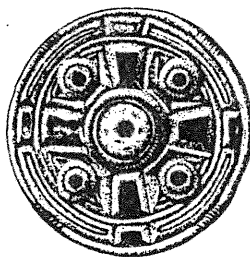


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Archaeological Field Unit

Watersmeet, Mill Common, Huntingdon
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Paul Spoerry

November 1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A151

Commissioned by Cambell, Melhuish and Buchanan

Watersmeet, Mill Common, Huntingdon

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

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1999

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Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out for Campbell Melhuish and Buchanan in advance of proposals to develop land at Watersmeet, Mill Common, Huntingdon. SMR, excavated, archival, research and documentary sources were studied to identify the archaeological potential of the site. In addition to the normal necessity of providing archaeological context, the degree of more recent destruction through development was deemed a key consideration. The site was found to lie in a location of key significance during several periods. The riverside position not only represents a favourable location for settlement in a general sense, but the use of this general area as a river crossing from the Roman period onwards, means that the site is likely to contain Roman burials, may have been within a Danish Burh, was certainly within the core of the subsequent Late Saxon town and may also have been within a 'lost' bailey of the Norman Castle. Modern land-use may well have removed remains in several areas including the western end of the site, and the degree of damage may have occurred resulting from the construction of the railway/A14 embankment and through landscaping for the construction of the house 'Watersmeet'.

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Appendix A

Extract from 1572 Survey for the area around the Castle (Dickinson 1972).

**Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment for Watersmeet, Mill
Common, Huntingdon
(TL 2398 7136)**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This desk-based assessment was commissioned by Mr G Cooper of Campbell, Melhuish and Buchanan in response to the first part of a Brief for Archaeological Evaluation produced by A Thomas of Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office (19 May 1999). The aim is to define the archaeological potential of the parcel of land identified in Figure 1, in response to the proposed development of houses and flats as shown in Figure 2. This will then help focus field evaluation towards those parts of the site that may prove most significant in terms of the potential threat to archaeological remains.
- 1.2 The site is bordered on the northern and eastern sides by the embankment for the A14 dual carriageway, which itself is a re-working of a mid-19th century railway embankment. The southern edge of the site is the riverbank, whilst to the west there is a trackway leading down to the River (Alconbury Brook). The site formerly contained a bus depot and before that a private house, a public house complex and buildings associated with a bathing area by the river.

The site is a parcel of land that has been reduced in size by the embankment construction. Its shape in early maps suggests that it may have formerly been a 'lost' western bailey to the 11th-12th century castle which now lies mostly beyond the A14.

2 The Nature of the Proposed Development

The development proposal is for a line of substantial houses along the southern half of the site, overlooking the Brook, with a second line of dwellings, probably mostly flats set further back and on higher ground. At the far eastern end of the site TPOs restrict construction, with a single major tree also being retained towards the western end. Nonetheless very substantial earthmoving is envisaged to enable such a significant construction programme to take place within a steeply contoured and restricted area. There is a potential threat to any archaeological deposits, regardless of burial depth, across all parts of the site except those where tree cover is to be retained.

3 Methodology

In order to map the archaeological remains in and surrounding the development area, investigations were carried out on accessible archaeological and historical resources held by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The site was deemed wholly inappropriate for geophysical surveying as an evaluative technique due to 19th century land-use and because of its topography.

Aerial photographic assessment has not been carried out as the site lies within an urban area surrounded by buildings and common pasture and it is known from other sources that it has received a varying density of development over the last 150 years. Recent aerial photographic cover has, however, been assessed to help determine detail of recent land-use, tree cover etc. (Figure 3).

The key sources of archaeological and historical information that have been studied are the CCC SMR and the AFU's Huntingdon Research Archive. This latter includes many publications and background documentation, and much material extracted from the Inskipp Ladds Archive which is held at the Norris Museum, St Ives. The Huntingdon Research Archive has been utilised to produce two forthcoming research papers on the topography of Saxon and medieval Huntingdon (Spoerry forthcoming a and b). Cartographic information has been extensively assessed, both from primary maps held at the AFU, Huntingdon Records Office and Cambridge University Library, and also from interpretative plans by P Dickinson and S Inskipp Ladds. A list of those Maps consulted is provided in with the Bibliography. Some additional maps held by the PRO have not been studied to date, although most were incorporated in Inskipp Ladds' analyses which culminated in the VCH Huntingdon section (Page, Proby and Ladds 1932).

4 Topographical and Geological Background

4.1 Topography

Watersmeet, Mill Common, Huntingdon lies on the north bank of the Alconbury Brook immediately upstream of its confluence with the River Great Ouse. The river bank is steep here, but in places there is low lying land at the waterside in front of the sand and gravel cliff. The site includes such low-lying land, plus cliffs several metres in height and higher land above (up to 12m OD). Thus much of the site has a large east-west aligned step, however this is confused at the western end where the inlet of a former stream causes the cliff to bend around into a north-south alignment. Below this the ground rises up gradually from the Brook side in a gradual manner that has resulted in this location being used as a routeway to a crossing point over the Brook for many centuries. All of this natural topography has been obscured by earthmoving for construction and demolition during several episodes from the pre-Conquest medieval period until the present century.

4.2 Geology

The site is located on river terrace gravels, which form the cliffs and the land above, whilst the low-lying brook side areas may well have a covering of recent alluvium.

5 Archaeological and Historical Background

5.1 SMR data

Figure 1 shows the locations for SMR entries within the immediate vicinity of the site, using up to date OS Map data (licensed use for CCC).

Prehistoric SMR entry

1912	stray find	flint scraper from High Street
------	------------	--------------------------------

Roman SMR entries

0867	stray find	pink ware jar from water pipe trench in St Mary's street.
2545	excavation	Roman corridor villa of 3rd-4th cent with earlier 1st cent occupation beneath.
2602	stray find	Two late Roman coins found in 1927.
2607	stray find	Two late Roman coins
2608	stray find	Roman coin
2635	excavation	Roman cremation group of 2nd cent.
2637	stray find	Roman pottery found in castle moat.
2638	stray find	?Roman stone coffin found in 19th century

Medieval SMR entries

1774	earthwork/ excavation	Castle Hills. Norman motte and bailey castle with 12th century additions including possible masonry structures. Also castle chapel, with burials investigated in 1975 on southern edge during A14 construction. The castle was destroyed in 1174 but had a later function as a gaol
2544	structure	Huntingdon Bridge. Built in 1332
2545	excavation	Late Saxon two-celled structure and up to 400 associated burials, aligned east-west. Believed to be a late Saxon church. The site was possibly re-worked as a siege castle in the 12th century, owing to its topographic position; a small hill close to Huntingdon castle
2594	doc. evid.	According to Dickinson the possible location of St Lawrence's church (mentioned until 14th century) in grounds of Castle Hill House.
2597	stray find	Medieval mortar found in 1935.

2614	doc .evid.	Post-medieval watermill probably with earlier origins.
2624	church / excavation	Probable site of St Clement's church, parish location generally known (river-side) and associated with past records of site of inhumation cemetery which was part-excavated in 1995.
2636	stray find	Norman socketed arrowhead and medieval glazed pot.
2805	stray find	human remains and medieval pottery found in garden.
4248	building	Medieval church of St Mary with mostly 13th and 15th cent. fabric, but a church is known to have existed in late Saxon period.
8660	stray find	Human remains found in secondary deposit in garden.
10486	excavation	Trial pits found 11th to 13th century features, dated by pottery.

Post-Medieval SMR entries

0714	doc evid	Maps and documents refer to a windmill here called Black Mill (16th-18th cent)
1774	earthwork/ doc. evid.	Huntingdon Castle is known to have been re-fortified during the Civil War and elements of this can be recognised in the surviving earthworks. In addition a windmill is documented on top of the Motte.
2567	doc evid	Maps and documents refer to a windmill here called White Mill (16th-18th cent). Post-mill foundations excavated in 1960s.
2639	building	Cowper House. Under facade is a mid 16h cent house with major wall paintings of c. 1620.
2656	building	Castle Hill House. Built 1787 and grade 2* Listed.

