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Dear Sirs

Mercury 62 – Ancient Woodland Briefing Note

This briefing note discusses the potential for Ancient Woodland on the site of the proposed Mercury 62 (hereafter 'the site').

Ancient Woodland, in heritage terms, does have cultural and historical significance, and as part of historic parkland, it is considered a heritage asset under the NPPF. It also has specific criteria for its designation encapsulated as 'any area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600AD' (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>).

Government guidance further advises that it can include areas of native ancient semi-natural woodland, plantations on ancient woodland sites that retain ancient woodland features, wood pastures as well as woodland in historic parkland. Continuous tree cover or all old, veteran or ancient trees are not necessarily essential to the designation of a woodland.

Whilst Ancient Woodland may have some heritage value, the identification of such habitats is considered predominantly an ecological or arboricultural specialism. The heritage value relates to historical features or mapping that may survive as evidence of woodland in a location since at least 1600. The historical and mapping evidence characterises the scope and limitations of this document; arboricultural or ecological evidence is not considered here.

During the site visit and research for the recently completed HEDBA (Orion Heritage, 2022, *Mercury 62. Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment*) no features or mapping that might identify the wooded areas along the southern and southwestern boundary of the site as potentially ancient were found.



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Evidence additional to the HEDBA has been collated; this is as follows:

- The wider vision document for the redevelopment of Halsnead Park (chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/SD02a%20Addendum%20to%20Report%20of%20Representations%20Made.pdf);
- Two desk-based assessments for Halsnead Park and Cronton Colliery by Oxford Archaeology (chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://eprints.oxfordarchaeology.com/5669/1/L9645%20final%20complete%20report.pdf; chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://eprints.oxfordarchaeology.com/5474/1/CombinedforEmily_311018.pdf);
- The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) as represented on the Natural England database and Magic Map (<https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/a14064ca50e242c4a92d020764a6d9df/explore> ; (<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx>); and
- New searches of the Liverpool City, Lancashire and Knowsley Archives.

The vision document does not identify Ancient Woodland within the specific area of the site nor identify it as a particular constraint to development across the wider area it covers. The area defined as the Halsnead Estate within the Oxford Archaeology DBA does not include the site. The focus of the DBA is on the broad development of the estate rather than the specific landscape or woodland elements. The Oxford Archaeology DBA corresponds with the HEDBA in interpreting that Halsnead was a separate manor or estate from Whiston. Halsnead has historically been under the ownership of very influential families, and from 1684 until 1929, continuously within the Willis family. It is likely the Willis family formalised the estate and built the Hall after 1684. This is much later than the 1600 threshold for Ancient Woodland. The Oxford Archaeology DBA does quote Knowles (Knowles, J, 1982 A History of Whiston, Part 1: 1100-1900, Huyton) in stating that the Halsnead estate was part of the former Royal hunting forest. No date is attached to this statement, which is important for determining Ancient Woodland, nor is its conflict with Halsnead also being described as a separate estate from the surroundings explained, which might exclude it from being an important forested area. It does not explicitly mean that the site or estate was woodland as there are other activities supported by a hunting forest. Indeed, the map evidence presented in the DBA, the HEDBA and reconsidered here, does not support this assertion as the emarked area of 'Knowesley' is shown some distance to the north on 17th century maps.

A further DBA by Oxford Archaeology on Cronton Colliery covers a much larger area, including the site. It refers to a number of areas of woodland, which it describes as remnants of larger areas that existed within Halsnead Park. Specifically, this Oxford Archaeology DBA refers to a belt of woodland following the line of Chapel Brook and suggests this has remained undisturbed since the creation of Halsnead Park in the medieval period, and possibly earlier. This suggestion is not referenced, and whilst Halsnead Park has medieval origins, the formalisation of the estate and shelter belt planting are more likely to be post medieval in date, associated with the arrival of the Willis family and building of the new house in the late 18th century.

No maps specific to the Halsnead Estate were located in searches of the three archives (Liverpool City, Lancashire and Knowsley Archives). The map resources consulted are tabulated in Appendix 1 below, accompanied by relevant images of the maps, along with a brief summary of what they show on the study site.

The earliest maps of the 17th century, closest in date to the Ancient Woodland designation requirement of 1600, do not definitively show woodland across or close to the site. The emparked area of 'Knowesley' is to the north and does not include the study site. No woodland is shown on the study site until the 1828 Hennes map when it appears in the form of a shelter belt, largely located on the southwestern corner of the site. This is formal planting relating to the Halsnead Estate and at least 200 years later than the Ancient Woodland requirement. 19th century depictions of the woodland are sporadic and mostly located to the south of the site, with a small area within the western boundary. Woodland is shown on the Tithe Maps with the Whiston apportionment describing it as plantation. On maps from 1849 onwards, the wooded areas are described as a bog and much of the site is covered in extraction pits associated with the collieries that proliferated at this time.

It is acknowledged that management as a plantation and industrial activity do not exclude the wooded area from a designation of Ancient Woodland. Nevertheless, the woodland on site is not included within the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI). The AWI is still a work in progress and many areas not yet included or too small to be depicted on mapping, however, no designation is currently in place for the site.

Old Wood, to the north and south of the M62 and north of the site, is designated Ancient Woodland. Old Wood is a named and consistently drawn area of woodland on the 19th century mapping. However, it is similar to the woodland within the site, in that it is not mapped earlier than the 19th century and there is currently no available definitive historical evidence for it dating to 1600. No information or links are provided on the AWI or via internet searches to justify or explain the designation. A request has been lodged with Natural England for more information (4/7/2023) and an update can be provided in due course. As the justification for designation of Old Wood is unknown, it cannot reasonably be used as comparison or validation of the potential for a historical origin of woodland within the site.

