



æon archaeology

Land at Don Street, Middleton Rochdale Borough. (Area 1)

January 2023 V 1.0



Archaeological Investigation

Project Code: A0391.1

Report no. 0378





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Archaeological Investigation
Strip, Map & Record

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1.0 NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Aeon Archaeology was commissioned by Kellen Homes to carry out a programme of archaeological investigation of Area 1, Land at Don Street, Middleton, Nr. Rochdale, Greater Manchester, M24 2WW. This took the form of an archaeological strip, map & record excavation.

The archaeological strip, map & record involved the excavation of an area measuring 37.20m in length by 32.00m in width and was intended to target the footprint of the suspected Boiler and Engine Houses associated with *Rex Mill*, a former spinning mill on the River Irk in Middleton, Greater Manchester.

Area 1 revealed the remains of red-brick walls, cast concrete flue bases, an economiser base, a pump house, a firing floor and the truncated remains of four boiler bays within the former Boiler House. Furthermore, within the Engine House there were red-brick walls and the partially infilled remains of an engine base for a suspected compound engine. In addition the remains of a heavily truncated chimney base were uncovered to the northwest of the site.

The findings of this report suggest that both the Boiler House and the Engine House may have experienced a phase of remodelling to facilitate a change to diesel/electric power during the middle part of the 20th century; with two of the former boiler bays being converted to diesel storage and the steam economiser being decommissioned in the Boiler House, and the infilling of the engine base to accommodate a suspected diesel engine in the Engine House. These remains corresponded with the buildings depicted on the Ordnance Survey (OS) map (1909) and subsequently on the 1965 and 1974 maps.

Unfortunately, due to the low level of the site within a shallow valley and the high ground water level due to heavy rainfall, the floors within the rooms were inundated with water soon after being uncovered. In addition, due to modern intervention and the subsequent demolition of the building, much of the detail within the eastern part of the Boiler House was absent. However, it is thought that the majority of the Boiler House appears to have had red-brick floors and the firing floor may have had a flagstone floor, though this was likely robbed out to such an extent that only a few flags remained.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Aeon Archaeology was commissioned by Kellen Homes, hereafter ‘the Client’, to carry out a programme of archaeological investigation at Area 1, Land at Don Street, Middleton, Nr. Rochdale, Greater Manchester, M24 2WW hereafter ‘the Site’ (centred on **NGR SD 88310 06347**), *see Figures 01-03*. This took the form of an archaeological strip, map & record and was conducted as part of a planning application for the development of a residential development.

The Client secured full planning permission (**21/00744/FUL**) from Rochdale Borough Council (hereafter ‘the Council’) with the following condition concerning archaeology being applied:

Condition 11

No development shall take place until the applicant or their agents or their successors in title has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the approved WSI and provision made for the completion of all elements of that programme. The WSI shall cover the following:

- 1. A phased programme and methodology of site investigation and recording to include:*
 - a) a strip-map-and-record of the site of Spa Farm and the power plant of Rex Mill ;*
 - b) pending results of a), more detailed excavation if the archaeological remains are more extensive than can be dealt with during the strip-map-and-record.*
- 2. A programme for post-investigation assessment to include:*
 - a) analysis of the site investigation records and finds;*
 - b) production of a final report on the significance of the heritage interest recorded.*
- 3. Deposition of the final report with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record.*
- 4. Dissemination of the results of the site investigations commensurate with their significance.*
- 5. Provision for archive deposition of the report, finds and records of the site investigation.*
- 6. Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the approved WSI.*

Reason: In accordance with NPPF policy 16, paragraph 205: To record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible.

Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) will monitor the implementation of the recording on behalf of Rochdale Borough Council.

The use of such a condition is in line with the guidance set out in paragraph 205, Section 16 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021), published by the Department for Communities; and Local Government and Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 2 (Historic England 2015).

Discussions were held between the Archaeological Consultant (Nexus Heritage) and the Heritage Management Director (HMD) (Mr. I. Miller) at GMAAS and it was agreed that the archaeological investigation should take the form of a strip, map & record.

This document reports on the details of a programme of archaeological investigation work for the Site carried out between 24th October – 18th November 2022 in response to the spirit and intent of Condition No. 11.

A written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was undertaken by Nexus Heritage in September 2022 (Document No: 3596.R01a) which outlined the aims of the archaeological investigation and the methods by which they would be met. This formed the basis of a method statement submitted for the work. The archaeological strip, map & record was undertaken in accordance with this document. The assessment of the Site through a single large trench was deemed adequate for the purposes intended, however it was acknowledged that there may be some latitude on the positioning of the trench due to site restraints from existing utilities and health and safety issues arising from site access.

The aim of this programme of archaeological strip, map & record was to establish the archaeological significance of the Site, to assess the impact of the development proposals on surviving monuments or remains, and to help inform future decision making, design solutions and further potential mitigation strategies.

This report is offered for consideration to the HMD at GMAAS for verification with reference to the Condition applied to the planning permission and the relevant provisions in NPPF.

