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**Desk Based Archaeological Assessment  
Stafford College  
Earl Street, Stafford**

**2003**

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## STAFFORD COLLEGE AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

### *Summary*

*A desk-based assessment was carried out by Birmingham Archaeology in September 2003 in advance of a planning application for proposed gym at Stafford College. The application involves the development of a car park fronting onto Broad Street. The assessment examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence for areas of archaeological interest and also examined areas where archaeological remains may have been truncated. A site inspection was also made.*

*It was concluded that due to the location of the site within the medieval city walls, and the findings from earlier excavations nearby, that there was a potential for the survival of Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post medieval remains. Excavations nearby, dating to the 1970's and 1980's suggest that as much as 3m of stratigraphy may be expected within the development area. Borehole data, however, is contradictory to this, and suggests that the natural drift geology may be encountered at a depth of 0.6m from the present ground surface.*

*This area lies outside the conservation zone and site levels suggest little in the way of levelling which may have truncated archaeological deposits. Although, nineteenth and twentieth century clearing may have impacted on any archaeological remains.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This archaeological desk-based assessment was prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (BA) in advance of submission of a planning application for a proposed development by Stafford College. The assessment was commissioned by Donaldsons on behalf of Stafford College. The development proposal involves the construction of a gym within the site of a car park fronting onto Broad Street, lying between two main college buildings (NG SJ919233). The site (hereafter referred to as the study area) is shown on Figs.1 & 2. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of all known archaeological and historical information for the study area, in order to enable an appropriate mitigation strategy to be devised. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

Earlier excavations close to the study area have revealed truncated medieval remains, including a hearth (Dodd 2000). Other excavations in the locality have produced prehistoric finds, Staffordshire ware pottery and medieval ovens and kilns (Carver 1981).



## **2 LOCATION OF STUDY AREA**

Stafford is located on a south facing peninsula formerly limited by marshland. Located within the former Stafford burh and medieval city walls, the study area lies outside the Stafford Conservation Area (Fig. 3). The study area is located to the east of a Windmill, still upstanding (SMR 03279, Fig. 4) and is bordered by Broad Street to the north and college buildings to the south, east and west. It comprises mostly tarmac hard-standing, used as a car park, with grassed areas along its north and east borders. To the west is Broad Eye Bridge, which was originally constructed in timber in the sixteenth century and later rebuilt in stone.

## **3 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this assessment was to determine the likely survival or absence, of archaeological remains within the proposed development site, and assess their significance in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate. This report also provides an assessment of the possible archaeological deposits in advance of a planning decision. Final mitigation decisions, however, rest with Staffordshire County Council.

## **4 METHOD**

A site inspection of the study area was followed by documentary research of primary and secondary records and maps held by Staffordshire County Record Office, the William Salt Library, and the Archives at the University of Birmingham. All sources consulted during the assessment are listed in Section 13.0 below.

## **5 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

A single borehole (sand deposits, Plate 1) described the earliest deposits as Mercian mudstone overlain by fluvio-glacial gravels. These in turn are overlain by quaternary glacial drift deposits and river alluvium. The upper 0.60m consists of made ground, a dark grey-brown sandy topsoil (Price 2003). Stafford was originally a peninsula confined by the River Sow and the Pearl Brook (which now runs below the ring road). Both of these watercourses once had wide flood plains and marshy ground which would have proved all but impossible to traverse.

## **6 SITE VISIT**

A site visit was made in order to determine how current land-use and conditions may have affected any deposits of historical or archaeological interest. The majority of the study area is used as a car park (Plates 1&2) with small areas of grass, at a slightly higher level although most of the area is fairly flat. The view fronting onto Broad Street is

restricted by a hedge (Plate 3) and several trees and bushes which will be removed before development commences, as will the small strip of grass that borders the car park on the north and east sides. The area appears to be criss-crossed by several modern services. There are no overhead cables although there is a covered bridge linking two of the buildings to the south of the car park. The tarmac car park is on a lower level than the grass and on a similar level to Broad Street.

## 7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 7.1 Prehistoric

Early settlers would have had regular access from the west, however access from the south and east would have been difficult. At some point a ford was discovered or built which gave the later town its name. Mesolithic flint tools dating from 5000BC have been found at Tipping Street, Mound Street and the eastern end of Broad Street (Carver 1981). A possible Iron Age causeway was found at Queensway in 1976, 800m north east of the study area (Greenslade 1984). There are also several barrows in the surrounding countryside but no prehistoric archaeology is recorded within the study area itself (Midgley 1959).

### 7.2 Roman

Several small sherds of pottery dating from the Romano-British period have been found within the old walled area of Stafford, however, the use of the site in Roman times remains uncertain. A Roman coin of Faustina Junior (SMR 2196, not illustrated) was found in Forebridge, to the north of the study area. Pottery dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD was recovered from the area of Clarke Street (Carver 1981). A complete Roman pot was found in 1961 at 10 Market Square, 12 ft. underground, but its archaeological context remains uncertain (Carver 1981). No Roman finds are recorded within the study area. The nearest known Roman settlement to Stafford was that at Penkridge, to the south.

### 7.3 Anglo-Saxon

The flood plains and marshy ground around the Stafford peninsula must have provided natural defences, with the sand and gravel promontory was probably covered with coarse grass and cut by flood-water gullies. Pollen analysis suggests that oaks, alder and hazel were growing in the area when the Anglo-Saxons arrived (Carver 1981). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us that in AD 913 Stafford was founded as a *burh* (SMR 00765, Fig. 4) by Aethelflaed. It is possible that this defensive structure consisted of a turf bank crowned by a palisade or with a stone wall revetment enclosing part of the urban core (Fig. 5). Stafford rapidly developed into a commercial centre which by the 11<sup>th</sup> century was the shire town with a mint on the north bank of the River Sow (AD. 924-1189, Middlefell 2000). As well as a thriving market, pottery was being manufactured in the town from at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence for pottery manufacture appears to be focused towards the southeastern side of the peninsula, between around Eastgate Street and Clarke Street (Carver 1981).

The castle site is thought to be located under or near the mill at Broad Eye, however official reports place it towards the eastern reaches of the town (SMR 03279, Fig. 4), close to the study area. Prior to this Stafford was located within the Danelaw until the 'Lady of the Mercians', Aethelflaed, recaptured the land, building burhs and castles in the surrounding areas (Davies 1928). Between 1977 and 1984 Dr Martin Carver excavated several sites of Anglo-Saxon origin, within the former medieval town walls, although none were excavated within the study area. The closest of these excavations were at St Mary's Grove and Bath Street, approximately 100m to the south and southeast (Sites 18/22/29 and 34 respectively, Fig. 5).

At St Mary's Grove (Site 18/22/29) natural sand was encountered at 76.63m OD (approximately 2.10m below the ground surface). This was cut by successive ditches containing 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century pottery and were thought to be the remains of former property boundaries. Also recorded was a Late Anglo-Saxon clay-built low temperature oven with baking floor, fire chamber, stakeholes and collapsed clay dome superstructure. This feature, along with a large pit produced 10<sup>th</sup> century Stafford Ware sherds. These features were associated with a 'substantial stone surface' which showed signs of considerable wear and produced a scatter of poorly preserved bone and further sherds of Stafford Ware on its' surface. The archaeological evidence suggests that during the Late Anglo Saxon period the area immediately to the south of the study area was the focus of domestic or light industrial occupation (Carver 1979), where as evidence for Anglo-Saxon occupation to the north is scant.

#### 7.4 Medieval

The Domesday Book of 1086 records Stafford as being surrounded by an earth bank with wooden palisade and during this time the River Sow was crossed by a ford. A road leading southwards out of Stafford is first mentioned in about 1200. St Mary's church, lying approximately 200m to the southeast, has Norman foundations and a Norman stone font as well as an *in situ* wooden preaching cross. The Domesday Book records a borough and burgesses and 128 habitable houses within the city walls as well as a motte and bailey castle built by Robert de-Stafford(Middlefell 2000). Suburbs soon began to develop across the peninsula, to the north and south of the 'Domesday settlement nucleus' and in 1206, a royal charter granted a free borough.

Excavations to the southeast (Site 18/22/29) recorded the presence of a barn in the early medieval period, with the site becoming 'open or horticultural' (Carver 1983). Only in the later medieval period was it once again exploited for domestic and industrial purposes. The earliest structural remains at the Bath Street excavations (Site 34) consisted of early medieval timber sill-beams and post-holes, and Carver proposed that this is when the first organised tenements were laid-out. During this period there was a complete re-organisation and expansion as narrow tenements were also laid out in Bath Street (34, Fig. 5) and Clarke Street (15, Fig. 5), while the manufacture of pottery ceased.

During the later medieval period stone walls were constructed to encompass the settled areas (Wilkinson 2002). Around the southern edge of the town, the walls fronted the northern bank of the River Sow (as shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1901, Fig.6)

which marks them along Mill Bank. The study area lies within the medieval town walls, close to the North Gate, and while the walls are no longer visible, one small section of the southeastern circuit can still be seen.

Broad Eye lends its name to an area of drained meadow to the north west of the River Sow, and the map evidence suggests it changes in size and extent. Speed's map (Fig. 7) shows it to be a relatively small part of the town in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. On Yates' map (Fig. 8) the area is depicted at a very small scale. Other maps, like the Jerningham Estate map produced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 9) shows the area has expanded (Dudley 1998). The Royal mint on the north bank of the River Sow was very productive and did not cease minting until the time of Henry II. The coins had a widespread distribution, being found as far afield as Sweden, and may have been used for payment to prevent further raids (Davies 1928). Our understanding of density of settlement in the Broad Eye area at this time, however, is not completely clear.

### 7.5 Post-medieval

Excavations at St Mary's Grove suggested that the street was constructed as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the ground laid out in tenements there after (Carver 1983). The most prominent upstanding 18<sup>th</sup> century structure is a windmill (SMR 03279, Fig. 4), which lies to the northeast of the study area. Built in 1796, from the materials of the demolished sixteenth century Shire Hall this still contains carved Elizabethan timbers inside. It is alleged to stand on the site a Norman castle, although this has only been supported by place-name evidence. The windmill was in use until the 1880's. The road layout has changed since the 1881 OS map (Fig. 10), which shows a number of houses and a school on the study area. Cherry Street and Church Street had disappeared by the time the 1973 edition of the OS map was surveyed (Fig.1).

