

Porthcurno Telegraph Museum

Maintenance Block Archaeological Watching Brief

Negative Result



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Acknowledgements

The Archaeological Watching Brief was commissioned by Porthcurno Telegraph Museum. Jeanette Ratcliffe, Historic Environment Consultant, conducted the work and prepared this report.

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Front cover illustration: Ground work excavations taking place on Maintenance Block site, July 2012

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1 Summary

In July 2012, as a condition of planning and listed building consent for improvement works to Porthcurno Telegraph Museum, an archaeological watching brief was conducted on the site of a late 20th century Maintenance Block, demolished to make way for the construction of a new learning centre.

The site is located c10 kilometres southwest of Penzance, Cornwall, at NGR SW38482231, on the eastern side of Porthcurno Valley, near its seaward end.

The watching brief produced a negative archaeological result, with foundation ground works exposing only modern re-deposited levelling material and drains, and natural granite and granitic subsoil (of which a photographic record was made).

2 Background

Porthcurno Telegraph Museum has been granted Heritage Lottery Funding to improve its visitor experience and archive and learning facilities. This involves alterations to the main museum building - the Edwardian, Grade 2 listed Eastern House - and the replacement of a redundant Maintenance Block with a new learning centre.

Planning and Listed Building Consent have been granted (PA11/08990), subject to a number of conditions, including Condition 3, which required historic building photographic recording, and archaeological recording during the ground works associated with the replacement of the Maintenance Block.

A Historic Building Appraisal was carried out at the pre-planning stage (Ratcliffe and Berry 2011) and formed part of the Design and Access Statement. The historical context and development of the site and its historic landscape character were covered in that earlier report, together with a summary of the surviving historic fabric and the potential for buried archaeology, and a colour digital photographic record of the elements affected by the development.

The Appraisal identified that the Maintenance Block (built of rendered concrete blocks on a paved concrete plinth in the 1970s/80s – Figures 5 & 6) did not have any intrinsic architectural value, but had some historic significance in that it represented a surviving element of the final years of Cable and Wireless' operations at Porthcurno.

Subsequent to planning permission being granted, Historic Building Photographic Recording was carried out in February 2012. An archive standard black and white photographic record was made of Eastern House and the Maintenance Block, adding to knowledge of the historical and architectural character (Ratcliffe and Berry 2012).

The Appraisal also assessed the potential for buried archaeological remains being revealed by the development. On the 1880 OS map, two small enclosures occupy the general site of the later Maintenance Block. By the time of the 1907 OS map (Figure 2) the larger of the two enclosures had a small structure in its eastern corner, with a track way leading from there to Zodiac House (the first Eastern Telegraph Company station building). The structure also appears in early 20th century photographs, as a low, insubstantial looking (wooden?) building with a pitched roof and some sort of construction against its southern gable end (Figures 3-4).

It was concluded that there was a slight possibility that ground works for the new building may uncover remains of the earlier structure depicted on the 1907 OS.

Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Planning Advice Officer (HEPAO) also required that provision be made for the possibility of archaeological remains of earlier date being uncovered by the ground works.

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Jeanette Ratcliffe in July 2012.

3 Location and setting

Porthcurno Telegraph Museum is located approximately 10 kilometres (6 miles) southwest of Penzance, on the eastern side of Porthcurno Valley, near its seaward end. Eastern House and its associated Tunnels are terraced and cut into the valley's eastern slope, while the Maintenance Block site is on the eastern side of the valley floor (Figure 1).

4 Development ground works and watching brief method

The ground works involved the excavation of a 400m² x 70cm deep foundation (for a concrete slab), with 0.5m wide 'stand beam' trenches around the edge and across the centre, dug down a further 20cm (ie maximum excavation depth = 90cm).

The archaeological contractor was present on site to conduct an archaeological watching brief during the digging of the main foundation excavation (after which, owing to the absence of archaeological layers, it proved unnecessary for her to be present).

A photographic record was made of the ground works using black and white 35mm or medium format film in order to produce archive quality contact prints and negatives. A photographic scale was used for both general and specific photographs and a register has been made of the photographs taken record, which details: feature, location and direction of shot. Colour digital photographs were also taken, with a small selection being used to illustrate this report (Figures 7-10).

