

Archaeological Field Unit

**Land at Bromham, Bedfordshire:
An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment**

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1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. N010

Commissioned by Martin Grant Homes UK LTD

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Summary

This report represents the results of an archaeological desk-based assessment of land to the West of Bromham village, Bedfordshire. The purpose of the assessment is to locate known archaeological and historical features within and adjacent to the Study Area in order to provide an indication of the possible constraints on any development.

The major documentary sources were consulted for known features and in addition cartographic and aerial photographs were checked for new data.

Bromham Grange, a moated site, possibly a medieval manor, is located beyond the north-eastern edge of the Study Area, along together with the site of a water mill. Features contemporary with these may extend into the Study Area. Otherwise map evidence suggests the Study Area was largely under cultivation from the medieval period.

An old road, surviving as a bridleway, bisects the Study Area from west to east. This appears to have once connected Bromham Grange with another moated site at Stagsden Bury End 1.5km to the West. The parish boundary between Bromham and Stagsden in part follows this road through the Study Area suggesting the feature may be of some antiquity.

No evidence for prehistoric or Roman period activity was located within the Study Area. A Roman road may run close to the East although the evidence for this is limited and cropmarks and pottery to the North suggest Iron Age and Roman settlement in the general area.

However, the lack of positive data should be set against the limitations of the evidence, and in particular the poor conditions for crop mark development. Equally the evidence of recent excavation in the locality indicates that archaeological sites are more densely distributed than previously thought. This suggests that sites may be present within the Study Area despite the lack of data produced during this survey. Only further field evaluation will provide conclusive evidence for the presence or absence of such sites.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) was commissioned by Martin Grant Homes UK Ltd to undertake a desk-based assessment of an area of land at west of Bromham, Bedfordshire, in order to assess its archaeological potential in advance of development. The work was undertaken according to a specification drawn up by William Wall of the AFU, and was carried out in consultation with locally-based archaeologists in Bedfordshire County Archaeological Service. The work mainly involved reviewing the known archaeological data for the study areas, although a site visit was made, in order to assess current landuse, topography, possible sources of ground disturbance and possible constraints to further archaeological work.

1.2 Location of Study Area

The village of Bromham lies 4km west of Bedford. This assessment concerns approximately 33ha of farmland to the west of the village centred at SP 997507 (OS 1:50000 sheet 153) (fig. 1). The land straddles the boundary between the parishes of Bromham and Stagsden. The northern boundary of the site comprises the Old Bedford to Northampton road, the western boundary its replacement the new A428 Bromham Bypass. To the South and East the land abuts fields and modern residential development and for part of its length follows the line of the Serpentine Brook.

1.3 Geology, Topography and Soils

Bromham Village lies within the valley of the River Great Ouse. The solid geology is largely Oxford clay although Oolitic limestone outcrops in places. These are overlain by Pleistocene and more recent alluvial deposits across the valley floor and by boulder clay on the higher ground. The Study Area lies over the boundary between these two deposits and this is reflected in the variability of the soils from gleyed brown earths over the gravels to the South and calcareous and non-calcareous gleyed soils over the clays in the central and northern part (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

Bromham sits within a loop of the Ouse with land rising from 33mOD. on the valley floor up to 88mOD in the East. The Study Area lies on this gentle east facing slope at around 50mOD.

1.4 Modern Land Use

At present, almost the whole of the study area is in arable cultivation. A single small parcel of land at the north-eastern corner of the area is pasture.

2 REVIEW OF KNOWN DATA

2.1 Summary of Main Sources

This assessment comprises a review of data drawn from five main archive sources:

- the Historic Environment Record of Bedfordshire County Council,
- the excavation archives of Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS),
- the National Library of Air Photographs (NLAP) at the National Monument Record in Swindon,
- cartographic evidence and parish survey documents held by Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service, Bedford.
- Victoria History of the County of Bedfordshire

Together these provide a comprehensive database for the archaeology and history of the Bromham / Stagsden area. They collate all known archaeological investigations and finds across the Study Area, and provide access to primary and secondary documentary sources, including aerial photographs and cartographic evidence.

2.2 The Historic Environment Record (HER)

Bedfordshire County Council's catalogue of known archaeological sites and historic buildings was consulted. All of the entries that concern this study are tabulated below and shown on fig. 2.

HER No.	Location	Description
808	TL002 509	Possible Roman road . Metalling on E side of modern road revealed during widening in 1964, thought to be Roman road running N-S. See HER 1500.
1366	T001 510	Toll house on road near Bromham Grange, probably destroyed during road widening in 1930s. Post-medieval.
1500	T015 5145	Possible Roman road - continuation of HER 808, running N-S. Stone scatter noted west of Bowles Wood in 1979.

2621	TL002 510	Watermill site visible as earthworks in 1976, immediately west of Bromham Grange Farmhouse. Could be one of two watermill sites in Bromham mentioned in Domesday.
3125	SP998 514	Cropmarks visible on aerial photos in 1946, described as open-ended ring-ditch, with two semi-parallel features that widen to run up to but not adjoin the ring-ditch. Not visible on later APs. Possibly Iron Age or Romano-British. Roman pottery, including Samian, found during digging of drainage channels by Bromham Hospital (SP998 515)
3384	TL001 510	Buzoun Manor , or possibly Wakes Manor, represented by Bromham Grange Farm. Large fishpond next to farmhouse. Probably once moated.
7304	TL0010 5095	Road/Track running from Bromham Grange, passing through Stagsden Bury End, and continuing on towards Olney. Hollow in parts. Surviving as bridleways. For some of its length forms the parish boundary between Bromham and Stagsden.

