

**Land off Aqueduct Road,  
Shirley, Solihull, West  
Midlands**

**An Archaeological Desk-based  
Assessment 2004**

**Project No. 1237**  
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**Land off Aqueduct Road, Solihull, West Midlands:**

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## **Land off Aqueduct Road, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment**

### **Summary**

*An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out in September 2004 on an area of land off Aqueduct Road, Shirley as a condition of planning consent for the redevelopment of the site for residential use. The work was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Developments and was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology. The desk-based assessment suggests that the site itself and much of the surrounding study area (approximately 1km radius from the site) was originally within the Forest of Arden and as such pre post-medieval activity is sparse. The site itself was possibly still woodland as late as the seventeenth century. Although Solihull Lodge to the north of the site did undergo some transformation during the post-medieval period, the site itself underwent very little. The buildings present on the site depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> Edition were not illustrated on the Enclosure Map of 1837, suggesting that any below ground remains present within the site boundaries will be less than 150 years old.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

This archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Birmingham Archaeology as a condition attached by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to planning consent for the redevelopment of the site for residential use (Application no. 2004/1082, planning condition no. 14). The report was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Developments. The location of the site and the surrounding study area is shown on Figs. 1 and 2. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of known and potential archaeological information for the study area, based on existing data, in order to enable appropriate archaeological mitigation strategies to be devised if required. The assessment conforms to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology and adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

### **2.0 Site Location**

The study area is situated on the west side of Aqueduct Road, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands (NGR SP 102785). It is bounded by Aqueduct Road to the east, school playing fields to the north and fields to the west and south.

### **3.0 Objectives**

The objectives of this assessment were to assess the possible presence or absence, location, extent, survival, quality, significance and date of any archaeological remains within the study area and to identify the need for any further archaeological work in advance of the planning application.

## **4.0 Methods**

A site inspection of the study area was carried out in order to relate research findings to the existing landscape. Research included consultation of the Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), the primary database of known archaeological and historical sites for the county (Fig. 3). Primary and secondary documentary sources, including historic maps, were examined at the Local Studies Centre at Solihull Library and Birmingham University Library.

## **5.0 Site Inspection**

The site inspection revealed that the site itself is a flattish, overgrown grassy field with large spoil heaps at the western end. Some of these spoil heaps comprised predominantly brick, some were rubble with silty sand and some were black silt sand and topsoil with much pottery, glass and oyster shell visible within them. Where the topsoil was exposed at the eastern end of the site it was determined to be a similar loose black silt sand with rubble, pottery and shell. The remains of a demolished building were visible at the western end as wall fragments within the spoil heaps. These were constructed from various brick sizes and included engineering bricks. The school playing field to the north is at a higher level than the site, though as it is also higher than the road it is possible that this has been built up, rather than indicating any truncation within the site boundaries. The site boundaries comprise lines of trees and shrubs of various species and appear to be ornamental. A tarmac path runs east west at the eastern end of the site.

## **6.0 Historical Development of the Site**

### 6.1 Geological and Geographical background

The geology of the study area and its surroundings is predominantly Mercia Mudstone, with small zones of Keuper sandstone and alluvium adjacent to riverbeds. Some boulder clay is also present, to the southwest of Solihull. The region as a whole is well watered, mainly by the River Blythe and River Cole, with other small streams and ponds. Undulating landscape dominates in an area once covered by the Forest of Arden.

### 6.2 Historical and Archaeological background

#### **Prehistoric period**

In the West Midlands generally, a widely scattered population is believed to have existed with intense cultivation and dense settlement from as early as 3000BC. In Warwickshire the earliest settlements focused on the easily cultivated gravel soils of the river valleys, and it was not until this land had been used up that settlement began to appear on the sandstone soils of the Arden plateau (Slater 1981, 17-18). Nevertheless knowledge of prehistoric settlement in the study area is extremely

limited. The Iron Age hillfort at Berry Mound, situated to the south-west of the site in Worcestershire is the only prehistoric site which has been studied in any detail, and the only evidence of prehistoric settlement and activity within the study area. The Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record lists a cropmarked enclosure to the north of the study area, but is unclear as to the date (SMR 9412). During the prehistoric period, the study area would have been covered by the Forest of Arden, an area of ancient woodland covering much of north-west Warwickshire.

### **Roman period**

The advance of the Roman army through Warwickshire led to the construction of a large number of forts and marching camps in the region. Following the departure of the army, the region is thought to have been left largely to the native population who continued farming their land. This is the explanation given for the absence of large-scale rural Roman sites, such as the villas found further south (Slater 1981, 22). The only Roman activity noted on the Sites and Monuments Record is a spot find of Roman coins (SMR 1792) located to the south-west of the site. Again, during this period the study area would have been covered by the Forest of Arden.

### **Medieval period**

The first documented settlement in the area came in the 6th century, when the Anglo-Saxons settled the region that was to become known as Mercia (Slater 1981, 32). Several medieval settlements in the area are thought to have originated during this period (Skipp 1963, 11). Shirley was situated on the boundary between Worcestershire and Warwickshire, which also represented the boundary between the lands of the tribes of Saxons and Angles respectively (Bates 1993, 1), and was originally part of the parish of Solihull, and previously part of the Manor of Ulverlei. Ulverlei was created in the Anglo-Saxon period and was a large manor stretching from the present Olton across to Solihull in the east, with a long section extending south through Shirley to Dickens Heath (*ibid.*, 1). The manor was in the Forest of Arden. The name 'Shirley' has been given two possible meanings: 'boundary clearing' or 'bright clearing' (*ibid.*, 1), or may mean bright wood (Gelling 1984, 205).

