

**DEVONIA PRODUCTS SITE
BUCKFASTLEIGH
DEVON**

HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL

**for Stephen Whettem Architects
on behalf of Axminster Carpets Limited**

DRAFT

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**PRELIMINARY HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL
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Introduction

This appraisal has been undertaken at the request of Stephen Whettem Architects, to provide an overview of the development of the Devonia Products site in Buckfastleigh. The site has been in industrial use since at least the early 19th century, being occupied by a tannery.

The site is within Dartmoor National Park. None of the standing buildings are listed.

This appraisal is based on background research and site visits made on 23 October and 6 November 2012. It is intended to be read with the drawings and photographs attached.

Location

The site is located in Higher Town, Buckfastleigh, NGR SX 736 662 (Figure 1). It lies to the east of Higher Town Bridge, which spans the river Mardle and forms the junction between Market Street to the south and Bridge Street to the north. The buildings which are the subject of this report are mostly on the north bank of the Mardle, with one large building complex to the south.

Water supply

Water is supplied to the site from a leat taken off the river Mardle some 0.76km to the west. The leat, which has not been investigated for this appraisal, was the historic watercourse that fed the Town Mill, which was located on the north bank to the west of the bridge. There is a high level launder alongside the ruined stone walls of the mill and vertical cast-iron siphon pipes on both sides of the road, the eastern one within the Devonia site, to take the water flow under the road. Both pipes are on the northern side of the Mardle and a timber launder crosses the stream at an angle and runs along the north side of the building to the south at high level. The launder is maintained to provide a live water supply for sheepskin processing, with an exit for excess water down a timber shaft at its eastern end.

Historical background and development

The significance of the tanning industry in Devon has recently been documented by Martin Bodman (2008; 2009), who has summarised the recent history of tanning in Buckfastleigh (Bodman 2008, 42-4). For over a century the tannery was run by members of the Hamlyn family: it was bought by Joseph Hamlyn in 1806 and in 1851 his youngest son, William, employed six men and two boys. In 1853 William and his older brother John formed the company Hamlyn Brothers, which ran the tannery and woollen mills and employed 270 people in 1861. William died at the age of 42 in 1865 and John, aged 61, in 1878. William's third son, Joseph, concentrated on running the tannery. In early January 1882 there was a major fire at the 'extensive premises of Messrs Hamlyn Bros., wool staplers and tanners of Buckfastleigh.' (*The Western Times*, quoted in Bodman 2008). Four large stacks of bark, weighing upwards of a thousand tons and valued between £5000 and £6000, were destroyed and the fire raged for nearly three days. In 1889 Hamlyn Brothers employed 700 people in their woollen mill and tannery. The woollen mill was sold to the Co-operative Wholesale Society in 1920, but the tannery business continued. Part of the

site is still used for processing sheepskins by Devonia Products Ltd., a subsidiary of Axminster Carpets Ltd.

Description of the buildings

As with many industrial sites, the surviving buildings represent several phases of development, dating from the late 19th century to the present. The phasing of the buildings, or parts of them, is therefore relatively complex and is discussed below. A site plan with the location of buildings considered in this appraisal is given Figure 1 and a more detailed sketch plan, showing sub-divisions, in Figure 5. The following notes are taken from a walk-round survey, to summarize the principal features. Orientations have been simplified.

Building A

A late 20th century office block on a stone plinth, spanning the river Mardle. The building appears to occupy part of the footprint of an earlier building or buildings which are shown on the late 19th century and early 20th century Ordnance Survey maps (see Figures 3 and 4). This building is not included in this appraisal.

Building B

A modern and adapted earlier building currently in use for processing sheepskins by Devonia Products Ltd. It is a three-storey block located on the S bank of the Mardle. The lower part of the N wall, fronting the river, is of rubble limestone with numerous blocked door and window openings with red brick arched heads and reveals and visible building breaks. Steel I beams span between the N wall and the S wall of building C, carrying a timber launder which runs the full length of B2. There are bridges at first and second floor levels across the stream, to building C.

B1: the S part of this building is the most recent. The W end has brick and concrete block walls and 2 double pitch roofs with steel trusses over.

