

**Archaeological Assessment
At
Dock Road
Limerick**

For

Bord Gais

By

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1. Introduction

An archaeological assessment was carried out at The Old Gasworks Site at the Dock Road Limerick (Fig. 1) on behalf of Bord Gais in advance of cleaning up hazardous material which is located in various areas of the site (Fig. 8). The reason for this assessment is the location of the site near the medieval outskirts of Limerick City and its proximity to the Shannon river which is rich in historic and pre-historic activity (Figs 2-6). The site which is 3.4 acres in area also contains two post-medieval structures which are listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. This assessment encompasses a desk top investigation with a field walking exercise on the site. Numerous local and national sources have been accessed to give a full scope of the existing archaeological and architectural potential of the site and recommends remedial measures as to how best to proceed with the site works and protect the existing known and unknown heritage of the site as well as the visual impact of the development on the surrounding area.

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3. Mitigation

Proposed Development

The proposed development is a primarily an open space interspersed with various buildings, walls, chainlink fences and industrial structures (Figs. 7 & 8; Pls. 1-7). The open spaces are partially covered with tarmacadam and also soil. The site is in a general unkempt manner with numerous areas of spoilheaps, building rubble and dumped domestic refuse. Various places contain well entrenched grass cover while juvenile trees planted while the site was in operation remain. A modern administration building in relatively good condition is present (Pl. 6). There is also a pumping station on the grounds of the site which is in active use.

Listed Structures

Gas House

This structure is the freestanding limestone ridge gabled power station, built c. 1880, with an attached lower gabled section, now roofless, and comprising a two-bay triple-height gable to south and north with a gabled higher central section (Pls 12-14). Situated on a former quarry site. The flanking building is one-and-half-storeys high with a stone chimneystack to the apex. Rock-faced coursed and snecked limestone ashlar walls with limestone coping to all gables. Cast-iron roof structure with timber purlins with roof covering removed.

Three square-headed window openings with smooth limestone surrounds and timber louvres to the first floor openings. An oculus located under the ridge gable has a smooth limestone surround and iron window frame without glass. A double-height camber-arched door opening with smooth limestone surround is located at the centre of the main gable. Square headed door opening with iron or steel lintel, now failing, to smaller building. The derelict building is located in a disused industrial site. The internal walls have engaged pier buttresses and no obvious lateral support.

This structure is a substantial stone building, now in a ruinous state, forming part of the former gas works site. Of uncertain original use, this structure has a utilitarian appearance but displays good masonry and craftsmanship.

*National Inventory of Architectural Heritage registration number 215170.
Coordinates 157019, 156539*

Boundary Wall

Freestanding section of limestone wall to Dock Road, erected c. 1880, with several blind arched openings (Pls. 8 -11). Squared and coursed limestone ashlar wall, limestone coping with later mortar flaunching above. To the northeast is a segmental-arched opening, expressed with a Baroque vigour, and now blocked up, with rusticated piers and impostes supporting a rusticated arch voussoirs radiating before squaring off with a plain stringcourse. Large keystone to centre of arch. Later squared, coursed and snecked limestone infill. This is repeated on the inner face of the wall. Further south is a three-bay, two-storey composition with limestone ashlar platband delineating the first level and parapet wall. Elevation is comprised of blind round-arched openings, each with an inner and outer arch on different planes, with rusticated voussoirs and a sill to the inner arch, set lower than flanking sills, and which spans the entire opening of the centrally-placed opening.

Segmental-arched blind opening at ground floor level with smooth limestone ashlar piers, impostes, voussoirs, and keystone. Further south is a double-height blind arch

and a further single-height segmental arch with smooth limestone ashlar surround. At the entrance to the site the wall continues at a ninety-degree angle and meets a triple-height limestone ashlar wall with a platband to each level continuing around two triple-height pilasters. To the upper stage is a set of three semicircular openings with vermiculated rusticated voussoirs with red brick soffits.

