ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

on behalf of
Wessex Solar Energy

Land off Pyde Drove Woolavington Somerset

archaeological desk-based assessment

report 3155
May 2013

Durham University

Contents

Figures

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1. Summary

The project

1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological desk-based assessment, conducted in advance of a proposed development at Woolavington, Somerset. The assessment comprised a search of pertinent documentary and cartographic records, records of archaeological interventions, the Historic Environment Record, and a site walk-over survey.

1.2 The works were commissioned by Wessex Solar Energy and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.

The archaeological resource

1.3 There are no historic or statutorily protected buildings in the vicinity of the site. There are no scheduled ancient monuments on or in the near vicinity of the site.

1.4 There is no direct evidence of pre-Roman activity in the proposed development area. However, the existence of a sub-surface deposit of peat, that is known to contain evidence for prehistoric occupation and palaeoenvironmental information elsewhere, indicates that an as yet unidentified resource relating to this has the potential to survive.

1.5 A Roman salt working industry is known to exist in the vicinity of the proposed development area. Two mounds are visible on the ground within the site, one of which has been recorded as a possible salt mound. Possible salt mounds have also been detected geophysically.

1.6 The peat deposits may be covered by a deposit of alluvial clay. A network of palaeochannels relating to the former River Siger traverse the site, which may contain palaeoenvironmental information.

1.7 Remains of a field system of medieval or post-medieval date survive to the north of the site. This potentially extends into the proposed development area.

1.8 The proposed development area has remained as agricultural fields, with only slight changes to their internal boundaries, since at least the late 18th century. Significant archaeological deposits post-dating this time are unlikely to be present.

Impact assessment

1.9 The proposed development has the potential to impact upon any archaeological resource that may be present through the construction of foundations, cable trenches and associated groundworks.

2. Project background

Location (Figures 1 & 2)

2.1 The site is located at Pyde Drove, Woolavington, Somerset (NGR centre: ST 3531 4299). It is roughly rectangular in plan, and covers an area of approximately 18.2 ha. To the north is Pyde Drove, to the south is Middle Moor Drove, to the east and west are neighbouring fields.

Development proposal

2.2 The proposal is for a solar park.

Objective

2.3 The objective of the scheme of works was to assess the nature, extent and potential significance of any surviving archaeological resource within the proposed development area, so that an informed decision may be made regarding the nature and scope of any further scheme of archaeological works that may be required in relation to the proposed development.

Methods statement

2.4 The works have been conducted in accordance with standard Archaeological Services' procedures for assessments. The works comprised the study of pertinent cartographic and other historical sources, records of previous archaeological interventions, sites listed in the Historic Environment Record (HER) within 1 km of the proposed development area, and a site walk-over survey. HER references are referred to in brackets throughout the text of this report, and are listed in the appendix.

Planning guidance

2.5 This assessment and its recommendations are a considered response to the proposed development in relation to Government policy, as it is set out in the *National Planning Policy Framework*.

Dates

2.6 The field visit took place on 13th May 2013. This report was prepared for the 30th May 2013.

Personnel

2.7 Research was conducted and this report prepared by Andy Platell, with graphics by Janine Watson. The Project Manager was Daniel Still.

OASIS

2.8 Archaeological Services Durham University is registered with the **O**nline **A**cces**S** to the **I**ndex of archaeological investigation**S** project (**OASIS**). The OASIS ID number for this project is **archaeol3-151698.**

Acknowledgements

2.9 Archaeological Services Durham University is grateful for the assistance of staff of Somerset Heritage Centre in facilitating this scheme of works.

3. Landuse, topography and geology

Landuse

3.1 At the time of this assessment, the proposed development area comprised three fields of pasture.

Topography

3.2 The proposed development area was almost level with a mean elevation of approximately 5m OD. It lies around 200m south of the Huntspill River, but this is of recent construction (see Section 5 below). An earlier silted up river system, the Siger, crosses the site and is visible as a dendritic pattern of slight depressions in the ground level.

Geology

3.3 The bedrock geology of the area comprises Lower Jurassic strata, the Langport Member of the Blue Lias Formation / Charmouth Mudstone Formation (undifferentiated). This is recorded as being overlain by Quaternary tidal flat deposits of clay, silt and sand (www.bgs.ac.**uk).**

3.4 The Somerset Levels are a series of valley systems that have been heavily infilled since the end of the last ice advance. Areas of higher ground, such as the Polden Hills, Isle of Wedmore and Mendips, form islands within this partially buried landscape. A considerable body of research has been undertaken to elucidate the sequence of deposits comprising this infill. Particularly useful in this respect was a transect produced by the cutting of the Huntspill River, 200m to the north of the proposed development area boundary (Godwin 1981, Figure 49).

3.5 Although details vary from place to place, the general sequence is that the valleys are mainly filled with estuarine clay to slightly above modern sea level. This is overlain by a deposit of peat that, in inland areas, forms the modern land surface. Towards the coast, the peat thins out and is increasingly overlain by a second deposit of estuarine clay. The peat started forming around 4000 BC and, where covered by an upper clay, this dates from around the Late Roman period onwards.

4. Site walk-over survey

4.1 A walk-over survey was conducted, to help ascertain the potential of the proposed development area to contain any archaeological resource. The visit noted site topography, earthworks and areas of modern overburden, modern services, boundaries, buildings and other upstanding remains. A *pro forma* recording sheet was completed.

4.2 The site consists of three fields, two smaller ones (Fields 1 and 2) separated by an east-west drain to the west, and a larger one (Field 3) to the east, extending all the way between Middle Moor Drove and Pyde Drove. All field boundaries are deep drains, supplemented by fences and hawthorn hedges. A line of overhead power cables crosses the southern third of the site on an east-west alignment. There is a small cowhouse between the two fields (Fields 1 and 3) on Middle Moor Drove. This is divided into two along the line of the field boundary and serves both fields (Figure 10). It is made from stone, with a corrugated iron roof.