5.2 Prehistoric remains

The middle Ouse valley is a zone that contains substantial and significant prehistoric remains of a range of periods. The gravels are periodically found to contain Palaeolithic tools and faunal material, although Neolithic and Bronze Age remains located on top of the terraces are perhaps most in evidence. This site lies half way between the Godmanchester 'Sun temple' ritual complex on the Ouse and the Brampton complex on the Alconbury Brook, but there is no reason to suspect similar remains here. The almost complete lack of prehistoric remains from the town may be more a result of these more ephemeral remains being not so readily observed as chance finds in urban locations, when compared to the more substantial concentrations of later material. Thus there is no reasons to expect prehistoric remains on this site, but the riverside location could have attracted settlement and activity at any period.

5.3 Roman remains

Inskip Ladds (1932, 1937), Dickinson (various unpub. manus.) and Greene (1977) have all in the past attempted to locate the line of Ermine Street between Godmanchester and the northern edge of Huntingdon. The consensus for the area around this site is something akin to the line shown on Figure 1, although there is in fact little direct evidence for this. For the purposes of this study it seems sensible to assume that Ermine Street lies close by and probably to the east. The site therefore lies in the roadside zone where various remains including an agger, chance losses, burials and occasional structures may lie. The Roman period SMR entries on the itself and to the north imply that the site did indeed experience a range of Roman activity, including burials. It is, however, possible that these may instead be located here through association with the late Roman corridor villa that lay 200m to the west, also on the bank above the Alconbury Brook. Thus a spread of Brook-side activity may be an additional or better interpretation of the finds to date.

5.4 Saxon and Danish remains

The location of the documented Danish and Saxon burhs (the latter being a rebuild or extension of the former) is not known. Recent work by the author (Spoerry forthcoming a) has attempted to re-assess the evidence now available to provide the best possible indication of the location and extent of Danish and Saxon burhs, and the extent of late Saxon occupation that presumably developed in and around the latter. This process eventually resulted in the very substantial town documented by Domesday Book, which also refers to the twenty properties cleared to make way for the Castle; implying that this site (next to the castle) was within an area that included late Saxon urban properties.

The SMR entry of most significance in terms of this period is that of the Late Saxon church and burial ground at Whitehills (2545). This is the most obvious element in a range of documentary and recorded data that suggest that the main area of pre-Conquest Saxon settlement was a zone from the later High Street in the east, to the end of Mill Common in the west, where an earthwork known as the bar dyke probably represent part of the Saxon burh defences. This site is a key part of such a zone. In addition, by analogy with other sites, the most likely location for the Danish defended area would be a D-shaped enclosure around the river crossing, which at this time was still Ermine Street. This suggests that the later Castle may represent the approximate location of the Danish burh, with, on topographic grounds, the western burh defences perhaps coinciding with the western part of this site.

In conclusion this site may represent part of the Danish burh, including its western defences, and it certainly represents part of the late Saxon Town, probably well within the Edwardian burghal defences (see Figure 13 for a model of the pre-Conquest town and burghal areas).

5.5 Post-Conquest Medieval remains

The major element in the post-Conquest medieval townscape that is of relevance here is the castle, built in 1068 and at least partially destroyed in 1174. The imposition of the castle onto the pre-existing Saxon town caused a need to move the river crossing, resulting in the construction of a wooden bridge, and made it necessary to lay out a new High Street and, probably, market place. Both Inskip Ladds and Dickinson thought that the original castle curtilage was much larger than that surviving by the post-medieval period, and proposed that the area immediately west of the Motte, including this site, was in fact a second bailey. The distinct rise from west to east under the houses on the street Castle Hill plus the substantial earthworks present on the development site offer strong support for this model and it must be taken seriously. The fact that the earthworks are not shown on the 1886 OS map (or the 1901 revision) but appear by 1926 may mean that this area was substantially re-modelled in the early 20th century, perhaps when the house called Watersmeet was built. Nonetheless this possibility needs consideration in the trenching strategy. If this land were not part of the castle then it may still have experienced a range of other activities in the medieval period and could have been occupied by buildings, particularly following the castle's demise as a defensive structure.

5.6 Post-Medieval remains

In the post-medieval period the castle had re-use and major re-modelling for defensive purposes during the Civil War, and this may also have impacted on this site. The proximity of wind mills and the route to the water mill in the 1572 survey and subsequent maps, may have some significance for this site, however, the general picture is very much of a town that is much less densely populated than in the preceding centuries. This may have been a period when the site was less actively used.

6 The Potential Impact from Modern Construction

6.1 Historic Maps, 1572 Survey, and Past Land Use (Figures 4-8 and Appendix A)

The 1572 Survey (Appendix A; Dickinson 1972) appears to describe this site as open land (probably Item 285), next to the waterside. Speed's Map of 1610 does not contradict this, nor do either of the 18th century maps, that of the Hospital Lands (1752) and by Jeffery (1768). The latter includes a representation of the cliff above the Alconbury Brook and confirms the presence of land below and above this feature, plus its general shape, prior to modern landscaping. The 1850 tithe map shows an empty area, except for a boundary line at the western end that is also present in 1768. This latter parcel soon provides the land that by 1863 has been used for a range of buildings that later becomes the General Peel public house (Gas Works Plan). By this time also the local environment has been

greatly changed by the construction of the railway through Castle Hills, running across the top of the site from east to west.

6.2 OS 1:2500 Maps and Modern Land Use (Figure 9-11)

By the time of the first edition 25" OS Map (1885) a belt of planting has been placed across the eastern part of the site, whilst a boathouse and a 'bathing place' characterise the Brook side. At the western end the range of buildings may have an industrial function. A saw pit is mentioned, which may well represent a very rare 19th century industrial feature, if surviving on the site beneath later structures. In addition part of what is now dry land is at this time an inlet to the Brook, located where in earlier times a small stream joined the main watercourse. The 1901 OS Map shows little change (not illustrated), however, by 1926 the house named Watersmeet has been constructed and substantial earthworks are now shown. These look rather like those shown on Jeffery's Map (1768), but may in fact be a modern re-sculpting of the earlier contours (which may themselves be partly medieval defensive works). Interestingly, the record of two archaeological discoveries on the 1926 OS 25" Map may well record remains found during the construction of the house and through associated landscaping. Some time between 1926 and 1983 the General Peel was demolished and replaced by a coach depot. This may have coincided with the creation of the A14 flyover in the mid-1970s which utilises the railway embankment, but has an additional land take. By the waterside a substantial boathouse was also constructed. In the last few years all buildings on the site have been demolished and it is now characterised by several redundant concrete rafts, large piles of building rubble and overgrown scrubland, with several large, mature trees. A number of these are protected by TPOs.

7 Conclusions and Model for Surviving Remains

7.1 The Major Impact Areas

Figure 12 shows those parts of the site that have experienced building in the last 150 years. These should not be discounted out of hand as archaeological deposits often survive comparatively intact under massive structures; however, they could signify whole or partial destruction. The buildings shown on the 1983 OS Map have all been demolished, but concrete rafts remain and will restrict evaluation trench location. There are also areas of building rubble, up to four metres high in one location, which again prevent easy access for trenching. In addition there is one part of the site which is a filled-in inlet, although, being under the more recent boathouse raft this area is not accessible at the moment. The riverbank contours around the site of Watersmeet look at least partially man-made, although it is most likely that this is in fact a modern re-working of a natural scarp, which itself may have had ancient re-modelling as well.

Other parts of the northern half of the site have the appearance of disturbed land which may date to the A14 Flyover construction. In addition there are mature trees that are protected by TPOs. These are present along the waterside, at the extreme eastern end of the site, and one large specimen is in the centre west. All are being incorporated within the proposed scheme and work cannot take place beneath them.

