

Hillfield Hall, Solihull.
An Archaeological Desk-
Based Assessment

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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Hillfield Hall, Solihull
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

by
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Summary

A desk-based assessment was carried out in December 2002 on a site at Hillfield Hall, Hillfield Road, Solihull (NGR SP 415040 278080, SMR SI 262) by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Fairclough Homes. The assessment was carried out ahead of the proposed refurbishment of Hillfield Hall and the erection of 16 dwellings within its grounds. The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential which contains a moated site of possible medieval date, whilst the Hall itself is a Grade II listed building. The assessment involved examination of available maps and other documentary sources, in addition to a walkover survey. Information relating to the history of the parish of Solihull and of Hillfield Hall itself was obtained. The land was originally granted to the Hawes family in 1311, who constructed a moated homestead and farmed the surrounding fields. Only a fishpond in the southeastern corner of the site is visible today, although traces of the moat were visible in the northwest corner until recently. A brick-built Hall was built in 1576, although most of this burned down in 1867, leaving only the front standing. Since then a large extension has been added to the south of the Hall in the 1970s and the grounds have been landscaped for the construction of car parks. The remaining outbuildings, including the stables, could date from the late 17th century. It has been recommended that a programme of geophysical survey and trial-trenching should be carried out, particularly in the southeastern corner of the site, where the majority of the building work will take place.*

1.0: Introduction

This archaeological assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Fairclough Homes ahead of the proposed refurbishment of Hillfield Hall into three residential apartments, and the erection of 16 dwellings within the grounds. The site is centred on NGR SP 415040 278080 (Fig. 1), in the parish of Solihull. The assessment involved consultation of available maps and other documentary sources, in addition to a walkover survey. The assessment was prepared in accordance with a Brief prepared by Edward Wilson, of Warwickshire County Council (Wilson 2002) and a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU 2002). The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

2.0: Location of Site

The site is centred on Hillfield Hall (NGR SP 415040 278080, Fig. 1), and comprises the hall, its outbuildings and its grounds. The grounds are bounded by Hillfield Road to the west and residential properties to the north, east and south. The hall is presently in use as a public house/restaurant and is owned by the Toby Grill House Chain.

3.0: Objectives

- To define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains on the site and the effects of renovation work on the standing structures.
- To determine the procedures and scope of further archaeological assessment by field evaluation, comprising geophysical survey and trial trenching, in advance of consideration of planning proposals.
- To determine the need for preservation of archaeological remains, and/or further archaeological work in advance of, or during, development.

4.0: Method

The Warwickshire County Record Office is currently closed and, therefore could not be accessed. All relevant historic maps and secondary sources held by the SMR, Solihull Local Studies Library, and Birmingham University Library were consulted.

The site survey involved an external examination of the Hall and its other standing structures and a walkover of the grounds, in order to identify any surviving earthwork and/or other evidence which could relate to earlier phases of activity. In addition, any later landscaping and building activities which could have impacted on any early archaeological features and deposits were noted.

5.0: Geology and Topography

The parish of Solihull is located on the Birmingham Plateau, and is approximately 130m AOD. The geology of the area is largely based on Keuper Marl, with pockets of boulder clay and deposits of sand and gravels,

6.0: Present Character of the Site

Entrance to the site is from Hillfield Road, and leads directly into a courtyard with a circular flower bed in the centre. This courtyard is presently used as car-parking for the restaurant. Opposite the entrance is the hall itself, presently classed as a Grade II* listed building, located towards the northern edge of the site, with its entrance frontage to the west. The frontage is the only remaining part of the original 16th-century hall. The structure is constructed from red brick and is three stories high with two semi-octagonal turrets with embattlements, the main entrance on the north turret. The rest of the hall, was constructed in the late 19th century, and has been built from machine-cut red brick and is three stories high. A single storey, later extension has been built on the southern side of the hall, also constructed from machine-cut red brick. This later extension is due for demolition under the present proposals. The hall is presently in use as a restaurant. To the rear of the hall, in the northeast corner of the site, there is a wooded private garden. This could not be accessed during the walkover survey. However the planning application will not affect this area greatly.

To the west of the hall, on the south side of the courtyard, is the old stable block. This block has also been constructed from red brick and is two stories high. At present the stables are not in use, although until recently it was a public house. To the northwest

of the stables, next to the entrance way is the old gatehouse, a small redbrick structure, two stories high, presently not in use. The stables and gatehouse are due for renovation under the planning proposals. To the south of the stables are two, small, brick-built outhouses. Both are one storey high and both are in a state of disrepair. They are both due for demolition under the present planning proposals.

To the north of the courtyard is a small wooded area, containing a slight dip in the ground which could be the only visible remains of the medieval moat. To the south and southwest of the stables is an unused tarmaced area and in the southwest corner of the site is a larger pond, possibly the remains of a fishpond. This pond is largely overgrown and has not been maintained. This pond will remain as part of the new development.

A small brick wall runs from the south west corner of the hall to the southeast corner of the pond, terracing a tarmaced car park in the southeastern corner of the site. This area slopes slightly upwards to the south, and at present seems to be disused. This area will be most heavily developed under the planning proposals. The land surrounding the site has been completely developed with modern housing.

7.0: Archaeological and Historical Background

The Solihull district does not contain many known sites of prehistoric date. The shift from farming-hunting communities to agriculturally orientated settlements began in the Neolithic and Bronze-Age periods, mainly in the fertile Blythe basin, although there was a slight shift to the Arden plateau during the late Bronze Age and Iron Age periods, when livestock pasturing could be carried out. This presumably continued into the Romano-British period although there is a lack of evidence from this time. During Saxon times, the focus was still towards the south of the region and it was not until the early Medieval period that the heavily wooded areas of the plateau were settled, when the process of assarting began (Nichol 1995).

During the early Medieval period grants of land were made to freeholders to settle in the wooded areas (Roberts 1977). Statistics dating from Domesday show a fourfold population in the area, although this was not uniform. It would seem that the greater Solihull area was colonised in particular, as can be seen by the number of moated sites within the parish, numbering 23 at the present time (Nichol 1995). In the post-Domesday period there were many new settlements in the area – Diddington, Knowle, Balsall, Nuthurst, Baddesley Clinton, Castle Bromwich and the dependencies of Packwood and Tanworth. Offshoot settlements of these were established shortly afterwards, including Solihull, which was part of the Ulverley manor (Bates, 1991). Ulverley was granted to the de Limsei family by Princess Christina, who became a nun. Solihull (meaning muddy hill, Smyth 1994) was set up by the de Limsci family as a trading centre, at the crossing of the Birmingham to Worcester Road, and the Coventry to Warwick Road (Bates 1991). It appeared on a tax list in 1190, the church of St Alpheage was built, and by c1200 it was referred to as Old Town (the present Olton, Smyth 1994). In 1242 the town was granted a Royal Charter for a market and an annual three day fair. The main manor house, Hobs moat, was built by Sir William de Odingsells, between 1264 and 1295, who inherited the lands from the de Limesi family (Pemberton 1905).

