

Brookhill

The land on which Brookhill was later built was part of the John Fownes Lutterell estate. Lutterell is recorded as living at Dunster Castle in Somerset and at Nethway in Devon. He died on the 16th February 1816. The Holdsworths bought the land soon after his death and in 1820 Robert Holdsworth built a house called Brook Cliff near the sea and alongside a brook (hence Brook Cliff). Unfortunately the cliff collapsed and two servants lost their lives. Robert with his brother Arthur Howe Holdsworth built a new house further up the hill and called it Brookhill. The two brothers lived there until 1845 when Arthur built The Beacon closer to the village and moved there.



The mouth of the Dart showing Brook Cliff in 1825.

The Holdsworths had dominated the area from 1715 and a Holdsworth, or a relation by marriage or a business partner, was frequently mayor of Dartmouth. A group of about 40 local freemen chose the mayor and 12 aldermen who in turn chose the freemen, mostly associates of the Holdsworths. They also chose the two MPs and on three occasions this was a Holdsworth. They also had the right to appoint the incumbents of the two churches in Dartmouth as well as those of Stokenham, Brixham and Ashprington. A Holdsworth was also Governor of Dartmouth Castle from 1725 until 1861 with responsibility for the defence of the harbour.

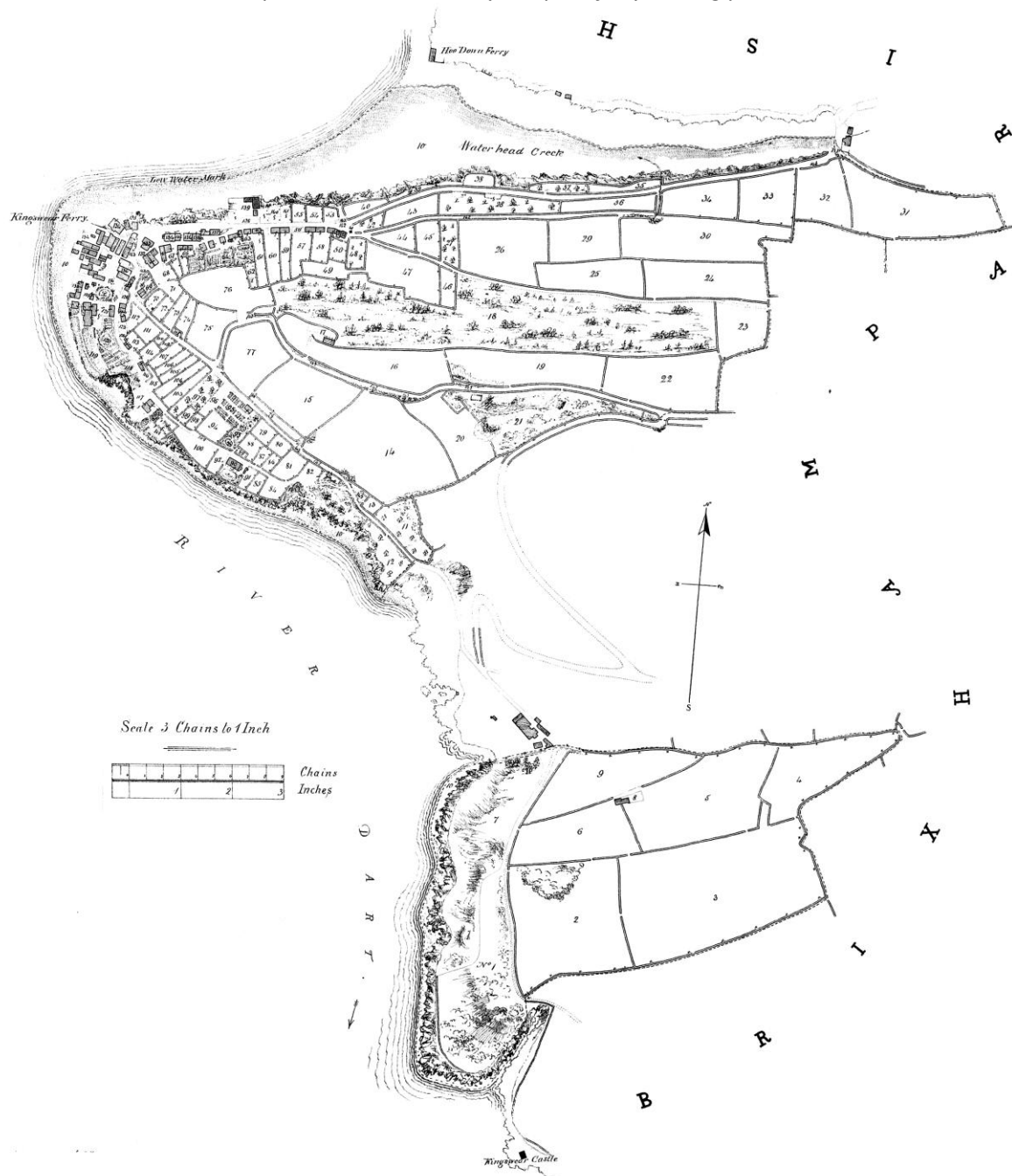
The Reform Act of 1832 changed the method of electing MPs, increased the number of electors which resulted in the Holdsworths losing their hold on the community. Robert Holdsworth resigned the living of St Clements church at Townstal, becoming instead vicar of Brixham.

