

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT THE  
BRITISH CERAMIC TILE FACTORY,  
HEATHFIELD, BOVEY TRACEY, DEVON**

by  
R. Sims

**Exeter Archaeology**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) at the British Ceramic Tile factory at Heathfield, Bovey Tracey, Devon, from July 19<sup>th</sup> to September 27<sup>th</sup> 2007. The work was required by Teignbridge District Council, on the advice of Devon County Council Historic Environment Service (DCHES), in respect of planning applications 06/07809/MAJ, 07/02255/MAJ and 07/00533/FUL. Planning application 06/07809/MAJ was for an extension to the factory and the construction of offices and a canteen; and the other two applications were for a new facility for handling deliveries of bulk raw materials. The watching brief was commissioned by Pearn & Procter Chartered Architects on behalf of British Ceramic Tile Ltd (BCT).

### 1.1 **The site** (Figs 1 & 2)

The site is located within the Heathfield Industrial Estate, Bovey Tracey, Devon, immediately northwest of the A38, at NGR SX 8334 7602. The extension to the factory was L shaped in plan, measuring approximately 7,800m<sup>2</sup> in area, and abutted the existing factory along its northern and western edges (Fig. 2, areas B–D).

The new bulk raw materials facility, rectangular in shape and measuring approximately 60m long by 40m wide, was constructed immediately south-west of the factory extension (Fig. 2, area A). Since the site of the facility was shown on the 1906 Ordnance Survey (OS) map to be crossed by a tramway, the agreed mitigation was for a trench evaluation to be undertaken; and a written scheme of investigation for this work was prepared by EA.<sup>1</sup> A separate written scheme for an archaeological watching brief on the other elements of the factory extension (Planning Application No. 06/07809/MAJ) was prepared by EA.<sup>2</sup> However, the contractors began work on the bulk materials facility before the evaluation had been carried out. Observations of the excavated area were incorporated into the watching brief on the remainder of the works.

### 1.2 **Archaeological and historical background** (Figs 7-11, Pl. 6)

Production of ceramics at the site now occupied by BCT began in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the site was known as the Great Western Potteries and Brick Works (Devon County Historic Environment Register [DCHER] PRN 8965). The pottery produced bricks, tiles, sanitary wares and terracotta products. The factory was located near to the Exeter-Plymouth road and clay was extracted from a quarry pit situated immediately to the north-west of the factory (DCHER PRN 52045). The pit was extended north-west as the clay deposits were exhausted. The pit was connected to the factory by a network of tramways, with the numbers of these increasing as the factory expanded (Figs 7–9).

In 1881 a dugout canoe, nine feet long and three feet wide and made from a large hollowed out tree trunk, was excavated from the clay pit at a depth of thirty feet below the surface (DCHER PRN 41988). The vessel does not survive, but may have been prehistoric in date.

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<sup>1</sup> Exeter Archaeology May 2007

<sup>2</sup> Exeter Archaeology July 2007

Historic maps show a progressive enlargement of the factory between 1888 and 1956 (Figs 7–9), and then a radical rebuild occurring some time before 1980 when the main works were shifted to the east. This presumably entailed the large scale demolition of the earlier buildings.

The site is adjacent to Heathfield Station (DCHER PRN 52046) which was the junction of two associated railway lines. The earlier line was the Moretonhampstead and South Devon Railway between Newton Abbot and Moretonhampstead, which opened in 1866.<sup>3</sup> Heathfield Station (DCHER PRN 52046), originally called Chudleigh Road Station, was established at the same time.<sup>4</sup> The line became part of the South Devon Railway in 1872 and was absorbed into the Great Western Railway in 1877; closing in 1964. The Teign Valley Railway (DCHER PRN 8969) between Heathfield and Christow was opened in 1882, and extended to Exeter in 1903 as the Exeter, Teign Valley and Chagford Railway. It was absorbed into the GWR in 1923, and was closed in 1967.<sup>5</sup> By 1906 the pottery was connected to Heathfield Station by its own siding (Fig. 8, Pl. 6).

## 2. AIMS

The principal aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any surviving below-ground archaeological features or deposits exposed by the construction works, and to establish their depth, extent, character and date.

## 3. METHOD (Fig. 2)

Four areas were monitored as part of the watching brief (Fig. 2): Area A, the site of the bulk raw materials extension; Area B within the south-west corner of the existing factory and measuring approximately 30m long by 20m wide; Area C immediately to the northeast, measuring 10m long by 7m wide; and Area D constituting the remaining portion of the site.

The standard EA recording system was employed. Information was recorded on pro forma watching brief and context record sheets. Plans and sections of features and deposits were drawn as measured sketches, and locations were plotted onto drawings provided by the architects. A photographic record was made in black-and-white film and colour digital media.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Area A (Fig. 3)

Area A was monitored after it had been excavated by the contractors. Ground reduction within the area ranged from 5m to 5.30m in depth along the western side where there was a bank running parallel with Old Newton Road, reducing to a depth of 3.30m along the northern and southern sides. Along the western edge the sequence

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia (a)

<sup>4</sup> Subterranea Britannica

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia (b)

comprised 2m of bank material [102] sealing 0.40m of topsoil [100] over natural clay subsoil [101]. Elsewhere the sequence consisted of 0.30–0.40m of topsoil over natural clay. No archaeological features or deposits were exposed within the observed sections.

#### **4.2 Area B** (Figs 4 & 5, Pl. 2)

Ground reduction within Area B ranged from 1.70m to 2.15m in depth. Removal of the existing concrete yard surface [103] and underlying rubble and gravel make-up [104] exposed clay natural subsoil [101] within the southern half of Area B and a second concrete surface [105] within the northern half. This abutted a north-west to south-east aligned wall [106] consisting of outer skins of mortared brick enclosing a void or flue that had been filled with brick and stone rubble [107]. Where the surface [105] abutted wall [106], it was edged with concrete kerbstones. A 1m by 1m stub of brick wall [109] was also exposed at the south-eastern end of [106], which abutted its south side.

