

# birmingham archaeology

Land at Albrighton, Shropshire

An Archaeological  
Desk-Based Assessment  
2007

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**Land at Albrighton, Shropshire  
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2007**

By Mark Charles

**For the Environment Agency**

*For further information please contact:*

Alex Jones (Director)  
Birmingham Archaeology  
The University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2TT  
Tel: 0121 414 5513  
Fax: 0121 414 5516  
E-Mail: [bham-arch@bham.ac.uk](mailto:bham-arch@bham.ac.uk)  
Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

LAND AT ALBRIGHTON, SHROPSHIRE  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

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**LAND AT ALBRIGHTON, SHROPSHIRE  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT**

**SUMMARY**

*An archaeological desk-based assessment of land at Albrighton, Shropshire (NGR SJ828 053), commissioned by the Environment Agency, was carried out in December 2006 and January 2007 in advance of a flood prevention scheme. A walkover survey took place in an area to the west of the study area, north of the Albrighton village conurbation. Both primary and secondary sources, including cartographic evidence, were researched in order to construct a historic background to the study area and its environs. The Historic Environment Record was also consulted to uncover any previous archaeological work or finds within the study area and the wider locality to inform the assessment of archaeological potential*

*The assessment found no evidence of standing structures or archaeological features within the walkover survey area except those that may be associated with a previously recorded watermill. It is most likely that this mill stood to the west, outside the survey area. In the north western area the purely desk-based assessment found evidence of standing listed and scheduled buildings dating from the medieval period to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but no evidence for structures or archaeology other than had already been identified.*

## **LAND AT ALBRIGHTON, SHROPSHIRE AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT, 2007.**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Between 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and 10<sup>th</sup> January 2007 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological desk-based assessment of land at Albrighton, Shropshire (hereafter referred to as the study area). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency in advance of a review of flood defences.

This report outlines the results of the assessment, which was prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (IFA 2001).

The assessment conformed to a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2007) which was approved by the Environment Agency Archaeologist.

### **2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY**

The village of Albrighton, Shropshire is located 7½ miles north west of Wolverhampton, West Midlands, and the study area, which is centred on NGR SJ 828 053, is divided into two. Area A, which forms a tract of land of approximately 6 hectares to the north east of the village (Fig. 1) being bounded by the M54 to the north, the A41 to the south west, by Whitley Bank to the south east and by Donnington Lane to the north west. It is agricultural land interspersed with farm buildings, former farm workers cottages and large private residences.

A second area of interest (Area B), separated from Area A by the transport corridor formed by the Shrewsbury to Birmingham railway and the A41, is the line of the parish boundary between Albrighton and Donnington civil parishes immediately north of the village. Its present character is of a partially enclosed wooded wetland and nature reserve contained within a narrow parcel of land.

### **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The principal aim of the project was to assess the survival and potential significance of any archaeology within the study area by collating existing archaeological and historical information for the site and its immediate environs.

This information will be used to inform a mitigation strategy for future archaeological work on the site (see Section 8 below).

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

A search of all relevant and readily available published and non-published documentary sources, including historic maps and photographs, was carried out in the Shropshire Archives and the library of the University of Birmingham. The Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), the main source of archaeological information for the county, was also consulted.

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In addition, a walkover of Area B was undertaken in order to assess the topography and any above ground archaeology, including standing buildings.

## **5 SITE INSPECTION**

The walkover survey of Area B commenced at the Shrewsbury to Birmingham railway embankment where a culvert allows a stream to flow south, bordering residential to the west of residential buildings to the east and fields to the west (Plate 1). After 100m the stream turns to the west and the study area becomes boggy woodland. A second stream, possibly a drainage ditch, starts to run south of the main stream, the land in between is then formed into a succession of narrow islands (Plate 2) as the southern flow repeatedly cuts into the bank separating the streams. The main stream turns further to the west and straightens (Plate 3); another curve to the stream leads to a further linear stretch and then spreads to form a swamp-like area within dense scrubland (Plate 4). At this point the route becomes impassable. Up to this point the study area continues to be bounded by fields to the north and residential buildings to the south.

The next accessible feature is Hall Pool (Plate 5), thought to be a large mill pond, and is bounded by residential accommodation to the south, a raised area of land to the north, known as Old Hall Orchard and Rectory Road to the west. The pool flows down under the road through a small weir (Plate 7) and reappears to the west amongst woodland, small ponds (Plate 6) and meadowland. To the north of the study area along a pond side walk is 'St. Cuthbert's Well', a spring that has been turned into a park feature. The stream then winds its way west to the end of the study area (Plate 8). At this point it is bounded by road and residential accommodation to the south and fields to the north.

Throughout the survey no standing buildings were encountered, nor were possible sites of buildings visible as raised linear features, ditches or mounds. It is possible that the build up of woodland flora may have obscured any remains but this is considered unlikely as the boggy nature of the land, especially to the east of the walkover area, would be detrimental to any structure, except those built for the express purpose of utilising the power of a stream, such as a watermill. The two linear stretches of the stream suggest that it may have been straightened at some time to form a mill leat but could also have been formed as part of a much later water diversion or flood control measure.

## **6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

No references to prehistoric or Roman remains or chance finds could be located in the study area within the HER. It should also be mentioned that the more recent written history of Albrighton often gets confused and intertwined with another Albrighton, near Shrewsbury.

### **6.1 Early Medieval and Medieval**

Albrighton's historical record is relatively quiet. An Anglo-Saxon origin is suggested by its inclusion in the Domesday Book as Albricston or the home/farm of Albric. The parish church, dedicated to Mary Magdalene, was completed in around 1181 and the village received its charter in 1303 (Wikipedia). Other fleeting historical references underline Albrighton's agricultural and manorial past.