Knowles' (Knowles, J, 1982 A History of Whiston, Part 1: 1100-1900, Huyton) assertion that Halsnead was part of the hunting forest does not specifically include the study site or provide a date from which an Ancient Woodland designation could be derived. Similarly, Oxford Archaeology's suggestion in their two DBAs that the woodland has medieval origins relating to the medieval form of Halsnead Park are not mapped, dated or substantiated.

None of the mapping specifically supports the woodland at the western end of the study site as having been in place since 1600, either as part of a hunting forest or as part of the Halsnead Estate. Maps indicate that it is most likely 19th century shelter belt plantation. Furthermore, industrial activity, railway construction and most recently road building have altered the environment such that it does not survive in its historical context and is completely divorced from the remains of the Halsnead Estate and other related areas of woodland if and where they still exist. The use as woodland either as plantation, shelter belt or other estate resource has long since ceased and there is no clear evidence for this remaining or for the inclusion of features such as pasture. The historical evidence does not therefore support a designation of any woodland within the site as Ancient Woodland.

Yours sincerely



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Appendix 1 – Maps

Date	Name/Maker	Comment
1610	Hondius	No woodland over area of site. 'Knowesley' is the closest emparked area, implying a hunting forest, some distance to the north.
1659	Janssonius	No woodland over area of site. 'Knowesley' and 'Tockseath' emparked areas shown to north and west of site. No other woodland or trees depicted.
1665	Blaeu	No woodland over area of site. 'Knowesley' and 'Tockseath' emparked areas shown to north and west of site. No other woodland or trees depicted.
1781	Bowen	No evidence of woodland.
1786	Yates	No evidence of woodland over area of site or close to it. Shows increased development and formal gardens at Red Hall (Halsnead). Windmills depicted east and west of site, indicative of a more open landscape.
1794	Cary	No evidence of woodland over area of site. Southern edge of woodland at Knowsley shown north of site.
1828	Hennet	Site appears part of Halsnead Estate as coloured green with motifs indicative of trees along southwestern edge like a shelter belt. First mapped indication of woodland on site.
1830	Greenwood	Halsnead Estate coloured green as per Hennet but no tree motifs and the edge of the estate appears retracted from Dacre's Bridge Road in the area of the woodland.
1840	Whiston Tithe	Pockets of woodland, including in the study area are shown. The apportionment names these as plantations.
1847	Tarbock Tithe	Band of woodland, labelled as part of Halsnead Estate, on western boundary of site.
1849	Ordnance Survey (OS)	Woodland shown across the western edge of the site.
1860	OS	Possible boundary planting but no specific woodland on the site. Area labelled as 'The Bog.'
1863	Weller	No evidence of woodland.
1894	OS	Woodland shown across the western edge of the site as part of Dacre's Bridge Bog.
1908	OS	Woodland shown across the western edge of the site as part of Dacre's Bridge Bog.
1938	OS	Woodland shown across the western edge of the site as part of Dacre's Bridge Bog. The mineral railway forms the northern edge of the site, separating it from any remnants of the Halsnead Estate, sold in auction lots a decade earlier.
1955	OS	Woodland shown across the western edge of the site as part of Dacre's Bridge Bog. The mineral railway forms the northern edge of the site, separating it from any remnants of the Halsnead Estate.
1966	OS	Woodland shown across the western edge of the site.
1977	OS	Cronton Road built to form southern boundary of the site. Small pocket of woodland at western end of site.
1990	OS	Small pocket of woodland at western end of site.
1999	OS	Small pocket of woodland at western end of site.
2006	OS	Small pocket of woodland at western end of site.
2021	OS	Sporadic woodland depicted across site.



Legend

 Approximate Site Location



Title:
Figure 1: 1610 Hondius Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
Illustrative Only





Legend



Approximate Site Location



Title:

Figure 2: 1659 Janssonius Map

Address:

Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
Illustrative Only





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Approximate Site Location



Title:
Figure 3: 1665 Blaeu Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
Illustrative Only





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Approximate Site Location



Title:
Figure 4: 1781 Bowen Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
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Approximate Site Location



Title:
Figure 5: 1786 Yates Map

Address:
Mercury 62

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Approximate Site Location



Title:
Figure 6: 1794 Cary Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
Illustrative Only





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 Approximate Site Location



Title:
Figure 7: 1828 Hennem Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
Illustrative Only