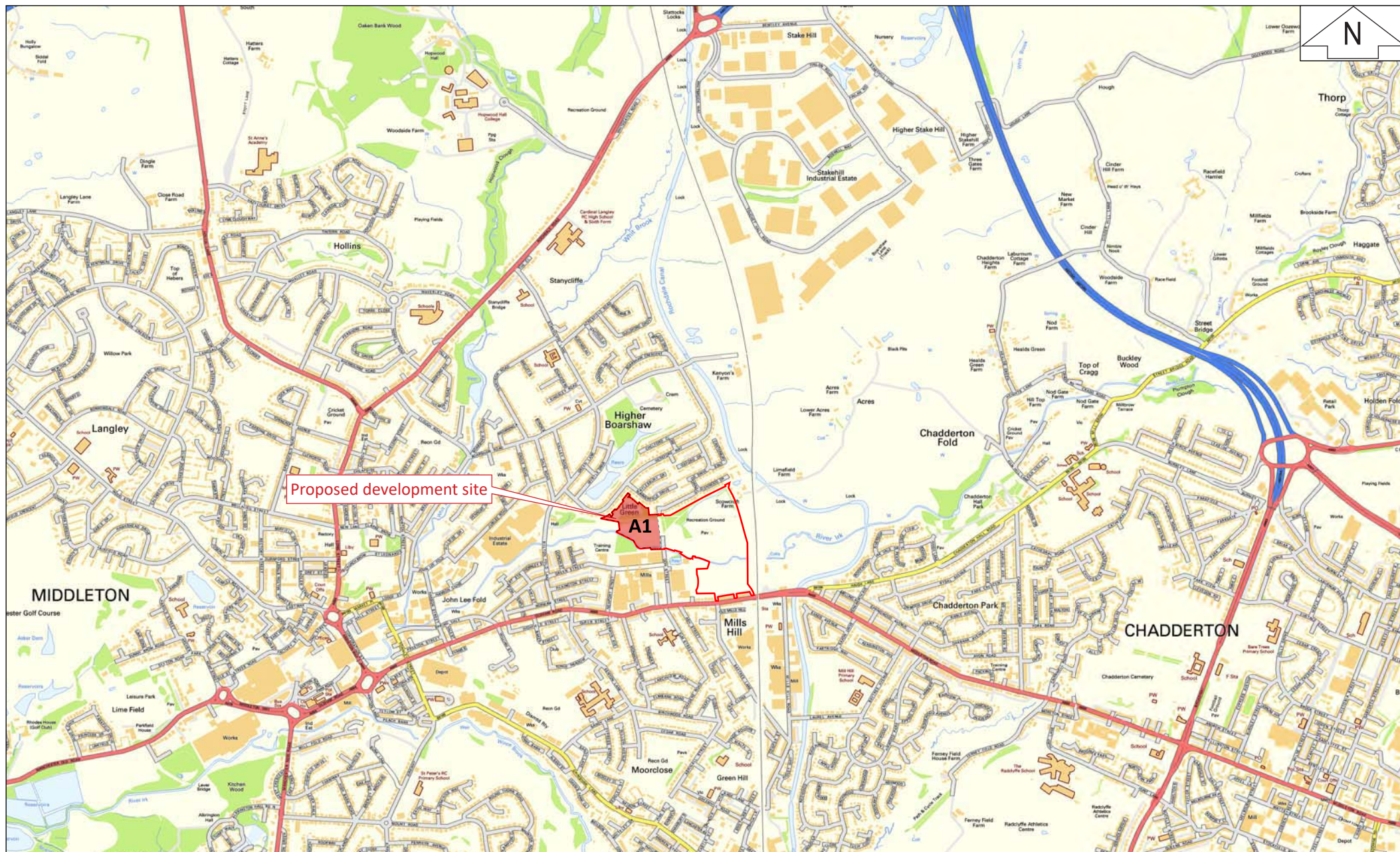


Figure 01: Location of Area 1 within, Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale Borough.
Scale 1:20,000 @ A4.



