

Towan Holy Well, St Austell, Cornwall

Recording and repointing



Historic Environment Service (Projects)

Cornwall County Council

**Towan Holy Well,
St Austell, Cornwall**

Recording and repointing

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Cover illustration

Dave Stark of Pentewan Old Cornwall Society re-pointing the roof of Towan holy well.

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Abbreviations

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| EH | English Heritage |
| HER | Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record |
| HES | Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council |
| NGR | National Grid Reference |
| PRN | Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER |
| OCS | Old Cornwall Society |
| OS | Ordnance Survey |

1 Summary

In June 2004, the roof of Towan holy well was re-pointed by a small team of volunteers from Pentewan Old Cornwall Society. This work was preceded by clearance of scrub from the surroundings and full recording of the well-house (including photographs, elevation drawings, a plan and historic building analysis) by the Historic Environment Service. Recording showed Towan Well to be an early 16th century building, restored in the 18th and early 20th centuries.

Towan Well, located at SX 0145 4890 is number 24066 in Cornwall County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) and is Scheduled Monument, number 31837.

2 Introduction

This report describes recording and conservation work that took place at Towan holy well in June 2004.

2.1 Project background

Towan holy well, in St Austell parish, is one of the most perfect examples of a holy well in Cornwall. Because of its importance and remarkable degree of preservation, the well-house is a Listed Building (grade II) and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Yet it is very little known because the access, over private ground, is not straightforward.

Care and maintenance of the holy well is undertaken by the local Old Cornwall Society, but anything other than occasional clearance of the scrub and nettles that grow up around it has always been made difficult by the statutory constraints of Scheduling and Listing. However, in December of 2003, members of Pentewan Old Cornwall Society approached the English Heritage Field Monument Warden, because they were concerned about the state of the pointing in the stone roof. As a result, a project was set up so that the necessary repairs to the well could be undertaken through the medium of the Historic Environment Service's Scheduled Monument Management Project. This was also seen as an opportunity to make a detailed record of the well, in line with other surveys and recording recently carried out at, for example, the holy well at Trelill near Helston and St Ruan's Well in Grade parish, on the Lizard (Preston-Jones *et al* 2003 a and b).

2.2 Project Aims

The aims of the project were therefore:

- To carry out minimal repairs to help secure Towan well for the future.
- To carry out appropriate archaeological recording before and as the work took place.
- To carry out documentary and building research, to shed light on the history of the building.
- To investigate the possibility of routine management of the well and its setting.

2.3 Methods

This project could be divided into two separate but linked parts: the recording of the holy well, and the implementation of management work.

The *recording* included preliminary research, the making of elevation drawings and a plan, a full photographic record and a site visit with Eric Berry, to carry out a historic building assessment.

The *management work*, undertaken by Pentewan Old Cornwall Society, involved re-pointing the roof and small areas of the front with a lime mortar; the process was recorded photographically.

3 Background

3.1 Location and setting

Towan holy well lies 3.5 kilometres to the south of the centre of St Austell: a busy modern town and also the location of one of the finest parish churches in Cornwall (Fig 1). In

contrast with the urban bustle of the latter, the holy well lies remote in a tranquil rural setting, near the head of a steep-sided valley whose river flows south-south-east to meet the sea at nearby Pentewan. The well sits in a sheltered, east-facing hollow at the bottom of the valley, in an overgrown marshy area, surrounded in the past by woods and orchards but now for the most part by improved pasture (see for example the OS 1st edition 25 inch map, Figs 2 and 3).

The underlying geology here is rock of the Lower Devonian Meadfoot Beds; but a significant feature of the area is the outcrop on the cliffs a short distance to the SSE of the well, of Pentewan Stone. This is an elvan, or quartz porphyry dyke, used from Norman times almost to the present as a building stone, and notable for the fact that it is easily worked and of excellent durability (Selwood, Durrance and Bristow 1998, 232-3). The holy well is built almost entirely of this material. Such was its importance that it was remarked by Leland in 1548, while Norden in 1728 considered it to be ‘the beste free stone that Cornwall yealdeth’ (these quoted by Hammond 1897, 24 – 5 and Evans and Prettyman 1994, 2). Another feature of geological importance, which has had a strong influence on the economy of the area, is the proximity of the Pentewan Valley, site of one of the most notable tin streams in Cornwall (for which see further below).

3.2 Historical background

Historical databases and archives were consulted in order to obtain information about the history of the site and the structures and features that were likely to survive. The main sources consulted were as follows:

- Cornwall HER (Historic Environment Record)
- Images of England online listed buildings database
- Early maps and photographs
- Published histories

In addition, Rob Evans of Pentewan Old Cornwall Society very kindly made available his personal archive of correspondence, photos, notes, etc, of the history of the well. Of particular value in this collection is the record of the well’s 1930s restoration. This includes a wide range of material, from the architect’s specification, to contemporary press cuttings and arrangements for the re-dedication of the well by the Bishop of Truro.

3.2.1 Historical summary

Historically, Towan well lies on the southern edge of the parish of St Austell, and just to the south of Towan Farm, the latter important as the capital of the Domesday Royal manor of *Bewintone*, later the Duchy of Cornwall’s manor of Tewington (Thorn and Thorn 1979, 1,3). Tewington, ‘situated on one of the most fertile belts of land in the county’, ‘was a very extensive manor ... spread over the parishes of St Austell, St Blazey, and Roche in a region which was intimately connected with tin-mining in the Blackmore stannary district’ (Hatcher 1970, 25). It included within its limits and close to the manorial centre the Pentewan Valley, ‘the most considerable stream of tin in Cornwall...running near three miles from the town of St Austell southwards towards the sea’ (Borlase 1758, and Penhallurick 1986, 177-86). Hence the location of Towan has always given it favourable economic circumstances and it is perhaps not surprising to find here one of Cornwall’s finest holy wells. At some point (unrecorded?) the manorial centre moved north by a mile from Towan to Penrice and the latter remained, for many years, the seat of the Sawle family (Hammond 1897, 287; Polsue 1867, 53-54), while Towan became what it is now: a sleepy rural backwater.

Little is known of the history of the holy well. In view of the paucity of contemporary information about the site, Henderson's suggestion that the well, and the chapel with which it is believed to have been associated, 'probably had their origin in the Celtic period and were doubtless kept in repair and re-erected by the tenants of the Royal Manor of Tewington for their convenience' seems a reasonable one. Any notable properties of the well for healing or divination, or its association with a locally significant saint may also have contributed to its importance in medieval times, although no traditions have survived or are recorded. (Based on the place-name, Doble speculates about a saint Touinianus, friend of Saints Samson and Mewan (patron saint of a parish adjoining St Austell – Doble 1939, 32-3) but this is far from certain.)

