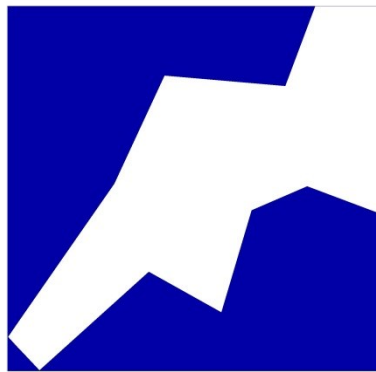


A DEVELOPMENT AT COLLATON CROSS DEVON

Results of an Archaeological
Desk-based Assessment



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A Development at Collaton Cross, Devon. NGR SX 5673 4942

Introduction

Peninsula Archaeology received a brief from the Devon County Historic Environment Team (HET) specifying archaeological work at the above site in order to ensure fulfilment of a planning condition on proposed works, namely the construction of employment units, boat storage and a mixed use development of 70 dwellings (South Hams planning references 37/2547/14/F & 37/2548/14/O). The programme of archaeological work was to include a desk-based appraisal in order to place any archaeological features found during the ground works in their historical and archaeological context. Such an appraisal was to be based on study of cartographic material held at the Devon Heritage Centre (The combined Records Office and West Country Studies Library) as well as examination of records and aerial photographs held by the HET. The desk-based appraisal was carried out during March 2015 by Dr Martin Tingle MCIfA.

Summary

The site is located 2.5 kilometres to the north east of Newton Ferrers (Fig 1). The proposed development is in a field immediately adjacent to the road which links Newton Ferrers to Yealmpton. It will involve the construction of 70 houses with business units together with community facilities such as allotments, a market square and a boat store.

Site Description and Topography

The site at Collaton Cross is located on a flat hill top approximately 92 metres AOD. The site is located within an area where the underlying geology forms a conjunction of the slate, siltstone and sandstone of the Meadford Group and the slate, siltstone and mudstone of the Staddon Formation. (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/>). The current land use is for a combination of pasture, arable agriculture and small areas waste. A site visit was made on 10th March 2015

Cartographic History

The earliest cartographic representation of the area around the site is on Donn's 1765 Map of Devon (Fig 2). This does not show the site itself but does show that the B 3186 which now runs past the site was not the principal access between Yealmpton and Newton Ferrers at the time the map was drawn. There is apparently no extant copy of the Ordnance Survey Surveyor's Draft map of c.1804 so that the earliest cartographic representation of the site is on the Tithe map of 1839 (Fig 3). The farmhouse and outbuildings of Collaton Farm are shown and the apportionment records the farm was owned by the Rev. John Yonge and tenanted by William Adams. The fields which occupy the area of the proposed development are all recorded as arable land.

Collaton Cross next appears on the Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 map (Fig 4) published c.1890, with the layout of field boundaries and the buildings almost exactly as it appears on the tithe map. In the Second Edition 1:2500 map of 1906 (Fig 5) there has been no major changes apart from two disused quarries being marked to the north and south of Collaton Farm. In 1939 work begins on the construction of a barrage balloon depot the plan for which shows the building of over 80 structures ranging from a substantial winch and trailer shed to barrack blocks (Fig 7). The base continues to be occupied after the war appearing on the 1950 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map but by then it had become a medical rehabilitation unit (Fig 9). These buildings continued in occasional use into the 1970's although by then most of them had been removed so that today a modern barn occupies the site in the centre of a large area of hard standing (Fig 10).

Current Archaeological Record

Within a 500 metre radius of area around Collaton Cross, the Devon Historic Environment Record has 16 entries (see Appendix A and Fig 6), the earliest of which are two prehistoric find spots (MDV 2280 & 13495) which record two retouched flint flakes. Two medieval entries (MDV 1747 & 36094) record the remains of a stone cross at Collaton Cross and place name evidence of a rabbit warren in Warren Meadow. A third medieval entry (MDV 39119) is for the listed farmhouse at Collaton, which was largely refurbished in the 19th century but retains some 17th century fabric and some features which may be earlier. To the north of Collaton, Wrescombe Farm with its accompanying barn and shippen are also listed. In addition there are two entries for parklands at Puslinch (MDV64769) and gardens at Gnaton Hall (MDV63470). Although they are outside the area of the original study it is possibly significant that a group of three prehistoric burial mounds have been recorded at Creacombe Farm (Fig 6, 5).

RAF Collaton Cross

The remaining entries relate to the barrage balloon depot, later a medical rehabilitation centre RAF Collaton Cross (MDV51747). Source material for the history of the base and the area around it were collected by a local historian, Arthur Cramp, whose archive is now in the Plymouth and West Devon Records Office (PWDRO 2489).