An anomaly in the Tithe Maps of the area shows the Brookhill estate being in Brixham parish with Kingswear Parish cut into two with the area containing Kingswear Castle cut off from Kingswear village. How and when this came about is not recorded but it is likely to have been around the time

when the Rev. Robert Holdsworth, who lived at Brookhill, became vicar of Brixham. Perhaps it was a condition of his being vicar there that he lived in the parish and rather than move from his fine home he moved the parish boundary instead.

However he must have moved from Brookhill eventually as in March 1856 the Dartmouth Chronicle advertised its sale although the February edition had already reported that it had been bought by Mr W Johnstoun Neale, Esq.

To be sold, the beautiful marine residence called Brookhill, possessing productive gardens and picturesque grounds, a coach house, stabling and all convenient offices. Also adjoining thereto, the small farmhouse and farm of Brookhill. The property comprises altogether about 48 acres. Immediately above the same advertisement is another one offering Brookhill House for letting, fully furnished with immediate possession. *Admirably adapted for yachting pursuits.*



Kingswear tithe map of 1841. The gap in the middle is the Brookhill estate which is included in the tithe map of Brixham

However it would appear that it was not sold but rented as the November 1857 Chronicle reported that a Mr D B Colvin, Esq. and family have taken Brookhill for the winter. In March it reported the death of W Johnstoun's mother in Dawlish but as living at Brookhill. The same year Brookhill was in the spotlight following a meeting held in the guildhall in Dartmouth to consider a proposal for a "Winter Palace and Yacht Hotel" to be erected at Brookhill. It would be half the size of the hotel at Paddington with half the capital, £40,000. This turned out to be a scam.

In June 1860 the Dartmouth Chronicle published the obituary of Governor Arthur Holdsworth and in January 1861 the death of two more Holdsworths. One was Colonel T W E Holdsworth, his unmarried younger son, the other death was of his brother the Rev. Robert Holdsworth. Of Robert Holdsworth the Chronicle wrote:

He was appointed at an early age to the living of Townstal, at that time in the gift of the Corporation of Dartmouth, by his brother, the late Governor Holdsworth, through whose parliamentary influences he also obtained the vicarage of Brixham. The deceased was a member of the Corporation of Dartmouth in the "snug old times" in turn Freeman, Alderman and Mayor. The former conferred the right of voting at Parliamentary elections for the borough, which he exercised at the recent contest in November. Only four now remain on the Register:- Mr Charles Brooking, Mr Cutler, a brother-in-law of the deceased, Mr Joseph Lidstone and Mr William Newman. The Vicarage of Brixham, which embraces the curacies of Churston and Kingswear, is in the gift of the Crown – value £650. The deceased was 51 years vicar of Brixham with Churston Ferrers and senior Prebend to Exeter Cathedral.

Meanwhile who occupied Brookhill is not recorded but in February 1869 the birth was announcement of a daughter to the wife of Capt Corbett of HMS Britannia. At the time HMS Britannia was a cadet training ship moored in the river Dart.