Around the town, several private farms, some of which were moated were set up, for example, Moat Farm by the de Buckemor family and Libbards Farm and moat (SMR 3072) by the Libers (Bates 1991). The site at Hillfield Hall was occupied from as early as 1311 by Thomas Hawes of Shirley (Pemberton 1905), who was known as a man 'skilled in the law' (Woodall and Varley 1987). It is not known what the estate consisted of at the time, but it was probably a farm worked from a homestead. The homestead was moated (SMR 3134), although there are no visible remains of this left. The fields around the homestead were likely to have been used for agriculture, and there is still surviving ridge and furrow in the area (SMR nos. 8753, 8754, 8755, 9413) dating from the Medieval period. Access to the Hall is likely to have been from Old Street (SMR 10822), running from the manor of Widney to Solihull, past Libbards Farm.

The site was owned, but not lived in, by the Hawes Family, each eldest son being called Thomas, for the next 250 years. The first member of the Hawes family to live there was William, who married Ursula, the daughter of William Coles, and it was them who constructed the brick Hillfield Hall (SMR 262) in 1576. It is likely that the moat was infilled at this time (Midgeley 1947).

A detailed description of the Hall and its history can be found in Woodall and Varley (1987), but only a brief description is given here. The Hall, three stories high and facing northwest, was constructed from red brick with diaper patterns in blue brick, in the style of a Medieval gatehouse. The front had two octagonal turrets with embattled parapets, with the main entrance through the northern turret. This gave the impression of an imposing looking building, but it was, in fact, only one room deep. Within the main body of the house there were three reception rooms, the hall, two parlours, seven sleeping chambers and a long gallery on the top floor.

The hall was sold by the Hawes family, on the death of Edmond Hawes in the 1660s, to George Fielding, who had previously lived at 'Ryegate' in Surrey. The estate was composed of five farms, and 455 acres: Hillfield Hall and farm, Shelly Farm, Twist Farm and Pratts Farm. He immediately built a new wing, facing southeast, said to be in the Italianate style. It is possible that the outbuildings were moved to their present position at his time to make way for the new wing. A new entrance way from Widney Manor Road was constructed, making use of the Blythe Bridge (SMR 10821) which had been constructed to the south of Libbards moat. The Hall was inherited by Robert Fielding, who did not live there, and was sold in March 1705 to Henry Greswold. The Greswold family lived in the Hall until Anne Greswold died in 1756, when it was inherited by her cousin Mary Greswold, who also inherited Malvern Hall Estate from her Husband. The Hall was then inhabited by tenant farmers for approximately one hundred years. It is probably during this period that Hillfield Farmhouse (SMR 341), and Libbards House (SMR 343) were built on Widney Lane, and Malvern Park Farmhouse (SMR 344) built to the northeast. The Birmingham-London Railway Line was opened in 1852 which split the lands owned by the Hall and the track leading to Widney Manor Road. Widney Manor Station (SMR 6043) was constructed at this time and access to the hall was likely to have been from Hillfield Road

In January 1867, there was a fire at the Hall which destroyed the south front, with only the original northwestern front remaining. The Hall was restored with Victorian brick-built buildings, and by 1871 the Hall was occupied by George Beard, a pin and needle manufacturer. The hall was bought in 1932 by the Everson family, who removed a lot of the Victorian extensions, leaving a reception hall, drawing room,

dining room, five bedrooms, kitchen, bathrooms, and offices, with the long gallery at the top used for storage. It was sold again in 1964, when it became a night-club, and in 1974 was converted into a restaurant, when it was renovated and many alterations were made. The entrance was moved to the western turret and a large extension was built on the south side.

8.0: Cartographic and Pictorial Sources

The Hall is first shown on the Tithe map of 1840 (Fig 5), although the buildings cannot be seen in any great detail, although the large pond to the south of the hall can be seen. The fields to the east, north, and south were owned by the Hall, as was The Bannisters (Apportionment 988), northeast of Hillfield Road, and The Sedgeleys (882) directly to the east of Whitefields Road. To the south of the Hall, running west to east, was Little Brick Kiln (901, pasture), Great Brick Kiln (907, pasture) and Libbards Field (908, pasture). North of these were Home Close (906, arable), Ten Days Work (909, pasture) and Shoulder of Mutton (910, arable). North of the hall were Malthouse Meadow (908, arable), Little Wood (903, pasture), Browns Close (904, pasture) and The Roundabout (934, meadow).

A picture from 1853 by A. E. Everitt (Fig. 10) shows the northwestern front of the Hall prior to the fire and shows the three-storey structure with the entrance in the northern tower. The picture shows structures to the north of the hall and additions to the front on the north and western sides, none of which is present today. The picture does not show the stables or other remaining structures standing today.

The 1st edition OS map from 1888 (Fig. 6) shows the Hall following the fire and its subsequent renovations. The Hall at this time is quite small, with no evidence of the additions to the front shown in the 1853 picture. The present stable block and gatehouse are shown, although the buildings to the south of the stables are considerably more numerous, with two towards the southeast corner. The map shows the large fishpond in the south, as seen on the Tithe Map, and also a smaller pond in the northwestern corner, labelled 'moat'. The grounds of the hall extend approximately 100 metres further to the east than the present grounds, and most of the area is wooded, except in the southeast corner. The other major addition to the map from the Tithe Map is the railway to the east.

The 2nd edition OS map, from 1904 (Fig.7), is almost identical to the 1st edition, although one building towards the southeast of the site has been demolished, whilst an addition has been made to an outbuilding directly to the south of the Hall. The site may have been landscaped, and there are far fewer trees, especially in the area directly southeast of the Hall, and around the courtyard area. The 'moat' and fishpond are still visible. The 3rd edition OS map, from 1917 (Fig 8), only shows the addition of one outbuilding towards the southeast corner of the site.

A photograph (Fig 11) from 'earlier this century' (Woodall and Varley 1987) shows the Hall similar to its appearance today, without the extensions to the south. A landuse map from 1950 (Fig 9) shows the Hall as a more rectangular structure, with possible outbuildings to the east. The Hall appears to have been slightly extended to the south, and, apart from the gatehouse and stables, the other outbuildings appear to have been demolished or reduced in size. The moat and fishpond are still visible on the map.

An aerial photograph from 1977 (Fig 12) is not clear enough to discern all of the buildings, but it would appear that the Hall by this time had been massively extended to the south, and the southeastern part of the site had been landscaped for car-parking. The grounds of the Hall are still as large as on the original OS map. The large fishpond is visible to the southwest, but no trace of the moat can be seen on the photograph. The land around the Hall has still not been developed with the modern houses by this time.

9.0: Conclusions

The site at Hillfield Hall has been occupied since 1311, although the only possible remaining feature from this time is the fishpond in the southwest corner of the site. The original Hall was demolished to build the brick-built Hall in 1576, and presumably the moat was infilled at this time. A small part of the moat was still visible in 1950 in the northwest corner of the site, but presumably the moat ran around the edge of the site. The site has been significantly landscaped over the years, but it is possible that the remains of the moat, and possibly of the original Hall are still preserved below-ground.

The only remains of the original brick-built Hall still standing is the front, with the majority of the rear of the Hall being built in the late 19th century, and the southern extension not built until the 1970s. The stables and other buildings on the site could be of late 17th-18th-century date, whilst the remains of other buildings of this time could also be present below-ground.

