



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM

**Former Council Offices,
High Street Uttoxeter,
Staffordshire:**

**An archaeological desk-based
assessment
2002**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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**Former Council Offices, High Street,
Uttoxeter, Staffordshire**
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by
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Contents

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| | Summary | |
| 1.0 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2.0 | Site location | 1 |
| 3.0 | Objective | 1 |
| 4.0 | Method | 1 |
| 5.0 | Geology and Topography | 2 |
| 6.0 | Archaeological and Historical Context | 2 |
| 6.1 | Prehistoric to Roman | 2 |
| 6.2 | Saxon | 2 |
| 6.3 | Medieval | 3 |
| 6.4 | Post-Medieval | 3 |
| 7.0 | Site Inspection | 4 |
| 8.0 | Conclusions and Provisional Recommendations | 4 |
| 8.1 | Below-ground Archaeology | 5 |
| 8.2 | Above-ground Archaeology | 5 |
| 8.3 | Provisional Recommendations | 5 |
| 9.0 | Acknowledgements | 5 |
| 10.0 | References | 5 |

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 General location map
- Fig. 2 The site
- Fig. 3 Copy of The Town of Uttoxeter by Peter Lightfoote, 1658
- Fig. 4 1882 Ordnance Survey
- Fig. 5 1901 Ordnance Survey
- Fig. 6 1922 Ordnance Survey
- Fig. 7 1964 Ordnance Survey
- Fig. 8 1973 Ordnance Survey
- Fig. 9 1989 Ordnance Survey
- Fig. 10 2002, dwg Architects plan of site as existing
- Fig. 11 2002, dwg Architects plan of site as proposed

List of Plates

- Plate 1. Existing building looking south-east
- Plate 2. Existing site access, looking west, showing tarmac surface
- Plate 3. Prefabricated building and additional car parking, looking north

Former Council Offices, High Street, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2002

Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out in November 2002 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Dodsworth Wright Grew Ltd. Architectural Consultants, as part of an application for planning permission for a residential development. The site is located next to 70 High Street, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire (centred on SK 092 337). The planning application involves the demolition of the building currently adjacent to 70 High Street to create space for a new apartment block and small business units with car parking facilities. The assessment examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence to identify areas of potential archaeological interest. The site was considered to have archaeological potential due to its location within an area of possible medieval and post-medieval activity. The standing buildings on site are all of modern origin but below-ground works during the redevelopment of the site may reveal much earlier structural evidence relating to the expansion of the medieval and post-medieval town.

1.0 Introduction

This assessment was prepared by BUFAU on behalf of Dodsworth Wright Grew Ltd. Architectural Consultants, subsequent to an application to develop the site of the former Council Offices, High Street, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire (Fig.1). The aim of this report is to provide a summary of the known and potential archaeological information for the site, based on existing data, in order that appropriate archaeological mitigation strategies may be devised.

2.0 Site Location

The site is located within the historic core of Uttoxeter (centred on SK 092 337), on the eastern side of the High Street, north of the market area. The site is bounded to the west by a pavement fronting onto the High Street and the front of a standing building, formerly the Council Offices. The rest of the site is enclosed by brick walls and fencing. Those parts of the development site not taken up by the standing building are given over to car-parking (Fig. 2).

3.0 Objective

The objective of this assessment was to define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains within the proposed development site.

4.0 Method

An inspection of the site was carried out in order to assess the nature of the pre-existing buildings, their form, function and date. The area outside the buildings was also assessed to ascertain the nature of any above-ground features of potential archaeological interest, the ground conditions, nature of boundaries, and any access points within these boundaries.

Documentary research on primary and secondary sources, including cartographic sources, was undertaken at the Staffordshire County Record Office, the Lichfield Joint Record Office and the William Salt Library, Stafford. The Staffordshire County Sites and Monuments Record, the primary source of archaeological information for the county, was also consulted.

5.0 Geology and Topography

Uttoxeter stands on an island of glacial sand and gravel near to the convergence of four glaciers. Immediately beneath the sand and gravel lies the solid geology of Mercia Mudstone. The area sits on a slight escarpment overlooking the floodplain of the River Dove, on the southern slope of which the High Street is situated.

6.0 Archaeological and Historical Context

The site lies within a historic town area, though away from the core and the market place. A previous desk-based assessment (Bain 2002) and subsequent archaeological evaluation (Duncan 2002) were carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) at a nearby redevelopment site at 48-50 High Street, Uttoxeter. This site was fronted by a timber-framed building dating to the 17th century. Trenches excavated to the rear of the property produced medieval features and pottery dating to the 14th century. An 18th-century property division was also seen and was thought to be a continuation of the sub-division of a burgage plot. However, there is no pre-existing archaeological information on the specific site to which this report relates.

6.1 Prehistoric to Roman

There is very little evidence for any kind of prehistoric settlement at Uttoxeter itself. However, some prehistoric artefacts were recovered in the 19th century from the surrounding area. These include a stone axe, a small looped palstave, a bronze spearhead and a wedge shaped 'amulet'. Details of the original location of these finds is somewhat vague, some giving no more detail than 'Uttoxeter district' (Redfern 1886, 49).

