



# **Chapel Euny Well, Sancreed, Cornwall**

## **Archaeological survey and watching brief**





Report No

2013R088

Report Name

Chapel Euny Well, Sancreed, Cornwall:  
Archaeological survey and watching brief

Report Authors

Nigel Thomas &  
Carl Thorpe

Event Type

Measured survey

Watching brief

Client Organisation

The British Horse Society

Client Contact

Adrian Bigg

Monuments (MonUID)

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MCO 9877

MCO56201

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(Created By)

(Create Date)

5.11.2013

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Chapel Euny Well, Sancreed

(Town – for urban sites)

(Postcode)

(Easting) X co-ord

SW 39975

(Northing) Y co-ord

28897



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## Acknowledgements

This study was commissioned by Adrian Bigg of the British Horse Society. Liaison was provided by Pete-Jane Field of the West Penwith Bridleways Association. The archaeological work was undertaken by Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council. Extracts from the Brane estate map and floor plan illustration of the chapel were provided by Mr and Mrs Chas Tricker of Carn Euny.

Help with the measured survey was provided by Sean Taylor.

Project management was carried out by Jacky Nowakowski.

# 1 Project background

Chapel Euny Well lies close to the western parish boundary of Sancreed, near where it adjoins the neighbouring parish of St Buryan (Figs 1 and 2). The well lies within moorland on the south side of a public bridleway from Carn Euny settlement to Tredinney Downs (at NGR SW 39975 28896).

For many years the bridleway had become very waterlogged and boggy to the west of the well (see Fig 12). A programme of drainage and upgrading works to the local bridleway and footpath network (the St Euny Well to Tredinney Moors project) was arranged by the West Penwith Bridleways Association. Grant funding for the work was sourced from Natural England's Paths for Communities Scheme.

The need for archaeological recording work close to the Chapel Euny well site was recognised by Ann Reynolds, Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Countryside Officer and a requirement for an archaeological watching brief was set out. Historic Environment Projects was then commissioned to undertake this recording work by Adrian Bigg, the County Access and Bridleways Officer of the British Horse Society. The project was managed by Peta-Jane Field of the West Penwith Bridleways Association.

## 2 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of the historic development of the well and former chapel site. The objectives were to obtain an archaeological record of the site prior to alterations:

- To establish the absence/presence of buried archaeological remains.
- To record archaeological features, layers and finds affected by the works.
- To establish the extent, condition, significance and character of the archaeological resource.
- To identify any artefacts relating to the occupation of the site.
- To gain further information about the archaeological potential of the area, through the recording of buried archaeological remains.
- The dissemination and publication of the results.
- The long-term conservation of the project archive in appropriate conditions.

## 3 Working methods

All recording work was undertaken according to the Institute for Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording*. The Institute for Archaeologists is the professional body for archaeologists working in the UK. Work comprised initial background research, fieldwork including a measured survey and a watching brief during the drainage works, and archiving/reporting.

### 3.1 Desk-based research

Rapid desk-based research was carried out to inform the fieldwork stage. This comprised:

- Published sources and web-based material
- Historic maps, including:
  - Brane estate map 1778
  - OS 1 inch survey (1803-13)
  - parish Tithe maps (1840 and 1843),
  - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Editions of the OS 25 inch maps (c1880 and c1907)
- Modern maps

A full list of the sources consulted appears in the References (Section 8).

### **3.2 Fieldwork: measured survey**

A measured survey including the well and its immediate environs (see Fig 9) was undertaken by Nigel Thomas and Sean Taylor of Historic Environment Projects. This survey shows the layout of the two wells at Chapel Euny, as well as the streams and footpaths adjoining. The probable location of the former chapel, recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was pointed out by Mr and Mrs Tricker, the owners of the adjoining garden to the east. The southern well includes a stepped structure down to the level of the spring and appears to be the older structure. Dressed stones, most likely from the chapel site, have been included in the parapet of this well. The basin of the northern well is also surrounded by large stones, including a potential arch.

### **3.3 Fieldwork: watching brief**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Carl Thorpe during installation of drainage channels close to the southern well. The course of the path near the site of the wells was stripped of topsoil under archaeological supervision using a machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket where possible. The soil was stripped cleanly to the level required for the path which in most cases was the top of the natural geology. The area was then inspected by the archaeologist. Due to the nature of the ground and the width of the trench required, the course of the trench for the drainage pipe and gully was dug with a toothed bucket.

The area investigated was plotted onto a site plan (noting the locations of features and recorded profiles) prepared previously during the measured survey.

