

SUTTON MILL, COPPULL LANE, WIGAN

Documentary Research



Oxford Archaeology North

August 2008

The Environment Agency

Issue No: 2008/09-863
OA North Job No: L10067
NGR: SD 5878 0665

Document Title: SUTTON MILL, COPPULL LANE, WIGAN

Document Type: Documentary Research

Client Name: The Environment Agency

Issue Number: 2008/09-863

OA North Job Number: L10067

National Grid Reference: SD 5878 0665

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SUMMARY

In August 2008, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned by The Environment Agency to carry out documentary research of the site of Sutton Mill, a former corn mill on Coppull Lane, Wigan (NGR SD 5878 0665). The study was required to inform design proposals for improvements to the River Douglas, which flows immediately to the east of the site.

The origins of Sutton Mill are unclear, and whilst the possibility that the site was occupied by a fulling mill during the medieval period cannot be discounted, firm evidence is lacking. Sutton Mill is first depicted on a plan of *c* 1712, and on William Yates' *Survey of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, which was published in 1786. Later, more detailed mapping, shows it as a rectangular structure with two additional out buildings, and an associated weir across the River Douglas. References to a corn mill on Coppull Lane in nineteenth-century trade directories occur from 1828 onwards. In trade directories from 1881 and 1887, and an almanac from 1889, Thomas Charlson is listed as the miller at Sutton Mill. Charlson was the leading corn dealer in Wigan at this time and, by 1889, owned at least three mills in the area. However, although his business continued into the early 1900s, Sutton Mill is not mentioned in trade directories after 1889, implying that it was sold.

By 1909, the mill had been converted for use as a farm, occupied by Edward Leather. The farm was still occupied by the Leather family in the late 1920s, when it formed part of the Bottling Wood Unhealthy Area, outlined for clearance by the Insanitary Houses and Conversions Committee of Wigan Borough Council. In total, 64 properties were demolished as part of this clearance scheme, with the residents being re-housed at the Bottling Wood Improvement Area. Most of the old houses in the designated Unhealthy Area, including Sutton Mill, were demolished in 1927-8, although the last property, the Woodman Inn, remained until 1932. The site of the mill was held subsequently by the Estates Committee until the Markets and Parks Committee decided to appropriate the land. The site of Sutton Mill remains open ground, used for recreational purposes.

There is some evidence to show that at least some building materials were being salvaged and removed from the site, implying that the buildings within the Unhealthy Area were dismantled with some care rather than being subject to rapid demolition. This is supported by the detail shown on a contemporary photograph, which depicts the roof and upper storey of Sutton Mill to have been removed, leaving the ground floor extant. However, there is no information available regarding the demolition of the final elements of the building. Similarly, there is no information regarding the mechanism by which the mill leat was decommissioned, although the absence of any earthworks such as a linear depression suggests that it was deliberately infilled. There are no surviving above-ground remains of the mill, although it is likely that elements of the water-management system, including the waterwheel pit, may survive as buried structures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Philip Catherall of The Environment Agency for commissioning and supporting the project. Thanks are also due to the staff at The History Shop in Wigan, the staff at the Lancashire Record Office in Preston, Alex Miller at the Wigan Archives Service in Leigh, Bill Aldridge at Wigan Archaeological Society, and Elizabeth Chantler at the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit.

The documentary research was undertaken by Kathryn Blythe, the site visit was undertaken by Ian Miller, and the drawings were produced by Marie Rowland. The report was compiled by Kathryn Blythe and Ian Miller, who was also responsible for project management.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In response to a request from The Environment Agency, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) undertook documentary research on Sutton Mill, which was located in St George's Ward to the north of Wigan from at least the 1780s until the late 1920s.
- 1.1.2 A map regression had previously been carried out by the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit covering a wider area as part of an assessment of the river Douglas Flood Defence Scheme (UMAU 2005). Sutton Mill was one of several sites identified within the scheme as being of archaeological interest.
- 1.1.3 The principal aim of this assessment was to ascertain further information on the history of the mill and in particular: the date of the demolition of the Sutton Mill buildings; the method of demolition; information regarding the infilling or demolition of the mill leat; and any information regarding earlier mills at the site, including location, mode of construction and demolition. This report sets out the results of the documentary research in the form of a short report.

1.2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 Wigan lies close to the western boundary of the modern county of Greater Manchester, approximately midway between the rivers Mersey and Ribble. The town is situated on the northern bank of the River Douglas, a tributary of the Ribble. The site of Sutton Mill (NGR SD 5878 0665) lies approximately 1km to the north-east of Wigan town centre, occupying land on the north side of Coppull Lane, and immediately west of the River Douglas (Plate 1). The mill site has not been developed since the mill buildings were demolished in the late 1920s, and the area is currently used as an open recreation area on the west bank of the river.
- 1.2.2 The geology of the Wigan area forms part of the Lancashire Coal Measures, which extend from the Mersey Valley in the south to the Amounderness Plain in the North West (Countryside Commission 1998, 172). The solid geology comprises productive coal measures, with Bunter sandstone and marls to the south (Ordnance Survey 1951). The overlying drift geology consists of glacial and post-glacial tills, with fluvial deposits of gravel along the course of the River Douglas (Countryside Commission 1998, 128).