The Roman period provides little more information, with the exception of a possible Roman earthwork to the south of the town in a field called Sandfort. Some pottery is associated with this earthwork, including an amphora found within the vicinity. Redfern's excavations on Bradley Street are reported to have been on the possible site of a pottery kiln. However, many of his 'Roman' artefacts have since been suggested to be of medieval or later date. Although Uttoxeter is situated close to the Roman road network, the village of Rocester, to the north, appears to have been the focus for settlement within this period.

6.2 Saxon

Uttoxeter appears to be first recorded in the Domesday Book as part of the Totmonslow hundred, referred to as 'Wotocheshede'. Prior to the Norman Conquest the lands were held by Earl Alfgar of Mercia. The meaning of the settlement's name may be translated as 'Wof's homestead on the heath' (Uttoxeter town guide 2001) or 'in the shade of the wood', *wudu-seade* (Redfern 1886, 10). It is suggested that there may have been a church at the settlement since the 8th century. However, no solid evidence for this exists. It is thought that the origins for the modern spelling of Uttoxeter come from the Saxon, the prefix possibly from the Saxon word for a deforesting device, *mattock*, and the suffix from the word *stocca* referring to the stem or trunk of a tree. It is, however, difficult to assess the place name evidence, as the

town's name has been spelt over 70 different ways in historical documents. The site of the town lies between the trading routes of the rivers Tean and Dove and relatively close to the existing Roman road network and it seems, therefore, reasonable to assume that the Saxons might have chosen to settle the area. It seems likely that the earliest parts of the settlement were centred around what is now the church and market area, which lay above the flood plain of the River Dove on a slight escarpment.

6.3 Medieval

There is much more information on the settlement at Uttoxeter in the medieval period. After the Norman Conquest the settlement passed from the hands of the Earls of Mercia via the Crown to Henry de Ferrers, Lord of Tutbury in 1086. Robert de Ferrers, first Earl of Derby, made the town a borough. The first market was established in 1140. Later, in 1251, a market charter was granted allowing a market every Wednesday and a fair lasting three days once a year. In 1252 Uttoxeter was made a free borough of 127 burgages.

The cartographic evidence suggests that the site lies within a sub-divided burgage plot at the northern end of the High Street (Fig.3). The market was located to the southern end of the High Street and the area seems little changed in plan from 1658 until at least the publication of the Third Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1922 (Figs.3,4,5 and 6). The market area displays the typical characteristics of a medieval 'filled-in' market and contains some of the oldest standing buildings in the town. Uttoxeter can be seen to exhibit some of the characteristics of a planned medieval town (Baker and Breedon 1989, 14).

6.4 Post-medieval

Documentary research suggests that the majority of building activity during the 1500s was focused in the southern, market end of the town. A good example of this was the Thomas Alleyne grammar school founded in 1558, on Bridge Street. The school was subsequently rebuilt in 1785 and, finally, in 1858/9, a new school was built under the same name on Dove Bank, near Bradley Street. The Old Talbot Inn was erected around 1590, also in the market area.

A major fire is reported to have destroyed the western side of the town in 1596. A further fire is reported to have destroyed the southern part of the town in 1672 (Encyclopaedia of Staffs, 618). By the 17th century Uttoxeter, mainly on the merit of its markets, was one of the three largest towns/cities in Staffordshire. At the time of publication of the 1658 map the Manor House, just to the north-west of the site, is clearly quite well established, with formal gardens shown. The date shown on this map, however, is the date of its completion and evidence indicates that it was begun in 1629. The earliest surviving feature within the still-standing, listed, manor house is a 16th-century (or earlier) chimney base.

Lightfoote's 1658 map of the town seems to demonstrate the sub-division of some of the medieval burgages to accommodate the construction of the post-medieval suburbs. The site is suggested to occupy part of one of these sub-divided plots. The western-facing buildings, including those at the northern end of the High Street, have much less land per property than the others, with their shorter, narrower plots aligned east-west rather than north-south. These small plots seem to be characteristic of the

properties on both sides of the High Street, perhaps demonstrating the rapid expansion of the town in this period. Several turnpikes, frequently associated with market towns, helped to support large Coaching Inns in other areas of the town, such as the Cross-Keys and the White Hart.

A boost to local industry came with the arrival of the Uttoxeter branch of the Trent and Mersey canal in 1811. However, this extended no further than Uttoxeter and, thus, was not as important a trade link as might have been expected. The Crewe to Derby railway line was built in 1848 and was soon to be accompanied by two further lines, the conjunction of which made Uttoxeter an important junction. With the incentive provided by cheap return train tickets on market and racing days both railway and town thrived.

The cartographic evidence suggests that the general layout of the town has changed very little since about the 17th century, with the exception of the expansion of the town to the north and west and the addition and expansion of the Leighton Iron Works and the Elkes Biscuit Factory. The earliest available Ordnance Survey map of the area is dated to 1882 (Fig.4) and shows the site fronted by a large building, identified as a bank, which can also be seen on the 1922 Ordnance Survey edition of the map (Fig. 6). This large building can still be seen at the front of the site on the 1973 (Fig. 8) Ordnance Survey map but this has been demolished by the time of the publication of the 1989 edition (Fig. 9). Historical photographs clearly show the bank building fronting onto the High Street in the area that now forms the front of the site. These photographs should be consulted for reference purposes if further archaeological work in the area formerly occupied by this building is to be undertaken.