7.2 Character of Surviving Remains

It seems likely that large parts of the site have received enough modern disturbance to destroy archaeological remains, if any were present. This should not be over-emphasised, however, as urban archaeology constantly reveals important deposits surviving beneath massive recent construction. This is particularly relevant when the remains are substantial in the first place and, if there were in fact any Danish or medieval defences on this site, remodelling existing topography, then these may survive modern landscaping. Roman and medieval occupation or cemetery deposits can be more ephemeral, but both may survive here, especially on the higher and eastern parts of the site. The lower, brook-side, areas will have survived fairly intact in the centre and east of the site, but have been severely altered in the modern period at the western end. Nonetheless, such areas may have had a prime role in economic activity in the pre-Conquest town, even if this was less important once the Castle was built. These areas look like they may be waterlogged, although it is possible that there has been huge variation in the shape of actual riverbank and the land now present might be a product of more recent dumping or dredging. Thus this zone could be of no archaeological significance, equally it could be very important if waterlogged Saxon waterside installations survive.

Any evaluation trenching scheme should aim to sample all zones present on the site. The low-lying brook-side, the eastern end close to the Castle (outside of tree-cover), the higher terraces and the western end close to the track that leads to the crossing point over the Brook. Trenching should be substantial enough to remove modern landscaping of the terrace edge, so that any earlier defensive works that also utilised the natural topography can be recognised. Trenches should therefore be widened and stepped if necessary.

8 Bibliography and Sources

Dickinson, P. 1972. *Survey of Huntingdon 1572*. Borough Council of Huntingdon and Godmanchester and Huntingdonshire Local History Society.

Green, H.J.M. 1977. *Godmanchester*. Cambridge. Oleander Press.

Ladds, S.I. 1937. The Borough of Huntingdon and Domesday Book. *Trans. Cambs. Hunts. Arch. Soc.* 5, 105-113.

Page, W., G. Proby & S.I. Ladds. 1932. *The Victoria County History of the County of Huntingdon. Volume II*. London. University of London Inst. of Historical Research.

Spoerry, P. forthcoming a. The Topography of Anglo-Saxon Huntingdon, *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*

Spoerry, P. forthcoming b. The Topography of Medieval Huntingdon, *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*

Sources/Resources

Inskipp Ladds Archive

Norris Museum, St Ives

Huntingdon Research Archive

AFU

P. Dickinson Manuscripts

HRO 2029

The relevant parts of the key cartographic sources are all provided here as Figures 4-11, with reference numbers recorded with the Figures where appropriate.



11

Figure 2 The proposed development

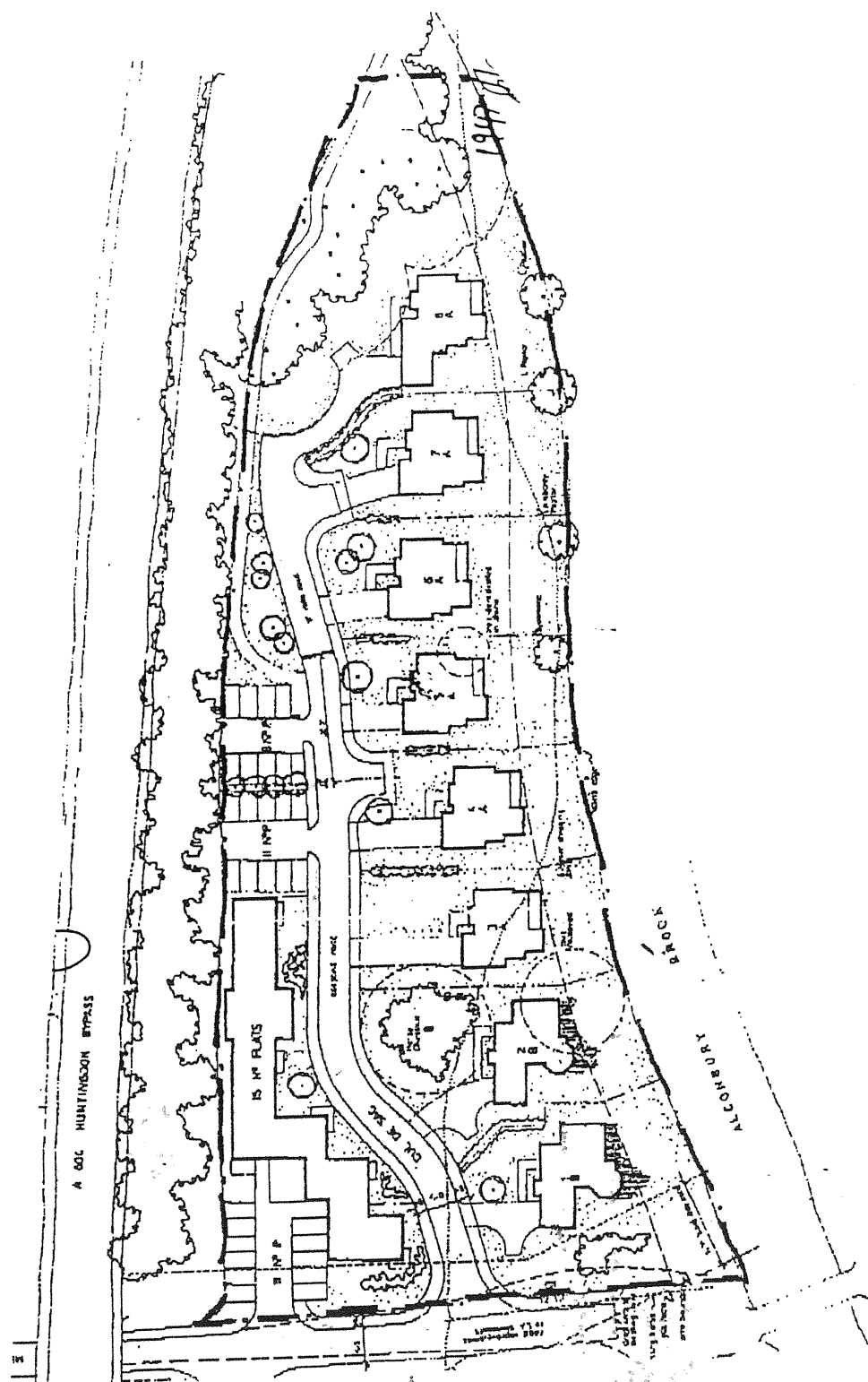


FIGURE 3 - MISSING FROM CAMERA-READY COPY

Figure 4 John Speed's Map of Huntingdon, 1610 (as re-printed by CCC)

