

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
OF LAND TO THE REAR OF  
HARRIS WAY, LEE MILL, DEVON**

**Prepared for  
Cavanna Homes (South West) Ltd**

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**Exeter Archaeology**

**Report No. 08.12**

**Project No. 6429**

**March 2008**

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## SUMMARY

*This proposed development site occupies two pasture fields to the north of Lee Mill village (centred at SX 5978 5587), originally in the ancient parish of Plympton St Mary but then in that part renamed Sparkwell parish in 1966.*

*There is only limited evidence for archaeological activity in the general area. Investigations nearby during the upgrading of the A38 Trunk Road in the 1970s produced only a small quantity of artefacts and no in situ archaeological deposits. Two possible features have been identified within the site boundary – previous use as a rack field during the post-medieval period (where cloth that had been fulled was stretched and dried) and a now-removed field boundary recorded on early maps.*

*Immediately to the east of the site was a mill complex with a varied industrial history. Originally it appears to have served as the manorial corn mill of the manor of Challonsleigh, with fulling added by the 15th century and spinning, seemingly briefly early in the 19th century. Another short period saw it manufacturing writing slates and pencils before serving as a paper mill for its last 75 years.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Exeter Archaeology at the request of Cavanna Homes (South West) Ltd, to assess the archaeological implications of the proposed development of land to the rear of Harris Way, Lee Mill, in Sparkwell parish, Devon (centred at SX 5978 5587). The assessment has been carried out to provide supporting information for a planning application for a proposed residential scheme.

### 1.1 Method

No specific brief was provided for the project, but the standard procedures for archaeological assessments in Devon have been followed. These are in accordance with the guidance notes in PPG16 *Archaeology and Planning* (November 1990). The assessment therefore comprises an examination of locally available cartographic, photographic and documentary sources and has included the following:

- Examination of records and sources held in the Devon County Historic Environment Record (DCHER) including examination of 1946 RAF vertical air photographs.
- Study of historic maps and other sources in the Westcountry Studies Library, Devon Record Office and Devon & Exeter Institution.
- Site inspection.

### 1.2 The site (Fig. 1)

The site, originally in the ancient parish of Plympton St Mary, comprises two fields of irregular shape, divided by a lane climbing towards Hitchcombe. The western field (here designated Field A on Fig. 2) occupies some 1.95 hectares and the eastern one (Field B) 0.78 hectares. It lies at around 50m AOD.

The geology of the area is Middle Devonian slate overlain by a soil assigned to the Denbigh 1 association.<sup>1</sup> This comprises well drained fine loamy and fine silty soils over rock, which supports stock rearing in the uplands but can allow dairying and some cereals at lower altitudes.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3 Statutory and other designations

No statutory designations have been identified on the actual site. No listed buildings have been identified within 1km of the site<sup>3</sup> and there are no scheduled monuments within 2.4km.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Archaeological background

The area appears to have been subjected to only limited formal archaeological investigations. Upgrading of the main Plymouth to Exeter road to form the A38 Expressway in the early 1970s was accompanied by some archaeological monitoring.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the two miles of

<sup>1</sup> Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1974; Soil Survey of England & Wales 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Soil Survey of England & Wales 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Listed Buildings Online: <<http://lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk/Login.aspx>>, accessed 28 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside: <<http://www.magic.gov.uk/>>, accessed 28 February 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Miles 1977.

new road west from Lee Mill to Voss Farm was surveyed but proved very unproductive, with no sites being located. Artefacts recovered were confined to two flints, a single fragment of medieval pottery and a post-medieval imported sherd.

In 1989 South West Water commissioned a desktop assessment of the route of a new water main from Littlehempston to Roborough, which crossed the A38 at Lee Mill and passed 100m to the north of the site.<sup>6</sup> This identified several areas of potential archaeological interest, including the leat serving the mill that give the area its name, and was followed in the autumn of 1990 by archaeological recording at various points.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2 Historical background

The area first appears in the documentary record as the Domesday estate of *Lege*, held in 1086 by William of Poilley, having been held by the Saxon Osferth. There was no indication of a mill being present at that date.<sup>8</sup> It was during the 12th century that ecclesiastical parishes are believed to have been formed, with the area being included in the very large parish of Plympton St Mary. By 1284 the manor is recorded as *Legh Chaluns*, ownership having passed to the de Chalons family,<sup>9</sup> the name subsequently becoming Challonsleigh, which pertains today. The bridge over the Yealm is first recorded in 1414 as *Leghbrygge*,<sup>10</sup> when it was said to have been almost destroyed by floods. The name hints that the mill was not then present but the inquisition following the death of John Chalons esquire in 1447 recorded that he held the manor of Chalonsleigh of Thomas, Earl of Devon, and that it included one water mill worth 5s (shillings) yearly and two fulling mills worth 2s apiece.<sup>11</sup>

By 1584 the manor was in the possession of Hannibal Vivian, in which year it was purchased by John Woollcombe,<sup>12</sup> whose family was to retain their interest in the area into the 20th century. It is unclear when Lee Mill was established. John Ogilby's strip map of 1675, showing the road from London to Lands-End, gives no indication of any other structures where the road crosses the 'Yalme fluvius' at the mis-transcribed 'Lemin bridg'. Benjamin Donn's map of 90 years later shows only a single house just west of the bridge (Fig. 3).<sup>13</sup> In the 1780s the Board of Ordnance surveyed an extensive area centred on Plymouth at six inches to the mile. The resulting map showed the area as Lee Mill and was the first to depict the kilometre-long leat from the River Yealm (Fig. 4). The map also showed a different configuration to the roads than prevailed subsequently, the re-alignment being carried out prior to 1819, presumably by the Plymouth Eastern Turnpike Trust.<sup>14</sup>

The mill, with its two water wheels, had been described as possessing spinning machinery when for sale in 1802 and again in 1809 but within the next few years had seemingly been converted to a 'Writing Slate and Pencil Manufactory'.<sup>15</sup> This was for sale in 1819 when the wheels were said to power 18 machines which could deliver 1200 framed slates and 20,000 slate pencils in 12 hours.<sup>16</sup> It appears that no purchaser was forthcoming, as an 1830 directory

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<sup>6</sup> Turton & Weddell 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Reed 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Thorn & Thorn 1985, 21,16.

