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Banners Lane, Cradley,
Halesowen, West Midlands:

**An Archaeological Desk-based
Assessment**

2005



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for

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Banners Lane, Cradley, Halesowen, West Midlands: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2005

Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment of Banners Lane, Cradley, near Halesowen, West Midlands (NGR SO 950851) was carried out for MarCity Developments in advance of proposed re-development of the site. The desk-based assessment, identified an early water mill site within the study area dating from 1525 and a blacking mill established on the site during the early 20th century. At this time too a single track Mineral Railway was constructed across the site, to carry coal from the surrounding collieries to the foundries, and other industrial premises which had established themselves within Cradley. During the 1920s the site was redeveloped, the blacking mill buildings were demolished and in their place a foundry was established, which remained in use until recently. Alterations to the course of the River Stour and the development of the site for industrial uses during the twentieth century are likely to have destroyed all archaeological evidence of the early water-powered mill. Landscaping and levelling at the site have destroyed remains of the mineral railway and the blacking mill.

1 Introduction

In January 2005 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological desk-based assessment of Banners Lane, Cradley, West Midlands (hereafter referred to as the study area). The work was commissioned by MarCity Developments in advance of proposed redevelopment of the site. This report outlines the results of the assessment, which was prepared in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology and which adhered to the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (IFA 1999)

2 Location (Fig. 1)

The study area is located on the east side of Banners Lane, in the town of Cradley, near Halesowen, Dudley Metropolitan Borough, West Midlands and is centered on NGR SO 950851. This is a former industrial site, with residential areas to the east and west. To the north of the study area are the Congreaves Trading Estate and Portersfield Industrial Estate and to the South lies the Bellevalle Works Forge. The eastern boundary of the study area is formed by the River Stour. Where the River Stour passes through a culvert, the study area extends over the culvert. Part of the western boundary of the study area runs along Banners Lane.

3 Aims and Objectives

The principle aim of the project was to assess the survival and potential significance of any archaeology within the study area. A more specific objective was to locate the site of

a documented water-mill in relation to the study area, and to assess the potential for the survival of below-ground archaeology relating to it, and any threat posed by the proposed development.

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 Dudley Archives, Worcestershire Record Office, Birmingham Central Library and the Library of the University of Birmingham. The Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Sites and Monuments Record, the main source of archaeological information for the borough was also consulted.

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

5 Archaeological and Historical Context

In 1086 Cradley formed part of the barony of Dudley. It followed the same descent as the manor of Northfield until the estates of Joyce Burnell were divided in the middle of the 15th-century. Cradley was then assigned with Northfield and Weoley, later it was to follow the descent of Hagley (VCH Vol iii p.143). The River Stour which forms the boundary between Worcestershire and Staffordshire has drawn industry to the area since the 12th century, when the first water-powered mill is listed in the documentary records. Issac Taylor's Map of Worcestershire (Fig. 2) dated 1772, clearly shows the great quantity of mills and forges which have by this time established themselves on the banks of the Stour.

The northeastern region of Worcestershire forms part of the mineral district commonly called the South Staffordshire coalfield. The Worcestershire district includes Oldbury, Cradley, Stourbridge, Halesowen and Old Swinford, and the detached part of the county round Dudley. The iron mines here seem to have been worked long before the utility and cheapness of coal for smelting purposes were discovered in the 17th century (VCH Vol iii p.144)

After this time Cradley became a centre for the production of tools, nails and chain (VCH Vol ii p.271), a result of the development of the iron and coal works in the district. Chain making in Cradley is said to have been at its most prosperous at the end of the 19th century, when each week about one thousand tons of chain were produced (VCH Vol iii p.135). Netherton and Lye are also noted as centres for the production of chain (VCH Vol ii p.272). The landscape of Cradley and its surrounding area has been shaped by its industrial past. Foundries, forges and collieries were once frequent features in the area.

6 Historical Development of the Study Area

For the past 80 years the study area has been occupied by a foundry, however, its use as an industrial site stretches back at least to the 16th century by which time a water-powered mill had been established here. The date at which the mill was founded is unknown. Although a mill exists at Cradley in the 12th century, it has not proved possible to establish a link between this mill and the one located in the study area (Blunt & Bradley 2004). The Staffordshire Pipe Rolls confirm the presence of Cradley Mill by 1525, at which time it was occupied by John Addenbrooke.

“John Addenbrooke holdeth by Indenture dated the xxvi day of April one water myll called Cradley Mill and one pasture called priests moore”

The document also informs us that John Addenbrooke was not the owner of the mill and lands, but rented them. The Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1535 lists a Cradley Mill, rented from the King by the Abbot, it is possible therefore that John Addenbrooke rented the mill from the Abbey (Blunt & Bradley 2004).

Further reference to John Addenbrooke appears in the Cradley Court Rolls 1519-1558, where he and another miller, William Wall, are listed several times as having interfered with the level of water in the River Stour. It is possible that these two millers were in partnership or rented water mills in close proximity to each other.

William Wall died in 1573 and the property he held at the time of his death included “one water corn-mill in Cradley”. This was taken over by his son, also William, who continued to operate the mill until his own death in 1583 (Blunt & Bradley 2004).