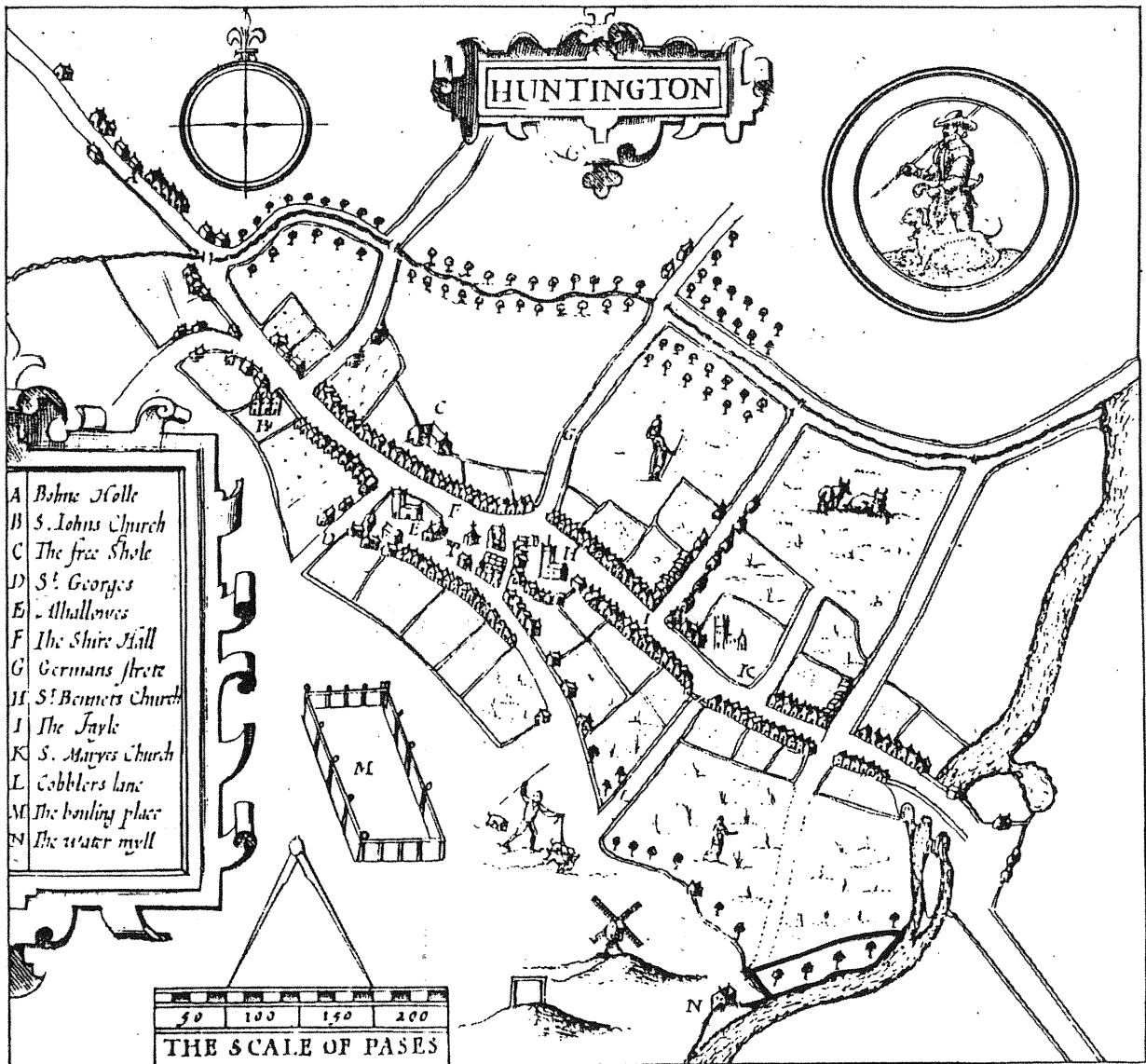


Figure 5 *A plan of the hospital lands lying in and about ye town of Huntingdon, 1752 (HRO SM1171, as re-drawn in Dickinson 1972)*

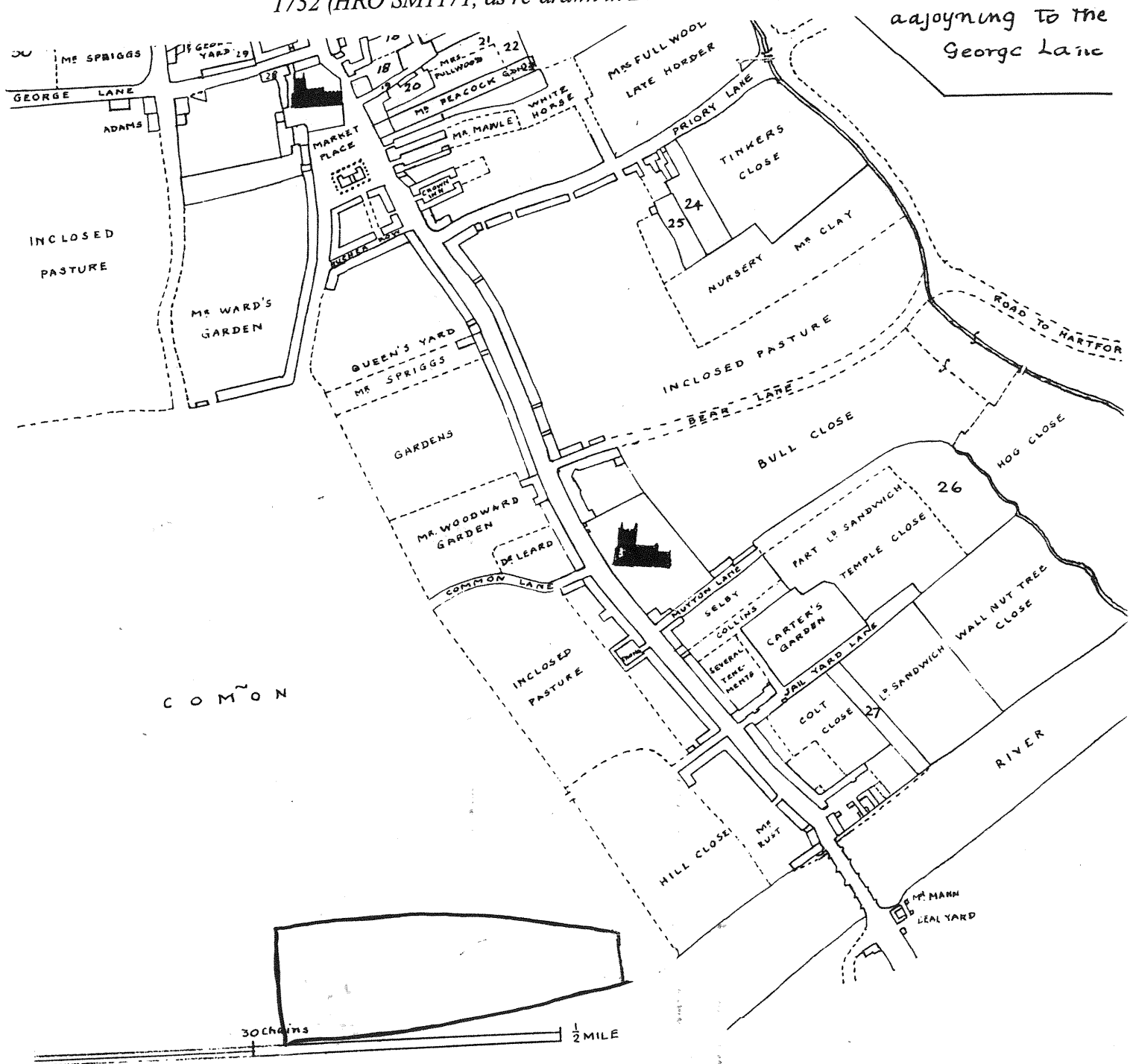
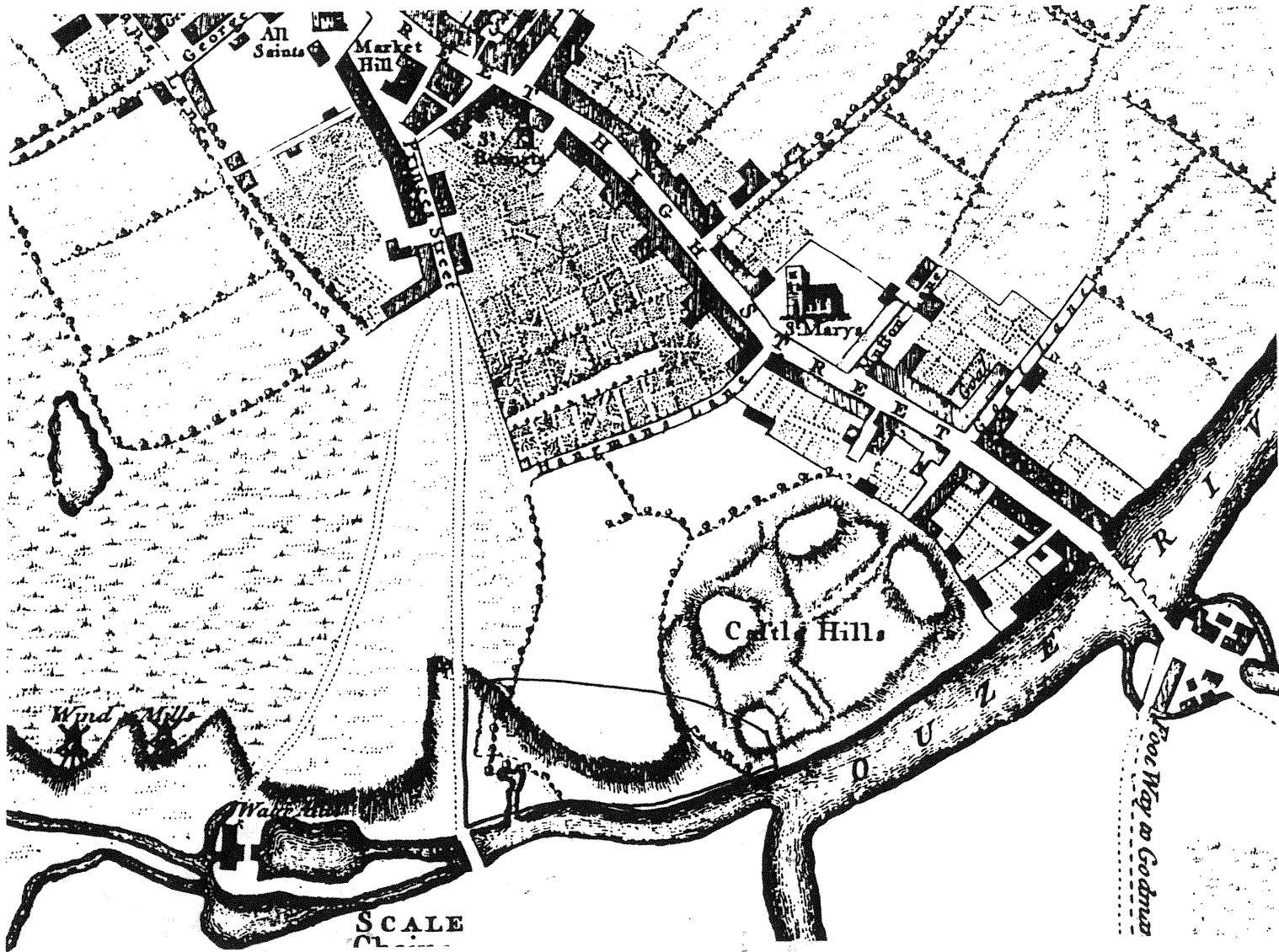


