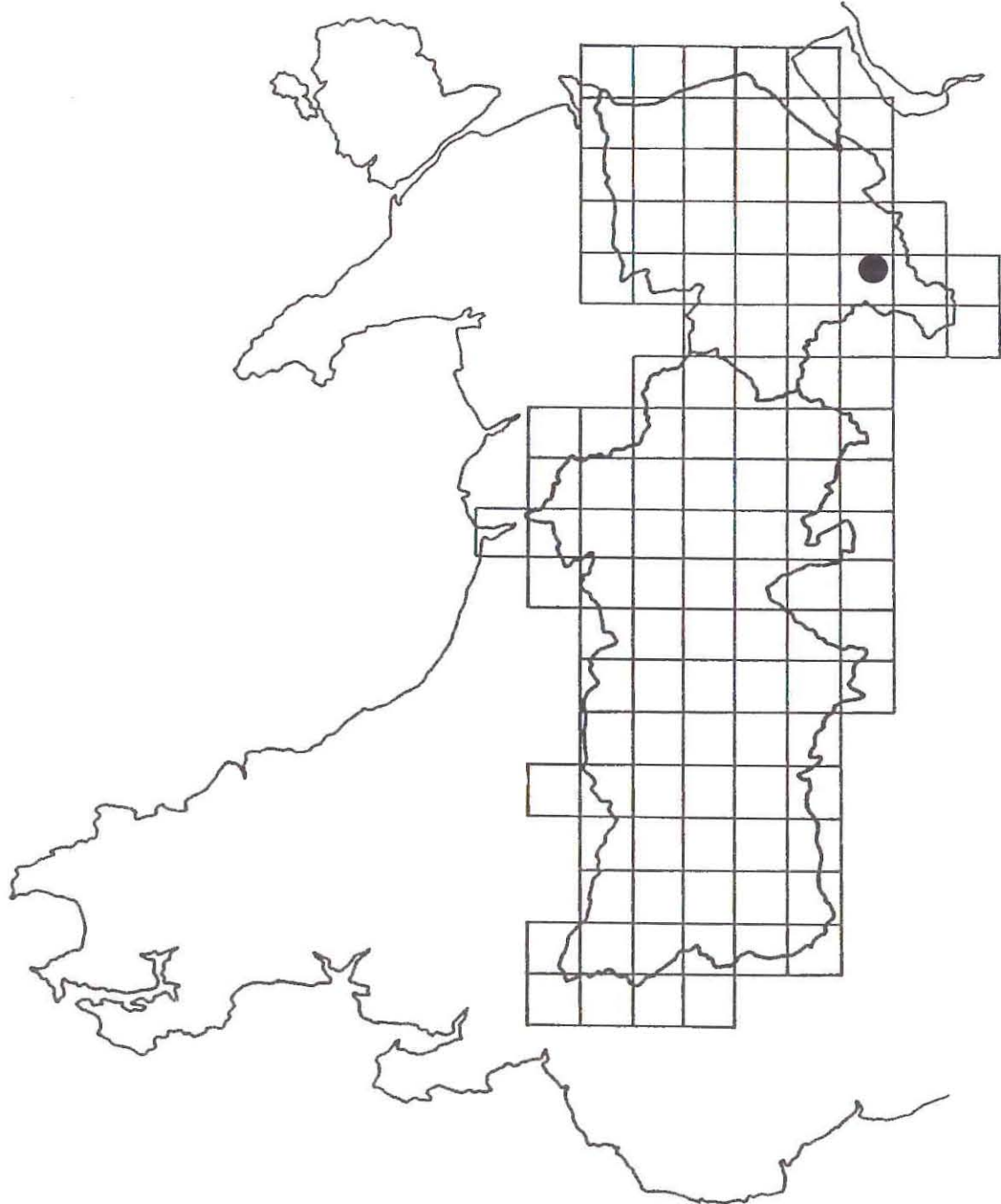


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

*Land at Abenbury Brickworks  
Wrexham, Clwyd*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



CPAT Report No 123

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

by W G Owen

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Report prepared for Gordon Mytton Developments Ltd

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## **1 Introduction**

1.1 In December 1994, the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust Contracting (CPAT) was invited by the Parry Davies Partnership, Chartered Architects of 4 Bridge Street, Denbigh, Clwyd, acting on behalf of their client, Gordon Mytton Developments Ltd, to tender for a desk-based archaeological assessment and field survey of an area immediately to the south-east of Wrexham, Clwyd. This area is referred to as Abenbury Brickworks (centred at NGR 349 493).

