

Archaeological Field Unit

**Fen Croft, Ringer's Lane, Leverington:
A Desk-based Assessment**

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Commissioned by Construct Reason Ltd.

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A Desk-based Assessment**

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SUMMARY

This desk top study was undertaken by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit in order to define the archaeological potential of Fen Croft, Ringer's Lane, Leverington (TF 4429 1100). This study also attempts to determine the potential impact of the development proposal upon the archaeological resource.

The study was commissioned by Construct Reason Ltd. before construction of new dwellings and associated services within a total area of 1.78 hectares.

The study area lies to the west of the historic medieval core of the village of Leverington. From a review of archaeological and historical resources the greatest potential for remains are in the post-medieval period.

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Fen Croft, Ringer's Lane, Leverington
A Desk-based Assessment
(TF 4429 1100)

1 INTRODUCTION

The desk-based assessment was undertaken in response to a Brief issued by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office (dated February 20, 2001). The Brief deals with the archaeological evaluation required following a planning application for residential development with associated access and services within a total area of 1.78 hectares. The desk-based assessment was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on behalf of Construct Reason Ltd.

The site lies in the western part of the village on land known as Fen Croft at approximately 3mOD. Notable archaeological sites in the vicinity of the subject site include the Saxon or medieval sea defence and a medieval hospital.

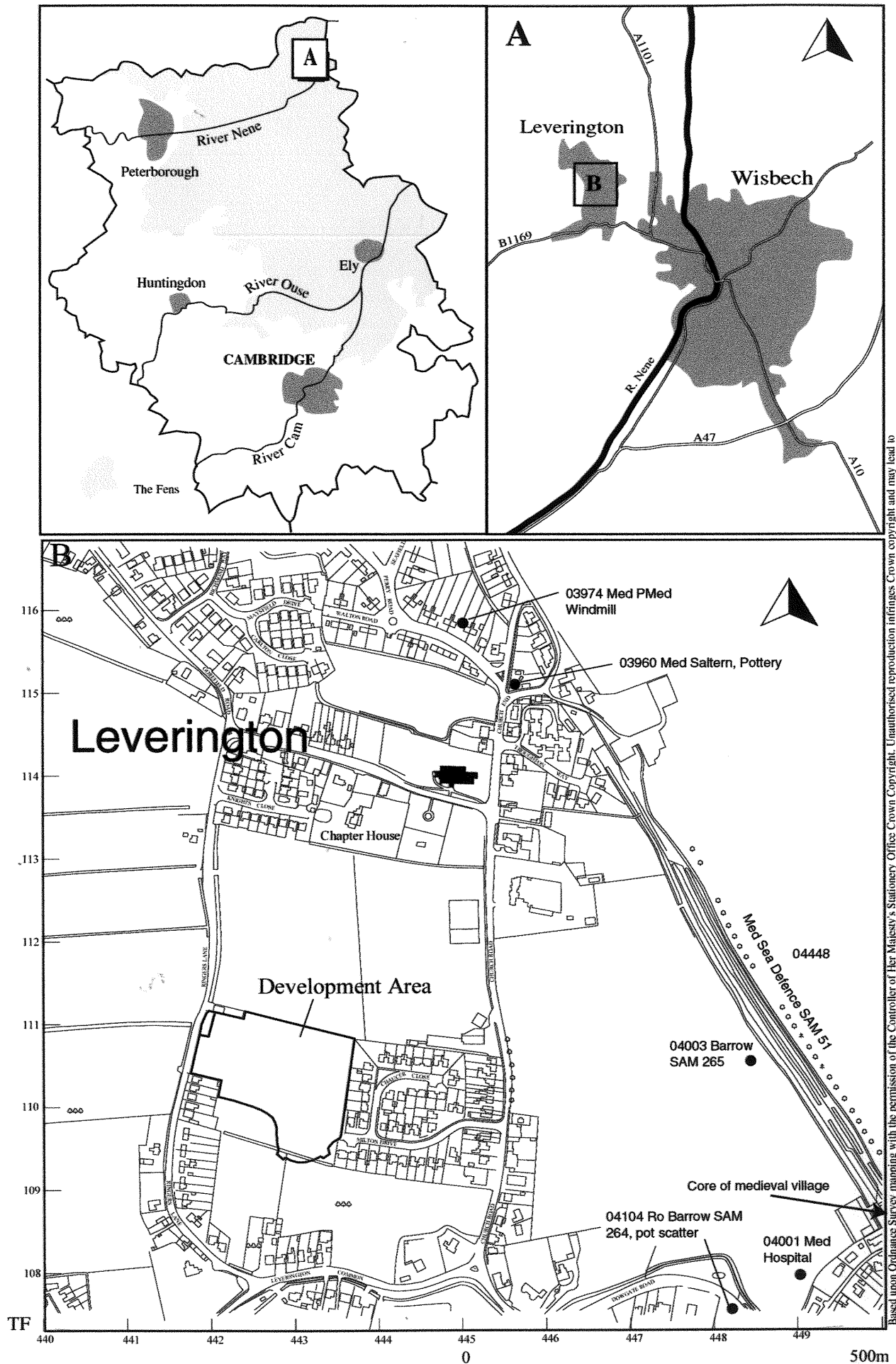
2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site lies on the Flandrian Terrington Beds, an Iron Age/Early Roman marine inundation deposit, overlying Jurassic Ampthill clay. The Terrington Beds are characterised as younger saltmarsh, and tidal creek by the British Geological Survey (BGS Sheet 159, Solid and Drift Edition).