In June 1871 an announcement in the Chronicle stated the following property was to be sold on the 28th June by auction in London:

BROOK HILL

Near Dartmouth, Devon, a valuable freehold Estate, forming one of the most perfect marine abodes in the kingdom, being bounded by the sea, and unique for yachting, bathing, boating and fishing. It is near the railway terminus of Kingswear, within one mile of Dartmouth, and nine miles from Torquay. It contains 15 bedrooms, two dressing rooms, drawing room, dining room, library and magistrates room, and lavatory. The domestic offices are very complete. Stabling for six horses, with men's room and lofts over, double coach house. Surrounding the house are grounds of great beauty, descending by winding shrubbery walks to the sea. A small pleasure Farm of 40 acres, with farmhouse and buildings, rises to a height of 300 feet above the sea. This land could be most advantageously and profitably devoted to the creation of marine villas with the proximity to Torquay would ensure a great demand for.

Also a pretty and commanding VILLA, called FOUNTAIN VIOLET, containing seven bedrooms, two sitting rooms, domestic offices, outbuildings, with garden and meadow about seven acres in extent.

Possibly the Londoners showed insufficient interest as the auction was first put back two weeks until the 12 July and then moved to the Yacht Club Hotel in Kingswear to be sold in one or more lots on the 31st August through a local Dartmouth agent:

BROOKHILL

One of the most perfect marine residential and building estates extant, being close to the railway, bounded by the sea, and unique for yachting, bathing, boating, and fishing, and including the pretty detached VILLA known as "Fountain Violet," each lot containing building stone, and commanding marine views of surpassing magnificence.

The romantic beauty of Brookhill has long been celebrated in the neighbourhood; presenting as does, much of the softness of Grecian and Italian Landscape. It stands as a monument of the fine taste and antiquarian lore of its founder, the late Governor Holdsworth, many years M. P. for Dartmouth, who formally owned the estate and resided here for a considerable period, during which the place was twice honoured by the visits of royalty.

Her Gracious Majesty, In the "Royal Journal," p. 195, says:—" It was thought best to put into that beautiful Dartmouth; we did so: this place is lovely: via its wooded rocks, and Church and Castle at the entrance. It puts me much in mind of the beautiful Rhine, and its fine ruined Castles and the Lurlei."

Murray, in his handbook of South Devon and Cornwall says:- "Brookhill is distinguished for the romantic beauty of the grounds and interesting embellishment of the house, and deservedly considered one of its principal ornaments of Dartmouth harbour. In the dining room the wainscoting is emblazoned with the arms of the most distinguished families of the county, a tablet of history most novel and comprehensive.

Dr Bartlett, in his treatise on chest affections, says of Brookhill: — "The scenery is most beautiful, all nature is redolent of health! During winter and spring there is no part of our home empire at all comparable to this neighbourhood may a life might be saved here that would be lost at Torquay": praises borne out not only by the longevity of its inhabitants, but even by nature herself, for in the grounds of Brookhill (nowhere else in the United Kingdom is it believed) the olive tree and the orange tree thrive out of doors, as standard trees, unprotected through the winter.

To families afflicted by any tenderness of the lungs, this estate is invaluable.

Brookhill House contains an excellent and extensive suite of servants' offices, stabling., hot-houses, conservatory, laundry-house. 5 sitting-rooms, 15 bed-rooms, walled gardens, plantations, pleasure grounds, and pasture fields, and will comprise lot 1, in all 5 acres, be it more or less, with free access to the sea and landing pier: the remaining five lots, each averaging from 3 to 8 acres, will include exquisite sites for building, with magnificent marine and inland views, fine quarries of building stone, plantations, roads, fresh water, and pasture fields, the lots arranged so as not to interfere with each other.

Lot 5 will comprise the pretty and commodious VILLA, called "FOUNTAIN VIOLET" With 2 sitting-rooms and 7 bed-rooms, outbuildings, offices, gardens, perpetually springing fountain of fresh water, and several pasture fields, in all eight acres, be it more or less, the whole Estate being within a mile of the Railway Terminus of Kingswear, one mile from Dartmouth, nine miles by railway from Torquay, connected by a lovely drive, and delineated on the ordinance maps of Kingswear and Brixham parishes.

As a Residential Estate, Brookhill presents a refined seclusion, with ready access to society, sheltered in winter; and cooled by sea and shade in summer. If desired as a speculation, the estate is supposed to be underlaid with copper ore, while the adjoining land is letting at more than £20 per annum per acre for building purposes.

There was another, passing reference to Brookhill in the 15th September 1871 edition of the Chronicle:

VISIT OF THE EX-EMPEROR OF THE FRENCH.

