

**Londonderry Road, Oldbury,
Sandwell, Archaeological
Watching Brief.
2004**

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**Londonderry Road, Oldbury, Sandwell,
Archaeological Watching Brief 2004**

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For

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(Removed)

*Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief
at Land off Londonderry Road, Oldbury.*
(Removed)

Londonderry Road, Oldbury, Sandwell: an Archaeological Watching Brief 2004

SUMMARY

The development of land adjacent to Londonderry Lane, Oldbury, Sandwell by K. C. Humpherson and Partners necessitated an archaeological watching brief, required by Sandwell MBC in order to fulfil PPG16 planning requirements. Woodbourne Homes undertook the development and commissioned K. C. Humpherson and Partners to carry out the groundworks which were monitored by Birmingham Archaeology in October 2004. The deposits exposed in the course of this work revealed that the majority of the site had been built up with a series of levelling layers in the 19th and 20th centuries by c.3.0m over the majority of the site. No evidence of earlier activity was present on this site. The dearth of archaeological deposits is consistent with the results of a rapid map regression undertaken prior to groundworks which provided no evidence for any previous settlement on the site.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief which took place during the development of land adjacent to Londonderry Lane, Oldbury (Fig.1; NGR SP007877). As a condition of the planning permission for this residential development, described in a brief prepared Graham Eyre-Morgan, Borough Archaeologist for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, all associated groundworks were monitored. The work took place from October to November 2004 and followed guidelines laid down in the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (2001) and observed a methodology described in a Written Scheme of Investigation, prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (2004). It was also conducted within parameters defined by P.P.G.16 *Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990).

2.0 SITE LOCATION

The development site is located near to the junction of Queens Road, Thimblemill Road, and Londonderry Lane adjacent to the Queens Head Inn (Fig.2). The site occupies an area of higher ground which steps down to the surrounding playing fields along its northern and eastern boundaries. Prior to this project the site was undeveloped and appears to have been so throughout the last century.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It has been suggested that the site may have been located adjacent to a potentially ancient roadway, and therefore that a watching brief during groundworks may provide archaeological evidence for the development of this area during the medieval period (Eyre-Morgan 2004). However, no historical or archaeological evidence has

previously been documented for the area under development. A rapid map regression exercise based on sources held at the Local Studies Section of Smethwick Library was undertaken in consultation with the Sandwell Sites and Monuments Record.

The earliest map available for the site dated to 1842 and suggested that the Queen's Head Inn was in existence as a structure and the study area was not occupied (Fig.3). The 1891 map (Fig.4), indicated that building had taken place in the wider area to some extent, with a low density situated along the route ways. At this date the study area, however, along with the majority of the Londonderry locality, remained as open fields. The development of a clay pit with associated kilns to the east of the site was one exception to this pattern (Fig. 4).

It was evident from the cartographic sources that the study area remained undeveloped at least from the time of the earliest source of 1842 until the current groundworks began. Around the turn of the 20th Century (1891, 1904, and 1919; Figs.4-6), the majority of the study area consisted of small fields or orchards, possibly associated with the Queen's Head Inn, which was located to the immediate west of the site.

Londonderry Road was straightened sometime between 1919 and 1936 (Figs. 6&7). This development appears to have been associated with the creation of adjacent playing fields and the subsequent urban development of the surrounding area. Prior to 1936 therefore, the current development area lay further to the north of the course of Londonderry Road than it does at present. A group of buildings visible on the 1891 map, adjacent to the southern line of the road, also appear to have been removed by 1936. The redevelopment of the Queen's Head Inn was also probably associated with these changes, and by 1936 the building was illustrated as a large single structure fronting onto the corner of Londonderry Road and Queen's Road (Fig.7). This structure appears to have replaced the earlier Queen's Head Inn, which consisted of a series of smaller buildings ranged round a courtyard, fronting onto Queen's Road. By 1938 it would appear that the study area had acquired the boundaries we see today, associated with the layout of the playing fields which bound the site to the north and east (Fig.8). No changes in the limits or character of the study area are apparent in the later cartographic evidence between 1956 and 1958 (Figs. 9&10).

4.0 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The aims of this archaeological watching brief as stated in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2004), were as follows:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area and to preserve by record any archaeological remains that are encountered.
- To determine the nature, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To provide further information on the origins and development of Oldbury from the medieval period to the present day.

- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation, subject to any confidentiality restrictions.
- To identify all previous unrecorded sites in order to update the SMR.
- To provide sufficient information to enable any subsequent archaeological interventions to be conducted within clearly defined research aims.

The methodology utilised in order to achieve the aims specified in the Written Scheme of Investigation ensured that the contractor's groundworks, including excavation by machine of all foundation and service trenches associated with the development, was continuously monitored and recorded (Plate.1).