1.2 The basis for the assessment and field survey was determined by a specification prepared by the Clwyd Archaeology Service, a part of Clwyd County Council, for Gordon Mytton Developments Ltd, who had applied for planning permission from Wrexham Maelor Borough Council for a mixed residential and commercial development on the site (Planning Application Number 6/22833).

1.3 CPAT Contracting was subsequently commissioned by the Parry Davies Partnership to carry out the assessment. This was done in the early part of January 1995 and this report was prepared immediately afterwards.

## **2 Archaeological Requirement**

2.1 The aim of the evaluation was to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological features within the application area (see also Appendix 1). The evaluation report would then allow the Local Planning Authority to make a reasonable and informed decision regarding the subsequent conservation of the resource or the need for additional archaeological work.

2.2 In addition a context for any archaeological features located within the proposed development area was to be provided by examining the immediate environs of the application area, the primary emphasis being on post-medieval industrial activity.

## **3 Location and Description (Fig 1)**

3.1 The application area, which lies immediately to the south-east of Wrexham, is at its closest point about 120m north-east of the confluence of the Rivers Gwenfro and Clywedog and lies at a height of approximately 60m OD. It comprises two irregular shaped plots of derelict land to the north and south of Abenbury Road.

3.2 The northern site which covers an area of about 6.5ha is bounded to the north and west by the Gwenfro river, the ground sloping, sometimes steeply, from the main, flat former brickworks site towards the river. Centrally within this area is a large dump of tarmacadam, to the east of which is a rectangular, building foundation of concrete aligned north/south and covering an area of around 7500 square metres. To the east the area is edged by residential development.

3.3 The southern site is approximately 3.2ha in extent and is bounded on the southern side by the line of the former Wrexham and Ellesmere railway which overlooks the northern slopes of the Clywedog river. To the east of the area is a clay and brick bank approximately 4m high. The site is almost



flat with numerous, haphazardly placed dumps of rubble and there is a large pit in the north-eastern corner.

3.4 Soils in the vicinity are deep and well-drained sandy loams of the Newport 1 Association derived from glaciofluvial drift (Rudeforth et al 1984).

#### **4 Method**

4.1 The desk-top research comprised a search of all easily accessible primary and secondary records relating to the site and its immediate environs. These included consultation of the Clwyd County Sites and Monuments Record and the National Monuments Record, the examination of available cartographic and documentary sources lodged at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, the Clwyd Record Office in Ruthin and the Public Library in Wrexham. A search was also made of vertical and oblique aerial photography held by Clwyd County Council in Mold and by the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Aberystwyth.

4.2 The field survey was carried out by walking the area systematically and recording any features of archaeological interest that were observed.

#### **5 The Desk-top Assessment: the Development Area and its Environs**

5.1 The earliest map to include the proposed development site, was the Tithe Apportionment Map of 1838 (Fig 2). This shows that it occupies an area which was then immediately adjacent to the boundary of the former medieval township of Abenbury Fechan with Wrexham Regis to the east and Marchweil to the south.

5.2 The Apportionment indicates that land to the north of the road was subdivided into small arable fields. The exception were three plots (70, 71 and 77) occupied by houses with gardens.