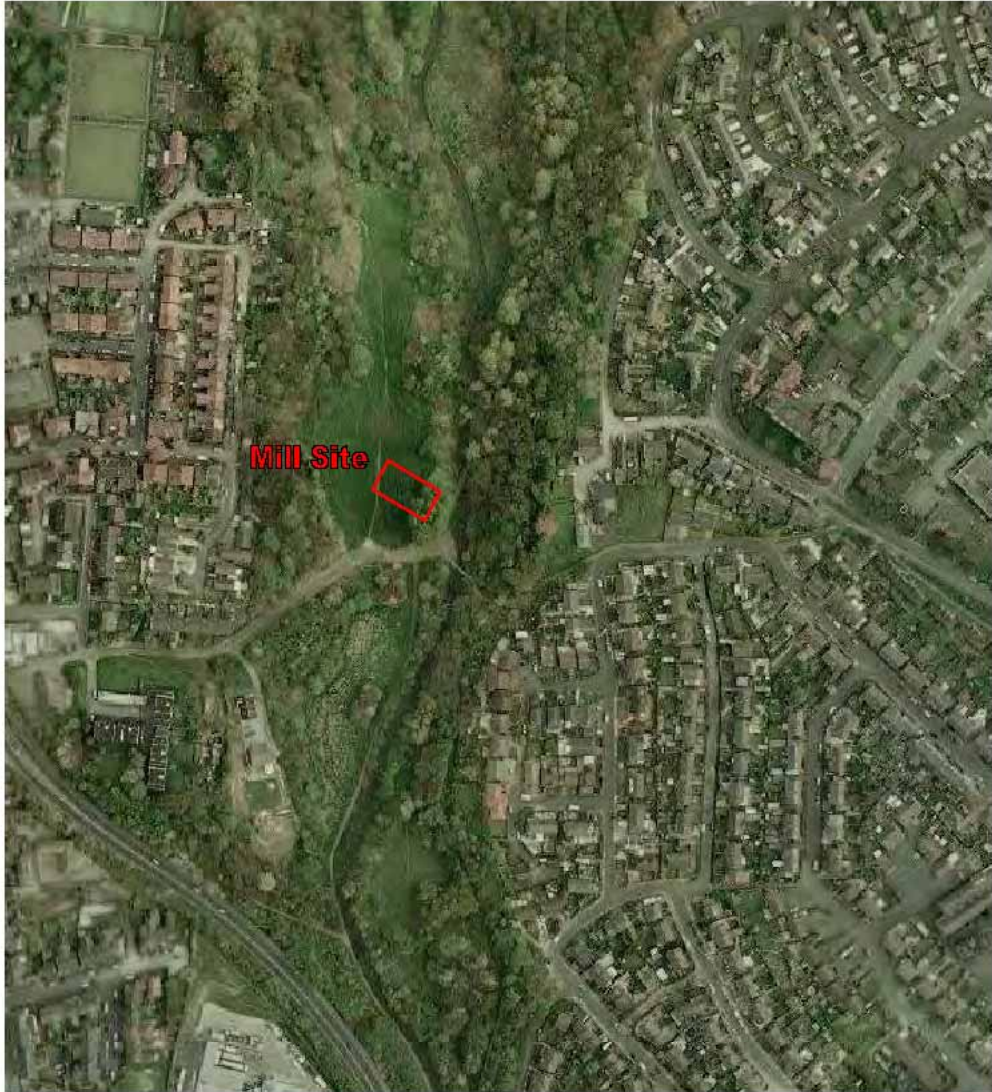


Plate 1: Recent aerial view of the site

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

2.1.1 The principal sources of information consulted were any available primary documents connected with Sutton Mill as well as published and unpublished secondary sources. The following repositories were consulted during the data-gathering process:

- ***Greater Manchester Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)***: the SMR is a Geographic Information System (GIS) linked to a database of all known archaeological sites in Greater Manchester, and is maintained by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit (GMAU). The SMR was consulted to establish if Sutton Mill was listed;
- ***Lancashire County Record Office, Preston (LRO)***: a visit to the record office was made in order to check for any sources relating to the study area;
- ***The History Shop, Wigan (HS)***: a visit to the History Shop was made to consult primary archives, and particularly the catalogued collection of the *Wigan Observer* and relevant trade directories. Secondary sources were also consulted at the History Shop;
- ***Wigan Archives Service, Leigh (WAS)***: the catalogue of the Wigan Archives Service was searched for information relating to the Sutton Mill, and relevant data was incorporated into the report. Selective minutes of Wigan Borough Council were also consulted at WAS;
- ***Wigan Archaeological Society***: an enquiry was made with the archaeological society as to their knowledge of Sutton Mill, as they have previously excavated two corn mills in the Wigan area;
- ***Oxford Archaeology North***: OA North has an extensive archive of secondary sources as well as numerous unpublished client reports on work carried out both as OA North, and in its former guise of Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU). These were consulted where necessary.

2.2 ARCHIVE

2.2.1 Copies of this report will be deposited with the Greater Manchester SMR on completion of the project.

3. DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

3.1 MAP REGRESSION

- 3.1.1 Map regression analysis of the site was carried out by the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit (UMAU) in 2005 as part of an assessment of the river Douglas Flood Defence Scheme. Several sites of archaeological interest were identified within the study area of the scheme, including Sutton Mill and its associated weir and mill leat (UMAU 2005). As a result of this work, the site of the mill has been given a number in the SMR (13630.1.0), but the SMR entry has no additional information on the mill.
- 3.1.2 The earliest cartographic depiction of the site is provided by a plan of the River Douglas, which was surveyed by Thomas Steers in *c* 1712 (LRO/DP 175) as part of a proposal to construct the Douglas Navigation between Wigan and the Ribble Estuary. Steers marked the position of water-powered mills on the river, as the construction of the Douglas Navigation would potential have an impact on their water supply. Whilst the plan is essentially schematic, and cannot be considered as an accurate survey, the location of 'Wild Miln' seems to correspond with the position of Sutton Mill (Plate 2).



Plate 2: Extract from a map of the River Douglas by Thomas Steers, *c* 1712 (LRO/DP 175)

- 3.1.3 The next map of the area is provided by William Yates' *Survey of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, which was surveyed during the 1770s, and published in 1786 (Fig 2). Yates' survey is particularly useful as it marks the position of water-powered mills in Lancashire, and one such mill is shown in the

approximate location of Sutton Mill; Yates shows a mill adjacent to a road, thought to be Coppull Lane, on the west side of the River Douglas, with a channel to the north and south, diverted from the river.