To the north of wall [106], a sequence of deposits was exposed below slab [105]. Removal of [105] and underlying make up [111] exposed a third concrete slab [112] within a cut [115] that occupied the southern half of the area. The slab sealed levelled demolition material [113], which overlay the continuation of wall stub [109] as well as concrete tank [116] to the west. Wall [109] was shown to be part of a rectangular structure 4m long (north-east/south-west) and more than 3.5m wide (north-west/south-east), built of yellow brick, with 0.30m wide ‘walls’ on two sides enclosing a sunken floor with a mortar surface [130] at a depth of 0.80m. The south-west corner of the structure had been removed. The third (north) side was open and ended in a flush edge finished with faced brickwork, which was exposed to a depth of 3–4m.

Within the northern half of this area, removal of [105] and make-up [111] exposed a tile surface [114] cut by [115]. This overlay an earlier brick surface [117], remnants of which were also visible further southeast, west of wall [109]. Removal of this surface exposed clay natural subsoil [101].

#### **4.3 Area C** (Fig. 6, Pls 3–5)

Area C was monitored after excavation by the contractors, reduced to a depth of 1.80m. Removal of the existing concrete surface [103] had exposed two layers of kiln waste, on either side of a partially robbed north-west to south-east brick wall [127]. The deposits comprised a loose brick and tile rubble layer [118] over a deposit of kiln debris [119], which in turn overlay a tile surface [120]. This sealed a further deposit of kiln waste [121], composed of crushed brick and tile. Removal of [121] exposed a network of eighteen rectangular brick flues [122] within the southern edge of the site (Fig. 6; Pl. 3). These flues were orientated north-east to south-west and opened into a large brick flue at the north-east end [123], which extended across the site from north-west to south-east. The flues [122] were constructed within a brick ‘floor’ [124] 0.30m deep that extended from the north side of wall [127] over the whole of the excavated area. The large flue [123] was built onto [124] and was of integral construction with it.

#### 4.4 Area D

Intermittent monitoring of groundworks in Area D showed that the area had previously been raised by between 1m and 3m and the excavations did not disturb any archaeological features or deposits.

### 5. DISCUSSION

Archaeological monitoring within Areas B and C identified a number of structural elements associated with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ceramic works.

The features exposed in Area B appeared to represent part of a structure that had been terraced into the clay subsoil, with wall [106] forming its southern edge. Brick surface [117], which covered most of the eastern half of the area and the tiled surface [114] that replaced it, were probably internal floors associated with [106]. The brick structure [109], which was partly exposed along the southern edge of the area and was abutted by or abutted [106], also appeared to be broadly contemporary. The function of the structure with its internal sunken mortar floor [130] remains unclear, as it was enclosed along the north and west sides, but was open on the east side, which ended in flush, faced brickwork that continued down to form the foundations. The depth of these foundations, at least 3–4m, shows it was a substantial feature, which perhaps served as a bin or receptacle.

Alterations to the structure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the insertion of concrete tank [116] ([115]) that was capped with concrete layer [112] and then covered by concrete floor surface [105], had destroyed much of the earlier structural evidence and obscured some stratigraphic relationships between the different elements. It was unclear from the observations whether concrete tank [116] was inserted into the tiled surface [114] and was then truncated by the more extensive cut [115] that also partly demolished feature [109]; or whether cut [115] was made to insert [116]. If the tank *was* inserted later, then no associated surface was identified.

In a final phase of activity associated with a later 20<sup>th</sup>-century remodelling of the factory, wall [106] was demolished, the ground level was raised by 1m (levelling layer [104]) and the whole of Area B was covered by concrete yard surface [103].

The absence of any burnt material or tile and brick debris normally associated with a kiln site (as observed within Area C) does suggest an alternative function for this structure, possibly one that involved the processing or storage of raw materials.

Structural evidence observed within Area C more clearly relates to the site's use as a tile and brick kiln. The exposed structures were probably part of a rectangular kiln. The series of brick flues [122] would have channelled the hot air produced by the furnace and directed it towards the kiln site for use in the firing process. The redundant air would then have run into the adjoining brick culvert [123] and finally been emitted from a nearby chimney. Tiled surface [120] would have served as the base of the kiln, whilst the robbed out wall [127]/[128] may have constituted the eastern extent of the structure.

Evidence of the tramway shown cutting across Area A on the 1906 OS map, connecting the quarry pits to the factory, was not observed during the watching brief and had clearly been removed during 20<sup>th</sup>-century remodelling of the factory.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The watching brief was commissioned by Pearn & Procter Chartered Architects on behalf of British Ceramic Tile Ltd (BCT). The project was funded by BCT and was co-ordinated by John Valentin for EA and Wyndham Procter of Pearn & Procter for BCT. The fieldwork was undertaken by R. Sims, K. Tyler and A. West. The report was written by R. Sims and edited by M.J. Dyer. Illustrations were prepared by S. Blackmore, T. Ives and J. Read.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

### Unpublished sources

Exeter Archaeology May 2007 *Method Statement for a Stage 1 Archaeological Evaluation at the British Ceramic Tile Factory, Heathfield, Bovey Tracey, Devon.* EA Project No. 6052.

Exeter Archaeology, July 2007 *Method Statement for an Archaeological Watching Brief at the British Ceramic Tile Factory, Heathfield, Bovey Tracey, Devon.* EA Project No. 6052/2.

### Printed sources

Ordnance Survey (OS):

1888 1:2500 map sheets 101.4 and 109.2

1906 1:10560 map sheets 101 SW and 109 NW

1956 1:2500 plan nos SX 8375 and SX 8376

1980 1:10000 map sheet SX 87NW

2004 1:10000 landplan

### Online sources

Subterranea Britannica: <http://www.subbrit.org.uk/sb-sites/stations/h/heathfield/index.shtml>

Wikipedia (a): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teign\\_Valley\\_Line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teign_Valley_Line)

Wikipedia(b): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moretonhampstead\\_and\\_South\\_Devon\\_Railway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moretonhampstead_and_South_Devon_Railway)



Fig. 1 Location of site.