5.0 RESULTS

The observation of groundworks demonstrated that the deposits present on this site comprised a series of built-up levelling layers which extended to a maximum depth of 3.0m below the present ground surface (Plates 2 - 3). Over the majority of the site these deposits were consistently around 3m in depth. However, toward the western part of the site the deposits were noticeably shallower, at c.1.0m in depth. This build-up comprised alternating layers of mixed sand, gravel and clay, redeposited natural subsoil and layers of dark grey silt. The earliest of these layers (1013) contained waterlogged organic material. No archaeological features were observed in association with this layer.

6.0 DISCUSSION

The stratigraphic layers identified during the course of this watching brief demonstrate that the ground level of the site has been considerably modified since the 19th Century. It is apparent that the ground level sloped sharply down to the east, away from the Queen's Head Inn. Whether this was a natural slope or the result of earlier human intervention could not be determined within the scope of this watching brief. It is probable that the levelling of the site occurred when the area was developed between 1936 and 1938. At this point the layout of the playing fields to the north and east of the site became formalised and the current site boundaries were established. Between 1919 and 1936 it appears that Londonderry Road was moved and straightened, with the result that the present road frontage of the site lies to the north of the original course of the road as recorded in the 19th Century. This suggests that archaeological remains associated with the earlier alignment of the road would probably be located outside the boundaries of the current site.

No evidence for the early development of The Queen's Head Inn was exposed within the boundaries of the site. The cartographic evidence suggests that the inn and associated buildings did not extend into the current area of development. The watching brief provided no evidence to contradict this interpretation. However, there remains the possibility that the deep deposits of overburden may conceal discrete archaeological features predating the 19th Century, although no such features were observed during the current groundworks.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The watching brief was commissioned by Woodbourne Homes. Thanks are due to all at K. C. Humpherson and Partners for their support and co-operation and to Ike Ahmed of Combi Construction for all on-site liaison. Mary Duncan undertook the project and wrote this report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds and Bryony Ryder. John Halsted edited the report and Mark Hewson managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology. Graham Eyre-Morgan monitored the project for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

8.0 REFERENCES

Birmingham Archaeology 2004, *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief at Londonderry Road, Oldbury.*

Department of the Environment (DoE), 1990 *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning.*

Eyre-Morgan, G. 2004, *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief at Land off Londonderry Road, Oldbury, West Midlands.*

Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999, *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, Institute of Field Archaeologists. Revised 2001.



