

NGR: SK 0575 0085

A report on a programme  
of archaeological works

# ***Marches Archaeology***

**Hollicombe Gas Works  
Torbay Road  
Paignton  
Devon**

**Report on an archaeological  
desk-based assessment**

September 2003

*Archaeological Consultants and Contractors*

NGR: SK 0575 0085

**A report on a programme  
of archaeological works**

*Marches Archaeology Series 300*

**This report is produced by**

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**Hollicombe Gas Works  
Torbay Road  
Paignton  
Devon**

**Report on an archaeological  
desk-based assessment**

**NGR: SX 8960 6230**

**Report by**  
Richard Stone

**Illustrations by**  
Jane Kenney

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*September 2003*  
*Marches Archaeology Series 300*

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**Hollicombe Gas Works  
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*Summary*

*An archaeological desk based assessment was carried out on land at the former Hollicombe Gas Works site north-west of Torbay Road, Paignton. The site straddles the historic parishes of Paignton and Cockington, with a stream, now culverted, marking the boundary. The central area of the site has been landscaped to form terraces and building platforms associated with the mid-twentieth century gas works. No development earlier than the twentieth century are known. Archaeological finds along the shore in Torbay indicate human activity in the area from the Mesolithic period. No entries for the site itself exist on the Torbay Sites and Monuments Register. The general character of the landscape is such that the possibility of archaeological remains on the site cannot be excluded, though the site is not considered to have high archaeological potential.*

## **1 Introduction**

In advance of applying for planning permission Hunter Page Planning, on behalf of SecondSite Property, the client, commissioned Marches Archaeology to provide an archaeological desk based assessment on the site of a depot and gas holding station off Torbay Road in Paignton (Fig. 1). The site is situated at NGR: SX 8960 6230. The site itself is not listed in the Sites and Monuments Record. A former part of the gasworks south of Torbay Road, now converted into a pleasure ground, is, however, included.

Marches Archaeology recognises the Code of Conduct, Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology, By-Laws, Standards and other documents produced by the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The project was managed by a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The Safety Policy and General Risk Assessment operated by Marches Archaeology were implemented. A risk assessment specific to this project was carried out and approved by the client's representative, SecondSite Property, before commencement of fieldwork.

## **2 Scope and aims of the project**

The purpose of Desk-based Assessment is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as “to gain information about the known or potential archaeological resource within a given area or site (including presence or absence, character and extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and relative quality of the potential archaeological resource), in order to make an assessment of its merit in the appropriate context, leading to one or more of the following: the

formation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource; the formation of a strategy for further investigation, whether or not intrusive, where the character and value of the resource is not sufficiently defined to permit a mitigation strategy or other response to be devised; the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research”.

### **3 Methodology**

Initially a site visit was made and representative photographs taken. The Torbay Sites and Monuments Register was the primary source consulted. Information provided by SecondSite Property was studied. Other repositories consulted included the National Monuments Record, Devon Record Office, West Country Studies Library, Exeter Library, Paignton Library and Torquay Library. The following sources were considered, as appropriate and subject to availability:

Ordnance Survey maps; Tithe maps; Estate maps and other historical maps;  
Previous published and unpublished archaeological reports and archive work;  
Written non-archaeological sources; Air photographs; Geological maps;  
Borehole and other engineering data.

Subsequently, this illustrated client report was produced, detailing the aims, methods, and results of the project. A non-technical summary and details of the location and size of the archive is included.

### **4 Site description**

The site is a roughly rectangular strip of land oriented north-west to south-east. It lies in a valley known as Hollicombe (variously Hollacombe and Hollocombe) that leads down to the sea. It is accessed from Hollicombe Road at the west and from Torbay Road at the south-east.

A stream in the valley bottom, now largely culverted, runs through the site and formed the historic parish boundary between Paignton to the west and Cockington to the east. Historic maps show a small pond, known as Hollicombe Lake, within the site, in the area of the stream not currently culverted.

The south-western side slopes down from a maximum height of 33.2m O.D. and the north-eastern from 26.2m O.D. At the north-west the valley bottom is at 25.1m O.D., dropping to 16.1m O.D. at the south-eastern entrance to the site on Torbay Road.

The site, including the former gas holder, is largely derelict, but the south-eastern corner is still in use by Transco. The southern part of the site is generally level, with a slope up to the north-west in the north-western part, except where terraced. The surface is partly hard standing of concrete and tarmac and partly soft cover. Much of the soft cover is gravel, but in some areas is vegetation, which may overlie gravel in some areas. In Transco's area this is approximately 90% hard standing, elsewhere it is 30% hard standing. Several buildings exist on the site, but most have been demolished and survive only as concrete floors and foundations below ground. An environmental assessment of the site carried out in 1998 for

British Gas includes a plan of the site (reproduced here as Fig. 2) showing areas of building and ground surfaces (Bray, 1998).

## 5 Ground conditions and geological background

The shallow natural deposits were tested by the environmental assessment (Bray, 1998). This included the excavation of 33 trial pits, 7 cable percussion and 5 window sampler boreholes (Fig. 2). The depth of made ground varied over the site in the range 0.4m - 3.5m (Table 1). In the open north-western quarter of the site the depth typically ranged from 0.4m to 1.3m, with one of the twelve readings being higher, at 1.7m. The south-eastern part of the site was typically between 2.0 and 3.0m, though two of the twelve readings here were less than 1m. The central area, from the gas holder to TP17 gave a wide range of readings varying between 0.4m and 3.5m. This variation may be indicative of landscaping works to level out parts of the valley to provide building platforms and terraces.