This report describes the negative archaeological result of the watching brief.

- The report has been submitted to Cornwall Council HEPAO and the Cornwall Record Office.
- Further digital copies have been supplied on CD-ROM in 'Adobe Acrobat' PDF format.
- The report will be held by the Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record (HER) and made available for public consultation.
- Copies of the report have been supplied to the client and their architect.

Archive creation & deposition

- An ordered and integrated site archive has been prepared in accordance with: *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) English Heritage 2006* upon completion of the project.
- The archive, including copies of the written report, has been deposited with the Cornwall Record Office.
- A summary of the contents of the archive has been supplied to the HEPAO.
- A Copy of the report has been supplied to the National Monuments Record (NMR) in Swindon.
- A project summary has been added to the OASIS (the English Heritage/ADS online index of archaeological investigations)

5 Negative archaeological result

The watching brief revealed that the (now demolished) Maintenance Block had been built onto a platform levelled into the bottom of the valley side. The depth of the cut made is indicated by the brick retaining wall, which still stands, to a height of up to 4 metres (Figure 7-10).

This triangle wedge cut out of the valley side during the 1970s removed any traces of the early 20th century building which preceded the Maintenance Block and any other features or layers on the site that might have had archaeological potential.

All that was recorded during the watching brief were layers of re-deposited gravel, overlying natural *rab* (orange-grey granitic subsoil), cut though by drains associated with the Maintenance Block (Figure 10). Large pieces of natural granite were also exposed, including one massive block with a squared-off face with drill marks, indicating that part of it had been blasted away during the 1970s levelling process (Figure 8).

Bibliography

Ratcliffe, J, & Berry, E, 2011. *Porthcurno Telegraph Museum Historic Building Appraisal* (report for inclusion in Planning Design & Access Statement)

Ratcliffe, J & Berry, E, 2012. *Porthcurno Telegraph Museum Historic Building Photographic Recording*