Fig. 2 Location of areas monitored and sections (based on plan supplied by Pearn and Procter, drawing No. P909.07 04/04/05). Scale 1:2000.

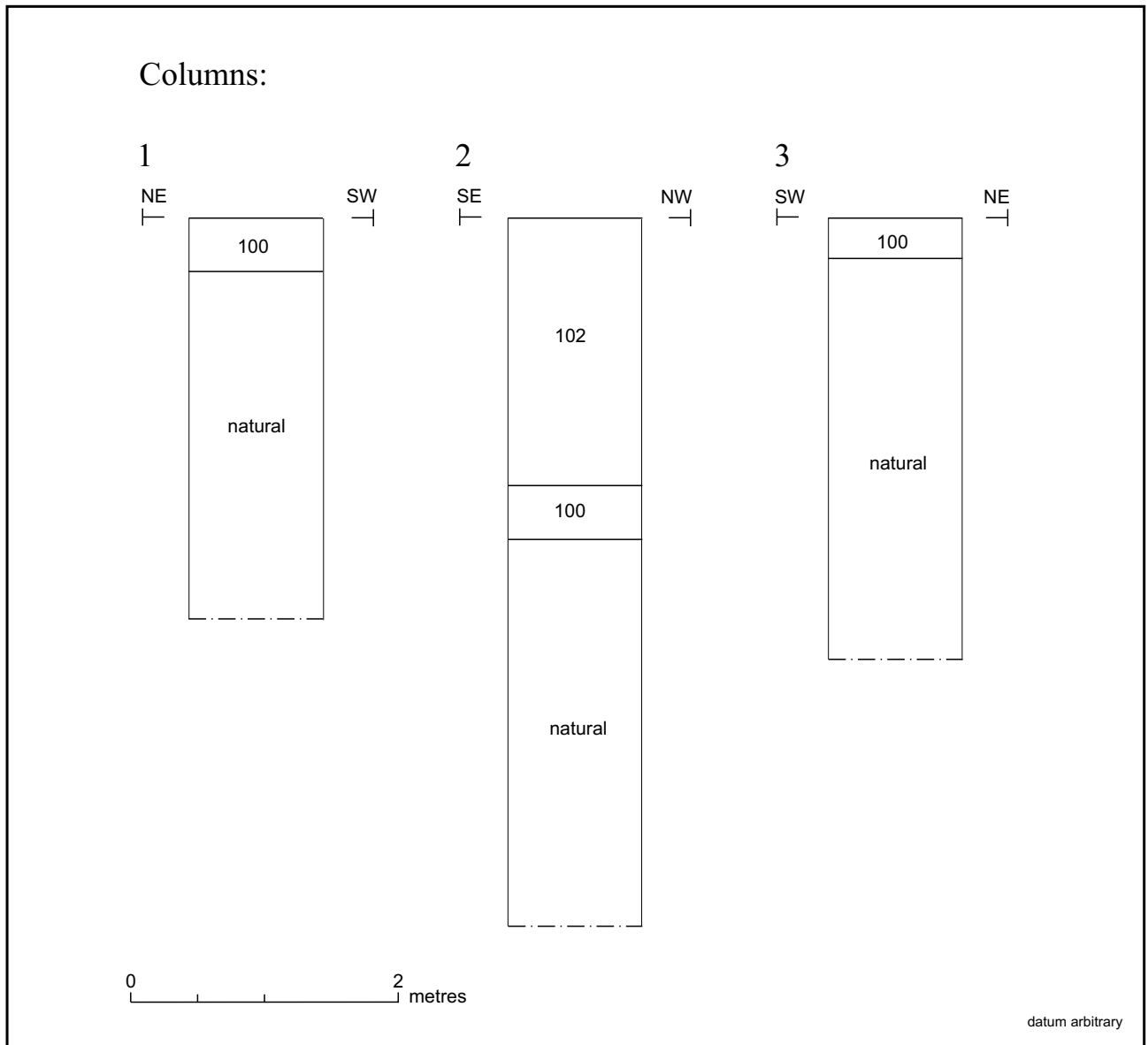
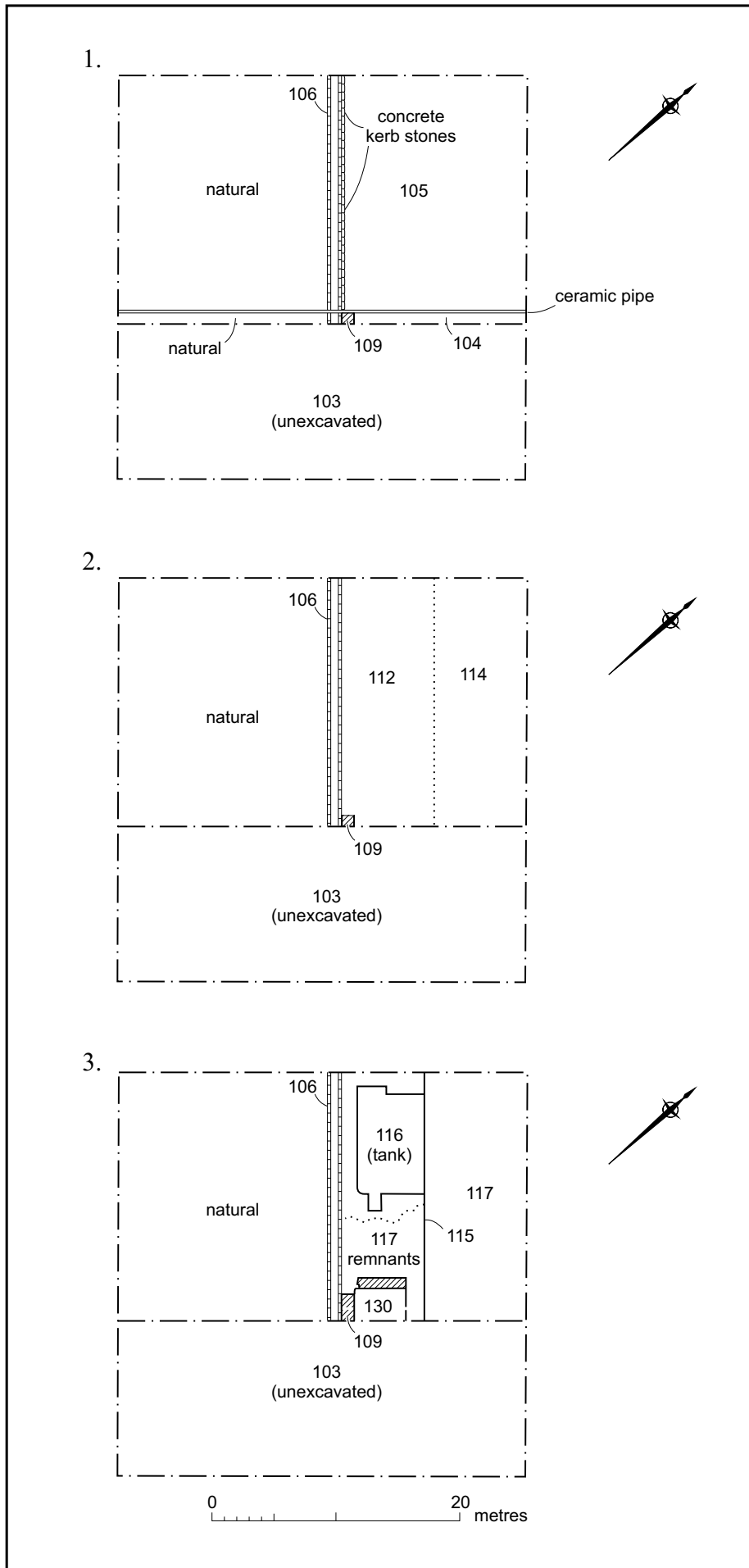