4.3 Field 1 is crossed from east to west by a shallow sinuous channel, part of a former river system. Poorer drainage within the channel allows it to support a line of sedges, which clearly define its course (Figure 11). Several other shallow depressions were present, although these were not picked out by lines of sedge and it was difficult to determine their orientations on the ground.

4.4 Field 2 contained a shallow sinuous depression crossing its south east corner (Figure 12). In addition, a regular series of shallow ditches crossed the field on a north-south orientation and spaced around 10m apart. These were a continuation of the series of drainage ditches that were more clearly visible in Field 3. A long, low raised mound was present along the eastern boundary of the field, close to the boundary ditch. It was thought to have been created by the excavation / cleaning out of this ditch.

4.5 Parts of Field 3 contained a regular series of shallow drainage ditches on a north-south alignment (Figure 13). In places these were connected by perpendicular cross-ditches. One of the north-south ditches was deeper and more continuous than the remainder and appeared to an infilled former field boundary (Figure 14). There were two slight raised mounds in the field, one close to the southern boundary (Figure 15) and one towards the eastern end, immediately under the overhead power cables (Figure 16). This latter mound is recorded on the HER as a possible Roman saltern (HER 15078). A third, more irregular, mound was present in the north-west corner of the field (Figure 17). The land owner informed the geophysical survey team that this was a foot and mouth disease burial site.

5. Historical and archaeological development

Previous archaeological works

5.1 Three archaeological interventions are recorded in the study area. All involved archaeological monitoring; of a water main next to the Huntspill River at Woolavington Bridge in 2007 (HER 24539), the Polden Villages Pipeline in 1994 (HER 28873) and the Northern Trunk Sewer in 1978 (HER 32073). None identified significant archaeological remains in the vicinity of the proposed development area.

5.2 In addition to this, but unrecorded on the HER, the excavation of the Huntspill River Cut in the early 1940s was monitored, complemented by an extensive series of levelled borings eastwards to Shapwick (Godwin 1981, 138-9; Figure 49). Roman salt workings were identified upstream from Woolavington Bridge and a transect through the stratigraphy of the area was recorded. Details are discussed below.

5.3 A geophysical survey has been carried out across the current site, concurrently with production of this report. This survey identified intense dipolar magnetic anomalies, which could represent sub-surface deposits of ash and burnt clay, characteristic of salt working deposits. However none of these aligned with the visible mounds in the fields. Former river channels and several other possible earth-filled features were also detected. A separate report on the geophysical survey has been produced (Archaeological Services 2013).

The prehistoric period (up to AD 43)

5.4 A limited number of early prehistoric finds have been recovered from the Somerset Levels, either as isolated residual artefacts in later contexts or as discrete lithic

assemblages on sand islands that rise above the surrounding area (Wilkinson 1999, 87). Across most of the levels, the depth of burial of pre-Neolithic deposits makes it unlikely that such deposits will be affected by development.

5.5 The peat deposits exposed to the east of the study area contain a rich diversity of prehistoric remains dating from the Neolithic period onwards, including Neolithic trackways, Bronze Age platforms and Iron Age settlements (Coles and Coles 1986). In the vicinity of the proposed development area this peat deposit is overlain by a later clay, concealing any evidence for prehistoric occupation. The Huntspill River cut shows that the peat is present at a depth of 2-3m below the current ground surface here (Godwin 1981, Figure 49).

5.6 There is no direct evidence of pre-Roman activity in the proposed development area. However, the existence of a sub-surface deposit of peat, known to contain evidence for prehistoric occupation elsewhere, indicates that an as yet unidentified resource relating to this has the potential to survive.

The Roman period (AD 43 to 5th century)

5.7 LIDAR survey has recently exposed the remains of an extensive tidal estuary along the coast between Brent Knoll and the Polden Hills (Brunning and Farr-Cox 2005). Precise dating is not yet available, but the estuary appears to post-date the widespread peat deposit in this area, since two erosion channels are present through this peat in the Huntspill River cut, directly where the LIDAR survey shows the estuary to cross it (*ibid*.). Roman remains are present on the top of this peat and the estuary is cut by, and therefore pre-dates, the modern course of the River Brue, which flows through an artificial channel of late 11th century date or earlier (Rippon 2004, 117-8). Broadly therefore, the estuary dates from the Roman to the early medieval periods. At least part of it appears to be the former River Siger, which is mentioned in an Anglo-Saxon charter (*ibid*.). Its extents have been plotted on the HER (HER 29686) and part is shown on Figure 1. Branches of the system cross the whole of the proposed development area and correspond with the sinuous shallow gullies observed during the walk-over survey (see above, Section 4).

5.8 An extensive Romano-British salt industry developed in the Somerset Levels (Grove and Brunning 1999). Most known sites fall into three discrete areas; a strip of land on the edge of the peat moors from Gold Corner Bridge to Burtle, the Huntspill Cut and close to the coast around Highbridge. This distribution is heavily influenced by the presence of an obscuring deposit of post-Roman alluvial clay, since the Huntspill sites are exposed below this clay in the sides of the cut and the coastal sites are similarly exposed below it in foundation trenches of construction sites (*ibid*. 63). The coastal sites have been dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries; the more inland ones are slightly later. This is thought to be due to a gradual marine transgression that forced production further inland (*ibid*. 63).

5.9 The salt workings take the form of salterns, slight mounds composed of burnt clay, ash and briquetage. Along the Huntspill Cut they appear to be located on peat hummocks within the tidal channels. This would be a very appropriate location for such sites, providing a ready source of transport, brine and peat fuel for the industry (*ibid*. 66).

5.10 It is possible that the salt industry extended across the proposed development area, since one possible saltern is recorded on the HER within it (HER 15078), a second possible one was observed during the walk-over survey (see paragraph 4.5 above), and several more are recorded on land to the south-east (HER 29602, 29603, 29627, 29628, 29631 and 29632). In addition, geophysical survey identified intense dipolar magnetic anomalies that could represent sub-surface saltern deposits.

