

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**Archaeological Salvage Recording
at
41-43, High Street, Wednesfield,
West Midlands**

1999

(SMR 10585)

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 556
January 1999

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1.0 Summary

Archaeological salvage recording was carried out at 41-43, High Street, Wednesfield, (SMR 10585) during preliminary trial-pitting and, following the demolition of existing structures and removal of an oversite slab, subsequent removal of overburden from the site. Documentary and place-name evidence suggests that Wednesfield dates back to the 10th century, when the area lay within a major royal estate. Topographic analysis has also suggested that a number of the modern-day property plots may reflect the medieval topography of the settlement which was unaffected by the much later construction of the Wyrley and Essington canal. Below-ground archaeological investigation within Wednesfield has identified deep deposits of clinker and industrial waste (SMR 6293 and 8872). These deposits, along with the imported topsoil identified by this project, may potentially, seal earlier deposits and features.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of archaeological salvage recording carried out prior to and during the redevelopment of 41-43, High Street, Wednesfield, West Midlands (NGR SO941900; planning application 83/98). The site was located within a designated conservation area and zone of archaeological importance. This work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of the sponsor, P.R. Silverwood, during groundworks.

The salvage recording was carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (White 1998), and a specification prepared by BUFAU (Mould 1998). The project was carried out in accordance with guidelines set down in *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994), and conformed to requirements set down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991).

3.0 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site, which lies within Wednesfield Town Centre, is defined to the north by the Wyrley and Essington Canal, to the south by High Street, to the east by a boundary with the former Royal Tiger public house and to the west by a property boundary with No. 39, High Street. It was formerly used as a shop unit and bakery.

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological salvage recording were to monitor all below-ground works and to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological deposits or features affected by the re-development works.

5.0 Method

The objectives were achieved through two site visits during contractors' groundworks, one during preliminary trial-pitting and one during the removal of overburden from the site which followed on from the demolition of existing structures and removal of an oversite slab. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeological deposits or features were present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. A copy of the paper and photographic archive will be deposited with the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record.

6.0 Archaeological Results (Figure 2)

Trial-Pit 1 (1.25m x 0.60m, excavated to a depth of 1m)

This trial-pit was located in the back-plot area of No. 41, High Street, adjacent to an existing machine-brick boundary wall (F100). A mixed, charcoal-flecked, red-brown sand-clay deposit, containing brick and slate fragments (1002) was partially sealed by a 0.85m thick layer of dark-brown, charcoal-flecked, sandy-loam (1001) and partially by the concrete foundation (1000) for the machine-brick and slate wall (F100).

No archaeological deposits or artefacts were identified.

Trial-Pit 2 (1.60m x 0.80m, excavated to a depth of 1.80m)

Located within the yard of No. 43, High Street, this trial-pit was excavated against the machine-brick wall of the adjacent property (F200). A cellar, with a partially-surviving vaulted roof, was recorded (F201). The cellar had been infilled with building debris, including former roof beams (2000). The floor of the cellar was not contacted.

No archaeological deposits or artefacts were identified.

Trial-Pit 3 (0.95m x 0.60m, excavated to a depth of 1.25m)

Trial-Pit 3 was located to the rear of No. 41, High Street, adjacent to a clamped-brick boundary wall (F300). A levelling deposit of clean, red-brown sand (3004) was overlaid by a dark brown, charcoal-flecked, loam layer which contained fragments of

brick (3003). This was sealed by an asphalt yard surface (F301) which was bounded by the clamped brick wall (F300).

No archaeological deposits or artefacts were identified.

Section 1

The removal of overburden revealed a running section through the site. This east-facing section was 0.50m deep at the High Street frontage, increasing to a depth of 1.50m adjacent to the canal. Deposits of clinker, sand and industrial waste were overlaid by a deep build-up of topsoil. The subsoil horizon was not contacted. As the associated service trenches and wall foundation trenches were not to exceed the observed depth of 1.50m, no further monitoring visits were made.

8.0 Discussion

No artefacts or deposits dating to the medieval period, or to any earlier activity, were recorded.