S. Keith Adams, in his book 'Solihull Lodge: The Victorian Years' states that it is uncertain how Solihull Lodge got its name, but suggests one plausible explanation may be found in the adjustment of the parish and county boundaries, which took place around 1243. The reasons for the adjustment are not clear but it may have been to reward, with a parcel of land, the Lord of the Manor of Solihull, William d'Odingsell, for his devotion to the king. In this way Solihull secured a lodgement in the crown lands of Worcestershire, the new territory becoming Solihull Lodge (Adams 1995, 1). Later maps, however, suggest there was an actual lodge in the area (Figs. 4 and 5).

The Domesday Book provides the first systematic record of the region as a whole, indicating that the countryside was and had been for some time, a complex landscape of human exploitation and habitation (Gelling 1992, 191). From at least the 13th century moated sites appear in the region in general, in much greater numbers than had been seen previously though none have been identified within the study area itself. However, these sites were no more isolated in the landscape than previous

forms of settlement, and extensive water management systems may have been a distinguishing characteristic of the local medieval landscape (Nichol pers. comm.).

The only sites of medieval date listed on the Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record are ridge and furrow, located to the south-east of the site (SMR 8571 and 9036), and a spot find of a copper alloy jetton of Edward II, found at 1097 Yardley Wood Road located to the west of the site (SMR 4777). The ridge and furrow shows that forest clearance had taken place and farming/assarting had taken over. It is also likely that these earthworks are associated with a moat that could exist outside the study area.

### **Post-medieval period**

Considerable changes occurred in the organisation of the landscape within Warwickshire during the post-medieval period. However, even as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century Solihull Lodge was described as 'Solihull Wood' (Bates 1993, 1). The area is described in a survey of Solihull Manor dated 1632 as 'common or waste ground called Solihull Wood, by estimation 150 acres in extent' (Adams 1995, 1). Enclosure of land occurred officially in the 19th century, although it had been an on-going process in some areas since Tudor times. This led to the desertion of some villages and settlements and the conversion of land from arable to pasture, as rich landowners took control of the region. These landowners built large country houses, which frequently overlaid medieval dwellings, such as moated sites. Improvements in transportation systems with the turnpiking of roads, and the building of canals and railways were a factor in the development of some settlements (Slater 1981, 75, 83). Shirley railway station to the east of the site, is listed on the Warwickshire Sites and Monuments record (SMR 6046).

Solihull Lodge appears to have partly remained common land until the early nineteenth century when it was enclosed. Evidence to support that this is the case is provided by a reference to Solihull Lodge Common in a Rate Book of 1806. Indentures relating to Colebrook Priory Mill dated 1711 and 1747 also contain references to 'the common there called Solihull Wood' (Adams 1995, 1).

The industrial revolution led cities such as Birmingham to flourish and expand, gradually encroaching on areas of countryside. This process is on-going and many areas that were until very recently green fields have now become urbanised, forming part of the Birmingham conurbation.

The area of Solihull Lodge was itself, in the nineteenth century, an area of meadows, pastures, narrow country lanes, fords, mills both wind and water, beerhouses and both large residences and small cottages. There was also a needle mill and an aluminium factory, whilst brickmaking continued through out the period (Adams 1995, 2).

Early maps of the area depict little in the vicinity of the site, but do illustrate the approximate location of a lodge to the west, possibly the Lodge of Solihull Lodge (Figs 4 and 5). Yates map of Warwickshire from 1793 depicts a windmill, possibly the same windmill listed on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR 3116). This windmill (SMR 3116) was a brick tower mill, built by 1789 and reconstructed by the

1890s. The Birmingham Post says it was reputed to be 300 years old (Seaby 1976). It ceased production in 1910 and was demolished in 1957 to make way for a housing development.

The boundaries illustrated on the Tithe Map of 1837 (Fig. 6) do not correspond to the present site boundaries, and the site and the adjacent fields are not annotated with numbers or corresponding awards. This might suggest that even at this time, the site was common ground. The Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> Edition of 1884 (Fig. 7) depicts a spring within the site boundary, and a series of buildings situated on the northern boundary. Several disused quarry pits are illustrated in the vicinity. The building is still present on the 1904 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 8), though by 1917 (Fig. 9) the majority of the building is no longer present. Instead there is a building illustrated at the western end of the site, and two north-south aligned linear features, annotated on later maps as ponds. The Ordnance Survey map of 1937 (Fig. 10) shows additional buildings at this end of the site, and the tarmac path still present today. The 1961 map (Fig. 11) depicts little change from the 1937 edition, but annotates the buildings 'Eversleigh'. It is likely that these buildings were residential.

The only other site mentioned on the Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record close to the study area is the site of Shirley Royal Observer Corps Post (SMR 1242) located to the north of the site. This was in use from 1937 for the purpose of the identification and plotting of enemy aircraft in the Second World War. It was situated somewhere in the area of Windmill Road (Dobinson 2000, 303).

## **7.0 Conclusions**

From the evidence, it appears that no remains of archaeological significance are present within the site boundaries. During the prehistoric and Roman periods the site would have been part of the Forest of Arden, and as such, probably uninhabitable. This is likely to have also been the case during the medieval period, and while the Forest of Arden was inhabited by an increasingly large population during this period, it appears that the site and its immediate surroundings remained woodland at the boundaries of the administrative centres until the post-medieval period. During the post-medieval period Solihull Lodge itself did see an increase in population and activity, however, cartographic evidence suggests that there was very little or no development within the site boundaries themselves until the mid to late nineteenth century.

## **8.0 Acknowledgements**

This report was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Developments. Thanks are due to Emma Jones of the Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record, and to the staff at Solihull Library for their help and advice. The research and site visit were conducted by Eleanor Ramsey, who wrote this report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds, and the report was edited by Dr Malcolm Hislop, who managed the project on behalf of Birmingham Archaeology.