- 3.1.4 The next available survey of the site is provided by Mather's *Map of the Town of Wigan in the County of Lancaster*, which was published in 1827. This map depicts the mill as a rectangular structure on the west bank of the River Douglas, which branches to the west forming a mill race running through the building, presumably powering a waterwheel. A weir across the river is also shown clearly, and the mill is marked as 'Sutton Mill'.
- 3.1.5 The next available map of the site is provided by Kellet's *Plan of the Town and Borough of Wigan*, which was published in 1837. This seemingly depicts the mill with additional buildings to those surveyed by Mather. This layout of the mill buildings is shown on subsequent maps from 1849 (Fig 3), 1851 (Fig 4), and 1856. The detail provided by the Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile plan of 1894 confirms the presence of a weir and mill race, and identified the site as Sutton Mill (Fig 5). The site is similarly marked as Sutton Mill on Platt's Plan of the County Borough of Wigan, published in 1907 (Plate 3), and on the Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile plan of 1909.



Plate 3: Extract from Platt's map of 1907

- 3.1.6 The next available Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1927/8 and published in 1930, appears to depict the mill as having been partially demolished; it is no longer annotated as Sutton Mill. The weir across the river is still shown. However, the subsequent edition of Ordnance Survey mapping, published in 1938, indicates all of the buildings to have been cleared, and the weir removed.

3.2 DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH RESULTS

- 3.2.1 *Early history:* in the early fourteenth century, there were three fulling mills situated on the River Douglas in Wigan: Coppull Mill was located 'at or near the foot of the present day Coppull Lane'; the 'Old Mill at Wigan' lay 'slightly further downstream'; and Lorrington Mill was between Wigan and Ince (Hannavy 1990, 34). There were two corn mills powered by the River Douglas in Wigan during this period, which are described in the Victoria County History as 'ancient water mills'. These were 'situated at Coppull and a little lower down the river by the school'. The school was located at Parson's Walk, to the west of Wigan Lane and close to the town centre; it is possible that this mill is the same as the 'Old Mill' referred to by Hannavy (Hannavy 1990, 34). It remains uncertain, however, whether Coppull Mill occupied the same site as Sutton Mill (Farrer and Brownbill 1911, 68-78).
- 3.2.2 By the early seventeenth century, there were five corn mills in the area, the principal being on Millgate, and another situated at Lorrington or Clarrington Brook (*ibid*); the locations of the other mills are not specified.
- 3.2.3 *Millers at Sutton Mill:* the occupants of Sutton Mill during the nineteenth century can be traced through entries in available trade directories. The earliest such entry is in a directory for 1828-9, which lists a Richard Kay as a miller at Bottlingwood Mill (Pigot & Co 1828, 470). In total, 14 corn mills are listed for Wigan in a directory for 1854. None of these are listed as Sutton Mill, although a John Daghish is entered as a corn miller at Coppull Lane (Whellan & Co 1853, 1062), and it seems likely that this refers to Sutton Mill.
- 3.2.4 By 1869, Sutton Mill was occupied by Ellen Ambrose. The Ambroses were a corn-milling family in Standish, a short distance to the north of Wigan, who were associated with Jolly Mill on Chorley Road during the mid-nineteenth century; John Ambrose is documented as a miller there from *c* 1842 to *c* 1871 (Morris 1995, 44-5); the family also operated a corn mill at Upholland at a slightly earlier date (Pigot & Co 1828, 470). It seems possible that Ellen was part of this family.
- 3.2.5 Later entries in trade directories indicate that Sutton Mill was occupied by Thomas Charlson from 1881-7 (Table 1); in the 1869 *Wigan Directory*, Thomas Charlson is listed as a corn dealer on Commercial Road, and in 1881 and 1887 he is listed as miller at Sutton Mill. An almanac for Wigan from 1889 (reprinted as part of Blakeman 1990) includes Thomas Charlson in its list of companies in Wigan. According to this entry (Plate 4), Charlson was still operating Sutton Mill at that date, the mill being dedicated to the production of provender (animal feed). By 1890, however, he is listed at Dawber Street, and by 1891 he has businesses listed at Dawber Street and Queen Street. No subsequent entries for Sutton Mill were found in the trade directories consulted. In 1909, however, Edward Leather is listed as a farmer at Sutton Mill Farm; Leather is similarly listed in 1918 and 1924 (Table 1). This suggests that the mill went out of use for milling in the late 1880s, and the buildings were converted for use as a farm, despite being marked on maps as Sutton Mill until 1909 (*Section 3.1.4 above*).

YEAR	ENTRY	SOURCE
1828/9	Richard Kay, miller, Bottlingwood Mill	Pigot & Co 1828
1853	John Daglish, miller, Coppull Lane	Whellan & Co 1853
1869	Ellen Ambrose, miller, Sutton Mill, Bottlingwood	<i>Wigan Directory 1869</i>
1881	Miller: Thomas Charlson, Sutton Mill, Bottlingwood (House at Dawber Street)	Worrall 1881
1887	Miller: Thomas Charlson, Sutton Mill, Coppull Lane	Slater 1887
1890	Miller: Thomas Charlson, Dawber Street (nb, nothing listed for Mr Leather)	Slater 1890; Kelly 1890
1891	Miller: Thomas Charlson, Dawber Street and Queen Street (nb. nothing listed for Mr Leather)	Kelly 1891
1909	Edward Leather, farmer, Sutton Mill Farm	Kelly 1909
1918	Edward Leather, farmer, Sutton Mill Farm	Kelly 1918
1924	Edward Leather, farmer, Sutton Mill Farm	Kelly 1924

Table 1: Selected trade directory entries for Sutton Mill

Thomas Charlson, Wholesale Corn, Flour, and Provender Dealer, Dawber Street (off Dorning Street), Wigan.—This business was established by the present proprietor in October, 1865, and in 1879 he came to the premises now occupied by him, which comprise a large and suitably appointed warehouse. Mr. Charlson is the largest corn, flour, and provender dealer in Wigan, and is unapproached on the score of general wholesale output. The premises are situated in convenient proximity to the railway. These premises were specially built for the requirements of his business by Mr. Charlson, and cover an area of forty-eight feet by thirty-nine feet. Mr. Charlson also occupies the Sutton Mill in Coppull Lane, which is solely devoted to the production of provender. He has lately taken over the business hitherto conducted by Messrs. W. J. Darbyshire & Son, at the Queen Street steam corn and provender mill, as also that of Messrs. Monks & Ormond, Bretherton's Row, Wallgate, wholesale corn and flour dealers. Mr. Charlson is an active and intelligent business man, conducting his entire concerns in an honourable and energetic spirit, and meeting with the well-merited support and confidence of a large business circle.