<sup>9</sup> Gover *et al.* 1931, 252; Reichel 1933, 283.

<sup>10</sup> Gover *et al.* 1931, 255, citing Bishop Stafford's Register.

<sup>11</sup> Westcountry Studies Library transcripts of Inquisitions Post Mortem.

<sup>12</sup> National Archives website <[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)>, accessed 28 February 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Donn 1765, Sheet 10a.

<sup>14</sup> DRO DP39.

<sup>15</sup> Bodman 2003, 315–6; Burt 1816, 206.

<sup>16</sup> *Woolmer's Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* 6.2.1819 1b.

gave no indication of any industrial activity at Lee Mill, and by 1833 the paper mill was present, continuing in production until damaged by fire in 1908.<sup>17</sup>

The Plympton St Mary tithe survey took place in 1840–41, and provides the most detailed picture of the area that has been found. The site then comprised the major part of two fields, and a small part of a third, all three described as arable (Fig. 5). That nearest the mill was called Tender Field, presumably a corruption of Tenter Field, derived from the Middle English *teyntour*, a frame on which cloth was stretched, confirming the previous association with cloth fulling.<sup>18</sup> The field was part of the Lee Mill estate of nearly eight acres, owned and occupied by the papermaker Benjamin Holman. To the north lay Higher Field, part of the 22-acre Hill Tenement, then owned by the Reverend Richard Polson, and occupied by Trobridge Horton.<sup>19</sup> A very small part of it is included within the site area. West of the lane lay Stephens field, part of the 27.5-acre Gandys Broadfields tenement, owned by the Reverend Samuel Whitelock Gandy and also occupied by Trobridge Horton.<sup>20</sup>

The subsequent history of the site can be derived from historic maps. The Ordnance Survey's first large-scale map dates from 1866, and shows no change to the site, although more development had occurred along the new roads in the village (Fig. 6). This was the first map to depict the two footpaths that cross the site as rights of way today, although the one through Field B was diverted slightly to the west during the 20th century. A re-survey took place in 1886 and this was the first to show that the small triangular part of Higher Field had been separated off to create a nursery, the new boundary forming the present site boundary (Fig. 7). Another re-survey took place in 1905, when the nursery was no longer shown as such (Fig. 8).

RAF vertical aerial photographic coverage took place in December 1946, when the two larger fields were under pasture, with the smaller still possibly a nursery. The first post-war Ordnance Survey re-survey took place in 1949, with no change detectable to the site, although the southern edge of Stephens Field had begun to experience ribbon development and the paper mill was then agricultural machinery works (Fig. 9). This was subsequently largely replaced by housing while a children's playground occupied another part of Stephen's Field. The eastern hedge of the former nursery has since been removed.

In 1966 Plymouth absorbed the urban part of Plympton, with the remainder of the parish being renamed Sparkwell.

### 3. IDENTIFIED SITES OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

#### 3.1 Within the site (Fig. 2)

##### 1. *Rackfield* SX 5990 5590

The fieldname Tender field indicates the former presence of frames for cloth drying following the fulling process in the nearby mill, known to have been present in the mid-15th and early 19th centuries. The tithe survey described the field as supporting arable cultivation and it is likely that ploughing will have destroyed any trace of the associated post holes for the drying racks.

<sup>17</sup> Pigot 1830; Turton & Weddell 1989, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Tithe Apportionment No. 985; Field 1972, 225.

<sup>19</sup> Tithe Apportionment No. 983.

<sup>20</sup> Tithe Apportionment No. 984.

2. *Site of field boundary* SX 5985 5589

Some 40m of hedge, that had separated the mill tenement from Hill tenement at the time of the tithe survey, was removed some time after 1949.

3.2 **In the vicinity of the site** (Fig. 2)

3. *Site of mill complex* SX 5994 5585 DCHER PRN 17052 / SX55NE/86

A corn and fulling mill is known to have been in existence by the mid-15th century. After brief periods as a spinning mill and then a 'Writing Slate and Pencil Manufactory' it eventually became a paper mill until fire damage led to its closure in 1908, the premises subsequently becoming an agricultural machinery works.<sup>21</sup> A part of the site has since been developed for housing.

4. *Leat* SX 6012 5628 DCHER PRN 44680 / SX65NW/192

The mills were served by a leat leading off the River Yealm approximately 1km to the north. Monitoring of the South West Water pipeline some 100 yards north-east from the site showed it to have been 1.2m wide at the base with stone-revetted sides c. 1.5m high.

5. *Bridge* SX 5999 5575 DCHER PRN 18226 / SX55NE/89

Lee Bridge is known to have been present in 1414, when it was said to have been almost destroyed by floods. An illustration in 1812 depicted it as a two-arch structure.<sup>22</sup> A bridge on the site coped with increased traffic for much of the 20th century until bypassed by the A38 Expressway.

6. *Boundary Stone* SX 5999 5576 DCHER PRN 46564 / SX55NE/176

This Plympton St Mary parish boundary stone was erected c. 1822 at west end of Lee Mill bridge.

7. *Boundary Stone* SX 6001 5576 DCHER PRN 2863 / SX65NW/28

The Ermington parish boundary stone was erected c. 1822 at east end of Lee Mill bridge. The 'Ermington' inscription has been defaced and the stone is not shown on current Ordnance Survey mapping.

8. *Boundary Stone* SX 5999 5576 DCHER PRN 71524

It was the county's policy to erect stones, engraved with the letter 'C', at some 100 yards distance from county bridges to show the limit of the area for which they were responsible. That to the west of Lee Mill bridge is regarded as being of 17th-century date. The corresponding stone in Ermington parish is not shown on current Ordnance Survey mapping.

9. *Site of road* SX 5963 5575 to SX 5985 5571

The original line of the pre-1820 main road survives only as a series of property boundaries extending for some 230m south of the present road through the village, with The Avenue providing the surviving length.

10. *Chapel* SX 5977 5570 DCHER PRN 46565 / SX55NE/177

<sup>21</sup> Bodman 2003, 315–6; Turton & Weddell 1989, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Somers Cocks 2349.

Map evidence indicates that Lee Mill Congregational Church originated as an Independent Chapel, built some 120m west of the junction of the two new roads at a date between 1866 and 1887.