Figure 6 Thomas Jeffery's Map of Huntingdon, 1768 (as re-printed by CCC)



Huntingdon St Mary tithe apportionment and plan, 1850 (HRO 2196/27/1)

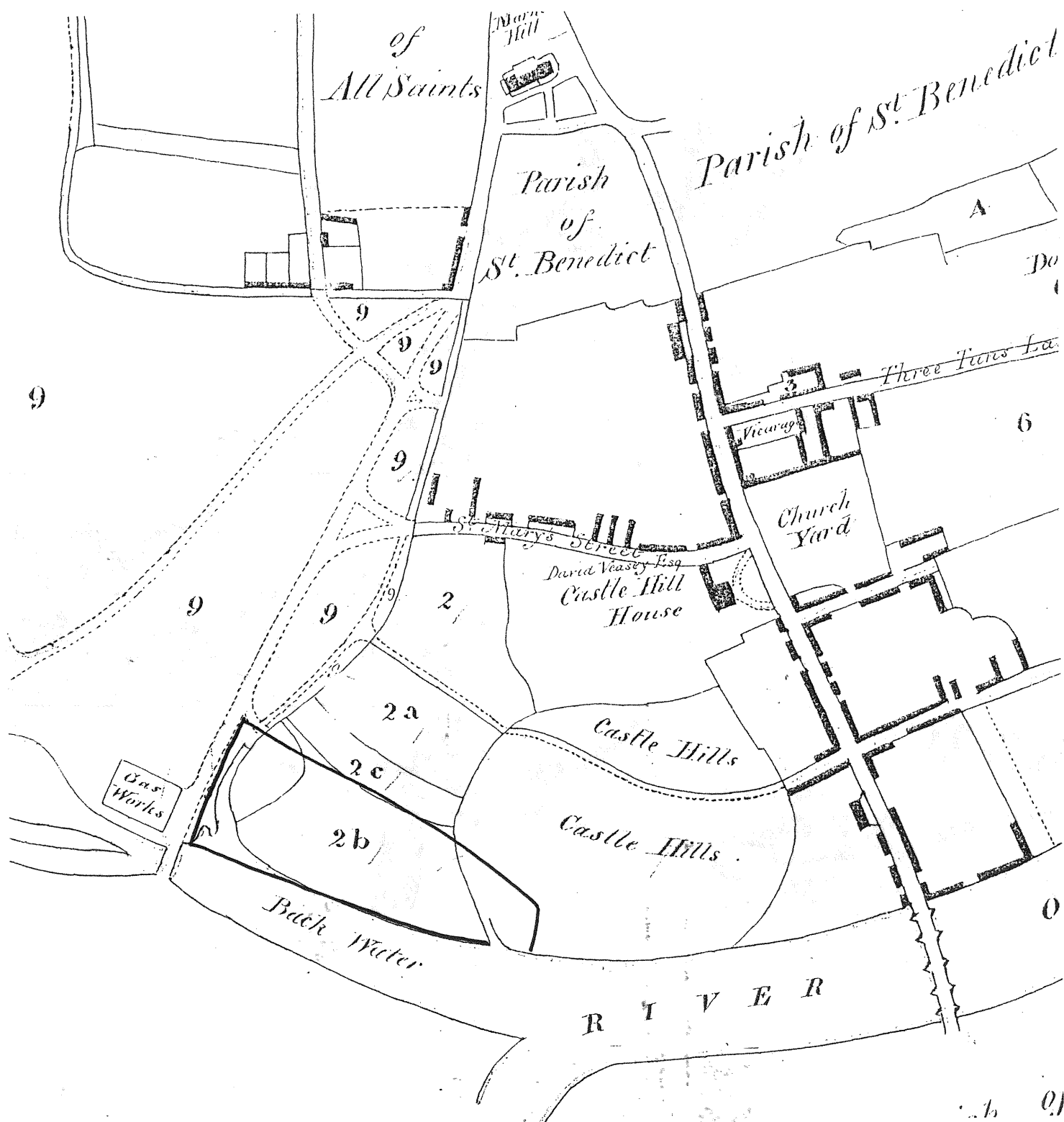


Figure 8

Huntingdon Gas Works Map, 1863 (HRO Map 76)