B2: is effectively 3 ranges running N-S, containing 3 floors. The ground floor level is lower in the two W ranges, with processing vats for sheepskins. The ground floor of the E range, which also contains processing machinery, is at a higher level, accessed at the N end by a footbridge across the river from C1. The lower N wall, against the river, is of stone with multiple openings with brick arches and reveals, with more recent buff brickwork with flat concrete lintels at first floor level, forming the gable ends of the 2 W ranges above. The N elevation of the E range has brick columns with metal cladding infill.

The first floor has low ceilings, with timber and steel beam structure supporting the top floor, on brick columns. The W range roof is of 7 bays with 6 trusses; its tie beams bear on brick columns. The S gable is brick, with a cast-iron multi-light window. The central range roof is similar. Both the W and central range roofs have king posts, raking struts and vertical posts at the ends of the struts between the tie beams and principals. The E range roof has 7 trusses of lighter construction, with sagging tie beams and tapered queen posts. The roof slopes are clad with corrugated metal sheeting.

B3: lean-to roofed single storey structure, with 3 full and 1 narrow bay (N) with steel columns and roof supports. It is built against the E wall of B2, which has 6 brick columns, partly infilled with rubble stone, and some brick dressings to openings.

Building C

A complex of modern and adapted earlier buildings in use for some processing and storage.

C1: two-storey. Concrete ground floor with steel columns dividing the space into 7 bays W-E; 3 bays N-S, with a narrow, flat-roofed, bay along the S side.

C2: single storey tank and boiler room, with passage to exterior (W) on N side. Double metal roller shutter doors to enclosed yard on W side. Flue etc. in SW corner.

C3: two bay building, single storey, orientated N-S, with concrete arched trusses carrying low double-pitch roofs. W bay is wider span than E. N ends closed with concrete blockwork, rendered externally, top part clad with vertical corrugated sheeting.

C4: two-storey, with loading doors at both floor levels in E gable end. Concrete ground floor, with ramps. Brick and rubble stone walls with brick arches to N and S sides, in 10 bays. First floor carried on timber joists spanning between steel beams, 18 bays W-E. First floor N wall brick at E end, rendered at W end.

C5: modern steel-framed and clad single storey building, of 4 bays with 3 steel roof trusses, with a double-pitch roof. E elevation rendered, with large doorway. N interior wall is lower part of S wall of C6, rendered and painted, with projecting brick and concrete block and steel columns. Concrete floor. Concrete block W end, with vertical corrugated metal cladding above; S wall with brick columns, rubble stone infill between to half height with concrete cills and concrete block infill above.

C6: long narrow two-storey range orientated W-E along N side. Maintenance workshop at E end, ground floor, office on first floor in centre. WC/shower room on first floor at W end. Double pitched roof clad with slates, with roof lights at W end.

Exterior: N elevation of limestone rubble with red brick quoins and columns between first floor windows at E end, concrete and steel lintels to ground floor openings, the heads of which are about level with the driveway. Concrete cills and timber lintels to first floor windows, which are of timber at E end and centre, metal-framed at W end. Central section has small gable roof at right angles to main roof, with brick infill above larger window and slate 'barge boards' at verges. Rubble stonework changes from E end to central feature, which is different to W end, suggesting three building phases (see below). CI guttering and downpipes. E gable with offset first floor window, concrete cill and lintel and brick reveals, timber frame. Timber barge boards. W gable plain rubble stone with timber barge boards. S elevation largely obscured by later building C5, but stonework below eaves rendered and colour-washed.

Interior: maintenance workshop at E end open to roof, but trusses largely obscured by inserted close-boarded ceiling. Number and details of trusses not visible. Timber steps up to first floor office, with stud and board E wall. WC and shower room at first floor, E end, with plastered walls and ceiling, accessible up exterior concrete steps at SW end.

Building D

A range of three-storey (2 floors and loft) 19th century buildings, part disused and part in use for skin storage.

D1 and D2:

Exterior: principal (S) elevation of limestone rubble with red brick arched heads and reveals to doors and windows, with larger inserted doorways to both spaces. Loading doors at first and loft levels in D1. W gable end of D2 is brick, infilling between stone front and rear walls, with window openings closed in brickwork at all three floor levels. Roof slated, with 4 roof lights to loft in D1. Timber barge boards to E gable.