5.3 To the south of the road, most of the land consisted of pasture fields. It may be noted that these were owned at that time by Thomas FitzHugh of Plas Power near Bersham (SJ 298 499) who also owned Abenbury Forge (83) located on the north bank of the Clywedog to the south-east of the area

5.4 In 1892, Thomas Lloyd Fitzhugh leased land, the subject of the current development proposal, to Llewelyn and Howell Davies upon which the Abenbury Brickworks was established south of the road. The King's Mill Brickworks on the land to the north of the Abenbury Road had been constructed ten years previously (Edwards 1987). Both works exploited the red marls of the Erbistock beds which are exposed on the slopes of the Gwenfro and Clywedog valleys (Edwards 1987). Production concentrated on the manufacture of rustic and plain Terra Cotta bricks, ornamental ridge tiles, finials and chimney pots fired in round or beehive kilns (Figs 3-6). At both sites, aerial photographs show that these kilns were still standing in 1985 (Fig 7); those at the King's Mill works were reported to have been demolished by 1987 (Edwards 1987).

5.5 In 1964, the Abenbury works, then owned by Thomas Marshall, and the King's Mill site, owned by Moler Products Ltd were amalgamated to become known as Thomas Marshall & Co. (Loxley) Ltd. A third works, housing a long tunnel kiln for the production of insulation bricks, was then built on the



disused clay pit area on the King's Mill site and linked to the Abenbury works by a conveyor belt over the road (Fig 7). This was still in place in 1987 (Edwards 1987), but, by that time, the production of insulation bricks had declined and both sites were abandoned and subsequently demolished.

5.6 The commencement of production at the Abenbury brickworks in 1895 coincided with the opening of the Wrexham and Ellesmere Railway in the same year. Although the Parliamentary Bill for its opening received Royal Assent in 1885 with the intention for it to open in 1891 this event was delayed. Photographs show that the Abenbury viaduct over the Clywedog to the east was still under construction in 1891 (CRO Photo Acc.No. PPD179) but was completed by 1895 (CRO Photo Acc.No. PPD179).

5.7 For its entire length of 12.75 miles, it was a single-track railway. Sidings at a number of places included those leading to the Abenbury works (Fig 5) where a major function of the railway was the transport of clay to the works (Bodlander 1992).

5.8 From its outset, the Wrexham and Ellesmere Railway was worked under agreement with the Cambrian Railway (Bodlander 1992) until its incorporation into the Great Western Railway in 1962 (Carter 1959). In that year, the railway was closed to passengers but remained open to freight between Wrexham and the Cadbury's Creamery siding near Pickhill (SJ 385 466) until 1973. The line was then cut back to the Abenbury sidings. In 1982, the last surviving part of the railway, the section between Wrexham Central station and Abenbury was closed (Bodlander 1992).

5.9 The railway was carried over the Gwenfro and Clywedog valleys by two viaducts (SJ 3476 4930 and SJ 3554 4885 respectively) and over the Abenbury Road by a single-span bridge. The stone piers of the viaducts survive and the bridge abutments of the dismantled bridge are still visible, constituting the only visible remains of the railway in this area.

5.10 The earlier industrial history of the area shows a close association with the Clywedog river. The Hafod y Wern Wire Mill dating to 1800 is said to have been located on the western side of the Gwenfro (SJ 3475 4936; Dodd 1957; Palmer 1893) but no trace of it exists now.

5.11 Further downstream, at Llwyn-on (SJ 355 490), standing walls and building foundations probably represent the remains of another wire mill and its position is shown on early maps of the area (Figs 2-4). This location has also been assigned both to the Llwyn-on Paper Mill, owned by Edward Bozley in 1797, and the Llwyn-on Flour Mill although there is uncertainty about these attributions (Powell 1985). It seems possible, however, that as in the instance of Esless Mill, also owned by Bozley, an existing corn mill, was later converted to a paper mill. In support of this, it was noted in 1859 that a corn mill did exist at Llwyn-on (Jones 1859)

5.12 To the south-west of Llwyn-on Mills are the remains of Abenbury Forge (SJ 351 488) recorded to as having been built in 1726 (Turley 1978) but with possible references to its existence a century earlier in 1615 (Palmer 1903).

