

# St Clether holy well and chapel, Cornwall

## Access and interpretation



**Historic Environment Service (Projects)**

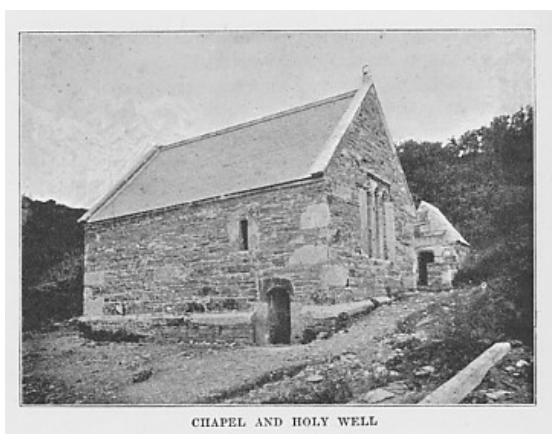
Cornwall County Council





# **St Clether holy well and chapel, Cornwall**

## **Access and improvement**



*...soon after restoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century*

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## **Acknowledgements**

The improvement of access to St Clether holy well and chapel, a long-felt need on the part of the monument's owner, was prompted by the sudden possibility of grant-aid. The work was entirely organised by Vanda Inman, the owner, and carried out by Barry Jones and team from the neighbouring parish of Laneast. Printing of leaflets and cards was carried out by the Launceston Printing Company.

The work was funded by the Scheduled Monument Management Project – a budget to which English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Cornwall Heritage Trust and Cornwall County Council contributes. The Heritage Lottery Fund paid for the capital works in this case, with the project organisation being funded by the other bodies.

## **Cover illustration**

The way to the holy well

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Project background	9
2.1.1	Introduction to the monument	9
2.2	Aims	9
<b>3</b>	<b>State of affairs prior to the recent work</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1	Ownership of the monument	10
3.2	The monument – access	10
3.3	The monument - interpretation	10
3.4	Condition of the monument	10
<b>4</b>	<b>Results of the recent work</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1	Access	11
4.1.1	Gates and stiles	11
4.1.2	Paths	11
4.1.3	Signs	12
4.1.4	Website	12
4.2	Interpretation	12
4.2.1	Leaflet	12
4.2.2	Greetings cards	12
4.2.3	Website	12
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Project archive</b>	<b>14</b>

## List of Figures

- Fig 1 Location map
- Fig 2 Ordnance Survey digital mapping (2003) showing the site and the location of the various elements of the management work
- Fig 3 St Clether chapel and holy well
- Fig 4 The main gate leading into the chapel's enclosure: before, and after the provision of the new gate
- Fig 5 The gateway into the chapel field, before the provision of the new gate and kissing gate
- Fig 6 The gateway into the chapel field: after the provision of the new gate and kissing gate (note the carved stone formerly re-used as a gatepost)
- Fig 7 The new stiles on the public right of way
- Fig 8 The path to the chapel before surfacing
- Fig 9 The new path and the posts marking the way to the site.
- Fig 10 The new booklet
- Fig 11 The images for the new greetings card
- Fig 12 Work in progress on the path (above) and the gate (below)

## Abbreviations

CHT	Cornwall Heritage Trust
CRO	Cornwall County Record Office
EH	English Heritage
HER	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
HES	Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRN	Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER
RIC	Royal Institution of Cornwall

# **1 Summary**

Work to improve the access to St Clether holy well and chapel took place in December of 2005. The work, which included path surfacing and the provision of new gates and stiles at certain key points, was entirely organised by the owner of the monument, in liaison with the Historic Environment Service. In addition, a batch of greetings cards was created, an existing guidebook updated and improved and a new website launched. This work was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, through the medium of the Historic Environment Service's Scheduled Monument Management programme.





## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 Project background**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction to the monument**

On the north-eastern side of Bodmin Moor, within a small enclosure on the side of a steep and lovely valley, is the chapel and holy well of St Clether (Figs 1 and 2). Following restoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the little group now forms a remarkably perfect example of a medieval cult site (Fig 3). A particular feature is the arrangement whereby holy water from the well is conducted through the chapel and beneath the stone altar, to fall into a basin built in the side of the chapel.