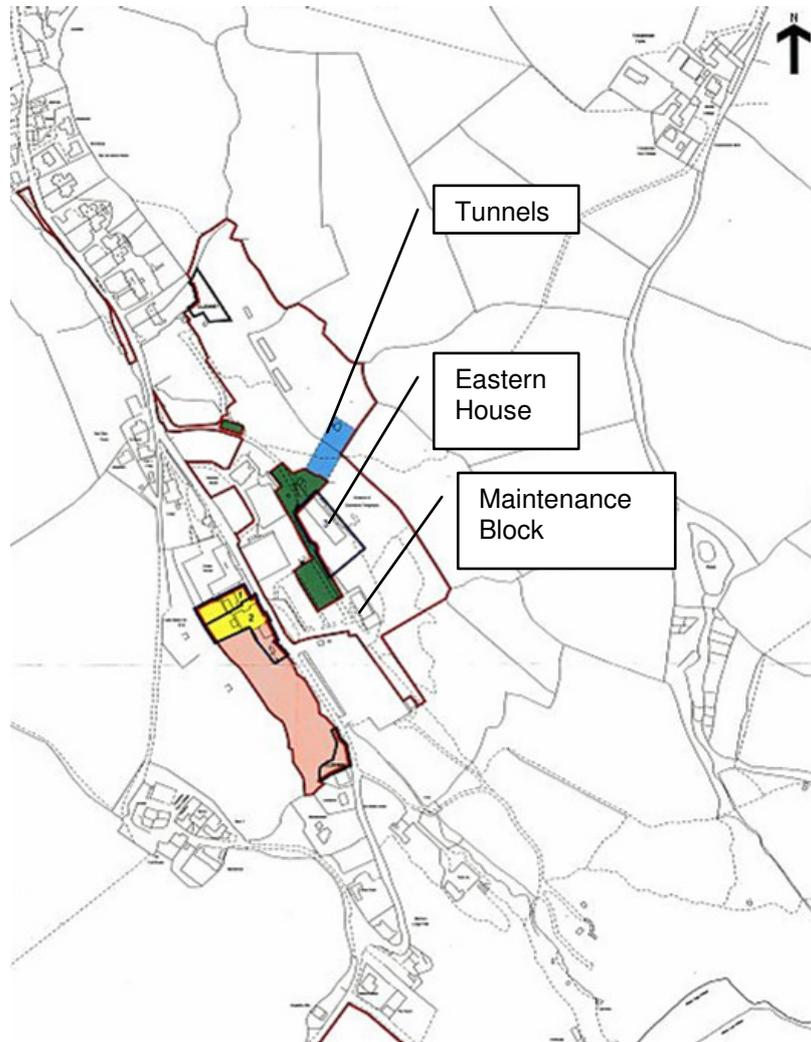


Figure 1: Site location. PK Trust holding, with location of Museum buildings affected by development proposal (Taken from Land Registry Title Plan)

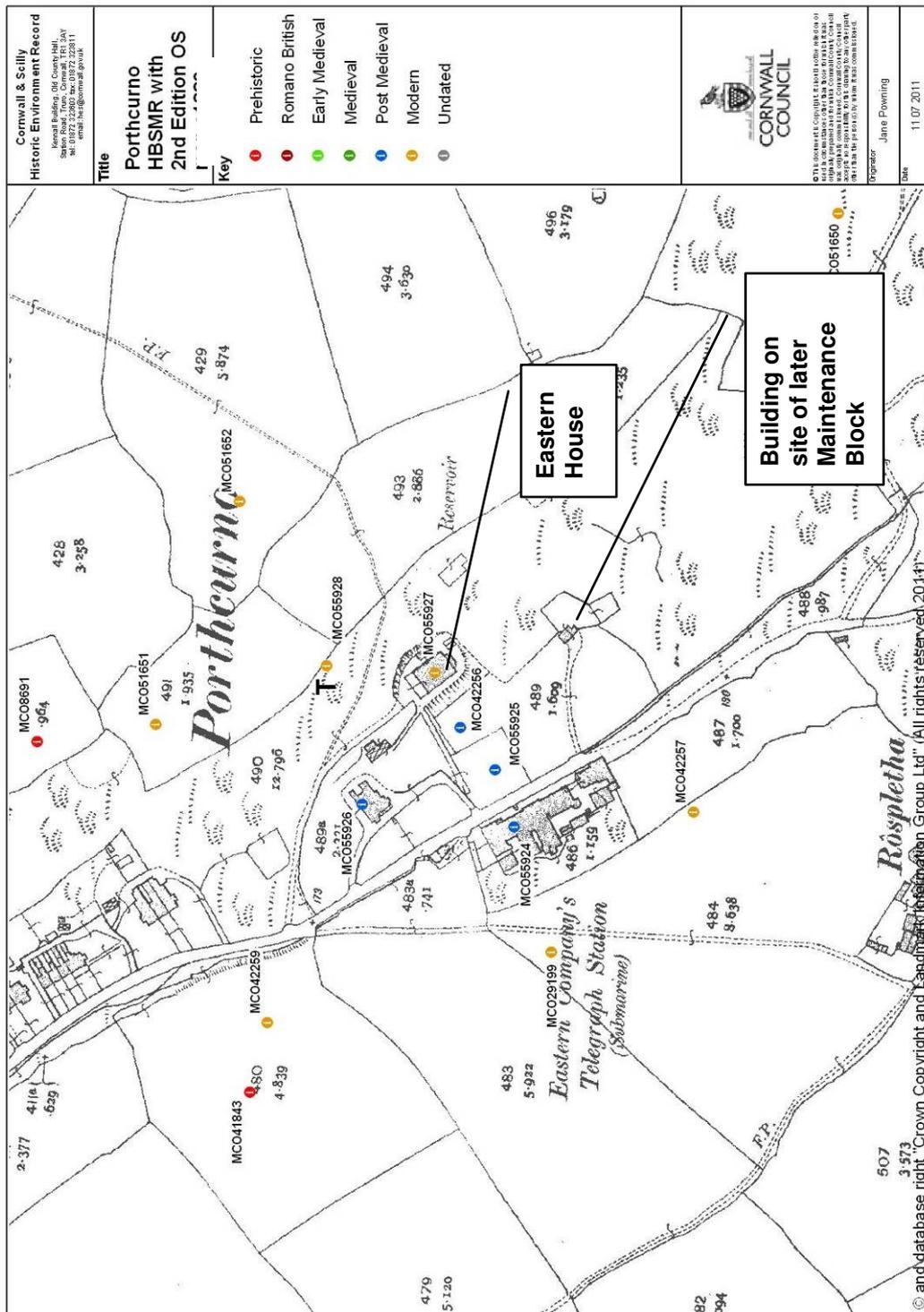


Figure 2: 1907 2nd Edition 1:2500 OS Map (Historic Environment Record, Cornwall Council), showing location of Eastern House and later Tunnels (T) and the building which predated the 1970s/80s Maintenance Block