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The main clues to Albrighton's history are to be found within the archaeological record. In the north eastern study area two medieval moated sites (HER, PRN01075, HER, PRN01076), one surrounding Humphreston Hall, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century manor house (HER, PRN01832) and a possible deserted medieval settlement (HER, PRN00969) suggest widespread activity during this period. The church of St. Cuthbert (HER, PRN13801), just to the north of the study area, in the parish of Donington, bordering the village conurbation of Albrighton, would have been a spiritual focus of a medieval settlement close to Humphreston Hall.

## **6.2 Post-medieval**

It has been suggested that Hall Pool (Albrighton Pool) (HER, PRN05367) served as a mill pond for a 16<sup>th</sup>-century watermill (HER, PRN05374) via a mill leat (HER, PRN05375) on the extreme western edge of the study area, and was possibly located on the site of Clock Mill Cottages (Fig.7). The well recorded mill at Cosford a mile further west (not shown) is evidence that such activity took place along this stretch of water.

Donington House (HER, PRN13805) a large 18<sup>th</sup>-century manor or farmhouse, and other post-medieval built farms, cottages and barns suggest a continuity of land usage in both survey areas during this period.

Perhaps the biggest social upheaval was caused by the building of the Shrewsbury and Birmingham Railway (HER, PRN17683), which was opened in 1849. The massive embankment (Plate 1 & Fig.7) that brought the line across the valley put a physical barrier between settlements in the study area and allowed commuters working in Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton and Birmingham to see Albrighton as a viable option as a place to live, a process that has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **7 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY AREA**

As mentioned previously there have been no prehistoric or Roman remains or chance finds recorded within the study area.

The earliest recorded remains of a structure and the only one to receive archaeological attention is a square moated site 330m south west of Humphreston Hall, known at the time of excavation as Albrighton Moat (HER, PRN01075) a Scheduled Monument. Excavations in 1988 and 1990 (Cane 1988; Hughes 1990), to evaluate the archaeological damage that could be caused by using the site as a public amenity, revealed well-preserved remains. The enclosure was measured at approximately 20m square with a barely traceable causeway and no upstanding remains or indications of structures within the enclosure. The 1988 trenches also revealed evidence of stone revetting to the inner and outer sides of the moat ditch but no datable artefacts. The 1990 excavation confirmed the existence of a causeway and used geophysics to locate rectangular structural features within the enclosure. The excavation also recovered pottery from the earliest contexts that were dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The other medieval moated site, at Humphreston Hall, has not been archaeologically investigated. The moat (HER, PRN01076) has not survived to the same extent as Albrighton Moat, with just three sides of an oblong moat visible, nor has it been dated. However, it partially surrounds Humphreston Hall (HER, PRN01076) a 15<sup>th</sup>-century timber framed, grade II\* listed, manor house, which was remodelled in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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The old medieval chapel of the Hall (HER, PRN01833), which lies 130m east, was converted into a farm building and now forms part of a conglomeration of agricultural buildings that range in date from the medieval period to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further east of Humphreston Hall lies another grade II listed 15<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse, Lower Dairy House (HER, PRN17724), which was remodelled in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and situated 100m north east of the Hall is a grade II listed small threshing barn (HER, PRN19817).

The only reference to a structure within the study area north of the village conurbation is the 16<sup>th</sup>-century watermill (HER, PRN05374) and associated mill leat and mill pond mentioned in the previous section. However, the exact position of the mill is contentious as the identification is based purely on place name evidence.

In the north eastern study area the remaining buildings listed within the HER are of a post-medieval date. Black Well Cottage (HER, PRN17725), a 17<sup>th</sup>-century grade II listed building with later additions, is situated in Donington Lane. Harriets Hayes, an early 18<sup>th</sup>-century grade II listed farmhouse with two stories and garret is located on Harriet Hayes Road (HER, PRN17669). Donington House, Donington Lane, is a large grade II listed three-storied red brick house (HER, PRN13805), and Lower Wood Farmhouse, also in Donington Lane, is a grade II listed two-storied red brick structure, built around 1800 (HER, PRN17726).

The greatest effect on the landscape, local economy, and Albrighton's relative isolation, as has already been observed, was the construction of the railway in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This barrier between the lands to the north and south was emphasised by the construction of the A41 bypass partly alongside the railway in the latter part of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Early cartographic evidence confirms the rural nature of the study area. John Rocque's map of 1752 (Fig.3), although lacking detail and accuracy, shows Albrighton as a village clustered around access roads amid large enclosed fields.

Robert Baugh's map of 1808 (Fig.4) illustrates the parish churches, names the dominant houses of Humphreston and Donington and charts the course of the stream set within the valley as it reaches Hall Pool. It is interesting to note that although Baugh's map, and Greenwood's map of 1827 (Fig.5), illustrate the position of windmills within the locality there is no evidence of a watermill by the stream within the cartographic evidence. It is therefore likely that the suggested 16<sup>th</sup>-century mill went out use before this time. The maps suggest the absence of any structures within Area B.

The unchanging nature of both survey areas is underlined by the two field name maps (Figs.6 & 7) compiled between 1835 and 1846. However, just outside the walkover survey area to the west are two fields named Near and Far Clock Mill Meadows that may offer a clue to the location of the elusive watermill.

