being a separated part of the L-shaped range shown on the 1890 map. This could imply that the earlier (possibly medieval) L-shaped building had been demolished (see above). The northeastern side of the building has been extended with the addition of a block of modern buildings. The northern section of the eastern range of buildings, shown on the 1913 map, remains but only the outer wall of the southern section is still standing. The southwestern corner of the platform is now occupied by two modern bungalows and the central area by a driveway and lawn with flower beds. A section of the curving wall shown on the 1913 map is extant. Adjacent to the southwestern end of the moat is a small cottage not shown on the 1913 map. It is referred to as the 'Boat House' and may have some connection with the later function of this part of the moat which was widened out and revetted with sandstone blocks (still *in situ*) at some time between 1890 and 1913 (see Figs. 4 & 5) when the moat may have become a garden feature. It is believed that there is a stone base for a fountain in the centre of this end of the moat, although this could not be verified due to the water level.

6.0: Conclusion

Although no evidence relating directly to the site at Moat House was found during the assessment, sufficient historical background material was available to allow deductions to be made about its likely status and date. Its proximity to the moated site of Exhall Hall (SMR MWA 1672) to the northwest, may be of significance. Exhall Hall is not directly referred to in the available sources as the site of the manor house of Exhall but its name, in addition to its location at the junction of two roads and near to the parish church of St. Giles and a mill at Smerecote (just northwest of Exhall Hall on the 1787 map Fig.3), suggests that it was the central residence of the manor of Exhall. If this was the case, then it is possible that Moat House was a sub-manor of Exhall (sub-infeudation being common in the Arden, see above) or an attached unit perhaps serving some ancillary function (for example, a farm) for the main moated residence of Exhall Hall. Exhall Hall was fed by the River Sowe, which enters at the northeast corner of the moat and exits in the southeast corner. It is believed that the moat at Moat House is fed from the moat at Exhall Hall and if this were to be verified it would give support to the suggestion that both moated sites could be contemporary and interconnected.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the site at Moat House could have been one of the many independent moated complexes which proliferated in the Arden during the medieval period. If so, this raises important questions about its status i.e. royal, manorial, non-manorial or ecclesiastical. Studies of Arden moated sites (Smyth 1994 p. 53) have shown a strong correlation between the status of a moated site and its platform size. The area enclosed by the moat depended on the amount the builder was able to spend and the size and number of buildings to be located on the platform. The platform at Moat House is approximately 4200 sq.m (MSRG, JEC, 1984) which would place it into the manorial/ecclesiastical category of Arden moat (Smyth 1994 p. 53). This could mean that Moat House is an unidentified, high-status manorial site, of

which there are others in the region (Smyth 1994 p. 64). It has already been mentioned that Coventry Priory was granted extensive lands in Exhall and the surrounding areas and a moated grange or rectory would be a typical ecclesiastical foundation. Also to be considered is the fact that Cheylesmore, the very high status manor of Coventry, had jurisdiction over a number of sub-manors in the area including Radford, Keresley, Foleshill, Exhall, Ansty, part of Sowe, Caludon, Wyken, Henley, Woodend, Stoke, Bigging Whitley, Pinley, Asthill, part of Stivichall, Horwell, Harnall and Whoberley, many of which contained moated manors (Lea 2002 p. 21). It may be that Moat House should be regarded in like vein, as the sub-manor of a much larger manorial unit lying elsewhere.

7.0: Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by John Craddocks Associates on behalf of Chasewood Lodge Residential Home. Thanks are due to Edward Wilson, planning archaeologist, who monitored the project on behalf of Warwickshire County Council. Thanks are also due to Louisa Mathews of the Warwick SMR for her assistance. The documentary research was undertaken by Helen Martin who also carried out the walk over survey and wrote this report. The report was edited by Kirsty Nichol, who also managed the project for BUFAU, and the illustrations were prepared by Bryony Ryder.