The site is to the west of the historic core of the village and to the south of the medieval parish church of St Leonard's. It is a very attenuated village with development along several roads, as well as along the original Nene frontage. Most of the northern part is relatively modern and it appears that the church was once isolated.

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this desk-based assessment is to provide information on the location extent, survival and significance of the known archaeological remains on, and in the vicinity of, the site.



Archaeological and Historical Sources

In order to map the archaeological potential of the site at Fen Croft, Leverington, a number of documentary, archaeological and cartographic sources were consulted. These concentrated on the accessible archaeological and historical resources held by Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record Office (SMR) as well those held by Cambridgeshire County Council Records Office (CRO). Documentary and cartographic sources were also consulted at the CCC Archaeological Field Unit.

Aerial Photographic Assessment

Rog Palmer of Air Photo Services was consulted and advised that an assessment of aerial photographs would be unlikely to show archaeological features that had not already been noted in other sources.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric

Very few prehistoric remains have been identified within the vicinity of the subject site. The Flandrian deposits in the area are mostly marine sediments which were unable to support human habitation until the Roman period and later, when the sea retreated. A Bronze Age barrow is marked on the SMR (SMR 04003) but the identification is uncertain and is discussed below.

Roman

Rabbit Hill, a Scheduled Ancient Monument to the south-east of the subject site, is a possible Roman barrow (SMR 04104, SAM 264). This mound was excavated in 1878 and a number of unidentified pottery sherds were recovered. The barrow was over 30m in diameter and over 6m high and was constructed of alternate layers of silt and clay. However, observations undertaken during the Fenland Survey (Hall, 1996) suggest that this monument is too irregular to be a Roman barrow and that it is more likely to be a purpose-built rabbit warren. Another tumulus to the east, previously thought to be Bronze Age, is now considered more likely to be Roman as the area would have been too wet for occupation during the prehistoric period (SMR 04003, SAM 265).

Medieval

Place Name and Documentary Evidence

Leverington is derived from a personal name Leofhere, with the common suffix 'ington' meaning 'farm of'. The 'ington' suffix is itself an early Saxon form even though it is not recorded until 1109 (Reaney 1943).

Leverington is not mentioned in Domesday Book and the method and date of its acquisition by the church of Ely is unknown. As at Wisbech both bishop and prior obtained interests in Leverington after 1109. Fen Croft, the subject site, is mentioned in Court Rolls of 1380.

The bishop's manor of Leverington was, in the thirteenth century, a fairly large one but it did not change much between the surveys of 1221 and 1251. In 1251 there were five free tenants, 64 customaries and nine cottars in the parish of Leverington (Pugh 1953).

Leverington had three guilds – St Mary, St John and the Holy Trinity. The first of these were founded in 1386. Furthermore there are references to the guild of St Mary in the visitation records of the Deanery of Wisbech in 1469 (Pugh 1953).

Ringer's Lane, to the west of Fen Croft was known as Pap's Lane or Pappyslane in 1461, with Pap's Field to the west (Reaney 1943). The name was changed in the twentieth century to Ringer's Lane – presumably named after the Six Ringers Inn at the northern end of the lane.