2.3 Aerial Photographs

2.3.1 Sources

The collections held at Bedfordshire County Council, within the Historic Environment Record (HER), and at the National Library of Air Photographs (NLAP) at the National Monument Record in Swindon were consulted for vertical and oblique photographs. No relevant photographs are held at Cambridge University Committee for Archaeological Photography (CUCAP). A list of photographs is contained in Appendix 1.

2.3.2 Assessment methodology

Only photographs from the BCC collections were viewed. A cover search was carried out of the NLAP collection although this was not viewed. Photographs were available for the period 1946-1996 at a variety of scales, both vertical and oblique.

Survey was targeted towards identifying possible archaeological sites only. Features considered to be of natural or modern origin have been excluded. Ridge and furrow was noted but was not mapped except where it impinged on other archaeological data.

Where archaeological data is identified photographs are scanned and geo-referenced using GIS software (GSYS 2.8) against a digital copy of the Ordnance Survey map.

2.3.3 Results

Archaeology

No archaeological features were identified

Land use

Throughout the period covered by aerial survey the dominant land-use within the Study Area has been arable farming. All of the soil and cropmarks visible were due to recent cultivation, drainage and access across the fields.

2.4 BCAS Projects Database

Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) maintains a database recording all watching briefs, evaluations and excavations carried out by the Service since its inception in 1972. Summary information on most projects is available through the HER although more recent projects will only be listed at BCAS. The database is available for enquiries and a search was undertaken centred on the Study Area. All listings were assessed.

BCAS has not undertaken any archaeological investigations within the Study Area although recent major projects have been carried out 200m to the south in Stagsden (fig. 2).

Stagsden Bypass: BCAS project 371

Excavation of two sites in advance of road-building work (June - August 1991): a late Iron Age settlement, and a series of pits and ditches next to a suspected Roman farmstead. The settlement site was enclosed within a ditch and bank, and consisted of at least two roundhouses, which had been rebuilt on more than one occasion, as well as several storage pits. Four Roman period kilns (C1st AD) with associated pottery were also found, along with ditches and a well suggesting a shift in the focus of settlement during the Roman period.

Stagsden Golf Course: BCAS project 513

Evaluation identified a total of six archaeological sites.

The earliest substantive evidence for human activity comprises a small ditched enclosure of early/middle Iron Age date. No structural features were present within the interior but deposits within the ditches suggest the enclosure contained or was associated with a farmstead. Contemporary activity, also probably representing farmsteads, was identified 180m to the east.

During the late Iron Age a ditched enclosure containing roundhouses was established. This was associated with additional domestic and animal enclosures to the south and north. At its largest extent this settlement occupied an area of at least 2.5ha. Contemporary farmsteads existed 400m and 600m to the north and 700m to the north-west. At least one of these three farmsteads was unenclosed.

The three farmsteads to the north and north-west appear to have continued in use into the Roman period. At least one of these may have been enclosed during this period. The settlement investigated ahead of the construction of the Stagsden bypass was found to extend into the Study Area. The survival of two gravel surfaces indicates preservation of archaeological remains below alluvial deposits in this area.

Watching Briefs

A number of small watching briefs have been carried out on sites within the Bromham area but with little archaeological result. These include two pieces of work at St. Owens Church (BCAS Projects 197, and 509) and two at Bromham Hall (BCAS Projects 39 and 435 -the latter producing evidence for medieval settlement). Recent observation of groundworks at Bromham Hospital immediately to the North of the Study Area (BCAS Project 340) produced no archaeological finds. Some observations were carried out during the construction of the Bromham Bypass in 1986 (BCAS Projects 58 and 67) but this was of a very limited nature and the only recorded observations came from the Biddenham side of the road, 1.5 to 2km away from the Study Area.

2.5 Historic Map Study

2.5.1 Sources

The historic maps for this area held by the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service were consulted and are tabulated below. Modern OS survey maps at 1:50000 and 1:25000 were consulted for recent features and topography. The historic maps for this area held by the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service were consulted and are tabulated below. Modern OS survey maps at 1:50000 and 1:25000 were consulted for recent features and topography.

CRO number	Description	Comments
	Jeffries Map of Bedfordshire 1765	Shows location of the Grange and the minor road to Bury End.
X152	Plan of the Parish of Bromham. Estate Map 1798	Shows field names including Dead Woman
MA53	Plan of Parish of Stagsden. Enclosure map, 1828.	Shows southern part of Study Area without Bury End Road
MAT 8/1	Map of Parish of Bromham attached to the Tithe Apportionment, 1844.	
X1/68	Map of Stagsden Estate, between 1828 and 1873	
-	Ordnance Survey, 1st Edition, 1879-84. XI:10 112, XI:14 125	

-	Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition, 1923-26. XI:10 112, XI:14 125	
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2.52 Results

No maps survive for the period prior to the late eighteenth century. Those that do survive show only field boundaries (and in some cases field names) roads/trackways and drainage within the Study Area.

The Jeffries Map of 1765 shows the Grange, the Serpentine Brook and the land rising to the West. A road or track bisects the Study Area and links the Serpentine Brook and 'Berry End' (Bury End).

The 1798 Map only shows the northern part of the Study Area within Bromham, the southern part is shown in the Stagsden Enclosure map of 1828. Both are provided with field names (although neither show the track to Bury End). The Field names comprise a number of separate closes in the north together called 'Dead Woman' and parts of three enclosures to the South named Hatfield, Little Hatfield and Great Hatfield. The latter provide no topographic or archaeological information useful to this survey but Dead Woman is interesting. A discussion of these types of names can be found in Field J 1993 *A History of English Field Names*. They are, unsurprisingly, sometimes associated with human burial, either ancient (an Anglo Saxon cemetery in Grantchester, Cambs.) or more recent (a Civil War cemetery in Acton, Cheshire). The southern edge of Dead Woman also provides the Parish boundary between Bromham and Stagsden and is therefore of some antiquity.

