

**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT OF BUILDINGS
ASSOCIATED WITH THE FORMER
BUCKFAST SPINNING MILLS, BUCKFAST, DEVON**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This assessment was carried out in November 2013 on a group of buildings on the site of the former Buckfast Spinning Co. Ltd, Buckfast, Devon (SX 502 794; Fig. 1), acquired recently by Buckfast Abbey. The Site lies within Dartmoor National Park. The work was commissioned by Buckfast Abbey.

1.1 The Site

The buildings forming the assessment site (the Site) are shown on Fig. 2.

Almost the entire Site is represented by industrial and retail buildings, one of which was once a dwelling. All other areas lie under tarmac or concrete surfaces, or industrial features such as storage tanks.

1.2 Aims and methods

The assessment aims to establish the date and heritage significance of the buildings within the Site, with a view to better informing decisions regarding any subsequent demolition and redevelopment of the area. A documentary and cartographic study has been undertaken in order to understand how the buildings and the Site have developed.

Sources consulted included the following:

- Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) (Record Office and Local Studies Library);
- Dartmoor National Park Authority Historic Environment Record (HER);
- English Heritage (EH) National Heritage List for England (Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and other statutorily designated sites);
- Archaedia archives

A Site visit was also undertaken (section 4, The Buildings, below).

2. STATUTORY AND OTHER DESIGNATIONS

There are no heritage statutory designations associated with the Site or its buildings. The adjacent South Gate of Buckfast Abbey is a Grade II listed building.¹ To the north in the abbey grounds, the North Gate and part of the precinct of the abbey form a Scheduled Monument,² which includes the Farmhouse, Guest House and North Gate (which are also listed Grade II). The Church of St Mary and Buckfast Abbey Main Block are Listed Grade II*,³ and there are other Grade II buildings within the precinct.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 General background (numbered heritage assets are located on Fig. 2)

The Buckfast Spinning Co. Ltd buildings are on the site of Lower Mills, which developed into a large woollen mill factory (or factories) in the later 19th and earlier 20th centuries. The site contained two mills, known as Lower Mill and Higher Mill (the latter being distinct from the Higher Mills to the west of the Abbey). The sites of both Lower Mill and Higher Mill are potentially of medieval, or late medieval, origin. The early Lower Mill buildings are excluded from the Site, but Higher Mill (or its site) is included.

¹ English Heritage (EH) list entry 1209042.

² EH list entry 1019607.

³ EH list entry 1209774 & 1292865.

3.2 Historic development of the Site

Buckfast Abbey

The Site lies within the outer court of the medieval Buckfast Abbey, which would have contained agricultural and industrial buildings, including mills, orchards, fishponds and pastures.⁴ Remains of stone buildings representing a farm complex within the outer court were excavated recently within the grounds of St Mary's School,⁵ and evidence of other buildings and features within the outer court have been found. The location of a mill mentioned in a royal grant of abbey land to Sir Thomas Dennys in 1540 is not known, but it is likely to have stood close to the present Lower Mill (asset 10), and possibly on the same site,⁶ where wheel pits associated with the c. 1800 mill, and an earlier mill, have been found.⁷

Lower Mills

The Lower Mills site contained two mills or mill factories, known respectively as Lower Mill (asset 10) and Higher (or Little) Mill (asset 1). Higher Mill was powered by Higher Leat, which also fed the millpond for a wheel at the south end of Lower Mill. A second wheel on the eastern side of Lower Mill was powered by Lower Leat. Both leats may be of medieval, or late medieval, origin.

Lower Mill was built a little before 1800 on the site of an earlier tucking or fulling mill which appears to be documented in 1769. A lease of 1800 refers to Lower Mill as 'lately newly erected, anciently a tucking mill', and includes land to the west as far as the road.⁸

It is not known when Higher Mill was built, but both 'Higher and Lower Mills or factories' are mentioned in a bargain and sale of August 1810. It is possible that there was also a grist mill on or near the site, as an indenture of 1827 includes 'a certain mill or factory and grist mill called the lower factory' and also mentions 'higher mill or factory'. In 1837 'Higher Mill', was described as a blanket mill.⁹

There were serious fires on the Lower Mills site in 1825, 1877 (most of mill destroyed) and 1967.¹⁰ The 1877 fire displaced 450 mill workers,¹¹ but the mills were 'rapidly being rebuilt' in 1878,¹² and employing about 400 hands again in 1897.¹³ The development of the mills from the later 19th century onwards is evident from historic mapping (see below) and seems to be linked to the relocation of Berry's mill business from Ashburton in about 1850.¹⁴ The mills were the largest (woollen mills) in the parish in 1877.¹⁵

There are 19th-century documents that refer to Lower Mills, together with other buildings that formed part of the property or a particular holding, but it is not clear whether the other buildings were within the present Site boundary. For example, documents of 1830 and 1899

⁴ Brown 2013, p. 32.

⁵ Brown 2013.

⁶ Brown 2013, p. 32.

⁷ Brown 2011.

⁸ Travers 2005, p. 15 & 40.

⁹ Travers 2005, p. 15, 43 & 45.

¹⁰ Travers 2005, p. 42, 46 & 50.

¹¹ Beard 1991, p. 41.

¹² White's Directory 1878, p. 195.

¹³ Kelly's Directory 1897, p. 106.

¹⁴ HER MDV 7783.

¹⁵ White's Directory 1878, p. 195.

refer to a 'worsted mill or factory and grist mill and smith's shop and dwelling house adjoining called Lower Factory..'.¹⁶

It is documented that water from Higher Leat was used to irrigate meadows in South Parks, to the south of the Site, and Orchard or Churchyard Meadow, to the north, implying the existence of water channels that passed through the Site (asset 2a).¹⁷ A section of such a feature has been seen to the north of the Site where it exists as a large underground stone-lined and capped channel.¹⁸ A document of 1825 refers to a gutter conveying water from the north side of the mill pond to Churchyard meadow etc.¹⁹

The 1910 Inland Revenue field survey book²⁰ gives details of property No. 21, Lower Woollen Mills, John Berry & Sons Ltd, which included: a stable and cartshed (both 'very old'), tailor's store, wool store and carpenters shop (all timber built). A stone and slate weaving shed contained 150 looms, and there were seven other buildings (mainly of stone and slate, or stone, brick and slate), with up to three floors, and one with a basement, with machinery and equipment listed. A further un-named property (No. 22) containing industrial buildings is also detailed but it is not clear if it refers to the Lower Mills site.

