

Cornish Buildings Group 'Buildings at Risk' Project

Caring for Cornwall's heritage

Newsletter No.11

A three-year project led by the Cornish Buildings Group and supported by Historic England and the Cornwall Heritage Trust commenced in September 2020. The funding supports a case officer in order to help identify and monitor buildings at risk and seek solutions for neglected, redundant or derelict listed buildings and unlisted buildings.



Polwithen House application for listing unsuccessful

Polwithen House was built for William Bolitho and his wife, Mary, in about 1870. The architect is not known; however, the building displays a muscular Jacobethan confidence with mixture of revivalist components such as mullioned and transomed windows, gables, and tall chimney stacks (now truncated).



Polwithen House when the Riviera Palace Hotel.

Historic England have not furthered our application for listing based on the following criteria.

Degree of architectural interest:

although a confident and well-executed Jacobethan-style country house, there are some awkward elements in the building's composition that have undermined its claims to architectural interest;

alterations to the plan form combined with the removal of historic fabric, including the truncation of the chimney stacks, a key feature of its design, have had an accretive impact on its architectural integrity;

the primacy of the earlier house has been compromised by later extension of an inappropriate scale;

although the house retains high quality bespoke fixture and fittings including the principal staircase and Rococo-style plasterwork, this does not outweigh the other factors of consideration for which the building falls short.

Degree of historic interest:

built in about 1870 it is a relatively late example of a small country house estate built in the Jacobethan style; it is not associated with a significant member of the Bolitho family or an architect of note.

Group value:

The associated estate buildings, which are not listed in their own right, are altered and have become divorced from Polwithen House;

the landscape has been eroded by successive development and whilst fragments of the garden and its structures survive, the inter-relationship between the house and its landscape has been significantly eroded



The report noted that ‘Internally, despite alteration, there is a good degree of overall survival of historic fixtures and fittings that include fireplaces, panelled doors and window shutters, door and window furniture, and decorative cornices’. The building is now set to be converted into residential apartments.

Our Top 10 Buildings at Risk

In September we launched our top 10 buildings at risk list. To date the blog has attracted 1,000 views. We have nominated St Paul’s, Truro, for inclusion in the Victorian Society’s top 10 endangered buildings for 2021. The Landmark Trust have taken an interest in our list and will take any appropriate cases forward to their acquisitions panel. Likewise, some of the buildings have attracted some interest from private buyers.

The list can be found at

Harrogate House, Falmouth

The planning portal shows overwhelming objection to the demolition of Harrogate House, Falmouth, an attractive property that does not have any statutory designation but sits within the Falmouth Conservation Area. As such it is a building with special interest relating to the significance of its coastal location.

Cornish Buildings Group is very concerned about the proposed demolition of Harrogate House, a building type that represents inter-war suburban developments throughout the UK. In Falmouth it signifies the expansion of the town to accommodate local and retirement residential needs. Thus it is a marker of the social history of the area. Many of these distinctive houses have been demolished or altered beyond recognition and Falmouth is sadly losing important parts of its heritage assets which local residents and Cornwall Council value highly.

Furthermore, the Cornish Buildings Group opposes the erosion of the unique Cornish coastal environment, epitomised by modest sized buildings which do not detract from the unique landscape. We are currently witnessing large-scale destruction of unobtrusive coastal towns and villages, obliterating the historical significance they represent.

Will the future seafront at Falmouth be continually reconfigured or will it be a showpiece for sustainability and conservation? The continual demolition of buildings at the end of increasingly shorter lifespans is of grave concern. The environmental impact of such destruction should be of major concern for all who live in Cornwall.



Harrogate House



Proposals to replace Harrogate House have been condemned as overbearing and inappropriate development

The current housing market in Cornwall, particularly for such plots as Harrogate House, is such that we would hope a buyer could be found who would not only enjoy the prime position in Queen Mary Road but also appreciate their contribution to the preservation of the historical environment which we in turn would applaud.

New Concerns

Some new buildings have been reported to the project.

Coryton Arms

Former public house, recently sold at auction. This 17th century stone rubble, building with staircase projection to the rear was originally had a three-room plan with cross passage. It has 20th century alterations. The building is need of repair and restoration, although it is weathertight. A large stone chimney on the road side was recently taken down to first floor level having started to lean alarmingly. The building is an important part of the St Mellion village streetscape and, sensitively restored, would enhance the village's appearance.