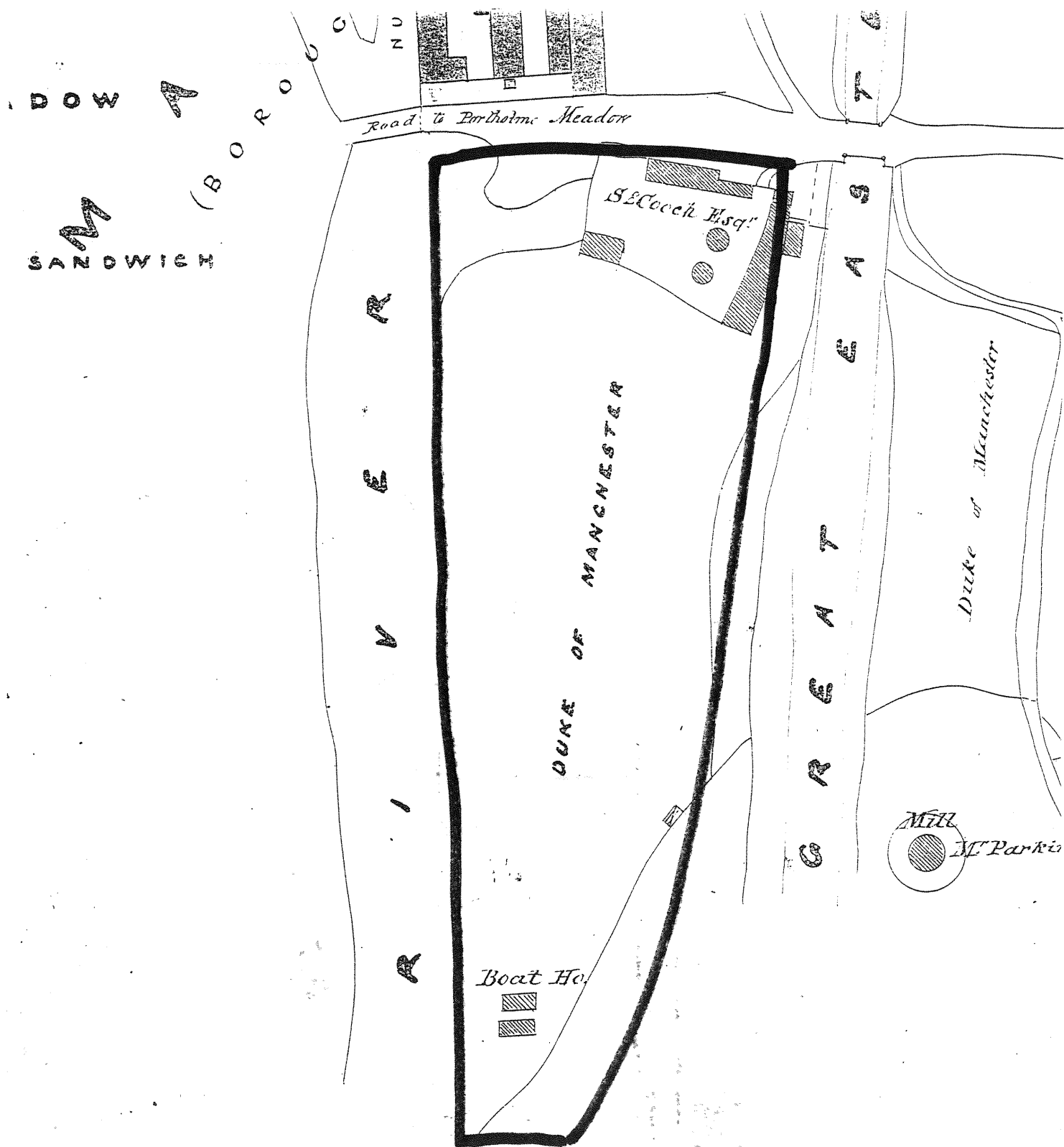


Figure 9 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2500 Map, 1895; Sheet Hunts XVIII. 13

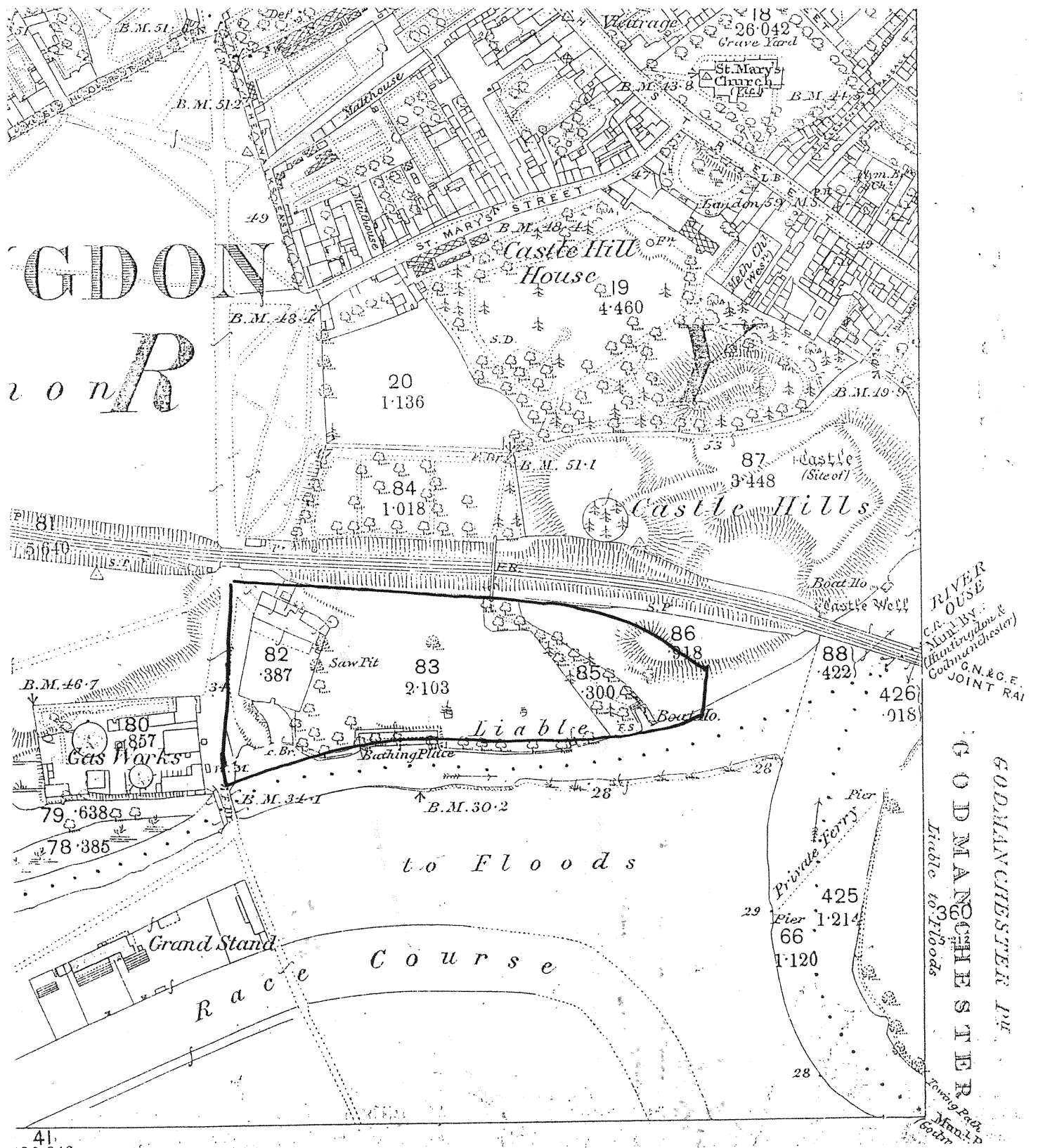


Figure 10 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 1:2500 Map, 1926; Sheet Hunts XVIII.