Plate 4: Extract from an almanac for Wigan from 1889 (Blakeman 1990)

- 3.2.6 A search was made for Thomas Charlson in contemporary newspapers. In 1890, a newspaper report gave details of an employees' day out to Blackpool held by Thomas Charlson. However, the article does not detail where or how the employees were employed (W/O 12/07/1890). Thomas Charlson had a son, also named Thomas, who died in 1913, aged 36. Details of his obituary name him 'a corn merchant of Wigan', and state that he was the only son of Thomas Charlson, also a corn merchant. No details of his place of employment are given in the obituary, therefore it is not known if the family business still ran Sutton Mill at this time (W/O 07/01/1913; W/O 11/01/1913). A later newspaper article, dating to 1974, announced the death of Dora Charlson, who is described as 'the last surviving member of the well-known Wigan corn-milling family' (W/O 20/12/74). Dora had been married to Thomas Charlson, owner of a corn mill on Doring Street, and had taken responsibility of the firm for 18 months after his death. The obituary does not mention Sutton Mill, reinforcing the suggestion that the family were no longer occupying Sutton Mill at the time of Thomas' death in 1913.
- 3.2.7 *Demolition of Sutton Mill:* the minutes of the Insanitary Houses and Conversions Committee between 1922 and 1935 indicate that Sutton Mill lay in an area designated as the 'Bottling Wood Unhealthy Area'. In a meeting held on the 16th January 1923, it was reported that three houses numbered 29a, 31a and 33a in Bottling Wood had been served with a closing order and, on the 12th March 1923, it was reported that these houses had been partially demolished (A2/23/4 1922-3, 324 and 628). This appears to be the first documented change to the housing in the Bottling Wood area. In a subsequent meeting, held on the 9th July 1923, it was reported that Bottling Wood was to be dealt with as an Unhealthy Area. The implications of this would be that the housing would be demolished, although concerns were voiced at the meeting that those residents who would be displaced by the scheme should be re-housed, and that the scheme could not go ahead until this matter was addressed. It was agreed that this would be discussed in a meeting to be held by the Town Clerk, the Borough Engineer and the Medical Officer (*op cit*, 1012).
- 3.2.8 On the 10th December 1923 it was reported that, despite discussions between the Medical Officer and the Town Clerk, replacement housing had not been found for the Bottling Wood residents (A2/23/4 1923-24, 185). However, by 11th February 1924 it was announced that new housing was to be erected in the Bottling Wood area as soon as possible (*op cit*, 558). New housing, including Walnut Avenue; Rosemary Crescent; Cedar Drive; and Chestnut Road, is shown on the 1930 Ordnance survey map to the east and north-east of the original Bottling Wood housing (UMAU 2005, 15), presumably representing the first houses to be erected as part of the Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme.
- 3.2.9 On the 6th December 1926 it was reported that good progress had been made with the new housing at Bottling Wood and, on the 10th January 1927, it was reported that '34 tenants of houses in Bottling Wood Unhealthy Area were prepared to accept tenancies of the Corporation's A2 type houses; 18 tenants were prepared to accept tenancies of A3 type houses, and nine tenants had

refused offers for tenancies' (A2/23/6 1927-28, 407). On the 25th January 1927, the Town Clerk reported that the Medical Officer, Borough Treasurer and himself had provisionally selected 12 tenants for 'A2 houses' and six tenants for 'A3 houses'. Amongst the 12 listed for the A2 houses is H Leather (*op cit*, 408-9), presumably a relation of the Edward Leather listed as a farmer at Sutton Mill Farm in the trade directories from 1909-24 (Table 1). The report goes on to say that once the Housing Committee had approved these tenants, the owners or agents of their current houses should be invited to attend the next meeting 'to show cause why Closing Orders should not be made in respect of the premises'. The Town Clerk 'suggested that the time was now opportune for the Committee to proceed with a scheme for the clearing of the Bottling Wood and Douglas Terrace Unhealthy Areas' (*op cit*, 409).

3.2.10 The progress made with clearing the 64 houses in the Bottling Wood Unhealthy Area is documented in the minutes of several meetings throughout 1927, and has been summarised in Table 2. The table shows that 62 of the 64 houses were vacated between June and December 1927, and 41 of these were demolished. Given that H Leather of Sutton Mill Farm had been recommended as a tenant for new housing in January of 1927 (A2/23/6 1927-28, 408-9), it seems likely that Sutton Mill Farm was amongst the buildings vacated and possibly also demolished in this year.

Date / (ref)	Houses vacated	Houses still occupied	Houses demolished	Houses being demolished
13th June 1927 / (A2/23/5 1926-27, 1151)	34	29	-	7
7th July 1927 / (A2/23/5 1926-27, 1308)	43	21	7	5
6th August 1927 / (A2/23/5 1926-27, 1515)	59	5	11	7
12th September 1927 / (A2/23/5 1926-27, 1554)	61	3	30	7
10th October 1927 / (A2/23/5 1926-27, 1692)	62	2	31	10
15th November 1927 / (A2/23/6 1927-28, 52)	62	2	38	4
12th December 1927 / (A2/23/6 1927-28, 178)	62	2	41	1

Table 2: Summary of progress made on the clearing of the Bottling Wood Unhealthy Area during 1927

3.2.11 A report regarding the new houses in Bottling Wood was made to the committee on the 30th August 1927, following a visit to inspect 93 houses on the new site (A2/23/5 1926-27, 1518). A subsequent report, dated 11th June 1928 (A2/23/6 1927-28, 1093), provides details of the compensation to be paid to owners in respect of their interests in lands and premises (Plate 5).

1093

INSANITARY HOUSES AND CONVERSIONS, 11TH JUNE, 1928.