11. *Site of chapel* SX 5985 5572

The religious census of 1851 records the existence of 'Lee Mill Chapel', of the Independent persuasion, said to have been erected about 1836.<sup>23</sup> The situation is confused by directories of 1850 and 1857 referring to a small Wesleyan chapel at Lee Mill, although none appears in the standard listing of methodist chapels.<sup>24</sup> Ordnance Survey maps of 1866 and 1887 show an Independent Chapel south of the junction of the new roads, but it was no longer shown as such on the 1906 and 1953 editions. The building has since been demolished.

12. *Site of school* SX 6004 5573

According to the leading authority on Devon schools, a National school was built at Lee Mill Bridge in 1874.<sup>25</sup> The 1887 Ordnance Survey map shows it occupying a site some 45m east of the bridge. The school was relocated in 1896, with the 1906 map showing the original building to have become a mission room. A garage subsequently occupied the site.

13. *Site of school* SX 5968 5575 DCHER PRN 46567 / SX55NE/179

In 1896 the school was relocated to a site at the west end of the village.<sup>26</sup> It closed in 1949, but the building is still present.

14. *Inn* SX 5984 5573

Map and directory evidence indicates that the Leemill Inn was built between 1850 and 1866, fronting the new road.

15. *Inn* SX 5995 5574

Map and directory evidence indicates that the Smith's Arms was built between 1850 and 1866 just to the east of the junction of the new roads. In the post-war period this has been enlarged to form the Westward Inn.

16. *Scraper* SX 598- 556- DCHER PRN 14546 / SX55NE/80

A side-scraper of Beer flint was found during surveillance of A38 roadworks, dating from the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age.

#### 4. SITE VISIT

##### 4.1 **Field A** (Plates 1 & 2)

This field slopes down moderately to the south-east and is currently under pasture. There are no earthwork features. Circular feeding station marks show that it has recently been used for grazing. The main boundaries are overgrown earthen banks with established small tree growth. The western and part of the northern boundaries have been coppiced and the hedges partially laid. Two overhead power lines cross the north-west corner.

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<sup>23</sup> Wickes 1990, 69.

<sup>24</sup> White 1850, 556; Billing 1857, 651; Wickes 1990; Thorne 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Bovett 1989, 249.

<sup>26</sup> *idem*.



Recently a fence of timber uprights and wire has been established, extending diagonally NW-SE across the field to create a corridor *c.* 1.8m wide defining the public footpath that terminates at a stile at the north-west corner.

The south-east corner of the field has been separated off by an intrusive chainlink and concrete post fence to create a playground. The field's southern boundary consists of a post and wire fence, dividing it from the late 20th century semi-detached houses fronting New Park Road.

#### 4.2 **Field B** (Plates 3 to 5)

This is roughly triangular in shape, also sloping moderately down to the south-east and is under established pasture.

The north-west boundary largely comprises a dry stone wall, heavily overgrown particularly with brambles. There are some gaps where the stone is exposed at ground level. Towards the north-east end it supports some established trees. At the south-west end, where the wall is more recent, it is mortared for *c.* 22m up to a gap, beyond which is a section *c.* 1.5m high dry stone wall (Plate 4). The south-east boundary is a modern stone wall topped with a wooden fence dividing the field from the late 20th-century houses on the former mill site. An overhead power cable runs close to the boundary, with a mast towards the southern corner.

The south-west boundary consists of earthen banks supporting medium established tree growth, lined by a timber post and wire fence. A public footpath runs north across the field from a gate in the southern corner up to where there are rounded stone terminals in the hedge (Plate 5). Beyond the boundary is a sunken trackway, *c.* 2m wide and 2–3m deep, dividing the two fields and leading towards Hitchcombe (Plate 6)

An earthwork towards the north-west corner, aligned approximately NE-SW, indicates the former field boundary lost in the post-war period (Site 2). It extends from the 'kink' in the sunken track up to the change in construction of the north-west boundary (Plate 4). The 'kink' may possibly indicate the junction of a now lost track, running along the west side of the now removed boundary, and perhaps continuing on to have provided a more direct route to Hitchcombe.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The assessment has established only limited evidence for archaeological activity both on and adjacent to the site. During works on the upgrading of the A38 Trunk Road, only a small quantity of finds were recovered, and no evidence for *in situ* archaeological deposits.<sup>27</sup>

Within the site, there is historical evidence that during the later post-medieval period Field B may have contained drying racks for cloth manufactured in the adjacent fulling mill. It is possible that the field contains associated postholes for these racks, but as these are likely to have been insubstantial, they may well have been obliterated by subsequent ploughing.

The former boundary in the north-west corner of Field B now survives as an earthwork (Site 2), and this is depicted on the 1841 tithe map (Fig. 5) and had been removed by 1949 (Fig. 9).

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<sup>27</sup> Miles 1977.

It is possible that this boundary was in place much earlier and it may have contained an associated ditch or ditches. The ‘kink’ in the sunken lane at its southern end suggests that another track extended along the western side of this boundary.

A larger settlement at Lee Mill is only likely to have been established during the later 18th century, probably associated with the expansion of the fulling mill. The site has clearly been agricultural land since this time, although there is the possibility that evidence for earlier, previously unknown, archaeological remains might be present. There has been only limited archaeological work in the area, but what has been undertaken indicates a generally low potential.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This assessment was commissioned by Cavanna Homes (South West) Ltd and co-ordinated for them by Ian Pugsley, Head of Planning & Technical Department, and for Exeter Archaeology by John Valentin.

The research was carried out by Tony Collings and the site visit made by Simon Hughes. The assistance of the staffs of the Devon Record Office, the Devon County Council Historic Environment Record, the Devon & Exeter Institution and the Westcountry Studies Library is gratefully acknowledged.

