

**Land west of Stoneygate School, Great Glen,  
Leicestershire: Archaeological earthwork survey  
(NGR SK 663 968)**

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**1. Summary**

*This document provides a report on a topographical earthwork survey conducted by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS), on land to the west of Stoneygate School, Great Glen, Leicestershire during May 2004. The site, which is to be levelled to form a playing field, contained well preserved ridge and furrow (medieval strip field systems). In view of this fact Leicestershire County Council Heritage Services recommended a programme of archaeological topographical survey to provide a permanent record of the earthworks. Work took place on the 5th May 2004. The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Heritage Services.*

**2. Introduction**

In order to create a new playing field, Stoneygate School proposed to level the earthworks in the central part of a field to the west of the existing buildings. A condition was placed upon the planning permission for the site requiring the implementation of a written scheme of archaeological investigation. A written specification was produced (*Design Specification for Earthwork Survey Land to the west of Stoneygate School, Great Glen, Leicestershire*), outlining the methodology for a topographical survey of the existing earthworks prior to their destruction by levelling.

**3. Geology and topography**

The development site lies just south-east of Great Glen adjacent to the former A6 Leicester to Market Harborough Road NGR SK 663 968 (Fig. 1). It comprises a large grassed field, which contains earthworks presumably relating to one of the medieval fields of Great Glen.

The Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Solid and Drift, Sheet 156 shows that Great Glen lies close to the River Sence. The areas around the river comprise alluvial deposits and river gravels. The development site is further south-east and lies on glacial boulder clay deposits.



Figure 1 Location plan. Scale 1:50,000

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#### 4. Background

The village of Great Glen appears in the Leicestershire Domesday survey of 1086. As well as land for ploughs there was also mentioned 30 acres of meadow and a mill (Morris 1979). The 1891 1st edition OS Map of the area shows the area to have been predominantly fields prior to the building of the school (Fig. 2).

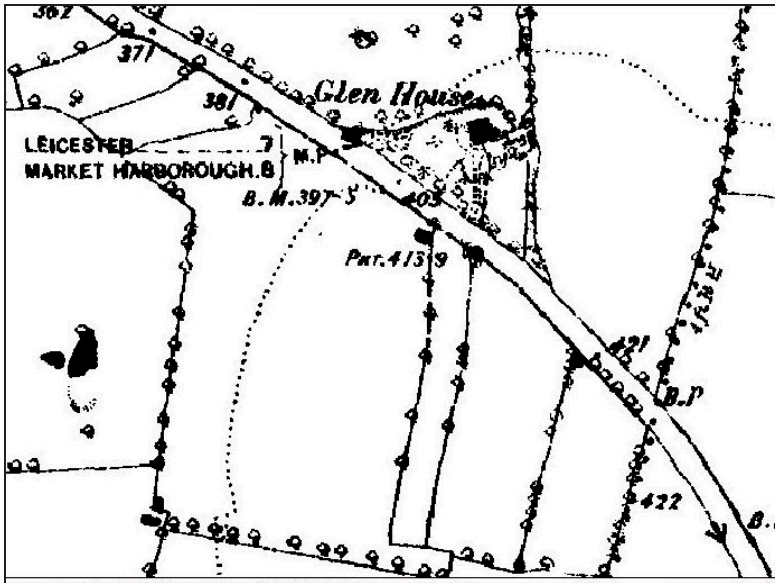


Figure. 2 1891 map showing the area as fields.

#### 4. Aims and objectives

##### *Aim*

The aim of the earthwork survey was to provide an adequate record of the ridge and furrow earthworks on the site before they are levelled as part of works to create a new playing field.

##### *Objectives*

- To establish the character, nature, extent and significance of earthworks on the site
- To prepare a measured survey of the earthworks
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

## **5. Methodology**

The development site comprised the central part of a field west of the school (Fig. 3). In order to provide a suitable context for the earthworks the entire field was surveyed.

An electronic distance measurer (EDM) was used to carry out the survey. A single line was recorded across the tops of ridges and banks and the bases of furrows. Tracks, disturbance and boundaries were also recorded. Three detailed profiles were recorded across the central area of the site.

EDM plots were converted using N4ce and all drawings were created using N4ce and Autocad.