“...attorneys for William Wall deceased and surrendered into the hands of the lord one messuage with appurtenances called Brookhouse, with orchard, two water mills stream or water course running to the same mills, and one close of land called Mill Close and one croft of land called Ashcroft with its appurtenances. To the use and behoof of William Wall, one son of the said William Wall deceased”

After a dispute over, who was the rightful heir of the property, William Wall released his interest in his father's property in favour of his elder brother John Wall in 1609 (Blunt and Bradley 2004). In 1613 the property was surrendered by John Wall, passing it on to his eldest son Humphery Wall (*Ibid*).

“To this court came John Wall of Cradley in the county of Worcester, yeoman, in his own person and surrendered into the hands of the lord two water-mills and one acre of land (or more or less) lying next to it and being within the manor aforesaid...To the use and behoof of him, John Wall, for and during the time of John Wall's natural life and after his, John Walls' death, to the use and behoof of Humphery Wall, son and heir apparent of himself, John Wall, his heirs and assigns for ever, according to the custom of the manor aforesaid.”

From 1648 to 1692 the mills and land had several different owners. By 1692, when the property was sold by Thomas Hadley and his wife Elizabeth to William Lea, there were three water mills occupied and operated at this time by John Hedger.

"Witnesseth that the said Thomas Hadley and Elizabeth his wife ...do hereby release and confirm to and to the use of the said William Lea, his heirs and assigns. All that dwelling house and three water corn mills now in the occupation of one John Hedger or of his under-tenant or under-tenants, assign of assigns and all that one parcel of land containing by estimation one acre be it more or less lying nigh or adjoining to the said water corn mills in a close there called the Mill Close and now also in the occupation of John Hedger."

On the 1772 map of Worcestershire by Issac Taylor a mill is called Hedges Mill (a name is thought to have derived from Hedger) (Fig.2). Ferdinando Dudley Lea was the successor to William. On his death in 1757 the property was left to his sister Ann Smith, from whom it passed to her son William Smith and then to his son Ferdinando Smith (Blunt & Bradley 2004). A plan of this area drawn in 1818 (Fig.3), and an account of possible alterations to the footpaths of Cradley, provide invaluable information about the location and appearance of the mill and surrounding landscape. In past documents up to three mills have been described as located at this site, the account of 1818 and the accompanying plan appear to now refer to only one.

"We, two of His Majesty's Justices of the peace in and for the said county of Worcester, acting within the lower division of Halfshire Hundred in the said county, having upon [] found that a certain part of a public footway within the township of Cradley in the said lower division and county, of the length of one hundred and ninety eight yards or thereabouts, leading from Overend Green...over and across the land of John Atwood esquire to a certain mill belonging to Ferdinando Smith esquire called Cradley Mill at a place marked 'V' upon the said plan, and from thence into the public highway leading from Dudley towards Halesowen, is dangerous and inconvenient and may be diverted and turned so to make the same nearer and more commodious to the public."

The mill was a large building located on a bend of the River Stour. A large mill pool had been created for it to the south, fed directly by the river, with 'overflow' being carried off to the north, following the course of the river. Water stored in the mill pool travelled through the mill and was carried off by means of a man-made tailrace back into the River Stour. The water mill seems to have spanned the inlet, perhaps suggesting the presence of an internal water wheel. The majority of the study area to the west of the mill was owned by John Atwood, and at this date appears to have been open land. A few buildings existed along Banners Lane.

The Tithe map gives the mill's appearance in 1843 (Fig. 4). Ferdinando Smith is named as a landowner in Cradley, however, no mention is made as to the ownership of the mill at this time. By this date the New British Iron Company had brought the land previously belonging to John Atwood (field No.253), and further buildings had been constructed along Banners Lane.

of the foundry at the south of the study area are referred to as the Belle Vale Foundry although the most recent occupiers of the site were a company called Henley Foundries Ltd.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

The change in the line of the River Stour will have almost certainly caused the destruction of any remains of the 'Rag Mill' and associated building as appears on the first edition OS map of 1884 (Fig. 5). It was thought that the earthworks to the south of the 'Rag Mill' which were potentially the remains of the water mill may have survived the alterations to the course of the river. However, site visits and close study of later OS maps have proved that it is highly unlikely that any such remains survive. Due to the steep escarpment which the new line of the River Stour follows none of the remains of the early mill are likely to have survived.

The study area appears to have been subjected to intensive landscaping and levelling. This is likely to have caused the remains of this part of the mineral railway to be destroyed. The remains of the blacking mill may also have been removed when the study area was prepared for the construction of the foundry during the 1920s.

It is not recommended that any further archaeological investigation be carried out at this site.

8 Acknowledgments

The project was commissioned by MarCity Developments. Thanks are due to the staff of Dudley Archive and Worcester Record Office, and also to Barry Blunt and Margaret Bradley whose thorough research of Cradley Mill was the basis for much of this report. Thanks also go to John Hemmingway who monitored the project on behalf of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. The assessment was undertaken by Leonie Driver 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.