The track noted on the Jeffries Map does not appear again although a footpath is marked on the OS First edition as linking Bury End with Bromham Grange and this is shown as a bridleway on the modern 1:50000 OS map (sheet 153). This is, however, some distance to the North of the Jeffries track. Either the earlier survey was wrong or this is a separate track, the latter having gone out of use.

2.6 Other Documentary Sources

The County Records Office was also consulted for local documentary sources other than maps. Those examined comprised:

Stagsden: Rapid Parish Survey
 The Cartulary of Newnham Priory
 Bromham; a rural parish GE Pell 1976 (CRO5630)
 Revision of Bromham Parish Survey, 1982

2.6.1 Results

No data directly relevant to the Study Area was found

3. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

3.1 Archaeological Background

The Ouse Valley around Bedford has been a focus for human occupation from the Palaeolithic with recent finds being made over the river at Biddenham (Harding, P, *et al* 1991 'A Palaeolithic site rediscovered at Biddenham, Bedfordshire' *Beds Arch Jnl* 19, 87-90). Recent excavations at Clapham (Dawson, M, 1988 'Excavations at Ursular Taylor Lower School' *Beds Arch Jnl* 18, 6-24) , Biddenham (BCAS 99/24), and Elstow (BCAS 95/06) have uncovered significant settlement remains of prehistoric Roman and medieval date. Within Bromham work has been concentrated on areas of mineral extraction close to the river where Iron Age settlement remains have been uncovered (Tilson, P, 1973 'A Belgic and Romano-British site at Bromham' *Beds Arch Jnl* Vol. 8, 23-66). In Stagsden major excavations were undertaken prior to the construction of the Stagsden Bypass in 1991 with evidence for both Iron Age and Roman settlement uncovered (CBA 9 Newsletter, 22, 1992) and more recently trial excavations in advance of the new Bedfordshire Golf Club course have confirmed the high concentration of sites of both these periods in the area (BCAS 98/65).

3.2 Prehistoric (c. 8000BC -AD43)

No finds or features of prehistoric date have been made within the Study Area. There is however low to moderate potential for unknown remains given the favourable topographic location of the site, (a spur of higher ground overlooking the river valley), and the local density of occupation sites as outlined above (from the Iron Age in particular).

3.3 Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)

No finds or features of Roman date were found within the Study Area. A possible Roman period site has been identified from cropmarks and pottery 300m to the North (HER 1362) and a Roman road may have run to the East (HER 808/1500). These together with recent work in Stagsden and Biddenham suggest, as with the Iron Age, that the Study Area has low moderate potential to contain unknown Roman period remains.

3.4 The Saxon Period (c.AD410 AD to c.1066 AD)

No finds or features of Saxon date were found within the Study Area. Bromham was mentioned in Domesday but no evidence has come to light to identify the Saxon centre of the settlement. This may be located close to the present church but recent work in Elstow (BCAS 95/06) and Harrold (BCAS 99/04) has shown the location of Early to Middle Saxon occupation to be more dispersed and fluid, with often more than one centre. Manor sites such as that on the north-eastern edge of the Study Area may mark these early sites and so there is moderate potential in that part of the Study Area for currently unknown Saxon period remains.

3.5 The Medieval Period (c.1066-1495)

No finds or features directly dateable to the medieval period were found within the Study Area other than the track (HER 7304). However, unlike the earlier periods the evidence of maps and the modern landscape does suggest that it is very unlikely that significant settlement remains of this date will be found within the Study Area. There is some potential close to Bromham Grange for features contemporary with the early history of the manor to survive, although fields named Grange Close on the 1828 Stagsden map lie outside the Study Area. It is more likely that the whole of the Study Area was taken up within agricultural fields at this time.

A feature hinted at on the maps and marked as significant on the HER (7304) is the track to Bury End. There is however some confusion as to its line, the Jeffries Map shows a track to the South as access from Bury End to the Serpentine Brook, whereas the HER puts it to the North, running to Bromham Grange along a footpath marked on the first edition OS map. The latter may appear more plausible as a route between two possible medieval manor sites and the Jeffries map may be wrong. The possibility of two tracks should be held in mind, however.

Also of some interest is the parish boundary which runs east-west through the Study Area. Earlier maps show it as contiguous with the southern boundary of Dead Woman and the northern track described above, continuing to Bromham Grange where it then turned south along the old Bedford to Northampton road. The modern boundary turns south earlier to run along the Serpentine Brook. The exact origin of modern ecclesiastical parishes is obscure although it appears certain that they were largely in place by the late Saxon period. In many cases, however they clearly comprise earlier manorial and estate units and arguments have been made for origins in the Roman period or earlier. It is unlikely that the boundary would have been marked along its total run during any period and Anglo Saxon Estate Charters make clear that trees and other topographical features (including ancient burial mounds) were often used to sight the line of the boundary. Nevertheless boundaries can be of some complexity and the coincidence of the boundary here with the probable line of the Bury End track suggests this may be the case here.