The medieval period (5th century to 1540)

5.11 Woolavington is recorded in the Domesday Book as being held by Glastonbury Abbey and forming part of its Shapwick estate (VCH 2004, 214). Gilbert le Waleys, rector of Woolavington, is recorded as holding an estate there at the end of the 13th century. This estate later descended to the Pym family and became known as Woolavington Pym manor. The proposed development area is first recorded as lying within this manor.

5.12 The River Brue (downstream from Glastonbury) originally flowed northwards, to pass through the Panborough Gap and join the headwaters of the River Axe. By at least the late 11th century its course had been diverted westwards by the monks of Glastonbury to improve drainage in the area (Rippon 2004, 117). The new course flowed into Meare Pool and beyond to Burtle Moor, where its course split; a southerly course flowing directly to the sea at Highbridge (*i.e*. approximately following the modern route) and a northerly course (the Pilrow) to join the River Axe at Rooksbridge.

The post-medieval period (1541 to 1899)

5.13 An extensive area of a former field system, consisting of slight banks and ditches, has been recorded from aerial photographs to the north of the Huntspill River immediately north of the site (HER 11171). Since this lies on post-Roman alluvium, it is likely to be of medieval or post-medieval date. Small patches of this field system are recorded to the south of the river in the area west of Woolavington Bridge. Although no remains of the field system are recorded within the proposed development area, there is a potential for it to extend into this area.

5.14 Bowen's map of 1750 (Figure 3) shows the River Brue (named as the Brent River) and the Pilrow Cut approximately following their current courses. The villages of Wollavington, Huntspill and Cote are all marked. A large area of marshland, Brent Marsh, is present along the course of the River Brue. This is mainly on the north side of the river, but does include a smaller area to the south. The proposed development area lies approximately on the edge of this area of marsh.

5.15 A detailed map of Woolavington Pym manor was produced around 1775 (Figure 4). This shows that the field pattern of today had been established by this time. Both Middle Moor Drove and Pyde Drove tracks were present, with long and generally thin fields stretching between them. One such field forms the western half of the modern western fields and another forms the eastern side of the east field. Relict ditches still survive marking the edge of these fields. The remainder of the proposed development area forms a third, untypically wide field.

5.16 At the end of the 18th century an act was passed for improving drainage along the River Brue. A detailed plan of the affected area was produced in 1806 (Figure 5). This shows some changes to the field pattern within the proposed development area.

The central field boundary has now been established and a single field (number 37 on this plan) forms the western half of the site. The boundary of the earlier, narrow eastern field has been removed, but another narrow field (number 38) is present at the western side of this half of the site.

5.17 The tithe plan of 1842 (Figure 6) shows just two fields, forming the eastern and western halves of the site respectively. This situation is also shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey plan of 1888 (Figure 7). This is the first plan to show the shared cowhouse between the two fields. The second edition plan of 1904 shows no significant alterations (Figure 8).

The modern period (1900 to present)

5.18 At the beginning of World War II an explosives factory was opened at Puriton, 2km to the south-west of the proposed development area. To give it a secure water supply, and coincidentally to improve drainage to the levels, the Huntspill River (HER 11684) was excavated from an existing drain at Gold Corner Bridge to the coast, west of Huntspill. The Ordnance Survey edition of 1961 shows the new river and also is the first plan to show the east-west boundary that divides the two western fields within the proposed development area (Figure 9).

The buildings

5.19 There are ten listed buildings within the village (Appendix): all are Grade II except St Mary's Church, which is Grade I. They are unlikely to be affected by the proposed development.

Scheduled ancient monuments

5.20 The nearest scheduled ancient monument to the proposed development area is a post-medieval duck decoy pond 1.7km to the east-south-east. This is unlikely to be affected by the proposed development.

6. The potential archaeological resource

6.1 There is no direct evidence of pre-Roman activity in the proposed development area. However, the existence of a sub-surface deposit of peat in the area, known to contain evidence for prehistoric occupation and palaeoenvironmental information elsewhere, indicates that an as yet unidentified resource relating to this has the potential to survive.

6.2 A Roman salt working industry is known to exist in the vicinity of the proposed development area. Two mounds are visible on the ground within the site, one of which has been recorded as a possible salt mound. Possible salt mounds have also been detected geophysically.

6.3 The peat deposits may be covered by a deposit of alluvial clay. A network of palaeochannels relating to the former River Siger traverse the site, which may contain palaeoenvironmental information.

6.4 Remains of a field system of medieval or post-medieval date survive to the north of the site. This potentially extends into the proposed development area.

6.5 The proposed development area has remained as agricultural fields, with slight changes to their internal boundaries, since at least the late 18th century. Significant archaeological deposits post-dating this time are unlikely to be present.

6.6 The regional research framework (Webster 2008) contains an agenda for archaeological research in the region, which is incorporated into regional planning policy implementation with respect to archaeology. In this instance, the potential archaeological resource could address a number of agenda items, specifically those related to past environments and to the Roman salt industry.

7. Impact assessment

7.1 The proposed development has the potential to impact upon any archaeological resource that may be present through the construction of foundations, cable trenches and associated groundworks.