Systematic processes of construction and demolition in and around the area of the site can be evidenced by analysis of the series of Ordnance Survey maps (Figs. 4-9). The earliest map sourced for this report is dated to 1658 (Fig. 3), which shows the area in which the site lies being occupied by buildings both fronting onto the High Street and located centrally within the plot.

7.0 Site Inspection

The site is bounded by a high brick wall on the eastern and southern sides, part of the southern boundary comprising standing buildings. The northern boundary is primarily wooden fencing, with a short length of brick wall on the western end which forms part of the garden boundary of the adjacent property. The frontage of the site, facing west onto the High Street, is comprised of the front of a standing building, recessed back from the pavement, and a wide access to the car park that lies alongside it. The building to be demolished as part of the redevelopment programme is of flat-roofed brick construction, with the exception of the block to the extreme east, which is of prefabricated construction. The rest of the development site is currently occupied by a tarmac surfaced car park. All of the structures on site, with the possible exception of the boundary wall to the rear, appear to be of modern origin.

8.0 Conclusions and Provisional Recommendations

Any recommendations for any mitigation work leading on from this assessment will need to be made by the Heritage Data Manager of Staffordshire County Council,

acting on behalf of the local authority. Recommendations are made here simply as possible options that might be adopted, possibly in tandem with design options.

8.1 Below-ground Archaeology

Below-ground works associated with Zone 1 (Fig. 11) have the potential to reveal possible remains of the building, named on the maps of 1882-1973 (Figs. 4-8) as a bank, facing onto the High Street. It is also possible that further, older, building remains, potentially relating to those shown on the High Street on Lightfoote's map of 1658 (Fig. 3) also survive. The area to the rear of the property may be associated with a medieval burgage plot and thus there is the potential for survival of medieval and post-medieval archaeology associated either with the plots themselves or the properties that fronted them. Thus there is a quite high survival potential for areas marked as Zones 2 and 3 on the mitigation Zone map (Fig. 11). It may also be possible to identify remains, shown on Lightfoote's 1658 map (Fig. 3), of structures located towards the centre of the plot. The area that is presently car parking has similar potential. It is likely that a field evaluation by trial trenching may be required as a next stage of possible mitigation works when considered in relation to the specific layout and foundation plans of the proposed development.

8.2 Above-ground Archaeology

All of the structures affected by the redevelopment are of modern origin and the rest of the land encompassed by the site boundaries is covered by a tarmac surface. Thus there would be no further requirement for archaeological survey of the existing above ground features.

8.3 Provisional Recommendations

As the area to be developed at the rear of the property has the potential to contain possible evidence of below-ground medieval and post-medieval activity, it may be necessary to carry out an evaluation well ahead of any groundworks, so that a mitigation strategy can be devised in consultation with the archaeological advisors to the district authority.

9.0 Acknowledgements

This report was compiled by Kate Bain and edited by Dr Iain Ferris. The figures were prepared by Bryony Ryder. Thanks are due to the staff of the Staffordshire Record Office, Lichfield Joint Record Office, The William Salt Library and Staffordshire County Sites and Monuments Record. Special thanks are due to Peter Nixon of the Uttoxeter Heritage Centre for copies of historical photographs for reference.

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1775 William Yates' Map of Staffordshire