Legend



Approximate Site Location



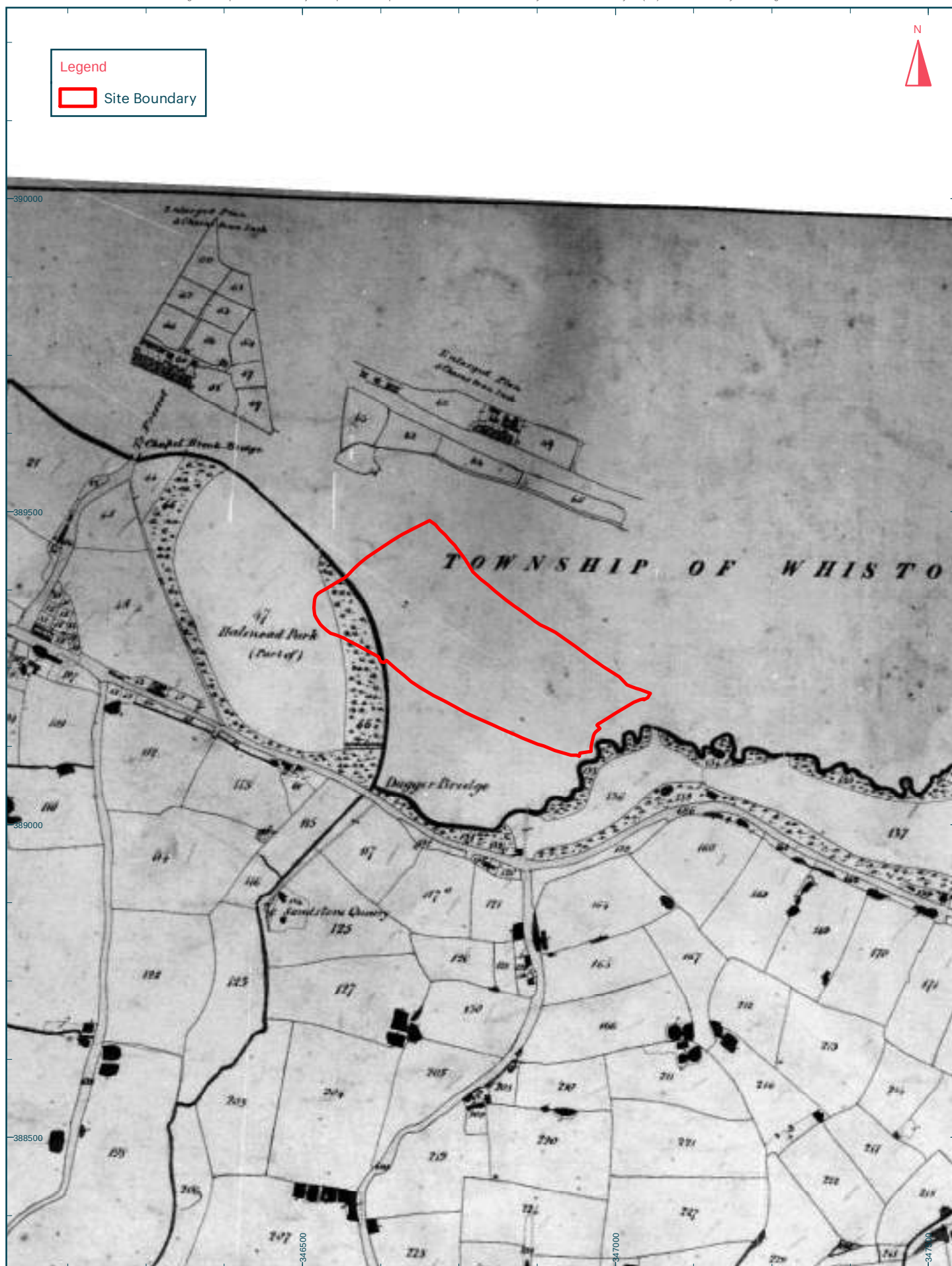
Title:
Figure 8: 1830 Greenwood Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
Illustrative Only





Title: Figure 9: 1840 Whiston Tithe Map Address: Mercury 62	Scale at A4: 1:8,000 0 250m	
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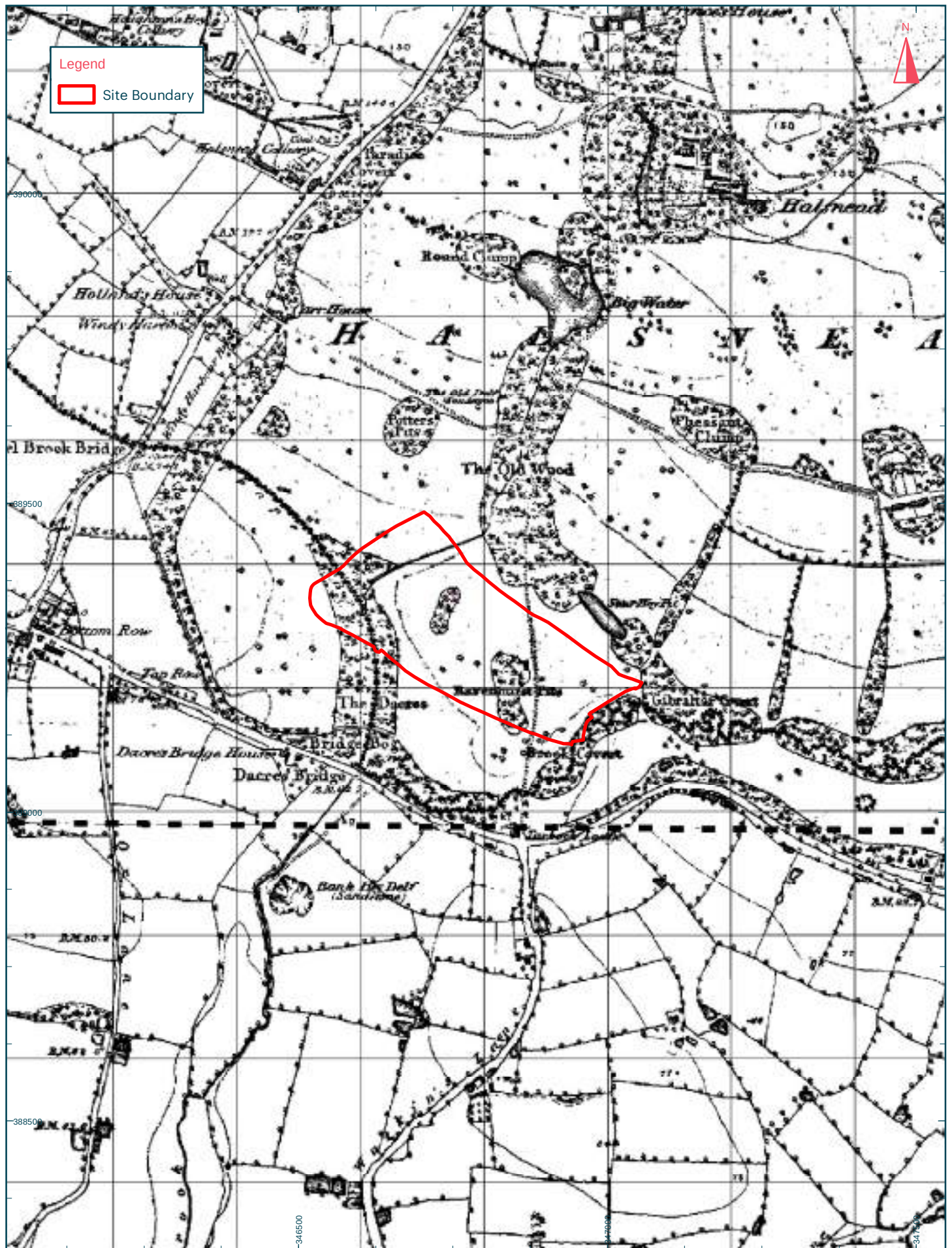