8. Sources

Cartographic sources

Bowen, 1750 A map of the County of Somerset
Anon, *c*.1775 Manor of Woolavington Pym
White, 1806 Brue Drainage plan
Woolavington tithe map, 1842
Ordnance Survey 1st Edition, 25", 1886
Ordnance Survey 1st Edition, 6", 1888
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition, 25", 1903
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition, 6", 1904
Ordnance Survey, 6", 1961
Ordnance Survey, 25", 1970

Other sources

Archaeological Services 2013 *Land off Pyde Drove, Woolavington, Somerset: geophysical survey.* Unpublished report **3173**, Archaeological Services Durham University

Brunning, R, and Farr-Cox, F, 2006 The River Siger rediscovered: LIDAR survey and relict landscape on the Somerset claylands, *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary*, **16**, 7-15

Coles, J and Coles, B, 1986 *Sweet Track to Glastonbury; the Somerset Levels in prehistory*, London

Godwin, H, 1981 *The archives of the peat bogs*, Cambridge

Grove, J, and Brunning, R, 1999 The Romano-British salt industry in Somerset, *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary*, **9**, 61-68

Rippon, S, 2004 Making the most of a bad situation? Glastonbury Abbey, Meare, and the medieval exploitation of wetland resources in the Somerset Levels, *Medieval Archaeology* **48**, 91-130

Webster, C J, (ed.) 2008 *South West Archaeological Research Framework; resource assessment and research agenda*, Somerset County Council

Wilkinson, K, 1999 *An investigation of Holocene peat and intertidal stratigraphy on Shapwick Heath, Somerset: preliminary results*, *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary*, **16**, 87-90

V C H, 2004 *A history of the County of Somerset; volume 8, The Poldens and the Levels*, London, 225-246

Somerset Heritage Centre Archive

D\D/Ri/M/403 Woolavington tithe plan 1842
DD/BR/ely/20/3 Map of manor of Woolavington Pym, *c.*1775
Q/RDE/121 River Brue drainage plan, 1806

Websites

Google Earth
http://ads.ahds.ac.uk
http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com~genmaps
http://webapp1.somerset.gov.uk/her/sop.asp?flash=true
http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyOfBritain/viewer
http://www.bing.com/maps/
http://www.british-history.ac.uk
http://www.historicaldirectories.org/hd/
http://www.genuki.org.uk/
http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk
http://www.magic.gov.uk
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
http://www.old-maps.co.uk/index.html
www.english-heritage.org.uk
www.visionofbritain.org.uk

Aerial photographs

The 1946 aerial photograph on the Somerset Historic Environment Record website and modern aerial images dated to 2001, 2006 and 2009 on Google Earth were examined online as part of this assessment.

Geotechnical works

No records of geotechnical works within the proposed development area were identified for this assessment.

Appendix: Historic Environment Record

The tables include sites recorded within the vicinity of the proposed development area (within an approximate radius of 1 km from the site).

Historic Environment Record

(PRN = Public Record Number, SAM = Scheduled Ancient Monument)

PRN	SAM	Description	Date
10945		Cropmark of enclosure, Woolavington Level	Recent?
10949		Stoning Pound	Post-medieval
10979		salt mounds, area of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
11171		Extensive field system, S of Mark Causeway	unknown
11179		Floodbanks on Withy Pill and Pyde Rhynes	unknown
11684		Huntspill River	1939
12857		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12858		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12860		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12861		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12864		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12865		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12866		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12867		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12868		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12870		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12871		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12872		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12873		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12874		salt mound, E of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12957		salt mound, S of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12959		salt mound, S of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12960		salt mound, S of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
12961		salt mound, S of Woolavington Bridge	Roman
15078		Mound (?saltern), Woolavington Level	Roman?
15531		Briquetage finds, Middlemoor Lake	Roman?
29602		Possible salt mound	Roman?
29603		Possible salt mound	Roman?
29627		Possible salt mound	Roman?
29628		Possible salt mound	Roman?
29631		Possible salt mound	Roman?
29632		Possible salt mound	Roman?
29686		Course of River Siger	Roman-early medieval
1014858	*	Duck Decoy	Post-medieval

Listed buildings

PRN	Description	Grade
1060102	Unidentified Monument in 10 Metres South of Chancel, Church of St Mary	II
1060103	Goldcleeve	II
1060104	Pool House	II
1060105	Grange Cottage	II
1060106	East Grange	II
1060107	Cockpit in Grounds of the Grange	II
1060144	Church of St Mary	I
1344686	Unidentified Monument 15 Metres South East of Church of St Mary	II
1344687	Causeway Farmhouse	II

Previous archaeological interventions

PRN	description
24539	Woolavington Bridge, archaeological monitoring, 2007
28873	Polden Villages Pipeline, archaeological monitoring, 1994
32073	Northern Trunk Sewer pipeline, archaeological monitoring, 1978