3.6 The Post-Medieval and Modern Period

No great innovation from the medieval period can be seen either in the evidence of maps or in changing land use. The track to Bury End survives as a footpath but some of the closes extant in the late eighteenth century have been amalgamated or destroyed (the Hatfields), principally by the construction of the A428 Bromham Bypass.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Limitations of the Evidence

Aerial photographs

On suitable soils sub-surface archaeological features are often visible as marks in ripening crops or as soil marks in ploughed ground. However, the permeable, water retentive soils of the Study Area do not always reveal crop marks. Study of aerial photographs from the area in general suggests that many of the recently identified cropmarks are forming on a localised basis on soils that are relatively gravel-rich (pers. comm. Stephen Coleman, HER Officer, BCC)). The Study Area is situated largely on heavy clay soil types which are not conducive to crop mark formation.

Most aerial photographs available were not taken for archaeological purposes and were not therefore taken under optimum conditions for research.

The potential of aerial photographs to show archaeological information within the Study Area is low and so the negative results cannot be taken to indicate a lack of archaeological remains

HER entries

The Bury End track is the only HER entry within the Study Area. Those entries adjacent to it focus on the site of Bromham Grange. This is useful for suggesting a focus of medieval and possible Saxon activity. In general, however, the HER entries reflect the poor aerial photographic coverage and a lack of fieldwork.

Cartographic sources

Cartographic sources survive from the late eighteenth century and are useful in projecting backwards into the later medieval period only. In general they hint at pattern of medieval fields visible within the Study Area and serve to inform our understanding of the morphology and development of the later medieval and modern settlement in general terms. For information of earlier periods, however, they contribute little.

Recent excavated evidence

Recent development within the historic village and its environs has instigated few archaeological investigations. Along with the evidence of aerial photographs these would normally provide the best indicators of the likely archaeological potential of the Study Area.

However, sites excavated nearby at Stagsden and Biddenham do suggest a significant density of archaeological sites in this area, from at least the Iron Age and this information is useful to indicate that the Study Area may contain archaeological remains that are currently unknown.

4.2 Potential for Archaeological Remains within the Study Area

There is low to moderate potential for buried remains of Prehistoric, Roman or Saxon date surviving undetected beneath the cultivated topsoil. Saxon period remains in particular might be located close to the site of Bromham Grange.

The field name Dead Woman may be associated with human burial

Medieval settlement remains are unlikely although again there is low to moderate potential for the survival of features close to Bromham Grange.

The location of a medieval trackway is slightly uncertain but probably coincides with the parish boundary. Both may survive in some form and their coincidence suggests an ancient and possibly complex feature.

In general the quality and availability of data upon which to make a judgement concerning the potential of the area was poor. A more accurate assessment would only be possible with further fieldwork, possibly involving both non invasive geophysical survey, and field artefact collection and/or trial trenching. These techniques would provide an indication of the location, nature and condition of any buried features that this desk-based survey can only suggest the presence of.