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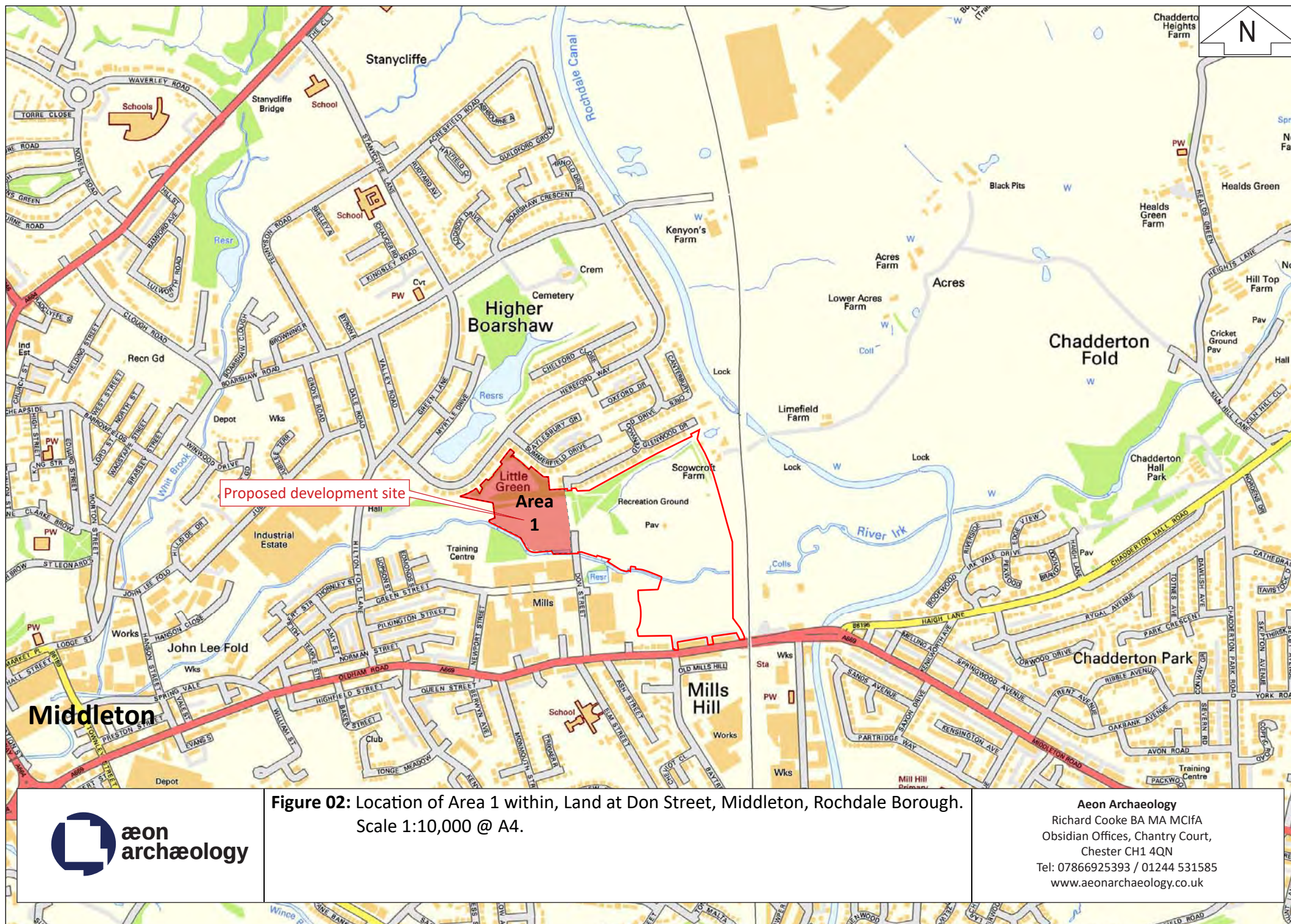


Figure 02: Location of Area 1 within, Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale Borough.
Scale 1:10,000 @ A4.