5.13 King's Mill Brickworks owes its name to the corn mill which was located close to the confluence of the Clywedog and Gwenfro rivers to the south-west (SJ 3470 4915). The earliest reference to a mill on the River Clywedog dates to 1332 (Pratt 1980), although there is mention of the presence of a water-mill in a survey of Wrexham in 1315 (Ellis 1924) and it has been proposed that this refers to the same establishment (Pratt 1980). It is generally assumed that this was King's Mill which remained a Crown



possession until 1769. The present building was erected during the second half of the 16th century and reconstructed by Philip Yorke of Erddig in 1769. The mill enjoyed a monopoly of corn-milling in Wrexham until 1854 when this monopoly, which had extended over a period of six centuries, was broken. Subsequently, small watermills suffered a general decline being superseded by larger mills powered by steam engines. In its latter years as a working mill, it relied mainly on the production of animal feedstuffs and it was finally closed in 1940. In 1973, it was acquired by Wrexham Borough Council who instituted a programme of restoration work.

5.14 Aerial photographs of the proposed development area give detail of the brickworks and its environs during the period 1974-1985 but no earlier photographs were available for consultation.

## **6 The Field Survey**

6.1 No features of archaeological significance were recorded within the proposed development area during the course of the field survey. In particular, no traces of the foundation of the former beehive kilns were seen and no structural features were noted within the area, other than the concrete base referred to in Section 3.2. The amount of dumping that has occurred on the site effectively obscures any upstanding features associated with the former brickworks.

6.2 The line of the former Wrexham and Ellesmere Railway is visible as a slight level terrace for most of its length along the boundary of the southern area. Beside it and running along the lip of the Clywedog Valley is an earthwork bank which is probably spoil derived from the construction of a level bed for the railway.

## **7 Conclusions**

7.1 A search of available documentary and cartographic sources relating to the general area yielded information relating to the general history of both brickworks and the Wrexham and Ellesmere railway.

7.2 An examination of available aerial photography gave detail of the brickworks and its environs between 1974 and 1985 but a field survey of the area did not locate any features of significance relating to this period.

7.3 The surrounding area is rich in the relics of past industry. Of particular relevance are the railway viaduct piers that remain standing to the west and south-east of the proposed development area and which bear a direct relationship to its early modern history.

## **8 Acknowledgements**

8.1 CPAT Contracting would like to thank the staff of the following organisations: the Clwyd Record Office, Ruthin; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; the Architects Technical Planning Library, Shire Hall, Mold; and the Wrexham Public Library. In addition thanks are tendered to Mr C. Rowsell of the Ministry of Defence Copyright Division for his permission to include Fig 7 in this report.

## 9 Sources

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### 9.2 Cartographic

Townships of Abenbury Fawr and Abenbury Fechan Tithe Map 1838 (AC/1255; National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth)

Ordnance Survey 1:10560 1st Edition 1878 Denbighshire Sheet XXVIII SE

Ordnance Survey 1:10560 2nd Edition 1900 Denbighshire Sheet XXVIII S

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 3rd Edition 1906 Denbighshire Sheet 28 SE

Ordnance Survey 1:10560 3rd Edition (revised 1954) Sheet SJ 34 NW

### 9.3 Vertical Aerial Photography

Meridian Airmaps Ltd (for Clwyd CC): No 38 74 012 (14-06-1974)

RAF: 81-096 001/002/003 (26-08-1981)

J.A. Storey & Partners (for Clwyd CC): No 18 85 111 (01-06-1985)

Geonex (for Countryside Council for Wales): No 111 92 106 (26-06-1992)



