

**THE TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT
AND A PROPOSED NEW TOWN SQUARE,
MIDDLE AND FORE STREETS,
BRIXHAM, TORBAY, DEVON**

ETO 433

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**A SURVEY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL,
THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT,
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The footprint of the proposed development area is shown in red superimposed over Figs 2 & 3.

Introduction

The Council is seeking to advance redevelopment of the site of the multistorey carpark and adjacent land (Fig 1). This is actively being promoted by the Brixham Project, which was established by the Council under the aegis of the Civic Trust in 1990. The community led project aims to manage change in the Town through economic regeneration, environmental improvement and traffic management (TBC 1995, 1.1).

The site lies in the centre of the lower town bounded on the north-west by Middle Street; to the west by the Baptist Church buildings, which front onto Market Street; to the south and east by the rear of the buildings fronting onto Fore Street; and to the north-east by the rear of the buildings of the Pump Street and Paradise Place area (Fig 1, outlined in red). Beyond Pump Street and the Strand lies the inner harbour. The site occupies the area of a former creek, which formed the original harbour area known as Brixham Quay. Now a flat valley it is some of the lowest lying ground of the town at around 5.57m OD; it slopes generally eastwards down to the Pump Street area at around 4.27m OD (TBC 1995, 4.1). North and south of Middle and Fore Streets respectively the ground rises steeply to Furzeham Hill and Rea Hill, both of Devonian limestone. The site is currently occupied by a multistorey car park of somewhat undistinguished design, a surface car park, west of Union Lane, and the site of the former bus station; a new public square is to be located here between the Baptist Church and the multistorey car park.

The author who was contracted as an archaeological consultant, by Torbay Borough Council, was supplied with the council's Outline Development Brief, third draft (TBC 1995) and a Layout Plan (ref. 1200/10) prepared by Peter Fischer Landscape Design. Correspondence between the Borough Council and the County Council's Archaeological Section in its Environment Department had suggested that part of the site contained archaeological deposits. The brief was to carry out an archaeological study of the proposed development area, to ascertain the potential of any surviving deposits, and to advise on the archaeological implications of the development. The site was visited on 21 August 1995 and again, in the company of Torbay Borough Council's Conservation Officer, Chris Panceri on 6 September 1995.

History and Archaeology

The limestone upland, above Brixham and to its west, was an area of known prehistoric settlement (Parker Pearson 1981, 17-26), while on Berry Head an iron age fort was established post-800 BC. From the immediate environs of the proposed development area there is no evidence of any prehistoric activity; slightly further afield two sites are well documented: the Windmill Hill, or Brixham, cavern; and the King Street burial. This last was accidentally uncovered in January 1958 when a new sewer was being installed; a crouched burial of a woman (or possibly two women) was found about 100 yards NNE of the "Coffin House". The grave rested on the natural limestone below at least 2 feet of road make-up, though the depth of the old land surface was unfortunately not observed (Belleville 1958, 124). The burial has been dated variously from the middle Bronze Age to the late post-Roman Iron Age, i.e., c.1500BC-400AD. Other than unsupported conjecture there is no

evidence of settlement in Roman times or in the Dark Ages; though isolated coin finds have been made (Read, 1988, *passim*)

me Many Saxon settlements in Devon were established by the eighth century, and the Parish may have been formed about this period. Brixham certainly was recorded in the Domesday book; its Saxon overlord having been dispossessed by a Norman one by 1086. Throughout the early medieval period the harbour and port area was quite separate from the parish centre on the hill above (what is now Lower Brixham was known as Brixham Quay well into the nineteenth century). The harbour area was regarded administratively as part of the port of Dartmouth until c. 1310, when the first individual reference to Brixham is found (Ellis, 1992 Part II Section 1). From this date on many further references exist, and in particular to vessels from Brixham being pressed into royal fleets for service during the French wars, to the extensive fisheries and to the pre-Reformation pilgrim trade to and from Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain.