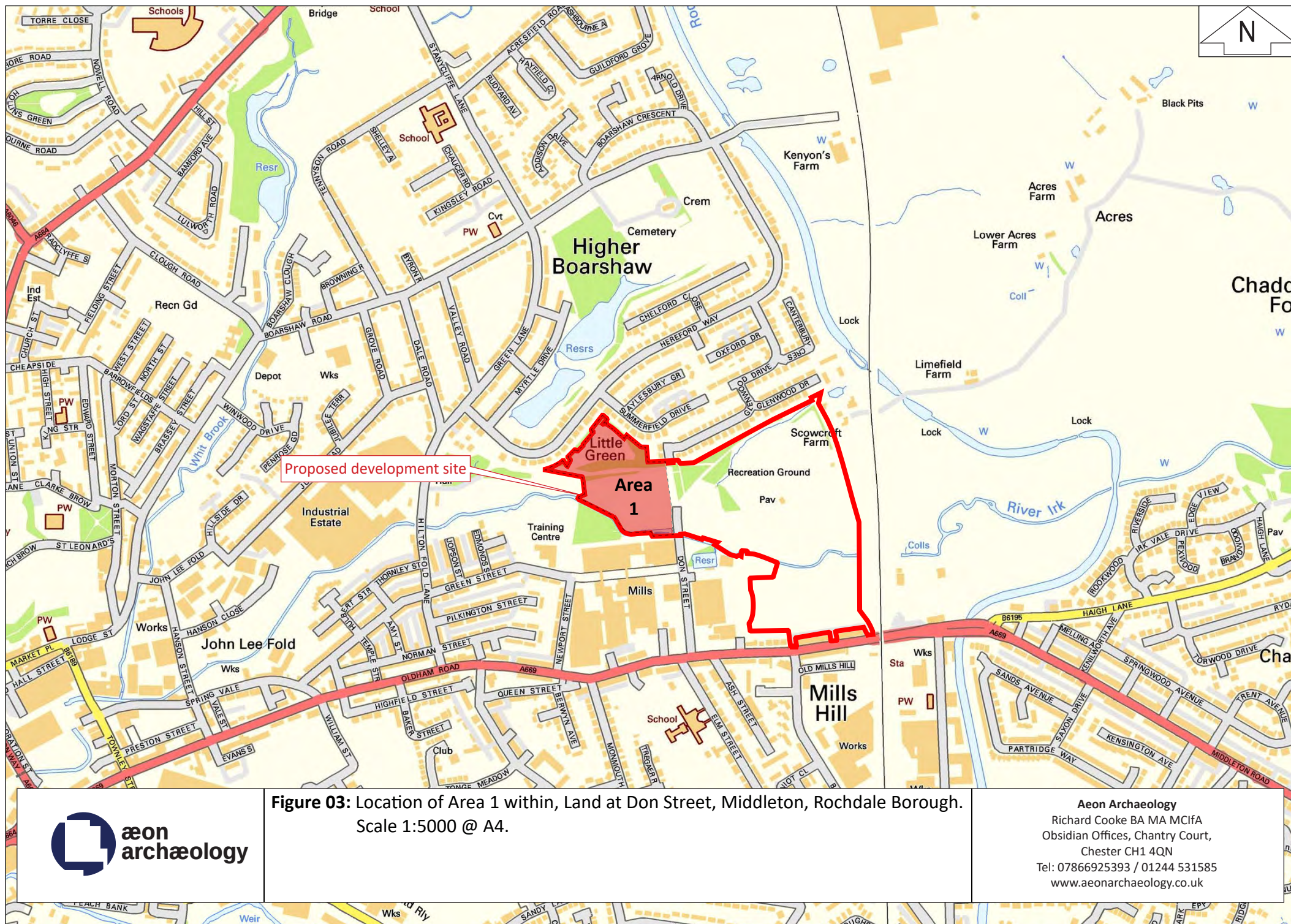


Figure 03: Location of Area 1 within, Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale Borough.
Scale 1:5000 @ A4.



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3.0 SITE LOCATION

The Site is situated at Don Street in Middleton, in the Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester and is centred approximately at National Grid Reference SD 88310 06347 (see Figures 1,2 & 3).

Prior to the archaeological investigation area 1 was predominantly level, with a surface of concrete hardstanding. Much of the area was covered by sapling woodland with some disturbed ground within the central and eastern areas. The area was bounded by a bund along the eastern boundary along Don Street and the River Irk along the southern boundary. The River Irk is bounded by stone and brick retaining walls on either side. The western boundary comprised of a line of poplar trees and the north boundary by a drainage sough beyond which there was a gabion wall and a shallow wooded slope.

An intrusive ground investigation was undertaken in 2021 (E3P, 2021b). In Area 1 (site of former Rex mill) 11 mechanically excavated trial pits, nine window sample boreholes, and five rotary open holes were excavated. In Area 1 there was no topsoil and the made ground extended to depths of up to 5.45 m below ground level (bgl) although, in general, the made ground was encountered at depths of less than 1.00m bgl. Hard obstructions in the form of former foundations were encountered throughout the former mill site. The made ground generally comprised a red sandy gravel with frequent cobbles of brick or a dark/light brown slightly clayey gravelly sand with gravel of brick, mudstone, concrete, glass and ash (E3P 2021b, 5).

Geology

The British Geological Survey records the bedrock at the Site as Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation - Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone – a sedimentary rock formed approximately 318 to 319 million years ago in the Carboniferous Period in a local environment previously dominated by swamps, estuaries and deltas. Trending across the Site there are also deposits of Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation - Sandstone. – a sedimentary rock formed approximately 318 to 319 million years ago in the Carboniferous Period in a local environment previously dominated by swamps, estuaries and deltas (<https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

The superficial deposits along the River Irk banks are noted as Alluvium - Clay, Silt, Sand and Gravel, deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period in a local environment previously dominated by rivers. The superficial deposits for the majority of the Site are, however, described as Glaciofluvial Sheet Deposits, Devensian Sand and Gravel, deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period in a local environment previously dominated by Ice Age conditions.

Pedology

The Cranfield Soil and AgriFood Institute (CSAI) Soilscape Viewer (<http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscape/>) maps the soils cover at the Site as freely draining slightly acid sandy soils. However, given the development history of parts of the Site, any soil cover may not match this classification.

4.0 HISTORY OF THE SITE

Rex Mill was a spinning mill, and as such spun yarn by drawing out cotton fibres and twisting them together. The yarn was then used by weaving mills to produce cloth. Although variations in layout, size, form and specific machine type are seen across the spinning mills of North West England, all of the mills required a boiler house, engine house, card shed, spinning mill, flues and chimney base (see plates A-C).

(The following has been Reproduced from Martin, A., (2022) Residential Development Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale Borough (21/00744/FUL), Written Scheme of Investigation for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation, Nexus Heritage, Report No. 3596 R01a).