Fig. 3 Columns 1-3, area A .



Columns:

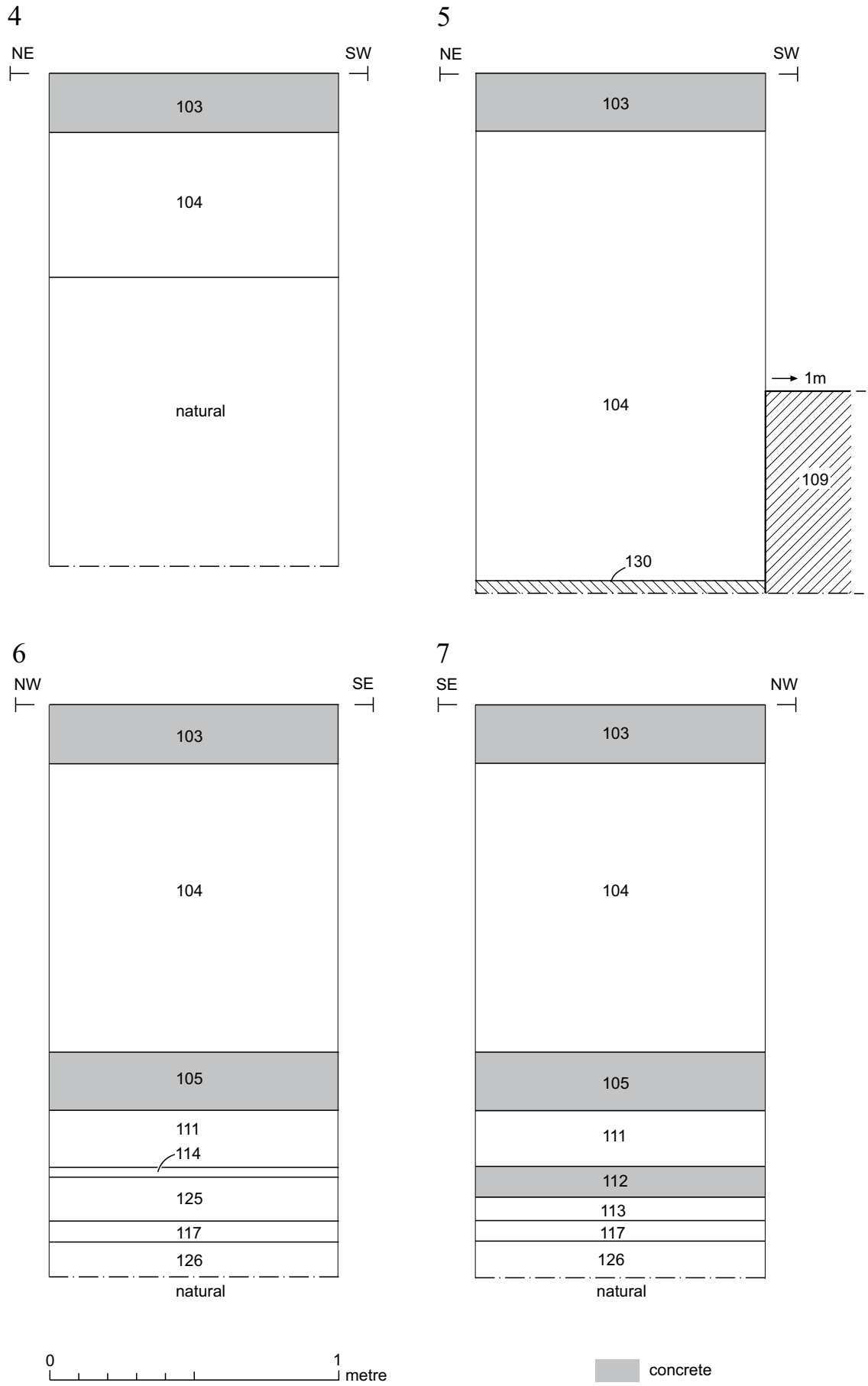


Fig. 5 Columns 4 to 7, area B.