The Western Independent newspaper reported in February 1939 that surveying had commenced for the construction of the balloon depot near Yealmpton and work must have commenced shortly thereafter since in July of that year it reported the accidental injury of a workman by the collapse of a large door. The depot became active shortly afterwards as No13 Balloon Centre. The bombing of Plymouth began in July 1940 with the heaviest raids taking place in April 1941. The balloon depot appears in a list of enemy actions around Yealmpton which reported that it was struck by 5 high explosive bombs on 27th November 1940. All such balloon depots followed a similar layout adapted to suit local conditions. They functioned as depots for mobile balloon deploying vehicles and were the location for repairing and servicing these units. The 1939/40 plan of RAF Collaton Cross (Fig7)

shows over 80 structures,. They are accompanied by a number which links them to a list that indicates their various functions (Fig 7). A comparison between the plan of RAF Collaton Cross and that of No 17 Balloon Centre at Sutton on Hull reveals that the buildings, if not their layout, were virtually identical (<http://www.17balloons.co.uk/pages/plan.html>)

Some of the structures dating from the period of wartime activity survived up to the present albeit in a rather poor condition. These were observed in a site visit in 1996 and include an air raid shelter (MDV55122) and a magazine (MDV55121), which would have stored the explosive charges that cut the cable when it was struck by an enemy (or more usually a friendly) aircraft. In addition there are features which relate to the sites wartime use which were not included in the depot plan. One such is the remains of “seagull” trenches” (MDV 51748), visible on an air photograph of 1947 (Fig 8).

The last bombing raid on Plymouth was in May 1944 and following the allied invasion in June, the Plymouth balloon defences became redundant and were removed by September of that year. The base continued to be operated by a skeleton staff until it was renovated and re-opened in 1946 as No2 Medical Rehabilitation Centre. By August of 1946 there were 73 patients being treated, a figure that rose to 150 by January 1948. New equipment was installed such as a medical treatment bath delivered in February 1948. At the beginning of June 1949 the staff numbered 221 including 1 WRAF officer and 55 Airwomen treating a total of 181 patients. It appears on the OS 1:2500 map of 1950 (Fig 9)

An inventory of the base dating from November 1956 lists the functions of the various structures based on the original 1939/40 base plan and utilising the same numbering system. This allows a comparison to be made between the two periods of use to reveal how the functions of buildings changed or stayed the same. Many of the structures such as the NAAFI, the church, the sewage treatment plant, latrines, showers and the cycle shed were unaltered but those parts of the site specifically related to the operation of barrage balloons were found new functions or occasionally removed. The large hangar like building (1 on Fig 9), described as the winch and trailer shed, became a gymnasium, the packed balloon shed a cinema (7) and the balloon fabric repair shed a medical administration centre (4). The most substantial difference between the balloon depot and the Medical Rehabilitation Centre was that an entire barracks area (numbered 82 and 82 on the 1939 inventory) located in the south west corner of the base was removed, although it is possible that they were never completed (cf Figs 7 & 9)

Subsequent use of the site was as a temporary campsite for RAF personnel and photographs from the 1960's show a large building, perhaps a balloon hangar, and the raised water tank were still extant. (<http://www.44th-entry.org.uk/CS10.html>). An account of the base mentions that it was being used as overspill accommodation for personnel based at RAF Mountbatten as late as 1972 but by then only the headquarters building remained.

During this period, the site also became the location of H. M. Coastguard Yealm. Two antennae were erected, the bases and support cables forming two large circles. Both have subsequently been

removed. The northern most has been partially adopted into the development plan with the former location of the mast forming a roundabout. The southern antenna site is outside the current development. Two modern Coastguard buildings remain and have been excluded from the proposed development

Walk over Survey of the site

A detailed walkover survey of the study area was undertaken on March 9th 2015, examining first the locations of the 3 HER entries and subsequently the area of the proposed development. All features considered to be of interest were recorded and located on to a 1:2500 scale map base, using taped or paced measurements from the field boundaries or with the aid of a hand-held GPS. Where appropriate, individual sites were planned and/or photographed.

The walkover survey was conducted on Monday March 9th. Weather conditions were damp with low cloud and moderately poor visibility. Initially the grid references from the HER records of the RAF site were input as waypoints on a hand held GPS in order to locate them. Following this a general inspection was made of the site looking at the locations of some of the principal buildings

Results

Magazine (MDV55121).

The site of the magazine was located at the end of a concrete road surface at the extreme south of the site (A on Fig 9). The site has been levelled but there is still an earthwork scarp where the magazine had previously been sited (Fig 11). The magazine is outside the area of the proposed development and will therefore be unaffected by it

“Seagull” trenches (MDV 51748).

Although their location is known, the trenches are not visible on the ground due to the subsequent erection of the southernmost Coast guard antenna. The field in which they were located is currently pasture and is also outside the area of the proposed development.

