

**Ryknild Street, Littleover,  
Derby:**

**An Archaeological Desk-Based  
Assessment 2003**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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by  
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## **Crest Motel, Littleover, Derby An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2003**

### **Summary**

*An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in January 2003 of a site in the Littleover district of Derby. The assessment was carried out ahead of a proposed housing development on the corner of Chain Lane and Pastures Hill (NGR SK 32503420). The proposed development area adjoins two lengths of Ryknild Street, a Roman road, which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM 23287). Features of Roman date could be located adjoining the road. Additionally, the proposed development site is close to the Anglo Saxon and medieval settlement of Littleover, and therefore the below-ground remains of these later periods could also be identified. A windmill of post-medieval or earlier date is also recorded within the proposed development area.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

This archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Michael Goodall Quality Homes, ahead of the proposed development of a site in Littleover, southwest Derby (NGR. SK 32503420, Figs. 1-3). The proposed development area adjoins two lengths of Ryknild Street, a Roman road, both Scheduled Ancient Monuments (DR 236 a and b), which are excluded from the scope of the proposed development. The study area for this assessment includes the proposed development area, and the surrounding area, including the two Scheduled Ancient Monuments. This archaeological assessment is required in advance of the consideration of development proposals, in accordance with government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 *Archaeology and Planning*. The aim of the report is to provide an assessment of recorded archaeological and historical data for the study area to enable an appropriate strategy for archaeological mitigation to be devised. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999). The Written Scheme of Investigation for this assessment (BUFAU 2002) was approved by Derbyshire County Council.

A geophysical survey (Fig. 2; Stratascan 2003) was undertaken of parts of the proposed development area in parallel with the preparation of this assessment.

### **2.0 Location of the study area**

The study area is located to the southwest of Derby. The proposed development area is bounded by Pastures Hill to the southeast, Chain Lane to the northeast, by Greenway Drive to the north, and a new housing estate to its remaining sides (Figs. 2-3). The

proposed development area currently comprises the partly demolished Crest Hotel and grounds. Most of the land comprises open areas of grass and tarmac.

### **3.0 Objectives**

The objectives of this assessment were to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, to identify the need for any further archaeological work within the proposed development area, in advance of the proposed housing development. In particular, it was intended to consider the archaeological potential of the areas adjoining the Roman road, and the possible effects upon the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

### **4.0 Methodology**

Documentary research for this assessment included consultation of primary and secondary records and maps held at BUFAU, the University of Birmingham Library, the Derbyshire Local Studies Library and Derbyshire County Records Office. The Derbyshire Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted. Sources consulted are listed in Section 11.0 below. Consultation and re-plotting of aerial photographs was outside the scope of this study.

### **5.0 Geology and topography**

The proposed development area comprises a mainly flat plateau, located between the 105m to 108m AOD contours, rising slightly from south to north, and less perceptibly from southeast to northwest.

The proposed development area overlies an area of Oadby Till, a 'reddish brown diamict with chalk and flint clasts'. Adjoining the proposed development area the drift geology comprises Older Lacustrine deposits, 'grey clay and greenish grey sandy clay' (terminology from the British Geological Survey 1:10000 sheet SK33SW).

### **6.0 Archaeological and historical background (Figs. 3-7)**

No previous archaeological investigations have taken place within the study area, and therefore this section of the report is based solely on archaeological and historic sources and surface finds.

#### **Prehistoric**

The only evidence of prehistoric activity in the area is an early Bronze-Age polished flint axe hammer found in Scarsdale Avenue approximately 100m from the proposed

development area (Derby SMR18933, Fig. 3). This may be representative of transitory activity across the landscape. However, it is possible that the high ground including the study area could have been settled during prehistory, although at present no such evidence exists.

## Roman

A length of Ryknild Street (also spelt Ryknield, Rykneld and Rycknield) runs across the study area. As noted above, the scheduled parts of the road are excluded from the scope of development proposals. The proposed development site docs, however, include a length of Ryknild Street, including the change of alignment which crosses the footprint of the hotel and associated car parking. Ryknild Street was the main route, running between the Fosse Way, from Alcester, *Letocetum* (Wall) to the south of Littleover and *Deventio* (Little Chester) to the north, and extending up to Templeborough in Yorkshire (Margary route 18, Margary 1973, 280). Originally a military road, it was built soon after the conquest, Ryknild Street became important as a trade route later in the Roman period. A fort was built on the west bank of the River Derwent in approximately AD 48, soon after the Roman invasion. Around AD 80 Little Chester was established on the other side of the river (Wheeler 1986; VCH 1905, 243-245). Roads connected Little Chester to Wall and Manchester, also possibly to Doncaster, Templeborough and Rocester (VCH 1905, 246; Brassington 1981, 88-92). Wall was an important military site in the first century AD, and became an important staging post and trading centre into the fourth (Finch Smith 1987).