Title:
Figure 10: 1847 Tarbock Tithe Map
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

0 250m

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Title:
Figure 11: 1849 OS 1:10,560
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

0 250m

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 Approximate Site Location

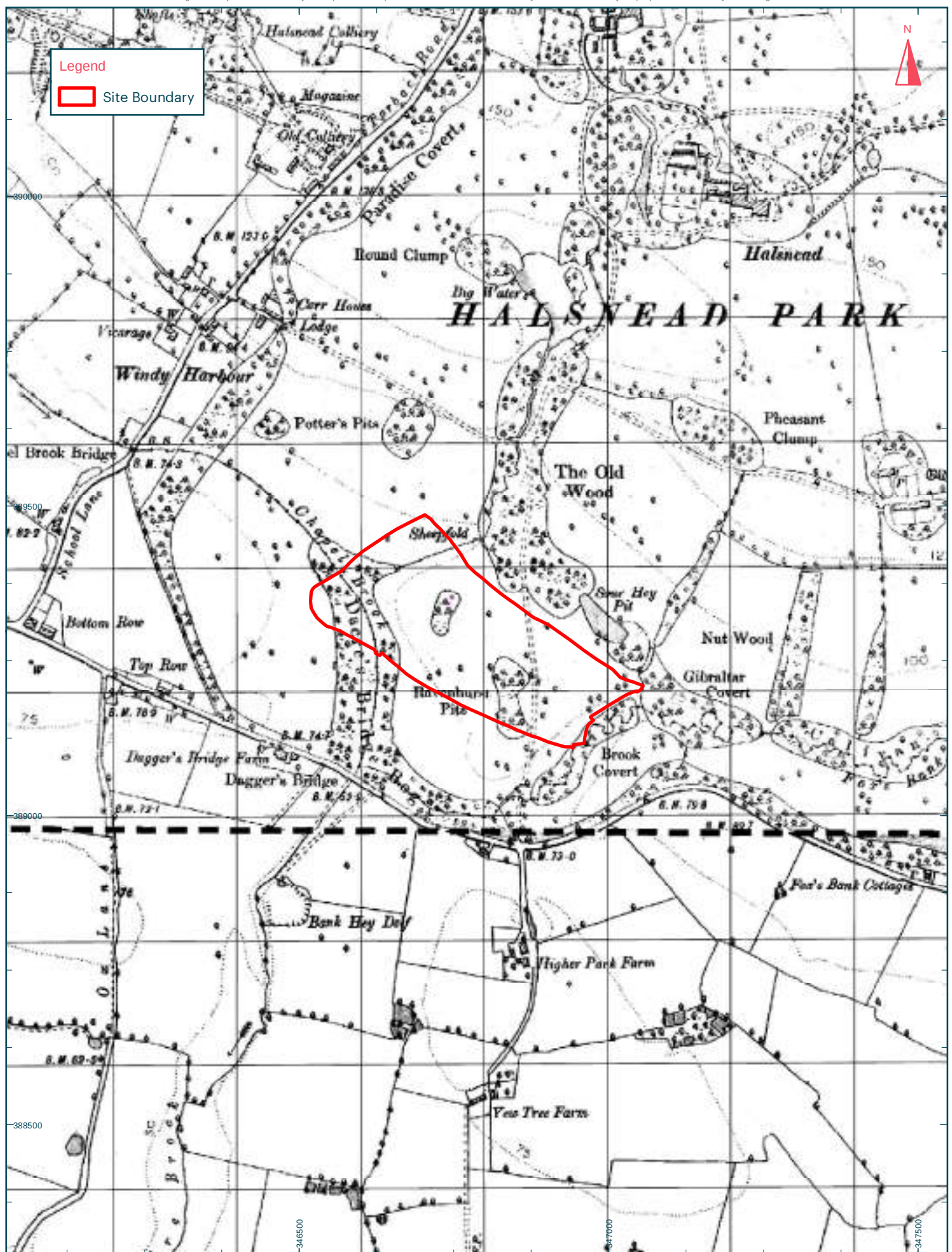


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Figure 13: 1863 Weller Map