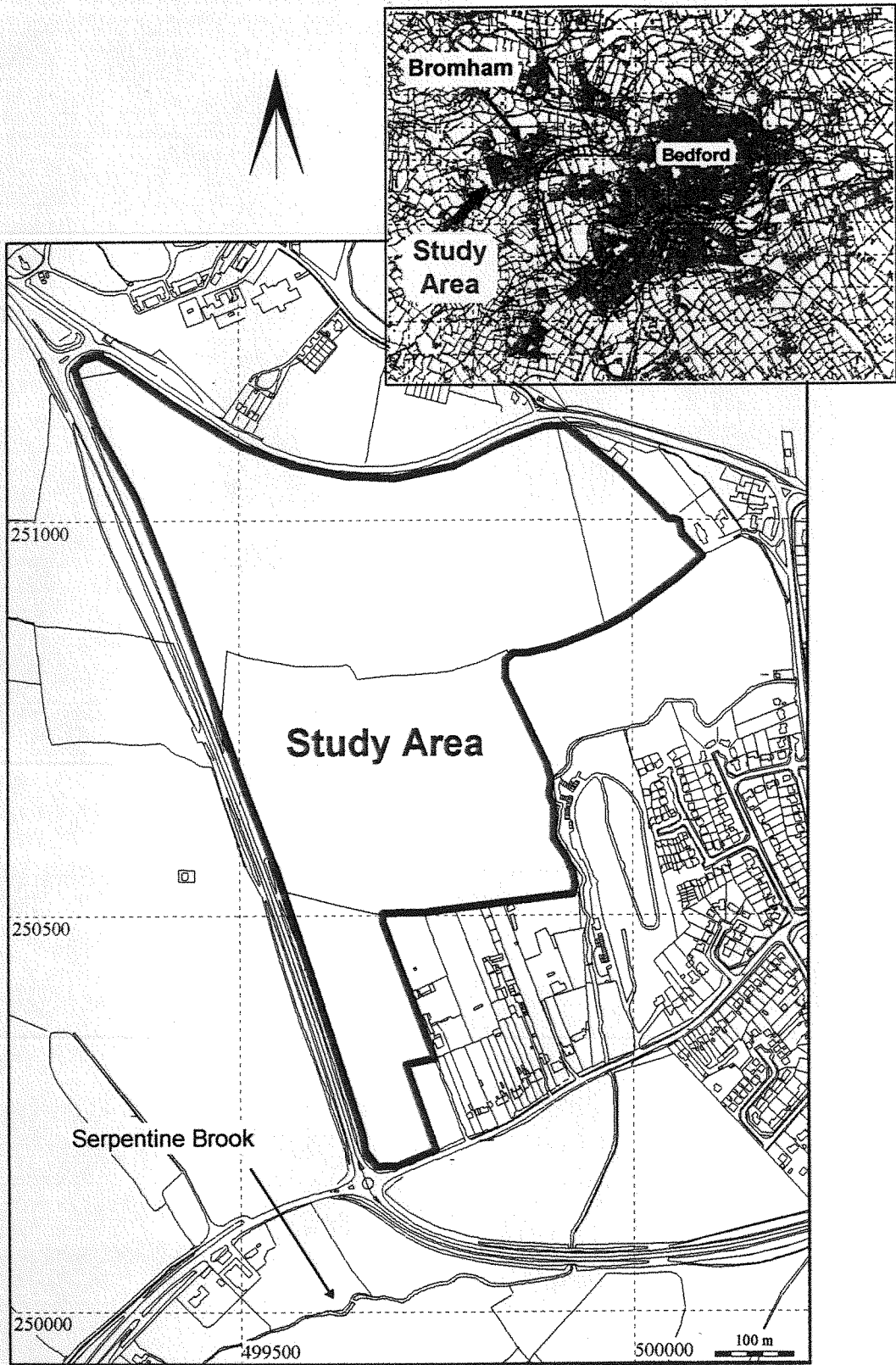


Fig. 1 Plans locating the Study Area

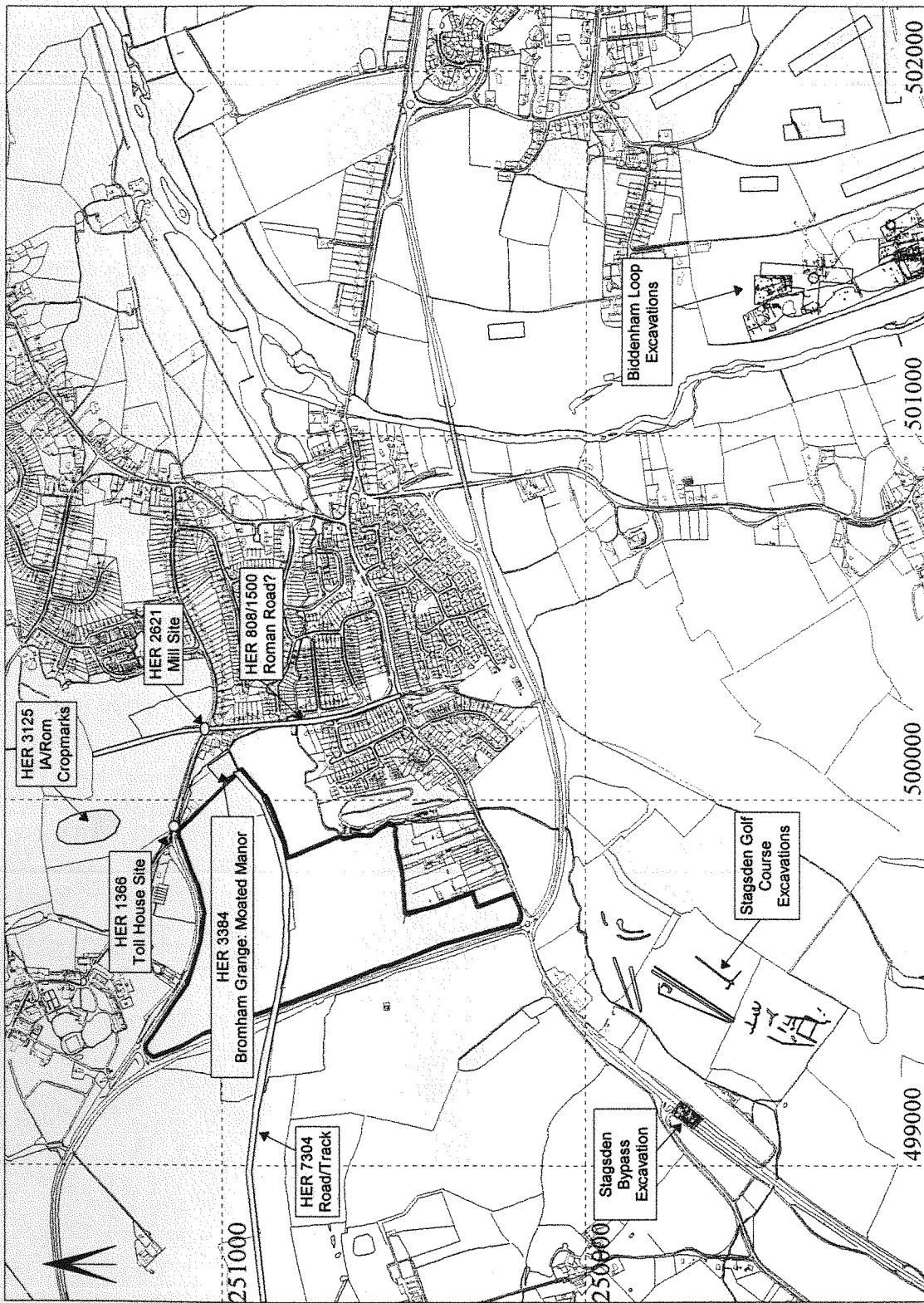


Fig. 2 Location of archaeological and historical features within the Study Area (source: HER and BCAS Projects Database)