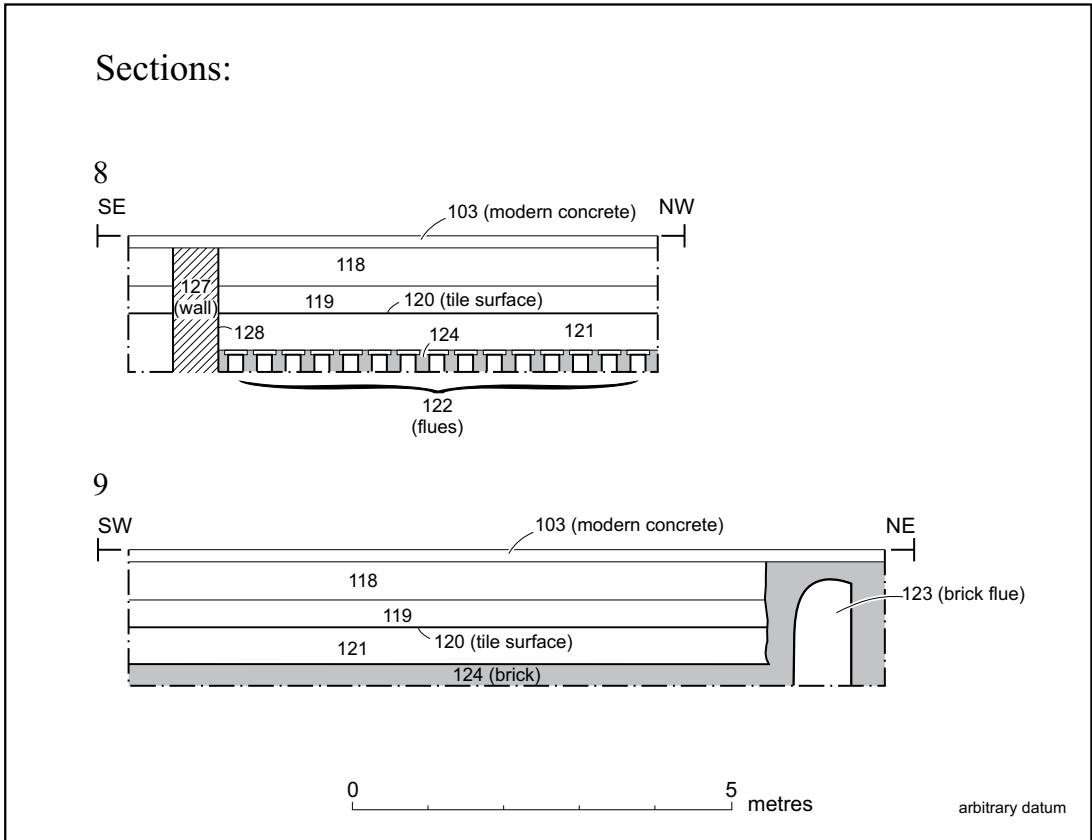


Fig. 6 Sections 8 and 9, area C.