The ex-Emperor Napoleon III, who is staying at the Imperial Hotel, Torquay, arrived at Kingswear by the 2 o'clock train, on Tuesday last, the 12th inst., accompanied by Prince Murat, and his ever-faithful Physician Dr. Conneau. After partaking of luncheon at the Dart Yacht Club Hotel, where the party were received by the manager, Miss Clatworthy, they proceeded to Brookhill, under escort of Mr Henry Mann, the well known favourite Railway Guard. His Majesty's visit was expected by Mrs Neale, who showed the party over the house and grounds, and His Majesty expressed his warm appreciation of the surrounding scenery. Returning to Kingswear, the party enquired for a boat, and there being none at hand for them, Mr Ellis Bartlett, who is visiting at Mount Ridley House, the residence of Roope Brooking, Esq., and Mr Welch, nephew of Mrs J.

Brooking, of Mount Agra, placed their boat at the Ex-Emperor's disposal, and the party were rowed by these gentlemen about the harbour, going round H. M. S. Britannia, and several of the yachts in harbour. They came alongside the schooner Derwent, but Mr H. Bridson not being on board, the party proceeded, and landed at the ferry-slip, where several persons had collected, whose salutes His Majesty courteously responded to. The ex-Emperor looked well in health, but stouter, and certainly looking older than when last seen by the writer, at Paris, in 1862, when in the zenith of his glory, he passed down the Champs Elysees, escorted by his magnificent Cent Gardes, and himself escorting the Sultan of Turkey, and King William of Prussia, now Emperor of Germany, — followed, in review, by some 30,000 picked troops of every arm of the French service. The contrast, under present circumstances, was most striking.

On the return of the party from Brookhill the "Conte de Pierrefond" was seated near the railway jetty, admiring the harbour before him, when his walking stick disappeared through the open woodwork of the staging into deep water below. The Western Times thus humourously alludes to this incident:—

"The ex-Emperor is here a refugee, and his stay may be protracted. He is a man of brooding mind, and is understood to be affected by omens. While standing on the jetty at Kingswear he dropped his gold headed stick into the Dart. The head of the stick is French eagle, moulded in gold, with a golden ball in its mouth —an eagle one might suppose about to take a bolus, Bon Deu, quel auspice atroce! Bonaparte had put the French eagle under water for many a long day before he crossed the Channel, and now here on the shore of the lovely Dart, when he 'was wrapped in dismal thinking' at the bare possibility of his return, the French eagle slipped from his grasp, the staff and symbol of his power fell into the Dart, and he had to return to Torquay without his talisman. All the efforts made to recover it were unavailing. All that night the French eagle lay at the bottom of the Dart, opposite that town where the women once beat off an assault of Frenchmen, who attacked the town while the men were away fishing. The women of Dartmouth, full of pluck, and pretty then as they are pretty now, 'rose like one man' and with such weapons as they could command, beat off the Frenchmen and great was the pride and joy of their husbands and sweethearts when they returned and found what had happened. Nephew Bartlett next day dived seven times before he found the stick, which he did, brought it up with him, and restored it to the nephew of the great Emperor at his Imperial Hotel, in Torquay. M. le Conte Pierrefond gave him his photograph, in compliment of the generous service he had rendered in bringing the French eagle above water once more, and now it is to be seen how Bonaparte will hold it."

His Majesty walks about the town of Torquay, drops into the shops, promenades the pier, and chats with sundry folks strolling about in perfect freedom, and almost unnoticed.

It would appear that the estate was bought by Mrs Parke, or her husband, as a conveyance dated 19th June 1879, states that Georgiana Frances Parke, then living in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa sold Brookhill for £6000 to Robert Francis Wilkins, then living at 10 Cornwall Terrace, Regents Park, in Middlesex.

Robert Wilkins adds to the Brookhill estate by the purchase, on the 4th September 1880 from George Fownes Luttrell, of land at the mouth of the river Dart for the sum of £9065. 2s. 4d. The land was known variously as Lower Mouth, Mouth Estate and Mouth Down and is numbered 1 to 9 on the Kingswear Tithe Map and additionally a plot further inland numbered 79 on the Brixham Tithe Map. Then in July of the following year he buys the foreshore of the land at Brookhill from the Duchy of Cornwall for the sum of £35. The vendor is named as Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, Duke of Saxony, Duke of Cornwall and Rothsay, Earl of Chester Garrick and Dublin, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles and Great Steward of Scotland.