The former Coryton Arms public house, St Mellion

Nun's Well, Rosteague, nr. Gerrans

The Grade II listing description notes 'Well head, possibly holy well. Probably medieval core with reused C16-17 doorway lintel. Slatestone rubble core and granite doorway semi-circular domed inner structure with corbelled roof. Doorway to south-west has rough granite jambs and nearly 4 centred arch chamfered lintel with spandrel recesses. Steep wide, stepped path known as Donkey Steps leads from well to house.'

The exterior is flooded and overgrown with ivy, bay, and elder. Inside an internal stone lintel has broken, and there is evidence of internal collapse. In addition, the left-hand granite door post has twisted out of alignment and appears potentially unstable.

There appear to be steps in the inside of the well leading down from the threshold; however, the well itself is significantly silted up with a good foot or more of mud. The steps down to the well are overgrown and indistinct.



William West Building, St Blazey.

A site which has been for sale for some time. A Grade II listed former foundry site, built in 1848. Most recently a builders merchants.

The Institute of Cornish Studies in 1973 contained an article on William West, they stated '...in 1848...Mr West took one of the most important of his business steps by establishing the Foundry & Engine Works at St Blazey, now conducted by his sons William & Charles, which have been a large source of employment in that district, & at which many of Mr West's important undertakings were carried out'. The site was sold in 1929, alongside most of the properties in St Blazey in the Blamey Estate, for £255 to Mr A. Jenkin. If anyone has more detail on this building contact cbgcasework@gmail.com

In other news

Trevaunance Mine, St Agnes

We highlighted the plight of the Grade II listed mine chimney, once part of Trevaunance Mine, St Agnes (BNG: SW 71254 50989). The World Heritage Site team, St Agnes Parish Council and Cornwall Council are now aware of the situation. The site is currently understood to be enclosed within temporary safety fencing for the protection of the public. We understand discussions are being had regarding the chimney and potentially its repair.

Tregarne Chapel, St Austell

Approval has been given for alterations and conversion of this long-neglected former chapel to create four self-contained dwellings and alterations to former Sunday school to create three self-contained flats and under-croft garage parking. The application has been approved with some conditions that we called for in our comments.

Full approval and conditions can be found at PA21/05140.

And finally...

The Cornwall Archaeological Society have long featured the plight of medieval stone bridges, usually reporting damage to them caused by motor traffic. This is a note from their recent newsletter....

It is uplifting to learn of a welcome initiative to study, catalogue and generally appreciate Britain's historic stone bridges. Earlier this week, completely out of the blue, a pamphlet arrived explaining the methodology and results of a nationwide survey. The person behind this is Dr T. Robertson, a retired research manager with a background in physics and metallurgy, and evidently very knowledgeable in the field of civil engineering. He has very kindly sent a copy to Cornwall Archaeological Society for the use of our members. In this fascinating pamphlet *Some Recent Investigations of the Historic Stone Bridges of the British Isles* (Dr T. Robinson, Rigg Free Publications, Edinburgh, 2022, ISBN 978-17399648) he describes how the project began and grew. At first he intended to revisit the surveys of Edwin Jervoise (*The Ancient Bridges of Wales and Western England*, Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings (London 1936)) and to add information on other areas, including Scotland and Ireland. After starting a database, he set himself a further task of estimating survival rates for bridges known to have existed in the 16th and 17th centuries. His findings may be found on his excellent website:

<https://drtomsbooks.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/the-old-bridges-of-great-britain-2021-review-h.pdf>

Some of this has been desktop research, including the use of John Leland's references to bridges in the 16th century, and digitised versions of maps produced by Christopher Saxton (c.1585) and John Speed (c.1610). He has also visited 835 (93%) of the bridges that met the criteria of his project and appears slightly vexed that 68 were beyond his reach!

To cherry-pick his findings would be a disservice to such a wide-ranging investigation but it is interesting to note that: 'Over a thousand bridges on late 16th century maps of England and Wales were identified and reference to the compendium showed that 17% had survived.' In the South-West the survival rate is 18%. Anyone interested in ancient bridges will enjoy and learn from Dr Robertson's research, which, he points out, is continuing.

Well, that was the good news, and readers will, no doubt, have a premonition of what will come next. Ruthern Bridge (HER 26032; Scheduled Monument 15576; Listed Building (II*) 67605; Lanivet parish) is a beautiful structure thought to have been built around 1450, possibly by the canons of Bodmin priory. Not so long ago it was repeatedly damaged, allegedly by farm traffic, and was considered by Historic England to be at risk.

