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Tameside Park, Aldridge Road,
Perry Barr, Birmingham.

An Archaeological Desk-based
Assessment 2006

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**Tameside Park, Aldridge Road, Perry Barr, Birmingham.
An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment 2006**

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Tameside Park, Aldridge Road, Perry Barr, Birmingham

An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment 2006

1.0 SUMMARY

An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in January 2006 at Tameside Park, Aldridge Road, Perry Barr, Birmingham (NGR 40567, 27895) on behalf of Hinton Properties Ltd. The aim of the assessment was to identify the extent, survival and significance of any archaeological remains on the site. All available documentary, cartographic and published sources were examined as part of the assessment and a site visit was made in order to identify topographic features which may influence the presence of in situ archaeological deposits. The assessment highlighted the fact that the site is located close to the possible line of the Roman road Ickniel Street. The Roman road may have crossed the River Tame to the south of the site. The site may also contain alluvial and organic deposits which may be conducive to the preservation of potential archaeological remains and palaeo-environmental data, which could provide information about the past local environment.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Birmingham Archaeology in advance of the determination of planning permission (APP No. N/07008/OS/OUT), for a proposed mixed use development at Tameside Park, Aldridge Road, Birmingham (Fig. 1; NGR 40567, 27895). The assessment has been undertaken on behalf of Hinton Properties Ltd following a requirement by Birmingham City Council Development Directorate (Birmingham City Council 2005) as a response to Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, *Archaeology and Planning* (DoE 1990) and in accordance with Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan. This desk-based assessment forms the first stage of an assessment of the impact of the proposed development. The site has the potential to contain archaeological deposits which may be affected by the proposed development (Birmingham City Council 2005). An archaeological desk-based assessment was therefore required in order to summarize the known archaeological record for the site and its immediate locality, and to assess the potential for the presence of *in situ* archaeological deposits. The significance of any potential archaeological deposits has also been assessed through an examination of their regional context. This desk-based assessment conforms to guidelines set out in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001).

2.1 Location of proposed development

The proposed development, hereinafter referred to as 'the site' is located at Aldridge Road, Perry Barr, north Birmingham, and contains areas which appear to have remained undisturbed within a generally built up urban area. The site lies to the east of Aldridge Road and immediately south of the M6 motorway and between the motorway and the River Tame (Fig. 2; NGR 40567, 27895).

2.2 Topography and Geology

The site lies within the valley of the River Tame at c.96m above OD and is located immediately to the north of the river, which is now canalised. The geology of the site is characterised by alluvial deposits associated with the river, and lies upon an island of boulder clay surrounded by sands and gravels (BGS map sheet 168). Geotechnical

bore holes and test pits within the site have recorded the presence of alluvium, black organic clay and peats in the southern area between c.92m above OD and 95m above OD, overlying fluvioglacial gravels. It is notable that peat deposits have also been recorded on another site in the vicinity (Birmingham City Council 2005). The alluvial layers are considered to vary in depth from between 0.8m and 1.4m (Crossfield Consulting 2002, 4), with the greatest depth of alluvium in the southeast corner of the site. No alluvial deposits were recorded in the northern area of the site, currently playing fields. Here topsoil and recent deposits overlay fluvioglacial gravels.

2.3 Objectives

The objective of this desk-based assessment is to assess the potential for the survival of *in situ* archaeological deposits within the site, and the significance of any such remains in a local, regional or national context, as appropriate. The results of the assessment will inform a subsequent archaeological field evaluation of the site (Birmingham City Council 2005). This assessment therefore will constitute the first part of a two-stage strategy to assess the impact of the proposed development, which will serve as a basis for any subsequent requirements for the preservation *in situ* or further excavation of archaeological deposits (*ibid.*). The objective of this desk-based assessment is to assess the potential for the survival, extent and significance of any archaeological remains in a local, regional and national context, as appropriate. The results of the assessment, together with subsequent field evaluation will provide information which will inform any possible mitigation strategies.

2.4 Site Inspection

The site lies directly to the north of the River Tame and is bounded to the west by Aldridge Road, an electricity sub-station and a number of residential properties and to the north by the M6 motorway and embankment. The east the site is bounded by a hedgeline.

The site is divided approximately in two by an east-west boundary, part of which is marked by a line of trees. The southern part of the site is substantially higher than the northern part (Plate 1) by c.4m. It has been noted in the geotechnical report (*ibid.* 4) that the area is comprised of “made ground” of between 2.7m and 5m with “varying amounts of ash, brick and clinker mixed with natural sands and gravels” (*ibid.*). The northern, lower part of the site is an area of former playing fields, and is grassed at present (Plate 1), with waste ground towards the north-west corner of the site.

Substantial quantities of brick rubble are currently being stored in the south-east area of the site (Plate 2), which appear to derive from the demolition of a former Ford garage adjacent to the Aldridge Road. The remaining southern area is comprised of a levelled expanse of brick rubble (Plate 3). The River Tame to the south is within a canalised concrete channel (Plate 4), at a depth several metres lower than the land to the south.

2.5 Method

This desk-based assessment is based upon sources contained in the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, published documents relating to excavations and historical research and available cartographic sources. An area of c. 500m diameter around the site at Tameside Park was examined for sites and monuments, whilst relevant

archaeological sites within both the local area and the region were also examined through published sources where appropriate.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This section describes the archaeological and historical evidence from the locality of the site at Tameside Park in a chronological sequence. The SMR record numbers are illustrated in Fig. 3.

3.1 Prehistoric

No prehistoric sites, artefacts or archaeological deposits have been recorded within the vicinity of the site. However the close proximity of the site to the River Tame may suggest there is potential for the presence of prehistoric archaeological remains, particularly where alluvial deposits may have sealed earlier horizons. Streams and wetland contexts in the midlands are frequently associated with burnt mounds (Hodder 1990), which date largely to the Middle Bronze Age (c.1500 BC) and are characterised by concentrations of burnt stone contiguous with water. Examples of such sites have been recorded in Sutton Park to the north (Hodder 2004, 30-33), and burnt mounds close to the River Tame have also been suggested at Berwood near Erdington (*ibid.* 30). The function of these sites is, however, ambiguous and they have been interpreted largely as cooking sites, though a number of alternative interpretations such as their use as sweat lodges, have also been put forward (e.g. Barfield and Hodder 1987).

Riverine contexts are frequently associated with the intentional deposition of Bronze Age metalwork (Bradley 1998) and examples have been recorded of concentrations of metalwork in the Midlands, e.g. at Shardlow Quarry in southern Derbyshire (Martin 2005). Two Bronze Age logboats were also recorded at this site within a silted former river channel (*ibid.*).

Therefore, despite apparent lack of prehistoric archaeological sites, there is some potential for the survival of archaeological remains of this period, within alluvial deposits associated with the river.

3.2 Roman

The site lies in the vicinity of the suggested line of the Roman road Icknield Street or Ryknild Street (SMR 20266; Margary 1967, Road 18b, 284-286) where it crosses the River Tame (e.g. Fig. 4 ; Walker 1936). The line of the road has been recorded between Bourton-on-the-Water in Gloucestershire, north through the Roman fort and major nucleated settlement at Alcester (Booth 1996,30-35) and towards the Roman town at Wall in Staffordshire (Fig. 5). In south Birmingham the line of the road has been recorded through its preservation as field boundaries and within the current road network (Margary 1967, 284-285). A significant Romano-British enclosed farmstead has also been recorded adjacent to the road at Longdales Road, Kings Norton (Williams 2003a; 2003b) in south Birmingham. A Roman fort has also been recorded and subject to recent excavations at Metchley, Edgbaston (Jones 2001 and 2005), again in the vicinity of the line of Icknield Street.

Although the route of Icknield Street through Birmingham has largely been masked by urban development, an alignment between Stirchley towards Kingsstanding has been discerned. The road is suggested to have taken a path along the line of Great

Hampton Row, Wheeler Street and part of Wellhead Lane (Margary 1967, 285). At Perry Barr, 1.5 km south of the proposed development and c.1km to the west of the suggested line of Icknield Street, a Roman Pottery Kiln has been recorded (Hughes 1959) where “several hundredweights” of Roman pottery was found. The kiln has been dated to the late 1st to 2nd centuries AD (Hodder 2002, 3) A further Roman kiln site has been recorded at Sutton Coldfield to the north (*ibid.* 4).