Interior: ground floor concrete. Walls of rubble stone, with vertical timber boarding to higher levels of gable ends. First floor removed; was fairly low. Loft floor on softwood joists with herringbone struts. D2 has vertical timbers defining bays along N wall, for skin storage.

No access to loft or roof. Roof truss (partly visible through window from D3) of king post and raking strut type, white-washed.

D3:

Exterior: walls of rubble stone, with large central doorway facing E, with modern plywood doors. Brick reveals to doorway and 2 windows in E elevation, the latter both closed in concrete blockwork. Openings at first and loft level in N gable closed with corrugated iron sheet. Timber barge boards to N and S gables and fascia to E. Slated roof.

Interior: coarse aggregate concrete floor in main part; slight step up to concrete floor in W extension. Rubble stone walls. Single storey space, open to roof. 4 brick arches with some decorative voussoirs and brick columns to extension on W side. 6 bay roof with 5 trusses: 1, 3 and 5 (from S) have light 'queen struts', 2 and 4 have scissor braces. 2 rows of purlins over backs of principals, common rafters and slates on battens. N extension has 6 bay roof with 5 trusses, each with 2 raking struts between the tie beam and the principals and a vertical tie rod from the tie beam to the ridge. Purlins at eaves, midway and ridge, with corrugated sheet cladding on the slopes.

Building E

The former Wool Marketing Board building, which forms a significant backdrop to the site when viewed from the south. It is thought to date from the 1960s and is now disused. This building is not included in this appraisal

Building F

A detached 19th century single-storey building, predominantly rubble stone with a corrugated metal clad gable roof, in use for skin storage.

Exterior: front (SE) elevation in yellow brick with two full height openings at SW end and third wider opening closed in concrete blockwork. 3 metal-framed fixed light windows in both gable ends, 2 to ground floor and 1 centrally above, with yellow brick heads and reveals. Windows 5 wide x 5 high panes, with inward opening bottom-hinged 3 x 2 pane light in centre. Rear (NW) wall of rubble stone, with building break about half way along, wall head higher to SW of break. Painted timber barge boards to gable ends.

Interior: concrete floor, open plan. Walls of rubble stone with some whitewash internally. Roof of 8 bays, with 7 trusses, all of similar form: king post with angled struts to undersides of principals. Eaves purlin and 2 purlins on backs of principals on both slopes; 2 ridge purlins; closely spaced rafters with modern corrugated cladding. Truss 5, from SW, has studs and top two thirds is closed with boarding.

Dating and discussion

It is stated that Joseph Hamlyn bought the tannery in 1806 (Bodman 2008, 42), but the origins of a tannery on this site are not known. The earliest cartographic evidence is the tithe map of c.1844, where two sites are indicated (Figure 2). It is unfortunate that not all the plots listed in the accompanying apportionment are numbered on the map, so there is some ambiguity in interpretation. One suggestion is that the original tannery was located towards the east end of the site, in the position of the present office building. Part of the building shown here on the tithe map is positioned directly over the river Mardle, which would have been necessary both for power (a water-driven bark mill) and for providing water for the tanning process. However, plot 1107, north-west of this site, is recorded in the apportionment as 'House Garden etc', owned and occupied by Joseph Hamlyn. Plots 1108 'Tan Yard' and 1113 'Buildings and Yard' are not numbered on the map, but were similarly in Hamlyn's ownership. Plot 1108 is likely to be close to 1107, suggesting that the tannery may have been to the west of Hamlyn's house, between its west front and Bridge Street, on the north bank of the Mardle. The eastern site is marked 'Tannery' on the first edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, which was surveyed in 1886 and published in 1887 (Figure 3), but is unfortunately on the junction of two sheets. It is not until the 1904 second edition (Figure 4) that a large block of buildings marked 'Tannery' is shown at the western end of the site. It is of note, however, that the rectangular area divided into 4 by 4 squares which appears on the first edition map to the west of the house probably represents tanning pits. It is feasible that the fire of 1882 (see above) may have caused considerable damage and that the block of buildings which appears on the 1904 map is the result of rebuilding. It is possible that further detailed research may uncover more information.