8.0: References

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Maps

- 1787 Dugdale et al.
1890 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6" map
1913 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1:2500 map



Fig.1

WARWICKSHIRE
MOATED SITES



Fig.2



Fig. 3

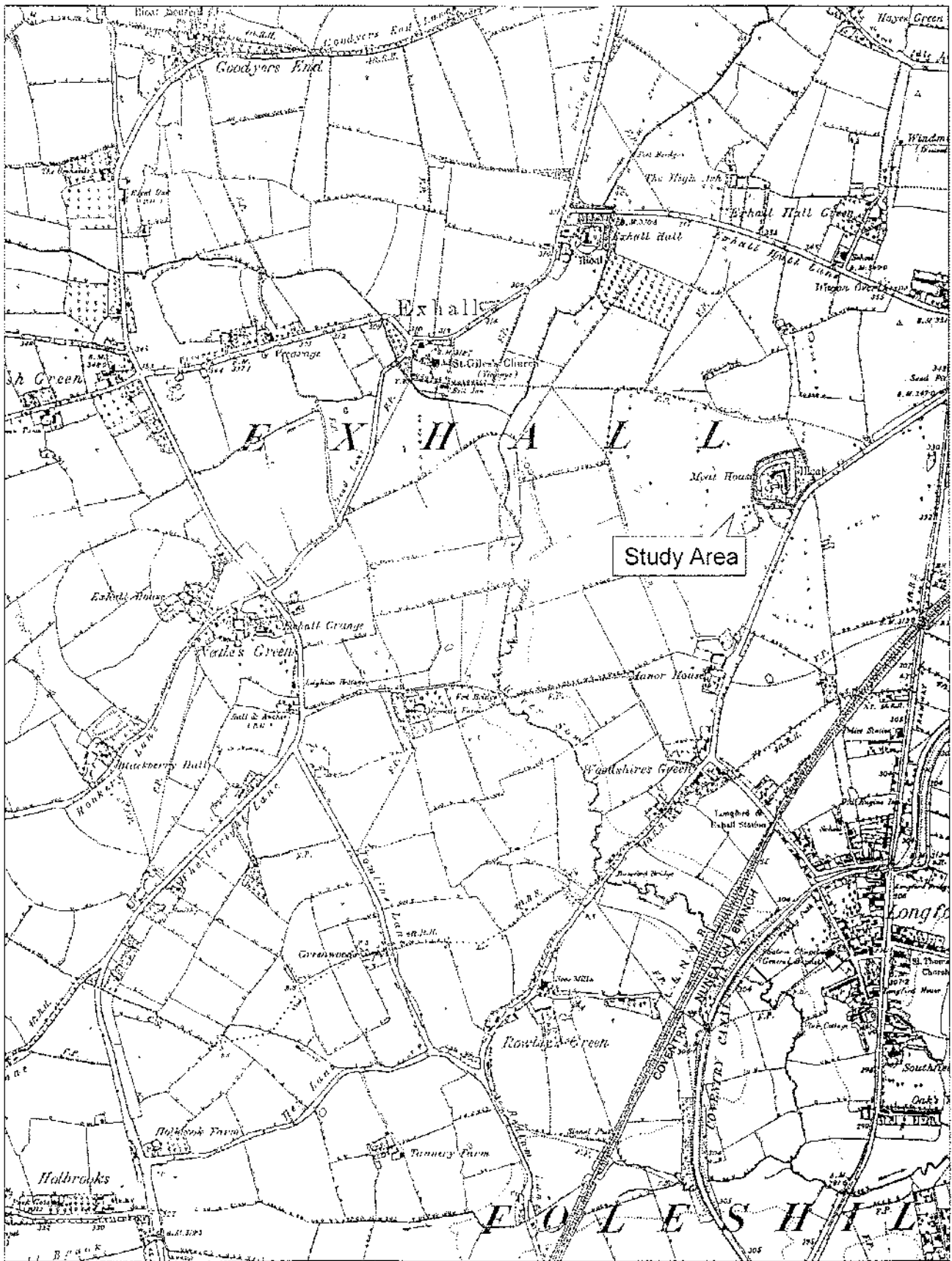


Fig.4

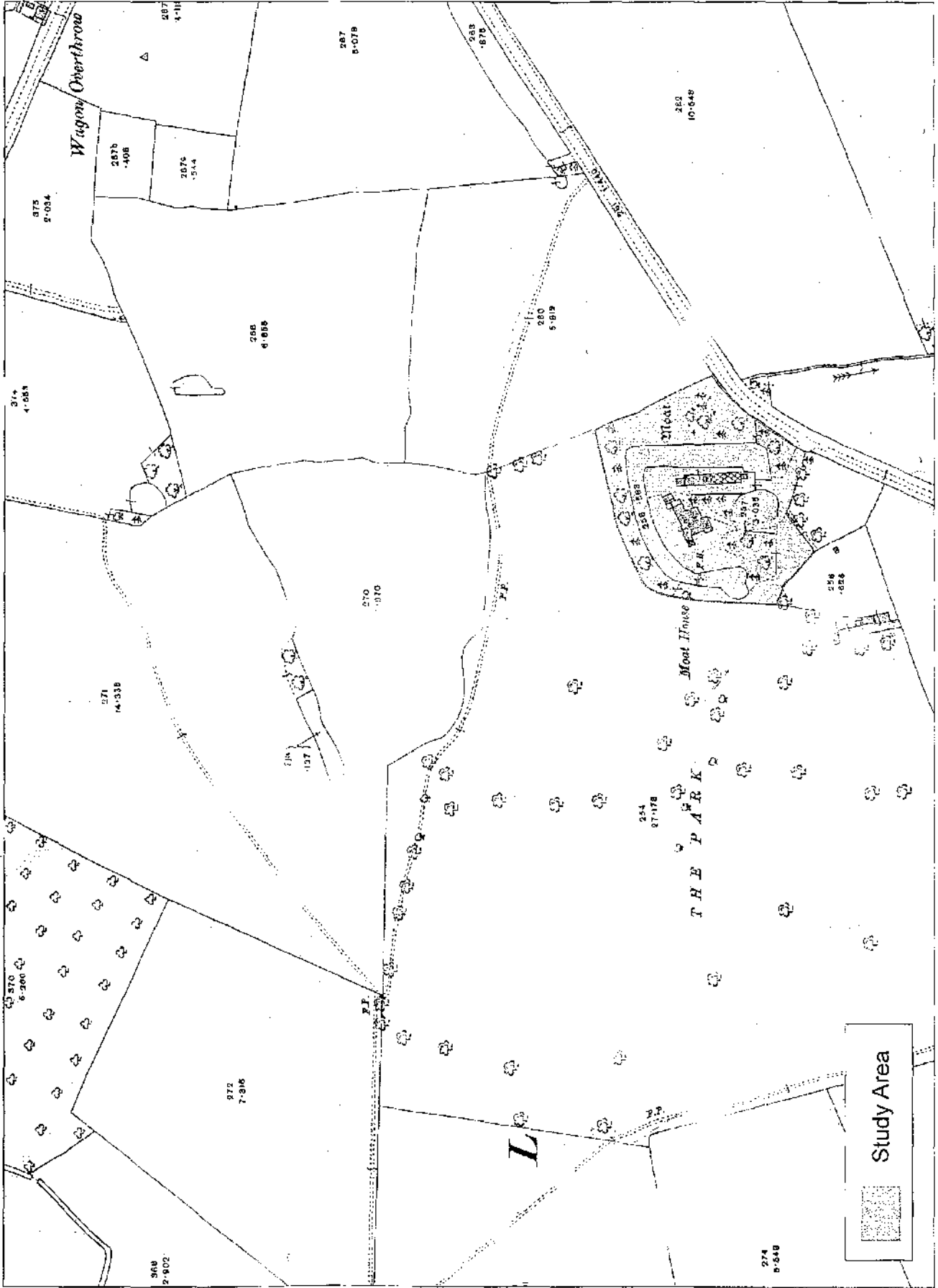


Fig.5