To the north of the study area was a gasworks which were developed in 1831 and steadily expanded around the east bank of the River Sow and the Broad Eye bridge. Production stopped around 1964, and by 1970 most of the works were demolished. The Broad Eye area was known as a working class district in the 1800s and this may have been its function for much of its history (Dudley 1998).

## 8 CARTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

### *c.1610 Speed's Map of Stafford (Fig. 7)*

This highly stylised non-detailed plan of the walled town does show the North Gate and the Broad Eye Bridge. It also shows the Broad Eye area, it appears to be sparsely developed which may be due to fact it lies on the very outskirts of the town. This map shows the study area to be centred on crossroads to the very western reaches of the town.

### *1775 Yates's Map of Staffordshire (Fig. 8)*

This map again is small-scale and only shows the main streets and the extent of the town wall. It does not clearly represent the study area or illustrate how densely populated it was. It appears to show that the town had expanded very little in the previous 150yrs.



*1788 Map of Several Estates belonging to Sir William Jerningham in the ...Manor of Forebridge (Fig. 9)*

This map shows the study area to have been divided roughly in half by irregular curving boundaries, possibly representing drainage channels, as they appear to join the River Sow. This map is also stylised and Broad Eye is represented as an area rather than a street. It encompasses a large portion of the western part of the town and although the buildings shown may be representational it seems to indicate a much denser level of settlement compared to Speed's map.

*1881 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 10)*

This map shows a more accurate representation of the Broad Street and shows the study area relatively clearly. It appears that the area was densely occupied and Queen Street and Cherry Street can be seen. This means the study area, which now lies along one street, was once split into two. The western half of the study area lies within the junction of Dukes Street and the eastern half shows what appear to be dwellings.

*1889 Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 11)*

This map shows that little has changed since 1881 with the layout of Broad Eye remaining the same.

*1901 Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 6)*

This map shows the study area to be extensively developed and still bisected by the two extant roads. This area is now more heavily occupied than is shown on the previous edition.

*1973 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 1)*

The latest map shows that buildings formerly fronting Queen Street and Cherry Street have been developed and this area is incorporated as part of Stafford College. It also shows that the area to the west of Broad Street, formerly Dukes Street, has been demolished. This includes two areas of buildings associated with the Windmill and Dukes Street itself. Earls Street has been extended as far as Broad Street to the north and Cherry Street has been replaced by the college. Tenterbanks is now the principle road to the west of the college, running parallel to the River Sow. The study area is shown, although it does not show two of the adjacent college buildings that surround the study area.

## 9 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AP 1946

This photograph was unavailable.

Plate 4. AP 63 47 A

1963. This photograph shows the study area before the development of Dukes Street, Cherry Street and Queen Street. The college is still split into the separate areas and the crossroads still exists.

AP 140 71 067

1971. This shows Stafford College and the study area can be seen as a much larger car park. The building to the East of the study area is not present and is grassed over. Cherry Street and Queens Street are both no longer present at this time.

AP 13 82 086

1981. This image shows the study area as a smaller car park with a new building to the East which is still there today.

Plate 5. AP 144 91 152

1991. This photograph is the most recent and shows the study area as it appears at present. It shows the grassed area and the car park that make up the study area. The contrast between this photograph and the 1963 photograph illustrate the way the road layout has changed.

## 10 SMR DATA (Fig. 4)

SMR No	Site Name	Brief Description	Grid Ref.	Distance from site
00765	Stafford Burh	Site of 10 <sup>th</sup> century burh built by Aethelflaed	SJ92202330	700m
00783	Broad Eye Bridge	Site of 16 <sup>th</sup> century bridge now in modern stone	SJ91792329	200m
03184	Medieval deposits	Broad Street medieval strata truncated by post-med strata	SJ91962335	30m
03279	Windmill	18 <sup>th</sup> Century mill	SJ91822325	200m
08194	23 St Bernard's House	19 <sup>th</sup> Century house, now offices.	SJ92012335	250m
08217	36 Former Noah's Ark Inn	16 <sup>th</sup> Century inn with 19 <sup>th</sup> century fronting	SJ92072329	600m

## 11 CONCLUSIONS

Broad Street, to the north of the study area, has been in constant use since the early beginnings of the town. While the exact extent of Anglo-Saxon settlement in Stafford is still not clear, Carver suggested that the western circuit of the early defensive *burh* was aligned along Mill Street, Earl Street, Broad Street and Stafford Street. If this is the case, then the study area may straddle the line of the former *burh* (Fig. 5).

Evidence from archaeological excavations, however, hint at the possible survival of Anglo-Saxon and medieval deposits within the study area. Deposits to a depth of more than 3m were demonstrated to have survived at St Mary's Grove (Site 18/22/29, Fig. 5). These related to a pre-Saxon ground surface, approximately 1m of stratified Saxon deposits, and a medieval ground surface (Fig. 12).

The study area is also located within the medieval town walls, in close proximity to the River Sow. Excavations at the Shopmobility site (SMR 03184), also fronting onto Broad Street, revealed evidence for medieval occupation from the fourteenth century onwards (Dodd 2000). The medieval features here were pits, lime deposits and a hearth of uncertain date, the rest of the features were mostly post-medieval pits.

The density of early medieval settlement in this area is not clear but it has been intensively developed from the 1700's onwards. During this period the town expanded into open areas of land and the study area was subject to a significant amount of residential development, which, in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century included a change in the road layout.

The study area may straddle the old course of Cherry Street and may have been the site of the worker's cottages associated with either the mill or the gasworks. The occurrence of brick fragments in the borehole samples indicates the presence of demolition deposits, possibly associated with these former buildings. As the site fronts onto Broad Street, it seems possible that post-medieval building activity may have truncated early deposits. How subsequent buildings or services have impacted on Anglo-Saxon or medieval or remains, however, is not clear.

## 12 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Nigel Tincknell, Principle Building Surveyor for Donaldsons, who commissioned the project on behalf of Stafford College. The research as undertaken for Birmingham Archaeology by Kristina Krawiec who also wrote this report. The illustrations were by Nigel Dodds. The project was managed for Birmingham Archaeology by Richard Cuttler, who also edited this report. Thanks also to the William Salt Library, Jo Macintosh at the Staffordshire County Record Office and Chris Wardle who monitored the project on behalf of the Development Services at Staffordshire County Council.

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***Cartographic sources***

***Ordnance Survey maps***

1881 First Edition 25" Sheet 37.11

1889 Ordnance Survey

901 Second Edition 25" Sheets 37.11

*1973 SJ 92223 1:10,000*

***Other maps***

c.1610 Speed's Map of Stafford

1775 Yates's Map of Staffordshire

c.1800 Map of Several Estates belonging to Sir William Jerningham in the...Manor of Forebridge