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### Cartographic Sources

1729 Beighton's map of Hemlington Hundred (copied from VCH Warwick Vol. 4)

1793 Yates Map of Warwickshire

1837 Enclosure Map of Solihull

1884 Ordnance Survey 1: 2500

1904 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1917 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1937 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1961 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

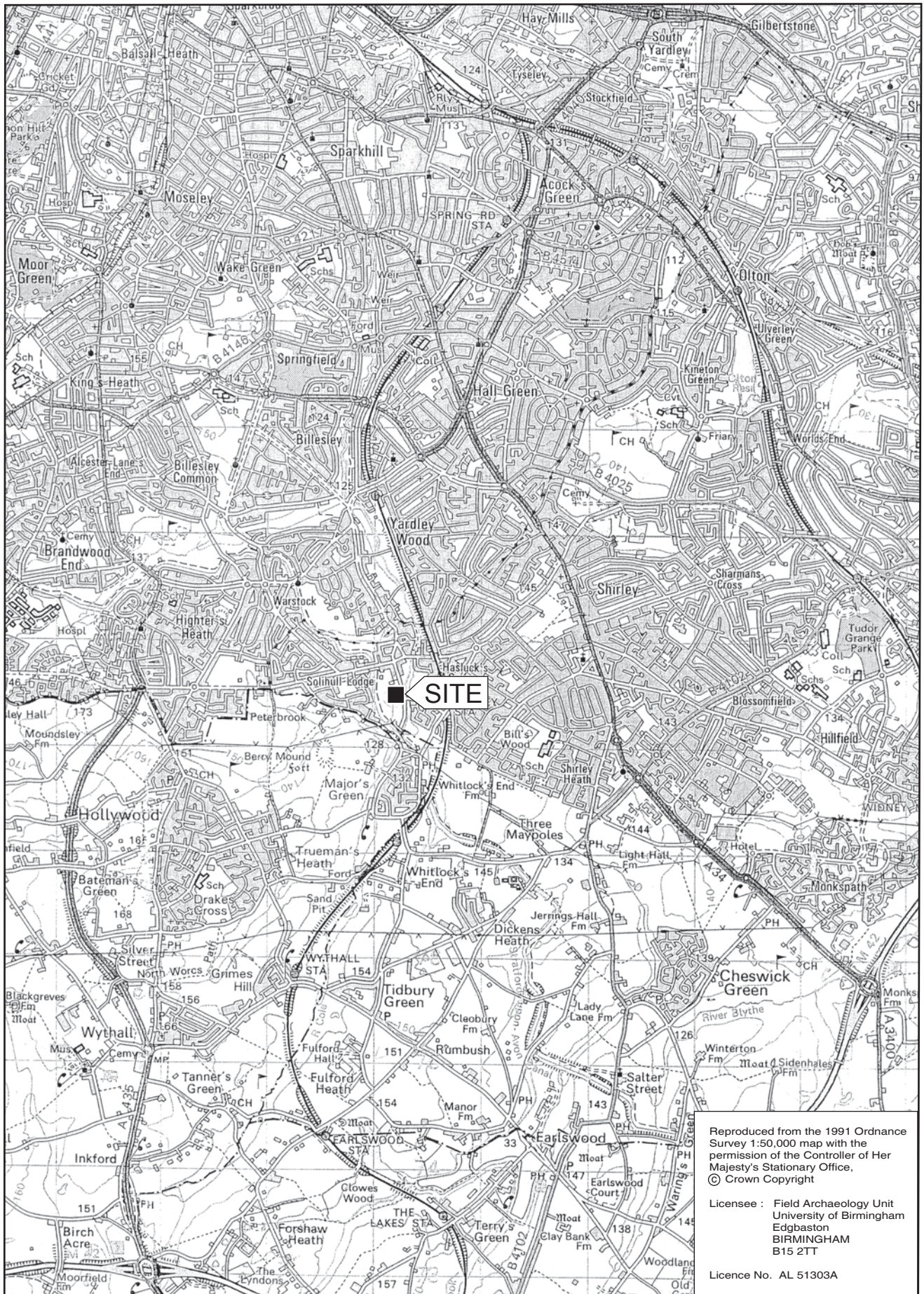


Fig.1

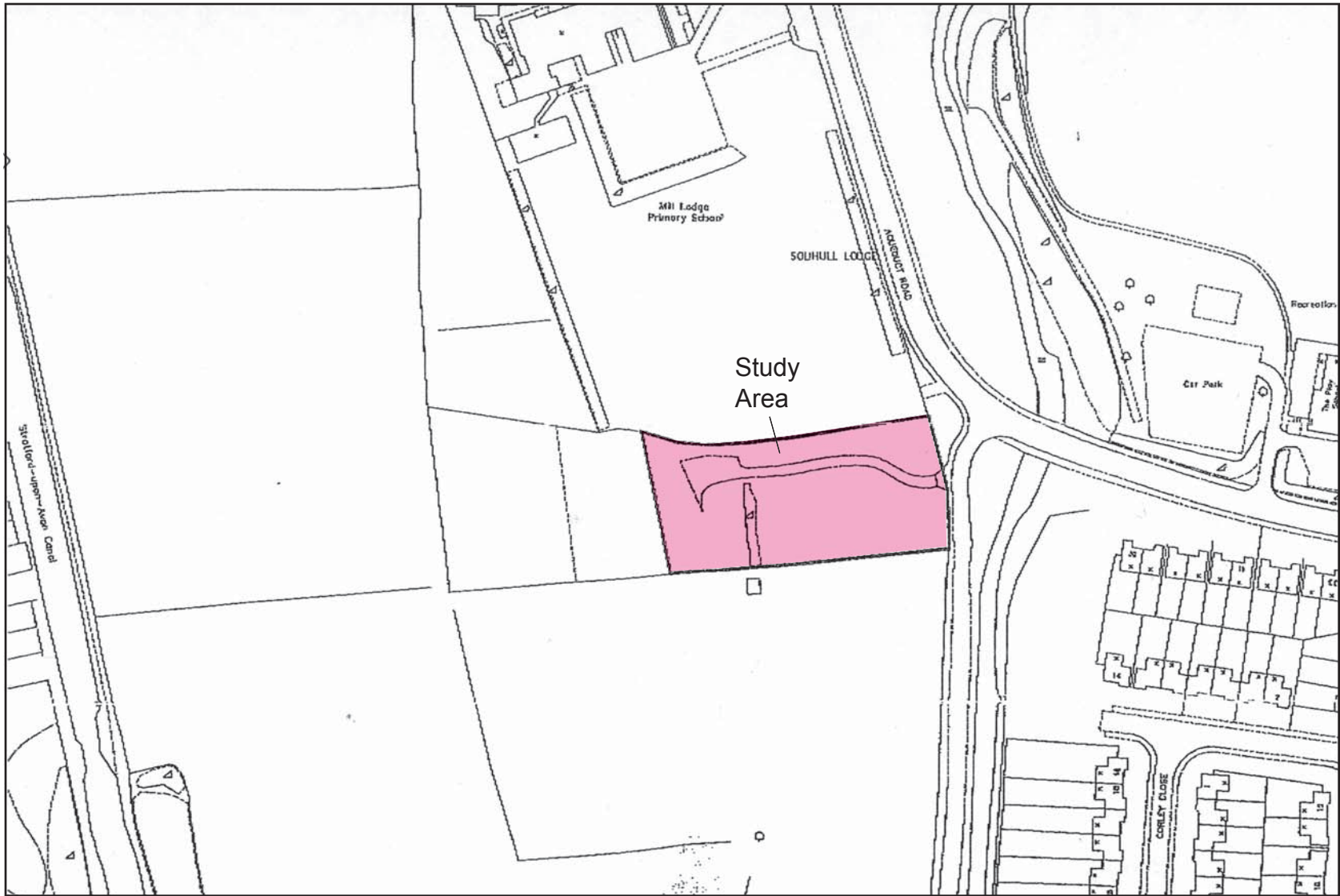


Fig.2

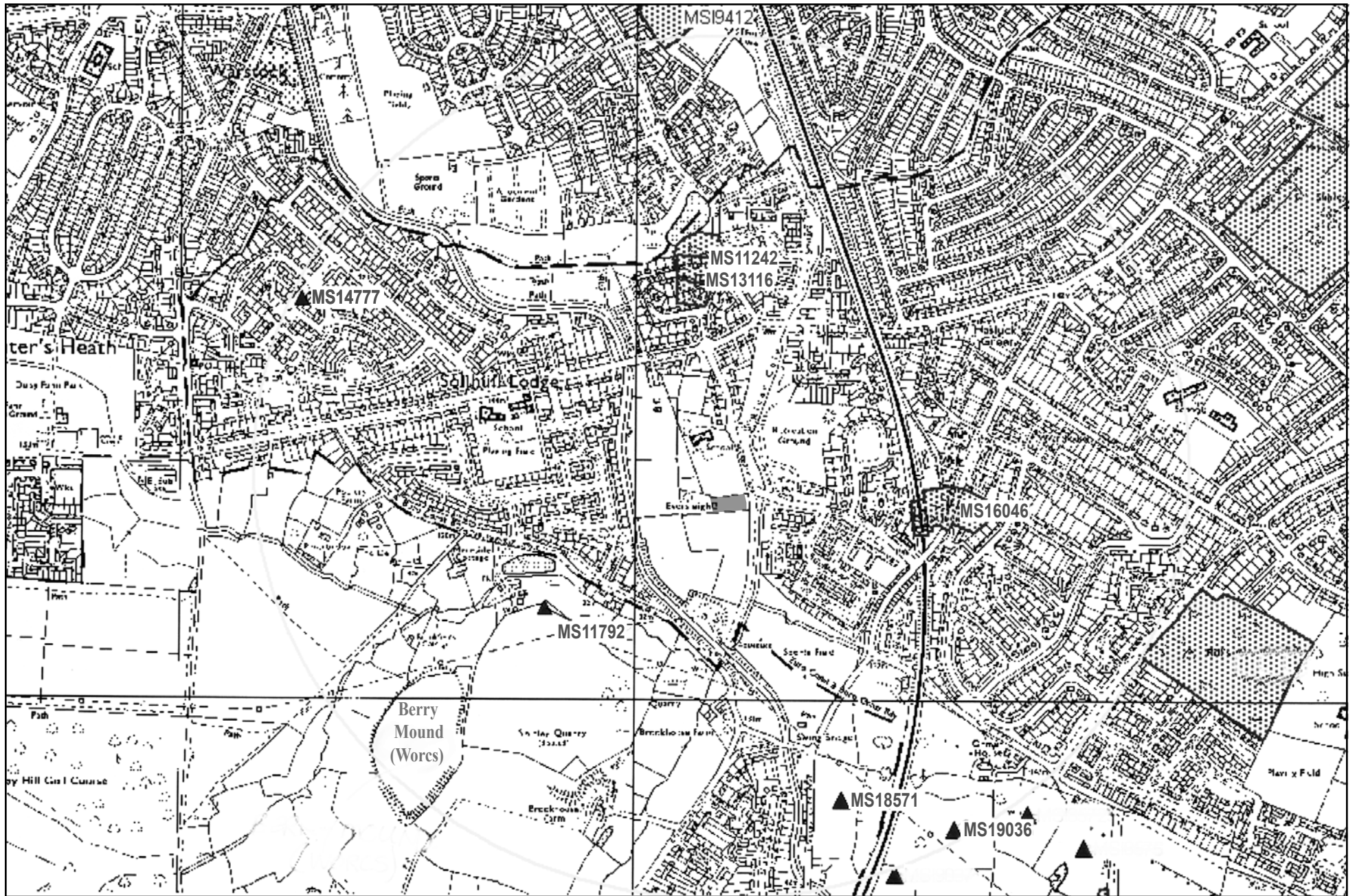


Fig.3



Fig.4 (copied from VCH Warwick Vol.4)