Air raid shelter (MDV55122)

The location of the air raid shelter is currently overgrown with brambles (Fig 12). It could not be determined whether the remains of the shelter which were observed in 1996 are still extant, and if they are, their current condition. The proposed development sites a house at the approximate location of the former air raid shelter but since the current state of the shelter is unknown, the impact of this cannot be determined.

In general, the central area of the RAF base is characterised today by extensive areas of hard standing, edged in part by cleared rubble heaps (Fig 10). There are some traces of the original

buildings such as the site of the large hangar like building (1 on Fig 9) where there are sections of channelled concrete which were probably guide ways for sliding doors (Fig 13). There are also the sections of large girders concreted into base plates which were probably wall supports (Fig 14). The 1956 inventory for the base lists this building as “Asbestos clad structure, originally winch and trailer shed, with brick infilling. Steel Construction” These remains will all be removed by the proposed development.

Archaeological Implications of the Proposed Works

The archaeological recording required as a result of the proposed development can probably be divided between possible historic or prehistoric features which predate the construction of the RAF base and the remains of the base itself.

Existing records do not suggest a significant likelihood of prehistoric activity at the site. There are prehistoric burial mounds in the area and a single prehistoric find spot near site but in itself this does not suggest a likelihood of notable prehistoric features. Collaton Farm would have served as a centre for farming activity from the medieval period onwards and this may have produce some archaeological features within the area of the propose development. Overall, while there is a possibility of encountering cut features within the area of the development, it is perhaps more likely that finds of worked flint or later pottery originating from the nearby settlement are most likely occur within the topsoil. The RAF base (Fig 7) occupied the entire area of the proposed development and its construction may have resulted in the removal of any pre-existing archaeological deposits.

The construction of the base in 1939 and its conversion to a medical facility in 1946 was recorded at the time in some detail. Accurate plans showing the location and function of all the various structures exist. There are even extant accounts from personnel who served on the base and a considerable archive of letters, newspaper cutting and transcribed local records which refer to its operational life. In contrast the current surviving physical remains of the base are very limited since most of it was been demolished when it ceased to be an active establishment.

Whether any additional archaeological investigation would be required of the RAF site is questionable given the potential of further historic research. The central area of the base is currently covered by concrete hard standing so geophysical survey or fieldwalking would both be ineffective, and it is difficult to determine what the purpose of such an investigation would be. Maintaining a watching brief during the clearance phase of the development to record the presence or not of the air raid shelter (MDV55122) may be all that is required here.

Websites

<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/>

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/ordsurvdraw/c/002osd000000019u00029000.html>.

<http://www.old-maps.co.uk/maps.html>

<http://www.17balloons.co.uk/pages/page-05.html>

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england/>

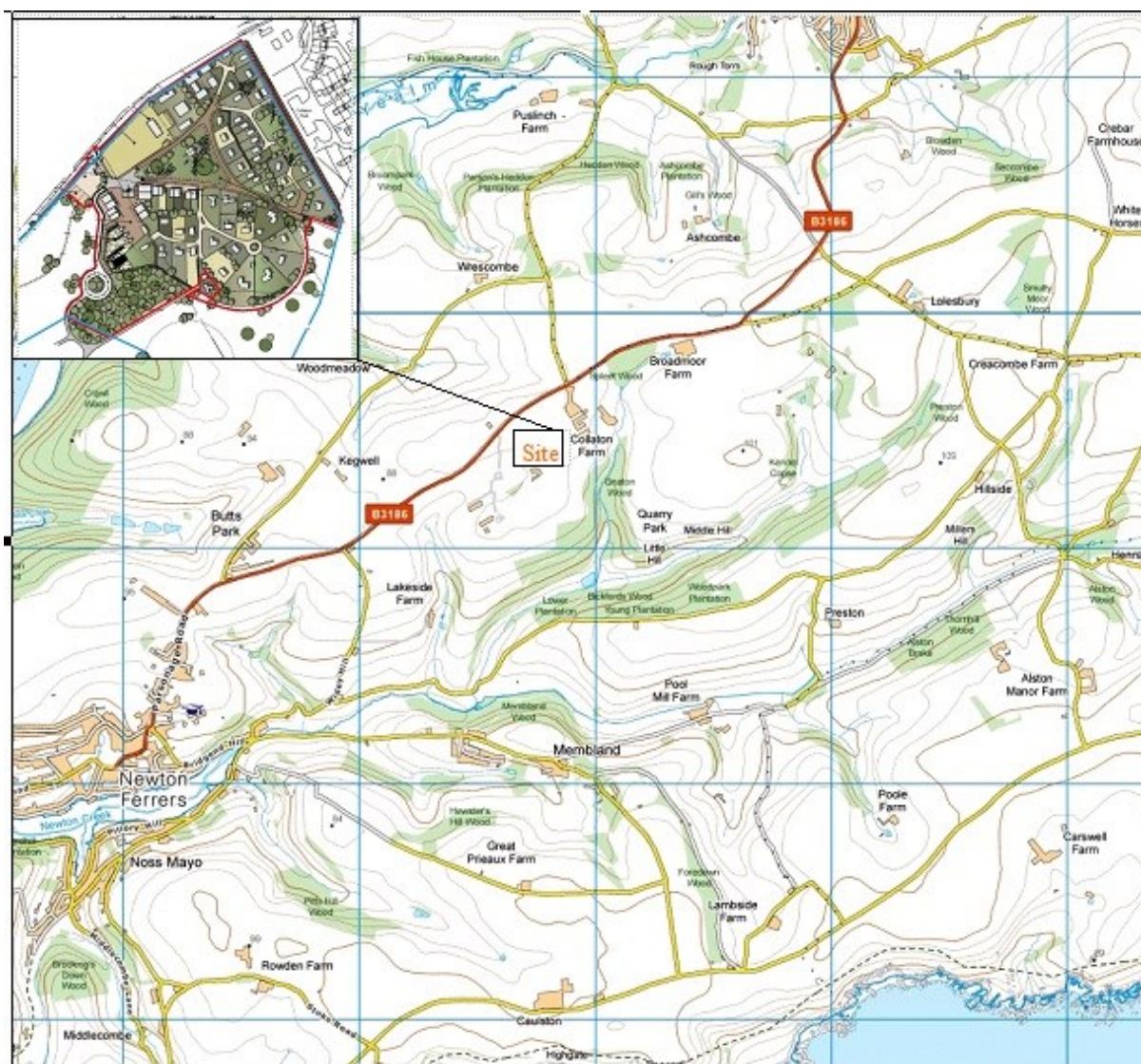
<http://www.44th-entry.org.uk/CS10.html>