Significantly the road is considered to cross the River Tame at Oldford Farm, Holford, “a little way to the east of the present Bridge” (Margary 1967, 285). To the north the road line of the Kingstanding Road echoes the line of Icknield Street (*ibid.*). The road is particularly well preserved to the north, within Sutton Park, where it has been recorded as having an earth core with a surfacing of coarse gravel and pebbles (*ibid.* 286) and a maximum width of 18m between flanking ditches (Hodder 2004, 61). Although the proposed development site lies within an area where the Roman Road is suggested to have crossed the Tame, the precise crossing point is unknown.

Romano-British activity in the vicinity of the site is also suggested by a number of Roman coin finds. To the south of site a Roman coin (SMR 02910) was found in the back garden of 184 Aldridge Road in 1955. The coin is datable to the later 2nd century AD (Marcus Aurelius 161-180 AD). To the west of the River Tame a further coin was recorded (SMR 03321; Mould 1993, 4). Further coins (SMR 02911) have been recorded to the south of the site, datable to the 4th century AD (Constantine period) and are described as having been found ‘in the west bank of the Roman encampment that Chattock discovered at Oldfort, at Perypont on the Icknield St.’ (SMR). This camp was suggested to have existed south of the River Tame, to the east of Aldridge Road by Chattock in 1884 (M. Hodder Pers. Comm.). A plan of the site’s defences was subsequently published (Benton 1906) involving a ‘clever arrangement of weirs’ (*ibid.* 53) and a re-channelling of the Tame. It is likely, however, that such interpretation relates to later medieval or post-medieval mill races associated with Holford Mill, rather than any Roman defences. The presence of a Roman fort here appears to have been brought into question as early as 1936 and the lack of Roman material recovered during excavations in the area was highlighted (Walker 1936, 43-44).

A watching brief (SMR 20143) on land to the south of the Tame to the east of Aldridge Road and north of Wellhead Lane did not record the presence of a Roman Road or associated activity (Jones 1993; Mould 1993), probably due to the fact that the land had been intensively truncated by 20th century industrial activity.

A geophysical survey in the area adjacent to the boundary likely to represent the line of Icknield Street, within the area of the current site, did not provide any positive results for the presence of the road (Leather 1997). Similarly, geophysical survey on waste ground immediately south of the river did not record the presence of a former road (*ibid.*).

3.3 Medieval

To the south of the site, a mill race is recorded running to Holford Mill, having been diverted from the Tame to the north. Documentary sources record that permission was granted to construct a fulling mill, with a leat and sluices, probably on this site in 1358 (SMR 03209). Oldford Farm, as it appears on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey

Map, is also described as Oldford Mill on Greenwold's Map of 1822, which could suggest that Oldford Farm was also a mill. The presence of mill races and mill sites, such as Mill Farm (also shown on the 1st edition OS map), to the south of Perry Hall and within the loop of the Tame, demonstrates that mills were a common feature in this area. No medieval mills have been excavated within Birmingham (Hodder 2004, 124), though well preserved examples have been recently recorded in the West Midlands, at Stafford for example (Hislop *et al.* 2003).

The stream channels as shown from 1840 through to the 1930s (see section 3.5 below), north of the River Tame within the southern part of the site may represent earlier courses of the River Tame. They may equally relate to diverted water courses associated with a mill on, or close to, the site. However there is no documentary or other evidence to substantiate this.

3.4 Post-medieval

The earliest documented activity post-dating the medieval period is represented again by Holford Mill, to the south of the site. A 'Hammer Mill' is recorded here in 1533 and again in 1591, and a 'blade mill' in 1654 (SMR 03209). The mill appears to have continued in use as a blade grinding mill into the 19th century.

The Perry Bridge to the south west of the site is considered to have been constructed c.1709, to replace a 'wood horse bridge' (SMR 01153), suggesting that this crossing point has earlier origins at least in the post-medieval period. The settlement name of Perry Pont (visible on the OS maps, see section 3.5 below) demonstrates a relationship between the bridge and the settlement ('Pont' referring to bridge). A windmill present to the east of Aldridge Road (SMR 20111) is also considered to date to the 18th or early 19th century. Possible industrial features dating to the 18th century, in the form of cobbled surfaces with iron slag and a brick-lined well, have also been recorded at Holford Drive (SMR 20702).

Buildings can be seen to have been constructed in the early 19th century alongside Church Road (SMR 01195) together with St. John the Evangelist's Church built in 1831 (SMR 02369/02370) and the Lodges of Witton cemetery built c.1850 (SMR 03615). The Tame Valley Canal appears to have been constructed in the 19th century (below), representing a significant addition to the local landscape. An associated boat yard was occupied in the vicinity of Perry Barr Wharf, and was in use as a boatyard until 1937 (SMR 20393). A large reservoir (SMR 20390), connecting to the Tame via a stream channel, and belonging to the Birmingham Corporation, represents further development in the area in the 19th century. A pumping station (SMR 20408) belonging to Birmingham Corporation Water Works was also constructed to the east of the east of the site in the late 19th century. Further industrial development in the area is represented by the establishment of the Wellhead brewery (SMR 20415) in the early 20th century.

In addition to the general expansion of residential properties in the area from the 1930s, the M6 motorway represents the single most significant feature to be constructed in the twentieth century. The motorway defines the northern perimeter of the site, the road itself being elevated and embanked.

Additional information on the development of the area in the post-medieval period can be discerned from the cartographic evidence described below

3.5 Cartographic sources

The earliest known maps covering the area serve to demonstrate the presence of settlement in the vicinity of the site from the sixteenth century. Saxton's 1577 map shows 'Peryhall' and John Speed's (1610) map of Warwickshire records 'Perry barr' and 'Perry hall'.

Further maps have also been examined which provide more specific information regarding the historical background of the site. These maps are described below and provide an illustration of the historical development of the area of the site and its immediate surrounds.

1686 Plott's Natural History of Staffordshire (Fig.6)

The 1686 map of the area illustrated in Plott's Natural History of Staffordshire records 'Ikenild Street' running through 'Pury Barr' and crossing the Tame to the east of a bridge and running southwards through Hockley and towards Edgbaston. The location of 'Pury Hall' is also recorded.

1775 Yates map of the county of Stafford (Fig. 7)

Yates' Map of 1775 records "Ikenild Street Roman Road" along the line of the current Kingstanding Road (B4138) but does not describe its position in the vicinity of the site. As with the earlier maps for the area this map shows the position of Perry Hall to the west of the site and also Perry Mill to the south-west. The position of Aldridge Road is shown, together with what later became known as Church Road joining it from the west. The road now known as Aldridge Road appears to have a number of properties alongside it on both its western and eastern sides. Perry Bridge, in the same location as the present structure, is also shown. Parallel to Aldridge road to the west is a stream with a number of what appear to be ponds along its length. These serve to demonstrate that there is evidence of the active management of the water courses associated with the River Tame. No further detail is shown, however, for the specific area of the site.

1794 Botham Survey of Estates, Perry Barr (Fig. 8)

This map provides greater detail for the specific area of the site than earlier documents. The basic road network of Aldridge Road, Church Road and College Road, can be seen to have been established by this date, with Aldridge Road crossing the Tame at Perry Bridge. The area of the site is largely made up of enclosed fields. Two enclosed settlements or farmhouses are present on the map on the eastern side of Aldridge Road. The first settlement is on the east of Aldridge Road, opposite its junction with Church Road. These buildings are. These buildings are likely to be within the area of the present buildings or the electricity sub-station adjacent to the site. The second settlement is located to the east of Aldridge Road at its junction with College Road. It is likely, however, that the location of this settlement is in the area of the M6 motorway and its associated embankment. Although it is possible, perhaps, that its enclosure may extend into the site. The map does not extend further east than the suggested line of Icknield Street, which appears, therefore, to form a boundary to the estate mapped here.

Further properties, associated enclosures and field boundaries can be seen to the west of Aldridge Road, together with a number of ponds which appear to be fed by a tributary of the Tame. Further west Perry Hall is also illustrated as a moated site linked to the Tame.