| Hole no. | Depth of made ground (m) | Hole no. | Depth of made ground (m) | Hole no. | Depth of made ground (m) | Hole no. | Depth of made ground (m) |
|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| BH1      | 1.7                      | TP1      | 1.00 *                   | TP13     | 1.8                      | TP25     | 1.20 *                   |
| BH2      | 1.2                      | TP2      | 2.1                      | TP14     | 2.8                      | TP26     | 0.6                      |
| BH3      | 1                        | TP3      | 3                        | TP15     | 2.2                      | TP27     | 2.4                      |
| BH4      | 0.5                      | TP4      | 2.8                      | TP16     | 3                        | TP28     | 0.8                      |
| BH5      | 0.4                      | TP5      | 1.10 *                   | TP17     | 2.2                      | TP29     | 0.6                      |
| BH6      | 2.00 ‡ >0.5              | TP6      | 0.6                      | TP18     | 0.5                      | TP30     | 0.4                      |
| BH7      | 0.9                      | TP7      | 1.40 *                   | TP19     | 0.6                      | TP31     | 1                        |
| WS1      | 2.75                     | TP8      | 3.5                      | TP20     | 1.3                      | TP32     | 2.9                      |
| WS2      | 0.8                      | TP9      | 0.3                      | TP21     | 0.4                      | TP33     | 3.5                      |
| WS3      | 2.5                      | TP10     | 0.5                      | TP22     | 0.6                      |          |                          |
| WS4      | 2                        | TP11     | 3                        | TP23     | 0.4                      |          |                          |
| WS5      | 2.00 ‡ >1.5              | TP12     | 0.7                      | TP24     | 2.50 ‡ >2.0              |          |                          |

Key: \* - Concrete encountered and not penetrated  
‡ - Depth after which modern materials not noted in log

**Table 1 - Depth of made ground in exploratory holes (from Bray, 1998)**

The site investigations indicated that throughout the site made ground included elements such as brick or ash which strongly suggest a recent origin, presumably during the twentieth century. In the north-western area coke, clinker and ashy sand were frequently present. Only three borehole or pits indicated deposits in which probably recent materials were not specifically identified (BH6, WS5 and TP25). The limitations of such ground investigation should be recognised in interpreting for archaeological purposes.

The environmental assessment indicated that the deposits below the made ground typically comprise 'soft red brown silty occasionally sandy clay with some to much gravel (becoming firm to stiff with depth) [overlying] loose red brown fine to coarse gravel, cobbles and boulders of slate in a silty clayey matrix' (Bray, 1998, 20).



The majority of the site is underlain by slates with grits of the Meadfoot Group of the Devonian era. The area adjacent to the culverted stream is underlain by alluvium (BGS).

The environmental assessment provided 'significant visual and olfactory evidence of hydrocarbon contamination' at depths of 2.5m to 3.0m in the south-eastern part of the site. Similar evidence of contamination in the remainder of the site was less widespread, but noted in Trial Pits 8, 18, 22 and 31.

## **6 Archaeological and historical background**

Chance finds along the sea front from Brixham to Torquay have revealed artefacts ranging in date from the Mesolithic period to the Roman period. The easily accessible beaches provide a good base for trade from other areas, whether of Britain or the Continent and this reflects the potential of the area for understanding patterns of trade.

Just inland at Brixham is a chambered tomb (SAM33025, SX85NE/4) excavated by Raleigh Radford and dated broadly to the middle of the Neolithic period. There are also chance finds of Neolithic burials in Goodrington to the south of Paignton. Beyond this there is little evidence of settlement or indeed burial before the medieval period.

The pattern of land use for the period up to and including the Roman period is poorly understood other than in the broadest sense. The beaches afforded good landing places and the finds along the strand show that the area was used at various times throughout the prehistoric and Roman periods. In the Neolithic at least the higher ground was used for burial, strongly suggesting that there are settlement remains in the general area. It is very likely that small settlements existed to support those landing in the area. These, however, may have been temporary or insubstantial and could well be elusive in the archaeological record. Valley bottoms are not the most favoured of locations for settlements in the prehistoric period, but the availability of fresh running water would be desirable and it is likely that over the prehistoric period the Hollicombe area was used at least as a water source, and possibly for other activities including settlement.

The place name evidence of the area is largely of Saxon origin. although the earliest documented reference to Hollicombe is circa 1200, the name is formed of two Saxon words based on landscape features - a hollow valley (*hohl* + *cumb*) (Glover *et al*, 1931, 518). Conversely, the names of the nearby settlements, Cockington to the east, and Preston and Paignton to the west, are all indicative of Saxon period settlements. This points to a managed landscape of manors by the late Saxon period. Artefactual remains of this period, often under-represented in the archaeological record, are limited to an early eleventh century bracelet of twisted gold found at Elberry near Brixham.

Based on a settlement founded in the Saxon period or earlier, the manor of Paignton was in the possession of the bishops of Exeter by at least 1055 (H. Bishop *pers. comm.*) and became the site of an episcopal palace. It acquired a weekly market and three day fair, indicated by a charter of 1295 (Hoskins, 1972, 449-450). Paignton remained a small settlement until the late Victorian period when a new town centre was developed by the local architect G S Bridgman adjacent to the older part (Cherry and Pevsner, 1989, 836). In the early part of the twentieth century the town expanded as a seaside resort.

The Mallock family held the manor of Cockington from 1654, when they acquired it from the Carys, another of the major landowners of the area. Despite the growth of Paignton to the south and Torquay to the north they did not develop their land in the late nineteenth century, allowing only isolated villas (Hoskins, 1972, 501). This attitude was crystallised in the 1930s when the Cockington Trust was formed with the intention of preserving 'entire and unchanged the ancient amenities and character of the place and in developing its surroundings to do nothing which may not rather enhance than diminish its attractiveness' (Cherry and Pevsner, 1989, 835). In 1928 the village and parish of Cockington were taken into the municipal borough of Torquay (Hoskins, 1972, 501). In 1968 Torquay and Paignton were amalgamated within Torbay District.

In 1567 an extensive survey was carried out of the Paignton area, which noted all settlements, though not referring to field names. Hollicombe was not mentioned, indicating that there were no dwellings there at the time (Straton, 1909).