The site, located at SX 2023 8459, is number 17622 in Cornwall County Council's Historic Environment Record and is a Scheduled Monument, number 31824.

This report describes various works undertaken in December 2005 to improve the access to and interpretation of the monument. These works included the improvement of a path leading to the monument, installation of new stiles and gates, updating of a guidebook, and the provision of an attractive series of greetings cards featuring the chapel and holy well. In addition, this work provided the impetus for the creation of a new website for information and news about the chapel and holy well.

### **2.2 Aims**

The primary aims of the project were to improve the access to and interpretation of the monument, by various means, including:

- Levelling, drainage and surfacing, where appropriate, of the path leading to the chapel and well, to make the access safer and easier for visitors.
- Provision of a new wooden stock-proof gate, to make access easier on the route to the site.
- New marker posts to guide visitors to the chapel and well.
- New gate and two stiles to be located at the points where the public right of way enters and leaves the chapel field.
- Provision of a new, bespoke, gate at the entrance to the chapel enclosure, with a short length of flanking fencing to either side.
- A leaflet to be available for visitors - in the chapel, in the nearby church, and other places locally, as appropriate.
- Greeting cards
- Set up a website providing information about the site. This to be a focus for information on any activities or work taking place there, and to contain links to other websites (eg CCC HES).

(Further on-line interpretation will be available through the parallel 'Access to Monuments' project being developed concurrently through the Scheduled Monument Management programme.)

## **3 State of affairs prior to the recent work**

### **3.1 Ownership of the monument**

Vanda Inman is the proud and devoted owner of St Clether holy well and chapel. She owns the monument and one field around it only – making its management a difficult and at times onerous and expensive task. Mrs Inman regards public access as one of the duties of caring for a site that is so special – even though this at times brings its own problems and can be costly, for example in relation to insurance.

### **3.2 The monument – access**

Although the holy well and chapel are privately owned, the site and the surrounding field are open and fully accessible at all times, by means of a permissive footpath from St Clether churchyard. The path is signposted from the churchyard, but not otherwise. The walk from the church to the chapel, over about a quarter of a mile through unspoilt countryside, along the side of the river Inny, is delightful, though the path is rough, slippery and steep in places, and hampered in one place by a difficult gate. A public right of way also passes nearby, along the bottom of the valley and through the field containing the monument; however this entered and left the field by rough breaks in the hedges, so that the access was awkward and the field not stock-proof. (Figs 4, 5 and 8)

### **3.3 The monument - interpretation**

As they are so picturesque, the chapel and holy well feature in a number of guide books and websites – both general sources and sources specifically dealing with holy wells. St Clether's church guide contains information about the site. A small leaflet, produced at the owner's own expense, is available at the site itself but there was a distinct need for more comprehensive information to be more generally available.

### **3.4 Condition of the monument**

Following restoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the site as a whole is in reasonable condition, although after a hundred years there is a constant need for ongoing maintenance and repair. The holy well underwent restoration ten years ago and the chapel's roof is now in imminent need of repair. In addition, there are various aspects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration which could be improved on – like the concrete windowsills and floor.

## **4 Results of the recent work**

The work at St Clether well and chapel, being on private ground, was bound by the very strict rules of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which can only fund capital works to monuments in public ownership. On privately owned ground, as here, the HLF cannot fund work other than that which improves the interpretation and access. Despite this constraint, the possibility of financial aid proved a major incentive in stimulating activity and enabling a number of long-desired aims to be achieved. These are described below.

The work, which was entirely organised by Vanda Inman, the owner, was carried out by Barry Jones and team from the neighbouring parish of Laneast in December 2005.

Text in *italics*, describing the work, was communicated via email to Ann Preston-Jones by Vanda Inman.

*Pleased to say I've heard from Barry, who will be commencing work tomorrow (Wednesday 14th). He is going to dig out the path and shore it up ready for the chippings. Tomorrow evening/late afternoon I'm going to his workshop to see the gates in progress.*

## 4.1 Access

Work to improve access to the holy well and chapel included new gates and stiles and improvements to the path to the site.