Address:
Mercury 62

Not to Scale:
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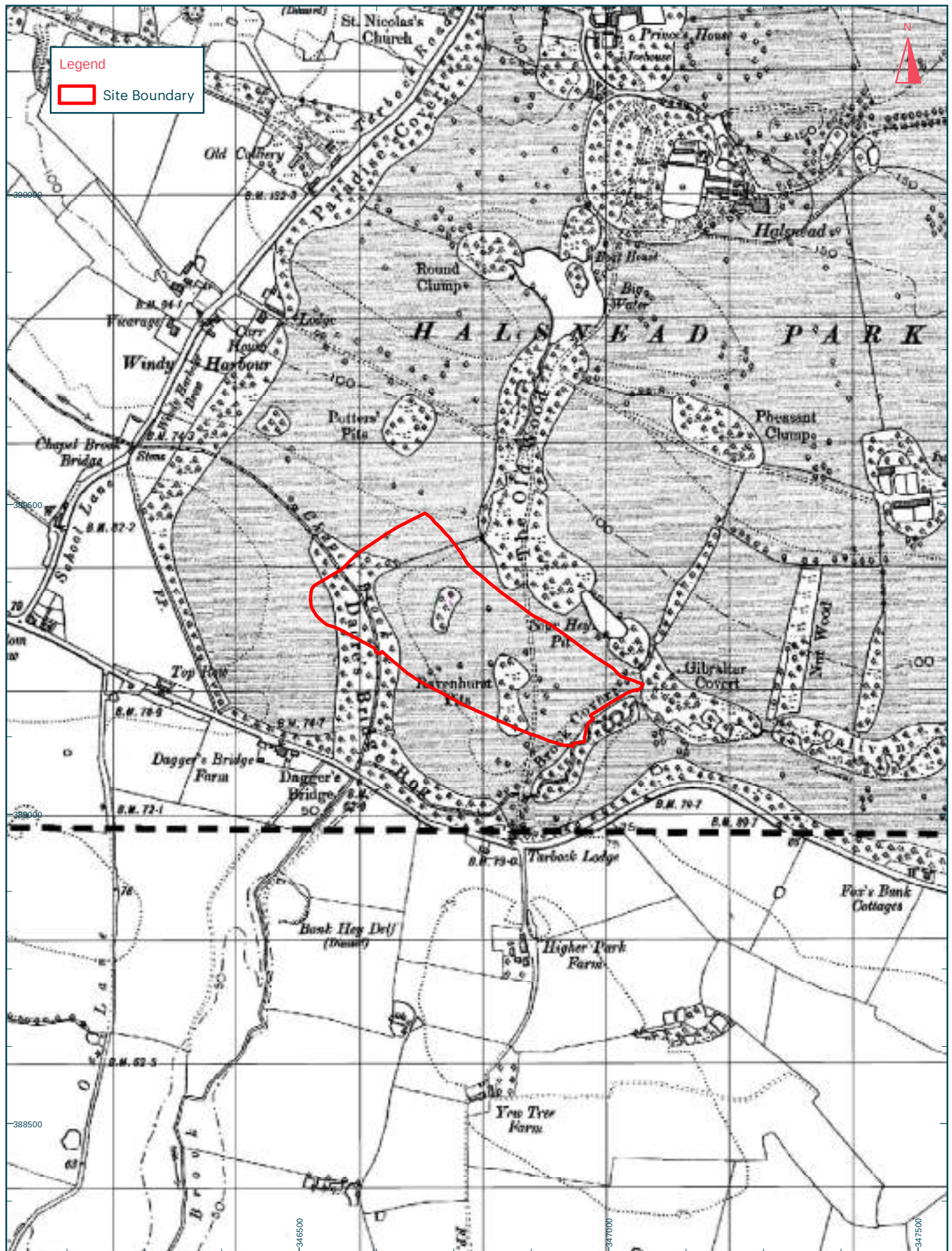


Title:
Figure 14: 1894 OS 1:10,560
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Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

0 250m

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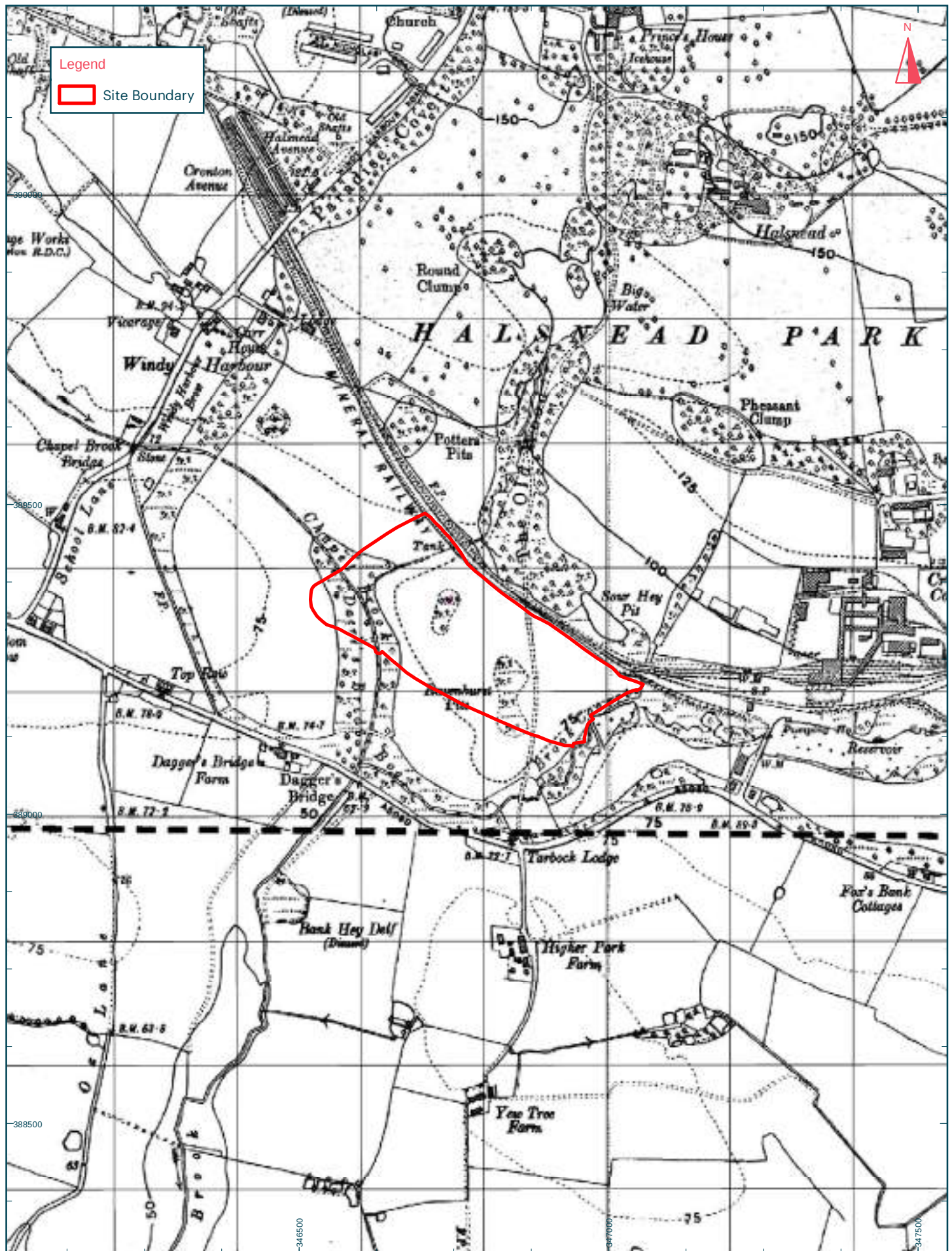
Title:
Figure 15: 1908 OS 1:10,560

Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

0 250m

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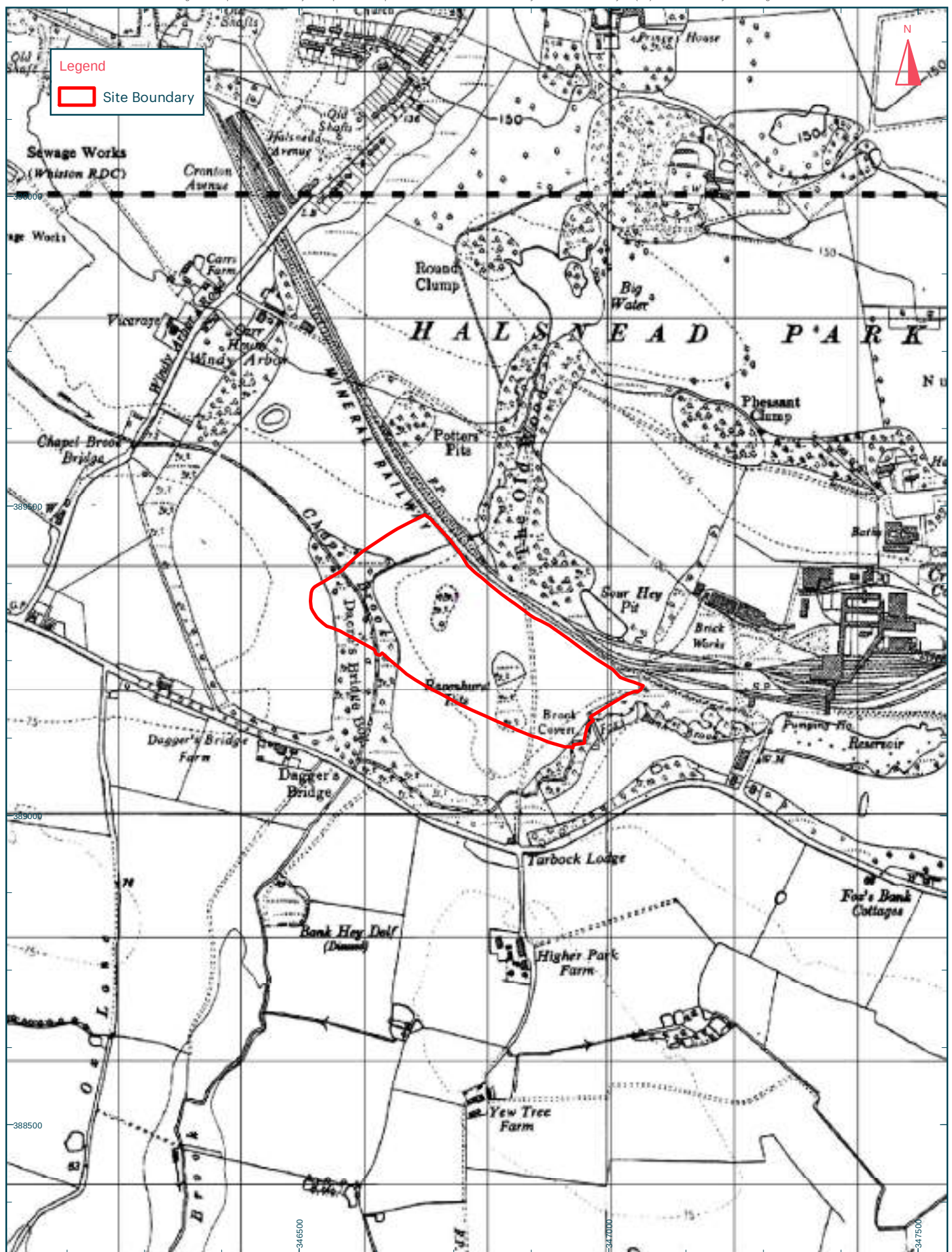


Title:
Figure 16: 1938 OS 1:10,560
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