In October 1881 Nathaniel Baker, of Inner Temple in the City of London and Barrister at Law, and Robert Wilkins records the exchange of land “out of neighbourly goodwill and friendship” to make the boundaries of their respective lands “more convenient”. On the shore the new boundary is marked by an iron spike stamped with the initials of Robert Francis Wilkins and Nathaniel Baker.

There were more transactions involving Robert Wilkins, one being between Frank Huxham Louisa Ann Turner and Emily Norris Turner on the 23rd July 1886 and a second with Lionel Sumner Milford and Arthur Johnson Mackey on the 9th March 1897. However what was bought and for how much is not recorded.



Postcard of Brookhill in 1908

The above postcard was sent in October 1908 by Mr Wilkins to Gilbert-Whitelocke, Esq. at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, and reads “I hope to come on board tomorrow for the Regatta so come and see me after the racing is over”. A different postcard from 1905 was sent by someone who had been to a Garden Fête “in this lovely place”.

Robert Francis Wilkins died on the 29th September 1909 and on the 29th July 1911 his widow, Mary Elizabeth Wilkins “being desirous of relieving herself of the upkeep and outgoings” in respect of the estate passed ownership to her son Philip Aveling Wilkins. The latter continues to expand the estate buy purchasing, in August 1912 for £2250 from Emily Windsor of Combeside, Kingswear, land known as Green Park which includes what is know called Fountain Violet Farm. Philip Wilkins died on the 24th April 1943.

During the Second World War Brookhill was used to house the Free French based in Kingswear. At the end of the war the large estate built up by the Wilkins began to be broken up. In February 1946 Elsie Harriot Wilkins, Philip Wilkins’ widow, and Bertram Sturt of Hurst Martock in Somerset, solicitor and executor, sold the wooded area adjoining Inverdart (formally Butts Hill) to Edward Job West of Kingswear. Then in December 1946 they sell to Derek Maxwell Sanderson of Brookhill Cottage the remaining land belonging to Brookhill and Fountain Violet Farm for £15,250.

The dividing of the estate continued with the sale in May 1954 by Derek Maxwell Sanderson of Brookhill to Geoffrey Thomas Shelly of Pinewoods, Kingswear for £5900. The land was that south of the road from Kingswear and amounted to 13.956 acres. Also included were two reservoirs in nearby fields. In September of the same year Fountain Violet Farm was sold to Olwen Jones and then in January 1955 as house known as The Quillet with 3.74 acres of land is sold for £2000. The address of Derek Maxwell Sanderson is now given as Ash House, Stoke Fleming. The new owners are to share the water from one of the reservoirs with Fountain Violet Farm and Brookhill.