An archaeological desk-based assessment of the Site was undertaken in 2022 (Nexus Heritage 2022). In summary the principal archaeological interest of Area 1 is associated with the following:

- The archaeological remains of Rex Mill (specifically the power plant),

The permitted development would disturb any archaeological remains associated with Rex Mill. The entry for Rex Mill on the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record (GMHER) reads as follows:

Cotton mill. Large late spinning mill site. Spinning mill is early C20 and red brick built. 5 storeys and 12x5 bays. Tall rectangular windows grouped 3 per bay. Domed water tower. Embellished brickwork to the upper storey. Flat roof.

The offices are situated at the entrance to the site. Early C20. 1 storey and 6x1 bays. Some embellished stonework. The warehouse is also red brick built and early C20. 2 storeys and 7x2 bays. Situated to the W side of the mill. Another building which may have been the boiler house is also attached to the W side of the mill. No engine house or chimney. Various other mid- to late C19 buildings are spread around the site.

George Saxon engine of 1150hp at 75 rpm. 22' flywheel. Corliss valve gear.

*Heavily damaged by fire on 18 August 2000. Now demolished.
Below-ground archaeological potential: high.*

Stott & Sons Ltd

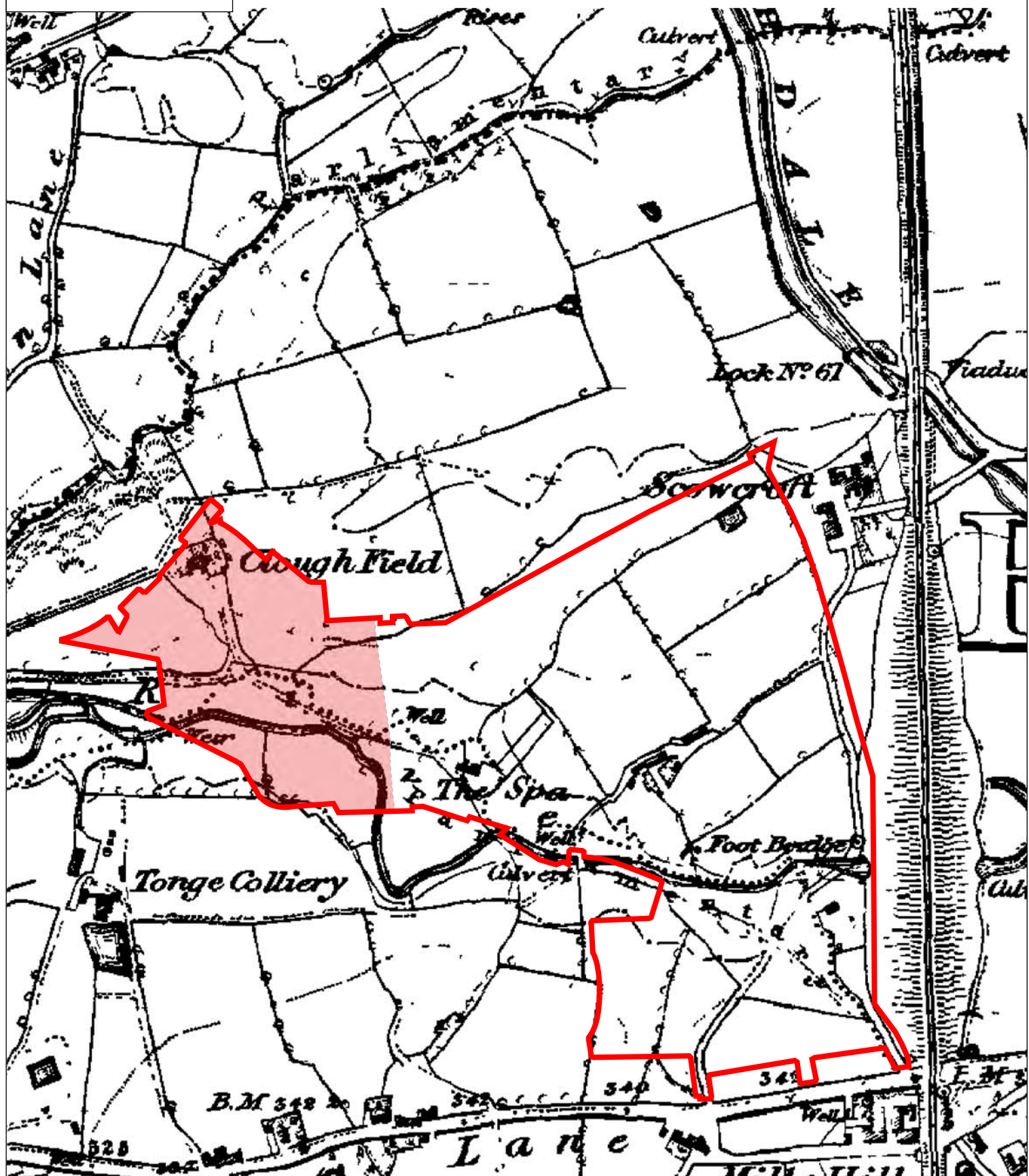
Rex Mill was built c. 1900 to a design by Stott and Sons, an architectural practice in Lancashire between 1847 and 1931. The Mill is shown on the Ordnance Survey Map, 1:2,500, Lancashire Sheets XCVI.4 and XCVI.8, 1909 (Figures 04-07) which clearly depicts the chimney and the boiler house and the engine house. The Stott practice specialised in cotton mills (Holden 1998), designing 130 mills and ancillary buildings related to the cotton industry. It is possible that the Mill was extended with a new card shed sometime after 1910.