This freestanding elevation now forms a boundary wall. It stands as a remnant of the former gas works site. The passing of the Corporation Gas Act in 1878 ensured the local authorities gained control, and in the case of Limerick, it was the United General Gas Company. The corporation moved to the newly built Dock Road site in 1884, from the United General Gas Company's original site at Watergate.

The United General Gas Company has been established in 1826 and were the sole providers of gas for public lighting at a time when the city expanded westwards along O'Connell Avenue. These wall elevations are of great importance to the character of the Dock Road. The Baroque quality of the surviving arch and three-bay elevations add significantly to the streetscape and architectural and industrial heritage of the city. The elevation retains excellent masonry detailing and an unusual feature arch.

*National Inventory of Architectural Heritage registration number 215170.
Coordinates 156899, 156584*

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4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The proposed development entails the removal of topsoil across the site to a depth of 3 to 4 metres for the purpose of soil removal for potentially hazardous material, gas cylinders, asbestos roofing etc.

There are two protected structures on the site, that being a former gasworks house and an enclosing wall. As there are *known* protected structures of post medieval interest located on site, there is a possibility that *unknown* subsurface features associated with these structures may be present. This area is also rich in archaeological heritage. The city of Limerick is itself a recorded monument containing numerous national monuments including the famous King John's Castle. The outlying areas of the city including the area of development in question, would contain various features associated with the medieval period. Viking activity is well documented in the 9th and 10 century in Limerick and as the Vikings were a sea faring people it is evident that maritime activity was carried out in the vicinity of what later became the city.

The proposed development site is located on a slight bluff on the southern bank of the river Shannon. This area would have been a natural site for domestic activity prior to the Viking era and earlier. Recent excavations undertaken in the Coonagh townland further downriver on the same side of the river bank for the preliminary phase of the construction of the Limerick Tunnel unearthed Bronze Age features. The river environment would have served not only as a feature of natural transportation it also would have provided an excellent environment for foraging of resources through to the Neolithic and possibly the Mesolithic.

The proposed development site is not located within or adjacent to the *zone of archaeological potential* of any recorded monument. The nearest recorded monument is the city of Limerick (LI05:017) *Historic Town* which is approx 600m to the northeast of the site.

Recommendations

1. The proposed development works call for the removal of topsoil across the site for which this assessment has been called for. As there are no plans for any building or structures to be constructed on the site at present, there will be no above ground structural intrusion into the landscape. Therefore there will be *no* negative visual impact from the proposed works.
2. There are two post-medieval structures located on the site. The two structures are listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and as such it is recommended that they are not disturbed or impinged in any manner. It is recommended that not only are the structures themselves not disturbed but that a buffer zone of at least 1metre be enacted around the entire outline of these structures. This buffer zone should be enacted by the erection of temporary fencing having brightly coloured hazard tape with appropriate signage. All personnel working on the site should be made aware of the structures and the need to maintain their integrity.
3. The development works call for the removal of topsoil to a depth of 3-4 metres across the site. As there are *known* features of a historic nature on the site (Gasworks

house and boundary wall) the possibility exists that subsoil disturbance may unearth *unknown* structures or features associated with them.

Due to the proximity to the historic city of Limerick and the general maritime environment of the site, it is also possible that further *unknown* features of a medieval or prehistoric nature may be present on the site. It is therefore recommended that all topsoil removal of the site be *monitored* by a suitably qualified archaeologist in order to determine if features of an historical or archaeological nature are present.

The recommendations contained within this report are subject to the approval of the Dept. of the Environment and Local Government who may issue additional or alternative recommendations.

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5. Bibliography

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6. Appendix

Figures

Figure 1. Site location map.

Figure 2. 1837 Map.

Figure 3. 1st Edition OS Map (1840).

Figure 4. Sites and Monuments Record Map.

Figure 5. 1907 sale of Limerick Map.

Figure 6. National Monuments Map.

Figure 7. Aerial Photograph.

Figure 8. Site Works.

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Plate 1. Interior of Gasworks site facing east.

Plate 2. Interior of Gasworks site facing west.

Plate 3. Interior of Gasworks facing northwest.

Plate 4. Interior of Gasworks facing west.

Plate 5. Interior of Gasworks facing east.