Roman roads were generally built in straight lines from one place of importance to the next. In the initial conquest period a system of military routes were planned out and constructed very rapidly, while over the following centuries other roads were added as trade routes were established. The roads were mostly constructed in the same way, but utilising local materials. An earth embankment (called an *agger*) was built over which the road metalling was laid. The *agger* was usually constructed from the earth dug out from ditches flanking the road. This provided good drainage. The *agger* was usually 0.6-1.0m high. A solid base of stone was then laid, with a gravel surface above. It has been noted that the *agger* is often very high when the road is crossing open or high ground. As drainage is not needed in these places, the height of the road is presumably for another reason, possibly to impress the natives (Margary 1967, 17-33). The surviving Ryknild Street earthworks within the study area survive to a height of approximately 0.75m above the present ground level. The width of Roman roads varied considerably, important routes were usually 7-10m wide, slightly narrower than the *agger* underneath.

Roman roads often alter their course slightly on high ground as it is easier to site from one viewpoint to another. The proposed development area is an example of this change of angle at a commanding viewpoint.

Griffiths (1990) notes that a field close to the end of Chain Lane was once referred to as 'Toothill Close' which means look out hill. The topography of the area suggests that this feature is likely to have been sited within the proposed development area, where it would

have enjoyed commanding views over the surrounding countryside. This lookout could have been Roman in date, associated with the road, and the nearby fort at Little Chester which it probably overlooked. However, the location of a lookout post or signal station within the proposed development area cannot be proven on the present evidence. Woolliscroft (2001) discusses the mechanics of signalling from such look out towers to other towers and forts in the landscape.

An excavation was carried out through a section of Ryknild Street at Morley Moor, 9km to the north of the study area, on the other side of the fort at Little Chester (Munslow 1949). A trench 2.4m by 6.9m was excavated, which showed the full details of the construction of the road. Munslow found that the road was nearly 6m wide, with a foundation of large irregular sandstone blocks up to 10cm thick and 30-60cm square, over which were smaller sandstone blocks. A surface of small stones and gravel approximately 8-10cm deep covered the road. Road construction here, as elsewhere, will have utilised local materials. The presence of drainage ditches was not noted at Morley Moor. Munslow (*ibid.*, 75) suggests that they may have not been dug since the site is situated on high ground and thus ditches may not have been necessary for drainage. Margary (1967, 21-22) notes that often other, smaller ditches were constructed along the edge of the road further out than the drainage ditches. These were only about 0.6-1m wide and fairly shallow, and presumably marked the course of the road. 'From examples noted on a number of roads it seems clear that by the widths thus outlined there were two classes of roads, those with the ditches averaging 25.2m from centre to centre, and a secondary class with ditches averaging 18.6m apart' (*ibid.*, 22). This suggests that ditches associated with the road may lie within the proposed development area, between 5m and 9m from the road edge.

### Anglo Saxon and medieval

The fact that the line of Ryknild Street can be traced almost continuously from Bourton to Derby, and that its route is represented by modern roads for much of its entire length, could suggest that the road has been in almost constant use ever since it was built (VCH 1905, 244). The area now known as Derby continued to be important in the Anglo-Saxon period, with a settlement being established by AD 500. Just a few miles to the south, along Ryknild Street was Repton, a capital of Mercia. This settlement probably dates to around AD 550 and is located only 14km from Littleover. Repton grew in importance after a monastery was founded there in AD 595. The Roman road may have continued to link these two places into the Anglo Saxon period.

The settlement of Littleover is believed to date from the Anglo Saxon period. The village was originally called Parva Ufra, a Saxon name meaning 'over slope'. At this time it was within Mercia. If Ryknild Street was still in use at this time, traffic could have travelled along the road on its way to and from Repton. The Anglo Saxon village of Littleover is believed to have been centred just to the east of the proposed development area, in what is now called 'The Hollow'. There was probably a church on the site of the present St Peter's at that time (Littleover 1972; Scott 1978).