According to Henderson, a reference to 'chapel lond' in the 1521 Assession Roll for the manor of Tewington may refer to a chapel at Towan, and Gilbert in 1820 notes that 'a chapel formerly stood near the well, the remains of which were taken down about forty years ago: the font is still preserved on the estate' (1820, 868). Fields nearby, but not adjoining, are called Chapel Park and Chapel Close in the 1839 Tithe Apportionment. Dressed stones built into hedges and walls in the vicinity of the well and visible in Henderson's time may have come from such a chapel, although they are not in evidence now (Henderson 1923-4, 33). The well-house itself was formerly known as 'Chapel Well' (Henderson *op cit* and Doble 1939, 43).

The earliest description of the well, recorded by the HER, is that of Gilbert (1820, 868). His description suggests that the well at that date was very much as it is now. He notes that it was 'walled with square blocks of granite, about nine feet in height. The front is about seven feet wide. The doorway is arched, according to the pointed Gothic order, and at the end of the interior is a kind of bracket, meant, without doubt, to support the figure of a saint. On the roof, which is carelessly fringed with ivy, grows a white thorn, and a small elm tree, without scarcely any soil to give them nourishment. These are remembered to have stood here for about seventy years.' A full description is likewise given by Hitchens and Drew in 1824. The well is marked on the first edition OS 25 inch map, at the foot of a lane leading down into the valley bottom from Towan Farm. In 1882, Thomas Quiller Couch was, like Gilbert, much concerned with the natural aspect of the site: 'I found it in what is now a morass, plashy and full of rush and marsh plants. The well was buried in a bush growth of ivy and bramble; the latter had never known the pruning hook for generations, and had grown with such unconstrained licence that the long branches with their formidable prickles were more than I could encounter, unarmed as I was....By carefully turning back as much of this lavish drapery as I could, I made out a stately well, built of shaped and shapely granite slabs....'. Quiller Couch made its condition known to its owner, Sir C Graves-Sawle, Bart., of Penrice, who evidently took some action, for when the Misses Quiller Couch visited perhaps ten years later, they found that 'the covering of nettles and brambles has been carefully cleared away; and the well stands, one of the largest and handsomest we found in the county, in a most wonderful state of preservation' (Quiller Couch 1894, 30 – 32).

The twentieth century saw the well alternately overgrown and reclaimed from encroaching scrub. Henderson, in the 1920s, found it covered in nettles, brambles and branches (Henderson 1923-4, 33; 1955, 30) and Fig 4 shows the well at about this time. In 1937 it was restored by St Austell Old Cornwall Society (OCS), under the direction of architect Cuthbert Atchley (Lane-Davies 1972, 36; Evans and Prettyman 1994, 37; Evans, personal collection). 'Mr Atchley said "in restoring the building no concrete has been used, the only new material employed is Pentewan Stone, to make good the missing ridge which had been of that stone".'

In 1970, Lane-Davies records having to cut and clear away overgrowth, although in 1978, Meyrick (1982, 18) found it well maintained. Further OCS restorations (basically scrub clearance and tidying exercises) took place in 1970 (*Old Cornwall* VII 7, 319), 1974 (Rob Evans personal collection), 1992 (Prettyman 1992), 1997 and 2003.

3.2.2 Details of the 1937 restoration

Taken from Rob Evans' personal collection.

An inspection of the well in 1936 by St Austell Old Cornwall Society revealed the fact that a tree growing in the roof had split and severely damaged many stones and dislodged parts of the barrel vault, thrusting out the two side walls, opening joints and cracking some stones, 'although the oval roof inside is quite intact'.

A specification for the repair was provided by the Old Cornwall Societies' consulting architect, Mr Cuthbert Atchley. His specification, included as an appendix to this report, indicates that the repair was a very careful and conservative one, re-using and dowelling stones wherever possible, resetting them in their original positions, using new but matching stone only when necessary, and employing a lime-based mortar. The work was estimated at £18 by Messrs Reeve. The roof had first to be cleared of vegetation, additional pressure removed and the side walls pushed back into position. The roof was grouted and the walls raked and pointed inside and out. Some six new Pentewan Stones were required to make good the roof. The work was in progress for about fourteen days during which the consulting architect paid three visits to supervise the work.

The well was re-dedicated by the Bishop of Truro Dr Joseph Wellington Hunkin on Thursday 10th June 1937, using the Cornish Well Service. This included an address by the Bishop and a declaration by Mrs Rosemary Cobbald Sawle of Penrice, giving the well and the approach to the people of St Austell for all time. Figs 5 and 6 are photos from Rob Evans' archive recording the well at this time, both before and after restoration.

4 Results of the recording

Archaeological recording of Towan Well was undertaken prior to repointing. On June 16th 2004 elevation drawings and a photographic record were made and these are used as the basis for the description below. On June 21st, Ann Preston-Jones visited the well with Eric Berry, in order to examine the fabric closely and investigate for evidence of past repairs and restorations. A summary of the conclusions arising from this is presented in section 4.2 below.

4.1 Description of the well-house (Figs 9 and 10)

Externally, Towan holy well is a fairly plain building, its four-square form of regular Pentewan Stone blocks with stone roof of the same material relieved only by the moulded, arched doorway. It is built into a steep slope on its west-south-west side (the back).

Clearly, the building was conceived in imperial terms, for it measures approximately six foot by seven foot and six foot high to the eaves, with the roof at a perfect 45 degree pitch. Overall, it is 9 foot high. The doorway is three foot wide. Internally, it measures three foot wide by four foot eight inches long. (Metrically, this amounts to a building which is 1.65m wide by 2.1m long externally and overall 2.87m high, and 0.91 by 1.43m internally.)

As noted above, the well-house is almost entirely constructed of squared blocks of Pentewan Stone, all closely fitted together. The one or two pieces of red elvan seen in the fabric must have been inserted at a later date, for repairs. The external walls are of six

courses of varying thickness, the coursing following round all four walls (where visible: the back wall is not visible, because of the slope into which the building is constructed). The stone roof is less even: the south-south-east face being of two courses plus ridge while the north-north-west face is of three courses plus ridge. As a result, the front and back walls above eaves level are unevenly coursed, to fit into the two distinct patterns on either side of the roof. Close inspection shows that several stones in the roof are re-used: having been cut for some other purpose, they are not perfectly rectangular like most of the other stones in the building, but have small notches cut in them (on which see further below). The stones of the ridge, although of Pentewan Stone, are distinctively different, being of much smaller stones, lightly 'rusticated' and standing very slightly proud of the overall roof line (Fig 8). The reason for this is clearly related to the 1930s restoration, which, as noted above, involved the total replacement of the ridge whose stones are said to have been cracked by the roots of a tree.