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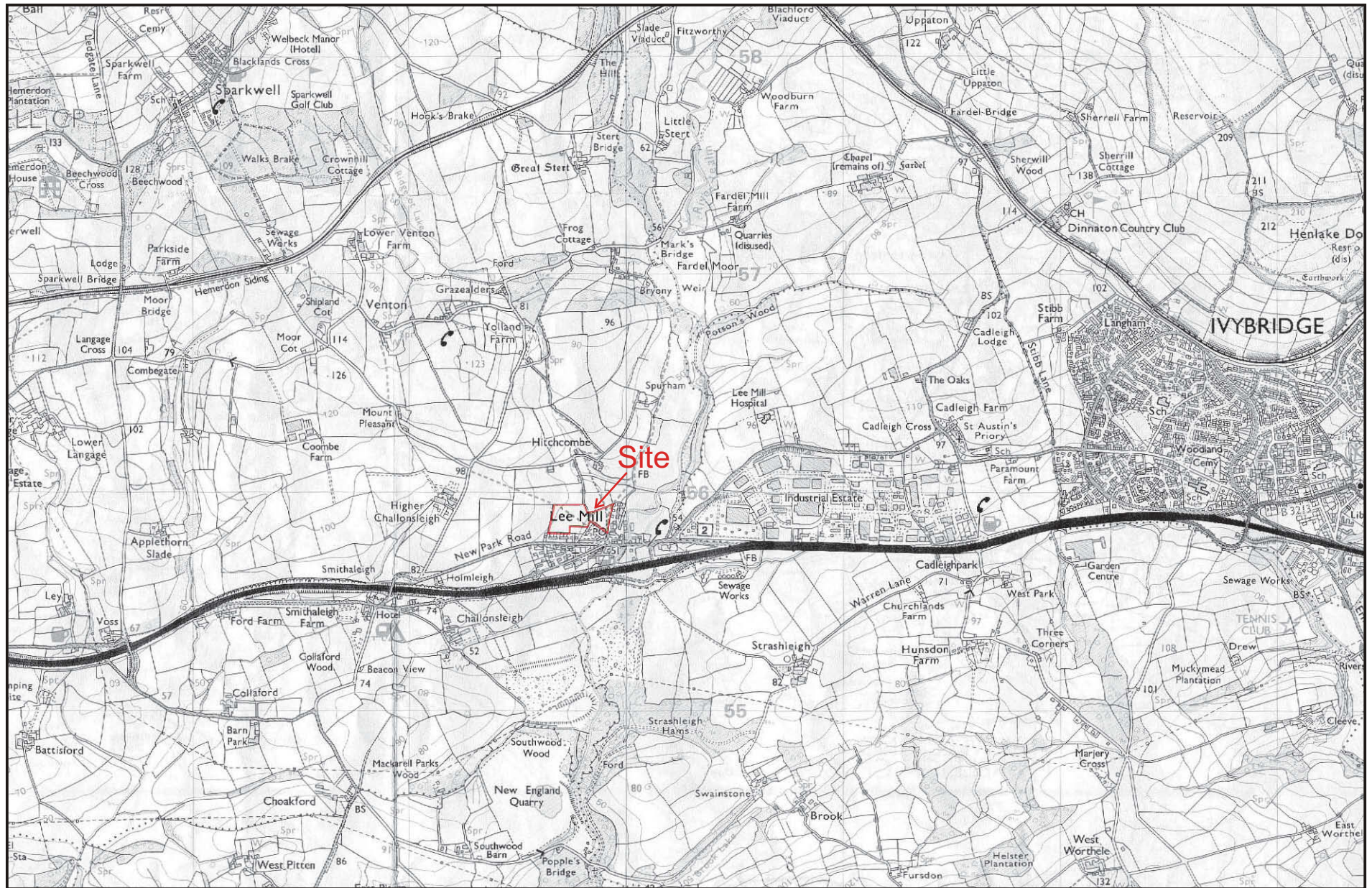


Fig. 1 Location of the site. Reproduced from the 1:25000 scale Explorer Map OL20 by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright, 2005. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100016685.