### **3.4 Post-fieldwork tasks**

These included:

- Storage and cataloguing of digital photographs
- Preparation of finished drawings
- Completion of the English Heritage/ADS OASIS online archive index
- Preparation of this report

## **4 Brief history**

The antiquarian William Borlase visited Chapel Euny well and chapel in the 1750s. He recorded the healing properties of the well and observed a sick child being bathed there. He also drew a plan of the chapel and although this illustration is not known to survive, a copy was made over a century later by JT Blight (Fig 4). The chapel had an unusual plan, being of two parallel rectangular spaces, but the ends of the two rooms are staggered. One room with an external doorway and 'ritual east end' window appears to have contained a small altar. The adjoining space had no recorded windows and was linked to the other part by a short arcade.

In 1778 the well and chapel were recorded on an estate plan of Brane (Fig 3).

The landscape including the well was mapped in 1843 (Fig 5) but neither the well, nor the accompanying chapel, are shown on the Sancreed Tithe Map, in which parish they lie. The map does show a numbered space close to the parish boundary which was accessed by tracks. This part was labelled 705 and named on the accompanying Tithe Apportionment as "Chapel Uny" Plot. It is possible that the chapel had been demolished before this time as it is not shown on later maps. Lane-Davies (1970, 95) notes that a writer in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1844 recorded that the chapel was by then ruinous but had been in use within "recent memory" (i.e. to about 1800).

The First Edition OS 25 Inch Map, surveyed c1880, indicates the well and the labels the 'site of St Euny's Chapel' (Fig 6). This map also shows that the boundary of an enclosure immediately east of "Chapel Uny" Plot (numbered 704 on the Tithe Map) had been altered, and this expansion of the enclosure may be related to demolition of the building.

The landscape as shown on the c1907 OS revision (Fig 8) largely duplicates information shown on the earlier survey. A footpath running south-westerly from the well site had disappeared by this date. Comparison of this map and a 1904 photograph (Fig 7) shows that at this time the local landscape was far less overgrown than in the present day.

Dressed stones (a pair of chamfered voussoirs) can be seen forming a kerb around the top of the well, and these, perhaps originally part of a doorway or window arch, are likely to have been taken from the demolished chapel. Interestingly, in 1904 the stream below the well seems to have been re-directed towards the south west. It appears this re-direction of the stream was temporary as earlier and later mapping show the southerly channel.

The northern well basin is not shown on early maps; it may therefore have been created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (post-1907).

## **5 Archaeological results**

### **5.1 Site survey**

Although now considerably overgrown, the site was recorded by measured survey in October 2013 (see Fig 10). A few observations were made:

- The former location of the chapel can be established with reasonable certainty given that the stream has usually flowed southwards towards a culvert beneath a hedge. Comparison of the 1778 estate plan (which shows an inaccurate north direction arrow) and later mapping indicates that the chapel was located slightly south-east of the well.
- The straight hedge separating the well plot from the garden to its east appears to be of later construction than other local boundaries. This is likely to represent expansion of the adjoining garden plot sometime after the chapel was demolished. A near right angle corner of the hedge to the east of the well may respect the former corner of the chapel.
- A rectangular stone in the line of the footpath is almost certainly derived from the chapel but assuming the historic plan and location of the building are correct then this stone does not appear to be *in situ*.
- Loose dressed stones on the well head are still extant but now considerably overgrown and much less recognisable than when photographed a century ago.

### **5.2 Watching brief**

Three sections were recorded across the course of the pathway leading down to the site of the wells from the west and another within the trench dug for the new drainage pipe and gully. (The locations of the sections are shown on Fig 10).

#### **5.2.1 Section 1.**

This profile was recorded at the northern end of the trackway. Here the soil profile consisted of 0.05m of grass, roots and topsoil which overlay 0.10m of grey-brown peaty clay loam, and 0.02m of yellow, grey-brown clay. The decayed natural granitic bedrock lay at the base of the trench. No archaeological features or artefacts were recorded.

#### **5.2.2 Section 2.**

This profile was recorded at an eastward bend in the track where it began to slope downwards towards the wells. At this point the original track also narrowed, with the new surface also being restricted in width by granite grounders. The soil profile noted here comprised 0.05m of grass, roots and topsoil which overlay 0.25m of black-brown peaty loam, and 0.10m of yellow, grey-brown clay mixed with yellow brown sand (this had the appearance of beach sand). This last deposit was not bottomed as the required depth for the trackway having been reached. It is uncertain why this layer of beach sand was present, though it may have been deposited by previous landowners or users of the path as an earlier attempt to improve drainage as it was noticed this was one of the areas where water collected when draining off the hillside. No artefacts were recorded.