The doorway, set within a rectangular frame, has a four-centred arch and moulding consisting of cavetto, roll and fillet, terminated on a bar and truncated tongue stop. Similar mouldings fill the spandrels: there is no further elaboration, owing presumably to the small scale of the building. A subtle feature, noted by Eric Berry, is that the lintel above the doorway may be a replacement for the original. It has a rather crisper and slightly less weathered appearance than other stones in the building, and is not quite a perfect fit, being a fraction narrower than the stones to either side.

Internally, the building is built of the same squared blocks of Pentewan Stone. However the coursing is not quite so neat, and though following a similar pattern on all sides, with three wider courses immediately above the former water level and two narrower courses above that, the courses do not follow round. Bedrock is visible at the bottom of the well basin, which is now dry, but which when full of water would have had a depth of about 0.7 metres. The vaulted roof is constructed of Pentewan Stone, the blocks specially cut and curved to fit, although it appears to have been rebuilt and heightened, for the curve is asymmetrical and smaller pieces of stone have been inserted at the apex.

In the back wall of the well is a small semi-circular bracket, 25cm high and 24cm across (Fig 7). This delicately carved piece has a small plain foot-ring from which beadwork decoration fans outwards and up to a plain rim. The stone of which it is carved is uncertain, as it is covered with a fine algae or lichen of a different colour and type (a very light bright green) from that which grows naturally on the rest of the well. It is possible that the bracket is a later insertion, for the wall to the right and above it is uneven and has probably been rebuilt.

The doorway is rebated internally for a door, which would have opened inwards. On the left are two traces of two door hooks, inserted into the masonry joints, and on the right are the remains of a fixing for a latch. The latter still contains the lead with which the iron fitting would have been held in place.

A further internal feature is a small recess to the left of the doorway. It has been suggested that this is a stand for a pitcher: but this seems unlikely, as it is so small – only 23 cm high, 21 cm across and 30 cm deep. It may alternatively have been intended to take a candle. A final feature of interest is the large slab directly below the doorway, which would have been mostly under water when the well was full. This slopes gently at an angle into the water, and was evidently designed to enable a bucket full of water to be drawn up without tipping and spilling the water. The stone is smoothed from long use in this way. At the top of this slab is a small notch, to direct any overflowing water out from the well. Hard standing in front of the well is provided by a flat stone at the threshold, into which a groove is cut, to

take away the overflowing water. In the building's back wall, at about the same height as the top of the threshold slab, is a small rectangular recess, 30 cm across and 10 cm high. This, Hitchens and Drew (1824, 54) suggest, may have been 'to receive the end of a board, extending from the doorway to this place, to keep from the water those who might have occasion to enter'. No other obvious explanation presents itself.

4.2 Summary of the architectural appraisal

Eric Berry's overall conclusion is that this appears to be a fine example of a good quality 16th century building, which, however, has been at least partly re-assembled, on probably two occasions. The first is not recorded but based on a combination of documentary evidence and close examination of the fabric, may have been the mid 18th century, while the second was in 1937, when it was restored by St Austell Old Cornwall Society.

Features leading to this conclusion are outlined below:

4.2.1 Regarding the original, early 16th century, date of the building

The good quality, squared, blocks of masonry indicate a date at the end of the medieval period. As this is an ecclesiastical site, a pre-reformation date must be assumed.

The best evidence for this date is the doorway, which by comparison with other dated examples must belong to the first half of the 16th century. The doorway does not appear to have been re-used from elsewhere, but appears to have been designed for this building. The fact that the blocks in the second course from ground level and immediately below the wall plate level extend across the full width from door to side of building indicates that they have been cut for this building.

4.2.2 The date of the bracket in the back wall

The bracket is not considered to be an original feature of this building. Some of the figures on the tower of St Austell Church, which is of late 15th century date, stand on not-dissimilar pedestals, but above and around them are very ornate canopies with ogee arches and pinnacles, and this is more the sort of thing that would have been appropriate here, rather than the isolated pedestal. Moreover, the wall around and above it has certainly been rebuilt and includes a very red stone (elvan?) in the wall directly above the bracket.

The bracket is decorated with lines of small raised balls, like strings of beads, fanning out and up to culminate in 'M' shapes below the rim. The Oxford Dictionary of English Architecture (Curl 1999) describes beading, beadwork or pearlwork as an enrichment consisting of a row of small balls resembling a string of beads, which was common in Romanesque work and revived in the 18th century, although in the 18th century it was more commonly used in plasterwork, ceramics and silverware (Curl 1992, 46). Examples of beadwork are certainly found in Cornish Romanesque work (see Sedding 1909, 88 for the doorway at Cury and for example, on the fine late 12th century font in St Austell Church) but there are no known brackets of this sort, so far as I am aware.

So the bracket is unlikely to be of 16th century date but may have been introduced at one of the well's restorations and may have been re-used from a very much earlier structure on the site: an earlier well-house, or perhaps the associated chapel; or it might even be of 18th century origin.

4.2.3 Evidence for re-assembly/ restoration

1. Various rebated stones are built into the structure. These may have originated as jamb stones or may have come from a box-framed (sash) window. Most of these are at roof

level, but one can be seen to the left (south side) of the doorway, indicating that there has been some rebuilding/repair at this level.

2. As noted above (p 13), the lintel above the doorway may be a replacement for the original.

3. Restoration of the roof has introduced a number of anomalies which would not have been expected in an original 16th century building of this quality. For example: -

- Arrangement of stones on the front gable end is uneven. Between the ridge and the wall plate there are two stones on the left and three on the right – this is not symmetrical and not as it would have been originally. The courses do not follow through, indicating rebuilding.
- The back gable end contains many small stones, notably on the south side: again, rather than the neat coursing which would normally be expected.
- The two sides of roof should be compared, for the north-north-west side of roof has evidently been far more damaged/restored. On the south-south-east there are two courses which are far more even than on the opposite side. Although one of the stones is rebated and therefore re-used, there are overall fewer re-used stones and the gable is solid at either end. On the other hand, coursing on the opposite side does not follow through, the two stones in west gable end were obviously not intended for this job (note their profile in the back gable wall), the stones generally show more signs of damage and include one piece of stone which is not Pentewan (probably a red elvan or similar).

4. The shape of the roof slabs is slightly uneven and suggests that the roof may have been re-dressed from an originally slightly higher pitch, in order to make good the building following restoration.