2003 Conservation Area map



Fig.1

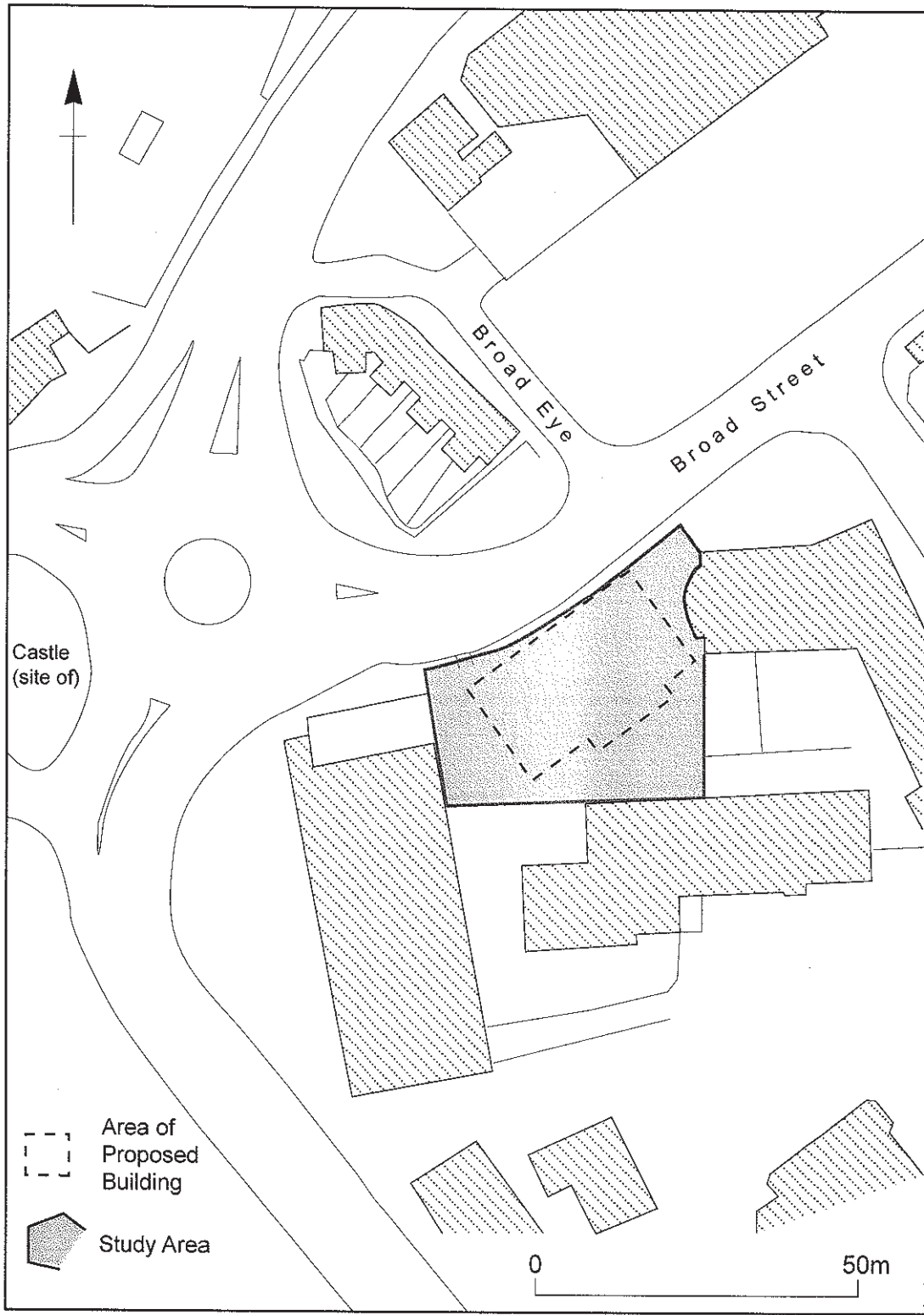


Fig.2



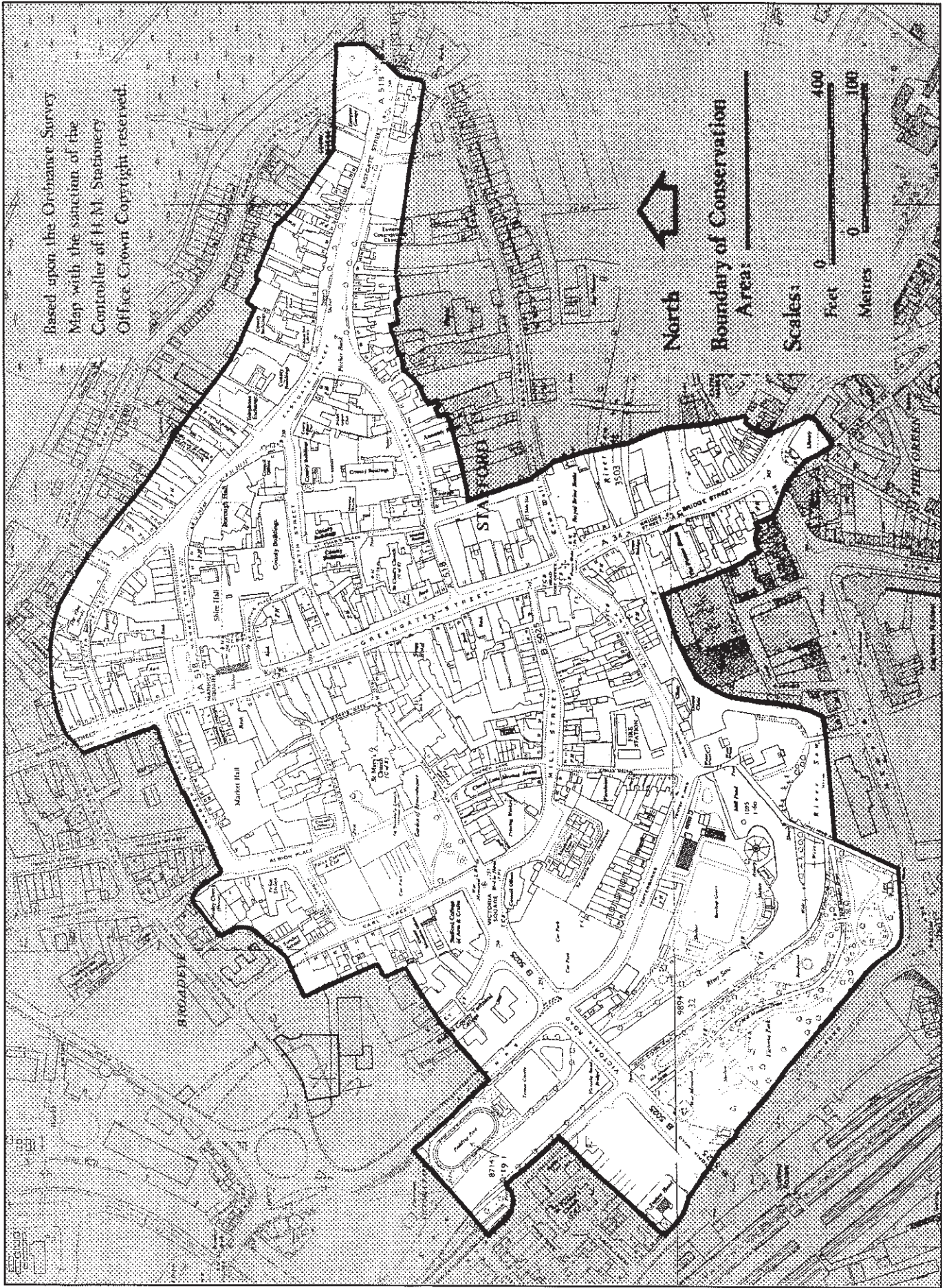


Fig.3 Conservation Area





Fig.4 SMR Numbers

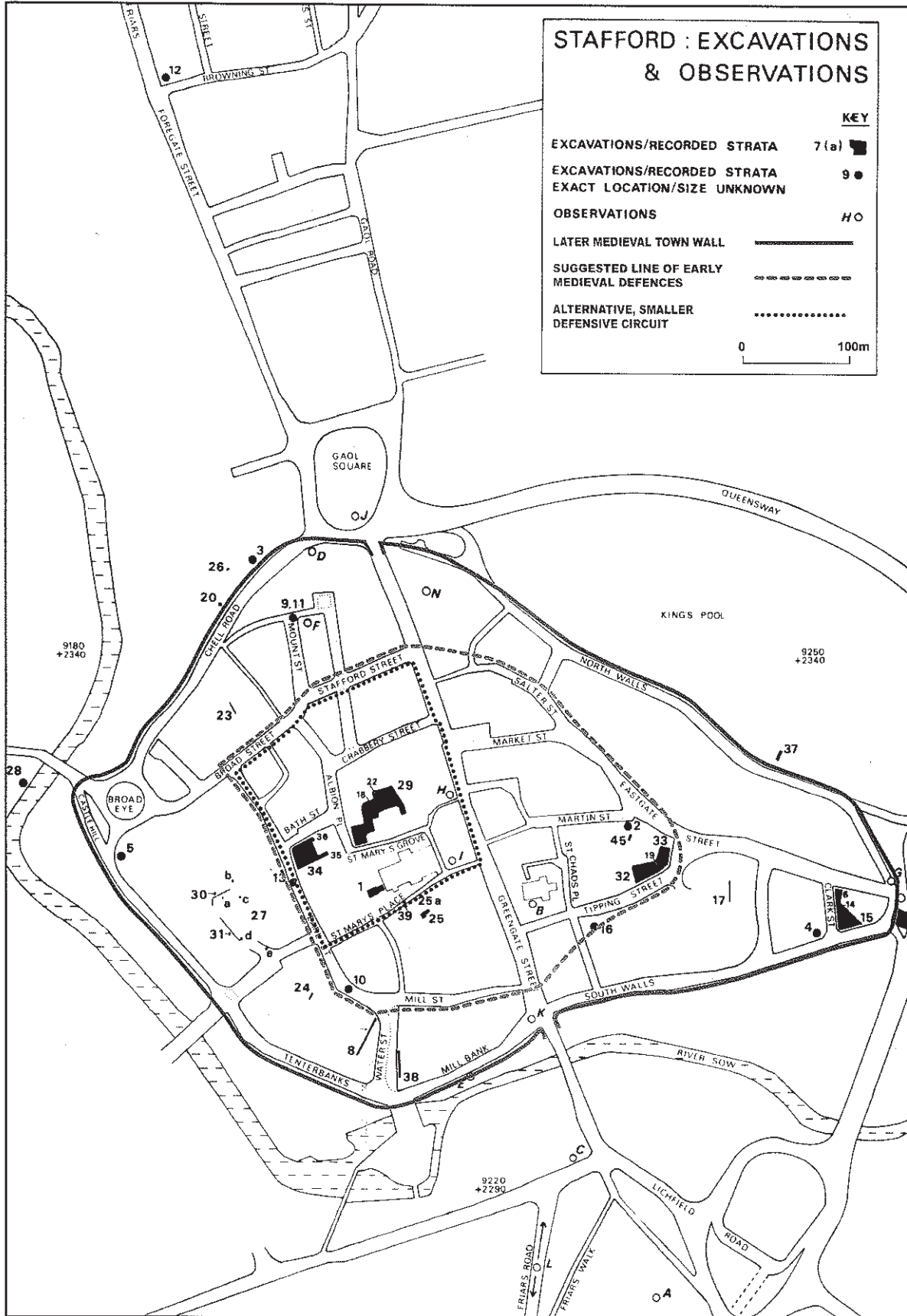