### 4.1.1 Gates and stiles

New gates and stiles to enhance the monument and to improve public access were provided at four points. (Figs 4-7)

1. At the point where the permissive path enters the field to the monument, the existing gate had deteriorated so badly that it was almost impossible to open and close, and so was permanently propped open. The plan here was to replace the existing gate with a smaller one and a kissing gate alongside, that would be easier for visitors to use, while also keeping the opening of the same width. This would have the further benefit of preserving *in situ* a piece of carved stone which had been re-used as a gatepost. The gates were finally installed by 24<sup>th</sup> December.
2. and 3. Two stiles were installed at the points where the public right of way enters and leaves the chapel field, and an 8 ft wide gate was put in beside the southern of these to allow access for machinery to the field and the chapel, for any future management works (Figs 5 and 6).
4. A grand new gate and short lengths of picket fence were placed at the entrance to the chapel enclosure (Fig 4). Built of oak, to ideas of Vanda Inman's, these were created specifically for the site by Barry Jones. They were designed to be a long lasting and fitting enrichment of this very special monument.

*Saw the gate-in-progress last night. I think it's going to be lovely! I sort of let Barry go his own way with it after giving him the trefoil/celtic cross criteria, and he's making something which is simple yet effective. Extremely sturdy!*

*The planks are dovetailed together and the trefoil goes right through at the top but the cross is carved on the main gate. As I say, simple, yet I think it matches the 'feel' of the place exactly. Lots of care going into it too.*

*24<sup>th</sup> Dec: The fencing at the chapel is up and has now been stained. Only thing missing now are the gates themselves into the chapel but I imagine they will follow shortly.....*

### 4.1.2 Paths

Work to improve the main path to the site, included

- levelling and surfacing of the path through the chapel field, to make it safer and easier for visitors to use
- drainage where the path crosses an overflow from the well

Work commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> December:

*Great progress made today.. The path has been dug out, boarded up at the sides and topped with chippings. It curves and dips with the landscape and I think it looks really nice. Also much safer! New drainage has been put in just outside the chapel gate and the ground built up, so should have no more problems there - it has been really wet and dangerous of late.*

The path is 3 foot wide, and was created by levelling into the hillside, and building boarding of tanalised timber to retain the 20 mm Pigsdon chippings. Disturbance was kept

to a minimum; the dull grey/green chippings blend well in this environment and are easy to walk on; and it is likely that within a year, as the vegetation grows back, the path will become relatively inconspicuous. (Figs 8 and 9)

The drainage works beside the gate into the chapel yard consisted of lifting the slabs of an old culvert, which had become blocked with stones, and reinstating it at a slightly deeper level. Further drainage was provided by installing a 4-inch perforated pipe under the new path, at about 3 metres from the gate.

It was also hoped that work could be undertaken to improve a small ‘flight’ of steps in the field between the chapel and the church, but the owners of this field were not enthusiastic about this: and so it remains an aim for the future.

#### **4.1.3 Signs**

An existing sign to the well was embellished with a number of posts, leading visitors across fields to the site, where the path had not been improved (Fig 9 ).

#### **4.1.4 Website**

Fuller information on the website is provided below under ‘interpretation’; but it is worth noting here that the website features a very attractive ‘virtual tour’ with delightful pictures of the chapel and well and the route to and from them.

### **4.2 Interpretation**

#### **4.2.1 Leaflet**

Five hundred printed leaflets were produced, these being based on an earlier leaflet produced several years ago by Vanda Inman, but much updated to include colour outside cover and sheet of black and white and colour photos in the centre (Fig 10). The HLF logo appears on the first page.

A small charge being made for the booklet will help to provide funds for maintaining the chapel and holy well.

#### **4.2.2 Greetings cards**

The cards feature four black and white photos, taken by Anna and David of JJ Photos. The images, which show different aspects of the chapel and well, go together nicely as a set; they include views of the chapel and the holy well, the arched door to the chapel, and a view into the chapel’s altar through the trefoil-shaped aperture carving in the door. HLF grant-aid is acknowledged on the back of the cards.