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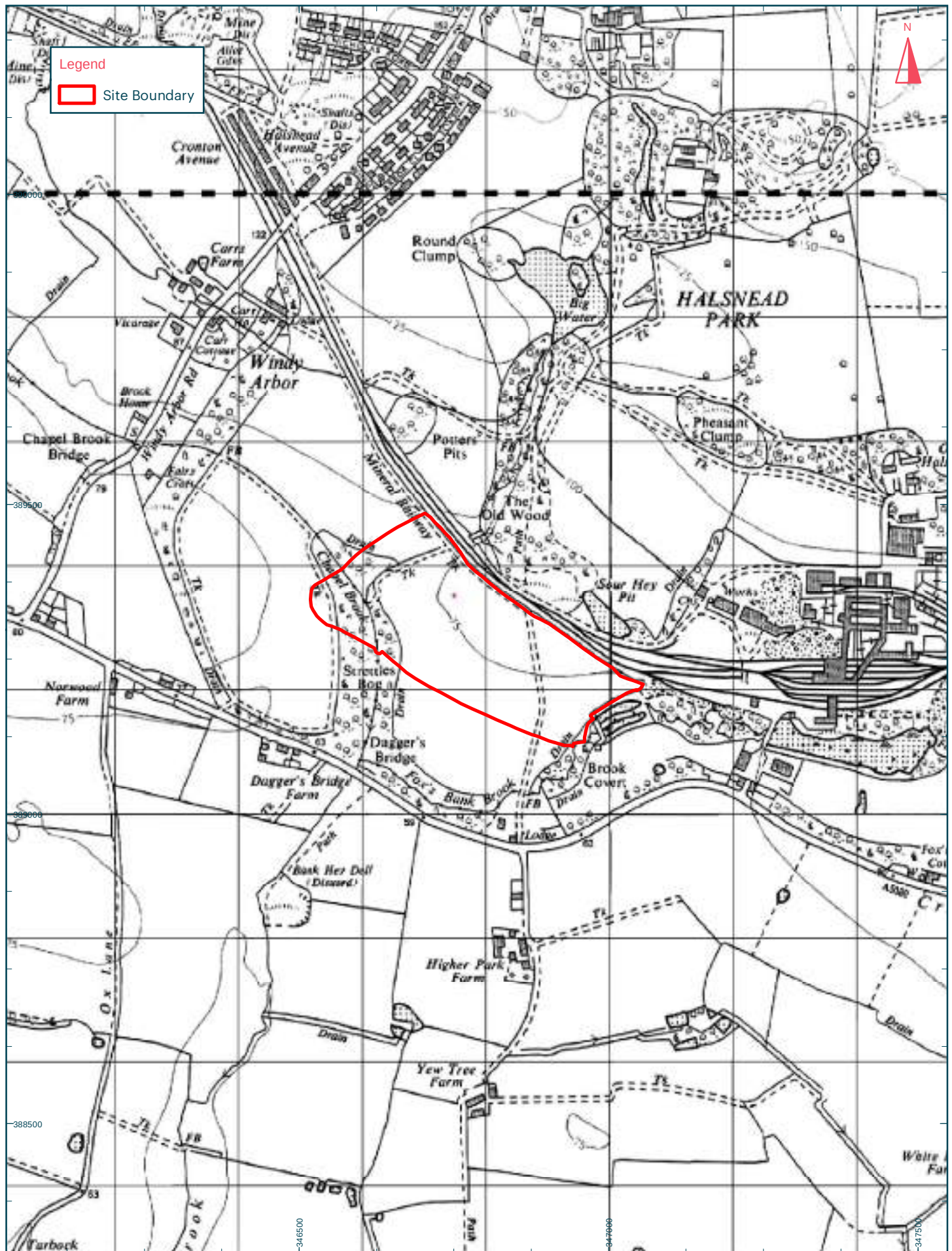


Title:
Figure 17: 1955 OS 1:10,000
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Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

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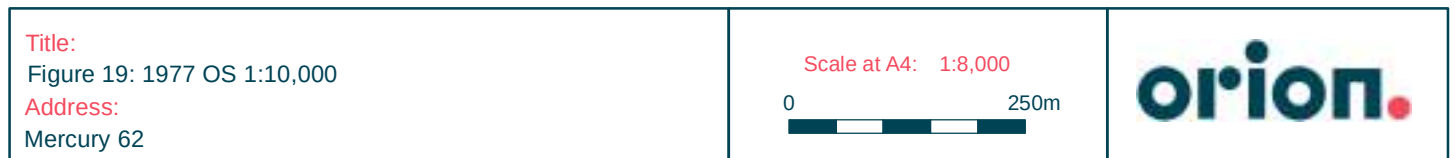


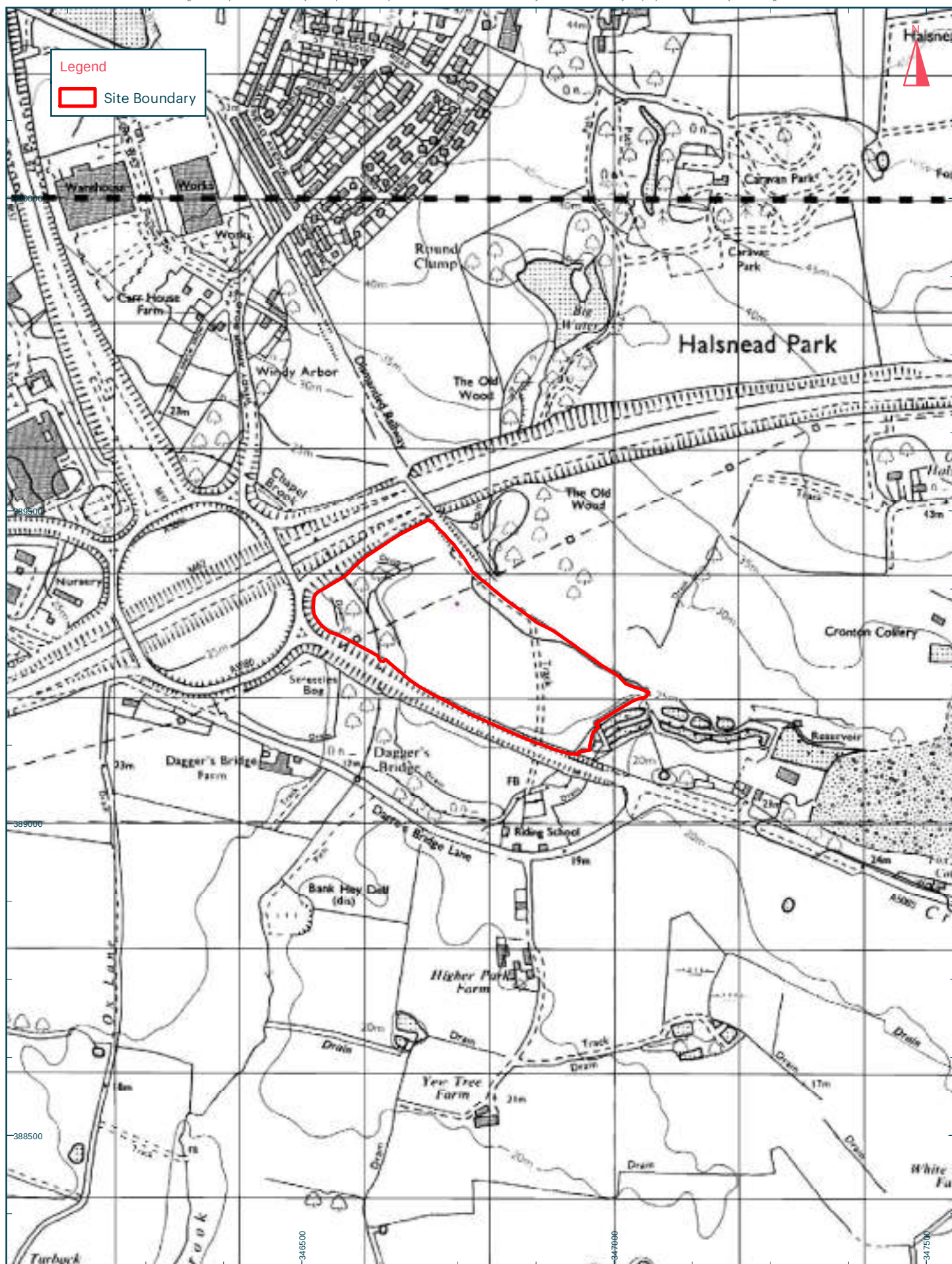
Title:
Figure 18: 1966 OS 1:10,000
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