John Berry went into receivership in 1950, when the property was conveyed to the Urban District Council, and then to the Buckfast Spinning Co. Ltd in 1960.²¹

3.3 Cartographic evidence

A Buckfast Abbey estate map, of 1815, depicts Lower Mill, and the leat, but does not include the area within the Site.²²

The Tithe Map (1843, Fig. 4) depicts Lower Mill and Lower Leat (assets 10 and 11), and a large mill pond to the south-west, within the Site (asset 3). A rectangular building to the north-west represents Higher Mill, alongside Higher Leat (assets 1 and 2) which can be seen coming in from the west, and disappearing under the road outside South Gate. The leat fed the millpond, but it is not certain if its' course is represented within the Site by the single black line that passes around the pond. Another building to the north of the pond lies within the Site boundary (asset 4), and a smaller one just outside. A further building against a field boundary lies to the east (asset 9).²³ The plot containing the mills and pond (1229) was called 'Factory Ground', under the tenement name of 'Collinswood', and was owned by Solomon Tozer and occupied by John Rowland. The field to the south was called simply 'Meadow' (1228).

A rough sketch of c. 1870 (Fig. 5) shows Lower Mill, with an extension, or perhaps proposed extension marked 'additional building', to the south. To the west are two adjoining mill ponds, the mill garden, a drive to the mill, and the Higher Mill building.

By 1887 the area had been developed considerably (Fig. 6). Buildings are depicted adjoining the south end of the old Lower Mill (asset 8a) and to the west on the site of the former mill ponds (8b). There are also structures (asset 8c) to the south of Higher Mill and a further range to the north (asset 8d.) In the south-western part of the site are three rows of cottages

¹⁶ Travers 2005, p. 44 & 46.

¹⁷ Brown 2013, Fig. 30.

¹⁸ Brown 2013, p. 43.

¹⁹ Travers 2005, p. 42.

²⁰ Travers 2005, p. 48.

²¹ Travers 2005, p. 49.

²² Devon Heritage Centre Z2/9.

²³ Plot No. 1232, called 'Orchard' (tithe apportionment).

that were built for mill workers (asset 5),²⁴ and a gas works (asset 6) to the east. The first gas works were built in Buckfastleigh in 1868.²⁵

By 1905 (Fig. 7) there were further ranges against the western boundary (asset 7a) and to the south on the boundary of the gas works and cottages (asset 7b). By 1955 (Fig. 8) the central building complex had been extended to join the eastern range, there were additional buildings against the western boundary, and to the south the gas holder had been removed and other structures are shown.

By 1961 (Fig. 9) the south part of the eastern range of buildings had been removed, and different structures are depicted in the south-east corner of the Site.

4. THE BUILDINGS

The Site was visited on 11.11.13. All required areas were seen. The buildings are located on Fig. 3.

Buildings A, C, F and H

A number of the structures within the Site are evidently of modern construction. These include buildings A, C and H. Although stone-built, it is also known that building F (in the background in Photo. 1) was erected in the 1980s.

Building A shares its west wall, and part of the south wall, with earlier structures, one being Building B, and, although none is visible, it is possible that earlier fabric may also survive within the lower elements of the wall to the north.

Building B

This building (Photos 2 and 3) is constructed on two levels under a hipped, slate roof, with a small louvre at each apex. Only the west, south and east exterior elevations were seen, and these are rendered. Where exposed on the interior of the ground floor, all four walls are of stone rubble. A photograph of c. 1912²⁶ suggests that the upper walls are also stone.

The ground floor is subdivided to produce a large main space with a high ceiling, and a corridor extending along the southern side. Substantial exposed timber joists support the first floor. At the west end, behind modern panelling, is a blocked aperture with a limestone arch (Photo. 6). This may represent a former water channel.

The first floor is entered through a doorway leading from the leat area immediately to the south. This floor contains a single room (Photo. 4), with a robust wooden planked floor, and is lit on both long sides by windows in widely splayed embrasures. Windows to the south, and in the west wall (Photo 2), are fixed, with twelve panes. On the north side, sash-windows are of probable later 19th-century date (Photo. 5). Brick jambs are visible in the elevation beyond. The internal roof structure was not seen.

The character of the building indicates that it was built to support the textile industry. It stands immediately alongside higher leat (asset 2) on the position of a watermill shown on the 1843 Tithe Map (asset 1). Although the sash windows on the north side of the first floor are likely to date to the later 19th century, these are probably replacements. It is strongly suspected that this building represents a mill, built in either the late 18th- or early 19th-century, with evidence of later refurbishments or rebuilding. It is also possible that fabric from earlier mill buildings may have been incorporated within this structure.

²⁴ HER MDV 22301.

²⁵ Beard 1991, p. 48.

²⁶ Beard 1991, p. 84.

Building D

Building D extends along the western edge of the Site (Photo. 7), and comprises a number of structures, built at different periods.

The southern tip is known to have been built in the early twentieth century, possibly at the same time that a short section was infilled at the centre of the range. The remaining southern two-thirds of the range is suspected to have been built between 1887 and 1905 and appears relatively unaltered.

The building at the northern end of this range is less easy to date with certainty, although it is all believed to be of 19th-, or, in part, possibly early 20th-century construction. Map evidence indicates an isolated structure here in 1887, in a position that was empty in c. 1870, and the stone western elevation almost certainly represents part of this initial structure. Stone capping to what appears to have been a freestanding wall is evident within this elevation (Photo. 8), and it is believed that an earlier boundary feature was incorporated when this building was erected. This elevation has since seen either the enlargement or creation of openings, and subsequent blocking. Due to the modern cladding over all internal faces, and modern plaster on the eastern elevation, it is not possible however to determine the date of the remainder of the structure with certainty, although the eastern elevation appears to have been straightened between 1887 and 1905, and the remainder of the main fabric of this structure may well date to this period.

Building E

This building is of stone construction under a slate roof (Photo. 1). Although stripped of many of its internal features, and with mostly replaced windows, map and documentary evidence indicates that it represents the only surviving mill worker's cottage (asset 5 - there were originally three or four terraces), constructed between c. 1870 and 1887. A photograph of c. 1910 shows the western terrace.²⁷

Building G

Although it appears to be on almost the exact position of a range of nineteenth-century dwellings (part of site 5), Building G (Photo. 9) shows no sign of construction during this period. As the cottages are shown on 1961 OS mapping (Fig. 9), it is assumed that it was constructed after this date.

