

1. 1975 - 1982

This first intervention was informal, and was carried out by Mr David Charlton, the owner/occupier of the bungalow (No. 37, High Street, Nailsea) built in “about 1945 ... within the space occupied by the [New House] cone.”³ [The bungalow is not visible on the December 1946 RAF aerial photograph, however.]

It started in 1975 when Mr Charlton “started 'digging' to help a local school engaged on a project. He continued to excavate each year until this year [1983] when Avon Community Conservation and Environment Scheme (ACCES) were introduced to the site in order to excavate quickly as a planned link road threatens the existence of the remains.”⁴

In 1982, he discovered the remains of a bogie, about three feet by four feet, believed to be from an annealing oven. It was recovered to what was then “Woodspring” Museum. (Avon Mercury, 9 April, 1982). (Another local paper said that the bogie would have been pulled along rails in “the kneel in” ovens!) The original dimensioned rough sketches are in Folder E of the North Somerset SMR (NS SMR), and copies have been sent to the North Somerset Museum.

As far as is known there are no other records from this work.

2. 1983 - 1988

This, the first formal work, was undertaken by ACCES, as noted above, under Mr David Pollard, using Manpower Services Commission (MSC) trainees. It seems from correspondence in the various files held by NS SMR that Mr Pollard led work on the site for the 1983 and 1984 seasons.

The first season ran from April to September **1983**⁵, and as well as “tidying up” based on Mr Charlton's work, the team went on to clear further areas around the bungalow, which was still standing. The work is summarised in a plan (see Figure 2.4 below), (the original photo-reduced copy from which this was taken was not legibly annotated) which together with a very detailed manuscript report of the 1983 work exists in a black ring binder “File A NAILSEA GLASSWORKS - GENERAL, (Site description, drawings, small finds)”, currently held in the NS SMR 2397. From this it appears that when the first airway was exposed it was initially thought to be an entrance to the cone. As well as the plan and descriptions there are some very nice drawings of finds, an extremely detailed record of measurements of (fragmented) cylinder glass, and detailed lists of drawings, some identified as being for publication. Unfortunately none of these drawings have been found at the time of writing. [That was in mid-2003. Later that year, some detailed drawings came to light, through the good offices of Vince Russett. All these drawings are in a long green box identified as “ASMR 2397 NAILSEA GLASSWORKS” which will pass with the archive to North Somerset Museum. Amongst these was a print of the original drawing on which the copy used for Figure 2.4 was based. The printing on it includes spot heights and other information, but it is in an extremely small hand, so does not show up when reduced in scale. Other drawings from the same source gave the position of the two datum lines, and enabled some attempt at identifying the approximate limits of the areas described in “File A”. It should be noted that the orientation of Figure 2.4 is not that given on the original. Comparison of the orientation of the bungalow as shown on a 1:2500 OS map of 1983 indicates that North on the original plan was orientated about 39° west of grid north.]

³ Letter dated 11 Jan 1984, D J Pollard to Mr D Ashurst, of Barnsley, Gawber glasshouse excavator.

⁴ “*Nailsea Glassworks - An Archaeological Excavation*” Author and date uncertain

⁵ Cutting - Weston Mercury 22 July 1983

The areas/sites are described as follows:

Area/Site A: “located between the rear (South side) of the bungalow and further south to the main east-west wall #2.”

Area/Site B: “defined as being the area south of Wall 2 and bordered on the south by the modern boundary wall and on the east by the workshop which housed the French Kilns.”

Area/Site C: “all the area to the east of the bungalow and area north of the workshop (Site ‘E’) including the archway at the SE corner of the bungalow.”

Area/Site D: “the area of the cone wall north of the bungalow. Prior to excavation there was one section of the cone wall visible above ground at the boundary The presence of such a large amount of cone wall found above ground is due to the fact that this section was mostly hidden by bushes at the property boundary line.” The triangle of brickwork in the “south-east” corner of Area D as shown is included on the basis of one of the recently found drawings.

Area/Site E: “the workshop which [formerly] housed the French Kilns” {14}. “The building had in previous years been used as a stone mason’s workshop.” However, it “had apparently become a dumping ground for various bricks and rubble from other parts of the site.”

It is noted by R Iles (*Avon Archaeology*, 1983. p63) that, “A considerable length of the 1m thick, pennant stone wall was uncovered, revealing inverted stress relieving arches; excavation at one point showed the base of the wall to be 4.2m below the level of the working floor of which only small area remains. A complete swinging pit, some 2.5m deep and used for the making of sheet glass by the cylinder method, yielded several glassmakers' tools including snips, blowing irons and glass gathering rods together with numerous fragments of cylinder glass. Part of the area of a much larger swinging pit extension to the cone dating from about 1840 was excavated as was part of the cave or airway leading to the furnaces in the centre of the cone.” [“Swinging pit” seems to be an alternative term for “blowing holes”, which is how they are described in the 1870 schedule {7}. Alternatively, they may have been associated, each swinging pit having its own blowing hole.]