Fig.5 Investigations Undertaken Within The Urban Area Between 1975-84



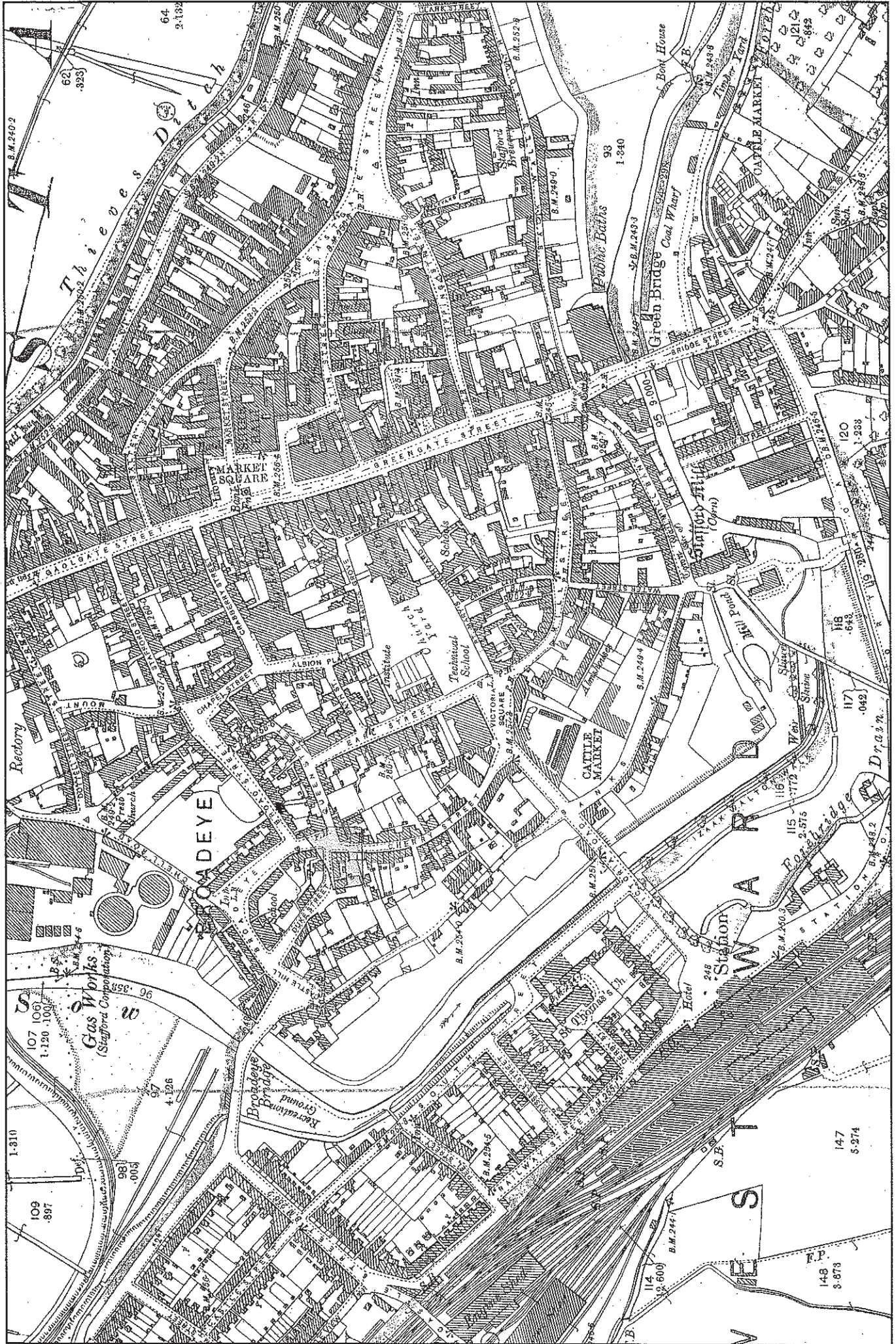


Fig.6 (1901)



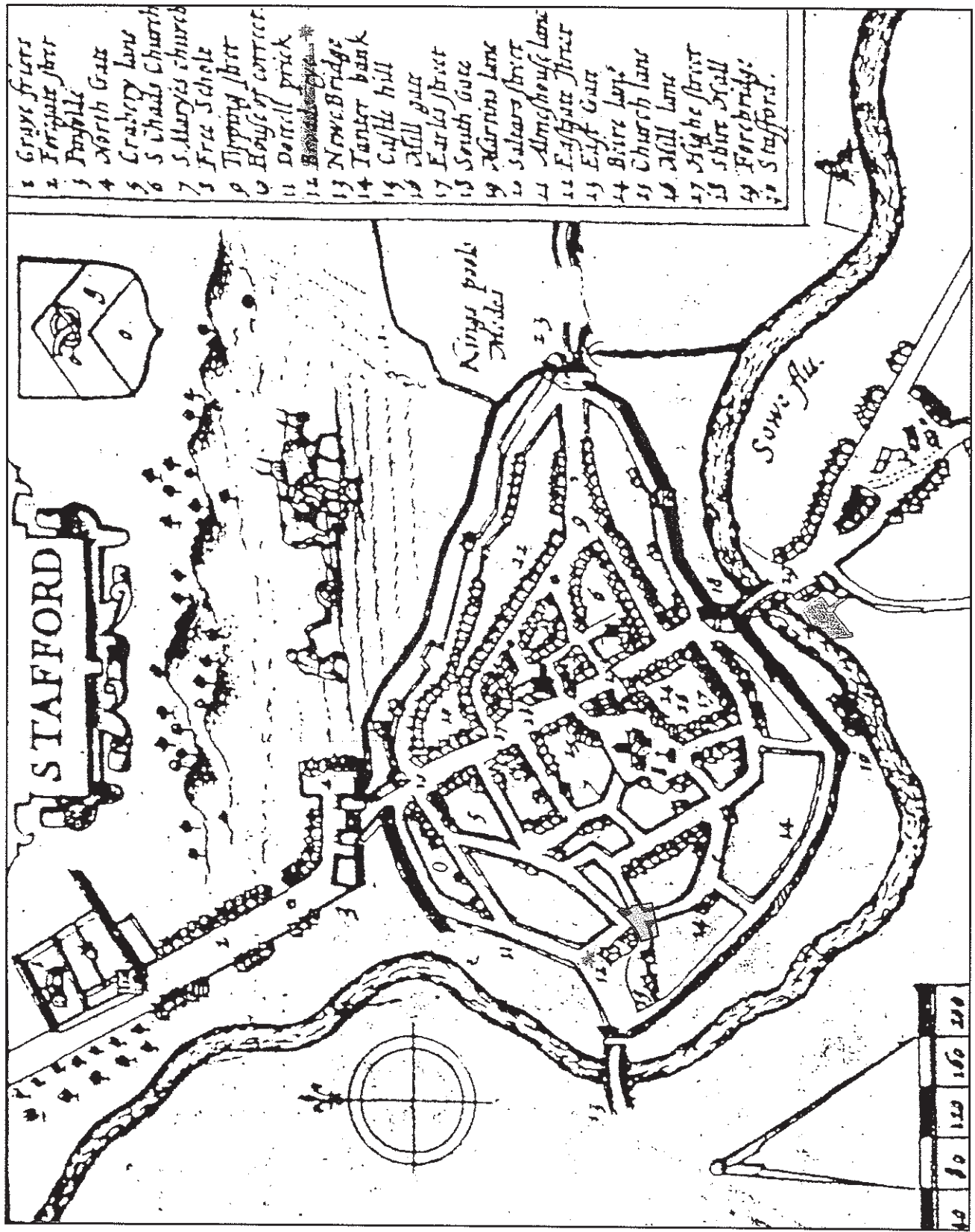


Fig.7 (1610)



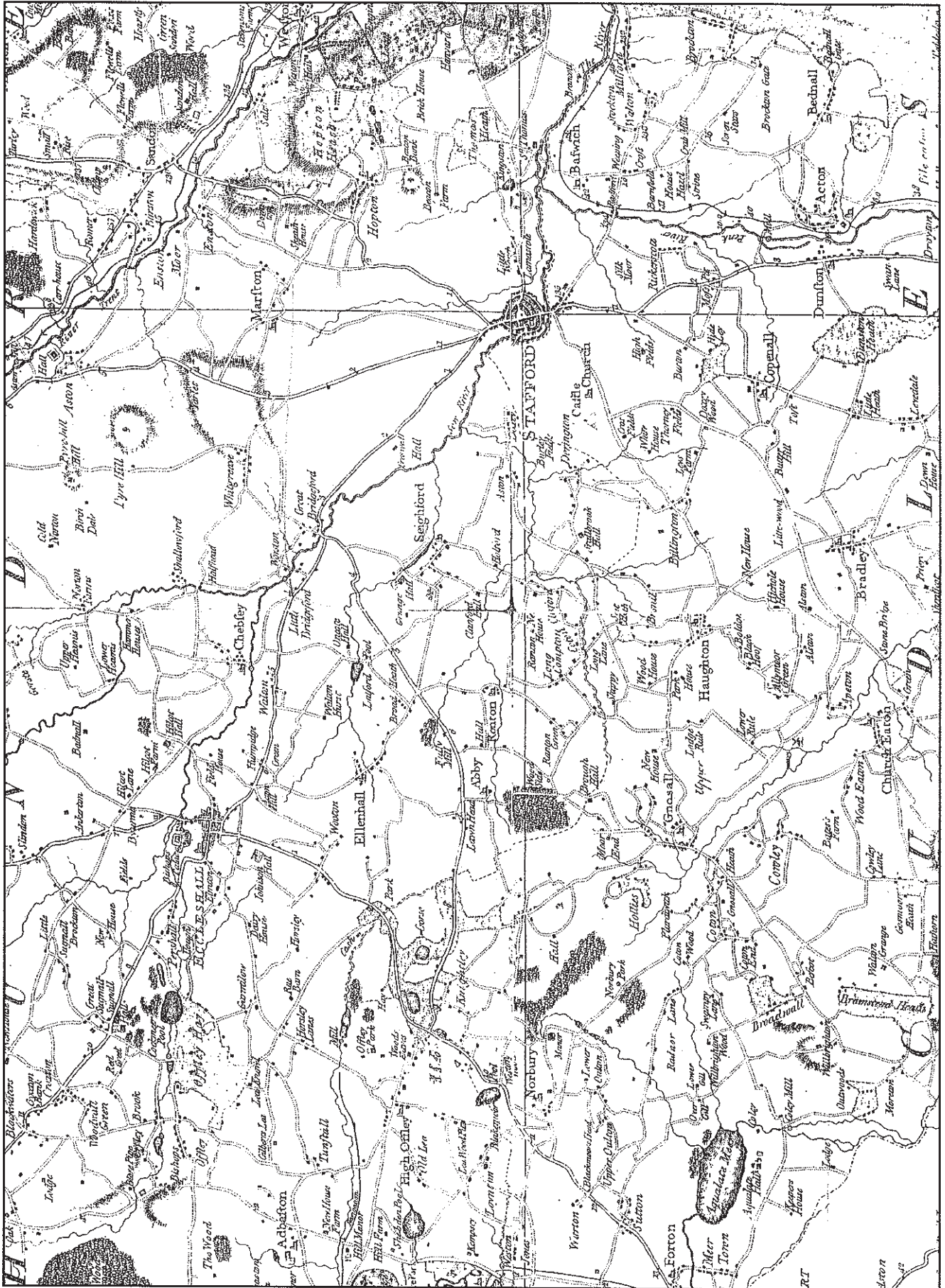


Fig.8 Yate's Map (1775)