Fig.1

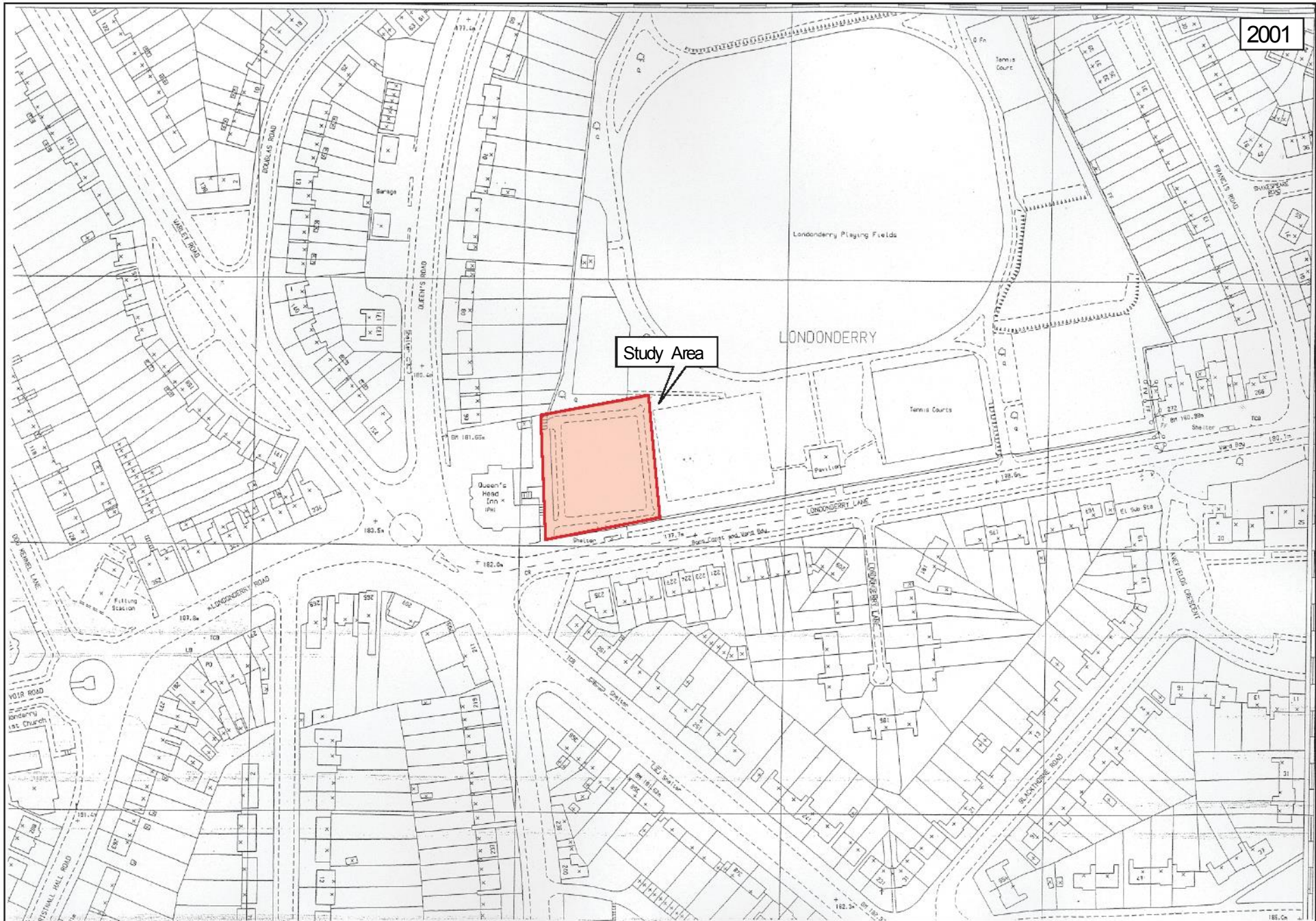


Fig2

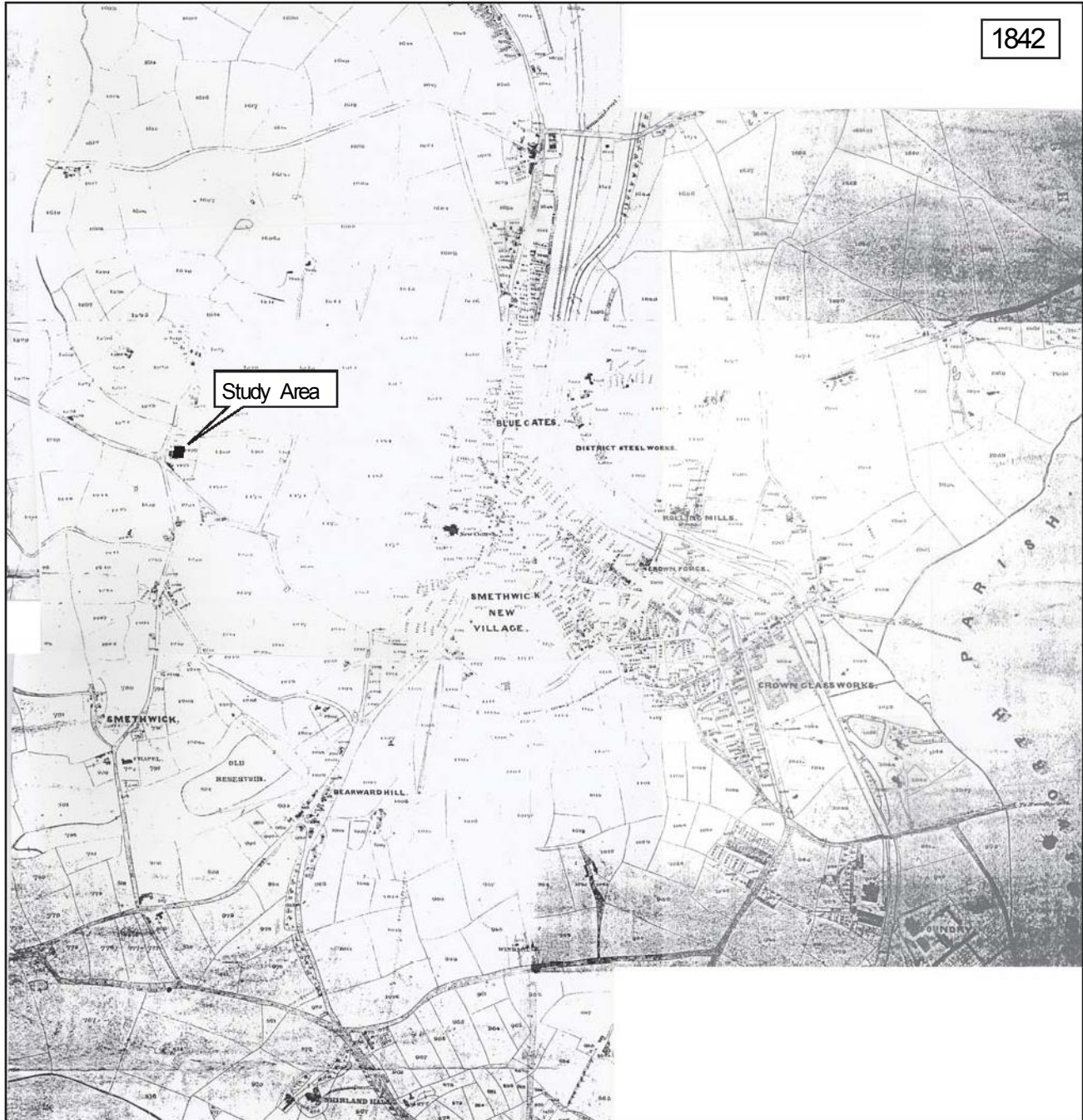