Stott and Sons was headed by Abraham Henthorn Stott, Jun. (Junior), during the Edwardian period (1900-1914) and he ensured that the company had a considerable share in the mill building boom (Douglas et al., 2002) that took place in Lancashire in the early 20th century. Of the 16.8 million

spindles that were added to the production lines in the county between 1900 and 1914, 2.61 million were in the 24 mills designed by Stott and Son, presenting them with an equivalent 20% share in that industry. Abraham was also instrumental in the promotion of a wide variety of contractors in the region.

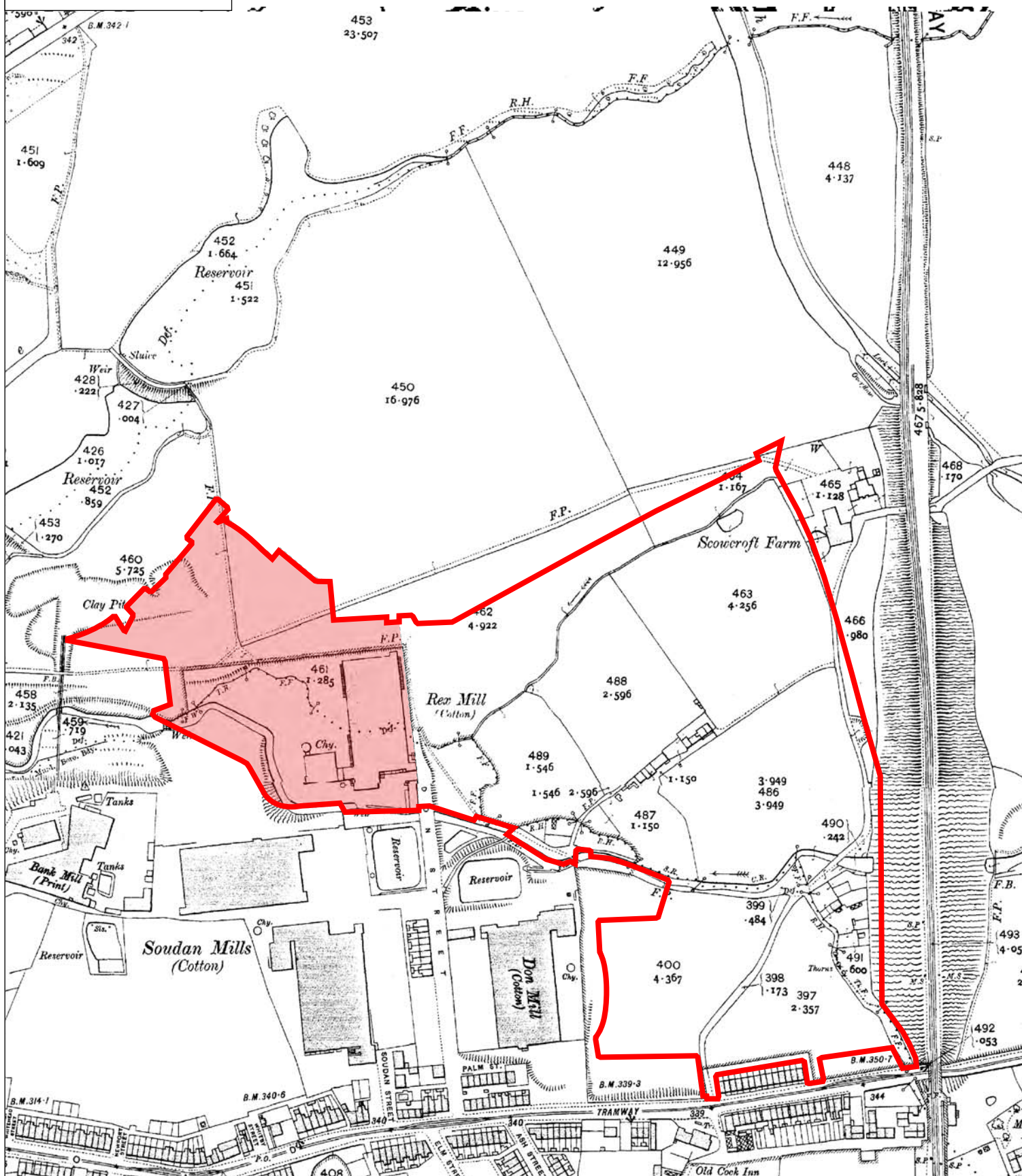
Although these mills were functional buildings, designed for the purpose of spinning or weaving cotton (Collier 1970), they also embraced the concept of a higher architectural aesthetic. Sometimes the application of Italianate or Georgian styles could make a mill's design appear overly elaborate or even be considered flamboyant. Conversely it is also recognised that their design practices may have inadvertently heralded a move towards modernism in architecture, with the sheer mass that the buildings needed to house all of the machinery that they came to dominate townscapes, signalling a move towards a form of brutalism by comparison to the small condensed rows of terraced houses (Miller 2017) .