1840 Perry Barr Tithing Map with detail from the apportionment dated 1843b (Fig. 9)

The map of 1840 shows a comparable group of field boundaries, properties and associated enclosures to that illustrated by the 1794 Botham Survey. The boundary to the east of the mapped area may reflect the line of Icknield Street. The associated apportionment provides details of land owners, occupiers and land use. The area of the site is a combination of pasture and meadow at this date. The property to the north-west of the site is described as a house, blacksmiths, wood, shed and gardens, occupied by Elizabeth Turner. The property located to the east of Aldridge Road, opposite the junction with Church Road, is described as a house and stable occupied by Mary Batt. Again, these properties are likely to be outside the site boundary. The fields to the east of these properties at this date were occupied/ used by the two above named persons, together with Ann Stanley who farmed fields in the south and east of the area.

What could be a small tributary of the Tame is mapped in the southern part of the site, which appears to terminate abruptly at its western extent (rather than join the river). The fact that the channel appears to divert sharply southwards to join the river, and that also at this point it appears to be linked to the original river course by a further channel running to the east (as shown on the 1st edition OS map, 1889), may suggest that this is an artificial channel.

It is possible, therefore in the light of the number of mills, mill races and pools utilising the river as a water source in this area, that this stream channel may also have been linked to a pond or mill, though no such site is recorded in the cartographic record. It is perhaps possible, however, that such a site may exist, pre-dating the earliest detailed mapping of the late eighteenth century.

1889 Ordnance Survey 1st edition, Staffs (Fig. 10)

The boundary indicated on the 1840 map and the Botham Survey of estates also appears on the 1st edition OS map, and again may represent the former line of Icknield Street. The stream course described above can also be seen on this map, and its extent is shown running further to the west, though again it is not shown joining the Tame. The area of the site still appears to be largely represented by field boundaries, although their form has changed to a more regular shape since the map of 1840, and some boundaries have been removed. The buildings shown on the earlier map also appear to remain unchanged at this date. The line of Icknield Street is again marked as a boundary on the map, which was also represented on the ground by a field boundary. The most significant landscape feature to be recorded since the 1840 map, is the Tame Valley Canal to the north of the site and a Birmingham Corporation reservoir to the north-west. A Birmingham Corporation pumping station has also been constructed to the east of the site, adjacent to the canal.

1904-1905 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition, Staffs (Fig. 11)

This map shows little change since 1889, with an additional field boundary having been added in the area. A 'Pound' and 'Smithy' are recorded at the site of the

property to the north-west of the site, the latter suggesting a continuity of function since 1840. It is possible that one of the buildings here has been enlarged. The property to the south may have lost one associated structure, but nevertheless appears to occupy the same area of land. Two 'Post' annotations appear to represent post boxes along Aldridge Road. The eastern site boundary is marked as the 'Union & U.D. By', representing the Union and Urban District boundary, again along the line of Icknield Street.

1921 Ordnance Survey 3rd edition, Staffs (Fig. 12)

Little significant change is recorded by this map in the area of the site. Again, a Smithy is recorded in the north-west of the area, and the property to the south of this now appears to incorporate two buildings. To the east of this a further field enclosure and small associated building are recorded. The county borough boundary is also recorded to the east of the site, along the same line as the earlier boundaries.

1938 Ordnance Survey 4th edition, Staffs, (Fig. 13)

The area of the site is shown as fields and remains largely unchanged by 1938. A smithy, again, occupies the same location as shown on maps since 1840, whilst the property to the south is no longer present at this time. To the north-east of the smithy a row of houses has been constructed, though these are beyond the area of the site. Nevertheless, they are indicative of an increase in housing in the area as can be seen more markedly to the south-west with the construction of Cliveden Avenue and associated roads.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

No prehistoric finds or archaeological sites have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the site. Nevertheless, the fact that the site is adjacent to the River Tame, and preserved alluvial deposits have been recorded, suggests the possibility of burnt mounds, other *in situ* prehistoric deposits or artefacts being present within the site, as exemplified by comparable contexts in the midlands (Knight and Howard 2004).

It is clear that the significance of the site relates to its proximity to the line of the Roman road, Icknield Street. It is notable that maps record the location of the probable line of Icknield Street as an estate, urban and county boundary (Botham Estate map 1794, Tithe map, 1840 and the OS maps from 1889). It is also likely that the current eastern boundary of the site represents the same feature. Therefore, it is possible that the line of the Roman road runs through the site, forming, approximately, its eastern boundary. This boundary may be preserved as the existing hedge line.

The precise position of the road has not, however, been established with certainty and it remains important to establish its presence or absence within the site. The fact that the Roman Road can be suggested to cross the River Tame in the vicinity of the site potentially provides an opportunity for the type of crossing point to be examined. The identification of a crossing point, such as the remains of a bridge structure, would represent a site of regional importance. The presence, in the southern area of the site, of alluvial and peat deposits suggests that the potential for the preservation of organic artefactual and structural material is high.

Despite the fact that a possible Roman Camp to the south of the River Tame may be disputed, the presence of Roman coin finds in the vicinity of the site indicate a Romano-British presence here. The extent to which these coins represent a settlement associated with Icknield Street is unclear. The relationship between coin finds and settlement in the west midlands is a research question that has been emphasised recently (Hodder 2002, 3). It has been highlighted that known Romano-British settlement sites in the midlands are separated by c.1km in distance. It may be significant, therefore, that the Roman kiln site at Perry Barr is c.1.5km to the south of the site.

In addition to the potential for the presence of Romano-British archaeological deposits and structural remains on the site, the presence of alluvial and organic deposits as demonstrated by geotechnical surveys of the site suggests the presence of deposits that may contain organic ecofactual data. Such remains have the potential to provide data on past environments from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods. Should datable archaeological remains be present within these deposits, there may be a high potential for the presence of significant palaeo-environmental data.

There is no specific evidence to suggest medieval occupation within the site. However, the presence of a medieval mill site at Holford Mill, to the south, and the frequency of mills in the vicinity, may suggest the possibility that medieval occupation may have existed here. The presence of what appears to be stream channels within the site as shown on historic maps could indicate the potential presence of a mill within the site, although, again, there is no other evidence to substantiate this. The historic maps demonstrate that the main focus of settlement at least from the 18th century was focussed upon Aldridge Road, specifically to the west and north-west of the site. It is likely, however, that any such archaeological remains relating to this settlement has been wholly truncated by 20th century building and development along the line of Aldridge road and by the construction of the M6 motorway.

The lack of alluvial clays and peat in the northern area of the site (currently playing fields), with topsoil directly overlying gravels, together with negative geophysical results (Leather 1997), may suggest the area has been truncated. Such an interpretation could be emphasised by the fact that this area is clearly lower in level than the southern portion of the site. It remains possible that this area was truncated during the construction of the M6 in the 1960s. Alternatively the southern portion of the site may have been built up, though this does not necessarily account for a lack of alluvial deposits and clays in the northern area of the site, which may be expected on the basis of its proximity to the river. The latter theory may be more likely in view of the thick deposits of recent overburden recorded by geotechnical works in the southern part of the site.

The site clearly has the potential to address significant research questions (e.g. Hodder 2002) regarding not only the position of the course of Icknield Street, but the extent to which the road influenced the presence of contemporary settlement. A further archaeological investigation, in the form of a field evaluation, may enable the survival, extent and significance of any potential archaeological deposits within the site to be established with more certainty. The results of the desk-based assessment

together with any field evaluation will enable an appropriate mitigation strategy to be devised for the site.