Fig.3

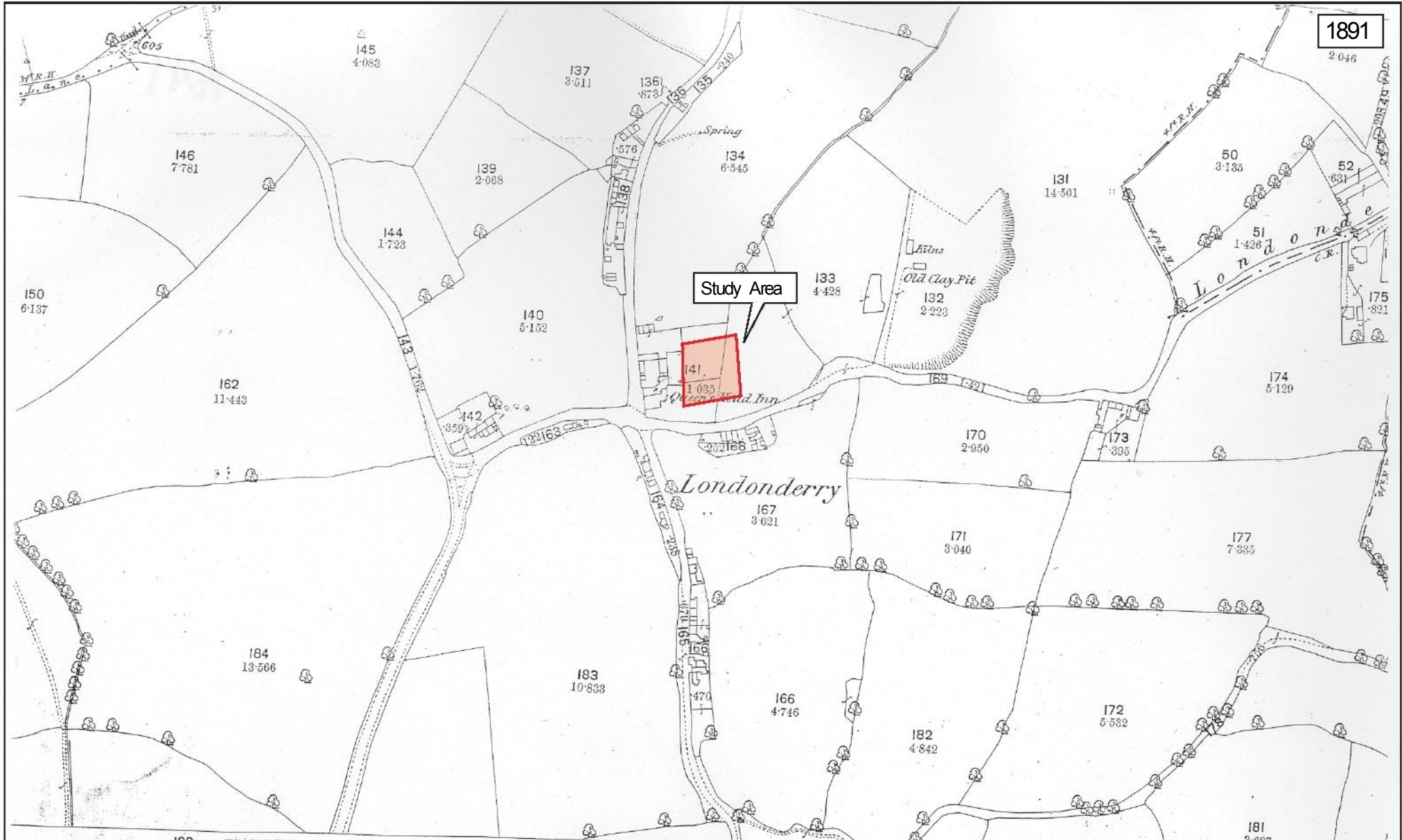


Fig.4