Thanks and Acknowledgements:

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The Staff of the Devon Heritage Centre

The Staff of the Devon HET



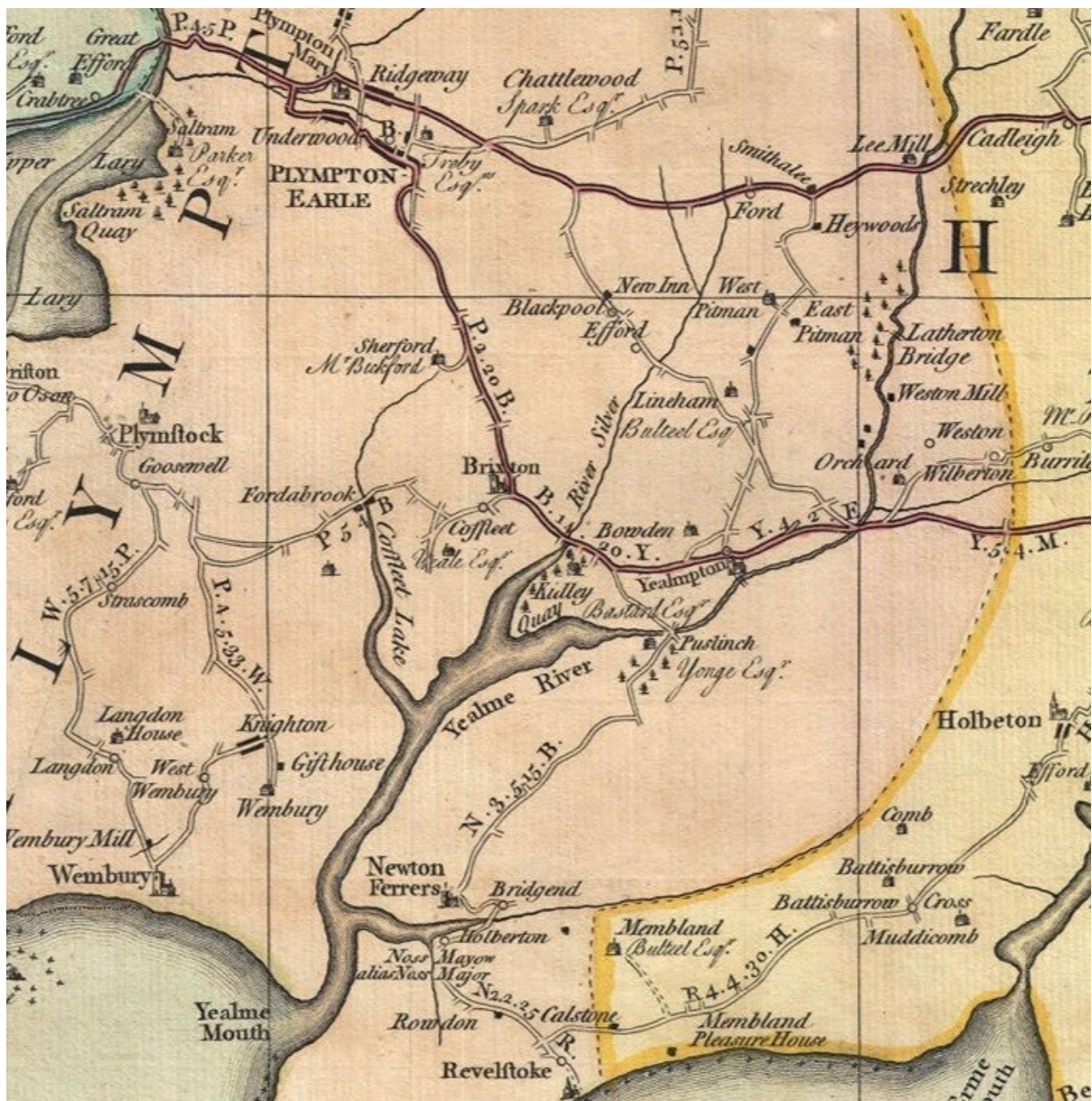


Fig 2 1765 Donn's Map of Devon



Fig 3. The 1839 Tithe Map

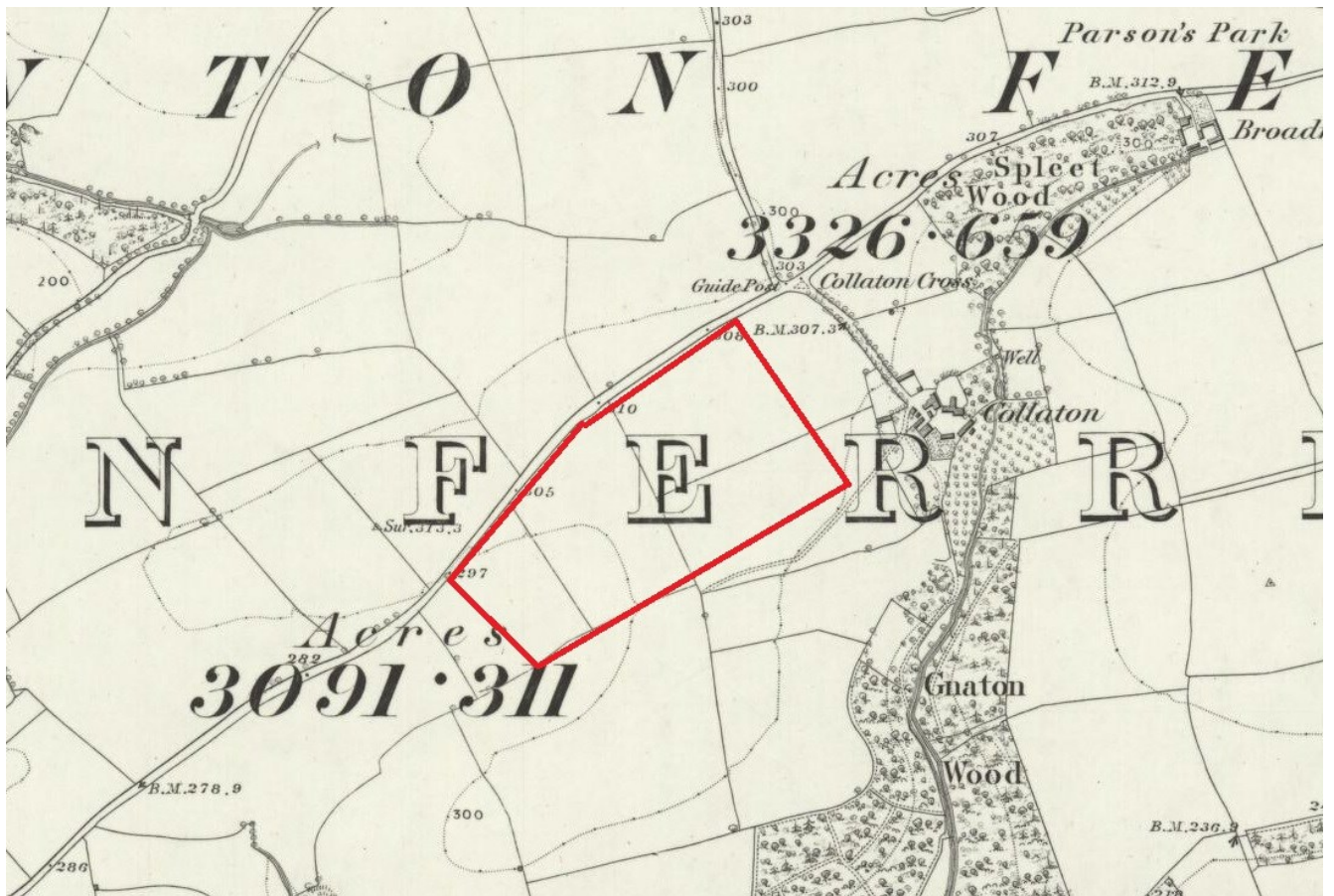