With regards to some notable design choices, particular attention was given to chimneys and to water towers, the later often advertising the name of the mill, sometimes making it visible from miles around. *Stott and Sons* also often preferred Byzantine-style water towers, which would be decorated with the use of horizontal bands of yellow brick above the windows, and terracotta ornamentation present in the eaves of the buildings (Holden 1998). Examples are the Goyt Mill, Marple (1905), Broadstone Mill, Reddish (1904) and Coppull Ring Mill (1905) that had identical water tower, Fernhurst Mill, Chadderton (1905), Butts Mill, Leigh (1907), Pear Mill, Stockport (1907), Ram Mill, Chadderton (1907) – (Gurr & Hunt 1998, Holden 1998).



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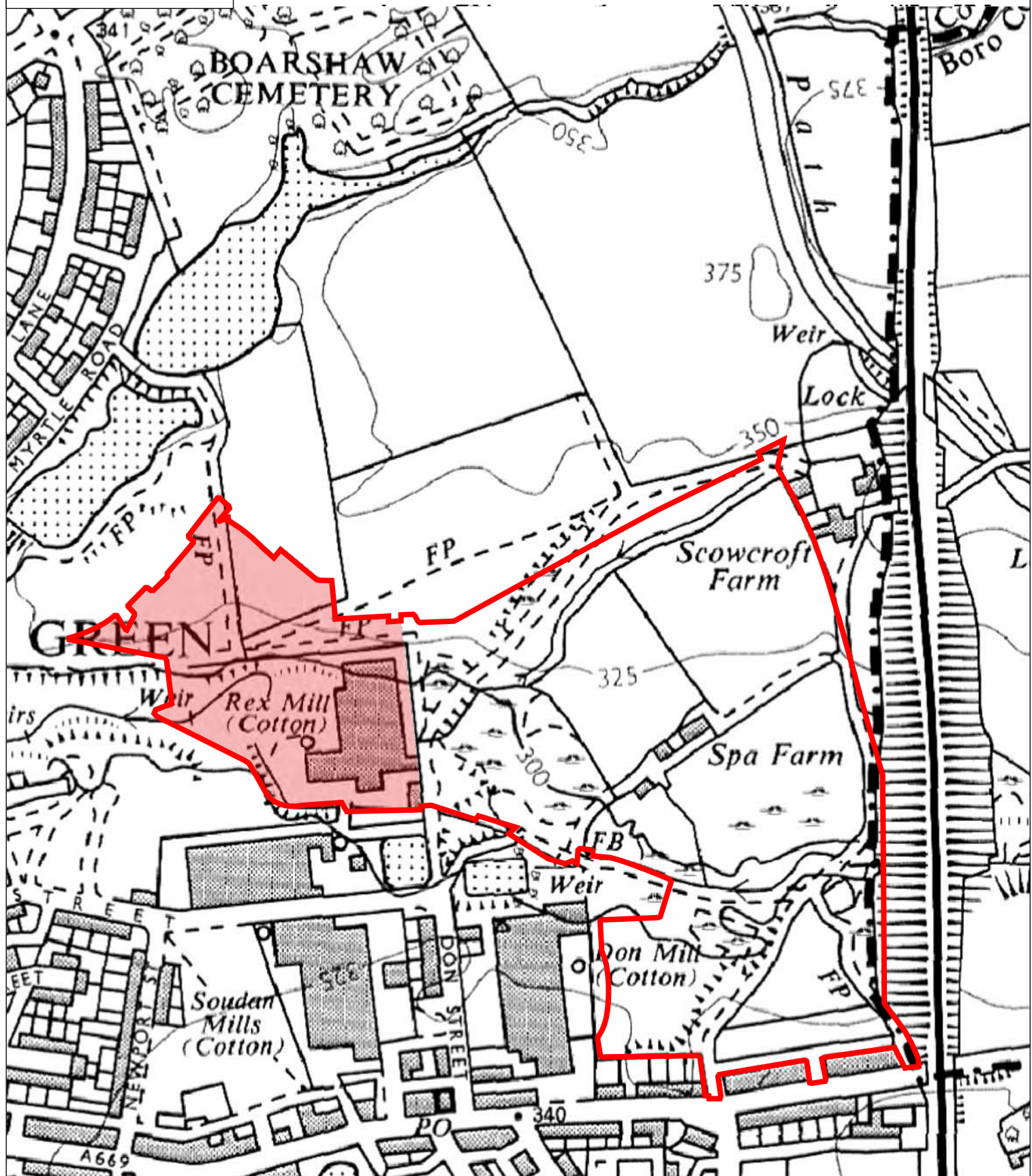
Figure 04: Ordnance Survey Map of Lancashire, 6 inch, 1848. Showing site boundary and Area 1 (in red) Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale.