Based on the map evidence, four phases of development are proposed for this discussion:

Phase 1: pre 1844	(tithe map and apportionment)
Phase 2: 1844 – 1886	(between the tithe map and survey for the first edition OS)
Phase 3: 1886 – 1904	(between the first and second edition OS 1:2500 maps)
Phase 4: post 1904	(after the second edition OS). This phase may probably be refined and enlarged using site/business records

Building A

Phase 4 office, on or close to the footprint of an L-shaped building shown on the tithe map (Phase 1) and marked 'Tannery' on the first edition OS. The plan of the complex changed in Phase 3.

Building B

Phase 1: A small complex of buildings, including a curious L-shaped building, the long leg of which projects into and along Market Street. Possibly the 'Buildings and yard' listed in the tithe apportionment. Part of the N wall of one building shown abutting the S bank of the Mardle appears to survive at low level.

Phase 2: W range, W wall and N wall – certainly at lower levels

Phase 3: this building complex appears to have been largely developed in this period, incorporating elements of earlier buildings, from Phases 1 and 2. E range of B2 dates from this phase

Phase 4: buildings fronting the E side of Market Street appear to have been demolished and the W end of B1 built. Lean-to shed B3 dates from this phase, built against E wall of B2, presumably late 20c

Building C

Basically a Phase 4 structure incorporating earlier elements, built over the site of the tan yard, tan pits and tanner's house which date from Phases 1 and 2

Phase 1: the N gable end of a small building shown on the tithe map at the N end of this complex appears to survive in C6. Located to the north of the tanner's house, this small building complex presumably incorporated domestic service buildings and perhaps stables

Phase 2: tan pits shown, apparently in an uncovered yard, to the W of the house

Phase 3: infill of E part of complex, covering over tan pits and leaving only a small open passage between the tannery building and the house

Phase 4: C2, 3 and 5 date from this phase

Building D

Now a partly derelict range of stone buildings, the S elevation of which has good architectural/industrial character

Phase 1: part of footprint of D1 occupies that of a Phase 1 building

Phase 2: D1 and D3, including 'extension' on W side of D3

Phase 3: D2; D1 and 2 are shown as a straight range on both the first and second edition OS maps, but occupy the existing building footprint and are stylistically of late 19th century origin

Building E

Phase 4: no buildings are shown in the area occupied by this building in any of the earlier phases

Building F

Phase 1: small building on or about the alignment of that surviving shown on the tithe map

Phase 2: square block with what appears to be shown as a glass house facing SE, with three small buildings orientated SE-NW behind, probably for growing fruit and vegetables for the house. SW end of rear (NW) wall of surviving building perhaps dates from this phase

Phase 3: phase 2 buildings still shown as such

Phase 4: part of rear wall of glass house incorporated in present building. Footprint of buildings to NW survives as parking area to rear

Conclusion

No significant buildings or structures appear to survive from Phase 1 and 2, although some parts of early walls have been incorporated into buildings B, C and F.

Significant development took place during Phase 3 (1887-1904), perhaps as a result of the 1882 fire.

Further removal and adaption of earlier structures has taken place during Phase 4, which covers most of the 20th century and therefore needs to be refined and perhaps sub-divided, which will require further data and research.

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References

Bodman, M. 2008: *Devon Leather* (Leat Press, Tiverton)

Bodman, M. 2009: Tanning in Devon in the Nineteenth Century. *Trans Devonshire Association* 141, 219-36

The on-line photographic collection of the Buckfastleigh and District Society (www.society.buckfastleigh.org/) has also been searched for images that might illustrate developments relevant to this site, with limited success.