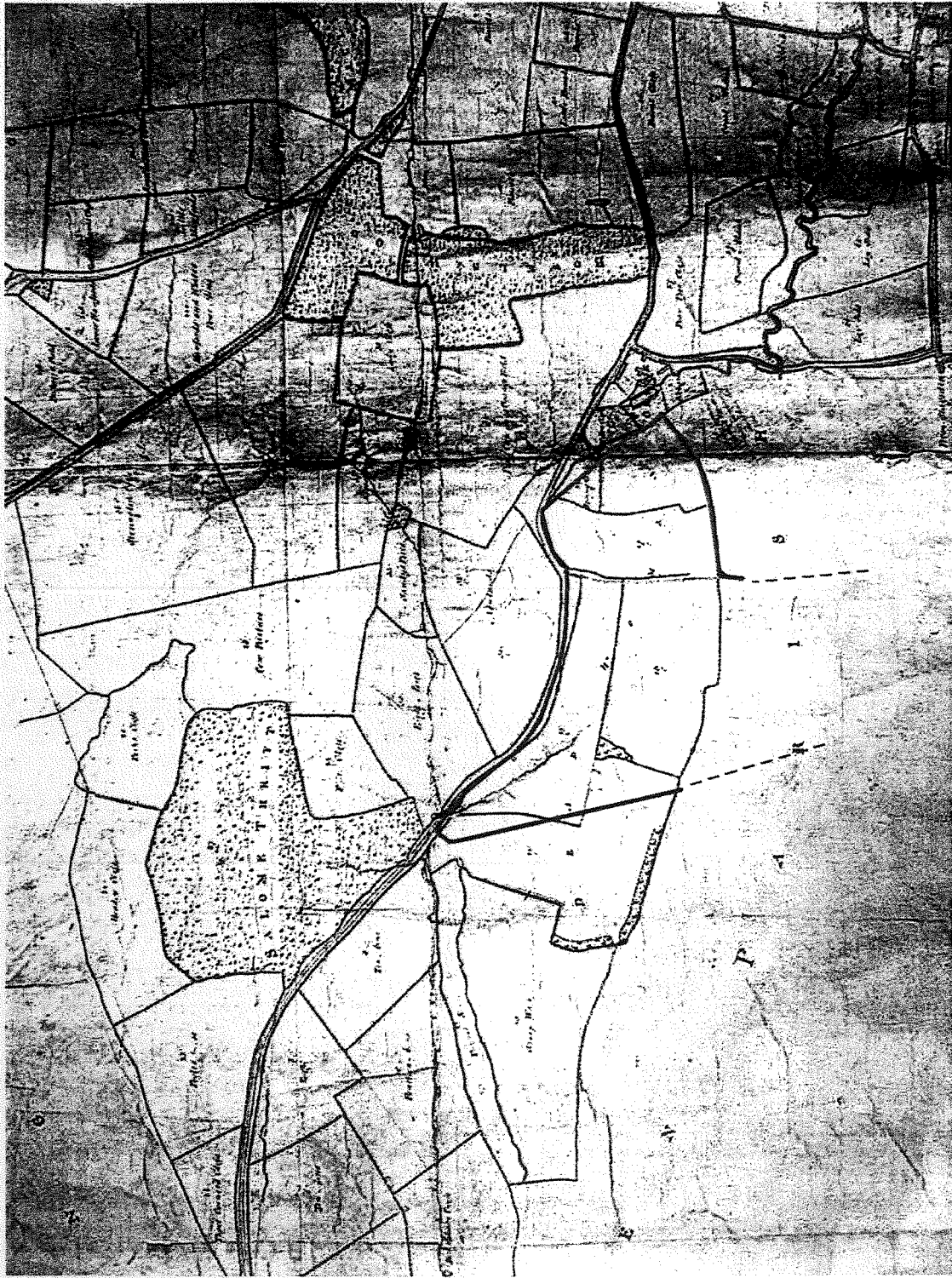


Fig. 3 Estate Map of 1798 showing the N part of the Study Area including closes called 'Dead Woman'