Plate 6. Interior of Gasworks facing north showing interior of boundary wall

Plate 7. Interior of Gasworks at northeast corner facing south.

Plate 8. Interior of boundary wall.

Plate 9. Exterior of boundary wall at Dock Road.

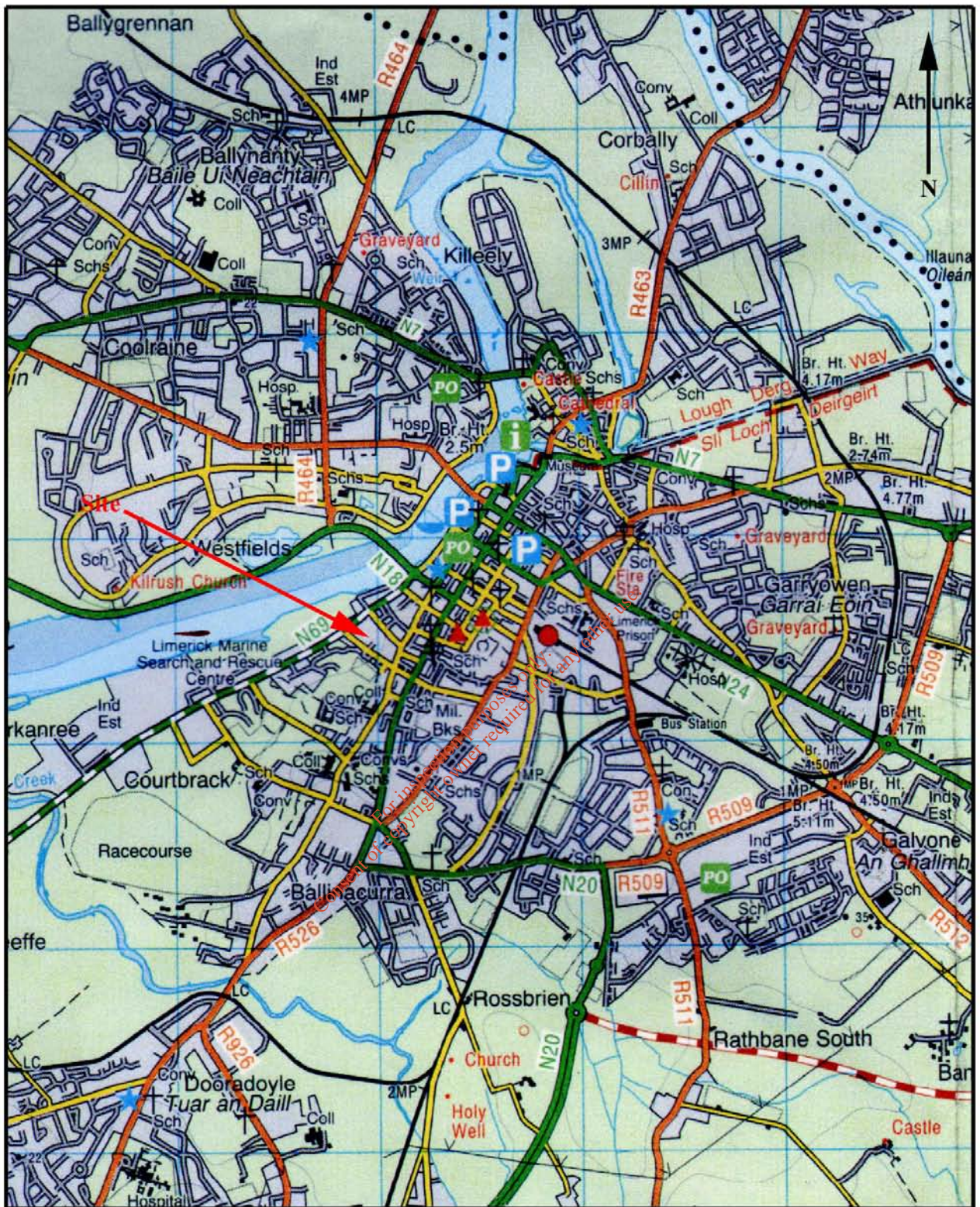
Plate 10. Exterior of boundary wall at Dock Road.