10.0: Provisional Recommendations

As the position of the moat and the original Hall are unknown, there is potential for below-ground survival of these structures. It is recommended that a programme of geophysical survey should be carried out, targeting in particular the south eastern corner of the site, which at present is disused, and where much of the new building will be concentrated, although areas to the east and south west of the Hall could also be surveyed. This should be followed by trial trenching, which should target any anomalies detected in the geophysical survey. These evaluative methods should enable a mitigation strategy for possible excavation to be formulated. A programme of building recording should also be undertaken before renovation of the Hall, stables and gate house. The scope and scale of the work required following this desktop study will need to be determined by Edward Wilson of Warwickshire County Council, acting as archaeological advisor to the local planning authority.

11.0: Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Fairclough Homes. 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 Warwickshire SMR for her assistance. The documentary research was undertaken by Josh Williams who also carried out the walkover survey and wrote this report. The report was edited by Iain Ferris, who also managed the project for BUFAU, and the

illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are also due to Kirsty Nichol for her advice and guidance, especially with reference to moated sites.

12.0: References

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Maps

- 1840 Tithe Map
- 1888 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1:2500 map
- 1904 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1:2500 map
- 1917 Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 1:2500 map
- 1950 Ordnance Survey Land Use 25" County Series

Other Sources

- 1853 Picture by A. F. Everitt
- 'Early this century' Photograph in Woodall and Varley (1987, 48)
- 1977 Aerial Photograph, Topographical International