The Court Roll for Cockington includes an entry dated 11 January 1658 referring to a holding including land at Hollicombe. The Lordship of the Manor had passed from the second Roger Mallock, who had died in June 1657, to his son Rawlyn Mallock, who was only nine years old. The lands referred to had been leased by the late John Keemer and had passed on his death to William Ley and his wife Ann on a standard 99 year one life lease. The land consisted of "one messuage and Tenement with th'appurtenances and two sev'all closes of land called Hollowcombe and Pitt parke" (Ellis, 1930, 183). It is possible that the two dwellings indicated as a messuage and a tenement were in the Hollicombe area. This, however, remains uncertain as Pit Park is in Livermead, not Hollicombe and it is equally likely that the dwellings were somewhere other than Hollicombe. The Court Rolls were not consulted for this study and it is possible that a close examination of this source may reveal other entries.

The map evidence before the nineteenth century consists predominantly of County maps which are insufficiently detailed to show the site itself. On the various eighteenth century maps settlements are shown at Paignton and Cockington, though not at Preston, which was clearly too small to warrant inclusion (Batten and Bennett, 1996). The earliest detailed map to show part of the site is an 1801 map of Cockington (included in the gazetteer by Ravenhill and Rowe, 2002).

The Tithe map information is more helpful for Paignton parish than for Cockington. The site lies within parcels 259- 266 of Paignton, and 7 and 39 of Cockington. Table 2 shows the tenurial and land use details for the Paignton parcels. The Cockington land is simply stated as parts of "Chelson alias Chilstone Barton and Cockington Barton" which was owned by Mary Mallock, John Yonge and Charles Herbert Mallock and was tenanted by "Charles Herbert Mallock and others".

| Landowner                              | Occupier       | Parcel | Description       | Land use |
|--|----------------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| Church of Exeter & Wise & Co. (Lessee) | William Sparks | 259    | Hollacombe        | Arable   |
|  |                | 260    | Hollacombe        | Arable   |
| Robert Bulland                         | Himself        | 261    | Higher Hollacombe | Pasture  |
| Church of Exeter &                     | Himself        | 262    | Nacks Field       | Pasture  |

|   |         |     |                    |         |
|---|---------|-----|--------------------|---------|
| Robert Bulland (Lessee)                   |         |     |                    |         |
| Church of Exeter & Thomas Distin (Lessee) | Himself | 263 | Hollocombe Orchard | Orchard |
| Isabella Distin                           | Herself | 264 | Hollacombe         | Pasture |
| Robert Bulland                            | Himself | 265 | Bobhill            | Arable  |

**Table 2 - Information from the Paignton Tithe apportionment**

The First edition of the 25" to 1 mile Ordnance Survey (OS) map of the area shows the site entirely undeveloped with a stream running south-eastwards through the site. Approximately 40% of the area is shown as wooded, principally at the north-west, with a smaller area of woodland towards the south of the site east of the stream in Cockington parish. At this point the stream widens into a small pond. To the south-east of the site Torquay Gas Works is shown, which was founded in 1860 and which was later to spread into the area of the site. This part of the gas works is included in the Sites and Monuments Record (SX86SE/86) and is noted as having been entirely converted into a pleasure ground with access to the beach.

By 1904 there had been several changes, but no significant alteration to the character of the landscape. The two fields in the north-eastern area had been amalgamated. The Cockington woodland had been cleared and Roundhill Cottage, with its ancillary buildings, had been built on the site. In Paignton parish, the southern part of the woodland had been cleared, restricting it to the northern parcel of land.

In 1923 the Paignton Gaslight Coal and Coke Company merged with the Torquay Gas Company. The expansion of the Hollicombe works into the study area is likely to date from shortly after this time. In 1929 the St Marychurch Gas Company also merged and from this time the making of gas was restricted to the Hollicombe site (Pike, 1993, 56).

The 1933 OS map indicates that the gas holder had been constructed along with two buildings at the south of the site. At this time it is apparent that the gas works did not extend east of the stream or north into the woodland at the north-west, but rather that the remainder of the site was unchanged except for a minor change to the structure south of Roundhill Cottage. The 1938 Six Inch County Series OS map (not illustrated) shows little change.

The OS map shows that by 1954 the gas works had expanded into the whole of the site. The southern half was built up with structures relating to the gas works. The environmental assessment (Bray 1998) identified, where possible, the use of the various buildings shown on this map (Fig. 2). The woodland is not shown at the north-west and the stream is culverted. There is evidence of landscaping to the east and north of the gas holder, presumably associated with the culverting of the stream and to create level areas for building platforms. The impression both from the map and on site is that the intention was to modify the natural slope of the valley to provide flat or gently sloping land with terraces created where the gradient was too steep to allow smoothing to be carried out. This presumably involved a process of cutting material from upslope, removing any archaeological deposits, and infilling the areas downslope with this material, burying any archaeological deposits downslope. In the absence of any detailed information about the contours of the site before the gas works was built it is not possible to determine the extent of such operations.

Later maps indicate that there have been several extensions, additions, demolitions and other alterations to the building stock. The modern map (Fig. 1) refers to Hollicombe Lake in the

area of the stream which is not culverted. This name is not mentioned on the earlier maps but may refer to the pond shown on the First Edition map, though that is approximately 50m further downstream. Gas production from coal ceased in 1968 (Pike, 1993, 56) but the gas holder remained operative until 2002.

Aerial photographs (APs) supplement the cartographic evidence in indicating the form of the buildings in three dimensions. An AP of *circa* 1930 (Plate 5) shows the new gas holder with open ground to its south and woodland to the east of the stream (Tully, 1992, 48). The gas holder is clearly shown on 1941 APs, though these are at the wrong angle and not sufficiently detailed to indicate the state of ancillary development (SX 8962/9 & 10). It is clear that the development of the site had occurred by 1946 (Plate 6). The later development is shown on further aerial photographs, examples of which are provided (Plates 7-10).

The only entries in the immediate vicinity, aside from the gas works itself, relate to mid twentieth century military installations created as WWII defences. These comprise the site of a rocket battery (SX86SE/28), two pillboxes (SX86SE/154 and /156), a railway siding guardhouse (SX86SE/155) and a gun emplacement (SX86SE/157). During WWII a Home Guard platoon was based at Hollicombe Gas Works which was being used as a store for barrage balloon gas (SMR entry). A fire broke out at the gas works during an air raid in 1942, indicating the strategic importance of the works.