The OS maps (Figs.1 & 8 to 12) illustrate that despite the arrival of the railway in the 1840s and the construction of the A41 bypass, the two study areas, show almost no sign of change into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The walkover survey to visually assess Area B concluded that there were no standing structures or archaeological features except for those associated with a possible watermill, said to have been constructed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The cartographic evidence suggests that any such mill was built to the west outside the walkover survey area and confirms the lack of evidence for any

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other structures. These conclusions were also confirmed by the absence of any such archaeology record in the HER.

The purely desk-based assessment of the area to the east of the A41 bypass concluded that there were a number of sites of archaeological interest. Of these, the Albrighton Moat, a scheduled monument, is the only site to receive archaeological attention through excavation. A number of grade II listed buildings ranging in date from the medieval period to around 1800 also stand within this area, such as Humphreston Hall and Donington Hall. Using the available cartographic evidence, the HER and other secondary sources the assessment found no evidence for structures other than for those still standing.

The presence or absence of archaeological deposits within the study area cannot, however, be demonstrated with certainty without any further archaeological work. The nature and scope of any further archaeological work or mitigation strategies in advance of any proposed development would, however, be formulated by the Planning Archaeologist at Shropshire County Council.

## **9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The project was commissioned by Marianne Jones, on behalf of the Environment Agency. Thanks are due to Scott Mountford for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. The assessment was undertaken by Mark Charles who also produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds and edited by Malcolm Hislop who also monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

## **10 SOURCES**

### **10.1 Secondary Sources**

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

Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) 1999, *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*, rev. edn.

Cane, J. 1988, *Excavations at Albrighton Moat, Shropshire*. BUFAU (now Birmingham Archaeology) Report No. 40.

Hughes, E.G. 1990, *Further Excavations at Albrighton Moat, Shropshire*. BUFAU (now Birmingham Archaeology) Report No. 136.

Internet Source:

Wikipedia – [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albrighton%2C\\_Bridgnorth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albrighton%2C_Bridgnorth)

### **10.2 Cartographic Sources**

John Rocque's Map of Shropshire 1752

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Plan of the estates belonging to the Right Hon. Charles Earl of Shrewsbury in the Lordship of Albrighton 1789. Ref. 1267/2

Robert Baugh's Map of Shropshire 1808

C & J Greenwood's Map of Shropshire 1827

Tithe map and apportionment used for field names plan 1835-43. Ref. PF 94/1/2/3

Tithe map and apportionment used for field names plan 1846. Ref. P7/1, P7/2

Ordnance Survey map 1892

Ordnance Survey map 1903

Ordnance Survey map 1924

Ordnance Survey map 1938

Ordnance Survey map 1998

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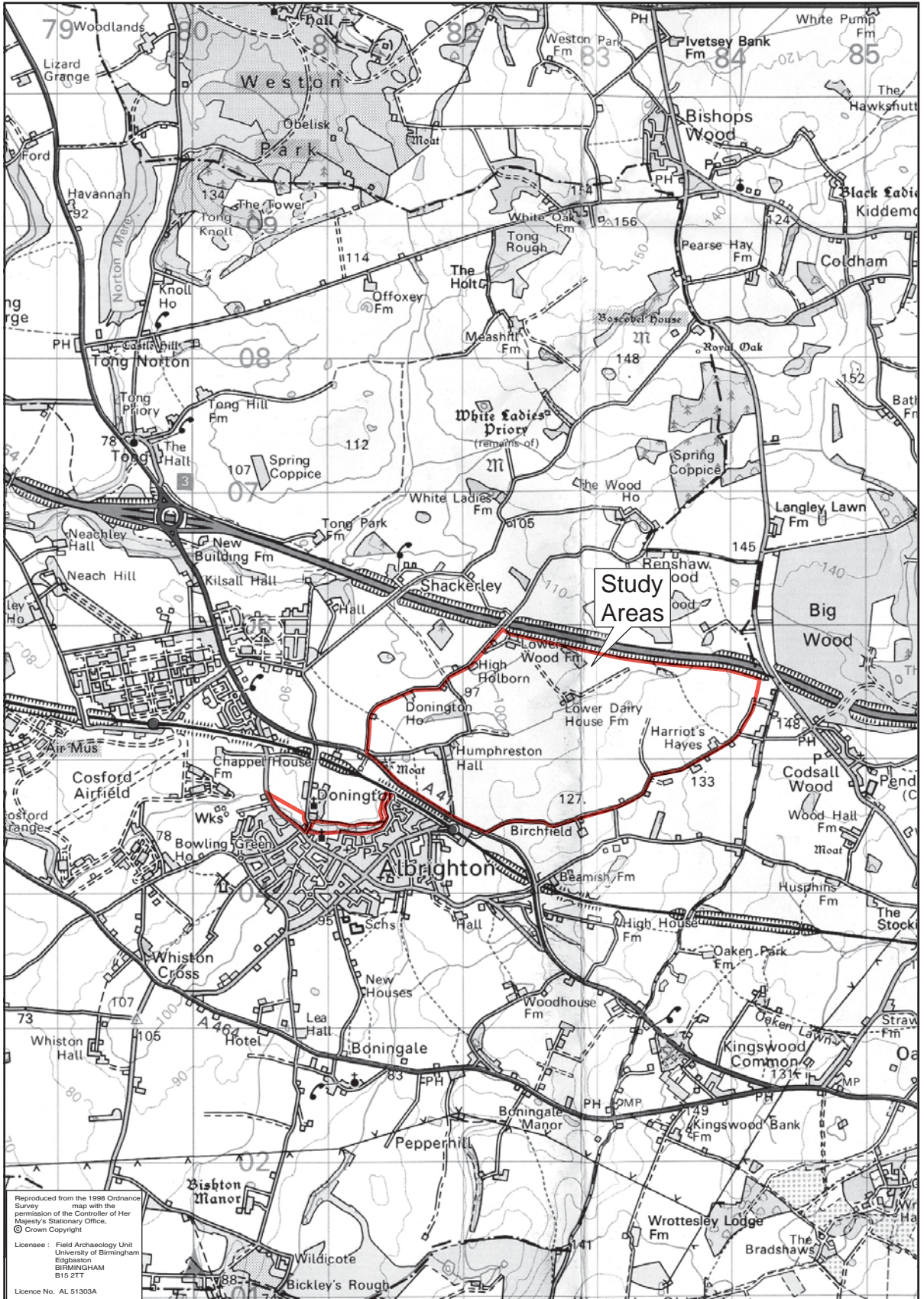