5.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Fig.1

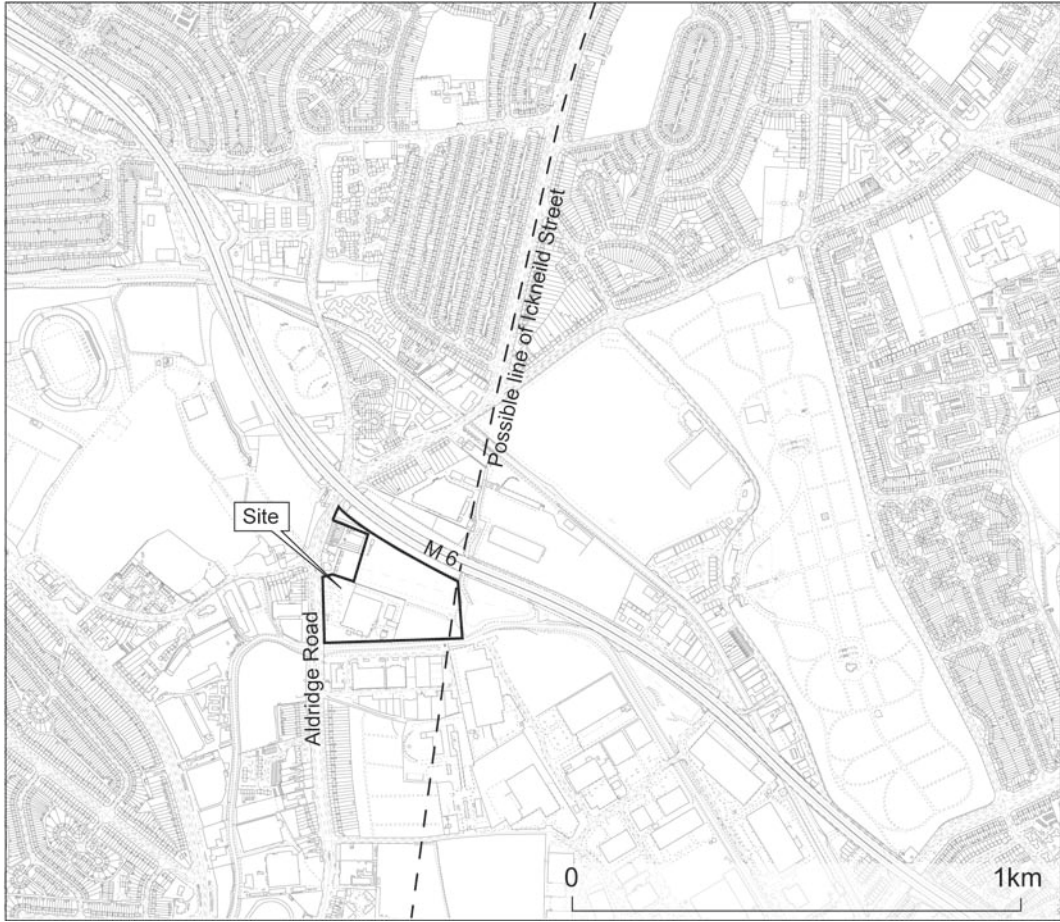


Fig.2

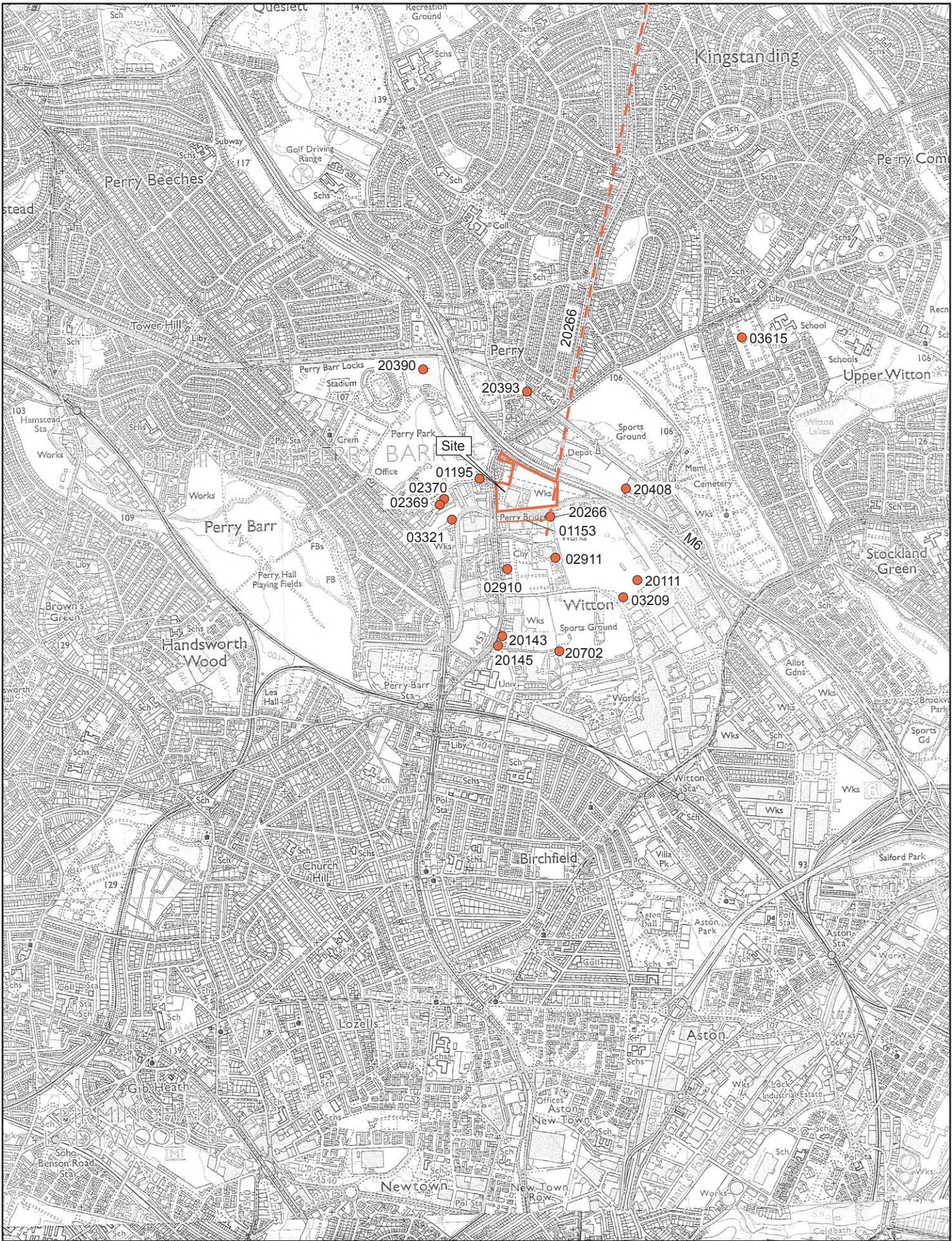


Fig.3

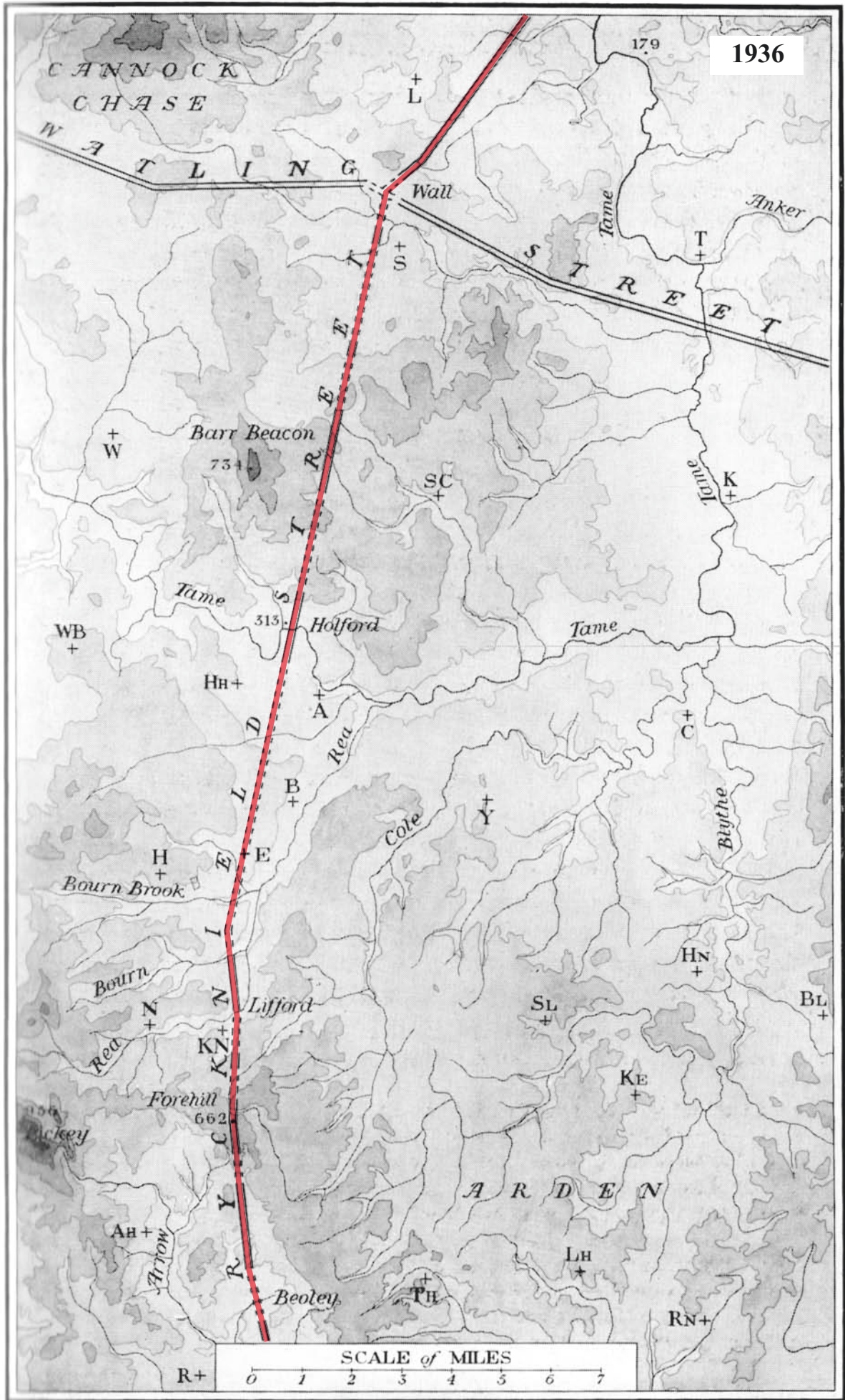


Fig.4



After: Hodder (2004); and Margary (1967)