Fig5

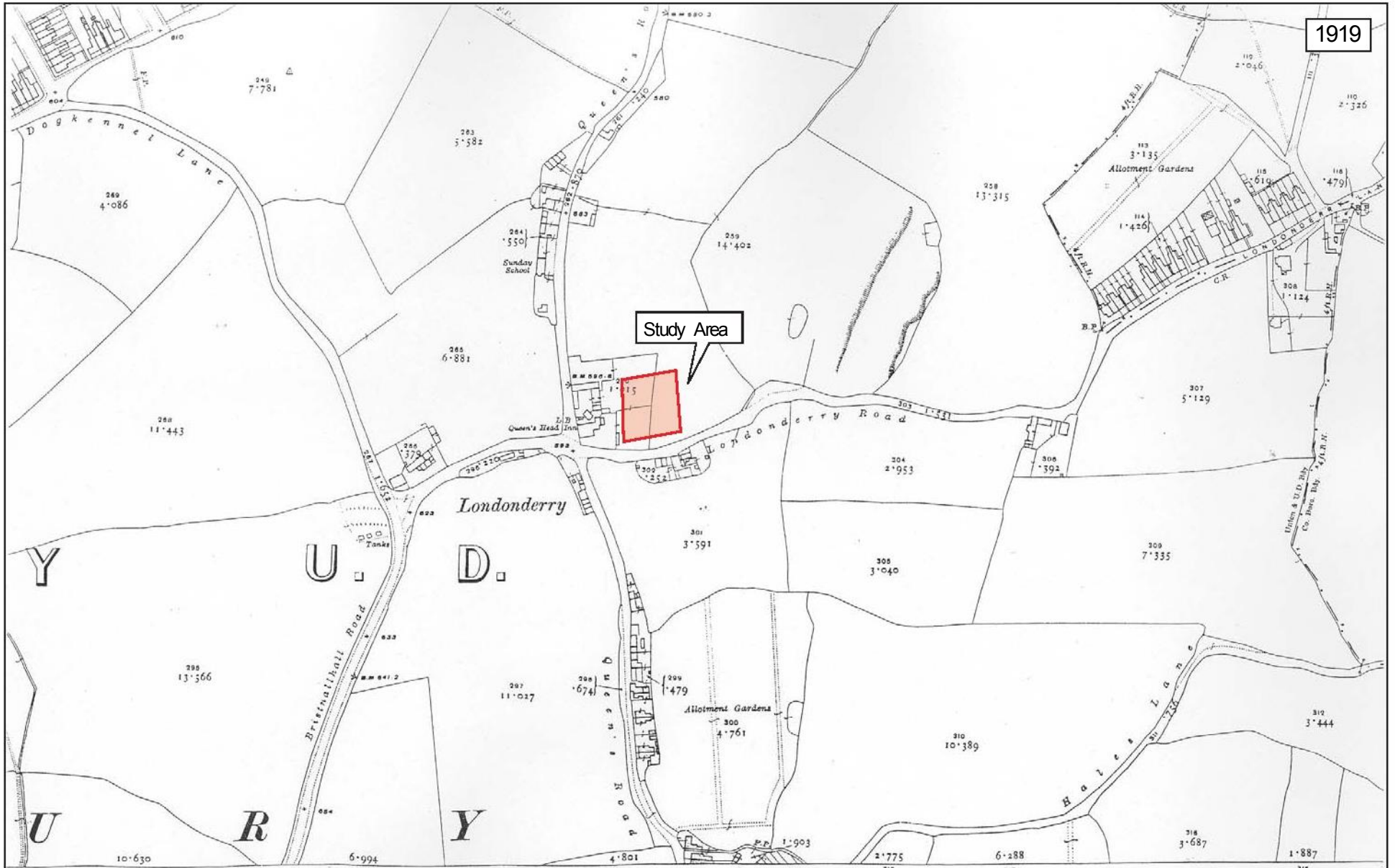


Fig6

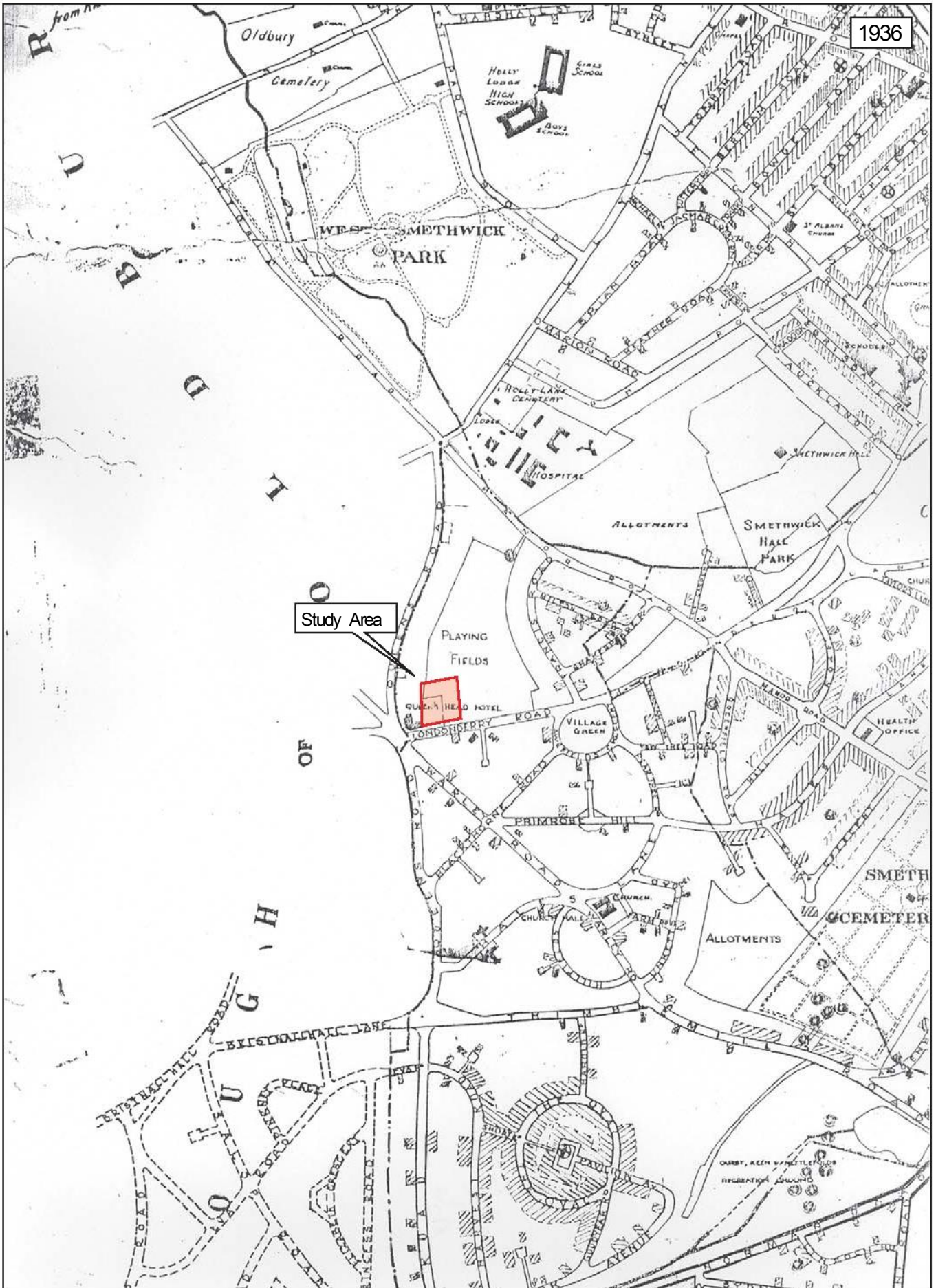