The cards were printed by Launceston Printing Co. One thousand A6 size cards and envelopes and one thousand A5 cards and envelopes were produced. (Fig 11)

#### **4.2.3 Website**

This project provided the incentive to make progress in an area that has been under consideration for some time, but which had not been achieved to date because of lack of appropriate expertise, not to mention time and uncertainty about what such a website should include. However, this at last seemed the right moment to explore the idea of a website further, in order to

- publicise and explain the work, to the many people who visit the site from all over the country
- to provide a venue for updating the site's many visitors with information on any further new projects
- to make information about the site accessible to as wide an audience as possible
- to enable people who visit and love the site to contribute and share information, thoughts, feelings or inspirations

*On the website front... help has arrived in the form of a friend called Miya who called in for a chat and is a website designer. She's extremely busy and I wouldn't ask her to actually do the work, but she showed me how to acquire a domain and find an ISP to suit my needs who will do all the work on the web and provide templates etc. So I think I've got to grips with having a go myself now! Will try to get domain registered this weekend so we have a space to work on.*

Once designed and launched by Brian Inman, the website has gained its own momentum and is already a truly attractive, interesting, exciting and informative source which continues to develop:

*We've uploaded your information on the website (thank you) and I've started an 'inspiration' page, with a story of mine and a sonnet of my daughter's. When the gates are up and all is done we are planning on taking lots of photos and making a 'virtual tour'.*

*As soon as the gates are up I'm going to do a page showing before, during and after and put this on the site too.*

The address is [www.peaceland.org.uk](http://www.peaceland.org.uk)

## 5 Discussion

This project has, without doubt, been extremely successful and a pleasure to be involved in. All who were involved worked with huge enthusiasm and the results are a credit all round. Any slight and inevitable blemishes in the landscape will heal before long and the freshness of the new materials soon blend with the subtle shades of the old work.

A slight upset occurred when an unhappy visitor, who found the new work intrusive and the removal of some bits of gorse disgraceful, left a note to this effect in the visitors book. However, this has so far been the only voice of dissent. Vanda Inman's response was to write an entry of her own in the book, explaining the reasons for the work and this produced several further messages: of support, praise for the new path and thanks for being allowed to visit. Notes subsequently left in the chapel's visitor book more than outweigh this one negative comment:

*Every old and wonderful thing was once new and probably gave offence – giving thanks for it all!*

*Thank you so much for all your hard work. The new gates look great and make it easier as does the path. Of course new ground works leave an initial scar but with the coming of new growth and the summer the harsh lines will mellow. We will all appreciate the path, particularly on wet damp days. Thank you for continuing to care for this very special place.*

This is indeed a fine example of 'value for money', where a relatively small grant has provided motivation beyond measure and resulted in improvements that will make the site an even better place to access and enjoy. It is to be hoped that future phases, including, attempts to restore correct drainage between the well and chapel and the much-needed work to the chapel's roof, will be able to take place in the near future.

And in conclusion, it is worth quoting from the website's guest book. This message was left by Alan Brooks:

*Congratulations on the web site Vanda and on the recent works. The path along the valley can be uneven but is well worth the effort and now with the new gates and path through the field this section is a lot easier. The improved drainage is most welcome. No longer will it be a hop, skip or jump over the stream to get to the gate! For anyone who has not visited, the virtual tour gives a great impression but only being there can give one the special feeling of peace found at the Holy Well. Today when we visited the leaves of the daffodils were already showing at the foot of the chapel wall bathed in sunshine.....*

## 6 Project archive

The HES project number is **2005048**.

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of the Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration.
2. Black and white photographs archived under the following index numbers: **GBP1839**
3. Digital photographs stored in the directory `..\\Images\\Sites\\Sites Q-T\\St Clether Well`
4. This report held in digital form as: `G:\\CAU\\HE PROJECTS\\SITES\\SITES S\\ST CLEther WELL, PR 5048\\ST CLEther HOLY WELL AND CHAPEL REPORT.DOC`