#### **5.2.3 Section 3.**

This profile was recorded at the eastern end of the new improved track. Here the soil profile comprised 0.05m of grass, roots and topsoil which overlay 0.20m of black-brown peaty loam, and 0.05m of yellow, grey-brown clay. The decayed natural granitic bedrock lay at the base of the trench. No artefacts were recorded.

#### **5.2.4 Section 4.**

This profile was recorded within the trench dug for the new drainage pipe and gully. This was designed to carry any water emanating from springs further up slope, and any running down the route of the trackway into the existing watercourse that currently drained water from the wells when they overflowed. This trench approximately 5m long ran roughly northwest to southeast across the line of the existing path and was approximately 0.80m wide and reached a maximum depth of approximately 0.70m. Here the soil profile comprised 0.05m of grass, roots and topsoil which overlay 0.20m of black-brown peaty loam, 0.25m of dark grey-brown clay, and 0.20m of yellow, grey-brown clay. The decayed natural granitic bedrock lay at the base of the trench. No archaeological features were recorded and no artefacts recovered.

At the eastern end of the main west-to-east path leading across Tredinney Down, a small boundary stone (Figs 17 and 18) was uncovered at SW 39966 28915. Completely obscured by soil and vegetation prior to the work, the stone was a small granite pillar which measured 0.30m x 0.30m. Its full height could not be determined though about 0.25m was visible. On the western face was inscribed the letter T, while on the eastern side, the letter B. Although this stone is located on the parish boundary and is shown on the current Ordnance Survey maps this most likely represents the boundary between two properties, that of Tredinney to the west, and Brane to the east.

## **6 Statement of significance**

Chapel Euny well is a significant feature on the boundaries of St Buryan and Sancreed parishes and has been a recognised historic and folklore site since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The site is a focus of many visitors who walk the path from Carn Euny settlement onto Tredinney Downs. It draws attention from many pagan groups and close by are two “decorated trees” covered by ‘clouties’ (Fig 10) – brightly coloured cloths and rags which are offered up to the spirit of the well as part of a cleansing rite. Chapel Euny Well like other holy wells in the south-west attract pilgrims on a regular basis through the old Gaelic feast days and by doing so keeps the significance and memory of the well alive (Straffon 1998).

Although the chapel was largely demolished sometime before the later 19<sup>th</sup> century there is a strong likelihood that foundations of the building still survive, most likely in the garden east of the well. The chapel also had an unusual plan and orientation, which hints at pre-Christian origins of the site.

## **7 Conclusions/discussion**

Apart from the boundary stone which lies on the parish boundary and noted above, no features of archaeological interest were seen along the length of the trackway inspected, or within the trench dug for the drainage pipe and gully. Natural moorland soil profiles were recorded with the only evidence of human activity being seen in Section 2 where a layer of beach sand may well have signalled a previous attempt at drainage improvement. No artefacts were collected in the course of the work. It was concluded that the groundwork related to this project had very little or no impact on any buried archaeological remains.

## **8 References**

### **8.1 Primary sources**

Margary, H, 1977. *The Old Series Ordnance Survey Maps, Vol II: Devon, Cornwall and West Somerset* Lympne (Reproduction of OS 1st Series 1 Inch Map, 1813)

Ordnance Survey, c1880. *25 Inch Map* First Edition (licensed digital copy at HE)

Ordnance Survey, c1907. *25 Inch Map* Second Edition (licensed digital copy at HE)

Ordnance Survey, 2013. *Mastermap Digital Mapping*

Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1843. *Parish of Sancreed* (microfiche copy at HE)



Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1840. *Parish of St Buryan* (microfiche copy at HE)

## 8.2 Publications

Blight, JT, 18\*\*. *Sketchbooks* (ms volumes at Morrab Library, Penzance)

Borlase, Rev W, 1758. *Natural History of Cornwall*

English Heritage, 2006. *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. English Heritage, Swindon

Lane-Davies, A, 1970. *Holy Wells of Cornwall*

Meyrick, J, 1982. *A Pilgrims Guide to the Holy Wells of Cornwall*

Quiller-Couch, M & L, 1894. *Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall* Reprint by Tamara publications, Liskeard 1994

Russell, V, 1971. *West Penwith Survey* Cornwall Archaeological Society

Straffon, C, 1998. Fentynyow Kernow – In Search of Cornwall's Holy Wells, *Meyn Mamvro*, 40-42

## 8.3 Websites

[www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/) English Heritage's online database of Sites and Monuments Records, and Listed Buildings

[www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net) Institute for Archaeologists (IfA Standards documents)

