

FROM YOUR OWN CORRESPONDENTS

Updates from Cornwall Archaeological Society's Area Representatives

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Issue 72

THIS MONTH'S FEATURES

- **KELP IS AT HAND**
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KELP IS AT HAND

Katharine Sawyer is the CAS Area Representative for the Isles of Scilly. In this fascinating article she explains how a relic of a once important local industry is under threat from coastal erosion.

COASTAL EROSION AND KELP PITS

Kelp-burning was an important part of the economy in Scilly from the late 17th to the mid 19th century. The process involved collecting and drying seaweed and then burning it in stone-lined pits in order to produce what was known as 'soda ash'. This was an alkali whose main use was in glass making, but it was also employed in the production of soap and alum. The soda ash from Scilly was exported mainly to Bristol and Gloucester for use in these industries.

At the height of the kelp industry, in the mid 18th century, there were a hundred or so kelp pits in operation on the islands. Twenty are recorded in the Historic Environment Record but there are now only eight visible. One of these is located at Toll's Porth on the western side of St Mary's, near Carn Morval [HER 7233.04; Scheduled Monument 15474; SV 9312 1191; St Mary's, Isles of Scilly]. Like the other sites it is close to the coast for the easier transfer of seaweed from the shore below. If untended, kelp pits fill up with windblown sand and vegetation and members of the Isles of Scilly Community Archaeology Group frequently clear them.

In late November, a friend and I removed the weeds from the kelp pit at Toll's Porth. We were pleased with the results but concerned at how close the pit was to the edge of the cliff, particularly as there was a footpath between the kelp pit and the edge (on the right in the photo below).



Photo: Katharine Sawyer

Only a week later I received a phone call from one of the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust Rangers, telling me that there had been a cliff fall and part of the kelp pit had been destroyed. I went to look at it and found that the footpath, the coastal side of the kelp pit and quite a lot of the cliff were now on the rocks below.



Photo: Katharine Sawyer



Photo: Katharine Sawyer

We hope that it might be possible to retrieve the stones that have fallen from the kelp pit and, perhaps, to rebuild the kelp pit further inland (Historic England permitting, as it is a scheduled monument) so that we can retain this evidence of Scilly's industrial heritage despite the impact of coastal erosion.

Report and photos: Katharine Sawyer

THE MYSTERIOUS EAST

Prepare yourselves for a rapid change of location as we move from the Isles of Scilly, almost as far as the banks of the Tamar. Richard Heard has been exploring the area of North Tamerton with a quizzical eye and in his report he draws attention to three very interesting features.

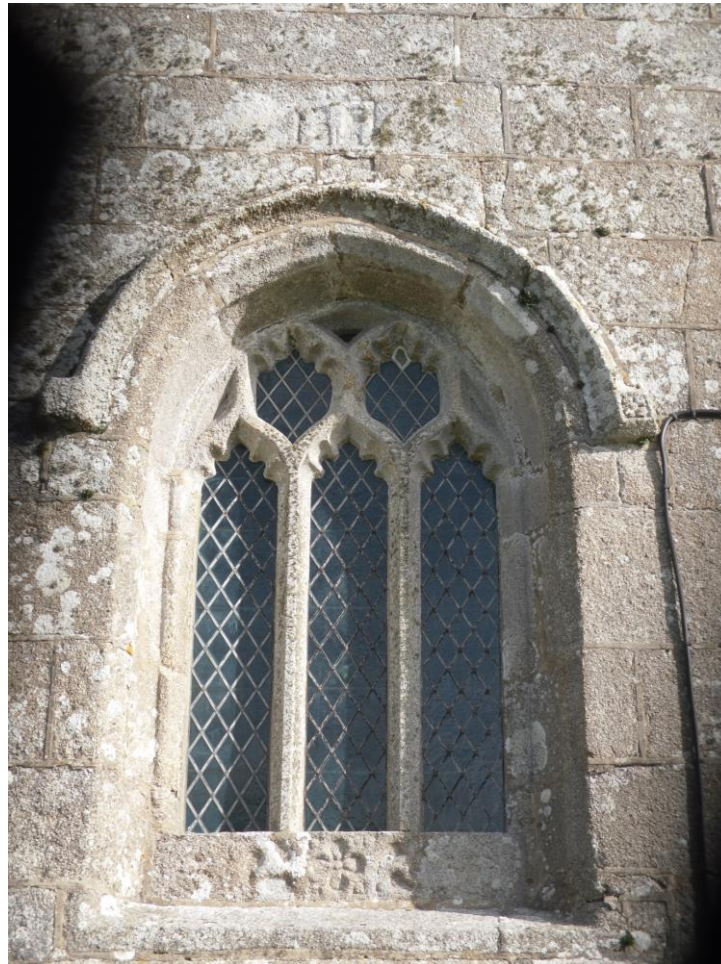
A chance remark by a North Tamerton resident led me into some research of the parish. The Church is dedicated to St. Denis (HER 802; Listed Building (I) 67213; SX 3119 9732; North Tamerton parish). There is an empty cross base outside the south-west corner of the church, seemingly of polyphant stone, and no sign of its cross (HER 170552; SX 3119 9731; North Tamerton parish).



Cross base outside North Tamerton Church

Photo: Richard Heard

The granite tower is in the style of Week St. Mary with splendid base carvings around its outside. Over the apex of the tower's west window there appears to be a crucifix carved on the granite block. It occurs to me that it could possibly be a squared up cross-head. Neither Week St. Mary nor Jacobstow possess such a thing, despite their similar architectural styles.