1838 Town plan by John Wood

1844 Tithe map of Uttoxeter

1882 Ordnance Survey

1922 Ordnance Survey

1901 Ordnance Survey

1964 Ordnance Survey

1973 Ordnance Survey

1989 Ordnance Survey

Figures

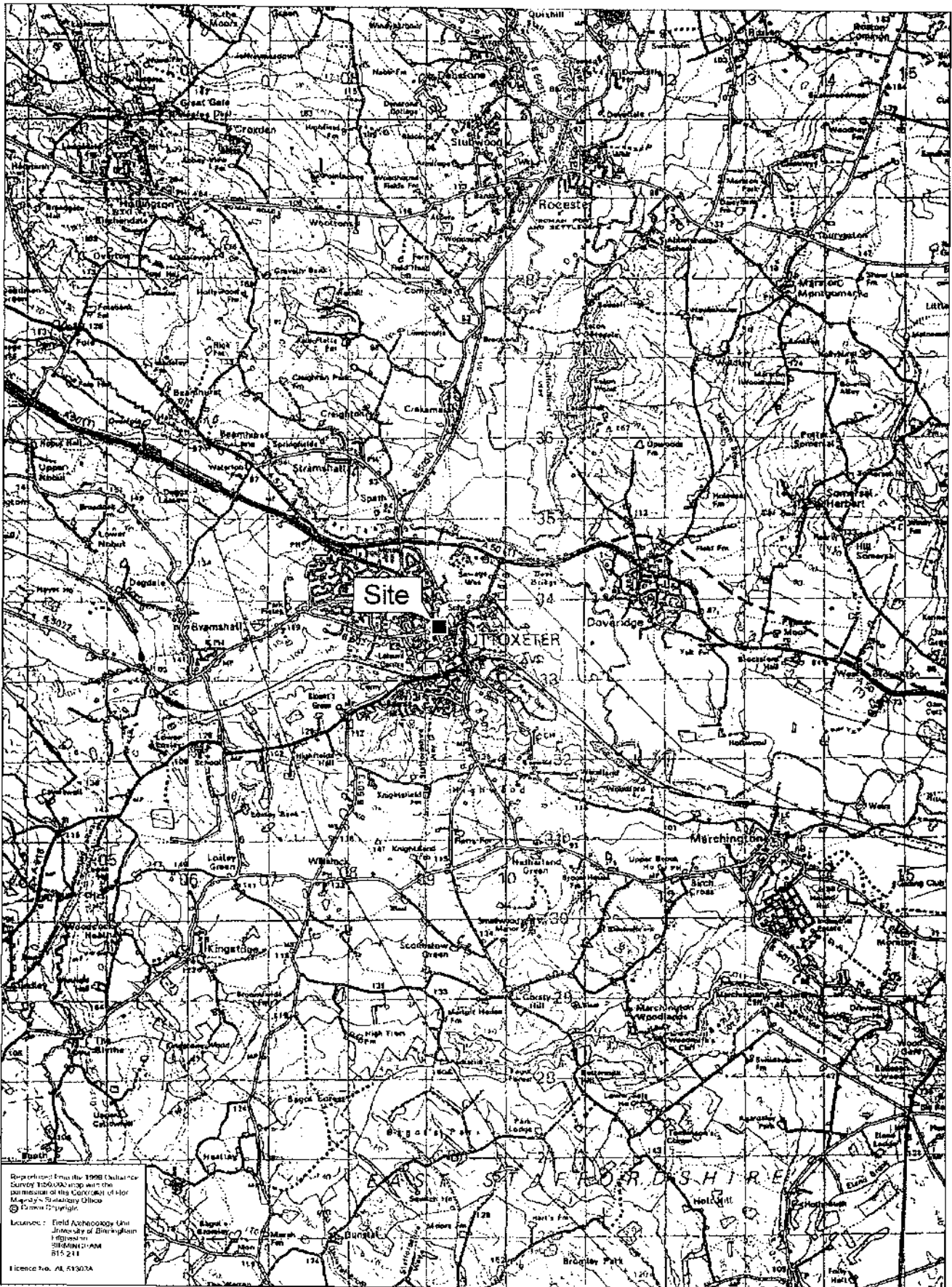