## 9 Project archive

The HE project number is **146294**

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of Historic Environment, Cornwall Council, Fal Building, County Hall, Treyew 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. Electronic drawings stored in the directory R:\Historic Environment (CAD)\CAD Archive\Sites C\Chapel Euny well 146294
3. Digital photographs stored in the directory R:\Historic Environment (Images)\SITES.A-D\Sites C\Chapel Euny Wells WB 146294
4. English Heritage/ADS OASIS online reference: cornwall2-166791

This report text is held in digital form as: G:\CAU\HE Projects\Sites\Sites C\Chapel Euny well restoration 2013\Report\Chapel Euny Well survey and WB report.doc



Fig 1 Location map

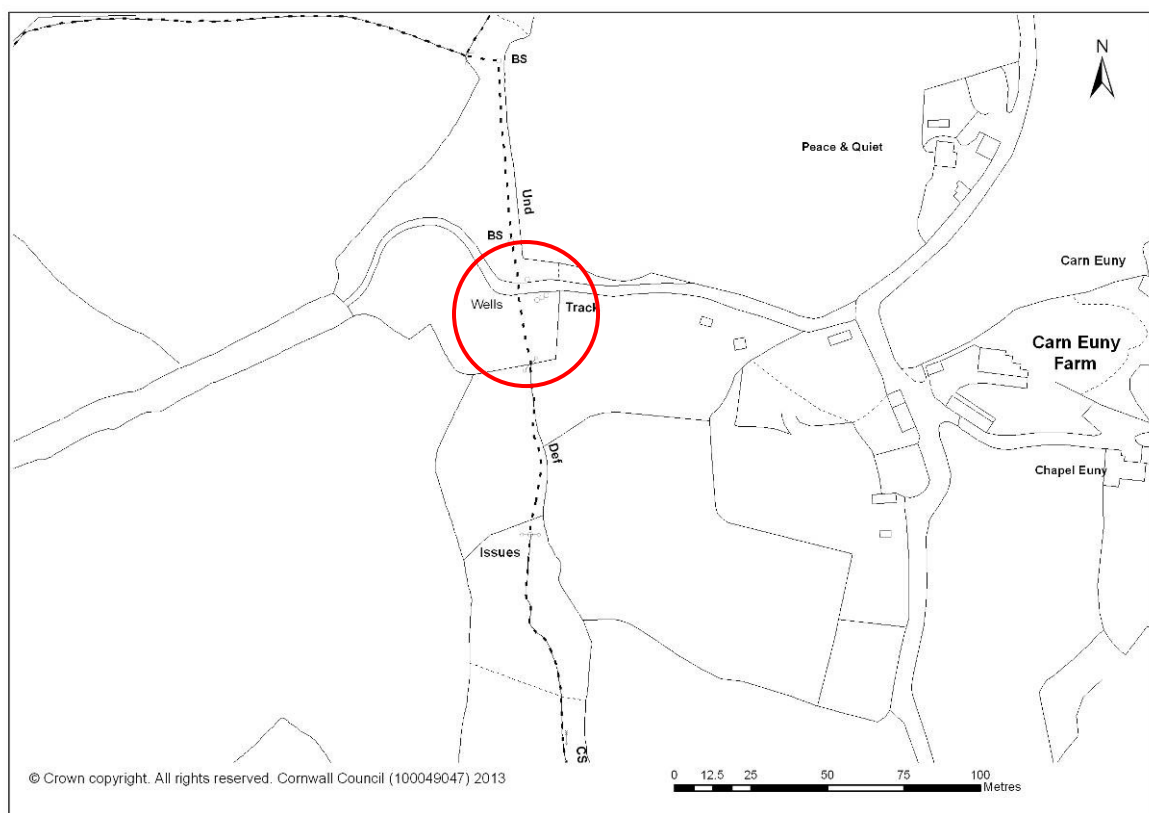


Fig 2 Location of Chapel Euny Well in relation to Carn Euny settlement

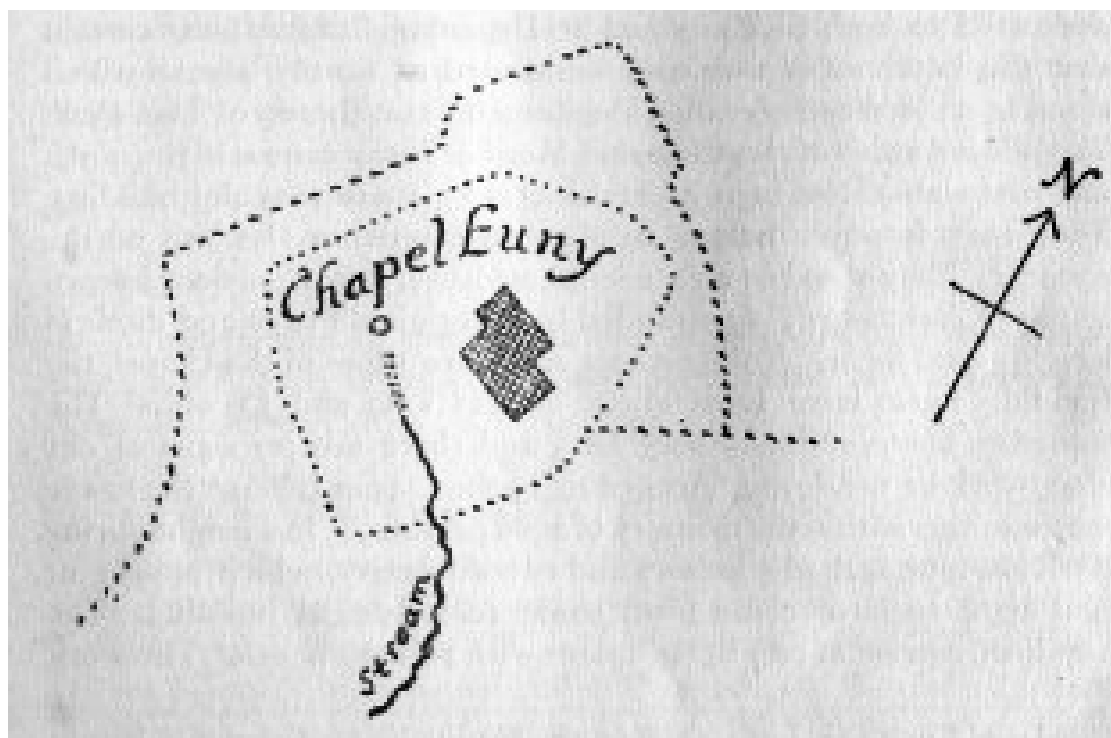


Fig 3 Copy of an estate plan of Brane drawn 1778

Note that the indicated north orientation is incorrect; comparison with the OS suggests that the arrow on the antiquarian plan points north-easterly