## **7 Discussion**

The current absence of archaeological evidence relating to the study area reflects the lack of previous investigation rather than an absence of former use of the area. Until recently, human activity, including settlements, tended to cluster around fertile areas and sources of fresh water. Hollicombe fulfils these conditions and it would not be unusual to find that the site had been used in the past other than for agriculture, though the extent to which this might survive in the archaeological record is unknown.

Along the Torbay coastline there is ample evidence of human use of the area over several millennia. Most of the evidence earlier than the medieval period is derived from chance finds and the opportunity to supplement this with an understanding of settlement or burial patterns as well as of trade would be most welcome. Any archaeological remains in the study area, particularly of the Saxon or prehistoric period, would have the potential to be of regional significance in view of the gaps in understanding of the use of the area. The likelihood that significant archaeological deposits survive in this area is, however, low.

The map evidence provides the only indication of the use of the site. Prior to the construction and use of the gas works, which has little archaeological significance, the site was in agricultural use as pasture woodland. This, however, is likely to have left few traces and is of limited archaeological interest.

The landscaping and terracing carried out for the gas works, together with the surface treatments laid for it, have obscured the earlier profile of the land as well as probably having removed part of the stratigraphic sequence of some areas of the study area. From visual examination of the surrounding area it is apparent that the north-western part of the site is less steep than the south-eastern and is therefore more conducive to settlement.

There is no specific period during which human activity is more or less likely in the study area. An excavation on a terrace in a river valley close to the coast at Newquay, a broadly similar landscape (albeit sandy), revealed an extensive settlement in the Bronze Age and a later reuse as a cemetery in the Iron Age (Novakowski, 1991, 12-13). In this case, and typically so, the settlement was confined to the terrace, which had been partly created by man. If the present study area includes ancient terraces, such as seems possible at the north-west this would provide a good site for settlement or other intensive activity. Such possibilities, however, remain speculative and there is no *a priori* evidence to suggest that this is a site of archaeological significance.

The issue of hydrocarbon contamination, found throughout much of the site, cannot be ignored in considering the archaeological potential of the site. If any remains do exist, significant measures may be required to ensure the health and safety of any archaeological investigations carried out on the site.

## **8 Conclusions**

The Torbay area has been used by man since at least the Mesolithic period but little is known about the early development of the study area. The landscape is conducive to human use but this will largely have been agricultural. There is no direct evidence of any archaeological deposits on the site. Deposits will have been compromised to some extent by recent landscaping and by contamination.

Overall, it is considered that the archaeological potential of the site is low. In view of this it is recommended that no further archaeological investigation is required.

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*Maps*

1801 *A Plan of the Parish of Cockington with part of the parish of Marlton in the county of Devon the property of Roger Mallock Esq.r. Surveyed in the year 1801*