Fig.1

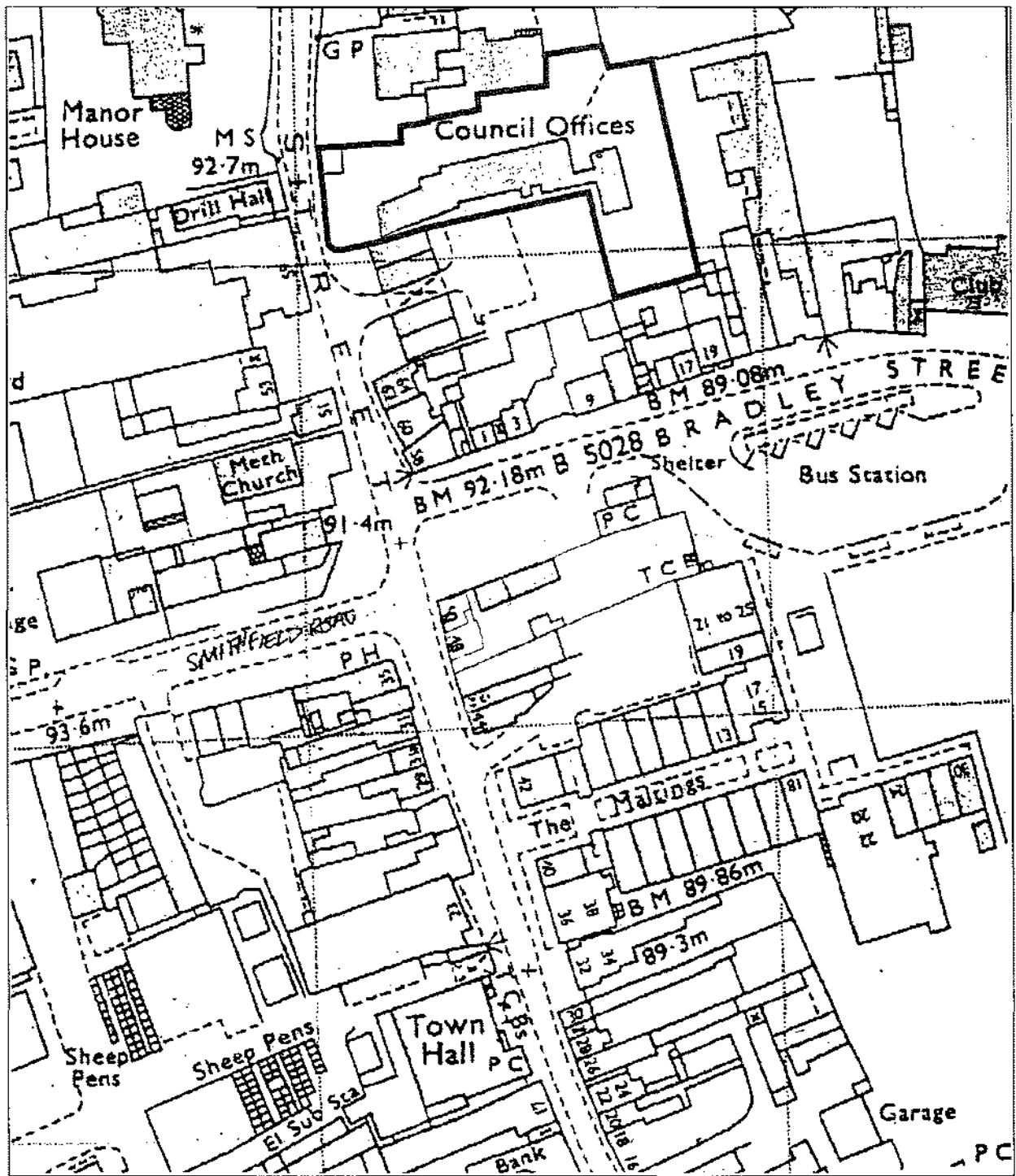


Fig.2

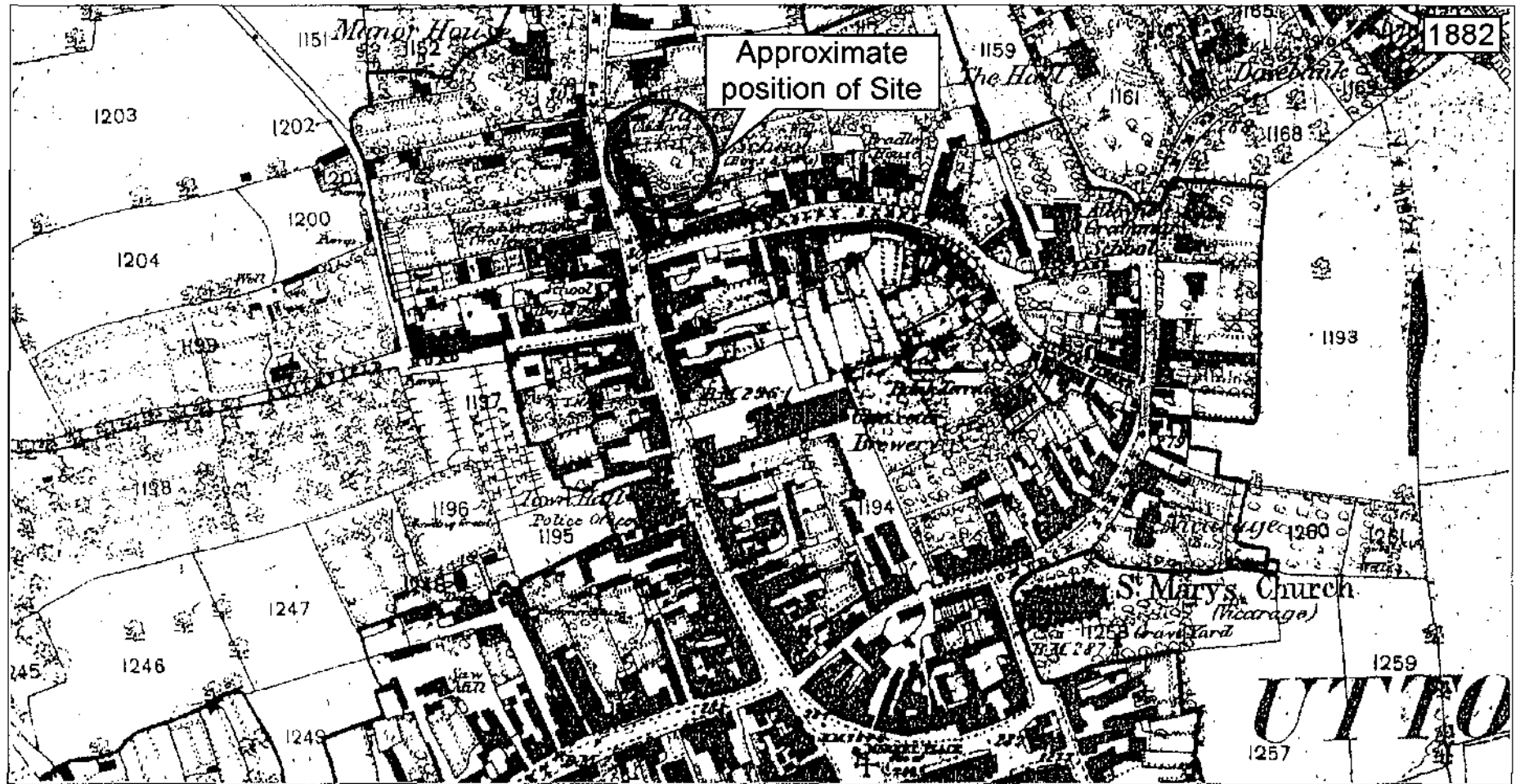


Fig.4