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Fig.1



Fig. 3

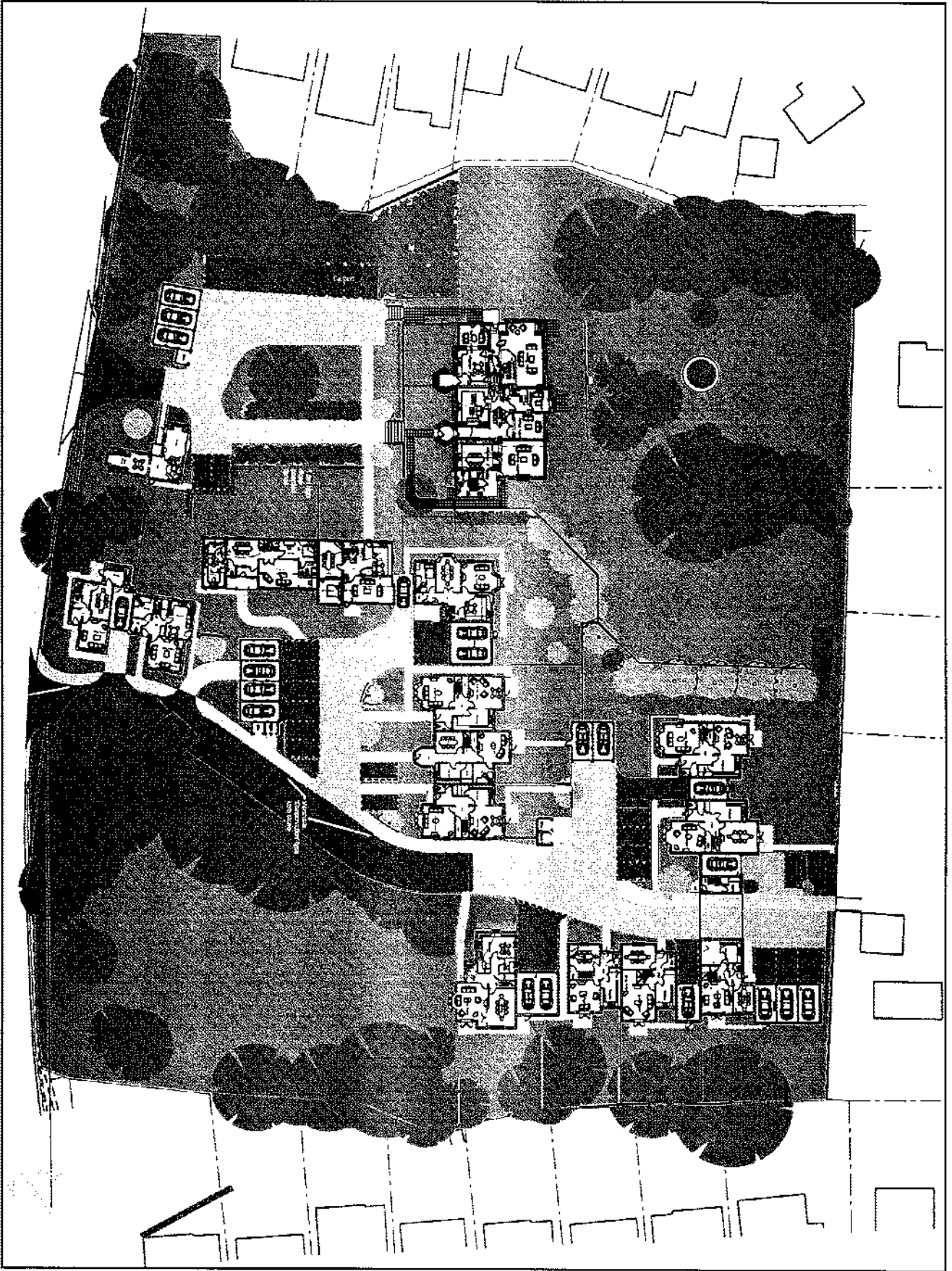


FIG.4

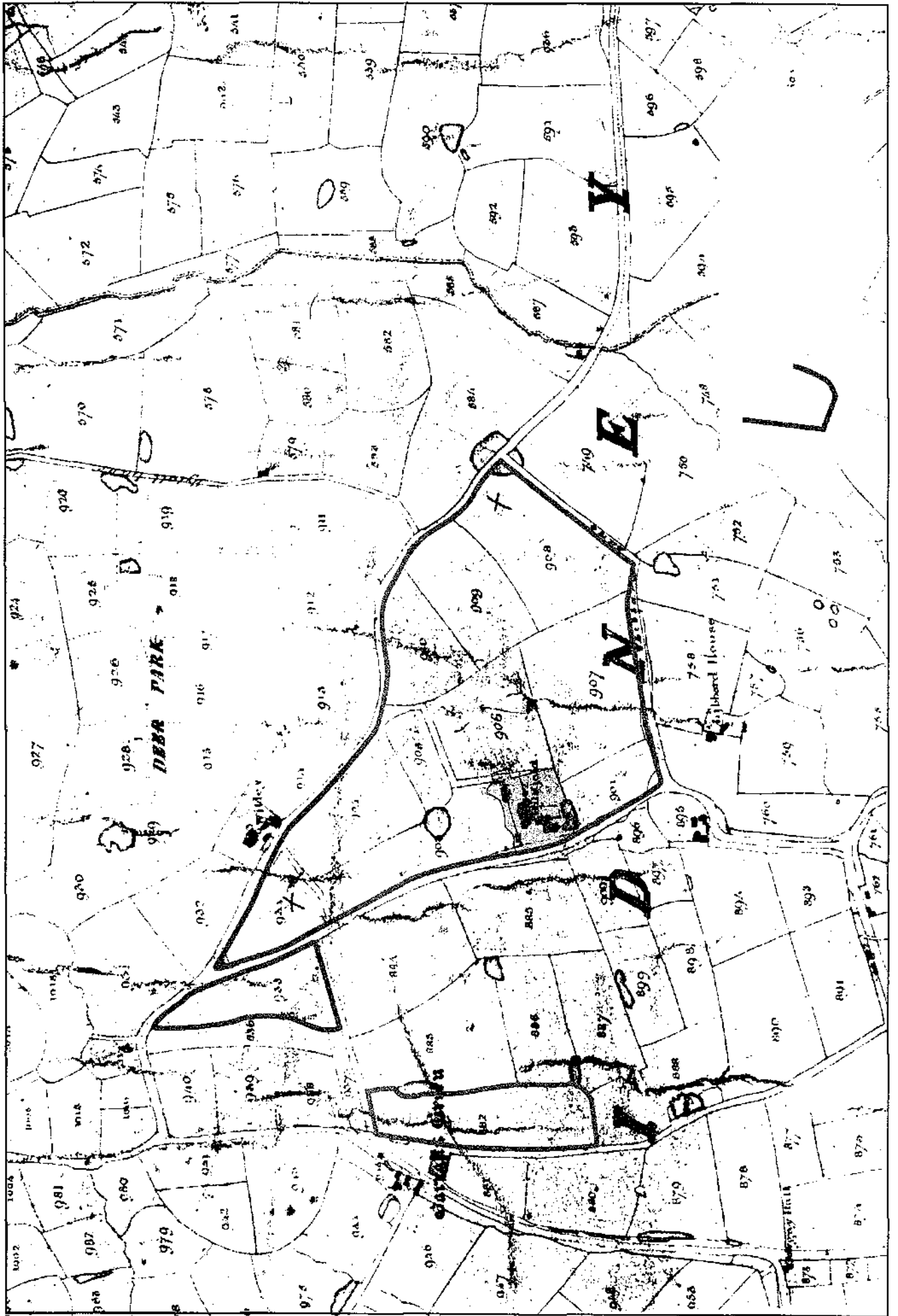


Fig.5