During this time all of the area between Fore and Middle Streets was part of the waterway of Brixham Quay, with wharves along either bank (Boyle & Payne 1952, 69). There is no evidence of any waterside reclamation during the middle ages. One source asserts that the open creek was dammed in 1172, roughly along the line of the present Pump Street and two tidesmills established on either bank with a water-gate between them to allow boats to pass up the creek; it is further asserted that on the Fore Street side the mill went out of use around 1560 (Horsely 1988, 8; cited by Minchinton 1989, 175-6) - this source should be used with extreme caution. That a mill or even two were present at an early date is not impossible but the evidence has not been evinced in the source. Documents from the seventeenth century do however attest to at least one mill (Ellis 1992, Part II Section 3). The Navy Board wrote to one Richard Cliffe, a prominent citizen, on 28 February 1672 asking for a report on the possibilities of the place. He replied on 11 March 1672:

BRIXHAM AT TORBAY

There is a Corne Mill that is constantly imployed with this water by mynes of which there is a large poole made to receive the same ... there will need that a large square vessel bee prepared to receive the water in from the mill poole which may be made with deale bordes well caulked and pitched ... and for the inlarging the stream there must be for at least a mile severall places be stopped and secured.

There is also, not much more distant from the road than the former in a Gent[leman's] land a very good stream of water and convenient for the boates to come at. There must a poole bee made to receive it ... there must a banke bee taken of for the easier roleing the caske to and from the sea...

The charge of preparing these conveniences and securing the water may be done for less than £30..

I remayn

Your honoured and most humble servant

Richard Cliffe

The report appears to have been ignored for about a century. The reservoir envisaged by Cliffe was built during the American war of Independence in 1781 (Oppenheim 1968, 95, citing BL Add MSS15496) though one writer maintains that a fleet watering facility was established as early as c. 1700 (Erskine 1992, 125-6)

There is a fleeting reference in 1706 - some years after William of Orange's landing on 5 November 1688 at the quayside, then by tradition at Bolton Cross, within the area of the old creek - in the churchwardens' accounts to 3 mills in Brixham, each tithed at 2/- (Milles 1747-62). Unfortunately only two are identified: the Higher Mill in Mill Street, now Bolton Street, and the *Kay* mill in Pump Street.

A map of the manor of Brixham, preserved in the Devon Records Office (DRO 59/7/5/6) displays in a cartouche the legend *The Estate of Chas Haynes Esq. Surveyed by Jos^h Willey 1743*, it shows a rudimentary shoreline but no inner creek. It has been argued on this evidence that the creek therefore must have been reclaimed by this time (Ellis 1992 Part II Section 3 Note 7). This however is to place too much reliance on the map as a pure source; it is essentially a depiction of the scattered manorial landholdings in Higher Brixham, the tenants and sizes being differentiated in coloured inks. Brixham Quay is shown in a quite rudimentary fashion as 9 houseblocks on what is probably Middle Street, and 4 on what is probably King Street. It cannot be supported on this evidence that the harbour of 1743 was the same as that known from 1781 (below). For while no creek is shown neither are the two streams that flowed into it, nor are the piers of the then outer harbour. No watermills are shown, though we know from both the churchwardens' accounts and from a private lease made in 1719 (DRO 924 B/L5) that at least one existed, while a windmill however is noted as part of the manor in Higher Brixham. One can only conclude that because the focus of interest was the manor holdings in the higher settlement, the absence of the mills and the creek from the map of the lower settlement can not be advanced for their not being extant.

A survey made on behalf of the Admiralty in 1781 is preserved at Brixham Museum (Fig 2). Entitled in the attractive cartouche *Plan of the Watering Place at Brixham Taken by J King 1781* the map shows the newly built reservoir, its inlets, outlet and overflow. It further gives precise detail, at a scale of about 1":100' (1:1200) showing the former creek between Middle & Fore Streets (the latter is not named) laid out as fields and enclosed in 4 parcels, belonging to from west to east: John Grant; William Gillard; Richard Fogwell, and the Duke of Bolton. The lands of John Grant and William Gillard are shown covered in vegetation, enclosed by stone walls and are bounded on the north by the mill leet. The lands of the Richard Fogwell and the Duke of Bolton by contrast have already been encroached upon, the northern areas of the fields cleared and buildings established on all sides of the mill pond. On the south side of their respective fields runs a water course which can be interpreted as a leet for a mill which stood on the south side of the Quay.