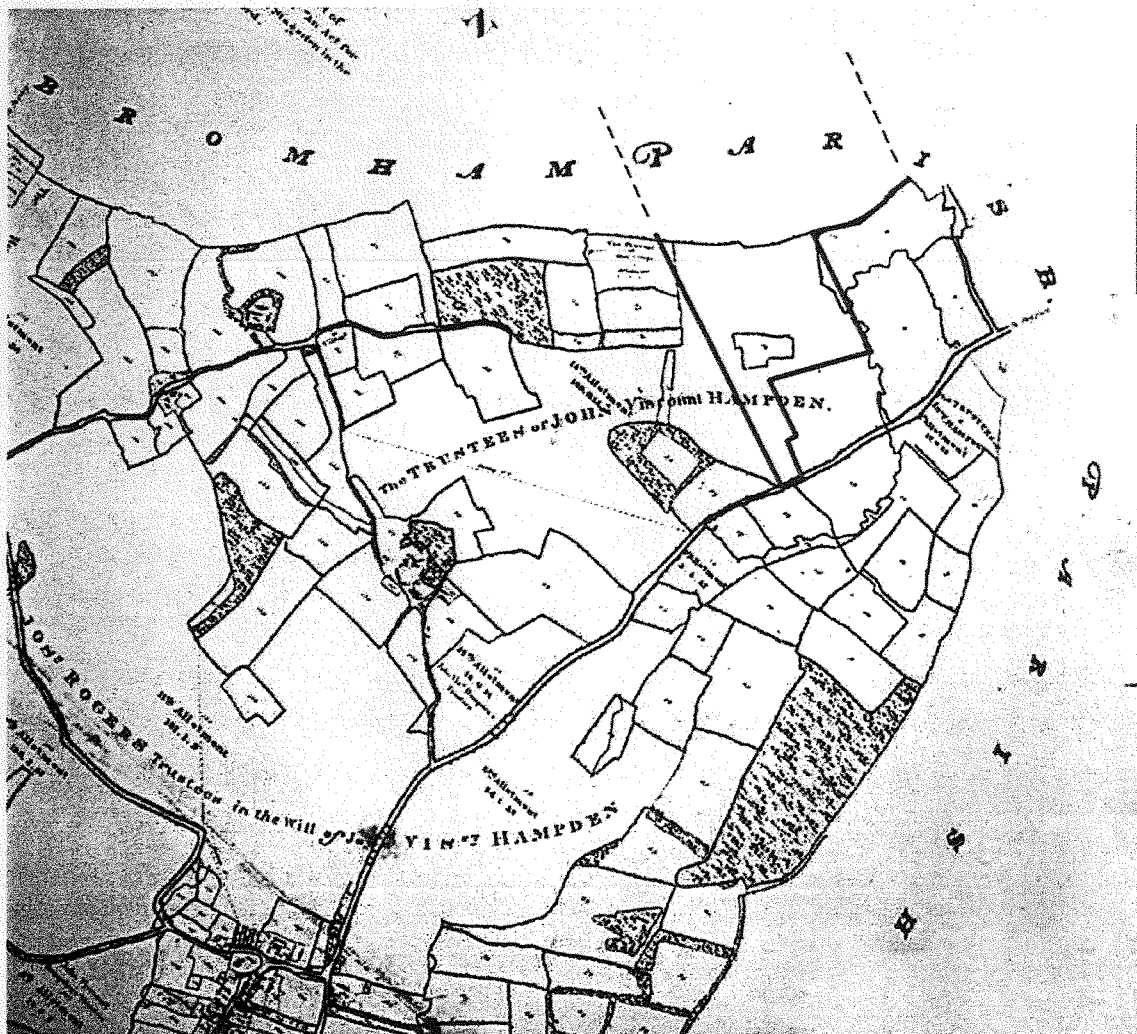


Fig. 4 Part of the 1828 Stagsden Enclosure map showing the S part of the Study Area

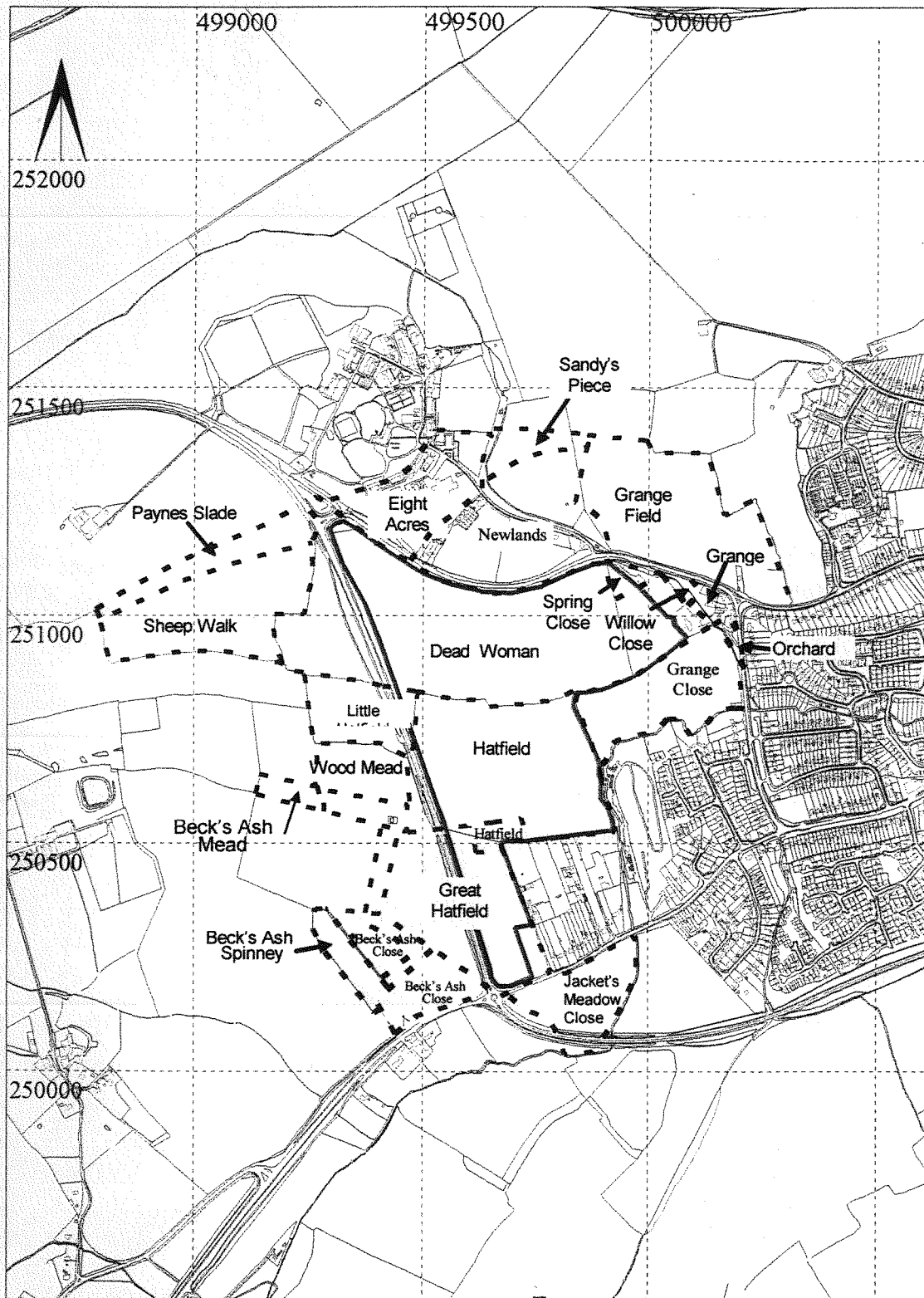


Fig. 5 Field names taken from the Stagsden Enclosure Map (1828) and the 1798 Bromham Estate map