5. The repairs and alterations to the roof noted above are reflected internally by evidence for alteration to the vaulted ceiling:

- It appears to have been raised slightly and thereby made more pointed. The long thin vault stones have been cut for the purpose, and appear to have a four-centred profile which probably once reflected the shape of the doorway. However, they have been re-set so that they are now more upright, with further stones inserted at the apex of the roof, to give the necessary extra height.
- The overall shape of the roof is slightly asymmetrical (compare front and back internal elevations, see Figs 7 and 10).
- The distance from the top of the door arch to the apex of the vault looks too high.
- Inside, the lower levels of coursing all follow round (not as neatly as the outside of the building, but in overall layout) up to the level of the bracket. From the level of the bracket up, they do not. This may suggest re-building/re-assembly from this level up, and may suggest that the bracket was inserted at a later date.

6. The roof-ridge is entirely new. The stones are much smaller and less regularly cut, they project slightly, they have a slightly rusticated finish and although of Pentewan Stone, they do not fit the style of the building particular well. These are thought to date to the 1930s restoration.

7. The wall plate stone to the right of the lintel is set a little unevenly in relation to the lintel, but this may be due to the fact that it had to be levered back into place during the

20th century restoration – it can be seen projecting significantly in the pre-restoration photo featuring Mrs Cobbold Sawle at the well (Fig 5).

8. On the south, there is a discontinuity in the stonework, with the masonry at the back projecting slightly beyond the line of the front part of the wall. This suggests that the wall has spread, and that the front part only has later been reconstructed, leaving this irregularity in the masonry. Again, the 1930s restoration refers to the need to push the side walls back into position, and this irregularity may be the result of this.

4.2.4 Evidence for date of restorations

So, the fabric of the holy well contains plenty of evidence for reconstruction. We know that there was a restoration in the 1930s organised by St Austell Old Cornwall Society, and suspect there was some work in the 19th century prompted by Thomas Quiller Couches complaint to the owner. But there is also an indication that there was an even earlier and very fundamental restoration. By examining what we know of the first restoration, we can work towards clear evidence of the earliest.

The Old Cornwall Society's 1930s restoration.

There is no full record of the well prior to this restoration. However, newspaper reports and the architects' specification, detailed above (page 12 and appendix) indicate that this was overall a relatively conservative restoration, in which stones were generally repaired rather than replaced. The new ridge is the main feature that must be attributed to the Old Cornwall Society's restoration. The discontinuity in the stonework on the south-south-east may date from this time while the stone to the right of the lintel is known to have been badly dislodged prior to 1937. Otherwise, from what we can see in photos taken before the restoration (Figs 4 and 5), it appears that the building was essentially as it is now. These photos also show that the 'new' lintel was already in place, while the roof on the south side was also as it is now.

This therefore means that all the other features noted above as likely to be the result of restoration or reconstruction must have been done at an earlier date.

The earlier restoration was far more substantial and involved reconstructing much of the upper part of the well house. It may have involved the insertion of the bracket and may have included the cutting of a new lintel. It must also have involved re-setting the vaulted roof at a higher level to make the arch more pointed, rebuilding the roof and following this, re-tooling it to an appropriate profile.

The date of all this is not known. It is possible that some of it took place after Thomas Quiller Couch's visit to the well in 1882 (see above, page 11) but the Misses Quiller Couch, who visited in about 1890, mention only that the covering of brambles and nettles had been cleared away: they do not mention any major restoration, which surely would have been evident if it had indeed taken place. Moreover, Hitchens and Drew in 1824 and Gilbert in 1820 had described the building in detail which suggests that the well was very much as it is now. The latter says that it is remembered to have stood here at least seventy years. This takes us back to about the mid 18th century, and it is this which is suggested here as a possible time for the first restoration. *Circa 1750* would have been just over 200 years from the original build: surely plenty of time for the well house to have decayed to the extent that a substantial reconstruction might be necessary. But this is also a time when the reconstruction might have been undertaken, in order to provide a picturesque and interesting landscape feature as well as a useful supply of water for the surrounding orchards and peasants of Towan Farm - on the Sawle's estate of Penrice. The eighteenth century reconstruction of holy wells has been identified previously, for example at Trelill Well near Helston, where the motivation was almost certainly to provide an ornamental

feature. This latter also involved the ‘improvement’ of the well by making the arch more pointed. Towan Well’s bracket, tentatively 18th century work, may confirm this attribution.

5 The conservation work

Repointing of Chapel Well, Towan, was carried out on 28th June 2004 by Graham Honey, Geoffrey Prettyman and Dave Stark of Pentewan Old Cornwall Society. Only pointing that was in poor condition was replaced, this being primarily in the roof and in the upper part of the front elevation. Vegetation had been treated with a herbicide two weeks earlier to kill it and prevent a regrowth. The work was done carefully and according to the specification, using a mortar consisting of hydraulic lime (St Astier, NHL 5) in a 2:5 mix with New Milton Sand. This aggregate proved rather coarse for repointing the very fine joints in this structure, but by carefully sifting out some of the coarser particles, a workable mortar was achieved.

6 Conclusion

The holy well at Towan must rank amongst the finest Cornish holy well buildings, and is an excellent example of the use of Pentewan Stone of the first part of the 16th century.

In this, it should be compared with its nearby but far grander cousin: St Austell parish church. This was largely rebuilt in the 15th century and the celebrated west tower, faced with Pentewan Stone ashlar, elaborated with statues in niches, with a highly decorated upper stage comparable to the Somerset towers, and a grand west door, has been ingeniously dated by Hammond to 1478 – 1487 (Hammond 1897; Cox 1912, 57). Its grandeur surely reflects the wealth of the parish, based, as mentioned at the outset of this report, on mining, agriculture, and its famous stone quarry. Would it be going too far to suggest that having completed this major work, the parish then turned its attention to a smaller project, and reconstructed the well-house at the lesser cult site at Towan?

Although restored and ‘improved’ with a more pointed vault in perhaps the 18th century, the holy well remains an outstanding example of late medieval work. Of wells where conservation work has been carried out by HES (formerly CAU) this is possibly the closest to its original form. Although the recent work was of very limited extent, it will have made an important contribution to ensuring that this lovely building survives into the future. Pentewan OCS is to be thanked for their care in looking after Towan holy well.

For the future, improved public access and regular maintenance of vegetation in the area are the main features that would really make a difference to the presentation of the well, although it is acknowledged that they will always be a problem while the main route to the well is through a farmyard and over private ground.