Fig 4. The Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1886 1:2500

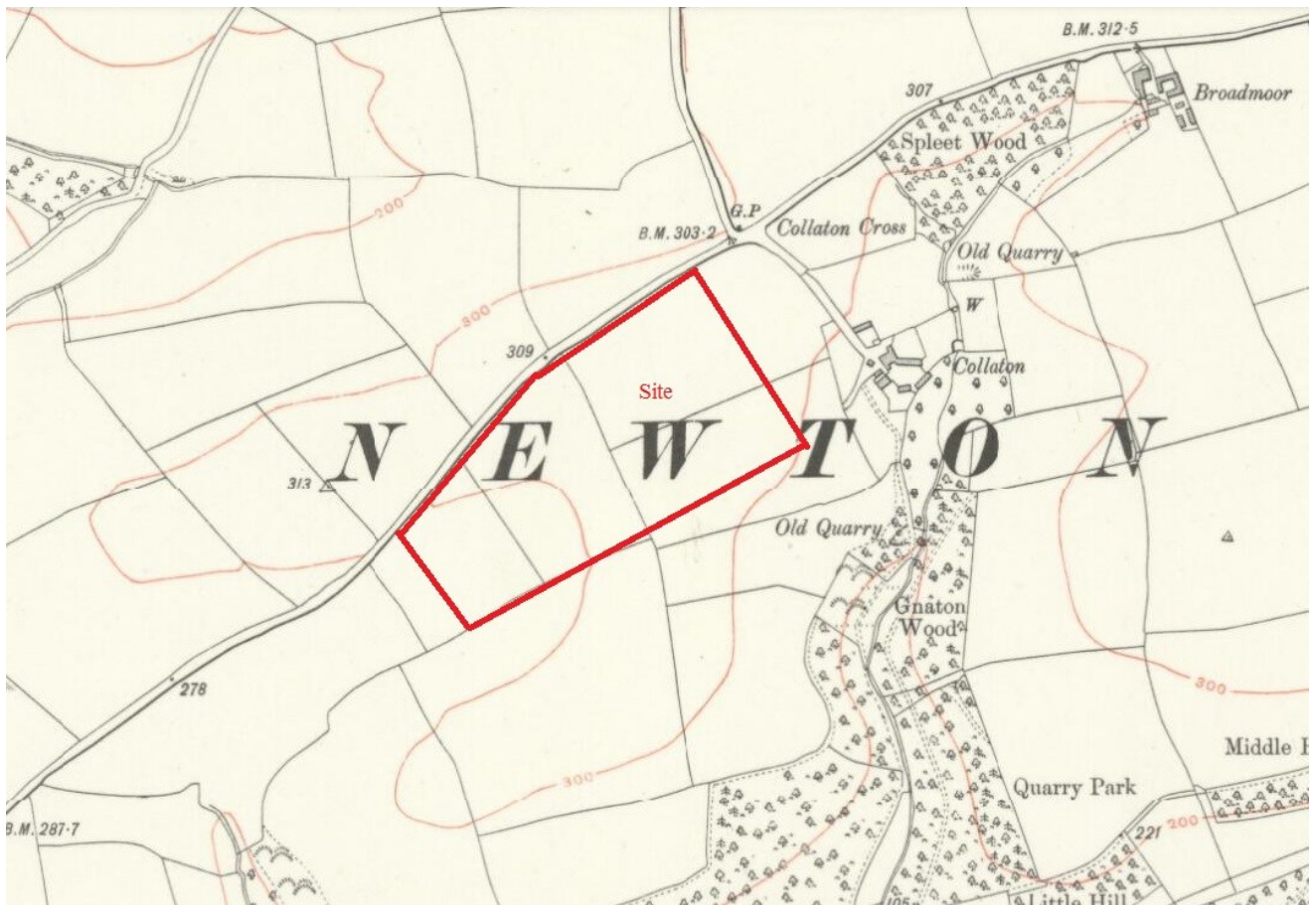


Fig 5. The 1906 Second Edition Ordnance Survey 1: 2500



Fig 6. Location of principal groups of HER entries surrounding The Site.
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Fig 7 Extract from the plan of RAF Collaton Cross. No 13 Balloon Centre 1939/40



Fig 8. Aerial view of the site in 1947 showing RAF Collaton Cross in a period of transition from Balloon Depot to Medical Rehabilitation Unit. Note that several barrack blocks shown on Fig 7 at the south west corner of the site are absent