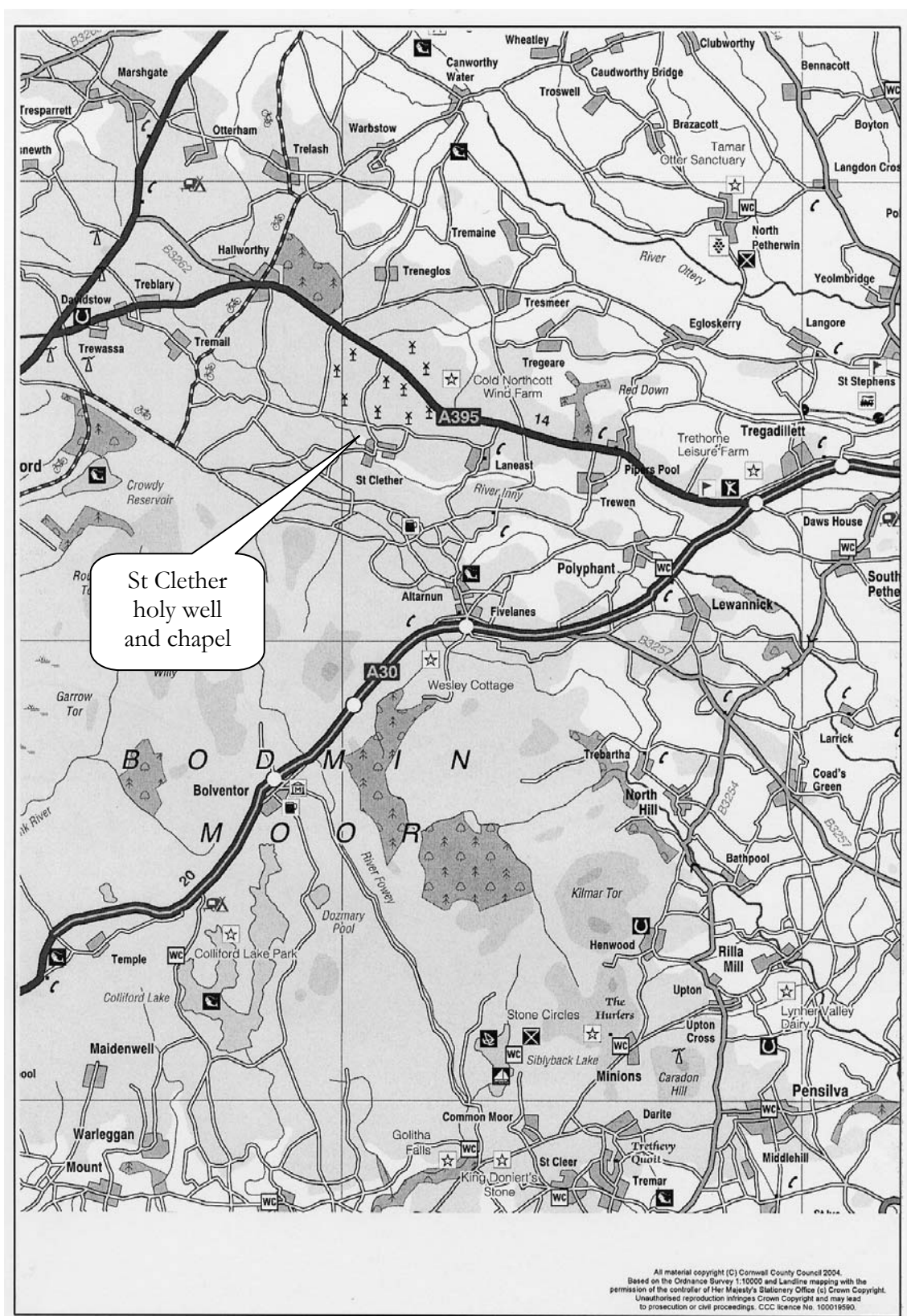


Fig 1 Location map

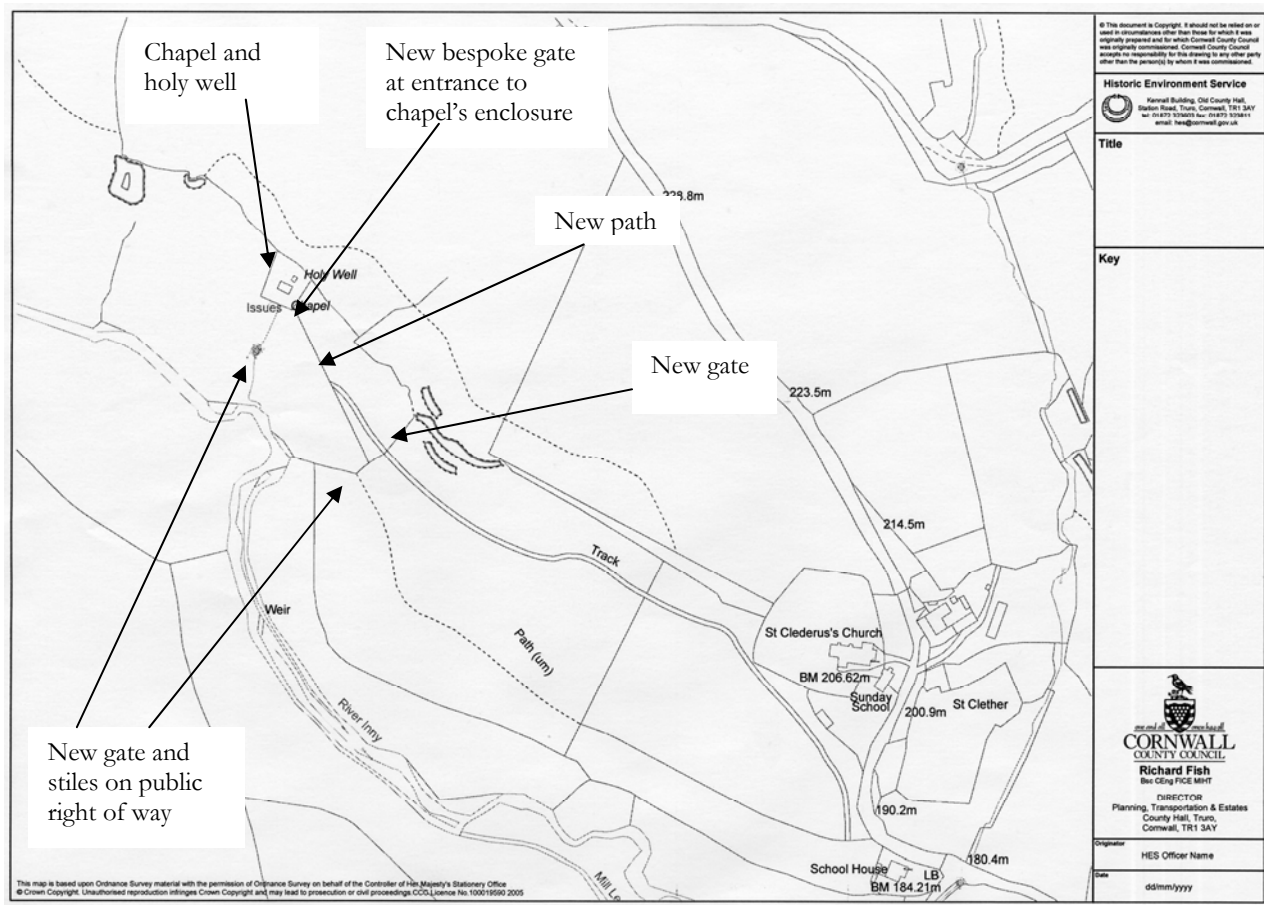


Fig 2 Ordnance Survey digital mapping (2003) showing the site and the location of the various elements of the management work





*The view of the chapel on the approach from the church*



*The chapel*



*The holy well*

*Fig 3 St Clether chapel and holy well*





*Fig 4 The main gate leading into the chapel's enclosure: before, and after the provision of the new gate*





*Fig 5 The gateway into the chapel field, before the provision of the new gate and kissing gate*





*Fig 6 The gateway into the chapel field: after the provision of the new gate and kissing gate(note the carved stone formerly re-used as a gatepost)*