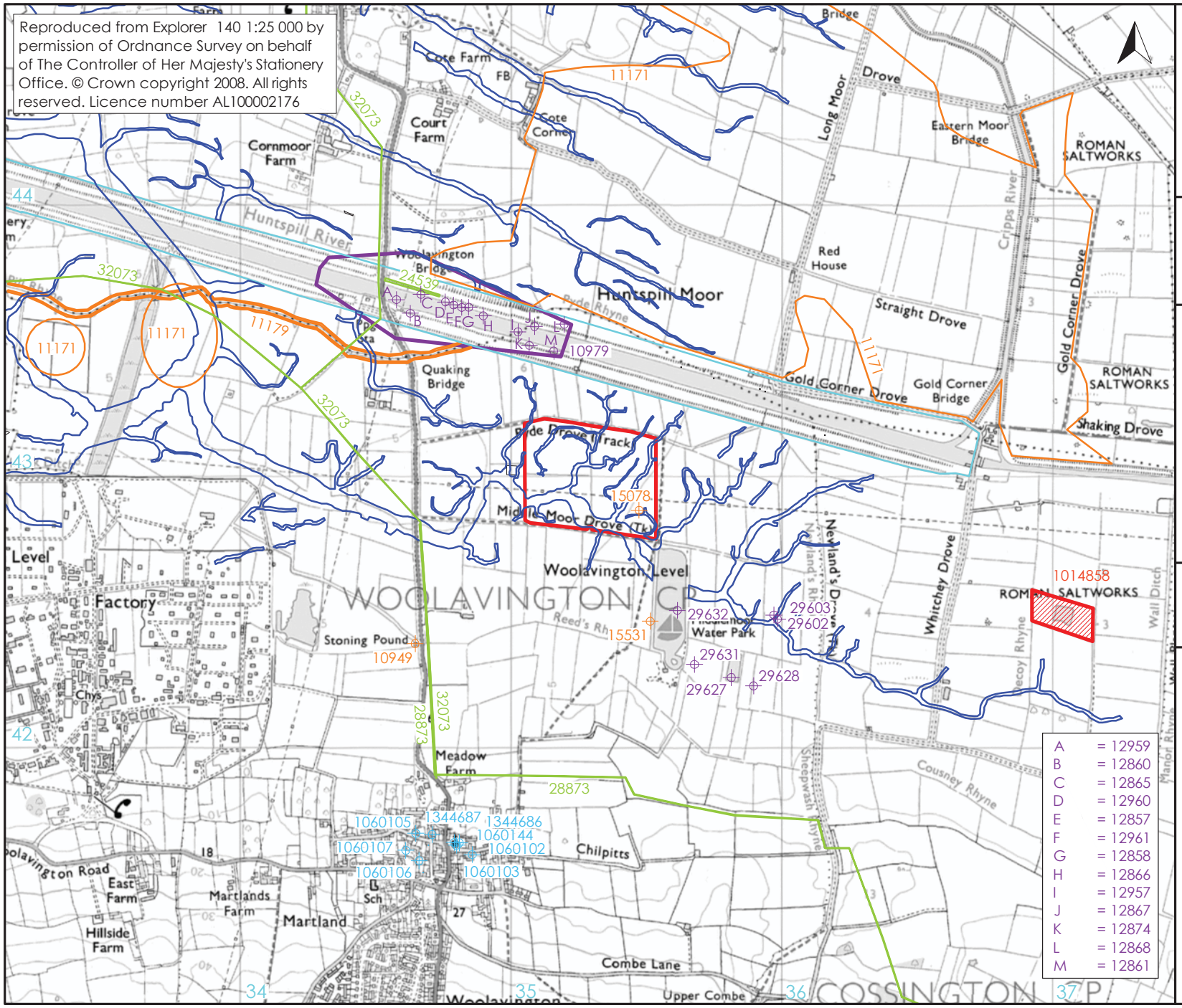

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Figure 1: Site location and Historic Environment Record

0 1km
scale 1:20 000 for A4 plot

- proposed development area
- HER site
- event
- listed building
- scheduled monument
- course of River Siger (29686)
- Huntspill River (11684)
- (possible) Roman salt mound

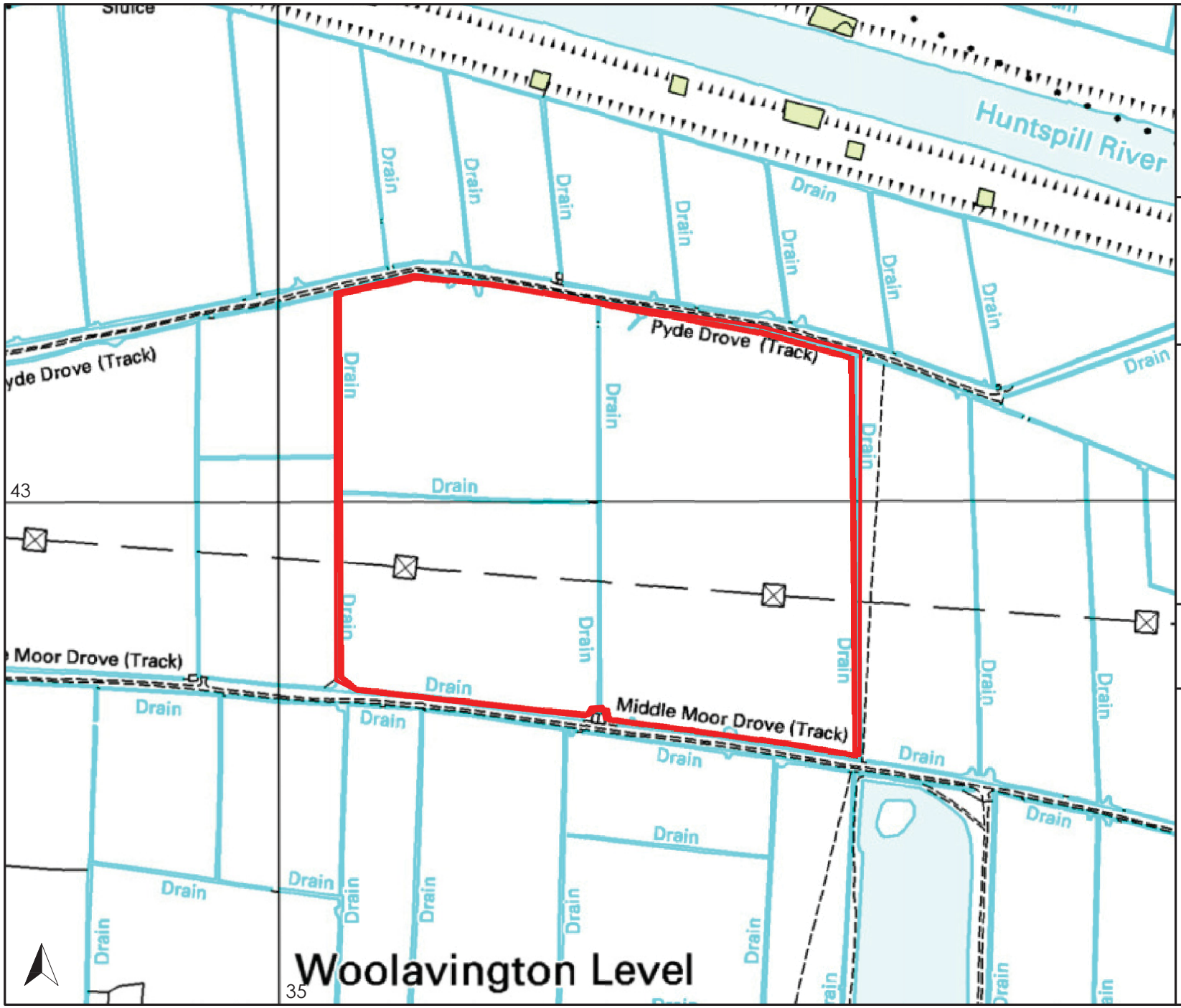

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Figure 2: Site as existing

0 250m
scale 1:5000 for A4 plot

proposed development area

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Figure 3: Extract from Bowen's Map of the County of Somerset, 1750