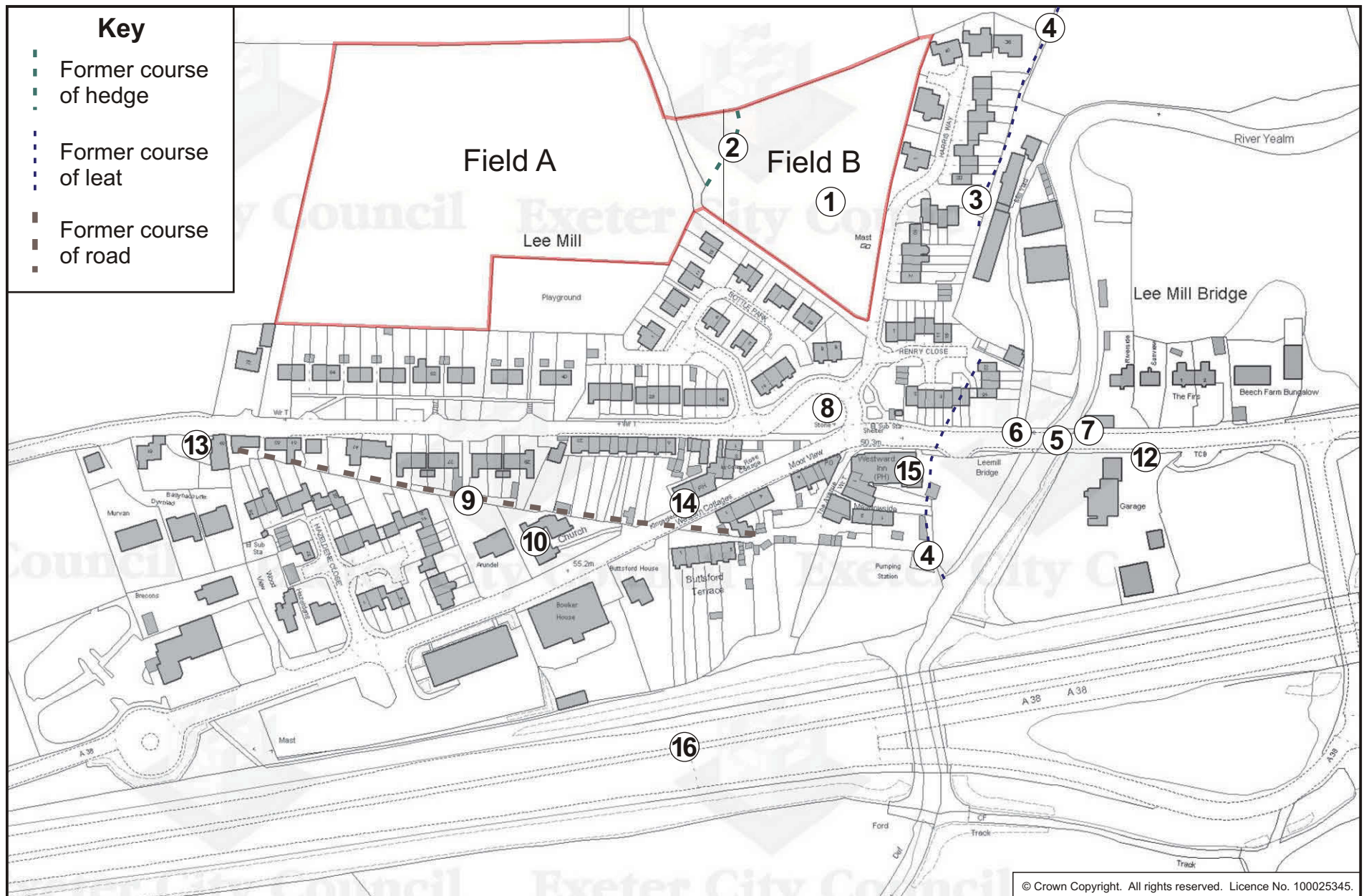


Fig. 2 Location of the 16 identified sites of potential archaeological interest. Based on Ordnance Survey digital mapping at 1:2500 scale.

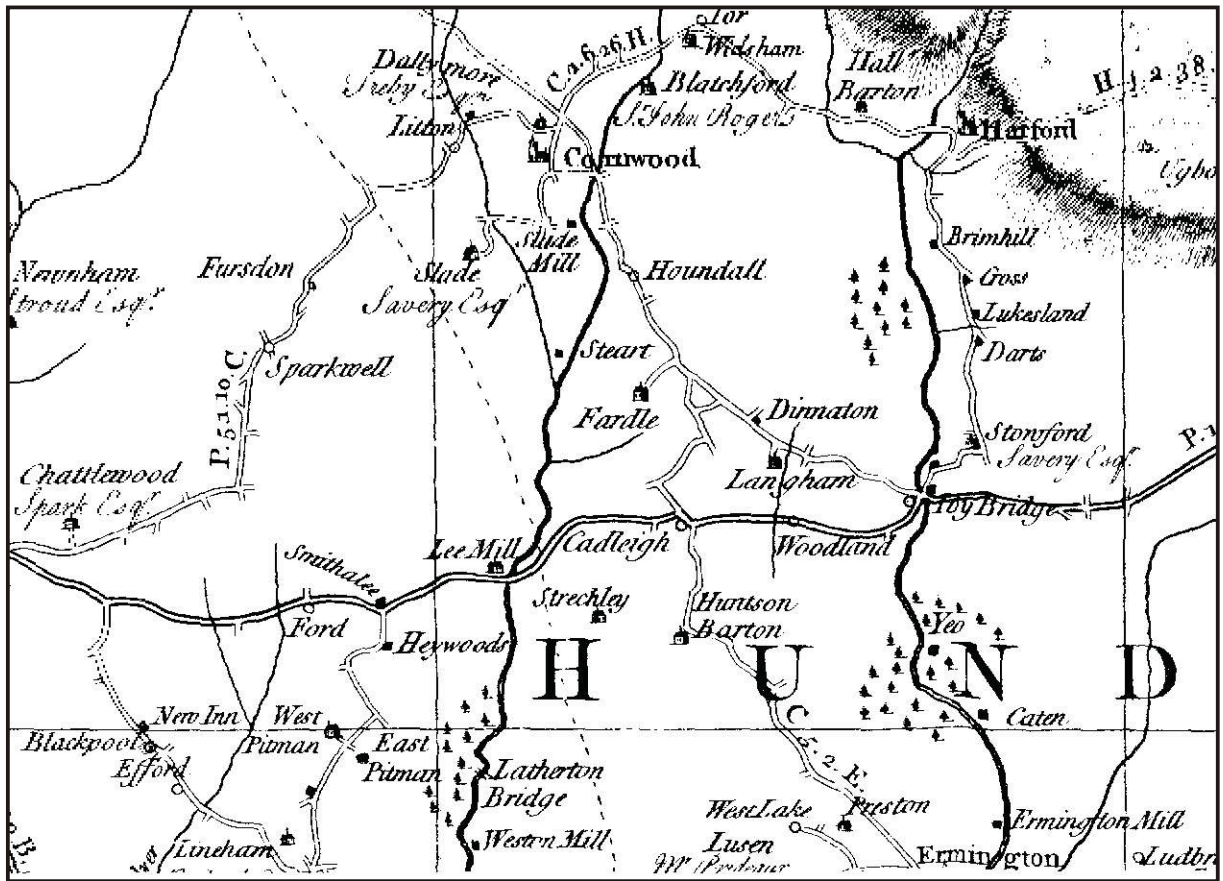


Fig. 3 Extract from Benjamin Donn's 1765 Map of the County of Devon, Sheet 10a.



Fig. 4 Extract from the 1:10560 scale Ordnance Survey Drawing 19 Part III, surveyed in 1784-86.