SMR entries and Historic Buildings

The church of St Leonard (recorded on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map as the church of St. Leonard and St. John) consists of a chancel, south chapel nave, south porch and west tower. The fabric of the church is Barnack stone. A large church was erected in the middle of the thirteenth century. The only trace of earlier architectural fragments is a small twelfth century cap preserved in the parvaise. Early in the fourteenth century the east end of the chancel, the south chapel and south aisle were rebuilt and porch and spire were added. In the second half of the fifteenth century there was a great reconstruction which included the rebuilding of the chancel arch and the west arch of the chapel. The tower has four stages, the three lower stages are thirteenth century in date and the top one is fourteenth century.

To the south-east of the development site was the Hospital of St John the Baptist (SMR 4001) which was founded in 1487. It was initially built for one or two hermit brothers tending the ancient causeway and providing for wayfarers. An hospital at Leverington is mentioned in a statement made in 1686 which states that it had been destroyed 150 years earlier (Pugh, 1953).

The most significant monument within the vicinity of the site is the Ancient Sea Defence (SMR4448 SAM 51) called Roman Bank or The Sea Bank. At Leverington the bank is 183m long, 2.5m high and 21m wide. Waterlogged timbers removed from beneath the bank have been radiocarbon dated to AD 1250 which may indicate a response to documented flooding in 1251 (Hall, 1996). However, Hall argues that the Sea Bank is likely to be Saxon in origin on the basis of observations in the neighboring Norfolk siltlands (Hall, 1996). The notion that Sea Bank has Saxon origins is further supported by the discovery of early medieval pottery underneath Sea Bank (SMR 03960).

The whole of this region was defended from marine flooding by this Sea Bank on the east and the Fen bank kept out fresh water on the west. The Sea Bank continued down the sides of the Ouse as far as Upwell to minimise the effect of the tides.

Post Medieval

There are a number of post medieval monuments within the vicinity of the subject site.

An archaeological evaluation undertaken by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (Kenney, 2000) at Gorefield Lane (immediately to the north of the subject site) revealed a number of sixteenth and seventeenth century features associated with the Chapter House. The Chapter House had been demolished before the archaeological evaluation took place. The house dated from 1720 and was formerly known as The Rectory. This was a three storeyed red-brick Georgian building with stables and an adjoining stable wall.

A post-medieval windmill was marked on the 1843 Inclosure map to the north west of the site (SMR 03974).

Leverington Hall, in the centre of the village, is the principal house in the parish. The first owner and occupier of the present house, in 1705AD, was Robert son of Thomas Swaine of Wisbech. The Hall is a building of mellowed brick with slated roofs. It consists of two gabled wings connected by a recessed central block. The plan of the building suggests an Elizabethan or Jacobean origin. This is confirmed by two chimney breasts at the back and on the north side of the house, which are of a late sixteenth century date.

The Victoria County History (Pugh, 1953) describes a post-medieval building known as Fen Croft. This building was at the south end of Church Road, in Fen Croft field, at the entrance to the village. It was essentially nineteenth century in date but incorporated earlier elements which related to an older house. That this older house was of some importance is proved by the representation of it on the map of Leverington Hall drawn in 1782 (Pugh, 1953). In the seventeenth century the house had 12 acres attached to it and extended from Church Lane to Pap's Lane.

Historic Maps

The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 shows that the subject site subdivided into three fields. All these fields are collectively known as Fen Croft. The maps show no buildings within the development site. To the north of the site is the Rectory or Chapter House with its associated formal gardens. To the north-east of the subject site Leverington Hall is depicted with its associated formal gardens.

5 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE SITE

There is very little potential for prehistoric or Roman remains being found on the site as this area would have been under water or used only for grazing during these periods.

Considering the type of landscape that the subject area is in there is a moderate potential for encountering medieval cultivation features on the site (Darlands or ditched strip fields probably running west-east (Hall, 1996)).

The post-medieval and medieval periods are well represented in the documentary record for this area. Post-medieval buildings include Leverington Hall, the Chapter House and Fen Croft House.

The presence of post-medieval material from the archaeological evaluation (Kenney, 2000) at the nearby Chapter House indicates that there is a moderate likelihood of encountering post-medieval remains within the development area.

6 POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

A planning application has been submitted for the construction of dwellings with associated access and services on the site. Any development that involves excavation or ground-work of more than minimal depth is likely to affect any archaeological remains that potentially exist on the subject site. This means all buildings foundation services trenches and access roads are likely to have an impact on the archaeological record.