Building J

Building J (Photo. 10) covers a substantial part of the Site, and it is evident that development took place in a number of phases. On the basis of both map evidence and construction methods and materials, it is clear that much of the structure, including the whole of the southern half (Photos 10 and 11), and significant elements at the northern end, was built after 1961. Much of the south-west corner has been terraced into the hill slope, and linear channels of unknown function have also been cut into the floor across this most recent part of the building.

Across the remaining central section it is suspected that much of the building's roof structure and all roof cladding and ancillary features, such as ventilation ducting and external ladders, also date to either this period, or the interval between 1905 and 1961. All floor surfaces are also probably of twentieth-century date, although earlier surfaces may survive below these.

Earlier fabric does survive however, although this is not always easy to determine beneath modern wall cladding. All four brick walls to one nineteenth-century industrial range (Photo. 12) appear to survive. The roof to this structure is not original. On the evidence that the western end of a range of this dimension is depicted on the 1887 OS map, this part of

²⁷ Beard 1991, p. 87.

Building J is thought have been constructed between c. 1870 (Fig. 5) and this date. At an unknown date, a long brick-lined channel has been cut into the floor along this range.

The roof trusses to the range immediately to the south are thought to be late 19th-century in date, although due to fire probably not original. On the north side these trusses rest on the brick southern wall to the range described above (Photo. 13), but to the south are supported by a brick wall of post 1961 date. The original stone end walls to this partial range also survive (Photos 13 and 14). This stone building is visible on a photograph of c. 1910.²⁸

Further early wall sections survive within Building J to the north and east of the earliest ranges. Most are not possible to date with any certainty, although, on the basis of their alignment, it is clear that the westernmost brick elevations to the next range were not constructed until after 1905.

Other wall sections within the building also predate 1961, although none seem to represent complete rooms. Sections may survive on the west side of the boiler house for example, where the room has been terraced into the hill slope, and appear to support the eastern side of an adjoining engine house that contains two Lister diesel units (Photo. 15).

The main works buildings have been almost completely stripped of fittings and equipment. Other than the later twentieth century boilers and the Lister engines, no industrial machinery survives.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present buildings

Buildings A, C, F, G and H are modern, each constructed after 1961.

Much of the main works building (Building J) is also of modern date, a large proportion built after 1905, and much of this post 1961. Later nineteenth-century elements do survive, although not as complete ranges. One early range is represented only by four walls. Another shares a wall with this range, and otherwise possesses only two end walls and the roof trusses. No original roof cladding survives, and no early floor surfaces are visible, although sections may survive below modern replacements. Further earlier fabric probably exists below ground level. No early machinery is present.

Much of Building D, forming the western extent to the Site, was built in the nineteenth or earlier twentieth century. Only the southern tip and the central section are known to have been constructed after 1905. The northern end, at least in part, probably dates to between 1870 and 1887, possibly incorporating an earlier boundary wall.

A single former mill worker's cottage is represented by Building E. Although apparently stripped of original internal features (not fully inspected), and with mostly replaced windows, it is otherwise largely intact.

Documentary and cartographic evidence suggests that Building B represents a mill building, often referred to as Higher Mill (since 1810). The date of construction is not known, but a late 18th- or early 19th-century date is suggested, and it is possible that earlier mill-building fabric was incorporated at this time. Features, including at least some windows, are almost certainly the result of refurbishment. It is not known to what extent any building here was affected by a number of documented fires. It is possible that there has been a mill here since the medieval period.

²⁸ Photo showing Buckfast Mill and cottages, c. 1910, in Beard 1991, p. 87.

Of the buildings depicted on the 1843 tithe map, only the mill represented by Building B survives. No other buildings of pre-1843 date were identified, and have evidently been demolished, although elements may survive below ground level.

Other features

It is known that Higher Leat runs in a culvert under the Site, with the leat open alongside Building B. In addition, there is documentary and cartographic evidence for further leats, millponds and other water channels within the Site. As the Site lies within the outer court of the medieval Abbey it is also possible that other presently unidentified buildings or features once existed in this area, and may survive as below ground features.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Unpublished sources

Devon Heritage Centre

Z2/9 'A Map of Buckfast Abbey Estate in the Parish of Buckfastleigh The Property of William Searle Bentall & Thornton Bentall Esqrs', by Thomas Richards, 1815.
Buckfastleigh Tithe Map/Apportionment c. 1843/1839.

Other

'Rude sketch of ground forming Buckfast Abbey Tenement & the boundaries ...',
date c. 1870, held in Buckfast Abbey archives.

Dartmoor National Park Historic Environment Record (HER)

Records within and adjacent to the Site.
Reports (various).

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White, W. 1850 & 1878. *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Devonshire*.

OS maps

Surveyors' Two Inch Drawing No. 25, date of survey 1802-3.
1:2500 map Sheet 114.7: 1887 & 1905.
1:2500 Plan SX7467, 1955.
1:2500 Plan SX7467 & 7567, 1961.
1:10 560 Sheet 114NE, Revision of 1904 with additions in 1938.

Websites

English Heritage Pastscape (www.pastscape.org.uk)
The National Heritage List for England (Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments):
list.english-heritage.org.uk



Fig. 1 Site location.