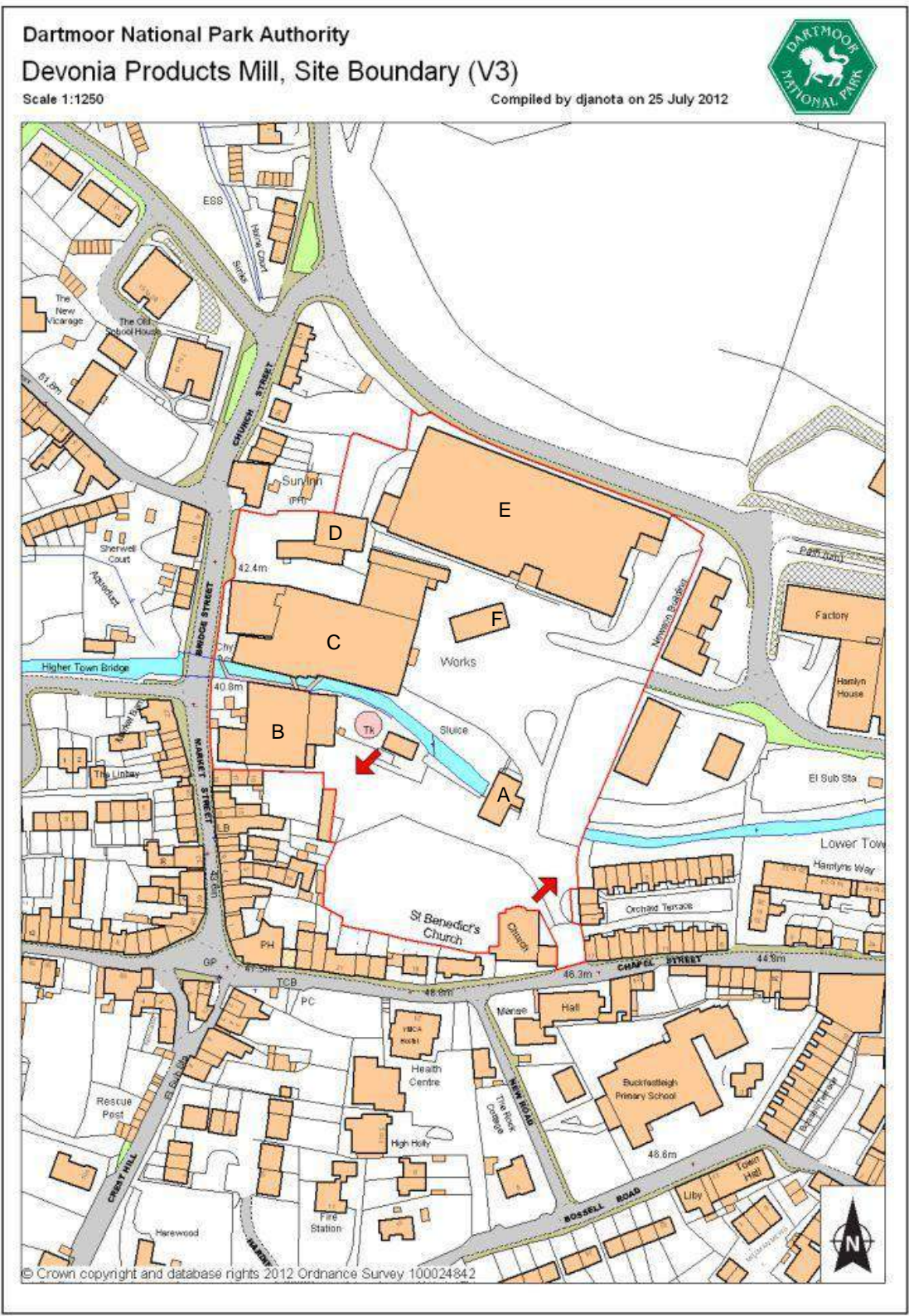


Figure 1: Devonia Products site, Buckfastleigh
 Site plan showing positions of principal buildings
 See Figure 5 for more detail of sub-divisions



Figure 2: Buckfastleigh tithe map, c.1844. North to top. Not reproduced to scale

Plots owned and occupied by Joseph Hamlyn:

- 1105 House and Yard
- 1106 Garden
- 1107 House Garden etc**
- 1108 Tan Yard
- 1113 Buildings and Yard

Only 1107 is numbered on the tithe map

The plot numbered 1112, south of the Mardle, is listed as orchard, owned by George Rowland and occupied by Robert Jackson in the Tithe Apportionment

(Source: Devon Heritage Centre/Devon County Council Historic Environment Record)