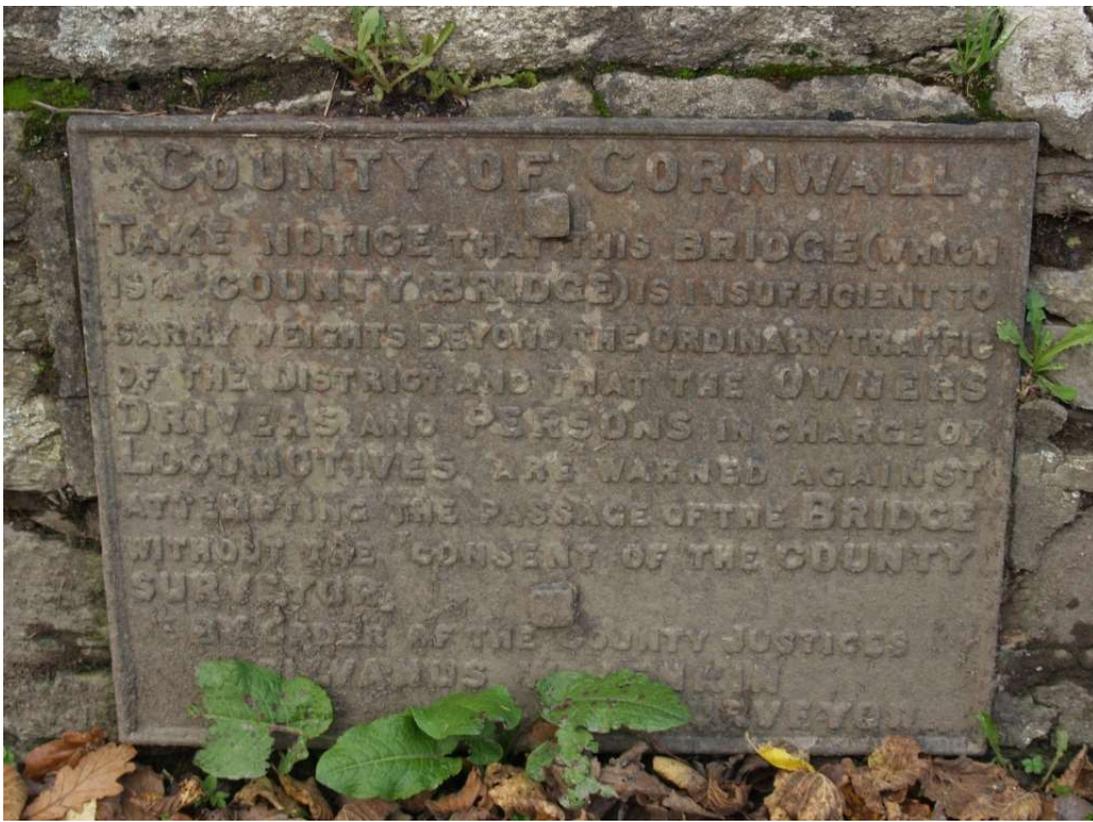


Ruthern Bridge, recently damaged.

Then, mysteriously, stout wooden posts appeared at the approaches to the bridge and all seemed well. And now – you have guessed it – this lovely old bridge has been hit again. The eastern approach with the wooden posts and damaged section beyond a length of the parapet has been dislodged. This sad situation prompts the fear that Dr Robertson may have to adjust his figure for the survival rate of ancient Cornish bridges downwards if this sort of carnage continues.



A repair made to Ruthern bridge in 2008 (T Knight)



The 19th century solution to the problem was to ask the County Surveyor for permission for passage across the bridge. (T Knight)



Historic
England



Published by buildings at risk

Since 1969 the aims of the Cornish Buildings Group have been to stimulate interest, appreciation and knowledge of good building in Cornwall, and to encourage the erection, protection, repair and recording of such buildings. Like any amenities group, we depend on numbers, strength and support of our membership, who provide the force and knowledge that have made us effective for over fifty years. We encourage the protection and repair of historic buildings whether these are listed buildings or simply good examples of traditional building. We aim to encourage good architecture and to raise the general standard of building throughout the county. We hope that our generation may leave behind it buildings which will be looked back on with that same pleasure and enjoyment that we experience when we look at the architecture of past ages.