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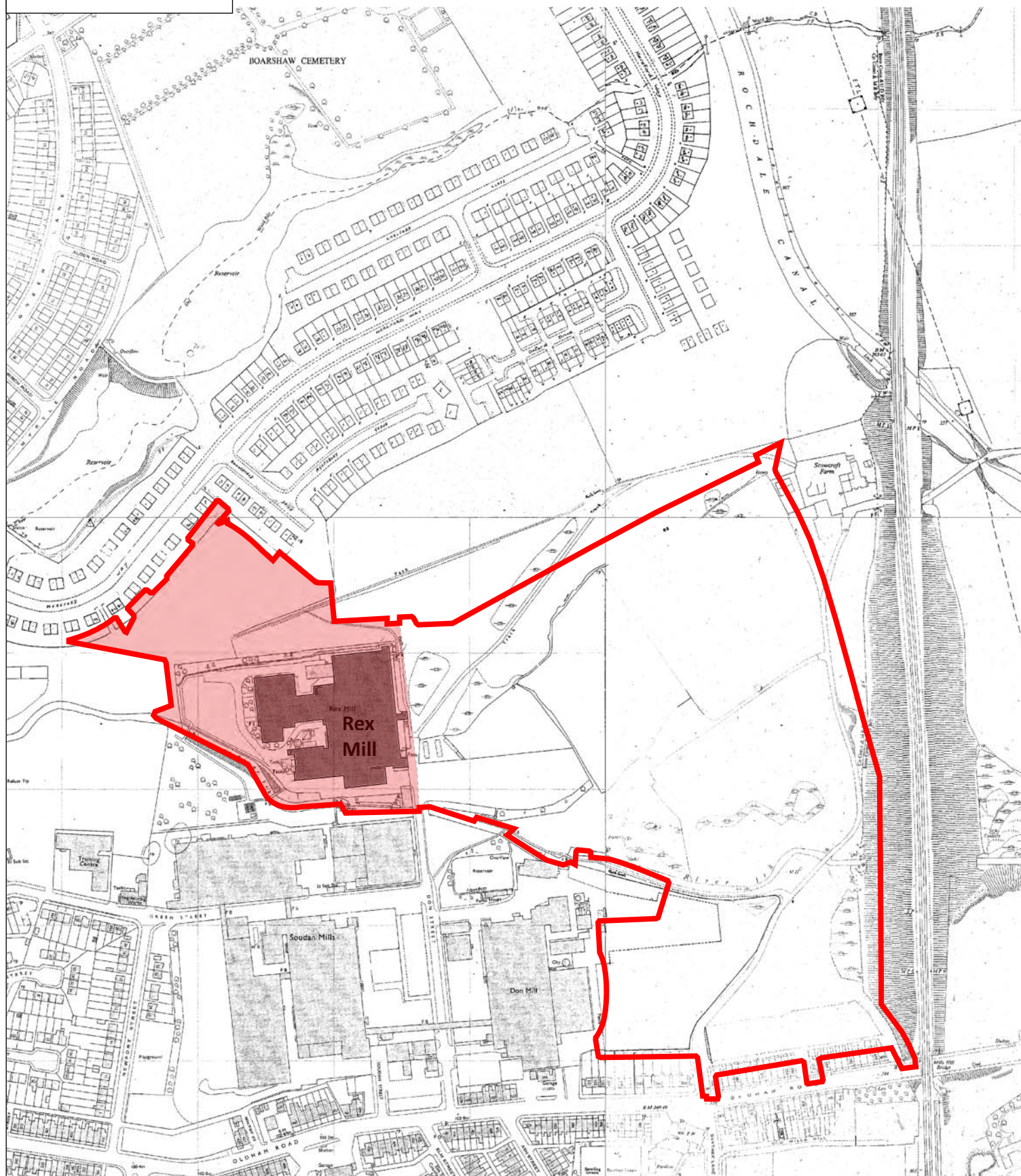
Figure 05: Ordnance Survey Map of Lancashire, 25 inch, 1909. Showing site boundary and Area 1 (in red) Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale.

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Figure 06: Ordnance Survey Map of Lancashire, 25 inch, 1965. Showing site boundary and Area 1 (in red) Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale.



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Figure 07: Ordnance Survey Map of Lancashire, 25 inch, 1974-75. Showing site boundary and Area 1 (in red) Land at Don Street, Middleton, Rochdale.