9 Sources

9.1 Textual Sources

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1916 Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire and Worcestershire

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Blunt, B & Bradley, M 2004. *Evidence of Cradley Mill*. (Unpublished Research)

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

VCH 1906. *Victoria History of the County of Worcester*. Volume II

VCH 1913. *Victoria History of the County of Worcester*. Volume III

9.2 Cartographic Sources

1772 Map of Worcestershire by Isaac Taylor

1818 Plan of footpaths in Cradley

1842 Tithe Map for Cradley

1884 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Worcestershire Sheet IV.16

1903 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Worcestershire Sheet IV.16

1919 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Worcestershire Sheet IV.16

1937 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Worcestershire Sheet IV.16

1948 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Worcestershire Sheet IV.16

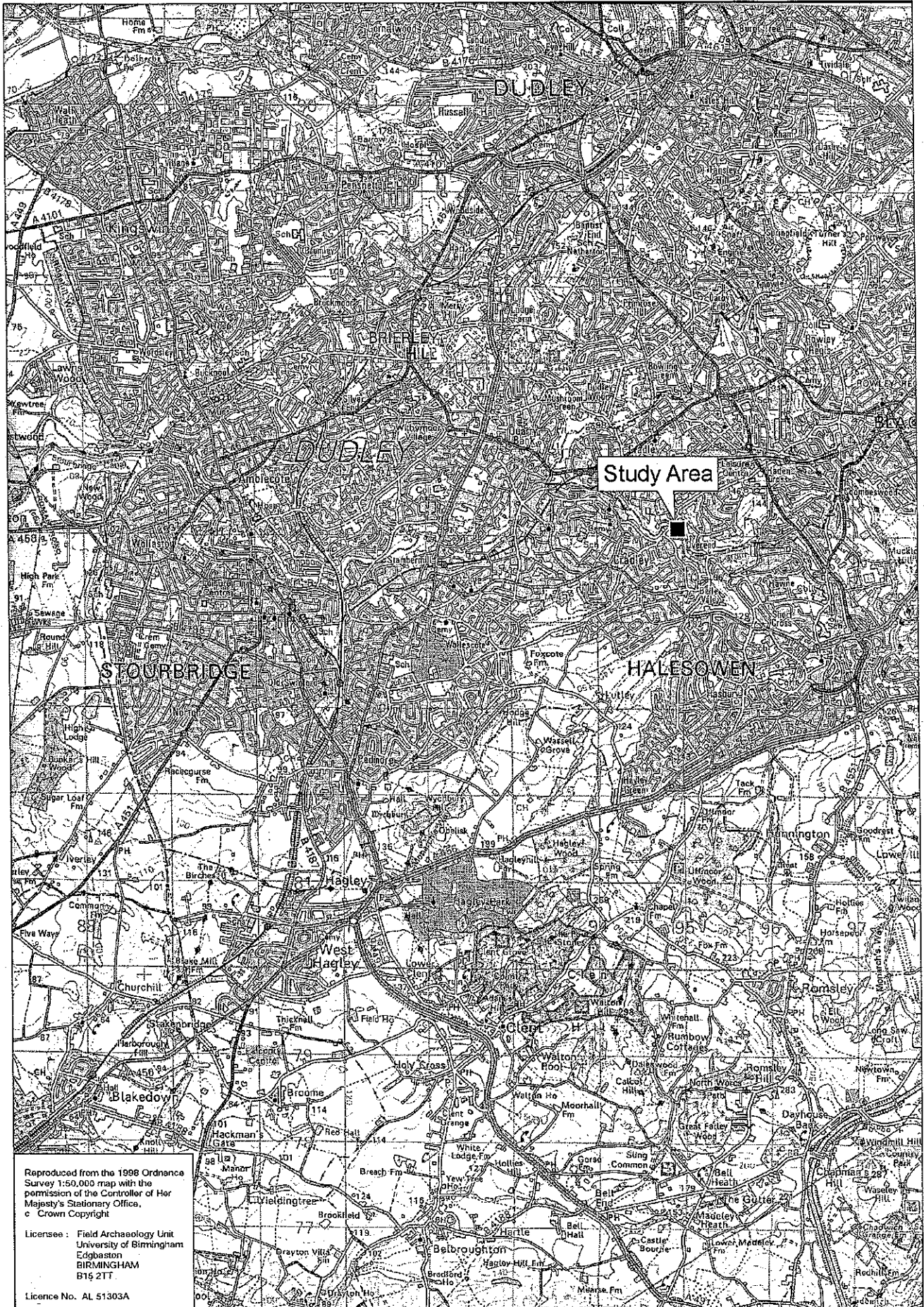


Fig.1

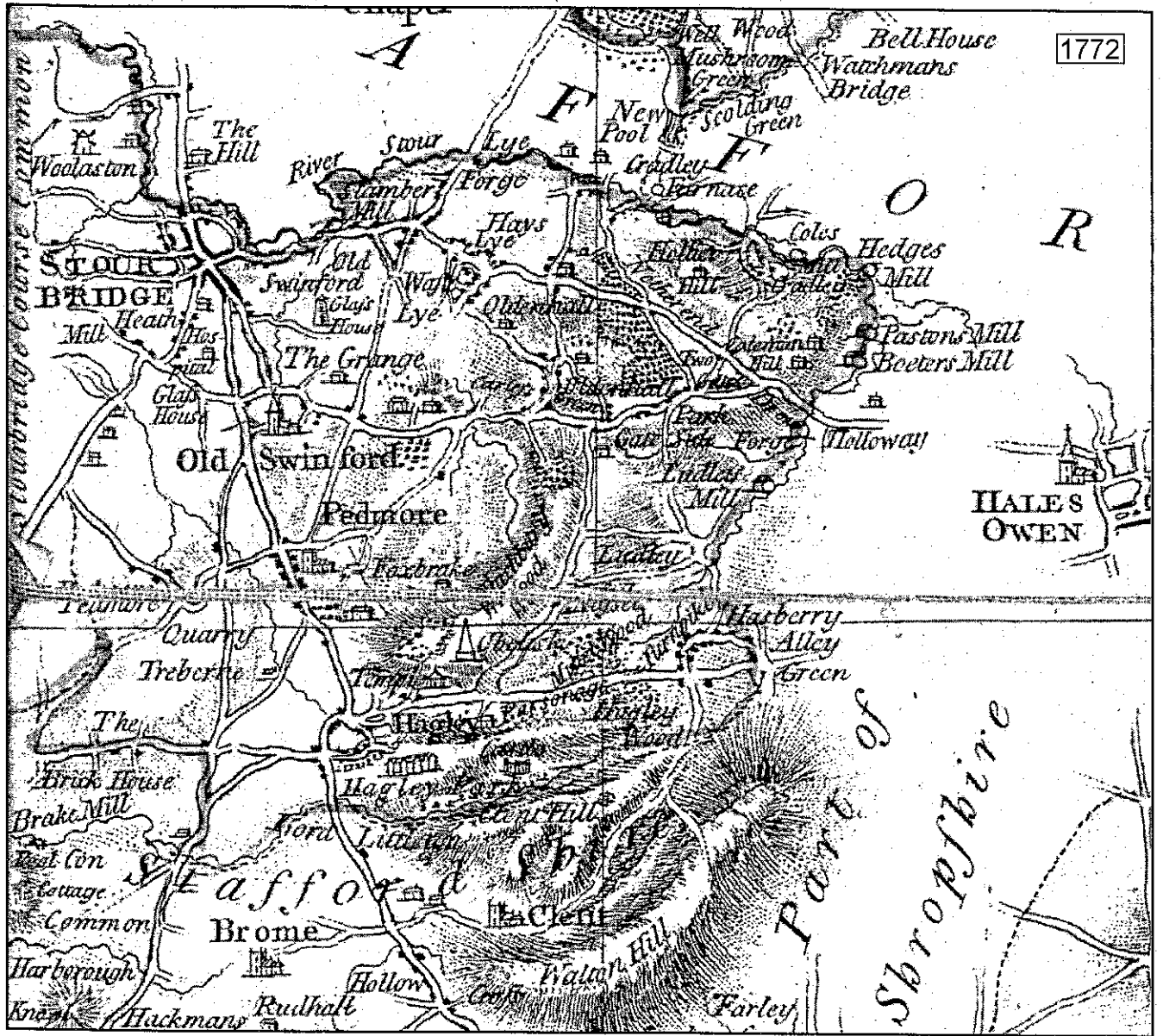


Fig.2

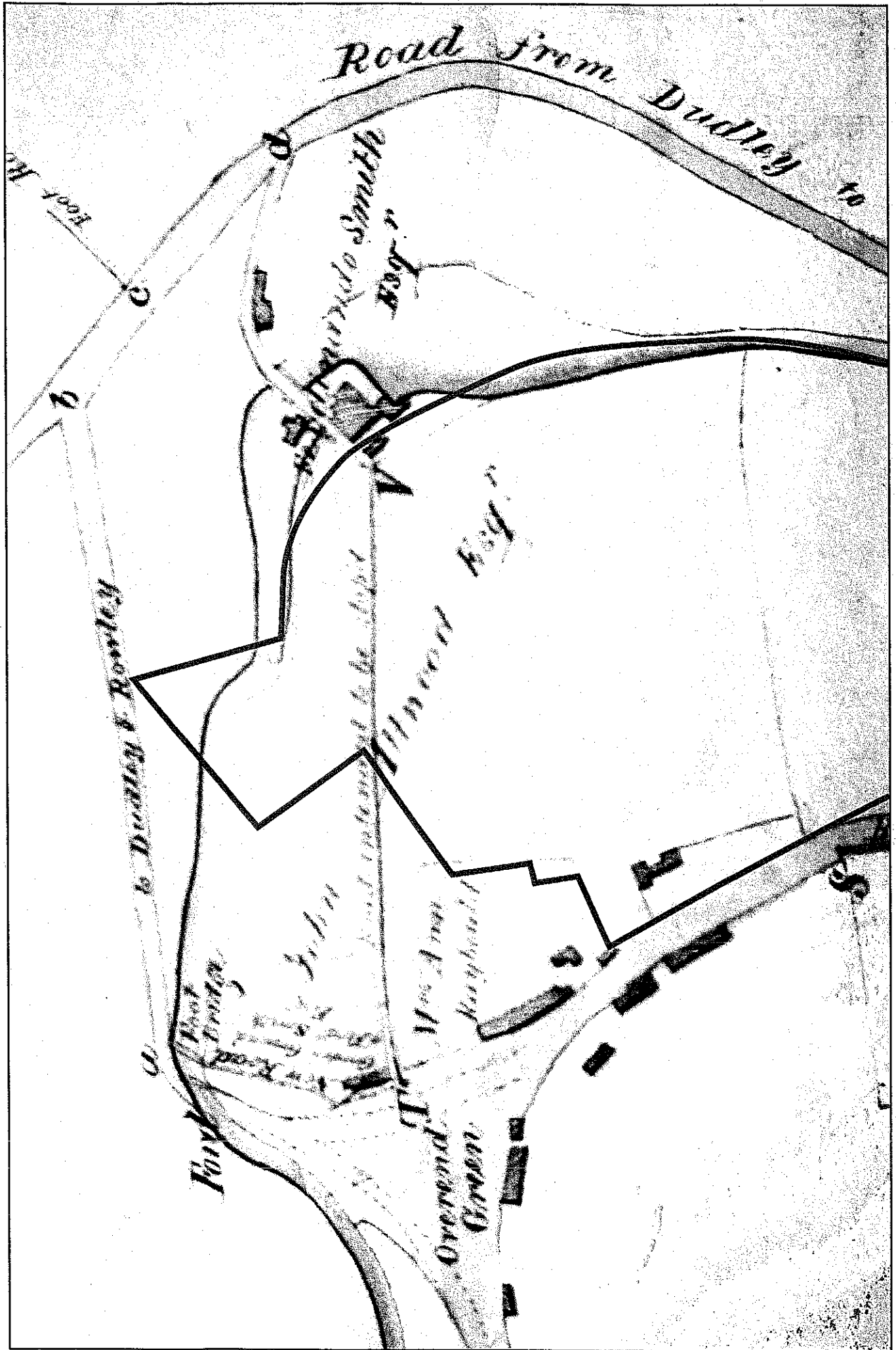


Fig. 3

Tithe Map



Fig.4