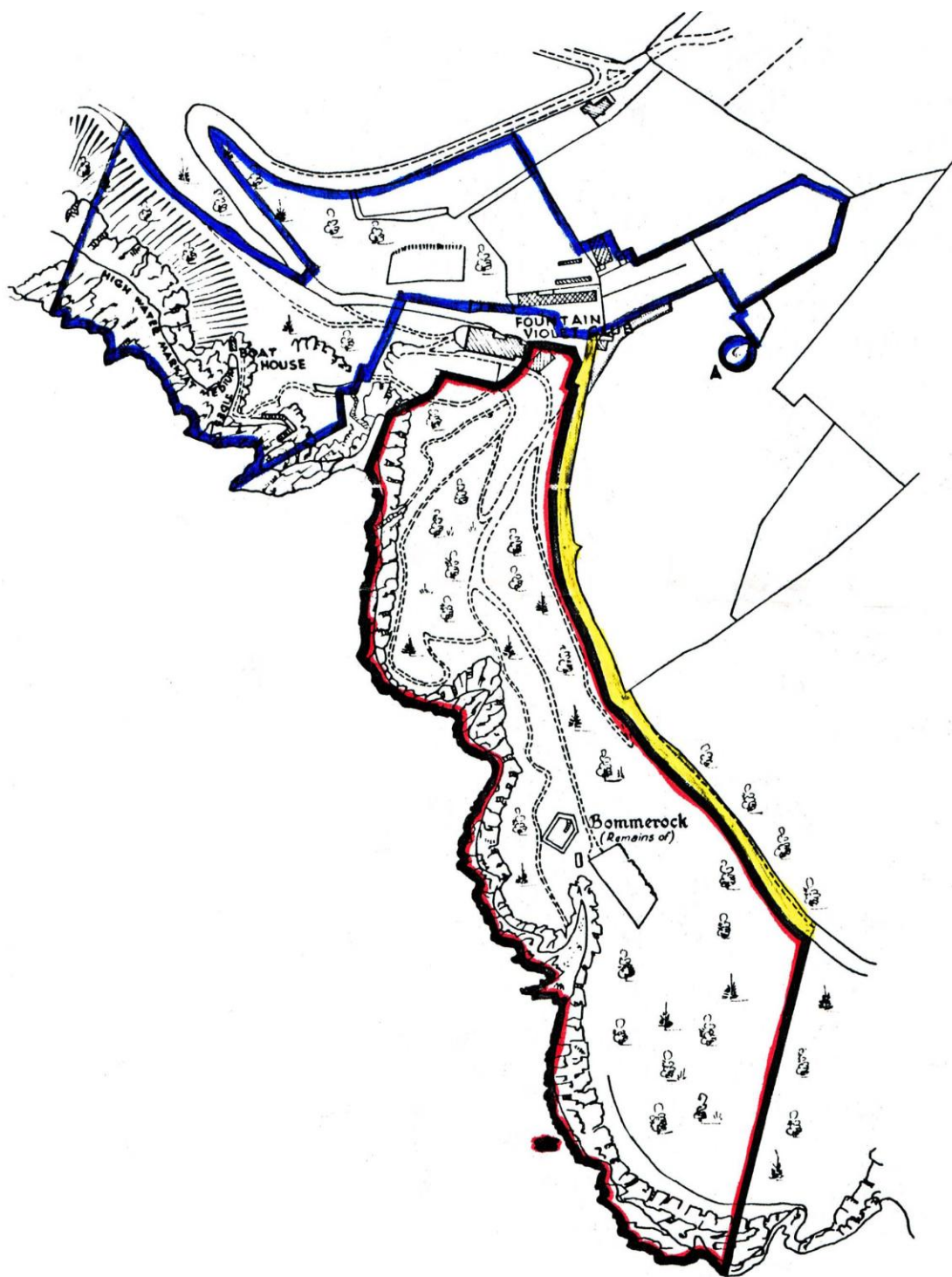
In March 1955 Geoffrey Thomas Shelley, formally of Pinewoods and now of Brookhill, sold Brookhill and land to his wife Doris Shelley for £5900. It would appear that when Geoffrey Thomas Shelley, then living in Dartmouth, died on 1 August 1960 the land passed to his executors who then sold the land to his wife. In August 1961 John Malcolm Hepburn, executor of Geoffrey Shelley, sold land known as The Quillet to Doris Shelley for £1000. This might have been so that Doris Shelley could, in May 1962, sell the Quillet for £2400 to Cornwall Investments Limited of Bristol.

On the 15th January 1964 a wedge of land was sold to Admiral Frank Henry Edward Hopkins who owned the neighbouring property of Kingswear Court Lodge thereafter business interests in the county of Cornwall seems to take over the estate. Two days later Doris Shelley of Brookhill signs an agreement to sell the house of Brookhill together with its garden and the garages opposite the house to Henry Graham Spinke Pinfield of the Ferry Boat Inn, Helford Passage. The price was £19,000. However a conveyance dated 31 January 1964 is for the sale of apparently the same plot of land and house by Doris Shelley to Palacio Limited, Falmouth, Cornwall, for £17,500.

On the same day Doris Shelley sells land next to the above land to Captain Henry Graham Spinke Pinfield, Company Director for £1500. The land in question, including the boundary road and is marked red and yellow on the map on the next page. Brookhill is shown as the Fountain Violet Club. The vendor kept the part marked blue. The same piece of land is sold by Palacio Limited to Major Digby Jeremie Willoughby of Shorton Cottage, Paignton for £1750 in June 1968. In the conveyance of this sale there is reference to a Deed of Covenant dated 12th January 1968 between Henry Graham Spinke Pinfield and the National Trust for Places of Historic or Natural Beauty but no details are available.

Finally on the 19 July 1971 Palacio Limited sold Brookhill to The Brookhill (Kingswear) Management Company Limited for £1. The sale included the benefit of the leases of the flat comprising the premises. Eight flats are listed with the names of the occupiers. All have 999 year leases and pay £10 ground rent pa.

Michael Stevens
September 2010



Map accompanying the sale to Captain Pinfield, 31 January 1964