not to scale

approximate location of proposed development area

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Figure 4: Extract from the map of Woolavington Pym manor, 1775

0 140m
scale 1:3500 for A4 plot

proposed development area

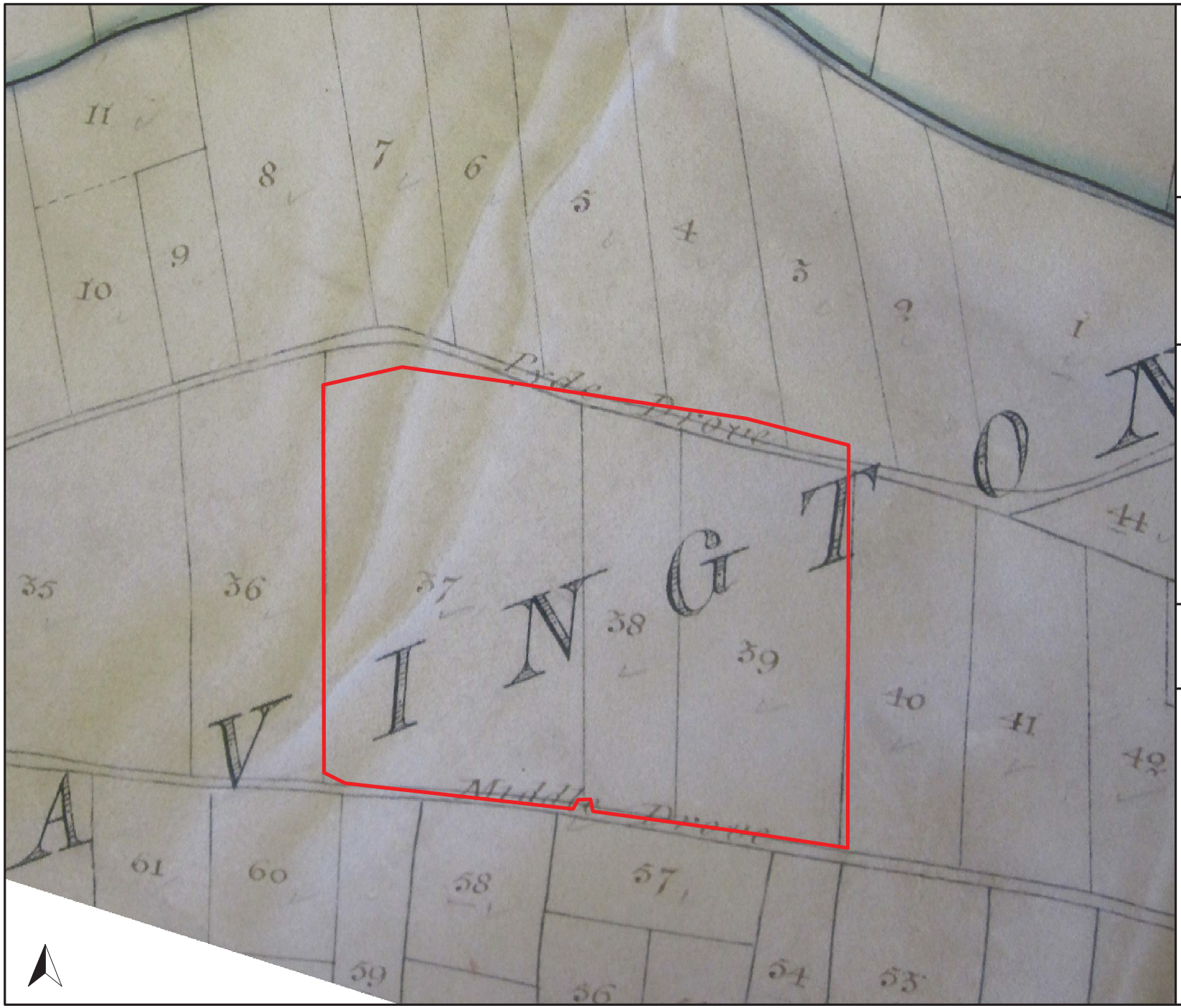

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Figure 5: Extract from the River Brue Drainage Scheme map, 1806

0 250m
scale 1:5000 for A4 plot

proposed development area

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Figure 6: Extract from the Woolavington tithe map, 1842