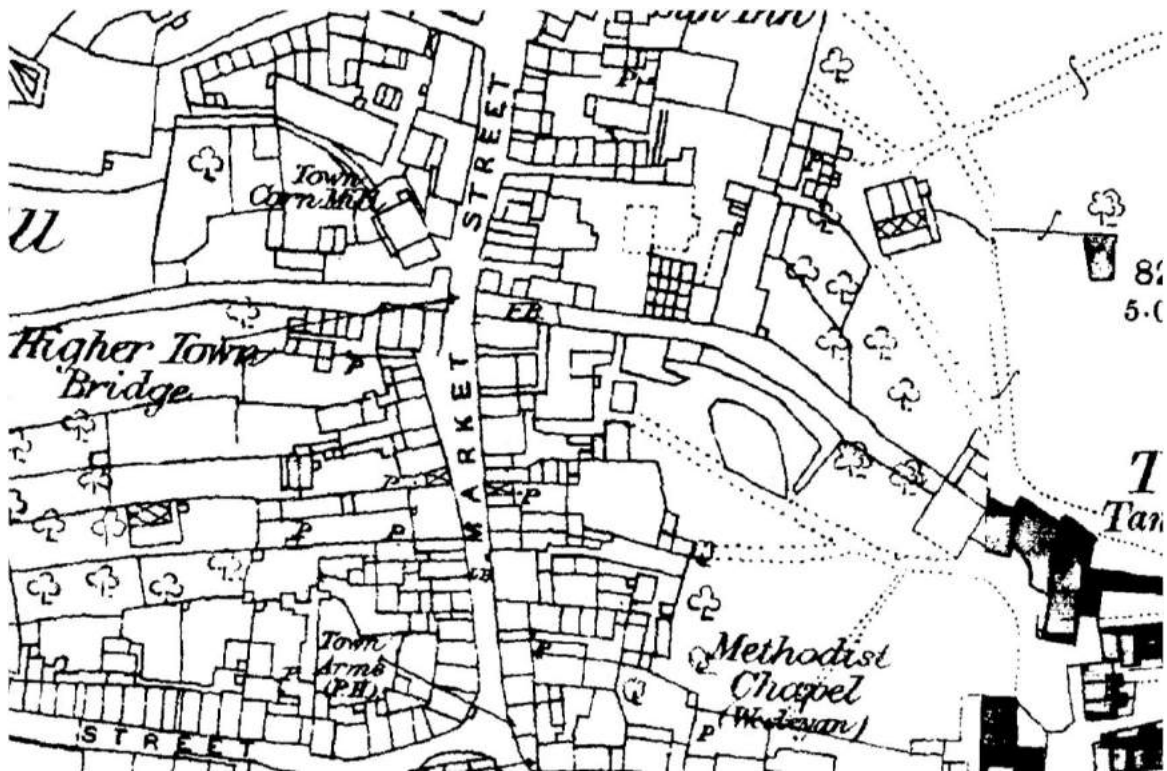


Figure 3a: Buckfastleigh, Higher Town. Ordnance Survey 1:2500 first edition, 1887