Fig.5 (Yate's Map 1793)

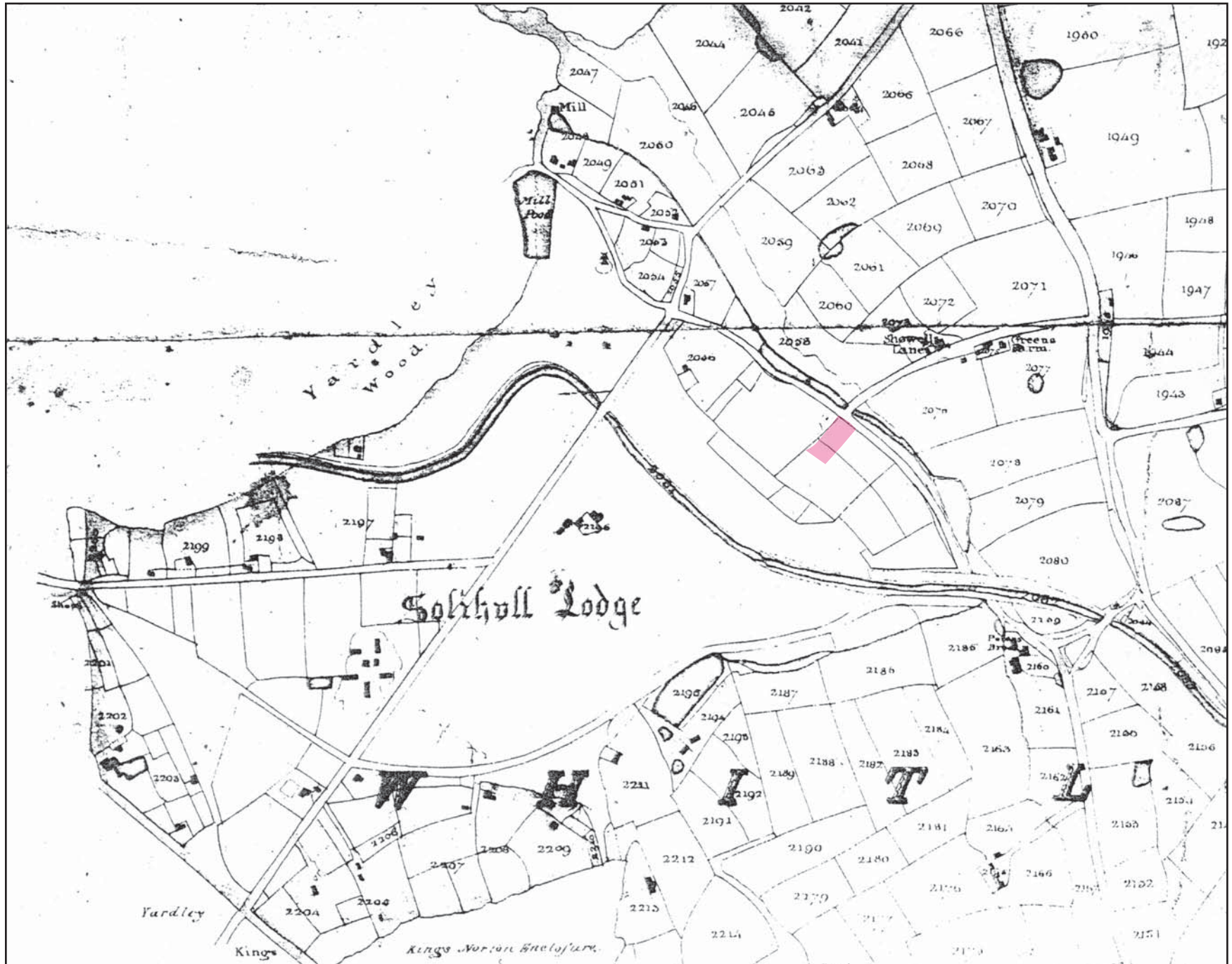


Fig.6 (Enclosure Map 1837)