1840 Tithe map for the parish of Paignton

1846 Tithe map for the parish of Cockington

1861 Ordnance Survey: Devonshire CXXII.1, 25" to 1 mile, First Edition (published 1864 (Cockington) and 1865 (Paignton))

1904 Ordnance Survey: Devonshire CXXII.1, 25" to 1 mile, Second Edition (published 1906)

1933 Ordnance Survey: Devonshire CXXII.1, 25" to 1 mile, Second Edition Revised (published 1933)

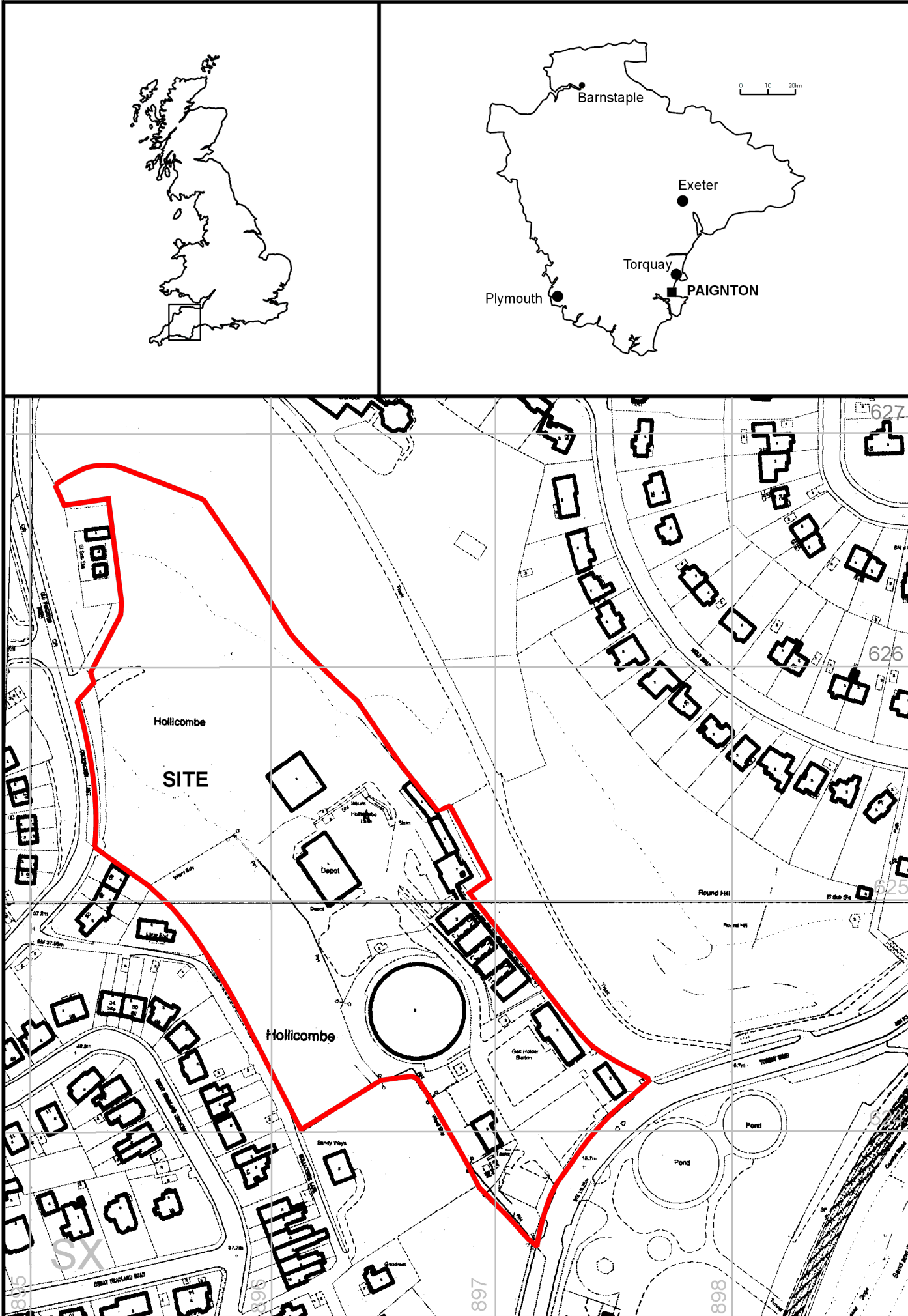


Fig. 1: Location of the site



| REV | DATE    | BY | CHKD | APPD |
|-----|---------|----|------|------|
| A   | 18/3/98 |    |      |      |

Grid aligned to National Grid

#### KEY FOR HISTORICAL USE

PRESENT IN 1933

1. UNIDENTIFIED BUILDING

2. CLUB ROOM

3. GAS HOLDER

4. UNIDENTIFIED BUILDING

5. UNIDENTIFIED BUILDING

PRESENT BETWEEN 1933 & 1954

1. PURIFIER

PRESENT IN 1954

1. RECTIFIER HOUSE

2. STORES

3. & 4. OIL TANKS

5. NAPHTHALENE WASHERS

6. STATION METERS

7. MAINTENANCE GARAGE

8. COKE PACKAGING PLANT

9. PURIFIERS (DEMPSTERS)

10. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

11. GOVERNOR & BOOSTER HOUSE

12. CAR PARKING AREA

PRESENT IN 1990

1. UNIDENTIFIED BUILDING

PRESENT IN 1993

1. DISUSED WORKSHOPS

#### KEY FOR SITE INVESTIGATION

TRIAL PIT

TP2

BOREHOLE

BH6

WINDOW SAMPLE

SURFACE WATER SAMPLE

(14.44) GROUNDWATER DEPTH (mAOD)

#### CLIENT

BG plc  
PROPERTY DIVISION

#### PROJECT

GAS HOLDER STATION  
HOLLACOMBE SITE  
TORBAY ROAD, PAIGNTON

#### TITLE

EXPLORATORY HOLE LOCATIONS

|         |                                 |             |     |
|---------|---------------------------------|-------------|-----|
| DATE    | JANUARY '98                     | PRODUCED BY | BRG |
| SCALE   | 1:500 at A1                     | CHECKED     |     |
| CAD REF | H:\GM\BL\207\020\DWG\FG-13A.DWG | APPROVED    |     |



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**Fig. 2 Layout of the site, showing ground investigations and former buildings**