Fig.7

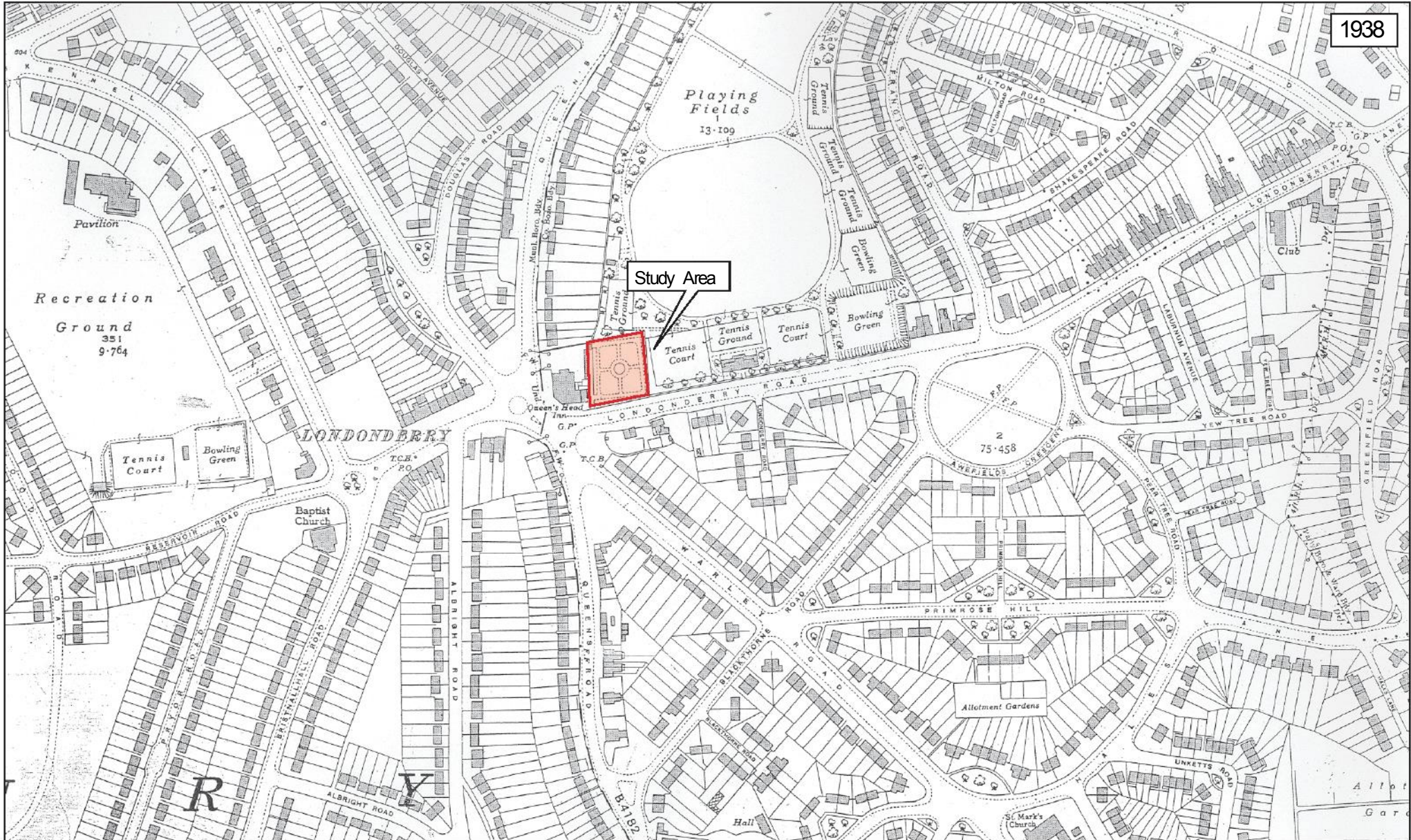


Fig.8