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7.3 Websites

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8 Project archive

The HES project number is **2004006**

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, copies of documentary/cartographic source material and project correspondence and administration.
2. Field plans stored in an A2-size plastic envelope (**GRE 208**).
3. Black and white photographs archived under the following index numbers: **GBP1766 and 1777**
4. Colour slides archived under the following index numbers: **GCS34771 - 34778**
5. This report held in digital form as: **G:\CAU\HE PROJECTS\SITES\SITES T\TOWAN WELL, PR400602\TOWAN HOLY WELL REPORT.DOC**

APPENDIX 1

Extracts from the SPECIFICATION OF THE REPAIRS TO BE DONE TO THE HOLY WELL OF CHAPEL TOWAN, ST AUSTELL by Cuthbert Atchley (1936)

Generally

Mortar. This shall be of six parts coarse, clean, sharp sand (the “H” Lee Moor, English China Clay Co. St Austell, or other approved by the architect) to one part of lime, ground slaked or hydrated, beaten up with water. Before using seven parts of this to be knocked up with one part of Portland Cement. All surfaces to be clean and thoroughly well wet before , and when mortar is applied.

Repointing. Carefully rake out, as least twice as deeply as the thickness of the joint, clean away all dirt from the joints, and keep thoroughly wet before and when mortar is applied. In the Pentewan Stone, the repointing to be kept back slightly from the face... and the joints to be finished by stippling with a brush before the mortar has set, and while yet soft enough to be little marked by the brush. All fractures due to shrinkage to be cut out and made good. During setting pointing to be kept moist and protected from both sun and wind.

Dowels to be 1” square by at least 6” long, of copper or slate, unless hereinafter stated.

All new stone to be as close as possible a match in colour and texture to the existing as possible.

Pathway. Give in estimate a sum per 10 yards for stone path averaging about 2’-0” wide, with such concrete as may be necessary.

Chapel Towan Well, St Austell

Carefully collect all broken fragments of masonry, especially from roof, and store near at hand.

Carefully remove all vegetation among masonry, and only remove such stones as may be necessary to cut out roots, etc.

Immediately after cutting out roots, etc., re-instate stones to mark original positions. Rake and point joints as described under “generally”, leaving only those that are in sound condition unpointed.

Reset all loose and broken stones on the roof, dowelling where necessary and using for such small stones as need dowels those of 5/8ths inch square, or less, only 3” or 4” long as the circumstances require.

Provide and fix any new stone as may be needed and to match the existing.

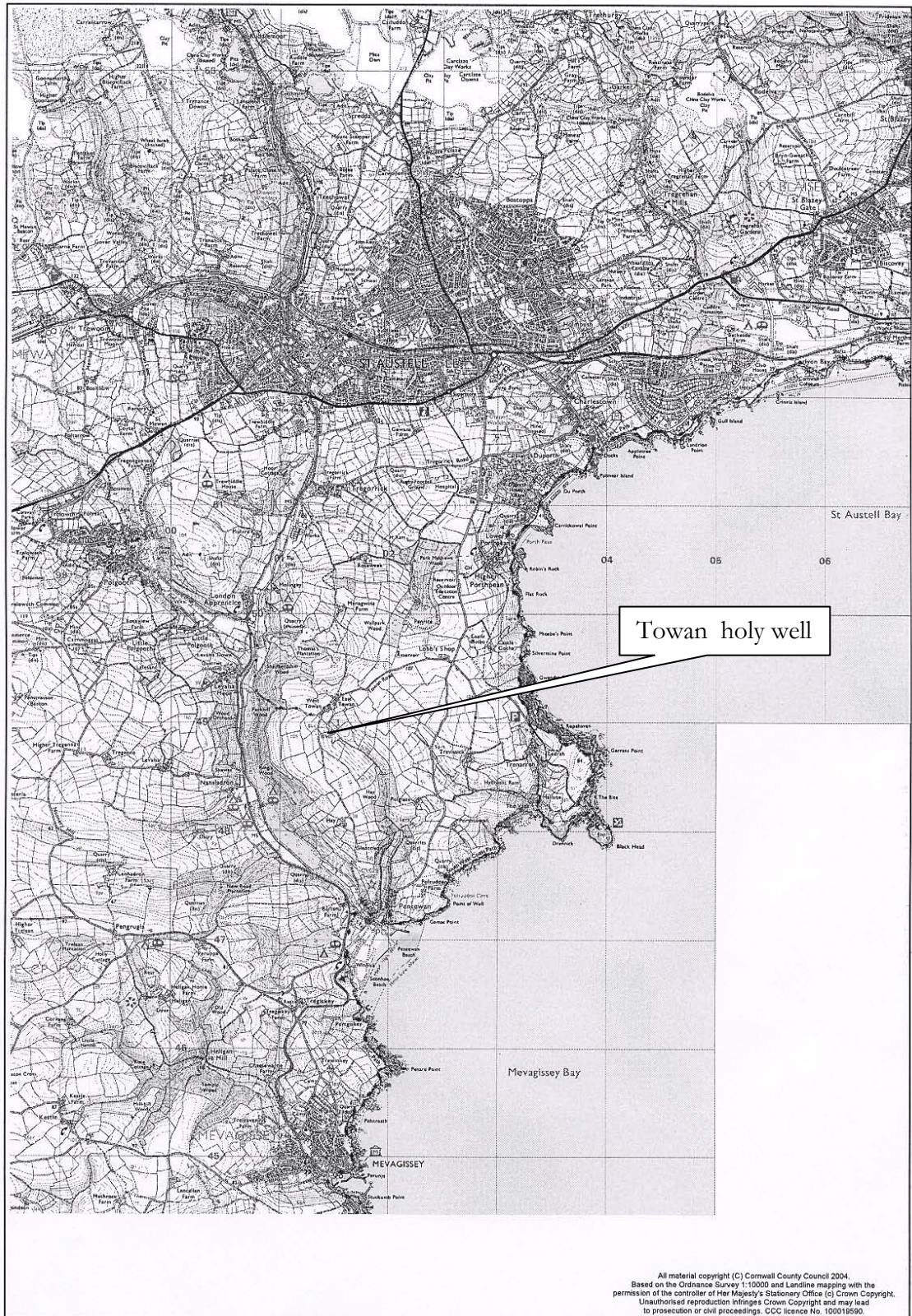


Fig 1 Location of Towan Well. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Cornwall County Council Licence No 100019590, 2004.