Fig. 3: 1801 map of Cockington, surveyed for R. Mallock

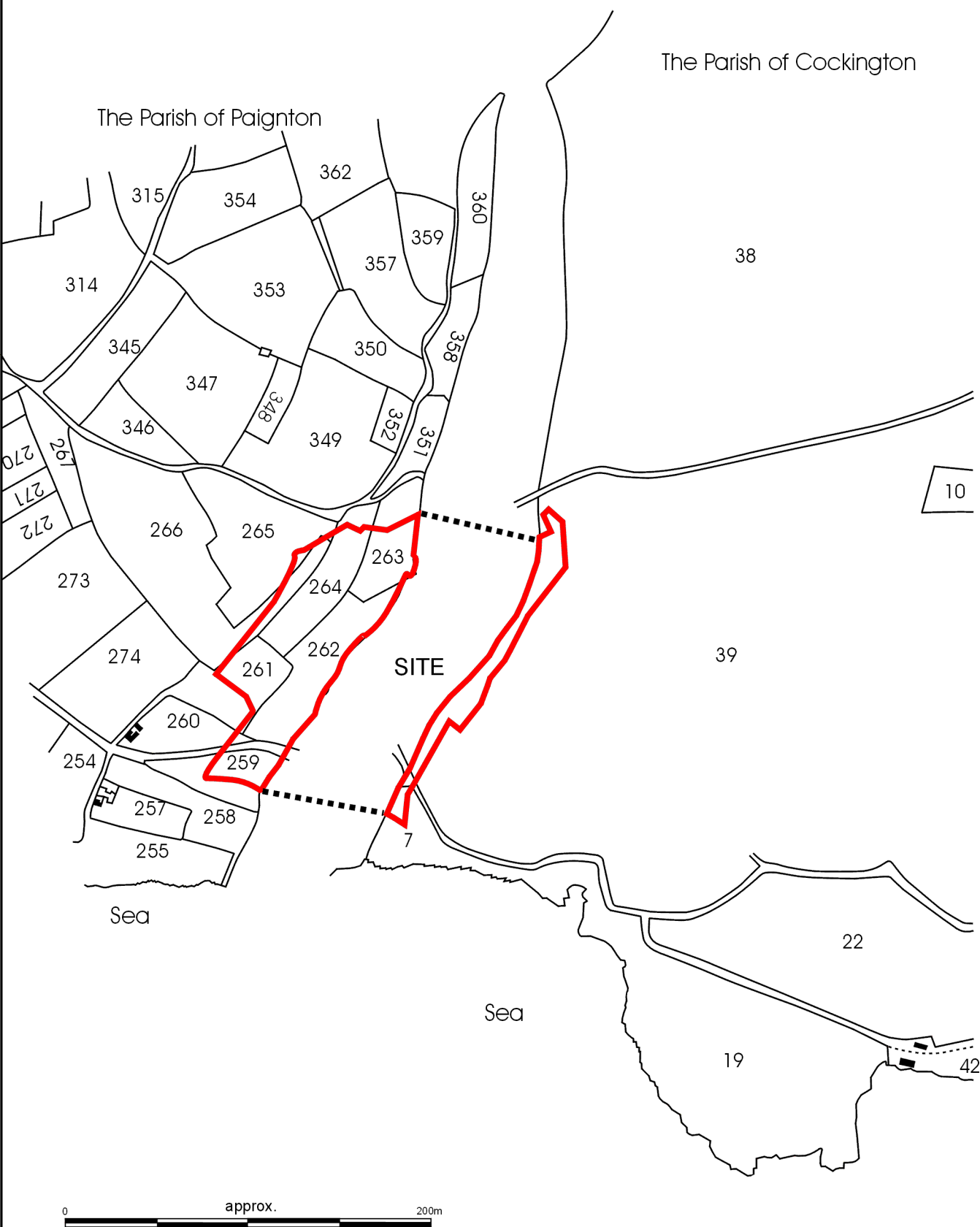


Fig. 4: Tithe maps for the parishes of Paignton and Cockington, 1840 and 1846  
(the parishes are directly adjacent but the maps could not be joined due to surveying errors)