13

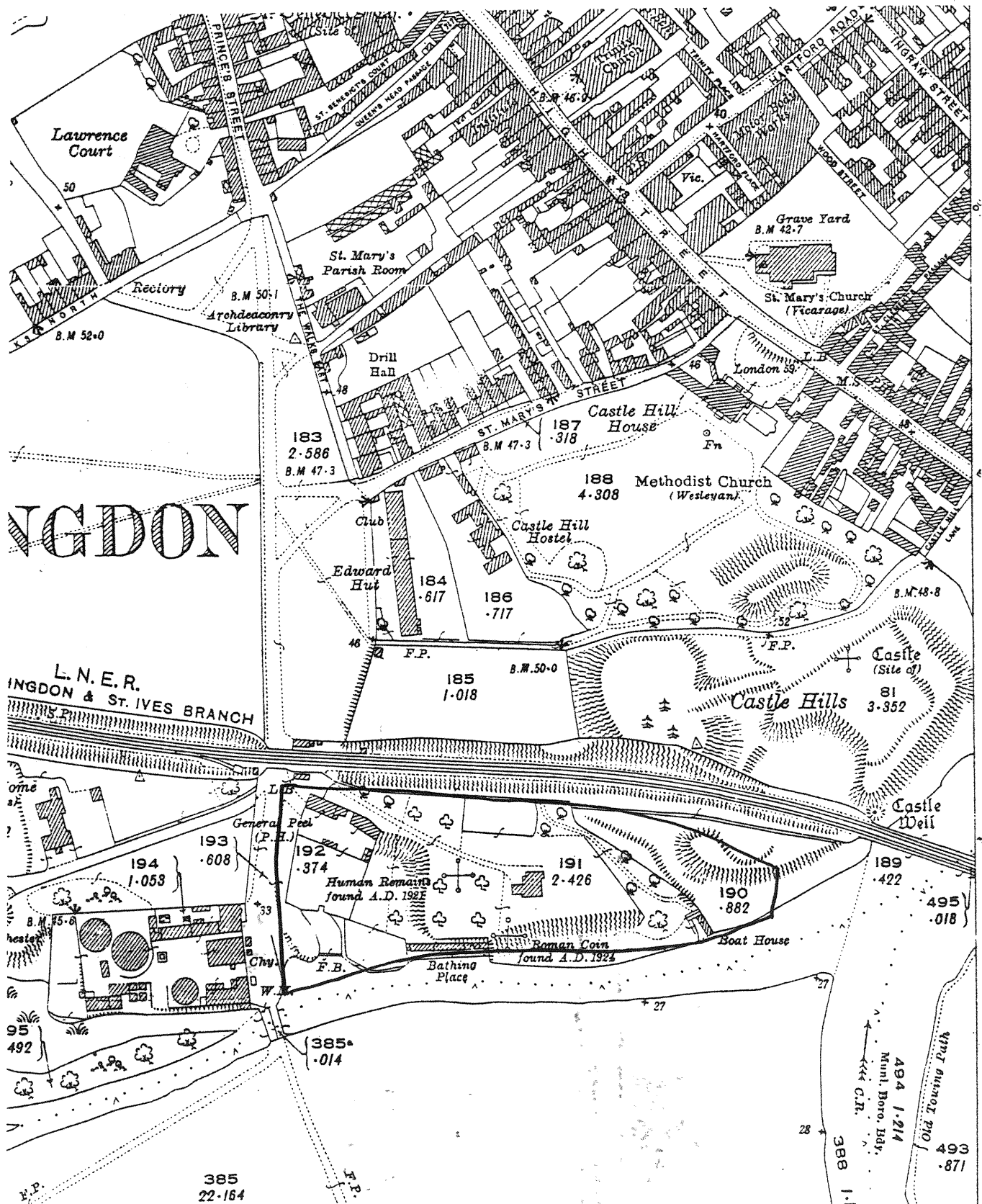


Figure 11 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Map, 1983; Sheet Hunts XVIII. 13

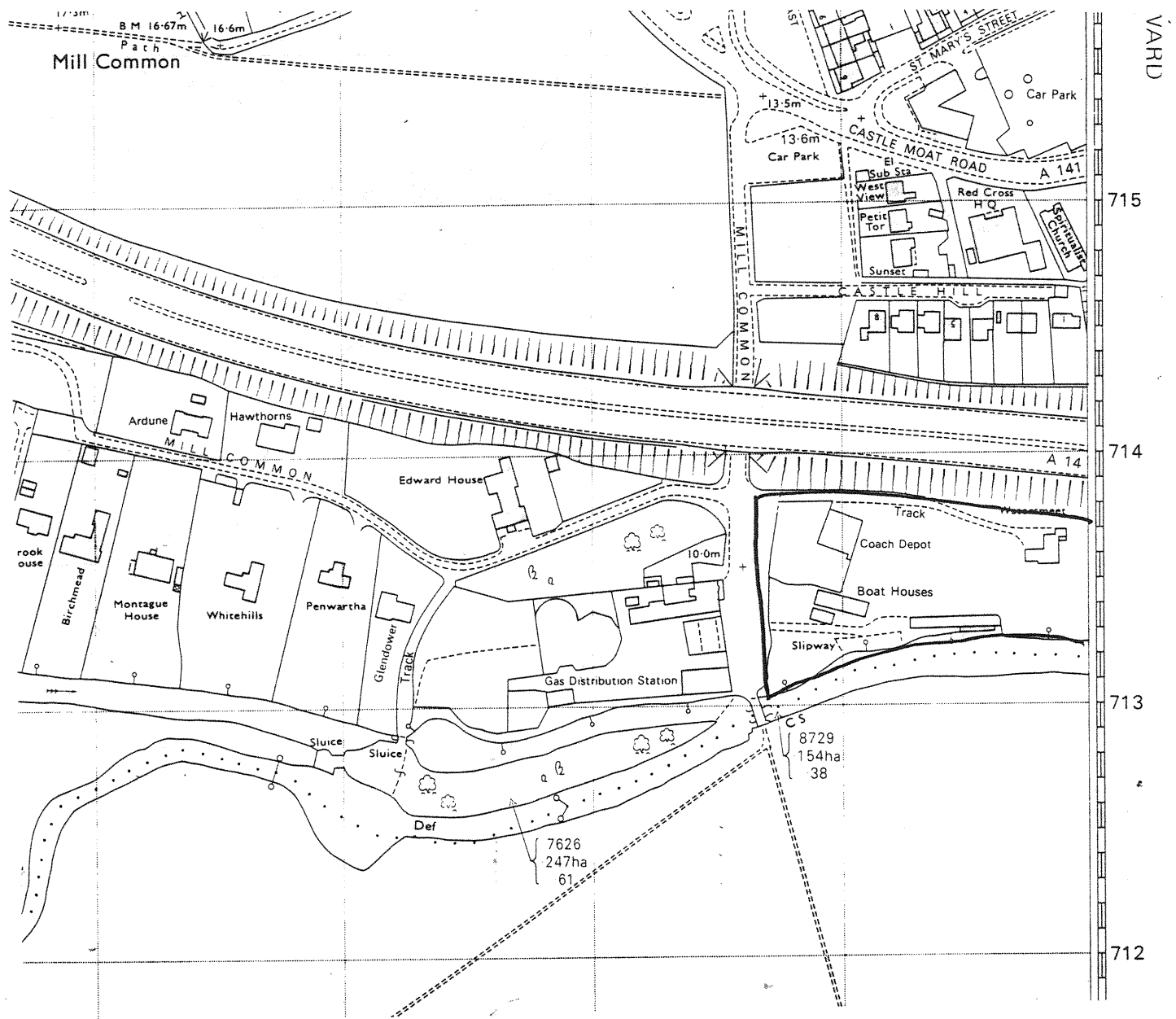


Figure 12 *The areas of potential damage from modern (19th-20th century) construction*