A general photographic survey of the site was also undertaken.

## **6. Results**

Most of the earthworks are well-preserved and stand to a height of approximately 0.5 – 0.6 m high. They tail off towards the eastern boundary and also towards the southern end.

The majority of earthworks within the field run north-south (Fig. 4). They continue to the west at an angle to the western boundary, which is presumably modern. To the north there is a small copse, which dissects the earthworks (again later in date than the ridge and furrow). There is a change of direction to earthworks oriented east-west at the northern end. These also continue to the west and are dissected by London Road to the north. At the far south end there is a lot of disturbance from trees and a small trackway. The north-south earthworks stop just before the southern boundary and a new set of east-west earthworks start. All of the earthworks stop short of the eastern boundary.

The ridges in the central area are fairly consistently 7.5 – 8m wide while those in the northern area are wider - between 8 and 10m (the average size of medieval ridge and furrow was between 7-9m (Hall 1982)).

There was no evidence for headlands or other earthworks within the area.



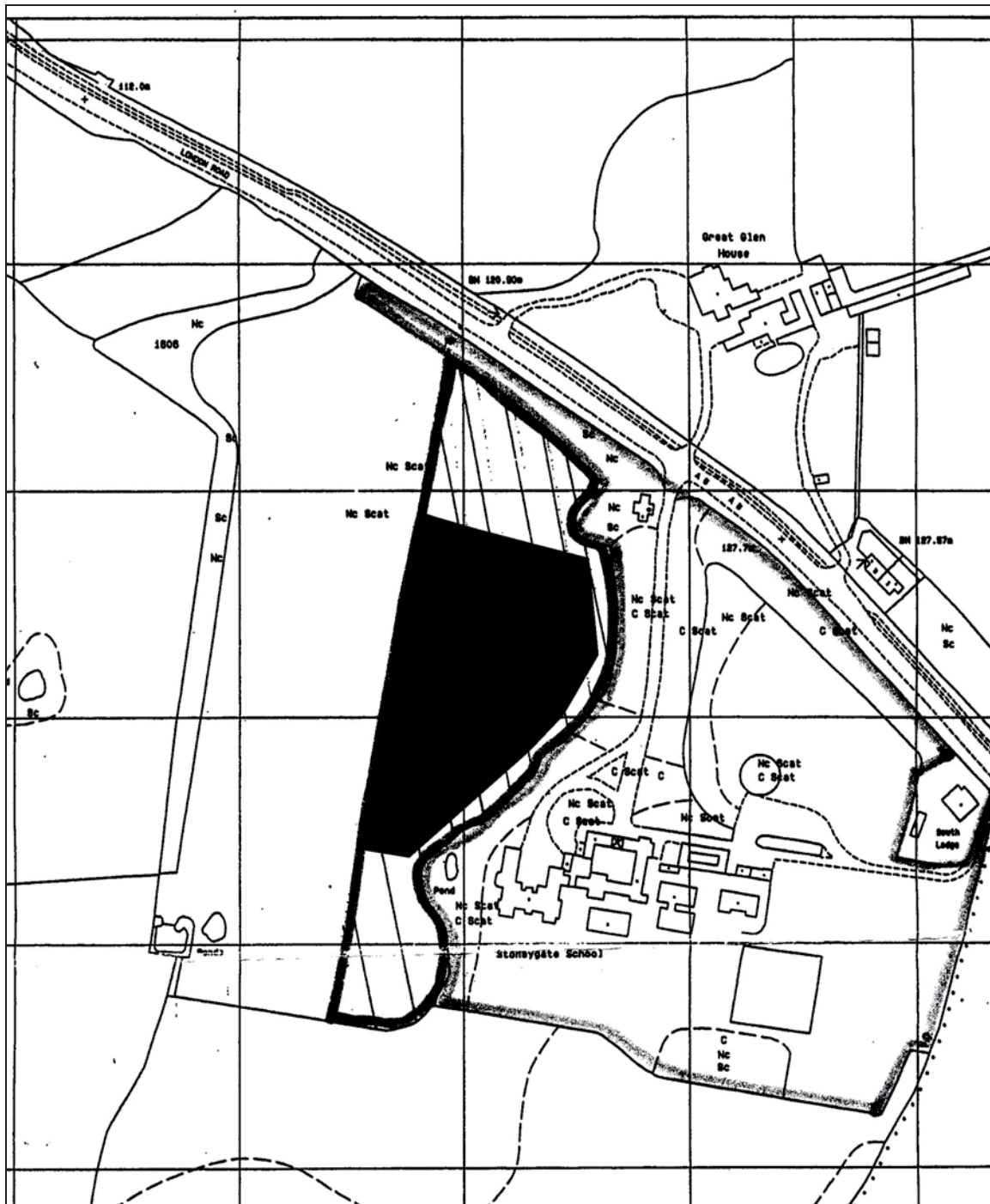


Figure 3 Area surveyed (shaded) and area to be levelled (black). Scale 1: 2500.

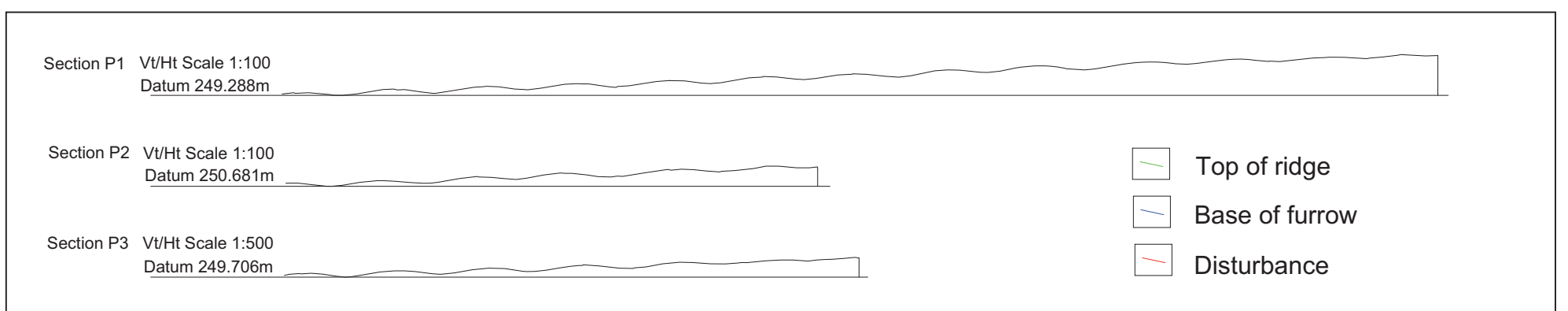
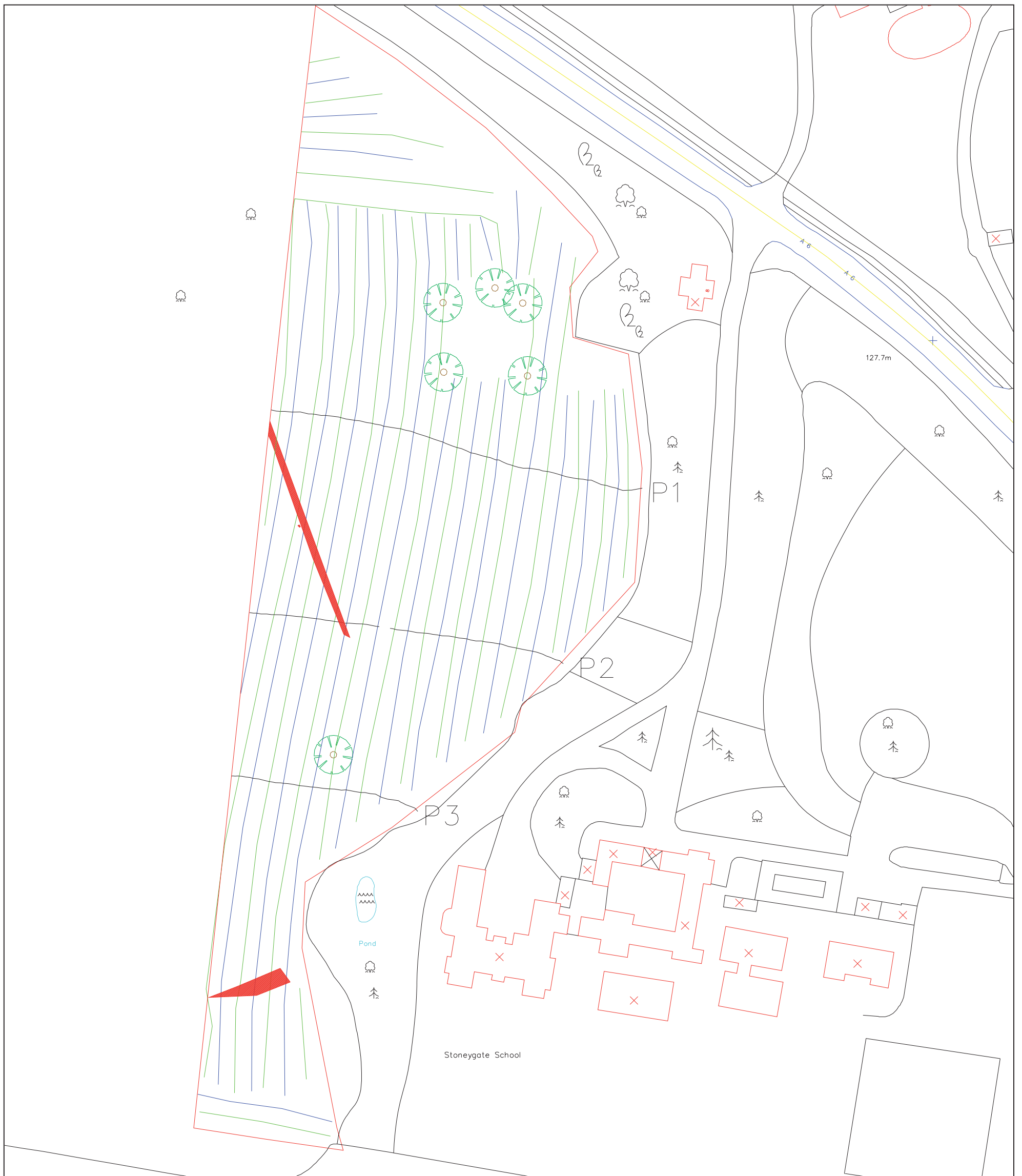