Fig.1

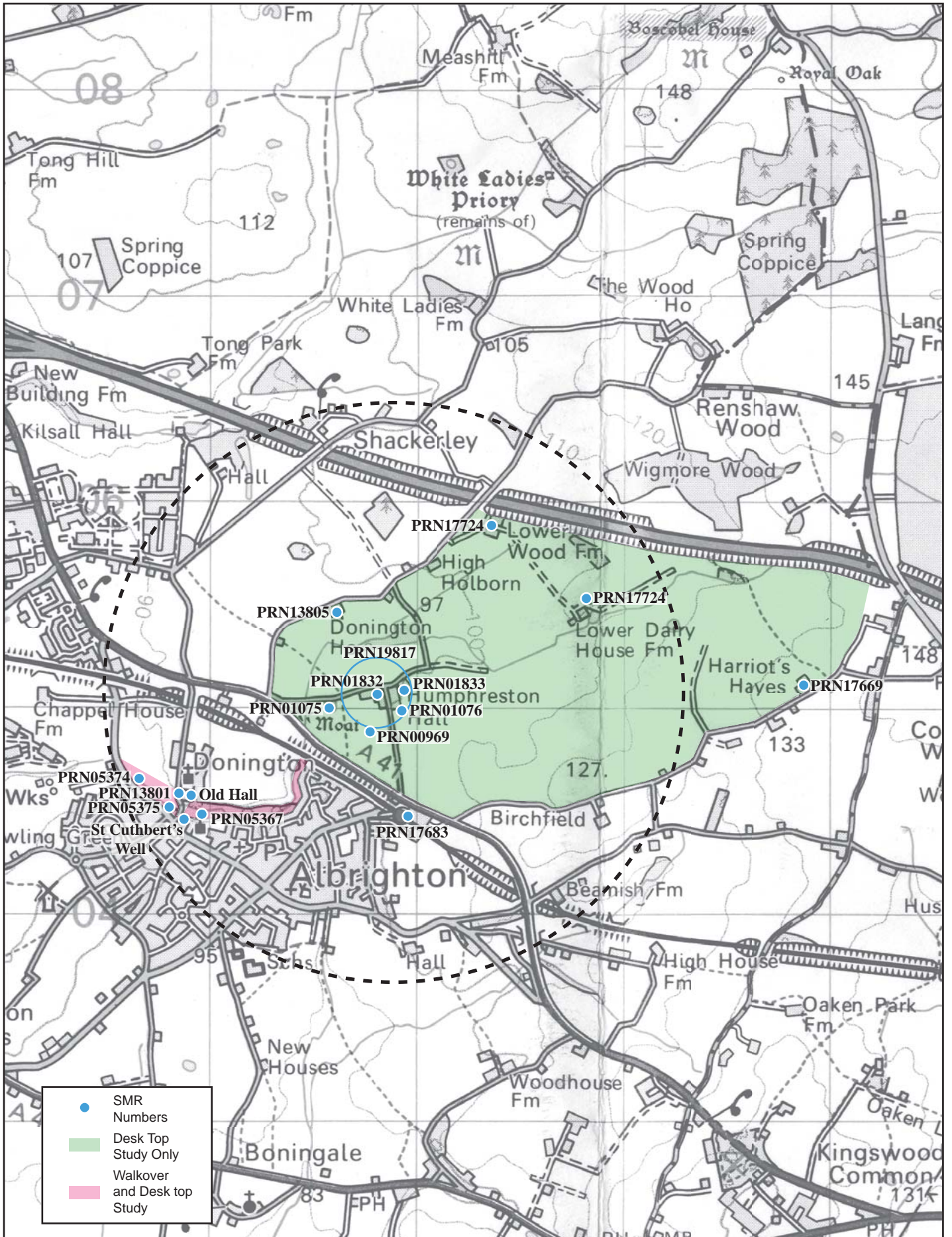


Fig.2



Fig.3