Plate 11. Blocked up segmented archway on Dock Road.

Plate 12. Front facade of Gasworks building.

Plate 13. Interior of Gasworks building.

Plate 14. Rear section of Gasworks building.



OLD GASWORKS
Dock Road, Limerick

Figure 1: Site Location

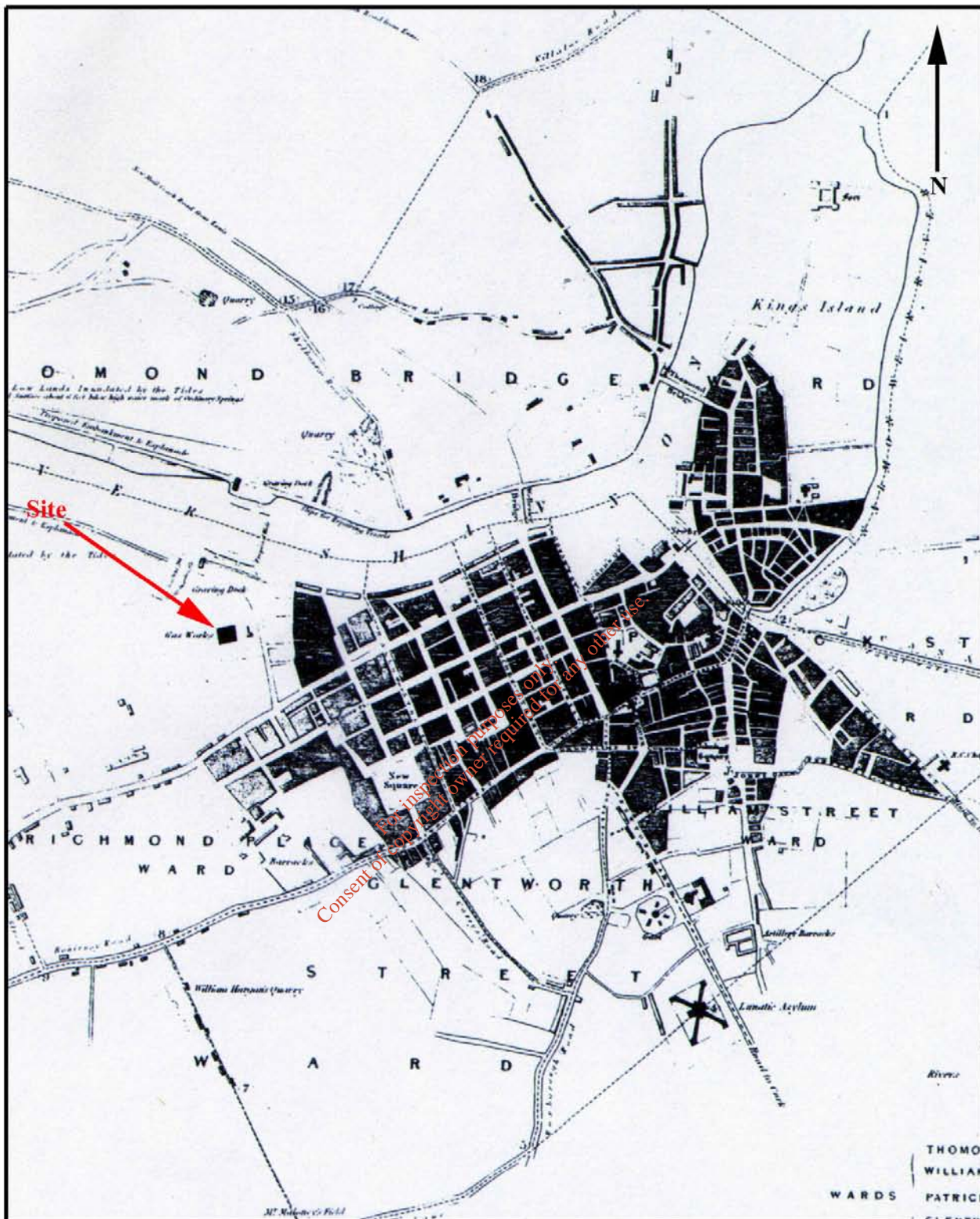
Client: Bord Gáis 25.03.2009

Based on Ordnance Survey Discovery Series



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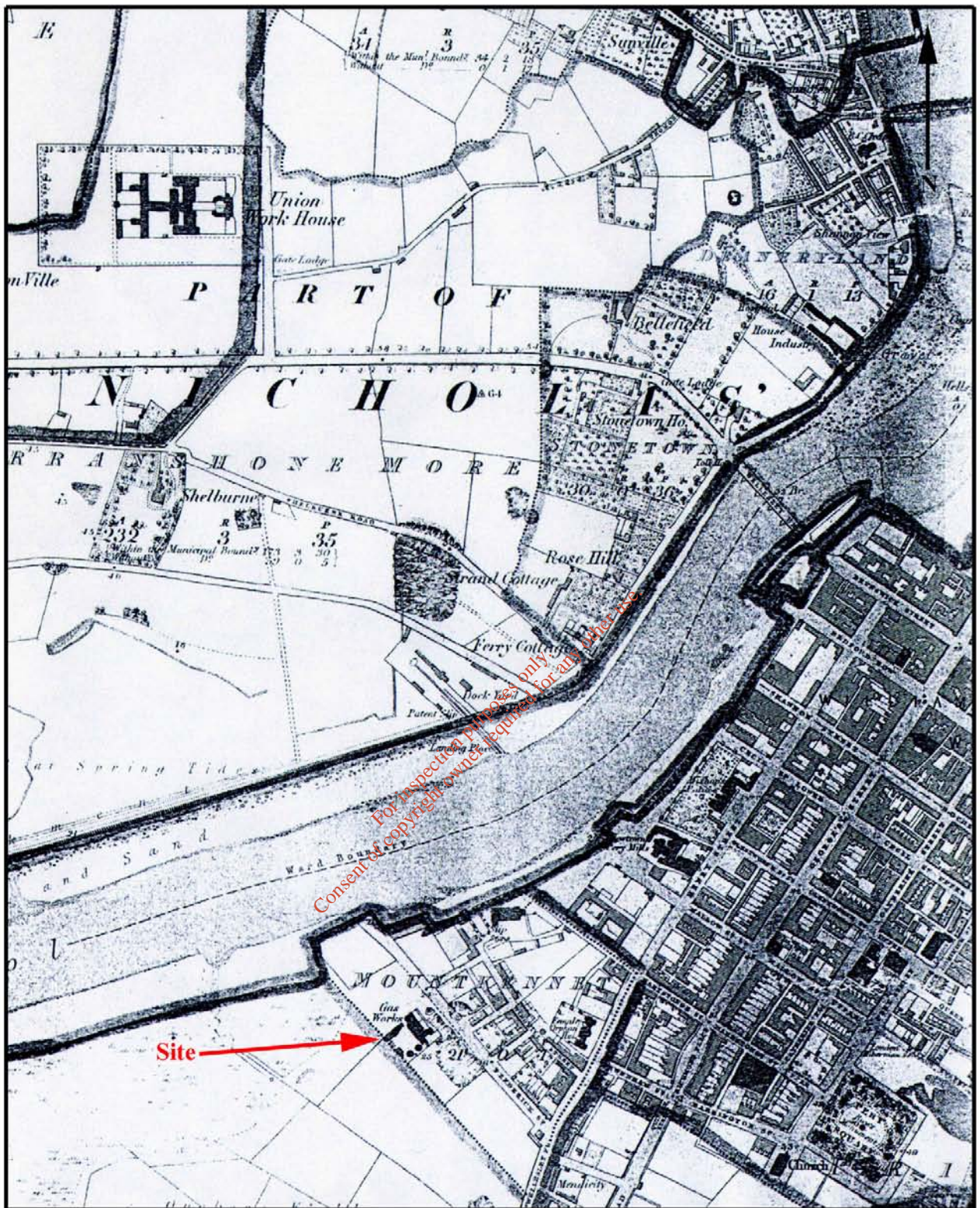
Figure 2: 1837 Map of Site Area