7 CONCLUSION

It is very unlikely that prehistoric or Roman remains will be encountered as this area was not suitable for occupation during these periods. The desk-top assessment has, however, revealed medium potential for medieval and post-medieval remains to survive on the site.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

A programme of 5% trial trenching has been recommended by the CAO Brief to focus on areas that have demonstrated archaeological potential. As no

features have been identified during this study it is therefore recommended that the trial trenching is done on a regular grid pattern.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Construct Reason Ltd for commissioning this work. Thanks are due to Caroline Malim for the illustrations and Tim Malim for editing the report.

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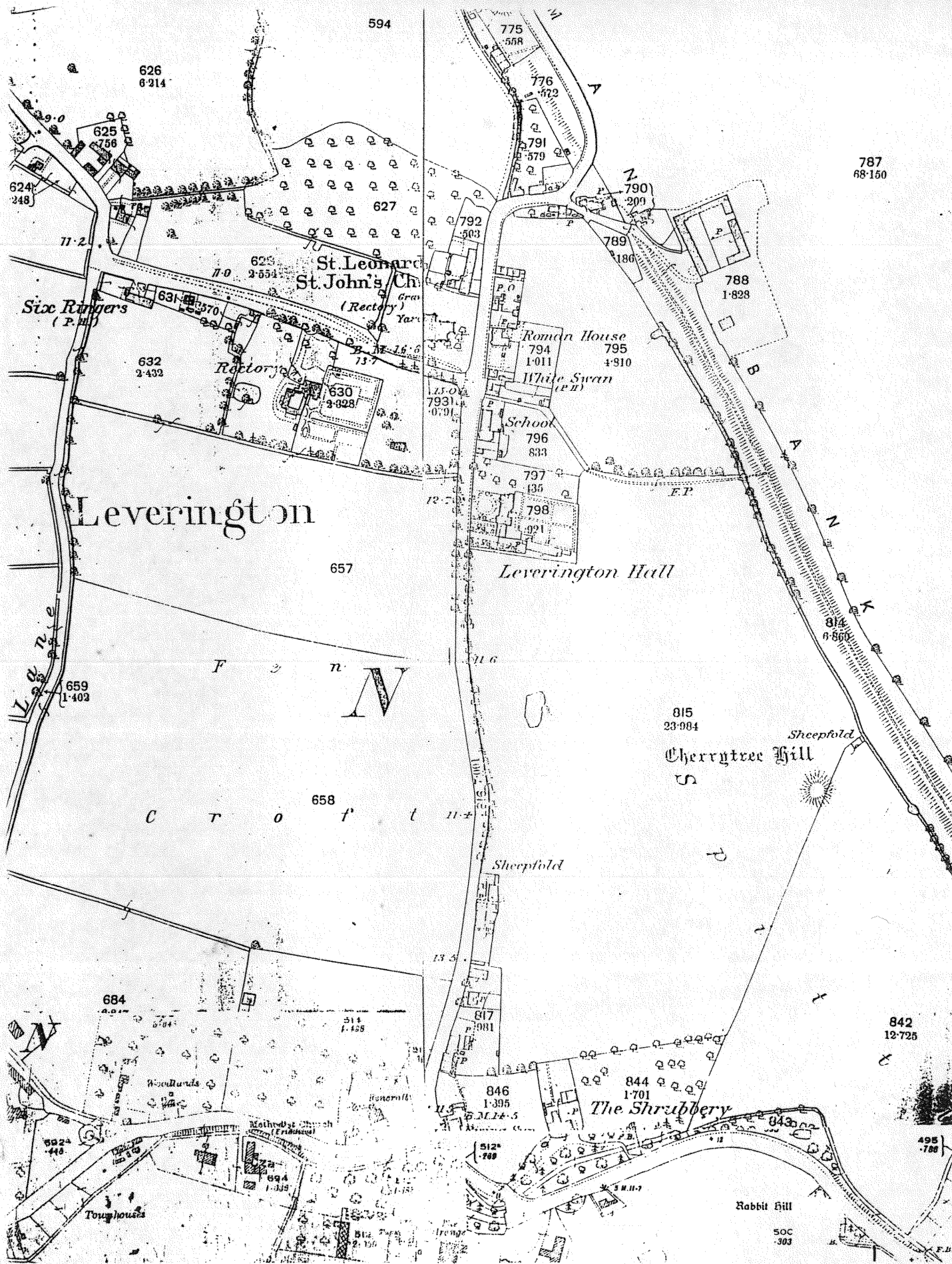


Figure 2 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map



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