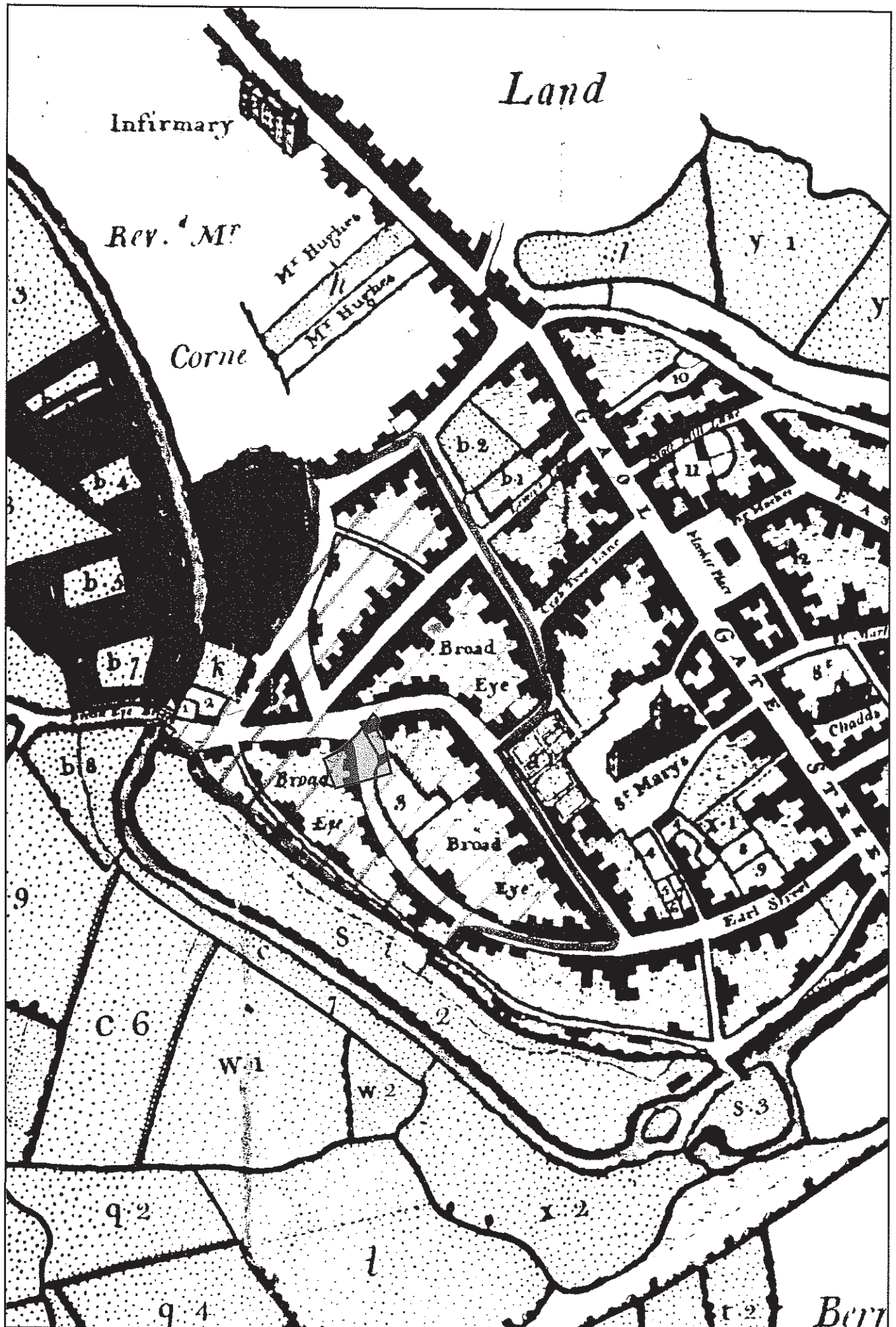


Fig.9 Jerningham estate map (1788)





Fig.10 (1881)



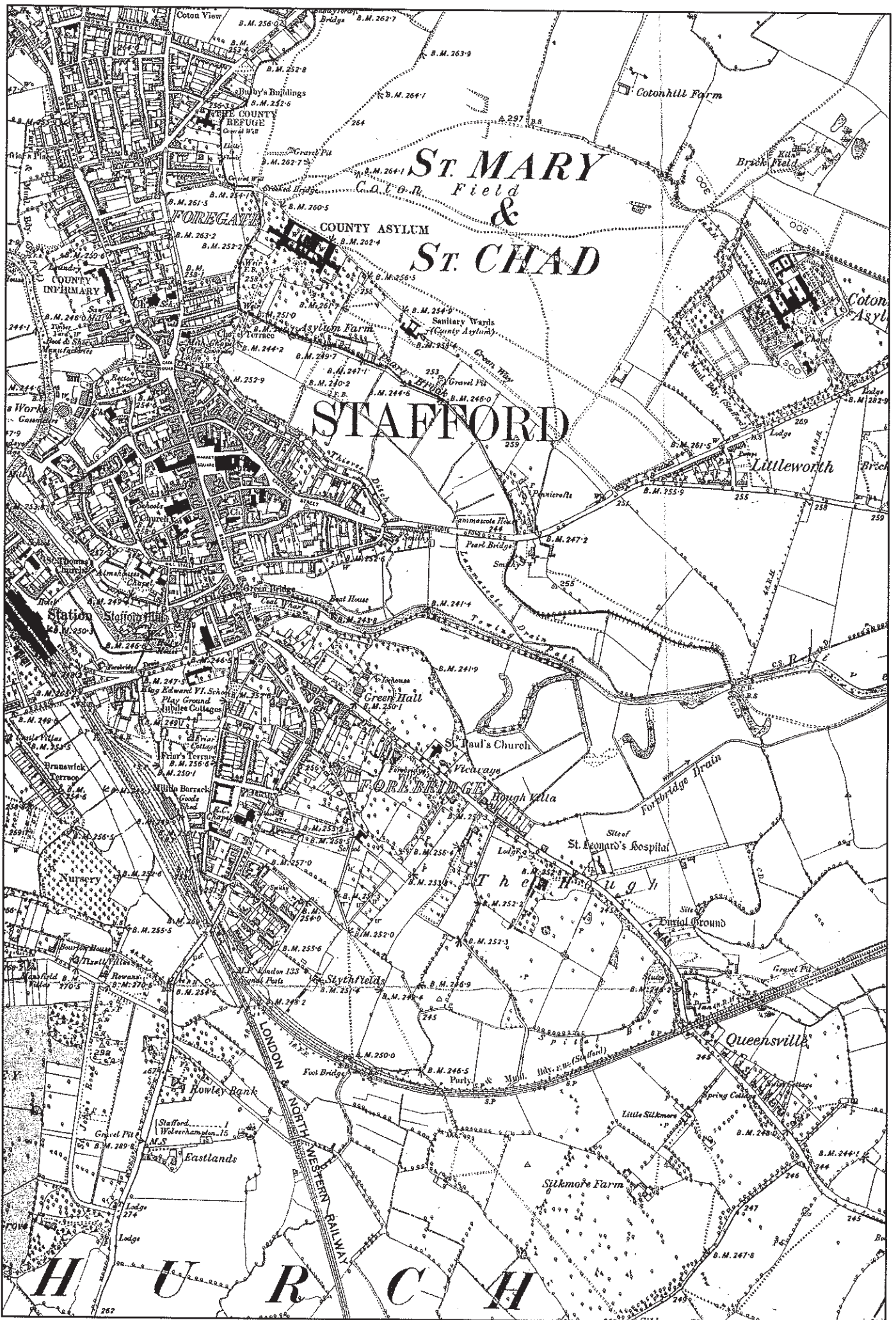


Fig.11 (1889)