*Fig 7 The new stiles on the public right of way*





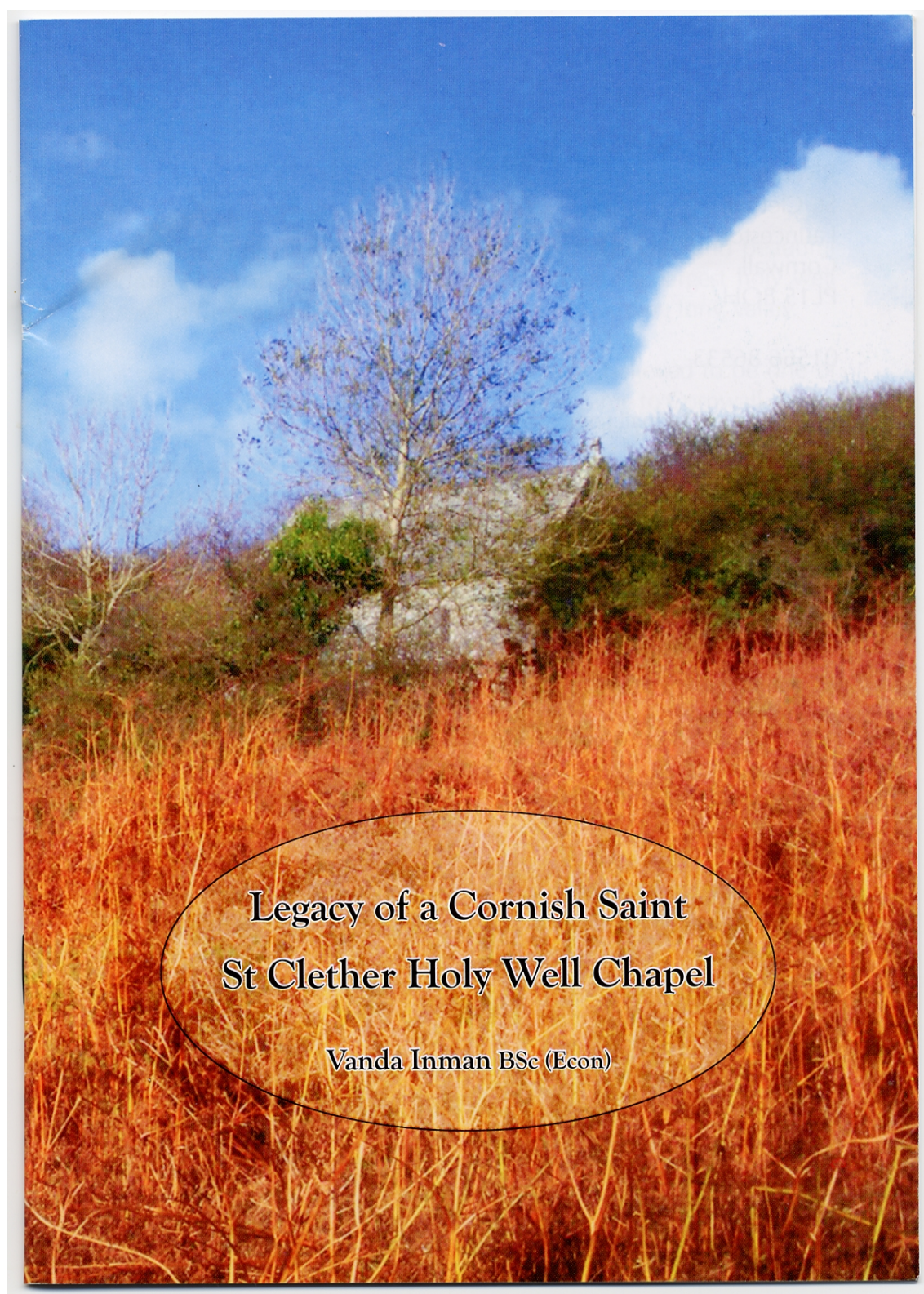
*Fig 8 The path to the chapel before surfacing*





*Fig 9 The new path and the posts marking the way to the site.*





*Fig 10      The new booklet*





*Fig 11      The images for the new greetings cards (photos by JJ Photographs )*



*Fig 12 Work in progress on the path (above) and the gate (below)*