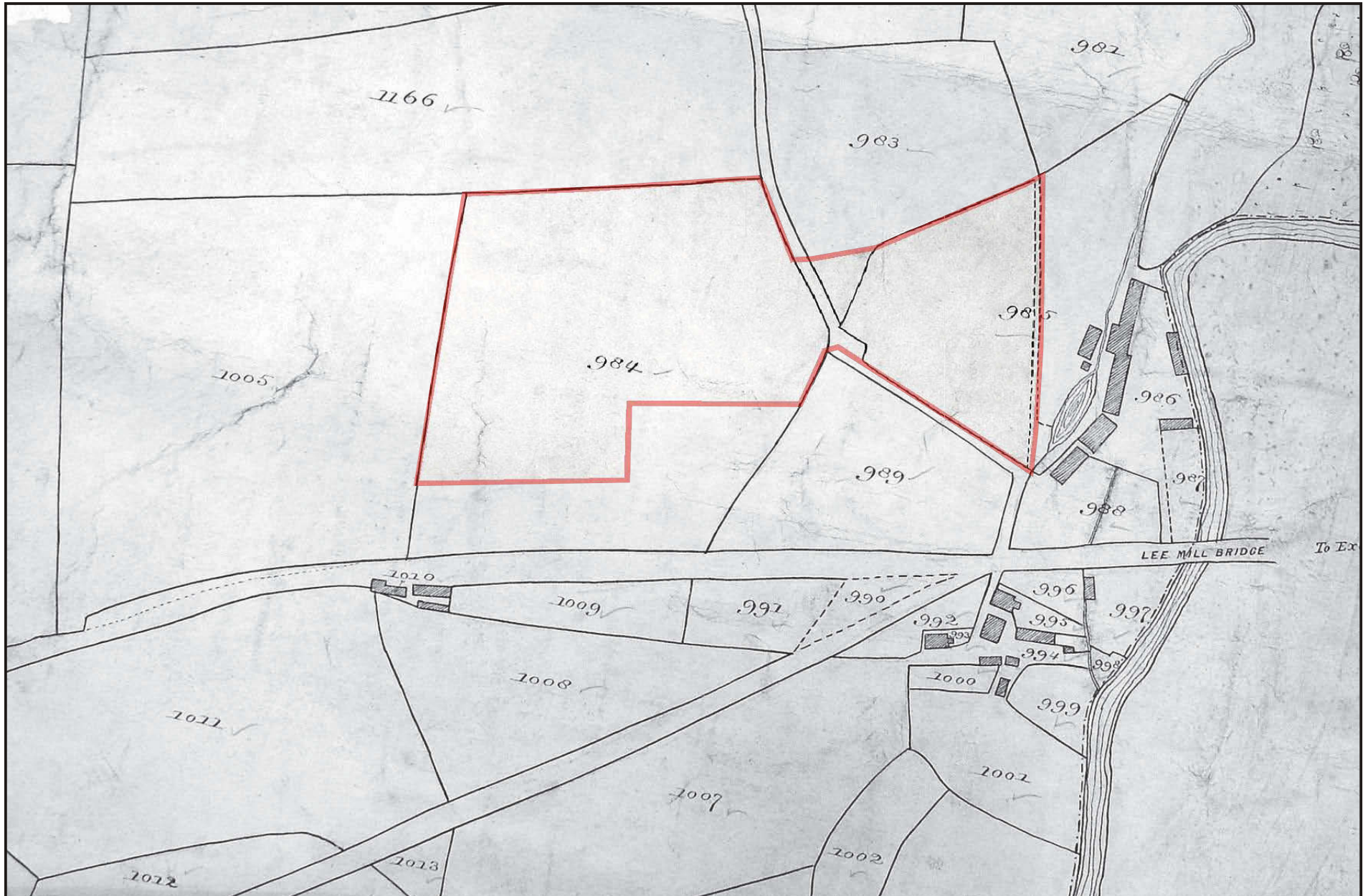


Fig. 5 The site in 1841: Plympton St Mary Tithe Map.

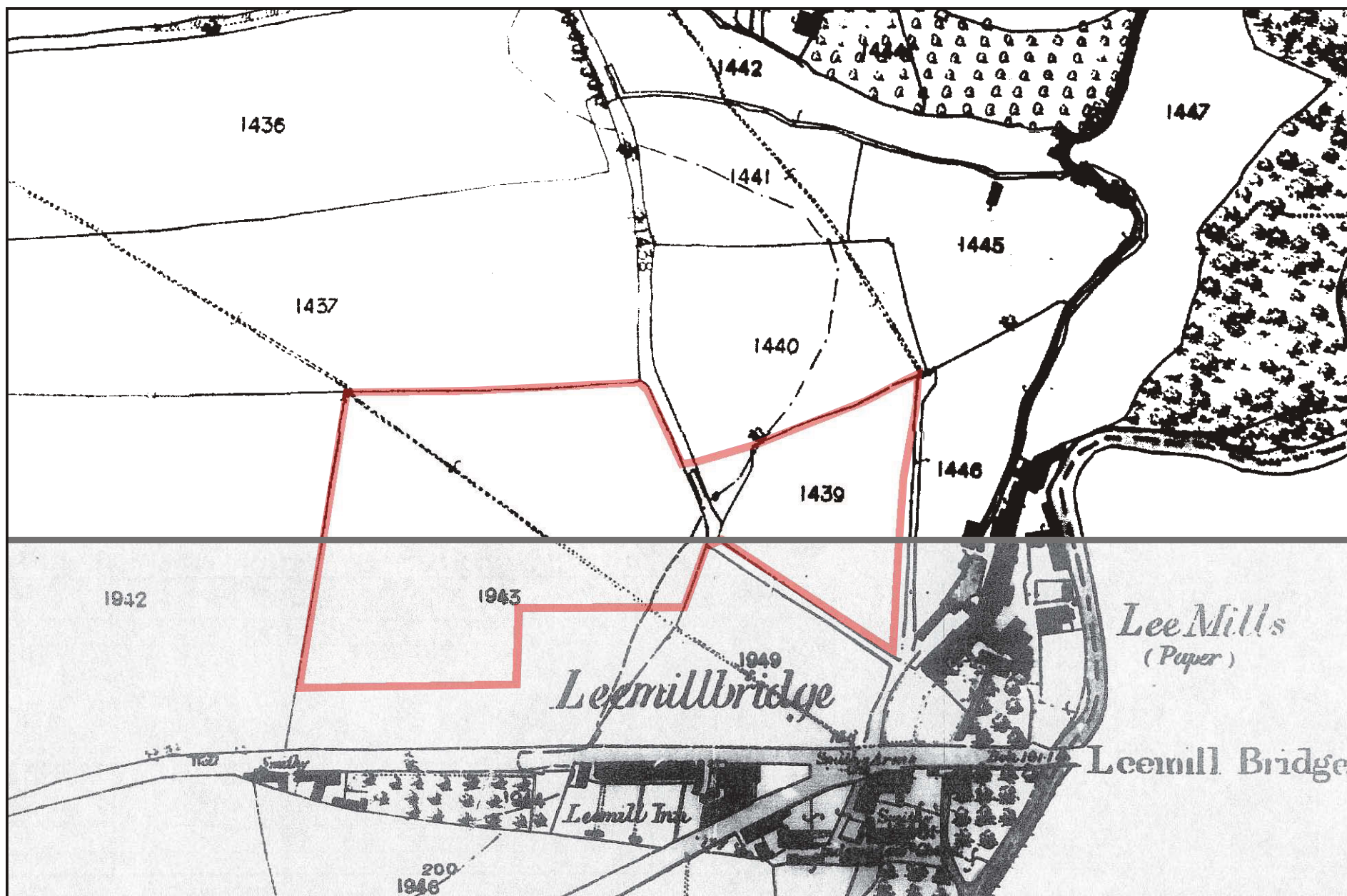


Fig. 6 The site in 1866: Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map sheets of Plympton St Mary parish, CXXV.1 & 5.