The Domesday Book lists Parva Ufra as being one of three berewicks within the district of Ufre (modern Mickleover). It was part of the royal manor of King Edward the Confessor in 1066, and had been given to Burton Abbey by 1087. It was recorded as having '10 carucates of land to the geld, land for 15 ploughs. Three berewicks belong there Parva Ufra, Findre and Poltac' in 1066. By 1087 'the Abbey of Burton has now in demesne 5 ½ ploughs, 20 villcins and ten bordars who have eight ploughs. There are two sites of mills and 73 acres of meadow, woodland for pannage half a league in length and half a league in breadth, and the same amount of underwood. £25 then, £10 now' (Scott 1978; Littleover 1972). Littleover continued to belong to Burton Abbey throughout the medieval period (Walmsley 1972).

During the medieval period the village grew in size. St. Peter's Church was built in the twelfth century, probably replacing an earlier, wooden Saxon church. Parts of the medieval church fabric remain visible. The church was substantially rebuilt in the fourteenth century. The population suffered during the early years of the plague. One vicar, William de Rostleton, died of the plague in 1375 (Griffiths 1990).

#### Post-medieval

The study area was called Lytleoure by 1539, when it was mentioned in a document concerning the dissolution of the monasteries and the reallocation of the lands of Burton Abbey (Walmsley 1968). There are several known buildings in Littleover which date to this period, most of these are from 'The Hollow' area of the village. 'Ye Olde Cottage' at Number 19 The Hollow and the Half Moon Public House still survive and are Grade II listed buildings. The Rising Sun Public House and The Old Hall were also built in the sixteenth century, but have now been demolished. The Half Moon and The Rising Sun are mentioned in 1577 as being the only two inns in the village (Scott 1978).

A windmill was built within the proposed development area (Fig. 3) but its exact location is unknown. The Domesday Book states that there were two mills in the village in 1087, but the locations of these two sites are unknown. The windmill within the proposed development area certainly pre-dates 1721 as it appears in a Harpur Inventory of this date (Fraser 1947). Scott (1978, 10) mentions that the field within the proposed development area was called 'Mill Close' within living memory. This field name, of course, may not reflect the location of a windmill here, merely its ownership as part of the windmill property.

Until 1886 when it became a parish in its own right, the village had been within the parish of Mickleover. The village population rose substantially from the end of the eighteenth century, from 251 in 1789 to 352 in 1811 and to 1,762 in 1912. By 1931 the population was 3,387 and in 1971 it had risen again to 11,430. In 1968 Littleover became part of the Borough of Derby (Griffiths 1990). The Coppice was built in the proposed development area in the early twentieth century. This was a large private house, which has since been converted into a hotel.

There are no listed buildings within the proposed development area.



## **7.0 Cartographic evidence**

The earliest surviving map of the study area is the Enclosure map of 1768 (Fig. 4). Chain Lane and Pastures Hill are shown following their present route. The proposed development area is shown as a field, without any buildings. The Tithe map of 1850 (Fig. 5) is very similar to the earlier map, the only difference being that a square building is now shown to be within the proposed development area. Information in the Tithe Award shows this to have been a mill. The field is also called Mill Close. The First and Second edition Ordnance Survey maps (respectively 1880, Fig. 6 and 1901, Fig. 7) both show the Development Area as an open field. The site of the mill probably adjoins or lies within the northernmost Scheduled Ancient Monument, in an area containing mature trees, possibly within the square-shaped stand of trees which remains visible. The earthworks of the Roman road are not marked on any of the maps.

In 1998 a map was drawn up by Kevin Archer, a local historian (not illustrated). It shows Littleover in 1848. The map is based on the 1850 Tithe map and the 1848 Tithe Award with additional information from the census returns of 1841 and 1851 and White's Directory of Derby from 1857. The mill is marked on this map in the southeast of Mill Close field, just within the proposed development area. When the Tithe map is overlain onto the modern map, the mill appears to be located in the area of the former hotel car park (Fig. 3).

## **8.0 Walkover Survey (Plates 1-5)**

The southwestern part of the proposed development area comprises a field of rough grass. The agger of Ryknild Street is visible to the rear of the modern road frontage (SAM DR 236a). Traces of possible ditches also flank the Roman road. The agger is approximately 12m wide, and measures a maximum of 0.75m in height above the modern ground surface. Traces of ridge and furrow earthworks lie between the Roman road and the modern road frontage. The centre of the proposed development site is occupied by the partly demolished buildings of the Crest Hotel, and associated surface car parking. To the northeast of the hotel are lawned areas adjoining Pastures Hill and Chain Lane, including ornamental avenues of trees. The northernmost scheduled segment of Ryknild Street (SAM DR 236b) which also remains visible as an above-ground earthwork, lies to the northeast of the hotel. Its line is further defined by a short avenue of trees. The agger of the northernmost segment of Ryknild Street measures a maximum of 0.45m in height, and 12m in width. Post-medieval ridge and furrow earthworks are visible to the southeast of the Roman road.