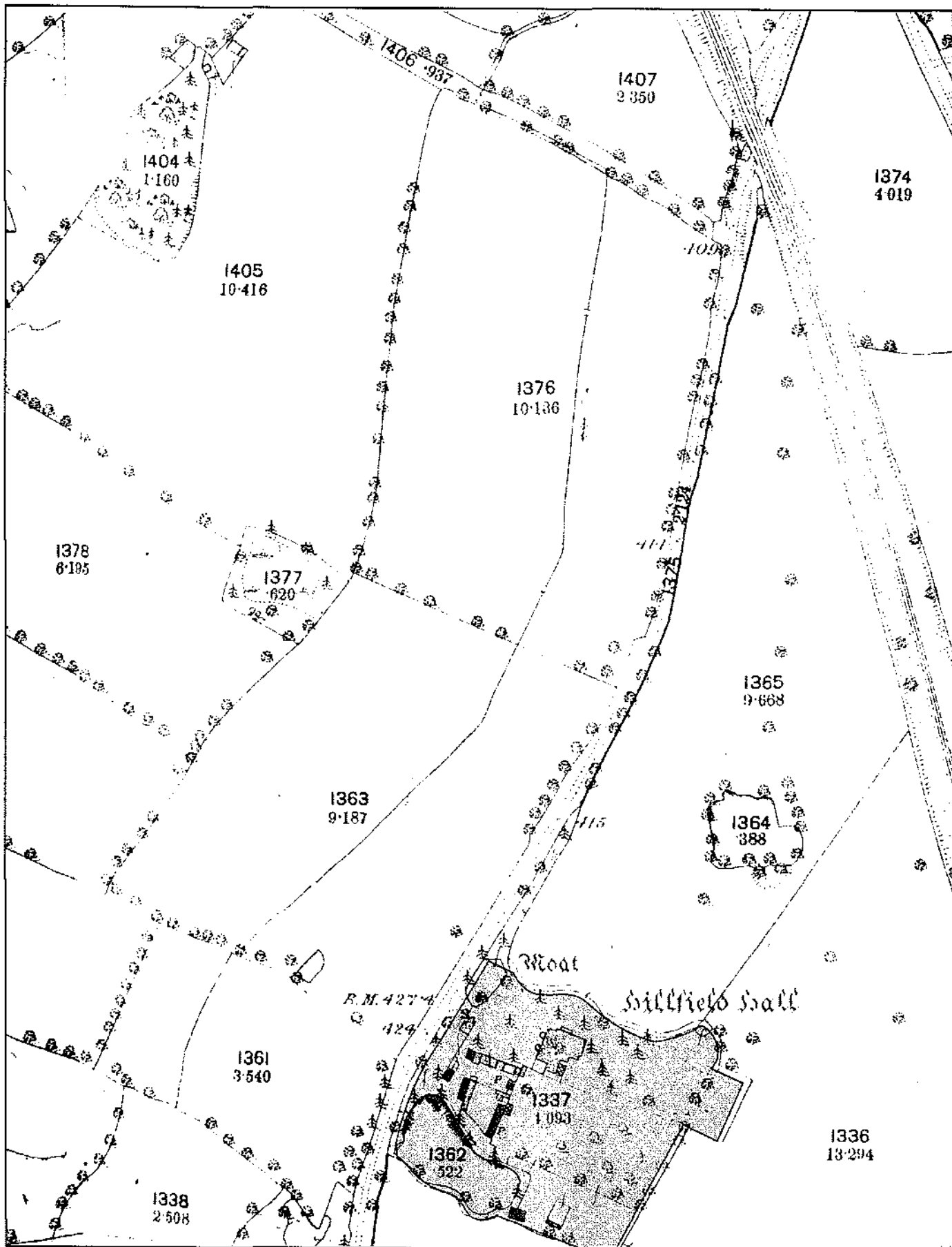


Fig.6

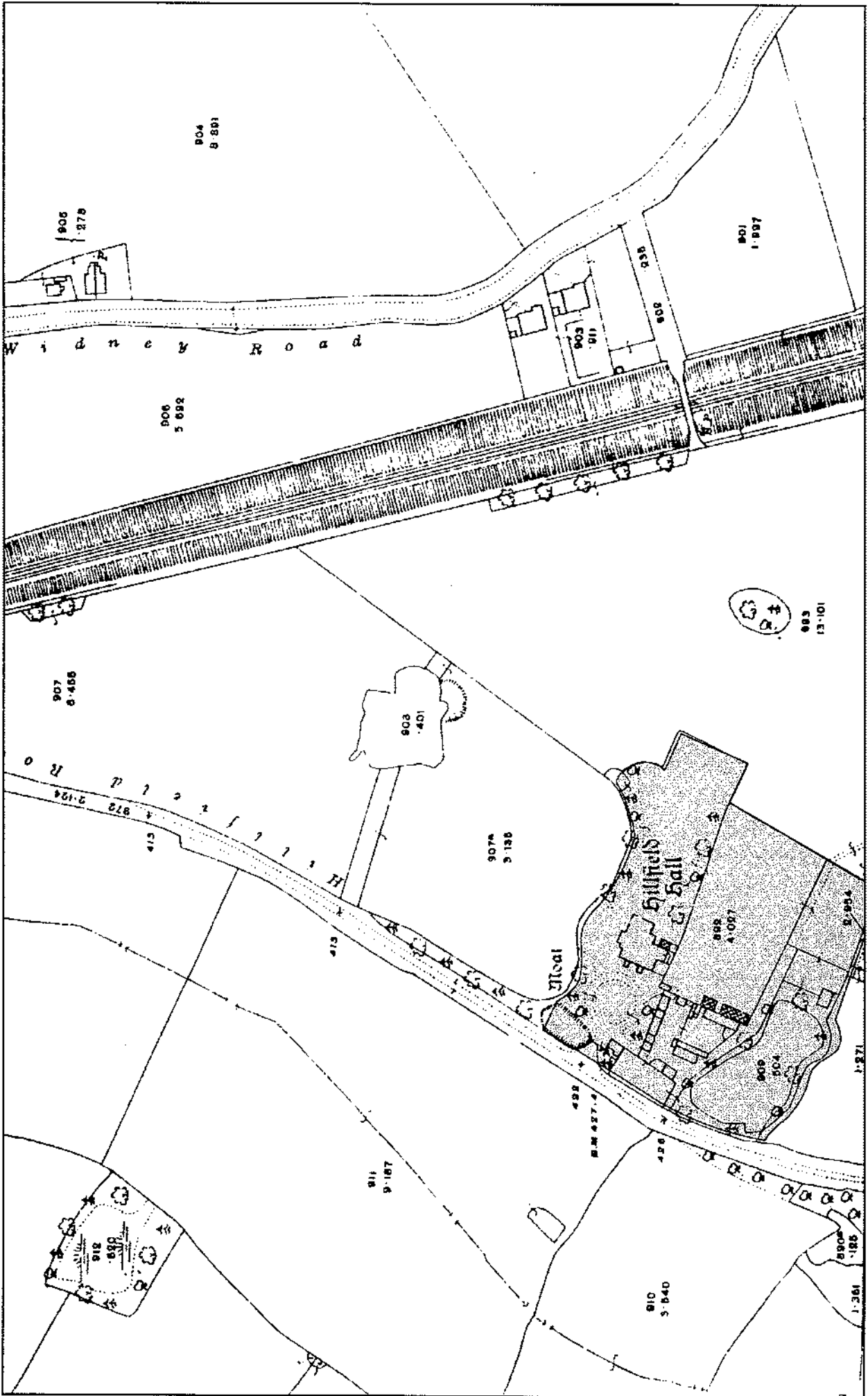


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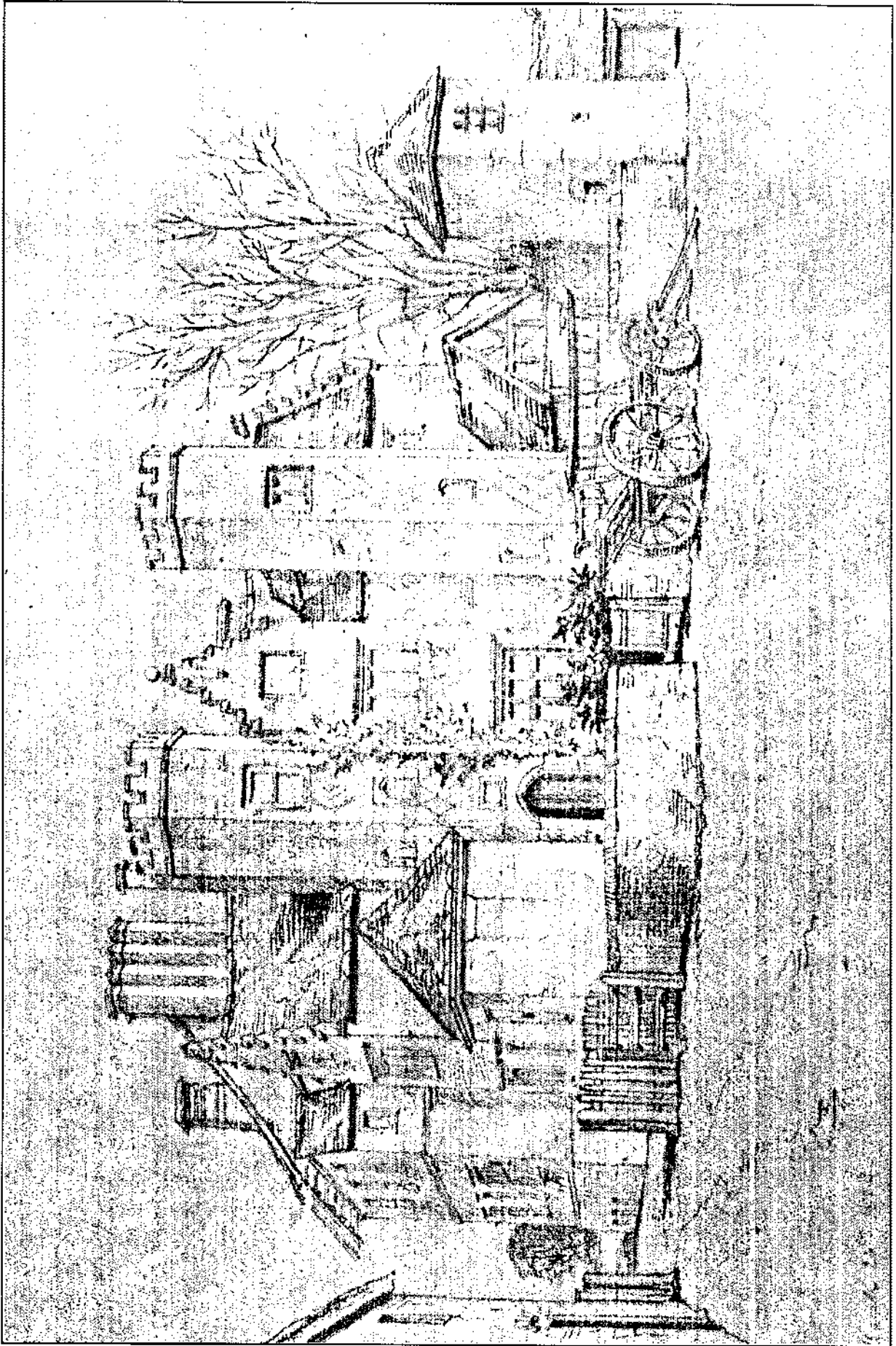