Cellaring in Trial-Pit 2 indicates the location of an earlier structure, which corresponds with one shown on the Ordnance Survey First Edition map, dated 1890 (Figure 3). The structure fronts onto High Street. Deep deposits of clinker and industrial waste, corresponding with deposits recorded by the two earlier archaeological investigations in Wednesfield (SMR 6293 and 8872), were also identified. The clinker deposits were sealed towards the canal-side by a thick layer of topsoil. This may represent the upcast soil produced during the canal construction. The canal itself is at a lower level than the ground level within the back-plots of Numbers 41 and 43, High Street. The deep build-up of waste deposits suggests that they represent industrial activity associated with the advent of canal transportation and the expansion of the Black Country industry as a whole. It is possible that earlier deposits may have been sealed and effectively protected beneath the industrial waste, clinker and imported topsoil.

11.0 References

- Mould, C.A. 1995 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at the Former Royal Tiger Public House, Wednesfield, West Midlands*. BUFAU Report No. 382.
- Mould, C.A. 1998 *41-43, High Street, Wednesfield, West Midlands*. SMR 10585. *Specification for Salvage Recording*.
- White, H. 1998 *Brief for Archaeological Salvage Recording at 41-43, High Street, Wednesfield, West Midlands*. SMR 10585

12.0 Acknowledgements

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41 - 43, High Street, Wednesfield 1999