The survey is labelled and for ease of interpretation these are highlighted in red on figure 2 and the key given here. The reservoir west of Market St showing the entrance of the stream (a); the penstock for letting off water to Deer Rock (b); the overflow connecting the reservoir to the leet *The waste pipe to be continually*

running (c); the Mill House (d) and adjoining stable (e). The course of the outlet pipe is shown running across all four parcels of land leading to a wharf, beyond the low water mark, constructed on Deer rock; this is shown as (f) on the full survey, but not shown in the reproduction here. This became known as The Kings' Watering Quay.

Shortly after King's Plan was made the *Exeter Flying Post* of 26 October 1786 carried the following item:

THIS is to give Notice, that on Friday the 17th November next, the Committee for Victualling his Majesty's Navy will be ready at the Victualling Office, London, to receive Tenders in Writing, sealed up, from such persons as are willing to purchase the FEE of his MAJESTY'S MILL situated at Brixham Quay, in the County of Devon. The Premises consist of a Mill-House, Stable, Mill Lake and Mill Pool, on which very advantageous Improvements maybe made, as Brixham is the greatest-Fishing Place in the West of England, and now in a flourishing State. For further Particulars apply to Mr Humphry Bartlett, of Brixham aforesaid, who will give every information requisite.

The buildings and description match those in King's survey. The Napoleonic wars which followed within a decade of the American war saw increased naval interest in Brixham and a considerable war establishment there. Though Berry Head from 1794 was the principal focus of this activity, within the lower town, that is Brixham Quay, there was a expansion of the reservoir and an increase in the bore of its pipes, which was completed in 1801. The King's Watering Quay was reconstructed in stone, to be known simply as King's Quay; while storehouses and naval and military hospitals were established (Duffy 1992, 188; Erskine 1992, 124-5). A contemporary account (Dunsford 1800) describes King's Quay *...at the east corner of the entrance to this harbour is a complete watering place for all the king's ships, and other vessels that anchor in the bay; fresh water is brought from the adjacent hills to a reservoir on the outside wall of the quay, from which it is conducted by large leaden pipes through the wall, at a proper height for conveying it into the casks brought in small boats to the side of the wall.*

The Baptist Chapel, still extant, was built in 1801, west of the enlarged reservoir on land shown as John Grant's fields in King's 1781 survey (Figs 2 & 3). At the other, eastern, end of the old creek the passing of the *Pier, Haven and Market Act 1799* had authorised the borrowing of £6,000 in order to repair, enlarge and rebuild the public quay at Brixham. In effect The Strand which King had shown literally on the beach had a high enclosing wall erected on it, with a Market House above and landing slips below on the seaward side. The Eastern Quay, was reconstructed and completed 1803-4 being paid for by public subscription, the older inner pier called King William's Steps inside this was removed. The reclamation probably begun in the eighteenth century - the fields shown in King's survey - was being completed by their transformation into urban plots. The population of all Brixham, in 1801 was recorded at 3,671, forty years later by which time the old creek had gone entirely it had risen to 5,684.

This urbanisation can be seen in a map made in 1860 but recording the position in 1840 (DRO 382 add P3). The map made by William Bovey, a surveyor of Brixham records that it was *made on 15 August 1860 being a copy of the 1840 tithe commutation map of Brixham parish*. Enormous in extent, almost 16' by 5' it shows Fore Street called Brixham Quay, in addition to that being the name of Lower Brixham; a gasometer is present, or something very like it, on its later site (see below). Not all plots within the area of the former creek are filled-in, the emptiest spaces are on the western end of the south side of Middle Street.