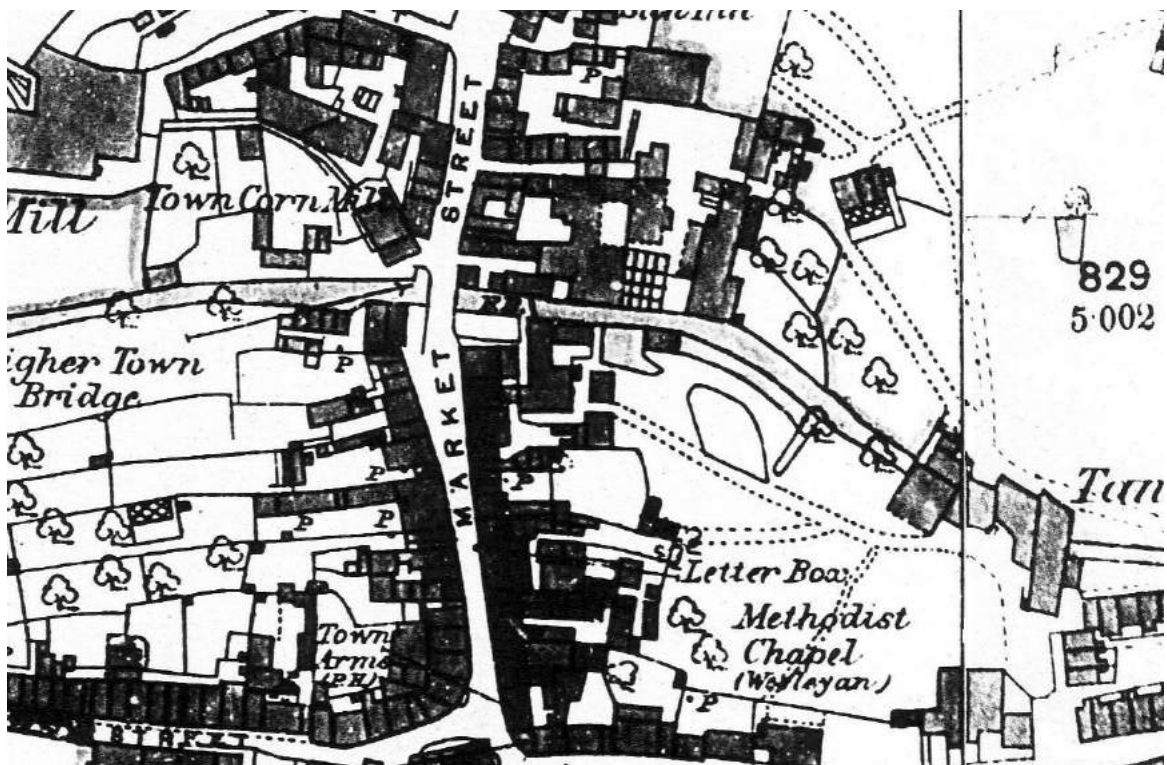


Figure 3b: Buckfastleigh, Higher Town. Ordnance Survey 1:2500, first edition, 1887
 A different printing, with the buildings shown solid