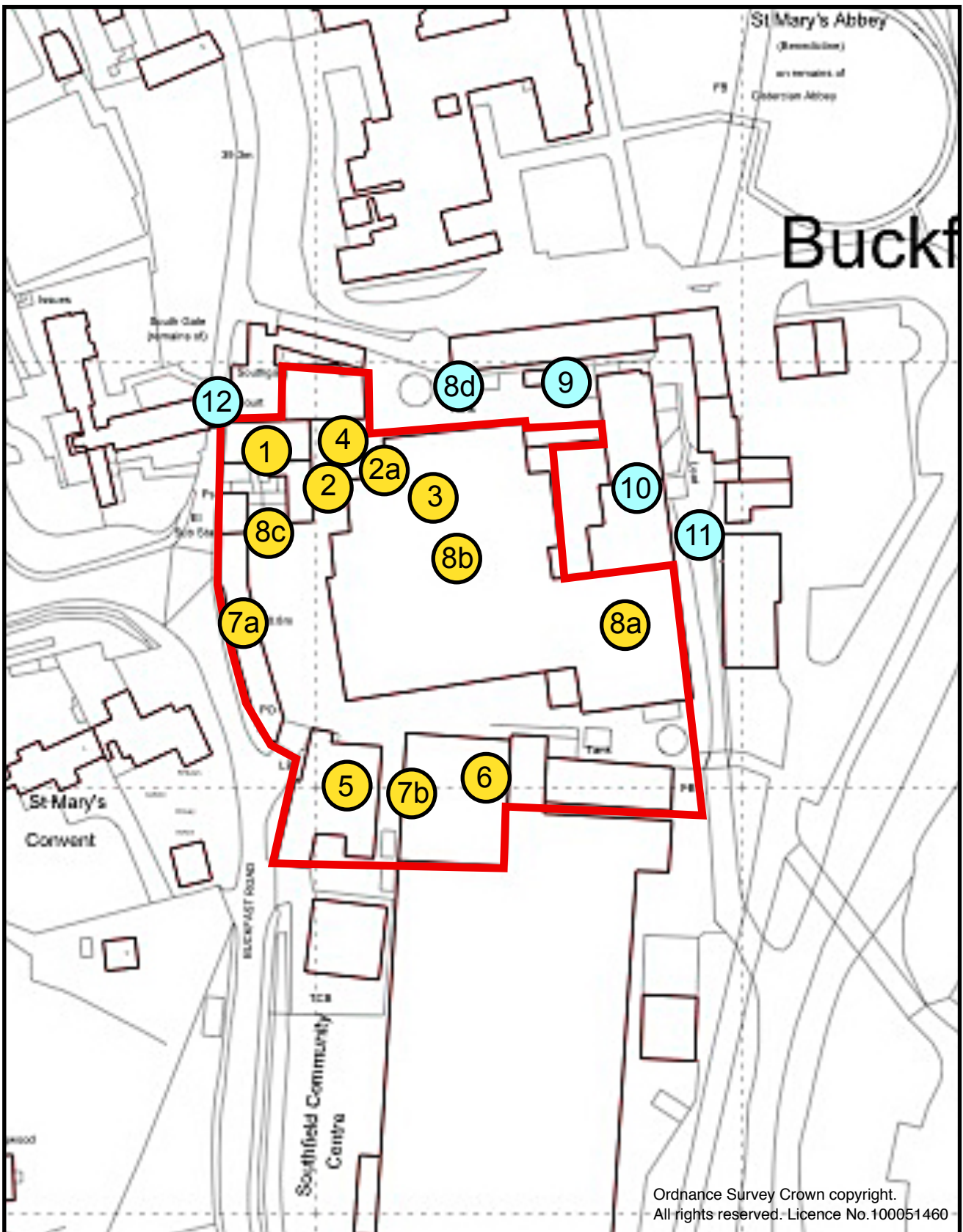


Fig. 2 Location of assessment Site (red line), showing heritage assets within the Site and the immediate vicinity (those within the Site in yellow circles).

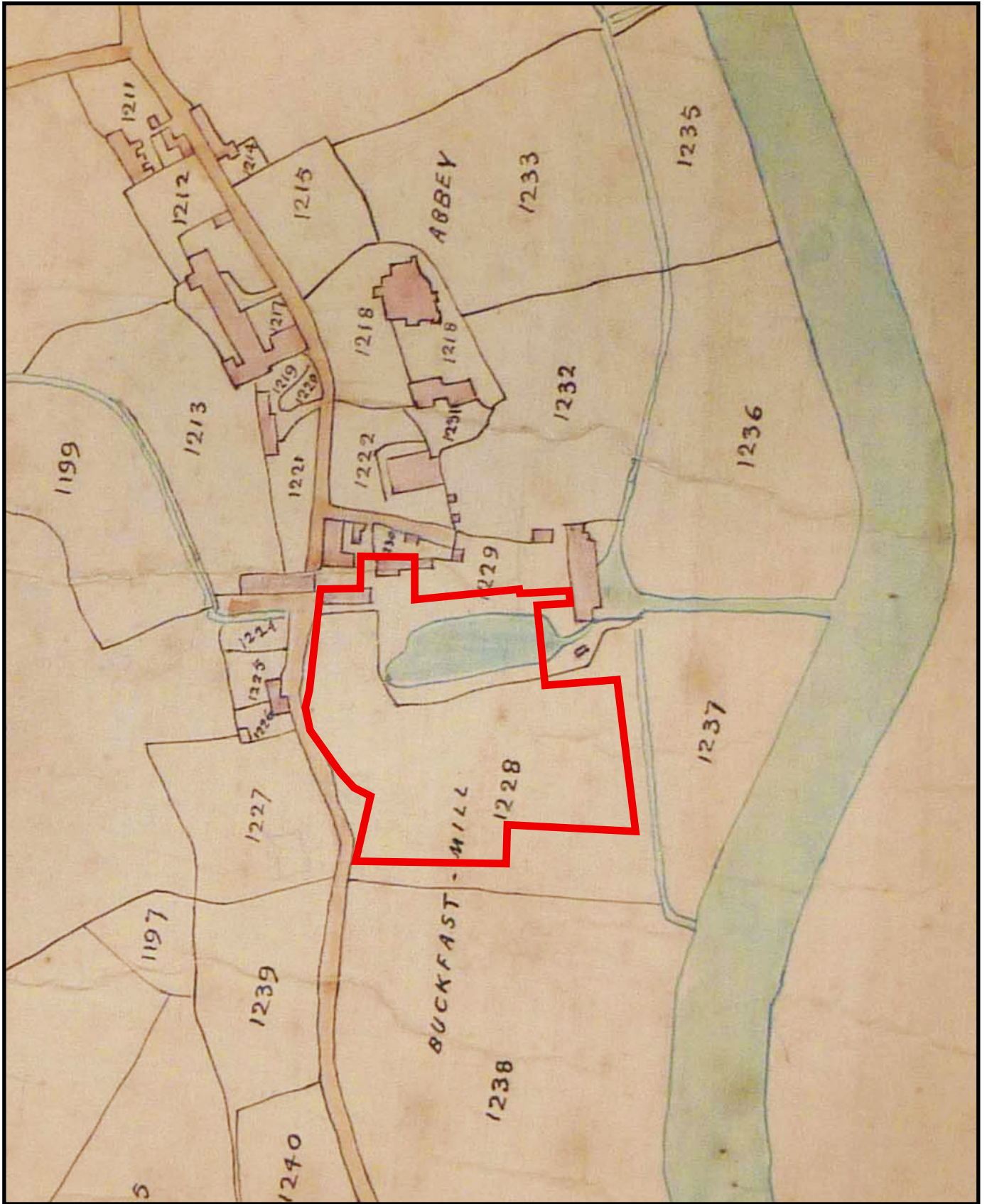


Fig. 4 The Buckfastleigh Tithe Map, c. 1843.