Name.	Description of land and property.	Numbers on plan.	Amount of Compen- sation.
1. Sir Albert Edward Naylor-Leyland ..	Ground rent issuing out of plot of land Bottling Wood	9a (red) ..	£5 (plus legal costs)
2. John T. Leather ..	5 houses Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, Sutton Mill Com- mon, Bottling Wood ..	1, 2, 3 and 4 (blue) ..	£400 (plus legal costs)
3. T. Worthington ..	6 houses Nos. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 Bottling Wood	7, 8, 9, 10, .. 11 and 12 (red)	£17
4. Walter Cox ..	2 houses Nos. 61 and 62, Bottling Wood and land ..	45 and 46 (blue) £132 44 and 47 (red) £18	£150 (plus legal costs)
5. I. B. Thompson ..	2 houses Nos. 29 and 30, Bottling Wood ..	24 (red) ..	£9
6. M. Benson ..	1 house No. 28, Bottling Wood Shop and 8 houses Nos. 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27, Bottling Wood	22 (red) .. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 (blue) ..	£5 £675 —£680
7. Wm. Rigby ..	2 houses Nos. 52 and 52a, Bottling Wood .. 4 houses Nos. 53, 54, 55 and 54a, Bottling Wood .. Plot of land (site of Nos. 36, 37 and 38, Bottling Wood) 3 houses Nos. 31, 32 and 33, Bottling Wood .. 1 house No. 34, Bottling Wood	56 and 57 .. (red) 52, 53, 54 .. and 55 (blue) 68 (red) .. 25, 26, 27 .. and 8a (red) 28 (blue) ..	£110 £375 £5 £18 £57
Compensation in respect of interest paid on mortgage for £400 to Mr. G. W. Makinson for the period during which the premises had been empty, viz.: 28th May, 1927, to date, in respect of premises 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 52 and 52a, Bottling Wood; and 9th July, 1927, to date, in respect of premises 53, 54, 54a and 55, Bottling Wood			£15 —£580

Plate 5: Details of compensation to be made to owners of properties at Bottling Wood
(A2/23/6 1927-28, 1093)

3.2.12 The second entry on the list of those to be compensated (Plate 5) is Mr John T Leather, who owned five houses at Sutton Mill Common in Bottling Wood. It is assumed that there is a connection between John T Leather and H Leather, listed as a tenant prepared to move out of his property in 1927 (A2/23/6 1927-28, 408-9). It should be noted that the plan referred to here no longer exists.

3.2.13 On the 8th April 1929 it was reported that the total amount required for purchase money and compensation in connection with the Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme was £5,850 (A2/23/6 1929-30, 878-9). It should be noted that some 'old material' from the demolished buildings was being sold. The details of this are shown in Plate 6:

		£	s.	d.
879				
INSAN. HOUSES, 8TH APRIL, 1929.				
Purchase money and compensation paid to				
26th March, 1929.		1,946	0	0
Costs		35	2	0
		£1,981	2	0
<i>Less :</i>				
Sale of old material		64	0	0
		£1,917	2	0
<i>Add :</i>				
Woodman Inn purchase and compensation	£3,800			
Estimated costs	133			
	3,933	0	0	
		£5,850	2	0

Resolved : That the Town Council be recommended to make application to the Ministry of Health for sanction to the borrowing of the sum of £5,850 to cover the total estimated expenditure in connection with the Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme, and that the Chairman be authorised to sign the necessary report to the Finance Committee under Standing Order No. 26 (b).

Edwin Yates Chairman.

Plate 6: Details of the costs of Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme (A2/23/6 1929-30, 878-9)

3.2.14 On the 8th July 1929, it was reported that a portion of the Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme Area was to be laid out as an open space, and as such should be transferred to the Markets and Parks Committee. This work was to be carried out under an Unemployment Committee Grants scheme, to create work for the locally unemployed (A2/23/6 1929-30, 1353). In the minutes of the Markets and Parks Committee for the 10th December 1929 (A2/27/3 1929-32, 212), it was reported that the area of open space at Bottling Wood, now referred to as Bottling Wood Slope, was to be laid out as a small park. A brief report was made on the 5th June 1930 to say that this work had commenced (A2/27/3 1929-32, 1320).

3.2.15 A report of the Insanitary Houses and Conversions Committee made on 13th November 1933 (Plate 7), notes that a small area of cleared land was purchased by the committee, but had not been used in the Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme, as it was considered to be too low-lying to be included

in the Bottling Wood Slope park area. The report goes on to explain that this was the land of Sutton Mill and Hermitage Farm (to the south-west of Sutton Mill), and it was to be held by the Estates Committee until the Markets and Parks Committee decided to appropriate the land (A2/23/8 1933-34, 37).

BOTTLING WOOD IMPROVEMENT SCHEME.—The Town Clerk informed the Committee that there was a small area of land which was purchased by this Committee under the Bottling Wood (Improvement Scheme) Order, 1928, containing an area of 596 square yards which had not been utilised for the purpose of laying out of the Bottling Wood Slope as it could not be economically included for that purpose on account of its low-lying situation. The Town Clerk explained, by reference to the plan now submitted, the small portion of land in question. The Town Clerk stated that he had received a communication from the Ministry of Health with regard to the surplus land in the Bottling Wood Improvement Area, in which it was suggested that the Corporation should take out of the Improvement Scheme the small portion of land above referred to, and the credit to be given to the Improvement Scheme Account would be the District Valuer's valuation as a cleared site, and it was requested that the report should be forwarded to the Ministry in due course.

The Town Clerk stated that he was taking the necessary steps to obtain the report of the District Valuer.

Resolved: That the plot of land containing 596 square yards be transferred to the Estates Committee until such time as the Markets and Parks Committee decide to appropriate the land purchased at Sutton Mill and Hermitage Farm as a park when the small piece of land in question could possibly be included in such scheme.

Edwin Yates

Chairman.