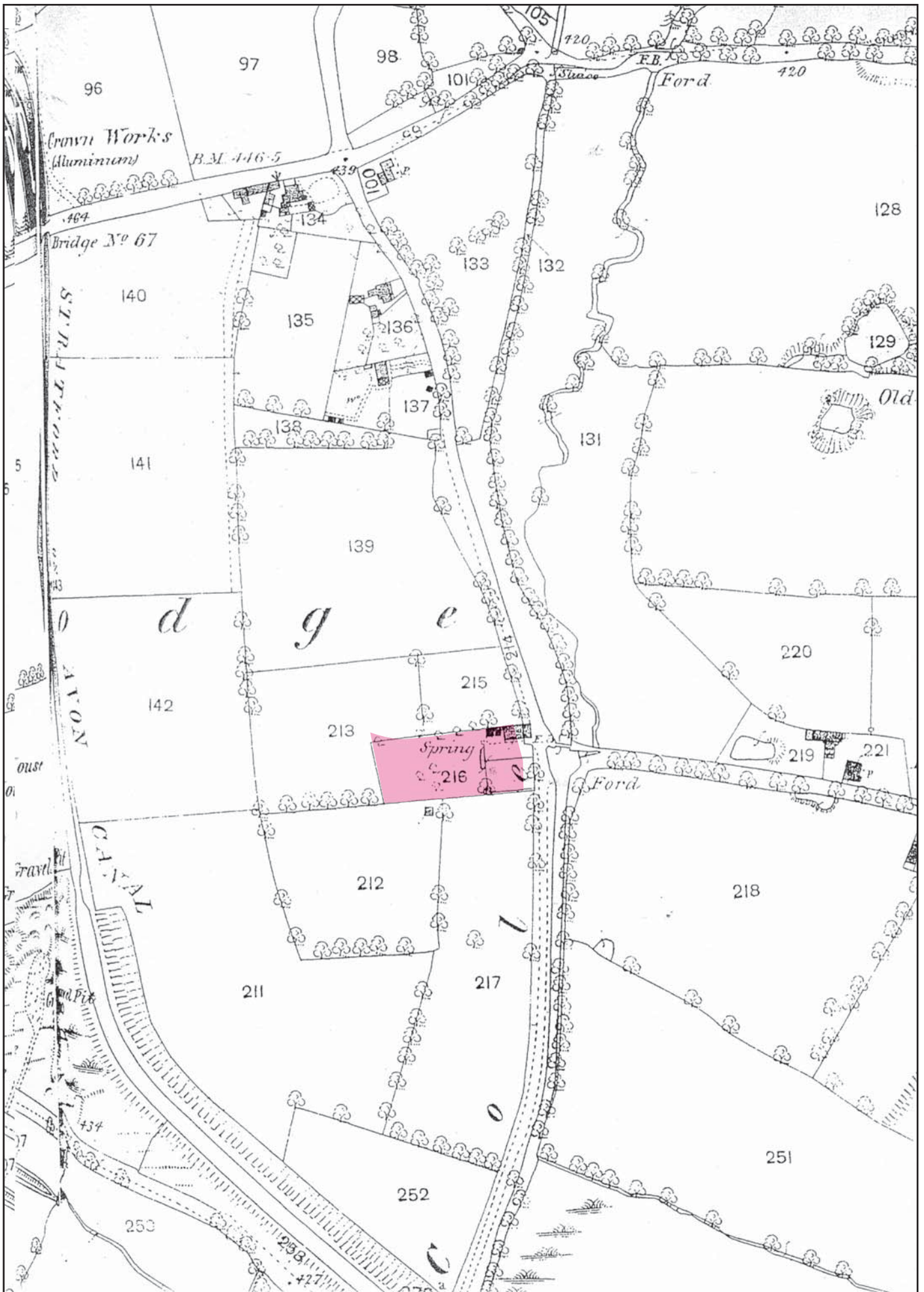


Fig.7 (O.S. 1884)



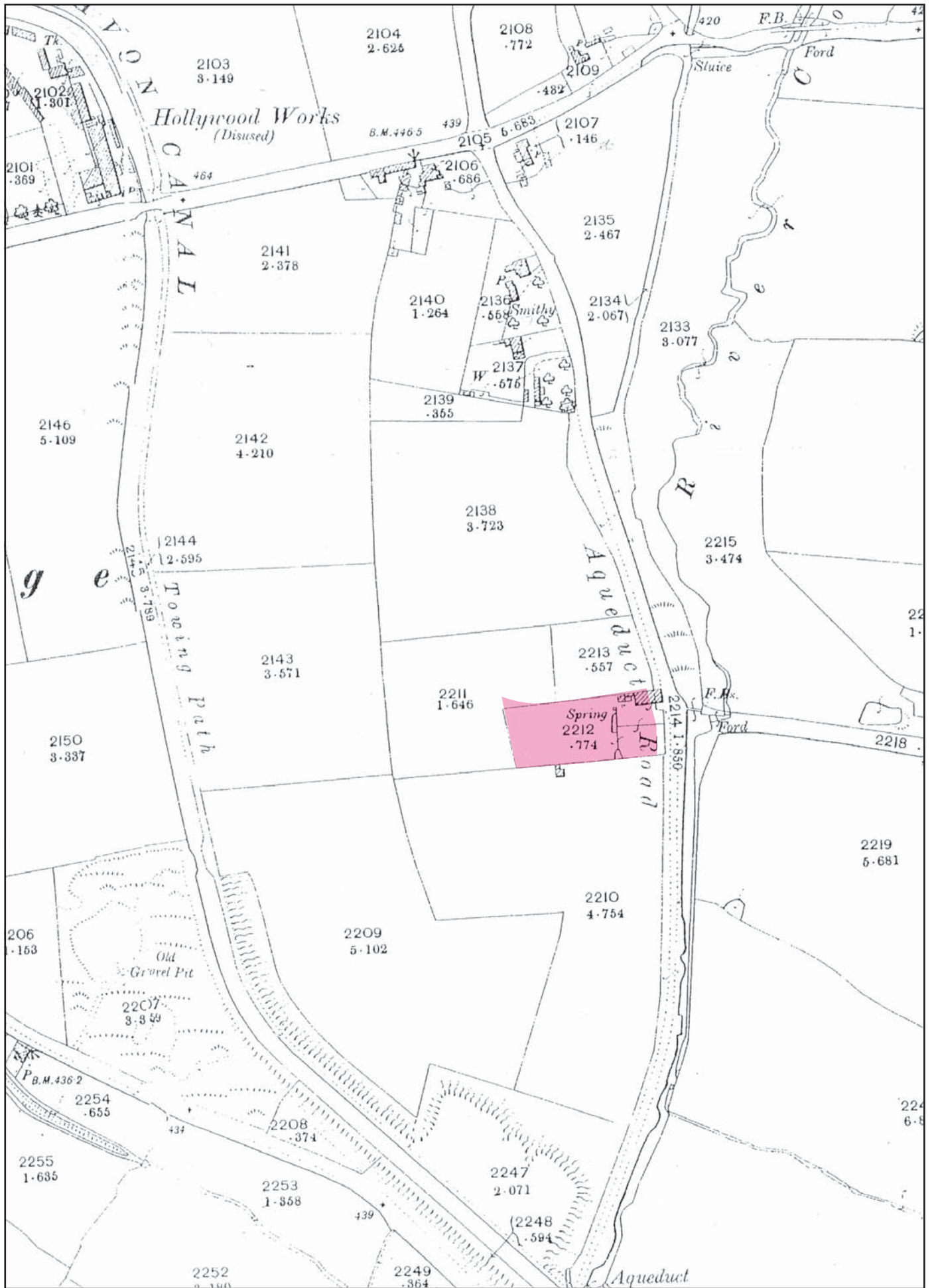


Fig.8 (O.S. 1904)