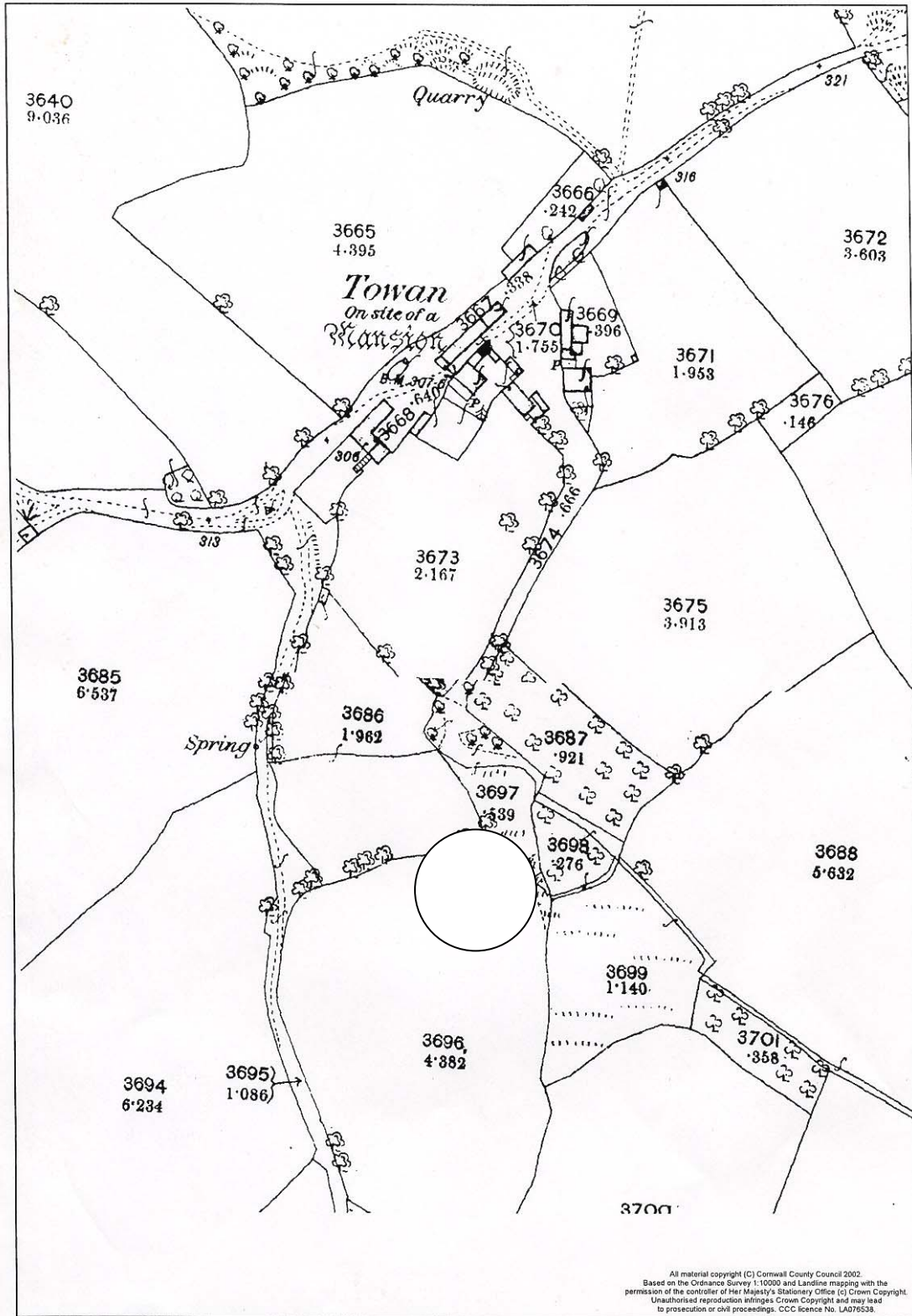


Fig 2 First Edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 Inch Map
 Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group

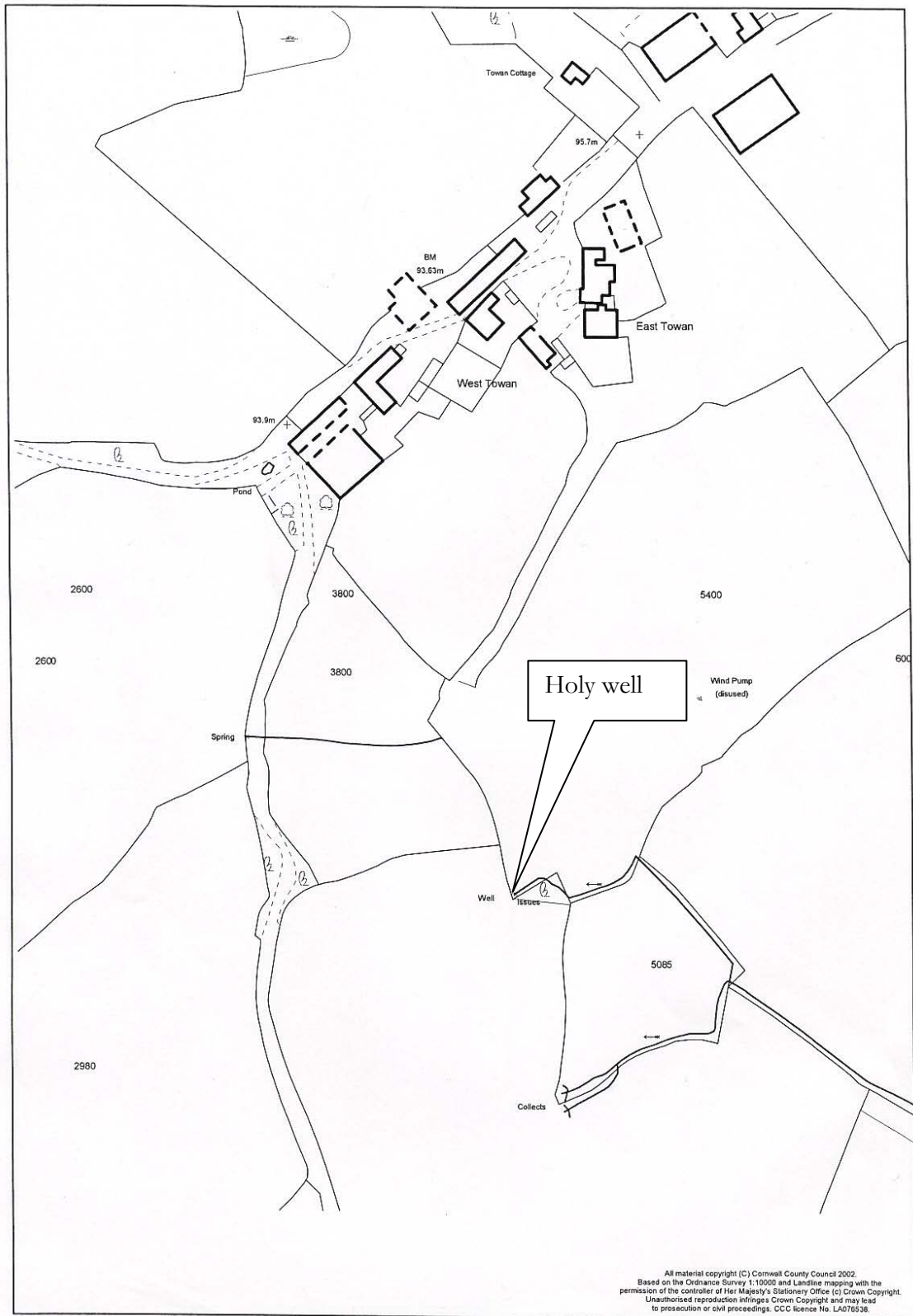


Fig 3 Ordnance Survey digital mapping showing the site and its environs (2003) Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © **Crown Copyright**. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Cornwall County Council Licence No 100019590, 2004