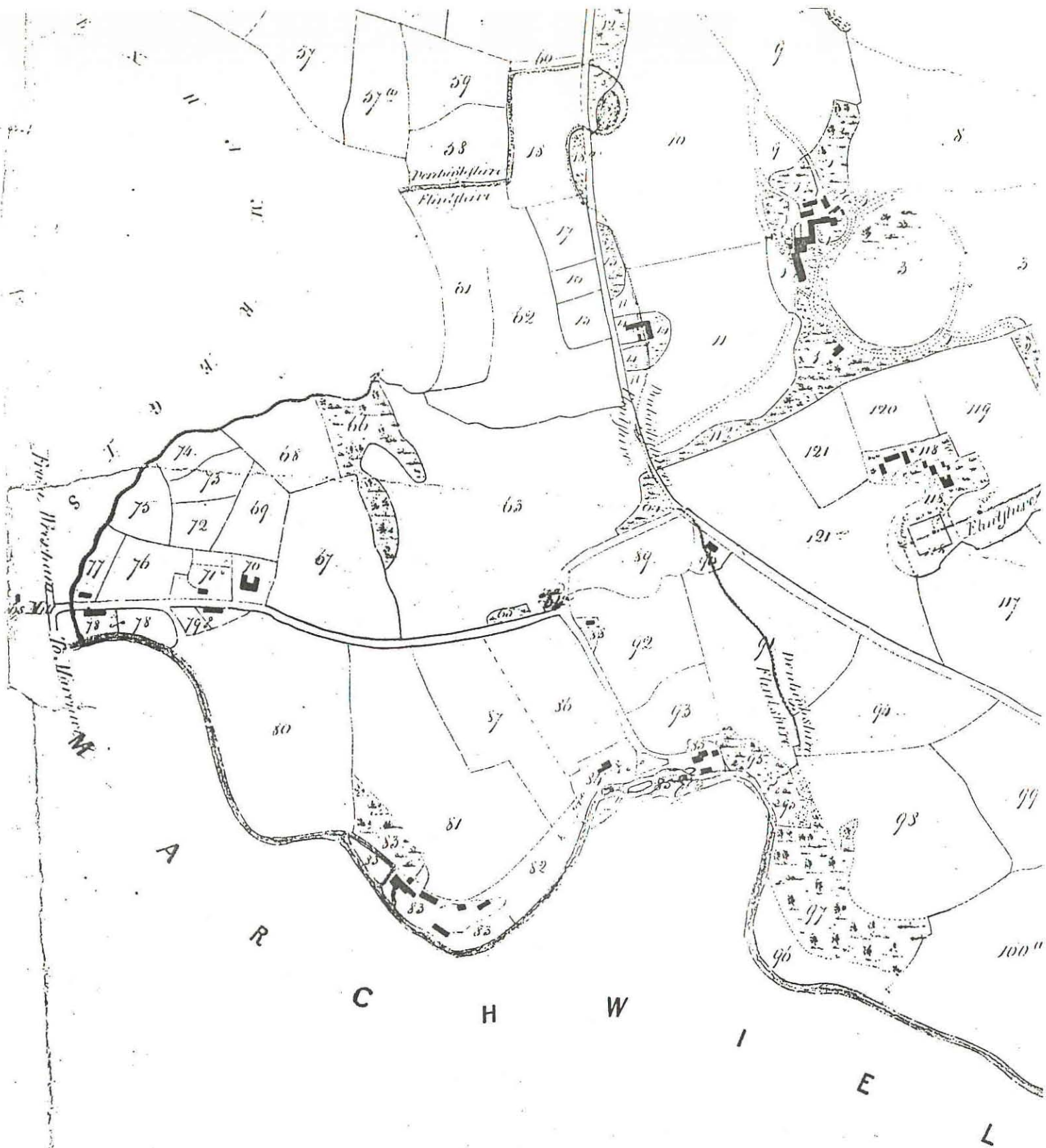


Fig 1

Location

Scale 1:3104





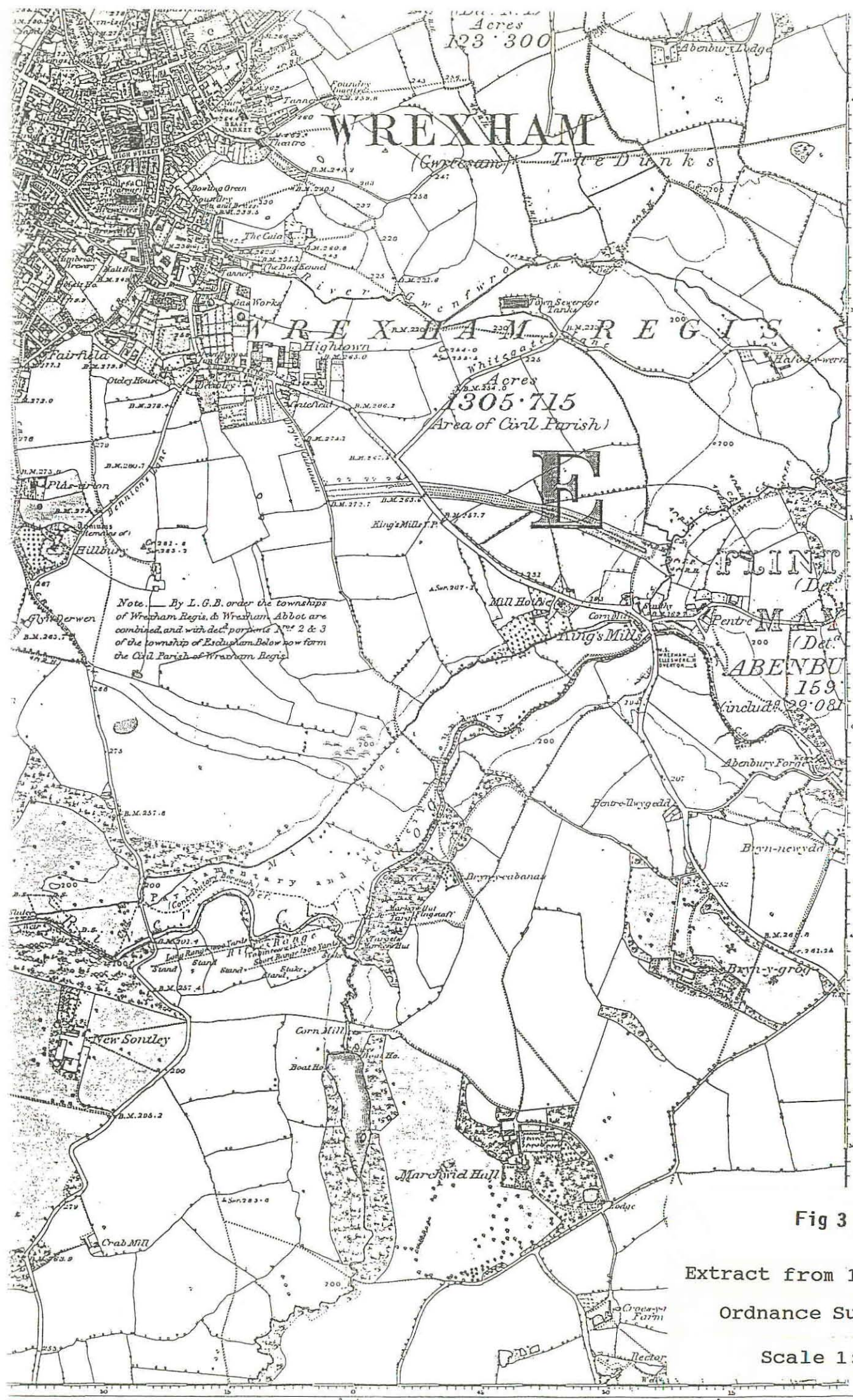
SCALE OF 8½ CHAINS TO AN INCH

Fig 2

Extract from 1838 Tithe M

*Signed, Andrew Owen*  
*Extract from 1838 Tithe Map*





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