By the time of the first Ordnance Survey in 1861-2 (Fig 3) the empty plots have all gone. This map is worthy of further attention; the Naval reservoir is still extant and its water inlets clearly marked: from the west along New Road, and from the south parallel and west of Bolton Street. The old mill leet which carried the reservoir overflow can be seen running south and parallel to Middle Street as far as the gas works, which had been founded in 1838 (Ellis 1992, Part II Section 3) and where a branch diverts to it. Essentially this part of the old leet was functioning as a town drain (see below for the significance of this). This can perhaps be more clearly seen in the large scale Ordnance Survey 1:500 (too large to illustrate here, which was surveyed in 1864 though not published until 1874) where the line of the leet and the position of the mill pond have been built over and are represented by the lane of Mill Tye and its shape. The building-over may also have resulted in the filling-in or narrowing of its water-carrying capacity, or in its total diversion to the gasworks; the absence of any large sewer shown on TBC 1995, Plan 4 suggests this.

In 1868 Brixham was linked to the Paignton-Kingswear railway and there begun its rise as a seaside resort. The freehold of the reservoir with *all its leets, watercourses and other rights...* was first sold in September 1870 at the dispersal of the Bolton estates (DRO 924 B/E4/6), and again in February 1880 (EFP 21 January 1880). It finally went out of use by 1882 and the land upon which it stood became the site of the Town Hall built in 1886. As a holiday resort, however, Brixham wasn't to everyone's taste, a guide to seaside watering places in 1896 described it as *a sort of Devonshire Wapping with a Billingsgate smell!* (Travis 1993).

The Archaeological Potential and the Implications of the Development

It is obvious from the cartographic evidence: King's Survey of 1781 and the Ordnance Survey (Figs 2 & 3) that the main area of the proposed development lies within an area of post-medieval, and probably eighteenth century, reclamation of the former creek. Although it has not been possible to accurately tie down the date at which reclamation began and the old wharves of Brixham Quay went out of use, King's survey of 1781 does show the area as land rather than as water. The areas of archaeological potential then can be assumed to be confined to the margins; the wharves of the former creek would lie on the north side of Fore Street and the south side of Middle Street. Those of the former lie outside the proposed development area. Middle Street was evidently in 1781 less than half the width it is now. King's survey shows houses on the south side of the street - what would now be within the footprint of the southern half of the carriageway - from about the eastern side of the junction with Union Lane running eastwards to Pump Street, formerly Beach Alley. This can still be seen in the Ordnance Survey of 1861-2 (Fig 3) and at one point the

road bifurcates north of Beach Alley/Pump Street to leave a freestanding block of six properties in the centre of Middle Street. The buildings on the south side of Middle Street survived until recent times and were only cleared away after 1959 in order to widen the road.

All these properties lay north of the mill leet and of the steep drop in levels which characterises the northern side of the multistorey carpark (TBC 1995, Plan 4 *Constraints to Development*). They are then also outside the limits of the proposed development; in any case their archaeological potential must be surely limited, if indeed not destroyed by the construction of the 72" sewer. West of the junction with Union Lane there are no buildings south of Middle Street shown on King's Survey, though a range of buildings is clearly evident on the 1861-2 Ordnance Survey, immediately north of the still extant mill leet. The leet and its diversion to the gasworks (see above) would seem to have been subsumed into the later 18" or 36" sewerage system (TBC 1995, Plan 4).

The surviving areas of archaeological potential would thus appear to be south of Middle Street, south of the extant sewer, from the rear of the Baptist Church to the west side of Union Lane. No buildings are shown in King's plan but the enclosed fields of John Grant and William Gillard would have been reclaimed over any former wharves. An even greater potential exists east of Union Lane where not only wharves may have been built utilising the steep change in levels in the area of what is now the north side of the carpark, but there are known buildings of substance. King's plan shows the mill, the mill pond and two buildings on the south side of the pond, which are all, or in part within the footprint of the carpark. King shows the layout as well established in 1781; Cliffe had written to the Navy Board about the mill in 1672, it is not unlikely that its origin is indeed medieval - though Horsley's (*op. cit.*) precise date of 1172 remains unsubstantiated. The buildings as they were in 1781 fall within the footprint of the development area (Fig 2).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Archaeological potential of the proposed development area is limited to the area south of Middle Street, within the northern limits of the site. It is presumed to be the wharves, with perhaps short jetties, that served the vessels of Brixham Quay from medieval times to the eighteenth century. There is no evidence as to the precise location of the quays, their extent or date. Similarly nothing is known of their survival; whatever may have been preserved by reclamation may have been subject to subsequent disturbance or destruction from the depth of Victorian and later building. Certainly the density of development indicated on the OS 1:500 of 1874 is considerable, though cellars may have been shallow or nonexistent in order to obviate the problem of damp. Older buildings are only recorded on the map of 1781, but these included a mill and ancillary works which may be considerably older still. Not only do these lie within the footprint of the development, but they are situated beneath the ground level of the multi-storey car park. However this 'ground level' is as much as 2m above the rest of the site; the southern row of steel columns supporting the multistorey decks lies within what at first looks like a retaining wall. However this wall appears to be at least nineteenth century and may have subsumed earlier structures, its other importance is that it suggests that the