Maps not reproduced to scale

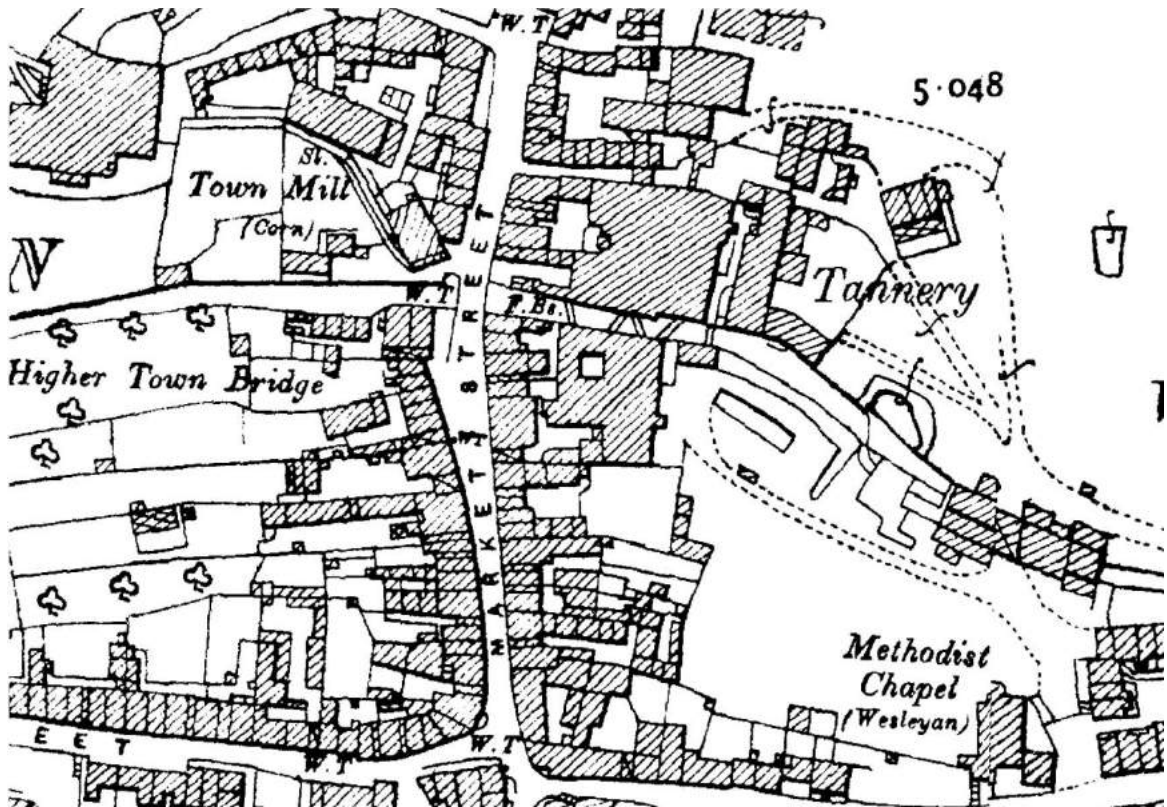


Figure 4: Buckfastleigh, Higher Town. Ordnance Survey 1:2500, second edition 1904

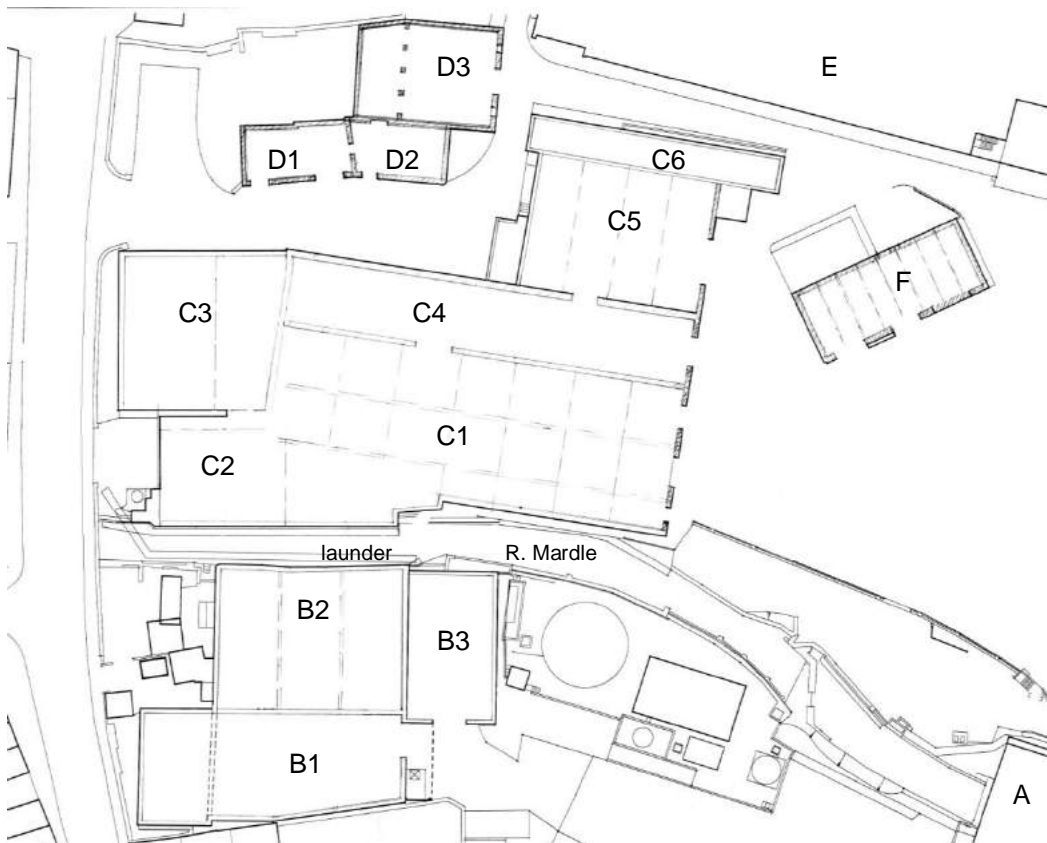


Figure 5: Devonian Products site plan: sketch plan of principal buildings