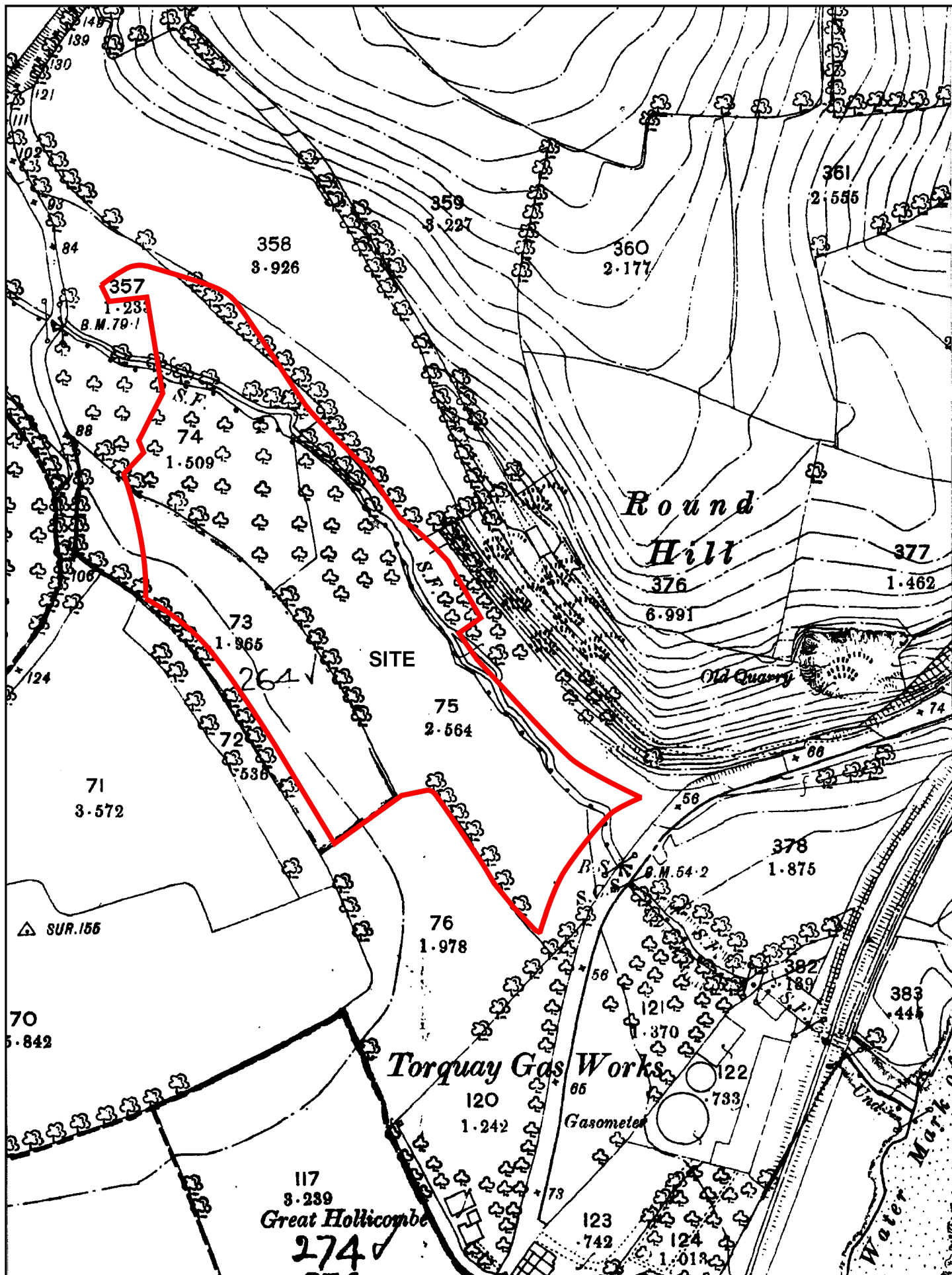


Fig. 5: OS County Series map, 1st edition, 1861

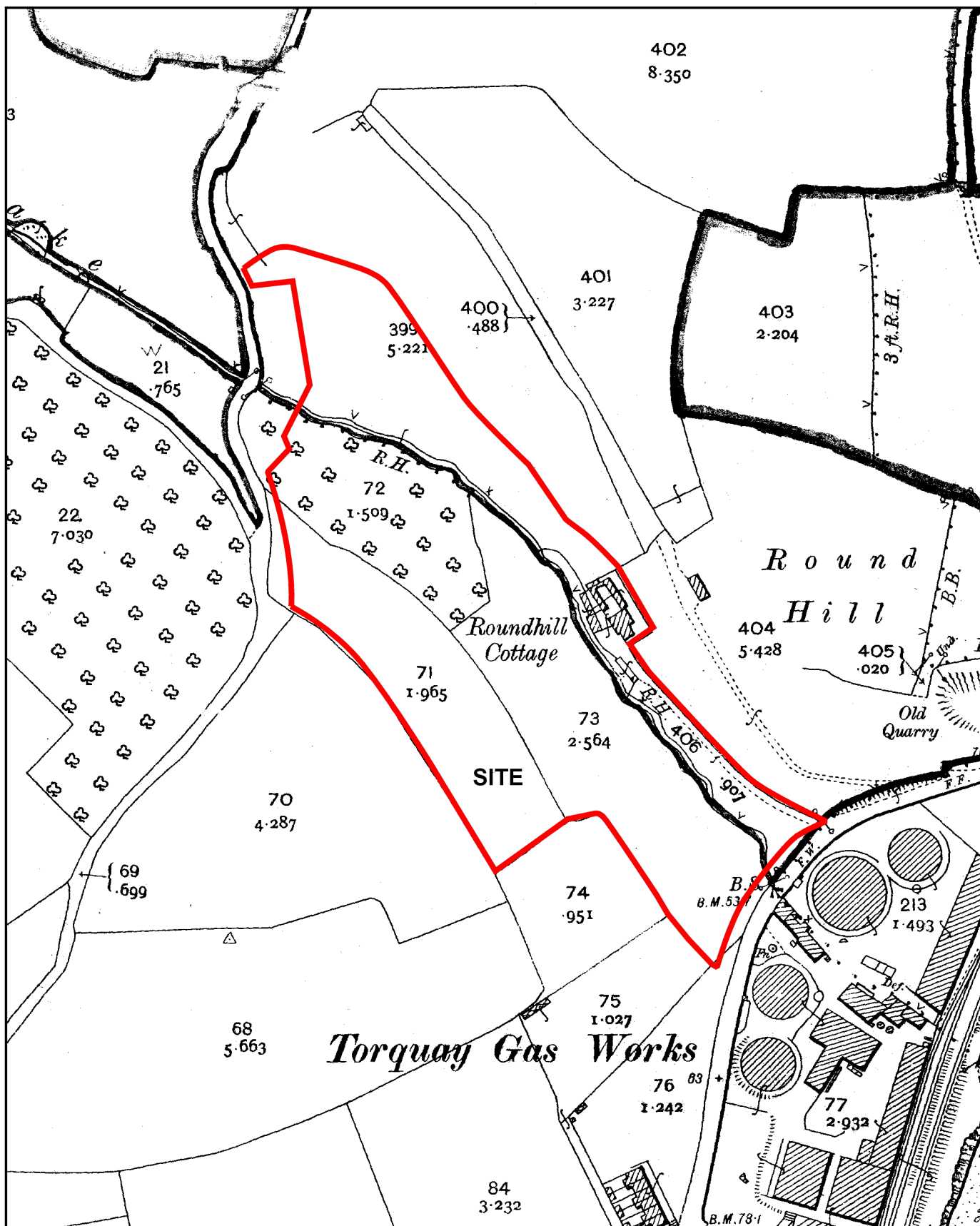


Fig. 6: OS County Series map, 2nd edition, 1904

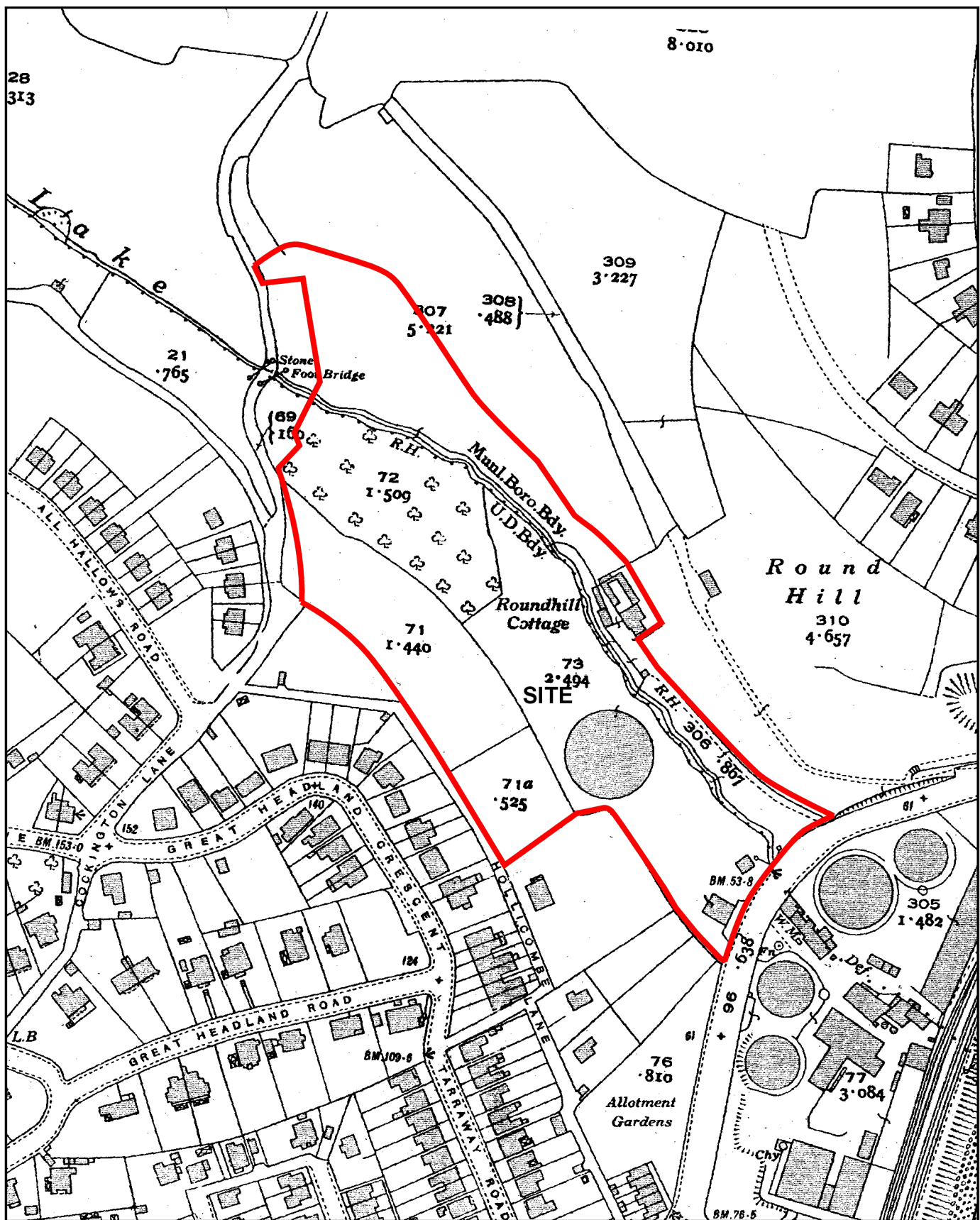


Fig. 7: OS County Series map, revision of 1933





**Plate 1 View of the northern site looking south-east from the northern end**



**Plate 2 - View of the central third of the site looking north-west from the north of the demolished gas holder**

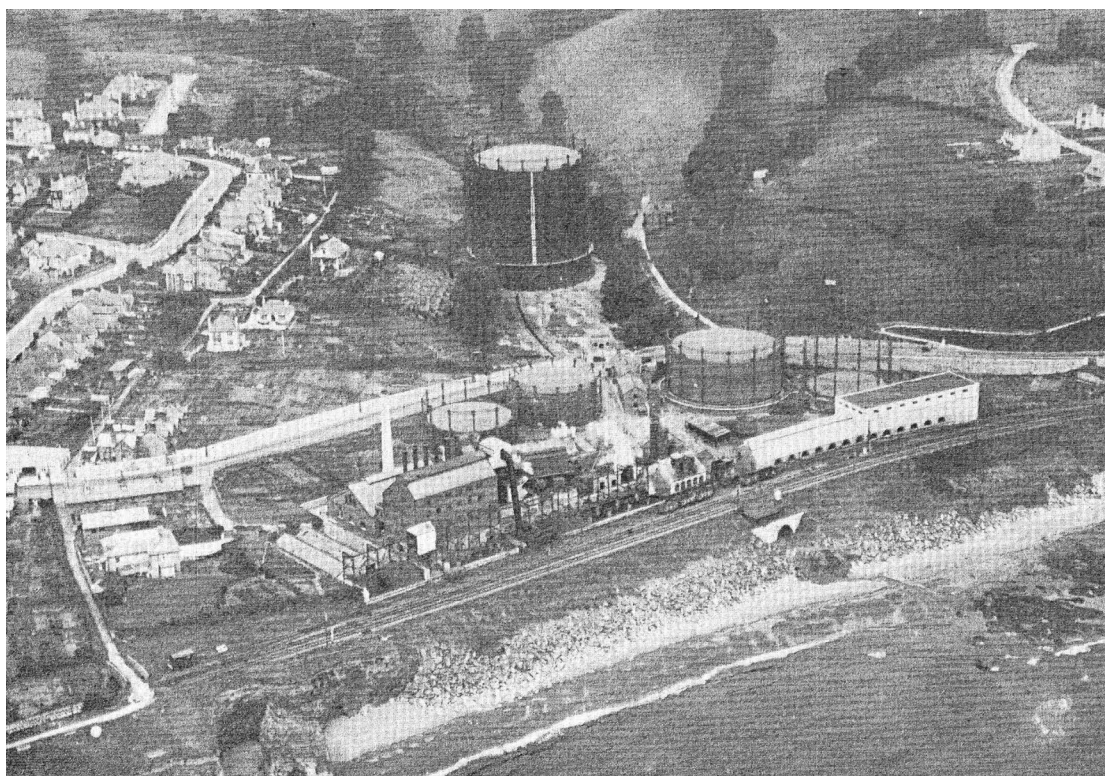




**Plate 3 - View of the southern third of the site looking south-east  
over the demolished gas holder to Torbay Road**