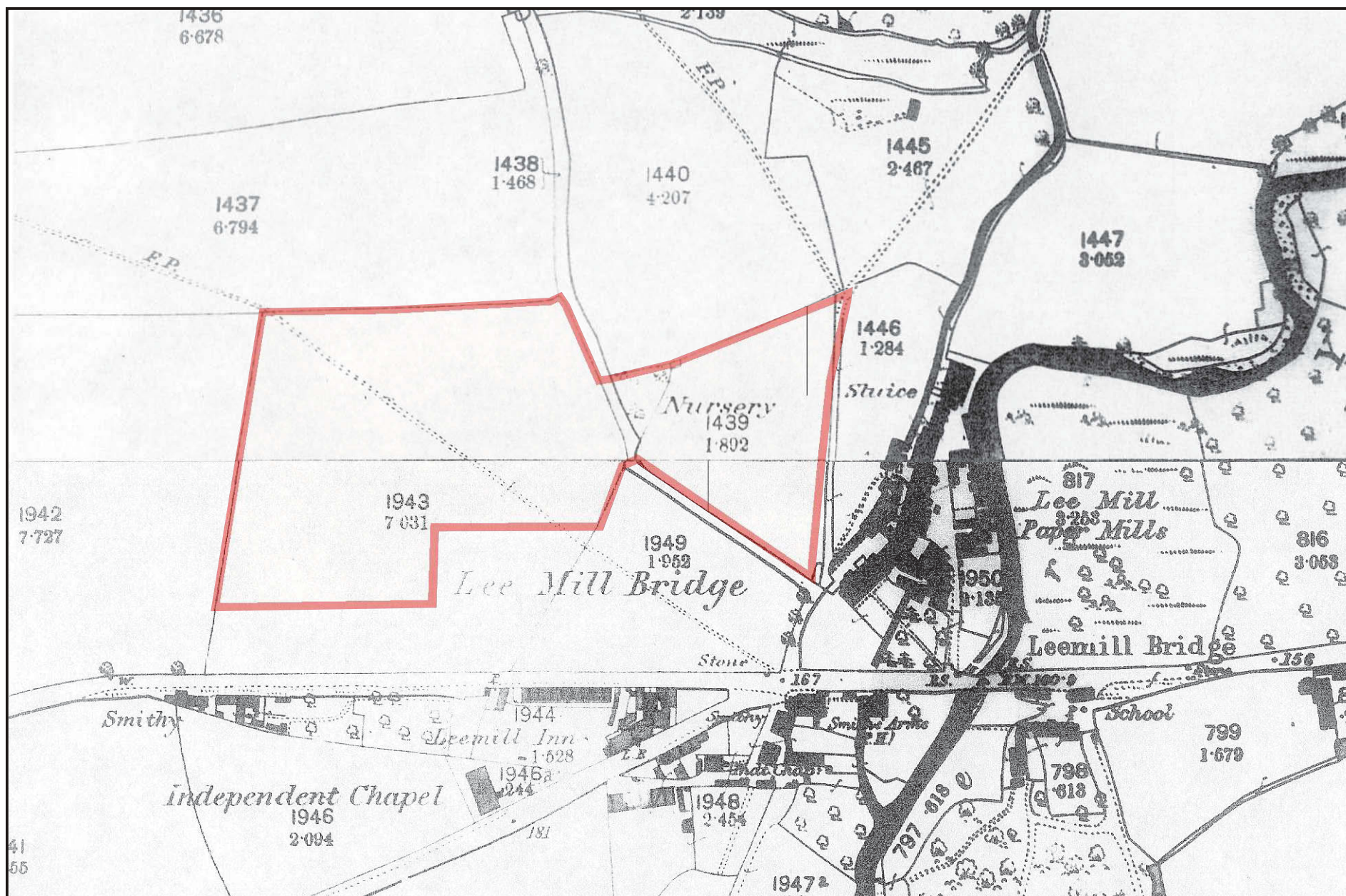


Fig. 7 The site in 1886: Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map sheets CXXV.1 & 5, published in 1887.