Fig.5

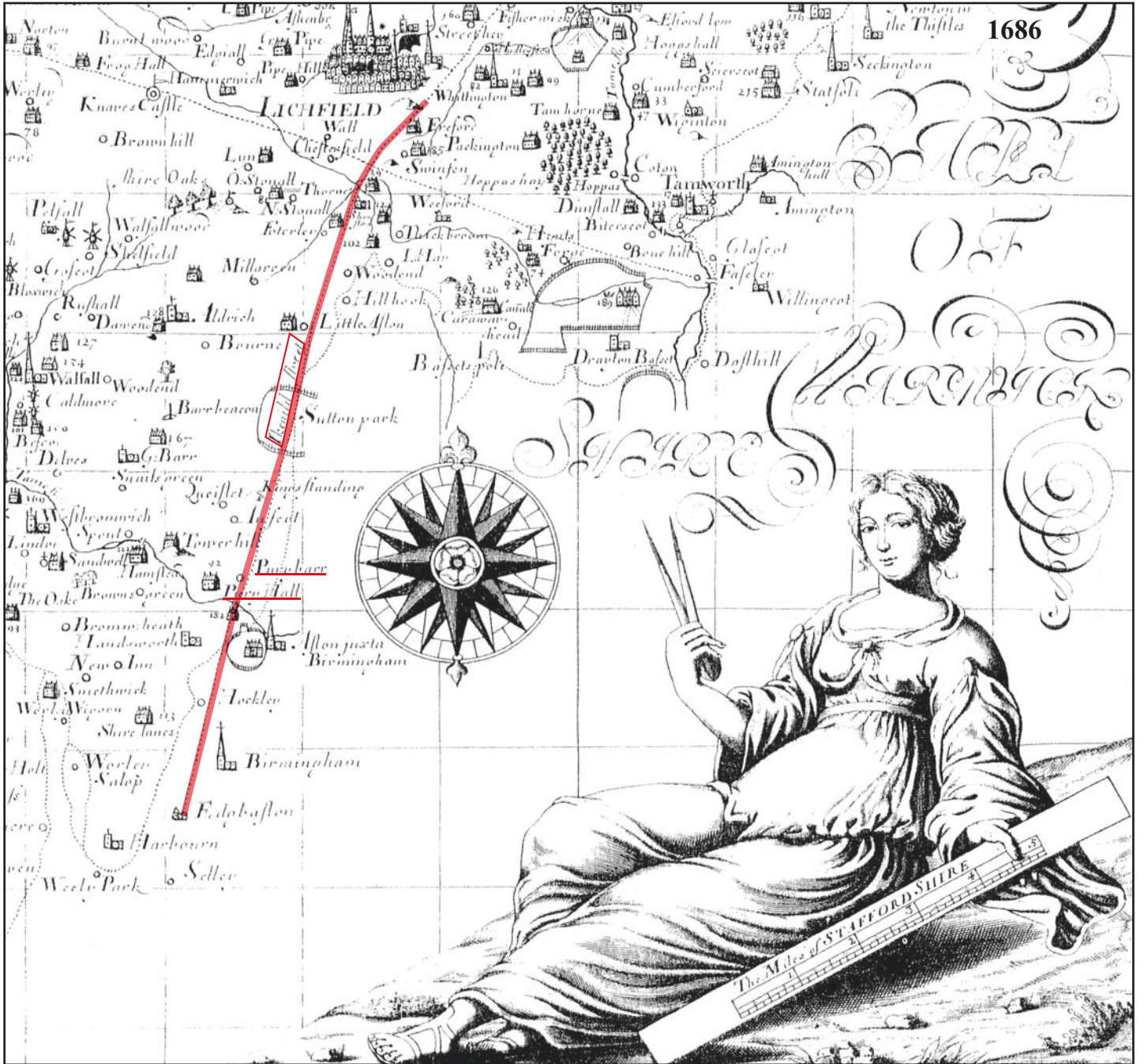


Fig.6

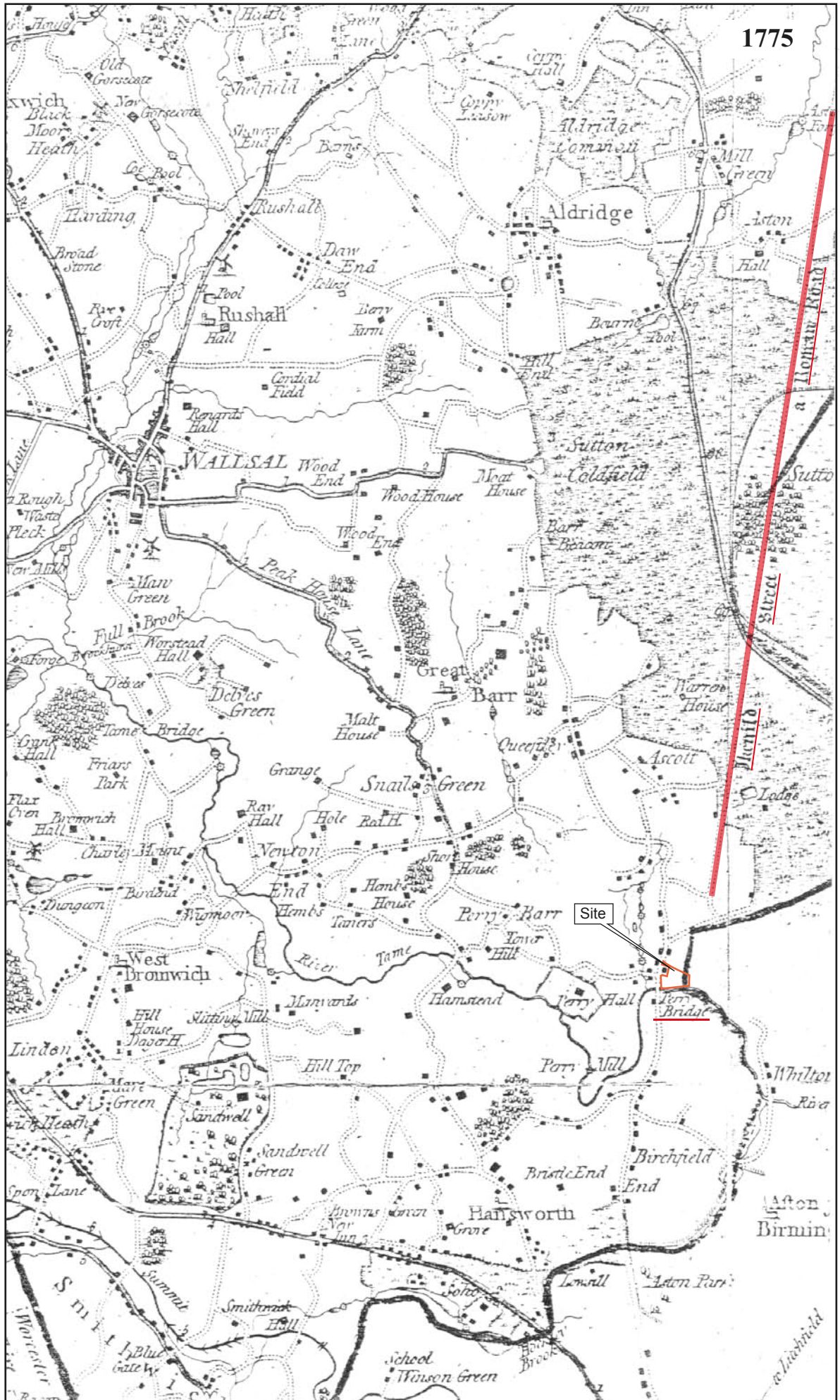


Fig.7

Botham Survey of Estates , Perry Barr 1794

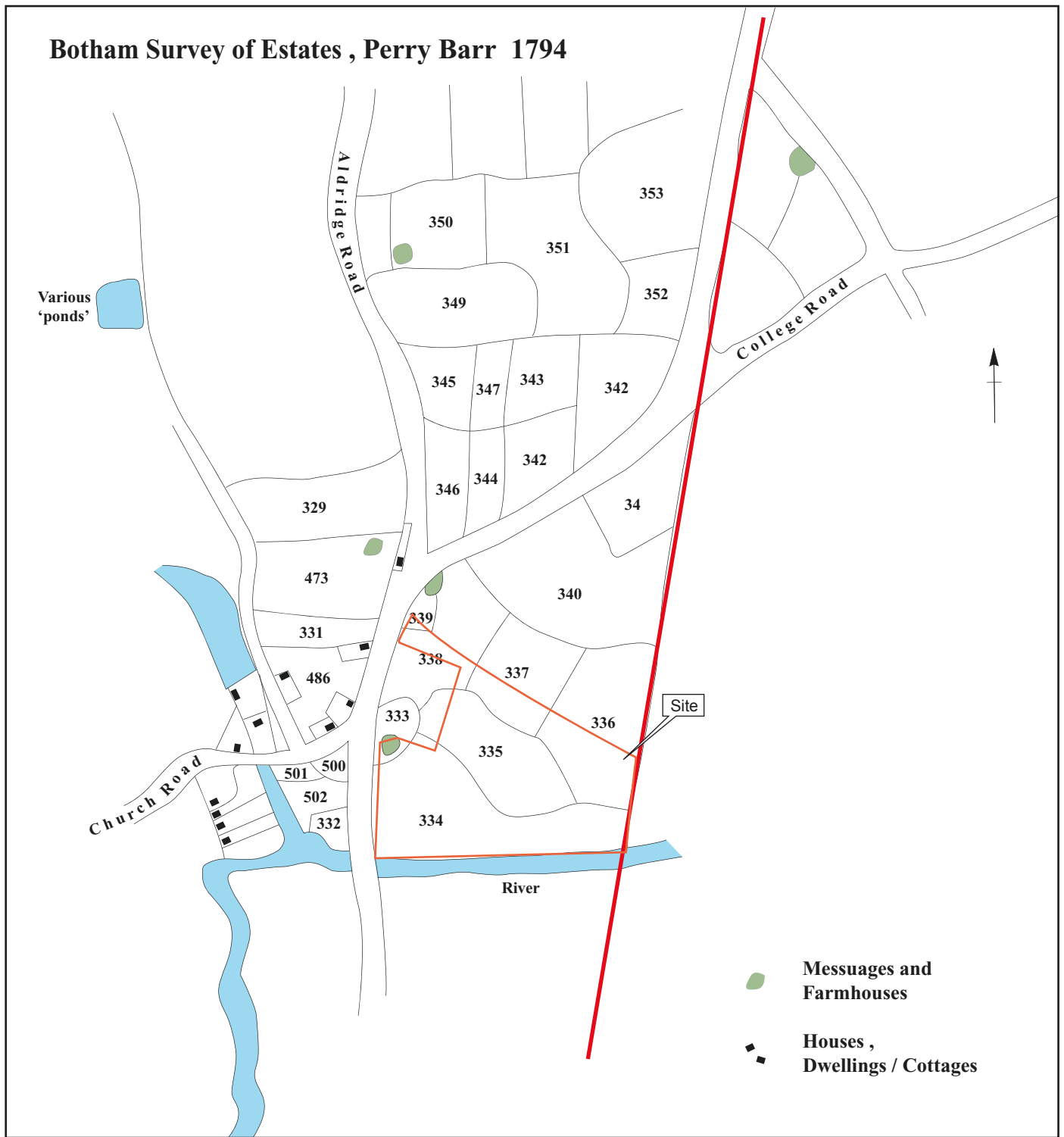


Fig.8

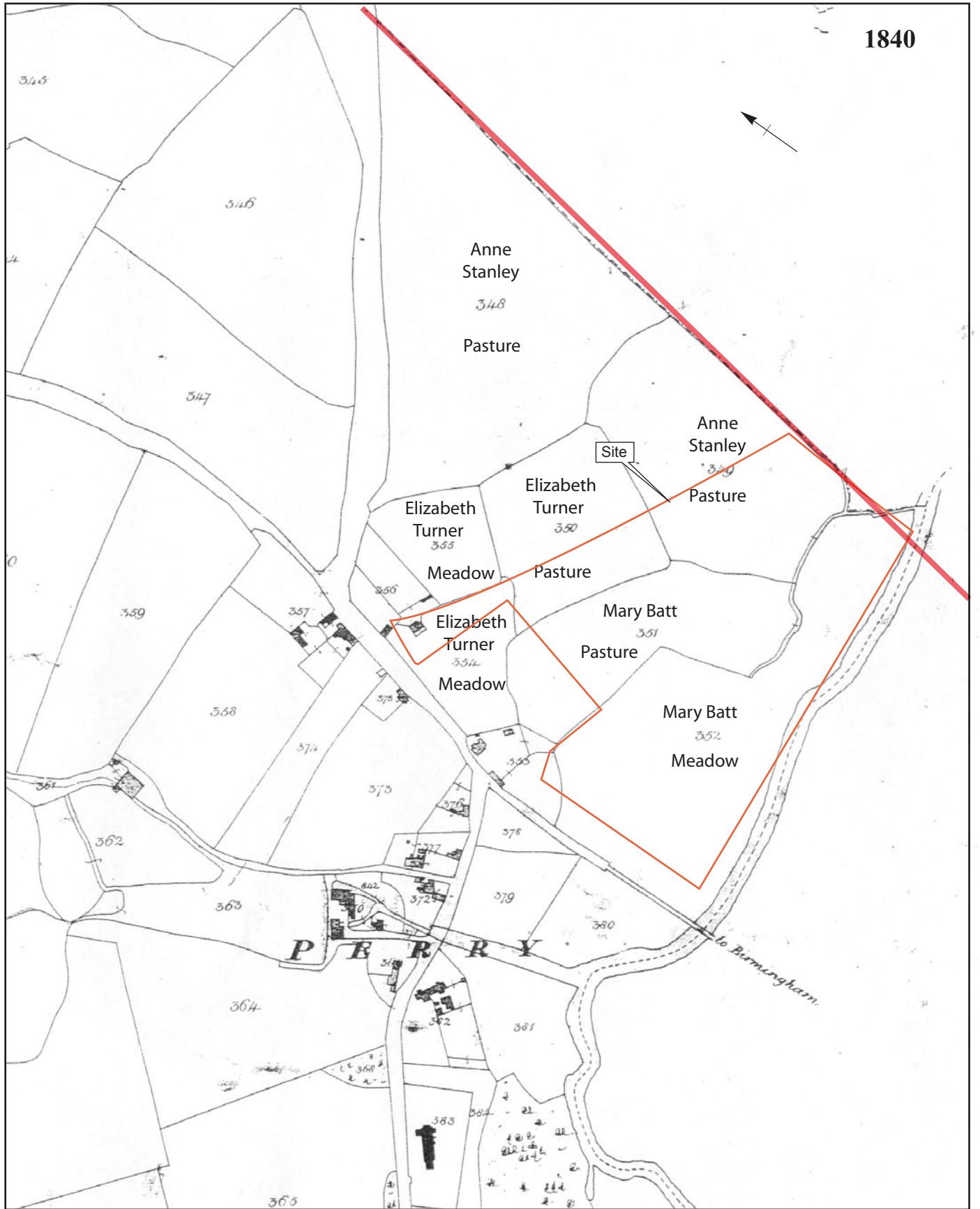


Fig.9