whole site was not cleared when the car park was constructed in the 1960s. This area then not only has a *prima facie* case for being that of most interest, but also of having an enhanced chance of least disturbance. This assumes that the steel columns do not sit on deeply cut thick pads or strip foundations.

The depth of potential archaeological deposits is almost impossible to estimate - the leet, mill pond and wooden quays would have been excavated and sunk into the natural estuarine deposits. In June 1937 a substantial archway was found under the road in front of a building on the site of the current Woolworths in Fore Street, and a number of wells were revealed at a depth of 6 or 7 feet below present ground level (Ellis 1992, Part II Section 5(a) Note 1). Excavations to lay a new gas main, outside the Library and opposite the entrance to Middle Street, shortly before the Second World War revealed a section of wooden conduit emanating from the reservoir. The depth at which it was found below the present street level would be an aid in estimating the depth of reclamation, unfortunately the author was unable to check this¹ (Western Morning News 11 July 1939).

It is understood that test pits were cut in the surface car park between the multi-storey block and the site of the old bus station (*pers. comms.* Paul Lucas and Chris Panceri) unfortunately no archaeological observation was undertaken. It is also understood that prior to any development South West Water will excavate an access chamber at the southern end of the surface car park adjacent to Union Lane. While this is not in the area of any expected archaeology, being in the centre of the former creek - shown as part of a timber yard on the early ordnance survey (Fig 3) - an indication of the date, nature and depth of reclamation could be observed and an archaeological watching-brief during this operation is recommended.

As always the only true test of the presence or absence of archaeology (in the absence of other supporting information) is the digging of trial pits. As geotechnical information is required prior to development (TBC 1995, 4.11) it is strongly recommended that this is integrated with trial archaeological work. Nowhere is this more important than in the raised 'ground' level of the multi-storey car park where the former presence of mill buildings is attested and where wharves with attendant installations may be assumed. The knowledge gained from such trial works would allow an informed decision to be made on what archaeological strategy should be adopted in planning and during redevelopment. As for the Town Square proposal (Peter Fischer Layout Plan 1200/10) it is not clear what impact this would have on any putative archaeological deposits. The plan only shows finished levels and no indication is given as to construction methods, or the depth of groundworks. Comments upon the impact, if any, of its implementation requires that the presence of archaeological deposits be established; their extent and depth, if they exist, be known (or at least the uppermost surviving level); and similarly the depth of the underside of the development. Archaeological observation of the SWW chamber is an obvious starting point.

NOTES:

1. Exeter's Archive copies of WMN before 1940 were largely destroyed during the war, while Plymouth's copies were temporarily unobtainable.