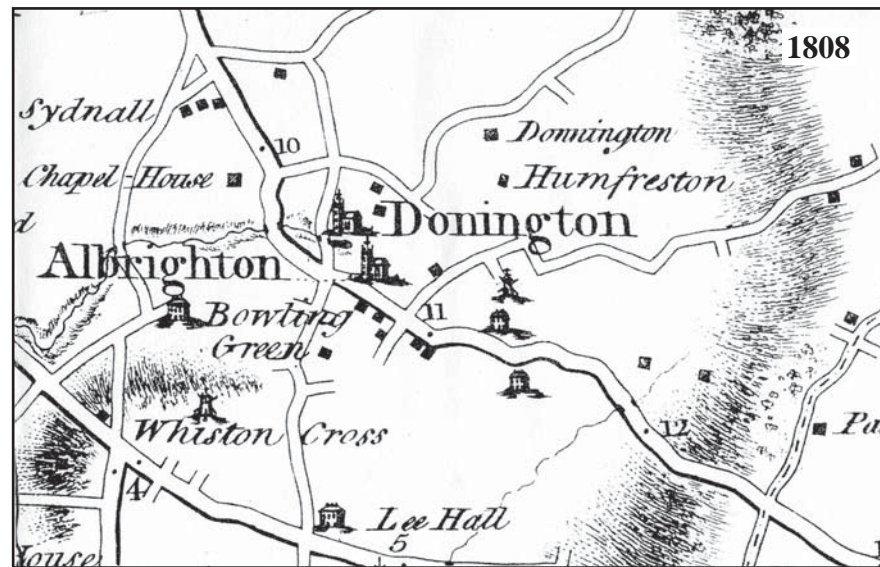
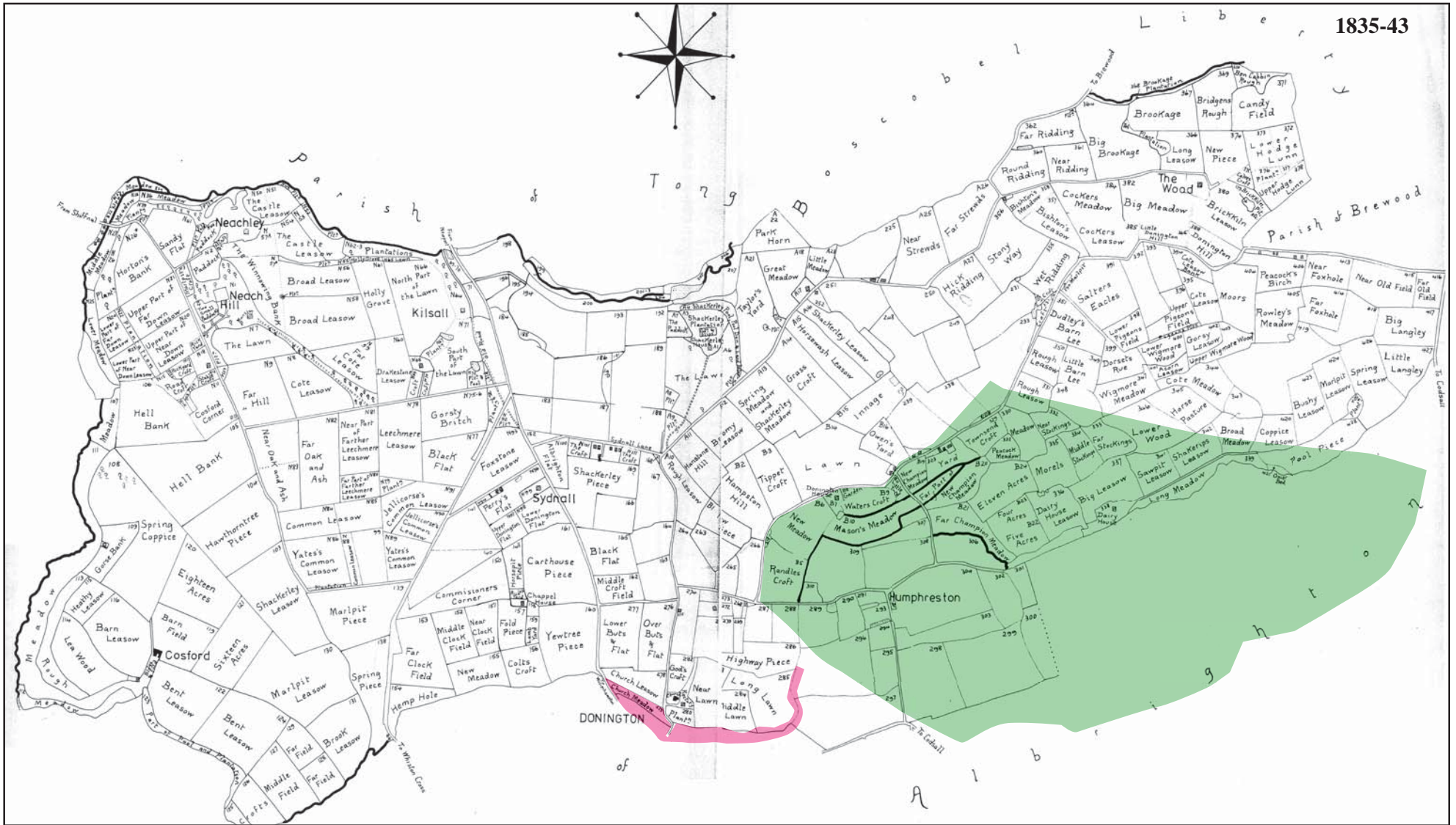