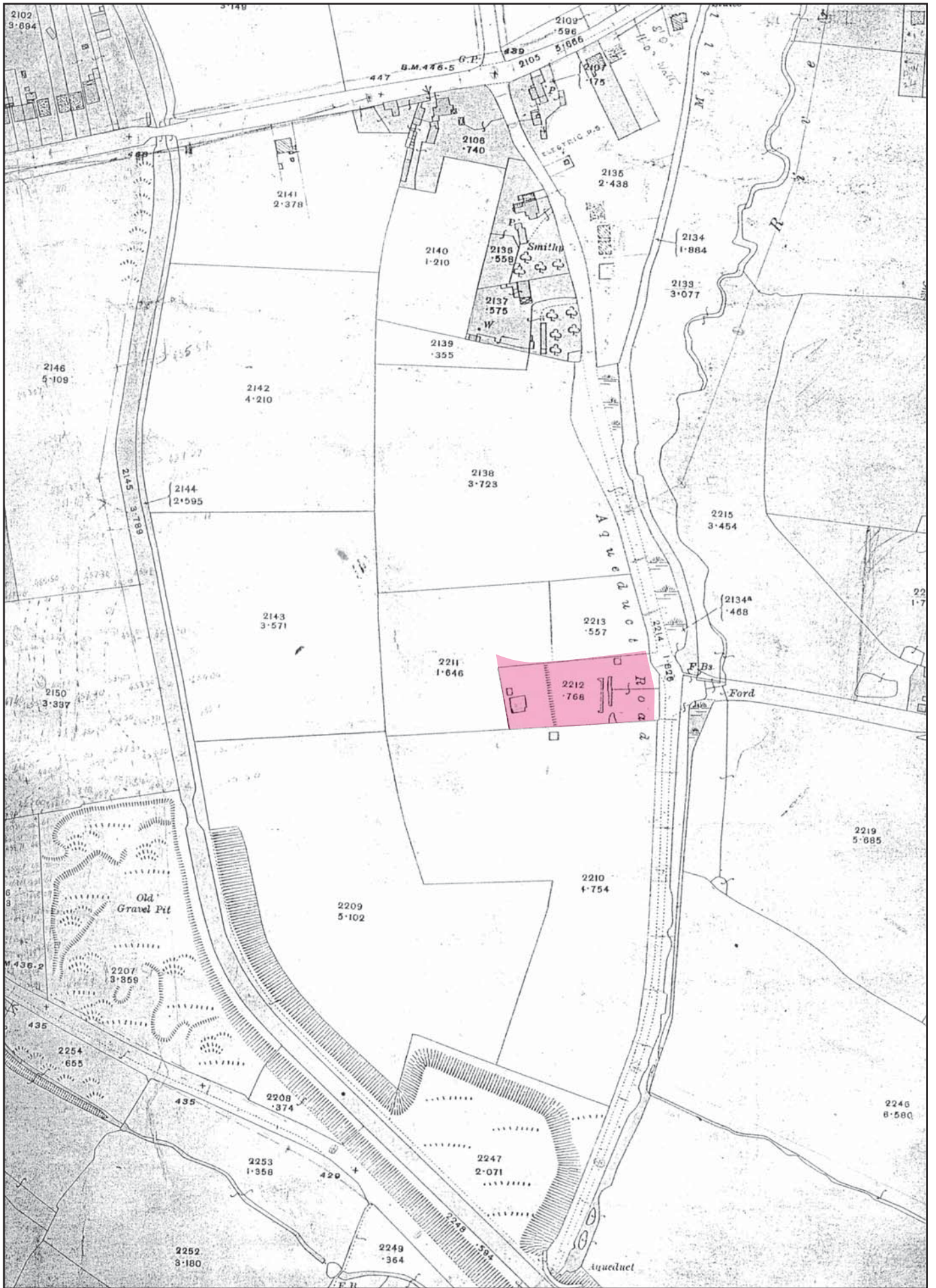


Fig.9 (O.S. 1917)