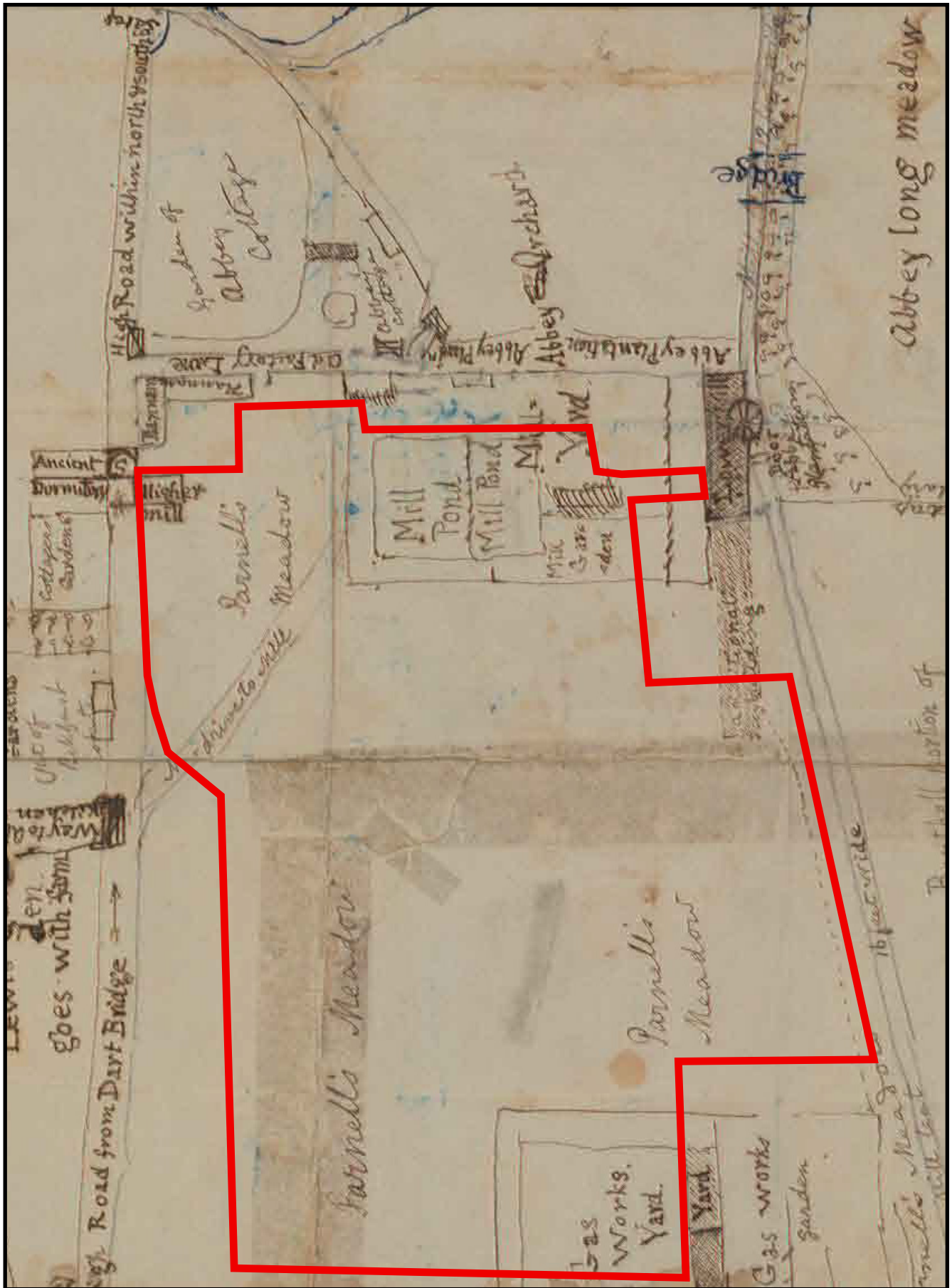


Fig. 5 Extract from a 'Rude sketch of ground forming Buckfast Abbey tenement and boundaries...'. c. 1870. The Site boundary is distorted to include known features. Reproduced with the permission of Buckfast Abbey.