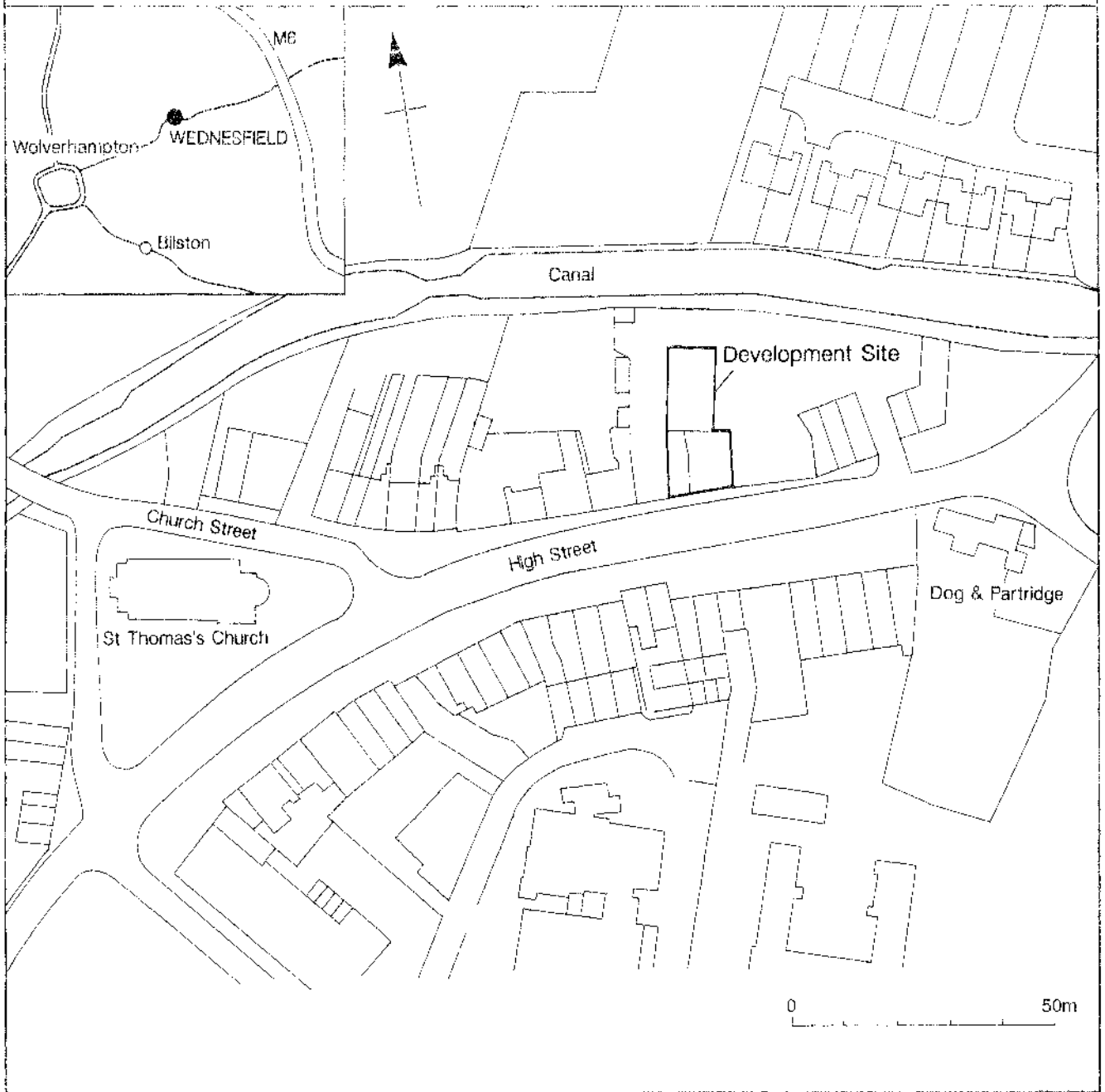


Fig. 1

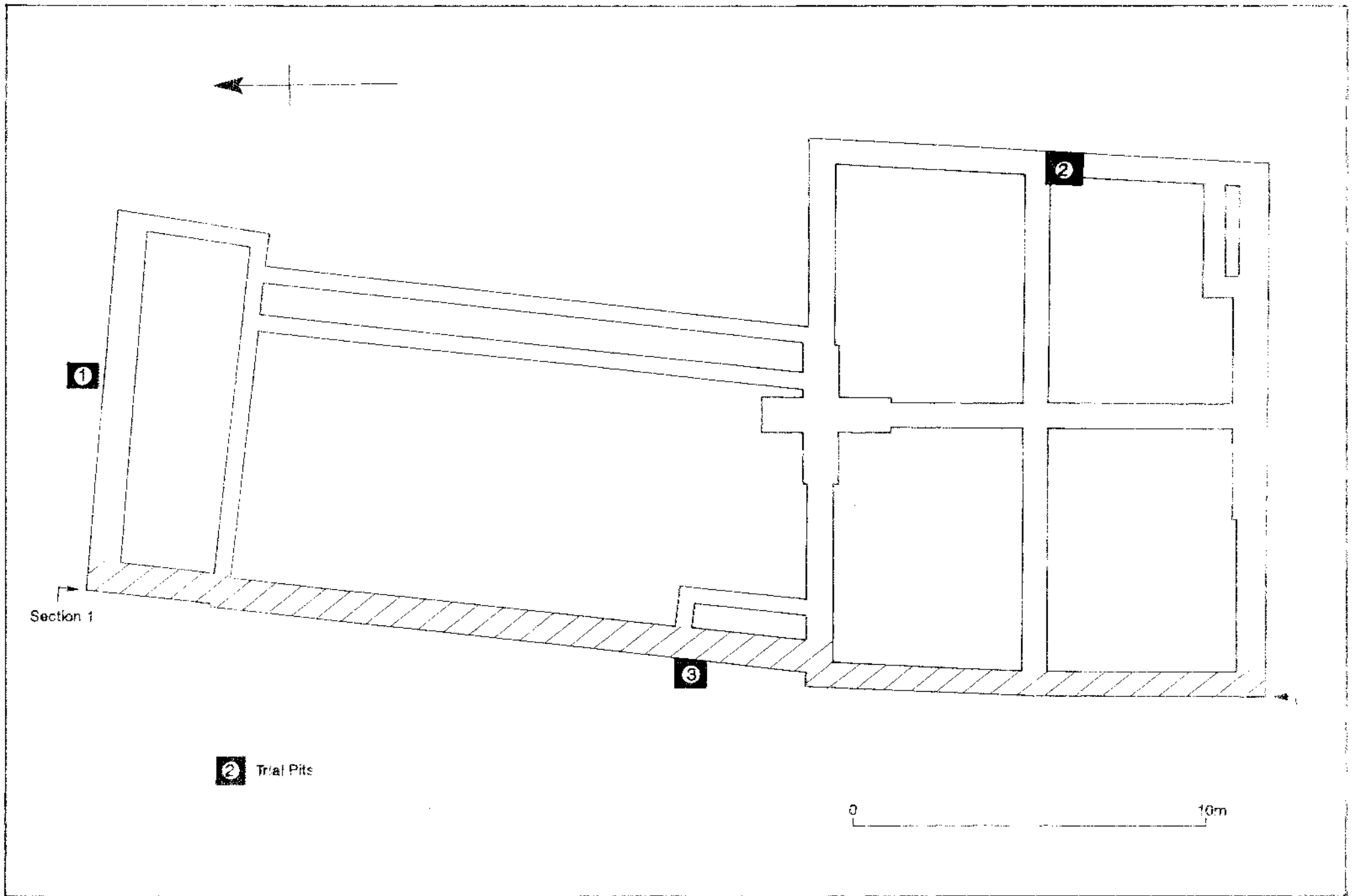