Fig.4



Fig.5



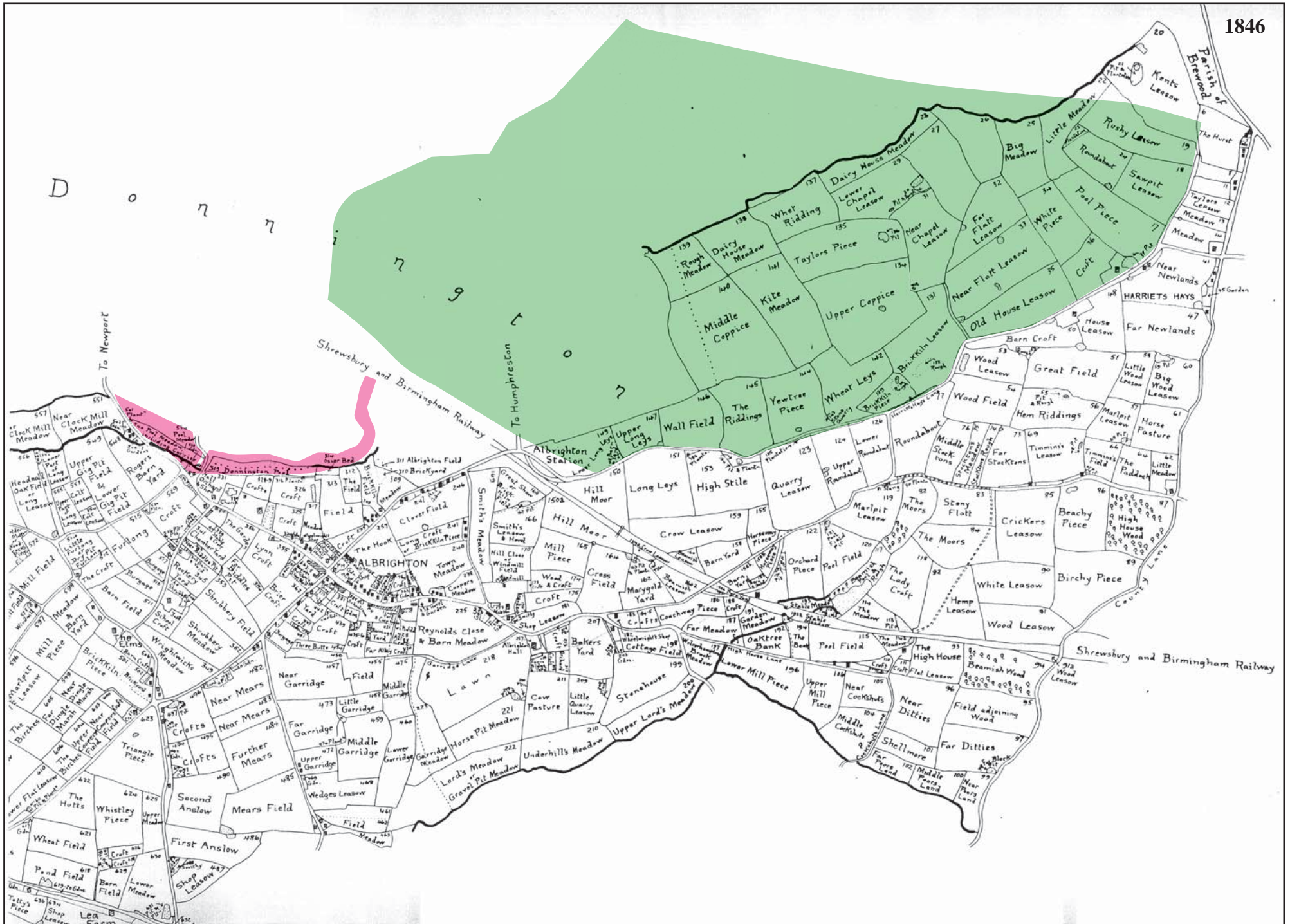


Fig.7



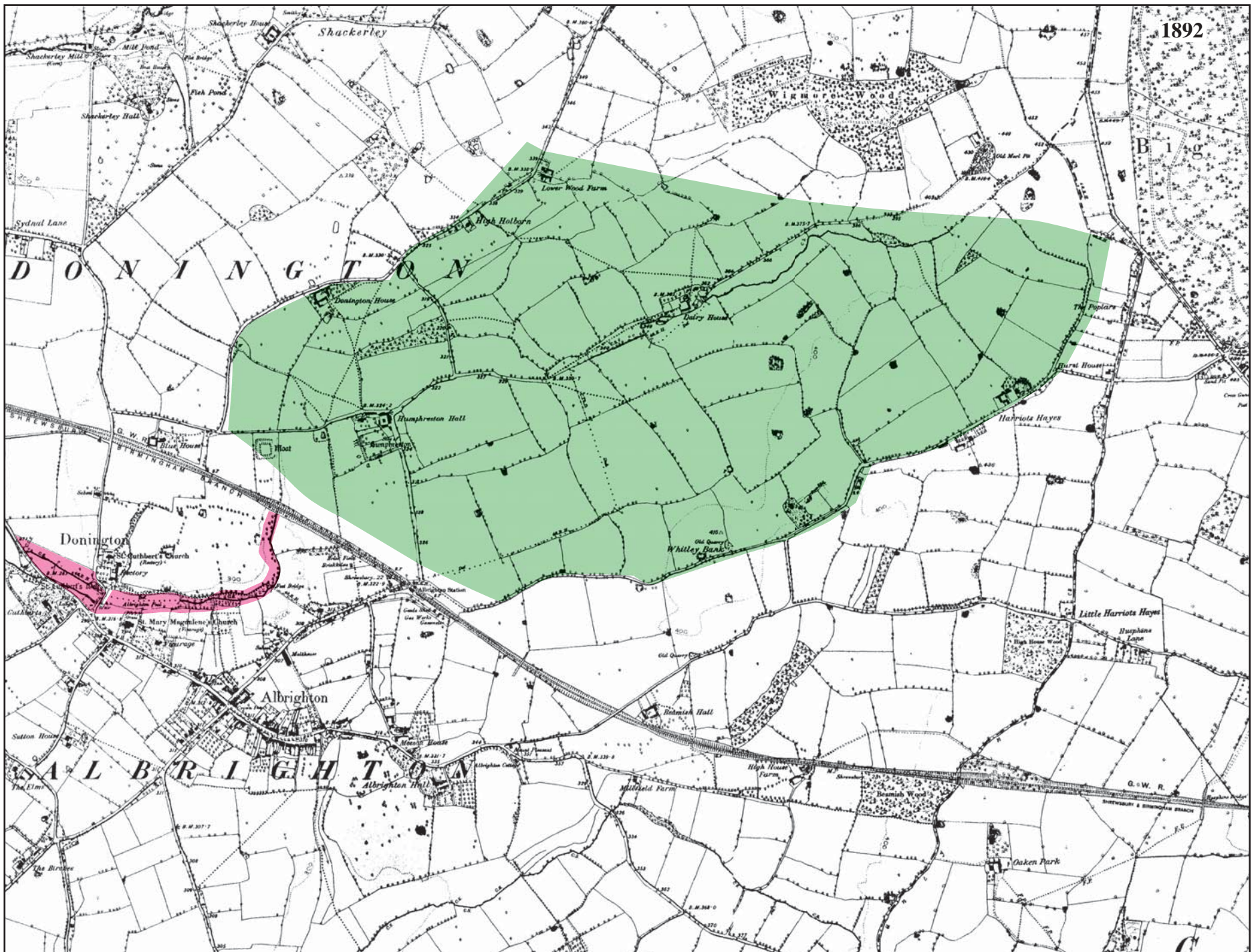


Fig.8



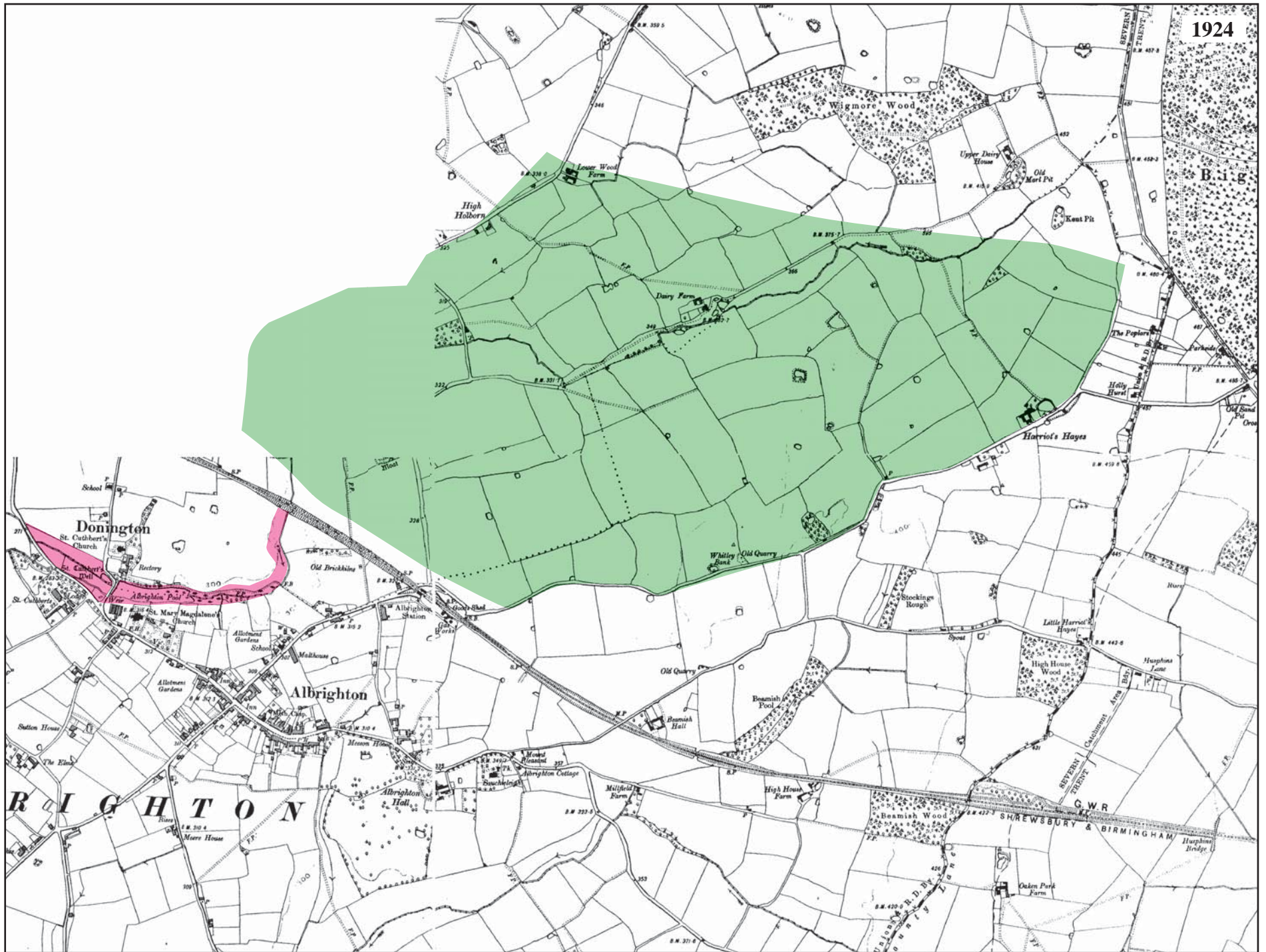


Fig.10

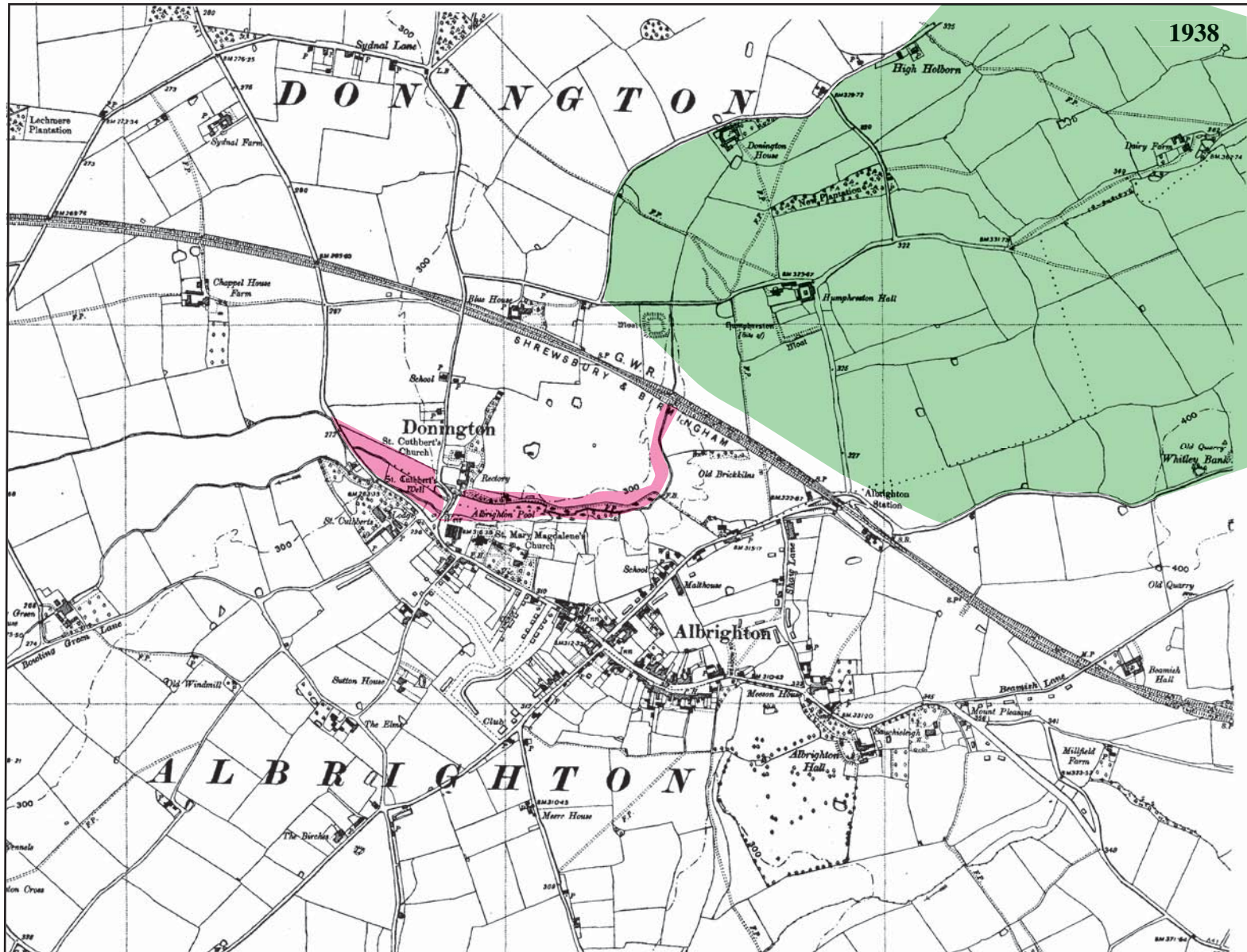


Fig.11



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8

# APPENDIX



# **Albrighton, Shropshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for a Desk-based Assessment**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This written scheme of investigation describes a desk-based assessment to be undertaken at Albrighton, Shropshire. The purpose of the assessment is to highlight the archaeological significance of the area in order to inform proposals for measures to counter the risk of flooding.

## **2.0 Site Location**

The study area comprises a rural landscape immediately northeast of Albrighton, Shropshire, centred on NGR SJ 828 053, bounded by the M54 to