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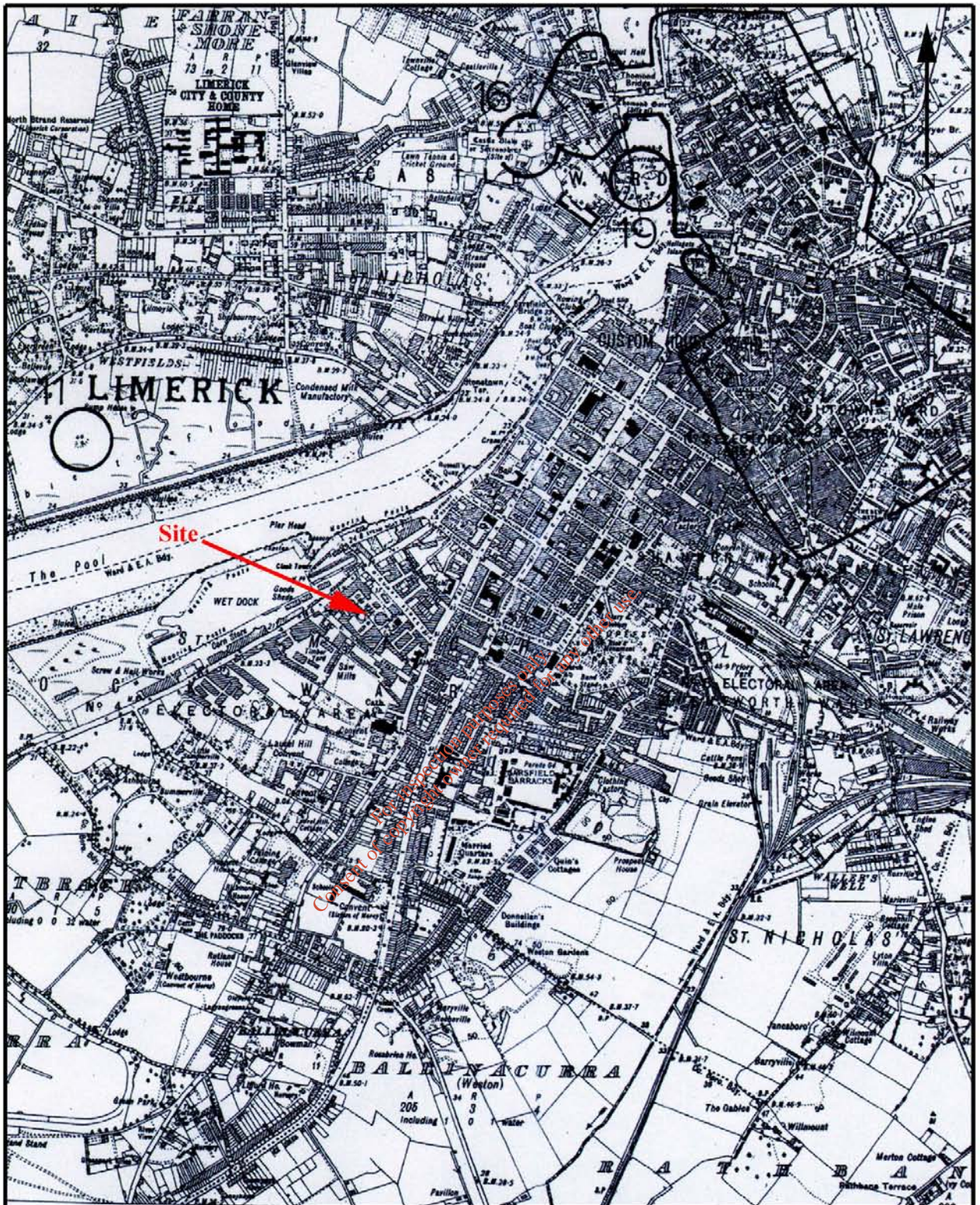
Figure 3: 1st Edition OS Map (1840)