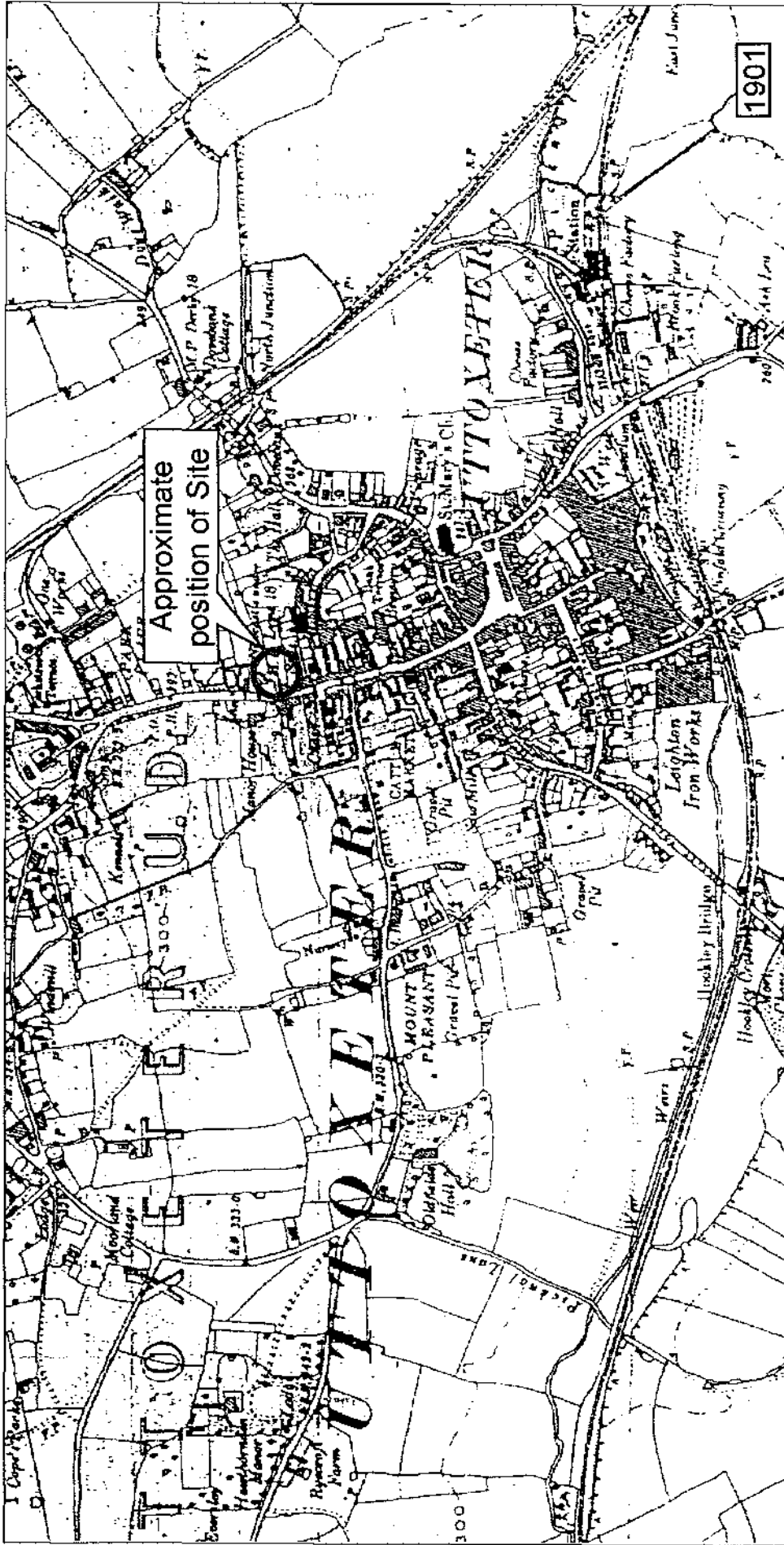


Fig. 5



Fig.6

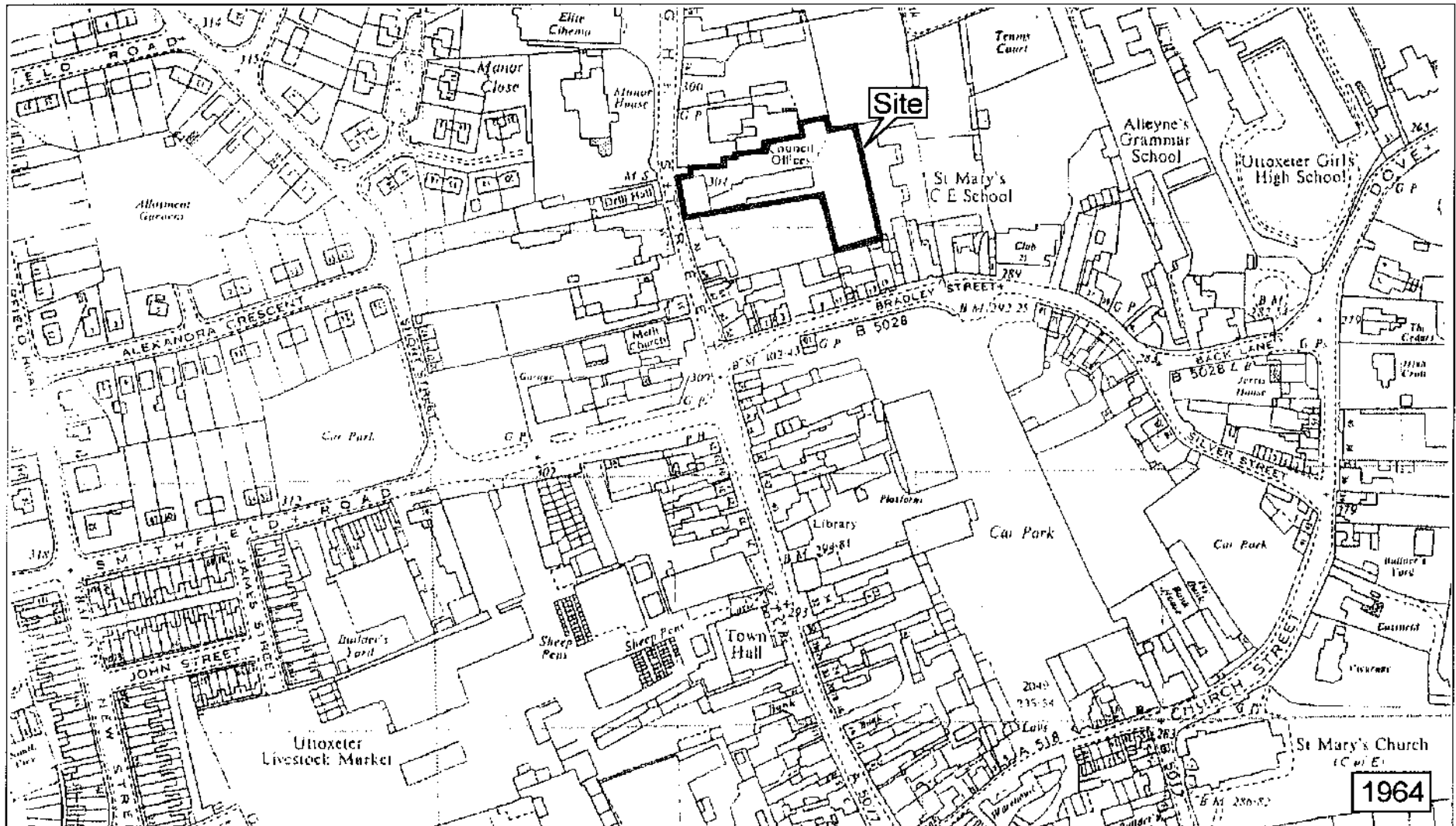


Fig.7