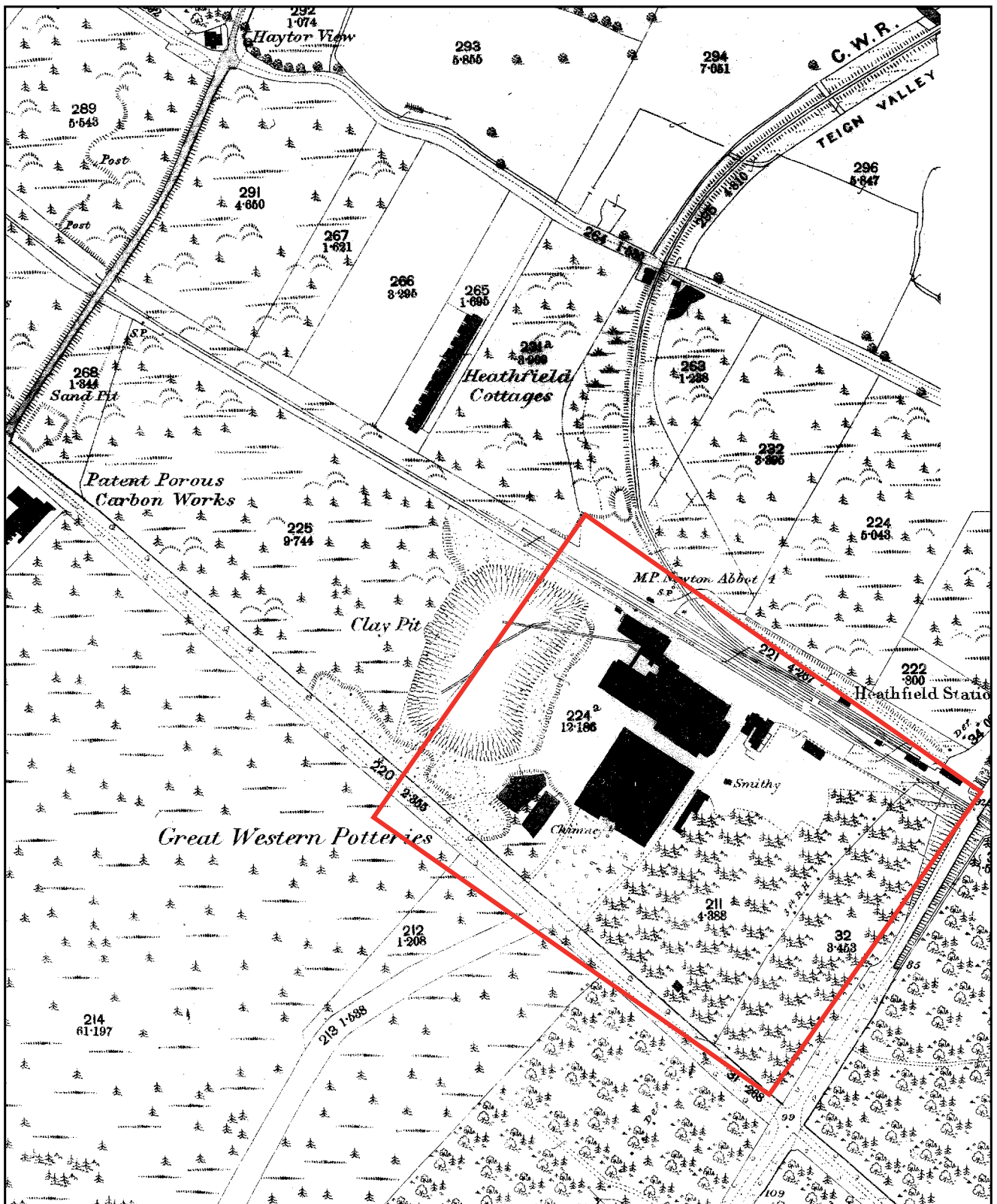


Fig. 7 The site in 1888. Detail from OS 1:2500 map sheets Devonshire 101.4 & 109.2 (reduced to 1:4000).

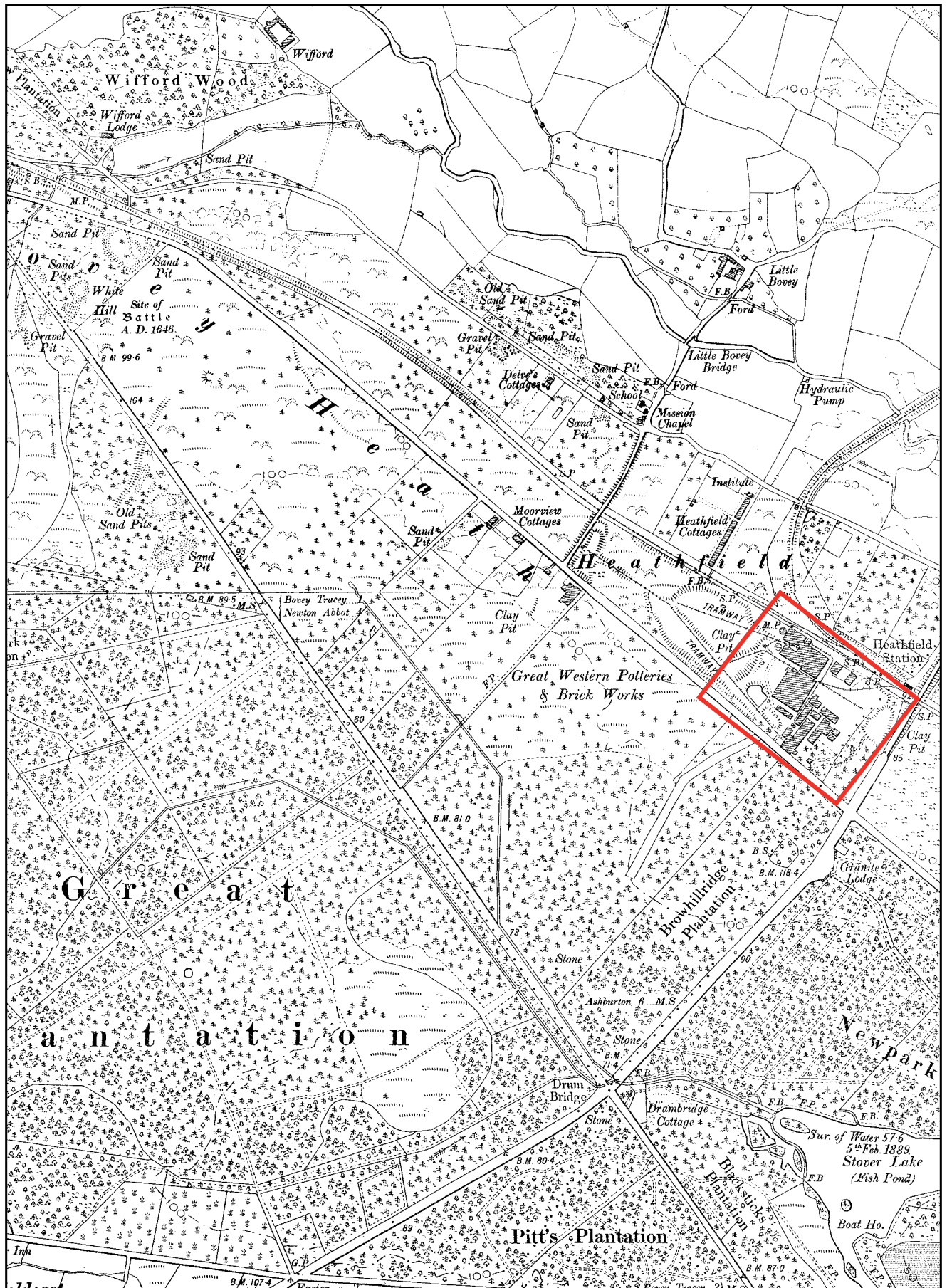


Fig. 8 The site in 1906. Detail from OS 1:10,560 map sheets 101 SW & 109 NW.