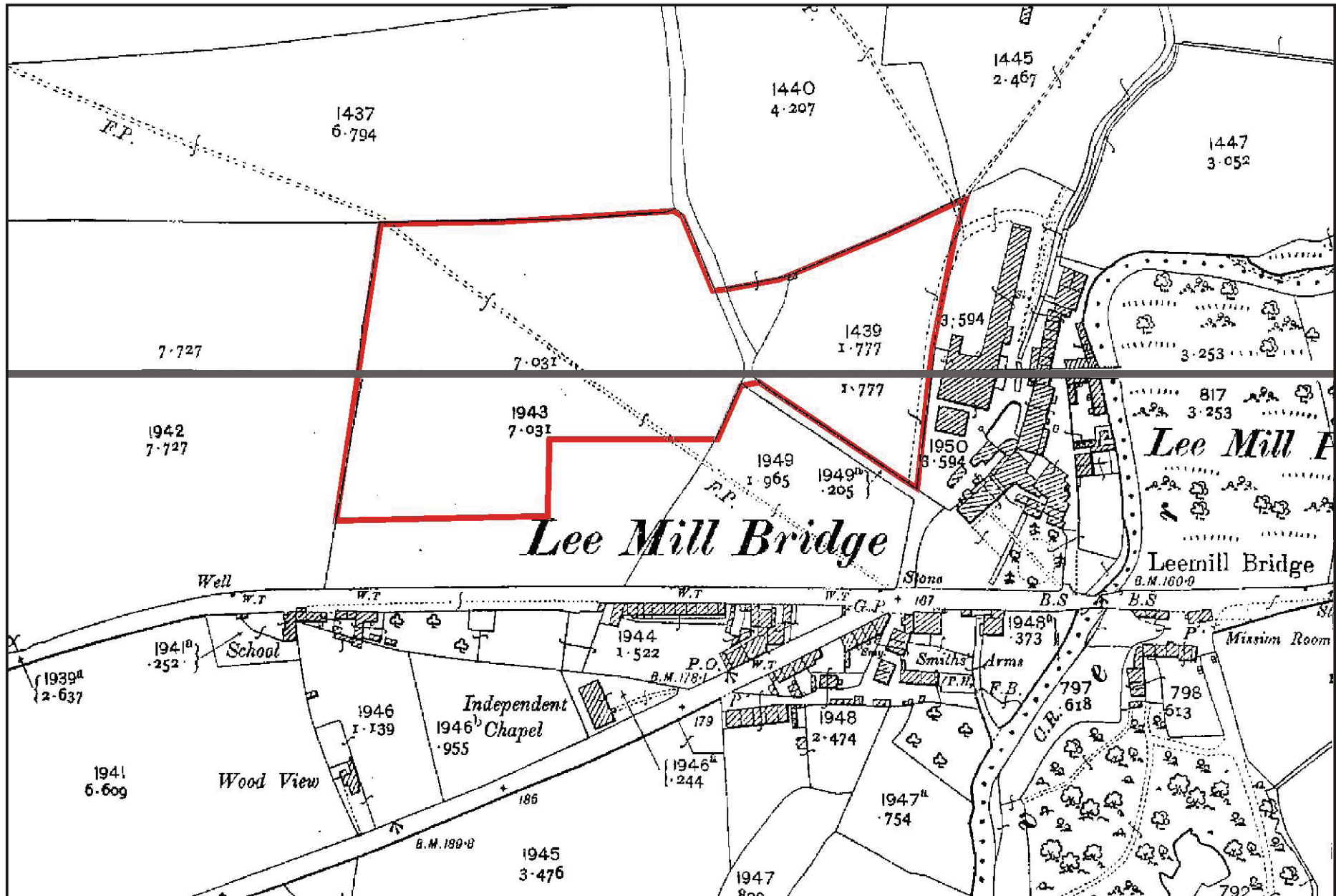


Fig. 8 The site in 1905: Ordnance Survey map sheets CXXV.1 & 5, published in 1906.

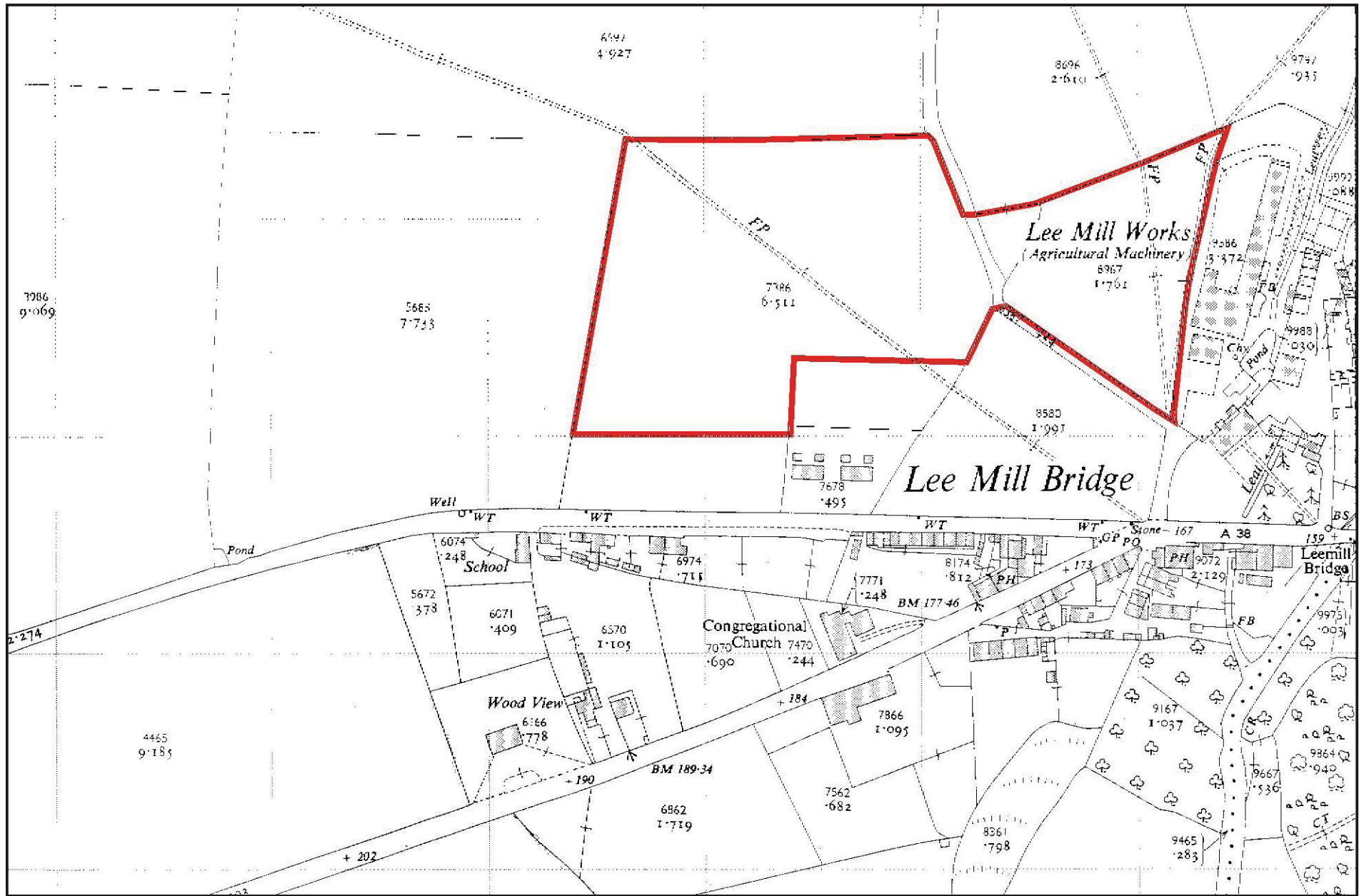


Fig. 9 The site in 1949: Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map sheet SX 5955, published in 1953.



Plate 1 Field A, viewed from its north-west corner.



Plate 2 Field A, looking north from its south-east corner.



Plate 3 Field B, viewed from its north-west corner.



Plate 4 The gap in the north-west boundary of Field B, where the change in construction type is present.



Plate 5 The gap in the north-west boundary of Field B, crossed by the public footpath.



Plate 6 The sunken trackway between Fields A and B.