As plotted (Fig. 2) the northernmost Scheduled Ancient Monument appears to be slightly tangential to the road line as represented by the above-ground earthworks. The southwestern Scheduled Ancient Monument also appears to be mis-aligned with the

Roman roadline as indicated by above-ground earthworks and the geophysical survey (Stratascan 2003, fig. 19).

## **9.0 Conclusions and recommendations**

The proposed development area contains the remains of Ryknild Street, which also partly continues within two adjoining areas which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments, excluded from development. The Roman road line within the proposed development area lies partly within grassed areas, and partly within the footprint of the hotel, and immediately adjacent car parking, and the degree of survival of the road is not presently known.

It is possible that the road could be associated with contemporary features. One possibility is that a look out tower could be located within the proposed development area, adjoining the road. Another possibility is that there could have been a small-scale settlement alongside the road, although there is no present evidence to support this hypothesis, except perhaps for the fact that the topography could have favoured the establishment of a settlement here.

The most evident trace of post-Roman activity are the ridge and furrow earthworks abutting Ryknild Street. A windmill was constructed within the post-Roman period, but its precise dating and location is not known. The windmill could be located partly or wholly within the scheduled areas, or within the proposed development area. Other below-ground remains dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods may also be encountered.

The proposed residential development would have an impact upon the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Full details of the proposed development are not available. Adjoining residential development would have an effect upon the setting of the scheduled areas, particularly the northernmost, where the course of the Roman road is partly marked by trees. However, the suggested positioning of new residential blocks at right-angles to the road would help to preserve and emphasise the road alignment within the wider landscape. It should be noted that the setting of the southwestern scheduled area is affected by the newly-completed residential development to the southwest and west of the proposed development site.

Subject to advice from the appropriate Planning Archaeologist a programme of trial-trenching is recommended (outside the Scheduled Areas) to further define the archaeological potential of the proposed development area.

The trial-trenching should:

- Assess the degree of survival of Ryknild Street.
- Locate any roadside ditches, and test the potential of the road to be associated with contemporary features, notably the possible look out tower, or any evidence of settlement.
- Attempt to locate the mapped windmill, and provide details of its layout and date.

- Test the anomalies identified by geophysical survey (Stratascan 2003). In particular in geophysical survey area 2 where the resistivity and magnetometry anomalies were recorded as following different alignments.

Before trial-trenching commences the extent of the Scheduled Areas should be agreed on the ground with a representative of English Heritage.

## 10.0 Acknowledgements

This report was researched and written by Emma Hancox. Alex Jones managed the project and edited the report. The plates and illustrations were produced by John Halsted and Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to the staff of Derbyshire County Records Office and the Derbyshire Local Studies Library.

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## 11.2 Cartographic sources