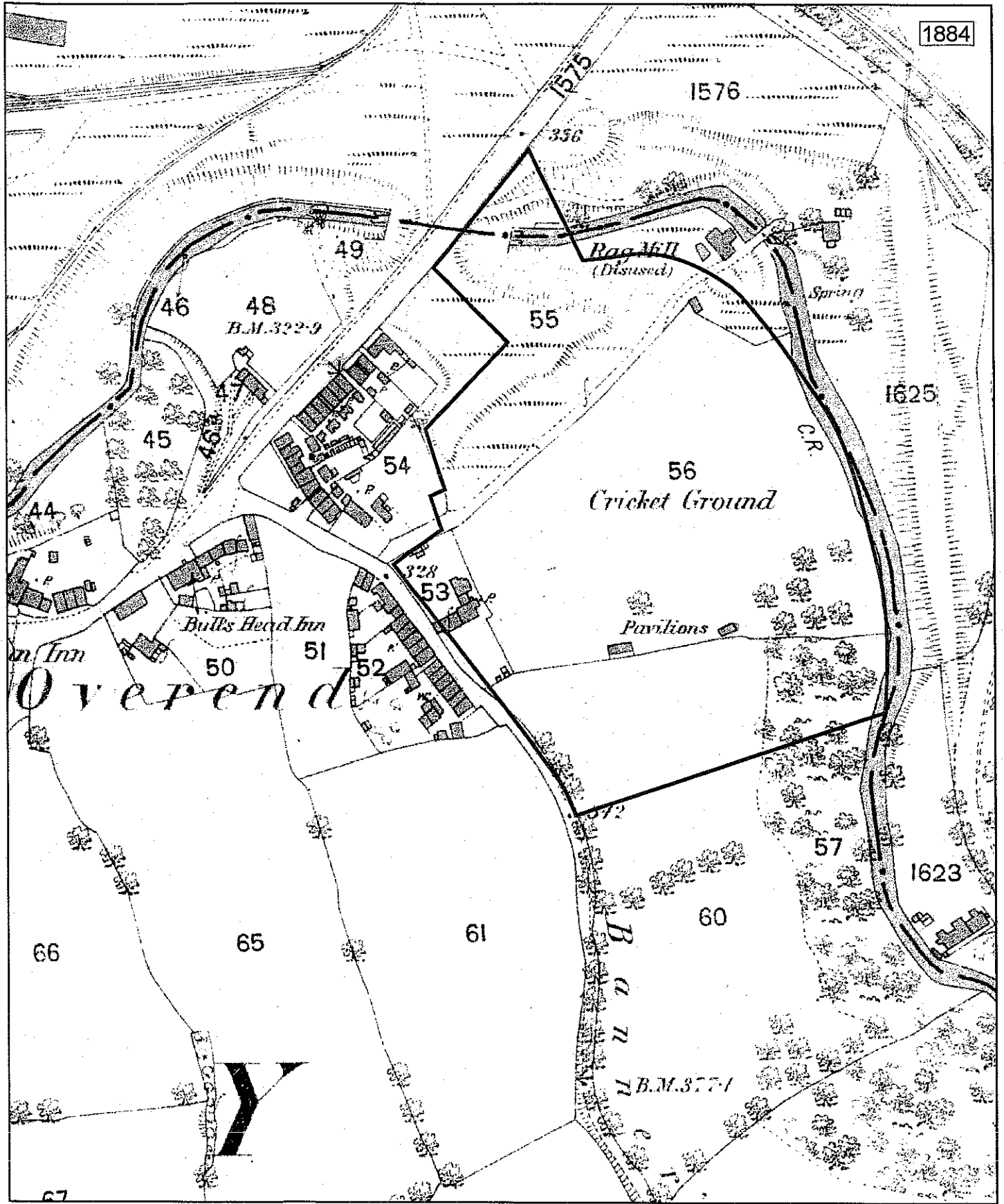


Fig.5

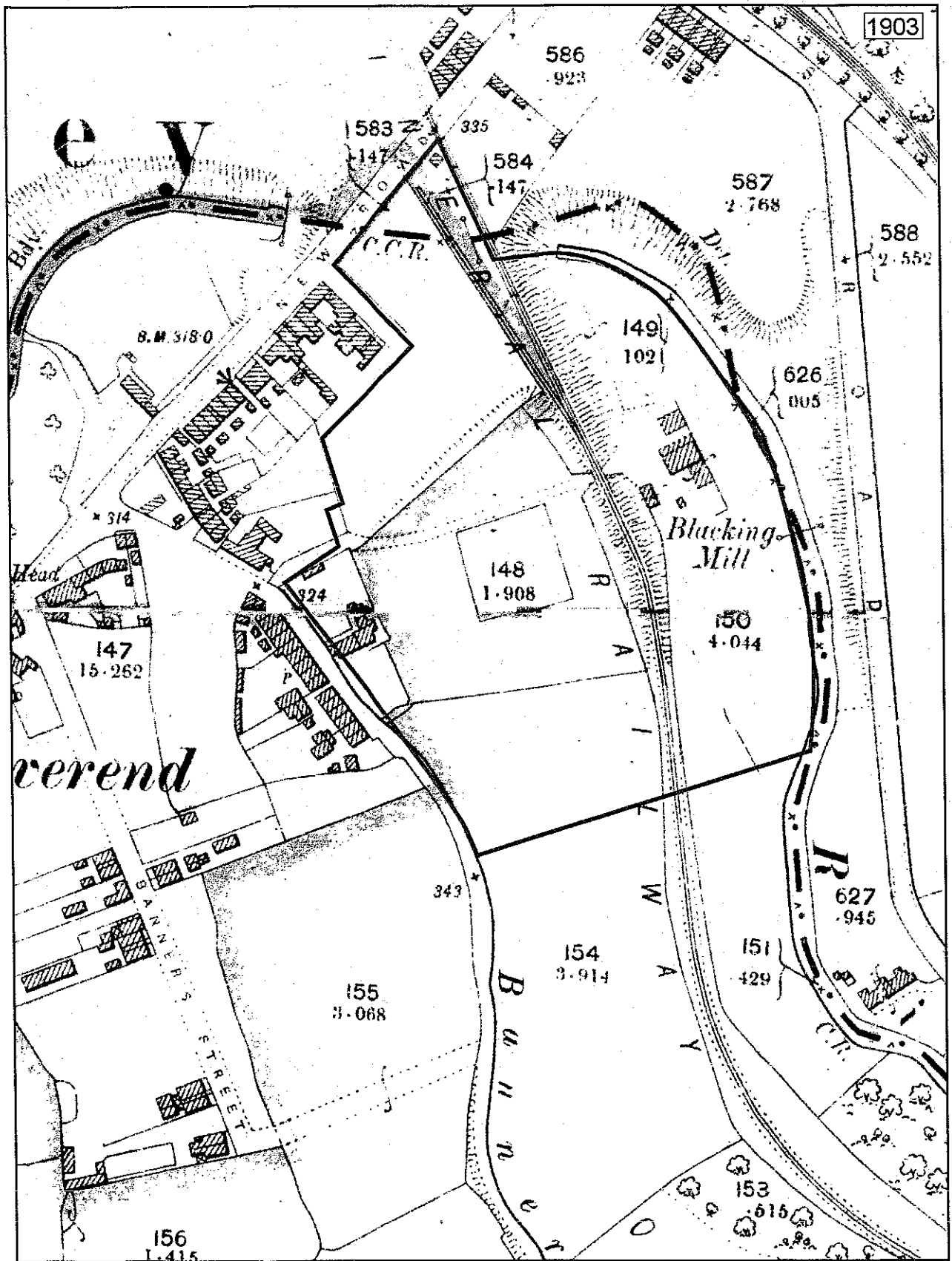


Fig.6

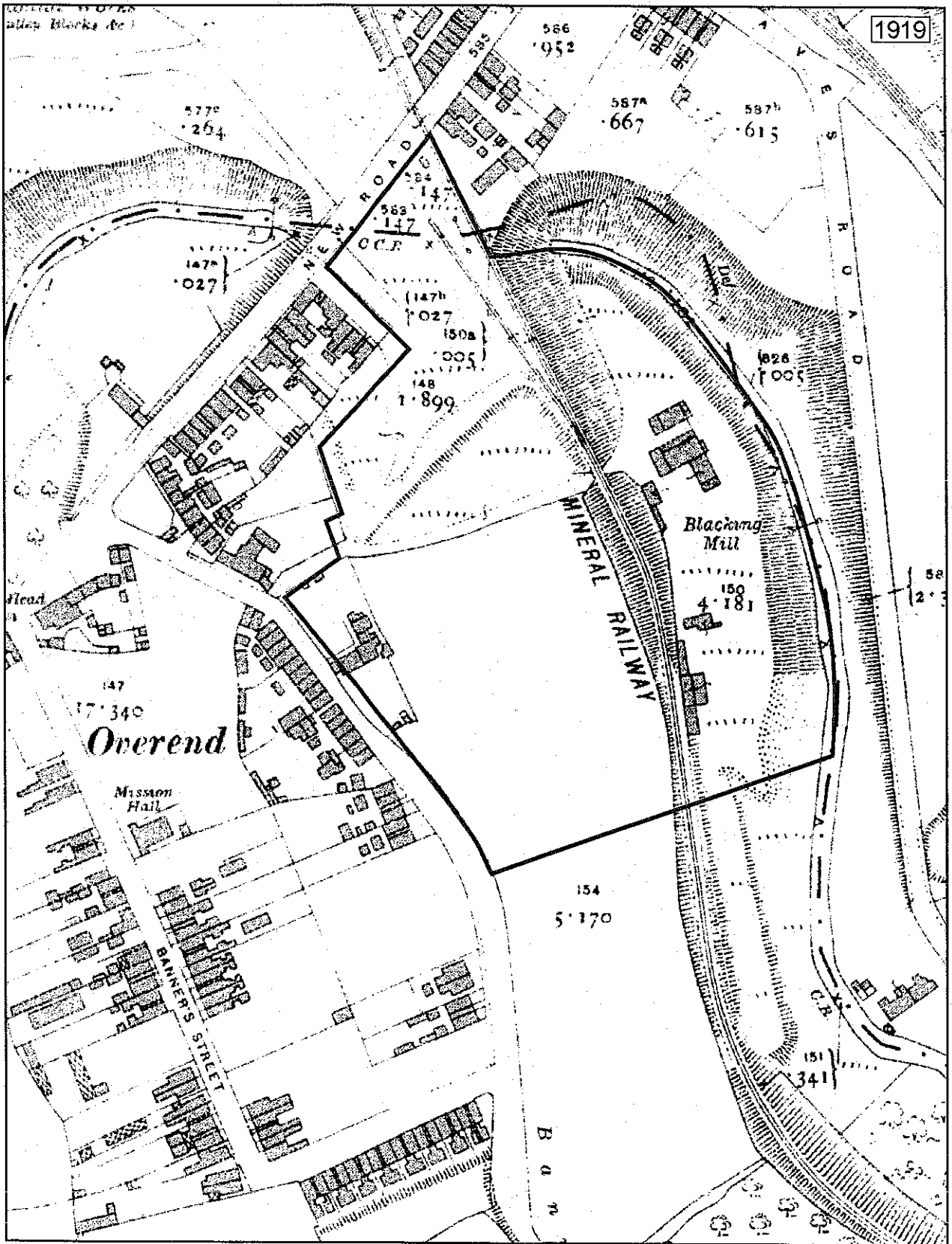


Fig.7

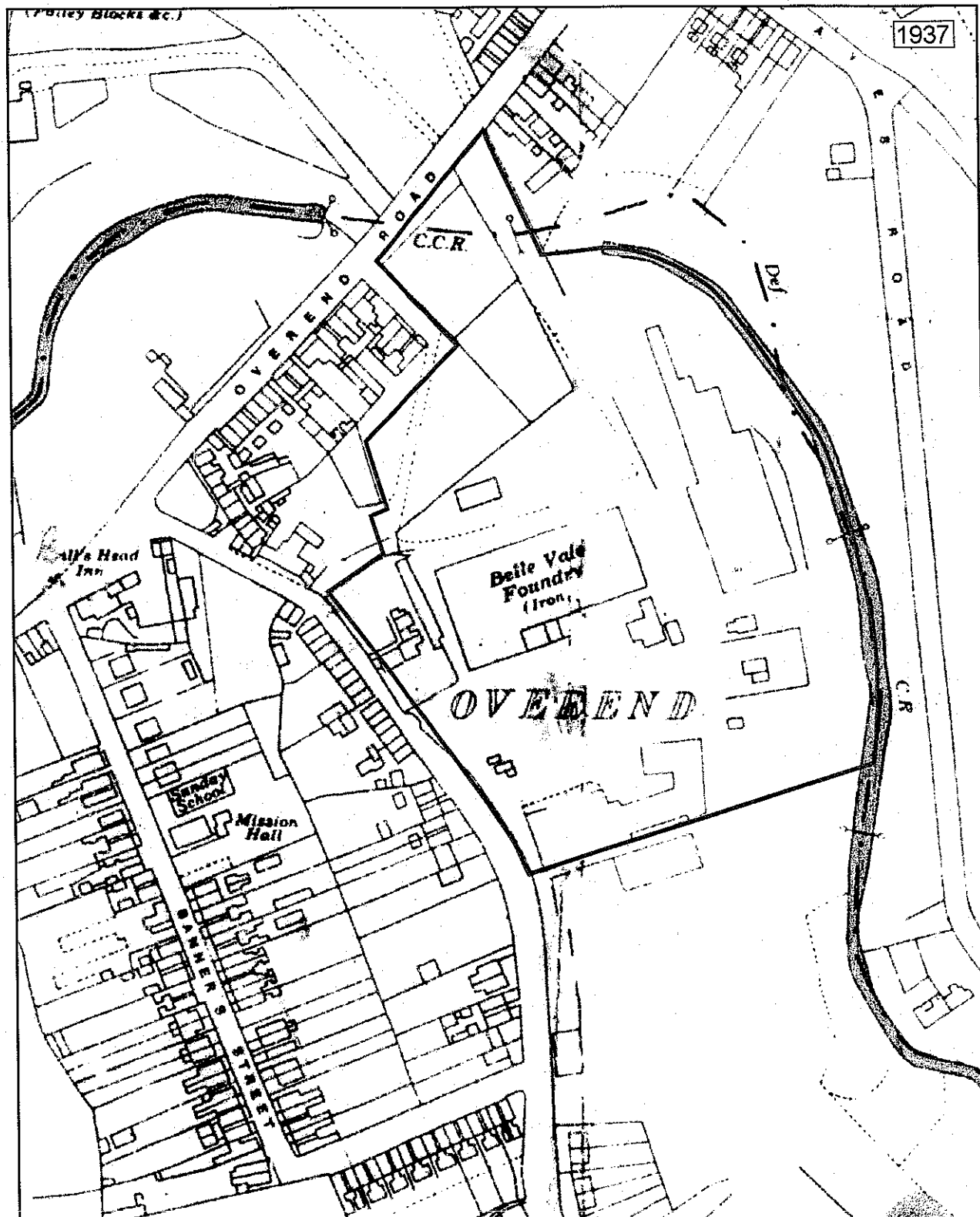


Fig.8

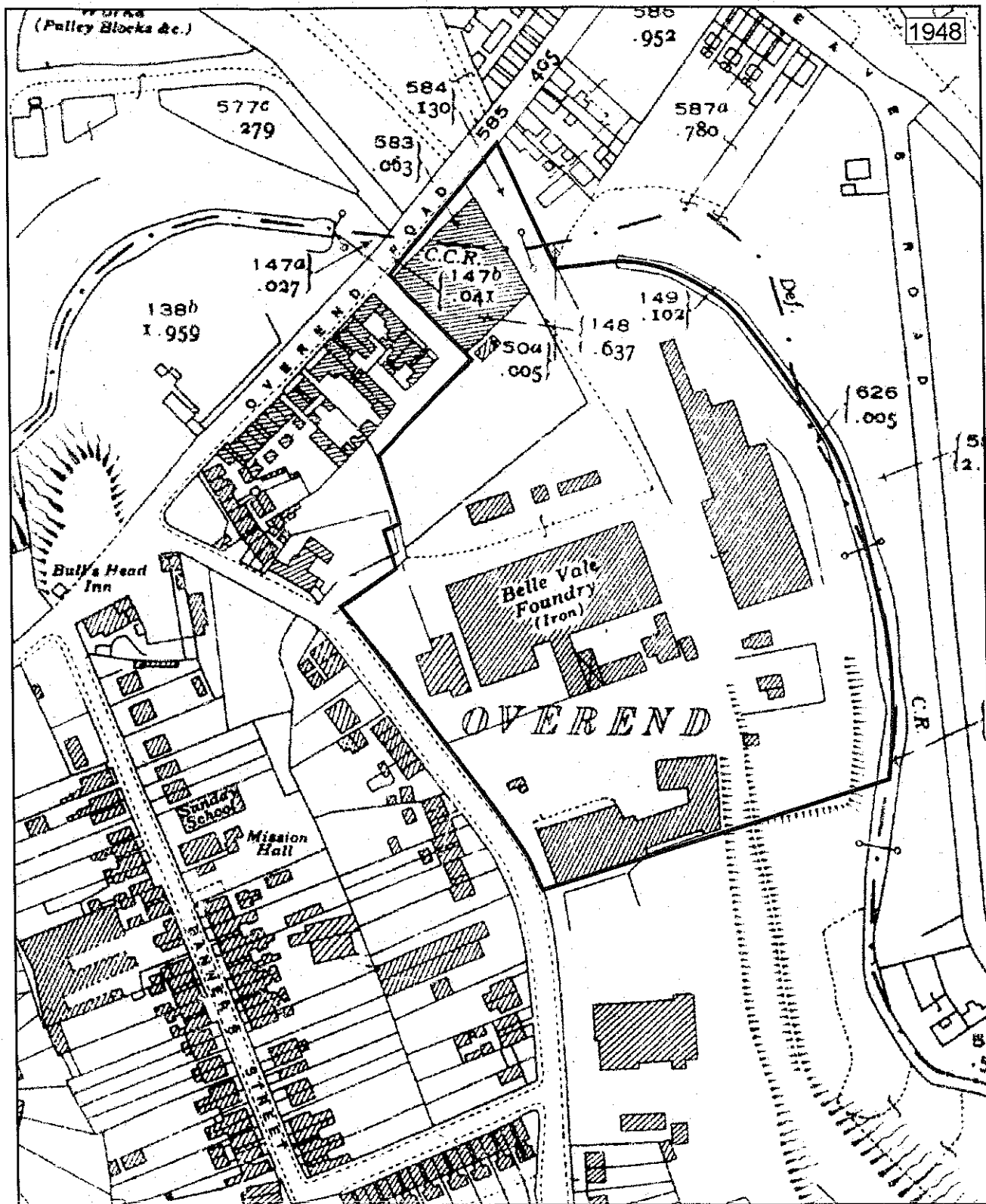


Fig.9