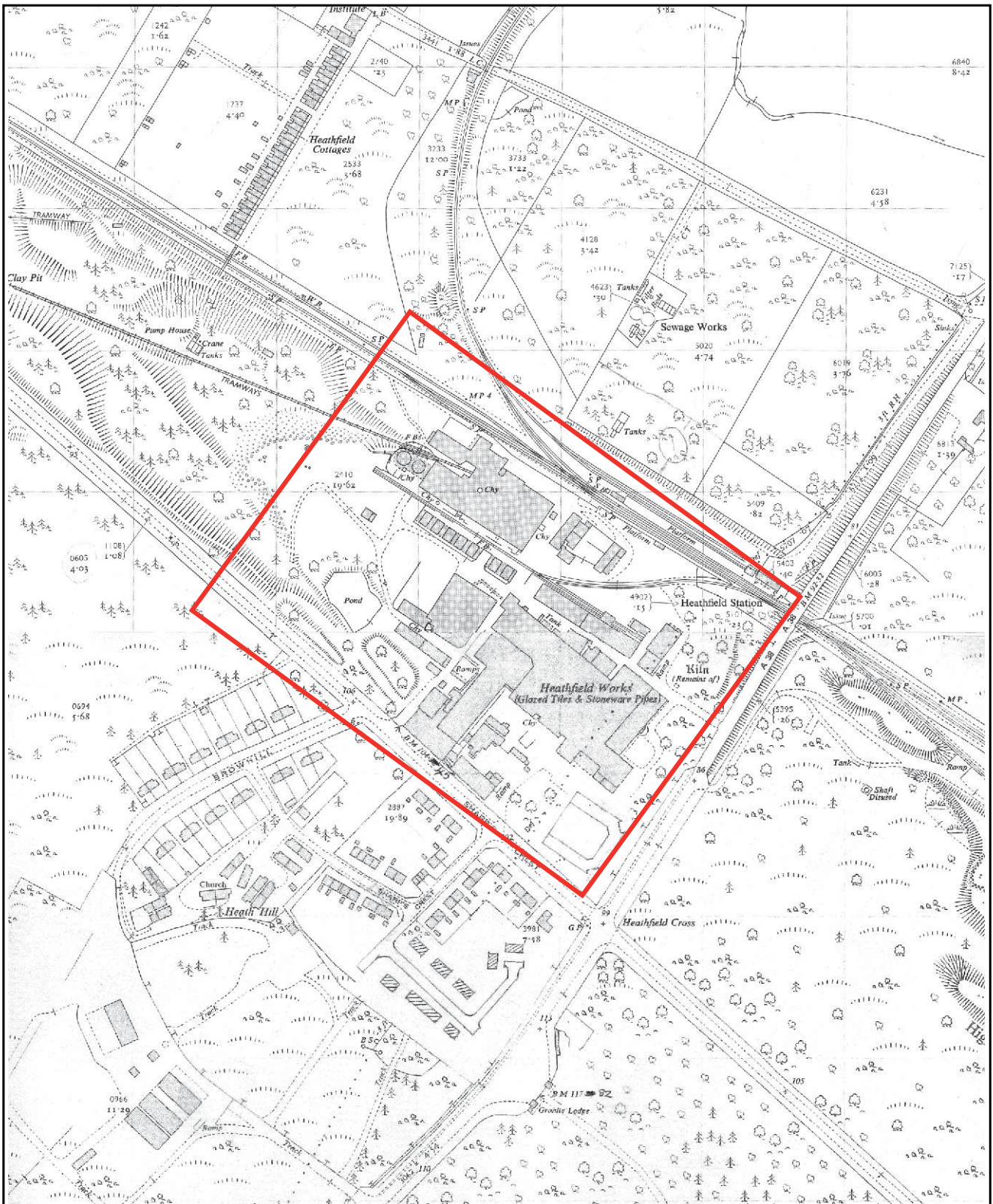


Fig. 9 The site in 1956. Detail from OS 1:2500 map sheets SX 8376 & 8375 (reduced to 1:4000).