West window North Tamerton church

Photo: Richard Heard



Close-up of stone above apex of window

Down the road toward the Tamar River there is what I believe to be a County Boundary stone, lying in the hedge (HER MCO67188; SX 3177 9732; North Tamerton parish). It has a large decorative "C" carved upon it (see photo). It is alleged to have been moved more than once when the boundary was disputed. It now lies against the road hedge of Whitethorne House; on the south side and opposite the former Smithy; and about 150 metres from the Tamar (now the county boundary in this area) at OS.3157.9730.



Cornwall County Council bridge stone

Photo: Richard Heard

Report and photos: R.M. Heard

SNOW PATROL

Strictly speaking, this newsletter is meant to be about what happened in November but in the tradition of British tabloids, let's not allow journalistic accuracy to get in the way (the headline is a gross distortion of the truth too). This is from December 2022, already famous as a cruel month of ice, then rain.



Snowy peaks of Rough Tor and Brown Willy as seen from Helman Tor

Last year, Pete Dudley of CAU and Ann Preston-Jones of Historic England organised work parties of volunteers to clear gorse and bracken from Helman Tor. So it seemed a good idea to visit to see if the the work of the volunteers and Cornwall Wildlife Trust's dedicated band of cattle had been able to keep the vegetation at bay. Although this is not a battle that can ever be abandoned, the combined inter-species assault has been very effective.



The summit, looking north. Before clearance last year much of the area on the left was covered in tenacious gorse.



Looking south-west towards Hensbarrow. Note the cattle grazing on the lower slopes.

The lower, western slopes of Helman Tor contain numerous significant archaeological features, including a Bronze Age roundhouse. Last year, a team led by Tom David, of *Naturally Green Countryside Services* (<http://www.naturally-green.co.uk/>) carried out a huge amount of gorse clearance, assisted by the volunteers. The follow up work is being carried out by a specialist group that not only lives on site but also demonstrates a natural appetite for hard work.

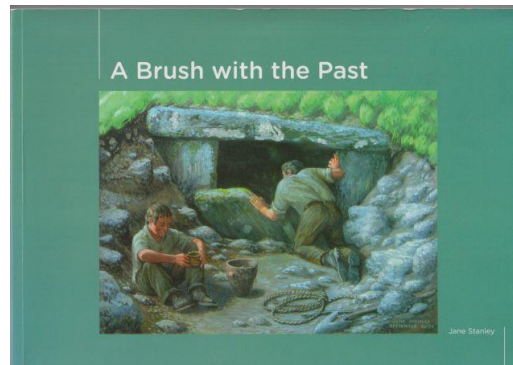


Cornwall Wildlife Trust task force

Here is one last look at the white hills of Bodmin Moor as seen from a bitterly cold Helman Tor, with mist rising from the River Fowey Valley in the middle ground:



A BRUSH WITH REALITY



Sometimes our most profoundly held beliefs are shaken. Assumptions that seemed beyond dispute crumble to dust upon the receipt of unexpected news. One such notion was that everyone interested in Cornwall's archaeology, especially the prehistoric period, and who loved art, had a copy of Jane Stanley's brilliant *A Brush with the Past*: but apparently this is not so. Open source investigations suggest there are still people without access to Jane Stanley's brilliant reconstruction paintings; deserving folks who cannot thumb through this superb book to instantly understand the day-to-day lives of people at numerous sites in Cornwall from Mesolithic times onwards. Fortunately, this worrying situation can be solved and what better time to do so than when Christmas shopping lists are still being written and Santa is packing his sleigh?

The book comprises 151 pages, is printed on high quality paper with over 50 full-colour illustrations. In addition to reproductions of the paintings there are sections explaining the research on which they are based. Originally published in 2009, these beautiful books have become hard to obtain. They can be purchased from Cornwall Archaeological Society: journalsales@cornisharchaeology.org.uk.

Paperback: Retail price: £10, plus postage and packing

Hardback: Retail price: £15, plus postage and packing

The late Tony Blackman, formerly President of Cornwall Archaeological Society and Chairman of Cornwall Heritage Trust, said this of the book:

'This is an outstanding collection of artwork, which really brings Cornwall's past to life.'

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER!!!!

If you live in Mid-Cornwall (taking Lanivet to be the centre) it may be possible to deliver your copy free of postage charges. To check if this is the case, please contact: secretary@cornisharchaeology.org.uk

We hope to have copies for sale at future talks, walks and other events. Or you can order by completing this form.

Name	
Address	
Email address/telephone	

Item	Number required	Add postage and packing	Total payment
<i>A Brush with the Past</i> paperback @ £10		£3.75 (UK only)	
<i>A Brush with the Past</i> hardback @ £15		£3.75 Per copy (UK only)	
		Total payment	

By cheque

Cheques should be made out to *Cornwall Archaeological Society*. Please send the cheque and completed order form to:

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HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR READERS!!!



Area Representatives would love to hear from fellow CAS members, and the general public, about any feature of the historic environment in their parishes, whether a new discovery, something causing concern, or even just to answer queries. If you have any concerns, or new information, about any archaeological feature, please contact the Area Representative for the parish. If you do not know who that is, just look at the inside back cover of the latest journal, *Cornish Archaeology* 59, or send an email to arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk.

Roger Smith, 20th December 2022