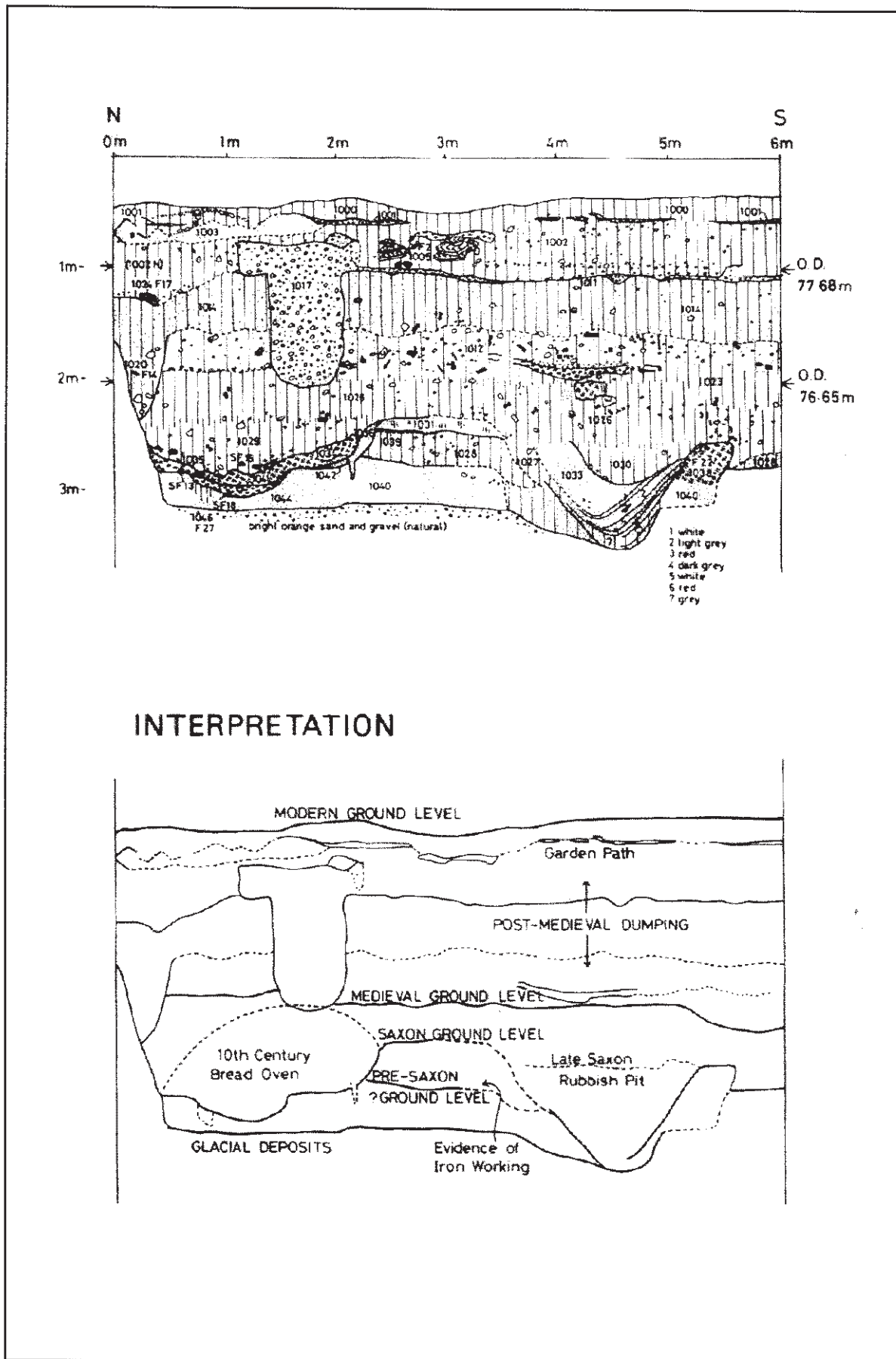


Fig.12 Section in the side of a 3 metre deep trench at Site 22





Fig.1

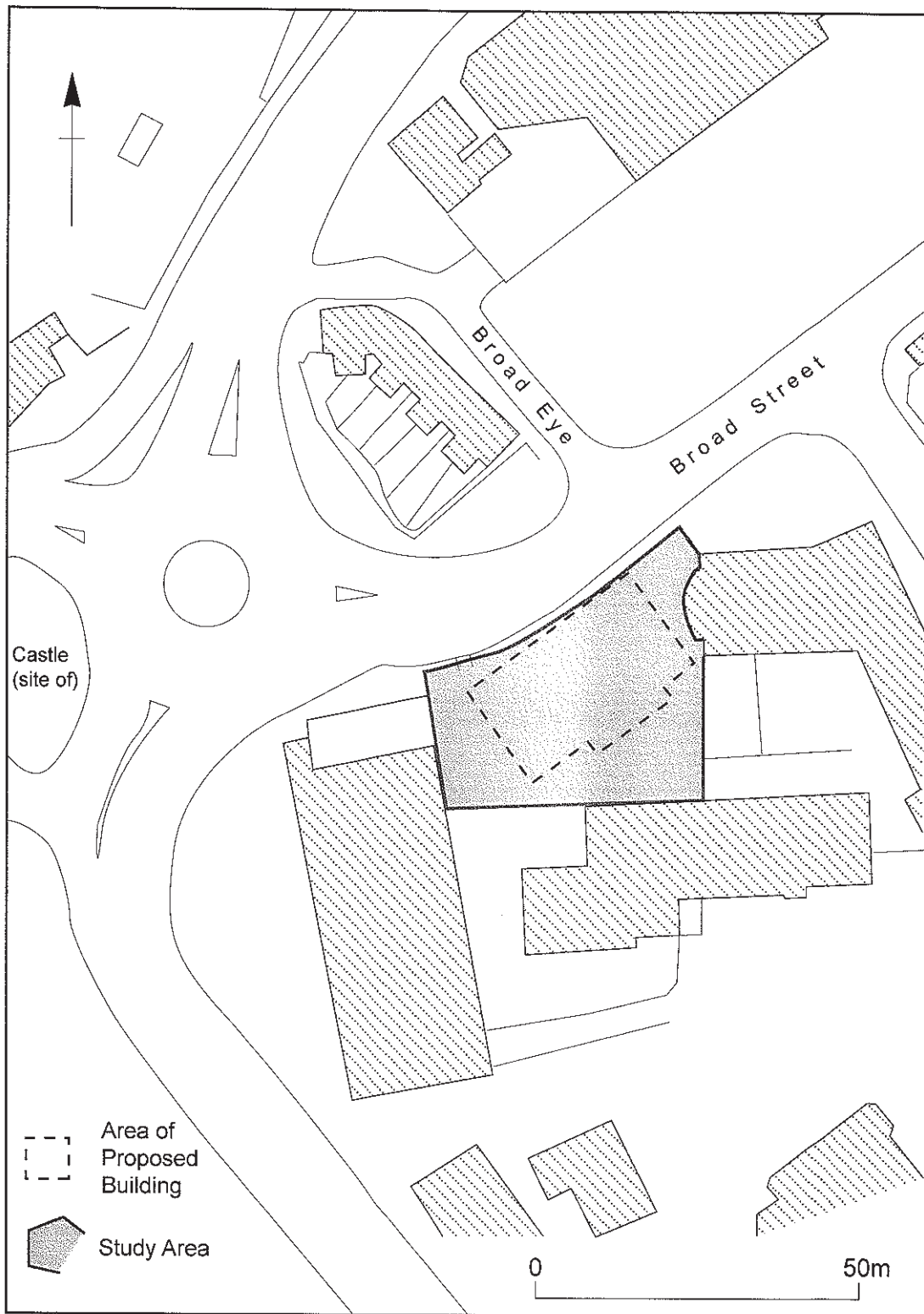


Fig.2



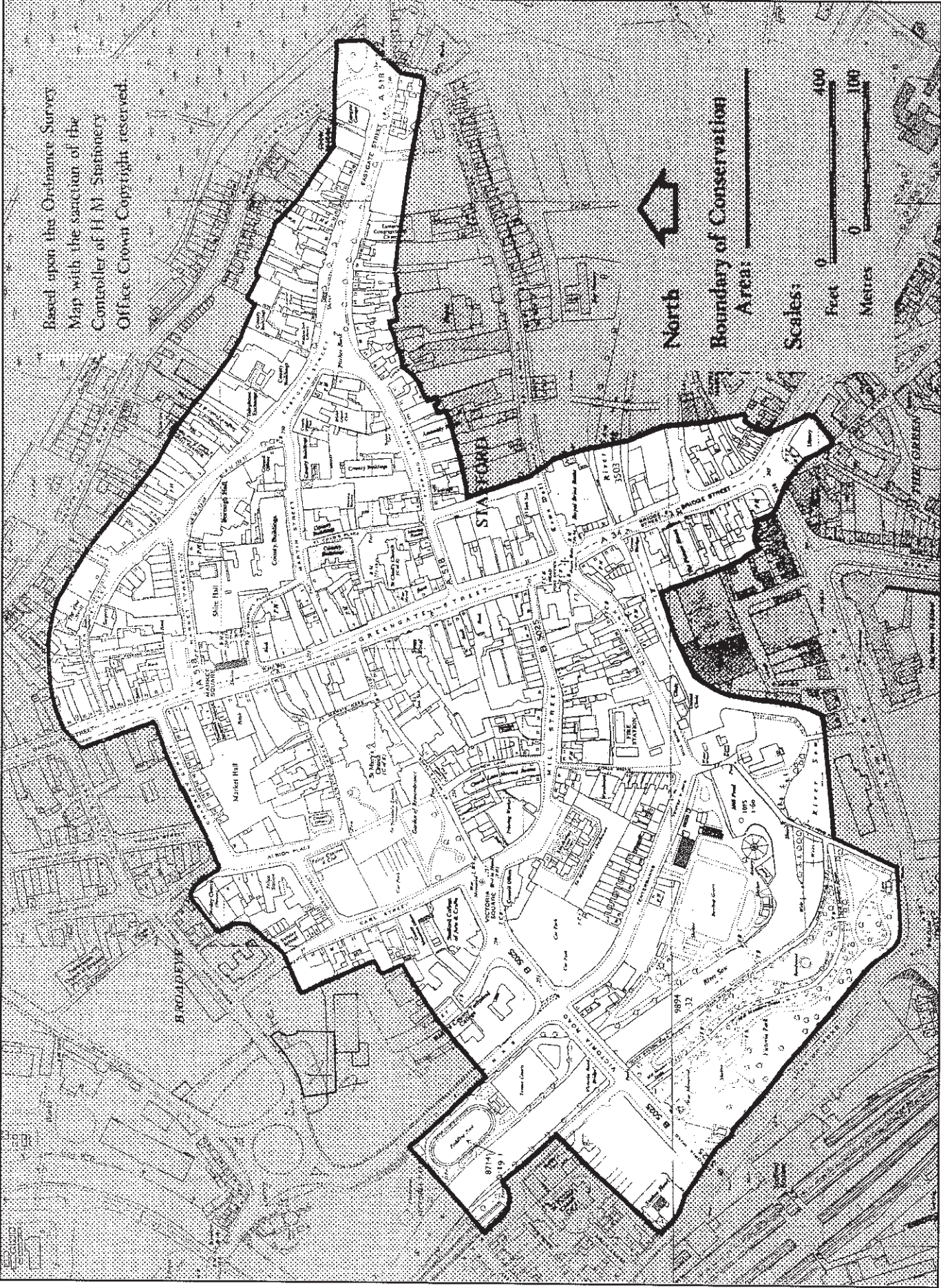


Fig.3 Conservation Area





Fig.4 SMR Numbers