From correspondence, a gasholder in the rear garden of ‘The Royal Oak’ (NS SMR 03530) just to the west of the site was also excavated in 1983 as part of the programme (D Pollard to Mr Inett Homes of Ledbury, 1st September 1983, NS SMR, Folder E). In this letter he states that “a small coal gas plant was installed here c1870,” and continues, “the infill [of the gasholder] contains finds indicating abandonment between 1880 and 1900.” In a later letter to the Science Museum (22nd December 1983, NS SMR, Folder E) he believes that the gas-holder dates from the 1860s, and states that finds in the infill suggest that it was disused in the 1890s. No drawings have been found but significant numbers of 35mm contact prints and negatives exist (NS SMR, Folder D). Whether the circular feature in the extreme south-west corner of the 1870 plan is another gas holder or the base of a chimney associated with the “Gas Retort” {11} has not been established. [A plan and a section have subsequently been found in the late-2003 green box mentioned above. These have been combined to produce Figure 2.3 below. The approximate position has been plotted on Figures 2.12, etc., even though outside the area defined for the glassworks in this study.]

It does not seem that the retort building {11} itself was excavated. Nowhere has there been any mention of gas pipes having been found during any of the excavations. Either they were salvaged during demolition or scavenged subsequently, or the gas was maybe being piped direct to the French Kilns in the adjacent building {10}, which still survives on the western edge of the study area.]

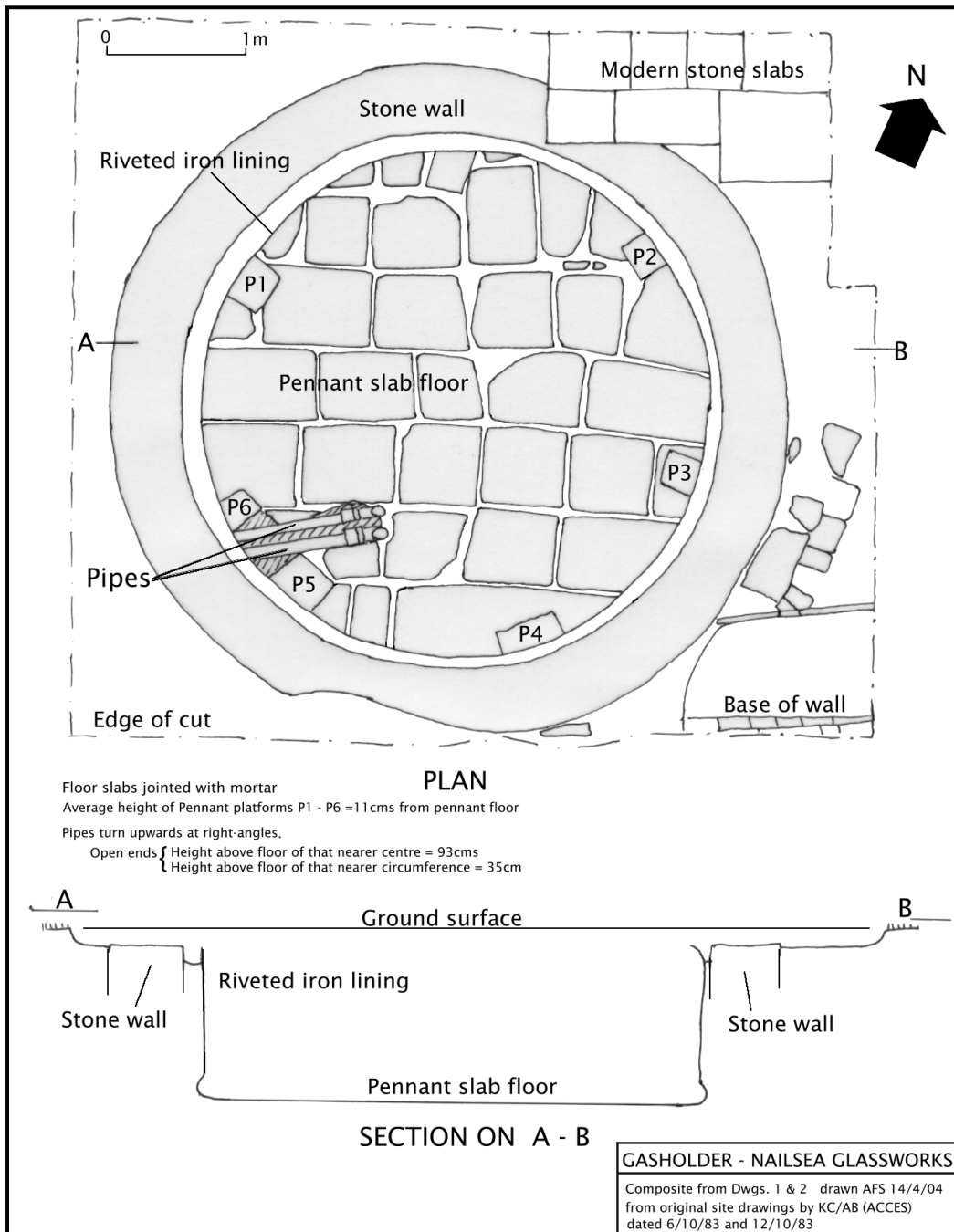


Figure 2.3: Composite plan and section of the gasholder

It appears that Mr Pollard was also responsible for the **1984** season, before leaving the area, but the evidence for any work in 1984 is slight. It is stated in “*Nailsea Glassworks - An Archaeological Excavation*” that, “ In January 1984, a bungalow, which had been built directly over the main furnace was completely demolished allowing further excavation of the main airway and furnace. As this represents the heart of the New House Cone it is hoped that we will establish some interesting finds in the coming months.” However it is clear from several items of correspondence (NS SMR File C) that the demolition of the bungalow was delayed, at least until mid-August, 1984.