Fig 4 Towan Well before the 1930s restoratio, (from a post card in Rob Evans personal collection)



Fig 5 Towan Well in the 1930s, before restoration, being inspected by the landowner, Mrs Rosemary Cobbald Sawle (from post cards in Rob Evans' personal collection)



Fig 6 Towan Well being re-dedicated after its resoration in 1937, by the Bishop of Truro (from a post card in Rob Evans' personal collection)

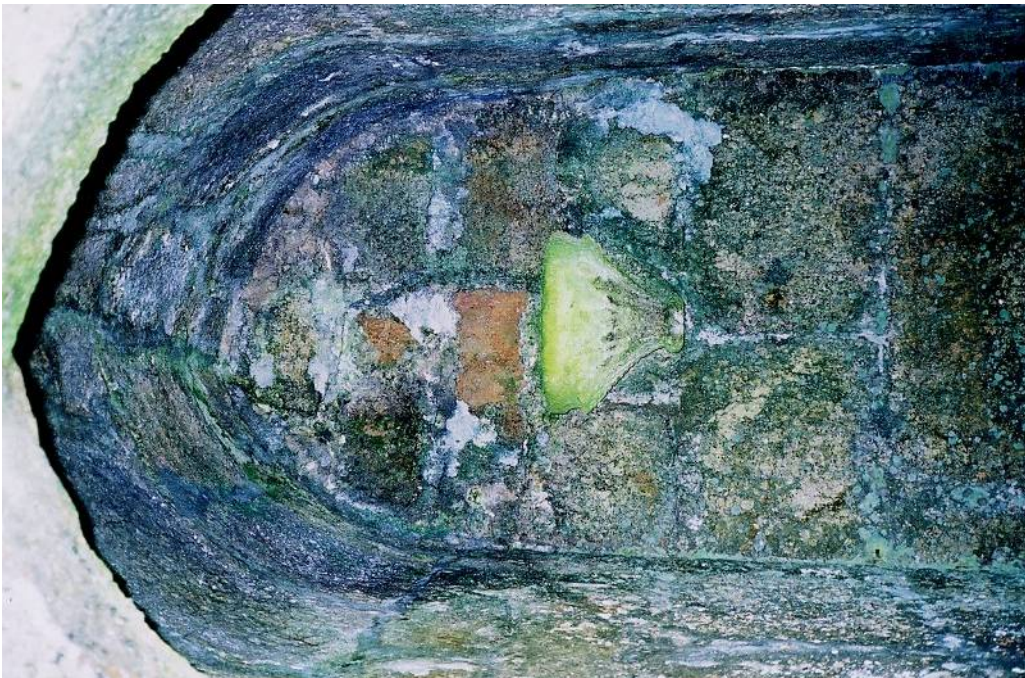


Fig 7 The back internal wall of Towan Well and the carved bracket



Fig 8 The roof of Towan Well. This photo shows the ridge, added in 1937, and a rebated, re-used stone (bottom left)