1768 Enclosure Map of Littleover

1850 Tithe Map of Littleover

Circa 1880 First Edition Ordnance Survey

1905 Second Edition Ordnance Survey

1965 Local map of Littleover

Modern British Geological Survey 1:10000, Sheet SK33SW

1998 Ordnance Survey

1998 Map of the township of Littleover in the County of Derby by Kevin Archer

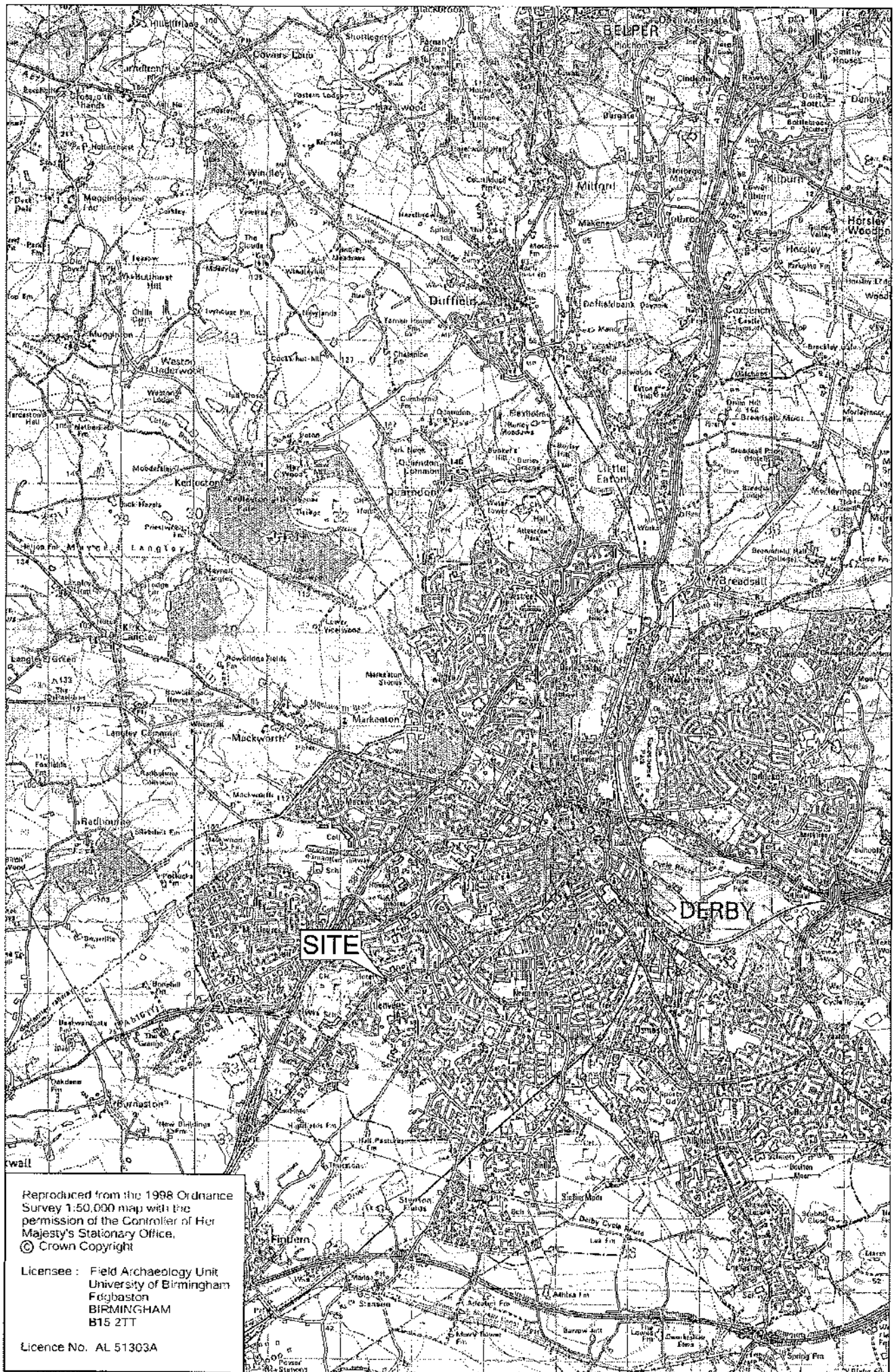


Fig.1

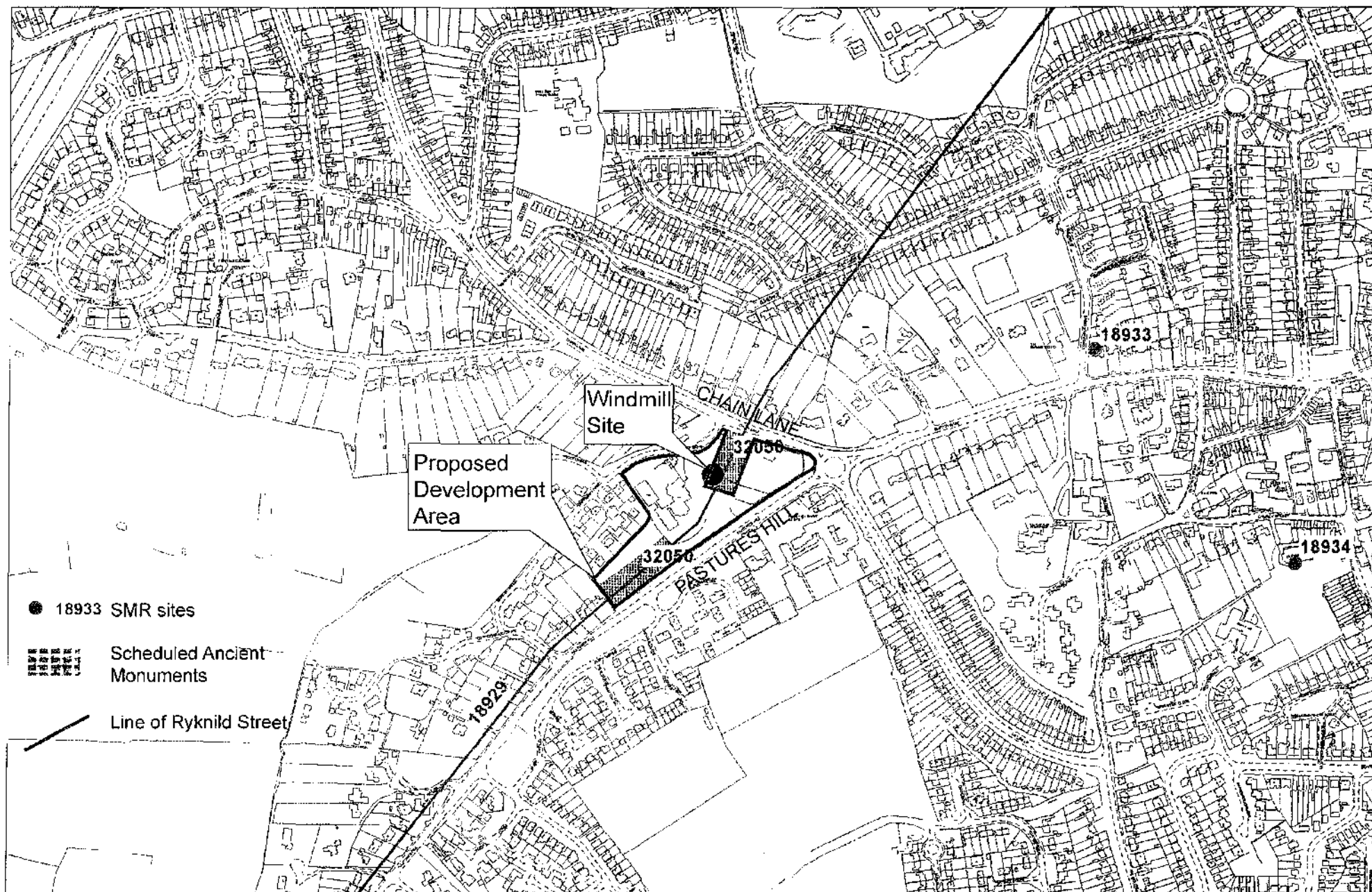


Fig.2



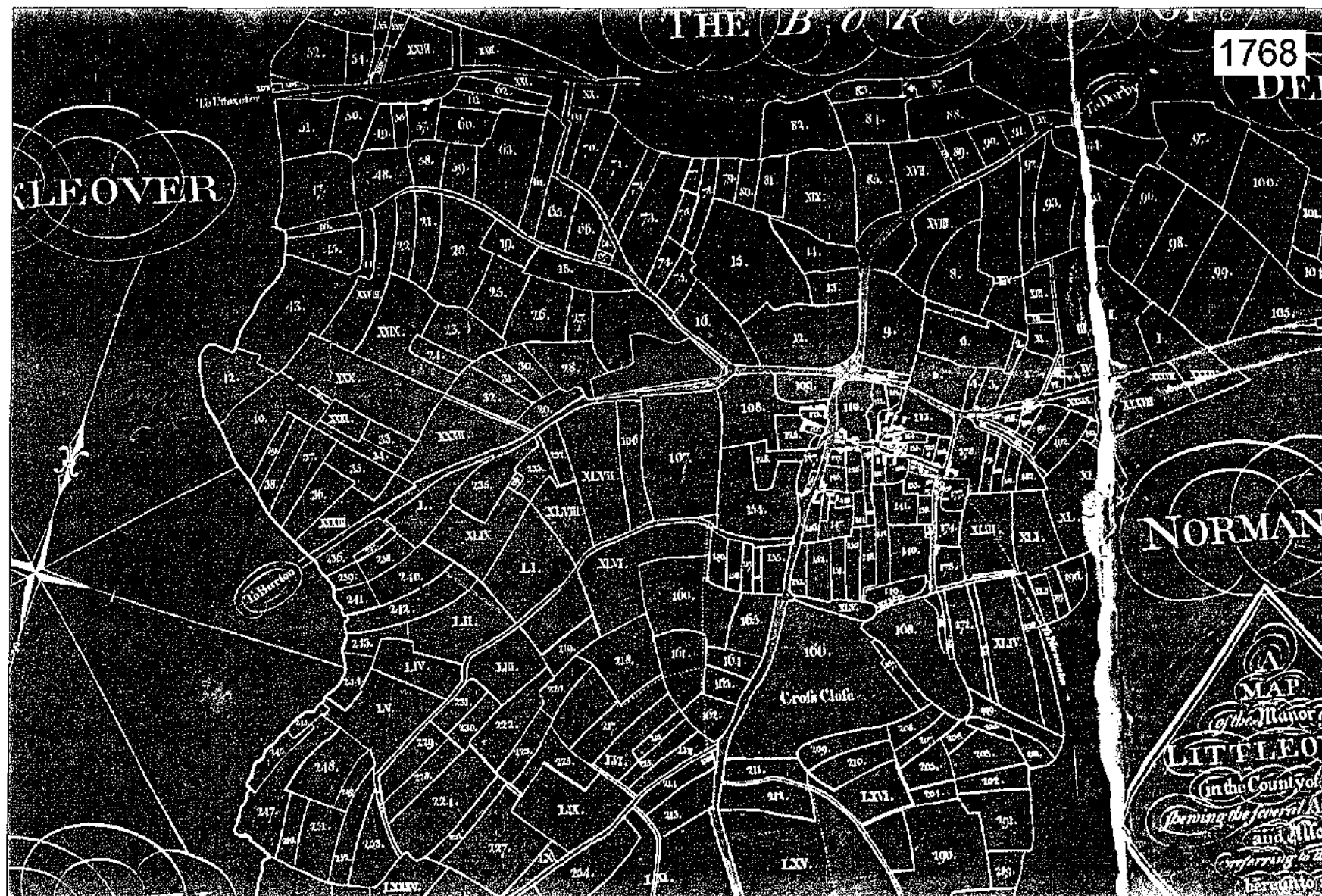


Fig.3