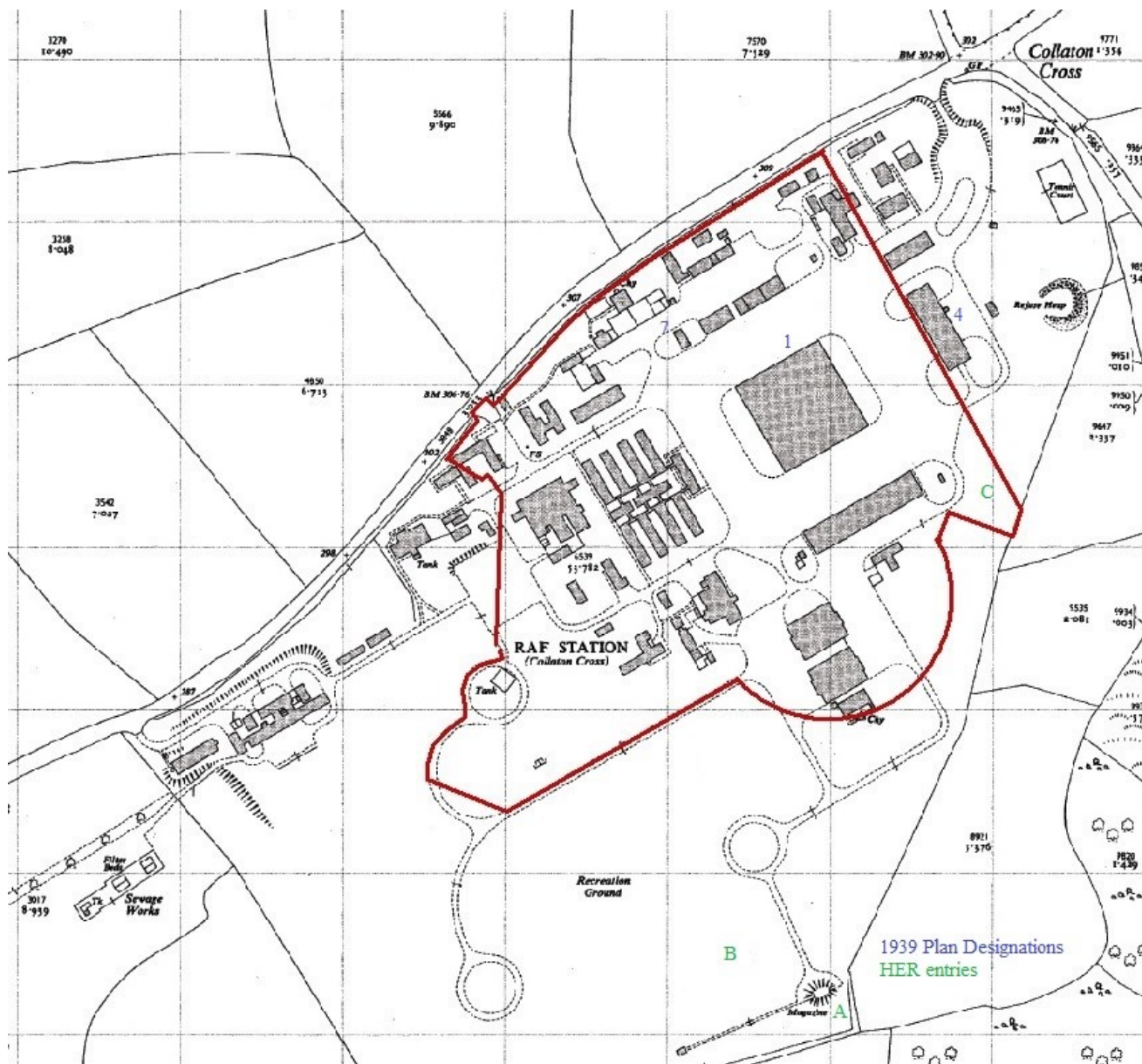


Fig 9. Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1950 showing RAF Collaton Cross, by then No 2 Medical Rehabilitation Unit. HER entries are marked as A. The Magazine, B. Location of "seagull trenches" C. Air raid shelter. Designations from the 1939/40 plan are 1 The Winch and Trailer shed 4. Balloon Fabric repair shop 7. Packed Balloon Shed. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No. 100048978