the north, the A41 to the southwest, by Whitley Bank to the southeast and by Donnington Lane to the northwest. A second area of interest is the line of the parish boundary between Albrighton and Donnington civil parishes immediately north of the village of Albrighton.

## **3.0 Objectives**

The overall objective is to define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains in the study area, so that the archaeological implications of any proposed works can be assessed.

## **4.0 Methods**

A search will be made of all readily available published and unpublished documentary records, including maps, illustrations, aerial photographs and archaeological and geotechnic records, primarily at Shropshire County Records Office. Shropshire County Sites and Monuments Record will also be consulted, and a walkover survey on the designated part of the parish boundary.

## **5.0 Staffing and Standards**

The project would be managed for Birmingham Archaeology by Malcolm Hislop BA, PhD, MIFA, and the principal fieldworker will be Shane Kelleher BA, MA, MA. All staff will be appropriately qualified for their roles in the project.

The work would be carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*, and *Code of Conduct*.

## **6.0 Reporting**

The results of the desk-based assessment will be presented in a report including the following information.

- Non-technical summary
- Introduction

- Site location
- Objectives
- Methods
- Historical and archaeological background
- Historical development of the study area
- Previous archaeological work
- Descriptions of any visible field monuments
- Statement of significance
- Conclusions and recommendations
- Sources consulted
- Appropriate illustrations including historic maps

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