Fig.10



Fig. 11

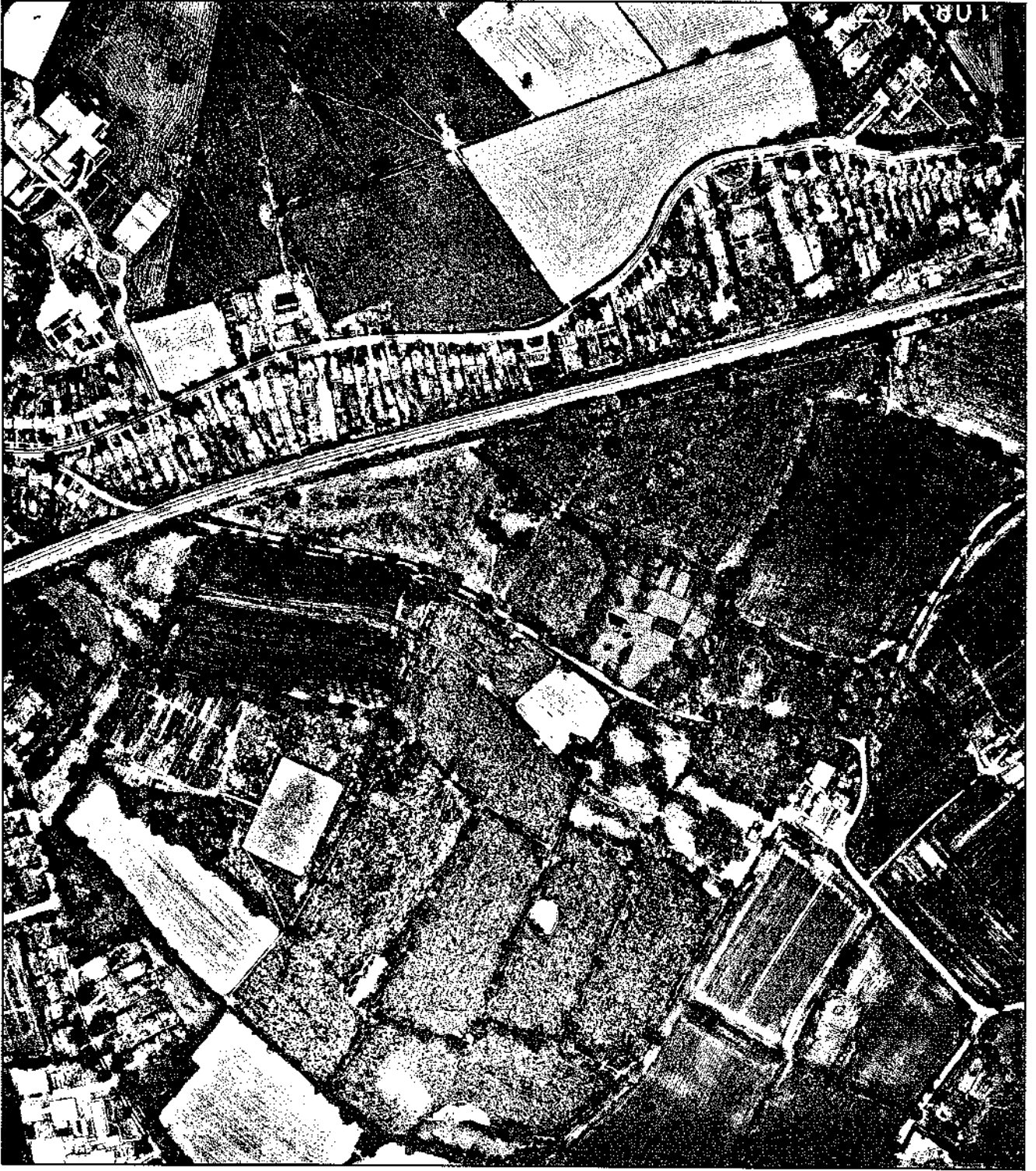


Fig.12



Plate 1

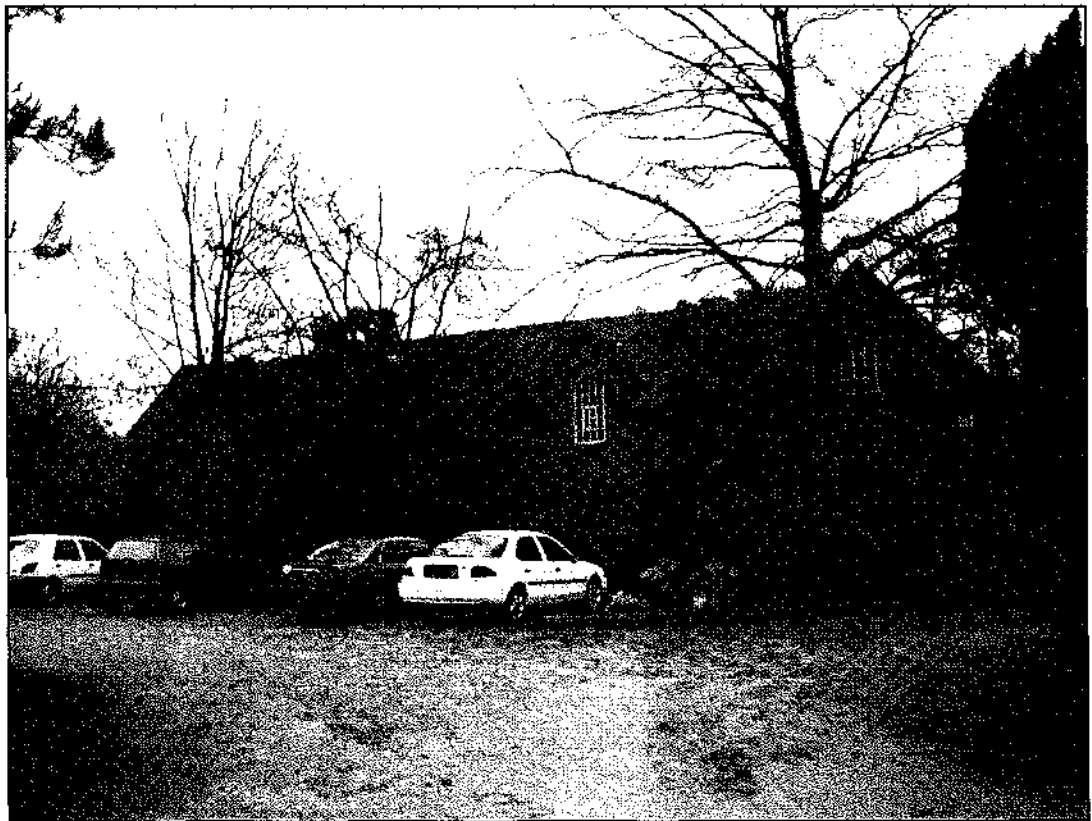


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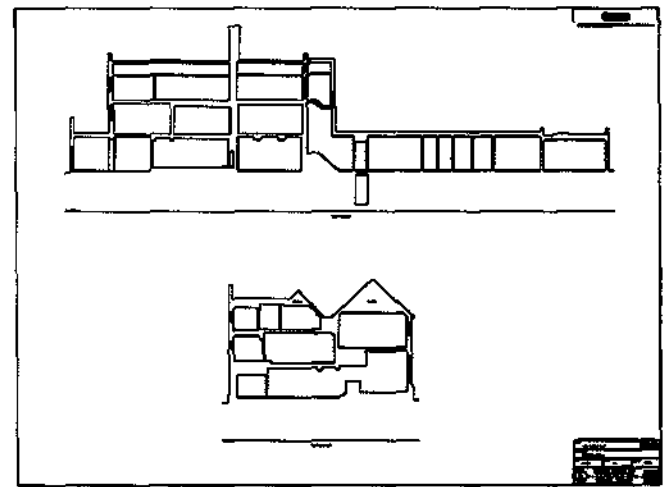
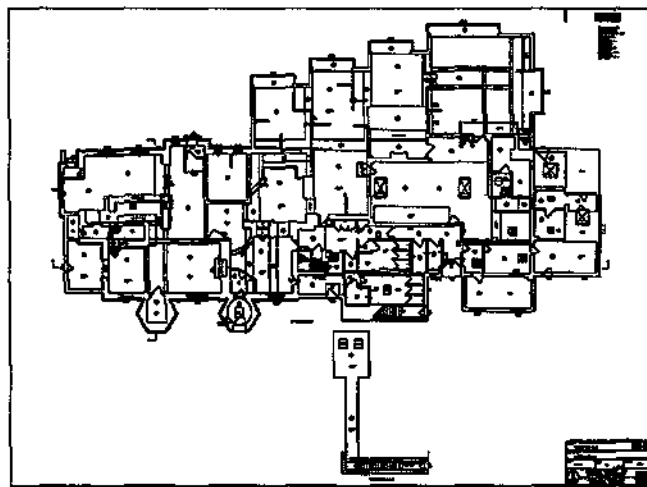
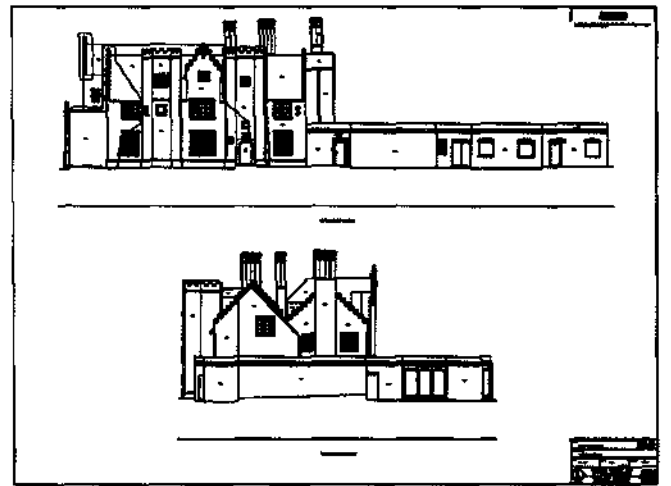
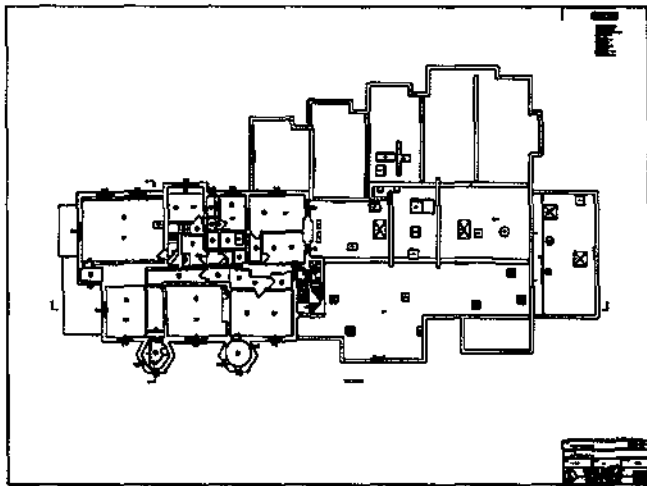
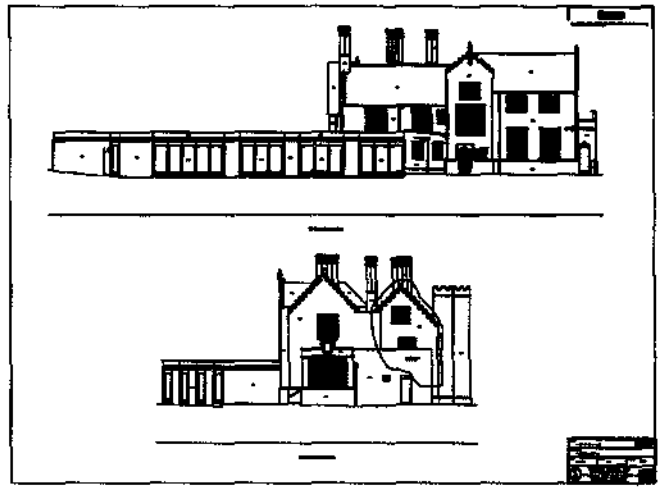
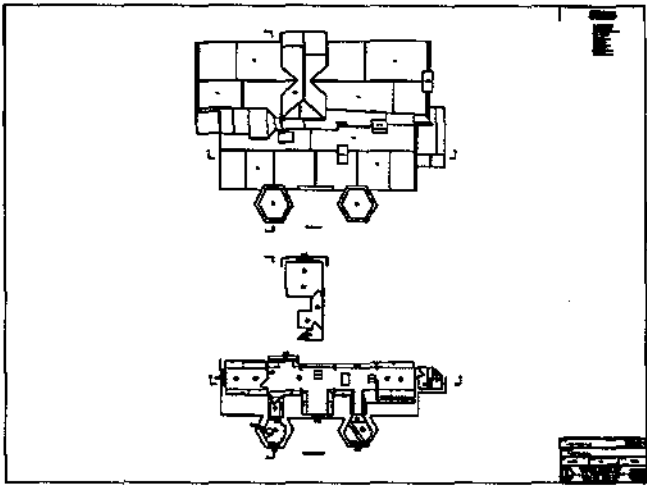


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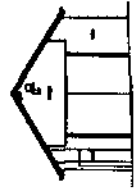


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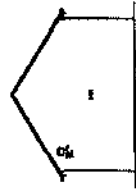
Appendix 1 - Plans and Elevations of the Hall, Stables and Gatehouse



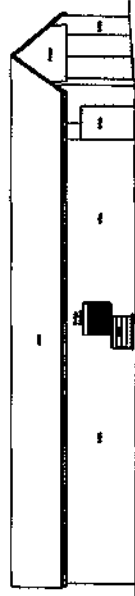
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| Site | 100-1000000000 |
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| Sheet No. | 100-1000000000 |
| Sheet Title | 100-1000000000 |
| Architect | MOBILE COUNTY, ALA |
| Engineer | MOBILE COUNTY, ALA |
| City | MOBILE, ALA |
| State | AL |
| Date | 10/1/2000 |