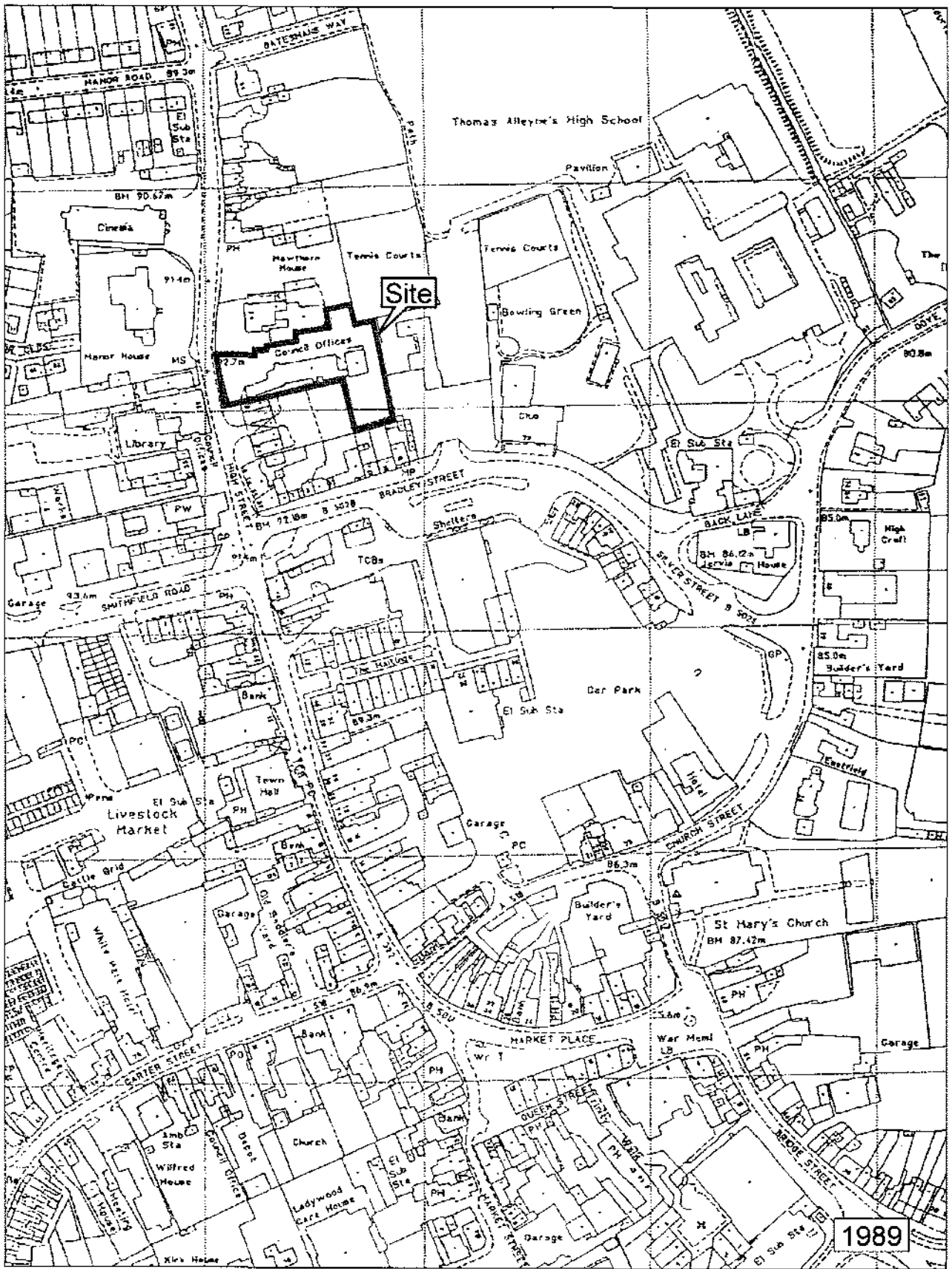


Fig.9



Fig.10

Plates



Plate 1



Plate 2

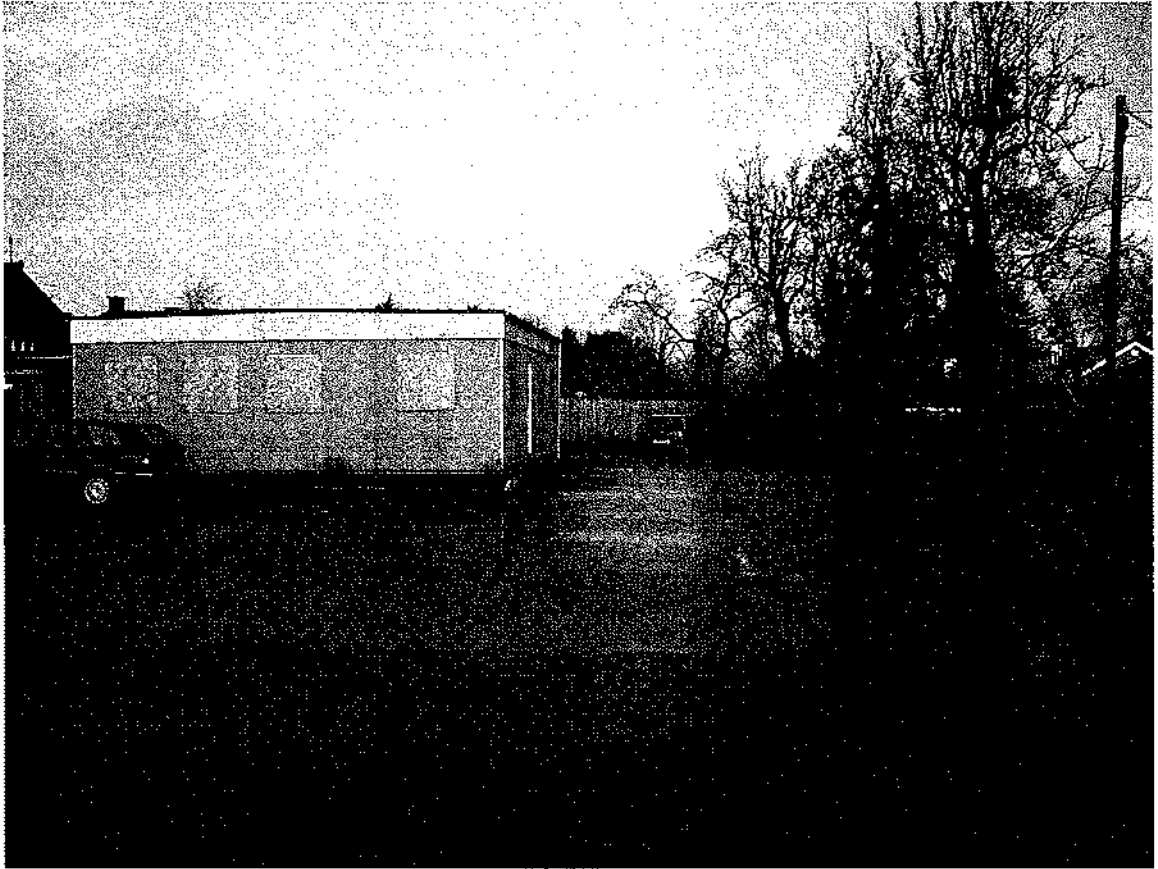


Plate 3