0 250m
scale 1:5000 for A4 plot

proposed development area

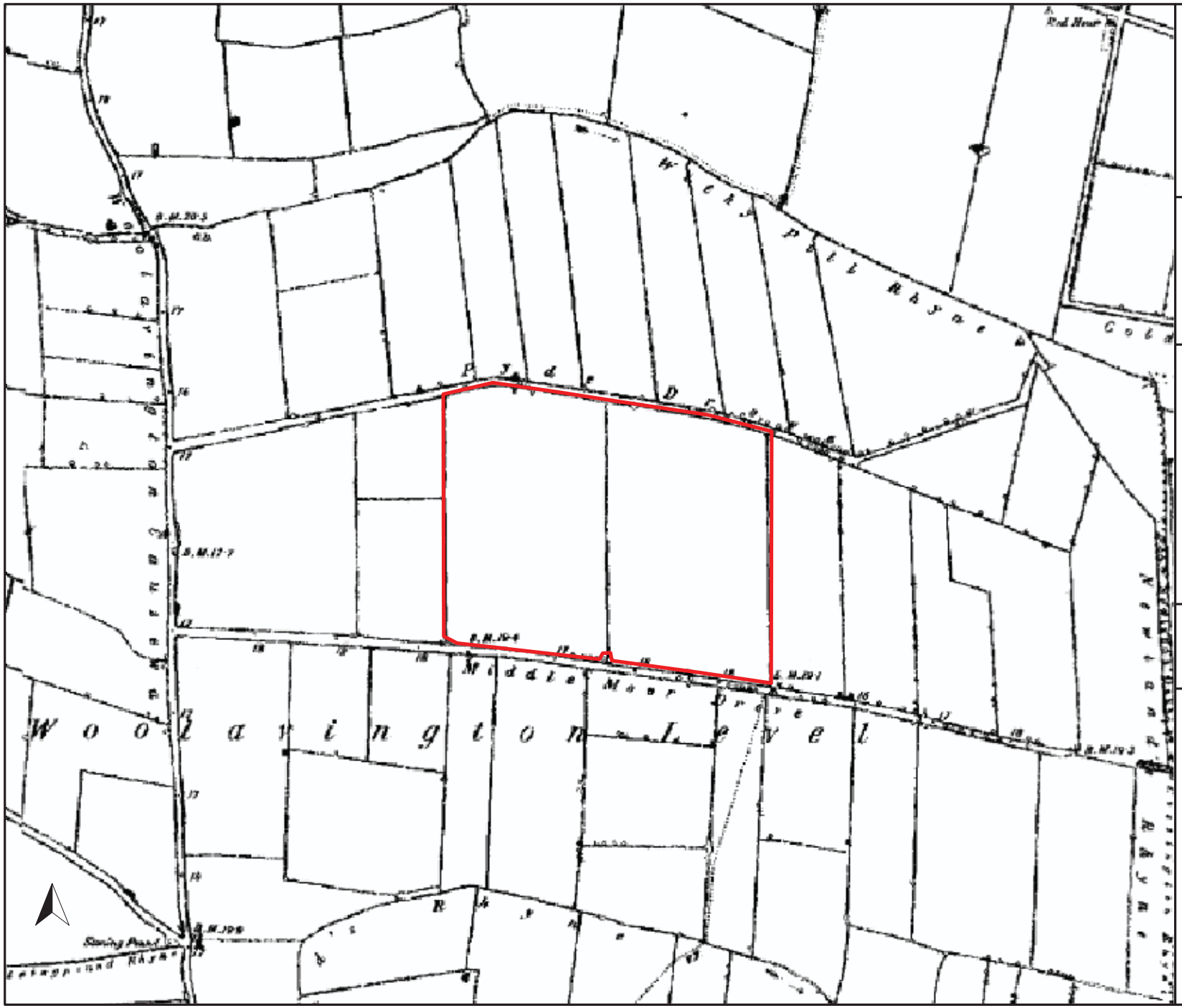

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Figure 7: Extract from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, 1888