Plate 7: Details of land cleared but not included in the Bottling Wood Improvement Scheme, including Sutton Mill (A2/23/8 1933-34, 37)

3.3 PHOTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

- 3.3.1 Wigan Archives Service holds three photographs of Sutton Mill (Plates 8, 9 and 10). A later note has been made on the back of photograph 671311/2 (Plate 9), which reads 'The old corn mill Coppull Lane, Cooper Photo'. No date is given for the photograph, although the image was reproduced in the *Wigan Observer* in 1958 (W/O 04.07.1958 – ix p.287), with the caption: 'Here is the old corn mill which stood on the bank of the River Douglas at the foot of Coppull Lane off Wigan Lane, Wigan. The buildings along with much of the adjacent property were demolished many years ago. The farm of which the corn mill formed part was last tenanted by Mr Leather. The story goes that there was a water wheel at the corn mill powered by the current of the River Douglas. This picture was taken about half a century ago'.
- 3.3.2 On the back of photograph W156 188/24 (Plate 9) are two notes which read: 'The Leather family owned Sutton Mill Farm on Sutton Mill Common at (the) bottom of Coppull Lane known as 'old corn mill' and 'Old corn mill

approaching from Coppull Lane'. Again, no date is given for the photograph, but judging from the similarity of the condition of the buildings in the photographs, and the position of the carts on the right-hand-side of the buildings, Plates 8 and 9 appear to be broadly contemporary.



Plate 8: Sutton Mill in c 1908 (671311/2)

- 3.3.3 The photographs show that the principal structure of the corn mill comprised a double-pitched gable building, seemingly of brick construction with slate roofing. Conversely, the adjacent building, which appears to have been a dwelling house, is of stone construction. Another building is visible to the west, abutting the main part of the corn mill, although detail is obscured. The photographs do not provide any evidence for the waterwheel or associated water-management features, suggesting that the wheel was housed internally, and the leat was at a lower level to the surrounding ground surface.
- 3.3.4 A subsequent photograph (270/34; Plate 10) also has a note written on the back, which reads: 'old corn mill Coppull Lane c 1930'. This photo is of particular interest as it shows the main element of the corn mill to have been partially demolished, although the dwelling survives extant. This suggests that the photograph was taken in c 1927, providing good evidence for the date of demolition.



Plate 9: Sutton Mill c 1908 (W156 188/24)



Plate 10: Sutton Mill c 1927 (270/34)

3.4 SITE VISIT

- 3.4.1 The site of Sutton Mill was the subject of a rapid site visit to relate the past landscape and surroundings to that of the present, and to establish the presence or absence of any above-ground remains. The site comprises an area of improved grassland (Plate 11), bounded on the eastern edge by trees and scrub vegetation that lines the western bank of the River Douglas (Plate 12).



Plate 11: View across the site of Sutton Mill from Coppull Lane, looking north-east



Plate 12: View looking east towards the River Douglas across the site of Sutton Mill

- 3.4.2 The land slopes to the east, reflecting the natural topography of the river valley. The area of improved grassland is used for recreation purposes, although the wooded area is impenetrable. There are no surviving above-ground remains of Sutton Mill, the footprint of which lay largely within the area of grassland, and partially in the wooded area. The narrow tract of wood across the eastern part of the site, however, corresponds broadly to the position of the head race to the mill, as shown on historical mapping (Plate 13).



Plate 13: View looking south along the route of the head race

- 3.4.3 There are no visible remains of the weir across the River Douglas, which has clearly been removed, resulting in a reduction of the river level upstream of the mill. There is similarly no physical evidence for the tail race from the mill, although this is likely to have culverted, at least along its route beneath Coppull Lane. A large dump of clay on the western bank of the river, however, is clearly visible at the approximate confluence of the tail race with the river, as shown on historical mapping (Plate 14). The northern edge of this clay has been cut by a narrow drainage channel, which contains a modern ceramic drainpipe (Plate 15). The channel contains some demolition material, including fragments of brick and worked stone.



Plate 14: View looking west across the river, showing dump of clay



Plate 15: Modern drain within dump of clay on the western bank of the river

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 ORIGINS OF SUTTON MILL

- 4.1.1 The origins of Sutton Mill are unclear, and whilst there is no evidence for an earlier structure, the possibility that a mill occupied the site during the medieval period cannot be discounted entirely. There are references to fulling mills and corn mills on the River Douglas during the medieval period, but these cannot be located accurately. The depiction of a mill in the location of Sutton Mill on a plan of *c* 1712, and Yates' map of 1786, provide the earliest firm evidence for a mill on this site.
- 4.1.2 Sutton Mill, located on the west bank of the river, is depicted on a map of 1827 as a rectangular structure with a mill race to its north and south. The mill complex appears to have expanded with the additional of two out buildings by 1837, creating a layout that is shown on maps up to 1909. There are no references in contemporary trade directories to Sutton Mill as a corn mill after 1889, and it seems that it was converted for use as a farm after that date; Sutton Mill Farm, occupied by Edward Leather, is listed in trade directories between 1909 and 1924.

4.2 DEMOLITION OF SUTTON MILL

- 4.2.1 Sutton Mill lay within an area designated by the Insanitary Houses and Conversions Committee of Wigan Borough Council as an Unhealthy Area. Several reports in the minutes of meetings throughout 1927 document the process of clearing the houses in the designated area, and their subsequent demolition. There is evidence in these minutes to suggest that Sutton Mill was demolished in 1927-8 as part of this clearance scheme. The site is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1938 to have been cleared entirely of buildings, and the associated weir across the River Douglas removed.
- 4.2.2 The council minutes include the total cost of the clearance scheme as £5850, although the sale of 'old materials' (£64) were subtracted from the calculations. This indicates that at least some building materials were being salvaged and removed from the site, implying that the buildings were dismantled with some care rather than being subject to rapid demolition. This is supported by the detail shown on a contemporary photograph (Plate 10), which depicts the roof and upper storey of Sutton Mill to have been removed, leaving the ground floor extant. However, there is no information available regarding the demolition of the final elements of the building. A common means of demolition during the early twentieth century was to attach a large chain to the building and pull it down with a tractor or machine of similar power.
- 4.2.3 There is no information available regarding the mechanism by which the mill leat was decommissioned, although the absence of any earthworks such as a linear depression suggests that it was deliberately infilled. The level of the site

relative to the river indicates that the mill utilised either an under-shot or, more likely, a breast-shot waterwheel. This will have required a waterwheel pit, which was probably located inside the mill building, and may survive as a buried structure. There are no visible remains of either the head race or tail race surviving above ground, although a line of trees may mark the route of the head race, and a dump of clay lies in the approximate location of the junction of the tail race and the river.