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Acknowledgements

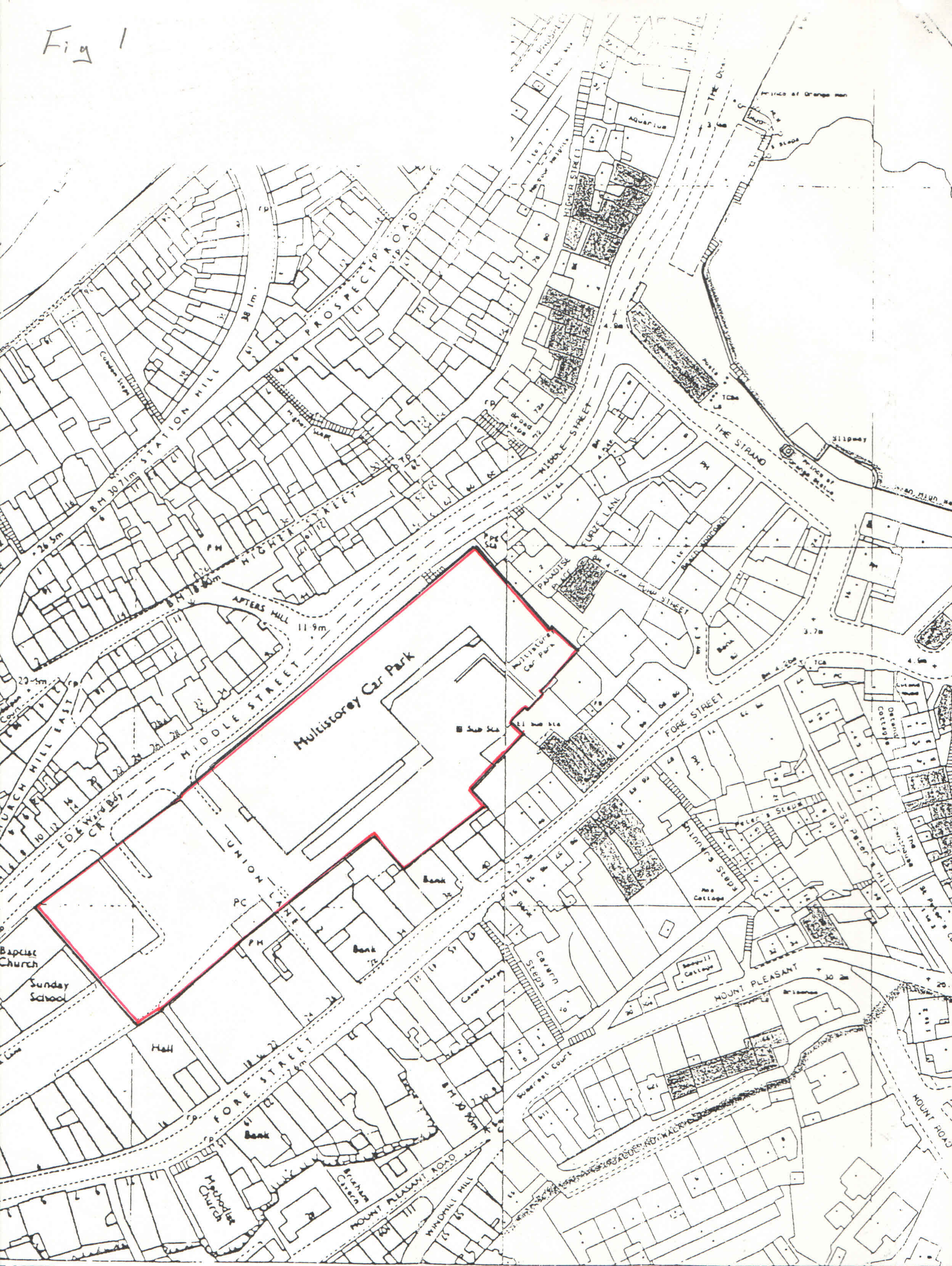
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APPENDIX

The Southern Mill Leet and Drainage behind Fore Street

TBC 1995, Plan 4 shows an 18" or 36" sewer running from Paradise Alley into Pump Street then northeastwards along the line of Beach Approach to debouch into the harbour. When visited on 6 September 1995 the exit was observed to be blocked. Similarly the exit of the former southern mill leet was also blocked. This watercourse can be seen in both scales of the first Ordnance Survey (1:2500, 1861-2; 1:500, surveyed 1864) exiting below the wall of The Strand, then still The Beach, into the Harbour. The passage of this southern leet can still be seen behind the buildings on Fore Street, one of which is called the "Old Mill". The leet is evidently still in use for local drainage, though now entirely covered over, for the blocking of its exit into the harbour had caused a backing-up of water and severe problems to one local tenant even in the dry summer of 1995 (*pers comm* to the author and Chris Panceri).

Fig 1



PLAN
 of the
 WATERING PLACE
 at
 BRIXHAM
 Taken by J. King
 © 1787