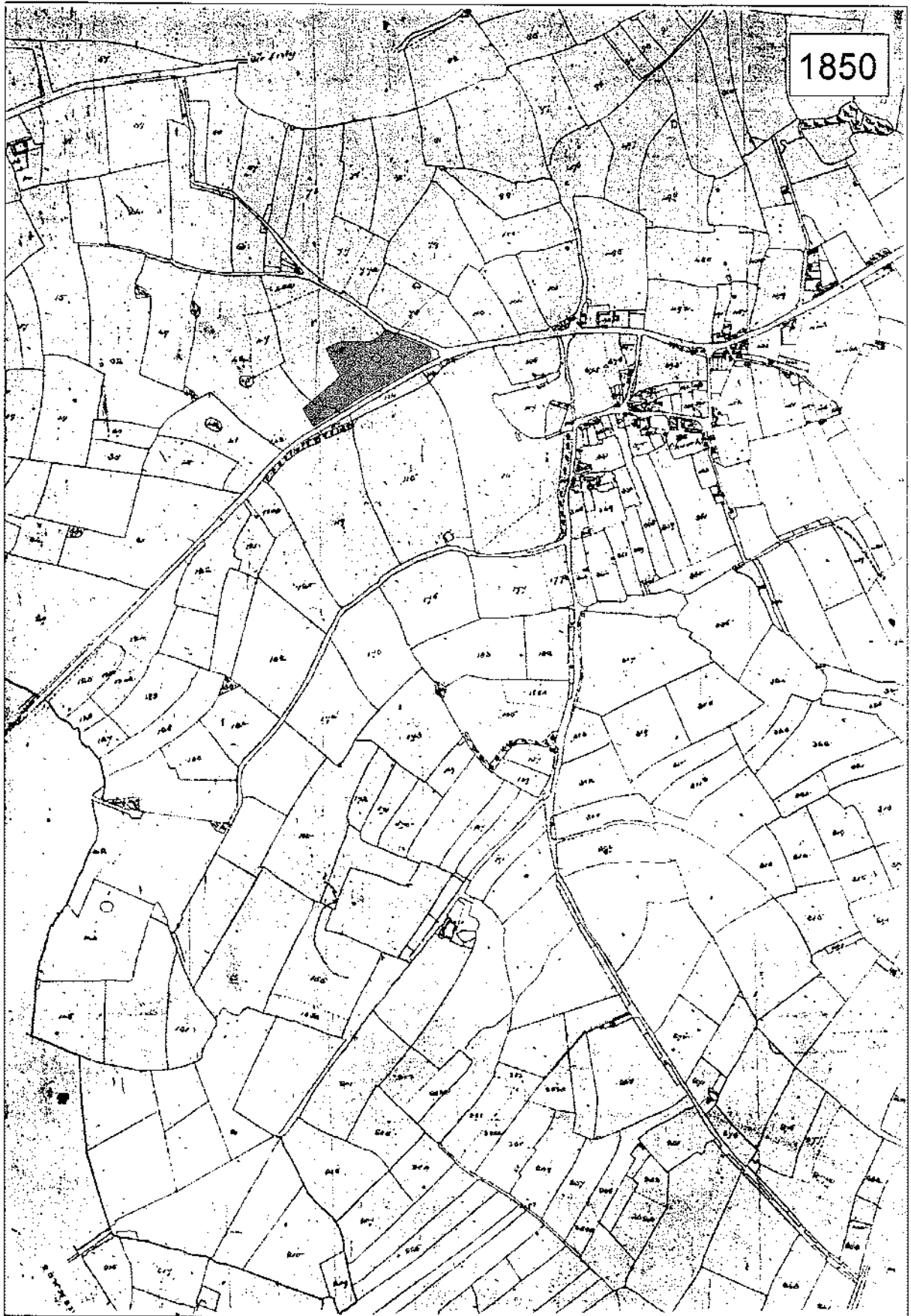


Fig.4



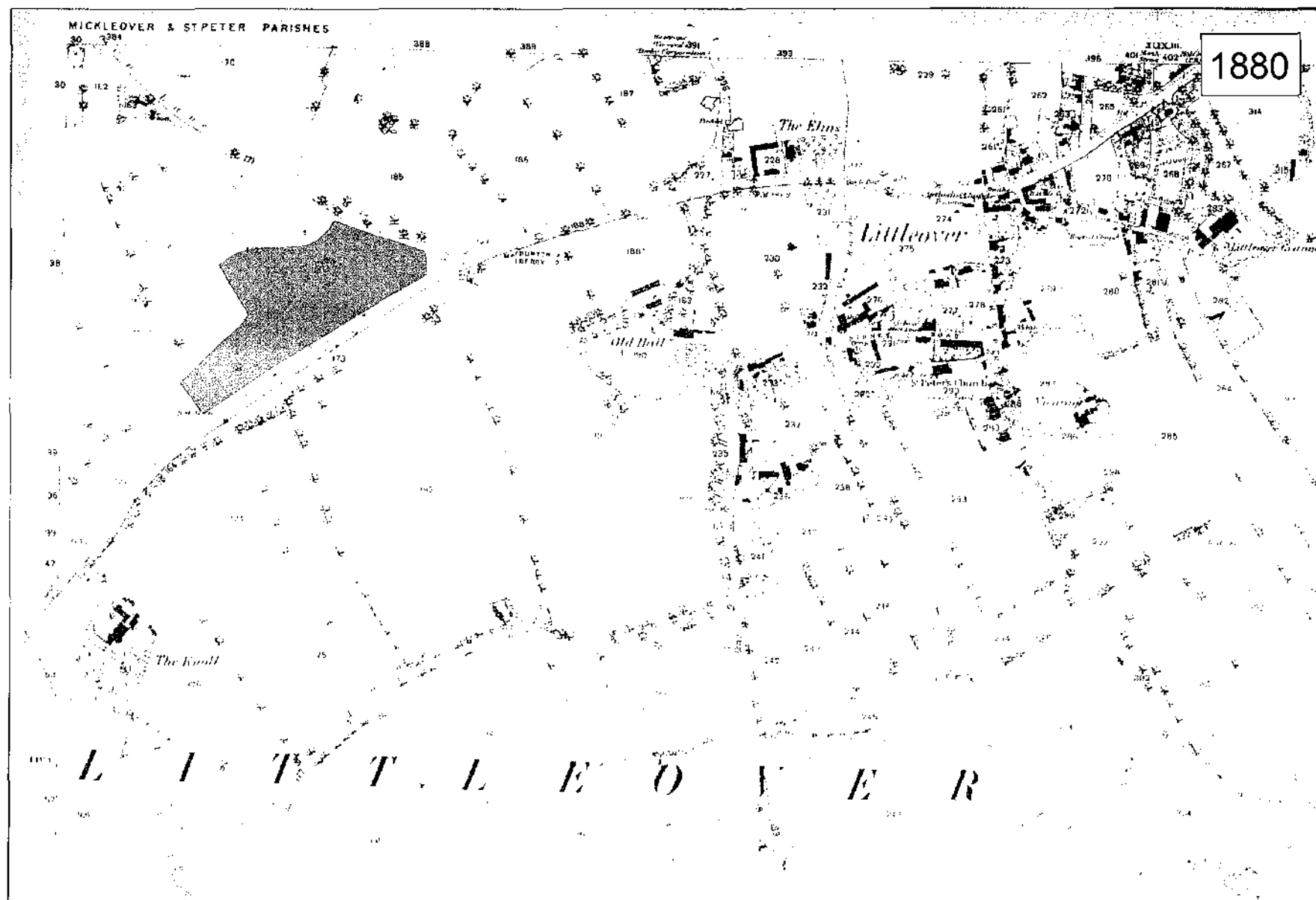


Fig.5







Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6