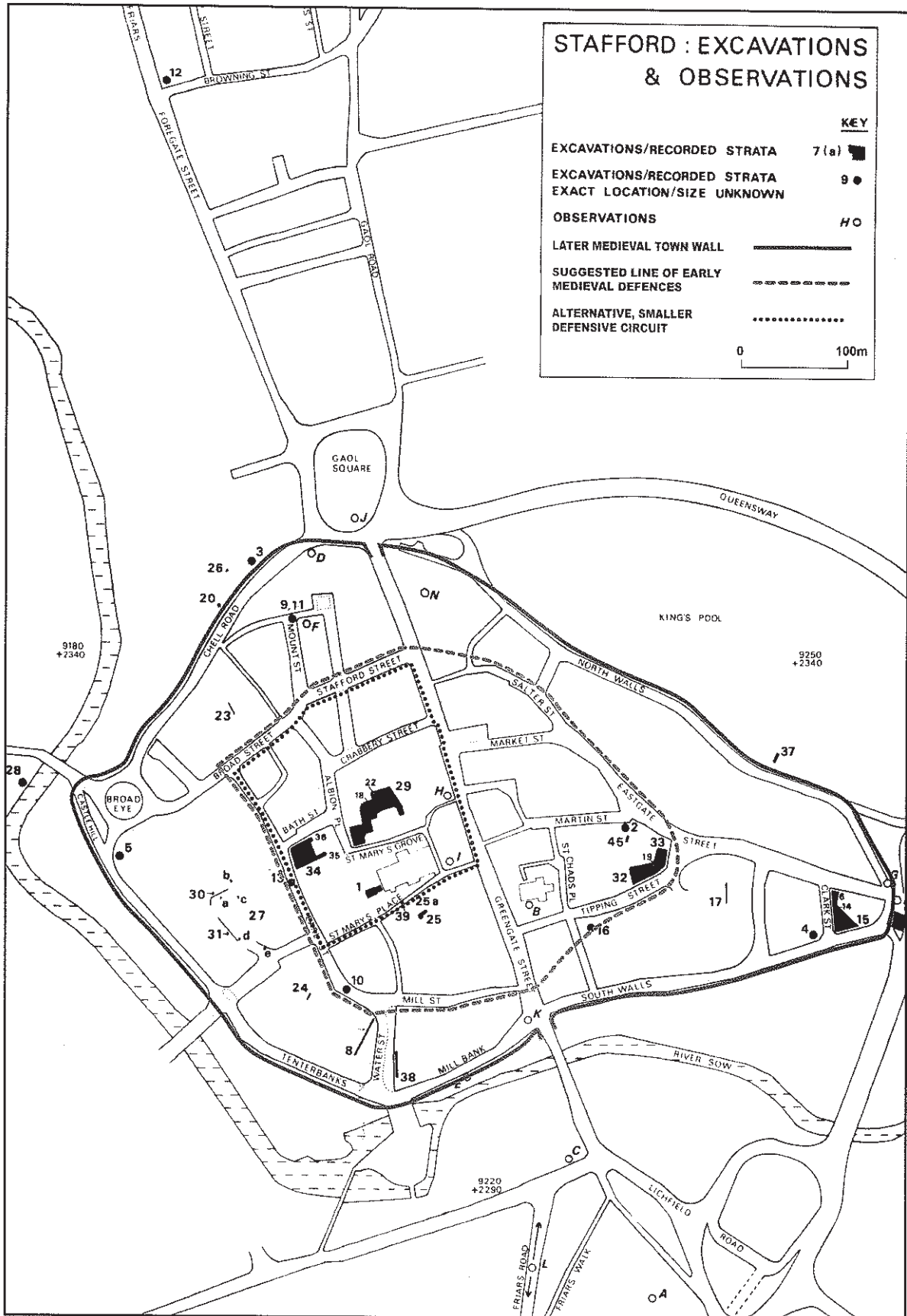


Fig.5 Investigations Undertaken Within The Urban Area Between 1975-84







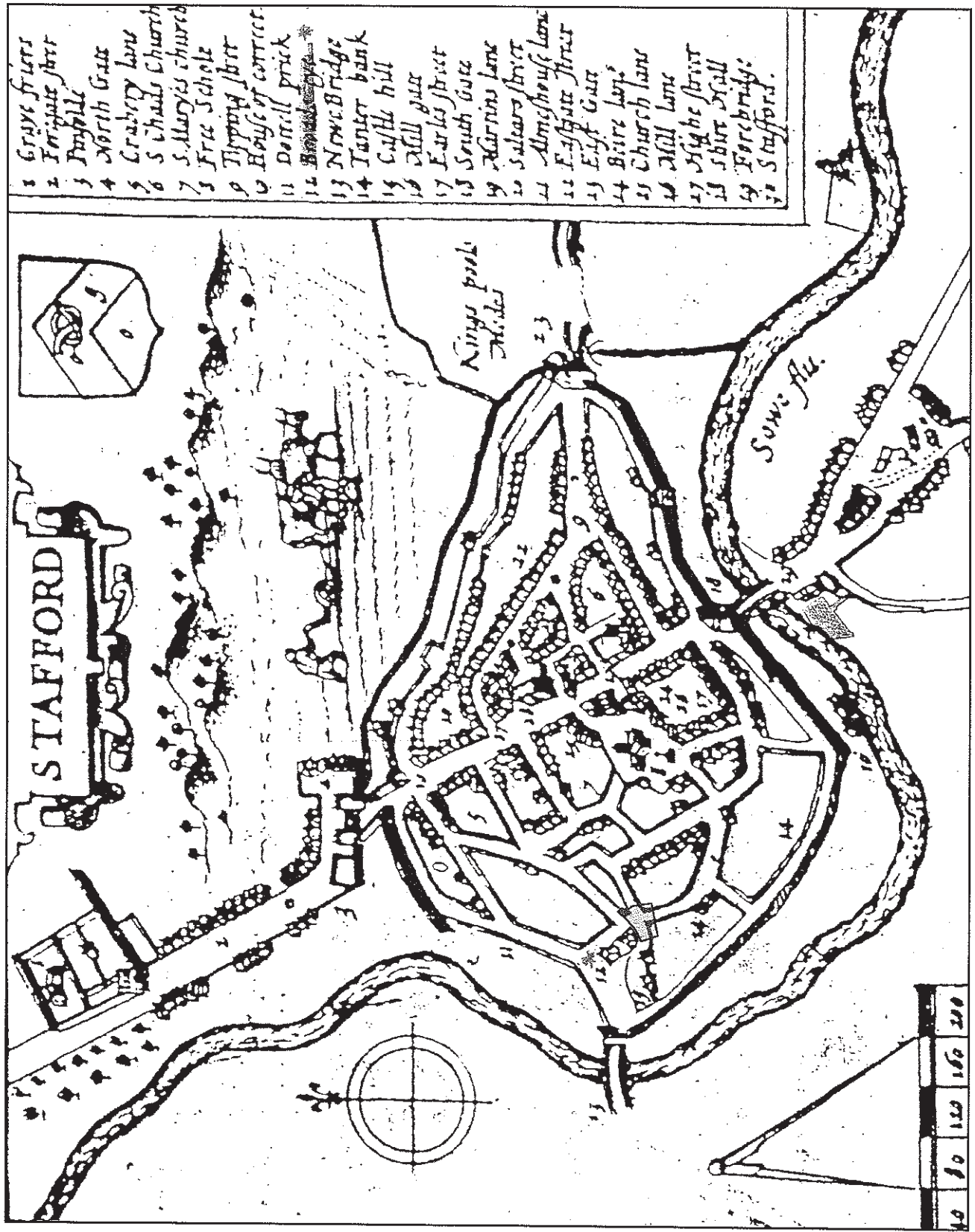


Fig.7 (1610)

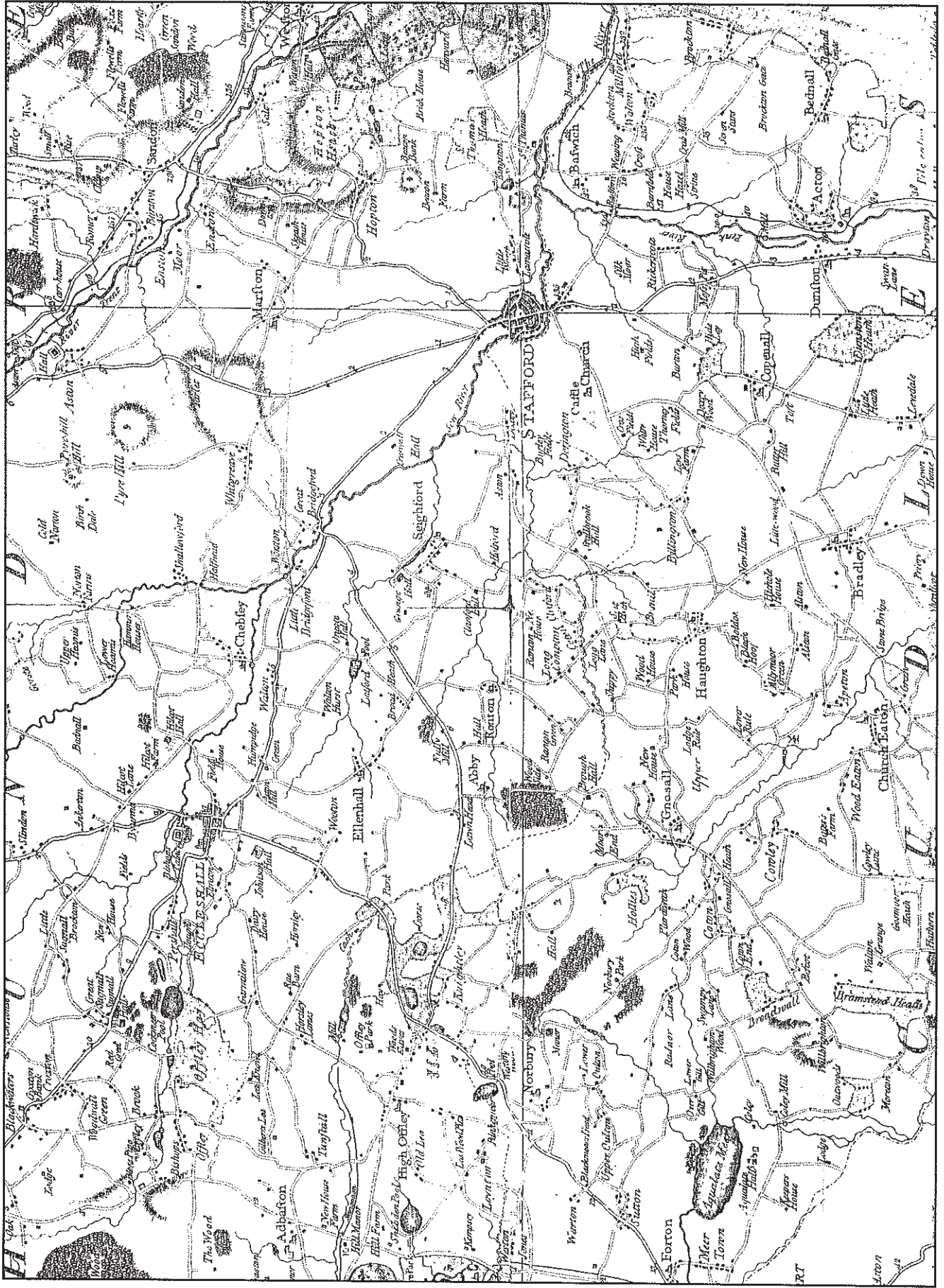


Fig.8 Yate's Map (1775)