**Plate 4 - View of the standing buildings at the  
south-east of the site, looking east**

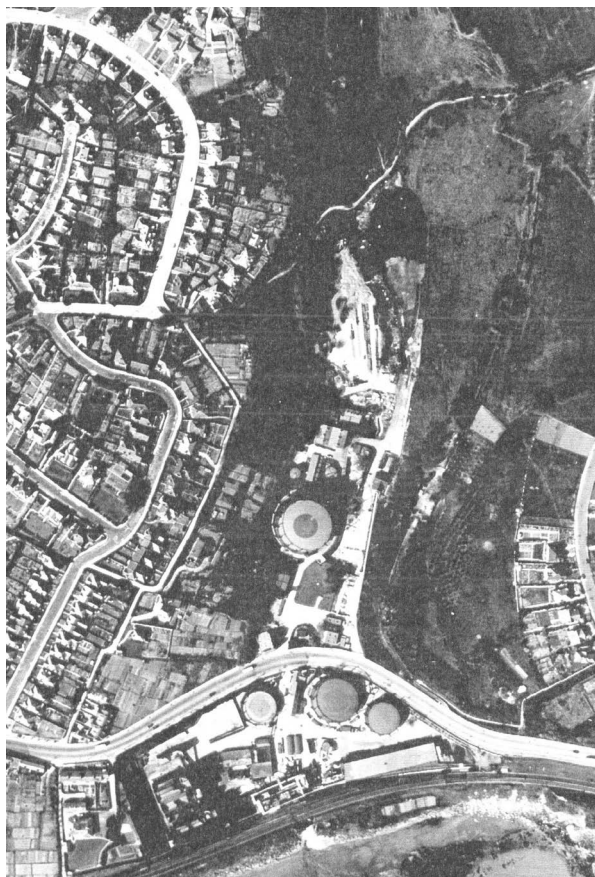


**Plate 5 Aerial photograph of the site *circa* 1930 (in Tully, 1992, 48)**



**Plate 6 Aerial photograph of the site in 1946 (RAF/3G/TUD/UK/223 frame 5098)**





**Plate 7**  
**Aerial photograph of the site in**  
**1949 (RAF/58/209 frame 5090)**

**Plate 8 Aerial photograph of the**  
**site in 1958 (RAF 30137 PSFO-PZ**  
**frame 0115)**





**Plate 9 Aerial photograph of the site in 1959 (F21.58/RAF/3190 frame 0080).**



Plate 10 Aerial photograph of the site in 1988 OS/88090 frame 073)