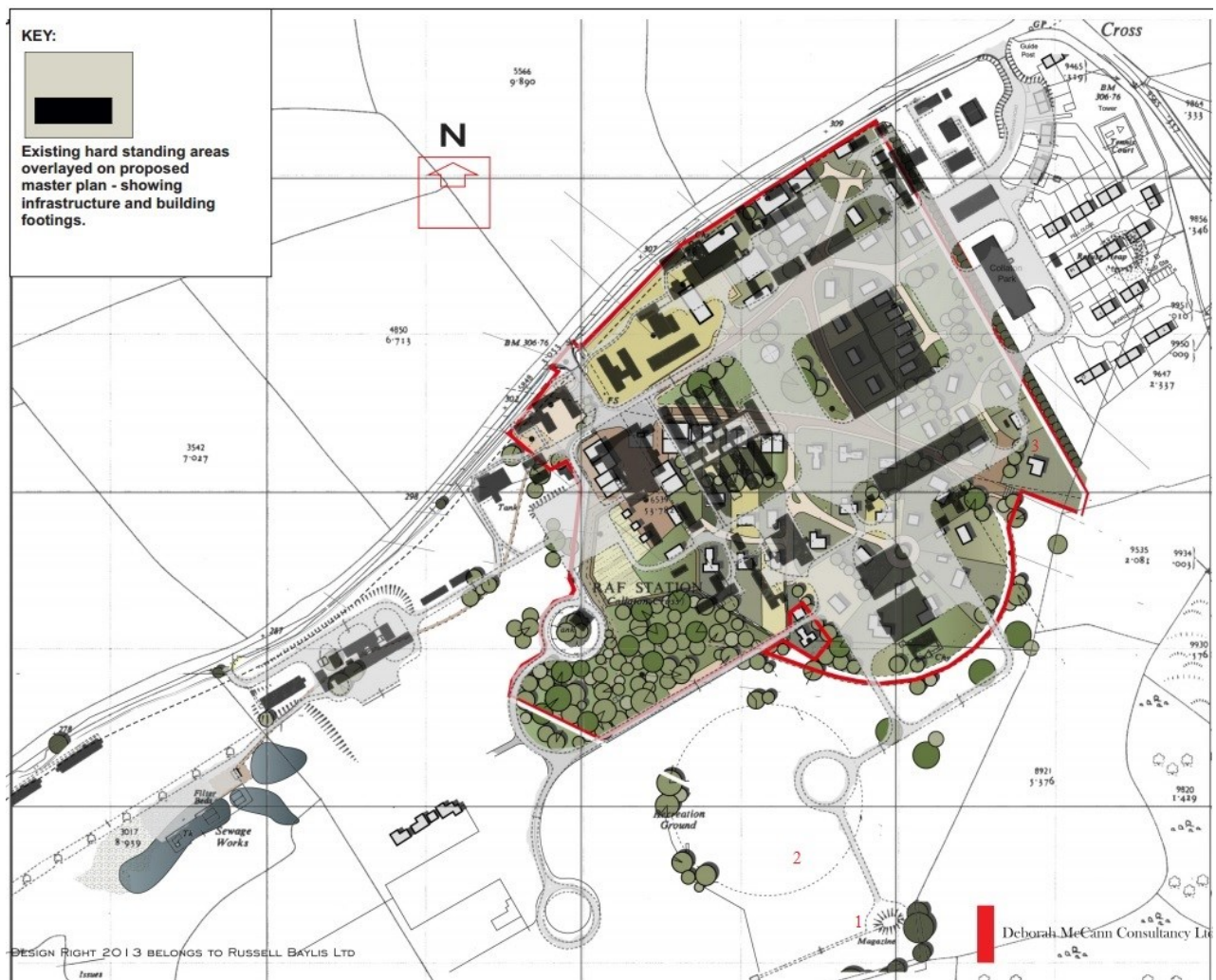


Fig 10 Plan of the proposed development superimposed on the existing hard standing and the footprint of the buildings of the Medical Rehabilitation Unit in 1950. HER entries are marked as 1. The Magazine, 2. Location of “seagull trenches” 3. Air raid shelter



Fig 11 Roadway and earthwork scarp at the magazine (ranging rod)



Fig 13 The overgrown location of the air raid shelter



Fig 14 The edge of the building. The ranging rod is in possible the door wheel channel



Fig 15 Girder sections that may have formed wall supports

Appendix A

Devon Historic Environment Record (HER) For Area Numbers see Fig 10

Area No	HER Ref	Grid Ref	Type	Period	Description
1	MDV1747	SX 5700 4970	Monument	Medieval	Collaton Cross
2	MDV2280	SX 568 502	Find spot	Prehistoric	Retouched Flint Flake
1	MDV13495	SX 569 497	Find spot	Prehistoric	Retouched Flint Flake
1	MDV36094	SX 5700 4970	Monument	Medieval	Field name "Warren Meadow"
1	MDV39119	SX 5704 4953	Building	Medieval	Collaton Farm. C17th building rebuilt C19
2	MDV39159	SX 565 501	Building	Modern	Barn and Shippen
2	MDV39160	SX 5652 5015	Building	Modern	Wrescombe farmhouse, dated 1829
1	MDV51747	SX 566 493	Monument	Modern	RAF Collaton Cross. Barrage ballon site
1	MDV51748	SX 567 491	Monument	Modern	"Seagull" trenches visible on air photograph
1	MDV55121	SX 5679 4912	Monument	Modern	Magazine within RAF Collaton Cross
1	MDV55122	SX 5689 4942	Monument	Modern	Air raid shelter at RAF Collaton Cross
4	MDV63470	SX 580 496	Monument	Modern	Gnaton Hall gardens
3	MDV64769	SX 5652 5069	Monument	Modern	Puslinch Parklands
3	MDV10348	Sx5635 5052	Monument	Modern	Site name "Catch Water Meadow"