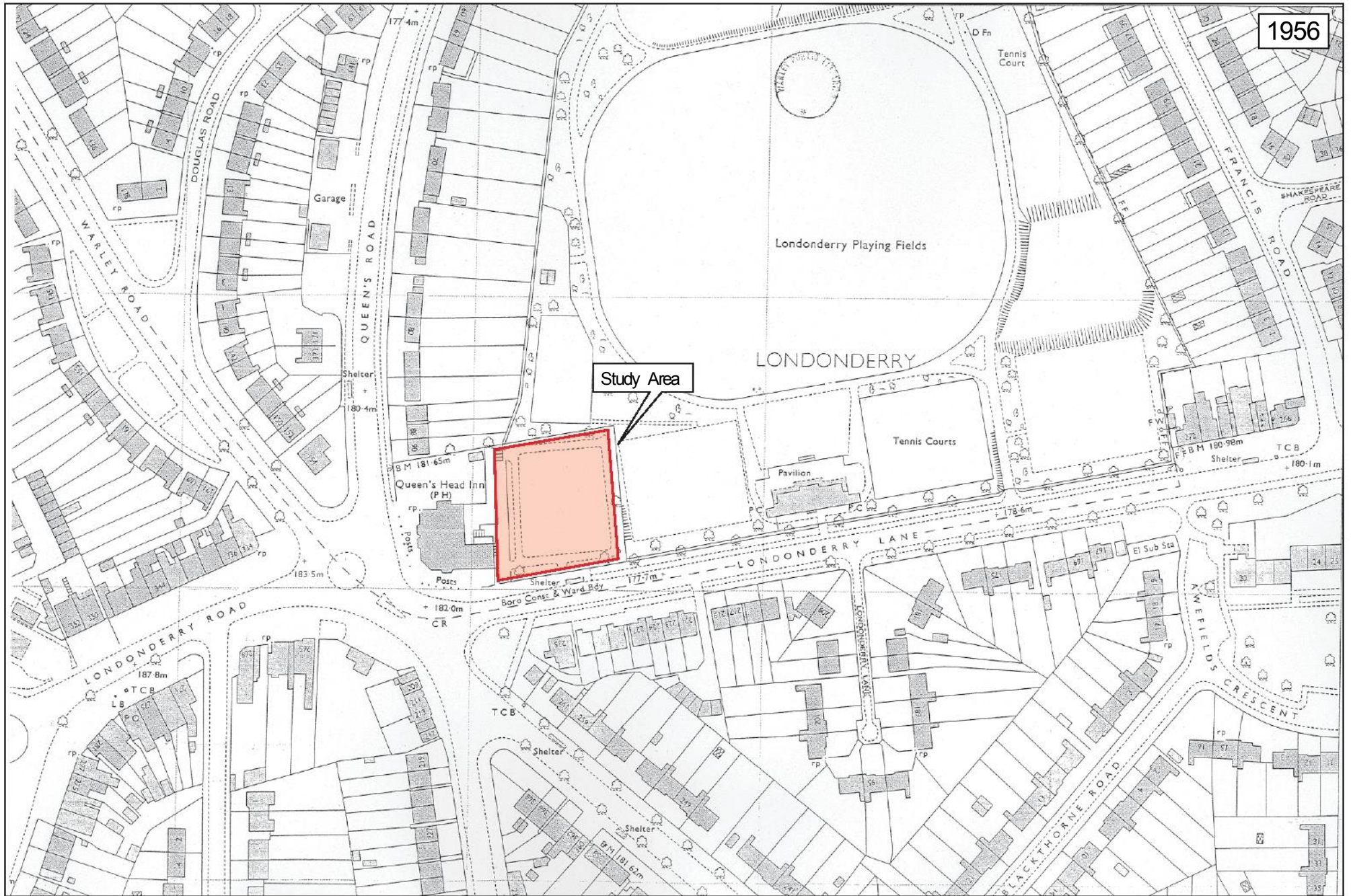


Fig.9

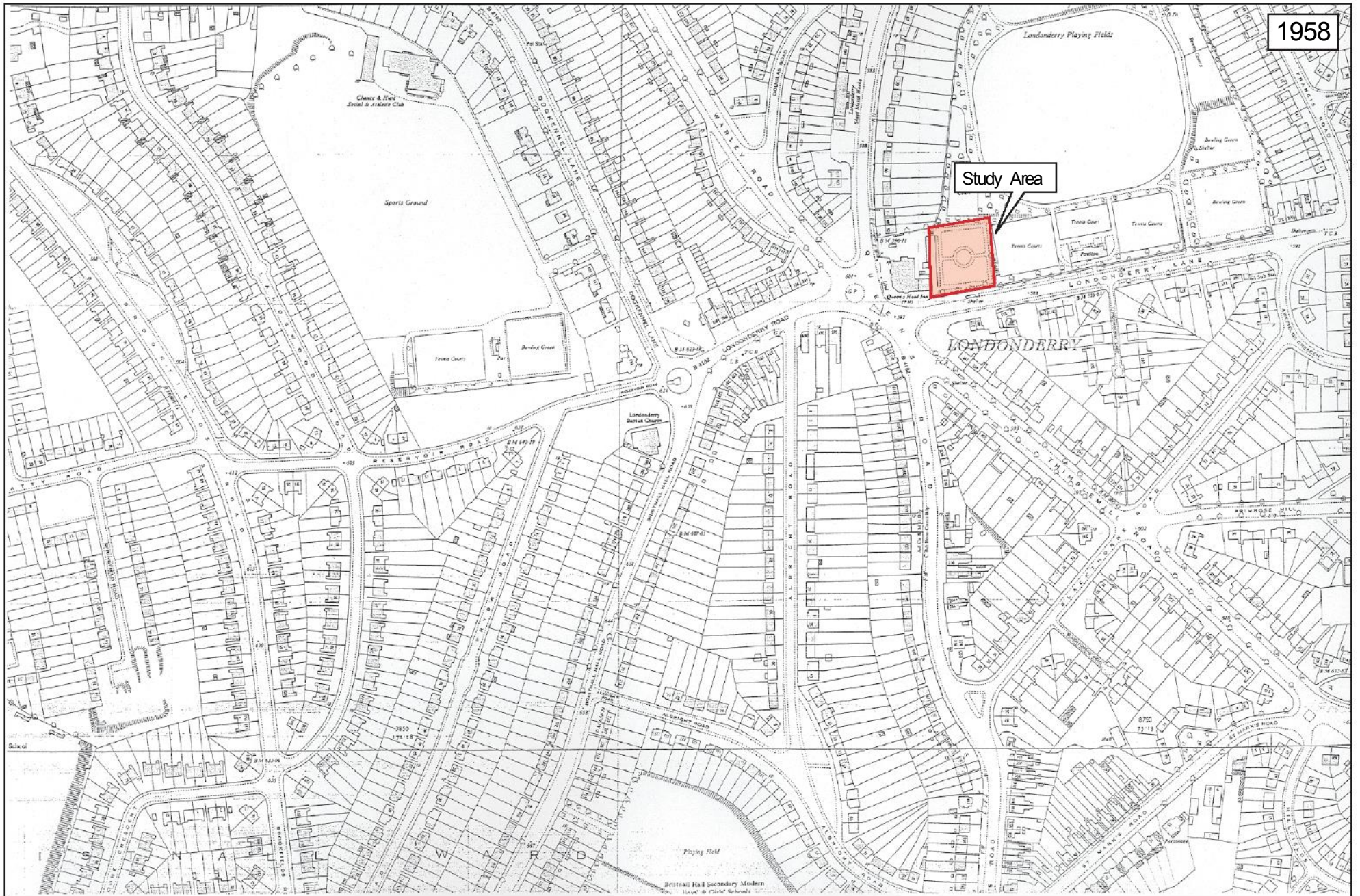


Fig.10



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