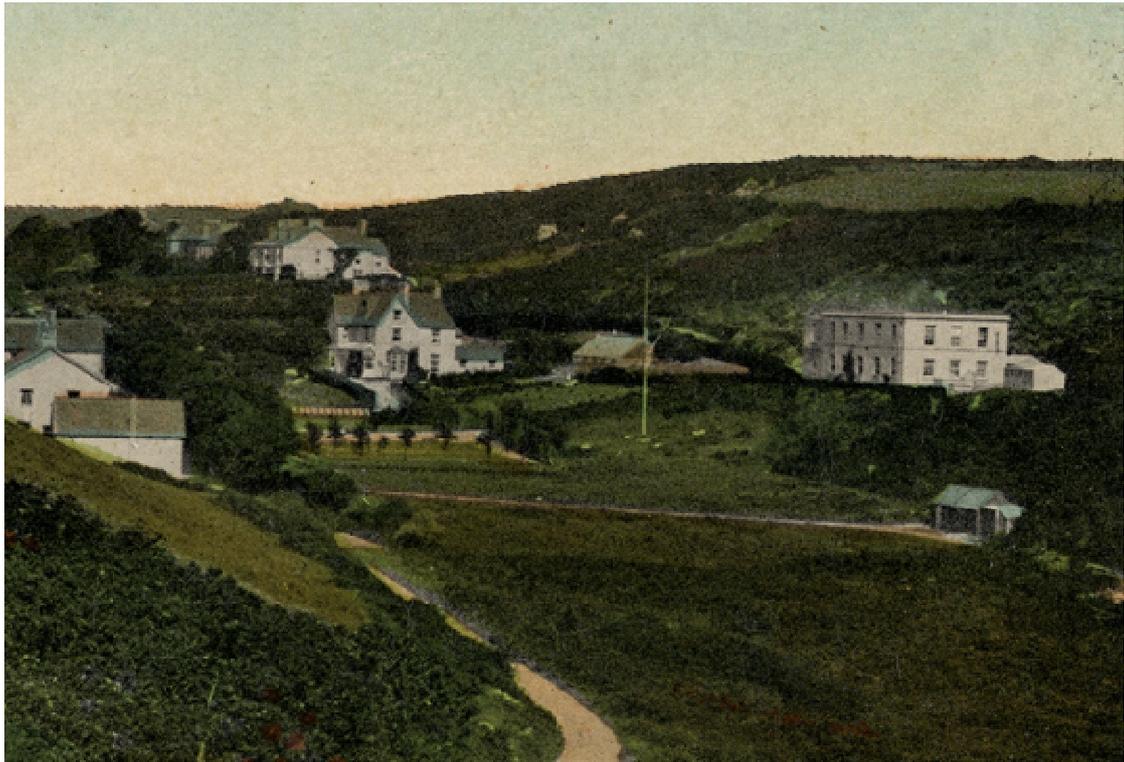


Figure 3: Tinted postcard photograph taken just prior to WW1, with the precursor to the Maintenance Block centre ground right (on the valley floor below Eastern House), looking NE



Figure 4: Postcard photograph taken c1920; looking NE towards Eastern House, with the precursor to the Maintenance Block centre ground right



Figure 5: Maintenance Block, from NW



Figure 6: Maintenance Block, from S



Figure 7: View of the Maintenance Block site from NW, after demolition of the building, before foundation excavations



Figure 8: Natural granite rock with drill marks from when it was split during the construction of the Maintenance, from NW



Figure 9: View of the Maintenance Block site from N, during foundation excavations



Figure 10: Maintenance Block site – NE section of foundation excavation