Fig. 2

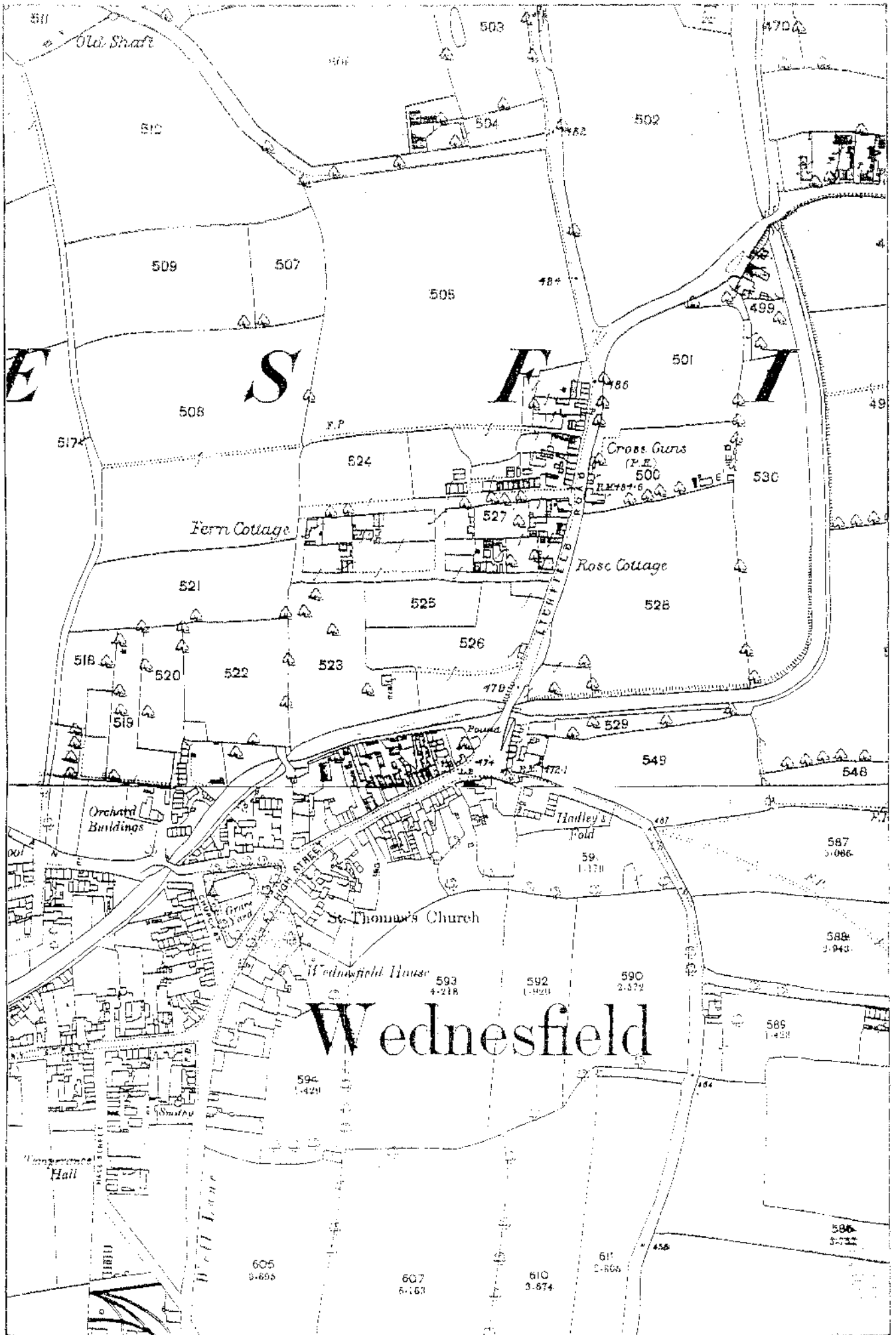


Fig. 3 OS 1st edition map (1890)