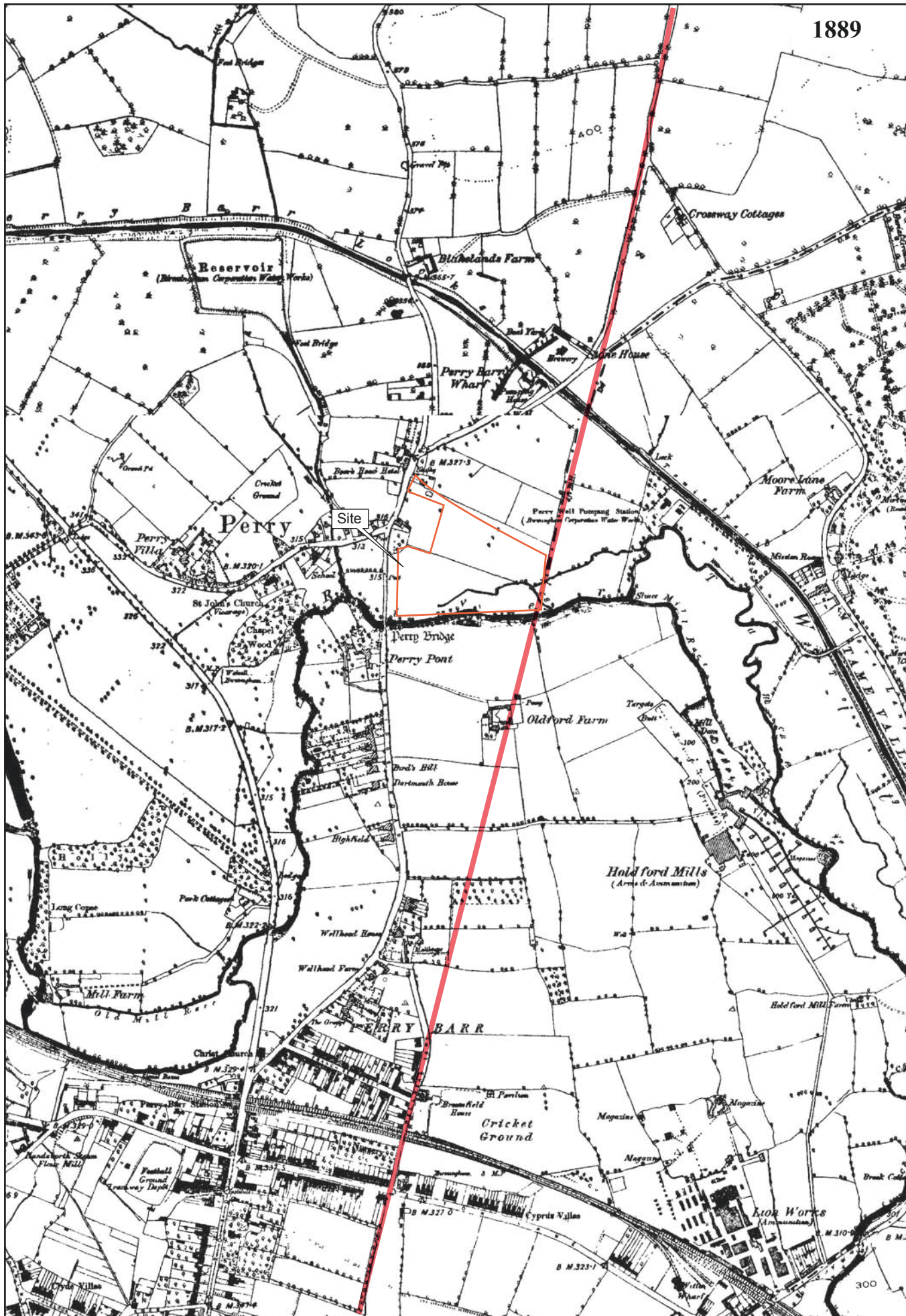


Fig.10

1904-5

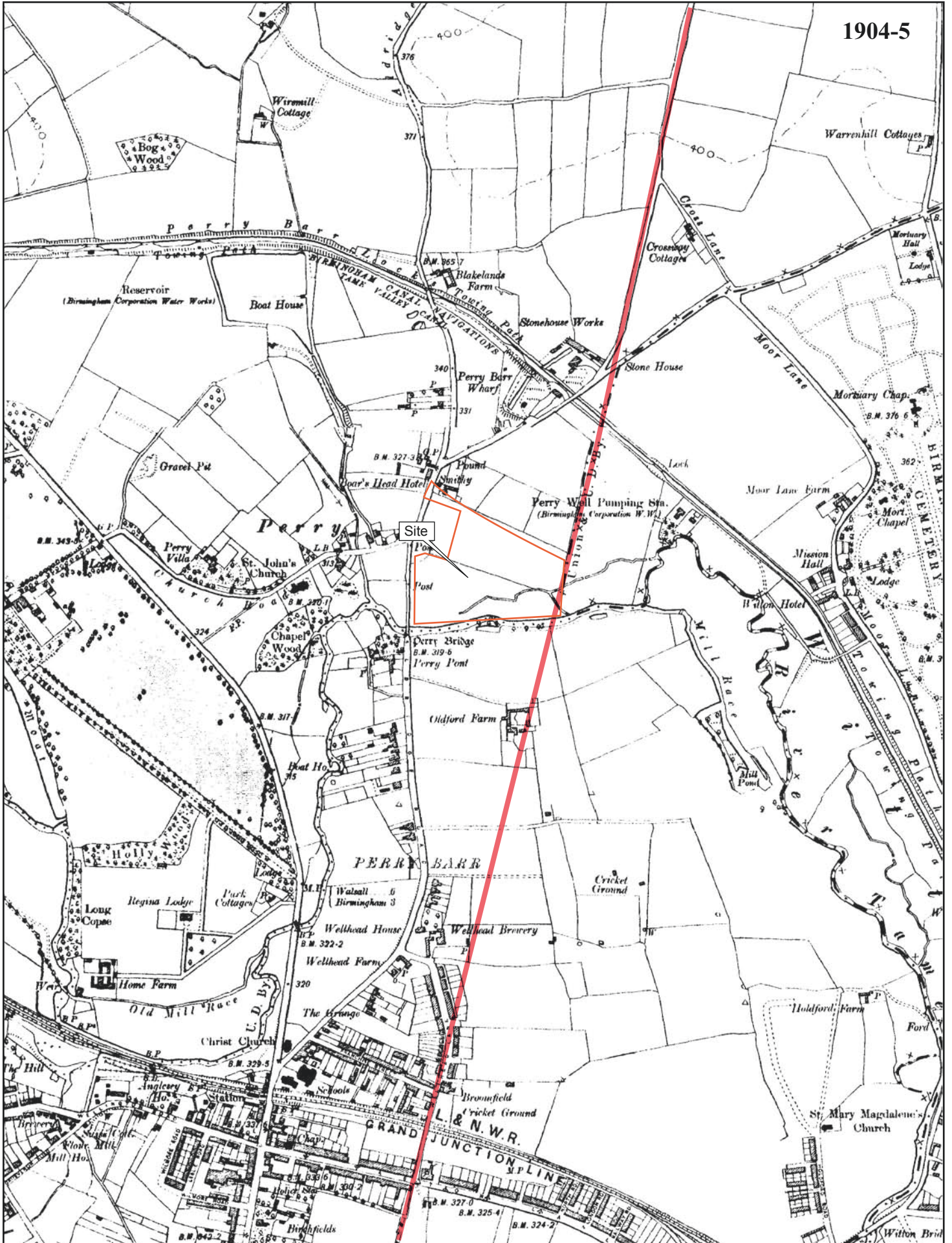


Fig.11

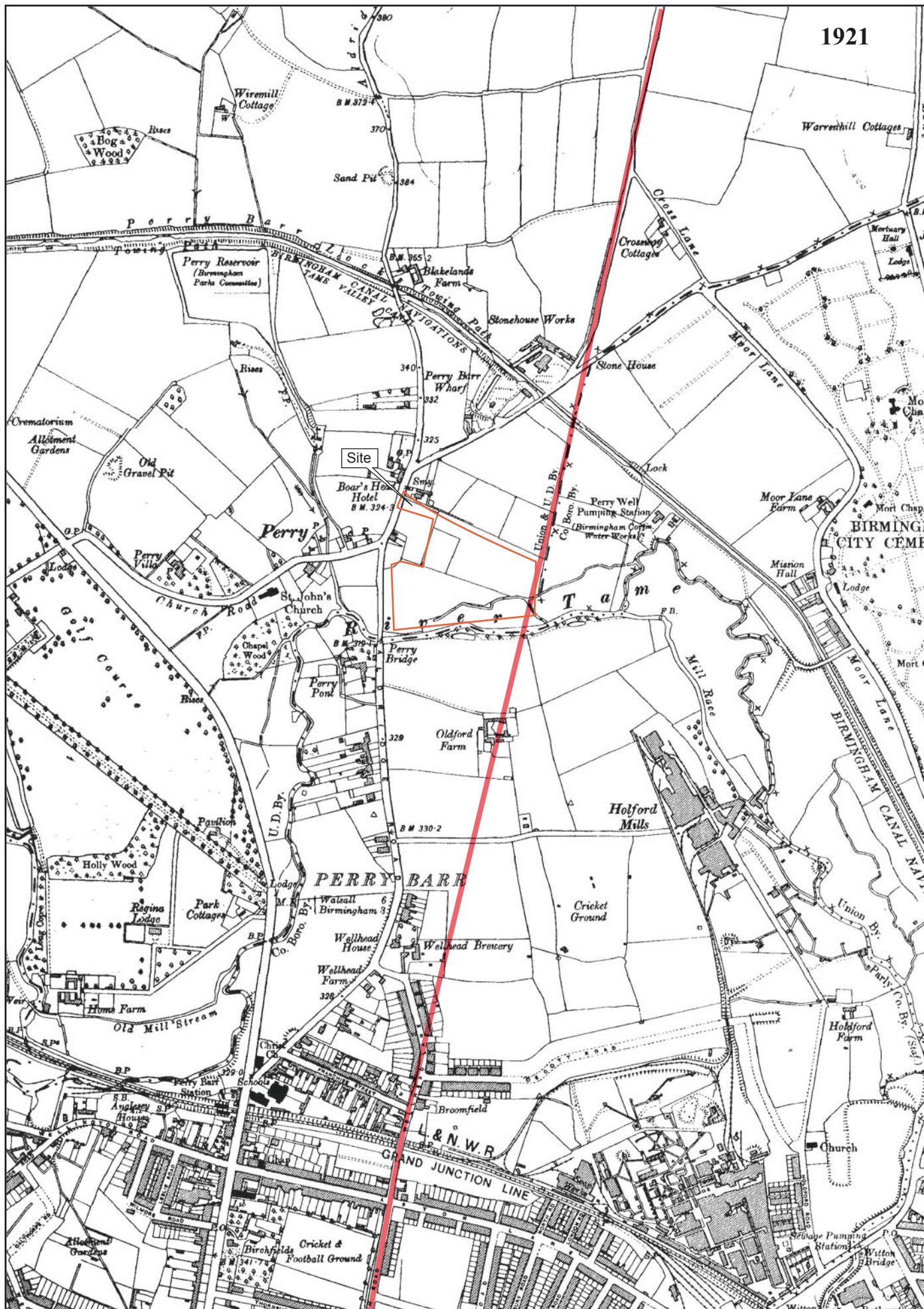