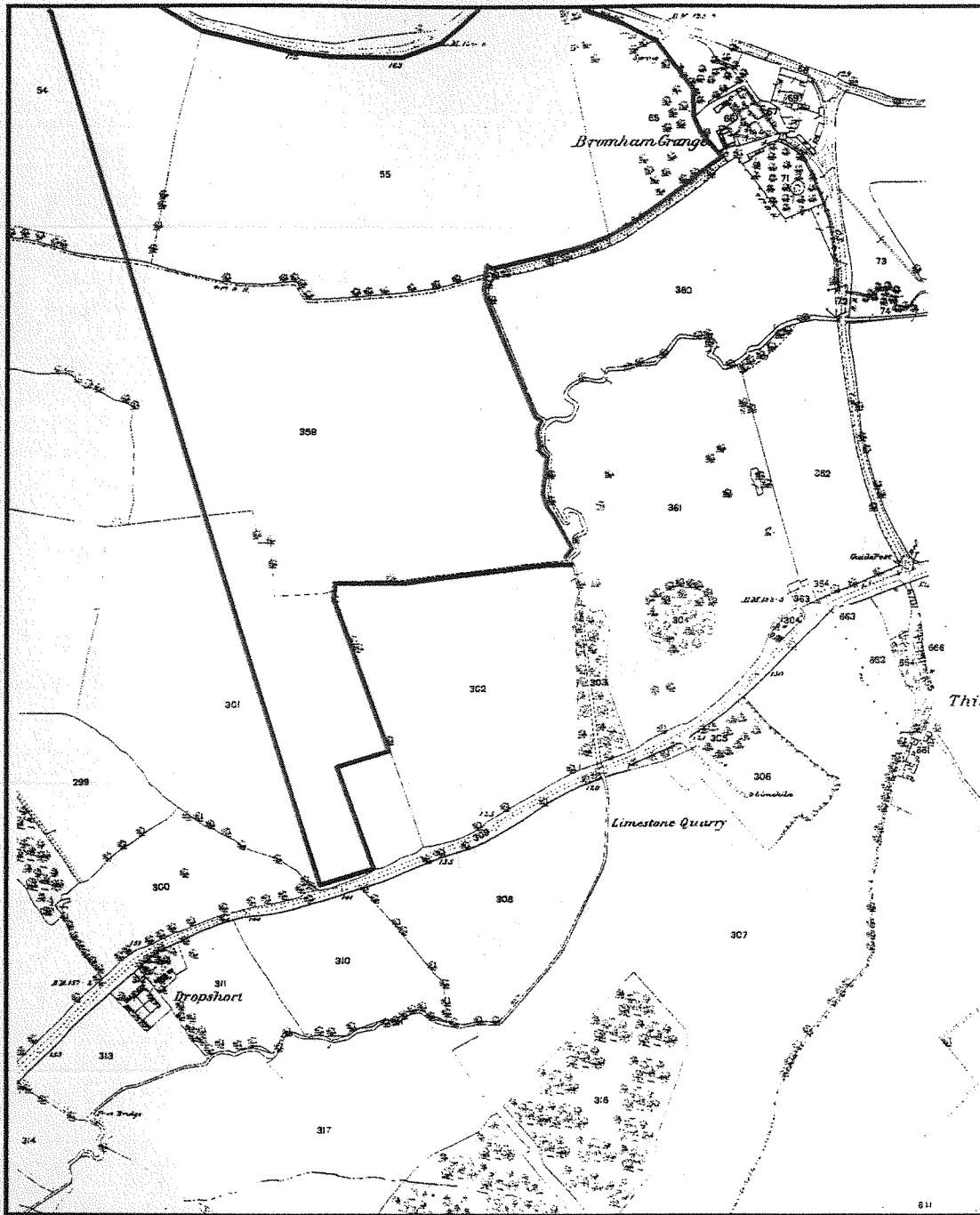


Fig. 6 Part of the First edition OS map showing the Study Area

5 APPENDIX

Air photographs consulted

BCC Historic Environment Record

Sortie Number	Frame nos.	Date
RAF 106 G/UK1562	3051-52	1946
HSL UKBED/780/6	8053	1968
HSL UK.76/15	1250-51	1976
HSL BEDS 81/4/17	9700-2	1981
AEROFILMS/91/126/7	5439, 5441	1991
AEROFILMS/96C/558/7	0355,56,57	1996

National Library of Air Photographs cover search number 47409899

Sortie Number	Library No.	Frame nos.	Date
106G/UK/1562	374	3051-3053	1946
CPE/UK/1792	487	3075-3076	1946
CPE/UK/1952	554	2362	1947
MAL/52014	21633	610-611	1952
MAL/52014	21633	613-614	1952
58/1674	1614	65-67	1955
58/1674	1614	65-67	1955
58/2250	1330	75-76	1957
58/2640	1879	52-53	1958
58/2640	1879	89-91	1958
58/T/118	2699	86-89	1958
58/2689	1886	2-3	1959
543/674	1942	48-50	1959
543/674	1942	91-92	1959
58/5517	2125	57-58	1962
OS/64195	9306	19-21	1964
OS/67144	9310	150-151	1967
OS/67144	9310	154-155	1967
OS/67262	9311	20-21	1967
OS/67338	9312	84-85	1967
OS/67338	9312	86-87	1967
OS/70437	11686	23-24	1970
OS/73443	12005	7-9	1973
OS/73443	12005	41-43	1973
MAL/78019	7529	35-38	1978
MAL/78019	7529	48-52	1978
MAL/78029	7530	177-180	1978



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