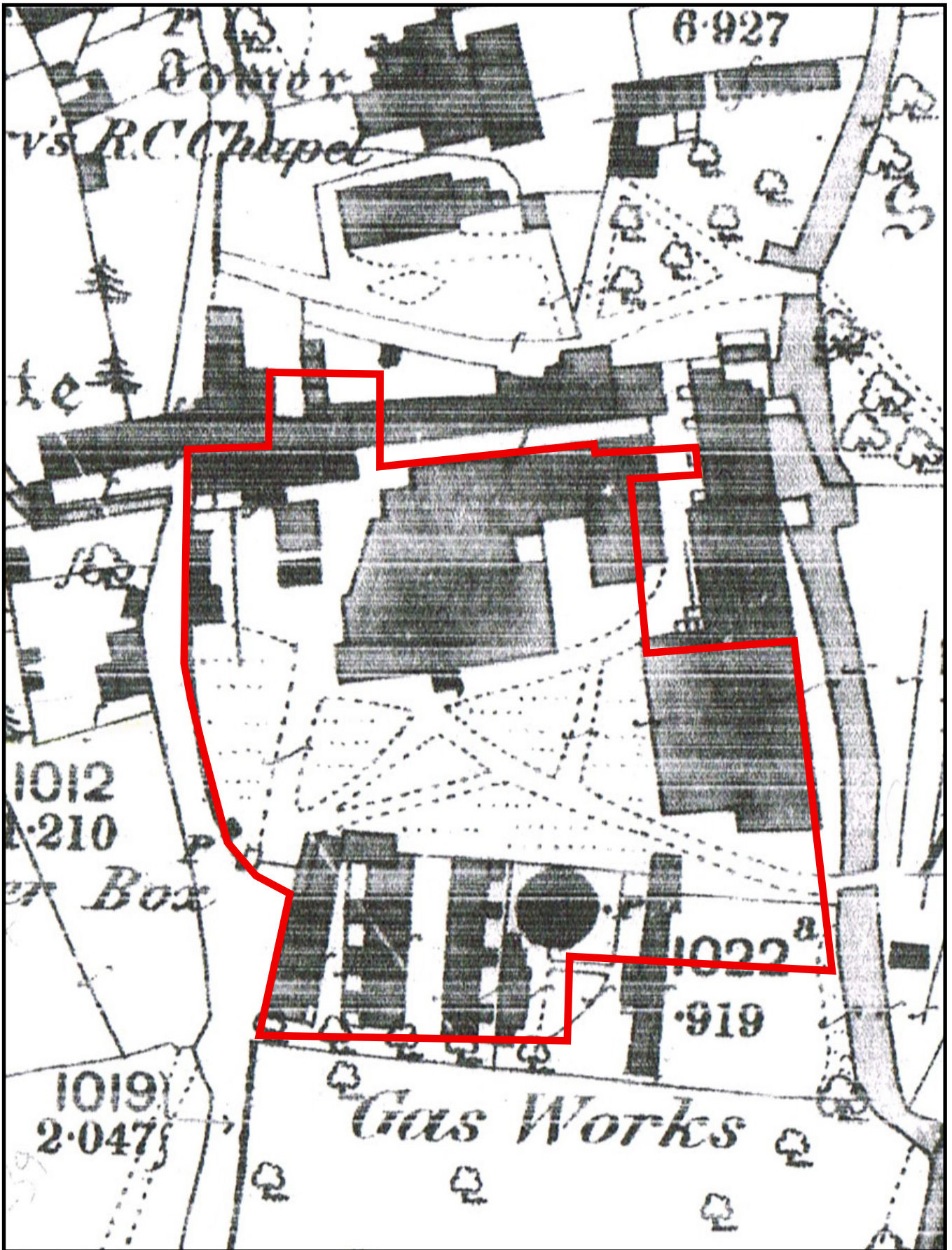


Fig. 6 OS 1:2,500 map, 1887.

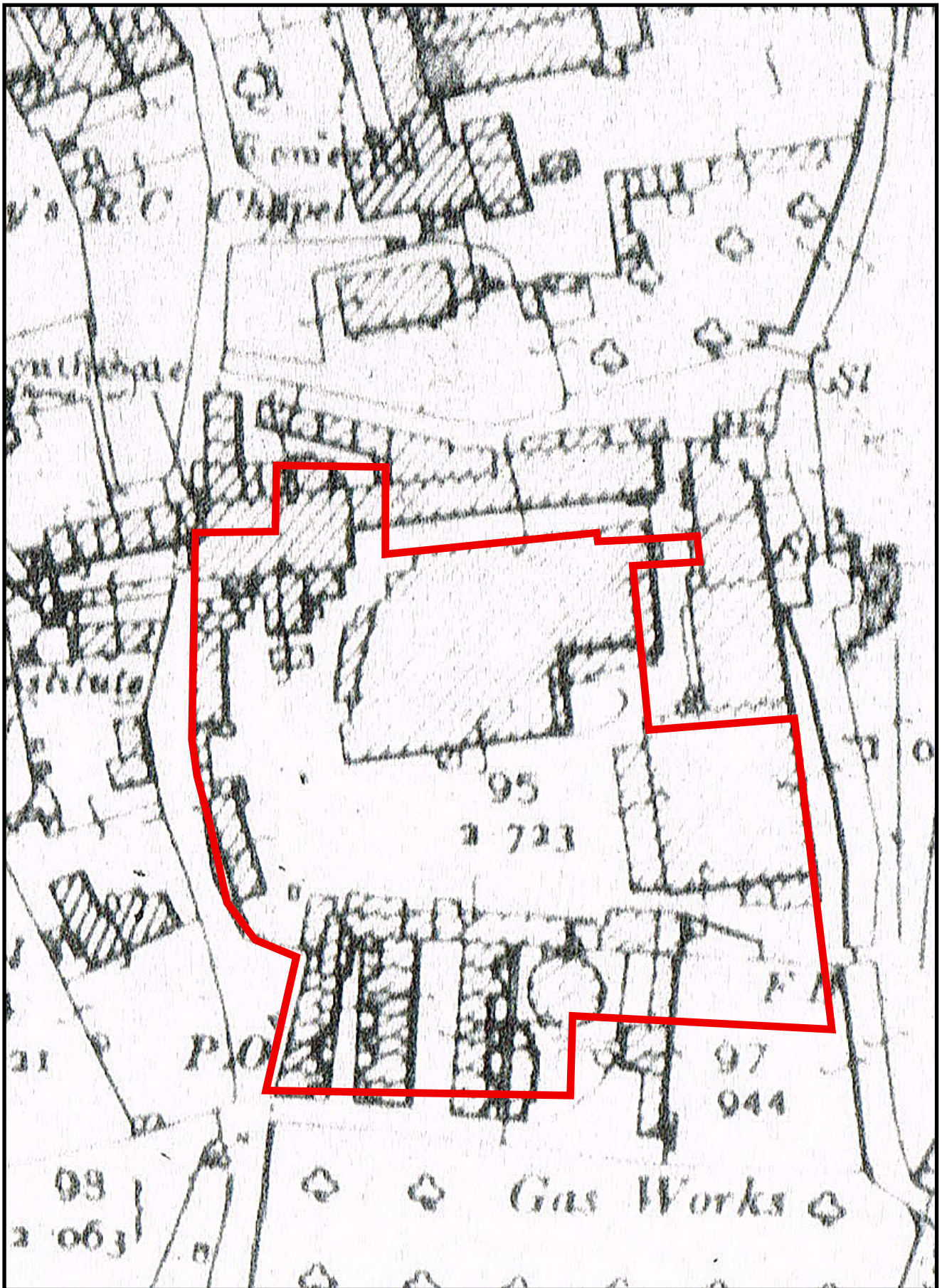


Fig. 7 OS 1:2,500 map, 1905.