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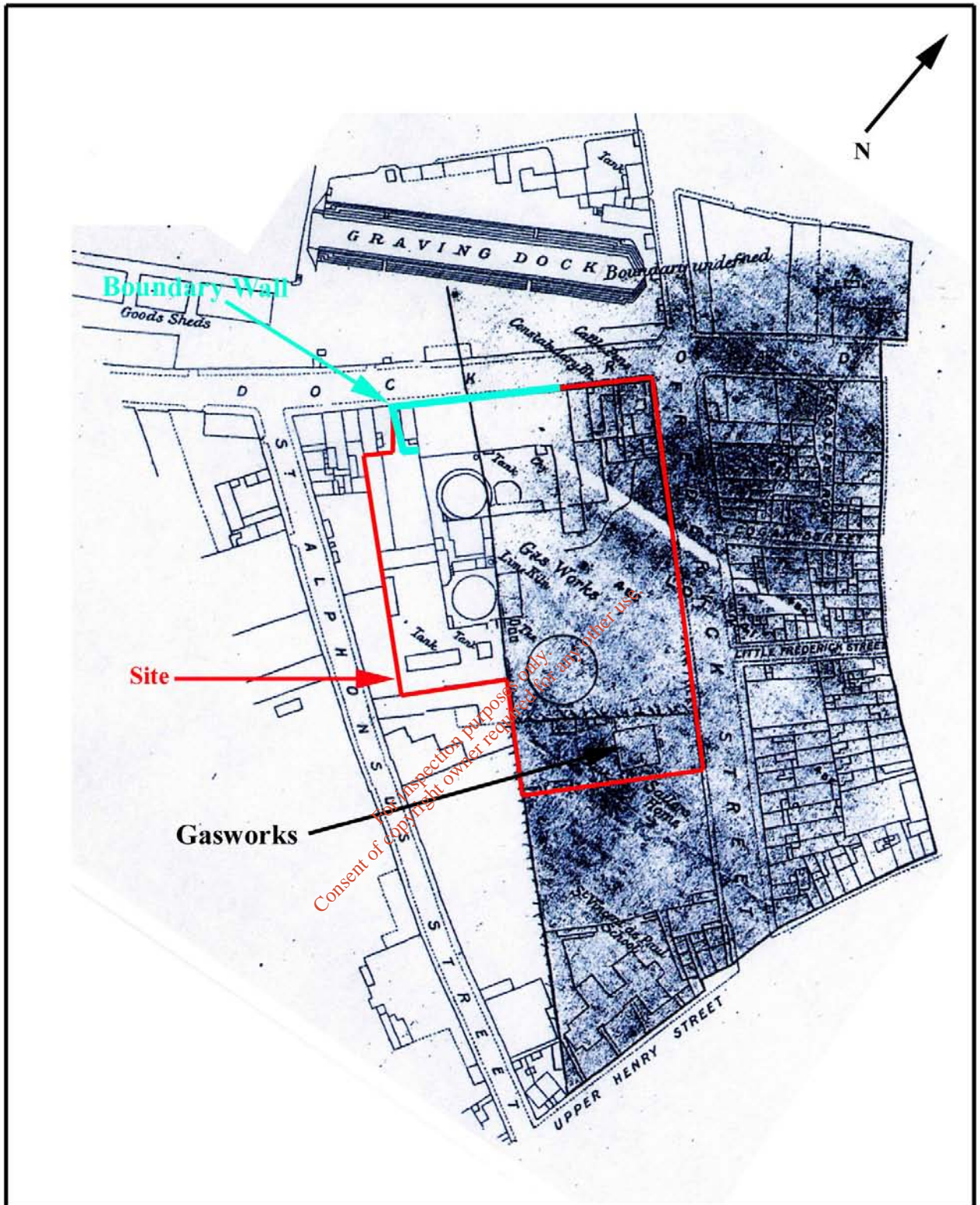
Figure 4: Sites and Monuments Record Map

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Figure 5: Site on 1907 Sale of Limerick Map