0 250m

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Title:
Figure 20: 1990 OS 1:10,000
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Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

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Title:
Figure 21: 1999 OS 1:10,000
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

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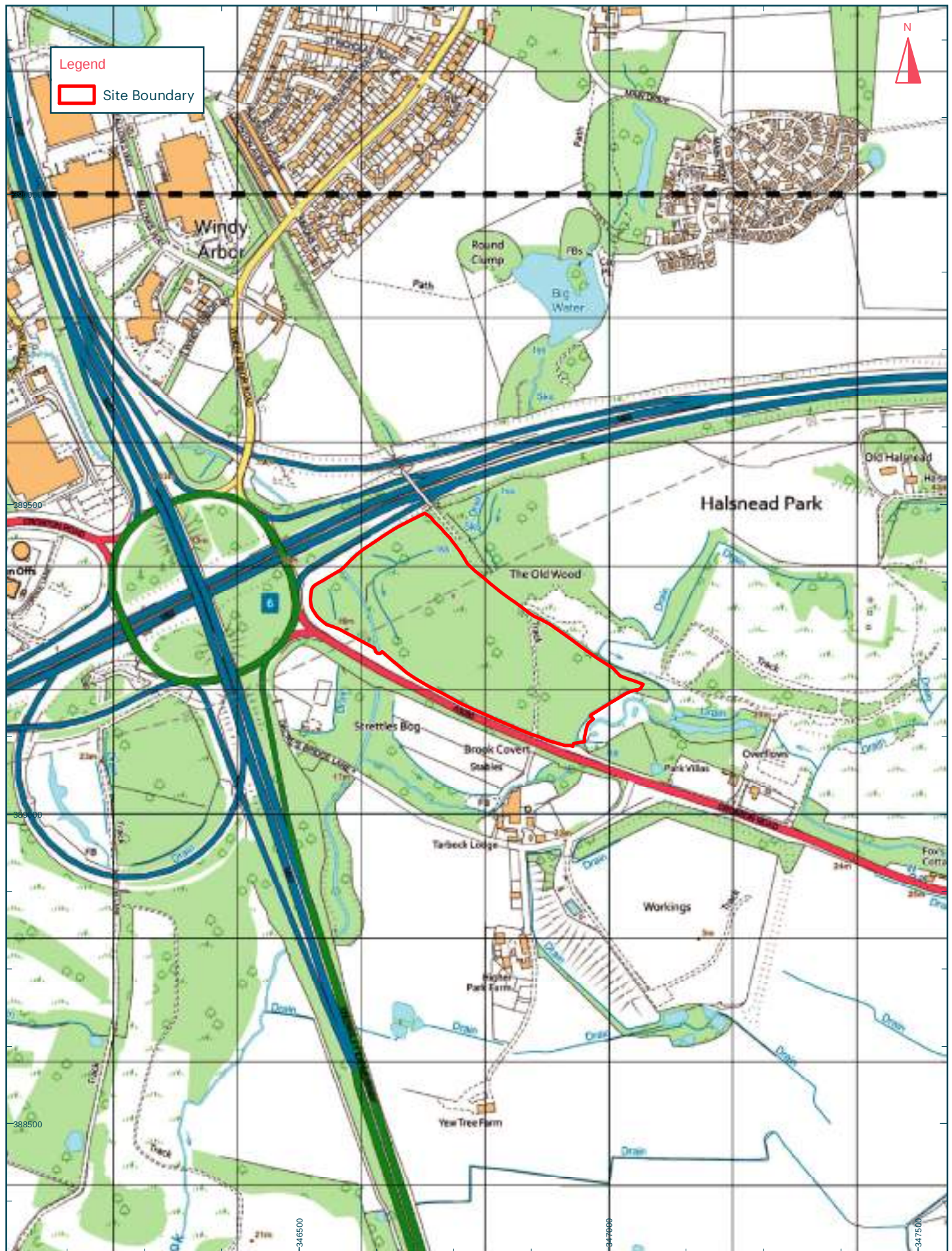


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Figure 22: 2006 OS 1:10,000
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

0 250m

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Title:
Figure 23: 2021 OS 1:10,000
Address:
Mercury 62

Scale at A4: 1:8,000

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