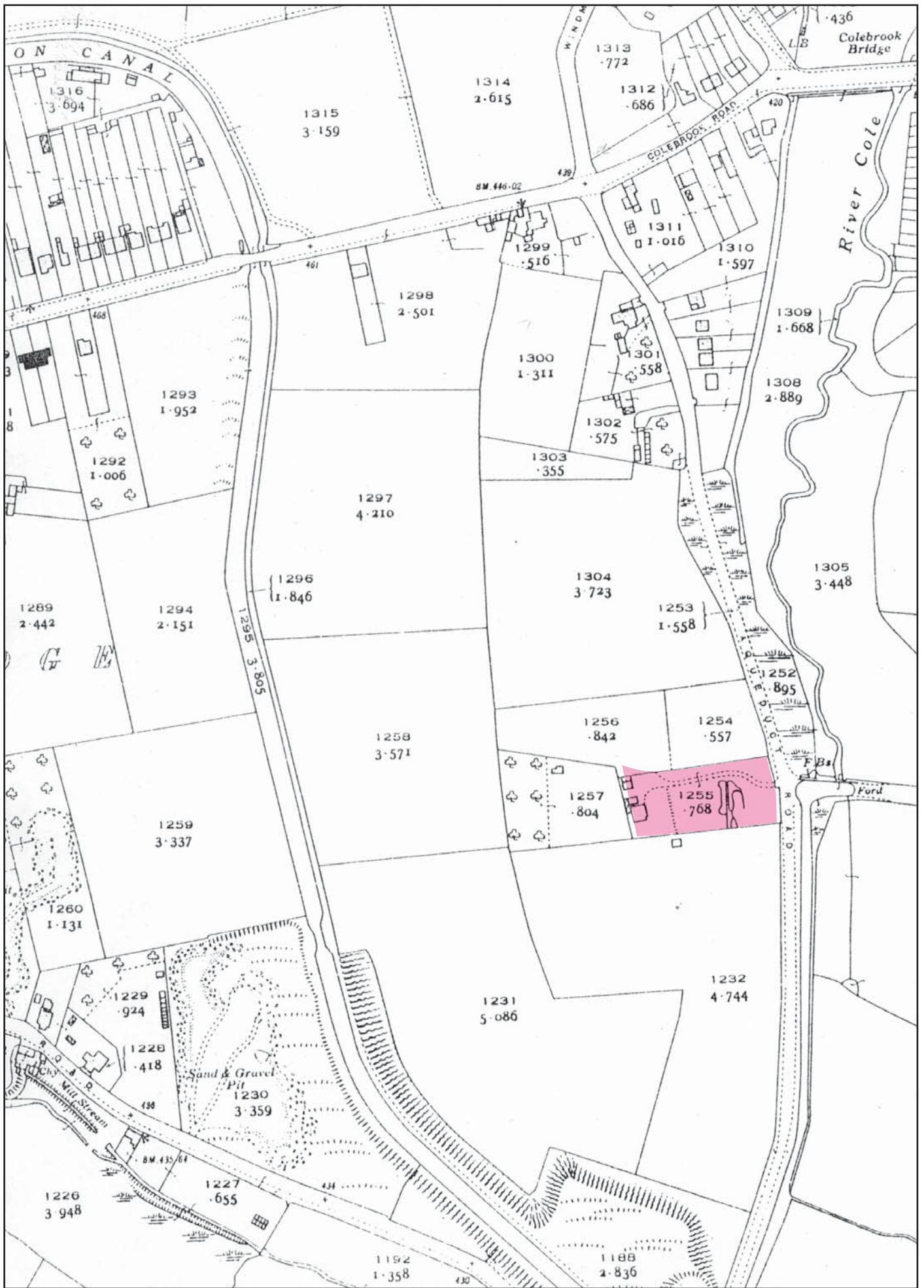


Fig.10 (O.S. 1937)

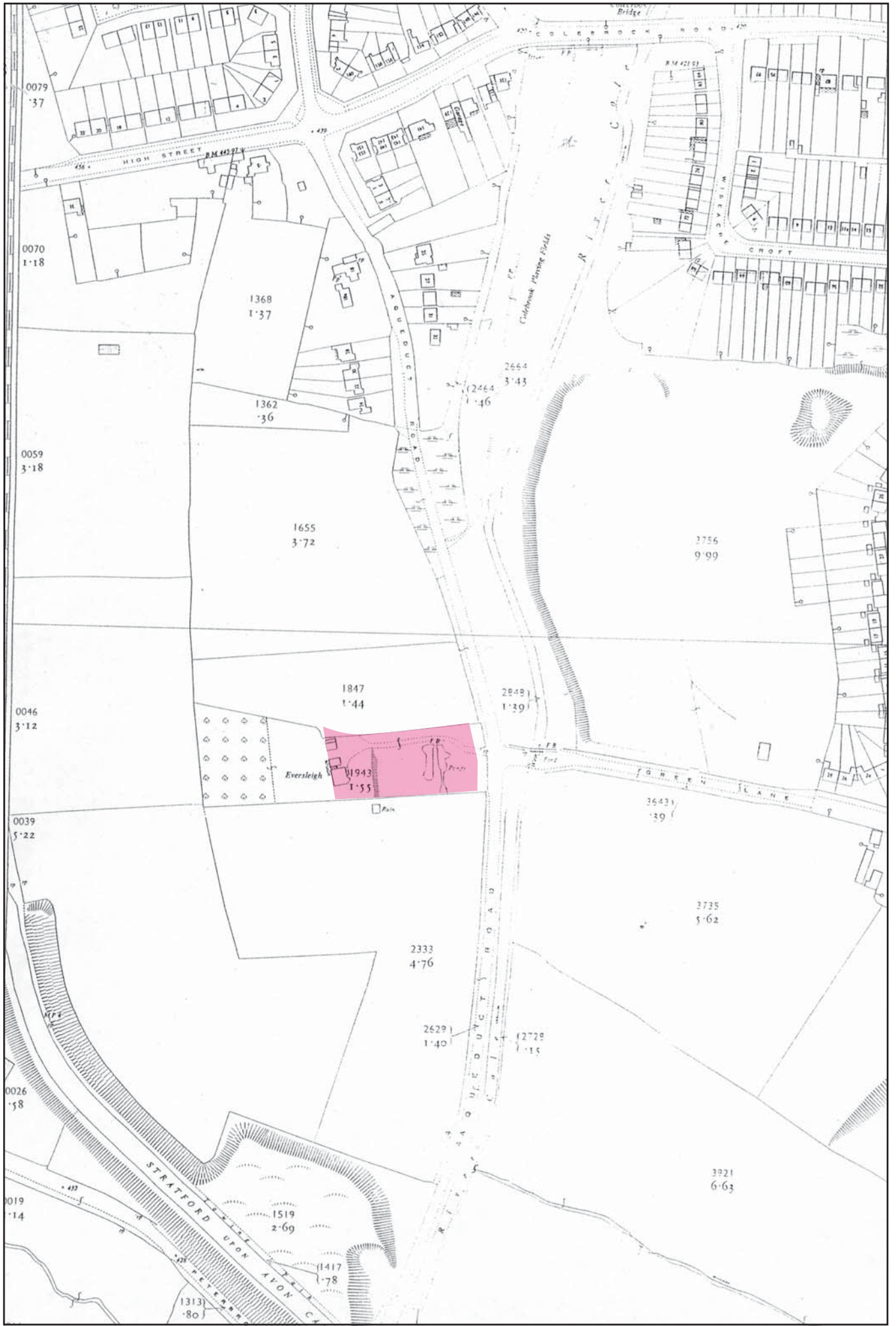


Fig.11 (O.S. 1961)