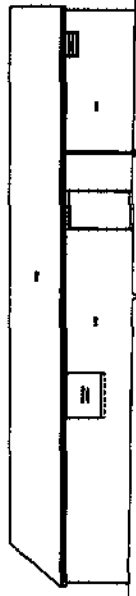
WEST ELEVATION



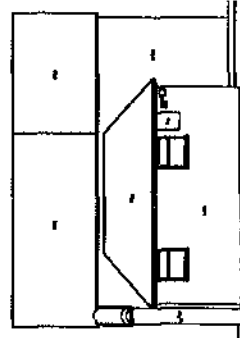
EAST ELEVATION



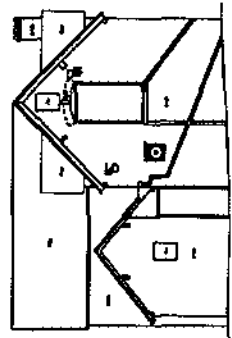
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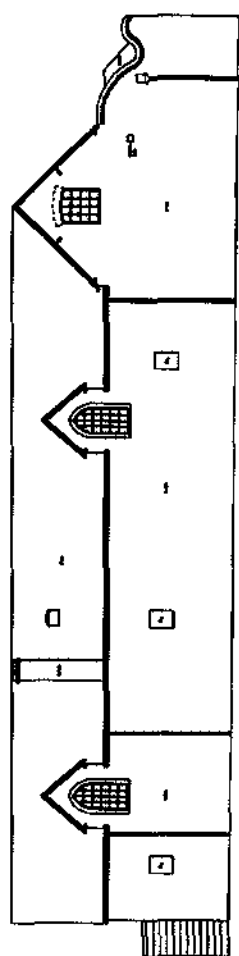
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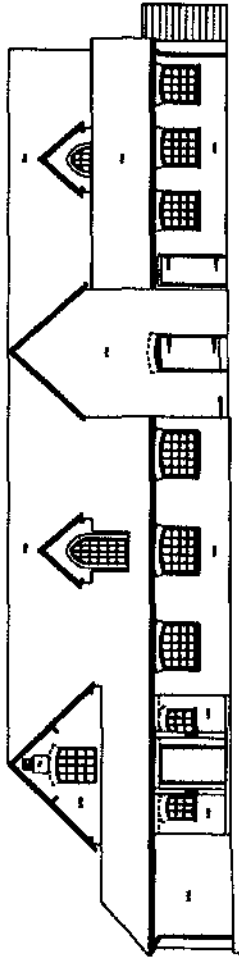
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



SECTION A-A

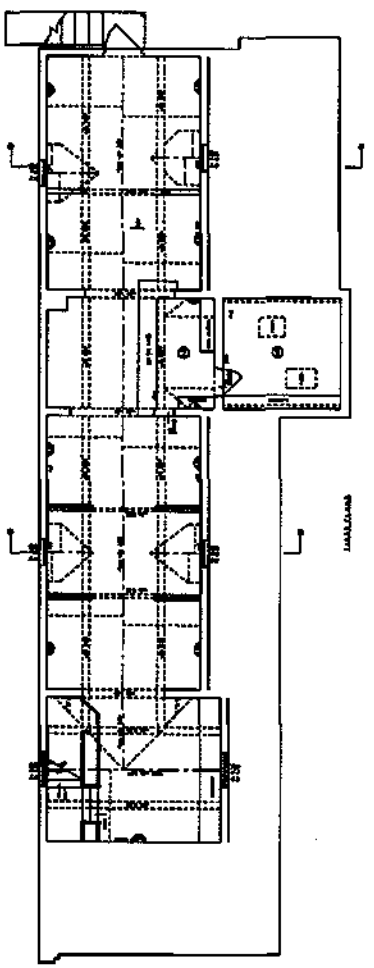
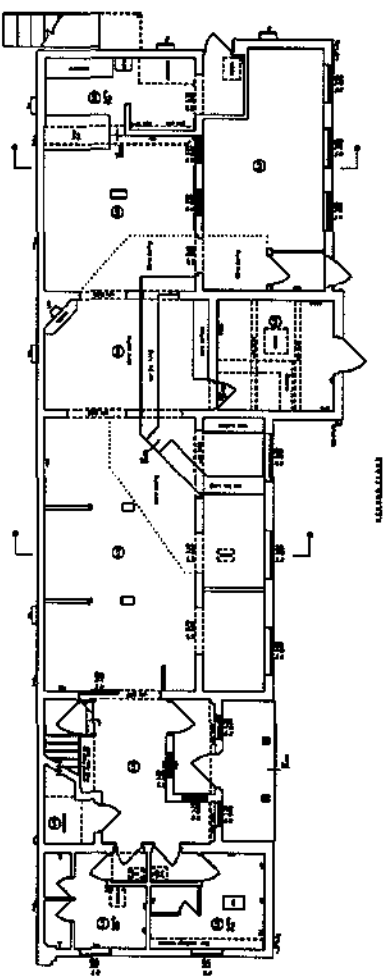
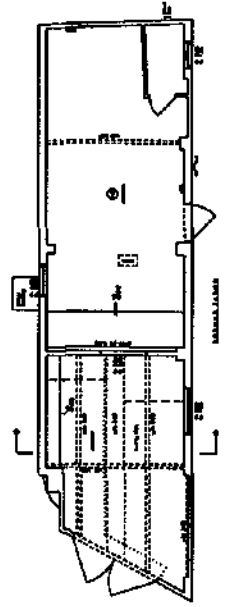
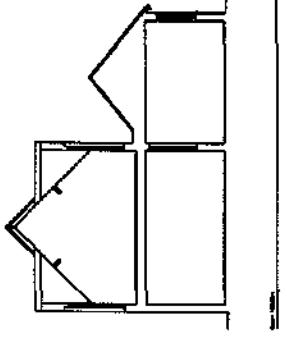
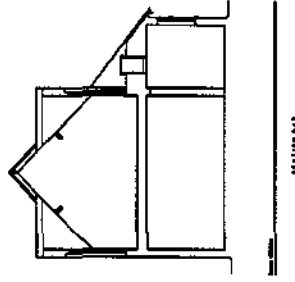
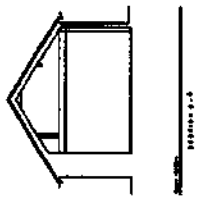


SECTION B-B

NOTES

1. ALL WORK TO BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPECIFICATIONS AND DRAWINGS.
2. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR OBTAINING ALL NECESSARY PERMITS.
3. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL MAINTAIN ACCESS TO ALL ADJACENT PROPERTIES AT ALL TIMES.
4. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL PROTECT ALL EXISTING UTILITIES AND STRUCTURES.
5. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL MAINTAIN THE SITE IN A SAFE AND SOUND CONDITION AT ALL TIMES.
6. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL ADJACENT PROPERTIES.
7. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL MAINTAIN THE SITE IN A SAFE AND SOUND CONDITION AT ALL TIMES.
8. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL ADJACENT PROPERTIES.
9. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL MAINTAIN THE SITE IN A SAFE AND SOUND CONDITION AT ALL TIMES.
10. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL ADJACENT PROPERTIES.

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Project No. | 100-100000-0000 |
| Sheet No. | 100-100000-0000 |
| Scale | 1/8" = 1'-0" |
| Date | 10/10/00 |
| Drawn by | J. J. ... |
| Checked by | J. J. ... |
| Approved by | J. J. ... |
| City | San Francisco |
| County | San Francisco |
| State | California |
| Project Name | ... |
| Address | ... |
| City | San Francisco |
| County | San Francisco |
| State | California |



NOTES

1. ALL WORK SHALL BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA BUILDING CODES AND ALL APPLICABLE LOCAL ORDINANCES.
2. ALL MATERIALS SHALL BE OF THE BEST QUALITY AND SHALL BE SUBJECT TO INSPECTION AND APPROVAL BY THE CITY ENGINEER.
3. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED WITHIN THE SPECIFIED TIME FRAME.
4. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR OBTAINING ALL NECESSARY PERMITS AND APPROVALS.
5. ALL UTILITIES SHALL BE PROTECTED AND MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT.
6. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL MAINTAIN ACCESS TO ALL ADJACENT PROPERTIES AT ALL TIMES.
7. ALL NECESSARY SAFETY MEASURES SHALL BE IN PLACE DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE.
8. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROTECTION AND REPAIR OF ALL EXISTING UTILITIES AND STRUCTURES.
9. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPECIFICATIONS AND DRAWINGS.
10. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROTECTION AND REPAIR OF ALL EXISTING UTILITIES AND STRUCTURES.