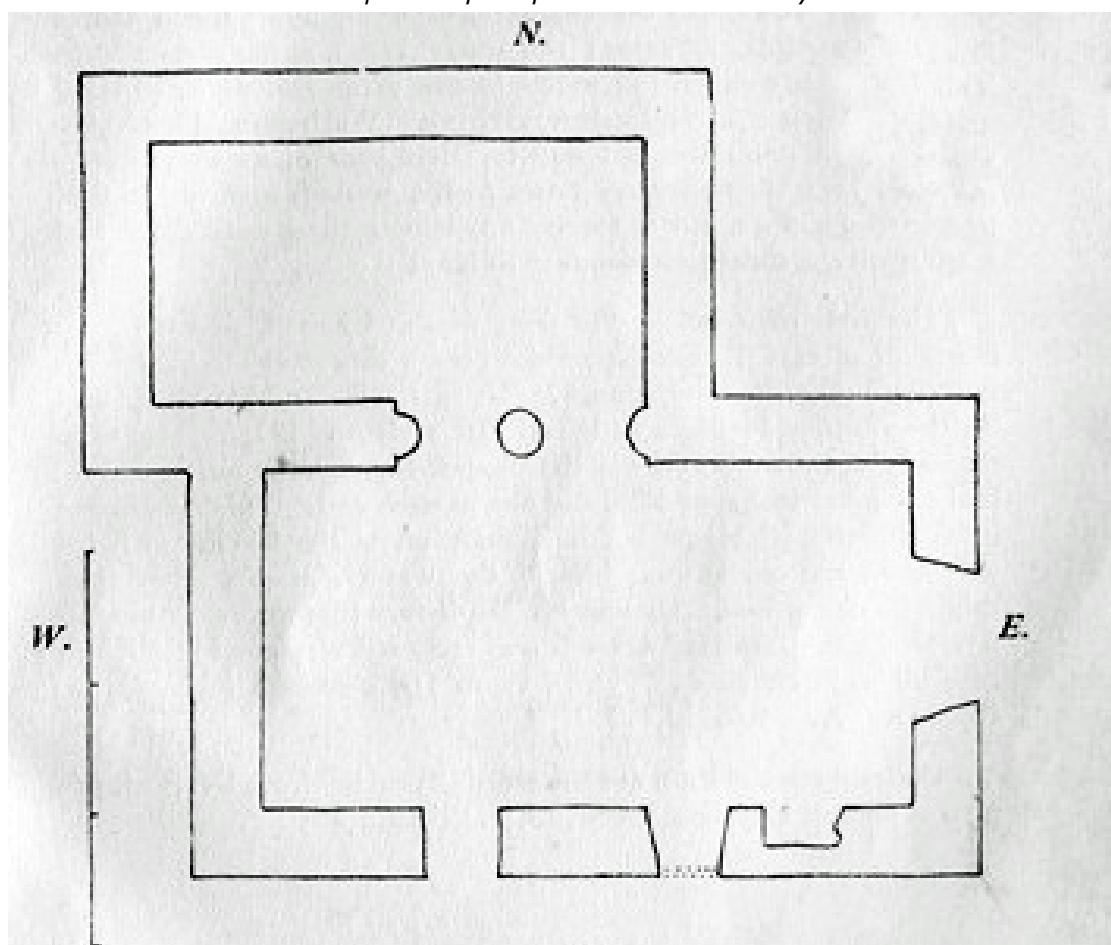


Fig 4 JT Blight's copy of William Borlase's 18<sup>th</sup> century plan of the chapel



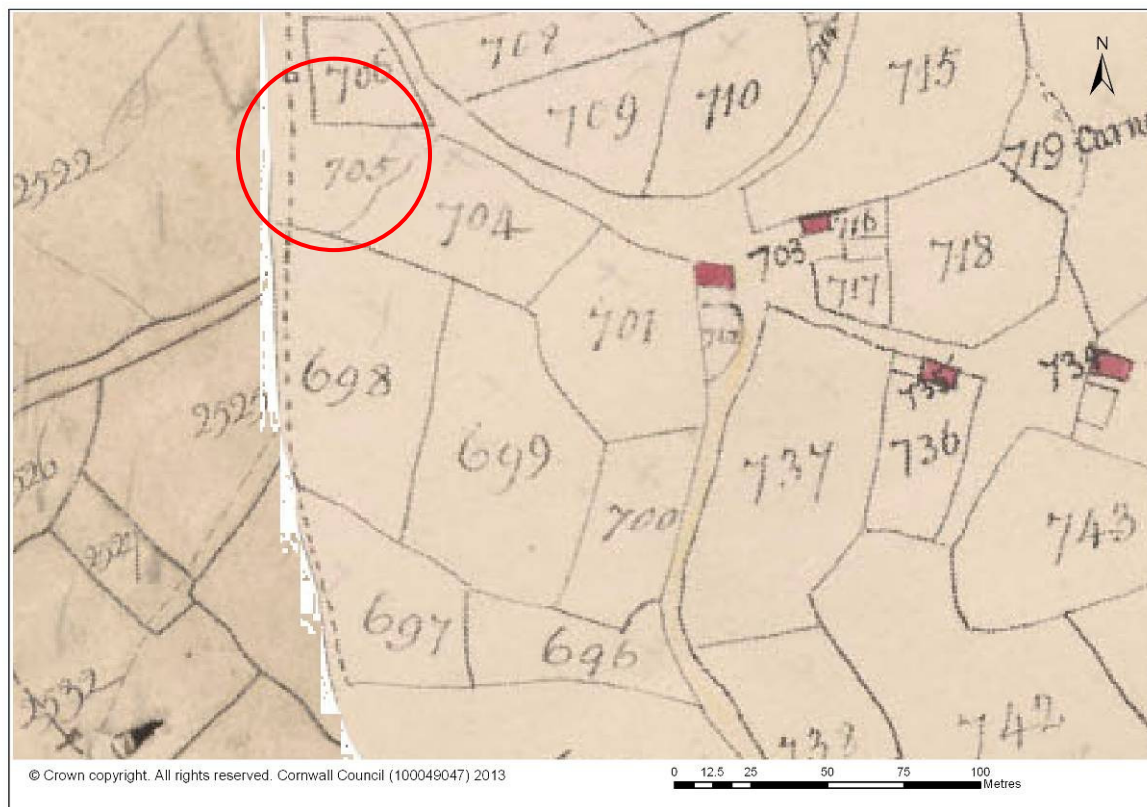


Fig 5 Extracts from St Buryan and Sancreed Tithe Maps (c1840)