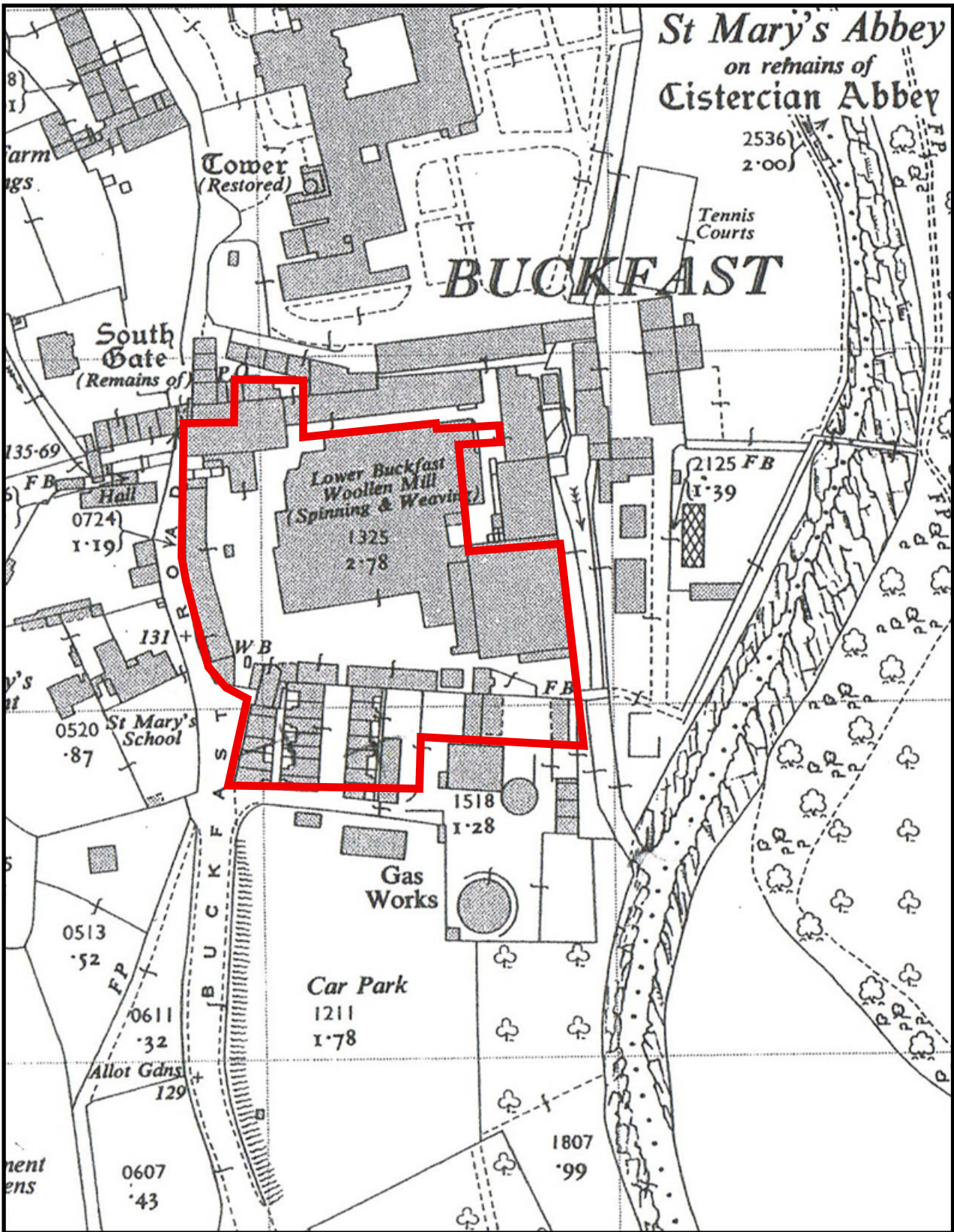


Fig. 8 OS 1:2,500 map, 1955.

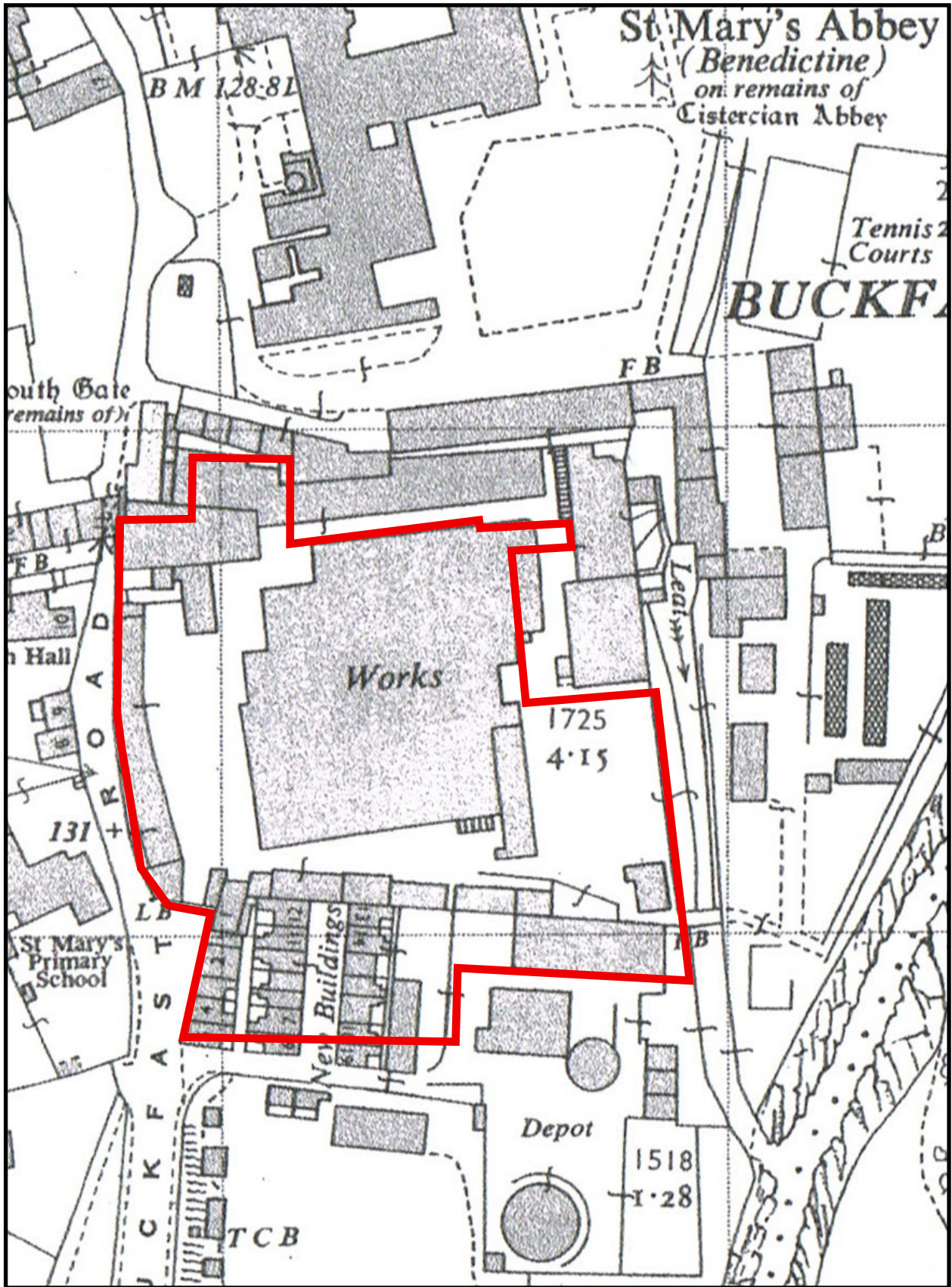


Fig. 9 OS 1:2,500 map, 1961.