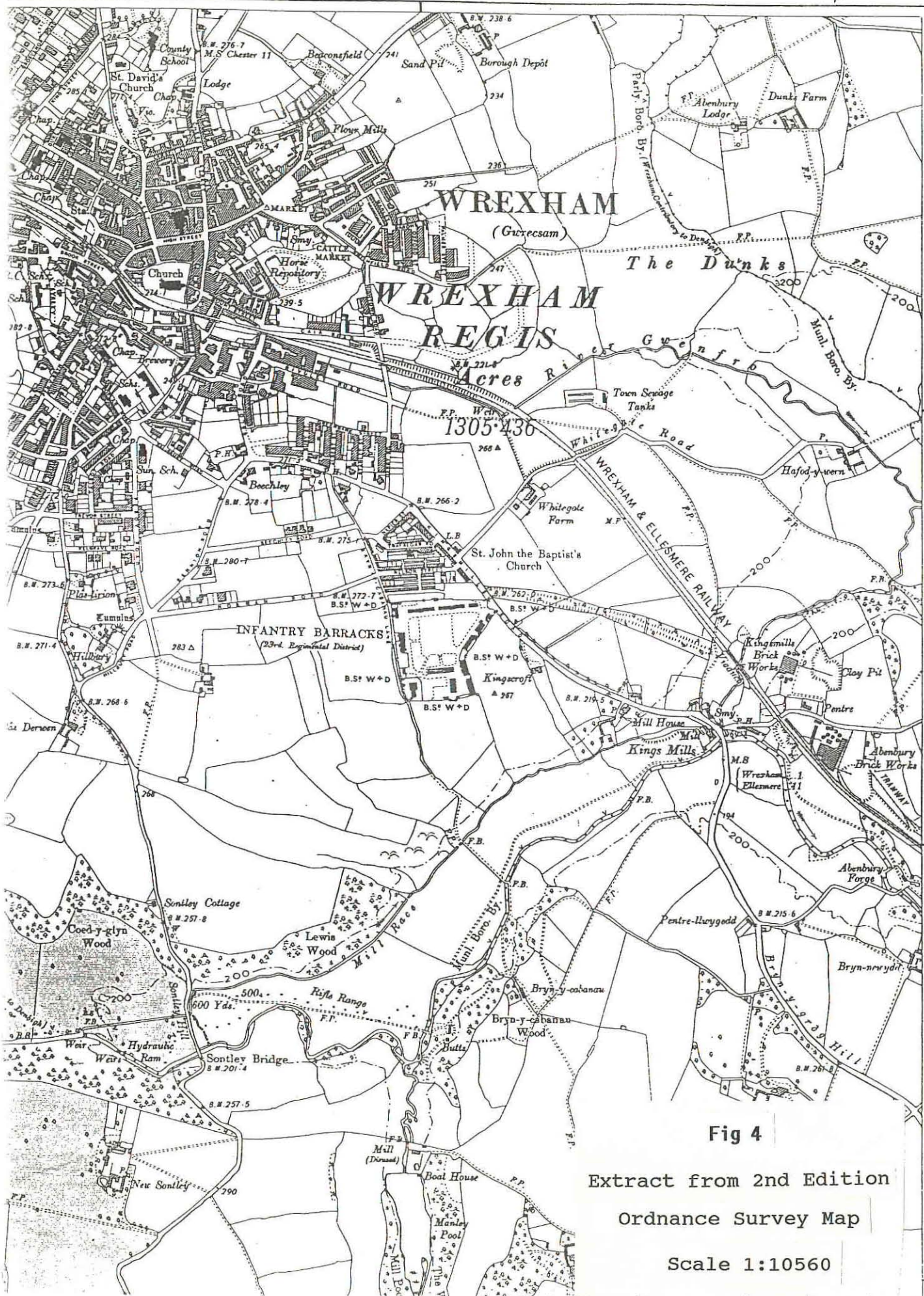
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SHIRE  
Nº 3.)  
LOR  
Nº 1)  
RY FECHA  
159.  
527 Acres  
det. portions)  
53.2'

Note.— By L. G. B. order the townships  
of Wrexham Regis & Wrexham Abbot are  
combined, and with det. portions Nº 2 & 3  
of the township of Esclusham Below now form  
the Civil Parish of Wrexham Regis.

Fig 3

Extract from 1st Editio  
Ordnance Survey Map  
Scale 1:10560





WREXHAM R.D.

ABENBURY FAWR PH.

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ABENBURY FAWR PH.