- 4.2.4 A report in 1933 noted that the site of Sutton Mill was not developed subsequently, as it was considered to be too low-lying. It was concluded that this land would be held by the Estates Committee until the Markets and Parks Committee decided to appropriate the land. However, the site remains open ground, which is used presently for recreational purposes.

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671311/2 - Photograph: 'The old corn mill Coppull Lane, Cooper'

W156 188/24 - Photograph: 'The Leather family owned Sutton Mill Farm on Sutton Mill Common at (the) bottom of Coppull Lane known as 'Old Corn mill' and 'Old Corn Mill approaching from Coppull Lane'

270/34 - Photograph: 'Old Corn Mill Coppull Lane c 1930'

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ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

Figure 1: Location map

Figure 2: Extract from Yates' *Survey of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, 1786

Figure 3: Extract from Ordnance Survey first edition of 1849 (6": 1 mile)

Figure 4: Extract from a map of the Borough of Wigan, 1851

Figure 5: Extract from Ordnance Survey first edition of 1894 (25": 1 mile)

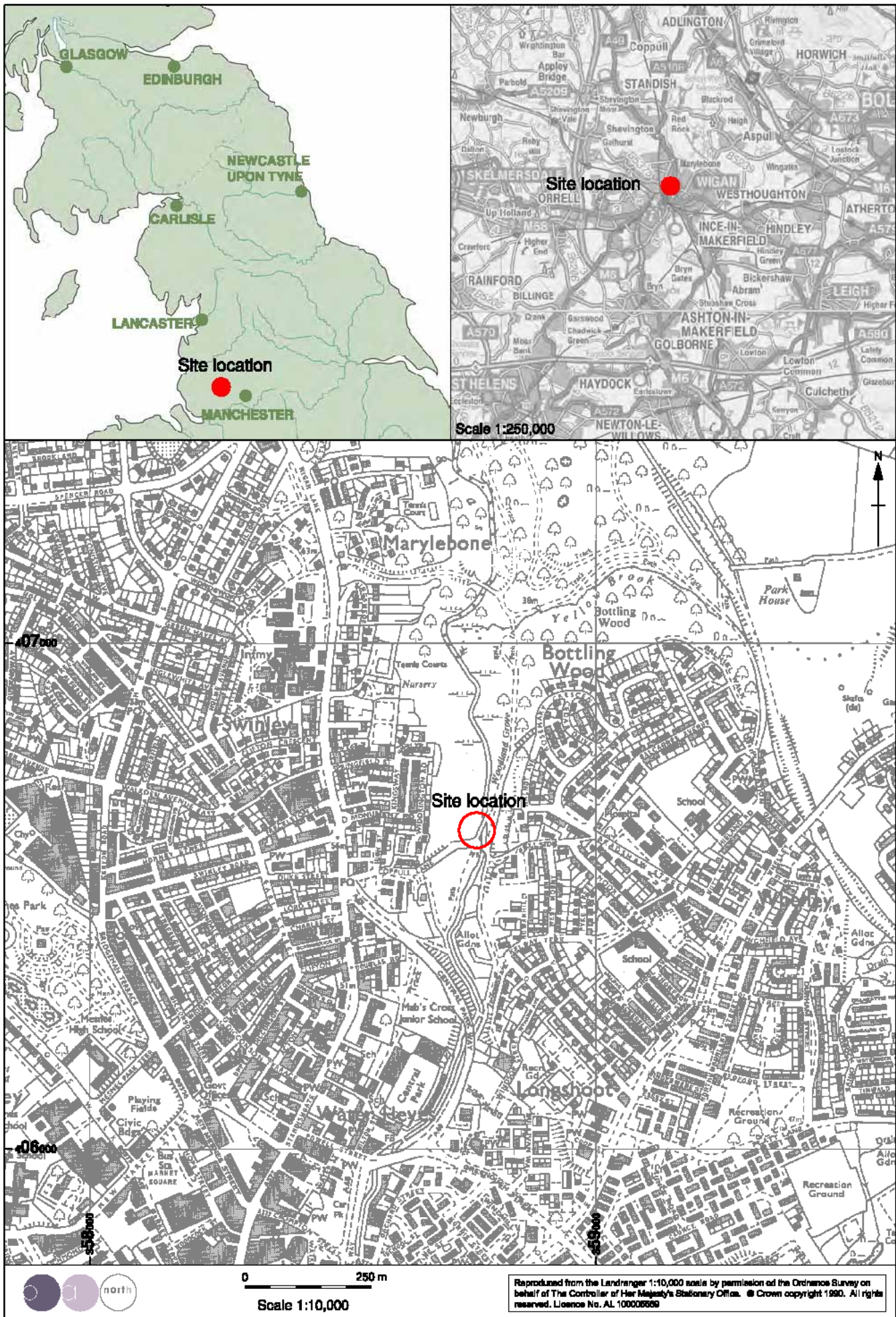


Figure 1: Site Location



Figure 2: Extract from Yates' Map of Lancashire, 1786



Figure 3: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6" : 1 mile map, 1849