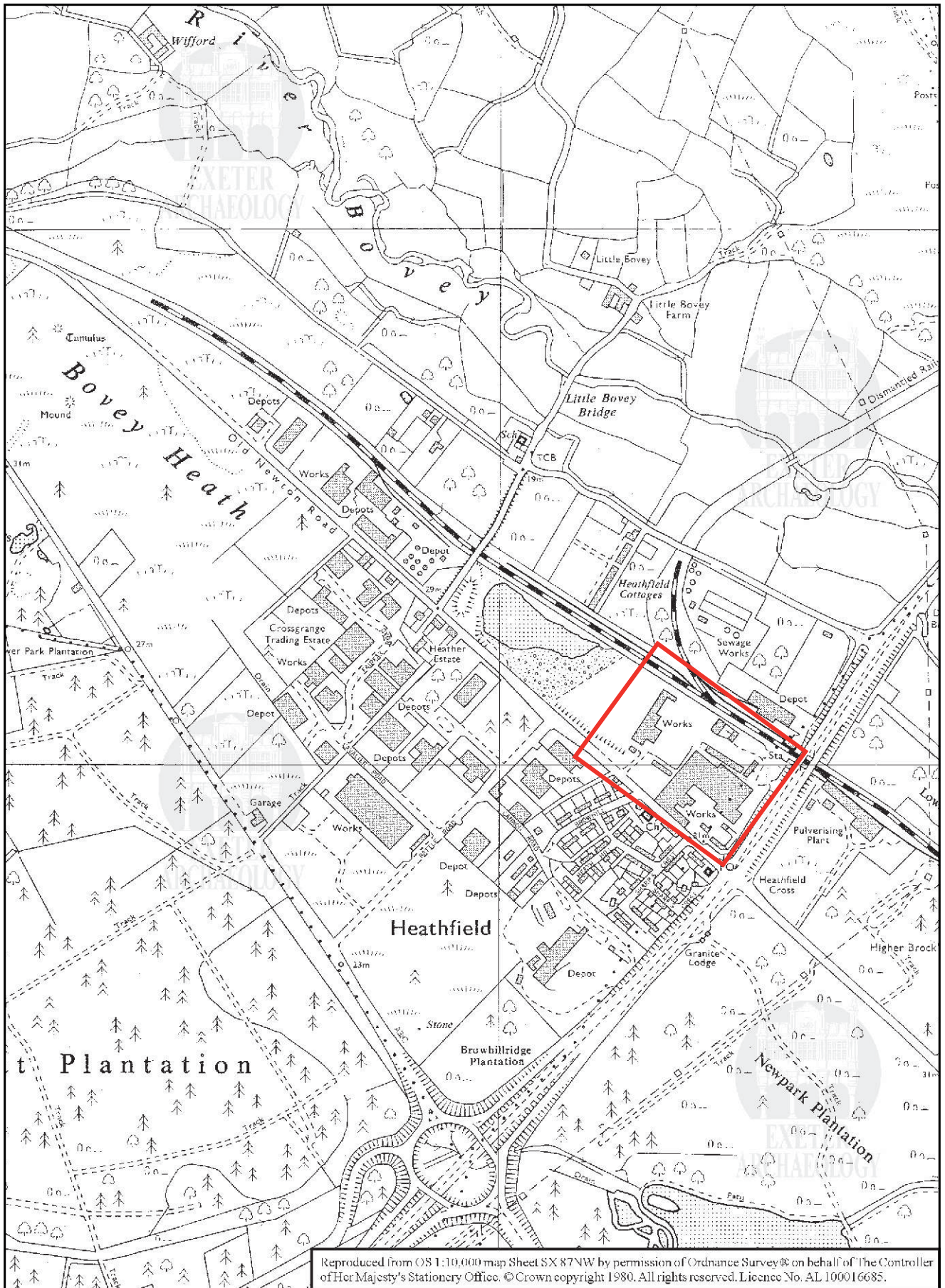


Fig. 10 The site in 1980.

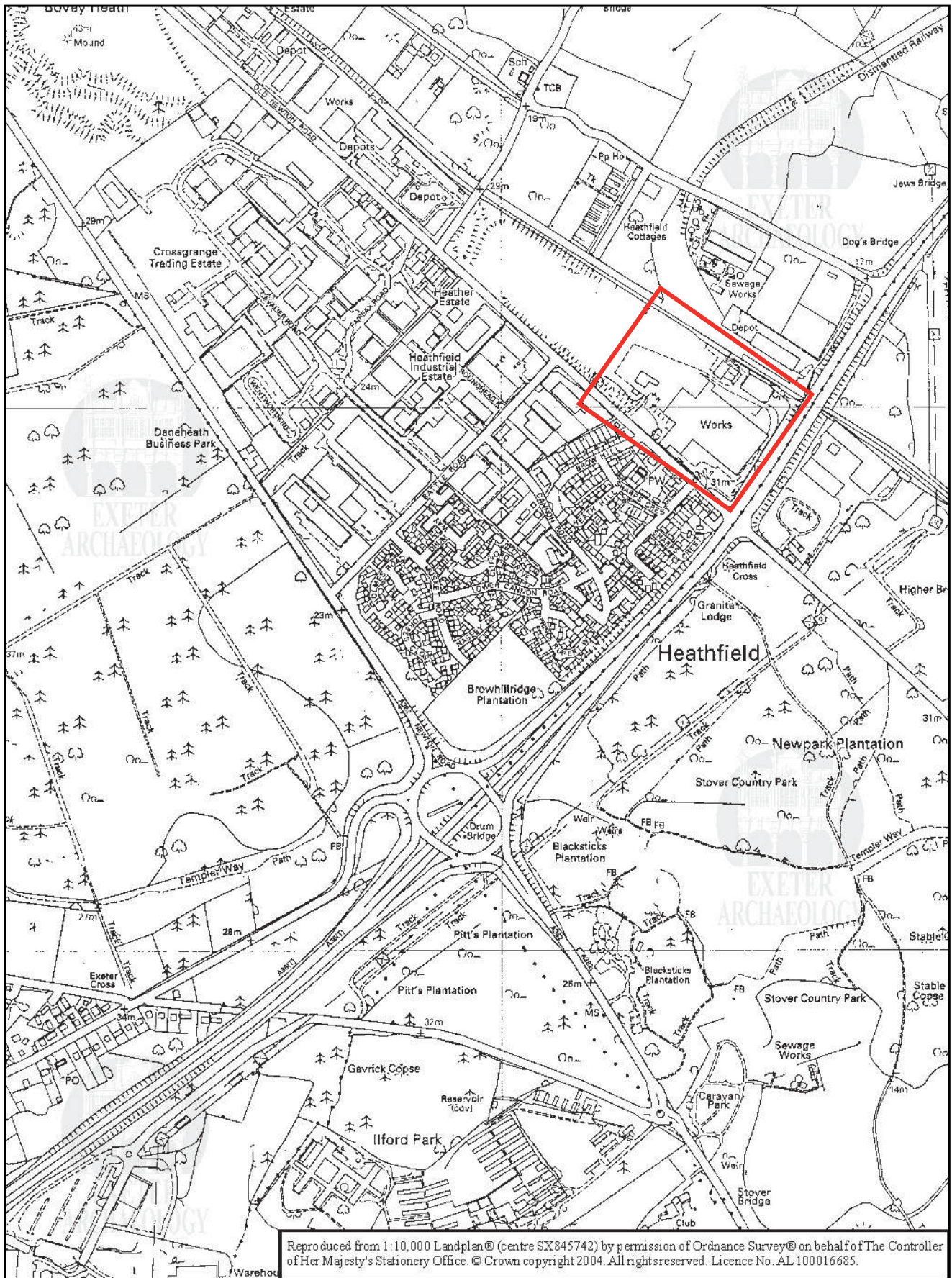


Fig. 11 The site in 2004.



Plate 1 Area A: section 2, view to south-west.



Plate 2 Area B: brick wall [106] and concrete slab [105] to right, view to north-west.



Plate 3 Area C: north-east facing section of kiln structure.



Plate 4 Area C: south-east facing section of kiln structure (south end).



Plate 5 South-east facing section of kiln structure (north end) showing flue [123].



Plate 6 Photograph of the Great Western Potteries and Brick Works in 1906, looking north-west from Heathfield station.