Photo. 1 Buildings E and F, looking south.



Photo. 2 The west elevation to Building 2, looking north-east.



Photo. 3 The east elevation of Building B, looking west. Parts of Buildings A (to the right) and C (to the left) are also shown.



Photo. 4 The first floor of Building B, looking west.



Photo. 5 A sash window on the north side of first floor to Building B.



Photo. 6 The blocked entrance at the west end of the ground floor to Building B.



Photo. 7 The western range (Building D), looking north-west. The roof to Building B is visible at the far right. Later elements include the southern tip (to the left, and behind the gate) and a section of infilling (abutting the cream painted northern section).



Photo. 8 The west elevation to the northern part of Building D, seen from the road. The capping to an incorporated boundary wall, and blocked openings, are visible.



Photo. 9 The south elevation of Building G, looking north.



Photo. 10 The west elevation of Building J, looking north-east. The gabled roofline directly to the right of the church tower represents the only early roof structure. The flat roof below the tower covers the only range with all four surviving walls.

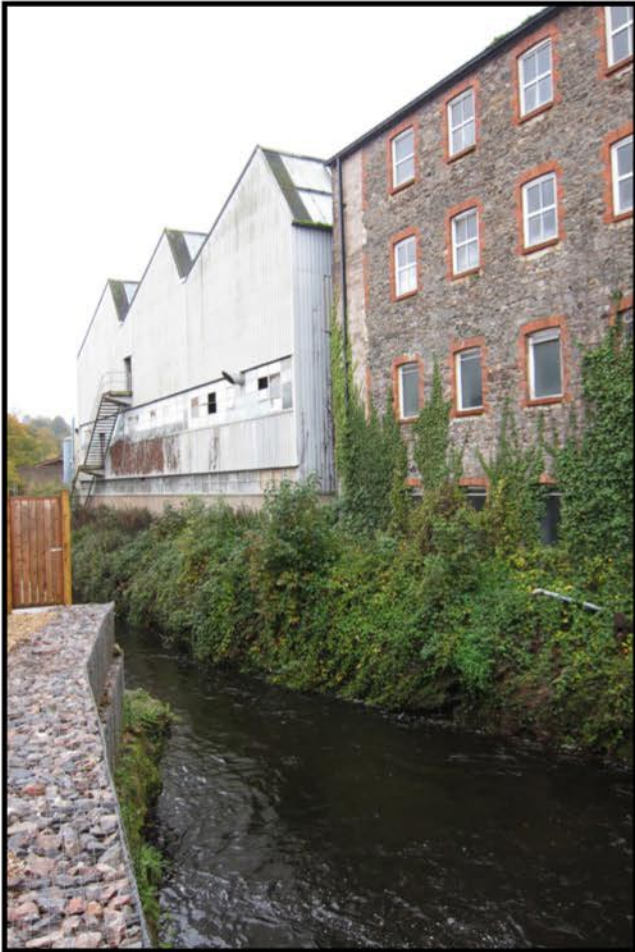


Photo. 11 The modern west elevation to Building J, to the south of the old mill buildings, looking south-west.

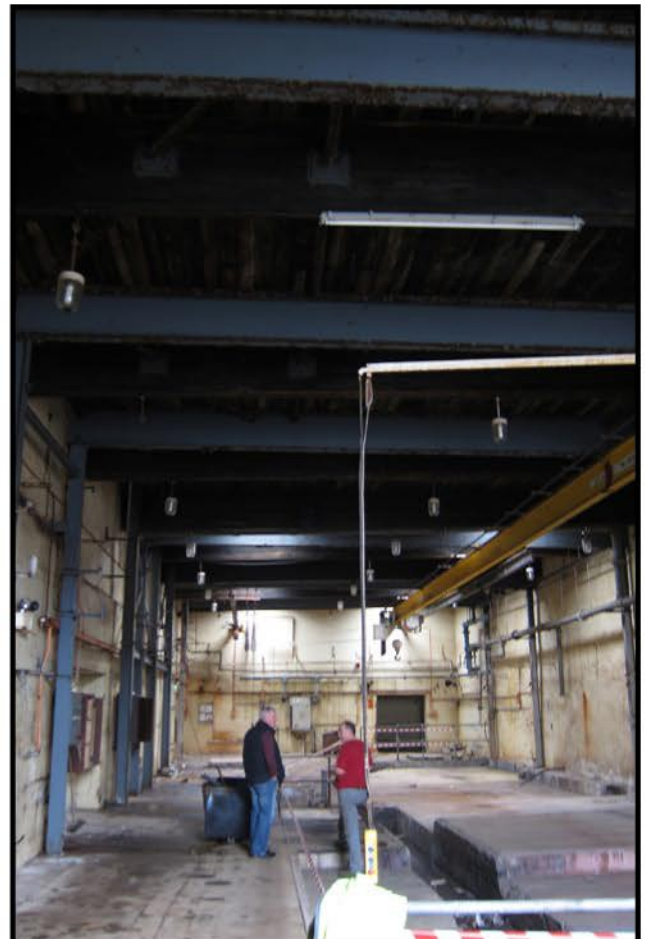


Photo 12. The only range within Building J with all four walls surviving. The roof is modern.



Photo. 13 The western interior to the partial nineteenth-century range within Building J, showing the surviving end wall, the side wall shared with the range to the north, and the end to an original roof truss, resting on this wall.



Photo. 14 What was once the eastern external elevation to the partial nineteenth-century range, now enclosed within the modern southern half of Building J.



Photo. 15 Two Lister engines within the engine room in Building J. The east wall (beyond the farthest engine) may date to the early twentieth century.