XXIX. S

LAT. 53° 2

To Whitehead

30"

Fig 4

Extract from 2nd Edition  
Ordnance Survey Map

Scale 1:10560







REGIS PH

34 LONG 2° 59' W

0 500 0

325900

10 Metres LONG 2° 58' W

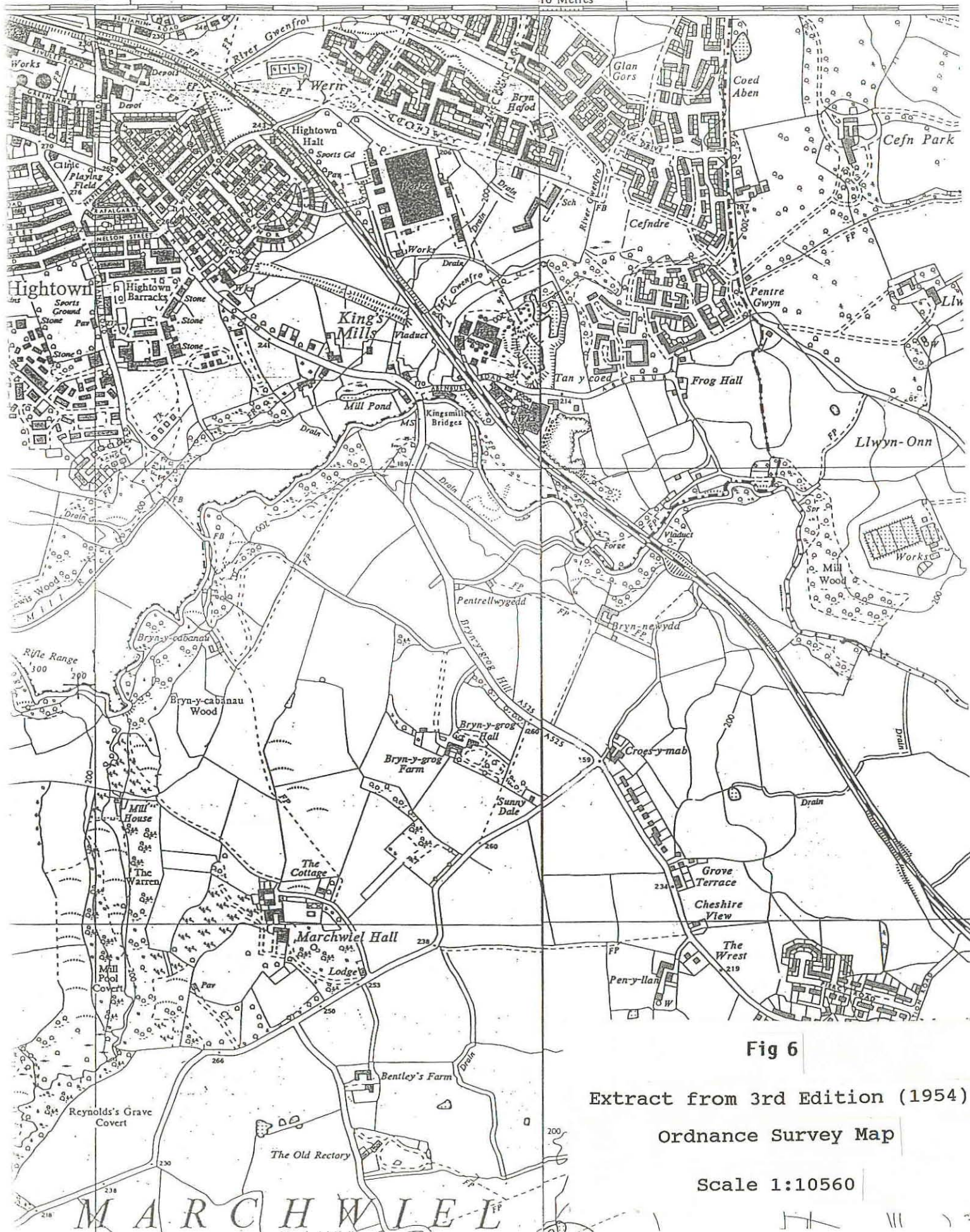


Fig 6

Extract from 3rd Edition (1954)

Ordnance Survey Map

Scale 1:10560



RAF 81-096 002



Fig 7

Aerial Photograph

RAF 81-096 002

Crown Copyright/MOD