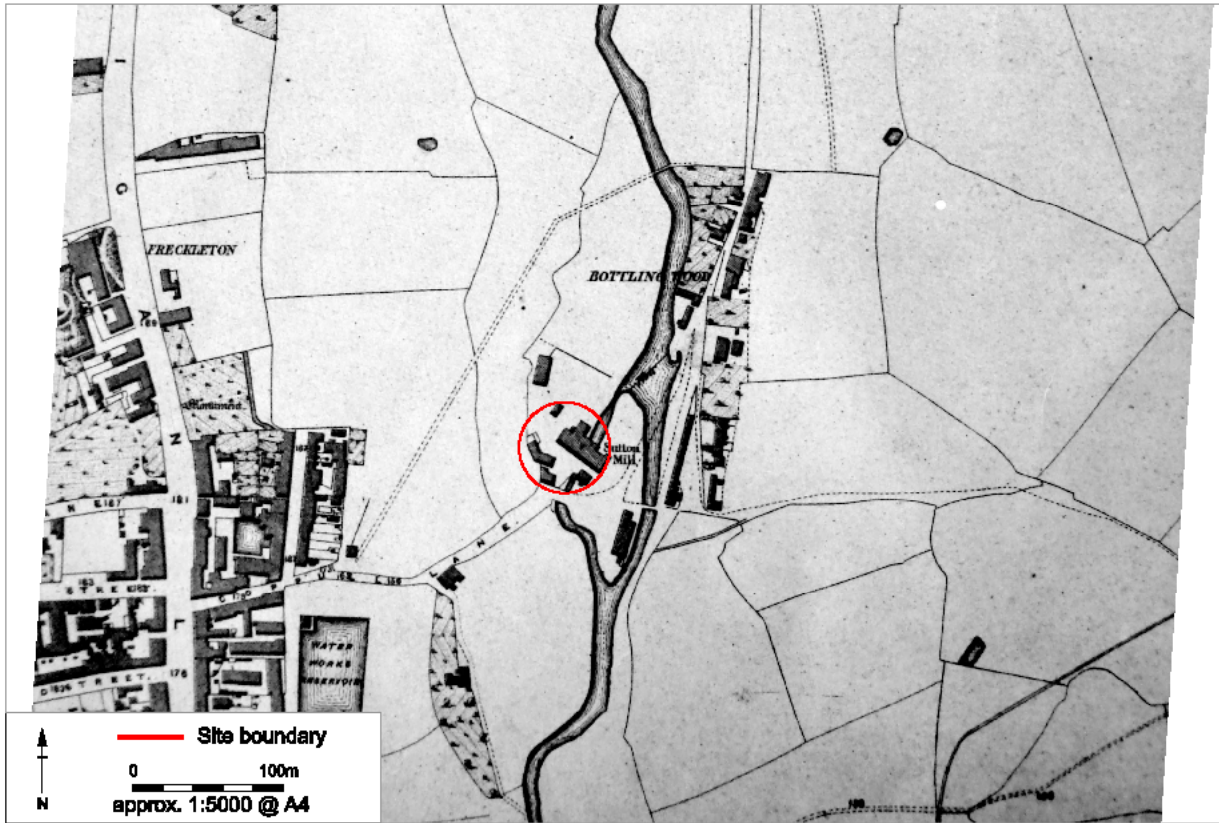


Figure 4: Extract from a map of the Borough of Wigan, 1851

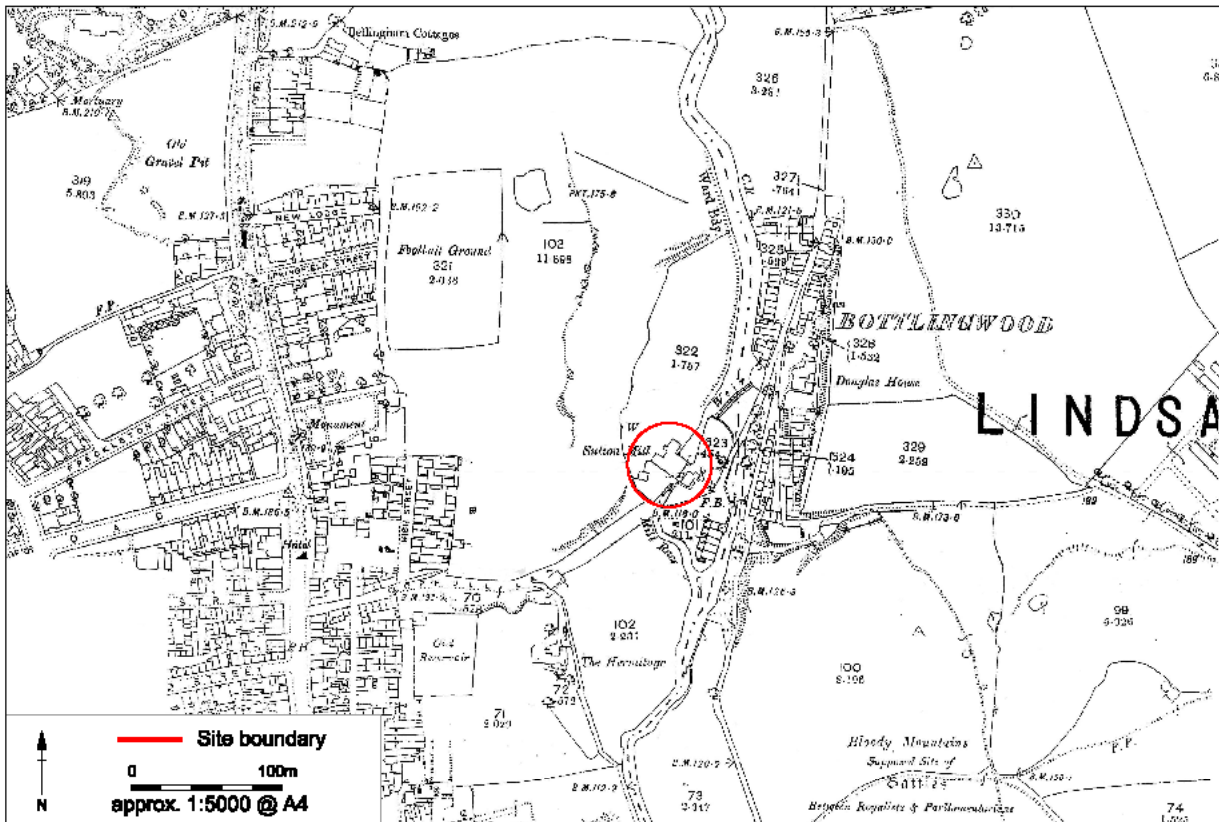


Figure 5: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 25" : 1 mile map, 1894