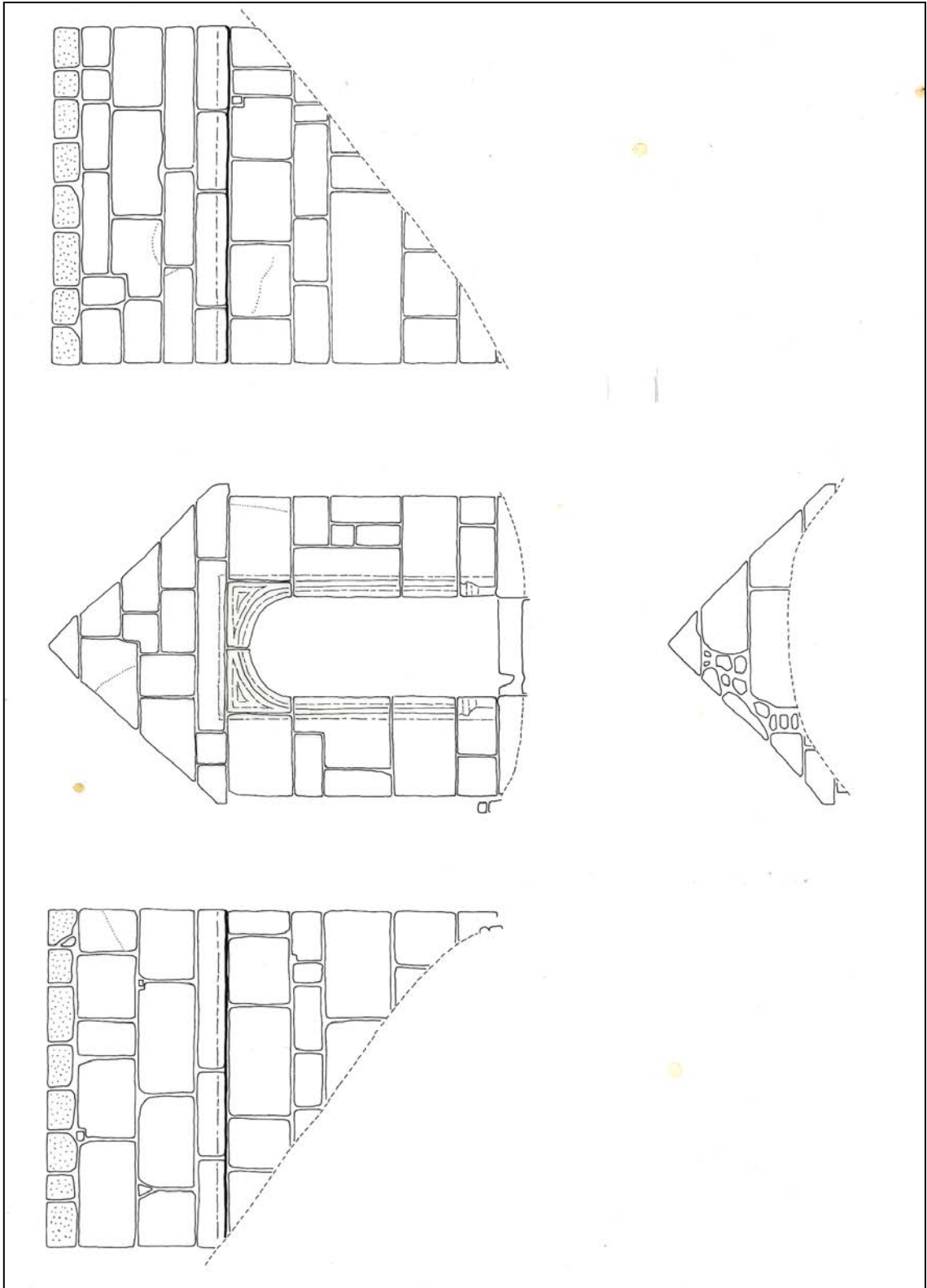


Fig 9 Towan Well: external elevations (for scale, see measurements in text)

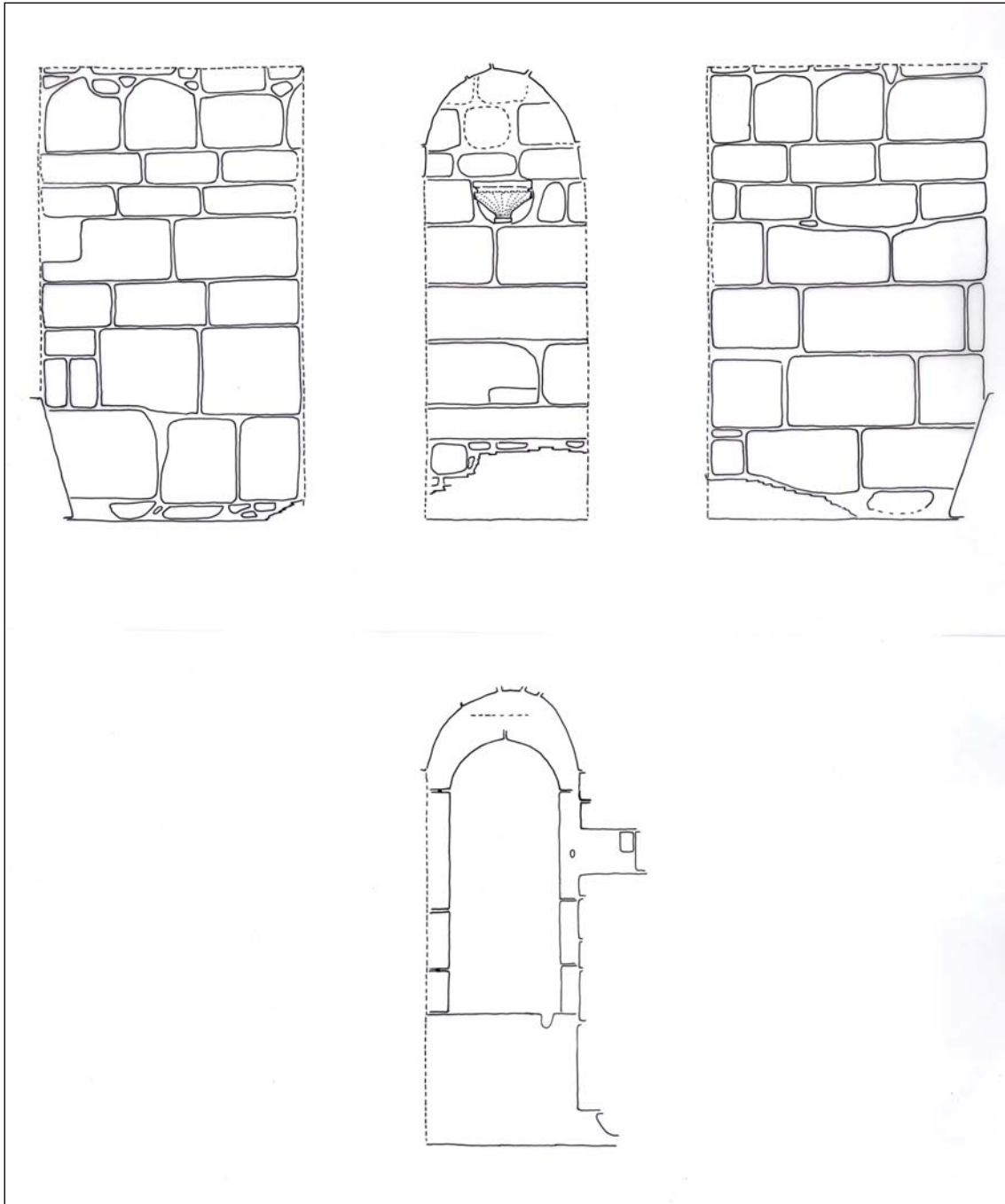
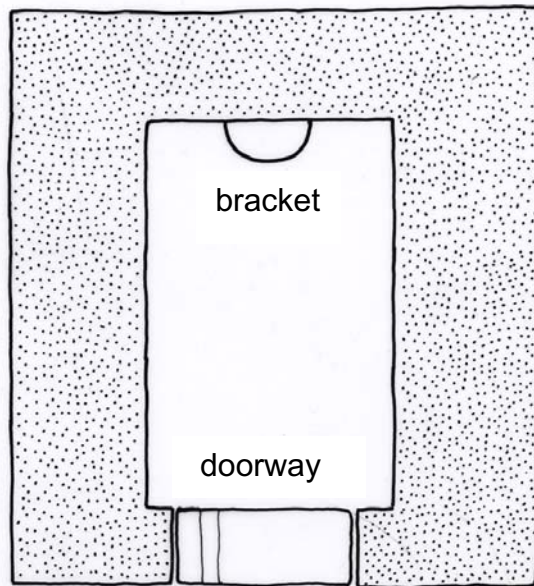


Fig 10 Towan Well: internal elevations (for scale, see measurements given in text)



One metre



PLAN OF HOLY WELL AT TOWAN

SKETCHES OF MOULDINGS

(not to scale)



Chamfer stop
at base of
doorway



Moulding of
doorway
(plan)

Fig 11 Towan Well: sketch plan and sketches of mouldings



Fig 12 Graham Honey and Geoff Prettyman of Pentewan Old Cornwall Society, repointing Towan Well



Fig 13 Towan holy well in July 2004, after re-pointing of the roof