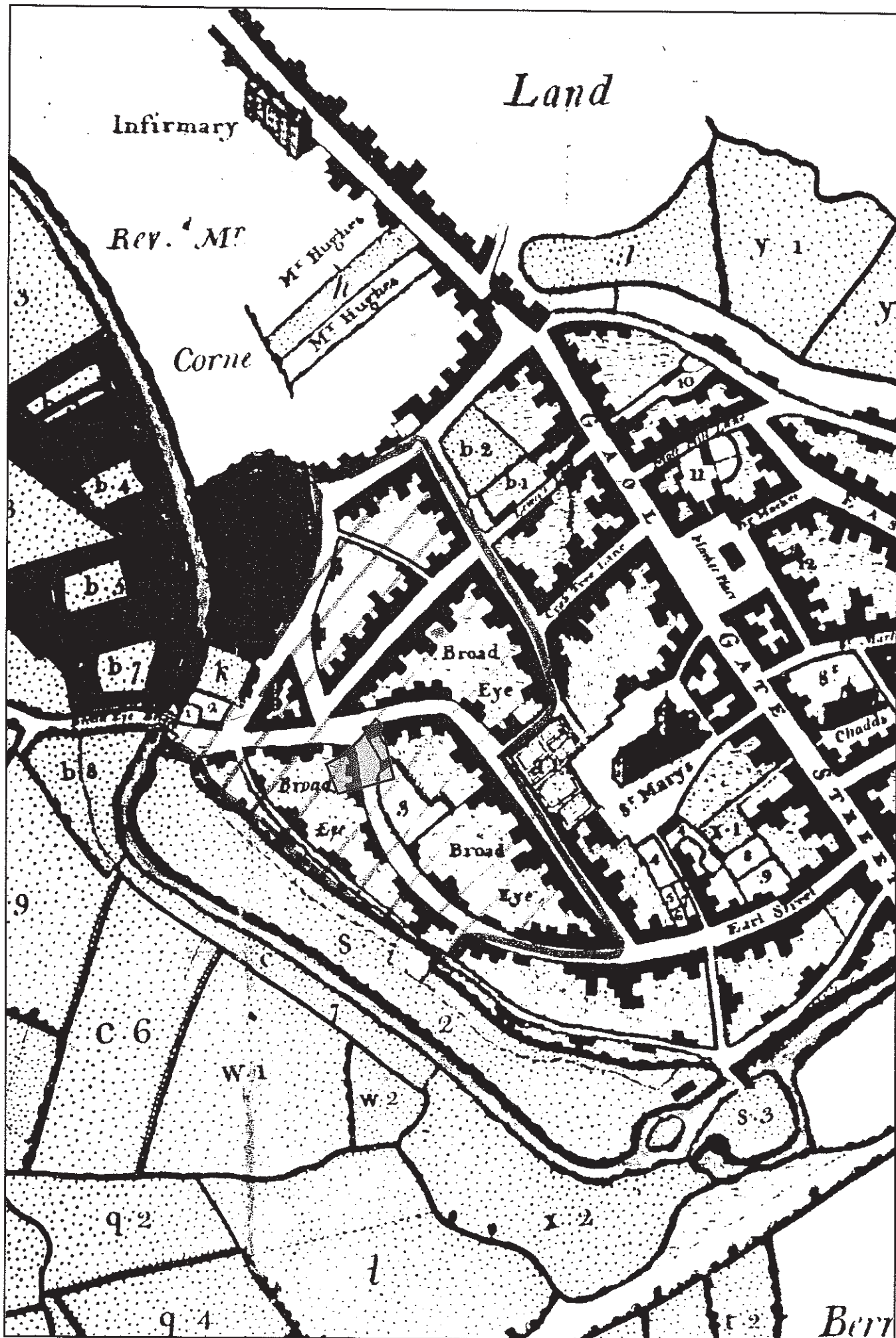


Fig.9 Jerningham estate map (1788)





Fig.10 (1881)





Fig.11 (1889)



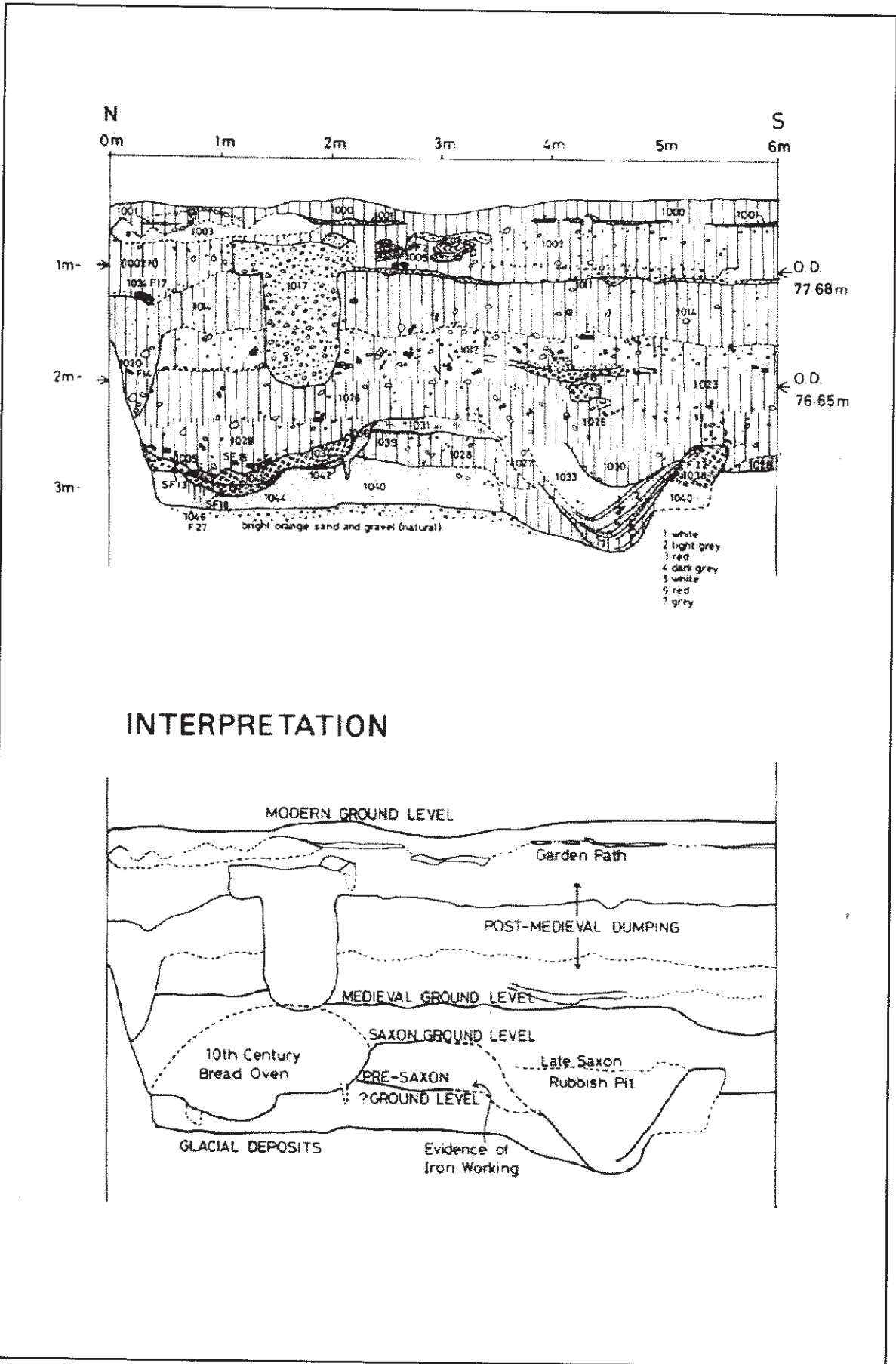


Fig.12 Section in the side of a 3 metre deep trench at Site 22



Plate 1



Plate 2

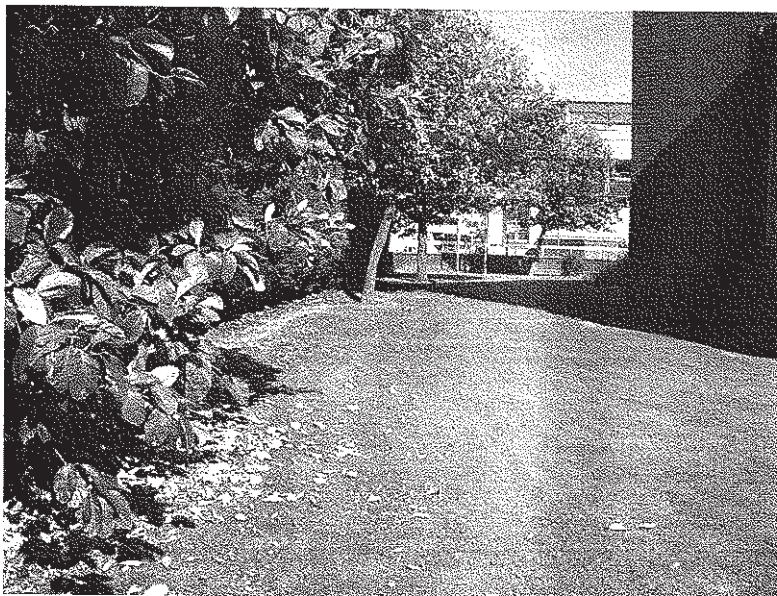


Plate 3





Plate 4





Plate 5