Fig.12

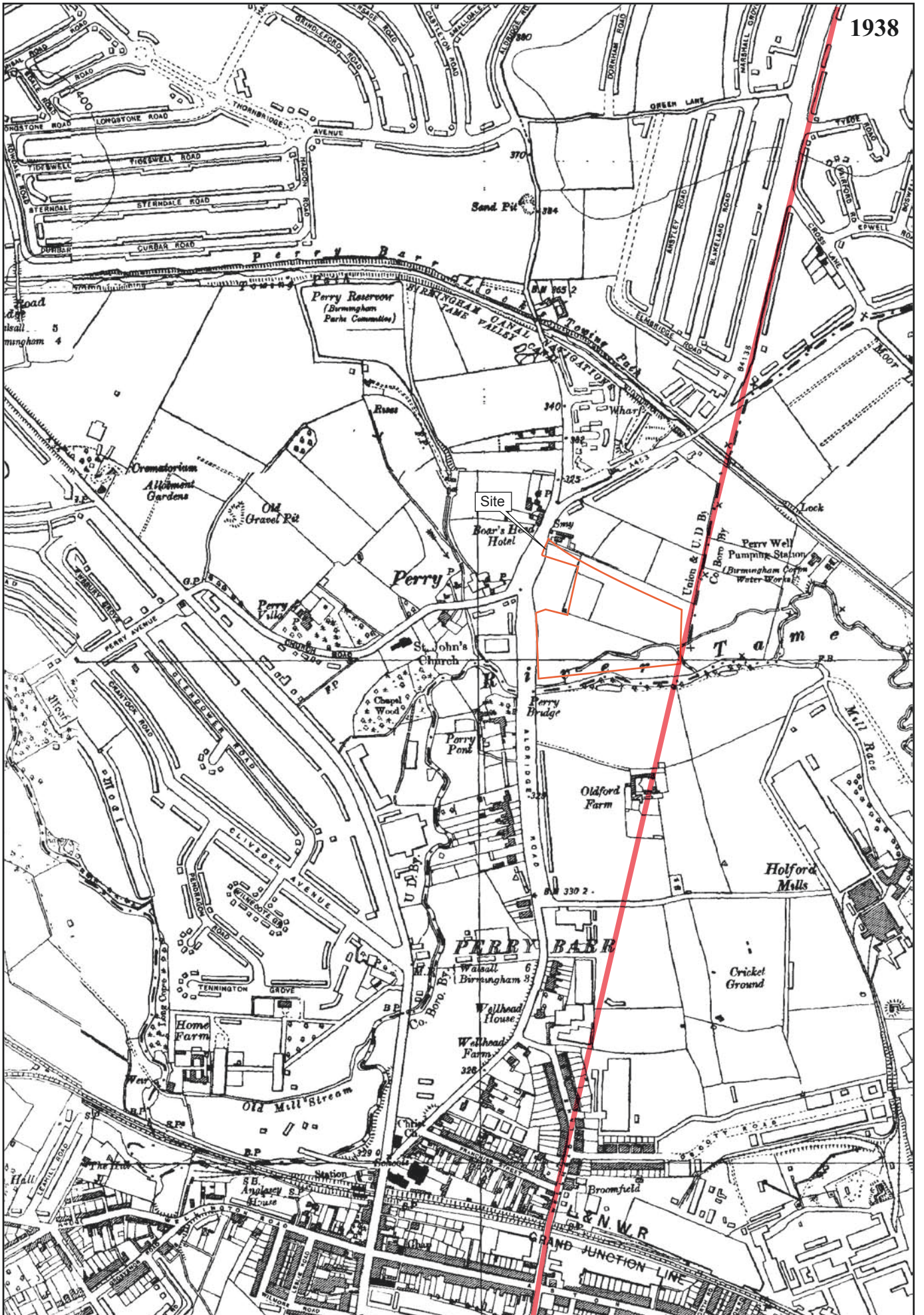


Fig.13



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4