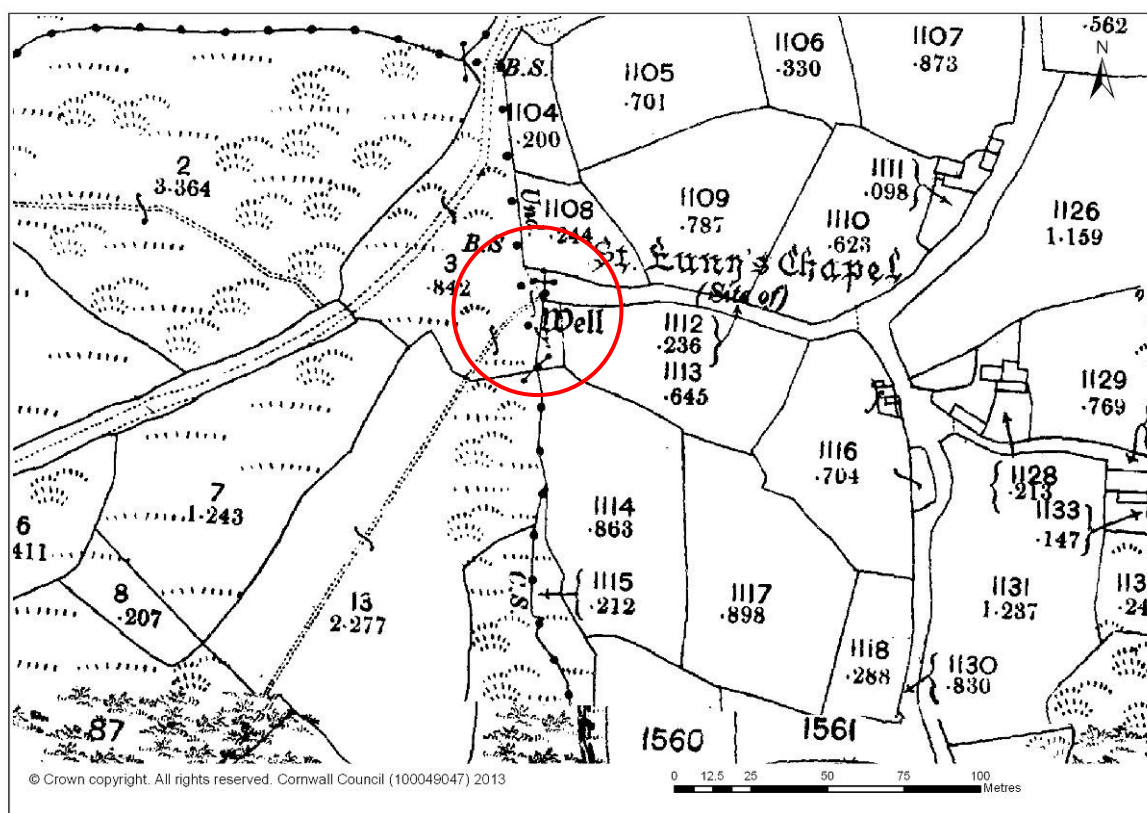


Fig 6 Extract from the First Edition OS 25 Inch Map c1880



Fig 7 View of the chapel site in 1904

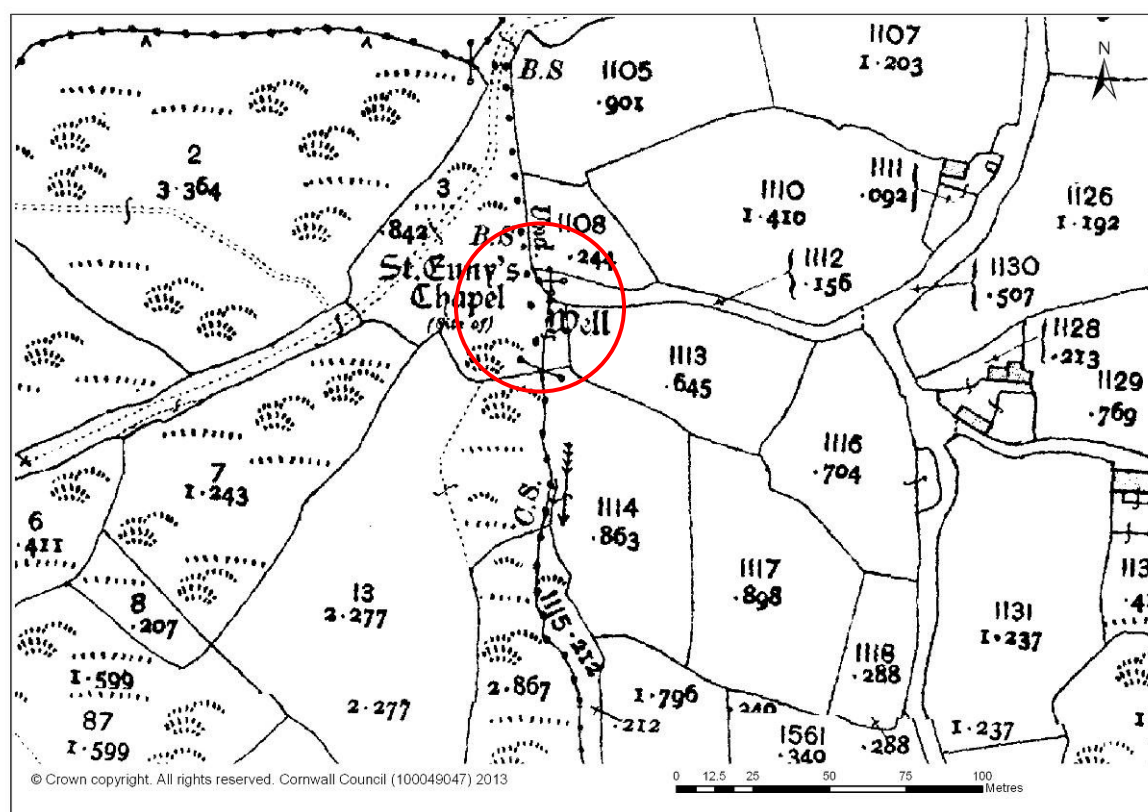
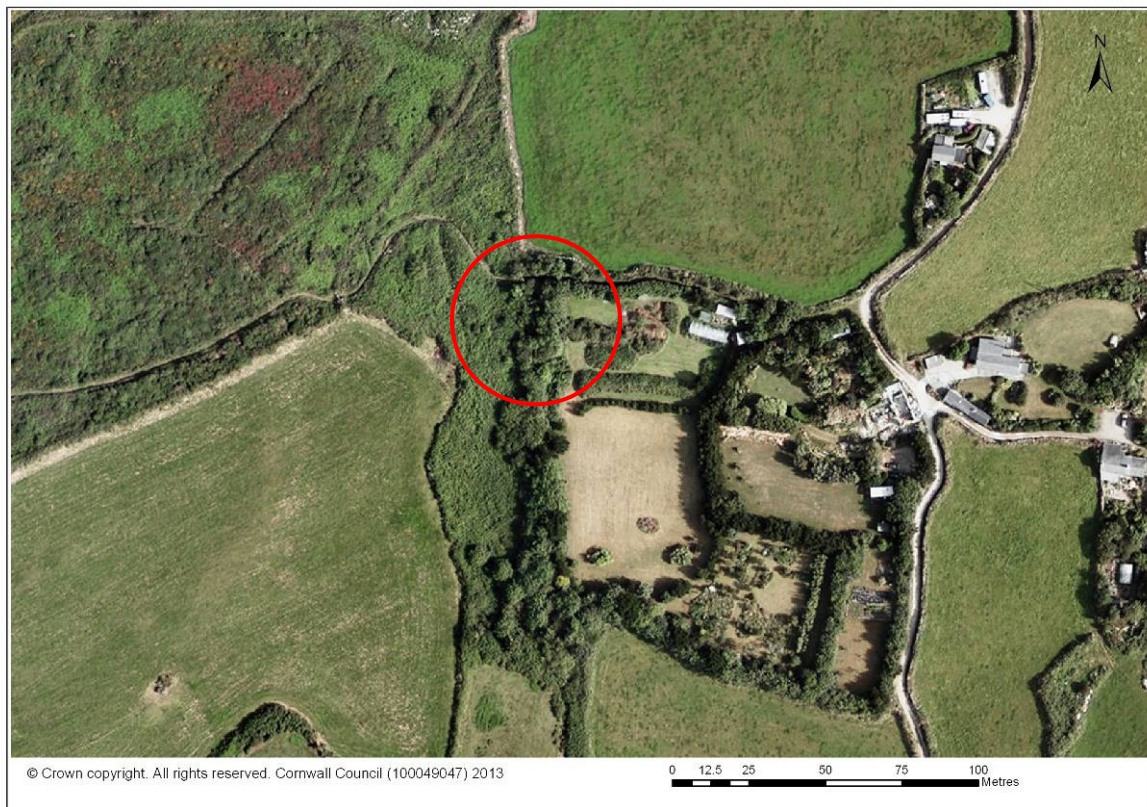


Fig 8 Extract from the Second Edition OS 25 Inch Map c1907





*Fig 9 Air photograph 2005*









*Fig 11 Chapel Euny Well in 2002, looking west  
(photo by courtesy of Ann Preston-Jones, English Heritage)*



*Fig 12 The flooded and boggy footpath west of Chapel Euny Well, photographed in 2002  
(photo by courtesy of Ann Preston-Jones, English Heritage)*





*Fig 13 The principal (south) well in 2013*



*Fig 14 The north well (2013)*





*Fig 15 Clearance of mud and debris west of the two wells*



*Fig 16 Insertion of the drainpipe to drain the ground upslope from the footpath and wells*





*Fig 17 Rediscovery of a boundary stone*



*Fig 18 Detail of boundary stone*