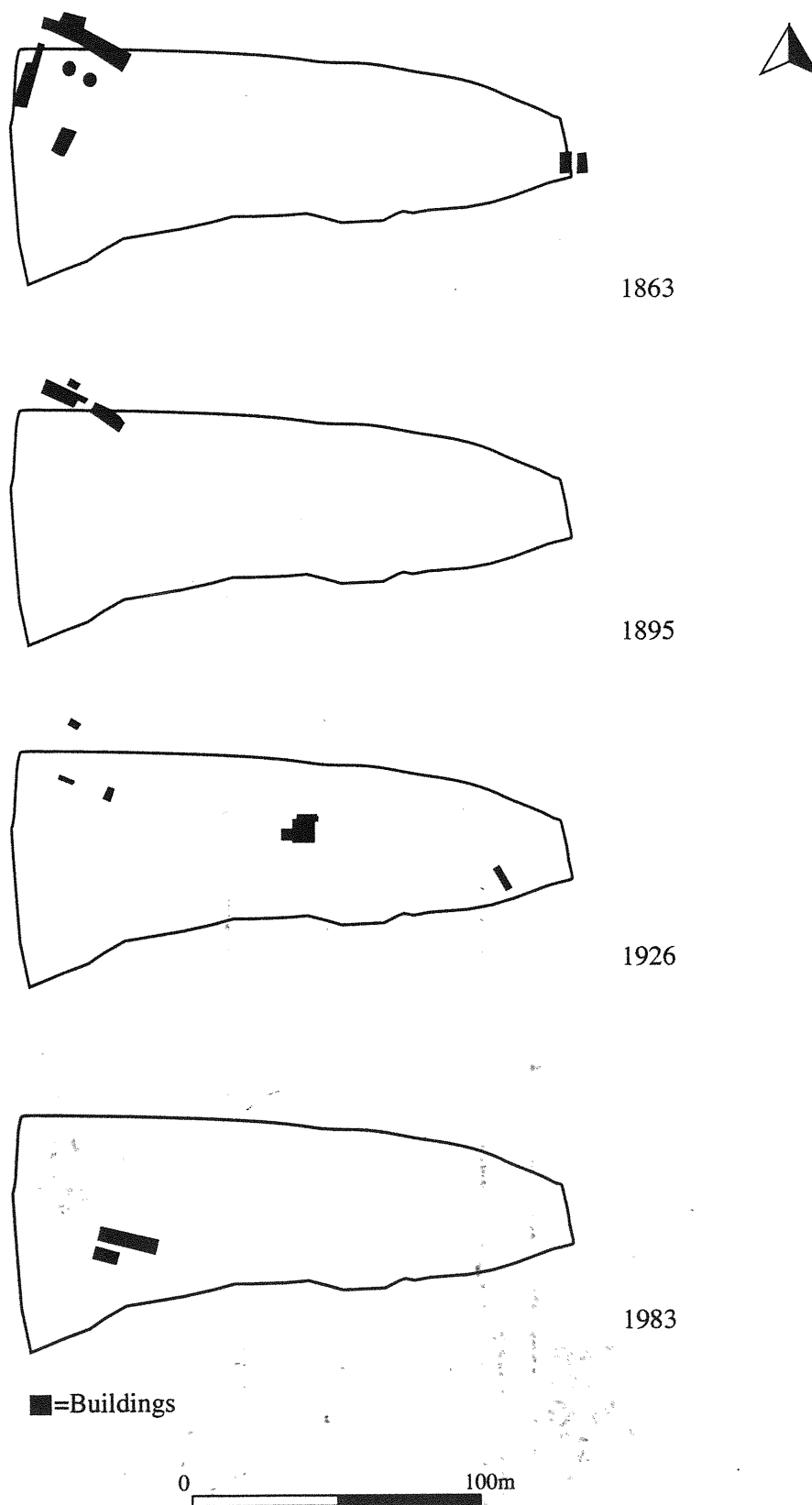


FIGURE B- MISSING FROM CAMERA-READY COPY

Appendix A

extract from 1572 Survey for the area around the castle (Dickinson 1972).

- 266 *ITEM* 2 lands in the tenure of Keech.
267 *ITEM* 2 lands conteyning one acre in the tenure of Joan Ventris.
268 *ITEM* One close called Fryers Close lying on the south side of the lane wherein the towne hath Comon from Lammas to Candlemas.
269 *ITEM* One peece of arrable land in the tenure of ye Qucene conteyning 4 acres in the tenure of Tho: Harris lying on Ambry Hill.
270 *ITEM* 3 acres of ground 6 lands in the tenure of Wm Wallis Ambry Hill Oliver Kings.
271 *ITEM* next y^t one acre of ground the towne land called Spittle Lands.
272 *ITEM* next y^t one acre of land next unto the Fryers Close in the tenure of Ashton.
273 *ITEM* All Ambry Hill or Smore Hill, Comons after cropp.
274 *ITEM* on Ambry Hill one peece of arrable land conteyning 4 acres next into the Comon balke.
275 *ITEM* A Comon balke at ye west end.
276 *ITEM* One Close adjoyning unto Ambry Hill in the tenure of Mrs. Ventris.
277 *ITEM* next y^t a little close & 5 leas belonging to St. Johns wch the Towne hath Comon in.
278 *ITEM* Betweene the 4 acres of the Queens & 5 leas a Comon balke conteyning in breadth 4 yards.
279 *ITEM* Betweene the Pryory Lane & Ambry Hill all the ground be S^r Henry Cromwell.
280 *ITEM* one Close abutting upon the Pryory Lane in the tenure of the Queene & now in the tenure of Richard Abbott.
281 *ITEM* next y^t one tenem^t of Bernard Cowpers called Eridge.

The West Side of the Town

- 282 *ITEM* The Castle Hills being the Queens in the right of the Honor of Huntingdon conteyning by estimat^{on} 5 acres now in the tenure of Wiseman.
283 *ITEM* Next the same a Close called Castle Lands; Comons to ye towne from Our Lady Day in harvest unto our Lady Day in Lent.
284 *ITEM* In the wch close Tho: Wiseman hath a p^cell of freehold on the westside conteyning by estimat^{on} 2 acres & of the westside next the Castle Hills a p^cell of ground of ye Honour of Huntingdon conteyning by estimat^{on} one acre & half.

- 285 *ITEM* At the south end of the same close is also the Castle lands conteyning by estimatōn one acre & half p'cell of the honour of Huntingdon and meane betweene is there a Common balke belonging to the Burgesses of Hunt' in breadth 12 foot in the east end & in the west end in breadth 24 foot & leadeth into ye Great Commons by the little close after mentioned. In the same close all the valley by the waterside belongs to the towne of Huntingdon.
- 286 *ITEM* next the same at the west end of the balke aforesaid is a little close in the tenure of Wiseman: Jo Hopkins.
- 287 *ITEM* in the same Close a little balke deviding the Freehold of Wiseman & the Castle lands being of breadth 6 foot.
- 288 *ITEM* next a peece of ground called the great Commons lying of the west side of ye towne conteyning by estimatōn acres.
- 289 *ITEM* next y^t on the southside one close called Paradise in the tenure of Walter Harwood.
- 290 *ITEM* Adjoyning to the same Commons one windmill & 2 watermills belonging to the towne.
- 291 *ITEM* next adjoyning to y^t one close called the Mill close being purchased ground belonging to the towne.
- 292 *ITEM* next y^t one lea belonging to the towne being wthin the bounds of Brampton.
- 293 *ITEM* on the north side of the Commons a peece of Ground called the Saffron Yard in the tenure of Sergeant Meade.
- 294 *ITEM* next y^t a Common lane compassing the s^d Saffron Yard upon the north and abutting to ye great Commons.
- 295 *ITEM* next y^t west one loft wth a close in the tenure of Joan Ventris.
- 296 *ITEM* next y^t one close in the tenure of Joan Ventris.
- 297 *ITEM* next y^t a close called Fardall abutting on the north side of the said great Commons wherein the Inhabitants of Hunt: have comon from Our Lady Day (8 Sept^r) in harvest unto the first day of March.
- 298 *ITEM* next y^t west a Common lane called Bardike.
- 299 *ITEM* next adjoyning to y^t a close called Bardike close in the tenure of Mr. Drewell wherein we have Comon from Lammas untill Candlemas.
- 300 *ITEM* next to y^t a Common lane from the great Commons to a peece of ground called the Gravell pitts.
- 301 *ITEM* next to y^t one peece of ground being common to the towne called the Gravell pitts extending from the George Lane and unto a bridge called Nunns bridge lying on the west side of the towne.
- 302 *ITEM* next y^t south one close called the Vine close in the tenure of Sir Henry Cromwell.
- 303 *ITEM* Next y^t 3 lands conteyning one acre belonging to St. Johns.



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Education, Libraries
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