0 400m
scale 1:8000 for A4 plot

proposed development area

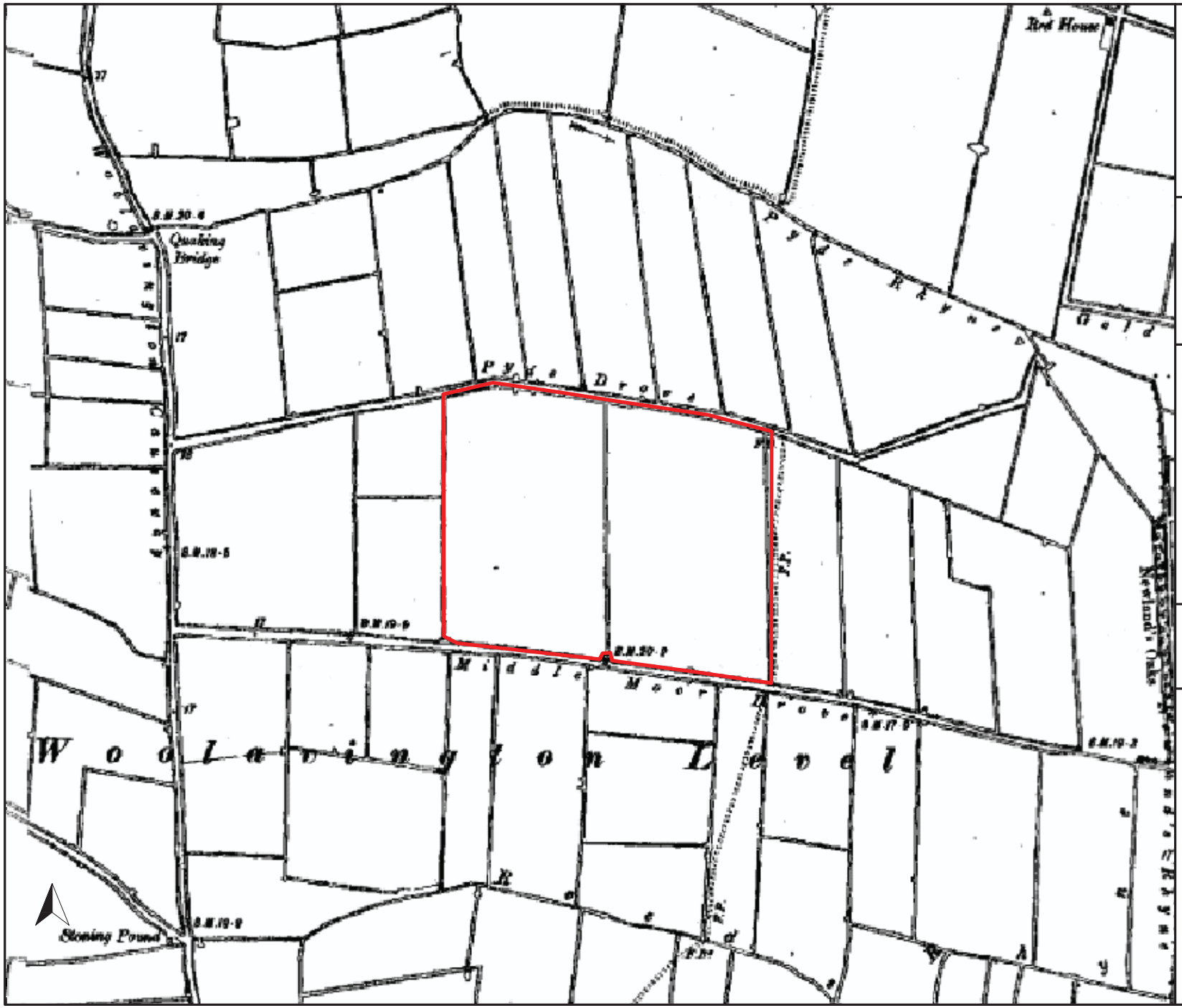

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Figure 8: Extract from the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map, 1904

0 400m
scale 1:8000 for A4 plot

proposed development area

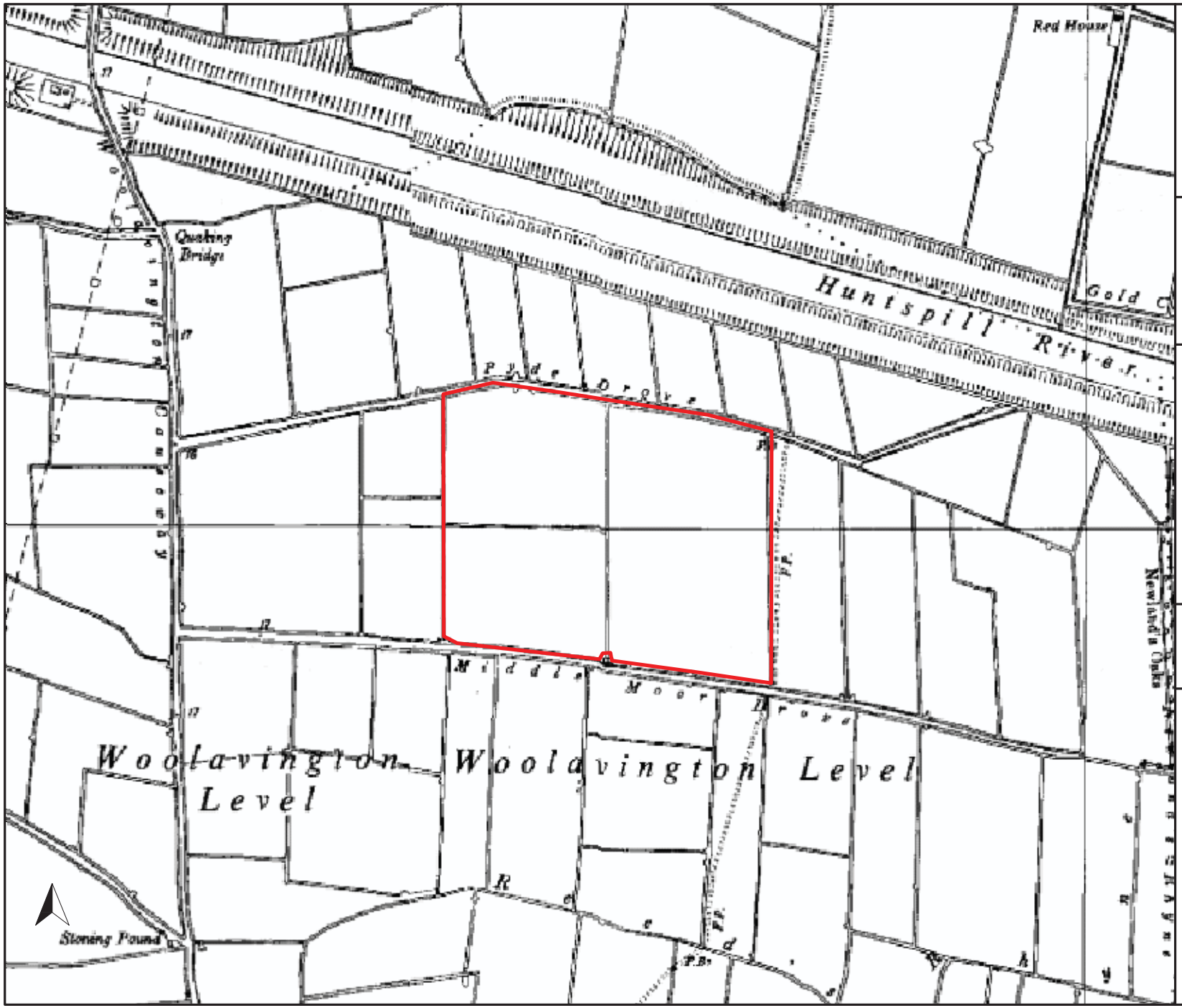

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Figure 9: Extract from Ordnance Survey map, 1961

0 400m
scale 1:8000 for A4 plot

proposed development area

Figure 10: Shared cowhouse between Fields 1 and 3, looking west

Figure 11: Former stream channel outlined by reed vegetation, looking south-east

Figure 12: Former stream channel, Field 2, looking north-west

Figure 13: Drainage ditches, Field 3, looking east

Figure 14: Former field boundary, Field 3, looking north

Figure 15: Mound at south end of Field 3, looking east

Figure 16: Mound at east end of Field 3, looking north

Figure 17: Mound in north-west corner of Field 3, looking west