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Figure 6: Site on National Monuments Map

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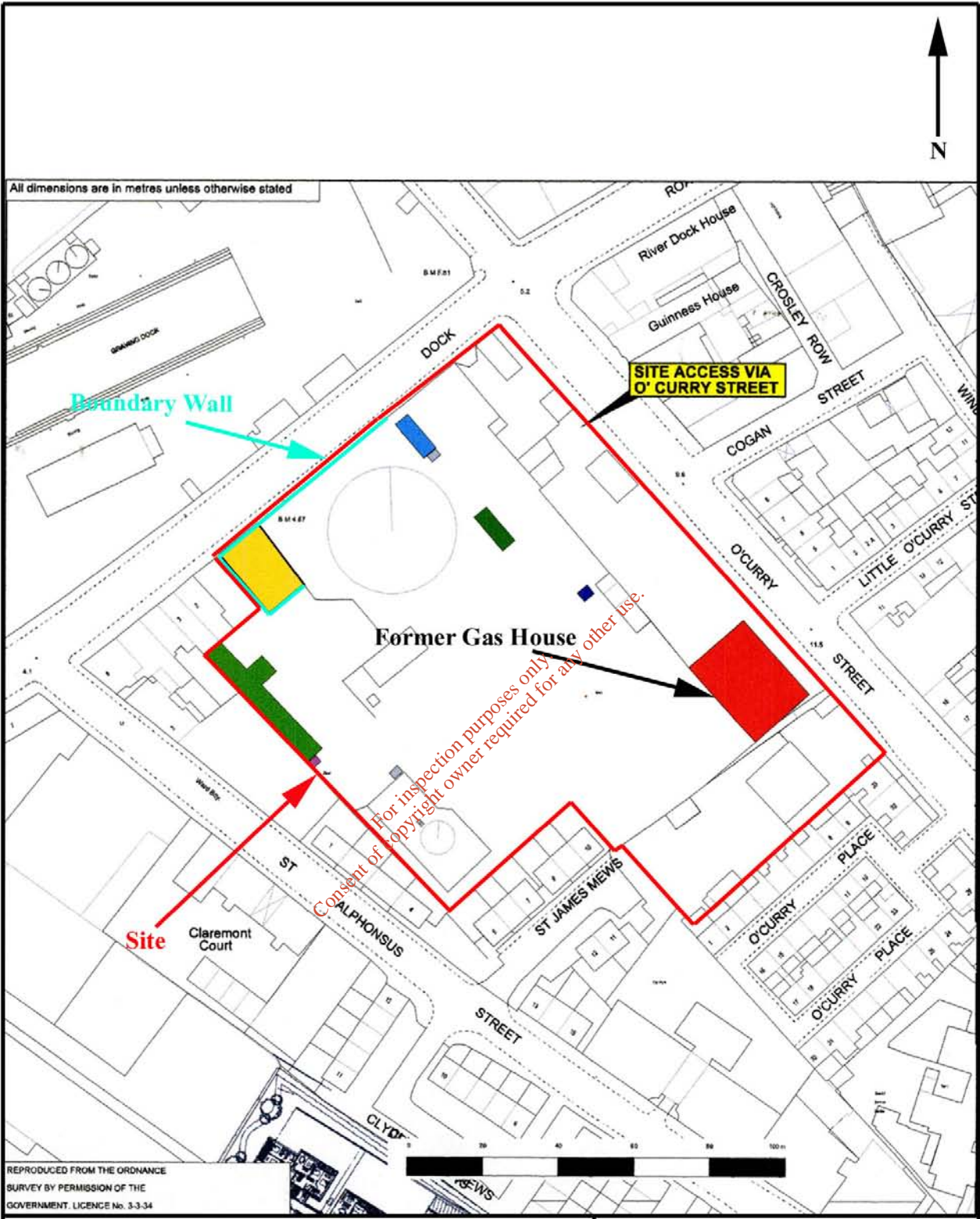
Figure 7: Aerial Photograph of Site

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Figure 8: Site Works

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Based on mapping provided by the client



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