Figure 4 Plan of the surveyed earthworks (Scale 1:1000) and profiles (Scale 1:500).



## **7. Discussion**

The study area appears to have formed part of the open fields surrounding Great Glen during the medieval period. Ridge and furrow is generally considered representative of medieval ploughing within the midlands and northern counties (Hall 1982) and is the most common surviving feature of the medieval landscape (Astill 1988). Fields were divided into strips within an open landscape and ploughed for arable crops causing large ridges. This creation of ridges is thought to assist natural drainage; ridges are usually therefore aligned down the steepest gradient (Hall 1982). This method caused the soil to move in the direction of ploughing creating heads at the end of ridges where the plough was lifted for turning and headlands where two strips lay at right angles to each other.

Although some ridge and furrow can be as late in date as the 19th century (Astill 1988), the proximity of the earthworks to the village of Great Glen that dates to the medieval period suggests that they are of pre-enclosure date. The southern boundary appears to be the same boundary seen on the 1891 map; as this cuts across a section of ridge and furrow, the ridge and furrow are certainly earlier than this. These earthworks form part of a larger system of medieval fields surrounding the village. R.F Hartley's base maps of the earthworks of Leicestershire in the SMR show that there is extensive evidence for medieval agricultural activity all around the village (Fig. 5).

None of the earthworks run all the way up to the eastern boundary. Despite its meandering shape, there is nothing on the 1891 map to indicate that this is an ancient boundary, and it was probably created during the building of the school. The general shape of the 1891 fields is still visible within the wider school boundary and the road probably echoes one of the original field boundaries seen on the map.

## **8. Archive**

The Archive consists of site notes, survey files and drawings and digital photos and will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council Heritage Services.



Figure 5 Ridge and furrow from the area around Great Glen from RF Hartley's Base map plans of Leicestershire earthworks.

## **9. Acknowledgements**

The work was carried out by Vicki Priest and Clare Strachen. The project was managed by Richard Buckley.

## **10. Bibliography**

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Plate 1      Looking north along the ridge and furrow.



Plate 2      Looking south along the ridge and furrow.